

**POETRY AND THOUGHT: A STUDY OF THE
MAJOR POETICAL WORKS OF ABRAHAM COWLEY**

BY

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**Submitted for the Degree of PhD
University of Edinburgh
2002**



DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by me, and that it represents the work of my research.

Marinus E. Fonge
Edinburgh, 12 July 2002

ABSTRACT

The commendable revival of seventeenth century poetry at the start of the twentieth century neither generated sufficient scholarly interest in Abraham Cowley nor restored his ailing reputation. This is because the parochial tradition of viewing him as a rather minor Metaphysical, allied to the charge of obsession with topicality, have been compounded by his treatment as a transitional poet who harked back to the age of Donne and heralded that of Dryden. This summary judgement, though largely invalid as we intend to demonstrate, is reflected in critical opinion that has only very occasionally attempted to appreciate the diverse nature of Cowley's oeuvre.

Motivation for this study therefore comes from the thoroughgoing need for a comprehensive study of the works of Cowley whose reputation was considered by his contemporaries to be as secure as that of any English poet before him. Our aim is to interpret his poetry by means of a closer reading than previously afforded in light of forces that shaped his thought and literary practice, discerning in the process how he left such a mark on his age and why this imprint remains indelible for us. The best way to effect a study on Cowley's works, as Jean Loiseau writing in French and to some extent David Trotter among his English critics have shown, is still to respect the divisions the poet himself made when grouping his poems in different blocks, thus encouraging a separate approach to each of them. But critical work on Cowley has mostly been confined to particular works or themes, Trotter's study for example restricted to the 1656 Poems, thereby ignoring the impact of the 1660 Restoration event of unsurpassable historical interest. Our study addresses this lacuna as it covers the gamut of Cowley's poetic career, including the key periods of civil war, the Interregnum, and the Restoration through to 1667 when he passed away. We reveal in the process the historical, political, and intellectual forces that condition his thought and thereby shape his poetry, bringing to the different sections propitious literary approaches to analyse the works in a manner as yet unattempted. Also, our chronological arrangement of material suitably reflects the evolution of thought and his development as a poet; plus, by respecting the formal divisions Cowley made we show how these help him resolve a life-long search for true poetic forms.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Cameroon Government has principally funded my studies, paying my fees as an overseas student here in Edinburgh. I have been lucky to receive assistance from a number of organisations also, including the Sir Richard Stapleton Trust, the Gilchrist Educational Trust and the Africa Educational Trust. In particular, I was the happy beneficiary of a scholarship award in the form of a year's grant from the Wingate Foundation. In my studies I have enjoyed the privilege of being supervised by Dr. Jonquil Bevan with whom I have had many informed chats through the years. I should remember always her patience and support. I wish to thank two other scholars also: Professor Alastair Fowler was inspirational during my conversations with him on my choice of topic, while Dr. James Loxley often helped refine my approach in his supervisory capacity. Staff in the University Library and the Arts Faculty, especially in the Computer Lab, have always been kind and helpful. Happily, I have not lacked for support from friends and family. I was truly blessed to have been able to travel to these shores with my life-long friend, Peter Fonjungo, along with Leo Njampa and Ernest Nama who have shown me the value of true friendship. I have been lucky to have friends like Walter Mboyi and Lamin Kargbo throughout my time here, always assisting every which way. I reserve a special mention for Yohanna Dangata with whom I came to this University on the same day and who, together with his wife Esther, has been my own very family here in Edinburgh. My great friend, Valentine Ntungwen, and his family have shown steadfastness and love that has been a source of strength. I have enjoyed lively chats through the years with Jude Mua whose words of advice have included the need for level-headedness always. My siblings know the gratitude I owe every one of them – John Wrenn, Maura, Tobias, Rose, Prudence, and especially Veronica whose awesome efforts have been constant and invaluable. Together with my cousin, Louisa, other close family, and my partner, Tracey, they have made all possible with much affection and such unflagging support. I salute the efforts of all these people and their partners and families and thank them heartily, as well as many others I could not name here. Still, this effort is dedicated to the blessed memory of my father who remains my abiding source of inspiration, to that of my beloved sister, Bernadette, whose love and exemplary courage helped drive me on, and to the tireless devotion of my loving mother.

INTRODUCTION

Abraham Cowley was one of the most esteemed and best-loved writers of the seventeenth century, and yet from the eighteenth century through to our own time critical opinion has not afforded him the same attention his peers and contemporaries did. The commendable revival of seventeenth century poetry at the start of the twentieth century, begun by Herbert Grierson, still did not generate sufficient scholarly interest in Cowley.¹ Grierson's work fostered a tradition that would last well into the century of Cowley receiving attention primarily as a Metaphysical poet.² This tradition could be traced back to Dr. Johnson's 1779 Lives of the English Poets where he authoritatively defined the traits of the Metaphysical school, stating that it had a typical representative in Cowley "who was almost the last of that race [of metaphysical poets] and undoubtedly the best."³

The revival of Metaphysical poetry at the start of the twentieth century was allied to the renewed attention critics and scholars gave to the meaning and importance of tradition, crystallised in such critical pieces as Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent." In another essay he wrote in a volume produced in honour of Grierson, Eliot sums up the opinion of his time on Cowley thus: "it is because he is so representative a man of his time – as a poet the victim of his time – that he is interesting." Further, Cowley is important "as a man who had some things to say about his own time, and who said them better than anyone else."⁴ It is ironic that Cowley's virtues should have proved his undoing, perhaps explaining the chasm that exists between the popularity he enjoyed in his time and the relatively little interest accorded him by later ages. Johnson's observation in this regard was apt: "[Cowley] has been at one time too much praised and too much neglected at another."⁵ The

parochial tradition of viewing him as a rather minor Metaphysical, allied to the charge of obsession with topicality, have been compounded by his treatment as a transitional poet who harked back to the age of Donne and heralded that of Dryden. It is our intention to show that this summary judgement is largely undeserved.

Lack of sufficient interest in Cowley in modern times is reflected in the fact that no complete edition of his works has appeared since A. R. Waller's two-part publication of his English writings, the Poems in 1905 and the Essays in 1906.⁶ The projected Collected Works, under the general editorship of Thomas O. Calhoun, Laurence Heyworth, Robert B. Hinman, William B. Hunter, Allan Pritchard, and Ernest W. Sullivan, was conceived in the 1980s as an attempt to address the long overdue need for a critical edition of Cowley's works.⁷ When completed, the project would fulfil John Sparrow's vision at last: "There is no doubt that Cowley deserves a definitive edition of his English writings ... in a properly constituted text, with full critical, bibliographical, and explanatory matter."⁸ However, only two of several projected volumes – that would include Cowley's Latin works – have been published and none since 1993.⁹ Cowley's undue neglect is reflected also in the largely fragmentary studies that have been conducted on him in English, with the notable exceptions of Arthur Nethercot's 1931 critical biography, Abraham Cowley: The Muse's Hannibal; Robert Hinman's 1960 thematic study, Abraham Cowley's World of Order; and David Trotter's 1979 monograph, The Poetry of Abraham Cowley. In fact, the most complete extant publication on Cowley was written in French by Jean Loiseau, who collaborated with Nethercot and released his work in the same year: Abraham Cowley: Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre (Abraham Cowley: His Life, His Works). Motivation for this study therefore comes from the thoroughgoing need for a comprehensive

study of the works of Cowley whose reputation was considered by his contemporaries to be as secure as that of any English poet before him.¹⁰ We intend to interpret his poetry in light of the forces that shaped his thought and practice by means of a closer reading than previously afforded, discerning in the process how he left such a mark on his age and why this imprint remains indelible for us.

The best way to effect a study of Cowley's works, as Loiseau and to some extent Trotter have shown, is still to respect the divisions the poet himself made when grouping his poems under specific headings or compartments, thus encouraging a separate approach to each of them. With the exception of one chapter on "Cowley and Crashaw," Trotter has largely remained faithful to Cowley's divisions, as did Loiseau in part of his study. These ensure that a close attention to their formal and stylistic aspects becomes ineluctable. I have chosen this approach even whilst being encouraged also by Hinman's critique that shows the workings of a thematic approach, for he explores the relationship between poetry and truth that underlies Cowley's vision of a world of order. Still, his approach only makes use of those aspects of Cowley's works that suit the subject and thus ignores a considerable amount of his poetry, Hinman's intention to effect only a monolithic reading notwithstanding. But even Loiseau and Trotter have limitations we intend to address also. There is nothing reductionist in Loiseau's scheme; in fact, it is a sufficiently vast and indeed encyclopaedic overview of Cowley's life and work. But Loiseau wrote in French,¹¹ one of the two parts indicated in his title is biographical, and he does not always fulfil one of his stated aims to "determine the positive aspects" in Cowley's work.¹² In fact, some of Cowley's major works, notably *The Mistress*, the *Davideis*, and the *Pindarique Odes*, receive harsh treatment from Loiseau that shows

how difficult it was for him to break the mould of mainly unsympathetic criticism of Cowley's poetry in the modern period. Also, Loiseau follows the traditional pattern of giving full attention to those works Cowley himself saw to the press in 1656, and beyond that, to those that his literary executioner, Thomas Sprat, released in 1668. This means that he ignores the need for a detailed study of Cowley's considerable war poetry not included in these two editions, even allowing for the fact that only one third of the *Civil War* poem was known in his time. By the time Trotter wrote, the full poem had been discovered and he duly makes it an integral part of his study, but his work is restricted to the 1656 Poems that show how the historical process that brought "a change in the conditions of thought" affected Cowley.¹³ He thereby ignores Cowley's diverse Restoration works and the impact of the 1660 event of unsurpassable historical interest. Our study addresses this lacuna as we take an all-inclusive approach, covering Cowley's poetic career that stretches from the 1630s through the outbreak of civil war, the Interregnum, and the Restoration to his death in 1667. In the process we reveal the historical, political, and intellectual forces that condition his thought and thereby shape his poetry. Also, our arrangement of material reflects the chronological pattern that suitably portrays the evolution of thought; more especially, we use the formal divisions Cowley made and show in the process how these help him resolve a life-long search for true poetic forms.

Our method of approach in analysing and interpreting Cowley's works has been conditioned by two main factors: its disparate nature that discourages a uniform approach throughout, and the fascinating prospect of evolving new and original readings despite the attention paid to the different sections by other critics and scholars. Various contributions are reviewed in the relevant sections under

discussion, including critical opinion in the works already mentioned. Our approach privileges the application of literary theories propitious to the particular work under discussion; where possible these are theories that were familiar to Cowley at the time of composition. The very application of theory has been ancillary to – rather than the *raison d'être* of – our reading and interpretation. Still, it has been a major reason for refreshingly new and original readings of Cowley's works.

This study is divided into six chapters that fall into two formal groupings. The first three chapters are based on traditional forms, that is, conventional forms already in wide use at the time of composition, and the last three chapters on experimental forms, that is, new forms that Cowley himself introduces into English, in particular the ode form. The three chapters on traditional forms all discuss the poet's association with the particular form; that is, the choice of form is shown to be deliberate and conducive to the poet's thought and argument. The chapters on experimental forms reveal how Cowley discards traditional forms, preferring to introduce his own unique forms that give him liberty to adapt them for use either in an individual body of work or for diverse thoughts and occasions. The newness of these forms that include the ode and essays in verse and prose prompt their total examination as used in translations and original compositions.

Chapter one is entitled "War Poetry: History and Propaganda in *The Civil War* and other Works." It includes discussions on Cowley's political poetry in the 1630s and early 1640s, covering the period leading up to, and including, civil war. Cowley's forms, chosen to highlight the role of poetry as political discourse, become increasingly longer as the crisis deepens, from the short poem in the 1630s to the

long poem and epic in the 1640s. As the warring factions attempt to outdo one another in the accompanying 'war of the pen,' Cowley increasingly appropriates more overt forms of propaganda and even invective, including the outright use of satire, until his choice of the epic form to assert his royalism in the grand heroic manner. Theories of power relations explain the irrevocable breakdown in communication between King and subject, while an appeal to history and even myth is part of Cowley's revolutionary attempt at using poetry as a participatory tool in the shaping of history.

Chapter two is entitled "Love Poetry: The Lyric Tradition and *The Mistress* of Love and Desire." Following Johnson's use of *The Mistress* to identify the defining traits of Metaphysical poetry, critical opinion has always favoured this interpretation of Cowley's body of love poems, revelling in his treatment of Cowley as a member of the school of Donne. Even so, comparisons have mostly been done with Donne by way of establishing Cowley's sources, but such studies have not compared him enough with his contemporaries in order to reveal other influences he succumbs to. The Metaphysical dimension is irrefutable; but in highlighting it we also show its very limitedness. The traditional approach has masked some fascinating facets of the poems also, such as the meaning of desire and its relationship to love. It is in order to explore these aspects at the crux of our understanding of *The Mistress* that this chapter uses the tools of psychoanalysis in a close reading of the text. If we apply an essentially twentieth century theory to this work, it is because it reveals uniquely how the façade of love disguises a sublimation of Cowley's ultimate desire for poetic recognition. The psychoanalytical approach, arguably the most enduring in the

twentieth century, owes its influence to its two most significant figures, Freud and Lacan, whose theories clarify our practice.

Chapter three is entitled “The Epic Tradition: The *Davideis* and the Art of Epic Composition.” The *Davideis* was conceived as the apotheosis of Cowley’s poetic efforts, a sublime piece that would fuse together the theories of the highest kind of poetry and the adaptation of a biblical narrative in the best traditions of sacred poetry. Many critics have approached the poem looking for a political agenda on Cowley’s part, thereby overlooking his original intention simply to compose the near-perfect poem using a form that turns out to be an anomaly, the sacred epic. Though the poem remains unfinished, our close reading of it in its extant form does not detract from Cowley’s intention. We therefore interpret it ultimately as a poem about the writing of poetry, a storehouse of poetic theory that makes it a consequential document in seventeenth century poetics. Cowley himself acknowledges the influence of Davenant on his conception of heroic poetry, and it is therefore natural that the latter’s theories should aid our approach.

Chapter four is entitled “*Pindarique Odes* and *Anacreontiques*: The Poetics of Translation.” The *Pindarique Odes* is the central work in Cowley’s poetic programme, the various poems he writes after its introduction in 1656 invariably relating to either of two key features, namely the use of the ode form and/or translation. This chapter is devoted to the art of translation and the associated concepts of imitation and adaptation, for which the *Pindarique Odes* outlines a body of theory and exemplifies it in practice. It is this same art that Cowley applies to his English version of the *Anacreontiques*, a most delightful lyric sequence that has

received the highest and most consistent literary acclaim through the ages of any of Cowley's poetic works! Studies portraying Cowley as a child of Donne have been so prevalent that his claims as a son of Ben have been largely ignored. Jonson provides guidance as a theorist and practitioner of translation and the different imitative arts, with Cowley accepting the challenge to innovate within this discipline and introduce his own method, free translation. Though he does not gather his own theories into a coherent whole, his *Pindarique Odes* and *Anacreontiques* reveal the main contours of his fascinating poetics of translation.

Chapter five is entitled "*Pindarique Odes: Poetics and Thematic Considerations in the Original Compositions.*" The groundbreaking nature of Cowley's achievement in successfully introducing a form into the language is yet to be appreciated fully, due largely to insufficient treatment even from those who have successfully identified the need for a thorough study of the Pindaric ode. Aware that his domestication of the ode constitutes a new addition to poetic forms in English, Cowley's compositions include poems where he consciously develops a poetics of composition to complement his poetics of translation. Together, they constitute an art of lyric poetry comparable to his art of composition in the *Davideis* epic. It is in this sense that Cowley ranks as one of the leading literary theorists of his time. Again critical opinion has paid more attention to those original compositions it insists on treating as political allegory amidst the general tendency to find a pervasive political presence in the bulk of Cowley's works. For us, these remaining compositions represent the beginning of Cowley's reliance on the flexible and adaptable nature of the ode form for the rest of his career. Instead of an outright political dimension, we find evidence in these poems of his importance to the intellectual history of the

seventeenth century instead. Again we identify a dominant influence on Cowley's thought in a figure from his own time, in this instance Thomas Hobbes, whose ideas on the twin concepts of reason and liberty set Cowley on a path that would culminate in philosophical musings on the range of human knowledge.

Chapter six, the last chapter, is entitled "Restoration Works: Political, Intellectual, and Classical Thought in Occasional Poems, the *Essays* and Other Works." The varied nature of Cowley's Restoration works is reflected in the broad expanse it covers in terms of the time span and the use of even more experimental forms that include prose writings. Three main currents emerge from the poetry under consideration, namely a political, a classical, and an intellectual dimension. The end of the Protectorate in 1659 and the advent of the Restoration in 1660 inform Cowley's political writings, his retirement and relocation to the country are sanctioned by a philosophy of life developed by Horace and other classical poets, and his association with the Royal Society contributes to his intellectual thought. We find it necessary to establish the appropriate context for Cowley's life and poetic career during the Restoration period by devoting a section to his controversial 1656 Preface, making it the starting point of our discussion. In fact, works written between 1656 and the 1660 event often prove invaluable to an understanding of those works written in the years leading up to his death in 1667. This chapter establishes the liberty that informs Cowley's choice of forms, most of which he introduces into English for that very reason. Thus we have the freedom of writing in verse and prose that characterises the *Vision* and is perfected in the *Essays*, the method of free translation of classical poetry in the same *Essays*, and the grand Pindaric manner for the lofty occasion of the Restoration and Royal Society odes.

¹ Herbert Grierson gave renewed impetus to the study of Metaphysical Poetry when he edited Donne's poetry. See Poems, John Donne, 2 vols., ed. Herbert J. C. Grierson (London: Oxford University Press, 1912). Further, he published an anthology containing seven poems of Cowley's. See Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century: Donne to Butler, ed. Herbert J. C. Grierson (London: Oxford University Press, 1921). Recently Alastair Fowler has revised this work, thus continuing the work of one of his predecessors as Head of Edinburgh University's English Literature Department. See Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century (Donne to Butler), ed. H. J. C. Grierson, rev. Alastair Fowler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

² See for example, since 1960, The School of Donne, A. Alvarez (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961); A Reader's Guide to the Metaphysical Poets, George Williamson (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968); The Metaphysical Mode from Donne to Cowley, Earl Miner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969); From Concord to Dissent: Major Themes in English Poetic Theory 1640-1700, Paul J. Korshin (Menston: Scolar Press, 1973).

³ Samuel Johnson, Lives of the English Poets, Vol. 1 (Cowley – Dryden), ed. George Birkbeck Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), p. 35.

⁴ T. S. Eliot, "A Note on Two Odes of Cowley," in Seventeenth Century Studies Presented to Sir Herbert Grierson (London: Oxford University Press, 1938, pp. 235-42), p. 237.

⁵ Johnson, p. 18.

⁶ Waller's editions constitute our main source, except in the case of the war poetry and *The Mistress*, where we use the 1989 and 1993 volumes of Collected Works respectively. See The English Writings: Poems, Abraham Cowley, ed. A. R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1905); and The English Writings: Essays, Plays and Sundry Verses, Abraham Cowley, ed. A. R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906). Hereafter cited parenthetically as Poems and Essays respectively.

⁷ Some critical editions of specific works, but not the complete works, have appeared in the intervening period. These include The Mistress with Other Select Poems, Abraham Cowley, ed. John Sparrow (London: Nonesuch Press, 1926), and The Civil War, Abraham Cowley, ed. Allan Pritchard (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1973).

⁸ Sparrow (ed.), Textual Notes, p. 195.

⁹ The two volumes published are The Collected Works, Vol. 1, Abraham Cowley, ed. Thomas O. Calhoun, Laurence Heyworth and Allan Pritchard (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989); and The Collected Works, Abraham Cowley, Vol. 2, Part 1 (*The Mistress*), ed. Thomas O. Calhoun, Laurence Heyworth and J. Robert King (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1993).

¹⁰ An indication of the esteem Cowley enjoyed in his time was his burial in Poets' Corner alongside Chaucer and Spencer, with the King declaring that he had left no better man in England. His funeral was a public event that brought London to a standstill, with this entry by John Evelyn in his diary:

Went to Mr. Cowley's funeral, whose corpse lay at Wallingford House and was thence conveyed to Westminster Abbey in a hearse with six horses and all funeral decency, near one hundred coaches of noblemen and persons of quality following, among them all the wits of the town, divers bishops and clergymen.

Cited in Abraham Cowley: The Muse's Hannibal, Arthur H. Nethercot (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), p. 276.

¹¹ Interestingly, in the same year Loiseau writes his other work on Cowley in English: Abraham Cowley's Reputation in England (Paris: Henri Didier, 1931).

¹² See Loiseau, Sa Vie. Son Oeuvre, Introduction, p. x. The translation from the French is mine.

¹³ David Trotter, The Poetry of Abraham Cowley (London: Macmillan, 1979), Introduction, p. 2.

PART ONE: TRADITIONAL FORMS

Part one comprises the first three chapters of this study, based on the traditional forms that Cowley uses, including forms as diverse as satire and epic in chapter one, the love lyric in chapter two and sacred epic in chapter three. It demonstrates that he is generally reluctant to innovate or experiment with form early on in his poetic development, seeking mainly to test out different conventional ones sometimes with the firm intention of establishing himself within a particular poetic tradition. In chapter two his love poetry is intended to establish his claims as a love lyricist, while in chapter three part of his motivation is to engage the highest poetic kind and thus join a select group of poets writing within the European epic tradition. The discussion in chapter one takes into account the latest addition to the Cowley canon, the satire now known as *The Puritans Lecture*, until the 1970s not considered as one of his works. The inclusion was facilitated by his continued use of the satiric form in *The Puritan and the Papist* that was definitively included in the canon only at the start of the twentieth century also. However, nowhere is Cowley's restless search for ideal forms as evident as in *The Civil War*, where he seeks to accommodate within the epic framework such disparate kinds as satire, myth, elegy, panegyric and the particularities of the political poem. But Cowley does not just involve himself in the arbitrary use of all conventional extant forms, as witnessed in his steadfast rejection of certain forms prevalent in the sixteenth century like the sonnet, the epyllion or the mythological narrative. This in itself reveals informed and selective usage that justifies a study in his poetic development from his earliest beginnings in the 1630s through the 1650s in his various incarnations as a propagandist and war poet, lyricist and love poet, sacred poet and epic poet.

CHAPTER ONE

WAR POETRY: HISTORY AND PROPAGANDA IN *THE CIVIL WAR AND OTHER WORKS*

A warlike, various, and a tragical age is best to *write of*, but worst to *write in*. (*Poems*, Preface)

What should they doe? unapt themselves to fight,
They promised noble pens the Acts to write.
(*The Civil War*, I. 231-32)

1.1 Introduction: The Political Poem

“Where there is power,” Michel Foucault wrote, “there is resistance.”¹ The history of seventeenth-century Britain is fraught with untold instances of resistance to the Stuart monarchy, owing to a perception by the people and by Parliament that power was transferable. The Stuarts’ response was to assert the divine right theory and mount a crusade of peace, but this did not stem the tide of a progressively weakening monarchy and, subsequently, the slide into anarchy and armed confrontation in the 1640s. When the King raised his standard in Nottingham to signal the start of civil war in August 1642, it marked the culmination of a bitter struggle and the utter collapse of relations between the monarchy and a significant number of its subjects. Foucault continued his discussion of power relations by positing a theory applicable to the circumstances that obtained before the chaos of the 1640s:

And yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. ... This would be to misunderstand the strictly relational character of power relationships. Their existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. ... Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case. ... But this does not mean that they are only a reaction or rebound, forming with respect to the basic domination an underside that is in the end always passive, doomed to perpetual defeat.²

The civil war showed how resistance could become localised, and then how the different points of resistance could be transformed from points of reaction into one great rebellion. The fact that there were no Parliaments throughout the 1630s meant

that there was “no single locus of great Refusal,” that is, until the King summoned Parliament again in 1640. Unlike the Tudors before them, the Stuarts did not seem to have thrived on the fact that the multiplicity of points of resistance could become a kind of “support, or handle in power relations.”

In a reworking of the Marxist thesis versus antithesis dialectical theory, Stephen Greenblatt, in his essay, “Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and its Subversion, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*,” describes the power relations of Renaissance England in terms of “the apparent paradox ... of subversion and its containment.”³ He explains that, “Thus the subversiveness which is genuine and radical is at the same time contained by the power it would appear to threaten. Indeed the subversiveness is the very product of that power and furthers its ends.”⁴ In his fine essay, “After the New Historicism,” Steven Mullaney attempts to unravel this paradox further: “The dominant culture of early modern England did not merely *allow* certain forms of unruliness or discontent or subversive thought to be manifested” as the Tudors maintained their leverage on power. “Rather, ‘the very condition of power’ for the Tudor state rested in its capacity to produce forms of resistance and subversion, both in order to contain them and to use them to its own ends,” Mullaney finishes off his delineation of Greenblatt’s theory.⁵ Despite the Stuarts having begun their reign in 1603 since when they could have consolidated the methods that stood the Tudors in good stead, the fragile and potentially explosive nature of such a relationship between was bitterly exposed in the 1640s.

Cowley marks 1641 as the year that witnessed an end to peace, the year when resistance to the Stuart King became so active and concentrated that relations broke

down irretrievably. He insists, however, on paying tribute to the Stuart dynasty for their peace crusade and the apparently seamless transfer of power from James I to Charles I in 1625:

Then happy *James* with as deepe quiet raign'd,
As in his heavenly throne by Death he gain'd
And lest this blessing with his life might cease,
He left us *Charles*, that pledge of future Peace.
Charles under whom with much adoe no lesse
Then Sixteene Yeeres we endur'd our Happinesse.
(*The Civil War*, I, 87-92)

The trend towards violent confrontation was probably triggered by the Strafford affair that marked a climacteric turning point in relations between King and Parliament. Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford and adviser to the King, was impeached by Parliament on the charge of treason and beheaded on 12 May without trial. Cowley uses his satirical poem to trace events leading up to the war back to this episode: "We thanke ye for the *Bloud* which *fats* our *Coast*, / (That fatall debt paid to great *Straffords* Ghost)" (*The Puritan and the Papist*, 297-98). Such punishment that takes the form of a public execution, according to Mullaney, constitutes a "spectacle of the law taking hold of and inscribing itself upon the body of the condemned."⁶ Clearly then, the law no longer resides singularly with a King who, in what is arguably the single most important event in seventeenth-century history, would himself be condemned and publicly executed in January 1649, thus bringing to a close a decade of struggle, armed resistance and revolution. Literary works take up this struggle and become new battlegrounds, such that the war of the pen attains previously unknown levels of intensity and ferocity. Cowley's political poetry is about celebrating both the person of the King and the institution of the monarchy seen to represent order, peace and the law of the land. As resistance to the King's authority becomes increasingly open, Cowley too seeks to match poetry to armed

struggle with appropriate poetic forms for his discourse, that is, specific forms that fit specific subjects, such as the use of satire for invective or the epic for a long, drawn-out war. That is how he moves from the short poem and stanza patterns to the long poem, and from the ode to satire and heroic poetry.

This chapter is concerned with Cowley's war poetry, covering the period from the gathering of the threat of war in the late 1630s through the outbreak of the war in 1642 to the abandonment of his war epic in 1643. A close reading of the works under consideration reveals his penchant for matching thought, in this instance shaped by historical and political forces, with form and style in his literary practice. The changing nature of events and the deepening of the political crisis, amidst a proliferation of polemical literature, is reflected in Cowley's constant change of form. Nowhere else in his work does the choice of form prove to be as propitious to essentially political thought as it does here, with the poetry getting ever longer from the form of the long poem to the longest possible form, the epic. This in some ways owes to the fact that he has increasingly more to say as the breakdown in power relations worsens, as well as showing how the use of such forms as satire and epic are designed to give a particular orientation to propaganda and polemic. The divisions into sections suggest themselves in this chapter along the lines of the three major poetical pieces that span the period under consideration, though the need for this whole body of poems to be read together has been highlighted as necessary. The first section discusses the forces of history and how they shape Cowley's thought and lead to the choice of his first main form of outright invective, *The Puritans Lecture*. Such is the determinant nature of these forces that Cowley moves from being spokesperson for the nation to becoming one for his party in a redefinition of poetry's

role as a site of struggle and conflict. The second section discusses *The Puritan and the Papist*, a title that immediately suggests an increased awareness of the threat, firstly of the Puritans countered in the previous poem, *The Puritans Lecture*, and secondly, from the smaller group of Catholics. But these religious labels, for Cowley, merely divert attention from an increasingly subversive Parliament that he identifies as the real locus of resistance to Royalism and therefore Anglicanism. *The Puritan and the Papist* demands a close reading in order to bring to light the full extent of the historical and political elements that occupy Cowley's thought in the seemingly inexorable approach of conflict and war. The third and final section discusses *The Civil War*, Cowley's final attempt at a persuasive form in order to seize the initiative in the literary war that accompanies armed conflict. But even as the King struggles to contain the changing face of history occasioned by his rebellious subjects who seek to sever his person from his office and authority, so too does Cowley struggle to contain the demands of propaganda within the vast literary site of his chosen form.

Cowley's war poetry has been the least known part of his work primarily due to its conspicuous absence in the 1656 Poems, where a statement about "some other pieces, which I have thought fit to reject in this publication" could apply to any of the three main poems discussed in this chapter (Poems, Preface, p. 9). Respecting Cowley's wishes, Sprat omitted all three works in the authoritative edition of Cowley's works he published in 1668, and so the task of discovering or publishing them would be left to others. Cowley wrote *The Puritans Lecture* in 1642, the peak year for press production. Its original title was more telling: *A Satyre Against Separatists, or, the Conviction of Chamber Preachers, and other Schismaticks*

Contrary to the Discipline of this own Protestant Profession. It initially appeared in *The Iron Age*, in full *The Foure Ages of England; or The Iron Age, with other select Poems*, the authorship of which Cowley famously disclaims in the 1656 Preface.⁷ Is it possible that he was not aware that *The Puritans Lecture*, a poem of two hundred and forty-four lines, was contained in a volume comprising forty verse chapters in all? Before its recent incorporation among Cowley's works, especially by Calhoun and others, the poem had not been published since 1705 and has hardly received any critical attention. Perhaps it is the one outstanding piece to be missing from Waller's edition, in addition to the fact that the major scholars on Cowley from the modern period, Nethercot and Loiseau, do not include it in the Cowley canon.⁸ Nethercot in particular appeared to ascribe it to Cowley but did not have sufficient reason to assert his authorship outright. For him the poem that was still called *A Satire against Separatists* was "orphan or bastard, though more likely the former," for Cowley may not always have "wished to acknowledge his offspring."⁹ Nevertheless, *The Puritans Lecture* is now firmly ensconced within the Cowley canon. The significant breakthrough was perhaps M. R. Perkin's inclusion of the poem in his 1977 bibliographical reference work on Cowley.¹⁰ But it is Calhoun and others who have argued conclusively in their commentary that Cowley is, in fact, the author.¹¹ Our study therefore provides a maiden opportunity to analyse the work.

The Puritan and the Papist endured a similar fate to *The Puritans Lecture* in terms of being suppressed by Cowley, but in 1682 it appeared alongside other pieces in *Wit and Loyalty reviv'd, in a Collection of some smart Satyrs in Verse and Prose on the Late Times*.¹² A century later Johnson mentions it but does not comment on it.¹³ Still it was only in the modern period that it was definitely accepted as Cowley's when

Waller included it in his publication. Whereas Waller had not given a reason for excluding the earlier satire, *The Puritans Lecture*, he clearly recognises the significance of including this one in the 1906 volume: “The *Satyre* called *The Puritan and the Papist* seems entitled to a definite place among the works of Cowley” (*Essays*, Publisher’s Note). John Sparrow would issue the poem again in 1926,¹⁴ and yet it has largely been ignored since the 1930s. That is when Nethercot describes it as “one of the most immoderate defences of a moderate position ever written,” uses the word “savageness” to describe its satire, and asserts that it is “a stinging piece of rough, witty abuse.”¹⁵ Loiseau implicitly counters Nethercot’s verdict by taking the view that Cowley, “even when he flares up or becomes excited, always retains the instinctive need for illustration” to substantiate his views in *The Puritan and the Papist*, thus making “his attacks appear logical and well thought out.” The work “deserves our attention,” he thinks, because it has “one main quality, ingenuity.”¹⁶ However, Loiseau curiously neglects to follow up on his remarks with a discussion of the poem, just as he would not consider it necessary to devote a section to *The Civil War*. This general attitude of neglect towards *The Puritan and the Papist* lasted for most of the century until the publication of Calhoun and others appeared in 1989. They suggest that the work “has been unjustifiably ignored” possibly due to the fact that “critics have, in general, not been receptive to earlier seventeenth-century satire.”¹⁷ They consider the poem “as something of a masterpiece,” and, in addition to its “neat couplet wit” that will not be attained again until the Restoration, “surpasses in conception and skill” most of the satires of the age.¹⁸ With the exception of such exciting editorial commentaries, this work has never really been studied or given the attention it deserved following those early twentieth-century publications.

If the 1970s marked the inclusion of *The Puritans Lecture* in the Cowley canon, it also marked another great moment in Cowleyan scholarship, that is, the discovery of the full text of *The Civil War*. Cowley abandoned the poem at a time and for reasons he offers in his 1656 Preface:

I have cast away all such pieces as I wrote during the time of the late troubles, with any relation to the differences that caused them; as among others, *three Books of the Civil War* it self, reaching as far as the first *Battel of Newbury*, where the succeeding *misfortunes* of the *party* stopt the *work*. (Poems, Preface, p. 9).

During the war, news from Newbury that would signify Royalist defeat had reached the King's headquarters in Oxford late in September 1643, bringing to an end this challenging project Cowley started earlier in the year after the completion of *The Puritan and the Papist*. For long it seemed that he had effectively carried out the threat to cast away the poem, for it was not until 1679 that Book I was found and published anonymously under the title of *A Poem on the Late Civil War*.¹⁹

Astonishingly it would be three centuries before the manuscripts of Books II and III would be discovered at last and published by Allan Pritchard in 1973. Following his original publication, Pritchard joined Thomas Calhoun and Laurence Heyworth to edit the 1989 volume of Cowley's Collected Works that includes *The Civil War*. It has not been released again but Julia Griffin in 1998 included a passage from the poem, "The Devil Speaks" (*The Civil War*, II. 504-617), in her selection of Cowley's poetry, perhaps encouraging a trend of selecting key passages to release for the entertainment of the readership.²⁰

Even allowing for the fact that only one book of *The Civil War* entered the public domain in the seventeenth century, it is surprising that it has generally suffered a dearth of criticism through the ages.²¹ Even twentieth century critics only made

sporadic comments on the poem as it existed until Pritchard's discovery. Loiseau mentions it as an example of Cowley's political satire, claiming that it takes the guise of an epic only to cover its true kind as a satire.²² Hinman would mention the poem once when noting that, Cowley's "abortive efforts" such as *The Civil War* still "reflect his elevated conception of the poet's function," but he does not comment further on why, for example, this "fragment" deserves to "be kept sacred to Posterity."²³ It was therefore left to Trotter, following Pritchard's release of all three books, to provide the first significant study of *The Civil War*. In the chapter he devotes to the poem Trotter suggests that, "here surely is a case for a historicist reading, a poem whose 'form' and 'content' were both supposedly determined by history." He prefers, however, to show that, "The poem had begun to fail, had moved into conflict with itself, *before* history started to provide the wrong plot. ... We must examine ... rhetorics which enter into conflict with themselves rather than with history."²⁴ We arrive at a similar conclusion as Trotter, namely that the incompleteness of the work is not due solely to historical forces, but our argument is that the demands of propaganda were becoming increasingly at odds with the conventions of epic. Where Trotter considers the various forms or generic kinds to be conflicting, especially satire and elegy, we conceive them as the means by which Cowley engages his propagandist intentions, adopting an all-inclusive approach that requires different forms for different purposes. For us it is not only down to historical factors because the political discourse of propaganda proves ill-suited to epic with its long-standing traditions, all compounded by the lack of emotional and spatial detachment that would have suited such a vast undertaking as Cowley's.

The outstanding study of *The Civil War* since Trotter has been done by Gerald

MacLean as part of his 1990 work, *Time's Witness*, where Cowley is the only poet to whom a chapter is entirely devoted. MacLean's study argues that "poetry does not simply reflect an otherwise knowable historical reality but rather represents specific points of cultural, social, or political tension in order to resolve or displace implicit problems by aesthetic closure." *The Civil War* is the subject of a "detailed critical examination" – given the need to examine this significant work in a new light – for "we have arrived at a moment of critical debate through which we can now assess ... the 'unfinished status' of the text rather than dismiss it as an abandoned failure."²⁵ On the subject of form, MacLean considers that "Cowley had seen fit to follow Lucan's controversial example and attempt that paradoxical form, the historical poem."²⁶ MacLean is thus suggesting that there is an inherent anomaly in the very conception of the poem, and we are agreed therefore that the incompleteness of the poem was not merely due to the fact that history delivered the wrong turn of events. But we engage a much fuller discussion on form, style and content, all the while moving towards an explanation of how the political poem we conceive it to be fares against the conventions of epic that should define Cowley's practice once he chooses such a traditional form. That is how we provide an original explanation for the incompleteness of the poem. Finally, unlike Trotter and MacLean who ignore *The Puritans Lecture* and especially *The Puritan and the Papist*, our approach establishes continuity between *The Civil War* and Cowley's earlier political poems that together comprise his body of war poetry.

1.2. Forces of History: The Early Poetry and *The Puritans Lecture*

I have beene (Sir) where so many *Puritans* dwell,
That there are only more of them in Hell.

Not a kinde sillable from him can God get

Till to the Parliament he comes at last;
Just at that blessed word his furie's past:
And here he thanks God in a loving tone.

(*The Puritans Lecture*, 1-2, 98-101)

The Puritans Lecture follows a long line of political verse Cowley started writing in his teenage years. In the 1636 volume titled *Sylva, or Divers Copies of Verses Made upon Sundry Occasions*, some of the poems are celebratory odes or praise songs for Charles I. These include 'On his Majesties returne out of Scotland [1633],' 'A Song on the same,' and 'Ode. V. In commendation of the time we live under the Reigne of our gracious King Charles.' What these poems have in common is the way Cowley stretches the panegyric form to the extreme, with comments ranging from Charles I's peaceful reign to his god-like nature. The tone is set by the first poem in the volume, probably written as early as 1633 shortly after the occasion it celebrates, that of the King's return from Scotland following his coronation in Edinburgh in June. There is a return to the past and even to mythology to find comparisons with Charles I. The following lines are typical:

Yet whil'st our *Charles* with equall ballance reignes
'Twixt Mercy and *Astrea*; and mainteynes
A noble peace, 'tis hee, 'tis onely hee
Who is most neere, most like the Deitie.

('On His Majesties returne out of Scotland [1633],' 51-4)

The mention of *Astrea*, meaning "Iustitia" or justice, represents "another way for Cowley to parallel the Caroline reign and the Golden Age."²⁷ *Astrea* was also used in relation to Elizabeth I, and a suggestion of continuity between the Tudor and Stuart dynasties is possible. George Parfitt uses the very terms of Cowley's poetry to discuss the reliance on the past for terms of praise:

This reliance on authority and the past probably has something in common with ideas of the deterioration of the world with the passing of time, and it is striking that the commonest way of praising a new regime is in terms of reclamation: *Astraea* returns to earth; there is a new Golden Age; Charles II is a second Augustus.²⁸

In 'Ode. V. In commendation of the time we live under the Reigne of our gracious King Charles,' the Caroline reign becomes another Golden Age in its own right:

Our *Charles*, blest *Alchymist* (though strange,
Beleeve it future times) did change
The *Iron* age of old,
Into an age of *Gold*.

(‘In commendation of ... King Charles,’ 33-6)

Cowley would later write another poem with the familiar title of ‘On his Majesties Return out of Scotland’ in 1641, following the King’s return from another journey to Scotland. This poem, along with *The Puritans Lecture*, written just before the war in 1642, would set the scene for *The Puritan and the Papist* and *The Civil War*.

‘On his Majesties Return out of Scotland’ is an assertion of Cowley’s royalism and a plea for peace.²⁹ It was included in a volume entitled *Irenodia Cantabrigiensis*, a collection of celebratory poems by Cambridge University students on the King’s return from Scotland and published in November 1641.³⁰ Possibly, this initiative was an affront to Parliament, for it had not only voted against obtaining funds for the King, but had even tried to prevent him from going to Scotland to broker peace by means of personal persuasion. The poem opens as an encomium for the King, with a commendation for all peace as a blessing from Heaven itself:

Welcome, great Sir, with all the joy that’s due
To the return of *Peace* and *You*.
Two greatest Blessings which this age can know;
For that to Thee, for Thee to Heav’n we ow.

(‘On His Majesties Return out of Scotland,’ 1-4)

Of great interest is the way the poem makes use of historical detail and the interpretation it gives to events that lead to civil war. Charles I’s visit to Scotland from the early summer till late autumn came only a few weeks after Strafford’s execution. It gave him a pretext to get away from London where the attitude of the crowds towards Strafford had caused him deep distress. Before the execution on 12

May, the people of London had gathered between 3 and 9 May at Westminster demanding Strafford's head and shouting "justice." In *The Civil War* Cowley would lambaste the crowds and their "sencelesse Clamours," while regretting the loss of the rare "voice" that Strafford represented:

They will be heard and in unjustest wise
The many-mouthed *Rout* for *Justice* cries.
They call for *blood* which now I feare do's call,
For *bloud* againe much louder then them all.
In sencelesse Clamours and confused Noyse,
We lost that rare and yet unconquered *voice*.
(*The Civil War*, I. 139-44)

Strafford had been impeached because of his deep involvement in Scottish affairs, a victim of the unsuccessful attempt to suppress the Scottish Rebellion of 1639-40. The decision to impose the Book of Common Prayer and so-called Arminian church canons on Scotland created this rebellion which resulted in two 'Bishops' wars. The First Bishops' War ended with the Treaty of Berwick in 1639, while the Second Bishops' War led to the Treaty of Ripon in October 1640. The poem on Charles I's return from Scotland could be read as an adjunct to *The Civil War*, for an understanding of the one poem repays a close reading of the other. The latter poem, for example, discusses the remarkable lack of bloodshed during these confrontations:

Just *Tweed*, that now had with long rest forgot
On which side dwelt the *English*, which the *Scot*,
Saw glittering Armes shine sadly on his face,
Whilst all th'affrighted fish sunke downe apace.
Noe bloud did then from this darke Quarrell flow:
It gave blunt wounds that bled not out till now.
(*The Civil War*, I. 97-102)³¹

The threat of war with Scotland was real because the Scots had occupied the north of England during the Second Bishops War. Charles I, seeking peace at all costs, had agreed to their occupation while negotiating financial terms of settlement. The Short Parliament of 1640 was summoned and then dismissed when it asked for its own grievances to be satisfied before meeting the King's demand to grant subsidies for

the army. This impasse was a throwback to the reign of the first of the Stuarts, James I, whose dealings with Parliament had been bedevilled also by the struggle for supremacy. Without the money needed to raise a large army, Charles I signed the treaty of Ripon, by which agreement he would pay the Scots £850 a day until the dispute was settled fully. He was now forced to call the Long Parliament, an action with huge consequences for power relations. Even without these circumstances, Cowley was convinced that the King would still have sought peace with the Scots. The King's Scottish heritage and the Stuart peace policy aside, even the designs of nature were meant to uphold the 'oneness' of the peoples of England and Scotland.³²

The *Sea* it self, how rough so ere
Could scarce believe such fury here.
How could the *Scots* and we be *Enemies* grown?
That, and its *Master Charles* had made us *One*.
(‘On His Majesties Return out of Scotland,’ 37-40)

‘On his Majesties Return out of Scotland’ demonstrates Cowley’s penchant for representing the past when writing on historical topics, a trait this poem would share with *The Civil War*. MacLean studies it for this use of history, finding that it is one of “two familiar Stuart poems,” along with Fanshawe’s ode of 1632, to “exemplify how the appeal to the past makes partisan narratives of current conditions seem ‘objectively’ historical.” He asserts further that, “Both poems shape events while claiming the status of historical reportage,” by means of drawing selectively from history in order “to persuade readers to accept their solutions to pressing political problems.”³³ Historical precedent, for example, suggests that the mighty English monarchs of the past defended their people against “Dangers from afar” (‘On His Majesties Return out of Scotland,’ 42); they did not encourage domestic uprisings or confrontation with Scotland. But peace with Scotland did not reduce the threat of

civil war that the King had to deal with on his return. Realising that it was probably too late to rein in the martial spirits of the people which were awakened already, Cowley suggests that these spirits be channelled into aggression abroad. Domestic troubles, then, become a way of whetting the appetite for war abroad: "This noise at home was but *Fates policie / To raise our Spir'its more high*" ('On his Majesties Return out of Scotland,' 49-50). Cowley's solution is to preach against internal strife that will tear the nation apart. It is in defence of his solution that he appeals to England's heroic past that was essentially one of unity at home and conquest abroad. He fuels the nostalgia for the past by using emotive words like forefathers and children in an image he creates of the nation as a big family:

No *Blood* so loud as that of *Civil War*;
It calls for Dangers from afar.
Let's rather go, and seek out *Them*, and *Fame*;
Thus our *Fore-fathers got*, thus left a *Name*.
All their rich blood was spent with gains,
But that which swells their *Childrens Veins*.
Why sit we still, our *Spir 'its* wrapt up in *Lead*?
Not like them whilst they *Liv'd*, but now they're *Dd*?
(‘On His Majesties Return out of Scotland,’ 41-8)

In MacLean's general theory on the poetic appeal to a historical past, "An ensuing nostalgia for the past and consequent discontent with the present commonly provide poets with an emotive means of making a judgement about the present *felt* to be true, even when it clearly isn't."³⁴ Cowley's rallying cry is a ploy to deflect attention away from an increasingly beleaguered monarchy to a common enemy for all England. In a frantic appeal to his audience, he resorts to his familiar technique of associating kingly actions with heavenly designs, the argument being that the substitution of foreign war for civil war is sanctioned by destiny. He even claims prophetic status for his words:

Sure there are actions of this height and promise
Destin'd to *Charls* his days.
What will the *Triumphs* of his *Battels* be,

Whose very *Peace* it self is *Victorie*?
 When *Heav'n* bestows the best of *Kings*,
 It bids us think of mighty things.
 His *Valour*, *Wisdom*, *Offspring* speak no less;
 And we the *Prophets Sons*, write not by *Guess*.
 ('On His Majesties Return out of Scotland, 57-64)

For all his appeal to channel domestic aggression overseas for the sake of peace at home, Cowley sensed the inevitability of civil war. 'On his Majesties Return out of Scotland' therefore proves to be a poem about the forthcoming internal disharmony. Half a year on from the execution of Strafford, the rift between the King and Parliament grows ever wider as the latter gradually assumes the mantle of authority. Though Cowley claims to be prophesying when mentioning civil war, it is, in fact, difficult to be insensitive to the bitter political rivalries and religious intolerance that foreshadowed armed confrontation. While peace with Scotland calls for celebration, there is yet a real threat of war in England. His style here is to claim professedly to be celebrating the peace while actually warning of the tragic consequences and futility of impending war:

This happy *Concord* in no *Blood* is writ,
 None can grudge heav'n *full thanks* for it.
 No *Mothers* here lament their *Childrens* fate,
 And like the *Peace*, but think it comes *too late*.
 No *Widows* hear the jocond *Bells*,
 And take them for their *Husbands Knells*.
 No Drop of *Blood* is spilt which might be said
 To mask our joyful *Holiday* with *Red*.
 ...
 The gain of *Civil Wars* will not allow
Bay to the *Conquerors Brow*.
 At such a *Game* what fool would venture in,
 Where one must *lose*, yet neither side can *win*?
 ('On His Majesties Return out of Scotland,' 9-16, 25-8)

This passage is revisited two years later when Cowley uses its very words to remind his audience of his predictions and the disaster that could have been averted. With the civil war raging ferociously, he would show in 1643 that events have happened

exactly as he forecast and warned against:

What *English* Ground but still some moisture beares
Of young mens blood, and more of Mothers teares?
What aires unthickned with some sighs of Wives!
And more of Mayds for their deare Lovers lives!
Alas, what *Triumph* can this vict'ory shew
That dyes us red in *blood* and *blushes* too!
How can we wish that *Conquest*, which bestowes
Cypresse, not *Bayes* uppon the conqu'ering browes!
(*The Civil War*, I. 5-12)

These passages reveal the need for Cowley's body of political poetry to be read together. There are many cross references and reworking of passages from one poem to the other, especially when circumstances afford very little time for composition, as in the case of *The Civil War*.

The Puritans Lecture was written in the wake of the 1641 relaxation of censorship laws, one of a vast array of literature that was unleashed on the political scene. It is representative of the new kind of discourse which was essentially polemical and propagandist. The arts were truly becoming sites of struggle and competing political discourses, the one more vitriolic than the other. Thomas Corns explains this upsurge in press production and this new wave of writing thus:

In part it shows the effect of the sudden release of those controls which had held the press in check over the 1630s and earlier. In part, too, it shows a strong market for written material, much of which related directly to the developing crisis. ... Securing the opinion of the reading public became almost an obsession in the political life of the nation in the 1640s.³⁵

Political satire becomes the vogue as the different factions jostle for support from undecided and even confused audiences. Significantly, Cowley follows a new trend whereby he ceases to write mainly on behalf of all England and starts defending the interests of his party. *The Puritans Lecture* represents Cowley's shift to this new rhetoric and the search for an appropriate form for his discourse.

The background to *The Puritans Lecture* belongs in the realm of religious controversy that dogged the Caroline reign throughout. The belief was that whoever controlled the Church would control the state. The appointment of William Laud, leader of the Arminians, as Bishop of London in 1628 meant not only the rise of Arminianism but the beginning of serious opposition to the King. It was because the House of Commons declared the Arminians enemies of the kingdom in 1629 that Charles I dissolved Parliament. When it became apparent that Laud was trying to rid the Church of Puritanism, many Calvinists and other Puritans started migrating to America and other Protestant lands, a pattern that continued throughout the 1630s. But as the Arminian party gradually became the main governing body with the highest positions in Church and State, so too did resistance from its detractors increase. Laud's attempt to extend his dominion to Scotland, where the Church was largely autonomous, would have damaging consequences for peace. It was when he decided to impose Arminianism on the Scots that the latter rebelled in 1639 to spark off a decade of hostilities in Britain. In the context of the background to *The Puritans Lecture*, two other significant Laudian acts in the 1630s were the imposition of press censorship and the ban on the ordination of Puritan lecturers or ministers paid to preach. The relaxation of censorship laws aside, Parliament also revoked the ban on the institution of the lectureship:

The lectureship, as a Reformation institution, was a preaching position and thus distinguished from formal clerical appointments that combined the functions of preaching with performance of church ritual and the offering of sacraments. Lecturers could be hired by the laity, parish vestries, or town corporations, ... thanks largely to the Long Parliament. On 8 September 1641 the House of Commons granted any parish the permission to set up a lectureship, the motion being made by Oliver Cromwell.³⁶

The decision to restore previously prohibited lecturers was one of many taken when the King was away in Scotland, such was the unprecedented manner in which Parliament was appropriating power for itself. Cowley's poem can be read as a

response to this act of restoring the lectureship. It is not only an attack on Puritanism, but also an indictment of Parliament portrayed as its political wing.

The Puritans Lecture opens on a note of cynicism about the “silenc’d Ministers” discovering liberty anew.

I have beene (Sir) where so many *Puritans* dwell,
That there are only more of them in Hell;
Where silenc’d Ministers enow were met
To make a Synod; And may make one yet.
Their blessed liberty they’ve found at last
And talk’d for all those yeares of silence past,
Like some halfe-pin’d, and hungerstarved men,
Who when they next get victells, surfet them.

(*The Puritans Lecture*, 1-8)

The attitude of cynicism is maintained throughout the poem, the main devices being humour and hyperbole. This passage refers to the huge number of Puritan ministers who came to work in London, following the new laws passed by Parliament. No sooner did this happen than Parliament was being entreated to create a National Synod of Divines. The mention of a synod is evocative of the Grand Remonstrance of December 1641 which stated that, “And the better to effect the intended reformation, we desire there may be a general synod of the most grave, pious, learned, and judicious divines of this island.”³⁷ Several other petitions for a synod followed, the result being the Westminster Assembly that would eventually start meeting in July 1643. Thus Cowley’s worst fears about the rise of Puritanism would be confirmed. Incidentally the Assembly would not only ban the episcopacy, but church lands were to be seized and many Anglican clerics were to be imprisoned.

Cowley had always made public his disliking and distrust of Puritanism. His instinct, his own religious training, and his unwavering loyalty to the King all contributed to mould life-long sentiments. In one of his precocious *Sylva* poems, ‘A Vote,’ he

wants all ages and future times to know “What I abhorre.” And then his very first resolution is never to be associated with the Puritan cause, crying that, “I would not be a Puritane!”

This let all ages heare,
And future tymes in my soules picture see
What I abhorre, what I desire to bee.

I would not be a Puritane, though he
Can preach two houres, and yet his sermon bee

But halfe a quarter long,
Though from his old mechanicke trade
By vision hee’s a Pastor made,

His faith was growne so strong.
Nay though he thinke to gayne salvation,
By calling th’Pope the whore of Babylon.

(‘A Vote,’ 6-16)

The Puritans Lecture makes these same charges Cowley made in his teenage years.

On the issue of unnecessary time consumption, for example, he mentions the wasted two hours of preaching: “... much I feare / That all will not be done these two houres here.” This is in a passage that continues an anti-puritan tradition of alleging the use of much time to say very little, mocking at the preacher’s mannerisms:

But *Laurd*; and then he mounts, *All’s not yet done*:
No, would it were, thinke I, but much I feare
That all will not be done these two houres here:
For now he comes too’t, *As you shall finde it writ*,
Repeats his text, and takes his leave of it,
And strait to’s Sermon in such furious wise
As made it what they call’t, an exercise.
The Pulpit’s his hot bath: the brethren’s cheere
Rost-beife, Mince-py, and Capon reeke out heere.

(*The Puritans Lecture*, 102-110)

Cowley proceeds to ridicule the hiring of preachers unfit for the lectureship, just because they claim to profess a strong faith. These are people seeking an escape from their lowly stations: “Can they whole Shopbooks write, and yet not know / If Bishops have a right devine or no?” (*The Puritans Lecture*, 161-62); or again, “Or can they sweepe their shops, and doores so well, / And how to cleans a State as yet not tell?” (163-64). He mocks at the new preacher delivering the Puritan Lecture

who thinks he will gain salvation if he called the Pope the whore of Babylon:

They'le roote out Popery here whats'ever come,
It is decreed, nor shall thy fate O *Rome*
Resist their Vow. They'le do't to a haire, for they ...
Have now vast thoughts, and scorne to set upon
Any whore lesse then her of *Babilon*.

(*The Puritans Lecture*, 147-9, 153-4)

In addition merely to pouring scorn on a rival religious group, the thrust of the *The Puritans Lecture* ultimately lies in the fact it is political satire, for Cowley's attitude towards Puritanism is the same as that towards Parliament. This is because they were working in tandem, the one promoting the interests of the other in an all-powerful alliance. Perhaps the most important passage in the poem is the one in which he voices his feelings about this connection between the Puritan Church and Parliament. The build-up is fraught with words like "sedition," "warre," and "violence," while the irony becomes particularly acerbic:

His stretchd-out voyce sedition spreads a farre,
Nor does he only teach but act a warre:
He sweats against the state, Church learning, sence,
And resolves to get hell by Violence. ...
An houre lasts this two handed Prayer, and yet
Not a kinde sillable from him can God get
Till to the Parliament he comes at last;
Just at that blessed word his furie's past:
And here he thanks God in a loving tone.

(*The Puritans Lecture*, 89-92, 97-101)

The practice of using the pulpit to preach political doctrine was an established and widespread one. Parfitt, for example, explains that,

The Elizabethan government had used the pulpit for political propaganda. Stuart governments did the same, while rightly fearing that puritan preachers were speaking an alternative politics as well as an alternative religion.³⁸

In Cowley's political poetry, the relation between Puritan religious practice and Parliamentary politics would reach its apotheosis when a preacher allegedly writes the speech for the Parliamentarian General to read to his troops before going into

war:

On th'other side th'Essexian Rebell strove,
His fainting Troopes with powrelesse words to move;
His Speech was dull and tedious; for him made
By some great Deacon of the Preaching Trade.
(*The Civil War*, III. 329-32)

The contrast in the lecturer's attitude towards the State and Church, on the one hand, and the puritan Parliament and *de facto* governing body, on the other, could not be more marked. The impending war and violence would threaten the established order and traditions of State and Church government. Cowley's attitude towards Puritanism is therefore partially motivated by fear, the fear that it will connive with Parliament to fight against everything he holds dear, namely the State, the Church and good sense.

The Puritan and the Papist and *The Civil War* will later develop these points, showing to what extent Cowley's fears would be realised. Together these three pieces stand out among Cowley's works as arguably the most polemical of his writings, comparable only to his *Vision* on Cromwell. They represent experiments with forms of satire for the first two and epic for *The Civil War*, in an attempt to match certain traditional forms to new kinds of discourse. These poetic pieces are interpretations of contemporary history and current events in a period of social upheaval, political tension, religious intolerance and civil war. Because he is writing on an historical topic, Cowley becomes an "all-seeing and all-knowing witness" of the history of his time.³⁹ The poems, however, cannot be read as history because he is not dealing with historical truth that takes the form of narrative and lays claims to objectivity. He does not set out to record events as a neutral observer; rather, his poetry becomes a participatory tool that is to be wielded to influence the processes of

history. His attitude is partisan, his motivation political, his poetry an agency for his party's ideology. They are, then, political discourses, serving ostensibly as propaganda to buttress the efforts of the Royalist party machine. Cowley was writing for an immediate audience in an attempt to restore the power relationships that obtained before the 1640s, such that their non-inclusion by the time of his 1656 Poems was essentially due to the fact that the changed political landscape had become uncondusive to such poetry.

1.3 Religious and Political Satire in *The Puritan and the Papist*

*Religion is a Circle, men contend,
And runne the round in dispute without end.*

*They blind obedience and blind duty teach;
You blind Rebellion and blind faction preach.*

*Bribes, Plunder, and such Parliament Priviledges,
Are words which you'le ne're learne in holy Writ.*

(The Puritan and the Papist, 3-4, 107-8, 216-17)

The Puritan and the Papist is ostensibly a religious polemic, a series of accusations levelled at Puritanism and Catholicism. The approach is therefore different from that in *The Puritans Lecture* where the attack is focused on one group. The last third of the poem, however, lapses into an outright invective against the political practices of the Puritans who make up the Parliamentary party. By condemning the two religious groups, Cowley adopts, by implication, the position of the 'true' religion, Anglicanism, and that of the 'true' party, Royalist or Cavalier. Adopting an argumentative stance and drawing from essentially Royalist sources of historical and political events, *The Puritan and the Papist* surveys the background to civil war, detailing the individual contributions of such diverse personalities from the political and religious scene as Members of Parliament and soldiers, preachers and divines.

We intend to interpret the various strands of Cowley's argument and his unique blend of different styles, moving all the time towards a theory of the need for Stuart absolutism in the light of his rejection of Parliamentary sovereignty.

The poem is also about Cowley himself and how his life mirrors the upheavals and fortunes of his party. The title page of *A Satyre, The Puritan and the Papist* indicates that the author was "a Scholler in Oxford," but it was written between December 1642 and March 1643 while Cowley was still at Cambridge. It was only after he had taken his MA degree in person that March that he moved to Oxford where he published the poem. His reason for leaving Cambridge can be extrapolated from the prologue he wrote to *The Guardian*: "We perish if the *Round-heads* be about" ('Prologue to the *Guardian*, Before the Prince,' 6).⁴⁰ Cambridge, which incidentally was Cromwell's constituency, had become a stronghold for the Parliamentarians. The stress on "Scholler" distinguishes Cowley from a motley crowd that included the King and his courtiers, Oxford having recently become the King's headquarters. The wrench of having to leave his beloved Cambridge and a life of scholarly venture is captured in *The Civil War*. In a tribute to Oxford in the latter poem, he would declare his joy to have come to a safe haven for Royalists, but fears for its 'sister' university, Cambridge, now in the hands of the enemy:

To *Oxford* next great *Charles* triumphant came,
Oxford the *British Muses* second Fame. ...
'Midst all the Joies kind heaven allows thee here,
Thinke on thy *Sister*, and shed then a *Teare*.
(*The Civil War*, I. 345-6, 363-4)

It was perhaps in response to Parliamentary party literature that Cowley wrote *The Puritan and the Papist*. It could also be intended to dissociate the King's party from

the Catholics whose involvement in the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 had shown that they could be politically dangerous. It is not clear where the political affiliations of Catholics belonged because the two main parties constantly accused them of sympathising with the enemy. The presence of a Catholic Queen at Court, the conversion to Catholicism of many courtiers, the fierce opposition of the Arminians to Calvinism and Laud's attempt to rid the Church of Puritanism, and the frequent publication of Catholic books were all cited by the King's detractors as proof of a pro-Catholic party at Court and a possible attempt to impose Catholicism on the people. Even the foreign policy seemed to support such claims because the King appeared to align himself with the Catholic nations like France and Spain, and established diplomatic relations with Rome in 1635. Among the Parliamentary declarations most offensive to the Royalists was that of 9 March 1642, which formulated detailed charges that Charles I and his counsellors and courtiers were intent on establishing popery and crushing Parliament. Many Royalists were anxious to be dissociated from Catholicism and were quick to level their own accusations at the Puritans. Cowley is one of those who feared that these two groups were joining forces against his party. In *The Civil War*, for example, there would even be accusations that Parliament had bought the services of mercenary Catholic soldiers:

The rest who sent in lesser helps to these,
Was Marcion, Nestorius, Eutiches, ...
With hundred more ill Names of Puritans.
With these (ô strange!) five hundred joyn'd that hold
The papall Faith (soe mighty'a God is Gold).
What could the threatning Bulls of Conscience doe?
Rome hates all Sects, but Rome loves Money too.
(*The Civil War*, III. 171-2, 182-6)

Cowley's source for these charges would almost certainly have been the main Royalist newspaper, "Mercurius Aulicus," which provided much of his information:

Mercurius Aulicus reported on 3 March 1643 the capture at Newark of "some *French* Papists, who served under the command, and for the pay of the two Houses of Parliament," and

subsequently it frequently repeated the charge that Catholic mercenaries served in the Parliamentary army. The Parliamentary *Mercurius Britannicus* satirized these claims as absurd.⁴¹

For all the accusations levelled at them, the Catholics were too small in number to hold considerable sway in politics, unlike the Puritans who wielded power through Parliament. It is perhaps in realisation of this that Cowley changes his approach in the last third and ignores the Catholics so as to focus his attacks on Puritans and their political misdeeds. If Cowley was responding to the large body of anti-Royalist satire, he probably did not want to show how drawn he was by shelving the bitter tone until the last third of the poem. His tone is predominantly ironic and even humorous, perhaps reflecting his contempt for the opposition. Changing his approach and attitude in the course of the poem, however, suggests impatience and an unsustainable attempt to innovate within the conventions of political satire. The overall effect is of a non-traditional approach but a powerful propaganda effort. It is therefore of great interest to history, even if the partisan nature of the poem demands that events be always interpreted unfavourably for the opposition. The poem is written in three hundred and two lines, in heroic couplets. In its choice of metre, as well as in terms of subject and focus, it heralds *The Civil War*.

The Puritan and the Papist opens with a conceit:

So two rude *waves*, by stormes together throwne,
Roare at each other, fight and then grow *one*.
Religion is a *Circle*, men contend,
And runne the round in dispute without end.
Now in a *Circle* who goe contrary,
Must at the last *meet* of necessity.

(*The Puritan and the Papist*, 1-6)

This beginning is particularly witty, making use of different figures and images as if to soften the attack and make the rhetoric open to varying interpretations. The “two

rude *waves*,” for example, could be a broadside aimed at the warring factions of Royalists and Parliamentarians. They will “fight, and then grow *one*” as England becomes united again. Cowley, however, is thinking of religion here, and he excludes himself from the “two rude *waves*” which are the two religious groups indicated in the title. Puritans and Catholics are not expected to agree, but Cowley’s self-assigned task is to find common ground for satire between these two groups. While it might be possible to join forces for political reasons, it is difficult, however, to imagine these two groups finding common ground in religious belief. Puritans preached predestination and the individual conscience responding to the Bible, while Catholics preached the authority of Church doctrine and the importance of ritual, this of course being uncomfortably close to High Anglican practice. Perhaps it is in an attempt to give their Church a separate character from Catholicism that some Anglicans had readily embraced Arminianism from the continent. Arminius, a Dutch theologian, had preached the doctrine of free will.

Cowley’s main contention is that both Puritanism and Catholicism are false extremes, hence they cannot be trusted, either in religious matters or in politics. His approach is to show up his opponents’ lies and falsehood, thereby implicitly drawing attention to the truth and golden mean that his group represents:

The *Roman* to advance the *Catholicke* cause
Allows a *Lie*, and calls it *Pia Fraus*.
The *Puritan* approves and does the same,
Dislikes nought in it but the *Latin name*.
He flows with these devises, and dares *ly*
In very *deed*, in *truth*, and *verity*.
He whines, and sighes out *Lies*, with so much ruth,
As if he griev’d, ’cause he could ne’re speake truth.
(*The Puritan and the Papist*, 7-14)

By mentioning the names of Catholic and Puritan in the same breath, Cowley again implies a contrast between these and that of Anglican. The contrast is evident

between “whines,” “lies” and “ruth” on the one hand, and “deed,” “truth” and “verity” on the other. He shows further indignation when he contends that his opponents lie not only to humankind, but also to God:

Nay to th' *Almighty's* selfe they have beene bold
To *ly*, and their blasphemous *Minister* told
They might say false to *God*, for if they were
Beaten, he knew't not, for he was not there.
But *God*, who their great *thankfulnessse* did see,
Rewards them straight with another *Victorie*,
Just such another at *Brainceford*; and san's doubt
Will *weary* er't be long their *gratitude* out.

(*The Puritan and the Papist*, 21-28)

The topicality of the events discussed is such that Cowley expects his audience to relate to them, even when he does not overtly mention names. The reference here is probably to Thomas Case, a Puritan divine, who is mentioned only later by name:

“Power of dispensing *Oaths* the *Papists* claime; / *Case* hath got leave o' *God*, to doe the same” (*Puritan and the Papist*, 49-50). Case was delivering a sermon in October

1642 when news arrived of the Battle of Edgehill in which the Royalists claimed victory, though it is perhaps of greater significance that this was actually the first major engagement in which Parliamentary forces showed they could stand up to the Royalists. Case apparently thanked God nevertheless, claiming that, “even when

God does not appear to be helping the Cause, he is in fact doing so.”⁴² Cowley then, with great sarcasm, argues that the Parliamentarians were wont to thank God even for defeats. It must be observed though, that both sides suffered substantial losses and Cowley himself would later mention “*Edgehills almost-Victory*” (*The Civil War*, 42).

His sarcasm becomes even more pointed when he says that God gave the Parliamentarians victory “at *Brainceford*.” Actually, it was Rupert, the King's nephew, who sacked Brentford in November 1642.

The Case episode might have prompted Cowley to comment about the “unknowne *sence*” in which Puritans pray. He claims that he can no more understand Puritan prayers, although they use English, than the Catholic laity could understand prayers and rituals in a foreign tongue, almost certainly Latin:

They keepe the *Bible* from *Lay-men*, but ye
Avoid this, for ye have no *Laytie*.
They in a forraigne, and unknowne *tongue* pray,
You in an unknowne *sence* your prayers say:
So that this difference 'twixt ye does ensue,
Fooles understand not *them*, nor *Wise-men* you.

(*The Puritan and the Papist*, 57-62)

Cowley has now resorted to addressing the Puritan in the second person whilst speaking of the Catholic in the third. He is attacking both groups who, though praying in different ways, share the peculiarity of not being understood by anyone. It is another example of how far he goes to ransack Catholic tradition for parallels with the relatively new pattern of Puritan worship.

Cowley's castigation of Puritanism and Catholicism is intended to leave these two with no redeeming features. Even age-old customs and rituals, such as those of the established Catholic Church, are discussed in a new and damaging fashion. The tone becomes one of chiding and ridicule in keeping with his new theme of “*Non-sence*.”

They an unprofitable zeale have got,
Of invoking *Saints* that heare them not.
'Twere well you did so, nought may more be fear'd
In your fond prayers, then that they should be heard.
To them your *Non-sence* well enough might passe,
They'd ne're see that i'th' *Divine Looking-glasse*:
Nay, whether you'de worship *Saints* is not yet knowne,
For ye'have as yet of your *Religion* none.

(*The Puritan and the Papist*, 63-70)

Cowley thus rejects the Catholic belief in beatification and sainthood on the grounds that dead people must be oblivious to prayers or invocations. The Puritans lie on the other extreme, with no saints and no place in their relatively new religion for any.

This is not good enough for Cowley, who suggests sarcastically that the Puritans should have had saints as well, so that their “fond,” that is foolish, prayers will go unheard. He picks at what he considers a lack of sense in Puritan prayer, as well as a propensity for lies, as the reason why it is not fit to be heard by God:

They keepe the *people ignorant*, and you
Keepe both the *People*, and yourselves so too.
Nay such bold lies to *God* him selfe yee vaunt,
As if you'd faine keepe *him* too *ignorant*.
(*The Puritan and the Papist*, 103-6)

A major feature of the poem is the way religion is used both as a weapon of attack and a means of introducing political discourse. One of the most effective couplets apparently opposes “obedience” to “rebellion” and “duty” to “faction,” but the use of the adjectival “blind” links these seemingly opposite concepts. It is a synthesis of Cowley’s method of showing up two false extremes by highlighting underlying similarities in what otherwise constitutes different beliefs and practice:

They *blind obedience* and *blind duty* teach;
You *blind Rebellion* and *blind faction* preach.
(*The Puritan and the Papist*, 107-8)

This attack opens the political angle and casts the Parliamentarians in the role of rebels. With the civil war under way, Cowley lays the blame on the Puritan left and, probably to a lesser extent, on the Catholic right. The style continues to be witty, with the changing tone now mellowing to depict a mildly provoking but intensely ironic attitude:

They hold *free-will* (that nought their soules may bind)
As the great *Priviledge* of all *mankind*.
You're here more *moderate*, for 'tis your intent,
To make't a *Priv'ledge* but of *Parliament*.
(*The Puritan and the Papist*, 81-4)

Cowley is disturbed by the manner in which Parliament is undermining the King’s authority by curtailing his powers. Parliament, in fact, is now bypassing the King to

pass laws of its own making, including those that allow it to extort money from the populace for “Parliament Priviledges:”

What mighty summes have ye squeez'd out o'th' City?
Enough to make 'em *poore*, and *something witty*.
Excise, Loanes, Contributions, Pole-moneys,
Bribes, Plunder, and such Parliament Priviledges,
Are words which you'le ne're learne in holy Writ,
'Till the *Spirit* and your *Synod* ha's mended it. ...
Where's all the *Goods* *distrain'd*, and *Plunders* past?
For you're growne wretched, *pilfering* knaves at last.
(*The Puritan and the Papist*, 213-18, 221-2)

Cowley's charge is that Parliament is abusing its self-awarded “*free-will*,” notably by extorting money from the people. What probably galls him most is Parliament's intention to fund its rebellion and war effort by such means. Parliament, of course, had earlier refused to sanction the raising of funds for the King. As with most of his accusations, Cowley actually draws on facts, on historical events, thus maintaining a truth-base from which he makes interpretations to favour his party. On the issue of excise, for example, in October 1641 the House of Commons threatened to punish anyone who claimed that an excise tax was going to be imposed. This did not prevent the House from finally issuing an excise or purchase tax in July 1642.

A pattern evolves whereby Cowley mocks at religious beliefs and practices, then associates the religious with the political, before finally attacking the political element outright. He ends his association of these two groups by accusing the Parliamentarians of making a failed attempt on Charles's life:

They *depose Kings* by force, by force you'de doe it,
But first use faire meanes to *perswade* them to it.
They dare *kill Kings*; now 'twixt ye here's the strife,
That you dare *shoot* at *Kings*, to save their *life*.
And what's the difference, 'pray, whether he fall
By the *Popes Bull*, or your *Oxe Generall*?
Three Kingdomes thus ye strive to make your owne;
And, like the *Pope*, usurpe a *Triple Crowne*.
(*The Puritan and the Papist*, 199-206)

Cowley makes a mockery of a seemingly paradoxical attempt to protect the King by firing in his direction.⁴³ The reference is to an incident in the Battle of Edgehill when Charles I was almost struck by a cannonball that fell near him. This was only the third month of the war and it is possible that Parliament wanted to wrest power from the King without slaying him. Parliament insisted, however, that they were fighting for the King and as such intended to protect him. Clearly, Cowley does not accept that Parliament can fight for and against the King at the same time. He accuses Parliament, and their “*Oxe Generall*,” Robert Devereux, earl of Essex and Parliamentarian general, of acting like the Pope to ensure the demise of monarchical government. It is unclear what particular incident involving Rome that he is alluding to, perhaps the Pope’s pardon of the Irish rebels in October 1642.

The last third of *The Puritan and the Papist* witnesses a dramatic change of tone and style. Perhaps feeling that his satirist’s punches were weakened by his two-pronged attack on Puritans and Catholics, Cowley now focuses his attack on just the one group. The wit, irony, allusion, humour, and various figures of speech of the first part all contribute to a style of great literary interest and are in good taste, but probably not best suited to satiric attacks. The attack now becomes more direct, as the discourse changes from a satire on religious practices to a censure of Parliament. The use of religion, then, was meant to provide a backdrop for the appraisal of the politics of Parliament. By casting the Puritans in Parliament as untrustworthy, deceitful and out of touch in their religious practices, Cowley intends to show that they are the same in the political arena. To understand the ideological position of the warring factions, it is necessary to take into account all the religious, social and political aspects concerning them. Earlier, Cowley searches his imagination for

suitable parallels between traditional Catholic practices and Puritan belief. He becomes impatient with this method, however, and decides to deal only in recent happenings and topical information. His first accusation relates to the Irish question:

Your *Covetousnesse* let gasping *Ireland* tell,
Where first the *Irish Lands*, and next ye *sell*
The *English Bloud*; and raise *Rebellion* here,
With that which should suppress, and quench it there.
(*The Puritan and the Papist*, 209-12)

The Irish rebellion broke out in October 1641. The thrust of Cowley's attack is that Parliament used money intended for the Irish wars to fund its own war efforts. This is a reference to events of 30 July 1642 when Parliament borrowed one hundred thousand pounds from the Irish war fund. Cowley goes on to accuse Parliament of funding their war by whatever means they devise, including extortion in the form of taxes, loans and bribes. After the seizure of Church lands, he would predict in *The Civil War* further Parliamentary abuse of power in the form of voting laws to legalise its plunder and extortion of the masses:

The Churches Lands (alas, what's that? 'tis lesse,
Then will suffice their very Wantonnesse,
Much less their Av'arice), all the Kingdomes Wealth,
Theires, not, as now, by borro'wing, plunder, stealth,
But openly, confest, and by a Law;
For such shall Votes bee then, and such their awe.
(*The Civil War*, II. 574-9)

The atrocities of which Cowley accuses Parliament not only include outright plunder, but the rampant imprisonment and victimisation of individuals also. He sums up his case by providing further examples of these charges:

What *Mysteries of Iniquity* doe we see?
New *Prisons* made to defend *Libertie*;
Where without cause, some are undone, some dy,
Like men *bewitcht*, they know not *how*, nor *why*.
Our *Goods forc'd* from us for *Propriety's* sake;
And all the *Reall Non-sence* which ye make. ...
Ye said that *gifts* and *bribes Preferments* bought,
By *Money* and *Bloud* too, they now are sought.
To the *Kings will* the *Lawes* men strove to draw;

The *Subjects will* is now become the *Law*.

(*The Puritan and the Papist*, 261-6, 271-4)

On the subject of prisons, Cowley charges that Parliament claims to defend liberty, and yet it throws people into prison for no apparent reason. In *The Civil War*, he would repeat these charges, accusing Parliament of incarcerating people out of sheer spite and as a show of force: "Why doe yee thus th'old and new *Prisons* fill? / When thats the onely why, because you will!" (*The Civil War*, I. 551-2). These charges are confirmed by newspaper accounts that constitute Cowley's likely sources. According to "The True Informer" of 1643,

Many hundreds more of the best sort of Subjects have been suddinly clapt up, and no cause at all mentioned in many of their commitments, and new Prisons made of purpose for them, where they may be said to be buried alive.⁴⁴

The example of the prisons shows a great defiance by Parliament in its bid for power, a determination to make the law. It is this attitude that makes Cowley fear a tyrannical government. Though his effort is largely propagandist, his fear is real. A sovereign Parliament, he is convinced, will only institute a reign of terror:

Ye boundlesse *Tyrants*, how doe you outvy
Th' *Athenian Thirty*, *Romes Decemviri*?
In Rage, Injustice, Cruelty as farre
Above those men, as you in *number* are.

(*The Puritan and the Papist*, 257-60)

Learned allusions and references appear only occasionally in the last third of the poem where Cowley makes several direct accusations against Parliament buttressed by facts, figures and events actually happening. The references to the ancient Greek and Roman examples are intended, however, to warn Parliament that, just as they perpetrate civil war in order to win power, so too would force be used to oust them from power. The "*Athenian Thirty*" and "*Romes Decemviri*" were ruling groups in the fifth century BC in Athens and Rome respectively. Both groups, after reigning in

a tyrannical manner, were rebelled against and ousted during civil war. These references therefore help to signpost a warning to Parliament to know that it could be forcefully ejected from power. Cowley thus finds in ancient precedent a rallying battle cry against the enemy and a firm belief that civil war does yield good when it boots out those tyrants who have been absolutely corrupted by power.

Having settled into a pattern of attack and a tirade of accusations, the poem ends with another twist. In what is clearly intended as a direct contrast in style and another innovation within the adopted form, the last ten lines revert to the use of wit and intense irony that characterise the earlier part of the poem:

We thanke ye for the *wounds* which we endure,
Whil'st *scratches* and slight pricks ye seeke to *cure*.
We thanke ye for *true reall feares* at last,
Which free us from so many *false ones* past.
We thanke ye for the *Bloud* which *fats* our *Coast*,
(That fatall debt paid to great *Straffords* Ghost.)
We thank ye for the ills receiv'd, and all
Which by your *diligence* in good time we shall.
We thanke ye, and our *gratitude's* as great
As *yours*, when you thank'd *God* for being *beat*.

(*The Puritan and the Papist*, 293-302)

These lines take the form of a refrain or chorus with the regular punctuation of “we thanke ye” every two lines to mark the start of a new couplet. The repetition and monotony add to the song-like effect that set these lines apart from the rest of the poem. The irony is compounded by the fact that it suggests a song of prayer, emphasised by the mere suggestion of thanksgiving even without the overt mention of God in the last line. Indeed the irony builds up and reaches a climax in the last couplet where the use of the caesura compounds the overall effect. Having thanked Parliament for all its indiscretions and acts of terror, Cowley says he learnt the trick from the Parliamentarians themselves who, like Thomas Case, was said to have thanked God for victory when suffering defeat. The “we thanke ye” refrain becomes

isolated for emphasis, with the line running on only to pause between “yours” and “you” in order to highlight the addressee who is held up to ridicule. Cowley is writing in the first person for the first time in the poem, using the “we” – a possible echo of the royal plural - to identify himself both with his party and with the victims of Parliamentary authority. The introduction of a direct and forthright approach in the last third of the poem already indicates an abandonment of the aesthetic distance of the spectator-poet. These last ten lines complete the transformation of the poet’s position from spectator to participant. The sudden reversion to thanking God and to the witty use of irony gives the poem a cyclical character and form.

Perhaps it is ironic that Cowley later flees to a largely Catholic country as a member of the staff of his Catholic Queen, Henrietta Maria. Perhaps he would not have been so vociferous against the Catholic Church if he had known that he would gain refuge in France under the Queen's auspices. Between Catholicism and Puritanism, however, he always thought of the former as the lesser threat to Anglicanism and the Stuart dynasty, perhaps because of its solid traditions, its smaller numbers and its relatively little political influence on the left. Abandoning his attack on Catholics in order to concentrate on a bitter offensive against the Puritans demonstrates this, but nowhere are his views on this subject better expressed than in *The Civil War*. It would be better, he asserts in these lines, to ‘drink’ of “Tyber’s Flood” or Roman Catholicism as of old, so to speak, rather than the new but “foule Waters” of Lake Geneva or Calvinism:

If such foule Waters the fam’d Lake containe
Let’s rather drinke old Tybers Flood againe.
Let our great Thames pay Homage as before,
Rather then new and worser streames adore.
If wee’re resolv’d and fixt our Way to loose,
Let’s some false Road before false By-wayes choose.

In his own life Cowley made many Catholic friends, perhaps none more so than Richard Crashaw whom he would later describe as a saint. Perhaps chastened by his sojourn in France, Cowley would demonstrate remarkable tolerance for the Catholic faith when writing his elegy 'On the Death of Mr. Crashaw:'

His *Faith* perhaps in some nice Tenets might
Be wrong; his *Life*, I'm sure, was *in the right*.
And I my self a *Catholick* will be,
So far at least, great *Saint*, to *Pray* to thee.

('On the Death of Mr. Crashaw,' 55- 8 in *Poems*, pp. 48-9)

Cowley never wavered, though, from his Anglicanism. The condemnation of other religions stems from a genuine conviction that his religion was the true one. He readily forsakes private happiness and peace to defend his religion and his King, whose authority he is convinced is the true one and should remain absolute. The gathering forces of war have left Cowley utterly convinced that the theory of the divine right of kings that is naturally allied to that of absolutist monarchy remains the only chance for peace and the reassertion of power relations between the King and his subjects. It will remain for history to test the accuracy of his vision, namely that theories such as the king-in-parliament, or worse still the sovereignty of the people – through the sovereignty of Parliament – could only lead to lust for power, subversion and ultimately open resistance. It was not that Cowley did not fundamentally believe in the institution of Parliament, but if pressed he would have agreed that the King had been correct to rule without it through the 1630s, if only to assert his sole right to sovereignty over all subjects including the Parliamentary assembly.

1.4 Propaganda and Epic Concerns in *The Civil War*

What rage does *England* from it selfe divide
More then Seas doe from all the world beside?

- Thus like a *Deluge War* came roaring forth, ...
Oreflowed all parts of *Albions* bleeding *Ile*.

A Muse stood by mee, and just then I writ
My Kings great acts in Verses not unfit.
The trowbled Muse fell shapelesse into aire,
Instead of Inck dropt from my Pen a Teare.

(*The Civil War*, I. 1-2, II. 1-2, III. 545-48)

The Civil War was conceived as a celebration of a Royalist victory in the grand epic manner. The figure of the Stuart King and the subject of rebellion and war provide suitable material for the epic poem. Giving epic treatment to the event of civil war means fusing the classical and the contemporary, or imposing a traditional style on a topical issue. Epic precedent suggests a design of twelve books almost certainly ending in a Royalist victory and the affirmation of Stuart absolutism, but only three books are completed. Epic precedent also suggests a cyclical turn of events, possibly beginning with a Royalist advantage, followed by an upsurge in the fortunes of the Parliamentarians that make up the enemy numbers, and finally a reversal of fortune or climax that hands the advantage irrevocably to the Royalists. The very outbreak of war already proves Cowley's theory that the recalling of Parliament established a locus of resistance that became impossible to contain once it became clear that the King's absolute authority and sole right to sovereignty was being challenged. He never accepts the possibility of change because of the horrors of armed conflict and in particular, the fervent belief that monarchy was the true form of government especially in an absolute form as history has shown. Despite the deployment of epic conventions and design, Cowley's effort is a pioneering one, finding originality in the way it lends itself to the caprices and vagaries of fortune and history. MacLean writes that, "Yeats was not ... the first poet to write great poetry out of the direct experience and emotional chaos of civil war: Cowley was."⁴⁵ A reading of the poem

as a unique attempt to pre-empt history suggests itself, justifying an approach to events as the poet presents them in sequence in order to appreciate fully the tidal waves of change in the history he interprets. In addition we evolve a theory on the irreconcilable demands of polemic and epic form, showing how the incorporation of various forms of propaganda such as panegyric, satire, and elegy only serve to undermine traditional epic practice. By writing during the event in order to serve the cause of propaganda, Cowley forfeits the benefits of leisurely composition. His approach is almost journalistic in the way he discusses events as they unfold, except that he is deliberately partisan and totally committed.

The Civil War represents an attempt by Cowley to put into use the notes he had made while in Cambridge on the classical features of the epic. While the design to give epic treatment to a political poem might have been a sudden impulse, the poem itself is designed to take its place in the European epic tradition. Thus there are such stylistic features as the frequent epic or extended simile, the periodic style whereby the sense is sometimes extended over several lines, and repetitive language and stock phrases. Technically, the poem is one of Cowley's more remarkable achievements. It is, for example, one of his finest accomplishments in the use of the closed heroic couplet that he helped make popular well in advance of Augustan poetry. The couplet is balanced and antithetical, making use of the caesura to heighten the effect of the paradox or antithesis, as in the way he reworks this line from an earlier poem: "Thus our *Fore-fathers* got, thus left a Name" ("On his Majesties Return out of Scotland," 44), into:

Thus our *forefathers* fought, thus bravely bled,
Thus still they live, whilst we alive are dead.
(*The Civil War*, I. 65-6)

MacLean observes of this couplet that it contains “one of the most startling images of the poem,” one in which “Cowley turns life against death and past against present in a paradox characteristic of Stuart absolutist discourse.”⁴⁶ The description of Hell provides a salient example of Cowley’s use of the couplet for antithesis to intensify the paradox, in addition to which the various couplets form distinct units, usually sentences:

Here Rebell Minds in envious torments ly;
Must here forever Live, forever Dy.
Here Lucifer, the mighty Captive reignes,
Proud midst his Woes, and Tyrant in his Chaines.
(*The Civil War*, ll. 385-8)

The poem is full of allusions to human history, biblical situations, myth, and legend. In fact, a significant feature of the poem is the representation of the past. While the Hell motif and the use of myth constitute prime features of the traditional epic, there are specific reasons for alluding to human and British history. These include an escape from the horrors of the present, an appeal to the past as a warning against the present, epic grandeur and vastness, and the universality of experience. In terms of setting, the involvement of Heaven and Hell suggests a timeless dimension and a universal or cosmic setting for the conflict.

It is not clear how much action Cowley actually sees, but he decides to fight the war in his own way: “What should they doe? unapt themselves to fight, / They promised noble pens the Acts to write” (*The Civil War*, I. 231-32). He wants to put his poetry at the service of politics, to unite poetry and arms, his avowed aim being to celebrate “My Kings great acts in Verses not unfit” (III. 546). His obsession to celebrate the King as central figure and epic hero is driven by a fervent desire to preserve things that are enshrined in tradition such as the institution of monarchy. The King, in fact,

could have been addressing the loyal court poet as well as his gallant soldiers when issuing this reminder: “Yow fight things well establisht to defend; / All ages past your pious armes commend” (III. 291-2). Such is Cowley’s unshakeable belief in his King’s eventual triumph, “*Charles strong in Power, invincible in Right*” (II. 362), that he is prepared to stake his burgeoning poetic reputation on a history plot yet to be unravelled by the events of war. As always in his poetry, such an act of faith is enabled by the oracular voice of the Muse that is yet to fail him: “... future thinges / Nere faile my prophesing *Muse*, in what she sings” (II. 353-4).

In a note to the Reader that prefaces the 1679 publication, the anonymous editor describes Cowley’s style as essentially one of continuity:

In his most imperfect and unfinish’d *Pieces*, you will discover the Hand of so great a Master, ... being habitually a *Poet* and *Always Inspired*. In this Piece the Judicious Reader will find the Turn of the Verse to be his; the same Copious and Lively Imagery of *Fancy*, the same Warmth of *Passion* and Delicacy of *Wit* that sparkles in all his Writings.⁴⁷

Cowley brings the full range of his poetic skill, passion and wit to bear on the poem, setting the tone in the opening lines in terms of theme, form and style. The poem opens with an announcement of the subject of war and the grand disaster it represents for England. It opens in *media res*, describing the on-going, relentless action of the war. In terms of style, a panoply of devices is suggested in these opening lines, from onomatopoeia, personification and repetition to the use of simile and metaphor:

What rage does *England* from it selfe divide
More then Seas doe from all the world beside?
From every part the roaring *Canon* play;
From every part *blood* roares as loud as they.
(*The Civil War*, I. 1-4)

The early lines suggest that Cowley privileges peace over party divisions as he rises above politics and his Royalism to discuss the meaning of the war for England. He places war in the grand scheme of things and contemplates the ramifications of

disunity. The war is England's loss, whatever the outcome, because only English blood is strewn across the land. No one side can justifiably claim to have triumphed in circumstances which are tragic for all England:

What *English* Ground but still some moisture beares
Of young mens blood, and more of Mothers teares?
What aires unthickned with some sighs of Wives!
And more of *Mayds* for their deare Lovers lives!
Alas, what *Triumph* can this victory shew
That dyes us red in *blood* and *blushes* too!
How can we wish that *Conquest*, which bestowes
Cypresse, not *Bayes* uppon the conqu'ring browes!
(*The Civil War*, I. 5-12)

Cowley's ideal is the classical one of the family as a unit and the nucleus of the nation, itself one large family. The war shatters these notions of the nation as family because there is as much spilled blood as tears from individual families suffering casualties. War signifies a chaotic world and churns up many questions about its uncertainties, and Cowley can only ask these questions in helplessness. The lack of answers moves him to express his indignation in even more rhetorical questions increasingly ending in an exclamatory manner!

The first major representation of the past comes immediately after the opening dozen lines, with Cowley probably eager to avoid the continued description of the unpalatable reality that the current war represents. The present is set against the past, a divided England killing one another against a united England fighting against external enemies. The past becomes shrouded in nostalgia, with the recollection taking the form of a reverie constantly punctuated by the refrain "it was not so:"

It was not soe when *Henryes* dreadfull name;
Not *Sword*, nor *Cause*, whole Nations overcame. ...
It was not soe, when in the happy *East*
Richard, our *Mars*, *Venus*es Isle possest. ...
It was not soe, when *Edward* prov'd his cause
By a *Sword* stronger than the *Salique Lawes* ...
It was not soe when *Agin Court* was wonne,
Under great *Henry* serv'd the *Raine* and *Sun*. ...

It was not soe when the vast Fleete of *Spaine*
Lay torne and scatter'd ore the injur'd *Maine*.
Through the proud world a *Virgin* Terror strooke,
The *Austrian* Crownes and *Romes* seaven *Hills* she shooke.
(*The Civil War*, I. 13-14, 21-22, 37-38, 51-52, 59-62)

By citing the exploits of previous monarchs and their troops on the battlefield, Cowley is drawing attention to the present monarch, Charles I, against whom his subjects have turned. He also draws attention to the long tradition of monarchical government enjoying so much security that the people's major concerns as an independent nation was external threats. His chronological list of examples here is selective of monarchical achievements in battle through the centuries. From the twelfth century there is Henry II who overcame Roderick of Ireland in 1175; and Richard the Lionhearted, compared to the Roman god of war, Mars, when conquering Cyprus, the legendary home of Venus, Mars's wife, in 1191. There is Edward III who repeatedly overcame France in the fourteenth century, notably in battles at Sluys (1340), Crecy (1346), and Poitiers (1356), before staking his claim to the French throne. The claim was made through his mother, in opposition to the Salic laws that prevented females and their heirs from acceding to the throne. From the fifteenth century there is Henry V whose unlikely victory at Agincourt in 1415 was achieved, incredibly, with the aid of the elements that conspired in favour of his archers. Heavy rains before the battle caused the ground to go soft and this caused untold difficulties for the French cavalry, as well as the sun that shone in their faces and dazzled them. Lastly, the sixteenth century witnessed the victory of Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen, in the Battle of the Armada in 1588, over Philip II of Spain, head of the Habsburg House of Austria and a champion of Roman Catholicism.

It is useful to note that Cowley does not just seek the past for refuge or escape from

the present. MacLean finds that he intends also “to displace the political crisis which marks the scene of his writing,” a strategy that encourages his audience to “direct their martial energies against foreign enemies.”⁴⁸ The examples of monarchical successes are select historical allusions intended to cover the institution of monarchy in glory. The reference to Richard the Lionhearted, for example, takes account of the religious dimension of the war that sets the present against the past. Richard’s conquest of Cyprus in 1191 and campaigns against Islamic nations represented an assertion of England’s Christian ensign of the Cross of St. George over the Islamic ensign of the crescent moon. In the past, religion was never an issue in domestic affairs, in sharp contrast to the sectarianism and religious factionalism of the present. The passage ends by recalling the “double madnes” and “fond” or foolish extremes that Catholicism and Puritanism represent in *The Puritan and the Papist*:

It was not soe, when in the happy *East*
Richard, our *Mars*, *Venus*es Isle possest.
 ’Gainst the proud *Moon*, Hee th’*English Crosse* displaid,
 Eclypst one *Horne* and th’other paler made. ...
 To what with Worship the fond *Papist* falls,
 That the fond *Zealot* a curst *Idoll* calls.
 So twixt their double madnes heres the odds,
 One makes false *Devills*, t’other makes false *Gods*.
 (*The Civil War*, I. 21-4, 33-6)

England is proud of an imperial past that witnessed many impressive victories and conquests against foreign enemies, rather than division and war against itself. How can “... we strive / Our owne, our owne good Sovereigne to captive” (*The Civil War*, I. 49-50), Cowley laments, instead of seeking to rekindle the passions that enabled the English capture “forraine Kings” (I. 49) and take them prisoner.

The second major instance of representation of the past occurs in Book II, right in the middle of Cowley’s delineation of Hell. This time the allusions to England’s history

are preceded by biblical examples. The subject is rebellion and its attendant pitfalls, the intention being to show that all rebels are traitors and have their punishment if not on earth, then in Hell. The biblical references are to such figures as Absalom (“Davids proud Sonne”) and his cohort Ahitophel (“the Pol’itick wretch”), Shimei, and Sheba, all of whom rebelled against David; and then to Baasha and Zimri, both of whom murdered their respective predecessors in order to become King of Israel. The inevitable punishment of these Old Testament rebels in Hell, according to Cowley, each takes a form that fits the crime:

Davids proud Sonne hangs up in flames by th’haire;
 A thousand Feinds stand round and wound him there.
 Still with fresh darts his dropping limmes they tore,
 As Joab, and the young men did before.
 By him the Pol’itick wretch, soe fondly wise,
 Forever hangs; and as hee dy’ed, hee dyes.
 To them old Shimei from his stake does call,
 And curses both, and Hell, and Heaven, and all.
 By them still Sheba does his Trumpet sound;
 Foole! For it calls the torturing Feinds around. ...
 There Baashas head weares still a burning Crowne,
 And Zimri, whose wild Spirit came smoaking downe.
 In such feirce flames the Traytour now is fried,
 That hee thinks those scarce warme, in which hee died.
(*The Civil War*, II. 433-42, 449-52)

MacLean’s findings on this passage are not convincing, namely that “Cowley describes the torments of the souls in hell ... with a certain sadistic relish;” and again, “[It] might have offered some rather dubious pleasure to an indignant royalist with sadistic inclinations.”⁴⁹ Such talk of sadism does not give sufficient credence to the sheer element of propaganda that drives Cowley as he fights in his own dutiful manner for his party. The Parliamentary rebels are being warned of their fate, and Cowley highlights this warning by drawing further from English history itself. The English have had so many notorious rebels, Cowley warns, that they must have sent more souls to Hell than any other land: “But of all Lands, (though all sende millions in) / More bountifull then Albion none hath bin” (*The Civil War*, II. 455-6). His

examples date from the twelfth century, namely the rebellions against King John and Henry III, to the seventeenth century itself with the reference to Guy Fawkes and the 1605 Gun Powder Plot: “Th’accursed powder-traitours there remayne, / (Ne’re yet did Hell, nere shall such Sinners gaine)” (II. 497-8). One of the most poignant examples, and that discussed at the greatest length, is that of Edward II who is also the eponymous hero of Marlowe’s play. In 1326 his queen, Isabella of France, and her lover, Roger Mortimer, plotted against the hapless King who was subsequently deposed and murdered. The plotters were aided and abetted by supporters in the Court and the Church, some of these being Bishop Adam of Orleton, Sir John Maltravers and Thomas Gourney. These last two are reputed to have carried out the murder of the imprisoned King at Berkeley Castle, while the Bishop is alleged to have contributed significantly in his deposition. Cowley, like Marlowe, is fascinated by the intrigue involved in this rebellion. In this allusion of sonnet length, he contributes a graphic description of the torments being endured in Hell by the roguish rebels involved:

They, who unhappy Edward cast soe low,
 His wicked Queene, around whose head does grow
 A Crowne of torturing Flame, that shines, and burnes;
 Her Mortimer close by forever mournes.
 Their scorching lusts, and all their hot desires,
 Are now extinguisht quite by greater fires.
 Th’unchristian Bishop too, who first did preach,
 What now these Bishop-haters boldlier teach.
 Tormenting heats his subtle braine surprize,
 Oh mine head akes, still, mine head akes, hee cryes.
 But all the art and rage of Death, does still
 Matrevers Sp’irit, and barb’arous Gournays kill.
 The paines that dying Edward felt before,
 Would seeme his heav’en if onely those they bore.
 (*The Civil War*, II. 469-82)

It is significant that the references to a biblical and historical past fraught with rebellion should punctuate Cowley’s adaptation of the Hell myth. Hell is an

important theatre in the poem's setting as it adds a dimension of myth and mystery to that of history and propaganda. On this descent to Hell, Thomas Maresco writes that,

The motif of the descent to Hell forms the spine of English epic tradition. ... The analogy of a spine conveys exactly what its function is within the epic tradition: a core, a structural principle, a channel through which flow the ideas and themes and actions which each individual poet will flesh out and embody in his own unique way.⁵⁰

Cowley's perception of Hell is the archetypal one of the demoniac world composed of infernal realms below the earth, in contrast to the divine world of the celestial

Heaven placed above. Here is the description of Hell:

Beneath the silent Chambers of the Earth, ...
Beneath the dens, where unflecht Tempests ly, ...
Beneath the mighty Oceans wealthy caves;
Beneath th'æternall Fountaine of all waves, ...
There is a place, deepe, wondrous deepe below,
Which genuine night and horrou does oreflow.
Noe bound controules th'unwearied space, but Hell,
Endless as those dire paines which in it dwell.

(The Civil War, II. 365, 369, 371-72, 375-8)

Cowley takes the view that those who inhabit Hell are sinners, and that the greatest sin of all is "proud Rebellion." Rebellion begets rebellion, hence the long line of sinners from Lucifer till the present time, all of whom are guilty of this sin and are damned. The Hell myth is thus selectively reconstructed to suit the subject of rebellion, trace the present conflict back to the Fall and thus place it within the context of postlapsarianism:

Here Lucifer, the mighty Captive reignes,
Proud midst his Woes, and Tyrant in his Chaines.
Once Generall of a guilded Hoast of Sp'rites,
Like Hesper, leading on the spangled nights.
But downe like Lightning, which him strooke, hee came,
And roar'd at his first plunge into the flame.
Myriads of Spirits fell wounded round him there;
With dropping Lights thick shone the singed aire. ...
But their deare Sinne, the Sinne themselves dare boast,
The Sinne they Love in man, and punish most,
Is proud Rebellion, their great Sonne, and Sire;
Which kindled first, now blowes the'eternall fire.

(The Civil War, II. 387-94, 399-402)

Cowley is being witty in using paradox and antithesis to conjure up the nature of existence in Hell, as in "The Sinne they Love in man, and punish most, / Is ... their

great Sonne, and Sire.” There are many repetitions and pauses for emphasis. Nothing reveals the character of the fiend more than “proud Rebellion” which comprehends his sin, his action and his legacy to the human world. But the nature of evil is essentially paradoxical, for Satan is presented firstly in oxymoronic terms as the “mighty Captive,” and secondly as a “Tyrant in his Chaines” who is “Proud midst his Woes.” While Hell itself is described unequivocally as a place of horror and damnation, Cowley mentions that Satan was once great, but he does so only to draw attention to the fate that awaits rebels. He is referring to his rebellion against God for being ranked only among the angelic order: “Still they Rebellions end remember well, / Since *Lucifer the Great*, that shining *Captaine* fell” (*The Civil War*, I. 307-8). It is this enigmatic figure, the architect of all rebellion, whom Cowley presents as a most powerful ally of the Parliamentarians-cum-rebels.

The character of the central figure, the King, is thus contrasted with that of Satan rather than with that of the Parliamentarian General. The King has no equal in the human world because his office, if not his person, would otherwise allow him to keep company with gods. He is Heaven’s ally, one of a group of which God, the “*King of Kings*,” is the Head. Heavenly figures like Angels seemingly flock to his side at his behest. For example, on the day war broke out, the world bore witness to “the wonderful providence of God, that, from that low despised condition the King was in at Nottingham after setting up his standard, he should be able to get men, money, or arms.”⁵¹ In the build-up to war in 1642, Parliament had undermined the King at almost every opportunity. Londoners led a demonstration when the King tried to arrest the so-called Five Members in January.⁵² There was a stand-off between the two parties when the King left for the north in March, established himself in York

and refused Parliament's request that he return to London. When in April the King declared his intention of leading an army to quell the rebellion in Ireland, Parliament blocked the project, hence Cowley's satirical comment: "He must not conquer his lewd *Rebells* there, / Lest he should learne by that to doe it here" (*The Civil War*, I, 163-4). Parliament was securing its own interests all the time mainly by blocking militarily-important cities from the King as from January and assuming control of the navy as from July. It was Parliament's antics of leaving the King financially handicapped, destitute of an army and alienated by certain sections of the populace, which drove the latter to raise his standard at Nottingham. The date was 22 August, the occasion the outbreak of hostilities:

Thus poore they leave him, their base *Pride* and *Scorne*;
As poore, as these, now mighty men, were borne.
When straight whole *Armies* meete in *Charles* his right,
How noe man knowes; but here they are, and fight:
A Man would sweare that saw his alter'd state,
Kings were call'd *Gods* because they could *create*.
Vaine men! Tis heaven this swift assistance brings;
The same is *Lord* of *Hosts*, thats *King* of *Kings*.
Had men forsooke him, *Angells* from above ...
Would all have muster'd in his righteous ayd.

(*The Civil War*, I, 167-75, 177)

The outbreak of war gives Cowley the opportunity to find even more common ground between the Parliamentary party and the legions in Hell, as well as between the King's party and Heaven. It is also an occasion for human activity to reverberate in otherworldly realms. Thus Satan's act of convening a parliament not only parodies what obtains in the real world, but also constitutes an attempt to thwart Heaven's design of enabling the slaying of the rebels:

At once whole feilds of ripened Traytours fell;
'Tis onely Peace breeds Scarcity in Hell.
Which that the Stygian Tyrant might prevent,
Hee calls below a dreadfull Parliament.

(*The Civil War*, II, 503-6)

Cowley thinks the rebels deserve retribution for shattering the heavenly state of peace. The very fact that they are consigned to Hell is an instance of divine and poetic justice. This is illustrated by the example of Edmund Sandys, the first officer to fall in the war. The fact that such a fate first befalls a Parliamentarian is ominous of the way Heaven would inflict its justice on the rebels:

Here *Sands* with tainted blood the fields did staine,
By his owne *Sacriledge* and *Kents* Curses slaine.
The first *Commander* did heavens Vengeance show,
And led the Rebels *Van* to Shades below.

(*The Civil War*, I. 203-6)

Sandys's is a particularly poignant case because his family had been Royalist, and because of the lengths to which he had gone to demonstrate his conversion, such as his act of defacing the Canterbury Cathedral in Kent. By claiming that Heaven had intervened to fight its own war and wreck vengeance on the rebels, Cowley is presenting the King as a medium or instrument of divine justice. Thus Heaven punishes the wrongdoer and rewards the righteous and the persecuted. It becomes the designated destination for the Royalist dead, as if in compensation for their heroism. They are martyrs whose path was traced by the biblical figure of Stephen, reputedly the first of their number and the head of the delegation receiving the martyred souls into Heaven:

Yow're kindly welcom'd to heavens peacefull coast
By all the reverend *Martyrs* noble Host.
Your soaring Soules they meete in triumph all,
Led by great *Stephen* their old *Generall*.

(*The Civil War*, I. 287-90)

For all the representation of the past and the adaptation of myth, *The Civil War* is still about current events and the attempt by the warring factions to win the right to shape England's future. The military action in Book I is based on events that stretch for almost a year from the start of the war till late July 1643. The confrontation in which

Edmund Sandys fell was one of the earliest in the war, on 23 September 1642 at Powick Bridge near Worcester: “*Worc’ester* first saw’t, and trembled at the View, / Too well the ills of *civill warr* she knew” (I. 181-2). Like Worcester, most of the confrontations described in Book I represent victories for the Royalists. These include Brentford on 12 November, Marlborough on 5 December, Cirencester on 2 February 1643, Stratton on 16 May, Adwalton Moor near Bradford on 30 June, and Roundway Down on 13 July. The battle that dominates Book I, however, is the first major one of the war, that of Edgehill at Kineton on 23 October 1642. After being routed at Worcester, it was important for the Parliamentary forces to show that they could stand up to the Royalists. Cowley’s report is not limited to events on the battlefield. Epic precedent suggests a style that shows how events in the human world find an echo in the supernatural world. It is also conventional to place conflict in the context of the timeless framework of good versus evil or truth versus falsehood. Supernatural characters, such as angels and fiends, add a new dimension to the conflict. With techniques like contrast, juxtaposition and personification, Cowley associates the warring factions with various concepts in order to magnify and transcend the immediate conflict. The contrast is effected by a “here” versus “there” dichotomy, the Royalists on the one hand against the rebels on the other:

On two faire *Hills* both Armies next are seene,
 Th’Affrighted *Valley* sighes and sweats betweene.
 Here *Angells* did with faire expectance stay
 And wisht good things to a *King* as mild as *they*.
 There *Fiends* with hungry waiting did abide;
 And curst both but spur’d on the guilty side.
 Here stood *Religion*, her lookes gently sage;
Aged, but much more comely for her *age*.
 There *Schisme*, old *Hag*, but seeming young appears,
 As *snakes* by casting skin renew their yeares. ...
 Here *Loyalty* an humble *Crosse* displaid,
 And still as *Charles* past by she bowd and prayd.
Sedition there her crimson *Banner* spreads,
 Shakes all her Hands, and roares with all her Heads. ...
 Here stood with *Truth* and her owne *Host* do’s blesse,
 Clad with those *Armes* of *Prooffe*, her *Nakednesse*.

There *Perjuries* like *Canon* roar'd aloud,
And Lies flew thicke like *Cannons* smoaky *Clowd*.
(*The Civil War*, I. 207-16, 219-22, 225-8)

Cowley would continue his propaganda by introducing a pattern for exaggerating Royalist successes while downplaying Royalist losses. Despite the unlikely death toll of "One honest man for ten such slaves as they" (l. 276), however, Cowley is convinced that the Royalist claim to victory was justified. Even nine months later he recalls the good portents of Edgehill as an act of fortune, his style revealing a penchant for concatenating events and finding the workings of fate in coincidences. On 13 July 1643, the Royalists enjoyed a most resounding success in the Battle of Roundway Down. On the same day, the King and his Queen, Henrietta Maria, met after her fifteen-month absence on the same site as the Edgehill battle at Kington:

Could this white *day* a gift more gratefull bring?
O yes! it brought blest *Mary* to the *King*.
In *Keinton* field they meete, at once they view,
Their former *victory* and enjoy a *New*.
Keinton the Place that Fortune did approve,
To bee the noblest *Scene* of *War* and *Love*.
(*The Civil War*, I. 491-6)

Book I ends with a direct address to God, an exhortation and a prayer soliciting divine intervention to make safe a Royalist victory. After his observations on the workings of fate, it is perhaps logical that Cowley should progress to a prayer-like ending to this first book. Religion is part of the ideology that defines each party. In trying to make sense of war, he casts his glance as far back as the Reformation but can find no plausible reason for the present chaos, except the familiar "*Madnesse*:"

Why are all *Sects* let loose, that ere had birth
Since *Luthers* *Noyse* wak'd the *Lethargicke* *Earth*?
'Tis *Madnesse* onely; which thow *Powers* above,
Father of *Peace*, mild *Lamb*, and gaulless *Dove*,
Gently allay, restore to us our sight,
And then, oh, say once more, *Let there bee* *Light*.
Speake to the restless *Sword*, and bid it stay,
Stop *Plague* and *Famine* whilst they're yet o'th'way.
But if that still their stubborn *Hearts* they fence,

With new *Earth-workes* and shut thee out from thence,
Goe on, great *God*, and fight as thou has fought.
Teach them, or let the *world* by them be taught.
(*The Civil War*, I. 565-76)

Cowley fears that the war is an act of God, an example of divine justice by which means human blindness and madness are punished. If the parties involved continue to be blind to the light of peace and continue to block their “stubborne” hearts to God’s message, then war could be followed by even more traditional forms of divine punishment such as the plague and famine. The allusions in the passage are mainly biblical, as in the evocation of “*Let there bee Light*” because the world is in darkness again. The lamb and the dove are the archetypal images of Christ in the animal world, complementing the “*Father of Peace*” in the divine world. Cowley thus ends Book I on the note of peace on which he started, contemplating the broad picture of the nation’s destiny rather than just his party’s fortunes.

Book II continues to place the war plot at the centre of the poem. It describes action from battles in the first half of 1643 that Book I could not take in, beginning with Hopton Heath near Stafford on 16 March, and moves the plot forward to events surrounding the Parliamentary defeat at Exeter on 4 September. While Cowley is still prone to exaggerate Royalist successes and withhold any merit from the Parliamentarians, he becomes increasingly despondent as he contemplates the debilitating effects of war and the role of the forces of evil. In terms of style, he continues to foster his acquaintance with the epic tradition and even to innovate within that tradition. The variety of his approach is evident in the opening that moves from the overview of the vast expanse of English history in Book I to the use of mythological references and images from classical antiquity:

Thus like a *Deluge War* came roaring forth,

The bending *West* orewhelm'd, and rising *North*.
 A *Deluge* there; and high red *Tides* the while
 Oreflowd all parts of *Albions* bleeding *Ile*.
 For dire *Alecto*, risen from *Stygian* strand,
 Had scattered *Strife* and *Armes* through all the Land.
 In a black hollow *Clowd*, by ill *Windes* driven,
 Shee sat; oreshadow'ed *Earth* and frighted *Heaven*.
 (*The Civil War*, II. 1-8)

The mode here is narrative and the main device is the epic or extended simile. There is also the contrast between the traditional white of Albion and the colour of blood responsible for the “red *Tides*” and the “bleeding *Ile*.” The comparison of war to a deluge is very effective both in terms of its uncontrollable, unstoppable and irrepressible nature, and in terms of the way it engulfs and destroys everything in its wake. The mythological reference to Alecto, one of the Furies usually depicted scattering seeds of war, gives an indication of the seriousness of the enemy threat. The Furies were even better known for the way they sought punishment for those involved in fatal confrontations, especially when kin killed kin, hence the appropriateness of Alecto’s involvement when Albion had turned against itself with English slaying English.

Cowley continues ostensibly to fashion an ultimate Royalist victory but for the first time there are signs that he is worried as elements of doubt creep into his tone. The first event in Book II is the Battle of Hopton Heath, and there is further reference to Alecto as the “nightborne *Virgin*” who blows a horn or trumpet to announce the start of war. Cowley sardonically credits her with yet another role, that of preserving enemy lives when it seems they are doomed:

The nightborne *Virgin* stopt on *Hopton* heath;
 Thrice filld the balefull *Trumpe* with deadly breath;
 Scarce had the fatall sound thrice strooke the aire,
 When strait her owne deare *Gell* and *Brereton*'s there.
 Men whom shee lov'ed, and twice had sav'ed before
 From *Hastings* sword, when thowsand fates it bore. ...

Just as the Sword raisd it selfe up to'his pray,
In a blind Clowd shee snatcht them both away.
Let now (said Shee) lesse villaines fill their roome, ...
To beare the *Curse* of great *Northampton*s fall.
(*The Civil War*, II. 19-24, 27-29, 32)

Historically the Battle of Hopton Heath was fought on 19 March 1643, before which the Parliamentarian troops of Sir John Gell and Sir William Brereton had survived two months of harassment and pursuit by Colonel Henry Hastings. During the Battle, the Royalist command led by the Earl of Northampton seemed headed for victory until enemy reinforcements arrived and outnumbered his troops by three to one. Northampton was mortally wounded but the battle itself was inconclusive. Survival of the rebel commanders is ascribed to a *deus ex machina* situation. They are saved, not by angels as Royalists would be, but by Alecto “in a blind Clowd,” just as the mythological Aphrodite had saved Paris from almost certain death at the hands of Menelaus by taking him away in a cloud. Cowley, his confidence dwindling, regrets the failing of the Royalists to finish off the enemy when victory seems within reach. He compares Hopton Heath to Edgehill, acknowledging that even the latter did not represent as clear-cut a victory as he had earlier intimated: “Why doe the conquering Troopes soe farr persue, / And *Edgehills* almost-*Victory* renew?” (*The Civil War*, II. 41-2).

Other battles and confrontations in the spring include the Royalist capture of Birmingham on 3 April and Lichfield later that month. The cathedral city of Lichfield had been captured in March by the Parliamentarians, but it was regained by the Royalists when Prince Rupert used landmines, perhaps for the first time in England, to breach the city walls and claim a costly victory. Enemy success is mentioned for the first time when reference is made to the capture of Reading by

Parliamentary forces on 26 April. However, this is countered by the loss the same forces would suffer during a skirmish at Chalgrove Field on 18 June: “Meanwhile the *Essexian Army* marcht about; / Their *Redding Blaze* by *Chalgroves storme* blowne out” (*The Civil War*, II. 157-8). Confrontations in the summer include the siege laid on Bristol by Princes Maurice and Rupert who, on 26 July, captured the city: “... two *Armies* by two *Princes* lead, / At *Bristow Walles* their conquering *Crosses* spread” (II. 201-2). The Royalists were thus able to build on their victory of 13 July at Roundway Down. For all the many occasions for rejoicing at the Royalist camp throughout the summer, however, the loss of some of their best soldiers and most popular men was felt acutely. Cowley introduces the elegy within his framework as the best way in which to bestow heroism on these Royalist martyrs. The most poignant example is that of Charles Cavendish, godson of Charles I and commander-in-chief in the Midland areas of Nottingham and Lincolnshire. After proving his valour at Edgehill and subsequently gaining many victories including one at Grantham in March 1643, he was killed, aged twenty-three, at Gainsborough on 28 July 1643. The remarkable outpouring of grief that followed his death was such that Cowley was moved to describe him thus:

Oft did the noble *Youth* whole *Armies* chase;
Hector in his *Hands*, and *Paris* in his *Face*. ...
 At last old *Gainesbrow* his sad fall beheld;
 And all along *Trents* mournfull waters swelled. ...
 Whilst Hee, with thowsand foes strow'ed lifelesse by,
 In all the *triumphs* of brave *Death* did ly.
 Like some fair *Flower*, which *Morne* saw freshly gay,
 In the feilds generall ruine mowne away.
 The *Hyacinth*, or purple *Violet*,
 Just languishing, his colourd *Light* just set.
 Ill mixt it lies amidst th'ignobler *Grasse*;
 The country *daughters* sigh as by't they passe.
(*The Civil War*, II. 139-40, 143-4, 149-56)

Cavendish is likened to Hector for his skill in arms and extraordinary courage, and to Paris for his youth and handsomeness. In the extended simile, Cowley depicts him

further as a fresh and beautiful flower in the midst of the “ignobler grasse” that represents the enemy dead strewn all around him.

The action in Book II ends with the Royalist capture of Exeter, one of three cities, along with Gloucester and Plymouth, that the Royalists desperately needed to capture in order to win the war. The outcome of the war would indeed hinge on the fate of these cities, all of which the Royalists laid siege to. Exeter eventually fell when the Earl of Stamford, Parliamentarian general, surrendered on 4 September 1643 to Prince Maurice on the same terms as when the latter had captured Bristol:

This timely blow well broke th' *Excestrian pride*;
Nor could they long our feirce assaults abide.
With *Bristols* fate *Stamford* the *Towne* resignes.
(*The Civil War*, II. 349-51)

Perhaps it was ominous that the siege of Exeter had lasted for almost nine months, with the Royalists unable to break the rebel resistance sooner. Cowley celebrates victory at Exeter in anticipation of an end to war after likely victories at Plymouth and Gloucester. Having committed the poem and indeed his own life to the outcome of the war, he must continue to scent the victory trail. His buoyant mood at this time is justified because events at Exeter brought great cause for optimism:

Beware next, *Plymmouth*; for if future thinges,
Nere faile my prophesing *Muse*, in what shee sings,
Thy conquest soone fame from my pen shall git;
Meanwhile a sadder *Vict'ry* calls for it.
Th'Imperiall Hoast before proud *Gloc'ester* lay;
From all parts *Conquest* did her beames display.
Feare, Sadnesse, Guilt, Despaire at *London* meete;
And in black Smoakes fly thick through ev'ery Street.
Their best Townes lost, noe Army left to fight!
Charles strong in *Power*, *invincible* in *Right*!
If hee march up, what shall these wretches doe?
(*The Civil War*, II. 353-63)

The same prophesying Muse that inspired Cowley to compose his poem on the strength of its prognostication now exhorts him to pin his faith on an impending

Royalist triumph. The initial prediction, largely on the basis of Charles being “*strong in Power*” and “*invincible in Right*,” is an act of faith comforted by the theory of absolutism. Cowley is happy then to predict doom for the rebels, but he probably underestimates their powers of recovery. Even as they lost Exeter, such was the alarm within the ranks of the Parliamentary forces that they rallied in London - “*Feare, Sadnesse, Guilt, Despaire at London meete*” - in order to discuss strategies for saving Plymouth and Gloucester and thus save the war. It is a meeting that Cowley construes as being analogous to the forces of Hell coming together to threaten and rebel against Heaven.

Book II ends with Satan’s address to his parliament, another rhetorical device by Cowley. He is introducing a new voice in the poem, a voice that crystallises the point of view of the enemy. By giving the address to Lucifer, he is also finalising his argument that the true masters of the Parliamentarian party are Satan and his cohorts in Hell. Though he would later describe a speech given at Newbury by Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex and Parliamentarian general, Cowley could have given the enemy’s rallying speech to any of the other Parliamentary leaders. Two of such leaders, among the real nemeses of Charles I, were William Fiennes, Viscount Saye and Sele, and John Pym, dubbed the “king” of the House of Commons during the early 1640s and principal among the Five Members. These two leaders are mentioned in Satan’s speech as incapable of turning the fortunes of the party round, for which reason he announces that he is taking control of operations. This speech represents a sardonic attempt by Cowley to understand enemy thinking and the mode is one of outright satire:

My Freinds, and fellow Gods, ...

Yow'have heard and seene't, and are asham'ed, I know,
 To see our bold Confederates falne soe low. ...
 Which shall wee'endure? shall wee sit tame and still,
 Suffering a Cause soe'unjust to thrive soe ill?
 Shall wee behold long sleepy peace again,
 The ills of Charles his dull and godly raigne? ...
 It must not bee; by my great selfe, I sweare,
 Had I another Heav'en I'de venture't here;
 The Cause is ours, ours the cheife gaine will bee;
 Is Say, or Pym concern'd soe much as Wee?
 Goe then, hast all to Luds seditious Towne: ...
 Strengthen weake Rebels, and confirme the bold,
 Adde fewell to the hot, flame to the cold. ...
 Cease not, my Freinds, till yow their ensignes spy,
 Advanc'ed 'gainst Charles his Army, and the Sky.
 The rest, when once their banners spread yee see,
 Leave to th'eternall Justice, and to Mee.

(*The Civil War*, II. 521, 524-5, 528-31, 534-8, 604-5, 614-17)

The fact that half of Book II is enacted in Hell suggests a scheme designed to present the forces of rebellion in all their supposed might, such that their eventual and inevitable fall (by way of Parliamentary defeat) would be all the greater. Milton would adopt a similar pattern in *Paradise Lost*, using the first two books to present the fallen glory of the once-divine Satan in council with his peers, only to depict later the subsequent ignominious transformation of this once-dazzling assembly into serpents biting the dust. Milton's Satan would reveal various shades of evil as he adopts different guises, notably that of the tempter in the shape of the serpent to entice humankind. But divine justice prevails, for when he would convene another council on his return to Pandemonium (or Hell), he is punished "according to his doom given in Paradise."⁵³ Together with the Hell legions, they are transformed into serpents at the moment when he has just finished a speech in which he boasts of his greatest triumph, that of deceiving man:

So having said, awhile he stood, expecting
 Their universal shout and high applause
 To fill his ear, when contrary he hears
 On all sides, from innumerable tongues
 A dismal unjversal hiss, the sound
 Of public scorn; he wondered, but not long

Had leisure, wondering at himself now more;
 His visage drawn he felt to sharp and spare,
 His arms clung to his ribs, his legs entwining
 Each other, till supplanted down he fell
 A monstrous serpent on his belly prone,
 Reluctant, but in vain, a greater power
 Now ruled him, punished in the shape he sinned,
 According to his doom: he would have spoke,
 But hiss for hiss returned with forkèd tongue
 To forkèd tongue, for now were all transformed.
 (*Paradise Lost*, X. 504-19)⁵⁴

Though of different political persuasions, Cowley and Milton share the Christian tradition from which springs the Hell myth. Both depict the impact of the demoniac world on the human, and yet maintain that Satan's is only an illusion of grandeur. The plot of the one poem no doubt casts light on the designs of the other. However, unlike Milton's, Cowley's plan for Satan's predictable humiliation and even deeper plunge into Hell is dependent on the wheel of fortune and the hazards of history.

The action in Book III moves from Exeter only to the events of the unsuccessful Royalist siege of Gloucester and the fateful Battle of Newbury, both happening within September. It opens with the activities of Hell's legions following the exhortations by Lucifer. He has urged them to go to London and aid the rebel cause, and they duly oblige:

Hee spoke, and what hee spoke was soone obeyd;
 Hast to their London prey the Furies made. ...
 The subtil Feinds themselves through London spread;
 Softly, as Dreames, they steale into'every head, ...
 The Will they poyson, and the Reason wound,
 Leave the pale Conscience blinded, gagd, and bound. ...
 The rebell Passions they below unchaine,
 And licence that wild Multitude to raigne.
 (*The Civil War*, III. 1-2, 9-10, 13-14, 17-19)

London was a Parliamentary stronghold and its crowds, long despised by Royalists, were to contribute to the relief of Gloucester. For MacLean, "Cowley registers this contempt for London by directing infernal spirits there."⁵⁵ Proposals for peace were put forward by the House of Lords in August but the Commons rejected them,

reflecting the mood of demonstrators at Westminster who shouted “No peace.” The siege of Gloucester began on the same day, 10 August, that the Commons rejected the peace proposals and Colonel Edward Massey, Gloucester’s Parliamentary governor, rejected the King’s call to surrender the city. The Parliamentarians in London then hastily raised an army under Essex to relieve Massey:

Up rose the mighty Traytours, in whose breasts,
The guilt of all our ills soe tamely rests, ...
To Westminster they hast, and fondly there,
Talke, plot, conspire, vote, cov’enant, and declare. ...
All strive who first shall goe, who most shall give,
Gloc’ester, and stiffe-neckt Massey to relieive.
(The Civil War, III. 25-6, 33-4, 45-6)

The King, withdrawing from Gloucester on 5 September 1643, decided to move back towards London and fight Essex on the latter’s return. The failure to capture Gloucester was a serious blow to Royalist hopes and seriously undermined morale as they prepared for Newbury. Cowley typically refuses to give the rebels any credit, preferring the ascribe Royalist fortunes to “fates cruell doome:”

The matchlesse King to meet this wicked rout,
Quits Gloc’ester hopes, and draws his Army out.
Unhappy Gloc’ester! whom fates cruell doome
Will not as yet permit to bee orecome!
So a young Lion with gay rage possest
Persuing to their dens some smaller beast,
A Fox or Wolfe; teares ope to them his way,
Nor earth nor stones defend the panting prey;
But if some Bull or rugged Beare appeare,
If their shape strike his eye or noyse his Eare,
He leaps from thence, and hasts t’a nobler fight;
The imprison’d Beasts peepe forth, and joy at sight.
(The Civil War, III. 199-210)

The epic simile here introduces “a nobler fight,” that of the first Battle of Newbury. This Battle, taking place on 20 September 1643, is the last to be discussed in the poem. Following the speech of Lucifer in Book II, Cowley introduces a speech by the King before the battle. The contrast between the two characters and their respective causes is reflected in their speeches, with Cowley professing that the King

represents truth in his person and in his speech:

Things well dispos'd; thus in his Armyes Head
The King began; Truth was in all hee said.
Whislt yow, my Lords and Gentlemen I veiw,
The choise of all that Peace or Warre can shew, ...
Yow fight things well establisht to defend;
All ages past your pious armes commend; ...
Yow all one Church binds close, I'me sure the most;
More Sects then Squadrons fill their spotted Host. ...
Behold yon Hill where those proud Troopes appeare;
My Crowne and all your Liberties are there.
Both call your Swords; and if both move not, see
The thing more deare then Crowne or Libertie,
See where the Church, our sacred Mother stands,
And with much Faith implores your Christian Hands.
Soe much this Cause your Valour does invite;
In this one Feild for Earth and Heav'en yee fight.

(The Civil War, III. 275-8, 291-2, 295-8)

Cowley's very purpose in the poem, and indeed in all spheres of life such as politics, is "things well establisht to defend." He is fighting to defend, among other things, the tradition of monarchy and the Anglican religion. By instinct and by training, he reveres order and he rises to fight when his world is infested with chaos and anarchy.

One of the features of the poem is the utter lack of heroic status for Parliamentarians. By giving Satan a speech and delineating his character and the nature of evil, Cowley transfers the status of enemy leader to the fiend and makes him a false hero to be compared with the King. The Parliamentarians are therefore cast in his shadow and presented as his pawns, an attitude that could be explained by Cowley's fear of legitimating the opposition's cause. Praising rebel strategy or crediting their military prowess would not agree with the aims of propaganda. The closest Cowley comes to endow the Parliamentarian leader, Essex, with any personality is to describe a speech he makes in imitation of the King at the Battle of Newbury. He does not report the speech as he does those of Satan and Charles I, but describes it for his audience:

On th'other side th'Essexian Rebell strove,
His fainting Troopes with powresse words to move;

His Speech was dull and tedious; for him made
By some great Deacon of the Preaching Trade.
Of Tyr'anny and Pop'ery much hee told;
An hundred Declaration Lies of old;
Unhappy Man; even their ill Phrase hee tooke,
And helpt it nether with his Toung nor Looke.
But with long stops the liveless sentence broke;
Noe Muse nor Grace was neere him when hee spoke.

(The Civil War, III. 329-38)

The Battle of Newbury would bring untold losses and suffering to the warring parties. Cowley tries to capture its ferocious and indecisive nature:

Noe place but saw some unexpected wound,
Noe part of Man but some wild bullet found,
Uncertaine Fate o're all the feild did range;
Heere strange Deaths seene, and there Eschapes as strange.
More equally noe fight did ere dispense,
The acts of Fortune, and of Providence.

(The Civil War, III. 355-60)

Cowley thinks it should have been the decisive battle of the war and regrets that the Royalist forces could not overcome the rebel challenge. Again their frailties are not explained by the strength of the enemy challenge, but by Heaven's designs:

Thus God some Conquest to his Host did send;
But not enough this fatal strife to end.
Hee mixt at once his Justice and his Love,
Punisht our Sinnes, yet did our Cause approve.

(The Civil War, III. 377-80)

Even when he appears to accept that his party lost more officers and commanders, he tempers his account with the suggestion that the Parliamentarians lost many more soldiers than the Royalists: "For thowsands then, thowsands of Rebels fell / And sacrific'ed their Soules to greedy Hell" (*The Civil War*, III. 381-82). Still, Cowley cannot claim victory, despite this staggering number of slain rebels, because the Royalist dead include many men of quality whom he mourns:

Had Essex and his whole ungodly Host,
Had all the Puritan Name that day binne lost,
Yet would our losse too, rightly understood,
Cost us as much in Teares as them in Blood.

(The Civil War, III. 551-4)

Book III and the poem thus end with Cowley and the Royalists more concerned with mourning their own slain heroes than attempting to claim victory. Cowley becomes so disillusioned with war that he cannot continue the poem and abandons it.

The Civil War becomes a poem no longer capable of being finished and reasons for this abound. From within the poem itself, the death of Falkland causes Cowley untold grief and anguish. Lucius Cary, Viscount Falkland, was Secretary of State and second in importance to his party only to the King, in addition to which Cowley mourned his death as a personal loss. The last one hundred and twenty-five lines of the poem constitute an elegy on his death. The impact of this loss, according to Cowley, must be comparable to that of Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, slain in November 1632 in the Battle of Lutzen:

I saw, meethoughts, the Conquering Angell fly
From Newb'ury Feilds toward Oxford through the Sky; ...
Such I beleive, such was his mournfull Flight
Ore the pale Baltick from sad Lutzens fight.
Some mighty man is slaine there, and (ah mee!)
Something within will needes say Falkland's Hee.
(*The Civil War*, III. 529-30, 537-40)

Gustavus Adolphus was one of the great European conquerors on the continent, a figure often admired by Cowley as an example Charles I could follow. In his insistent appeal for conquests abroad rather than war at home, he claims in an earlier poem, for example, that an opportunity to lead the English in war abroad could yet make Charles I the new Gustavus Adolphus of Europe. "How would the *German Eagle* fear," / "To see a new *Gustavus* there?" ('On his Majesties Return out of Scotland,' 53-4). The "mournfull Flight" of the "Conquering Angell" to Oxford refers to the news of Falkland's death reaching the Royalist headquarters the day after. In the light of these events, Cowley's observation in an earlier ode on Falkland

turns out to assume the dimensions of prophecy: “He is too good for *War*, and ought to be / As far from Danger, as from *Fear* he’s free” (‘To the Lord Falkland,’ 37-8, in *Poems*, p. 19). The devastation suffered by the Royalists prompts Cowley’s claim that any victory gained at Newbury would be a hollow one. He becomes weary of the war, an attitude evident in his unprecedented acknowledgement that the enemy has dealt his party a telling blow: “Wretches, your losse will now triumphant bee, / You’le Falkland name when wee name Victorie” (III. 623-4). Even as he ends the poem, Cowley calls for an end to war and bloodshed in honour of fallen heroes like Falkland. The last lines take the form of a prayer for peace and the abandonment of war. In doing so, he gives up the struggle he has fought with his poetry; his call for the laying-down of arms implies an end to propaganda as well:

Yet rather, gracious God, stop here thine hand,
And let this losse excuse our perishing Land, ...
If this red warre last still, it will not leave,
Enough behind great Falkland’s death to greive; ...
Think on our sufferings, and sheath then againe;
Our Sinnes are great, but Falkland too is slaine.
(*The Civil War*, III. 639-40, 643-4, 647-8)

The reason Cowley himself advances for not completing the poem is that his plans were scuppered by history itself. Having chosen for his plot the unfolding events of the war, he explains in his Preface how he becomes unstuck: “the succeeding *misfortunes* of the *party* stopt the *work*.” This suggests that it was not Newbury *per se* that was responsible because the Royalists were not defeated, although their ranks were so depleted that subsequently they could not overhaul their sinking fortunes. For all his emotional distress at the loss of prominent Royalists like Falkland, Cowley would, in all probability, have continued the poem if succeeding events had favoured his party. But then they dashed his hopes completely instead. Historically,

the Parliamentarians grew stronger after Newbury. The Royalist siege of Plymouth foundered in December, in spite of Cowley's premature boast: "Beware next, *Plymouth*; ... / Thy conquest soone fame from my pen shall git" (*The Civil War*, II. 353-5). Plymouth, like Gloucester they had also laid siege to, represented yet another example of the inability of the King's party to enforce victory from a seemingly unassailable position, a flaw that cost the Royalists the war. In January 1644 the Scots entered the war and strengthened the position of the Parliamentarians even further. A number of Royalist reverses culminated in defeat at Marston Moor in July, when Oliver Cromwell claimed victory over the indefatigable Rupert. By the time Charles I eventually surrendered himself to the Scots in 1646, the Queen, and many in the Oxford circle, including Cowley, had fled into exile. Meanwhile Cromwell's fortunes had risen meteorically and it was his Parliament that was to take ultimate responsibility for the fate of monarchical government and that of the King's person after the latter was handed over by the Scots in 1647.

The Civil War crystallises the demands of the different kinds of discourse required for the vastly ambitious project of a poem that would both reflect and shape history; and so it explores the possibilities of the different forms Cowley tries to accommodate in the genre of the political poem. Hence there is the praise song and panegyric for occasions of royal rejoicing, the biting satire for the unjust cause of rebellion, the heroic or grand epic manner for reporting "my King's great acts," and elegy and songs of lament for slain heroes. MacLean finds even more forms, for example, "In book 2, Cowley retunes his elegiac lyre to a pastoral mode ... [when] he sings the passing of Charles Cavendish."⁵⁶ All these forms make a heady mix when added to traditional epic forms of discourse such as myth. It is Trotter's contention

that these unchallenged forms of discourse ultimately prove too conflicting for the orthodox epic form. He defends his view that “the poem had begun to fail ... *before* history started to provide the wrong plot” by identifying two forms in particular, satire and elegy, as being fundamentally untenable in the same poem. These two forms represent the two extremes of Cowley’s attitudes depending on the figure in question turning out to be friend or foe. Therefore,

It is not so much civil war as the conflict between the attitudes ... to civil war which invalidates epic structure. Caught in a fierce oscillation between satire and elegy, a language for ‘them’ and a language for ‘us’, Cowley found the epic frame increasingly inhospitable. ... Looking for a triumphant form and a triumphant style, it discovered only its own divisiveness.⁵⁷

When MacLean urges a more positive approach than Trotter’s, preferring to consider the poem not so much as having failed, but as having “unfinished or unfinishable status,” it is because it has become “an unwritable epic:”

The unfinished or unfinishable status of [Cowley’s] epic fragment deserve serious consideration as an emergent characteristic of English historical poetry. ... The epic fragment, the brief epic, the mock epic, the incomplete or unfinished epic, *Annus Mirabilis*, Pope’s *Brutus* fragment and his “Opus Magnum,” even Cowley’s *Davideis*; the piece of an unwritable epic is surely a *typical* form of English historical poetry for two generations of major poets.⁵⁸

MacLean has argued persuasively against Trotter’s view, claiming that “the problem facing Cowley in *The Civil War* was not that of an irreconcilable conflict of modes caused by generic variety, but the need to reconcile partisan interests with the formal requirements of an epic design.”⁵⁹

It is our contention that Cowley could not continue with the seemingly irreconcilable demands of epic and propaganda. The poem stops because there is no further opportunity for propaganda; it was designed to serve a political purpose and it had to stop when his party’s defeat became apparent. That is why we disagree with this “literary” reason MacLean advances that Cowley might have been sufficiently “dissatisfied with the literary qualities of the work” to stop it.⁶⁰ The literary reasons

should pertain to the traditions of epic that increasingly become at odds with propaganda. The mode of political satire to which Cowley resorts when describing the Parliamentarians actually conflicts, not so much with elegy, as with a certain epic tradition of elevating friend and foe to heroic status for the purpose of balance and suspense. For the sake of propaganda, he cannot credit the Parliamentarians with any virtue nor can he delineate their leaders in the same way as he does the King. In order to circumvent this problematic, not only does he explain Royalist defeats as the working of fate, but he also presents Satan as the chief nemesis of the King and raises him to the heroic status of central figure for the opposition. But using the Hell motif as an outlet for the explanation of Parliamentarian success is unworkable. For the epic to work the action must have man at the centre; if the epic hero has a nemesis it must be man, an individual with a name.⁶¹ In *The Civil War* a fundamental violation of traditional epic practice occurs each time credit is not given to man in acknowledgement of his awesome or heroic deeds, notwithstanding the fact that such deeds are not carried out by the epic hero. If anything, deeds that oppose the hero usually ensure the epic's cyclical turn of events, for the opposition should enjoy an upsurge in fortune that makes the hero's ultimate victory all the more remarkable. Also, Cowley chooses the epic as a fitting form to celebrate potential Royalist heroes destined for glory in war, but surely heroes should already have been made and confirmed as such before their awesome deeds are narrated in epic. Further, the balance becomes lop-sided, as Cowley can no longer introduce Heaven as a theatre of action – because earth already opposes Hell – nor can he introduce a divine figure to counter Hell and Satan respectively. Charles I might be portrayed throughout as a god-like figure, but there is no actual interdependence between the human and the divine worlds or a divine sanction of his actions as far the epic hero is concerned.

That Cowley acknowledges all this could be gauged from his later practice in the *Davideis* where he would cast the poem in a more traditional mould and follow the established epic conventions very closely.

Cowley would almost certainly not have chosen to give epic treatment to the same subject if he had waited until after the event, for he was not sufficiently detached spatially and sentimentally from it. At the start of the poem he poses as one intent on peace for England, or alternatively victory for the Royalists that would assert the King's authority and deliver the nation from the sinister forces of rebellion. But by the end of the third Book, he becomes so partisan in his report and so unnerved by his party's losses that he is caught up in the sentimentalism of it all, hence the difficulty of finding further inspiration for his epic scheme. It becomes a poem about his inability to continue when he comes to the realisation that his Muse would only inspire him to do so if he wills it. But his troubled mind cannot summon his will, and in what is a most remarkable conceit, tears of anguish and surrender drop from his pen rather than ink:

A Muse stood by mee, and just then I writ
My Kings great acts in Verses not unfit.
The trowbled Muse fell shapeless into aire,
Instead of Inck dropt from my Pen a Teare.
(*The Civil War*, III. 545-8)

Cowley's admission here is crucial, for it confirms his participation. Not only does history in the shape of those "succeeding *misfortunes* of the *party*" deprive him of further opportunity to write "My Kings great acts in Verses not unfit," but epic does not readily admit of the poet who would be a participant. Thomas Greene, for example, defines the epic poet's role thus:

The poet stands midway between the hero and his audience. He is the amphibian, the mediator, the messenger, the guide, who is inspired and inspires in turn. He is the Knower of the Names, the

speaker to those who cannot speak of high things. But he is not the actor; he, like the audience, has only heard of those things. He can say “we” to embrace himself and the audience, but never himself and the hero.⁶²

That is how, along with the verdict of history, an attempt to challenge this traditional epic practice along with the other established conventions combine, to use MacLean’s word, to make *The Civil War* unfinishable.

What Cowley’s body of political poetry shows is an attempt at interpreting and shaping the truth of history from the perspective of a committed participant. Together, the poems constitute different discourses coming together in one vast body of discourse inspired by the history of Britain in the early 1640s, from the fomenting of resistance against Stuart absolutism to the climactic moment when this subversive movement appears to prevail. In trying to forestall this revolution and change, such ambitious poetry defines the poet’s role at the moment when the fabric of his society threatens to collapse. Cowley finds a niche in the history of his time as spokesperson in defence of his cause, one on whom it is incumbent in times of danger to exert the power of discourse. Rather than just textualising history, poetry becomes a participatory tool to be used as a weapon and a major force in the war that propaganda itself represents. In his vigorous attempt to assert himself in the European epic tradition, Cowley effects a revolution of his own in his unique attempt to fuse the conventions of a time-honoured form with the unorthodox and imminent demands of propaganda and the unfolding history of his time.

¹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1 (An Introduction), trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 95. For a discussion of Foucault's theory in the context of power relations, see "After the New Historicism," Stephen Mullaney, in *Alternative Shakespeares*, Vol. 2, ed. Terence Hawkes (London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 17-37), pp. 30-31.

² Foucault, pp. 95-6.

³ Stephen Greenblatt, "Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and its Subversion, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*" in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, 2nd ed., ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994, pp. 18-47), p. 25.

⁴ Greenblatt, pp. 23-4.

⁵ Mullaney, pp. 26-7.

⁶ Mullaney, p. 37

⁷ In his Preface to *Poems*, p. 4, Cowley writes:

At my return lately into *England*, I met by great accident a *Book* entituled, *The Iron Age*, and published under my name. ... I wondred very much how one who could be so *foolish* to write so ill Verses, should yet be so *Wise* to set them forth as another *Mans*. ... It would have been much less injurious, if it had pleased the *Author* to put forth some of my Writings under his *own name*, rather than his own under mine.

⁸ Loiseau says that the *Satyre Against Separatists* that first appeared in 1642 "belonged to Cowley's time at Cambridge, and it is highly unlikely he would have been involved at that time in religious controversy, which he disliked, without a motive. It is therefore right to exclude it from Cowley's works as Waller did." (The translation from the French is mine). But Calhoun and others counter Loiseau's claims: "But Cowley had, in fact, already involved himself in religious controversy in *The Guardian*. Although Loiseau mentions one of the editions of 1642, he does not explain why it bears the signature that it does." See *Abraham Cowley: Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre*, Jean Loiseau (Paris: Henri Didier, 1931), p. 81, n. 7; and *The Collected Works of Abraham Cowley*, Vol. 1, ed. Thomas O. Calhoun, Laurence Heyworth, and Allan Pritchard (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), Commentary, p. 322.

⁹ Arthur H. Nethercot, *Abraham Cowley: The Muse's Hannibal* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 83-4. Nethercot was almost certainly inspired here by Cowley himself when refuting authorship of the poem: "I wondred ... how one who could ... write so ill Verses, should yet ... set them forth as another *Mans*, ... and not fathered the *Bastard* upon such a person, whose stock of Reputation is, I fear, little enough for maintenance of his own numerous *Legitimate Off-spring* of that kind" (*Poems*, Preface, p. 4).

¹⁰ See *Abraham Cowley: A Bibliography*, M. R. Perkin (Folkestone: William Dawson and Sons, 1977), pp. 25-9.

¹¹ See *Collected Works*, pp. 320-26. However, Gerald MacLean, in his important work that covers Cowley's *Civil War* poetry, is unaware of the work of Calhoun and others when he writes that "*The Foure Ages of England* [was] incorrectly ascribed to Cowley," showing that he has not made the distinction between *The Puritans Lecture* in particular and the other works in that volume. See *Time's Witness: Historical Representation in English Poetry, 1603-1660* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), p. 168.

¹² See Loiseau's bibliographical listing, p. 662. Nethercot, p. 82, notes that, "Although Cowley never included it among his acknowledged works, the discussion of its authorship by the publisher of *Wit and Loyalty Revived* in 1682 is conclusive enough."

¹³ A footnote in Johnson's work suggests that he might not have commented on the poem because it had not been "inserted in any collection" of Cowley's work, an opinion Johnson later revised. See Lives of the English Poets, Samuel Johnson, Vol. 1 (Cowley – Dryden), ed. George Birkbeck Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), p. 5.

¹⁴ See "The Text of Cowley's Satire, *The Puritan and the Papist*" (*Anglia*, Vol. 58, 1934, pp. 78-102)

¹⁵ Nethercot, pp. 82-3. Loiseau, p. 404, distinguishes Cowley's approach in the poem from Cleveland's satires instead. More recently, Calhoun and others, p. 341, have rejected Nethercot's views outright: "Nethercot is wrong. ... The savagely divisive satirist of the time was Cleveland."

¹⁶ Loiseau, p. 404. The translation is mine.

¹⁷ Collected Works, Commentary, p. 337.

¹⁸ Collected Works, Commentary, p. 339.

¹⁹ Allan Pritchard suggests that the 1679 publisher of the poem was Langly Curtis, adding that, "he may have been prompted to publish the poem not only by Cowley's high literary reputation but also by the general interest in works relating to civil wars." See *The Civil War*, Abraham Cowley, ed. Allan Pritchard (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), Introduction, p. 6.

²⁰ See Selected Poems of Abraham Cowley, Edmund Waller and John Oldham, ed. Julia Griffin (London: Penguin, 1998, pp. 1-48), pp. 9-12. Griffin's selection recalls that of David Hopkins and Tom Mason who earlier included portions of the *Davideis* on particular themes in their publication of Cowley's selected poetry. One of these was the description of 'Hell' which not only has affinities with Griffin's selected passage, but which Cowley had actually reproduced in *The Civil War*. See David Hopkins and Tom Mason, Abraham Cowley: Selected Poems (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1994).

²¹ For example, Loiseau's review of reactions through the ages to Cowley's various works in Abraham Cowley's Reputation in England makes mention of the poem only once, and that is to announce its appearance in 1679.

²² Loiseau, pp. 403-4.

²³ Robert B. Hinman, Abraham Cowley's World of Order (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 3.

²⁴ David Trotter, The Poetry of Abraham Cowley (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 7.

²⁵ Gerald M. MacLean, p. 8.

²⁶ MacLean, p. 33

²⁷ Collected Works, Notes, p. 308.

²⁸ George Parfitt, English Poetry of the Seventeenth Century, (London: Longman, 1985), p. 11.

²⁹ This is the one poem in this chapter that requires us to use Waller's edition where it appears in the *Miscellanies* section in Poems, pp. 22-4. Calhoun and others (pp. 307, 400) mention this poem, one of two pieces (one in Latin) Cowley contributes to a student collection, but do not include it in Collected Works, Vol. 1, which we are using for all the other poems discussed in this chapter.

³⁰ Cowley's first panegyric for Charles I, the earlier poem 'On his Majesties returne out of Scotland' of 1633, had also been written as a contribution to a collection by students of his institution. This was at his school at Westminster, the project being *In Auspicatissimum Serenis: Simi Regis Caroli e Scotia Reditum Regiae Scholae Westmonasteriensis Carmen Gratulatorium*.

- ³¹ The following passage expands on the bloodless nature of these Anglo-Scottish conflicts:
 In the First Bishops' War the Scottish and English armies were camped within sight of each other, separated only by the Tweed, during May and June 1639. In the Second Bishops' War the Scots crossed the Tweed in pursuit of the English army in August 1640, but the second war was almost as bloodless as the first.
- See Collected Works, Notes, p. 393.
- ³² MacLean, p. 174, notes that, "Although other English poets at the time commonly slandered the Scots in contemptuous terms, Cowley never questions the union of England and Scotland."
- ³³ MacLean, p. 171.
- ³⁴ MacLean, p. 158.
- ³⁵ Thomas Corns, Uncloistered Virtue: English Political Literature, 1640-1660 (London: Oxford University Press, 1992), Introduction, p. 2.
- ³⁶ Collected Works, Notes, p. 325.
- ³⁷ Collected Works, Notes, p. 347.
- ³⁸ Parfitt, p. 6.
- ³⁹ MacLean, p. 5, comments on the authority of writings of the civil war period thus: "Historians, and poets writing on historical topics, empowered themselves by appropriating the stance of the all-seeing and all-knowing witness."
- ⁴⁰ The prologue and epilogue to *The Guardian*, the play written for the entertainment of the young Prince Charles, appear as independent pieces in Poems, pp. 31-2. Cowley appeared to have written the play in such haste that he appeals to the Prince to consider mainly its intentions of being "*Acted by the Heart*," that is, as an emotional demonstration of "our *Duty*" as committed Royalists:
- Accept our *hasty zeal*; a thing that's *play'd*
 Ere't is a *Play*, and *Acted* ere'tis *Made*.
 Our *Ign'orance*, but our *Duty* too we show;
 I would *all Ignorant People* would do so!
 At other Times expect our *Wit* or *Art*;
 This *Comedy* is *Acted* by the *Heart*.
- ('Prologue to the *Guardian*, Before the Prince,' 19-24)
- ⁴¹ Collected Works, Notes, p. 431.
- ⁴² Collected Works, Notes, p. 344.
- ⁴³ In *The Civil War*, Cowley describes the event again, accusing the Parliamentarians of pretence and malicious intent:
- Now flew their *Canon* thicke through wounded Aire,
 Sent to defend and kill their *Sovereigne* there.
 More than *Hee* them, the *Bullets* fear'd his head,
 And at his feete lay innocently dead.
 They knew not what those men that shot them ment,
 And acted their *pretence*, not their *intent*.
- (*The Civil War*, I. 245-50)
- ⁴⁴ Quoted in Collected Works, Notes, pp. 409-10.
- ⁴⁵ MacLean, p. 8.
- ⁴⁶ MacLean, p. 185.

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- ⁴⁷ Cited in Waller's edition. See Essays, p. 466.
- ⁴⁸ MacLean, p. 183.
- ⁴⁹ MacLean, pp. 191-92.
- ⁵⁰ Thomas Maresco, Three English Epics: Studies of Troilus and Criseyde, The Fairie Queene, and Paradise Lost (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), Prologue, p. ix.
- ⁵¹ Quoted in Collected Works, Notes, p. 396.
- ⁵² The Five Members were John Pym, John Hampden, Denzil Holles, Sir Arthur Hazlerigg, and William Strode.
- ⁵³ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1998), Book X, The Argument, p. 539.
- ⁵⁴ Milton, pp. 567-68.
- ⁵⁵ MacLean, p. 205. On the Royalist contempt for London as the centre of the rebellion, MacLean, pp. 205-05, cites from several sources, including Sir Edward Walker who described the capital as "the head and fountain of this detested rebellion," and Clarendon, for whom London was a "sink for the ill humours of the kingdom."
- ⁵⁶ MacLean, p. 203.
- ⁵⁷ Trotter, p. 21.
- ⁵⁸ MacLean, p. 209.
- ⁵⁹ See MacLean, pp. 207-08.
- ⁶⁰ MacLean, p. 207, is citing from Pritchard's comments in his 1973 text.
- ⁶¹ Thomas Greene devotes a chapter in his book to epic norms where he writes, for example, that, "The act which induces heroic awe must be performed by a single individual or ... individuals. The hero must be acting for the community, the City; ... he must be nonetheless an individual with a name." This test of the hero's humanity is true of his opponents as well. See The Descent From Heaven: A Study in Epic Continuity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 15.
- ⁶² Greene, p. 25.

CHAPTER TWO

LOVE POETRY: THE LYRIC TRADITION AND THE MISTRESS OF LOVE AND DESIRE

In furias ignemq; ruunt; Amor omnibus idem – They [Poets] all rush into the fires of passion; all feel the same Love. (Poems, Preface, cited from Virgil, *Georgics* 3. 244)¹

Haeret lateri lethalis arundo – The deathly shaft (of love) stuck deep in her flank.
(*The Mistress*, Motto, culled from Virgil, *Aeneid* IV. 73)²

If she be coy and scorn my noble fire,
If her chill heart I cannot move,
Why I'll *enjoy* the very *Love*
And make a *Mistress* of mine own *Desire*.
(‘The Request’)

2.1 Introduction and Theoretical Considerations

In his prefatory remarks on *The Mistress*, Cowley defends its relative lack of originality by contending that it was written in fulfilment of an obligation, something he had to do because the very fact of being a poet involves writing love lyrics:

The Second [Part of the 1656 Poems] is called *The Mistress*, or *Love-Verses*; for so it is, that *Poets* are scarce thought *Free-men* of their *Company*, without paying some duties, and obliging themselves to be true to Love. Sooner or later they must all pass through that *Tryal*, like some *Mahumetan Monks*, that are bound by their Order, once at least, in their life, to make a *Pilgrimage* to *Meca*. *In furias ignemq; ruunt; Amor omnibus idem* - “They all rush into the fires of passion; all feel the same Love” (Virgil, *Georgics* 3.244). (Poems, Preface, p. 10).

The lyric tradition goes back to Petrarchan times,³ through the period that, according to Jacques Lacan, witnessed “the appearance, articulation, establishment, of a whole moral code, of a whole ethic, a whole way of life, that is called courtly love.”⁴ In comparison with the Virgilian line on poets rushing into the fires of passion and feeling the same love, Lacan proceeds thus: “the feminine object of praise, of service, of devotion, and all kinds of sentimental stereotyped behaviour on the part of the defender of courtly love relative to the Lady, leads one to say that they all seemed to have been praising the same person.”⁵ This courtly love tradition is primarily linked to Cowley’s mid-seventeenth century lyricism through the aspect of convention, whereby a certain kind of poetry is adopted as a stance, a social pose, and a fashion

statement. When Cowley writes about fulfilling some duties and obliging himself to be true to love, or about being bound by his Order to write love poetry, he is intimating that his foremost aim in composition is the *rite de passage*, the means to poetic fame and recognition. According to Catherine Belsey, "writing is narcissistic to a degree, at its most elementary level a quest for recognition, the place where the subject appears."⁶ Like courtly love which, according to Lacan, was "in effect, an exemplary form, a paradigm of sublimation,"⁷ much of seventeenth century love poetry, including *The Mistress*, could be read as a sublimation of desire. To uncover the various facets of desire that an analysis of Cowley's various tropes and figures reveals, we intend to refer to the work of Lacan who, along with Sigmund Freud, provides us with tools for an essentially psychoanalytical reading.

The Mistress is one of Cowley's best known works and the main source of his reputation as a Metaphysical poet; but it has also provoked the most varied reaction to any of his works, hence the considerable lack of consensus among critics over the ages. Johnson, whose views on *The Mistress* have been uncommonly influential, appears to commend Cowley as a man of learning but rejects his claims as a lover:

[The poems] are written with exuberance of wit, and with copiousness of learning; and it is truly asserted by Sprat that the plenitude of the writer's knowledge flows in upon his page, so that the reader is commonly surprised into some improvement. But, considered as the verses of a lover, no man that has ever loved will much commend them. They are neither courtly nor pathetick, have neither gallantry nor fondness. His praises are too far-sought and too hyperbolic, either to express joy or to excite it.⁸

The basis for Johnson's criticism is his theory that, "The basis of all excellence is truth: he that professes love ought to feel its power."⁹ His ambivalent attitude therefore arises from a fundamental disagreement with Cowley's own theory:

Poesie ... is not the *Picture* of the *Poet*, but of *things* and *persons* imagined by him. He may be in his own practice and disposition a *Philosopher*, nay a *Stoick*, and yet speak sometimes with the softness of an amorous *Sappho*. (*Poems*, Preface, p. 10).

Cowley is confiding here that the source of poetry could be as much the poet's imagination as his experience. We are warned not necessarily to expect a personal account because he could wield his poetic licence to feign or imagine love situations. These are conventional situations which, when added up, should constitute the universal truths of the love experience. Nethercot takes up the issue:

If Cowley had any basis of actuality for these poems, it was a slight one. According to Sprat's Latin life, he played with, or counterfeited, love-adventures ('De Amoribus lusit') with the ease and ingenuity of Ovid and Catullus.¹⁰

For Johnson, Cowley's is a contrived and mechanical approach that does not become a true lover, hence this famous pronouncement to conclude his criticism of the work:

Cowley's *Mistress* has no power of seduction; she 'plays round the head, but comes not at the heart.' ... The compositions are such as might have been written for penance by a hermit, or for hire by a philosophical rhymmer who had only heard of another sex; for they turn the mind only on the writer whom, without thinking on a woman but as the subject for his talk, we sometimes esteem as learned, and sometimes despise as trifling, always admire as ingenious, and always condemn as unnatural.¹¹

The fashion leading up to Johnson's views could be traced back to the previous century. In 1692 William Walsh had already found thoughts that are "surprising and glittering" everywhere among earlier seventeenth-century poets when compared to the ancients, but could not find any one of them writing as a lover:¹²

The Moderns ... fill their Verses with Thoughts that are surprising and glittering, but not tender, passionate, or natural to a Man in Love. ... The best way I conceive to make her love you, is to convince her that you love her. Now this certainly is not to be done by forc'd Conceits, far-fetch'd Similes, and shining Points; but by a true and lively Representation of the Pains and Thoughts attending such a passion. ... At the same time that we must allow *Dr. Donne* to have been a very great wit; *Mr. Waller* a very gallant writer; *Sir John Suckling* a very gay one, and *Mr. Cowley* a great genius; yet methinks I can hardly fancy any one of them to have been a very great lover.¹³

A year after Walsh's remarks, his friend Dryden took up the charge and established the trend leading up to Johnson's verdict of much learning and little feeling:

[*Donn*] affects the Metaphysicks, ... where Nature only shou'd reign; and perplexes the Minds of the Fair Sex with nice Speculations of Philosophy, when he shou'd ingage their hearts, and entertain them with the softnesses of Love. In this (if I may be pardon'd for so bold a truth) *Mr. Cowley* has Copy'd him to a fault; so great a one, in my Opinion, that it throws his *Mistress* infinitely below his Pindariques.¹⁴

These views reveal significant changes in taste between the mid-century and Dryden's neo-classical age. A. Alvarez remarks in a chapter on Cowley that, "the curious thing is that *The Mistress* may have been admired for exactly the qualities Johnson attacked. The poems may have been frigid, but they were eminently correct."¹⁵ Even Walsh is said to have written poems that "often echo the themes chosen by Cowley."¹⁶ Sprat's passage, where he highlights the "plenitude of the writer's knowledge" in Johnson's words, reveals that *The Mistress* did move the heart while instructing the mind:

The whole Passion of Love is intimately describ'd, with all its mighty Train of Hopes, and Joys, and Disquiets. Besides this amorous tenderness, ... there is something of more useful Knowledge very naturally and gracefully insinuated, and everywhere there may be something found, to inform the minds of wise men, as well as to move the hearts of young Men, or Women.¹⁷

Johnson's comments are therefore made at a significant remove from Cowley's age, for to paraphrase Loiseau, Cowley's contemporaries did not consider it paradoxical that the poet would write love lyrics celebrating an ideal mistress that was only a creation of his imagination.¹⁸ It is because his seventeenth-century readers understood this, that "*The Mistress* was to stand for a good many years as one of the pillars on which Cowley's Temple of Fame was erected."¹⁹

Twentieth century criticism has invariably been marked by the enduring influence of Johnson's remarks. In the modern period Ruth Wallerstein, quoting from the "Life of Cowley," does not give credence to Cowley's efforts in *The Mistress*, stating matter-of-factly that,

Johnson's word on Cowley's mind is final: 'A mind capacious by nature, and replenished by study; ... he is never pathetick, and rarely sublime, but always either ingenious or learned, either acute or profound.' Cowley's genius is not suited to the love lyric.²⁰

The categorical nature of this remark shows the desperate fate sometimes suffered by *The Mistress*, even allowing for the fact that for most of the twentieth century

Cowley's poetic reputation was that of a Metaphysical poet. By far the most important moment in the first half of the century was John Sparrow's release in 1926 of all eighty-four poems in The Mistress, With Other Select Poems. Sparrow wrote how "In *The Mistress* and the *Miscellanies* ... the metaphysical influence triumphed," and then identified those poems where "Cowley seems to catch something of Donne's inspiration and almost to equal his achievement."²¹ Despite his efforts and the discussions of Nethercot and Loiseau, *The Mistress* has never recaptured its former levels of attention. Even Hinman's approach would be to paraphrase critics like Walsh and Dryden, before drawing a tame conclusion: "Cowley, even more than Donne, demands too much cerebration of ladies; love poetry ought not to be too intellectual, and therefore *The Mistress* is not Cowley's most successful work."²² He arrives at this conclusion despite censuring Johnson's remarks thus: "Johnson oversimplifies love and women as Cowley never does;" or again, "Presumably notions of what is general had changed by Johnson's day, so that Johnson was unable to read Cowley's often highly compressed images in any terms but the particular."²³ It was not until Trotter's study, where *The Mistress* is given the lengthiest treatment of any of the works under discussion, that it is discussed in an original light.

Trotter is keen on examining *The Mistress* in terms of its use of the love-lyric form, and finds essentially that this form has been exhausted by the time Cowley uses it.

He explains his fascination thus:

By the time Cowley wrote, instability had become endemic; one could either write poems which celebrated their own heroic marginality, as Marvell and the 'Cavalier' poets in various ways did, or one could massively and gloomily regret the inhospitality of familiar conventions, as Cowley did. There is no doubt in my mind as to which of these two possible courses of action produced the more enjoyable poetry, but *The Mistress* holds a kind of fascination for me because it registers from the inside the exhaustion of a discourse. ... I want to discuss the ways in which certain poems in *The Mistress* 'come unstuck' when they attempt to reproduce familiar codes.²⁴

For Trotter the code of formal conventions that worked so well for Donne would fail Cowley, such that he “writes poems about his inability to write a certain kind of poem.”²⁵ The exception to this “failure of codes and the consequences of that failure,” is a group of “poems which follow conventions usually thought of as ‘Cavalier’.”²⁶ This assessment therefore appears to invalidate Johnson’s appraisal that, “Cowley adopted [the metaphysical style], and excelled his predecessors; having as much sentiment and more musick.”²⁷ Instead Trotter cites John Oldmixon’s remarks in *Arts of Logick and Rhetorick*: “It seems strange to me, that after *Suckling* and *Waller* had written, whose Genius’s were so fine and just, Mr. *Cowley* should imitate Dr. *Donne*; in whom there’s hardly ... one Stroke which has any Likeness to Nature.”²⁸ The Delaware edition of *The Mistress*, published in 1993 as Volume 2, Part 1, of Cowley’s *Collected Works*, offers a refreshingly different approach to Trotter’s in what remains the last major commentary on the poems. It opens in upbeat mood: “Echoing various earlier opinions, ... *The Mistress* contains ‘the favourite love poems of the age [1640-1660].’”²⁹ Documentary evidence, it claims, shows that “the sheer mass of surviving copies shows Cowley only second to Donne as the seventeenth-century reader’s and singer’s choice for love lyrics.”³⁰ The difference with previous critical opinion could be gauged by the appreciation of these lines: “*Awake* all men do *lust* for thee, / And some *enjoy* Thee when they *sleep*” (‘The Innocent Ill,’ 18-19). Whereas Johnson cited them among examples of “indelicate and disgusting” lines, Calhoun and others find instead that, “The lines represent Cowley’s glib wit at its best.”³¹ It is our intention to discuss *The Mistress* in new ways that reveal his declared association with the company of love poets, and then to demonstrate in an original fashion why beneath this façade it is ultimately a text about an individual’s desire. Unlike Trotter we do not refute the claims of those

that find in it some of the finest specimens of Metaphysical poetry, but we contend that criticism has fallen short of searching further into Cowley's motives to resolve such key notions as poetry and truth, and love and desire.

The English civil war was still being fought when *The Mistress* was published in 1647 and Cowley's work as a transmitter and decoder of correspondence between the King and the exiled Queen ensured his involvement. His shattering experiences and the capitulation of the Caroline cause continued to haunt him. Even in a volume of love verses as *The Mistress*, quite a few of the titles have a certain *double entendre*, for example, 'The Thraldome,' 'Not Fair,' 'The Change,' 'The Despair,' 'The Wish,' 'Against Hope,' 'Coldness,' 'The Parting,' 'The Distance,' 'My Fate,' 'The Heartbreaking,' 'The Usurpation,' and 'The Separation.' Some of these poems make frequent use of military figures and tropes, even while discussing love:

Even so rude *Armies* when the field they quit,
And into several *Quarters* get;
Each *Troop* does spoil and ruine more,
Then all joyn'd in one *Body* did before.

How many *Loves* raigin in my bosom now?
How many *Loves*, yet all of you?
Thus have I chang'd with evil fate
My *Monarch-Love* into a *Tyrant State*.
(‘The Heart-Breaking,’ 13-20)

Thomas Corns finds in *The Mistress* “examples of equating aspects of sexual love to contemporary political life: ... the roles of lover and exiled servant of the royal cause interanimate each other.”³² However, for all its political overtones, *The Mistress* is not a political work as, for example, *The Civil War* that precedes it. The choice of form is itself persuasive and discursive, for Cowley's reversion to the short poem with variations in stanza patterns marks a volte-face from his previous innovations with the long poem and the epic. Where he had chosen those forms for political

poetry, with the epic in particular the ideal framework to record a momentous event in a nation's history, he now conceived of the short poem and lyric as being propitious to the private mood of the individual. The poems in *The Mistress* do not take great account of the historical and political moment in discussing the individual's private life. Rather, its concerns include the assertion of the poet's licence to feign, and other timeless but private concerns such as the fascination with various aspects of sexual love, fact and fantasy, and desire.

The Mistress is unique among Cowley's works for the way he seeks inspiration from fellow seventeenth century poets rather than effect his own innovations or look up mainly to classical sources. The lyric tradition he fostered was the one made hugely popular by Donne whose poetry, Alastair Fowler writes, was distinguished by "his deep reflective interest in the experiences of which his poetry is the expression, [and] the new psychological curiosity with which he writes of love and religion."³³ Donne made the significant contribution of helping to take the form of the lyric from the courtly variety to the plain-style lyric and from the social or public to the private mode. Earl Miner, in his fine study on The Metaphysical Mode from Donne to Cowley, makes clear the preponderance of this newly found private mode:

The most distinctive, and distinguishing feature of Metaphysical poetry is its private mode. ... It cannot be said of Elizabethan poetry, of Cavalier poetry, or of Restoration poetry as it must be said of Metaphysical that it is at root private.³⁴

The private mode came with a new sense of urgency, with the emphasis on the individual thus captured by George Parfitt: "The speed, frequency, and variety of [Donne's] images suggest a compulsion to define and communicate which is something more internally urgent than the stylised pressures of the Elizabethan lyricist."³⁵ Cowley's steadfast refusal to use the sonnet form so popular in

Elizabethan times aside, there are many common features in the work of the poets that belong to the School of Donne. Fowler harnesses these and pronounces as apt their label of Metaphysical poetry, his assessment focussing on:

The more intellectual, less verbal character of their wit compared with the conceits of the Elizabethans; the finer psychology of which their conceits are often the expression; their learned imagery; the argumentative, subtle evolution of their lyrics; above all the peculiar blend of passion and thought, feeling and ratiocination which is their greatest achievement. Passionate thinking is always apt to become metaphysical, probing and investigating the experience from which it takes its rise.³⁶

Therefore, before analysing poetry and truth, and love and desire in the final two sections, we would examine first of all Cowley's handling of the love-lyric in relation to poets writing in the great seventeenth-century love tradition, highlighting the extent to which he sustains his Metaphysical verse in the process.

2.2 The Love-Lyric and the Metaphysical Strain

And if some lover, such as we,
Have heard this dialogue of one
Let him still mark us, he shall see
Small change, when we're to bodies gone.
(Donne, 'The Ecstasy')

Some dull Philos'opher when he hears me say,
My Soul is from me fled away;

...

Will cry, Absurd! And ask me, how I live:
And Syllogisms against it give.

...

Her Body is my Soul; laugh not at this, ...
And separation from it is my Death.
(‘The Soul[II]’)

For all the considerable sway Johnson's critical appreciation of *The Mistress* has held over subsequent critical opinion, it is for his very influential views on the nature of Metaphysical poetry that his "Life of Cowley" has been mostly remembered. Dryden used the word "Metaphysicks" in the 1693 passage from the *Discourse on the Original and Progress of Satire* cited in the previous section, where crucially he proclaimed Cowley's discipleship to Donne: "He affects the Metaphysicks. ... In this

Mr. Cowley has Copy'd him to a fault." But it was Johnson who defined the character of Metaphysical poetry, in the process affirming Dryden's incontrovertible link between Cowley, Donne and indeed a whole "race of writers:"

About the beginning of the seventeenth century appeared a race of writers that may be termed the metaphysical poets. ... [They] were men of learning, and to shew their learning was their whole endeavour. ... They neither copied nature nor life; neither painted the forms of matter nor represented the operations of intellect. Those however who deny them to be poets allow them to be wits.³⁷

That Johnson was aware of Dryden's earlier criticism is evident in the reference to his predecessor's proclamation of Donne as "the greatest Wit, though not the best Poet of our Nation."³⁸ Johnson proceeds to define wit thus:

[Wit] may be ... considered as a kind of *discordia concors*; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike. ... The most heterogenous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions; their learning instructs, and their subtilty surprises; but the reader commonly thinks his improvement dearly bought, and, though he sometimes admires, is seldom pleased. ... Their courtship was void of fondness and their lamentation of sorrow. Their wish was only to say what they hoped had been never said before.³⁹

Metaphysical poetry is fraught with learned allusions to mythological, classical and contemporary sources; various subjects are broached from philosophy and religion to science and astronomy; and there is an inquiry into issues on love, life and society, as well as body, mind and soul. But Johnson's definition of wit perhaps captures most of all the nature of the conceit, the outstanding device in this kind of poetry. Miner noted in this regard that, "Although Johnson spoke of ideas and did not restrict wit to images, it has become common to think of wit in terms of conceits."⁴⁰

If Johnson appears to have been harsh in his appreciation of Metaphysical poetry, he also finds many qualities to commend it:

Yet great labour directed by great abilities is never wholly lost: if they frequently threw away their wit upon false conceits, they likewise sometimes struck out unexpected truth: if their conceits were far- fetched, they were often worth the carriage. ... In perusing the works of this race of authors the mind is exercised either by recollection or inquiry. ... If their greatness seldom elevates, their acuteness often surprises; ... genuine wit and useful knowledge may be sometimes found ... and such as, when they are expanded to perspicuity and polished to elegance, may give lustre to works which have more propriety though less copiousness of sentiment.⁴¹

He might have famously denied being seduced by *The Mistress*, but Johnson is happy to acknowledge its exuberance of wit and copiousness of learning. Such has been the impact of Johnson's treatment of Cowley as a Metaphysical poet that Loiseau described it as at once as Johnson's "most original" analysis and as a "final judgement" on the poet.⁴² Our discussion would show that while the Metaphysical qualities are undeniable, they are not characteristic of all the poems and Johnson's judgement has masked even more propitious approaches to *The Mistress*.

In summing up the method in *The Mistress*, A. Alvarez at once describes Donne's influence and Cowley's skilful reworking of his sources:

Cowley's poetry is based on the ability to analyse some other poet's work and then reproduce the techniques, suitably chastened and corrected according to his own and the time's lights. He admitted that this was the method he used in translating Pindar. He did the same when he translated Donne into Restoration terms.⁴³

Cowley's technique is most evident in the use of the conceit, his wielding of this device bringing into relief the trademark feature of Donne's style. It is a figure of speech involving comparison, an extended or complex metaphor, with the emphasis placed both on the subject or tenor item and on what it is likened to. Of Cowley in particular, Johnson asserted, of course, that "the fashionable style remained chiefly with Cowley," implying that his work "abounded in conceits."⁴⁴ Cowley does appear to enjoy giving free rein to his wit and fancy in finding likeness in things whose similarity is not readily apparent. The first two of six stanzas that make up 'Resolved to be beloved' suffice to make the point:

'Tis true, I have lov'd already three or four,
And shall three or four hundred more;
I'll love each fair one that I see,
Till I find one at last that shall *love Mee*.

That shall my *Canaan* be, the fatal soil,
That ends my wandrings, and my toil.

I'll settle there and happy grow;
The *Countray* does with *Milk* and *Honey* flow.
(‘Resolved to be beloved,’ 1-8)

Opening this poem with “’Tis true” recalls Donne’s same expression in the overture of the ‘Break of Day’ from his *Songs and Sonnets*: “’Tis true, ’tis day, what though it be?”⁴⁵ Cowley uses images in his poem that are at once familiar and ingenious to effect a witty comparison of his would-be mistress to Canaan, thus evoking images of a would-be Promised Land. The search for his ideal woman brings to his mind the search for Canaan by the wandering Jews, thus forging a metaphorical union between this non-existent woman and the as yet undiscovered Canaan. Another association of the Promised Land then springs to mind, for the poet must depict this country that flows with milk and honey. Finding a mistress would end his odyssey of a quest, and happily so, for she holds out magnificent promises of a life full of consummate bliss. Even so, the exaggeration of “three or four hundred more” women is a typical Metaphysical trait, one on which Johnson commented that, “What they wanted however of the sublime they endeavoured to supply by hyperbole; their amplification had no limits.”⁴⁶

Closely associated with the conceit device and equally in ubiquitous use in *The Mistress* is paradox, another intellectually contrived feature suited to the kind of witty arguments prevalent in metaphysical poetry. The use of these and associated devices such as the oxymoron probably reaches its culmination in ‘The Innocent III,’ the apparent contradiction in its title heralding a series of paradoxes especially in the fourth and last stanza. Their use here reflects the poet’s cynical mood towards his mistress’s pretentious nature. The insistent, albeit colloquial, “thou” introduces the various paradoxical statements which themselves read like brief conceits:

Thou *lovely Instrument of angry Fate*,
 Which *God* did for our faults create!
 Thou *Pleasant, universal Ill*,
 Which *sweet as Health*, yet like a *Plague* dost kill!
 Thou kind, well-natur'ed *Tyrannie*!
 Thou *chaste* committer of a *Rape*!
 Thou *voluntary Destinie*,
 Which no man *Can*, or *Would* escape!
 So gentle, and so glad to spare,
 So wondrous good, and wondrous faire,
 (We know) e'ven the *Destroying Angels* are.
 ('The Innocent III,' 34-44)

Robert Ellrodt has observed of Cowley's frequent use of paradox that it is mere rhetoric, a question of style: "His paradoxes are not the sudden affirmation of a complex truth, but the arbitrary invention of an impossibility, a miracle, in order to give the poem an ingenious conclusion."⁴⁷ Ellrodt appears to be comparing Cowley's use of paradox with that of Donne, conceding the element of ingenuity to the one and the effect of surprise to the other. It is all part of Cowley's fanciful embellishments that perhaps compensate for the perceived lack of innovation in his choice of form.

In the Preface to his 1926 publication, Sparrow wrote of *The Mistress* that, "Donne's influence determines the form, the openings, the titles of the poems, and might often be said to dictate their subject."⁴⁸ Though such a generalisation is not true of all the poems,⁴⁹ perhaps the best example of a poem where the subject does appear to be determined by earlier example is 'Platonick Love,' eminently comparable to Donne's 'The Ecstasy.' The relevant parts of Cowley's poem are the first and fourth stanzas:

Indeed I must confess,
 When *Souls* mix, 'tis an *Happiness*;
 But not compleat till *Bodies* too do joyne,
 And both our *Wholes* into one *Whole* combine;
 But half of Heaven the *Souls* in glory tast,
 'Till by Love in Heaven at last,
 Their *Bodies* too are plac't.
 ...
 That *souls* do beauty know,
 'Tis to the *Bodies* help they ow;
 If when they know't, they strait abuse that trust,
 And shut the *Body* from't, 'tis as unjust,

As if I brought my dearest *Friend* to see
My *Mistris*, and at th' instant *Hee*
Should steal her quite from *Mee*.
(‘Platonick Love,’ 1-7, 22-8)

Donne writes his poem in quatrains or stanzas of four lines each. The ecstasy mentioned in the eighth stanza out of nineteen is the name given to the state of union between the lovers’ souls:

This ecstasy doth unperplex
(We said) and tell us what we love,
We see by this, it was not sex,
We see, we saw not what did move:

But as all several souls contain
Mixture of things, they know not what,
Love, these mixed souls doth mix again,
And makes both one, each this and that.

...
But O alas, so long, so far
Our bodies why do we forbear?
They are ours, though they are not we, we are
The intelligences, they the sphere.

...
On man heaven’s influence works not so,
But that it first imprints the air;
So soul into the soul may flow,
Though it to body first repair.

...
To our bodies turn we then, that so
Weak men on love revealed may look;
Love’s mysteries in souls do grow,
But yet the body is his book.

And if some lover, such as we,
Have heard this dialogue of one,
Let him still mark us, he shall see
Small change, when we’re to bodies gone.

(Donne, ‘The Ecstasy,’ 29-36, 49-52, 57-60, 69-76)⁵⁰

Cowley’s familiarity with his predecessor’s poem is evident, even allowing for the topicality of the subject: “It is well known that of all the commonplaces of seventeenth-century poetry, the subject of platonic love (and anti-platonic reactions) was the preoccupation of the court of the 1630s and pre-war 1640s.”⁵¹ In fact, before Cowley’s poem, Thomas Carew explored the elaborate idea of souls loving in “mystique” fashion in his address ‘To My Mistress in Absence:’

I breath in you, you keepe my heart;

'Twas but a carkasse that did part. ...
 Yet let our boundlesse spirits meet,
 And in loves spheare each other greet;
 There let us worke a mystique wreath,
 Unknown unto the world beneath;
 There let our claspt loves sweetly twin;
 There let our secret thoughts unseen,
 Like nets be weav'd, and inter-twin'd,
 Wherewith wee'le catch each other's mind. ...
 (Such as grosse lovers cannot know,
 Whose hands and lips meet here below). ...
 There seated in those heavenly bowers,
 Wee'le cheat the lag, and lingring houres,
 Making our bitter absence sweet,
 Till soules, and bodyes both, may meet.

(Carew, 'To My Mistress in Absence,' 5-6, 9-16, 19-20, 31-4)⁵²

Carew's depiction of the grossness of physical love - involving hands and lips - is typical of the platonic stance, and so too is the notion that true love involves the trinity of heart, mind and soul, with the body serving as a vessel that contains but could not restrain them. But Cowley is likely to have been mainly inspired by Donne whose heightened sense of drama is highlighted in the situation of lovers presently enjoying the ecstasy engendered by the union of their souls. In terms of how they handle the subject, the affirmation of the platonic stance in Cowley's poem parodies Donne's depiction of the lovers' ecstatic union – "we see by this it was not sex." The lovers even decide when to become only souls and when to go back into bodies, their activity completely unaffected by the third party lover or audience watching them and listening to their "dialogue of one." However, Cowley entertains an element of doubt when he intimates that the soul could shut out the body in the same way that a visiting friend could steal his mistress from him. Whereas he entertains the prospect of souls preceding the tarrying bodies to Heaven in the first stanza, and then contemplates the love triangle at the end,⁵³ the lovers in Donne's poem are confident of their bodily or mystique union at all times, including during ecstasy.

A variation of Cowley's treatment of the theme of lovers' souls leaving their bodies appears in 'The Soul [II].' A poem of three stanzas,⁵⁴ it is also important for its mention of syllogisms and the nature of arguments prevalent in Metaphysical poetry:

Some dull Philos'opher when he hears me say,
My Soul is from me fled away;
Nor has of late inform'd my Body here,
But in anothers breast does ly,
That neither Is, nor will be I,
As a Form Servient and Assisting there;

Will cry, Absurd! And ask me, how I live:
And Syllogisms against it give;
A curse on all your vain Philosophies,
Which on weak Natures Law depend,
And know not how to comprehend
Love and Religion, those great Mysteries.

Her Body is my Soul; laugh not at this,
For by my Life I swear it is.
'Tis that preserves my Being and my Breath,
From that proceeds all that I do,
Nay all my Thoughts and speeches too,
And separation from it is my Death.
(*'The Soul[II]'*)

One of the charges Dryden levelled against Donne in the passage cited in the previous section was that, "[He] perplexes the Minds of the Fair Sex with nice Speculations of Philosophy, when he shou'd ingage their hearts, and entertain them with the softnesses of Love. In this Mr. Cowley has Copy'd him to a fault." Donne's more complex poems lend some justification to this charge, and into this group belongs 'Air and Angels,' along with 'The Ecstasy' the likely inspiration for 'The Soul [II].' Here are the lines that herald Cowley's on the soul seeking accommodation in another's bosom:

But since my soul, whose child love is,
Takes limbs of flesh, and else could nothing do,
More subtle than the parent is
Love must not be, but take a body too,
And therefore what thou wert, and who
I bid Love ask, and now
That it assume thy body, I allow,
And fix itself in thy lip, eye, and brow.
(Donne, 'Air and Angels,' 7-14)⁵⁵

The complicated nature of Donne's argument is evident. Just as his soul has taken on a corporeal or bodily form, or else would be incapable of any action, so too the child of the soul, his love, should assume a bodily form so as not to be more ethereal than its parent. And so he has urged his love to ask what sort of person its host is before allowing it to take on her body, manifesting itself in facial features such as her lips, her eyes and her brow. For Cowley, the ways of love, like those of religion, are so mysterious that they would elude even philosophers, certainly the dull philosopher who insists on understanding it only in light of natural law. The true philosopher would surely not make the study of Nature's law his sole domain and sever it from the study of love and religion. Little wonder that wit and syllogistic arguments are the benchmark for a poem like 'The Soul [II].' Syllogisms do not only apply to the logical argument or proof with propositions or premises and a conclusion, but denote also a specious or sophistical argument, an especially subtle piece of reasoning. In 'The Soul [II]' for example, the poet's soul has left his body for that of his mistress. So how does he survive without his soul? The mysteries of love demand a suspension of disbelief, for her body that has enslaved his soul itself becomes his soul. It preserves his very being and his life, and so he would never be separated from her because that would mean certain death. To paraphrase Dryden, if Cowley was inspired here by Donne, then he copied him well.

Cowley's stance in 'Platonick Love' is all the more remarkable when compared to his treatment of the subject in 'Answer to the Platonicks,' which title suggests an anti-platonic reaction in the debate on platonic love. It is a poem of thirty lines without stanza breaks, the first dozen lines sufficing to state its case:

So Angels love; so let them love for me;

When I'am *all soul*, such shall *my Love* too be:
 Who nothing here but like a *Spirit* would do,
 In a short time (believ't) will *be* one too:
 But shall our Love do what in Beasts we see?
 E'ven *Beasts* eat too, but not so well as *Wee*.
 And you as justly might in thirst refuse
 The use of *Wine*; because *Beasts Water* use:
 They taste those pleasures, as they do their food;
Undrest they tak't, devour it *raw*, and *crude*:
 But to us *Men*, *Love Cooks* it at his fire,
 And adds the *poignant sawce* of sharp desire.

(‘Answer to the Platonicks,’ 1-12)

The currency of the debate meant that Cowley's apparent anti-platonic response could be compared to other contemporary ones, most notably John Cleveland's 1651 piece with a revealing title, ‘The Antiplatonick.’ Here is the keynote first stanza:

For shame, thou everlasting Woer,
 Still saying Grace and ne'er fall to her!
 Love that's in Contemplation plac't
 Is *Venus* drawn but to the Wast.
 Unless your Flame confesse its Gender,
 And your Parley cause surrender,
 Y'are salamanders of a cold desire,
 That live untouch't amid the hottest fire.

(Cleveland, ‘The Antiplatonick,’ 1-8)⁵⁶

For Cleveland the lover should not be all speech with wooing or contemplation, but should surrender parley or words for the fiery love that desire engenders. Just as a salamander is thought capable of enduring fire, so too the platonic lover's desire would need to be a particularly “cold desire” to withstand the hot fire of love and sexual passion. Cowley's poem, like Cleveland's, appears to sanction or approve sexual love, but ‘Platonick Love’ defends platonic love also, hence the question as to whether he was accommodating both arguments.

Having become familiar with the ways of the Caroline court when it moved to Oxford, Cowley would have been comforted in the appropriateness of his own behaviour which was anything but promiscuous. For one who proclaimed moderation in all things, he would have disapproved of the licentious practices of the

company he kept in England and later in the French court. One such courtier was his patron, Lord Jermyn, later to be named Earl of St. Albans, described in Nethercot's words as "a good and understanding friend, as well as a patron of the arts," but also as "ostentatious, a lover of the flesh, ... roué as he was."⁵⁷ A roué is a debauchee or a rake, one given to excessive sensual indulgence. 'Answer to the Platonicks' is therefore not encouraging debauchery. Rather, it starts by asserting that platonic love is not realistic unless practised by essentially asexual beings such as angels who exist in spirit form: "So Angels love; ... / When I'am *all soul*, such shall *my Love* too be." For humans, sexual love is natural and it would be strange to think only of enjoying platonic or spiritual love as angels in the spirit world do: "Who nothing here but like a *Spirit* would do, / In a short time (believ't) will *be* one too." In fact, the distinguishing feature of human love, namely the palpable element in bodily functions and the senses, is highlighted in the first of 'The Soul' poems, where Cowley details the different senses and the roles they play in love:

If mine *Eyes* do e're declare
 They've seen a second thing, that's *fair*;
 Or *Ears*, that they have *Musick* found,
 Besides thy *Voyce*, in any *Sound*;
 If my *Taste* do ever meet,
 After thy *Kiss*, with ought that's *sweet*;
 If my 'abused *Touch* allow
 Ought to be *smooth*, or *soft*, but *You*;
 If, what seasonable *Springs*,
 Or the Eastern Summer brings;
 Do my *Smell* perswade at all
 Ought *Perfume*, but thy *Breath* to call;
 If all my *senses* *Objects* be
 Not *contracted* into *Thee*, ...
 May I as worthless seem to *Thee*
 As all, but *Thou*, appears to *Mee*.

(‘The Soul,’ 1-14, 21-2)

However, 'Answer to the Platonicks' warns that the element of palpability should not constitute a licence to act like beasts whose sexual practices are based on instinct. Beasts take their pleasures as crudely and instinctively as they eat their food raw,

whereas for humans the sexual act must be a culmination of the love process, just as food must be cooked or processed before it is consumed. The poet is therefore at pains to stress the transmutational influence of love: “*Undrest they tak’t, devour it raw, and crude: / But to us Men, Love Cooks it at his fire.*”

Donne’s “dialogue of one” in ‘The Ecstasy’ characterises the private mode that usually takes the form of a dramatic monologue or an address by the lover to his silent mistress. His expression captures the dramatic situation of two souls joined in an ecstatic union and speaking as one, but it could also denote the ‘dialogue’ the poet engages with his mistress in their private world with him speaking for both of them.

Again Miner serves a reminder of the importance of the private mode:

The private mode is simply the most crucial feature of Metaphysical poetry, distinguishing it not only from other styles but also from poems in other styles by the same poet, whether King or Cowley, Marvell or Vaughan. Moreover, the exploitation of the private mode distinguishes Metaphysical poetry from all other modern English poetry before the Romantics.⁵⁸

In *The Mistress* the private mode usually explores the various moods of the poet that swing from joy to despair or from gentle supplication to cynicism, thus each such poem represents a performance revealing a different mood. Some of the best lyrics in this regard show the poet in supplicant mood, persuading or wooing his mistress. An example is ‘My Dyet, a poem also important for the way it inspires some of the lines in Marvell’s ‘To His Coy Mistress.’ It is written in three stanzas, its sudden, Donne-like opening enhancing its dramatic effect. Here is the first stanza:

Now *by my Love*, the greatest *Oath* that is,
None loves you half so well as I:
I do not ask *your Love* for this;
But for heave’ns sake *believe me*, or I dy.
No *Servant* ere but did deserve
His *Master* should believe that he does serve;
And I’ll ask no more *wages*, though I *sterve*.
(‘My Dyet,’ 1-7)

Swearing by his love and employing the colloquial “for heave’ns sake” reinforces the

theatrical nature of the speaker's plea. If she fails to return his love he will die, not just of frustration or dejection, but also of starvation because reciprocal love is the diet on which he has to live. Such exaggeration is borne out of desperation and the effect is to show to what lengths he will go to affirm his sincerity. In fact, the poem depends on hyperbole for effect, which hyperbole is not just a token device but an expression of genuine feeling. By the third and last stanza, the poet is at his most sincere as he completely personalises his feelings with the constant use of the first person 'I' and 'you:'

O'n a *sigh* of Pity I a year can live,
One *tear* will keep me twenty at least,
Fifty a gentle *look* will give;
An hundred years on one *kind word* I'll feast:
A thousand more will added bee,
If you an *Inclination* have for Mee;
And all beyond is vast *Æternitie*.
(‘My Dyet,’ 15-21)

It is this last stanza that proves the inspiration for the following lines in Marvell's famous piece, ‘To His Coy Mistress:’

Had we but World enough, and Time,
This coyness Lady were no crime. ...
My vegetable Love should grow
Vaster than Empires, and more slow.
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine Eyes, and on thy Forehead Gaze.
Two hundred to adore each Breast:
But thirty thousand to the rest.
An Age at least to every part,
And the last Age should show your Heart. ...
And yonder all before us lye
Deserts of vast Eternity.
(Marvell, ‘To His Coy Mistress,’ 13-18, 23-4)⁵⁹

Cowley's hyperbolic usage serves as the means of the supplicant's argument: “An hundred years on one *kind word* I'll feast.” For Marvell, however, the comparable usage of “An hundred years should go to praise / Thine Eyes” sounds a note of regret precisely because he does not have the hundred years he would have liked to praise his lady's eyes or gaze on her forehead. Where ‘My Dyet’ expresses the blissful

effects that a reciprocation of the poet's love would bring, that is, the diet on which he will live, Marvell creates a private world where the mistress is alerted to possible regrets should they fail to consummate their love and passion. This is because he was writing in the *carpe diem* tradition of 'seize the day' or enjoy the present moment, lest passing time and death – or indeed the redefined "vast Eternity" in Marvell's poem - engulfs you.

Marvell's *carpe diem* motif was one with which Cowley was familiar, but did not always explore. The theory in 'Answer to the Platonicks' that lovers should explore their human possibilities before death appears to be an extension of the *carpe diem* theme. This is especially so in the reminder of the transience of life: "Who nothing here but like a *Spirit* would do, / In a short time (believ't) will *be* one too" (3-4). But this is part of the anti-platonic argument rather than an outright exploration of the *carpe diem* theme. When Cowley does make the case for enjoyment, he is not overly concerned with passing time, as would become clear if we compare the call to enjoyment by three different poets. These are Carew's 'Song. Perswasions to Enjoy' addressed to his Celia, the rest of Marvell's invitation 'To His Coy Mistress,' and Cowley's 'The Gazers.' Carew's poem reverses the sonnet pattern, as its two parts comprise a sestet first and then an octave:

If the quick spirits in thine eye
Now languish, and anon must dye;
If every sweet, and every grace
Must fly from that forsaken face:
Then (*Celia*) let us reape our joyes,
E're time such goodly fruit destroyes.

Or, if that golden fleece must grow
For ever, free from aged snow;
If those bright suns must know no shade,
Nor your fresh beauties ever fade:
Then feare not (*Celia*) to bestow
What still being gather'd, still must grow.

Thus, either *Time* his Sickle brings
In vaine, or else in vaine his wings.
(Carew, 'Song. Perswasions to Enjoy')⁶⁰

Carew's poem, though one of persuasion, is clearly not written in the Metaphysical tradition where the private mode and the dramatic are crucial features. Marvell with his "echoing song" shares the concerns Carew reveals in his song, that is, the effects of passing time; it is indeed the fine expression he gives to the *carpe diem* leitmotif that makes 'To His Coy Mistress' arguably his most popular poem. But he merges Carew's mid-century concern with time with a Donne-like intensity enabled by the dramatic monologue or "dialogue of one" in the private world of the poem. The poet having surmised that his vegetable love would have grown vaster than empires if only they could live for thousands of years, uses a style that includes markers like 'but' and 'therefore' to signal the key points including the conclusion in his syllogistic argument:

But at my back I alwaies hear
Times winged Charriot hurrying near: ...
Thy Beauty shall no more be found;
Nor, in thy marble Vault, shall sound
My ecchoing Song: then Worms shall try
That long-preserv'd Virginity:
And your quaint Honour turn to dust;
And into ashes all my Lust.
The Grave's a fine and private place,
But none I think do there embrace.

Now therefore, while the youthful hew
Sits on thy skin like morning glew,
And while thy willing Soul transpires
At every pore with instant Fires,
Now let us sport us while we may;
And now, like am'rous birds of prey,
Rather at once our Time devour,
Than languish in his slow-chap't pow'r.

(Marvell, 'To His Coy Mistress,' 21-2, 25-40)

Cowley's 'The Gazers' is so entitled because the lovers have sat gazing at each other "As *Man* and *Wife* in *Picture* do." The poet is fed up with merely marvelling at her beauty, and opens with a passionate call to action: "Come let's go on, where *Love* and *Youth* does call." It is better for love to die in its infancy, he claims, than to live

long and not get out of the childhood stage which it will only do if consummated:

“For Love to *Dye an Infant’s* lesser ill, / Then to Live long, yet *live in Child-hood*

still.” The pleasures of the eye should merely serve as foreplay, a prelude to the

“farther bliss” of enjoyment. The concluding stanza is a long drawn-out comparison

that echoes the epic simile, between human sexual activity and that of the “lusty *Sun*”

that kisses, unlocks, devours, and begets things. “The *Sun* himself, although *all Eye*

he bee,” Cowley writes, seeks its pleasures with the passion of a bridegroom on heat:

“Then on the earth with *Bridegroom-Heat*, / He does still new *Flowers* beget.” In

like manner should lovers do.

Come let’s go on, where *Love* and *Youth* does call;

I’ve seen *too* much, if this be *all*.

Alas, how far more *wealthy* might I be

With a contented *Ign’orant Povertie*?

To shew such stores, and nothing grant,

Is to enrage and *vex* my want.

For Love to *Dye an Infant’s* lesser ill,

Then to Live long, yet *live in Child-hood* still.

We’ve both sate gazing onely hitherto,

As *Man* and *Wife* in *Picture* do.

The richest crop of *Joy* is still behind,

And He who onely *Sees*, in Love is *Blind*.

So at first *Pigmalion* lov’d;

But th’*Amour* at last improv’d:

The *Statue*’ it self at last a *woman* grew,

And so at last, my Dear, should you do too.

Beauty to man the greatest *Torture* is,

Unless it lead to farther bliss

Beyond the tyran’ous pleasures of the *Eye*.

It grows too *serious a Crueltie*,

Unless it *Heal*, as well as *strike*;

I would not, *Salamander*-like,

In scorching heats always to *Live* desire,

But like a *Martyr*, pass to *Heav’en* through *Fire*.

Mark how the lusty *Sun* salutes the *Spring*,

And gently kisses every thing.

His loving *Beams* unlock each mayden flower,

Search all the *Treasures*, all the *Sweets* devower.

Then on the earth with *Bridegroom-Heat*,

He does still new *Flowers* beget.

The *Sun* himself, although *all Eye* he bee,

Can find in *Love* more *Pleasure* then to *see*.

(‘The Gazers’)

Cowley, not showing the concern with passing time that Carew and Marvell do, is not strictly writing in the *carpe diem* tradition. He shares Marvell's urgency, intensified by the heightened sense of drama typical of Metaphysical verse, but veers away from the ultimate *carpe diem* argument Marvell uses: "The Grave's a fine and private place, / But none I think do there embrace." Cowley mounts instead a sophisticated argument that builds on the belief that lovers naturally do more than merely gaze at each other.

A favourite type of poem in *The Mistress* is the definition poem, with 'Against Hope' the most prominent possibly because of its connection with another Metaphysical poet, Richard Crashaw. Compared to a title like Marvell's 'The Definition of Love' for this kind of poem, Cowley's titles are usually limited to the one-worded abstract entity in question: 'Wisdom,' 'Beauty,' or 'Honor.' 'Against Hope' is distinct from 'For Hope,' both poems occupying the central positions in *The Mistress* of forty-two and forty-three out of eighty-four poems. Nevertheless 'Against Hope' was written originally as a companion piece to Crashaw's 'For Hope,' the poems appearing as a joint effort in alternate stanzas in Crashaw's *Steps to the Temple* in 1646.⁶¹ Later Cowley wrote his own version of 'For Hope,' which first appeared in *The Mistress* to the exclusion of Crashaw's piece.⁶² Hope proves as elusive for Cowley to describe as life itself, and he can only find contradictions and paradoxes such as, "Hope is the most *Hopeless* thing of all." Here is 'Against Hope:'

Hope, whose weak *Being* ruin'd is,
Alike if it *succeed* and if it *miss*;
Whom *Good* or *Ill* does equally confound,
And both the *Horns of Fates Dilemma* wound!
 Vain *shadow!* which dost vanish quite,
 Both at full *Noon*, and perfect *Night!*
The stars have not a *possibility*
 Of blessing Thee;

If things then from their *End* we happy call,
'Tis *Hope* is the most *Hopeless* thing of all.

Hope, thou bold *Taster* of Delight,
Who whilst thou shouldst but *taste*, *devour* 'st it quite!
Thou bringst us an *Estate*, yet leav'st us *Poore*,
By clogging it with *Legacies* before!

The *Joys* which we *entire* should wed,
Come *deflowr* 'd *Virgins* to our bed;
Good fortunes without gain imported bee,
Such mighty Custom's paid to Thee.
For *Joy*, like *Wine*, kept close does better taste;
If it take air before, its spirits waste.

Hope, Fortunes cheating *Lotterie*!
Where for one *prize* an hundred *blanks* there be;
Fond *Archer*, *Hope*, who tak'st thy aim so far,
That still or *short* or *wide* thine arrows are!

Thin, empty *Cloud*, which th'eye deceives
With shapes that our own *Fancy* gives!
A *Cloud*, which gilt and painted now appears,
But must drop presently in *tears*!
When thy false beams o're *Reasons* light prevail,
By *Ignes fatui* for *North-Stars* we sail.

Brother of *Fear*, more gaily clad!
The *merr* 'ier *Fool* o'th' two, yet quite as *Mad*:
Sire of *Repentance*, *Childe* of fond *Desire*!
That blow'st the *Chymicks*, and the *Lovers* fire!
Leading them still insensibly'on
By the strange *witchcraft* of *Anon*!
By *Thee* the one does changing *Nature* through
Her endless *Labyrinths* pursue,
And th'other chases *Woman*, whilst She goes
More ways and turns then *hunted Nature* knows.
(*'Against Hope'*)

Johnson singled out this poem for praise: "Where scholastick speculation can be properly admitted, their copiousness and acuteness may justly be admired. What Cowley has written upon Hope shews an unequalled fertility of invention."⁶³

'Against Hope' draws attention to other definition poems in the series. Like honour in 'Honor' hope is not endowed with being. It is a "Vain *shadow*! Which dost vanish quite," just as honour is defined as "... this *Phantome* ... / *Noisy Nothing*! *Stalking shade*!" ('Honor,' 12-13). Honor is made invisible "By the *Nights* obscurity" ('Honor,' 20), but not before the poet has perceived it and appreciated its nature in the light: "Thou attemp'st not men t'affright, / Nor *appear* 'st but in the

Light.”(“Honor,” 23-24). But hope, in contradistinction, remains invisible at the brightest and darkest hours alike.

The poet’s attempt to associate hope with love only yields an oxymoron in “deflower’d Virgins!” His longing for a virgin to love highlights the subject of virginity, itself the subject of the definition poem, ‘Maidenhead.’ Virginity is described as that “Which *Women lose*, and yet no *Man can find!*” (‘Maidenhead,’ 24). Also, the figure of the ‘chymick’ or alchemist, whose mission is compared to that of the lover, is mentioned in stanza four of ‘Maidenhead’ as well:

Although I think thou never found wilt be,
Yet I’m resolv’d to search for thee;
The search it self rewards the pains.
So, though the *Chymick* his *great secret* miss,
(For neither it in *Art* nor *Nature* is)
Yet things well worth his toyle he gains:
And does his Charge and Labour pay
With good *unsought exper’iments* by the way.
(‘Maidenhead,’ 25-32)

Both lover and alchemist are futile seekers, for a virgin and for the philosopher’s stone respectively. The seeker may never find the truth, yet he searches still:

“Although I think thou never found wilt be, / Yet I’m resolved to search for thee.”

Similarly, in ‘Against Hope’ the last stanza highlights the plight of all seekers who may not find it humanly possible to access the “endless *Labyrinths*” that lead to truth.

Typical of Cowley’s association of hope with fear in the series, hope is declared to be “*Brother of Fear*,” recalling for example the twin poems, ‘The Soul [I]’ and ‘The Passions.’ In the latter the poet is robbed of freedom by these and other “*Passions*”:

From Hate, Fear, Hope, Anger, and Envy free,
And all the *Passions* else that bee,
In vain I boast of *Libertie*,
In vain this *State a Freedom* call.
(‘The Passions,’ 1-4)

In true Metaphysical fashion, ‘Against Hope’ asks abstruse questions on the nature of

women, the nature of love and the nature of truth. The only certainty about truth is that it has a “changing *Nature*,” for such is Nature itself. The pursuit of woman and love, like that of nature, is a thankless task that leads through umpteen “ways and turns” especially when Hope is the guide. The light by which Hope leads all seekers, as opposed to that of, say, reason, is an “*Ignes fatui*” or false light: “When thy false beams o’re *Reasons* light prevail, / By *Ignes fatui* for *North-Stars* we sail.” Reason, perhaps when allied to Hope rather than opposed to it, should be a more useful guide.

Crashaw’s ‘For Hope’ offers a response that is different in tone, mood and attitude, with an intricate argument of its own. Cowley’s scepticism is replaced by quiet confidence, his exclamations by statements. When Crashaw exclaims, it is not to denote puzzlement or indignation but to show wonderment and enlightenment at a truth he beholds. The key to their differences lies in their method of inquiring into truth: Cowley approaches truth from an essentially secular and even rational perspective; Crashaw’s is a more theological approach consistent with his faith in Scripture and the truth of supernatural revelation. His religious thinking clarifies his interpretation of life and the world. In answer to his friend’s concern with Hope in the limited human world, Crashaw links Hope to the divine world and eternity, the Christian hope of life in Heaven after death. Here is an excerpt from the poem, including the final stanza:

Faire *Hope!* our earlier Heaven! by thee
Young *Time* is taster to Eternity.
The generous wine with age growes strong, not sower;
Nor need wee kill thy fruit to smell thy flower. ...

Sweet *Hope!* kind cheat! faire fallacy! by thee
Wee are not where, or what wee bee,
But what, and where wee would bee: thus art thou
Our absent presence, and our future now.

Faith’s Sister! Nurse of faire desire!

Feares Antidote! a wise, and well stay'd fire
 Temper'd 'twixt cold despaire, and torrid joy:
 Queen Regent in young Loves minoritie.
 Though the vext Chymick vainly chases
 His fugitive gold through all her faces,
 And loves more fierce, more fruitlesse fires assay
 One face more fugitive then all they,
 True *Hope's* a glorious Huntresse, and her chase
 The God of Nature in the field of Grace.

(Crashaw, 'For Hope,' 21-4, 37-50)⁶⁴

The oxymorons – “kind cheat” and “faire fallacy” - and paradoxes – “... thus art thou / Our absent presence, and our future now” - reveal the complex nature of Hope. It is a promise of a certain future, an equivalent term for the life which is not of the present in the human world but of the future in the divine world. The present time just serves as a “taster” of that life that Hope guarantees. Seeking God ensures solace in the darkest moments for all believers. That is why Crashaw encourages his public to banish all fear and to seek for the truth that leads to God. Where Cowley discusses the alchemist's search for knowledge and the lover's quest for a mistress, for Crashaw the true quest is for divine grace and the “true Hope” that leads to God.

Cowley's 'For Hope' was inspired by Crashaw's and replaced it as a companion poem to 'Against Hope,' written in four stanzas like the earlier poem. Crashaw's influence is most evident in the third stanza where his “*Faith's* Sister” is replaced by “*Brother of Faith*,” thus effecting a contrast with “*Brother of Fear*” in 'Against Hope.' Crashaw's depiction of hope as “Feares Antidote” is endorsed when faith is placed alongside hope as the antithesis of fear. Also, the earthly joys of passion and love in 'Against Hope' become part of the joys of heaven and earth, just as Hope itself represents future bliss that Cowley now acknowledges:

Brother of Faith, 'twixt whom and Thee
 The joys of *Heav'n* and *Earth* divided bee!
 Though *Faith* be *Heir*, and have the *fixt estate*,
 Thy *Portion* yet in *Moveables* is great.

Happiness it self's all one
 In *Thee*, or in *possession*!
 Onely the *Future's Thine*, the *present His*!
 Thine's the more hard and noble bliss;
 Best *apprehender* of our joys, which hast
 So long a *reach*, and yet canst hold so *fast*!
 ('For Hope,' 21-30)

The divine realm opening new vistas of truth shows Crashaw's role in broadening Cowley's dynamic vision of truth. This new vision is clearly manifest in another poem, 'Her Unbelief,' where faith and hope are central to the argument. Faith is associated with miracles and the poet visualises himself parodying Christ's resurrection, a feat that gives him great confidence in love where he is full of hope:

I by thy *Unbelief* am guiltless slain;
 Oh have but *Faith*, and then that you
 May know that *Faith* for to be true,
 It shall it self by' a *Miracle* maintain,
 And *raise* me from the *Dead* again.

Mean while my *Hopes* may seem to be o'rthrown;
 But *Lovers Hopes* are full of *Art*,
 And thus dispute, that since my heart
 Though in *thy Breast*, yet is not by thee known,
 Perhaps thou may'st not know thine *Own*.
 ('Her Unbelief,' 21-30)

Though Cowley replaced Crashaw's companion poem with his, his friend would have noted with satisfaction his subscription to faith to the point of exhorting others, "Oh have but *Faith*!" Nevertheless he is still short of Crashaw's unerring religious conviction, as he appears to harbour hope for a love miracle.

For all Cowley's Metaphysical qualities, there is a half-century gap between Donne and himself and some of the poems in *The Mistress* succumb to other influences occasioned by this generation gap. There are signs even within individual poems of a faltering of the Metaphysical manner, drawn as he was towards the public mode of contemporary taste. Miner distinguishes the public from the private mode thus:

The convenient symptoms of the private mode are speech approaching dialogue or monologue, with use of the singular first and second person pronouns; the symptoms of the public mode are

allusion and public detail, with use of the plural first, second, and third person pronouns.⁶⁵

In 'The Same,' for example, the poet does not personalise his sentiments throughout. His mood deteriorates as he realises that he is a rejected lover. As a mood of lament becomes apparent, the poetry is transformed from the dramatic in the first stanza to the meditative in the second:

For Heavens sake, what d'you mean to do?
Keep me, or *let me go*, one of the two;
Youth and *warm hours* let me not idly loose,
 The *little Time* that Love does choose;
 If always here I must not stay,
 Let me be gone, whilst yet 'tis *day*;
Lest I faint, and benighted lose my way.

 'Tis dismal, *One so* long to love
In vain, till to love *more* as vain must prove:
To hunt so long one nimble prey, till we
 Too weary to take others be;
 Alas, 'tis folly to remain,
 And waste our *Army* thus in vane,
Before a *City* which will ne'r be tane.
 ('The Same,' 1-14)

The first stanza has the familiar qualities of the dramatic monologue. "For Heavens sake" is reminiscent of Donne's overture in 'The Canonization': "For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love."⁶⁶ In fact, opening with a direct question, the only one in the poem, is suitably dramatic in itself. The rejected lover is one whose rhetoric has failed. Sometimes in Metaphysical poetry, the stanza break serves to effect a change in the situation, as in a drama where some actions take place between scenes and are then reported. Because the mistress is usually a silent actress, her own response to the situation sometimes occurs during stanza breaks. An example is that of Donne's 'The Flea' where the mistress kills the flea between stanzas despite her lover's protestations to the contrary. Similarly, in answer to the poet's ultimatum here, the mistress seems to have rejected him by the start of the second stanza. He also seems to have carried out his threat to leave in the event of rejection. She is no longer his interlocutor or immediate audience and the private mode gives way to the

public. The singular “I,” “me” and “my” are replaced by “one,” “we” and “our.” By resorting to allusion, as in mentioning a collective army, he is veering away from the direct and the personal, as in the earlier mention of his individual time that could be wasted. His disappointment in love coincides with his abandonment of the metaphysical code; he is no longer able to sustain the pose required to continue with that kind of poem. Cowley is beginning to engage the public directly. The change in emphasis becomes more apparent when we compare two poems, ‘The Bait’ by Donne and ‘Bathing in the River’ by Cowley, both of which describe the mistress bathing in a river among the fishes.

The characteristic traits of Donne’s poem are present in ‘The Bait.’ These include the call to love and the central conceit in the mistress turning out to be the bait of the title. These first three of seven quatrains are marked by hyperbole: the river receives more warmth from her eyes than from the sun, and the poet’s role of lover is subtly projected onto the “enamour’d” fish he imagines clinging “amorously” to her:

Come live with me, and be my love,
And we will some new pleasures prove
Of golden sands, and crystal brooks:
With silken lines, and silver hooks.

Then will the river whispering run
Warm’d by thine eyes, more than the Sun;
And there the enamour’d fish will stay,
Begging themselves they may betray.

When thou wilt swim in that live bath,
Each fish, which every channel hath,
Will amorously to thee swim,
Gladder to catch thee, than thou him.

(Donne, ‘The Bait,’ 1-12)⁶⁷

The poet is the audience within the situation, the sole spectator to the drama unfolding of the female swimming in the river. The time and place in which he finds himself are crucial because it is in that particular setting that he seeks to come to

terms with the love that gives life its meaning. Metaphysical wit, manifest in the conceit of the female as bait, sustains the poem through to its conclusion:

Let coarse bold hands from slimy nest
The bedded fish in banks out-wrest,
Or curious traitors, sleevesilk flies
Bewitch poor fishes' wandering eyes.

For thee, thou needs't no such deceit,
For thou thyself art thine own bait,
That fish, that is not caught thereby,
Alas, is wiser far than I.

(Donne, 'The Bait,' 21-28)

In Cowley's poem, drama gives way to narration and the female is spoken of in the third person. Similarities with the earlier poem abound on the effect the female has on the fish, and extend to the exaggerated manner in which her light makes that of the sun pale in comparison. However, Donne's confident attitude contrasts with Cowley's tone of lament as the first two of six stanzas show:

The *fish* around her crowded, as they do
To the false light that treach'rous Fishers shew,
And all with as much ease might taken be,
As she at first took me.
For ne're did *Light* so clear
Among the *waves* appear,
Though ev'ery night the *Sun* himself set there.

Why to *Mute Fish* should'st thou thy self discover,
And not to me thy no less *silent Lover*?
As some from *Men* their buried *Gold* commit
To *Ghosts* that have no use of it!
Half their rich treasures so
Maids bury; and for ought we know
(*Poor Ignorants*) they'r *Mermaids* all below.

('Bathing in the River,' 1-14)

It is with self-deprecating humour and even cynicism that the poet pronounces the female a possible mermaid below, considering the resistance she has mounted when he tried to 'discover' her. He is not a participant in the situation he describes, rather he begins by narrating a spectacle he witnessed and then meditates on it using allusion and imagery. The certainty in 'The Bait' – "we will some new pleasures prove" - gives way to speculation - "for ought we know." The use of "we" in 'The

Bait' refers to the poet and his mistress, whereas in this one it includes the public but not her. Fed up with being the rejected lover, he leaves her world and joins the public to watch her. The key lies in the third stanza:

The amo'rous *Waves* would fain about her stay,
But still new am'orous *waves* drive them away,
And with swift current to those joys they haste,
 That doe as swiftly waste,
 I laught the wanton play to view,
 But 'tis, alas, at *Land* so too,
And still *old Lovers* yield the place to *new*.
 ('Bathing in the River,' 15-21)

The yielding of the old to the new captures the change between the ages of Donne and Cowley, for the latter did not want to continue to shun or react against the world, but to make it an ally. He would now enter the world of Edmund Waller, whose verse captures in fine fashion the idea of leaving the old for the new:

The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
Lets in new light through chinks that time has made;
Stonger by weakness, wiser men become
As they draw near to their eternal home;
Leaving the old, both worlds at once they view
That stand upon the threshold of the new.
 (Waller, 'Of the Last Verses in the Book,' 13-18)⁶⁸

Metaphysical wit might have appealed to Cowley's fancy, but so too did his natural genius suit the public mode that would mark neo-classical poetry. Identifying with the new vogue, he famously proclaims in 'The Given Love' that his mistress shall be known alongside Waller's Sacharissa. Here are the last two of nine stanzas:

Bestow thy *Beauty* then on me,
Freely, as Nature gave't to *Thee*;
'Tis an exploded *Popish* thought
To think that *Heaven* may be *bought*.
Prays, *Hymns*, and *Praises* are the way;
And those my thankful *Muse* shall pay;
Thy *Body* in my verse enshrin'd,
Shall grow *immortal* as thy *Mind*.

I'll fix thy title next in fame
To *Sacharissas* well-sung name.
So faithfully will I declare
What all thy wondrous beauties are,

That when at the last great *Assise*,
All *Women* shall together rise,
Men strait shall cast their eyes on Thee
And know at first that *Thou art Shee*.

(‘The Given Love,’ 65-72)

Cowley’s declared intent of matching Waller was no surprise given that the latter wrote poems “every young Cavalier had got by heart long before their publication to the world in 1645.”⁶⁹ Even the idea of enshrining the lady in immortal verse is reminiscent of Waller’s verse. In his 1645 piece, ‘The Story of Phoebus and Daphne Applied,’ Waller describes the immortal strain of the love poet who wins, if not his mistress’s heart, then the laurel wreath of victory or lasting praise and fame that accompany poetry:

Thyrsis, a youth of the inspired train,
Fair Sacharissa loved, but loved in vain. ...
Yet what he sang in his immortal strain,
Though unsuccessful, was not sung in vain. ...
Like Phoebus thus, acquiring unsought praise,
He caught at love and filled his arm with bays.

(Waller, ‘The Story of Phoebus and Daphne, Applied,’ 1-2, 15-16, 19-20)

In addition to Waller there were other contemporary influences on Cowley, including Carew, Shirley, Davenant, and Suckling. In fact, the grounds for the successful reception of *The Mistress*, with two editions in its first year alone, were prepared by the long list of exponents of the genre in the decade leading up to its publication in 1647. Also, Waller to Sacharissa, Carew to Celia, and Herrick to Julia not only gave names to the ladies they addressed in their verse, but identified themselves with Jonson in whose honour they all wrote poems of praise. By seeking to join their ranks, Cowley was affirming that he was one of the ‘Sons of Ben.’

An example of a poem that places Cowley firmly within the new circle is ‘Against Fruition.’ Calhoun and others trace the origins of this topic back to Jonson:

Once the platonic lover has yielded to the blandishments of the antiplatonic, the next rung down love’s ladder may be represented by the argument of this anti-antiplatonic poem. ... The topic

gained the impetus of wider readership, if not entrance in English verse, with Jonson's translation of a fragment presumed to be by Petronius, published as the third to last poem in *The Underwood* in 1640.⁷⁰

Here is Jonson's poem in question, warning that sexual pleasure is "a filthy pleasure," that is short and leads to regret; in contrast, lovers who just kiss or lie close to one another perpetually generate pleasure for themselves:

Doing a filthy pleasure is, and short;
And done, we straight repent us of the sport;
Let us not then rush blindly in unto it,
Like lustful beasts that only know to do it:
For lust will languish, and that heat decay.
But thus, thus, keeping endless holiday,
Let us together closely lie, and kiss,
There is no labour, nor no shame in this;
This hath pleased, doth please, and long will please; never
Can this decay, but is beginning ever.

(Jonson, '[A Fragment of Petronius Arbitrarius]')⁷¹

The tradition Jonson perpetuated in England with this poem proved popular with several poets, especially Suckling whose two poems on the subject provoked responses by Waller and Henry Bold. Cowley, following Suckling in his choice of title, argues the case for a postponement of enjoyment in 'Against Fruition' that is almost unique in *The Mistress*. The "anti-antiplatonic" stance is an unlikely one for a love poem, but one that Jonson already made popular. Here is Cowley's rendition:

No; thou'rt a fool, I'll swear, if ere thou grant:
Much of my *Veneration* thou must want,
When once thy *kindness* puts my *Ignorance* out;
For a *learn'd Age* is always least devout. ...
Thy sweetness is so much within me plac'd,
That shouldst thou *Nectar* give, t'would spoil the taste.
Beauty at first moves wonder, and delight;
'Tis *Natures juggling trick* to cheat the sight,
We 'admire it, whilst unknown, but after more
Admire our selves, for liking it before.
Love, like a greedy *Hawk*, if we give way,
Does overgorge himself, with his own *Prey*.
Of very *Hopes* a surfeit hee'll sustain,
Unless by *Fears* he cast them up again:
His spirit and sweetness dangers keep alone;
If once he lose his *sting*, he grows a *Drone*.

('Against Fruition,' 1-4, 21-32)

Suckling's poems are the prototypes for this kind of "anti-antiplatonic" poem. Even Cowley's line, "For a *learn'd Age* is always least devout" compares with "Knowing

too much long since lost Paradise” (2) in Suckling’s ‘Against Fruition [I].’⁷² This poem, written in thirty lines compared to Cowley’s thirty-two, argues the case that “Fruition’s dull.” Here are the last two stanzas:

Women enjoy’d (what s’ere before th’ave been)
Are like Romances read, or sights once seen:
Fruition’s dull, and spoils the Play much more
Than if one read or knew the plot before;
'Tis expectation makes a blessing dear:
It were not heaven, if we knew what it were.

And as in Prospects we are there pleas’d most
Where something keeps the eye from being lost,
And leaves us room to guesse, so here restraint
Holds up delight, that with excesse would faint.
They who know all the wealth they have, are poor,
Hee’s onely rich that cannot tell his store.

(Suckling, ‘Against Fruition [I],’ 19-30)⁷³

Suckling’s ‘Against Fruition [II]’ takes the form of continuous writing without stanza breaks, like Cowley’s piece, and provides some more inspiration. For example, Cowley’s “Of very *Hopes* a surfeit hee’ll sustain, / Unless by *Fears* he cast them up again” compares with Suckling’s “And surfets when it comes to grosser fare: / ’Tis petty Jealousies, and little fears.” Suckling concludes his argument with a surprising dramatic twist when in a direct plea he urges the mistress not to yield, but instead to “... hold the power you have / By still denying what we still do crave.” That way, the lover is kept in hope of “strange things to see” that he would not ‘see’ otherwise:

Fye upon hearts that burn with mutual fire;
I hate two minds that breath but one desire. ...
Love’s a *Camelion*, that lives on meer ayre,
And surfets when it comes to grosser fare:
'Tis petty Jealousies, and little fears,
Hopes joy’n’d with doubts, and joyes with *April* tears,
That crowns our Love with pleasures: these are gone
When once we come to full *Fruition*. ...
Shee’s but an honest whore that yeelds, although
She be as cold as ice, as pure as snow. ...
Then fairest Mistresse, hold the power you have,
By still denying what we still do crave:
In keeping us in hopes strange things to see
That never were, nor are, nor e’re shall be.

(Suckling, ‘Against Fruition [II],’ 1-2, 5-10, 19-20, 23-6)⁷⁴

Suckling’s are mainly poems of meditation whereas Cowley’s is cast in the dramatic

mould, bringing the qualities of his Metaphysical verse to bear on the Jonsonian poem in what Geoffrey Walton has described as the “Cavalier-Metaphysical mode.”⁷⁵

If the vast proportion of *The Mistress* appears to be a palimpsest written to serve conventional purposes and impose itself on the lyric tradition, then Donne is its single most original source of inspiration. Even the poet’s licence to feign, that would gain such central importance in *The Mistress*, was already taken for granted in Donne’s time. In ‘Love’s Growth,’ he takes it as a given that the poet’s mistress could owe her creation either to the poet’s contemplation, or to what he has actually experienced:

Love’s not so pure, and abstract, as they use
To say, which have no mistress but their Muse,
But as all else, being elemented too,
Love sometimes would contemplate, sometimes do.
(Donne, ‘Love’s Growth,’ 11-14)⁷⁶

Cowley would have taken comfort from the fact that his desire to be fashionable was such that he could deliberately acclimatise his genius towards a poetry that exhibited fancy and wit, despite the generation gap with Donne. This gap is important because of the rapidly changing nature of poetry and literary taste in the seventeenth century, William Hazlitt for example declaring in his “Lectures on the English Poets” that,

It should appear, in tracing the history of our literature, that poetry had, ... in general declined, by successive gradations, from the poetry of imagination, in the time of Elizabeth, to the poetry of fancy in ... Charles I; and again from fancy to the poetry of wit, as in Charles II.”⁷⁷

Perhaps Cowley sought to accommodate the private mode alongside the social poetry of his time as part of his bid for recognition, but critical opinion has insisted on attending mainly to the Metaphysical nature of the verse that does not survive a reading of the text. Like Johnson’s criticism, Cowley’s prefatory comments appear to have masked the aspect of desire stated throughout in the poems themselves. We

would use these prefatory comments to situate the issue of poetry and truth we intend to resolve, and then search into the poems, sometimes even the same exemplary Metaphysical poems, to unravel the nature of desire. That way we would have moved from showing Cowley in our original manner taking his place in the company of his peers, to revealing his private concerns and innermost thoughts and desire.

2.3 A Question for Psychoanalysis: Poetry and Truth

I thought, I'll swear, an handsome ly
Had been no *sin* at all in *Poetry*.

...

Truth gives a *dull Propriety* to my stile,
And all the *Metaphors* does spoile.

...

In things, where *Fancy* much does reign,
Tis dangerous too cunningly to *feign*.
(*'The Dissembler'*)

When Cowley wrote that "*Poets* are scarce thought *Free-men* of their *Company*, without paying some duties, and obliging themselves to be true to *Love*," he warned also that, "But we must not always make a judgement of their *manners* from their *writings* of this kind" (*Poems*, Preface, p. 10). It is typical of his ambiguous approach either to feign love experiences as part of his poetic mission or to claim really to have lived these experiences. Little wonder that distinctions between fact and fantasy become blurred as he befuddles the issue even further: "Neither would I here be misunderstood, as if I affected so much gravity, as to be ashamed to be thought really in *Love*. On the contrary, I cannot have a good opinion of any man who is not at least capable of being so." (*Poems*, Preface, p. 10). These statements constitute in effect theories on the relationship between poetry and truth, on which he takes as granted the commonplace of the writer's licence to make or to feign. This was the position Sidney defended in his sixteenth-century *Defence of Poesy*: "[The

poet] goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit.”⁷⁸ Hopkins and

Mason in our own time have reviewed insightfully this traditional position:

Poetry is a true, complete, and human form of discourse because it admits, and indeed rests its case on, the story-telling, the fictionalising, which is in truth an essential part of all human attempts to understand the world. It is partly because [poetry and works of art] ARE, and declare themselves to be, LIES, that they may be considered the truest form of discourse. ... For the object of Poetry is truth, ... general truth – the truth of the moving soul of things. It is carried alive into the heart of passion, by pleasure; it is a truth which is its own evidence.⁷⁹

We intend to examine and reconcile the seemingly disparate trends in *The Mistress*, that is, on the one hand, Cowley’s claim as a lover depicting his desire for his mistress, and on the other hand, his use of poetry to strike a social pose and fulfil a poetic convention.

Feigning, dissembling, and disguise would seem to be the very condition for poetry.

In the flagship poem, ‘The Prophet,’ Cowley declares himself love’s chief professor and greatest prophet, and yet he also declares himself love’s Columbus who seeks new worlds of love for others to enjoy. He echoes Ovid’s bold declaration in *Ars Amatoria (The Art of Love)* that “*ego sum praeceptor Amoris*” - “I am Love’s teacher” (I. 17),⁸⁰ and the proof lies in the sheer range of the love situations *The Mistress* covers. And yet it also reveals a newly found, untested world of love by the visionary and poet-prophet:

Teach *me* to Love? go teach thy self more wit;
I chief *Professor* am of it. ...

’Tis I who *Loves Columbus* am; ’tis I,
Who must new *Worlds* in it descry:
Rich *Worlds*, that yield of *Treasure* more,
Then all that has bin known before.
And yet like *his* (I fear) *my Fate* must be,
To find them out for *others*; not for *Me*.
Mee Times to come, I know it, shall
Loves Last and greatest *Prophet* call:
But, ah, what’s that, if she refuse
To hear the wholesome *Doctrines* of my *Muse*?
If to my share the *Prophets fate* must come;

If Cowley teaches love without experiencing it, or discovers it without enjoying it, then the question arises if this world in *The Mistress* exists only at the level of fantasy, utopia and ultimately desire? The portrayal of a world of love reveals a radical departure from, and denial of, the world of violence and anarchy portrayed in his war poetry. Cowley’s physical displacement from England to France corresponds to an abandonment of the historical representations and hard facts of *The Civil War* for the ostensible imaginings of *The Mistress*. Though the war is still on, he appears rejuvenated and liberated, ready to give vent to his deepest fantasies. Everyone is “at least capable” of being in love, not least the poet who feels the pangs of desire. Perhaps his transit to the French capital, the Western world’s lair for lovers par excellence, did more than restore his *joie de vivre*; perhaps it just coincided with the release of buried or dormant passions. It is the way these passions reveal themselves that brings into relief the issue of fact and fantasy.

The opening poem of *The Mistress*, ‘The Request,’ opens with a question that establishes the motif for the whole text: “I have often wisht to love, what shall I do?” There is a quest motif operating within the text and the story emerges how for three years Cowley attempts to woo the lady of his affections. With his wish expressed in the first poem and the unsuccessful outcome of the quest in the last, fittingly entitled ‘Love Given Over,’ the series conveys a sense of an ordered structure with an episodic plot. His quest takes him on a journey of knowledge and self-discovery, during which time he endures many frustrating moments in trying to make a mistress out of the object of his love. This frustration is even evident in some of his titles:

'Platonick Love,' 'Leaving Me, and then Loving Many,' 'The Vain Love,' 'The Despair,' 'The Wish,' 'All-over, Love,' 'Against Fruition,' 'Love Undiscovered,' 'The Rich Rival,' 'Against Hope,' 'Loves Ingratitude,' 'My Fate,' 'The Heartbreaking,' 'Impossibilities,' 'Silence,' 'Weeping,' and 'Love Given Over.' He vehemently refuses to name the lady he was so enamoured of – "With more than *Jewish Reverence* as yet / Do I the *Sacred Name* conceal" ('Her Name,' 1-2). But he would confirm in his later writings that he had fallen in love at least once seemingly with a stately lady of majestic beauty:⁸¹

If I were ever to fall in love again (which is a great Passion, and therefore, I hope, I have done with it) it would be, I think, with Prettiness, rather than with Majestical Beauty. I would neither wish that my Mistress ... should be ... like a Daughter of great *Jupiter* for the stateliness and largeness of her person. (*Essays*, "Of Greatness," p. 429)

But Cowley may never have experienced what it felt like to be loved in return, for there is no evidence that his love was reciprocated. It is our contention that he has recourse to surrogate modes such as fantasy and wish-fulfilment to make up for unrequited love.

In psychoanalytic parlance desire is founded on lack, for a need or wish to be loved has given rise to the demand for love that has gone unheeded. But if Cowley cannot fathom how to love – "I have often wisht to love; what shall I do?" - he would at least write about it. He drew inspiration from the prototypical tale of fantasy becoming fact, the Ovidian tale of Pygmalion's statue coming to life. He refers to it occasionally, the outstanding example coming in 'The Gazers' which also provides the sole use in the sequence of the French word "*Amour*" for love:

So at first *Pigmalion* lov'd;
 But th' *Amour* at last improv'd:
 The *Statue* ' it self at last a *woman* grew,
 And so at last, my Dear, should you do too.
 ('The Gazers,' 13-16)

The poems become punctuated by situations where the subject imagines that he is living the experience he fantasises about. In one instance, “A *real* cause at first did move; / But mine own *Fancy* now drives on my Love” (‘The Encrease,’ 10-11); in another, “At mine own *breast* with care I fed thee still ... / With *Idle* thoughts and *Poetrie*” (‘Loves Ingratitude,’ 7, 10). This section is about resolving the perceived ambiguities between fantasy and imagination on the one hand, and reality and experience on the other. To achieve this, that is, to reconcile “a *real* cause” to “mine own *Fancy*,” we would appraise the two poems where this situation attains its plenitude, namely ‘My Picture’ and ‘The Dissembler.’ However, we would start our discussion with ‘Inconstancy’ that could serve as a link poem, displaying the trademark conceits and paradoxes of Metaphysical verse and yet showing how the workings of psychoanalysis unravel the complexities of fantasy and desire.

The argument in ‘Inconstancy’ develops by means of a paradox that reworks the adage that, change is the only constant in nature: “The *World’s* a *Scene* of *Changes*, and to be / *Constant*, in *Nature* were *Inconstancie*.” It has the makings of a literary exercise, for the tone is light-hearted, and the intention, at first sight, seems to be to surprise with the humour and wit on display:

Five years ago (says *Story*) I lov’d you,
 For which you call me most *Inconstant* now;
 Pardon me, Madam, you mistake the *Man*;
 For I am not the same, that I was than;
 No *Flesh* is now the same ’twas then in Mee;
 And that my *Mind* is chang’d your self may see. ...
 My *Members* then, the *Father Members* were
 From whence *These* take their birth, which now are here.
 If then this *Body* love what th’other did,
 ’Twere *Incest*; which by Nature is forbid. ...
 The *World’s* a *Scene* of *Changes*, and to be
Constant, in *Nature* were *Inconstancie*;
 For ’twere to break the *Laws* her self has made: ...
 T’imagine then that *Love* should never cease
 (*Love* which is but the *Ornament* of these)
 Were quite as senseless, as to wonder why

The poet labels this a story, not in the sense of history but in the context of a made-up tale, something feigned, something possibly fantasised. The argument is sophistic and rhetorical: “Pardon me, Madam, you mistake the *Man*; / For I am not the same, that I was than.” In psychoanalysis, the main thrust of analysis converges on the incest and a suggested love triangle of father, son, and woman. In fact, Lacanian psychoanalysis identifies the phallus or Cowley’s word, ‘member’ – the *membrum virile* – as the principal signifier of desire. Lacan discusses this theory in his chapter on “The Signification of the Phallus,” where he describes its signifying function:

In Freudian doctrine the phallus is not a phantasy, if by that we mean an imaginary effect. Nor is it as such an object in the sense that this term tends to accentuate the reality pertaining in a relation. It is even less the organ, penis or clitoris, that it symbolises. ... For the phallus is a signifier. ... For it is the signifier intended to designate as a whole the effects of the signified, in that the signifier conditions them by its presence as a signifier.⁸²

In relation to the family love triangle, Maud Ellmann suggests that, “the most disturbing implication of the Oedipus complex is that love is never merely a relationship between two people, but always a contest between three, even if the third is only present as a psychic obstacle.”⁸³ Perhaps the father figure is such an obstacle, for the poet claims not to be the man he was five years ago because “*My Members* then, the *Father Members* were / From whence *These* take their birth, which now are here.” It might be a joke about father and son loving the same woman, but it serves the means to introduce the subject of incest: “If then this *Body* love what th’other did, / *Twere Incest*; which by Nature is forbid.” Psychoanalysis disagrees with Cowley that incest is forbidden against nature because there is nothing fundamentally untoward with two people mating. Instead, the taboo against incest is a cultural thing, as when Lacan echoes Levi-Strauss’s assertion that this taboo is the fundamental law of human culture. In Lacan’s words, “this primordial law ... in

regulating marriage ties superimposes the kingdom of culture on that of a nature abandoned to the law of [copulation].”⁸⁴ Usually it is the father’s role to introduce the law against incest. He has both a paternal function and a legal authority that invests him with the duty of introducing what Lacan calls the symbolic order or the order of language and by extension cultural norms. Ellmann discusses Lacan’s take on the father’s role, describing the family love triangle as an Oedipal drama:

[The father’s] function is to introduce the law against incest into the Oedipal drama of the home. So he institutes the Symbolic Order which distinguishes parent from child, sister from brother. The real father cannot be conflated with the symbolic father, the paternal function or the Nom-du-Pere: here the pun on non-du-pere implies that the Name-of-the-Father is *not*-of-the-father, not intrinsic to the man as such but donned upon him like a giant’s robe upon a dwarfish thief. ... The father’s name outlives its bearer, anticipating the extinction of the very monster that it brings into life. Thus the name, from the beginning, is an epitaph, a ghost, destined to outlive the dissolution of the flesh.⁸⁵

If Cowley had an Oedipus complex, then he found a two-pronged means to check it: the cultural credo of incest as taboo or forbidden desire, and the symbolic order of the law of the father. The father, who is the son’s potential rival in the Oedipal drama, is the one who implements the law. The poet does not deny his deep-lying desire for the object of his attention – “I lov’d you” – but an increasingly specious reasoning leads him to an attempt to blur the lines between the reality of his desire and the phantom of the law: “...to be / *Constant*, in *Nature* were *Inconstancie*.”

In ‘My Picture’ the poet muses over the changes likely to befall a picture of him that he offers his mistress as a valedictory gift. She invigorates him by her sheer presence; therefore her imminent absence would leave him a picture of death while transforming the picture in her possession into something with an essence, a soul. And so the picture would seem to be coming to life even as he would be dying.

Here, take my *Likeness* with you, whilst ’tis so;
For when from hence you go,
The next Suns rising will behold
Me pale, and lean and old.

The Man who did this *Picture* draw,
Will swear next day my face he never saw.

I really believe, within a while,
If you upon this *shadow* smile,
Your *presence* will such vigour give,
(Your *presence* which makes all things live)
And *absence* so much alter *Me*,
This will the *substance*, *I* the *shadow* be.

When from your well-wrought *Cabinet* you take it,
And your bright looks *awake* it;
Ah be not frighted, if you see,
The *new-sould Picture* gaze on Thee,
And hear it breath a sigh or two;
For those are the first things that it will do.

My *Rival-Image* will be then thought blest,
And laugh at me as dispossesst;
But *Thou*, who (if I know thee right)
I'th *substance* does not much delight,
Wilt rather send again for *Me*,
Who then shall but my *Pictures Picture* be.
(‘My Picture’)

The exhortation in the opening line, “Here, take my *Likeness*,” recalls Donne’s ‘Elegy 7: His Picture’ which opens with “Here, take my Picture.” In fact, in his pithy opening Donne writes about the lover and his picture both becoming shadows – ghosts or phantoms – if he met his death while separated from his mistress:

Here take my picture, though I bid farewell;
Thine, in my heart, where my soul dwells, shall dwell.
'Tis like me now, but I dead, 'twill be more
When we are shadows both, than 'twas before.
(Donne, ‘Elegy 7: His Picture,’ 1-4)⁸⁶

Cowley conceives his own metamorphosis of the picture that comes to life. It is made possible by the life-giving and life-taking force the mistress is endowed with: “Your *presence* will such vigour give, / (Your *presence* which makes all things live).” Freud established the relation between the binary terms of absence/presence in operation here, and desire. In “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” he discussed the so-called ‘fort/da’ game that his grandson of eighteen months played when his mother (Freud’s daughter) was away:

The child had a wooden reel with a piece of string tied round it. ... What he did was to hold the reel by the string and very skilfully throw it over the edge of his curtained cot, so that it

disappeared into it, at the same time uttering his expressive ‘o-o-o-o’ (this represented the German word ‘fort’ – ‘gone’). He then pulled the reel out of the cot again by the string and hailed its reappearance with a joyful ‘da’ – ‘there’. This, then, was the complete game – disappearance and return.⁸⁷

“Disappearance and return” or absence and presence! “The moment of naming absence is also the instant of the birth of desire,” Belsey writes.⁸⁸ The poet’s desire is founded in the mistress’s absence, in the void her departure would create.

According to Lacan the unconscious is structured like a language and the child’s first use of language corresponds to the birth of its desire. For Lacan, “this is the point of insertion of a symbolic order that pre-exists the infantile subject and in accordance with which he will have to structure himself.”⁸⁹ By naming absence, the poet operates within the symbolic order or the realm of language usage in which the boundaries between fact and fiction become indistinct. The poet’s argument of the picture becoming endowed with a soul and coming to life goes beyond the mere alternatives of fact or fiction. Possibly driven by solitude, his metamorphic picture is probably intended to dissuade his mistress from starting out on the journey. The classic pattern is described by Lacan thus: “... since his appeal has the effect of making the partner disappear, he will seek in a banishing summons the provocation of the return that brings the partner back to his desire.”⁹⁰ Further arguments by the poet are all meant to ensure presence, the mistress’s presence. He provokes her return by a series of arguments that culminates in the summons that, “But *Thou*, who (if I know thee right) ... / Wilt rather send again for *Me*.”

The self-deprecatory remarks by the poet about becoming “pale, and lean, and old,” or in one word a shadow, suggest death, a death that would presumably serve to wreak vengeance on the mistress who has dared to leave him. ‘My Picture’ is

sustained by parody. In the first stanza the poet's picture parodies his person, in the second his shadow parodies death, in the third the behaviour of the picture endowed with a life-giving soul parodies the poet's routine of gazing at her, and in the fourth his "Pictures Picture" parodies his original likeness. Absence, and its derivations such as death, according to Belsey, "is desire's recurring figure in Renaissance lyric poetry."⁹¹ This relationship between absence and desire could be explained further by Lacan's theories on need, demand and desire. The poem is structured as a demand for love because it takes the form of an address and all speech is demand. It is the gap between the subject's need and the demand that conveys it that constitutes desire:

Demand in itself bears on something other than the satisfactions it calls for. It is demand of a presence or of an absence. ... Demand constitutes the Other as already possessing the 'privilege' of satisfying needs, that is to say, the power of depriving them of that alone by which they are satisfied. This privilege of the Other thus outlines the radical form of the gift of that which the Other does not have, namely, its love. ... Desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomenon of their splitting.⁹²

'My Picture' is about the poet's desire, his picture or likeness serving as a metonym that combines with other signifiers to express this desire. The issue between fact and fiction is a moot point because nothing that the poet muses about has actually happened. He operates mainly in the future tense, projecting forward his desire for his mistress to abandon her journey and stay with him.

The relationship between poetry and truth is overtly discussed in 'The Dissembler,' a poem of meditation compared to the dramatic monologue of 'My Picture.' With the poet apparently casting himself in the role of the dissembler, the poem complements prefatory comments on the poet's licence to feign. The many lyric forms in the series already establish Cowley's deliberate choice of triumphal patterns, but this poem

reveals a peculiar use of numerology. There is a pattern of sorts, the five stanzas having in order 53, 51, 50, 51, and 53 syllables each. Here is 'The Dissembler':

Unhurt, untouched did I complain;
And terrifi'd all others with the pain:
But now I feel the *mighty evil*;
Ah, there's no *fooling* with the *Devil*!
So wanton men, whilst others they would fright,
Themselves have met a real *Spright*.

I thought, I'll swear, an handsome ly
Had been no *sin* at all in *Poetry*:
But now I suffer an *Arrest*,
For words were spoke by me in *jest*.
Dull, sottish *God of Love*, and can it be
Thou understand'st not *Raillerie*?

Darts, and *Wounds*, and *Flame*, and *Heat*,
I nam'd but for the *Rhime*, or the *Conceit*.
Nor meant my verse should raised be,
To this sad fame of *Prophesie*;
Truth gives a *dull Propriety* to my stile,
And all the *Metaphors* does spoile.

In things, where *Fancy* much does reign,
Tis dangerous too cunningly to *feign*.
The *Play* at last a *Truth* does grow,
And *Custom* into *Nature* go.
By this curst art of begging I became
Lame, with *counterfeiting Lame*.

My Lines of amorous desire
I wrote to kindle and blow others fire:
And 'twas a *barbarous delight*
My *Fancy* promise'd from the sight;
But now, by *Love*, the mighty *Phalaris*, I
My *burning Bull* the first do try.
(‘The Dissembler’)

‘The Dissembler’ takes the allure of a soliloquy. In the one instance where the “thou” of direct address is employed, it is to the imaginary figure of Cupid who is dubbed “Dull, sottish *God of Love*.” But Cupid is merely a name because Cowley does not believe in his existence. Right from the opening poem of the series, ‘The Request,’ there is the challenge to Cupid to prove that he is anything but a name created by poets:

Come at last and strike for shame;
If thou art any thing besides a name.
Ile think Thee else no *God* to be;
But *Poets* rather *Gods*, who first created *Thee*.

The god of love thus exists only in the symbolic order, the order of language and signification. While ‘The Dissembler’ is not overtly addressed to anyone, the fact that language is used means that, in Lacanian parlance, it is addressed to an Other. This capitalised Other “refers to a hypothetical place or space, that of the pure signifier.” According to Lacan, “the Other is, therefore, the locus in which is constituted the I who speaks to him who hears, that which is said by the one being already the reply, the other deciding to hear it whether the one has or has not spoken.”⁹³ Therefore there is no such thing as a monologue because speech is involved. Malcolm Bowie explains: “Speech has now become the necessary and inescapable medium of desire, the place where Subject and Other come into being conjointly, and under pressure each from each.”⁹⁴

By claiming that “*Darts, and Wounds, and Flame, and Heat, / I nam’d but for the Rhime, or the Conceit,*” Cowley makes clear his primary linguistic interest. This is because “if you are a poet you will produce for your own delight a continuous stream, a dazzling tissue of metaphors.”⁹⁵ Admitting that it is a stylistic concern that makes him weave meaning into metaphors (and conceits) resolves the issue of his address in the keynote poem, ‘The Request,’ where the same darts (or arrows), flame, and heat are featured. The address is to Cupid, the god of love that does not exist except in the symbolic order of language:

But do not touch my heart, and so be gon;
Strike deep thy burning arrows in. ...
Come arm’d with flames, for I would prove
All the extremities of mighty Love.
Th’ excess of heat is but a fable;
We know the *torrid Zone* is now found *habitable*.
(‘The Request,’ 25-6, 29-32)

No sooner does the dissembling poet intimate that his being smitten with love never happened, that he is merely feigning, than he confuses the issue again by saying that he is now falling in love merely by talking about it! “But now I feel the *mighty evil*,” he writes, or again “The *Play* at last a *Truth* does grow, / And *Custom* into *Nature* go.” His claim about being in love is becoming a prophecy of his fate: “Nor meant my verse should raised be, / To this sad fame of *Prophesie*.” But he does not want to dwell on the truth of his love story that has brought only disappointment. He would rather don his poet’s hat, so to speak, and embellish his style with the “dazzling tissue” of metaphors and conceits: “*Truth* gives a *dull Propriety* to my stile, / And all the *Metaphors* does spoile.” That he has desire is firmly established, and this desire is no less true if love remains unrequited. It is this desire that he enjoys couching in language, his style characterised by the extended use of metaphor. He teases his desire in language, for language is the site of desire. In doing so, he teases the desire of the reader as well. When he writes in the concluding stanza that, “My Lines of amorous desire/ I wrote to kindle and blow others fire,” he is clearly thinking about his target audience.

In Lacanian terms, Cowley’s deliberate use of metaphors and conceits aims at creating “a sort of intoxication” that provides “a demonstration of the radical superfluosity of all signification.”⁹⁶ It is partly in this sense that the text of *The Mistress* could be read as sublimation. Sublimation is defined as,

[The] process postulated by Freud to account for human activities which have no apparent connection with sexuality but which are assumed to be motivated by the force of the sexual instinct. The main types ... are artistic creation and intellectual inquiry. The instinct is said to be sublimated in so far as it is diverted towards a new, non-sexual aim and in so far as its objects are socially valued ones.⁹⁷

Harold Bloom writes that, “Freudian sublimation involves the yielding-up of more primordial for more refined modes of pleasure, which is to exalt the second chance above the first.”⁹⁸ Further evidence of Cowley’s attempt to sublimate his desire could be found in his voiced quest for poetic recognition, his attempt to deflect attention from himself onto the reader, his sophisticated metrical patterns, and the extensive use of figures of speech. The use of metaphor, in psychoanalytic terms, brings to sharp relief the relationship between language and the human unconscious in the expression of desire. Because language is the site of desire, Lacan equates the structure of the unconscious to that of language and insists that the unconscious of the subject is the discourse of the Other. Like language, the unconscious works along the two axes of metaphor and metonymy that function as signifiers generating the signified. While metonymy works by combination and indicates an association between two concepts, metaphor works by selection and indicates likeness.

2.4 Love and Desire in the *Mistress*

Such Heat and Vigour shall our *Kisses* bear,
As if like *Doves* we’engendred there.
No *bound* nor *rule* my pleasures shall endure,
In Love there’s none too much an *Epicure*.
Nought shall my hands or Lips controul;
I’ll kiss Thee *through*, I’ll kiss thy *very Soul*.

Yet nothing, but the *Night* our sports shall know. ...
Then I will do t’*enjoy*, and *feast* on Thee.
(‘The Injoyment’)

The deliberate and persuasive choices of form and style in *The Mistress*, presenting an array of lyric forms and stanza patterns, show how Cowley relished the freedom to match different kinds to different themes within the ambit of the short poem. In comparison, his earliest love poems, ‘Constantia and Philetus’ and ‘Pyramus and

Thisbe' in *Poetic Blossomes*, were long, drawn-out narratives written in sestets, the rigidity of the form only relieved by the occasional punctuation of songs. In *The Mistress* Cowley rarely repeats the same form, giving the impression that the lyrics represent ideal forms to the extent that each kind seems designed for the particular situation it accommodates. The poems thus read more like unique experiences than the narration or contemplation of a singular experience. The different permutations in the form of the short poem and love lyric, then, reflect the nature of desire itself in their unpredictability and even eccentricity. This section explores further the nature of desire, unravelling the language that couches it in tropes and figures.

Cowley's awareness of his desire is evident in his frequent mention of it. The opening poem to the series, 'The Request,' sets the tone. And so from the very beginning he announces his possible recourse to surrogate fulfilment:

Desire takes wings and strait does fly,
It stays not *dully* to inquire the *why*.
That *Happy* thing a *Lover* grown,
I shall not see with *others* Eyes, scarce with *mine own*.

If she be coy and scorn my noble fire,
If her chill heart I cannot move,
Why I'll *enjoy* the very *Love*,
And make a *Mistress* of mine own *Desire*.
(‘The Request,’ 13-20)

The mistress may not make the poet “that *Happy* thing a *Lover* grown” by her chilly response to his blandishments, but she cannot prevent his wish-fulfilment. His need for her love prompts his demand for reciprocation, but her apparent refusal highlights the glaring absence in his life and thereby fuels his desire. It is this set of circumstances that prompts him to make his keynote resolution: “Why I'll *enjoy* the very *Love*, / And make a *Mistress* of mine own *Desire*.” His insistence on enjoyment, a word that carried sexual connotations in the Renaissance, is sometimes

replaced by the fashionable 'jouissance.' In fact, it is partly due to the notion of enjoyment losing its previous connotations that jouissance is not readily translatable.

Still, Leon Roudiez has interpreted Julia Kristeva's definition of the word:

Kristeva gives "jouissance" a meaning closely related to that given the word by Jacques Lacan. ... What is significant is the *totality* of enjoyment that is covered by the word "jouissance." ... "Jouissance" is sexual, spiritual, physical, conceptual at one and the same time. In Kristeva's vocabulary, sensual, sexual pleasure is covered by *plaisir*; "jouissance" is total joy or ecstasy.⁹⁹

Cowley seems determined to experience jouissance, even if it is only by surrogate means through fantasies that desire sponsors. The point is made strongly in the two poems that include the word "enjoyment" in the title, 'The Injoyment' and 'Dialogue, After Enjoyment.'

'The Injoyment' takes the form of a direct address from the male subject to his mistress confiding that, "I will ... *enjoy*, and *feast* on Thee." The poem opens right in the middle of this speech that effectively represents the foreplay to the impending occurrence of jouissance. The rhyming couplets mostly forming distinct units in themselves, and the matter-of-fact statements emphasised by the end-stopped lines, all show how the poem's structure reflects the supreme confidence the speaker exudes. There is a neat pattern of tetrameter lines regularly punctuating the pentameters as highlighted by the poem's appearance, again revealing Cowley's close attention to organisational detail:

Then like some wealthy *Island* thou shalt ly;
And like the *Sea* about it, *I*;
Thou like fair *Albion*, to the Sailors Sight,
Spreading her beauteous Bosom all in *White*:
Like the kind *Ocean* I will bee,
With loving *Arms* for ever clasping Thee.

But I'll embrace Thee gentli'er far then so;
As their fresh *Banks* soft *Rivers* do,
Nor shall the *proudest Planet* boast a power
Of making my *full Love* to *ebb* one hour;
It never *dry* or *low* can prove,
Whilst thy unwasted *Fountain* feeds my Love.

Such Heat and Vigour shall our *Kisses* bear
As if like *Doves* we'engendred there,
No *bound* nor *rule* my pleasures shall endure,
In Love there's none too much an *Epicure*.
Nought shall my hands or Lips controul;
I'll kiss Thee *through*, I'll kiss thy *very Soul*.

Yet nothing, but the *Night* our sports shall know.
Night that's both *blind* and *silent* too.
Alpheus found not a more secret trace,
His lov'd *Sicanian Fountain* to embrace,
Creeping so far beneath the Sea,
Then I will do t'*enjoy*, and *feast* on Thee.

Men, out of *Wisdom*; *Women*, out of *Pride*,
The pleasant Thefts of Love do *hide*.
That may secure thee; but thou'hast yet from Me
A more *infallible Securitie*.
For there's no danger I should tell
The Joys, which are to Me *unspeakable*.
(*'The Injoyment,'*)

So strong is the poet's desire that he evokes the vastness of the sea and ocean when talking about himself: "And like the *Sea* about it, I; ... / Like the kind *Ocean* I will bee." The sea is a traditional metaphor for desire, and Cowley even describes its 'amorous waves' elsewhere: "The amo'rous *Waves* would fain about her stay / But still new am'orous *waves* drive them away" (*'Bathing in the River,'* 15-16).

Catherine Belsey explains this common link between desire and the sea: "Desire, we are to understand, is boundless, natural, profound, transfiguring."¹⁰⁰ The lady's qualities – wealthy, fair, 'beauteous,' fresh, unwasted – have an intense effect.

Associating her with Albion suggests whiteness or a pure nature, Albion having been derived from the Latin 'albus' meaning white. Albion combines this whiteness with the fact that it is an old name for Britain, as in the image of the blood of the fallen in battle spreading over the whiteness of the land in *The Civil War*: "A *Deluge* there; and high red *Tides* the while / Oreflowd all parts of *Albions* bleeding *Ile*" (II. 3-4).

Here Cowley combines the two senses of the word in the traditional figure of the sailor returning to the white cliffs of Dover, hence "Thou like fair *Albion*, to the

Sailors Sight, / Spreading her beauteous Bosom all in *White*.” In fact, this “fair” and “beauteous” lady fulfils the poet’s vision of woman as exists in Plato’s ideal forms, such as he expresses in ‘Not Fair:’

’Tis very true, I thought you once as faire,
As women in th’ *Idea* are.
Whatever here seems beauteous, seem’d to bee
But a faint *Metaphor* of *Thee*.
(‘Not Fair,’ 1-4)

‘The Injoyment,’ with its age-old sexual connotations in the title, postpones jouissance as nothing is actually happening except speech. There is a preponderant use of the future tense that underlines the fact that nothing has happened: “Then ... *thou shalt ly*” and “I will bee ... clasping Thee” from the first stanza alone. If there is anything happening, it is an argument developing typically by means of a metaphysical conceit. The female is an island, complete with the name of Albion, with fresh banks and a beautiful expanse of uncharted territory that holds out many possibilities, whilst the male represents the water that should for ever surround and embrace her, alternately a sea, an ocean and a river. The image of the ocean “with loving Arms for ever clasping thee” is powerful and persuasive, indicating a lasting embrace and an enduring union. The interest of the poem lies in this perpetual union sealed by the graphic representation of jouissance the female is invited to experience.

Jouissance takes the form of “pleasures” which are at once tactile and physical by means of roving lips and hands, and spiritual because of the involvement of the soul: “I’ll kiss Thee *through*, I’ll kiss thy *very Soul*.” The kissing process here plays the role of signifier in the first and last lines, the signified in both cases being the unbounded and ungovernable pleasures. Enjoyment – “Then I will do t’*enjoy* and *feast* on Thee” – therefore constitutes ultimately a spiritual experience, for jouissance

goes beyond mere sexual pleasure or *plaisir* to suggest the totality of enjoyment in Kristeva's definition. The concluding stanza centres on lovers hiding the "pleasant Thefts of Love," that is, the secrecy that could be a condition for their union. Also, there appears to be a special thrill to clandestine love that takes the allure of the forbidden fruit. The male subject proffers "*infallible Securitie*" of his silence, whereupon some psychoanalytic studies have explored the pun between "(in)fallible" and the phallus that represents the ultimate signifier of desire. Jane Gallop, for example, observes that, "there seems to be some insistent link between *phallic* and *fallacious*, one certainly attributable to the material similarity between the two signifiers."¹⁰¹ If "In-fallible" reads as a pun on phallus which signifies the subject's desire, then phallus also represents the ultimate guarantee, the "*inphallic Securitie*" of *jouissance*. The male subject is sufficiently wise not to talk about their secret liaison, but he would be unable to do so anyway because language would fail him, for "The Joys ... are to Me *unspeakable*." In his work titled *Sexuality*, Joseph Bristow writes that Lacan's *jouissance* is not just about sex but "'something more': 'that which puts us on the path of ex-istence'. Such 'ex-istence' is literally the ex stasis encrypted in 'ecstasy': an intensely pleasurable out-of-body state that, as these puns vividly dramatize, cannot be contained."¹⁰²

'Dialogue, After Enjoyment' is a unique poem in *The Mistress*, both for its form, the overtly dramatic pattern of dialogue that brings into relief its "delicacy of spatial arrangement,"¹⁰³ and for its theme of lovers who have experienced fruition already. The mistress gives voice to her sentiments in a verbal exchange that reveals essential differences between male and female attitudes to *jouissance*. The stanzas read like

speeches in a poetic drama with the female attributed the key opening, central and closing stanzas in nine. The first exchanges set the tone:

She. What have we done? What cruel passion mov'd thee,
Thus to ruine her that lov'd Thee?
Me thou'hast *robb'ed*, but what art thou
Thy *Self* the *richer* now?
Shame succeeds the short liv'd *pleasure*;
So soon is spent, and gone, this thy *Ill-gotten Treasure*.

He. We've done no harm; nor was it *Theft* in *mee*,
But noblest *Charity* in *Thee*.
I'll the well-gotten *Pleasure*
Safe in my *Mem'orie* *Treasure*;
What though the *Flower* it self do wast,
The *Essence* from it drawn does long and sweeter last.
(‘Dialogue, After Enjoyment,’ 1-12)

The female subject's attitude is a complex one, for she would welcome their union but worry about its social consequences. Her “short liv'd *pleasure*” contrasts with the male subject's “well-gotten *Pleasure*,” typifying the way her veritable coalescence of moods engendered by *jouissance* contrasts with his ecstasy. The experience, which apparently has left the female deflowered, makes her feel ruined, robbed and ashamed; in one word, debased! Perhaps hers is the fear of being undervalued, discussed by Freud in his “Debasement” essay: “It is naturally ... unfavourable for a woman if his initial overvaluation of her when he is in love gives place to undervaluation after he has possessed her.”¹⁰⁴ By the time her accusations reach a crescendo in the central stanza, it becomes clear that cultural norms, allied to natural inclinations, regulate the manifestation of desire and the perception of *jouissance* among the sexes. Here is the fifth stanza and his response in the sixth:

She. *Thou first* perhaps who didst the fault commit,
Wilt make thy wicked boast of it.
For *Men*, with *Roman pride*, above
The *Conquest*, do the *Triumph* love:
Nor think a perfect *Victo'ry* gain'd,
Unless they through the *streets* their *Captive* lead enchain'd.

He. Who e're his secret joys has open laid,
The *Baud* to his own *Wife* is made.
Beside what boast is left for *mee*,

Whose whole wealth's a *Gift from Thee*?
'Tis you the *Conqu'erer* are, 'tis you
Who have not onely *ta'ne*, but *bound*, and *gag'd* me too.
(*'Dialogue, After Enjoyment,'* 25-36)

The female introduces the element of culture, deriding a perceived unjust social structure in which men, in their phallic dominance, see women as trophies to be won, paraded and boasted about after the sexual act. Could the female really experience the total ecstasy of *jouissance* within such cultural boundaries? "Desire is genderless," but its signifier is the phallus; "the agent that is called upon to give the subject 'his' desire is the male genital, transcendentalized."¹⁰⁵ Perhaps the phallic signifier, not stripped of gender in the mind of the female, contributes to her perception of being retrograded to an object of male desire. Her criticism is brought into sharper focus by the image of the sexual act as a military conquest that yields triumph to the male, while the female subject becomes captive. By referring to the "Roman pride" of the male, the female clearly finds parallels between her society and the classical patriarchal cultures of Roman times, cultures which Michel Foucault, for example, has lengthily discussed in his works on sexuality. Foucault's theories on power relations also apply here because the relationship between man and woman is presented like that of master and slave. Sexual relations, however, are far more complex than a mere reflection of the most unequal power relationship in society. According to Foucault, power is not exercised monolithically from the top to the bottom, but often the other way round, especially in sexual relations. The 'slave' is not really a slave and the 'master' not really a master. In fact, in the words of Bristow, the male often responds to this charge by turning "those binary power differences against themselves."¹⁰⁶ Thus Cowley's male subject responds by telling the female that, "'Tis you the *Conqu'erer* are, 'tis you / Who have not onely *ta'ne*, but *bound*, and *gag'd* me too." He has become a captive of (her) love.

The lady would change tack again by proceeding to examine the place of sex with relation to a whole new area, that of guilt and sin. The sexual arrangement she has with her lover is one that recalls Thomas Corns's terms of "carnal and extramarital," terms he used when commenting on the "life-style of libertine eroticism about the well-to-do."¹⁰⁷ Such a state of affairs has left the female subject with overwhelming feelings of guilt and sin, feelings not shared by her lover. Here are the seventh and eighth stanzas:

She. Though publique pun'ishment we escape, the Sin
 Will rack and *torture* us within:
Guilt and *Sin* our bosom bears;
 And though fair yet the *Fruit* appears,
 That *Worm* which now the *Core* does wast,
 When long t'has gnaw'd within will break the *skin* at last.

He. That *Thirsty Drink*, that *Hungry Food* I sought,
 That *wounded Balm*, is all my fault.
 And Thou in pity didst apply,
 The kind and onely *remedie*:
 The *Cause* absolves the *Crime*; since *Mee*
 So mighty *Force* did move, so mighty *Goodness Thee*.
 ('Dialogue, After Enjoyment,' 37- 48)

While the male appears to bask in the afterglow of *jouissance*, the female feels restrained by some stigma and signification attached by society to female *jouissance*. One of Jane Gallop's feminist theories applies to her, that of "a traditional, unified, rational, puritanical self – a self supposedly free from the violence of desire."¹⁰⁸ The fact that public knowledge of their sexual union would bring punishment confirms its illegitimacy, hence the need to keep it secret. For one with puritanical concerns, such illicit and clandestine love brings about the internal torture that comes from an acknowledgement of wrongdoing. The male, in contrast, is not burdened by these inhibitions and moral constraints because, "The *Cause* absolves the *Crime*; since *Mee* / So mighty *Force* did move, so mighty *Goodness Thee*." The sexual act was

consensual, for his demand was heeded in the only way possible, through “The kind and onely *remedie*” of *jouissance*. Far from denying the illicit nature of the affair or deflecting blame from himself, he points to the cause of his demand that happens to be the “mighty *Force*” of desire. Desire is uncontrollable and irrational, making him seek after such impossibilities, nay illogicalities, as “*Thirsty Drink*,” “*Hungry Food*,” and “*wounded Balm*.” Such language, such outrageous use of the oxymoron and the paradox in depicting the nature of desire, is appropriate and even warranted, for desire is “paradoxical, deviant, erratic, eccentric, even scandalous.”¹⁰⁹

‘Dialogue, After Enjoyment’ ends with a rather unexpected twist in the female’s closing speech. It is all about the conflicting moods within the female self. She is spiteful of her lover for taking her honour by deflowering her, and yet she has fallen in love with him for introducing her to sexual passion. Should she shed her (cultural) inhibitions and follow her (natural) instincts in love? Should she transgress the laws of her repressive culture and enjoy the ecstasy of the *jouissance* experience? Even as she expresses anger at being undone, paradoxically he would undo her even more if he does not do again what initially undid her. She now makes the demand for love:

She. *Curse* on thine *Arts!* Methinks I *Hate* thee now;
 And yet I’m sure I *love Thee* too!
 I’m *angry*, but my *wrath* will prove,
 More *Innocent* then did thy *Love*.
 Thou hast *this day* undone me quite;
 Yet wilt undo me more, should’st thou not come *at Night*.
 (‘Dialogue, After Enjoyment,’ 49-54)

Catherine Belsey comments on the culture versus nature dichotomy thus:

What if there is no human sexual relation outside culture, outside the regime of the signifier? ... Desire, I believe, is the location of the contradictory imperative that motivates the signifying body which is a human being in love. Desire is in excess of the organism; conversely, it is what remains unspoken in the utterance. In consequence it has no settled place to be.¹¹⁰

This last stanza is a series of paradoxes in which each couplet represents a set of binary oppositions. The unpredictable and unsettled nature of desire is shown in the female's remark that "... Methinks I *Hate* thee now; / And yet I'm sure I *love Thee* too!" Equally unpredictable is the twist provided by her invitation for a repeat performance, an 'encore:' "Thou hast *this day* undone me quite; / Yet wilt undo me more, should'st thou not come *at Night*." Lacan was to ask openly the question which Cowley's manner suggests here, namely that, "What does woman want?" Jane Gallop takes up the story of how this question dominated a special issue of the journal "L'Arc" 58, in which all the contributors were women. It was titled "Encore," as if to say that woman's desire is never sated. "Encore" calls both for a repetition of the phallic performance, and for more, for something Lacan says is beyond the phallus. Cowley leaves the discussion open-ended on the issue of feminine desire and jouissance for, according to Gallop, "Any conclusive answer to 'What does woman want?' is an effort to recuperate the question back into the closure. It is the continual asking of it as an open question that makes the closure impossible to maintain."¹¹

Even when Cowley is writing ostensibly about platonic love, a poem like 'Platonick Love' still reveals desire and even concludes with an outright situation of "erotic melodrama." Calhoun and others observe of the poem that, "The descent from spirit to flesh in the concluding stanza is entirely expected. The further descent, by way of simile, into erotic melodrama may come as a surprise."¹² Here is the final stanza:

That *souls* do beauty know,
 'Tis to the *Bodies* help they ow;
 If when they know't, they strait abuse that trust,
 And shut the *Body* from't, 'tis as unjust,
 As if I brought my dearest *Friend* to see
 My *Mistris*, and at th' instant *Hee*

Should steal her quite from *Mee*.
(‘Platonick Love,’ 22-8)

The poem is built on fantasy and shows sophisticated reasoning, for it involves two loving souls coming together to form a happy mix. The union is not complete until the two bodies too are joined, at which point the two lovers become one. Even when death severs bodies from souls and propels the latter into Heaven, only half of the total bliss could be experienced until the two are reunited. The fantasy here is of the perfect reciprocal love, where two souls and two bodies become as one. That is why the change in tone in this final stanza becomes surprising as the poet contemplates a disruption in the beautiful world of souls and bodies. Even more unexpected is the way he compares this disruption to a possible *ménage à trois*: “As if I brought my dearest *Friend* to see / My *Mistris*, and ... *Hee* / Should steal her quite from *Mee*.” The love triangle is not unusual in *The Mistress*, its most notable occurrence coming in ‘The Rich Rival’ where the mistress is indeed ‘stolen’ from the poet. His reaction is to taunt his rival with claims that he is not worthy of her bed despite his riches, and to warn that he would accept her if she came back and begged him:

They say youre angry, and rant mightilie,
Because I love the same as you.
...
When next I see my *fair One*, she shall know,
How worthless thou art of her bed.
...
Did she now *beg* I’d love no *less*,
And were she’an *Empress*, I should love no *more*.
(‘The Rich Rival,’ 1-2, 7-8, 21-2)

Again there is the reverse situation in ‘The Waiting-Maid (Suspected to Love her)’ of the poet and two women. His mistress suspects him of loving her maid, but he quashes her suspicions by referring implicitly to Ovid’s words of advice: “Be sure to know the handmaid of the woman you would win; she will make your approach easy” (*Ars Amatoria -The Art of Love*, 1. 351-52).¹¹³ He expresses this by drawing an

analogy with himself as supplicant, the mistress as goddess and the maid as saint through whom he must pass in order to reach her:

Thy *Maid*? Ah, find some nobler theame
Whereon thy doubts to place.

...

Thou art my Goddess, my Saint, Shee;
I pray to *Her*, onely to pray to *Thee*.

(‘The Waiting-Maid (Suspected to Love her),’ 1-2, 21-2)

When the poet draws the analogy of his friend stealing his mistress in ‘Platonic Love,’ he is addressing some third party, almost in meditation. It seems as though love always involves an Other – according to Lacan there is nothing like a love relationship (between two people) – that exists in the symbolic order of language.

Bowie explains the Lacanian context thus:

There is no such thing as a sexual relationship, Lacan repeatedly announces, because, although each partner plays the role of Subject to the other’s Other, this dispensation can never produce symmetry or reciprocity: language always creates between them an intractable and unshedtable surplus cargo of otherness, a third party ubiquitous and powerful enough to be called God.¹¹⁴

For Kristeva, “the ‘Other’ refers to a hypothetical place or space, that of the pure signifier, rather than to a physical entity or moral category.”¹¹⁵ This shadowy area helps create the situation of the triangle comparable to that between a mother and child, whereby the mother speaks of the child in the third person to the Other with statements like “Isn’t he beautiful?” According to Belsey, “Love, it follows, is a triangular relationship between a narcissistic couple and a shadowy Third, and this Third Party is a differential formation, a ‘ghost.’” Therefore it comes to life when language is used:

[This Third Party] is not grasped as a real person by the infant, but like a sort of symbolic instance; something that is here that cannot be here – the possibility of absence, the possibility of love, the possibility of interdiction but also a gift, ... some sort of archaic occurrence of the symbolic.¹¹⁶

An example of the presence of a shadowy third party or ghost that stalks the lover is provided in fantastical fashion by ‘Honor.’ Using the language of war to equate the

act of winning a woman's love with the sacking of a city, the poet professes his shock at discovering a ghost or phantom standing in his way just when he thought he had made the conquest. Already the poet is soliloquising, seemingly speaking alternately to himself and to the ubiquitous Other, that force he addresses as "ye Gods," in line with Bowie's description of this Other as "a third party ubiquitous and powerful enough to be called God." But then between the first and second stanzas he discovers Honor whose presence he had been unaware of all along!

She *loves*, and she *confesses* too;
 There's then at last, no more to do.
 The happy *work's* entirely done;
 Enter the *Town* which thou hast *won*;
 The *fruits* of *Conquest* now begin;
Iô Triumph! Enter in.

What's this, ye *Gods*, what can it be?
 Remains there still an *Enemie*?
 Bold *Honor* stands up in the Gate,
 And would yet *Capitulate*;
 Have I overcome all *real foes*,
 And shall this *Phantome* me oppose?
 ('Honor,' 1-12)

The poet's insistent imperative to himself to "enter the Town" and "enter in" takes on the allure of a sexual command. This Honor only exists in the realm of fantasy to check his desire, representing either an abstract entity such as the lady's honour or an actual barrier such as the hymeneal membrane: "Bold Honor stands up in the Gate." There appears to be a perception by the woman of the sexual act representing a loss of honour, for he would have had to cast honour aside in order to achieve coitus. Our interest in the relationship between desire and language clarifies our understanding that this Honor, lacking substance and indeed being, exists only at the level of the symbolic, the locus of speech, the domain of the Other. It must be dissociated from his need for love, for it is "an *Enemie*" to his desire and the joys of jouissance.

The importance of the symbolic Other could be gauged further in the peculiar form of 'Clad all in White.' It unfolds in a curious pattern whereby the poet directs his address to his mistress and to the Other in alternate stanzas, such that the poem oscillates between the dramatic and the meditative. Love is really not a straightforward relationship between two persons:

Fairest thing that shines below,
Why in this robe dost thou appear?
Wouldst thou a *white* most perfect show,
Thou must at all *no garment* wear:
Thou wilt seem much whiter so,
Then *Winter* when 'tis *clad* with snow.

'Tis not the *Linnen* shews so fair:
Her skin shines through, and makes it bright;
So *clouds* themselves like *Suns* appear,
When the *Sun* pierces them with Light:
So *Lillies* in a glass enclose,
The *Glass* will seem as white as those.

Thou now *one heap* of *beauty* art;
Nought outwards, or within is foul:
Condensed beams make every part;
Thy *Body's Cloathed* like thy *Soul*.
Thy *soul*, which does it self display,
Like a *star* plac'd I'th *Milky* way.

Such robes the *Saints* departed weare,
Wooven all with *Light* divine;
Such their exalted *Bodies* are,
And with such full glory shine.
But they regard not mortals pain;
Men *pray*, I fear, to *both* in vain.

Yet seeing thee so gently pure,
My hopes will needs continue still;
Thou wouldst not take this garment sure,
When thou hadst an intent to *kill*.
Of *Peace* and *yielding* who would doubt,
When the white *Flag* he sees hung out?
(*'Clad all in White'*)

The poem opens and ends in a question, indicating that the poet's doubts are not resolved within the situation. The argument centres on his attempt to coax his mistress to shed her white robe and appear naked. Alternating address and meditation reveals a curious pattern of thought, the meditation checking the urgency of his demand: "Thou must at all *no garment* wear." This demand is fuelled by

desire. The near-perfection of her alabaster-like body, the poet enthuses, reveals the equally near-perfection of her soul, for external beauty is often an accurate gauge of the internal: “Thy Body’s Cloathed like thy Soul.” *Jouissance* would serve to discover both her body and her soul, for it is at once a physical and spiritual experience. He expresses the hope that she has come not just in peace, but in yielding to his advances also: “Of *Peace* and *yielding* who would doubt?” However, doubts persist till the end because he is unsure about her succumbing to his request to take off the robe as a prelude to a sexual act. His demand has gone unheeded and his desire would remain unfulfilled, but she has not opposed him either, hence “My hopes will needs continue still.”

Some poems stand out in *The Mistress* as attempts to define desire and fathom its nature, into which category belong ‘Answer to the Platonicks’ and ‘The Innocent III.’

In the former Cowley explains away the key terms of love, desire and lust.

But shall our Love do what in Beasts we see?
 E`ven *Beasts* eat too, but not so well as *Wee*. ...
 They taste those pleasures, as they do their food;
Undrest they tak`t, devour it *raw*, and *crude*:
 But to us *Men*, *Love Cooks* it at his fire,
 And adds the *poignant sawce* of sharp desire. ...
 The *Sun* does his pure fires on earth bestow
 With nuptial warmth, to bring forth things below;
 Such is *Loves* noblest and divinest heat,
 That *warms* like his, and does, like his, *beget*.
Lust you call this; a name to yours more just,
 If an *Inordinate Desire* be *Lust*:
Pygmalion, loving what none can enjoy,
 More *lustful* was, then the hot youth of *Troy*.

(‘Answer to the Platonicks,’ 5-6, 9-12, 23-30)

The analogy between sex and food as natural needs in the human and animal worlds is a common one. According to Freud, “The fact of the existence of sexual needs in human beings and animals is expressed in biology by the assumption of a ‘sexual instinct’, on the analogy of the instinct of nutrition, that is of hunger.”¹¹⁷ Freud’s

“instincts” as in hunger and sexual instincts become “biological needs” for Lacan, who explains that desire emerges from the gap between the manifestation of such needs and the demand to fulfil them:

The human individual sets out with a particular organism, with certain biological needs, which are satisfied by certain objects. ... There is no adequation between the need and the demand that conveys it; indeed, it is the gap between them that constitutes desire, at once particular like the first and absolute like the second.¹¹⁸

For Cowley, beasts act on the sexual instinct, that is, the biological need for sex gives rise to demand, such that, “*Undrest they tak’t, devour it raw, and crude.*” This is a natural occurrence that has no bearing on love or lust. However, in the human world the link between the need for jouissance and the demand for it is split by the key elements of love and desire. These are so intertwined that love is distinguished from, but not separated from desire: “But to us *Men, Love Cooks* it at his fire, / And adds the *poignant sawce* of sharp desire.” Love and desire are knit together like a fire and its heat; desire takes the form of “*Loves noblest and divinest heat.*” Not only is desire poignant and sharp, it is also “*Inordinate Desire,*” the word inordinate denoting that which is excessive and immoderate. To distinguish finally between desire and lust, the key for Cowley is that desire is natural, however inordinate or insatiable it proves to be, whereas lust is not. Desire manifests itself in natural love, lust in unnatural love. To clarify the point, Paris’s passion for Helen might have caused the Trojan War, but it was engendered by a natural need that was fuelled by love and desire, whereas Pygmalion’s passion for a statue constitutes lust because it was unnatural.

Cowley takes the desire motif to its extreme in ‘The Innocent III.’ The paradox in the title gives a foretaste of the manner in which desire is articulated in this poem, this notwithstanding Lacan’s axiom that “it is precisely because desire is articulated that

it is not articulable.”¹¹⁹ The second stanza out of four, in particular, is one of the most forthright and expressive in *The Mistress*:

Though in thy thoughts scarce any Tracks have bin
So much as of *Original Sin*,
Such charms thy *Beauty* wears as might
Desires in dying confest *Saints* excite.
Thou with strange *Adulterie*
Dost in each breast a *Brothel keep*;
Awake all men do *lust* for thee,
And some *enjoy* Thee when they *sleep*.
Ne're before did *Woman* live,
Who to such *Multitudes* did give
The *Root* and *cause* of *Sin*, but onely *Eve*.
(‘The Innocent III,’ 12-22)

The woman is a temptress comparable to Eve, whose temptation of Adam led to the Fall and the resultant original sin that exposed the innate depravity of humankind. This time the woman does not tempt men necessarily by speech but by her sheer beauty. Such is this beauty that it could even stir desire in saints! The language is condensed with metaphors and several signifiers of desire, often with one signifier substituting another in a manner that suggests that the poet wishes to see how far he could stretch them. When he says, “Thou with strange *Adulterie* / Dost in each breast a *Brothel keep*,” each breast, so to speak, conjures, hides, or becomes a front for, a brothel, that is, a house or lieu where prostitution takes place. It is also the setting par excellence for adultery that is related to sin in the first and last couplets, showing that desire knows no bounds. In his essay, “A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men,” Freud claims that the adulterous subject has a neurotic precondition for loving. “The person in question shall never choose as his love-object a woman who is disengaged but only one to whom another man can claim right of possession as her husband, fiancé or friend,” he writes.¹²⁰ Also, the brothel evokes a second precondition Freud gives, namely “love for a prostitute.” Cowley’s signifiers point to what Freud calls the “compulsive nature” of love relations, especially with reference

to the male subject's choice of love-object. For the subject to be aroused only in situations of adultery and prostitution is considered by Freud to be "unintelligible and indeed bewildering." It is precisely this kind of desire, however deviant, that the poet says is common to male subjects, though some prefer to repress it so that it manifests itself during sleep, in dreams: "*Awake all men do lust for thee, / And some enjoy Thee when they sleep.*" Enjoyment or *jouissance* during sleep by way of dreaming is the ultimate wish-fulfilment. In a text where language is usually embellished to couch desire in intricate metaphors and conceits, words such as adultery, breasts, brothel and lust make 'The Innocent III' an unorthodox poem.

Finally Cowley uses the concluding poem of *The Mistress*, 'Love Given Over,' to confirm the unsuccessful outcome of his love quest. Perhaps, as he intimates in another poem, that which is true of love is true of all life: "I well believe the Fate of mortal days / Is writ in Heav'en" ('My Fate,' 27-8). 'Love Given Over' is about his appeal going unheeded, for he neither experiences *jouissance* nor does he become the desire of the woman who has been the object of his love seemingly for three years. The poem's title suggests resignation and even despair, but most of all a strong resolution to abandon the pursuits of love and rein in the eccentricities of desire. He is adamant that he would not attempt again to answer the call to love. 'Love Given Over' is written in six stanzas, the first three of which employ the 'you' of drama and direct address; he is speaking to himself and uses his own name. After that he resorts to the 'I' of meditation as he begins addressing the Other, perhaps his God! Here are the first four stanzas:

It is *enough*; enough of time, and pain
Hast thou consum'd in vain;
Leave, wretched *Cowley*, leave
Thy self with *shadows* to deceive;

Think that *already lost* which thou must *never gain*.

Three of thy lustiest and thy freshest years,
(Tost in storms of *Hopes* and *Fears*)
Like helpless *Ships* that bee
Set on fire ith' midst o'the *Sea*,
Have all been *burnt in Love*, and all been *drown'd in Tears*.

Resolve then on it, and by force or art
Free thy unlucky *Heart*;
Since *Fate* does disapprove
Th'ambition of thy *Love*.
And not one *Star* in heav'n offers to take thy part.

If ere I clear my *Heart* from this desire,
If ere it home to'his breast retire,
It ne'r shall wander more about,
Though thousand beauties call'd it out:
A *Lover Burnt* like me for ever *dreads the fire*.
(*'Love Given Over,'* 1-20)

The virginal Cowley therefore has recourse only to surrogate means of fulfilment, notwithstanding Freud's conviction that "every surrogate nevertheless fails to provide the desired satisfaction."¹²¹ Desires that are repressed in the unconscious emerge as wish-fulfilment in the dreams, a domain in which jouissance is often simulated. In attempting to grasp and articulate desire, Cowley draws from his experience of wish-fulfilment. Freud wrote on the role of the writer that,

Up till now we have left it to the creative writer to depict for us the 'necessary conditions for loving' which govern people's choice of an object, and the way in which they bring the demands of their imagination into harmony with reality. The writer can indeed draw on ... a sensitivity that enables him to perceive the hidden impulses in the minds of other people, and the courage to let his own unconscious speak. ... Writers are under the necessity to produce intellectual and aesthetic pleasure, as well as certain emotional effects. For this reason they cannot produce the stuff of reality unchanged, but must isolate portions of it, remove disturbing associations, tone down the whole and fill in what is missing. These are the privileges of what is known as 'poetic licence.'¹²²

Cowley's naming of the dream, as a means of wish-fulfilment, is crucial in a psychoanalytic reading of his work; also, it has great implications for the relationship between poetry and truth. In terms of physical action, nothing happens; but living the fantasy is important to the subject and becomes a source of the poet's material.

Sublimation involves repressed desire coming back in some way like the dream, just

as it could be transfigured into a work of art. Maud Ellmann recalls Yeats's words: "The passions, when ... they do not find fulfilment, become vision;" and adds that, "the visions of the poet, like the visions of the dream, represent the 'sublimation' – the sublime transfiguration – of shackled cravings of the flesh."¹²³ The possibility of sublimation occurs when there is a change of object, when the sexual libido finds satisfaction in objects that the group approves, insofar as they are objects of public utility. Poetry is an outstanding example of such an object, providing Cowley therefore with recognition. That also is how *The Mistress* fulfils his desire.

The Mistress may not have given Cowley a mistress and companion to love, but that is because he had already found the great love and companion of his life:

For when we once fall in love with that bewitching *Art* [of Poetry], we do not use to court it as a *Mistress*, but marry it as a *Wife*, and take it for better or worse, as an *Inseparable Companion* of our whole life. (Poems, Preface, p. 6)

Cowley proves the truth of his thesis that poetry may define life rather than copy it. His farewell to love in the last poem is not contravened in the last score that his life runs after the publication of the volume in 1647, that is, he does not take a mistress. If the poetry is a sublimation of his own desires, however, he would have taken satisfaction in disguising any intentions for therapeutic release. So effective has been this disguise that critical opinion has largely followed Johnson's lead and explained away Cowley's language embellishments as evidence of his Metaphysical style. Also, accusations of frigidity, that Cowley's remarks about using the love lyric as a fashion statement appear to contribute to, do not take account of his desire which he states in the opening piece and shows its different manifestations through to the concluding piece. He might not have enjoyed reciprocal love, but as a poet he finds a niche in the great lyric tradition of his time. The seventeenth century alone witnessed

the printing of several editions of these poems and the setting to music of one-half of them, thus bearing out his overtly-stated objective in *The Mistress* of becoming the representative and perhaps favourite love poet of his age. If he gives up on love, he never does so with that other desire of his, namely immortality, something he considers fated for the poets he imitates as well as for himself. He continues to associate himself, for, example, with the accomplishments of Virgil, choosing the motto for the title page of *The Mistress* from his hero's epic: "haerit lateri lethalis arundo" – "The deathly shaft stuck deep in her flank" (*Aeneid* IV. 73). The abiding impression of *The Mistress*, perhaps, is of this statement of intent by the poet to carve out a path to enduring fame, the kind of fame that sometimes comes posthumously. For all his perplexity when trying to get to grips with the slippery contours of love and desire, it is a measure of his achievement that his claim to immortality did not have to wait "for times to come." He was destined to witness in his own time the bold vision he states coming to pass: "Mee Times to come, I know it, shall / Loves last and greatest *Prophet* call" ('The Prophet').

¹ This translation from the Latin is by Calhoun and others. See The Collected Works of Abraham Cowley, Vol. 2, Part 1 (*The Mistress*), ed. Thomas O. Calhoun, Laurence Heyworth and J. Robert King (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1993), Commentary, p. 219. Where they have not provided a translation I use C. Day Lewis's Virgilian texts.

² Virgil, Aeneid, trans. C. Day Lewis (1966), ed. Jasper Griffin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 93. This line is comparable to earlier ones in the same book: "... the queen had been growing more grievously love-sick, / Feeding the wound with her life-blood" (IV. 1-2); and "These words blew to a blaze the spark of love in the queen's heart" (IV. 54).

³ Johnson comments in his "Life of Cowley" that, "This obligation to amorous ditties owes, I believe, its original to the fame of Petrarch, who, in an age rude and uncultivated, by his tuneful homage to Laura, refined the manners of the lettered world, and filled Europe with love and poetry." See Lives of the English Poets, Samuel Johnson, Vol. 1 (Cowley – Dryden), ed. George Birkbeck Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), p. 6.

⁴ Jacques Lacan, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: Seminar 1959-1960, Bk. VII, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1992) p. 125.

⁵ Lacan, p. 126.

⁶ Catherine Belsey, Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 19.

⁷ Lacan, p. 128.

⁸ Johnson, p. 40.

⁹ Johnson, p. 6.

¹⁰ Arthur H. Nethercot, Abraham Cowley: The Muse's Hannibal (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 102-3.

¹¹ Johnson, p. 42.

¹² Pope would be particularly inspired by Walsh's comments - on glittering thoughts, forced conceits and great wit - in these lines:

Some to *Conceit* alone their taste confine,
And glitt'ring thoughts struck out at ev'ry line;
Pleas'd with a work where nothing's just or fit;
One glaring Chaos and wild heap of wit.

(*'Essay on Criticism,'* 289-92)

See The Poetical Works of Alexander Pope, ed. Herbert Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 62-85.

¹³ William Walsh, Preface to *Letters and Poems, Amorous and Gallant*. Cited in "The Context of Dryden's Criticism of Donne's and Cowley's Love Poetry," Leonard Nathanson (*Notes and Queries*, Vol. CCII, January – December 1957, pp. 56-9), p. 57. See also The Reputation of Abraham Cowley, Jean Loiseau (Paris: Henri Didier, 1931), p. 41.

¹⁴ John Dryden, *Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire* in Works, Vol. IV (Poems 1693-1696), ed. A. B. Chambers and William Frost (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 7.

¹⁵ A. Alvarez, The School of Donne (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), p. 141.

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- ¹⁶ Loiseau, p. 33.
- ¹⁷ Thomas Sprat, "An Account of the Life and Writings of Mr. Abraham Cowley" in *The Works of Abraham Cowley* (London, 1668), Preface.
- ¹⁸ Loiseau, *Abraham Cowley: Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre* (Paris: Henri Didier, 1931), p. 370.
- ¹⁹ Loiseau, *Reputation*, p. 17.
- ²⁰ Ruth Wallerstein, "Cowley as a Man of Letters" (*Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters*, Vol. 27, 1932, pp. 127-40), p. 132.
- ²¹ Abraham Cowley, *The Mistress, With Other Select Poems*, ed. John Sparrow (London: Nonesuch Press, 1926), Introduction, pp. xvi, xx.
- ²² Robert Hinman, *Abraham Cowley's World of Order* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 13.
- ²³ Hinman, p. 27.
- ²⁴ David Trotter, *The Poetry of Abraham Cowley* (London: Macmillan, 1979), pp. 30-31.
- ²⁵ Trotter, p. 35.
- ²⁶ Trotter, p. 51.
- ²⁷ Johnson, p. 22.
- ²⁸ Trotter, pp. 51-2.
- ²⁹ *Collected Works*, v. 2, pt. 1, Commentary, p. 219
- ³⁰ *Collected Works*, v. 2, pt. 1, Commentary, p. 221.
- ³¹ *Collected Works*, v. 2, pt. 1, Notes, p. 298.
- ³² Thomas Corns, *Uncloistered Virtue: English Political Literature 1640-1660* (London: Oxford University Press, 1992) p. 252.
- ³³ *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. H J. C. Grierson, revised Alastair Fowler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), Introduction, p. 2. But Nethercot, p. 280, observes on the link between Cowley and Donne that,
It would have been much less surprising to Cowley to be put with the disciples of Spenser or with the Sons of Ben than with the School of Donne. ... Almost none of the poets who have been associated as 'Metaphysical' claimed Donne as their master.
- ³⁴ Earl Miner, *The Metaphysical Mode from Donne to Cowley* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 3.
- ³⁵ George Parfitt, *English Poetry of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Longman, 1985), p. 21.
- ³⁶ Fowler, *Metaphysical Lyrics*, Introduction, p. 3.
- ³⁷ Johnson, pp. 18-19.
- ³⁸ Dryden, *Eleonora*, Epistle Dedicatory, in *Works*, Vol. III (Poems 1685-1692), ed. Earl Miner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 233. Further, the Notes to this Epistle Dedicatory,

p. 496, distinguish between Dryden's use of 'poet' and 'wit' by citing from John Aubrey's life of Lucius Cary, Viscount Falkland: "Dr Earles would not allow him to be a good poet, though a great Witt; he writt not smooth verse, but a great deal of Sense."

³⁹ Johnson, p. 20.

⁴⁰ Miner, p. 118.

⁴¹ Johnson, pp. 21-2.

⁴² Loiseau, Reputation, pp. 123, 124.

⁴³ Alvarez, p. 141.

⁴⁴ Johnson, p. 22.

⁴⁵ John Donne, The Major Works, ed. John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 102.

⁴⁶ Johnson, p. 21.

⁴⁷ Robert Ellrodt, L'Inspiration Personnelle et L'Esprit du Temps Chez Les Poetes Metaphysiques Anglais, Vol. 2 (Paris: Jose Corti, 1960), p. 85. The translation is mine.

⁴⁸ Sparrow, The Mistress, Introduction, p. xvi.

⁴⁹ Sparrow, p. xvii, counters his own earlier statement thus: "In *The Mistress* itself there are many poems and still more passages that could not be the work of a mere imitator of Donne."

⁵⁰ Donne, pp. 121-3.

⁵¹ Collected Works, v. 2, pt. 1, Notes, p. 246.

⁵² Thomas Carew, Poems, ed. Rhodes Dunlap (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), p. 22.

⁵³ Calhoun and others suggest that "the situation of two male friends and one woman ... is probably dramatizing the conclusion of Donne's 'The Extasie' where 'some lover' has the chance to look at both the speaker and his mistress." See Collected Works, v. 2, pt. 1, Notes, pp. 246-7.

⁵⁴ Calhoun and others observe that the three stanzas or three parts "[correspond] to the traditional tripartite division of the soul." See Collected Works, v. 2, pt. 1, Notes, p. 270.

⁵⁵ Donne, p. 101.

⁵⁶ John Cleveland, Poems, ed. Brian Morris and Eleanor Withington (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 54-6.

⁵⁷ Nethercot, p. 94

⁵⁸ Miner, p. 3.

⁵⁹ Andrew Marvell, The Complete Poems, ed. George deF. Lord (London: David Campbell, 1993), pp. 23-5)

⁶⁰ Carew, p. 16.

⁶¹ Nethercot, p. 44, describes the genesis of the poems:

Apparently in one of their conversations the two youths had fallen into an argument on hope and its value. Cowley, in a cynical or at least a contrary mood, had constituted himself the attacker,

and Crashaw had championed the cause of this 'virtue'. As a result, they wrote a poem, in alternate stanzas. ... [Crashaw] added an extra stanza of triumph at the end. In *The Delights of the Muses* the composite poem was entitled 'On Hope, by Way of Question and Answer, between A. Cowley and R. Crashaw'.

⁶² Calhoun and others speculate that Cowley could not have included the text of his well-known Catholic-convert friend, should he (or Moseley or both) have aimed to keep *The Mistress* politically uncontroversial. The evidence cited in support of this view is from Cowley's elegy on Crashaw:

Pardon, my *Mother Church*, if I consent
That *Angels* led him when from thee he went,
For even in *Error* sure no *Danger* is
When joyn'd with so much *Piety* as *His*.
(‘On the Death of Mr. Crashaw,’ 47-50)

See *Collected Works*, v. 2, pt. 1, Notes, p. 274.

⁶³ Johnson, p. 33.

⁶⁴ Crashaw's poem, 'For Hope,' is printed in Cowley's *Collected Works*, v. 2, pt. 1, Textual Notes, pp. 189-91. In Crashaw's own works it has long been customary to publish the poem as was done originally, that is, as part of the project entitled 'On Hope, *By Way of Question and Answer, between A. Cowley and R. Crashaw.*' See for example *The Complete Poetry of Richard Crashaw*, ed. George Walton Williams (New York: New York University Press, 1972), pp. 71-4.

⁶⁵ Miner, p 5.

⁶⁶ Donne, pp. 95-6.

⁶⁷ Donne, pp. 117-18. Donne is inspired in this poem by Marlowe's 'The passionate Sheeheard to his love,' just as many of Donne's poems inspire Cowley. The four line stanza or the quatrain, the rhyming couplets, and the octosyllabic lines of 'The Bait' all recall Marlowe's poem, not to mention the opening couplet which is copied almost exactly. Marlowe renders it thus: "Come live with mee, and be my love, / And we will all the pleasures prove." See *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, Vol. 1 (Translations), ed. Roma Gill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 215.

⁶⁸ *Selected Poems of Abraham Cowley, Edmund Waller and John Oldham* (Edmund Waller, pp. 49-90), ed. Julia Griffin (London: Penguin, 1998), pp. 89-90.

⁶⁹ Nethercot, p. 100.

⁷⁰ *Collected Works*, v. 2, pt. 1, Notes, p. 263.

⁷¹ Ben Jonson, *Ben Jonson*, ed. Ian Donaldson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 135.

⁷² John Suckling, *Works: The Non-Dramatic Works*, ed. Thomas Clayton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 37-8.

⁷³ Waller's interesting response against 'Against Fruition' appears in Appendix A, pp. 181-3, Suckling's *Non-Dramatic Works*. In 'Against Fruition [I], In answer of Sir John Sucklins Verses,' Suckling has the "Con" and Waller the "Pro" lines. This is how the concluding stanza of the original is dealt with:

Con.

And as in Prospects we are there pleas'd most
Where something keeps the eye from being lost,
And leaves us room to guesse, so here restraint
Holds up delight, that with excesse would faint.

Pro.

Restraint preserves the pleasure we have got,

But he ne'r has it that enjoys it not.
In goodly prospects, who contracts the space,
Or takes not all the bounty of the place?
We wish remov'd what standeth in our light,
And Nature blame for limiting our sight,
Where you stand wisely winking, that the view
Of the faire prospect may be alwaies new.

Con.

They who know all the wealth they have, are poor,
Hee's onely rich that cannot tell his store.

Pro.

Not he that knows the wealth he has is poore,
But he that dares not touch, nor use his store.

(Waller, 'In answer of Sir John Sucklins Verses,' 51-66)

⁷⁴ Henry Bold, having already responded like Waller to Suckling's 'Against Fruition [I],' counters the argument in 'Against Fruition [II]' with 'For Fruition, In Answer to Sir John Suckling.' It is printed in Suckling's Non-Dramatic Works, Appendix A, pp. 184-5. Bold's answer becomes virtually a companion piece to the original:

Pox on those *hearts* that *singly freeze* with *cold*,
I Love two *minds*, that one *opinion* hold. ...
Love *Cormorant-like*, on every *pray* doth fall:
And's *hunger-starv'd*, where there is *none* at all.
'Tis the *Grand confidence*, and *mighty hope*,
Unsheathe'd of *fear*, with winter *tears* dry'd up,
That *Love*, takes *pleasure* in; That can be *none*,
That only dwels, in *Contemplation*. ...
She's *honest*, that does *yeild* although Poor Fooll,
She be as *hot* as *Summer*, warm as *Wooll*.
Then (fairest Ladies) use what *nature* gave,
Never *denying*, what we ever *Crave*,
Confirming us that *that's* not *strange* at all,
Our *Fathers did*, we *do*, and *Children shall*.

(Bold, 'For Fruition, In Answer to Sir John Suckling,' 1-2, 5-10, 19-20, 23-6)

⁷⁵ Geoffrey Walton, Metaphysical to Augustan: Studies in Tone and Sensibility in the Seventeenth Century (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1955), p. 60.

⁷⁶ Donne, p. 109.

⁷⁷ William Hazlitt, "Lectures on the English Poets: Suckling, Denham, Cowley" in Ben Jonson and the Cavalier Poets, ed. Hugh Maclean (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), Criticism, p. 439.

⁷⁸ Sir Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesy* in Sir Philip Sidney, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 101-142), p. 105.

⁷⁹ David Hopkins and Tom Mason, The Story of Poetry (Bristol: Broadside Books, 1992), p. 158.

⁸⁰ Cited in Collected Works, v. 2, pt. 1, Notes, p. 265.

⁸¹ Johnson, p. 6, writes that, "Of Cowley we are told by Barnes, ... that, whatever he may talk of his own inflammability and the variety of characters by which his heart was divided, he in reality was in love but once, and then never had resolution to tell his passion."

⁸² Jacques Lacan, Ecrits: A Selection, trans. Alan Sheridan (Bristol: Tavistock, 1977), p. 285.

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- ⁸³ Maud Ellmann (ed.), Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism, (London, Longman, 1994), p. 13.
- ⁸⁴ See Lacan, Écrits, p. 177. Ellmann discusses the two authorities, claiming that, “For Lacan, as for Levi-Strauss, incest is bad grammar.” See Ellmann, p. 16.
- ⁸⁵ Ellmann, p. 18.
- ⁸⁶ Donne, pp. 31-2.
- ⁸⁷ Sigmund Freud, The Freud Reader, ed. Peter Gay (London: Vintage, 1995), p. 599.
- ⁸⁸ Belsey, p. 58.
- ⁸⁹ Lacan, Écrits, p. 234.
- ⁹⁰ Lacan, Écrits, p. 104.
- ⁹¹ Belsey, p. 15.
- ⁹² Lacan, Écrits, pp. 286-7.
- ⁹³ Lacan, Écrits, p. 141.
- ⁹⁴ Malcolm Bowie, Lacan (London: Fontana, 1991), p. 81.
- ⁹⁵ Lacan, Écrits, p. 157.
- ⁹⁶ Lacan, Écrits, p. 157.
- ⁹⁷ J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, The Language of Psychoanalysis, Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Karnac Books, 1988), p. 431.
- ⁹⁸ Harold Bloom, “A Meditation upon Priority, and a Synopsis” in Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reader, ed. Sue Vice (Cambridge: Cambridge Polity Press, 1996), p. 27.
- ⁹⁹ Julia Kristeva, Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art, ed. Leon S Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), Introduction, pp. 15-16.
- ¹⁰⁰ Belsey, p. 17.
- ¹⁰¹ Jane Gallop, Thinking Through the Body (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 129.
- ¹⁰² Joseph Bristow, Sexuality (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 97.
- ¹⁰³ The phrase is Alastair Fowler’s, when he wrote that it would be hard to match Cowley’s ‘Dialogue, After Enjoyment’ for “delicacy of spatial arrangement.” See Triumphal Forms, Alastair Fowler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 75.
- ¹⁰⁴ Freud, p. 400.
- ¹⁰⁵ Bowie, p. 141.
- ¹⁰⁶ Bristow, p. 188.
- ¹⁰⁷ Corns, p. 251.

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- ¹⁰⁸ Gallop, Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction (London: Macmillan, 1982), Introduction, p. xii.
- ¹⁰⁹ Lacan, Ecrits, p. 286.
- ¹¹⁰ Belsey, p. 5.
- ¹¹¹ Gallop, 1982, p. 36.
- ¹¹² Collected Works, v. 2, pt. 1, Notes, p. 246.
- ¹¹³ Cited in Collected Works, v. 2, pt. 1, Notes, p. 293.
- ¹¹⁴ Bowie, p. 154.
- ¹¹⁵ Kristeva, Introduction, p. 17.
- ¹¹⁶ Belsey, p. 138.
- ¹¹⁷ Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," p. 240.
- ¹¹⁸ Lacan, Ecrits, p. viii.
- ¹¹⁹ Lacan, Ecrits, p. 302.
- ¹²⁰ Freud, "A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men," p. 388.
- ¹²¹ Freud, "A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men," p. 391.
- ¹²² Freud, p. 391.
- ¹²³ Ellmann, Introduction, p. 12. The citation from W. B. Yeats is from *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1917).

CHAPTER THREE

SACRED EPIC: THE *DAVIDEIS* AND THE ART OF COMPOSITION

*Me verò primùm dulces ante omnia Musæ,
Quarum sacra fero ingenti percussus amore,
Accipiant, Cæliq; vias ac Sidera monstrent.*

Since Poetry for me comes first – my goddess and chief delight
Whose devotee I am, with a master-passion adoring –
I wish above all she accept me, revealing the stars and the sky-routes.

(*Davideis*, Motto, culled from Virgil, *Georgics* II. 475-77)¹

3.1 Introduction: Theoretical Considerations

Cowley conceived the *Davideis* as the supreme example of the appropriation and application of correct theories of epic composition in the key aspects of form, style and content. This was a return to the traditional form of the epic that he had earlier chosen for his unfinished poem on *The Civil War*. Though the *Davideis* first appeared in the 1656 Poems, he would have started collecting notes for it while still at Cambridge before moving to Oxford in 1643. We find that, not only are many passages in *The Civil War* elucidated by the Notes to the *Davideis*, but also that many lines from the one poem are copied into the other, as in the example of the description of Hell (*The Civil War*, I. 365-96; *Davideis*, I. 71-100). Cowley therefore thought about the *Davideis* for many years, giving himself allowance fully to appreciate and imitate what Sprat calls “the true form of Heroick Poetry [which is] perfectly antient.”² Sandwiched by the two epics was *The Mistress* that he confessed to have written in order to gain recognition as a love lyricist and hopefully attain immortal poetic renown. This overriding desire for poetic fame and immortality is part of the motivation for the *Davideis*, his greatest challenge yet. He would have identified entirely with Davenant’s statement in the Preface to *Gondibert* on the

poet's obsession with fame, especially when earned for the unrivalled beauty of epic poetry:

Having confess'd that the desire of Fame made me a Writer; I must declare, why in my riper age I chose to gaine it more especially by an Heroicall Poem; and the Heroick being by most allow'd to be the most beautiful of Poems, I shall not need to decide the quarrels of Poets about the Degrees of Excellence in Poesy.³

Davenant's Preface appeared in 1650 before three of the five projected books of *Gondibert* would appear in 1651. It provides a poetics we intend to use as a theoretical base in our discussion, for it was the most influential treatise on literary theory to appear in the period between the poet laureates Jonson and Dryden.

The *Davideis* not only represents one last use of the most traditional of forms, it also represents the final stage of Cowley's poetic development which started with the teenage efforts in the early 1630s that culminated in *Poetic Blossomes*. The progression has been in terms of chronology, nobility of purpose and poetic renown as he has constantly reinvented himself mainly as a war poet, then a love poet and now a divine poet. He is no more daunted by this new challenge than by his secular poetry, and would remain faithful to the style that has established his reputation:

The same fertility of *Invention*, the same wisdom of *Disposition*; the same *Judgment* in observance of *Decencies*; the same lustre and vigor of *Elocution*; the same modesty and majestie of *Number*; briefly the same kind of *Habit*, is required to both; only this latter allows better *stuff*, and therefore would look more deformedly, if *ill drest* in it. (Poems, Preface, p. 14).

Now his self-imposed task is to select carefully among the various theories of poetry, both ancient and modern, in order to compose his ideal poem. We read the *Davideis* as a poem about the composition and writing of epic poetry, and it is our intention in this chapter to synthesise the various arguments and theories in this work. While this reading is sustained throughout the various parts of the work - preface, poem, and notes - our interpretation is informed also by concerns expressed by critical opinion on the apparent discrepancy between two kinds of truth Cowley appears to embrace.

In Davenant's theory these are distinguished as "truth narrative" and "truth operative:" the first deals with the past and "is the Idoll of Historians;" the second, "by effects continually alive, is the Mistresse of Poets."⁴ A consideration of critical opinion would show the centrality of this issue of poetry and truth by linking it to the incomplete status of the poem.

The *Davideis* has arguably suffered the most desperate fate of all Cowley's major works; it has been largely ignored for reasons that could be found in comments made by its most notable critics through the ages. Compared to the other traditional writings such as *The Civil War* and *The Mistress* which have been issued individually at different times, the *Davideis* is only usually released as part of Cowley's complete works. This means that in the twentieth century it was only released in the two-part English Writings edited by Waller, because its release as part of the Collected Works is still projected. And yet it was well received by Cowley's public,⁵ a typical reaction being that of regret for the incomplete poem such as Lord Broghill expressed: "But why dost thou thyself and us so wrong / As to begin and not conclude thy song?" ("To Mr. Cowley on his *Davideis*").⁶ However, towards the end of the century dissenting voices began to be heard, including that of Thomas Rymer who produced the first significant criticism of the poem in 1694. He esteemed Cowley "a more happy genius for heroick verse than either Spenser or Davenant,"⁷ but he was unhappy with certain matters ranging from the choice of title and subject to the lack of unity in the plot and Cowley's perceived inability to sustain the measures of heroic verse.⁸ Dryden, though famously inspired by the *Davideis* in *MacFlecknoe*, was to have untold influence on succeeding generations with this seemingly reluctant condemnation:

I look'd over the Darling of my youth, the Famous *Cowley*: there I found, instead of them [Beautiful Turns of Words and Thoughts], the Points of Wit, and Quirks of Epigram, even in the *Davideis*, a Heroic Poem, ... but no Elegant turns, either on the word or on the thought.⁹

In his "Life of Cowley" of 1779, Johnson wrote lengthily about the work, as if in compensation for the silence he claimed it had had to endure:

There are not many examples of so great a work produced by an author generally read and generally praised that has crept through a century with so little regard. Whatever is said of Cowley, is meant of his other works. Of the *Davideis* no mention is made; it never appears in books, nor emerges in conversation.¹⁰

Johnson gives two main reasons for the neglect of the *Davideis* in his time: the choice of subject, and Cowley's performance. The subject of "Sacred History" presents a twofold difficulty: first, "all addition to that which is already sufficient for the purposes of religion seems not only useless, but in some degree profane;" second, "such events as were produced by ... Divine Power are above the power of human genius to dignify." On Cowley's style, there is a charge of providing inferences rather than images at the expense of the reader's delight; and also, "nothing can be more disgusting than a narrative spangled with conceits."¹¹ But just as he did with *The Mistress*, Johnson does find the learning instructive: "If the continuation of the *Davideis* can be missed, it is for the learning that had been diffused over it, and the notes in which it had been explained." He feels so strongly about this, Johnson, that he says it again:

In the perusal of the *Davideis*, as of all Cowley's works, we find wit and learning unprofitably squandered. Attention has no relief; the affections are never moved; we are sometimes surprised, but never delighted, and find much to admire, but little to approve. Still, however, it is the work of Cowley, of a mind capacious by nature, and replenished by study.¹²

Johnson's views had a great bearing on subsequent critical assessment of the *Davideis*.¹³ Citing certain lines from "The Life of Cowley," Thomas Greene, writing in 1963, observes that "Dr. Johnson's strictures ... can scarcely be improved upon." In particular, he adds his voice to the question of truth in the *Davideis*: how could

Cowley's objective of grounding his poem in truth be reconciled with his practice of wielding his poetic licence and departing from the truth? Greene concedes only the fact of historical significance to the *Davideis*, the poem's importance residing largely in the fact that it was "the first thorough-going neoclassical epic in England." This makes it an "important landmark, historically if not artistically."¹⁴ But then Greene tempers even this historical significance when he associates it with *Paradise Lost*, in a manner as to suggest that the *Davideis* is only important as a preamble to Milton's poem.¹⁵ Among Cowley's traditional critics, Loiseau has gone beyond establishing the link between the two works to question whether Milton would have written his poem as an epic, rather than, say, a poetic drama like *Samson Agonistes*, had it not been for Cowley's example.¹⁶ But his most insightful comments are on Cowley's "duality of intention," that is, the discrepancy between historical and scientific truth on the one hand, and poetic truth on the other; and again between his bold theories on the one hand, and his timorous practice on the other.¹⁷ In a conclusion that synthesises Johnson's observations as well as those Greene would make, Loiseau comments on Cowley's "honourable failure" in the *Davideis*:

Fine and subtle rather than robust, his personality is not suited to the epic. ... The sustained excellence of the genre is alien to his nature. The *Davideis* has fatally proved a failure for him. Honourable failure all the same! The work is not devoid of merit. But it does not capture our attention from an artistic point of view as it does as a document of seventeenth century literary history. Through it we see an age seeking equilibrium, thrown into conflicts and contradictions, steeped at once in theology and humanism, impassioned by modern reason and yet faithful to the superstitions of the past. Cowley was wrong not to make a choice. But had he done so, his work would not have provided us with so much instruction.¹⁸

Hinman, writing about the time Greene did and fully aware of Loiseau's comments, agrees with those who found Cowley's natural genius unsuited to the epic. In a significant development, however, he adopts a more positive attitude and finds enough to commend the poem:

The *Davideis*, though unfinished, is worth reading. Cowley's poetic energy was more suited to lyric than to epic poetry; but he was capable of the epic conceptions that often impart a lofty dignity to his lyrics; he had enough to say to produce an epic; and he could tell a story well. The

Recently David Hopkins and Tom Mason have included portions of the poem on particular themes in their publication of Cowley's selected poetry. Thus the readership could sample 'Hell' under the theme of "How to Live," and the 'Music of Creation' under "On Poetry."²⁰ Their comments on the *Davideis* point to Cowley's lack of solemnity or certainly a natural aversion to sustaining the solemn manner, comments that corroborate those pronouncing Cowley's genius unsuited to the epic. Still, the comments are intended to highlight Cowley's "smiling manner" and his constant striving to keep the reader delighted with his language and tone:

What may seem strange is that this familiar, smiling manner is also the ground tone ... at times of his attempt to write a religious epic, the *Davideis*. ... Cowley's diction remains familiar even when the subject-matter treats topics which would seem to demand the most elevated or serious language. ... Cowley is never entirely solemn.²¹

We intend to keep the positive attitude of some of the commentators while confronting the subject of poetry and truth and related issues that constitute the main thrust of traditional criticism. For example, we choose not to perceive these issues as shortcomings just because the poem remained unfinished; rather, we would show that Cowley's practice or execution merely confirms certain near-irreconcilable differences inherent in his stated intention. Put differently, the section in this chapter devoted to Cowley's reinvention, as a divine poet writing a sacred poem, will examine how the sheer notion of 'sacred epic' is inherently contradictory. This establishes the basis for the discussion in the final section on the *Davideis* as a poem about the writing of poetry, a poem that reveals Cowley as poet and critic at one and the same time.

Our position brings to light different arguments from those of criticism that seeks to interpret the *Davideis* as an allegory, for such are the apparent parallels between the

biblical society depicted and Cowley's own. Nethercot, for example, finds evidence in Book IV to suggest that the poem is a political allegory.

The art of cloaking a modern political allegory in a Biblical narrative was still to be brought to perfection by Dryden, but in the first half of the fourth book of his epic Cowley provided his successor with an excellent example of how the thing could be done.²²

Frank Kermode even takes this view to an unpalatable extreme when commenting on Nethercot's interpretation:

Nethercot's theory is that the whole book constitutes an addition made in the same spirit as the expurgated passage of the 1656 Preface and the Ode *Brutus* – written, in fact, during Cowley's undoubted period of apostasy. ... The poem contains, in that book which Nethercot plausibly regarded as an allegory, evidence that Cowley was thinking along republican lines.²³

The charge of republicanism from the 1656 Preface, the 'Brutus' Ode, and the *Davideis* section at issue here is one we disagree with.²⁴ Further, when attempting to defend the plausibility of Nethercot's views, Kermode confuses the issue instead. "Even if it were not written as an allegory it might be read as one," he writes, or again, "Whether or no Cowley intended the allegory, ... it could be read as one." He suggests, again unconvincingly, that this would merely follow a pattern of reading such poems as allegories "especially by readers familiar with the idea of such allegory, and particularly in poetry dealing with the Davidic stories."²⁵ Themes of a topical nature that have marked Cowley's previous works do feature in the *Davideis* , such as domestic strife and war, as in *The Civil War* , or the love of *The Mistress* . On the subject of conflict, for example, the poem highlights the perennial fighting between the peoples of Israel and Philistia that finds its climax in the titanic confrontation between David and Goliath, and the domestic conflict between David and Saul. But it was the mention of the Commonwealth, a form of government at odds with monarchy, that spawned the various analogies and interpretations of allegory.²⁶ Even in Cowley's time, William Creed said in a sermon in 1660, the year of the Restoration, that, "The Author of this book of Samuel, or the Kings, seems to have been a Register of our times, and to have foretold of these same changes, we in

our days have lived to see.”²⁷ Book IV of the *Davideis* includes on its Contents page: “*David’s* Speech, containing, The state of the *Commonwealth* under the *Judges*, the *Motives* for which the people desired a *King*,” and also “the manner of *Samuels* quitting his office of *Judge*” (IV, Contents, p. 364). Nethercot is persuaded by the Commonwealth issue and by Cowley’s note on Book IV that, “For all the wickednesses and disorders that we read of during the time of the Judges, are attributed in Scripture to the want of a *King*. *And in those days there was no King in Israel*” (IV, Notes, p. 395). Nethercot seems to preclude other views, however, in insisting that it must be read as an allegory with his claim that the poem was “the extended discussion of ... the same question that was agitating all England at the time [Cowley wrote it]”.²⁸

Rejecting Nethercot’s views, David Trotter still claims a political dimension for the *Davideis* and finds a connection with Cowley’s *Civil War* epic: “Although not a record of contemporary events the epic is, in part at least, political, caught in the violent swirl of allegiances produced by civil war.”²⁹ Trotter proceeds to claim that it “is a work of political despair,” a poem arguing “in terms provided by contemporary political discourse and fully intelligible only in that context.”³⁰ This, however, is a most subjective view, one to which Thomas Corns subscribes when he writes, “I see the poem as another royalist fantasy, the rehearsal of royalist values in action, and I view its abandonment as a further token of Cowley’s political despair.”³¹ Unlike Trotter, Corns is vague and ambiguous, and seems unsure how to criticise the poem. He is frustrated by unsuccessful attempts to find parallels between the poem’s characters and the main political players of the 1650s: “In ‘*Davideis*’ David is (and is not) Charles II, just as Saul is (and is not) Cromwell. No

simple equations obtain.” The reason why no simple equations obtain is that, Cowley’s prefatory comments are entirely confined to preoccupations with epic form and style, and in particular, the nature of the sacred poem, whilst his innovative notes merely explain away aspects of Israel’s history that are important to David’s story. This is his stated aim, just as he does not shy away from discussing the political situation on those occasions when he has written political poetry. Moreover, an analysis of the poem could hardly be made from one book only. Trotter, writing on Book IV in particular, claims that it “must be understood not as a political allegory, but as a political statement.”³² This, together with his intention to “show that the *Davideis* expresses anti-monarchist sentiments,”³³ culminates in the unconvincing view that it is a work of political despair. This view remains unconvincing for us because they seem to suggest that a more propitious political situation for Cowley in 1650s England would have led to a completion of the work and his becoming fulfilled as an epic poet. It is an argument that holds good for the earlier *Civil War* epic, but not for the *Davideis*.

The political dimension aside, Trotter also is fascinated in time-honoured fashion by the “considerable anxiety” that Cowley “reveals about the probability of his narrative.” But his concern is that there are “two types of statement, narrative and footnote, which function according to different criteria of truth.” Further, the possibility for contradiction “increases wherever Cowley, instead of claiming that the narrative at a particular point is probable, admits its improbability, but argues that what is said should be taken ‘in a Poetical sense.’”³⁴ Trotter rightly suggests that it is remarkable that Cowley should seek to justify his choices at all by writing the notes, but his interest does not lie in showing how Cowley attempts through these notes to

explain the processes involved in poetic composition as we intend to do. We agree that there appear to be different criteria for truth, but we find the difference between the prefatory remarks on the ideal of the sacred poem, and the execution or practice in the poem itself. The notes for us become the *ancilla* or 'handmaid' to the poem, rather than a contradiction to the poem. All told, the different interpretations show that various issues find a home both in David's person and his society, for David is the complete hero in whose person is united and reconciled such apparently disparate titles as poet, lover, prince, musician, warrior, sage, scholar, man of God, and ultimately King. With such dynamic attributes, David remains the vehicle by which Cowley aims to achieve his design of walking the "untrodden paths to *Sacred Fame*" (I. 28) and "teach that *Truth is truest Poesie*" (I. 42). It is our aim to examine this quest fully, for the *Davideis* represents Cowley's most obsessive attempt yet to reconcile (sacred) truth and poetry and in the process emphasise the truly divine nature of the poet's mission.

In his instructive prefatory notes, Cowley casts himself in the role of pioneer: "But sure I am, that there is nothing yet in our *Language* (nor perhaps in *any*) that is in any degree answerable to the *Idea* that I conceive of it." (Poems, Preface, p. 14).³⁵ This firm assertion is not due to a lack of awareness of what poets like Tasso and Du Bartas accomplished. He concedes in his explanatory notes that, "Though some in other Languages have attempted the writing a *Divine Poem*; yet none, that I know of, has in English" (I. Notes, p. 266). His desire remains to be known as a pioneer, that is, to be the first to conceive of the idea of a religious epic in English and execute it. In his comprehensive account of The English Epic and Its Background, Tillyard wonders that, "How was it that Cowley ... decided to take with full seriousness those

rules for the strict epic which in the first half of the seventeenth century, though commonly enough known, were not followed?"³⁶ The size of his task could be measured by Davenant's remark that very few poets throughout history could boast the required excellence. "Wee may observe how rarely humane excellence is found; for Heroick Poesy (which, if exact in it selfe, yeelds not to any other humane worke) flow'd but in few," he writes.³⁷ This is borne out because Cowley would remain unfulfilled as an epic poet, the *Davideis* remaining unfinished just like *The Civil War*. But surely the remark does not explain away all incomplete poems including Davenant's own *Gondibert*; and if Cowley thought that heroic poetry 'flowed' in him, why did he remain unfulfilled? Dryden probably had Cowley in mind when coming up with this theory in his *Discourse on Satire*:

I have then, as You see, observ'd the Failings of many great Wits amongst the Moderns, who have attempted to write an Epique Poem. ... The fault is laid on our Religion: They say that Christianity is not capable of those Embellishments which are afforded in the Belief of those Ancient Heathens.³⁸

The incompleteness of the *Civil War* epic could be attributed to the same fault Davenant found with Lucan: "Lucan who chose to write the greatest actions that ever were allow'd to be true did not observe that such an enterprize rather beseem'd an Historian then a Poet."³⁹ While the applicability of this selfsame reason to the *Davideis* is not immediately obvious, Davenant's distinction between the historian and the poet is as important as his distinction between the "truth narrative" of the historian and the "truth operative" of the poet.

The critics who have accused Cowley of embracing both kinds of truth have argued that the difficulty he met in trying to reconcile them compromised the continuation of the work. Cowley himself wrote how, "But I have had neither *Leisure* hitherto, nor have *Appetite* at present to finish the work." (*Poems*, Preface, p. 12). In explaining

further why the “mighty matters” of the *Davideis* had been left “but a third finished,” Nethercot says that Cowley “tired of his subject,” and refers to an explanation given later by the poet:

I thus employed myself not so much out of counsel as the fury of my mind; for I am not able to do nothing, and had no other diversion of my troubles; therefore through a wearisomeness of human affairs to these more pleasing solaces of literature my sick mind betakes itself; and not long after from an irksomeness of the selfsame things, it changes its course and turns off to some other theme.⁴⁰

Cowley insists nevertheless on casting his poem in a positive light, claiming that his efforts could be inspirational by way of “opening of a way to the courage and industry of some other persons, who may be better able to perform it throughly and successfully.” (*Poems*, Preface, p. 14). These words would take on the dimension of prophecy when his work would serve as model for Milton’s, and perhaps were written to pre-empt questions on why he insisted on publishing the incomplete poem.

In making a case for a study of Cowley’s poetics, we find that Davenant appears to be the single most important contemporary influence on his art. *Gondibert* itself is designed as “an Heroick Poem” that compares with the *Davideis* with regard to its promise to combine all the highest forms of literature, only to be left unfinished.

Both poets, together in exile in France, actually met several times to discuss

Davenant’s work:

Gondibert furnished the topic for many conversations between its author and Cowley, who praised the design and encouraged the work. All of the English men of letters in Paris – and there were many of them – discussed it and criticised it.⁴¹

When *Gondibert* finally appeared, it was accompanied by two commendatory poems written by Cowley and Waller, both with the same title: ‘To Sir William Davenant, Upon his two first Books of *Gondibert*, Finished before his Voyage to America.’⁴²

This shows the close association between the poets and their influence on one another, though Cowley never collected his ideas together in one essay or treatise

like Davenant's. Still, the strictures on the divine poem outlined in the Preface, the four completed books out of the projected twelve, and the explanatory notes suffice for our purpose of unravelling his art of composing the kind of heroic poetry which he considered the highest kind of writing.

3.2 Sacred Poetry and the Divine Poet

Too long the *Muses-Land* have Heathen bin;
Their *Gods* too long were *Dev'ls*, and *Vertues Sin*;
But *Thou, Eternal Word*, hast call'd forth *Me*
Th' *Apostle*, to convert that *World* to *Thee*;
T' unbind the charms that in slight *Fables* lie,
And teach that *Truth* is *truest Poesie*.

(*Davideis*, I. 37-42)

The popularity of the *Davideis* was assured upon its publication principally because of Cowley's reinvention as a divine poet writing sacred poetry. Compared to *The Mistress* with its perceived frivolities, the sacred poem showed good taste and was well received especially by moralists and divines.⁴³ Bacon had written how the very nature of the heroic poem was inherently divine because it combined the outstanding virtues of delight and morality: "This [Narrative Poesy, - or Heroical] Poesy conduces not only to delight but also to magnanimity and morality. Whence it may be fairly thought to partake somewhat of a divine nature."⁴⁴ Loiseau comments that, "[Cowley] gained the favour both of frivolous persons through his *Mistress*, and of serious-minded ones through the moral earnestness displayed in [the *Davideis*]."⁴⁵ An anecdote involving an exchange with Lord Broghill shows how the poem fulfilled both the readership and the poet. Broghill, in a poem of his own, claims that at last Cowley has found his true calling which is to write poetry in praise of God. Put differently, the "best of Poets" had at last chosen "the best of themes:"

When to the world thy Muse thou first didst show,
It caused in some wonder and sorrow too,
That such vast parts God unto thee had lent,

And yet they were not in his praises spent,
 But those which in this sacred Poem looke
 Now find thy Blossoms for thy Fruit they tooke. ...
 In this are met the most admired extremes,
 The best of Poets and the best of themes.
 Writing for Heaven thou art inspired from thence,
 Thy subject thus become thy influence.
 Scripture no more the impious ear shall fright,
 Now the best duty is the best delight.

(‘To Mr. Cowley on his *Davideis* ’)⁴⁶

Such praise, spiced by the epithet of “best of Poets” inspired by Heaven, perhaps an application of Cowley’s own description of David as “... best Poet, best of Kings did grow; / The two chief gifts Heav’n could on Man bestow,” was surely unsurpassable. Cowley certainly thought it a fitting reward for his efforts, a defence of his intentions, a reason to continue his bonding with the Muse, and yet more occasion to ensure his immortality. His response is contained in an ode he wrote purposefully to make these points in the climactic third and central stanza, whilst acknowledging the commendation Broghill must have been inspired by his own poetic Muse to write:

The Muse came in more chearful than before,
 And bad me quarrel with her now no more.
 Loe thy reward! Look here and see,
 What I have made (said she)
 My Lover, and belov’d, my *Broghil* do for thee.
 Though thy own verse no lasting fame can give,
 Thou shalt at least in his for ever live.
 What Criticks, the great *Hectors* now in Wit,
 Who Rant and Challenge all men that have Writ,
 Will are t’ oppose thee when
 Broghil in thy defence has drawn his conquering Pen? ...
 Well satisfi’d and proud,
 I straight resolv’d, and solemnly I vow’d,
 That from her service now I ne’r would part.
 So strongly, large Rewards work on a grateful Heart.

(‘Ode. Upon occasion of ... Verses of my Lord Broghills,’ 45-55, 58-61, in *Poems* , pp. 406-9)

The title page to the *Davideis* describes it as “A Sacred Poem of the Troubles of David.” In the words of Trotter, “a crucial factor in the writing of Renaissance epic was the need to reconcile two types of coding, or imitation: literary imitation of classical models, and ethical imitation of Christian values.”⁴⁷ It was the latter aspect that especially enraptured Cowley’s admirers like Broghill. As Sprat’s comments

show, the sheer aspect of being a sacred poem “according to God’s own heart”

ensured that the *Davideis* immediately found a home among the readership:

The subject was truly Divine, even according to God’s own heart: The matter of his invention, all the treasures of knowledge and Histories in the Bible. ... The Design, to submit mortal wit to heavenly Truths: in all there is an admirable mixture of humane Virtues and Passions with religious Raptures.⁴⁸

The background to the *Davideis* reveals the influence of Renaissance and contemporary sources in shaping Cowley’s ideas and motivation for the sacred poem, despite the choice of Virgil’s *Aeneid* as a model for its formal design. The popularity of religious poetry throughout the seventeenth century ensured that fellow Metaphysical poets like Donne, Herbert and Crashaw all attained lasting fame with passionate religious lyrics. But Cowley was not keen on religious lyrics. The kind of religious poem he wanted to write was an epic not unlike that which was becoming increasingly popular on the continent. Works such as Tasso’s *Gerusalemme Liberata (Jerusalem Delivered)*, perhaps the most influential contemporary epic, had been translated and circulated in England. It was a work whose subject and form were comparable to those in Cowley’s design of a divine theme and a traditional epic framework. Also, Du Bartas’s *Semaines (Divine Weeks)*, made popular in England through Sylvester’s translation, greatly captured Cowley’s imagination.⁴⁹ Its author was even “acclaimed in Renaissance England as the Christian Homer.”⁵⁰ Susan Snyder names the *Davideis* among the scriptural or divine poems that “takes over the aim and much of the method of the Second Week, trying to communicate through elaboration and modern parallel the human and divine significance of Biblical events.” Further, it was widely read “and imitated in other ways by poets whose place in the line of couplet development remains unchallenged, like Sandys and Cowley.”⁵¹ Unlike some of his predecessors in the area of divine poetry who were inspired by sheer religious fervour, however, Cowley

appears to be exploring the possibilities of religion and Scripture for the kind of poetry that should bring him the recognition and fame he craves.

Cowley readily acknowledges that the earliest influence on him was one of his English predecessors, Spenser, whose Renaissance classic, *The Fairie Queene*, had provided his maiden reading. He claims to have read all of Spenser before he was twelve and it was his authority that first moulded his precocious talent:

I remember when I began to read, and to take some pleasure in it, there was wont to lie in my Mothers Parlour ... *Spencers Works*; this I happened to fall upon, and was infinitely delighted with the Stories of the Knights, and Giants, and Monsters, and brave Houses, which I found every where there. ... I think I had read him all over before I was twelve years old, and was thus made a Poet as immediately as a Child is made an Eunuch. (*Essays*, "Of Myself," pp. 457-58).

Perhaps it was Spenser's influence that was brought to bear on the creation in the *Davideis* of a figure like Envy, who is brought to life and is characterised with a portrait, speeches, and actions. But Cowley did not harbour Spenser's inclination to people his poem with characters like knights, giants and monsters. It was in the poem he wrote to celebrate Davenant's *Gondibert* that Cowley first announced his ideas on heroic poetry, claiming that there was no longer any place for monsters and such fairy-tale superhuman and supernatural characters in this kind of poetry:

Methinks *Heroick Poesie* till now
Like some fantastique *Fairy Land* did show;
Gods, Devils, Nymphs, Witches, and Gyants race,
And all but *Man* in *Mans chief work* had place.
Thou like some worthy *Knight* with sacred Arms
Dost drive the *Monsters* thence, and end the *Charms*.
In stead of those, dost *Men* and *Manners* plant,
The things which that rich *Soil* did chiefly want.
Yet ev'en thy *Mortals* do their *Gods* excell,
Taught by thy *Muse* to *Fight* and *Love* so well.

(‘To Sir William Davenant,’ 1-10, in *Poems*, pp. 42-3)

Johnson would observe of this poem that, “The verses to Davenant, which are vigorously begun and happily concluded, contain some hints of criticism very justly conceived and happily expressed.”⁵² In his poem of the same title written to celebrate Davenant as well, Waller echoes Cowley's very sentiments and thereby

reveals the extent to which the latter's ideas had been influenced or instigated outright by their group of exiled poets. Both poets give the subject positions of emphasis in their poems, Cowley at the beginning and Waller at the end. Writing in forty-two lines compared to Cowley's forty, Waller commends Davenant's choice of characters in *Gondibert*,

Which no bold tales of *Gods* or *Monsters* swell,
But humane Passions, such as with us dwell.
Man is thy theame, his Vertue or his Rage
Drawn to the life in each elaborate Page.
Mars nor *Bellona* are not named here;
But such a *Gondibert* as both might feare.
Venus had here, and *Hebe* been out-shin'd
By thy bright *Birtha*, and thy *Rhodolind*.
Such is thy happy skill, and such the odds
Betwixt thy *Worthies* and the *Grecian Gods*.
Whose Deity's in vain had here come down,
Where Mortall Beauty wears the Soveraign Crown;
Such as of flesh compos'd, by flesh and blood
(Though not resisted) may be understood.

(Waller, 'To Sir Will. D'avenant,' 29-42)⁵³

For both poets the chief concern is the same, for Cowley's "Dost drive the *Monsters* thence, ... / Instead of those dost *Men* and *Manners* plant" compares with Waller's "Which no bold tales of *Gods* or *Monsters* swell, / But humane Passions,... / *Man* is thy theame." By resolving to place man at the centre of the *Davideis*, Cowley is affirming that heroic and epic action belongs in "the City of man, not of God," to appropriate Greene's words, or that "the most important recognition scenes in epic are ... between the hero and his mortality."⁵⁴

However, the point Cowley and Waller make about the virtues of heroic verse that is devoid of fairy-tale characters quickly turns into a source of disagreement with Davenant, who takes this policy to its most extreme form in *Gondibert* by rejecting the supernatural out of hand. In his Preface, he derides the example of Homer, for example, whose deities were endowed with anthropomorphic attributes despite their

immortality, such that they could be characterised as immortal men, just as the men themselves could be characterised as mortal gods:

Some there are, that object that even in the likelyhoods of Story [*Homer*] doth too frequently intermixe such Fables, as are objects lifted above the Eyes of Nature; ... whilst supernaturally he doth often advance his men to the quality of Gods, and depose his Gods to the condition of men. His Successor to fame, (and consequently to censure) is *Virgill* ... [who] by conversation with Gods and Ghosts, he sometimes deprives us of those naturall probabilities in Story, which are instructive to humane life.⁵⁵

For Davenant, not only does such characterisation in Homer not stand up to the laws of probability or nature, but also the sheer introduction of immortality should be censured. He proceeds to argue that the use of settings like Heaven and Hell are alien to human understanding and to reality. Here is an example he gives of Tasso, a Christian poet like Cowley, who erred in his estimation:

But *Tasso* ... seemes most unfortunate, because his errors ... admit no pardon. Such as are his Councell assembled in Heaven, his Witches Expeditions through the Aire, and enchanted Woods inhabited with Ghosts. ... Yet a Christian Poet (whose Religion little needs the aydes of Invention) hath lesse occasion to imitate such Fables, as meanly illustrate a probable Heaven, by the fashion, and dignity of Courts; and make a resemblance of Hell, out of the Dreames of frighted Women; by which they continue and increase the melancholy mistakes of the People.⁵⁶

The premise on which Davenant bases his conviction is founded in reason, that is, in a concept that associates reality to the material world: "And surely Poets ... should represent the Worlds true image often to our view."⁵⁷ The poet should limit his scope to the bounds of Nature, and therefore not write about Heaven and Hell because they are outside the realms of Nature. Having lambasted the ancients for using characters like gods and ghosts, Davenant proceeds to disown their depiction of Heaven or Hell: "More closely then *Virgill* waits on *Homer*, doth *Statius* attend *Virgill*, and follows him there also where Nature never comes, even into Heaven, and Hell." He attributes this error to indiscriminate imitation and counsels these poets rather to imitate those "[that] lay the Scene at home in their owne Country, so much they avoid those remote regions of Heaven and Hell."⁵⁸

Cowley does not believe also in characters like the witches Davenant mentions, or in the Olympian gods or the mythical and fairy-tale characters of some of his predecessors. But he does not preclude supernatural characters altogether in heroic poetry. He disagrees with Davenant because, unlike the gods, fairies, nymphs, giants, fairies, witches and other fantastic characters in some heroic poems, God is real to the Christian poet who seeks to glorify Him. Commenting on Davenant's rejection of the supernatural, David Gladish insisted that this was a failing because true epics must gain from themes of immortality:

Instead of dealing with his subject in the context of the Immortals and immortality, as the epic must do, Davenant presumes to scan only mankind and the material environment. ... In omitting the supernatural as an operative, causative, and reciprocating agent, Davenant presents a realistic, or at least a Deistic, world, at the sacrifice of the profundity which true epics normally gain from themes of immortality, whether of the race, of the Olymp, or of Heaven.⁵⁹

For Cowley, the inclusion of supernatural characters is therefore not in question, but their existence should be acknowledged in Christian belief as with Satan in his Hell or God in Heaven. It is for this reason that Cowley claims superiority for his projected epic over classical ones because, while retaining the traditional form, he would improve the subject matter into sacred poetry and thus ensure a greater nobleness of purpose. In short he is claiming superiority over any epic, such as *Gondibert*, that does not have his divine purpose, which is why he would have endorsed Milton's stated aim in *Paradise Lost* that, "I may assert the eternal providence, / And justify the ways of God to men" (I. 25-6).⁶⁰ In Cowley's grand design, there could be no more beautiful poem than one that deals with the noblest subject, sacred or divine matter, written in the most elevated form, epic. Milton, conscious of his superiority as a Christian epic poet, would present his subject matter early on in Book IX as "more heroic" and a "higher argument" than anything that the classics offered. His is an argument and a poem "Not less but more heroic than the wrath / Of stern Achilles on his foe pursued" (*Paradise Lost*, IX. 14-15); and

again he asserts himself: "... Me of these / Nor skilled nor studious, higher argument / Remains ..." (IX. 41-3).⁶¹

The *Davideis* represents Cowley's first attempt at sacred poetry and therefore a maiden engagement with this kind of truth, documented and disseminated by the Bible, and described by Sprat as "heavenly truths." By choosing to propagate this truth, he highlights the vital lack of religious continuity between the classical age and his own. Biblical matter, abetted by the advent of Christianity, has impacted upon age-old attitudes towards Greek and Roman mythology to the extent that Cowley's prefatory notes comment on his scathing rejection of the gods and religious beliefs Homer and Virgil held dear:

Though those mad stories of the *Gods* and *Heroes*, seem in themselves so ridiculous; yet they were then the *whole Body* (or rather *Chaos*) of the *Theologie* of those times. ... There was no other *Religion*, and therefore *that* was better than *none at all*. But to us who have no need of them, to us who deride their *folly*, and are wearied with their *impertinencies*, they ought to appear no better arguments for *Verse*, than those of their worthy *Successors*, the *Knights Errant*. (*Poems*, Preface, p. 13).

Cowley's age perceived the Bible as a record of truth and Christian humanists accepted its unquestioned authority. Also, Cowley is infinitely excited by the possibilities for poetry offered by the Bible that is "more proper for the ornaments of *Wit or Learning*," compared to, say, mythology. Further, it affords "plentiful matter," yields "incomparably more Poetical variety," and describes far more "great, heroic and supernatural actions." He effectively claims finally to have found a treasure trove for the best themes, if not forms: "All the *Books* of the *Bible* are either already most admirable, and exalted pieces of *Poesie*, or are the best *Materials* in the world for it." (*Poems*, Preface, pp. 13-14). The notion of exalted or sublime poetry is all about poetry that is beautiful and yields delight, for "the main end of *Poesie*," he asserts, "[is] to communicate delight to others." (*Poems*, Preface, p. 7). Echoes of

this traditional combination of beauty and delight in poetry are found in an imaginary conversation that Hopkins and Mason fashion between the Muse and her poet: “A poet is a human speaking to humans. In your stories, you try to make everything as *beautiful* as possible, in order to give your audience as much *pleasure* as possible.”⁶² Nothing could be more powerful, then, than poetry that at once brought untold delight and praised the Godhead, the Bible being exemplary in this regard. Again Cowley relishes the many “bright and magnificent subjects ... the *Holy Scripture* affords and *proffers*, as it were, to *Poesie*, in the wise managing and illustrating whereof, the *Glory of God Almighty* might be joynd with the singular utility and noblest delight of *Mankind*.” (*Poems*, Preface, p. 12). Cowley therefore has a clear objective of attaining ‘sacred fame’ and thus become the complete poet, capable of writing on all kinds of themes and exploring all extant forms. He is not daunted by this challenge; in fact, he effectively projects himself as a “good artist” intent on bringing his vast experience to bear on this divinely inspired undertaking:

None but a good *Artist* will know how to do it: neither must we think to cut and polish *Diamonds* with so little pains and skill as we do *Marble*. For if any man design to compose a *Sacred Poem*, by only turning a story of the *Scripture* ... into *Rhyme*; He is so far from elevating of *Poesie*, that he only *abases Divinity*. In brief, he who can write a *prophane Poem well*, may write a *Divine one better*, but he who can do that but ill, will do this much worse. (*Poems*, Preface, p. 14).

The *Davideis* is intended to fulfil a long-held wish, one that Cowley stated in an earlier poem where he contemplates matters divine: “And when my *Muse* soars with so strong a Wing, / ‘Twill learn of things *Divine* ...” (‘On the Death of Mr. Crashaw,’ 73-4). Previously his Muse had inspired him mostly to write odes and elegies like the one on Crashaw, encomiums to friends and patrons, and love lyrics that idolised woman. He was guilty, then, of desecrating poetry, which he describes as a “*Divine Science*,” because he used it for anything but its ordained purpose, namely “the glory of God Almighty.” Not surprisingly then, he declares a *mea*

culpa, for it seems as though the true end of poetry is suddenly revealed to him as in a supernatural revelation or an epiphany:

It is not without grief and indignation that I behold that *Divine Science* employing all her inexhaustible riches of *Wit* and *Eloquence*, either in the wicked and beggerly *Flattery* of great persons, or the unmanly *Idolizing* of *Foolish Women*, or the wretched affectation of scurril *Laughter*, or at best on the confused antiquated *Dreams* of senseless *Fables* and *Metamorphoses*. Amongst all holy and consecrated things which the *Devil* ever stole and alienated from the service of the *Deity*, ... there is none that he so universally, and so long usurpt, as *Poetry*. It is time to recover it out of the *Tyrants* hands, and to restore it to the *Kingdom of God*, who is the *Father* of it. (Preface, Poems, p. 12)

Cowley wants to place himself at the forefront of developments to restore poetry to its divine sanctuary. One of the means of achieving this is to assume the mantle of the Christian poet who is chosen to instruct that Christ is the truth and Christianity is the touchstone. Little wonder, then, that in the poem itself he should appeal to Christ to guide him in his poetic and apostolic mission. Epic composition in itself might be a tribute to human ability and poetic accomplishment, but the sure guidance of Christ would ensure that his poetic fury becomes a “blest rage” and that his divine undertaking would lead unerringly to “*Sacred Fame*.” Here is his invocation:

Ev'en *Thou* my breast with such blest rage inspire,
As mov'd the tuneful strings of *Dauids Lyre*,
Guid my bold steps with thine old *trav'elling Flame*,
In these untrodden paths to *Sacred Fame*;
Lo, with *pure hands* thy heav'only *Fires* to take,
My well-chang'd *Muse* I a chaste *Vestal* make!
(I. 25-30)

Whilst asking for heavenly assistance and dedicating his poem to Christ, Cowley claims that he is freeing himself from such earthly and mundane ventures as the love pursuits of *The Mistress*. Poetry fills the vacuum a mistress would otherwise occupy, it becomes the love of his life, his “*Magdalene*” which he consecrates and renders sacred in order to devote it to Christ:

From earths vain joys, and loves soft witchcraft free,
I consecrate my *Magdalene* to Thee!
Lo, this great word, a *Temple* to thy praise,
On polisht *Pillars* of strong *Verse* I raise!
(I. 31-4)

The demands of sacred poetry, as well as an established link with the Christ figure, hold sway in determining the hero or central figure of the poem. In true epic tradition it must be a character with sufficient interest to demand lasting attention in a long, drawn-out poem of twelve books. In the traditional epic, such a character must be human and must have heroic attributes. Greene begins his study on epic by devoting a chapter to "The Norms of Epic" in which he comments on the hero thus:

The hero must be acting for the community, the City; he may incarnate the City, but he must be nonetheless an individual with a name. What he does must be dangerous, not only for other people but for him. It must involve a test. Moreover it must make a difference; it must change in some manner the hero's situation or the community's. ... Above all the heroic act must be visible, external, objective. ... It must certify itself in the world of space and time, the world which the eye can see or the inner eye imagine.⁶³

In the sacred epic the responsibility is even broader, for the hero should represent an ideal, indeed the Christian ideal, and demonstrate the workings of a godlike mind. The choice of David is fitting in this regard, for he is Christ's forebear as depicted in the Bible. The first book of the New Testament, Matthew's Gospel, begins by tracing the genealogy of Jesus Christ and establishes the link with David. On this subject of Christ's ancestry, Cowley describes David as "the man who had that sacred pre-eminence above all other *Princes*, to be the best and mightiest of that Royal Race from whence *Christ* himself, according to the flesh disdained not to descend." (Poems, Preface, p. 12). The Christian ideal, so important because Christ is the greatest of all biblical heroes in Christian belief, is thus ensured through David and his own Davidic tradition.

There is much to admire in the choice of David as hero, a choice that provides ample scope for the grand epic treatment:

For what worthier *subject* could have been chosen among all the *Treasuries* of past times, then the *Life* of this young *Prince*; who from so small beginnings, through such infinite troubles and oppositions, by such miraculous virtues and excellencies, and with such incomparable variety of wonderful actions and accidents, became the greatest *Monarch* that ever sat on the most *famous* Throne of the whole Earth. (Poems, Preface, p. 12)

David thus represents the kingly ideal as arguably the greatest monarch to preside over the destiny of the Jews. Also, David represents a poetic ideal by means of the fact that the authorship of the Book of Psalms, is attributed to him. Cowley appears to subscribe to the view that the Psalms provide the finest example of biblical, hence sacred, poetry: "Whom should a *Poet* more justly seek to *honour*, then the highest Person who ever *honoured* his Profession?" (*Poems*, Preface, p. 12). He opens the *Davideis* by emphasising precisely these different ideals that David represents:

I sing the *Man* who *Judahs Scepter* bore
In that right hand which held the *Crook* before;
Who from best *Poet*, best of *Kings* did grow;
The two chief *gifts Heav'n* could on *Man* bestow.
(I. 1-4)

Cowley seeks to follow the example of his hero and write poetry that would provide the greatest delight and yet establish the glory of God. If he needed any assurance in his identification with David, it came from his contemporaries who identified the first sacred poets as those Old Testament heroes who made the songs and psalms. Davenant, for example, had written of his intention to swell the list of supreme poets by adding the names of "*Moses, David, and Salomon, for their Songs, Psalmes, and Anthemes; the Second (David) being the acknowledg'd Favorite of God; whom he had gain'd by excellent Praises in sacred Poesy.*"⁶⁴

One of Cowley's additions in the *Davideis* is the description of Heaven to go with that of Hell he introduced already in his previous *Civil War* epic. The sheer notion of vastness associated with the epic means that its setting occupies the boundless realms of space and the cosmos. This had led Bacon, for example, to suggest that the author of the heroic poem was fulfilling the desire of the boundless human mind and imagination to transcend the delimiting bounds of nature:

A sound argument may be drawn from Poesy, to show that there is agreeable to the spirit of man a

more ample greatness, a more perfect order, and a more beautiful variety than it can anywhere find in nature. And therefore, since the acts and events which are the subject of real history are not of sufficient grandeur to satisfy the human mind, Poesy is at hand to feign acts more heroical.⁶⁵

The description of Heaven does not only bear this theory out, it enhances the sacred motif of the poem also. On the notion of vastness associated with the epic's setting, Greene summed up the traditional position thus:

The first quality of the epic imagination is expansiveness, the impulse to extend its own luminosity in ever widening circles. ... The epic universe is there to be invaded by the human will and imagination. Epic answers to man's need to clear away an area he can apprehend, if not dominate, and commonly this area expands to fill the epic universe, to cover the known world and reach heaven and hell. Epic characteristically refuses to be hemmed in, in time as well as space; it raids the unknown and colonizes it.⁶⁶

The place of Heaven, especially in relation to that of Hell, is crucial both to the conflict and to the setting of the poem. Regarding conflict, Cowley traces the source of all human and universal conflict back to the mythical confrontation eternally opposing Hell to Heaven. The human world, traditionally placed between these two, becomes a theatre for the forces of good and evil to do battle, with the hero claiming God for his ally and his enemies perceived as Satan's agents. By establishing a role for Heaven in David's life, the poet is making a statement about heroism as a divine attribute and a form of divine dispensation. The association of evil with Satan is one that Cowley has made already in *The Civil War* from where almost thirty lines describing Hell are copied directly into the *Davideis*. The difference this time, however, is a further description of the setting that is Heaven, God's abode, which description gives balance to the poem and even more evidence of the expansiveness of the poet's imagination:

Above those petty *Lamps* that guild the *Night*;
There is a place o'reflown with hallowed *Light*;
Where *Heaven*, as if it left it self behind,
Is stretcht out far, nor its own *bounds* can find:
Here *peaceful Flames* swell up the sacred place,
Nor can the glory contain it self in th' endless space. ...
On no smooth *Sphear* the restless *seasons* slide,
No circling *Motion* doth swift *Time* divide;

Nothing is there *To come*, and nothing *Past*,
But an *Eternal Now* does always last.
There sits th' *Almighty*, *First* of all, and *End*;
Whom nothing but *Himself* can comprehend.
(l. 349-54, 359-64)

Concerning the setting of time, Cowley associates the concept of eternity to the person of God by way of further explanation in his notes: "The whole and perfect possession, ever all at once, of a Being without beginning or ending. Which *Definition* is followed by [Thomas Aquinas] and all the *Schoolmen*; who therefore call *Eternity Nunc stans*, a *standing Now*." (I, Notes, p. 273). The story of David is actually Old Testament history, but the Bible itself is structured to begin and end in God who represents eternity as the beginning and the end of all time. There is no chronological pattern of events; rather, events that are past, present, and future are interwoven possibly to reflect the fact that these distinctions of time are not relevant in Heaven where "No circling *Motion* doth swift *Time* divide; / Nothing is there *To come*, and nothing *Past*." The poem is set therefore in eternity, with no conceptual difference in the timing of events, in the same way as the theatre of action that Heaven represents is boundless, an "endless space."

We have been examining Cowley's theories from the Preface and the intentions he states at the start of the poem. It is when he strives to execute these intentions that he finds it increasingly impossible to reconcile the theories with his practice. It appears that his main challenge is to match divine truth to poetic truth, but the sacred poem becomes increasingly at odds with the epic *per se*. Could the Christian poet who serves as a medium for divine truth also wield the poetic licence required in epic composition? Sidney suggested in his *Defence of Poesy* that the "feigned example" in poetry had the same effect as the "true example,"⁶⁷ but surely not when narrating biblical history or the truths of Scripture. Perhaps the key statement in the Preface is

that lying, though part of the poet's make-up, is not essential to the sacred poem.

The poet does not need to lie, feign or invent truths because his work and the world of the poem are already "*confined to Heaven*:"

It will meet with wonderful variety of new, more beautiful, and more delightful *Objects*; neither will it want *Room*, by being *confined to Heaven*. There is not so great a *Lye* to be found in any *Poet*, as the vulgar conceit of men, that *Lying* is *Essential* to good *Poetry*. (*Poems*, Preface, p. 13)

In the poem itself Cowley declares himself the apostle whom it behoves to convert heathens into Christians. Christ is the "*Eternal Word*" of John's Gospel whose call the Christian poet answers:

Too long the *Muses-Land* have *Heathen* bin;
Their *Gods* too long were *Dev'ls*, and *Vertues Sin*;
But *Thou, Eternal Word*, has call'd forth *Me*
Th' *Apostle*, to convert that *World* to *Thee*.
T' unbind the charms that in slight *Fables* lie,
And teach that *Truth* is *truest Poesie*.

(I. 37-42)

Cowley's search for truth has led him to the Bible and to Christ, enabling him to conclude that truth could not be found among heathens, in fables or indeed in all poetry that is not inspired by Scripture. This is because truth is divine; truth resides with the Godhead whose message in the Bible renders that work sacrosanct and one of revelation. As with the statement in the Preface, one of the key statements in all of the *Davideis* is that, "*Truth is truest Poesie!*" This truth is therefore sacred or divine truth, and the truest poetry is that of the sacred or divine poet. This statement is consistent both with the theories announced in the Preface and with the intentions stated especially at the beginning of the poem. But it is a statement Cowley finds difficult in actual practice to reconcile to his natural inclination and poetic will to feign. In order to answer the call of Christ and take on the role of His apostle, in short, to write as a Christian poet, Cowley would require sound theological conviction that would make his mission one of disseminating biblical truths and Christian doctrine. The true Christian poet is therefore a religious poet, not one who

is merely engaging a biblical subject in order to win poetic fame. The poet is compelled to choose therefore either to feign in true poetic fashion, or not to feign as becomes a Christian poet. It is a situation comparable to that which Hopkins and Mason enact in a speech from the Muse to her poet, that “Do you see now why Poetry and Religion are at opposite poles?” The Muse proceeds to advise her poet in this instance to choose poetry and leave religion to priests:

Priests require worshippers to believe that the gods are not the product of human imagination but exist as absolute facts. Such belief makes pleasure irrelevant – or worse, distracting, diminishing. For you, for me, *mortal pleasure alone is sacred*. Pleasure is our business; our true religion. You will give mortals the peculiar pleasure that comes when they ... recognise creatures of delight with delight – in delight.⁶⁸

Perhaps the crux of the matter lies in the very concept of ‘sacred epic’ that constitutes an anomalous epithet. Commentators who have expanded on Loiseau’s “duality of intention” have suggested that Cowley should have made a choice. Loiseau suggests a choice, for example, between theology and humanism. Perhaps it could just have been a choice between ‘sacred’ (poem) and ‘epic.’ Greene, despite making seemingly patronising comments like “Cowley could not remember that epic poetry requires the subordination of part to whole,” or about “Cowley’s lack of structural intelligence,”⁶⁹ finally meanders his way to the poetry and truth issue. “In practice Cowley departs from the truth, or from his own beliefs regarding the truth, and records the departures in his exhaustive notes,” he writes, and then surprisingly proceeds to exonerate him somewhat:

The issue of epic truthfulness which troubled Cowley can be related to ... international critical controversy. ... Critics were not agreed as to whether the heroic action should be based on actual history, or how closely it should follow history. ... Despite continuing debate, the cause of historical fidelity was markedly gaining ground on the continent by the mid-seventeenth century, at the expense of the imagination.⁷⁰

Johnson had pointed out the apparent discrepancy between “Sacred History” and (epic) poetry, but we have not found evidence to support his other assertion that

Cowley's style was equally to blame for the unfinished status of the work. Still, he had the merit of suggesting that Cowley's task became a near-impossible task upon the very conception of his lofty project. Only Milton would rise up to such a challenge in *Paradise Lost* with "my advent'rous song" (I. 13) or "Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme" (I. 16). The inherent difficulty of the task puts into perspective Milton's awesome efforts, for "only the massive, proud, and isolated independence of a Milton could have brought even this poem into being."⁷¹

3.3 The *Davideis* and the art of composition

As first a various uniform'd Hint we find
Rise in some god-like Poets fertile Mind, ...
Such was Gods Poem, this Worlds new Essay;
So wild and rude in its first draught it lay; ...
Till they to Number and fixt Rules were brought
By the eternal Minds Poetique Thought.

(*Davideis*, I. 447-8, 451-2, 455-6)

Cowley's grand scheme in the *Davideis* is one of immense proportions as he assumes the mantle of a poet and a critic all at once. The poet otherwise composes and the critic explains, but Cowley does both. He begins each book with a Contents page similar to the "Argument" of Davenant, and later Milton. And then there is his novel but audacious approach of providing notes at the end of each book explaining various aspects of his composition. This aspect of the poem is most unusual, for Cowley is treading on new ground by sharing his notes with the reader whom he expects will raise him on the pedestal to lasting fame. The work, then, is full of theories and an attempt to implement or apply them, so much so that an interpretation or a study of the *Davideis* becomes a study of Cowley's poetics. Even as he models his poem on Virgil, Cowley already shakes off the shackles of the sacred poem that require a strict adherence to biblical matter, for the European epic is rooted in timeless traditions and age-old conventions that the composing poet should adhere to. He therefore

harks back to theories stretching from antiquity to the Renaissance, explaining the bulk of his choices and the wielding of his poetic licence in his innovative notes. In the previous section we have already noted how some of these theories and conventions, such as the norms of epic that Greene discusses, have been shown to work alongside the sacred ideal. In actual practice Cowley finally makes his choice to abandon the sacred ideal for traditional concepts and established epic practice.

Cowley's Preface comments just enough on the form of the *Davideis* to announce that it was on Virgil's *Aeneid* that he modelled the formal aspects of the poem, the *Aeneid* that has been considered "the central work of western culture, ... the central classic of western civilization."⁷² In the Renaissance it was "widely taught in the schools and generally considered to be the greatest of epics."⁷³ For Cowley to acknowledge Virgil as his master and the supreme poetic authority was natural during the Renaissance when "Virgil was long considered the supreme classic, the *poeta*, master of the true poetic language by comparison to which all others were vernaculars."⁷⁴ He follows the Virgilian model as closely as possible, and goes as far as to translate the first book of the *Davideis* into Latin.⁷⁵ This was possibly in honour of Virgil, an attempt to emulate him in his own language, or perhaps to find out how Virgil would have written the same poem in Latin, just as the *Davideis* itself was an attempt to emulate the master's achievements in English. His efforts are symptomatic of the way Renaissance England looked up to the Latins just as the latter had previously so admired the Greeks.⁷⁶ Such is Cowley's consciousness of Virgil's style that *Davideidos* is almost certainly written in a manner designed to have won Virgil's approval. John Denham, for example, would later suggest as much when writing about Cowley:

But for his Latin vein, so clear,
Strong, full, and high it doth appear,
That were immortal Virgil here,
Him, for his judge, he would not fear.

(‘On Mr Abraham Cowley: His Death and Burial Amongst the Ancient Poets,’ 57-60)⁷⁷

The foremost notion of poetic composition has always been associated in Cowley’s mind with the event of the Creation. He describes poetry in his Preface, for example, as “that *Divine Science*,” and refers to “*God-like Poets*” in his panegyric ‘To Sir William Davenant:’ “So *God-like Poets* do past things rehearse, / Not *change*, but *Heighten* Nature by their Verse” (21-2). But it is in the *Davideis* that this theory is given amplification as ‘The Music of Creation:’⁷⁸

As first a various uniform’d *Hint* we find
Rise in some god-like *Poets* fertile *Mind*,
Till all the parts and words their places take,
And with just marches *verse* and *musick* make;
Such was *Gods Poem*, this *Worlds* new *Essay*;
So wild and rude in its first draught it lay;
Th’ ungovern’d parts no *Correspondence* knew,
An artless *war* from thwarting *Motions* grew;
Till they to *Number* and fixt *Rules* were brought
By the *eternal Minds* *Poetique Thought*. ...
The *motions* *Strait*, and *Round*, and *Swift*, and *Slow*,
And *Short*, and *Long*, were mixt and woven so,
Did in such artful *Figures* smoothly fall,
As made this decent measur’d *Dance of All*.
And this is *Musick*; *Sounds* that charm our ears,
Are but one *Dressing* that rich *Science* wears.
Though no man hear’t, though no man it rehearse,
Yet will there still be *Musick* in my *Verse*.

(I. 447-56, 461-8)

Cowley’s use of the epic simile, comparing the Creation of God to the poet’s creations, fulfils the description Greene gave to this trademark feature of the grand epic style:

The characteristic imagery of epic ... expands, exfoliates, fulfills itself in harmony with the expansive, emancipated imagination governing it. The epic simile cannot, by definition, be a brief candle of an impression; it is permitted to fill out space to its natural limits.⁷⁹

God’s poem is the world he created. The notion of poetic composition as approaching the divine act, or indeed of the poet as a ‘creating god’ and conversely of God as the supreme artist, was a popular one in Renaissance literary theory. It

went back to the very meaning of the word poet, here explained by Cristoforo Landino, member of the fifteenth century Florentine Academy, in the first of his essays setting forth a theory of poetry:

The Greeks derived the word 'poet' from the verb *poiein*, which is halfway between 'creating', which is what God does when out of nothing He brings something into existence, and 'making', which is what men do when in any art they compose out of matter and form.⁸⁰

Cowley would possibly have been familiar both with Tasso's epic and his often-revised theoretical work on heroic poetry, the *Discorsi (Discourses)*. In it there is this long, drawn-out analogy between the Creation and poetic composition.

For just as in this marvellous domain of God called the world we behold the sky scattered over and adorned with such variety, ... yet for all this, the world that contains in its womb so many diverse things is one, its form and essence one, and one that links its many parts and ties them together in discordant concord, and nothing is missing, yet nothing is there that does not serve for necessity or ornament; just so, I judge, the great poet (who is called divine for no other reason than that as he resembles the supreme Artificer in his working he comes to participate in his divinity) can form a poem in which, as in a little world, one may read [such variety]. ... Yet the poem that contains so great a variety of matters none the less should be one, one in form and soul. ... And if that is true, the art of composing a poem resembles the plan of the universe.⁸¹

That "Landino assumes an analogy between the poet as maker and the divine artificer who produced our universe,"⁸² shows how indebted Tasso was to his predecessor as a literary theorist. Among English theorists, Sidney, another disciple of Landino's, synthesised prevailing theories in his *Defence of Poesy* and wrote for example that,

Give right honour to the heavenly Maker of that maker, who having made man to His own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature: which in nothing he showeth so much as in poetry, when with the force of a divine breath he bringeth things forth surpassing her doings.⁸³

These Renaissance theories that Cowley appeared to have espoused heartily echoed ancient theories rather than alter them. The intervening ages had not really destroyed the divine-like aura that surrounded the poet's mission such that Cowley has no hesitation in speaking of the "god-like *Poets fertile Mind*."

And so the poet was perceived to be following the same principles that God observed in the Creation, a notion Cowley explains thus: "The World was made in *Number*,

Weight, and *Measure*; which are all qualities of a good *Poem*. This order and proportion of things is the true *Musick* of the world.” (I, Notes, p. 276). Order and proportion apply also to the construction of a building to which the composition of poetry was sometimes likened. Thus Davenant describes his poem as “this new Building” needing certain materials: “And because you shall passe through this new Building with more ease to your disquisition, I will acquaint you, what care I tooke of my materialls, ere I began to worke.”⁸⁴ Early on in the *Davideis* Cowley likens the act of dedicating his work to Christ to that of building a temple for His worship, with the strong verse of this great work likened to the polished pillars of the building. The comparison is marked by the way he shifts the emphasis of the conceit onto its vehicle item, the temple, as he urges Christ to dwell in it!

Lo, this great work, a *Temple* to thy praise,
 On polisht *Pillars* of strong *Verse* I raise!
 A *Temple*, where if *Thou* vouchsafe to dwell,
 It *Solomons*, and *Herods* shall excel.
 (I. 33-6)

But it is with the making of music that the composition of poetry is most commonly associated. From the first idea that inspires the poet, through the first wild draft in the poet’s mind to the final copy, the watchwords are proportion and correspondence of the parts, as well as all the qualities of music and dance, namely decency of measures and harmony. Davenant had typically used the one to aid his depiction of the other whilst explaining his choice of form: “Numbers in Verse must, like distinct kindes of Musick, be expos’d to the uncertaine and different taste of severall Eares.” Further, the choice of his rhyming pattern was not intended to “make the sound lesse Heroick, but rather [to] adapt it to a plaine and stately composing of Musick.”⁸⁵ In Cowley’s passage on the Creation, God as supreme artificer and musician “... made this decent measur’d *Dance of All*. / And this is *Musick*; *Sounds* that charm our ears.” Hopkins and Mason capture such descriptions in the succinct definition of the poem

as “a song and a dance of human thought and human truth.”⁸⁶ Cowley seals the relationship of these arts by proclaiming that their ideal forms, bound together as always, are to be found in the Heaven. In that divine realm the singing angels represent a model of constant harmony and perpetual inspiration:

*Music and Verse seem'd born and bred up here;
Scarce the blest Heav'en that rings with Angels voyce,
Does more with constant Harmony rejoyce.
The sacred Muse does here each brest inspire.*
(l. 762-5)

The timeless association of music and verse partly explains Cowley's adherence to the tradition of epic poets describing their work as song. The very first line of the *Davideis* starts with “I Sing the *Man*...!” It had effectively become a formula to speak of the song as part of the “*Proposition* of the whole work” (I. Notes, p. 266), applied by poets from Homer to Milton and accompanied by the invocation. The pagan poet, operating within an essentially oral tradition, usually claimed that his work was a song, owing its composition to a favourite goddess or the Muse. In Greek mythology, Calliope, whose name means ‘beautiful voice,’ was the Muse of epic poetry and one of the nine goddesses of the arts, all daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne. Being herself the daughter of Uranus (or Heaven) and Gaia (or Earth) and with a name that meant ‘memory,’ Mnemosyne was felt also to inspire the epic poet who, working in the oral tradition, was thus enabled to sing his entire piece from memory. That is why the traditional epic was such a tribute to human memory as well as the human capacity for song, because for all his inspiration the poet remained human. Cowley's Muse or guide will henceforth be Christ whom Milton would make one of his heroes. Whereas Cowley ‘sings’ one man, Milton would sing two, namely Adam, the first man, and Christ, who is the Son of God as well as being “one greater man” (*Paradise Lost*, I. 4).⁸⁷

By naming Christ as the divine force enabling him to write of subjects otherwise beyond his normal reach, Cowley is fulfilling his duty by his Christian faith, asserting the historical and spiritual reality of the Christ figure, and proclaiming the superiority of a sacred Muse over the traditional Muse. The fact that Cowley did not have such an invocation in *The Civil War* shows that this time it is more than a mere convention; it is a way of confining his work to Heaven where Christ is enthroned by the side of God:

Thou, who didst *Davids* royal stem adorn,
 And gav'st him *birth* from whom thy self was't *born* .
 Who didst in *Triumph* at *Deaths Court* appear,
 And slew'st him with thy *Nails* , thy *Cross* and *Spear* ,
 Whilst *Hells* black *Tyrant* trembled to behold,
 The glorious light he forfeited of old,
 Who Heav'ns *glad burden* now, and justest pride,
 Sit'st high enthron'd next thy great *Fathers* side, ...
 Ev'en *Thou* my breast with such blest rage inspire,
 As mov'd the tuneful strings of *Davids Lyre* ,
 Guid my bold steps with thine old *trav'elling Flame* ,
 In these untrodden paths to *Sacred Fame* .

(l. 13-20, 25-8)

“Blest rage” is a variation on the traditional *furor poeticus* or poetic fury by which means the poet was necessarily divinely inspired. The articulation of this theory goes back to Plato’s *Ion*: “A poet is a light thing, and winged, and holy, and cannot compose before he gets inspiration and loses control of his senses and his reason has deserted him. ... They utter these words ... [not] by skill, but by a divine power.”⁸⁸ It was still a popular theory in the seventeenth century when Dryden wrote: “We, who are Priests of *Apollo*, have not the Inspiration when we please, but must wait till the God comes rushing in us, and invades us with a fury, which we are not able to resist.”⁸⁹ Cowley offers an account in the poem of how inspiration could be achieved by the soul that becomes possessed, when it is given a glimpse into divine truth away from human realms. And so he relates how “... his ravisht *Soul* with sudden flight / Soar'd above *present Times*, and humane sight” (l. 759-60). This is comparable to

Milton's claim that, "Into the heav'n of heav'ns I have presumed, / An earthly guest, and drawn empyreal air" (*Paradise Lost*, VII. 13-14).⁹⁰

By imploring Christ to inspire him, and to "Guid my bold steps ... / In these untrodden paths to *Sacred Fame*," Cowley is again exploiting a much-used formula, this time the boast of treading new ground. That is why he would have identified with Milton's description of his epic as "my advent'rous song" on "Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme" (*Paradise Lost*, I. 13, 16).⁹¹ He proceeds to explain: "I hope this kind of boast (which I have been taught by almost all the old *Poets*) will not seem immodest," (I. Notes, p. 266). On the choice expression "untrodden paths," Ian Donaldson has found that, "the poetic assertion that one was walking an untrodden path was already a familiar trope by the time of Callimachus."⁹² When citing verses from Virgil and "the old *Poets*" to establish a precedent for his boast, Cowley includes Horace's famous line, "*Non aliena meo pressi pede*" ("I walked not where others trod"). Horace was widely imitated in the use of this same phrase right down to Ben Jonson who chose it as the motto for the title page of his play, *Every Man and His Humour*. Donaldson instances Jonson's choice as a classic example of imitation that he qualifies as a process of absorption and resistance: "a signal ... of each writer's awareness of the time-honoured need, and time-honoured licence, to break with tradition in order to extend it."⁹³ His belief that a formula so deeply entrenched in epic tradition deserved to be perpetuated made Cowley take note of Davenant's break with tradition on this issue. In the poem celebrating *Gondibert*, Cowley had been struck by Davenant's bold resolve not to walk the trodden or beaten path: "Thou in those beaten pathes disdain'st to tread, / And scorn'st to *Live* by robbing of the *Dead*." ('To Sir William Davenant,' 31-2).

Cowley might have admired a revolutionary approach that resisted some aspects of tradition, but he could not fathom Davenant's attempt to break with tradition altogether and yet attempt to write an epic.

The invocation brought to its culmination the fundamental disagreement Cowley had with Davenant, even if the latter had Hobbes's approval. Cowley's, and indeed Milton's, persistence with the invocation came in the wake of fierce criticism from these two disciples of reason. Davenant does not follow this practice in *Gondibert* and rejects the theory of divine inspiration outright in his Preface. For him poetry is not Cowley's divine science, but an art of man. Poetry takes its source in human experience, nature, and reason; it is neither inspired by some mystical outer-world experience nor could human wit be passed off as "an imputation to the Heroique Muse." Homer made an error not to apply reason in his dealings with the Muse: "He often interrogates his Muse, not as his rationall Spirit but as a *Familiar*, separated from his body, so her replies bring him where he spends time in immortal conversation." Davenant then compares this Muse to a bird of prey, with the unwary poet, say, as the object of pursuit or quarry to be preyed upon:

Many ... are taken with those bold flights, and thinke tis with the Muse (whose noble Quarry is men) as with the Eagle, who when he soares high stoopes more prosperously, and is most certaine of his prey. And surely Poets (whose businesse should represent the Worlds true image often to our view) are not lesse prudent than Painters, who when they draw Landshaps, ... terminate the sight with lofty Hills, whose obscure heads are sometimes in the Clowdes.⁹⁴

Davenant was influenced in his ultra-rational theories by Hobbes, his "much honor'd friend," and addressed his Preface to him. Its opening confirms the philosopher's involvement in his daily life and work: "You have done me the honour to allow this Poem a daylie examination as it was writing."⁹⁵ When Davenant, along with Cowley and the other exiles in France would discuss *Gondibert*, Hobbes would usually defend Davenant's views. Nethercot writes how, "Davenant's enthusiasm toward his

poem later excited the derision of Denham and other courtiers, and even the philosopher Hobbes was drawn into the argument, though, on the whole, on Davenant's side."⁹⁶ Hobbes is even more forthright than Davenant on the issue of the invocation and divine inspiration. In his answer to Davenant's Preface, he condemns modern Christian poets who, as Cowley and Milton would do, refuse to give up a practice suited to the ancients. That is why he is full of praise for Davenant's "noble Poesy" that did not use such outdated formulae as the invocation:

You make so small account of the example of almost all the approved Poets, ancient and moderne, who thought fit in the beginning, and some times also in the progresse of the Poems, to invoke a Muse, or some other Deitye, that should dictate to them, or assist them in their writings. ... But why a Christian should thinke it an ornament to his Poeme; either to profane the true God, or invoke a false one, I can imagine no cause, but a reasonlesse imitation of custome; of a foolish custome; by which a man enabled to speake wisely from the principles of nature, and his owne meditation, loves rather to be thought to speake by inspiration, like a Bagpipe.⁹⁷

Cowley rejects the idea that this practice should be discarded just because poets who did not know Christ first used it. The ancients might have invented the tradition but not the divine power he implores. His defence against Hobbes's charge is the first item of his notes: "The custom of beginning all *Poems*, with a *Proposition* ... and an *Invocation* of some God for his assistance to go through with it, is so solemnly and religiously observed by all the ancient *Poets*." Surely there could be no better way: "Though I could have found out a better way, I should not (I think) have ventured upon it. But there can be, I believe, none better." Having answered Hobbes's various charges so far, he rounds it up by rebutting possibly the most serious of them, that of a Christian poet profaning the true God or invoking a false one. He is fully conscious, he claims, that he is a Christian poet practising what had been instituted by heathen poets: "If [the *Invocation*] became a *Heathen*, is no less *Necessary* for a *Christian Poet*" (I. Notes, p. 266). Though his choice of Christ as guide would give his work the stamp of Christian authority, it would be Milton who would finally

authenticate the practice of the invocation and thereby put to rest the notion that the Christian poet invokes false gods.

Milton's practice would bear out Cowley's claims fully with regard to the invocation, the Muse's role, and the naming of this Muse. For all his wily craftsmanship, scholarly genius and encyclopaedic knowledge, he asks for divine assistance from his "heavenly Muse" for the adventurous song that *Paradise Lost* represents:

Sing heavenly Muse, that on the secret top
Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
That shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed,
In the beginning how the heavens and earth
Rose out of chaos: or if Sion hill
Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flowed
Fast by the oracle of God, I thence
Invoke thy aid to my advent'rous song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
Above the Aonian mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.

(*Paradise Lost*, I. 6-16)⁹⁸

It is significant that the heavenly Muse should soar above the Aonian mount into hitherto unknown realms. The Aonian mount was the Helicon, a mountain famous as the favourite haunt of the traditional Muses. It was on its slopes, where Hesiod had his home, for example, that perhaps the first known visit of the Muses was recorded, for they came seemingly unsolicited to give him what he claimed was the gift of song.⁹⁹ Milton's Muse is therefore superior to the traditional Muse, soaring much higher than the Muses could ever have done as it makes its way to the celestial realms of its heavenly abode. It is from here that she visits him to inspire his heroic song, hence the easy manner in which poetry comes to him:

If answerable style I can obtain
Of my celestial patroness, who deigns
Her nightly visitation unimplored,
And dictates to me slumbering, or inspires
Easy my unpremeditated verse:
Since first this subject for heroic song
Pleased me long choosing

(*Paradise Lost*, IX. 20-26)¹⁰⁰

Milton's Muse, though a celestial patroness, appears to perform a role essentially the same as that assigned to the traditional Muse. Through her very role of inspiring the poet, the Muse, though of divine extraction, still recalls the Muses of old, an association that is enhanced by the name Milton gives her:

Descend from heaven Urania, by that name
If rightly thou art called, whose voice divine
Following, above the Olympian hill I soar,
Above the flight of Pegasean wing.
The meaning, not the name I call: for thou
Nor of the Muses nine, nor on the top
Of old Olympus dwellst, but heav'nly born.
Before the hills appeared, or fountain flowed,
Thou with eternal wisdom didst converse,
Wisdom thy sister, and with her didst play
In presence of the almighty Father, pleased
With thy celestial song. ...

*(Paradise Lost, VII. 1-12)*¹⁰¹

And so Milton calls his heavenly Muse Urania, for so the name Urania literally means "Heavenly One" and pertains to the last of the nine Muses, the one who presided over astronomy in the same way that Calliope, for example, presided over epic poetry. The Muses lived in Mount Olympus where they were born and made the Helicon where they met Hesiod a place sacred to them. As the ancient Muse of astronomy, it is appropriate to evoke Urania when recalling the flight of Pegasus, the mythical horse associated with Helicon and the Muses, and often depicted carrying a poet to symbolise poetic flight, inspiration and immortality. But Milton does not intend the meaning of the name as previously understood: "The meaning, not the name I call." He intends Urania to mean the Christian Muse in line with the new meaning given the name in the sixteenth century.¹⁰² Of interest to us is the way Milton goes to great lengths to dissociate her from the nine Muses of mythology, thereby distancing himself from the Olympian gods and pagan tradition: "... for thou / Nor of the Muses nine, nor on the top / Of old Olympus dwellst, but heav'nly born." His Urania is divine, resides in Heaven, and has been associated with wisdom from the beginning of time. Therefore her name might be ancient, but her attributes

are those Cowley has already claimed for the Christ figure. Cowley would have felt fully vindicated in his use of the invocation when Milton boldly claims that his Muse speaks to him with the Voice of God, coming as she does from the “presence of the almighty Father, pleased / With thy celestial song. ...”

The proposition and invocation aside, it is fitting to discuss further theories of composition and the use of poetic licence, theories that contribute to Cowley’s development as a critic. Essentially, the inherent difficulty of reconciling the truths of religion and sacred history to poetic truth has forced Cowley to make a reluctant choice, and his response is to restore fully the poet’s right to feign. The facts of biblical history are sacrificed where they clash or do not fit in with the poetic imagination; the poet must have the full powers of the creating god available to him, the composing poet who traditionally “calleth the sweet Muses to inspire into him a good invention.”¹⁰³ Not surprisingly, he latches onto theories that proclaim the poet’s right to feign; he discards, in one fell stroke as it were, any ambitions to stick to Biblical history. In this example, “That *Naas* was slain in this battel, I have *Josephus* his authority; that *Jonathan* slew him, is a *stroke* of *Poetry*” (IV, Notes, p. 399). His original intention, to “teach that *Truth* is *truest Poesie*,” remains just that, an ideal born of a striving to propagate sacred truth that has been found to clash with the reality of literary practice. Therefore his new statement of intent is the assertion of the privilege of poets as in the use of the “*Poetical Licence* ... which therefore I make bold to use upon several occasions” (III. Notes, p. 352).

As the poem progresses Cowley becomes increasingly open about his feigning in his fascinating notes. In defence of a noble and true cause, deceit could be just, a lie

could be virtuous and dissembling could be good. For example, those sent to murder David unjustly are foiled by his wife, Michol, who is inspired to deceive the would-be killers with a made-up story that her husband is sick, speechless and in the throes of death already. Her elaborate deceit has involved placing a statue to look like David on his sick bed, a veritable dissembling act that could only be described with the use of the oxymoron as in a just deceit or a virtuous lie:

To unjust Force she'opposes just deceit.
She meets the Murd'ersers with a *vertuous Ly*,
And good dissembling Tears. ...
My much-wrong'd *Husband* speechless lies within,
And has too little left of vital breath
To know his *Murderers*, or to feel his *Death*.
One *hour* will do your work---
... A pale *Statues* head
In linnen wrapt appear'd on *Davids* bed;
Two servants mournful stand and silent by,
And on the table med'cinal reliques ly. ...
And for th' *Impression God* prepar'ed their *Sence*;
They saw, believ'd all this, and parted thence.
(I. 575-7)

Cowley's illuminating comments on this passage reveal how analogous Michol's dissembling act is to that of the composing poet, and most of all he defines poetic truth. It is a truth that obeys one main law, the law of probability:

Even [Michol's] deceit I am forced to help, with all the circumstances I could imagine, especially with that most material one, *And for th' impression God prepared their sense*. And now concerning the *Civil use of Images* among the Jews, I have declared my opinion before, which whether it be true or no, is not of importance in *Poetry*, as long as it hath any appearance of probability. (I. Notes, p. 278).

"Whether it be true or no, is not of importance in *Poetry*, as long as it hath ... probability" is a defining statement of Cowley's poetics. It is a measure of the way literary theory has evolved that the poet-critic of the mid-seventeenth century freely acknowledges the centrality of fiction in his art, as long as the poet abides by the rules of making fiction. Examples abound in the rest of the *Davideis* of Cowley's practical application of his theory.

Davenant wrote that, whilst the poet's licence gave him a special privilege, he had a duty to ensure that credibility remained the touchstone of poetic composition. "But to make great actions credible is the principall Art of Poets," he writes, "who though they avouch the utility of Fictions, should not make use of their Priviledge to the detriment of the Reader."¹⁰⁴ Cowley accepts unhesitatingly that the poets are artists, and their art is to make actions credible or probable, that is, to transform these acts by means of fiction if necessary. It is because being a poet defines him that Cowley need not bring his practice in line with that of the theologian transmitting sacred truth as documented in the Scriptures or that of the historian narrating biblical history. In Davenant's words, "Austere Historians have enter'd into bond to truth," but the historian's truth is "an obligation which were in Poets, as foolish and unnecessary as is the bondage of false Martyrs, who lye in chaines for a mistaken opinion."¹⁰⁵ An example from the poem is this account of Cain killing Abel: "I saw him fling the stone, as if he meant, / At once his *Murder* and his *Monument*" (I. 201-02). With the effects of alliteration assured with "*Murder*" and "*Monument*," the stone that Cain is supposed to have flung like a club is amplified in epic proportions into a tombstone or monument. Cowley explains that such amplification was standard practice among the poets of old: "That this stone was big enough to be the *Monument* or *Tombstone* of *Abel*, is not so *Hyperbolical*, as what *Virgil* says in the same kind of *Turnus*, ... which he takes from *Homer*" (I. Notes, p. 270). But his biblical source does not mention how the slaying of Abel was done, which Cowley judges to constitute an omission. To act on his judgement, he would need to rectify this omission and to do so he must feign. Thus he explains: "And therefore I had the Liberty to chuse that which I thought was most probable; which is, that he knockt him on the head with some great stone, which was one of the first ordinary and most natural weapons of

Anger” (I. Notes, p. 270). In a similar example he confirms in the notes the necessity of filling lapses in the original story, but the addition must be probable. “The Scripture does not say particularly, that *Abram* surprised this Army in, or after a debauch, but it is probable enough for my turn, that this was the case,” he writes (I. Notes, p. 309). Probability is again the watchword when Cowley chooses a disguise for the devil, for such is the horror of his true appearance that he must assume a pleasing shape in order to make friends. When the devil Envy, the Fiend’s messenger, visits Saul, she perfects the art of dissembling by appearing as Father Benjamin, one of his favourites: “And nimbly there the reverend shape she took / Of *Father Benjamin...*” (I. 240-41). Cowley justifies the disguise thus:

No person is so improper to perswade man to any undertaking, as the *Devil* without a disguise: which is the reason why I make him here ... in the likeness of *Benjamin*, who ... might the most probably seem concern’d for [Saul’s] welfare, and the easiliest be believed and obeyed.” (I. Notes, p. 272).

Also, Cowley’s presentation of the Devil’s character provides an example of how the poet achieves credibility: “It were improper for a *Devil* to make a whole speech without some lies in it” (I. Notes, p. 270). Therefore the principle of probability, as related to credibility and necessity, is truly the defining principle in poetic composition. Again Davenant concurs, associating the principle of giving delight to that of feigning: “For why should a Poet doubt in Story to mend the intrigues of Fortune by more delightfull conveyances of probable fictions?”¹⁰⁶

Having established the element of probability as the distinguishing tenet of poetic creation, Cowley feels confident to bring the reader’s attention to certain situations that “must be taken in a Poetical sense” (I. Notes, p. 268). The description of the Hell setting provides one such instance:

Beneath the silent chambers of the earth,
Where the *Suns* fruitful beams give *metals* birth, ...
Beneath the dens where *unfletcht* *Tempests* lye,

And infant *Winds* their tender *Voyces* try,
 Beneath the mighty *Oceans* wealthy *Caves*,
 Beneath th' eternal *Fountain* of all *Waves*, ...
 There is a place deep, wondrous deep below,
 Which genuine *Night* and *Horror* does o'reflow;
 No bound controls th' unwearied space, but *Hell*
Endless as those dire *pains* that in it dwell.

(I. 71-2, 75-8, 81-4)

“Beneath ... the earth, ... There is a place deep, wondrous deep below!” So Cowley writes, despite confessing to being unsure where Hell actually is: “On my conscience, where e’re it be...” (I. Notes, p. 268). And yet, if the reader accepts the description in a poetical sense, then the actuality or not of Hell becomes of little importance. The poet’s consideration is to situate it, to give it a location. He places it deep beneath the earth through the principle of elimination, for he first of all considers placing it in the centre of the earth: “For else, making *Hell* to be in the *Centre* of the *Earth*, it is far from infinitely large, or deep” (Notes, p. 268). Cowley’s confidence of the poetical sense working here comes from the knowledge that a long line of poets are agreed on the existence of Hell, and he cites names like Bellarmin, Lessius, Ribera, Virgil, Hesiod, Statius and Aeschylus. By the same token, there is common consensus regarding the existence of Heaven, thought to be situated above the earth, within celestial realms and therefore diametrically opposite the setting Cowley has found for Hell. Still, he works on similar principles by making Heaven boundless as well:

Above the subtle foldings of the *Sky*,
 Above the well-set *Orbs* soft *Harmony*,
 Above those petty *Lamps* that guild the *Night*;
 There is a place o'reflown with hallowed *Light*;
 Where *Heaven*, as if it left it self behind,
 Is stretcht out far, nor its own *bounds* can find.
 Here *peaceful Flames* swell up the sacred place,
 Nor can the glory contain it self in th' endless space.

(I. 347-54)

As with the description of Hell, this one of Heaven is popular, and therefore to complement the element of probability, “to speak according to common opinion, though it be false, is so far from being a fault in Poetry” (I. Notes, p. 272).

The poet who expresses common opinion in the *vox populi, vox dei* tradition, might be doing so at the expense of making known his private opinion: “I would not have the Reader judge of my opinion by what I say” (I, Notes, p. 272). Such situations arise when the poet has to choose between offering delight through common opinion or offering instruction if he voiced his own. For Cowley it is an obvious choice, for the poet takes satisfaction in a description such as that of Heaven that gives untold delight to the reader. That is how it is possible to say something “Which is false, but so well said, that it were ill changed for the *Truth*,” as in this line: “*The bowing Mountains seem to nod.*” He is affirming, along with Davenant, that the poet’s primary duty is to communicate delight, usually through beautiful language. This has been tested by the ancients: “*Virgil* did not look upon, what might be spoken most *Truly*, but what most *gracefully*; and aimed more at *Delighting* his *Readers*, than at *instructing Husbandmen*. Infinite are the examples of this kind among the *Poets*” (I. Notes, p. 273). In *Paradise Lost*, Milton, finding Heaven and Hell indispensable to the epic framework, would follow Cowley’s example and depict them. In fact, he would even neologise by introducing the term “Pandemonium” – from the Greek ‘pan’ meaning “all,” and ‘daimon’ meaning “demon” – to denote Hell, that is, a place for all demons.

A favourite device of Cowley’s is that of the *deus ex machina*, a Latin form much used in poetic composition, and borrowed from the practice in Greek theatre whereby

gods were supposedly suspended above the stage in order to intervene in seemingly hopeless situations. The poet, finding it impossible to explain an event or action by logical procedure or the rules of Nature, achieves plausibility by means of the sudden appearance of a supernatural being or by divine intervention. A good example from the *Davideis* is the statement discussed earlier: “And for th’ *Impression God* prepar’ed their *Sence*; / They saw, believ’d all this, and parted thence.” Cowley made this up: “[Of] all the circumstances I could imagine, the *deus ex machina* was “that most material one” (I. Notes, p. 278). When David’s wife shows his would-be killers a statue lying motionless on the bed, they believe they are looking at a dying man and thus depart. These men would surely not have been so gullible, elaborate though Michol’s plan to fool them had been, had Cowley not attributed it to divine intervention in order to achieve plausibility. The more usual situation is for the supernatural being to appear on the scene of the event and act decisively. The classic situation occurs in Homer’s *Iliad* where Achilles is stopped from killing Agamemnon in his anger by the sudden intervention of Pallas Athena, sent by Hera who cared alike for both men.¹⁰⁷ Similar examples abound in the Bible, and Cowley is particularly fascinated by the depiction of Abraham on the verge of killing his son, Isaac, in sacrifice to God, “Till *one* leapt nimbly forth by *Gods* command / Like *Lightning* from a *Cloud*, and stopt his hand” (II. 318-19). Cowley thus takes his cue from classical precedent and biblical example, and it is one he uses to great effect, nowhere more so than when Saul attempts to kill David. David is attempting to cure Saul of his fit when the latter becomes so consumed with murderous intent that he attempts to execute it, cue the *deus ex machina*:

The barb’arous *Patient* casts at him his *spear*,
 (The usual *Scepter* that rough hand did bear)
 Casts it with violent strength, but into th’ roome
 An *Arm* more strong and sure then his was come;
 An *Angel* whose unseen and easie might

Put by the *weapon*, and *misled* it *right*.
How vain Mans pow'er is! Unless God command,
The weapon disobeys his *Masters* hand!
(I. 526-33)

Closely associated with the sudden divine intervention is the very act of the descent from Heaven, where angels take on the role attributed to the messenger of the Greek and Roman gods in mythology. Greene, making this convention the subject of his study, writes of the celestial descent that: "It represents the intersection of time and the timeless; it points to the human realm of paramount concern to the gods; and it brings divine authority to the unfolding heroic action."¹⁰⁸ Cowley, fully aware of an epic convention that shows the interdependence of the human and divine worlds, chooses the angel Gabriel to make the descent, the name Gabriel signifying "*Power of God*" (II. Notes, p. 321). David, privileged to have events beyond his own time projected to him, is asleep when he sees a vision of his descendants leading up to Christ. The ultimate vision is that of the infant Christ nestling in Mary's arms: "In her chaste arms th' *Eternal Infant* lies, / Th' *Almighty voyce* chang'ed into feeble cries" (II. 777-78). It is at this moment that the angel descends to confirm it:

When *Gabriel* (no blest *Spirit* more kind or fair)
Bodies and cloathes himself with thickned ayr.
All like a comely *youth* in lifes fresh bloom;
Rare workmanship, *and* wrought by heavenly loom! ...
Thus he appears to David, at first sight
All earth-bred fears and sorrows take their flight.
In rushes joy divine, and hope, and rest;
A Sacred calm shines through his peaceful brest.
Hail, *Man* below'ed! From highest heav'en (said he)
My mighty *Master* sends thee *health* by me.
The things thou saw'est are full of *truth* and *light*,
Shap'd in the *glass* of the divine *Foresight*. ...
My *Fellow-Servant*, credit what I tell.
Straight into shapeless air unseen he fell.
(II. 793-6, 821-28, 837-39)

Cowley attempts constantly to refine the technique of projecting events set in a future time, mainly done through the medium of prophecies, dreams and visions. He makes

full use of biblical practice here to aid the design of the poem, for such mediums constitute the favourite means of divine revelation in the Scriptures. In Book I, where a third of the action takes place in a College of Prophets, the students do become inspired to tell those future things which, as Gabriel tells David, are “Shap’d in the *glass* of the divine *Foresight*.” Their inspiration therefore recalls that of the Old Testament prophets, especially in the way it comes to them as dreams:

And when the Down of *sleep* does softly fall,
Their *Dreams* are heavenly then, and mystical.
With hasty wings *Time present* they outfly,
And tread the doubtful *Maze of Destiny*.

(I. 875-78)

“*Time present they outfly!*” This is a fitting description of Cowley’s design in the *Davideis*, brought about by his fondness for the traditional patterns like that of opening the epic poem in *media res*, right in the middle of the action. The epic poet conventionally “begins *in media res* to indicate at the outset that chronology is not a constraint. Universals, of course, are timeless.”¹⁰⁹ The whole structure of the work then relies considerably on the flashback technique as well as that of projecting into the future. The poem starts at the point where Saul is King, hence the need for the complete picture of Israel’s history from the time when it was still ruled by Judges. Books III and IV are basically flashbacks that re-enact both David’s past and Israel’s history. Had the poem not been untimely stopped after the fourth book, the story would have reverted to the present challenges facing David as hero, all the while showing how his personal fortunes are irrevocably tied to those of all Israel over which he was destined to rule as King.

For the formal aspects of his work, it was Cowley’s keenness to write the correct neo-classical epic that led him to copy the Virgilian model in such a manner as to explore fully the virtues of poetic imitation and tradition. Such correctness of form

had rarely been attained, but he was perceived to have come closest, Virgil, hence the admiration he enjoyed from his own time through the Renaissance as the greatest poet within the European epic tradition. Cowley's very title of *Davideis*, reverting to the tradition of the eponymous hero, follows Virgil in naming his epic after the hero.

He begins by choosing the motto for his title page from Virgil:

*Me verò primùm dulces ante omnia Musæ,
Quarum sacra fero ingenti percussus amore,
Accipiant, Cæliq; vias ac Sidera monstrent.*

Since Poetry for me comes first – my goddess and chief delight
Whose devotee I am, with a master-passion adoring –
I wish above all she accept me, revealing the stars and the sky-routes.

(*Davideis*, Motto, culled from Virgil, *Georgics* II. 475-77)

He is a devotee of Poetry, a devotee of his Muse that is capable of such delight.

Rather than be fazed by the responsibility of the poet, he adores it and welcomes its unique nature. Poetry is the sacred object of the sweet Muses, unique in showing the sky-routes to the heavens and the divine world of truth. The fame Cowley craves from his epic is akin to the immortal renown to which Virgil's Muse inspired him in the *Aeneid*. And so he designs this "*Davideis*, or an *Heroical Poem of the Troubles of David ...into Twelve Books*; not for the *Tribes* sake, but after the *Pattern* of our Master *Virgil*" (Poems, Preface, p. 11). Homer's design had been twenty-four books, but Cowley encourages the imitator, when faced with a choice between Greek and Latin example, to opt for the latter. "[In] almost all things," he wrote when comparing the two, "I prefer the judgment of the *Latins*" (I. Notes, p. 266). Cowley's favourite classical poets were Virgil and his peer Horace, and his declared preference for the Latin over the Greek poets is down to them. Commenting on a friend's daring attempt to polish a Latin expression – "*Sic? Sic juvat ire sub umbras*" – Cowley observes that, "[This] does indeed a little mend the sense; but then the expression is lame, and not like the *Latin of Virgil*, or of that age" (I. Notes, pp. 269-70).

From within the poem, there are several notable instances where Cowley follows Virgil closely, perhaps most visibly the short line and the long line that are alien to traditional English verse. In the case of the short line or hemistich, the sense of the rest of the line though not stated is implied, and Cowley uses it as a pause for reflection after a weighty statement. For example, the Fiend, Lucifer, contemplates the horrors of Hell: “Did I lose *Heav'en* for this?” (I. 142). The hemistich literally means half of a line in Greek, hence this awe-struck direct address to the Godhead: “Thou Great *Three-One*?” (I. 370). For Cowley, the hemistich reveals a facet of Virgil’s genius, as he explains:

Though none of the *English Poets*, nor indeed of the ancient *Latin*, have imitated *Virgil* in leaving sometimes half-verses yet his authority alone is sufficient, especially in a thing that looks so naturally and gracefully: and I am far from their opinion, who think that *Virgil* himself intended to have filled up those broken *Hemestiques*: ... nothing could there be well added. (Notes, p. 269).

Cowley’s attempt to pre-empt censure of his use of the hemistich did not stop Johnson from doing exactly that. Cowley is erroneous, for Johnson, “because this truncation is imitated by no subsequent Roman poet; because Virgil himself filled up one broken line in the heat of recitation; because in one the sense is unfinished; and because ... a *cæsura* and a full stop will equally effect.”¹¹⁰ Regarding the use of the long line, it is primarily intended to match the form of the verse to the subject. An example comes in the description of Heaven: “Nor can the glory contain it self in th’endless space” (I. 354). The long line here shows the appropriateness of not containing the endless space of Heaven within the confines of the standard pentameter. Overrunning the line, as it were, is again evident in this example where a stream overflows its banks: “And overruns the neighboring fields with violent course” (I. 60). Here is Cowley’s explanation for the occasional long line:

It is not by *negligence* that this verse is so loose, long, and as it were, *Vast*; it is to paint in the number the nature of the thing which it describes. ... The thing is, that the disposition of words and numbers should be such, as that out of the order and sound of them, the things themselves may

be represented. ... The *Latins* sometimes did it, and their *Prince, Virgil*, always. (I. Notes, p. 273).

Johnson is less sure how to appreciate Cowley's long line: "I know not whether he has in many of these instances attained the representation or resemblances that he purposes."¹¹¹ The seriousness with which Cowley assumes his discipleship of Virgil shows that he could never have identified with those who insisted, like Davenant, on a break with the classical past in the composition of epic. Not for Cowley, then, the huge experimentation, or indeed revolution, with form that marks *Gondibert*, designed in five books that represent acts, with each book further divided into several cantos that represent the scenes of a play. For Cowley, his neo-classical epic should follow classical precedent, for it remains the most traditional of forms.

Perhaps Cowley's most significant contribution to the form of English epic was his use of the heroic couplet. The epic, a piece of considerable length, traditionally took the form of narrative in continuous writing, though Davenant had exceptionally cast *Gondibert* in the dramatic mould with a stanza pattern. Cowley's is a narrative in the traditional mould with each book averaging almost a thousand lines consisting of heroic couplets. He might not have given particular thought to other alternatives but just used it because it had become second nature to him. After all he had used it consistently throughout his poetry career, especially in *The Civil War*. This fact was yet to come to light when Tillyard wrote, and therefore he considered that it is in this area, "as an experiment in epic metre and style," that the *Davideis* becomes particularly important. For him, this experiment marked a watershed in the use of the couplet in this kind of poetry: "There is of course no great authentic English epic in the heroic couplet. ... Cowley's *Davideis* marks a true stage in fitting the couplet to the task of high narrative."¹¹² The singular importance of Cowley's choice could be gauged by two important considerations, namely that he was the only one in his

time who seemed to favour it, and that it would become very fashionable in the neo-classical age, beginning with Dryden for whom Cowley was a natural English model. A century on from Cowley, in 1762, Robert Lloyd would compose a piece 'On Rhyme' in which he would consider how important it was in the seventeenth century that the poet chose to use blank verse or rhyming couplets. Milton was the prototype of the one, Dryden of the other kind:

Can only blank admit sublime?
Go read and measure Dryden's rhyme.
Admire the magic of his song,
See how his numbers roll along
With ease and strength and varied pause
Nor cramped by sound nor metre's laws.
Is harmony the gift of rhyme?
Read, if you can, your Milton's chime;
Where taste, not wantonly severe,
May find the measure, not the ear.
As rhyme, rich rhyme, was Dryden's choice,
And blank has Milton's nobler voice,
I deem it as the subject's lead,
That either measure will succeed;
That rhyme will readily admit
Of fancy, numbers, force, and wit;
But though each couplet has its strength,
It palls in works of epic length.

(Robert Lloyd, 'Rhyming couplets v. blank verse,' from 'On Rhyme')¹¹³

The couplet offered Cowley huge possibilities for witticisms, axioms or aphorisms, as in this example: "*Heav'en contain'd Virgins oft, and will do more; / Never did Virgin contain Heav'en before*" (II. 779-80). Some of his axiomatic statements take on the allure of proverbs, as in this suggestion that a human person's greatness cannot hide for too long: "*Stones of small worth may lye unseen by Day, / But Night it self does the rich Gem betray*" (III. 37-8). In another example he brings his wit to bear on a pithy variation of the *vox populi, vox dei* theme: "*And in one sound when all mens voices join, / The Musick's tun'd no doubt by hand divine*" (IV. 218-19). He sometimes uses the couplet for contrast from one line to the next: "*Sometimes a violent laughter scru'd his face, / And sometimes ready tears dropt down apace*" (III.

55-6). Most of Cowley's lines are end-stopped, but the occasional run-on lines are usually to be found within the couplet. An example is this address to Mary where the wit lies in the punning technique, albeit with the aid of the caesura: "Hail, full of *Grace*, thee the whole world shall call / Above all *blest*; *Thee*, who shalt bless them all" (II. 753-4). Having perfected his use of the couplet in previous long poems such as 'The Puritans Lecture,' 'The Puritan and the Papist,' and of course *The Civil War*, Cowley could be said to have made popular a form that would become standard practice, indeed the accepted norm, in the neo-classical period.

Cowley's contemporaries who practised the epic form did not share his enthusiasm for the use of the couplet. Davenant, writing *Gondibert* in lines that rhymed alternately, gave a justification against continuous writing in couplets: "I belev'd it would be more pleasant to the Reader, in a Worke of Length, to give this respite or pause, between every *Stanza* then to run him out of breath with continu'd *Couplets*." Cowley clearly disagrees with this statement, though he might not have had any quarrel with Davenant's further assertion that "alternate Rime" does not amount to "lowliness of cadence" and therefore does not make the sound "less Heroick."¹¹⁴ In fact, Cowley inserts songs in the form of odes into the *Davideis* on two occasions, one in the first book (I. 483-515) and the other in the third (III. 785-813). In both instances he veers away from his normal verse pattern and experiments with different line lengths and rhyming patterns. Here is the example of the first of three such stanzas with peculiar patterns that constitute the first song:

When *Israel* was from bondage led,
Led by th' *Almighty's* hand
From out a forreign land,
The great *Sea* beheld, and fled.
As men pursu'd, when that fear past they find,
Stop on some higher ground to look behind,
So whilst through wondrous ways
The sacred *Army* went,

The *Waves* afar stood up to gaze,
And their own *Rocks* did represent,
Solid as *Waters* are above the *Firmament*.
(I. 483-493)

Though these unorthodox songs constitute exceptions that serve very occasionally to punctuate the flowing narrative, they show how much Cowley is willing to take certain liberties with the epic form. He justifies this practice thus: "For this liberty of inserting an *Ode* into an *Heroick Poem*, I have no authority or example; and therefore like men who venture upon a new coast, I must run the hazard of it. We must sometimes be bold to innovate." (I. Notes, p. 277).

Cowley's use of language is marked by the observance of various rules, some traditional and some innovative, all contributing to give his style a mark of its own. One of the more unusual rules he observes is that which he labels as decency. This instance involves the use of repetition, one of the outstanding traits of the Homeric style. Cowley copies this trait in this passage where God sends the angel messenger to advise David of Saul's intention to kill him:

So flew this *Angel*, till to *Davids* bed
He came, and thus his sacred Message said,
Awake, young *Man*, hear what thy *King* has sworn;
He swore thy blood should paint this rising Morn.
Yet to him go securely when he sends;
'Tis *Saul* that is your *Foe*, and *God* your *Friends*.
The *Man* who has his *God*, no aid can lack;
And he who bids thee *Go*, will bring thee back.
(I. 423-30)

The angel's speech to David (I. 425-30) is a repetition, using the selfsame words, of the message as given by God Himself moments earlier (I. 407-412). Cowley makes the point that repetition is not a favourite device of his in composition, but that it serves the purpose here of decency:

I do not like *Homers* repeating of long Messages just in the same words: but here I thought it necessary, the Message coming from *God*, from whose words no creature ought to vary, and being delivered by an *Angel*, who was capable of doing it punctually. To have made him say a long, eloquent or figurative speech ... would have pleased perhaps some *Readers*, but would have been a crime against ... *Decency*. (I. Notes, p. 274)

Long, eloquent, and figurative passages therefore provide the epic with one of its distinguishing features that brings delight also. Cowley appears to deploy figures of speech for this purpose, as well as for purposes of probability and credibility. His trademark figure is the hyperbole, and occasionally the extended or epic simile. The hyperbole offers huge possibilities in the areas of beauty of expression of fanciful thoughts; it displays the vast reaches of the poet's imagination and enhances the grandeur on which epic composition thrives. For Cowley, "there is no extraordinary or extravagant species that the imagination is not capable of forming" (III. Notes, p. 359). He basks in the authority of Virgil, who has been known to speak of tall young men being "Equal to the Mountains of their Country," and who writes of the giant Polyphemus, "That walking in the midst of the Sea, the waves do not wet his sides" (III. Notes, p. 360). Even so Cowley would establish some rules for the use of hyperbole in order to make it even more credible, as when he uses the simile rather than Virgil's metaphors: "Th' *Egyptian* like an *Hill* himself did rear, / Like some tall *Tree* upon it seem'd his *Spear*" (III. 91-2). Also, the use of "seem'd" instead of, say, "was," ensures that he observes the main principle of not affirming anything: "For the poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth," according to Sidney.¹¹⁵ Cowley observes that Seneca "does not say it *Is*, but *Seems* to be." In addition to absolving the poet of any supposition of fact, he adds this reason to Sidney's: "Any thing, though never so improbable, is favourably heard, if it be excused before it is spoken" (III, Notes, p. 360). Occasionally Cowley uses the word "methinks" to mean the same thing, "it seems to me." The description of Goliath exemplifies the heightened use of the hyperbole in observance of these principles:

On two near *Hills* the two proud *Armies* stood. ...
 And from the midst an huge & monstrous man stept out.

Aloud they shouted at each step he took;
We and the *Earth* it self beneath him *shook*,
 Vast as the *Hill*, down which he marcht, he'appear'd. ...
 The *Valley* now this *Monster* seem'd to *fill*;
 And we (methoughts) *lookt up* to'him from our *Hill*. ...
 The *Sun* himself started with sudden fright,
 To see his beams return so dismal bright. ...
 His *Spear* the *Trunk* was of a lofty *Tree*,
 Which *Nature* meant some tall *ships Mast* should be. ...
 Thus arm'd he stood; all *direful*, and all *gay*,
 And round him flung a scornful look away.
 So when a *Scythian Tyger* gazing round,
 An Herd of Kine in some fair Plain has found
 Lowing secure, he swells with angry pride,
 And calls forth all his *spots* on ev'ery side.
 Then stops, and hurls his haughty eyes at all,
 In choise of some strong neck on which to fall.
 Almost he scorns, so weak, so cheap a prey,
 And grieves to see them trembling hast away.

(III. 362, 366-69, 385-86, 389-90, 393-94, 399-408)

Goliath is vast as a hill, he seems to fill the valley, and those standing on a hill
 “methoughts” looked up rather than down on him. Cowley here indulges a flight of
 fancy whilst striving to remain credible. He explains his use of hyperbole in the first
 part of this description of Goliath: “This perhaps will be accused by some severe
 men for too swelling an *Hyperbole*; and I should not have endured it my self, if it had
 not been mitigated with the word *Methought*” (III. Notes, p. 359). The second part of
 the description, the comparison of Goliath to a tiger surveying its prey, constitutes an
 example of the extended simile. Here it tempers the hyperbole and enhances the
 credibility of the whole description. Cowley, then, has clearly found a variety of
 methods to achieve credibility, one of the yardsticks of poetic composition.

There are several other aspects of composition regarding language usage to which
 Cowley pays close attention, including a choice of “heroic sounding” words.
 Referring to Isaac, Abraham’s son, as “the innocent *Boy*” (II. 306), he explains that
 “boy,” instead of the more common “lad,” is to be preferred in poetry: “Our English
 Translation, *Lad*, ... is not a word for verse, [hence] the Latin *Puer*, *Boy*” (II. Notes,
 p. 311). Again Mary is addressed as “*Gods wife*” (II. 758), not “spouse” because,

“Though the word seems bold, I know no hurt in the figure. And *Spouse* is not an *Heroical word*.” (II. Notes, p. 321). This practice of using ‘heroic’ words is even extended to proper names. In the Contents page introducing Book III, there is a mention of “*David’s flight to Nob*,” but the monosyllabic “*Nob*” is changed to the bisyllabic “*Nobe*” within the poem itself: “To *divine Nobe* directs then his flight” (III. 3). This change ensures that the line remains the standard pentameter, but there is an added explanation: “I call it *Nobe* according to the *Latin Translation*; for (methinks) *Nob* is too unheroical a name” (III. Notes, p. 351). To such words are added those with “a better sound in *Poetry*!” When explaining why he thought the Queen of Sheba hailed from Ethiopia in Africa and not from Asia or the Middle East, Cowley provides convincing arguments that include, “All the Histories of the *Abyssines* or *African-Ethiopians* affirm, that she was *Queen* of their Country.” But then he finishes off with the surprising comment that, “In fine, whatever the truth be, this opinion makes a better sound in *Poetry*” (II. Notes, p. 314). Related to the suitability of words is the complex issue of the position of the adjective in relation to the noun it describes, for Cowley likes to observe the minutiae of *le mot juste*, that is, the right word in the right place. Here is his theory:

There is great caution to be used in English in the placing of *Adjectives* after their *Substantives*. I think when they constitute specific differences of the *Substantives*, they *follow* best; for then they are to it like *Cognomina*, or *Surnames* to *Names*, and we must not say, the *Great Pompey*, or the *Happy Sylla*, but *Pompey the Great*, and *Sylla the Happy*; sometimes even in other cases the *Epithete* is put last very gracefully, of which a good *ear* must be the *Judge* for ought I know, without any *Rule*. I chuse rather to say *Light Divine*, and *Command Divine*, than *Divine Light*, and *Divine Command* (II. Notes, p. 307).

Adding this theory to all the various ones on language use provides us with the distinct features of Cowley’s style and makes us privy to the thought processes that go into poetic composition. These features reveal the extent of the poet’s desire to bring delight and pleasure to his readership, even whilst striving to remain credible.

While regretting that Cowley did not live to write his proposed “Discourse on Style” that would have amounted to a work on literary theory and criticism, our findings in this chapter permit us to discern some of the key elements that form the cornerstone of his poetics. The central concern with truth governs the creative process that takes into account two kinds of imitation. The one relates to poetic imitation that lies at the heart of humanist achievements whereby a new art is made from the art of other writers, whilst the other relates to the Aristotelian concept of mimesis whereby the poet reveals the essence of the natural world by means of feigning. Regarding the former, Cowley shows himself to be a traditional poet in his neo-classical epic, a firm believer in preserving established conventions even as he seeks to adapt them to new purposes. He is therefore a veritable descendant of Jonson, the imitative poet *par excellence*, and one who as poet laureate and a compiler of literary theory became such an inspiration to his successors.¹¹⁶ The second kind of imitation relates to Aristotle’s mimesis with its rules of probability and necessity: “Poesy therefore is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in the word *mimesis* – that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth ... with this end, to teach and delight.”¹¹⁷ By subscribing fully to such theories, Cowley demonstrates the virtues of poetic truth, a truth fashioned by the poet’s imagination, not necessarily verifiable scientifically or historically. These theories have endured, as in the dramatic exchange enacted by Hopkins and Mason, whereby the Muse tells her poet: “It is by telling delightful lies, by creating pleasurable and provisional fictions, that you and I will reveal the great and infinitely various power which rolls through all things.”¹¹⁸ Cowley’s poetics therefore reveal how far literary theory has come from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century because, as late as the Elizabethan period, literary theorists appeared to have as a primary concern the defence of poetry from

attacks levelled at it by those who perceived it as lies. For example, Lewis appears to marvel that Sidney's *Defence of Poesy* was an apology for the seemingly obvious fiction of the poet: "It is a defence not of poetry as against prose but of fiction as against fact. ... What is in question is ... his right to feign, to 'make things up.'"¹¹⁹ This observation was based on Sidney's own refutation of the charge that poets are "the principal liars" when he asserted that, "I will answer paradoxically, but truly, I think truly, that ... the poet is the least liar, and, though he would, as a poet can scarcely be a liar."¹²⁰ By the mid-seventeenth century, the nature of the debate had changed and Cowley, along with his peers like Davenant, help articulate in bold fashion the poet's prerogatives. They work from the basis that the difference between the poet and say, the historian, is readily acknowledged. Davenant refers to a special quality in poetry that he calls "the feign'd complexion,"¹²¹ a quality not necessarily in accordance with factual or historical evidence but governed by the wide-ranging and loosely defined domain of *la vraisemblance*, that is, verisimilitude, likelihood or probability. This notion too has endured to our time, the notion that the poet has his laws of creation but ultimately is defined as maker:

Yes, you, My Poet, are governed by Laws – governed absolutely, despotically, tyrannically. These Laws are as severe, as inexorable, as immutable, and as powerfully *creative* as those which brought the this [sic] circumambient universe into being. It is by means of these Laws that a new world leaps forth when you say, 'let it be'.¹²²

¹ Virgil, *The Eclogues, The Georgics*, trans. C. Day Lewis (1966), ed. R. O. A. M. Lyne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 85. Cowley here is echoing Virgil's appeal to the Muses to be kind and show him the path to the stars.

² Thomas Sprat, "An Account of the Life and Writings of Mr. Abraham Cowley" in *The Works of Abraham Cowley* (London, 1668), Preface. Hereafter referred to as "Life."

³ William Davenant, *Gondibert*, ed. David Gladish (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), Author's Preface, pp. 26-7.

⁴ Davenant, Author's Preface, p. 11.

⁵ Even before it was published, Dorothy Osborne read the manuscript in 1654 and sent it to her future husband with these comments: "It is only a piece taken out of a new thing of [Cowley's]. ... Tis I think the best I have seen of his, and I like the subject because it is that I would be perfect in." See *The Reputation of Abraham Cowley*, Jean Loiseau (Paris: Henri Didier, 1931), p. 5.

⁶ Cited by Loiseau, p. 5.

⁷ An explanation for placing Cowley above Spenser and Davenant could be found in an earlier appraisal by Samuel Wesley in 1693: "But Mr. Cowley's *Davideis* is the medium between both; it has *Gondibert*'s majesty without his stiffness, and something of Spenser's sweetness and variety without his irregularity." Wesley was acknowledging his debt to the *Davideis* in his attempt to write an heroic poem, *The Life of our Blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*. See Loiseau, pp. 33, 38.

⁸ *Monsieur Rapin's Reflections on Aristotle's Treatise of Poesie* (Made English by Mr. Rymer). Cited by Loiseau, p. 40. Loiseau notes that, "Here, for the first time, Cowley was called at the bar to answer for his infractions against the 'Rules.'" He escaped lightly."

⁹ John Dryden, *Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire* in *Works*, Vol. IV (Poems 1693-1696), ed. A. B. Chambers and William Frost (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 84.

¹⁰ Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, Vol. I (Cowley – Dryden), ed. George Birkbeck Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), p. 49. Interestingly, Loiseau quotes from this passage (p. 121) but does not challenge Johnson's statement that the *Davideis* had been ignored throughout the eighteenth century, despite having noted earlier that "as late as 1749 ... the *Davideis* found earnest advocates" (p. 73).

¹¹ Johnson, pp. 49-51.

¹² Johnson, pp. 54-5.

¹³ Until the work of Loiseau and Nethercot in the 1630's, the most significant commentary on the *Davideis* in the twentieth century was provided by John MacBryde's exhaustive study in "A Study of Cowley's *Davideis*" (*Journal of Germanic Philology*, Vol. II, 1901).

¹⁴ Thomas Greene, *The Descent from Heaven: A Study in Epic Continuity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 364-66.

¹⁵ Greene does not devote a chapter to Cowley but rather discusses him as a preamble to Milton in his chapter on Milton, finishing the section with this sentence: "The report has survived that Cowley, with Shakespeare and Spenser, were Milton's favourites among the English poets" (p. 373).

¹⁶ Jean Loiseau, *Abraham Cowley: Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre* (Henri Didier: Paris, 1931), p. 334.

¹⁷ Loiseau, *Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre*, pp. 339-41.

¹⁸ Loiseau, *Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre*, pp. 346-7.

¹⁹ Robert Hinman, *Abraham Cowley's World of Order* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 227.

²⁰ David Hopkins and Tom Mason, *Abraham Cowley: Selected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1994), pp. 48-9, 78-9.

²¹ Hopkins and Mason, Introduction, pp. xv-xvi. The comments on Cowley's familiar manner here were possibly influenced by Johnson who wrote that, "Cowley, whatever the subject, seems to have been carried by a kind of destiny to the light and the familiar." See Johnson, p. 46.

²² Arthur H. Nethercot, *Abraham Cowley: The Muse's Hannibal* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 153-4.

²³ Frank Kermode, "The Date of Cowley's *Davideis*" (*The Review of English Studies*, Vol. 25, 1949, pp. 154-58), p. 156.

²⁴ We will make the case defending Cowley against such charges in Part II, especially Chapter Six.

²⁵ Kermode, pp. 156-57. Trotter would later replicate Kermode's views. The following speculation, for example, is almost spoken in Kermode's same words:

[Sprat] was only too aware of the harm further revelations about Cowley's wavering political loyalties might do. Sprat could not, perhaps, suppress parts of the poem, in the way he had suppressed a part of the 1656 Preface, but he could reduce the chances of people scouring it for political allusions by claiming that it was 'wholly written' *before* the Great Rebellion – by dissociating it from the early 1650s, the period of Cowley's return to England and acquiescence in Republican rule.

See *The Poetry of Abraham Cowley*, David Trotter (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 83.

²⁶ See Chapters Five and Six for a discussion on the theory of free states and the Commonwealth.

²⁷ Cited by Trotter, p. 84.

²⁸ Nethercot, p. 154.

²⁹ Trotter, p. 84.

³⁰ Trotter, pp. 96-7.

³¹ Thomas N. Corns, *Uncloistered Virtue: English Political Literature 1640-1660* (London: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 266.

³² Trotter, p. 85.

³³ Trotter, p. 83.

³⁴ Trotter, pp. 100-101.

³⁵ Loiseau, without detracting from Cowley's statement, places his claims for originality in context. While agreeing that Cowley was really the first in England to write a Christian heroic poem, he cites also several post-Spenserian English influences: Giles Fletcher, Phineas Fletcher, Benlowes, and Henry More all write about Christian mysticism; Barnes, Habingyon, Hall, Donne, Vaughan, Traherne, Crashaw, and Herrick could be considered religious poets; Austin, Sandys, Ballard, Aylet, Quarles, Heywood, and especially Drayton all use Biblical narratives as the inspiration for their works. These, of course, do not include Du Bartas whose *Divine Weeks*, along with Tasso's *Jerusalem*, directly inspired Cowley. See Loiseau, *Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre*, pp. 324-33.

³⁶ Tillyard finds that “so thorough a piece of neo-classicism as the *Davideis* ... was certainly influenced by Ben Jonson.” See *The English Epic and Its Background* (Cowley, pp. 421-27), E. M. W. Tillyard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 422.

³⁷ Davenant, Author’s Preface, p. 6.

³⁸ Dryden, p. 16.

³⁹ Davenant, Author’s Preface, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁰ Nethercot, p. 221. The quotation is taken from Nahum Tate’s 1689 translation of Cowley’s Latin works.

⁴¹ Nethercot, p. 95.

⁴² Both poems have traditionally appeared with *Gondibert* since it was first released. See Davenant, Appendices, pp. 269-71.

⁴³ *The Mistress* had excited strong reactions from some readers, with Edmund Elys, for example, describing it as “provoking to speculative lust.” Elys claimed in his long title that his reaction against Cowley’s “lascivious and prophane Verses” was out of a duty to his church: *An Exclamation to all those that love the Lord Jesus in sincerity, against an apology written by an ingenious person for Mr. Cowley’s lascivious and prophane Verses* (By a dutiful Son of the Church of England). Cited in Loiseau, *Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre*, p. 512, n. 71. In “Life,” Sprat himself felt the need to apologise for Cowley’s *Mistress* because it was lacking in moral purpose but should be excused as the fanciful imagination of a young man. Little wonder that he expressed such preference for the *Davideis*: “In his Moral and Divine Works [his wit] outdid itself.” For a discussion of these aspects of Sprat’s “Life,” see Loiseau, *Reputation*, pp. 14-18.

⁴⁴ Francis Bacon, *Of the Dignity and Advancement of Learning in Works*, Vol. IV (Translations of the Philosophical Works, Part 1), ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath (London: Longman, 1858), p. 316.

⁴⁵ Loiseau, *Reputation*, p. 5.

⁴⁶ Cited by Loiseau, *Reputation*, pp. 4-5. Loiseau records many other examples of the lavish praise the *Davideis* enjoyed in the seventeenth century. See for example pp. 38-9.

⁴⁷ Trotter, p. 99.

⁴⁸ Sprat, “Life.”

⁴⁹ Loiseau discusses Cowley’s indebtedness to Du Bartas and to Tasso, estimating that he owed more to the latter because *Jerusalem Delivered* was a proper epic poem. See *Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre*, pp. 326-30. Further, Tillyard (p. 424) concludes on this subject that, “There can be little doubt that Tasso’s vehement advocacy of a Christian as against a pagan subject and the example of Du Bartas swayed Cowley strongly in his decision to go to Scripture for the subject of his epic.”

⁵⁰ Du Bartas, *The Divine Weeks and Works*, trans. Joshua Sylvester, ed. Susan Snyder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), Introduction, p. 72.

⁵¹ Du Bartas, Introduction, pp. 80, 95.

⁵² Jonson, p. 38.

⁵³ Printed in Davenant, Appendices, pp. 269-70.

⁵⁴ Greene, pp. 14-15.

- ⁵⁵ Davenant, Author's Preface, pp. 3-4.
- ⁵⁶ Davenant, Author's Preface, p. 6.
- ⁵⁷ Davenant, Author's Preface, p. 4.
- ⁵⁸ Davenant, Author's Preface, p. 5.
- ⁵⁹ Davenant, Introduction, p. xi.
- ⁶⁰ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1998), p. 60.
- ⁶¹ Milton, pp. 468, 470.
- ⁶² David Hopkins and Tom Mason, The Story of Poetry (Bristol: Broadside Books, 1992), p. 173.
- ⁶³ Greene, p. 15.
- ⁶⁴ Davenant, Author's Preface, p. 27.
- ⁶⁵ Bacon, pp. 315-16.
- ⁶⁶ Greene, pp. 9-10.
- ⁶⁷ Sir Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesy*, in Sir Philip Sidney, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 114.
- ⁶⁸ Hopkins and Mason (1992), p. 173.
- ⁶⁹ Greene, p. 368.
- ⁷⁰ Greene, pp. 370-71.
- ⁷¹ Greene, p. 365.
- ⁷² Thomas Greene, The Vulnerable Text: Essays on Renaissance Literature (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 225.
- ⁷³ Trotter, p. 99. Also, on the subject of Renaissance poets coming to look up to Virgil, Bowra writes: [Virgil] exerted a powerful spell on men to whom Latin was a second tongue and the classical past almost an ideal world. For Vida he is the greatest of all poets and most worthy of study and imitation. He was studied in every school and ... from him young poets learned the elements of their art, and there was no serious doubt about his perfection.
See From Virgil to Milton, C. M. Bowra (London: Macmillan, 1945), p. 11.
- ⁷⁴ William Frost, "Translating Virgil, Douglas to Dryden: Some General Considerations" in Poetic Traditions of the English Renaissance, ed. Maynard Mack and George de Forest Lord (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 276-286.
- ⁷⁵ The Latin translation, *Dauidēidos*, concludes the 1656 Poems. See for example the facsimile reprint: Poems (1656), Abraham Cowley (Menston: Scolar Press, 1971).
- ⁷⁶ On the subject of the Romans imitating the Greeks, G. M. A. Grube, for example, wrote that, Latin Literature was therefore the self-conscious creation of men who were thoroughly familiar with a kindred literature which they knew to be far more developed than their own. ... They deliberately set out to forge their own language into an instrument by means of which they could hope to rival the Greeks with masterpieces of their own which, imitative in all external matters of form, would yet breathe the Roman spirit and celebrate Rome's achievement.
See The Greek and Roman Critics, G. M. A. Grube (1965), (Indianapolis: Hackett, repr. 1995), p. 153.

⁷⁷ Sir John Denham, The Poetical Works, ed. Theodore Howard Banks (Yale: Yale University Press, 1969), pp. 149-152.

⁷⁸ This label for this passage was coined by David Hopkins and Tom Mason (1994, pp. 78-9). Hopkins also includes the passage in his anthology on poetry and poets under the "Music and Poetry" theme, noting that "Cowley plays throughout on God's dual role as creator/maker and poet/musician." See The Routledge Anthology of Poets on Poets: Poetic Responses to English Poetry from Chaucer to Yeats, ed. David Hopkins (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 31.

⁷⁹ Greene (1963), p. 11.

⁸⁰ Landino's essays appeared in the Introduction to the *Divine Comedy* of Dante he released. Cited in Sidney and Spenser: The Poet as Maker, S. K. Heninger Jr. (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), p. 180.

⁸¹ Torquato Tasso, Discourses of the Heroic Poem, trans. Mariella Cavalchini and Irene Samuel (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 77-8.

⁸² Heninger, p. 180.

⁸³ Sidney, p. 106.

⁸⁴ Davenant, Author's Preface, p. 3.

⁸⁵ Davenant, Author's Preface, p. 17.

⁸⁶ Hopkins and Mason (1992), p. 171.

⁸⁷ Milton, p. 57.

⁸⁸ Plato, *Ion* in Plato: Early Socratic Dialogues, ed. Trevor J. Saunders (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 55.

⁸⁹ Dryden, *Eleonora*, Epistle Dedicatory, in Works, Vol. III (Poems 1685-1692), ed. Earl Miner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 231.

⁹⁰ Milton, p. 390.

⁹¹ Milton, p. 59.

⁹² Ian Donaldson, Jonson's Walk to Scotland (Edinburgh: Quadriga, 1992), p. 6.

⁹³ Donaldson, p. 6.

⁹⁴ Davenant, Author's Preface, pp. 3-4.

⁹⁵ Davenant, Author's Preface, p. 3.

⁹⁶ Nethercot, p. 105.

⁹⁷ Hobbes, "Answer to Sir Will. D'avenant's Preface Before *Gondibert*" in Davenant, pp. 48-9.

⁹⁸ Milton, pp. 58-9.

⁹⁹ Hesiod records his encounter with the Muses in the *Theogony*, telling how they inspired him with song and the subject to sing about:

And it was they who once taught Hesiod
his splendid singing

as he was shepherding his lambs
on holy Helicon,
and these were the first words of all
the goddesses spoke to me,
the Muses of Olympia, daughters of Zeus
of the aegis:

“You shepherds of the wilderness, poor fools,
nothing but bellies,
we know how to say many false things
that seem like true sayings,
but we know also how to speak the truth
when we wish to.”

So they spoke, these mistresses of words,
daughters of great Zeus,
and they broke off and handed me a staff
of strong-growing
olive shoot, a wonderful thing;
they breathed a voice into me,
and power to sing the story of things
of the future, and things past.
They told me to sing the race
of the blessed gods everlasting,
but always to put themselves
at the beginning and end of my singing.

(Hesiod, *Theogony*, 22-34)

See Hesiod: *The Works and Days, Theogony, The Shield of Herakles*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1991), p. 124.

¹⁰⁰ Milton, pp. 468-69.

¹⁰¹ Milton, pp. 388-90.

¹⁰² Many sixteenth-century sources reveal this new meaning of Urania, for example Du Bartas's revealing title of *L'Uranie, La Muse Chrestienne (Urania: The Christian Muse)* in 1574.

¹⁰³ Sidney, p. 126.

¹⁰⁴ Davenant, Author's Preface, p. 11.

¹⁰⁵ Davenant, Author's Preface, p. 10.

¹⁰⁶ Davenant, Author's Preface, p. 10.

¹⁰⁷ Here is the Homeric passage:
Just as he drew his huge blade from its sheath,
Down from the vaulting heavens swept Athena,
The white-armed goddess Hera sped her down. ...
Only Achilles saw her, none of the other fighters --- ...
And his winged words went flying: "Why, why now?"
(*The Iliad*, I. 228-30, 233, 236)

See *The Iliad*, Homer, trans. Robert Fagles, ed. Bernard Knox (Bath: The Softback Preview, 1997), p. 84.

¹⁰⁸ Greene (1963), p. 7.

¹⁰⁹ Heninger, p. 158.

¹¹⁰ Johnson, p. 63.

¹¹¹ Johnson, p. 62.

¹¹² Tillyard, p. 426.

¹¹³ Culled from Hopkins, p. 46.

¹¹⁴ Davenant, Author's Preface, p. 17.

¹¹⁵ Sidney; p. 126.

¹¹⁶ Jonson's influence and the theory of poetic imitation and tradition are discussed in Chapter Four.

¹¹⁷ Sidney, pp. 106-07.

¹¹⁸ Hopkins and Mason (1992), p. 173.

¹¹⁹ C. S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 318.

¹²⁰ Sidney, p. 125.

¹²¹ Davenant, Author's Preface, p. 5.

¹²² Hopkins and Mason (1992), p. 171. The last sentence here establishes in irrevocable fashion the link with Cowley's poetics, for it is inspired by Cowley's Pindaric ode, 'The Muse,' where the poet assures his Muse that she is endowed with powers like those with which the God of Creation brought forth the world:

Whatever *God* did Say,
Is all thy plain and smooth, uninterrupted way. ...
Thou speakst, great *Queen*, in the same *stile* as *He*,
And a *New world* leaps forth when *Thou* say'st, *Let it Be*.
(*'The Muse,'* 30-1, 34-5)

PART TWO: EXPERIMENTAL FORMS

Part two comprises three chapters based on new and experimental forms, often introduced into English by Cowley himself. The search for ideal forms among the established poetic kinds has not always brought him fulfilment, especially in light of his aspirations when appropriating the epic framework as the highest kind among traditional forms. He therefore turns to another kind that in his estimation is just as lofty, namely lyric poetry. This time, however, he innovates and introduces his own form for it; he calls it the Pindaric ode, his followers perceive it as the Cowleyan Pindaric or Cowleyan ode, and successive generations come to regard it simply as the English ode. In chapter four the study of his non-original compositions reveals another novelty, the art of free translation that he uses in *The Pindarique Odes* and the *Anacreontiques*. In chapter five his original compositions show to what uses he puts the new ode form that becomes his favourite poetic kind henceforth. The period under consideration in chapter six, leading up to his death in 1667, witnesses his experimentation with other forms also, notably his *Essays* in verse and prose. Still, his mostly occasional poems are written in his now masterful form, the ode, not just with some of the poems in the essays, but especially in his sundry collection called *Verses Written on Several Occasions*. A pattern emerges whereby, rather than find ideal conventional forms to suit particular occasions, as previously, he is now able to adapt the flexible ode to any occasion. The previous reliance on traditional forms invariably restricted him to the one main theme; in contrast, the ode affords him the liberty he craves in order to accommodate several themes and several occasions. That is how the English ode comes to be known as the ideal occasional poem.

CHAPTER FOUR

PINDARIQUE ODES AND ANACREONTIQUES: THE POETICS OF TRANSLATION

The genius of the ancients acts as a kind of oracular cavern, and effluences flow from it into the minds of their imitators. (Longinus, *On Sublimity*, 13.2)¹

Pindarici fontis qui non expalluit haustus – “[Who] is not afraid to drink of the Pindaric spring.”
(*Pindarique Odes*, Motto, culled from Horace, *Epistles* 1.III, 10)²

To him no Author was unknown,
Yet what he wrote was all his own; ...
He not from Rome alone, but Greece,
Like Jason brought the Golden Fleece. ...
On a stiff gale (as Flaccus sings)
The Theban Swan extends his wings. ...
To the same pitch our Swan doth rise;
Old Pindar's flights by him are reacht.

(Sir John Denham, ‘On Mr. Abraham Cowley: His Death and Burial amongst the Ancient Poets’)³

4.1 Introduction: Theoretical Considerations

“’Tis only for a poet to Translate a Poet,” Dryden wrote.⁴ This statement is at the core of Cowley’s poetics of translation in his masterpieces of the *Pindarique Odes* and the *Anacreontiques* published in his 1656 Poems. Cowley’s revolutionary theory places the emphasis both on the act of translating and more especially on the person translating. First, it was his belief that poetry must only be translated into poetry, not prose; therefore only one poet could translate another. Second, he conceived translation as an imitative art involving a creative process for which only the poet was equipped, for he was making a new art out of the original. The Preface to the *Odes* where Cowley outlines his theory of translation is unique in the Poems as an addition to a section of introductory notes, such is his awareness of the unorthodox and in his view radical nature of his approach. It is here that he explains the notion fundamental to his conception of the act of translating as a poetic exercise, that is, it is inconceivable that poetry could be translated into prose:

If a man should undertake to translate *Pindar* word for word, it would be thought that one *Mad*

man had translated *another*; as may appear, when he that understands not the *Original*, reads the verbal Traduction of him into *Latin Prose*, than which nothing seems more *Raving*. ... And I would gladly know what applause our best pieces of *English Poesie* could expect from a *Frenchman* or *Italian*, if converted faithfully, and word for word, into *French* or *Italian Prose*. (*Pindarique Odes*, Preface, p. 155).

He is therefore a poet first of all, who would become a translator.

Cowley had the example of some seventeenth-century poets who were beginning to make translation a popular art form. Writing about Jonson after the latter's visit to Hawthornden, for example, William Drummond had this observation on his guest's oeuvre: "His inventions are smooth and easy; but above all he excelleth in a translation."⁵ As if to confirm this, Thomas Greene presents Jonson as a master of what he considers two principal categories into which imitation falls, namely "simple imitation, where history, time and intertextuality are not thematized, and complex imitation, where they are."⁶ He proceeds to cite Jonson's companion poems from his 1616 collection, *The Forest*, rewritten from Catullus and entitled 'Song: to Celia' and 'To the Same' as respective examples of complex and simple imitation. Cowley, however, claims that his kind of translation is yet different from all that has gone before. Sprat, perhaps acknowledging Denham's contribution to the same kind, makes this comment on Cowley's claim: "I will not presume to say that Mr. Cowley was the absolute Inventor of it. Nay, I know that others had the good luck to recommend it first in Print. Yet I appeal to you Sir, whether he did not conceive it, and discourse of it, and practise it as soon as any man." But just what was this method that Cowley had conceived and practised independently of others? Sprat again offers that it is "a new sort of Writing" that involves "imitating;" it is different from "Verbal Translations" or word verbatim, that is, it focuses on "the Sense and Genius of the Author:"

Besides this imitating of Pindar, which may perhaps be thought rather a new sort of Writing, than a restoring of an Ancient, he has also been wonderfully happy in Translating many difficult parts of the Noblest Poets of Antiquity. ... This way of leaving Verbal Translations, and chiefly regarding the Sense and Genius of the Author, was scarce heard of in England, before this present Age.⁷

Cowley's practice is characterised by considerable latitude that predisposes him towards free translation, for his watchword is liberty. He was among the first, along with Denham, to explain the theory of free translation and develop it as an art form. Writing earlier in 1647 to Sir Richard Fanshawe on the occasion of his translation of *Il Pastor Fido*, Denham had paid tribute to his addressee for avoiding the word for word and line by line method, thereby sounding a caution on the unsuitability of literal translation:

That servile path thou dost decline
Of tracing word by word, and line by line.
Those are the labour'd births of slavish brains,
Not the effects of Poetry, but pains;
Cheap vulgar arts, whose narrowness affords
No flight for thoughts, but poorly sticks at words.
A new and nobler way thou dost pursue
To make Translations and Translators too.
They but preserve the Ashes, thou the Flame,
True to his sense, but truer to his fame.

(Denham, 'To Sir Richard Fanshaw,' 15-24)⁸

Even so, it was Cowley's conscious manner of practising this art that really caught the public imagination. Perhaps his was a reaction to a lifetime of respecting age-old customs and conventions that left him yearning for a literary exercise devoid of myriad constraints or, as with his whole Pindaric experiment and Anacreontic poetry, he wanted to practise an art the rules of which he formulated himself. Loiseau finds a link between Cowley's new theory and his well-documented dislike for committing the rigid rules of grammar to memory whilst at school:⁹

Let us recall the repugnance shown by the pupil of Westminster school to the mechanical learning of grammar. Does his refusal of literal translation not manifest the same instinctive hostility to methods that do not give liberty to the individual imagination? He could not bring himself to accept the exigencies of strict learning: just so when he translates, he wants to feel that he is his own master.¹⁰

It comes as no surprise that Cowley shuns the rigidity and predictability of the word

for word translation Dryden would later describe as metaphrase, to distinguish it particularly from paraphrase that gave the translating poet latitude for creativity. That is how Cowley comes to give translation a new meaning and the translator new responsibilities with the emphasis on his poetic attributes. This conviction helped establish a close kinship with Dryden, for example, whose often-repeated keynote statement constantly echoed Cowley, for he wrote again that, "So that to be a thorow Translatour, he must be a thorow Poet."¹¹

The two bodies of translation in the *Pindarique Odes* and the *Anacreontiques* provide the exemplification of Cowley's methods as the arch poet-translator, but his approach to them is different. In the *Anacreontiques* he shows himself to be a master of his art, working with supreme conviction and displaying confidence that the outcome would fully vindicate his methods. The Anacreontic corpus, made up of one original poem in the form of an elegy on Anacreon and a sequence of eleven translations, is not discussed in the Preface and does not come with any notes. In contrast, Cowley conceives the *Pindarique Odes* as an experiment for which he provides notes in his general Preface, a special Preface to the Odes, three non-original compositions or translations, ten original pieces and two biblical adaptations, and explanatory notes that recall a similar practice in the *Davideis*. The prefatory and explanatory notes highlight and clarify the theories at the core of Cowley's poetics of translation, which theories set the stage for his practice in the poems. Thus it is necessary to appreciate fully the various components of *The Pindarique Odes* in order to be sufficiently equipped for our study of his Anacreontic compositions. We will therefore treat the *Anacreontiques* in a special section to close this chapter, before which we would devote the rest of this section, a section on the poetics of imitation, and another one

on the Pindaric translations themselves, essentially to the *Pindarique Odes*.

The *Pindarique Odes*, having been ostensibly conceived as a novel and unorthodox poetic venture, ends up representing Cowley's greatest accomplishment for its contribution to translation and the imitative arts, and its founding of the irregular English ode. Presenting his Pindaric programme as a discovery in the fashion of humanists, Cowley claims that Pindar "might, perhaps, be put into the List of *Pancirollus*, among the *lost Inventions of Antiquity*" (*Pindarique Odes*, Preface, p. 156). By choosing to return to antiquity, he is following the humanist method of returning to true sources and in this instance to an original poetic programme for wisdom and inspiration.¹² By associating himself with ancient genius and Pindar's accomplishments in particular, he is perpetuating European classical literary tradition in a radically different manner from his contribution to that tradition in the *Davideis*. The epic might be the highest form to which the poetic mind could aspire, but the lofty manner of the ode qualifies it also as "the noblest and highest kind of writing in Verse" (*Pindarique Odes*, Preface, p. 156).¹³ In his search for ideal poetic forms, it is ironically by accident rather than by design that Cowley reacquaints himself with Pindar on a visit to Jersey in 1651.¹⁴ Sprat reports:

The occasion of his falling in the Pindaric way of writing, was his accidental meeting with Pindar's Works, in a place, where he had no other Books to direct him. Having then considered at leisure the height of his Invention, and the Majesty of his Style, he try'd immediately to imitate it in English.¹⁵

This testament points to Cowley's reacquaintance with Pindar as an epiphanic-like moment, and his decision to imitate him as bearing the hallmarks of an unpremeditated and inspirational turn of mind. This is why it is disappointing when critics insist on a link with his 1647 volume of *The Mistress*. Paul Korshin, for example, notes accurately that, "Our view of the theoretical bases of

[Cowley's] Pindarics and his later poems has been distorted by the tendency of twentieth century scholarship to evaluate his poetics predominantly in the light of the poetry of *The Mistress*.”¹⁶ Unfortunately, Korshin's chapter on Cowley then proceeds towards a contradiction because it covers the works from *The Mistress* through the *Pindaric Odes* to the Royal Society ode of 1667 in the generalisation that, “Cowley was primarily interested in further evolving the Metaphysical poetics which he derived from the Donne tradition!”¹⁷

There could hardly be any better judge of Cowley's accomplishments and the legacy of the *Pindarique Odes* than Dryden, his fellow seventeenth-century eminent man of letters who had trodden a similar path from attending Cowley's Westminster school to becoming a literary theorist and poet-translator also. Dryden's early comments come mainly in the prefaces to two of his own translations, *Ovid's Epistles* in 1680 and *Sylvæ* in 1685, the one usefully commenting on Cowley's translation in particular and the other on his Pindaric art in general. The important event of *Ovid's Epistles*, the first in a long line of translations to be released by Dryden, gave him occasion to synthesise Cowley's theories of translation as set out especially in the prefatory notes to the *Pindarique Odes*:

The Consideration of ... a servile, literal Translation, not long since made two of our famous Wits, *Sir John Denham*, and *Mr. Cowley* to contrive another way of turning Authours into our Tongue, call'd by the latter of them, Imitation. ... I take *Imitation* of an Authour in their sense to be an Endeavour of a later Poet to write like one who has written before him on the same Subject: that is, not to Translate his words, or to be Confin'd to his Sense, but only to set him as a Patern, and to write, as he supposes, that Authour would have done, had he liv'd in our Age, and in our Country.¹⁸

Turning to Cowley's practice, Dryden endorses his manner of translating Pindar and finding the best way of making him “speak *English*.”

To add and to diminish what we please, which is the way avow'd by him, ought only to be granted to *Mr. Cowley*, and that too only in his Translation of *Pindar*, because he alone was able to make him amends, by giving him better of his own, when ever he refus'd his Authours thoughts. *Pindar*

is generally known to be a dark writer, to want Connexion, to soar out of sight, and leave his Reader at a Gaze: So wild and ungovernable a Poet cannot be Translated literally. ... A Genius so Elevated and unconfin'd as Mr. *Cowley's*, was but necessary to make *Pindar* speak *English*, and that was to be perform'd by no other way than Imitation.¹⁹

In the Preface to *Sylvæ*, Dryden writes of his attempt to translate an ode in the Pindaric manner and avails himself of this opportunity to speak of Cowley's "happy Genius" and how he brought his Pindaric art "as near Perfection as was possible." Cowley's excellence lies in his mastery of "the Soul of it," in the way he captures its essence. But he is critical of the ornamental or aesthetic aspects of Cowley's manner of domesticating Pindar, for "somewhat of a finer turn and more Lyrical Verse is yet wanting." Dryden thus censures Cowley, but the overriding tone in the passage is still one of deference in acknowledgement of his predecessor's pioneering efforts:

One Ode which infinitely pleas'd me in the reading, I have attempted to translate in Pindarique Verse, ... which allows more Latitude than any other. Every one knows it was introduc'd into our Language, in this Age, by the happy Genius of Mr *Cowley*. The seeming easiness of it, has made it spread; but ... it languishes in almost every hand but his. ... He, indeed, has brought it as near Perfection as was possible in so short a time. But ... somewhat of the Purity of *English*, somewhat of more equal Thoughts, somewhat of sweetness in the Numbers, in one Word, somewhat of a finer turn and more Lyrical Verse, is yet wanting. As for the Soul of it, which consists in the Warmth and Vigor of Fancy, the masterly Figures and the copiousness of Imagination, he has excelld all others in this kind.²⁰

Dryden's observations on Cowley's Pindaric art were those of a kindred spirit, of one poet-translator seeking to perfect the art of free translation begun by the other; for Dryden would fashion for himself a career as a translator in the last score of his life. He set the benchmark for criticism leading up to Johnson a century later with his commentary, especially the *Sylvæ* one, that remains possibly the most memorable on the *Pindarique Odes*.

The extent of the popularity the *Pindarique Odes* would enjoy was captured over a century later by Johnson. Compared to, say, the *Dauides* that had supposedly crept through the century with little regard, Johnson observed how "The *Pindarique Odes*

have so long enjoyed the highest degree of poetical reputation.” His criticism could be said to have essentially fleshed out in equal measure those aspects that met with Dryden’s praise on the one hand and disapproval on the other. In terms of praise, he would remark on Cowley’s “great fertility of fancy” and thus recall Dryden’s “Warmth and Vigor of [Cowley’s] Fancy,” and the conclusion he would draw that only Cowley could have written the odes matches Dryden’s assertion that Cowley had “excelld all others in this kind.” In terms of disapproval, he would fasten on ornamental aspects of composition like balance, language use, and negligence of detail, all of which echo Dryden’s criticism. That Johnson should follow his predecessor and conclude his remarks on the highest note possible shows the resilience of the odes, despite their perceived shortcomings, in the intervening years between the two critics:

Though the mode of their composition be erroneous, yet many parts deserve at least that admiration which is due to great comprehension of knowledge and great fertility of fancy. The thoughts are new and often striking, but the greatness of one part is disgraced by the littleness of another; and total negligence of language gives the noblest conceptions the appearance of a fabric, august in the plan, but mean in the materials. Yet surely those verses are not without a just claim to praise; of which it may be said with truth, that no one but Cowley could have written them.²¹

Johnson’s commentary marks a watershed in the criticism of the *Pindarique Odes* for two main reasons. First, it marks a culmination of the high esteem in which this work had been held since its release, even whilst discussing in impassioned fashion those aspects that Dryden had begun to construe as its shortcomings. Second, it marks a turning point as the popularity of the work slumped post-Johnson right through the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries.²²

None of Cowley’s works has suffered the sudden change in fortunes of the *Pindarique Odes*, whereby it moved from a work held in such high esteem at the start of the eighteenth century to a deeply unpopular one by the end of it. Loiseau

provides this explanation: "It was not until Gilbert West published his translation of Pindar, in 1749, and Thomas Gray his *Odes*, that people realized how much they had been led astray by Cowley, and began to forsake him."²³ Loiseau suggests elsewhere that the popularity of the *Pindarique Odes* had been due to Pindar's enthusiastic manner as portrayed by Cowley, for whom it manifests itself through hardiness, disdain for logic, and an explosion of images that amount to an inspired frenzy. But in the nineteenth century, "The 'enthusiasm' that Cowley projects ceased to be a dominant note in Pindaric poetry. Modern critics who show indignation at Cowley's errors have not really realised that they are asking him to be two centuries in advance of his contemporaries."²⁴ Surprisingly though, whilst saying how unfair it is to judge Cowley's Pindaric art by these new standards, Loiseau claims that he deserves to be lambasted by those who accuse him of understanding Pindar's Greek but not his lyricism.²⁵ Nethercot, writing in the same year as Loiseau, claimed in Cowley's defence that, "To conclude, as most critics have done, that Cowley was ignorant of the strict rules of the Pindaric is to do an injustice to his scholarship."²⁶ But then Nethercot, like Loiseau, proceeds to launch an attack of his own on Cowley, claiming that "Cowley's nature had little in common with his original's. ... Cowley was too much inclined to abuse his own liberty."²⁷ Loiseau takes this generally virulent position to its extreme as he concludes that Cowley's *Pindarique Odes*, among his works, constitutes an error!²⁸ We disagree with the use of the same arguments to condemn the *Odes* that had appeared valid for the *Davideis*, namely that Cowley's genius was unsuited to the project and that the work was inherently doomed from the start. It appears also that most of the criticism is prescriptive, insisting on the rules Cowley should have followed and frowning on the liberties he takes. It is not our intention to argue with these purists, but to describe Cowley's Pindaric art fully, not

to place it alongside the original for comparison but to describe his conception of it and the body of theory he assembles to inform his practice.

Critical opinion that culminated in the commentary of Nethercot and Loiseau in the modern period turned largely to neglect and indifference in the half century following their work. Even Hinman, who devotes a chapter to the *Dauides*, for example, does not sustain a discussion of any considerable length on the odes, preferring to use aspects of them for illustrative purposes. Still, he observes that, “Cowley found the norm of great lyric art, the middle ground between wildness and formalism,”²⁹ and his positive attitude towards this great lyric art emerges fully in his interpretation of the pivotal critical opinions of Dryden and Johnson.³⁰ However, during the 1960s when he wrote, the *Pindarique Odes* were still largely misunderstood, ignored or rejected outright.³¹ It was not until Trotter’s work in 1979 that the Odes started receiving their due critical attention again as we reveal in the next chapter. It is our contention that the *Pindarique Odes* constitutes the central masterpiece in Cowley’s poetic programme, the one in which he thoroughly outlines his theory of poetry and successfully completes his practical demonstration of the same. In addition to his acclaimed pioneering effort, Cowley’s work on translation in both the Odes and the *Anacreontics* makes popular the theory of free translation and paves the way for another poetic kind that becomes the rage after the Restoration, the genre of the imitation. It is because of the importance of the whole *Pindarique Odes* both to Cowley’s oeuvre and to seventeenth-century poetic traditions that its discussion spans two chapters. We intend to effect a detailed study of the Odes as befits the importance of two favourite kinds of poetry that would mark Cowley’s works henceforth, namely translations of classical authors and original compositions in his

Pindaric manner. This chapter therefore gives due consideration to his poetics of translation, just as the next would do to the formal and thematic considerations in his original compositions.

For a theoretical approach we turn especially to Jonson, acclaimed as the first poet laureate almost certainly because he was the first self-conscious poet-critic and literary theorist in English. Ian Donaldson has used the authoritative phrase “literary progenitor” to describe Jonson, that is, “the father of a ‘tribe’ of other writers – imitators, disciples, ‘sons of Ben’.”³² Cowley was a member of Jonson’s tribe, benefitting more than most from his vast body of theory and practice that remained the dominant influence on the age. On critical studies on imitation in our time, I have mainly considered the claims of Thomas Greene’s The Light in Troy. This 1982 seminal work on Renaissance imitation has retained its appeal, even if I have not particularly adopted its projected approach of ‘subreading’ the original classical text.³³ Cowley’s practice takes into account theories stretching from Pindar himself through Horace to Petrarch in the early Renaissance and Jonson in his own time. The next section considers the various imitative arts; it highlights the various requisites for the imitative poet and investigates in the process the importance of various theories of poetry and of imitation in Cowley’s framework. Ultimately his ode in imitation of Horace would conclude the section as a demonstration of the challenge facing the would-be imitator of Pindar. The section after that focuses on the actual Pindaric translations, a major part of Cowley’s programme to nationalise Pindar by way of practical demonstration allied to a thorough exposition of his groundbreaking theory of free translation. The pivotal figure of Jonson, because of his work in literary theory, translation and lyric composition, serves as a culminating point for

discussions often begun with Pindar, considered in his own right as the earliest European literary critic.³⁴

4.2 Theories of Poetry and Literary Imitation

Pindar is imitable by none;
The *Phoenix Pindar* is a vast *Species alone*.

...

Whether the *Swift*, the *Skilful*, or the *Strong*,
Be crowned in his *Nimble, Artful, Vigorous Song*: ...

He bids him *Live* and *Grow* in fame,

Among the *Stars* he sticks his *Name*. ...

So *small* is *Deaths*, so *great* the *Poets* power.

(‘The Praise of Pindar. In Imitation of Horace his second Ode’)

“Imitation in the Renaissance,” in the words of Donna Hamilton, “meant making something new from the art of another artist.”³⁵ The fundamental requisite for the imitative artist was the mastery of the original language, in addition to the very fact of being a poet. On this fundamental requirement of native competence in the original tongue, Sprat was to write of Cowley that, “Having got the Greek and Roman languages, as he had done his own, not by precept but use, he practis’d them, not as a Scholar but a Native.” Further, Sprat observes that only one poet could translate another: “To perform this according to the dignity of the attempt, he had ... not only the Elegance of both the Languages; but the true spirit of both the Poetries.”³⁶ Cowley’s decision to practise the imitative art owes a lot to his desire to become part of the tradition of classical imitation that began in the Renaissance with Petrarch.³⁷ For the latter imitation is natural and even unconscious because the works of other writers become embedded in the spirit or make-up of the imitative poet:

I have read Virgil, Horace, Livy, Cicero, not once but a thousand times, not hastily but in repose, and I have pondered them with all the powers of my mind. I ate in the morning what I would digest in the evening; I swallowed as a boy what I would ruminate upon as a man. These writings I have so thoroughly absorbed and fixed, not only in my memory but in my very

marrow, these have become so much a part of myself, that even though I should never read them again they would cling in my spirit, deep-rooted in its inmost recesses.³⁸

In one of his three letters on imitation Petrarch presents his theory of literary imitation by way of the filial metaphor of a son resembling the father:

A proper imitator should take care that what he writes resemble the original without reproducing it. The resemblance ... should be the resemblance of a son to his father. Therein is often a great divergence of particular features, but there is a certain suggestion, what our painters call an "air," most noticeable in the face and eyes, which makes the resemblance. As soon as we see the son, he recalls the father to us, although if we should measure every feature we should find them all different. But there is a mysterious something there that has this power. Thus we writers must look to it that with a basis of similarity there should be many dissimilarities. ... Thus we may use another man's conceptions and the color of his style, but not his words. In the first case the resemblance is hidden deep; in the second it is glaring. The first procedure makes poets, the second makes apes.³⁹

Donna Hamilton finds that Petrarch's notion of the new work resembling the parent work and yet standing securely on its own with its radical dissimilarities recalls Seneca's views on the subject in *Epistle 84*:

I think that sometimes it is impossible for it to be seen who is being imitated, if the copy is a true one; for a true copy stamps its own form upon all the features which it has drawn from what we may call the original.⁴⁰

Petrarch's views were as instructive as would become those of Jonson, another one of Seneca's followers. Donaldson makes the point that Jonson, like Dryden after him, "attempted to shape public opinion through numerous critical writings which often defended ... their own literary practice."⁴¹ It is a point comparable to one already made by Greene of Petrarch who sets the benchmark by formulating a body of theory that "corresponds to something of moment in [his] own artistic formation." Greene adds immediately what amounts to a summing up of what Petrarchan imitation involves, that is, what it takes to make something new out of another's art. "It betokens an intimacy of conversation with the ancient text," he writes, "a habitual interiorization of its letter and essence, and a freedom to transform, to recreate this sweetness of an alien wit into the honey of one's own personal creation."⁴²

When Cowley comes to compose the Pindaric odes, he takes the extraordinary step of building his invention on the foundation of Pindar's lyric achievements, of making one poet his focal and constant source of inspiration. He does so despite Jonson's caution: "One, though he be excellent and the chief, is not to be imitated alone. For never no imitator ever grew up to his author; likeness is always on this side truth."⁴³ The title page of Cowley's Odes confirms that they are "Written in Imitation of the Stile and Manner of the Odes of Pindar." It is as if he decides to abide by an altogether different Jonsonian dictum on 'imitatio' that comes third on the list of poetic requisites (following 'ingenium' and 'exercitatio') outlined in *Discoveries*. With the aid of the food metaphor in evidence earlier in Petrarch, Jonson now advocates the choice of one excellent man to imitate:

The third requisite in our poet or maker is imitation, to be able to convert the substance or riches of another poet to his own use. To make choice of one excellent man above the rest, and so to follow him till he grow very he, or so like him as the copy may be mistaken for the principal. Not as a creature that swallows what it takes in crude, raw, or indigested, but that feeds with an appetite, and hath a stomach to concoct, divide, and turn all into nourishment.⁴⁴

In his Introduction to Ben Jonson, Ian Donaldson stresses the centrality to Jonson's art of this notion that Cowley seems to heed in his imitation of Pindar: 'So to follow him *till he grow very he*'. Expanding on the notion of a writer fostering tradition even while resisting it, Donaldson writes that, "A writer appropriates what he needs from his sources, and remains, in an ultimate sense, 'himself'."⁴⁵ Literary imitation is therefore inherent in poetic expression. But Jonson, like Petrarch before him, warns in the rest of the passage on 'imitatio' against the dangers of imitating "servilely" or blindly:

Not to imitate servilely (as Horace saith) and catch at vices for virtue, but to draw forth out of the best and choicest flowers, with the bee, and turn all into honey: work it into one relish and savour, make our imitation sweet, observe how the best writers have imitated, and follow them.⁴⁶

In the *Discoveries* itself, Jonson seems to be jostling constantly with his own inventions and those of earlier writers, echoes of whom are found everywhere. The bee metaphor from Horace through Seneca and Petrarch has become a familiar trope by the time Jonson uses it. Donaldson observes elsewhere, in Jonson's Walk to Scotland, that he is not trying to claim the ideas of others for his own. Rather, “[Jonson] is instead remembering that the great writers who have gone before him have not trudged in a servile manner along familiar ways; ... that to inherit a tradition in the deepest sense one needs also in some way to resist it.”⁴⁷

Cowley's general acquaintance with Jonson's works is not in doubt, but he does not mention the individual titles by name, hence the question as to what extent he was familiar with the commonplace notebook, *Discoveries*, published in 1641, or indeed the diverse collection of poems, *The Underwood*, published in 1640. This latter collection includes a tribute ‘To the Immortal Memory and Friendship of That Noble Pair, Sir Lucius Cary and Sir H. Morison,’ a conscious imitation in English of the structure of Pindar's odes. The return to classical sources and to Pindar in particular, and the high importance attributed by both men to tradition and the art of imitation are traits that link Cowley to Jonson. Perhaps this common interest could be traced to their common Alma Mater, a point that links both men to Dryden as well: they all attended Westminster school and, in the words of Donaldson, “[they] retained from their schooldays a lifelong interest in classical translation, imitation, and precedent.”⁴⁸ Donaldson's observations are made in a chapter on “Fathers and Sons,” a description that captures the relationship between Jonson and Cowley, though it is another ‘son’ that he writes of in this instance:

No other writer in English is more firmly associated with the notion of literary paternity than is

Ben Jonson; and the very title, 'father', associates Jonson with the great classical forebears whom he admired. Dryden could speak easily ... in his *Apology For Heroic Poetry* of 'our great forefathers, even from Homer down to Ben'.⁴⁹

What Donaldson does not indicate is that Dryden took his words directly from a Cowley source, and that it was Cowley who made the use of Jonson's first name something of a vogue. The source is one of Cowley's original Pindaric odes, 'Destinie,' in which he claims for all poets in the European tradition a special fate that sets them apart. His own fate, as one of their number, is "As all th'inspired *tuneful Men, / And all thy great Forefathers were from Homer down to Ben*" ('Destinie,' 64-65). On the impact of Jonson's theories on his followers and on Cowley in particular, Clarendon testifies that,

[Jonson] was the best judge of, and fittest to prescribe rules to, poetry and poets, of any man who had lived with or before him, or since: if Mr. Cowley had not made a flight beyond all men, with that modesty yet, to ascribe much of this to the example and learning of Ben Jonson.⁵⁰

It therefore comes as no surprise that Jonson's poetics becomes the focal point for Cowley. This passage from Jonson, typically imitated from Seneca, becomes representative of the imitative theory of the age:

I know nothing can conduce more to letters than to examine the writings of the ancients, and not to rest in their sole authority, or take all upon trust from them. ... For to all the observations of the ancients, we have our own experience; which, if we will use and apply, we have better means to pronounce. It is true they opened the gates and made the way, that went before us; but as guides, not commanders. Truth lies open to all; it is no man's several.⁵¹

Such considerations inform Cowley's poetics and the notion that truth lies open to all fuels his groundbreaking theories on free translation and his pioneering efforts in founding the irregular ode in English. Before proceeding to the section on translation proper, it would be useful to introduce some of Pindar's basic theories and discuss 'The Praise of Pindar. In Imitation of Horace his second Ode.' It is in this poem that Cowley extols the virtues of the greatest lyric poet in ancient Greece even as he imitates the great theorist and practitioner of the art of imitation that Horace was.

Cowley seems to measure himself against Pindar's theories to establish the extent to which he is in kinship with the Theban poet's idea of poetry. The first area of consensus is a fundamental one: the role of the Muse. In the Argument to his opening poem, Cowley warns of Pindar's recurring tendency to call on his Muse: "The *Reader* must not be shocked to hear him speak so often of his own *Muse*; for that is a *Liberty* which this kind of *Poetry* can hardly live without" ('Second Olympique Ode,' Argument, p. 157). He agrees with the substance of Pindar's views that the poet, working in tandem with his Muse, deciphers and interprets her message. The poet is not only inspired temporarily; his inspiration is a permanent state that sets him apart from other men. Therefore the poet does not have special moments of poetic fury; it is not the poet but the Muse who is possessed. At such times the divine Muse imparts her knowledge, for Pindar the very condition of poetry because it is only with this revealed knowledge that the poet could set to work. Cowley takes this view on board and develops it in one of his original compositions justly entitled 'The Muse,' where his fascination with the Muse would become even more apparent as he describes the whole creative process for which she provides a catalyst.

The role of the Muse is intertwined with the notion of the pre-eminence of the poet's natural gifts over art or technique. The poet cannot learn his craft by study, hence the elevation of inborn gifts over acquired skill, of natural talent over art. Pindar makes the point in *Olympian 2*, the first of his two odes that Cowley translates. Nature is the touchstone; art or technique merely adds to that which is already within the poet. Though poetry is not completely a matter of inspiration, it could not depend on art

because that would take away its essence. Here is Cowley's rendition of the relevant passage in which art is likened to the 'ignoble' crow and nature to the 'sacred' eagle:

Let *Art* use *Method* and good *Husbandry*,
Art lives on *Natures Alms*, is weak and poor;
Nature herself has unexhausted store,
Wallows in *Wealth*, and runs a turning *Maze*,
That no *vulgar Eye* can trace.
Art instead of mounting high,
About her *humble Food* does hov'ering fly,
Like the ignoble *Crow*, *rapine* and *noise* does love,
Whilst *Nature*, like the sacred Bird of *Jove*,
Now bears loud *Thunder*, and anon with *silent joy*
The beauteous *Phrygian Boy*,
Defeats the *Strong*, o'retakes the *Flying* prey;
And sometimes basks in th'open *Flames* of *Day*,
And sometimes too he shrowds,
His soaring *wings* among the *Clouds*.
(*'Second Olympique Ode,'* 148-162)

In this poem Pindar gives the impression of despising art which he describes as methodical, weak and poor, humble, and resembling the crow. Everything about the poet has to bespeak a natural talent or inborn gift that he uses to access the message of the Muse and explain it to men. Cowley affirms that, "*Pindar* falls frequently into this common place of preferring *Nature* before *Art*. ... The comparison of *Art* to a *Crow*, and *Nature* to an *Eagle*, is very *nobly extravagant*, but it was necessary to enlarge it." Among the many qualities of the eagle are its "strength, courage and swiftness;" in addition, "Nothing but the Eagle is said to be able to look full right into the Sun" (*'Second Olympique Ode,'* Notes, p. 168). For Pindar the eagle was the king of birds and the sacred bird of Zeus, hence his complete identification with it. In fact, Pindar often portrayed himself as the eagle, soaring high in the clouds with his Muse and accomplishing his poetic tasks forcefully and faultlessly. In warning to his followers, poets who did not possess the same natural qualities would not keep pace with him or soar as high up in the clouds. Pindar's position almost certainly inspires the many situations where Cowley portrays his poetic vocation as fated to the extent that he had no choice in his destiny. He considers himself to have

been born a poet. Perhaps the most salient example comes from one of the odes in imitation of Pindar already cited above on the subject of 'Destinie,' where Fate decrees that the Muse should claim him for her own from birth:

Me from the *womb* the *Midwife Muse* did take:
She cut my *Navel*, *washt me*, and mine *Head*
 With her own *Hands* she *Fashioned*;
 She did a *Covenant* with me make,
And *circumcis'ed* my tender *Soul*, and thus she spake,
 Thou of my *Church* shalt be. ...

 With *Fate* what boots it to contend?
Such I *began*, such *am*, and so must *end*.
 ('Destinie,' 33-38, 50-51)

Having established a common theoretical base with Pindar, Cowley finds it useful to find out how the Latin poets followed the Greek master, for which he turns to Horace, along with Virgil his favourite Roman poet. Already Cowley is following in the tracks of Jonson who became the first major English poet to claim Horace for his chief classical model, translating a lot of his works including the *Ars Poetica* and some odes and epodes. Jonson unsurprisingly acclaims him as the best to learn from. Accordingly, "[Our poet] must read many, but ever the best and choicest: those that can teach him anything, he must ever account his masters, and reverence: among whom Horace, and he that taught him, Aristotle, deserve to be the first in estimation."⁵² On Latin imitation of Greek models, Jonson cites Horace's example in conclusion to this familiar passage: "Observe how the best writers have imitated, and follow them: how Virgil and Statius have imitated Homer, how Horace, Archilochus; how Alcaeus, and the other lyrics; and so of the rest."⁵³ Cowley's first mention of Horace in the *Pindarique Odes* comes right at the beginning when he chooses the motto for his title page from the piece Horace addressed to Julius Florus (Horace, *Epistles* 1. III, 9-11). Perhaps the influence of Pindar on Horace's odes might have

been a determining factor on Cowley's decision to imitate the greatest lyric poet in ancient Greece? Perhaps Cowley merely sought to benefit from the experience of a great Roman poet who was a self-confessed follower of Greek models? Without any overt mention of other possible sources of inspiration such as Jonson's imitation of Pindar, it is possible that Cowley might have accepted a challenge from Horace who proclaimed the difficulty of imitating Pindar in the poem that would conclude this section. Greene sums up the difficulty for would-be followers of Pindar that Horace was very so conscious of:

The vital power inherent in Pindar's poetry seems to be conflated with the vital flow of history, sweeping from that distant, almost unattainable source. Pindaric odes move with a fearful energy lacking in lesser versifiers and requiring special courage from that follower who has not paled at the prospect of drinking from their stream. ... [Horace's] respect for this awful force is genuine.⁵⁴

The appropriation of the motto sets the scene for Cowley's adaptation of Horace's praise of Pindar in *Odes* 4.2. His avid interest in the Roman poet's theory of Pindaric imitation is in line with Harvey Goldstein's remark that, "The various classical, mediæval, and Renaissance references to Pindar are, by and large, variations and repetitions of Horace's celebration."⁵⁵ Even so, Cowley's imitation of Horace involves the use of only one half of the original that chimes with his intention of celebrating Pindar. He does not need the second part of the poem that speaks about Augustus's triumphs and military heroism, thus staying well clear of the political associations in Horace's original. He states his subject in the title he gives to the poem, 'The Praise of Pindar. In Imitation of Horace his second Ode.' In the first of four stanzas, the Pindaric spring of the motto swells up into a flood of cataract proportions capable of drowning the noise of the on-rushing ocean that meets it:

Pindar is imitable by none;
The *Phoenix Pindar* is a vast *Species alone*.
Who e're but *Daedalus* with waxen wings could fly

And neither *sink* too low, nor *soar* too high?
 What could he who *follow'd* claim,
 But of vain *boldness* the unhappy fame,
 And by his fall a *Sea* to name?
Pindars unnavigable Song
 Like a swoln *Flood* from some steep *Mountain* pours along,
 The *Ocean* meets with such a *Voice*
 From his enlarged *Mouth*, as drowns the *Oceans* noise.
 ('The Praise of Pindar. In Imitation of Horace his second Ode,' 1-11)⁵⁶

In his Notes, Cowley explains further the lofty status enjoyed by Pindar as a unique personality whose memory was even held sacred:

Pindar was incredibly admired and honoured among the Ancients: ... Insomuch, that long after his death, when *Thebes* was quite burnt and destroyed both times the *House* wherein he had lived was alone preserved by publick Authority, as a place *sacred* and *inviolable*. ('The Praise of Pindar,' Notes, p. 180)

Cowley goes on in the same passage to cite in Latin the authority of Quintilian, whom he considered as good a literary judge as ever lived, to bear testimony to Pindar's greatness and thereby draw attention to his inspired decision to follow him:

Novem Lyricorum longe Pindarus princeps, spiritus magnificentiâ, sentiis, figuris beatissimus, rerum verborumq; copia & velut quodam eloquentiæ flumine, propter quæ Horatius nemini credit eum imitabilem - Of the nine lyric poets Pindar is by far the greatest, in virtue of his inspired magnificence, the beauty of his thoughts and figures, the rich exuberance of his language and matter, and his rolling flood of eloquence, characteristics which, as Horace rightly held, make him inimitable.⁵⁷

Cowley is at one with Horace in his total admiration for the accomplishments of Pindar and this is evident in the glowingly intense images and figures of speech he uses in the poem. These images reinforce the message of the first line: Pindar is not imitable. The metaphor of the phoenix comforts the Theban poet's immortality, like that of the mythical bird whose life could never be extinguished or else it would rise again from its ashes. The difficulty for aspiring imitators is that only one of these birds exists, meaning that anyone attempting to imitate him would either "*sink* too low" or "*soar* too high." His "*unnavigable Song*" is compared to a mighty flood that rumbles along and drowns the ocean's noise, an image on which Cowley expatiates thus: "I term his Song *Unnavigable*; for it is able to drown any *Head* that is not

strong built and well *ballasted*. Horace in another place calls it a *Fountain*; from the unexhausted abundance of his Invention” (‘The Praise of Pindar,’ Notes, p. 180).

Cowley is therefore fully conscious of the magnitude of his task, but he is supremely confident in his ability to avoid an Icarus-like crash that would send him drowning in unnavigable waters.

Following on from highlighting Pindar’s reputation in the first stanza, the next two praise his art. The second stanza celebrates his style and the nature of his poetry, making continued use of the water imagery. The flood of the previous stanza becomes a tide that could be contained neither by natural banks nor by man-made dikes.

So *Pindar* does new *Words* and *Figures* roul
Down his impetuous *Dithyrambique* Tide,
Which in no *Channel* deigns t’abide,
Which neither *Banks* nor *Dikes* controul.
Whether th’ *Immortal Gods* he sings
In a no less *Immortal strain*,
Or the great Acts of *God-descended Kings*,
Who in his Numbers still survive and *Reign*.
Each rich embroidered *Line*,
Which their triumphant *Brows* around,
By his sacred Hand is bound,
Does all their *starry Diadems* outshine.

(‘The Praise of Pindar,’ 12-23)

The dithyramb was one of the various kinds Pindar wrote,⁵⁸ and Cowley regretfully points out that, “There are none of *Pindars Dithyrambiques* extant. *Dithyrambiques* were *Hymns* made in honour of *Bacchus*. ... It was a bold, free, *enthusiastical* kind of Poetry, as of men inspired by *Bacchus*, that is, *Half-Drunk*” (‘The Praise of Pindar,’ Notes, p. 180). The banks and dikes that seek to control Pindar’s tide are metaphors for nature and art, just as the tide is yet another metaphor for his poetry: “*Banks*, *natural*; *Dikes*, *artificial*. It will neither be bounded and circumscribed by *Nature*, nor by *Art*” (Notes, p. 181). The all-conquering force of this kind of poetry

contributes to the “*Immortal strain*” of Pindar’s song that cherishes and enhances the time-honoured link between poetry and immortality. Poetry lasts for all ages, conferring immortality on the poet as well as on those his song celebrates. In Bowra’s words, “However immediate and temporary the occasions may have been, ... [Pindar] looked beyond the passing moment to an unending future when his works would be known and the men whom he honoured in them still remembered.”⁵⁹ This theme is carried into the next stanza that highlights Pindar’s celebration of heroes that triumph in the Olympic games.

The relationship between heroism and the poetry that celebrates it marks the third stanza. Pindar’s song is the poetry equivalent of the art of an Olympic champion; we find that all art ultimately requires similar technical qualities in order to attain perfection. Where the exercise requires the champion to be swift, Pindar’s song is nimble; the one is skilful, the other artful; the one strong and the other vigorous. This correlation presupposes a connection between the poet and the hero; it places Pindar on the same level as the heroes he celebrates in his immortal strain, thus preserving both poet and subject for all time.

Whether at *Pisa’s* race he please
To *carve* in polisht *Verse* the *Conque’rors Images*,
Whether the *Swift*, the *Skilful*, or the *Strong*,
Be crowned in his *Nimble, Artful, Vigorous* Song:
Whether some brave young man’s untimely fate
In words worth *Dying for* he celebrate,
 Such *mournful*, and such *pleasing* words,
As *joy* to’his *Mothers* and his *Mistress grief* affords:
 He bids him *Live* and *Grow* in fame,
 Among the *Stars* he sticks his *Name*:
The *Grave* can but the *Dross* of him devour,
So *small* is *Deaths*, so *great* the *Poets* power.
 (‘The Praise of Pindar,’ 24-35)

The subject of poetry having the power to overcome death and confer immortality is one that Cowley finds particularly appealing. In fact, it is the first subject he tackles

in the opening lines of the opening poem of his 1656 collection, setting the tone for the whole volume thus: "What shall I do to be for ever known, / And make the *Age to come* my own?" ('The Motto,' 1-2). He resolves to attain the immortality enjoyed by the ancients, hence his chosen method of becoming an imitative poet.

The last stanza provides a contrast between the strong Theban Swan that soars high into the clouds and a seemingly timorous Muse that preoccupies itself with unambitious tracks down below.

Lo, how th'obsequious *Wind*, and swelling *Ayr*
The *Theban Swan* does upwards bear
Into the *walks* of *Clouds*, where he does play,
And with extended *Wings* open his liquid way.
Whilst, alas, my *tim'orous Muse*
Unambitious tracks pursues;
Does with weak unballast wings,
About the *mossy Brooks* and *Springs*;
About the *Trees* new-blossom'ed *Heads*,
About the *Gardens* painted *Beds*,
About the *Fields* and flowry *Meads*,
And all *inferior beauteous things*
Like the laborious *Bee*,
For little drops of *Honey* flee,
And there with *Humble Sweets* contents her *Industrie*.
(*'The Praise of Pindar,'* 36-50)

The poem first describes Pindar as a bird, the phoenix, and now conjures up the image of a swan to conclude his description. Cowley explains this choice thus: "*Theocritus* terms the Poets ... The *Birds* of the *Muses*; which the Commentators say, is in allusion to *Swans*. ... They were consecrated to *Apollo*, and consequently beloved by the *Muses* and *Poets*" ('The Praise of Pindar,' Notes, p. 181). The interest in this stanza lies in the contrast between one poet finding his range high above in the clouds and the other labouring without effect down below.

Cowley has already drawn attention to the need for Pindar's followers to be "strong built and well *ballasted*" or else they drown, and yet Horace affirms that his Muse is

incapable of following the Theban Swan into the clouds because of its “weak unballast wings.” He no longer feels like one of the birds of the Muses capable of soaring upwards; rather he feels like a bee that contents itself with seemingly inferior things on the ground. Like the laborious bee with its humble industry, he cannot follow Pindar because of his weak and limited Muse. But Horace seems to be playing down his own poetic ability in order to complete effectively his praise of Pindar and give all glory to the Greek master. He gives the impression that, incapable of following Pindar, he would rather make honey out of several choice flowers or imitate a variety of poets. And yet his ode is testament to his understated ability to capture the Pindaric spirit and achieve the grand manner of the Greek master. Of Horace’s efforts in this particular ode Greene remarks that, “Horatian imitation is ... allegedly incapable of the grand Pindaric note. Yet here in the ode as a whole something like the force of Pindar is genuinely conveyed, and there is no Icarian catastrophe.”⁶⁰ It is in this sense that Horace too becomes Cowley’s master. In his Preface, he infers that he has joined Horace in a select group of Pindar’s followers and warns off potential imitators or pretenders to such status, his advice itself taken from a Horatian source, the *Ars Poetica* (240-42):

... *Ut sibi quivis*
Speret idem, multum sudet frustráq, labore
Ausus idem. ...

This comes from a passage where Horace is discussing the seeming ease of writing that might lead some to try it: “That any one might think himself capable of the same; but upon trial sweat much, and labor in vain” (*Poems*, Preface, p. 11).⁶¹

4.3 Translation: The Pindaric Experiment

Leave, wanton *Muse*, thy roving flight,
 To thy loud *String* the well-flecht *Arrow* put. ...

Swear in no City e're before,
A better man, or greater-soul'd was born. ...
Swear that none e're had such a graceful art.
(‘The Second Olympique Ode of Pindar’)

Thee first my Song does greet
With numbers smooth and fleet. ...
For whom should we esteem above
The Men whom Gods do love.
'Tis them alone the Muse too does approve.
(‘The First Nemeæan Ode of Pindar’)

Cowley’s theory of free translation could be placed along the axis of the two related seventeenth-century nomenclatural kinds of “‘translational imitation’ (which only modernizes details) and of ‘creative imitation’ (which not only modernizes details but differs significantly from the original in structure or meaning).”⁶² Without fitting tightly into any one category, Cowley’s special Preface on his theory calls for a modernisation of the translator’s art. This modernisation takes cognisance of the need for the translator-poet “to supply the lost Excellencies of another *Language* with new ones in their own” (*Pindarique Odes*, Preface, p. 156). The closest he comes to labelling his method is when he describes it as “this libertine way,” a non-conformist approach that leaves him wondering if his rendition of Pindar would still deserve to be called a translation. He proceeds to say that his practice is deserving of a better label because the much-used title of translator and even imitator might not do justice to his revolutionary approach:

It does not at all trouble me that the *Grammarians* perhaps will not suffer this libertine way of rendring forreign Authors, to be called *Translation*; for I am not so much enamoured of the *Name Translator*, as not to wish rather to be *Something Better*, though it want yet a *Name*. I speak not so much all this, in defence of my manner of *Translating*, or *Imitating* (or what other Title they please) the two ensuing *Odes* of *Pindar*. (*Pindarique Odes*, Preface, p. 156).

According to Weinbrot’s definition in his work on seventeenth century imitation, Cowley’s work appears to belong to the category of translation, free translation being “that which is basically a modernized work largely faithful to the original

author.”⁶³ Another determining factor is that, “The translator and Imitator as modernizer normally direct their work towards an audience substantially unfamiliar with the original.”⁶⁴ However, Weinbrot’s interchange of the two terms increasingly confuses the issue, all the more so when he introduces too many labels for the imitator – modernising or pure imitator on the one hand and independent or creative imitator on the other. The key lies with Cowley himself who suggests that his theory of free translation makes it a form of imitation. A study of his practice would reveal that his insistence on total liberty in rewriting Pindar’s poems, as well as his act of effectively equating translation to a creative process, reveals how he turns imitation into an art form. Our challenge here is therefore one which Sowerby eloquently expresses: to show how a classical poet, Pindar, “has been received in translation, transformed by imitation and put to creative uses” by a modern poet, Cowley.⁶⁵

On the word for word method of translation that Denham likewise had previously rejected out of hand, Cowley finally finds a name for it, calling it exact imitation. He becomes increasingly scathing in his negation of it, claiming that it could never attain the excellence of the original because it is comparable to servitude, not art:

All [*Translations*] which ever I yet saw, are so much inferiour to their Originals. The like happens too in *Pictures*, from the same root of exact *Imitation*, which being a vile and unworthy kind of *Servitude*, is incapable of producing any thing good or noble. I have seen *Originals* both in *Painting* and *Poesie*, much more beautiful than their *natural Objects*; but I never saw a *Copy* better than the *Original*, which indeed cannot be otherwise; for men resolving in no case to shoot *beyond the Mark*, it is a thousand to one if they shoot not *short* of it. (*Pindarique Odes*, Preface, pp. 155-156).

Describing literal translation or exact imitation as servitude recalls Denham declining the “servile path” in ‘To Sir Richard Fanshaw,’ which in turn recalls Jonson’s caution “not to imitate servilely (as Horace saith).” The Horatian source

Jonson refers to is the *Ars Poetica* (131-35): “For what was originally writ by another may be so turned ... your own; if you are not solicitous to every trifle, or translate faithfully word for word; if in fine, like a servile imitator, you do not fetter yourself with such narrow rules.”⁶⁶

Also, Cowley’s comparison of poetry to pictures perhaps has a Jonsonian source, which itself would typically be copied from antiquity:

Poetry and picture are arts of a like nature, and both are busy about imitation. It was excellently said of Plutarch, poetry was a speaking picture, and picture a mute poesy. ... They both are born artificers, not made. Nature is more powerful in them than study.⁶⁷

Cowley would have agreed with Jonson’s observation at the end of this passage that poetry is a natural gift; in fact, this strengthens his argument against exact imitation or literal translation because it negates the translator-poet’s inborn poetic gifts.

The idea that only one poet could successfully translate another forms the basis on which Cowley develops his theory of translating Pindar. Translation is essentially a creative activity, an art form. He makes the distinction between a poet and a mere versifier or rhymester, the latter lacking two indispensable ingredients: the wit of poetic expression and the true spirit of poetry essential to composition:

Rhyme, without the addition of *Wit*, and the *Spirit of Poetry* would but make it ten times more *Distracted* than it is in *Prose*. We must consider in *Pindar* the great difference of time betwixt his age and ours, which changes, as in *Pictures*, at least the *Colours of Poetry*, the no less difference betwixt the *Religions* and *Customs* of our Country, and a thousand particularities of places, persons, and manners, which do but confusedly appear to our Eyes at so great a distance. And lastly we must consider that our Ears are strangers to the Musick of his Numbers, which sometimes (especially in *Songs* and *Odes*) almost without anything else, makes an excellent *Poet*. ... This is in some measure to be applied to all *Translations*. (*Pindarique Odes*, Preface, p. 155).

The two indispensable qualities of wit and spirit of poetry are incidentally the exact same ones Jonson identifies as well: “[Aristotle] taught us ... how we ought

to judge rightly of others, and what we ought to imitate specially in ourselves. But all this in vain without a natural wit, and a poetical nature in chief.”⁶⁸ Cowley gives details here of his plan for modernisation: the translator should take into account the manifold differences between his age and that of the original poet, including time and place, country, language, culture, and religion. Cowley therefore endorses the point Jonson made about bringing modern circumstances and the poet’s experience to bear on imitative art: “For to all the observations of the ancients, we have our own experience; which if we will use and apply, we have better means to pronounce.” Further, there should be no harmonisation of Pindar’s metre by trimming it down to regular feet and measures: “Though the *Grammarians* and *Criticks* have laboured to reduce his Verses into regular feet and measures yet in effect they are little better than *Prose* to our Ears” (*Pindarique Odes*, Preface, p. 155). For Cowley the true test lies in making the reader perceive the translation as natural in English. This involves using an English idiom and paying attention to prosody and metrical patterns.

Cowley’s sentiments, from the need for the translator to be a poet to the inevitability of modernisation, are echoed by Denham in his Preface to *The Destruction of Troy*, published incidentally in 1656, the same year as Cowley’s work. Again the overt influence of the *Ars Poetica* is evident in the deliberate use of the Horatian phrase, “*Fidus Interpres*:”

I conceive it a vulgar error in translating Poets, to affect being *Fidus Interpres*; let that care be with them who deal in matters of Fact, or matters of Faith: but whosoever aims at it in Poetry, it is not his business alone to translate Language into Language, but Poesie into Poesie; and Poesie is of so subtle a spirit, that in pouring out of one Language into another it will all evaporate; and if a new spirit be not added in the transfusion, there will remain nothing but a *Caput mortuum*, there being certain Graces and Happinesses peculiar to every Language, which gives life and energy to the words. ... For the grace of the Latine will be lost by being turned into English words; and the grace of the English, by being turned into the Latine phrase. ... If

Virgil must needs speak English, it were fit he should speak not only as a man of this Nation, but as a man of this age.⁶⁹

This section is about Cowley's experimentation with these new theories of translation and applying them to the rendition of Pindar's *Olympian 2* and *Nemean 1*. Here is how he explains his project and closes his special Preface by introducing the poems:

I have in these *Odes of Pindar* taken, left out, and added what I please; nor make it so much my aim to let the Reader know precisely what he spoke, as what was his *way* and *manner* of speaking; which has not been yet (that I know of) introduced into *English*, though it be the noblest and highest kind of writing in Verse. ... This *Essay* is but to try how it will look in an *English habit*: for which experiment, I have chosen one of his *Olympique*, and another of his *Nemean Odes*. (*Pindarique Odes*, Preface, p. 156).

Cowley begins his translation of Pindar's 'Second Olympique Ode' with an Argument that provides proemial information. As well as introducing the subject, it provides a commentary on Pindar's original practice as well:

Written in praise of *Theron Prince of Agrigentum* (a famous City in *Sicily* built by his *Ancestors*) who in the seventy seventh *Olympique* won the *Chariot-prize*. He is commended from the *Nobility* of his Race (whose story is often toucht on) from his great *Riches* (an ordinary *Common-Place* in *Pindar*) from his *Hospitality*, *Munificence*, and other *Virtues*. The *Ode* (according to the constant custom of the *Poet*) consists more in *Digressions*, than in the main *subject*: And the *Reader* must not be chocqued to hear him speak so often of his own *Muse*; for that is a *Liberty* which this kind of *Poetry* can hardly live without. ('Second Olympique Ode,' Argument, p. 157).

This introduction hints at Cowley's intention largely to preserve the essence of Pindar's content in terms of subject matter and meaning; therefore at first sight it is in the structure that he mainly veers away from the original. But the practice itself shows how he effectively rewrites the ode into a poem one hundred and ninety three lines in length, split into eleven stanzas of varying lengths from thirteen to twenty two lines each. The individual lines are themselves of irregular length, from as short as four syllables to rather long fourteen-syllable lines. Still, perhaps the most obvious difference in external structure is in the stanza division:

Cowley's stanza pattern numbering one to eleven is at complete variance with Pindar's pattern of a series of triads each consisting of a strophe, an antistrophe,

more familiar with Latin tradition and Roman culture, including their gods. There is even more evidence of his fondness for Latin in his Notes, because they offer a stanza by stanza rendition of the Greek original followed by a Latin translation. It is not clear who the author of the Latin version is or why he has an alternative version at all, but the pattern would be repeated in the notes to the Nemeæan ode as well. A theory by Judith Sloman suggests that, the change of name – Jove for Zeus - would be significant in ruling out the work as a strict paraphrase: “the minimal distinction between imitation of any sort and paraphrase is that the first modernizes names and allusions while the second repeats them.”⁷² There is even more evidence of Cowley’s innovations in that first stanza. He noticeably changes the opening line (“*Queen* of all Harmonious things”) in order to introduce the Muse immediately: “Whereas *Pindar* addresses himself to his *Song*, I change it to his *Muse*” (‘Second Olympique Ode,’ Notes, p. 163). It is a change of the original intention, an introduction of a new meaning to the poem’s opening. It turns it into an invocation to the Muse for poetic inspiration, thereby giving the impression that the Muse is the real author whose wisdom the poet interprets and renders in the ode. This agrees with the theory propagated by Pindar himself that it is not the poet but the Muse that is possessed, that the poet is the prophet of the Muse enabled by his poetic calling and natural talent to sing in human terms what the Muse communicates to him.

Following on from Cowley’s appeal to Pindar’s Muse, there is a sense in which Cowley is simultaneously invoking his own Muse as well, just as he would make statements about poetic activity that apply both to Pindar and to himself. His creative translation makes him consider himself no less an author than Pindar of

the new poetic creation, enough reason for him to require the inspiration of his Muse as well. He would compose as one of his original odes a piece suggestively entitled 'The Muse,' but in this poem he is thinking of himself whilst endorsing Pindar's statements about the poet's fortunes. He says as much himself, for example, when claiming that poets follow the heroes they immortalise in their passage to Elysium: "I make bold to adde, that the *Poets* are there too, for *Pindars* honour, that I may not say, for *mine own*" ('Second Olympique Ode,' Notes, p. 168). Here is the passage occasioned by Cowley's revealing confession and describing Elysium, the land of the blessed:

Whilst in the Lands of unexhausted *Light*
O're which the *God-like Suns* unwearied sight,
 Ne're *winks* in *Clouds*, or *Sleeps* in *Night*,
An endless *Spring* of Age the Good enjoy,
Where neither *Want* does *pinch*, nor *Plenty cloy*. ...

Soft-footed Winds with tuneful voyces there
 Dance through the perfum'd Air.
There *Silver Rivers* through *enamell'd Meadows* glide,
 And *golden Trees* enrich their side,
Th' *illustrious Leaves* no dropping *Autumn* fear,
 And *Jewels* for their *fruit* they bear.
 Which by the *Blest* are gathered
For *Bracelets* to the Arm, and *Garlands* to the Head.
Here all the *Hero's*, and their *Poets* live.

 ('Second Olympique Ode,' 106-110, 122-130)

Again Cowley explains that his two-stanza description of Elysium is done in his manner rather than Pindar's: "A description of the *Fortunate Islands*, or *Elysian Fields*, so often mentioned by the *Poets*, and much after this manner." Perhaps Cowley does not even believe so much in Elysium itself as in the idea of life after death, for he speaks with conviction of "the *Blessed* now in the other World" ('Second Olympique Ode,' Notes, p. 167). It is even more certain that he believes in the idea of the poet attaining heroic status and deserving of such recognition, just as he believes that poetry confers immortality both on the hero being described and on the poet describing him. Addressing Theron, whose Olympic triumph

occasions the poem, he makes it clear that the poet and the hero need one another, the proof being that the latter and an equally great ancestor, Thersander, would forever 'live' by means of the poet's enduring creation:

Brave *Thersander* was by none
In war, or warlike sports out-done.
Thou *Theron* his great virtues dost revive,
He in *my Verse* and *Thee* again does *live*.
(‘Second Olympique Ode,’ 74-77)

Cowley is happy to endorse Pindar's view that his poetry has so much power that it generates immortality because the gods themselves have given it their blessing. He confirms this in a direct address to Jove, son of Rhea and father of gods and humans who has the power to preserve life and forbid things to decay or die:

To which great *Son of Rhea*, say
The *Firm Word* which forbids things to *Decay*. ...
If in *my Verse* thou dost delight,
My Verse, O *Rhea's Son* ...
(‘Second Olympique Ode,’ 29-30, 34-35)

Again these lines that Cowley introduces amount to a personal statement, showing how he draws attention very subtly to his verse and its ability to live on and not decay. The technique of repetition works to great effect as he constantly harps on the god – Rhea's Son – and his verse as he forges a relationship between them. Johnson cited the same passage as constituting “pretty lines,” but also an example of how “the spirit of Pindar is indeed not every where equally preserved.”⁷³

The passage cited in the previous section on the virtue of natural talent and inborn gifts shows the level at which poet and hero meet, for both enjoy the privilege of being distinguished in their respective ways from other men at birth. Cowley agrees with Pindar that art is nothing without nature and that the difference should be emphasised so as to ensure the acknowledgement of the poet's special status. He endorses Pindar's comparison of art to a crow and of nature to an eagle

because, though he thinks the comparison extravagant, he must defend the necessity to enhance the poet's special status as it applies to him. This is why we could infer that his call to the Muse to ensure that no greater man than Theron was born doubles up as a plea to ensure that no better poet than himself is born. After all, is it not to his Muse as much as Pindar's that he addresses the plea?

Leave, wanton *Muse*, thy roving flight,
 To thy loud *String* the well-flecht *Arrow* put. ...
 And lest the Name of *Verse* should give
 Malitious men pretext to *misbelieve*,
 By the *Castalian waters* swear,
 (A sacred *Oath* no *Poets* dare
 To take in vain), ...
 Swear in no City e're before,
 A better man, or greater-soul'd was born, ...
 Swear that none e're had such a graceful art,
 Fortunes *free* gifts as *freely* to impart
 With an *Unenvious hand*, and an *unbounded Heart*.
 ('Second Olympique Ode,' 163-64, 167-71, 173-74, 177-79)

The notes to this first rendition of Pindar's poetry deserve special mention for the way they clarify Cowley's poetics and thus recall a similar use to which he puts his notes in the *Davideis*. They are especially useful for explaining how he uses his poetic licence to introduce characteristic changes into his translation, thereby turning it into a veritable creative exercise. Following on from his design to leave out or add what he pleases to the original, he claims early on, for example, to "make bold to take that sense which pleases me best." The occasion concerns the mention in the second stanza of Theron's ancestors building the town of Agrigentum:

They say, that *Æmon* ... fled from *Thebes* ... into *Sicilie*, where he built *Agrigentum*; and from him to *Theron* are reckoned many Generations. ... I rather chuse to call *Agrigentum*, then *Therons* Ancestors (as *Pindar* does) the *Eye of Sicilie*. The Metaphor in this sense is more natural. ... I know very well, that it is not certain that this Town was built by *Therons* Ancestors; neither do the words of *Pindar* import more than their dwelling there: nevertheless, the thing being doubtful, I make bold to take that sense which pleases me best. ('Second Olympique Ode,' Notes, pp. 163-4).

Again the description in stanza five of Oedipus's slaying of his father, Laius, as "the *innocent Parricide*" (70) is Cowley's addition, for which he explains thus:

One may ask, Why he makes mention of these tragical accidents and actions of *Oedipus* and his *Sons*, in an *Ode* dedicated to the praise of *Theron* and his Ancestors? I answer, That they were so notorious, that it was better to excuse than conceal them; for which cause, he attributes them to *Fatality*; and to *mitigate* the thing yet more, I adde, *The innocent Parricide*. ('Second Olympique Ode,' Notes, p. 165).

Another notable example of Cowley making full use of his licence is where he changes the actual message, rather than just stylistic or cosmetic adjustments. This is on occasion of a passage in stanza eight in which he feigns that Achilles had joined the immortals in Elysium by virtue of his mother dipping his soul in the River Styx. On this occasion, not only does he leave out the original passage in Pindar, but he substitutes it with an idea founded on the tradition of Thetis dipping Achilles's body into the Styx:

Here great *Achilles* wrathful now no more,
Since his blest *Mother* (who before
Had try'd it on his *Body*' in vain)
Dipt now his *Soul* in *Stygian Lake*,
Which did from thence a *divine Hardness* take,
That does from *Passion* and from *Vice Invulnerable* make.
(*'Second Olympique Ode,'* 135-140)

What is remarkable in Cowley's notes to this passage is the vigorous assertion of his authority to feign. It is indeed a bold declaration: "I am authorized to feign!"

There follows a Description of *Achilles*, from the slaughter of *Hector*, *Cygnus* and *Memnon*, which I thought better to leave out; and instead of it, to adde by what means *Thetis* made his *Soul*, that was before so tainted with Anger, Pride, and Cruelty, capable of being admitted into this place; which I believed it not improper to attribute to her dipping of it in *Styx*, as she had formerly done his *body*, all but his *heel*. ... That the water of *Styx* might have the like effects upon his *Soul*, I am authorized to feign, by the common Tradition of the water of *Lethe*, whose power upon the *Soul* is no less. ('Second Olympique Ode,' Notes, pp. 167-68).

Cowley's insistence on exercising total liberty supports the idea that his free translation is an imitation, a rewritten version of the original. Completely at odds with the thought of producing a pale and uninspired copy of the original, he perceives translation as an imitative art that offers him the possibility to impose the full range of his poetic powers on the work thus transformed.

The second of the two odes Cowley translates from Pindar is the 'First Nemeæan Ode' that celebrates the achievements of Chromius in the Nemeæan Games. Again Cowley provides introductory notes in the Argument that doubles up as a commentary on Pindar's original:

Chromius, the Son of Agesidamus, a young Gentleman of Sicilie, is celebrated for having won the prize of the Chariot-Race in the Nemeæan Games upon which occasion, the Poet begins with the commendation of his Country, which I take to be Ortygia though the title of the Ode call him Ætnian Chromius, perhaps because he was made Governour of that Town by Hieron. From thence he falls into the praise of Chromius his person, which he draws from his great endowments of Mind and Body, and most especially from his Hospitality, and the worthy use of his riches. He likens his beginning to that of Hercules, and according to his usual manner of being transported with any good Hint that meets him in his way, passing into a Digression of Hercules, and his slaying the two Serpents in his Cradle, concludes the Ode with that History. ('First Nemeæan Ode,' Argument, p. 170).

Cowley arranges his version into one hundred and thirty three lines split into nine stanzas, compared to the twelve stanzas but shorter length of the Greek original done in Pindar's four-part triadic arrangement. In the original, the commendation Cowley describes in the Argument occupies the first triad and is done in three parts. The strophe focuses on Ortygia as site of the festivities, the anti-strophe discusses the role of the gods in human victories, and the epode praises Sicily as the birthplace of Chromius. The second triad is mainly devoted to the praise of Chromius's person, while the remaining two triads take up the parallel story of Hercules and his exploits. Cowley follows this arrangement in similar proportions: the commendation takes up three stanzas, the praise of Chromius two including the central fifth, and the myth of Hercules the last four. Here is the first stanza:

Beauteous *Ortygia*, the first *breathing place*
Of great *Alpheus* close and amorous race,
 Fair *Delos Sister*, the *Child-Bed*
 Of bright *Latona*, where she bred
 The *Original New-Moon*,
Who saw'st her tender *Forehead* e're the *Horns* were grown.
Who like a gentle *Scion*, newly started out,
 From *Syracusa's* side dost *sprout*.
 Thee first my *Song* does greet
 With numbers smooth and fleet,
 As thine own *Horses* airy feet,
When they young *Chromius* Chariot drew,

And o're the *Nemeæan* race *triumphant* flew.
Jove will approve my *Song* and *Me*,
Jove is concern'd in *Nemea*, and in *Thee*.
 ('First Nemean Ode,' 1-15)

In comparison, here is a direct translation of the first strophe:

O revered ground where Alpheus
 Stayed his pursuit, and Artemis found rest, Ortygia,
 Let thy name, branch of glorious Syracuse
 And sister of Delos, prelude my song,
 Whose words shall ring sweet to the ear, in praise
 Of race-horses swift-footed as the wind,
 And in honour of Zeus of Aetna.
 For Chromius' chariot and Nemea's contest
 Charge me to yoke to his victorious deeds
 My melody of triumph.
 (Pindar, *Nemean 1*)⁷⁴

Cowley seems to relish a long introductory segment or invocation that provides plenty of opportunity to extol the virtues of heroism. Firstly, though, he decides to invert the established order by invoking the island of Ortygia, historically part of Sicily but joined to the mainland of Syracuse by a mole, before invoking the River Alpheus. By modifying the original, he gives Ortygia its rightful place as the subject of the opening stanza to which he aims his address: "Thee first my *Song* does greet / With numbers smooth and fleet." Straightaway Cowley emphasises the poet's contribution with "my *Song*," and again he places the emphasis on "my *Song* and *Me*" in the last couplet: "*Jove* will approve my *Song* and *Me*, / *Jove* is concern'd in *Nemea*, and in *Thee*." On the contribution of poetry in preserving heroes, Pindar has made it possible for Chromius to live perpetually and Cowley is keen to highlight his role in giving the hero a new lease of life. He too is composing a song, even as Pindar composed the same before him.

The second part of the invocation at last introduces the Muse and highlights the role of the gods who lay the foundations of the hero's prowess. By this act of bringing the hero to success in the games and therefore the height of his fame, the gods also lay

the foundation of the poet's song as the Muse inspires him to sing about these victors and their conquests. Little wonder then that the Muse would want to sing everything about Chromius, starting from his birthplace, the island of Sicily, otherwise called the Isle of Proserpine, the praise of which constitutes the final part of the commendation:

With *Jove*, my *Song*; this happy man,
Young *Chromius* too with *Jove* began;
From hence came his success. ...
For whom should we esteem above
The *Men* whom *Gods* do love.
'Tis them alone the *Muse* too does approve.
Lo how it makes this victory shine
O're all the fruitful Isle of *Proserpine*! ...

To thee, O *Proserpine*, this *Isle* I give,
Said *Jove*, and as he said,
Smil'd, and bent his gracious *Head*,
And thou, O *Isle*, said he, for ever thrive,
And keep the *value* of our *Gift* alive.
(‘First Nemeæan Ode,’ 16-18, 21-25, 31-35)

Cowley is keen to take on board what Pindar says about the Muse because he attributes it to his very own Muse as well, as in the gnomic proposition that the Muse approves of those whom the gods love. In fact, whereas the Muse's presence throughout is implied in Pindar, Cowley brings in his Muse again at the core of the ode, right in the middle, to introduce the praise of Chromius:

Go to great *Syracuse*, my *Muse*, and wait
At *Chromius* Hospitable Gate.
'Twill open wide to let thee in,
When thy *Lyres* voyce shall but begin. ...
Chromius and *Thou* art met aright,
For as by *Nature* thou dost *Write*,
So he by *Nature* Loves, and does by *Nature* Fight.
(‘First Nemean Ode,’ 47-50, 57-59)

The keynote statement, “by *Nature* thou dost *Write*,” is another personal comment by Cowley drawing attention to his supreme natural gifts. He reverts to the old theme that the hero and the Muse “art met aright,” thereby reiterating the fact that their celebration in poetry is natural, just as it is natural that poet and hero are endowed with inborn gifts. The keenness with which Cowley highlights the axioms

concerning the Muse could be contrasted to his attitude towards other ones. When for example he narrates in stanza eight how Amphityro beholds the infant Hercules throttling the two monster serpents, he does not include the “wise saying” that follows in the original. He explains why: “I leave out a sentence that follows [For what is his own weighs on every man alike, while the heart is soon free of care in the case of another’s sorrow]; which is a wise saying, but methinks to no great purpose in that place” (‘First Nemeæan Ode,’ Notes, p. 177). Cowley is therefore keen to highlight the importance of the Muse and her prophet who is the poet; further, he is keen to show that all poetic activity demands the use of the poet’s natural gifts. His practice of transforming the original, of leaving out or adding what his poetic instinct allows, enables him to embrace fully this notion of Pindar’s that poets are born, not made. But he does not express his opinion on the role of art in the poet’s make-up at this point.

As with the previous poem, Cowley’s notes reveal the full extent of his libertine way of translating that constitutes a constant interpretation of the original poem. There is a salient example in his conscious decision to avoid Pindar’s sudden transition from the praise of Chromius to the story of Hercules in the original. He explains: “*Pindar*, according to his manner, leaves the Reader to find as he can, the connexion between *Chromius* and the story of *Hercules*, which it seem’d to me necessary to make a little more perspicuous” (‘First Nemeæan Ode,’ Notes, p. 177). His remedy is to include a new passage on the infant Chromius in order to keep pace with his theory in the Argument that Pindar’s intention was to liken Chromius’s beginnings to Hercules’s:

How *early* has young *Chromius* begun
The *Race* of *Virtue*, and how swiftly run,
And born the noble *Prize* away,
Whilst other youths yet at the *Barriere* stay?

This connection that Cowley appears to make “more perspicuous” in his words between Chromius and Hercules recalls Johnson’s observations on one of his strengths in the ‘Olympique Ode.’ He wrote that, “The connection is supplied with great perspicuity, and the thoughts, which to a reader of less skill seem thrown together by chance, are concatenated without any abruption.”⁷⁵ In contrast to his additions, Cowley leaves out all mention of Hercules’ brother who, in the original poem, was lying beside him when the serpents came to attack them. He explains: “I leave out the mention of his Brother *Iphiclus*, who lay in the same Cradle, because it would but embroil the story, and adds nothing to the *similitude*” (‘First Nemeæan Ode,’ Notes, p. 177). His inclination to stress the similitude between the two heroes, Chromius and Hercules, makes the twist at the end of Cowley’s poem all the more surprising. In Pindar’s original the Hercules figure is supposed to have enjoyed peace, marriage, and happiness in the presence of the gods, the inference being that Chromius enjoyed similar rewards. But where Pindar mentions marriage to Hebe, Cowley describes the ‘marriage’ to eternal youth that accounts for Hercules’ immortality and thus draws attention to the immortality that awaited the other hero, Chromius, and the poet who celebrates him. It is upon closer inspection that it becomes evident that Cowley is merely placing the emphasis on a different aspect of the myth from Pindar, especially as concerns Hebe. Cowley latches onto Hebe’s status as the goddess of Youth and indeed of youthful beauty, and the fact that she was given to Hercules as his immortal wife such that their union would symbolise his newly-acquired eternal youth. That is how Cowley comes to concern himself with the aspect of the marriage that confers on a mortal the rewards of Heaven and immortality:

And that the *grateful Gods* at last,
The race of his *laborious Virtue* past,
 Heaven, which he *sav'ed*, should to him give,
Where *marry'd* to eternal *Youth* he should for ever live;
Drink *Nectar* with the *Gods*, and all his senses please
In their harmonious golden *Palaces*.

(‘First Nemean Ode,’ 123-128)

In a century-long tradition of free translation, Cowley’s libertine way marks a high point in the practice of this imitative art between the ages of Jonson and Dryden.

He is confident of his place in this tradition, claiming that his manner of exploring the delights of imitation is yet the most radical of all. Shunning constraint and methods that delimit his interpretation of the original, he insists on total liberty to challenge the master. He wants the freedom to transform the original into his own personal creation, and to this end he effects a clever device by which he prompts the arguments with personal comments that serve a reminder of his authorship.

“He was among those who freed translation from servility,” Johnson was to write of Cowley in familiar Horatian parlance, “and, instead of following his author at a distance, walked by his side.”⁷⁶ With Cowley’s approach, the translator is and is not the author of the work, rather like Denham who wrote ‘To the Reader’ of *Cato Major* that, “I can neither call this Piece *Tully’s* nor my own, being much altered from the Original.”⁷⁷ Cowley stresses at every turn that he is a poet, making his heroes show both himself and Pindar. Rather than suppress his identity or remain in the master’s shadow he claims in distinct fashion the status of all those heroes who, as mortal gods, preserved their immortality in poetry if not in the land of the blessed. In doing so, he preserves the immortality of Pindar as well.

4.4 Translation, Imitation and Composition: The *Anacreontiques*

Begin, my *Muse*; but lo, the strings
To my great *Song* rebellious prove;
The strings will sound of nought but *Love*.
(‘*Love*,’ 3-5)

They should always laugh, and sing,
And dance, and strike th’harmonious string.
Verse should from their Tongue so flow,
As if it in the *Mouth* did grow,
As swiftly answering their command,
As tunes obey the artful *Hand*.
(‘*Elegie Upon Anacreon*,’ 71-6)

The *Anacreontiques* epitomises Cowley’s search for new and congenial forms to express particular aspects of his thought just as it represents a culmination and the interlacing of the practices of translation, imitation and composition in the area of lyric poetry. It ranks among his greatest poetical masterpieces, combining with the grand undertaking of the *Pindarique Odes* to establish his reputation as a poet-translator. In accommodating the Anacreontic in addition to the Pindaric body of translation in his 1656 Poems, Cowley invariably adds to the trend-setting and extremely varied nature of his poetry, again inspired by ancient authority and practice.⁷⁸ As a short sequence of eleven lyrical pieces, the *Anacreontiques* punctuates and mediates between the love songs of *The Mistress* and the distinct lyric manner of the *Pindarique Odes*, combining the short lyric form and at times the love motif of the former with the free translation of the latter. Cowley probably conceived the idea of an Anacreontic project in 1651, the year Thomas Stanley published his translation that would especially influence his choice of titles.⁷⁹ It gave him occasion, therefore, to practise the theories of translation and imitation outlined in both his Preface to the *Pindarique Odes* and his Notes to the same, as well as the other theories and practices that have been discussed in the previous section. This section aims at seeking out the motivation for the *Anacreontiques*, the way Cowley

incorporates his vision, thought and practice to blend in with the subject and form of the original, and the way his brand of free translation enhances and transforms the Anacreontic tradition in England.

Critical opinion, when it has been forthcoming, has been remarkably favourable through the ages in its acclaim of Cowley's attempts to convey the delights of the original Greek Anacreontea in English.⁸⁰ In modern times Nethercot has suggested that no one could deny the success of the *Anacreontiques*,⁸¹ while Loiseau has explained away this success by claiming that they are the poetic equivalent of Cowley's hugely popular *Essays*.⁸² There was a tendency in the early twentieth century to pay only lukewarm interest and then mostly to censure his poetry while producing several editions of the *Essays* that received the highest praise, but the *Anacreontiques* still escaped the strictures on the other poetical works. In this regard comments such as Ruth Wallerstein's on the poetry were typical: "Cowley never found himself. He brought none of his endeavors to sustained excellence, except the *Anacreontics*."⁸³ In the half century following the work of Nethercot and Loiseau in the early 1930s, the *Anacreontiques* suffers considerable neglect nonetheless; even Cowleyan scholars like Hinman in the 1960s and Trotter in the 1970s pass it over.⁸⁴ Curiously it appears that the fate of the Greek Anacreontea mirrored that of Cowley's English adaptation as both versions became casualties of the vicissitudes of literary taste, just as the revival of the one would appear to herald that of the other.⁸⁵ The renewed interest since the 1980s in particular has witnessed the publication in full of the *Anacreontiques* by David Hopkins and Tom Mason who place it at the head of their selection of Cowley's poetry.⁸⁶ In his compendium, The Poets on the Classics: An Anthology, Stuart Gillespie has called for more critical attention to these poems,

commenting on the 'Elegie Upon Anacreon' for example that, "This fine distillation of thought on the 'grand elementary principle of pleasure' suffers from serious neglect in literary criticism."⁸⁷ Tom Mason, perhaps responding to such sentiments in "Abraham Cowley and the Wisdom of Anacreon," would apply the phrase to the whole of Cowley's corpus when commenting that, "The poetic wisdom [of Cowley's Anacreon] seems to be a human spirit ... allowing the 'grand elementary principle of pleasure' to dictate its own particulars."⁸⁸ In his fine article offering a unique poem by poem study of Cowley's Anacreontics, Mason strikes a particularly revivalist note as he writes "in the hope that it might again be possible to say as Johnson once said, that they 'give now all the pleasure which they ever gave'."⁸⁹ Johnson had also called them "songs dedicated to festivity and gaiety" and had famously declared them thoroughly suited to Cowley's natural genius:

These little pieces will be found more finished in their kind than any other of Cowley's works. The diction shews nothing of the mould of time, and the sentiments are at no great distance from our present habitudes of thought. ... If he was formed by nature for one kind of writing more than for another, his power seems to have been greatest in the familiar and the festive.⁹⁰

As Mason shows, Johnson's memorable verdict strikes a powerful chord with recent criticism, for example Stella Revard's "Cowley's *Anacreontiques* and the Translation of the Greek Anacreontea." In this article she describes it in typical Johnsonian terms as "the most finished of Cowley's work;" and then she sums it up with the phrase "his happiest vein," a phrase that chimes with the observation that Cowley's power was greatest in this kind of poetry. In the same instance, Revard pays homage to his craftsmanship and genius by declaring that Cowley's is "conspicuously the best among the English translations of the anacreontea."⁹¹ This view is upheld by Gillespie, for whom Cowley's sheer mastery of the 'Anacreontic' form and ability to blend his vision of pleasure with that of Anacreon contribute to make his rendition the best:

Herrick and Thomas Stanley were noted for their renderings, and the term 'Anacreontic' began to be used as the name of a specific form. But the most inward and appealing versions were provided by Cowley, in his 1656 *Anacreontics*. His true feeling for the life of present pleasure celebrated in the Anacreontea earns him the title of the most direct descendant of 'Anacreon' in England.⁹²

It is rewarding then, in the light of such commendation, to examine the particularities of Cowley's method in the proven manner that does it full justice, that is, a poem by poem study of his Anacreontic corpus.

Cowley does not provide prefatory or explanatory notes justifying the *Anacreontiques* as he does for his Pindaric translations. Perhaps he was responding to specific challenges in the area of translation; freely translating, imitating and adapting ancient forms was becoming a favourite means of fulfilling his ambitions, for he constantly sought a mastery of the greatest poetic kinds. Perhaps also the increasing popularity of the Anacreontic tradition in England was reason enough for him to explore it and show the elasticity of his poetic thought and practice.⁹³ Thomas Carew, writing in the 1630s, had interestingly and most precisely identified Anacreon and Pindar as two poets apparently responsible for a lack of genuine poetic rage or inspiration among current poets intent on "licentious thefts" and "servile imitation." The occasion of Carew's writing was the elegy renowned for crowning Donne as the universal monarch of wit, but not before praising him for supposedly freeing poetry from imitation. Still, using the obligatory "servile" reveals his own submission to influences stretching from Horace to Jonson:

The Muses garden with Pedantique weedes
O'rspredd, was purg'd by thee; The lazie seeds
Of servile imitation throwne away;
And fresh invention planted, Thou didst pay
The debts of our penurious bankrupt age;
Licentious thefts, that make poetique rage
A Mimique fury, when our soules must bee
Possessed, or with Anacreons Extasie,
Or Pindars, not their owne... .

('An Elegie upon the death of the Deane of Pauls, Dr. Iohn Donne,' 25-33)⁹⁴

Perhaps Cowley, who even in the same period in the 1630s started experimenting with the anacreontea,⁹⁵ wanted to show that Anacreon's "extasie" was truly in harmonious agreement with his own natural poetic instinct. Loiseau has commented on the freedom Cowley's poetic instinct craves and which he enjoys in the *Anacreontiques*, and has followed Johnson in suggesting that it was not just composed out of a desire to indulge in imitation but was totally suited to Cowley's nature.⁹⁶ Perhaps the lure of bringing some of the greatest delights of antiquity to his English audience proved irresistible. Thomas Moore was to preface his 1802 translation of the *Odes of Anacreon* with this compelling explanation of their delights: "We need not be diffident in expressing our raptures at their beauty, nor hesitate to pronounce them the most polished remains of antiquity. They are, indeed, all beauty, all enchantment."⁹⁷ To depict his method and explain further his motivation and justification for the collection, we turn to the one piece of commentary by Cowley, namely the title, and his one original composition that accompanies the sequence, namely the 'Elegie Upon Anacreon.' The title in itself rejects servile imitation out of hand while illuminating the nature of his practice, whereas a flavour of his subject matter, style and approach, and indeed his enchantment with Anacreon are contained in the said elegy.

The full title of the collection is "*Anacreontiques: or, Some Copies of Verses Translated Paraphrastically out of Anacreon,*" the combination of translation and paraphrase here indicating at one and the same time that which was familiar and that which was a new creation or fresh invention respectively. This is the essence of the argument Cowley expounds in the Preface to the *Pindarique Odes*, namely that he

would not consider exact imitation or literal translation in order not to stifle his natural wit, creative flair and poetic licence. The paraphrase was familiar in humanist circles as one of the four categories of the imitative art, but these divisions often overlapped:

This is the series *translatio, paraphrasis, imitatio, allusio*, which tries to draw boundary lines as the version of the original becomes increasingly free. In addition to these four exercises, Renaissance pupils were also introduced to multiple translations of a single original (*variae interpretationes*). ... Divisions between the four principal categories are likely to seem arbitrary; parts of many imitations might well be regarded as translations, while most Renaissance “translations” are already interpretations.⁹⁸

Greene incidentally chooses Anacreon to explain the difficulty of placing a sequence like Cowley's *Anacreontiques* within one distinct category: “A comparison of sixteenth – and seventeenth – century adaptations of, say, Anacreon shows how various even faithful versions could be and how blurred the lines between translation, paraphrase and imitation.”⁹⁹ These kinds were no more watertight by the time Dryden would attempt to distinguish between his three categories in 1680 on the occasion of his first translations to appear in print, *Ovid's Epistles*. In the Preface he comments on these categories, that is, the metaphrase or word for word and line for line, the paraphrase or the sense, and imitation or total liberty of imitating from word to sense or not at all:

All Translation I suppose may be reduced to these three heads: First, that of Metaphrase, or turning an Authour word by word, and Line by Line, from one Language into another. ... The second way is that of Paraphrase, or Translation with Latitude, where the Authour is kept in view by the Translator, so as never to be lost, but his words are not so strictly follow'd as his sense, and that too is admitted to be amplyfied, but not alter'd. ... The Third Way is that of Imitation, where the Translator (if now he has not lost that Name) assumes the liberty not only to vary from the words and sence, but to forsake them both as he sees occasion: and taking only some general hints from the Original, to run division on the ground-work, as he pleases.¹⁰⁰

It is clear that the metaphrase is rejected out of hand, for Cowley from his school days had enjoyed working with the more creative modes of translation, insisting on his libertine way and evolving his practice of free translation. His challenge here is to remain true to the Anacreontic spirit and he seeks to do so by preserving the metre,

the form, and the spirit of gaiety of his model. And yet he transforms and enhances that tradition by adapting it to blend in with his own thought on such grand themes as love and conviviality, by recreating the poems mostly by bringing additions to it and incorporating elements of his style, and by appropriating it to his own ends. As Rosenmeyer comments on Horace's 'Fidus Interpres' passage, "the successful author must be *infidus*, unfaithful, one who selects from and modifies his sources. ... In the process of appropriation, both the new and the old texts benefit."¹⁰¹ And so the creative translator in Cowley's mould must also be an author, for his practice bears out the veracity of Mason's observation. "It is a remarkable fact that the very best parts of the very best seventeenth – and eighteenth – century translations are often moments when the translator has altogether abandoned his original," he writes.¹⁰²

A grand accompaniment to his selection, the elegy Cowley chooses to write in commemoration and celebration of Anacreon has been described as "perhaps the most engaging of all English responses to the spirit at the heart of the Greek collection."¹⁰³ The full title of the poem reveals at once a certain divine inspiration for the work and a special relationship between Anacreon and the god of love:

'Elegie Upon Anacreon, Who was choaked by a Grape-Stone. *Spoken by the God of Love.*' This special bond explains the god's cry of lament that opens the poem:

How shall I lament thine end,
My best *Servant*, and my *Friend*?
Nay and, if from a *Deity*
So much *Deifi'ed* as I,
It sound not too profane and odd,
Oh my *Master*, and my *God*!

(*'Elegie Upon Anacreon,'* 1-6)

The poem would also close with a lament on the death of this poet and lover *par excellence*, with the fact that Anacreon is supposed to have died when a grape seed

stuck in his throat coming to the fore. It is not so much the death itself as its almost freakish manner – by “*Deaths* smallest dart” – that appears to gall Cowley.

It grieves me when I see what Fate
Does on the best of *Mankind* wait.
Poets or *Lovers* let them be,
'Tis neither *Love* nor *Poesie*
Can arm against *Deaths* smallest dart
The *Poets Head*, or *Lovers Heart*. ...
Nay in *Deaths Hand* the *Grape-stone* proves
As strong as *Thunder* is in *Joves*.
(‘Elegie Upon Anacreon,’ 105-110, 115-6)

Cowley admires the fine human specimen that Anacreon represents as one who was blessed with a poet’s head and a lover’s heart, “mixing the splendid gifts of the Muses and Aphrodite.”¹⁰⁴ The combination of poet and lover is one that Cowley, having already published *The Mistress*, readily identifies with. If he grasps the spirit at the heart of the Anacreontea so readily, it is because he sees elements of himself everywhere, elements which the rest of the elegy elaborates on.

Anacreon’s craftsmanship, reflected in the grace and beauty of his verse, is a quality Cowley admires, but he has great admiration also for the way the Greek master evolves a style that reveals his personality and character. Again the direct address:

All thy Verse is softer far
Then the downy Feathers are,
Of my Wings, or of my *Arrows*,
Of my Mothers *Doves*, or *Sparrows*.
Sweet as Lovers freshest *kisses*,
Or their riper following blisses,
Graceful, cleanly, smooth and round,
All with Venus Girdle bound,
And thy *Life* was all the while
Kind and gentle as thy *Stile*.
The smooth-pac’d *Hours* of ev’ry day
Glided numerously away.
Like thy *Verse* each *Hour* did pass,
Sweet and short, like that it was.
(‘Elegie Upon Anacreon,’ 11-24)

Anacreon’s poetry is “softer far” than the feathers of birds or the wings of gods, it is “Sweet as Lovers freshest *kisses*, / Or ... blisses,” or again it is “sweet and short” like

“The smooth-pac’d *Hours* of ev’ry day.” In addition it is “Graceful, cleanly, smooth and round,” while his style mirrors his life: “And thy *Life* was all the while / Kind and gentle as thy *Stile*.” Even as he describes the sweetness of Anacreon’s verse, Cowley is drawing attention to the challenges awaiting the would-be imitator, challenges he shows himself capable of meeting as a poet with his surfeit of apt images and figures of speech. Moving from the nature of the verse to its theme, the driving force of Anacreon’s life was love as seen in the way Cowley claims in the title that the poem was ‘*Spoken by the God of Love*.’ If anything, Anacreon’s bond with love paradoxically became increasingly inextricable the older he got:

Some do but their *Youth* allow me,
 Just what they by *Nature* owe me, ...
Love was with thy *Life* entwin’d
 Close as *Heat* with *Fire* is joyn’d, ...
 Th’ *Antiperistasis* of *Age*
 More enflam’d thy amorous rage,
 Thy *silver Hairs* yielded me more
 Then even *golden curls* before.

(‘Elegie Upon Anacreon,’ 25-6, 33-4, 37-40)

Antiperistasis suggests contrariness in things, in Anacreon’s case a resistance to ageing and the perverse logic whereby the older he got the more inflamed his “amorous rage” or power to love became. But there is more to Anacreon’s life, for Cowley goes on to explain how he took his pleasures simply without recourse to the worldly trappings of wealth and power. He pays him the ultimate homage by identifying him as the ideal specimen for all creatures, he “shouldst their *Idea* be” as in the Platonic notion of things existing as ideas or ideal forms in God’s mind. The only thing that matters is beauty wherever it is found and its devotees need not concern themselves with worldly issues or the vicissitudes of fortune:

My *Creatures* should be all like *Thee*,
 ‘Tis *Thou* shouldst their *Idea* be.
 They, like *Thee*, should throughly hate
 Bus’iness, Honor, Title, State.
 Other wealth they should not know
 But what my *Living Mines* bestow;

The pomp of *Kings* they should confess
At their *Crownings* to be less
Then a Lovers humblest guise. ...
Beauty alone they should admire;
Nor look at *Fortunes* vain attire.

(‘Elegie Upon Anacreon,’ 45-54, 59-60)

With its mention of ideal forms and the attractions of beauty, this passage highlights the nature of Cowley’s own striving as poet, lover and man of the world. His vision and his ideals mirror Anacreon’s, for example in the rejection of money and power, thereby revealing how natural it was to respond to him and adapt his poetry.

The climactic moment of the ‘Elegie Upon Anacreon’ comes when life and verse are shown to reflect one another, when there is an outpouring of human gaiety and joy. Suddenly the business and cares of the world along with the pomposity of power and the accoutrements of wealth are replaced by a simple and joyous life characterised by mirth and gaiety, dance and song. If life is brimming “With Mirth, and Wit, and Gayety,” in one word laughter, then poetry will come easily too. For laughter, song, and dance all fuse to produce the happy love, the happy life, and the happy verse:

All their Life should gilded be
With Mirth, and Wit, and Gayety,...
They should always laugh, and sing,
And dance, and strike th’harmonious string.
Verse should from their Tongue so flow,
As if it in the *Mouth* did grow,
As swiftly answering their command,
As tunes obey the artful *Hand*.

(‘Elegie Upon Anacreon,’ 65-6, 71-6)

The delineation of common attributes in life, music and poetry complements the earlier description of Anacreon’s gentle style and soft, sweet and short verse, as well as a life dedicated to the delights of love and beauty. Against this background of beauty, of laughter, of song and of dance, that is, of glorious harmony, Cowley’s comparison of the making of poetry to the making of music is a striking one: “*Verse* should from their Tongue so flow / ... As tunes obey the artful *Hand*.” Verse flows

easily or naturally when the ingredients are right, but the artful hand of the musician is also that of the poet. Part of the fascination of the *Anacreontiques* is this apparent natural flow of the poetry despite the fact that Cowley weaves into it his own thought and his own art. It is this blend that prompts Johnson's observation that "Of those songs ... [Cowley] has given rather a pleasing than a faithful representation," or again that "The 'Anacreon' of Cowley ... has admitted the decoration of some modern graces, by which he is undoubtedly made more amiable to common readers."¹⁰⁵ Eliot was to find in three different works a common element of a particular kind of wit that the individual poet brought to bear on the work: "What is meant is some quality which is common to the songs in *Comus* and Cowley's *Anacreontics* and Marvell's Horatian Ode. ... It is, what we have designated tentatively as wit, a tough reasonableness beneath the slight lyric grace."¹⁰⁶ The elegy therefore brings to light Cowley's enchantment with Anacreon even whilst describing the very makings of his craft in the *Anacreontiques*.

The fact that the *Anacreontiques* is a collection of eleven lyrics out of the fifty-five in Henri Estienne's authoritative collection of 1554 reveals the studious and painstaking nature of Cowley's selection of the poems.¹⁰⁷ Unlike Estienne and Stanley he gives titles to all his selections, though he submits to the influence of his English predecessor in most of his title choices. As with *The Mistress*, the use of the lyric form means he enjoys the freedom of choosing different lengths for each poem. However, the seemingly natural flow of the Anacreontic pieces is aided by the absence of breaks occasioned by stanzaic patterns. Also, unlike the use of varying metrical patterns and line lengths in the earlier sequence, they appear in mainly octosyllabic verse. Compared to the irregular measures and innovative structure of

the *Pindarique Odes*, the lines are more regular and symmetrical, enhancing their compact nature and song-like effect. This is because Cowley seeks to preserve the ‘anacreontic’ metre of the original Greek which generally take two forms, the hemiambic if it is a seven-syllable line and the anaclost if it is an eight-syllable line. On the use of the anacreontic metre in the original Greek, David Campbell explains the link between form and content:

Although the two ‘anacreontic’ metres have different origins, their aesthetic effect is exactly alike. They are suited for frivolity rather than profundity of thought. Sentences tend to short; when they are long, ... the shortness of the sub-units of the sentence keeps the thought clear. Parataxis ... is common.¹⁰⁸

To work on the two vastly different Greek poets Carew identified reveals Cowley’s remarkable versatility and adaptability as well as his firm belief in the importance of congenial forms. If he reserves weighty, abstruse and philosophical subjects for the grand Pindaric manner, then he shows also how the Anacreontic form enables him to convey his vision of pleasure in a most witty and light-hearted manner. In the use of free translation as a means of domesticating the ancient Greek poet, the Anacreontics offer him even more scope for adaptation because of their relative lack of context compared to Pindar’s poetry. In the Pindaric translations, “I have in these two *Odes* of *Pindar* taken, left out, and added what I please,” the aim being to bring to the English audience “his *way* and *manner* of speaking” (Preface to the *Pindarique Odes*). Even so, the ‘Olympique Ode’ is written in praise of Theron, Prince of Agrigentum, for his victory in the Olympic games, while the ‘Nemeæan Ode’ celebrates the feats of Chromius of Sicily in the Nemean games in ancient Greece. The Greek Anacreontea are not situated within such settings of time and place, nor do they refer to actual persons or events; the only guide to setting Cowley had was the mistaken belief that Anacreon was the author and therefore would have written the poems in his lifetime. Rosenmeyer writes how, “An authorial figure, temporal

references, and topicality constitute ... conspicuous absences in the collection. The anacreontic poems have been called 'one of the most thoroughly decontextualized lyric corpora in Western literature'.¹⁰⁹ The vagueness of the Anacreontics therefore makes them most suited to the adaptation and re-creation Cowley subjects them to.

The first of the *Anacreontiques*, 'Love,' is the poem Estienne placed at the head of his collection and represents the only instance where Cowley follows what he thought was the original ordering.¹¹⁰ Even so, he chooses his own title of 'Love,' perhaps persuaded by Estienne's argument that the subject of both the poem and the sequence that celebrated the Greek poet was love.¹¹¹ There is a remarkable symmetry between the opening three and the closing three lines whereby the very same words close the lines:

I'll sing of *Heroes*, and of *Kings*;
In mighty *Numbers*, mighty things;
Begin, my *Muse*; but lo, the strings
To my great *Song* rebellious prove;
The strings will sound of nought but *Love*.
I broke them all, and put on new;
'Tis this or nothing sure will do.
These sure (said I) will me obey;
These sure *Heroick Notes* will play.
Straight I began with thundring *Jove*,
And all th'immortal Pow'ers, but *Love*.
Love smil'd, and from my'enfeebled *Lyre*
Came gentle airs, such as inspire
Melting love, soft desire.
Farewel then *Heroes*, farewell *Kings*,
And mighty *Numbers*, mighty *Things*;
Love tunes my *Heart* just to my *strings*.
(*'Love'*)

The music motif in the poem is seized upon by Estienne whose title translates as 'To the Lyre' and by Stanley's 'The Lute.' Cowley's choice of title is therefore a statement of intent and emphasis. A comparison with Stanley's translation reveals the extent of his changes and additions:

Of th' *Atrides* I would sing,
Or the wandring *Theban King*;

But when I my Lute did prove,
 Nothing it would sound but Love;
 I new strung it, and to play
Herc'les labours did essay;
 But my pains I fruitlesse found,
 Nothing it but Love would sound;
 Heroes then farewell, my Lute
 To all strains, but Love, is mute.

(Stanley, 'The Lute')¹¹²

Cowley's poem of seventeen mainly octosyllabic lines is glaringly much longer than Stanley's ten-line rendition of seven-syllable lines. Both favour the use of the caesura in the occasional run-on line, but Stanley's translation reads as one long sentence with the full stop coming only at the end. On the subject of love, Stanley's line of "Nothing it would sound but Love" seems to receive an even greater stress in Cowley's line where each word is a monosyllable: "The strings will sound of nought but *Love*." However, Stanley repeats the line, this time placing the emphasis on "sound" where it was on "Love" before: "Nothing it but Love would sound." Whereas Stanley's translation seems to give at least equal importance to the sound of the lute and to love, Cowley plays on the different meanings of love, such as the god of love and the emotion of love in "*Love* smil'd" and "Melting love" respectively. The subject of "Melting love, soft desire" recalls the love and desire of *The Mistress* where the distinction between the emotion of love and the god of love is usually clear. By contrast, 'Love' sets a pattern for the *Anacreontiques* whereby there is a constant reworking of the meaning of love that requires great awareness of wordplay and punning, so that love becomes an operative word whose meaning appears to be elusive and ambiguous. This manner of making love work at different levels is typified in the last line where love could be read either as the god of love or the emotion of love: "Love tunes my *Heart* just to my *strings*." What is clear nevertheless is that the emphasis is firmly on love while the strings of the lyre have become a way of expression, a convenient means of introducing the themes of song

and music. Cowley thereby shifts the emphases and gives the poem a new orientation in order to accommodate both his love vision and his style. His is more than just a translation because he is effectively rewriting the poem.

It is significant that the opening words of 'Love' are a declaration of personal intent, for Cowley joins Anacreon in using the first person at every opportune moment, as in "I'll sing" or "Begin, my *Muse*." Cowley's authorial intentions are evident throughout: just as he banishes the name of Eros which is replaced by Love throughout the collection, so does he exclude the name of Homer in this poem, nor does he mention any poets but the beloved Anacreon in the rest of the collection. He does not even make a direct reference to Homer's works as Stanley does, for example. Perhaps he does not want to detract from the icon that Anacreon represents in this collection by mentioning other poets and evoking comparisons, preferring to mention the idea of the epic rather than Homer's works in particular. By mentioning at the start and towards the end the heroes and kings as well as the mighty numbers and mighty things his lyre repudiates, he is insisting that he is endowed with the special gifts of the epic poet even if he does not need them now. What he needs is a different set of poetic attributes, the attributes of Anacreon, still a poet's head but a poet writing lyrics with a lover's heart. This is the same set of attributes he has already shown himself to possess in *The Mistress* but with notable differences. Whereas *The Mistress* contains such poems on sexual love as 'The Injoyment' that serves the purpose of prelude or foreplay to consummation and jouissance, or 'Dialogue, After Enjoyment' that discusses the aftermath or consequences of the same, the *Anacreontiques* discusses love without actual action or consequences. Where *The Mistress* makes use of dramatic situations mostly involving the male

lover addressing his mistress, the Anacreontic pieces are mostly poems of contemplation in which Cowley's Anacreon is all alone reflecting on his life, his pleasures and his loves.

The second poem of the sequence, 'Drinking,' is typical of a tradition that includes hymns to Dionysus and where revelry and carousal are prominent. Cowley's Anacreon is not just a lover or poet-in-love, but is also a drinking man who thrives on the convivial and the festive.

The thirsty *Earth* soaks up the *Rain*,
And drinks, and gapes for drink again.
The *Plants* suck in the *Earth*, and are
With constant drinking fresh and fair.
The *Sea* it self, which one would think
Should have but little need of *Drink*,
Drinks ten thousand *Rivers* up,
So fill'd that they or'eflow the *Cup*.
The busie *Sun* (and one would guess
By's drunken fiery face no less)
Drinks up the *Sea*, and when h'as done,
The *Moon* and *Stars* drink up the *Sun*.
They drink and dance by their own light,
They drink and revel all the night.
Nothing in *Nature's Sober* found,
But an eternal *Health* goes round.
Fill up the *Bowl* then, fill it high,
Fill all the *Glasses* there, for why
Should every creature drink but *I*,
Why, *Man of Morals*, tell me why?
(*'Drinking'*)

The extent to which Cowley rewrites and adapts this poem becomes clear with a look at Stanley's translation, untitled and just six lines long:

Fruitful Earth drinks up the rain,
Trees from Earth drink that again,
The Sea drinks the Air, the Sun
Drinks the Sea, and him the Moon:
Is it reason then d'ee think
I should thirst when all else drink?
(Stanley, Poem opening "Fruitful Earth drinks up the rain")

The argument in Cowley's piece is founded on the paradox in this axiomatic statement: "Nothing in *Nature's Sober* found, / But an eternal *Health* goes round." It

serves the purpose of a premise in a rather syllogistic argument, suggesting that all nature is sustained by drink, and yet the very act of drinking leads also to insobriety and drunkenness. Of course the drink that nourishes and sustains mostly comes in the form of water, but Cowley typically plays on the meaning of drink as intoxicating liquor taken convivially or to gratify a certain human appetite. The notion of drinking in its various forms is thus emphasised throughout. Where Stanley, for example, describes the earth as “fruitful,” Cowley replaces the adjective with “thirsty,” effectively portraying the earth as being perennially thirsty to the point that it always “soaks up the *Rain*,” and then “gapes for drink again.”¹¹³ This approach is typical of the way Cowley selects his adjectives carefully throughout the sequence, often different from Stanley’s for example. Having opened the poem with the use of drink in a literal sense, as in the earth that is never sated or even the plants that need water as nourishment, Cowley proceeds to use drink in a figurative sense. Hence the sun appears to drink up the sea when shining over it, and then the moon and stars seem to drink up the sun they blank out when they succeed it. Such metaphorical usage attains its climactic moment in this couplet which, speaking of the moon and the stars, proffers that, “They drink and dance by their own light, / They drink and revel all the night.” The use of the same words at the start of successive lines is the technique of anaphora, a traditional Anacreontic feature of repetition and emphasis that Cowley uses constantly in the poems. If the moon and stars drink, dance, and revel all night long, then surely the premise that nothing in nature remains sober must be true. But those activities are human activities, they relate to human nature with which the poet is ultimately concerned. Cowley is making the link between drink and conviviality, revealing a fondness for festive society and festive activity. Drinking, dancing and revelling all the night suggests a carousal, even riotous or

wanton merrymaking. Despite the protestations of some “*Man of Morals*” who would frown upon such activity, the conclusion spoken by Cowley’s Anacreon is that of a typical syllogism: every creature needs drink, I am one such creature and I need drink, so why should I not drink? In sum, drinking is natural and each has its drink. For humans especially, it could be water for nourishment and sustenance or wine for revelry and merrymaking, for one is only being true to one’s nature whatever one drinks.

Cowley’s studied selection and initial ordering of poems according to their popularity in the tradition is evident in his choice of ‘Beauty’ as the third poem to complete the familiar Anacreontic trinity of love, wine and women. “Just as Anacreon was said to have had three allegiances in his life,” Rosenmeyer observes, “so the powerful trinity of Eros, Aphrodite, and Dionysus holds the entire anacreontic realm in its jurisdiction.”¹¹⁴ Estienne gave this poem equal prominence by placing it just after the opening poem of his collection in second place, his title translating as ‘To Women;’ however, Cowley’s ‘Beauty’ represents the first instance where he copies Stanley’s choice of title. Nature has accorded men gifts of wisdom and wit, the one for defence and the other for attack, whereas beauty is its pre-eminent gift to women, useful at one and the same time as a shield or armour for defence and a weapon or arms with which to attack:

Liberal *Nature* did dispense
To all things *Arms* for their defence. ...
Wisdom to *Man* she did afford,
Wisdom for *Shield*, and *Wit* for *Sword*.
What to beauteous *Woman-kind*,
What *Arms*, what *Armour* has she assign’d?
Beauty is both; for with the *Fair*
What *Arms*, what *Armour* can compare?
What *Steel*, what *Gold*, or *Diamond*,
More *Impassible* is found?
And yet what *Flame*, what *Lightning* e’re

So great an *Active* force did bear?
(‘Beauty,’ 1-2, 9-18)

Not content with the wit and hyperbole of beauty being at once impassable in defence and a devastating force in attack, Cowley’s ending to the poem is laden with even more wit, humour and paradox. The poem builds to a climax when it is suggested that women express their strength as they undress so that they are at their strongest when “*Cap-a-pe with Nakedness*” – naked from head to foot:

They are *all weapon*, and they dart
Like *Porcupines* form every part.
Who can, alas, their strength express,
Arm’d, when they themselves undress,
Cap-a-pe with Nakedness?
(‘Beauty,’ 19-23)

Cowley’s style here is marked by the use of unusual words like the sixteenth century coinage ‘cap-à-pie’ (‘head to foot’) which, preceded by the word “Arm’d,” is particularly effective because it was usually used with reference to arming or accoutring. Even more remarkable is the introduction of the simile comparing the weapon that beauty represents to the porcupine known to have defensive erectile spines or quills that protected its body. But where “Addison alluded to the final conceit in the *Anacreontic Beauty*, with which he declared himself delighted,”¹¹⁵ others have surprisingly condemned it. Rosenmeyer criticises Cowley here as an example of the poet-imitator’s “revisions [damaging] the original impact” on the grounds of “Cowley’s trivializing image of the force of female beauty as that of a porcupine.”¹¹⁶ She clearly fails to appreciate the thrust of what is a most ingenious comparison in only the first simile of the sequence, the simile being a device Cowley uses occasionally and selectively in these poems. Women are all weapon and the body of the porcupine is an example of how this is possible, in addition to which the porcupine was formerly supposed to shoot or, to use Cowley’s word, to “dart” its

spines at an enemy. Cowley's ingenuity here lies in the choice of an exact comparison that demonstrates the working of the theory that the selfsame attribute of beauty could at once constitute in every part a defensive shield and an attacking weapon. This is topped up by the paradox that the more women reveal of their nakedness, the more of their strength they express. This is because the naked condition reveals beauty in all its devastating glory.

Cowley follows up the grand Anacreontic themes in the first three poems with a cluster of four poems on the subject of love. These poems – in order 'The Duel,' 'Age,' 'The Account,' and 'Gold' – restore the pre-eminence of the love theme and treat its different facets in the tradition. 'The Duel' is written in a light-hearted tone, an exercise of the poetic imagination whereby the poet challenges Love to a duel. As in 'Love,' love has a *double entendre*, now evoking the god of love, now describing the love that comes from the heart. The opening actually provides the conclusion, namely the poet's resolution to love from which there is no escape, whereas the rest of the poem tells the story that leads to that conclusion:

Yes, I will love then, I will love,
I will not now *Loves Rebel* prove,
Though I was once his *Enemy*;
Though ill-advis'd and stubborn I,
Did to the Combate him defy,
An Helmet, Spear, and mighty shield,
Like some new *Ajax* I did wield. ...
But when I thought all danger past,
His *Quiver* empty'd quite at last,
Instead of *Arrow*, or of *Dart*,
He shot *Himself* into my Heart. ...
In vain a *Breastplate* now I wear,
Since in my *Breast* the Foe I bear.
In vain my *Feet* their swiftness try;
For from the *Body* can they fly?

(‘The Duel,’ 1-7, 14-17, 25-8)

This poem is an expansion of a theme already broached in *The Mistress* where

Cowley wrote octosyllabic verse as well:

My *Soul* at first indeed did prove
Of pretty strength against a Dart;
Till I this *Habit* got of *Love*.
(‘The Inconstant,’ 37-39)

Even in *The Mistress* Cowley tentatively plays on the meaning of love, a practice that attains its plenitude in the *Anacreontiques* where names like Cupid and Eros are banished altogether to be replaced by Love. Of the complex use of love as a defining Anacreontic term, Tom Mason observes that,

It appears that when in the *Anacreontiques* Cowley uses the word ‘Love’ he is gesturing towards something both larger and more circumscribed than is usually meant. He is invoking a spirit of gaiety that love, stripped of its concomitant miseries, might inspire in an ideal world of youth and poetry. ... The poems are not invitations to sexual promiscuity but evocations of the spirit of a life lived according to the edicts of a god of human gaiety.¹¹⁷

The next poem, ‘Age,’ is the shortest of all, bringing a sudden change and relief in the pattern because there had been a steady increase in length in the first four poems.

Anacreon is growing old, but the workings of the process Cowley describes as antiperistasis are such that the effects of age are but ill felt as he becomes an even better lover. Accordingly he seeks pleasure more than ever in the elegy: “Th’

Antiperistasis of *Age* / More inflam’d thy amorous rage.” This is useful in

appreciating the ‘Age’ of Cowley’s Anacreon:

Oft am I by the Women told,
Poor *Anacreon* thou grow’st old.
Look how thy hairs are falling all;
Poor *Anacreon* how they fall?
Whether I grow old or no,
By th’effects I do not know.
This I know without being told,
'Tis Time to *Live* if I grow *Old*,
'Tis time short pleasures now to take,
Of little *Life* the best to make,
And manage *wisely* the *last stake*.
(‘Age’)

This is the piece that perhaps most closely compares with Stanley’s in terms of length and subject. Here is Stanley’s translation entitled ‘The old Lover:’

By the women I am told

'Lasse *Anacreon* thou grow'st old,
 Take thy glasse and look else, there
 Thou wilt see thy temples bare;
 Whether I be bald or no
 That I know not, this I know,
 Pleasures, as lesse time to try
 Old men have, they more should ply.
 (Stanley, 'The old Lover')

Echoes abound from *The Mistress* in 'Age' in the expression of its major themes.

Already 'The Inconstant' speaks in true antiperistatic fashion of the lover's passion becoming fierier with age. In addition, women succumb to its effects in a manner that compares with good wine getting better with age: "Nay *Age* it self does me to rage encline, / And strength to *Women* gives, as well as *Wine*" ('The Inconstant,' 23-4). The introduction of the *carpe diem* theme of "'Tis Time short pleasures now to take, / Of little *Life* the best to make" recalls, for example, "So though my *Life* be short, yet I may prove / The great *Methusalem* of *Love*" ('Love and Life,' 5-6). What Cowley does in 'Age,' therefore, is that he effects a wily blend of aspects that are already intrinsic to his vision with the peculiar wisdom and philosophy of life for which Anacreon was famous.

The central piece in Cowley's Anacreontic corpus is 'The Account,' perhaps fittingly the longest also. The poem's length reflects the long line of loves that constitutes its subject, for the poem takes the form of a catalogue. Cowley's Anacreon wants to establish a list of his loves and the poem opens with images that establish a basis for impossibility in counting due to the endless sums involved:

When all the *Stars* are by thee told,
 (The endless Sums of heav'nly Gold)
 Or when the *Hairs* are reckon'd all,
 From sickly *Autumns Head* that fall,
 Or when the drops that make the *Sea*,
 Whilst all her *Sands* thy *Counters* be;
 Thou then, and Thou alone maist prove
 Th' *Arithmetician* of my *Love*.
 ('The Account,' 1-8)

Despite these impossibilities, the rest of the poem attempts valiantly to count the women who soon number up to one thousand, one hundred and sixty-three and counting. They come from various geographical locations, all recalled with varying degrees of clarity and emphasis:

An hundred Loves at *Athens* score,
At *Corinth* write an hundred more. ...
Write then at *Chios* seventy three;
Write then at *Lesbos* (let me see)
Write me at *Lesbos* ninety down,
Full ninety *Loves*, and half a One.
And next to these let me present,
The fair *Ionian Regiment*.
And next the *Carian Company*,
Five hundred both *Effectively*.
Three hundred more at *Rhodes* and *Crete*;
Three hundred 'tis I'am sure Complete.
(‘The Account,’ 9-10, 13-22)

Just when it appears that the count is complete, the poem serves notice that there are thousands more loves as yet uncounted. These are women from even more outlandish locations all over the world, namely from the known continents including Europe, Africa and Asia. Cowley's Anacreon starts from the central belt of the world in the Temperate Zone around the equator, and then spreads the map of women to the furthest reaches of the earth. This takes him through the Frigid Zone, that is north of the frozen Arctic Circle and south of the still more frozen Antarctic Circle:

Seems this to thee too great a *Summe*?
Why many *Thousands* are to come. ...
I have not yet my *Persian* told,
Nor yet my *Syrian Loves* enroll'd,
Nor *Indian*, nor *Arabian*;
Nor *Cyprian Loves*, nor *African*;
Nor *Scythian*, nor *Italian* flames;
There's a whole *Map* behind of *Names*.
Of gentle Love I'th' *temperate Zone*,
And cold ones in the *Frigid One*,
Cold frozen *Loves* with which I pine,
And parched *Loves* beneath the *Line*.
(‘The Account,’ 27-8, 33-42)

Rosenmeyer observes of the use of this kind of catalogue that,

It convinces by its scope or mass. ... The longer the list of love objects, the more of a lover the

poet is. ... This catalogue merges two modes, the travel list and the erotic list, to assemble an unassailable sum of evidence of the poet/lover's virility.¹¹⁸

Whereas Cowley's earlier amatory poetry had already offered him plenty of opportunity for erotic lists, 'The Account' accords him the chance to introduce a new dimension with the heightened use of the travel catalogue which merges such diverse aspects as history and geography, and fantasy and desire. Though the opening poem of 'Love' mentioned "soft desire" to announce perhaps the essential non-action and lack of fulfilment in the love poems, 'The Account' differs from the others in mentioning some relationship with women as Cowley's Anacreon pursues his desire for his various loves.

The centrality of the 'The Account' both to the *Anacreontiques* and to Cowley's amatory poetry is reflected in the way it recalls 'The Inconstant' again and 'The Chronicle' in the *Miscellanies*. Whereas 'The Inconstant' has already introduced themes expanded upon especially in the 'The Duel' and 'Age,' it has an even more obvious association with 'The Account.' The first four stanzas in seven of 'The Inconstant' provide a catalogue this time of different female types the poet-lover falls in love with, whereby he loves all regardless of age, colour, shape, means, and character:

I Never yet could see that face
Which had no dart for me;
From fifteen years, to fifties space,
They all victorious be.
Love thou'rt a *Devil*; if I may call thee *One*,
For sure in Me thy name is *Legion*.

Colour, or *Shape*, good *Limbs*, or *Face*,
Goodness, or *Wit* in all I find.
In *Motion* or in *Speech* a grace,
If all fail, yet 'tis *Womankind*;
And I'm so weak, the *Pistol* need not be
Double or *treble charg'd* to murder *Me*.

If *Tall*, the Name of *Proper* slays;

If *Fair*, she's pleasant as the *Light*;
If *Low*, her *Prettiness* does please;
If *Black*, what *Lover* loves not *Night*?
If *yellow hair'd*, I Love, lest it should be
Th' excuse to others for not loving *Me*.

The *Fat*, like *Plenty*, fills my heart;
The *Lean*, with *Love* makes me too so.
If *Streight*, her *Bodie's Cupid's Dart*
To me; if *Crooked*, 'tis his *Bow*.
Nay *Age* it self does me to rage encline,
And strength to *Women* gives, as well as *Wine*.
(‘The Inconstant,’ 1-24)

Of the link between *The Mistress* and the love poems in *The Anacreontiques*, Nethercot wrote that, “Cowley was not satisfied to base his claims to being ‘Love’s Columbus’ on *The Mistress* alone. ... In introducing the Anacreontic, ... [Cowley was] much more of a Columbus than he had ever been in *The Mistress*.”¹¹⁹

Cowley reveals another world of love in ‘The Chronicle’ where the notion of a catalogue of loves is given an altogether different dimension, marked by his unique provision of a list of names for hitherto unidentified women.¹²⁰ ‘The Chronicle’ works on the theme of ‘The Account’ and appropriates many aspects of the form and style of the *Anacreontiques* such as the short line, the easy style, the witty but familiar images, and the leitmotif of an idyllic world. Loiseau, whilst reproducing over half of ‘The Chronicle’ when discussing the *Anacreontiques*, explains their connection thus: “Cowley’s anacreontism finds its full expression in the most graceful of his amorous pieces, the exquisite ‘Chronicle.’ There he develops, with humour and a lightness of touch that could not have been thought possible, the theme of ‘The Account’.”¹²¹ Here are ten of the fourteen symmetrical stanzas:

Margarita first possest,
If I remember well, my brest,
Margarita first of all;
But when a while the wanton Maid
With my restless Heart had plaid,
Martha took the flying Ball.

Martha soon did it resign
To the beauteous *Catharine*.
Beauteous *Catharine* gave place
(Though loth and angry she to part
With the possession of my Heart)
To *Elisa*'s conqu'ring face.

Elisa till this Hour might reign
Had she not *Evil Counsels* ta'ne.
Fundamental Laws she broke,
And still new *Favorites* she chose,
Till up in *Arms* my *Passions* rose,
And cast away her yoke.

Mary then and gentle *Ann*
Both [t]o reign at once began.
Alternately they sway'd,
And sometimes *Mary* was the *Fair*,
And sometimes *Ann* the *Crown* did wear,
And sometimes *Both* I' obey'd.

Another *Mary* then arose
And did rigorous *Laws* impose.
A mighty *Tyrant* she!
Long, alas, should I have been
Under that *Iron-Scepter*'d *Queen*,
Had not *Rebecca* set me free.

When fair *Rebecca* set me free,
'Twas then a *golden Time* with me.
But soon those pleasures fled,
For the gracious *Princess* dy'd
In her *Youth* and *Beauties* pride,
And *Judith* reigned in her sted.

One Month, three Days, and half an Hour
Judith held the *Sovereign Power*.
Wondrous beautiful her *Face*,
But so weak and small her *Wit*,
That she to govern was unfit,
And so *Susanna* took her place.

But when *Isabella* came
Arm'd with a resistless flame
And th' *Artillery* of her *Eye*;
Whilst she proudly marcht about
Greater *Conquests* to find out,
She beat out *Susan* by the *By*.

But in her place I then obey'd
Black-ey'd *Besse*, her *Viceroy-Maid*,
To whom ensu'd a *Vacancy*.
Thousand worse *Passions* then possest
The *Interregnum* of my brest.
Bless me from such an *Anarchy*!

Gentle *Henriette* than
And a third *Mary* next began,
Then *Jone*, and *Jane*, and *Audria*.

And then a pretty *Thomasine*,
And then another *Katharine*,
And then a long *Et cetera*.
(‘The Chronicle,’ 1-60)

Johnson would describe ‘The Chronicle’ as “this airy frolick of genius,” explaining that “[It] is a composition unrivalled and alone: such gaiety of fancy, such facility of expression, such varied similitude, such a succession of images, and such a dance of words, it is vain to expect except from Cowley.”¹²² The poem is certainly alone as the only one Cowley describes as a ballad, a sentimental or romantic story complete with its unique catalogue of names. Such original compositions as ‘The Inconstant’ and ‘The Chronicle’ reveal a natural affinity with the train of thought and passion of Cowley’s Anacreon that goes towards explaining the very motivation for the *Anacreontiques*.

In ‘Gold,’ where Cowley follows Stanley’s choice of title in preference to Estienne’s that translates as ‘To Love,’ he reveals different aspects to his style in seeking to establish the relationship between love and gold. The poem depends for its effect on the technique of repetition and in particular the use of anaphora fully exploited here, but also the aphoristic sayings in the opening lines, the enhanced use of pun, and the wit and irony as found in the twist in the last two lines.

A Mighty pain to *Love* it is,
And ’tis a pain that pain to *miss*.
But of all pains the greatest pain
It is to love, but love in vain.
Virtue now nor noble *Blood*,
Nor *Wit* by *Love* is understood,
Gold alone does passion move,
Gold Monopolizes love!
A *curse* on her, and on the Man
Who this traffick first began!
A *curse* on him who found the Ore!
A *curse* on him who digg’d the store!
A *curse* on him who did refine it!
A *curse* on him who first did coyn it!
A *Curse* all curses else above
On him, who us’d it first in *Love!*

Gold begets in Brethren hate,
Gold in *Families* debate;
Gold does Friendships separate,
Gold does Civil Wars create.
 These the smallest harms of it!
Gold, alas, does *Love* beget.
 ('Gold')

In a pithy opening, love is a mighty pain but it is still a greater pain not to love: "A Mighty pain to *Love* it is, / And 'tis a pain that pain to *miss*." In the twist at the end, the poem concludes that all the devastation and destruction gold brings forth such as hatred and wars are not as harmful as the fact that, "*Gold*, alas, does *Love* beget," rather than the other way round. In Cowley's organisation this poem ends the string of poems on the love theme in order to return to that of drink, merriment and conviviality announced in 'Drinking.'

The eighth poem, 'The Epicure,' reverts to the subject of wine and rekindles the *carpe diem* theme with the words, "today is ours." It is written in only twelve lines compared with the fourteen lines of Stanley's untitled translation, thereby proving an exception to Cowley's practice of adding to the original. It is a poem typical of the Anacreontic tradition, a rather short lyric on the convivial and the happy life. Each sentence represents a couplet, each of which stands out as a separate unit. Devices employed include parataxis, simile, mythological allusion, and anaphora.

Fill the *Bowl* with rosie Wine,
 Around our temples *Roses* twine.
 And let us cheerfully awhile,
 Like the *Wine* and *Roses* smile.
 Crown'd with *Roses* we contemn
Gyge's wealthy *Diadem*.
To day is *Ours*; what do we fear?
To day is *Ours*; we have it here.
 Let's treat it kindly, that it may
Wish, at least, with us to stay.
 Let's banish *Business*, banish *Sorrow*;
 To the *Gods* belongs *To morrow*.
 ('The Epicure')

The opening line - "Fill the *Bowl* with rosie Wine" - establishes a connection with

‘Drinking’ where Cowley’s Anacreon urges in the imperative: “Fill up the *Bowl* then, fill it high,” and again “Fill all the *Glasses*.” This link will continue in the next poem with “Fill to me, *Love*, nay fill it up” (‘Another,’ 9). The resolve to drink in ‘Drinking’ is taken up by the pleasure-seeking Anacreon of ‘Age’ who now becomes an epicure. Epicurus’s theory, often misrepresented as a licence for indulgence of the appetites, actually sought the minimisation of pain through a life of simple pleasures and the avoidance of unnecessary fears, leading to a happy life of freedom from disturbance. In the essay he would later address to John Evelyn entitled “The Garden,” Cowley would acknowledge the popular misrepresentation of Epicurus in an improvised eleven-stanza poem in which he offers a thought on what it means to be “a true Epicure.” He stresses that it is only “if rightly understood” that Epicurus’s teachings on the pleasure principle would be appreciated:

When *Epicurus* to the World had taught,
 That Pleasure was the chiefest Good,
 (And was perhaps I’th’ right, if rightly understood)
 His Life he to his Doctrine brought,
 And in a Gardens shade that Sovereign Pleasure sought:
 Whoever a true Epicure would be,
 May there find cheap and virtuous Luxurie.

(“The Garden,” Concluding Poem, 95-101, in *Essays*, pp. 422-8)

The notion that “Pleasure was the chiefest Good” comes directly from Epicurus’s *Morals* that explained the ataractic ideal of freedom from pain:

When we say that pleasure in the general is the end of a happy life, or the chiefest good, we are very far from understanding those pleasures which are so much admired, courted and pursued by men wallowing in luxury or any other pleasures ... whereby the sense is pleasantly tickled as some ... have wrongfully expounded our words; but only this ...: not to be pained in body, nor perturbed in mind.¹²³

From his delicate taste in simple “rosie Wine” to his condemnation of the wealth and power symbolised by Gyge’s diadem, from his sheer *joie de vivre* when enjoying life’s simplest pleasures to his banishment of the wealth, business and sorrows of the world, Cowley’s Anacreon approaches the Epicurean ideal. Always the man of

thought, Cowley takes his cue both from Epicurus's idea of freedom from the cares of the world and from Anacreon's own *carpe diem* theory to spin the philosophy that today belongs to man while tomorrow belongs to the gods.

'Another,' the poem placed next to 'The Epicure,' accommodates the fullest expression yet of the *carpe diem* theme and asserts that the only excuse needed for enjoying the pleasures of life is the very fact of being alive: "Let me *Alive* my pleasures have, / All are *Stoicks* in the *Grave*." This follows from the notion that if time, or the "*Wheel of Life*," cannot be halted, then let it be spent in a pleasant way: "Since it equally does flee, / Let the *Motion* pleasant be." The poem argues boldly that the dead have no life: "Nothing they but *Dust* can show, / Or *Bones* that hasten to be so;" hence the revolt against the custom of taking precious ointments or oils, the best wine and most beautiful flowers to the graves and monuments of the dead. Cowley's Anacreon wants his share of them now because, "After *Death* I nothing crave." As if to prove his point, the poem opens with him enjoying these things already, hence the picturesque description of an idyllic setting under a myrtle shade where he is lying on flowery beds in the midst of roses, enjoying the scented oils and drinking away. He even has Love as an attendant at his beck and call to satisfy every need: "In this more than *Kingly* state, / *Love* himself shall on me wait." He has found his ideal setting to enjoy his pleasures, the happy state that for him is the very essence of being alive:

Underneath this Myrtle shade,
On flowry beds supinely laid,
With od'orous Oyls my head o're-flowing,
And around it Roses growing,
What should I do but drink away
The *Heat*, and *troubles* of the Day?
In this more than *Kingly* state,
Love himself shall on me wait.

Fill to me, *Love*, nay fill it up;
 And mingled cast into the Cup,
Wit, and *Mirth*, and noble *Fires*,
 Vigorous *Health*, and gay *Desires*.
 The *Wheel* of Life no less will stay
 In a *smooth* then *Rugged* way.
 Since it equally does flee,
 Let the *Motion* pleasant be.
 Why do we precious *Oyntments* shower,
 Nobler *wines* why do we pour,
 Beauteous *Flowers* why do we spread,
 Upon the Mon'uments of the *Dead*?
 Nothing they but *Dust* can show,
 Or *Bones* that hasten to be so.
 Crown me with *Roses* whilst I *Live*,
 Now your *Wines* and *Oyntments* give.
 After *Death* I nothing crave,
 Let me *Alive* my pleasures have,
 All are *Stoicks* in the *Grave*.

(‘Another’)

The use of the plural pronoun, our/s, us, we, in ‘The Epicure’ has been replaced by that of the singular, my, I, me, in ‘Another.’ Suddenly the collective element, that of conviviality and social intercourse, is gone; to apply the words of West, “the drinker exists in solitary beatitude, drenched in perfume, laden with rose-garlands, with beautiful boys and girls to bring him wine.”¹²⁴ Cowley’s Anacreon is therefore portrayed here as the very antithesis of the Stoic who is wont to show indifference to pleasure. Hopkins and Mason identify in the use of Stoic an example of “the thought-provoking word set amidst playfulness [that] is deployed particularly strikingly by Cowley in a number of instances when that word is the name of a philosophical sect.”¹²⁵ Cowley loves his pleasures so much so that he considers the adherents of the Stoic philosophy to have shunned life itself, for surely the very fact of being alive is concomitant with enjoyment and pleasure.

The last two poems, entitled ‘The Grasshopper’ and ‘The Swallow,’ offer a different dimension to the collection. Choosing Stanley’s titles for both poems, Cowley’s pieces are more than just representations of the key element of insect and bird

traditions in the Anacreontic corpus. The whole sequence seems to climax in ‘The Grasshopper’ which constitutes the very embodiment of Cowley’s vision of the pleasures of life, while ‘The Swallow’ offers a different tone to the collection in serving the purpose of a valedictory piece. Both poems adopt the direct form of address otherwise deployed only in the ‘Elegie Upon Anacreon,’ a peculiarity of Cowley’s practice here being that the addressees are only mentioned by name in the respective titles. ‘The Grasshopper’ is ostensibly about the life of the short-lived insect that takes its pleasures simply and most happily, making it the envy of man:

Happy *Insect*, what can be
 In happiness compar’d to Thee?
 Fed with nourishment divine,
 The dewy *Mornings* gentle *Wine!* ...
 Thou dost drink, and dance, and sing;
 Happier then the happiest *King!* ...
 Man for thee does sow and plow;
Farmer He, and *Land-Lord Thou!*...
 Thee *Phoebus* loves, and does inspire;
Phoebus is himself thy *Sire*.
 To thee of all things upon earth,
Life is no longer then thy *Mirth*.
 Happy *Insect*, happy Thou,
 Dost neither *Age*, nor *Winter* know.
 But when thou’st drunk, and danc’d, and sung,
 Thy fill, the flowry *Leaves* among
 (*Voluptuous*, and *Wise* with all,
Epicurean Animal!)
 Sated with thy *Summer Feast*,
 Thou retir’est to endless *Rest*.

(‘The Grasshopper,’ 1-4, 9-10, 15-16, 25-34)

The two previous poems, ‘The Epicure’ and ‘Another,’ have been building towards the climax of ‘The Grasshopper’ where the life of the grasshopper represents the Cowleyan ideal. The link between these poems, as well as that between the insect and human worlds is complete with the quite innovative epithet “*Epicurean Animal.*” In one fell blow Cowley’s neologism sums up the happy creature and projects a vision of a special kind of existence. If Epicurus taught that the *summum bonum* or highest good was personal happiness, a state of freedom away from life’s shifting fortunes and the cares of the world, then clearly the grasshopper has achieved this

state: “Happy *Insect*,” or again “Happier then the happiest *King*!” The grasshopper attains the Cowleyan ideal in the sense that it epitomises both the philosophy of Epicurus and the wisdom of Anacreon: “*Voluptuous*, and *Wise* with all.” His use of voluptuous proved popular with Johnson who in turn used the word of the *Anacreontiques* when commenting on “those songs dedicated to festivity and gaiety, in which even the morality is voluptuous, and which teach nothing but the enjoyment of the present day.”¹²⁶ Perhaps Thomas Moore had this statement in mind when he went on to use the noun, voluptuary, to describe Anacreon himself and in the process employ another sense of morality from Johnson’s:

The soul of Anacreon speaks unequivocally through his odes, that we may safely consult them as the faithful mirrors of his heart. We find him there the elegant voluptuary, diffusing the seductive charm of sentiment over passions and propensities at which rigid morality must frown.¹²⁷

Perhaps Cowley himself has the last word, for he would write in his *Essays* that, “The Voluptuous Men may be divided, I think, into the Lustful and Luxurious, who are both servants of the Belly.” The two senses of the word are typical of the varying interpretations of Epicurus’s philosophy but he intends the virtuous sense of voluptuous:

Metrodorus said, That he had learnt ... to give his Belly just thanks for all his pleasures. This by the Calumniators of *Epicurus* his Philosophy was objected as one of the most scandalous of all their sayings; which, according to my Charitable understanding may admit a very virtuous sense, which is, that he thanked his own Belly for that moderation in the customary appetites of it, which can only give a Man Liberty and Happiness in this World. (“Of Liberty,” *Essays*, p. 385).

And so the grasshopper is wise to make pleasure its guiding principle such that its life is one long story of uninterrupted mirth: “To thee ... / *Life* is no longer then thy *Mirth*.” And yet closer scrutiny reveals that the grasshopper observes by its very nature the kind of “moderation in the customary appetites of [its belly] which can only give a Man Liberty and Happiness in this World.” An example of this virtuous moderation is that its morning food doubles up as its drink, and this is mere dew which for the insect has a divine source: “Fed with nourishment divine, / The dewy

Mornings gentle Wine!” Cowley’s admiration of the way the insect takes its pleasures shows itself in the heavy emphasis, achieved by monosyllabic words and the enhanced use of caesural pauses in this line: “Thou dost drink, and dance, and sing;” and again, “But when thou’st drunk, and danc’d, and sung.” Just as he delights in playing on the meaning of wine when comparing it with dew, so does Cowley delight in playing on words like drink and drunk, at every opportunity hinting at but not overtly stating the connection with man with whom he is ultimately concerned. Of the use of such telling words as drink, dance, and song in the sequence that climaxes in ‘The Grasshopper,’ Tom Mason observes that,

Cowley, like other thinking poets, [gives common words] a fullness of sense and a weight of meaning that they had never borne before: ‘yesterday’, ‘today’, ‘tomorrow’, ‘love’, ‘sing’, ‘drink’, ‘dance’, ‘roses’. [Cowley] was the first [English poet] to allow these words to describe the sum of life; ... letting them work freely upon one another [so that] a spirit of gaiety might be released.¹²⁸

Even death is only described in romantic terms: “Thou retir’est to endless Rest;” so voluptuous and sated is the insect from a life of pleasure that it goes for a rest from which it would not emerge again. This understated and quixotic view of mortality emerges from a vision of death as a boon, a reward almost, for all those who wisely allow their lives to be guided by the grand elementary principle of pleasure.

‘The Swallow’ completes Cowley’s selection and demonstrates, possibly better than any of the other poems, his approach of selective imitation and adaptation, the piece being inspired by two different poems but with a similar title of ‘The Swallow’ in Stanley’s translation. Cowley also reveals a different attitude from that of total admiration he showed the grasshopper in the previous poem, this time showing frustration with the use of strong adjectives like “foolish” and “cruel” to describe the bird. This is because the swallow has been doing an impression of a serenade at night under the poet’s window that wakes him up and cuts out his dream:

Foolish *Prater*, what do'st thou
 So early at my window do
 With thy tuneless *Serenade*?
 Well t'had been had *Tereus* made
 Thee as *Dumb* as *Philomel*;
 There his Knife had done but well.
 In thy undiscover'ed Nest
 Thou dost all the winter rest,
 And dreamest o're thy summer joys
 Free from the stormy seasons noise:
 Free from th' Ill thou'st done to me;
 Who disturbs, or seeks out *Thee*?
 Had'st thou all the charming notes
 Of the woods *Poetick Throats*,
 All thy art could never pay
 What thou'st ta'ne from me away;
 Cruel *Bird*, thou'st ta'ne away
 A *Dream* out of my arms to day,
 A *Dream* that ne're must equall'd be
 By all that *waking Eyes* may see.
 Thou this damage to repair,
 Nothing half so sweet or fair,
 Nothing half so good can'st bring,
 Though men say, *Thou bring'st the Spring*.
 ('The Swallow')

Cowley preserves the tone of the original poem that appeared in twelfth position in

Estienne's ordering and which Stanley renders in only six lines thus:

Chattering Swallow, what shall we,
 Shall we do to punish thee?
 Shall we clip thy wings, or cut
Tereus like thy shrill tongue out?
 Who *Rodantha* driv'st away
 From my dreams, by break of day.
 (Stanley, 'The Swallow [I]')

For the association of the swallow with the seasons, Cowley turns to the second

'Swallow' poem numbered thirty-three in Stanley's collection. Only the first four

lines out of twenty as rendered in Stanley's translation suffice for Cowley's purpose:

Gentle Swallow, thou we know
 Every year dost come and go,
 In the Spring thy nest thou mak'st;
 In the Winter it forsak'st.
 (Stanley, 'The Swallow [II],' 1-4)

In Stanley's versions there is a contrast in attitude to the swallow from one poem to

the other, the one opening with "Chattering Swallow" and the other with "Gentle

Swallow." Cowley's poem is an expansion on the chattering swallow that he

otherwise describes as a foolish prater that talks out of turn and too much, electing not to reconcile or confuse this aspect of the bird's character with that of the "gentle swallow." He follows Stanley in suggesting that the swallow comes in the spring to build its nest rather than in the summer, the one instance right at the end when Cowley's harsh tone seems to relent: "*Thou bring'st the Spring.*" With its twittering cry, its tendency to build its nest on buildings and especially its migratory nature, the swallow was a fascinating bird, popularly regarded since ancient times as a harbinger of summer. For over half the year after enjoying the summer it would disappear: "Thou dost all the winter rest, / And dreamest o're thy summer joys." Cowley would almost certainly have been enjoying his own dreams during the long winter months until the swallow's return. He does not say what dream the swallow interrupts, but it is important enough for him to use the mythological allusion to Tereus who ravished Philomel and then violently dismembered her tongue; later she was metamorphosed into a swallow!¹²⁹

Is it a dream on poetic inspiration that Cowley was having, the interruption of which signals the end of the Anacreontic sequence itself? Discussing the use of the dream in the opening poem of the *Anacreontea*, Rosenmeyer associates it with "dream visions of poetic inspiration."¹³⁰ The very notion of receiving inspiration from a god is found throughout Cowley's poetry; in fact, he expresses it even in the preceding poem addressed to the grasshopper whose wisdom comes from the gods: "Thee *Phoebus* loves, and does inspire; / *Phoebus* is himself thy *Sire*" ("The Grasshopper," 23-24). *Phoebus* is Apollo, the Shining One, one of the twelve great Olympian gods, among other things the god and patron of poetry and music who presided over the Muses. The dream vision as a favourite source of inspiration is a poetic

commonplace: poets have long asserted the paradox of having to go into a trance-like or dream state in order to gain knowledge and wisdom deprived them when fully conscious. At its most extreme form the poet is even physically blind, like Milton who explains in *Paradise Lost* how his Muse visits him at night - "Her nightly visitation unimplored" (IX. 22) - and inspires his poetry: "And dictates to me slumbering, or inspires / Easy my unpremeditated verse" (IX. 23-24).¹³¹ Cowley expresses the need for the poet to get into the dream state by concurring that he 'sees' in his dream what could never be equalled by what he sees when awake: "A *Dream* that ne're must equall'd be / By all that *waking Eyes* may see." Further, something has been taken "out of my arms to day," perhaps suggesting that on this day the sequence he has been writing has come to a stop and the current poem is his last. He could only set to work when armed with the revealed knowledge his Muse transmits to him in his dream. Even if the swallow had all the beautiful music and art of the singing birds he describes in synecdochic fashion as "*Poetick Throats*," it could not compensate for the dream, perhaps of his own poetic art, that was now lost. "All thy art could never pay / What thou'st ta'ne from me away" suggests that the one art could not replace the other, that is, the bird's singing could not replace his composition of the Anacreontics. His dream was certainly of something "so sweet," "fair" or beautiful, and "so good," all terms applicable to Anacreon and his imitators, as in Cicero's observation that "Anacreon is wise as a man, sweet as a poet, and most appealing to his audience."¹³²

In the words of Hopkins and Mason, "Cowley's discovery was to see that it was not necessary to follow the surface features and particulars of the original Latin or Greek any more when 'translating' than when 'imitating' ancient poems."¹³³ As translator,

imitator and composing poet, Cowley does not just bring to his English audience the pleasures of the *Anacreontea*, but by selection and adaptation makes of his *Anacreontiques* a new creation. It was already common in the seventeenth century to talk of the imitative text equalling the model. Jonson's famous pronouncement is a case in point: "To make choice of one excellent man ... and so to follow him till he grow very he, or so like him as the copy may [even] be mistaken for the principal." That Cowley achieves this was suggested by one of his contemporaries, Francis Willis, who attempted his *Anacreon done into English out of the Original Greek* in 1683. His reasons included "the tempting pattern set by the inimitable Mr. Cowley: where he has rendred part of this author so lively in an English dress, that I began to esteem it of allmost equal beauty with the original."¹³⁴ In the modern period Eliot stretched this idea to suggest that, even as his ancestors from the past direct the present poet, so too be the past altered by the present:

The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; ... and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.¹³⁵

More recently, Rosenmeyer has been even bolder with her theory that the adapted text may even become better than the original depending on the borrower's performance. In the *Anacreontiques* Cowley exemplifies her theory of adaptation:

A poet who takes his subject from another poet, unravels or decomposes it, and then reassembles it, affixing his own stamp or seal; the composite text which results may be better than the model, if the borrower brings more "poetry" to his version.¹³⁶

Cowley has certainly unravelled and reassembled the sequence, affixing his own stamp onto it. Such is the extent of his mastery of his art that it has indeed been suggested that "[Cowley's *Anacreontiques*] surpass the Greek originals in their sprightliness."¹³⁷

When Carew wrote disparagingly of servile imitators – that “... our soules must bee / Possesst, or with Anacreons Extasie, / Or Pindars ...” – he could not have identified two more radically different poets from antiquity, nor could he have imagined that one very same poet in Cowley would find his soul, so to speak, being possessed at one and the same time with the ecstasy of Pindar and Anacreon. Johnson summed up the contrast between the two ancients by describing them in the same breath as “the gentle Anacreon and the tempestuous Pindar!”¹³⁸ But the study of Cowley’s main bodies of translation, the Pindarics and the Anacreontics, attests to the applicability of one of Jonson’s observations in *Discoveries* on the imitative author:

Such as accustom themselves, and are familiar with the best authors, shall ever and anon find somewhat of them in themselves, and in the expression of their minds, even when they feel it not; to be able to utter something like theirs, which hath an authority above their own.¹³⁹

Not content with merely rising above servile imitation or indeed railing against it himself, Cowley is able to find in each of the ancients aspects of his own thought or body of theory which, on their authority, he is able to pass off as his own. He remains ultimately himself, constantly bringing his own powers of invention to the fore and never allowing his originality to be stifled.

“To judge of poets is only the faculty of poets,”¹⁴⁰ Jonson counselled. Surely there could be no better judge of Cowley’s efforts than Denham. Between them they had conceived and made popular the theory of free translation and it is little wonder that Denham should reserve special praise for the supreme imitator Cowley was. To name Jonson when speaking of the imitative arts as Denham does comes *de rigueur*, in acknowledgement of his role in turning translation and imitation into a discipline that influenced his sons like Cowley and no doubt himself. But Denham pays the

ultimate tribute to his friend for improving on the practice of the great progenitor. And yet his most delightful compliment perhaps is to acclaim Cowley as a swan in his own right, an English swan, one who has soared to the heights reached by his greatest heroes whose company he surely graces. For Pindar is labelled the “*Theban Swan*” in the Horatian poem Cowley imitates in praise of the Greek master, in a similar vein to his characterisation of Virgil as the “*Mantu’an Swan*” in ‘The Motto.’ In the way he becomes the English Pindar and English Anacreon, Cowley demonstrates the veracity of the remark that, “In imitation one becomes a very Another.”¹⁴¹ Denham’s encomiastic effort is addressed to a readership of his contemporaries on whose behalf he felt he was speaking when designating Cowley not just as “our Swan,” but also as one who always preserved the pureness of his “English stream.”

To him no Author was unknown,
 Yet what he wrote was all his own;
 He melted not the ancient Gold,
 Nor with Ben Johnson did make bold
 To plunder all the Roman stores
 Of Poets, and of Orators:
 Horace his wit, and Virgil’s state,
 He did not steal, but emulate,
 And when he would like them appear,
 Their Garb, but not their Cloaths, did wear:
 He not from Rome alone, but Greece,
 Like Jason brought the Golden Fleece;
 To him that Language (though to none
 Of th’others) as his own was known.
 On a stiff gale (as Flaccus sings)
 The Theban Swan extends his wings.
 When through th’aetherial Cloud he flies,
 To the same pitch our Swan doth rise;
 Old Pindar’s flights by him are reacht,
 When on that gale his wings are stretcht;
 His fancy and his judgment such,
 Each to the other seem’d too much,
 His severe judgment (giving Law)
 His modest fancy kept in awe:
 As rigid Husbands jealous are,
 When they believe their Wives too fair.
 His English stream so pure did flow,
 As all that saw, and tasted, know.

(‘On Mr Abraham Cowley: His Death and Burial amongst the Ancient Poets,’ 29-56)

¹ Longinus, *On Sublimity*, trans. D. A. Russell, in *Ancient Literary Criticism: The Principal Texts in New Translations*, ed. D. A. Russell and M. Winterbottom (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978, pp. 460-503), p. 476. The full passage fuses Plato's theory of inspiration with literary imitation, using the image of the Delphic oracle who becomes possessed when receiving her inspiration from a cleft in the ground that exhales a divine vapour; and concluding that, "Even those previously not much inclined to prophesy become inspired and share the enthusiasm which comes from the greatness of others."

² Horace, *Works*, Vol. 2 (*The Satires, Epistles, and Art of Poetry*), trans. (1739) David Watson, rev. (1792) W. Crakelt (New York: AMS Press, repr. 1976), pp. 218-21. For Horace's odes we make an exception to this critical edition and turn instead to David West's *Horace: Complete Odes and Epodes*. The motto Cowley chooses for his title page is part of a question asked by Horace of Titius's ability to write lyrics in Pindar's manner, a possible reference to the writer of tragedies and lyric, Titius Septimius. Horace would ask again: "Is he employed in fitting the Theban (Pindaric) measures to the Roman lyre?" (13).

³ John Denham, *Poetical Works*, ed. Theodore Howard Banks (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), pp. 149-152.

⁴ John Dryden, *Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire* in *Works*, Vol. IV (Poems 1693-1696), ed. A. B. Chambers and William Frost (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 70.

⁵ *Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden* in *Ben Jonson*, Ben Jonson, ed. Ian Donaldson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 611.

⁶ Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 52.

⁷ Thomas Sprat, "An Account of the Life and Writings of Mr. Abraham Cowley" in *The Works of Mr. Abraham Cowley* (London, 1668), Preface. Hereafter referred to as "Life."

⁸ Denham, p. 43.

⁹ Cowley would recall in later life how, "Even when I was a very young Boy at School, ... I was then too, so much an Enemy to all constraint, that my Masters could never prevail on me, by any perswasions or encouragements, to learn without Book the common rules of Grammar" (*Essays*, "Of Myself," p. 456).

¹⁰ Jean Loiseau, *Abraham Cowley: Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre* (Paris: Henri Didier, 1931), p. 475. The translation from the French is mine.

¹¹ John Dryden, *Sylvæ: or, the Second Part of Poetical Miscellanies* in *Works*, Vol. III (Poems 1685-1692), ed. Earl Miner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), Preface, p. 5.

¹² The search for truth as a humanist ideal enabled the new covenant with classical learning reflected in the desire to return "*ad fontes* and *ad res*" – to the sources and to reality. See *English Humanism: Wyatt to Cowley*, Joanna Martindale (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 21. Elsewhere Elizabeth Bieman writes that, "*Ad fontes*, the rallying slogan of the early humanists, suggested in the early Renaissance the search for wisdom in the traditional texts of the classical world." See *Plato Baptized: Towards the Interpretation of Spenser's Mimetic Fictions*, Elizabeth Bieman (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), p. 184.

¹³ David Trotter depicts the views of those who insist that Cowley's praise for the ode form represents an attempt to dilute his disappointment with epic: "There is in the claim that Pindarism represents the 'noblest and highest kind of writing in Verse' a bravado compensating for the failed grandiloquence of

the *Daiveis*; the focus of Cowley's ambition has shifted." See The Poetry of Abraham Cowley, David Trotter (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 110.

¹⁴ Nethercot has argued in a chapter entitled "Pindar in Jersey" that it was in Jersey that Cowley accidentally met with Pindar's work, despite Sprat omitting this detail in his account. See Abraham Cowley: The Muse's Hannibal, Arthur H. Nethercot (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), p. 135.

¹⁵ Sprat, "Life."

¹⁶ Paul J. Korshin, From Concord to Dissent: Major Themes in English Poetic Theory 1640-1700 (Menston: Scolar Press, 1973), p. 11.

¹⁷ Korshin, p. 13.

¹⁸ John Dryden, *Ovid's Epistles, Translated by Several Hands in Works*, Vol I (Poems 1649-1680), ed. Edward Niles Hooker and H. T. Swedenberg, Jr. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956), Preface, p. 116.

¹⁹ Dryden, Vol. I, p. 117.

²⁰ Dryden, Vol. III, pp. 16-17.

²¹ Samuel Johnson, Lives of the English Poets, Vol. 1 (Cowley – Dryden), ed. George Birkbeck Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), p. 48.

²² Of nineteenth century attitudes in particular, Loiseau says that, "Irregular odes were still being written, in spite of repeated condemnations, in the middle of the nineteenth century, but Cowley as a model had long been forgotten, and his odes were hardly ever mentioned but to be jeered at." See Abraham Cowley's Reputation in England, Jean Loiseau (Paris: Henri Didier, 1931), p. 208.

²³ Loiseau, Reputation, p. 208.

²⁴ Loiseau, Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre, pp. 352-53. On the nineteenth century interpretation of Pindar excluding the element of enthusiasm, Loiseau quotes from Croiset's 1880 study, *Les lois du lyrisme grec (The laws of Greek lyricism)*: "An ode of Pindar's is not a work of pure imagination created arbitrarily by disorientated enthusiasm" (p. 352, n. 18).

²⁵ Loiseau, Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre, pp. 353. Also, in Reputation, p. 111, Loiseau quotes from the 1806 edition of *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, where Joseph Warton seemingly dismisses Cowley's Odes with the curt remark: "they cannot be perused with patience by a lover of antiquity."

²⁶ Nethercot, p. 136. As if by coincidence, initially Loiseau also defends Cowley against the charge of breaking strict rules that Pindar's verse follows:

Pindar's art is subjected to strict laws. But how do you blame Cowley for this error [of thinking that Pindar varies the length and appearance of his verse to suit his thought]. He has only the ideas of his age to go by. It is only very slowly, after long research and the impact of discussions, that the rules that govern this art became understood.

See Loiseau, Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre, p. 352.

²⁷ Nethercot, p. 138. Loiseau makes a similar point on Cowley "doing violence to his true nature by trying to raise himself to Pindar's level," in Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre, p. 365. These comments recall those of Richard Hurd who, in his Select Works of Mr. Abraham Cowley in 1772, describes Cowley's Pindarics as "an exquisite sort of poetry, to which his *style* was very ill suited; being, for the most part, careless, and sometimes affectedly vulgar." Cited in Loiseau, Reputation, p. 104.

²⁸ Loiseau, Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre, p. 365. Perhaps the first critic to have adopted such a trenchant stance was Richard Hurd again: "[According to Hurd] everything he wrote is either so good or so bad that, in all reason, a separation should be made. ... For this reason, he thought Cowley ought never to have

attempted writing odes.” See Loiseau, Reputation, p. 103.

²⁹ Robert B. Hinman, Abraham Cowley’s World of Order (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 89.

³⁰ Hinman, pp. 8-14.

³¹ A notable exception is Harvey D. Goldstein who studied “Cowley and the ‘Pindarick Madness’” for his unpublished PhD dissertation and wrote the useful article on “*Anglorum Pindarus: Model and Milieu*” (*Comparative Literature*, Vol. 17, 1965, pp. 299-310). In contrast, David Rawlinson, for example, rails against his fellow critics who had been unsympathetic towards Cowley, claiming that modern criticism seemed to have missed Cowley’s distinctive contribution. And yet he joins the same critics to dismiss out of hand those works with which he appears not to have been sufficiently familiar: “Despite their historical place, and despite the critical intelligence Cowley reveals in the preface to the *Pindarique Odes* these [including the *Davideis*] are not works worth defending. ... Wallerstein rightly judges them to be ‘unsuccessful intellectual experiments.’” See “Cowley and the Current Status of Metaphysical Poetry,” David Rawlinson (*Essays in Criticism*, Vol. 13, 1963, pp. 323-40), p. 336.

³² Ian Donaldson, Jonson’s Magic Houses: Essays in Interpretation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 164.

³³ Greene, p. 93, writes of Renaissance literature that, “[It] requires an ‘archaeological’ scrutiny, a decipherment of the latent or hidden or indecipherable object of historical knowledge beneath the surface. I propose to call this activity *subreading*. ... Subreading an ancient text involved first of all an intuition of its otherness, ... a dynamic and constant interplay between the reader and the distant voice whose very accent and idiom he sought to catch.”

³⁴ G. M. A. Grube, for example, citing from Gilbert Norwood’s 1945 *Pindar*, wrote: “[Pindar] reflects upon the nature and methods of his craft; indeed he has been called ‘the earliest European literary critic.’” See The Greek and Roman Critics, G. M. A. Grube, 1965 (Indianapolis: Hackett, repr. 1995), p. 9. Further, D. A. Russell gives these examples of Pindar’s theories: “His own relation to the Muse as her prophet or spokesman, his rivals’ plodding incompetence, Homer’s seductive falsifications, the improprieties of myth, are all themes which [Pindar] takes up.” See Criticism in Antiquity, D. A. Russell (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1981) p. 19.

³⁵ Donna Hamilton, Virgil and The Tempest: The Politics of Imitation (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990), p. 11.

³⁶ Sprat, “Life.”

³⁷ On this tradition dating back to Petrarch, Thomas Greene, for example, writes: “Petrarch was the first modern man to be intoxicated by the sweetness of another’s wit.” See Greene, p 94.

³⁸ Cited by Greene, p. 99.

³⁹ Cited by Greene, p. 95.

⁴⁰ Cited by Hamilton, p. 12.

⁴¹ Donaldson, p. 162.

⁴² Greene, p. 99.

⁴³ Ben Jonson, *Timber or Discoveries* in Ben Jonson, p. 545. Hereafter referred to as *Discoveries*.

⁴⁴ Jonson, *Discoveries*, p. 585.

⁴⁵ Jonson, Introduction, p. xvi.

⁴⁶ Jonson, *Discoveries*, pp. 585-6.

⁴⁷ Donaldson, *Jonson's Walk to Scotland* (Edinburgh: Quadriga, 1992), p. 6.

⁴⁸ Donaldson (1997), p. 162.

⁴⁹ Donaldson (1997), p. 165.

⁵⁰ Cited by Nethercot, p. 30.

⁵¹ Jonson, *Discoveries*, p. 525.

⁵² Jonson, *Discoveries*, p. 586.

⁵³ Jonson, *Discoveries*, p. 586.

⁵⁴ Greene, pp. 67-8. Greene is referring especially to the poem addressed to Julius Florus, that is, the same poem from which Cowley chooses his motto, for he cites these lines that interested Cowley:

What of Titius, soon to be on the lips of Romans,
Who quailed not at draughts of the Pindaric spring,
But dared to scorn the open pools and streams?
(Horace, *Epistles* 1.3, 9-11)

⁵⁵ Goldstein, p. 301.

⁵⁶ Cowley's four stanzas totalling fifty lines take their source from just one half of the original, the first thirty two lines out of sixty as rendered in West's direct translation:

Pindarum quisquis

All those, Iullus, who aim to rival Pindar,
are struggling on feathers waxed by the art
of Daedalus, and will give their names
to the glassy sea.

Like a rain-fed river running down
from the mountains and bursting its banks –
seething, immeasurable, deep-mouthed,
Pindar races along in spate,

winning the laurel of Apollo as he rolls
new words down the bold current
of his dithyrambs, rushing along in rhythms
that know no law,

or as he sings of gods or kings, blood-line
of gods, by whom the Centaurs
fell in just death, by whom fell
the fierce Chimaera's fires,

or as he tells of boxer or of charioteer,
heavenly ones brought home by the palm
of victory from Elis, and gives a prize
worth a hundred statues,

or as he laments the young man torn
from his weeping bride, and raises to the stars
his golden valour, his virtues, his spirit,
to cheat black Orcus.

Many a breeze lifts the swan of Dirce
whenever he soars into the tracts of cloud;
as for me, to the style and measure
of the Matine bee,

all round the well-watered woods and river banks
of Tibur I work busily, sipping
the harvest of sweet thyme and shaping
my laborious poems.

(Horace, *Odes* IV. II, 1-32)

See The Complete Odes and Epodes, Horace, trans. David West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 113-14.

⁵⁷ Quintilian, *The Education of an Orator*, X, 1, 61. Cited in translation in The Classical Legacy in Renaissance Poetry, Robin Sowerby (London, Longman, 1994), p. 175.

⁵⁸ Russell, pp. 153-54, notes that, "Pindar was edited under nine heads [by Alexandrian scholars]: hymns, paeans, dithyrambs, prosodia, partheneia, hyporchemata, encomia, *thrènoi* (dirges), epinicia. Only the last survive, but the whole range was known and studied in Hellenistic and Roman times."

⁵⁹ C. M. Bowra, Pindar (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 37.

⁶⁰ Greene, p. 68.

⁶¹ The translation is David Watson's in Horace, *Art of Poetry* (pp. 360-405), pp. 382-83.

⁶² Judith Sloman, Dryden: The Poetics of Translation (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), p. 8.

⁶³ Weinbrot, The Formal Strain: Studies in Augustan Imitation and Satire (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p.15.

⁶⁴ Weinbrot, p. 16.

⁶⁵ See Sowerby, p. 2

⁶⁶ Horace, *Art of Poetry*, pp. 372-73.

⁶⁷ Jonson, *Discoveries*, p. 561.

⁶⁸ Jonson, *Discoveries*, pp. 586-7.

⁶⁹ Denham, pp. 159-60.

⁷⁰ Johnson, p. 43.

⁷¹ Pindar, The Odes and Selected Fragments, trans. G. S. Conway and Richard Stoneman, ed. Richard Stoneman (London: J. M. Dent, 1997), pp. 12-21.

⁷² Sloman, p. 8.

⁷³ Johnson, p. 43.

⁷⁴ Pindar, pp. 193-99.

⁷⁵ Johnson, p. 43.

⁷⁶ Johnson, pp. 64-5.

⁷⁷ Denham, p. 202.

⁷⁸ On Cowley's varied interests and his use of the ancients, L. C. Martin, for example, comments that: [Cowley] was always ready to turn his hand to some new enterprise. He entered nearly all the fields. And because almost everything he wrote had about it some flavour of classical precedent or authority he seemed to offer guidance which was not only spirited but safe.

See Abraham Cowley: Poetry and Prose, ed. L. C. Martin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), Introduction, p. v.

⁷⁹ Commentators have largely kept away from the question of the date of the *Anacreontiques* which falls between Stanley's publication in 1651 and the publication of *Poems* in 1656. Among the tentative efforts, Stella P. Revard's suggestion that some of Cowley's anacreontics may have been written much earlier, perhaps as early as when he was a student, seems to contradict the appreciation of them as "mature pieces, carefully chosen, polished, and arranged in a well-ordered sequence." Nethercot earlier confused the issue by not appearing to take account of Cowley's submission to Stanley's influence when suggesting that "'The Chronicle' would seem to have been itself suggested by Cowley's own version of Anacreon's 'The Account,'" and yet "['The Chronicle'] was written between 1642 and 1650, and probably after 1647." See respectively "Cowley's *Anacreontiques* and the Translation of the Greek *Anacreontea*," Stella P. Revard, in Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Torontonensis, ed. Alexander Dalzell, Charles Fantazzi, and Richard J. Schoeck (Binghamton: State University of New York, 1991, pp. 595-607), p. 605; and Nethercot, pp. 108-09.

⁸⁰ Along with 'The Chronicle,' the *Anacreontiques* has been the most consistently praised of all Cowley's poetic works. Loiseau, in his review of the reception of Cowley's works for over two and a half centuries in Reputation, finds that it retained its appeal throughout.

⁸¹ See Nethercot, p. 107.

⁸² Loiseau, Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre, p. 395.

⁸³ Ruth Wallerstein, "Cowley as a Man of Letters" (*Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters*, Vol. 27, 1932, pp. 127-140), p. 128. Wallerstein's article, claiming that "If Cowley did not find himself as a poet, he did find himself as a man of letters" (p. 140) has been attacked by David Rawlinson as an example of the harshness of criticism towards Cowley's poetry in the modern period. See "Cowley and the Current Status of Metaphysical Poetry" (*Essays in Criticism*, Vol. 13, 1963, pp. 323-40). But in Wallerstein's 1930s even Loiseau appeared to deride the "solemn heaviness" of the *Daiveis*, the "laborious sublimity" of the *Pindarique Odes*, and the "unnatural flashes" in *The Mistress*, but praised the *Anacreontiques* as one of Cowley's "perfect successes" because in them he totally finds his natural range. (The translation from the French is mine). See Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre, p. 395.

⁸⁴ An exception to this general neglect is Martin's inclusion of three representative Anacreontics in his 1949 edition of Abraham Cowley: Selected Poetry and Prose.

⁸⁵ On the revival of the original Greek *Anacreontea* in English, see for example Greek Lyric, Vol. II, ed. David A. Campbell (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988); and The Poetics of Imitation: Anacreon and the Anacreontic Tradition, Patricia A. Rosenmeyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁸⁶ See Abraham Cowley: Selected Poems, ed. David Hopkins and Tom Mason (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1994). Also, Julia Griffin includes three representative Anacreontic pieces in her selection. See Selected Poems of Abraham Cowley, Edmund Waller and John Oldham, ed. Julia Griffin (London: Penguin Books, 1998). (The publication of the *Anacreontiques* in the Delaware edition of Cowley's Collected Works that is still pending is projected in Vol. 2, Part 2).

⁸⁷ Stuart Gillespie, The Poets on the Classics: An Anthology (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 70.

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- ⁸⁸ Tom Mason, "Abraham Cowley and the Wisdom of Anacreon" (*Cambridge Quarterly*, Vol. 19, Number 2, 1990, pp. 103-137), p.111.
- ⁸⁹ Mason, p. 103. One of the critics to have pondered the question of the neglect of the mid-twentieth century, Mason reasons that,
It may be that the rejection [of both English and Greek versions] was deliberate, considered, and founded upon genuine critical sophistication, or it may be that the critical loss was also a human loss, a closing down of a small area of human possibility.
- ⁹⁰ Johnson, pp. 39-40.
- ⁹¹ Revard, p. 595. Revard's "most finished of Cowley's works" and "his happiest vein" are reminiscent also of the views of Hugh Blair in his "Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres" of 1783: "In his Anacreontic Odes he is much happier. They are smooth and elegant, and indeed, the most agreeable and the most perfect, in their kind, of all Mr. Cowley's poems." Cited by Loiseau, *Reputation*, p. 115.
- ⁹² Gillespie, p. 68.
- ⁹³ On the increasing popularity of the Anacreontic tradition in England, see for example Loiseau, *Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre*, p. 389, and Revard, p. 595, both of whom mention especially the contributions of Herrick and Stanley.
- ⁹⁴ Thomas Carew, *Poems*, ed. Rhodes Dunlap (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), pp. 71-4.
- ⁹⁵ In his 1638 play, *Love's Riddle*, for example, Cowley adapts some anacreontea as songs. Revard, p. 605, uses this example to suggest implausibly that Cowley may have started composing his *Anacreontiques* in the late 1630s.
- ⁹⁶ See Loiseau, *Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre*, p. 389.
- ⁹⁷ Culled from Gillespie's *Anthology*, p. 76.
- ⁹⁸ Culled from Greene, p. 51.
- ⁹⁹ Greene, p. 51.
- ¹⁰⁰ John Dryden, *Works*, Vol. 1 (Poems 1649-1680), ed. Edward Niles Hooker and H. T. Swedenberg, Jr. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956), pp.114-15. Greene, p. 52, observes pointedly that, "Dryden confesses in his last paragraph that he himself, in the version of Ovid to follow, has taken 'more liberty than a just translation will allow,' which may in fact be a confession that his original distinctions were too rigid to be of value." For similar discussions see further Sloman, p. 8.
- ¹⁰¹ Rosenmeyer, p. 148.
- ¹⁰² Mason, p. 137.
- ¹⁰³ Gillespie, p. 69.
- ¹⁰⁴ Culled from *Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, Vol. 1, ed. P. E. Easterling and B. M. W. Knox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 219. The full sentence is translated from one of Anacreon's fragments admonishing the drinker to sing love songs rather than songs on war themes:
I don't like the man who while drinking his wine beside the full mixing-bowl talks of quarrels and tearful war, but the man who by mixing the splendid gifts of the Muses and Aphrodite keeps lovely festivity in mind.
- ¹⁰⁵ Johnson, p. 39.

¹⁰⁶ T. S. Eliot, "Andrew Marvell" (pp. 292-304) in Selected Essays (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), p. 292.

¹⁰⁷ Revard, p. 597, provides this commentary on Cowley's careful choice:

With only two exceptions, he includes all of the most popular anacreontea. Only the Cupid poems – "The Beggar Cupid" and "Cupid and the Bee" – are excluded, remarkable exclusions, however, since the Cupid poems had won the hearts of French and English translators alike, with versions by Ronsard, Spenser, Watson, Lodge, and Herrick, as well as many others.

¹⁰⁸ Campbell, p. 10.

¹⁰⁹ Rosenmeyer, p. 109.

¹¹⁰ The correct ordering of the Anacreontea has since been restored such that Estienne's opening poem now appears in second place; in fact, the correct opening poem did not even appear in Estienne's original selection of fifty-five poems in 1554. Rosenmeyer, p. 5, explains:

Stephanus [or Estienne] begins with an alternative Byzantine introductory poem (2), justifying its placement by comparing it with the initial poem in Ovid's *Amores* (I.I). ... [He] omits a total of five anacreontics found in the Palatine manuscript, and poem 1 will not reappear at all until 1560.

The importance of the ordering of the poems in the Anacreontea has been made clear by M. L. West who divides them into four parts: Poems 1-20, 21-34, 35-53, and 54-60. Each group of poems has distinct features in terms of metre and versification, choice of subject, style, all of which go to suggest different dates and origins. See "The *Anacreontea*," M. L. West, in Sympotica: A Symposium on the *Symposion*, ed. Oswyn Murray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, 272-76).

¹¹¹ Revard, p. 597, explains further the choice of the opening poem:

Estienne had argued that this lyric ... ought to be first in the sequence because, like the introductory poems of Ovid's *Amores*, it announces the subject of the sequence as love. ... Estienne's and Stanley's discussion of the affinities of classical amatory elegy and the Greek anacreontea persuade Cowley to adopt this anacreontic as his introductory poem, ... using it as the apology for his collection.

¹¹² Thomas Stanley, Poems and Translations, ed. Galbraith Miller Crump (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), Anacreon, pp. 74-100. All citations from Stanley will be taken from this edition.

¹¹³ Revard, p. 598, chooses Cowley's use of "thirsty" here as an example of his careful word selection when he decides to use the proliferation of especially Greek and Latin sources open to him:

Cowley, like translators before him, is unhappy with the adjective *black*, traditional though it may be in Homer and Sappho as an epithet for earth. Only Lubin retains it, both Estienne and Andre substituting the Latin *fecunda* or *ferax* (fertile or fruitful) and Stanley concurring with the English *fruitful*. But Cowley, no slavish translator, is interested neither in the liberal nor the gloss but in sharpening the wit of the poem. Hence, he reaches back to a word that George Buchanan had used in his Latin translation, *sicca* (thirsty).

¹¹⁴ Rosenmeyer, p. 108.

¹¹⁵ Loiseau, Reputation, p. 65.

¹¹⁶ Rosenmeyer, p. 232. That Rosenmeyer felt strongly about Cowley's choice here could be gauged from the fact that it is the only instance where she mentions Cowley.

¹¹⁷ Mason, p. 116.

¹¹⁸ Rosenmeyer, pp. 90-91.

¹¹⁹ Nethercot, p. 107.

¹²⁰ Cowley had previously been quite reticent about providing names of women. In *The Mistress* even the poem entitled 'Her Name' turns out to be a strong disavowal of the idea of naming the woman:

With more then *Jewish Reverence* as yet
Do I the *Sacred Name* conceal;
When, ye kind *Stars*, ah when will it be fit
This *Gentle Myst'ery* to reveal?
When will our Love be *Nam'd*, and we possess
That *Christning* as a *Badge of Happiness*?
(*'Her Name,'* 1-6)

The impact of Cowley at last mentioning various women by name in 'The Chronicle' was still strongly felt over a hundred years later, with Bishop Hurd writing in 1772 that, "Nothing is more famous even in our days than Cowley's *mistresses*." See Johnson, p. 37, n. 4.

¹²¹ Loiseau, *Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre*, p.393.

¹²² Johnson, p. 37.

¹²³ Cited by David Hopkins, "Cowley's Horatian Mice" in *Horace Made New: Horatian Influences on British Writing from the Renaissance to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Charles Martindale and David Hopkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 103-26), p. 111.

¹²⁴ West, p. 275, makes his observation whilst highlighting the *symposion* theme in the Anacreontea.

¹²⁵ Hopkins and Mason, Introduction, p. xix.

¹²⁶ Johnson, p. 39

¹²⁷ Culled from Gillespie, p. 76.

¹²⁸ Mason, pp. 112-13.

¹²⁹ Recent commentators have been baffled by the difference in tone in this poem in relation to the others, and more particularly have been at a loss to decipher what dream the swallow interrupts. Mason, p. 136, is unconvincing with "without some such explanation" as "the extreme sorrow of Cowley's Anacreon at waking from his dream;" while Revard, p. 605, suggests a political analogy that is groundless: "Cowley, a royalist supporter, ... might well have felt that the Puritan, like the foolish prating swallow, had interrupted his royalist dream."

¹³⁰ From the poem which modern scholarship places at the head of the Anacreontea, the words "I am relating a dream" prompts these comments from Rosenmeyer, p. 65:

These words warn the reader that anything is now possible, since the poem obeys dream logic. The literary *topos* recalls other dream visions of poetic inspiration: Archilochus' fateful meeting as recorded on inscriptions in Paros, Callimachus' encounter with the Muses on Mt. Helicon which was influenced, of course, by Hesiod's waking vision, and Ennius' dream on Parnassus in which Homer revealed that the younger man's poetic genius was a direct result of the transmigration of souls.

¹³¹ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1998), p. 469.

¹³² Quoted by Rosenmeyer, p. 50. Of the use of the epithet "sweet" and similar descriptions of the Anacreontea, Rosenmeyer, p. 5, cites the example of Estienne:

[His introductory essay] characterizes the poetry as sweet, pleasing, and full of grace. ... [His] prefatory poems continue in the same strain, predicting that the reader will be captivated by the delicate *versiculi*, the literary equivalents of nectar and ambrosia: 'Whoever, then, is not captivated by the sweetness of the verse knows nothing, or he knows more than the God himself.'

¹³³ Hopkins and Mason, Introduction, p. xxii.

¹³⁴ Cited by Loiseau, Reputation, p. 44.

¹³⁵ Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (pp. 13-22), p. 15.

¹³⁶ Rosenmeyer, p. 149.

¹³⁷ Revard, p. 595. Loiseau writes also that, Cowley's paraphrases do not betray the original, they enhance it; their inexactitude adds even more to their charm such that no other translation matches their spritely character. See Loiseau, Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre, p. 393.

¹³⁸ Johnson, p. 59.

¹³⁹ Jonson, *Discoveries*, p. 567.

¹⁴⁰ Jonson, *Discoveries*, p. 588.

¹⁴¹ The remark is Greene's, p. 277.

CHAPTER FIVE

PINDARIQUE ODES: POETICS AND THEMATIC CONSIDERATIONS IN THE ORIGINAL COMPOSITIONS

Begin the *Song*, and strike the *Living Lyre*;
Lo how the *Years to come*, a numerous and well-fitted *Quire*,
All hand in hand do decently advance,
And to my *Song* with smooth and equal measures *dance*.
(‘The Resurrection’)

The ripened *Soul* longs from his pri’son to come, ...
The noble vigorous *Bird* already wing’d to part.
(‘Life’)

5.1 Introduction: Pindarical Liberty

The *Pindarique Odes* occupies a special place within English literature for introducing a new kind of writing in English. Cowley’s original compositions, and in some measure his biblical adaptations, complete his imitation of the Pindaric form and the creation of his, the Cowleyan Pindaric world. If his translations involved rewriting and interpreting ancient poetry in another language, then his original compositions involve similar handling of dissimilar material in new poems written in imitation of Pindar’s manner. His agenda seems to be to engage in a perpetual contest with the master: how Pindar would have written on the same subject in English in the seventeenth century? Perhaps in the manner of Jonson who eulogised two heroes in ‘To the Immortal Memory and Friendship of That Noble Pair, Sir Lucius Cary and Sir H. Morison,’ with its familiar four-part triadic arrangement? Cowley takes great delight in revealing new facets of the imitative arts with his original compositions written as he thought the greatest lyric poet in ancient Greece would have done, just as the *Davideis*, for example, had been conceived as the ultimate exhibition of another triumphal form. Cowley would have considered the comparison a fair one, for he considered the epic and lyric to be the two most estimable kinds of poetry. If the former was originally conceived

as the apotheosis of his poetic achievement, he could not have heaped any higher praise on the latter form than when describing it as the noblest and highest kind of writing in verse. However, as the uncompleted *Davideis* shows, he was not always happy working within traditional forms where established precedent imposed conventional rules of composition. Such rigidity stifled his creative genius because he was not at liberty to work outside fixed guidelines and the scope for innovation was manifestly limited. His Pindaric exercise is therefore a reaction against conventional forms and a manifestation of that liberty he exhibits in his translations. This chapter therefore deals with Cowley's authoritative domestication of the Pindaric form, showing how the creation of his new Pindaric world becomes a demonstration of what would become known as the irregular ode in English.

After passing the test of popularity for well over a hundred years following its release in 1656, the *Pindarique Odes* underwent long periods of neglect, harsh criticism or outright rejection in the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries. However, interest in Cowley's central masterpiece surged in the last quarter of the twentieth century, due essentially to increased acknowledgement of his invention of the English ode. On this literary milestone, Stuart Gillespie, for example, writes in his anthology that, "In Cowley both the Anacreontic and the Pindaric found an extremely gifted exponent. His *Pindaric Odes* founded a new style in English lyric. The 'irregular', Cowleyan, Pindaric became a tenacious form throughout the following century."¹ More recently, Howard Weinbrot has written in his impressive volume on the rise of British Literature that, "Abraham Cowley initiates perhaps the most important revolution in British poetic form. The

Cowleyan Pindaric permanently enlarges the options of poetry in English.”²

Sowerby too makes a similar point on the *Pindarique Odes*: “On the example and authority of Pindar a new verse form with its own characteristics of style has been introduced into English.”³ Not all Cowley critics have gone down the same path in paying attention to the formal aspects of the *Pindaric Odes*, nor have they discussed how a poetic experiment with form turned into such a major poetic revolution. It is part of our motivation to fill this gap with an exhaustive study of the odes, for the readership hardly understands them better now than when Cowley first introduced them to his audience. Weinbrot recognises this gap and calls for more studies on the formal aspects of the Cowleyan Pindaric odes, though his interest seems to be to use such a discussion as a vehicle towards tracing the creation and development of a British literary consciousness.⁴ Sowerby’s excellent section on Cowley is limited only to those odes that serve his aim “to describe and illustrate the main lines of classical influence flowing through the Renaissance.”⁵ With the exception of such commentators like Nethercot and Loiseau from the modern period, perhaps only Trotter has written exclusively on Cowley and shared similar concerns in the last half of the twentieth century.

In Trotter’s monograph, the chapter on the *Pindarique Odes* makes comments in the opening paragraph favourable towards a concern with form: “The very skepticism which sabotaged the *Davideis* became the principle on which the innovatory form of the *Pindarique Odes* was based. Cowley has never got the credit he deserves for this bold change of direction.”⁶ Trotter’s chapter has the merit of discussing both formal and thematic aspects, establishing the link between them thus: “The basis for [Cowley’s] poetic lies, I believe, in the equivalence

between the *Pindarique Odes* and the radical psychology developed by Thomas Hobbes.”⁷ We are devoting a section to the formal aspects and poetics of composition and the rest of the chapter to the themes developed in the odes, thus giving ourselves the opportunity to discuss the central work in Cowley’s oeuvre in as extensive a scale as has yet been accomplished. All the poems in the collection thus stand the chance of being discussed, unlike in Trotter’s chapter, for example, where the scope is limited and half of the poems do not get discussed. Hobbes remains a central figure in Cowley’s world of ideas, as Trotter suggests, but we would show in the sections on thematic considerations that his influence on Cowley lies more in philosophy and reason than in imitation or formal matters of lyric composition. Still on matters of theme, Trotter stays clear of arguments that seek to establish an allegorical basis for the odes with the political scene of the 1650s. The allegorical dimension could be traced back to Nethercot who insisted on finding in the poems “so many opportunities for allegorical interpretation.”⁸ Stella Revard has unsuccessfully attempted recently, in the 1990s, to show that Cowley has a secret political agenda in the odes. Her study, entitled “Abraham Cowley’s *Pindarique Odes* and the Politics of the Inter-regnum,” aims to reveal “a coded message to the people of England, one which those in the know may very easily decipher and read.” But she cannot sustain the unconvincing argument that “we ought to be suspicious of his blandly apolitical account of Pindar.” The apolitical account she refers to is Cowley’s on the difficulty of rendering into English “the peculiarities of Pindar’s style while remaining true to the spirit of his poetry,” basing her argument on the notion that the period of 1651 - 55 “was hardly an apolitical time in Cowley’s life.”⁹ As with the *Davideis*, it would be better to steer clear of the allegory of a political agenda, for which sufficient

evidence has never been established, and interpret the odes by means of discussions that could be substantiated with Cowley's written word.

Having finally discarded the shackles of convention imposed by the use of traditional forms, Cowley's freedom manifests itself not just in the liberties he takes with the formal aspects of composition, but in the treatment also of a vast array of themes ranging from the new science to matters divine. In Sprat's estimation, the form of the Pindaric ode was "fit for all manner of subjects: For the pleasant, the Grave, the Amorous, the Heroic, the Philosophical, the Moral, the Divine."¹⁰ Only the amorous from Sprat's list would be missing from Cowley's original compositions, but he gives us the reason himself in one of the poems: "I was born for *Love*, and for a *Muse*" ('Destinie,' 49). He would accommodate various subjects such as destiny, fame, and life, subjects inspired by Pindar whose favourite themes included the inscrutability of Fate and the unpredictability of good and ill fortune in human life. This indelible link with Pindar, who often weaves his subject choices with his four traditional elements of gods, myths, gnomic propositions and personal comments, shows the fundamental universality of human experience. Still, Cowley's programme of domestication dictates his professed method of discarding those elements from ancient Greek society that are not relevant to his England, hence the replacement of gods with other supernatural beings from angels to the Godhead, and the rejection of myth outright. There are four remaining sections to this chapter, with the very next section devoted to formal considerations, that is, to a study mainly of the two original compositions dedicated to the delineation of Cowley's Pindaric form and his poetics of composition, namely 'The Resurrection' and 'The Muse.' We complete the

section with a look at the two biblical adaptations, ‘The 34 Chapter of the Prophet Isaiah’ and ‘The Plagues of Egypt.’ The three remaining sections would be on thematic considerations, with one section devoted entirely to the question of liberty and Hobbesian philosophy that introduces the terms of discussion in the remaining eight original compositions. Finally, one section is devoted to the poems of praise addressed to individuals: ‘Brutus,’ ‘To Mr. Hobs,’ and ‘To Dr. Scarborough;’ while another is devoted to the philosophical musings in ‘Destinie,’ ‘Life and Fame,’ ‘The Extasie,’ ‘To the New Year,’ and ‘Life.’ Our interest in this chapter therefore focuses on the way Cowley appropriates and develops the ode as a form for lofty poetry, revealing how he moves from demonstrating the Pindarical liberty of the new form to using it for original compositions on subjects that exercise his thoughts most.

5.2 Pindaric Art: Form and Style in ‘The Resurrection’ and ‘The Muse’

Hold thy *Pindarique Pegasus* closely in,
 Which does to *rage* begin, ...
 Disdains the *servile Law* of any settled pace,
Conscious and *proud* of his own *natural force*.
 (‘The Resurrection’)

Unruly *Phansie* with strong *Judgment* trace,
 Put in nimble-footed *wit*,
 Smooth-pac’ed *Eloquence* joyn with it,
 Sound *Memory* with young *Invention* place,
 Harness all the *winged race*.
 Let the *Postillion Nature* mount, and let
 The *Coachman Art* be set.
 (‘The Muse’)

Cowley makes the rare exception of naming a particular poem in his general Preface, referring the reader who would understand his Pindaric art to ‘The Resurrection:’ “I have briefly described the nature of these Verses, in the *Ode* entituled, *The Resurrection*” (Poems, Preface, p. 11). In terms of Cowley’s Pindaric poetics, ‘The Resurrection’ is complemented by the poem in which he celebrates his creative

Muse, 'The Muse,' giving it the dimension of a companion poem. A study of these poems therefore reveals aspects of composition to add to those of translation and the imitative arts and thus complete the poetics of the *Pindarique Odes*. If the special Preface to the odes serves as an argument for the translations, then the general Preface serves to introduce the formal aspects of the whole Pindaric exercise. In it Cowley shows himself to be a self-conscious innovator, working from the basic assumption that he was visiting a strange form on his audience:

For as for the *Pindarick Odes* I am in great doubt whether they will be understood by most *Readers*; nay, even by very many who are well enough acquainted with the common Roads, and ordinary Tracks of *Poesie*. ... [They are] according to the fashion of all *Lyriques*, and of *Pindar* above all men living. (*Poems*, Preface, pp. 10-11).

It is for this reason that he elaborates on the special qualities of this kind of poetry. There are many digressions, bold and unusual figures, irregularity of numbers and verse patterns; its liberty could give the impression of ease, and thus ensnare the unwary imitator who overlooks real difficulties of composition:

The digressions are many, and sudden, and sometimes long. ... The *Figures* are unusual and *bold*, even to *Temeritie*, and such as I durst not have to do withal in any other kind of *Poetry*: The *Numbers* are various and irregular, and sometimes seem harsh and uncouth, if the just measures and cadencies be not observed in the *Pronunciation*. So that almost all their *Sweetness* and *Numerosity* lies in a manner wholly at the *Mercy* of the *Reader*. ... And though the *Liberty* of them may incline a man to believe them easie to be composed, yet the undertaker will find it otherwise. (*Poems*, Preface, p. 11).

Goldstein was to deduce that, "As understood by Cowley, the ode was the form most characterised by its variety of figure, matter, tone, and meter; and further, it was the form which accepted such variety as its principle of decorum."¹¹

Cowley's pronouncements and his general adoption of a pioneering pose recall his assertion that Pindar's way and manner of speaking "has not been yet (that I know of) introduced into *English*." This casts doubts on the possibility that he would have read Jonson's Pindaric, generally considered "the first sustained attempt in English to imitate the Pindaric ode."¹² However, Jonson did not describe his ode as a Pindaric

and he had no followers. He merely seems to be testing his ability to copy a structure he might have come across in another language or the original Greek version, for Pindar had still not been translated into English by the time Cowley wrote. The differences between the two imitations are significant enough for Cowley to claim to be the first to introduce his kind into English, certainly on the extensive scale in which he does. Jonson, on the one hand, seems keen to copy external particulars and make the imitation readily apparent from the structure and stanza arrangements, so much so that he clearly labels each stanza as “The Turn,” “The Counter-Turn” or “The Stand,” to parody Pindar’s strophe, anti-strophe and epode respectively. He even adopts Pindar’s fashion of carrying sentences over from the strophe to the anti-strophe or from the anti-strophe to the epode; for it was not uncommon for the Greek master even to carry over sentences from one triad into another. He sometimes splits words between lines also, the overall result being that his sentence structures do not always respect metrical or stanza divisions. Jonson practises all these, from small scale imitation with the word “twi-Light” split between two lines, to grand scale imitation with a sixteen-line sentence carried over from the counter-turn into the stand. There is the trademark Pindaric metrical variation, the subject of immortality, the special status of his song and the religious-like mission of the poet. In a deliberate attempt to clamour for recognition of his authorship even whilst showing that he is imitating the Greek master, he splits the stanzas conveniently with his own very name and makes it chime with his song:

The Counter-Turn

He leaped the present age,
Possessed with holy rage
To see that bright eternal day,
Of which we priests and poets say
Such truths as we expect for happy men;
And there he lives with memory, and Ben

The Stand

Jonson, who sung this of him, ere he went

Himself to rest,
Or taste a part of that full joy he meant
To have expressed
In this bright asterism;
Where it were friendship's schism
(Were not his Lucius long with us to tarry)
To separate these twi-
Lights, the Dioscouri;
And keep the one half from his Harry.

(Jonson, 'To ... Sir Lucius Cary and Sir H. Morison,' 79-94)¹³

Cowley, on the other hand, assiduously veers away from the idea of copying Pindar's external form. It is his conviction that if Pindar was writing in English, he would not have used the triadic structure because it was not native to English poetry. Cowley is more inclined to capture the spirit of Pindar – his way and manner of speaking – rather than externals. The disregard for the triadic plan and the structural looseness evident in stanzas of irregular length and metre are some of the features of his Pindaric translations that would characterise the original compositions.

'The Resurrection' is the first of Cowley's original compositions and, having announced that it is exemplary of the genre, he repeats this assessment in notes to the poem: "This Ode is truly *Pindarical*, falling from one thing into another, after his *Enthusiastical manner*" ('The Resurrection,' Notes, p. 183). The title possibly refers to the lasting nature of great poetry and the perpetual resurrection of great poets, of whom there was none greater in lyric than Pindar. The poem is about the nature of poetry, defining the traits that unite all great poetry in general and therefore links Pindar to Cowley himself, and ending with a description of the exhilarating Pindaric experience as a case in point. By choosing one of Pindar's favourite subjects, the power of poetry, Cowley avails himself of further opportunity to reveal his close kinship with the Greek master in the sheer conception of the poet's mission. The poem is written in four stanzas of twelve, fifteen, twenty-four and thirteen lines respectively! This gives the impression of a lack of harmony and indeed

organisation, and yet closer inspection reveals a certain semblance of order within this unusual kind of poetry. There is, for example, a regular rhyming pattern to it, for Cowley has generally remained faithful to the rhyming couplets that have so marked his poetry throughout his career. The lines are deliberately long or short depending on the idea being expressed and the reader who could understand the poet's thoughts would discover a witty sense of symmetry and the spirit of poetry that pervades the poem. Having earlier admonished his followers not to be fooled by the ode's appearance, he is confident that his shibboleth or slogan of liberty belies its apparent lack of harmony. It is true that Cowley relishes this liberty, but it is also his means of capturing the various liberties Pindar took to make his work retain the element of surprise and to ensure such great variety within the framework of the poetic conventions of his time. Such are the beginnings of the genre of the irregular ode in English.

The first stanza opens with a flurry of images on the relationship between the alliterative "*Verse*" and "*Virtue*," that is, between poetry and the ideal of virtue, in a manner comparable to Pindar's portrayal of the relationship between poetry and the heroic ideal. It is not immediately clear why Cowley decides to harp on virtue, although the emphasis is always on the role and power of poetry. Crucially, virtue may die but poetry never dies and forever takes care of virtue. It feeds and clothes the living virtue, and then preserves it by erecting a pyramid in its memory when it dies. This edifice therefore ensures the resurrection of virtue, hence the title of the poem, by endowing it with the immortal allure of poetry itself that would never decay until the end of time.

Not *Winds* to *Voyagers* at Sea,
Nor *Showers* to *Earth* more necessary be,
(*Heav'ens* vital *seed* cast on the *womb* of *Earth*)

To give the *fruitful Year a Birth*)
 Then *Verse* to *Virtue*, which can do
 The *Midwives Office*, and the *Nurses* too;
 It *feeds* it strongly, and it *cloathes* it gay,
 And when it dyes, with comely pride
Embalms it, and erects a *Pyramide*
 That never will decay
 Till *Heaven* it self shall melt away,
 And nought behind it stay.
 ('The Resurrection,' 1-12)

Virtue here personifies the good man, the *vir bonus*, almost certainly the poet, while the writing of verse signifies the quest for immortal renown. Death does not signify the end for men of virtue such as poets; rather, it signifies a new beginning, a resurrection, and preservation in everlasting poetry. The idea of poetry serving as a 'pyramid' or memorial has its source in Pindar himself. In his monograph on Pindar, Bowra draws attention to examples where the poet's song serves this purpose:

Pindar, in reference to [Timasarchus'] dead father, says that he is fashioning for him 'a grave-stone whiter than the Parian marble' (*N.* 4. 81). The song is to be, among other things, an enduring memorial, but it will have the special brilliance of white marble and the solemn beauty of all such monuments. ... Again, for Deinias and Megas of Aegina he makes a song which he calls 'a light stone of the Muses' (*N.* 8. 46). The image is a bold paradox. ... In it Pindar unites two main aspects of his art, its enduring permanence and its impalpable sprightliness.¹⁴

The reference to the end of time – "Till *Heaven* it self shall melt away" – would be developed in the second stanza, but not before he reverts to the subject of poetry by urging his Muse to sing. This time he works with different layers of meaning such that his poetry is the song, the music of the lyre, and the dance all at once. The smooth and equal measures of song and dance evoke the rhythm of life also, as well as the motion of time itself. The three-tier meaning of dance ensures the connection with the end of time, because the end of the dance signals at once the end of song and therefore poetry, the end of life and therefore humanity, and indeed the end of the world and therefore times. The connection between the lyre as a musical instrument and the trumpet whose sound signals the end of the world is evident also. Until that time Cowley is confident that his voice should always be heard; his poetry should

last until the end of time and therefore he should live on in everlasting fame as well.

The intricate weaving of the argument with a variety of meanings and the characteristic falling from one thing into another are exemplary of the way Cowley conveys the spirit of Pindar's odes:

Begin the *Song*, and strike the *Living Lyre*;
Lo how the *Years to come*, a numerous and well-fitted *Quire*,
All hand in hand do decently advance,
And to my *Song* with smooth and equal measures *dance*.
Whilst the *dance* lasts, how long so e're it be,
My *Musicks* voyce shall bear it companie.
 Till all *gentle Notes* be drown'd
 In the *last Trumpets* dreadful sound.
That to the *Spheres* themselves shall *silence* bring,
 Untune the *Universal String*.
 Then all the wide extended *Sky*,
 And all th' *harmonious Worlds* on high,
 And *Virgils* sacred *work* shall dy.
And he himself shall see in one *Fire* shine
Rich *Natures* ancient *Troy*, though built by *Hands Divine*.
 ('The Resurrection,' 13-27)

The exhortation to the Muse – 'Begin the *Song*' – is relevant not just to this ode but to the whole body of original compositions. There is a repeated emphasis on the sheer concept of poetry as song that establishes a link with Pindar, particularly in the context of it being something that is alive, something that accompanies the dance of life with a power and force of its own. The connection is then made with the power of Virgil's poetry, a reminder of his lofty position during the Renaissance as the supreme master, and of the enduring centrality of his *Aeneid* to western thought. Cowley is in no doubt that he is the greatest of all poets and celebrates him in the opening poem of the 1656 volume thus: "Welcome the *Mantu'an Swan*, *Virgil* the *Wise*, / Whose verse *walks highest*..." ('The Motto,' 35-36). Virgil was often cited as the exemplar for imitative poets and it is not unusual to mention him in the context of Cowley imitating Pindar. But Virgil's name serves yet another purpose here, for its lofty status makes it representational and synecdochic of all poetry. Poetry would

be the last thing to die at the end of the world, after the spheres, the firmament and the heavens all cease to be.

The third stanza is more settled in comparison to the second, as it does not have the same intensity, variety and compactness. More images are conjured up regarding the far reaches of time to the end of the world, where the Muse has been transported:

Whom *Thunders* dismal noise,
And all that *Prophets* and *Apostles* louder spake,
And all the *Creatures* plain *conspiring* voyce,
 Could not whilst they *liv'ed*, awake,
 This mightier sound shall make
 When *Dead* t'arise,
 And open *Tombs*, and open *Eyes*
To the long *Sluggards* of five thousand years.
This *mightier Sound* shall *make* its *Hearers Ears*.
Then shall the scatter'ed *Atomes* crowding come
 Back to their *Ancient Home*,
 Some from *Birds*, from *Fishes* some,
 Some from *Earth*, and some from *Seas*,
 Some from *Beasts*, and some from *Trees*.
 Some descend from *Clouds* on high,
 Some from *Metals* upwards fly,
And where th' *attending Soul* naked, and shivering stands,
 Meet, salute, and joyn their hands.
As disperst *Souldiers* at the *Trumpets* call,
 Hast to their *Colours* all.
 Unhappy most, like *Tortur'ed Men*,
Their *Joynts* new set, to be new *rackt* agen.
 To *Mountains* they for *shelter* pray,
The *Mountains* shake, and run about no less *confus'ed* then *They*.
 ('The Resurrection,' 28-51)

Cowley is preoccupied here with images of the end of the world, when the divine thunder shall make the mightiest sound ever heard to signal Judgement Day. The idea is pursued to its last ramifications in one of those long digressions the reader is warned about in the Preface – “The digressions are many, and sudden, and sometimes long.” The dead shall rise, some having been in that state for over five thousand years; their bones, now infinitesimal particles like atoms, would join up with their souls again. Again the concatenation between this apocalyptic vision and the subject of poetry is not readily apparent, until we identify the trumpet's call that is carried over from the second stanza. In that second stanza his song is set to

accompany the motion of time, otherwise described as the dance (of life), “Till all *gentle Notes* be drown’d / In the *last Trumpets* dreadful sound.” Therefore this third stanza expatiates on the trumpet’s sound, as if the poet is reflecting on just what kind of event, or noise, or fate could extinguish the music of his poetry. To give some impression of this unnatural noise, he starts by calling it a thunder because of its divine associations: “No natural effect gives such impressions of *Divine fear*, as *Thunder*” (‘The Resurrection,’ Notes, p. 184). It is a “dismal noise” to end all noises, a “mightier sound” than the voices of the prophets and apostles heard all over the world, a noise that not only raise all the human dead of all time but is truly earth-shattering as mountains shake and are dislodged! That is what it would take to extinguish his poetry that would have lasted for all time, the event of Judgement Day that could only have been divinely ordained.

The final stanza witnesses a sudden change both in the shift of argument and the quickening of the pace. The poem veers off into the direction of what appears to be a new subject, namely a contemplation of the typical Pindaric experience. However, the fact that Pegasus symbolises immortality and poetic vision establishes a link at one level with the previous stanzas, for this experience is compared to sitting astride a Pindaric Pegasus with all the ramifications of that analogy. Another link, for example, is that the divine thunder of the previous stanza, constantly associated with Zeus in mythology, evokes the role of Pegasus in Olympus, namely, to draw the chariot that brought Zeus his thunder and lightning. The Pindaric experience is an unpredictable one, just as it is uncertain whether Pegasus would rather gallop up a violent course or use its wings to fly over it. There is no settled pace to this violent ride, and only they who are able to shackle the vigour and power of this impatient

horse would enjoy the experience. Just as the poem itself does not move at a settled rhythm, so too does the horse abhor moving at a settled pace or set pattern. Now it canters, now it gallops; now it prances about, now it flies. The unwary rider should beware being flung by the wayside, in comparison with the mythological Pegasus flinging its rider, Bellerophon, back to earth when he presumed as a mortal that it could fly him up the gods' Olympian abode. That is when Pegasus left the mortal world for Olympus, and that is where this poem with its horse-in-flight motif appropriately ends also:

Stop, stop, my *Muse*, allay thy vig'orous heat,
 Kindled at a *Hint* so Great.
 Hold thy *Pindarique Pegasus* closely in,
 Which does to *rage* begin,
 And this steep *Hill* would gallop up with violent course,
 'Tis an unruly, and a *hard-Mouth'd Horse*,
 Fierce, and unbroken yet,
 Impatient of the *Spur* or *Bit*.
 Now *prances* stately, and anon *flies* o're the place,
 Disdains the *servile Law* of any settled *pace*,
Conscious and *proud* of his own *natural force*.
 'Twill no *unskilful Touch* endure,
 But flings *Writer* and *Reader* too that *sits* not *sure*.
 ('The Resurrection,' 52-64)

This last stanza memorably captures the essence of the genre: the sudden change in argument, the dramatic opening, its compact nature and short length relative to the previous one, the change of pace in harmony with the sustained use of the Pegasus image, and its subject of Pindaric poetic theory. The Pindaric trait of changing the argument from one thing to another, advertised by Cowley as a trademark of the genre, has been otherwise described as hardness. David Trotter suggests that it has a dual meaning: "an unfamiliar use of language," but more importantly, "inconstancy of argument."¹⁵ For Cowley the hardy poet must have something of the unruly horse in him, revelling in the liberty that overrides the tendency to be shackled within the straitjacket of regulated writing. The composition of the odes clearly represents the highest examination of the lyricist's craft, for it is a difficult

art, the Pindaric art. However, he is confident that when his Muse is possessed, its vigorous heat and rage, and its fierce and impatient character would all come to the fore and ensure that he partakes fully of this exhilarating experience. He is in awe of the experience, yet he relishes its challenge as he places great store by his poetic abilities and skilful touch. He is writing about both Pindar and himself when he describes the horse as “Conscious and proud of his own natural force.” It is this ability that gives him the confidence to exhort his Muse to steady on – “Stop, stop, my *Muse*” – because he must be in control of the Pindaric Pegasus or face the danger of being flung aside. Poetry is all about natural talent and inborn gifts that ensure the poet’s quasi-permanent state of inspiration, a state that distinguishes the poet from other mortals. It is something of this inspired state that Cowley thinks his readers and followers need in order to obtain the measure of as tricky an art as the Pindaric one.

‘The Muse’ is the second of the two original compositions Cowley uses to outline his theories of composition. It is about the creation of a Pindaric world, a reminder of a theory of poetry that unites Cowley with a poet as far away in time and place as Pindar. Already in the Argument to the ‘Second Olympique Ode,’ Cowley has warned that, “the *Reader* must not be chocqued to hear him speak so often of his own *Muse*; for that is a *Liberty* which this kind of *Poetry* can hardly live without.” ‘The Muse’ becomes a testament of the indispensable nature of Cowley’s own Muse to his original compositions, not in blind imitation of the Greek source, but in agreement with a theory that Cowley finds strikingly similar to his own. Pindar holds something of the traditional view of the Muse as a source of inspiration for his odes-cum-songs. However, he takes a different view from, say, Homer who invokes the

Muse to sing of Achilles's wrath, thereby making the poet a medium through which the divine Muse expresses itself to men. Where Pindar deviates from the traditional view is in his conception of the role of the poet, for he believes that the Muse merely brings a message that the poet deals with by bringing his natural gifts to the fore.

The following passage from Bowra's monograph highlights Pindar's conception of the unique relationship between the Muse and her poet:

Pindar regards himself as 'the prophet of the Muses in song', and claims that they give him a message which he interprets, puts into shape, and passes on to men. This is a more precise and more advanced notion than Homer's; ... for, while Homer regards the Muse as the source both of information and of words, Pindar distinguishes between what the Muse gives him and what he has to do with it. ... He stands in the same relation to the Muses as that in which a prophet stands to an oracular god. ... In making such a claim he is not alone. Bacchylides proudly calls himself 'the inspired prophet of the violet-eyed Muses'. ... But whereas Bacchylides does not pursue the idea or develop it elsewhere, Pindar makes it the centre of his whole outlook on poetry.¹⁶

As with the previous poem, Cowley composes 'The Muse' in four stanzas. But where the argument to that one was the power of poetry and the exhilarating nature of the Pindaric experience, the argument to this one would be the nature of the creative process, the art of poetry-making.

The image of the Muse sitting astride the Pindarique Pegasus gives way to one in which she sits in a chariot drawn by several horses through the air. Here is a first stanza in which is packed virtually the sum total of the theories of composition that mark the creation of Cowley's Pindaric world and perhaps all his Muse-inspired poetical works:

Go, the rich *Chariot* instantly prepare;
The *Queen*, my *Muse*, will take the air;
Unruly *Phansie* with strong *Judgment* trace,
Put in nimble-footed *Wit*,
Smooth-pac'ed *Eloquence* joyn with it,
Sound *Memory* with young *Invention* place,
Harness all the *winged race*.
Let the *Postillion Nature* mount, and let
The *Coachman Art* be set.
And let the airy *Footmen* running all beside,
Make a long row of *goodly pride*.
Figures, Conceits, Raptures, and Sentences

In a well-worded *dress*.
 And *innocent Loves*, and *pleasant Truths*, and *useful Lies*,
 In all their gaudy *Liveries*.
 Mount, glorious *Queen*, thy *travelling Throne*,
 And bid it to put on;
 For *long*, though *cheerful*, is the *way*,
 And *Life*, alas, allows but one ill *winters Day*.
 ('The Muse,' 1-19)

The image evoked by the Muses' chariot takes its source in Pindar himself who used it in *Olympian 9*: "Now may invention grant my tongue, / Riding the Muses' car" (80-81).¹⁷ He wants to show that he is fit to ride in his Muse's car or chariot.

Bowra expands on Pindar's use of this chariot image so central to the understanding of Cowley's journey motif in the ode:

The image of the chariot was used by Simonides with reference to victory, and it suggests pomp and glory. When it is applied to song, it suggests rather the thrill and the exaltation of an experience which carries men's hearts and minds at an unprecedented pace. It is with some such intonations that Pindar uses it elsewhere. Before he starts on a poem he is agog for it as a charioteer is for a race, and in his tense concentration needs the same qualities.¹⁸

The adjectives Cowley employs suggest a heady and potent mix: it is "unruly" or wild and unrestrained, and yet "strong" and sure; it is at once "nimble-footed" and "smooth-paced;" it is "sound" or dependable and effectual, and yet "young," that is, fresh, novel and original. These adjectives denoting wildness, strength and pace enforce Cowley's theory that his Muse's chariot should be harnessed in order for it to complete its journey and not spiral out of control.

Cowley's juxtaposition of nature and art alongside one another in that first stanza of 'The Muse' highlights a position that is markedly different from Pindar's and indeed ancient Greek theory. The Postillion is supposed to ride the horse drawing the chariot only when the Coachman is absent, and yet the two are brought together here and accommodated in the same ride. The one represents nature and the other art, hence the implicit statement Cowley makes on the importance he attaches to the latter. Already in 'The Resurrection' he writes of the poet's natural

force and skilful touch, that is, the touch of the artist. Pindar, however, represents one extreme in which nature rules supreme, as seen in his familiar distinction between the holy bird of Zeus, the eagle, and the chattering crow. In the fourth epode of *Nemean 3* he writes:

Swift is the eagle, from the deep sky afar
 Spying his mark,
 Lo, suddenly hath he seized, swooping,
 His tawny-dappled prey.
 But chattering daws have a lowly range.
 (Pindar, *Nemean 3*, 80-83)¹⁹

Cowley's analogy is made apt by the fact that the winged horse or the chariot soars in flight like the eagle. The crows represent not only art itself but by inference those who would write poetry through the acquisition of technique or art and whom he does not recognise as genuine poets. It is in *Olympian 2* that Pindar makes it clear that the eagle represents nature, while the chattering crow represents taught skills or art. The analogy begins in strophe 5 and is typically carried over into anti-strophe 5:

Inborn of nature's wisdom
 The poet's truth; taught skills, rough-hewn,
 Gross-tongued, are like a pair
 Of ravens vainly chattering

 Before the divine bird of Zeus.
 (Pindar, *Olympian 2*, 86-8)²⁰

Grube is stark in his assessment: "[Pindar] despises technique and training; everything in poetry is natural talent, and this is in agreement with ... his general philosophy of inborn worth."²¹ Bowra's assessment is similar:

[Pindar] insists that mere technique is not enough, because the poet must have a special [wisdom] which is inborn and cannot be acquired. It is this conviction which impels him to dismiss other poets as crows, who are no better than scavengers living on picking and stealing, and jabbering jackdaws (*Nemean 3*, 82), who are expert at copying the voices of other birds.²²

While agreeing with the essence of Pindar's view that poetry is a gift of nature, Cowley accommodates art as well. Between them, nature and art drive forward this rich chariot in which is extravagantly and paradoxically assembled the

formidable armoury of the poet's weapons. To nature belongs the first set of tools such as fancy and judgement, wit and eloquence, memory and invention, while to art belongs the other set: "*Figures, Conceits, Raptures, and Sentences / In a well-worded dress.*"

The difference between Pindar and Cowley on the role and importance of art is also the difference between ancient Greek poetic theory and that of Cowley's age. Plato articulated the idea of the poetic frenzy in *Ion*: the poet, dependent upon the Muse for his power and thus rapt by divine inspiration, is not really an artist because he is unable to sing until put out of his senses. The poet loses control of his own will and becomes a madman whose utterances owe more to divine influence than to art:

All good poets recite all that splendid poetry not by virtue of a skill, but in a state of inspiration and possession. ... A poet is a light thing, and winged and holy, and cannot compose before he gets inspiration and loses control of his senses and his reason has deserted him. No man, so long as he keeps that, can prophesy or compose. ... They utter these words of theirs not by virtue of a skill, but by a divine power.²³

In *Phaedrus*, this divine power is emphasised: the poet, like the prophet, being mad by divine dispensation, is allowed in this state to glimpse the heaven of celestial forms, absolute beauty and truth. "The man who arrives at the doors of poetry without madness from the Muses, persuaded that expertise will make him a good poet," in Socrates' words, "both he and his poetry, the poetry of the sane, are eclipsed by that of the mad, imperfect and unfulfilled."²⁴ Even though Pindar conceived the idea that it was the Muse and not the poet that was possessed, he still accommodated the idea of a dominant force outside of the poet that was more important than any technique or art the latter might acquire. In fact, his was a creative Muse precisely because she had to give him something to work with first of all, before he could set to work with the full powers of poetry he received from

nature. Cowley identifies the Romans, and in particular Virgil, as the first to show that poetry is a marriage of natural talent and art or technique. In the passage on Virgil cited earlier from 'The Motto,' Cowley offers the opinion that Greek poetry 'flies' with its inspiration and frenzy or 'rage' whereas Virgil's greatness owes to his contribution in turning poetry into an art form:

Welcome the *Mantu'an Swan*, *Virgil the Wise*,
Whose verse *walks highest*, but not flies.
Who brought green *Poesie* to her perfect Age;
And made that *Art* which was a *Rage*.
(*'The Motto,'* 35-38)

Even Horace debated the question in his *Ars Poetica* as to whether good poems come by nature or by art.²⁵ Cowley's flight motif is therefore attributed to raw and raging nature that is not tempered or refined by art. Already in 'The Resurrection' he pleads with his Muse to temper her nature: "Stop, stop my *Muse*, allay thy vig'orous heat, / Kindled at a *Hint* so Great;" or again, "Hold thy *Pindarique Pegasus* closely in, / Which does to *rage* begin." It is this message he repeats in 'The Muse' when he says, "Harness all the *winged race*." The means by which he harnesses unruly nature is by art; it is art that holds nature in check, thus establishing a mutually dependent relationship. The importance he attaches to this marriage of nature and art recalls its fine expression by Jonson who, after his discussion of four distinguishing marks of the poet, adds that art is that which makes all else perfect:

There goes more to his making than so: for to nature, exercise, imitation, and study, art must be added, to make all these perfect. ... It is the assertion of Tully, if to an excellent nature there happen an accession or conformation of learning and discipline, there will then remain somewhat noble and singular. For as Simylus saith, ... without art, nature can never be perfect; and without nature, art can claim no being.²⁶

Finally from that first stanza, of unsurpassable importance is Cowley's theory of "*pleasant Truths*, and *useful Lies*" which again highlights the differences in theory

between his age and Pindar's. In Cowley's 'First Nemeæan Ode,' he chooses not to translate this statement from Pindar's original because he disagrees with Pindar's insistence on the truth element: "Many a glory / In truth my arrows' flight shall compass" (*Nemean 1*, 18).²⁷ Pindar makes the statement to stress the truth of all the elements of praise for Sicily in general and for Chromius in particular. Pindar gives truth a moral dimension and does not subscribe to a theory of fiction. Truth, for him, is divine: "... Truth, / Daughter of Zeus! ..." (*Olympian 10*, 3-4).²⁸ This explains the Greek master's discomfort with any theories associating poetry and fiction, such as Hesiod claimed the other daughters of Zeus, the Muses, told him:

"We know how to say many false things
that seem like true sayings,
but we know also how to speak the truth
when we wish to."
So they spoke, these mistresses of words,
daughters of great Zeus.
(Hesiod, *Theogony*, 27-29)²⁹

Pindar also rejected Homer's methods because the latter took history and fact such as the Trojan War as his starting point, but did not confine himself to it. His fabling and inclination towards stylistic embellishments set the standard for "Falsehoods all, / but he gave his falsehoods all the ring of truth" (*Odyssey 19*. 234-35).³⁰ While acknowledging Homer's greatness, Pindar seemed to regret Homer's adornment of his work with pleasant falsehoods or exaggeration of the truth. In his *Nemean 7*, for example, he makes this observation of the *Odyssey* that carries over from the first epode into the second strophe:

Yet I am fain to think
That by the sweet charm of great Homer's word
Odysseus wins a larger fame
Than his proved deeds would grant him,

Through false tales and the skilled magic
Of wingéd words, a majesty enfolds him.
The poet's art by his fables deceives us.
(Pindar, *Nemean 7*, 20-24)³¹

Pindar did not take account of mimesis, which Aristotle discussed, nor of the full range of possibilities of the poetic imagination as demonstrated in this famous example where Apollonius, in a verbal exchange with Thespesion, finds a missing quality in the representation of the gods by the Ethiopians:

‘How are your statues made then?’ asked Thespesion angrily.
‘In the most beautiful and pious way.’...
‘Did Phidias and Praxiteles go up to heaven, then, and take an impression of the gods’ appearances so as to reproduce it, or was there some other influence controlling their work?’
‘Indeed there was – something rich in wisdom.’
‘What? You can’t find anything other than imitation (*mimèsis*) surely.’
‘Yes; imagination (*phantasia*) did this work, a more cunning craftsman than your imitation. Imitation will fashion what she has seen, imagination also what she has not seen. She will form her conception with reference to reality. Amazement (*ekplèxis*) often baffles imitation; nothing baffles imagination. She marches undismayed to her own end.’
(Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, 6.19)³²

The moral dimension of poetry persisted, however, and even as late as the sixteenth century, literary theorists found themselves defending poetry as a truth-seeking activity, cue Sidney’s *Defense of Poesy*, for example. Cowley’s “*pleasant Truths, and useful Lies*” incorporates the essence of the poet’s activity and the evolution of poetic theory, for it involves the act of feigning or creating fiction. He does not sympathise with Pindar’s perplexed attitude to it because his concept of truth in poetry had been considerably stripped of its moral dimension. By the seventeenth century the need is no longer felt to explain that such elements as necessity, probability and likelihood constitute the touchstone in poetic creation. In fact, as Jonson shows in this definition of the poet and his art, the place of fiction had become understood:

A poet is that which by the Greeks is called a maker or a feigner; his art, an art of imitation or feigning, expressing the life of man in fit measure, numbers, and harmony, according to Aristotle: from the word [poiein], which signifies to make or feign. Hence he is called a poet, not he which writeth in measure only, but that feigneth and formeth a fable, and writes things like the truth. For the fable and fiction is the form and soul of any poetical work or poem.³³

Going further, Jonson comes full circle from Pindar when he intimates elsewhere that the poet would gain no credit by writing the truth but by feigning: “Poet never credit gained / By writing truths, but things like truths, well feigned” (*Epicoene*,

Second Prologue, 9-10).³⁴ For Cowley, this ability to feign or create fiction, that is, the poet's privilege to invent, constitutes the essence of the poet's activity and gives him his special licence, a discussion of which he would carry over into the second stanza.

The second stanza introduces yet another dimension to the poetic freedom that characterises the Pindaric world. It expresses the poet's desire, firstly, to travel to the furthest reaches of the cosmos, and secondly, to be able to create in a manner similar to God's at the Creation. Cowley makes the case for the novelty of his Pindaric world by affirming that his Muse is journeying into hitherto undiscovered realms hidden even from the sun, where man, beast, fish or bird never yet explored.

Where never *Foot of Man*, or *Hoof of Beast*,
The *Passage* prest,
Where never *Fish* did *fly*,
And with short silver *wings* cut the low liquid *Sky*.
Where *Bird* with painted *Oars* did nere
Row through the trackless *Ocean* of the *Air*.
Where never yet did pry
The busie *Mornings* curious *Eye*:
The *Wheels* of thy bold *Coach* pass quick and free;
And all's an *open Road* to *Thee*.
Whatever *God* did *Say*,
Is all thy plain and smooth, uninterrupted *way*.
Nay ev'n beyond his *works* thy *Voyages* are known,
Thou 'hast thousand *worlds* too of thine *own*.
Thou speakst, great *Queen*, in the same *stile* as *He*,
And a *New world* leaps forth when *Thou* say'st, *Let it Be*.
(*'The Muse,'* 20-35)

God created the world by saying, "Let it be!" The poet-creator, inspired by his Muse, could invent a "thousand worlds too" like this Pindaric one just because he fancies doing so, for he too is enabled to say, "Let it Be." Cowley makes the point in a couplet where each word is a monosyllable, thus driving home the emphasis:

"Thou speakst, great *Queen*, in the same *stile* as *He*, / And a *New world* leaps forth when *Thou* say'st, *Let it Be*." He proceeds to explain his theory of creation, a theory

that sums up previous ones from ancient times to his own. Poetry concerns itself with things that exist and form part of experience, or things feigned because they are probable or true to life, or things invented because the poet is so inclined:

Whatsoever God made, for his saying, Let it Be, made all things. The meaning is, that Poetry treats not only of all things that are, or can be, but makes Creatures of her own, as Centaurs, Satyrs, Faires, &c. makes persons and actions of her own, as in Fables and Romances, makes Beasts, Trees, Waters, and other irrational and insensible things to act above the possibility of their natures, as to understand and speak, ... and varies all these into innumerable Systemes, or Worlds of Invention. ('The Muse,' Notes, p. 187)

The particular notion that the poet was a creating god or that the Creation was God's work of art had become such a commonplace by Cowley's time that he makes it the cornerstone of his poetics, as is already evident from the *Dauides*.

The third stanza presents a different facet of Cowley's theory: poetry is not constrained by time because its subject is the past, the present and the future. When he urges his Muse to delve into the past and bring up forgotten or long-buried riches for public use and consumption, he is probably thinking of Pindar whom he 'plucks up' and domesticates. But he urges her also to 'peep' into the future and decipher what the Fates have decreed, for the future has even now been determined!

Thou fadom'est the deep *Gulf of Ages* past,
And canst pluck up with ease
The *years* which Thou dost please,
Like shipwrackt *Treasures* by rude *Tempests* cast
Long since into the *Sea*,
Brought up again to *light* and publique *Use* by Thee.
Nor dost thou only *Dive* so low,
But *Fly*
With an unwearied *Wing* the other way on high,
Where *Fates* among the *Stars* do grow;
There into the close *Nests* of *Time* do'st peep,
And there with piercing *Eye*,
Through the firm *shell*, and the thick *White* do'st spie,
Years to come a forming lie,
Close in their *sacred Secondine* asleep,
Till *hatcht* by the *Suns* vital heat
Which o're them yet does *brooding* set
They *Life* and *Motion* get,
And *ripe* at last with vigorous might
Break through the *Shell*, and take their everlasting *Flight*.
(*'The Muse,'* 36-56)

If reaching into the past represents the act of resurrecting Pindar and possibly of saving some of the delights of antiquity from oblivion, then reaching into the future perhaps represents an act of safeguarding the fate of the newly created Pindaric world. Cowley's familiar flight motif is in evidence as he encourages his Muse in an exhortation that takes in the shortest line in all his poetry: "But *Fly* / With an unwearied *Wing*. ..." Again the stanza ends on a note of flight that could be applied to the new Pindaric creation as has constantly been applied to the original: "They *Life* and *Motion* get / ... and take their everlasting *Flight*." When poetry such as the song or ode comes into existence, it assumes a life of its own and lives on forever.

The concluding stanza follows up on the theme of poetry and time past, present and future from the previous stanza, concentrating in this instance mostly on the implications of his poetry for the present time. Previously Cowley's Muse has dug up Pindar for his use from the past and then assured both him and the Greek master of immortality in the future that she is privy to. Now he pauses to dwell on the present time from which point he could look back to that rich past or forward to that certain future. He sees a past that is vast and still in which are contained the treasures and wrecks of time, and a future that is so slow in forming that he can decipher its forms clearly and see it obeying the Muse's command to accommodate and preserve the poet forever. What distinguishes the present is the lack of stillness, for time now never ceases to move. In a veritable torrent of images, it could be compared to a current or a running river rather than a still lake, or again to a slippery snake that could never stay still. Therefore the present time could not be savoured or contemplated properly, for it disappears like a piece of ice that the sun melts away.

And sure we may
The same too of the *Present* say,
If *Past*, and *Future Times* do thee obey.

The last two odes in Cowley's collection are biblical adaptations, entitled 'The 34. Chapter of the Prophet Isaiah' and 'The Plagues of Egypt,' culled from Old Testament stories that he rewrites in verse. There is some symmetry in starting the collection with translations from Pindar and ending with adaptations from another ancient source, the Bible. From the two translations, the Horatian poem on Pindar, the first two original compositions and the two adaptations, the picture becomes complete of Cowley's theoretical considerations and the variety of his practice of the different imitative arts. These two poems give Cowley the chance to adapt Old Testament stories in a different manner other than the *Davideis* epic. In the fashion of 'The Resurrection' and 'The Muse,' they have such traits as irregular line lengths and stanza patterns that typify Cowley's irregular odes, but it appears that he conceived them merely to exercise fully his Pindaric form. He takes full advantage, writing over four hundred lines of 'The Plagues of Egypt' in particular. Cowley himself reveals a most surprising connection, a kinship between the style of the Old Testament writings, done originally in Hebrew, and that of Pindar. We would discover another relationship between their content and the subject of fate and destiny that concerns Cowley in our discussion on thematic considerations, but it is this link between such seemingly disparate sources from antiquity that holds our interest presently. Elements common to both include the "*Invisible connexions*" as it moves without warning from one subject to another, with the reader often left to supply the link, and the familiar flight motif in the bold "flights of *Poetry*:"

The manner of the *Prophets* writing, especially of *Isaiah*, seems to me very like that of *Pindar*; they pass from one thing to another with almost *Invisible connexions*, and are full of words and expressions of the highest and boldest flights of *Poetry*, as may be seen in this Chapter, where there are as extraordinary Figures as can be found in any *Poet* whatsoever; and the connexion is so difficult, that I am forced to adde a little, and leave out a great deal to make it seem *Sense* to us, who are not used to that elevated way of expression. ... The design of it to me seems to be this, first to denounce great desolations and ruines to *all Countryes*, ... and to illustrate these confusions by the similitude of them to those of the last Day, though in the Text there be no Transition from the *subject* to the *similitude*; for the old fashion of writing, was like *Disputing* in *Enthymemes*, where half is left out to be supplied by the Hearer: ours is like *Syllogisms*, where all that is meant

The link that the biblical adaptations provide between the *Pindarique Odes* and the *Davideis* serves a reminder of how these two bodies of poetry complement one another, for Cowley's epic is really a storehouse of theories of poetic composition. The only two of his works to have explanatory notes, Cowley uses them to present the programme of his art of poetry, extolling the lyric and epic as the highest poetic kinds of all. Having commented insightfully on the *Davideis* as a work of criticism, Johnson does not say whether the comparative practice in the *Pindarique Odes* leaves him sated. "Cowley's critical abilities have not been sufficiently observed," Johnson observed, "the few decisions and remarks which his prefaces and his notes on the *Davideis* supply ... shew such skill as raises our wish for more examples."³⁵ But Cowley's abandonment of the incomplete *Davideis* leaves the *Pindarique Odes* as his greatest success and the genre in which he finds his niche. This is why after their publication and their imposition on the English literary consciousness in 1656, the ode becomes his favourite form for subsequent poetic works.

In some of his post-1656 poems Cowley would continue to delineate the nature of the Pindaric ode to his English audience of whom he has been so conscious when adapting and domesticating this form. Perhaps the first poem he wrote after seeing the 1656 Poems to the press was on the occasion of his presenting a copy of it to the University of Oxford. In June of that year he took it to the University that had served as the Royalist headquarters during the war and where he had sought academic and political refuge before going into exile. Before chaining the book to one of the shelves in the Bodleian Library as was the custom, he decided to write a Pindaric ode in honour of the University and entitled it 'The Book Humbly Presenting It Self to

the Universitie Librarie at Oxford.’ Perhaps it was Sprat who entitled it as it now appears, that is, ‘Mr. Cowley’s Book presenting it self to the University Library of Oxford.’ He uses the central stanza in five as the occasion to write about his familiar subjects of fame, poetic freedom in general and Pindaric liberty in particular:

Will you into your Sacred throng admit
The meanest British Wit?
You Gen’ral Councel of the Priests of Fame,
Will you not murmur and disdain,
That I place among you claim,
The humblest Deacon of her train?
Will you allow me th’ honourable chain?
The chain of Ornament which here
Your noble Prisoners proudly wear;
A Chain which will more pleasant seem to me
Than all my own Pindarick Liberty:
Will ye to bind me with those mighty names submit,
Like an Apocrypha with holy Writ?
What ever happy book is chained here,
No other place or People need to fear;
His Chain’s a Pasport to go ev’ry where.

(‘Mr. Cowley’s Book ... to the University Library at Oxford,’ 25-40, in *Poems*, pp. 409-11)

The one other notable occasion Cowley would describe or recall the peculiarities of the ode is the 1660s essay, “Of Liberty,” that he concludes with a poem entitled ‘Ode. Upon Liberty.’ This ode demonstrates that the freedom Cowley enjoys in Pindaric composition could become a metaphor for life. Not for him any more attempts at heroic or epic poetry, or a tinkering with any other form; he has found his life’s path in the ‘Pindaric way’ where he enjoys ‘a thousand liberties.’ It is in the last of six typically irregular stanzas that he gives expression to this way of poetry that doubles up as the way of life itself:

If Life should a well-order’d Poem be
 (In which he only hits the white
Who joyns true Profit with the best Delight)
The more Heroique strain let others take,
 Mine the Pindarique way I’le make.
The Matter shall be Grave, the Numbers loose and free.
It shall not keep one settled pace of Time,
In the same Tune it shall not always Chime,
Nor shall each day just to his Neighbour Rhime,
A thousand Liberties it shall dispense,
And yet shall manage all without offence;

following fortunes” in poetry, especially in the work of Virgil, “whereupon grew the word of *Sortes Virgilianae*.”³⁶ Nethercot takes up the story:

The King, ... (being not unsuperstitious), happened to notice some of the young noblemen ... ‘pricking in Virgil’ for their fortunes – in other words, trying the *sortes Virgilianae* or Virgilian lots. ... Calling for the book, he too thrust his pin into it, reckless of consequences. ... It was Dido’s curse of Aeneas, in book four of the epic. The King looked concerned; the nobles looked concerned and embarrassed. But Charles, once committed, would not turn back. He would have the verses rendered into English; moreover he would have the translation done by one who was a master of both Latin and English poetry. ... He would have the job done by Mr. Cowley.³⁷

By asking Cowley to proclaim his fate, the King was harking back to the poet-prophet’s function in ancient times: “Among the Romans a poet was called *vates*, which is as much a diviner, foreseer, or prophet; ... so heavenly a title did that excellent people bestow upon this heart-ravishing knowledge.”³⁸ Here then is Cowley’s translation of the passage that presaged such ill fortune and indeed an unnatural death for the King, a prophecy that in time came to pass almost exactly as Cowley rendered it.

By a bold people’s stubborn arms oppressed,
Forced to forsake the land which he possessed,
Torn from his dearest son, let him in vain
Seek help, and see his friends unjustly slain;
Let him to base, unequal terms submit,
In hope to save his crown, yet lose both it
And life at once; untimely let him die,
And on an open stage unburied lie.³⁹

The King’s subsequent demise in 1649, the nadir of Royalist fortunes, effectively signalled an end to any hope Cowley had of returning from exile in France to enjoy political and civil liberty. Crucially for the thematic considerations of his original Pindaric compositions, the whole episode raised the issue of destiny or providence and human action and freedom with which he ultimately concerns himself. The concern of the rest of this chapter is to show how, not content with questions merely concerning the political freedom which he was deprived, Cowley gradually evolves a thesis on the role of divine providence in human life. The discussion here also provides a theoretical

basis for overlapping discussions in Chapter Six that require an understanding of how Cowley's political and intellectual thought evolves.

Even as Royalists and sympathisers of monarchical rule were ruing the regicide, England was proclaimed 'a Commonwealth and Free State' under a new administration. This was not enough initially to convince Cowley to return, firstly because the idea of any kind of state other than a monarchy was repugnant to him, and secondly because his ideas on liberty would not have been consonant with those propounded by the Free State that England had become. Such fears would later be confirmed when, after his brave decision to return to England finally in 1654, he would be arrested and thrown into jail. Before this, any sorties from his French haven were confined to uneventful spy missions such as the visit to Jersey in 1651 where he renewed his acquaintance with the work of Pindar. It is therefore not surprising that a crucial development from the events of 1649 was the way he started subscribing to ideas on liberty and to emerging rationalist doctrines that would shape the intellectual revolution. When the outcome of the war had been uncertain, he had diverted his mind by composing *The Mistress*, but the regicide now threw up questions he was forced to confront. The question of liberty and the rights of citizens were prominent among these, not least because it conditioned his return to England and determined the extent to which his personal circumstances were shrouded in doubt. Perhaps he might have started his new education with De la Mothe le Vayer's essay, *Of Liberty and Solitude*, after his friend, John Evelyn, translated it from the French during his visit to France in that same year, 1649. However, it was in Hobbes' philosophy that Cowley mostly sought sanctuary as he began to contemplate the extent of the individual's rights. Our interest here centres on this change in Cowley's thought brought about by personal

circumstances as much as by the revolutions of his time. According to Nethercot, “Queer new ideas about government and ethics had been invading his mind ever since he had been exposed to Epicurean and *libertin* trains of thought, all of which culminated in his enthusiastic discipleship under Thomas Hobbes.”⁴⁰ We intend therefore to refer to Hobbesian thought, especially *The Leviathan*, for the terms of our discussion; but it will be useful also to reach across the political divide to Milton for comparative views from one of the foremost poets and thinker-scholars of his time. For clarification of Hobbes’s philosophy in our time, I have mainly considered the interpretations of the intellectual historian, Quentin Skinner.

It was in Hobbes’s contribution to the key twin concepts of reason and liberty that Cowley found encouragement for his own philosophical musings on human life and freedom. Such comfort would have come not just from personal discussions with Hobbes over several years together in exile, but also from an intimate knowledge of the philosopher’s works, perhaps as early as when they were circulated in manuscript in his Parisian circle before they appeared in print. The *Leviathan* and the English version of the *De Cive* appeared in 1651, though Cowley would have read the original Latin text of *De Cive*, completed in 1642 and republished in 1647, as well as other notable Hobbesian works such as *The Elements of Law* released in 1640. The first part of the *Leviathan* is “Of Man,” where reason emerges as a central factor, while the second part, “Of Commonwealth,” presents the notion of liberty as a key concept.

That reason was already important in Cowley’s thought could be gauged from the poem he wrote as early as 1636, ‘Of Wit,’ where this couplet stands out: “All ev’ry where, like *Mans*, must be the *Soul*, / And *Reason* the *Inferior Powers* controul” (27-

28). He had been stating the old-fashioned view that the human soul was composed essentially of two parts, an inferior bestial one and a superior godly one, and that reason belonged to the latter and must control the former. Reason, in fact, was the determining factor in establishing man's superiority over beasts, thereby placing him higher up in the scheme of things. Milton, in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* of 1649, accepts this natural hierarchy of beast, man, and God when describing how men, "being the image and resemblance of God himself, ... were by privilege above all the creatures, born to command and not to obey."⁴¹ Hobbes's contribution in this area is notable for challenging the classical position that attributed the difference between man and beast to mere speech and indeed eloquence. Skinner clearly delineates this classical position, whose repudiation reaches its zenith in Hobbes, in his article entitled "'*Scientia civilis*' in classical rhetoric and in the early Hobbes:"

Both Cicero and Quintilian suggest that the *bonus orator* is not merely a *vir bonus* and a *bonus civis*, but is possibly the most humane of men, the man in whom the distinctive attributes of humanity attain their highest peak. To see why this is so, we need only reflect that the quality which makes us distinctively human is not so much our faculty of *ratio* or reasoning; what separates us from brute creation is rather our power of *oratio*, our unique capacity for speech. ... Quintilian's analysis thus culminates in the claim that, as Cicero had already expressed it at the start of *De inventione*, the greatness of the orator derives from the fact that 'he is the man who is pre-eminent over all other men in the very quality that makes men pre-eminent over the beasts'.⁴²

While corroborating the view that there are "two principal parts of our nature," animal passion and divine reason, Hobbes insists also that men "exceed brute beasts in knowledge" due to "the benefit of words and ratiocination."⁴³ This becomes so much the accepted wisdom in the mid-century that by the time of Rochester, for example, it is readily accepted that reason in man distinguishes the different levels of hierarchy:

Blest glorious Man! To whom alone kind Heav'n
 An everlasting Soul has freely giv'n;
 Whom his great Maker took such care to make
 That from himself he did the Image take
 And this fair Frame in shining Reason drest
 To dignify his Nature above Beast.
 ('Satyr,' 60-65)⁴⁴

Further, Hobbes concurs that it is with reason, not speech or oratory, that man aspires to the highest possible excellence, since “God almighty hath given reason to man to be a light unto him.”⁴⁵

On the subject of liberty, Hobbes concerns himself with defining the extent of individual rights, and claims in the process that man can only depend on his own reason when in a state of nature. The first part of the *De Cive* is devoted entirely to this subject and the discussion is continued in the *Leviathan* where he describes the right of nature (as distinct from the law of nature) thus:

The RIGHT OF NATURE, ... *jus naturale*, is the liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature; that is to say, of his own life; and consequently, of doing any thing, which in his own judgment, and reason, he shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto.

By LIBERTY, is understood, ... the absence of external impediments: which impediments, may oft take away part of a man's power to do what he would; but cannot hinder him from using the power left him, according as his judgment, and reason shall dictate to him.⁴⁶

In the state of nature, therefore, man has the liberty to act according to his judgement or reason, which faculty enables the power to act. Milton in *Areopagitica* is even more straightforward in establishing the kinship between reason and liberty: “When God gave him (Adam) reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing.”⁴⁷ Having been made in God's image, it was thanks to his reason therefore that man enjoyed absolute freedom in Eden until the Fall; to experience such freedom was to experience the natural expression of the ‘right reason’ that was the divine attribute in man. Elsewhere, in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, Milton explains that the loss of man's absolute freedom was a direct consequence of the impairment of human reason occasioned by the Fall. A resulting inflammation of the passions would have wrought man's destruction, if men had not formed a society to guard against this destruction:

All men naturally were borne free, being the image and resemblance of God himself. ... Till from

the root of Adams transgressions, falling among themselves to do wrong and violence, and foreseeing that such courses must needs tend to the destruction of them all, they agreed by common league to bind each other from mutual injury, and joyntly to defend themselves against any that gave disturbance or opposition to such agreement. Hence came Citties, Townes and Commonwealths.⁴⁸

Cowley would question the human loss of absolute freedom that came at the point of the Fall, when the monumental divide between human and divine nature, or again between the natural and the supernatural worlds, became apparent. However, postlapsarian man retained the use of his reason, though impaired, and there is first of all the question of how he uses it in society, particularly in the context of liberty – civil, political, economic, social, and intellectual.

It was generally agreed among such scholars as Hobbes and Milton that natural law was permissible in a state of nature, but there was disagreement as to whether this same law could become a social contract between sovereign and subject in a commonwealth. The differences in opinion were much along political party lines, with monarchists refuting any interpretations of this law that might suggest a contractual theory of government. Having earlier defined the concept of the right of nature, Hobbes proceeds to define the law of nature thus:

A LAW OF NATURE, *lex naturalis*, is a precept or general rule, found out by reason, by which a man is forbidden to do that, which is destructive of his life. ... RIGHT, consisteth in liberty to do, or to forbear: whereas LAW, determineth, and bindeth to one of them: so that law, and right, differ as much, as obligation, and liberty.

And because the condition of man ... is a condition of war of every one against every one; in which case every one is governed by his own reason; ... it followeth, that in such a condition, every man has a right to every thing; even to one another's body. ... And consequently it is a precept, or general rule of reason, *that every man, ought to endeavour peace, as far as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek, and use, all helps, and advantages of war.* The first branch of which rule, containeth the first, and fundamental law of nature; which is, *to seek peace, and follow it.* The second, the sum of the right of nature; which is, *by all means we can, to defend ourselves.*

From this fundamental law of nature ... is derived this second law; *that a man be willing, when others are so too, as far-forth, as for peace, and defence of himself he shall think it necessary, to lay down this right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself.*⁴⁹

The basic tenet of self-preservation was generally accepted, “for the reverence for [the law of nature] among the best thinkers on both sides was too genuine for disagreement about the principle, however strongly it might be interpreted.”⁵⁰

Milton’s definition essentially agrees with that of Hobbes up until the point where he adds that the sovereign could be deposed in a given society just because the populace decide to exercise that “liberty and right of free born Men” to do so:

Since the King or Magistrate holds his autoritie of the people, both originaly and naturally for their good, ... then may the people as oft as they shall judge it for the best, either choose him or reject him, retaine him or depose him though no Tyrant, meerly by the liberty and right of free born Men, to be govern’d as seems to them best. This ... cannot but stand with plain reason.⁵¹

Milton’s *Tenure* sets out defiantly to defend regicide as its full title states: *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates: Proving, That it is Lawfull, and hath been held so through all Ages, for any, who have the Power, to call to account a Tyrant, or wicked KING, and after due conviction, to depose, and put him to death; if the ordinary MAGISTRATE have neglected, or deny’d to doe it.* If the regicide of 1649 was lawful, from Milton’s perspective, so too was the new administration that proclaimed England a ‘Commonwealth and Free State.’ But “Hobbes, though he may never have read *The Tenure*, must certainly have regarded its reasoning as no less “bad” than he thought that of the first *Defence*.”⁵² The reason is that,

Hobbes ... sought by a strictly rational attack to purge the law of nature of all the revolutionary implications which were assumed by Parliament, the Independents, the Levellers, and the army. Royalists and Presbyterians who disagreed with him on other points could welcome his theory of nature’s first laws as precluding any social contract *between* kings and their subjects.⁵³

Cowley, like Hobbes and other Royalists, would obviously have rejected out of hand any suggestions of a contract that gave the populace the right to unseat the monarchy. For him, this act of changing the government, to use Miltonian parlance, amounted to the use of licence, not freedom.⁵⁴

Cowley's odes fall into two main parts: those written as paeans in praise of individuals and those on the fundamental philosophical topic of fate and providence in human life. The two Old Testament adaptations that complete the collection irrevocably establish the importance of divine dispensation. When man cultivates his reason, he can attain the highest human excellence and obtain what freedom he seeks after, such as Brutus did in ancient Rome or Hobbes in modern times. Brutus contributed to the cause of civil liberty by freeing the Roman citizen from oppression while Hobbes achieved intellectual freedom when dismantling the edifice of age-old systems of philosophy that no longer served the cause of truth. But, these triumphs in the cause of human freedom notwithstanding, can man in his most excellent state achieve absolute freedom? Does this excellent attribute of reason not become helpless when faced with the control that the supernatural world exerts over the human one? Does it matter what freedoms we achieve in the human world when we realise that we truly have no free choices in life because it appears to be all foreseen and perhaps determined by the Godhead? It is such questions that Cowley's discussion of liberty throws up, questions that had already exercised the minds of humanists and other scholars throughout the Renaissance. His method is to exalt the faculty of reason that defines the place of man in the scheme of things, and then show up the human incapacity for attaining true freedom.

5.4 Right Reason, Liberty, Knowledge: The Poems of Praise

... Men above *themselves* Faith raised more
Then *Reason* above *Beasts* before.
(‘Brutus’)

Thy solid *Reason* like the *shield* from heaven
To the *Trojan Heroe* given,
Too strong to take a mark from any mortal dart,
Yet shines with *Gold* and *Gems* in every part.
(‘To Mr. Hobs’)

Who whilst thy wondrous skill in *Plants* they see,
Fear lest the *Tree of Life* should be found out by Thee.
(‘To Dr. Scarborough’)

Two poems from his *Miscellanies*, published as part of his 1656 *Poems*, practically provide a backdrop to Cowley’s *Pindarique Odes* in the way they accommodate reason even while asserting the superiority of faith as a means to divine truth. These poems, written by 1651, are fully entitled ‘The Tree of Knowledge. That there is no Knowledge. Against the Dogmatists,’ and ‘Reason. The use of it in Divine Matters.’ The mid seventeenth century when Cowley wrote was a time that witnessed a dwindling of faith in favour of a perpetual strengthening of the cause of reason in the pursuit of knowledge and truth. In the words of D. C. Allen,

The dike of faith was going down as the sea of rationalism burst through. Christians realized that when it had overwhelmed the steeples and drowned the cocks, it would sweep all men into a materialistic skepticism or, at best, into a rational theism.⁵⁵

Cowley’s ‘Reason’ praises God for allowing man, despite breaking his covenant, to retain possession of reason. Though he is expelled from Eden, man is left with “*Reason*, which (God be prais’d) still *Walks*, for all / It’s old Original *Fall*” (‘Reason,’ 27-28). Perhaps Cowley is all the more grateful because, though the Fall was due to the connivance between proud man and the cunning Serpent, the latter is not left with the attribute of reason. The Serpent arguably had both speech and reason that enabled its guile at the time of deceiving Eve, attributes lost when cursed and punished by God:

That *Serpent* too, their *Pride*,
Which aims at things deny’d,
That learn’d and eloquent *Lust*
Instead of *Mounting high*, shall creep upon the *Dust*.
(‘The Tree of Knowledge,’ 29-32)

Milton would paint a graphic picture in *Paradise Lost* of the Serpent’s punishment. Satan, having disguised himself as a Serpent for the purpose of deceiving man,

experiences the force of divine justice when he is turned into a Serpent himself. He is boasting about his triumph and is about to be applauded by his peers when,

They saw, but other sight instead, a crowd
Of ugly serpents; horror on them fell,
And horrid sympathy, for what they saw
They felt themselves now changing; down their arms,
Down fell both spear and shield, down they as fast,
And the dire hiss renewed, and the dire form
Caught by contagion, like in punishment,
As in their crime. Thus was the applause they meant
Turned to exploding hiss, triumph to shame.

(Milton, *Paradise Lost*, X. 538-46)⁵⁶

Having then been blessed with reason, man should not give it over and the man of faith must accommodate it always: "Reason within's our onely Guide" ('Reason,' 26). One of the benefits of reason, Cowley thought, would be to discourage superstitious beliefs ranging from the practice of astrology to magic. Man should not look to the stars for his fortune, nor should he dabble in practices that are at odds with reason. Perhaps the incident when he had delivered the King's fate with the *sortes Virgilianae* played in his mind when warning against such practices:

Visions and Inspirations some expect
Their course here to direct,
Like senseless *Chymists* their own wealth destroy,
Imaginary Gold t' enjoy.

('Reason,' 9-12)

When examined with reason, a truth will contain in itself proof of its authenticity by dint of logical processes in a way in which fortune telling could not. In a dramatic example of the need for a rational basis to human activity, he ridicules the sorceress unable to recognise the devil who appeared in a pleasing shape:

So *Endors* wretched *Sorceress*, although
She *Saul* through his disguise did know,
Yet when the *Dev 'il* comes up *disguis 'd*, she cries,
Behold, the *Gods* arise.

('Reason,' 21-24)

In dismissing fortune-telling practices in his society, which had kept pace with advances in such disciplines as astronomy, natural philosophy and mathematics, Cowley sets the tone for a reliance on faith and reason as the only means to

knowledge. Also, he continues a debate that goes back to the early Renaissance and even beyond. For example, the fourteenth century humanist, Petrarch, had asked these rhetorical questions: “What is the use of soothsayers? What is the point of astrologers? Why do the *mathematici* waste their time in useless speculation?”⁵⁷ Even though the intervening period witnessed untold advances in science and knowledge that brought man ever closer to certitude, such questions were still largely unanswered. This background lays the groundwork for an assertion of human reason in Cowley’s odes, thus revising humanist and early Renaissance positions in debates on fate, knowledge and freedom.

In the odes Cowley confirms reason as man’s defining quality, as the faculty which not only distinguishes him from other creatures, but makes him the focal point of God’s Creation also. The point is illustrated in ‘Brutus,’ one of three original odes written in honour of individuals. The other two, ‘To Mr. Hobs’ and ‘To Dr. Scarborough,’ are addressed to friends in whom reason attains its apotheosis as a means to truth in the areas of philosophy and medicine respectively. In ‘Brutus’ he establishes that it is reason that raised humankind above beasts whilst affirming that only faith could take man into higher realms than reason. Brutus therefore represents those men whom, “... above *themselves Faith* raised more / Then *Reason* above *Beasts* before” (‘Brutus,’ 3-4). Further, reason can raise man to a divine-like status when enabling in him the manifestation of the supreme quality of virtue, that is, moral excellence and goodness: “That *Virtue*, which had worshipt been by thee / As the most solid *Good*, and greatest *Deitie*” (‘Brutus,’ 73-4). It is on this note that the poem opens in a rare heroic couplet: “Excellent *Brutus*, of all humane race, / The best till *Nature* was improv’ed by *Grace*” (‘Brutus,’ 1-2). Because of his supreme

virtue, Brutus is the quintessence of rational humanity: “Virtue was thy *Lifes Center*. ...” (5). Compared to the rivals of the slain Caesar, his slayer is described as “God-like *Brutus*” (70), unlike “The false *Octavius*, and wild *Antonie*” (69). By extolling virtue, again described as the “supreme *Idea*” (‘*Brutus*,’ 24), Cowley is putting forth a view that was familiar if not dominant in Greco-Roman societies of old. From the moralists of ancient Rome to the Stoics in their Athenian stronghold, virtue was the touchstone, something that was acclaimed as the greatest good. Similarly, many humanists reiterated this importance of virtue as the ideal, especially when it was brought to bear on public service. In Thomas More’s sixteenth century seminal work, *Utopia*, for example, the state of supposedly perfect liberty of the subjects is attributed to the quality of virtue in which everyone is instructed. By proceeding to link virtue to reason, Cowley seems to echo the more contemporary position of the Cambridge Platonist, Henry More, who wrote in a chapter suggestively entitled “Of Virtue in General: and of Right Reason” that:

Virtue is an intellectual power of the soul, by which it overrules the animal impressions or bodily passions. ... We term this a power intellectual ... because it is always excited by some principle which is intellectual or rational. By animal impressions we understand every motion of the body, which being obtruded with any sort of violence on the soul, brings danger of sin and error, if not carefully watched.⁵⁸

Cowley’s word for base humanity, that which opposes virtue, is vice. Virtue approximates humankind to the Godhead, but our imperfect nature is sometimes incapable of appreciating the supreme idea of virtue, mistaking it for vice:

Th’ *Heroick Exaltations of Good*
 Are so far from *Understood*,
 We count them *Vice*: alas our *Sight’s* so ill,
 That things which swiftest *Move* seem to *stand still*.
 We look not upon *Virtue* in her height,
 On her supreme *Idea*, brave and bright,
 In the *Original Light*:
 But as her *Beams* reflected pass
 Through our own *Nature* or ill *Customs Glass*.
 (‘*Brutus*,’ 19-27)

Human nature most resembles God's when man understands the importance of virtue, recognises it when he sees it and makes it the mainstay of his life. Again the best model is perhaps the community in More's *Utopia* that is "instructed in the ways of *virtus*, is incited to behave with *virtus* and learns to take pleasure in *virtus* alone."⁵⁹ Man is his own worst enemy when he yields to vice because he then ceases to be human in the noble sense of the word.

Even as Cowley gives expression to the classical-cum-humanist ideal of virtue, he would also seek to accommodate the reasoning of Hobbes who negated the humanist attempt to connect liberty with virtuous public service. For Hobbes, the notion of liberty could only belong in the area of individual rights, even allowing for the individual living within a commonwealth. It is in this direction that Cowley moves the discussion to the question of liberty, the question of the defence of the individual's rights. In *Brutus* is epitomised not just the worth of reason, but an example of how to put it at the service of liberty. Firstly though, Cowley hails his slaying of Caesar, for which Brutus is chiefly remembered, as a great moment for the cause of freedom: "What *Mercy* could the *Tyrants Life* deserve?" (17). Brutus' heroic act of freeing the people of Rome was surely an example of "Th' *Heroick Exaltations of Good*" that those who misunderstood and condemned it took it for vice. Unseating the ruler could therefore be upheld as an exemplary act if done for such a cause as freedom of the subjects, that is, just as Brutus did it for the public good and not for himself. Those who say Brutus betrayed Caesar's friendship and call him "*Ingrateful Brutus*" ('Brutus,' 38) should rather apply this label to Caesar. The fact that they were friends actually makes Brutus' act more commendable and shows his noble nature, for it is not as if Brutus wanted to seize power for himself by

usurping Caesar. This is an instance where Cowley seems to be at variance with Hobbes. In a passage in the *Leviathan* on ancient Greek and Roman societies, Hobbes mocks at a practice such as that for which Cowley fetes Brutus:

Men kill their kings, ... [and] make it lawful, and laudable, for any man to do so; provided, before he do it, he call him tyrant. For they (Greek and Latin writers) say not regicide, that is, killing a king, but tyrannicide, that is, killing of a tyrant is lawful.⁶⁰

Perhaps it is because he is fully conscious of this position, namely that the subject may not attempt to remove the sovereign, that Cowley gives an impassioned defence of Brutus as one who was moved to come to the assistance of people crying out for freedom. Here is the central stanza in five, where he describes the stark choice facing Brutus, analogous to watching one's mother being assaulted, defiled and ravished: does he stand by and watch, or does he attack the rapist to the point of killing him, even if he had been a friend?

Can we stand by and see
Our *Mother* robb'ed, and bound, and ravisht be,
Yet not to her assistance stir,
Pleas'd with the *Strength* and *Beauty* of the *Ravisher*?
Or shall we fear to kill him, if before
The *cancell'd Name* of *Friend* he bore?
Ingrateful Brutus do they call?
Ingrateful Caesar who could *Rome* enthrall! ...
There's none but *Brutus* could deserve
That all men else should *wish* to serve,
And *Cæsars* usurpt place to him should proffer;
None can deserve't but he who would *refuse* the *offer*.
(‘Brutus,’ 32-39, 42-45)

Cowley contributes to the discussion on the individual's liberty within the state when he explains the influence of Brutus within the Roman state:

Virtue was thy *Lifes Center*, and from thence
Did *silently* and *constantly* dispense
The gentle vigorous *Influence*
To all the wide and fair *Circumference*:
And all the *parts* upon it lean'd so easilie,
Obey'd the mighty *force* so *willinglie*
That none could discord or disorder see
In all their *Contrarietie*.
Each had his motion natural and free.
(‘Brutus,’ 5-13)

In line with Hobbes's definition of liberty and the concept of life in motion, Brutus is credited with restoring freedom to the Roman citizen: "Each had his motion natural and free." On the liberty of subjects, Hobbes writes in the *Leviathan*:

Liberty, or freedom, signifieth, properly, the absence of opposition; by opposition, I mean external impediments of motion; and may be applied no less to irrational, and inanimate creatures, than to rational. ... A FREEMAN is he, that in those things, which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindered to do what he has a will to.⁶¹

Cowley essentially disagrees with the (neo-Roman or classical) idea of the free state, as in the proclamation after the regicide of 1649 that England was to be 'a Commonwealth and a Free State.' As defined by Quentin Skinner, "a free state is a community in which the actions of the body politic are determined by the will of the members as a whole."⁶² The shortcomings of the theory of the free state are many. The "wills and interests" of individuals cannot always be expected "to converge on any one outcome," thus creating a "problem of minority rights."⁶³ Further, "the government of a free state should ideally be such as to enable each individual citizen to exercise an equal right of participation in the making of the laws."⁶⁴ In short, the idea of a free state was utopic and impracticable. This is why Cowley finds himself in kinship with Hobbes who, right at the start of his Introduction to the *Leviathan*, offers a rival theory of the state or commonwealth."⁶⁵

For by art is created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMONWEALTH, or STATE, in Latin CIVITAS, which is but an artificial man; though of greater stature and strength than the natural, for whose protection and defence it was intended; and in which the *sovereignty* is an artificial *soul*, as giving life and motion to the whole body.⁶⁶

Hobbes goes on to explore further the body metaphor in the body of the text:

[A COMMONWEALTH] is *one person, of whose acts a great multitude, by mutual covenants one with another, have made themselves every one the author.* ... And he that carrieth this person, is called SOVEREIGN, and said to have *sovereign power*; and every one besides, his SUBJECT.⁶⁷

Therefore the subject, having agreed to submit himself to this sovereign man, or assembly of men, that is, the state, is in effect agreeing to obey the laws enacted on his behalf by this sovereign person or assembly of persons. Such obedience does not impair the subject's freedom. In Skinner's words, "where law ends, liberty

begins.”⁶⁸ The subject’s liberty remains intact when, as we have already seen from Hobbes, he suffers no “impediments of motion,” and “is not hindered to do what he has a will to.” But is this liberty still intact if the law shapes the subject’s will, that is, if he is constrained to act in obedience? Hobbes responds in the affirmative: “And generally all actions which men do in commonwealths, for fear of the law, are actions, which the doers had liberty to omit.”⁶⁹

Cowley welcomes the relationship between subject and sovereign because it ensures peace and harmony, and above all has been practised before in Rome to good effect, thanks to the efforts of men like Brutus. That is why he writes in that passage above that the sovereign, and by extension the state, “Did *silently* and *constantly* dispense / The gentle vigorous *Influence*.” So, for the subject, the sovereign’s power or ‘influence’ comes across as being at once silent and constant, at once gentle and vigorous; also, it touches everyone in the commonwealth as it is dispensed “To all the wide and fair *Circumference*.” Cowley’s paradoxical usage is not unlike that employed by Hobbes when explaining how the subject remains in possession of his liberty whilst obeying the law of the state. Cowley describes this law, or power, or indeed sovereignty, as a mighty force which, crucially, all the subjects or ‘parts’ of the commonwealth are happy to obey or ‘lean’ on: “And all the *parts* upon it lean’d so easilie, / Obey’d the mighty *force* so *willinglie*.” Hobbes has an explanation for the subjects’ willing obedience of this mighty force that the sovereign represents: “The sovereignty is the soul of the commonwealth; which once departed from the body, the members do no more receive their motion from it. The end of obedience is protection.”⁷⁰ Cowley adds to this by inferring that where there is obedience to the law, there would be no discord or disorder and therefore peace will reign supreme:

“That none could discord or disorder see / In all their *Contrarietie*.” It is within such a commonwealth that the subject will enjoy true civil liberty: “Each had his motion natural and free.” It is in this sense that Cowley could be said to have subscribed to Hobbes’s brand of a philosophy of liberalism.

To leave Brutus’s ancient Roman society and move to 1650s England is to enter a world dominated by Hobbes as the foremost English philosopher of his time. ‘To Mr. Hobs’ is perhaps the most famous of Cowley’s original odes, possibly because of the way it traces the decline of the impact of ancient wisdom during the Renaissance and the tribute it pays to a modern mind filling the intellectual void. It was during the time Cowley shared with Hobbes in exile that the Malmesbury philosopher wrote some of his most important works, including the *Leviathan*, “the greatest, perhaps the sole, masterpiece of political philosophy written in the English language.”⁷¹ Hobbes was perhaps the first among the exiles to return to England in 1651, thereby encouraging the others, most of them poets like Cowley, Waller, Davenant, and Denham, to contemplate their return. We have noted his immense impact on Cowley’s thought in such diverse areas as literary theory and civil philosophy. In this special ode Cowley is in effect celebrating the sum total of Hobbes’s contribution to philosophy and knowledge, a contribution that could be summed up in the word ‘reason.’

For Hobbes, to think philosophically is to reason; philosophy is reasoning. To this all else is subordinate; from this all else derives. It is the character of reasoning that determines the range and the limits of philosophical enquiry; it is this character that gives coherence, system, to Hobbes’s philosophy. ... To understand more exactly what he means by this identification of philosophy with reasoning, we must consider three contrasts that run through all his writing: the contrast between philosophy and theology (reason and faith), between philosophy and ‘science’ (reason and empiricism) and between philosophy and experience (reason and sense).⁷²

Cowley shows great courage in eulogising Hobbes because of the fierce opposition to his ideas by increasingly large numbers of his contemporaries and beyond. For

example, "Against Hobbes, Filmer defended servitude, Harrington liberty, Clarendon the church, Locke the Englishman, Rousseau mankind, and Butler the Deity."⁷³

Perhaps Cowley, who would not set foot in England until 1654, was oblivious to the manner in which the *Leviathan* and some of Hobbes's other works were received by the English public after their release in 1651. Perhaps, along with a small group of admirers, he simply preferred to give a genuine appraisal of the achievements of one of the great thinker-scholars whom he knew more intimately than most.⁷⁴

'To Mr. Hobs' is about the way Hobbes's creation of a new philosophy serves as an act of liberation, freeing knowledge from the grip of authority. It takes the form of direct address, opening with praise for the philosopher who has brought a new dimension to the search for truth by restoring the living soul, hence new life, into philosophy and indeed all knowledge. Here is the first stanza:

Vast *Bodies* of *Philosophie*
I oft have seen, and read,
But all are *Bodies* Dead,
Or *Bodies* by *Art* fashioned;
I never yet the *Living Soul* could see,
But in thy *Books* and *Thee*.
'Tis onely *God* can know
Whether the fair *Idea* thou dost show
Agree intirely with his *own* or no.
This I dare boldly tell,
'Tis so *like Truth* 'twill serve our turn as well.
Just, as in *Nature* thy *Proportions* be,
As full of *Concord* their *Varietie*,
As *firm* the parts upon their *Center* rest,
And all so *Solid* are that they at least
As much as *Nature*, *Emptiness* detest.
(*'To Mr. Hobs,'* 1-16)

There is an implicit reference here to Plato for whom everything in our natural or sensible world exists in its perfect form as an original idea or ideal form in God's mind. Therefore our world, the world of becoming or change, is inferior to, but reflective of the real, supersensuous one of being or permanence. This reference to Plato's ideal forms has become a commonplace with Cowley since his use of it in his

Mistress: “’Tis very true, I thought you once as faire, / As women in th’ *Idea* are” (‘Not Fair,’ 1-2). Truth resides with God, it is divine in character, but it is possible to effect a transposition from one level of existence onto another, and when the human person is so inspired like Hobbes, he can glimpse that divine realm where those original, ideal and true forms exist. Surely Hobbes’s “fair *Idea*” is authentic because divinely sanctioned; surely his new body of philosophy is divinely inspired, for it has the properties of God’s own Creation of Nature itself: “as in *Nature* thy *Proportions* be,” “full of *Concord*,” “*firm* the parts,” and “all so *Solid*.”

The word “*Solid*,” used in contrast to “*Emptiness*,” would appear again in the description of Hobbes’s “solid *Reason*,” and as Cowley explains, solid equates divine: “*Solid*, and that is, *Divine Reason*” (‘To Mr. Hobs,’ Notes, p. 191). Hobbes’s solid creation, therefore, represents a triumph for reason and is not unlike God’s own work. Here is the relevant passage where Cowley celebrates the magic of reason with which Hobbes finds the true light:

Thy solid *Reason* like the *shield* from heaven
 To the *Trojan Heroe* given,
 Too strong to take a mark from any mortal dart,
 Yet shines with *Gold* and *Gems* in every part,
 And *Wonders* on it grave’d by the learn’d hand of *Art*,
 A *shield* that gives delight
 Even to the *enemies* sight,
 Then when they’re sure to *lose* the *Combat* by’t.
 (‘To Mr. Hobs,’ 70-77)

Reason is sent from Heaven, it is indeed divine. That is why Hobbes’ system will endure, for humankind will not be able to strike a blow against reason. Like the shield made for Aeneas made by Vulcan, the Roman god of fire and patron of smiths and craftsmen, it will prove “Too strong to take a mark from any mortal dart.” Just as the shield’s design revealed unsurpassable craftsmanship and beauty, so too does Hobbes’s reason strike friend and foe alike with inimitable delight. Cowley’s

insistent presentation of the human in divine terms demonstrates why 'To Mr. Hobs' possibly represents the zenith of his faith in humankind.

Cowley's presentation of Hobbes in the role of liberator in 'To Mr. Hobs' reveals great vision and foresight in his appraisal of the role reason would play in transforming the average English mind from an essentially medieval one at the start of the century into a modern one.⁷⁵ The use of reason would truly revolutionise thinking; and it is in order to appraise fully the magnitude of Hobbes's contribution that he provides the background that follows. A thinker-scholar himself, Cowley is convinced that ancient authority had become a bane to humankind, stalling rather than enhancing progress over the ages. In its most sublime form, authority was almost synonymous to the name of Aristotle whose ubiquitous influence could be found in almost every area of learning, from literature through philosophy to medicine. In 'The Motto' that opens his Poems, Cowley has already acknowledged Aristotle as one of the leading intellectual figures of all time: "Welcome, great *Stagirite*, and teach me now / All I was born to know" ('The Motto,' 27-28). Aristotle would now be described in 'To Mr. Hobs' as the "mighty" *Stagirite*, the 'monarch' who had a "*universal Intellectual reign*," for his 'kingdom' stretched from the eastern to the western world:

Long did the mighty *Stagirite* retain
The *universal Intellectual reign*,
Saw his own Countreys short-liv'ed *Leopard* slain;
The stronger *Roman-Eagle* did out-fly,
Oftner renewed his *Age*, and saw that *Dy-*
Mecha it self, in spite of *Mahumet* possess,
And chas'ed by a wild *Deluge* from the *East*,
His *Monarchy* new planted in the *West*.
(*To Mr. Hobs*, 17-24)

The image of Aristotle is that of a conquistador whose superior force enabled him to penetrate various lands and civilisations throughout the world and conquer them.

Cowley explains that the influence of his imperial authority “outlasted the *Grecian Empire*,” that is, his own country where he was born in Stagira, which country “in the Visions of *Daniel*, is represented by a Leopard.” The Romans had no answer for the unremitting domination and influence of Aristotle’s intellectual power, such that his authority “was received even beyond the bounds of the *Roman Empire*, and out-lived it.” Aristotle then ‘possessed’ Mecca, the birthplace of Islam, where his philosophy “was in great esteem among the *Arabians* or *Saracens*, witness those many excellent Books upon him ... by *Averroes*, *Avicenna*, *Avempace* and divers others.” This was “*in spite of Mahumet*: because his *Law* ... forbids all the studies of *Learning*” (‘To Mr. Hobs,’ Notes, pp. 190-191). Learning thus became an outlet for oppressed people who preferred to submit to his authority when under the yoke of the sword wielded by an all-conquering ruler whose goal was greatness of empire. Even so, his intellectual empire covering the Islamic, Jewish and Christian worlds for all of two thousand years had to succumb finally to the overtures of time.

But as in time each great imperial race
 Degenerates, and gives some new one place:
 So did this noble *Empire* wast,
 Sunk by degrees from glories past,
 And in the *School-mens* hands it perisht quite at last.
 Then nought but *Words* it grew,
 And those all *Barb'arous* too.
 It *perisht*, and it *vanisht* there,
 The *Life* and *Soul* breath'd out, became but empty *Air*.
 (‘To Mr. Hobs,’ 25-33)

The old order changes, yielding “some new one place,” for that authority that had once waxed supreme over the intellectual world could only corrupt it now. For Cowley the demise of all systems that no longer serve the cause of truth is natural. One such system is scholastic philosophy that was constituted of “nought but *Words*.” The Schoolmen failed to contribute meaningfully to the search for truth because they interpreted Aristotle’s oeuvre for its own sake, that is, they were all ancient theory without invention or new thinking that ensures progress. If

medievalist thought was still an important factor at the start of the seventeenth century, it is because there was a vacuum in knowledge. Like the Schoolmen, seekers of truth found their deserts in ancient thought and failed to appreciate that discovery was the key to knowledge.

The *Fields* which answer'd well the *Ancients Plow*,
Spent and out-worn return no *Harvest* now,
In barren *Age* wild and unglorious lie,
 And boast of past *Fertilitie*,
The *poor relief* of *Present Povertie*.
 Food and *Fruit* we now must want
 Unless new *Lands* we *plant*.
We break up *Tombs* with *Sacrilegious hands*;
 Old *Rubbish* we remove;
To walk in *Ruines*, like vain *Ghosts*, we love,
 And with fond *Divining Wands*
 We search among the *Dead*
 For *Treasures Buried*,
 Whilst still the *Liberal Earth* does hold
So many *Virgin Mines* of *undiscover'ed Gold*.
 ('To Mr. Hobs,' 34-48)

Hobbes, like that Renaissance icon of discovery, Columbus, becomes the supreme example of one who has dug up a very rich virgin mine, striking gold and unearthing a whole new idea from the bowels of the liberal earth. He is to philosophy and knowledge what Columbus was to exploration and discovery, that is, a man who has moved into hitherto uncharted territory and discovered “*Golden Lands of new Philosophies*.” The apparent discovery of America or the New World by Columbus, coinciding with the beginning of the English Renaissance, had given a new meaning to exploration and made possible a whole new language of metaphor. Among the ancients, astronomers such as Ptolemy had posited a terra Australis, necessary, they thought, to counterpoint the weight of land in Europe, but the existence of America seemed not to have been thought of. Ptolemy’s theory that the earth was the static centre of the universe explains why further scientific discoveries were needed to aid geographical expansion. Perhaps it is no surprise that the discovery of America, and

the exploration of some of the furthest reaches of the globe, coincided with advancements in the area of astronomy that culminated in Copernicus's authoritative view that the earth and indeed all the planets revolved round the sun. In fact, Cowley thinks that the only way the ancients would have known about America would have been to sail there, almost certainly by accident rather than by scientific prompting. However, this was not possible because "they seldom ventured into the *Ocean*" ('To Mr. Hobs,' Notes, p. 191); and even so their navigation was restricted to the Baltic, Euxin, Caspian and Mediterranean seas. That America appears to have remained such a *terra incognita* for so long explains why it came to express freshness and newness once it was discovered. Hobbes would free knowledge and learning with his very own "learn'd *America*:"

The *Baltique*, *Euxin*, and the *Caspian*,
 And slender-limb'ed *Mediterranean*,
 Seem narrow *Creeks* to *Thee*, and only fit
 For the poor wretched *Fisher-boats* of *Wit*.
 Thy nobler *Vessel* the vast *Ocean* tries,
 And nothing sees but *Seas* and *Skies*,
 Till unknown *Regions* it describes,
 Thou great *Columbus* of the *Golden Lands* of *new Philosophies*.
 Thy task was harder much than his,
 For thy learn'd *America* is
 Not onely found out first by *Thee*,
 And rudely left to Future *Industrie*,
 But thy *Eloquence* and thy *Wit*,
 Has *planted*, *peopled*, *built*, and *civiliz'd* it.
 ('To Mr. Hobs,' 49-62)

Comparing intellectual accomplishments to the discovery of new worlds had become a familiar Renaissance trope, for the exploits of Columbus had greatly encouraged geographical expansion. To claim that Hobbes's achievements would mark the age even more constitutes praise of the highest order. This could be appreciated even more in the light of the two other instances where Cowley has used this form of praise, the one for himself, the other for Saint Paul. Cowley first reserved such praise for himself when claiming that he was the Columbus of love; therefore he establishes a level on which he identifies with Hobbes. The occasion was the 1647

Mistress, where the language is similar to that of Hobbes unearthing treasures from new gold mines:

'Tis I who *Love's Columbus* am; 'tis I,
Who must new *Worlds* in it descry:
Rich *Worlds*, that yield of *Treasure* more,
Than all that has bin known before.
(*'The Prophet,'* 25-28)

The other occasion is another Pindaric ode where Paul, the foremost of Christian converts, is described as "this great *Worlds Columbus*" (*'The Extasie,'* 46). The comparison of Hobbes to Columbus "establishes the appropriate modern context for his philosophy," Trotter observes, "since the discovery of new worlds was thought to have inaugurated an era of equivalent intellectual expansion." Trotter cites Bacon in the same breath, for it was he who wrote in *Discourses* that,

This proficience in navigation and discovery may plant also great expectation of the further proficience and augmentation of the sciences; especially as it may seem that these two are ordained by God to be coevals, that is, to meet in one age. For so the Prophet Daniel, in speaking of the latter times, foretells 'That many shall go to and fro on the earth, and knowledge shall be increased', as if the opening and thorough passage of the world, and the increase of knowledge, were appointed to be in the same age."⁷⁶

The concluding stanza of 'To Mr. Hobs' expresses Cowley's marvel at the novelty and originality of Hobbes' ideas and finishes with the observation that such a high peak of human excellence should be enabled to endure lastingly. By way of explanation, "his *Notions* are so *New*, and so *Great*, that I did not think it had been possible to have found out *words* to express them clearly" (*'To Mr. Hobs,'* Notes, p. 191). One of these notions so central to Hobbesian thought is that of cause and effect:

And if we weigh, like *Thee*,
Nature, and *Causes*, we shall see
That thus it *needs must be*.
(*'To Mr. Hobs,'* 90-92)

Hobbes himself expatiates on this notion of cause and effect thus: "Every act of man's will, and every desire, and inclination proceedeth from some cause, and that

from another cause, in a continual chain, whose first link is in the hand of God the first of all causes.”⁷⁷ The importance of this principle of causality to the Hobbesian system of thought could be gauged from this explanation:

For Hobbes reason has two alternative ends: to determine the conditional causes of given effects, or to determine the effects of given causes. ... It follows, therefore, that its activity must lie within a world composed of things that are causes or the effects of causes.

Philosophy is not only knowledge of the universal, it is a knowledge of causes. ... A knowledge of cause is, then, a knowledge of how a thing is generated. ... In short, a knowledge of causes is the pursuit in philosophy because philosophy is reasoning.⁷⁸

In the last two lines of his poem, Cowley harps on his favourite theme of immortality. Hobbes has found a divine spark in the form of reason and this would ensure that his system will perpetually strive to assert its immortal strain: “To things *Immortal Time* can do no wrong, / And that which never is *to Dye*, for ever must be *Young*” (93-94).

‘To Dr. Scarborough’ is an ode celebrating the achievements of Charles Scarborough in the field of medicine, thereby completing the trio of poems in which Cowley demonstrates unsurpassed faith in humanity. If amongst his friends Hobbes was the man who freed knowledge or philosophy and equated it to reasoning, then Scarborough was perhaps the natural successor to the discoverer that Harvey was. William Harvey, the discoverer of the circulation of blood and a scientist who believed in laboratory tests and experiments, was Scarborough’s mentor.

At Oxford Harvey grew acquainted with Dr. Charles Scarborough, then a young physician; and whereas before he marched up and down with the army, he took him to him, and made him lie in his chamber, and said to him: ‘Prithee, leave off thy gunning and stay here; I will bring thee into practice.’ Harvey’s guarantees were never chimerical. Scarborough eventually gained one of the best practices in England.⁷⁹

Scarborough was an eminent physician in London, holding the title of Anatomical Reader of the Barber Surgeons Company from 1649 before succeeding Harvey himself, in what constitutes a symbolic act of inheritance, as Lumbeian Lecturer at

Gresham College in 1656. Scarborough would later rise to even greater prominence after the Restoration when he would be knighted and become the personal physician of Charles II, in a way reminiscent of the position Harvey had held in Oxford during the war as the most eminent of the physicians attending on Charles I. However, Cowley is writing about a friend as much as a physician when writing the poem. Besides paying the bail for Cowley's release from prison in 1655, such was the physician's influence on the poet that he would later persuade him to read botany and medicine before introducing him to a fledgling Royal Society of Science. Writing poems of praise in honour of Hobbes and Scarborough reveals the extent of Cowley's willingness to welcome developments in various spheres of knowledge, unlike some of his contemporaries. For example, Hobbes himself, despite readily acknowledging the immense contribution of Harvey's theories on the circulation of blood, "had neither sympathy nor even patience for the 'new or experimental philosophy', and did not conceal his contempt for the work of the Royal Society."

This paradox is explained thus:

One of the few internal tensions of his (Hobbes's) thought arose from an attempted but imperfectly achieved distinction between science and philosophy. The distinction, well known to us now, is that between knowledge of things as they appear and enquiry into the fact of their appearing, between a knowledge of the phenomenal world and a theory of knowledge itself. ... He perceived that his concern as a philosopher was with the second and not the first of these enquiries."⁸⁰

'To Dr. Scarborough' reveals Cowley's yearning for a cure to the madness of a nation that had brought on itself the horrors of civil war, and yet could not find lasting peace. Comparing the ailments that afflict the body to the 'diseases' of war and tyranny that afflict the nation, he wonders if the genius of the physician in finding a cure for those could instil hope for the discovery of a miracle cure for these. The first stanza establishes a common ground between an epidemic and a war: both could be fatal to everything in their wake. In sophisticated fashion civil war is

described as the epidemic of the nation while disease is portrayed as the civil war that rages in the body!

How long, alas! has our mad *Nation* been
Of *Epidemick War* the *Tragick Scene*,
When *Slaughter* all the while
Seem'd like its *Sea*, embracing round the *Isle*,
With *Tempests*, and *red waves*, *Noise*, and *Affright*?
Albion no more, nor to be nam'd from *white*!
What *Province*, or what *City* did it spare?
It, like a *Plague*, infected all the *Aire*.
Sure the unpeopled *Land*
Would now untill'd, desert, and naked stand,
Had *Gods* All-mighty hand
At the same time let loose *Diseases* rage
Their *Civil Wars* in *Man* to wage.
But *Thou* by *Heaven* wert sent
This *Desolation* to prevent,
A *Medi'cine* and a *Counter-poyson* to the *Age*,
Scarce could the *Sword* dispatch more to the *Grave*,
Then *Thou* didst *save*;
By wondrous *Art*, and by successful *care*
The *Ruines* of a *Civil War* thou dost *alone repair*.
(*'To Dr. Scarborough,*' 1-20)

The civil war of the 1640s accounted for many lives, but Cowley warns that the whole of “our mad *Nation*” would have been annihilated if God had visited a plague on the land at the same time (“Had *Gods* All-mighty hand / At the same time let loose *Diseases* rage”). Scarborough is credited with saving lives by means of the “wondrous Art” of medicine, even as the “*Slaughter* all the while” was going on in the “*Tragick Scene*” around him. Just as reason in Hobbes was divinely inspired or a godsend, so too was Scarborough with his art: “But *Thou* by *Heaven* wert sent.” If a physician could provide a cure for diseases and thereby “A *Medi'cine* and a *Counter-poyson* to the *Age*,” then surely the powers that be could also provide a cure to the nation’s madness?

The rest of ‘*To Dr. Scarborough*’ focuses on the physician’s medical knowledge and skill that serve as a testament to the effectiveness of the new science and learning. Science was not new to the present age; examples from ancient times like that of

Hannibal shows how human ingenuity was used to overcome the hazards of nature. Cowley explains how Hannibal was once confronted in his passage on the Alps by rocks that could not be physically scaled by his army. His solution was that he “made fires upon them, and when the *Stone* was very hot, poured a great quantity of Vinegar upon it, by which it being softened and putrified, the *Souldiers* by that means were enabled to cut a way through it” (‘To Dr. Scarborough,’ Notes, p. 201). The difference between ancient and modern genius could be gauged from the difference in approach to breaking and melting Hannibal’s rock according to the dictates of modern science. The rock or stone is used as a metaphor for pain, as in the myth in which Sisyphus’s pain was represented by the stone he would eternally and futilely thrust up a hill. The knowledge Hannibal needed for his problem pales into insignificance when compared to what Scarborough contends with. It is needless to name the various ailments the body could suffer because they constitute a veritable catalogue, a “barbarous *Lexicon*,” indeed a legion of diseases that reveals the true extent of “*Mans Infirmitie*.”

The cruel *Stone* that restless pain
 That’s sometimes *roll’d away* in vain,
 But still, like *Sisyphus his stone*, returns again,
 Thou *break’st* and *meltest* by learn’d *Juyces* force,
 (A greater work, though short the way appear,
 Then *Hannibals* by *Vinegar*). ...

What need there here repeated be by me
 The vast and barbarous *Lexicon*
 Of *Mans Infirmitie*?
 At thy strong charms it must be gon
 Though a *Disease*, as well as *Devil*, were called *Leagion*.
 (‘To Dr. Scarborough,’ 34-39, 56-60)

Still there are some common examples of the physician’s skill at curing maladies in accordance with the dictates of his medical and scientific methods:

The *Inundations* of all *Liquid pain*,
 And *Deluge Dropsie* thou do’st *drain*.
Feavers so hot that one would say
 Thou mightst as soon *Hell-fires* allay ...
 Thou dost so *temper*, that we find
 Like *Gold* the *Body* but *refin’d*;

No *unhealthful dross* behind.
The subtle *Ague*, that for *sureness* sake ...
When thy strong *Guards*, and *works* it spies,
Trembles for it *self*, and *flies*. ...

The *Indian Son of Lust*, (that foul *Disease*) ...
Is so quite rooted out by Thee,
That thy *Patients* seem to be
Restor'ed not to *Health* onely, but *Virginitie*.
The *Plague* it self, that proud *Imperial Ill*
Which destroys *Towns*, and does whole *Armies* kill,
If thou but succour the *besieged Heart*,
Calls all its *poysons* forth, and does depart.

(‘To Dr. Scarborough,’ 21-4, 26-9, 32-3, 43, 47-53)

What do the medical sciences involve? How does the scientist differ from the empiricist, for both could be practitioners? The answers are to be found in Scarborough who, in addition to the workings of the human body, has studied the “*Magick Virtues*” or medicinal properties of plants ranging from creepers like the moss to the tallest trees like the cedar. The stress Cowley would place on different renditions of the verb ‘to see’ perhaps announces the importance of observation which is the starting point of scientific study methods. Finally, the physician’s knowledge of the human body must be so thorough that it becomes like “some *living Chrystal Man*” to him, that is, it is as if he uses the all-revealing crystal glass to gaze inside the human body.

From creeping *Moss* to soaring *Cedar* thou
Dost all the powers and several *Portions* know,
Which *Father-Sun*, *Mother-Earth* below
On their green *Infants* here bestow.
Can’st all those *Magick Virtues* from them draw,
That keep *Disease*, and *Death* in aw.
Who whilst thy wondrous skill in *Plants* they see,
Fear lest the *Tree of Life* should be found out by Thee.
And Thy well-travell’d knowledge too does give
No less account of th’ *Empire Sensitive*,
Chiefly of *Man*, whose *Body* is
That active *Souls Metropolis*.

As the great Artist in his *Sphere of Glass*
Saw the whole *Scene* of Heav’ely *Motions* pass,
So thou know’st all so well that’s done within,
As if some *living Chrystal Man* thou’dst seen.

(‘To Dr. Scarborough,’ 61-76)

Scarborough is finally the quintessence of the man of learning, placing himself at the vanguard of developments in natural philosophy and the medical sciences, in addition to his interests in other disciplines such as poets and their works. Cowley marvels at his interest in poetry in particular, saying that it is as if he has embraced the two sides of Apollo who was at once the god of medicine and the god of poetry. In a passage in which words like science and learning are watchwords, Cowley is full of admiration for Scarborough's many scholarly accomplishments for one so young:

Nor does this *Science* make thy *Crown* alone,
 But *whole Apollo* is thine owne.
His gentler *Arts*, *belov'ed* in vain by *Mee*,
 Are *wedded* and *enjoy'ed* by *Thee*. ...
And this great race of *Learning* thou hast runne,
 E're that of *Life* be half yet done.
 Thou see'st thy self still fresh and strong,
 And like *t'enjoy* thy *Conquests* long.
 ('To Dr. Scarborough,' 77-80, 86-9)

Having delineated Hobbes's contribution in liberating the intellectual world from the grip of authority, the praise of another contemporary scholar in Scarborough suggests that Cowley was immersing himself totally in the intellectual revolution. However, just as his admiration for Hobbes's achievements could not be dissociated from their private friendship and years of mutual influence whilst in exile, so too is his friendship with Scarborough an important contributory factor to this poem. It was a friendship that was memorably sealed by the physician's gesture of paying the thousand pound fee set for Cowley's release from prison on bail in 1655. Against the deprivation of civil liberty in his personal life, the relative intellectual freedom enjoyed by these men of learning was something Cowley relished; but it provoked also a profound concern with the meaning and true extent respectively of human life and freedom. A certain cynicism begins to gnaw at his mind and the poem takes an unexpected twist at the end. As he contemplates the physician's youth, bright

achievements and even brighter prospects, he develops an ineluctable sense of the futility of life. He advises Scarborough to take time out of his practice to enjoy his own pleasures and spend time with his friends, Cowley no doubt considering himself chief amongst them, for life would inevitably come to an end. Perhaps he intends his remarkable conclusion to mock at himself and fellow humanity for gaining knowledge that ultimately cannot save mortal man from death:

Ah, learned *friend*, it grieves me, when I think
That *Thou* with all thy *Art* must *dy*
As certainly as *I*.
And all thy noble *Reparations* sink
Into the sure-wrought *Mine* of treacherous *Mortality*. ...
Unbend sometimes thy restless care;
And let thy *Friends* so happy be
T' enjoy at once their *Health* and *Thee*.
Some hours at least to thine own pleasures spare. ...
Let *Nature*, and let *Art* do what they please,
When all's done, *Life is an Incurable Disease*.
(‘To Dr. Scarborough,’ 94-8, 104-07, 110-11)

For Cowley, the appraisal of human excellence only throws up questions on the usefulness of human knowledge. If he had intended to celebrate Scarborough, like Hobbes and Brutus, as a fine specimen of humanity, then it had the effect of making him ponder his own mortality and perhaps the role of cosmic and supernatural forces. Was his lot fated – war, exile, imprisonment? Perhaps it had even been destined that he would be born a poet? What was the role of providence in human life? These were the kind of age-old questions that had begun to exercise Cowley’s mind.

5.5 Right Reason, Liberty, Knowledge, Providence: From ‘Destinie’ to ‘Life’

Hoc quoq; Fatale est sic ipsum expendere Fatum – “It is Fate that we should thus dispute of Fate.”
(‘Destinie,’ Motto, culled from Manilius, *Astronomica* IV)

We *Poets* madder yet then all, ...
Think we not onely *Have*, but *Give Eternitie*.
(‘Life and Fame’)

The *Book of Fate* is writ,
'Tis well we *understand* not it.
(‘To the New Year’)

At the start of his study of “Fate, Fortune, Providence and Human Freedom” in the early Renaissance, Antonino Poppi observes that questions surrounding these concepts “are as old as humanity itself:”

Is the individual a rigidly defined link in a universal chain of being in which birth, life and death have been entirely preordained by physical cosmic forces? Or can the individual control his life and, by means of more or less independent decisions, direct it to some consciously chosen goal? Such questions are as old as humanity itself.⁸¹

The place of man in the chain of being, the range of his liberty and control, and the role of fate and divine providence in human life comprise Cowley’s concern in the five odes entitled ‘Destinie,’ ‘Life and Fame,’ ‘The Extasie,’ ‘To the New Year,’ and ‘Life.’ By putting into stark perspective the relatively little knowledge man gains from his search, even with the reason within him, these poems mark an almost complete volte-face from Cowley’s glorification of humanity in the poems of praise. Before discussing each of them in turn, it is useful to note how the poem on ‘The Tree of Knowledge’ shows already that the more man presumes to know, the more ignorant he discovers he is.

Cowley points to the Fall as the point when man estranged himself from divine truth, ironically by succumbing to the lure of the tree of knowledge: “The sacred *Tree* midst the fair *Orchard* grew; / The *Phoenix Truth* did on it rest” (‘The Tree of Knowledge,’ 1-2). This act of disobedience was responsible for the chasm between the human and divine worlds. Man had been endowed with true freedom but chose to disobey God and bring death on himself:

Taste not, said *God*; ’tis *mine* and *Angels* meat;
A certain *Death* does sit
Like an ill *Worm* i’th’ *Core* of it.
Ye cannot *Know* and *Live*, nor *Live* or *Know* and *Eat*.
(‘The Tree of Knowledge,’ 9-12)

Not only would Milton concur with the view that the Fall cost man the divine attribute of immortality, as well as being the source of all human woe, but the opening lines of his epic would announce it as its subject:

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden. ...

(*Paradise Lost*, I. 1-4)⁸²

The condition of man, as a mere mortal, suggests a state of ignorance and blindness that negates the possibility of ultimate knowledge. When in his act of disobedience, man attempted in his ignorance to seek knowledge, he grew even more blind instead: "Thus spoke *God*, yet *Man* did go / *Ignorantly* on to *Know*," and instead "Grew so *more blind*" ('The Tree of Knowledge,' 13-15). The extent of human knowledge is a perpetual realisation of this ignorance:

The onely *Science* Man by this did get,
Was but to *know* he nothing *Knew*:
He straight his *Nakedness* did view,
His ign'orant poor estate, and was 'asham'd of it.
Yet searches *Probabilities*,
And *Rhetorick*, and *Fallacies*,
And seeks by useless pride
With slight and withering *Leaves* that *Nakedness* to hide.
(*'The Tree of Knowledge,'* 17-20)

By making the point on human ignorance, Cowley paves the way for a discussion on the superior divine world, the world of being, whence come providence and destiny.

The ode, 'Destinie,' is actually positioned, perhaps deliberately so, between the odes on Hobbes and Brutus, thus revealing even in terms of the arrangement of the poems a certain fluctuating attitude towards human capabilities. In the one instance Cowley would berate human ignorance and then in the very next he would extol the sublime accomplishments of rational humanity. 'Destinie,' the first of the group of five odes, is one of only two – together with 'Life,' the last – in which Cowley takes the extra step of choosing a motto that serves as epigraph to the poem. In both instances he

chooses the motto from the same work, the *Astronomica* by Manilius, one of the lesser-known Latin authors from antiquity rediscovered by fourteenth century humanists. It is possible that this work impacted greatly on Cowley, for “[The *Astronomica*] demonstrates not only the intellectual power and freedom of the human mind, but also its ultimate helplessness and subjection to fate.”⁸³ The motto for ‘Destinie’ is, “*Hoc quoq; Fatale est sic ipsum expendere Fatum*” (“It is Fate that we should thus dispute of Fate”). Fate or destiny is the watchword, for the ode is based on the supposition that man does not have control over his actions or what seem like choices in life, because whatever happens is destined to be so. In fact, its argument is summed up in the proposition that “*Desti’ny plays us all!*” (‘Destinie,’ 32).

The situation at the start is that of a startled poet watching a game in which chess pieces seem to be moving themselves on a board:

Strange and unnatural! Lets stay and see
 This *Pageant* of a *Prodigie*.
 Lo, of themselves th’*enlivened Chesmen* move,
 Lo, the unbred, ill-organ’d *Pieces* prove,
 As full of *Art*, and *Industrie*,
 Of *Courage* and of *Policie*,
 As we our selves who think ther’s nothing *Wise* but *We*.
 (‘Destinie,’ 1-7)

It turns out that angels who remain invisible to the natural human eye – normally incapable of beholding or apprehending spirits and supernatural beings – are the ones playing the chess game and moving the pieces. These chess pieces actually constitute a metaphor for man: the invisible hand that moves them is the unseen hand that controls humans. This is confirmed in Cowley’s explanatory notes:

This *Ode* is written upon an extravagant supposition of two *Angels* playing a *Game* at *Chess*; which if they did, the spectators would have reason as much to believe, that the pieces moved themselves, as we can have for thinking the same of *Mankind*, when we see them exercise so many, and so different actions. ... We are but *Tennis Balls* for the *Gods* to play withal, which they strike away at last, and still call for new ones: And *S. Paul* says, *We are but the Clay in the hands of the Potter*. (‘Destinie,’ Notes, p. 194)

A man of reason, the watching poet could not otherwise explain the strange sight. That which he would describe in the second stanza as his precious “*Philosophie* and *Sense* or *Reason*” stipulate that chess pieces in themselves have no capacity for motion. Being inanimate denotes a lack of imagination, and therefore motion, for Hobbes makes it clear that, “the imagination is the first internal beginning of all voluntary motion.”⁸⁴ This is obviously on the assumption that the subject in question is “enlivened” or has life, the primal condition of all beings. Do the seemingly inanimate chess pieces have a life and imagination of their own? Are they capable of making choices? Proceeding by means of reasoning, surely the chess pieces must therefore have wisdom of their own? It is at this point that the truth is revealed to the incredulous poet: the chess pieces have all the while been moved by angels:

What e're these *seem*, what e're *Philosophie*
 And *Sense* or *Reason* tell (said I)
 These Things have *Life*, *Election*, *Libertie*;
 'Tis their own *Wisdom* molds their *State*,
 Their *Faults* and *Virtues* make their *Fate*.
 They do, they do (said I) but strait
 Lo from my' enlighthned Eyes the Mists and shadows fell
 That hinder *Spirits* from being *Visible*.
 And, lo, I saw *two Angels* plaid the *Mate*.
 With *Man*, alas, no otherwise it proves,
 An *unseen Hand* makes all their *Moves*.
 And some are *Great*, and some are *Small*,
 Some climb to *good*, some from *good Fortune* fall,
 Some *Wisemen*, and some *Fools* we call,
Figures, alas, of *Speech*, for *Desti'ny* plays us all.
 ('Destinie,' 18-32)

The poet presents two different sides here, one founded in his initial state of ignorance, and the other in his enlightened state, after the mists and shadows fall from his eyes and the spirits become visible to him. On the one hand, if the chess pieces had life, election, and liberty, then it would mean that they are enabled to determine their own fate: “’Tis their own *Wisdom* molds their *State*, / Their *Faults* and *Virtues* make their *Fate*.” On the other hand, it turns out that they are actually bereft of these attributes and cannot determine their fate, because angels are playing

them. This means that they are really the pawns and pieces they seemed to be, hence the analogy with man: “With *Man*, alas, no otherwise it proves, / An *unseen Hand* makes all their *Moves*.”

Hobbes tries to explain away a similar predicament when he accommodates the two schools of thought Cowley presents. He labels man’s wisdom and capacity to mould his state as liberty, and labels the unseen Hand of God as necessity. A formula then emerges: liberty is man’s liberty; necessity is God’s liberty.

Liberty, and *necessity* are consistent: as in the water, that hath not only *liberty*, but a *necessity* of descending by the channel; so likewise in the actions which men voluntarily do: which, because they proceed from their will, proceed from *liberty*; and yet, because every act of man’s will, and every desire, and inclination proceedeth from some cause, and that from ... the hand of God the first of all causes, proceed from *necessity*. ... And therefore God, that seeth, and disposeth all things, seeth also that the *liberty* of man in doing what he will, is accompanied with the *necessity* of doing that which God will. ... And did not his will assure the *necessity* of man’s will, and consequently of all that on man’s will dependeth, the *liberty* of men would be a contradiction, and impediment to the omnipotence and *liberty* of God.⁸⁵

Hobbes here is covering ground that had been much trodden upon in the early Renaissance when some form of compromise had generally been sought for both the human and the divine will. His discussion recalls, for example, that of one of the fifteenth century thinkers from the continent, Lorenzo Valla, who stated that one of his aims was to discover “whether divine foreknowledge precludes [human] free will” in his *De Libero Arbitrio*. Valla’s findings on the familiar concepts of necessity, will and volition persuaded him otherwise as he stated the same conclusion Hobbes would arrive at: “The fact that God knows beforehand what a man will do results in no necessity that he should do it, because man acts according to his own will: that which is voluntary cannot be necessary.”⁸⁶ Cowley prefers to proceed by means of reasoning and imposes certain conditions that would empower the human will: “*Life, Election, Libertie*.” He finds that postlapsarian man is deficient in these

because of the “*unseen Hand*” that is responsible for human fortune; therefore,
“*Desti’ny plays us all.*”

Cowley presents his own station and background as the best example to substantiate his findings that the human world and human life are dependent on the divine or celestial one. He was destined from birth to become a poet, such that the Midwife into whose arms he was born was none other than his Muse. Poetry is at once a religion and a profession, pervading every facet of his life. A poet is a creature apart in society, capable of fame with his pen but destined neither to enjoy the trappings of wealth or power nor to succeed in any other profession or vocation. Cowley makes a claim similar to the one that he is love’s Columbus (“I was born for *Love*”) and perhaps that would be a source of fame. Still, he feels some sense of frustration at not being free to choose his own path, at not having been able to exercise election and liberty.

Me from the *womb* the *Midwife Muse* did take:
She cut my *Navel*, *washt me*, and mine *Head*
 With her own *Hands* she *Fashioned*;
 She did a *Covenant* with me make,
And *circumcis’ed* my tender *Soul*, and thus she spake,
 Thou of my *Church* shalt be,
 Hate and renounce (said she)
Wealth, Honor, Pleasures, all the *World* for *Me*.
Thou neither great at *Court*, nor in the *War*,
Nor at th’ *Exchange* shalt be, nor at the wrangling *Bar*.
Content thy self with the small *Barren Praise*,
 That neglected *Verse* does raise.
 She spake, and all my years to come
 Took their unlucky *Doom*.
Their several ways of *Life* let others *chuse*,
 Their several pleasures let them use,
But I was born for *Love*, and for a *Muse*.
 (‘*Destinie*,’ 33-49)

From Homer to Ben Jonson, from the first poets in ancient times to the great poets of modern times, poets have been fated to be born, to live and to die as poets. If fate could despise the poet by ordaining his life in this fashion, the only satisfaction the

poet could take, Cowley consoles himself, is to despise fate in turn. This he will do by following the example of his poetic ancestors and peers who have not been known to argue with fate nor to grieve, even if a veritable catalogue of misfortune were to cascade on them:

With *Fate* what boots it to contend?
Such I *began*, such *am*, and so must *end*. ...
No Matter, *Cowley*, let proud *Fortune* see,
That *thou* canst *her* despise no less then *she* does *Thee*.
Let all her gifts the portion be
Of Folly, Lust, and Flattery,
Fraud, Extortion, Calumnie,
Murder, Infidelitie,
Rebellion and Hypocrisie.
Do Thou nor *grieve* nor *blush* to be,
As all th'inspired *tuneful Men*,
And all thy great *Forefathers* were from *Homer* down to *Ben*.
(‘Destinie,’ 50-51, 56-65)

And so, from his choice of title and motto for ‘Destinie’ through the role of destiny in human life to deductions about the role of fate in his own life, Cowley reveals a certain obsession with fatalism. This is amply demonstrated in the claim that he has not had any influence over the shaping of his life and fortunes: “With *Fate* what boots it to contend? / Such I *began*, such *am*, and so must *end*.”

Milton in *Paradise Lost* would challenge the kind of claims Cowley makes on necessity and destiny, for example, when he says of the Muse that, “She spake, and all my years to come / Took their unlucky *Doom*.” Milton would insist that postlapsarian man has free will, thereby refuting the theory that any kind of relationship between the human and the divine, such as the poet and his Muse, could depend on necessity or fate. In the relevant speech here, God makes two important distinctions: the Godhead must be distinguished from necessity or fate, and fallen man should blame neither.

Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.
Not free, what proof could they have given sincere
Of true allegiance, constant faith or love?

Where only what they needs must do, appeared,
 Not what they would, what praise could they receive?
 What pleasure I from such obedience paid,
 When will and reason (reason also is choice)
 Useless and vain, of freedom both despoiled,
 Made passive both, had served necessity,
 Not me. They therefore as to right belonged,
 So were created, nor can justly accuse
 Their maker, or their making, or their fate.

(*Paradise Lost*, III. 102-113)⁸⁷

Milton's notion that "reason also is choice" is a repeat of his statement made over a score of years earlier in *Areopagitica*: "Many there be that complain of divin Providence for suffering *Adam* to transgresse, foolish tongues! When God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing."⁸⁸ Milton, whom as a poet is numbered among the group that Cowley describes as "th'inspired *tuneful Men*," clearly believes that his life and indeed his choices are determined by his own will and reason, rather than on anything ordained by fate. While Cowley is neither giving reason over, nor is he grieving his privileged admission into the select group of poets, he seems unable to reconcile human free will and necessity or providence.

If the tone in 'Destinie' is one of the helplessness of humankind in the face of destiny, that in 'Life and Fame' seems to build on the cynical attitude the poet adopts at the end of 'To Dr. Scarborough.' The intention seems to be to put mortal man firmly in his place by holding up to ridicule the notion that fame represents a form of life after death. The opening stanza shows up life as a mere link between the pre-birth and post-death eternities; the central one discusses living as an illusion that man creates to counter the finality of death; and the concluding third expands on the shallowness of fame, for no amount of fame could bring back life. Having established in 'Destinie' that man cannot claim to have true life without election and liberty, Cowley is even more scathing here, describing life in the opening stanza as "*Nothings younger Brother*" and "*Dream of a Shadow!*" These are things that create

an illusion of being but are actually without substance, without essence, without life! Life is such a mirage, that it is a moot point making the distinction between “*Some Body*” and “*No Body*.” The same point is made when Cowley uses Shakespeare’s famous phrase in *Hamlet*, “*To be, or Not to Be.*” For, no sooner does life rear up its head than it is crushed, “*broken and overwhelmed,*” between the past and the future and is engulfed by eternity!

Oh Life, thou *Nothings* younger Brother!
 So *like*, that one might take *One* for the *other*!
 What’s *Some Body*, or *No Body*?
 In all the *Cobwebs* of the *Schoolmens* trade,
 We no such nice *Distinction* woven see,
 As ’tis *To be, or Not to Be.*
Dream of a *Shadow!* A *Reflection* made
 From the false glories of the gay *reflected Bow*,
 Is a more *solid* thing then *Thou.*
 Vain weak-built *Isthmus*, which dost proudly rise
 Up betwixt *two Eternities*;
 Yet canst nor *Wave* nor *Wind* sustain,
 But *broken* and *orewhelm’d*, the endless *Oceans* meet again.
 (‘*Life and Fame,*’ 1-13)

The opening words, “Oh Life,” are laden with irony because life is more of an illusion than a reality. The image of the isthmus likens life to an island surrounded by two oceans, analogous to the two points of eternity before birth and after death, which end up swallowing it. Cowley explains: “*Isthmus* is a neck of Land that divides a *Peninsula* from the *Continent*, and is betwixt two Seas. ... This narrow passage of *Life* divides the *Past Time* from the *Future*, and is at last swallowed up into *Eternity*” (‘*Life and Fame,*’ Notes, p. 203).

So fleeting is life that it passes like a blur, but man tries to counter death by seeking some form of permanence, largely by means of memorials and inscribed tombstones. The poet’s sarcasm, cynicism and blatant belittling of humanity reaches its high point at the centre of the central stanza, where the *hic jacet* epitaph is mocked at in

is to cease living, to turn to dust; life and its pleasures can only be enjoyed by the

living:

Why do we precious *Oyntments* shower,
Nobler *wines* why do we pour,
Beauteous *Flowers* why do we spread,
Upon the Mon'uments of the *Dead*?
Nothing they but *Dust* can show,
Or *Bones* that hasten to be so.
Crown me with *Roses* whilst I *Live*,
Now your *Wines* and *Oyntments* give.
After *Death* I nothing crave,
Let me *Alive* my pleasures have,
All are *Stoicks* in the *Grave*.
(‘Another,’ 17-27)

The last stanza of ‘Life and Fame’ recalls the figure of Pompey the Great, for it opens with his father in law, Caesar, who lays claim to even greater fame because, in addition to the usual sculptures, his name is constantly on the lips of men.

His *Father* in *Law* an higher place does claim
In the *Seraphique Entity* of *Fame*.
He since that *Toy* his *Death*,
Does fill all *Mouths*, and *breathes* in all mens *Breath*.
'Tis true, the *two Immortal Syllables* remain,
But, Oh ye learned men, explain,
What *Essence*, what *Existence* this,
What *Substance*, what *Subsistence*, what *Hypostasis*
In *Six poor Letters* is?
In those alone does the *Great Caesar* live,
'Tis all the *Conquered World* could give.
(‘Life and Fame,’ 30-40)

The vocative “Oh Life!” has been a central feature of the poem, usually epitomising the poet’s sense of irony and use of parody. Here he merely refers to it as the two immortal syllables or six poor letters. Caesar is the very embodiment of the way by which man attempts to challenge the finality of death, that is, by inscriptions on tomb stones, memorials, art forms such as sculptures, and fame that manifests itself in the way men constantly call his name. But the fact remains that “the *Great Caesar*” turned into sordid dust after death and he lives no more. It is not enough that life is just a dream, a shadow or reflection, and yet man proceeds to parody its essence and existence with the words “Oh Life!” Again it is not enough that life itself is no more

solid than a rainbow in the sky, its lack of solidity exposed when it is broken and overwhelmed by death, and yet man parodies its substance, subsistence and hypostasis in those words, "Oh Life!" If the discussion on Caesar recalls his connection with Brutus in the 'Brutus' ode, and the obsession with death the conclusion to 'To Dr. Scarborough,' then the conclusion of 'Life and Fame' would recall 'Destinie.' Again it centres on the fortune of poets and again Homer is mentioned in the last line. Here the poet challenges anyone who is fooled into thinking that men live on in fame to swap his "*To-morrow*," that is, the remainder of his life, for all the years of death Homer has endured in fame till the present time. He admits in a self-deprecating manner that poets themselves are the worst culprits among the mad lot of humanity; for, not only do they claim to confer eternity by writing timeless poetry, but also that they live eternally in fame themselves.

We *Poets* madder yet then all,
 With a refin'ed *Phantastick Vanitie*,
 Think we not onely *Have*, but *Give Eternitie*.
 Fain would I see that *Prodigal*,
 Who his *To-morrow* would bestow,
 For all old *Homers Life* e're since he *Dy'ed* till *now*.
 ('Life and Fame,' 41-6)

The extent of Cowley's disillusionment could be gauged from comparing his attitude to life and fame in this poem with an almost completely contrasting one that he reveals in the earlier composition that opens the 1656 Poems. 'The Motto' serves, in fact, the purpose of an epigraph to the whole volume, and in it Cowley declares that it is the craving for fame that inspires his work:

What shall I do to be for ever known,
 And make the *Age to come* my own?
 I shall like *Beasts* or *Common People* dy,
 Unless you write my *Elegy*. ...
 Yet I must on; what sound is't strikes mine ear?
 Sure I *Fames Trumpet* hear.
 It sounds like the *last Trumpet*; for it can
 Raise up the *bu'ried Man*.
 Unpast *Alpes* stop me, but I'll cut through all,

‘Life and Fame’ therefore refutes the exact claims, and challenges the attitude, that Cowley had adopted in the earlier poem. This hardening of attitude makes him question all his erstwhile stated ambitions because he has become imbued with a sense of the futility of life. He would now direct his gaze even more towards the divine world, the world of bliss and eternal life. In fact, even as man is being put firmly in his place, the mention of “an higher place ... in the *Seraphique Entity*” carries further the discussion on the hierarchy or chain of being. The seraphim make up the highest order of the traditional nine-fold celestial hierarchy, above the other angelic beings. The nine grades, in ascending order, are as follows: angels, archangels, virtues, powers, principalities, dominations, thrones, cherubim, and seraphim. Unless he names the specific order, the mention of angels probably denotes any of them as in the ode on ‘Destinie.’ Cowley describes the seraph as “Supernatural, Intellectual, Unintelligible Being” (‘Life and Fame,’ Notes, p. 203). By its position and description, the seraphim should therefore be only one remove from the Godhead in the scheme of things. Cowley’s continued preoccupation with angels in this group of poems shows a fascination with this hierarchy that should end with God, in whose divine presence those two immortal syllables - “Oh Life”- should truly mean eternal life.

The next ode, suggestively entitled ‘The Extasie,’ shows how the poet’s disenchantment with the lot of humanity makes him undertake a journey in a quest for the divine world. The poem’s opening sums up the human state in the word ‘mortality,’ a state the poet symbolically rejects when he begins his rapturous ascent into the heavens above:

I leave *Mortality*, and things below; ...
 For I am *call'd* to go.
 A *Whirlwind* bears up my dull Feet,
 Th'official *Clouds* beneath them meet.
 ('The Extasie,' 1, 4-6)

The poet suddenly discovers that he appears almost unexpectedly to have reached the divine presence where he glimpses angels and the Godhead, before experiencing the ethereally intoxicating delight that proves too ecstatic for human senses:

Where am I now? *Angels* and *God* is here;
 An unexhausted *Ocean of delight*
 Swallows my *senses* quite,
 And drowns all *What*, or *How*, or *Where*.
 Not *Paul*, who first did thither pass,
 And this great *Worlds Columbus* was,
 The *tyrannous pleasure* could express.
 Oh 'tis *too much* for *Man*! But let it ne're be *less*.
 ('The Extasie,' 41-8)

Milton in *Paradise Lost* would appear to wander into the realm of the divine also. When he imagines himself being led by his Muse, Urania, into the heavens, no sooner does he seem to have got there than he discovers the disservice he does himself when he tries to reach beyond the bounds of human nature:

Into the heav'n of heav'ns I have presumed,
 An earthly guest, and drawn empyreal air,
 Thy tempering; with like safety guided down
 Return me to my native element.
 (*Paradise Lost*, VII. 13-16)⁸⁹

In the same breath Milton, imploring Urania to take him back to earth whence he comes, is able to come to terms with his human fate: "Standing on earth, not rapt above the pole, / More safe I sing with mortal voice ..." (*Paradise Lost*, VII. 23-24). This mortal voice, or the voice of reason for Cowley, has become man's saving grace. It enables him acknowledge his place in the scheme of things as commensurate with his nature, for things divine are of an alien nature. He finally comes to terms with the fact that only the beings in the empyrean world of bliss, a glimpse of which has been allowed him, could claim to enjoy the true life that comes with absolute freedom. However, he finds solace in having been able to observe the

workings of the hierarchy from man through the angelic order to the Godhead, in a journey that would make him contemplate his own ultimate transposition from the human to the divine world.

Back in the human world, his natural habitat, Cowley finds it increasingly difficult in the next ode to reconcile its myriad limitations to the abundantly blissful state he has glimpsed in the divine world. The role of destiny in the life of humans, the inability of humans to know the future even when this has been determined or fated, and the human lack of liberty in making choices about life are some of the themes already discussed that feature in 'To the New Year.' The key to the poem lies in this verse: "The *Book of Fate* is writ" ('To the New Year,' 58). It is about the coming of the New Year and the poet's concern for what the year might bring in terms of good or ill fortune. His frustration is compounded by his realisation that the events of the New Year are ordained already, and yet the human person could neither know nor change them:

If then, *young year*, thou needs must come, ...
Choose thy *Attendants* well; for 'tis not *Thee*
We fear, but 'tis thy *Companie*,
Let neither *Loss of Friends*, or *Fame*, or *Libertie*,
Nor pining *Sickness*, nor tormenting *Pain*,
Nor *Sadness*, not uncleanly *Povertie*,
Be seen among thy *Train*.
('To the New Year,' 25, 29-34)

By way of solution to man's dilemma, the poet, like some Delphic oracle counselling Oedipus, thinks that man should do nothing about his fate. The excitement of welcoming the New Year would be dampened for him if, say, he knew in advance that he would endure a loss of friends, as happened during the civil war, a loss of fame as in poetic fame, or a loss of liberty as in civil liberty. Other basic fears include sickness and poverty that would curtail his freedom even further. It is

precisely because the human person is incapable of doing anything about the future that Cowley now thinks it is a good idea not to know what it holds in store:

Into the *Future Times* why do we pry,
And seek to *Antedate* our *Misery*?
Like *Jealous men* why are we longing still
To *See* the thing which onely *seeing* makes an *Ill*?
'Tis well the *Face* is *vail'd*; for 'twere a *Sight*
That would even *Happiest men* affright,
And something still they'd spy that would destroy
The *past* and *Present Joy*
In whatsoever *Character*;
The *Book of Fate* is writ,
'Tis well we *understand* not it,
We should grow *Mad* with *little Learning* there.
Upon the *Brink* of every *Ill* we did *Foresee*,
Undecently and foolishlie
We should stand *shivering*, and but slowly venter
The *Fatal Flood* to enter,
Since *willing*, or *unwilling* we must do it,
They feel least *cold* and *pain* who *plunge* at once into it.
(*To the New Year*, 49-66)

Cowley's problem is not a life of misery *per se*, but that the misfortunes that have blighted his life have occurred despite his best efforts. Therefore, if the coming year ushers in more misfortune, there would be nothing he could do to change his fortune and shape his life. In this debate on providence versus freedom, Cowley believes that his path in life is already determined and, finding that he is not empowered to shape his destiny, he could only hope for good fortune. In this way, Cowley absolves himself from any responsibility for the choices in his life because they were not made of his own will, "Since *willing*, or *unwilling* we must do it."

Although Cowley's personal frustrations in life seem to have a direct bearing on his stance here, such frustrations also made him receptive to arguments making the case for a providential order of fate holding sway over human affairs. His position recalls, for example, that which Pietro Pomponazzi adopts in his sixteenth century work, *De Fato, de Libero arbitrio et de Praedestinatione*, acknowledged as "the most important Renaissance work on the problems of freedom."⁹⁰ According to

Pomponazzi, to deny providence is to deny the existence of God. Human will precludes God's knowledge and divine causality; therefore, it must be right to deny human freedom in order to assert divine providence. In affirming necessity over free will, Pomponazzi consciously restated the position of the Stoics: "They believed that everything was fated and arranged according to providence and that there is nothing in us which is not done by providence."⁹¹ In Cowley's own time, it is exactly this kind of argument that Milton would reject outright in *Paradise Lost*. He refuses to equate God with necessity or fate, thus opening the way for the argument that God's foreknowledge excludes necessity because it has no bearing on what is foreseen. Put differently, the fact that God foresees the future does not mean he ordains those events to happen. This is why, in comparison with Cowley absolving himself of responsibility for his choices, God absolves Himself of responsibility for the Fall and says that man is the author of all that befalls him:

... They therefore as to right belonged,
So were created, nor can justly accuse
Their maker, or their making, or their fate,
As if predestination overruled
Their will, disposed by absolute decree
Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
Their own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,
Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
Which had no less proved certain unforeknown.
So without least impulse or shadow of fate,
Or aught by me immutably foreseen,
They trespass, authors to themselves in all
Both what they judge and what they choose; for so
I formed them free, and free they must remain.
(*Paradise Lost*, III. 111-124)⁹²

It is not in the affirmation that "The *Book of Fate* is writ" that Cowley differs from Milton, but in his estimation that fate therefore overrides the human will and becomes the author of human choices.

'Life' is the last of the group of five poems concerned with Cowley's philosophical musings and meditations, and the one in which a summary of the arguments

developed in the others leads to his final rejection of the human condition. And so he would not wish “To be as long a *Dying as Methusalem*” (‘Life,’ 44), he who is reputed to have endured the human world for almost a thousand years (Genesis 5: 27). Rather, his would be “The ripened *Soul* [that] longs from his pris’ on to come” (45), the prison of the human world. Firstly though, having begun this series of poems with an epigraph on the ineluctability of fate (‘Destinie,’ Motto), he provides another one here – “*Nascentes Morimur*” – from the same source, the *Astronomica* by Manilius. The notions this carries of birth and death are turned into a paradox when he tries to expatiate in his Notes with this rhetorical question: “Who knows whether to Live, be not to Dye; and to Dye to Live?” (‘Life,’ Notes, p. 211). This suggests a certain possibility of transposition from one world to another, for human life is in a state of flux that has implications for both human and divine forms. The poem argues that man only deludes himself that he is living, for the true life is to be found in the divine world; therefore, the present condition is a prelude to the real life that comes after death, when man would join the order of angels.

In the first stanza of ‘Life’ we find that grammarians appear to have been mistaken to label the human condition as life, because no one between the moments of birth and death could truly claim to have life. Conversely, angels whose condition is an enlightened one correct the errors in man’s language when they speak. For example, when humans speak of death, angels speak of life, no doubt the new life in their company in the divine world. Therefore the consolation for humans is the promise of the angelic state after what they know as death, indeed the promise of life, true life. It is in this sense that the grave is described as a womb, and not as a tomb:

We’re ill by these *Grammarians* us’d;
 We are abus’d by *Words*, grosly abus’d;
 From the *Maternal Tomb*,

To the *Graves* fruitful *Womb*,
 We call here *Life*; but *Life's* a *name*
 That nothing here can truly claim. ...
 But *Angels* in their full enlightned state,
Angels who *Live*, and know what 'tis to *Be*,
 Who all the *nonsense* of our *Language* see,
 Who *speak Things*, and our *Words*, their ill-drawn *Pictures* scorn,
 When we by 'a *foolish Figure* say,
Behold an old man Dead! Then they
 Speak properly, and cry, *Behold a man-child born.*
 ('Life,' 1-6, 10-16)

The human world as a state of flux, a world of becoming, as opposed to the divine state of permanence in a world of being, is a long-standing philosophical view. Also, it is possible that Cowley is influenced here by his Christianity that preaches the transitional nature of human life as preparation for eternal life in Heaven. Perhaps Cowley had predestinarian sympathies, interpreting this doctrine to mean that all humans stand elected or chosen by the Godhead to make the transposition into the divine world after death. Death is therefore not the end, but the means to life. By way of explanation, Cowley draws on both philosophical and religious sources to buttress the argument that true life belongs in the divine world, essentially the distinction between the human world of becoming and the divine world of being:

Plato in *Timæus* makes this distinction: *That which Is, but is not generated; and That which is generated, but Is not.* This he took from *Trismegistus*, whose *Sentence* of God was written in the Egyptian Temples, I am all that *Was, Is, or shall be.* And he drew this from the very *fountain* where he calls himself, Exod. 3. [14], *I am that I am*, or, *That which is.* This doctrine of *Plato*, that nothing truly *Is* but *God*, is approved by all the *Fathers.* *Simplicius* explains it thus, That which has more degrees of *Privation*, or *Not-Being* then of *Being* (which is the case of all *Creatures*) is not properly said to *Be*; and again, That which is in a perpetual *Making*, never is quite *Made*; and therefore never properly *Is.* Now because this perpetual *Flux* of *Being* is not in *Angels*, or *Separated Spirits*, I allow them the *Title* of *Being* and *Living.* ('Life,' Notes, p. 210).

In a manner recalling the 'Destinie' ode where he first beholds the otherworldly spirits and angels ("Lo from my' enlightned Eyes the Mists and shadows fell / That hinder *Spirits* from being *Visible*"), the poet proceeds to claim that he is now enabled to see the fallacy of human reasoning. This is the second stanza, where the near desperation of 'Destinie' is gone, for he seems to have undergone an initiation, a

process of which the cleansing of his eyes was symbolic, that fills him with a new understanding. Where there was helplessness before, there is now a certain cynicism and even arrogance in the attitude of the poet that recalls his cynical approach in 'Life and Fame.' The activities of man give the illusion that he is living but the human condition is a parody of life, comparable to mere shadows and empty dreams:

My *Eyes* are opened, and I see
Through the *Transparent Fallacie*:
Because we seem wisely to talk ...
And mighty *Journeys* seem to make, ...
Because we *fight*, and *Battels* gain; ...
Because we heap up *yellow Earth*, and so,
Rich, valiant, wise, and vertuous seem to grow;
Because we draw a long *Nobilitie*
From *Hieroglyphick* proofs of *Herauldrie*,
And *impudently* talk of a *Posteritie*, ...
We grow at last by *Custom* to believe,
That really we *Live*:
Whilst all these *Shadows* that for *Things* we take,
Are but the empty *Dreams* which in *Deaths sleep* we make.
(*'Life,'* 17-19, 23, 25, 27-31, 36-39)

In the shortest of the three stanzas, the compact third, words like prison, womb, and cell become metaphors for the human world with which the poet is ready to part:

But these fantastique errors of our *Dream*,
Lead us to solid wrong;
We pray God, our Friends torments to prolong,
And wish uncharitably for them,
To be as long a *Dying* as *Methusalem*.
The ripened *Soul* longs from his pris'on to come,
But we would *seal*, and *sow* up, if we could, the *Womb*.
We seek to close and plaster up by Art
The *cracks* and *breaches* of the' extended *Shell*,
And in that narrow *Cell*
Would rudely force to dwell,
The noble vigorous *Bird* already *wing'd* to part.
(*'Life,'* 40-51)

The strength of Cowley's belief in the divine cause, no doubt aided by his Christian leanings, shows that for the man of faith the prospect of the bliss that enables true freedom and knowledge is always real.

Perhaps it is in an attempt to bolster his understanding of faith that Cowley relinquishes philosophy and worldly reasoning for the otherworldly revelation of the Bible, the ultimate Book of Fate and fountainhead of divine dispensation. Those last two Pindaric odes, 'The 34. Chapter of the Prophet Isaiah' and 'The Plagues of Egypt,' introduce a religious and biblical dimension to the problematic of human freedom and destiny. The poems merely rewrite what obtains in the Bible; it is the very fact of turning to the Bible that is symptomatic of Cowley's intention to complete the collection of odes with a leap of faith and a celebration of things divine. On the subject of the Bible, the poem discussed earlier, 'Reason,' already establishes its authenticity as a document of divine truth: "The *Holy Book*, like the eighth *Sphere*, does shine / With thousand Lights of *Truth Divine*" ('Reason,' 33-4). The poem also tells us how to approach and access this truth, mainly by harnessing our faith and reason and not oppose them as distinctly separate means to truth. Reason may not only be used in our earthly quests, but also in matters divine. Perhaps if Cowley were to define 'right reason' it would be reason that ensures a rational base for revealed truth, a reason that buttresses all belief, all faith, all religion. The point is made forcefully in the following quatrains from different stanzas:

And since it self the boundless *Godhead* joyn'd
 With a *Reasonable Mind*,
 It plainly shows that *Mysteries Divine*
 May with our *Reason* joyn.

Yet *Reason* must assist too, for in *Seas*
 So vast and dangerous as these,
 Our course by *Stars above* we cannot know,
 Without the *Compass* too *below*.

Though *Reason* cannot through *Faiths Myst'eries* see,
 It sees that *There* and *such* they be;
 Leads to *Heav'ens Door*, and there does humbly keep,
 And there through *Chinks* and *Key-holes* peep.
 ('Reason,' 29-32, 37-40, 41-4)

When Hobbes came to define what it meant to be a prophet, he wrote that: "The name of PROPHET signifieth in Scripture, sometimes prolocutor; that is, he that speaketh from God to man, or from man to God: and sometimes predictor, or a foreteller of things to come."⁹³ The first of the two biblical odes in the collection, 'The 34. Chapter of the Prophet Isaiah,' is based on the vision revealed in Book 34 of the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, concerning the fate of the peoples of the world in general and of Judah and Jerusalem in particular. But if it is about the fate of man, it is also about God's plan, about what God reveals to the prophet about the heavens and the earth at the end of time. Isaiah is both prolocutor and predictor, as God's foreknowledge of man's future is revealed by means of a vision to the prophet, hence this manner by which the prophet introduces his mission in the opening to the poem:

Awake, and with attention hear,
 Thou *drowsie World*, for it concerns thee near;
 Awake, I say, and listen well,
 To what from *God*, I, his *loud Prophet*, tell.
 ('The 34. Chapter of the Prophet Isaiah,' 1-4)

The interest of the poem lies in the way Cowley changes tack from human affairs in the original Pindaric compositions in order to focus on divine activities. It is all about God's foreknowledge of the future, from the time the vision is visited on the prophet till the end of the world. It is as if Cowley has now decided to place his faith in divine prescience as he reviews the destiny of man outlined by the Godhead in Scripture. The other poem, 'The Plagues of Egypt,' complements the first one as it moves from a prophecy concerning the future of man in the previous poem to a story from the past of God freeing the Jews from slavery. It moves, that is, from the general story of man to a particular instance when the might of the divine was brought to bear on a given situation. Cowley probably finds comfort in a biblical narrative that tells the story of the liberation of a people in bondage and the restoration of their freedom. Perhaps he seeks some kind of spiritual restoration,

beginning at this point ahead of the political restoration that would come in 1660. Having established the limits of his will and reason, he affirms the importance of faith as a means of coming to terms with the mysterious manner in which divine forces regulate human life and destiny.

Liberty, reason, knowledge and providence thus make up the major themes of the odes. At a time of much uncertainty as a result of civil unrest, religious and political controversies, Cowley manages to move the debate to fundamental philosophical concerns in a manner that demonstrates the impact of the new learning and the changing conditions of thought in his time. The changes in the political landscape paralleled the changes in thinking and learning, for the events of the 1640s coincided with the great strides made in fostering awareness on issues of individual liberty and human freedom, intellectual pursuits and the search for knowledge. The emergent philosophy of rationalism and the rise of the new science impacted greatly on the use of reason and the search for knowledge. This intellectual revolution that asserted the primacy of reason “was a historical process [that] left its mark more plainly on the poetry of Cowley than on the work of any other contemporary writer.”⁹⁴ However, his progressive rationalism proves insufficient to make him affirm complete faith in human powers. As he finds his will increasingly subordinated to divine providence, he turns to faith and a celebration of things divine. Perhaps the one area he would have agreed with Milton is on the importance of faith, for both were men of faith not destined to ‘drown’ in the sea of rationalism bursting through: “Who against faith and conscience can be heard / Infallible? Yet many will presume” (*Paradise Lost*, XII. 529-530).⁹⁵ It is this faith that enables Cowley to become increasingly obsessed with the divine world such that he begins to court it. That is why the prison he

mentions in his 'Life' is at once literal from a life experience and representative of the human condition: "The ripened *Soul* longs from his pris'on to come." Not unlike the Theban eagle, he wants liberty, true liberty, which is why he is inspired to say of himself: "The noble vigorous *Bird* already *wing'd* to part" ('Life').

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- ¹ Stuart Gillespie, The Poets on the Classics: An Anthology (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 186.
- ² Howard D Weinbrot, Britannia's Issue: The Rise of British Literature from Dryden to Ossian (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 338.
- ³ Robin Sowerby, The Classical Legacy in Renaissance Poetry (London: Longman, 1994), p. 180.
- ⁴ Weinbrot writes that, "The burst of interest in Cowley from Arthur H Nethercot and Jean Loiseau extended to Harvey D. Goldstein and Robert B. Hinman. Though they produced several important works, one hopes for more modern studies." See Weinbrot, p. 339, n. 6.
- ⁵ Sowerby, Introduction, p. 2.
- ⁶ David Trotter, The Poetry of Abraham Cowley (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 109.
- ⁷ Trotter, p. 115.
- ⁸ Arthur H. Nethercot, Abraham Cowley: The Muse's Hannibal (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), p. 154.
- ⁹ Stella P. Revard, "Abraham Cowley's Pindaric Odes and the Politics of the Inter-regnum" (*Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts*, Vol. 35, 1993, pp. 391-418), pp. 391-92.
- ¹⁰ Thomas Sprat, "An Account of the Life and Writings of Mr. Abraham Cowley" in *The Works of Mr. Abraham Cowley* (London, 1668), Preface.
- ¹¹ Harvey D. Goldstein, "Anglorum Pindarus: Model and Milieu" (*Comparative Literature*, Vol. 17, 1965, pp. 299-310), p. 302.
- ¹² See Ben Jonson, Ben Jonson, ed. Ian Donaldson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), Notes, p. 703. Donaldson follows up with a mention of Jonson's debt to Scaliger, thereby suggesting a precedent other than the original: "'Turn', 'counter-turn', and 'stand' are Jonson's renderings of Scaliger's *volta*, *rivolta*, and *stanza*, which in turn represent Greek 'strophe', 'antistrophe', and 'epode', the three sections of the choral ode."
- ¹³ Jonson, pp. 394-8.
- ¹⁴ C. M. Bowra, Pindar (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 20.
- ¹⁵ David Trotter, p. 111.
- ¹⁶ Bowra, pp. 3-4.
- ¹⁷ Pindar, The Odes and Selected Fragments, trans. G. S. Conway and Richard Stoneman, ed. Richard Stoneman (London: J. M. Dent, 1997), pp. 61-6.
- ¹⁸ Bowra, p. 12.
- ¹⁹ Pindar, pp. 202-211.
- ²⁰ Pindar, pp. 12-21.
- ²¹ Grube, p. 10.
- ²² Bowra, p. 14.
- ²³ Plato, *Ion* in Plato: Early Socratic Dialogues, ed. Trevor J Saunders (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p. 55.

- ²⁴ Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. C. J. Rowe (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1986), p. 59.
- ²⁵ Horace, *Works*, Vol. 2 (*The Satires, Epistles and Art of Poetry*), trans. (1739) David Watson, rev. (1792) W. Crakelt (New York: A M S Press, repr. 1976, pp. 360-405), pp. 306-9. Horace mentions Democritus (297) for whom art had no place in forming a poet, and concludes that the key lies with good sense: "Good sense is the source and ground of writing well."
- ²⁶ Jonson, *Timber or Discoveries* in *Ben Jonson*, p. 586.
- ²⁷ Pindar, pp. 193-99.
- ²⁸ Pindar's full exhortation calls on Truth to shield him: "... Ah Muse, I beg you, and Truth / Daughter of Zeus, with your right hand upraised / Shield me! ..." (*Olympian* 10, 3-5). See Pindar, pp. 69-76.
- ²⁹ Hesiod, *The Works and Days, Theogony, The Shield of Herakles*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1991), p. 124.
- ³⁰ Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Eagles (Bath: The Softback Preview, 1997), p. 397. The line(s) quoted appear as line 203 in the original.
- ³¹ Pindar, pp. 233-44.
- ³² Cited in *Ancient Literary Criticism*, ed. D. A. Russell and M. Winterbottom (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 552.
- ³³ Jonson, *Discoveries*, p. 582.
- ³⁴ Cited in Jonson, Introduction, p. xii.
- ³⁵ Johnson, p. 38.
- ³⁶ Sir Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poesy* in *Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 101-142), p.104.
- ³⁷ Arthur H. Nethercot, pp. 86-88. Also, Nethercot, p. 87 gives the original passage from Book IV of Virgil's *Aeneid* that met the King's gaze as he thrust his pin on it:
 At bello audacis populi vexatus et armis,
 Finibus extorris, complexu avulsus Iuli,
 Auxilium imploret, videatque indigna suorum
 Funera; nec, cum se sub leges pacis iniquae
 Tradiderit, regno aut optata luce fruatur,
 Sed cadat ante diem, mediaque inhumatus arena.
- ³⁸ Sidney, p. 104.
- ³⁹ Nethercot, p. 88. Jean Loiseau also quotes this passage and notes that the episode was recounted in many seventeenth century sources, for example, in 1678 by Edward Lake in *The Diary of Dr. Edward Lake*, and in 1692 by Gildon in *Miscellany Poems on Several Occasions*. See Loiseau, *Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre*, pp. 83-84.
- ⁴⁰ Nethercot, p. 150. Also, Loiseau, p. 103, observes that Hobbes himself introduced Cowley to other philosophers in France, notably Gassendi whose theories have an affinity with Cowley's brand of epicureanism.
- ⁴¹ John Milton, *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, Vol. III (1648-1649), ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), pp. 198-99.

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- ⁴² Quentin Skinner, “‘*Scientia civilis*’ in classical rhetoric and in the early Hobbes” in Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain, ed. Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 76-77.
- ⁴³ Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law*, cited by Skinner, pp. 82, 85.
- ⁴⁴ John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, Poems, ed. Keith Walker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), pp. 91-97.
- ⁴⁵ Cited by Skinner, p. 95.
- ⁴⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan or the Matter, Forme and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil*, ed. Michael Oakeshott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1946), p. 84.
- ⁴⁷ Milton, *Areopagitica* in Complete Prose Works of John Milton, Vol. II (1643-48), ed. Ernest Sirluck (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 527.
- ⁴⁸ Milton, Vol. III, *The Tenure*, pp. 198-99.
- ⁴⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 84-85.
- ⁵⁰ Milton, Vol. III, Introduction, p. 69.
- ⁵¹ Milton, Vol. III, *The Tenure*, p. 206.
- ⁵² Milton, Vol. III, Introduction, pp. 69-70.
- ⁵³ Milton, Vol. III, Introduction, p. 72.
- ⁵⁴ Milton writes at the start of *The Tenure* that, “For indeed none can love freedom heartilie, but good men, the rest love not freedom, but licence.” See Milton, Vol. III, p. 190.
- ⁵⁵ D.C. Allen, Doubt’s Boundless Sea: Skepticism and Faith in the Renaissance (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1964), p. x.
- ⁵⁶ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1998), p. 569.
- ⁵⁷ Cited in The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy, ed. Charles B. Schmitt and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 645.
- ⁵⁸ Henry More, “An Account of Virtue (Enchiridion Ethicum)” in The Cambridge Platonists, ed. Gerald Cragg (London: Oxford University Press, 1968) pp. 262-69.
- ⁵⁹ Thomas More, *Utopia*. Cited in Charles B. Schmitt and others (eds.), p. 448.
- ⁶⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 214.
- ⁶¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 136-37.
- ⁶² Skinner, Liberty Before Liberalism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 26.
- ⁶³ Skinner, 1998, p. 29.
- ⁶⁴ Skinner, 1998, p. 30.
- ⁶⁵ Skinner suggests that Hobbes was fully conscious of the theory of the free state and deliberately set out to disprove it:
 As Hobbes always emphasised, one of his aims ... was to discredit and supersede a strongly contrasting tradition of thought in which the concept of civil liberty had instead been

associated with the classical ideal of the *civitas libera* or free state.
See Skinner, 1998, p. 10.

⁶⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Author's Introduction, p. 5.

⁶⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 112.

⁶⁸ Skinner, 1998, p. 5.

⁶⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 137.

⁷⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 144.

⁷¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Introduction, p. viii.

⁷² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Introduction, p. xx.

⁷³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Introduction, p. li.

⁷⁴ David Trotter, for example, writes that, "Cowley was virtually alone among his contemporaries in celebrating, without qualification, the scope of Hobbes's achievement." See Trotter, p. 128.

⁷⁵ Douglas Bush wrote that, "In 1600 the educated Englishman's mind and world were more than half medieval, by 1660 they were more than half modern. ... It is the impact of modernism upon medievalism that gives the age its peculiar character." See English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century (1600-1660), Douglas Bush (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 1.

⁷⁶ See Trotter, pp. 128-29.

⁷⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 138.

⁷⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Introduction, pp. xx, xxv-xxvi.

⁷⁹ Nethercot, pp. 81-82.

⁸⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Introduction, p. xxii.

⁸¹ Cited by Schmitt and others (eds.), p. 648.

⁸² Milton, *Paradise Lost*, pp. 56-7.

⁸³ Trotter, p. 134.

⁸⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 31.

⁸⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 137-38.

⁸⁶ Cited in Charles B. Schmitt and others (eds.), p. 648.

⁸⁷ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, pp. 173-74.

⁸⁸ Milton, Vol. III, *Areopagitica*, p. 527.

⁸⁹ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, p. 390.

⁹⁰ Charles B. Schmitt and others, p. 654.

⁹¹ Cited in Charles B. Schmitt and others, p. 657.

⁹² Milton, *Paradise Lost*, pp. 173-74.

⁹³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 275.

⁹⁴ Trotter, p. 5.

⁹⁵ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, p. 671.

conceived and written partly in prose. The areas explored in these works are so intertwined with Cowley's life that to understand them effectively demands biographical information. This is certainly the case also with the original Preface to his 1656 Poems, the prose prolegomenon that carries huge ramifications for the rest of his life and career.

Cowley's Restoration poetical works have not always been given sufficient attention, due in part to their extremely diverse nature. His best loved and most consistently praised work from this period has been the *Essays*, but even here the considerable body of poems has received relatively scant attention. Among Cowley's traditional critics, it is mainly Nethercot and Loiseau who have discussed various parts of this vast section. Johnson, despite his awareness of these works, gives them little attention as he focuses mainly on the 1656 Poems.² Even David Trotter, the last scholar to effect an out-and-out Cowley study, does not extend his discussion beyond the 1656 publication. Before him Hinman's discussion includes mainly the Restoration and Royal Society odes. The general neglect, particularly of the outright political works written against Cromwell's Protectorate or in celebration of the restoration of Charles II's monarchy, is surprising in the light of critical opinion that has vigorously sought to treat Cowley's other works, such as the *Davideis* or *Pindarique Odes*, as political allegories. On the latter, for example, Nethercot fostered a tradition of politicising the odes, seeking to find in them evidence of Cowley's supposed defection from one political party to another. He finds that Cowley's "recantation" is portrayed in 'Destinie' and 'Brutus' "under the veil of different allegories;" and that in 'Brutus' in particular, Brutus is identified "with Cromwell, Caesar with Charles I, and Rome with England."³ Echoing Nethercot

who makes his findings in a chapter entitled “Spy and Apostate,” Frank Kermode wrote in conclusion to an article on the *Davideis* that “the period of *Brutus*” coincided with “the metamorphosis from spy to apostate.”⁴ More recently, Nicolas Jose has described one of the odes, ‘Destinie,’ as “an allegorical means of criticising the Royalists for mismanaging their cause.”⁵ Also, Jose considers ‘Brutus’ as “a panegyric of Cromwell,” but he proceeds inexplicably to offer the contradictory view that, “if the poem is about contemporary events, Cowley is imagining Cromwell’s death and destruction of his achievements.”⁶ A more complete programme of an attempted political reading in general of Cowley’s writings belongs to Thomas Corns who considers that the *Pindarique Odes* represents “an idiom well suited to complex political expression that would both elude the dangers of explicitness and allow the conscious exploration of ideological contradictions.”⁷ But not unlike Jose, and in the same two odes, he finds it impossible to sustain his favoured political reading of Cowley sympathising with Republicanism: “two of the odes may seem more critical of the conduct of the royalists and perhaps even pro-Cromwellian, though those interpretations prove untenable.”⁸ Of the ‘Brutus’ ode in particular, he suggests in an increasingly confused argument that “the equation of Brutus and Cromwell [is] inconsistent with an intelligent reading of the poem (but available to a gullible one)!” “Such a reading,” Corns continues,

would be inconsistent with the openly royalist poems retained within the volume and would seem bizarrely sycophantic in a poet who elsewhere forwent the opportunity for open praise of the new political ascendancy. After all, if the objective is ingratiating with a tyrant, why do it obliquely and enigmatically in ‘Brutus’ and not in an epistle dedicatory to the Lord Protector or in straightforward panegyric?⁹

Corns clearly felt that he had laid to rest the argument that the odes constituted political allegory. In an attempt to make a case for Cowley joining the Republicans, he had proved instead that this could not have been possible, certainly not on the strength of his reading of the ‘Brutus’ ode in particular,¹⁰ and the *Pindarique Odes* in

general. This shows that a political reading could only be effected on Cowley's works that are overtly political, such as his 1656 Preface, his *Vision* on Cromwell and his ode on the Restoration. It is with this Preface that we begin our discussion in the next section, followed by way of chronology by a section on the 1660 ode, another on the poetry in the *Essays*, and a final section on the 1667 ode. This means that, other than political thought, we would analyse classical and intellectual thought in the last two sections. First though, is biographical information that shows how Cowley's personal circumstances become entwined with politics leading up to 1656.

Cowley became a controversial figure when he returned to England from exile, albeit with the permission of Cromwell, in 1654. Perhaps he never gave up hope of an upsurge in Royalist fortunes, but he seemed to have desired just to return home and live in peace. In March 1655 there was an uprising in Salisbury by the Yorkshire Royalists that proved abortive. Most of the ringleaders were apprehended and sentenced "to be hanged, drawn, and quartered."¹¹ Cowley was arrested in April 1655 as a suspect on the pretext that yet another plot against Cromwell and his government had been discovered. In fact, Cromwell personally interviewed him before throwing him into jail. It was not until November that he was granted bail at the considerable sum of one thousand pounds. He owed his release to the largesse of his friend, Charles Scarborough. Cowley's release from prison came at a far greater cost than just the fee set for his bail, for the authorities forced him to make certain public concessions to the Cromwellian regime before making him bailable. Stopping just short of asking him to renounce publicly his Royalism, the regime intended to explore fully the prized asset that he represented by demanding repentance and asking for public recognition of their authority. Cowley's promises of future

neutrality and peaceful coexistence were rejected as mere expediency when in November intelligence reached Cromwell's office advising that, "Cowley shall apply to you, and pretend to serve your interest to secure and free himself."¹² Concrete concessions were required for his claims for bail to be considered, and these had to come from the Poems he originally prepared for publication in September 1655.

The year 1656 marks the date of Cowley's publication of Poems and therefore the Preface that would shape the contours of the rest of his life and career. With the exception of sections we have previously considered that introduce the particularities of the major poetical works contained in the volume, the 1656 Preface has always been a source of contention and debate as to what political orientation it gives to Cowley's life and career. What has never been in question is that the Preface was occasioned by the peculiar nature of his personal circumstances, brought home to him sharply by the restriction of his civil and political liberty; that is, the Preface is a politically conscious piece of writing. But this does not mean that Cowley became a member of Cromwell's party in order to write it. Using the nature of his personal troubles as a starting point, it is our contention that Cowley never joined Cromwell's party and that his Royalism never wavered, such was his fervent belief in government by monarchy as we intend to show. Also, the very idea of leaving his Anglican faith, of which the King was the head, and joining any of the other militant factions or religious groups would have been repugnant to him. Such were the repercussions of the Preface from its appearance in 1656 up until and even beyond the Restoration of 1660 that the contemplation of its political aspects illuminates our discussion on the relationship between poetry and authority. The section on Cowley's political writings of the Restoration shows among other things the extent to

which he was firmly ensconced within the King's party, and the pervasive influence of Hobbes evident in his articulation of his absolute belief in monarchy. But his life after 1656 would be essentially devoted to the intellectual revolution and after the Restoration to the retired country life, part of his motivation being to escape the political world. This is especially the case with his *Essays* that contain his poetry of retirement. The final section of this chapter discusses concerns with discovery and knowledge, our aim being to show how the founding of the Royal Society represented a culmination of his political and intellectual efforts.

6.2 Poetry and Authority: The 1656 Preface

The truth is, for a man to write well, it is necessary to be in good humor. ... So that 'tis almost as hard a thing to be a *Poet* in despite of *Fortune*, as it is in despite of *Nature*. (*Poems*, Preface)

Cowley's Preface, written as part of an increasingly popular prose tradition and an important piece in itself, was issued in its original uncut form in 1656 and in a revised form after 1660.¹³ This revision would owe everything to the political situation that obtained, that is, the expiration of the Interregnum and the advent of the Restoration. The Preface was almost certainly written after the works in the volume, part of its agenda being to defend the non-polemic nature of his latest works. Its opening makes clear the impact of politics on his life, hence the importance of biographical information: "At my return lately into *England*, I met by great accident a *Book* entituled, *The Iron Age*, and published under *my name*, during the time of my absence." (*Poems*, Preface, p. 4). His absence had been occasioned by exile from a nation ultimately devoid of monarchy, and yet his late return had been sanctioned by the Cromwellian regime, thus accounting for the complexities and political slant of the Preface. His impassioned disclaimer of the authorship of any part of *The Iron Age*, in full *The Four Ages of England; or The Iron Age, with other select Poems*, is

brought about by a sense of its polemical nature proving offensive to the political authority of the day. The piece in *The Iron Age* particularly attributed to him was the satirical attack on Puritanism, *A Satyre Against Separatists, or, the Conviction of Chamber Preachers, and other Schismaticks Contrary to the Discipline of this own Protestant Profession*. His 1656 publication is primarily geared towards poetic fame and literary renown, but he must preserve his good name as well:

I wondred very much how one who could be so *foolish* to write so ill Verses, should yet be so *Wise* to set them forth as another *Mans* rather than his *own*. ... It was in vain for me, that I avoided censure by the concealment of my own writings, if my reputation could be thus *Executed in Effigie*; and impossible it is for any good *Name* to be in safety, if the malice of *Witches* have the power to consume and destroy it in an *Image* of their own making. (*Poems*, Preface, p. 4).

It is on account of this manifest intention to ensure his “good *Name* to be in safety” that he decides to leave out his Royalist literature, propaganda and other political and religious wartime pieces from this publication. In his words, “I have suppressed and cast away more than I *publish*; and for the ease of my self and others, have *lost*, I believe too, more then *both*” (*Poems*, Preface, p. 6). The “ease of my self” suggests an act of conscience, for it is against conscience that he suppresses his political works of the 1640s. However, with the political authorities demanding a more overt public gesture of recognition, Cowley proceeds to carry out his outstanding action against conscience: the inclusion of the passage that would later bring about the vigorous revision of the Preface after 1660.

Cowley never renounced his Royalism, though critical opinion has been divided as to how to interpret the contentious passage in the Preface. The debate surrounding his political allegiance was discussed at length by Nethercot who claims, perhaps by way of conjecture, that Cowley when imprisoned in 1655 found himself in a dilemma:

Should he let himself languish in confinement, stiff-necked, proud – but loyal? – or should he bend himself to the will of the conqueror who had overcome all opposition, and had even done away with Parliament itself? Should he remain faithful to Charles and the Cavalier cause, perhaps putting his head in the way of a noose, ... or should he turn his coat, recant or at least pretend to do

so?¹⁴

Nethercot makes up his mind that Cowley became a turncoat but this is unfounded speculation: "There are ... too many stories afloat about his alleged recantation to doubt that eventually a change began to occur." Another flimsy piece of evidence is that, "Cowley was inconsistent, easily swayed by his environment, even weak-willed."¹⁵ For Nethercot, the Preface was therefore not the sole piece of evidence but the "one thing [that] remained to clench Cowley's severing from his former allegiance: a public admission ... of his defection."¹⁶ Nicholas Jose, as in his reading of the *Pindarique Odes*, echoes Nethercot with the view that, "Cowley formally abandoned his royalism in the preface. In a pacific tone he recognized that God's benign will operated over and above the political commitments of individuals. ... His submission must be taken at face value."¹⁷ As if on cue, Roger Pooley writes matter-of-factly that Cowley "prefaced his 1656 Poems with an admission that the Royalist cause was dead," but then he proceeds that it was possible "the original accommodation with republicanism" could have been half-hearted.¹⁸ The fact is that Cowley never shirks his faith in monarchy, which he considers the true form of government, nor does he ever become a Republican or member of Cromwell's party. The contentious passage, cut off after the Restoration,¹⁹ bears copying in full:

It is so uncustomary, as to become almost *ridiculous*, to make *Lawrels* for the *Conquered*. Now though in all *Civil Dissentions*, when they break into open hostilities, the *War of the Pen* is allowed to accompany that of the *Sword*, and every one is in a maner obliged with his *Tongue*, as well as *Hand*, to serve and assist the side which he engages in; yet when the event of *battel*, and the unaccountable *Will of God* has determined the controversie, and that we have submitted to the conditions of the *Conqueror*, we must lay down our *Pens* as well as *Arms*, we must *march* out of our *Cause* it self, and *dismantle* that, as well as our *Towns* and *Castles*, of all the *Works* and *Fortifications* of *Wit* and *Reason* by which we defended it. *We* ought not sure, to begin our selves to revive the remembrance of those times and actions for which we have received a *General Amnestie*, as a *favor* from the *Victor*. The truth is, neither *We*, nor *They*, ought by the *Representation of Places* and *Images* to make a kind of *Artificial Memory* of those things wherein we are all bound to desire like *Themistocles*, the *Art of Oblivion*. The *enmities* of *Fellow-Citizens* should be, like that of *Lovers*, the *Redintegration* of their *Amity*. The *Names of Party*, and *Titles of Division*, which are sometimes in effect the whole quarrel, should be extinguished and forbidden in peace under the notion of *Acts of Hostility*. And I would have it accounted no less unlawful to *rip up old wounds*, then to *give new ones*; which has made me not onely abstain from printing any things of this kinde, but to burn the very copies, and inflict a severer punishment on them my self, then perhaps the most rigid Officer of *State* would have thought that they deserved. (Poems, Notes,

While it appeared to have pacified the Cromwellian regime, this passage would so stir the wrath of the Royalist hierarchy that their *prima facie* reaction would be to consider Cowley a renegade and turncoat. He felt completely misunderstood by his own party for having used an expedient measure just to ensure peaceful coexistence with Cromwellian authority. He was shocked by their hostile reaction and the way they effectively made him a *persona non grata*. One way of appreciating the passage is to consider Sprat's explanations:

Upon his coming over he found the state of the Royal Party very desperate. He perceived the strength of their enemies so united that till it should begin to break within itself all endeavours against it were like to prove unsuccessful. On the other side he beheld their zeal for his Majesty's cause to be still so active that it often hurried them into inevitable ruin. He saw this with much grief. And though he approved their constancy as much as any man living, yet he found their unseasonable showing did only disable themselves, and give their adversaries great advantages of riches and strength by their defeats. He therefore believed that it would be a meritorious service to the King if any man who was known to have followed his interest could insinuate into the usurpers' minds that men of his principles were now willing to be quiet, and could persuade the poor oppressed Royalists to conceal their affections for better occasions. And as for his own particular he saw it was impossible for him to pursue the ends for which he came hither if he did not make some kind of declaration of his peaceable intentions.²⁰

Nethercot refuses to believe Sprat's account: "Perhaps [it] represented what Cowley really thought, ... [or] what Sprat pretended to think that Cowley thought. ... But that Cowley remained totally unmoved by their arguments is not to be believed."²¹ Corns cannot fathom why Cowley does not make a more overt gesture towards Cromwell. But that is because he is reading the Preface as a statement of Cowley's change of camp. He finds that, "Nothing in the volume suggests a conscious wish to effect his rehabilitation through praise of Cromwell. His dedicatory elegy is directed to praise Cambridge, his Alma Mater, though the option was open to dedicate it, politically, to the new establishment."²² Steven Zwicker, in comparison, appears to have a more objective conclusion: "Anyone opening the volume in 1656 and noting the pieces on Lord Falkland, on Charles I's return from Scotland, on the bishop of Lincoln, to Davenant, and on Crashaw could not have doubted Cowley's royalism."²³

It was at the time of writing the Preface that Cowley apparently was first held in check by the political authorities. His frustration at not being able to select all his works for publication, allied to the deprivation of his civil and political liberty, was compounded by the regime's exploitation of his status in making him write the contentious passage under duress and against conscience. He offers a hint that it crossed his mind to sit on his works and not publish them to the world, possibly indicating that the token gesture of recognition of the political regime was the price to pay for doing so:

I have been persuaded ... to produce these *Poems* to the light and view of the World; not as a thing that I approved of in it self, but as a less evil, which I chose rather than to stay till it were done for me by some body else, either surreptitiously before, or avowedly after my death: and this will be more excusable, when the *Reader* shall know in what respects he may look upon me as a *Dead*, or at least a *Dying Person*, and upon my *Muse* in this action, as appearing, ... and *assisting* at her own *Funeral*. For to make my self absolutely dead in a *Poetical* capacity, my resolution at present, is never to exercise any more that faculty. (*Poems*, Preface, p. 6).

It all led to Cowley, a career poet, contemplating the abandonment of poetry, a decision intended as a means of fending off the unwarranted attentions of the authorities. He decided to pursue other interests notably in the new science or natural philosophy rather than write under the authority of the Protectorate. Corns interprets Cowley's confession of these thoughts as amounting to a surrender to Cromwell in the same way as his contentious passage cited above. It is an unconvincing argument: "If in the notorious passage Cowley appears to be wrapping himself in the white flag of surrender," he writes, "other, equally poignant sections [of the Preface] show him trying on his winding-sheet."²⁴ Cowley himself would go on to suggest that the decision is almost taken out of his hands because poetry is only possible within a certain kind of climate, political and otherwise.

With his poetry getting frustrated by politics, Cowley proceeds to a discussion of the ideal conditions for poetry. It is yet another part of his Preface that presents a theory of writing, in this case the circumstances in which the poet flourishes:

Neither is the present constitution of my *Mind* more proper than that of the *Times* for this exercise. ... There is nothing that requires so much serenity and cheerfulness of *Spirit*; it must not be either overwhelmed with the cares of *Life*, or overcast with the *Clouds of Melancholy* and *Sorrow*, or shaken and disturbed with the storms of injurious *Fortune*; it must like the *Halcyon*, have *fair weather* to breed in. The *Soul* must be filled with bright and delightful *Idea's*, when it undertakes to communicate delight to others; which is the main end of *Poesie*. (*Poems*, Preface, p. 7)

If politics had become an overwhelming factor in his life from the moment he found himself compelled to leave Cambridge, then poetry had been so from birth, hence the heart-rending though forced decision to sever the 'marriage' contracted to his poetic Muse. He affirms that he could not preserve this poetic relationship at any cost:

The truth is, for a man to write well, it is necessary to be in good humor. ... So that 'tis almost as hard a thing to be a *Poet* in despite of *Fortune*, as it is in despite of *Nature*. For my own part, neither my obligations to the *Muses*, nor expectations from them are so great, as that I should suffer my self on no considerations to be *divorced*. (*Poems*, Preface, p. 8)

The difficulty Cowley experiences in seeking a peaceful coexistence with Cromwellian authority has deprived him of more promptings from his Muse, but in abandoning poetry he is seeking to abandon political and religious controversy in the interest of peace. He yearns for a world of order and tolerance so as to be able to put his pre-exile tribulations of war and his post-exile incarceration and deprivation of liberty behind him. It is this yearning that has accounted for his consideration over the last few years of the extreme measure of escape to America:

My desire has been for some years past and does still vehemently continue, to retire my self to some of our *American Plantations*, not to seek for *Gold*, ... but to forsake this world for ever, with all the *vanities* and *Vexations* of it, and to bury my self there in some obscure retreat (but not without the consolation of *Letters* and *Philosophy*). (*Poems*, Preface, p. 8)

While Corns seems justified in saying that Cowley's meditated retreat constitutes "a valediction to both political activism and poetic genius," it is not the case, as he suggests, that Cowley perceives the role of poetry as an essentially political one.²⁵

Two main points emerge from Cowley's statement on retirement: his return to Cromwell's England has heightened rather than quelled his desire for escape, and he could not contemplate life without Letters and Philosophy. These points explain his return in 1657 to the University of Oxford that had been his home during the Civil War. In one fell swoop he achieves his escape and retreat from the political centre and finds a niche in the academic world that was something of a natural habitat for him. Perhaps the true restoration – to intellectual and possibly spiritual values – begins for him at this point, before the political event of 1660.²⁶ He probably finds in "Natural Philosophy, itself a hybrid of the abstract and concrete," in the words of Nicholas Jose, "the perfect mediator between the two realms," that is, on the one hand the intellectual and spiritual, and on the other the political and social.²⁷

6.3 Of the King's Party: The Political Writings

I know you to be an obstinate and inveterate Malignant.

(The Protector to the Poet, *Vision Concerning Cromwell* in *Essays*, p. 375)

The *King* and *Truth* have greatest *strength*,
 When they their sacred force unite,
 And twine into one *Right*,
 No frantick *Common-wealths* or *Tyrannies*. ...
 No deeply entrenched *Islands* can withstand,
 Or any small resistance bring
 Against the *naked Truth*, and the *unarmed King*.

(‘Ode. Upon His Majesties Restoration and Return, 191-4, 200-202)

Cowley's outstanding political efforts of the Restoration are *A Discourse by Way of Vision, Concerning the Government of Oliver Cromwell*, and ‘Ode. Upon His Majesties Restoration and Return.’ These works are experimental forms, the one an unusual prose attempt, and the other a use of the ode form for a long poem. These works define Cowley's political sympathies and form the next stage of Cowley's English writings after 1656. Though the *Vision* was not finally published until 1661, it was written two years earlier; however, the uncertainties of the political situation

prevented Cowley from publishing it before his journey to France in the early part of 1659.²⁸ The work was conceived the moment Cowley witnessed Cromwell's funeral procession in September 1658, as indicated in the opening sentence: "It was the Funeral day of the late man who made himself to be called *Protectour*." (*Vision, Essays*, p. 342). Concerning the Restoration ode, he came back from France swiftly and composed it to mark the Restoration event. Essentially a panegyric, this Pindaric ode appears less than a week after Charles II's return to England on 25 May 1660.²⁹ Our study of these works would not only quell any remaining doubts relating to Cowley's Royalism, but would show in the process how an essentially Hobbesian view negating the neo-roman or republican theory of the free state pervades his appreciation of monarchical government. Quentin Skinner, in his recent work on the intellectual history of early modern Britain, *Liberty Before Liberalism*, develops a method for tracing the evolution of the free state theory that begins to collapse in Cowley's time.

The declaration of England as 'a Commonwealth and Free State' in 1649 was essentially an assertion of republicanism, implying that there was no freedom to be enjoyed under a monarchical system.³⁰ It was not uncommon thereafter for advocates of Cromwell's England to speak of "a state of freedom," thereby portraying Cromwell as a champion of freedom and thus rejecting similar claims from monarchists.³¹ It is this view that Hobbes seeks to counter in his famous chapter "Of the Liberty of Subjects" in the *Leviathan*. Essentially, his argument is that the freedom of a subject cannot be inferred from the political system, his equally famous example being that a subject does not necessarily enjoy more freedom in a western republic than in the sultanate of Constantinople. The freedom the Greeks

and Romans claimed was as nation states, that is, they were independent of other nations as a people, not in the sense of their subjects enjoying any amount of liberty:

The Athenians, and Romans were free; that is, free commonwealths: not that any particular men had the liberty to resist their own representative; but that their representative had the liberty to resist, or invade other people. There is written on the turrets of the city of Lucca in great characters to this day, the word LIBERTAS; yet no man can thence infer, that a particular man has more liberty, or immunity from the service of the commonwealth there, than in Constantinople. Whether a commonwealth be monarchical, or popular, the freedom is still the same.³²

Hobbes opines that the mistaken perception that there is necessarily restricted liberty in a monarchy belongs to a tradition handed down from Aristotle, who claimed in his *Politics* that a subject could not be said to be free in any government except a democracy.³³ But Aristotle was only writing what the Greeks were taught – and the Romans after them – that subjects in a monarchy were no more than slaves, little realising that the perpetrators of this doctrine had their own agenda to restrain their subjects from attempting a change of government. Hobbes's conclusion is that his peers are completely mistaken and out of touch to subscribe to Greek and Roman theories that encourage a “false show of liberty” and the dissolution of monarchies.

But it is an easy thing, for men to be deceived, by the specious name of liberty; and for want of judgment to distinguish, mistake that for their private inheritance, and birth-right, which is the right of the public only. And when the same error is confirmed by the authority of men in reputation from their writings on this subject, it is no wonder if it produce sedition, and change of government. ... Because the Athenians were taught, to keep them from desire of changing their government, that they were freemen, and all that lived under monarchy were slaves; therefore Aristotle puts it down in his *Politics*, *In democracy*, LIBERTY is to be supposed: for it is commonly held, that no man is FREE in any other government. And as Aristotle; so Cicero, and other writers have grounded their civil doctrine, on the opinions of the Romans, who were taught to hate monarchy, at first, by them that having deposed their sovereign, shared amongst them the sovereignty of Rome; and afterwards by their successors. And by reading of these Greek, and Latin authors, men from their childhood have gotten a habit, under a false show of liberty, of favouring tumults, and of licentious controlling the actions of their sovereigns. ... I think I may truly say, that there was never any thing so dearly bought, as these western parts have bought the learning of the Greek and Latin tongues.³⁴

Hobbes's rejection of the theory of the free state provides a useful backdrop to the political leanings and theories of government that Cowley, a self-confessed Hobbesian disciple *par excellence*, subscribes to.

By the time of Cromwell's demise in 1658 and Cowley's resulting *Vision*, a strong tradition of prose writings that included Hobbes's *Leviathan* had been established through the 1650s. As ever these were written mainly along party lines, with the Republicans who would not be outdone attempting to seize the initiative from Hobbes and other Royalists. Skinner summarises the ideals of these republicans as the assertion of the subject's natural rights and freedom: freedom of speech, of movement and of contract.³⁵ For Skinner, this idea of freedom or civil liberty represents their whole thought and makes them belong to a single school, that of the exponents of republicanism and the free state theory.³⁶ Perhaps the most notable exponent of this Republican ideal was James Harrington in *The Commonwealth of Oceana* in 1656, a work that ranks among the most important contributions in English on the theory of free states. But the ceaseless activity of Milton had also produced *A Defence of the People of England* in 1651 and especially his *Second Defence* in 1654 where he is at the peak of his prose powers. The government as a riposte to Salmacius's *Defensio Regia* of 1649 attacking the regicide expressly commissioned his first *Defence* in 1651. Published in the same year as the *Leviathan*, Milton would have been aware of Hobbes's 1650 publications that contained the central ideas synthesised in the *Leviathan*.³⁷ Hobbes had published his *Humane Nature* in February 1650, at about the same time that the response to Salmacius's attack was initiated, while his *De Corpore Politico* soon followed in May. Milton's writings are full of classical allusions to Greek and Roman writers, the very practice Hobbes militates against.³⁸ But the greatest point of difference between the two thinkers is what "Hobbes considered the most dangerous conception of his time: the right of the individual to judge the truth from his reading of the Bible."³⁹ For Hobbes, with his paramount idea of absolute monarchy, it was the

King that was empowered to interpret religious truth, not the individual who would use it to sow seeds of sedition. Charles I's followers had looked up to him as head of the Anglican Church, but not so dissenters and other factions: "From the Scriptures men drew their justification of rebellion, denying that the will of the king was superior to their interpretation of obedience to God."⁴⁰ In contrast to Hobbes, then, Milton found justification for his ideas in the Bible, using it as an all-important source alongside the classics. The flaring of barely suppressed divisions and the warring of factions after Cromwell's death were to prove Hobbes right, and Cowley would doubtless have agreed wholeheartedly with the assessment that, "as a prophet of England's immediate destiny, Hobbes was therefore a more searching, realistic analyst than Milton."⁴¹ Milton's work is full of republican ideals and monarchical failings, rather than an assessment of the practicalities of Cromwellian rule. Cowley would hardly use any classical references in *Vision* perhaps because like Hobbes he sees no point in implanting Greek and Roman political ideals on English soil. He bases his evidence on Cromwell's record in office, judged from across the political divide, revelling in the freedom to express such views and to show up the mistaken nature of republican ideals of liberty. It is in this sense that Cowley follows Hobbes's example in contributing to shatter the theory of free states for good.

The original title of the *Vision* summed up Cowley's sentiments towards Cromwell, *A Vision Concerning His Late Pretended Highness, Cromwell the Wicked*, before it was changed to the title under which the work has survived. It could be viewed in political terms as a form of royalist invective, a discourse written for the party cause. It is nominally an essay punctuated by poetry pieces, a first attempt at a form of writing to be developed fully in the *Essays*, in full *Several Discourses by way of*

Essays, in Verse and Prose. However, the *Vision* could simply be read also as the dream vision it claims it is, or as a lament for a nation deprived of monarchy and subjected to tyranny. It takes the form of a debate over Cromwell's record, making it a reflection also on the fortunes of the nation during the Interregnum. Loiseau classifies it as political satire, acclaiming it as "the only royalist attack against Cromwell that is worthwhile reading." This is partly due to its form, original in its conception and distinguished from the usual political pamphlets and diatribes, and its "oratorical" style and eloquence, such that even the prose "does not diminish the poetical character of his style."⁴² Further, to give satire such an intellectual character "does not lessen its force; rather, Cowley is never more at ease than when there is a conflict of ideas," whereupon he crushes opposing arguments with irrefutable logic.⁴³ But we disagree with Loiseau's view that Cowley is torn between condemnation of the regime and private admiration for Cromwell.⁴⁴ Our discussion will reveal that Cromwell has no redeeming feature for him, his admission that he condemns him not out of personal hatred but out of love for the nation notwithstanding. The mainly narrative style in the opening section gives the work the hallmarks of a short story also, though it mostly proceeds by means of argument. It is not clear whether Cowley's decision in 1656 to 'die' in a poetic capacity is responsible for this complete change witnessed in the use of a prose form. Before recounting his vision proper, the opening paragraph comments on the funeral procession he witnesses, an introduction that immediately reveals his stance against Cromwell:

And though I bore but little affection, either to the memory of him, or to the trouble and folly of all publick Pageantry, yet I was forced by the importunity of my company to go along with them, and be a Spectator of that solemnity. ... I found there had been much more cost bestowed than either the dead man, or indeed Death it self could deserve. ... The Herse was Magnificent, the Idol Crowned, and the vast multitude of Spectators made up, as it uses to do, no small part of the Spectacle it self. But yet I know not how, the whole was so managed, that, methoughts, it somewhat represented the life of him for whom it was made; Much noise, much tumult, much expence, much magnificence, much vainglory; briefly, a great show, and yet after all this, but an ill sight. At last, (for it seemed long to me, and like his short Reign too, very tedious) the whole Scene past by, and I retired back to my Chamber, weary, and I think more melancholy than any of

Cromwell's death prompts a reflection from Cowley on the unsettled nature of English society from the beginnings of the Civil War: "[I] called forth the sad representation of all the Sins, and all the Miseries that had overwhelmed [England] these twenty years. And I wept bitterly" (*Vision, Essays*, p. 345). He cannot resist the temptation of continuing in verse, for which he writes an eight-stanza poem of eight lines each. He regrets the loss of peace and monarchy, two of his favourite subjects, in the strategic opening and centrally placed fourth stanzas respectively:

Ah, happy Isle, how art thou chang'd and curst,
 Since I was born, and knew thee first!
When Peace, which had forsook the World around,
(Frighted with noise, and the shrill Trumpets sound)
 Thee for a private place of rest,
 And a secure retirement chose
 Wherein to build her *Halcyon* Nest;
No wind durst stir abroad the Air to discompose.

...

When Men to Men respect and friendship bore,
 And God with Reverence did adore;
When upon Earth no Kingdom could have shown
A happier Monarch to us than our own,
 And yet his Subjects by him were
 (Which is a Truth will hardly be
 Receiv'd by any vulgar Ear,
A secret known to few) made happier ev'n than He.

(First Poem in *Vision*, 1-8, 25-32, in *Essays*, pp. 343-45)

Cowley's *Vision* is ostensibly about an argument that the poet sustains in his dream with an unknown interlocutor whose person assumes symbolic proportions, for he would literally play the role of devil's advocate for Cromwell. In the vision, the poet beholds the strange figure of this mysterious visitor who has come to defend Cromwell from his charges, but does not immediately recognise him as the devil:

I was interrupted by a strange and terrible Apparition, for there appeared to me the figure of a man taller than a Gyant. ... His body was naked, but that nakedness adorn'd, or rather deform'd all over, with several figures, after the manner of the ancient *Britons*, painted upon it: and I perceived that most of them were the representation of the late battels in our civil Wars. ... His Eyes were like burning Brass, and there were Crowns of the same metal and that lookt as red-hot too, upon his head. He held in his right hand a Sword that was yet bloody, and never the less the Motto of it was *Pax quæritur bello*, and in his left hand a thick Book, upon the back of which was written in Letters of Gold, Acts, Ordinances, Protestations, Covenants, Engagements, Declarations,

Remonstrances, &c. ... And he said, I am called The North-west Principality, His Highness, the Protector of the Common-wealth of *England, Scotland and Ireland*, and the Dominions belonging thereunto, for I am that Angell, to whom the Almighty has committed the Government of those three Kingdoms. (*Vision, Essays*, pp. 345-46)

The devil pretends to be an angel, but for Cowley he could not fully hide his “terrible” and “deform’d” nature. His great delight at the civil war, the low point for Cowley as a witness to the history of the last twenty years, shows in the way that he advertises it on his body. The book in his hand contains a full documentation of this history, while his sword represents the warfare. The identification of the devil with Cromwell becomes complete when he appropriates the latter’s erstwhile titles for himself. Therefore Cromwell, like the devil, was no angel.

Cowley is no more fooled by the devil’s disguise and impassioned but unconvincing arguments than by Cromwell’s pretence: “By this speech I began to understand perfectly well what kind of Angel his pretended Highness was” (*Vision, Essays*, p. 348). But Cowley freely confesses that he could not have brought himself to tell Cromwell to his face what he really thought of him:

His Highness began to put on a displeased and threatning countenance, ... for I did not believe that *Cromwel* among all his forein Correspondences had ever held any with Angels. However, I was not hardned enough yet to venture a quarrel with him then; and therefore (as if I had spoken to the Protector himself in White-hall) I desired him that his Highness would please to pardon me, if I had unwittingly spoken any thing to the disparagement of a person, whose relations to his Highness I had not the honour to know. (*Vision, Essays*, pp. 346-7)

This passage serves a reminder of Cowley’s arrest when the Protector himself had interviewed him. In that instance Cowley could not mount a quarrel with the displeased and threatening Cromwell, and would then have felt compelled to ask for pardon for any offence towards his person or his cause he might have “unwittingly” caused. In a witty and sophisticated manner Cowley continually blurs the lines of distinction between the devil and Cromwell. In the end he is emboldened to say

what he thinks to the devil's face and thereby obtain some sort of surrogate

satisfaction, for he clearly considers the devil to be Cromwell's double:

By Gods Grace I became so bold as thus to interrupt him. I understand now perfectly (which I guesst at long before) what kind of Angel and Protector you are; ... whether you think Us in this age to be grown so impudently wicked, that there needs no more Art or Disguises to draw us to your party. My Dominion (said he hastily, and with a dreadful furious look) is so great in this World, and I am so powerful a Monarch of it, that I need not be ashamed that you should know me; and that you may see I know you too, I know you to be an obstinate and inveterate Malignant; and for that reason I shall take you along with me to the next Garrison of Ours; from whence you shall go to the Tower, and from thence to the Court of Justice, and from thence you know whither. (*Vision, Essays*, p. 375)

If the previous passage where he pleads with Cromwell appears to be a re-enactment of what transpired during his interview in 1655, then this passage represents what Cowley thinks would have transpired if he had incurred any more of Cromwell's wrath by telling him to his face "what kind of ... Protector you are!" He was still sent to prison until he accepted to write that passage in the Preface. Cowley has no doubt that Cromwell would have sent him to his death if he had conveyed his true sentiments to his face or, as he writes in the previous passage, even to any "person, whose relations to his Highness I had not the honour to know." The stories of Cromwell's perceived enemies being sentenced "to be hanged, drawn, and quartered" would have been all too real for Cowley. People sent to the Tower were usually convicted in the rubber-stamp Court of Justice and then made to pay with their life. Cromwell seems to have asked him to join his party, a request to which Cowley withheld his true answer: "you think Us in this age to be grown so impudently wicked, that there needs no more Art or Disguises to draw us to your party." The plural "Us" represents the Royalists, for it was his importance to the party, and vice versa, that Cromwell sought to exploit. He knew Cowley to be "an obstinate and inveterate Malignant," the term commonly used for a Royalist or a monarchist. Cowley would even have felt this as a compliment; his fierce Royalism was being acknowledged by his political foe. His war poetry, his move from

Cambridge to join the King at Oxford, his passage to France in the company of the queen, and his stay in the exiled court on the continent had all contributed to his well documented Royalist activity. This passage therefore goes some way towards explaining why Cromwell granted him leave to return to England, only to apprehend him soon after on the pretext that he was a suspect in some uprisings of spring 1655. The manner of his interview, the request to join Cromwell's party and the demand for his token recognition of the regime all show that Cowley was a prisoner of conscience, a political prisoner, rather than an underground plotter of ineffective uprisings that usually led to the purported ringleaders being hanged.

The *Vision* does not just recall Cowley's personal problems with the Protectorate, but also provides an assessment of his rule by one alienated from the regime. In spite of his troubled circumstances, Cowley makes it clear that he does not bear personal animosity towards Cromwell's person because he is more concerned with the fate of the nation. His condemnation of Cromwell is not out of hatred to a man now deceased, but out of love instead for the people he subjected to tyranny. He makes this extraordinary claim in a passage where he provides a theoretical overview of tyranny in general, using a style of wise sayings and proverbial statements:

When we fix any infamy upon deceased persons, it should not be done out of hatred to the Dead, but out of love and charity to the Living, that the curses which onely remain in mens thoughts, and dare not come forth against Tyrants whilst they are so, may at least be for ever settled and engraven upon their Memories, to deter all others from the like wickedness. ... Ambition is so subtil a Tempter, and the corruption of humane nature so susceptible of the temptation, that a man can hardly resist it, be he never so much forewarn'd of the evil consequences. ... The mischief of Tyranny is too great, even in the shortest time that it can continue; it is endless and insupportable. ... Since [Tyrants] have left behind them too deep wounds to be ever closed up without a Scar, at least let us set such a Mark upon their memory, that men of the same wicked inclinations may be no less affrighted with their lasting Ignominy, than enticed by their momentary glories. ... I speak not all this out of any private animosity against the person of the late *Protector*. (*Vision*, *Essays*, pp. 350-51)

Reinforcing his claim that his castigation of Cromwell was that of a citizen of a wronged nation rather than that of one disaffected individual, Cowley claims that he

has nothing against his son. As Cromwell's son, Richard, takes over control, Cowley suggests that he would surely have dissociated himself from his father's stewardship:

Here's at last an end of him; And where's now the fruit of all that blood and calamity which his ambition has cost the World? Where is it? Why, his Son has the whole Crop; I doubt he will find it quickly Blasted; I have nothing to say against the Gentleman, or any living of his family, on the contrary I wish him better fortune than to have a long and unquiet possession of his Masters inheritance. Whatsoever I have spoken against his Father, is that which I should have thought even against mine Own, if I had been so unhappy, as that Mine by the same wayes should have left me three Kingdoms [of England, Scotland, and Ireland]. (*Vision, Essays*, p. 372)

Cowley's theoretical propositions and personal disclaimers heighten a rather detached, if not objective, stance he adopts for an assessment of Cromwell's record, for which he brings several charges to lay at the door of the man whose funeral is even then going on. Among these charges is that of Cromwell's dictatorship: "He presently slew the Common-wealth, which he pretended to protect, and set up himself in the place of it" (*Vision, Essays*, p. 346). And then there is the charge of dissembling and wilful falsehood: "If Craft be Wisdom, and Dissimulation Wit, (assisted both and improved with Hypocrisies and Perjuries) I [grant] him to have been singular in both. ... It makes me almost mad when I hear a man commended for his diligence in wickedness" (p. 364). There is the charge of slave-trading: "All murdering, and all torturing is more Humane and more Supportable, than his selling of Christians, Englishmen, Gentlemen; his selling of them (Oh monstrous! Oh incredible!) to be slaves in *America*" (p. 370). There is also the charge of megalomania: "He loved to say and do senceless and fantastical things, onely to shew his power of doing or saying any thing" (p. 371). There is the charge of paranoia: "Let any man shew me an Example of any Nation in the World where there have in the space of four years been made so many Prisoners only out of the endless jealousies of one Tyrants guilty imagination" (p. 370). Following a number of other

charges such as overblown ambition and flagrant disregard for the laws of the land, there is finally the charge to which we could give the name of madness:

To day you should see him ranting so wildly, that no body durst come near him, the morrow flinging of cushions, and playing at Snow-balls with his Servants. This month he assembles a Parliament, and professes himself with humble tears to be onely their Servant and their Minister; the next month he swears By the Living God, that he will turn them out of dores, and he does so. ... What shall we call this? Boldness, or Bruitishness? Rashness, or Phrensie? There is no name can come up to it, and therefore we must leave it without one. (*Vision, Essays*, p. 371)

Cowley's chosen term to sum up all the various sides to Cromwell is that of tyrant, which term he duly defines thus:

I call him a Tyrant, who either intrudes himself forcibly into the Government of his fellow Citizens without any legal Authority over them, or who having a just Title to the Government of a people, abuses it to the destruction, or tormenting of them. So that all Tyrants are at the same time Usurpers. (*Vision, Essays*, p. 353)

Describing Cromwell as "the Supreme Usurpt Authority" (*Visions, Essays*, p. 366),

Cowley shows in several instances how he fits his definition of tyrant-cum-usurper.

"It appears therefore plainly," in one example, "that *Cromwel* was not a Conqueror, but a Thief and Robber of the Rights of the King and Parliament, and an Usurper upon those of the People" (p. 358). The vigorous manner of these accusations takes in the now familiar charge of regicide and the subsequent mockery of the ideal of a 'Commonwealth and Free State,' along with the disastrous tinkering with the constitution and the lost ideal of parliamentary rule. Even in a work founded on a relentless attack on Cromwell's record, this is Cowley's most sustained tirade:

There would be no end to instance in the particulars of all his wickedness; but to sum up a part of it briefly; What can be more extraordinarily wicked, than for a person ... to pretend freedom for all men, and under the help of that pretence to make all men his servants? To take Armes against Taxes of scarce two hundred thousand pounds a year, and to raise them himself to above two Millions? To quarrel for the losse of three or four Eares, and strike off three or four hundred Heads? To pretend the defence of Parliaments, and violently to dissolve all even of his own calling, and almost choosing? To undertake the Reformation of Religion, to rob it even to the very skin, and then to expose it naked to the rage of all Sects and Heresies? To set up Counsels of Rapine, and Courts of Murder? To fight against the King under a commission for him; to take him forceably out of the hands of those for whom he had conquered him; to draw him into his Net, with protestations and vows of fidelity, and when he had caught him in it, to butcher him, with as little shame, as Conscience, or Humanity, in the open face of the whole World? To receive a Commission for King and Parliament, to murder (as I said) the one, and destroy no less impudently the other? ... To usurp three Kingdoms without any shadow of the least pretensions, and to govern them as unjustly as he got them? To set himself up as an Idol and make the very streets of London, like the Valley of *Hinnon*, by burning the bowels of men as a sacrifice to his *Moloch-ship*? ... And lastly, by the severest Judgment of Almighty God, to dye hardned, and mad, and unrepentant, with

Cowley ends the vision in the *Vision* with a poetic flourish, for he does not resist the lure of finishing off with a poem. An angel arrives to rescue the poet in a *deus ex machina* situation, for the fiend is just about to pounce and grab him. The poem thus ends on a note of irony as a genuine divine being makes the angelic descent to thwart the fiendish impostor who had appeared in the guise of an angel. Poignantly, Cowley completes his association of the “trembling Fiend,” “affrighted Tyrant,” and of course Cromwell on the one hand, and that of “Angelique Race,” “*Brittish* Monarchs,” and Jesus on the other:

A flash of Light rather than Lightning came,
So swift, and yet so gentle was the Flame.
Upon it rode, and in his full Career,
Seem'd to my Eyes no sooner There than Here,
The comliest Youth of all th' Angelique Race;
Lovely his shape, ineffable his Face.
The Frowns with which he strook the trembling Fiend,
All smiles of Humane Beauty did transcend,
His Beams of Locks fell part dishevel'd down,
Part upwards curld, and form'd a nat'ral Crown,
Such as the *Brittish* Monarchs us'd to wear;
If Gold might be compar'd with Angels Hair. ...
In his fair hand (what need was there of more?)
No Arms but th' *English* bloody Cross he bore,
Which when he towards th' affrighted Tyrant bent,
And some few words pronounc'd (but what they meant,
Or were, could not, alas, by me be known,
Only I well perceiv'd Jesus was one)
He trembled, and he roar'd, and fled away.

(Final Poem, *Vision*, 3-14, 23-29, in *Essays*, pp. 375-76)

As Cromwell exits from the English stage, the devil flees with him. The dramatic nature in which Cowley portrays his liberation and that of the nation befits the historical events that would unfold from this point and culminate in the Restoration.

‘Ode. Upon His Majesties Restoration and Return’ is a prominent inclusion in *Verses Written on Several Occasions*, occasional poems written after the 1656 *Poems*. He writes a monumental Pindaric ode, his longest yet – nineteen stanzas originally

written in nineteen pages spanning four hundred and forty lines. It was first published under the title of 'Ode. Upon the Blessed Restoration and Returne of His Sacred Majestie, Charls the Second,' before the change of title in 1663. On the evidence of the *Vision* already, the Restoration would surely be a divinely ordained event, just as this original title of the ode indicates. Loiseau mentions the poem only to speak of its grandiloquent tone and inordinate flattery of the King, but notes that the event engendered like pieces from Waller, Marvell, Denham and others.⁴⁵ It should be noted that Cowley speaks of the monarchy as an institution of which Charles II is its latest embodiment, and our discussion would reveal Cowley's position on the theory of the divine right of kings. Hinman engages a fine discussion of the ode as ushering in the restoration of a world of order, the political event complementing other areas in the new order such as the new learning and the new science. "In a perfectly synchronous order, the new faith, the new science, the new political life would simultaneously foster and sustain one another;" he writes, "men might finally hear the heavenly music instead of their own often-repeated discordant notes."⁴⁶ We read the ode as the political poem it is, as showing the full extent of Cowley's political theories that contribute to the new British political order.

Having invented the English ode form, it would have been a welcome opportunity for Cowley to practise it again, for he had refrained from using it in the *Vision* where the few poems took more conventional forms. The *Vision* paves the way for this celebratory ode on the restoration of monarchical government that Cromwell had done so much to attempt to banish to history. Also, the *Vision* ends on an exultant note, despite the mood of lament for damage caused to the English nation that pervades most of the work. This note of celebration, based on Cowley's confident

prediction that the likes of Cromwell will never usurp power again because the Devil who worked in tandem with him has been banished *sine die*, is carried over into the ode. Little wonder, then, that the ode looks back on Cromwell's England, as already elaborated upon in the *Vision*, and compares it to the new order ushered in by the restoration of monarchy:

No frantick *Common-wealths* or *Tyrannies*,
No *Cheats*, and *Perjuries*, and *Lies*,
No *Nets* of humane *Policies*;
No stores of *Arms* or *Gold* (though you could joyn
Those of *Peru* to the great *London Mine*)
No *Towns*, no *Fleets* by Sea, or *Troops* by Land,
No deeply entrencht *Islands* can withstand,
Or any small resistance bring
Against the *naked Truth*, and the *unarmed King*.

(‘Ode. Upon His Majesties Restoration and Return,’ 194-202)

Cowley here is predicting that the monarchy would not be unseated again, especially in light of the way the Commonwealth had proved to be a by-word for tyranny. The King is mentioned in the same breath as “*naked Truth*,” monarchy is the true form of government yet. In stating all this, Cowley is stating a historical fact, namely that the Restoration did bring an end to the notion of England as a “Commonwealth and Free State.” It marked the beginning of the modern British state, born out of a vision of “a system of mixed government in which there is a monarchical element together with an aristocratic senate and a democratic assembly to represent the citizens as a whole.”⁴⁷ Skinner notes that some republicans in the end were not unfavourable to such a constitutional model, no doubt chastened by the failed attempt to implement the free-state theory during the Commonwealth.⁴⁸ These had previously touted a Republican system as the only form of government that could really be termed a free state. But as Hobbes’s previously cited theory shows, “whether a commonwealth be monarchical, or popular, the freedom is still the same.” Again Hobbes is proved right as an increasing number of republicans come to accept that “there is nothing

paradoxical,” in Skinner’s concluding words, “in the thought that ... it is possible, at least in principle, for a monarch to be the ruler of a free state.”⁴⁹

The Restoration ode twice mentions Cromwell by name. In the first instance, Cowley claims that the loss of liberty still riled victims like him, in addition to the sufferings many others were subjected to. He does so in a compact couplet: “That *Name of Cromwell*, which does freshly still / The Curses of so many sufferers fill.” Liberty is personalised and discussed as something that will stay on perpetually, in light of the elimination of Cromwell from the scene, and will be defended by Charles II. Everybody who has been living in exile is invited to come and enjoy this liberty.

Of all, methinks, we least should see
The chearful looks again of *Liberty*.
That *Name of Cromwell*, which does freshly still
The Curses of so many sufferers fill,
Is still enough to make her stay. ...
Your fears are causeless all, and vain
Whilst you return in *Charles* his train,
For *God* does *Him*, that *He* might *You* restore,
Nor shall the world him only call,
Defender of the Faith, but of *ye All*.

(‘Ode. Upon His Majesties Restoration and Return,’ 58-63, 74-8)

“For *God* does *Him*, that *He* might *You* restore!” Cowley’s identification of liberty with Charles II, in contrast to Cromwell, comes as a blow to republican theorists who had made the use of the word freedom the mainstay of their thought. Their error was to conclude that freedom could only be obtained in a free state, that is a republican state. But Hobbes’s teaching is that there is no direct correlation between the notion of freedom and the ideal of the free state. That which matters for the subject’s liberty is not the source but the extent of the law. As Skinner observes, “the concept of liberty underlying the claim that it is only possible to live freely in a free state is itself misleading and confused.”⁵⁰ For Cowley, the proof lay in Cromwell’s tyranny and the boundless hopes for true liberty held out by the Restoration.

More *Lustre* and more *Majesty*,
Than all his *Coronation Pomp* can shew to *Human Eye*.
(‘Ode. Upon His Majesties Restoration and Return,’ 316-23)

The discussion of divine forces extends from the Heavens to the stars and other natural phenomena. The natural order is disrupted when monarchy is usurped. Introducing natural forces into the argument reinforces the interdependence of the human and divine worlds that pervades the ode. Monarchy means peace, order, liberty and indeed truth, all of which virtues Cromwell negated. Cowley suggests right from the poem’s opening that the universal harmony and the peace of the stars is back in evidence now:

Now *Blessings* on you all, ye peaceful *Starrs*,
Which meet at last so kindly, and dispence
Your universal gentle *Influence*,
To calm the stormy *World*, and still the rage of *Warrs*.

...

Auspicious *Star* again arise,
And take thy *Noon-tide station* in the skies,
Again all *Heaven* prodigiously adorn;
For loe! Thy *Charls* again is *Born*. ...
Thou mad’st of that fair *Month* thy choice,
In which *Heaven*, *Air*, and *Sea*, and *Earth*,
And all that’s in them all does *smile*, and does *rejoyce*.

(‘Ode. Upon His Majesties Restoration and Return,’ 1-4, 20-23, 29-31)

Waller unusually includes a footnote in his edition to recount this historical fact of “the Star that appeared at Noon, the day of the Kings Birth, just as the King His Father was riding to St. *Pauls* to give thanks to God for that Blessing” (*Poems*, Footnote, p. 421). Hinman explains that, “Cowley knew that this bright star was of Venus, and therefore a natural phenomenon.”⁵¹ Cowley’s call for this “celestial coincidence” again, for Hinman, amounts to a call for “divine grace, offering men peace and harmony.”⁵²

Armed with evidence of divine intervention, Cowley pointedly evokes the divine rights theory to suggest that the King was merely regaining that authority derived from God. Charles I had been a martyr for the Royalist cause. But God guarded his

son in exile and ensured that he took his rightful place on the throne, for it was his by right of birth and equally by divine dispensation.

He who had seen the noble *British Heir*,...
Might have perceiv'd (me thinks) with ease...
That God had no intent t' extinguish quite
The *pious King's eclipsed Right*.
He who had seen how by the power Divine
All the young *Branches* of this Royal Line
Did in their *fire* without *consuming shine*,
How through a *rough Red sea* they had been led,
By *Wonders* guarded, and by *Wonders* fed. ...
Th' *Almighty Mercy* would at last
Conduct them with a strong un-erring hand
To their own *promis'd Land*.
For all the glories of the *Earth*
Ought to be *entail'd* by right of *Birth*
And all *Heaven's blessings* to come down
Upon *his Race*, to whom alone was given
The double *Royalty* of *Earth* and *Heaven*,
Who *crown'd* the *Kingly* with the *Martyrs Crown*.

(‘Ode. Upon His Majesties Restoration and Return,’ 145, 151, 153-59, 165-173)

“The *pious Kings's eclipsed Right!*” By championing the doctrine of divine rights, Cowley again shows how the fundamental currents of his thoughts agree with those of Hobbes, despite Milton’s protestations. The latter’s first *Defence* sets out vehemently to discredit it by insisting that the powers attributed to the King reside with his subjects:

The majesty of the English people shone more brightly than that of any monarch when they shook off the old superstition of divine right. ... Did not God himself speak at that moment through the voice of the English patriots? A king overthrown who thought himself immune to human laws, superior indeed to the human condition, justified by divine approval.⁵³

Rebutting this position, Hobbes would evolve a theory of government that justifies monarchy, and absolute monarchy at that.⁵⁴ Though he writes in the *Leviathan* of a rule of one sovereign man or a sovereign assembly of men, his system really admits only of monarchy.⁵⁵ He believed that men had deliberately given up their state of nature in favour of a society of law because of the need for peace and security, and that they had done so by pledging obedience in the social contract with the sovereign. The monarchy had stood the test of time and through history had delivered peace and protection for its subjects. Why abandon this system for an untried and flawed

republican one or for a commonwealth fraught with the worst of human nature: selfish ambition, avarice and lust for power? The monarch, above the law as he towers over all in the land in his absolutism, has been the way in the past and would be the way forward, the only way to prevent man from falling again into a state of nature where all become a law unto themselves. When Hobbes later came to defend this absolutism in *Behemoth*, it was the theory of divine rights that he used: "The King owes his crown to God only, and to no man."⁵⁶ This was a restatement of a theory the truth of which Cowley had always been convinced.

Cowley's decision to give the Restoration ode the full Pindaric treatment is evident not just in its structure, but also in the themes under consideration. To the the role of nature, destiny and supernatural forces in the fortunes of Charles II, Cowley proceeds in time-honoured Pindaric fashion to add his subject's claims for hero status; and then he completes the exercise by making personal comments pertaining to the poet's special role. Like the victors from the Games that Pindar celebrated, the King becomes a latter-day hero in spite of, or perhaps because of, his destiny having already been shaped by natural and divine rights. That is why the King cuts a fitting heroic figure that would grace an epic. His birth as prince, the Civil War, life in exile, his many troubles, and finally his fairy-tale restoration to the throne, all contribute to make him an ideal subject for heroic poetry. Cowley depicts what the plot of such a poem might be, the point being that an epic poet would gladly feign such a plot, except that in the case of the King it was actually the story of his life:

So when the wisest *Poets* seek
In all their liveliest colours to set forth
 A *Picture of Heroick* worth,
(The *Pious Trojan*, or the *Prudent Greek*)
They chuse some *comely Prince of heavenly Birth*. ...
But in the *cold of want*, and *storms of adverse chance*,
They *harden* his *young Virtue* by degrees;
The *beauteous Drop* first into *Ice* does *frees*,

And into *solid Chrystal* next advance.
 His *murdered friends* and *kindred* he does see,
 And from his *flaming Country* flee.
 Much is he *tost* at *Sea*, and much at *Land*,
 Does long the force of *angry gods* withstand.
 He does long *troubles* and long *wars* sustain,
 E're he his *fatal Birth-right* gain.
 With no less *time* or *labour* can
Destiny build up such a *Man*,
 Who's with sufficient virtue fill'd
 His *ruin'd Country* to *rebuild*.

(‘Ode. Upon His Majesties Restoration and Return,’ 275-80, 284-97)

The allusions and classical references identify Charles II with many heroes from the European epic tradition, just as Cowley identifies himself with the wisest poets, that is, the epic poets. He is making statements all the time about the workings of poetry, revealing how poets choose stories worthy of epic vastness and grandeur. He offers an example of the way the poet feigns at the beginning of the next stanza where he explains how an armed Charles II could be portrayed if chosen as the hero in an epic. All the poet would need to do is to suggest that Heaven has given him the arms he has used in real battles. The tacit reference to the shield of Achilles made by the mythical Hephaestus in the *Iliad*, or indeed that of Aeneas made by Vulcan in the *Aeneid*, reinforces the link between Charles II and these epic heroes.

Nor without cause are *Arms* from *Heaven*,
 To such a *Hero* by the *Poets* given.
 No *human Metal* is of force t' oppose
 So many and so violent blows.
 Such was the *Helmet*, *Breast-plate*, *Shield*,
 Which *Charles* in all *Attaques* did wield.

(‘Ode. Upon His Majesties Restoration and Return,’ 298-303)

“To such a *Hero* by the *Poets* given!” Cowley draws attention to himself and thus recalls Pindar’s insistence that both hero and poet enjoy immortal renown. In the penultimate stanza again he asserts continuities between himself and Homer and Virgil, mentioning his Muse as well as the epics in question by name:

Did I not know my *humble Verse* must be
 But ill-proportion'd to the *Height* of *Thee*,
Thou, and the *World* should see,
 How much my *Muse*, the *Foe* of *Flattery*,
 Do's make *true Praise* her *Labour* and *Design*;
 An *Iliad* or an *Aeneid* should be *Thine*.

Cowley had remained unfulfilled in his two attempts at epic previously. Perhaps he would have attempted it again, this time confident of finding fulfilment, but his would remain the Pindaric way, for such is the resolute nature of the vow he would repeat in the *Essays*: “The more Heroique strain let others take, / Mine the Pindarique way I’ll make” (‘Ode. Upon Liberty,’ 114-15, in *Essays*, pp. 388-91).

The last stanza of the Restoration ode celebrates the glorious return of another revered national institution, that of Parliament. Its importance to the national psyche could be gauged from Cowley’s fierce criticism in the *Vision* of Cromwell’s abuse of this institution. He uses the strategically placed final stanza to give it the last word. The Houses having now been restored to their rightful standing, he envisions that the lessons of the recent past should ensure that they never be so tampered with in future:

And ill should We deserve this happy day,
 If no acknowledgements we pay
 To you, *great Patriots*, of the *Two*
 Most *truly Other Houses* now,
Who have redeem’d from *hatred* and from *shame*
A *Parliaments* once *venerable name*;
And now the Title of a *House* restore,
To that, which was but *slaughter-house* before. ...
And to your *Successors* th’ *Example* be
Of *Truth, Religion, Reason, Loyalty*. ...
The grateful *Nation* will with joy consent,
 That in *this sense* you should be said,
 (Though yet the *Name* sounds with some dread)
To be the *Long*, the *Endless Parliament*.

(‘Ode. Upon His Majesties Restoration and Return’ 420-27, 433-4, 437-40)

“*Truth, Religion, Reason, Loyalty!*” These constitute Cowley’s cardinal virtues needed for Parliament to endure through time. They are the exact same ones Parliament had been guilty of not showing in the early 1640s, from a royalist perspective, when it was to blame for the outbreak of civil war. The historical connection is enforced by the reference to the Long Parliament. This new Parliament, however, will be known by future generations as the long Parliament in

along with the act of fusing classical thought with his own. From the theme of the happy husbandman relishing the apparent innocence and simplicity of rural life to that of the gentleman farmer who sets up home in the natural setting of the country, Cowley makes full use of the storehouse of classical wisdom. Nowhere is this more evident than in "Of Agriculture," where he explores in its fullest measure the correlation between the ideal of the happy life and the actual delights of the country, making this essay most central to our discussion. This section aims at showing how Cowley's *Essays* reflects on his own life, such that the total identification with antiquity enables him articulate theories on the retired country life that justify his decision to go and live in the countryside.

Along with his *Anacreontiques*, the *Essays* has been the most consistently praised of Cowley's works through the ages, what with another triumphal form in the blend of poetry and prose, its easy and familiar style, and its unity of purpose. Johnson devoted only a short paragraph of five sentences to the *Essays*, but the concluding two were typical of time-honoured critical opinion: "His thoughts are natural, and his style has a smooth and placid equability. ... Nothing is far-sought, or hard-laboured; but all is easy without feebleness, and familiar without grossness."⁶⁰ Few, though, have insisted like Bishop Hurd on the virtues of the poems in particular, which he thought "with all their seeming negligence of *style* and *numbers*, extremely elegant," or again, "why are these verses in every one's mouth, but because they are *the language of the heart?*"⁶¹ Hurd seems to have been deliberately recalling Pope's appraisal of the *Essays*: "Forgot his epic, nay Pindaric art, / But still I love the language of his heart."⁶² In fact, Pope had predicted that the *Essays* would stand the test of time and so they did, gradually attaining a popularity that perhaps reached its

peak in the first quarter of the twentieth century when several editions were released. His words were, “Nor yet shall Waller yield to time, / Nor pensive Cowley’s moral lay.”⁶³ Nethercot and Loiseau excepted, hardly any commentators have bypassed Pope’s “moral lay” for the treatment of the retirement motif in the *Essays*. By far the most important treatment of this theme has been done by Maren-Sofie Rostvig as part of her seventeenth-century study, The Happy Man, where Cowley’s engaging treatment of this theme marks his age. She asserts that, “[In] the essays and poems of Abraham Cowley ... were penned the most lucid exposition and the warmest defence of the retired country life in the seventeenth century.”⁶⁴ In our discussion demonstrating the synchronisation of Cowley’s act of retirement in life to the philosophy of retirement in his art, the considerably vast treatment he gives to this theme will become evident.

A key aspect of the *Essays* is its projection of a set of ideal circumstances for a happy life. Primarily this life is to be found in a state of retirement or withdrawal from public life. Rostvig comments on the defiance that yields forth retirement: “The act of retirement is a glove flung in the face of society. It is a supreme gesture of disgust with the world, and a manifesto of individual independence.”⁶⁵ For Cowley retirement does not only make good sense, also poets throughout the ages have preached it. Thus we read that, “[Poets] have not onely withdrawn themselves from the Vices and Vanities of the Grand World into the innocent happiness of a retired Life: but have commended and adorned nothing so much by their Ever-living Poems” (“Of Agriculture,” *Essays*, p. 406). Cowley’s conception of the retired life is further distinguished in a twofold manner: it is to be lived in the country; and it precludes idleness and ease, encouraging instead both intellectual and practical

pursuits such as gardening or the “art of husbandry” (p. 406). His ideas are neither novel nor revolutionary, for he claims to be part of a tradition perpetrated by the ancients: the Greeks, Hesiod and Homer, and especially the Romans, Virgil and Horace. He cites the Virgilian model as the basis for his philosophy, opening this pivotal essay in this manner:⁶⁶

The first wish of *Virgil* was to be a good Philosopher; the second, a good Husbandman. ... [God] made him one of the best Philosophers, and best Husbandmen, and to adorn and communicate both those faculties, the best Poet. To be a Husbandman, is but a retreat from the City; to be a Philosopher, from the world, or rather, a Retreat from the world, as it is mans; into the world, as it is Gods. ... The best mixture of humane affairs that we can make, are the employments of a Country life. (“Of Agriculture,” *Essays*, p. 400)

The happy life was therefore to be found in the countryside, mixing the delights of philosophy and husbandry to create the perfect balance between mental and physical sharpness. The happy man is he who would detach himself from the world in order to understand it better, as well as enjoying the simplicity, freedom, and the pleasures nature offers in the country. Cowley would seek to experience this life for himself by abandoning the city of London for the country, a decision of great moment in the construction of his philosophy in the *Essays*. Settling in Barn Elms in 1662 and then Chertsey in 1665 where he writes most of the *Essays*, Cowley would therefore seek to live according to the ideal pattern of the happy life he describes.

And yet Cowley might not have retired, much less moved to the country if he had been offered public office by the King in the wake of the Restoration, his fondness for the country notwithstanding. It had been common for Royalists to seek obscurity during the Interregnum when “Practically all the Royalist poets [offered] poetic homage in front of the shrine of the goddess of solitude.”⁶⁷ Fuelled by his harassment and incarceration by the regime, Cowley’s *cri de coeur* had been the wish he expressed in his 1656 Preface for retirement in some obscure retreat even as

far away as the American plantations. But why contemplate retirement or obscurity after the supposedly happy Restoration? Cowley's decision to move away from the political centre of London was taken after his private hopes for public office were cruelly dashed. The problem arose when the Mastership of the Savoy Hospital, promised to Cowley by Charles I and acknowledged by the future Charles II, was refused him.⁶⁸ The King only intervened on his behalf in the matter of his fellowship at Cambridge, by writing to the University to preserve his status as Fellow and thereby ensuring for him a steady income by way of a stipend.⁶⁹ Cowley wrote a petition to the King staking his claim for the Savoy position without success, hence his grave sense of injustice.⁷⁰ The immediate offshoot of his disappointment was a poem written in 1662 conspicuously entitled 'The Complaint,' a prominent piece in *Verses Written on Several Occasions*. This poem would reveal the inescapable influence of political forces on Cowley's life that push him towards retirement.

'The Complaint' is the poem that contains the famous "Melancholy Cowley" (7, 103).⁷¹ It takes the form of a debate between the Muse and her poet. She chides him for abandoning his true station in life as a career poet and becoming embroiled in the world of the court, right at the political centre of the city and the state. She treats him like a prodigal son who has squandered his youth and the talent she gave him. She is especially disappointed because his talent was as huge as was ever bestowed on anyone by any of the nine Muses.⁷²

She touch'd him with her Harp, and rais'd him from the Ground;
 The shaken strings Melodiously Resound.
 Art thou return'd at last, said she,
 To this forsaken place and me?
 Thou Prodigal, who didst so loosely waste
 Of all thy Youthful years, the good Estate;
 Art thou return'd here, to repent too late? ...
 But, when I meant t' adopt Thee for my Son,
 And did as learn'd a Portion assign,
 As ever any of the mighty Nine

Had to their dearest Children done;
 When I resolv'd t' exalt thy anointed Name,
 Among the Spiritual Lords of peaceful Fame;
 Thou Changling, thou, bewitcht with noise and show,
 Wouldst into Courts and Cities from me go; ...
 Thou would'st, forsooth, be something in a State,
 And business thou would'st find, and would'st Create. ...
 Business! The thing which I of all things hate,
 Business! The contradiction of thy Fate.

(‘The Complaint,’ 21-7, 31-8, 41-2, 46-7)

This passage inspires Hopkins and Mason who use Cowley's same words in their witty masterpiece, The Story of Poetry, when asserting that the traditional poet's person and mission necessarily precludes business activity.⁷³ Not satisfied with rebuking the poet, who contradicts his fate by getting involved in what should have been the alien world of state affairs, the Muse would proceed in the following stanza to deliver a damning verdict on his fortunes. She alleges that he forsook her, thereby renouncing his claims to knowledge, fame and liberty. She mocks at his assumptions that the Restoration would bring him rewards when in reality he has been cast adrift, isolated and unrewarded. The following stanza is the high point of the Muse's pronouncements and is particularly important for expressing in verse many of the sentiments already noted in the aforementioned petition to the King:⁷⁴

Go, Renegado, cast up thy Account,
 And see to what Amount
 Thy foolish gains by quitting me:
 The sale of Knowledge, Fame, and Liberty,
 The fruits of thy unlearn'd Apostacy,
 Thou thought'st if once the publick storm were past,
 All thy remaining Life should sun-shine be:
 Behold the publick storm is spent at last,
 The Sovereign is tost at Sea no more,
 And thou, with all the Noble Company,
 Art got at last to shore.
 But whilst thy fellow Voyagers, I see
 All marcht up to possess the promis'd Land,
 Thou still alone (alas) dost gaping stand,
 Upon the naked Beach, upon the Barren Sand.

(‘The Complaint,’ 48-62)

Cowley's response to the Muse is a long and impassioned attack of his own. He blames his misfortunes on her because she contracted a relationship with him right from birth, at which time she stole him and abused his soul by making him her poet:

And to her thus, raising his thoughtful head,
The Melancholy *Cowley* said,
Ah wanton foe, dost thou upbraid
The Ills which thou thy self hast made?
When in the Cradle, Innocent I lay,
Thou, wicked Spirit, stolest me away,
And my abused Soul didst bear,
Into thy new-found Worlds I know not where,
Thy Golden Indies in the Air;
And ever since I strive in vain
My ravisht freedom to regain;
Still I Rebel, still thou dost Reign,
Lo, still in verse against thee I complain.
(‘The Complaint,’ 102-114)

But the thrust of his remarks would be directed at the King: “Teach me not then, ... / The Court, and better King t’accuse.” He professes not to want to criticise the King but this is the *recusatio* technique whereby he makes the accusation even as he denies it. He takes a philosophical view of his circumstances as the will of God, referring to the King’s example of patience during the years in exile.⁷⁵ The Muse therefore has no cause to reproach the King, considering that her own reward of poetic renown and literary fame was the slowest of all as it would normally come only after death.

Teach me not then, O thou fallacious Muse,
The Court, and better King t’accuse;
The Heaven under which I live is fair;
The fertile soil will a full Harvest bear;
Thine, thine is all the Barrenness; if thou
Mak’st me sit still and sing, when I should plough,
When I but think, how many a tedious year
Our patient Sovereign did attend
His long misfortunes fatal end;
How chearfully, and how exempt from fear,
On the Great Sovereigns Will he did depend:
I ought to be accurst, if I refuse
To wait on his, O thou fallacious Muse!
Kings have long hands (they say) and though I be
So distant, they may reach at length to me.
However, of all Princes thou
Shouldst not reproach Rewards for being small or slow;
Thou who rewardest but with popular breath,
And that too after death.
(‘The Complaint,’ 144-162)

Following in the wake of 'The Complaint' is Cowley's move to the country in 1662. He obtains a property in Barnes called Barn Elms that year and would later move to Chertsey in 1665 where he would spend the rest of his life.

Cowley was leaving behind a Restoration court fraught with intrigue and marked by a hedonistic life of luxury and ease. He was leaving, in the words of Rostvig, for "the greater happiness inherent in a life of rustic simplicity and morality." Also, she finds similarities between Augustan Rome and Restoration England:

The truckling courtiers, the crowded and unsanitary towns, the vices inherent in city life and its uncomfortable publicity ... were common to both. Men like Horace and Virgil, Vaughan and Cowley were prompted by contemporary conditions to confront their own greedy age with the picture of an earlier Golden Age of rustic innocence and harmless mirth. It is out of the thorough disapproval of modern times that retirement poetry proper arises. When public office becomes associated with ignominious dependence, greatness with incessant toil and absence of privacy, ambition with insecurity, company with noisy corruption, and business with a greed that defeats its own purpose, then the time is ripe to renounce all these things and return to a state of nature conceived as simple, secure, quiet and innocent.⁷⁶

It is not surprising that Cowley turns to classical thought and practice for solace, inspiration and example, his obtention of a property in the country inevitably drawing comparisons with Horace's Sabine farm.⁷⁷ If he seeks to emulate Virgil's example, then he finds even more inspiration in Horace's various odes and epodes, satires and epistles where the happiness of rural existence is unremittingly propounded. Of the Horatian character of the *Essays*,⁷⁸ Hinman, in his sole comment on the essays, observes that,

[Cowley] knew that a supreme source of human pleasure is the harmony and repose of a simple, ordered, integrated intellectual life disturbed by few material desires; from such pleasure emerges poetry of stately calm and grace, of profound emotions rooted in the earth. ... [His] verse *Essays* achieve this Horatian quality.⁷⁹

Cowley himself explains, again in the essay "Of Agriculture," why he so applauds the Roman poet's example, Horace fittingly mentioned alongside Virgil:

Among the *Romans* we have in the first place, our truly Divine *Virgil*, who, though by the favour of *Mecænas* and *Augustus*, he might have been one of the chief men of *Rome*, yet chose rather to employ much of his time in the exercise, and much of his immortal wit in the praise and instruction of a Rustique Life. ... The next Man whom we are much obliged to, both for his Doctrine and Example, is the next best Poet in the world to *Virgil*; his dear friend *Horace*, who when *Augustus* had desired *Mecænas* to perswade him to come and live domestically, and at the same Table with him, and to be Secretary of State of the whole World under him, ... [he] could not be tempted to forsake his *Sabin*, or Tiburtin Mannor, for so rich and so glorious a trouble. There was never, I think, such an example as this in the world, that he should have so much moderation and courage as to refuse an offer of such greatness. ... If I should produce all the passages of this excellent Author upon the several Subjects which I treat of in this Book, I must be obliged to translate half his works. ... I run not to contend with those before me, but follow to applaud them. ("Of Agriculture," *Essays*, pp. 407-8)

Cowley could do Horace no greater honour than to place him next only to Virgil in greatness, and his manner of introducing Horace next to Virgil as poet and friend has continued through to our time. For example, Hopkins and Mason offer a telling insight into the poet that Horace was and why he was so predisposed to influencing generations:

"Who is [Virgil's] friend whose features seem to combine good humour with wisdom?"
 "A clear-voiced teacher *and* a Poet! ... His verse will seem to crown distress with garlands, and to charm the human soul into a happiness like that this Poet will enjoy on the Sabine farm he will love so well. His shorter poems will dance with briskness, delicacy, jollity and good-humour while he advises his audience to shun the deeps and rocks of life. With light but earnest voice he will eulogise peace, leisure, freedom, moderated desires, and a joyful inner content. Even when rebuking the vices of men, this Poet will speak with the voice of the most genial of drinking companions and he will seem to be looking on all that err with silent pity. He will appear to talk his audience into sense with graceful negligence. In this incarnation, loved as a life-long familiar friend, known as HORACE, you will also be a great and clear-voiced teacher of future Poets."⁸⁰

"These [discourses] he intended as a real Character of his own Thoughts, upon the point of his Retirement," Sprat was to write of Cowley's intention in the *Essays*.⁸¹

With his life and his art feeding off or mirroring one another, the *Essays* take on the dimension of a justification for his rural retirement, building in the process a body of thought and an exposition on retired country life unrivalled in the seventeenth century. For Rostvig, Cowley succeeds in showing that the *Essays* were more than just the result of political despair, that they reveal a "mature philosophy:"

Cowley's discourses were written to defend his retirement into the country-side after the Restoration. He certainly succeeded, if his aim was to prove that this act was not prompted merely by resentment at not obtaining the reward which his faithful services certainly had merited, but by a mature philosophy honoured by the sanction of the most impeccable classical authors. Never

before had so much been written in such an excellent style to glorify the obscure life.⁸²

The political backdrop and the disappointment expressed in ‘The Complaint’ therefore provide only a partial explanation for Cowley’s retirement as expressed in his philosophy and as acted out in real life. In order to understand this fully we need to seek in the *Essays* themselves the full measure of Cowley’s thought and practice.

The concluding essay, “Of Myself,” cites Cowley’s fundamental reason for embracing the retirement ideal; namely that it stems from his very nature.⁸³ While it is true that the voice of reason always militated against life in the city and the court where he was never at ease, by far the most important reason is what he calls

“Natural Inclination:”

Now though I was here engaged in wayes most contrary to the Original design of my life, that is, into much company, and no small business, and into a daily sight of Greatness, both Militant and Triumphant yet all this was so far from altering my Opinion, that it onely added the confirmation of Reason to that which was before but Natural Inclination. I saw plainly all the Paint of that kind of Life, the nearer I came to it. (“Of Myself,” *Essays*, p. 458).

The ideal existence was one where the Muses and books, liberty and rest, gardens and fields remained the touchstone, a life of solitude in a modest accommodation tending to Letters and Philosophy, having few friends and working on his garden.

Some of these ideas are expressed in a poem he inserts in “Of Myself:”

Nor by me ere shall you,
You of all Names the sweetest, and the best,
You Muses, Books, and Liberty and Rest;
You Gardens, Fields, and Woods forsaken be,
As long as Life it self forsakes not Me.

(Poem in “Of Myself,” *Essays*, p. 459)

From the very beginnings of his life he recognised in himself the yearnings for solitude, an attitude ingrained among “the natural affections of my soul:”

As far as my Memory can return back into my past Life, before I knew, or was capable of guessing what the world, or glories, or business of it were, the natural affections of my soul gave me a secret bent of aversion from them, as some Plants are said to turn away from others, by an Antipathy imperceptible to themselves, and inscrutable to mans understanding. (“Of Myself,” *Essays*, p. 456)

As if to prove this natural inclination that manifested itself from his earliest beginnings, he copies sections of 'A Vote,' one of the poems from the 1630s *Sylva* collection he had composed when just into his teens. His lifelong consistency of views is summed up in "this happy State" of life the poem explores. In his words, "That I was then of the same mind as I am now may appear by the latter end of an Ode, which I made when I was but thirteen years old" (p. 456). Here are the three stanzas he copies from the original:

9.

This only grant me, that my means may lye
Too low for Envy, for Contempt too high.
Some Honor I would have
Not from great deeds, but good alone.
The unknown are better than ill known.
Rumour can ope' the Grave,
Acquaintance I would have, but when 't depends
Not on the number, but the choice of Friends.

10.

Books should, not business entertain the Light,
And sleep, as undisturb'd as Death, the Night.
My House a Cottage, more
Then Palace, and should fitting be
For all my Use, no Luxury.
My Garden painted o're
With Natures hand, not Arts; and pleasures yield,
Horace might envy in his Sabine field.

11.

Thus would I double my Lifes fading space,
For he that runs it well, twice runs his race.
And in this true delight,
These unbought sports, this happy State,
I would not fear nor wish my fate,
But boldly say each night,
To morrow let my Sun his beams display,
Or in clouds hide them; I have liv'd to Day.
(‘A Vote’ in “Of Myself”)⁸⁴

So Cowley was already falling under Horace's spell at the age of thirteen, his precocity informed by an insatiable reading of the classical poets. His comment on the poem lauds their enduring influence. "You may see by it, I was even then acquainted with the Poets (for the Conclusion is taken out of *Horace*)," he writes, "They were like Letters cut into the Bark of a young Tree, which with the Tree still

grow proportionably” (“Of Myself,” *Essays*, p. 457). Even among the *Sylva* poems, ‘A Vote’ was just one of many examples that show how Cowley’s ideal life has remained the same. Others include the odes he wrote with titles such as, ‘That a pleasant Poverty is to be preferred before discontented Riches,’ ‘On the uncertainty of Fortune. A Translation,’ and ‘Upon the shortnesse of Mans life.’ These titles from yesteryear appear to have been crystallised into the title of his ninth essay, “The shortness of Life and the uncertainty of Riches.”

The essay that demonstrates Cowley’s determination to move from London once he has made up his mind to leave, is “The Danger of Procrastination. *A Letter to Mr. S. L.*”⁸⁵ Its appearance in the penultimate position shows that the *Essays* were not ordered chronologically, for this one appears to have been written first. It is the one essay where it is clear that he is yet to retire to the country, and could be dated early 1662.⁸⁶ It opens thus: “I am glad that you approve and applaud my design, of withdrawing my self from all tumult and business of the world. ... But nevertheless you would advise me not to precipitate that resolution but to stay a while longer” (*Essays*, p. 452). To convince the addressee that his mind is made up to move post-haste, he rejects the argument of “*festina lente*” (“hasten slowly”) and turns instead to Horace’s advice in *Epistles* 1.2 which he renders thus:

Begin, be bold, and venture to be wise;
He who defers this work from day to day,
Does on a Rivers Bank expecting stay,
Till the whole stream, which stopt him, should be gon,
That runs, and as it runs, forever will run on.

(Poem in “The Danger of Procrastination,” *Essays*, p. 454)

So memorable is Cowley’s rendition of that last line “That runs, and as it runs, forever will run on,” that Johnson cited it as an “example of representative versification, which perhaps no other English line can equal.”⁸⁷ Insisting that he is

not a procrastinator, and yet has given mature reflection to the issue of his retirement, he concludes the essay with two imitations of Martial's epigrams. The first one is done in a light, mocking tone proclaiming the foolishness of waiting for tomorrow:

To morrow you will Live, you always cry;
In what far Country does this morrow lye,
That 'tis so mighty long 'ere it arrive?
Beyond the *Indies* does this Morrow live?
'Tis so far fetcht this Morrow, that I fear
'Twill be both very Old and very Dear.
To morrow I will live, the Fool does say;
To Day it self's too Late, the wise liv'd Yesterday.
(*'Mart. Lib. 5. Epigr. 59'*)

The second epigram is more personal as he makes his point that there is no reason for him to hold back from moving to the country and into retirement. Again it is typically mocking, an almost gentle chiding:

Wonder not, Sir (you who instruct the Town
In the true Wisdom of the Sacred Gown)
That I make haste to live, and cannot hold
Patiently out, till I grow Rich and Old.
Life for Delays and Doubts no time does give,
None ever yet, made Haste enough to Live. ...
My humble thoughts no glittering roofs require,
Or Rooms that shine with ought but constant Fire. ...
Pleasures abroad, the sport of Nature yields
Her living Fountains, and her smiling Fields. ...
Thus let my life slide silently away,
With Sleep all Night, and Quiet all the Day.
(*'Mart. Lib. 2. Ep. 90,' 1-6, 11-12, 15-16, 23-4*)

The ordering for the remaining essays places "Of Liberty" in first place, the intention here stated applying to the whole body of essays, namely how the individual uses liberty and which of life's circumstances truly enables this liberty.

The Liberty of a private man [consists] in being Master of his own Time and Actions, as far as may consist with the Laws of God and of his Country. Of this ... only we are here to discourse, and to enquire what estate of Life does best seat us in the possession of it. ("*Of Liberty*," *Essays*, p. 377)

Cowley's reflections on the individual's use of liberty are inspired by a lifelong vision of the happy life as one rooted in simplicity, as demonstrated in this prayer asking only for bread and liberty:

For the few Houres of Life allotted me,

Give me (great God) but Bread and Liberty,
I'll beg no more; if more thou'rt pleas'd to give,
I'll thankfully that Overplus receive:
If beyond this no more be freely sent,
I'll thank for this, and go away content.

(Poem in "Of Liberty," *Essays*, p. 386)

The poetry that concludes the essay comprises imitations of three of Martial's epigrams and one original Pindaric, 'Ode. Upon Liberty.' Whilst this ode of over a hundred lines argues the case for freedom, it is the first two epigrams that are most relevant in the context of retirement and the happy life. In the first epigram Cowley identifies with the "Poetick Friend" who discusses his prayers and hopes:

Well then, Sir, you shall know how far extend
The Prayers and Hopes of your Poetick Friend;
He does not Palaces nor Manors crave,
Would be no Lord, but less a Lord would have.
The ground he holds, if he his own, can call,
He quarrels not with Heaven because 'tis small:
Let gay and toilsome Greatness others please,
He loves of homely Littleness the Ease.

(*Martial. Lib. 2. Vota tui breviter,* 1-8)

The second epigram is a delightful piece on the meaning of freedom. The "certain way" to be free is to be able to fulfil a series of conditions, especially the ability to use the power of the mind to shun a life of luxury and worldly trappings. True power and greatness lie in the mind, not in flashy and flamboyant appearances, material things, grandiose houses or positions of power in the state:

Would you be Free? 'Tis your chief wish, you say,
Come on; I'll shew thee, Friend, the certain way,
If to no Feasts abroad thou lov'st to go,
Whilst bounteous God does Bread at home bestow,
If thou the goodness of thy Cloaths dost prize
By thine own Use, and not by others Eyes.
(If onely safe from Weathers) thou can'st dwell,
I[n] a small House, but a convenient Shell,
If thou without a Sigh, or Golden wish,
Canst look upon thy Beechen Bowl, and Dish;
If in thy Mind such power and greatness be,
The *Persian King's* a Slave compar'd with Thee.

(*Martial. L. [2.]. Vis fieri Liber?* 1-8)

The joys of life away from the multitude are captured in the second essay, “Of Solitude,” that opens with this maxim: “*Nunquam minus solus, quam cum solus*” - “Never less alone than when alone” (“Of Solitude,” *Essays*, p. 392). The power of the mind comes to the fore in the state of solitude, that is, a state of withdrawal from the world that allows the individual paradoxically to study and understand the world better. Only very few could boast this power: “Solitude can be well fitted and set right, but upon a very few persons. They must have enough knowledge of the World to see the vanity of it, and enough Virtue to despise all Vanity” (p. 393). When we come to the poem that concludes the essay, we realise that it is unique in the *Essays* for the tone Cowley adopts and what he says about London. He associates the capital with misery and portrays it as a monster and as a foolish city deserving of pity. Equally important is the other extreme, that is, the way the poem firmly links the happy state to life within a natural setting in the country. It is an original, untitled, twelve-stanza composition:⁸⁸

2.

Hail, the poor Muses richest Mannor Seat!
 Ye Countrey Houses and Retreat,
 Which all the happy Gods so Love,
 That for you oft they quit their Bright and Great
 Metropolis above.

3.

Here Nature does a House for me erect,
 Nature the wise Architect,
 Who those fond Artists does despise
 That can the fair and living Trees neglect;
 Yct the Dead Timber prize.

4.

Here let me careless and unthoughtful lying,
 Hear the soft winds above me flying,
 With all their wanton Boughs dispute,
 And the more tuneful Birds to both replying
 Nor be my self too Mute.

...

7.

Oh Solitude, first state of Human-kind!
 Which blest remain'd till man did find
 Even his own helpers Company.
 As soon as two (alas!) together joy'n'd,
 The Serpent made up Three.

...
11.

Whilst this hard Truth I teach, methinks, I see
The Monster *London* laugh at me,
I should at thee too, foolish City,
If it were fit to laugh at Misery,
But thy Estate I pity.

12.

Let but thy wicked men from out thee go,
And all the Fools that crowd the[e] so,
Even thou who dost thy Millions boast,
A Village less then *Islington* wilt grow,
A Solitude almost.

(Concluding Poem, "Of Solitude," 6-20, 31-5, 51-60, in *Essays*, pp. 395-97)

For the first time Cowley moves the discussion from a state of contentment to physical retirement, from the theory of a life that invests the individual with true liberty to the concrete need to forsake London and abscond to the country.

The third essay, "Of Obscurity," extols the virtues of the obscure life summed up in this maxim: "*Bene qui latuit, bene vixit*, He has lived well, who has lain well hidden" ("Of Obscurity," *Essays*, p. 398). The ultimate example is that of Epicurus:

Epicurus lived there [in Athens] very well, that is, Lay hid many years in his Gardens, so famous since that time, with his friend *Metrodorus*, ... that in the midst of the most talk'd-of and Talking Country in the world, they had lived so long, not only without Fame, but almost without being heard of. ("Of Obscurity," *Essays*, p. 398).

For all his admiration of Epicurus as a model of the obscure life, Cowley's conviction is that the country, and not cities like Athens and London, offered the ideal conditions to lay hidden. The following passage expands on the ideal life of the well-hidden individual or "innocent Deceiver of the world," repeating in prose what he began recording in 'A Vote' all those years before:

I account a person who has a moderate Minde and Fortune, and lives in the conversation of two or three agreeable friends, with little commerce in the world besides, who is esteemed well enough by his few neighbours that know him, and is truly irreproachable by any body, and so after a healthful quiet life, ... goes more silently out of it then he came in. This innocent Deceiver of the world, as *Horace* calls him, this *Muta persona*, I take to have been more happy in his Part, then the greatest Actors that fill the Stage with show and noise. ("Of Obscurity," *Essays*, p. 399)

The poem that concludes the essay is a relatively short one of twenty-six lines, a translation of Seneca's choral ode on obscurity. It serves to reinforce Cowley's desire to live a life protected by quiet and obscurity:

Here wrapt in th' Arms of Quiet let me ly;
Quiet, Companion of Obscurity.
Here let my Life, with as much silence slide,
As Time that measures it does glide.
Nor let the Breath of Infamy or Fame,
From town to town Echo about my Name.
(*Seneca, ex Thyeste, Act. 2. Chor.,* ' 11-16)

The fourth essay, "Of Agriculture," is the key essay in our discussion that follows a review of the other essays. We have already demonstrated its pivotal nature when using some of its prose passages to clarify Cowley's philosophy, in the same way we intend to show that the poetry of retirement in the *Essays* finds its strongest expression here. "Of Agriculture" would show also the extent to which Cowley attends to the country versus city debate ignited in "Of Solitude," this against the backdrop of events in his life.

The fifth essay is "The Garden. *To J. Evelyn Esquire,*" in its original guise a letter written in August 1666.⁸⁹ When Cowley had previously written to Evelyn in 1663, he was living at Barn Elms and "was at last, then, realizing his heart's desire," for "he was becoming an enthusiastic amateur gardener."⁹⁰ This time, writing from Chertsey, Cowley opens with his often-stated wish:

I never had any other desire so strong, and so like to Covetousness as that one which I have had always, that I might be master at last of a small house and large garden, with very moderate conveniences joyned to them, and there dedicate the remainder of my life only to the culture of them and study of Nature. ("The Garden," *Essays*, p. 420)

The essay could be summed up as a celebration of Evelyn's success in finding the happy state in the fashion of Epicurus: "I know no body that possesses more private happiness then you do in your Garden" ("The Garden," *Essays*, p. 421). Perhaps the

title of “The Garden” could be attributed to the Athenian who delivered his teachings in the garden he made his home, whereupon a sect was even named the Garden in his honour. The poem that concludes the essay is an original composition in the Pindaric manner, spanning a full two hundred and twenty-eight lines. The first sentence itself spans a dozen lines, used by Cowley to commend his friend’s choice of books and gardens around which he builds his happiness:

Happy art Thou, whom God does bless
With the full choice of thine own Happiness;
And happier yet, because thou’rt blest
With prudence, how to choose the best:
In Books and Gardens thou hast plac’d aright
(Things which thou well dost understand;
And both dost make with thy laborious hand)
Thy noble, innocent delight:
And in thy virtuous Wife, where thou again dost meet
Both pleasures more refin’d and sweet:
The fairest Garden in her Looks,
And in her Mind the wisest Books.

(Concluding Poem, “The Garden,” 1-12, in *Essays*, pp. 422-28)

Acknowledging that his friend has found the happy state like a latter-day Epicurus is the highest praise Cowley could have heaped on him. But Evelyn has found his happiness in the capital without necessarily hauling himself away from the public eye. In the poems in “Of Agriculture,” Cowley would argue that it is only in a country retreat that he could attain his own happy state.⁹¹

The remaining essays deal with some of Cowley’s grand philosophical and moral themes in an essentially Horatian manner. The sixth and seventh essays, “Of Greatness” and “Of Avarice” respectively, continue with the individual’s happiness which is concomitant neither with the trappings of power and wealth nor with “the other many Inconveniences of grandeur I have spoken of dispersly in several Chapters” (“Of Greatness,” *Essays*, p. 434). The poems that conclude them are exclusively imitations of Horace and could be read as a trinity of poems linked

together by the moral stance they adopt. “Of Greatness” is concluded by *Odes* 3.1 on the transience of power and wealth, asserting that even Kings are like mere pigmies in the eyes of the gods and death befalls all; while “Of Avarice” finishes with two pieces, *Satires* 1.1 and *Odes* 3.16. The satire lambastes the tendency among humans to envy the lot of others as well as human greed and avarice evident in the insatiable desire to acquire and hoard wealth. For its part, *Odes* 3.16 preaches how wealth corrupts and gives the illusion of power, finishing with the moral that wealth has very tenuous kinship with the truly happy state:

Much will always wanting be,
To him who much desires. Thrice happy He
To whom the wise indulgency of Heaven,
With sparing hand, but just enough has given.
(*A Paraphrase on an Ode in Horace's third Book,* 61-4)

The essentially moral stance and guidance for living in these essays would again occur in “Of Agriculture” where the happy life is shown to preclude power and wealth. Cowley would argue that the temptation to make these trappings the chief pursuits of life is more likely in the city than in the seemingly innocent countryside.

The eighth essay, “The dangers of an Honest man in much Company,” shows why solitude and obscurity are to be preferred to human company. The presence of the many ensures the use of various guises to entrap or victimise the few:

Do ye wonder that a vertuous man should love to be alone? It is hard for him to be otherwise; he is so, when he is among ten thousand: neither is the Solitude so uncomfortable to be alone without any other creature, as it is to be alone, in the midst of wild Beasts. Man is to man all kinde of Beasts, a fauning Dog, a roaring Lion, a thieving Fox, a robbing Wolf, a dissembling Crocodile, a treacherous Decoy, and a rapacious Vulture. (“... An Honest man in much Company,” *Essays*, p. 443)

Drawing from his own experience in Chertsey where he settled in 1665, Cowley observes that men manifest similar traits everywhere and therefore one must be wary of human company anywhere, for even in the country all were not innocent:

I thought when I went first to dwell in the Country, that without doubt I should have met there with the simplicity of the old Poetical Golden Age: I thought to have found no Inhabitants there,

but such as the Shepherds of Sir *Phil. Sydney* in *Arcadia*, or of *Monsieur d'Urfe* upon the Banks of *Lignon*; and began to consider with my self, which way I might recommend no less to Posterity the Happiness and Innocence of the Men of *Chertsea*: but to confess the truth, I perceived quickly, by infallible demonstrations, that I was still in Old *England*. (*Essays*, pp. 446-7)

The poem that concludes the essay is an adaptation of 'Claudian's Old Man of Verona.' The old man of the title has lived all his life in the same cottage where he was born, working the earth and never travelling anywhere, not even nearby Verona. And yet his happiness is all the more glaring for making life's journey at home:

Happy the Man, whom the same humble place,
(Th' hereditary Cottage of his Race)
From his first rising infancy has known, ...
Which both preserv'd his Life, and gave him birth.
H'as only heard of near Verona's Name,
And knows it like the Indies, but by Fame. ...
About the spacious World let others roam,
The Voyage Life is longest made at home.

(*'Claudian's Old Man of Verona,'* 3-5, 8, 23-4, 29-30)

Even allowing for as extreme a case as that of this man who has lived in isolation, Cowley's stance remains that social exclusion does not necessarily amount to a lonely experience; anyway human society is fraught with manifold ills.

The title of the ninth essay is quite explicit: "The shortness of Life and uncertainty of Riches." It seeks to show the fickleness of human life and fortunes: "God takes away sometimes the Man from his Riches, and no less frequently Riches from the Man; what hope can there be of such a Marriage, where both parties are so fickle and uncertain?" (*Essays*, p. 450). This pattern of rhetorical questions comes at the end of the essay and is carried right over into the closing poem. Despite being one of his original compositions, its whole tenor and inspiration is still Horatian. It starts by questioning the senseless practice of hoarding wealth and ends with Cowley actually calling his own name and giving himself advice to remain humble:

1.
Why dost thou heap up Wealth, which thou must quit,
Or, what is worse, be left by it?
Why dost thou load thy self, when thou'rt to flie,
Oh Man ordain'd to die?

The wise example of the Heavenly Lark,
Thy Fellow-Poet, *Cowley* mark,
Above the Clouds let thy proud Musique sound,
Thy humble Nest build on the Ground.

(Concluding Poem, "... Life and uncertainty of Riches," 1-4, 49-52, in *Essays*, pp. 450-52)

Cowley thus reminds himself how to live in this essay where the Horatian moral stance constitutes the touchstone, along with the reinforcement of his desire to seek solitude. In "Of Agriculture" he would argue that he could only find this happy state in the retired country life.

"Of Agriculture," where the sheer volume of poetry outstrips that of any other in the *Essays*, demonstrates the consideration Cowley gives to the country versus city debate. The poetry consists of one translation from Virgil's second *Georgic*, three of Horace's poems – one epode, one satire and one epistle – and Cowley's translation of one of his own Latin poems to finish off. His preference for the country is not in doubt, as amply shown in that poem in "Of Solitude" where the polarisation first becomes clear: on the one hand, "Hail, the poor Muses richest Mannor Seat! / Ye Countrey Houses and Retreat," (6-7) and on the other, "... I see / The Monster *London* laugh at me, / I should at thee too, foolish City" (51-3). This time, however, the tone is never as harsh. A pattern emerges in the series whereby the claims of the city are increasingly considered early on, analogous to rising as in a crescendo, the climax coming in the third and central poem in five; and then they diminish in the fourth, leading to the conclusion that becomes absolute in the last poem.

The Virgilian *Georgic* poem of one hundred and twenty lines in length is about the traditional figure of the happy husbandman whose simple life and natural riches in the country contrast with the complications and artificial excesses of life in the city.

The first sixteen lines set the scene for this and succeeding poems. It pits the innocent happiness and peace, and the “easie plenty” and “substantial blessedness” of the natural countryside against the “Alarms of Fear” and “storms of Strife” in the city. The city is characterised by artificiality: painted rooms, adorned figures, wrought tapestry, dyed wool and perfumed oils.

Oh happy, (if his Happiness he knows)
The Country Swain, on whom kind Heav'n bestows
At home all Riches that wise Nature needs;
Whom the just earth with easie plenty feeds.
'Tis true, no morning Tide of Clients comes,
And fills the painted Chanel of his rooms,
Adoring the rich Figures, as they pass,
In Tap'stry wrought, or cut in living brass;
Nor is his Wooll superfluously dy'd
With the dear Poyson of *Assyrian* pride:
Nor do *Arabian* Perfumes vainly spoil
The Native Use, and Sweetness of his Oyl.
Instead of these, his calm and harmless life
Free from th' Alarms of Fear, and storms of Strife,
Does with substantial blessedness abound,
And the soft wings of Peace cover him round.

(*Virg. Georg. ... A Translation out of Virgil,* 1-16)

The operative word of contrast is “instead,” but the verbs Cowley uses to depict city life, such as painted, wrought, and dyed all bespeak unnaturalness and sophistication in contrast to the naturalness and simplicity of country ways. The depiction of “... his calm and harmless life / Free from th' Alarms of Fear, and storms of Strife” makes the life of the country swain compare with that of the old man of Verona:

He never dangers either saw, or fear'd:
The dreadful storms at Sea he never heard.
He never heard the shrill allarms of War,
Or the worse noises of the Lawyers Bar.
(*Claudian's Old Man of Verona,* 11-14, in *Essays*, pp. 447-48)

Claudian's old man and Virgil's country swain share Cowley's admiration, but his retirement ideal includes the cultivation of the mind and more than their simple living offers. The *Georgic* passage is the same one from which Cowley concluded that “the best mixture of humane affairs that we can make, are the employments of a Country life” (“Of Agriculture,” *Essays*, p. 401). The mixture here refers at once to

the life of the husbandman and that of the philosopher, something Cowley clearly thought that his choice of the country for his retirement would achieve.

It is fitting that the sequence should start with the master Virgil, followed by Horace who dominates it. It is fitting also that the first of the Horatian pieces is the famous 'Beatus ille' poem, *Epode 2*, where the celebration of the life of the husbandman links it to the Virgilian poem. One of the offshoots of this poem and the *Essays* in general, according to Rostvig, was that "the classical *beatus ille*-philosophy was firmly established in England as the code of life consciously chosen and obeyed by one of the most prominent and highly respected poets of the age."⁹² This poem centres on the simple life of the husbandman and its sixty-four lines are summed up in this one: "This is the life from all misfortunes free" (43). The structure is such that the opening and closing lines offer explicit comparisons between city and country life, whereas the vast expanse of the intervening fifty lines focuses on the activities of the husbandman. It details especially his work, his sports and his food. In a pithy opening he is compared to "the first golden Mortals," that is, Adam and Eve who lived long before the advent of city life with its business and money cares, the rule of law and the politics of the court.

Happy the Man whom bounteous Gods allow
With his own Hands Paternal Grounds to plough!
Like the first golden Mortals Happy he
From Business and the cares of Money free! ...
From all the cheats of Law he lives secure,
Nor does th'affronts of Palaces endure.

(*Horat. Epodon* 1-4, 7-8)

After mentioning the business and the law in the city, as well the palaces of kings or the court, depicting the life of the husbandman in the passage that follows implicitly invites comparisons with the city dweller. He leads a full life, does the husbandman:

Sometimes the beauteous Marriagable Vine
 He to the lusty Bridegroom Elm does joyn;
 Sometimes he lops the barren Trees around,
 And grafts new Life into the fruitful wound;
 Sometimes he sheers his Flock, and sometimes he
 Stores up the Golden Treasures of the Bee.
 He sees his lowing Herds walk o're the Plain,
 Whilst neighbouring Hills low back to them again:
 And when the Season Rich as well as Gay,
 All her Autumnal Bounty does display.
 How is he pleas'd th' encreasing Use to see,
 Of his well trusted Labours bend the tree?

(*Horat. Epodon,* 9-20)

Far from a life of idleness and ease, the husbandman's routine requires his "well trusted Labours," for he is a farmer who tends the soil, the trees, and the cattle. He takes great pleasure from seeing his efforts bear fruit by way of a bountiful autumn harvest. When he needs rest from his manifold activity, he finds solace in any one of nature's sources of comfort, his relaxation aided by such diverse noises as the humming of the nearby river and the singing of the birds:

His careless head on the fresh Green recline
 His head uncharg'd with Fear or with Design.
 By him a River constantly complains,
 The Birds above rejoyce with various strains.

(*Horat. Epodon,* 25-8)

For his sports, he plays with birds and beasts, using all his malice and craft to wage "innocent wars" that consists of such innocuous activity as hunting the hare with his dogs or chasing the boar:

He runs the *Mazes* of the nimble Hare,
 His well-mouth'd Dogs glad concert rends the air,
 Or with game bolder, and rewarded more,
 He drives into a Toil, the foaming Bore,
 Here flies the Hawk t' assault, and there the Net
 To intercept the travailing fowl is set.
 And all his malice, all his craft is shown
 In innocent wars, on beasts and birds alone.
 This is the life from all misfortunes free.

(*Horat. Epodon,* 35-43)

The closing lines complete the husbandman's portraiture by characterising his wife, before reverting to overt comparisons between city and country cuisine. Perhaps the

city woman would be loathe to confine herself to house chores and the care of children, or to carry out such tasks as milking the cows because she considers herself “too noble or too fine.” In contrast, her country counterpart makes a “homely wife” and adds to the many blessings of her husband’s life. For food, whereas the city dweller would seek shellfish and other exotic delights, the country fellow enjoys the natural, balanced diet of lamb for meat, lettuce for vegetable, and olives for fruits:

And if a chaste and clean, though homely wife
Be added to the blessings of this Life, ...
Who makes her Children and the house her care,
And joyfully the work of Life does share,
Nor thinks herself too noble or too fine
To pin the sheepfold or to milch the Kine,
Who waits at door against her Husband come
From rural duties, late, and wearied home. ...
Not all the lustful shel-fish of the Sea,
Drest by the wanton hand of Luxurie,
Nor Ortolans nor Godwits nor the rest
Of costly names that glorify a Feast,
Are at the Princely tables better cheer,
Then Lamb and Kid, Lettice and Olives here.

(*Horat. Epodon,* 45-6, 49-54, 59-64)

Cowley never marries and would therefore not experience life with a homely wife, but then he would not fill his days with the husbandman’s full range of activities either. True he would experience the thrill the husbandman feels when working the soil, especially in his garden, but at the same time he would arm himself with his books, and live as a gentleman farmer in the peace and solitude of the country. In Horace’s original, the story-teller outlines all the virtues of the husbandman whose happy existence he so admires, but the following day he abandons the idea of moving to the country and lives on in the city. Not so Cowley; he abandons London for Barnes and later Chertsey. By putting in practice an idea famously expressed in Horace’s poem, Cowley applies his philosophy to his own life.

Following the ‘*Beatus Ille*’ poem is ‘The Country Mouse,’ central to the three Horatian poems and central to the five poems in this series, its strategic position

reflecting its importance as having arguably the most balanced debate of city and country in all the poems in the essays. It justifies Cowley's protestations that his retirement in the country was an informed decision only taken after full consideration of the merits of both city and country life.⁹³ The balance is achieved by the contrasting figures of two mice delineated in anthropomorphic fashion, one of the country and the other of the city. Everything about the poem bespeaks contrast, for example, whereas the one lives a solitary life in an obscure retreat, the other is full of worldly ways and wisdom, unable to contemplate an existence outside the company of men. The opening depicts the settled country mouse in his ancient, hereditary dwelling-place, his description prompting David Hopkins to surmise that he represents "a respected figure in the neighbourhood, the murine equivalent, perhaps, of a local Justice of the Peace."⁹⁴

At the large foot of a fair hollow tree,
 Close to plow'd ground, seated commodiously,
 His antient and Hereditary House,
 There dwelt a good substantial Country-Mouse:
 Frugal, and grave, and careful of the main.

(*'The Country Mouse,'* 1-5)

Following on is the description of the city guest as "a mouse of high degree," epitomising the city dweller "sleek" in appearance and manner:

A City Mouse well coated, sleek, and gay,
 A Mouse of high degree, which lost his way,
 Wantonly walking forth to take the Air.

(*'The Country Mouse,'* 7-9)

Further, the city mouse represents the courtier (14), he is courteous in his ways (78), as befits the gentleman of considerable breeding (27). But his restlessness that makes him wander into the country puts into perspective the settled nature of the country mouse's life, so much so that the latter's grand ancestral dwelling includes spare lodgings and a hall for storing various foods and delicacies. That is how he is able to provide a feast:

Fitches and Beans, Peason, and Oats, and Wheat,
 And a large Chestnut, the delicious meat
 Which *Jove* himself, were he a Mouse, would eat.
 And for a *Haut goust* there was mixt with these
 The sword of Bacon, and the coat of Cheese.
 The precious Reliques, which at Harvest, he
 Had gather'd from the Reapers luxurie.
 Freely (said he) fall on and never spare,
 The bounteous Gods will for to morrow care.

(‘The Country Mouse,’ 15-23)

The feast represents the finest in rural hospitality and is supposed to appeal even to the gods. Perhaps the host’s first speech in the poem is simply meant to put his guest at his ease: “Freely (said he) fall on and never spare, / The bounteous Gods will for to morrow care.” For Hopkins, however, his exhortation contains at once Epicurean and Christ-like sentiments: “The Epicurean command to live in the present, for example, can be reconciled ... with Jesus’ exhortation (Matt. 6:34) to ‘take ... no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself’.”⁹⁵

The country mouse’s character befits an Epicurean animal: “Frugal, and grave, and careful of the main” (5). Rather than live in idleness or wanton ease, he works hard taking care of the ancestral home and at harvest time gathers precious foods and delicacies. All this tallies with these qualifications Hopkins cites from Charleton’s

Epicurus’ Morals:

The wise man, in Epicurus’ conception, is prudent but not avaricious. He should ‘proportion his expenses as still to be laying up somewhat for the future, yet without avarice, and the sordid desire of heaping up wealth. For it is not the part of a wise man to neglect his household affairs.’⁹⁶

It appears that the country mouse’s virtues have no kinship with the popular misconception of Epicurus’s doctrine as one of ease, corporeal pleasure and unrestrained indulgence of the senses. Commenting on Cowley’s Epicureanism, Nethercot suggests that it “was not the vulgar one” but “the Golden Mean as Horace saw it – moderation in the indulgence of the mind as well as all the senses.”⁹⁷ The life of the country mouse shows that it was possible to work hard and live a “substantial” (4) or comfortable life, or to live prudently and yet enjoy the occasional

banquet. This is akin to Cowley's model of Christian Epicureanism, opposed to the vulgar one that was practised, according to Rostvig, by "the hedonistically inclined court of Charles II," their doctrine being that "nothing exists after death: *post mortem nihil est*."⁹⁸ For Christians there was life after death as acknowledged by some of the most famous Epicureans in Cowley's time, with Nethercot observing that, "Gassendi and Charleton themselves were Christian Epicureans, who had somehow trained their philosophy and their theology to lie down quietly together."⁹⁹

Cowley's identification with the country mouse appears to indicate opposition to the city mouse whom he proceeds to label overtly as Epicurean, as if to suggest another comparison with that other Epicurean, the country mouse. The guest would despise this feast because he is thinking instead of delicately wrought cakes and pies which are symptomatic of a life of luxury, extravagance and things wrought by man:

Yet the nice guest's Epicurean mind,
(Though breeding made him civil seem and kind)
Despis'd this Country feast, and still his thought
Upon the Cakes and Pies of *London* wrought.
('The Country Mouse,' 26-9)

In his defence, perhaps the city dweller might genuinely find it difficult to relish a diet he is unused to, his courtly breeding and civility notwithstanding. Further, his eloquence makes the speech that follows arguably the high point of the poem. He begins by heaping praise on his host, and then describes the variegated joys of city life, before inviting his unresisting host to follow him back to the city:

Your bounty and civility (said he)
Which I'm surpriz'd in these rude parts to see,
Shews that the Gods have given you a mind,
Too noble for the fate which here you find.
Why should a Soul, so virtuous and so great,
Lose it self thus in an Obscure retreat?
Let savage Beasts lodg in a Country Den,
You should see Towns, and Manners know, and men:
And taste the generous Lux'ury of the Court,
Where thousand beauteous shees about you move,
And by high fare, are plyant made to love.

We all e're long must render up our breath,
No cave or hole can shelter us from death.
 Since Life is so uncertain, and so short,
Let's spend it all in feasting and in sport.
Come, worthy Sir, come with me, and partake,
All the great things that mortals happy make.
 ('The Country Mouse,' 30-47)

For all the protestations about the serene happiness of a simple, settled life in a quiet retreat and natural setting, something within the country gentleman still responds to visions of a life of luxuriant ease spent “in feasting and in sport.” The city dweller implicitly assumes for himself the qualities he invests the other with - bounty, civility, a noble mind, a virtuous and great soul – and then derides the idea that such virtues could find a home in a country den. Perhaps he is patronising his host but his argument against the life of solitude in an obscure retreat is strikingly persuasive: “You should see Towns, and Manners know, and men.” Surely social exclusion does not become the gentleman with such human and intellectual qualities! Further, the courtier's grandiose plans to take advantage of the generosity of the court, enjoy its luxuries, and mix with society belles sound quite exciting. Little wonder that the country host is totally swayed, for the prospect of enjoying “All the great things that mortals happy make” is not only sumptuous, but rings true.

In the wake of the city mouse's engaging arguments, it is especially unfortunate that the country mouse's visit to the city would end in disaster. No sooner do these murine creatures sample a delicious feast in some Lord's luxurious mansion than they are attacked and forced to flee for their lives:

Loe, in the midst of a well fraited Pye,
They both at last glutted and wanton lye.
When see the sad Reverse of prosperous fate,
And what fierce storms on mortal glories wait.
With hideous noise, down the rude servants come,
Six dogs before run barking into th' room;
The wretched gluttons fly with wild affright,
And hate the fulness which retards their flight.
Our trembling Peasant wishes now in vain,

That Rocks and Mountains cover'd him again.
Oh how the change of his poor life he curst!
This, of all lives (said he) is sure the worst.
Give me again, *ye gods*, my Cave and wood;
With peace, let tares and acorns be my food.

(‘The Country Mouse,’ 82-95)

The country mouse’s judgement on city life is emphatic: “This, of all lives (said he) is sure the worst.” There is no doubt he would return for good to the peace and quiet of his obscure retreat, like the country swain in the Virgilian piece and the husbandman of Horace’s. If Cowley appears to identify totally with the country mouse of the title, it is because he was always the countryman at heart who fell for the glittering charms of city life. However, Cowley’s personal experiences left him rethinking his destiny as he began pining for the country. As a Londoner Cowley understands the workings of the city dweller’s “Epicurean mind” and does not condemn it; rather this knowledge helps him choose decisively the model of peaceful solitude. In Rostvig’s observation,

The Restoration poets favoured the absolute retirement of Epicurus into his garden. The individualism of the Restoration gentleman was complete and unchecked. Society was there for his convenience; if he preferred to scorn it, that was his privilege.¹⁰⁰

When he finally settles in the country, Cowley appears to find his own golden mean of Christian Epicureanism, as this report shows: “Cowley lived in Chertsey, a model of steadiness and orthodoxy to all who knew him, respected for his piety and purity.”¹⁰¹ Amidst the shifting arguments and seventeenth-century debates on true and false Epicureanism, Cowley’s position was clarified by his life choices as he aspired towards ataraxia, especially in the pleasure he took in his freedom from the business and cares of the world. Here is a key passage in *Epicurus’ Morals*:

When we say that pleasure in the general is the end of a happy life, or the chiefest good, we ... [understand] only this ...: not to be pained in body, nor perturbed in mind. For it is not perpetual feasting and drinkings; it is not the love of, and familiarity with, beautiful boys and women; it is not the delicacies of rare fishes, sweet meats, rich wines, nor any other dainties of the table that can make a happy life; but it is reason with sobriety, and consequently a serene mind.¹⁰²

The third Horatian poem, 'Horace to Fuscus Aristius,' is a paraphrase of the letter that constitutes *Epistles* 1.10. A key aspect to the poem is Cowley's different approach to that of the original as he tilts the argument unerringly in favour of the country: only Nature could be the architect of happiness and doubtless she would choose the country for her setting. Symbols of city life, including "honie'd Cakes" not unlike the cakes and pies that occupied the city mouse's thoughts in the previous poem, are rejected out of hand. Here are the first sixteen lines out of seventy-eight:

Health, from the lover of the Country me,
Health, to the lover of the City thee,
A difference in our souls, this only proves,
In all things else, w' agree like married doves.
But the warm nest, and crowded dove-house thou
Dost like; I loosly fly from bough to bough,
And Rivers drink, and all the shining day,
Upon fair Trees, or mossy Rocks I play;
In fine, I live and reign when I retire
From all that you equal with Heaven admire.
Like one at last from the Priests service fled,
Loathing the honie'd Cakes, I long for Bread.
Would I a house for happiness erect,
Nature alone should be the Architect.
She'd build it more convenient, then great,
And doubtless in the Country choose her seat.
(‘Horace to Fuscus Aristius,’ 1-16)

Cowley preserves Horace's opening that includes the mock titles of lover of the country and lover of the city for himself and Fuscus respectively. They agree in almost everything like a pair of doves, but such is the significance of the one difference between them that it constitutes the subject of the poem. Cowley's opening attempts to preserve the sympathetic tone of the original, acknowledging the other's love for the city. But his approach and Horace's are markedly different. On the one hand, whilst revealing a preference for the country, Horace's original refrains from condemning the city. Its abiding theme is that each should live as befits their nature and that one need not forsake that which is the source of one's happiness, implying that Fuscus could stay on in the city as long as he forsakes the misguided pursuit of wealth. Cowley on the other hand is drawing towards a denouement in his

trinity of Horatian poems and prefers to make his choice of country life ever more trenchant, using this series of rhetorical questions to highlight its advantages:

Is there a place, doth better helps supply,
Against the wounds of Winters cruelty?
Is there an Ayr that gentl'er does assuage
The mad Celestial Dogs, or Lyons rage?
Is it not there that sleep (and only there)
Nor noise without, nor cares within does fear?
Does art through pipes, a purer water bring,
Then that which nature straines into a spring?
Can all your Tap'stries, or your Pictures show
More beauties then in herbs and flowers do grow?
(‘Horace to Fuscus Aristius,’ 17-26)

These questions are like premises or examples to support the earlier proposition that happiness was to be found in a country setting: “Nature alone should be the Architect ... / And doubtless in the Country choose her seat.” As if in conclusion, these lines following recapture the ideal of a humble existence that runs through the *Essays*:

An humble Roof, plain bed, and homely board,
More clear, untainted pleasures do afford,
Then all the Tumult of vain greatness brings
To Kings, or to the favorites of Kings.
(‘Horace to Fuscus Aristius,’ 45-8)

Cowley’s derision of the vanities of the Restoration court is so stark that it highlights the clarity of his position compared to Horace’s ambivalent original. The difference is borne out in real life: whereas the Roman alternated between his Sabine farm and the city, Cowley decisively forsook the company of the King and his favourites and would never return to live in London once he leaves.

The argument for the retired country life has progressed apace to the point that it dominates totally ‘The Country Life,’ the last poem in “Of Agriculture” that completes Cowley’s association with Virgil and Horace. It is a translation of one of Cowley’s own Latin works, the *Libri 4 Plantarum* (*Fourth Book of Plants*). Whereas the proposition in the ‘Horace to Fuscus’ poem - that true happiness could only be found in the country - was defended by a one-sided deliberation or monologue, this

poem proceeds to tell real life stories of two men, Abdolonymus and Aglaüs. One is a humble gardener who is offered the crown to his kingdom but is loathe to be whisked away to sit on the throne; the other is a husbandman certified by the Delphic oracle to be the happiest man in the land, to the mystification of King Gyges who had presumed that distinction for himself. Abdolonymus is utterly convinced that his garden is a much happier kingdom than the seat of power he is asked to occupy:

Blest be the man (and blest he is) whom e're ...
A little Field, and little Garden feeds; ...
Thus his wise life *Abdolonymus* spent:
Th' Ambassadors which the great Emp'rour sent
To offer him a Crown, with wonder found
The reverend Gard'ner howing of his Ground,
Unwillingly and slow and discontent,
From his lov'd Cottage, to a Throne he went?
And oft' he stopt in his tryumphant way,
And oft lookt back, and oft was heard to say
Not without sighs, Alas, I there forsake
A happier Kingdom then I go to take.
(*'The Country Life,'* 1, 3, 13-22)

Then comes the remarkable story of Aglaüs, happiest of mortals, unlike Abdolonymus a husbandman to the last. His story bears out Abdolonymus's wise remark that more happiness was to be found in his little field than in the throne, for Gyges is taught that the greatest happiness does not lie in worldly power and sovereignty, circumstances at birth, victories in war, or endless wealth. Everything about Gyges is derided: his pursuit of wealth, his wickedness, his presumed greatness, his vain pride, and the megalomaniac disposition that makes him seek certification of his happiness from the gods.

For *Gyges*, the rich King, wicked and great,
Presum'd at wise *Apollo's Delphick seat*
Presum'd to ask, Oh thou, the whole Worlds Eye,
See'st thou a Man, that Happier is then I?
The God, who scorn'd to flatter Man, reply'd,
Aglaüs Happier is. But *Gyges* cry'd,
In a proud rage, Who can that *Aglaüs* be?
We have heard as yet of no such King as Hee. ...
Is some old *Hero* of that name alive,
Who his high race does from the Gods derive?
Is it some mighty General that has done,
Wonders in' fight, and God-like honours wone?
Is it some man of endless wealth, said he?

None, none of these; who can this *Aglaiüs* be?
 After long search and vain inquiries past,
 In an obscure *Arcadian* Vale at last, ...
 This *Aglaiüs* who Monarchs Envy drew,
 Whose Happiness the Gods stood witness too,
 This mighty *Aglaiüs* was labouring found,
 With his own Hands in his own little ground.
 ('The Country Life,' 27-34, 37-44, 47-50)

In the context of Cowley's retirement, the last sentence that concludes 'The Country Life' makes a fitting conclusion to the whole *Essays*, showing how his life mirrors his poetry to the last. These final lines are nothing short of prophetic, reflecting upon the past only to foretell in visionary fashion the course of his life until its end. His end would come soon enough in 1667 at the age of forty-nine, justifying talk of his "declining Age" though only in his forties. The fleeing into exile and the restlessness he had endured for over twenty years are reflected in the "long toiles and Voyages" as well as the "tost Vessel," hence the search for a "quiet Port" for rest and retirement. The country is the chosen venue, the "private stage" where he can seek solitude after a life so neatly summed up here. Bishop Hurd would even comment on this sentence thus: "These concluding eight lines are written in the author's best manner, which is when he expresses his own feeling, along with his ideas."¹⁰³ The differences between poetry and life become blurred as Cowley contemplates the ultimate retirement, death:

So, gracious God, (If it may lawful be,
 Among those foolish gods to mention Thee)
 So let me act, on such a private stage,
 The last dull Scenes of my declining Age;
 After long toiles and Voyages in vain,
 This quiet Port let my tost Vessel gain,
 Of Heavenly rest, this Earnest to me lend,
 Let my Life sleep, and learn to love her End.
 ('The Country Life,' 51-8)

6.5 Discovery and Knowledge: The Royal Society of Science

From you, great Champions, we expect to get

These spacious Countries but discover'd yet; ...
God with Design has pickt out you,
To do these noble Wonders by a Few.
(Cowley, 'To the Royal Society')

When controversy and political wrangling forced Cowley to turn his back on public life and poetry in 1656, it was in the field of natural philosophy in the tranquil realms of Oxford that he sought solace. His decision to sever the 'marriage' contracted to his poetic Muse since his infancy was probably rash, but it paved the way for a total commitment to the new science in the company of theoretical and experimental philosophers. In such company he quickly got caught in the whirlwind of new developments and exciting possibilities for discovery and knowledge. He did not need to go to America as he had once threatened, because in the end he virtually achieves his escape and retreat by returning to the University of Oxford that had provided a home for him during the Civil War. His studies this time would not be in the Humanities or even Theology; rather, he would take on the study of Science and Medicine. Such choice of discipline, if not of institution, was almost certainly influenced by Scarborough who was himself a Fellow of Merton College. Having raised money for Cowley's bail, inspired his interest in medicine and the sciences, and convinced him of the need to move away from London's political centre to Oxford, again it was Scarborough who in 1657 would introduce Cowley to the group of scholars later to become the Royal Society. The period under consideration in this section therefore stretches from this year, 1657, to the year of his death, 1667, for he never stops working in the interests of the Society from the moment he joins them. In literary terms, the period therefore begins with the 'Ode. Upon Dr. Harvey' in 1657, and most important of all, ends with the ode 'To the Royal Society' in 1667. Spanning these are more of the pieces that make up *Verses Written On Several*

Occasions and, for our purposes, his prose masterpiece published in 1661 in the form of a treatise entitled *A Proposition for the Advancement of Experimental Philosophy*.

After his resolve to stop writing poetry, certainly under the Protectorate, it took the extraordinary achievements of William Harvey to make Cowley compose an ode on his behalf. This was in 1657, shortly before Harvey died on 3 June, his impending demise and the time of composition suggested in the very last lines of the poem:

For though his Wit the force of Age withstand,
His Body alas! and Time it must command,
And Nature now, so long by him surpass't,
Will sure have her revenge on him at last.
(‘Ode. Upon Dr. Harvey,’ 88-91)

The ode to Harvey follows those on some of the other giants of the intellectual revolution like Hobbes and Scarborough who had wielded such untold influence on Cowley.¹⁰⁴ It is fitting that the ode to Harvey should coincide with Cowley becoming an early member of the Society devoted to the cause of discovery and knowledge, for Harvey’s discovery of the circulation of blood was one of the most ground-breaking scientific achievements in the seventeenth century. He had published his treatise on the circulation of blood at Frankfurt in 1628, a discovery that many considered quite simply to be the most important in the history of the ‘anatomical’ sciences. Joseph Glanvill, for example, placed it at the top of his list of discoveries issued in 1668: “But of all the *modern Discoveries, Wit and Industry* have made in the *Oeconomy of humane Nature*, the Noblest is the of the *Circulation of the Blood*, which was the Invention of our deservedly-famous *Harvey*.”¹⁰⁵ Cowley’s celebration of such scholarly feats was therefore a spur to his own intellectual pursuits in his newly designated studies in botany and medicine, studies that in themselves constituted an extension to discussions of the new science for which the Society provided an ideal forum. The ode therefore presents Harvey as a

torch-bearer of a new era of science, a true follower of the Baconian principles of experimentation on which the Society was founded.

The poem delineates Harvey's study of Nature by means of several images of pursuit and discovery. The first stanza presents Nature, for all her age, as a coy virgin still whose naked glory is yet to be discovered by a lover. Harvey's passion for knowledge is as strong and violent as that of a smitten lover chasing this coy maiden, causing his quarry, Nature, to flee and seek sanctuary in one of her many abodes, in this case a tree. But Harvey, determined to consummate his passion for the elusive and mysterious Nature, is not content merely to feel the leaves of her tree. He must grope the bark, uproot it if he must, so as to discover all infinitesimal details of the object of his pursuit.

Coy Nature, (which remain'd, though aged grown,
A Beauteous virgin still, injoy'd by none,
Nor seen unveil'd by any one)
When *Harveys* violent passion she did see,
Began to tremble, and to flee,
Took Sanctuary like *Daphne* in a tree:
There *Daphnes* lover stop't, and thought it much
The very Leaves of her to touch,
But *Harvey* our *Apollo*, stopt not so,
Into the Bark, and root he after her did goe:
No smallest Fibres of a Plant,
For which the eiebeams Point doth sharpness want,
His passage after her withstood.
What should she do? Through all the moving wood
Of Lives indow'd with sense she took her flight,
Harvey persues, and keeps her still in sight.

(‘Ode. Upon Dr. Harvey,’ 1-16)

In the second stanza Nature claims that she is well hidden from view, except of course from her Maker's all-seeing eye. But she reckons without Harvey's determination to be the first to discover her secrets. He clutches her in his grip and would not let go until she reveals all, making her realise that there is nothing she could successfully hide from him. That is because of his unprecedented method of

pursuit, the same method that he uses in his study of the human heart and his discovery of its multifarious secrets.

Here sure shall I be safe (said she)
None will be able sure to see
 This my retreat, but only He
 Who made both it and me.
The heart of Man, what Art can e're reveal?
 A wall impervious between
 Divides the very Parts within,
And doth the Heart of man ev'n from its self conceal.
 She spoke, but e're she was aware,
 Harvey was with her there,
And held this slippery *Proteus* in a chain,
Till all her mighty Mysteries she descry'd,
Which from his wit the attempt before to hide
Was the first Thing that Nature did in vain.
 ('Ode. Upon Dr. Harvey,' 23-36)

Still the key stanza is the fourth where Cowley outlines the lessons from Harvey's efforts and their implication for the search for knowledge and truth. As Bacon had preached, Harvey discarded age-old books and found out for himself at first hand the truth about nature. His methods demonstrated, for Cowley, the progress that could be made just by shunning authority and well-worn paths that no longer led to truth. He could not have discovered the circulation of the blood if he had confined himself to the traditional methods of learning that precluded experiment:

Thus *Harvey* sought for Truth in Truth's own Book.
 The Creatures, which by God himself was writ;
 And wisely thought 'twas fit,
Not to read Comments only upon it,
But on th'original it self to look.
Methinks in Arts great Circle others stand
 Lock't up together, Hand in Hand,
 Every one leads as he is led,
 The same bare path they tread,
A Dance like Fairies a Fantastick round,
But neither change their motion, nor their ground.
Had *Harvey* to this Road confin'd his wit,
His noble Circle of the Blood, had been untrod yet.
 ('Ode. Upon Dr. Harvey,' 54-66)

The praise of Harvey, as with the tributes to Hobbes and Scarborough, both of them Bacon's followers also, is a celebration of the immense possibilities of method and

practice over words and theory. Clearly Cowley had well defined views on the effectiveness of the Baconian method before he joined the Society. His inquisitive mind was at once excited and awed by all kinds of discoveries and this instinctive response is reflected in the panegyric odes like the one on Harvey. Though he knew him closely, Cowley still demonstrates a close attention to developing trends and reveals the breath of his awareness of various intellectual and scientific exploits. For Cowley, Harvey was the prototype of the modern scholar, an example to society.

Cowley spent the last year of Cromwell's reign embarking on his studies, testing his utter conviction that experimentation was the way to knowledge and truth. The result of these studies would be an academic award, the degree of 'doctor of physic' at Oxford in December 1657.¹⁰⁶ He would apply the method of venturing abroad, of inquiring into nature in nature itself. In the study of anatomy, for example, he undertook anatomical dissections, while in botany "he resolved to study ... not merely from books but in nature itself. Consequently, he retired into a fruitful part of Kent, where every field and wood might show him the real figure of those plants of which he read."¹⁰⁷ It was from the work of a long line of scholars and discoverers, then, buttressed by his own studies and the experiences of members of the Society, that Cowley began to formulate his ideas on experimental philosophy into a coherent body of thought. The result was the *Proposition*, an apology for the new learning complete with a Preface and a Conclusion, advocating the creation of a Philosophical College. Though the *Proposition* would not be published until 1661, it was completed and circulated among members of the Society in 1659. Before his last journey to France that year, Cowley left the manuscript with a friend who prefixed

the following address directed “To the Honourable Society for the Advancement of Experimental Philosophy:”

The Author of the following discourse, having since his going into *France* allowed me to make it publick, I thought I should do it most right by presenting it to Your Considerations; to the end that when it hath been fully examin'd by You, and receiv'd such Additions or Alterations as You shall think fit, the Design thereof may be promoted by Your recommending the Practice of it to the Nation. (*Proposition, Essays*, p. 245)

The Royal charter given to the Society after the Restoration ensured that it was confirmed in its own way as the kind of Philosophical College Cowley proposed, that is, a pool of scientists whose select members would devote themselves to making discoveries and inventions for human knowledge and use.

“It is humbly proposed to his Sacred Majesty and ... his Subjects,” Cowley concludes the Preface to the *Proposition*, “that by their Authority, Encouragement, Patronage, and Bounty, a *Philosophical Colledge* may be erected, after this ensuing” (*Proposition, Preface*, in *Essays*, p. 247).¹⁰⁸ In ‘To Mr. Hobs’ he showed his thorough impatience with traditional authority and scholastic methods, whilst strongly defending the use of reason. His *Proposition* would add to this a new theory of education, an insistence on the observation of nature to verify theory, and an abiding faith in human ability to broaden perpetually the horizons of knowledge. It reflects Cowley’s desire to give learning a modern and scientific character. The problems he identifies are not unlike those to which the Society meeting in Oxford had dedicated its efforts, namely, a void in discovery and knowledge that had endured for several centuries:

We see that for above a thousand years together nothing almost of Ornament or Advantage was added to the Uses of Humane Society, except only Guns and Printing, whereas since the Industry of Men has ventured to go abroad, out of Books and out of Themselves, and to work among Gods Creatures, ... every age has abounded with excellent Inventions, and every year perhaps might do so, if a considerable number of select Persons were set apart, and well directed, and plentifully provided for the search of them. (*Proposition, Preface*, in *Essays*, p. 247)

The *Proposition* discusses the idea of transforming institutions with an inclination towards research and experimentation into colleges whose members should be full-time researchers, discoverers and inventors. The workings of the Society prove that a disparate group, having the same aims, could work together; and so logically the next step should be to live together. The subsequent creation of the Royal Society was a triumph for all kind of agencies, political as well as intellectual, collective and individual. Cowley recognised in this a fulfilment of his efforts as a spokesperson for the cause of truth.

Cowley's *Proposition* recalls Bacon's *The New Atlantis*, a forerunner in the seventeenth century for such schemes. Bacon's ideas generally serve as a guide, for Cowley was conscious of the utopic nature of the original scheme and sought to mould it into more realistic and practical proposals:

Much might be added, but I am afraid this is too much already for the charity or generosity of this age to extend to; and we do not design this after the Model of *Solomons House* in my Lord Bacon (which is a Project for Experiments that can never be Experimented) but propose it within such bounds of Expence as have often been exceeded by ... private Citizens. (*Proposition, Essays*, p. 251)

By mentioning Bacon, Cowley is reinforcing the link between his proposed institution and the Society that exists already, for Bacon's vision had begun to be realised in the shape of the Oxford Experimental Science Club that evolved into the Society. In the words of D. C. Allen, for example, "the Royal Society was *The New Atlantis* made flesh."¹⁰⁹ Actually this view was encouraged by the Society itself, for it echoed the view of one its members, Glanvill, who observed that the *New Atlantis* represented a prophetic scheme of the Royal Society.¹¹⁰ This is because the concept of a college of research persisted with Bacon until it became the soul of his Utopia.¹¹¹ In his *History of the Royal Society*, commissioned by the Society after receiving its official charter in 1662, Thomas Sprat would pay tribute to Bacon:

I shall onely mention one great Man, who had the true Imagination of the whole extent of this Enterprize, as it is now set on foot; and that is the *Lord Bacon*. ... If my desires could have prevailed there should have been no other Preface to the *History of the Royal Society*, but some of his writings.¹¹²

Even the Society's use of the term "Fellows" to designate members was inspired by its use in *The New Atlantis* and adopted in the English draft of the charters.¹¹³ When Cowley's colleagues would later prevail upon him in 1667 to write a poem for the Society, he would use the opportunity to celebrate Bacon in 'To the Royal Society.' Cowley would give him his due as one who, more than any other English scholar, had stood between the medieval and the modern world, ushering in the new learning.

Cowley's appeal to the King in the Preface to the *Proposition* was well founded, for the political dimension was crucial to the very existence of an institution like the Society. Despite the fact that these science enthusiasts started meeting since 1648 in Oxford, it was only after the Restoration that they were granted official licence and a royal charter. Thus Sprat records that the Society underwent three phases:

I shall divide [the Narration] into three Periods of Time, according to the several Degrees of *preparation, growth, and compleat Constitution* of the *Royal Society*. The First shall consist of the first occasions of this Model, ... and shall end, where they began to make it a form'd, and *Regular Assembly*. The Second shall trace out their *first attempts*, till they receiv'd the publick assistance of *Royal Authority*. The Third shall deliver, what they *have done*, since they were made a *Royal Corporation*.¹¹⁴

Cowley was inclined to think that royal assent was not only meant to serve political ends, for the restoration meant more to him than the return of monarchy, a triumph for Anglicanism or a vindication of the divine rights theory. It was an assertion of divine reason, a divine act that ensured a triumph for the cause of truth also. In the Restoration ode, he had made this association between Kingly authority and truth: "The *King* and *Truth* have greatest strength, / When they their sacred force unite" ('Ode. Upon His Majesties Restoration and Return,' 191-92). In the *History* Sprat also acknowledges the role of the King and his wise use of authority.¹¹⁵ For him the

King's enabling of the Society was evidence of his enlightened attitude towards knowledge, for which he deserves as much fame as any discoverer who will benefit from his action:

For, to increase the Powers of all Mankind, and to free them from the bondage of Errors, is greater Glory than to enlarge Empire, or to put Chains on the necks of Conquer'd Nations. What Reverence all Antiquity had for the Authors of Natural Discoveries, is evident by the Diviner sort of Honor they conferr'd on them. This Zeal indeed, by which they express'd their Gratitude to such Benefactors, degenerated into Superstition: yet has it taught us, That a higher degree of Reputation is due to Discoverers, than to the Teachers of Speculative Doctrines, nay even to Conquerors themselves. ... Your Majesty will certainly obtain Immortal Fame, for having establish'd a perpetual Succession of Inventors.¹¹⁶

The Society was therefore an example of how intellectual agencies benefited from the return of the Stuarts and of monarchical rule. Again Sprat affirms in the body of his work that, "Philosophy had its share, in the benefits of that glorious Action: For the *Royal Society* had its beginning in the wonderful pacifick year, 1660."¹¹⁷

The end of the first phase (1648-60) in the Society's history coincided with Cowley's completion of his *Proposition* that was eventually published in 1661. The Society considered Cowley's *Proposition* seriously and passed a largely favourable verdict. Their disagreements were in two main areas: first, they thought it unlikely that it was possible to get the kind of funds Cowley envisaged; and second, they felt that research had no inherent bond with education, and that asking the members to teach would be impracticable. This did not detract from the general admiration of Cowley's work. In fact, the Society through Sprat openly acknowledged the impact of the *Proposition* in hastening the granting of its charter:

There came forth a Treatise, which very much hasten'd its contrivance: and that was a Proposal by Master Cowley, of erecting a Philosophical College. This Model was every way practicable: unless perhaps, in two things he did more consult the generosity of his own mind, than of other mens: the one was the *largeness of the Revenue*, with which he would have his College at first indow'd: the other, that he impos'd on his Operators, a Second task of great pains, the *Education of youth*. ... Perhaps this labor is not so proper, for Experimenters to undergo. And as to the other particular, the large estate, ... it were more advisable, to begin upon a small stock, and so to rise by degrees. ... However, it was not the excellent Author's fault, that he thought better of the Age, then it did deserve. His purpose in it was like himself, full of honor, and goodness: most of the other particulars of his draught, the *Royal Society* is now putting into practice.¹¹⁸

With the collapse of the Protectorate in 1659, the Society's activities were disrupted in the ensuing confusion and disorder. Also, there was a lot of movement, with many members transferring to London where they reassembled. It was therefore in London where, on 28 November 1660, the Society became a formal assembly and thus began its second phase. Cowley was proposed for formal membership on 13 February 1661, incidentally the same day that Henry Herringman accepted to publish his *Proposition*. He was then officially elected on 6 March 1661. The second stage of the Society was a transitional one, a period of "growth," leading to the third and last phase of the "complete Constitution of the Royal Society." The Royal Charter, the first on 15 July 1662 and the second on 22 April 1663, marked this last phase. Meanwhile Cowley left London in the early months of 1662 to settle in the country, and so could not attend meetings. When the Council drew up a definitive list of Fellows on 20 May 1663, one month after its second charter, he was absent and thus failed to register his name. He continued, however, to receive information and follow the progress of the Society.

Cowley's frustrations with the political order at this time, the period of his 'Complaint,' make him turn ever more to his intellect for solace, as he becomes increasingly obsessed with various areas of knowledge, including the mysteries of religion. His 1663 poem, 'Christ's Passion,' belongs to this period when he turns to faith and religion in order to approach life's unfathomable nature from a Christian perspective. His mood by this time is in contrast to the hopeful period of 'The Complaint' when he still had faith in earthly matters. But he is happy now to plead with his Muse for an escape from earthly things as he finds it hard to accept earthly ways that do not make sense, for surely earthly things should appeal to reason and

divine ones to faith? It is only the authenticity of divine mysteries and the truths of supernatural revelation that he could accept without question, not earthly things.

Enough, my Muse, of Earthly things,
And inspirations but of wind,
Take up thy Lute, and to it bind
Loud and everlasting strings;
And on 'em play, and to 'em sing, ...
Of the great Crucified King.
Mountainous heap of wonders! Which do'st rise
Till Earth thou joynest with the Skies!
Too large at bottom, and at top too high,
To be half seen by mortal eye.
How shall I grasp this boundless thing?
What shall I play? What shall I sing?
(‘Christ’s Passion,’ 1-5, 8-14)

The ‘mortal eye’ represents human reason that cannot on its own attain full knowledge. Sprat describes an enormous project that Cowley begins to contemplate at this time, namely to seek into the secrets of divine knowledge. He comes close to devoting his time and resources, in Sprat’s words,

[To] search into the secrets of divine and human knowledge, and to communicate what he should observe. ... The whole compass of the Creation, and all the wonderful effects of the Divine Wisdom, were the constant prospect of his senses and his thoughts.¹¹⁹

Cowley thought of carrying out an extensive study of the origins and early times of Christianity for four or five centuries. It would have been a four-year project that should have given him occasion to apply scientific tenets and the use of reason. Such a design would have severely tested his own faith and religious system because he wanted to arrive at religious certitude, itself a possible contradiction in terms. His professed aim was to end religious controversy and schism among Christians, by an objective and methodical study that would have led to verifiable and indisputable findings. By the time he comes to write his last poetic masterpiece, ‘To the Royal Society,’ Cowley has had occasion thoroughly to ponder the use of his favourite method of inquiry into boundless realms of knowledge.

discourse” or merely verbal exercises. There was no exploitation of nature itself with its “endless treasure,” there was no urge to exploit to its furthest reaches the “vast estate” of human knowledge, and consequently the only major discoveries since ancient times that Cowley can think of are printing and guns. It was this reliance on authority, and the consequent stagnation of knowledge, that had moved Bacon himself to exclaim:

How could it happen that no mortal man devoted head and heart to providing helps and support for the human mind in studying nature and sifting the experience thus acquired? To think of the whole process of discovery and invention being left to the obscurity of tradition, the giddy whirl of argument, the billows of chance, and the devious course of mere experience! To think that nobody succeeded in opening up a middle way between practical experience and unsupported theorising!¹²⁰

The major challenge facing the Society and disciples of the new science, then, was to equip themselves properly to fill this void.

Just as the Society had advised Sprat to trace its origins back to Bacon, so too Cowley traces the rebellion against authority and the new thinking to him:

Some few exalted Spirits this latter Age has shown,
That labour'd to assert the Liberty
(From Guardians, who were now Usurpers grown)
Of this old *Minor* still, Captiv'd Philosophy;
But 'twas Rebellion call'd to fight
For such a long-oppressed Right.
Bacon at last, a mighty man, arose
Whom a wise King and Nature chose
Lord Chancellour of both their Lawes,
And boldly undertook the injur'd Pupil's cause.
(‘To the Royal Society,’ 31-40)

Bacon had been Lord Chancellor of England under James I. From defining the laws of the land, Bacon had defined the laws of nature also and is thus credited with the founding of experimental philosophy.¹²¹ Having pinned down the problem facing knowledge to one word, authority, Cowley goes on to discuss the most effective tool for effecting change, namely the use of reason. He uses words like “ghost,” “shadow” and “phantom” to depict authority in order to highlight its sinister influence and the size of the task Bacon faced when confronting it:

Aurality, which did a Body boast,
Though 'twas but Air condens'd, and stalk'd about,
Like some old Giants more Gigantic Ghost,
To terrifie the Learned Rout.
With the plain Magick of true Reasons Light,
He chac'd out of our sight,
Nor suffer'd Living *Men* to be misled
By the vain shadows of the Dead:
To Graves, from whence it rose, the conquer'd Phantome fled.
(*'To the Royal Society,' 41-9*)

For Cowley the new thinking represents a triumph for reason. Reason permeates all facets of life and learning, and Bacon's merit was to have realised that the human person's use of their right to investigate nature would only be possible with the use of reason. Continuing his peculiar use of imagery, Cowley further compares authority to a "Monstrous God," a false god or scarecrow which stands in the middle of an orchard terrifying children and superstitious men, but whose destruction Bacon would successfully negotiate before proceeding to redeem the orchard:

He broke that Monstrous God which stood
In midst of th' Orchard, and the whole did claim,
Which with a useless Sith of Wood, ...
(Ridiculous and senceless Terrors!) made
Children and superstitious Men afraid.
The Orchard's open now, and free;
Bacon has broke that Scar-crow Deitie;
Come, enter, all that will,
Behold the rip'ned Fruit, come gather now your Fill.
(*'To the Royal Society, 50-52, 56-61*)

The destruction of the scarecrow symbolises the end of a past that smacked of falsehood and fear, hence the overtones of freedom and happiness. The orchard represents an Edenic situation; it is a kind of paradise and all who come there are sure to taste of its life-giving fruit. New life has been breathed into philosophy and science, and the Society is the living proof of Bacon's courageous but no less pioneering efforts bearing fruit. Sprat says of Bacon:

For is it not wonderful, that he, who had run through all the degrees of that *profession*, which usually takes up mens whole time; who had studied and practis'd, and govern'd the *Common Law*: who had always liv'd in the crowd and born the greatest burden of Civil business: should yet find leisure enough for these retir'd Studies, to excel all those men, who separate themselves for this very purpose?¹²²

Bacon's theory of rational and experimental interrogation of nature, his defiance of authority and tradition, his exposure of the fallacies of outdated systems, his passion for natural science, his utilitarian ideals, and his infinite faith in the human capacity for progress were all fundamental to the shaping of seventeenth-century thought.

In light of the failings of previous systems, the hallmark of the new learning would be the investigation of things themselves, rather than unsupported theorising or mere verbal exercises. Bacon has truly transformed learning and knowledge:

From Words, which are but Pictures of the Thought, ...
To things, the Minds right Object, he it brought,
Like foolish Birds to painted Grapes we flew;
He sought and gather'd for our use the True;
And when on heaps the chosen Bunches lay,
He prest them wisely the Mechanick way,
Till all their juyce did in one Vessel joyn,
Ferment into a Nourishment Divine,
 The thirsty Souls refreshing Wine.
Who to the life an exact Piece would make,
Must not from others Work a Copy take; ...
 No, he before his sight must place
 The Natural and Living Face;
 The real object must command
Each Judgment of his Eye, and Motion of his Hand.
 ('To the Royal Society,' 69, 71-80, 85-8)

The mythological image of the artist, Zeuxis, painting grapes so realistically that birds mistook them for real ones is conjured up to depict the manner in which scholars had hitherto been deluded when they sought to quench their thirst for knowledge. With his mechanistic and rationalistic philosophy, Bacon has, so to speak, gathered real grapes and refined them into a 'divine nourishment.' Such images may have been inspired by Bacon himself who wrote: "I pledge mankind in a liquor strained from countless grapes, from grapes ripe and fully seasoned, collected in clusters, and gathered, and then squeezed in the press, and finally purified and clarified in the vat."¹²³ Bacon directed the new science away from mere ideas, images, dogma, and books, to experimentation with "the Natural and Living Face" of

God's Creation. All discovery and knowledge is for human use, and such utilitarianism is the motivating force behind experimentation.

Within the ranks of those who failed to rally to the new learning, there was scepticism, suspicion and even ridicule for scientific optimism. Charles II himself, some months after granting the Society a charter, seems to have been found laughing at some members "for spending time only in weighing of ayre, and doing nothing else since they sat."¹²⁴ Such an attitude may have been light-hearted mirth but there are many who would seriously have stifled the growth of the infant society. This is why Sprat, recognising the dangers of such threats, writes his History in the manner of an apologist seeking to justify the Society's very existence and its operations:

The Style perhaps in which it is written, is larger and more contentious than becomes that purity and shortness which are the chief beauties of Historical Writings: But the blame of this ought not so much to be laid upon me, as upon the Detractors of so noble an Institution: For their Objections and Cavils against it, did make it necessary for me to write of it, not altogether in the way of a plain History, but sometimes of an Apology.¹²⁵

It was difficult to shake the faith by which people had always lived, but the challenge of science, with its discovery of truths that were at once factual and verifiable, would change the whole approach to knowledge. The age of reason was at hand, and with reason came method and order. The Restoration world was still awakening to this new dawn, and not everyone's system could readily countenance new ideas. There were a lot of attacks on the Society from religious quarters, though some of its most enthusiastic defenders were churchmen. To add to Sprat's History, for example, Glanvill wrote a defence entitled, *Plus Ultra, or the Progresse and Advancement of Knowledge since the days of Aristotle, in an Account of some of the most remarkable late Improvements of practical useful Learning, to encourage Philosophical Endeavours; occasioned by a Conference with one of the Notional Way*. Cowley now

defends the Society further, warning the proud but ignorant people who scoff at the Society's endeavours that they are threatening a noble design:

Mischief and true Dishonour fall on those
Who would to laughter or to scorn expose
So virtuous and so Noble a Design,
So Human for its Use, for Knowledge so Divine.
The things which these proud men despise, and call
 Impertinent, and vain, and small,
Those smallest things of Nature let me know,
Rather than all their greatest Actions Doe.
 ('To the Royal Society,' 148-55)

Another problem the Society could not ignore was the prevalence of superstitious beliefs. Even exponents of the new learning and members of the Society found it difficult to discard age-old beliefs. No sooner does Glanvill, for example, defend the Society in various documents, beginning with *Plus Ultra*, than he publishes a work aimed at providing evidence of witchcraft: *Sadducismus Triumphatus, or Full and Plain Evidence, concerning Witches and Apparitions, in Two Parts. The First treating of their Possibility, and the Second of their real Existence* (1681). One of the most prominent cases of superstition concerned the number 666, as in the year 1666. This number gave rise to various accounts of omens and prophecies, forecasting anything for that year from a millennium to the apocalypse. Such accounts were fuelled by actual happenings such as the Dutch war, the plague and the fire of London, events conveniently clustered around 1666. Sprat sees the Society using science to teach people to depend on reason, rather than on prophecies:

This wild amazing mens minds, with Prodigies, and conceits of Providences, has been one of the most considerable causes of these spiritual distractions, of which our Country has long been the theater. Our Countrymen ... order their affairs of the greatest importance, according to some obscure *omens*, or *predictions*, that pass'd about amongst them, on little or no foundations. And at this time, especially last year (1666) this gloomy, and ill-boding humor has prevail'd. So that it is now the fittest season for *Experiments* to arise, to teach us a Wisdome, which springs from the depths of *Knowledge*, to shake off the shadows, and to scatter the mists, which fill the minds of men with a vain consternation.¹²⁶

According to Cowley, the Society must be patient and expect to deal with obstacles to knowledge like ignorance, envy and foolishness. Science is like an unknown star that appears by divine dispensation and causes panic among those who fail to apprehend its essentially heavenly beauty. Such a star, so to speak, will appear for what it is to the wise, but the foolish will take it to be a meteor, an ill omen and a cause for superstitious pessimism:

Whoever would Deposed Truth advance
Into the Throne usurp'd from it,
Must feel at first the Blows of Ignorance,
And the sharp Points of Envious Wit.
So when by various turns of the Celestial Dance,
In many thousand years
A Star, so long unknown, appears,
Though Heaven it self more beauteous by it grow,
It troubles and alarms the World below,
Does to the Wise a Star, to Fools a Meteor show.
(‘To the Royal Society,’ 156-65)

The poem ultimately celebrates science as a vehicle to truth; it celebrates the human spirit, liberated from ignorance and from the shackles of authority, which craves incessantly for knowledge. The Society is a focus for these aspirations and Cowley outlines what he expects of them. He tells this group of Bacon’s successors and devotees of truth that God has designated them to champion the cause of discovery and lead the legions who seek knowledge the world over:

From you, great Champions, we expect to get
These spacious Countries but discover'd yet;
Countries where yet in stead of Nature, we
Her Images and Idols worship'd see:
These large and wealthy Regions to subdue,
Though Learning has whole Armies at command,
Quarter'd about in every Land,
A better Troop she ne're together drew.
Methinks, like Gideon's little Band,
God with Design has pickt out you,
To do these noble Wonders by a Few.
(‘To the Royal Society,’ 109-119)

In a final twist to the poem, the last stanza introduces a discussion on style and draws a parallel between beauty in writing and beauty in natural philosophy. In particular,

the poem discusses Sprat's style in the History, the beauty of which should serve as an inspiration for the Society itself. Sprat has achieved the feat of purging his style of "all modern follies," just as the Society can attain its goal of purging knowledge of its error-strewn past and error-prone character:

With Courage and Success you the bold work begin;
Your Cradle has not Idle bin:
None e're but *Hercules* and you could be
At five years Age worthy a History.
And ne're did Fortune better yet
Th' Historian to the Story fit:
As you from all Old Errors free
And purge the Body of Philosophy;
So from all Modern Follies He
Has vindicated Eloquence and Wit.
His candid Stile like a clean Stream does slide,
And his bright Fancy all the way
Does like the Sun-shine in it play;
It does like *Thames*, the best of Rivers, glide. ...
T' has all the Beauties Nature can impart,
And all the comely Dress without the paint of Art.
(*'To the Royal Society,'* 166-79, 183-84)

Cowley's appreciation of Sprat amounts to an appreciation of the Society's policies on matters of language and style. The Society placed great store by the manner in which members expressed themselves and it became official policy to aim for plainness and simplicity at all times:

It will suffice to point out, what has been done by the *Royal Society*, towards the correcting of its excesses in *Natural Philosophy*; to which it is a most profest enemy. ... They have therefore ... a constant Resolution, to reject all the amplifications, digressions, and swellings of style: to return back to the primitive purity, and shortness, when men deliver'd so many *things*, almost in an equal number of *words*. They have extracted from all their members, a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions, clear senses; a native easiness: bringing all things as near the Mathematical plainness, as they can: and preferring the language of Artizans, Countrymen, and Merchants, before that of Wits, or Scholars.¹²⁷

The discussions on style recall some projects to which the Society invited Cowley to participate under its auspices, concerning the refinement of English. The most important of these projects concerned the founding of an English Academy, just as the French had done with the Académie Française. In an increasingly neo-classical age in which members added their voices to those calling for a regulatory body, the Society wanted to bring its values of order and reason to bear on the use of English:

If we observe well the English Language; we shall find, that it seems at this time more then others, to require some such aid, to bring it to its last perfection. The Truth is, it has been hitherto a little too carelessly hand led; and I think, has had less labor spent about its polishing, then it deserves.¹²⁸

Cowley was invited to join a committee of Society members that included fellow poets like Dryden and Waller, and friends like Sprat and Evelyn. Evelyn, writing many years later to Samuel Pepys (1689), would explain that the plan for an English Academy was never fulfilled because of the London disasters and Cowley's demise:

And indeed such was once designed (1665) and in order to it three or four meetings were begun at Gray's inn, by Mr. Cowley, Dr. Sprat, Mr. Waller, the D. of Buckingham, Mart. Clifford, Mr. Dryden, and some other promoters of it. But by the death of the incomparable Mr. Cowley, distance and inconvenience of the place, the contagion, and other circumstances intervening, it crumbled away and came to nothing.¹²⁹

Another related project was the one of which Sprat says, "We had persuaded him to look back into his former studies and to publish a Discourse concerning style."¹³⁰

Sprat would later find some notes on ancient and modern authors, but Cowley had not started the actual writing of the discourse. This would have been a comprehensive work on criticism, as suggested by the design:

In this he had designed to give an account of the proper sorts of writing, that were fit for all manner of arguments; to compare the perfections and imperfections of the authors of antiquity with those of this present age; and to deduce all down to the particular use of the English genius and language.¹³¹

Cowley's death therefore robbed the Society of the dominant personality in its projects on language and related disciplines. While his sole presence may yet have failed to ensure the founding of an English academy, his death effectively killed off such projects and confined the Society's legacy to essentially scientific interests.

Cowley's natural inclination is to accommodate and even celebrate all extant kinds of knowledge, but the objective standards set by the new learning make it evident that many ancient systems have no place in modern thought. But ancient authority is not the only challenge; the seeker of knowledge and truth must be at peace with themselves and with society, not wallow in a climate of social and political unrest

which, as Cowley's experience reveals to him, confounds the scholar's yearnings for intellectual and spiritual fulfilment. But Cowley has cause for optimism because the Restoration and the Royal Society are symbolic of the desire to return to true socio-political and intellectual values. His vision is for the Society, in particular, to lead the way in turning discovery and knowledge into a kind of palimpsest, with discoveries engendering greater discoveries, and the horizons of knowledge forever laying themselves bare. He is confident that monarchical government and kingly authority will ensure that this comes to pass. With so many of his visions coming to pass, he is emboldened to reach into the remote future and forecast many triumphs for the human spirit, triumphs that will bring heaven, the sanctuary of truth, within human range. Then, the yearning for the rediscovery of the 'golden' world of all knowledge will find fulfilment:

Io! Sound too the Trumpets here!
Already your victorious Lights appear;
New Scenes of Heaven already we espy,
And Crowds of golden Worlds on high.
(*'To the Royal Society,'* 134-37)

¹ William Cowper, *The Task and Selected Other Poems*, ed. James Sambrook (London: Longman 1994), *The Task* (pp. 55-228), p. 163. In these lines Cowper affectionately captures Cowley's final years in retirement spent in the countryside in Barnes from 1662 to 1665, and in Chertsey from 1665-1667. It is in order to focus on this aspect that I have omitted the following lines, inspired by Cowley himself in 'Life and Fame:' "What's *Some Body*, or *No Body*? / In all the *Cobwebs* of the *Schoolmens* trade" (3-4):

Ingenious Cowley! And though now reclaim'd
By modern lights from an erroneous taste,
I cannot but lament thy splendid wit
Entangled in the cobwebs of the schools.

(Cowper, *The Task*, IV. 723-26)

² Johnson does mention the "Song of Triumph" at the Restoration (p. 13), that is, the 'Ode. Upon His Majesties Restoration and Return;' he offers a brief account of 'The Complaint' (pp. 14-15); and he offers a most brief discussion of the *Essays* (p. 64). See Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, Vol. 1 (Cowley – Dryden), ed. George Birkbeck Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905).

³ Arthur H. Nethercot, *Abraham Cowley: The Muse's Hannibal* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 152-53.

⁴ Frank Kermode, "The Date of Cowley's *Davideis*" (*Review of English Studies*, Vol. 25, 1949, pp. 154-58), p. 158.

⁵ Nicholas Jose, *Ideas of the Restoration in English Literature (1660-71)* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 80.

⁶ Jose, p. 82.

⁷ Thomas Corns, *Uncloistered Virtue: English Political Literature, 1640-1660* (London: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 259.

⁸ Corns, p. 263.

⁹ Corns, pp. 264-5.

¹⁰ For a reading that challenges the notion of republicanism in the 'Brutus' ode, see for example T. R. Langley's article, "Abraham Cowley's 'Brutus': Royalist or Republican?" (*Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 6, 1976, pp. 41-52).

¹¹ Nethercot, p. 147.

¹² The intelligence was sent to Cromwell's Secretary of State, John Thurloe, by John Bampffield, ex-Royalist turned government spy, on 22 November 1655. It is contained in *A Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe*, cited in *Abraham Cowley: Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre*, Jean Loiseau (Paris: Henri Didier, 1931), p. 119.

¹³ The preface as a separate piece and as a work in poetics had been made popular by Davenant's Preface to *Gondibert* in 1651. Steven Zwicker discusses these prefaces as important documents in "our history of poetics," claiming that, "Perhaps the prefaces, once attached to the body of the poem, had a ... clearer literary identity." See *Lines of Authority: Politics and English Literary Culture, 1649-1689*, Stephen N. Zwicker (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 26.

¹⁴ Nethercot, p. 148.

¹⁵ Nethercot, p. 150.

¹⁶ Nethercot, p. 158.

¹⁷ Jose, p. 75.

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- ¹⁸ Roger Pooley, *English Prose of the Seventeenth Century, 1590-1700* (London: Longman, 1992), p. 185.
- ¹⁹ Waller appends the passage to Notes at the end of the text, preserving the tradition of non-inclusion in the Preface itself.
- ²⁰ Thomas Sprat, "An Account of the Life and Writings of Mr. Abraham Cowley" in *The Works of Abraham Cowley* (London, 1668), Preface.
- ²¹ Nethercot, pp. 149-150.
- ²² Corns, p. 256.
- ²³ Zwicker, p. 29.
- ²⁴ Corns, p. 259.
- ²⁵ Corns, pp. 258-9.
- ²⁶ On the subject of a spiritual restoration in the years leading up to the Restoration, Nicholas Jose wrote:
Within or without, a transformation of the world was pending, which made the immediate world insignificant. When Charles' Restoration actually occurred, there was a body of thought already in existence which enabled men like Cowley to celebrate and explain the event sublimely and allegorically. ... The Restoration which really mattered was that which responded to the previous decade's spiritual yearnings for total transformation. See Jose, p. 74.
- ²⁷ Jose, p. 95
- ²⁸ Loiseau has since discovered a copy in the British Museum that indicates that Cowley intended to publish the work initially under a pen name with this title: *The Visions and Prophecies concerning England, Scotland, and Ireland, of Ezekiel Grebner, son of Obadiah Grebner, son of Paul Grebner, who presented the famous book of Prophecies to Queen Elizabeth*. See Loiseau, Appendix III, p. 652.
- ²⁹ Cowley seemingly intended his poem to be the first of all Restoration poems and panegyrics to appear, but, appearing on 31 May, came later than that of Waller who beat him to the press by one day.
- ³⁰ Skinner writes that, "We find the neo-roman theory at the heart of the propaganda commissioned by the new government in its own defence." See *Liberty Before Liberalism*, Quentin Skinner (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 13.
- ³¹ Skinner, p. 13, cites from the official newspaper, *Mercurius Politicus*, where a series of articles were published from 1651 on what it meant to be "settled in a state of freedom."
- ³² Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Michael Oakshott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1946), p. 140.
- ³³ Don M. Wolfe cites from Hobbes' later work, *Behemoth*: "In the classics of Greece and Rome, wrote Hobbes, 'the popular government was extolled by that glorious name of liberty, and monarchy disgraced by the name of tyranny'." See *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, John Milton, Vol. IV (1650-1655), Part 1, ed. Don M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), Introduction (pp. 1-285), "The Advent of Thomas Hobbes" (pp. 30-37), p. 32.
- ³⁴ Hobbes, pp. 140-41.
- ³⁵ Skinner, p. 20.
- ³⁶ Skinner, pp. 22-3.

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- ³⁷ Wolfe cites Milton's reaction to Hobbes's ideas from John Aubrey's *Brief Lives*: "[I] did not like [Hobbes] at all, but would acknowledge him to be a man of great parts, and a learned man." See Milton, Introduction, p. 35.
- ³⁸ Again Hobbes would write in *Behemoth* that, "For who can be a good subject in a monarchy whose principles are taken from the enemies of monarchy, such as were Cicero, Seneca, Cato, and other politicians of Rome, and Aristotle of Athens, who seldom spake of kings but as of wolves and other ravenous beasts?" Cited by Wolfe in Milton, Introduction, p. 32.
- ³⁹ Milton, Introduction, p. 31.
- ⁴⁰ Milton, Introduction, p. 33.
- ⁴¹ Milton, Introduction, p. 35.
- ⁴² Loiseau, pp. 405-6. The translation from the French is mine.
- ⁴³ Loiseau, p. 409.
- ⁴⁴ Loiseau, pp. 407-8.
- ⁴⁵ See Loiseau, pp. 397-98.
- ⁴⁶ Robert B. Hinman, *Abraham Cowley's World of Order* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 217.
- ⁴⁷ Skinner, p. 54.
- ⁴⁸ Skinner, p. 54, cites the examples of Algernon Sidney and Henry Neville, with the latter, in particular, hailing the 'happy Restoration' of Charles II.
- ⁴⁹ Skinner, pp. 54-5.
- ⁵⁰ Skinner, p. 79.
- ⁵¹ Hinman, p. 219. Also, Hinman quotes the astrologer, Thomas Fuller, who remarked that, at Charles's birth, "The star Venus was visible all day long."
- ⁵² Hinman, p. 219.
- ⁵³ Milton, Introduction, "Milton's Reply to Salmacius," p. 108.
- ⁵⁴ Hobbes read Milton's *Defence*, as well as Salmacius's *Defensio Regia* that prompted it, but seems to have judged them more on religious lines than on party lines. In *Behemoth* he would deliver this verdict on both: "I have seen them both. They are very good Latin both, and hardly to be judged which is better; and both very ill reasoning, hardly to be judged which is worse. ... So like is a Presbyterian [Salmacius] to an Independent [Milton]." Cited by Wolfe. See Milton, Introduction, p. 35, n. 23).
- ⁵⁵ Writing in *Behemoth* under Charles II, Hobbes would lay emphasis on a sovereignty of one man, thereby hinting that his claim in *Leviathan* that sovereignty could be of one man or a body of men did not reflect his true position. See Milton, p. 31, n. 6.
- ⁵⁶ Cited in Milton, Introduction, p. 32.
- ⁵⁷ The *Essays* were published posthumously in 1668 by Sprat who chose the title of the collection.
- ⁵⁸ Mixing prose and verse was such a unique form of writing that Geoffrey Walton opened his chapter on "Cowley's Essays" with this sentence:

Cowley first mixed prose and verse together in a single composition and I can recall no one since, with the exception of Traherne, who in any case does not link them so closely in theme, who has attempted to use the mode until Auden, in *The Orators*, and some of the Surrealist writers, who again are too different to be comparable.

See Metaphysical to Augustan: Studies in Tone and Sensibility in the Seventeenth Century, Geoffrey Walton (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1955), p. 94.

⁵⁹ In 1663 Cowley had already printed some of the poems, classical translations and paraphrases, which were later added to the *Essays*. See Nethercot, p. 261.

⁶⁰ Johnson, p. 64.

⁶¹ Cited in Abraham Cowley's Reputation in England, Jean Loiseau (Paris: Henri Didier, 1931), p. 105.

⁶² Alexander Pope, *Imitations of Horace: Epistle to Augustus*. Cited in Loiseau, Reputation, p. 91.

⁶³ Cited in Loiseau, Reputation, p. 91.

⁶⁴ Maren-Sofie Rostvig, The Happy Man: Studies in the Metamorphoses of a Classical Ideal 1600-1700 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1954), p. 34.

⁶⁵ Rostvig, p. 59.

⁶⁶ On Cowley's fondness for classical thought, Loiseau observes in Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre, p. 428, that classical culture has become second nature to Cowley, for when he develops themes already discussed by the ancients, he uses their words spontaneously to express his thoughts. Loiseau adds, p. 429, that Cowley does not make a point of distinguishing what comes from him and what he borrows from the ancients, such is the complete fusion between himself and them, an instinctive identification.

⁶⁷ Rostvig, p. 60. In addition to Cowley she cites poets like Waller, Vaughan, Benlowes, Katherine Philips, Philip Stanley, and Sherburne.

⁶⁸ Loiseau, in Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre, p. 140, notes that from Oxford Charles I had written to his Queen promising Cowley the post of Master of Savoy Hospital, and that on 30 January 1653 his son and successor signed a text attributing this post to Cowley. This date is given by Cowley in his petition to the King cited by Loiseau on pp. 646-7.

⁶⁹ Loiseau, as part of his Appendices in Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre, pp. 645-6, cites the King's letter on Cowley's behalf to the University that included the following:

Whereas our trusty and well-beloved servant Abraham Cowley was wrongfully put out of his said fellowship since the beginning of the late warres before hee had enjoyed any of the said tyme that should have been allowed him, ... [we] require you that you give the said A. Cowley quickly to enjoy the said fellowship and all priviledges and emoluments belonging thereunto for the said space of seaven yeares.

⁷⁰ Loiseau, pp. 646-7, cites the petition Cowley wrote to the King giving a number of reasons to justify his claims on the Mastership of the Savoy. These reasons included that promise granted "under the hand of two Kings." He could not understand his treatment despite his unstinting service to these same two Kings and the Queen Mother "during all the times of distresse and banishment ... in matters of considerable trust and labour," and that various Royalists had already been "rewarded with profitable employments and honours." See Loiseau, Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre, pp. 646-47. Also, see Nethercot, pp. 197-8 for further commentary.

⁷¹ 'The Complaint' seems to have provoked reactions in equal measure of pity and sadness, derision and satire. A response from an unknown author that seemed to contain all of these elements appeared in the *Session of the Poets*, following a performance of one of Cowley's plays in the theatre:

Savoy-missing Cowley came into the Court,

Making apologies for his bad play;
Every one gave him so good a report
That Apollo gave heed to all he could say;

Nor would he have had, 'tis thought, a rebuke,
Unless he had done some notable folly:
Writ verses unjustly in praise of Sam Tuke,
Or printed his pitiful Melancholy.

Cited by Nethercot, p. 215, where this anonymous piece is used to close a chapter simply entitled "The Melancholy Cowley." See also Johnson, p. 15, and Loiseau, *Reputation*, p. 11.

⁷² Cowley never identified with any particular one of the nine Muses and tended to refer to them collectively, compared to Milton for example who identifies with Urania in *Paradise Lost*. The Muses were: Calliope ('Lovely Voice'), Clio ('Renown'), Euterpe ('Gladness'), Thalia ('Good Cheer'), Melpomene ('Singer'), Terpsichore ('Delighting in the Dance'), Erato ('Loveliness'), Polymnia ('Many Songs'), and Urania ('Heavenly One').

⁷³ Compare for example Cowley's "Business! The thing which I of all things hate, / Business! The contradiction of thy Fate" with Hopkins and Mason's "Business, which I (of all things) hate! Business, the contradiction of his Fate!" See *The Story of Poetry*, David Hopkins and Tom Mason (Bristol: Broadside Books, 1992), p. 69.

⁷⁴ Such is the incomprehension and frustration of his treatment that Cowley ends his petition by suggesting that his casting adrift smacks of the treatment of a criminal or worthless person:
[The] reward of twenty years service from two Kings hath bin taken from him without the least recompense or consideration for it, and hee not onely ruined by ye losse thereof but exposed to ye shame of a generall interpretation yt this could not have happened to him but either as ye punishment of a great criminall, or ye casting away of a most worthless person.

Cited in Loiseau, *Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre*, p. 647. See also Nethercot, p. 198.

⁷⁵ The Savoy issue would not stop Henrietta Maria rewarding Cowley later. Nethercot, pp. 208-9, takes up the story of how, at the instigation of the Earl of St. Albans, the Queen Mother made "a conveyance of a goodly portion of her lands in the County of Kent" to Cowley. It has been suggested that it was not so much the King himself as his advisers who were responsible for Cowley losing the Savoy position. Anthony Wood writes in his *Fasti Oxonienses* of 1690 that, "He lost [the Mastership] by certain persons, enemies to the Muses" (Quoted by Johnson, *Lives*, p. 13). These persons obviously misinterpreted some of Cowley's works, such as the powerful Lord Clarendon who reproached him for his 'Brutus' ode (see Loiseau, *Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre*, p. 142). Cowley wrote in the Preface to the *Cutter of Coleman Street* play in 1661 that, "From all which I have written I never received the least benefit; but, on the contrary, have felt sometimes the effects of malice and misfortune." In fact, similar misinterpretations of this same play caused Cowley to ask in the same Preface why, after following them throughout his life, "he should chuse the time of their restoration [of the royal family] to begin a quarrel with them."

⁷⁶ Rostvig, pp. 42-3.

⁷⁷ Rostvig, p. 46, writes that, "The country life which [Cowley] sought was a direct imitation of Horace's existence on his Sabine farm and it was prompted by the same philosophy." Also, Nethercot, p. 252, entitles a chapter on Cowley's retirement "The Sabine Farm," writing that, "Yes, Cowley ... came as close to realizing his Sabine farm ideals as Providence usually allows men to do with such hopes."

⁷⁸ Commentators have gone as far as ascribing the epithet "Horatian" to the essays. A recent example is that of Martindale who speaks of Cowley's "*Horatian Essays in Prose and Verse*." See "The Horace of Ben Jonson and his Heirs," Joanna Martindale, in *Horace Made New: Horatian Influences on British Writing from the Renaissance to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Charles Martindale and David Hopkins (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 72.

⁷⁹ Robert Hinman, p. 87.

⁸⁰ Hopkins and Mason, p. 60.

⁸¹ Sprat, p. xxii.

⁸² Rostvig, pp. 100-101. Also, Loiseau writes also that Cowley uses the *Essays* to prove that his fleeing from the city into the country was not done out of resentment, but by mature reflection. See Loiseau, *Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre*, p. 422.

⁸³ Walton, p. 100, concurs that "Of Myself" constitutes a natural starting point for a discussion on the *Essays*: "*Of Myself*, though the last essay, provides the best starting-point for a consideration of Cowley's [life] values." It appears to be the only essay whose position also reflects its being written last. Loiseau states categorically that certain expressions reveal Cowley's intention to use it to conclude the sequence, most notably, "Because I have concluded all the other Chapters with a Copy of Verses, I will maintain the Humour to the last" ("*Of Myself*," *Essays*, p. 459). See Loiseau, *Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre*, p. 171.

⁸⁴ The poem entitled 'The Wish' in *The Mistress* could be read as an extension of 'The Vote.' It is written in five stanzas, of which here are the first two:

1.

Well then; I now do plainly see,
This busie world and I shall ne're agree;
The very *Honey* of all earthly joy
Does of all meats the soonest *cloy*,
And they (methinks) deserve my pity,
Who for it can endure the stings,
The *Crowd*, and *Buz*, and *Murmurings*
Of this great *Hive*, the *City*.

2.

Ah, yet, e're I descend to th' Grave
May I a *small House*, and *large Garden* have!
And a *few Friends*, and *many Books*, both true,
Both wise, and both delightful too!
And since *Love* ne're will from me flee,
A *Mistress* moderately fair,
And good as *Guardian-Angels* are,
Only below'd, and loving me!

('The Wish,' 1-16)

⁸⁵ Nethercot, pp. 234-5, proposes that Mr. S. L. stands for Mr. Sprat of Lincoln, arguing that, "in the first folio of Cowley's *Works*, ... the 'S.' is in roman type and the 'L.' in italic. ... And if it was not written to Mr. Sprat, how did it come into his possession?"

⁸⁶ Loiseau (*Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre*, p. 171) suggests 1662, just as Nethercot's argument (pp. 234-5) that it was addressed to Mr. Sprat of Lincoln also places it firmly in 1662, the year when Sprat became prebendary of Lincoln cathedral.

⁸⁷ Johnson, p. 62.

⁸⁸ On this poem being Cowley's own composition as opposed to a classical piece, Rostvig, p. 95, suggests that Cowley considers the theme of solitude no less classical than others despite the apparent lack of classical sources dealing with it:

The classical poets did not forget their love of a golden mean long enough to fall for the snares of the theme of solitude; the love of solitude was a much later development. ... To Cowley, the theme of solitude was classical by imputation, if not by direct statement.

⁸⁹ Nethercot, p. 261, records that, “‘The Garden’ was ... dated from Chertsey on August 16, 1666; it was a complimentary acknowledgement of Evelyn’s intention to dedicate the second edition of the *Kalendarium Hortense* to Cowley.”

⁹⁰ Nethercot, p. 237. Further, such was Cowley’s enthusiasm as a gardener that “he went so far as to borrow the manuscript of his friend’s *Kalendarium Hortense*, not yet in print, and to transcribe it for his guidance on such precarious problems as had to do with the use of hot-beds versus flower-pots” (p. 238).

⁹¹ Evelyn, on the occasion of his dedication of the *Kalendarium Hortense* to Cowley in 1666, does compliment his friend on his success on finding his happy state in Chertsey:

You gather the first roses of the Spring, and apples of Autumn; and as the Philosopher in Seneca desir’d only bread and herbs, to dispute felicity with Jupiter, you vie happiness in a thousand easy and sweet diversions; not forgetting the innocent toils which you cultivate, the leisure and the liberty, the books, the meditations, and above all, the learned and choice friendships that you enjoy, who would not, like you, *acher sa vie*.

Cited by Walton, p. 104.

⁹² Rostvig, p. 101.

⁹³ Loiseau notes that Cowley’s premature retirement was the source of much criticism and cites the case of Jermyn who was indignant at being separated from his ex-secretary and confidant. The *Essays* are to some extent Cowley’s response, his desire being to prove that by fleeing the city he did not act out of mere frustration but only after mature reflection. See Loiseau, *Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre*, p. 422.

⁹⁴ David Hopkins, “Cowley’s Horatian Mice,” in Martindale and Hopkins (eds.), p. 121.

⁹⁵ Hopkins, p. 113. Still on the connection between Cowleyan doctrine and Christian teaching, Hopkins cites this sentence from Cowley’s ninth essay, “The Shortness of Life and the Uncertainty of Riches:”

We are all *ephèmeroi*, as Pindar calls us, creatures of a day, and therefore our Saviour bounds our desires to that little space; as if it were very probable that every day should be our last, we are taught to demand even bread for no longer a time.

Loiseau observes that the practice was rife in Cowley’s age whereby many commonplace books sought maxims and examples from classical literature that chimed with guides for Christian living. See Loiseau, *Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre*, pp. 429, n. 19.

⁹⁶ Hopkins, p. 112.

⁹⁷ Nethercot, p. 265.

⁹⁸ Rostvig, p. 314.

⁹⁹ Nethercot, p. 267. Hopkins, p. 113, echoes Nethercot’s observations: “For Cowley, as for Gassendi and his English populaizers, the main tenets of Epicurus’ ethical teaching are compatible with the teachings of Christianity.”

¹⁰⁰ Rostvig, p. 66.

¹⁰¹ Nethercot, p. 267.

¹⁰² Cited in Hopkins, p. 111.

¹⁰³ Cited in Loiseau, *Reputation*, p. 105.

¹⁰⁴ Nethercot, p. 171, suggests that Harvey’s close relationship with Scarborough, for whom he was patron and master, would have brought Cowley even closer to the great discoverer.

¹⁰⁵ Joseph Glanvill, *Plus Ultra*, pp. 82-3. Cited in *The Royal Society: Concept and Creation*, Margery Purver (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 172.

¹⁰⁶ Nethercot, pp. 170-71, writes that,
The result of this course of study, which could not have consumed more than two years at the most, was that Cowley was created 'doctor of physic'. ... He made no attempt to exercise his new and quickly gained power by practising upon ailing and defenceless humanity. The only consequences of his studies were his new title of 'Dr.' and a long series of botanical verses, written in Latin a year or two later.

¹⁰⁷ Nethercot, p. 169.

¹⁰⁸ Loiseau points out that this last paragraph containing this formal plea to the King and the nation was only added to the original text (1659) after the Restoration for self-evident reasons. See Loiseau, *Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre*, p. 173.

¹⁰⁹ D. C. Allen, *The Legend of Noah: Renaissance Rationalism in Art, Science and Letters* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1949), p. 25.

¹¹⁰ Joseph Glanvill, *Scepsis Scientifica*. See *History of the Royal Society*, Thomas Sprat. Ed. Jackson I Cope and Harold Whitmore Jones (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), Introduction, p. xii.

¹¹¹ Bacon's concepts were not wholly original. Eleanor Blodgett, for example, finds remarkable similarities, for example, between his *New Atlantis* and Tommaso Campanella's *Civitas Solis*:
If the connection between the two works is not a conscious one, the coincidence of time, theme and treatment testifies to the wide currency of the idea of a scientific basis for knowledge in the seventeenth century, and shows how inevitable empiricism was as an outgrowth of Renaissance thinking. ... [But] if Campanella's work actually provided Bacon with the immediate incentive to lay aside temporarily his work on the *Instauratio Magna* and to set down, in *The New Atlantis* his conception of a commonwealth as it ought to be, we may thank the Italian monk for having contributed indirectly to the founding of the Royal Society.

Blodgett is in no doubt, however, that both scholars definitely fell under the influence of *De Rerum Natura* of Bernardino Telesio, the scholar who
sowed the seeds from which sprang the scientific methods of Campanella and Bruno, of Bacon and Descartes. ... His system is a forerunner of all subsequent empiricism, scientific and philosophical, and marks clearly the period of transition from authority to experiment. ... Bacon called him *novorum hominum primus*.

See "Bacon's *The New Atlantis* and Campanella's *Civitas Solis*: A Study in Relationships," Eleanor Dickinson Blodgett (*PMLA*, Vol. 46, 1931), pp. 763-780.

¹¹² Sprat, *History*, p. 35.

¹¹³ Henry Lyons, for example, offers this explanation:

It is not known by whom the English translations of the Charters were made. ... In it and the other Charters the members of the Society are described as 'Fellows', a term which was used by Bacon in his *New Atlantis* whence it is said to have been adopted by the Society. ... Later the term 'Fellow' became general, 'Member' being applied to the foreign members only.

See *The Royal Society 1660-1940: A History of its Administration under its Charters*, Henry Lyons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1944), p. 40.

¹¹⁴ Sprat, *History*, p. 52.

¹¹⁵ The title "Royal Society" was adopted on its incorporation, on the instigation of John Evelyn, in honour of the King's contribution as official founder. See *The Diary of John Evelyn*, Vol. III, ed. E. S. De Beer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 306.

¹¹⁶ Sprat, *History*, Epistle Dedicatory.

¹¹⁷ Sprat, *History*, p. 58.

¹¹⁸ Sprat, History, pp. 59-60).

¹¹⁹ Sprat, "Life."

¹²⁰ Bacon, The Refutation of Philosophies, trans. in The Philosophy of Francis Bacon, Benjamin Farrington (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1964), p. 120.

¹²¹ Bacon is often referred to as the founder of experimental philosophy. Peter Urbach, for example, observes that, "Bacon well deserves his title of 'Father of Experimental Philosophy' because of the accuracy of his conception of the empirical basis of knowledge and the detail with which he expounded it." See Francis Bacon's Philosophy of Science: An Account and a Reappraisal, Peter Urbach (La Salle: Open Court, 1987), p. 185.

¹²² Sprat, History, p. 36.

¹²³ Bacon, Novum Organum in Works, ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis and Douglas Denon Heath, Vol 1 (London: Longman, 1858), p. 110.

¹²⁴ Pepys Diary, 1 February 1664. Cited in History, Introduction, p. xiii.

¹²⁵ Sprat, History, Advertisement to the Reader.

¹²⁶ Sprat, History, p. 362.

¹²⁷ Sprat, History, p. 113.

¹²⁸ Sprat, History, pp. 42-3).

¹²⁹ Cited by Nethercot, p. 258. See also Loiseau, Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre, p.175.

¹³⁰ Sprat, "Life."

¹³¹ Sprat, "Life."

CONCLUSION

Abraham Cowley had the vision to forecast, and participate in, the beginnings of modern British society that could be traced back to the mid-seventeenth century. The evolution of his thought reflected the overall transformation from an essentially humanist and even medievalist way of thinking and general world-view at the start of the century to a modern one on the eve of the Restoration. Like Hobbes, the greatest contemporary influence on his thought, Cowley's unswerving faith in monarchical government was rewarded in spectacular fashion by the very occurrence of the Restoration. He might have been a traditionalist in matters of politics, casting his mind back for reassurance to centuries of monarchical rule in British history, but his fervent belief that monarchy was also the true form of government made him something of a visionary. If this aspect of his thought is particularly relevant for us, it is because his vision for British political institutions has been perpetually fulfilled through the endurance of the monarchy through the ages. Despite not having experienced the fulfilment of his Parliamentary ideals in his own time, Cowley was able to forecast correctly that the British model would be a form of government in which the age-old institutions of monarchy and parliament work together. But this was not the king-in-parliament theory propounded by republican apologists, nor was it Milton's theory accommodating the sovereignty of the subject. For Cowley there could be no question that the monarch was sovereign, and that his subjects, including the Parliamentary assembly, owed it to him to acknowledge this. It is with this vision that, like a veritable intellectual historian, he contributed so bravely to the shattering of the essentially neo-roman theory of republicanism and free states that would ultimately be laid to rest in the eighteenth century.

A reluctant participant in public life and the political centre, despite his heightened sense of history and his political vision, Cowley's thought was primarily intellectual, his concern the need for discovery and the pursuit of knowledge. That is why he wanted to be at the vanguard of the intellectual revolution that led to the founding of the Royal Society. He was more than just one of its earliest members, for the Society was actually structured along the lines he laid down, his emboldened vision rewarded by the manner in which this body has endured as a symbol of scientific research and the search for truth. Defending such a body and showing abiding faith in the human mind's capacity for progress towards divine truth were fitting tributes to Bacon himself. No wonder the Society acknowledged his inspiring contribution, the poem it entreated him to write prefixed for all time to Sprat's History. Cowley loved this role of poetry, conferring immortality on its subject and even in that process ensuring lasting acclaim for himself. We have sought to study his poetical works fully, on a scale not previously accomplished in English, as a means of harnessing the many dimensions to his thought in addition to the historical, political and intellectual, in short the thought that contributed to the makings of modern Britain. He ensured that he influenced his age on such diverse subjects as love and liberty, building in the process a body of poetry as well as a poetics that makes him one of the earliest critical theorists in English literature. Cowley was a career poet profoundly conscious of his craftsmanship, for he had been born as a child of his Muse who had defined his station in life. Acknowledging this, he decided to bring his full faculties of mind and reason to bear on his art, evolving a style whereby his thought and his poetry would fuse together, the one informing and shaping the other. That is why we have explored this unique approach, taking account in particular of how his thought evolved in line with his formal poetic considerations.

It is largely because of the way Cowley's life-long search for true forms made him shape his work that twentieth century critical opinion has involved itself only with precise sections of his large body of poetry. In doing so it has mostly ignored to appreciate that Cowley could only be truly judged, as his contemporaries did, when the whole diversity and variety of his poetic oeuvre is evaluated. We have taken account of this and sought to show the accuracy of the judgement of his age, hopefully discovering in the process why his reputation was considered to be as safe as that of any English poet before him. This return to basic and true sources is part of our method, for we have sought to return to the poet's original method with our emphasis on form. Our unprecedented close reading of his poetry, and along the lines of his formal divisions, has enabled the fascinating possibility of offering interpretations that are at once natural and new. In doing so, we have sought to revise some parochial assumptions of the last century while hopefully setting scholarly interest and critical opinion on a path that should lead ultimately to Cowley's own very restoration in the new twenty-first century on a scale befitting his groundbreaking contribution and poetic genius.

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