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Robert Frank

This essay is an exploration of identity formation and expression. Humanity's

identity formations create the orientations and languages with which we use to

create our knowledge and understanding of the surrounding external environment

(both social and physical) and our internal environment (psychological). This

essay traces the sources of identity formation to the mythological creation of

ancient poets and seeks to develop an understanding of the ideas behind

mythological thinking and expression. 'Poetry' is a term derived from the ancient

Greek word for 'maker,' 'shaper,' and 'former;' serving in this essay as a guide

through history's mythological structures of identity formation in the various

historical manifestations of art, philosophy, religion, and psychology. Identity's

value lies in its personal and communal modes of expression used to form practical

definitions for the development of knowledge and understanding of the internal

world of our being and the external world outside and/or related to our being.

Identity also holds an inherent danger as our identity formations, once becoming

objective realities, can begin to dominate and repress other identities or our ability

to create alternate identities. The later scenario is represented in current cultural,

psychological, and epistemological theories based upon 'domination' while a counter trend could be seen in 'relational' systems based upon reciprocity: hostile dualisms which privilege one side over another or a more harmonious system of balance and mutual definition. It is the author's claim that the later, more harmonious system is the core 'value' found within poetic thought and he tries to present an outline to a 'philosophy of poetry,' which would further develop this idea. Poetry is not only an external manifestation, but also a state of being, and tenets for the understanding of poetic sensibility are outlined and unified under a terminology of 'Vision' and 'Unity.' Mythological thinking and expression are held to be the roots of the various social manifestations of the terms 'Vision' and 'Unity' found within poetic philosophies recorded throughout human history. This essay is the framework for a larger work in progress by the author, and should be read and understood as such.

Expression & Identity: The Word Made Flesh

by

J. M. Beach

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorized release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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J. M. Beach, Author

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If I think, again, of this place,
And of people, not wholly commendable,
Of no immediate kin or kindness,
But some of peculiar genius,
All touched by a common genius,
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Whatever we inherit from the fortunate
We have taken from the defeated
What they had to leave us—a symbol:
A symbol perfected in death...
What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from...
Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,
Every poem an epitaph. And any action
Is a step to the block...
...and that is where we start.
We die with the dying:
See, they depart, and we go with them.
We are born with the dead:
See, they return, and bring us with them...
...A people without history
Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern
Of timeless moments...
We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time...
Quick now, here, now, always—
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)

　　　　-T.S. Eliot; "Four Quartets," III & V

Preface: Questionable Criticisms

> The critical power is of lower rank than the
> creative...It is undeniable that the exercise of a
> creative power, that a free creative activity, is the
> highest function of man...The grand work of literary
> genius is a work of synthesis and exposition, not of
> analysis and discovery
>
> > -Matthew Arnold, "The Function of Criticism at the Present
> > Time"

Creativity and independent thought seem to have been sucked out of the

learning process in all stages of education. I find that a travesty and something that

needs to be addressed and remedied. As I will try to outline in this essay, creativity

is an important part of human expression and it should be encouraged and nurtured

in all areas of human production—especially in the Liberal Arts and especially

when it comes to understanding and questioning human history and human thought.

Accept no man's truth as your own until you make it your own:

> I believe, as perhaps you do, that precise knowledge on that subject
> is impossible or extremely difficult in our present life, but that it
> surely shows a very poor spirit not to examine thoroughly what is
> said about it, and to desist before one is exhausted by an all-round
> investigation. One should achieve one of these things: learn the
> truth about these things or find it for oneself, or, if that is
> impossible, adopt the best and most irrefutable of men's theories,
> and, borne upon this, sail through the dangers of life as upon a raft,
> unless someone should make that journey safer and less risky upon a
> firmer vessel of some divine doctrine.[1]

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[1] Plato. "Phaedo." Trans. G. M. A. Grube. Plato: CompleteWorks. Ed. John M. Cooper. Ass.
Ed. D.S. Hutchinson. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1997. 74.

In our Post-Modern age of Deconstruction it is safe to say that "precise knowledge" on any subject is "impossible or extremely difficult," but it still doesn't change the fact that we should "examine thoroughly what is said" in an "all-round investigation" of what is known. Plato gives 2 steps, which could help one achieve a 'base' of knowledge in the hope of furthering a greater philosophical understanding. The first step is to "learn" or "find" the truth on your own accord, which Plato readily acknowledges is none too easy. The second step is to borrow another man's theory and use it until something better comes along. Taken in conjunction, this two step process is full of practical advice.

Of course, it is easier to skip step one and go directly to step two. And once an idea is found and reinforced, the human tendency is to stick with it until it sinks (with you clutching firmly—slowly dropping to the bottom of the sea of discarded ideas). Academia seems to actively promote the second step of riding on the coat tails of great thinkers, while passively (if at all) encouraging the young to think for themselves. 'Reputable' philosophies are the intellectual currency of the day and few have the ability or gumption to mint their own reserve.

> we have become habituated to *reading in an academic way*. Our books are not 'thumbed by graving hands'. We *learn of an influence*, we are *directed to a book* or to a *'reputable' intellectual tradition*, we set this book beside that book, we compare and cross-refer. But Blake had a different way of reading. He would look into a book with a directness which *we might find to be naïve or unbearable*, challenging each one of its arguments against his own experience and his own 'system'...He took each author (even the Old Testament prophets) as his equal, or as something less. And he acknowledged as between them, *no received judgements as to their worth, no hierarchy of accepted 'reputability'*. For Blake, a

neighbor, or a fellow-reader of a periodical, or his friend and patron, Thomas Butts, were quite as likely to hold opinions of central importance as wan any man of *recognized learning* [my emphasis].[2]

Besides the intellectual snobbery and 'academic' bias the above author holds, my real issue with this statement (and by extension the justification for his book) is that the only conclusion that he could use to 'refute' Blake's "naïve" and "unbearable" practices was the assertion that Blake was "eccentric" and "eclectic." The author then proceeds to base his whole book on finding the 'definite' sources of a fraction of Blake's knowledge and proving them more 'localized' and 'shallow' then had been heretofore accredited to Blake. I, personally, could think of several, better ways to approach studying Blake and his poetry. And surely this 'critical practice' is by far closer to the rule in academia then the exception.

I pride myself on my ability to look into a book, a philosophy, a lecture, or theory with a "directness" akin to Blake's, and I always "challenge" each argument against my "own experience" and my "own 'system.'" It is my belief that we should always stick with Plato's first step of personally investigating the truth while hesitantly examining the other paths that men have blazed. I think Blake's take on Plato's analogy would be closer to my own view: "I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Man's. / I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create."[3] And if my own practice (and by extension this essay) is, like Blake,

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[2] Thompson, E. P. <u>Witness Against the Beast</u>. New York: The New Press, 1993. xvii.

[3] Blake, William. "Jerusalem" <u>Blake's Poetry and Designs</u>. Ed. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979. 316.

"naïve," "unbearable," "eccentric," or "eclectic" then so be it: "I was not born to be

forced, I will breathe after my own fashion. Let us see who is the strongest."[4]

Another issue that I would like to address here is my dissatisfaction with the

current operating procedures in the academic field of the humanities. The role of

the critic and literary criticism seems to be falling farther and farther into the depths

of cultural irrelevance. On the one hand, there is the seemingly endless

compartmentalization of the humanities in general (and literature specifically)

wherein each 'field' materializes into its own "mystery-religion" and in which each

guild member can "communicate, or quarrel, only with one another."[5] In this

scenario "The student becomes aware of an undertow carrying him away from

literature"[6] and into the unmapped depths of "-----studies" where (as found in

Delillo's fictionalized rendering in White Noise) a person might devote their whole

life to the study of Hitler or some other such single personage—totally devoid of

any kind of larger cultural context.

And then there are those critics who within their 'fields' of study set up

different factions and draw battle lines over 'disputed' territory; where "ink is the

great missive weapon in all battles of the learned, which conveyed through a sort of

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[4] Thoreau, Henry David. "Resistance to Civil Government." Walden and Resistance to Civil Government. Ed. William Rossi. 2ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992. 238.

[5] Frye, Northrop. Anatomy of Criticism. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990. 14.

[6] Frye, 12.

engine called a quill, infinite numbers of these are darted at the enemy, by the

valiant on each side, with equal skill and violence."[7] "Shelley studies" abounds

with this destructive and completely unnecessary criticism. Simon Haines unearths

the very beginnings of Percy Bysshe Shelley's literary career where a battle

between those who thought Shelley a poetical genius and those who thought him

literary heretic or ineffectual hack drew their lines, and set the stage for the next

150 years of Shelley's poetic infamy. Haines had to actually justify his 'unique

critical approach' of trying to impartially understand and reflect on Shelley's poetry

(which he spends the first third of his book trying to outline):

> This book is not an unsympathetic and partisan assault on a
> besieged and misunderstood canonical writer. Its chief purpose is to
> promote serious reflection on an important poet *whose habits of
> thought may turn out to be more widely significant*; and to suggest
> *the continuing value of attending closely to how poetry thinks*, of
> *treating it with respect whether or not one happens to like it*. This
> may in the end turn out to be a better way of serving Shelley's
> poetry then *fencing it off behind intimidating referentialist
> scholarship*. The name "Shelley" for most educated younger people
> now refers only to the author of <u>Frankenstein</u>. This is a sign of
> substantial cultural loss: a loss to which that referentialism has
> actually contributed, in *its self-regarding complacency and in its
> relativising tendency to avoid evaluative judgements* [my
> emphasis].[8]

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[7] Swift, Jonathan. "The Battle of the Books." <u>Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings by Jonathan Swift</u>. Ed. Miriam Kosh Starkman. New York: Bantam Books, 1981. 400.

[8] Haines sumation of Shelly's repugnance to many literary critics can be nicely captured by a quote made by J.T. Coleridge in 1819: "he [Shelley] has slandered, ridiculed and blasphemed our holy religion" (6). The "holy religion" Coleridge speaks of is the conservative, poetic formalism espoused by critics from J.T. Coleridge, Hazlitt, and Poe in the 19th century to the likes of Leavis and T.S. Eliot in the 20th. Haines, Simon. <u>Shelley's Poetry: The Divided Self</u>. New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1997. 246.

And this leads to my final critique of academic criticism, which lies in the fact that the primary source material is often slighted by, and in some cases totally buried under, the overwhelming presence of the 'critical community'—the 'critical conversation' composed of centuries of commentary ranging from the deeply moving and insightful to the absurd and petty. I am all for a cultural and historical context, which would include contemporary commentary on the primary material, but this should not preclude a serious analysis of the work itself as a creative document with creative 'insight' on any range of relevant topics/ideas within the work itself.

"Blake studies" is popular critical topic in academia and yet (as with Shelley and a lot of other poetical authors in particular) very few of the critical analyses are actually based upon *what* the author has said or was trying to say, but instead the focus is on explaining the where, why, how, who, when, *ad infinitum.* And it seems to me that the avoidance of 'what the author has to say' lies in the fact (again in our Post- Modern, Derridian universe of discourse driven by Aristotelian Formalism) that there is no objective, concrete, interpretation of the 'what' that could ever be passed off as 'academic knowledge,' and so the 'content' is slighted for the more objectively analyzable 'form.' The idea of subjective interpretation is so out of taste (because of the New Critic's excesses) that any kind of direct 'conversation' with the primary author is avoided by academics within their 'critical communities' and certainly rarely taught in the classroom.

This 'avoidance syndrome' is then instilled within students who have never been taught or encouraged to think for themselves. And, furthermore, what they are taught is that in order to receive a good grade (or, in more advanced settings, in order to get published) they must fight their way to the overly crowded 'conversation table,' bumping a few elbows along the way, to carve out some 'new' niche on the topic at hand by 'refuting' or 'condoning' those who have the loudest or most distinct voices:

> "Whoever hath an ambition to be heard in a crowd, must press, and squeeze, and thrust, and climb with indefatigable pains, till he has exalted himself to a certain degree of altitude above them. Now, in all assemblies, though you wedge them ever so close, we may observe this peculiar property, that over their heads there is room enough, but how to reach it is the difficult point; it being as hard to get quit of number, as of hell."[9]

I am not concerned with finding a place in the critical community. I am not an academic nor am I a critic in the contemporary sense of the word because I will "never pursue literature as a trade"[10]. I study literature and I study culture for my own benefit and for the benefit of those that I will come into contact with over the course of my life. "Too few contemporary critics both conceptualize and actually read literature as practical wisdom,"[11] which can serve as an invaluable resource for

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[9] Swift, Jonathan. "A Tale of a Tub." Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings by Jonathan Swift. Ed. Miriam Kosh Starkman. New York: Bantam Books, 1981. 309.

[10] Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. Biographia Literaria. Ed. James Engell & W. Jackson Bate. Bollingen Ser. LXXV. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984. 223.

[11] Haines, 52.

understanding historical contexts of culture, politics, and a whole host of other subjects. My stance as a 'critical reader of literature' involves the search for "practical wisdom" and lies more in the vein of a 'critic' like S.T. Coleridge, though far from the excesses of the New Critics who paraded in his name.

And it is in the tradition of Coleridge that I hack out of the existing intellectual jungle a new path (by also clearing away the clutter to find the older paths that lie neglected). And in doing so I am forced, as was Coleridge, to either *"use old words with new meanings"* or *"introduce new terms,"* which, in both cases, means that *"the reader (or hearer) is required not only to learn and bear in mind the new definition; but to unlearn, and keep out of his view, the old habitual meaning* [my emphasis]."[12] I will hereby invoke both cases in my attempt to rediscover—or rather uncover—ideas that have been misunderstood, misinterpreted, and misused within the very Formalist, Post-Modern discourses of our times. And it is my hope that these ideas may hold direct relevance and deep insight into the problematics of our age of irrelevance and uncertainty.

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[12] Coleridge, 171.

Expression & Identity: The Word Made Flesh

Introduction: To Have a Culture or Be Cultured?

> great antiauthoritarian uprisings made their earliest
> advances, not by denying the humanitarian and
> universalistic claims of the general dominant culture,
> but by attacking the adherents of that culture for
> failing to uphold their own declared standards, for
> failing to extend them to all as opposed to a small
> fraction, of humanity...it does not finally matter *who*
> wrote what, but rather *how* a work is written and *how*
> it is read.
>
> -Edward Said; "The Politics of Knowledge"

> This revolution is to be wrought by the gradual
> domestication of the idea of Culture.
>
> -Emerson; "The American Scholar"

I have chosen a field of study, which I believe, encompasses all fields of study with its breadth and scope: language and culture. And I will begin this essay by briefly outlining what these terms mean. Language can be any agreed upon group of oral sounds or non-oral gestures or, in the literate sense, any code of written symbols, which are used for communicative purposes (although the complexities of how language works in the larger field of sociology and linguistics is beyond this study). The idea of 'culture,' however, has a much more ambiguous

meaning in our present, historical context and I would like to re-examine what culture means in an effort to both define the dynamics of 'identity,' which I believe is central to the idea of culture, while at the same time theorizing on the idea of identity as it concerns the individual's relationship with other individuals, larger social groups, and societal institutions.

For our current understanding and use of the word 'culture' I turn to Edward Said, who defines it as "all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation, that have relative autonomy from the economic, social, and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure."[1] This idea of culture places the definition within "relatively autonomous" artistic practices (such as literature, the plastic arts, movies, fashion, etc.), that exist primarily to give pleasure to a society through aesthetic creations of style and form. And the different 'styles' and 'forms' a culture produces come to be an identifying mark and/or representation of the culture as a whole.

If Said's definition is taken in conjunction with Raymond Williams', then we will see the term 'culture' further developed. Williams acknowledges culture's aesthetic appeal and its ability to give pleasure, but he focuses on culture's ability to instill social meaning through the creation of different social identities within the society at large. Williams defines culture as "the meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture" and goes on to say that to

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[1] Said, Edward W. <u>Culture and Imperialism</u>. New York: Vintage Books, 1994. xii.

study culture is to study "the relationships between the elements in a whole way of life."[2] Here culture is not only an external source of entertainment or pleasure, but becomes a source for various "meanings and values," which can serve to characterize various individual and group identities. It is through the study of social relationships that cultures and subcultures manifest themselves in a coherent social context, and where culture then becomes synonymous with the politics of identity.

And how are culture and identity expressed in a society? They are expressed through a communicable language—be it the spoken word, the written word, or some other symbolic system of representation agreed upon by a group of people.[3] The two—language and culture—cannot be separated. They are tangible manifestations of the larger society's identity and ideology. And ideology is what creates stability and order within a structured hierarchy of power (in the Foucaultian sense[4]) which serves as the 'active preserver' of both the social order

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[2] Quoted in. Hebdige, Dick. Subculture: The Meaning of Style. London: Routledge, 1996. 6-7.

[3] The idea of culture and the languages that a culture uses are becoming more and more complex as we move toward the 21st century. Dick Hebdige's influential work (Ibid) serves as a foundational point in understanding the 20th century's fractionalization of the term 'culture' into the idea of a dominant, hegemonic 'culture' and various 'subcultures' working within and against that larger culture, and a subculture's subsequent exploitation and subversion of the dominant culture's 'languages' (modes of expression).

[4] Foucault's assertion that "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (93) moves the idea of power from any fixed, centralized source and hides the tangible producer of 'power' in society behind the idea that power must mask itself; for its success is "proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms" (86). Foucault, Michel. The History of Sexuality. Vol 1. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.

and ideology, which in turn solidifies the society's conceptual identity. This ultimately means that a society's linguistical and cultural institutions are the pillars, which hold and reinforce the power structure, and which in turn promote the stability and order of the surrounding society. Therefore, when one (as Said, Foucault, Chomsky, and others have done in the late 20th century[5]) wants to challenge the power structure, social order, or identity politics they analyze and attack the language and culture, which holds and reinforces the dominate ideology in the various social/political institutions.

Now this idea of culture as a social/political identity dominates the current discussion of the later 20th century and is the cornerstone for much Post-Colonial and Revisionist Historian thought, but it is not the only definition of 'culture.' Matthew Arnold[6] formulated the Victorian idea of 'culture,' which he developed from the older idea of "humanism" formulated in the Renaissance.[7] I would like to

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[5] These writer's informative critiques of 20th century culture and language are part of my foundation in exploring, understanding, and using a critical terminology of culture in my literary pursuits.

[6] I feel that Arnold has been unfairly brushed away as a side note in our post-colonial re-evaluation of Imperial culpability and I see within his Victorian prose much of the humanist dialectic of the Renaissance and Romantic periods. He also carries forth the conviction that poetry and the poet are of central importance to understanding and formulating a culture, of which this essay will explore the historical significance: "it is to the poetical literature of an age that we must, in general, look for the most perfect, the most adequate interpretation of that age." Quoted in Keating, P.J. "Introduction." Matthew Arnold: Selected Prose. Ed. P. J. Keating. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1987. 34.

[7] Humanism has been a central theme in English and American Romantic thought and American Transcendentalism, but began to dissipate first in the Darwinian revolution, and then in the racist scientology of Imperialism, and finally it lost the full force of its appeal within the late Modernist movement as the destructiveness of modern technological advances in 20th century warfare and political atrocities of racism, state communism, and national socialism became more evident. Jean Paul Sartre sums up the problematic in the "Preface" to Fannon's The Wretched of the Earth: "Humanism. There you can see it, quite naked, and it's not a pretty sight. It was nothing but an

re-examine Arnold's idea of culture, not to replace the existing definitions already presented, but to parallel them in an effort to bring a broader awareness to the dynamics of cultural 'identity.'

Arnold wanted to highlight culture's importance as a dynamic social force, which had the potential—through the politics of identity—to create a 'positive,' egalitarian social cohesiveness while also, simultaneously, having the very real power to 'negatively' formulate social distinction based on the exclusionary tactics of class. Culture could be "valued either out of sheer vanity and ignorance, or else as an engine of social and class distinction, separating its holder, like a badge or title, from other people who have not got it."[8] In Arnold's Victorian England 'culture' was the bourgeois' tool to maintain its power through order and stability predicated upon the antiquated notions of social castes.[9] It is an identity based on difference, where a dominant social group manifests itself as the measuring stick with which all 'other' entities in the society must measure up to or be rejected by.

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ideology of lies, a perfect justification for pillage; its honeyed words, its affectation of sensibility were only alibis for our aggressions...But if the whole regime, even your non-violent ideas, are conditioned by a thousand-year-old oppression, your passivity serves only to place you in the ranks of the oppressors...With us, to be a man is to be an accomplice of colonialism, since all of us without exception have profited by colonial exploitation." Humanism has survived into the late 20th century in different forms, but most notably in the political ethos of 'Liberalism.'

[8] Arnold, Matthew. Culture and Anarchy. Matthew Arnold: Selected Prose. Ed. P. J. Keating. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1987. 209.

[9] This is the idea of 'culture' that informs Raymond Williams' prior definition and is most readily associated with the 20th century fights against "Cultural Imperialism" and "Cultural Hegemony."

A culture's social and political power comes from its ability to create hegemonic control. The institutionalization of a dominant group's identity creates an ideology, which the whole society is then supposed to claim (or is told to claim) as its standard. This standard becomes the 'normal' mode of operation—the ideology—set down in codes of conduct, laws of convention, and social mores. One group's identity comes to control and define all others by its measure and any deviance is punished under the banner of 'morality' set within the mean of the dominant group's ideological parameters. Identity then becomes solidified in an institutionalized, ideological framework, and culture becomes a form of tyranny for those individuals or marginalized social groups who refuse its constrictive definitions.[10]

Arnold wanted to challenge the idea of a 'restrictive culture' based upon external distinctions of class and social rank, and created another definition of 'culture,' which he hoped would serve as a positive tool for social change. He wanted to define 'culture' as "a study of perfection," which questions "all the voices of human experience which have been heard upon it, of art, science, poetry, philosophy, history, as well as of religion, in order to give a greater fullness and certainty to its solution."[11] Arnold brings forth an idea of culture, predicated on the

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[10] This is the legacy of Imperialism and the independence movements of the middle 20th century and is also manifesting itself in the phenomenon of 'subcultures,' 'countercultures,' and 'multiculturalism' found in the later 20th and early 21st century.

[11] Arnold, Matthew. Culture and Anarchy. Matthew Arnold: Selected Prose. Ed. P. J. Keating. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1987. 207.

older Renaissance idea of 'Humanism,' which believes that the source of social identity and social cohesiveness begins first with the individual's freedom to search for 'perfection' and 'identity' within themselves.

He wanted to emphasize that "The kingdom of God is within [the individual]; and culture, in like manner, places human perfection in an internal condition."[12] And not only does Arnold place 'perfection' and 'identity' within each human being, but he goes on to write, that what we find in our internal search of ourselves is not a "resting, but a growing and a becoming:" "perfection which consists in becoming something rather than in having something, in an inward condition of the mind and spirit, not in an outward set of circumstances."[13] Here 'culture' is found in the freedom of a human being to find within his/herself the "inward condition" of 'perfection' and 'identity.' This idea of fluid, individual identity is the antithesis of the institutionalized ideological norms found within any dominant, ideological standards a society might have.

Hegel's "theory of positivity" is a great illustration of the split between these two versions of 'culture' where—as Hegel analyzes it in terms of the institutionalization of religion and Christianity—virtue and morality should be based on the personal freedom of the individual to explore him/herself within a dynamic social setting (as Arnold suggested within his idea of 'culture') instead of suffering the tyrrany of socio-political institutions based on rigid codes and

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid. 208.

doctrines (which are the static institutions formed out of a culture's dominant ideology).[14] The "positivity" of religion (or culture) is a natural reflex caused by the elevation of one spiritual belief or identity into the dominant, social/political realm, which has the tendency to convert fluid ideas into rigid and restrictive institutions. The solidified institutions then reinforce themselves as being the formal 'identity' of the culture and thereby promote themselves as the societal standard.

However, the idea behind 'identity' and how it is formed is much more complex and is applicable to more than just cultural theory. Identity has historically been the 'source' of our formulations and articulations on the subject of human relationships between single, human beings (individuals); other groups of human beings (community/society); and the surrounding, external environment (nature). Identity is a concept without stable borders and has gradations of utility within personal, artistic, and cultural realms of thought. If we can better understand the intricacies of identity then we might be able to create ethical standards, which would allow humans to coexist peacefully and productively while maintaining a 'higher' awareness of the need for personal 'artistic' expression. This discussion has a broad range of implications and possible applications, but the

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[14] Avineri describes Hegelian 'positivity' as "a religious system which lays down a set of rules and regulations which the believer has to follow not because each individual act of behavior represents for him the expression of his own inner conviction and free moral choice, but because it has been so established, set down and 'posited' for him by the institutions of religion" (14). Avineri, Shlomo. Hegel's Theory of the Modern State. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

focus remains clearly on artistic expression through literature, and more specifically through the art of poetry.

I.   The Art of Poetry

The Imagination is not a State: it is the Human Existence itself
-William Blake; "Milton: Book the Second"

History's definition of poetry, any good academically minded person would

say, is extremely diversified and varied with each culture and age that you might

discuss. 'Form' and 'content' seem to be the two most readily established

categories for critical analysis, although most (if not all) academic distinctions of

poetic 'definition' primarily focus on form.[15] This, however, has not always been

the case. Up until the 19th century there was an abundant amount of emphasis

given to the content that the poet was dealing with and it was usually based upon

this content that a poet was judged within his culture.[16] What a poet said had

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[15] 'Form' can be most simply stated as 'how the poet or poem speaks' and 'content' as 'what the poet or poem says.'

[16] Plato's attacks on poets in "Ion," "Meno," and "The Republic" strike at the notion that poet's were the supposed mouthpiece of the gods and what the poet's were saying (the content) was not always edifying or morally justifiable for Plato's taste: Plato felt the need to censure poets because what they said posed a threat to the social fabric of Plato's ideal state. The incendiary nature of a poet's content and the need for censure can be traced all the way to the 20th century. But the eclipse of content by form began, I would argue, for another reason. In "Protagoras" Plato likens discussing poetry to "second rate dinner parties" and critiques poetry as useless in philosophical debates because 'everyone has a different opinion as to the meaning of a poet's content.' "Protagoras." Trans. G. M. A. Grube. Plato: CompleteWorks. Ed. John M. Cooper. Ass. Ed. D.S. Hutchinson. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1997. 778. This line of thought believed that the only *analyzable 'truth'* to be found in poetry came from the poet's mastery of formal components, which, like a symphony or a mathematical equation, produced a structured 'theory' of component parts. Aristotle's "Poetics" is exemplary of this formal analysis, but this did not supercede discussion of content, I would argue until the Romantics broke with the tradition of classical form. Until then, classical formal components were taken for granted as the only "how" available and even the overly 'formal' emphasis of the Latin tradition seen for example in Ramus' rhetorical tradition placed the stress on what was being said, and in this case, how simply and straitforward it was done. Once the discussion centered on the nature of form, "what" a poet had to say became less important

marked social repercussions—whether it be the formation of cultural myths, social

satire, morality plays, or idealistic yearnings: the poet's power rested on what he

had to say.

The various formal elements and modes of poetry are too numerous for me

to even mention, but, nonetheless, I would highlight three important formal

elements that have been used since the pre-historic, oral societies: rhythm, melody,

and verse.[17] Formally speaking, poetry is very similar to musical composition as its

formal elements were aids to facilitate memorization and recitation in oral cultures

and were often accompanied with musical harmony. But, unlike the musician, the

poet crafted his rhythms and sounds into a communicable language meant to

deliver a message to his audience. And as rhythm and sound have been an essential

ingredient from the beginnings of poetry, so too has a specific message, embodied

within the very idea of the poet, been delivered through history as one of the

primary definitions of 'true' poetry.[18]

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than how it was said. Modernism became the epoch of form for the sake of form and the widespread devaluation of content—in the Post Modern content becomes irrelevant, prejudiced, illusionary, and absurd.

[17] Aristotle relates these terms as the fundamental formal elements of all written expression. Aristotle. "Poetics." Trans. I. Bywater. The Complete Works of Aristotle. 1984. Ed. Jonathan Barnes. Vol. 2. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995. 2317.

[18] By inserting the essentializing word 'true' as an adjective describing the primary and original 'type' of poetry, I know I have made a statement that I cannot ever fully justify within a level of academic certainty. This essay is built out of associative reasoning and contextual analysis and so to further refine my use of the adjective 'true' let me say that my meaning lies somewhere along the lines of a 'common denominator of poetic-understanding and purpose' expressed as 'a central theme and/or belief.' 'True' would also be synonymous with a subjective term such as 'great,' 'extraordinary,' and also 'most complete' distinguishing the best and brightest—the masters—of the poetic medium. And the primary 'common denominator' and 'theme' held by the 'greatest' poets

This universal message[19] that the poet has carried down, which I believe

goes beyond just the Western tradition, is not all that easy to trace or recognize if

you analyze the content of poetry through the blinders of form. It is easy to see and

analyze centuries of difference based on language, grammar, vocabulary,

cultural/historical contexts, culturally based metaphors and symbols, and the

accuracy of textual transference. But if you look primarily at the content of some

of the world's greatest poets you will find a marked similarity in themes, symbols

and metaphors, and descriptions of the nature of the poet and poetry. And for

considerations of time and cultural context, I will focus primarily on English

speaking poets who have developed intricate explanations concerning what a poet

is and what a poet tries to say.

To begin with there is a marked distinction between form and content, but

'true' poetry bridges and unites these dissimilar elements within an organic whole.

To be a poet means much more than producing a rhyme or writing an intricate

piece of verse.[20] Ben Jonson once distinguished four elements, which are essential

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lies in the 'belief' that 'true' poetry is a harmonious balance between 'form' and 'content'
expressing human thought for the uplifting, understanding, and edification of human beings.

[19] For a further explanation of the ideas behind 'a central theme and/or belief' or a 'universal
message' of the poet see Chapter 2, footnote 1.

[20] Aristotle. Poetics." Trans. I. Bywater. The Complete Works of Aristotle. 1984. Ed. Jonathan
Barnes. Vol. 2. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995. 2316-17. Plato. "Ion." Trans. W.
H. D. Rouse. Great Dialogues of Plato. Ed. Eric H. Warmington and Philip G. Rouse. New York:
Mentor, 1984. 18. Sidney, Sir Philip. "A Defence of Poetry." Ed. J. A. Van Dorsten. Oxford:
Oxford University Press, 1997. 27. Johnson, Ben. "Timber, or Discoveries." Ben Johnson and
the Cavalier Poets. Ed. Hugh Maclean. New York. W. W. Norton & Company, 1974. 415.
Wordsworth, William. "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads (1802)." William Wordsworth. Ed.
Stephen Gill. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984. 602. Shelley, Percy Bysshe "A Defence of

to a 'true' poet: "Ingenium", "Exercitatio, "Imitatio," and "Lectio."[21] These

roughly correspond in English to 'genius or natural poetic talent;' 'the ability to

exercise that talent;' 'the ability to imitate other poets;' and 'the ability to master

the study and subject of poetry': 1) *genius & talent*; 2) *discipline/training*; 3)

imitation/re-creation; and 4) *learning/study*. These four principles are, I would

argue, the fundamental ingredients for any poet (and, by extension, any artist in

general).

Two of the categories are academically or instructionally based, meaning

that they must be taught by a master and learned by a student. *Discipline/training*

is simply practicing and perfecting an art under expert tutelage while *learning/study*

is becoming knowledgeable about the art that one wants to practice. *Imitation/re-*

creation cannot be taught in any kind of traditional way, but must be absorbed as a

way of being and seeing. The primary elements of any great artist—*genius &*

talent—cannot be taught at all. But the latter two elements—*genius & talent*—hold

the key to what a poet tries to do and, in essence, what poetry truly is. Plato once

declared that poetry is "of two kinds: one wholly through imitation" [imitation/re-

Poetry." Romanticism: An Anthology. Ed. Duncan Wu. 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1998. 946-47. **Keats, John. "Letter To J.A. Hessey, 8 October 1818."** Letters of John Keats. Ed. Robert Gittings. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970. 156. **Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "The Poet."** Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson. Ed. Stephen E. Whicher. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960. 225. **Whitman, Walt. "Leaves of Grass 1855"** Complete Poetry and Collected Prose. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1982. 11. Time and space do not permit me to give more examples, but there are many more.

[21] Ben Johnson. 414-16.

creation] and "the other through the poet's own report of things" [genius &

talent].[22] Let us look deeper into what he might mean.

I.a. Subject Meets Object

> As to imitation, poetry is a mimetic art. It creates, but it creates by
> combination and representation.
> -Percy Bysshe Shelley; "Preface to Prometheus
> Unbound"

I would like to first look at imitation/re-creation because it is by far the

oldest trait that a poet is agreed upon to have possessed. Plato discusses poetical

imitation in the third and tenth book of "The Republic" and Aristotle, in greater

detail, revisits the theme in his "Poetics:"

> It is clear that the general origin of poetry was due to two causes,
> each of them part of human nature. Imitation is natural to man from
> childhood...he is the most imitative creature in the world, and learns
> at first by imitation. And it is also natural for all to delight in works
> of imitation.[23]

The second origin/'cause' of poetry, Aristotle wrote, was man's love of learning

and imitation was thereby a part of the process of learning and recognition.

Imitation is defined here as a form of representation or recreation of identity, which

at once reinforces the imitator's knowledge of the object he is imitating, while at

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[22] Plato. "The Republic." Trans. W. H. D. Rouse. <u>Great Dialogues of Plato</u>. Ed. Eric H.
Warmington and Philip G. Rouse. New York: Mentor, 1984. 192.

[23] Aristotle. "Poetics." Trans. I. Bywater. <u>The Complete Works of Aristotle</u>. 1984. Ed. Jonathan
Barnes. Vol. 2. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995. 2318.

the same time giving some sort of pleasure derived from the imitator's skill of representing 'faithfully' what he sees.

But what I find most interesting is that representing the object 'faithfully' is not always what the poet is concerned about. Aristotle notes that the poet can represent objects or human beings "above our own level of goodness, or beneath it, or just such as we are"[24]: better, worse, or equal to. He then divides poetry into two categories: poets who represent objects better than the original and poets who represent objects worse than the original.[25] What this seems to imply is that the act of imitation or representation was more interesting or popular when the poet took his own license to emphasize through *misrepresentation* what it is he wanted to say.[26]

Or to put it a different way, the veering away from objective faithfulness to more subjective representations is what poetry seeks to accomplish: the very act of *imitation* is an *interpretation* on the part of the poet. It is the coming together of object and subject through the poet's act of mimesis:

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[24] Ibid. 2317.

[25] The objects are again men and the two forms of representation Aristotle distinguishes are tragedy and comedy.

[26] Aristotle never again mentions or alludes to the act of faithfully representing an object for the purposes of poetry. Perhaps he took this issue for granted and thought it needed no further explanation, or perhaps faithful representation was not of central importance within the realm of artistic expression. I think his omission highlights the fact that artistic expression is subjective and any imitation will be a subjective interpretation of the object and can never be wholly objective or faithful.

> As to imitation, poetry is a mimetic art. It creates, but it creates by combination and representation. Poetical abstractions are beautiful and new, not because the portions of which they are composed had no previous existence in the mind of man or in nature, but because the whole produced by their combination has some intelligible and beautiful analogy with those sources of emotion and thought, and with the contemporary condition of them...A poet is the combined product of such internal powers as modify the nature of others; and of such external influences as excite and sustain these powers; he is not one, but both. Every man's mind is, in this respect, modified by all the objects of nature and art; by every word and every suggestion which he ever admitted to act upon his consciousness; it is the mirror upon which all forms are reflected, and in which they compose one form. Poets...in one sense, the creators, and, in another, the creations, of their age.[27]

P.B. Shelley's statement outlines the position of the poet as a subjective observer

and communicator who relates and represents objects in their contextual

background for the purposes of reinterpreting the nature and meaning of an object

for the present 'age.' The poet is acted upon by, as well as acting on, the objective

environment around him, and it is this 'give and take process' where the poet finds

himself animating his representations with his unique, subjective mark. It is the

poet's subjective view, which makes the objective world relevant and meaningful

to both the poet and the poet's audience. The poet's imitation is an acculturation or

recreation of an object. Therefore even an imitative act is a creative act on the part

of the poet. The poet redefines the identity of the object. The poet takes an old,

objective reality and gives it new meaning and relevance. The poet redefines

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[27] Shelley, Percy Bysshe. "Preface to Prometheus Unbound." The Complete Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley / with Notes by Mary Shelley. New York: The Modern Library, 1994. 227.

objective reality. But is the poet's creative power simply an extension of general creative instincts of the human mind or is it something more?

I.b. Superman or Everyman?

> Why I should be a Poet more than other Men
> -John Keats; "Letter to Leigh Hunt, 10 May 1817"

If Shelley believed that "Every man's mind is, in this respect, modified by all the objects of nature and art," then seemingly it would mean that every man is capable of subjective representation of objects and, therefore, every man is capable of becoming a poet. But is the poet just a 'representative man' in that "all men have the thoughts whereof the universe is the celebration"[28] or is the poet something more—something much more extraordinary. Is the poet truly "a liberating god" as Emerson wrote[29] or divinely inspired as the ancients once thought?

Plato addressed this seeming controversy several times within his writings, but no where does he attempt to reconcile the position of the poet.[30] Plato does have this to say, however:

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[28] Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "The Poet." 228.

[29] Ibid. 235, 236. Emerson makes this statement twice in this essay.

[30] I have above already alluded to several essays where Plato discusses the poet.

> [Diotima asks] 'You know that poetry is many kinds of making; for when anything passes from not-being to being, the cause is always making, or poetry, so that in all the arts the process is making, and all the craftsmen in these are makers or poets.' 'Quite true,' I [Socrates] said. 'But yet,' said she, 'they are not all called poets; they have other names, and one bit of this making has been taken, that concerning music and verse, and this is called by the name of the whole. For this only is called poetry, and those who have this bit of making are called poets.'[31]

This would support the idea that all men (and women) can be poets in the sense that humans can make and create subjective representations of objective reality, but only the makers and creators of the word—of language—bear the title or definition of "poet."[32] But in "Ion" Plato uses Socrates to say that poets are especially unique in that they are divine interpreters filled with divine dispensation[33] and again Socrates repeats this sentiment in "Meno" where he says, "we should say they are divine and ecstatic, being inspired and possessed by the god when they are often right while they say grand things although they know nothing of what they say."[34] The idea of divine inspiration and the poet as a sort of 'superman' is also

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[31] Plato. Symposium." Trans. W. H. D. Rouse. Great Dialogues of Plato. Ed. Eric H. Warmington and Philip G. Rouse. New York: Mentor, 1984. 100. Socrates is repeating a conversation he had with the seer Diotima.

[32] The Greek word ποιετεσ "poietes" means literally "maker," "shaper," or "former" and it is the root of our English word "poet." In a general sense any one can be maker, shaper, or former of objects, but again the distinction that Diotima gives the 'poet' is that of a maker, shaper, and former of words.

[33] Ibid. 18-19.

[34] "Meno." Trans. W. H. D. Rouse. Great Dialogues of Plato. Ed. Eric H. Warmington and Philip G. Rouse. New York: Mentor, 1984. 67.

championed by Shelley: the poet is "the happiest, the best, the wisest, and the most illustrious of men" and "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."[35]

To further flesh the issue out, I would bring in one more poet's opinion. John Keats once wrote:

> A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence; because he has no Identity—he is continually in for [fragment—possibly 'informing']—and filling some other Body—The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute—the poet has none; no identity—he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's Creatures.[36]

Here the poet is devoid of identity—devoid of attributes and personality—because the poet, like an actor, takes on and associates with many identities, but resides in none. The poet's personal identity is not fixed—it has no concrete, objective reality. Just as the poet has the ability to re-create his external reality, so too, does he have the same ability over his internal reality. The poet is in constant flux because his internal nature and identity are dependent upon his re-creation of external reality: The poet as creator reflects his creation.[37]

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[35] "Defence of Poetry." 954, 956.

[36] "Letter to Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818." 157.

[37] And here again I would assert that this idea of a 'creator reflecting his creation' is common to all men. John Locke's theory of property in the Second Treatise on Civil Government gives men 'right' of ownership when they mix their 'labor' with 'nature' and Marx equates alienation of man in modern, capitalist societies with man's alienation from the fruits of his labor. This idea that man imparts a piece of his subjective identity through his labor onto objective reality is a commonly held by material philosophers. And Freud wrote in Civilization and its Discontents, that satisfaction and devotion to 'work' in general, and 'artistic work' specifically, could greatly enhance personal happiness and increase the 'economics of the libido.'

Keats begins his fragmented poem "The Fall of Hyperion" with these words:

> Fanatics have their dreams, wherewith they weave
> A paradise for a sect; the savage too
> From forth the loftiest fashion of his sleep
> Guesses at Heaven; pity these have not
> Trac'd upon vellum or wild Indian leaf
> The shadows of melodious utterance.
> But bare of laurel they live, dream, and die;
> For Poesy alone can tell her dreams,
> With the fine spell of words alone can save
> Imagination from the sable chain
> And dumb enchantment. Who alive can say,
> "Thou art no Poet—may'st not tell thy dreams?"
> Since every man whose soul is not a clod
> Hath visions, and would speak, if he had loved,
> And been well nurtured in his mother tongue.[38]

I feel that emphasis should fall upon the words "Who alive can say, 'Thou art no Poet—may'st not tell thy dreams?'" in this discussion on who can or cannot be a poet. For Emerson wrote, man "is only half himself, the other half is his expression,"[39] which lends support to Keats' proposition in this poem: every man is and should be a poet—a maker, shaper, and former—for every man needs to create, and in his creation express himself to the world. And in creating his expression, man creates himself and his identity. It is not only man's right to create, but it is essential component in human nature.

"But bare of laurel" do most human beings "live, dream, and die"—never expressing or truly knowing themselves and who they could have been. For "every

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[38] Keats, John. The Complete Poems of John Keats. New York: The Modern Library, 1994. 353.

[39] "The Poet." 223.

man whose soul is not a clod / Hath visions, and would speak, if he had loved, / And been well nurtured in his mother tongue," but poets "alone can tell [their] dreams." The poet has the ability to be everyone because he is no one—the poet is extraordinary, but is at the same time ordinary. The poet is just like other men, but he has an extraordinary talent. The poet has the ability to express himself where other men do not: poetry in general is creative expression and, specifically, creative expression through words. But how is it the poet can express himself when others cannot?

I.c. Expressing Vision Through the Imagination

> Poetry, in a general sense, may be defined to be 'the expression of the imagination;' and poetry is connate with the origin of man...a principle within the human being [which]...produces not melody alone, but harmony.
> -Percy Bysshe Shelley; "A Defence of Poetry"

However, expression is only half of the extraordinary equation, which comprises the poet. The poet's unique qualification for being considered a "liberating god" lies in two abilities that most other men do not have (or, more accurately, do not realize they have): 1) the poet can *speak* because he has "loved, / And been well nurtured in his mother tongue," and 2) the poet "hath *vision*:" Poets have *talent* and *genius*. "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world"

precisely because they can *express* their world through language, literally inspiring a creative *vision*.

My definition and use of the term 'vision' originates within William Blake's discourse on poetry and art. In a "letter to the Reverend John Trusler, August 23, 1799" Blake writes:

> And I know that This World Is a World of imagination & Vision. I see Every thing I paint In This World, but Every body does not see alike. To the Eyes of a Miser a Guinea is more beautiful than the Sun, & a bag worn with the use of Money has more beautiful proportions than a Vine filled with Grapes. The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing that stands in the way. Some See Nature all Ridicule & Deformity, & by these I shall not regulate my proportions; & Some Scarce see Nature at all. But to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination, Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is, So he Sees. As the Eye is formed, such are its Powers. You certainly Mistake, when you say that the Visions of Fancy are not to be found in This World. To Me This World is all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination, & I feel Flattered when I am told so.[40]

Everyone sees the world that they inhabit, but everyone does not see the world alike. Blake's "Miser" has his eyes fixed on those material things that bring him wealth and temporary satisfaction, but he is oblivious to the greater world about him and his relationship to it.

The term 'Nature' holds the key to understanding Blake's use of 'Imagination.' Nature is the external world—everything external to the human being—and the external world sets up objective, 'realities' or 'contexts' for the human being to identify and relate to. The human being must come to some understanding of the

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[40] Blake, William. <u>Blake's Poetry and Designs</u>. Ed. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979. 448-49.

'natural' world (other individuals, community, society, and culture) and his place within that 'nature.' Once this is done, a human being can come to terms with the internal world (the world of personal identity). The formation of human identity begins with what we see and is then internalized: "As a man is, So he Sees." Only after some reciprocal identification between the internal and external world takes place can the human being then shape the external and internal world: a man can passively 'see' the external world and *be acted upon*, or a man can actively 'See' the external world with 'vision' and *act upon it*.

Blake raises a distinction between 1)'seeing' the world and 2)'Seeing' the world through a Platonic dialectic of the Real and the Ideal. There is the material world of temporary, physical gratification and there is the ideal world of eternal, spiritual fulfillment. Everyone has the ability to see the former, but few come to realize the latter. And it is only with the later, with the ability to 'See' the Ideal (the possible) within Nature that one can see and, by seeing know, and by knowing create "One continued Vision" of life. The poet creates his own subjective identity and imposes that subjective identity on the objective world, thereby relativising the objective and creating a relational identity. He is the creator reflecting on his creation: "Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is, So he Sees."

And it the poet who has the most sensitive eyes—the most sensitivity, as Wordsworth believed—and who, as Blake said, could be moved to "tears of joy" at the simple sight of a tree. It is this sensitivity that gives the poet a deeper 'vision' and understanding of not only the external world as it is (reality), but also as it

could be (possibility). This sensitivity allows the poet to see beyond (or deep

within) the Real/material/temporary world, and mining it, if you will, for relative

'truth': relational identity is created by the subjective linking and rationalization[41]

of the external with the internal. The poet animates the Real world he lives in by

imposing upon it the Ideal world he creates within his mind

But how does the poet animate his world? What is it exactly that enables

the poet to 1)'see' the Real world and then 2)'See' the Ideal world. The answer lies

in what S.T. Coleridge called "the armed vision"[42] and what the English Romantics

termed the 'imagination.' Samuel Taylor Coleridge formulated an explanation of

the imagination and its complexities within his <u>Biographia Literaria</u>:

> The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all
> human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of
> creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former,
> co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the
> *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation.
> It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is
> rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is
> essentially *vital*, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.[43]

Coleridge divides the imagination into the *primary* and the *secondary*, and gives to

the secondary imagination the ability to create or synthesize through the subjective

powers of the mind, and to the primary the ability to break apart and analyze in

terms of conscious recognition of the external world. He also characterizes the

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[41] For an explanation of the term 'rationalization' see Ch 2, footnote 1.

[42] Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. <u>Biographia Literaria</u>. Ed. James Engell & W. Jackson Bate. Bollingen Ser. LXXV. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984. 118.

[43] Ibid. 304.

secondary imagination as the more active process, where man operates on the

object while relegating the primary imagination to the more passive process of

being operated on by the object: 1) *man acts upon the object* or 2) *the object acts*

upon the man.[44]

This idea is further expounded upon by P.B. Shelley in his "Defence" where

he writes:

> Two classes of mental action which are called reason and
> imagination, the former may be considered as mind contemplating
> the relations borne by one thought to another, however produced;
> and the latter, as mind acting upon those thoughts so as to colour
> them with its own light, and composing from them, as from
> elements, other thoughts, each containing within itself the principle
> of its own integrity.[45]

Shelley echoes Coleridge's definitions of a 1) *secondary* and 2) *primary*

imaginative faculty with the terms of 1) *imagination* and 2) *reason*.[46] "Reason,"

Shelley goes on to write, "is the enumeration of quantities already known;

imagination of the perception of the value of those quantities, both separately and

as a whole."[47] 'Reason' contemplates the relations of all the minute details in a

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[44] This same idea is touched upon in Wordsworth's exploration of 'fancy' and 'imagination' in his "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, 1815."

[45] Ibid. 944.

[46] William Blake also uses the terms 'reason' and 'imagination' for his distinction of the creative mental faculties.

[47] "Defence." 944.

form of analysis, and 'imagination' subjects those details to a unification process.[48]

These two mental faculties work in harmony together in an effort to acknowledge

the disparate parts while unifying those parts within a greater whole.

Coleridge, and likewise all of the Romantic and Transcendental poets and

philosophers, give primary importance to the 'armed vision of the imagination' and

its ability to be "esemplastic"[49]—its ability to create unity. And it is the idea of

unity that is at the heart of the term 'vision.' For vision is 1) seeing the world as it

is, and coming to an understanding of that world and one's place within it, which

serves as the basis for the more important step 2) of Seeing the world as it could

(possibly) be and Seeing yourself as you could (possibly) be: vision is creating and

integrating identity for the dual purpose of social/civic responsibility and

personal/spiritual fulfillment. And it is here where the poet's being (internal) and

relational sphere (external) come together in a vision (imagination), which creates

mythos (unity)—and mythos derives it power from being both an aesthetic and a

moral expression.

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[48] I will here on out use Shelley's and Blake's terms of 'Reason' and 'Imagination' when describing the different creative mental faculties. *'Primary imagination'* = *analysis* = *'Reason.'* *'Secondary imagination'* = *synthesis* = *'Imagination.'*

[49] Ibid. 168.

II. The Poet's Word: Mythos & Logos

> For poetry was all written before time was, and whenever we
> are so finely organized that we can penetrate into that region where
> the air is music, we hear those primal warblings...The men of more
> delicate ear write down these cadences more faithfully, and these
> transcripts, though imperfect, become the songs of the nations.
> The sign and credentials of the poet are that he announces
> that which no man foretold. He is the true and only doctor; he
> knows and tells; he is the only teller of news, for he was present and
> privy to the appearance which he describes. He is a beholder of
> ideas and an utterer of the necessary and causal. For we do not
> speak now of men of poetical talents, or of industry and skill in
> meter, but of the true poet.
> -Ralph Waldo Emerson; "The Poet"

The poet was historically the maker and bearer of myths. In pre-historic

oral societies the poet developed creative thought, which humans used to express

their 'identity,' and explore that identity in relation to other individuals within their

communities, to other communities, and to those impersonal entities (perceived or

imagined) outside of society, which fell under the terms 'nature,' 'gods' or 'God.'

It is here where the first notions of personal identity were developed in a systematic

formulation of an internal/subjective personality, which had an awareness of, and

relationship with, an external/objective reality. And the objective world was

usually given personal terms in order to 'humanize the non-human.' Like the myth

of Adam, the understanding and subjection of the objective world began by naming

and internalizing the whole of creation.

Primitive, 'pagan' societies developed intricate 'naming and internalizing'

processes, which have come to be known as myth making. These myths gave the

individual/society some sort of 'rational' understanding of the external world,

which in turn produced a symbolic domination and sense of power over 'natural'

forces that were really, well beyond human control.[50] These primitive, rational

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[50] By rational I mean a kind of "psycho-analytic rationalization" based on the individual's/society's verbalized knowledge of itself and the surrounding natural phenomenon, which were both well beyond detailed, 'scientific' knowledge and understanding at the time. Burke, Kenneth. Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose. 3rd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. 17-18, 59-61. Edith Hamilton had this to say on mythological 'rationalization:'

> That is the miracle of Greek mythology—a humanized world of men freed from the paralyzing fear of an omnipotent Unknown....It may seem odd to say that the men who made the myths disliked the irrational and had a love for facts; but it is true, no matter how wildly fantastic some of the stories are. Anyone who reads them with attention discovers that even the most nonsensical take place in a world which is essentially rational and matter of fact. Hamilton, Edith. Mythology. New York: Warner Books, 1999. 17.

And this 'rationalization' process manifested itself as the specific 'myths' composed by specific societies, which served both as a social tool for cohesion and order, and also as a tool for explanation (as of origins of material phenomenon) and teaching. Thus Bernard Knox (paraphrasing an idea of Giambattista Vico) sees Homer and his myth as a product of Greek society and not necessarily of an extraordinary individual: "the poems are the creation of a people, of a tradition, of generations of nameless bards." Knox, Bernard. "Introduction." The Odyssey. Trans. Robert Fagles. New York: Viking, 1996. 17. And within this same idea, but outside of the 'Western' tradition is the Native American 'Medicine Man' who shapes his 'visions' with a similar 'rationalization' process for the purposes of not only embodying the society in myth, but utilizing the myth as a 'means' or an example of how to live. In one story Wakan Tanka the "Great Mystery Spirit" of the Brule Sioux instructs 'The White Buffalo Woman' to give the sacred pipe to the Sioux people. This pipe would then serve as a living symbol of the mythological world in which they live as they smoke and tell their ancient stories: "With this holy pipe," she said, "you will walk like a living prayer. With your feet resting upon the earth and the pipestem reaching into the sky, your body forms a living bridge between the Sacred Beneath and the Sacred Above...The pipe holds them all together [or the myth or vision, of which the pipe is a symbolic representation, 'holds them all together]" (50-51). This same sentiment is echoed by Bronislaw Malinowshi who said, "Myth in its living, primitive form is not merely a story told but a reality lived" (xv). American Indian Myths and Legends. Ed. Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984. xv, 50-51. And to place both the 'rationalization' of myth and the action of 'living a myth' in one more non-Western society, let me turn now to Africa. Janheinz Jahn explains the African tradition of magic and 'Voodoo' as a 'rational' process under the circumstances of its conception and use (and he even defends it somewhat against modern 'science'). He also illustrated the 'rationality' of the not only 'non-literate' modes of African communication, but the 'non-oral' as well. Thus the poetic process of myth making can be extended to "The Creator's Drummer" or "The Divine Drummer" who passed the tribe's mythology down to the people to be lived through the rhythmic beats of the drum and the sacred dances that conjoined. Jahn, Janheinz. Muntu. Trans. Marjorie Grene. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1961. 19, 189.

structures can best be explained within the ancient Greek term "mythos,"[51] which

greatly resembles a process anthropologists have come to call *bricolage*:

> the means by which 'primitive' man carefully and precisely orders,
> classifies and arranges into structures the minutia of the physical
> world in all their profusion by means of a 'logic' which is not our
> own...[the briocolage, or what I would prefer to call 'myth'] so
> satisfactorily 'explain[s]' the world and make[s] it able to be lived
> in.[52]

The anthropological idea of *bricolage* characterizes my definition and use of the

word *mythos*. Mythos is the creation of a 'primitive' (or for my purposes,

subjective) rationalization of the external world. This subjective rationalizing

process has been the common denominator of poetic achievement throughout

history—even more so then the formal languages or words (*logos*) that have been

used to verbalize and transcribe the various historical myths. But mythos is

dependent upon logos, for as Northrop Frye writes, "myths that retain a special

status in society" have to be "translated into logos language."[53] And through the

Biblical figure of Jesus, history provides an example of the powers of the 'Word'—

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[51] The ancient Greek term for 'word' was originally 'mythos' as used by Homer (meaning also, because of the oral nature of the 'word,' that of 'tale' or 'story'), but it gradually changed, sometime around the epoch of the Greek Academy, to the word 'logos' (with the emphasis on the written word). In this essay I will associate Mythos with the English equivalent 'myth' and Logos with 'word.' These two terms will be developed in this essay along the already introduced terms of Content and Form. For purposes of this essay *Mythos = Content* and *Logos = Form*.

[52] Hawkes. T. Structuralism and Semiotics. 1977. qtd. in. Hebdige, Dick. Subculture: The Meaning of Style. London: Routledge, 1996. 103-04.

[53] Frye, Northrop. Words with Power. San Diego: Harvest/ Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992. 33.

mythos and logos—coming together: *Word = mythos + logos*:[54] "a verbal

communication coming form a Word made flesh, a presence in whom the

distinction between the end and means of communication has disappeared."[55] The

pinnacle of the poetic profession has been the expression of the Word.

Aristotle once wrote, "even the lover of myth is in a sense a lover of

wisdom, for myth is composed of wonders."[56] And even within the subjective

structure of mythological thinking there still is relevant truth because

"mythological thinking cannot be superseded...it forms the framework and context

for all thinking."[57] Mythos was the 'origin' of man's quest for knowledge and

understanding and as it was diversified by logos into 'literatures' and 'religions' it

became the ideologies, which formed the basis of philosophical questioning and

social reasoning, and which in turn formed the basis of modern cultures and

cultural identities.

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[54] John: 1.1-3: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being." The New Oxford Annotated Bible. Ed. Bruce M. Metzger & Roland E. Murphy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

[55] Frye. 110.

[56] Aristotle. "Metaphysics." Trans. W. D. Ross. The Complete Works of Aristotle. 1984. Ed. Jonathan Barnes. Vol. 2. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995. 1554.

[57] Frye. xvi.

Mythos derives its power (it's timeless *reason d'être*) from its imaginative freedom to transform and adapt itself as a "model for continuous action."[58] Myth "transcends" logo-logical history because of what philosophers since Plato have supposed to be its very "weakness" or "danger:" subjective 'untruth.' But its very 'fictive' and imaginative nature is what resists concrete logos-definition, and because of this very fact 'historical' ideologies come and go, but myth remains free to exist within and without our 'histories:' "the point is not that the myth falsifies history, but that history, the continuous record of what ascendant ideologies do, falsifies primary concern."[59] The purpose of myth has been to give the individual/society symbolic power over, and understanding of, its history by highlighting those 'historical' personages or deeds, which resonate with symbolic meaning applicable to the society and its cultural (i.e. identity) development.

Our 20th century understanding of the word 'myth' is synonymous with the negative connotations of untruth and illusion, but as Northrop Frye points out illusions do not have to be negative:

> There are two kinds of illusion: the negative illusion that merely fails to be an objective reality, and the positive illusion which is a potential, a something hoped for that can be actualized by a creative effort…Nothing except a positive illusion can possibly have a future. Reality is something that obviously changes only on its own terms: as far as we are concerned, its future has already occurred.

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[58] Frye. 117.

[59] Frye. 60-1.

> To realize an illusion is to abolish its future and turn it into a
> presence.[60]

It is the 'illusory' quality of myth that gives it its power: the power to transcend

history and time. Until a myth is 'realized'—that is, turned into a reality—it

remains an illusion and outside the limits of reality—it remains a possibility—but

once a myth comes into time and history as an ideology it trades its power of

abstract transcendence for the power of personal/societal motivation—it becomes a

certainty and bears all the consolations that certainty brings. And by 'certainty' I

do not mean a 'universal truth' or 'fact' provable by the scientific method, but a

'practical factuality' as Frye explains:

> mythology is not a proto-science: it expresses human beliefs and
> fears and anxieties and passions and aggressions, in its context of a
> tradition or revelation…mythology is not primarily interested in the
> speculative, much less the factual: it is a structure of practical
> human concern.[61]

Myth derives ethical value from its ability to address those personal "beliefs and

fears," which hold a central place within the human psyche. Myth—found

solidified in the forms of literature and religion—has the ability to address the

human need to 'believe,' and in this act comes the power "that turns the illusory

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[60] Frye. 131. Frye's use of the term 'illusion' resembles a great deal R.W. Emerson's term 'fate.' Both speak of latent potential lying within human ability and the need to disregard limits, strive through strength of will to act upon the external world, and measure limitations *after* the act is attempted. Even Freud attributes to illusions the ability to be "substitutive satisfactions," which can temporarily diminish the pain of life through "pleasure" and "consolation." Freud, Sigmund. Civilization and Its Discontents. Trans. James Strachey. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961. 24, 31.

[61] Frye. 31-2.

into the real."[62] Through an awareness and understanding of the symbolic structures of myth, human beings began to control and subdue their external environment through the formulation of complex theories of identity based upon the individual's growing knowledge of the external world. And it is within the mind of the poet where reality and illusion converge: "The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a heav'n of hell, a hell of heav'n."[63]

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[62] Frye. 129. The poet builds his "castles in the air" "with a real foundation" as Ibsen once wrote. Ibsen, Henrik. "The Master Builder." Henrik Ibsen: Four Major Plays. Trans. James Mcfarlane & Jens Arup. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992. 342. And Freud's relation of 'illusion' with 'consolation' also echoes his linkage of 'illusion' with 'wish fulfillment' played out in the dreaming mind utilizing mythological symbol structures. Freud, Sigmund. On Dreams. Trans. James Strachey. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1980. August Strindberg combined both of these metaphors—Ibsen and the poet's creation of myth with Freud and the dreamer's search for wish fulfillment:

Daughter. "Then you know what poetry is...
Poet. "Then I know what dreams are...---what is poetry?
Daughter. "Not reality, but more than reality...not dreams, but waking dreams...
Poet. "And people believe we poets only play...invent and make believe.

Strindberg, August. "A Dream Play." August Strindberg: Miss Julie and Other Plays. Trans. Michael Ronbinson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. 230.

[63] Milton, John. "Paradise Lost." The Complete Poetical Works of John Milton. Ed. Douglas Bush. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965. Book I, 255-56.

III. The Word Divided

> The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could perceive...
>
> Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of & enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their object: thus began Priesthood.
>
> Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales.
>
> And at length they pronounced that the Gods had ordered such things.
>
> Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast.
>
> -William Blake; "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell"

To liken human beings to "God" or the "gods" is an old idea and to claim that humans are "God" or can aspire to be a "god," while always a controversial claim, is also rooted in the very origins of human thought. In the Bible, Adam and Eve thought such, as did some of the Greek and Roman poets who made gods out to be like men and, conversely, men to be like gods. The backbone of Greek stoicism and, likewise, the Buddhist faith was that men have the ability to master their material bodies and, with the aid of our mind, attain the spiritual heights of the "gods" and beyond—toward Nirvana.

But there is a great chasm though (which is as old as these ideas) between aspiring to be like "God" or becoming a "god" and actually attaining deification. It is interesting that in both the Christian and the Greek creation myths man's sole 'claim' to 'God-hood' (Wisdom—Knowledge) is in fact a stolen birthright. Prometheus stole Wisdom from Zeus, and Adam & Eve stole the 'Knowledge of

Good and Evil' from God. So one could argue that while man has the power or ability to be a "god" or like "God," it is an alien power, and man has never completely been sure how to use it towards his best interests.

The Greek word ποιετεσ "poietes," which means "maker," "shaper," and "former," hints towards the creative potential lying deep within every human being. The ability to create has been a fundamental drive for both God and man, and hence it is seen as the keystone of divinity. Of course in the myths passed down to man through the ages, there has been the recurring metaphor of a fallen world subject to time and decay. And the beauty of creation soon falls prey to the violence of destruction. The Hindu Triad composed of Brahma, the creator, Vishnu, the maintainer, and Shiva, the destroyer is a metaphor for the mutability of life. Life and death (Heaven and Hell) remain locked in an eternal struggle and man is placed within the middle of these titan forces—drawn half to rise and half to fall: "to every man is given the key to heaven; the same key opens the gates of hell."[64] The poet

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[64] A Buddhist proverb. qtd. by. Feynman, Richard. "The Value of Science." Harper's 299.1791 (August 1999) : 19. This particular dualism, raised from Eastern mysticism, Manichean thought, and Neo-Platonism can be seen applied to the evolution of mankind in the late 16th and early 17th centuries in the works of Montaigne and Pascal. Pascal, more so than Montaigne, develops his philosophy on this premise: "what is humanity in nature? A nothingness compared to the infinite, everything compared to a nothingness, a mid-point between nothing and everything, infinitely far from understanding the extremes." Pascal, Blaise. Pensees and Other Writings. Trans. Honor Levi. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995. 67. The 18th century 'Age of Reason' gloried in man as "animal rationale," which placed man on par with 'God,' but there were still skeptics such as Swift, who labeled man "rationis capax" (capable of reason) and Pope, whose "Essay on Man" echoed Pascal's judgements: "In doubt to deem himself a god, or beast...Still by himself abused, or disabused; / Created half to rise, and half to fall...The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!" Pope, Alexander. "An Essay on Man." The Norton Anthology of English Literature. Ed. M.H. Abrams. 6th ed. Vol. 1. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993. 2270. This discussion becomes much more dark and pessimistic with Nietzsche and then with 20th century thinkers like Freud whose belief in "homo homini lupus" (Man is a wolf to man) led him to predict that human nature was leading toward self-destruction: Freud felt he could offer 'no consolation' on the future of mankind. Freud, Sigmund. Civilization and Its Discontents. Trans. James Strachey. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961. 69,111.

as author of these myths of gods and supermen[65] has given mankind numerous

examples and teachings on the nature of existence and experience, and on the very

real ability of man to both create and destroy. And the poet has given mankind,

time and again, the key to heaven, but rarely has mankind used it for the right door:

Hell is a choice.

III.a. Mythos in Motion

> Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and the
> circumference of knowledge.
> -Shelley; "A Defence of Poetry"

Within the endless cycle of history,[66] the poet dreams the dreams of society

and reminds mankind that "whatever human beings have made human beings can

remake."[67] Various 'hells' have existed within history because of the choices of

mankind, but it is the poet who, in the midst of hells, can see heavens and try to

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[65] "Alas, there are so many things between heaven and earth of which only the poets have dreamed. / And especially above the heavens: for all gods are poets' parables, poets' prevarications" Nietzsche, Fredric. Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Penguin Books, 1978. 128.

[66] Some religions, like Christianity and Islam, see 'time' as linear with a definite beginning and ending. Others, like Hinduism and Buddhism, see 'time' as cyclical and man trapped on the wheel of history (the wheel of Samsara) because he has not earned his way 'out.' The natural seasonal pattern of birth, growth, decay, death, and re-birth (spring, summer, fall, winter, spring) is a recurrent metaphor in both 'prehistoric' history and the history of 'civilizations,' and it can be seen as linear if one imagines a beginning and ending to the cycle.

[67] Frye, Northrop. Words with Power. San Diego: Harvest/ Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992. 82.

usher them into being. Sir Philip Sydney alluded to this power when he described the two essential ingredients that comprised what he thought to be a 'true' poet: the poet is both the Greek ποιετεσ "poietes"—"maker" (based on the Greek word ποιειϡν "to make")—and the Latin "vates"—a visionary and a prophet.[68] The poet is both creator and prophet; 'Seeing' into the future and creating the present out his vision.[69]

Sydney went on to describe the three 'types' of poetry: 1) the 'religious,' 2) the 'philosophical,' and 3) 'poetry.' The later, as explored in the last chapter, is based upon the formation of myth through the utilization of vision. It is this—the art of poetry— which Sydney claimed to be the highest state of creative-man and, thereby, he proclaimed the poet as the most valued personage within society:

> For these third be they which most properly do imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be; but range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be and should be. These be they that, as the first and most noble sort may justly be termed vates, so these are waited on in the excellentest languages and best understandings with the fore-described name of poets.[70]

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[68] Sidney, Sir Philip. "A Defence of Poetry." Ed. J. A. Van Dorsten. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. 21-22.

[69] As noted in the last chapter, the poet creates an 'illusion,' which in fact is a 'potential' and if worked towards and realized it can become a 'reality.' The prophetic capabilities of the poet is twofold. One is based on the previous idea of bringing 'potential' reality into being and the second part, as will be discussed latter in the essay, is the poet's ability to 'read' history as Marxists belive, and make 'predictions' based upon historical analysis and contextual reasoning.

[70] Sidney. 26-27.

Here the poet is not just a creator of words, but is in fact a visionary prophet who creates new worlds out of "what may be and should be." This characterizes the ideas behind the word 'visionary' already discussed and what Blake called the "Poetic Genius:" they both describe the 'true' poet's gift of 'Sight.' The poet uses his vision to create a myth (mythos), using the particular words and symbols (logos) of his time. And when the logos passes away the mythos remains and reinvents itself, or, more appropriately, it literally reincarnates itself through the visions and words of future poets: In the beginning was the "Word" (the union of mythos and logos) and the "Word" is eternal because of the previously mentioned power of mythos to recreate itself within new logos oriented contexts.

The poet is the creative center of his society because of his vision, which gives him power over, and understanding of the "Word." It is the poet who sees and knows both the past and the future and is, therefore, both the agitator and the preserver of his society:

> I think of a poet, in relation to his society, as being at the center of a cross like a plus sign. The horizontal bar forms the social and ideological conditioning that made him intelligible to his contemporaries, and in fact to himself. The vertical bar is the mythological line of decent from previous poets back to Homer (the usual symbolic starting point) which carries on into our own time.[71]

The poet takes the existing language and culture of his present society and with these tools the poet harkens back to the past and sees the present in relation to its history— determining the present—coursing for the future. The poet creates out of

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[71] Frye. 47.

time a history for the present. The poet creates a myth to give the present both

context and meaning:

> He [the poet] is the rock of defence of human nature; an upholder
> and preserver, carrying every where with him relationship and love.
> In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners,
> of laws and customs, in spite of things silently gone out of mind and
> things violently destroyed, the Poet binds together by passion and
> knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the
> whole earth, and over all time...Poetry is the first and last of all
> knowledge.[72]

The poet, for this reason, is both inside and outside of what we call history.

The poet is not concerned with the myriad facts that sit upon dusty, shelves

decomposing into irrelevance. The poet instead takes those 'facts' that weave a

natural pattern throughout time, and whose relation to the present holds particular

insight and meaning:

> mythology tends to see history as a sequence, not of unique events,
> but of repetitions of model or pattern situations...the mythical
> structures developed by literature are not anti-historical, but counter-
> historical: they transpose a historical theme into the present tense,
> and hence modify or alter features that emphasize the pastness of the
> past.[73]

The poet takes the past as an external object and in the process of 'imitating' or

'creating' history the poet makes his subjective mark in both his selection and his

presentation of the 'facts.' The poet then derives 'meaning' out of history through

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[72] Wordsworth, William. "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads (1802)." William Wordsworth. Ed. Stephen Gill. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984. 606.

[73] Frye. 56.

the relevance these 'facts' have in the present, and could potentially have in the future.

> To me myth is not simply an effect of a historical process, but a social vision that looks toward a transcending of history, which explains how it is able to hold two periods of history together, the author's and ours, in direct communication...[the mythical vision] do[es] not denigrate history, but help[s] to clarify its function.[74]

Myth creates a pattern out of historical events and creates a historical context for the present. The 'understanding' of the past has as its purpose the application of that historical contextualization toward the prevention of recourse into history's faults and toward the transcendence of history's glories.

The poet, in addition to being at the heart of his society, can also be seen to reside in a 'Nirvana' or a 'God like position' circumscribing the whole of the historical context. In this position, the poet creates both time's beginning and ending[75] while he looks in on temporal history and contextually appraises the wheel of time. And as the world—in eternal revolutions of pain and pleasure—goes on, the poet tries to produce a paradise in the present by striving toward a 'heaven' in the midst of history. The poet's mythos is a mimesis of history. In the act of

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[74] Frye. 60-1.

[75] If there is a 'beginning of time' or will be 'an end of time' it is really beyond our place to speculate. All we know for certain is our present situation with varying degrees of certainty about the not too distant past. But in order to create a fuller context to the discussion, postulations concerning both the beginning and ending of time have been made to facilitate a more complete understanding of the present, and out of concern for the future. In this way metaphysicians and religions speculate on the remote regions of time for the purpose, I would argue, of more accurately appraising our present understanding. Speculations, like 'illusions' discussed in the last chapter, are neither true nor false. They are simply mental constructions, which help to facilitate our understanding of an immensely complicated and possibly impenetrable mystery, which we know as 'existence.'

recreating it, the poet makes history an objective reality (gives it an identity), and

thus makes it tangibly available for contextual reference and personal meaning.

III.b. Mythos in Decay

> Every spirit makes its house; but afterwards the house confines the
> spirit.
> -Ralph Waldo Emerson; "Fate"

The Aristotelian philosophical model begins with the end: "The end aimed

at is, then, the starting-point of our thought, the end of our thought the starting-

point of action."[76] Socrates spent his life trying to explain why one must actively

search for 'Ideals' and 'Truth' and not just accept what is passed off in their name.

This in turn paved the way for the speculative visions of Plato. Plato created a

philosophy out of trying to explain what our ends should be and focused on the

limitless possibilities that man could (and should) attain through the infinite

faculties of dialectical logic and metaphysical speculation. Aristotle was brought

up on the ideas of the first two, but focused his search primarily on exploring the

means, with which one could use to attain these Ideal ends.[77] Aristotle neglected

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[76] Aristotle. "Eudemian Ethics." Trans. W. D. Ross. The Complete Works of Aristotle. 1984. Ed. Jonathan Barnes. Vol. 2. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995. 1945. This premise is based on an 'Ideal'—an end of human thought—which one then tries to map their way toward with thought and then attain with action.

[77] Aristotle's 'Ideal ends' were based on both the speculations of Plato combined with the Socratic notion of happiness (eudemics), which Aristotle developed into a systematic ethics.

an exploration of the 'end'—the content—of thought and instead focused on the 'means'—the form—of making thought a reality.

And when one is primarily concerned with the 'means' of thought, distinctions and judgments are made based upon 'expediency' and 'feasibility.' The poet's creation of the Word fell under the scrutiny of a 'new logic' and the Word was divided into parts.[78] The poet who was at one time the holder of both philosophy and religion, and who had once combined the two within mythos, was divorced from his creation. While the poet still held a certain exalted place within society, his authority and integrity came to be questioned, as were the gods and myths that he had created. The poet's authority based on subjective, associative reasoning was attacked by a new form of 'objective' logic based solely on the restricted confines of verified, sensory information and qualitative judgments. Plato's banning of poets from his 'Ideal' republic and labeling their products as a luxury was the first step in a larger devaluation of the poet within society, but in historical hindsight, Plato's indictment against poets was not so damaging as Aristotle's rhetorical analysis of their craft.

Sir Philip Sidney once divided poetry upon classifications inherited from the classical world: 1) the mytho-poetic, 2) religion, and 3) philosophy. But he gave to the mytho-poetic the greater accolades because he knew that it embraced

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[78] What happens is that the parts are analyzed by themselves and then qualified as a sum total, which replaces (destroys) the unity of the poetic expression. The idea falls under the distinction Camus makes in The Rebel between "Totality" and "Unity"—Totality is a collection of parts forced together as a whole, while Unity is an organic synthesis of parts contributing to a greater whole, which at once brings together and binds the parts as one.

the other two within its magnitude. It was the Ancient poets who carried histories, philosophies, and religions within their myths. In non-literate societies these myths were passed down through oral traditions, which then came, with the advent of literacy, to be written into formal languages and grammars.[79] The advent of literacy separated the Word into mythos and logos, which caused their relationship to become more and more disjointed as the solidification of cultural expression (logos) into language precipitated the solidification of cultural ideas (mythos) into institutions.

In The Rhetoric of Religion, Kenneth Burke stresses man's "relationship to the *word* 'God,'"[80] which can be seen to reflect the evolutionary "ascendancy of dialectician over poet" since the times of Plato and Aristotle, where logos was first used as "an ideological rhetoric assumed to be controlled by dialectic,"[81] and has since evolved with formalist philosophy into purely rhetorical endeavors. Burke's 20th century concentration on logos as a "terministic concern,"

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[79] The Upanishads and Vedas of the Hindus, the teachings of the Buddha, Zoroastrianism, The Old and New testament books of the Bible, the Tao, the Qur'an, and the epics of Homer and many other orally based texts are all what we would now consider 'religious texts' and, at different points in time, were the basis of various world religions. The scope of religious thought dealt in the speculative areas of metaphysical concern for, as I have already argued, greater context and insight in dealing with the external, objective and internal, subjective worlds of human experience. But religion as it became solidified and 'posited' onto a culture and populace lost the dynamics of mythos for the permanence and power of ideology.

[80] Burke, Kenneth. The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970. vi. Burke focuses on the *logos* and not the *mythos* of 'God' in order to understand mankind's attachment to language's particular expressions and our obliviousness to the root origins of the words within our own cultural mythos.

[81] Frye. 33.

however, is not just for the sake of rhetorical argument, but in an effort to "balance" the ideas of mythos. He makes an effort to 'keep mythology honest' by re-evaluating what a myth is really 'saying' to the society in which it is embedded.[82]

For mythology has the potential to exert a certain power over a society because of the fact that "ideology is an applied mythology" and that the "mythology, good or bad, creates the ideology, good or bad."[83] And the ideologies that myth creates are empowered by the logos in the form of doctrine:

> And insofar as men "cannot life by bread alone," they are moved by doctrine, which is to say, they derive purposes from language, which tells them what they "ought" to want to do, tells them how to do it, and in the telling goads them with great threats and promises, even unto the gates of heaven and hell.[84]

When myth is solidified into ideology, it is first written into logos language, and then the particular formal arrangement of the words is turned into a distinct doctrine. Here Aristotle's concrete *logos* language supercedes the *mythos* of the poet, and philosophy and poetry began to go their separate ways. It also marks the ascendancy of 'religion' as a separate and distinct path of knowledge driven by 'doctrine.'[85] The 'Word' becomes divided and the quest for knowledge once based

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[82] Burke. 14.

[83] Frye. 23, 25.

[84] Burke. 274.

[85] This is again, a reflection of Hegel's theory of positivity where the social/political realm converts the fluid ideas of mythos into rigid institutions based on logos.

on the Word (*logos* & *mythos*) now becomes a quest for knowledge of, and for, the word alone (logos). The Word gives way to logos, and logos becomes an ideology, and then the ideology becomes a doctrine solidifying a particular interpretation of the mythos into a stagnant identity. Religion is then built upon the rock-like stability of these identities and codified into holy, rule-books, which wields the power to distinguish those who share in the elected identity and those who do not. 'Hell' becomes a punishment and heaven a reward for the select few.

IV. The Word's Rebirth

> After all not to create only, or found only,
> But to bring perhaps from afar what is already founded,
> To give it our own identity, average, limitless, free,
> To fill the gross the torpid bulk with vital religious fire,
> Not to repel or destroy so much as accept, fuse, rehabilitate,
> To obey as well as command, to follow more than to lead,
> These also are the lessons of our New World;
> While how little the New after all, how much the Old, Old
>   World!
>
>   -Walt Whitman; "Song of the Exposition"

Over the ages of linear history mythos becomes more and more reliant and dependent upon logos language, which then develops into more and more fractionalized ideologies. These ideologies are then formulated into more complexly written doctrines, and these doctrinal codes of conduct soon replaces the dynamic mythos, and in turn solidifies identity into negative 'Laws' segregating one society from another. The Biblical story of the "10 commandments"—"Thou shalt not"—sets a sort of prophetic precedence for the complex systems of religious/political laws, which give rise to religious/political institutions.[86] But the true poet knows that only mythos and logos together—only the "Word made

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[86] Judaism's "Torah," Plato's "Republic" and "Laws," Paul's "doctrines of faith," Mohammed's "Qur'an," and the Hindu Caste system all are based upon 'negative,' 'thou shalt not' commandments, which demand a separation between an 'us' and a 'them.' And when these 'Laws' are incorporated within a religious/political institution such as a sect or a party, or on a larger scale such as a state or empire, these 'Laws' are used as justification for the disruption, destruction, and dominance over 'other,' 'opposed' societies or institutions. The 'other' poses a threat to the power dynamics of the 'us' by the very existence of another alternative identity or ideology, which could vie for supremacy. The Judaic 'Promised Land could only be inhabited by 'God's chosen people' after the extinction of the Cannanites.

flesh"—can bring about revelation and revolution, which would give society a vital meaning and worth without the dangers of dogmas and institutional credos.

During the rise of logos as ideology and doctrine, the mytho-poetic can find itself displaced by religion and philosophy and subject to the categories of either one or both of these dominant modes of expression. For a time religion can dominate (and has dominated) both poetry and philosophy leaving little outside the bounds of doctrinal law and stringent metaphysical belief.[87] But the true poetic spirit does not die that easily and even though the power of mythos can be ignored it has never been (nor ever could be) destroyed. A poetic renaissance can shake the roots of religion free from the logos ruled ideologies and doctrines. The Word has the timeless ability to reinterpret and reinvigorate the current, cultural contexts to challenge the authority and validity of those ideologies and doctrines, which destroy the human capacity to create and express dynamic identity.

IV.a. Reincarnation of the Word

> For the experience of each new age requires a new confession, and
> the world seems always waiting for its poet.
> -Emerson; "The Poet"

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[87] The 'Middle Ages' are marked by the destructiveness of religious and feudal wars and the relative absence of large-scale artistic expression until (within the Islamic and Christian worlds) the first millenium AD when the renaissance brought renewed interest in cultural and artistic endeavors. But by and large the greatest source of 'mythological' thinking and production occurred at this time orally through folk traditions or artistically and orally through the Medieval conception of the 'illuminated book' and the reading/teaching of it (in most cases the Bible) to an illiterate community.

Jelaluddin Rumi,[88] in his poem "Only Breath," also characterized the nature

of the true poet as I have already discussed the concept in this essay. Rumi

believed the poet to be outside of time and all the temporal—logos—prisons of

religion, ideologies, and culture. The poet could be both the center and the

circumference of history and could mediate the past, present, and future in the

ultimate context of unity:

> Not Christian or Jew or Muslim, not Hindu,
> Buddhist, sufi, or zen. Not any religion
>
> or cultural system. I am not from the East
> or the West, not out of the ocean or up
>
> from the ground, not natural or ethereal, not
> composed of elements at all. I do not exist,
>
> am not an entity in this world or the next,
> did not descend from Adam and Eve or any
>
> origin story. My place is placeless, a trace
> of the traceless. Neither body or soul.
>
> I belong to the beloved, have seen the two
> worlds as one and that one call to and know,
>
> first, last, outer, inner, only that
> breath breathing human being.[89]

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[88] 13ᵗʰ Century Islamic, Sufi poet who was originally named Jelaluddin Balkhi. Smith, Hurston. "Introduction." The Essential Rumi. Trans. Coleman Barks et. al. New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1998. xi-xvi.

[89] Rumi. The Essential Rumi. Trans. Coleman Barks et. al. New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1998. 32.

Rumi invokes an image of the true poet who is at one and the same time within and without the world of men. The poet does "not exist" in the traditional sense of 'being' exclusively formed from his society and societal institutions nor is he formed by the language (logos) of the present context; nor is the poet described as originating in, or belonging to a certain place or time: the poet is "traceless" and "placeless." What defines and gives life to the poet is his breath or his spirit. It is the same breath attributed to God who created the world by animating dust and it is the same spirit, which descended upon men to give them inspiration and holy gifts.[90] The poet uses this same spirit and this same breath to create his world with vision and animate the dusty flesh of history with the Word.

The poet's 'breath' is his life, and his existence (or non-existence) in society is predicated upon his ability to "[see] the two / worlds as one and that one call to and know:" the poet creates historical unity through myth. In Rumi's poem "Unfold Your Own Myth" he wrote:

> But don't be satisfied with stories, how things
> have gone with others. Unfold
> your own myth, without complicated explanation,
> so everyone will understand the passage,
> We have opened you.[91]

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[90] This first metaphor is both Christian and Islamic and comes from the stories of the creation of man in the book of Genius and various verses in the Qur'an (15:29; 21:91; 32:9; and 38:72). The second metaphor is Christian and is found in the descending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in the book of Acts.

[91] Rumi. 41.

Who is it that Rumi is talking to in this passage—the "you?" He could be speaking to a general audience, or more specifically to an audience of disciples, or he could be speaking to those current or future poets who will carry on the tradition of the Word. But then who is the "We?" Is not Rumi speaking alone? The "We" could be Rumi and his wandering dervish friend Shams, or Rumi and his 'God,' or it could be Rumi and past poets who have created the myths that have inspired the Word. For my purposes I will say it is the later, which really encompasses all three. The "We" that "have opened" is Rumi and his poetic tradition calling the "you" of the poem to create original myths from the inspiration of those poets who have gone before. Rumi is literally re-inspiring the mthyo-poetic breath of God, found in the Word of poets past—giving to both the present and the future a vision, which will "open" the eyes of poets and enable them to "see the two / worlds [the past and the future] as one [the present]." Rumi was (and is) calling for poetic heirs of the Word.

IV.b. Recapitulation & Recreation

> There is that in me—I do not know what it is—but I know
>   it is in me...
> I do not know it—it is without name—it is a word unsaid...
> The past and present wilt—I have fill'd them, emptied them,
> And proceed to fill my next fold of the future...
>   -Walt Whitman; "Song of Myself"

Dante Alighieri began his <u>Divine Comedy</u> by following the ghost of

Virgil—"my master and my author, you— / the only one from whom my writing

drew / the noble style for which I have been honored."[92] Virgil represents, to return

to the previous example of Rumi, the "We" that "have opened" (the poets of the

Word) and Dante is the "you" (the new creating artist). Thus Virgil inspires Dante

to write his epic, and is the guiding 'spirit' or breath behind Dante's Word: "Poet,

you who are my guide."[93] Dante took up the call of the poet and began on his

journey of myth making, and used the mytho-poetic to produce an extraordinary

unity of logos and mythos in his new inspiration of the Word.

But did Dante create an 'original' myth or did he just borrow on older and

existing mythological currencies. One could argue both for and against the notion

that Dante created his 'own' myth by following two strains of thought: 1) he either

uses, or 2) is used, by the Christian religion and its symbols, which dominated,

again through ideology and doctrine, the cultural context of his time. But there is

fine line between these two options and Dante, I would argue, dances right down

the middle of it.

> The artist qua artist neither doubts nor believes his religion: he sees
> what it means, and he knows how to illustrate it. His religion
> performs two great services for him. It provides him with a
> generally understood body of symbols, and it puts into his hands the

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[92] Alighieri, Dante. <u>Inferno</u>. Trans. Allen Mandelbaum. N.p.: Quality Paperback Book Club, [c. 1981]. 6.

[93] Alighieri. 12.

visionary masterpieces on which it is founded: the Bible particularly, in the case of Christian poets.[94]

Dante illustrates the degrees by which a poet can come to create an 'original' myth. He used those sets of symbols[95] that were symbolic currency at the time in both the artistic, religious, and political realm and redefined them through his new artistic context. "All true thought is but recapitulation,"[96] and one could argue that all true myth is also just recapitulation. The past and present meet again within the flesh of a poet, but a new past and a new present recreates the old mythos, and revitalizes it to meet the needs of the new historical context.

This idea of recapitulation and recreation of thought (or history), to flash forward some 400 years, makes its way into the thought of Karl Marx when he wrote,

> Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please, they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstance directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.[97]

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[94] Frye, Northrop. Fearful Symmetry. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990. 118. Frye argues thus for William Blake, another myth-creating poet who uses the Christian religion in subversive ways within his mytho-poetic structure.

[95] The symbolism is predominately Christian in its scope, but Dante relies heavily upon the pagan myths of the Romans and to a certain extent the Greeks. Most of the proper names of people and places bear some relation to Roman mythology and/or the contemporary Italian, political scene.

[96] The Lord, in Kenneth Burke's theo/logo-logical drama "Prologue in Heaven," makes this pronouncement. Burke, Kenneth. The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970. 284.

[97] Qtd. in. Hebdige, Dick. Subculture: The Meaning of Style. London: Routledge, 1996. 80.

So William Blake's notion of "I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Man's. / I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create"[98] illustrates Marx's problematic: the poet strives for originality and creativity within his own current context, but the tools that the poet uses to "Create a System" are those very tools, which history has passed down to him. They are, therefore, (as Marx points out) clearly "another Man's" (or another time's, i.e. the past's). They are not the poets unique creation, but instead his inheritance.

What we see in Dante's myth then, is a type of *collage*, which draws upon the poet's 'original' mytho-poetic vision and combines it within the structured archetype myths of history, and links them both within the doctrine of Christianity (the prevailing religion of the time). This collage then comes to create a mythos that is not entirely pagan and not entirely Christian, but assuredly the unique product of a visionary poet. Dante's 'myth' is the creation of a visionary poet within history animating *that time* and *that place* using *that culture* and *its symbols*.

But what makes The Divine Comedy so extraordinary, however, is the fact that Dante also worked outside of history. The poem has the unique ability to *transcend* that time, and that place, and that culture and its symbols, and speak in a trans-historical, mytho-poetic language, which future generations can then appreciate. What makes this possible is the very process of *collage*. Dante drew upon the mythos of his predecessors and he recapitulated and recreated it, and in

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[98] Blake, William. "Jerusalem." Blake's Poetry and Designs. Ed. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979. 316.

doing so passed his history on to future generations so they could add their part and carry on the mythos tradition. The mythological past (the common denominator for each generation of poets) is what Dante used as his mytho-poetic base and by doing so he revitalized the trans-historical mythos and allowed it to be carried further into the future. The past is never superseded, but blends itself in each generation that would acknowledge and accept its gift. The archetypal mythological forms of the past are the starting-point for the succeeding poet as he creates his 'new' myth, built out of the older mythos. The past is the poet's outline, which he uses to gage the proportions of the present and map a course for the future.

IV.c. Subversion & Subterfuge?

> Do I contradict myself?
> Very well then I contradict myself,
> (I am large, I contain multitudes.)
>   -Walt Whitman; "Song of Myself"

> Should we abandon our gods for the sake of an insane poet?
>   -The Qur'an; 37:36

The same mytho-poetical process of collage that we see in Dante's work is also to be found in the work of another extraordinary, visionary poet: John Milton. But something interesting happened to the process of collage when Milton proceeded to use it in shaping his masterpiece <u>Paradise Lost</u>. What happened, I would argue, is what modern Sociologists call *bricolage*:

> Together, object and meaning constitute a sign, and, within any one culture, such signs are assembled, repeatedly, into characteristic forms of discourse. However, when the bricoleur re-locates the significant object in a different position within that discourse, using the same overall repertoire of signs, or when that object is placed within a different total ensemble, a new discourse is constituted, a different message conveyed.[99]

What Milton does is use the agreed upon 'object/meaning' 'signs' of Christianity within Paradise Lost, but proceeds to re-locate significant Christian objects in different positions within that discourse, and thus convey a different message then that of traditional Christian theology—so much so that theologists like C. S. Lewis had to justify the poem as still 'fitting' within the scope of acceptable Christian doctrine.

Milton, in his effort to "justify the ways of God to Men,"[100] seemed to use the poem to actually justify the ways of Satan to men. Milton's only justification for the ways of God is "Solicit not thy thought with matters hid: / Leave them to God above, him serve and fear,"[101] and this argument of 'don't ask—just accept' falls somewhat flat against Satan's argument of "To thee no reason, who know'st only good, / But evil hast not tried."[102] Satan investigates whether or not God's

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[99] This is the same anthropological term introduced earlier, but it is given a new meaning in relation to a modern culture's and/or sub-culture's subversion of hegemony. Clarke, J. Qtd. in. Hebdige, Dick. Subculture: The Meaning of Style. London: Routledge, 1996. 104.

[100] Milton, John. Paradise Lost. The Complete Poetical Works of John Milton. Ed. Douglas Bush. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965. Book I, 24-26.

[101] Milton. VIII, 167-68.

[102] Milton. IV, 895-6.

universe is run under questionable assumptions and suggests that perhaps God's

principles of 'good = ignorance' and 'evil = knowledge' is in fact pervious to

critique.

Some English Romantic poets saw Milton's Satan as admirable and used

him as a symbol within their own mytho-poetic discourse. P. B. Shelley likened his

hero Prometheus to Milton's Satan.[103] Shelley's Prometheus is the noble deity who

"def[ies] Power, which seems omnipotent" and is, at the end of the poem, "Good,

great and joyous, beautiful and free."[104] And William Blake, in his poem "The

Marriage of Heaven and Hell," commented directly upon Milton's act of bricolage:

> But in Milton; the Father is Destiny, the Son, a Ration of the
> five senses. & the Holy-ghost, Vacuum!
> Note. The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of
> Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he
> was a true Poet and of the Devils party without knowing it.[105]

For Blake saw the nobility of reason given only to Satan who uses it in turn to

question the tyrannous authority of an omnipotent and jealous God.

So what then is the point of Milton's seeming subterfuge of the position of

God and Satan. Some say that the answer lies in the historical allusions of the

poem, some that Milton was exploring the theological tensions surrounding

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[103] Shelley makes his hero "exempt," although, from certain "taints" that Milton had given his Satan. Shelley, Percy Bysshe. "Preface to Prometheus Unbound." The Complete Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley / with Notes by Mary Shelley. New York: The Modern Library, 1994. 226.

[104] Shelley. 293.

[105] Blake, William. "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell." The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake. Ed. David V. Erdman. New York: Doubleday, 1988. 35.

Christianity, and some, like C. S. Lewis, go out of their way to say that nothing is amiss and all is as it should be. What I am suggesting is that all three are operating simultaneously, with or without Milton's complete comprehension of what he did.[106]

Milton's myth was based, again, partly on the existing myths and symbols of his time, and partly on his own creative-visionary genius, with which, in the act of collage, he created a mytho-poetic expression of his own symbolic understanding of the world around him. But as Milton's vision (mythos) took shape and was communicated into words (logos), I think that, more than likely, Milton didn't quite grasp what his vision meant. His own personal confrontation with, and indecision about, his present context (in both the political and the religious sphere) seeped into his mythological creation and reared its head by subverting his original context of "justify the ways of God to Men," with another context he wouldn't or couldn't, at that time, put directly into words—namely, God's ways[107] were not rationally justifiable. And perhaps he was also thinking that religion was not rationally justifiable either.

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[106] And as G. B. Shaw said of Ibsen: "the existence of a discoverable and perfectly definite thesis in a

poet's work by no means depends on the completeness of his own intellectual consciousness of it. Shaw, G. B. The Quintessence of Ibsenism. New York: Dover Publications, INC., 1994. viii.

[107] 'God's ways' here could mean both the Christian religion's God and even the power structure of monarchy.

The poet, whether he is fully conscious of his message or not, produces both a recapitulation of history and a recreation of mythos for the purpose of contextual identification with the past, while asserting the primacy of the present's search for an identity. The poet's Word is a dynamic balance of both mythos and logos and within this unity comes the presentation and preservation of its transcendental power. But once the unity of the Word is broken and mythos and logos become divorced myth loses its essential value.

Religion can come to usurp mythos by solidifying it into ideologies and then into institutional dogmas. The poet, confronted with a suspension of mythos-transference, can recreate the Word in new visions and challenge its existing degradation. Religion and the poet's Word, once contained within the other, can come to be at odds within history as each vies for a position within the ideological structure of a society. When and if the poet looses his place to religion, he comes to turn his poetry almost completely to the act of subversion and Milton is a representative of the Romantic tradition of poetic dissent (whether he consciously chose this position or not). But even within the poet's reactionary drama of subverting organized religion, he still keeps the essential nature of spiritual thought within his preservation of the sleeping Word and thus it can wake every now and again in visions of new mythos/logos-creations materializing under the cover of 'art.'

V. The Divination of Unity

I will not make poems with reference to parts,
But I will make poems, songs, thoughts, with reference to
    ensemble,
And I will not sing with reference to a day, but with
    reference to all days,
        -Walt Whitman; "Staring From Paumanok"

The poet's struggle with religion can place him outside the social mores and his vision can become frustrated by his inability to affect his target audience. The devaluation of mythos accompanies the poet's social marginalization. The more reactionary or the more faithful a poet is to his vision, the greater his chance of misunderstanding, rejection, and ostracism from the very community he seeks to reach. The poet can become anathema and his legacy one of expatriation and exile. The public attack on the poet has traditionally been waged on two fronts, however, and where the fight against religion usually can be, by and large, a lost cause, the other front against philosophy, in most cases shows, some signs of struggle.

As religion was divorced from the poet's mythos, so too, was philosophy, but never did the poet relinquish his claims to both fields of knowledge. Philosophy's distinguished break from mythos and mytho-poetic reasoning also caused a disruption between philosophy and religion. And where philosophy and poetry could keep a tenable relationship, the same could not be said with religion. Philosophy has attacked the very roots of religious sensibility and metaphysical

thought, and has laid siege to religion, wanting to sack the palace, and to behead the absolute monarch for all to see.

But before the walls of religion could crumble, however, philosophy began its attack on poetry and the poet as well. From the very beginnings of its birth as a 'distinguished' field of knowledge, philosophy sought to undermine the poet's position by questioning the validity and ethics of his craft.[108] The philosopher's means of examination and reasoning became completely antagonistic to that of the poet's. The poet incorporated the formation of identity upon the positive determination of 'thesis' and the negative 'antithesis' into a collective 'synthesis.' But the philosopher questioned the validity and the 'logical' basis of the poet's 'synthesis,' and began to break it apart with another form reason and understanding: 'analysis.'[109]

The philosopher broke the poet's Word into its separate parts and found that the only 'truth' to the poet's mythos was based upon a collection of lies. The poet could not defend himself against this charge because there was no defense: Poetry was (and is) *a 'primitive' rationalization built upon subjective understanding of the objective world ordered in a contextualized collage by a selective/relative mode of synthesis.* The poet's mythos was never 'historical fact,' nor did it ever claim to be.

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[108] See footnote 2 in Chapter 1.

[109] This is not to be confused with the ideas attributed to Hegel nor is it to be confused with the jargon these terms are supposed to represent within dialectical materialism. What I am trying to conceptualize is a formation of 'positive' and 'negative' definitions [an idea to be discussed later in this essay] united under a synthesis as opposed to the analysis of these two definitions in opposition, which would therefore lead to mutually exclusive and contradictory determinations.

So when the Word came to be separated into mythos and logos, logos was determined to have viable 'truth' because of its power to communicate ideas while mythos was deemed nothing, but 'irrational lies,' which were useless to 'rational' beings.

What philosophy did not take into account though was the fundamental principle giving the poet's Word power: synthesis—unity. The poet's Word was based upon the unity of mythos and logos (content & form), and it was the synthesis of these two separate parts combined toward the common purpose of creating both identity and understanding, wherein the value of mytho-poetic expression lay. Devoid of unity and purpose there is nothing but language and lies. How can one formulate identity, philosophers then asked, on nothing but language and lies? The answer, found in the poet's unique domain of creative expression, had always existed in the paradoxical concept known as unity.

V.a. The Substance of Life

> The universal is made of various disunited individuals, whereas the whole is made of various united individuals, and that the universal includes only parts of the same kind, whereas the whole includes parts of the same kind and of another kind.
> -Spinoza; "A Non-Geometric Draft of the *Ethics*"

For thousands of years mankind has attempted to learn the 'why' and 'wherefore' of living, in the hope that what we call 'life' could be perfected and

distilled into a positive 'Truth,' which would both inspire and instruct each succeeding age. Philosophers have tried to learn and understand the age-old relation of 'cause' and 'effect' that dominates the environment in which we are placed. If one can know 'what' has happened and 'how' it came about, then from this knowledge one could try to formulate 'why' it happened and further, 'what does it mean.'

This quest for knowledge has hinged on mankind's ability to understand the phenomena of 'life,' which has come down to a quest for 'definitions' and 'concepts.' In the 17th century Spinoza wrote, "the right way of discovery is to form thoughts from some given definition."[110] The better the definition the better our understanding of what we are trying to define. This sets up a "Taxinomia," which "treats of identities and differences; it is the science of articulations and classifications; it is the knowledge of beings."[111]

A good definition must "explain the inmost essence of the thing" and be "affirmative," but Spinoza conceded that because of the "poverty of language" a definition must be "expressed negatively, although it is understood affirmatively."[112] Spinoza's concession that language requires 'substance' to be

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[110] Spinoza, Benedict de. "A Theory of Scientific Method." A Spinoza Reader. Trans. Edwin Curley. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. 52.

[111] Foucault, Michel. The Order of Things. New York: Vintage Books, 1994. 74.

[112] Spinoza, Benedict de. "A Theory of Scientific Method." A Spinoza Reader. Trans. Edwin Curley. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. 52-3.

defined negatively created what Kenneth Burke would come to call the "paradox of contextual definition": "All definition is 'negation,'" "all determination is negation," or "every positive is negative."[113]

In the enlightenment this paradoxical taxinomia, in the hands of material philosophers like Locke and Bacon, caused the notion of 'substance' to change from Spinoza's ideal of a positive definition—the "essence of the thing"—to Locke's realistic negative definition—"something to support," "standing under," or "upholding" a thing:[114] 'Substance' ideally should "designate something within the thing, intrinsic to it," but realistically it referred to "something outside the thing, extrinsic to it."[115] The thought that we might come to name or understand a 'substance' only by its positive affirmation proved to be untenable because of the "poverty of language."

Therefore, our notion of 'substance'—what a thing is—is dictated by what it is not: we can only know the intrinsic essence of a thing by its extrinsic relationship with other things. William Blake described this idea of 'substance' as consisting of two parts: 1) the essence of a thing—a positive definition of what the thing is—and 2) what contains or limits that essence of a thing—a negative definition caused by other things extrinsic to the original and describing what the

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[113] Burke, Kenneth. A Grammar of Motives. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969. 25.

[114] John Locke. qtd. in. Burke, Kenneth. A Grammar of Motives. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969. 23.

[115] Burke. 23.

original thing is not. Blake describes this idea of 'substance' as two "Contraries"—

"Reason" and "Energy":

> Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate…From these contraries spring what the religious call Good and Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy…Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.[116]

Blake's idea of 'substance' is based on a dualistic nature that is contained in some kind of harmony: each half defines the other. 'Substance' is a balance of what a thing is and what a thing is not. This idea of 'substance' could then be called a *relationship (synthesis)*—a functional reciprocity existing between two parts. Each retains a distinct identity while coming together to form a collective unity.

This idea of a relationship then necessitates viewing a dual 'substance' as composed of parts, but unified within a whole. Pascal said, "I maintain that it is no more possible to know the parts without knowing the whole than to know the whole without knowing the parts individually."[117] But through the ages, philosophical dualities have been characterized less as a relationship and more as an antagonism. And with this antagonistic stance comes the loss of any kind of unified whole. Unity is replaced with discord, as the parts become more important than the whole they comprise:

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[116] Blake, William. "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell." Blake's Poetry and Designs. Ed. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979. 86-7.

[117] Pascal, Blaise. "Pensees." Pensees and Other Writings. Trans. Honor Levi. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995. 71.

> They take the Two Contraries which are calld Qualities, with which
> Every Substance is clothed; they name them Good & Evil.
> From them they make an Abstract, which is a Negation
> Not only of the Substance from which it is derived,
> A murderer of its own Body: But also a murderer
> Of every Divine Member...[118]

The empirical nature of the "paradox of contextual definition" makes defining a thing an ultimate negation of what that thing is. In defining something wholly in terms of something else, we find that the original something has lost any semblance of its objective identity. The danger here, as Blake saw it, is that a contextual definition can very easily lead to the utter destruction of the thing which is being defined, *if* it is only *defined completely in terms of that something else*, because then all value is placed with the extrinsic "other". This leads to an antagonistic dualism, which seeks to place value on one side at the expense of the other and this ultimately, as Blake described, destroys the value of both. What Blake called for is a "perfect whole" seen in "its Minute Particulars, Organized."[119] Blake envisioned a functioning whole—a relationship—a synthesis—a unity.

V.b. Emerson's Quest for Unity

> I maintain that it is no more possible to know the parts without
> knowing the whole than to know the whole without the parts
> individually.
> 　　　　　　　　-Pascal; "Pensees"

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[118] Blake. "Jeruselem." 316.

[119] Blake. 352.

Ralph Waldo Emerson spent his life trying to understand and rectify this concept of substance and the "paradox of conceptual definition." He was on the same track as Blake when he wrote, "an inevitable dualism bisects nature, so that each thing is a half, and suggests another thing to make it whole."[120] Emerson also wanted to see a harmonious relationship between the two "Contraries" within a 'substance'. He wanted unity and he spent his life trying to find what it meant and how he could translate the idea of unity into a practical understanding that would illuminate and facilitate the act of living.

Emerson once wrote very simply, "this defining is philosophy. Philosophy is the account which the human mind gives to itself of the constitution of the world."[121] Understanding the world means defining or detaching the parts and then reconstructing those parts into a unified whole:

> Two cardinal facts lie forever at the base; the one, and the two. 1. Unity, or Identity; and, 2. Variety. We unite all things by perceiving the law which pervades them; by perceiving the superficial differences and the profound resemblances. But every mental act— this very perception of identity or oneness, recognizes the difference of things. Oneness and otherness. It is impossible to speak or to think without embracing both...Urged by an opposite necessity, the mind returns from the one to that which is not one, but other or many; from cause to effect; and affirms the necessary existence of variety, the self-existence of both, as each is involved in the other. These strictly-blended elements it is the problem of thought to

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[120] Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Compensation." The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Ed. Brooks Atkinson. New York: The Modern Library, 1992. 156.

[121] "Plato; or, the Philosopher." 425.

separate and to reconcile. Their existence is mutually contradictory and exclusive; and each so fast slides into the other that we can never say what is one, and what it is not.[122]

We are given two poles with which to view the "paradox of conceptual definition": Unity and Variety. It is interesting that Emerson explicitly associates "Identity" with "Unity," as did Blake, and also makes the idea of a 'relationship' the only valid way to view duality: "But every mental act—this very perception of identity or oneness, recognizes the difference of things. Oneness and otherness. It is impossible to speak or to think without embracing both."

The true characterization of 'substance' then is a unity of positive—what the thing is—and negative definitions—what a thing is not. The 'Contraries' are "mutually contradictory and exclusive," which means that any identity based on difference is dependant on a relationship between two exclusive parts vying for complete distinction from the other. The 'oneness' derives its presence from 'otherness' and all 'otherness' is contained within a mutual whole. It takes a 'mental act' to simultaneously see 'oneness' and 'otherness,' and it is only by using "thought to separate and to reconcile" the parts within the whole that this dualism becomes a tool for building rather than a weapon for destroying.

This "inevitable dualism" is a two-sided coin and the "game of thought is, on the appearance of one of these two sides, to find the other:" "Life is a pitching of the penny,— heads or tails." And Emerson believed that "each man is born with a

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[122] Ibid.

predisposition to one or the other of these sides of nature; and it will easily happen that men will be found devoted to one or the other."[123] Blake described the danger within the "paradox of conceptual definition," which leads to antagonistic dualisms—placing value on one side at the expense of the other and ultimately destroying the value of both—and so too did Emerson know how easily it was to lose sight of the whole in favor of a predispositioned part and thus reinforcing a destructive antagonism.

It is not that seeing 'Contraries' as a united whole is impossible, but it is difficult and as Socrates, on the subject of 'difficult' tasks, once said to Adeimantos in "The Republic," "for the thing is not impossible, and we are not speaking of impossibilities; difficulties there are indeed—even we admit that."[124] And Socrates goes on to say, "they will surely change their opinion if you soothe them without controversy; if you undo this prejudice against the love of learning by showing what you mean."[125] Emerson, with a 'difficult' task of his own admits, "it is the *problem* of thought to separate and to reconcile," and that it is easier to "separate" and understand the parts then it is to "reconcile" and try to understand the whole. But Emerson also thought that the very difficulty of actively creating a

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[123] "Montaigne; or The Skeptic." Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson. Ed. Stephen E. Whicher. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960. 284.

[124] Plato. "The Republic." Trans. W. H. D. Rouse. Great Dialogues of Plato. Ed. Eric H. Warmington and Philip G. Rouse. New York: Mentor, 1984. 297-98.

[125] Ibid. 298.

reconcilement between contraries is what gives the most value to the act: "An action is the perfection and publication of thought."[126] Emerson wanted, using the words of Socrates, to "undo [the] prejudice" that inhibited a positive, unity creating relationship by "showing" what he meant—by perfecting and publicizing his thought in the hope that he could help "soothe" the "controversy."

V.c. Ideas or Life?

> Whatever can be a means to his attaining it is called a true good; but the highest good is to arrive.
> -Spinoza; "Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect"

What was the "controversy?" Emerson saw that there was an inherent gap or "chasm"[127] within the mind of men, which exploited these dualistic differences while marginalizing the greater context of the whole. He knew how easy it was to dismantle and separate—to see difference more easily than sameness. He knew these differences were exploited by philosophies whose very basis was founded on the search for definitions and those definitions, as Blake had argued, were ultimate negations of the very thing being analyzed. And so as philosophies, with their predisposition for seeing only parts, advanced definitions that inadequately

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[126] Emerson. "Nature." 41.

[127] "Montaigne; or The Skeptic." 301.

contained what they were trying to label, a greater dualistic distinction arose between philosophic definitions and the material 'substances' being defined.

Socrates, trying to describe 'ideal justice,' said to Adeimantos, "is it possible for things to be done exactly as they are said? Or is it natural that doing has less grasp of the truth than saying."[128] This passage exploits the distinction between 'ideas' and 'material life' with an explicit judgement giving "saying"—or ideas—more value then "doing"—or activity. Plato here is reinforcing an antagonistic dualism based on a predispositioned preference for 'ideas' over 'materialism.' And this antagonistic dualism, in a war of words covering centuries, has come to dictate a dividing line based on difference, which separates the world we live in into two seemingly irreconcilable halves: Idealism and Realism.

Emerson was conscious of the antagonistic dualism found between Idealism and Realism. He was also conscious of the fact that this dualism did not have to be antagonistic. Emerson acknowledges Plato's distinction between the Ideal and the Real, but Emerson did not completely privilege thought over action: "What help from thought? Life is not dialectics...Intellectual tasting of life will not supersede muscular activity."[129] Emerson, in "Montaigne," goes even further to question Platonic Idealism when he says, "A world in the hand is worth two in the bush. Let us have to do with real men and women, and not with skipping ghosts."[130] What

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[128] Plato. 272.

[129] Emerson. "Experience." 261.

[130] "Montaigne; or The Skeptic." 289.

Emerson is calling for is not a hedonistic materialist philosophy to counter Platonic idealism, but instead he calls for a unifying of the rift between the Ideal and the Real—between thought and action—to instill a vital and vascular idealism that could be translated into material 'Life.' It is, as Thoreau said, "to solve some of the problems of life, not only theoretically, but practically."[131]

To Emerson "the practice of ideas, or the introduction of ideas into life"[132] is the only viable solution. Emerson questions Socrates' assertion that "saying" has a firmer hold on the truth then "doing": "words are finite organs of the infinite mind. They cannot cover the dimensions of what is in truth. They break, shop, and impoverish it. An action is the perfection and publication of thought."[133] And even though Emerson later equates action with thinking, as when a thought "passes from the unconscious to the conscious," this but reflects his ultimate belief that the reconcilement of the external world lies only within the untapped power of the active mind.[134]

The great skeptic Montaigne said, "Philosophy is a hollow bone with no flesh on it: are they providing us with a place to feed in, where we can chew on

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[131] Thoreau, Henry David. Walden. Walden and Resistance to Civil Government. Ed. William Rossi. 2ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992. 9.

[132] Emerson. "Nature." 47.

[133] Ibid. 41.

[134] "The American Scholar." 70.

it?"[135] Emerson sought a philosophy to "chew on"—a substantial philosophy that would identify and satisfy both thought and life as an integrated whole—but in order for one to come to terms with the external world, Emerson said one must first come to terms with the inner world of the 'self': "The riddle of the ages has for each a private solution."[136] Emerson believed that "the reason why the world lacks unity, and lies broken and in heaps, is because man is disunited with himself."[137] And so to Emerson, "the question of the times resolved itself into a practical question of the conduct of life."

> How shall I live? We are incompetent to solve the times. Our geometry cannot span the orbits of the prevailing ideas, behold their return and reconcile their opposition. We can only obey our own polarity.[138]

And so the quest for unity and reconciliation within the world begins first, for Emerson, within the world of the 'self.' No external reconciliation can be found until man becomes united within himself.

Margaret Fuller was also keenly aware of the need to unite the disparity within. She was also looking for a substantial philosophy that would unite the

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[135] Montaigne, Michel De. An Apology for Raymond Sebond. Trans. M. A. Screech. London: Penguin Books, 1993. 76.

[136] Emerson. "Fate." 331.

[137] "Nature." 55.

[138] "Fate." 330.

inner self with the outer world and in her own philosophic quest she seems to parallel Emerson's:

> Man is a being of two-fold relations, to nature beneath, and intelligences above him. The earth is his school, if not his birth-place: God his object: life and thought, his means of interpreting nature, and aspiring to God.[139]

Here Fuller sets up the Platonic dualism of Idealism and thought, which counters materialism and action. She says that the object of man is "God" and that the way to acquire "God" is by using the means of "life" and "thought" (action and ideas) to "interpret nature."

So in order to come to terms with "God" man must use both thought and action to interpret "nature." Now if "God" is the Emersonian "Over-Soul"—the "soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal One"[140]—and if "nature" is the material world of the many "essences unchanged by man,"[141] then in order to get the intrinsic unity found in the "soul" one must look externally into the many parts of "nature." To understand the positive definition found in the 'soul'—the "what I am"—one must assuredly understand the negative definition found in 'nature'—the "what I am

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[139] Fuller, Margaret. Woman in the Nineteenth Century. Ed. Larry J. Reynolds. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998. 99.

[140] Emerson. "Over-Soul." 237.

[141] "Nature." 22.

not." And this sets up the Emersonian medal of Jove where "Emerson divides not only all creation but all that is conceivable into two parts: ME and NOT-ME."[142]

V.d. ME and the NOT-ME

> Nothing remains static for us, it is our natural state yet it is the one most in conflict with our inclinations...So let us not look for certainty and stability. Our reason is always disappointed by the inconstant nature of appearances; nothing can fix the finite between the two infinites which both enclose and escape it.
> -Pascal; "Pensees"

Montaigne wrote about this relationship saying, "all things, Heaven, Earth, the elements, our bodies and our souls are in one accord: we simply have to find how to use them. If we have the capacity to understand, they will teach us."[143] Emerson further refined Montaigne's idea into a dualistic relationship based on reciprocity:

> Philosophically considered, the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul. Strictly speaking, therefore, all that is separate from us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME, that is, both nature and art, all other men and my own body, must be ranked under this name, NATURE.[144]

and

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[142] Hughes, Gertrude Reif. Emerson's Demanding Optimism. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984. 138.

[143] Montaigne. 10.

[144] Emerson. "Nature." 22.

"The world,—this shadow of the soul, or *other me*,—lies wide around. Its attractions are keys which unlock my thoughts and make me acquainted with myself...I pierce its order; I dissipate its fear; I dispose of it within the circuit of my expanding life. So much only of life as I know by experience, so much of the wilderness have vanquished and planted, or so far have I extended my being, my dominion [his emphasis].[145]

and

This very perception of identity or oneness, recognizes the difference of things. Oneness and otherness. It is impossible to speak or to think without embracing both...Urged by an opposite necessity, the mind returns from the one to that which is not one, but other or many; from cause to effect; and affirms the necessary existence of variety, the self-existence of both, as each is involved in the other. These strictly-blended elements it is the problem of thought to separate and to reconcile. Their existence is mutually contradictory and exclusive; and each so fast slides into the other that we can never say what is one, and what it is not.[146]

The world is then composed of the 'Me' and the 'Not Me'—'oneness' and 'otherness'—and in this dual relationship, as with the idea of 'substance,' the essence of each part is derived from what it is and what it isn't. John Michael writes, "the perceived sentiments of the other enter into Emerson's sense of himself, for, he soon realized, only in relation to the other can any self exist at all."[147] Like with Blake's conception of 'substance,' it is the presence of 'Contraries' which is the essence of a 'substance.' Not only do the 'Contraries'

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[145] "The American Scholar." 70.

[146] "Plato; or The Philosopher." 425.

[147] Michael, John. Emerson and Skepticism. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988. xiii.

give shape and identity by contrast, but taken together in a reciprocal relationship they form a unity, both preserving the separate identities while at the same time connecting those separate identities into a single, functioning whole.

Now there is no clear 'gap' or 'chasm' between the 'Me' and the 'Not Me' because "their existence is mutually contradictory and exclusive; and each so fast slides into the other that we can never say what is one, and what it is not." Margaret Fuller echoes this idea when she talks of the "great radical dualism" of 'Male' and 'Female': they are perpetually passing into one another. Fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes to fluid. There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman."[148] Likewise, there is no wholly subjective 'Me' nor is there any wholly objective 'Not Me.' It is like Thoreau in his boat on Walden Pond: "Lying between the earth and the heaven, it partakes of the color of both."[149]

Therefore, if the dualistic nature of the 'Me' and the 'Not Me' is taken as a harmonious relationship then the old philosophical question of definition rises to ask, "what then is 'Me' and what is 'Not Me'? John Michael answers,

> The self is decentered; it does not originate but derives, it does not exclude but involves, it is not self-identical but alters with the alterations it finds in its perceptions of those who judge it. It is an object or a construction in which inside and outside are confused but remain identifiable as inner and outer; otherwise there would be simply no self, and no thing, of which to speak.[150]

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[148] Fuller. 68-9.

[149] Thoreau. 119.

[150] Michael. 49.

Michael highlights the fluidity of human identity—the 'Me'—based on its

relationship with the external world of the 'Not Me'. There is no solid 'Me' or any

solid identity associated with the 'Me' because 1) it is dependant on the 'Not Me'

for its notion of identity, and 2) since the 'Not Me' is always changing, causing the

relationship between them to be changing, the 'Me', therefore, is in a constant state

of *becoming* and any notion of identity is always unstable. Montaigne, in the 16th

century, described it this way:

> There is no permanent existence either in our being or in that of
> objects. We ourselves, our faculty of judgement and all mortal
> things are flowing and rolling ceaselessly: nothing certain can be
> established about one from the other, since both judged and judging
> are ever shifting and changing...And if you should determine to try
> and grasp what Man's being is, it would be exactly like trying to
> hold a fistful of water: the more tightly you squeeze anything the
> nature of which is always to flow, the more you will lose what you
> try to retain in your grasp...all things are in a state of never-ending
> inconstancy, change and flux.[151]

For Montaigne the situation comes down to the absence of permanent identity

based on the fact that the identity comes from relationship, and because

relationships are constantly changing, identity is constantly changing.

Michael believes that "for the skeptic," "self-identity is relation with

another."[152] He makes that claim based mostly on an analysis of Hume,

Montaigne, and Emerson, but the idea of relative identity and relative truth, while

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[151] Montaigne. 186-7.

[152] Michael. 57.

inclusive of, it is not limited to 'skeptic' philosophers. I feel the idea behind this "state of never-ending inconstancy, change and flux" is a mental tool to reinforce a reciprocal relationality based on harmony and unity. But as I said earlier in the paper, the philosophical tradition is known for its 'exclusiveness,' and it is this practice of placing partial definitions onto complex 'substances' and 'beings' that has reinforced antagonistic dualisms that cause the destruction of cogitative and social unity.

Now the skeptic tradition is conceived, as Montaigne described it, "through the form of a question: 'What do I know?'"[153] And even before this, Plato's use of 'Socratic Irony' served the same purpose. The stance of the skeptic is to question all sides of the argument for truth: "Why fancy that you have all the truth in your keeping," Emerson said, "there is much to say on all sides."[154] And so this idea of skepticism was used by Emerson to promote intellectual toleration in his goal towards a substantial philosophy: "The philosophy we want is one of fluxions and mobility...Adaptiveness is the peculiarity of human nature."[155]

Emerson used the idea behind skepticism to promote a 'middle path' between philosophical dogmas. For philosophy broke 'substance' into antagonistic

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[153] Montaigne. 100.

[154] Emerson. "Montaigne; or, The Skeptic." 288.

[155] Ibid. 289.

dualisms and philosophers would clamor onto the side that they had a "predisposition" for, and in their "arrogance" they would create battle lines between the 'Me' and the 'Not Me'. And as they focused on, and exploited the pieces and particulars, they completely destroyed the whole, and unity became a word without meaning. And so Emerson devised a philosophy that would unite the lifeless particulars into a vital whole: a substantial philosophy of life.

Emerson used the idea of relational identity to deflate and reconcile philosophical differences and to incorporate an idea, which would allow for, and lead to, unity of thought. His 'middle path', based on skeptical assumptions, cut through the arrogance of philosophical definitions by proposing the 'flux' of relative identity and communal corroboration to bring humanity together. Hughes called Emerson's search for identity "a quest within certainty, not a quest for certainty"[156] and that "the quest within a certainty about flux is a quest in which arriving at the goal becomes problematical...in the Emersonian quest the goal functions to give direction but never to invite closure."[157] Emerson devised his philosophy to be like Spinoza's original idea of 'substance': The limitless 'essence' of a thing composed of infinite potential.

But near the end of his essay on "Montaigne," Emerson wrote:

> It [Providence] has shown the heaven and earth to every child and filled him with a desire for the whole; a desire raging, infinite; a hunger as of space to be filled with planets; a cry of

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[156] Hughes. 109.

[157] Ibid. 128-9.

> famine, as of devils for souls…Each man woke in the morning with an appetite that could eat the solar system like a cake; a spirit for action and passion without bounds; he could lay his hand on the morning star; he could try conclusions with gravitation or chemistry; but, on the first motion to prove his strength,—hands, feet, senses, gave way and would not serve him…this chasm is found,—between the largest promise of ideal power, and the shabby experience.[158]

In this passage Emerson knows that he has devised a philosophy, which allows people limitless potential and "desire for the whole; a desire raging, infinite," but Emerson also knew that he could never deliver a realization or fulfillment of that desire. A "chasm is found" between our promise and our actual state of affairs. And it is this "chasm" within our mind, which keeps us from realizing our limitless identity and integrating our own 'Me' smoothly into the 'Not Me'. "The astonishment of life," Emerson said, "is the absence of any appearance of reconciliation between the theory and practice of life."[159] It is here where Emerson saw a chasm in his own life and mind and he came to propose a 'bridge,' with which one could use successfully to cross the void and realize their potential—integrating their 'Me' into a harmonious relationship with their 'Not Me' and creating an active philosophy of Life.

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[158] Emerson. "Montaigne; or, The Skeptic." 300-1.

[159] Ibid. 298.

V.e. Transcendence

> To understand ourselves we must understand *it*; but to climb higher, we must then climb over and beyond it.
>
>   -Nietzsche; <u>Human, All Too Human</u>, "56"

Emerson proposed the philosophical idea of Transcendentalism as a way to bridge the "chasm" between the theory and practice of life. Kenneth Burke wrote that Emerson's transcendentalism used language to discuss a "realm HERE...*in terms of* a realm ELSEWHERE—and there is a terminology designed to *bridge* these disparate realms...

> Viewed as a sheerly terministic, or symbolic function, that's what transcendence is: the building of a *terministic bridge* whereby one realm is *transcended* by being viewed *in terms of* a realm "beyond" it [his emphasis].[160]

Emerson's use of the 'Me' in terms of 'Not Me' and his formulation of 'oneness' and 'otherness' creates a bridge to discuss things in terms of other things. This helped enunciate the relationship between the two parts and how they inform each other's identity. Burke is relating Emerson's use and description of nature and the material world in terms of 'God' and the soul as verbal means of transcendence, which Burke goes on to clarify as he wrote, "the everyday world, all about us here and now, is to be interpreted as a *diversity of means* for carrying out a *unitary purpose*

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[160] Burke, Kenneth. "I, Eye, Ay." <u>Language as Symbolic Action</u>. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966. 187.

> (or, if you will, the *principle* of purpose) that is situated in an ultimate realm *beyond* the here and now. The world's variety of things is thus to be interpreted *in terms of* a transcendent unifier (that infuses them all with its single spirit). And by this mode of interpretation all the world becomes viewed as a set of *instrumentalities* [his emphasis].[161]

And so if we go back to Margaret Fuller's description of man we can see Burke's

idea of a "transcendent unifier":

> Man is a being of two-fold relations, to nature beneath, and intelligences above him. The earth is his school, if not his birth-place: God his object: life and thought, his means of interpreting nature, and aspiring to God.[162]

Man is placed between two poles: 'nature' and 'intelligence'. Man is born and

raised in nature (the earth) and he is aspiring to reach 'God' (for Fuller this would

be some concept transcending the earth). Now the way for Man to reach 'God' is

too use the tools of 'life' and 'thought' to interpret 'nature' and thus, through the

action of interpreting 'nature,' we aspire to (and possibly become) 'God'.

Now to place this in Emersonian terms. Man has both thought and action

with which to learn and understand the 'Me,' and with this knowledge he can then

learn to interpret nature, or the 'Not Me'. The more Man can understand the 'Me'

the more he can interpret the 'Not Me'. Likewise, the more Man can interpret from

the 'Not Me,' the more he will understand of the 'Me'. And taking the 'Me' and

the 'Not Me' as two parts in a dualistic relationship, the more Mankind can

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[161] Ibid. 190-1.

[162] Fuller. 99.

understand his/her relationship with the 'Not Me', the more mankind can then understand his/her relationship with 'God'. For God lies in both the 'Me' and the 'Not Me'—God is the "transcendent unifier" or "purpose" within all beings—and so the greater that Mankind's understanding is of his/her relationship to the 'Not Me,' then the greater will be Mankind's understanding of his/her relationship with God. For *God is unity* and all action or thought that promotes unity brings Mankind closer to God. God is at once in the 'Me' and the 'Not Me' while residing outside of both and encapsulating both in an ultimate context, thus embodying and transcending reality: All in All.

VI. The Evolution of the Subject-Object Relationship

Every philosophy also conceals a philosophy; every opinion
is also a hideout, every word also a mask.
Nietzsche; Beyond Good and Evil, "289"

The English Romantics and the American Transcendentalists spent a
majority of their time trying to bridge a 'gap,' which they had seen dividing what I
have been calling the '*subject/object relationship*.' Their theory was based upon
the idea that prehistoric man held a close connection with the natural world and
was thought to be 'one' or 'unified' with the natural world in a single state of
'becoming'—a state solely of 'object' reality and action. The Romantics believed
that the Platonic 'invention' of 'Ideas' and abstract logic, although not the first, was
by far the most critical development to strain the *unity* of prehistoric man and his
subject/object relational schema (and here the qualification must be made of
Western man although their generalization included 'all' mankind).

Plato's 'Forms' at once interposed another reality into the mix through
'abstract' thinking, which reproduced a certain 'unity' although one based on
rigidity. The tyranny of the 'abstract' as the only reality caused a new hierarchy
built out of antagonistic dualities. Platonism carried down through Western history
a growing distance between 'subject/object' discourses in art (content/form), in
ethics (individual/individual), in politics (individual/society or
individual/community), in religion (God/individual) and in philosophy (reason/anti-
reason [emotion])—slowly separating the subject/object relationships farther and

farther apart. These ideas and the notion of the evolving 'subject' was centered in man's explanation of himself as that 'subject.' Man, where he once stood as a single object among the many in the objective landscape, was now breaking his state of 'becoming' into that of 'being,' thus setting up dichotomies within man that were not there before. Plato characterized man as composed of Body and Soul, the Empiricists latter classified him with Mind (Reason)/Body (Non-Reason), then with the rise of psychology man became known under the terms of conscious/unconscious (in Freudian terminology Ego/Id). All of these terms reflect philosophical constructions formulated for practical, social purposes.

The nature of these various subject/object 'relationships' as they grew apart, however, were usually defined by the distance between either pole with emphasis placed on the superiority of one side over the other. This gave rise to antagonistic dualities where 'extremism' marked a distinct barrier between the two poles at hand and 'judgments' were made based on a given 'morality' about the 'inherent' 'good' of one side set against the 'evil' of the other. Therefore, in the 'Age of Reason' (as the term suggests) the idea of 'Reason' was given priority over 'anti-reason' or 'emotion' and was set up as the standard of all that was 'good,' and condemned all that fell outside its 'definitions' as 'evil.' The Romantics, however, begged to ask not only what is this 'reason,' which is the pinnacle of our civilization, but what is 'anti-reason' and why is it so bad? The question condensed into the Romantic argument, which could be articulated in this way: perhaps by elevating one pole

over the other we gain something, but perhaps we lose something too—what is it we could be losing?

VI.a. Knowledge: The Birth of the Subject

> for in this state he is, in a marvelous manner, like the weird picture
> of the fairy-tale which can turn its eyes at will and behold itself; he
> is now at once subject and object, at once poet, actor, and spectator.
> Nietzsche; The Birth of Tragedy, "5"

The Romantics put forward the premise, which articulated that prehistoric, oral societies before the advent of literacy, had a 'subject/object' relationship best described with the term 'unity.' In this relationship there was little to no distinction between a 'subject' and its 'object'—there was only one state, that of 'becoming.' It is a state of continuous action and no reflection. All the above mentioned dualities would be described in the nature of a 'world' or a 'cosmos' where difference was contained within the whole: There was 'art,' but not 'content/form,' there was 'society,' but not 'individual/community,' there was 'becoming,' but not 'being' either 'God' or 'man.' Of course the nature of the distinction between these very categories are themselves totally alien to the 'state of becoming' (a state of continuous action), which in the very 'simplicity' of the idea captures the supposed naïveté or straightforwardness we, in hindsight, place on life in oral, 'pre-historic' societies.

The last adjective of 'pre-historic' carries with it another characteristic of the unique nature of the 'primitive' man. There was no history. There was no

distinction between past, present, and future. There was only 'now'—an eternal

state of 'becoming' captured in myth. Some Native North American cultures

echoed this idea in their original languages where there was only the present tense.

The past and the future both had 'presence' in the present, displayed in the cultural

phenomenon of 'ancestor worship,' which both Native American and also Eastern

cultures built their societies around. There was no 'real' distinction between death

and life or 'being' and 'not-being' (in our sense of these terms)—even the dead had

presence within the community of the living. Time was literally an 'eternal,'

uninterrupted flow of continuous action in the 'now'—always in the 'now.'

The Homeric culture of the ancient Greeks is believed to be a society, which

displayed this 'prehistoric' concept of a state of perpetual 'becoming.' And the

nature of the Homeric society offers yet another insight into this 'subject/object'

innocence. The classic distinction between 'art/life' or even 'fiction/reality' was

not an issue for the ancient Greeks as 'art' (illusionary representation), it could

argued, was indistinguishable from what they considered life. The nature of oral

societies was predicated upon the technology of their 'art,' which was

predominately an oral communication and the Homeric epic, as Eric A. Havelock

argues in <u>Preface to Plato</u>, was a tool for the preservation, indoctrination, and

stability of their society. And of course the Western elevation of the Homeric epic

as the paramount creation of classic 'Literature' has placed the 'prehistoric' Greek

culture in a much brighter spotlight than perhaps any other ancient civilization, but

there is another factor, which makes the Greek culture a keystone to understanding

the evolution of the 'subject/object' relationship: Plato.

Havelock argues that the nature of the Homeric subject/object

relationship could best be described by re-evaluating Plato's term of "Mimesis:"

> the basic psychology of the oral-poetic relationship between
> reciter and listener or between reciter and the material
> recited, and the corresponding characteristics of the oral-
> poetic 'statement'...[were] first articulated into a simple
> system of human experience which he [Plato] labeled
> mimesis.[163]

Mimesis was the individual's "active personal identification" with the epic poem

combined with emotional sympathy[164], or what we would consider an extreme state

of empathy, which is to say "a state of total personal involvement" and "emotional

identification" with the oral recitation[165]. In this 'act' of mimesis the epic poem

was memorized and incorporated into the individual's personal being "at the cost of

total loss of objectivity."[166] The emotional attachment of the individual was also

heightened by "sensual pleasure"[167] because of the sensual nature of the poetic

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[163] Havelock, Eric A. Preface to Plato. Cambridge, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963. 57.

[164] Ibid. 26.

[165] Ibid. 44.

[166] Ibid. 45.

[167] Ibid. 157.

recitation and enactment, which furthered the "act of personal commitment, of total engagement, and of emotional identification."[168]

And here is where language (and the fact of trying to describe the completely alien state of 'becoming') may be misleading in my description of mimesis. For when I say 'individuals' identified or when I say 'individuals' emotionally attached themselves to the mimetic process, I am simply referring to a single entity, which would have been one among many partaking in this engagement. It is more than possible to think that there was no 'individual' to speak of, as there was no distinction between 'objects' in this Homeric world: there were no subjects. It was because of this 'Homeric state,' as a process of total emotional identification with the epic (and one could argue, emotional identification with the community and the external world in general), that the Pre-Socratics, Socrates, and Plato (most of all) wanted to critique and condemn the oral, poetic cultural of the Greeks. The 'Homeric state' could be seen as a "mechanism of power"[169] where "what the poet was saying was in Plato's eyes important and maybe dangerous, but how he was saying it and manipulating it might seem even more important and more dangerous."[170]

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[168] Ibid. 160.

[169] Ibid. 145.

[170] Ibid. 146.

The very nature of the 'Homeric state' or 'Oral state' of mind was called

into question by Plato because it "constituted the chief obstacle to scientific

rationalism, to the use of analysis, [and] to the classification of experience," which

would usher in, after the marked influences of Aristotle, and the Empiricists of the

Enlightenment, a new mode of the subject/object relationship; namely the

introduction of analytics and with it a 'subject' and 'object' world. It was Plato

through his Socratic beacon, who first sought to separate the subject as a 'being'

from the object world of 'becoming:'

> He [Plato] asks of men that instead they should examine this
> experience and rearrange it [the epic experience], that they
> should think about what they say, instead of just saying it.
> And they should separate themselves from it instead of
> identifying with it; they themselves should become the
> 'subject' who stands apart from the 'object' and reconsiders
> it and analyses it and evaluates it, instead of just 'imitating'
> it.[171]

Plato wanted to destroy the state of eternal 'becoming' because it embodied eternal

chaos, as everything was always changing. Plato wanted the transcendent

permanence of the abstract, which would translate man into a new state of 'being'

where the 'subject' could withdraw from the objective world in contemplation and

thereby *judge* the objective world and derive 'knowledge,' and hence determine

'Truth.'[172] In a continuous state of action there was no room for reflection. Plato

wanted a new generation of 'subjects' to rise above the *passive* indoctrination of

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[171] Ibid. 47.

[172] Ibid. 182.

the Homeric epic, whereby they could learn to *actively* critique their sources of

knowledge and disseminate ultimate truth (Forms) from the chaotic circumstances

of the 'illusionary' world.

And really it is only when the subject and object broke from each other that

one could say a 'relationship' between the 'subject' and the 'object' began. For it

took the subject in relation to the object, identifying the object as distinct, which

then caused the subject to 'know' the object in relation to that distinctness.[173] This

was not enough, however, as Plato wanted to take it one step further:

> it [an object] must be somehow isolated from its setting in
> the great story and set 'itself by itself' and identified *'per se.'*
> It must be 'abstracted' in the literal sense of that word. The
> Greek for this object, thus achieved by an effort of isolation,
> is 'the (thing) in itself, precisely the equivalent of the Latin
> *per se.*[174]

What Plato wants here is the impossible, that is to say his 'Ideals' or 'Forms' are

impossibilities or illusionary: they hold no presence within the world of appearance

and action. Plato's drive for abstract 'Truth' and absolute 'Laws' have in fact led

to the evolutions of modern science and the realizations of the 'laws' of

mathematics and physics, but one could argue that even these 'laws' still remain

'illusionary' for people in their everyday lives. In fact Plato's major concern was

not with developing an abstract conception of 'science', as we would think of it,

but with refining the tools of 'logic' for practical and political purposes. It could be

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[173] Ibid. 201.

[174] Ibid. 217.

argued that his 'mathematic' theories were developed for the purpose of being used as logical tools or exercises to help further mankind's conception of morality, the mystical nature of 'knowing,' and man's new state of 'being' so as to refine the act and organization of politics and the social state.

So when Plato asks to know a thing 'itself by itself' or as "existing itself by itself with itself"[175] he is speaking about metaphysical 'Forms,' which "exist beyond all actual or possible instantiations of it" and therefore beyond the 'object' realm of men[176]: Plato's idea comes close to what Spinoza would later describe as 'Substance.' And as Spinoza came to realize, one could never know a thing 'itself by itself' in this physical world of change and flux; a thing can only be known in this world by its relation to other things. Therefore any speculations made outside of this world ('Forms,' 'God,' 'Substance') would have neither grounding nor any 'real' relationship to this world. This caused Spinoza to come to the conclusion that even if you can 'intuit' what a thing is—'itself by itself' (a positive understanding)—in order to truly know it and give it presence in the world one would have to 'define' it. And because of the 'poverty of language' the definition would have to be negative (what it is not): the metaphysical would have to be put in physical terms for physical man to understand. This was the impossibility.

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[175] Vlastos, Gregory. <u>Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher</u>. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991. 73.

[176] Ibid. 74.

This 'paradox of contextual definition,' as Kenneth Burke called it, brings

to mind Plato's critical definition of the 'lower form of knowing:' opinion. The

Greek noun *doxa* and verb *doko* "are truly baffling to modern logic in their

converge of both the subjective and objective relationship." And Havelock goes on

to say,

> The verb denotes both the 'seeming' that goes on in myself,
> the 'subject,' namely my 'personal impressions,' and the
> 'seeming' that links me as an 'object' to other people
> looking at me—the 'impression' I make on them. The noun
> correspondingly is both the 'impression' that may be in my
> mind and the 'impression' held by others of me. It would
> appear therefore to be the ideal term to describe that fusion
> or confusion of the subject with the object that occurred in
> the poetized performance and in the state of mind created by
> this performance. It is the 'seeming show of things,'
> whether this panorama is thought of as within me or outside
> of me. *Doxa* is therefore well chosen as a label not only of
> the poet's image of reality but of that general image of
> reality which constituted the content of the Greek mind
> before Plato.[177]

The realm of *opinion* is in fact the realm of the 'real' world of action, change, flux,

and of *relational identity*. It is a world of *'contextual definition'* where one thing

informs and defines another. To determine in this realm a positive definition (what

the thing is) one would also have to take into account the negative (what the thing

is not), as one bears upon the other. The seemingly chaotic realm of opinion is a

multifarious environment of fluctuating, complex relationships and Plato had a

right to be afraid of it. So when Plato says that he wants to isolate a 'thing' from its

setting and set 'itself by itself' and identify it *'per se'* he is talking about wanting to

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[177] Havelock. 250-51.

abstract some permanent 'law' or 'system' by which he can contain and order the chaos of *doxa*.

But Plato's isolation process has two ramifications, which William Blake and the Romantics would point out over two thousand years later:

> They take the Two Contraries which are calld Qualities, with which
> Every Substance is clothed; they name them Good & Evil. From
> them they make an Abstract, which is a Negation
> Not only of the Substance from which it is derived,
> A murderer of its own Body: But also a murder
> Of every Divine Member...[178]

First, the 'thing' that was isolated is 'cut in half' so to speak and defined only by 'what it is' leaving the other half of its nature ('what it is not'—it relational identity) severed off. Therefore its true nature becomes negated and the 'thing itself by itself' is only a shadow of what it once was. Second, the environment from which the 'thing' came out of is also 'cut in half' because part of its negative identity ('what it is not') becomes severed off, which means that the relational objects, which surrounded the 'thing' have themselves been negated of their true nature. The removal and isolation of the thing 'itself by itself' effect both the 'thing' and the 'environment surrounding the thing'.

But this is only true if the examined and dislocated 'thing' is 'real' (meaning it exists in the world of opinion, that is to say in the world of appearance, change, and flux). And even though Plato wanted to use this process to 'abstract'

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[178] Blake, William. "Jerusalem." The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake. Ed. David V. Erdman. New York: Anchor Books, 1988. 316.

and 'discover' his ideal 'Forms' he still had to apply his methods to the 'real'

world. So Plato went looking for what he thought were 'givens;' ideas and

concepts (like 'piety' and 'justice')—but what did he get? Nothing. Or rather he

got a lot of interpretations of what 'piety' and 'justice' were, but never did he or

Socrates find 'Piety' or 'Justice.' One could argue that the Socratic dialogues

produced not Plato's beloved 'Forms,' but in fact what could be considered the

very opposite: 'Socratic irony.' This is to say that Plato's dialogues really

produced uncertainty and doubt about the very existence of Plato's 'Forms'. But

near the middle of his career Plato ditched the dialogues altogether to produce

Socrates with a more 'direct' and pedagogic voice, and then much later Plato

delivered, without ambiguity or possible Socratic irony, his book of "Laws." And

here the damage was done.

Now Platonic 'Forms' aside, what did Plato's attack on the 'Homeric State'

do to the subject/object relationship and how did this affect future developments of

this concept in the 'real' world? As I already discussed, somewhere along the line

the 'subject' became separated from the objective world of action, which caused, in

this new distance between subject and object, a new state of 'being' to rise out of

the older state of 'becoming.' What we have is the literal 'birth of the individual:'

> the point where it can say 'I am I, an autonomous little
> universe of my own, able to speak, think and act in
> independence of what I happen to remember.' This amounts
> to accepting the premise that there is a 'me,' a 'self,' a 'soul,'
> a consciousness which is self-governing and which discovers
> the reason for action in itself rather than in imitation of the

> poetic experience...the autonomous psyche is the counterpart of the rejection of the oral culture.[179]

And Havelock quotes a passage from the <u>Republic</u> where Plato articulates what he means by 'individual:'

> Righteousness pertains to the inner action not the outer, to oneself and to the elements of the self, restricting the specific elements in one's self to their respective roles, forbidding the types in the psyche to get mixed up in one another's business; requiring a man to make a proper disposition of his several properties and to assume command of himself and to organize himself and become a friend of himself...becoming in all respects a single person instead of many...[180]

Havelock goes on to note that after the 'individual' becomes conscious of himself as a distinct 'I,' Plato vacillates between whether the "salvation" (Havelock's term, but perhaps 'determination' would be a better) of the individual should come from within the individual himself or should in fact come from the society that nurtures him.[181] I would suggest that Plato's "bifocal emphasis" acknowledges what I have heretofore said of the 'real' world and the necessity for a 'contextual definition,' meaning that the individual's 'definition'—his *identity*—has to come from both within and outside of himself: in the 'real' world of 'opinion' a thing (or person) must retain a relationship to, and be put in context with, its environment in order for its 'identity' to exist.

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[179] Havelock. 200.

[180] Ibid. 204.

[181] Ibid. 204.

And it is to better understand the *concept of identity* that my search has taken me back to this particular 'birth of the individual.' For after the Greek 'I' was established there came "psychological" and "linguistic consequences,"[182] which were essential to the now critical process of partitioning off the individual from the objective world. The method had to be created whereby the individual, as Plato states, "assumes command of himself" and begins to "organize himself." This methodology came into 'being' very haphazardly over the centuries of Western thought, but the (shall we say) 'maturity' of the individual came about most assuredly when 'self-awareness' of the 'partitioning' process 'solidified' the individual into an "*I*." The Rationalists would then add the qualification of a "*I think*," to which the Romantics would then counter with "*I am*." But these three component parts, taken in conjunction (not as antagonists), can roughly be characterized into one methodology of the individual under the terminology of the '*Ego*' (*I*), the '*Consciousness*' (*think*), and the '*Soul*' (*I am*).

VI.b. The Novel 'I:' The birth of the individual

> the two urges, the one towards personal happiness and the other towards union with other human being must struggle with each other in every individual
>   -Sigmund Freud; <u>Civilization and Its Discontent</u>

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[182] Ibid. 302.

The individual 'Ego' or 'I' really begins to take shape in the Western world through developments within the artistic representation of the individual. The birth of the 'novel' form, which has its very roots in the Platonic mode of dialectic[183] was at once a 'new' art based upon individual experience, while at the same time it reinforced the contextualization of that experience in the natural world and in the world of collective human experience. And where the Platonic dialogue was a "weapon for arousing the consciousness" of the individual to assert an "I" before the knowledge or opinion of an external object,[184] the novel came to be a tool to then place that 'I' within the world of 'men.'

But the first stage of the development of the individual is the assertion of an 'I:' the 'birth' of the conscious, critical 'subject' who begins to see and 'know' the world as separate from his 'self.' "Modern realism, of course, begins," as Ian Watt writes, "from the position that truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses."[185]

> From the Renaissance onwards, there was a growing tendency for individual experience to replace collective tradition as the ultimate arbiter of reality; and this transition would seem to constitute an important part of the general cultural background of the rise of the novel.[186]

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[183] Nietzsche, Friedrich. The Birth of Tragedy. Trans. Clifton P. Fadiman. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1995. 49.

[184] Havelock. 209.

[185] Watt, Ian. The Rise of the Novel. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964. 12.

[186] Ibid. 14.

The emergence of the individual from the objective world caused a growing 'self' awareness, which lead to the next stage of development where the new "I" begins to contemplate, relate to, and classify both the external and internal world in an effort to identify and partition off the individual. Once the individual begins to have some marked sense of "I" and "not I" (or in Emersonian terms "Me" and "not Me") he then must further solidify his 'permanence' and 'place' by 'mixing' his 'self' with the objective world, and thereby 'create' through his labor a physical 'representation' and 'justification' of his 'self' through property and/or artistic expression: 1) *Self-Awareness*, 2) *Self-Contemplation, Relation, & Definition*, and 3) *Expression & Creation*.

But when does an individual begin to become 'self' aware? Havelock was unclear about when exactly the ancient Greeks began to break from the totality of the oral culture, but he suggests that the emergent technology of literacy held the key. He suggests that because of the growing awareness of the literate mind that Hesiod begins to show 'self' reflection in the <u>Theogony</u> and <u>Works and Days</u>. And a large part of the 'self' reflection, as Havelock makes clear, comes from the fact that 'written' documents wedge between the individual and the objective world by creating a mediating object (the written document), which serves to characterize and define both the individual and the object being discussed. The written document is a preserved moment in time reflecting both its value and presence as an object, while being simultaneously a product or creation of its author and reflecting his qualities too.

Let us then look to the two developers of the English novel, Jonathan Swift and Daniel Defoe, to see their narratives of an individual's confession and justification of his 'self' through the 'journey' metaphor utilized by the ancient Greeks, but instead of a journey primarily of conquest and return we have a journey of 'self' discovery and enlightenment. If one looks at Guliver's Travels (1726) and Robinson Crusoe (1719), for example, in both cases the individual learns the 'truth' about himself through a journey of sensory experience. In each case the individual observes, relates, and defines himself in the different sensory contexts by internalizing the objective world through the inner explanation and classification of his experience. And it is only after the journey of 'self' discovery comes to an end that the narrator of the story sets down his tale as the novel that we have before us. Therefore the 'purpose' of the novel, it could be argued, is 'self' expression. For only through the expression into words (as objects themselves) does the individual gain a permanence and stability of presence within the objective world. Later Defoe adds more complexity to this equation in Roxana, where he turns expression into a more definitive 'confession,' as the individual seeks justification and absolution from the 'reader:' the individual seeks conformation of her reality and individuality from other individuals.

Swift's Gulliver's Travels illustrates the Platonic world of *doxa* or opinion to perfection and in this world Swift developed a systematic evaluation of contextual definition. Gulliver must relate to the smallness of the people of Lilliput and Blefuscu while all the while noting similarities (and as the reader sees the

allusion more than Gulliver) between these 'unknown' nations and the 'known'

nations of England and France. Then Gulliver must relate to the largeness of the

Brobdingnags, where he loses all sense of proportion and feels more akin to a

caged animal than a man. And where the contextual definitions heretofore had left

Gulliver's sense of 'self' somewhat intact (feeling more superior to the quarrelsome

'little' people, but then losing this sense of superiority when the Brobdingnag king

in turn pronounces humans to be "the most pernicious race of little odious

vermin"[187]) this changes when Gulliver reaches the Houyhnhnms and he begins

question his whole 'self' concept and value system.

Gulliver and the Houyhnhnms are examples of not only a duality of the

'noble' animal (reason) vs. the 'savage' beast (non-reason), but also bring in the

Platonic duality of 'body' and 'mind' refined in Enlightenment terminology as

'brute strength' vs. 'reason.'[188] It is in this environment where Guliver's sense of

contextual 'self' gives way to a to a physical identification which he wants to reject

(yahoos) and a mental identification that he wants to accept (Houyhnhnms), but

because of the Houyhnhnms prejudice he is himself rejected because he seems to

be a hybrid—(*rationis capax*). What do you do when the existing 'categories' and

'taxinomia' cannot define the individual—an individual that is both capable of

reason and capable of non-reason?

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[187] Swift, Jonathan. Gulliver's Travels. Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings. New York: Bantam Books, 1981. 134.

[188] Ibid. 230.

And it seems to be that Gulliver's travels (reinforced by Swift's delightful irony) is a lesson in developing contextual definitions over prejudiced perspectives:

> a traveler's chief aim should be to make men wiser and better, and to improve their minds by the bad as well as good example of what they deliver concerning foreign places.[189]

And of course the irony lies in the fact that these 'foreign places' are allusions to the domestic predicaments of Europe and that for all the Enlightenment talk of "reason alone is sufficient to govern a rational creature,"[190] the fact that Swift hits home is that "no person can disobey reason, without giving up his claim to be a rational creature."[191] All have fallen short of the grace of 'reason' and are equal sinners against 'reason' thus Swift's pronouncement of *rationis capax*. The definition and evaluation of the individual should not be based upon the prejudices of one viewpoint (Reason), but upon the contextual definition many objective vantagepoints (the un-rational), thereby discovering a more accurate 'opinion' or 'contextual' understanding of the individual within the larger environment.

Daniel Defoe, in Robinson Crusoe, develops a similar theme of contextual definition:

> Thus we never see the true State of our Condition, till it is illustrated to us by its Contraries; nor know how to value what we enjoy, but by the want of it.[192]

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[189] Ibid. 272.

[190] Ibid. 245.

[191] Ibid. 263.

[192] Defoe, Daniel. Robinson Crusoe. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983. 139.

William Blake would expound upon the theme of Contraries and contextual

definition some 75 years later:

> Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion,
> Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human
> existence.[193]

For it is only in the presence of a 'contrary' state that one can determine a context,

with which one can then gain an adequate definition based upon both similarity and

difference. Crusoe comes to terms with a similarly conditioned, 'prejudiced

perspective', as Gulliver did. When Crusoe sees the cannibals on 'his' island his

first notion is to exterminate the 'different,' but he 'reflects' and makes a contextual

reappraisal of the situation, whereby deciding "What Authority, or Call I had, to

pretend to be Judge and Executioner upon these Men" in the face of the larger

picture[194]. Crusoe even decides that these 'abhorrent' savages, given a little

thought, are not nearly as bad or as 'unhuman' as the Spaniards. And even later in

the novel, when Crusoe finds Friday, he makes the astounding pronouncement that

not only are the 'savages' very similar in a lot of ways, but perhaps they are even

better than Europeans.[195]

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[193] Blake. "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell." 34.

[194] Defoe. Robinson Crusoe. 171.

[195] Ibid. 209-10.

By why then does Crusoe subjugate Friday as his 'man' (servant/slave)? The answer comes in the same reason why Crusoe subjugates the island and the rescued prisoners: the individual seeks power over his environment. Once the individual has progressed past 'self' awareness and past self-contemplation, relation, & definition the individual then seeks to express himself through labor and creation: the individual begins to 'subject' the object world to his will. And through the individual's encroachment on the objective world he begins to 'possess:'

> I descended a little on the Side of that delicious Vale, surveying it with a secret Kind of Pleasure, (tho' mixt with my other afflicting Thoughts) to think that this was all my own, that I was King and Lord of all this Country indefeasibly, and had Right of Possession...[196]

The Lockeian notion of mixing labor with nature to produce an extension of yourself is here brought to full force. The environment 'belongs' to Crusoe, as does everything within that environment: the land, the animals, Friday, and even the European prisoners. And this 'possession' of the objective world can also be seen as a metaphor for the 'possession' and 'domination' of the objective world through his travel narrative. Crusoe has 'triumphed' and 'conquered' nature, if you will, and recorded that triumph and that 'identity' as Crusoe the 'conqueror' and Crusoe the 'I' within the memoirs of the journal. The journal is the preservation and continuation of Crusoe's 'I' in the midst of the objective world.

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[196] Ibid. 100.

But it is also a 'confession' of sorts, as Crusoe tries to make it, although unconvincingly. His story is meant to be not only a record of his life, but also a 'justification' of that life. Here we have Defoe's attempt to delve not only into the objective world, but into the subjective world as well so as to make the demarcation of the individual solid from within and from without. But this theme is only superficially developed in <u>Robinson Crusoe</u> whereas Defoe takes the emerging psychological drama at full force within his novel <u>Roxana</u>

But I want to come back first to the idea of the individual's 'possession' of the objective world as this issue has historically concerned the 'possession' of peoples as part of that objective landscape. As Havelock noted, part of the reason Plato attacked the Homeric system so vehemently was because of the poem's mimetic and empathetic 'possession' of the Greek peoples. The 'Homeric state' was a "mechanism of power," which held people as objects (as Plato saw it) bound to the 'living' poem and its cultural indoctrination.[197] Likewise, did Crusoe hold Friday bound as an object and as an extension of his will in a state of slavery, and so too did Roxana see the position of a wife as slave to her husband: both slave and wife were objects possessed by an autonomous subject, but were not themselves allowed autonomy—they were not allowed to be individuals.

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[197] Havelock. 145.

Roxana, in refusing a marriage proposal, even goes so far as to say that a Wife is nothing but an "Upper-Servant" who has to "give up all she has" to her husband[198]:

> That the very Nature of the Marriage-Contract was, in short, nothing but giving up Liberty, Estate, Authority, and every-thing, to the Man, and the Woman was indeed, a meer Woman ever after, that is to say, a Slave.[199]

While a woman was 'single' she "was her own," but if she got married then she "gave away that "Power" of autonomy and became a "possession" of the husband: "She is to have no Interest; no Aim; no View; but all is the Interest, Aim, and View, of the Husband."[200] Roxana proposed that equality in a relationship comes only from the relative autonomy of each member in the relationship and that because of the power structure dominated by and benefiting men, a woman was better off as a "whore" than as a "wife:"

> while a Woman was single, she was a Masculine in her politick Capacity; that she had then the full Command of what she had, and the full Direction of what she did; that she was a Man in her separated Capacity, to all Intents and Purposes that a Man cou'd be so to himself; that she was controul'd by none, because accountable to none, and was in Subjection to none...[201]

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[198] Defoe, Daniel. Roxana. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. 132.

[199] Ibid. 148.

[200] Ibid. 149.

[201] Ibid. 148-49.

The individual must have 'self' awareness first, which brings autonomy to the individual, but then the 'self' must contemplate its relation and definition within the objective world. But under the terms of 'slave' or 'wife' the individual has to renounce their very 'self' and status as a 'subject,' and thus their relation to the world by definition comes wholly from outside sources: they are reduced to objects owned by, and therefore extensions of, a 'subject.'

Roxana had to relate her 'self' to her world under the definition of a 'whore,' but even though the definition was negative the relationship to the objective world found within that term was positive: power, autonomy, individuality. Of course the whole novel is based on Roxana's seeming guilt over her rejection of the social system and its psychological comforts, but it is also a condemnation of a system that demands a woman must be a 'whore' in order to be free. Roxana does in fact come to marry at the end of the novel (to the very man she first rejected), but only after she has asserted her independence and individuality and so when she ties the knot it is as an equal partner.

Friedrich Nietzsche was a thinker way ahead of his time in most respects, but for all his far-sightedness he was still very much conditioned by his environment when it came to the psychology of gender roles. But he gives a unique insight into the idea of "possession" and uses the example of a man wanting to "possess" a woman. He believes that in order to fully possess a woman a man must allow himself to be "possessed" in turn. He then, linking 'possession' with

'knowing,' states that in general he who would 'know' (possess) another must first

be 'known' (possessed):

> One type wants to possess a people—and all the higher arts
> of a Cagliostro and Catiline suit him to that purpose.
> Someone else, with a more subtle thirst for possession, says
> to himself: "One may not deceive where one wants to
> possess." The idea that a mask of him might command the
> heart of the people irritates him and makes him impatient:
> "So I must let myself be known, and first must know
> myself."[202]

The idea of knowledge as possession is not new, and here Nietzsche states that

truth begets truth in that the nakedness of the 'self' as an individual will solicit

others who can themselves accept your 'self' as it is—without masks. Roxana

could not bare her naked 'self' to her contemporaries and had to wear many masks

because of that fact. Only in her 'confession' does Roxana bare her 'self' and we

the reader 'know' and 'possess' her (honestly?) for the first time. Of course the

question here begs to be asked: can a person discard all their masks and be truly

known?—but of that latter.

Many of Henrik Ibsen's plays, <u>Heda Gabler</u> in particular, describe the

position of the male in society as the only source of power, individuality, and 'self'

realization and so women are reduced to envy or manipulation of men in order to

feel autonomy. Ibsen's plays echo Roxana's condemnation of a society where only

men are free to be them 'selves' and women are reduced to being 'property' or

'whores.' Ibsen also takes up the idea of the 'self' and 'possession' within his play

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[202] Nietzsche, Friedrich. <u>Beyond Good and Evil</u>. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1989. 107.

"A Doll's House" (1879) where 'knowledge' and 'self' are impossible for the woman (Nora) because 1) she was only an object of 'possession' and therefore had no real autonomy, and 2) there was no real distance between her as object (wife) and her possessor (her husband). But what we find, as in the nether world between Homer and Plato, is that the individual gains autonomy by slowly breaking out of the social conventions of the time and Nora's 'self' awaking comes in her growing freedom to act independently from her husband.

In a relationship of "possession" there is no 'self' independent of the possessor and therefore no real knowledge on the part of the dominated party: "You don't understand me [Nora tells Helmer]. And I have never understood you either."[203] It is only at the end of the play when the 'illusion' of the social convention has melted completely from Nora's eyes that she realizes the predicament that she is in. Not only does she not 'understand' or 'know' her possessor (Helmer), but she also doesn't even 'understand' or 'know' her own 'self' and thus she demands distance and complete autonomy to find it:

> I believe that first and foremost I am an individual, just as much as you are—or at least I'm going to try to be...I'm not content any more with what most people say, or with what it says in books. I have to think things out for myself, and get things clear...I must try to discover who is right, society or me.[204]

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[203] Ibsen, Henrik. "A Doll's House." Four Major Plays. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992. 79.

[204] Ibid. 82-83.

And really for the first time do we find the complete break of the individual from the collective unit—without regret. But even Nora acknowledges that she might in fact want to someday come back and be a wife and mother, but only after she has established her 'self.' As Nietzsche had said in order to be known one must know one's 'self' and so Nora must, to truly be a mother, a wife, or anything else, first know and possess her 'self' before she allows her 'self' to be known or possessed by another.

The individual must break from the collective illusion that binds it as a collective object and become 1) 'self' aware thereby allowing distance to form a 'subject' who can then 2) contemplate its 'self' and the relation of that 'self' to the objective world, which will form a definition of 'self' (identity) through a contextual appraisal of the environment. This then allows the 'self,' as an individual, to come back to, and then to 'exist' within the collective/objective world. The last state then is that of solidifying the 'self' as a stable and autonomous entity through the 3) expression and/or creation of that 'self' by the possession and subjection of the object world through work and art. But let us now, after identifying the manifestation of the 'I' externally, look toward how exactly the I formulates itself internally through the process of 'consciousness' and 'thinking.'

VI.c. Awakening: The Birth of 'Self' Consciousness

So I must let myself be known, and first must know myself
-Nietzsche; Beyond Good and Evil

Defoe reaches into the psychological realm in Roxana (1724) where the character of Roxana and her servant Amy reflect the inner psychological realm of the individual: (in Freudian terms) the 'I' becomes split into "Ego" (consciousness) and "Id" (unconscious) with a nagging "Super-Ego" to bring guilt. In this novel Defoe has the 'moral' Roxana put in immoral situations and then, through the narrative confession, she 'repents.' But what we find is a series of events where the 'necessity' of the situation makes it imperative for Roxana to do an immoral act, and while Roxana balks, Amy makes it clear she really has no choice. For example, in the beginning of the novel Roxana is starving and without means of support, however when a nice gentleman wants sexual favors in return for monetary support Roxana hesitates. The 'necessary' but immoral thing to do would be to gratify the gentleman, as Amy (Id—instinct) argues, as in such a situation it is 'life' demanding self-preservation at any means (Eros). Roxana (Ego) realizes that Amy is right, but she has a reflex (Super-Ego) of conscience, which makes her abhor breaking the social convention of sexual propriety. In the end she bows down to demands of the situation and the preservation of her life (Eros).

But then the plot thickens and we find Roxana, now given to 'immoral' ways, at the end of the novel trying to come to terms with her 'self' and her past 'self' in order to live in some psychological peace with a man (the Dutch merchant) in the present:

> all I had to satisfie myself was, that it was my Business to be what I was, and conceal what I had been; that all the Satisfaction I could make him, was to live virtuously for the Time to come, not being able to retrieve what had been in Time past; and this I resolv'd upon, tho' had the great Temptation offer'd as it did afterwards, I had reason to question my Stability.[205]

Roxana's psychological 'stability' is crumbling because she is trying to repress her past 'misdeeds' ("what I had been") and keep up her present Ego ("what I was") in order to 'satisfy' herself as a 'moral' subject (an individual), but also to 'satisfy' herself as a 'moral' object (an individual in relation to another individual in the objective world). Of course, her psychological 'stability' is further threatened when her past comes looking for her in the shape of a discarded daughter.

If the daughter were to ever confront Roxana then all would be lost (according to Roxana's reasoning) because she would lose her objective desirability within the moral, bourgeois world. So what Defoe delivers is several confrontations between Roxana and Amy where Roxana lets slip that the situation would fix itself if the girl (Roxana's daughter) were killed, and Amy readily agrees and is willing to murder for her mistress. Of course each time the subject is brought up Roxana's conscience (Super-Ego) gets the better of her (Ego) and she

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[205] Defoe. <u>Roxana</u>. 301.

suppresses her secret desire (wish-fulfillment) deep within her own unconscious

(Id) and Amy (as an extension of Roxana's Id). Of course what happens is that

Roxana begins to 'visualize' the death of her daughter and because of Amy's

disappearance and 'passionate' devotion to her mistress, Roxana assumes her

daughter will be murdered. Of course Roxana is consciously horrified and

disgusted that Amy most likely has killed the girl (guilt), but of course she admits

that the girl's death was the only solution to keep her 'I' safe and secure and so she

does not want to think about it (repression).[206] And Roxana cannot blame Amy

because Amy is but an extension of herself (Id) so she tries not to think about Amy

either.[207] The novel ends on the note of don't ask-don't tell,[208] but that 'I' (Ego)

have lived and this 'confession' is 'my' plea for justification and absolution for any

deeds or thoughts done, which may affect the way 'you' perceive 'me.'

She is acknowledging the world of *doxa* or opinion where one's subjective

perception determines not only their 'subjective' reality, but also effects their

'objective' reality as well—what 'you' think of 'me' will effect what 'I' think of

my 'self.' But somewhere in between what 'I' think and what 'you' think there lies

a common ground of reciprocal relation. It is exactly this tight reciprocity of action

and thought in the realm of 'becoming,' which caused Plato so much horror

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[206] Ibid. 325-26.

[207] Ibid. 302.

[208] Ibid. 328.

because there was little room for independent, objective truth. What we get in Defoe, Swift, and Ibsen is the individual emerging from the environment, marking themselves apart through the assertion of the 'I', but then coming back to both act on their environment (through expression and creation of Ego) and then to be acted upon by their environment (through others' perception of the expressed and created Ego). The individual must break from the objective world to discover and define the 'I,' but in order to fully realize the identity of the 'I' one must come back to the objective world of context to make a place for the 'self.'

What we see in the 'self' aware individual is at once the acknowledgment of an 'I,' but an 'I' within and defined by its relation to the objective world in which it lives. And where the objective world of *doxa* and opinion is itself chaotic and fluctuating so too does the conscious individual realize that the internal, subjective world is the same. Sigmund Freud was one of the first psychologists to break into and try to understand the depth within the individual, so as to define and order the chaos in hopes of controlling and containing it. His structured theory of the individual was composed of 7 major parts: 1) Perception Consciousness 2) Preconsciousness 3) Ego 4) Id 5) Repression 6) Unconsciousness 7) and the Super-Ego. But the three major psychological constructs that are of interest here are the Ego, the Id, and the Super-Ego.

The Ego, as has already been superficially referred to, is the 'I' of the individual. The 'I' filters the external sensory information that the Perception Consciousness gathers as well as the internal sensory information of the

Preconsciousness and of the Id.[209] The 'I' is the controller of the consciousness

through "reason" and "common sense"[210] and seeks to conduct "reality-testing" by

subjecting the external world to the 'Ego construct' while doing the same to the

internal world of the Id, which is the center for the "passions" and the

"instincts."[211] The Ego is a constructed "surface," which is created from a unity of

object associations and historical actions solidified under the coherence of an 'I.'[212]

Freud spends an predominant amount of time trying to convince the reader that the

Ego is a 'moral' construction, which seeks to be moral[213] with the aid of the

tyrannous Super-Ego, which is itself a hyper-moral construct based upon the

inherited value system of parents, community, and civilization.

Now part of the reason that the Ego wants to be (or is forced to be) 'moral'

lies in the fact that the Ego 'exists' and takes part in the objective world, which

includes social conventions and 'morality.' Roxana's drive to keep her Ego

appearance as 'moral' stemmed from her fear of rejection and approbation from her

community. The 'still small voice' of conscience, which kept harping on Roxana

for breaking with social norms was the implanted social mores condensed in her

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[209] Freud, Sigmund. <u>The Ego and the Id</u>. W.W. Norton & Company, 1960. 14, 37.

[210] Ibid. 19.

[211] Ibid. 19, 37.

[212] Ibid. 20, 24.

[213] Ibid. 33, 53, 56.

very own Super-Ego. Of course the irony of this situation (Freud calls it a "paradox") is that "the normal man is not only far more immoral than he believes but also far more moral than he knows"[214] and this irony reaches its height in Roxana: She must become "immoral" to survive and then lie and kill to be "moral."

But morality, it can be argued, is only a conditioned environment and or regulation created by society to harness and limit the individual so as to promote group harmony and stability—all clinging close to the median of expectancy and productivity. And if one would survive in this 'moral' environment of mediocrity then one must conform to its standards and in return for the loss of individuality and identity one gains stability and continuity. Morality, like Plato's forms, orders the chaos, but the price for order is the loss of part of your 'self,' and if you believe as Blake did, then any loss or corruption of the 'self' is the total, reciprocated loss of the whole. And if all have sinned then who (in the absence of a deus ex machina) is left to save?

So what does all this mean in relation to the individual and identity? What Freud characterized was a process of construction, internally, that resembles the process of construction, externally that I have heretofore discussed. The individual must discover, assert and create his 'self' both externally and internally. And this formed the basis for theorists like Jean-Paul Sartre who would then come along and declare that the Ego was itself only an 'object' "in the world" and a "being of the

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[214] Ibid. 53.

world,"[215] and that it exists as an external creation to record the 'I,' just as the confessional narratives of Defoe and Swift confirmed the 'I.'

Therefore, identity is not only a construction of 'self,' but it is an assertion of 'self' into the object world for the explicit purpose of recognition and acceptance by other 'selves.' The realm of *doxa* both reflects and is reflected in each 'ego' and 'self' constructed, and so every object demands the presence of every other object in order that all might be at once within and outside of each: chaos is not contained, it is mediated. The 'I' is a mediator.

Jean-Paul Sartre furthered the distinctions of the Freudian model of 'being' and declared that 'consciousness' was not the active and dominant 'Ego' as Freud believed, but was in fact only a passive process of sensory data recognition. This means that the Ego or the 'I'

> is not given as a concrete moment, a perishable structure of my actual consciousness. On the contrary, it affirms its permanence beyond this consciousness and all consciousnesses, and—although it is scarcely resembles a mathematical truth—its type of existence comes much nearer to that of eternal truths than to that of consciousness.[216]

Sartre's 'I' can be seen as a direct descendant of Plato's abstract conception of the 'Forms.' The 'I' is an transcendent unity, which is abstracted from the various sensory data that is collected and in turn processes that data into an 'objective unity' to posit into the objective world: the 'I' becomes the unifier, but in actuality

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[215] Sartre, Jean-Paul. The Transcendence of the Ego. Trans. Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick. New York: Hill and Wang, 1999. 31.

[216] Ibid. 50.

exists only as a collection of the unified. The Ego or 'I' is "nothing outside of the concrete totality of states and actions it supports," but it is "the infinite totality of states and actions which is never reducible to an action or to a state," and thus Sartre pronounced the 'I' as a "World" containing everything, while being 'self' contained.[217]

But how does one 'realize' the Ego and construct it? Sartre believe that consciousness is composed of both an "unreflected level" and a "reflective level," which means both an "object" and a "subject" level co-existing together. The "object" level is the external, psychophysical manifestation of the body. The "subject" level is the internal, 'self' reflective creation of the Ego as a transcendent unity combined with the deeper, interior level of the totality of sensory data contained within the psyche. The body is the physical "symbol" of the 'I' and the 'I' is the psychological "symbol" of the totality of reflective consciousness.[218] Sartre makes the statement that "the ego is not the owner of consciousness; it is the object of consciousness"—consciousness is simply a function—and that "I is *an other.*"[219]

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[217] Ibid. 74-75.

[218] Ibid. 90-91.

[219] Ibid. 97.

What this implies then is that man exists on a level where he is "at once subject and object"[220] and that identity—'I'/Ego—is "not so much theoretical as practical."[221] And if one can see and admit this then one can make the next step and say, "my I, in effect, is no more certain for consciousness than the I of other men. It is only more intimate,"[222] which means that all identities and Egos are but masks that we wear for functional recognition and cooperation within the objective world. If 'I' am not recognized and validated within the world of *doxa* then 'I' do not exist, and further if 'I' am recognized and validated only partially then 'I' only partially exist, but if 'I' am fully recognized and validated then 'I' exist and am part of all, as all then becomes part of my 'I.' And if all are fully recognized and all exist then all are equal, for all is in all:

> It is enough that the me be contemporaneous with the World, and that the subject-object duality, which is purely logical, definitively disappears from the philosophical preoccupations. The World has not created the me: the me has not created the World. These are two objects for absolute consciousness, and it is by virtue of this consciousness that they are connected...And the relation of interdependence established by this absolute consciousness between the me and the World is sufficient for the me to appear as "endangered" before the World, for the me...to draw the whole of its content from the World. No more is needed in the way of a philosophical foundation for an ethics and a politics which are absolutely positive.[223]

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[220] Ibid. 101.

[221] Ibid. 100.

[222] Ibid. 104.

[223] Ibid. 106.

"Existence precedes essence,"[224] which means all Egos are 'self' created masks and that under all our masks lies the same existence translated into different languages of experience. Equality is the essential nature of the world of chaos, flux, and change because everything is evolving into everything thing else. Inequality comes not from the 'self' awareness of the individual nor does it come from the individual's contextual definition of his 'self' within the world of *doxa*. Inequality arises only out of the final, and some might argue most important, state of the individual's progression: the creation and expression of self.

VI.d. The Tyranny of 'Self'

> Every spirit makes its house; but afterwards the house
> confines the spirit.
> -Ralph Waldo Emerson; "Fate"

It is here, to turn full circle, where Plato saw the power inherent within identity—be it individual or group—for once identity becomes a physical object it then has the possibility to displace and tyrannize the individual or group which created it. As Havelock argues, Plato (middle to late) was going after the power mechanism of the oral technology which passively indoctrinated Greek society

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[224] Kaufmann, Walter. "Kaufmann: Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre." Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre. New York: Meridian, 1975. 45.

(where Plato's early Socrates only went after individuals who felt their identity set them above others, and who used his trusted irony to deflate and bring them back down to the world of men). And as the early Socrates seemed content to bring all men to the same level of ignorance, the middle Socrates in the name of order and stability, seems to destroy one identity—one 'Art'—only to replace it with another.

Crusoe could admit while his 'self' was still developing that the 'savages' on his island were his equals, but once his 'self' was secure and solidified he then felt threatened and argued the necessity of murder because it was in his 'self' defence and in the defence of others like him. So too did Roxana become 'immoral' so that she could be free to determine her 'self' and provide for her children, but once she determined that her 'self' should be secure and 'moral' did she then murder, lie, and reject in 'self' defence. Both use their 'confessionals' to repent for deeds done, but in ultimate justification for Egos won.

Gulliver found his 'self' in continual flux with no stability to determine any conclusive judgment because he was always apart from his environment. It is only when he latched onto the concept of the 'mind' and tried to reject the 'body' that he found his ideal 'self' rejected because he was both Houyhnhnm and Yahoo. He was unable to reconcile his avowed 'self' as Houyhnhnm with his disavowed 'self' of Yahoo, and so became bitter in his refusal to live without his ideal, and therefore rejected everyone in his own 'self' rejection.

The separation of 'subject' from 'object,' as I mentioned earlier, brought with it the need for hierarchies with one pole over the other. Analytics made it a

priority to then organize the world of Egos somewhere between the dualities raised in this antagonistic order. 'Aesthetic over the functional' or 'functional over the aesthetic' reinforces the same distorted logic of 'reason over emotions' or 'emotions over reason.' There was Rational excess as well as Romantic excess on both sides of the conflict. And in the midst of the logical and emotional discrepancies man forgot about the practical necessities of life, the individual necessities of freedom, and the communal necessities of communication and interdependence.

For what we gain as individual subjects we loose as communal objects, but somewhere in between is reconciliation and reciprocity. It is the complexity and interdependent nature of *doxa*, which demands fluidity of vision and judgement to see the chaos contained without limiting and debilitating the system as a whole. William Blake's print "The Ancient of Days" with compass in hand orders the universe, but he also bears striking resemblance to Urizen locked within the restrictive order that he had forged. What Blake and Emerson had argued was that duality was contained in unity and that each side of the pole reinforced, defined, and created the other. But what they argued was different from what the early Nietzsche devised: "Whatever exists is alike just and unjust, and in both cases equally justified."[225] The other side of this statement would be that whatever exists is justified because it is alike [even though it is different] and equal, and that nothing is just or unjust, but which we make it so: All is in all.

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[225] Nietzsche. The Birth of Tragedy. 34.

Nietzsche had, one could argue, a deeper insight into the world of *doxa* than any other man had had before him and thus he understood the nature of the game of life behind the artifice of 'art.' And although he might have made it more savage then it is, he did so to highlight the notion of equality in common danger. For his "Will to Power" can be seen to be the opposite side of Sartre's coin of "absolute consciousness:" both bring the fear and dread of chaos calling, but contain it within man's ability to cope and create that chaos into 'art.' Both Nietzsche and Sartre emphasize the notion that chaos is life, but life doesn't have to be chaos:

> In man creature and creator are united: in man there is material, fragment, excess, clay, dirt, nonsense, chaos; but in man there is also creator, form-giver, hammer hardness, spectator divinity, and seventh day: do you understand this contrast?[226]

The glory of man, as Swift, Pope, and Pascal once pointed out, lies in the nature of his riddle—a riddle that will perhaps never be solved. And somewhere between our atoms and empty space, and our body and Ego lies an 'I' who 'thinks' and therefore is free to be whatever 'I Am' capable to be.

The God of the Hebrews in the desert once defined himself "I AM that I AM." I think He had a greater and yet simpler insight into life, which Cartesian logic and all the analytic Philosophers before and after Descartes seemed never to have grasped. But then this God of the Hebrews was lonely in his wisdom. He could not bear to be alone and so he created—and even though God's failure was

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[226] Nietzsche. <u>Beyond Good and Evil</u>. 154.

born of his creation he had no choice—one must create in order to solidify one's

identity. And out of His chaos came a world and it was good for a time, but then it

soured and fell as all things fall apart. He gave up and left us with His mess to

clean. But created in His image with His chaos animating our flesh we have the

ability to clear, contain, and create beyond our limitations because we live between

His dividing lines:

> I say unto you: one must still have chaos in oneself to be able
> to give birth to a dancing star. I say unto you: you still have
> chaos in yourselves.[227]

Thus our stars and our worlds have yet to be created, as we wander through the

wreckage and ruins of God's earth fumbling in our own broken identities searching

for our 'soul'—the great 'I AM.'

This was the essential nature of the Romantic quest for mediation between

the 'subject' and 'object'—between 'spirit' and 'body'—between 'content' and

'form'—between 'art' and 'life:' the 'soul' of man lies in the mediation of his

dichotomies and in the creation of his unities. Somewhere between the 'subject'

and the 'object' lies the soul hidden within the chaos of *doxa* teasing our exalted

notions of 'self' into an existence of 'selves' surrounded and contained by lines

drawn in the dust of time: All in all.

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[227] Nietzsche, Friedrich. <u>Thus Spoke Zarathrustra</u>. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Penguin
Books, 1978. 17.

Was it doubted that those who corrupt their own bodies
    conceal themselves?
And if those who defile the living are as bad as they who
    defile the dead?
And if the body does not do fully as much as the soul?
And if the body were not the soul, what is the soul?...
You are the gates of the body, and you are the gates of the
    soul...
As I see my soul reflected in Nature,
As I see through a mist, One with inexpressible
completeness,
    sanity, beauty...
(All is a procession,
The universe is a procession with measured and perfect
    motion.)
Do you know so much yourself that you call the meanest
    ignorant?
Do you suppose you have a right to a good sight, and he or
    she has no right to a sight?
Do you think matter has cohered together from its diffuse
    float, and the soil is on the surface, and water runs
and
    vegetation sprouts,
For you only, and not for him and her?...
Within there runs blood,
The same old blood! the same red-running blood!
There swells and jets a heart, there all passions, desires,
    reachings, aspirations,
(Do you think they are not there because they are not
    express'd in parlors and lecture-rooms?)...
O I say these are not the parts and poems of the body only,
    but of the soul,
O I say now these are the soul!

-Walt Whitman; Children of Adam, "I Sing the Body
    Electric"

VII. Conclusion: Where To Go from Here?

In my end is my beginning.
            -T.S. Eliot; <u>Four Quartets</u>, "East Coker"

Here, at the end of this essay is the beginning of my own understanding about what I have written and perhaps yours as well. Identity is the cornerstone of artistic expression and it manifests itself under different guises in cultural and political realms; artistic and social productions; and personal and communal psychologies. I have tried to trace identity through its inception in artistic creation through poetic theory and how those created identities can be both embraced and challenged through the continuing process of recreation and subversion. What we know as 'poetry,' 'religion,' and 'philosophy' are themselves created identities and even though they are mandated as dogmas we do not have to understand them or use them as such. They are objects scattered in the objective landscape for our appraisal and use. That is all.

Likewise, what we have come to know as our 'self' or our 'I' is also a created entity, which we have the power to alter or put off at will. We are not bound (or should not be) by our constructions of 'self' and, therefore, should not place our own 'self' concepts above our biological or communal needs or the needs of others. And we should not dictate our 'self' image on the inherited dogmas, which demand this or that external representation in order to fit within the social 'mores' of the day. We are free to chose and create at will what we are and what

we would be, while at the same time acknowledging the march of time and the

precarious nature of our fluctuations and evolutions of 'self.'

And at the same time we realize our freedom to create, we must also be

knowledgeable about the means and ends of creation. For the quality of our

creations will dictate the quality of our life as the quality of our vision will dictate

the quality of our creations: We are what we would be and what we would see.

And as this particular idea might seem naïve and idealistic, I challenge you to seek

the possibilities that it holds:

> For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.
>
> Home is where one starts from. As we grow older
> The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated
> Of dead and living.[228]

And I acknowledge the limitations that this essay holds as well as the ideas

contained within it, but who and what in this world does not have limitations. Our

limitations are where we start from and give us direction toward where we must go

to succeed. A foundation is in its essence and alone limited, but it becomes the

base on which to build grand palaces and kingdoms whereby superceding its

limitations by creating out of, and over them.

And what of 'poetry' that I have heretofore discussed and attempted to give

a history? Have I defined it? Have I developed its historical significance? What is

poetry, where is poetry, and why should we care? This study has been at once an

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[228] Eliot, T.S. "East Coker." <u>T.S. Eliot Collected Poems 1909-1962</u>. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1991. 190.

investigation *within* poetry, but really never *about* poetry. I am a poet and I take for granted the term poetry as an inclusive term of creation, and therefore fail to see (as a conscious act on my part) the distinctions between creative gradations of expression: dialogue, novel, verse, prose, philosophy, religion, psychology all hold poetical value, and if used to express creatively then they are all tools of poetry.

But this formulation is unacceptable because it is limited by its generality:

> That was a way of putting it—not very satisfactory:
> A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion,
> Leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle
> With words and meanings[229]

Where are my judgments and evaluations? They are there in force under the guise of the inclusionary methods of comparative thought and entangled in my disregard for concrete, historical contextualization. My one distinct assertion would be the presence within history of a 'true' poetry and a tradition built out of what the 'masters of the poetic medium' had to say. For the most part this essay is a collage built largely from those personages whom I would consider 'true' poets: Pascal as much as Blake; Emerson as much as Elliot; Swift as much as Pope; Homer as much as Milton; the Bible as much as the Platonic dialogues.

I have tried to recreate an understanding of the poetical concept of the Word in order to keep that Word alive (although its pulse is fatally weak). By and large the mytho-poetic Word has become extinct in our times, but manages to still manifest itself in reduced forms in new artistic mediums as well as in preservation

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[229] Ibid. 184.

under glass in the academies. This essay, as the first part of a conceived trilogy, is an effort to resuscitate, rehabilitate, and reinvigorate the mytho-poetic Word in our present historical context and within our present historical understandings, in order to insure its transference and relevance to future generations.

> If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent
> If the unheard, unspoken
> Word is unspoken, unheard;
> Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,
> The Word without a word, the Word within
> The world and for the world;
> And the light shone in darkness and
> Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled
> About the centre of the silent Word.
>
> O my people, what have I done unto thee.
>
> Where shall the word be found, where will the word
> Resound? Not here, there is not enough silence
> Not on the sea or on the islands, not
> On the mainland, in the desert or the rain land,
> For those who walk in darkness
> Both in the day time and in the night time
> The right time and the right place are not here
> No place of grace for those who avoid the face
> No time to rejoice for those who walk among noise and
> deny the voice[230]

The voice of the Word still resides in countless inspired books upon the dusty shelves of history and they wait for those who would hear their voice to re-inspire the Word into time thus birthing our savior into flesh again. But we first must know to look, and then know where to look, and then where to find, and then

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[230] Ibid. "Ash Wednesday." 92.

finally what to do with the treasure unearthed. What to do with the treasure unearthed?

This essay was my attempt at using the treasure of knowledge that I had unearthed. I tried to understand 'unity' and then 'identity' in terms of philosophy, art, and psychology where these terms hold a presence and applicability for both thought and action in current contexts. I tried to explain how one can form identity, but also the dangers inherent thereof. I tried to explain the concept of unity, but also the limitations of philosophical concepts within the world of action. I tried to formulate an idea of culture in order to foster a means of understanding the world, but also of changing it. And finally, and to my mind most importantly, I tried to demystify the concept of poetry and poetic expression in the hope that it can be understood and practiced by more and more people in more and more areas of life.

And even more than this, I have tried to recreate history in this essay outside of the historical limitation of time. I am a lover of history and an inhabitant of history: it is my home and my destination. But too many people are ignorant of their roots within time and within history, and this, to the detriment of us all, will create shiftless foundations and withered branches, which will break all too easily in the future. This essay was conceived as a large, encompassing project (perhaps too large) and in falling short of my original vision I have found my feet farther then I could have imagined before this project was begun: "Either you had no purpose / Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured / And is altered in

fulfillment."[231] I have become a firm believer in Emerson's 'Fate' and thus this essay is my first mark in the sands of time—my first effort—my first limit. And in re-evaluating what I have done I will come to transcend and go beyond my 'self' as expressed here in these words, in this essay, and at this time. My journey has just begun.

> At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor
>> fleshless;
> Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance
> is,
> But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
> Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from
>> nor towards,
> Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still
>> point,
> There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.
> 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.[232]

May the dance continue and may we all continue to find our part within it.

Fin.

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[231] Ibid. "Little Gidding." 201.

[232] Ibid. "Burnt Norton." 177.

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