

ROMANTICISM AND THE RELIGIOUS IMPERATIVE : A STUDY  
OF THE IMAGINATION AS THE COMMON GRAMMAR OF  
LITERATURE AND RELIGION

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All religions owe their origin or acceptance to  
the wish of the human heart to supply in another  
state of existence the deficiencies of this.  
.....  
..... all great poets are in this  
view powerful Religionists.

- Walter Savage Landor

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(A) INTRODUCTORY RATIONALE

(DESCRIPTIVE ABSTRACT)

This study will offer a close examination of Literature and Religion, investigating the parallels in central preoccupations, areas of exploration and modes of discourse which exist between them. There will be a particular emphasis on the way in which Literature and Religion articulate their concerns, i.e. on the language in which their ideas and investigations are expressed. In this regard, we will focus on the essential narrative structures integral to literary and religious discourse. Closely linked to this, there will be an examination of the role of the Imagination as the principal source of inspiration, persuasive power and narrative force in both Literature and Religion. This examination will include an in-depth analysis of the "vocabulary" and "grammar of the Imagination"<sup>1</sup> with close attention to metaphor, myth and symbol as the primary components of Imaginative discourse.

Following on from and arising out of the above discussion, there will be an investigation of the religious imperative in the work of some of the major English Romantic poets. Attention will be focused on the religious character of the Romantic "Quest for the Sublime" and this will be supplemented with a close scrutiny of the predominant symbols and metaphors through which this quest is articulated.

Finally, there will be a brief survey of literary theories arising out of philosophical paradigms which repudiate the Romantic understanding of the function of poetry. We will consider how and where these "anti-Romantic" perspectives challenge or oppose the Romantic ontology and thereafter, an attempt will be made to estimate just how serious a threat they pose to the "religious"<sup>2</sup> validity of Literature in general.

NOTES

1. In observing that Literature and Religion actually share a "common grammar", I am drawing on John Coulson's reference to the notion of a "grammar of assent" between these two traditions. In this context, "grammar" is understood as "that underlying form or structure which is revealed" as we come to terms with any particular discipline.  
[See John Coulson, Religion and Imagination (Oxford Clarendon Press; 1981) p.145]
  
2. The adjective "religious" is used here and elsewhere in the sense of the broad definition offered at the beginning of this dissertation.

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## CHAPTER 1

### LITERATURE AND RELIGION : THEIR COMMON CONCERNS

The strongest part of our religion today  
is its unconscious poetry.

- Matthew Arnold

Although Literature and Religion would seem to constitute two autonomous and discrete traditions, they are, as this chapter will attempt to show, intimately linked through shared spheres of interest. The relationship between them is so ancient, and the interdependence of their major themes and modes of discourse so clearly evident, that a study of their connection must certainly be of interest to theologians and literary theorists alike. In fact, to ignore the intimate association between sacred and secular literatures is to present a grossly impoverished understanding of the function of Religion and Literature in human history.

In this chapter, my central concern is to locate the major thematic "areas of coincidence" between Literature and Religion. What I wish to demonstrate is that the principal preoccupations of the two traditions are fundamentally the same. It is no mere random occurrence that the world's oldest surviving literary texts are religious scriptures. We have only to consider some of the earliest writings in the languages of antiquity - The Old Testament, The Vedas, Upanisads and Puranas of ancient India, Graeco-Roman Mythology, Scandinavian folklore and legend and even ancient Runic inscriptions - to realize the extent to which early literature was permeated by religious preoccupations.<sup>1</sup>

At this interim, it should be noted that the term "religious" used here and throughout this entire discussion is to be understood at its broadest level of meaning, i.e. I am not concerned with the perspectives of any specific or localized denomination, but rather with those universal, all-embracing themes relating to human and cosmic origin and to Man's purpose and destiny. The issues encompassed by the epithet "religious" are those pertaining to what the theologian Paul Tillich described as "Ultimate concern". Like Tillich, our concern here is with "that which matters to us unconditionally"<sup>2</sup> and with the transphenomenal sphere of the "unconditioned".<sup>3</sup>

The thematic interdependence of Literature and Religion rests in the fact that they ask the same questions. These questions are "religious" in nature and orientation because they address issues of "ultimate concern", i.e. how and for what reason was the world created? What is Man's role in the universe, his place within, and his contribution to a perceived "cosmic design"? They are the age-old, perennial questions of cosmogony, theodicy and human destiny.

While these "ultimate" questions constitute the primary investigation of all religious traditions, it may be argued at this point that they are not the major preoccupation of all literature, i.e. not all works of literature extend themselves to examining issues of "ultimate concern". The fact is, however, that all literature, along a varying spectrum of concentration, deals with the drama of the "Human Condition", so that while the ultimate existential questions of Man's origin, role and destiny may not be directly addressed, they are certainly implicit or latent even in "non-metaphysical" literature which confines itself to the mundane sphere of social, political and economic issues.

Dickens, for example, did not concern himself with metaphysics, but his novels constitute an in-depth examination of the existing social conditions of his day.

Though he may not have been immediately concerned with the "ultimate destiny" of Mankind, he was deeply concerned with human relationships and with the effect of socio-economic circumstances on the psychological development of human character.<sup>4</sup> Though profoundly aware of the social injustice, economic disparity and class prejudice which characterized Victorian England, Dickens nonetheless affirmed a vision of potential harmony and order which, if largely improbable at a broad social level, was definitely within the grasp of the individual. For Dickens, fiction was the medium through which this vision of personal harmony and psychological integrity could be expressed. In the face of the spirit of commercial rationalism which permeated his era, Dickens's novels reflect an essential humanism, a clear affirmation of the potential of the individual to achieve moral victory over social corruption.

Thus, while his work may not be "religious" in the normative understanding of this word, or even in terms of Tillich's broad theory, it certainly reflects a religious orientation in its profoundly moral approach to the Human predicament. We cannot dismiss the idea that any literature which addresses itself to issues of moral or metaphysical concern is either essentially "religious" in motivation, or is at very least approaching this level of enquiry. There is no doubt that works which investigate human psychology occupy the first rungs of the ladder towards "Ultimate Concern". It is my contention that insofar as any work of literature begins to investigate issues that will eventually culminate in the "ultimate questions", it is to some extent adopting the same motivation and direction as religious enquiry.

In touching on the work of Dickens, I have stressed the relevance of the moral emphasis of his novels because it seems obvious that the concept of morality is inextricably linked to a religious apprehension of the universe. In fact, the very notion of morality only assumes significance within a frame of reference that recognizes an absolute standard of arbitration. The notion of moral transgression, for example, can only make sense if there is a moral standard from which it is possible to deviate!

Within all religious traditions, the existence of a "Moral Absolute" is axiomatically accepted. This concept must be broadly explained since it is of major significance in our understanding of what constitutes religious enquiry in both a religious and literary framework.

The term "Moral Absolute" as used here and throughout this discussion is closely identified with the concepts of The Holy, The Sacred and The Numinous.<sup>5</sup> It corresponds with that profound sense of some supernal "Grand Design", which is at the foundation of the religious paradigm.

The concept of the "Moral Absolute" or "Moral Order" broadly accommodates all cultural and theological variants on the notion of an enduring "Ultimate Reality"<sup>6</sup> which both encompasses and transcends the phenomenal universe. It is a prevailing archetype in both the individual and collective human psyche and, though it may assume different lineaments within the various cultures and traditions in which it emerges, it nevertheless retains certain distinctive, inalienable properties which transcend spatial and temporal boundaries. For example, it is always associated with eternality and immutability. For this reason, the Moral Order is identified with the Absolute, a fact which authorizes it as an axiomatic source of "absolute", incontestable arbitration in situations involving ethical controversy or dispute.



It is also characterized by a perennial self-generating and self-regulating equilibrium. (Cosmic Order/Harmony/Balance)<sup>7</sup>

Levels of enquiry and endeavour that qualify for the description "religious" are those that attempt firstly to explore the "Moral Imperative", and secondly, to reconcile human thought and action to the Moral Order.<sup>8</sup>

When we investigate Literature, certain distinctive levels of enquiry become evident. As earlier indicated, all literature is to some extent concerned with exploring the implications of the Moral Order although, as previously conceded, not all literature pursues this exploration to the level of "Ultimate Concern". However, it is this fundamental explorative impetus, clearly evident in the spirit of literary enquiry, which links Literature so intimately with Religion.

Within Literature, however, the trajectory of enquiry branches out into two types of exploration: firstly there is that school of literature which, having explored the possibility of the Moral Order, finds no evidence to support the existence of such a concept and thus repudiates all theories of Cosmic design or Providential purpose. This type of literature arises out of those schools of philosophy which conceptualize the universe as random, even absurd, and which do not recognize any ultimate or absolute destiny for Mankind other than the inevitable and irrevocable facts of birth and death. The paradigm which best reflects this interpretation of the "Human Condition" is that of atheistic Existentialism<sup>9</sup> of which Nietzsche and Sartre are perhaps the most renowned exponents.

In a world devoid of Ultimate meaning and purpose, Existentialism suggests that Man, at very best, is afforded the possibility of creating his own subjective meaning, and at worst, is the victim of a meaninglessness so vast that it reduces human existence to irredeemable absurdity. It is particularly within this latter, extreme view that "Literature of the Absurd", with its bleak though often macabrely humorous representation of the Human Condition, has its roots.<sup>10</sup>

The second type of literature - and that with which this discourse will primarily concern itself - explores the concept of the Moral Order, concludes that such an order does indeed exist, and then continues to examine Man's role within the complex hierarchy of relationships which form the "gestalt" of this all-pervading Design. There is a wide variety of literature which represents this category, all of which, irrespective of the extent to which they pursue it, endorse a vision of life that affirms meaning, purpose and the possibility of achieving personal integrity and/or social harmony. In this discussion, our particular focus of attention will be on those works which extend their enquiry to "Ultimate Concern", i.e. those which raise and examine the "ultimate questions" and which are predominantly interested in exploring the nature of "Ultimate Reality".

Such literature may be broadly defined as "Romantic" and our investigation will therefore not confine itself to Romanticism as an historical phenomenon, i.e. the literary and artistic movement which flourished in Europe from the late 18th Century to the mid 19th Century, but rather our understanding of this term will apply to all those forms of literature which reflect the "Quest for the Sublime" and are thus "romantic" thematically rather than chronologically.

The literature that we shall designate "Romantic" is identified by its predominant concern with the nature of the Sacred or the Numinous. Within this category, there is a wide variety of definitions and understandings of what constitutes the Sacred, but the fundamental assumptions consistently prevail as we shall later see.

With our earlier broad definition in mind, it will also become clear that Romantic literature is essentially "religious" in that it shares the same central preoccupations as Religion, i.e. it attempts to gain some apprehension of the Moral Order and to explore the means by which Man might re-connect himself to it. The theme of reconnection is extremely significant here, since Romantic literature is pervaded by a sense of humanity's alienation from the Moral Order and it constantly strives to re-align Man with the state of Harmony and Balance which it sees as his psychological and spiritual heritage.<sup>11</sup> It is perhaps in this respect that Romantic - as opposed to Existentialist - literature is most intimately allied to Religion: integral to both are the pervasive and predominant themes of Restoration, Redemption and Healing ("making whole").

The parallels between Romantic literature and Religion in motive and principal domain of enquiry are such that, as early as the 19th Century, scholars and critics began to interpret Literature as the modern substitute for a religious tradition that had become sterile and unfulfilling. Matthew Arnold, for example, attached immense importance to the religious role of poetry. In his essay "The Study of Poetry" he observed: "The future of poetry is immense because in poetry, where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay".<sup>12</sup>

On the subject of the sterility of orthodox religion, he claimed that "there is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve. Our religion has materialized itself in the fact, in the supposed fact; it has attached its emotion to the fact and now the fact is failing it".<sup>13</sup>

By "the fact", Arnold was alluding to the rigid emphasis which normative religion attached to the "letter of the law" rather than to its spirit. Like all the Romantics, he condemned the narrowness of a religious tradition which clung tenaciously to laws and rules - in short, to dogma - but which was patently barren in terms of emotional and imaginative content.<sup>14</sup>

The Romantics believed that it was Literature, specifically poetry, which contained the spiritual dimension so glaringly absent in traditional religion. Clearly locating himself in this context, Arnold postulated that it was the mission of poetry to restore society to its spiritual integrity - its religious "wholeness". "But for poetry the idea is everything; the rest is a world of illusion, of divine illusion. Poetry attaches its emotion to the idea; the idea is the fact. *The strongest part of our religion today is its unconscious poetry*".<sup>15</sup> (italics mine)

Two concepts are significant here : The notion of the idea and the emotion which poetry attaches to it. For Arnold, as indeed for all the Romantics, the idea is consonant with the Imagination, a concept which we will explore in detail later in this discussion. Suffice it to say at this juncture that "the idea" as Arnold understood it, represents authentic spiritual vision as opposed to mere religious dogma ("the fact") and it is significantly charged with emotion, a crucial and inalienable

aspect since, unless the emotions are powerfully engaged, no self-styled religious tenet can have any enduring impact.

Having broadly established the thematic and conceptual parallels between Literature (always understood in the context of this discussion as Romantic Literature) and Religion, we must now narrow the field of our attention since it does not lie within the scope of this discussion to examine in depth all existing literary genres. Our focus here will therefore be on poetry, since of all literary forms, its structure and mode of discourse seem most ideally suited to the "quest for the sublime" which is at the heart of religious enquiry. Prose (the novel) and drama may well be - and indeed, have been - employed to address issues of "Ultimate Concern", but they lack the density and concentration of structure and that "multivalence" of meaning and imagery which are peculiar to Poetry.

It is not surprising, therefore, that of all the available literary forms, Romantic literature predominantly selects Poetry as its medium of expression.

In support of this observation, we have only to consider the major Romantic writers in English literature: Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats and Shelley (who are chronologically as well as temperamentally "Romantics") and Tennyson, Yeats and T.S. Eliot (who are "neo-Romantics" in that they are clearly located within the Romantic tradition, although they do not fall within the same historical period).

All these writers used Poetry as their main vehicle of expression, a fact which clearly establishes Poetry as the principal discourse of Romantic literature.

Along with Arnold (more noted as a critic and essayist than a poet) the Romantics held the belief that "more and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us".<sup>16</sup>

Aptly representing the Romantic point of view, Arnold also claimed that "most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry".<sup>17</sup> While at first glance this may seem a rather radical prophecy, it must be remembered that for Arnold, the vocation of poetry was essentially religious in its close and intense preoccupation with the "ultimate questions".

Like Religion, Romantic literature by its very nature operates within a world view of moral absolutes. It is this which above all other criteria distinguishes it from the Existential literary tradition. Because it affirms no Moral Absolute, Existentialist literature locates itself in a Relativist Universe in terms of which Good and Evil have no enduring value as moral indices. In such a framework, it is impossible to make any moral pronouncements: all viewpoints are purely subjective, derived from the inescapable solipsism of human vision. Thus, within the Relativist paradigm, the possibility of grading types of literature according to degrees of merit does not exist. All such distinctions would be invalid since Relativism recognizes no ultimate standard of judgement - no "Moral Absolute" - in terms of which they might be evaluated.<sup>18</sup>

In the Romantic tradition on the other hand, the existence of a Moral Absolute is regarded as an axiomatic principle which functions both as the thematic premise and the ideological context of all Romantic literature.

This makes it not only possible, but indeed obligatory for the writer, scholar or critic of the Romantic school to evaluate literature, i.e. to distinguish superior from inferior forms.

The evaluative process is essential because, in a framework which affirms a Moral Absolute, Art and Literature are not mere gratuitous expressions of human subjectivism, but are on the contrary vested with the tremendous potential to harm or to heal, i.e. they may further alienate Man from the Moral Order, or they may restore him to it by communicating a sense of wholeness, of moral cohesion and psychological integrity. Obviously, Romantic literature such as we have defined it here would fall into this last category.

On the subject of evaluating the purpose and merit of literature - specifically Poetry - it is interesting to turn once again to Arnold and to note that, in true Romantic spirit, he completely endorses the notion of "excellent" and "inferior" poetry :  
"..... in poetry, the distinction between excellent and inferior, sound and unsound or only half-sound, true and untrue or only half-true, is of paramount importance".<sup>19</sup>

The distinction is crucial because, insofar as Literature is both a reflection and a "criticism of life",<sup>20</sup> its healing and restorative capacities "will be of power in proportion as the poetry conveying it is excellent rather than inferior, sound rather than unsound or half-sound, true rather than untrue or half-true".<sup>21</sup>

Arnold does not explicitly articulate the relationship of Poetry to what we have chosen to call the "Moral Order" but everything he says about the subject clearly indicates that his conception of the "high destiny" of Poetry conforms to the Romantic

interpretation of the role of Literature. We explained earlier that the nature of Literature is "religious" in that it is directed at re-establishing and maintaining Man's sense of spiritual wholeness or psychic integrity. This is what Arnold implies when he claims that "the best poetry will be found to have a power of forming, sustaining and delighting us, as nothing else can".<sup>22</sup>

It is important to note Arnold's emphasis on "the best poetry", for in a paradigm which acknowledges an absolute standard of judgement, gradations of literary merit are an accepted fact. It is the best Literature of which we must avail ourselves, for anything less will not effectively fulfill the restorative and redemptive (religious) destiny of the art.

In this connection, Arnold declares : "Everything depends on the reality of a poet's classic character. If he is a dubious classic, let us sift him; if he is a false classic, let us explode him. But if he is a real classic, if his work belongs to the class of the very best (for this is the true and right meaning of the word classic, classical), then the great thing for us is to feel and enjoy his work as deeply as ever we can, and to appreciate the wide difference between it and all work which has not the same high character".<sup>23</sup>

Of course, Arnold's views would be completely denounced by literary theorists of the Existential and Absurdist schools who would challenge the very premise that poetry has any meaning or value beyond the ephemeral and subjective context in which the poet finds himself. Since such theorists refute the notion that poetry is in any way aligned to an Ultimate or Absolute Truth, it follows that they would deny the benefit and even the possibility of evaluating poetry.



Certainly, they would treat with extreme scepticism the concept of identifying work "which belongs to the class of the very best".

What "anti-Romantic" theorists cannot deny, however, is that throughout history, society at large has consistently upheld certain works of literature as "superior", and the value attributed to them has been remarkably enduring, given the passage of time, changing cultural and sociological contexts and vacillating ideological perspectives.

The work of William Shakespeare springs immediately to mind as a substantiation of this observation. From the 16th Century onwards, Shakespeare's plays and verse have occupied a prominent place in the world's literary consciousness that cannot be adequately explained by their purely political, social or economic relevance. In fact, such an explanation is hopelessly impoverished since Shakespeare's drama frequently reflects political, social and economic conditions that have little or no relevance to the current status quo.

Yet, in spite of this, his plays continue to exert a powerful fascination on people from every class, cultural milieu and language group. If we are to seek an explanation for the Bard's time-defying and almost global popularity (his plays have been translated into many languages and are staged in virtually every part of the literate world) we have to look beyond the ephemerality of "historial relevance" and to the thematic preoccupations of his work.

Such an investigation reveals that all Shakespeare's plays deal essentially with the "Human Condition", i.e. they examine Man's relationship not only to his fellow man, but to the universe.

Every play is to some extent a dramatized exploration of Man's role in the cosmos and of his purpose and ultimate destiny within the context of some superior "Grand Design".<sup>24</sup> Thus, Shakespeare's drama is "religious" in our stipulated definition of the term, i.e. in its preoccupation with issues of "Ultimate Concern".

It is this crucial commitment to the exploration of a transcendent "absolute" domain of experience that underlies Aristotle's declaration that Poetry (here a term relating to literature in general) is superior to History. Aristotle elaborates that this superiority resides in Poetry's possession of "a higher truth and seriousness".<sup>25</sup>

It is from the recognition of this "higher truth" and from the "seriousness" of its pursuit that Romantic literature derives its religious nature. Furthermore, it is the degree of truth, of "high and excellent seriousness" which characterizes any work that determines the degree of its literary merit.

As mentioned before, a framework which recognizes an absolute standard of arbitration allows for the comparison and evaluation of various works of literature. Thus Arnold, for example, relying on Aristotle's "truth and seriousness" criterion as his evaluative yardstick, is able to claim that in spite of Chaucer's "divine liquidness of diction"<sup>26</sup> he "is not one of the great classics".<sup>27</sup> He elaborates : "however we may account for its absence, something is wanting, then, to the poetry of Chaucer, which poetry must have before it can be placed in the glorious class of the best. And there is no doubt what that something is. *It is the high and excellent seriousness which Aristotle assigns as one of the grand virtues of poetry.* (italics mine).

The substance of Chaucer's poetry, his views of things and his criticism of life, has largeness, freedom, shrewdness, benignity; but it has not this high seriousness. Homer's criticism of life has it, Dante's has it, Shakespeare's has it. It is this chiefly which gives to our spirits what they can rest upon".<sup>28</sup>

Although Arnold never clearly explicates what he understands by Aristotle's "high and excellent seriousness" (an omission which undoubtedly contributes to a certain vagueness and even sentimentality that sometimes colours his criticism) it is fairly evident that he is alluding to the pursuit of "Higher Truth" or "Ultimate Concern" which we have identified as the fundamental premise of religious enquiry. Clearly, along the spectrum of literary works which approach such an enquiry, Arnold feels that Chaucer's poetry falls short of this "Ultimate horizon" while that of Homer, Dante and Shakespeare successfully achieves it.

To establish whether or not they do is not the immediate task of this discussion. I have simply presented Arnold's point of view as one that clearly demonstrates the evaluative possibilities that exist in a context which acknowledges an absolute criterion of judgement.

The notion of evaluating and grading literature according to merit has long been a controversial subject amongst literary theorists. The point which I am stressing here is that such an exercise only assumes real weight and significance within an "absolutist" paradigm. Within the relativist paradigm, the standards which one might select for claiming the superiority of one literary text over another always remain open to the charge of subjectivism, i.e. they will be (and indeed are) invariably accused of being "value-laden" and "culture bound".

Within this frame of reference, it becomes impossible and indeed, even absurd, to consider making a claim for the superiority of Shakespeare's drama over contemporary "agitprop" theatre, or to declare that Dickens is a better novelist than Harold Robbins or Wilbur Smith!

It is the firm contention of this argument that the absence of absolute standards of artistic and literary judgement invalidates all theoretical discussions by a process of "reductio ad absurdum". In fact, the repudiation of moral and aesthetic absolutes has had enormously self-sabotaging implications for literary theory. For example, at the extreme end of the Relativist spectrum, we encounter Deconstructuralism which denies even the possibility of the successful communication of meaning through language. The most radical exponents of this theory are Jacques Derrida and his followers who question the symmetrical unity between signifiers and signifieds posited by Saussurean linguistics.<sup>29</sup>

The implications of Deconstructuralism and other related "anti-Romantic" schools of literary theory will be examined in greater depth later in this discussion. For the present, it is enough to reiterate our defence of the Romantic position by pointing out that without enduring ("absolute") standards, we can make no enduring judgements, and that if we cannot do this, then the very validity of literary criticism is open to serious challenge.

Our next obligation in examining the parallels between Literature and Religion is to explore the means through which they reflect "Ultimate Concern". If we accept that there is an absolute system of judgement, a moral and aesthetic "yardstick" against which all literary endeavour may be measured, then we have to establish the means through which the artist gains access to this standard.

Secondly, if absolute standards of judgement reflect a transcendent "Moral Imperative" which in turn derives from the existence of an absolute "Moral Order", how does Literature represent this?

It is in the consideration of these questions that we now turn to an investigation of that visionary state of expanded consciousness, at once noetic and intuitive, and common to the mystic and poet alike, which the Romantics called the Imagination.

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N O T E S

1. G.B. Tennyson and Edward E. Ericson, Jr. (ed)  
RELIGION AND MODERN LITERATURE  
(Grand Rapids, Michigan; William B. Eerdman's Publishing Company; 1975)
2. "das, was uns unbedingt angeht"
3. "das Unbedingte". These terms, alluding to an Ultimate Reality, are found in Tillich's early German writings. His expression "Ultimate Concern" incorporates both subjective and objective connotations, implying the state of being unconditionally concerned as well as that about which one is so concerned [see THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RELIGION (Mircea Eliade, chief editor) New York; Macmillan Publishing Company; 1987] Vol. 14, p.530
4. Dickens's novels fall into the genre of the "Bildungsroman" i.e. novels which explore the evolution of character towards a state of moral maturity.
5. See Rudolf Otto's THE IDEA OF THE HOLY (DAS HEILIGE - 1917) in which the word "numinous" was first used in reference to an Ultimate Reality. The "numinous", also described as the "Mysterium tremendum et fascinans", is, according to Otto, basic to all religious experience and is thus an a priori category.

6. We are reminded again of Tillich's definition.
7. This idea of Cosmic Harmony recurs within almost every religious tradition. Consider, for example, the concept of the TAO in Chinese philosophy, MA'AT in the religion of the ancient Egyptians and RTA in the Hindu tradition.
8. The theme of reconciliation or realignment with an Ultimate Reality is at the heart of all religious motivation. The term "religion" itself is etymologically derived from the Latin "religare" - "to tie back, tie up, tie fast". See, for example, WEBSTERS THIRD NEW INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY, Philip Babcock Gove (Chief Editor) (Massachusetts; G and C Merriam Co. 1971).
9. The qualification is significant since there are Existential thinkers who affirm an essentially theistic worldview, e.g. Soren Kierkegaard (1813 - 1855) and Martin Buber (1878 - 1965).
10. Consider as examples the plays of Samuel Beckett (notably his famous WAITING FOR GODOT, a grimly amusing dramatization of the absurdity of the Human Condition in the context of the "Godless Universe") and the work of Jean Genet, the French poet, novelist and playwright, whose writing reflects a bizarre, inverted moral order in which thieves, murderers and sexual perverts are exalted as saints.
11. See Note 8 in this regard.
12. In MATTHEW ARNOLD'S ESSAYS IN CRITICISM - introduction by G.K. Chesterton (London; J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd; 1964) p.235.

13. Ibid.
14. Arnold's observations, made as early as the 19th Century, significantly and prophetically describe a state of religious disillusionment which has continued well into our own century. The decline of orthodox religion in the west may be largely attributed to its over-emphasis on the "fact" at the expense of the "idea" or spirit. In consequence of this, the once meaningful beliefs and ceremonies of the Judaeo-Christian tradition have, over the years, ossified into sterile ritual or "dead metaphors".
15. MATTHEW ARNOLD'S ESSAYS IN CRITICISM p.235
16. Ibid
17. Ibid
18. If we pursue the Relativist argument to its extreme, we arrive at a point where it becomes impossible to make moral pronouncements of any sort. For example, to see Hitler as the personification of "Evil" or Christ as the Incarnation of "Good" would be purely subjective distinctions, carrying no moral weight beyond the parameters of their respective "culturally mediated" paradigms.
19. MATTHEW ARNOLD'S ESSAYS IN CRITICISM, p.236
20. Ibid, p.237
21. Ibid
22. Ibid



23. Ibid p.239
24. This is especially true of the tragedies which all unfold against the backdrop of a vast, supernatural Design, be it Christian or pagan in concept. In the Medieval and early Renaissance worldview, this sense of Providential Order was understood as the "Great Chain of Being". The tragedies MACBETH and HAMLET, for example, have as their central theme the examination of the serious consequences of disturbing or jeopardizing the Great Chain of Being through regicide, a particularly heinous crime because in the Medieval worldview, the King was perceived as God's divine representative on earth.
25. Cited in MATTHEW ARNOLD'S ESSAYS IN CRITICISM, p.244
26. Ibid, p.247
27. Ibid, p.249
28. Ibid
29. Commenting on Derrida's theory of Deconstructuralism, Terry Eagleton explains : "Meaning is the spin-off of a potentially endless play of signifiers, rather than a concept tied firmly to the tail of a particular signifier ....." (T. Eagleton : LITERARY THEORY : AN INTRODUCTION - 1983).

Thus, to speak of the stability and determinacy of textual meaning is meaningless !

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CHAPTER 2

THE IMAGINATIVE IMPERATIVE : A STUDY OF THE POET AS

VISIONARY AND PROPHET, AND OF THE ROLE OF THE

IMAGINATION AS THE "CONNECTING GRAMMAR" OF

LITERATURE AND RELIGION

And all should cry, Beware! Beware!  
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!  
Weave a circle round him thrice,  
And close your eyes with holy dread,  
For he on honey-dew hath fed  
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

- Samuel Taylor Coleridge

KUBLA KHAN

Implicit in the acknowledgement of a Higher or Ultimate Reality which both encompasses and transcends our limited reality is the idea that it is possible for the artist to : (i) gain access to this Higher Reality; and (ii) to communicate his realization of this Reality to society at large. For centuries, this two-fold process has been recognized as the "metier" of the poet who is traditionally vested with the dual role of seer and prophet.<sup>1</sup>

In Mediaeval times, the poet was called the "makar" ("maker" or "craftsman"), a title which implied recognition of the essential creativity of his role. In Classical times, the creativity of the poet was associated with the Divine and the Sacred. The poet was often believed to be the mouth-piece of the gods (usually of Apollo or the muses) and gifted with oracular vision and prophecy. In this capacity, he was thought to be invested with divine powers, inspired by contact with a mysterious, transcendent realm of experience which was inaccessible to ordinary men.

Within the Romantic tradition - and here the term applies in both its historical and generic sense - it is believed that this dimension of experience is accessible to all men, but that the faculty by which it might be perceived lies dormant in the average person. It thus becomes the special vocation of the poet, in whom this faculty of "extrasensory perception" is highly developed, to stimulate and awaken it in his fellowman.

The poet is thus perceived as a person gifted to a high degree in his ability to apprehend "Ultimate Reality" through a faculty of perception which is not confined to rational cognition.

In the preface to his comprehensive study of the occult, Colin Wilson equates this faculty of perception with a vastly magnified state of consciousness that permits man a direct and extensive understanding of the fundamental nature of things. Wilson (somewhat unoriginally) calls this "Faculty X". "The paradox", he claims, "is that *we already possess it to a large degree* but are unconscious of possessing it. It lies at the heart of all so-called occult experience".<sup>2</sup>

Wilson goes on to suggest that "the poet is a man in whom Faculty X is naturally more developed than in most people. While most of us are ruthlessly 'cutting out' whole areas of perception, thus impoverishing our mental lives, the poet retains the faculty to be suddenly delighted by the sheer reality of the world 'out there'".<sup>3</sup>

Associated with the visionary powers of the poet there has always seemed to be a moral or spiritual obligation to reveal his insights to his fellowman. The poet's role is thus simultaneously visionary and revelatory - he is both "seer" and "revealer". This conception of the "poetic mission", in terms of which a person who is gifted with insights into a reality beyond the limited perceptions of ordinary men feels himself obliged to use his gifts for the spiritual and moral advancement of his society, is integral to the Romantic paradigm. It is an idea which persistently recurs in the work of the 19th Century Romantic poets, and in that of the "Neo-Romantics", their literary and ideological heirs who took the spirit of Romanticism into the 20th Century.

For example, William Blake, widely regarded as the ideological architect of English Romanticism, strongly felt that his poetic mission lay in stimulating Man's latent "Faculty X" (defined by Blake and later by the rest of the Romantics as the Imagination) so that he could gain immediate access to a dimension of experience and knowledge that transcended his limited cognitive reality.<sup>4</sup>

Contact with this "Higher Reality" would result in a state of spiritual illumination in which certain universal truths, ordinarily denied to men, could be understood. The poetry of Blake frequently expresses this idea of limitless, "occult" insight, e.g.

" If the Doors of Perception were  
cleansed everything would appear  
to Man as it is : Infinite.  
For Man has closed himself up  
Til he sees all things  
Thro' narrow chinks of his cavern "5

What becomes clearly evident is that, within the context of Romanticism, the vocation of Literature, particularly of Poetry, is essentially and profoundly religious in the sense which we explained at length in Chapter I, i.e. in its deep and prevailing preoccupation with issues of "Ultimate Concern" and in its recurring themes of healing and restoration which reflect its impetus towards reconciling Man with the Numinous, the Sacred, the Divine.

The restorative and redemptive function of Poetry is strongly emphasized by the arch-Romantic Blake, who had no doubts about the nature of his own role : "The nature of my work is visionary or imaginative. It is an endeavour to restore what the ancients called 'The Golden Age' "6

Chronological, temperamental and personal ideological differences notwithstanding, all poets who write within the Romantic tradition are identified and united by two outstanding features:-

- (i) Their work is predominantly motivated by the pursuit of spiritual restitution;
- (ii) it is primarily through the stimulation of the Imagination, understood as an innate faculty of limitless, visionary consciousness, that they hope to actualize their poetic vocation.

The Romantic poets, like the biblical prophets of old, address their message to a corrupt and decadent civilization in which the structures of traditional religion have either ossified or crumbled, so that they remain only as "whited sepulchres" which "outwardly appear beautiful, but within (they) are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness".<sup>7</sup>

Like the prophet, the poet sees his spiritual vocation in terms of a divinely assigned obligation to renew and revitalize that which has become deficient and sterile in normative religion. Through the medium of Poetry, the Imagination is purified of its mundane obfuscations and, once "the Doors of Perception" are cleansed, Man is afforded the direct experience of a timeless, enduring reality.

This is the major "religious imperative" of Romantic Literature and it is to be found in the work of poets as chronologically and stylistically disparate as William Blake who sought to restore the "Golden Age"; John Keats whose poetry explores various ways of attaining to an immutable reality beyond "the weariness, the fever and the fret"<sup>8</sup> of mundane existence; Ezra Pound whose CANTOS - "an immense quest-poem in the Romantic tradition"<sup>9</sup> - presents the panacea for spiritually-diseased western civilization in "things enduring and redemptive";<sup>10</sup> and T.S. Eliot who offers us "the moment in the rose garden",<sup>11</sup> an experience of timeless and visionary consciousness, as an "objective correlative"<sup>12</sup> of the Numinous.

To the extent that each of these poets reflects a profound concern with escaping the confines of phenomenal reality and re-establishing union with a higher, limitless dimension of experience (what I earlier referred to as the "Moral Absolute or Order") his work may be unequivocally described as both romantic and religious.

What becomes evident from these observations is that, central to the restorative and redemptive impetus of both Religion and Literature, is the role of the Imagination, a state of expanded awareness that transcends the parameters of normative reality and reconnects man - notably but not exclusively the poet or mystic - to a higher dimension of consciousness which may be described interchangeably as the Sacred, the Divine, The Numinous or the Absolute.

It is principally the Imagination that gives substance to any concept, be it religious or literary. This becomes apparent when we consider that central to the fabric of any religion, is its belief system, and that the very process of belief is determined by the degree to which an idea resonates with the Imagination. As John Coulson observes in RELIGION AND IMAGINATION: "belief cannot be simply put or resolved ..... (it) must first be credible to the Imagination".<sup>13</sup>

It is thus from the energizing power of the Imagination that Religion and Literature derive their influence on the human psyche. History consistently bears out that when a religious tenet or a literary concept fails to excite the Imagination, it inevitably fails to achieve a lasting impact on human thought and conduct.

Our obligation now is to examine more closely how the Imaginative impetus operates in both Literature and Religion. Within the religious framework, our concern is with how the Imagination strengthens and authenticates belief. Before a concept or an ideal moves into the terrain of belief, it must carry with it a firm sense of plausibility: a powerful impression of its "realness" must be conveyed if it is to have any enduring impact or to elicit an active response.

It is this resonance of idea with Imagination that culminates in the "real-ization" of the idea as belief. Without this process, no concept can be translated into a principle of faith.

As Coulson observes, "when a religious claim ceases to find convincing embodiment or ground in its contemporary culture, it soon degenerates into implausible rhetoric".<sup>14</sup>

It is thus abundantly clear that religious ideas have greatest impact and demonstrate the greatest capacity for motivating adherents to act in terms of their dictation when they are effectively translated into what Coulson calls "the language of the literary imagination".<sup>15</sup> Coulson's phrase is an important one and demands close scrutiny. In exploring its implications, we turn our attention to the particular mode of discourse through which the power of the Imagination within Literature and Religion is conveyed.

In scientific circles, it is becomingly increasingly recognized that the Imaginative faculty is associated with what clinical psychologists have called "right-brain" activity,

i.e. with those spheres of human interest and conduct which arise out of intuitive or affective processes rather than out of the rational, cognitive functions associated with the "left-brain". These latter functions are active in the Applied Sciences which address themselves primarily to phenomenal reality and remain largely if not wholly unconcerned with "extra-sensory" dimensions of consciousness.



Conversely, "right-brain" activity is closely associated with the Imaginative function which manifests itself through the creative arts - music, dance and the visual arts. However, it is arguably through literary expression - the novel, short story, drama and most intensively through poetry - that the Imagination achieves its most powerful impact on the human psyche.

This view is based on the premise that whereas the other creative arts have primarily an affective appeal - they address the senses and the emotions - Literature, founded on a linguistic model, is able to engage both the emotions and the intellect. Its appeal is therefore cognitive as well as affective. Given this particular distinction, it is neither an exaggeration nor unfair to the other creative arts to suggest that Literature is probably the most potent vehicle of the Imagination.

It is precisely because of the simultaneously cognitive and affective impact of language that Coulson emphasizes the reliance of Religion on the "literary Imagination" and claims that Religion cannot "be insensitive to literary form".<sup>16</sup>

Religious ideas divorced from the literary imagination (and by extension, from literary expression) stand the risk of losing experiential authenticity.

Since it is the function of the Imagination to realign Man to the Moral Order, it follows that it is primarily through Imaginative discourse that the moral tenets integral to Religion achieve their greatest effect. Through Literature, such concepts are brought to life and experientially verified. Consider for example how we are moved by the loyalty of Desdemona, the unflinching devotion and Christ-like compassion of Cordelia and conversely, how we recoil from the avaricious ambition of Macbeth

and the calculated ruthlessness of his evil wife. Through a consideration of Shakespeare's tragedies alone, we are struck by overwhelming evidence of the Imagination's power to make abstract concepts of love, loyalty, forgiveness, envy and deceit immediately and enduringly valid.

Thus far in our discussion, we have explored the relationship between literary discourse and the Imagination. We have emphasized the power of "the literary imagination" in bringing abstract ideas to life and in giving experiential veracity to moral concepts, and we have also stressed the essentially religious function of Imaginative discourse insofar as it is a vehicle through which Man is restored/reconnected to a Higher Reality.

Two further exercises are now required. Firstly, we must engage in a closer appraisal of the Imagination itself, and secondly, we must examine more precisely how it employs literary discourse to fulfill its restorative and redemptive vocation.

With respect to the first requirement, the question which raises itself is : to what may we attribute the tremendous persuasive and energizing power of the Imagination? In answering this question, we turn once again to the Romantics and to the particular interpretation of the Imagination which they advanced.

It must be emphasized that within the Romantic context, the term "Imagination" is never used in its contemporary and popular sense, i.e. a purely subjective process of memory and fantasy. On the contrary, the Imagination is regarded as a powerful visionary faculty innate within the human psyche which facilitates a vast expansion of ordinary consciousness.

It is significant that the Romantics recognized a clear distinction between these two perceptual levels. Coleridge, for example, distinguished the true Imagination from a lower-order faculty which he called "Fancy". In his BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA, a work which presents an extensive study of the Imagination, Coleridge declares that "Fancy .... has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space".<sup>17</sup>

The Imagination, however, is something very different. For Coleridge, it is distinguished from Fancy primarily by its creative potency, i.e. it is able to create rather than merely reassemble.

While the Fancy is purely mechanical, the Imagination is "vital": it "generates and produces a form of its own"<sup>18</sup> and is governed by "the very powers of growth and production".<sup>19</sup> Thus, whereas the Fancy facilitates the mechanical production of verse, the source of true poetry is the Imagination. This alliance between poetry and the self-generative power of the Imagination is a theme which persistently recurs in the work of the Romantics. For them, Poetry is the written utterance of visionary experience - it is nothing less than the voice of the Imagination.

As the vehicle enabling Man to escape the constrictions of mundane perception and become re-aligned with a transcendent, "Ultimate Reality", the Imagination as the Romantics conceive of it is essentially a religious function within the human psyche. Coleridge describes the Imagination as "what brings the whole soul of Man into activity"<sup>20</sup> (the religious nuances are significant) and attributes such power to the Imagination's immense creative energies : it is able to revitalize and

transform normative reality through an extension of ordinary consciousness. In Coleridge's words, the Imagination is that faculty which "dissolves, diffuses and dissipates in order to re-create".<sup>21</sup>

It is the ability to "re-create", i.e. to "dissolve" rigid "fixities and definites" and synthesize disparate elements into a new, organic whole - in short, a new reality - which qualifies the Imagination as a sacred or divine function in "the soul of Man".

Pursuing Coleridge's line of argument, John Coulson describes the Imagination as denoting "a particular kind of cognitive perception", and elucidates by stating that it "marks the arousal of a state of deep but highly-ordered feeling which is never mere feeling but has as its object a new sense of reality".<sup>22</sup> Once again, it is interesting and directly germane to our argument that the very wording of Coulson's description should possess an almost mystical resonance : although speaking of the Imagination, he could quite as plausibly be defining the essence of religious experience.

Both Coleridge and Coulson (the latter's vein of comment clearly establishes him as a "Neo-romantic" critic) are profoundly conscious of the visionary, numinous power of the Imagination. Coleridge speaks of its ability to bring about "a more than usual state of emotion with more than usual order"<sup>23</sup> and Coulson once again endorses this view by claiming that through the Imagination, "our powers of perception are more than merely enlarged - they are re-ordered".<sup>24</sup> It is this visionary and creative aspect of the Imagination which affirms its close kinship to the religious imperative and establishes it as an indispensable feature of successful religious expression.

Since there is a clearly discernible analogy of function between the Imagination and Religious enquiry in that both are concerned with extending and transforming mundane perceptions of reality and since, as previously discussed, the Imagination speaks most evocatively through a literary framework, the alliance between Religion and Literature becomes both necessary and inevitable.

This idea is, of course, not a new one: it is after all as old as the identification of the Logos with the Word (JOHN I: 1) and it is through the word that the religious impetus of reaching out in pursuit of the "Ultimately Real" is given form and meaning.

It is no coincidence that throughout history, across geographical, linguistic and cultural barriers, men have cherished and preserved the Word - their apprehension of the Sacred - through their literatures and have recognized the writer, the dramatist, and most significantly the poet as its custodians.

Thomas Carlyle, another eminent 19th Century critic and essayist whose views clearly locate him in the Romantic tradition, speaks of the poet as "a heroic figure belonging to all ages; whom all ages possess, when once he is produced, whom the newest age as the oldest may produce; and will produce, always when Nature pleases".<sup>25</sup> He goes on to exclaim: "Let Nature send a Hero-soul; in no age is it other than possible that he may be shaped into a Poet".<sup>26</sup> For Carlyle, as indeed for all the Romantics, the "heroism" of the poet resides in his capacity for visionary insight and in his sacred task of communicating his illumination to the rest of mankind.

Once again, we encounter the characteristically Romantic identification of the Poet with the Prophet. Says Carlyle on this subject: "Vates means both Prophet and Poet: and indeed at all times, Prophet and Poet, well understood, have much kindred of meaning. Fundamentally indeed they are still the same; in this most important respect especially that they have penetrated both of them into the sacred mystery of the Universe".<sup>27</sup>

George Steiner's essay "Silence and the Poet" represents a contemporary version of the same theme. In it, Steiner describes the visionary, almost messianic role of the poet and eloquently conveys the sense of how great Literature is infused with that urgent pursuit of an ultimate validation of human experience which is at the heart of religious aspiration: "The poet is the maker of new gods and preserver of men : thus Achilles and Agamemnon live. Ajax's great shade is burning still, because the poet has made of speech a dam against oblivion, and death blunts its sharp teeth upon his word.

And because our languages have a future tense, which fact is itself a radiant scandal, a subversion of mortality; the seer, the prophet, men in whom language is in a condition of extreme vitality, are able to look beyond, to make of the word a reaching out past death".<sup>28</sup>

This simultaneously visionary and revelatory role of the poet, reflected in his intense consciousness of his obligation to use his gifts for the spiritual and moral edification of society is, as we have already indicated, a prominent feature of Romanticism.

The poetry of the Romantics is above all else characterized by its profound sense of its redemptive (religious) vocation, i.e. the need to restore to Mankind "intimations of immortality"<sup>29</sup> - the sense of an enduring transcendent realm of experience beyond the parameters of mutable phenomenal reality.

The Romantic school derives its name logically enough from its dominant concern with the revival of romance. As Harold Bloom observes: "more than a revival, it (Romanticism) is an internalization of romance, particularly of the quest variety, an internalization made for more than therapeutic purposes, because made in the name of a humanizing hope that approaches apocalyptic intensity".<sup>30</sup> (Once again, we are struck by the religious resonances of the Romantic imperative). Bloom goes on to explain that "the poet takes the patterns of quest-romance and transposes them into his own imaginative life, so that the entire rhythm of the quest is heard again in the movement of the poet himself from poem to poem".<sup>31</sup>

It is primarily through this quest motif of their poetry, essentially religious in that it is a "quest for the Sublime", i.e. for "Ultimate Concern", that the Romantics may be identified as a school or tradition.

The Romantic quest is conducted through the exercise of the Imagination which in every instance is regarded as a vehicle of redemption and transformation. It facilitates Man's redemption from his mortality - from the "wages of sin" which dictate his imprisonment in linear, time-bound reality. Through the mysterious alchemy of the Imagination, Man's consciousness is "re-created", transformed from a narrow focus on the temporal to a limitless apprehension of the Eternal.

Harold Bloom elaborates : "The Romantic movement is from nature to the imagination's freedom ..... and the imagination's freedom is frequently purgatorial, redemptive in direction but destructive of the social self".<sup>32</sup>

The "social self" must of necessity be destroyed, since it is not the true self, but merely an artificial construct or "false persona" arising out of material conditioning and socialization. It is the true self which the Imagination redeems from the illusion of linear time (the finite) and restores to its original condition which in the major religious traditions is characterized by eternality, complete (absolute) consciousness and indiminishable rapture.<sup>33</sup>

It is this state of completion, of absolute spiritual integrity (wholeness) which marks Man's realignment with the Moral Order. In this regard, it is significant to observe that in every religious tradition, the Moral Order, in what ever way it is conceptualized, generally constitutes a frame of reference in which that which is benevolent/benign/good is consonant with that which is "whole", "integrated", "connected" and "complete".<sup>34</sup>

When the psyche of Man is "made whole" - healed in the ultimate sense of the word - he becomes a microcosmic reflection of macrocosmic order. (The "As above, so below" principle of hermetic mysticism). This state of human and cosmic congruence is achieved through the healing and redemptive energy of the Imagination.

Having examined in some detail the vocation of the Imagination and its prophet, the poet, as understood by the Romantics, we turn now to the second obligation of this chapter : an exploration of how the Imagination expresses itself through literary discourse.



If, as Romantic ontology affirms, the Imagination is the means through which a vision of "Ultimate Reality" is attained, its mode of discourse must function as a bridging mechanism between the mundane and the Divine. The language of the "literary imagination" must radically diverge from the lingua mundi - the discourse of temporal reality.

As the bridge between the finite and the Eternal, the Imagination speaks to us not through the language of reason and intellect (the rational, empirical discourse of cognitive reality) but through the language of the spirit which is communicated through symbols - powerfully evocative, emotionally-charged images which have their a priori location in the realm of the Numinous.

Our claim for the a priori nature of the symbols of the Imagination is borne out by the testimony of the world's creative literatures - by its legends, myths, fairytales and folklore in which certain distinctive narrative patterns recur with striking persistence and similarity in spite of cultural, geographical and linguistic diversity.

These perennial narrative patterns are based on the recurrence of certain predominant symbols which the acclaimed psychoanalyst Carl Jung called "archetypes".

In Jungian psychology, archetypes are images resident in the "Collective Unconscious", i.e. the universal psyche of Mankind. These images exist "prior to and independent of conscious experience",<sup>35</sup> are "similar in form in all people"<sup>36</sup> and are "prototypical in nature".<sup>37</sup> When given literary expression, they reflect the prevailing themes of the "human drama", i.e. the struggle between Good and Evil, the triumph of spirit over matter, the search for one's original identity and the pursuit of immortality: in short, the "quest for the Sublime".

Archetypes are the Imagination's "bridging mechanisms" between the Relative (the mundane) and the Absolute (the Sacred). As the fundamental components of Imaginative discourse (the "literary imagination") they constitute a lingua animae - a "vocabulary of the spirit" through which the "ultimate questions" are addressed.

Archetypal images and narrative patterns thus compose the "grammar of the Imagination", the common idiom of Literature and Religion. The literary devices through which archetypal narrative is conveyed are integral to Imaginative discourse - are in fact its very substance. They are - not surprisingly - the devices of poetic language: symbol, myth, metaphor, parable and allegory.

Our task now is to engage in a close analysis of these devices in order to establish more clearly how they serve the "literary imagination".

We have said that the Imagination speaks to us through archetypes - powerful, recurring symbols which have their a priori location in the Numinous and which are also present in the human psyche at both an individual and a collective level. What we must now do is to examine the exact function of the symbol.

In his essay, "The Nature of the Symbol", Erich Kahler observes that a symbol is a "bridging act", i.e. it is "an act of pointing to something or somebody".<sup>38</sup> The notion of symbol as bridging mechanism is relevant here, since it substantiates our understanding of the Imagination as the bridge between the mundane and the sacred. (Once again, the theme of re-connection (reliquare) is clearly evident. In this regard, it is significant that the word "symbol" is etymologically derived from the Greek "symballein": "to bring together" or "to come together").

Clearly what the symbol points to is a transcendent Reality. In fact as Kahler observes, the image or symbol is in its ultimate sense "no longer merely a road to reality but *the very figuration of reality .... in fact, a new, independent reality*" (italics mine).<sup>39</sup>

In explaining the peculiar power of symbols, Kahler declares: "the closer the symbol approximates the Transcendent, the more powerful and evocative it is". He offers the following example in substantiation: "In mass, the host and the wine in the chalice, symbolic residues of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, are through the magic process of transubstantiation *turned into the very presence of Christ*"<sup>40</sup> (italics mine).

What happens in this instance is that the bridging function of the symbol actually falls away: the host and the wine no longer merely "point to" the body and blood of Christ, but in fact become - are transformed into - these things. It is at this point that in the idiom of Saussurean linguistics, "signifier" and "signified" become one. The breach between the Sacred and the Profane is healed.

Romantic epistemology affirms the notion that the soul of Man - his spiritual identity - was originally "at one" with the Numinous or the Sacred.

However, through a perverse desire for autonomy and independence, Man has severed himself from this state of union with the Divine and has effectively sent himself into a kind of spiritual exile. (This idea is reflected in Blake's "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" in which Man is seen to have repudiated the Infinite, choosing instead to close himself up "til he sees all things/thro' narrow chinks of his cavern".)

The vocation of Literature is, through the healing powers of the Imagination, to redeem Man from his exile. It is here that the function of archetypal symbols becomes evident : the symbol enables Man to cross the chasm between the material and the spiritual. Once this has been accomplished, the symbol no longer functions as a mere bridge or signpost to Reality. To repeat Kahler's statement, it becomes "The very figuration of reality .... in fact, a new independent reality".

Here we are reminded again of Coleridge's emphasis on the creative and transformative properties of the Imagination : through the power of its symbols, it "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates" mundane perceptions in order to re-create a new and ultimate apprehension of Reality.

Herein lies the visionary quality of the Imagination, and it is precisely this vision - this luminous clarity of perception - that great Literature affords us. In Chapter I, we spoke of the notion of "great Literature" as advanced by Matthew Arnold. In accordance with his views, we see that from the Romantic perspective, Literature qualifies for "greatness" when it has the effect of uplifting us, of transporting us from the sphere of the limited, the finite, the relative, to the domain of the Limitless, the Infinite, the Absolute.

We recognize such Literature by its power to engage us at every level - mental, emotional, psychological and spiritual - and by its capacity to make us feel with absolute conviction not only that a higher dimension of Reality exists, *but that we have been realigned with it*. It is this capacity which, for example, imbues the Bible and the epics of Homer with their power to touch and transform the human psyche. In this connection, Kahler comments : "whether we are believers or not, we do not read the

Biblical stories simply as an account of some remote happenings. We do not read the Homeric epics as we would read any ordinary adventure or travel story. We feel ourselves, our own lives, deeply involved in all these doings and sufferings. So these great tales seem to fit exactly the pattern of accomplished symbolic representation. They present in singular figures and destinies matters of common human purport".<sup>41</sup>

What Kahler significantly highlights here is the commonality of the symbols in Biblical and Homeric literature. Archetypal symbols are defined by this very property, by the fact that they are not confined to any one culture, time or place. Their relevance and their power are universal.

While symbols are the fundamental components of Imaginative vocabulary, they are mobilized, i.e. given narrative momentum, through myth which may be broadly described as any story or narrative which evolves out of an accretion of symbols. If we analyse any myth, for example, we find that it involves a plot in which several prominent symbols are teleologically linked, i.e. their connection is determined by a specific design or outcome.

As an example, we have only to think of the quest myth which abounds in literary traditions worldwide. The plot of the quest myth, allowing for the ideational "colouring" and culturally-mediated interpretations which may affect the details, is broadly as follows: a hero-figure (our first symbol or archetype) is issued with a divine summons - he is usually instructed by a god or God - to embark on a voyage or journey (a second symbol) in quest of some rare and precious object, talisman or territory (a third symbol) which, though its pursuit will require enormous energy, effort and courage, will ultimately be of immense benefit not only to the hero, but to the rest of his community.

The quest myth is one of the oldest archetypal constructs in the human psyche. It is common to every society and culture and enshrined in the world's popular literature.

In corroboration of this, we have only to consider as examples the classical myths of Jason's quest for the golden fleece, Odysseus' quest for his homeland of Ithaca which he had left to participate in the siege of Troy, and Aeneas' quest for the divinely-appointed site of the city of Rome. Within the Judaeo-Christian tradition, we have the quest of the Hebrew people, led by Moses, for the Promised Land, the Grail Quest of Arthurian legend and as recently as the 17th Century, the allegorical quest of Christian in John Bunyan's THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS.

To what might the power of this universal quest myth be attributed? Our argument is that the imaginative potency of this myth lies in the fact that it is a literary analogue of the human condition.

Let us examine the above assertion in detail. We have already described how, from a Romantic perspective, Man is regarded as having fallen from his original position of divine integrity and is consequently understood to be in a state of spiritual or moral exile. (In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the Biblical account of the Fall and the expulsion from Eden offers a powerful mythic dramatization of this event).

Latent in the human psyche, however, is the primordial memory of the state of union with the Divine. It is reflected in archetypal images of a blissful and prosperous period when Man lived in total peace and harmony not only with his fellows, but with the entire cosmos - with all its animal, vegetable, mineral and celestial components.

This archetype of pristine concord manifests variously but with remarkable similarity as the Eden of the Old Testament, the Golden Age of classical antiquity, the Dilmun of Sumerian legend, the Avalon of Celtic myth and the Satyayuga or Krtayuga of the Vedas. Accompanying this archetypal memory is an intense and anguished yearning within the human psyche for an end to spiritual exile and a return to this rapturous paradisiacal state.

In every religious and cultural tradition, the ardent desire for redemption from postlapsarian suffering is met by the archetype of the hero - the prophet, prince, knight, divine saviour or messiah who, prompted by some deep spiritual inspiration (in the legends, he is directly called upon by God or by the gods) sets out on a hazardous odyssey<sup>42</sup> in search of the means through which the redemption of Mankind might be achieved.

We have already cited some of the more well-known examples of the quest myth. What we wish to stress here is that the exploits of the hero are never undertaken solely for his own benefit: in every instance, he must eventually return to his people, his race, his family or his community with the sacred talisman or knowledge which will effect their redemption.<sup>43</sup>

The theme of the quest myth is redemption. It is a symbolic "pointing to" the original spiritual wholeness of humanity - an indication of the possibility of being restored/reconnected/realigned with Ultimate Reality.

It is because this myth and its constituent symbols (the hero-saviour; the arduous quest; the sacred talisman or wisdom; the "paradise regained") speaks so eloquently and persuasively of the hope of spiritual redemption that it features so prominently in the literary imagination.

It is also the redemptive impetus of this myth that gives it its religious character. In fact, the quest for redemption and restitution, the quest for re-connection with the Sublime is, as we have stressed throughout this discussion, precisely what defines the religious imperative.

We have seen, then, how the power of the Imagination communicates itself linguistically through symbols, the principal bridging mechanisms through which the poet and the prophet gain access to Ultimate Reality. Since their power lies in their capacity to heal the schism between the Sacred and the Profane, to redeem Man from his spiritual exile and reconcile him with the Divine, symbols have an intrinsically religious function.

Paul Tillich emphasizes this fact when he observes that "they (symbols) are a representation of that which is *unconditionally beyond the conceptual sphere - they point to the ultimate reality implied in the religious act, to what concerns us ultimately*"<sup>44</sup> (italics mine).

All literature which seeks to realign Man with "Ultimate Concern" conveys its themes through symbolic discourse. In fact, where a text fails to draw on the transformative energies of symbols, it fails to excite or engage the reader's imagination.

After all, it is only through the universal "grammar of the Imagination" that the individual imagination may be stimulated, roused from its dormant state and precipitated into its healing and restorative function.

For the Romantics, the Imagination is nothing less than those "Doors of Perception" which, once cleansed, open onto a vista of timeless, immutable Reality.



It is the poet and the prophet (and as we have shown, Romantic epistemology holds these two to be one and the same) whose task it is to communicate this limitless vision to his fellowman.

In this regard, consider Blake's interpretation of the visionary vocation of the poet :

" Hear the voice of the bard  
who present, past and future sees - " 45

What is significant is that the poet or bard does not see with material vision : he sees through the doors of the Imagination and thus for him, all barriers of time are dissolved.

We have spoken of the simultaneously visionary and revelatory (prophetic) vocation of the poet : once having beheld "Ultimate Reality", it is his spiritual obligation to reveal his vision to the rest of mankind. In this sense, the poet himself personifies the hero-archetype - he is the person to whom the sacred summons is issued, to whom the gods speak through divine inspiration. His journey into the realms of the Imagination (a Jungian descent into the Collective Unconscious of the race) becomes an acting out of the mythic odyssey - a spiritual quest for the Sublime.

When the poet-hero has beheld the grail, won the golden fleece, slain the dragon and tasted its wisdom-bestowing blood,<sup>46</sup> he must return to his community to share the transformative energies of his prize with his fellowmen. The vocation of the poet is thus essentially religious in that, by releasing the numinous, revitalizing powers of the Imagination into the world, he effects a form of spiritual and moral renewal of Postlapsarian humanity.

The sacred talisman or gnosis which the poet brings back to his community is the symbol or archetype of redemption - a powerful, visionary evocation of a return to Paradise/Eden/The Golden Age.

Later in this discussion, we shall examine in detail how some of the major Romantic poets and their "spiritual heirs" communicate their respective visions of this state of psychic wholeness and completion. For the present, what we wish to reiterate is the predominance of this archetype as an intrinsic feature of all Romantic Poetry, irrespective of the individual stylistic and perceptual variations in its articulation.

In the previous chapter, we claimed that of all literary forms, it is Poetry which is most ideally suited to the "quest for the Sublime". This was argued on the basis of the density of structure and the "multivalence" of meaning and imagery which are peculiar to Poetry.

In the light of our subsequent analysis of the "grammar of the Imagination", it becomes evident that a further reason for the particular appropriateness of Poetry in exploring "Ultimate Concern" is its symbolic discourse.

It is precisely because Poetry speaks to us through symbol that it is the most effective mode of discourse for bridging the divide between the mundane and the Transcendent.

It is no mere coincidence that the language of religious texts is richly "poetic", i.e. characterized by a particular density of symbols which point to an eventual restoration of Man to a condition of spiritual integrity. The Cross and the Resurrection of the New Testament, for example, encapsulate a "vision of the new heaven and new earth",<sup>47</sup> i.e. a vision of "Paradise regained".

In his essay "Poetry and Religious Belief", Ronald W. Hepburn speaks of Biblical symbols forming "a chain of images vital for the understanding of crucial revealed truth".<sup>48</sup> The notion of the "chain of images" in a deliberate configuration is significant here: it indicates that the symbols are never randomly grouped - their connection is always determined by a particular design or vision, and this vision is inevitably one of redemption and restitution. Supporting our claim that the Bible's mode of discourse is poetic, Hepburn also states that "the impact of the Bible is not unlike the impact of a great poem in which there is a constant developing and echoing of image-materials".<sup>49</sup>

We have spoken of symbol and myth as components of the "grammar of the Imagination" shared by both poetic and religious discourse. In fact, we have gone even further, suggesting that religious discourse is poetic, and vice versa, since both discourses employ myth and symbol to bridge the divide between the Sacred and the Profane.

We have also stressed that the close affinity between Poetry and Scripture rests in that both speak the lingua animae - the language of the Spirit, which is the discourse of the Imagination. Similarly, since the poet and the prophet are oracles of the Imagination in that both are concerned with restoring postlapsarian humanity to its primordial condition of spiritual wholeness (union with the Divine), the vocation of each is essentially a religious one.

In the light of these assertions, it will be the task of our next chapter to examine in greater detail and with specific reference to selected texts, the prophetic/revelatory vocation of the major English Romantic poets and of some of their "heirs", i.e. those poets who, while not "Romantics" in the strict historical sense of the word, nevertheless carried the spiritual and thematic legacy of Romanticism into our own century.

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N O T E S

1 Consider in this regard, the views of some of the major English Romantic poets and critics on the prophetic vocation of the poet : -

(i) "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world"

- Shelley : THE DEFENCE OF POETRY

(ii) "In some old languages, again, the titles are synonymous. Vates means both Prophet and Poet and indeed .... Prophet and Poet, well understood, have much kindred of meaning".

- Thomas Carlyle : ON HEROES, HERO-WORSHIP, AND THE HEROIC IN HISTORY

(iii) "Sure a poet is a sage,  
A humanist, physician to all men"

- John Keats : "THE FALL OF HYPERION"

(iv) "What is a Poet? .... He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind"

- William Wordsworth : Preface to the  
LYRICAL BALLADS

- 2 Colin Wilson : THE OCCULT (London; Mayflower Books,  
Granada Publishing Limited; 1972)  
p.14
- 3 Ibid, p.113
- 4 Northrop Frye, in commenting on Blake's conceptualization  
of Imaginative vision, explains: "Imagination is life -  
everyone has it, but in some (most) it has become  
distorted. Hence the Doors of Perception must be  
cleansed so that we can exercise the Imagination and  
perceive Higher Innocence and our own Divine Nature"
- NORTHROP FRYE : FEARFUL SYMMETRY - A STUDY OF  
WILLIAM BLAKE. (New Jersey; Princeton University  
Press; 1972)  
p.31
- 5 William Blake : "THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL"  
plate 14
- 6 M. Bottrall (ed) : WILLIAM BLAKE - SONGS OF INNOCENCE  
AND EXPERIENCE  
p.166
- 7 MATTHEW 23, Text 27.
- 8 John Keats : "ODE ON A GRECIAN URN", 1.49
- 9 A.G. Woodward : Unpublished notes on AN INTRODUCTION TO  
(EZRA POUND'S) CANTOS I - XXX, p.4

- 22 John Coulson : RELIGION AND IMAGINATION, p.6
- 23 Samuel Taylor Coleridge : BIBLIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA,  
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John Coulson: RELIGION AND  
IMAGINATION, p.8
- 24 John Coulson : RELIGION AND IMAGINATION, p.8
- 25 Thomas Carlyle : "ON HEROES, HERO-WORSHIP AND THE HEROIC  
IN HISTORY" in VICTORIAN PROSE AND POETRY  
Lionel Trilling and Harold Bloom (eds)  
(New York; Oxford University Press; 1973)  
p.38
- 26 Ibid
- 27 Ibid, p.40
- 28 George Steiner : "SILENCE AND THE POET" in LANGUAGE AND  
SILENCE (London; Faber and Faber Limited,  
1985) p.57
- 29 William Wordsworth
- 30 Harold Bloom : "THE INTERNALIZATION OF QUEST-ROMANCE" in  
ROMANTICISM AND CONSCIOUSNESS [Harold Bloom  
(ed). New York; W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.  
1970] p.5
- 31 Ibid
- 32 Ibid, p.6

- 33 cf the Sanskrit Satcitananda meaning "eternal, complete consciousness and total bliss".
- 34 It is illuminating to consider the Genesis account of God's comment upon the "completion" of His Creation : "And God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good" (GENESIS I : 31). This substantiates the Biblical identification of "Good" with completion/wholeness. Consider too, the comment of the ZOHAR III 296 on the subject of completion : " .... no blessing rules over a faulty or incomplete thing but only over a complete place, not one that is divided, for divided things cannot long endure or be blessed".
- 35 THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PSYCHOLOGY  
(Oxford; Basil Blackwell Publisher Ltd. 1983)  
p.323
- 36 Ibid
- 37 Ibid
- 38 Erich Kahler : "THE NATURE OF THE SYMBOL" in  
SYMBOLISM IN RELIGION AND LITERATURE  
[Rollo May (ed) New York; George Braziller; 1960] p.54
- 39 Ibid, p.61
- 40 Ibid
- 41 Ibid, p.65



- 42 The very word comes into our language from Homer's epic of the same title which gives an account of the homeward voyage of Odysseus after the fall of Troy.
- 43 "The return and reintegration with society -- is indispensable to the continuous circulation of spiritual energy into the world and --- from the standpoint of the community is the justification of the long retreat ----".  
- Joseph Campbell : THE HERO WITH A THOUSAND FACES  
(Great Britain; Abacus edition published by Sphere Books Ltd; 1975) p.36
- 44 Paul Tillich : "THE RELIGIOUS SYMBOL" in SYMBOLISM IN RELIGION AND LITERATURE  
[Rollo May (ed) New York; George Braziller; 1960] p.77
- 45 William Blake : from the introduction to SONGS OF EXPERIENCE
- 46 The feat of the Norse hero Sigurd (Siegfried), protagonist of the VOLSUNG SAGA and the NIBELUNGENLIED
- 47 Ronald W. Hepburn "LIVING IMAGE AND DEAD DOGMA" in METAPHYSICAL BELIEFS  
[Alasdair MacIntyre and Ronald Gregor Smith (eds) London; SCM Press Ltd; 1957] p.91.
- 48 Ibid, p.92
- 49 Ibid, p.95

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CHAPTER 3

REGAINING PARADISE: ROMANTIC POETRY AND THE QUEST  
FOR REDEMPTION.

I will not cease from mental fight,  
nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,  
Till we have built Jerusalem,  
in England's green and pleasant land.

- William Blake, preface to MILTON

Here the impossible union  
Of spheres of existence is actual,  
Here the past and future  
Are conquered and reconciled

- T.S. Eliot, "THE DRY SALVAGES".

FOUR QUARTETS

In chapter II, we spoke of the simultaneously visionary and prophetic role of the poet, experienced by him as a deeply intuited obligation to communicate his insights into an Ultimate Reality to his fellowmen. We also suggested that in the light of this obligation, viewed as nothing less than a spiritual vocation, the poet himself embodies one of the most powerful archetypes of the quest myth : the hero-saviour who embarks on an odyssey in search of the sacred talisman or gnosis which will redeem his community from spiritual exile.

We claimed further that what the poet-hero brings back to society is the symbol or archetype of redemption : a state of both individual and cosmic concord which is imaginatively (symbolically) evoked as "Paradise Regained".

Our task in this chapter will be to examine in detail how some of the major Romantic and Neo-Romantic<sup>1</sup> poets pursue the archetype of redemption through the quest myth which consistently informs their poetry.

Central to the dynamic of the quest myth is the pervasive theme of alienation as the defining feature of postlapsarian humanity. The profound sense of isolation, whether it is socially, artistically or spiritually experienced, repeatedly manifests itself in the Romantic consciousness to the extent that the image of the Romantic as "outsider", "wandering lonely"<sup>2</sup> on the periphery of a society that is neither able nor willing to understand and accept him has become something of a literary caricature.

Regardless of his individual method of articulation, each Romantic poet seeks to give expression to his personal experience of alienation and thereafter to his particular vision of redemption from this condition.

As mentioned earlier, the concept of a fall from spiritual grace - consonant with the Biblical parable of the expulsion from Eden - is a prevailing theme in Romantic consciousness.<sup>3</sup> Nowhere is this more evident than in the work of William Blake whose poetry constantly juxtaposes a vision of this original state of spiritual integrity with bleak images of Man's postlapsarian condition.

The fall from Grace implies, as we have indicated, a state of spiritual exile, i.e. a condition of misery and ignorance arising out of a total severance from the Moral Order. In Blake's epistemological framework, Man's fall from spirit implies his inevitable incarceration in the prison of the flesh and the consequent loss of his original unlimited perception of the Infinite. This idea is clearly articulated in "THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL" which describes Man's fallen condition as an imprisonment in the "cavern" of corporeality through which only a limited and hence distorted vision of reality is permitted through the five senses which comprise the "narrow chinks" of the cavern.<sup>4</sup>

In Blake's poetry, Man's postlapsarian condition is represented as the state of "Experience", i.e. the state of ignorant identification with phenomenal reality and all its attendant limitations and suffering.

Blake regarded it his divinely-appointed task as poet-prophet - a role which he unequivocally and fervently embraced - to redeem Mankind from the domain of Experience and restore him to his original condition of spiritual wholeness.

*Foot*  
Preparatory to looking at some of Blake's texts, it would be a useful and indeed necessary exercise to examine more precisely what the concepts of Innocence, Experience and Higher Innocence imply, since they are integral to Blake's personal ontology.

We have claimed elsewhere in this discussion that the Moral Order, however it is conceived, reflects an understanding of "Ultimate Good" which is consonant with that which is "whole", "integrated", "connected" and "complete".<sup>5</sup> For Blake, this condition of immutable unity and cohesion constituted Man's primordial spiritual legacy - the state of Original Innocence.

It is only when Man is realigned with this condition that the "Infinite vision" described in "THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL" is restored to him, and it is Blake's self-confessed mission as visionary and prophet to bring this restoration into effect.

In examining Blake's symbolic evocation of what I have called "the Moral Order", it is essential to bear in mind his strongly implied but never directly explicated distinction between "Innocence" and "Higher Innocence" since the two states are not one and the same despite their frequent confusion in Blakean scholarship and criticism.

What in the interests of clarity I have called "Higher Innocence" corresponds to our definition of the Moral Order, i.e. a prevailing archetype of Transcendent Reality which, irrespective of cultural and theological variations in representation, is universally imbued with the inalienable qualities of eternity, infinity, inviolable integrity and immutability.

From a Blakean perspective, all human beings have their original "ground of being" in this Transcendent Reality but have somehow become alienated from it (a view which broadly conforms to traditional Judaeo-Christian theology). In his alienated state, Man no longer possesses his original harmonious synthesis of vision and is therefore incapable of seeing everything "as it is: Infinite".<sup>6</sup>

The limitless apprehension of Reality becomes fragmented in the fallen state so that Man views Reality only in terms of *partial* truths.

This ontological schism is reflected in the dichotomous states of Innocence and Experience which Blake describes as "the two contrary states of the Human Soul".<sup>7</sup>

Innocence / Experience.

Postlapsarian Man is thus condemned to perceiving life in a state of *contraries*, neither of which offers a complete (whole) vision of Reality. Placed in conjunction, however, Innocence and Experience *synthesize the original totality of prelapsarian vision*. Together, they facilitate a progression from the fallen, limited perspective of corporeal reality to the infinite vision of "Higher Innocence". Each state is thus a necessary component of the original whole as clearly evidenced in Blake's famous dictum: "without contraries is no progression".<sup>8</sup>

In his SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE, Blake clearly demonstrates the inadequacy of both "Innocent" and "Experienced" vision as isolated, independent perspectives. The state of Innocence is radically distinguished from that of Higher Innocence by its childlike simplicity and naivety.

Most of the SONGS OF INNOCENCE communicate a vision of the world as seen through the eyes of a child. They portray with a kind of idealized benevolence the charmed, idyllic landscape of infancy (cf "LAUGHING SONG"; "CRADLE SONG"; "THE ECHOING GREEN") and where they do not, they at least reveal that trusting, unquestioning acceptance of circumstance which is peculiar to children (cf "THE CHIMNEY SWEEPER"; "THE LITTLE BLACK BOY").

As beautiful and beguiling as this condition of Innocence is, it lacks that depth of understanding, that judicious irony of insight which only an encounter with Experience can provide. The elemental, pre-rational Innocence of childhood is not the Higher Innocence which Blake wishes to reclaim for Mankind. In his own words, "Unorganiz'd Innocence is an Impossibility. Innocence dwells with Wisdom, but never with Ignorance".<sup>9</sup>

For Blake, the route to spiritual redemption lay in healing Man's fragmented vision by revealing Innocence and Experience as the two halves of an Ultimate Truth. To transcend his fallen state, Man must progress from the naive benevolence of childhood to a necessary encounter with the brutal realities of the postlapsarian world. Only when this crisis is successfully negotiated will the Higher Innocence which "dwells with Wisdom" be achieved.<sup>10</sup>

The spiritual challenge of this progress is a formidable one : while assimilating the harshly-won wisdom of experience, Man must yet retain that utter lack of bitterness and rancour which marks the innocence of children, "for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as they"<sup>11</sup>

These two qualities, reaped respectively from the states of Experience and Innocence, together synthesize a new reality : one which is complete and whole in that it suffers neither from the uninformed simplicity of childhood nor from the inveterate cynicism of disillusioned adulthood.

Blake indicates that there are two possible responses to the crisis of Experience : a person may either (i) succumb to the fears and prejudices of the postlapsarian predicament and withdraw into a kind of nihilistic scepticism, as does the nurse in "NURSE'S SONG" of the SONGS OF EXPERIENCE whose personal disillusionment and bitterness obscure her vision so that she projects the negativity of adult experience onto the children in her care<sup>12</sup>; or (ii) rise above the adversity of one's circumstances as does the nurse in the corresponding poem of SONGS OF INNOCENCE whose benign serenity bears testimony to her achievement of Higher Innocence. "My heart is at rest within my breast", she claims, "And everything else is still".<sup>13</sup>

Her words reflect the healed and therefore holistic vision of one who has reconciled all psychic contradictions ("contraries") and has thereby transcended the apparent dualities of sacred and profane, eternal and temporal, spirit and matter.

This harmonious cohesion of perception, undistorted by the limitations of Experience, is the radiant vision of Higher Innocence.

Blake's concept of vision involves a hierarchy of perspectives composed of four levels of which only two concern us here. The highest level of vision representing the state of Higher Innocence is significantly called Eden, the realm of supreme Imaginative intensity.<sup>14</sup> It is at this level that the "Doors of Perception" are totally cleansed of the distortions and obscurities of the Fallen World. Eden in Blake's symbology thus represents the vision of the Illuminate and is clearly recognizable as the archetype of "Paradise Regained".

The lowest level called Ulro<sup>15</sup> - a kind of perceptual hell - consists of memory and abstract reflection and is entirely devoid of creative (synthetic) potential. We are reminded again of Coleridge's definition of Fancy, the lower-order faculty as "indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space"<sup>16</sup> and dealing only with "fixities and definites".<sup>17</sup>

Ulro for the most part corresponds to the level of vision experienced by postlapsarian humanity. It is the vision of the world of Experience, permeated by the anguish, prejudices, fears and suspicions of temporal reality. Perceived through Ulro vision, Eden, "The garden of love", is grotesquely transformed into a desolate cemetery -

go to p. 70!



And I saw it was filled with graves,  
And tomb-stones where flowers should be -  
And priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,  
And binding with briars my joys and desires. 18

The defining feature of material reality/Experience/Ulro is its finitude and it is precisely against this condition and all its bleak consequences of transience, decay and mortality, that the Romantic temperament rebels. Romantic poetry reflects the urgent search for a way out of the finite and the perishable and the corollary pursuit of the Immutable and the Absolute.

Ezra Pound, for example, whose epic quest for "things enduring and redemptive"<sup>19</sup> is the unifying theme of the CANTOS, captures the spirit of the Romantic quest when he declares :

"one wants to find out what sort of things endure, and what sort of things are transient; what sort of things recur; ..... to learn upon what the forces, constructive and dispersive, of social order move".<sup>20</sup>

In the light of this intense recoil from the transient and the ardent pursuit of the Immutable, it is not surprising that a pervasive feature of Romantic poetry is its preoccupation with two opposing dimensions of Time which respectively correspond to the relative (the temporal) and the Absolute (the Eternal).

The phenomenal world is subject to "Linear Time" which is experienced as "that constant succession of moments presumed to be irreversible and infinitely extensible in a single direction ..... the unalterable temporal order of past, present and future".<sup>21</sup>

"Linear" or "Clock time" (since it is "clock measured" and "ticks off its seconds without regard to the flow of human experience"<sup>22</sup>) is the time scheme of limited, finite reality in which all things are perpetually subject to entropy and decay. It is from this reality that the poet-prophet feels it his duty to redeem his fellowman.

According to their varying conceptualizations of "linear time", the Romantic poets reveal different motives for wishing to liberate Man from this dimension. For John Keats, "linear time" contains the menace of transience: physical degeneration culminating in the awful finality of death. Keats's poetry thus explores the possibility of transcending a material reality in which "Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes"<sup>23</sup> and attaining instead to an immutable Reality where "a thing of beauty is a joy forever"<sup>24</sup>

For Blake, "linear time" is merely the illusion of Man's limited consciousness - of Ulro vision. "How do you know", he challenges, "but ev'ry bird that cuts the airy way/is an immense world of delight/closed by your senses five?"<sup>25</sup>

In contradistinction to linear time in Romantic ontology is the concept of the Timeless which is invariably associated with the apprehension of Absolute/Ultimate Reality. F.C. Happold in his study and anthology of Mysticism, describes mystical consciousness as a state in which the traditional temporal distinctions of past, present and future are eradicated. "The mystic", Happold asserts, "feels himself to be in a dimension where time is not, where 'all is always now'".<sup>26</sup> We are immediately struck by the parallel between the mystic's experience of the Timeless and Blake's bard - the persona of the poet-prophet "who present, past and future sees".<sup>27</sup>

When Man is afforded a vision of "Higher Innocence" or Eden, all temporal boundaries, which, after all, are simply the mechanical constructs of "Linear Time" or Ulro vision, are dissolved.

Imaginative or mystical consciousness is thus primarily identified by its transcendence of temporal constraints. This is apparent for example in T.S. Eliot's observation that

Time past and time future  
Allow but a little consciousness.  
To be conscious is not to be in time. 28

and

I can only say, *there* we have been: but I cannot say  
[where  
And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it  
in time. 29

This Timeless Absolute also emerges in Ezra Pound's canto 49 as a "fourth dimension" of reality :

The fourth; the dimension of stillness  
And the power over wild beasts.

The significance of stillness here is two-fold: in the temporal sense, it means "without ever having ceased", i.e. that which permanently endures. In the spatial context, it suggests that which is unmoving and changeless. Once again, we find ourselves face to face with the inalienable properties of infinity, eternity and immutability which constitute the Moral Absolute.

What we begin to perceive in examining the various "objective correlatives" for Ultimate Reality as they appear in Romantic poetry is that they exhibit a remarkable and pervasive similarity.

The state of spiritual redemption is invariably associated with a luminous clarity of vision, an impression of infinite, boundless perception and the sense of participating in a dimension of consciousness which is not qualified or limited by the constraints of "linear time".

Our concern now will be to examine more closely the "Imaginative vocabulary" of Romantic poetry in its representation of that state of consciousness which characterizes Man's restoration to Ultimate Reality. What are the predominant motifs - the major myths and metaphors which articulate the Romantic "quest for the Sublime", and how is the Sublime itself imaginatively evoked ?

Earlier in this discussion, we claimed that within the context of the Absolute or Moral Order, "Ultimate Good" is equated with wholeness, completion and harmonious integration. Significantly, it will be seen that the symbols which "point to" the Moral Order reflect a powerful sense of both individual (psychological) and cosmic wholeness.

Conversely, the state of spiritual exile or alienation is consistently reflected in metaphors of erosion, fragmentation, division and decay.

In Blake's "EARTH'S ANSWER", for example, the anguish of postlapsarian alienation is conveyed through the metaphor of Earth, personified as a deeply despairing woman who is chained to

her mortality by the jealousy and vanity of a tyrannical patriarchal God - the "Selfish Father of men"<sup>30</sup> whom Blake associated with the sterile and rigid dogma of normative religion.

Earth is "divided" from her original state of spiritual integrity, and her consequent misery is reflected in the pervasive images of darkness and bondage which respectively symbolize the blindness of Ulro vision and the incarceration of spirit in the prison of matter.

In striking contrast, the vision of the Sublime in Blake's poetry is rendered in images of light and illimitable freedom. In "NIGHT", for example, we are presented with an apocalyptic glimpse of "Higher Innocence" as perceived with the radiant clarity of Imaginative vision. What we behold is a "new world",<sup>31</sup> richly conveyed in symbols that are significantly redolent of Biblical prophecies of the Messianic Age :

And there the lion's ruddy eyes  
Shall flow with tears of gold,  
And pitying the tender cries,  
And walking round the fold,  
Saying 'Wrath by his<sup>32</sup> meekness,  
And by his health sickness,  
Is driven away  
From our immortal day.

' And now beside thee, bleating lamb,  
I can lie down and sleep,<sup>33</sup>  
Or think on him who bore thy name,<sup>34</sup>  
Graze after thee and weep.

For washed in life's river  
My bright mane for ever  
Shall shine like the gold  
As I guard o'er the fold. '

It is a world of "immortal day" - redeemed from the mechanical divisions of linear time - in which the lion, a symbol of unbridled ferocity in mundane reality, is metamorphosed into an agent of divine compassion and protection.

The image of this savage beast lying down beside the sheep has strong echoes of ISAIAH 11 with its eloquent evocation of prevailing harmony among all creatures. It is also significantly, a powerful metaphor for the reconciliation of "contraries", i.e. the harmonious re-integration (or "healing") of energies which the Fall from Grace has polarized.

What Blake conveys to us here is the archetype of spiritual wholeness and redemption, symbolically presented as a dazzling apocalyptic vision of a reclaimed Eden or Paradise.

Another of the most powerful symbols to emerge in both religious and literary parables of spiritual wholeness is that of the child. It is not difficult to understand how the untarnished innocence and unquestioning, trusting receptivity of children should function as a metaphor for the state of consciousness in which Divine Mystery is met with a joyous simplicity, uncomplicated by the probing, rational scepticism of adult cognition. We are reminded in this particular respect of Christ's exhortation to his disciples that "unless ye turn to God from your sins and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven".<sup>35</sup>

It is interesting too that in his study of archetypes, Carl Jung devotes special attention to the motif of the Divine Child as one of the most prominent a priori symbols resident in the Collective Unconscious.<sup>36</sup>

This archetype clearly connotes the primordial condition of spiritual wholeness before the human psyche is riven by the conflicts and contradictions of postlapsarian experience.

In Scripture and Mythology, the archetype of the Divine Child is closely related to the figure of the Hero-Saviour. In fact, in most accounts, the Divine Child is incarnated precisely in order to fulfill the mission of the Hero. When we examine the universal myth of the Divine Child, we are once again struck by the remarkable parallels which exist in spite of cultural and theological variants. Minor deviations aside, the Divine Child narrative is broadly as follows : -

During a time of immense suffering and tribulation, generally arising out of the persecution of a particular race or nation, a child is born into the community of the oppressed with the express destiny of liberating his people once he has grown to manhood. The birth of this prodigious infant has usually been predicted by the sages and scriptures of the community and is naturally anticipated with great eagerness. Once the child is born, he is traditionally the sought-after target of the forces of darkness and oppression which make every endeavour to annihilate him.

For this reason, the identity of the child is vigilantly concealed and he is customarily reared in obscurity, usually by foster parents, until he has come of age.

Even during his childhood, however, the youthful saviour exhibits certain wondrous feats of conduct or wisdom which make it irrefutably clear to his people that he is the promised liberator. When he grows to manhood, he is summoned by the forces of Good which reveal to him the details of his divine mission. From this point on, the myth of the Divine Child evolves into the myth of the Hero-Saviour which we have already discussed in some detail.

Once again, there are numerous examples which corroborate the global pervasiveness of this archetype. From Graeco-Roman mythology, we have the tales of Perseus and Theseus, both fathered by gods, whose heroic destinies are respectively fulfilled in the slaying of the Gorgon and the Minotaur, horrific monsters who wreak atrocities on humankind until the advent of the hero-saviours.

Vedic mythology enshrines the epiphany of Krishna who, after years of living incognito as a humble cowherd boy in the village of his foster parents, reveals himself to be the "Supreme Personality of Godhead",<sup>37</sup> slays the demoniac usurper-king Kamsa and thereafter restores both political and cosmic equilibrium.

In the legends of the West, we have the popular Arthurian Cycle (with its British, Celtic and Germanic variants) in which the child Arthur, foster son of Sir Ector, draws the miraculous sword from the stone, an act which verifies his true identity as "rightwise king of all Britain born".

The Judaeo-Christian tradition gives the account of Moses who as an infant, is concealed in the bullrushes from the murderous wrath of the reigning Pharaoh and who later grows up in the court of that same monarch, reared by the tyrant's daughter who guards



her foster son's true identity. The child Moses eventually becomes the saviour of the oppressed Hebrews whom he leads from Egyptian bondage to the freedom of the Promised Land.

Finally, we have the story of Jesus, the long-awaited, biblically prophesied Messiah whose advent is revealed to the magi by a radiant star over the site of his birth. Like Krishna, Moses and Arthur, he is saved from a "slaughter of the innocents", a mass infanticide perpetrated by an evil ruler who is threatened by reports of his birth.

Raised in deliberate obscurity - for some years in Egypt and then in the remote village of Nazareth - the Saviour grows to maturity when he then takes up his divine ministry and embarks on his redemptive mission.

Along with the Hero-myth and the archetype of "Paradise Regained", the symbol of the Divine Child is one of the most powerful and pervasive Imaginative evocations of spiritual integrity, redemption from mortality and realignment with the Moral Order.

The poetry of William Blake frequently draws on the metaphor of the child in representing his conception of both naive innocence before it is tested by Experience, and the Higher Innocence in which the original candour of the child is sustained side by side with the robust, invincible faith that is acquired with wisdom.<sup>38</sup>

In the companion poems "THE LITTLE GIRL LOST" and "THE LITTLE GIRL FOUND" (SONGS OF INNOCENCE), Lyca, the little girl of the titles, is clearly a Blakean evocation of the Divine Child.

The former poem tells of how "Lovely Lyca", only "seven summers old", goes astray while she is playing. That she symbolizes Higher Innocence is made unequivocally clear both by the deep compassion she exhibits for her distressed parents and by her utter lack of personal fear or anxiety : -

'Sweet sleep, come to me  
Underneath this tree;  
Do father, mother weep,  
"Where can Lyca sleep?"

'Lost in desert wild  
Is your little child.  
How can Lyca sleep,  
If her mother weep?

'If her heart does ache,  
Then let Lyca wake;  
If my mother sleep,  
Lyca shall not weep.

'Frowning, frowning night,  
O'er this desert bright  
Let thy moon arise,  
While I close my eyes'. 39

While the little girl sleeps, she is observed by savage nocturnal predators who significantly refrain from harming her. Once again, the sacred character of the Divine Child is evinced in images which recall Isaiah's apocalyptic description of the Messianic Age, and we are reminded of the prophet's revelation of a time when

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,  
And the leopard shall lie down with the kid;  
And the calf and the young lion  
and the fatling together;  
*And a little child shall lead*  
*them.*<sup>40</sup> (italics mine)

It is illuminating to compare Isaiah's inspired vision with  
Blake's personal rendition of the same experience : -

Sleeping Lyca lay -  
While the beasts of prey  
Come from caverns deep,  
Viewed the maid asleep.

The kingly lion stood  
And the virgin viewed;  
Then he gambolled round  
O'er the hallowed ground.

Leopards, tigers play  
Round her as she lay,  
While the lion old,  
Bowed his mane of gold,

And her bosom lick;  
And upon her neck,  
From his eyes of flame  
Ruby tears there came;

While the lioness  
Loosed her slender dress,  
And naked they conveyed  
To caves the sleeping maid. 41

The experience of Higher Innocence is not exclusively confined to childhood, though its qualities of childlike candour and humility are necessary prerequisites for gaining entry to the "Kingdom of God", i.e. for realignment with the Moral Absolute.

The mark of the Illuminate or self-realized soul is that he has remained childlike while having outgrown childishness, i.e. the naivety and ignorance of untested innocence. The state of Higher Innocence is the innate legacy of every human being regardless of age. This is clearly depicted in Blake's "THE LITTLE GIRL FOUND" in which Lyca's parents, although distraught with grief and anxiety, nonetheless display an admirable fortitude of spirit which enables them to meet the crisis of Experience and rise above personal calamity.

Half-way through the poem, Lyca's father, bearing his exhausted and grief-stricken wife in his arms (for "with feet of weary woe/she could no further go")<sup>42</sup> encounters a crouching lion in their path. At this point in their search, the couple come face to face with their mortality, with the doom that awaits all human beings trapped in linear time.

However, it is at this very instant when "turning back (is) vain", that unconquerable faith defies the deadly illusion of temporal reality. The lion "with his heavy mane" bears the couple to the ground, but then in an amazing peripeteia allays their fears by silently standing by and licking their hands.

In a sudden beatification of vision, Lyca's parents are able to see *beyond* the superficial veneer of material reality and to perceive the true nature of the lion. What, under the limitations of Ulro vision had appeared as a menacing portent of certain death, is through Edenic vision miraculously transmuted into a source of Divine Consolation:

They look upon his eyes  
Filled with deep surprise,  
And wondering behold  
A spirit armed in gold.

On his head a crown,  
On his shoulders down  
Flowed his golden hair -  
Gone was all their care. 43

The crowned figure, clearly a variant of the hero-saviour, leads the wandering couple to their lost child :

'Follow me', he said  
'Weep not for the maid,  
In my palace deep,  
Lyca lies asleep'.

Then they followed  
where the vision led,  
And saw their sleeping child  
Among tigers wild.

To this day they dwell  
In a lonely dell,  
Nor fear the wolvis howl,  
Nor the lion's growl. 44

The conclusion of the poem represents the triumph of Higher Innocence over the fearful distortions of worldly vision.

The loss of Lyca the Divine Child is in some ways a felix culpa - a paradoxically fortunate calamity - since her eventual restoration facilitates the redemption of her parents from their postlapsarian condition and their realignment with a Higher Reality from which the fear of injury or annihilation is permanently banished.

The state of undefiled innocence associated with childhood also emerges in the poetry of William Wordsworth as a correlative for the experience of Higher Reality. His "Intimations of Immortality", for example, are derived as the full title of the ode informs us, "from recollections of early childhood". This is a time when an apprehension of the Numinous is particularly vivid since the power of the Imagination has not yet been attenuated by worldly rationalism or cynicism. Recollecting his childhood, Wordsworth claims :

There was a time when meadow, grove,  
and stream,  
The earth and every common sight,  
To me did seem  
Apparelled in celestial light,  
The glory and the freshness of a dream. <sup>45</sup>

Wordsworth here describes his own experience of the luminous splendour of Blake's Edenic vision. It is nothing less than a glimpse of the "new earth",<sup>46</sup> perceived with the unblemished clarity of the "pure in heart".<sup>47</sup> This clarity is gradually obscured as the child matures and inevitably adopts postlapsarian perspectives. Reflecting on this diminution of Imaginative vision Wordsworth laments :

It is not now as it hath been of yore; -  
    Turn wheresoe'er I may,  
    By night or day,  
The things which I have seen I now can  
    see no more. 48

Earthly beauty remains, but it is no longer suffused in the "celestial light" which accompanies numinous vision, and the poet, deeply and painfully conscious of his "fall from Grace", observes

But yet I know, where'er I go  
That there hath past away a glory from  
    the earth. 49

It is no sweeping exaggeration to say that the main trajectory of Wordsworth's poetry reflects an urgent endeavour to reclaim the visionary capacity lost with his childhood.

The Romantic sense of anguished alienation from the Sublime and unmitigated longing for spiritual restitution (Sehnsucht or insatiable yearning) is evident in Wordsworth's question :

Whither is fled the visionary gleam ?  
Where is it now, the glory and the dream ? 50

In the "INTIMATIONS" ode, Wordsworth traces Man's transition from the innocence of childhood when

Heaven lies about us in our infancy ! 51

to the inevitable encounter with Fallen Reality (Blake's domain of Experience) when

Shades of the prison-house begin to close  
Upon the growing Boy <sup>52</sup>

until he succumbs at last to the narrow confines of time-bound reality and loses his vision of the Sublime :

At length the Man perceives it die away  
And fade into the light of common day. <sup>53</sup>

Yet even in the face of this inexorable decline from Spiritual Grace, Wordsworth affirms the existence of divine potential in the human soul and continues to pursue the means by which it might be actualized. Although the encounter with relative - and hence transient - reality brings with it the loss of "Delight and liberty, the simple creed of Childhood",<sup>54</sup> the recollection of one's early contact with the Sublime is in itself a potent reminder that a Higher Reality does exist. The very knowledge of its existence is an immense source of hope and solace which mitigates postlapsarian suffering :

But for those first affections,  
Those shadowy recollections,  
Which, be they what they may,  
Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,  
Are yet a master-light of all our seeing;  
Uphold us, cherish, and have power  
to make  
Our noisy years seem monuments in the  
being  
Of the eternal Silence: truths that wake,  
To perish never:



Which neither listlessness, nor mad  
endeavour  
Nor Man nor Boy,  
Nor all that is at enmity with joy,  
Can utterly abolish or destroy !<sup>55</sup>

We have already discussed the archetype of Reclaimed Eden or "Paradise Regained" as one of the most powerful symbolic correlatives for the state of spiritual redemption. This archetype and the pursuit of its realization comprise a major aspect of the Romantic "quest for the Sublime".

For Wordsworth, as indeed for many of the Romantics, the advent of the "Golden Age" on earth seemed imminent with the outbreak of the French Revolution which was widely interpreted as a redemptive rebellion of the forces of liberty and light against the repressive tyranny of the Old Order.

The initial enthusiasm with which this supposedly millennial portent was greeted knew no bounds. M.H. Abrams deftly conveys this millennial fervour when he describes Romanticism as a mode which "fuses history, politics, philosophy and religion into one grand design, by asserting Providence - or some form of natural teleology - to operate in the seeming chaos of human history so as to effect from present evil a greater good".<sup>56</sup>

Framed within this "politics of vision",<sup>57</sup> the French Revolution was weighted with apocalyptic significance and perceived as "the symptom or early stage of the abrupt culmination of this design from which (would) emerge a new man on a new earth which is a restored Paradise".<sup>58</sup>

Wordsworth's fervent endorsement of the Revolution and the New Order which he believed it heralded, is reflected in Book XI of his long autobiographical poem "THE PRELUDE". Here he describes the approaching New Age as a time

In which the meagre, stale, forbidding  
ways  
Of custom, law and statute, took at once  
The attraction of a country in romance. 59

For Wordsworth, the most particular source of joy afforded by the Revolution was that it seemed to promise a physical manifestation of the "Kingdom of Heaven" on earth. Paradise would cease to be merely some lofty metaphysical abstraction. It would be *historically realized*, assuming the concrete and visible lineaments of political reality!

The redemption of humanity would thus occur

Not in Utopia - subterranean fields -  
Or some secreted island, Heaven knows  
where !  
But in the very world, which is the world  
Of all of us, - the place where, in the end,  
We find our happiness, or not at all. 60

Awed by what he considered the immense privilege of witnessing in his own day the transmutation of the world into an earthly Paradise, Wordsworth rapturously exclaimed

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was very Heaven ! 61

Sadly, this dream was not to be translated into reality. The Revolution rapidly degenerated from a noble crusade for "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" into a sordid and bloody power struggle between feuding political factions.

Wretched with disillusionment, Wordsworth watched this millennial vision fade as had his childhood apprehension of the Numinous.

Book X of "THE PRELUDE" records the shock and despair which accompany his repudiation of the French Revolution as an augury of Heaven on earth :

Amid the depth  
Of those enormities, even thinking minds  
Forgot, at seasons, whence they had their  
being;  
Forgot that such a sound was ever heard  
As Liberty upon earth .....  
.....  
It was a lamentable time for man,  
Whether a hope had e'er been his or not;  
A woeful time for them whose hopes  
survived  
The shock; most woeful for those few  
who still  
Were flattered, and had trust in human  
kind;  
They had the deepest feeling of the grief. 62

The dissolution of the heroic ideals of the French Revolution effectively terminated any belief that the redemption of Mankind could be achieved within the sphere of corporeal, temporal reality. Now more than ever, the Romantics were urged to pursue the state of redemption not through the historical process with its capricious political struggles, but through an Imaginative realization of archetypal truths.

"Paradise Regained", they began to see, was less a socio-political possibility than an interior revolution - a radical transformation of self marked by a profound, psychological and spiritual serenity and achieved only through regaining contact with a higher dimension of Consciousness. Not until the human psyche is restored to this condition of Higher Innocence does the hope exist for an enduring transformation of society at large.

Thus, the millennial hope vested in the French Revolution shifts, as M.H. Abrams observes, "from the history of mankind to the mind of the single individual, from militant external action to an imaginative act".<sup>63</sup>

The failure of the Revolution as a symbol of redemption brought with it the recognition of an irrefutable truth : "Man's infinite hopes can never be matched by the world as it is and man as he is".<sup>64</sup> Wordsworth from this point on no longer pursues his "quest for the Sublime" within the parameters of history, doomed as it is to perpetual mutability and failure because of its subjection to linear time.

Instead, he re-directs his efforts in search of an experience of the Numinous which once again coheres with his childhood intimation of an immutable, transcendent Principle governing the whole of Creation. His quest becomes an invocation of the

Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe!  
That Soul that art the eternity of thought,  
That givest to forms and images a breath  
And everlasting motion ..... 65

Renouncing the ephemeral hopes of history, Wordsworth asserts that

Our destiny, our being's heart and home,  
*Is with infinitude, and only there* <sup>66</sup> (italics mine)

The writings of the other prominent Romantics similarly reflect this significant shift from the endorsement of a historical revolution to the espousal of a *spiritual* and *moral* revolution which prior to any transformation of the world, must transform Man's psyche.

This shift of emphasis is evident in the work of Shelley, for example. The latter's earlier poetry (notably his "QUEEN MAB", written when he was nineteen) displays a certain naive literalism in its conceptualization of an earthly paradise in which Man is envisaged as standing "with taintless body and mind" in "a happy earth! reality of Heaven!"<sup>67</sup>

His later poetry, however, while still cherishing the hope of "the ultimate promise of a renovation in human nature and circumstances",<sup>68</sup> conveys this vision less in the lingua mundi of political aspiration than in the symbolic and mythic discourse of the Imagination.

In "PROMETHEUS UNBOUND", the theme of reconciliation with the sublime is symbolized by the reunion of the protagonist Prometheus - clearly representing the archetype of the hero-saviour<sup>69</sup> - with his beloved, Asia, in a joyous ceremony celebrated by the entire cosmos. The marriage of Prometheus and Asia sees the dawning of the Promethean Age, Shelley's rendition of the classical Golden Age or the Messianic era of Biblical prophecy. It is, as we indicated earlier, less the reflection of political transformation than a depiction of that radical metamorphosis of self which marks the state of spiritual redemption.

Once "the loathsome mask"<sup>70</sup> of material conditioning has fallen, self-realized Man reveals the glorious wholeness of nature which is his original and inalienable spiritual heritage.

The Promethean Age is Shelley's mythopoeic portrayal of the New World revealed, as M.H. Abrams explains, to "the purged imagination of Man *when he has reformed his moral nature*"<sup>71</sup> (italics mine). Referring to the poem's conclusion, Abrams comments that "the last words of Demogorgon, the inscrutable agent of this apocalypse, describe a *revolution of the spirit* whose sole agencies are the cardinal virtues of endurance, forgiveness, love, and above all, hope".<sup>72</sup>

In the last stanzas of the poem, the voice of Shelley as prophet-bard may be clearly detected in the words of his character Demogorgon who gives an apocalyptic and panoramic account of the New Order as a time when

Love, from its awful throne of patient power  
In the wise heart, from the last giddy hour  
    of dread endurance, from the slippery, steep,  
And narrow verge of crag-like agony, springs  
And folds over the world its healing wings. 73

In the final stanza, Shelley fulfills his visionary and religious vocation by revealing to Mankind the glorious potential of the human spirit which Prometheus exemplifies and which lies in the ability

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;  
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;  
    To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;  
To love and bear; to hope, till Hope creates  
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;  
    Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent:  
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be  
    Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;  
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire and Victory. 74

It is the enduring capacity for love, forgiveness and hope even in the face of worldly sorrow and pain which is the "sacred gnosis" that Shelley in his role as poet-hero dispenses to society. Only when these attributes are soundly consolidated in the human spirit will Man be truly redeemed from his exile in linear time, and from his consequent mortality.

Earlier in this chapter, we claimed that Romanticism is motivated by a search for a means of transcending the finite and the perishable, and attaining instead to the Immutable and Absolute. It is this search which constitutes the ideological imperative of Romanticism and which establishes its essentially religious character.

Although this pursuit of an Ultimate and inviolable Reality is thematically evident in the poetry of all the Romantics, nowhere is it given such bold prominence as in the work of John Keats. The latter's naturally Romantic temperament was honed to an unusually fine degree by his personal circumstances : in his early twenties, he discovered that he had consumption, a then fatal disease which had already claimed the life of his brother. The sense of his own impending death intensifies the characteristic Romantic pursuit of the Absolute in Keats's poetry.

His "quest for the Sublime" takes the form of a search for what approximates a Platonic "World of Perfect Forms" where

Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty <sup>75</sup>

and where both exist as immutable principles beyond the ravages of linear time.

In his search for this domain where "A thing of beauty is a joy forever",<sup>76</sup> Keats explores several avenues of escape from the inevitable decay of material nature. His "ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE" expresses the urgent ambition to be released from "the weariness, the fever and the fret"<sup>77</sup> of the mortal world, vividly evoked as a place

Where men sit and hear each other groan;  
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,  
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;  
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow  
And leaden-eyed despairs;  
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,  
Or new Love pine at them beyond tomorrow. <sup>78</sup>



In this ode, the rapturous song of the nightingale excites in him a passionate desire for freedom from the anguish of phenomenal reality and he seriously reflects on Death as a means to this freedom:

..... for many a time  
I have been half in love with easeful Death,  
Called him soft names in many a mused rhyme,  
To take into the air my quiet breath. 79

The almost erotic evocation of Death illustrates Keats's perception of it as the supreme consummation of all Life's beauty and intensity :

Now more than ever seems it rich to die;  
To cease upon the midnight with no pain. 80

Death is seen as both the acme and fulfillment of Life - "Death is Life's high meed",<sup>81</sup> exclaims Keats elsewhere - and the agent which terminates material decay and offers final release from the impermanence of the human predicament.

However, as the poem progresses, Keats comes to recognize the fundamental inadequacy of Death as a way out of material reality since, though it offers liberty from the atrophy and misery of the temporal, it also annihilates consciousness, the very faculty which enables an appreciation of Beauty. Were he to die, Keats realizes, the beauty of the nightingale's melody would be forever denied to him :

Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain -  
To thy high requiem become a sod. 82

This irreversible deprivation of Beauty is too high a price for a release from linear time, and in the succeeding stanza, Keats emphatically rejects Death as an alternative to impermanence :

Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird! 83

However, his search for a transcendent Reality continues and in "ODE ON A GRECIAN URN" Keats explores the possibilities in Art of preserving Beauty from the erosion of Time.

The Urn, perceived as a bride whom Time cannot ravish (line 1), depicts on its frieze a moment of beauty and ecstasy. Through the suspension of time and motion, it would seem that the ephemerality of mortal existence has been transcended.

The world of the Grecian Urn is one in which trees cannot shed their leaves, a world of perpetual song, of enduring love and passion, of eternal spring.

Through a process of aesthetic suspension, Beauty is distilled and preserved so that it becomes the transcendent, immutable Poetic Truth which, "when old age shall this generation waste",<sup>84</sup> will remain "in midst of other woe than ~~o~~urs, a friend to man ...".<sup>85</sup>

However, closer analysis of the ode betrays Keats's underlying ambivalence towards "aesthetic suspension" as a viable alternative to impermanence for ultimately, this type of art *arrests* and *inhibits* fulfillment. In the world of the Grecian Urn, the lover can never satisfy his ardour :

Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,  
Though winning near the goal ..... 86

It is a world in which Love is "still to be enjoyed" (line 26), i.e. potential enjoyment is never translated into actuality. Thus, it is a frozen, soundless, immobile and *sterile* world - in Keats's own words, a "cold pastoral"<sup>87</sup> - which Art preserves.

While Keats does not make as decisive a rejection of Art as he does of Death in "ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE", there is a strong suggestion here that the chilly sterility of the Urn, despite its beauty, does not provide a satisfactory alternative to the transience of the phenomenal world.

Art, Death and even the temporary palliatives of alcohol and opiates<sup>88</sup> all receive Keats's consideration as methods through which the suffering of postlapsarian existence might be alleviated or terminated. Keats even flirts with the danger of succumbing to the seductive but fatal allure of Fancy, the lower-order faculty which the Romantics distinguished from the true Imagination. In Keats's poetry, Fancy is personified as a beautiful but treacherous woman whose irresistible but lethal enchantment results in the literal or spiritual death of her lovers. Consider for example, the fairy maiden - "La Belle Dame sans Merci" - whose paramours are doomed to a perpetual emotional limbo. Her tale is recounted by one of them, a knight whom we first encounter "alone and palely loitering"<sup>89</sup> in a desolate and barren landscape - "the sedge has withered from the lake, and no birds sing".<sup>90</sup>

There is also Lamia, the serpent-woman whose seduction of her lover Lycius in a "purple-lined palace of sweet sin"<sup>91</sup> ultimately culminates in his death.

Finally, Keats repudiates Fancy along with the other temporary and inadequate remedies he has explored. Though it seems to mimic Imaginative vision, Fancy is ultimately deceitful, for its shadowy illusion is even less substantial than the vital though flawed beauty of normative reality.

To reside in the realms of Fancy, one must undergo a kind of paralysis of will and feeling and thereby forfeit the rich intensity of experience which validates human existence.

At the conclusion of "ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE", Keats renounces the deceitful allure of Fancy and its domain of "perilous seas" and "fairy lands forlorn" :

Adieu! The fancy cannot cheat so well  
As she is famed to do, deceiving elf.<sup>92</sup>

It is not until the writing of "THE FALL OF HYPERION" that both Keats's literary gifts and his prophetic vocation as poet-bard burgeon into full maturity.

This long though unfinished poem written in September 1819 (less than two years before his death) is the culmination of Keats's poetic credo. The narrator of the poem - a transparent persona of Keats himself - is clearly identifiable as the poet-hero who acts out the Romantic quest by embarking on a hazardous journey (in this case, a journey into the deepest recesses of his psyche) and who finally achieves the supreme prize: a vision of Ultimate Reality, personified as the goddess Moneta who unveils her face to him.

The poem is remarkable in that it is simultaneously a unique expression of Keats's own ideas and experience and a reflection of the universally applicable truths of the quest myth.

The poet-hero, having drunk a strange draught which induces an altered state of consciousness, is summoned by Moneta (the mother of the muses<sup>93</sup> and hence an embodiment of Divine Inspiration - the Imagination itself) and commanded to ascend the "immortal steps" of her sacred altar.

If thou canst not ascend  
These steps, die on that marble where thou art <sup>94</sup>  
she tells him.

Her command is nothing less than the ineluctable divine summons which marks the beginning of the hero's quest. As in the archetypal narrative, he is conscious of the enormity of the task that lies before him, of

The tyranny  
of that fierce threat and the hard task proposed <sup>95</sup>

"Prodigious seemed the toil",<sup>96</sup> but the poet-hero responds to the inexorable challenge and begins the arduous and painful ascent.

By successfully meeting this supreme test of faith, the poet-hero proves himself eligible for the divine Revelation and Moneta, "with sacred hand"<sup>97</sup> parts the veils which conceal her. The poet thus receives an unmediated vision of her face, a record of infinite wisdom and boundless compassion for the sufferings of humanity.

That Moneta is a symbol of Ultimate Reality is evident from the fact that her face reflects the entire experience of the world, and that she is able to contemplate all things with unassailable serenity and benevolence.

Overcome with awe, the poet declares :

But for her eyes I should have fled away  
They held me back, with a benignant light,  
Soft-mitigated by divinest lids  
Half-closed, and visionless entire they seemed  
Of all external things. <sup>98</sup>

The face-to-face encounter with "Ultimate Concern" marks the consummation of the quest for the Sublime and the apotheosis of the poet.

"I am certain of nothing" Keats declares in his famous letter to Benjamin Bailey, "but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination. What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth".<sup>99</sup> Keats is not speaking here in relative, subjective terms, but is clearly evoking a Platonic notion of the inviolable Beauty and unconquerable Truth which comprise the Moral Absolute. It is a vision of this Absolute that "THE FALL OF HYPERION" with its mythic resonances and archetypal symbolism conveys. To gaze on the immortal face of Moneta - "which happy death can put no end to"<sup>100</sup> is, in Keats's own words, to behold "The truth of Imagination".

In this chapter, we have explored the various ways in which the Romantic poets symbolically convey their vision of the Sublime. As a consolidation of this exercise, and in support of our argument that Romanticism is not so much a cultural and historical phenomenon as an innate condition of mind and temperament which is perennially evident, we turn finally to an examination of the quest myth in the work of T.S. Eliot.

Though literary purists might think it a misnomer to call Eliot a Romantic, the mystical nuances of his poetry (particularly of his FOUR QUARTETS) and its pervasive theme of seeking realignment with a higher dimension of Consciousness clearly locate him within the same ideological parameters as the "chronological Romantics".

Like Blake's bard, for example, Eliot seeks the experience of Timeless Vision, of a state of Consciousness which transcends the distortions and illusions of mundane perception. The mechanical divisions of linear time - "Time present and time past" are the product of the limited, one-dimensional consciousness of Man's fallen condition.

The Blakean resonances are evident in Eliot's observation that

Time past and time future  
Allow but a little consciousness  
To be conscious is not to be in time. 101

Eliot's poetry presents a grim panorama of Western civilization as an arid wilderness, utterly barren of faith and vision. It is a spiritual "Wasteland", symbolically depicted in the epic poem of the same title as a desolate landscape, revealing only

A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,  
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no  
relief  
And the dry stone no sound of water. 102

This is the world which Eliot's "kindred spirits", the 19th Century Romantics, would immediately have recognized as a metaphor for the spiritual exile of fallen humanity.

It is a condition of impoverished consciousness and fragmented perception, reflecting a diminished grasp of reality since, as Eliot observes

human kind  
Cannot bear very much reality. 103

Estranged from "Ultimate Concern", Man is trapped in a limbo of spiritual alienation, in

a place of disaffection  
Time before and time after  
In a dim light, 104

Where there is no clarity of definition - "neither daylight investing form with lucid stillness ..... nor darkness to purify the soul ..... Neither plenitude nor vacancy". 105

In this Wasteland, everything is subject to the mechanistic dictation of linear time :

The world moves  
In appetancy, on its metalled ways  
Of time past and time future 106



and vitality is reduced to

Only a flicker  
Over the strained time-ridden faces  
Distracted from distraction by distraction. 107

In keeping with the Romantic notion of the poet's spiritual vocation, Eliot, having held up to society a mirror of its diseased and disaffected condition, endeavours to find the panacea and, in accordance with the role of the poet-hero, to reveal this redemptive remedy to Mankind.

As in the poetry of the 19th Century Romantics, the source of redemption in Eliot's work is to be found in his symbolic evocation of Transcendent Reality - a Reality which can only be apprehended through an Imaginative transmutation of consciousness.

The pursuit of this Higher Reality is the principal theme of FOUR QUARTETS, the meditative and frequently mystical poem which of all his work, perhaps most clearly exemplifies Eliot's innate Romanticism.

In the first quartet, "BURNT NORTON", the peculiarly ineffable experience of the Numinous is conveyed through the correlative of the "moment in the rose garden".<sup>108</sup> The imagery is uniquely Eliot's, but the symbolic "gestalt" is clearly recognizable as the universal archetype of "Paradise Regained".

We find ourselves transported to a garden, a kind of Eden - full of mysterious, invisible presences, resonant with birdsong and "unheard music hidden in the shrubbery",<sup>109</sup> where the roses display "the look of flowers that are looked at"<sup>110</sup> and where the

leaves are "full of children, hidden excitedly, containing laughter".<sup>111</sup>

It is in this primaeval garden that a miracle of Imaginative vision occurs. The narrator of the poem - Eliot in his persona of poet-bard who serves as our guide much as Virgil does for Dante - leads us to a drained pool. As we look down into it - "dry concrete, brown edged",<sup>112</sup> a marvellous transfiguration suddenly occurs :

And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,  
And the lotus rose, quietly, quietly,  
The surface glittered out of heart of light,  
And they were behind us, reflected in the pool".<sup>113</sup>

The lines are dense with numinous symbols: the sacred lotus flower, the baptismal water, the benevolent invisible presences, the glittering light emanating from some mystical, luminous source - all of these images combine to elicit in the reader the compelling sense of having actually beheld a vision.

True, we do not sustain this vision for very long. As fallen souls, we "cannot bear very much reality" and the radiant epiphany lasts only for a moment -

Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty.<sup>114</sup>

Nonetheless, having had even a glimpse of this "Ultimate Reality", having stood for one transfigured moment "at the still point of the turning world",<sup>115</sup> we cannot help but be changed by it, and it is this change, no matter how minute or how briefly intuited, which marks the beginning of that "radical transformation of self" which is the only hope of our redemption.

Eliot, in reaching into the Imagination, that vast repository of eternal, immutable symbols, and fashioning for us in the language of the spirit a vision of our restoration to the Sublime, re-enacts no less than his Romantic predecessors the sacred mission of the poet-hero.

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N O T E S

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- 1 For my definition of this term, see the concluding paragraph of Chapter II.
- 2 William Wordsworth : "I WANDERED LONELY AS A CLOUD"  
in POEMS OF THE IMAGINATION in  
WORDSWORTH: POETICAL WORKS, edited by  
Thomas Hutchinson (London; Oxford  
University Press; 1975) p.149
- 3 See Chapter II, p. ~~20~~ 39
- 4 William Blake : "THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL" 11.80-83  
in BLAKE : THE COMPLETE POEMS, edited by  
W.H. Stevenson (London; Longman edition;  
1975), p.114
- 5 See Chapter II, p. ~~3~~ 6 and note 34
- 6 William Blake : "THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL"  
1.81 in BLAKE: THE COMPLETE POEMS  
p.114
- 7 The subtitle of Blake's SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE  
(1794)
- 8 William Blake : "THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL".  
1.7 in BLAKE: THE COMPLETE POEMS  
p.105

- 9 From THE COMPLETE WRITINGS OF WILLIAM BLAKE, ed. Sir Geoffrey Keynes (London; 1966) p.380, cited in SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE : TWENTIETH CENTURY VIEWS, (ed) M.D. Paley, p.5
- 10 In relation to the psychological odyssey from naive Innocence to Higher Innocence, Norman O. Brown remarks; "It is one of the great romantic visions, clearly formulated by Schiller and Herder as early as 1793 and still vital in the systems of Hegel and Marx, that the history of mankind consists in a departure from a condition of undifferentiated primal unity with himself and with nature, an intermediate period in which man's powers are developed through differentiation and antagonism (alienation) and a final return to a unity on a higher level of harmony ....."

See N.O. Brown : "LIFE AGAINST DEATH: THE PSYCHOANALYTICAL MEANING OF HISTORY" in SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE : TWENTIETH CENTURY VIEWS, p.8

11 MARK 10 : 14

12 See BLAKE : THE COMPLETE POEMS, p.214

13 Ibid, p.60

14 See NORTHROP FRYE : FEARFUL SYMMETRY - A STUDY OF WILLIAM BLAKE (New Jersey; Princeton University Press; 1972) p.49

- 15 Ibid, pp. 48 - 49
- 16 Extract from Coleridge's BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA, cited in THE ROMANTIC IMAGINATION edited by John Spencer Hill (London; The Macmillan Press Ltd; 1977) p.38
- 17 Ibid
- 18 "THE GARDEN OF LOVE" in BLAKE: THE COMPLETE POEMS p.212
- 19 A.G. Woodward : Unpublished notes on "AN INTRODUCTION TO CANTOS I - XXX", p.4
- 20 Daniel D. Pearlman : THE BARB OF TIME (New York; Oxford University Press; 1969) pp. 20 - 21
- 21 Ibid
- 22 Ibid, p.22
- 23 John Keats : "ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE", 1.29
- 24 John Keats : "ENDYMION : A POETIC ROMANCE"  
Book I, 1.1
- 25 William Blake : "THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL"  
ll. 69 - 71 in BLAKE : THE COMPLETE POEMS  
p.108

- 26 F.C. Happold : MYSTICISM - A STUDY AND AN ANTHOLOGY  
(Middlesex; Penguin Books Ltd; 1963)  
pp 47 - 48
- 27 Introduction to SONGS OF EXPERIENCE in BLAKE : THE COMPLETE POEMS, p.209
- 28 T.S. Eliot : "BURNT NORTON", FOUR QUARTETS
- 29 Ibid
- 30 "EARTH'S ANSWER" in BLAKE : THE COMPLETE POEMS, P.210  
This image of a repressive and tyrannical deity - the "Jealous God" of orthodox religion - emerges again in the figure of Urizen, protagonist of THE BOOK OF URIZEN (1794). His name appears to derive (as does our word "horizon") from the Greek word meaning "to limit" and characteristically, we first see him "separating off from the rest of existence, creating a void, a 'soul-shudd'ring vacuum' that keeps out the spirit and secedes, as it were, from Eternity".
- Martin Price : "THE STANDARD OF ENERGY" in ROMANTICISM AND CONSCIOUSNESS, edited by Harold Bloom (New York; W.W. Norton and Company Inc; 1970) p.255
- 31 "NIGHT", 1.32 in BLAKE : THE COMPLETE POEMS, P.67
- 32 Christ
- 33 cf ISAIAH 11; 6 - 9

34 cf JOHN I : 29: "Behold the Lamb of God who takest away the sins of the World".

35 MATTHEW 18 : 3 cf also MATTHEW 18 : 4 : "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven".

and

MARK 10 : 15 : "Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein".

36 See C.G. Jung and C. Kerényi : INTRODUCTION TO A SCIENCE OF MYTHOLOGY - THE MYTH OF THE DIVINE CHILD AND THE MYSTERIES OF ELEUSIS  
Translated by R.F.C. Hull  
(London; Routledge and Kegan Paul; 1951).

37 See A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada : KRSNA - THE SUPREME PERSONALITY OF GODHEAD :  
a summary of the SRIMAD - BHAGAVATAM,  
Tenth Canto  
(Los Angeles; Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1970)



- 38 Blake's child symbolism also bears strong evidence of the Swedish Visionary, Emanuel Swedenborg whose work Blake annotated in the 1780's and who also regarded the child as a metaphor for Innocence, cf "The Lord himself is called a *child* or a *boy* (Isaiah 9:6) because he is innocence itself and love itself". - Swedenborg, cited in TWENTIETH CENTURY INTERPRETATIONS OF SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE (ed) Morton D. Paley (New Jersey; Prentice-Hall Inc. 1969) p.3
- 39 "THE LITTLE GIRL LOST", ll. 17 - 32, in BLAKE : THE COMPLETE POEMS p.71
- 40 ISAIAH 11 : 6
- 41 "THE LITTLE GIRL LOST", ll. 33 - 52, in BLAKE : THE COMPLETE POEMS, pp 71 - 72
- 42 "THE LITTLE GIRL FOUND", ll. 19 - 20, in BLAKE : THE COMPLETE POEMS, p.72
- 43 Ibid, ll. 33 - 40 p.73
- 44 Ibid, ll. 41 - 52
- 45 William Wordsworth : "ODE ON INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY FROM RECOLLECTIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD", Stanza 1, in WORDSWORTH : POETICAL WORKS p.460
- 46 REVELATIONS 21 : 1
- 47 MATTHEW 5 : 8

- 48 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH : "ODE ON INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY"  
Stanza 1, in WORDSWORTH : POETICAL  
WORKS p.460
- 49 Ibid, Stanza II 11. 17 - 19
- 50 Ibid, Stanza IV 11. 55 - 56
- 51 Ibid, Stanza V 1.66
- 52 Ibid, 11. 67 - 68
- 53 Ibid, 11. 75 - 76
- 54 Ibid, Stanza IX 11. 140 - 141
- 55 Ibid, 11. 152 - 164
- 56 M.H. ABRAMS : "ENGLISH ROMANTICISM : THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE"  
in ROMANTICISM AND CONSCIOUSNESS (ed)  
Harold Bloom (New York; W.W. Norton and  
Company Inc; 1970) p.103
- 57 Ibid, p.102
- 58 Ibid, p.103
- 59 "THE PRELUDE", Book XI, 11. 110 - 112
- 60 Ibid, 11. 140 - 144
- 61 Ibid, 11. 108 - 109

- 62 Ibid, Book X, ll. 375 - 388
- 63 M.H. ABRAMS : "ENGLISH ROMANTICISM : THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE"  
in ROMANTICISM AND CONSCIOUSNESS  
p.111
- 64 Ibid, p.109
- 65 "THE PRELUDE", Book I, ll. 401 - 404
- 66 Ibid, Book VI, ll. 604 - 605
- 67 Percy Bysshe Shelley : "QUEEN MAB", IX, ll. 1 - 4
- 68 M.H. ABRAMS : "ENGLISH ROMANTICISM : THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE"  
in ROMANTICISM AND CONSCIOUSNESS  
p.111
- 69 " ..... Prometheus is ..... the type of the highest  
perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by  
the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest  
ends" - P.B. Shelley in his preface to "PROMETHEUS  
UNBOUND"
- 70 P.B. Shelley : "PROMETHEUS UNBOUND", Act III, 1.93
- 71 M.H. Abrams : "ENGLISH ROMANTICISM : THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE"  
in ROMANTICISM AND CONSCIOUSNESS  
pp 111 - 112
- 72 Ibid

- 73 P.B. Shelley : "PROMETHEUS UNBOUND", Act IV, ll. 557 - 561
- 74 Ibid, ll. 570 - 578
- 75 John Keats : "ODE ON A GRECIAN URN", 1.49
- 76 John Keats : "ENDYMION : A POETIC ROMANCE", Book I, 1.1
- 77 John Keats : "ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE", 1.23
- 78 Ibid, ll. 24 - 30
- 79 Ibid, ll. 51 - 54
- 80 Ibid, ll. 55 - 56
- 81 John Keats : "WHY DID I LAUGH TONIGHT?" 1.14
- 82 John Keats : "ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE", ll. 59 - 60
- 83 Ibid, 1.61
- 84 John Keats : "ODE ON A GRECIAN URN", 1.46
- 85 Ibid, ll. 47 - 48
- 86 Ibid, ll. 17 - 18
- 87 Ibid, 1. 45
- 88 See "ODE ON A NIGHTINGALE", Stanza II; "ODE ON MELANCHOLY"  
Stanza I

- 89 John Keats : "LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI", 1.2
- 90 Ibid, 11. 3 - 4
- 91 John Keats : "LAMIA", part II, 1.31
- 92 John Keats : "ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE", 11. 73 - 74
- 93 Moneta is another name for Mnemosyne, mother of the muses by Jupiter. Keats reverts to the name Mnemosyne twice in the poem (part I, 1.331; Part II, 1.50)
- 94 John Keats : "THE FALL OF HYPERION", part I, 11. 107 108
- 95 Ibid, 11. 119 - 120
- 96 Ibid, 1. 121
- 97 Ibid, 1. 254
- 98 Ibid, 11. 264 - 268
- 99 Extract from letter to Benjamin Bailey (Nov. 1817)
- 100 John Keats : "THE FALL OF HYPERION", part I, 11. 259 - 260
- 101 T.S. Eliot : "BURNT NORTON", part II; FOUR QUARTETS
- 102 T.S. Eliot : "THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD", 11. 22 - 24, in THE WASTELAND
- 103 T.S. Eliot : "BURNT NORTON", part I, in FOUR QUARTETS

104 Ibid, part III

105 Ibid

106 Ibid

107 Ibid

108 Ibid, part II

109 Ibid, part I

110 Ibid

111 Ibid

112 Ibid

113 Ibid

114 Ibid

115 Ibid, part II

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CHAPTER 4

ROMANTICISM UNDER SIEGE : THE CHALLENGE  
OF RATIONALISM AND THE "ONTOLOGIES OF  
DESPAIR"

Oh yet we trust that somehow good  
Will be the final goal of ill  
To pangs of nature, sins of will,  
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood.

That nothing walks with aimless feet;  
That not one life shall be destroyed,  
Or cast as rubbish to the void,  
When God hath made the pile complete;

That not a worm is cloven in vain;  
That not a moth with vain desire  
Is shrivelled in a fruitless fire  
Or but subserves another's gain.

- Alfred, Lord Tennyson.

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan  
The proper study of Mankind is Man.

- Alexander Pope

The sun shone, having no alternative, on the  
nothing new

- Samuel Beckett : MURPHY

I shall soon be quite dead at last  
in spite of it all.

- Samuel Beckett : MALONE DIES

A prevailing idea in this discussion is formulated again towards the end of Chapter III in the statement that "Romanticism is less a historical and cultural phenomenon than an innate condition of mind and temperament which is perennially evident".<sup>1</sup> What I am suggesting here is that Romanticism reflects a personal response to the world, based on a particular mode of interpreting reality.

The Romantic "mode of interpretation" arises, as we have discussed and illustrated at length, out of an ontology which affirms the existence of an Ultimate Reality (the Moral Order/Moral Absolute) and which implicitly acknowledges the ability of all individuals to gain access to this higher dimension, principally through the faculty of the Imagination which is recognized as a divine function innate within the human soul.

The aim of this chapter will be to explore other modes of interpretation which arise out of an essentially Anti-Romantic world view and which thus contradict Romantic theories of the Human Condition, the centrality of the Imagination as an agent of spiritual and moral redemption, and the validity of a religious interpretation of the role of Literature. We will examine the Anti-Romantic challenge in some detail, attempting to ascertain how far it threatens to undermine the Romantic appraisal of Literature as a vehicle of spiritual transformation.



What becomes apparent in a broad survey of the major philosophical paradigms governing Western thought is that all such philosophies have their genesis in one of three epistemological constructs : -

- (i) The Romantic or Transcendent, so called because it affirms the existence of a Transcendent Reality which is not solely accessible to human reason.
- (ii) The Rationalist or Empirical which defines and interprets reality from within a strictly cognitive frame of reference, firmly grounded in the empirical observation of data.
- (iii) The Existential or Nihilist which emerges essentially out of a philosophy of Nihilism since it repudiates the notion that the Human Condition is imbued with enduring meaning and purpose.

What will hopefully become clear in this survey is that Rationalism and Nihilism as "modes of interpretation" are closer to each other than a preliminary analysis would suggest. Although the former endorses a qualified notion of meaning and order (structure) as opposed to the latter's unqualified renunciation of these concepts in relation to the Human Predicament, both approaches deny the existence of a "Moral Absolute" which transcends the parameters of rational cognition and which is therefore inaccessible to "Pure Reason" alone.

Since neither the Rationalist nor Nihilist paradigm affirms the existence of the Moral Absolute, the literary theories to which they give rise resort at best to highly subjective and relative standards of aesthetic judgement or at worst, reflect a self-confessed inability to make any judgements whatsoever.

During the course of this discussion, we will consider the areas in which Rationalism and Nihilism challenge the Romantic interpretations of Literature and Religion. This exercise complete, our task will then be to estimate how far Romanticism succeeds in withstanding the onslaught of its detractors.

Like Romanticism, Rationalism and Nihilism represent responses to reality that are perennially evident, i.e. they are not exclusively confined to any particular historical period, although from time to time, any one mode may constitute the dominant ideology of a given era.

The Mediaeval period, for example, clearly exhibited a predominantly Romantic ethos, evidenced by its prevailing preoccupation with worldly transience and the hope of spiritual redemption from "linear time".

The Mediaeval period shares with 19th Century Romanticism the same conviction that a vast Providential Design is at work in the universe and that if Man allies himself to the harmonious unfolding of this Design, his ultimate redemption is guaranteed. Just as the 19th Century Romantics ardently pursued the vision of "Paradise Regained", so Mediaeval theologians embraced the idea that "all history moves towards the Last Judgement and the establishment of the Kingdom of God".<sup>2</sup>

The Romanticism of the Middle Ages is challenged by the Anti-Romantic assumptions of Rationalism evidenced as early as the Renaissance which radically opposed the theocentric vision of the Middle Ages in favour of an anthropocentric world view in terms of which Man's powers of reason and intellect established him as the centre of his universe.

The deification of human reason culminated in the 18th Century Enlightenment, frequently dubbed "the Age of Reason" and characterized by an unassailable confidence in the supremacy of a Rationalist weltanschauung.

Thus, a broad survey of western thought reveals a clearly discernible cycle in terms of which the dominant ideology of one age is challenged and superseded by the opposing ontology of the next. What we therefore begin to perceive is a pattern of alternating world views : a particular variant of Romanticism is displaced by one of the Anti-Romantic modes, identifiable either as a form of Rationalism or Nihilism.

The 20th Century, no less than any other age, bears witness to this ongoing dialectic between Romantic and Anti-Romantic imperatives.

The Anti-Romantic challenge has received added scope and momentum in the aftermath of World War II in which the pervading sense of horror and disillusionment at "Man's inhumanity to Man" proved fertile ground for the rise of what I have called "Ontologies of Despair", i.e. a series of nihilistic interpretations of the Human Condition which, in spite of minor differences in articulation, are fundamentally alike in their repudiation of the redemptive vision of Romanticism.

It is undeniably true that the events of our century have not offered a cheerful prognosis for human destiny and yet, even in the face of the grim atrocities of war and the sinister implications of a technological revolution which is dangerously insubordinate to any system of ethical values, the spirit of Romanticism remains evident.

It is true that it has had to assume different forms and to make necessary adaptations in order to confront the various challenges which confront it, but such adaptations are part of any strategy of survival. The point which I wish to emphasize is that, in an age such as ours, in which spiritual disillusionment and psychological ennui threaten to paralyze the human "will to meaning", the salvation of emotional vitality, imaginative intensity and creative energy depend more than ever upon the survival of Romanticism.

In the 20th Century, the first serious challenge to Romanticism came from the school of Logical Positivism, a philosophy which located its mode of interpretation firmly within a Rationalist or Empirical frame of reference. Logical Positivism became the credo of a group of Rationalist philosophers known as the Vienna Circle. The group was comprised mainly of mathematicians and philosophers of science who aimed at establishing philosophy on a strictly scientific and logical foundation.

The Logical Positivists of the early 20th Century had much in common with the philosophers of the 18th Century, men such as Descartes, Newton, Locke and Hume who promoted the concept of "scientific and rational Man". The Positivists, like their 18th Century predecessors, shared the Rationalist's supreme confidence in Man's ability to document and manipulate observable "regularities" in his environment ("Natural Laws").

The goal of the Rationalist is to gain increasing command over his universe. In this sense, he displays a predominantly "left-brain"<sup>3</sup> mode of engagement with the world, identifiable by a characteristic emphasis on the scientific verification of "truth-claims". The criteria for such verification are rooted in the empiricist notion of "objectively" observing the "plain facts".

The implications of a Rationalist ontology for the interpretation of Literature and Religion are dangerously evident : since Imaginative discourse - the common grammar of Literature and Religion - cannot be empirically verified, both disciplines are viewed as highly suspect modes of engagement with reality. In fact, when pursued to its logical extreme, the Rationalist emphasis on empirical verification leads to the inevitable conclusion that religious, moral and poetic assertions are quite meaningless!

The revival of Rationalism in the early decades of this century amounted to a kind of ideological "death knell" for Romanticism. Nonetheless, in the face of this threat, Romanticism rallied, asserting itself once again in the philosophical formulations of Edmund Husserl, the pioneer of Phenomenology, who aimed at displacing the assumptions of Positivism as the dominant ideology of the age.<sup>4</sup>

My claim that Phenomenology represents an essentially Romantic mode of interpretation is not the "glib" or "sweeping" statement that a first glance might suggest : there are undoubtedly some striking parallels between the assumptions of Phenomenology and Romanticism which deserve our consideration.

The most obvious of these is the prominence given to the role of Consciousness. Both Phenomenology and Romanticism are primarily concerned with the nature of Consciousness and with investigating ways of extending its frontiers. For the Romantics, the ultimate frontier of Consciousness is reached through the Imagination, the innate faculty of the human psyche which, when activated from its dormant state, is able to transfigure mundane perception into visionary awareness.

As an effective illustration of the power of the Imagination, consider Colin Wilson's illuminating distinction between the consciousness of the Rationalist poets of the 18th Century, and that of the Romantic poets of the 19th Century : "Take those 'romantic' poets of the early nineteenth century - men like Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, Goethe. They were quite different from the poets of the previous century - Dryden, Pope and the rest. Their minds were like powerful binoculars with a sharper power of focusing human existence. When Wordsworth looked down on the Thames from Westminster Bridge in the early morning, his mind suddenly roared like a dynamo, and superimposed a great many experiences on top of one another. For a moment, he saw human life from above, like an eagle, instead of from our usual worm's eye view. And whenever a man sees life in this way - whether he is a poet or a scientist or a statesman - the result is a tremendous feeling of power and courage, a glimpse of what life is all about, of the meaning of human evolution".<sup>5</sup>

Wilson's description of life "seen from above" conveys something of the panoramic scope of Imaginative vision. Within a Romantic context, the state of being truly conscious is identified with this condition of elevated vision - this quality of heightened awareness which transcends spatial and temporal limitations. We are inevitably reminded in this instance of Eliot's statement that "Time past and Time future allow but a little consciousness"<sup>6</sup> and that "to be conscious is not to be in time"<sup>7</sup> (italics mine).

Phenomenology is equally preoccupied with the question of Consciousness : its entire interpretive premise is based on the recognition of Consciousness as the motivating and mobilising agent of all creative endeavour.

As a prominent phenomenologist Maurice Natanson observes, "Its (Phenomenology's) concern is with a total reconstruction of consciousness, in terms of which science will achieve its rationale, art and religion their validation, and philosophy its own consummation".<sup>8</sup>

Central to the theoretical formulations of Phenomenology is Husserl's concept of the intentionality of consciousness which postulates that Consciousness is not a passive process, but rather a dynamic exercise comprising the active apprehension of Reality. As such, it is "always object-directed, always conscious of something".<sup>9</sup> Here, we are reminded yet again of Coleridge's emphasis on the essential vitality of the Imagination: far from being a passive and mechanical process, (such as the "lower-order faculty", Fancy) it is characterized by its dynamic and creative interaction with Reality.

The "intentionality of Consciousness" is an intrinsic component of the Imaginative process : in order to transmute ordinary perception into vision, the Imagination "intends" a higher dimension of Reality, thereby transforming (re-creating) ordinary consciousness from a limited perception of the temporal and finite into a boundless apprehension of the Eternal and Infinite. It is this "intentionality of Consciousness" which allows us

To see a world in a grain of sand  
And a heaven in a wild flower  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand  
And eternity in an hour.<sup>10</sup>

Yet another guise which 20th Century Romanticism assumed in defiance of the Rationalist onslaught of Positivism was the New Criticism, a school of literary theory which came to prominence in mid-20th Century Anglo-American criticism.

The spirit of the New Criticism was essentially Romantic in that it dismissed reason and rational discourse as the sole means of access to Truth. Like the Romantics, the New Critics exalted Poetry above Science, insisting that the former "bodies forth a special kind of knowledge"<sup>11</sup> not accessible to empirical modes of interpretation.

A survey of mid-20th Century literary criticism reveals a vigorous ongoing debate between Romantic and Rationalist imperatives. The literary critics who rise to prominence in this debate may be clearly identified as belonging to either one of these opposing "ideological camps".

For example, Philip Wheelwright's defence of the New Criticism, evident in his efforts to vindicate Poetic discourse from the assault of Positivism,<sup>12</sup> indisputably identifies him as a Romantic, whereas I.A. Richards, his major opponent in the field of literary criticism,<sup>13</sup> is an affiliate of the Rationalist "camp". In the 1920's, Richards formulated a theory which Wheelwright branded as "Semantic Positivism".<sup>14</sup> This theory was essentially a repudiation of the Romantic belief in Poetry's access to a dimension of knowledge or Truth that eludes empirical enquiry. Richards contended that Poetry is quite incapable of asserting any truths beyond the parameters of its immediate context. As a "context-bound" self-referential system with a purely affective mode of address, Poetry, in Richards's view, could only make "pseudo-statements" which serve to elicit emotional rather than intellectual assent.<sup>15</sup>

Wheelwright's theory of Poetry is to a large degree a fiercely "Romantic" defence of Poetic discourse against the positivist interpretations of Richards.



(In this respect, Wheelwright follows in the tradition of his 19th Century prototype, Shelley, who similarly undertook "the defence of Poetry" in his famous essay of the same title).

Wheelwright's defence rests on the crucial distinction between the modes of discourse elsewhere described as the lingua mundi and the lingua animae.<sup>16</sup>

The former comprises the language of Reason and Intellect and addresses itself primarily to the empirically observed universe. Wheelwright calls it "steno-language";<sup>17</sup> the latter is the language of Transcendence in that it directs us to a realm of knowledge and experience beyond the boundaries of cognitive perception. It is the language of the spirit, the discourse of Vision.

The essence of Wheelwright's argument is that Poetry, since it speaks "the language of Transcendence" (which Wheelwright calls "depth" or "expressive language")<sup>18</sup> has access to a dimension of wisdom which eludes rational discourse.

The descriptions which Wheelwright selects for each mode of discourse are in themselves revealing : "steno-language" derives its prefix from the Greek word meaning "closed" or "restricted"<sup>19</sup> and Wheelwright, with typical Romantic disdain for empirical discourse, goes on to describe "steno-language" as "dead", "block-like", "closed", "static", "inert" and "stereotyped".<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, his Romantic enthusiasm for "expressive/depth language" is evident in his descriptions of it as "alive", "fluid", "open", "organic", "imaginative" and "deep".<sup>21</sup>

It is "depth language" which in Wheelwright's view holds the key to Truth. In this respect, he shares the New Critical view of Poetry as "an autonomous and ineffable object, mediating a sense of reality beyond the reach of reason and conceptual discourse".<sup>22</sup>

For Wheelwright, as indeed for all Romantics, "steno-language" is the discourse of temporal reality, i.e. it describes a universe which is subject to the inevitable erosion of linear time. It is no mere coincidence, therefore, that "steno-language" should be associated with extreme enervation, stasis and death.

Conversely, "depth/expressive language" transcends the constraints of temporal reality or, in phenomenological terms, it "intends" an immutable Reality - a Reality which, like Keats's Grecian Urn, remains "unravished" by Time.

The dichotomy between "steno-" and "depth language" has further significant ramifications for the Rationalist vs Romantic debate. As claimed earlier in this discussion, Romanticism embodies the religious imperative in its concern with healing, reconciliation and restitution, which all constitute the process of redemption.

In support of this observation, we have demonstrated how Romantic discourse - the grammar of the Imagination - consistently reflects the theme of redemption through its major narrative components - symbol, myth and metaphor. A symbol, for example, is fundamentally a "bridging act",<sup>23</sup> as is evident from its etymological source, "to bring together" or "to come together".<sup>24</sup> Similarly, a metaphor is a poetic device which functions as a bridge between the referents of a comparison. The more closely these referents ("signifier" and "signified") are identified, the greater the impact and efficacy of the metaphor.

Wheelwright's "depth" or "expressive language" is distinguished from "steno-language" by its densely metaphoric character. Whereas "steno-language" is the "appropriate and adequate linguistic response to this orderly, quantifiable, rational world",<sup>25</sup> "expressive language" "intends" a dimension of consciousness which lies beyond what Kant called the "cognizable world".

In his book METAPHOR AND REALITY, Wheelwright consistently points to metaphor as the principal agent for the process of semantic transfiguration which he believed was fundamental to expressive language. In this book, he claims that "imaginative language is basically metaphoric"<sup>26</sup> and supports this statement by treating symbols, myths and poetry as metaphoric forms of language.

The power of metaphor lies in its ability to accommodate apparent contradictions and to reconcile heterogeneous ideas in a way which facilitates what Aristotle called "the intuitive perception of the similarity of dissimilars".<sup>27</sup> Governed by the redemptive (religious) impetus of Imaginative discourse, metaphor and symbol address themselves to healing the perceptual schism which characterizes postlapsarian vision.

The "Imaginative Truth" conveyed by Poetry through its metaphoric grammar is that Ultimate Reality is a multifaceted but harmoniously integrated Gestalt, a "whole" which both encompasses and transcends the organic composite of its infinitely varied ("dissimilar") yet entirely complementary parts. Here we are reminded yet again of the identification of the Moral Order - the source of "Ultimate Good" - with that which is "whole", "integrated", "connected" and "complete".<sup>28</sup>

It is this sense of awe-inspiring harmony and congruence, this "fearful symmetry"<sup>29</sup> hinting at an unfathomable Designing Intelligence behind the immaculate design, that symbol and metaphor seek to convey.

Thus far, this chapter has highlighted three prominent features common to Romantic schools of literary theory. They are briefly as follows : -

- (i) The centrality of Consciousness, understood in this instance not as ordinary awareness, but as a vastly expanded and intensified perception of the fundamental nature of things.

Consciousness in the Romantic idiom is virtually synonymous with "Imagination" and "Vision" and represents a "mode of knowing" which is independent of rational cognition.

- (ii) A concern with the "grammar of the Imagination" (Wheelwright's "depth language"), i.e. close attention to the components of Poetic discourse such as myth, metaphor, symbol and archetype.
- (iii) A belief in the redemptive potential of the Imagination, i.e. the ability of Poetic discourse to reconnect Man with the Moral Absolute by evoking in him the dormant knowledge of his original union with the Divine. (This last belief is summed up in Wheelwright's assertion tht the "best utterances" of Poetry are on the same plane as myth and religion, engendering in the reader a sense of the Sacred and Transcendent.<sup>30</sup>)

To the extent that a particular literary theory incorporates any of these features, it is adopting a Romantic position. Thus Phenomenology with its close scrutiny of the dynamics of Consciousness, and the New Criticism with its view of Poetry as a source of transphenomenal wisdom are both variants of Romantic ideology.

Our task now is to examine those schools of literary theory which oppose the Poetics of Romanticism. As indicated earlier in this chapter, Anti-Romantic perspectives are rooted in either a Rationalist or Nihilist paradigm.

As regards the first, we have already touched on 18th Century Rationalism and 20th Century Logical Positivism as opponents of the Romantic interpretation of Literature. However, our analysis remains incomplete without some consideration of what is perhaps the most widely influential critical strategy to be spawned by Rationalism - Structuralism.

In many ways, Structuralism constitutes a methodology that is the direct antithesis of Phenomenology. Whereas the latter's principal concern is with the nature and function of Consciousness, Structuralism consigns Consciousness to its periphery, regarding it as only one phenomenon amongst others.<sup>31</sup>

Robert Detweiler, whose work STORY, SIGN AND SELF compares the assumptions of Phenomenology and Structuralism, comments on this central contradiction between the two traditions : whereas Phenomenology's objective may be defined as discovering "how Consciousness forms a system of being and meaning",<sup>32</sup> Structuralism's strategy is conversely to investigate "how system forms the being and meaning of Consciousness".<sup>33</sup>

With its emphasis on coding and categorizing phenomena according to a strictly scientific analysis of what is "empirically verifiable", Structuralism clearly reflects its Rationalist antecedents.

Even the definition offered by Michael Lane conveys something of Structuralism's Rationalist impetus : "(Structuralism) is a method whose primary intention is to permit the investigator to go beyond a pure description of what he perceives or experiences, in the direction of the quality of rationality which underlies the social phenomena in which he is concerned".<sup>34</sup>

Phenomenology reflects its Romantic persuasion in placing Consciousness at the centre of its enquiry. Structuralism, on the other hand, is less concerned with the actual nature and operation of Consciousness than with the perceptible systems, patterns and structures through which Consciousness is ordered. In fact, the question of Consciousness itself seems somewhat incidental to the Structuralist enquiry. In its predominant concern with investigating the interrelationship of signs (the science of semiology) and exploring the differences between the semiotic and linguistic systems of various cultures and literatures, Structuralism exhibits the Rationalist preoccupation with objectively observing "the plain facts".<sup>35</sup>

The Romantic (and Religious) concern with the "Human Drama" and its urgent enquiry into the predicament of Man - his nature, origin, ultimate destiny and interim struggle with the remorseless consequences of his mortality - is of no relevance to the Structuralist investigation except in so far as it can be systematically documented and categorized within a recognizable semiotic structure.

The implications of Structuralist analysis in the interpretation of Literature and Religion are disturbing, one might even say ominous, since given the Structuralist credo, concepts such as Consciousness, Imagination, Intuition and Emotion - the vital components and arguably the "heart's blood" of literary and religious aspiration - are ruthlessly reduced to "data", relevant only within the context of their "synchronic" or "diachronic" character or in so far as their function may be seen to be either "metaphoric" or "metonymic".<sup>36</sup>

This clinical reduction of the "grammar of the Imagination" to a system of arbitrarily defined "signifiers" and "signifieds"<sup>37</sup> which are not accorded any meaning beyond their reference to each other is total anathema to literary critics of the Romantic school. Paul Ricoeur speaks for this school in his vehement denunciation of Structural Analysis. In "STRUCTURE, WORD, EVENT", an essay published in 1968 and which significantly became a "rallying point" for Anti-Structuralists,<sup>38</sup> Ricoeur declares that Structural Analysis can effectively be applied "only to closed 'dead' systems; to furnish catalogues of a system's components; to establish these components in oppositional relations; and to provide an 'algebra' of the components' organization".<sup>39</sup> Ricoeur further declares that Structuralism can only create "taxonomies" - the "categories and inventories" of the "dead phonological lexical and syntactical levels of language".<sup>40</sup>

Ricoeur's "Romantic" assault on what he perceived to be the stultifying consequences of Structuralism for literary criticism shares the same ideological motivation which underlies Philip Wheelwright's attack on "steno-language". There is a revealing parallel between Ricoeur's repudiation of Structuralism and Wheelwright's attack on the "steno-language" of Semantic Positivism.

As understood by Wheelwright, "steno-language" denotes a closed system of discourse which confines its discussion exclusively to "conceptual logical pursuits".<sup>41</sup> Ricoeur similarly criticizes the Structural linguistic view of language as an "autonomous, closed system of signs"<sup>42</sup> that has no "outside"<sup>43</sup> and hence, no room for a meaningful appraisal of Consciousness, Vision, Imagination, Intuition and other concepts central to a Romantic interpretation of Literature.

Both critics take a Romantic stance in their vehement opposition to a mode of discourse which divides, fragments and devitalizes Man's engagement with Reality. Whereas Romanticism is concerned with healing schisms, bridging contraries and highlighting the "similarity of dissimilars", Rationalism is concerned with dividing, separating and differentiating. Far from being concerned with the "similarity of dissimilars", Structuralism is interested primarily in examining difference or "otherness". In this respect, Cervantes Gimeno comments : "The real novelty of structuralism is that it is no longer confined to the comparison of types, but instead examines distinct wholes, paying attention to their differences ..... The same procedure is followed in linguistics; the linguist orders oppositions, not similarities. Similarly, the structuralist anthropologist examines differences between societies and tries to explain them. The anthropologist, like the psychiatrist, searches for alterity or otherness".<sup>44</sup>

Thus far, we have examined in some detail the ways in which Structuralism opposes the Romantic ethos. Our obligation now is to assess the extent to which Structuralism threatens Romanticism as a viable critical framework.



The divisive impetus of Structuralism casts doubt on its efficacy as a critical method in Literature and Religion. With its rigorous emphasis on coding, categorizing and compartmentalizing data, Structural Analysis as an interpretive method tends to obscure the broader and more profound themes with which Literature and Religion are concerned. In fact, Structuralism does not even pretend to be seriously concerned with these themes at all! Its critical strategy is dictated by the tenets of Rationalism which deny meaning to religious, moral and poetic assertions because they lie beyond the scope of empirical verification. Consciousness, the central preoccupation of Romantic methodologies, is a marginal concern of the structuralist, having significance only in so far as it can be semiologically monitored.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, although Structuralism may present itself as an "interpretive method" applicable to Literature and Religion, the truth is that it is not really concerned with interpretation at all, but merely with the systematic translation of literary and religious concepts into linguistic constructs.

As Detweiler aptly observes : "interpretation in the hermeneutical sense of the word never occurs, only a preliminary and preparatory kind of explanation".<sup>46</sup>

Structuralism's inadequacy as an interpretive method makes it at best an impoverished and at worst, a thoroughly inappropriate critical strategy in the fields of Literature and Religion. In this respect, its challenge to Romanticism is negligible.

Literature and Religion embody aspects of experience that defy rational conceptualization and which are therefore beyond the scope of Structuralist Analysis.

The exploration of a sphere of Consciousness which transcends cognitive perception demands a "discourse of transcendence" and in this respect, literary theories grounded in a Romantic ontology have a greater claim to relevance than those rooted in Rationalism.

As long as Literature and Religion continue to be significant and meaningful dimensions of human existence, critical strategies that reflect a Romantic mode of interpretation will occupy an invaluable and incontestable place in literary theory.

The Structuralist obsession with semiotic oppositions - with the "otherness" or "alterity" of a system's components rather than with its Gestalt, reaches its most radical extreme in the Deconstructuralist methodology of Jacques Derrida whose theory of différance centres on "the recognition of the absolute dissimilarity of each moment of existence from every other".<sup>47</sup>

With Deconstructuralism, we are transported right out of a Rationalist epistemology into the domain of Nihilism, for the theory of différance goes so far as to deny almost entirely the communicative capacity of language. As Detweiler points out, this emphasis on irreconcilable alterity "implies at best the impossibility of comprehending the systems within which one abides (suggesting an alterity so strong that interalterity cannot occur) or at worst a despair over the alienating power of otherness that prohibits systems from forming at all".<sup>48</sup>

The word "despair" is particularly appropriate in commenting on Deconstructuralism and related Anti-Romantic theories which reflect a similar nihilistic interpretation of the function of language and hence of Literature.

If, as Derrida's theory of différance suggests, meaning is purely relative, based on an arbitrary and constantly vacillating relationship between "signifier" and "signified", then we can indeed despair of Literature as a viable mode of communication.

The assumptions of Nihilism arise out of a radical scepticism which at best questions, and at worst denies the concept of enduring (absolute) meaning. It reflects a world view which sees the universe as random and the Human Condition as "absurd". Nihilism is grounded in an essentially relativist framework in that it does not recognize the existence of a Moral Absolute which invests human endeavour with purpose and value.

Since Nihilism holds that Man's aspirations and achievements have no lasting significance, it reduces Literature and Religion to expressions of human vanity and folly - futile attempts to impose order and harmony upon an irredeemable chaos.

It is this sense of vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas, this uncompromisingly bleak spirit of Nihilism which informs what I have called the "Ontologies of Despair" - those literary theories which are principally identified by their denial of Cosmic Order and the value of human endeavour.

Deconstructuralism is one such theory. When pursued to its logical extreme, it points to the perpetual translational indeterminacy of language which, needless to say, has profoundly nihilistic implications for the study of Literature.<sup>49</sup>

Derrida's theory is based on a denial of ontological certainty and his strategy is aimed at "deconstructing" the metaphysical presuppositions of a text which, he believes, should be mistrusted and resisted.

In Derrida's view, Poetry is incapable of meaningful assertions since this would suggest that "there is a signified free of the signifier, something outside textuality to which the poem must refer".<sup>50</sup> Such an assumption is categorically repudiated by Derrida's anarchic process of "decentering" which is based on the premise that *there is nothing outside the text*.<sup>51</sup> Deconstructuralism is thus intrinsically hostile to the idea that Literature directs us to a transcendent Truth which exists beyond the text.

Yet another "ontology of Despair" which radically opposes Romanticism and which is clearly formulated on the assumptions of Nihilism is Existentialism.<sup>52</sup> This mode of interpretation has arguably found its most consistent and influential exposition in the philosophical and literary ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre, but a peculiarly American variation of it emerges in what Frank Lentricchia calls the "Conservative Fictionalist tradition".<sup>53</sup> The most famous exponent of this tradition is the poet Wallace Stevens who postulated a poetics of "Supreme Fictions". Contrary to the Romantic understanding of Poetry as a "sacred discourse" giving access to an immutable, transcendent Reality, Stevens interpreted the poetic endeavour as "a fictional thrust generated out of the great voids of desire (a 'nothingness')"<sup>54</sup> and that these "fictions of desire" are evasions rather than symbolic assertions of Truth.

Stevens's innate Nihilism is evident in his reduction of the Romantic and Platonic definitions of Truth and Reality to a "Supreme Fiction".

Far from conceptualizing Reality as an enduring, transcendent dimension of Consciousness, Stevens regarded it as a "violence"<sup>55</sup> which constantly pressures Man, and the Imagination, conceived of by Coleridge as a numinous faculty bringing "the whole soul of man into being", was in Stevens's view merely the "response of our subjective violence which presses back against an inhuman chaos".<sup>56</sup>

The ontological dichotomy between Romanticism and Nihilism gives rise to their mutually antagonistic conceptions of the poetic raison d'être. Whereas Romanticism sees Poetry as a sacramental discourse through which Ultimate Reality is revealed, Nihilism claims that all Poetry can do is to "make space between us and chaos",<sup>57</sup> thereby granting "momentary release from sure engulfment, madness and death".<sup>58</sup>

Wallace Stevens's theory of "Supreme Fictions" is firmly located in the nihilistic ontology of Existentialism. For him, all Art and Poetry are mere fictions which at best may be seen as "Heroic evasions"<sup>59</sup> of a brutal reality, or at worst, as "pitifully unheroic lies".<sup>60</sup> Frank Lentricchia observes that what Stevens actually formulates is an "antipoetics"<sup>61</sup> constituting a "constant lament"<sup>62</sup> for the "futility of all human effort".<sup>63</sup>

Jean-Paul Sartre, whose name is irrevocably linked with modern Existentialism, also endorses the "fictionalist" interpretation of Art and Literature. His apparent identification with certain significant aspects of Phenomenology - an essentially Romantic interpretive strategy - seems at first to obscure his exact location on the ontological spectrum. However, a close scrutiny of Sartre's theories inevitably establishes him quite categorically as an Anti-Romantic.

Unlike the New Critics, for example, Sartre does not conceive of Reality as a source of enduring value and thus a goal decidedly worthy of artistic endeavour.

It is true to some extent that Sartre shares with the Phenomenologists a predominant concern with Consciousness and the Imagination, and it is this mutual concern which causes confusion about Sartre's position. However, a careful investigation of the Sartrean and Phenomenological (Husserlian) conceptions of Consciousness rapidly brings the distinction between them to light.

Husserl, pioneer and architect of phenomenological epistemology, understood Consciousness as the faculty which, through the operations of epoché and reduction - a suspension of normative judgement and the "bracketing" of routinely perceived reality - facilitated the "intention" of a "new region of being".<sup>64</sup>

This prior dimension of being is conceived of in terms which are decidedly Romantic. Husserl speaks of its "absolute uniqueness"<sup>65</sup> and understands it to be independent of and transcendental to the natural world. Significantly, it cannot be approached through rationalist, scientific modes of discourse. Husserl vigorously affirms that the phenomenological residuum - the essential or eidetic reality achieved via the epoché and reduction - is a victory over "all sciences which relate to this natural world".<sup>66</sup>

In his work IDEEN (IDEAS), Husserl conceives of this transphenomenal ground of being as the "Transcendental Ego"<sup>67</sup> - the "ultimate structure"<sup>68</sup> or "pure flow"<sup>69</sup> of consciousness. His vocabulary here has undeniable echoes of the neo-platonic mysticism which permeates much of Romantic Literature.<sup>70</sup>

Sartre, on the other hand, while also giving credence to a transphenomenal ground of being (the en-soi or "Being-in-itself") does not actually conceive of it as a source of Consciousness. His descriptions of the en-soi are irritatingly vague and at times reflect a kind of distorted mysticism.

"Being-in-itself" represents a plenitude, a "full positivity"<sup>71</sup> from the vast, undifferentiated matrix of which emerges the human ego - the pour-soi or "for-itself".<sup>72</sup>

The unhappy predicament of the "for-itself" is that, unlike its source of origin, it is conscious: it is aware of its separation from the "in-itself" and constantly endeavours to heal this duality. Here we find ostensible parallels between Sartre's philosophy and Romantic interpretations of Man's Fall from Grace.<sup>73</sup>

However, whereas Romanticism affirms and encourages the possibility of Man's reunion with his original "Ground of Being", the bleak irony of Sartre's view is that it is only through separation, through "alienation" from the "in-itself", that the "for-itself" achieves ontological freedom. For Sartre, "freedom" exists only in "a permanent rupture in determinism",<sup>74</sup> a perceptual individuation from "being-in-itself" which compels the human ego to remain in a perennial condition of "indetermination".<sup>75</sup> Thus, what the Romantics conceive of as a spiritually healthy desire to achieve wholeness and plenitude through reconciliation with a transcendent Reality is seen by Sartre as mauvais fois or "bad faith".<sup>76</sup>

Needless to say, Sartre's view of the Imagination is totally at odds with the Romantic interpretation. Whereas "authentic" Romantics share the Coleridgean understanding of the Imagination as the faculty which provides intuitive access to the Transcendent, Sartre (like Wallace Stevens) sees no enduring merit in Imaginative activity.

For him, such activity "suffers from a sort of essential poverty"<sup>77</sup> since it "teaches nothing, never produces an impression of novelty and never reveals any new aspect of the object".<sup>78</sup>

This desolate pronouncement once again confirms Sartre's tenacious adherence to an "Ontology of Despair" in terms of which all artistic endeavour, beautiful as it might be, is only a fiction, a deception, and hence ultimately unsatisfying.

This gloomy theme is treated at length in Sartre's THE PSYCHOLOGY OF IMAGINATION in which he argues that the function of the imagination is always negative in that it annihilates the real. Robert Detweiler explains: "Sartre's argument is that in order for consciousness to imagine an object it must deny the real, for if it intends the real (and thus constitutes it) it cannot imagine it. Hence the imagination is a projection of nothingness".<sup>79</sup> This view is clearly aligned to Wallace Stevens's view of Literature as constituting an evasion of truth through the creation of "Supreme Fictions".

What this chapter has thus far demonstrated is that literary theories located in either a Rationalist or Nihilist framework are essentially hostile to Romanticism.



Both these paradigms relegate the whole question of Consciousness to the periphery of their enquiry and certainly, in Derrida's view, the very idea of Poetry giving access to a coherent and absolute "centre" of knowledge beyond the parameters of cognitive reality would be ludicrous in the extreme. We have indeed come a long way from Matthew Arnold's fervent belief in the "high destinies" of Poetry!

Neither Rationalism nor Nihilism recognizes the unique and special powers vested in the human psyche (the "self") through its ability to "intend" a transcendent domain of Imaginative Consciousness.

From the Romantic view of the self as a "capacious and generous sort of medium particularly suited for the transmitting of those capacious literary structures called archetypal mythoi and images",<sup>80</sup> we are brought to the Structuralist understanding of the self as "an intersubjective construct formed by cultural systems over which the individual person has no control".<sup>81</sup>

What we witness here is a descent from "the Sublime to the ridiculous" in a sense that goes beyond mere cliché, for Romantic ontology is founded on a belief in and an ongoing "quest for the Sublime" which confers ultimate merit and value on human endeavour, while Rationalism and Nihilism see such endeavour as having no ultimate purpose. Within the context of these latter ontologies, all acts of the Imagination are at best pathetic, and at worst, patently ridiculous.

In the light of the Rationalist and Nihilist challenge to Romanticism, the crucial question which now demands our attention is : to what extent do Anti-Romantic assumptions jeopardize the Romantic validation of literary and religious enquiry? We have already gone some way towards demonstrating the ultimate inadequacy of a Rationalist interpretation of Literature and Religion. Rationalist strategies such as Positivism and Structuralism give only superficial accommodation and consideration to concepts which are centrally significant to literary and religious enquiry. Moreover, their function as "interpretive methodologies" is impoverished since they are not concerned with (nor capable of) authentic interpretation.

Structuralism, for example, observes rather than interprets and, as its very name implies, is more concerned with structure than with meaning.

However, the greatest weakness of any Rationalist strategy lies in its implicit assumption that religious, moral and poetic assertions have no meaning. Rationalism does not recognize the Moral Absolute since its existence cannot be empirically substantiated. However, in renouncing the concept of the Moral Absolute, Rationalism also destroys the notion of what Colin Wilson calls "moral purpose".<sup>82</sup>

In an incisive essay which exposes the flaws inherent in 18th Century Rationalism, Wilson points out that its major error was its failure to recognize that "moral problems" continue to exist even when they have been dismissed as "peripheral" or "inconsequential". "Moral problems", claims Wilson, "are actually *problems of vitality* ..... A man's temperament gives him the power to become more alive or less alive.

He can drift, give way to every sensual urge, and become little better than a cow; or he can discipline himself, exercise his intelligence, and raise himself to a higher form of life ..... Morality, then, is the power of higher forms of life to achieve yet more life".<sup>83</sup>

It is this search for more life, more plenitude, more completeness, which constitutes the moral or religious imperative in the Romantic "quest for the Sublime", and it is this religious imperative in Romantic Literature that Rationalist critical strategies tend to minimize or worse still, to overlook entirely.

We turn now to an evaluation of the implications of Nihilism for Literature and Religion. Nihilist critics frequently justify their bleak vision of the Human Condition by pointing to the 20th Century's grim testimony of violence and alienation. The cataclysmic impact of two world wars is widely regarded as the inception of post-modernist Nihilism. The hopeless vision of human beings trapped in a self-perpetuating cycle of violence, economic exploitation and emotional anguish is, according to Nihilist theorists, an irrefutable truth - in fact, the only truth which art is obliged to record.

Within a Nihilist framework, human existence is experienced as a kind of psychological malaise (as in Sartre's LA NAUSEE/NAUSEA), and human beings, incapable of meaningful interaction with each other, are doomed to a perpetual state of disaffection (the theme of Albert Camus's L'ETRANGER/THE OUTSIDER).

Since Nihilism, like Rationalism, does not recognize a Moral Absolute, access to which would facilitate humanity's redemption from its miserable predicament, it offers at best the possibility

that Man might create his own subjective (hence relative) meaning, and at worst, envisages Man as the victim of irredeemable meaninglessness.

Nihilism sees the Romantic pursuit of spiritual redemption as a form of intellectual compromise (Sartre's mauvais fois) or fanciful escapism based on wish fulfilment. The question is : to what extent does this judgement hold true?

It is my contention that this contemptuous dismissal of Romanticism is both intellectually and psychologically unsound. Allegations that Romanticism espouses a facile optimism or naive utopianism are patently untrue as the work of the major Romantics unequivocally indicates.

At no time does William Blake, for example, attenuate or minimize the appalling cruelty and suffering which characterize the world of "Experience".

His SONGS OF EXPERIENCE depict the darker aspect of the Human Drama with a vividness that is almost brutal in its uncompromising honesty. Similarly, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats never soften their harsh and often ugly portrayal of postlapsarian humanity.

The Neo-Romantics are equally uncompromising in their rendition of the abysmal history of the 20th Century. The first thirty cantos of Ezra Pound's epic treatment of Western civilization presents us with a ruthlessly honest survey of a corrupt and degenerate society, depicted as a kind of Dantesque inferno.

This vision is rendered with particular acuity in cantos XIV and XV which, in their portrayal of unmitigated squalor, obscenity and depravity, rival the darkest evocations of Sartre, Camus and Genet. As for T.S. Eliot's depiction of the sterility of our age, his image of the Wasteland as a metaphoric correlative for spiritual barrenness has become something of a modern mythologem.

In their uncompromising recognition of human alienation and suffering, the Romantics are unequivocally above reproach. Where they differ from the Nihilists is in *their refusal to accept the "Ontology of Despair"*.

Since Romanticism affirms the existence of a transcendent Reality, its view of suffering and nescience is counterbalanced by a vision of "Ultimate Good", i.e. the redemptive promise of healing and restitution achieved through reconciliation with the Moral Absolute.

Nihilism, rooted as it is in a Relativist interpretation of Reality, has no recourse to Moral Absolutes and thus offers an unremittingly desolate vision of the Human Condition.<sup>84</sup>

This discussion will not even attempt the self-sabotaging task of deciding which mode of interpretation - Romanticism or Nihilism - is "more true". Since the very interpretation of the nature of "Truth" is governed by the particular world view from which one opens the enquiry, such an exercise would be doomed to endless circularity.

Our conclusions, then, are drawn not so much from a consideration of the actual veracity of each world view, as from the more pragmatic consideration of what each has to offer us. In this respect, only the inveterate cynic would deny the appeal of Romanticism.

The strength of a Romantic interpretation of Reality lies in its assertion of the victory of Imagination over Nihilism's despairing compliance with spiritual ennui.

The Romantic is gifted with a capacity profoundly lacking in his opponents : he has what Colin Wilson calls "the strength to dream".<sup>85</sup>

It is significant that Wilson identifies dreaming with strength, for the Romantic's dream of Redemption requires courage, effort and even heroism if it is to be sustained in the face of the harsh implications of the phenomenal world.

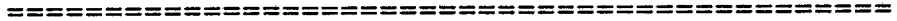
The "strength to dream" is the spiritual energy which the poet-hero must summon to embark on his perilous journey to redemption. Such strength is needed if the dream is to be translated from mere wish-fulfilment into Imaginative Vision.

Without the Romantic's "strength to dream", we are left with the alternative of Nihilism : the post-modernist vision of Man trapped in the inescapable subjectivity of fanciful "fictions". It is a vision in which literature becomes "a violence of mastery",<sup>86</sup> history a "chimera"<sup>87</sup> and Man a pathetic "antihero" irrevocably alienated from Ultimate meaning in an "abyss" of perennial solipsism.

The cynic is at liberty to repudiate the redemptive (religious) imperative of Romanticism, but in doing so, he endorses the emotional, psychological and spiritual impoverishment of Nihilism.

Romanticism offers us an infallible sense of meaning and a spiritual resilience which permits even the experience of suffering to enrich and extend our engagement with Reality.

To deny Romanticism's redeeming vision of the potential triumph of the human spirit over material adversity is to surrender to an interpretation of Reality that in the words of Joseph Conrad, "is too dark - too dark altogether".<sup>88</sup>



N O T E S

- 1 See Chapter III p. 92
- 2 Colin Wilson : RELIGION AND THE REBEL  
(London; Victor Gollancz Ltd; 1957)  
p.102
- 3 See Chapter II p. 28
- 4 Robert Detweiler : STORY, SIGN AND SELF-PHENOMENOLOGY  
AND STRUCTURALISM AS LITERARY -  
CRITICAL → METHODS (Hereafter cited as  
STORY, SIGN AND SELF)  
(Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Fortress  
Press; 1978) p.7
- 5 Colin Wilson : THE MIND PARASITES  
(London; Granada; 1980)  
p.73
- 6 T.S. Eliot : "BURNT NORTON" part II; FOUR QUARTETS
- 7 Ibid
- 8 Cited in Robert Detweiler : STORY, SIGN AND SELF  
p.8
- 9 Ibid
- 10 William Blake : "AUGURIES OF INNOCENCE", ll. 1-4



- 11 Frank Burch Brown : TRANSFIGURATION - POETIC METAPHOR  
AND THE LANGUAGES OF RELIGIOUS  
BELIEF (Hereafter cited as  
TRANSFIGURATION)  
(Chapel Hill and London; The University  
of North Carolina Press; 1983)  
p.22
- 12 Wheelwright's fervent repudiation of Logical Positivist  
notions has been the cause of several critics regarding him  
as "the chief ally of the New Critics"  
(Frank Burch Brown : TRANSFIGURATION. p.22)
- 13 Frank Burch Brown : TRANSFIGURATION p.17
- 14 Ibid
- 15 Ibid, p.19
- 16 See Chapter II pp 37-38
- 17 Frank Burch Brown : TRANSFIGURATION p.19
- 18 Ibid
- 19 Ibid
- 20 Ibid
- 21 Ibid, p.19
- 22 Ibid, pp. 6-7

- 23 Erich Kahler : "THE NATURE OF THE SYMBOL" in  
SYMBOLISM IN RELIGION AND LITERATURE  
[Rollo May (ed) New York; George  
Braziller; 1960] p.54
- 24 Ibid, p.70
- 25 Frank Burch Brown : TRANSFIGURATION p.21
- 26 Ibid, p.27
- 27 Ibid
- 28 See Chapter II and note 34
- 29 William Blake : "THE TIGER", 1-4
- 30 Frank Burch Brown : TRANSFIGURATION p.39
- 31 Robert Detweiler : STORY, SIGN AND SELF p.17
- 32 Ibid
- 33 Ibid
- 34 Michael Lane (ed), Introduction to INTRODUCTION TO  
STRUCTURALISM, p.31, cited in Robert Detweiler :  
STORY, SIGN AND SELF p.17
- 35 Frank Burch Brown : TRANSFIGURATION p.16

36 In support of my claim that structuralist analysis has decidedly ominous implications for Literature and Religion, consider the following : in terms of structuralist assumptions, the anguished madness of King Lear, the soul-shattering revelation of Oedipus and the ecstatic illuminations of St. Theresa only achieve interest and significance when translated into "linguistic operations",<sup>a</sup> "subordinated to the laws of transformation"<sup>b</sup> and generally made accessible to "semiological classification".<sup>c</sup>

a Robert Detweiler : STORY, SIGN AND SELF p.24

b Ibid, p.23

c Ibid, p.24

37 Terms coined by Ferdinand de Saussure in his formulation of Structural Linguistics.

38 Robert Detweiler : STORY, SIGN AND SELF p.177

39 Ibid, pp. 177-178

40 Ibid, p.177

41 Frank Burch Brown : TRANSFIGURATION p.20

42 Robert Detweiler : STORY, SIGN AND SELF p.180

43 Ibid

- 44 Cited in Robert Detweiler : STORY, SIGN AND SELF  
pp 24-25
- 45 In this respect, Structuralism shares the premise of the mechanistic schools of psychology and philosophy which proliferate in the West. Consider the views of John B. Watson, psychology professor at John Hopkins University : "It (Consciousness) has never been seen, touched, smelled, tasted or moved. It is a plain assumption just as unprovable as the old concept of the soul".  
(John B. Watson and William Dougal : THE BATTLE OF BEHAVIOURISM, p.15 - cited in "ORIGINS", a magazine of The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust; 1984, p.17).
- 46 Robert Detweiler : STORY, SIGN AND SELF p.20
- 47 Ibid, p.25
- 48 Ibid
- 49 According to Derrida, there is no absolute criterion of meaning, since "the interpretation of any signifying chain is necessarily only another sign of chains"  
(Frank Lentricchia in AFTER THE NEW CRITICISM, p.161)  
Given this view, not only is the ultimate validity of imaginative effort categorically denied, but any attempt to communicate imaginative insights is seen as an utterly doomed and pointless enterprise.

- 50 Frank Lentricchia : AFTER THE NEW CRITICISM  
(Chicago; The University of  
Chicago Press; 1980)  
pp. 167-168.
- 51 Ibid, p.170
- 52 I refer here specifically to atheistic/nihilistic  
Existentialism. The distinction is important since  
there are Existential writers and thinkers who  
affirm an essentially theistic world view  
(see Chapter I, note 9).
- 53 Frank Lentricchia : AFTER THE NEW CRITICISM, p.31
- 54 Ibid, p.33
- 55 Ibid
- 56 Ibid
- 57 Ibid
- 58 Ibid
- 59 Ibid
- 60 Ibid
- 61 Ibid
- 62 Ibid

- 63 Ibid
- 64 Ibid, p.68
- 65 Ibid
- 66 Ibid
- 67 Robert Detweiler : STORY, SIGN AND SELF  
p.14
- 68 Ibid
- 69 Ibid
- 70 Particularly the poetry of Blake, Shelley and Keats.
- 71 Frank Lentricchia : AFTER THE NEW CRITICISM p.47
- 72 Ibid
- 73 As Lentricchia observes, Sartre's philosophy projects a  
"metaphysics of desire which posits a lost origin and an  
eternal yearning for its recovery"  
(AFTER THE NEW CRITICISM, p.48)
- 74 Ibid, p.47
- 75 Ibid
- 76 Ibid, p.49
- 77 Ibid, p.50

- 78 Ibid
- 79 Robert Detweiler : STORY, SIGN AND SELF p.40
- 80 Northrop Frye, cited in Frank Lentricchia : AFTER THE NEW CRITICISM p.8
- 81 Frank Lentricchia : AFTER THE NEW CRITICISM, p.108
- 82 Colin Wilson : RELIGION AND THE REBEL, p.103
- 83 Ibid
- 84 Such a vision informs the work of Nihilist/Absurdist writers such as Sartre, Camus, Genet, Kafka and Beckett.
- 85 The title of his book on Literature and Imagination (London; Abacus; 1982)
- 86 Frank Lentricchia : AFTER THE NEW CRITICISM, p.179
- 87 Ibid
- 88 From his novel HEART OF DARKNESS

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