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THE IDEA OF THE GOLDEN WORLD : A STUDY OF THE NATURE OF IMAGINATIVE ENLARGEMENT, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO SIR PHILIP SIDNEY

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To Anne, who endured its making.

Caperwit: I hope you will excuse these fancies of mine ... if now and then my brains do sparkle I cannot help it; raptures will out ... The midwife wrapt my head up in a sheet of Sir Philip Sidney. That inspired me.

James, Shirley, Love in a Maze, I.ii.

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ABSTRACT

'Imaginative enlargement' is a vague concept which the thesis attempts to give a more specific content. Sir Philip Sidney's discussion in his An Apology for Poetry of the poet as teacher, as maker and as seer is used as a frame for an examination of the idea of imaginative enlargement in relation to the three realms of the moral, the aesthetic and the numinous with which poetry has been variously associated.

The theoretical discussion is related throughout to a consideration of specific literary texts chosen mainly from English Renaissance writers. Particular attention is paid both to Sidney's Arcadia and to his Astrophel and Stella poems.

The strategy of the argument is to consider in turn Sidney's discussions of the poet as teacher, as maker and as seer, and to press each of these possible ways of thinking of the poet and of poetry towards what would seem to be its useful limits. The argument implies that any full consideration of poetry needs to take some account of each of these aspects, and as the discussion develops an attempt is made to suggest how a reconciliation of the various viewpoints might be achieved.

The opening chapter discusses and illustrates Sidney's central contention that poetry presents an energizing vision which has a moral and civilizing effect. The second and third chapters suggest that the poet can charge the imagination of his readers by driving inwards into the painfulness and mystery of life as well as by presenting the shining forms of perfection, and that the nature of the "enlargement" which is achieved is in each case far more complex than the "kinoticism" which a didactic view envisages.

The fourth chapter picks up Sidney's *admission* that works of literature *need not* have a moral content or moral effect, and it suggests that in Sidney's views on the poet as maker a recognition of specifically aesthetic qualities is beginning to emerge. Subsequent chapters extend the notion of imaginative enlargement to include aesthetic considerations, and consider the idea of artistic autonomy.

The seventh chapter argues that whereas a resolutely moral approach makes literature *something* instrumental, and cannot say what it *uniquely* is, a resolutely formalist approach makes literature *something* peripheral, and can never say really convincingly what its importance is. An attempt is then made to short circuit the polarity of aesthetic and moral by arguing that whereas the appropriate mode of attention to a work of literature should always be aesthetic or contemplative, the work itself is free to embody values of any kind, and the act of attention to it involves an intimate engagement with the 'ethos' of the work. Moreover, it would seem that only a work in which the pressure of a strong moral ethos is apparent proves capable of stretching and sustaining attention, and ultimately of moving the mind to the point where the object before it seems inexhaustible because it is felt to open onto the mystery of things.

The final section on the poet as seer endorses Sidney's reservations about revelatory claims for literature, but argues that the idea of literature as a "strange and miraculous" delivery, cognitive at levels beyond the rational, needs to be accommodated to the previous discussion.

DECLARATION

I declare a) that this dissertation is my own unaided work,

b) that neither the substance nor any part of it has been submitted in the past or is being or is to be submitted for a degree in any university,

c) that no information used in this dissertation has been obtained by me while employed by, or working under the aegis of, any person or organisation other than the University of the Witwatersrand.



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INTRODUCTION

In the opening paragraph of An Apology for Poetry Sidney says, recalling the enthusiasm for horses and riding of John Pietro Pugliano at the Emperor's court, "self-love is better than any gilding to make that seem gorgeous wherein ourselves be parties"; and it is no small part of the appeal of Sidney's essay that his own enthusiasm shines continuously through his words, nowhere more than in the famous passage on the golden world:

> Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done: neither with pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too-much-loved earth more lovely; her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden. (100.29)[1]

The freshness and potency of this passage is more than just a matter of rhetorical élan. The metaphors have a surprising pertinency and suggestiveness because Sidney affirms the ideality of art in such a way as to remind the reader irresistibly of that exhilarating sense of liberation and imaginative enlargement which seems characteristic of a genuine response to art. His lines would seem to mirror the invigorating experience of being caught up into the world of a poem and privileged to range freely, for the moment, within the zodiac of an erected wit.

But such comments represent an unscholarly reaction to a passage [illegible] out of its historical context and out of its immediate context in Sidney's whole argument; and while a phrase such as "imaginative enlargement" calls confidently for intuitive assent, it is incorrigibly vague and subjective. The modern critic, schooled on the

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[1] All notes will be found together at the back of the volume, pp. 230f.

affective fallacy, fights shy of such emotive terms. Perhaps, though, too much scorn has been directed at the impressionistic tingle up A. E. Housman's spine. He who rushes in like Bottom, crying, "Masters, I am to discourse wonders: but ask me not what ...",[2] is liable to reveal only that he has been an ass: nevertheless, in his "bottomless dream", Bottom has been moved by experiences of which the level-headed Theseus has no notion. It is all very well to be magisterially sensible, but when it comes to assessing the "story of the night" Shakespeare gives the last word not to Theseus but to Hippolyta. After her husband has dismissed lovers, lunatics and poets in a single breath she reminds him that the lovers' accounts have "grown" - an admirably expansive verb - into "something of great constancy, howsoever strange and admirable". Modestly but firmly she directs his attention from the strangeness of the various accounts to the "transfigured" coherence which they achieve in their own way as records of the dream-filled night. Taking this as a parable for critics, one might hope that the way is always open to an examination of those transfiguring qualities of "the story of the night" which make for its "strange and admirable" effect.[3]

In the Apology Sidney talks of the poet as teacher, as maker and as seer. His discussion of these three aspects of the poet's activity seems to me to offer a convenient and congenial frame within which to examine the idea of imaginative enlargement in relation to the three realms of the moral, the aesthetic and the numinous with which poetry has been variously associated.

The vastness of the topic creates obvious difficulties, but I hope that my discussion of the Apology itself will provide a stable base for the argument. If I attempt at times to make large generalisations it is not because I have any brash confidence in their authority but

because it seems to me necessary for a critic at some stage to attempt to take a large view and to ask himself what it is that he is about. My argument should be looked upon as an *essai* in Montaigne's sense of the term; for in such matters it would be folly to think that one can ever finally satisfy oneself or others. There would seem to be value though in trying to see more clearly, and from what is perhaps a different perspective, what must have been plain to many others from the start. As Shakespeare has it in Troilus and Cressida:

> Speculation turns not to itself
> Till it hath travelled and is mirrored there
> Where it may see itself.
> (III.iii. 109)

I do not for a moment believe that critical theory is an end in itself or of value if it leads one away from literary works in all their immediacy and complexity. The lines which I have just quoted from Troilus and Cressida, given a slightly different application, would seem to offer a method for the literary theorist, a method spelt out in appropriate terms by Goethe:

> There is a sensitive empiricism that ultimately identifies itself with the object and thereby becomes *genuine theory*.[4]

With this ideal in mind I have pursued my argument not with any hasty desire to press towards conclusions but attempting always to identify with the object. As object I have chosen for the most part literary works of the English Renaissance, the versions of Sidney's Arcadia[5] and Astrophel and Stella sequence being prominent among these; but I have freely extended the historical scope on a few occasions.

In considering in turn Sidney's discussion of the poet as teacher, as maker and as seer my strategy has been to

press each of these possibilities towards what would seem to be its limits before moving on to suggest how a reconciliation of the various viewpoints might be achieved.[6] I only hope that the turns in the argument are not too predictable.

SECTION ONE : THE POET AS TEACHER

Chapter I

THE FORM OF GOODNESS

Sidney's defence of poetry has, like almost all its Renaissance counterparts, a clear moral emphasis. For him the imaginative enlargement which poetry affords in liberating the reader into the zodiac of an erected wit is by no means an end in itself, nor is it a state of merely contemplative delight. Rather he emphasises the coercive power of the wonder or admiration which the poet's presentation of the "golden world" induces. For him poetry should be, in one of those compound epithets which are a trademark of his style, "heart-ravishing"; and he confesses that even the old ballad of Chevy Chase moved his own heart "more than with a trumpet" (118:28). But the poet moves us, he argues, in order to make us actively embrace that virtue which is "the most excellent resting place for all worldly learning to make his end of" (113:30). Sidney harnesses the energizing effect of poetry firmly to a moral end. Literature, he declares, offers a heightened experience, but it does so in order to figure forth in the most compelling manner the very "form of goodness" (115:30); and the highest praise of poetry is that it offers in its "winning" so sweet a prospect into the way, as will entice any man to enter into it" (113:20).

In this emphasis on the moving power of the moral marvellous Sidney gives surpassing expression to the humanist belief in the civilizing force of literature. It is the burden of his argument that just as poetry was "the first light-giver to ignorance", drawing "the wild untutored wits to an admiration of knowledge" (9:12 and 27), so the poets remain the most effective "bringers-in of civility" (141:35).

The energy and confidence with which Sidney presents such a view is something we can perhaps only distantly envy; for civility itself might seem in question now. This is the problem that Robert Lowell confronts in 'For the Union Dead'. He says of the Civil War monument to Colonel Shaw and his negro soldiers in Boston:

> Their monument sticks like a fishbone
> in the city's throat.
> Its Colonel is as lean
> as a compass-needle.
>
> He has an angry wrenlike vigilance,
> a greyhound's gentle tautness;
> he seems to wince at pleasure,
> and suffocate for privacy.
>
> [1]

What Lowell admires and envies is the Colonel's surety, his compass-needle certainty in the public cause and the angry vigilance of his dedication to an ideal. Yet there is no sentimental nostalgia in Lowell's regard, for he so clearly understands and so wittily defines both the cost to a gentle nature of subscribing everything to the demands of the dedicated will, and the temptation of that total self-abandonment which "rejoices in man's lovely,/peculiar power to choose life and die". All the images point to a sense of attenuation, and this is seen in part as the consequence of a forced rigidity that "cannot bend [its] back". For Lowell the fishbone-like monument is a painful reminder of the decent and aristocratic Boston values which are no longer needed in a city where everywhere

> a savage servility
> slides by on grease.

But he finds Shaw's commitments no longer viable. What the monument stands for seems attenuated and there is something absurd in its aggressive assertiveness: Colonel Shaw seems to be riding on a bubble, naively optimistic about the "blessed break". The age of monuments has gone:

> There are no statues for the last war here;
> on Boylerton Street, a commercial photograph
> shows Hiroshima boiling.

What gives Lowell's poetry its stature is the honesty of his own desperate protest against a civilization in which no affirmation seems adequate or possible, and in which there seems to be nothing to redeem "the ditch".

In its vigilance, and in its wincing tautness, however, Lowell's work proves that the civilities of art survive. It is thus not entirely anachronistic to begin our general argument by considering Sidney's claims that the imaginative enlargement which literature achieves is a matter of the inspirational effect of its teaching. But first something of the context within which Sidney conceived of the poet as teacher must be briefly sketched in.

Sidney's stress on the civilizing effect of literature reflects the larger humanist stress on education and on the primacy of the active life.[2] The heart of the humanist view of life is the notion that human dignity depends upon man's freedom to transform his condition, or, if that is not possible, at least to find a remedy for fortune in stoic virtue; and man is thought of as capable of fronting his destiny in this way primarily because his nature is open to nurture. Erasmus summed it up in a phrase: Homines non nascitur, sed finguntur. With the pragmatical end of nurture clearly in mind Christian humanists such as Erasmus tried above all to avoid what they considered the monkish oversubtlety of the schoolmen, and to make religious and moral ideals direct and simple. They prided themselves on replacing obscurantism with practical piety, and they concerned themselves not with theological speculation and philosophical synthesis but with helping men to follow the dictates of right reason and to accomplish good works. Aquinas had argued for the pre-eminence of the contemplative life:

> If, then the final happiness of man does not consist in those exterior advantages which are called goods of fortune, nor in good of the body, nor in goods of the soul in its sentient part, nor in the intellectual part in respect of the *moral* virtues, nor in the virtues of the practical intellect, called art and prudence, it remains that the final happiness of man consists in the contemplation of truth.[3]

In the Apology, by contrast, Sidney stands firmly by the practical intellect, declaring that all learning is *directed to*

> the highest end of the mistress-knowledge, by the Greeks called architectonike, which stands (as I think) in the knowledge of a man's self, in the ethic and politic consideration, with the end of well-doing and not of well-knowing only. (104:20)

Here Sidney could have been paraphrasing Cicero who had affirmed in his De officiis that "to be drawn by study away from active life is contrary to moral duty; for the whole glory of virtue is activity".[4] This shift in emphasis reflects the decisive change in assumptions resulting from the recovery of classical ideals, and from the displacement of metaphysics and logic by the studia humanitatis or litterarum. In its turn the New Learning was to be accused of neglecting deeds for words; but inasmuch as the humanist curriculum involved not just the mastery of a limited cycle of scholarly disciplines but the pursuit of a positive ethical programme it aimed at producing virtuous men and effective citizens. Thus it was that the education of the princes Pyrocles and Musidorus in Sidney's Arcadia included the reading of

> the stories of worthy Princes, both to move them to do nobly, and teach them how to do nobly; the beautie of vertue still being set before their eyes, and that taught them with far more diligent care, then Gramatical rules". (1.170)[5]

At its best the real subject of the humanists' study was not classical texts and elegance of style but man as a rational and ethical being whose aim was to fulfil himself in the life of his society. This active ideal inspirits Cicero's whole discussion in the De oratore, and it is endorsed by all but the final section of Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. These works were touchstones and

Sidney's regard for the latter can be seen not only in his borrowing of the term architectonike but also in the admonition which he offered to his younger brother Robert:

> I thinke you have read Aristotles Ethicks if you have, you knowe it is the begyning, and foundacion of all his workes, the good ende [to] which everie man doth and ought to bend his greatest actions. (III.124)

Sidney takes it for granted that man's task is to fulfil himself in good works, and in the Apology he makes it quite clear that he thinks of education as a preparation for the active life, pithily quoting the Ethics once again to the effect that "not gnosis but praxis must be the fruit" (112.36).[5]

It is precisely on the grounds that the end of all earthly learning is "not gnosis but praxis" that Sidney claims the poet as the monarch of all sciences and poetry as the highest form of learning. In this insistence he goes beyond most sixteenth-century discussions of literature, and his argument is worth recalling in all its wit and verve. He first calls the competitors to the bar, providing delightfully unflattering vignettes of the philosophers coming forward "with a sullen gravity, as though they could not abide vice by daylight", and of the officious historian laden with "mouse-eaten records" but proving himself in his portentous meanderings merely "a wonder to young folks and a tyrant in table talk" (109:3,21 and 28). Having slyly made use of the poet's licence to feign things to his own end, Sidney takes the offensive and proceeds to justify this feigning. The poet's superiority to the historian, he asserts, depends upon his greater freedom. The historian, though he sets forth all the lives of the noble Greeks and Romans, is properly limited to reportage, and cannot be "liberal of a perfect pattern" (110:14); for in life even the virtuous Cato is driven to commit suicide. The poet, on the other hand, far from being "captived to the truth

of a foolish world" (111:36), can construct his tale so as to show vice punished and virtue rewarded: he can reveal "the general reason of things" (107:6) by setting virtue out in her best colours and by making "Fortune her well-waiting handmaid" (111:28). Sidney invokes Aristotle's argument that poetry is superior to history because of its greater universality, but he is inclined to stress rather the coercive effect that the poet's representation of poetic justice will have. Again, Sidney sees the poet's superiority to the moral philosopher as lying even more clearly in his ability to move the reader and to make morality imperative. He argues that truths are liable to "lie dark before the imaginative and judging power, if they be not illuminated or figured forth" (107:32). This is especially true of the bare precepts of the philosopher which are notoriously "hard of utterance and misty to be conceived" (106:37). The poet, however, offers instead of precepts a "speaking-picture" whose heart-ravishing effect is such as to "strike, pierce [and] possess the sight of the soul" (107:33 and 15). Thus where moral philosophy is concerned with what should be, and history with what is or was, poetry creates a unique synthesis: it couples "the general notion with the particular example" (107:12) in such a way that precept and example, in becoming one, achieve a "virtue-breeding delightfulness" (141:21). Hence it is that the poet deserves to stand foremost in the ranks of those who "endeavour to take naughtiness away and plant goodness in the secretest cabinet of our souls", for it is he who best "inflameth the mind with the desire to be worthy" (106:28 and 119:20).

Far from sounding particularly relevant to the notion of imaginative enlargement, Sidney's exemplary view of art as something intent on making everything into figured precepts and on moving the reader to moral betterment clearly contains elements which might seem narrowly didactic. One detects a continuation of that stern spirit which moved the

resolutely pragmatic Sir Thomas Elyot to recommend literature both for its moral teaching and for the lessons that it gave in horse breeding and arms, and which led Roger Ascham to denounce medieval romances as conducive only to "open mans slaughter and bold bawdrye". Significantly, the most damning thing which Ascham could find to say of such romances was that they "were made in Monasteries, by idle Monkes, or wanton Chanons".[6] It was with a zealously Protestant determination that the earlier Tudor humanists insisted that poetry should direct the will to self-improvement and moral effort. And inasmuch as the Apology inherits something of this spirit it can justly be thought of as endorsing and encouraging that self-conscious and often oppressive seriousness which characterises a good deal of Renaissance writing.

The restrictive rather than enlarging effect of such committed didacticism is well illustrated not only in Ascham's comments on romances but in what has been described as "the Renaissance perversion of pastoral", whereby pastoral forms and motifs such as the idea of a Golden Age were frequently used simply as a moral platform from which to judge the present in relation to the norms of simplicity, humility and loss of corruption.[7] Of course this was not the exclusive nature of Renaissance pastoral. The general argument to Spenser's The Shepheardes Calender distinguishes three kinds of pastoral, the moral which is described as for the most part "mixed with some Satyrical bitternesse", but also the plaintive and the recreative; and only five of Spenser's twelve eclogues are moral. Moreover, in dedicating the collection, E. K. in no way disdains the plaintive and recreative eclogues; nor in presenting a collection of pastoral poems does he feel the need to apologise for anything more than the "uncouthness" of the language.[8] But most English writers felt a self-conscious need to justify the use of so lowly a form. Puttenham, invokes the practice of Virgil and claims that his eclogues "containe and enforme morall discipline, for the amendment of mans behaviour";[9] and Sidney, conscious that this is a

place where the "hedge is lowest" for detractors to leap over, stands firmly by his exemplary doctrine and affirms with greater specificity than Puttenham that Virgil in the figures of Meliboeus and Tityrus showed respectively "the misery of people under hard lords or ravening soldiers" and "blessedness ... derived to them that lie lowest from the goodness of them that sit highest" (116:14f.). Such sententiousness is a stultifying gloss on the 'First Eclogue' whose mood of tender and haunting melancholy creates an effect which is, if anything, subtly masochistic rather than moral. As the evicted Meliboeus drives away the flock of goats that used to be the pride of his farm he leaves the more fortunate Tityrus behind him. Tityrus is helpless in his regret, and in his parting gesture the final image of smoke and shadow creates an uncanny blending of tranquility and unease which has nothing whatever to do with ethical imperatives:

> Hic tamen hanc mecum poteras requiescere noctem
> fronde super viridi: sunt nobis mitia poma,
> castaneae molles et pressi copia lactis;
> et iam summa procul villarum culmina fumant
> maioresque cadunt altis de montibus umbrae.
>
> (Yet surely you might have rested here as my guest for this one night, with green leaves for your bed? We have ripe apples, mealy chestnuts and a good supply of pressed cheeses. Even now the rooftops of the farms over there are sending up their evening smoke and the shadows of the mountain crests are falling further out.)
> 10

High seriousness is clearly inimical to the indulgence of a nostalgia which is justified only by its own exquisite poignancy.

In fairness to Sidney, the didactic strain in the Apology must be seen partly as the consequence of his determination to defend poetry in the face of virulent Puritan attacks, and partly as an inevitable reflection of the literary climate of the early 1580's when the

Apology was written. The Apology is finally, despite its didactic element, so exuberant and confident a work that it is easy to forget that it largely anticipated the flowering of Elizabethan courtly literature. Sidney was writing at a time when he felt few contemporaries other than Spenser to have "poetical sinews in them" (135:31), and he was able to hold up as the best examples of English literature since Chaucer only such heavily moralistic works of the previous generation as A Mirror for Magistrates and Gorboduc.

Given the modern hostility to anything that suggests overt moralizing, it might be salutary to follow the lead given by critics such as Yvor Winters and J.V. Cunningham and briefly remark on the moving power of the "moral" or plain style which was so much the staple poetic fare at the time when the Apology was written.[11] Cunningham himself singles out the following stanza from Tichbourne's 'Elegy' of 1586 as characteristic of this style, both in the blunt deliberateness of its rhetoric, which at once disdains and is incapable of ingratiation, and in its straightforward yet sturdy moral directness:

> I sought my death and found it in my womb,
> I looked for life and saw it was a shade,
> I trod the earth and knew it was my tomb,
> And now I die, and now I was but made.
> My glass is full, and now my glass is run
> And now I live, and now my life is done.
> [12]

Monosyllabic severity, repetitive syntax and unvaried placing of the caesura within the heavily iambic lines give the verse an unremitting thrust. This handling of the style allows neither self-pity nor evasion, and the bitterness and regret are held firmly in check. Nothing, said Dr Johnson, so concentrates a man's mind as the imminent prospect of hanging, and Tichbourne had available to him a style which allowed him, in a perhaps unwonted concentration of mind, to

achieve one poem of memorable sternness.

But what makes for strength in the style also tends to set a limit upon its possibilities. It thrives on "complaint" and on the expression of contemptus mundi, but it does not readily lend itself to celebration or affirmation, or to the subtle analysis of complex feelings: when it aspires to moods where severity is inappropriate the effect is frequently of flatness or ineptitude. At its best the most striking effects which the style achieves are the product of bold contrasts. Sackville's description of the Duke of Buckingham, met in Hell and re-living his execution, is remarkable in this respect:

> And with these words, as if the axe ev'n there
> Dismembered his head and corpse apart,
> Dead fell he down: and we in woeful fear
> Stood 'mazed when he would to life revert:
> But deadly griefs still grew about his heart,
>
> That still he lay, sometime reviv'd with pain,
> And with a sigh becoming dead again.
>
> Midnight was come, and every vital thing
> With sweet sound sleep their weary limbs did rest,
> The beasts were still, the little birds that sing,
> Now sweetly slept beside their mother's breast,
> The old and all wel shrouded in their nest:
>
> The waters calm, the cruel seas did cease,
> The woods, the fields, and all things held their peace.
>
> The golden stars were whirl'd amid their race,
> And on the earth did with their twinkling light,
> When each thing nestled in his resting place,
> Forgat day's pain with pleasure of the night:
> The hare had not the greedy hounds in sight,
>
> The fearful deer of death stood not in doubt,
> The partridge drept not of the falcon's foot.

13

After this passage the poem moves on for some twenty gruesome stanzas to describe how Buckingham, Sisyphus-like, re-enacts his death: he twitches in constant rage at the memory of the wretch who betrayed him, and he ever and again revives to curse him. The description of midnight

creates a solemn hush which is interposed between the fearsomeness of Buckingham's re-enacted death and the horrors of his ensuing tirade, and the poignancy of this contrast lifts the poem to a new height of imaginative apprehension. Yet even the contrast provides no relief, for the interposed stanzas throb painfully with a sense of the cruelty of life: they offer a fragile vision of the momentary peace which would seem the best to hope for of a brutal existence. Not achieved calm but an almost desperate yearning for rest and extinction is implied by details such as "the cruel seas did cease".

It is significant that in moods of sombreness later Elizabethans tended to fall back upon the plain style, as Sidney himself did in 'Leave me o love'. A poem such as Raleigh's 'The Passionate Man's Pilgrimage', which like Tichbourne's 'Elegy' is supposed to have been written in the Tower while the poet was awaiting execution, illustrates that the furthest development of the moral style discovers the ability to move the mind with great power. Near the end of the poem's reverie, for example, the speaker envisages his execution in unforgettable lines:

> Seeing my flesh must die so soon,
> And want a head to dine next noon,
> Just at the stroke when my veins start and spread,
> Set on my soul an everlasting head.
> 14

Here the plain style has been enlivened by a wit that in no way cheapens the seriousness but allows it a wider context of feeling. The almost grotesque understatement of the first two lines holds back the enormity of what is being envisaged, but the anguish of "so soon" fights against the attempt to keep some grip on normality and it generates in the lines a feeling of unease that rocks upon the syntactically uncompleted couplet. Consequently, when "start and spread" provides its vivid realisation of the brutality of the axe blow, long anticipated yet now only convulsingly known, the precision of the perception - as sharp as wit - takes one's

breath away, though it comes also as a relief for what was most dreaded has been named. The change from a line with four metrical feet to one with five heralds a confident new movement towards the final triumphant affirmation and the verse spreads gratefully into the surety of the imperative verb, finds even further assurance in the balance of "my soul" against the earlier "my flesh", and achieves full poise in the stabilizing polysyllables of "an everlasting head".

Such lines, and the Buckingham passage, indicate in little that it is hardly possible to over-emphasise the strength which much of the greatest writing of the English Renaissance derived from the sternness of its moral aspirations. At the same time it is noteworthy that the moral style, pushed to its limits, moves well beyond the provision of precepts to a confrontation of the moment of death, and it measures the whole effect of self-examination and of active endeavour against the impotence which threatens the conscious will when it apprehends its own defeat. This is a point to which we will return, but for the moment the important point to make is that the sombre and chastened restraint which is characteristic of the moral style is not the tone which characterises Sidney's style and vision in the Apology and in the bulk of his creative work. Nor is it the central characteristic of the period ushered in by The Shepheardes Calender and the Apology. In C. S. Lewis's suggestive but less than completely satisfying terms, in the 1580's and 1590's "drab" gives precedence to "golden", and a heightened responsiveness to ideal forms becomes dominant in style, in content and in moral tone.[15]

Next to Ascham's comment on the romances one might put Sidney's remarks on the Amadis de Gaule:

> Truly, I have known men, that even with reading Amadis de Gaule (which God knoweth wanteth much of a perfect poesy) have found their hearts moved to the exercise of courtesy, liberality, and especially courage. (114:9).

For Sidney, active virtue forgets pragmatic propriety and it lives in terms of its appeal to the generous expansiveness of men's responses to what is brave and free in "the form of goodness".

For Sidney, as for all the later sixteenth-century humanist defenders of poetry who gratefully reflected the opinion of Horace, the epic was the highest literary form; and the most obvious way in which Sidney thinks of the moral marvellous as manifesting itself is in coercive images of heroic virtue. He says of the epic, or "heroicall", that its very name "should daunt all backbiters" (119:12), and he asserts that it is the glory of the poets to have revealed wisdom and temperance in Ulysses and Diomedes, valour in Achilles, and friendship in Nisus and Euryalus, all "in their own natural seats laid to the view" (108:16). In almost identical terms Spenser declares in his famous letter to Raleigh that his main concern in The Faerie Queene is "the profit of the ensample", and he cites the long line of "antique Poets historicall" who have inspired him:

> First Homere, who in the persons of Agamemnon and Ulysses hath ensampled a good gouernour and a vertuous man ... then Virgil whose like intention was to doe in the person of Aeneas: after him Ariosto ... and lately Tasso ...
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Tasso himself, in elaborating the theory of the epic poem in the six books of his Discorsi del Poema Eroica,[16] fills out the picture by insisting that the special aim of epic is to inspire maraviglia or admiration, that heart-ravishing effect which Sidney had claimed as the prerogative of the poet's "speaking picture".

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From ambitious works written in the shadow of this epic tradition to the flood of new and reprinted medieval romances which were churned out cheaply as chapbooks for popular consumption,[17] Elizabethan literature is full of

representations of "the eternal brood of glory excellent". Each exemplary hero could be offered, as Douglas Bush reminds us, in the full confidence that he reflected "the magnified projection of a socially accepted ideal".[18] This is a very important point, but it was more than the secure sense of shared and reinforced moral assumptions that made exemplary heroes, from the knights of Faerie to Pamela at her embroidery, compelling to the imagination. There was in the Elizabethan conception of virtue itself an expansive and magnanimous quality that helped to make the exemplary hero a figure inspiring admiration and the desire to emulate.

Sidney says of the epic that it "maketh magnanimity and justice shine throughout all misty fearfulness and foggy desires" (119:18). Likewise, when Spenser, in the 'Dedicatory Sonnet to the Earl of Cumberland', describes the effect that he intends The Faerie Queene to have on its readers he announces it as his wish that the

> ... braue ensample of long passed daies,
> In which trew honor yee may fashioned see,
> To like desire of honor may ye raise
> And fill your mind with magnanimitee.
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Each stresses that idea of magnanimity which is derived from Aristotle's praise of "high-mindedness". In essence the idea points to a quality of outgoingness and fortitude; it is the opposite of accidie or of that wanhope which skulks in on itself. Sir Thomas Elyot brings out its essential quality in a discussion in the fourteenth chapter of the Third Book of The Governor:

> It seemeth that magnanimity or good courage is, as it were, the garment of virtue, wherewith she is set out (as I might say) to the uttermost. I mean not that thereby virtue is amended, or made more beauteous, which of herself is perfect, but likewise as a lady of excellent beauty, though that she be always fair, yet a rich and fresh garment declareth her estate, and causeth her the more to be looked on, and thereby her natural beauty to be the better perceived.

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> Semblably doth magnanimity, joined with any virtue, set it wonderfully forth to be beholden, and (as I might say) marvelled at.[19]

This is prosily put; by the later Elizabethans it was enthusiastically conceived that just as epic raises life to a more expansive splendour and magnitude, so magnanimity completes virtue, "set(ting) it wonderfully forth to be beholden", and giving it the compelling authority of a large and decisive gesture.

The conception of magnanimity points one beyond epic works such as The Faerie Queene and the Arcadia. For the writers of the English Renaissance virtue is scarcely conceivable except as set off by magnanimity, and Shakespeare, no less than Milton, disdains a shy and cloistered virtue. As the Duke puts it in Measure for Measure:

> ... if our virtues
> Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike
> As if we had them not. (I. i.32)

It is significant that even Prospero's renunciation is projected in terms of the positive decision to break his staff and drown his book "deeper than did ever plummet sound" (V.i.56) - actions characterised by hyperbole and ritual display. And even Cordelia's denial in the face of Lear's demand that she reckon her love is given the quality of a splendid gesture; her rhetoric of silence comes as the expected and necessary climax of the opening scene, and it sweeps aside falsity and calculation with a fine authority.

The outgoing quality of the goodness that the great Elizabethan writers desire art to celebrate gives a particular appropriateness to Sidney's defence of art as a heart-ravishing inspiration. It is because the magnanimous example is "braue" and full of vitality that it is especially likely to fill the mind with admiration, and

to energize the will. And many a will was indeed energized. When Sidney refused the famous cup of water at Zutphen, or when he took off his thigh-pieces at the fateful battle so that he should not have the advantage over an older man, he was acting like the hero of one of his own romances; and when Charles I did nothing lowly or mean upon the scaffold it was at least in part because he had in mind the noble words of Pamela's prayer from the Arcadia, and perhaps also the speech of Pyrocles condemned to death:

> Wee have lived and have lived to bee good to ourselves, and others, our sowles which are putt into the sturring earthe of our bodyes have atcheved the causes of theyre hether coming, they have knowne and honoured with knowledge the cause of theyre Creation: And for many men (for in this tyme place and Fortune yt ys lawfull for us to speake gloriusly) yt hathe been behovefull that wee shoulde live. (IV. 344)

The virtue which Sidney celebrates was magnanimous not only in its heroic energy but also in the grace and generosity of its ideals. Consider, for example, Sidney's description, near the start of the revised Arcadia, of Kalendar's house:

> The house it selfe was built of faire and strong stone, not affecting so much any extraordinarie kinde of fineness, as an honorable representing of a firme statelines. The lightes, doores and staires, rather directed to the use of the guest, then to the eye of the Artificer: and yet as the one cheefly heeded, so the other not neglected; each place handsome without curiositie, and homely without lothsomnes: not so daintie as not to be trode on, nor yet slubberd up with good felowshippe: all more lasting then beautifull, but that the consideration of the exceeding lastingnesse made the eye beleeve it was exceeding beautifull. The servants not so many in number, as cleanlie in apparell, and serviceable in behaviour, testifying even in their countenaunces, that their maister tooke as well care to be served, as of them that did serve. (I.15)

The passage clearly sets out to instruct the reader by affirming a generously conceived moral norm. Yet despite the highly mannered formality so characteristic of the revised Arcadia Sidney achieves an effect of plain sensibleness that is anything but stern and didactic. Persuasiveness is no more affected in the language of the passage than in the house, and what would seem to be a colloquial phrase, "slubbered up", is used with complete naturalness to convey its quiet contempt. Far from creating a sense of discontinuity, as is so often the case in euphuistic prose, the antithetical clauses build up with a wonderful firmness and clarity, and they act as the vehicle of a series of fine discriminations. For the reader, the effect is of sharing in a set of lucid judgments which do not seem in any way stiff or external because they are continuously grounded in concrete observations and have the warmth and authority that goes with intimate perceptions. Sidney knows, one feels, for it is the implication of the comments, that servants are prone to skulking malice or concealed resentment of their office, particularly when they feel themselves to be either hired or harried and when they have nothing to do but parade like peacocks in their livery. By creating the sense of a personality behind the lines such unspoken awarenesses enliven the qualifications and distinctions, and give force to the maxims. Similarly, the perception that "good fellowshippe" can be as oppressive as fastidiousness gives pertinency to the idea of the rational mean which is central to the passage. This idea is enshrined in the notion of ceremony, and the reader is made to feel on the pulse that ceremony has value, not in *itself*, but as an ordering and refining ritual. By ensuring respect in those that serve and humanity in those that are served it constitutes a liberating discipline. Sidney says elsewhere of the relationship between Pyrocles and Philoclea that,

> the respect borne bredde due ceremonies; but the affection shined so through them, that the ceremonie seemes not ceremonious (1.96)

and the passage in hand well illustrates the way in which ceremony is both the natural consequence and the safeguard of right feeling. As Yeats was to put it, only out of "custom and ceremony" in human relationships are "innocence and beauty" born.[20]

It should be clear that Sidney's description of Kalendar's house implies an ideal of political as well as of social order. Like Plato and Aristotle, Sidney believed that the function of the good ruler was to create those conditions in which the good life and individual happiness became possible. The qualities of firm but unostentatious good sense which make for order and prosperity in the running of a Great House are equally those that make for order in the governing of a state; and it is no surprise to find the last sentence of Sidney's description echoed in a comment on the exemplary rules, Euarchus:

> /He/ vertuouslie and wisely acknowledging, that he with his people made all but one politike bodie, whereof himselfe was the head; even so cared for them as he woulde for his owne limmes. (I.187)

Euarchus, no less than Amphialus of whom the comment that follows is made, has learned the lesson that,

> in the Arte of man /stands/ the quintessence, and ruling skill of all prosperous government, either peaceable, or military. (I. 373)

To speak condescendingly of didacticism in relation to the emblematic presentation of these ideals in the description of Kalendar's house is to be less than civil. Sidney provides anything but pasteurised precepts, and Rosemond Tuve's claim that for the Elizabethans the poet's "teaching" was a matter of "showing a hitherto unperceived rationally apprehensible order"[21] would seem to apply with justice to Sidney's best practice. It applies too to Sidney's argument in the Apology that learning is accomplished through an "enobling of judgment, and enlarging of conceit" (104:3). These last phrases

precisely describe the means by which, in the passage we have just considered, he produces a sense of imaginative insight and enlargement and leads the reader to a "judicial comprehending" (107:28) of an ideal which has been realized in human terms.

The ideal which Sidney presents was by no means new to English literature. A passage from Ascham's Toxophilus, written almost forty years before the Arcadia, shows the extent to which Sidney's views were based upon commonplaces of optimistic humanist thought. Ascham had said:

> In buyldynge a house, in makynge a shyppe, every parte the more hansomely they be joyned for profyt and laste, the more cumlye they be fashioned to every mans syght and eye. Nature it selfe taught men to joyne alwayes welfavouredness with profytablenesse. As in man, that joynt or pece which is by anye chaunce deprived of hys cumlynesse the same is also debarred of hys use and profytablenesse. (English Works, p.99)
>
> [22]

But what is new in Sidney is the confidence with which such views are expressed and the imaginative reach whereby they are made the basis for a total and affirmative vision of society and of human relationships. Clearly there is no reason at all why moral earnestness should be associated with either primness or narrow sobriety. Those puritans who agitated for the closing of the theatres represented a prudent morality which thrived on restraints and denials, but Sidney's celebration of the moving quality of the moral marvellous was activated by a more magnanimous spirit. It sanctioned a morality of perfected feeling rather than a morality of the will.

For both Sidney and Ascham morality was "comely" (so much more appropriately English a word than "beautiful"); and behind the attempt to see "virtue it selfe [as] nothynge eles but cumlynesse"[23] lay not only Aristotle, Cicero and the civic humanist stress on education and effort but also the Platonic and Christian

affirmation that the Creation itself was eloquent of the rational and comely order of Being. Coming together, these two sets of beliefs fed a dream that grace and effort could be one. Sidney knew intimately Castiglione's famous mediation of this idea in The Courtier, and especially in the Fourth Book where Bembo establishes love as the motive and principle of all things, and where he urges his listeners to ponder the order of God's handiwork and to wonder at its beauty:

> Behoulde the state of this great Inginn of the world, which God created for the helth and preservation of every thing that was made. The heaven rounde besett with so many heavenly lightes: and in the middle, the Earth environed wyth the Elementes, and upheldе wyth the verye waight of it selfe: the sonn, that copassinge about giveth light to the wholl, and in winter season draweth to the lowermost signe, afterward by litle and litle climeth again to the other part: the Moone, that of him taketh her light, accordinge as she draweth nigh, or goith farther from him: and the other five sterres, that diversly keepe the very same course. The e things emong them selves have such force by the knitting together of an order so necessarilye framed, that with altering them any one jott, they should be all lewsed, and the world would decaye. They have also such beawtie and comeline se, that all the wittes men have, can not imagin a more beawtifull matter. Thinke nowe of the shape of man, which may be called a litle world: in whom every percell of his body is seene to be necessarily framed by art and not by happ, and then the fourme all together most beawtifull, so that it were a harde matter to judge, whether the members, as the eyes, the nose, the mouth, the eares, the armes, the breast and in like maner the other partes: give eyether more profit to the countenance and the rest of the body, or comelinesse ... Beeside other thinges therefore, it giveth a great praise to the world, in saiyinge, the beawtifull heaven, beawtifull earth, beawtifull sea, beawtifull Cities, beawtifull Churches, houses armies. In conclusion this comelye and holye beawtie is a wonderous settinge out of everie thinge.
>
> (Castiglione, p.309)

With its elements mixed in different proportions, this affirmation of the comely and rational order of things inspired writers as different in emphasis as Hooker and Castiglione, and it must be recognised as the most powerful and sustaining myth of Renaissance humanism. It was with passages such as Bembo's oration in mind that Walter Pater tried to define the Renaissance itself as "a many-sided yet united movement, in which the love of the things of the intellect and the imagination for their own sake, the desire for a more liberal and comely way of conceiving life, made themselves felt."[24] For all its oversimplification, and for all its attempt to provide an end-stopped aesthetic interpretation of Renaissance aspirations, such a comment does provide a useful reminder that the compelling presentation of a civilized ideal in Renaissance literature can not be thought of in narrowly conceived ethical terms. Wherever one looks during the period one finds not only artistic but social, educational and moral ideals imbued with the principles of grace and harmony which Christianity, Neoplatonism and the renewed understanding of the classical spirit had all in their various ways helped to sanction. Huizinga has rightly pointed out that the aspiration to realize a dream of beauty in the forms of social life is much older than the Italian quattrocento,[25] but it had never before been sustained by so complex a range of sanctions. Castiglione, in his description of what Yeats called,

> That grammar school of courtesies
> Where wit and beauty learned their trade
> Upon Urbino's windy hill
> [26]

did not avoid elements of triviality; and at times a note close to cynicism intrudes into his presentation. But he spoke to deeply human impulses in attempting to raise grace and <u>sprezzatura</u> to the highest level of value, and in attempting to give to life itself something of the comeliness and order of a work of art. It is by no means a contemptible aspiration that in the rootedness of achieved civility life *might confront* us with,

No business but dispensir ound
Her magnanimity of sound.
27

As Yeats rightly divined, the dream of comely order can hardly be separated from the dream of plenitude. Sidney himself precedes his description of Kalender's house by an account of the fertility and good husbandry that characterize Arcadia, and Ben Jonson affirms in his praise of Penshurst that Sidney, and his brother Robert after him, in realizing the ceremonious ideal in their own house and its dependent community, ensured the fecundity of the communal life:

> The blushing apricot, and woolly peach
> Hang on thy walls, that every child may reach.
> And though thy walls be of the countrey stone,
> They 'are rear'd with no mans ruine, no mans grone,
> There's none, that dwell about them,wish them downe;
> But all come in, the farmer, and the clowne:
> And no-one empty-handed, to salute
> Thy lord, and lady, though they have no sute.
> Some bring a capon, some a rurall cake,
> Some nuts, some apples; some that thinke they make
> The better cheeses, bring 'hem; or else send
> By their ripe daughters, whom they would commend
> This way to husbands; and whose baskets beare
> An embleme of themselves, in plum, or peare ...
>
> 28

Here affection is so clearly seen to "shine through" respect that the very simplest actions and motives are raised to the dignity of *a ritual celebration*; a celebration of the fruitfulness of life itself, no less than of the communal order which allows it to thrive. The ideal of an organic community in Elizabethan times was not the invention of the Scrutiny critics, but a contemporary ideal, and one conceived with great imaginative vigour. It was also a long-lasting ideal. Keeping even to the narrow focus of the passages we have considered it is easy to see that the values expressed in the description of Kalendar's house and of Penshurst were to inspire a long tradition of "country house poems" continuing at least to Pope's treatment of

Timon and his villa in the 'Epistle to Burlington'. where gross excesses are still measured against the plenteous vision of "laughing Ceres" reassuming the land and of nature exulting again in its true comeliness.[29]

Ultimately, as the stress on ceremony and respect suggests, the ideal of gracious fecundity was related to the belief in what Lovejoy describes as "the necessary plenitude and continuity of the chain of beings".[30] With one part of themselves the Elizabethans felt that the order of nature was fallen and inalienably separate from the order of grace; with another part of their being they rejoiced in the idea of nature as a ceremonial festival in which all created things were "illustrious with being".[31] Some felt like Sidney that plenitude was to be experienced most actively in a nature transformed and made golden by art, others, like Shakespeare, seemed more immediately responsive to the variety and vitality of things, but few were untouched by the feeling for plenitude.

The quality of magnanimity was related to the dream of comeliness by the principle of decorum, and to the dream of plenitude by the element of lavish generosity inherent in magnanimity itself. But again, in a fallen world, ambivalent feelings attended upon the vitality of the magnanimous man. The very confidence that characterises the magnanimous spirit may be unfounded or vulnerable, as the prime case of Othello illustrates; and it is in the ironic context of Pyrocles' helplessness at a moment when he is deprived of his sword and surprised in an act of dishonour that Sidney comments in the Old Arcadia that "Confidence in ones self ys the Cheef Nurse of true Magnanimity"(IV.270). Moreover, the element of recklessness in magnanimity that makes it generous makes it also prone to the excesses of the energies that it should husband. At the centre of the vision of society in Shakespeare's main cycle of history plays lies the image of the garden that has been allowed to become rank, and in the triumphant climatic scene of Henry V

Burgundy still keeps before us the horror of a plenty "corrupting in its own fertility":

> The even mead, that erst brought sweetly forth
> The freckled cowslip, burnet, and green clover,
> Wanting the scythe, all uncorrected, rank,
> Conceives by idleness, and nothing teems
> But hateful docks, rough thistles, kecksies, burrs,
> Losing both beauty and utility.
> (V.ii.48)

Order and proper plenitude depend upon each other; and if either is abused "the rose and bloom of the fair state" can find himself almost suffocated in the "unweeded garden" of a Denmark possessed by "things rank and grass in nature merely". Always, as John Peale Bishop puts it in appropriately symbolic terms, and with a memory of Shakespeare's reference in his twenty-third sonnet to "the perfect ceremony of love's rite",

> "the ceremony must be found
> That will wed Desdemona to the huge Moor".[32]

But, inasmuch as magnanimity points to the possibility of a generosity of spirit, or even to the largeness of vitality without which such generosity is not possible, it operates in Shakespeare almost as a value in itself.

Shakespeare has a terrifying vision of the power of evil, but it is significant that when he wants to portray the most active principle of evil at work he deprives characters such as Regan and Goneril or Iago of all vital impulse: Regan is gorgeous in her attire, but she and her sister serve the self and its ultimately destructive appetites with the withering calculation of beings who have wilfully disbranched themselves from their "material sap" (V.ii.35). And Iago, by the very default of any convincing positive desires, seems finally to embody only the ruthless principle of negation itself. A villain like Edmund who does have an almost engaging vitality ends by submitting to the compunctuous visiting of a better nature than the amoral energy which he named as his goddess. Similarly the power which Lady Macbeth momentarily achieves by a willed perversion of her nature collapses in insanity, and Macbeth's

equivocal assertiveness is related all along to the deep intuition that he is cutting himself off from the truly vital powers of life and renewal.

The desire to believe that there is something potentially magnanimous in the vitality of life itself asserts itself as strongly in Shakespeare as his fear of mutability and appetite, and it is not muted by his awareness of the inevitable defeat of individual vitality. Indeed the two impulses of fear and desire can be seen as complementary for, in Wallace Stevens's words, "Death is the mother of beauty".[33] Given time, I would have liked to argue at length that images of vitality can be taken as the most trustworthy pointers to Shakespeare's intentions in those places where interpretation has most diverged or foundered. The critic of Shakespeare's history plays can not disregard Vernon's description of the young Prince Hal mounting for battle in all his panoply and "gorgeous as the sun at midsummer".(IV. ii.102). The critic of Measure for Measure must note, when Lucio says of Claudio and Julietta,

> Your brother and his lover have embraced;
> As those that feed grow full, as blossoming time
> That from the seedness the bare fallow brings
> To teeming foison, even so her plenteous womb
> Expresseth his full tilth and husbandry ...
>
> (I.iv.40)

that though the image of feeding implies a judgment on the lovers the images of natural foison imply a more serious judgment on the repressive morality of Isabella and Angelo, and even on the Duke of dark corners who never manages to convince us that he has been touched by "the dribbling dart" (I.iii.2) of love. Similarly, the stress on "breed" which some commentators find puzzling in the first set of sonnets addressed to the young man reveals its significance when seen as helping to establish an ideal of generosity and outgoing vitality, in the light of which both his selfishness and the poet's lustful relationship with the dark lady are

ultimately to be judged. The instinct which moves one expansively to "praise the deep vermilion in the rose" and to "wonder at the lily's white" forbids one to be "contracted" to one's own bright eyes; and "lends additional horror to the barren act of squandering the genial spirit "in a waste of shame".[34]

A related sense of love as an outgoing and regenerative vitality which, in Berowne's words,

> Lives not alone immured in the brain:
> But, with the motion of all elements,
> Courses as swift as thought in every power,
> And gives to every power a double power ...
> (IV.iii.328)

sustains all Shakespeare's comedies and romances for, as we would expect, the dream of plenitude finds its surest human ground in the experience of love. Geoffrey Bush has a fine summing up of the impression that the comedies create:

> To be ourselves, in the vision of comedy, is to realise a perfect idea of ourselves, and return to our original natural goodness. The Forest of Arden, in As you Like It, is like the golden world; it is a natural persuasion that leads us first to be ourselves and then, in the happy notion of comedy, to one another.[35]

With an impulsive extravagance that is entirely unsentimental, for mockery of any affected or inflated claims is one of the main sources of their energy, the comedies bring Jack to Jill and almost the whole company to the marriage dance. And in the romances love is still the great persuader, prompting Florizel, for example, to the astonishing and strange excitement of discovering that perfection can "... move still, still so ..." (IV.iii.142), in the ordered grace which endows all Perdita's "present deeds" with the single and abiding harmony of song.

In Donne too, despite the pervasive Ovidian influence which encourages him to think of love as a game played out against a witty and corrupt urban background, and despite the anxieties of his temperament, the best lyrics struggle to achieve or to sustain a resting place in which lovers need not watch one another "out of fear" and where love may be known as a joyful and generous celebration. In some ways Donne is least like himself and most like a memory of Shakespeare when he expresses the hope that in his loving, "No winter shall abate the spring's increase" ('Love's Growth'). But at his most Donne-like too he struggles to think of love as "a growing". In what is perhaps the greatest moment of his poetry, when he is alone in the desolation of St Lucies' midnight, he thinks suddenly of the sun as having gone to fetch new lust, and in enjoining other lovers to enjoy their "Summer all" he heralds his own renewal.

Ultimately, of course, as we are reminded by the provenance of Berowne's eulogy on the educative power of love, and by the symbolic significance of St Lucies' night as the turning point of the year, the sense of a redeeming force in vital impulses was more than instinctive. The Elizabethan writers inherited it from a literary tradition incalculably suffused with a feeling for the soul's delight in the plenitude of creation and a belief in the creative power of love, a tradition inspirited by both Platonism and incarnational Christianity. But the roots of this feeling are no more to be finally unravelled in the Elizabethans than in Chaucer who felt so strongly the power of renewal in life that "pricks" men's hearts and sends them on pilgrimages, and that brings forth out of the old fields "all this newe corn from yer to yer".[36]

Among the Elizabethans Spenser made the most sustained effort to provide an explicit, doctrinal context for such intuitions. In proposing to himself the task of fashioning "a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle

discipline" he chose to build his epic around the portrait of Arthur, who was to embody that central moral quality of "magnificence" which Spenser describes as "the perfection of all the rest". Magnificence had been defined by Cicero, in a passage that was a Renaissance locus classicus, as "the contemplation and execution of great and sublime projects with a certain grandeur and magnificence of imagination".[37] Again, magnificence and magnanimity, as related "parts" of fortitude in the anatomy of virtues which the Renaissance inherited from the Middle Ages, shared the idea of something splendidly set out. But Rosemond Tuve has shown that Arthur's magnificence goes beyond such secular conceptions. Spenser imagines magnificence in Christian terms: for him it is the quality which perfects all the other virtues by bringing them to a state of completeness through the workings of Grace. Magnanimity, when completed by magnificence in this sense, is purged of any element of pride or reckless self-regard, and made to shine forth in lasting perseverance with all the splendour of what Tuve calls a "lavish spiritual generosity".[38]

This full spiritual dimension of magnificence can perhaps be best illustrated in relation to the larger allegorical set-pieces of The Faerie Queene, passages such as the description of the Garden of Adonis or of Nature's court of Arlo, which C. S. Lewis has described as offering "images of life" and mediating directly Spenser's deepest intuitions of value.[39] Consider, for example, merely one detail of one of the set-pieces, the pastoral setting of Mount Acidale where Calidore has his vision of the Graces. Here, in the most bountiful of natural settings, the Graces dance at the centre of a merry throng of naked maidens, turning in a ring just as Botticelli depicts them doing in his Primavera. A single stanza will serve to recall the quality of the description:

It was an hill plaste in an open plaine,
That round about was bordered with a wood
Of matchlesse hight, that seem'd th'earth to disdaine,
In which all trees of honour stately stood,
And did all winter as in sommer bud,
Spredding pauilions for the birds to bowre,
Which in their lower braunches sung aloud;
And in their tops the soring hauke did towre,
Sitting like King of fowles in maiesty and powre.

(VI.x.6)

Here, as in the locus amoenus of tradition or in the Earthly Paradise, there is no winter and the richly spreading trees are in perpetual bud. But what makes this "pleasaunce" different is the effect of splendid order. In the Bower of Bliss,

The waters fall with difference discreet,
Now soft, now loud, unto the wind did call:
The gentle warbling wind low answered to all.

(II.xii.71)

In such lines the "differences discreet" of a variety of gratuitously present sounds address themselves to the senses, with a lulling and caressing quality that seduces the mind to rest and ease. Mount Acidale by contrast stands foursquare, "plaste in an open plaine"; and even the birds observe not "differences discreet" but a strict degree. The details, unexceptional in themselves, achieve a regal firmness in the swelling rhythm of the stanza; and a sense not only of plenitude, but of order, is vividly and immediately evoked.

In context, however, the passage has a multiple significance. In its ultimate extension, the plenitude and order of the description relates to God's own "lavish spiritual generosity" evinced in his gift of Grace, which sustains all life and makes possible the flowering of goodness in men. The pleasaunce, a garden specially culled by nature and imaging the unfallen world, directly shadows

both the bounty and the noble order of God's graciousness. But in relation to the idea of courtesy, which is the theme of the book, the pleasaunce is a "sacred noursery of vertue". In its union of plenitude and order it provides a "faire patterne" of the conditions "deepe within the mynd" which nourish courtesy.[40] The plenitude of the description points to those generous and gracious impulses, the most important among them being the prompting of love, which are the source of all truly courteous action in man. Correspondingly, the order on Mount Acidale reflects the necessity of those civilized forms which protect the heart from shame and from rude ways; and which make it possible for the fecund impulses to spring, by teaching men "to beare themselves right/ To all of each degree, as doth behove". Sidney, Jonson, Shakespeare, the Elizabethans all would clearly have endorsed such teaching. It is the Graces who teach men "Civility", and significantly when they appear they are seen moving in a continuous circle away from and back towards the viewer, a detail which is used to suggest the reciprocal quality of Grace: all courteous impulses emanate from God and prompt men's hearts to move towards him and to mirror his own perpetual generosity and harmony in the persevering magnificence of their virtuous actions.[41]

The plenitude and order of the description has, however, a further significance, for though the Graces are seen by Calidore, the Knight of Courtesy, they are dancing for the shepherd Colin Clout, and it is his piping that leads the dance. It is through the poet-shepherd and his love that the pleasaunce is momentarily transformed into an image of "the sacred noursery of vertue". By this detail Spenser suggests that it is only the poet who can deliver the rich and ordered pattern of a "golden world". This pattern is revealed to him when his imagination is stirred by a vision of life as it might be in all its unfallen richness and order and innocence. Here, in the sense

t..at poetry is regenerative, is the ultimate significance of Sidney's claim that the "erected wit" of the poet can make men know and strive towards perfection.

The phrase "images of life" could thus most happily be annexed to any discussion of Sidney's Apology. It provides an incidental reminder that when Sidney talks of a work of art as providing a "p.rfect picture" or "notable *images*" his words .an be taken in an almost literal sense to relate to the effect of set-pieces or images within a work as well as to the total action rationally set forth. But, what is *much more* important, it makes quite clear that the claims that art delivers a "perfect pattern" and the very "form of goodness" should not be interpreted in too narrowly ethical a way. The Elizabethans expected a work of literature to offer moral exemplars and a just ending so that the satisfied audience could exclaim with Tourneur, "When the bad bleeds, *then* is the tragedy good"; they also expected it to offer exempla and sententiae such as those collected by Erasmus and others for the school texts of the period.[42] More sophisticatedly, they demanded that the continuous decorum of a work's verbal texture should "enable" their judgments and lead them to a "judicial comprehending". But when they *thought* of poetry as a "nursery of virtue" able to "plant goodness" (106:29) in the soul they felt in addition that the "golden world" delivered by the poets could provide an *affirmation* of life and of its potentialities in the profoundest moral sense.

Huizinga, in his discussion of the powerful formative influence of poetic aspirations to ideal life, has rightly said that,

> History pays too little attention to the influence of these dreams of a sublime life on civilization *itself and on* the forms of social life.
> [43]

Literature has always been one of the most potent instruments for giving "form and pressure" to human dreams and aspirations. Certainly, during the Renaissance, and under the influence of humanism, a fervent belief in the civilizing force of literature in its magnanimous reaches directly inspired such central achievements as The Faerie Queene, the revised Arcadia and Paradise Lost; and it made possible Milton's claim that Spenser was a better teacher than Aquinas. Shakespeare hardly seems to offer himself to the reader as a teacher, but he, no less than his great contemporaries, was fired by the sublime and civilizing dreams of order and of plenitude; and he inspires us with a sense of the large possibilities of life even in the depiction of its vitality.

The inspirational justification of literature has remained central in the English tradition. George Eliot could have been paraphrasing Sidney when she said that the artist should present ideas "clothed in a living human soul", because "then their presence is a power ... and we are drawn after them with gentle compulsion".[44] And she had in mind not a gentle compulsion but the force of an heroic example when she made the climactic scene in Middlemarch that in which Dorothea inspires Rosamond to accomplish her single virtuous act. Or, to take a less likely example, consider the final stanza of Yeats's 'Long-legged Fly':

> That girls at puberty may find
> The first Adam in their thought,
> Shut the door of the Pope's chapel,
> Keep those children out.
> There on that scaffolding reclines
> Michael Angelo.
> With no more sound than the mice make
> His hand moves to and fro.
> Like a long-legged fly upon the stream
> His mind moves upon silence.
>
> (Collected Poems, p.381)

The refrain, with irresistible unexpectedness, evokes the movement of the creative mind, holding itself apart in

silent absorption, lost in the quivering concentration with which it waits for the sudden dart of insight. And Yeats suggests that the flux of existence is given form only by such intensities of human creativity. The image of the mind moving upon silence evokes the sense of a mysterious power and, for me it always recalls Milton's reference at the start of Paradise Lost to the spirit which "dove-like satst brooding on the vast abyss and mad'st it pregnant". (I.19) Yet Yeats, in a way that seems characteristically modern, insists upon the contrast between the vastness of the creative spirit and the fly-like frailty of the man that broods. A gentle irony in the details of the stanza helps to bring out this sense of frailty: Michael-Angelo reclines before the unfinished work in the posture of his own uncreated Adam, and he must be protected against intruding children who would distract him from "perfection of the work". Nevertheless, Yeats deliberately chooses images that recall the heroic tradition of Renaissance humanism. Spenser made Piers exclaim on a related subject:

> O what an honor is it, to restraine
> The lust of lawlesse youth with good advice.
> 'October Eclogue', l.21.

That is hardly Yeats's tone when he talks of girls at puberty or globe-trotting madam with her bowels in a heat,[45] but he no less than Spenser or Sidney is thinking of art as putting pressure on life, and as creating the examples for men to live by.

I have tried to suggest that the idea of art as achieving a coercive effect of imaginative enlargement by the presentation of the forms of goodness is one which can legitimately be extended to include the most far-reaching dreams of a sublime life. Northrop Frye finely expresses the idea which I have been trying to present:

> The drive behind [the imagination] we may call desire, a desire which has nothing to do with the biological needs and wants of psychological theory, but is rather the impulse towards what Aristotle calls telos, realizing the form that one potentially has.
> 46

If this view of the imagination, indeed this view of the possibility of culture, is something we [illegible] largely lost, then at the least we should be clear about the nature of what it is that is slipping away.

Chapter II

THE GOLDEN AND THE BRAZEN

The view that the imaginative enlargement which literature offers is primarily a matter of the affirmation it provides is too exclusive, and it runs into certain obvious difficulties. Perhaps these can best be approached obliquely by means of a brief consideration of the difficulties that such affirmative visions as the dreams of order and of plenitude themselves encounter.

The humanist dream of rationality was built on the recognition that the achievement of order was possible only at the expense of tremendous effort. This recognition is implicit in the stress on education and on the primacy of virtuous action. Similarly the dream of plenitude, in whatever guise it offered itself, achieved its poignancy from the recognition that in a fallen world grace is rare. The vision of the Graces on Mount Acidale vanishes as Calidore steps out of the wood and moves eagerly towards the circling dancers. And not only is this "lucklesse breach" made in Colin's bliss, but the pastoral haven is itself despoiled by a band of lustful Brigants after Calidore has set off again on his quest for the Blatant Beast. It is true that the ravishing away of Pastorella by the Brigants leads ultimately to the discovery of her true parentage and thus to a happy resolution, so validating the lesson of the linked Graces "that good should from us goe, then come in greater store" (VI.x.24); nevertheless, the Book does not end with Pastorella's happiness nor even with Calidore in triumph, but with the malicious Beast ranging the world and the work needing to be done all over again. The malignity of the Beast is the very opposite of all the gracious impulses of courtesy, and its continuous ranging is a reminder of the precariousness of human aspirations and the endlessness of human effort.

The despoliation of the pleasaunce and the presence of the Beast image the difficulties of a fallen existence where the will itself is liable to be corrupted and where the vital energies of nature are as capable of producing a Caliban as a Miranda. In such a world even love is vulnerable and liable to be irremediably coupled with lust.

Chaucer's dreamer in The Parlement of Fowles is offered an intuition of the ambivalence at the heart of love in mortal life that can be taken as a paradigm. He is led in his dream into a love garden - the medieval equivalent of Arcadia - and over the gate into the garden are two contrasting inscriptions. The first promises:

> Thorgh me men gon unto the welle of grace,
> There grene and lusty May shal evere endure ...
> Al open am I - passe in, and sped thee faste.

The other warns:

> Thorgh me men gon ...
> Unto the mortal strokes of the spere
> Of which Disdayn and Daunger is the gyde,
> Ther nevere tre shal fruyt ne leves bere.
> This streme yow ledeth to the sorweful were
> Ther as the fish in prysoun is al drye;
> Th'eschewing is only the remedye.
> [1]

Here is not plenitude but the sterility of mere desire, not order but apparent confusion in which the will is at once confronted with choice and deprived of certainty. The vision is all the more bitter because the instinct of the fish to spawn can hardly be eschewed. Small wonder that the dream of plenitude rarely excludes a wrenching nostalgia for the certainty that what we will is attainable and indeed fulfilling:

O to break loose, like the chinook
salmon jumping and falling back,
nosing up to the impossible
stone and bone-crushing waterfall -
raw-jawed, weak-fleshed there, stopped by ten
steps of the roaring ladder, and then
to clear the top on the last try,
alive enough to spawn and die.
2

Even a work apparently as sure of itself as The Courtier is given its characteristic note by an underlying nostalgia and by a sense of lost certainties. The book is punctuated by laments for the good old times, and not all of these are by any means as facetious as that of the Unico Aretino:

> Among them of old time the manner was, that women wrastled naked with men, but wee have lost that good custome together with many moe.
> 3

Despite Castiglione's capacity for self-parody there is a genuine poignancy when he declares, "I reckon my selfe bound (for that lyeth in me to doe) to stretch forth my force with all diligence to defend this famous memorie from mortall oblivion "[4], and his book strikes its deepest chord in the comment in the Prologue which Yeats so memorably recalled in his Autobiographies:

> All Wednesday I heard Castiglione's phrase ringing in my memory, 'Never be it spoken without tears, the Duchess, too, is dead', and that phrase, which - coming where it did among the numbering of his dead - often moved me till my eyes dimmed, brought before me now all his sorrow and my own, as though one saw the worth of life fade for ever.
> 5

Because nothing is certain in mortal life, and because men can rarely be sure that they are not "guided by vanities"[6], a moral concern leads in literature as

inevitably to a vigorous examination of motive and of behaviour as to the provision of models for behaviour or to visions of unfallen life. And what is invariably discovered is that behaviour resists being subdued to a moral form.

Before using Sidney's Apology as a context in which to confront the problems which behaviour creates for any attempt to see the idea of imaginative enlargement in affirmative, or even in exclusively moral, terms, let us briefly consider the larger context of Sidney's own acute awareness of the ways in which the possibilities revealed by man's "erected wit" are compromised by the fact of the "infected will". It soon emerges that Sidney's views on man and on human potential reveal deep uncertainties. On the one hand, his writings reveal plentiful evidence over and above the programme for literature which the Apology provides that he was powerfully drawn to the optimistic vision of the beautiful rationality of man in an ordered universe, and to the idea of the ennobling force of love. In the very first pages of the revised Arcadia[7] the shepherds Strephon and Claius describe, in conventionally Neoplatonic terms, how their love of Urania has raised their thoughts "above the ordinary level of the world". The theme of the ennobling power of love is picked up by the young prince Pyrocles who is soon found defending his love for the beautiful Philoclea, and his disguising as a woman which it had led him to, by arguing that,

> In that heavenly love, since ther are two parts, the one the love it self, th'other the excellency of the thing loved; I, not able at the first leap to frame both in me, do now (like a diligent workman) make ready the chiefe instrument, and first part of that great worke, which is love it self; which when I have a while practised in this sort, then you shall see me turn it to greater matters.
> (I. 80)

Musidorus, the prince's princely companion, is unconvinced by his friend's promise of a progress up the Platonic ladder, but despite his opposition to Pyrocles falling in love, he shortly falls in love himself. Thereupon he too proclaims that it is "by love that we are made, and to love we are made", and he defends beauty in the most extravagant terms:

> Beasts onely cannot discerne beauty,
> and let them be in the role of Bea[illegible]s
> that doo not honor it.
> (I.113)

It ensues that the great matter of the revised Arcadia is indeed the educative force of love, which is to teach Pyrocles and Musidorus lessons of magnanimity and patience; though in ways that they had certainly not foreseen.[8]

Sidney's desire to affirm not only the power of love but also the essential order and rationality of things is apparent in the fact that just before the revision of his work breaks off the book reaches a climax in a long and serious debate between the imprisoned Pamela and her godless aunt, Cecropia. Pamela makes a fierce effort to argue Cecropia out of her atheistic folly by invoking the wonderful order of God's creation. In the world as we see it, says Pamela, all things serve "[illegible] well consorted partes to ... an unexpressable harmonie" (I.408); and she moves on from this affirmation of order to the triumphant conclusion that "This worlde ... cannot otherwise consist but by a minde of Wisedome, which governes it" (I. 410). Though Pamela is only a virtuous heathen Sidney clearly endorses her reading of the book of nature. Cicero and Boethius had long since formulated the argument from order to divine orderer in almost identical terms,[9] and Sidney was probably also remembering the lengthy elaboration of similar views in du Plessis Mornay's Of the Trewenes of the Christian Religion, a book which he had energetically translated (or rather freely paraphrased in the manner of many contemporary "translations"). Mornay's tone of high-minded conviction is precisely Pamela's:

> Lo heere an order, such from degree
> too degiee, that whosoever conceiveth
> not by and by some Author thereof,
> hat neither Reason nor Sence.
> (III.265)

Mornay assumes that God has framed in our bodies "a Counterfet of the whole world, and in our Soules hath ingraven an image of himself" (III. 264), and he asserts that the most expedient way in which religion can be "declared unto Infidels or unbeleevers" (III.251) is by reasonable exposition. The whole burden of his argument is that it is possible to come near to a knowledge of God by a rational consideration of his effects; and it is in the spirit of such commonplaces that Sidney in the Apology speaks of ratio as "the greatest gift beste upon mortality" (121: 38).

But Sidney well knew that in practice the optimistic faith in human perfectibility proves fragile, and that life reveals itself as less than reasonable. Cecropia remains stubbornly evil in the face of all Pamela's arguments. Indeed those arguments present themselves to the sceptic as no more than the persuasive working out of the consequences of the initial assumption of order. Even so, it might be argued, 'If the Almigh did not intend us to eat each other, why did he make us of meat?' Cecropia stands firmly by her view that to believe that any God takes account of our doings,

> carries asmuch reason as if flies should
> thinke, that men take great care which of
> them hums sweetest, and which of them
> flies nimblest ...
> (I.407)

and she appeals to nature in her turn as a sanction for Epicurean pleasure.

It was likewise no small part of Sidney's strength as a writer that he could never deceive himself about the

reality of physical passion. Pyrocles justifies his love in Neoplatonic terms; but he soon finds that he cannot subdue his grosser desires. The force with which Musidorus condemns both Pyrocles' love and his transvestite disguising is deeply disquietening:

> If we wil be men, the reasonable parte of our soule, is to *have absolute commaundement*; against which if any sensuall weaknes arise, we are to yeelde all our sounde forces to the overthrowing of so unnaturall a rebellion ... And see how extremely every waye you endaunger your minde; for to take this womannish habit ... is wholy vaine.
>
> (I.77)

The pun on "habit" implies that the love is as unnatural as the disguise which it here provokes; and a medieval anti-feminist could hardly have produced a more ascetic rejection of the senses. Musidorus almost immediately launches into a further attack on love itself:

> Let us see, what power is the aucthor of all these troubles: forsooth love, love, a passion, and the basest and fruitlessest of all passions: feare *breedeth wit*, *Anger* is the cradle of courage: joy openeth and enhableth the hart: sorrow, as it closeth, so it draweth it inward to looke to the correcting of it selfe: and so all generally have power towards some [illegible] by the direction of right Reason. But this bastarde Love (for it deede the name of Love is most unworthylie applied to so hatefull a humour) as it is engendered betwixt lust and idleness; as the matter it workes upon is nothing, but a certaine base weakenes, which some gentel fooles call a gentle hart; as his adjoyned companions be unquietnes, longings, fond comforts, faint discomforts, hopes, ielousies, unfounded rages, causelesse yeeldings; so is the hiest ende it aspires unto, a little pleasure with much paine before, and great repentaunce after.
>
> (I.78)

Acute insights into the mechanics of human behaviour, no less than the confident marshalling of the logic, lend the lines their bite. One's admiration for the epigrammatic terseness hardly constitutes a consolation, and the lines carry a burden of bitterness that makes comparison with Shakespeare's "expense of spirit" sonnet not altogether presumptuous. Pyrocles is deeply angered and hurt by what Musidorus says, but in response to the attack he drops his Neoplatonic posturings and admits that his end is "enjoying". Much more heartfelt than his defence of love is the anguished cry into which he is provoked:

> I am sicke, and sicke to the death; I am a prisoner, neither is any redresse, but by her to whom I am a slave.
> (I.82)

The vocabulary is that of the conventional Petrarchan lover. Yet Sidney's treatment of the affection between the two princes - an affection which leads Musidorus to forgo his disdain and to give Pyrocles his sympathy - is so delicately handled in this scene that the reader is convinced of the reality of Pyrocles' frustration.

When Musidorus falls in love, the speech in which he complains to Pyrocles of his own love is even more bitter, especially in view of his earlier claim that it is only beasts that do not honour love:

> These beasts, like children to nature, inherite her blessings quietly; we, like bastards, are layd abroad, even as foundlinges to be trayned up by griefe and sorrow. Their mindes grudge not their bodies comfort, nor their sences are letted from enjoying their objects: we have the impediments of honor, and the torments of conscience.
> (I.154)

Wherever one looks in Sidney's writings one finds a comparably bitter attitude towards love. Love for Urania

might have ennobled Strephon and Claius, but what they feel most strongly is her absence. In the famous double sestina 'Ye goteherd gods' they lament that her departure has turned the best-pastured mountains into deserts. Strephon complains that he has grown a screech-owl to himself each morning, and Claius that the vales are filled with cries instead of with music: love has produced only a nightmarish desecration of their world.

At the most extreme, Sidney's bitterness moves over into a complete religious rejection of earthly love and of its imperfections. This is seen, for example, in his final request to have the Arcadia burned. Greville, in his Life of the renowned Sir Philip Sidney, frequently stresses the intensity of Sidney's religious feelings, and he says of Sidney's dying request that,

> /He saw/ that even beauty it self, in all earthly complexions, was more apt to allure men to evill, than to fashion any goodness in them.
> 10

This uncompromising attitude, which would exclude all claims for the poet as revealing the "form of goodness", finds its reflection even in the Arcadia. Basilius consults the Oracle because he desires a universe which admits no incalculables and in which any threatened fall can be evaded; but the resonant words in which he is blamed for this action imply that the threat of mutability can be countered only by a shift to an other-worldly perspective:

> Many ... (making a perpetuall mansion of this poore baiting place of mans life) are desirous to know the certaintie of things to come; wherein there is nothing so certaine, as our continual uncertaintie.
> (I.26)

The Arcadia illustrates most forcibly the precariousness of the good; and it reveals that at the heart of Sidney's

vision is his sense of man's uneasy existence. He can never forget that "our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is", yet he understands even more clearly how the "infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it".

The phrases just quoted are often remembered, and they occur in one of the most revealing paragraphs of the Apology. It is the paragraph in which Sidney insists that the idea of the poet delivering a golden world is in no way "saucy", which is to say that it in no way blasphemously denies the fact of man's fallen condition:

> Neither let it be deemed too saucy a comparison to balance the highest point of man's wit with the *efficacy of Nature*; but rather give right honour to the heavenly Maker of that maker, who having made man to His own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature: which in nothing he showeth so much as in Poetry, when with the force of a divine breath he bringeth things forth far surpassing her doings, with no small argument to the incredulous of that first accursed fall of Adam: since our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us *from reaching* unto it.
>
> (101.14)

Sidney's logic here is that the claims made for the erected wit, far from being an argument against man's fallen nature, provide a strong argument for Original Sin - they are no small argument against those who are incredulous of the Fall - precisely because the very poignancy of that belief comes from the fact that we are capable of knowing what perfection is, but unable to attain it in this life. Geoffrey Shepherd glosses the paragraph by adducing a most apt quotation from Calvin's *Institutes*:

> Yea [the Wit] is not so blockish, but that it tasteth also some little of the higher things ... For when it is carried up above the compasse of this present life

then it is principally conuinced of her
owne weaknesse.
11

It is the possibility of knowing perfection rather than the fact of infection which Sidney argues, and this not merely because the detractors of poetry would take that infection for granted. The assumption of man's "infected will" is the starting poing of his thoughts, no less than of Calvin's or Hesson's: and it is significant that he talks elsewhere of *aiming only* at such perfection as "our *degenerate* souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of" (104.7).

Sidney's friend and biographer Fulke Greville expressed what was admittedly an extreme Calvinist view in asserting that man's

> ... bankrupt Nature is not free,
> By any Arts to raise it selfe againe ...
> 12

but Sidney himself came very close to *this mood* in poems such as 'Leave me O Love ...' and 'Thou blind man's marke ...' with their burden of disillusion and disgust:

> Desire, desire I have too dearely bought,
> With price of mangled mind thy *worthlesse* ware.

However much Sidney was intellectually drawn to the confident and literal views of Christian humanism, or to Neoplatonic affirmations, he could not evade a powerful *awareness* of man's vulnerability and inclination to "death-bringing sins". This awareness would seem to have been more deeply engrained in his *temperament* and it was doubtless encouraged both by his education at Shrewsbury where there was a distinctly Protestant ethos, and by his friendship with men such as Greville and Languet.
13

It is not surprising that ethical optimism was only one strain in humanist thinking, a strain which seemed to some to come extremely close to the Pelagian heresy. Augustine had bitter personal experience of the inefficacy of the merely natural powers of the mind and he directed his attacks on pagan thought both at the idea of fortuna, which might seem to deny God's omnipotence, and at the idea of virtus, because it seemed to deny the necessity of divine revelation and of grace. The sixteenth-century reformers were inclined to adopt an Augustinian view of the depravity of man's reason since the fall, and of its proclivity to pander will. Hiram Haydn sees what he calls "the counter-renaissance" - a concept which subsumes the Protestant reformation along with other forms of reaction to the optimism of the early Christian humanists - as characterised precisely by its "rejection of the established exaltation of reason ... as the normative principle of human life".[14] It is worth reminding oneself that in Elizabethan England the Thirty-Nine Articles embodied the doctrinally acceptable view of Original Sin as,

> the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is ingendered of the spring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is, of his own nature inclined to evil

and the Pauline confession - "The good that I would do, I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do"[15] - struck (and still strikes) the deepest of chords.

Idealism invariably generates a sharpened sense of the inevitability of imperfection, but during the course of the Renaissance, in the period in England of "Elizabethan optimism" as well as of "Jacobean gloom", the duality was felt with particular acuteness. Shakespeare brings the duality home to us, wittily but fiercely, in the scene in which he has Troilus lament it as the "monstruosity in love" that "the will is infinite, and the execution confin'd;

that the desire is boundless, and the act a slave to limit" (III.ii.85) while Cressida stands at the young idealist's elbow archly enjoying what she takes to be a joke about sexual potency. Uncertainty and scepticism were no less typical of what Sidney called "this clear age" (133:20) than idealistic aspirations, and they were the more bitterly felt precisely because men had come to believe, with one part of their being at least, that their age had brought a rebirth of civilization.[16]

We can now return to our main argument and consider some of the difficulties which an acute awareness of the ambiguities of wit and will creates for the view that literature enlarges the imagination by its affirmation of the moral marvelous. I intend in the remainder of this chapter and in the chapters that follow to try to illustrate these difficulties by throwing certain aspects of the Apology into an unnaturally sharp focus in order to reveal inherent uncertainties in Sidney's argument. This might seem unkind to Sidney who writes with such persuasive ease and brio, and whose tone creates the strong sense of a mind surely the master of its main intentions and perfectly content to make, in passing, points which might seem to cancel each other out; but part of my intention is to suggest that the Apology, in consequence of its very inconsistencies, is a more complex and a more comprehensive work than is often realized.[17]

As far as the argument of the Apology is concerned, the difficulty created by man's fallen condition presents itself most immediately in the fact that the poet deals with *brazen* as well as with golden examples. This might seem to create no real problem, for clearly it can be argued that Sidney talks of the poet's world as "golden" only in the sense that it provides heightened images, whether of good or of evil. But it remains unclear in what sense heightened images of what is vicious in life are heart ravishing, and productive of imaginative enlargement. The question is more than a quibble for it opens up fundamental issues; but let us move towards these more scrupulously in terms of Sidney's argument itself.

Sidney accepts that poetry which aims at teaching can accomplish only a certain amount by limiting itself to perfect examples, inspiring passages and just endings. If poetry is to "take naughtiness away and plant goodness even in the secretest cabinet of our souls" (108:9) it must show us, he asserts, not only "in Cyrus, Aeneas, Ulysses, each thing to be followed", but also "in Tantalus, Atreus and such like, nothing that is not to be shunned" (110:10). The poet must thus figure forth

> the remorse of conscience, in Oedipus, the soon repenting pride of Agamemnon, the self-devouring cruelty in his father Atreus, the violent ambition in the two Theban brothers, the sour-sweetness of revenge in Medea; and, to fall lower, the Terentian Gnatho and our Chaucer's Pandar ... and finally, all virtues, vices, and passions so in their own natural seats laid to the view, that we seem not to hear of them, but clearly to see through them.
> (108:9)

The poet throws his perfect examples into relief, and makes them more telling, by contrasting them with heightened images of what is morally repugnant. As Sidney puts it, the man who fails to see "the filthiness of evil wanteth a great foil to perceive the beauty of virtue" (117:17), and this is a view which Spenser endorses in The Faerie Queene when he affirms that "Good by paragon/ Of evil, may more notably be rad" (III.ix.2). But dramatic contrast is an incidental advantage only. Brazen examples have in themselves an admonitory power to move the reader towards virtue. This argument is no more than a logical extension of the exemplary view of literature; and poetry written within a didactic frame has traditionally invoked the power of "apt admonishment" to spur the reader to repudiation. Satire and comedy, in Sidney's conventional Renaissance account of them, teach exclusively in this way. Comedy confronts us with "the common errors of our life" (117:11), and satire makes us aware of the "many

headaches" (117:5) occasioned by foolish passions: each moves us to virtue on the recoil. In addition Sidney talks of tragedy as working essentially through admonition. He describes the most excellent tragedy as that which,

> openeth the greatest wounds, and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue ... [and which by] stirring the effects of admiration and commiseration teacheth the uncertainty of this world, and upon how weak foundations gilded roofs are builded.
>
> (117:35)

The comments here make play with Aristotle's formula of pity and fear, but within the frame of the late medieval view - set out in Chaucer's Monk's Tale and entrenched for a writer of Sidney's generation in the example of Gorboduc and A Mirror for Magistrates - that tragedy offers admonitory lessons and cautionary tales with something of the grimness of a memento mori.

Sidney was quite obviously only too ready to fall back upon the staple Renaissance argument that certain forms of literature have an admonitory effect because this argument seemed to contribute to his stress on moving as being in the last resort above teaching. But though the idea that art provides brazen as well as golden examples falls easily enough into place in Sidney's defence as the inevitable consequence of an exemplary view of poetry, it does seem to imply a qualification of the claim that the poets deliver a heart-ravishing golden world. Consider, for example, the quality of the "admiration" which Sidney talks of as part of the proper effect of tragedy. This is comparable to the elevation produced by epic in that it owes something to the high status of the suffering protagonist, but the more important implication of the term as Sidney uses it of tragedy would seem to be that, far from enlarging the mind, tragedy produces the constricting fear that the "gilded" world will crumble in our grasp. Moreover, though

Sidney's view of satire is comparatively genial - he says of the satirist that he "sportingly never leaveth, until he make a man laugh at folly, and, at length ashamed, to laugh at himself" (117:1) - satire is not frequently content to be merely genial. Sidney remarks in passing that a man may fail, even "at length", to see that he himself dances "the same measure" (117:30) as that played by the satirist; but he leaves the point in the air. Such inconclusiveness, would not, however, satisfy so determined a moralist as Swift, who echoed Sidney in complaining that satire commonly provides the reader with a glass in which he obligingly recognises every face except his own, but who set about roughly jolting the reader into a response by a most unsporting technique of systematic assault upon all his complacencies. In a similar spirit Yeats wrote,

> I study hatred with great diligence,
> For that's a passion in my own control,
> A sort of besom that can clear the soul
> Of everything that is not mind or sense.
> 18

Clearly the most strenuous application of the literary imagination to a moral end is anything but invariably productive of a heart-ravishing vision. Indeed, to an unsympathetic eye, a view of art as liberating the mind into a larger zodiac might seem barely relevant to that essentially confrontative mode of the imagination which produced works of satire such as Troilus and Cressida and Volpone, and the run of Shakespearean tragedy from Richard III to Coriolanus.

Nor does the argument that by "golden world" Sidney meant simply "heightened world" meet the case, for the golden world, as Sidney describes it, is seen to contain sweet-smelling flowers, Cyruses and even chimeras; but not Thersites, blatant beasts and dead Cordelias. It is not delightful to be admonished, in any manner. Realising this, Sidney in the central section of his argument simply side-

steps the difficulty created by admonitory forms and he talks of poetry as though it always offered a "sweet prospect into the way"

Nevertheless, as we have noticed, the Apology does make room for the idea that we are often moved by a "judicial understanding"; and this view allows for a more subtle explanation than that provided by any straightforward exemplary argument of how the imagination is enlarged and the mind moved in its responses to the confrontative modes of the imagination. When Sidney talks of the poet as presenting "all virtues, vices and passions so in their own natural seats laid to the view, that we seem not to hear of them, but clearly to see through them", it is plainly his conviction that the poet, no less than the philosopher, must reveal virtue for what it is, and make known

> his enemy, vice, which must be destroyed,
> and his cumbersome servant, passion,
> which must be mastered.
> (105:13)

It is in making known both "the oblique" and "the right" (117:15) that the poet leads men to that "knowledge of a *man*'s self, in the ethic and politic consideration" which Sidney names as the highest end of all learning. And the poet exerts his coercive force upon us by presenting this knowledge not as "bare philosophy precepts" but in such a lively way that we are forced (in Shelley's pithy phrase which Sidney would clearly have applauded) to "imagine that which we know"[19].

It has often been remarked that Renaissance humanism produced a renewed interest in the intricacies of individual psychology. Renaissance writers were fascinated by human behaviour, not as something to be studied and codified as it had been by the schoolmen, but as an inexhaustible object of interest and concern. Where Aquinas scrutinized

human emotions to decide - to take one of his 'Questions' at random - 'Whether the species of fear are suitably assigned?'[20], Montaigne employed an equally subtle intellect in perfecting the *essai* as a tool for introspection and for the most searching, yet always provisional, self-discovery. And where the medieval imagination was prone to provide a pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins, Shakespeare developed the soliloquy as a means of laying bare the very hearts of his characters. Sidney was of his age in implying that the poet's scrutiny should "look right through the deeds of men" and bring to the bar of understanding and judgment all forms of behaviour, golden and brazen. As he summed it up, the poet should have all, "from Dante's heaven to his hell, under the authority of his pen" (III:17).

The humanist stress on self-knowledge as a condition of active virtue was clearly one of the strongest incentives to this presentation of character in depth. In the first place it encouraged the idea that the most moving example was that in which the hero was shown as coming to full understanding of himself in the course of rising above trials and misfortunes. It equally encouraged the idea that the hero could most movingly be shown in the process of rising above his temptations, and of coming to "know his own good or evil, by practise" (I.58).

The *Arcadia* presents examples of precisely this sort and this is one of the main sources of its interest and strength. Indeed it is arguable that the exemplary hero who is not shown as having to rise above both fortune and the elements of baseness in his own human nature is liable to seem cold and uninspiring, as at times threatens to be the case with Shakespeare's Henry V. Strangely enough, however, the nearest that Sidney comes to spelling out points such as these in the *Apology* is when he remarks, in the course of his discussion of the coercive effect of the poet's just ending, that the poet goes out of his way to show Ulysses in a storm and in other hard plights so that his patience

and magnanimity might be seen to "shine the more in the near-following prosperity" (111:31). Walter Davis is quite wrong to argue that in the Apology Sidney talks of literature as having a deliberately explorative function.[21] Davis offers as a parallel to Sidney's views Wallace Stevens's affirmation that the poet's fictions represent,

> The poem of the mind in the act of finding
> What will suffice ...

but this way of putting it not only goes beyond the Apology, it suggests a self-consciousness and a sense of moral values as problematical that is completely inappropriate to the temper of the work. Sidney, like virtually all his contemporaries, would have contorted that ideas of order are not a matter of "what will suffice" but the unquestioned verities of the good life.

Nevertheless, Sidney's own creative work does provide a most searching exploration of the nature and consequences of the moral necessity. This is the case in the Astrophel and Stella sequence, for example. These sonnets and songs present the development of Astrophel's love, in all its urgency, to the point where passion overmasters reason and Astrophel's strongest motive is to have Stella, despite the fact that she is already married. The climax of the sequence is the Eighth Song, one of the finest and most neglected of all English lyrics.[21a] Here Astrophel urges his love for the first time and Stella finally refuses him. The twenty-six stanza poem is exquisitely constructed. The opening description of an idyllic setting is quiet and restrained, but with an underlying sensuousness that would seem to look forward discreetly to a satisfactory conclusion:

> In a grove most rich of shade,
> Where birds wanton musicke made,
> May then yong his pide weedes showing,
> New perfumed with flowers fresh growing ...
>
> (The Poems, p.217)

Immediately, however, a contrast is established between the rich shade, the wanton music and the confident vernal display on the one hand, and the long-suffering lovers who gratefully, almost hopelessly, meet for the "mutual comfort" which the wonder of their being even momentarily together affords. Through a use of parallel and repetitive forms, and explicitly in Donne-like images such as that of the lovers' eyes "enterchangeably reflected", Sidney stresses the mutuality of their feeling. In their unhappy happiness they gaze silently at each other until "teares themselves /do/ smile".

Then Astrophel is wrought to speak, first with something of the heightened, ritualistic formality of the Petrarchan lover praising his lady. This very formality in context signals an almost desperate attempt to express and yet contain mounting feeling. Then the rhetoric breaks, as Astrophel's passion becomes unbearable:

> Graunt, o graunt, but speech alas,
> Failes me fearing on to passe,
> Graunt, o me, what am I saying ...

At the climax of his confusion, however, the verse modulates into a poignant lyrical simplicity that seems to rise effortlessly from the depths of his desire:

> Never season was more fit,
> Never roome more apt for it;
> Smiling ayre allowes my reason,
> These birds sing: 'Now use the season.'
>
> This small wind which so sweete is,
> See how it the leaves doth kisse,
> Ech tree in his best attiring,
> Sense of love to love inspiring.
>
> Love makes earth the water drink,
> Love to earth makes water sinke;
> And if dumbe things be so witty,
> Shall a heavenly grace want pitty?

What is expressed in these stanzas of extreme rhythmical subtlety, with their thrusting impetus made graceful by

the balance, and by the lifting lightness of the feminine endings, is no importunate desire but a natural and irresistible springing of deep affection. What Astrophel pleads is not his own selfish lust or pain but the rightness of a "sinking" which would be as freely granted as gratefully received; and he stresses this rightness by implying that nature itself vouches for it. "Graunt", he says,

> That not I, but since I love you,
> Time and place for me may move you.

The return to the pastoral imagery of the opening is brilliantly effective and it lends to Astrophel's appeal a quality of almost innocent tenderness. It is as though he is arguing from plenitude to virtue.

But with a matching tenderness and restraint Stella rejects his appeals:

> Trust me while I thee deny,
> In my selfe the smart I try,
> Tyran Honour doth thus use thee,
> Stella's selfe might not refuse thee.
>
> Therefore, Deere, this no more move,
> Least, though I leave not thy love,
> Which too deep in me is framed,
> I should blush when thou art named.

Stella's tribute to Astrophel, that his love is deeply "framed" within her, is as moving as the tact of her allusion to shame. "Tyran honour", which would make her blush with guilt if she surrendered, is here no Petrarchan commonplace, nor the "ungratefulness" of a cruel concern for reputation. Rather it represents an inflexible reminder of the moral impossibility of their love. Though their love has all the rightness of a "natural persuasion" it must bow to a higher imperative, and Stella must leave the "pleasaunce". Sidney has prepared the reader for this inevitable outcome even in the terms of the appeal which Astrophel speaks. Stronger

arguments than "smiling ayre" disallow Astrophel's "reason", a "heavenly grace" is more "witty" than to do as "dumbe things" do, and the required surrender would indeed be a "sinking".

The poem ends with a chaste firmness that conveys both an inexpressible depth of feeling and the finality of Stella's decision:

> Therewithall away she went,
> Leaving him so passion rent,
> With what she had done and spoken,
> That therwith my song is broken.

The consequences of virtue are hard, but absolutely binding and the poem has discovered them with superb grace and surety.

Far from presenting "law and impulse" (to borrow a phrase from Wordsworth) as complementing each other, the whole Astrophel and Stella sequence sees them as pulling apart. Plenitude can no longer be trusted. At the heart of the sequence is the conflict between Astrophel's sense of a responsibility to moral restraints and his sexual desire. The Petrarchan code demanded a despairing lover, and it would be wrong to read the sequence too disingenuously as a direct account of Sidney's relationship with Penelope Rich. Nevertheless, the poems reflect a more than conventional understanding of the chaotic effects of desire. Consider, for a moment, the fifth sonnet in the sequence:

> It is most true, that eyes are form'd to serve
> The inward light: and that the heavenly part
> Ought to be king, from whose rules who do swerve,
> Rebels to Nature, strive for their owne smart.
>
> It is most true what we call Cupid's dart,
> An image is, which for our selves we carve
> And, fooles, adore in temple of our hart,
> Till that good God make Church and Churchman starve.
>
> True, that true Beautie Vertue is indeed,
> Whereof this Beautie can be but a shade,
> Which elements with mortall mixture breed:
> True, that on earth we are but pilgrims made,
> And should in soule up to our countrey move:
> True, and yet true that I must Stella love.

(The Poems, p.167)

Within the frame of dramatic urgency provided by the repeated "It is most true ..." the poem builds up its argument in a manner that convincingly suggests the intimate movement of a mind discovering the depth of its distress. The full perversity and pain of Astrophel's final rejection of the inward light of reason is brought out by the fact that he nowhere questions that man's charge in life is to "lift up the mind from the dungeon of the body" and not to surrender to the infected will. The tone of the final assertion of the speaker's counter-truth is neither audacious nor self-pitying, but chastened; and this is particularly so because the phrase "our country" in the previous line so firmly endorses the simple naturalness of the heavenly pilgrimage. We are confronted at the end with no witty literary paradox, but with the human truth of the lover who realizes his disgrace and yet can "not leave loving".

In poems such as this the sequence provides an uncompromising exploration of the tensions that breed between virtue and passion, and it painfully reckons the cost of achieving the moral ideal. It seems clear, however, that Sidney did not have this sort of exploration in mind when he was writing the Apology. The example of Astrophel is hardly one which "giveth so sweet a prospect into the way; as will entice any man to enter into it" (113:20), nor is his fate "food for the tenderest stomachs" (109:14). At the same time Astrophel is not offered to the reader as a simple moral warning of the consequences of failing to master that "cumbersome servant passion": indeed the sequence as a whole commands far more sympathy for does Stella.

In the Arcadia no less than in Astrophel and Stella Sidney's heroes find it extremely difficult to achieve exemplary perfection, and this would seem to be mainly because the moral imagination when exercised in literature tends to generate its own form of brazen honesty in relation to the behaviour which it confronts. This honesty

is something more than the clearsightedness of the teacher who recognises that it is when he has a grip on the actual that he can most effectively exert pressure upon it. What it entails is a recognition on the part of a writer that his main moral commitment is to truthfulness rather than to any neat strategy of teaching which is not to say that truthfulness excludes teaching. On the contrary, the fuller the poet's vision, the more liable it is to have engaged the coercive vigour of a profound moral concern and the more likely it is to ravish the reader into an acceptance of its moral premises.

It is important to be fair to Sidney's arguments in the Apology. It is admirable for a writer to order his values in terms of an ideal of the Just City. Moreover, though Sidney's assertion that the artist should reveal a just pattern is somewhat bluntly presented, his recognition of the artist's need to affirm some pattern in experience is not different in kind from the more general recognition that all art, in order to be art and not merely a passive mirroring of the inchoate flood of random and inane experience, must impose some order upon the material which it presents. And an artist achieves order by committing himself in each work to a particular vision and hence to a particular set of values which explicitly or implicitly governs his choices and rejections. It is precisely this that some "post-modern" art and its attendant theorizing would deny.[22] Nevertheless, the post-modernists who would suggest that a resolute nominalism, a commitment to flux or a determination to break up all existing ideas of order are the only honest possibilities for the contemporary artist are themselves as assumption-prone as Sidney, for a consistent denial of order itself amounts to an affirmation of a particular view. There would seem to be no escape from the fact that the artist achieves a view, or nothing.

In presenting his particular vision the artist may well decide to construct his plot in such a way that the

hero is successful and justice prevails. But his work is unlikely to be satisfying if it does not make allowance for the complexities of the moral life and for the often painful consequences of achieving justice. The writer has thus, for example, to be careful not to imply that goodness is invariably successful in worldly terms, and that that is why it should be embraced. Sidney's claim that the poet is a better teacher than the historian because he can better show virtue rewarded and vice punished is perfectly admissible, but it is liable to prove fatal to the poet if it encourages him to falsify or simplify experience and to ignore what Aristotle called 'the probable".That way lies the eighteenth-century idea of poetic justice as a formalistic criterion and all the sentimental absurdities of a Thomas Kyd suggesting that Desdemona should only have feigned death while Othello cut his throat in remorse, or of Nahum Tate re-writing the final scene of King Lear in such a way that it is not art and nature but Cordelia and Edgar that end up cosily "hand in hand".[23]

That there is nothing sentimental in Sidney's attitude, however, is suggested by the fact that his whole argument for the pre-eminence of poetry in teaching is based on the hard-headed acceptance that virtue is not simply a matter of knowing what is right but of being "moved to do that which we know" (113:16). This insistence on the necessity of moving goes with a complete lack of illusions about the infected nature of man's will. As Sidney says, with an engaging bluntness, the poets "move men to take that goodness in hand, which without delight they would fly as from a stranger" (103:3).

Of course the possibility remains that men may not be any more irresistibly moved to virtue by the poet's delightful teaching than by any other. Sidney cites, as an example of the poet's power to move, Plutarch's account of the abominable tyrant Alexander Pheraeus:

> From [his] eyes a tragedy, well made and represented, drew abundance of tears, who without all pity had murdered infinite numbers, and some of his own blood; so as he that was not ashamed to make matters for tragedies, yet could not resist the sweet violence of a tragedy.
> (118:9)

Alexander was not, however, any more than Shakespeare's Claudius, converted by the "sweet violence" of the play that he was watching: he simply walked out of the theatre. Sidney says of the play, "if it wrought no further good in him, it was that he, in despite of himself, withdrew himself from hearkening to that which might mollify his hardened heart". Though the anecdote illustrates the moving power of poetry it concedes that poetry will not necessarily improve men who have set their hearts against virtue. Elsewhere, as we have noticed, Sidney says of the effect of comedy:

> There is no man living but, by the force truth hath in Nature, no sooner seeth these men play their parts, but wisheth them in pistrinum: although perchance the sack of his own faults lie so behind his back that he seeth not himself dance the same measure; whereto yet nothing can more open his eyes than to find his own actions contemptibly set forth.
> (117:26)

The last comment makes a not unreasonable claim but the admission that men may not be led by poetry to see their own faults does, despite Sidney's adroit underplaying of it, and like the Alexander anecdote, imply a significant qualification of the argument that poetry coerces the will to action.

The weakness of a kinetic view of the effect of art, however, is not that it is impossible to guarantee that good teaching will issue in virtuous actions, which would obviously be unreasonable to expect, but that it implies far

too crude and narrow an account of the nature of the moral enlargement that art affords. Moral imperatives tend to be relatively clear cut - 'Thou shalt not' and 'Thou shalt' - whereas literature tends to upset fixed habits of thought and feeling. While it refreshes morality by the cogency of its figuring it also suggests how complicated moral problems can be in practice. It brings together the precept and the example in so concrete a way and with such a regard for the complexities of behaviour that the main effect is rarely exemplary in any simple sense. The song from the Astrophel and Stella sequence which we examined is characteristic in that its main effect is to engage our sympathies and to enlarge our understanding: it arrests the mind rather than engages the will.

It would seem necessary to allow that literature does not put moral pressure on the reader in any simple way but rather by helping him to extend and confirm his understanding of experience within a moral frame. Implicit in this stress on achieving understanding is a decisive shift from a crudely kinetic to a more subtle contemplative view of art and of its effect. A neat model for the latter view is provided by Ben Jonson's little poem 'An Epitaph on Master Philip Gray':

> Reader, stay.
> And if I had no more to say,
> But here doth lie till the last Day,
> All that is left of Philip Gray,
> It might thy patience richly pay:
>
> For, if such men as he could die,
> What suretie of life have thou, and I?

The controlling metaphor of the poem is the idea of arrest. For the moment, confrontation with the epitaph stays the mind from its busy pursuit of getting and spending, from all that "richly pays" in any immediate or practical sense. In this moment of arrest the mind is "raised above desire and loathing", to use Joyce's words from A Portrait of the

Artist, and invited to brood on something "grave and constant" in the human condition.[24] Once the initial contract to stay and read on has been entered into, the relationship between reader and speaker entails not coercion but the sharing of a developing train of thought and feeling which is pertinent to both "thou, and I", and which has something of the objective quality of an inscription on a tombstone. Yet despite this objectivity the arrested mind is actively engaged and the brooding is coloured by moral preoccupations. The tendency of an epigrammatic style is towards a chiselled statement, but Jonson achieves a dramatic and witty quality by playing off the simple form of the epitaph against the complexity of a tone which achieves resonance by its ironical reserve, and he makes the final line not a clinching enunciation but a disconcerting challenge: thus, though the poem does not urge the reader to action, it certainly urges the mind to "aftersight and foresight".[25]

In relation then to the model which this poem can be thought of as providing, the idea of imaginative enlargement needs to be modified to accommodate the notion of arrest and of an enlargement of moral awareness.

It is an obvious weakness of Sidney's Apology that it resolutely sets itself against anything but a kinetic view of art as energizing the will to action. Nevertheless, in the course of his discussion of tragedy, when he renders the Aristotelian "pity and fear" as "admiration and commiseration" Sidney does open the way to a much more challenging view of the moral effect of the confrontative imagination. Shakespeare extends these terms most fruitfully in a speech in Hamlet in which Horatio sums up the effect of the final catastrophe. Horatio says to the enquiring Fortinbras, whose "where is this sight?" implies an as yet uninvolved curiosity:

> What is it you would see?
> If aught of woe or wonder, cease your search.
> (V.ii.376)

The terms appear congruent: woe and wonder, commiseration and admiration, fear and pity; yet this is not quite the case. J. V. Cunningham has brilliantly demonstrated not only the continuity of the tradition of views about the effect of tragedy from Aristotle, through Donatus and medieval writers to the Renaissance; but also the resonances which the term "wonder" had assimilated from its use in the medieval tradition of psychological analysis.[26]

Aquinas distinguishes three species of fear that may be felt in relation to external things, namely amazement, stupor and anxiety. Stupor is caused especially by the experience of something unwonted. The man who is stupefied neglects either to judge the unwonted experience or to think about it afterwards: he simply shuts his mind in fear. But clearly the tragic artist does *not* aim at creating a feeling of stupor, for the last thing he desires is that the reader or spectator should clamp tight. Anxiety, says Aquinas, is related particularly to unforeseen misfortunes (such as might be brought about by the turning of Fortune's wheel). This species of fear corresponds to the common understanding of Aristotle's tragic fear as the appalled recognition that 'There, but for the grace of God, go I'. It would seem to be in much this sense that Sidney uses the term "admiration". But one wonders whether the response to tragedy is as self-regarding as this notion of fear implies. "Amazement" or "wonder", Aquinas's third term, might seem much more relevant. The reaction of amazement is essentially a response to the magnitude of an experience, and the man who is amazed "shrinks at present from forming a judgment of that which amazes him, fearing to fall short of the truth, but inquires afterwards".[27] This would exactly correspond to what might seem to be a writer's legitimate hope that the reader should submit totally, for the moment, to the vastness and pain of the tragic experience before him, and

then brood upon its implications. It was presumably with this power of wonder to provoke awed contemplation in mind that Stephen Dedalus insisted that he, not Aristotle, had defined terror:

> Terror is the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence of whatsoever is grave and constant in human sufferings and unites it with the secret cause.
> (Joyce p.209)

Not for the first time, Stephen was simply plagiarising Aquinas.

Of course Aquinas allows that not all forms of wonder are species of fear for, as Cunningham says, wonder can be thought of as "the state of over-powering surprise, the shocked limit of feeling, which represents either the extreme of joy or ... the extreme of fear".[28] Shakespeare's understanding of the word as relating to the shocked limit of feeling is illustrated by a passage from near the end of The Winter's Tale. The First Gentleman describes the news that Perdita is the King's daughter as producing "a little amazedness", and he continues with his report by offering a more minute description of the reaction of Leontes and Camillo:

> But the changes I perceived in the King and Camillo were very notes of admiration: they seemed almost, with staring on one another, to tear the cases of their eyes; there was speech in their dumbness, language in their very gesture; they looked as they had heard of a world ransomed, or one destroyed: a notable passion of wonder appeared in them; but the wisest beholder, that knew no more but seeing, could not say if the importance were joy or sorrow; but in the extremity of the one it must needs be.
> (V.i.11)

As in the lines from Hamlet in which Horatio replies to Fortinbras there is the insistence that wonder is dependent upon full emotional involvement and on knowing something feelingly: it is denied to the mere beholder who knows "no more but seeing". In Sidney's terms the effect of wonder is such as to "strike, pierce, and possess the sight of the soul" in a manner that a mere "wordish description" does not achieve. But not only does the effect of wonder possess the feelings to the utmost, it also throws the mind forward, spurring it to a "true lively knowledge" of what has been felt. Though Fortinbras finds that he can cease his search in a physical sense, he cannot stop his mind from brooding on the significance of the scene before him:

> O proud Death,
> What feast is toward in thine eternal cell
> That thou so many princes at a shot
> So bloodily has struck?
> (V.ii.378)

Hamlet's insistence that Horatio should absent himself from felicity for a while in order to tell his story "aright" falls into place in relation to the necessity that the significance of the tragedy should be made known, and the events truly understood. Likewise Shakespeare's dramatic device of reporting the "amazedness" at the discovery in The Winter's Tale acts as a challenge to the mind to grasp "the extremity" in a way that the messenger does not, and to brood upon the precise relationship of joy and sorrow in the experience that the play presents.

In this respect, "wonder", as an effect of literature which ever from the first as Sidney said drew "the wild untamed wits to an admiration of knowledge" (96:27), is closely related to that wonder which Aristotle recognised to be the motive for learning and the occasion of philosophy. It is especially when the mind is temporarily baffled or

overwhelmed that it expands and tries to grow towards an understanding of the mystery.

Such remarks may be illustrated by a brief discussion of the effect of "wonder" in the last moments of King Lear. The pattern of the final scene is unusual in Shakespeare: the swift and terrible sequence of events leads up to Albany's attempt, as the man of highest rank surviving, to achieve some equilibrium in a speech of "high order" that is normative to such moments in Shakespearean tragedy:[29]

> You lords and noble friends, know our intent,
> What comfort to this great decay may come
> Shall be applied ... All friends shall taste
> The wages of their virtue, and all foes
> The cup of their deservings ...
> (V.iii.288f.)

But Albany finds that he cannot continue in this vein. To think of offering Lear a remission of the kingdom is a mockery. Just as Albany's earlier pious wish that Cordelia be safe - "The Gods defend her!" - was savagely undercut by the immediate entry of Lear with the dead Cordelia in his arms, so here his talk of "comfort" and rewards is totally inadequate to the spectacle of Lear's mind clouding, and yet still thundering, under the injustice whereby his "poor fool" is hanged. Albany talks as though a moment of poise has been reached from which a tentative new start can be made in terms of an "intent" quite unlike Lear's "fast intent" of dividing the kingdom, which prologued the "great decay". But the time is not "free". Lear's own death must still be endured; and while Gloucester's heart "burst smilingly", between extremes of joy and grief but at least in the knowledge that Edgar had been "miraculously" delivered, Lear is to die still willing and straining to make Cordelia's lips move by the very intensity of his desire to see them move. He has known from the first, despite mirror and feather, that she is dead, but the enormity of the idea that she will never come again is more than he can bear. As the play

moves towards his "promised end" there is no hint of redemption or of "Heaven blazing into the head",[30] nothing but the agony of his continuance on the rack of a desperate hope and the echoing of his unanswerable indictment:

> Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
> And thou no breath at all?

William Empson's comment that there is at the heart of the play "a fundamental horror, an idea that the gods are such silly and malicious jokers that they will soon destroy the world"[31] points to something essential in the effect of the play's close. Edmund's failure to remember Cordelia sooner, as indeed Shakespeare's decision to change the ending from that in the source, would seem quite gratuitous were it not that the very principle of the play's construction has been one of a succession of hard-won respites brutally swept up into worse disasters. This savagery with which all expectations of comfort and justice are brushed aside would seem to imply a nihilistic drive at the heart of life. Freud has what seems at first a surprising comment on the last moments of the play, but a comment which brilliantly evokes the monstrousness of the reversal of expectation which the end achieves:

> Reverse the situation and it becomes intelligible and familiar to us - the Death goddess bearing away the hero from the place of battle, like the Valkyr in German mythology. Eternal wisdom, in the garb of primitive myth, bids the old man renounce love, choose death and make friends with the necessity of dying.[32]

But it is impossible to choose Cordelia's death or to make friends with the necessity of her dying. Much has been written of Lear's patience, but unlike Hamlet he could hardly be further at the end from feeling that "the readiness is all": the desperateness of his loss is all that he

is left with. As in the Rondanini Pietà where all heroic pretentions of form are sacrificed to the overwhelming pathos of a grief in which the two figures merge into one, so here all mythic or redemptive analogies are sacrificed to the pathos of the struggle in which Lear, who had initially desired to crawl "unburthen'd" towards death, is finally borne down by a weight beyond even his strength.

Nevertheless, though there is no iota of consolation or justice in the deaths of Cordelia and Lear, the final effect of the play is not nihilistic, for a sense of profound awe mingles with the grief and horror felt by the survivors. Edgar expresses this in his last hushed comment:

> The weight of this sad time we must *obey*;
> Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say,
> The oldest hath borne most: we that are young
> Shall never see so much, nor live so long.

He accepts the futility of attempting to establish "intents", or even of attempting judgment. Out of his own experience of bearing much his mind gropes towards an intuition of what Lear has experienced, and wonder suffuses his woe. Like Edgar, the reader or spectator of the play, at the shocked limit of feeling, is still *impelled* to wonder and even to pay tribute to the human capacity, in enduring all, to suffer all. Like Edgar, we continue to *respond to* Lear's vitality even in its defeat. Yet our wonder is directed too towards "the secret cause". Wordsworth catches something essential in the spirit of the ending in a passage in The Borderers, a play which owed much to King Lear:

> Action is transitory - a step, a blow,
> The motion of a muscle - this way or that-
> 'Tis done, and in the *after vacancy*
> We wonder at ourselves like men betrayed:
> Suffering is permanent, obscure and dark,
> And shares the nature of infinity.[33]

The spectacle of such suffering turns our attention from ourselves, or even from the individual sufferer, to what is "permanent, obscure and dark" in the nature of things. Wanton and inordinate suffering like that at the end of King Lear forces us to confront "the mystery of things", not from the privileged position of God's spies but as awed spectators as yet "young" in the terrible understanding of what life might bring. As Yeats put it in his essay The Tragic Theatre, the experience of tragedy drowns all dykes and in the trance-like intensity of the experience, "the persons upon the stage ... greaten till they are humanity itself".[34]

As the mind broods upon the closing cadences of the play it becomes clear that there is no total abandonment to the idea that existence is meaningless and valueless. The survivors huddle together and we know that they will begin anew as best they can. The state, though gored, will be sustained by Edgar; and Kent expresses his spiritual exhaustion in words that still have a haunting sense not only of resignation but of respect:

> I have a journey, sir, shortly to go;
> My master calls me, I must not say no.

Moreover, we are left with an acute perception of the nature of goodness, and of evil. We have seen character after character brought to the point where they have felt compelled to speak out for the good - Cordelia, Kent, the Fool, Gloucester, the servingman, Albany, Edgar, finally even Edmund. Thus goodness has been affirmed at least in the sense that we have been made to recognise its necessity; for apart from the "foolish" love and loyalty of the characters who have committed themselves without hope of a reward, there would seem nothing of which we can be sure save the horror of consuming appetite, and the foul storm. The universe may be meaningless, and life may seem barely to be endured, but if it is to be endured - and Shakespeare

did not "break up his lines to weep" but drew his breath in pain to tell the story - then it must be endured "foolishly" rather than appetitively.

Almost any comment of this sort runs the risk of sounding like a plea in mitigation, yet it must be made though nothing can mitigate what has happened, and though it is on those who have helped him that Lear turns in fury:

> A plague upon you, murderers, traitors all.
> I might have saved her ...

In a famous letter Keats praises Shakespeare for his Negative Capability - his ability to remain in "uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable *reaching after* fact and reason".[35] In writing as he did, Keats could well have had in mind Shakespeare's *own disparaging* comment in All's Well on the tendency of the philosophic mind to *impose order*:

> We have our philosophical persons to make modern and familiar, things supernatural and causeless. Hence it is that we make trifles of terrors, ensconcing curselves into seeming knowledge when we should submit ourselves to an unknown fear.
> (II.iii.5)

At the same time, however, the Keats who described King Lear as a "fierce dispute/ Betwixt damnation and impassioned clay"[36] hardly thought of it as an amoral work. It is knowledge, not value that is problematic in Shakespeare.

The confrontative modes of the imagination, wrought to the extreme of which they seem capable, as in a work such as King Lear, hold dialogue with our deepest fears; but, to revert to Aquinas's terms, they leave us neither in stupor nor even in anxiety. It is the mind that demands certainties that is overwhelmed by stupor and anxiety on discovering that nothing is certain. The furthest reach of imaginative enlargement on the other hand discovers the

paradox that because we can know nothing as final, the only condition in terms of which it is bearable to live is one of hope: and the rest is a silence and mystery to which we can only submit in woe and wonder.

Tragedy may seem the most profound *form of art*, but in saying this I do not mean to turn my back on my earlier remarks about the moral marvellous. W. H. Auden avers, in *one* of his characteristic discourses by dichotomy, that there are two theories of poetry:

> Poetry as a magical means of inducing desirable emotions in oneself and *others*, or Poetry as a game of knowledge, a bringing to consciousness, by naming them, of emotions and their hidden relationships. The first view was held by the Greeks, and is now held by M.G.M., Agit-Prop and the collective public of the world. They are wrong.
> 37

The Auden who wrote this would doubtless have classified Sidney's demands for an affirmative art within a moral *frame* together with those of the Greeks and M.G.M., but it is with more humility that the later Auden smiles at the fashionable proclivities of *those* in the modern City without Walls:

> Few now applaud a play that ends
> with warmth and pardon the word to all,
> as, blessed, unbamboozled, the bridal pairs,
> rustic and oppidan, in a ring-dance,
> image the stars at their stately bransels.
> 38

A happy ending with a conventional distribution of rewards and prizes is inclined to seem philistine now, but there is something equally artless about the propriety with which so many contemporary works conform to the acceptable failure convention. Auden might well have enlarged his scorn to include "poetry as a mechanical means of inducing

undesirable emotions in oneself and others". Such is the current store set by realism and irony that there is a strong temptation to value the visions provided by the affirmative modes of the imagination, from epic down to *romance* and even pastoral with its lesser dream of plenitude and innocence, only for the intrusions into their somewhat self-contained worlds of an awareness of pain and insufficiency. But it would be foolish, a crude modern distortion, to value works in an idealizing mod· only for *their impurity: ends need* not always be apocalyptic. It is arguable that one of our deepest desires is that for justice and order. Thus Chesterton tells the story of how some children whom he had taken to see Maeterlinck's Blue Bird were aggrieved "because it did not end with a *Day of Judgment*, and it was not revealed to the hero and heroine that the Dog had been faithful and the Cat faithless".[39] With regard to Auden's two theories of poetry, it must be remembered that one of the most important aspects of the game of knowledge is the act of recognizing and naming what it is that we truly desire.

From the Seafarer, musing on landsmen wealthy and wine-flushed, while his ship tosses close to the cliffs and the gannet screams in his ears, to Prufrock, formulated on a pin but remembering the mermaids' singing, literature has been concerned with man's fate as well as with his dreams - and with the tensions that breed between these. It is with an eye to both the wonderful and the probable that it strives to achieve a larger understanding of the human condition, of man, himself balanced precariously between what R. P. Blackmur has memorably called the numen and the moha.[40]

Chapter III

WHAT MAY BE AND SHOULD BE

In the previous chapter we saw the "teaching" paradigm moving towards its limits. The poet can charge the imagination of his readers by driving inwards into the mystery of life as well as by looking outwards at the shining forms of perfection, and the nature of the response which he calls for is in each case far more complex than the "kineticism" which a didactic view envisages. Moreover, the effect would seem to be ultimately of a movement beyond a tight moral frame such as that within which Sidney's Apology presents its arguments. This is particularly apparent in the value which Shakespearean practice assigns to vitality and to awe: confronted with the "infinite variety" of a Cleopatra who hops forty paces down the public street and who transforms the bite of the asp to "a lover's pinch,/ Which hurts, and is desir'd" (V.ii.296), or with the agony of Lear in his last moments, the mind moves beyond judgment to wonder.

One thing I have become acutely conscious of in writing these chapters is the extent to which the notion of morality becomes slippery within one's grasp. The phrase forms itself: 'The mind moves beyond judgment to wonder'. But no sooner has it done so than one pauses to reflect whether a formulation such as: 'The mind moves beyond a moral view to wonder' would have sounded equally acceptable, or meant the same thing. Views of art as teaching tend to take it for granted that there is a moral code of value which is fixed and unitary and to which all right-minded men will consent. But things are not this simple. For a Stoic there is nothing morally wrong in the suicide of a Cleopatra, Antony or Brutus: for the Christian there is. Other issues seem problematic, even within a given frame.

It is possible, for example, to debate at length whether one can give moral approval to Hamlet's brushing aside the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as *not on* his conscience, and to debate too whether the play calls for such approval. Tolstoy is convinced that it was immoral for Anna to run off with Vronsky: Lawrence retorts that it was moral inasmuch as it was a life-enhancing action. Reinhold Niebuhr raises the same issue in a more provocative way by asserting that at the heart of Greek tragedy was an uncertainty as to whether the centre of life lay in its law or in its vitality.[1] And to confound the difficulties of conflicting goods and shifting frames of value one is bound to bump into a well-meaning social scientist who takes it for granted that the issue must be considered within his frame of reference on the grounds that an anthropologist told the story of Hamlet to a group of African elders only to have them applaud the speed with which Claudius married his brother's widow.[2]

Henry James might seem to cut the Gordian knot by declaring that the morality of any work is a matter of the amount of felt life in it.[3] But this appropriation of the word "morality" does not get round the fact that a sympathetic rendering of felt life inevitably involves actors who are "seeing", or seeking value, and whose lives can hardly be understood or rendered without some code or criteria for assessing choice and commitment.

Let us try to move slowly forward by picking up the point which we made in the last chapter that each successful and coherent work of literature must explicitly or implicitly have reference to a frame of value within which it orders its action. And let us test this assumption against a work such as Sidney's Old Arcadia in which a frame which was clearly prior to the work is resolutely thrust at our attention.

The Old Arcadia is meticulously constructed and the structure is governed by Sidney's plainly didactic intention,

as the briefest outline of the plot will illustrate. At the start of the book Pyrocles and Musidorus would seem to be models of princely promise stepped into the harmonic perfection of Arcadia, a land characterised by "the moderate and well tempered myndes of the people" (IV.I). Once in Arcadia, however, the princes fall one by one in love and they consequently put the heroic and active life behind them. That this is to be considered a falling away, despite their Neoplatonic claims for love, is made clear both in their long debate on love and, emblematically, in their lowering their estate to disguise as a woman and a shepherd respectively. The opening sentence of Book Two images their love as the deep tasting of a cup of poison which has left no sinew "withoute mortally searching into yt" (IV.87); and the subsequent actions show how their passions betray them into foolish and dishonourable excesses which produce and are imaged by death and disorder. By the time that they have been finally imprisoned and condemned to death, all "romantic" expectations have been thwarted and Arcadia has ironically revealed itself as "the place prepared to bee stage of [their] endles overthrowe" (IV.100).

The political dimension of the plot provides an exact parallel to the princes' abdication from reason and responsibility. Basilius, the ruler of Arcadia, retires from the life of public activity to a pastoral haven, but in doing so he dishonourably renounces the responsibilities of ruling and opens the way for rebellion and civil war in his country. Thus when the opening sentence of the Fifth Book sums up the situation before the final trial of the princes the judgment that it offers applies equally to Basilius and to the princes:

> The daungerous Devision of Mens myndes, the Ruynous renting of all estates had now broughte Arcadia to feele the pangues of uttermost perill.
> (IV.327)

Sidney's use of a parallel plot is an interesting experiment

and it helps him doubly to enforce his moral lesson that reason must overmaster passion and correct backsliding in all spheres of life. Indeed he cuts away the pretensions of love and honour with such ruthless structural effectiveness that Franco Marenco has gone so far as to describe the Old Arcadia as "a gloomy, almost desperate book".[4] This is an extreme judgment which neglects the wit and humour that leaven the work, but at least it has the merit of its conviction that the book deserves serious consideration.

Our briefest of summaries of the plot has omitted any reference to Sidney's treatment of the love relationships but it is this that deserves careful attention both because criticism has been unfair to Sidney in this respect[5] and, more immediately for our purpose, because his involvement with his characters is so clearly achieved within his chosen moral frame. We will have time to consider only the scene in which Pyrocles seduces Philoclea.

Pyrocles, in his disguise as a woman, has been forced to evade separate attempts at seducing him by Basilius, and by Gynecia who has seen through the prince's disguise. He manages to trick the couple into sleeping with each other in the mutual belief that they are enjoying him. Then, sighing with his own "Impacyence of desyr" (IV.217), he visits his beloved Philoclea in her bedchamber. A scene of powerful recriminations ensues in which Sidney skilfully maintains the sense of a pressure of passion just below the surface. Pyrocles protests that he has been avoiding Philoclea only to deceive her father and mother, and at last, unable to sustain the tension, he faints at her bedside. Her heart melts and she flings herself down to help him. In a quick recovery he severs his cyelids, revels in her embrace, gathers his wits, and lifts her onto the bed. As the Third Book ends he is "feighting ageanst a weyke resistance whiche did stryve to bee overcome".

It is difficult to avoid a certain facetiousness in telling the story, and Sidney himself deliberately exploits the comedy of the situation. He brings out the folly of love in an almost puckish way, yet without any touch of disdain for the foolishness of mortal men. What is most impressive about the scene is the exceptional richness and balance of his attitude. First he describes the pitch to which Pyrocles' feelings are wrought as he goes up to Philoclea's chamber. For Pyrocles this climactic moment seems to knit up past and future. All the pains and difficulties which he has endured for this love seem but "to serve for a moste fitt sauce, whose sowernes mighte give a kinde of Lyfe to the delightfull chere his Imaginacyon fedd upon"; all the greatness of his father seems no more than "tryffling pompe, whose good standes in other menns Conceipt"; all the possibly painful consequences of the consummation he hopes for seem "but as a sleight purchase of possessing the topp of happynes" (IV.216). By showing how larger perspectives impinge upon this moment Sidney suggests the concentrated intensity of Pyrocles' feelings; and yet he implies too Pyrocles' unfounded disregard of those values which are embodied in the greatness of his father (who is ultimately to be the judge of these present actions), and also Pyrocles' reckless indifference to consequences. Thus in the very act of sympathetically rendering Pyrocles' exaltation of his immediate desire Sidney makes clear that it involves a moral blindness. Pyrocles has surrendered to the extremity of that "J yfull payne" which stretches all the faculties beyond their limits, and confounds them, with "a harming kynde of Ravisshing them from the free use of theyre owne function" (IV.216).

Sidney now turns to Philoclea and varies his analysis of the intricacies of love by allowing her to express the turmoil of her feelings in a song which begins,

> Vertue Bewty and Speeche, did stryke, wounde, Charme,
> My Hart, Eyes, Eares with wonder, Love Delighte ...

and ends,

> For nothing, tyme,nor place can lewse,quench,ease,
> Myne owne,embrased, sought,Knott,Fyer,disease.

The continuous triple linking is an interesting but not entirely successful attempt to mirror the paradoxical feelings stirred up by a love which Philoclea accepts as having run a painful course between the poles of virtue and disease.

Even Sidney's more dramatic passages take their orientation from his moral frame. When Pyrocles catches sight of Philoclea lying in her bedchamber, her

> beutyes [are] eclipsed with no thinge but with a fayre smock, wroughte all in flames of Ashe culloure silke and golde. lying so uppon her right syde, that the lefte thighe downe to the foote, yeelded his delightfull proportion to the full viewe: which was seene by the help of a Rich Lampe whiche (throughe the Curteynes a litle drawne) cast suche a lighte upon her, as the Moone dothe when yt shynes into a thynn wood.
> (IV.218)

The description is masterly. The reference to the flames on Philoclea's smock evokes with great suggestiveness a sense of the curving contours of her stretched-out body. At the same time the flames image Pyrocles' rising passion which desires to engulf her, and her own passion which she can barely suppress. But in the choice of colours - "Ashe culloure silke and golde" - Sidney subtly suggests the ambivalent qualities of this desire. Tempering the sensuous boldness of the flame image is the succeeding image of moonlight which helps to create the sense of Pyrocles standing enraptured in an enchanted spell of wonder and tenderness. Yet even here Philoclea's vulnerability is lightly pointed to in the mention of the "thynn wood". It is in such richly suggestive tableaux that Sidney particularly excels, but the passage gracefully accommodates precise description to a judgment which is unobtrusive but firm. What is most impressive about

such passages is the way in which Sidney makes his moral judgments inward to the scene which he presents without their entailing any limitation of his sympathies. On the contrary, it must be stressed that it is his firm moral viewpoint that ensures him a vantage for understanding more clearly than the lovers themselves, and that enables him to achieve a coherent presentation.

A brief look at the concluding section of the Old Arcadia will suggest that the opposite also holds true. At the end of the Fifth Book Euarchus condemns the two princes to death, and impugns their lust with unrelenting severity. He brushes aside their excuse that they intended all along to marry the princesses, and he argues that justice has nothing to do with convenient resolutions. When the princes plead the force of their love he retorts:

> Yf that unbrydeled Desyr which is intituled Love mighte purge suche a sicknes as this, surely wee shoulde have many Loving excuses of hateful myscheefes ... That sweete and heavenly uniting of the myndes, which properly ys called Love, hathe no other knott but vertue: And therefore, yf yt bee a Right Love, yt can never slyde into any action yt ys not vertuous.
>
> (IV.378)

The sternness of tone covers a shrewd and not unkindly understanding of human nature, but the charge is just and no concessions can be made. It is difficult not to feel that Euarchus's attitudes are meant to be taken as normative.

Yet the Fifth Book is dramatically unsuccessful. This is because Sidn fails to sustain a coherent moral viewpoint, and not simply because he moves over right at the end into a fairy-tale denouement. Euarchus's condemnation judges the princes' passion in a way that is consistent with the book's chosen frame. And there are brief touches in the presentation of the princes in Book Five that imply a subtle understanding of their weakness that is also consistent with the previous complex

presentation of them. When Philoclea is sentenced to be shut up in a nunnery, for example, Pyrocles' joy that she has escaped the death penalty is made to mingle with a certain selfish, yet very human gratification that after he has been executed "none shoulde obtayne the after enjoying that Jewell whereon hee had sett his lyves happynes" (IV.354). There are moments too when the book seems to be driving powerfully towards an ending consistent with the severity of the chosen moral frame. It is suggested that Euarchus has been brought to preside over the trial by "the secrett working of Justice", and Sidney goes on to sound disturbing depths in a passage that looks forward in feeling to The Duchess of Malfi, for which Webster borrowed some of Sidney's images:[6]

> In suche shadowe or rather pit of Darckenes the wo,mish mankynde lives that neyther they knowe howe to foresee nor what to feare; and they are but lyke Tennys balles tossed by the Rackett of the higher powers.
> (IV.358)

Sidney decides, however, in the Fifth Book, to make great play with the magnanimity of the princes, and he sets about enlisting a good deal of sympathy for the fortitude with which they endure their punishment. He says of them that they, "like Men in deede", fortify their courage "with the true Rampier of pacyence", and that they are firm in the belief that no "Humane chaunces can bee coumpted an overthrowe to hym that standes upon vertue" (IV.344). Again at their trial Sidney says that the violence of their magnanimity conquered the expectation of the onlookers "with an extraordenary vertue" (IV.350).

In order to highlight the fortitude of the princes Sidney makes Philanax, who is the prosecutor at the trial, suppress the letters from the princesses which might have led to an amelioration of the judgment. Philanax is also made to accuse them with an unrestrained ferocity. The following

is the passage which takes up the narrative after Euarchus has delivered *sentence:*

> Philanax more greedy than any hunter of his pray, went streighte to lay holde of the excellent Prisoners: who casting a Farewell looke one uppon the other represented in theyre faces as muche unapalled Constancy as the most excellent Corage can delyver in owteward graces: Yet yf at all there were any shewe of Chaunge in them, yt was that Pyrocles was some thinge nearer to Bashfullness, and Musidorus to anger, bothe over Ruled by reason and resolutyon.
>
> (IV.380)

There would seem no doubt that we are meant to approve of the princes' magnanimity and to disapprove of the vengeful greed of Philanax. And, of course, there is no inconsistency in showing the princes as more virtuous in their suffering than *in their loving.* But the presentation of their magnanimity excludes any suggestion of penitence or of self-understanding. Indeed, on the evening prior to the trial Pyrocles speaks the stirring and confident speech of self-justification beginning "We have lived and have lived to bee good to ourselves, *and others* ..." which we quoted in Chapter 1, and whose bravura excludes any suggestion of a recognition that it is delivered in the context of "a dead duke, a ruined queen, two princesses dishonoured, and a tumultuous kingdom ruled by a foreign king".[7] After judgment has been passed too, the princes *show no hint* of contrition. Musidorus is merely angry; Pyrocles is partially moved towards "Bashfulines", but this represents a momentary loss of self-possession rather than a modest acknowledgment of guilt, as the comment that the feeling was soon mastered by reason makes clear.

It should be apparent that there is a disconcerting hiatus between so bland an affirmation of the princes' "extraordenary vertue" and the previous subtle presentation of their human failings in loving. And because a particular frame of judgment has been so clearly established in the previous books it is difficult for the reader in Book Five

to concede unqualified virtue to men who have achieved so little in the way of self-knowledge.

What has happened is that Sidney's own frame of judgment has shifted, or rather he has vacillated between frames which have not been clearly enough reconciled to one another. In consequence his characterisation seems inconsistent and the Fifth Book as a whole something of a botch. Not only are the princes let off scot-free when the supposedly dead Basilius reawakens, and without a single reference to the judgment on their passionate excesses, but Gynecia is happily reunited with the husband to whom she has been unfaithful, "all men thincking (saving onely Pyrocles and Philoclea who never bewrayed her) that shee was the perfect mirror of all wyvely Love". Moreover, it is chance alone, and not the secret working of justice, that brings about the gratuitous fairy-tale ending. And it is almost as an afterthought that Sidney allows in at the end one jolting comment on Gynecia which recalls his earlier severity:

> So uncertayne are mortall Judgmentes the same person moste infamus and moste *famus* and neyther justly.
> (IV. 388)

It would seem true then that without a consistent use of a coherent frame of values in terms of which to align his presentation a writer can produce only an effect of confusion. It would be wrong, however, on the basis of this recognition, to suggest that any particular frame necessarily has value in itself. It is this sort of supposition that leads the thorough-going Marxist or the fundamental moralist to the rejection of all works of literature that do not comply with his own criteria of value. The alternative, for those who would try to maintain a more flexible moral view of literature, is to argue that *the moral* quality of any work is obviously more than a matter of the writer's commitment to a particular code.

It would seem only reasonable to concede that any particular frame can be given conditional consent - Coleridge's temporary suspension of disbelief would apply - on the grounds that the moral value of a work lies not so much in its postulates as in what the writer achieves within a chosen frame. Again the Old Arcadia provides convenient illustration. Consider the following reflections which are presented just before Pyrocles reaches Philoclea's chamber:

> The force of Love to those pore folcke that feele yt ys many wayes very straunge, but no way straunger, then that yt dothe so encharme the Lovers Judgement, uppon her that holdes the Raynes of his mynde, at what soever shee dothe ys ever in his eyes best, And that best beeyng by the Continuall motyons of oure chaunging lyfe turned by her to any other thing, that thing agoane becometh best. So that Nature in eche kynde suffering but one Superlatyve, the Lover onely admittes no positive yf shee sitt still, that ys best, for so ys the Conspiracy of her severall graces helde best together to make one perfect figure of Beuty: yf shee walke, no doubt that ys best, for besydes ye making happy the more places by her steppes the very sturring addes a pleasaunt lyfe to her naturall perfections.
> Yf shee bee sylent that, withoute Comparysons ys best, synce by that meanes the untroubled eye most freely may devowre the sweetnes of his object: But yf shee speake, hee will take yt uppon his deathe that ys best the quintessence of eche woord beeyng distilled downe into his affected sowle.
> (IV.217)

The pressure of Sidney's clear-sighted judgment is apparent particularly in the description of love as a charming of the judgment, and in the final remark about the "affected sowle". But it is felt too, more subtly, as an undertow in the reference to the "Continuall motyons of oure chaunging lyfe", and to "the untrubled eye" which "devours" the sweetness of its object. Such references enlarge the perspective to include a momentary sense of the pain that is to be expected of life, and in so doing they greatly deepen the quality of the total feeling. Like the references to the lovers as "pore folcke" and to the strangeness of love they move the

feeling towards an elegaic and wondering tenderness. The tone of the whole passage is consequently that of one who has grown wise enough to savour the strangeness of human life and of the delights to be found in it, while yet knowing that nothing is so unstable as that which would seem to promise and provide "the best degree of felicity" (IV.218). Nothing could be further from these lines than the gloom and despair of the ascetic or the sharpness of the satirist. What one is offered is an understanding of the joy that the lover finds in love (a sympathy so deeply felt that Shakespeare was to store it until he came to write his celebration of plenitude in The Winter's Tale)[8] and yet also a perspective in which the intense delight of love is placed within an encompassing understanding of the limits of human love. And the reader is prepared to consider the controlling judgment seriously because it seems not wilfully imposed, but almost the condition of the largeness of understanding which has been achieved.

At times, however, the balance of Sidney's tone momentarily wavers. As he leaves the lovers in bed together he says of Pyrocles:

> Hee gives mee occ syon to leave hym in so happy a plighte, lest my Penn might seeme to grudge, at the due Blisse of these pore Lovers, whose Loyalty had but small respite of theyre fyery Agonyes.
> (IV. 227)

Sidney here looks forward to the looming catastrophe in which the lovers are surprised and brought to judgment, but in talking of their "due Blisse" he shows a particularly touching sympathy for both their loyalty and their "plighte". The word "grudge" graciously and delicately reminds us of the moral frame, but for all the wit of the opening clause there would seem to be no irony in the phrase "due Blisse".

The dilemma which the Old Arcadia confronts is a painful one for Sidney. He clearly responds powerfully to the

joyful rapture which love provides, he feels it as a natural prompting and he enjoys figuring it forth; but he also feels committed to, and he has constructed his plot *in terms of*, a disavowal of sensual pleasure and of its attendant passionate excesses. Musidorus expresses the dilemma of the lover with a poignant perplexity:

> Though the wayes be foule, the journeys end
> is most faire and honourable.
> (I.117)

Sidney accepts the moral frame, but his feelings at times seem to pull against it. Perhaps it was this ambivalence in Sidney's own feelings as much as any courtly obligation to provide a happy ending for his "Fayre Ladyes" (IV.226) that led to the retreat from severity in Book Five. Sidney's structure and his moral commitment marshalled him the way he was to go with exemplary lucidity, but the sympathies which he discovered in the course of his writing, the very sympathies which helped bring his work to life, proved something of a liability as far as the impeccable logic of a moral demonstration was concerned.

The suggestion that there is a certain ambivalence in the attitude towards love in the *Old Arcadia* would seem to find support from the fact that Sidney, in his revision of the work, could set about reversing the direction of the moral plot as it relates to the two pairs of lovers. In the revised version it seems, for the alteration of the climatic love scenes of The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia is generally held to have had Sidney's authority,[9] love will be shown to be truly educative, and the princes will not "be caught with their heroic trousers down".[10] Sidney would also seem to point towards a more satisfactory solution of the dilemma that desire presents, namely his own equivalent, in terms of a pagan society, of that sanctifying of the joys of love and desire within the frame of Christian marriage which Spenser was to present in his Epithalamion and in the

romance of Britomart and Artegall.[11] Thus when Cecropia tries to win Philoclea's love for her son Amphialus the princess replies:

> Have you ever seene a pure Rosewater kept in a christal glas; how fine it lokes, how sweet it smels, while that beautifull glasse imprisons it? Breake the prison, and let the water take his owne course, doth it not embrace dust, and loose all his former sweetnesse, and fairnesse? Truly so are we, if we have not the stay, rather than the restraint of Cristalline mariage.
>
> (I.380)

Yet it is particularly in the presentation of Philoclea in the Arcadia that a most interesting reflex of sympathy is to be discerned which has no moral sanction. Philoclea is the most subtly conceived of all Sidney's characters. The analysis of the stages by which she falls in love with Zelmane (Pyrocles), for example, is extremely acute. Her natural and generous responsiveness, both to Zelmane's qualities and to the devotion which Zelmane feels for her, moves her to "a most friendly affection",

> which when it had gotten so ful possession of the keies of her mind, that it would receave no message from her senses, without that affection were the interpreter; then straight grew an exceeding delight stil to be with her, with an unmeasurable liking of al that Zelmane did: maters being so turned in her, that where at first, liking her manners did breed good-wil, now good-wil became the chiefe cause of liking her manners: so that within a while Zelmane was not prized for her demeanure, but the demeanure was prized because it was Zelmanes.
>
> (I.169)

The keys of the mind should be held by reason, and the image implies the mind's need to be shut against what is "unmeasurable". Thus the love which is growing in power in Philoclea is still shown by Sidney to be robbing her of her proper judgment and to be reducing her to a position of vulnerability. It is at first only an innocent affection which breeds in Philoclea from contact with Zelmane, so that though

> Zelmanes eyes would deliver a submissive, but vehement desire in their looke, she, though as yet she had not the desire in her, yet should her eyes answere in like pearcing kindnesse of a looke.

But the end is inevitable, and as Sidney puts it, "at the last (poore soule, ere she were aware) she accepted not onely the band, but the service; not only the signe, but the passion signified". What is noteworthy about this analysis is not only its subtlety but the way in which it is firmly conducted from within a controlling view of love as by its nature a manifestation of infected will.

But it is Philoclea of all the characters who feels and who responds most strongly to the joy of love. When Pyrocles at last openly declares his passion to her, Sidney writes of her reaction:

> The joy which wrought into Pygmalions mind, while he found his beloved image was softer, and warmer in his folded armes, till at length it accomplished his gladness with a perfect womans shape (still beautified with the former perfections) was even such, as by each degree of Zelmanes wordes creepingly entered into Philoclea.
>
> (I.259)

Sidney goes on to describe Philoclea in the next sentence as one of those who "neither absolutely clime the rocke of Vertue, nor freely sinke into the sea of Vanitie"; but the figurative image which he instinctively uses to describe her joy looks beyond any moral sanctions. Again, when Philoclea bathes naked in the river Ladon her impact on Zelmane is such as to spur the watcher to take up a lute and compose a spontaneous blason of delight. Sidney says that Zelmane "began to be with a divine fury inspired" (I.218), and he provides a rapturous description of the inspiration which takes hold of Zelmane. Again only the creative joy of art is adequate to mirror the intensity of the joy which Zelmane feels.

Sidney says of the bathing Philoclea in this scene that she

> tenderly moved her feete, unwonted to feele the naked ground, till the touch of the cold water made a prettie kinde of shrugging come over her bodie, like the twinckling of the fairest among the fixed stars.
> (I.218)

She is certainly the fairest star in Arcadia. There is something forbidding about Pamela the moral paragon, and even the Princes - Musidorus in particular - can be priggish at times; but Philoclea is the proper goddess of this fair plot. Indeed she has something of the self-sufficient presence of the Arcadian landscape itself, and she speaks to something as deep in our yearnings. At times both our and Sidney's own affection for her overspills the moral frame within which the whole book is conceived, and it is no occasion for surprise when Sidney in one place observes of her,

> And alas (sweete Philoclea) how hath my penne till now forgot thy passions, since to thy memorie principally all this long matter is intended?
> (I.168)

I am arguing that in his sympathetic attitude towards the joys of love Sidney can be seen as tempted beyond the moral position which he has chosen to endorse. It could be argued that he is tempted towards a more comprehensive morality. But here we really move on to tricky ground. Arguments that literature enlarges the moral awareness of the reader suggest that the act of attention is a means of <u>discovering</u> structures of value, and it seems reasonable enough to allow that the process of writing may well involve a writer too in an extension of his awareness and in a refinement of his judgments: Lawrence argues that it is precisely the writer's task to create a living relationship

with his circumambient universe at each moment.[12] Such arguments, however, imply a highly relativistic view of morality, and many people would agree with Graham Hough when he flatly declares that any moral view which does not have reference to specific criteria is too vague to be of any practical use.[13] When Henry James puts such stress on the adjective "felt" in the phrase "felt life" it would seem that he, like Lawrence, is really attempting to give moral content to the act of sympathetic responsiveness in itself. Such a view is attractive, for there is clearly a value in an act of attentiveness before life which is not immediately related to considered choice or willed action. But it is still not clear, on the one hand, how there can be attentive understanding without judgment of some kind; nor is it clear, on the other hand, that attentiveness in itself can best be described as a moral activity.

I am not really sure that much is to be gained by trying to stretch the notion of morality to include even a celebration of the joy of love. For there is the obvious fact still to be reckoned with that a good deal of literature simply disdains a moral frame of reference altogether and makes no attempt to be attentive before life in anything that could conceivably be thought of as a moral way.

If man's desires are not to be trusted in a fallen world the poet may well offer gilded indulgences rather than true gold, and Gosson, whose attacks on literature and the stage Sidney is sometimes thought to have *been answering*, seizes on this point:

> Because the sweet numbers of poetry flowing in verse do wonderfully tickle the hearer's ears, the devil hath tied this to most of our plays, that whatsoever he would have stick fast to our souls might slip down in sugar by this enticement; for that which delighteth never troubleth our swallow ... the poison creeping on secretly without grief chokes us at last, and hurleth us down in a dead sleep.
> [14]

It hardly needs saying that the vision of a golden world as we find it in poetry is just as capable of being at least amoral in effect as moral. A neat illustration of this truism is provided by the wide range of uses made in poetry of a single motif, the image of a Golden Age of innocence and perfection. Men have always looked back wistfully to a happier and less demanding past - to childhood or the childhood of the race in Eden. Among the most cherished myths are those of a pristine paradise, among the most recurrent fantasies those of a time when neither "Adam delved nor Eve span" and where no Cain disrupted the pastoral harmony. As we saw in Virgil's 'First Eclogue' this dream could be charged with a haunting poignancy. It could also be raised completely above regressive motives. Dante conflated the idea with the Christian conception of the Earthly Paradise. In the Purgatorio he sympathises with the pagan yearnings of earlier poets and accepts, with a generous instinct for accommodation, that such dreams could at best - as doubtless in Virgil's 'Fourth Eclogue' - involve a profound intuition of recoverable innocence, an intuition like that in the rose-garden of Burnt Norton, "requiring, pointing to the agony/ Of death and birth".[13] But far more commonly the motif appeals to "the idle singer of an empty day" who does not pretend to offer more than a momentary "womb with a view". Horace unashamedly indulges himself in his much imitated 'Second Epode', praising the simple country life which offers all the ease known to the priscia gens mortalium, and striking a mood which became particularly dear to the sophisticated courtly poets of the Renaissance, men who were often thoroughly urban and middle class, tired of the strains of intrigue and patronage, and not in the mood to "sing high and aloof";

> Libet iacere modo sub antiqua ilice,
> modo in tenaci gramine.
> labuntur altis interim rivis aquae,
> queruntur in silvis aves,
> fontesque lymphis abstrepunt manantibus,
> somnos quod invitet leves.

(What joy, beneath some holm-oak old and grey
Or on thick turf, one's limbs to lay;
While streams past toppling banks roll down their flood,
And the birds croon in every wood
And fountains murmur with their gushing streams,
Sounds that small sooth to sleep and dreams.)
16

Here the features of the locus amoenus are rehearsed with a soothing deliberateness, with the "awareness of the lie"[17] kept delicately just below the surface. Robert Graves was perhaps moved to an unnecessary tartness by uneasy memories of his own Georgian past when he dismissed this species of graceful gesture as expressing merely "a jaded city-dweller's nostalgia for simple country joys, or a dispirited labourer's for the fruit-eating innocence of childhood".[18] But then the motif itself could be used with a certain tartness. In a stock variation the first age becomes one of free love in an erotic naturalistic paradise - a variation attractive to Donne, and one which Marvell wittily exploited in his description of the gorgeous clusters of the vine which crush themselves upon the lips, and of the "curious peaches" which reach themselves breast-like into the hand.[19]

For one man the golden world which art delivers is truly the lost Eden, for another it is the land of Cockaigne. For the poet of Sidney's day it could equally amount to a place at court or the favours of a lady: innumerable Renaissance poets praised their rulers or patrons as the instigators of a new Golden Age, and Sannazaro imagined the great sequence of the ages starting afresh in honor of Amaranta's birthday.[20]

Sidney himself faces up squarely to this difficulty, for indeed there would seem to be no way of answering the argument that poetry, with its "siren's sweetness", is just as capable of "drawing the mind to the serpent's tale of sinful fancy" (123;7) as of "bestowing that in colours upon you which is fittest for the eye to see" (102:29). He frankly admits that the poets do not limit their imitations

to objects or desires which will guarantee a moral effect: he allows that "not only love, but lust, but vanity, but ... scurrility, possesseth many leaves of the poet's books" (125:18). He even recognises that

> Poetry may not only be abused, but that being abused by the reason of his sweet charming force, it can do more hurt than any other army of words.
> (125:35)

His defence is to stand firmly by the idea of abuse, and to insist *that it is not* poetry which abuses man's wit, but man's wit which abuses poetry. He rightly points out that *any form of learning* can be abused: the skill of medicine can be used to produce the most virulent poisons, the forms of law can be used to foster horrible injuries; even the philosophy of Plato which lays the charge of scurrility upon poetry authorises community of women and homosexual love. Sidney sums up the case with a characteristically pertinent and concrete epigram:

> With a sword thou mayest kill thy father and with a sword thou mayest defend thy prince and country.
> (126:12)

Abusus non tollit usum is a just enough reply. Indeed Aristotle had defended rhetoric against the Platonic charge of sophistry by arguing in almost identical terms that,

> If it be objected that one who uses such power of speech unjustly might do great harm, that is a charge which may be made in common against all good things except virtue, and above all against things that are most useful.
> (Rhetoric: 1355,b)
> 21

This reply does concede, however, that the moral defence of poetry is prescriptive rather than descriptive.

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