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INSPIRATION AND THE CLAIM TO KNOWLEDGE IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY  
ENGLISH POETRY

by  
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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION: RENAISSANCE AND MODERN POETRY AND KNOWLEDGE

Alone among the major disciplines the theory of literature has been mainly a branch of apologetics; and we shall mistake the emphases of many major critical documents, whether or not they are labeled a Defense of Poetry, if we fail to recognize the rebuttal in a persistent debate. The positions most strongly defended have shifted, to meet the threat from one or another enterprise claiming exclusive access to the kind of truth poetry was supposed to pretend to: philosophy, history, Christian theology and morals, and then, in the seventeenth century, the New Philosophy. But in every age the seemingly positive principles of criticism have been designed for the defense of poetry, and usually, as in the Platonic dialogues, on a terrain selected by the opposition.<sup>1</sup>

What follows will be, in part, a gloss upon Professor Abrams' text, but it will help for the moment to take a perspective even wider than the one he presents. If "the theory of literature has been mainly a branch of apologetics," it has been because poetry, when it has been recognized as something in itself, as opposed to its functioning in ritual, for example, has needed defending. Like all other activities not directly concerned with providing the means of existence, the creation and study of poetry can be looked upon as a waste of time. Poetry

is a luxury that can become a necessity, if literary criticism makes it appear sufficiently beneficial and deflects charges of harmfulness or worthlessness.

The chief means of defense, Abrams implies, has been the claim that the poet has exclusive access to a certain kind of knowledge, the nature of which has been variously described. D. G. James is another among many who see that claim as essential to the status of poetry:

But we cannot, I take it, if we are committed to believing that literature is important, fail to argue that poetry . . . issues from a peculiar labor of knowing; and we must declare that the merits of any literary work belong to it as an act of knowledge. A play such as King Lear exhibits human life as it is known by its author; our judgment on it is necessarily a judgment on its veracity. . . . We therefore take King Lear, to say the least, seriously, as a contribution to human knowledge. . . .<sup>2</sup>

Yet, we must recognize at the outset that the claim has not always been asserted and that it has rarely been easy to put it forth. There have been other ways of looking at poetry, and it will be one of the arguments of this essay that the way in which the relationship of poetry to knowledge is conceived is a determining factor in the kind of poetry that is written. The essay will concentrate on the seventeenth century as a period of crisis and change in the relationship of poetry to knowledge, but it will be clear that the seventeenth century conceptions of this relationship were not being set forth for the first or last time. In fact, one reason

for the empathy that scholars of the twentieth century have felt for the seventeenth lies in recent concern with this problem. The logical positivists, turning from traditional realms of speculation to the analysis of discourse, may be likened to the seventeenth-century Ramists in that both seek a single set of principles which make for sense instead of nonsense in all forms of verbal communication.<sup>3</sup> Philosophy has once again bid fair to become methodology, but the positivists, unlike the Ramists, have not asserted that poetry must be based on logic; they have instead cut all ties between poetry and cognition. Impetus has been given to the art-for-art's-sake notion that "a poem should not mean/ But be," and other critics, accepting the dictum that poetry deals only in "pseudo-statements," have jettisoned the claim to knowledge in order to defend poetry on other grounds, usually those of the psychologist. Rudolf Carnap gives a good statement of the positivist view, one that contrasts nicely with the passage from James quoted above:

The aim of a lyrical poem in which occur the words "sunshine" and "clouds," is not to inform us of certain meteorological facts, but to express certain feelings of the poet and to excite similar feelings in us. A lyrical poem has no assertional sense, no theoretical sense, it does not contain knowledge. . . . A poet . . . does not assert that the verses of another are wrong or erroneous; he usually contents himself with calling them bad.<sup>4</sup>

It is not insignificant that James gives as his

example of "poetry" King Lear while Carnap is thinking of a hypothetical modern lyric poem. The Renaissance, as we shall see, was a time when the poet's claim to knowledge was at its height, when instruction was taken by many as the chief end of poetry, and when the epic and tragedy were prized not merely on Aristotle's and Virgil's authority but because they represented incursions into the Platonic realm of the ideal. Most forms of the lyric, on the other hand, have been regarded as issuing more from an act of feeling than from an act of knowing and, because that is so, the modern identification of poetry with the lyric testifies to the bankruptcy of the traditional claims to knowledge.

Not all practitioners of the lyric have forsaken entirely the claim to knowledge, however, and it is important to distinguish both the kinds of knowledge and the means of knowledge claimed by modern poets from those claimed by the older ones. The distinction, to simplify, points to the empirical cast that characterizes an age dominated by the scientific method, for the knowledge claimed by modern poets is invariably psychological and of their own experience, while the knowledge claimed by Milton is objective and of the nature of things. The verification of the content of Paradise Lost depends largely on our judgment of the narrator's claim to inspiration; the verification of the content of In Memoriam depends

largely on our judgment of the narrator's sincerity. David Perkins has argued that the quest for sincerity dominates modern poetry, sincerity in a poem being the complete and faithful rendering of a personal experience. He has pointed to Wordsworth as the first major poet dominated by the ideal of sincerity, and it is surely significant that Wordsworth's Miltonic ambitions resulted not in a traditional epic but in The Prelude: or, Growth of a Poet's Mind.<sup>5</sup>

As an interesting coincidence, C. Day Lewis, considering "The Poet's Way of Knowledge," turns to Wordsworth as Aristotle turned to Sophocles. Day Lewis justifies Abrams' statement by treating poetic creation as a process similar to scientific induction. Just as writers on scientific method consider that error lies not in the sense-data but in the interpretation put upon them (i.e., there is nothing wrong with the sense-datum telling us that an oar appears bent in water, but there will be something wrong with our inference if we think it actually is bent), so the trouble with a poem is not in its subject matter, not, that is, in the experience that triggers the process of creation:

Most poems which go wrong, go wrong through the poet's failure to extract the right theme, or extract it whole, from his subject-matter. His activity during the initial stages of making a poem is equivalent to what Professor Young calls "doubt" in scientific investigation: it is a

rigorous questioning of data--data which include the poem's original subject, the secondary subject-matter which is attracted into the field of the poem out of the poet's whole life-experience, and the formal patterns into which he is beginning to arrange it.<sup>6</sup>

A good poem, like a good scientific hypothesis, "saves the appearances," or is faithful to the poet's experiences. A poor theme results from faulty induction. It is remarkable that Day Lewis attributes to modern poets a method which turns a much-professed Renaissance procedure on its head. The Renaissance poet, when not disclaiming craft, spoke of beginning with a purpose or theme which he then adumbrated with apt particulars.<sup>7</sup> A fiction was constructed to sugar-coat the poem's doctrine, and the poem failed not because of something wrong with the theme but because the fiction failed to body the theme forth or did so without entertaining. The modern poet begins with particulars, and these may lay greater claim to the reader's belief than the conclusion he points them toward. The Renaissance poet begins with the theme, for which he expects belief, and proceeds to the particulars, which require the merest suspension of disbelief.

The early poetry does not base its claim to truth on the poet's experience; in fact, the poet's experience may not be a viable factor in the poem's creation. Leo Spitzer has noted that the "I" in medieval poetry is always fictive, the poet's experiences coming more from

literary tradition than from personal biography.<sup>8</sup> Even with Chaucer and later poets who put more of themselves into what they write, fidelity to personal experience is not rigorously demanded. The poem is to be judged by more public standards of truth.

To put it another way, the poem can be judged by more public standards of truth because its subject matter does not lie in the author's personal experience. The world is still considered knowable, and truth is one and eternal. The poet is usually regarded as a learned man who is responsible for his work to other learned men; verses are criticized for being wrong and erroneous as well as for being bad, and Shakespeare, however undeniable his talent, can be patronized for his shortcomings in the classical languages. Where the modern poet can claim special knowledge of his subject matter because it is personal, the Renaissance poet had to find another way of asserting that his work had a special truth.

How, then, could the poet assert the cognitive claims of poetry against those of philosophy, history and science? Once again, his strategy was the opposite of that employed by many modern apologists. Just as C. Day Lewis has sought to bring the processes of poetic and scientific discovery together, so John Crowe Ransom and others have stated that the poet's knowledge is more

empirical than that of the scientist. The scientist, looking for general laws, abstracts from his sense-data and fails, in any case, to use all of his senses. The poet, interested in the uniqueness of each experience, strives to present the "world's body" in all its Dinglichkeit.<sup>9</sup> The Renaissance poet, on the other hand, spurns what can be known empirically and explores the Platonic or Christian otherworld. His special knowledge is "higher" than that of the historian or philosopher and he maintains, in effect, that poetry surmounts the limitations stemming from man's fall.

He maintains, that is, that the truest poetry results from an infusion of grace which enables the poet to transcend his mortal capacities. The poet can claim quasi-divine knowledge because he is inspired by a being superior to man. This being is omniscient, and its benevolence guarantees that it will not deceive the poet and his audience. Knowledge derived from this being (whether Muse or God) must be true and certain, for it has divine authority behind it.

Inspiration, we shall see, is the chief ground of the poet's claim to knowledge in the Renaissance, and, we shall argue, the death of a belief in inspiration was a major factor in the shift in the kind of knowledge that poetry could claim. That shift, which we have just been discussing, necessarily entailed a shift in



literary forms, the epic giving way to the lyric on the one hand and to the novel on the other.

The reader may very well object at this point that inspiration did not die in the seventeenth century or later, because there were references enough to it in the literary criticism of fifty years ago and, even if critics today rarely touch upon it, that is because they are allowing the psychoanalysis a monopoly.<sup>10</sup>

Inspiration does not seem foreign to us, the way light metaphysics and analogies between microcosm and macrocosm do. We may have only a generalized sense of what the word means, but that does not disturb us because we either look to the psychoanalysts for a closer definition or suspect that one is not possible. We must pause to realize that the word had a specific meaning for Milton which it lacks for us and that the continuity in usage is deceptive. The continuity masks a change in meaning.

We must recognize that one of the besetting problems of the history of criticism arises because of the apologetic nature of criticism. Where a scientist concerned primarily with clarity escapes whenever he can to the purely denotative language of mathematics, the critic is often less concerned with clarity than with enlisting in his cause words with favorable connotations. Words have a magical aura for him that

they lack for the scientist and, consequently, where the scientist will coin a word to fit an invention, the critic may decide to clothe his innovation in old, well-received words, phrases, even sentences, not much caring whether he is displacing original meanings. Thus, for over two hundred years new poetic styles and goals were all introduced with the cliché that the author was merely "following Nature."<sup>11</sup>

"Inspiration" in the following discussion will have the ancient meaning that, for all purposes, died in the seventeenth century, at which time a rival meaning, with an ancestry of its own, took over so completely that some people can look at early uses of the term and doubt that the author meant by it what he clearly did mean. The following essay will trace the development and importance for poetry's claim to knowledge of the first meaning and then point to the implications of the shift to the second meaning. Here it will be helpful merely to distinguish between the two meanings.

The difficulty that one finds in talking about inspiration is largely a result of the shift in meaning. For the modern meaning, A. C. Bradley's attempt at definition is useful:

In literary works, for example, it [Inspiration] is a marked change, the sudden rising of ideas and their expression above the customary level even of the mind of genius, and much more

above the customary level of minds less gifted, that arrests us, evokes wonder, delight, sometimes even awe, and perhaps suggests the feeling, expressed by the word "inspiration" (in-breathing) that up to this point the man himself was at work, but that at this point he has become the channel of another power.

The chief characteristic of inspired writing, he goes on to say, is that it is new and original. "The man of genius in his inspired mood is not repeating or varying a theme already announced and treated by himself or another."<sup>12</sup>

Bradley's statement incorporates a reference to the older meaning of "inspiration" but does not develop it. If he had gone on to take the "in-breathing" seriously and treated the poet's relation to the other power, he would be following a Renaissance tack, particularly if he specified the power as higher than man and as a Muse, a daemon, an angel, or a person of the Trinity. He would then be interested in the nature of the revelation presented by that higher power, and he would be making a claim for poetry that he does not make. As it is, his interest is in another direction. He is concerned with effects more than with causes, primarily with the effect on the reader. The nature of the inspiring power remains vague, for he does not rule out the possibility that one can be "inspired" by a beautiful sunset or a string quartet, and he is more inclined to see the effect as emotional rather than as intellectual. The content is

to be judged on aesthetic rather than epistemological grounds: the new need not be true, but it must please by its departure from the old.

The linking of inspiration with an emotional response suggests the modern identification of poetry with the lyric, whereas for most Renaissance critics, as we said, the highest form of poetry was the epic. The suggestion that one can pick out parts of a work as inspired reminds one of Poe's dictum that there can be no long poem. Bradley would probably regard Paradise Lost as inspired only in parts. In Book Three, the opening hymn to light would be inspired but not the ensuing scholastic discussion in Heaven. Milton, on the other hand, expected his reader to believe the whole work inspired and, in Book Three, could allow the inspiration of the invocation to be slighted but not that of the colloquy in Heaven. One need not have divine assistance to ask for divine assistance, but, having asked, one cannot go on without it. Inspiration for Milton results not in originality but in substantial truth.

The distinction is not simply that between the literal and figurative meanings, between the divine breath and a creative urge provided by a moving object of perception. For those living after Locke and Berkeley, the distinction between external and internal is blurred, and the impulse can come from within the

mind as well as into it. Moreover, as the modern connection between inspiration and genius makes clear, the quality of the receiving mind determines what happens more than the quality of the source of the impulse. A good poet may be "inspired" by an inferior work of art or a drab scene to turn out a masterpiece. In the Renaissance, the quality of the source of inspiration was more directly related to the quality of the poem. A good poet inspired by a bad angel could only turn out a damnable poem, and a mediocre poet could expect his religious epic to surpass the Iliad if he succeeded in obtaining aid from the true God.<sup>13</sup> Inspiration in modern parlance indicates genius; in the Renaissance it indicated the grace of God.

The two meanings of inspiration, like the two kinds of poetic knowledge distinguished above, are rooted in different areas of discourse and have different implications. One has an ontological base in the existence of a being or beings higher than man who are willing to give him knowledge that his limitations would otherwise prevent him from getting. The other has a psychological base in a mental capacity for states of extraordinarily energetic thought and powerful emotion. One form of inspiration and its subsequent knowledge draw on Platonic idealism: they descend from the

heavens. The other form and its consequent knowledge are related to Aristotelian empiricism: they ascend from the senses. One involves the premises of realism, the other those of nominalism. Poets and critics who accept the first meaning consider the second an abuse of the term; those who accept the second regard the first as referring to something impossible or hallucinatory.

Though we are going to argue that, in the course of the seventeenth century, the second meaning obliterated the first, and though we may treat the second as modern and the first as ancient, it would be misleading if we implied that the second sprang full-blown from the head of a Restoration critic, for the seventeenth century was still an age when an idea's novelty was a sure sign of its poverty, when even Francis Bacon felt obliged to point out that his notions were only as new as the Wisdom of his beloved Solomon or as the Greek myths he interpreted in De sapientia veterum. The modern meaning has its ancestry in ancient Greece, though in a Greece not so ancient as that which spawned the first meaning. It has perhaps a better right to be called "classical" than the first meaning, which we may prefer to call "pre-classical." Both meanings were venerable in the seventeenth century, and a critic citing the second might be paying as much of a tribute to Horace as a critic citing the first was paying to Homer. Consequently,

we can only begin where our authors did. In doing so, not only will we gain historical perspective on the Renaissance and Augustan statements, but we will also be able to see parallel developments in ancient and modern times.

NOTES: CHAPTER ONE

1 M. H. Abrams, "Belief and the Suspension of Disbelief," in Literature and Belief, English Institute Essays, 1957 (New York, 1958), pp. 2-3.

2 D. G. James, The Dream of Learning (Oxford, 1951), pp. 78-79.

3 For Ramism, cf. below pp. 334-6.

4 Rudolf Carnap, Philosophy and Logical Syntax (London, 1935), pp. 29-31.

5 David Perkins, Wordsworth and the Poetry of Sincerity (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), ch. 1. For the failure of The Prelude to become an epic, cf. also Geoffrey Hartman, Wordsworth's Poetry: 1787-1814 (New Haven, 1964), p. 39.

6 C. Day Lewis, "The Poet's Way of Knowledge," in Essays by Divers Hands, Trans. Royal Soc. of Lit., n. s. XXXIII (London, 1965), p. 11.

7 E. G. Gascoigne, in G. G. Smith, Elizabethan Critical Essays (Oxford, 1904), I, 47-48. Hereafter called "Smith."

8 Leo Spitzer, "Note on the Poetic and the Empirical 'I' in Medieval Authors," Traditio, IV



(1946), 414-22.

9 J. C. Ransom, The World's Body (New York, 1938), pp. 111-142.

10 The best psychoanalytic essays on inspiration are collected in The Creative Imagination, ed. Hendrik M. Ruitenbeck (Chicago, 1965).

11 Cf. A. O. Lovejoy, "Nature' as Aesthetic Norm," Essays in the History of Ideas (New York, 1960), pp. 69-77.

12 A. C. Bradley, "Inspiration," A Miscellany (London, 1929), pp. 226-27.

13 One mediocre poet who makes the claim is Saint-Sorlin in the "Epistre au Roy," Clovis (Paris, 1657), p. 13. Cf. chapter five.

## CHAPTER TWO

### GREEK AND ROMAN BACKGROUNDS

It was not just the Christian faith that the Renaissance scholars sought to understand through a study of its sources. They looked also to Homer, and beyond him to legendary poets like Orpheus and Musaeus, in the belief that the first poetry, like early Christianity, would exist in essential simplicity unconfounded with excrescences; they did not realize that simplicity is usually the result of sophisticated refinement. Since their search was not disinterested but, as with Sidney, for purposes of apology, they discovered that poets were the first philosophers, priests and prophets, and, disregarding logic to varying degrees, they sought to attach to modern poets the glories of the ancients. Basic to this endeavor was the claim to inspiration.

Interestingly, the views of modern classicists are in some agreement with the Renaissance pioneers. Principium Sapientiae, the culmination of F. M. Cornford's search for the beginnings of philosophy, cites evidence from a wide variety of cultures existing at many

different times to prove that the original repository of knowledge, sacred, natural, historic, and prophetic, was a shaman combining the functions of poet, prophet and sage. This shaman derived his authority solely from his ability to enter into a divine madness that comprehended all four furors as later enumerated by Plato.<sup>1</sup> All knowledge, as the myth of Prometheus reminds us, comes to man from the gods. It is expressed in verse, both because that medium is removed from common speech and therefore appropriate for the sacred, and because verse has mnemonic advantages for a people depending on oral communication. The Renaissance apologists erred in assuming the shaman was prophet and sage because he was a poet when in fact the three functions had not yet been distinguished.

From the separation of poet and philosopher dates what Plato calls their "ancient quarrel,"<sup>2</sup> for both claimed knowledge and, Cornford argues, both claimed inspiration as a source. Of the early philosophers Pythagoras seems least removed from the shaman, but even if the others did not found religious disciplines, they all felt that they held the key to a secret of the cosmos that was unavailable to common experience and they all had the dogmatism that comes with a cult. In the opening of the philosophical fragment we have from Parmenides, the philosopher describes a trip to the sun where he

hears from the goddess Justice what will be the main point of his philosophy, that Being is one and unchanging and that what we experience is illusion.<sup>3</sup> Even Socrates, when he ceased ridiculing other people's pretensions to knowledge and expounded his own lore, said he had it from Diotima.

There was then, at the start, little distinction in method between the poet and the philosopher, not only because both owed their knowledge to revelation but also because there was at first no identification of poetry with fiction. Fiction is, by definition, made up by the poet, but the poetry of Homer and Hesiod comes from divine sources. The truth-status of fiction is a matter of dispute, but the Iliad and Theogony were accepted as truth by the Greeks, for the Muses vouched for their accuracy. The poet as maker is not as old a concept as the poet as bard.

If we can find traces of the shaman in the ancient philosophers, we must not be surprised at finding greater traces in the more ancient poets. In Homer there is already a distinction between a seer like Calchas, whose business is to know the future and not to entertain, and a poet like Demodokos, who entertains through his knowledge of the past, but the poet is still apart from common humanity and an object of awe. In

Odyssey XXII the minstrel Phemios asks Odysseus to exclude him from the general slaughter of the suitors in the great hall:

My gift is song for men and for the gods undying.  
My death will be remorse for you hereafter.  
No one taught me: deep in my heart a god  
Shaped all the various ways of life in song.  
And I am fit to make verse in your company  
As in the god's. Put aside lust for blood.<sup>4</sup>

The poet is touched by divinity and like the shaman uses his knowledge to mediate between god and man. It is not for a mortal to slay him: for good or ill he is under the Muse's domination and protection. Demodokos, in Book VIII, is introduced as one "whom the Muse cherished; by her gift he knew/ the good of life, and evil--/ for she who lent him sweetness made him blind."<sup>5</sup> The blindness is the ambivalent mark of the goddess upon him, a sign that it is she who composes his poems. Though he sings of past events, his knowledge is better than that of a good eyewitness, and he wins Odysseus's admiration for his ability to enlighten that intelligent observer on a number of matters which he sings of at his host's request. Tradition has it that Homer himself was similar in blindness to Demodokos; he begins, "Sing in me Muse, and through me tell the story/ of that man skilled in all ways of contending. . . ." In Iliad II the all-knowing Muses are invoked to give the catalogue of Greek leaders and ships, knowledge beyond the

capacity of the poet's mind.<sup>6</sup>

Hesiod goes further than Homer and chronicles his first encounter with the Muses. Perhaps because the subject matter of the Theogony is "higher" than that of the Homeric epics and therefore more inaccessible to human reason, he wishes to leave no doubt about his inspiration. He was no poet but a shepherd grazing his flock on sacred Helicon when the Muses came to him. Significantly, their first words deal with the relationship between poetry and the truth:

we know how to say many false things  
that seem like true sayings,  
but we know also how to speak the truth  
when we wish to.<sup>7</sup>

The lines have been variously interpreted. Those who have regarded the Muses as merely metaphorical mouthpieces and the "lies like truth" as a reference to verisimilar epic seem to be guilty of anachronism, for the poem is presented not as like the truth but as true. The purpose of the episode is, in fact, to rule out any possibility of fiction. Cornford argues that the lies are simply those told on occasion by the epic characters, e.g., several of the stories told by the crafty Odysseus.<sup>8</sup> It may be, though, that Hesiod's Muses are informing him that they need not tell the truth. They are not, like the Christian god, bound to benevolence; they could be as capricious as any of the

other Greek deities (and the ease with which they were later allegorized must not make us forget the ample evidence that they received considerable worship as goddesses); consequently, they were not bound to communicate only the truth to their chosen poets.

Nonetheless, there is no suggestion in what follows that the Muses may be deceiving Hesiod; in fact, they not only empower him but order him to sing the truth. After introducing themselves,

they breathed a voice into me, and power  
to sing the story of things  
of the future, and things past.  
They told me to sing the race  
of the blessed gods everlasting,  
but always to put themselves  
at the beginning and end of my singing.<sup>9</sup>

The inspired poet, then, is prophet and historian, with all time for his domain, and he is not limited to the doings of mortals but can sing of the gods.

The lyric poets of the sixth century invoke the Muses, but they also, for the first time, come to be called "makers."<sup>10</sup> Thus a tension, at first largely unrecognized, is created, for if the poet is not merely god's instrument, then it must be decided how the responsibility for the poem is to be divided. There will be those in the seventeenth century and earlier who will say that the poet's allowing God a share in his poem detracts from his own glory. Many will attempt to

reconcile inspiration and craftsmanship, some by altering the character of inspiration from an occasional, special grace given for a particular task to a general gift allotted for the poet's career. The poet, then, wrests control from the god and creates a product whose relationship to cognition is not as clear as that of the inspired poem. This development cannot, however, be dated as early as the sixth century: the poets are not yet creating fictions.

Nor are the odes of Pindar, in the next century, anything but truth, though it is significant that he is celebrating contemporary heroes and that belief in his subject matter is not, therefore, dependent on belief in inspiration. In all, the Pindaric odes seem to be a good halfway house. G. M. A. Grube has stated, with little supporting argument, that Pindar interpreted inspiration as the gift of talent, and, if this were so, it would make Pindar the first poet to hold this belief.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, there is little in the odes substantiating Grube's statement and much to indicate that Pindar's position was less consistent and more complicated.

Pindar does assert himself as a poet more than Homer and Hesoid do, particularly in Olympia 3 and Pythia 1, where he seems to lead the Muse rather than vice versa. Yet Olympia 11 states that "only by God's grace does a



man blossom in the wise turning of his thought," and the metaphor of process rules out the notion of a god-given talent operating on a constantly superior level. The invocation is unnecessary if one has already received all the help one needs or can get, i.e., if inspiration is just an initial gift of talent; but Pindar's odes are full of invocations and many of them, particularly the moving appeal to the graces that takes up most of Olympia 14, cannot be dismissed as conventional.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps Pindar's position is best represented by the opening of Nemea 3:

Lady and Muse, our mother, I entreat you,  
in the holy Nemean month, come to the city  
thronged with strangers,  
the Dorian island, Aigina; for beside  
the waters of Asopos the craftsmen of lovely  
choral songs, the young men, await your voice.

...  
Of such inspiration grant me abundance.  
Daughter to the cloudy king of the sky, begin  
his stately song. And I shall elaborate it  
with voice and in the lyre's strain.<sup>13</sup>

He invokes and awaits the Muse, for only she can provide the impulse for his poem, the idea that will allow him to raise the deeds of the person he celebrates to epic proportions. But he is not the passive instrument of the goddess which Homer and Hesiod seem to suggest they are; he is a "maker" who takes responsibility for the technical aspects of the poem, the diction and the versification.

Democritus appears to have been the first philosopher

to assert that inspiration is essential to the creation of good poetry. Inspiration, for him, probably does not allow of the same degree of control by the poet that Pindar believed in, for he emphasizes that it is a kind of divine madness. The poet has a literally fiery temperament which enables him to receive from celestial beings, who are made of the same element,

spectres charged with ideas, emotions and impulses which confer on such men, for a time and in a certain degree, the character of the beings whence they emanate; and it is in a crisis of superhuman exaltation, resembling madness, that works of art are created and mysterious truth is revealed in communion with the divine.<sup>14</sup>

In the seventeenth century those who offer scientific explanations of the divine madness are usually opposed to the notion that it comes from any celestial being and attribute it instead to an excess of mental heat. This first attempt is interesting in combining special mental qualities in the poet with the supernal impulse, the latter being the more important because it controls the former. Democritus contains the germ of a new theory of inspiration but cleaves to the old.

The earliest literary criticism among the Greeks attacks Homer and Hesiod for conveying false knowledge. Pindar, in Nemean 7, laments that Homer has told false stories about the gods, making them appear immoral; the immorality is his only reason for thinking the stories

false, for his religion is sophisticated enough to judge the gods by human standards of morality and to insist that they must be superior. Heraclitus and Xenophon both wish to substitute their own philosophical theories for those in the ancient epics, and both attack them for misleading the people. Protagoras, in the Platonic dialogue bearing his name, regards Homer and Hesiod as particularly cunning sophists who disguised themselves as poets to claim truth for their speculations, a position often echoed in the seventeenth century. The hostility of statesmen to poets expressed in Plato's Republic may have some basis in the judgments of the poets' mendacity attributed to Solon and Pericles.<sup>15</sup>

It is clear from the attacks that the poets' claims to inspiration and to possession of the truth were widely accepted. Gilbert and Kuhn argue that Homer and Hesiod had for the Greeks something of the authority that the Bible has for Christians,<sup>16</sup> but that is probably an overstatement as far as Plato's and Aristotle's contemporaries are concerned. Still, some of the philosophers seeking to introduce novel theories felt the necessity to attack the epics that were the repositories of the traditional views.

Plato's contributions to the quarrel were to become the most frequently cited attacks on the poet. He regards

and attacks poetry almost exclusively as a means to knowledge; even when he considers harmony as the end of the formal aspects of poetry and music, he applauds the harmony more for leading the mind to the Idea of Beauty than for its psychological effects. He begins where the other critics began. Treating, in the Republic, the place of poetry in education, he considers that Homer and Hesiod have created dangerous fictions in attributing immoral actions to the gods and heroes.<sup>17</sup> That is, he regards their stories as the poets' inventions and believes that fables should be created with an eye toward the effect they will have in molding young minds. Poetry does not contain inspired truth; the Republic implicitly denies the claim that the other Platonic dialogues treat seriously. Poetry's place is only at the beginning of education; it is for the very young, who need to be amused while they learn and who learn only through examples, the precepts being too difficult for them.

This view of poetry was to become highly influential in the Middle Ages and accounts for the relatively low status of poetry at that time. It regards poetry not as a means of discovering truth but only as a means of expressing it. It ignores the possibility of inspiration, for if poetry were revelation, then it would be more important for the truth it conveyed than for the manner in which it did so, and the epics would

be more occasions for discovering what the Muse would unfold than for passing on what is already known. Poetry in the medieval view is not a scientia with things celestial as its proper sphere of truth, but a facultas like logic and rhetoric, having no content of its own. As such, it is inferior to both logic and rhetoric, for, presuming with the medieval thinkers that truth is best stated as a logical argument and that rhetoric is for the uneducated, whose reason is too weak for them to be moved by the merely rational, poetry appears as the form of rhetoric that does most to obscure the outlines of the argument and to appeal to the emotions. Hence, as Plato also believed, it is suited only for those with the most undeveloped capacities.

The first consideration of poetry in the Republic, then, rejects existing poets as liars but it does not reject poetry as lying. It calls for poets to make themselves useful to the state by treating the gods and heroes as virtuous examples, which Plato generally believes that they have been and should be.

The second consideration of poetry in the Republic, in Book X, rejects it completely. Again the possibility of inspiration is disregarded. The poem cannot contain knowledge or even right belief because the poet is ignorant. He is ignorant because his method is the exact opposite of the right one, that of the philosopher. This

opposition of methods is highly significant because it makes possible an even deeper conflict between philosophy and poetry. As long as both philosophers and poets were claiming inspiration, they were too close kin for indictments to proceed from attacks on individuals to more damning generalizations. Now Plato isolates dialectic as the philosophical method and regards the poets as empiricists. The poets, that is, regard only sense-data and represent only the appearances of things. The philosophers ascend to an understanding of the most general principles and, from there, descend to knowledge of specific principles. The craftsman, intermediate between the philosopher and the poet, does not understand the general principles but has sufficient knowledge of the specific principles required for his craft. The bed-maker must know about beds in order to make them, and his knowledge, not as ephemeral as the beds he makes, is of a higher reality than the beds, just as the philosopher's knowledge of the principles behind making beds, the principles of harmony and, ultimately, of goodness, is of a reality even less ephemeral and hence more real. The poet, however, is stuck at the most materialistic and most ephemeral level. He knows from observation only how things look and that events occur. He does not know the causes of either. In short, he lacks knowledge.<sup>18</sup>

If one wanted to make a syllogism of Whitehead's

statement that the history of Western philosophy is a series of footnotes to Plato and Abrams' statement that criticism defends poetry from encroachment by philosophy, one might conclude that all criticism is a series of defenses against Plato's attack on poetry. It will provide a useful perspective to consider this conclusion for a few paragraphs. ---

The attack can be countered in various ways. One can, with Aristotle, reject both the Platonic ontology and the Platonic account of what poetry does. Universals do not exist apart and are manifested imperfectly in particulars because the matter resists, in varying degrees, the form. Poetry seizes on the universal in the particular and presents it with greater realization and fewer accidents than Nature does.

Then, one can accept Plato's version of poetic imitation and gave that kind of imitation a new evaluation by going further in the rejection of the ontology than Aristotle did. Forms and universals can be considered as mere mental constructs. One can argue that the greatest reality lies in the sensible particulars which, in any nominalism, precede and help to create the constructs in the way that the universals precede and help to create their particular manifestations in Plato. A sensuous, concrete poetry, then,

is operating in the area of surest truth, a truth proved upon the pulses. This view appears somewhat in the Roman and Renaissance concern for enargeia, more in the rise of loco-descriptive poetry and other "painterly" genres in the late seventeenth century, and most in the modern concern for Dinglichkeit.

Then again, one can accept the Platonic ontology but reject the role assigned to poetry. There are then two procedures that can be substituted for that of trying to represent in words the qualities of sense-data. The poet may write by means of a mental creation of his own world, a world superior to that of Nature in its avoidance of moral ambiguity or the confounding of good and evil that Milton considered a prime characteristic of our fallen state. The poet is, on the analogy with God popularized by Scaliger and Sidney, a "maker," and, just as the Platonic carpenter knows more about the bed than the Platonic poet because the former has made it, and just as God knows all about His creatures because He is their Creator, so the poet has complete knowledge of the ideal world he makes. The problem is whether the fictive world exists in such a relationship to the reader's world as to allow for correspondence and the transfer of what is discovered in the one world to the other. Many of those who hold this position, particularly the



pre-Romantics, stress the delightfulness of poetry and slight the equally traditional function of instruction, arguing that the best poetry does not convey knowledge.

The poet may also be not God's analogue but His instrument. He is inspired and embodies in his works something of the divine knowledge. In that case, he presents not a universal world but the universal world. This, the most radical of the lines of defense, is also the most Platonic; it is Platonic because the analogy of the poet and God does not need the existence of a God and a universal world to function, but the theory of inspiration does, and it is Platonic because it does find expression in Plato's writings.

The Renaissance critics generally regarded Plato as having provided the best defense against his charges, for they attributed the theory of inspiration to him and regarded him as the highest authority speaking in its support. Most of them, however, were misreading the Ion. In that dialogue, as well as in passages in the Apology and the Laws, Plato continues to attack the poets, wittily using the doctrine of inspiration against the very claims to knowledge which it had supported. Throughout the Ion, Socrates argues that the poet not only does not know the content of his poems but does not even know how to compose poetry. "For the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no

invention in him until he is out of his senses and the mind is no longer in him: when he has not attained to this state, he is powerless and unable to utter his oracles. . . ."20 One hardly goes for knowledge to someone who is the most ignorant of men except in rare moments of divine furor, over which he has no control and which he cannot induce. It was only by missing the irony in "light and winged and holy" that Ficino and his Renaissance followers came to regard the dialogue as an exaltation of the poet.

Still, the Neoplatonic misreading can be readily excused. It is not just that the Florentine school was more hospitable to mysticism than Plato was. For one thing, the doctrine of inspiration is too much on the side of poetic claims to knowledge to be used against them with much success. In the Republic, Plato could argue that ignorance in the poet means ignorance in the poem, but inspiration blocks this equation. The poet may be ignorant, but he is not responsible for the poem's content; the Muse is responsible, and she is far from ignorant. Hence one does not go to the poet for knowledge but one comes from his poems with it.

Then, the doctrine of inspiration fits in well, as we have seen, with the Platonic scheme, and, more important, is placed in that scheme by the master himself in his Phaedrus. In this his second most

extensive treatment, inspiration is, as Cornford points out,<sup>21</sup> on a different footing. Socrates, presumably to make amends to Eros for previous indifference, ceases to be his former rationalistic self and, distinguishing between human and divine madness, elevates the four kinds of divine madness, erotic, prophetic, initiatory and poetic, above the reason. He relates inspiration to his favorite doctrine of anamnesis, or knowledge through the recollection of innate ideas, and thereby frees poetry from the reliance on the untrustworthy senses that he had moralized upon in the Republic and allows it access to the ideal otherworld all but closed to those without rapture. The poet is now as far removed from the empiricist as he can be; he does not merely ignore sense-data; invention is possible only when he is literally "out of his senses." Moreover, he does not, like the philosopher of the Republic, have to go through a thorough training in dialectics before he can apprehend the forms; what is gradual and voluntary in the Republic becomes sudden and involuntary in the Phaedrus.

Lovers of the easy paradox can hardly fail to note that Plato, for all his attacks on poetry, became in the hands of his interpreters a stronger ally of the poets than Aristotle, who defended poetry from Plato's attacks, became in the hands of his interpreters. For Plato, the poet is either one of the worst or one of the best of

men; he is either close to the animals because his reason is inoperative and he relies on his senses or he is touched with divinity. For Aristotle, the believer in the golden mean, the poet is a man, no more and no less. Similarly, where for Plato poetry is either a disruptive force catering to the appetites or the receptacle of heavenly wisdom, Aristotle again finds a middle ground.

Since, before the Romantic period, the conception of the poet usually follows from the conception of poetry, the poet being the kind of man who would produce that kind of poetry, we may begin with Aristotle's treatment of poetic knowledge. Briefly, he divides all knowledge into the theoretical and the practical; the theoretical consists of the demonstrably certain truths of physics, metaphysics and mathematics, and the practical consists of the merely probable truths of human behavior directed toward action rather than contemplation. Poetry is in a somewhat anomalous position: its end is closer to contemplation than to action, for that end is aesthetic pleasure, i.e., either catharsis or the mere delight in recognizing imitation; but its sphere of knowledge is the probable human realm. The universals imitated by poetry are the actions that would probably proceed from certain types of characters in certain situations if the characters were enabled to express themselves as clearly

in action as they can in poetry, where the "accidents" of life are eliminated. Poetry does not involve metaphysical or theological speculation. Empedocles is not a poet but a philosopher writing in verse. The dei ex machina in tragedy are not meant to instruct about the gods; they are transparent devices which the most artistic poet can do without and the lesser poet should only use for minor functions of exposition. The marvelous in epic is irrational, fictitious, and solely for the listeners' delight.

Aristotle argues, moreover, that the poet is not to be censured, as the Socrates of the Ion does censure him, for making mistakes in talking about such human crafts as shipbuilding. Against Ion's claim that Homer knew everything and Socrates' counter-claim that, as an inspired poet, he knew nothing, Aristotle asserts that the poet only needs to know human nature and, at that, his knowledge need only be a probable one.<sup>23</sup>

The author of such poetry hardly needs to be inspired; indeed, Aristotle leaves no room in his system for inspiration. His god, like the god of seventeenth and eighteenth-century science, is a remote First Cause who does not disturb the universe with miracles and offers no revelations, basically because there is nothing that needs revealing. In De Anima he cautions the visionary against taking his phantasms for a reflection of reality,

and elsewhere he denies that dreams may express divinity. The only madness he considers is human and is regarded unfavorably.<sup>24</sup> It might also be said that to write a Poetics is to reject, at least in its purest form, the theory of inspiration, for if poetry is an art in the Ion, it is the art of God alone.

Nonetheless, most of the Renaissance apologists managed to enlist Aristotle in support of inspiration. That they were able to do so is largely a tribute to their method of textual interpretation, which consisted of breaking a text into statements and then correlating each statement with presumably similar statements from other authorities. The scholiast was allowed to ignore the statement's context, its place in the author's argument and its relation to other statements by the author.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, the oft-made comment that Renaissance theories were subservient to ancient authorities may be reversed; sometimes the ancient authorities were at the mercy of the modern theories.

Three passages in Aristotle might seem to support inspiration. Rhetoric 3.7 does state that "poetry is a thing inspired," but the context makes it clear that what is stated is the audience's opinion and not the philosopher's claim for poetry; i.e., hyperbole and strange words are to be accepted in poetry because they are proper to a state of madness and the audience

believes the poet to be in such a state. Aristotle suggests that the poet merely takes advantage of a vulgar belief.<sup>26</sup>

The sole passage from the Poetics has been emended in this century. The Bywater translation of the traditional text of 55a 32-34 explains that "poetry demands a man with a special gift for it, or else one with a touch of madness in him," hardly a statement of the necessity of the latter. Allen Gilbert, basing his translation on Gudeman's text, which is also used for Else's translation and mammoth commentary, declares that "poetic art is the affair of the gifted man rather than of the madman."<sup>27</sup>

In the Problemata, a work attributed to Aristotle, inspiration is effected by hot black bile:

Many too, if this heat approaches the region of the intellect, are affected by diseases of frenzy and possession; and this is the origin of Sibyls and soothsayers and all inspired persons, when they are affected not by disease but by natural temperament. Maricus, the Syracusan, was actually a better poet when he was out of his mind.<sup>28</sup>

This passage is the ancestor of the Renaissance attempts to explain what has been called "inspiration" on the same grounds, the most notable being that of Juan Huarte. That "inspiration" is not being used here the way it had been used is plain from the abuse of "possession" as well. There is no deity to inspire or possess; there is just the hot black bile. "Sibyls and soothsayers and all

inspired persons" owe their inspiration to melancholic temper or distemper.

What does it mean, then, that Maricus the Syracusan was a better poet when he was thus "inspired"? It cannot mean that he had more knowledge to convey. Where would he get it? It can only mean what Aristotle means when he calls Homer "divine," that the poet has a special ability to visualize what he is depicting and to present his subject in the liveliest images.<sup>29</sup> Inspiration is not the capacity for supernal knowledge but for rhetorical ability, particularly in the manifestation of enargeia.

There is little that the Romans will say about inspiration that is not latent in Aristotle, for his view of the poet is already a long way from that of Plato, let alone Homer. The poet is fast coming to be considered the gifted man rather than the inspired one, and where in the Phaedrus the madman could enter the temple of poetry but not the man of art, the contrast in Horace's Ars Poetica will be between ars and ingenium.<sup>30</sup> Following Aristotle, the Hellenistic and Roman poets will be considered responsible craftsmen for whom one can lay down rules of procedure: the creation of poetry is under their control.

Believing that poetry is under their control, the poets will not believe in a poetic furor which would wrest this control from them. In the Ars Poetica,



Horace ridicules the unkempt extravagances of poets claiming inspiration; clearly he regards them as frauds pretending to be poets who have been betrayed by hopelessly out-of-date beliefs. He is too urbane to cherish enthusiasm.

Though worship of the Muses has not ceased, inspiration, in our primary sense, is never more than a fiction for classical authors after Aristotle; at worst it is a well-recognized and meaningless convention to invoke the gods; at best it is an act of nostalgia. As a convention, it is open to being burlesqued, as in Horace's fifth satire, and it may be wittily used for flattery, as when Virgil, in the first Georgic, substitutes the emperor's name for that of the goddess in the standard formula, thereby suggesting the divinity of Augustus. Propertius combines burlesque and flattery when he declares his mistress Cynthia to be the source of his poems: their lovemaking, he says, will create in him vast Iliads.<sup>31</sup>

The poet may also express his wit by mockingly refusing to accept the convention. This is Ovid's specialty. He says in the Tristia, "My songs, following the precedent of Pallas Athene, are born from me alone, without a mother. This offspring and progeny is all mine."<sup>32</sup> The Ars amatoria also springs full-blown from Ovid's head. He asserts that personal experience is a

better source of poetry than Phoebus or Hesiod's Muses:

Non ego, Phoebe, datas a te mihi mentiar artes,  
Nec nos areisæ voce monemur avis,  
Nec mihi sunt visae Clio Cliusque sorores  
Servanti pecudes vallibus, Ascra, tuis;  
Usus opus movet hoc: vati parete perito!  
Vera canem: coeptis, mater Amoris, ades!<sup>33</sup>

Poets claiming inspiration are liars; Ovid will tell the truth.

Ovid's preference for experience over the Muse suggests an empiricism like Aristotle's, that is, an empiricism that avows induction even if it does not make a very thorough use of it. This empiricism is inimical to inspiration: as Aristotle's famous dictum puts it, there is nothing in the mind that was not first in the senses. At the same time, it favors a process which can be called "inspiration" and which can be looked upon as replacing the former concept.

Aristotle, we have seen, honors Homer for his ability to visualize. Quintilian speaks of

visions, whereby things absent are presented to our imagination with such extreme vividness that they seem actually to be before our very eyes. It is the man who is really sensitive to such impressions who will have the greatest power over the emotions. . . . [This is a] power of vivid imagination, whereby things, words and actions are presented in the most realistic manner . . . and it is a power which all may readily acquire if they will.<sup>34</sup>

"Longinus" also regards the inspired imagination as a chief source of the sublime. Unlike Quintilian, and like most other writers, he attributes vividness of

imagination more to ingenium than to ars, but feels that one can learn to approximate it. He anticipates a Renaissance usage when he argues that one can be inspired by the great writers, meaning that one can learn to ape the stylistic devices and diction of the great writers.<sup>35</sup>

The connection between inspiration and imagination betokens an empirical view of inspiration. The imagination is that faculty which, drawing on the fund of images supplied by the senses and stored in the memory, combines the images to enable a person to visualize something not before him. The imagination is regarded as inspired if it is quick and fertile, that is, if it is fast at combining images and has a great number of images to work with. The inspiration, in other words, is from below, from the senses, rather than from above, from a deity.

This second kind of inspiration provides no guarantee of truth, for the imagination must be regulated in its combining power by the poet's judgment, and its products are valued solely for their beauty and not for their verity. "Longinus" finds the sublime in passages where he regards Homer as lying as well as in passages where he feels Homer is telling the truth.

The popularity of this inspiration, then, points to a greater aestheticism in the judging of literature. This development, too, is foreshadowed in Aristotle.

Plato's interest in poetry is didactic and moralistic. The Poetics, on the other hand, comes close to regarding the unity and integrity of a work as ends in themselves, and where Plato wants a poem to instruct but is suspicious of the delight it may cause, as something coming from the emotions, Aristotle seems to regard the poem's instruction through imitation as a means to delight.

The Alexandrians carry out the tendencies in Aristotle, arriving at a position of, if not art-for art's sake, then art-for-aesthetic-delight's sake. With one exception, the poets cultivated the minor genres, where the quality of execution is the most important factor in a poem's success; the exception, Apollonius Rhodius, wrote an epic which, for its derivativeness and empty conventionality, testifies to the others' wisdom in avoiding genres where the poet must have something to say. Callimachus, the chief of the Alexandrians, denied that the poet should do anything but delight, and apparently most of his contemporaries were in agreement. Philodemus, who is generally held to reflect second and third century attitudes, mocks those who look for allegorical meaning in all poetry.<sup>36</sup> According to Strabo, Eratosthenes, the Alexandrian author of a Geography, felt that all poetry, including his own venture in what ought to be a didactic genre, should entertain rather than instruct.

Strabo feels it necessary to devote several pages

to an attack on Eratosthenes' views. He asserts, with the ancients, that poetry is elementary philosophy and goes further to say it can only be written by a wise man. He tells Eratosthenes he is "wrong when you deny to Homer the possession of vast learning, and go on to declare that poetry is a fable-prating old wife, who has been permitted to 'invent' (as you call it) whatever she deems suitable for purposes of entertainment."<sup>37</sup> Strabo rejects the conception of poetry as pleasant fiction and insists that it must be grounded in truth. He makes one suspect that the Roman commonplace that poetry should both instruct and delight reflects a certain literary conservativeness.

Indeed it may be helpful to see the Romans as reacting against the lowered status of poetry in Hellenistic times. If poetry is only a well-made, delightful object, the poet is a maker and nothing more. But for the Romans the poet may be a vates as well as a maker, and poetry depends as much on natural ingenium as on ars. The Augustan poets retain something of the theory of inspiration not only because it is an accepted convention but also because it testifies to their sense of themselves as engaged in an important enterprise. If they did not believe in the Muse, they at least believed in their own talents, which they liked to think of as god-given. The Muse might have been a fiction for them,

but it was not for all of them an empty fiction.

Accordingly, they establish a new usage: the Muse becomes a personification of the poetic talent. "The Muse" becomes "my Muse" and tends to take on the characteristics of the poetry in which she figures. Thus, Virgil, in the Bucolics, speaks of "my rustic Muse," and Ovid has a "musa iacosa."<sup>38</sup>

Internal rather than external, controlled by the poet rather than controlling him, the Muse is no longer part of any extraordinary claims to divine sanction. Divinity is not totally out of the picture, however. The Romans had available to them the Stoic belief that there is a divine spark in every man, and this spark could be interpreted as ingenium or the poetic faculty. The poet could, then, be responsible for his works and still maintain that he has been divinely chosen to be a poet. Individual poems do not get divine approval, and hence there is no guarantee of their truth, but the art of poetry can still claim, in a fashion, that it comes from God. Poeta nascitur is thinkable only when ingenium replaces inspiration; the Roman poetic talent, like the Aristotelian universe, has its birth from God but then proceeds to act by its own rules; Hesiod, on the other hand, was made, not born, a poet, and he is re-made a poet for each successive poem. That is what the

invocation is for.

One can, then, distinguish three kinds of invocation. There is the invocation proper where the poet requests the aid of a deity, without which, he and his readers feel, he cannot write his poem. At the opposite pole, there is the invocation as a convention for convention's sake alone: the poet includes it because he feels he must, but it means nothing to him and he proceeds to forget about it. Statius' Thebaid provides a relatively humorous example. He begins with not so much of an invocation as a statement that he is already inspired: "My spirit is touched by Pierian fire to recount the strife of Brethren. . . ." Then he decides, at length and laboriously, where to begin, proposing and rejecting possibilities.<sup>39</sup> The third kind of invocation is equally conventional but not meaningless: the poet uses it to rally his faculties, express piety and hope that he is equal to his great endeavor. Virgil's invocations seem to have these functions.

Where Homer begins, "Sing in me Muse," Virgil introduces himself and his theme first. He then requests the Muse to assist his memory in recalling Juno's motives for harassing the pious Aeneas, leaving no doubt that he is composing the work rather than allowing the work to be composed through him. The Muse is, in each

invocation, associated with memory, in fact with a kind of tribal memory which the poet can draw upon in celebrating his nation's history, and the association with memory no doubt comes from the relatively late myth which made the Muses the daughters of Mnemosyne (Memory),<sup>40</sup> a myth which points toward their allegorization. The Muses as tribal memory, another word for which would be "tradition," solve the problems of the epic for Virgil: they are his memory, for he is a member of the tribe, but they transcend individual limitations and provide an external authority for his content, namely common belief. Virgil presents his story not as truth but as received opinion. This stand is clearest in a brief invocation in Book IX:

What god, O Muses, turned the fire? Who saved  
The Trojan ships? Remind me--the story is old  
Men have believed it long, its glory endless.<sup>41</sup>

The Muses preside over catalogues, as in Homer. The end of the invocation before the catalogue of warriors in Book VII holds as well for the invocation for the catalogue of ships in Book X:

For you remember, Muses, and you have power  
To make us all remember, deeds that rumor,  
Far-off and faint, brings to our recollection.<sup>42</sup>

The one invocation that is not to the Muses expresses the narrator's piety but does not change the source of his knowledge. Before the descent into the



underworld, another Homeric parallel, the narrator pauses to address the gods of that region:

Gods of the world of spirit, silent shadows,  
Chaos and Phlegethon, areas of silence,  
Wide realms of dark, may it be right and proper  
To tell what I have heard, this revelation  
Of matters buried keep in earth and darkness!<sup>43</sup>

He has not heard anything from the silent gods and, since he does not specify his source, we have no reason to suppose it has changed. He emphasizes, as usual, that he is doing the telling and is responsible for the poem.

Because the Romans maintained the convention of inspiration, the Renaissance Platonists had no difficulty enlisting them in its support. Cicero, for example, liked using the doctrine for apologetic purposes, but he usually states it as someone else's opinion and it clearly does not govern his thinking. De oratore attributes the belief to Democritus and Plato; Pro archia poeta states it as received on "the highest and most learned authority"; in both places, however, Cicero continues to regard poetry as a perfectible skill, and in the Pro archia inspiration is clearly being used just as a means of placing God on the side of Cicero's client.<sup>44</sup>

Ovid's oft-cited "est deus in nobis" is another statement which can only be taken seriously out of context. It occurs at the beginning of Fasti VI:

Hic quoque mensis habet dubias in nomine causas,  
quae placeant, positis omnibus ipse leges.  
facta canam; sed erunt qui me finxisse loquantur  
nullaque mortali numina visa putent.  
est deus in nobis; agitante calescimus illo:  
impetus hic sacrae semina mentis habet.  
fas mihi praecipue voltus vidisse deorum,  
vel quia sum vates, vel quia sacra cano.

He goes on to relate how three goddesses, Juno, Hebe and Concordia, appeared to him and each urged her claim that the month was named after her.<sup>45</sup> As he said at the outset, he refuses to choose among them: each is self-seeking and at least two must be liars. The reader may believe whatever he likes, and Ovid even invites him to doubt that he saw the goddesses. Some, he admits, will say he lies and that no deities have been seen by mortals. The "est deus in nobis" is part of Ovid's denial of the charge of mendacity, but the dubiousness of the visions he relates, combined with the invitation to doubt, must make us doubt his denial and suspect irony.

In Ovid we note once again a general Roman attitude. The reader may believe Ovid saw the goddesses, but Ovid does not. The reader may believe that the story of Aeneas is true, but Virgil does not invoke divine authority to support its truth. That the work is based on the reader's belief rather than on truth is what is probably behind a famous passage in Plutarch's De audiendis poetis. Simonides, asked why the Thessalonians are the only people he cannot deceive, answered, "They

are too stupid for me to deceive," to which Plutarch adds, "Gorgias said that tragedy is deceit, and that he who deceives is a better man than he who does not, and he who is deceived is wiser than he who is not."<sup>46</sup> The good poet improves on reality and the good audience comes to his fiction with a willing suspension of disbelief.

The Romans were not, of course, unanimous in their conception of the relationship of poetry to truth and to fiction. Strabo stresses truth-value more than Virgil and Virgil more than Petronius. Where in Homer's time there was no distinction between history and epic, Petronius distinguishes between them sharply in denying that Lucan wrote an epic:

It Epic is not a question of describing events in verse, historians do this much better; but the spirit must freely range over byways, interventions by the gods, and swoop over mythical content, so that the poem appears to be the prophesying of a frenzied mind rather than a scrupulously reliable statement of facts before witnesses. . . .<sup>47</sup>

This statement is remarkably close to French neoclassical theory. Petronius regards machinery as a fictional element necessary to the epic and justifies its necessity through a radical misinterpretation of Homeric inspiration in terms more suitable for what we have designated as Roman inspiration. Homeric furor does not communicate itself to the poem, but the enthusiasm of the inspired imagination is meant to: the poet, having visualized

intensely, makes the reader do so. Petronius regards divine machinery as existing, like intense visualization, for the reader's delight. He invokes the fiction of inspiration to support the fiction of machinery, where Homer invokes genuine inspiration in support of genuine deities.

To summarize the development of Greek and Roman conceptions of the relationship of poetry to truth and inspiration, we can hardly do better than to quote at length from Plutarch. Discussing why the Pythian oracle no longer speaks in verse, he attributes the change to a change in times. In the old days poetry was much revered and, when potential poets appeared, the god helped them.

Accordingly, the god did not begrudge to the art of prophecy adornment and pleasing grace, nor did he drive away from here the honoured Muse of the tripod, but introduced her rather by awakening and welcoming poetic natures; and he himself provided visions for them, and helped in prompting impressiveness and eloquence as something fitting and admirable. But, as life took on a change along with the change in men's fortunes and their natures, when usage banished the unusual and did away with the golden topknots . . . /and/ Philosophy welcomed clearness and teachability in preference to creating amazement . . . /the gods took/ away from the oracles epic versification, strange words, circumlocutions, and vagueness. . . . 48

The welcoming of "clearness and teachability in preference to creating amazement," it must be emphasized, is not just a change in stylistic preferences but a change in what is acceptable in thinking. The change in men's

natures that Plutarch refers to may be the disappearance of the pre-Aristotelian taste for the mysterious, what Lucretius would call the vanquishing of superstition. Roman philosophy, unlike Pythagorean or Platonic, for example, does not encourage speculations about the noumenal. Of the three major philosophical schools, the Sceptics deny that any statement about the noumenal can be proven and the Stoics and Epicureans, both of whom limit the place of the divine in the universe, feel that they know as much as they need to.

The god Plutarch speaks of is clearly an ornamental machine: his alteration of the oracles follows a change in belief, and he may be regarded as the personification of that change. In the next passage, style follows content as Plutarch dispenses with the god to put things more plainly.

The introduction of clearness was attended also by a revolution in belief, which underwent a change along with everything else. And this was the result: in days of old what was not familiar or common, but was expressed altogether indirectly and through circumlocution, the mass of people imputed to an assumed manifestation of divine power, and held it in awe and reverence; but in later times, being well satisfied to apprehend all these various things clearly and easily without the attendant grandiloquence and artificiality, they blamed the poetic language with which the oracles were clothed, not only for obstructing the understanding of these in their true meaning and for combining vagueness and obscurity with the communication, but already they were coming to look with suspicion upon

metaphors, riddles, and ambiguous statements, feeling that these were secluded nooks of refuge devised for furtive withdrawal and retreat for him that should err in his prophecy.

There were also so many pretended poet-prophets that people lost their belief in divine inspiration. "This, then, is not the least among the reasons why poetry . . . lost all standing with truth and the tripod."<sup>49</sup>

The Greek and Roman development, in general, and Plutarch's discussion of it, in particular, raise the question as to what sort of philosophical milieu is most favorable to the poet's claims to knowledge and to inspiration. This question may be postponed, for it will be more fruitfully discussed in relation to Renaissance and seventeenth-century developments which, we have suggested, are analogous to the Greek and Roman. Before we can consider the Renaissance, however, we must give some indication, albeit a sketchy one, of what happened in the intervening centuries, and we must consider Christian inspiration, which usually lies behind references to neo-pagan inspiration in sixteenth-century verse.

NOTES: CHAPTER TWO

1 F. M. Cornford, Principium Sapientiae (New York, 1965), pp. 88-95 et passim.

2 Republic, 607b.

3 Selections from Early Greek Philosophy, ed. Milton C. Nahm (New York, 1947), pp. 113-14. Cf. Cornford, pp. 110-18.

4 Homer, The Odyssey, tr. Robert Fitzgerald (Garden City, 1963), p. 420.

5 Ibid., p. 127.

6 Homer, The Iliad, tr. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago, 1966), p. 89.

7 Hesiod, Theogony, tr. Richmond Lattimore (Ann Arbor, 1959), p. 22.

8 Cornford, pp. 104-105.

9 Hesiod, p. 22.

10 G. M. A. Grube, The Greek and Roman Critics (London, 1965), p. 9.

11 Ibid., pp. 9ff.

12 Pindar, The Odes of Pindar, tr. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago, 1964), pp. 9, 45, 32, 42.

13 Ibid., p. 100.

14 Cornford, p. 65.

15 Pindar, pp. 114-15; for the philosophers, cf. K. Gilbert and H. Kuhn, A History of Esthetics (Bloomington, 1953), pp. 1-2; Solon is quoted in W. C. Greene, "The Greek Criticism of Poetry," in Perspectives of Criticism, ed. Harry Levin (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), p. 21; for Pericles, see the funeral oration in Thucydides, ii, 41.

16 Gilbert and Kuhn, p. 2.

17 The Republic of Plato, tr. F. M. Cornford (New York, 1958), pp. 69-80.

18 Ibid., pp. 324-333.

19 John Milton, "Areopagitica," in The Works of John Milton, ed. F. A. Patterson et. al. (New York, 1931-8), IV, 311; F. M. Padelford, Select Translations from Scaliger's Poetics (New York, 1905), p. 8; Sir Philip Sidney, "The Defense of Poesy," in Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden, ed. Allen H. Gilbert (Detroit, 1962), p. 413; cf. Thomas Warton and Richard



Hurd in Scott Elledge, Eighteenth-Century Critical Essays (Ithaca, 1961), II, 771-72, 860-61.

20 The Dialogues of Plato, tr. Benjamin Jowett (Oxford, 1953), I, 346; IV, 289, I, 108.

21 Cornford, pp. 70-81.

22 Poetics 1447b, 1454b, 1460a in The Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. Richard McKeon (New York, 1941), pp. 1456, 1470, 1482.

23 Ibid., p. 1464; cf. Gerald F. Else, Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), pp. 305-06.

24 Ibid., 610-11, 626; cf. Else, p. 494 and M. W. Bundy, The Theory of Imagination in Classical and Medieval Thought (Urbana, 1927), pp. 76, 79.

25 Bernard Weinberg, "From Aristotle to Pseudo-Aristotle," in Aristotle's Poetics and English Literature, ed. Elder Olson (Chicago, 1965), pp. 194-5.

26 G. F. Else agrees, p. 498.

27 Basic Works, p. 1472; Gilbert, pp. 117-18; Else, p. 496.

28 Problemata 954a in The Works of Aristotle, ed. W. D. Ross, tr. E. S. Forster (Oxford, 1927), v. 7, no pagination.

29 Else, p. 499.

30 Plato, III, 151; cf. J. F. D'Alton, Roman Literary Theory and Criticism (London, 1931), p. 474.

31 Cf. Steele Commager, The Odes of Horace (New Haven, 1963), p. 8; E. R. Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, tr. Willard R. Trask (New York, 1953), p. 232.

32 Tr. Commager, p. 8; Ars Amatoria I, 25-30.

33 Bundy, p. 106.

34 Ibid., pp. 107-09.

35 Grube, pp. 126, 195-96.

36 The Geography of Strabo, tr. H. L. Jones (London, 1917), I, 57-59, quote on p. 59.

37 Commager, p. 8.

38 Statius, Thebiad, tr. J. H. Mozley (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), p. 341.

39 Robert Graves, The Greek Myths (Baltimore,

1959), I, 55.

40 The Aeneid of Virgil, tr. Rolfe Humphries (New York, 1951), p. 236.

41 Ibid., p. 200.

42 Ibid., p. 152.

43 Cícero, De Oratore, tr. E. W. Sutton (Cambridge, 1948), p. 339; The Speeches, tr. N. H. Watts (Cambridge, 1961), p. 27.

44 Ovid's Fasti, ed. and tr. James George Frazer (London, 1931), p. 318ff.

45 Grube, p. 10n.

46 Petronius, Satyricon 118, tr. in Grube, p. 264.

47 Plutarch, Moralia, tr. F. C. Babbitt (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), V, 327-29.

48 Ibid., pp. 329-33.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### MEDIEVAL DEVELOPMENTS

As readers of Yeats know well, the mental calm brought about by the Stoic and Epicurean separation of the noumenal from the phenomenal was shattered by the coming of Christ. Just when Greek and Roman rationalism seemed to have tamed the Olympians, when not only beautiful women but poets and the rest of mankind were free to go about their business without the danger of divine interference, the Incarnation re-established an intimacy between God and man. The mingling of human and divine natures in Christ was all the more wonderful because the Christian god was at least as exalted as the Stoic god and not so anthropomorphic as Homer's Zeus. Yet, God walked the earth, spoke to men and signified His involvement with them by being crucified for their sakes.

For Christians, belief in inspiration became not merely possible but necessary. The Christian is more dependent on the Bible for his essential knowledge than the Greek was on the Iliad and the Theogony, and the

authority that Homer and Hesiod derived from the Muse is nothing to the authority due to Scripture as the Word of God. Christian faith begins with the belief that the Bible is holy.

The Bible, of course, includes the Old Testament as well as the New, and Christian inspiration, at least outside the spheres of Christian Neoplatonism, is more an extension of the Jewish idea than the revival of a Greek one. The Pentateuch, which Jews and Christians believed to be written by Moses, includes an account of the author's meeting with God on Mount Sinai, from which meeting the Pentateuch derives. The prophets testify that the Spirit fills them. Thus Ezekiel 3: 24-27:

Then the spirit entered into me, and set me upon my feet and spake with me, and said unto me . . . I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth, and thou shalt be dumb . . . But when I speak with thee, I will open thy mouth, and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD . . .

That Ezekiel will be mute unless moved by the Spirit is a guarantee that he will transmit only the word of God and will do so without distortion. David, who for the Renaissance humanists will be the archetypal poet, affirms with his last words that "The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue."<sup>1</sup>

The authors of the New Testament assert their own inspiration and verify that of the Old Testament. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God," states Paul

in 2 Timothy 3:16. In Matthew 22 Jesus acknowledges the truth of his ancestor David's claim. Paul says that Christ speaks through him (2 Cor. 13:3) and places revelation above rational inquiry or criticism, for it is beyond the capacity of the senses and the reason:

Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. . . . Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

The inspired apostle speaks with the authority of Christ, for he is enlightened by the Spirit and his words come from the Spirit. His message is above being judged by the natural man.

Christians, then, could not but accept the possibility of inspiration; the Bible proved it has happened often enough over a considerable period of time. There was also general agreement on the nature of inspiration. Consequently, we can take St. Thomas's discussion as having general validity.

Thomas begins, as Paul did, by stating the limitation of natural man to what can be known by the

senses:

Now every form bestowed on created things by God has power for a determined act, which it can effect in proportion to its own proper endowment; and beyond this act it is powerless, except by a superadded form, as water can heat only when heated by fire. And thus, the human understanding has a form, viz., intelligible light itself, which of itself is sufficient for knowing certain intelligible truths the human intellect cannot know, unless it be perfected by a stronger light, viz., the light of faith or of prophecy, which is called the light of grace, inasmuch as it is added to nature.<sup>3</sup>

Grace may be termed "operating" or "co-operating" depending on whether God acts on the man directly or bestows on him an habitual gift which will allow his good works to proceed from free choice. The distinction between operating and co-operating grace is equivalent to the distinction drawn in the last chapter between inspiration and ingenium. Ingenium is given by Nature just as co-operating grace is given by God: both are what Thomas would call "abiding forms" whose employment is voluntary and subject to man's control. Prophecy, on the other hand, is involuntary and out of man's control; it is not an abiding form but a passing impression of intellectual light on the intellect.<sup>4</sup>

Thomas also distinguishes between a greater sanctifying grace, which justifies a man and unites him to God, and a lesser gratuitous grace, which is given to a man so that he may help in the justification of

others. It is the gratuitous grace which

embraces whatever a man needs in order to instruct another in divine things which are above reason. Now for this three things are required. First a man must possess the fullness or knowledge of divine things, so as to be capable of teaching others. Secondly, he must be able to confirm or prove what he says, or otherwise his words would have no weight. Thirdly, he must be capable of presenting fittingly to his hearers what he knows.<sup>5</sup>

Thomas goes on to explain that, while verification of what is within reason rests upon argument, verification of what is beyond reason "rests on what is proper to the divine power, and this in two ways." God may provide a miracle as a clear, sensible proof of His involvement. Moreover, the audience is justified in believing the speaker "when he can manifest what God alone can know, and these are either future contingents--and thus there is prophecy, or also the secrets of hearts, and thus there is the discerning of spirits."<sup>6</sup> The second means of proof, one may note, begs the question. One might ask how it can be known whether the claimant to inspiration is indeed manifesting what God alone knows, whether his statements are indeed correct. The Renaissance poets, unable to work miracles, unless one takes their poems as such, will claim inspiration under the second mode of proof.

St. Thomas does not, though, mention the poets in his discussion of gratuitous grace and, as we shall see, he held poetry in contempt and rather expected his



readers to do the same. For the Christians there is not the connection between poetry and inspiration that there is for the Greeks. Of plato's four furors the Christian recognizes only the prophetic, though the erotic element is present in that God's love for man is the cause of the inspiration. The prophet is enabled to present what he receives "fittingly" but not aesthetically. His speech must be comprehensible; it need not be beautiful.

Christian theory, then, allows for an extension of inspiration to poets but does not enforce or suggest that extension. Whether or not the poets claim inspiration will depend, for the most part, on how important poetry is considered to be. The Deity does not involve Himself in projects for man's recreation; on the contrary, there have been those quite ready to suppose the devil active in that phase of life. Gratuitous grace is given for man's salvation: there is a limit as to how far from this end the poet can pitch his goal and still claim divine sanction for his poem.

This chapter will argue that, for much of the medieval period, poetry was held to be of too little consequence for the theory of poetic inspiration to be advanced, and, in a vicious cycle, the failure of poetic inspiration to take hold contributed to poetry's low position on the scale of intellectual activities. The option provided by the theory of gratuitous grace

was not widely taken up, except in cases where we may postulate an influence favorable to it, and that influence did not exist in the first Christian centuries.

Though the early Church fathers were not, of course, particularly interested in poetry, they did occasionally refer to it and their statements carried weight for later times. In fact, their statements defined most of the basic positions that the Middle Ages would take towards poetry and, hence, were influential out of all proportion to their importance in the contexts in which they occurred.

The Latin fathers had occasion to comment on poetry because they were concerned with propagating and maintaining the true faith. Their interest, in other words, was solely in poetic content and not in more purely aesthetic matters. "Poetry" for them meant pagan poetry, and pagan poetry meant the repository of pagan mythology. This identification meant that poetry would be criticized first for its verity and then, works being almost as important as faith, for its morality. The myths were lies, and black lies at that. The ancients attributed to their gods the most criminal of human actions and thereby appeared to regard cannibalism, incest and sodomy as divine.

The earliest fathers are the harshest. For Minucius Felix, the "fables and errors" about the false gods are preserved by ignorant parents and "especially

in the verses of the poets, who as much as possible have prejudiced the truth by their authority. . . . And all these things have been put forward with this view, that a certain authority might be gained for the vices of men." Poetry corrupts the minds of men and boys and is to be rejected.<sup>7</sup> Tertullian agrees: the poets lie about and ridicule the gods and were deservedly banished by Plato.<sup>8</sup>

Against these extreme charges, Arnobius defends the poets without defending the poetry. They did not invent the wanton stories about the gods. They would hardly "have assumed to themselves so great license as to foolishly feign what was almost sheer madness, and might give them reason to be afraid of the gods, and bring them into danger with men." Since their gods did not seek revenge against them and since their fellow men did not reproach them with blasphemy, the poets must have been telling what everyone knew; they are at fault only for perpetuating the worst elements in pagan culture.<sup>9</sup>

Lactantius also feels that poetic license has been misunderstood and, in his remarks upon it, he seems to be trying to save pagan poetry and hence all poetry. He is sufficiently concerned to prescribe rules to prevent poetry from being merely untrue in the future. The poets, he says, lie not for deception but for

ornamentation; "it is the business of the poet with some gracefulness to change and transform actual occurrences into other representations by oblique transformations." Lactantius follows the euhemeristic interpretation of myths: Zeus wooing Danae as a shower of gold is, underneath the ornament, a rich man, probably the poet's patron, corrupting a woman with gold coin. The myths are history transformed by poetic license. "But to feign the whole of that which you relate, that is to be foolish and deceitful rather than a poet."<sup>10</sup>

Lactantius's defense, and particularly his example, hardly generate much interest in poetic content. While it is not unusual for allegory to be taken to mean the obscuring, through figures, of simple statements, the example of Zeus and Danae so trivializes poetic content that it is hard to imagine anyone wanting to spend time making similar translations of the other myths. In fact, Lactantius is primarily interested in saving the poets as examples of pure Latin;<sup>11</sup> he is willing to diminish the content to do so, and all the more because it is the content which the earlier fathers found vulnerable.

Jerome, commenting on the parable of the prodigal son, interprets the husks that the prodigal would have eaten with the swine as the songs of the poets, which are the food of demons.

They delight all with their sweetness; but while they captivate the ears with fluent verses of charming rhythm, they penetrate the soul as well and bind the inmost affections. But when they have been read with the greatest enthusiasm and effort, they afford their readers nothing more than empty sound and the hubbub of words. No satisfaction of truth, no refreshment of justice is found. They who are zealous of these things continue to hunger for truth, to lack virtue.<sup>12</sup>

Yet, he too wished to save poetry because it provided the best examples for the study of grammar and rhetoric. His solution, more radical and simple than Lactantius's, was to ignore the content and to reduce the poems to a series of grammatical and rhetorical constructions. Bolgar points out that, for much of the medieval period, Jerome's attitude toward the classics was a liberal one.<sup>13</sup> We shall shortly cite a few examples of men who felt that Christians could learn all the rhetoric they needed for Scriptures.

If Jerome could be cited by both the attackers and the defenders, St. Augustine contributed almost entirely to the attack. When the poets, like Virgil in the Fourth Eclogue, tell the truth, it is without meaning to do so. These truths

may be useful for the refutations of pagan error, but cannot lead us to believe in these writers. For while they spoke, because they could not help it, of the God whom we worship, they either taught their fellow countrymen to worship idols and demons, or allowed them to do so without daring to protest.<sup>14</sup>

Even the best of the poets, he writes in The City of God, "were unable to abstain from dishonoring their gods by fables."<sup>15</sup>

Plato's rejection of the poets means a good deal to Augustine, as it does to all of the fathers. If the wisest of the pagans could not tolerate the poets, how could a Christian, who had so much more to find objectionable? If Plato banished the poets from the city of man, what place could they have in the city of God?<sup>16</sup>

In the Confessions Augustine regrets that, in his youth, he wept for Dido when he should have been weeping for his sins: the implication is clear that poetry distracts man from reality with its vain fictions. He also says, somewhat contradictorily, that poets are less dangerous than heretics because their truths make less pretense to credibility. No one believes that Medea flew.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps there is no contradiction, for the assent that one has to give to Dido's plight in order to weep over it does not involve an intellectual choice the way that assenting to the Manichean heresy does. In any case, to say that poets are not as bad as heretics is hardly to defend the former. Augustine does not credit the poets with good intentions, merely with little power to do ill, and if poetry cannot do ill it is impotent to do good as well. A similar point is made in the

Soliloquies. There he argues, rather platonically, that just as an image cannot be the thing it imitates, so poems do not wish to deceive but must be false because they are unable to be true.

It is difficult to sum up the effect of the fathers' statements on the way poetry will be conceived, but it seems clear that, if they do not banish poetry from Christendom, they do make of it a diminished thing. If poetry is saved through its becoming the raw material of grammar or rhetoric, then it loses its integrity and becomes an accumulation of constructions; as such, it is without content, blank, and no means to knowledge. If, on the other hand, poetry is to be saved through some sort of allegorization, that procedure usually trivializes it, as in Lactantius' euhemerism, or turns it into an instructional tool for elementary philosophy.

Poetry hardly fares better in the hands of Boethius and Macrobius, who, if not church fathers, were more influential than most of them. Boethius begins the Consolation by putting poetry squarely in its place. Before he ran into difficulty with Fortune, he had been given to writing pleasant songs, and now the Muses are seeking to console him. Philosophy enters and angrily berates the "Sirens of poetry":

"Who has suffered these seducing mummers to approach this sick man? Never do they support those in sorrow by any healing remedies, but

rather do ever foster the sorrow by poisonous sweets. These are they who stifle the fruit-bearing harvest of reason with the barren briars of the passions: they free not the minds of men from disease, but accustom them thereto. . . ." Their band thus rated cast a saddened glance upon the ground, confessing their shame in blushes, and passed forth dismally over the threshold.<sup>19</sup>

Boethius feels that poetry addresses itself primarily to the passions; it is irrational and, hence, as argument it can only be ineffective sophistry. Only his reason can give Boethius the conviction he needs to bear his misfortune; therefore, he turns to philosophy. In assigning poetry to the passions and philosophy to reason, Boethius indulges in the sort of simplistic compartmentalization that we find Ramus and Bacon utilizing in the Renaissance, with equally harmful effects for poetry.

Macrobius also makes distinctions, but they are among kinds of poetry. "Fables--the very word acknowledges their falsity--serve two purposes: either merely to gratify the ear or to encourage the reader to good works. . . ." The first group he relegates to children's nurseries. The second group he subdivides into those entirely fictitious, which he dismisses, and those where truth is ornamented with fiction. The philosopher approves only those poems where "a decent and dignified conception of holy truths, with respectable



events and characters, is presented beneath a modest veil of allegory." The fiction must be decent in itself: no allegory will justify improprieties. Thus, he rules out many of the pagan myths. Moreover, he limits the subject of the allegory; it may deal with the soul or with "spirits having dominion in the lower and upper air," but it may not deal with Mind or God or the Ideas.<sup>20</sup> Poetry does not discover truth but merely expounds it, and the higher truths it may not touch.

Boethius' De Musica has a reference to poetic madness that is worth attending to, if only because of the rarity of such references. There are, he begins, three classes of musicians. The lowest is the performer, who knows nothing of the science of harmony and has the dignity of a manual worker. Next comes he who writes poems by instinct: "genus poetarum, quod non potius speculatione ac ratione quam naturali quodam instinctu fertur ad carmen." The highest is the class who compose through a thorough knowledge of the art or who simply speculate on the theory without descending to apply it.<sup>21</sup>

This reversal of the order of things in Plato's Phaedrus, where the madman could enter the temple of art but not the man merely skilled, is typical of the thoroughly intellectualist and methodic outlook of most medieval authors. It is clear that Boethius's conception of inspiration does not involve any noumenal influence;

in fact, his conception of it is basically that of Horace in the Ars Poetica. There is nothing divine about poetic madness: it is simply lack of control and failure to submit to discipline. It is trusting to mere ingenium and, as every Christian knew, man's wits have been damaged by the Fall. A Carolingian commentator on Horace makes this point. Citing Democritus's praise of inspiration, he disagrees. To write well, the poet must acquire wisdom; ingenium is merely brutal nature unless disciplined by art.<sup>22</sup>

According to De Bruyne, by "wisdom" the Carolingian commentator means philosophy. Literary culture forms the base, moral studies the center, and the physical sciences the apex of the poet's knowledge. The first provides the formal elements of the poem; the latter two, which are derived from the philosophers, provide the content.<sup>23</sup>

It is therefore not surprising that inspiration plays no part in these early statements about poetry. Though the theory of gratuitous grace provides for the possibility of poetic inspiration, there was little opportunity for that possibility to be realized. The first accounts of poetry were hostile and totally negative, and the later accounts could save poetry only by making it inconsequential. The Romans had little faith in poetic inspiration, and the early Christians, who took most of their thinking on secular matters from

the Romans, had little belief in it either.

Minor exceptions can be brought forward. The standard interpretation of Virgil's "Fourth Eclogue" gained him a reputation for being inspired, but that inspiration may be considered more prophetic than poetic and did not, in any case, hold for other poets.

Lactantius once quotes a line from Terence as written "as though inspired by the Divine Spirit," but he also says, without much consistency, that the gods the pagans invoked were demons,<sup>24</sup> and, like most early Christians, he was more ready to regard poetry as diabolic than as divine.

Throughout the medieval period, the spirit that we call "puritan," the spirit which considers that everything that does not contribute to salvation contributes to damnation, was ready to condemn poetry. Jerome's famous dream is a locus classicus for this spirit, and its moral was heeded by many better than it was heeded by the dreamer himself. In a high fever, Jerome dreamt that he was called before the judgment seat and there pronounced no Christian but a Ciceronian.<sup>25</sup> In this manner, God seemed to be declaring his opposition to all pagan literature and to all but the most functional eloquence.

Of the later medieval analogues to Jerome's experience, Bolgar cites two that are not lacking a touch

of humor. A twelfth-century monk, Otloh of St. Emmeram, made the mistake of reading Lucan, not, one would think, a particularly corrupting author. For this sin, a searing wind blew on him and him alone. When, ignoring this "Homo fuge," he continued reading, he saw a monster in a vision and finally dreamt that a giant beat him. Vilgardus, a student at Ravenna at the end of the tenth century, became a heretic from too much reading of classical literature. He told his examiners that he was misled by demons in the guise of Virgil, Horace and Juvenal.<sup>26</sup>

Jerome, however, and the other thinkers we have been discussing, did not care to give poetry such power over man. It could not, of itself, damn or save; it could only amuse or give elementary instruction. The claims to diabolical inspiration and the claims to divine inspiration cancelled each other out. Poetry was man-made, and its maker was in no way extraordinary.

Contemporary with Jerome and Augustine were Juvenius and Prudentius, the first authors of Christian narrative. Their view of poetry was naturally not the same as the fathers', for the fathers were thinking of pagan poetry and they were thinking of their own. They had no doubts as to poetry's value, for they were sufficiently worldly to admire the Roman poets and to regard their

achievement as an index to the greatness of Roman culture. They felt themselves in the unenviable position of having to compete with the poets they admired to win glory for their God, and naturally they called on Him to help show that His poets could surpass those aided by the Muses.

The Muses, on the decline in Imperial Rome, had lately returned to some of their former eminence. Franz Cumont has shown that the Muses were used by pagan Neopythagorean and Neoplatonic cults, who connected them with universal harmony (the music of the spheres) and attributed to them the ability to confer immortality. Proclus's "Hymn to the Muses" praises the goddesses first for saving souls and then for instructing men's faculties and making them god-like. The Muses had been allegorized as the Neoplatonic Logos and, hence, were in direct competition with the Christian Word. They had also, as early as Cicero, come to stand for learning and doctrine, which meant, for the Christians, pagan learning and heretical doctrine.<sup>27</sup>

Curtius has noted that the rejection of the Muses became a commonplace with the early Christian poets,<sup>28</sup> and it is no wonder, considering that the Muses had come to symbolize so much that was opposed to Christian poetry. However, since the baptized poets admired the pagans and had learned much of their technique from

them, they did not, in practice, so much reject the pagan theory of inspiration as translate it. Without any systematic thinking on the subject, they initiated what is called "biblical poetics" simply by looking for the biblical equivalents of the paraphernalia of pagan inspiration. Juvenecus, author of biblical paraphrases which might count as the first Christian epics, asks the Holy Ghost to sprinkle him with the waters of the Jordan.<sup>29</sup> Jordan is a clear substitute for Helicon, and the suggestion of baptism accurately conveys what Juvenecus is doing, converting the pagan into the Christian. Similarly, Prudentius invokes Christ in a construction that recalls the opening of pagan epic: " . . . say, our King, with what fighting force the soul is furnished . . . "30

One can see biblical poetics springing up as a reflex action. The poet, having rejected something pagan, feels a need to fill the gap with something Christian. Thus Paulinus of Nola writes,

Negant Camenis nec patent Apollini  
Dicata Christo pectora.<sup>31</sup>

It should be emphasized that biblical poetics appears in these authors in scattered fragments. No one works it out as a reasoned theory in defense of poetry, and it only comes into some sort of prominence in Anglo-Saxon England.

The topos of the rejection of the Muses receives its most extensive development in the works of the Anglo-Latin poet Aldhelm. At the opening of his Riddles, he refuses to call upon the Castalian nymphs,

For God can fill me with the power of song,  
Breathing into my dull mind holy gifts  
Of poesy; if he but touch a mind,  
At once the swelling heart pours out his  
praise.<sup>32</sup>

The other appearances of the theory in Anglo-Saxon England do not betray the pagan influence we find in Aldhelm, and we may speculate that they, and the relative strength of the theory in England, owe something to pre-Christian native tradition. Holzknecht points out that the scop

was looked upon as divinely inspired for the purpose of setting forth the noble deeds of his hearers, and of raising their thoughts to higher things. He held a high place in the court as a thane and a member of the king's household, and his dignity and worth stand out in marked contrast to the disrepute of his successors in later times.

He quotes from the Exeter gnomic verses, lines 170-72:

þonne þy laes þe him con lēopa worn,  
Oppe mid hondum con hearpan grētan,  
hafap him his glīwes giefē, þe him god sealde.<sup>33</sup>

The Anglo-Saxon poets, then, know from tradition that their gift has a divine origin. Cynewulf, for one, acknowledges in his epilogue to Elene that he learned his craft from God.<sup>34</sup>

The best-known and most illuminating reference to

inspiration is Bede's story of Caedmon. In this account the rationale of inspired Christian poetry and the desire to establish it as different in kind from secular poetry appear more plainly than they do elsewhere.

Just as Hesiod was an uneducated shepherd when he met the Muses on Helicon, so Caedmon was a cowherd who had been unable to learn, let alone create, a single song; when, during festivities at the mead-hall, each celebrant was expected to contribute a song, Caedmon always left for shame when he saw the harp coming his way. One evening, after he had departed as usual from a feast, an angel came to him while he was standing watch over the cattle. Commanded to sing, Caedmon demurred, but when his guest persisted, he began to sing the "Creation Hymn." There followed a creative and pious career devoted to poetry which would win men's souls from worldly concerns. Bede draws a proper moral: Caedmon "pūrh Godes gife þone songcraeft onfēng; ond he for þon naefre noht leasunge, ne ȝdles leopes wyrcean ne meahte. . . ."35

Close to the surface of Bede's account is what we may conjecture to be his reason for believing in inspiration. The clergyman believed that all gifts come directly or indirectly from God; the corollary is that the more something seems beyond human capacity the more it must come directly from the deity. Bede tells us that



none of Caedmon's followers could match his skill, and it must be the contrast between the former ignorant cowherd and the present poet of surpassing excellence that makes the scholars assembled by the abbess declare that Caedmon's gift comes "from Drihtne sylfum." In other words, as Bede tells the story, God's inspiration guaranteed the truth and excellence of the poetry, but as Bede reasoned it, the truth and excellence of the poetry guaranteed the inspiration.

In the passage we have quoted, Bede suggests the ways in which Caedmon's poetry differed from other poetry. Caedmon told only the truth, whereas other poets have told lies. Caedmon wrote poetry to convert men to the ways of God; the other poets wrote only "idle songs" which entertained but did not ennoble. The implication is that the angel came down to turn poetry from a pleasant fiction to an instrument of the divine will.

Unfortunately, the only poetry Bede is redeeming is the biblical paraphrase. His judgment on other verse is as harsh as the fathers': he is willing to let secular poetry stand condemned if he can save the sacred. It will not be until the Renaissance that the notion of divinely sanctioned poetry will appear with sufficient force to pass Bede's narrow boundaries and embrace the higher secular subjects and themes.

We may generalize from the discussion thus far that Christian piety does not usually produce a theory of poetic inspiration unless acted upon by an influence favorable to that theory. This influence usually comes from the desire to imitate the classics, but, as with the Anglo-Saxons, the theory can be nourished by a traditional respect for the poet. It may also gain support from what may be termed "folk belief." The Chadwicks have shown that belief in poetic inspiration has been held, at one time or another, in almost every part of the globe,<sup>36</sup> and it figures in Germanic and Celtic legend. With Christianization the old gods survived as daemons and fairies, and the poet came to be thought of as a magus. This development is basically sub-literary but occasionally makes itself felt, as with Dante's Virgil, who is something of the legendary magician as well as the ancient Roman poet.<sup>37</sup>

The most notable surfacing of the folk belief in Middle English literature is "The Ballad of Thomas the Rhymer," best known as a source or analogue for Keats' "La Belle Dame Sans Merci." The poem, actually written about 1400, was attributed to Thomas of Erceldoune, who flourished a century earlier. It "forecasts" the events of the wars between England and Scotland of 1333-88. The first fit and the start of the second introduce the prophecies with a story of Thomas' meeting with the

Faery Queen. He lived with her in her kingdom for three years and then, when he had to leave, asked for the gift of poetry as a token. She promised him, and the reader, that what would follow would be true:

Yf pou wolte speke, or talis tell,  
lesynges shalt pou neuer lye. . . .38

The story is archetypal; i.e., it is neither very original nor very sophisticated but it was very effective. Thomas's reputation as poet and prophet lasted into Sir Walter Scott's day. Unfortunately, the Faery Queen does not seem to have been available to those poets who were more self-consciously men of letters, and, for that reason, we cease to consider her influence.

The general medieval resistance to the theory of the inspired poet may be seen in the treatment of poetry in St. Isidore of Seville's highly influential Etymologiae. Isidore has more than enough material at hand to construct such a theory. He believes in biblical poetics sufficiently to regard the Old Testament as containing the originals of the basic poetic forms: Moses wrote the first epic, David the first hymns, Solomon the first epithalamion, and Jeremiah the first lament. He does not speak of Moses, David, Solomon and Jeremiah as inspired poets, but, in another part of his mind, he knows that all of the authors of Scripture were inspired. He also states that the Romans called the

first poets vates, and he connects vates with a divine furor. The Renaissance apologists needed less than what Isidore has to construct an argument for inspiration. For Isidore, however, the material all exists in a vacuum; he does not connect any of it, and none of it influences what he has to say about the poet. The poet is a fabulist; truth should not appear directly in his work but only underneath oblique figures, if at all. Lucan is no poet because his work is based on true actions.<sup>39</sup> Isidore does not notice that Moses's epic should be ruled out on the same grounds as Lucan's. Moses, the vates, and the poet in the abstract are all in separate compartments.

Even more illuminating than Isidore's inability to draw an obvious conclusion is the nun Hroswitha's acknowledging that her gift comes from God, which she acknowledges in such a way as to make the acknowledgment meaningless. Humility, as is well known, is the most difficult virtue to maintain: to become aware of it is to lose it. Hroswitha, responding to praise of her work, gets all tangled up in humility:

. . . I am torn by conflicting feelings. I rejoice from the depths of my soul that the God through Whose grace alone I am what I am should be praised in me, but I am afraid of being thought greater than I am. I know that it is as wrong to deny a divine gift as to pretend falsely that we have received it. So I will not deny that through the grace of the

Creator I have acquired some knowledge of the arts. He has given me the ability to learn. . . . That my natural gifts might not be made void by negligence I have been at pains, whenever I have been able to pick up some threads and scraps torn from the old mantle of philosophy, to weave them into the stuff of my own book, in the hope that my lowly ignorant effort may gain more acceptance through the introduction of something of a nobler strain, and that the Creator of genius may be the more honoured since it is generally believed that a woman's intelligence is slower. Such has been my motive in writing, the sole reason for the sweat and fatigue which my labours have cost me.<sup>40</sup>

Who is responsible for the work? To whom is the praise due? Hroswitha's first impulse is to direct the praise toward God, but then she realizes that if it is through God's grace alone that she is what she is, then she has been made special, as a recipient of extraordinary grace. She wishes to maintain a contradiction: the praise is due to God, but He has done nothing special through her. She stresses her hard work, her attempt to make her "lowly ignorant effort" less low and ignorant through the addition of the higher material of philosophy, for which she takes no credit. She hopes the Creator will be the more honored because of her work: she is a woman and a woman's intelligence is slow. The implication is that her ignorance, like Caedmon's, must have been filled out by the Creator's knowledge, but surely her ignorance was sufficient if the work is indeed a "lowly ignorant effort," and the Creator can hardly take pride

in borrowed "threads and scraps" of philosophy. In the end, it appears that she does not really believe herself to have been inspired: the motive, the sweat and the fatigue were hers. She cannot allow herself, like Milton, to take pride in being God's instrument, and she cannot, for that reason, think her work superior to the philosophers'.

After all, what is the poet that God should assist him? In the tenth century, Hroswitha could not, like Milton, call upon the humanist tradition that made the poet one of God's agents. The poet still had no great place in the world: at worst he was a jongleur on the level of acrobats or trained animals; at best he was a popularizer of elementary material.

In theory, though, as we shall see, not wholly in practice, the poet's position underwent no substantial improvement until Dante's time. Readers of Curtius come away with the impression that poetry suffered a demotion when twelfth-century humanism lost out to thirteenth-century scholasticism,<sup>41</sup> but while the Chartrians may have liked poetry far better than did St. Thomas or St. Bonaventure, and while they may have read and taught more of it, they did not say of it anything anticipatory of what the Renaissance humanists were to say.

One surveys the twelfth-century attitudes in vain for a high conception of poetry. There is no regard for

the integrity of poetry: either it is to be dismissed altogether or it is to be subordinated to one or another member of the trivium.

Poetry is dismissed altogether by those who regard the revival of pagan learning as a threat to the simplicity of the Christian faith. Ottloh of St. Emmeram and St. Peter Damian reject poetry as they reject all of culture. Writes Damian, "Quid enim insanientium poetarum fabulosa commenta?"<sup>42</sup> The poets are insane as well as fabulous: that is what he makes of the poetic furor.

Poetry is also dismissed by Abelard, who, fighting for the status of philosophy, revives its ancient quarrel with poetry. Jerome's attack, Abelard argues, is solely against pagan poetry and not against pagan philosophy. Poetry lies. It should be banished from all association with the trivium: Scripture provides better examples of rhetoric. Plato and Augustine were right to banish the poets.<sup>43</sup>

Hugh of St. Victor has no enmity toward poetry, but he thinks little of it. His Didascalion states that there are two kinds of writing: the first includes the arts, i.e., the trivium and quadrivium, and the second, the appendages of the arts.

The arts are included in philosophy: they have, that is, some definite and established

part of philosophy for their subject matter--as do grammar, dialectic, and others of this sort. The appendages of the arts, however, are only tangential to philosophy. What they treat is some extra-philosophical matter. Occasionally, it is true, they touch in a scattered and confused fashion upon some topic lifted out of the arts, or, if their narrative presentation is simple, they prepare the way for philosophy. Of this sort are all the songs of the poets. . . .

He goes on to say that between the arts and their appendages

is a distance such that the man wishing to attain knowledge, yet who willingly deserts truth in order to entangle himself in these mere by-products of the arts, will find, I shall not say infinite, but exceedingly great pains and meagre fruit. . . . Finally, the arts themselves . . . are able to make the student perfect but the appendages have nothing desirable with which to tempt the student except what they have taken over and adapted from the arts. . . .<sup>44</sup>

Hugh may not wish to dispense with poetry, but, by weakening its ties with the arts, by considering it a mere appendage rather than a part, he places poetry in a precarious position. His position is not far from that of those who would drop poetry from the curriculum.

The defense of poetry appears in John of Salisbury's Metalogicon, and it shows how limited a conception of poetry one of the major humanists of the twelfth century could have. The Metalogicon was written to defend the arts of the trivium and the traditional method of teaching those arts. It attacks the corruption of education through ineffective simplifications, which,



by the way, it compares to thinking that one can become a prophet by sleeping a night on Mount Parnassus or that one can learn the art of poetry by drinking from the Castalian stream, and it protests against the replacement of the ancient authors by "books of formalist receipts and purely verbal discussions" where content is slighted. In the works of the authors, John feels, grammar, rhetoric and logic are applied to the study of the real; the manuals, on the other hand, lead to mere study of words.<sup>45</sup>

John defends poetry as a part of grammar, one of the ways in which grammar may be said to imitate nature. He quotes Horace to show that poetry may not depart from the footsteps of nature. Certainly he is interested in poetic content as well as form, but he does not regard the interest in poetic content as making poetry a separate art. He disagrees with those who say "that poetry no more belongs to grammar than it does to rhetoric, although it is related to both, inasmuch as it has rules in common with each." Grammar is "the mother and nurse" of poetry. He concludes, "Either poetry will remain a part of grammar, or it will be dropped from the roll of liberal studies."<sup>46</sup>

As a part of one of the arts, poetry is a part of philosophy. Without poetry, John adds, the philosopher

may be merely a wise man and not a good one: poetry conduces to moral knowledge by making the good seem attractive and the bad repulsive. Moreover, "that 'poetry is the cradle of philosophy' is axiomatic."<sup>47</sup> With this statement, John's defense of poetry concludes. It is the best that the twelfth century can offer.

The two chief poets associated with John's School of Chartres, Alan of Lille and Bernard Silvestris put a higher conception of poetry into practice than they put into words. The De Universitate Mundi, the De Planctu Natura and the Anticlaudianus do not stick to the elementals of philosophy but reveal a coherent cosmological system. The poems are, in content, nearly as ambitious as Dante's. "But," writes Nancy Lenkeith, "their authors never proclaimed their poetry to be in itself a method of knowledge, a way to truth. It was to them a means of popularizing established knowledge."<sup>48</sup>

In fact, Alan and Bernard have nothing but contempt for most poetry. At one point in De Planctu the protagonist makes the mistake of taking seriously "the dreamy fancies of the poets" about the gods. Nature, who resembles Philosophy in Boethius's Consolation, then delivers herself of a tirade against the poets which her Boethian counterpart might envy:

Does not philosophy's saner treatment file  
away and erase with higher understanding

that which is learned in the child's cradle of poetic teaching? Can it be that thou dost not know how poets expose naked falsehood to their hearers with no protecting cloak, that they may intoxicate their ears, and, so to speak, bewitch them with a melody of honeyed delight; or how they cloak that same falsehood with a pretense of credibility, that, by means of images of objective things, they may mold the souls of men on the anvil of dishonorable assent; . . .

At this point, rather confusingly, Alan continues the sentence by referring to his own procedure:

. . . or that in the shallow exterior of literature the poetic lyre sounds a false note, but within speaks to its hearers of the mystery of loftier understanding, so that, the waste of outer falsity cast aside, the reader finds, in secret within, the sweeter kernel of truth?

It may be that Alan, having mentioned two kinds of poetry, felt he had to include the third. His three kinds are close to Macrobius's: the first appeals only to the ear, the second presents fiction as fact, and the third is allegory; like Macrobius he approves of only the third. Nature, though, does not end her speech on this note of acceptance. When the poet speaks of the gods, "there dawns the shadow of untruth, nor in such matter is the poet found varying from his peculiar quality."<sup>49</sup> In other words, it is more natural for the poet to lie than to speak truth, and the poet is not to be trusted with the highest matters. Even in the approved third kind of poetry, we may note, Alan is contemptuous of the purely poetical fable and approves only of the philosophic

doctrine.

Bernard is at least as hard on his calling. In his commentary on the Aeneid, he divides scientia into four parts, mechanics, poetry, eloquence and wisdom, in ascending order. Poets are not worthy of allegorical interpretation, except for Virgil, who is a philosopher as well. As a philosopher, Virgil describes in the first six books of his epic the six ages of man. This exposition follows the approved, "natural" order, beginning at the beginning. As a poet, Virgil tells the fable of Aeneas, following the "artificial" order, beginning in medias res.<sup>50</sup> The worth of the poem is wholly dependent on the meaning Bernard reads into it.

Alan and Bernard would, no doubt, exempt their own compositions from the abuse they heap on poets for roughly the same reason that Bernard exempts Virgil: they are philosophers as well as poets. They do not, however, consider themselves to be philosophers and poets in the same way that Boccaccio and later Renaissance apologists say the poet is a philosopher. For Boccaccio the poet philosophizes in the act of creating poetry, for poetry is a kind of philosophy. Alan and Bernard do their philosophy first, or take it from others, and then embody it in their poetry.

De Bruyne argues that the view of divine creation

held by the school of Chartres influenced its view of artistic creation. In the twelfth century, Plato, not Aristotle, was "the Philosopher," and the Timaeus was taken as a commentary on Genesis. According to the Chartrians, God first created matter in chaos and then arranged and "ornamented" it, "ornamentation" being the name for most of what we would call "creation"; i.e., the stars are the ornaments of heaven and the animals are the ornaments of earth. Similarly, poets like Bernard do not claim to create the matter of their poems, but they do ornament and arrange it, not in syllogisms, but in a special technique of demonstration under a fabulous narrative.<sup>51</sup>

If we may leave the Chartrians for a moment, this attitude toward poetic creation may well account for the paucity of discussion of invention in the poetic manuals of the period. Traditionally the first part of poetics, invention gets a mere mention from Geoffroi de Vinsauf. The less influential Jean de Garlande gives it eleven pages, in the Faral edition. Of these ten are devoted to the places and verbal invention, less than one to the choice of matter. The matter is chosen, in Faral's words, for "l'agrément de l'esprit, le plaisir de l'oeil et l'utilité."<sup>52</sup>

These arts poétiques are entirely taken up with

schemes and tropes, in other words, with ornamentation. If they do not subordinate poetics to grammar, they do make of it a "second rhetoric," though one that leaves invention to logic. Indicative of their lack of interest in invention is their failure to include the invocation in their otherwise exhaustive catalogues of rhetorical devices. Geoffroi suggests beginning a work with a sententia or an exemplum. Jean notes that ancient poets sometimes began with a summary.<sup>53</sup> If Jean is referring to the epic proposition, it is all the more remarkable that he omits the epic invocation which usually precedes or follows the proposition. Under apostrophe, the rhetoricians suggest addressing a man, a place, or an object, but not a daemon or a deity.<sup>54</sup>

Invocations do, nonetheless, occur in medieval works, but these are usually requests that God bless the poet's patron or his audience and have nothing to do with the poems they precede. In the Waltharius, the opening invocation is separated from the body of the text: the rhetoricians cannot be blamed for ignoring it.<sup>55</sup>

Alan of Lille provides us with an exception that proves the rule. Curiously enough, as a result of his desire to be thought more than a poet, Alan includes in his Anticlaudianus a magnificent invocation that does embody a plea for inspiration. He uses all the figures one will find in Renaissance poetry: he will be a reed

or a tabula rasa; God will shine, rain or blow upon him. He even distinguishes between a terrestrial Apollo and a celestial Muse, and thereby anticipates Milton's two Uranias. There is but one statement that places the invocation in the twelfth century, and that is the crucial one for the passage. Alan invokes God only after turning from poet to prophet.

In Anticlaudianus V. v, Phronesis climbs toward the citadel of Jove, leaving her erstwhile companion Reason behind, much as Dante leaves Virgil before ascending to Paradise. At this point comes the "Invocatio auctoris":

Thus far my Muse has sung in faint murmuring  
. . . but resigning the petty, I now tune a  
greater lyre; laying aside the poet entirely,  
I usurp to myself the rare sayings of the  
prophet; the terrestrial Apollo yields to the  
celestial Muse, the Muse of Jove; the manifest  
language of the earth surrenders to the speech  
of heaven, earth gives place to Olympus.<sup>56</sup>

The only confusion in understanding this passage can arise if one insists on associating the two Muses, Alan's and Jove's, with poetry. Alan is probably using the Muse to represent learning, as in Cicero, Fulgentius, and later allegory. In that case, poetry is associated with the petty, with earth, with merely human learning, with Apollo, who comes to represent the pagan gods after "Jove" is interpreted as a corruption of "Jehovah." The Muse of poetry is still led by the terrestrial Apollo, but the Muse of prophecy looks to Olympus, or heaven.

The terminology is pagan, but the theory it expresses is medieval Christian: inspiration comes to prophets but not to poets.

The passage is also characteristic of its era in the way it blends traditional motives with contemporary light metaphysics and theories about the renewal of the soul through mystical enthrallment:

I shall be the reed-pipe of this song, not  
scribe or author, resounding air, the silent  
tablet of the writer. . . . /He addresses the  
Father./ Shine Thou upon me with divine light  
and, bedewing my mind more fully with godly  
nectar, rain upon, cleanse the marks of shame  
on my soul and, cutting away, dispel the  
shadows, and make me serene in the splendor of  
Thy light. Renew Thou the reed, clean the  
tongue of mould, give to one who lisps to speak  
Thy words . . . blowing upon my sails with a  
celestial breath.<sup>57</sup>

Alan, unlike Hroswitha and like the major Renaissance poets, thinks enough of himself and of what he is doing to ask for and claim he has received God's gratuitous grace. The difference between Alan and the later poets is that Alan asks in isolation, while they ask in concert, and Alan feels he must put the poet off before he can be worthy as a man to receive inspiration, while they feel that they are entitled to inspiration because they are poets. Alan has to switch callings in the middle of his work, lest his status as poet render his claim incredible; they can make the claim for poets as a class and then argue that they are inspired because they are



members of that class.

It is, of course, true that the Middle Ages had less need for a theory of poetic inspiration because poetic invention was so slighted. One does not find in medieval poets that self-conscious pride in the creation of fiction that appears with Ariosto. The matter of narrative poems seems never to have been invented: it is always attributed to an "auctour," like Chaucer's Lollius, or preceded by a vague "it is said." The responsibility for telling a true story is laid on the "auctour's" shoulders; the current teller of the tale is presumed to be telling the truth so long as he does not deviate from his authority. Even in The Canterbury Tales Chaucer pretends to be merely the dutiful amanuensis: he is not responsible for the tales invented by the churls.

Only with the allegorical poem was it widely recognized that the poet was inventing a fable. It is no accident that Alan's invocation occurs preceding the most ambitious part of his most ambitious allegory. The fable of an allegory cannot be verisimilar because the poet is clearly personifying abstractions: even a strange being like the Green Knight can win belief more readily than a lady named Mercy who does nothing but utter pieties. Consequently, the poets feel the need to clarify the status of their characters. Alan's invocation encourages us to believe that his characters

have a "real" existence, in terms of Platonic philosophical realism.

The allegory is also a means of communicating truths, which, however, derivative they may be, the poet will not admit to having come across in such a prosaic way. Alan's invocation supplies a source for the doctrine of the latter part of the Anticlaudianus, and that source, in turn, guarantees the importance of the doctrine. The other authors of allegory, and Alan himself in his lesser work, have to use another means of accounting for the poem's content.

Most medieval allegories are cast in the form of a dream-vision, and the dream-vision, as a device, invites comparison with the claim to inspiration. According to Leo Spitzer, "The idea of the accessibility of the divine to man explains the medieval literary device of the vision or dream: the writer who wished to teach some transcendental truth to which man has access could do so by imagining a dreaming or visionary 'I.'"<sup>58</sup> The somnium, one of the five kinds of dreams distinguished by Macrobius, tells the truth veiled in allegory;<sup>60</sup> it could be regarded as a truth coming from God. Moreover, the dream vision permits, and, in fact, demands a certain lack of verisimilitude. Like the claim to inspiration, it provides for freedom of imagination and frees the

poet from responsibility as well; if the reader accepts the convention at face-value, the telling of a dream, like the narration of a story told by a daemon, disarms criticism.

At the same time, the differences between the dream-vision and the inspired poem are considerable. Where the latter claims to present revealed truth, the former merely tells of a dream. It is up to the reader to decide that the dream is a somnium and, as any reader of "The Nun's Priest's Tale" knows, the significance of dreams was a matter of controversy. Consequently, the dream-vision has a built-in feature characteristic of the often ironic humility of the medieval poet: the Pertelotes in his audience can take his dream for nonsense, if they wish. Furthermore, where the inspired poem claims a reality for its narrative, the dream-vision disclaims one: the action described happened only in a dream. The poet cannot be accused of lying, because he has asserted nothing and asked for no audience belief; of course, not having asked for any, he may get none.

Where the inspired poet demands attention and points to himself and his work as special, the dream-vision poet asserts his ordinariness, for everyone dreams, and he may more or less dare his audience to make little of his work. The inspired poet is in the class of Northrop Frye's alazon:<sup>60</sup> he risks considerable abuse to gain

considerable praise. The dream-vision poet in in the class of Frye's eiron: he appears willing to let at least part of his audience think he is a "mere poet" writing a "mere poem." The dream-vision poet knows all about defensive tactics; the inspired is contemptuous of them. But then, as we have been saying all along, the dream-vision poet had greater need of defensive tactics.

If the twelfth-century humanist could find room for poetry only in the compartment of grammar, the late twelfth and thirteenth century scholastic can give poetry only the lowest berth in the car of logic. Beginning with Gerard of Cremona (1114-87) and Dominicus Gundissalinus (1150), the scholastics follow the Arabic commentator on Aristotle, Al Farabi, in fitting poetry into the Organon. Just as analytics deals with truth, dialectic with probability and sophistic with error passing for truth, so rhetoric deals with persuasion and poetics with "imaginative representation." As each kind of logic has its appropriate kind of syllogism, so rhetoric has the enthymeme and poetics the "imaginative syllogism." An "imaginative syllogism" makes an object appear beautiful or ugly that is not so. Poetry has an ethical function in causing the passions to love the good and hate the bad. It is not based on truth; when it does use an actual event, it transforms it.<sup>61</sup> This is the view of Vincent of Beauvais, of Albertus Magnus,<sup>62</sup>

and of Albert's pupil, St. Thomas.

For St. Thomas, however, the major problem poetry presents is not in connection with its place in the *Organon* but related to its similarity to Scriptures. The Bible's language is, like poetry's, "inartificial" in that it uses figures instead of the "modus definitivus et divisivus et collectivus" of the higher parts of logic.<sup>63</sup> How is it, asks an objection in the *Summa Theologiae*, that the highest science of the Bible should use the method of the lowest science of poetry? Thomas explains that, because "it is natural for man to attain to intellectual truths through sensible things," Scripture uses similitudes, but where Scripture uses them because they are necessary for human understanding of the highest truth, poetry uses them for its function of representation.<sup>64</sup> Elsewhere he explains that poetry uses metaphors because it is so deficient in truth that, in order to be accepted, it must distract the reason with comparisons.<sup>65</sup> Poetical figures come from the imagination; Scriptural figures are inspired. Imaginative poetry is beneath reason, whereas inspired Scripture is above it; there is only an apparent, not a real, likeness between the two.

It may be asked how, if poetry is beneath reason, it performs its ethical function of making the good

attractive and the bad repulsive. This difficulty is easily resolved, for a thing does not have to be understood to attract or repel. St. Augustine, On Free Will III, ii, points out that beasts are drawn to what is good for them and turn away from what is bad; since beasts lack reason they must decide on the basis of their sensus communis or imagination, the inner sense that in man mediates between the outer senses and reason and, in the beasts, is the closest they come to reason.<sup>66</sup> Hence poetry not only draws its figures from the imagination but appeals to the imagination, and because the imagination is below the understanding, poetry is, in its inception and in its apprehension, beneath reason.

However indebted Dante may be to St. Thomas in other areas, their views on poetry have little in common. They differ particularly on the question of poetic allegory. "Fictiones poeticae," writes Thomas, "non supergrediuntur modum litteralis sensus"; only the inspired Scriptures may be said to have allegorical, tropological and anagogical senses.<sup>67</sup>

What about allegory as practiced by the medieval poets? De Bruyne solves this problem by distinguishing between senses of "allegory."<sup>68</sup>

For St. Thomas and the other medieval theologians, allegorical meaning may be attributed to words or to

things; however, only God may attribute it to the latter because only He knows how the visible things of this world refer to the invisible things of the next. Only in the allegory of His book are revealed the moral and spiritual realities which transcend this world. The poet is limited to an allegory of words which, since it never leaves the level of words, remains on the literal level.

The literal level, though, encompasses both the proper and the figurative meaning of words. A word may refer to another word. Thus, to use the two chief models for poetic allegory, in Aesop's Fables one reads "flatterer" for "fox" and "innocent" for "lamb," and in the myths one may read "passion" for "Venus" and "reason" for "Minerva." There are kinds of substitutions: a word representing an individual may stand for a word representing a class, a scientific phenomenon or a moral faculty. This poetry contains generalizations about morality or instructs in physics or cosmology, but it has no access to supernatural truth, to the higher reality which is figured forth in biblical allegory.

The difference between the Bible and poetry corresponds to the difference between revelation and natural reason. Without God's gratuitous grace man's knowledge is limited to the things of this world. Allegorical theory, like all other medieval theory

concerning poetry, insists that poetry comes solely from man's labors and has nothing to do with inspiration, for if poetry were inspired by God, it would have a quasi-scriptural status. This status Dante claims for his Comedy.

Before turning to Dante, we may find it helpful to link the discussion of allegory more closely with the problem of poetic knowledge as it has been appearing in the medieval commentators. Those who say, like St. Bonaventure,<sup>69</sup> that poetry at best provides entertainment and at worst deceives without entertaining are confining poetry to the proper sense of its words, considering it, in short, as mere fiction. Those who say, with Alan of Lille, that the best poetry hides a moral or scientific lesson under a cloak of fiction, are allowing the proper reference of the words to indicate a figurative reference. Poetry may then embody the content of philosophy, except for that part of philosophy which borders on theology, namely metaphysics. Greater knowledge and higher allegory are possible only through the grace of God. To use the terminology of Dante scholars, what separates the allegory of the poets from the allegory of the theologians is that the latter presupposes divine inspiration and the former does not.

In Dante, one sees a gradual progress to a higher



view of the poet and of poetry than his contemporaries and predecessors had attained. The De Vulgari Eloquentia combines traditional and new elements and, in particular, throws light on the considerable role that nationalism will play in the exaltation of the poet. To become great a country must have a great language, as Rome had Latin, and to have a great language a country must have great poets. A vernacular, says Dante, can only be refined and strengthened by poets; good prose is based on the language of good poetry. The poet, then, plays an important part in the country's growth. His poetry must not be trivial, for the best language will only appear if the poet strives to express the highest thoughts, and the highest thoughts are associated with the highest subjects, "prowess in arms, the fire of love, and the directions of the will." The poet attempting these subjects should

first drink of Helicon, and then, after adjusting the strings, boldly take up his plectrum and begin to ply it. But it is in the exercise of needful caution and discernment that the real difficulty lies; for this can never be attained to without strenuous efforts of genius, constant practice in the art, and the habit of the sciences. And so it is those so equipped whom the poet in the sixth book of the Aeneid describes as beloved of God, raised by glowing virtue to the sky, and sons of the gods, though he is speaking figuratively.<sup>70</sup>

The emphasis on the need for learning and labor is traditional, but the statement that the poet must first

drink from Helicon is refreshing. The diction suggests poetic inspiration, but Dante is probably just saying that one must have talent if one's labor is to result in anything worthwhile. He recognizes that poetry is something other than what the schoolboys of his age were taught to compose. If instinct is not enough, neither are the rules of art. Because the poet must be gifted, Dante can revive, albeit guardedly, some of the ancient hyperboles in praise of the poet. These hyperboles will appear in later writers without the qualification that they be taken figuratively.

The discussion of allegory in the Convivio is traditional, though a little confused because Dante adds the last two levels from sacred allegory to the levels of poetic allegory. He begins by saying

that writings should be understood and ought to be expounded chiefly in four senses. The first is called literal, and this is that sense which does not go beyond the strict limits of the letter; the second is called allegorical, and this is disguised under the cloak of such stories, and is a truth hidden under a beautiful fiction. Thus Ovid says that Orpheus with his lyre made beasts tame, and trees and stones move toward himself; that is to say that the wise man by the instrument of his voice makes cruel hearts grow mild and humble, and those who have not the life of Science and of Art move to his will, while they who have no rational life are as it were like stones. . . . Theologians indeed do not apprehend this sense in the same fashion as poets; but, inasmuch as my intention is to follow here the custom of poets, I will take the allegorical sense after the manner which the poets use.<sup>71</sup>

The last sentence is not clear: theologians as well as poets define allegory as hidden truth. Theological allegory, however, is not "hidden under a beautiful fiction," for the literal level of Scripture is historical truth, and perhaps this is the distinction Dante has in mind. The exposition of the myth of Orpheus is a straightforward exercise in substitution of the kind traditionally associated with poetic allegory. In analysis of Scripture, one does not replace the literal level in the way Dante replaces the literal level of the Orpheus myth with his allegorical interpretation.

Dante takes his examples of the moral and anagogic senses from the Bible. He does not, however, restrict these senses to Scripture, but seems to think all writing may have them. In practice, though, he is only interested in his first two senses: he will first discuss the literal sense of each canzone "and after that will speak of its allegory, that is, of the hidden truth contained in it, and sometimes I shall touch incidentally on the other meanings as place and time shall permit."<sup>72</sup> There seems to be a bluff here. Because he has confused poetic and sacred allegory, Dante has been misled into thinking that his poetry should have four levels. He therefore hints that his canzone contain the other two levels but that he will lack the time and space to expound them. Actually, Dante is so eager and thorough

in displaying the profundity of his work, that he would hardly let an anagogical level go if he really thought it were there. He is simply getting out of the difficulty he has made for himself and leaving us with a discussion of poetic allegory that is, when clarified, quite orthodox. In fact, as Singleton points out, Dante sacrifices the reality of Beatrice to the demands of orthodoxy: the Convivio treats her as a mere fiction.<sup>73</sup>

In the letter to Can Grande prefacing the Paradiso, Dante again explains that his work is to be read on four levels, but this time his exposition is of "the allegory of theologians:" without any elements from the "allegory of poets." The Divine Comedy is

polysemous, that is, having many meanings. The first meaning is the one obtained through the letter; the second is the one obtained through the things signified by the letter. The first is called literal, the second allegorical or moral or anagogical. . . . And though these mystic senses may be called by various names, they can all generally be spoken of as allegorical, since they are diverse from the literal or historical.<sup>74</sup>

Dante makes a clear distinction between the allegory of words and the allegory of things, associating the first with the literal level and the second with the three kinds of allegory, which he significantly calls the "mystic senses," thereby suggesting their connection with revelation. He goes on to say that the Divine Comedy has two subjects, one literal and one allegorical. The

literal subject, "the state of souls after death," is not called a fiction and is not meant to be one; there are no references to fiction in the discussion, and the example of an allegorical text is from the Bible. The Divine Comedy, Singleton comments, has "not an allegory of 'this for that,' but an allegory of 'this and that.'"75

In asking that his work be read according to the allegory of theologians, Dante is giving the Divine Comedy quasi-scriptural status. He is arguing that the knowledge contained in the poem has a touch of divinity and that he is inspired. Joseph Mazzeo explains,

Of course Dante cannot /Like God/ claim to see all things or to confer on any thing or res the status of a signum. He can legitimately claim, however, that, by divine inspiration, he has been able to see the god-given transcendental meanings of many of the events of his life and time.76

Not only do the people and events of the Divine Comedy have historical reality; they are significant as well, for, seen in the light of eternity, they help to clarify the divine scheme. Moreover, the divine scheme and the universal order revealed in the poem are real as well. Consequently, though the journey is a fiction, it is only a means of making it easier for the reader to grasp Dante's inspiration. It does not, like poetic fable, conceal the truth; it reveals it. It is not, then, to be equated with poetic fable.

Since the mode of existence of the Divine Comedy

depends on inspiration, we must look closely at the claims to inspiration found in the work. When we do, we notice that Dante, in contrast to later poets, distinguishes two kinds of inspiration, one for words and another for content, the first to be taken more or less figuratively, the second to be taken altogether literally.

Though Dante, giving his work some of the trappings of classical epic, invokes the Muses and Apollo for aid at important points in the Inferno, the Purgatorio, and even the Paradiso, and though at one point he calls them "O sante Muse" (Purg. 1.8), they are not dissociated from the pagan Muses and are invoked for words alone, not matter. The Muses are not for him what the explicitly Christian Urania is for Milton; rather he asks their aid "So that my words may not the truth distort," and, in Par. 1.23-24, he wishes to be filled with Apollo's power so that he may justly communicate the holy image he has seen. For Dante poetry still expounds a truth the poet has achieved through other means: it does not produce that truth. Homer, "the Greek . . . Whom with their milk the Muses suckled most," is in Limbo: he could not, for all the Muses' aid, attain to the Christian knowledge which fills Dante's poem.<sup>77</sup>

There is little reason to suppose that, in this most Christian of poems, Dante is invoking pagan goddesses. It might, of course, be possible that he thought of poetry

as a purely pagan achievement for which one had to go to pagan sources, but this possibility, unlikely on the face of it, is ruled out by the invocations at the end of the poem. Throughout the Paradiso Dante admits to finding more and more difficulty in communicating what is revealed to him.<sup>78</sup> In Canto XXX he confesses himself "more defeated here at the Empyrean/ Than by his theme's height and the exacted cost/ Comic or tragic poet ever were," and he turns, for the first time in the poem, to ask help in expression from the source of his knowledge:

O Splendor of God, by whose largesse I saw  
With these mine eyes truth realmed in triumph,  
fill  
My lips with power to re-tell how I saw.

In Canto XXXIII Dante again runs out of words and asks for help from God, at Whom he is looking, but only silence can express this last vision.<sup>79</sup>

For the most difficult tasks of expression, then, Dante seeks out divine aid. But for ninety-six cantos out of a hundred invocation to the Muses seems sufficient. These invocations only give the appearance of involving inspiration; actually Dante probably regarded the Muses as allegorical figures, as his contemporaries did. He could have found in Bernard Silvestris's commentary on Virgil the equation "filii Calliopes: eloquentes."<sup>80</sup> He could have recalled Fulgentius's popular treatment of them as steps in the learning process, beginning with

Clio, the desire for learning, proceeding through Thalia, the ability to learn, to Calliope, beautiful expression.<sup>81</sup> Dante indicates at two points that he equates the Muses with his mind, a usage he was aware of in the Roman poets. He writes in the Vita Nuova, "In Horace man is made to speak to his own intelligence as unto another person . . . as thus in his Poetics: 'Dic mihi, Musa, virum' etc."<sup>82</sup> In Inferno II he makes a straightforward identification of the Muses with his ingenium: "O Muse, o alto ingegno, or m'aiutate!" It seems, then, that in calling upon the Muses, he is not calling for aid from any suprahuman source, but from his own powers.

The inspiration in the Divine Comedy is not poetic inspiration. Matter and expression are not joined, as they would be in poetic inspiration; in fact, Dante capitalizes on the widening gulf between the two to point to the ineffability of the Highest. More important, it is not as a poet that Dante receives the ability to make the visionary journey that presents him with the matter for his poem. Leo Spitzer's argument is conclusive:

How could the medieval public have accepted as genuine the supposedly eye-witness report (in this poem "to which Heaven and Earth collaborated") on the supermundane world, unless the "poetic I" of Dante represented, for this medieval community, the human soul as such with all its capacity to attain to the Beyond and to reach out of space toward its Creator?<sup>83</sup>



The "I" of the Divine Comedy is both Everyman and Dante, but not the Poet, just as the experience depicted is both universal and personal, but not peculiar to poets.

The moving force in the poem is love, Dante's love for Beatrice, who has died so that he will direct his sights and his love upward and, through her, to God, and God's love for man. The poetic madness is an innovation Dante does not quite support, but the erotic madness, and its effects on poetry, he uses as something well known since the twelfth century.

In Canto XXIV of the Purgatorio, Dante makes erotic inspiration the distinguishing feature between the stilnovists and their predecessors. Asked to identify himself by a prestilnovist named Buonagiunta, Dante replies, "I am one who hearkens when/ Love prompteth, and I put thought into word/ After the mode which he dictates within." Buonagiunta marvels at the dolce stil and admits that Dante is right:

For now I see well how the pen with you  
Follows him who dictateth close behind,  
Which our pens truly were not wont to do;

And he who seeks to look beyond can find  
No difference else 'twixt one and the  
other style.<sup>84</sup>

The worthlessness of this passage as an explanation of the essentials of the "sweet new style" becomes apparent when we read the following in Bernard de Ventadour:

It is no wonder that I sing better than any other singer, for my heart carries me closer to love and I am more completely subject to his command. Body and heart and mind and sense, strength and power, I have given them all; the rein draws me so strongly to love that I have no will to go anywhere else.<sup>85</sup>

From the beginning a direct relation was established between the greatness of a lover's poetry and the greatness of his love. Just as fin amor turns the medieval relationship between man and woman upside down, so in its poetry, and in its poetry alone, is the medieval preference for art over nature inverted. Of course, the poet must have great art, but, in theory, without the impetus of love he cannot succeed.

It is not on the necessity of being under love's control that the stilnovists and their predecessors disagree but on what that control brings with it. For the troubadours, the erotic inspiration of poetry works primarily through a quickening of the mind that makes the poem's rhetoric striking.<sup>86</sup> It is similar to the Roman or modern concept of poetic inspiration in that the process is psychological and its effect is aesthetic, not intellectual. The troubadours speak of gaining knowledge from their lady's eyes, but the knowledge is merely of love's pains and joys and, though they are elevated by an erotic furor, their sight remains fixed on the beloved. The stilnovists, and particularly Dante, place more value on content and less on formal

sophistication. They write a more intellectual, a more metaphysical love poetry. Love sets them thinking as well as feeling, sometimes thinking more than feeling. Hence erotic inspiration for them involves at least the first steps on a Neoplatonic scala amoris: the beloved offers intuitions of the noumenal world. Of the stilnovists, only Dante receives the complete inspiration; in the Divine Comedy he climbs the ladder to its top and reaches a comprehension of Providence. His inspiration is not just a quickening of the mind but an infusion of gracious knowledge: the effect is not only aesthetic but cognitive.

To put it another way, the troubadours, though impelled by love, still claim to be writing their own love poems, but Dante, in Purgatorio XXIV, says that Love dictated his. Mazzeo explains that "until Dante, 'dictation' was used only to describe the supernatural manner in which the prophets received the truth of revelation,"<sup>87</sup> but, as our analysis of the rift between matter and expression in the Divine Comedy has shown, Dante does not claim in the writing of that poem to be as passive as the prophets.

Lenkeith finds in Purgatorio XXIV a three-stage process in which the idea is first formed, and then

receives inner expression in Dante's mind when he notes it, and outward expression when he transcribes it. . . . But the agent of this

process is not the intellect, as it is in the Aristotelian logic. The concept is not formed in Dante's mind, but passively received as it is dictated by the love that inspires him. It is this first phase of inspiration that differentiates poetic truth from logical truth: the principle of motion does not come from within the human mind, but from God.<sup>88</sup>

This account seems to correspond to what is happening in the Comedy: the matter is inspired but not, at least until the last four cantos, its expression. Knowledge and poetry are, for Dante, closely related but not inseparable. The lover and the knower are one, but not yet the knower and the poet.

Beatrice is more of a Muse to Dante than the Muses are. She is the intermediary between God and him, or, as Virgil refers to her, "the light between truth and the intellect." The role that Dante assigns to her is unprecedented in the literature of fin amor and a magnificent solution to his problems as lover and as poet. For the older poets such as Guittone d'Arezzo<sup>89</sup> the worship of the lady was at worst pagan and heretical and at best a distraction from their worship of the true God, but Beatrice makes Dante see that his love for her is really love for God, just as her love for him is a reflection of God's love for man. Dante does not have to turn away from his beloved to reach the right path: she is marking it out for him. She is not an obstruction but a necessary intermediary: only she can bridge the

abyss between Dante and God. She personalizes God's love and saves Dante's claim to visionary knowledge from the charge of being presumptuous, for it is less extraordinary that Beatrice should hold out her hand to Dante than that God should hold out His.

What Dante does with Beatrice, the Renaissance poets will do with the Muse, whose career, in fact, parallels that of the beloved. Gradually re-introduced into secular poetry, the Muse, like the beloved, was able to live a comfortable life, suffering renunciation by the poet in his more pious moments but essentially kept apart from the religious sphere. When, however, the poet's love for and idolatry of the Muse had grown to considerable proportions, the solution was to make the Muse, like Beatrice, a means of approaching God. The implicit reasoning about the Muse was the same as it was for Beatrice: what was so good in itself and the cause of so much good in others could hardly be autonomous and must come from the Fount of Goodness.

The exaltation of the Muse was considerably assisted by developments in Renaissance philosophy and theology, which we save for the next chapter. Here we may note the early stages of the process: the return of the Muse and the invocation to prominence and the gradually increasing respect for poetry in the late medieval authors.

In this context, it is clear that, in comparing Dante's Muse with Milton's, we have undervalued the invocations in the Comedy. Dante's Muse may be no noumenal being but a mere allegorical figure (particularly in C. S. Lewis's sense: a projection of an inner faculty),<sup>90</sup> but Dante's rationalization of the invocation must not detract from the crucial fact of his invoking the Muse at all. The importance of his impulse to imitate antiquity in general and his admired Virgil in particular cannot be overstated. Dante is coming to conceive, as no one has for centuries, of a sublime poetry: his turning to Rome for a model is a sign of his desire to recapture poetry's greatness, unsure as he may be of what that greatness is. The allegory of the invocations is not to be despised; Dante makes what he can of the Muse and thereby gives life to what might otherwise be empty and dead imitations.

That Dante connects the invocation with the potential greatness of poetry is clear from the letter to Can Grande, where he justifies the invocation at the opening of the Paradiso. The poets "have great need of an invocation, because something contrary to the way of life common among men is to be sought from the superior beings, as a sort of divine gift."<sup>91</sup> To need aid from superior beings, poetry must be difficult, and it is difficult only because Dante is ambitious for it. We

recall that it is at the point in Paradiso where things have become most difficult, where the poem's ambition extends to a description of the splendor of heaven, that Dante ceases to invoke his allegorized goddesses and makes a literal plea to God. It is in Canto XXX that the theory of poetic inspiration comes to life. The invocation to Apollo at the beginning of the Paradiso was probably meant to be read as allegorically as any of the invocations to the Muses, but it is noteworthy that the letter to Can Grande treats it as though it were to be taken literally. Dante suggests that Apollo, like Beatrice, may be enrolled as a servant of the true God.

The two major poets who follow Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarch, do not attain to the understanding of inspiration that Dante reached at the end of his career. Boccaccio begins his Filostrato with an invocation that acquires meaning only by being detoured from its proper course:

Some poets, Lady, still of Jove do crave  
Fair favour for poetic enterprise:  
Others invoke Apollo's aid to save  
Their fragile verse. E'en I, with frequent  
    sighs,  
Besought Parnassian Muses, all too grave,  
My theme to lift though music to the skies;  
But Love, who changed old use, doth now require  
I seek thine aid alone my true song to  
    inspire.<sup>92</sup>

Boccaccio makes it clear that, if he were to invoke the Muses, it would be for music, not for anything having

to do with his content. He does not have a theory of inspiration; in fact, the absence of such a theory from the fourteenth and fifteenth books of the De Genealogia Deorum is principally what distinguishes that first modern apology for poetry from most of its Renaissance successors. Nonetheless, Boccaccio wishes to begin his Filostrato with an invocation and, because poetic inspiration is not available to him (i.e., it means nothing to him), he turns to erotic inspiration. His lady will be his Phoebus, his Jove, his Muse; she will guide his hand. Unfortunately, Boccaccio's notion of fin amor is closer to the troubadours' than it is to Dante's. His lady is no Beatrice, no source of illumination. What he asks of her is closer to what Dante asks of his Muse than to what Dante gets from Beatrice:

In my sad heart thou art so effigied  
Thou hast become more potent there than I.  
O bring my voice then from my heart, I plead,  
    . . .  
And if men listen, be the honour thine,  
The praise thy words shall win--the labour be  
    but mine.<sup>93</sup>

The poet's lady has no more power than to make him work as well as he would if he had not lost his heart to her. Control has passed from him to her, but the instrument remains the same.

The lack of a theory of inspiration does not, however, prevent Boccaccio from advancing the poet's claim to knowledge. Where the medieval theoreticians



had assimilated poetry to grammar, rhetoric or logic, Boccaccio insists that poetry is a scientia, a body of knowledge, rather than a facultas, a language skill. The poet does not imitate the philosopher; he competes with him. They both have the same destination but travel by different roads. "The poet conceives his thought by contemplation, and, wholly without the help of syllogisms, veils it as subtly and skillfully as he can under the outward semblance of his invention."<sup>94</sup>

Boccaccio's position is midway between the traditional medieval stance that the poet derives his thinking from the philosopher and Dante's claim to illumination, and it is not as tenable as either. The poetic method must be more sharply defined if its results are to be trusted. Perhaps it is uncertainty as to how poetic truth is arrived at that makes Boccaccio revert, several pages after the last quoted passage, to the older view. "If Philosophy errs, Poetry cannot keep in the right path. She is Philosophy's maidservant, and must follow in the steps of her mistress . . ."<sup>95</sup>

Petrarch shows greater ambivalence than Boccaccio. On the one hand, he believes that true poetry can only result from a divine gift:

The inherent difficulty of the poet's task lies in this, that whereas in the other arts one may attain his goal through sheer toil and study, it is far otherwise with the art of poetry, in

which nothing can be accomplished unless a certain inner and divinely given energy is infused in the poet's spirit.<sup>96</sup>

Convinced that he has that gift, Petrarch sets out to write the Africa, a Latin epic in the classical manner which will make him as immortal as Virgil. Before he has finished it, however, he stops to write the Secret, a series of imagined dialogues with St. Augustine, in the third of which Augustine characteristically reproaches him for wasting his time on "tickling other men's ears" when he should be thinking of his soul.<sup>97</sup>

Petrarch's uncertainty appears vividly at the opening of the Africa. He begins by invoking the pagan Muse. Then he turns to Christ, but not to enlist His aid. He promises that, when he finishes the epic, he will bring Christ many pious songs, but he is not sure if songs will delight Him. Tears and repentance would be better. Such a turn is surprising. It was not unusual in the Middle Ages for poets to condemn their secular work as vanity, particularly if the poets were near death, as Chaucer was when he did it. It is decidedly unusual, though, for a poet to regret a poem at the commencement of it, particularly when the poem answers to his ambitions as a poet.

It seems that Petrarch was subject to grave doubts, the traditional medieval ones, about being a poet. These doubts did not all come from the pious side of his nature;

the part of him that hungered for fame had its share too.

Petrarch's coronation with the laurel is generally taken as a high point of his career and as a symbol of the emerging Renaissance. His coronation oration, from which the passage on poetry as a divine gift was taken, is in some respects a shortened version of Boccaccio's eulogy of poetry in De Genealogia Deorum. Yet, when he comes to discuss how "poets under the veil of fiction have set forth truths physical, moral, and historical," he concludes "that the difference between a poet on the one hand and a historian or a moral or physical philosopher on the other is the same as the difference between a clouded sky and a clear sky."<sup>98</sup> If the poet merely presents obscurely a truth which can be found clearly stated by a philosopher, then most people would cherish the philosopher over the poet, as most people prefer sunshine to clouds. Astonishingly, considering the occasion of his remarks, Petrarch acquiesces in that evaluation. He concludes his remarks on allegory by saying:

Let this suffice as a statement not so much about myself as about the poetic profession. For while poets are wont to find pleasure in a certain playfulness, I should not wish to be a poet and nothing more.<sup>99</sup>

The something more he clearly wishes to be is a philosopher. In this, he shows a conception of his calling

that hearkens back to Alan of Lille and Bernard Silvestris.

Thus the early Italian humanists can be seen sometimes advancing the standard of poetry, sometimes unsure of their ground, and sometimes retreating. Still, if they stumble in their theorizing, they are, all the while, writing poetry that their countrymen will shortly regard as marking a Renaissance of letters.<sup>100</sup>

Though the English do not regard Chaucer as beginning their Renaissance, his excellence had much to do with initiating England's pride in its poetry, and he too had some desire to imitate the classical conventions, though he too had little notion of inspiration. He has invocations at or near the beginning of the first four books of Troilus and Criseyde, but they have nothing to do with the matter of the poem: Chaucer claims to be following his "auctour," Lollius, throughout. Nor are the invocations linked with supernal knowledge. The only vision in the poem occurs at the end when Troilus, rapt up to the eighth sphere by death, laughs at the world's vanities: he discovers only what the good Christian has known all along. Only one of the invocations is to a Muse (significantly the Muse of history); the first and last are to the Fates and the Furies, and the longest is to the goddess of Love. It seems that

Chaucer is choosing his deities primarily to set a mood for what follows each invocation. The Fates establish a portentous atmosphere and introduce the problem of determinism. Venus presides over the consummation of the love, the Furies over its destruction and Troilus' despairing search for revenge.

The invocations have also a greater function. The Divine Comedy, even without the invocations, would be set apart by its subject matter and its treatment of that matter from poems that we might consider similar, like Bernard Silverstre's. Chaucer is writing a romance, but one more philosophical in intent than Parzifal or Tristan and Iseult. The story of Troilus provides the occasion for considerations of predestination, the ways of fortune, and the place of courtly love in the Christian scheme. The invocations, which had not appeared in the narratives of Chrétien, Wolfram or Gottfried, let alone in such "purer" epics as The Song of Roland, point to the higher seriousness of Chaucer's poem.

Contemporary with Chaucer are two dream-vision poems, The Vision of Piers Plowman and The Pearl, which are similar only in that they carry more intellectual weight than their predecessors and make a greater claim to truth. In doing so, they move close to the inspired poem, for, in stating that their dreams are true, the poets are stating that their dreams are inspired. A

passage in The Pearl is explicit:

Fro spot my spyryt þer sprang in space;  
My body on balke þer bod in sweuen,  
My goste is gon, in Godes grace,<sup>101</sup>  
In auenture þer meruayles meuen.

The dream is here unmistakably a means of passage to the noumenal world.

Finally, we may mark, in the work of the fifteenth-century Chaucerian, Robert Henryson, the passing of a cherished medieval convention. Henryson begins The Testament of Cresseid by telling how, after he had read Chaucer's Troilus, he picked up another book dealing with Cressid's end. He is going to use the device of attributing what he writes to an "auctour," but, at the same time, he casts doubt upon it:

Quha wait gif all that Chauceir wrait was trew?  
Not I wait nocht gif this narratioun  
Be authoreist, or fenyeit of the new  
Be sum Poeit, throw his Inuentioun . . .<sup>102</sup>

It is hard to escape the suspicion that Henryson is, in this manner, giving veiled notice that his poem is "new-feigned" and from his own invention. "Trew," as he uses it, means "from an author," and Henryson does not quite have the nerve to destroy this conventional, if weak, epistemological foundation for his narrative, but he only gives the appearance of siding with the convention and against poetic feigning. After all, he begins by suggesting that Chaucer attributed to Lollius what was,

at least in part, his own invention and, between the lines, we can imagine Henryson writing that he means to follow the Chaucerian precedent.

With the invention of narrative regaining recognition and poetry becoming more ambitious in its subjects and themes, a higher conception of poetry is at hand. That is not to say that the Renaissance did not have its Savonarola to liken to St. Peter Damian or its Ramus to liken to Hugh of St. Victor, but these people no longer present the dominant view of poetry. To this change of view we now turn.

NOTES: CHAPTER THREE

1 2 Samuel 23:2. All quotations are from the King James Version.

2 I Cor. 2:9-19. The preceding four citations were gathered together by Milton to prove Scripture inspired; cf. XVI, 249.

3 Summa Theologica I-II-109 in Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, ed. A. C. Pegis (New York, 1945), II, 980-81.

4 Ibid., pp. 1005-06. On abiding forms and passing impressions, cf. S. T. II-II-171-2, in the translation of the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London, 1934), XIV, 6.

5 Ibid., pp. 1008-09.

6 Ibid., p. 1009.

7 Octavius, ch. 22, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, 1951), IV, 186.

8 Cf. Gerard L. Ellspermann, The Attitudes of the Early Christian Latin Fathers Toward Pagan Literature and Learning (Washington, 1949), p. 36.



- 9 Roberts and Donaldson, VI, 486.
- 10 Lactantius' Epitome of the Divine Institutes, tr. E. H. Blakeney (London, 1950), pp. 67-68; Ellspermann, p. 75.
- 11 R. R. Bolgar, The Classical Heritage (New York, 1964), pp. 47, 53.
- 12 The Letters of St. Jerome, tr. Charles C. Mierow (Westminster, Md., 1963), I, 117.
- 13 Bolgar, pp. 51-52.
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- 15 The City of God, tr. Marcus Dods (New York, 1950), p. 621.
- 16 Ibid., pp. 52, 214.
- 17 Basic Writings of St. Augustine, ed. Whitney J. Oates (New York, 1948), I, 13, 34.
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22 Ibid., I, 225.

23 Ibid., I, 229.

24 Ellspermann, p. 77; Epitome, p. 76; Domenico Comparetti, Vergil in the Middle Ages, tr. E. F. M. Benecke (New York, 1929), pp. 96-103, esp. p. 100.

25 Jerome, p. 166. For a discussion of how well Jerome kept his pledge, cf. pp. 243-44.

26 Bolgar, p. 191.

27 Franz Cumont, Récherches sur le Symbolisme Funéraire des Romains (Paris, 1942), pp. 277, 259; Cicero, Tusculan Disputations, tr. J. E. King (London, 1927), p. 493.

28 E. R. Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, tr. Willard R. Trask (New York, 1953), p. 235.

29 Ibid.

30 Prudentius, Psychomachia, tr. H. J. Thomson (Cambridge, Mass., 1949), p. 279.

- 31 Curtius, p. 235.
- 32 James Hall Pitman, The Riddles of Aldhelm (New Haven, 1925), p. 3.
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- 34 Cynewulfs Elene, ed. F. Holthausen (Heidelberg, 1914), p. 46.
- 35 For period flavor I use the O. E. translation in Bright's Anglo-Saxon Reader, ed. J. R. Hulbert (New York, 1963), p. 8.
- 36 H. M. Chadwick and N. K. Chadwick, The Growth of Literature (Cambridge, 1932); N. K. Chadwick, Poetry and Prophecy (Cambridge, 1942).
- 37 On Virgil the magician, cf. Comparetti, p. 100.
- 38 The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune, ed. James A. H. Murray (London, 1875), pp. 19.
- 39 St. Isidore, Etymologiae (Oxford, 1965), I, xl; VIII, vii.
- 40 The Plays of Roswitha, tr. Christopher St. John (New York, 1966), pp. xxix-xxx.
- 41 Curtius, p. 77 and passim.

42 Bolgar, pp. 181, 414.

43 Cf. Richard McKeon, "Poetry and Philosophy in the Twelfth Century," in R. S. Crane, Critics and Criticism (Chicago, 1952), p. 303.

44 The Didascalion of Hugh of St. Victor, tr. Jerome Taylor (New York, 1961), p. 88.

45 The quoted words are De Bruyne's, II, 156. The Metalogicon of John of Salisbury, tr. Daniel D. McGarry (Berkeley, 1962), pp. 14-15.

46 Ibid., pp. 51-52.

47 Ibid., p. 63.

48 Nancy Lenkeith, Dante and the Legend of Rome (London, 1952), p. 39.

49 Alan of Lille, The Complaint of Nature, tr. Douglas M. Moffat (New York, 1908), pp. 39-40.

50 McKeon, p. 305.

51 De Bruyne, II, 380.

52 Edmond Faral, Les Arts Poetiques du XIIe et du XIIIe Siecles (Paris, 1924), pp. 194, 378-79.

53 Ibid., pp. 58-59.

54 Ibid., p. 71.

55 For another example, cf. the fourteenth-century English romance The Earl of Toulouse.

56 The Anticlaudian of Alain de Lille, tr. William H. Cornog (Philadelphia, 1935), p. 109.

57 Ibid., p. 110.

58 Leo Spitzer, "Note on the Poetic and the Empirical 'I' in Medieval Authors," Traditio, IV (1946), 417.

59 Macrobius, pp. 87-92.

60 The terms are from Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, 1957), p. 40. In these statements I am thinking particularly of Chaucer's dream-visions and of The Romance of the Rose. For Pearl and Piers Plowman see below.

61 O. B. Hardison, Jr., The Endless Monument (Chapel Hill, 1962), p. 13.

62 Cf. C. S. Baldwin, Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic (Gloucester, Mass., 1959), p. 175; Lenkeith, p. 34.

63 Curtius, p. 222.

64 Pegis, pp. 14-15.

65 Walter J. Ong, "Wit and Mystery," The Barbarian Within (New York, 1962), p. 104.

66 Augustine, Earlier Writings, tr. John H. S. Burleigh (Philadelphia, 1953), p. 139.

67 De Bruyne, II, 317.

68 The discussion of allegory in the next two paragraphs draws on De Bruyne, II, 312-13.

69 St. Bonaventure, "Retracing the Arts to Theology," in Medieval Philosophy, ed. Herman Shapiro (New York, 1964), p. 370.

70 A Translation of the Latin Works of Dante Alighieri (London, 1925), pp. 65, 71, 79.

71 Dante's Convivio, tr. W. W. Jackson (Oxford, 1909), p. 73.

72 Ibid., p. 75.

73 Charles S. Singleton, Dante Studies I (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), p. 92.

74 Allen Gilbert, Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden (Detroit, 1962), pp. 202-03.

75 Singleton, p. 91.

76 Joseph Mazzeo, Structure and Thought in the Paradiso (Ithaca, 1958), p. 36.

77 For the Divine Comedy and Vita Nuova I use the Binyon and Rossetti translations in The Portable Dante (New York, 1962). Cf. pp. 171, 367, 302-03 and Curtius, p. 239.

78 E.g. in Canto XXXIII (p. 487) where the Muses' aid is considered inadequate.

79 Ibid., pp. 523, 526, 543.

80 Curtius, p. 354n.

81 Lenkeith, p. 55.

82 Portable Dante, p. 593.

83 Spitzer, p. 416.

84 Portable Dante, p. 312.

85 Maurice Valency, In Praise of Love (New York, 1961), p. 108.

86 "At the core of the trobar ric there was, of course, a social motive, the sophisticate's horror of being caught in some banality of expression. But, as we have already noted, it occurred to nobody who practiced

this style to avoid banality of idea." Ibid., p. 123.

87 Mazzeo, p. 8.

88 Lenkeith, p. 52.

89 Valency, pp. 199-201.

90 C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (New York, 1958), p. 45. Lewis's distinction between allegory and symbolism may correspond to the distinction between the allegory of the poets and that of the theologians. Cf. p. 48: "Symbolism is a mode of thought, but allegory is a mode of expression."

91 Gilbert, p. 205.

92 Giovanni Boccaccio, Il Filostrato, tr. Hubertis Cummings (Princeton, 1924), p. 1.

93 Ibid., p. 2.

94 J. W. H. Atkins, English Literary Criticism: The Medieval Phase (London, 1952), pp. 171-72; Boccaccio on Poetry, tr. Charles G. Osgood (New York, 1956), p. 79.

95 Osgood, p. 84.

96 Ernest H. Wilkins, Studies in the Life and Works of Petrarch (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), p. 301.



97 Petrarch's Secret, tr. William H. Draper (London, 1911), p. 175.

98 Wilkins, p. 307.

99 Ibid.

100 Cf. B. L. Ullman, Studies in the Italian Renaissance (Rome, 1955), p. 12: ". . . the founders of the Renaissance were creative artists, poets chiefly, and . . . it was their poetic achievements that indicated to their contemporaries that something new was stirring, that a thousand years of creative torpor were ended."

101 The Pearl, ed. Sister Mary Vincent Hillman (Rahway, New Jersey, 1961), p. 6; cf. Elizabeth Salter Piers Plowman: An Introduction (London, 1960), pp. 59ff.

102 The Poems and Fables of Robert Henryson, ed. E. Harvey Wood (Edinburgh, 1933), p. 107.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE RISE OF INSPIRATION IN THE RENAISSANCE:

#### EXTRA-LITERARY DEVELOPMENTS

To explain why the theory of the inspired poet rose to prominence in the Renaissance is rather of the order of explaining why the Renaissance itself occurred, for it is not enough to look to the poets and critics and analyze their motives for reviving the theory; we must also see what there was in the thought of the period that allowed them or even encouraged them to put forth the claim. Moreover, since we are arguing that the theory had little currency in the earlier centuries but was popular in the sixteenth, we are committed to answering the question, "Was there a Renaissance?" in the affirmative; that is, we must argue that thinking has changed sufficiently to justify marking off, roughly, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Italy and the sixteenth century elsewhere, as a period distinct from the one preceding it. We do not, however, have to establish the total opposition between the period that Victorian scholars initiated and modern scholars have reacted against. In fact, if the "Renaissance" is going to

mean, for our purposes, a period characterized by a complex of ideas that allowed the claim to poetic inspiration to flourish, we can hardly find credible a complex that does not grow out of previous thinking.

It may seem strange to characterize the Renaissance by its philosophy, when philosophy is one area in which, until fairly recently, historians in the field have not been given to talking about a Renaissance. The tendency has been for historians to skip from Ockham to Bacon and Descartes, regarding the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as a pause, albeit a pregnant one in which Cartesian ideas can be seen in gestation.<sup>1</sup> A few students of the period have even suggested that any age in which Peter Ramus could figure as a major philosopher can make no claims to philosophical respectability.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the Renaissance as a philosophical interregnum, however uninteresting it may be to someone concerned with the progress of philosophy to its present state of enlightenment, is of great significance to a student of the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry. This chapter will argue that the theory of inspiration and the poetic claim to knowledge flourished precisely because there was no dominant philosophical system opposing them, and that Renaissance Neoplatonism, skepticism and eclecticism, however much a historian may

regard them as impure philosophy or as dead ends on wisdom's journey from Thales to G. E. Moore, made positive contributions to the elevation of poetry as well as the negative one of not blocking that elevation.

To understand how a philosophical and theological milieu was created for the theory of inspiration, we must look, with brevity and unavoidable simplification, at the careers of medieval philosophy and theology. We begin by remarking, somewhat paradoxically, that although Christianity re-introduced the possibility of inspiration, that possibility, apart from the use made of it by the speculative mystics, played little part in medieval Christian epistemology. Revelation was very important, but that revelation was contained in the Bible and complete; it was not in the process of being specially revealed to the philosophers. Divine illumination had a major role, but that illumination was a steady light given to all rational animals as part of the cognitive process rather than a sudden flash lighting up a specific problem; it was, in short, more akin to ingenium than to "inspiration," as we have been using the term, though it is not exactly ingenium since it comes from God and is not in man from birth.

Developing the paradox, we may say that inspiration was not important precisely because divine illumination was. Inspiration, we shall see, thrives on uncertainty

and a skepticism as to the competence of man's reason. As long as such skepticism was absent from medieval thought, inspiration was unnecessary. From one point of view, the history of medieval thought is a history of the growth of conditions favorable to skepticism.

We must first be clear as to what is meant by "skepticism." The ancients knew two schools of skeptics, the Academics, who were sure of their ignorance, and the Pyrrhonists, who were sure of nothing. It is important to keep the two schools apart. When Sir Thomas Browne writes, "The Scepticks that affirmed they knew nothing, even in that opinion confute themselves, and thought they knew more than all the world beside," he is pointing to the weakness of the first group, which contradicts itself in its dogmatism. When he writes, some pages later, "I perceive the wisest heads prove, at last, almost all Scepticks, and stand like Janus in the field of knowledge,"<sup>3</sup> he is allying himself with the second group, which is more powerful because, instead of relying on unreasoning negation, it utilizes the method found in the Hypotyposes of Sextus Empiricus, the major and nearly sole source of Pyrrhonism, whereby every affirmation is opposed by its negation. Hence the Pyrrhonist, like Janus, looks in two opposite directions at once and, feeling no more need to travel on one path than on the

other, rests tranquil.

The Academics were known to the Middle Ages principally because St. Augustine, having cured himself of the virulent Manichean heresy by inoculating himself with the less fatal germs of skepticism, signaled his achievement of Christian certainty by writing Contra Academicos, a work which, in the process of refuting the Academic arguments, made them available. Sextus was unknown until Henri Estienne published his Latin translation of the Hypotyposes in 1562, from which event Pierre Bayle dates the beginning of modern philosophy. Gilson has found a twelfth-century translation of Sextus in the library of St. Victor, but he has not found any indication that anyone read it; even those who would have had access to it, when they bring up skeptical arguments, draw on Augustine and show no knowledge of the subtler strategies of Sextus.<sup>4</sup>

There is, Gilson affirms, no medieval skepticism: no medieval philosopher finished without a doctrine. It is significant that Henry of Ghent, a fourteenth-century Augustinian, is the first author of a Summa Theologica to whom it occurs to ask the question, "Does man know something?" His Summa may be regarded as a lengthy and emphatic reply in the affirmative.<sup>5</sup>

Still, the elements of Pyrrhonist thought existed in medieval philosophy, in solution, as it were. To

understand how, we need only look at the definition of Pyrrhonism given by Sextus:

Scepticism is an ability to place in antithesis, in any manner whatever, appearance and judgements, and thus--because of the equality of force in the objects and arguments opposed--to come first of all to a suspension of judgment and then to mental tranquility. . . .  
"Appearances" we take as meaning the objects of sense-perception; hence we set over against them the objects of thought.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, the skeptic takes two opposing epistemologies and refuses to choose between them. He agrees with Plato that the senses deceive, and he accepts the Aristotelian axiom that there is nothing in the mind that was not first in the senses. He opposes the commonsense certainty of sense-experience to the logical certainty of a priori demonstration. There is, he argues, no criterion for choosing one theory of knowledge over another without first accepting a theory of knowledge in order to arrive at a criterion. Hence he remains in uncertainty.

Neither St. Augustine nor St. Thomas allows man to remain in a state of doubt, but St. Augustine can only achieve certainty by belittling the senses, and St. Thomas can assure himself of reason's effectiveness only by limiting that effectiveness. Both have to deny as well as affirm, and their denials, taken by themselves, provide the grounds of skepticism.

St. Augustine had learned from his association with

the Manicheans that a crude empiricism led to materialism, for the senses can attain knowledge only of body and not of spirit.<sup>7</sup> To avoid this error, one must put the senses in their place and realize that they cannot be the mind's source of knowledge because it violates the principle of hierarchy for an inferior thing to act on a superior. The mind may act on the body but not the body on the mind. The mind does not learn through a process of abstraction from sense-data, as in Aristotle, but through attending to the Truth that God has impressed on it. Augustine explains in De Musica that to trust the immediate data of sensation as knowledge is to live a life of mere opinion and error. What the mind knows is a phantasm produced by itself in response to the initial sensation, a response in which the soul condescends to the body for the body's needs. The phantasm has the coherence which the sensation, coming from a world of perpetual flux, lacks; not necessarily true in itself, it is capable of being judged in accordance with the standards of truth, likenesses to the divine Ideas, which God has placed in the mind. Judgment can only err if the inner Truth is insufficiently heeded; "the universal cause of false opinion is the mistake of regarding phantasies or phantasms as true facts ascertained by sense-perception."<sup>8</sup> The divine illumination is the sole source of certainty and the answer to



skepticism.

Agreement between men, the consensus gentium, is possible because God universally provides the standards of truth;<sup>9</sup> such agreement would be impossible if each had to rely on what his senses could discover from his limited situation: relativism is a consequence of an empirical epistemology. God, however, only provides the standards of truth; He does not do man's thinking for him, as He would in inspiration. In Gilson's words, "His illumination is needed only to make our intellects capable of thinking the truth." Nor is this illumination, like inspiration, given only to the few; "on the contrary, to be the receptive subject of divine illumination belongs by definition to the nature of the human intellect."<sup>10</sup>

The world is fundamentally intelligible, and hence knowable. The soul may also discover much about God by reflecting on the knowing process, in which God not only reveals Himself but, as Augustine demonstrates copiously in De Trinitate, reveals Himself as a Trinity. It is not, though, likely that the mind would discover the analogues to the Trinity within itself without the knowledge of God's mysteries provided by faith.<sup>11</sup> "For faith is understanding's step, and understanding is faith's reward."<sup>12</sup> Christian truth can only be known

through the acceptance on faith of biblical authority, but once it is known by faith it may become a goal for reason to reach. St. Augustine puts no limit on what the understanding can accomplish when it is directed by faith. This was a matter for his followers to work out for themselves. Hence, we find St. Anselm providing necessary reasons for the Trinity and Incarnation and St. Bonaventura demonstrating the Trinity. Only after the recovery of the Organon leads to a gradual rejection of the analogical reasoning used by the Augustinians is the understanding's capacity progressively limited.<sup>13</sup>

Augustine's optimism as to what the mind enlightened by faith and by God could accomplish grew, if anything, with his successors. For John Scotus Eriugena, "all things subsist in the divine understanding causally and in the human understanding effectually,"<sup>14</sup> for all things have their source in the divine Ideas which illuminate man's understanding. Ignorance is the result of a defective will which, damaged by the Fall, turns the attention away from the apparitions of the Ideas in the mind to engross it in the bodily things presented by the senses. What Adam knew actually, man still knows potentially.

For the optimism in full flower, let us look at St. Bonaventura's The Mind's Road To God. In this little

volume, St. Bonaventura takes the mind through six stages of increasing knowledge of God to the seventh, a mystical elevation where the soul rests in God; only in the last stage are intellectual operations abandoned.<sup>15</sup> As the mind moves from the sensible world, to the process of sensation, to the process of judgment, wherein it recognizes divine illumination, to the effects of grace in restoring its lost integrity, to considerations of its ultimate constituents of Being and Goodness, it rises up the Great Chain of Being, passes itself, and goes on until it reaches the Trinity.

The unthinkability of skepticism is essential to the early stages of Bonaventura's argument because, instead of deducing the possibility of infallible judgments from the presence of divine illumination, he infers the presence of divine illumination from the possibility of infallible judgments, which passes as axiomatic. He argues that the mind "retains the eternal principles and the axioms of the sciences and retains them eternally." It cannot forget them or fail to assent to them when they are propounded. It follows that the mind "has an undying light present to itself in which it remembers unchangeable truths."<sup>16</sup> This light cannot come from the mind because the mind is changeable and the light is not. "Therefore it [the mind] knows in that light

which enlighteneth every man which cometh into this world, which is true light and the Word which in the beginning was with God."<sup>17</sup> The allusions to the opening of The Gospel According to St. John only cap the argument with biblical authority; they do not supercede it.

It is faith which enables us to recognize God as the Source of the mind's illumination and to apprehend the state of the soul restored by grace. In considering the perfected soul, the mind comes to comprehend things above itself. Moreover, in the nine steps through which the soul regains its integrity, Bonaventura sees reflected the nine orders of angels, as, to a lesser degree, in all of the creatures, are reflected the powers of God.<sup>18</sup> From the angels seen as reflected in the gracious soul, the mind ascends to the essential attributes of God, which appear from consideration of the concept of Being, and to a proof of the necessary existence of the Trinity, which is the expression of the concept of Goodness.

What follows is the union of the soul with God in love. Inspiration, the partial union of the soul with God in knowledge, which is usually a preparation for the more complete union, is slighted, perhaps because the scope allowed to the rectified understanding has rendered it relatively unnecessary.

We have postponed consideration of the earliest

stages of the mind's journey because it is here that Bonaventura introduces a theme that is in the Augustinian tradition but not in Augustine. Augustine had looked to the functioning of the mind but not particularly to the content of our sensations for knowledge of God. In fact, thanks to the obscurity of his theory of sensation, knowledge of God is easier to explain than knowledge of things. When Bonaventura finds God's thumbprints on His handiwork, he follows Robert Grosseteste and Roger Bacon rather than the master himself. He follows them as well in allowing for the abstraction of universals from sense-data, thereby making the senses a greater source of knowledge than they were in Augustine's purer Platonism.

Roger Bacon's Opus Majus is a work which points up rather well the transition from traditional Augustinism to the new Aristotelianism. That Bacon's work precedes Bonaventura's should indicate that the development of medieval thought was nothing so simple as the replacing of Augustine's influence by that of "the Philosopher" and "the Commentator," as Aristotle and Averroes were called. Rather we now find a fairly full spectrum of thought, in which the philosophers of greatest interest are not those who are repeating traditional thinking but those who are trying to reconcile the authority due the Aristotelian system for its inconclusiveness and coherence

with that due Christian theology.

In Bacon we find Aristotelian and Augustinian elements modifying each other or simply co-existing. One crucial example of interference comes in his Averroistic interpretation of divine illumination. Augustine had argued that the standards of judgment were impressed by God on the intellect. Bacon argues that the standards come from God but identifies the judging faculty with Averroes' "active intellect," which subsists not in the individual soul but apart from it, in God.<sup>19</sup> Such a tactic leaves man with only a passive, receiving intellect to call his own and, though Bacon does not realize it, places the doctrine of personal immortality in jeopardy. One of the reasons for the ecclesiastical condemnation of Aristotelianism in 1277, less than two decades after the probably date of the Opus Majus, was that Aristotle denied the soul's immortality;<sup>20</sup> hence one could only be circumspect in adopting any part of his reasoning about the soul, however plausible it might be.

The readiness with which Augustinian illumination was found to merge with Averroistic heresy accounts, McKeon argues, for the lessened popularity of the doctrine.<sup>21</sup> As illumination comes to play less of a role in the cognitive process, other sources of certainty become necessary, lest skepticism raise its

head. The three chief sources of certainty came to be authority, logical demonstration and experience.

Bacon is often considered a pioneer of modern science because he attacked authority and regarded experience as more certain than demonstration. The opening of the Opus Majus is a forerunner of Francis Bacon's discussion of "idols" in its scorn for those who accept statements merely because other people do. In preferring experience to demonstration, however, he is less forceful than the later Bacon; he does not deny the assumption that logic mirrors reality; he merely find experience more convincing:

For if a man who has never seen fire should prove by sufficient argument that fire burns and that it injures things and destroys them, the mind of one hearing it would never be satisfied by that, nor would a hearer avoid fire until he had put a hand or combustible object into the fire that he might prove by experience what argument had taught. But once he has had experience of combustion, his mind is made sure and rests in the brightness of truth.<sup>22</sup>

Bacon praises experiments and gives examples of some which refute popular beliefs, such as Thomas Browne will do in Pseudodoxia Epidemica. However, his notion of experience is far more elastic than that of later thinkers. He uncritically accepts Pliny as a treasury of the experiences of two thousand wise men<sup>23</sup> and affords that absurd compendium more respect than someone

favoring logic would. He sees as a strength of mathematics the visible nature of geometrical figures and regards "a mathematical experience" as doing the proof oneself instead of watching someone else do it.<sup>24</sup> Most important, he values the experience of the "inner senses" over that of the outer.

Unlike Bonaventura, he stresses a need for inspiration, and he does so as a natural consequence of his devaluation of argument. Learning from sense-data is difficult and, moreover, tells us nothing of the spiritual world. Though there is faith to tell us what we need to know, he is reluctant to leave faith unsupported. Hence he recalls that "the holy patriarchs and prophets, who first gave science to the world, received interior illuminations and were not dependent only on sense." That he uses the plural indicates that he is not referring to the continuous process of Augustinian illumination. These are "divine inspirations" which enlighten "not only in spiritual but in corporeal things and in the sciences of philosophy, according to what Ptolemy says in the Centilogium, that the way to come to a knowledge of things is twofold, one by the experience of philosophy, the other by divine inspiration, which is far the better, as he says."<sup>25</sup> He gives the example of a student of his who, since he is very young and lacks



great genius or memory, can only thank God's grace for his considerable superiority over his fellows.<sup>26</sup>

For all his stress on experience, then, Bacon is far from being an empiricist. The senses are neither the only nor the best source of knowledge; they are supplemented by faith, Augustinian illumination and inspiration. Since the possibility of a conflict between these ways of knowing does not occur to him, Bacon must consider that he has left no room for doubt.

If we want to see how empiricism may limit knowledge, we must turn from the pioneer of modern science to the pioneer of medieval scholasticism. On the vexed question of universals, Bacon is a traditional Augustinian: the universals are derived from the Ideas in the mind of God and are known through illumination. Peter Abelard, on the other hand, assumes that man can only arrive at a universal through abstraction from sense-data and denies that such an abstraction can be similar to a divine Idea:

Therefore, conceptions of this sort by abstraction are ascribed well to the divine mind but not to the human mind, because men who learn things only through the senses, scarcely ever or never ascend to simple understanding of this sort, and the exterior sensuality of accidents prevents them from conceiving the natures of things purely. God, however, to whom all things which he created are known through themselves and who knows them before they are, distinguishes the individual states among them, and sense has no impediment to him who alone has only true understanding. Whence it happens that men

have, in those things which have not been touched by the sense, opinion rather than understanding as we learn from experience itself.<sup>27</sup>

For Abelard, because the universal concepts men form through abstraction are not likenesses of the divine Ideas, the gulf between man's knowledge of things and God's is greater than that to be found in the Augustinian tradition. Abelard is not, though, quite the empiricist the passage quoted makes him out to be. Like the later Aristotelians, he accepts as axiomatic the origin of our knowledge in sensation, but, again like them, he puts no limit to what kind of structure man's reason can build on this presumably empirical base. He has no theory of induction to make empiricism work and, indeed, recovery of the lost books of the Organon would not supply this lack for later philosophers, Aristotle's logic being deductive. Nor does Abelard end in the nominalism to which he sometimes seems headed; his concepts, unlike Ockham's ficta, do to some extent mirror the reality from which they are abstracted, and his logic is therefore a means of knowing reality.

If one means by "humanism" the placing of man rather than God in the center of attention, then the scholastics might be regarded as incipient humanists, for where the Augustinian tradition begins with God's knowledge and then tries to decide how much of it comes

down to man, the scholastics begin with man's reasoning process and then decide how close it can come to God's knowledge. Instead of God's light coming down, we now have man's reason going up to meet what he knows by faith. Thus, where St. Anselm proves God's existence with an a priori argument based on the definition of God as perfect, St. Thomas rejects the ontological argument for a posteriori proofs which work from man's experience of causation and motion back to a First Cause and Self-moving Mover.

The recovered Aristotelian Organon provided a stricter and more certain means of demonstrating truth than medieval man had yet known, and hence he was, through his faith in logic, able to escape the skepticism that might have come with the collapse of Augustinian illumination. At the same time, and again because of their faith in logic, the Aristotelians came more and more to emancipate philosophy from theology. Where the Augustinians, as in Bonaventura's famous On Retracing the Arts to Theology<sup>28</sup> or in the second part of Bacon's Opus Majus, see only one science and one method in which the trivium and quadrivium lead to the study of theology, the Aristotelians subordinate the trivium to logic and emphasize that each area of learning has its own method.<sup>29</sup> Logic is freed from theological authority

so that it may work the more efficiently to enable man to understand what he can of the principles of faith.

Once philosophy and theology are allowed to operate independently, with theology obtaining its first principles from revelation and philosophy relying on experience or, more often, on the principle of contradiction, the possibility arises that the two will conflict. St. Thomas denies this possibility. The Bible and the world both have God for their author. Truth is one because the Source of truth is one. If reason operates correctly it can only support faith:

From this we evidently gather the following conclusion: whatever arguments are brought forward against the doctrines of faith are conclusions incorrectly derived from the first and self-evident principles imbedded in nature. Such conclusions do not have the force of demonstration; they are arguments that are either probable or sophistical. And so, there exists the possibility to answer them.<sup>30</sup>

Reason, then, enriches faith by demonstrating that part of revelation which it can demonstrate and by refuting all arguments which run counter to revelation.

Unfortunately, impressive as St. Thomas's accommodation of the new philosophy to the old theology was, it was unable to contain and render harmless the burgeoning Aristotelianism. In his confidence that truth was one, Thomas had reckoned without those who would look for their truth not to God's Word or to His world but to

Aristotle. If philosophy was to be independent of theology, then the philosophers might prefer the "real" Aristotle, as they presumed the Arabic version of him to be, to Albert's or Thomas's Christian Aristotle. Acquaintance with Thomism did not prevent Siger of Brabant and his followers from asserting the eternity of the world and other heresies as the conclusions of an independent Aristotelianism.<sup>31</sup>

Thomas seems to have been too ready to believe that the Philosopher's logic could be used against him. After all, if the highest truths of revelation are not accessible to reason, then statements denying those truths would be of the same order and, similarly unverifiable, would be similarly unfalsifiable. If creation ex nihilo is a theological proposition, the eternity of matter cannot be considered a philosophical proposition, unless one is to accept the Averroistic doctrine that Thomas particularly wished to avoid, the doctrine of "double truth." If the acceptance of peripatetic logic led to the acceptance of Aristotelian first principles, it became much easier to arrive at Aristotle's conclusions than to modify or refute them. One had either to deny the efficacy of philosophy or argue that its conclusions had validity even when they came into conflict with those of theology.

In the prologue to his Ordinatio Duns Scotus raises

the question "whether man in his present state needs to be supernaturally inspired with some special knowledge he could not attain by the natural light of the intellect." He begins with the arguments of the philosophers, Aristotle and Avicenna, that man's natural faculties enable him to have unimpeded knowledge of all intelligible objects. Then, at the beginning of his refutation, he includes the following marginal note:

By natural reason nothing supernatural can be shown to exist in the wayfarer, nor can it be proved that anything supernatural is necessarily required for his perfection. Neither can one who has something supernatural know it is in him. Here then it is impossible to use natural reason against Aristotle. If one argues from beliefs, it is no argument against a philosopher since the latter does not concede a premise taken on faith. Hence, these reasons which are here urged against him have as one premise something believed or proved from something believed. Therefore, they are nothing more than theological persuasions from beliefs to a belief.<sup>32</sup>

In Augustine, one could not talk of a conflict between philosophy and theology, not only because the former was subordinated to the latter, but because no clear distinction could be made between the natural knowledge of reason and the supernatural knowledge of faith; there was no strictly natural knowledge because judgments were dependent on the standards provided by divine illumination. In Thomas, there is natural knowledge because the universals are abstracted from sense-data, not received from above, and philosophy is

an independent discipline. Thomas prevents a conflict between philosophy and theology only by arguing that, since we know by faith that theology is true, whenever philosophy conflicts with theology, it can only mean that philosophy's reasoning has been defective. In this manner Thomas knew that Aristotle's reasoning was defective and corrected it to bring it into line with faith. However, faith, being extrinsic to philosophy, could not stand as a safeguard against philosophical heresy by those who preferred to have their reasoning, or their Aristotle, undiluted.

The passage from Scotus makes it clear that, contrary to Thomas's hopes, philosophy could provide no remedy for the errors it fell into by ignoring revelation. With our hindsight, it is not difficult to see that there were primarily two solutions available for escaping this impasse: either philosophy and theology would be driven further apart, with theological questions declared out of bounds for philosophers, or an attempt would be made to re-integrate them. The first solution will be attempted by the nominalists in France, the second by the Neoplatonists in Italy.

William of Ockham limits philosophy's competence by drawing from the axiom that knowledge begins in the senses conclusions that are more rigorously empirical

than those of the earlier scholastics. Where they assumed that knowledge was only of universals because only genera and species figured in the premises of the syllogism, he argues that knowledge is primarily of individuals because individuals and not universals are present in sense-data. He distinguishes between "intuitive" and "abstractive" cognition. "Intuitive cognition" is sensation of individual contingent things and informs us infallibly whether its object is existent or not. "Abstractive cognition," which includes cognition of universals, does not provide any information about the existence of contingent facts and needs to be verified through intuitive cognition. A universal is merely a mental sign which can be used to refer to individuals outside the mind; being less precise and detailed than the given individual it might stand for, it is less valuable for cognition.<sup>33</sup>

Ockham provides the argument for experience and against deductive logic that Roger Bacon failed to provide. Only direct perception carries with it certainty that the object of discourse exists and that it exists with the qualities we attribute to it; syllogisms may have nothing to do with the world of contingent facts. In this way Ockham directs the philosopher's attention away from metaphysics and the



Organon to the physical sciences and a logic of discovery as well as of demonstration. His followers begin the work on dynamics and on scientific methodology that, transplanted from Paris to Padua, will culminate in the achievements of Galileo.<sup>34</sup>

Because its scientific interests eventually bore fruits that aroused the hostility of the Inquisition, it is sometimes assumed that nominalism was an anti-religious or anti-papist movement. But Ockham must have believed he was protecting the faith, for, by limiting reason, he was strengthening biblical and ecclesiastical authority. Where, in Anselm, there seemed little that natural reason could not demonstrate about God, in Ockham reason knows little more than His existence and His more elementary attributes. Philosophy, with its more or less empirical method, can have little to do with the truths of faith. If Ockham does not make credo quia absurdum his motto, he does lessen the role of reason in religion and increase that of faith, as a sheer act of will. His follower Gabriel Biel will deny that there can be a deductive theology: one cannot accept first principles on faith and then accept the remaining Christian truths on the rational ground of their having been deduced from the first principles. Everything must be accepted on faith, and faith does not appear if one has logical reasons for one's

beliefs.<sup>35</sup> From Biel's position to Calvin's is not very far.

Though Ockham, then, has considerable skepticism about the powers of natural reason and its tool, Aristotelian logic, he is not a skeptic. He believes in faith, and he has no doubt about the functioning of sense experience in its proper sphere. What intuitive cognition reveals to exist must exist. He even takes up the question whether God could deceive intuitive cognition and answers that, intuitive cognition being by definition infallible, such deception would involve a contradiction and hence would not occur.<sup>36</sup> The realm of certainty may have shrunk for Ockham, but it is still ample.

Unfortunately, not all of Ockham's followers could rest in his security. The two letters of Nicolaus of Autrecourt in criticism of the doctrine of Bernard of Arezzo point to the imminent danger of a revival of Academic skepticism. Bernard, unlike Ockham, is willing to entertain the possibility that God could deceive him about the existence of an external perceived object. He proposes that "intuitive cognition does not necessarily require the existing thing." It follows, Nicolaus argues, "that you do not have evident certitude of the existence of external objects." Moreover, he cannot know his own acts, for these would be known by

intuitive cognition. In fact, since all knowledge is ultimately based on intuitive cognition, he cannot know any thing or any proposition. Nicolaus concludes by informing Bernard that "the absurdities which follow on the position of the Academics, follow on your position."<sup>37</sup>

Thus, if nominalism did not necessarily lead to skepticism, neither was it much of a safeguard against it. It was up to the founders of the scientific method, and Francis Bacon in particular, to establish a surer foundation for sense-knowledge, just as it was up to Descartes and his followers to put deductive logic on a new footing.

In the meantime, nominalism could be regarded by the new class of humanists as the philosophers' confession of their own impotence. Of all the pretenders to knowledge ridiculed in Erasmus's Encomium Moriae (1509), the philosophers and theologians receive most space, for their pretensions are the greatest. They are, Erasmus implies, purveyors of nonsense who hide their ignorance in the obscurity of their language. The schoolmen claim to know more about Christ or about the Eucharist than the apostles did, but they really know less, for they have lost the essentials of faith in a miasma of logical distinctions. The philosophers boast of their learning, but they are fools; the apostles proclaim their foolishness in the eyes of the world, and in the

eyes of the philosophers, but they have the wisdom of Christ.

Though Erasmus places Ockham among the philosophers he despises,<sup>38</sup> his position may be regarded as an extension and application of nominalism in its opposing of reason and faith. In fact, The Praise of Folly contains the germs of the two ultimate extensions of that opposition, fideism and Calvinism.

Fideism uses the arguments of skepticism in defense of the faith. It takes the extreme position of defending Christian truth by denying all other truth. If all that is not revelation is only opinion, there can be no conflict of truths. If man has no source of certainty, he must fall back on what is established by the suprahuman authority of God's Word and His church. Thus, fideism figures primarily in Roman Catholic apologetics, for that religion makes the most of ecclesiastical authority.

Full-fledged fideism appears first in the Examen Vanitatis Doctrinae Gentium (1520) by Gian-Francesco Pico della Mirandola, nephew of the famous Neoplatonist. As Montaigne will do later, Pico divides all philosophers into dogmatists, Academics, and Pyrrhonists and allies himself with the last group. He draws his method from Sextus, whom he probably read in manuscript, and uses it to rule out contention. Erasmus had already spoken of

the peace of the ignorant and the faithful, and Pico conflates that peace with the skeptics' cherished ataraxia. Skepticism enables the philosopher to forget philosophy and become as a believing child so that he may enter into the kingdom of heaven.<sup>39</sup>

Much more influential than Pico's volume was the De Incertitudine et Vanitate Scientiarum et Artium (1531) by Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim. Agrippa explains at the outset that he wrote to deflate those who were proud in human learning and despised the simplicities of Scripture. He regards knowledge as "the very pestilence, that putteth all mankind to ruin," the cause of the Fall and, consequently, of sin and death, and the extinguisher of faith.<sup>40</sup> He then proceeds, with wit and learning, to reject wit and learning.

Neither the deductive nor the inductive approach endures his scrutiny. A deductive science

hath no especiall thinge aboue the very Beleeefe,  
that is, where the goodnesse of the Authour,  
moueth the free will of the Schollers Beleeefe.  
. . . For euery Science, hath in it some  
certaine Principles, which must be beleued,  
and can not by any meanes be declared: which  
if any will obstinately deny, the Philosophers  
haue not wherewith to dispute against him.  
. . .<sup>41</sup>

If deduction is based on an appeal to merely human authority, induction depends on the all too fallible senses:

For euery knowledge (as they saie) hath his beginning of the senses, and the proufe of true speeches (as Auerrois saithe) is that they agree with sensible thinges. . . . But sithe that oftentimes all the senses are deceaued, doubtlesse they cannot proue to us any certaine experience. Furthermore, sithe that the senses cannot attaine to the intellectuall nature, and the causes of the interiour things, . . . is it not manifest that the waie of truth is shutte up frō the senses. Wherefore al these deriuations and sciences, which are faste rooted in the senses shal be uncertaine, erroneous, & deceitful.<sup>42</sup>

Having attacked the sciences at their roots, Agrippa goes on to write a "dispraise" of every art he can think of, including some as out of the way as the art of whoring. Since the "dispraise" of something usually admired was, like the more common encomium or "praise" of something usually contemned, a literary form favored by humanist lovers of the paradox,<sup>43</sup> and since Agrippa goes to lengths far greater than those necessary to establish his fideism, it may be assumed that his motives for his work were not as entirely religious as he makes out. The English, however, appreciated the work neither as a plea for faith nor as an exercise of wit. Agrippa's English translator felt required to defend the work from the charge that it was an attack on learning, and Nashe seems to have taken it as such.

Agrippa failed to be a successor to Erasmus, but in Montaigne the combination of wit and fideism had its moment of glory. Montaigne's Apology of Raymond Sebond

leaves Sebond in much more ardent need of defense than he was before Montaigne came to his aid. Sebond undertook "by human and natural reasons to establish and verify all the articles of Christian religion against atheists."<sup>44</sup> Montaigne believes that no one has equalled Sebond at that task and that Sebond's book might be deemed "some quintessence extracted from out St. Thomas Aquinas."<sup>45</sup> Consequently, when he then finds Sebond sadly lacking, Montaigne is passing judgment on the entire scholastic attempt to use reason in support of faith.

He begins by finding that instinct enables the beasts to lead a life that is, in every way, superior to the life man's reason makes for him. He praises the ignorant and the innocent, for their days are happily free from intellectual strife. Then he expounds and recommends Pyrrhonism, and with it fideism:

It is not by our discourse or understanding that we have received our religion; it is by a foreign authority and commandment. The weakness of our judgment helps us more than our strength to compass the same, and our blindness more than our clear-sighted eyes. It is more by the means of our ignorance than of our skill that we are wise in heavenly knowledge.<sup>48</sup>

Just as the opinion of wisdom keeps us trying to arrive at a truth we are incapable of, so the recognition of our insufficiency makes us accept truth on divine authority, as that authority is contained for us in the

Bible and in the church.

The Apology, though, does not end on a note of fideism. Montaigne has already suggested that supernatural knowledge may enter into us through an "extraordinary infusion." At the end of his essay, after nearly two hundred pages of belittling mankind, he quotes a familiar passage from Seneca. "'Oh what a vile and abject thing is man,' saith he, 'unless he raise himself above humanity.'" Montaigne approves of this sentiment, but only with modification. Man cannot by himself raise himself above his humanity:

He shall raise himself up if it please God  
extraordinarily to lend him his helping hand.  
He may elevate himself by forsaking and  
renouncing his own means and suffering himself  
to be raised and elevated by mere heavenly  
means.<sup>49</sup>

In this passage, man and God commune without any mediation. Montaigne's skepticism of reason includes a readiness to believe that God will give his truth to man directly, as "extraordinary" aid.

In John Calvin skepticism leads to the need for inspiration much more surely than it does in Montaigne. Calvin is no fideist, for he does not believe man can accept doctrine on church authority and still have faith, and, unlike Montaigne, he has high praise for what man's mind can accomplish in nontheological matters, but he too has the nominalist's certainty that reason



is bankrupt in matters of faith.

He has the humanist's eloquence when he speaks of how magnificent man was when God first created him, but his sense of that magnificence only increases his awareness of how much man has lost through the Fall. Where the fideists argued their readers into accepting church authority, Calvin considers man too corrupt to save himself. Man can only be saved if he receives from the Spirit an "inner light" which is closer to inspiration than to the Augustinian illumination, of which it first appears to be reminiscent. Where Augustinian illumination came to all men, most of whom ignored it, Calvin's inner light comes only to those whom God has decided to save. Where Augustinian illumination provides standards of right judgment, the inner light forces assent to particular propositions of faith. It is, like inspiration, not a contribution to a reasoning process but above reason; it differs only in that it occasions a movement of the will toward previously given content, rather than introducing the content and compelling assent simultaneously.

The working of the inner light appears in Calvin's discussion of the proposition on which so much hinges: the assertion that God is the author of Scripture. For Hooker the demonstration of this proposition will give a rational basis to faith, and he will regard the

proposition as easily demonstrated. Had not the prophets and apostles performed miracles to provide sensible evidence that they drew their knowledge from God?

Calvin does not reject the arguments, nor does he find any flaw in them, but he considers rational assent insufficient:

Now, if we wish to consult the true interest of our consciences that they may not be unstable and wavering, the subjects of perpetual doubt, that they may not hesitate at the smallest scruples, this persuasion must be sought from a higher source than human reasons or judgments or conjectures--even from the secret testimony of the Spirit.<sup>50</sup>

That reason will not suffice where it has been sufficient before and will be again seems to indicate that Calvin is not sure reason can carry certainty with it. He remarks that there are profane men who regard the truths of faith as mere opinion but, instead of seeking, as the scholastics did and Hooker will do, for objective grounds to prove them wrong, Calvin returns to the position of St. Paul in the passage from 1 Corinthians quoted in the last chapter:

I reply that the testimony of the Spirit is superior to all reason. For as God alone is a sufficient witness of himself in his own word, so also the word will never gain credit in the hearts of men till it be confirmed by the internal testimony of the Spirit. It is necessary, therefore, that the same Spirit who spoke by the mouths of the prophets should penetrate into our hearts to convince us that they faithfully delivered the oracles which were divinely entrusted to them.<sup>51</sup>

Calvin shows the influence of Renaissance skepticism in his ability to imagine occasions for doubting where no one has doubted before. The miracles may prove that the apostles were inspired, but they cannot prove that the Bible is an accurate record of the content of their inspiration. Only the author of their inspiration can testify to that. The Spirit's testimony enables us to accept the divinity of the Bible with a certainty "superior to that of any human judgment."

Calvin did not, of course, invent Christian inspiration. It had always been present as a possibility, but it had not been emphasized because the need for it was not regarded as great. Augustinian illumination, Thomistic reason and, most of all, ecclesiastical authority provided the layman with what he needed to know. When Calvin denied the efficacy of the latter two, he could only mold the former into inspiration if he were going to allow man the necessary means of certain knowledge.

Though claims to inspiration appear in the Renaissance at all points of the religious spectrum, it is probably no coincidence that the most thorough-going claims come from poets with Huguenot or puritan leanings: du Bartas and d'Aubigné in France, Spenser and Milton in England. The religious right, with more faith in reason and in the accumulated reason of church tradition,

did not leave man so impotent before God and, hence, was less ready to believe that God would be free in granting inspiration and more ready to regard a claim to it as presumptuous. The Roman Catholic and Anglican poets were also, understandably, less ready to renounce responsibility for their work, but the puritans, thinking little of man's free will, had no such hesitation in pronouncing themselves manipulated by the hand of God.

When the Roman Catholic poets pronounced themselves inspired, they were likely to be thinking in more secular terms. The inner light may have been spoiled for them, but the newly rediscovered poetic furor was not. Moreover, Plato had been recently made into a Christian by the Florentine Academy, and that meant that the Christian God had, as it were, adopted his four furors.

Italian Neoplatonism grows out of a situation not unlike that which gave rise to nominalism. Padua had become the European center of Averroistic free-thinking and, in the eyes of the humanists, it seemed that the authority of Aristotle and the authority of his logic were combining to threaten Christianity. Historians of the Latin Averroists have remarked that, though the doctrine of the "double truth" was central to Averroism, it is difficult to find a profession of it.<sup>52</sup> Petrarch, however, is certain not only that the

"Aristotelians" believe in the double truth but also that their profession of it is merely a cover for a rejection of faith. They confound theology and philosophy:

Wishing to keep up the appearance of scholars, they are mad enough to assume that what is denied to the humble handmaid is forbidden to the omnipotent master too. You could, furthermore, observe in their tumultuous gatherings that, as soon as public disputation is started, they are in the habit of declaring emphatically that during the debate they intend to lay aside faith. . . . However, I beseech you, is this anything else than seeking the truth after having rejected the truth? . . . They deny faith in a clandestine protestation, not daring to do it in an open profession.<sup>53</sup>

Pressed by the Averroists, Petrarch was tempted to find relief in either fideism or Platonism, though it is to be doubted that his adherence to either was more than temporary. In a letter to Francesco Bruni (1362), he exclaims:

So much do I fear to become entangled in errors that I throw myself into the embrace of doubt instead of truth. Thus I have gradually become a proselyte of the Academy . . . and doubt every single thing, with the exception of what I believe is a sacrilege to doubt.<sup>54</sup>

We cannot, however, attribute the beginning of fideism to Petrarch, for he never develops the position any further than he does here. The long and dull essay On His Ignorance professes his ignorance only with heavy irony and never proclaims universal ignorance; it is merely an attack on four "Aristotelians" who had criticized Petrarch for deviating from the Philosopher's doctrine.

In the course of his attack on Aristotelianism, Petrarch, true humanist that he is, suggests that Platonism may provide a proper antidote. Petrarch owned a Greek codex of the Platonic dialogues, but, not knowing Greek, he had to develop his enthusiasm for Plato on the basis of Augustine's statement that Plato came nearer to Christian truth than any of the other ancients and on his knowledge of Chalcidius's incomplete Latin translation of the Timaeus.<sup>55</sup> Unable himself to mine the rich gold of Plato's thought, he directed others to the treasure.

Marsilio Ficino, in a letter of 1484, writes of the urgent need for a new philosophy:

The whole world is now in the hands of the Peripatetics and is divided mainly into two sects, Alexandrists and Averroists. Both deny any form of religion. If anyone seek to destroy by the simple preaching of faith an impiety so diffused among men and defended by such subtle minds, he will soon be refuted by the results. Stronger measures are needed: either divine miracles manifested on all sides or at least a philosophical religion to which philosophers will listen more readily and which will someday succeed in convincing them.<sup>56</sup>

The "philosophical religion" to which he refers is Christian Platonism. Plato's authority is strong enough to counter Aristotle's, and the resemblance of his doctrines to the truths of faith is so remarkable, Ficino feels, that they can be made the instruments for

bringing the philosophers back into the fold. So impressed is Ficino by Plato's knowledge of the divine mysteries that he concludes that Plato built his philosophy on a foundation inspired by God. God would not leave the pagans wholly in the dark about Himself. "It was, therefore, by the will of divine Providence . . . that a religious philosophy arose among the Persians under Zoroaster" and was passed on to Orpheus, Pythagoras and Plato. The philosophy, however, was not for the common people and, when it was written down, it was hidden under "poetic veils" in an allegory to which only the skilled philosopher could find the key.<sup>57</sup> Ficino thus considers that the form and mythic content of the Platonic dialogues place them in the hermetic tradition.

Ficino has, in short, discovered what allegorical reading can do for philosophy. It enables him, and, to an even greater extent, his disciple Pico della Mirandola, to be an eclectic as well as a Platonist. Eclecticism, as Ficino and Pico see it, is a surer means of arriving at truth than swearing fidelity to one narrow school. No one has all the truth but everyone has some part of it. As Pico explains,

Moved by this reasoning, I have wished to bring into view the things taught not merely according to one doctrine (as some would desire), but things taught according to

every sort of doctrine, that by this comparison of many sects and by the discussion of manifold philosophy, that radiance of truth which Plato mentioned in his Letters might shine more clearly upon our minds, like the sun rising from the deep.<sup>58</sup>

The ultimate answer to Aristotle, then, is a philosophy drawn from all philosophies, including Aristotle's. The unhistorical and allegorical method makes the single truth possible, though the widespread diffusion of Platonism helps. Thus, Pico is able to reconcile Aristotle and Plato, in his De Ente et Uno, not only because Aristotle was responding to Plato but also because Aristotle's Prime Mover and Plato's One are both converted into the Christian God.<sup>59</sup>

The above discussion, besides making it clear why professional philosophers have tended to leave Ficino and Pico to the historians of ideas, should indicate that, even if they had not re-introduced the poetic furor, the Florentine Neoplatonists would have done poetry a service. In making philosophy depend not on logic but on divine inspiration and in identifying philosophy with myth and allegory, they were bringing philosophy closer to poetry than it had been since Plato. Moreover, eclecticism, which finds truth everywhere, is like skepticism, which finds it nowhere, in that they both foster an intellectual openness, a tolerance for the not immediately reasonable and even a



willingness to consider ideas aesthetically rather than just for their validity. Montaigne, skeptic and eclectic, will preside over the Age of Shakespeare.

We can summarize the Renaissance developments quite simply by saying that the old philosophical method, Aristotle's Organon, was losing its sway and there was not yet a new method to take its place. The natural sciences, which would provide the new method were, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, contributing more to the breakdown of the old. With the recovery of Euclid rose the difficulty of reconciling the geometrical axiomatic system, with its "linear proofs," with the Aristotelian syllogism.<sup>60</sup> Aristotle was accused of being ignorant of mathematics; Campanella argues that his syllogistic logic was insufficient for understanding the "divine mystery, recondite thought, and sublime majesty" of that science.<sup>61</sup> Nor was Aristotle a help in scientific discovery. Galileo concludes that logic "teaches us how to test the conclusiveness of any argument or demonstration already discovered and completed; but I do not believe that it teaches us to discover correct arguments and demonstrations."<sup>62</sup>

Found wanting in the two most important new areas of thought, the method had also suffered considerable abuse because the humanists considered it responsible

for the "barbarism" of the scholastic philosophy. What was telling was not the impure Latin of the schoolmen; in a famous letter Pico replied to that charge by saying he would rather have wisdom inelegantly expressed than the grammarian's trivia beautifully put;<sup>63</sup> it was rather the "quiddities, haeccities, formalities, and the like stuff; things so thin and bodiless that I believe even Lynceus himself was not able to perceive them," as Erasmus's Folly put it.<sup>64</sup> The scholastic method was condemned because it was believed to foster useless abstraction and hair-splitting; Erasmus's insistence that one should be "able to perceive" the subjects of philosophy proved prophetic. The humanists and natural scientists shared a common respect for the useful, and the scholastic method seemed to them to lead to pure speculation.

In this intellectual milieu, Ficino took poetry, which the medieval philosophers had considered dependent on the imagination, a faculty beneath reason and not so reliable as the senses, and made it dependent instead on inspiration, a transport above reason. That he should have invoked for this proceeding the authority of Plato, whose Republic had first dismissed poetry as dependent on imagination, is hardly paradoxical, for Ficino translated Plotinus and the lesser Neoplatonists as well as their master, and he read Plato through their

eyes. Moreover, Plato had, in the Ion and Phaedrus, expounded the doctrine of the sacred furors and, if he had undercut the doctrine with irony in the former dialogue, it was an irony which the Neoplatonists were capable of missing.

Kristeller argues that, as we move from Plato to Plotinus, Proclus and Iamblichus, the extreme realist position is taken more and more for granted, and, perhaps as a consequence, intuition and inspiration come to have the importance for apprehending the Ideas that dialectic had in Plato.<sup>65</sup> As part of their stress on inspiration, the Neoplatonists exalt poetry and art. The artist does not, as in Plato, present a poor copy of a mere appearance; he conveys a perception of the reality behind appearances:

Still the arts are not to be slighted on the ground that they create by imitation of natural objects; for, to begin with, these natural objects are themselves imitations; then we must recognize that they give no bare reproduction of the thing seen but go back to the Reason-Principles from which Nature itself derives, and, furthermore, that much of their work is all their own; they are holders of beauty and add where nature is lacking. Thus Pheidias wrought the Zeus upon no model among things of sense but by apprehending what form Zeus must take if he chose to become manifest to sight.<sup>66</sup>

For Plotinus, and for Plato as Ficino presents him, the work of art mediates between the ideal form and its imperfect material manifestation. Only the poor artist

depicts what his senses give him; the true artist apprehends and works from the forms, which, following the Platonic doctrine of reminiscence, are innate in his mind but need to be brought to light. In the Meno, Socrates demonstrated the recollection of forms through dialectics: asked the right questions an uneducated slave can "recall" the Pythagorean theorem. Plotinus's artist, however, comes to know Zeus's form not through dialectics but through inspiration: "thus a man filled with a god--possessed by Apollo or by one of the Muses--need no longer look outside for his vision of the divine being; it is but finding the strength to see divinity within."<sup>67</sup> The strength is not native to the mind but infused in the poetic furor.

The Neoplatonic theory of artistic creation allows Proclus to defend Homer against Plato's charges. Informed by the Muses, Homer writes about the chains of Hephaestus what is above reason, though he may also write on the levels of reason and of imagination.<sup>68</sup>

In adopting and expanding the Plotinian reading of Plato, Ficino is not altogether consistent in his treatment of the poetic furor, but his inconsistencies are easily reconciled. In the thirteenth book of the Theologica Platonica, poets are the class of people who, after the philosophers, most separate their souls from their bodies in divine madness. They must be inspired

because, when they sing, they reveal a suprahuman knowledge, but "when their fury has lessened, they do not well understand themselves, as if they had not themselves made the utterance, but God had announced it through them as through trumpets."<sup>69</sup>

In his Commentary on Plato's Symposium, though, Ficino treats the poetic furor as the least of the four kinds of divine madness and as a preparation for illumination rather than a means of it. In the Platonic version of the Fall, the soul becomes disunited from the One and then descends through the successive stages of Mind, Reason, Opinion and Nature until, at last, it falls as far as it can and becomes imprisoned in the body. The stages indicate descending levels of knowledge: mind is akin to contemplation, Reason to logical thinking, and Opinion and Nature to common sense issuing in right belief. Control of the soul by the body means that the passions and senses dominate. Since these are basically unstable,

the whole soul is filled with discord and dissonance; therefore the first need is for the poetic madness, which through musical tones arouses what is sleeping, through harmonic sweetness calms what is in turmoil, and finally, through the blending of different things, quells dissonant discord and tempers the various parts of the soul.<sup>70</sup>

Where, in the Theologia, poetic furor had a primarily intellectual function, its effect here is

psychological: it repairs the imbalance of the faculties so that the mind dominates over the senses and the imagination and is made ready to receive the prophetic furor, which enlightens it. Poetry is assimilated to music. It provides harmony, which is the proper ordering of the parts of a whole, and thereby, through a kind of imitation, brings about the reintegration of the soul. Perhaps Ficino is thinking of Orpheus as the archetypal poet and of Orpheus's calming the savage beasts as the archetypal poetic action: the beasts had long been interpreted as the passions. Perhaps he is thinking of the tradition which made the Muses the creators of the music of the spheres and, by extension, the agents of all concord. In any case, the assimilation of poetry to music would emphasize its formal elements at the expense of its content.

However, it should be remembered that, in the Symposium commentary, Ficino is dealing with the poetic furor as the first of four, the beginning of a process that leads through knowledge back to the reunion, in the erotic rapture, of the soul with the One. He never speaks of anyone stopping in mid-process, and it may be that he limits the function of the poetic madness in order to allow the other three furors their functions. In other words, where Plato spoke of four furors coming

to four classes of people, poets, prophets, initiates and lovers, Ficino speaks of four stages in a single process and therefore has to distinguish them. When he is not relating the poetic furor to the other three, as in the Theologia, he does not limit it.

This resolution of the inconsistency is all the more likely because Ficino's popularizers in the Renaissance failed to maintain his distinctions. The great Renaissance compendium of Muse-lore, Pontus de Tyard's Solitaire Premier ou Prose des Muses, is, as Frances Yates has shown,<sup>71</sup> heavily indebted to Ficino, but the Muses have far greater power in Tyard than they had in Ficino. They reconstitute the soul intellectually as well as morally, for under their influence

elle devient invincible, et ne peut estre souillée, ou vaincue d'aucune chose basse et terrestre: mais au contraire surmonte et surcharge toutes ces vilitez. D'avantage elle est esveillée du sommeil et dormir corporel à l'intellectuel veiller, et revoquée des tenebres d'ignorance à la lumière de verité, de la mort à la vie, d'un profond et stupide oubly à un rensouvenir des choses celestes, et divines: en fin, elle se sent esmeue, esguillonée, et incitée d'exprimer en vers les choses, qu'elle prevoit et contemple.

Unlike Ficino in the Symposium commentary, Tyard describes a poetic furor that eventuates in poetry. The first sentence quoted refers, as in Ficino, to the moral preparation of the soul, its purification through the subjugation of the other faculties to reason and the

turning of reason to things celestial. The next sentence makes it clear that the mind in its madness apprehends truth and, as the final stage, instead of uniting with the One in love, it is moved to express in verse what it has learned. It is noteworthy that Tyard extends the force of inspiration to the process of composition as well as that of invention.

In another passage Tyard is more explicit as to what knowledge is given by the Muses. In all the varieties of divine madness, he says,

sont cachées toutes les plus abstraites et sacrées choses, auxquelles l'humain Entendement puisse aspirer: mesmes la vraye et certaine cognoissance de toutes les disciplines, qui si longuement (et souvent en vain) entretiennent les studieux à leur poursuite. Car il ne faut croire, que defaillent en nous l'illustration de ces raiz divins, . . . nous puissions en aucune sorte nous conduire à la cognoissance des bonnes doctrines et sciences. . . .<sup>73</sup>

For Tyard, as for the more casual Platonists among his contemporaries, the poetic furor suffices to provide certain knowledge unattainable except through inspiration. This knowledge is not only of sacred things, which are traditionally known only through a form of divine illumination, but also of the school subjects, the arts and sciences, which medieval scholars had considered the natural reason sufficient to master. Tyard appears to be reflecting the skepticism and methodological uncertainty of the Renaissance.



The revival of a specifically Christian inspiration by the Protestant reformers and of a not unchristian inspiration by the Neoplatonists allowed the poets, who, as we saw at the end of the last chapter, had already begun to imitate the classical invocations, to give their imitations meaning. Those sacred poets who addressed the Word or the Holy Ghost would never have been in danger of having their invocations thought meaningless, though they might be thought presumptuous. The poets who invoked the Muses were in a different situation: their effort might be taken as a mere ornament included for form's sake, as, to be sure, it sometimes was in the Renaissance and regularly became when the seventeenth-century French classicists legislated the invocation as a necessary opening for the epic. The best invocations to the Muses, however, came alive not because the poets were addressing pagan goddesses, who at best had no reality and at worst were demons, but because they regarded the Muses and their gifts as standing for benevolent realities. The Muses could be neutral daemons, neither angels nor devils, of the sort favored by the Neoplatonists and hermeticists, or, even better, they could be agents of Christian grace.

The worship of the Muses proved that the pagans had some knowledge of Christian truth. Faustino Summo can cite Plato and Aristotle as authorities for inspiration,

only to go beyond them:

This is how much these two great minds, Plato and Aristotle, could comprehend with their natural light. And although one came much closer to the truth than the other, both nevertheless remained far from it; nor did they see, nor could they see, what we with our truly holy and divine light can understand, which is that such furors are all immediate gifts of God, and this is His spirit which He gives to those who please Him, freely and graciously in an ineffable and singular manner.<sup>74</sup>

That some Greek myths, such as Deucalion's flood, could be considered as imperfect versions of the Biblical narrative had been known for some time, and Hercules was, like his Hebrew counterpart Samson, a recognized type of Christ. The Renaissance learned from such medieval attempts at "saving" pagan literature as the Ovide Moralisé that the false gods could represent the true God. Hence, Ronsard could justify the imitation of pagan invocations, explaining that "les Muses, Apollon, Mercure, Pallas & autres telles deitez ne nous representent autre chose que les puissances de Dieu, auquel les premiers hommes avoyent donné plusieurs noms pour les divers effectz de son incomprehensible majesté."<sup>75</sup>

As a further example, we may consider what happened to Plato's comparison, in the Ion, of the descent of inspiration into the poet to a magnetic chain. This chain was christianized by Ficino, who made God the lodestone and the Angelic Mind and World Soul major

links; this account will figure prominently in Ronsard's "Ode à Michel de l'Hospital." More interesting, though, is Drayton's treatment of the chain in Endimion and Phoebe. He regards the nine Muses as derived from the nine orders of angels separating God and man and thereby conflates the magnetic chain of inspiration with the Great Chain of Being:

From these the Muses onely are derived,  
Which of the Angels were in nine contrived;  
These heaven-inspired Babes of memorie,  
Which by a like attracting Sympathy  
Apollus Prophets in theyr furies wrought,  
And theyr spirit inchanting numbers taught,  
To teach such as at Poesy repine,  
That it is onely heavenly and divine,  
And manifest her intellectual parts,  
Sucking the purest of the purest arts.<sup>76</sup>

Thus the theory of inspiration was renewed at a time when the intellectual milieu was flexible enough to allow the poets to make their claims. The poets would not, however, have been led to make those claims had they retained the low status they had possessed two centuries earlier. Nor would Neoplatonism have been sufficient in itself to raise the poet's worth. Rather the poets rose with a rising nationalism, and we cannot close this chapter without relating that nationalism, by some considered to be the distinguishing feature of the Renaissance, to the intellectual currents we have been discussing.

Eugenio Garin has argued that the Renaissance may

be said to begin with the start of a sense of history and the consequent realization of the pastness of the past.<sup>77</sup> Once the discontinuity is recognized, and medieval Christian culture ceases to be thought of as an extension of Roman culture, and the papacy ceases to be regarded as an extension of the office of Holy Roman Emperor, the differentness of the past can arouse the desire for emulation. Only in the Renaissance do the works of ancient culture become "classics" to be rigidly imitated for their excellence instead of cheerfully pillaged for the author's own purposes, the difference being roughly that between Ronsard's Franciad and Spenser's Faerie Queene.

Just as a new king may not be crowned until the old king is pronounced dead, so recognition of the discontinuity caused the rulers of the newly self-conscious nations to aspire to the mantle of Augustan Rome. Being resolutely determined to keep the city of God and the city of man under different administrations, they looked to the greatest secular government they knew for their model and for their criterion of success. The poets, then, were not imitating Virgil and Horace for purely literary reasons; they were leading a great movement to rival Roman civilization.

It was agreed that a great government and a great

poetry were reciprocally related. The Dante of De Monarchia wrote De Vulgari Eloquentia, and du Bellay urged the French to attempt the epic and thereby make the French language illustrious because he felt that the French themselves would then be made illustrious. If good poetry is a sign of good government and, as Spenser argues in his "October" eclogue, one cannot have a Virgil without a Maecenas, it is also true that good poetry makes a good government better. The poets provide virtuous examples for all classes to follow, spur on the nobles to great deeds by offering them the reward of eternal fame, and correct abuses through satire. They also enrich the language, which then becomes the foundation for a polite civilization. One concludes that it is difficult for a country to amount to anything without poets and that, should it manage to do so, it would still need poets if it wanted recognition for its achievement.

In other words, poets were now able to claim for themselves a more exalted place and greater power and responsibility than they had had before. And inspiration was a central part of this claim. The men of the Renaissance were too strongly Christian to believe that civilizations and poetry became great of themselves; rather they became great because such was the divine will. The Spirit of God, Ronsard wrote, appears like

a will-of-the-wisp, first in one time and place and then in another.<sup>78</sup> If the Spirit had now come to France or to England, it would naturally manifest itself in the production of more than human poetry. Poets are human barometers registering the divine pressure.

All of the extra-literary developments we have been discussing influenced one important literary development, the return of invention to prominence, with its attendant emphasis on the greatness of poetic content and the height of poetic knowledge. With this development inspiration was vitally connected. In the next chapter we shall examine the use that Renaissance poets and critics made of their new ability to claim inspiration.

NOTES: CHAPTER FOUR

1 Even the recent multi-volume history of philosophy under the general editorship of Etienne Gilson includes Renaissance philosophy only in the last chapter of the volume on medieval philosophy and as part of the background for Descartes.

2 The statement is made outright by Norman E. Nelson, "Peter Ramus and the Confusion of Logic, Rhetoric and Poetry," Univ. of Mich. Cont. in Mod. Phil., no. 2 (1947), p. 4, and implied on many a page of Walter J. Ong, Ramus, Method and the Decay of Dialogue (Cambridge, Mass., 1958).

3 Sir Thomas Browne, Religio Medici and other Works, ed. L. C. Martin (Oxford, 1964), pp. 51, 66.

4 Etienne Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages (New York, 1955), pp. 447, 759; R. H. Popkin, History of Skepticism from Erasmus to Descartes (New York, 1964), pp. 17-18.

5 Gilson, p. 759.

6 Sextus Empiricus, Scepticism, Man and God, ed. P. P. Hallie, tr. S. G. Etheridge (Middletown, Conn., 1964), p. 33.

7 Etienne Gilson, The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine, tr. L. E. M. Lynch (New York, 1960), p. 65.

8 Philosophies of Art and Beauty, ed. Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns (New York, 1964), p. 188.

9 Augustine, De Magistro, in Herman Shapiro, Medieval Philosophy (New York, 1964), pp. 21-41.

10 Gilson, Augustine, pp. 79-80.

11 Cf. Peter Lombard, The Four Books of Sentences in Richard McKeon, Selections from Medieval Philosophers, 2 vol., (New York, 1929), I, 193. "McKeon" in later notes in this chapter will refer to this anthology.

12 Erich Przywara, An Augustine Synthesis (New York, 1958), p. 52.

13 McKeon, II, xv-xvi.

14 Ibid., I, 137.

15 St. Bonaventura, The Mind's Road to God, tr. George Boas (Indianapolis, 1953), p. 44.

16 Ibid., p. 23.

17 Ibid., p. 24.

18 Ibid., p. 30.



- 19 McKeon, II, 33-34.
- 20 Gilson, History, p. 294.
- 21 McKeon, I, 320.
- 22 Ibid., II, 73.
- 23 Ibid., II, 75.
- 24 Ibid., II, 53.
- 25 Ibid., II, 75-76.
- 26 Ibid., II, 77.
- 27 Ibid., I, 243.
- 28 Bonaventura in Shapiro, Medieval Philosophy,  
pp. 369-383.
- 29 Richard McKeon, "Rhetoric in the Middle Ages,"  
Speculum, XVII (1942), 23, 25.
- 30 Summa Contra Gentiles I, viii in Shapiro,  
p. 347.
- 31 Gilson, History, pp. 389-99.
- 32 Shapiro, p. 446.
- 33 Selections in McKeon, II, 360-421, and Shapiro,

pp. 483-508, esp. 487-89, 500.

34 Cf. McKeon, II, 358.

35 H. A. Oberman, The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), p. 74.

36 McKeon, II, 371.

37 Shapiro, pp. 511, 516.

38 Desiderius Erasmus, The Praise of Folly, tr. John Wilson (Ann Arbor, 1960), p. 97. He is, though, hardest on Duns Scotus.

39 I draw on the discussion of Pico in the standard work on Renaissance fideism, Louis Bredvold, The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden (Ann Arbor, 1962), p. 28, and on Engenio Garin, Italian Humanism tr. Peter Munz (New York, 1965), pp. 133-34. For Erasmus, cf. Erasmus, p. 54.

40 Henrie Cornelius Agrippa, Of the Vanitie and Vncertaintie of Artes and Sciences, tr. Ja[m]es San[f]ord (London, 1569), "To the Reader," and p. 4r.

41 Ibid., pp. 4v, 5r.

42 Ibid., pp. 21r, 21v.

- 43 On Renaissance paradoxy, cf. R. L. Colie, Paradoxia Epidemica (Princeton, 1966).
- 44 Selected Essays of Montaigne, tr. John Florio, ed. Walter Kaiser (Boston, 1964), p. 85.
- 45 Ibid., p. 86.
- 46 Ibid., p. 87.
- 47 Ibid., p. 94.
- 48 Ibid., p. 145.
- 49 Ibid., pp. 246-47.
- 50 John Calvin, On the Christian Faith, ed. John T. McNeill (Indianapolis, 1957), p. 23.
- 51 Ibid., p. 24.
- 52 Cf. William F. Edwards, "The Averroism of Iacopo Zabarella (1533-1589)," Proceedings of the Twelfth Int. Cong. of Philosophy, vol. 9 (Florence, 1960), 95-97.
- 53 Ernst Cassirer, P. O. Kristeller and J. H. Randall, Jr., Renaissance Philosophy of Man (Chicago, 1963), pp. 94-5.
- 54 Ibid., p. 35.

55 Ibid., pp. 112n, 101. St. Augustine, The City of God, tr. Marcus Dods (New York, 1950), 253.

56 P. O. Kristeller, The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino, tr. Virginia Conant (Gloucester, Mass., 1964), p. 28.

57 Ibid., pp. 28, 26.

58 Pico della Mirandola, On the Dignity of Man, and Other Works, ed. Paul J. W. Miller (Indianapolis, 1965), p. 23.

59 Cf. Miller's "Introduction," Ibid., p. xxiii.

60 N. W. Gilbert, Renaissance Concepts of Method (New York, 1960), 89-91.

61 Tomasso Campanella, "The Defense of Galileo," ed. Grant McColley, Smith College Studies in History XXII, Nos. 3-4.

62 Galileo Galilei, Dialogues Concerning Two New Sciences, tr. Henry Crew and Alfonso de Salvio (New York, 1914), pp. 137-8.

63 Quirinus Breen, "Giovanni Pico della Mirandola on the Conflict of Philosophy and Rhetoric," JHI XIII (1952), 384-412 includes a translation of the

correspondence between Pico and Ermolao Barbero.

64 Erasmus, pp. 89-90.

65 Kristeller, p. 220.

66 Plotinus, The Enneads, tr. Stephen MacKenna, 2nd ed. (New York, n. d.), pp. 422-3..

67 Ibid., p. 431.

68 M. W. Bundy, The Theory of Imagination in Classical and Medieval Thought (Urbana, 1927), pp. 141-143.

69 Kristeller, p. 309.

70 Marsilio Ficino, Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plato's Symposium, tr. Sears R. Jayne, Univ. of Missouri Stud., XIX (1944), no. 1, p. 231.

71 Frances A. Yates, The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century (London, 1947), pp. 79-82.

72 Pontus de Tyard, Solitaire Premier, ed. Silvio Baridon (Geneve, 1950), p. 22.

73 Ibid., p. 18.

74 Cited in Baxter Hathaway, The Age of Criticism (Ithaca, 1962), pp. 424-425.

75 Pierre de Ronsard, Oeuvres Completes, ed. Paul Laumonier, 8 vol. (Paris, 1918-19) VII, 46.

76 Michael Drayton, The Works of Michael Drayton, ed. J. W. Hebel (Oxford, 1931-3) I, 153.

77 Garin, passim.

78 Ronsard, VII, 404.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE USES OF INSPIRATION IN THE RENAISSANCE

The position of poetry at the end of the Middle Ages bears some resemblance to its position at their beginning. That is, poetry was emancipating itself from the restrictive but also protective association with the trivium which medieval educators had established; and, like Pico's man, its new-found freedom to make its own place put it in as much danger of falling below the beasts as of rising above the angels.

We recall that, in the twelfth century, John of Salisbury, speaking for traditional education, had protested that poetry must either be a part of grammar or be dropped from the curriculum and had defended poetry as part of his defense of grammar. Similarly, in the twelfth-and thirteenth-century manuals by Geoffroi de Vinsauf and others, poetry was considered as a part of rhetoric (or a "second rhetoric," as it would be called later), and rhetoric was not considered in need of justification. Finally, the scholastics found a place for poetry within the confines of logic and defended the

function they thought it was qualified to fulfill. None of these groups thought very highly of poetry; but so long as it knew its place, none of them, with isolated individual exceptions, wished to do away with it.

Poetry's claim to knowledge, and with that its vulnerability, was limited by its association with the trivium, for grammar, rhetoric and logic are faculties or instruments having no proper subject matter. If poetry is, for example, logic, then says G. P. Pigna (1554) it must take its content from the scientiae, or bodies of knowledge.<sup>1</sup> In this situation, the only charge that can be levelled against poetry is Agrippa's that

it is a verie slender, and bare Arte which of it selfe is altogeather a foolishe thinge, excepte it be attired and fauoured with some other Discipline. An Arte that is alwaies hungerie, and eatinge up other mens breade like mise. . . .<sup>2</sup>

However, most Renaissance apologists realized the need for making it a scientia instead of a facultas. The question then arose as to what knowledge poetry could convey, and the solution, first stated by Albertino Mussato in the early 1300's,<sup>3</sup> though not developed and popularized until nearly a century later by Petrarch, Boccaccio and Salutati, was to make of poetry an exalted philosophy or theology. Significantly, these early humanists achieve the conversion of poetry into theology not by rejecting the scholastic conception of poetry but



by ignoring it. Thus, they build their case on a passage in Aristotle's Metaphysics<sup>4</sup> which had been the foundation for the attack on poetry. Aristotle remarked that the first theologians were poets, e.g., Homer and Hesiod. He then went on to point up their inadequacies as metaphysicians, but this was not sufficient for Christians, who understood from the passage that the early poets had led the Greeks to believe in false gods. For Boccaccio, though, the passage simply establishes a connection between poetry and theology, the highest form of knowledge.

Boccaccio does not regard the poets as purveyors of a false religion because he regards them as referring allegorically to the true God. He asserts, and Salutati re-iterates, that all metaphor and parable are poetry and that, therefore, the Bible is a poem. They ignore St. Thomas's distinction between God's metaphors, which are above reason, and the poet's, which are below it, and claim for poetry in general the quasi-scriptural status that Dante claimed for his Comedy. Poetry, says Salutati, is God's gift to the divinely inspired Moses to enable man to speak about Him.<sup>5</sup> This position will be strengthened by the negative theology of Nicholas of Cusa, which will place all discussion of God outside the bounds of logical discourse, and by the Neoplatonists' confusion of theology, philosophy, and poetry, with their attribution to each of the same allegorical method.

Boccaccio's defense of poetry occurs in the midst of a vast undertaking in allegorizing the ancient myths, and his theory of poetry tends to identify it with myth. This tendency will be solidified by the later humanists who, contemptuously disregarding most medieval poetry, were rather in the position, vis à vis poetry, of the early Church fathers, who also equated it with fable. Moreover, when Aristotle's Poetics became influential in the sixteenth century, the equation would have the Philosopher's support.

Unfortunately, poetry could not claim its own knowledge without taking responsibility for the verity of that knowledge; the potentiality for discovering truth was with difficulty separated from the potentiality for creating error, and to the extent that a truth about divinity was admirable, a falsehood about it was pernicious. The fables which Boccaccio lauded for their ingenious concealment of the truth had been attacked by the Church fathers for deceiving the people, and their condemnations were bound to become current as an answer to the humanists' praise. If a humanist like Lionardo Bruni could find Virgil better reading than the Bible,<sup>6</sup> then the world needed to be reminded of Jerome's dream, and the Neoplatonic admirers of poetry were clearly paying insufficient attention to the Republic. The more

poetry sought to rise, the greater the need some felt to put it in its place.

The Renaissance attacks on poetry, then, are valuable not only because they help us to understand the defenses but also because they present inverse testimony for the defenders' position. None of them regards poetry as impotent; in fact, they extend its scope for evil at least as far as the defenders extend its scope for good. Poetry as black magic is as effective as poetry as white magic; where the medieval poet was a Wagner, the Renaissance poet is a Faustus.

The Renaissance is more an age of the Excluded Middle than one of the Golden Mean. Man, for a Calvin or a Hamlet, is either everything or nothing, and the consciousness of one includes the consciousness of the other; only one for whom man has been "the paragon of animals" could grow so disappointed in him to call him the "quintessence of dust." Similarly, when the Congregation of the Index Expurgatorius in 1563 charged the poets with deliberate intention to deceive,<sup>7</sup> that was the prelude to the great Counter-reformation effort to employ future poetry in support of the faith.

Gosson is likewise a prelude to Sidney, and Agrippa and Sir Martyn Cognet spur on poetry's defenders. All testify that poetry is not something one can be moderate

about. Thus, Cognet opposes poetry and truth: poetic practice involves the distortion of history to please an audience, and Socrates "was y<sup>l</sup> brought vp to poesie because he loued the truth."<sup>8</sup> For Gosson, poems are "the fathers of lyes, Pipes of vanitie, & Schools of Abuse,"<sup>9</sup> the first metaphor being one traditionally applied to the devil and the second suggesting an inspiration not divine but false. Agrippa considers poetry "an Arte, that was devised to no other ende, but to please the eares of foolishe men with wanton Rithmes . . . and to deceiue mens mindes with the delecration of fables, and with fardels of lies."<sup>10</sup> Poetry is the chief source of lies, not only about men but, much worse, about the gods, for

with venemous eloquence of wordes, and with pernicious pleasantnesse of verse, writing of their natiuities, their deathes, . . . their fornications, their advouterie, their accompanying with men and beastes, & worse then these, if any maie be more shameful and dishonest, poetry dothe not onlie deceiue & infecte them which then lived, but dothe moreouer make the posteritie parttaker of these furious venims . . . & who so euer shee that once infecte with her doctrine and lies, she cōstraineth to rage with the like woodnesse, as it were with the bitings of a madde dogge.<sup>11</sup>

In making poetry responsible for the sins of the Greek gods, Agrippa hurls invectives of which Tertullian would be proud.

It should be noted that some of the defenders of

poetry, most notable Castelvetro, agreed with the attackers that poetry deceives the audience for the mere purpose of entertaining it. These critics chose to jettison the claim to knowledge and to defend poetry on purely recreational grounds. Since this view flourishes primarily in the seventeenth and later centuries, it need not be discussed here.

Even those critics who did not agree with the attackers were, in a sense, playing into their hands when they identified poetry and fiction. Where modern critics have attempted to solve the truth-status of fiction by considering it as neither true nor false but as something in between which, on Aristotle's authority, they call "possible" or "verisimilar,"<sup>12</sup> the first Renaissance commentator on the Poetics regards the Philosopher as having relegated poetry to the realm of the false,<sup>13</sup> and, in general, Renaissance treatment of the problem suffers from an Excluded Middle. In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century criticism, fiction and its constituent parts, the verisimilar and the marvelous, tend to be considered as kinds of truth or as kinds of falsehood.

Of the two, fiction had stronger connotations of falsehood. As late as 1611 Randle Cotgrave's A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues could

translate une fiction as "a fiction, invention, lie, fib, cog . . ." <sup>14</sup> and, four years later, the author of A Refutation of the Apology for Actors could enter upon the following argument:

A comedy is not like unto truth, because it is wholly composed of fables and vanities, and fables and vanities are lies and deceits, and lies and deceits are clean contrary to truth, and altogether unlike it, even as virtue is unlike to vice. <sup>15</sup>

The connection of poetry with fiction, then, raises acutely the problem of belief. If poetry seeks to have the reader believe in the historicity of its narrative, is it not deceiving him and is it not therefore morally reprehensible? Some critics strove to answer this charge by denying that the poet sought belief for his fable, particularly if the fable contained an example of immorality. Lionardo Bruni insists, "When I read the loves of Aeneas and Dido in the Aeneid I pay my tribute of admiration to the genius of the poet, but the matter itself I know to be a fiction, and thus it leaves no moral impression. . . ." <sup>16</sup> Bruni argues that he is not tempted to follow a vicious example when he knows the example to be fictional, and, if he is not tempted, then Virgil can be exonerated of the charge of tempting him. He does not face up to the fact that his knowledge of the unhistorical nature of the encounter between Dido and Aeneas is external to the poem: Virgil did

not mark off the episode as fictional or act as if he expected less belief for it than for the rest of his epic.

His defense is, moreover, shortsighted in another, more significant way. He does not see that, by denying the fable any immoral effect, he is denying it a moral effect as well. His statement reverts to St. Augustine's position that poetry does not deceive because it does not come near enough to the truth to do so: no one believes Medea flew.<sup>17</sup> In other words, Bruni's defense implies a position which not even the attackers of poetry held, the impotence of fiction.

Though Bruni does not seem to have been aware of this implication, later critics were. The seventeenth-century French critic Chapelain is fully aware

that where belief is lacking attention or feeling also fail; but where feeling does not exist there cannot be any emotion nor consequently any katharsis, nor any improvement in the morals of mankind, which is the purpose of poetry. Belief is then absolutely necessary in poetry. But what belief can we have in a fable which is admitted to be a fable?<sup>18</sup>

His answer, that we believe the meaning we draw from the fable, ignores the question of whether we will draw a meaning from something we have just dismissed as fictional, and, when he goes on to champion verisimilitude as a means of making the reader accept the

poem as true, it is clear that self-confessed fiction makes his uncomfortable.

And well it might, for Lionardo Salviati (1584) had shown the extent to which Bruni's line of defense might be used against the poet. His argument deserves quoting at length, for it is the best Renaissance indictment against feigning evil. He begins with the proposition that poetry is recognized as fiction and, on this, builds his condemnation:

When poetry puts forward the virtues, no benefit results; for since we quickly recognize them as false, we do not found our actions upon those good examples. On the contrary, by showing us the vices the poet frequently does us much harm. For vice is completely the prey of the passions, and these passions constitute properly the power of the poem: it excites them, it works upon them, it exercises its force over them, it is with respect to them that poetry excels. Nor is damage of this kind compensated by blame or punishment of vice [within the poem]; for our desire, without wishing to hear out the argument, seizes suddenly upon what pleases it and accepts it for true; but when unpleasant things are involved, it has recourse to reason and says, "These are mere stories, what's the use of thinking about them?"<sup>19</sup>

This argument would not only render immoral such patently moral plays as Richard III and Dr. Faustus but would, if carried far enough, do away with mimesis altogether.

Salviati states very well one of the chief problems of Renaissance and neoclassical criticism. If the fable



exists for the sake of the allegory, what happens when one ignores the allegory? One solution, the fairly conservative one, is to clarify the relationship between fable and allegory in such a way that the allegory cannot be ignored. This we find stated in Sidney's Apology and exemplified in The Faerie Queen. The other three solutions, however, testify along with Salviati to the weakened belief in allegory that becomes manifest in the late seventeenth century. Thus, the second solution is to deny the difference between poetry and fact, to deny, in short, that the narrative is fiction. This is the position of Du Bartas and Milton. The third solution is to admit in criticism that poetry is fiction but to insist that the poem may not present itself as fiction and must try for the reader's belief through verisimilitude. Ronsard equivocates between this position and the previous one, but Tasso and most of the neoclassicists embrace it. The fourth solution, which we have already mentioned, is to admit both in criticism and in the poem that it is fiction, to assert that one is primarily an entertainer, and to leave the reader free to draw instruction from the fiction. This position is implicit in Ariosto and Rabelais and enters into the development of the novel with Fielding, just as the previous solution enters into the novel with

Defoe.

Related to these views on the nature of poetry were three views on the nature of the poet and of poetic composition. Where the attackers asserted that the poet was a liar, the apologists said he was an imitator, a vates, or a maker. The Renaissance critics tended to use these terms with a good deal of flexibility, for all three terms had appeared in ancient criticism; and, being good humanists, they felt that any theory they might construct had to use and account for the terms, much as scientists reconstruct their theories to "save appearances." Thus, Sidney's poet makes his fiction through imitating the divine Ideas which his vates-like nature enables him to see. Nonetheless, the three terms are more easily opposed than united and, when they are united, it is usually through a shift in meaning in one or more of them, as in Sidney's taking the object of "imitation" to be neither the historical actions of men nor literary models but the Platonic Ideas.

McKeon has written several essays detailing the numerous meanings of imitation in literary history, and we will not attempt to summarize them here.<sup>20</sup> Suffice it to say that most forms of imitation, insofar as in some way they involve copying, are opposed to the purest invention or making, which depends solely on the poet's

ingenium. The form of imitation that figured most in the Renaissance as a process of composition was the most unAristotelian but also most neoAristotelian practice of imitating the ancient poets. This, of all forms of imitation, tends to be the least congenial to invention, for where Nature, however conceived, must be recreated in the medium of poetry, Virgil needs only to be paraphrased. Imitation of the classics, especially when taken as literally and heavyhandedly as it often was, constricted invention in making everything without a Greek or Roman pedigree suspect, limited novelty to variations or combinations of the familiar and, in encouraging the lifting of Homeric and Virgilian devices from the literary contexts which gave them meaning, guaranteed superficiality.

Imitation of the ancients was the least daring of the new processes of composition and probably appealed to the humanists for that reason. Medieval poets, we recall, had made much of their dependence on "auctours"; all the new imitation does is to narrow radically the approved literary sources and to limit the extent to which the poet may depart from them. Moreover, imitation involves primarily formal concerns and hence is easily accommodated to the overriding medieval concern with poetic rhetoric: one might even say that the chief appeal of the classics to the humanists was

that they were felt to embody a superior rhetoric.

The theory of inspiration, on the other hand, stresses content above form and sanctifies a freedom of invention, though at the same time it may allow for a degree of imitation in that all poetry comes from the same source, be it the Muse or the Holy Ghost, and therefore a new poem may share features with an old one. Inspiration is much more of a departure from the medieval view than imitation, though not so much a departure as the third view, which allows the poet to create on his own, without divine assistance. Inspiration depends on, and assists, a rise in importance of invention, but when invention becomes important for its own sake and not for the revelation of truth, it separates itself from inspiration and functions as wit.

"Creation," meaning creation ex nihilo, is a term medieval philosophers had zealously guarded for the Creator. The artist made his work not out of nothing but out of material in which God had planted the form in potentia.<sup>21</sup> In the Renaissance, however, some considered the poet to "create" his poems from his own invention, much as God created through His Word. The conception of the poet as maker could, then, be extended to make the poet an analogue of God, and we occasionally find this analogy side by side with the

claim to inspiration, for both exalt the poet. Nonetheless, the poet as God-like must be sharply distinguished from the poet as God's instrument, for the two concepts resolve themselves into the distinction between ingenium and inspiration. If the poet is a vates, control of the poem is not his but God's; if he is a maker, control of the poem is his and god-like. The vates transmits something of God's knowledge of Nature, but the maker "creates a second Nature." The maker's knowledge is perfect not because it comes from God but because, like God, he knows perfectly the world he creates.

It should be noted that invention and wit, though potentially opposed to inspiration, are not, at least in the Renaissance, equated with inspiration's traditional opposite, imagination. In the Neoplatonic Renaissance, imagination continued to be as much maligned as ever,<sup>22</sup> and the apologists have little use for it. Poetry is no longer restricted to appearances and can function on any level of knowledge.

Bringing together the four kinds of poem one can write and the three processes of composition, we may make some further distinctions. Imitation may figure in all four kinds of poem, but its use is limited in the second and fourth kinds, which put all responsibility

for the poem on the Muse and the wit respectively. Inspiration occurs in the first three and is excluded in the fourth; but in the first a genuine inspiration is connected not so much with the narrative, which is acknowledged to be a fiction, as with the moral norms revealed by the allegory, for whose rectitude it vouches; in the second neither the narrative nor the inspiration is to be taken as fictional; and in the third the inspiration is a fiction which serves to render credible the fictional narrative. Invention dominates the fourth kind of poem and figures in the other three, with the stipulation that the invention in the second kind is God's or the Muse's.

The foregoing schematization will, hopefully, be justified and clarified in the remainder of this chapter and in the chapters to come, where we will examine the use of inspiration, and the failure or refusal to use it, in creating a truth-status for poetry. We begin, indeed we have already begun, with the Italians, who, in literary criticism as in other fields, were taking the lead.

Though we have argued that respect for poetry as a means of knowledge and the belief that poetry is inspired are interdependent, we have also seen that the earliest apologists for poetry, of whom Boccaccio

is the chief, manifested their respect for poetry with little, and undeveloped, recourse to the theory of inspiration, however much that theory may have been implied in their insistence on the congruence of biblical and poetic metaphor. Without this theory, they were in danger of begging the question of poetry's truth-status. Thus Brunì (1405), whom we have already found troubled over the credibility of fables, has difficulty establishing why the great poets should be included in a true education. He claims that "in their writings we find deep speculations upon Nature, and upon the Causes and Origins of things, which must carry weight with us both from their antiquity and from their authorship."<sup>23</sup> But the value of their authorship is precisely what Brunì is arguing for, and the value of antiquity, if not accepted as given, depends on the value of the authors of antiquity.

Brunì makes a better case when, drawing on the medieval tradition that Virgil was a prophet and a magus, he transfers the magical aura from Virgil the man to Virgil the poet, and hence to all poets. Referring to the "Fourth Eclogue," he states that "such power of reading the future is implied in the name 'vates,' so often given to the true poet, and we must all recognize in such a one a certain 'possession,' as by a

Power other and stronger than himself."<sup>24</sup> Philology and folk-tradition may not make the best foundation for a theory of inspiration, but they have to suffice for Bruni and the other pre-Ficinian defenders of poetry.

For the early humanists poetry was one concern of many. They did not write systematic arts poétiques. Their defenses of poetry appear in epistles, like Salutati's, in treatises on education, like Bruni's, and in encyclopaedias, like Boccaccio's. Just as much of the scientific work of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries took place in the context of commentaries on the Sentences, so the Ars Poetica, the major form of Renaissance literary criticism, was to grow as an adaptation of one or more classical texts. Before it could grow, the texts had to become available, and differences of opinion had to be noted so that the desire to resolve them could furnish the impetus to a critical treatise.

Of great importance was the advent of Florentine Neoplatonism, which elaborated upon the new exalted view of poetry and gave it a sound philosophical foundation in Platonic realism and the theory of the four sacred furors. Ficino's Theologica Platonica appeared in 1474, six years after he completed his translation of Plato, and his theories were immediately trumpeted forth by members of his circle. Christoforo



Landino, in his edition of Dante, considers the "divine fury" essential to poetry: "stimulated by the divine spirit, poetry sets forth exalted and divine thoughts and feeds the mind with heavenly ambrosia."<sup>25</sup>

Poliziano's "Nutricia" likewise registers enthusiastic praise for enthusiasm.

Aristotle's Poetics appeared first via a Latin translation of Averroes's paraphrase in 1481, then in Valla's translation of 1498 and in the Greek text in 1508.<sup>26</sup> Its authority was early recognized but its impact was at first softened because its passages were interpreted in the light of Platonic or Horatian doctrines or in congruence with the medieval theory of poetry, which had passed for "Aristotelian." Thus, Poetics 55a22 was interpreted to bring Aristotle into line with Plato on the necessity of the poetic furor, and Aristotle's interpreters continued to argue that poetry delights in order to instruct, even though the Poetics provides a much better foundation for interpreting the end of mimesis as catharsis or as aesthetic pleasure.

Robortello, the first commentator on the Poetics, stayed remarkably close to the scholastic treatment of poetry as a part of logic, only where they assigned to poetry the vague "imaginative truth," he, having the benefit of Aristotle's discussion of fable, argued that it deals with the "false."<sup>27</sup>

Horace's Ars Poetica seems never to have been lost, though its influence waxed and waned. Spingarn has remarked that a translation of Horace appears at or near the proliferation of arts poétiques in the Italian, French and English vernaculars.<sup>28</sup> Since Horace was regarded as an interpreter of Aristotle, Renaissance critics interpreting Aristotle could regard themselves as imitating Horace. Moreover, Horace seems more congenial to the interests and capacities of many of the critics than Aristotle or Plato, and he may be regarded as the stock to which they are grafted.

The Renaissance arts poétiques differ from the earlier arts de la seconde rhétorique in that the medieval manuals were concerned solely with poema, the formal metrical and stylistic aspects of poetry, while the Renaissance treatises, even when they devote most of their space to schemes and tropes, take up matters of poesis and poeta, the nature of poetry, of the poet, and of poetic composition. The difference is simply another manifestation of the altered status of poetry. In the intellectualist Middle Ages, when theory was more noble than practice, Hugh of St. Victor and St. Bonaventura could classify poetry with the mechanical arts because they felt it lacked a theory and deserved none. In the Renaissance, theory was amply supplied.

The most thorough-going believers in inspiration, of course, did not write arts poétiques, for they believed that poetry, if an art, was the art of God alone. There is a basic inconsistency between insisting on the necessity for inspiration and providing detailed instructions for composition, but this inconsistency was not generally noted, and the claim to inspiration became a regular feature of the theoretical sections of the art poétique, only to have its implications forgotten in the rest of the work. It is the rare critic who, like Thomas Sebillet, the author of the first French art of poetry, apologizes for calling an art what he should properly call divine infusion and explains, "Car ce qu'en Poésie est nommé art . . . n'est rien que la nue escorce de Poésie, qui couvre artificieusement sa naturelle seve et son ame naturellement divine."<sup>29</sup>

It is clear that most of the critics used the theory for apologetic purposes. It was a means of exalting the poet's claim to knowledge and, thereby, of glorifying the subject the critic was going to teach. In fact, the prestige of the theory was such that it would even be used metaphorically for opposing processes of composition, and so it is in the first Italian De Arte Poetica.

When Vida wrote his Christiad, he began with an invocation that could be a source for passages in Paradise Lost, an appeal for "spiritual light, so that my mortal tongue may utter things immortal and unfold the design of the Almighty Father and the reasons for a death so cruel,"<sup>30</sup> but when he wrote his De Arte Poetica (c.1520), perhaps because he regarded himself as imitating Horace, he omitted reference to the Almighty Father and did not take inspiration so seriously. True, he does consider poetry a calling, and he has a fine passage on a youth so enamoured of the Heliconian nymphs that he is fit for nothing but poetry, a youth with whom Ronsard would identify himself.<sup>31</sup> However, he is clearly a champion of learning through imitation, who believes that rules for writing can be discovered from the classics which will enable those who are not inspired to write as though they are.

The first two books of De Arte Poetica begin with invocations to the Muses to reveal their "mysteries" to Vida so that he may pass them on to aspiring poets. There is nothing wrong with the invocations themselves, but the very act of invoking is paradoxical, for Vida asks the Muses to tell him that which, once he has set it down, will make further invocation unnecessary.

Once he knows their secrets, his book, being more accessible than they, will replace them. He, not they, will lead future poets to the top of Mount Helicon.<sup>32</sup> In other words, the Muses are equated with a limited number of rules for composition, rules which are also manifest in the writings of the ancients. At the start of the essay, Vida takes the Muses for his authority, thereby giving himself a certain oracular dignity, but, as the essay progresses, the Muses are replaced by Homer and Virgil.

The shift from the superficial Muse-worship to deep bardolatry is accomplished without altering the language of inspiration. Just as in Plato's magnetic chain Homer's Muse was seen as affecting his rhapsode Ion, so the bard's inspiration is sufficient for succeeding poets. Homer is the intermediary between the poets and the god of poetry, the one

Whom with a reverent eye the rest regard,  
And owe their raptures to the sovereign bard;  
Through him their god their panting souls  
    inspires,  
Swells every breast and warms with all his  
    fires.<sup>33</sup>

Vida indicates the prestige of inspiration by using its terminology for an opposing method of composition. Not only Nature and Homer but the Muse and Homer are the same. Apollo's priests are urged to go forth and dutifully pillage the classics.

Vida's contribution to the theory's popularity can be seen in the way both supporters and attackers of imitation pick up his metaphor. Giraldi Cinthio (1549), whose praise of imitation is more moderate than Vida's, treats the metaphor literally and psychologically. As the young poet reads the master,

there will work in him the spirit that caused the activity of the poet whose work he reads, and it will awaken in him a flame that little by little will set his mind on fire and will fill him with the fury that the Greeks call enthusiasm; roused by this, as though stung by a gadfly, he will be as it were forced to put on paper those things that are born in his mind because of his reading of that author.<sup>34</sup>

Imitation, then, becomes the background for a rationalizing and trivializing of the concept of poetic furor. No longer producing masterpieces, the furor is merely the desire to imitate an admired literary work.

Those who attack imitation do so by returning to the original meaning of inspiration. It is probably with Vida in mind that the heroic enthusiast Giordano Bruno rejects the possibility of recipes for composition. Much as T. S. Eliot will put it in East Coker, Bruno asserts that rules only hold for the past performances from which they have been derived; they are no help in mastering new experience for a new poem. He concludes that only a poet who lacks a Muse of his own will follow Homer's.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, even George Chapman, who had reason to welcome

Vida's bardolatry, denied that imitation of Homer could make anyone better than second-best. Virgil is inferior to Homer because he derives his invention from him and does not, like Homer, look directly to the Muse, who alone has access to the universal world depicted on Achilles's shield.<sup>36</sup>

At another point, Vida invokes the theory of inspiration to justify the inclusion of incredible fictions, or, as it would come to be called, the "marvelous." Acknowledging that the story of Bellerophon's slaying the Chimera is unbelievable, Vida argues, as Bruni did before him, that it was not meant to be believed:

For those surprising fictions are designed  
With their sweet falsehoods to delight the  
mind;  
The bards expect no credit should be given  
To the bare lie, though authorized by Heaven,  
Which oft by confidence they vent abroad,  
Beneath the needful sanction of a god.<sup>37</sup>

Vida's position here is extraordinary, perhaps because it is confused. The marvelous, which in the eighteenth century was to be a chief source of the "sublime," was recognized by Renaissance critics as essential to poetry, not so much for its own sake, like the sublime, as in making palatable the instruction the poem sought to convey. Unfortunately, something became marvelous in proportion to its remoteness from the ordinary and, therefore, in proportion to its

incredibility. The marvelous, then, threatened to present, in a heightened form, the problem of the self-confessed fiction or the deliberate falsehood. To avoid this problem Tasso would advocate the sole use of the Christian marvelous, which could rally belief in God's omnipotence to its support. However, to some poets the Christian marvelous smacked of taking God's name in vain, and others merely preferred pagan marvels. They accounted for these marvels by citing the Muse as authority. Guilio Cammillo (1560), for one, gives the following advice:

All phantastic images, like Saturn, the Titans, the Giants, the Centaurs, the Sirens, the Tritons, the Cyclops and Perseus are suitable for poetry. For poetry has to state things that transcend man's nature in a miraculous manner. . . . It must mention universally and in an extraordinary manner things that are incredible. . . . One ought not to appear to be saying these things oneself, but . . . see to it that the speech in question appears to be the speech of the gods.<sup>38</sup>

After all, inspiration is itself a marvel and, if the reader will accept that, then he will at least suspend disbelief in the god's authority.

Vida, on the other hand, seems to be arguing that divine sanction is necessary for propagating a story that no one is expected to believe, he takes away the necessity for invoking divine aid, and one defense cancels out the other. Perhaps he means to apply the



"needful sanction" to the act of lying, but since the falsehood does not deceive and causes delight, the fabulist hardly needs divine protection. The passage seems to be merely a final instance of Vida's unreflecting and casual use of inspiration, which only his familiarity with the doctrine could make possible.

The Zodiake of Life by Marcellus Palingenius, though only about ten years later than Vida's essay in time, is far from it in its view of poetry. This work upholds a high didacticism and manifests its dependence on inspiration in a number of invocations. Palingenius has a strong sense of the limitations of man's capacity to know, and he argues that, of all those who speculate, the poet is most trustworthy because his invention alone is inspired:

Eche one presuming of his wit, iuenteth matters  
    newe,  
But Poets specially, to whom most confidence  
    is dewe,  
For they may by authoritie of any matters  
    write,  
With Bacchus rage they moued be, and with  
    Apolloes sprite.<sup>39</sup>

His opening invocation is addressed to Apollo, who lifts man from baseness and supports his poor wit with grace. With Apollo's favor Palingenius will ascend the skies and describe what he sees there. He feels that much poetry is vicious but defends true poetry as a source of profit, especially for the young. Thus, from the outset, he

draws a sharp distinction between works which cater to vain delight and works which teach, and he associates his endeavor with the latter.<sup>40</sup>

A second invocation to Apollo, in Book IV, establishes the poet's inspiration by recounting how it occurred:

Thus, whylste at Castale spryngs on knees  
my humble sute declard  
The Muses all about me paste, the God my  
prayers hard,  
From towers of Delphos high he heard, and  
straight as semde to me  
The steeple beckt, and therewithal a shining  
light I see  
From out the Chauncell came, and eke, a  
wondrous voyce I heare,  
Which wyth these words, as the me thought,  
resounded in mine eare.

Phoebus promises the poet immortal fame as a reward for the undertaking he eagerly continues.<sup>41</sup>

Some forty pages after he has described his fruitful encounter with the god of light, Palingenius suddenly stops short. He realizes that there are some cocksure wits who will deny that he is inspired or that he deserves the name of poet

Because I write not fansies fond, and monsters  
maruelous,  
And fayning not deceiue the eares, of such as  
credit us.  
For they suppose the Poets parte, is only lies  
to tell:  
As if it were a thing to yile, for them with  
truth to mell. . . .<sup>42</sup>

Palingenius is now ready to defend his conception of poetry against the vain poetry he opposed at the beginning

of the poem. He is against fables and particularly against the fabulously marvelous because he has only contempt for delight unaccompanied by instruction. Yet, he does not reject the marvelous or the desire to please as well as teach. The entire Zodiacke of Life, and particularly the sections we are coming to, is an exercise in displaying the true marvelous, the wonders of the heavens, and the reader is expected to experience an awed pleasure at the harmony that is revealed to him. Consequently, in attacking empty rhetoric in general and superficial imitation of the classics in particular, Palingenius is not opposing didactic to aesthetic aims but rejecting a shallow aesthetic on the ground that, as Cowley will later put it, "Truth is truest Poesie":

If needes we must such trifles write and use  
such pleasant lies,  
Troth thus dispisde, Of many tounge is had, but  
few are wise.  
(Beleue mee well) and many write with haute  
verses hy:  
And many haue the Graecians tounge, and Latin  
perfectly.  
And while so many things they know their  
wisdome is but thin:  
With princely words theyr stile is deckt, but  
small effect within.  
What learneth he that readeth them? what  
knowledge hath he got?  
But dreames and folish fansies fond, that life  
here profit not,  
Which for to know, and not to know, is all of  
one effect.<sup>43</sup>

Palingenius is able to sound like Francis Bacon berating the scholastics because, like Bacon, he feels

he knows what profitable knowledge is and how to get it. There the resemblance ends, however, for the knowledge he wishes is Platonic and his means of arriving at it is through inspiration.

Platonic realism and inspiration are, in fact, the central ingredients of his aesthetic. "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty," when both are Platonic hypostases: only the highest truth has the integrity, comprehensiveness and internal harmony to qualify as the highest beauty. This truth is the goal of inspiration, as Palingenius makes clear in his invocation to Book VII. At this point, the poet has but a short distance to rise before he will reach the seat of Jove at the apex of the sky, from which he will survey the principles of physics, beginning with the Prime Mover. As he spurs on his Muse, he lets us know how literally he takes the common admonition to choose a high subject, and he gives the first indication of the true realm of poetry, the Platonic heaven to which he is coming:

My Muse aloft raise up thy self, and use a  
better flite:  
Mount up on highe, I think it scorne of base  
affaires to write.  
More great renoune, and glory more, in  
haughty matters lyes  
View thou the Gods, and take thy course  
throughout the starry Skyes:  
Where Sprigtime laste for euermore, where  
Peace doth neuer quaile,  
Where Sunne doth shine cōtinually, where  
Light doth neuer fayle. . . .<sup>44</sup>

The metaphors point to the immutability of the celestial world, where there are no seasons and none of the elemental strife which characterizes the world below. If the poet is to win eternal fame, he must have an eternal subject.

Palingenius argues for the existence of an immaterial world transcending the senses' capacity. His premise is Augustinian: if the mind is superior to the senses, then it should not have to depend on them for knowledge of the world. We cannot maintain the mind's superiority unless we also allow it a world which it alone can know, a world that excels the world known by the sense as much as the one instrument of knowledge excels the other:

And minde without his proper world a Cyphar  
should remaine,  
And none but dreames and fancies finde,  
w'shapes and shadows vaine.  
Thus eyther nothing is the minde, or els  
hath nature wrought  
A worlde agreeing to the same, wherein  
contained are thought  
Unfained, chiefe, and purest things . . .<sup>45</sup>

Because matter is no obstacle to development in this mental world, everything assumes its true shape, and knowledge of the Platonic world, therefore, enables us to know what the things of our world would be if they could totally realize their potentials:

All things more sound & perfect there, & all  
things whole appeare,

We have but portions of the same which are  
increased here  
By nature's fault and great defect. . . .<sup>46</sup>

Since the truest knowledge is of universals, and universals, according to Aristotle, are always imperfectly realized in matter, then the Aristotelian method of knowing through abstraction from sense-data is necessarily imperfect as well. Platonic realism allows inspiration to seize upon the unembodied universal and thereby to gain complete knowledge not only of it alone but of its embodiment in matter as well. Inspiration turns the poet from the dark mirror of the material world to the bright mirror of the Ideas and then, since each mirror reflects the other, the bright mirror becomes an instrument for seeing the things of this world more clearly. Inspiration and the Ideas, then, are as dependent on each other as the knower and the known, both of which take on meaning only in the act of knowing.

It may be argued that The Zodiacke of Life does little to justify the aesthetic it preaches, but it would be foolish to discount the aesthetic for that reason. The Platonic world is, as Palingenius says, "unfained," but, at the same time, only the inspired poet has access to it and, hence, it provides all the freedom of fiction. The world Palingenius describes

is not unlike Spenser's faeryland, and because of its element of Platonic realism Spenser's allegory is more than the thing of mere projections and personifications that C. S. Lewis imagined allegory to be.<sup>47</sup> The aesthetic forged by Palingenius merely needed a stronger poet to wield it.

When we return to the Artes Poetica, we naturally miss Palingenius's singleminded devotion to inspiration. Girolamo Muzio (1551) is much more typical in his mixing of Plato and Horace in a compromise that du Bellay had stated in his Deffence two years earlier. Both inspiration and the poet's judgment are equally essential to the great poem: revision must follow vision. G. P. Capriano (1555) testifies to another tendency to confound Greek and Roman literary theories when he chides his contemporaries for equating poetic furor with nature, or with the poet's faculties. Nature, he correctly points out, operates constantly while the furor does not.<sup>48</sup>

Palingenius's distinction between vain and inspired poetry reappears in J. C. Scaliger's highly influential Poetics. Speaking about the earliest compositions, Scaliger presents the origin of the distinction between the true poet and the mere versifier:

After certain more inspired composers were successful in providing the old forms of poetry with new themes, they were called

poets, and they arrogated to themselves, as guardians, the protection of the Muses, the Muses by the inspiration of whom they discovered what was concealed from others. Those, on the other hand, who lacked this inspiration, and simply composed metrical narratives, were called versifiers.<sup>49</sup>

Though Scaliger elsewhere argues that verse form and not fabulous content makes something poetry, his distinction between poet and versifier seems to depend primarily on invention rather than on more formal aspects. The poets are those provided by the Muses with "new themes"; technical competence is not an issue: it is allowed to the versifiers. Scaliger affirms with Plato's Phaedrus that only the inspired and not the merely skilled can enter the temple of art.

Whether constructed for such a purpose or not, Scaliger's distinction was bound to be of great assistance to the self-consciously new poets of France and England in their striving to raise the status of poetry and to win recognition for their own works. If they did not wish to seem presumptuous, they had to assert that they were making their claims for a poetry different in kind, and not just in degree, from that of their less ambitious predecessors. They could not, at least in France, base this assumption on their considerable technical skills, for medieval French poetry had so cultivated and refined a rhetorical



ingenuity that it was in danger of forsaking the fresh air of nature for the hothouse of the manuals of schemes and tropes. They could not, in either country, claim that their poetry was more pleasing because they were well aware that previous audiences had found previous poetry to their tastes, and they did not, at any rate, wish to appeal to such relativistic standards. They also knew that medieval poets had drawn on the philosophers to instruct their readers. Consequently, they turned to the Muse as a source of wisdom greater than philosophy and more eloquent than the rhetoricians. Only divine poetry could be different in kind from human poetry.

Ludovico Castelvetro undoubtedly was born before his time, for he presents much that was to become commonplace in seventeenth-and eighteenth-century criticism and thereby profoundly disagrees with the opinions of most of his contemporaries. He regards poetry as strictly a means of popular entertainment and not only denies that it should instruct but insists that it employ no notions from any art or science, lest it render itself unintelligible to its ignorant audience. He particularly wishes to separate poetry and history and denies the title of poet to anyone using historical matter. When the poet mixes historical fact with his

fiction, he is guilty of trying to deceive his reader into thinking his fiction true, whereas, for Castelvetro, when one chooses to write in verse, he is pledged to write only what he has invented for himself.<sup>50</sup>

Castelvetro is as thorough a champion of invention as Vida was of imitation or Palingenius of inspiration, and, where believers in inspiration praise invention for the truth it embodies, Castelvetro regards invention as leading only to delight in itself. Inspired poetry, as we have been seeing, depends on the competition of poetry with either philosophy or history: The Zodiacke of Life claims to be inspired philosophy and Paradise Lost will claim to be inspired history; however, Castelvetro rigidly separates poetry from philosophy and history, restricting it to the invented, much as Vida restricted it to the imitated.

Castelvetro occasionally manifests a crude empiricism, as when, in his argument for unity of place, he declares that once an audience sees the stage as one place, it cannot, minutes later, believe it to be another place without contradicting the evidence of its senses. This same empiricism is allied to a nominalism which makes him one of the few Renaissance critics to assert that the poet does not imitate Platonic Ideas and that, insofar as he does treat universals, he treats

them only as they appear in particulars.<sup>51</sup>

Having separated poetry and knowledge and having dismissed the Platonic Ideas, Castelvetro is not willing to tolerate belief in inspiration. He anticipates Gudeman's reading of Poetics 55a22, regards Plato as only jesting in his references to poetic furor,<sup>52</sup> and constructs an account of the role of inspiration in the early poetry that contrasts nicely, and probably deliberately, with Scaliger's. He argues that belief in poetic furor originated in popular ignorance, for poetry seemed divine to those whose natural powers could not attain to it:

Hence the first poets were thought by the ignorant people to be full of the spirit of God and to be aided by God. . . . This belief of the people, though false, was pleasing to the poets, since through it great reputation came to them and they were looked on as dear to the gods. Hence they nourished it with their approval, and making it appear that the condition was as the people thought, they began at the beginnings of their works to call on the aid of the Muses and Apollo, the god set over poetry, and to make it seem that they uttered their poems as though with the mouths of the aforesaid gods.<sup>53</sup>

Castelvetro, like Scaliger, treats the first claims to inspiration with more recent claims in mind. He implies that contemporary poets are not inspired and are merely glorifying themselves.

Yet, Castelvetro does not reject the invocation merely because it is a fiction; the champion of invention

is as willing to have his process of composition pass for inspiration as Vida was to have imitation do so. He recognizes that the invocation is a means of claiming for one's invention supernal truth and beauty: "the miraculous favor of the Muses, as far as the form is concerned, consists only in helping the writer to make such verses as would be thought impossible, by the masses, as productions simply of human effort, either because of the power of their meaning or because of their beauty." Consequently, he gives rules for the intelligent use of the invocation, as he does for other kinds of fiction. The Muse's help is to be invoked only when there is an apparent necessity for it, when knowledge or invention beyond the ordinary is required. It is needed when the matter of the poem is history, or feigned history, but not when it is didactic or argumentative: the Castelvetrican Muse supports fable and rejects science. The Muse's aid is needed when the matter is invented, but not when it is observed, and it is needed when the subject is so difficult that "it is not verisimilar [i.e. credible] that the writer could know or understand" it without divine aid.<sup>54</sup> It may be noted that Castelvetro only allows the claim to inspiration in the kind of poetry he favors; thus, he too recognizes the prestige of the theory and desires to

use it to his advantage.

In sixteenth-century criticism, Castelvetro's primary importance is as a devil's advocate, for he makes the critics of the last quarter of the century think through more thoroughly the old positions. Thus Agnolo Segni (1581) strives for an understanding of "fable" that will allow one "to contemplate and recognize the truth" in it,<sup>55</sup> and, in doing so, he affirms the existence of the Platonic Ideas and relates poetry to philosophy and history much as Sidney will in his Apology. "The Ideas outside of things, which are therefore their most perfect nature, intelligible and certain in intellect," are the subject of philosophy;<sup>36</sup> the "things in our world with their imperfections" are the subject of history; "but the one and the other conjoined generate poetry." History and philosophy, dealing with separate and true worlds, are themselves completely true; poetry, in combining Ideas and things, "is in part true and in part false: true for the Ideas which she expresses, and false for the things in which she puts these Ideas. . . ." <sup>57</sup> Thus, for example, the "things" of the narrative of The Faerie Queene are fictional, but the moral Ideas "in" those things are true, and it is precisely the extent to which the Ideas radiate in the things that makes the things fictional:

This perfecting of things, we say, is the cause and first principle of poetry, when materials are narrated in terms of the all-perfect, and each item in its highest and most sovereign form, for such speech must necessarily be false and fabulous, not history, since among us there is no perfection, or any semblance of what ought to be; but when a fable imitates that perfection and its truth, it is poetry.<sup>58</sup>

Sperone makes a similar point in less Platonic terms by distinguishing the "true," by which he means the factual, from the reasonable:

History deals with what is in effect true but also with that which, considered by reason, ought not to be true, since it is true counter to reason. Poetry may deal with what in effect is false because in effect it never existed, but it is true according to reason because according to reason it should be like this.<sup>59</sup>

Sperone's "ought," it may be noted, is not subjective, and that is why he can equate it with reason. Reason presents the moral norms established by God, and it is these that poetry imitates. Hence, for Sperone as for Segni, fiction does not deal with the false and is a means of knowledge.

The critics also reject Castelvetro's pragmatic approach to inspiration, much as Galileo would oppose those scientists and churchmen who were willing to accept the Copernican theory as a useful working fiction but not as an explanation of the true state of things. Tasso defends the spiritual necessity and reality of

the invocation. It is an act of piety, not a self-advertisement, to call on God, and "nothing is so small that it does not have need of divine aid."<sup>60</sup> Patrizi devotes the first ten books of his Poetica (1586) to literary history, proving, among other things, that the early poets were inspired and not just pretending. He recognizes three causes of poetry, which, incidentally, correspond to our three processes of composition: furor, genius or nature, and art. He provides a helpful and unambiguous definition of the first, putting the theos back into "enthusiasm":

Enthusiasm is a movement of the natural and of the possessed mind working with fantasies that are presented by the light that some deity, genius or demon infuses in the soul; and it operates according to the subject that that light receives, without the illuminated one's knowing what he does or says.<sup>61</sup>

Finally, Sperone speaks for most of his contemporaries when he concludes that the poet reveals things known only by God, "and if they are revealed to the poet, he is rightfully called a philosopher of high degree and poetry is indeed divine grace and furor rather than our profession."<sup>62</sup>

The great poem of the last half of the cinquecento, Tasso's Jerusalem Delivered, should have been a monument to these impressive statements, and especially to the theories of its author, but the poem is not supported

by its narrator's claim to inspiration because that claim is strangely blunted and undercut. Though Tasso, as a critic, is literally on the side of the angels, Tasso, as a poet, appears to be a vates manqué.

Tasso's theorizing is sound and had great influence on the Christian epic. He argues that poetry must be based on Christian history, for the marvelous is essential to poetry, and the pagan marvelous is incredible because no one believes in the pagan gods. The possibility of Christian miracles, though, is widely believed:

If one regards the virtue and power of the doer, these same things will be judged true to life, because the men of the present age drank in this opinion with their milk when they were in their swaddling clothes and were confirmed in it by the teachers of our holy faith, namely that God and his ministers, and by his permission the demons and the magicians, are able to do wondrous things exceeding the force of nature. . . .<sup>63</sup>

Where purely invented matter, or the pagan marvelous, is an imitation "of things that are not and never were, . . . the best poetry imitates the things that are, that were, and that can be. . . ." <sup>64</sup> It is unlikely that great deeds should have occurred without having been recorded; hence poetry based on Christian history is believable while poetry that is totally feigned is not. Moreover, when the poet "bases his work on some true action and considers it as like the truth," he gives his



work verisimilitude and, therefore, "it tends to be true, since it is not at all reasonable that what possesses verisimilitude should tend toward the false. . . ."65 In this way, Tasso clears the poet from the charge of lying.

Thus far, Tasso's theory would square with Milton's practice, but it is clear that Tasso is only limiting fiction's role so that he may justify fiction, that he still thinks of poetry as predominantly fiction, and that he is uneasy over the matter. He argues that one may not take one's subject from Scripture, for one may not contaminate the biblical stories with feigning. In this, he shows the influences of the Counter-reformation and indicates that his fear of being presumptuous is greater than his belief in his inspiration. The protestant Milton, on the other hand, could undertake to fill in the story of Genesis with a working procedure that a paraphrase of Sir Thomas Browne would cover: where the Scripture is silent, hexaemeral tradition is his comment; where there is a joint silence of both, he borrows his invention of no one but from the dictates of his own inspiration.

Tasso's hesitations are more visible in the Jerusalem Delivered than in his criticism. He begins with an invocation that is genuine enough, and to a

Muse Christian enough to bear comparison with Milton's, but he abstains from using the invocation to suggest a divine sanction for his inventions:

O heavenly muse, that not with fading bays  
Deckest thy brow by th'Heliconian spring,  
But sittest, crown'd with stars' immortal rays,  
In heaven, where legions of bright angels  
sing,  
Inspire life in my wit, my thoughts upraise,  
My verse ennoble, and forgive the thing,  
If fiction light I mix with truth divine,  
And fill these lines with others' praise  
than thine.<sup>66</sup>

The heavenly Muse will provide divine truth and high style, but the poet will mix these with fictions for which he takes full responsibility. These fictions are not to be commended but forgiven, and therefore the poet cannot think of attributing them to any higher agency. The position is a strange one, for Tasso is giving the poem two unequal authors and suggesting that the intelligent reader may wish to dismiss some parts of it as all too human. Since his poem does not, like The Faerie Queene, enable us to designate a literal level as fiction and retain the figural level as inspired revelation, we are left in doubt as to the truth-status of any particular part of the poem.

Nor does Tasso's placing of his invocations help matters. In Paradise Lost Milton renews his request for divine aid every time the story shifts from one part of the cosmos to another: he will not venture to

describe the events in heaven without first assuring himself and his reader of his heavenly sanction. Tasso, however, narrates the infernal counsel of Book IV without any introduction; only at its conclusion, when the devils leave to plague Godfrey's forces, does he call on the Muse, who has knowledge of that forgotten time, to tell what the devils did on earth. If we regard the invocation in stanza nineteen as a division of the book into two unequal parts, then Tasso is requesting divine assistance for the part that contains the more easily knowable matter.

Either Tasso is afraid to ask too much of the Muse or else he has too great a sense of himself as a maker. The second invocation in the poem, occurring only thirty-four stanzas after the first, undercuts more than anything else the claim to inspiration and asserts that the poet is an artificer. Tasso is about to give the names of the major Christian knights. The catalogue, with a precedent as ancient as the one in the Iliad, calls for an invocation so that the poet will not omit any important figure, it being one of the chief aims of the heroic poem to give glory where glory is due. Tasso accordingly invokes not the daughters of Memory but

My mind, time's enemy, oblivion's foe,  
Disposer true of each note-worthy thing,  
O let thy virtuous might avail me so,  
That I each troop and captain great may  
sing,

That in this glorious war did famous grow,  
Forgot till now by time's evil handling:  
This work, derived from thy treasures dear,  
Let all times hearken, never age out-wear.<sup>67</sup>

If the heroes have been forgotten and the poet's mind knows them, then the poet's mind has the power usually attributed to the Muse. Moreover, it has that power because the work is derived from its treasures: the mind knows its own invention.

In the last analysis, Tasso is simply inconsistent. He refuses to choose between his mind and the Muse, nor is he using the Muse allegorically, as Dante did, to refer to his mind: his Muse is too Christian for that, though perhaps not Christian enough to stand on its own. He could not be happy presenting his poem as fiction, but his belief in inspiration, whether sincere or affected, was not strong enough for him to deny that his poem was essentially fiction. That he ended his career with Il Mondo Creato, a hexaemeral poem that is neither fictional nor inspired, was perhaps to be expected. He was the victim of a critical fin de siecle, existing, like Arnold's pilgrim, between the two worlds of inspiration and ingenium, and, like Arnold's pilgrim, he could wholly accept neither.

By the seventeenth century the Castelvetrician spirit had triumphed, and the new poets and critics, Marino and the concettists, valued wit and delight in wit

above all things. Invention came to mean the construction of conceits rather than the working-out of a high subject, and cleverness replaced truthfulness as a standard of judgment. The theory of inspiration, no longer needed or wanted, passed from the Italian critical scene.<sup>68</sup>

In suggesting that Tasso's Muse may not have been sufficiently Christian to stand, we were pointing to the general one-sidedness of Italian statements of inspiration. That is, the statements tend to be based on classical authority, most often Platonic authority as interpreted by Ficino, and the more purely Christian tenets of biblical poetics do not seem to play much of a role. Hence, there is the possibility that Christian Neoplatonism may not be able to lend enough support to the theory of inspiration, particularly if elements of a more orthodox Christianity may regard the poet's claim to inspiration as presumptuous. Moreover, in Italy the positions of imitation and invention early receive strong support and one has a greater sense of views in competition that one gets, particularly, in France. The result is that the Italian statements of the theory seem more fragile than the French, for in France there was co-operation between biblical poetics and Neoplatonism, and the dominant poets were all, to one degree or another, committed to inspiration.

Warner Patterson finds French critical literature devoid of any reference to divine infusion until 1501, at which time the reference is not substantial. The author of L'Instructif de la Seconde Rhetorique (1501), as might be expected from a rhetorician, asks for "clers raiz fulgens deloquence [sic]" rather than profound doctrine.<sup>69</sup>

The first significant statement comes from the pen of the first major sixteenth-century poet, Clement Marot. In the verse preface to his translation of the Psalms, Marot works out, with a thoroughness we can but sample, biblical equivalents for the trappings of pagan inspiration:

O donques, Roy, prens l'oeuvre de David,  
Oeuvre plus tost de Dieu qui le ravit,  
D'autant que Dieu son Apollo estoit,  
Qui luy en train et sa harpe mettoit.  
La saint Esprit estoit sa Calliope  
.  
Dont il devint poëte en un moment  
Le plus profond dessoubz le firmament,  
Car le subject qui la plume en la main  
Prendre luy fait est bien autre qu'humain.<sup>70</sup>

He continues by offering reasons why David is a better poet and a more profitable model than the Greeks and Romans, and he clearly believes that if the French poets turn like David to praise their Maker they may be inspired like him. Thus, just as Bruni, in one of the

first Italian statements of the theory, had taken Virgil the magus for the exemplary poet, so Marot takes David the servant of the Lord. The difference is significant, though one should be wary of making too much of it: it may account for du Bartas and d'Aubigné but not for Ronsard.

Marot's statement, in 1541, appeared five years before the theory put on its full Neoplatonic regalia with Richard Le Blanc's translation of the Ion and his preface to his translation, both of which are indebted to Ficino. Le Blanc's abstract of the dialogue preserves not a whit of the original Socratic irony:

Or, en ce petit dialogue, Socrates dit que fureur poetique n'est aultre chose que telle inspiration de Dieu, par laquelle l'entendement humain est eslevé oultre le pouvoir de l'homme. Car il est impossible (dit-il) que les poetes peussent traicter de tous artz et les enseigner par leurs escriptz, sans grand'aide et faveur de Dieu. . . . Poesie donc est un don divin. Et tout ce que les poetes excellentz, soient Grecz, Latins, ou Francoys, ont faict, dict, et composé, il procede de la grace divine.<sup>71</sup>

What might be an issue, the claim of poets to know and teach all the arts, is taken for granted as the premise for the argument that poetry is a divine gift.

Two years after Le Blanc's translation of Plato, and three years after Peletier had translated Horace, Thomas Sebillet wrote the first original Art Poétique (1548). We have already seen Sebillet distinguishing

between inspiration and art without sacrificing either. Here we may point out that he was also aware of the difference between inspiration and nature. His argument for inspiration and against wit is rather like Le Blanc's: "Mais qui pourroit raisonnablement affirmer que la Poésie fust de nature et de première naissance, sans estude, doctrine, précepte, outremente que divinement donnée."<sup>72</sup> Sebillet assumes, and it was a not uncommon assumption, that great poetry existed before the art of poetry was formulated. Not coming from art, this poetry could derive only from man's natural, untrained wit or from a superior force, but since poetry is obviously learned and could not therefore come from an unlearned mind, it must come as a divine gift. In this manner Sebillet places art above nature and inspiration above both.

There is in sixteenth-century poetic taste no element of that primitivism which, in the eighteenth century, created a vogue for fisher-poets and the like. On the contrary, the most important poetic "school" of the century stressed the "docte" in poetry as much as the stilnovists stressed the "dolce." For the Pléiade, poetry is the most learned of all human works, if indeed it is a human work.

In anticipating the Pléiade's theories, Sebillet



called down upon his head the school's manifesto, du Bellay's monumental Deffense et Illustration de la langue françoise (1549); and, while du Bellay stresses the difference between himself and Sebillet, the reader is as likely to notice their agreement. If we agree with Marcel Raymond that inspiration is the "cardinal point" of the Pléiade's doctrine,<sup>73</sup> then we may see that they share with Sebillet the problem of reconciling the divine afflatus with art and with merely human learning.

One of the sonnets in Les Regrets best expresses du Bellay's belief that the suprahuman must have a hand in the creation of a work if the work is to live:

Tout oeuvre qui doit vivre, il a des sa  
naissance  
Un Daemon qui le guide à l'immortalité:  
Mais qui n'a rencontré tell nativité,  
Comme un fruict abortif, n'a jamais  
accroissance.<sup>74</sup>

The advice to poets at the end of the Deffense urges that they take care not to let pass "cete fureur divine, qui quelquefois agite et echaufe les esprits poëtiques, et sans la quele ne fault point que nul espere faire chose qui dure. . . ." The next sentence is, however, more typical of its author: he recommends emendation:

"ajouter, oter, ou muer à loysir ce que cete premiere impetuosité et ardeur d'écrire n'avoit permis de faire."<sup>75</sup>

The Muse is, then, fallible, and the poet's judgment is the final arbiter of what goes into the poem.

Du Bellay devotes a chapter to attacking the maxim, revived with qualification by Sebillet, that poets are born, not made. He interprets the maxim correctly as extolling wit over art, but fails to remark that Sebillet has confounded inspiration and wit in his exposition of the maxim. It would be too easy, du Bellay argues, and therefore contemptible, to gain the eternal renown of a poet, if natural wit were alone necessary. Rather the true poet must sweat for his art and must live a disciplined, ascetic life, enduring hunger, thirst and long vigils.<sup>76</sup> The Pléiade liked to point up the poet's kinship with the prophets, and du Bellay was not above comparing the moral preparation of the one to that of the other; as Ronsard puts it in the "Hymne de l'Automne": "Car Dieu ne communique aux hommes ses mystères/ S'ils ne sont vertueux, devots et solitaires."<sup>77</sup> Nonetheless, du Bellay, more than any other member of the Pléiade, stressed intellectual preparation as well. The poet must master all of human learning so that he will know how best to use what he receives, and he must know all of the secrets of his art so that he can polish what he receives and correct the little slip-ups the Muse may have made.

One can see du Bellay wrestling with the difficulties that most of the new poets faced in their adherence to

the doctrine of poetic furor. Du Bellay wished to assert the importance of what poetry had to say; he wanted poetry considered as a divine calling and not as one of the least of human activities; he felt that the creation of true poetry was difficult and should be recognized as such: for all of these reasons he was ready to affirm the necessity of the grace of inspiration.

At the same time, he did not want to be considered as the mere instrument of God. When he promised a patron or mistress immortality, he did not wish to allow doubts about his ability to fulfill that promise. More than that, while Muses like Pontus de Tyard's infuse the poetry with learning beyond that of mortal men, the members of the Pléiade, industrious humanists and scholars all, wanted to insist that the learning was their learning, the praise and reward due the poetry due to them. Hence they were caught in a tension between art and inspiration, with each poet gravitating toward one pole or the other. Du Bellay, who seems from his own statements to have been less facile than Ronsard, naturally stressed the poet's own responsibility and hard work.

Jacques Peletier, the next member of the Pléiade to write an Art Poétique (1555), makes somewhat more than du Bellay does of poetic furor. One way of praising

poetry that was fast becoming conventional was to refer to its divine origins. In the Middle Ages it had been common, following Aristotle's Metaphysics,<sup>78</sup> to refer to the human inventors of the arts, but Boccaccio and Salutati had made it clear that poetry, as the first theology, came from the gods. Peletier agrees that the arts are too celestial to have come from human imaginations: the ancients made Apollo and the Muses preside over poetry to indicate its divinity. The poets, when they are in their holy furors, are the interpreters of the gods. "Car eux ravis, et abstraits des pensements terrestres, concevaient les secrets célestes, divins, naturels et mondains: pour les manifester aux hommes."<sup>79</sup> The poets are not only the first theologians but the first scientists as well. If some of their secrets are "célestes" and "divins," that does not mean that they neglect the "naturel" or "mondain."

When Peletier turns to the theory of composition, he provides an interesting simplification. His discussion is in terms of art and nature, but his definition of "nature"--"ce qui est imposé en nous, sans notre peine et sans notre première intention"--suggests inspiration more than wit. He regards art and nature as performing separate functions. "Nature donne la disposition, et comme une matière: l'Art donne l'opération, et comme la forme. En somme, la Nature bien demande le secours

et la main artisanne: Et l'Art ne peut rien sans le naturel."<sup>80</sup> The conclusion is du Bellay's: one must begin with inspiration and proceed with art, but the simplification leading up to the conclusion is not his. The first two of the traditional parts of rhetoric, invention and disposition, the parts most related to content, are given to the poet; the rest depend on his art. Responsibility is thus neatly divided: the poet does not lie because he does not "make" his matter, but he does make the poem, using the technique he learns from the Art Poétique.

Ronsard, the most talented poet of the group, is also one with the highest regard for the poetic furor and the one who says most about it. In fact, he writes more extensively on the subject than any other Renaissance poet. From the early "Ode à son lut" (1550) to the late "Elegie I, Au Roy" (1584), he claims inspiration for the poets and stresses their divinity, though in his later works, when he had abandoned much of his Platonism, he sometimes treats as fiction or allegory what the earlier works tend to regard as more or less literal truth.

His most complex early statement of the importance of poetry comes in his most ambitious Pindaric ode, the "Ode à Michel de l'Hospital," written a year after du Bellay's Deffense and complementary to it. It begins

with an account of the Muses' birth. Memoire lies nine nights with Jupiter, grows pregnant, and gives birth to all of the Muses at once (a proof of their indivisibility). When the girls reach the age of seven, they express a desire to see their father, so Memoire binds their tresses with violets and guides them to the shore of the River Ethiope. The young Muses are afraid of the river, the flux of the world of becoming, but their mother convinces them that, as daughters of the Omnipotent God, they do not need to fear the waters. Poetry, of celestial birth, is guaranteed eternal duration.

At length, the Muses arrive at the palace of Ocean, where the Gods are sitting at a feast. Jupiter at once recognizes them for his children and asks them to sing. After some preliminaries, they sing an epic poem of the war between the Giants and the Olympians. Epic, Ronsard felt, was the highest genre, and was to be used, as Homer and Virgil used theirs, to celebrate a great national victory; the Muses, as daughters of the highest of the Olympians, naturally sing of the Olympians' heroic war. It is likely that Ronsard's contemporaries were, at this point, meant to identify Jupiter with Francis I and the Giants with the Huguenots.

Jupiter, enthralled by the Muses' performance, asks what reward they desire. Calliope's response indicates the extent of poetry's realm. The Muses will rule all

poets and prophets, know the future and the course of the stars, and preside over oracles. They will have the power to raise the soul out of the "salle bourbier" of the body. Kings will be honored only if they revere the Muses and have merited the Muses' homage; at the same time they will advise the kings and make them all honorable men. Jupiter grants their requests and puts in their charge as well all four of the divine madnesses. He borrows the metaphor of the magnetic chain of inspiration from Plato via Ficino to explain how the Muses and their chosen poets will communicate the divine knowledge and goodness to men. He then sends the Muses to earth, warning them that they will be scorned by the masses and eventually driven away by Ignorance.

There follows an adaptation of the myth of the goddess Astraea, the goddess of justice, who was the last of the Olympians to leave the earth and whose departure pointed to the degeneration of man from what he was in the original Golden Age. In Ronsard's version justice is replaced by poetry and Astraea by the Muses; that he can make the substitution and expect the reader to accept the analogy is itself significant of the new importance of poetry.

The golden age after the Muses' descent is that of the divine poets and first theologians whose glory had

already been claimed for poetry by Boccaccio, Scaliger and the others. Musaens, Orpheus, Homer and Hesiod are chosen priests revealing the secrets of God. Then follow the human poets, the later Greeks and Romans of the silver age of poetry, who are less inspired but quite artful and whose verse, like that of the previous age, incites all men to virtue. Finally, in the third age, Ignorance interposes itself between mankind and the Muses, who, receiving hostility instead of patronage, reascend to heaven. The ode ends with Jupiter's creation of Michel de l'Hospital to aid the Muses in a further battle with Ignorance.<sup>81</sup>

Ronsard's Muses appear to stand equally for inspiration and learning; that is, he uses them to conflate the two; similarly, their enemy is Ignorance, which breeds disrespect for learned poetry. Ignorance comes in the third age, which, occurring after the fall of Rome, is veritably the middle age before the hoped-for renaissance of inspiration in Ronsard's day. Ignorance produces a state in which a low standard of literary excellence, that of the rhétoriqueurs, and the contempt of a poorly educated nobility for poetry feed upon each other. Ronsard now hopes that the spiral will be reversed and that poetry and its audience will get better and better, poetry becoming more profound as its audience becomes



better educated.

Though he would not use the figure, Ronsard's god-possessed poet is related to his king as Merlin is related to Arthur. He has about him something of the magician and seer. In the "Hymne de l'Automne" (1563), Ronsard includes an account of what the poet can be said to know:

Quand l'homme en est touché il devient un  
Prophete  
Il predit toute chose avant qu'elle soit faite,  
Il cognoist la nature et les secrets des Cieux,  
Et d'un esprit bouillant s'eleve entre les  
Dieux.  
Il cognoist la vertu des herbes et des pierres,  
Il enferme les vents, il charme les tonnerres:  
Sciences que le peuple admire et ne sçait  
pas. . . .82

These Sciences que le peuple admire et ne sçait, has  
pas. . . .82

the ambition all great poets must have, the ambition to write an epic. Homer was supposed to have put everything his civilization knew or could know into the Iliad and the Odyssey, and everyone was agreed that the epic poet impressed primarily through the height of his knowledge and through his invention. In his Abbrégé de l'Art Poétique (1565), Ronsard sees the invocation, as Castelvetro will, as a guarantee of the worth of the poem's invention:

Tu auras en premier lieu les conceptions  
hautes, grandes, belles, & non trainantes à  
terre. Car le principal poinct est l'inuention,  
laquelle vient tant de la bonne nature, que de  
la leçon des bons & anciens autheurs. Si tu

entreprens quelque grand oeuvre tu te montreras religieux & craignant Dieu, le commençant ou par son nom, ou par un autre qui représentera quelque effect de sa majesté. . . . Et c'est aussi pour te monstrier que rien ne peut estre ny bon ny parfait, si le commencement ne vient de Dieu.<sup>83</sup>

There is a certain ambiguity in the passage: it is not altogether clear whether the poet actually gets his high conceptions from God or only claims he does. The epic poet shows himself to be a pious candidate for inspiration, and Ronsard equivocates when he goes from the poet's beginning with God's name to the poem's beginning with God's aid. In any case, the invention essential to the poem, which does not come from imitating the classics, is validated through the statement in the invocation that it comes from God.

One suspects that the ambiguity is studied when, in a later passage, Ronsard recommends setting the epic in a mythical, or at least far-off time: "Tu ne commenceras iamais le discours d'un grand poësme, s'il n'est esloigné de la memoire des hommes, & pour-ce tu inuoqueras la Muse, qui se souient de tout, comme Déesse, pour te chanter les choses dont les hommes ne se peuuent nullement souuenir."<sup>84</sup> The reason for choosing a distant time, most writers on epic agree, is that it allows the writer freedom of invention without violating what history the reader knows.

Ronsard, however, seems to be suggesting that the time is chosen so that the writer will have occasion for invoking the Muse, who will then tell him what no one else can know, and what no one else can know, cannot be judged. The invocation enables the author to treat his work as truth rather than fiction but gives him the freedom that comes with fiction.

The later prefaces to the Franciade (1572) show more of an Aristotelian influence and stress more strongly the fictional nature of poetry. Invention is more closely related to the novel and the marvelous: "le Poëte Heroique inuente & forge argumens tous nouveaux, faict entreparler les Dieux aux hommes & les hommes aux Dieux. . . ." He regrets that some people have taken the story of Francus for true; he does not know whether it is true; it should be sufficient for the poet that his story be possible. In the light of the rest of the prefaces, his statement that the poet invokes "les Muses qui se souuient du passé, & prophetisent l'aduenir, pour l'inspirer & conduire plus par fureur diuine que par inuention humaine" seems to be expressing more of a hope than a fact.

In discussing composition, Ronsard agrees in the main with du Bellay and Peletier but tends to make inspiration more important than hard work. "La Lyre" builds up to a description of the poetic furor.

Ronsard insists that he is only a poet by virtue of the furor, for he cannot write, not even if a prince or his lady commands, in six months or even a year, lines which will please, unless he is inspired:

I'attens venir (certes ie ne ments point)  
Ceste fureur qui la Sibylle espoit:  
Mais aussi tost que par long interualle  
Dedans mon coeur du ciel elle deualle,  
Colere, ardent, furieux, agité,  
Ie tremble tout dessous la Deité.  
Ainsi ie cours à course desbridée,  
Lors que la vérue en moy s'est desbordée,  
Impetueux sans raison ny conseil.<sup>86</sup>

There are few finer accounts of the poet's possession by the daemon who, as du Bellay says in Les Regrets and Ronsard in Ode XVIII,<sup>87</sup> guides the work to its completion. The possession is necessary and, at the same time, it is frightening. Ronsard is not, like d'Aubigné, an enthusiast; in describing the fit he dwells more on the negative side, the loss of reason and self-rule, than on the gain of insight. It is not difficult to see from this passage how later poets with more confidence in their skills and less exalted goals could wonder that anyone should desire to be in such a state. Not in all ages were men capable of accepting with Ronsard the paradox that the highest art comes from the greatest loss of control.

Most of the time, though, Ronsard agrees with his friends that art and judgment play an important rôle

in composition; in his prose, we might say, he takes a more prosaic view of poetry than we find in his poetry. That even the early Ronsard tempered his admiration for inspiration is clear from Louis Le Caron's dialogue Ronsard, ou de la Poésie (1556). Here Jodelle takes, as he sometimes does in his poetry, the enthusiast's position. He asserts the necessity of the "fureur, laquelle souffle en l'âme" and which embraces all divinity. This enables the great poets to surpass "les humaines conceptions," while the bad poets, with only art, sweat and pain, vainly aspire to a memorable work. Ronsard, the other speaker in the dialogue, does not deny what Jodelle has said about inspiration but insists that art is equally valuable. Art is as much a gift of God as inspiration.<sup>88</sup>

In contradistinction, the two Huguenot authors of religious epics, du Bartas and d'Augibné, base their poetics, such as it is, almost exclusively on divine illumination. Lily B. Campbell regards du Bartas's Uranie as the seminal work of the movement toward sacred poetry in France and England.<sup>89</sup> The argument of the poem is simple. Poetry comes only from God and should be used only to magnify God's glory. Urania, a more developed Christian muse than Tasso's, tells the poet:

Each Art is learn'd by Art: but POESIE  
Is a meere Heauenly gift; . . .  
For out of Man, Man must him all aduance,  
That Time-prooffe Poems euer hopes to utter,  
And Extased (as in a holy Trance)  
Into our hands his Sensive part must put-her.  
For, as a humane Furie, makes a man  
Lesse then a man; so Deuine-Furie makes-him  
More than himselfe; and sacred Phrenzie than  
Aboue the Heav'ns bright flaming Arches  
takes-him.

. . .

True Poets, right are like winde-Instruments,  
Which full, doo sound; emptie their noise  
surceases:  
For, with their Furie, lasts their Excellence;  
Their Muse is silent, when their Furie  
ceases.<sup>90</sup>

Lest the last line be taken for a tautology, it should be pointed out that Sylvester, the translator, like du Bartas and nearly every other Renaissance poet, whatever his beliefs on inspiration, regularly uses "Muse" in the Roman sense as the personification of the poet's talent. This was established poetic diction and was often used, as clichés are, quite thoughtlessly. Thus, Spenser refers to the voice of the turtle-dove that comforts the love-smitten Timias as its "mournefull muse" (IV, viii, 5). It could also be played off against the Greek sense, as in John Davies of Hereford's "The Author, of, and to his Muse":

O then, thou great vnlimitable Muse,  
(that rests, in motion, in th'ETERNALS  
Breast)  
Inspire my Muse, with grace her pow'r to vse

in nought, but what to thee shall be  
addrest. . . .<sup>91</sup>

The wit lies in the fact that the first Muse is genuine,  
the second a figure of speech.

It is clear that du Bartas presents a much more uncompromising belief in inspiration than has yet been found in the Renaissance. Man only writes poetry when he is wholly given over to God: there is no correction of what one writes when inspired because, as Calvin said, the Spirit is superior to reason and ~~answerable~~ only to itself. The poet is merely God's instrument, and consequently he should only express the divine harmony. Poetry was created so that the sacred Mysteries could be communicated to man, and so that man could praise God aright; these were the uses to which the first divine poet, not Orpheus but, as in Marot, the Psalmist, put it, and to fashion it to secular ends is to pervert it.<sup>92</sup>

In the Middle Ages, when poetic and biblical languages were sharply distinguished and poetry was thought to have a very limited capacity for conveying truth, the poet was enjoined not to profane the things of God. But for du Bartas, and for the movement toward sacred poetry that he leads, poetry is so exalted that it is dealing with unworthy material if it does not deal with God's works or His providence. Poetry deals not with the verisimilar but with the highest truth.

One cannot appreciate du Bartas or Milton, to whose work du Bartas's is but the prolegomenon, without recognizing the audacity of this position, and without seeing that the audacity can only be supported, as it is, by a belief in inspiration. It will be clear that the seventeenth-century controversy between sacred and profane epic is, in fact, a controversy between two different conceptions of poetry and two opposing views on the possibility of inspiration.

The program announced in Urania is carried out in The Divine Weeks and Days, du Bartas's monumental project to recount and praise God's part in the early history of the world. The invocations that regularly appear at the opening of each day are noteworthy both for the completeness with which they attribute everything to God and for the ways in which some of their devices were improved upon by du Bartas's great follower. In Book VII of Paradise Lost, the subject of which is that of the first Sepmaine, Milton invokes du Bartas's Urania and, as he does throughout the epic, pits the Christian reality against the classical fable: "For thou art Heav'nly, shee an empty dream" (VII, 39). Du Bartas opens the First Day of the First Week by invoking God, the "true Neptune," who rules the vast ocean of heaven. Like Milton, he is careful to label his classical allusions as fictions, and thereby he not only derives



poetical benefit from them but uses them as yardsticks to point up the non-fictional nature of the rest of the work.

As the first invocation continues, du Bartas asks for "learned Arte" so that he may

record in verse  
The rarest Beauties of this Vniuerse;  
and graunt therein, thy power I may discerne,  
That teaching others, I my selfe may learne.<sup>93</sup>

If the doctrine of inspiration was widely accepted because it exalted the poets, one can see why not many were willing to follow it to its logical conclusions as du Bartas was, for his conclusions stem from, and enforce, a greater degree of Christian humility than most poets, qua poets, were trying to achieve. Ronsard and du Bellay are true papists in believing that God may grant illumination to those who have undergone long moral, spiritual and intellectual preparation, preparation which appears in their poems and for which they can take credit. For du Bartas God's grace is arbitrarily and inexplicably bestowed; before he is chosen, the poet is not extraordinarily skilled or learned and, when God has finished with him, he returns to his former state of imperfection. The poem is God's, not the poet's, and the poet learns from the poem just as the readers will. Du Bartas is, in short, willing to accept the implications of inspiration that

Plato gleefully pointed out in the Ion: it is enough for him to be the mere instrument of god. Milton will not go this far.

Like Milton, du Bartas invokes divine aid as he moves, in vision, from one part of God's creation to the next. Sometimes there is even a touch of possibly unconscious humor, as in the opening of the Fifth Day, when God created the sea creatures:

Prouide me (Lord) of Steeres-man, Starre and  
Boat,  
That through the vaste Seas I may safely  
float:  
Or rather teach me dyue, that I may view  
Deepe under water all the Scalie crieu.  
. . .<sup>94</sup>

Milton is never so delightfully and absurdly literal.

If du Bartas sometimes strikes us as inhabiting, at least as far as the lack of a critical self-consciousness goes, his own Eden, d'Aubigné has eaten of the tree of knowledge of good and bad poetry. By the time of Les Tragiques the neoclassical age was arriving, and d'Aubigné could sense, as du Bartas did not, that poetic furor was becoming a thing of the past. Asked by a correspondent if he prefers the new generation of poets to the old, d'Aubigné answers that the old poets, and he is thinking primarily of Ronsard, may have written

peut estre d'un stile moins delicat que  
celuy d'aujourd'hui, mais avec des avantages

ausquels je vay ceder tout ce qui escrit de ce temps où je trouve plus de fluidité, mais je n'y voy point la fureur poetique, sans laquelle nous ne lisons que des proses bien rimées.

By "seeing" the fureur poetique, d'Aubigné refers to being impressed by height of invention; he grants that contemporary poetry has greater beauty of form per se, is more delicate and fluid than that of the Pléiade. Nonetheless, he agrees with du Bartas that high content automatically exalts style and, in an invocation like that to Book VI of Les Tragiques, the two are treated as inseparable:

D'un saint enthousiasme appelle aux cieux  
mon ame,  
Mets au lieu de ma langue une langue de  
flamme,  
Que je ne sois qu'organe à la celeste voix  
Qui l'oreille & le coeur anime des Francois;  
.  
L'esprit de verité despouille de monsonges  
Ces fermes visions, ces veritable songes;  
Que le haut ciel s'accorde en douces unissons  
À la sainte fureur de mes vives chansons.<sup>96</sup>

For d'Aubigné the major criterion in the judgment of a poem is the truth of its content, and both truth and a moving style come from the divine madness. Poetic furor is essential to the epic; the laws that are being established by Rapin and the others are not. In the verse "Preface" to Les Tragiques, he asks his friends to forgive him if they sometimes see his soul leave the boundaries of the rules; they will ignore his "sainte

erreur."<sup>97</sup> In other words, he feels that divine possession excuses faults in style. This attitude was not calculated to make those who already doubted the reality of inspiration think any more highly of it. In its extreme form, it would allow a far inferior poet like Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin to claim that grace from the true God has made him a better poet than Homer and Virgil.<sup>98</sup>

D'Aubigné, however, would no more moderate his enthusiasm than he would his Huguenot zeal, though both were for dying causes. Les Tragiques ends with an ecstasy in which the poet, rewarded by God if not by his countrymen, passes first beyond the boundaries imposed by the senses and then beyond mere illumination to lose himself in God's glory:

Chetif, je ne puis plus approcher de mon oeil  
L'oeil du ciel; je ne puis supporter le  
soleil.  
Encor tout esbloui, en raisons je me fonde  
Pour de mon ame voir la grand'ame du monde,  
Sçavoir ce qu'on ne sçait & qu'on ne peut  
sçavoir,  
Ce que n'a ouï l'oreille & que l'oeil n'a  
peu voir;  
Mes sens n'ont plus de sens, l'esprit de  
moy s'envole,  
Le coeur ravi se taist, ma bouche est sans  
parole:  
Tout meurt, l'ame s'enfuit, & reprenant son  
lieu  
Exstatique se pasme au giron de son Dieu.<sup>99</sup>

In narratives seeking to convince the reader that they are inspired, usually the poetic persona is given some

dramatic life. An inspired narrator cannot be a transparent nonentity, a bloodless author's device, because he must ask for grace and give indication that he has received it. He has a history in which the act of inspiration that shapes the poem plays a major part. Consequently, he may become a character "in" the poem and may even be exemplary. Thus, whatever the fortunes of the religious wars, the narrator of Les Tragiques, having served God well, receives his ultimate reward. The claim for the inspired poet could hardly be greater.

Nonetheless, d'Aubigné's claim, if far from least, is not so far from last. After him inspiration receives some support from Henri de Regnier in his ninth satire,<sup>100</sup> but the personage to whom that satire is addressed, René Rapin, was too busy helping to build French neoclassicism, with its faith in labor according to specifications, to be congenial to the antipathetic theory of inspiration. The poets of the new era feel, for the most part, little need of divine sanctions.

iv

In England, John Skelton's Replycacion (1528) may be credited with the first apologetic use of the theory of inspiration.<sup>101</sup> Defending poetry from the charge that it "may nat flye so hye," Skelton cites the example of King David,

To whom we must gyue faythe,  
Warblyng with his strynges  
Of such theologicall thynges,  
Why haue ye then disdayne  
At poetes, and complayne  
How poetes do but fayne?<sup>102</sup>

Like the later Marot, Skelton indicates that poets were the first theologians not by referring to the ancient Greeks, whose theology was in error, but by choosing David as his exemplary poet. In this way he is able to argue that poets are not limited to feigning and may deal with the highest truth.

He then explains that it is inspiration that makes such divine poetry possible. Though Skelton can often be verbose, he expounds the theory at such length and with such care that we must conclude that he is conscious of the theory's novelty. He proliferates adjectives to make sure that his reader appreciates the scope of the concept. "Heuenly inspyracion/ In laureate creacyon" is a mysterious, spiritual and mystical effect of such energy and pregnant with such content that the poet can only conclude that

God maketh his habytacion  
In poetes whiche excelles,  
And soiourns with them and dwelles.

By whose inflammacion  
Of spiritual instygacion  
And diuine inspyracion,  
We are kyndled in suche facyon  
With hete of the Holy Gost,  
Which is God of myghtes most,  
That he our penne dothe lede,  
And maketh in us such spede,

That forwith we must nede  
With penne and ynke procede . . .<sup>103</sup>

Two years later, Sir Thomas Elyot takes more of the humanist's approach in linking poetry and the claim to knowledge; he cites Cicero and Plato to prove that "in poets was supposed to be science mystical and inspired, and therefore in Latin they were called vates, which word signifyeth as much as prophets."<sup>104</sup> John Rainolds, another humanist, argues at some length in his Oratio in Laudem Artis Poeticae (ca. 1572) that "poetic ability is not learned, perceived or acquired by conventional education; but is introduced, impressed, and imparted by heavenly inspiration," and cites as proof Hesiod, who wrote about an area in which he lacked knowledge.<sup>105</sup>

When we look to the early invocations, though, we see more of Skelton's biblical poetics than of the pagan equivalent. As early as 1515, Alexander Barclay begins The Life of St. George with an invocation to the Trinity and to Mary for strength of reason: "Breath me some wysdom/ by heuenly influence." He stresses the moral nature of his work and, reviving an old topos, contrasts himself with the "raylynge poetes" who call on Venus and influence man to evil.<sup>106</sup> Where the humanists use inspiration to distinguish the true poet from the versifier, Barclay, like Skelton, uses it to distinguish the virtuous and truth-telling poet from the liar.

Similarly Gavin Douglas, in "The Proloug of the First Buik of Eneados" (1553), calls on the king of kings as prince of poets. Calliope, being pagan, will only do him harm. A marginal note explains that "the werk that beginnes not of God can neuer haue prosperys succes."<sup>107</sup> And Nicholas Grimald feels that Christus Redivivus has merit "according to the measure of grace received from the Lord. . . ."<sup>108</sup>

In 1575 the struggle between poetry as truth and poetry as fiction was coming to a head. Gascoigne regards "the first and most necessary poynt . . . to be considered in making of a delectable poeme" to be "some fine inuention," and when he thinks of invention he thinks first of the supernatural. Thus, if he were to praise a gentlewoman, he would avoid the trite and obvious comparisons and instead "finde some supernaturall cause whereby my penne might walke in the superlatiue degree . . ."<sup>109</sup> If by a supernatural cause he means erotic enthusiasm, then he is open to Beza's criticism, as translated the same year by Arthur Golding:

And woulde God that the great number of good  
witts which I know in Fraunce, would in  
steede of buzying them selues about vnhappy  
inuentions or imitations of vaine and  
vnhonest fancies, (for so they be, if a man  
iudge them according to truth) rather set  
their minds to the magnifying of the great  
God, of whom they haue receiued those so  
great giftes. . . . Of a truth it would  
become them better to sing a song of God,  
then to counterfet a ballet of Petrarks,



. . . or to counterfet the furies of the  
auncient Poets, . . . thinges which beare the  
readers on hande that the authors of them  
not only are mounted vp to the toppe of their  
Pernassus, but also are come to the very  
circle of the Moone.<sup>110</sup>

In Gascoigne and Golding we see once again that  
inspiration could be used to lend credibility to a happy  
fiction as well as to a solemn truth; in fact, in the  
first instance the claim to inspiration would be itself  
a happy fiction. For the puritans such counterfeiting  
would be omitting the divinity in divine madness and  
hence veritable lunacy, for they could not imagine a  
sane man telling a deliberate and transparent lie, and  
such they imagined secular poetry to be.

Gosson's Schoole of Abuse, stating the puritan  
position, appeared in 1579 and brought an immediate reply  
from Thomas Lodge. Lodge is well aware of the gravity  
of the problem:

Poetae (sayth he /Aristotle/) multa mentiuntur;  
and to further his opinion seuer Cato putteth in  
his censure, Admiranda canunt, sed non credenda,  
Poetae. These were sore blemishes, if objected  
rightly. . . .<sup>111</sup>

They are not, however, proper objections. Poetry is not  
a lie or a truth but a lie and a truth: the fiction is  
justified by the allegorical truth it conceals, and that  
truth is justified by the doctrine of inspiration. It  
is significant of the strength of that doctrine in the  
sixteenth century that, where critics of the next

century will blithely interpret inspiration as ingenium, Lodge understands Poeta nascitur, orator fit to mean "Poetrye commeth from aboue, from a heauenly seate of a glorious God" and cites Hesiod as proof of the maxim.<sup>112</sup>

Equally significant is the curtness with which Lodge can treat a subject which Skelton had to treat at length fifty years earlier. Poets must be inspired because "when ther matter is most heauenly their stile is most loftye, a strange token of the wonderfull efficacy of the same. I would make a long discourse vnto you of Platoes 4 furies, but I leue them. . . ." <sup>113</sup> Only when something is a commonplace is there the danger of overstating it.

Sir Philip Sidney, unlike Lodge, expresses disbelief in inspiration, but, like Castelvetro, he is ready to use it for his purposes. Thus, he remarks of plato that "he attributeth unto Poesy more than myself do, namely, to be a very inspiring of a divine force, far above man's wit," <sup>114</sup> and, in Sonnet LXXIV of Astrophil and Stella, dismisses the concept with a positivist's scorn:

Some do I heare of Poets' furie tell  
But (God wot) wot not what they meane by it.<sup>115</sup>

But he is ready to cite in defense of the poet the opinions of those who thought the poet divine. He explains that the poet was called a vates by the ancients, to whom his "high flying liberty of conceit

. . . did seem to have some divine force in it," and, in summing up, he asks the reader "to believe, with Clauserus, the translator of Cornutus, that it pleased the heavenly Deity, by Hesiod and Homer, under the veil of fables, to give us all knowledge," and "to believe, with Landino, that they [poets] are so beloved of the gods that whatsoever they write proceeds of a divine fury."<sup>116</sup>

Furthermore, his abandonment of inspiration does not prevent Sidney from advancing the poet's claim to knowledge or from considering poetry as primarily didactic. His replacement of inspiration by ingenium as the source of knowledge will concern us in a later chapter. Here we are concerned with what he says of the relationship of poetry to philosophy and history, for in arguing that poetry combines the rational prescriptions of philosophy with the concrete examples of feigned history, he is composing an aesthetic for Spenser's allegory.

The difficulty concerning much allegory is that its levels are too easily separable. To use Singleton's terms,<sup>117</sup> in an allegory of "this for that" we are likely to be satisfied with neither the narrative, which is apt to be thin and forced, nor the doctrine, which is apt to be oversimple in its schematization. In other words, since one level is meant to be substituted

for the other, the allegorical poem divides readily into Sidney's too unsatisfactory extremes: a meaningless history, on the one hand, and a bloodless philosophy, on the other. One solution, the allegory of "this and that" which Dante uses, allows the narrative to develop an intrinsic interest of its own. The other, which we may call "this in that," presents, as Spenser does, the patterns of moral norms working themselves out in particularized instances, with the poet controlling the particulars in such a way as to make them illuminate rather than obscure the universals. Thus Guyon, the hero of Book II of The Faerie Queene, undergoes fairly particularized adventures which reveal him to be the pattern of the temperate man. In an episode such as his destruction of Acrasia's bower, doctrine and narrative are so wedded that both lose depth if considered independently. Acrasia acquires resonance from the abstraction she embodies and it becomes vivid when endowed with her charms.

Because poetry does not deal with what is or has been, it is fiction. However, Sidney removes the opprobrium from fiction by taking a rhetorical or pragmatic view of truth. If the choice were merely one between good and poor representation of what is, then history would be superior to poetry, and poetry, being but a poor representation, could justifiably be called

a lie. But poetry is not judged by what is because it does not seek to imitate the world of fact. The poet is a maker because he creates a world of what should be, and that world, though not factually true, is, as Sperone would say, true according to reason; that is, it is true because it reveals the true universals and thereby furnishes better models for behavior than history can. Xenophon's Cyrus, Sidney argues, is preferable to the historical figure, and, if non-existent when Xenophon wrote, is gaining existence now through being imitated by historical rulers.<sup>118</sup> Sidney would agree with Oscar Wilde that Nature should follow Art rather than vice versa, though he would base the argument on the moral rather than on the aesthetic superiority of poetry's golden world.

Sidney further argues that, though the poet "recount things not true, yet because he telleth them not for true, he lieth not. . . ."<sup>119</sup> This line of reasoning, as we have seen, may, in denying poetry credibility, render it impotent, but Sidney does not deny poetry all belief. The reader, he says, does not believe the fiction as what is, but does believe it as what should be. The reader is not intended to, and does not, believe the poem's feigned history, but he is intended to, and does, believe its philosophy.

Sidney's analysis, we may note, raises some difficulties. His poet is, in the last analysis, a rhetorically superior philosopher; that is, the poet is superior to the historian on the philosophical ground of writing with greater necessity and intelligibility and superior to the philosopher on the rhetorical ground of presenting his concepts more forcefully. He does not, however, explain how the poet arrives at or validates his moral philosophy. He bases the mind's capacity for discovering moral truth simply on its creation by God and takes a decidedly optimistic view of the Fall when he argues that "our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is," though "our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it."<sup>120</sup> Sidney retains what Calvin specifically rejects, man's ability to know the highest moral truths, and he retains it without arguing for it. If he means to imply that man has unobscured innate ideas of good and evil, he provides no underpinning, Platonic or proto-Cartesian, for such an assumption.

Another, more literary, problem arises when we consider how the audience is to know that the poet is affirming nothing and, therefore, not dissembling. Sidney recognizes that the audience may be expecting truth instead of fiction, and he must be aware, though he does not admit it, that many poets do in fact affirm

a great deal. Sidney does not, like Castelvetro, regard verse as the indicator of fiction. Rather he thinks that fiction proclaims itself when the poet "citeth not authorities of other historians, but even for his entry calleth the sweet Muses to inspire into him a good invention. . . ."121

Not believing in inspiration, Sidney does not see the Muses as powers of God. He takes them instead in the Roman sense as personifications of the poet's invention. Therefore, he is ready to regard the invocation, which for other poets guaranteed the truth of the poem, as a signal to the audience that what follows is feigned. In this, as in his erecting of the wit or in his willingness to regard poetry as no more than a human skill, he anticipates much of seventeenth-century theory. At the same time, his ideas can, in Spenser's more Platonizing hands, form the basis for that most un-neoclassical work, The Faerie Queene.

The difference between Sidney and Spenser may be indicated in brief through a glance at the opening sonnets of their sonnet sequences. At the start of Astrophil and Stella Sidney's Muse tells him to look in his heart and write, but the opening of the Amoretti claims that Spenser's rhymes have been bathed in

Helicon. Sidney is, like Donne after him, a self-announced new poet who makes much of his own wit and who claims to rely less on poetic conventions than he actually does. Spenser is also a new poet, but one who puts on an air of being much more conventional than he is. Sidney attacks Petrarch while imitating him. Spenser goes in for elaborate imitation of Virgil to disguise the audacity of his far-from-Virgilian epic.

In 1579, the year of Lodge's theoretical defense, Spenser entered the lists as a champion wielding the sword of true poetry. The Shepheardes Calendar appeared with glosses, which, with literary works, were usually reserved for the ancient and acknowledged masterpieces. This move, roughly the equivalent of Jonson's calling his collected plays Works, proclaimed Spenser in competition with the ancients, and the competition was further enhanced since the glossed work was a series of versatile eclogues with the suggestion, in "October," that the poet was grooming himself for an attempt at the epic. In other words, Spenser announced that he was following the Virgilian model of poetic development, and, at the start of The Faerie Queene, he alluded to that model by imitating the opening of Virgil's Aeneid:

Lo, I the man whose Muse whilom did mask,  
As time her taught, in lowly Shepherd's weeds,  
As now enforced a far unfitter task:  
For trumpets stern to change my oaten reeds,



· · ·  
Helpe then, O holy Virgin chiefe of nine,  
Thy weaker Nouice to performe thy will,  
Lay forth out of thine euerlasting scryne  
The antique rolles, which there lye hidden  
still,  
Of Faerie knights and fairest Tanaquill,  
· · ·  
O helpe thou my weake wit, and sharpen my  
dull tong. (I, Pr., 1-2)

Spenser, like Virgil, introduces himself and refers to his apprenticeship in pastoral before invoking the Muse to help him in his new work. He professes humility, which Virgil does not, and hence gives the invocation greater plausibility. The last line indicates that he needs inspiration both for his invention and for his style; unlike Sidney and like Chaucer, he makes little of his wit. He follows what was coming to be orthodox epic practice by setting his action in an unknown place and time, before Arthur was king, and consequently he can call on the Muse who has recorded all great deeds to tell him what he wishes to relate.

Thus far, Spenser might seem to be merely the good ape of Virgil and the good student of Vida, but in the remaining invocations his Neoplatonism comes out and we realize that imitation is not the ground of the first passage but only an added fillip. Belief in poetic furor is, in fact, cited by E. K. as the basis of Spenser's lost tract, The English Poete. Poetry, that tract explains, is "no arte, but a diuine gift and

heavenly instinct not to be gotten by laboure and learning, but adorned with both: and poured into the witte by a certaine *ἐνθουσιασμός*. and celestiall inspiration. . . ."122 The position suggests that of the Pléiade, under whose influence Spenser fell in the early part of his career, when he must have written the tract. Inspiration is all-important, but to it are to be added the poet's labor and learning. Moreover, if "adorned" is taken to refer, as it often does, to the use of figures, then Spenser's early position is not far from Peletier's: inspiration provides the story, copied from the Muse's scroll, and the poet labors to use his art and learning in the construction of epic similes and other devices that enrich the narrative.

But is not Spenser merely calling upon "the sweet Muses to inspire into him a good invention"? The "Letter to Raleigh" refers to the narrative as a fiction. The placing of the action in Faeryland would seem to be a way of affirming nothing about the historicity of the characters, and J. W. Bennett has shown that St. George was available to Spenser only because he was regarded as a mythical national hero and not a true Roman Catholic saint.<sup>123</sup> Surely Error lacks all verisimilitude, even as a dragon, and his presence, like that of similar creatures, points up the fictionality of the work. All this is undeniable; yet,

Spenser refuses to treat Faeryland as a mere fiction and argues, in the Proem to Book II, for the possibility of its existence. He well knows

That all this famous antique history,  
Of some th'abundance of an idle braine  
Will iudged be, and painted forgery,  
Rather than matter of iust memory. . . .  
(II, Pr., 1)

Still, more strange lands are being discovered every day, and man can no longer be sure he knows what is possible and what is not. A dragon that vomits forth pamphlets is only slightly more wonderful than some of the things related in Mandeville's Travels. Spenser uses a skepticism of the senses and of established knowledge to attack the crude, commonsense empiricism to which he attributes possible reader disbelief in his narrative. If Peru and Virginia existed before they were discovered by Europeans, who knows what other lands of marvels there may be?

Why then should witlesse man so much misweene  
That nothing is, but that which he hath seene?  
What if within the Moones faire shining  
spheare?  
What if in euery other starre unseene  
Of other worldes he happily should heare?  
He wonder would much more: yet such to some  
appeare.

Of Faerie lond yet if he more inquire,  
By certaine signes here set in sundry place  
He may it find; ne let him then admire,  
But yield his sence to be too blunt and  
bace. . . . (II, Pr., 3-4)

He goes on to say that Elizabeth will find the image of

herself and of her kingdom in Faeryland, and, on one level, he is, like Virgil, dealing with his nation's heroic antiquity and praising his monarch by reciting the brave deeds of her ancestors and types. However, at the same time, he does not regard Faeryland as historically bound and treats it as still existent, and his anti-empiricist argument suggests that the realm may have a Platonic existence. Faeryland is not just a mirror of England but a mirror for magistrates and for all mankind. If Elizabeth finds her likeness there, it is because hers is a likeness of the virtues, and Faeryland is a land of moral patterns. Stanza 3 suggests that Faeryland may be supramundane, and stanza 4 asserts that the senses are too base to perceive it. We conclude that Faeryland is a world of the mind, in some ways (e.g., its perpetual springtime) similar to the one Palingenius argued for.

This conclusion is supported by the invocation to Book VI:

Ye sacred imps, that on Parnasso dwell,  
And there the keeping haue of learnings  
    treasures,  
Which doe all worldly riches farre excell,  
Into the mindes of mortall men doe well,  
And goodly fury into them infuse;  
Guyde ye my footing, and conduct me well  
In these strange waies, where neuer foote  
    did vse,  
Ne none can find, but who was taught them by  
    the Muse.

Reuele to me the sacred nourserie  
Of vertue, which with you doth there remaine,  
. . . (VI, Pr., 2-3)

The sole entrance to Faeryland is through poetic furor because it is the nursery of virtue hidden from the view of man. It is not, though, the realm of the pure Platonic Ideas but only derived from them ("being deriu'd at furst/ From heauenly seedes of bounty soueraine"). Calidore may be Courtesy, but he is also Calidore. Faeryland is Sidney's golden world, the world that should be, but Spenser is less of a nominalist than Sidney and supports his world with the theory of inspiration. The virtues are not ficta, and the characters embodying them are, if fictions, not merely such. One might call them epistemological fictions, for their mode of existence is like that of legal fictions: they are born from the wedding of the individual invention with something suprapersonal and objective, the legal system in one case, the moral system in the other. Moreover, the poet's invention is vouched for by the Muses. His characters, then, are meant to have something of the reality of Platonic intermediaries, more particularized than the Ideas apprehended by philosophy and more intelligible than people caught in the flux of earthly history.

Spenser introduces degrees of poetic furor to indicate the height of his subject. In the second

invocation in the poem, Spenser asks the aid of the "sacred Muse" who is "Nourse of time and euerlasting fame" in relating the struggle between Red Cross and the dragon:

O gently come into my feeble brest,  
Come gently, but not with that mighty rage,  
Wherewithal the martiall troopes thou doest  
infest,  
And hearts of great Heroes doest enrage,  
.  
.  
.  
Faire Goddess lay that furious fit aside,  
Till I of warres and bloudy Mars do sing,  
.  
.  
.  
And to my tunes thy second tenor rayse,  
That I this man of God his godly armes may  
blaze. (I, xi, 6-7)

The passage depicts two kinds and two degrees of rage. The hero's rage is for glory, and hence Prince Arthur's deeds are motivated by his quest for Gloriana. The epic Muse may be said to cause that rage in that she promises the hero everlasting fame for his noble actions, fame being a secular equivalent of glory. The heroic rage is, though, not inspiration, though it is comparable to it in that both exact a physical and emotional toll from the persons possessed.

The passage also distinguishes between two degrees of inspiration. The poet will need the "mighty rage," the highest invention and style, to depict the last apocalyptic struggle between good and evil, the forces of "that great faery Queene and Paynim king." In Canto Eleven of Book I, he has not reached that level

of generality; he is dealing with the individual's, Red Cross's, defeat of evil through an imitatio Christi, a three-day struggle in which the old man is slain and the new man emerges victorious through God's grace; this, however exemplary, is not the final defeat of Satan, or even of Archimago and Duessa, his cohorts. For this subject, a special plea for inspiration is deemed necessary, but the "second tenor," with its gentler coming-on, is requested.

Two degrees of inspiration also seem to be involved in the Mutabilitie Cantos, and at least one of them is different from the two of Book I, Canto Eleven. The poet interrupts his discourse of the gods and Mutability to tell the pastoral story of Faunus and, in doing so, changes Muses (VII, vi, 37). Canto Seven then begins with an invocation to the "greater Muse" who is lifting the poet's "fraile spirit" out of the woods and to heaven:

Yet sith I needs must follow thy behest,  
Doe thou my weaker wit with skill inspire,  
Fit for this turne; and in my feeble brest  
Kindle fresh sparks of that immortall fire,  
Which learned minds inflameth with desire  
Of heauenly things: for, who but thou alone,  
That art yborne of heauen and heauenly Sire,  
Can tell things doen in heauen so long ygone;  
So farre past memory of man that may be  
knowne. (VII, vii, 2)

The Mutabilitie Cantos differ from the rest of the epic in being cosmological poetry, and the forces involved

are fictional only insofar as they are personified. The story of Faunus, on the other hand, is a pleasant, and not particularly high, fiction. Consequently, different degrees of inspiration and differing amounts of divine control appear. Since, in Canto Seven, the poet is relying on the Muse's knowledge of heavenly things, it is proper that she should see to it that the poem conveys the truth accurately.

In addition to the various degrees of inspiration. Spenser presents the possibility of writing without the Muse's assistance. In telling the Mother Hubberds Tale, the poet refuses to invoke any goddess: "No Muses aide me needes heretoo to call;/ Base is the style, and matter meane withall." Yet, he is not saying that the tale is not worth reading; he is announcing that the poem is a satire and reflecting Persius' refusal to invoke a deity in the "Prologue" to his Satires.<sup>124</sup> Satire, dealing with human folly and corruption, is the opposite genre from epic; it claims to be based on observation rather than on invention because it has no trace of the world as it should be and is wholly taken up with the world as it is; and it uses an unpolished style to go with its "low" subject matter and to express the author's indignation. Hence, no supernal help is needed; to invoke the Muse here is to debase her.



That varying degrees of inspiration go with varying heights of subject matter is clearest in Spenser's most Platonic work, the Fowre Hymnes. Professor J. W. Bennett has shown that the concluding stanzas of the hymns trace an ascension up a Platonic ladder of love like that described in Pico's commentary on Benivieni.<sup>125</sup> As the soul becomes receptive to each successively higher power (each Love being inferior to each Beauty since, by Platonic definition, Love is the desire of Beauty, and having is superior to wanting), it climbs until, in the concluding hymn, it enters the presence of the godhead. The poems may then be said to represent, in Ficinian terms, the triumph of the erotic furor. Nonetheless, it may be pointed out that the poet has, as poet, also been rising through the sequence of hymns. Spenser parallels the poet's ascent with the lover's, just as, in FQ I, x, 53-54, he compares the Mount of Contemplation that Red Cross climbs for his Pisgah-vision of the New Jerusalem first to Mount Sinai, then to the Mount of Olives, and then, in splendid anticlimax, to Mount Parnassus. The poetic madness is not inferior to the erotic, as in the Fowre Hymnes, or to the prophetic, as in The Faerie Queene.

Spenser begins the first hymn as much a lover as a poet. Suffering under Cupid's smart, he decides to relieve his pain and win the god's favor by writing a

hymn in his praise.

Only I feare my wits enfeebled late,  
Through the sharpe sorrowes, which thou hast  
me bred,  
Should faint, and words should faile me, to  
relate  
The wondrous triumphs of thy great godhed.  
• • •  
Come softly, and my feeble breast inspire  
With gentle furie, kindled of thy fire.  
(HL 15-28)

The "gentle furie," once again, suggests a lesser degree of inspiration, and indeed not much seems to be necessary. The poet implies that were he not enfeebled by love's sorrows words would not fail him. Moreover, the help needed is only in expression; the loving poet has ample knowledge of Cupid's triumphs.

As Love naturally leads to Beauty, so the first hymn entails a second. The latter begins with an acknowledgment that the poet has been seized by greater rage. "What wontlesse fury dost thou /Love/ now inspire/ Into my feeble breast, too full of thee?" Yet, what the poet asks of Venus is still not very great:

Thereto do thou great Goddess, queene of  
Beauty,  
Mother of loue, and of all worlds delight,  
Without whose souerayne grace and kindly dewty,  
Nothing on earth seems fayre to fleshly sight,  
Doe thou vouchsafe with thy loue-kindling  
light,  
T'illuminate my dimmed and dulled eyne,  
And beautifie this sacred hymne of thyne.  
(HB 15-21)

That Venus is connected with the "worlds delight"  
and making things "on earth /seem/ fayre to fleshly

sight" indicates that she is to be distinguished from the Heavenly Beautie of the last hymn. There is no indication in the stanza that the eyes the poet wishes sharpened are any other than the eyes of the body. A sensitivity to what makes the world's beauties beautiful leads to the conception of a pattern of Beauty which can then be contemplated by the mind's eye; the poet seems to be asking for the initial sensitivity. He is asking for more than words; beauty is to be the matter of his poem; but insofar as he is asking only for heightened powers of observing the world, he is not quite within the realm of true inspiration, in which supernal knowledge is infused into the poet's mind.

The plea opening the next hymn stands in contrast to that in An Hymne of Beavtie:

Loue, lift me vp upon thy golden wings,  
From this base world vnto thy heauens light,  
Where I may see those admirable things,  
Which there thou workest by thy soueraine  
    might,  
Farre aboue feeble reach of earthly sight,  
That I thereof an heavenly Hymne may sing  
Vnto the god of Loue, high heauens king.  
                        (HHL 1-7)

The poet is now desiring to pass the boundaries of terrestrial knowledge. "Earthly sight," however sharp, would be too feeble to contemplate celestial glory. He seeks aid from the Holy Ghost, "Eternall spring of grace and wisdome trewe" (HHL 44), for he will need grace to

attain to the wisdom to write a proper hymn to Heavenly Love, the Christ who became Jesus to show man the way to the Father. To complete the invocation, he asks as well for "words equall vnto my thought" (HHL 48), and this request contrasts with the similar request in An Hymne of Love because this heightened expression is naturally called for by inspired matter.

In the final invocation, the poet at last contemplates Heavenly Beautie in the height of rapture and asks for further inspiration so that he may, as in Plato's magnetic chain, communicate his transport to his fellow men:

Rapt with the rage of mine own rauisht thought,  
Through contemplation of those goodly sights,  
And glorious images in heauen wrought,  
Whose wondrous beauty breathing sweet delights,  
Do kindle loue in high conceipted sprights:  
I faine to tell the things ~~that~~ I behold,  
But feele my wits to faile, and tongue to fold.

Vouchsafe, then, O most almightie Spright,  
From whom all guifts of wit and knowledge flow,  
To shed into my breast some sparkling light  
Of thine eternall Truth, that I may show  
Some little beames to mortall eyes below,  
Of that immortall beautie, there with thee,  
Which in my weake distraughted mynde I see.

That with the glorie of so goodly sight,  
The hearts of men, which fondly here admyre  
Fair seeming shewes, and feed on vaine delight,  
Transported with celestial desyre  
Of those faire formes, may lift themselues vp  
hyer,  
And learne to loue with zealous humble dewty  
Th'eternall fountaine of that heauenly beauty.  
(HHB 1-21)

Sapience is both the source of Beauty and the source of Truth, and both are apprehended through the elevation of the mind, the "high conceipted spright." The Poet's wits fail now not from the accidental weakness of earthly love but from the essential weakness of mortality contemplating eternity. Poetry is now impossible without inspiration and, where the end of the erotic furor is union with the loved object, the end of Spenser's ecstasy is poetry, communication with those less fortunate than he. For, however much Spenser is the lover of the Heavenly Beautie, he is also her poet, and he is no less concerned than d'Aubigne or Milton will be to show the inspired poet's power.

In the next generation of poets, two stand out as believers in inspiration. Michael Drayton praises Marlowe for having "in him those brave translunary things/ That the first poets had;" he attributes Marlowe's success to poetic furor:

For that fine madness still he did retain  
Which rightly should possess a poet's brain.<sup>126</sup>

He sees the poet as a fountain of civilization, one "from whose Sacred Rage,/ Flowes the full glorie of each plenteous Age. . . ." <sup>127</sup>

Drayton is most interesting, though, in his efforts to make inspiration plausible to nonbelievers. The passage in Endimion and Phebe (1595) where he justifies

the nine Muses as an allegory for the nine orders of angels has been quoted on page 187 in the previous chapter. In another part of the same poem he explains how inspiration is possible:

Her sweet Endimion more to beautifie,  
Into his soule the Goddesse doth infuse,  
The fiery nature of a heavenly Muse,  
Which in the spyrit labouring by the mind  
Pertaketh of things celestial by kind:  
For why the soule being divine alone,  
Exempt from vile and gross corruption,  
Of heavenly secrets comprehensible,  
Of which the dull flesh is not sensible,  
.  
.  
.  
And so by inspiration conceaveth  
What heaven to her by divination breatheth.<sup>128</sup>

As long as the soul's divinity is eclipsed by the "dull flesh," man's knowledge is limited to what is "sensible"; when the soul is set free by poetic rapture, its divinity asserts itself, and it "partaketh of things celestial" because it has an immortal essence similar to theirs. It may be noted that later poets, exalting the wit, will deny that rapture is essential for the soul to exercise its divine nature, thereby making the soul possess actually the power Drayton gives it only potentially.

Drayton's Harmonie of the Church (1591) is an early example of the sacred poetry to which other fine talents will shortly turn their energies. His "Address to the Reader" stresses that he is going to avoid "devises of mine owne invention, as carieng an

overweening of mine own wit," and he concludes that he will write "Not of Vanitie but of Veritie: not of Tales, but of Truethes."<sup>129</sup> He thus anticipates seventeenth-century developments in the theory of inspiration in turning poetry away from fiction and closer to simple truth.

George Chapman also ridicules the pretensions of wit. He mocks "soule-blind Scalliger" for "the absolute inspiration of thine owne ridiculous Genius," but for genuine inspiration from God he has only the highest respect. Poetry "must needs be acknowledged a diuine infusion" because everyone agrees that it cannot achieve excellence through mere art and labor.<sup>130</sup> He presents Homer's work as the best evidence for his argument. What does the depiction of Achilles's shield suggest but a "more then Artificiall and no lesse then Diuine Rapture, . . . for what is here prefigurde by our miraculous Artist but the vniuersall world, which, being so spacious and almost vnmeasurable, one circlet of a Shield represents and imbraceth?"<sup>131</sup>

Chapman is the last major poet before Milton to make a contribution to the theory of inspiration without equivocation or contradiction. Of the three most influential new poets of the first half of the seventeenth century, Donne and Herbert, the founders

of the secular and sacred metaphysical poetry respectively, are silent on the subject, and Jonson, at the head of the classical line, rejects it outright. Even the imitators of Spenser have little use for it. The invocations of Giles and Phineas Fletcher are perfunctory and ask for high style rather than for high truth. Phineas lacks the scientific imagination to treat his Purple Island as the mysterious, barely explored realm it was and instead regards it as a familiar province in which he has seen all the sights. Giles invokes Holy Scripture, not the Holy Ghost, for his knowledge of Christ's Victorie and Triumph.<sup>132</sup> William Browne, as we shall see, belongs more with the doubters than with the believers in inspiration.

A minor poet who embraced the theory, George Wither, shows the extent to which it had become declass  . Wither placed more and more stress on the content of his poems, and on their divine infusion, as he turned more and more to utilitarian poetry for a devout, nonliterary audience and adopted his audience's distrust of rhetoric. But even before he turned to hymns and biblical paraphrases, he argued that "the sacred Muses can/ Make a child in years a man"<sup>133</sup> and felt that having the Muse more than made up for a lack of wisdom:



Her divine skill taught me this,  
That from everything I saw  
I could some invention draw,  
And raise pleasure to her height,  
Through the meanest object's sight.  
She could more infuse in me  
Than all Nature's beauties can  
In some other wiser man.<sup>134</sup>

Wither exercises the option, which Ronsard and Milton strive to deny, of bringing out the anti-intellectualism inherent in any theory of inspiration. In presenting inspiration as a means by which an untutored man may become better than his betters, he may have been doing no more than drawing the moral from the stories of Hesiod and Caedmon, but the arrogance of his claim, coupled with the utter lack of evidence for it in his pedestrian verse, places him, and the theory of inspiration, squarely in the camp of the enthusiasts, and the confusion of genuine inspiration with misguided enthusiasm is a prime reason for the downfall of both theory and poet.

Wither also testifies to the rupture between inspiration and allegory. Allegory involves feigning and uses rhetoric to color the truth, but inspired poetry will have nothing to do with feigning and will present its truth plainly.<sup>135</sup> Wither, then, uses the theory to deny the very creative freedom it had initially been adopted to foster.

The theory merely hangs on in the prose. Puttenham

is unstinting in his claims for poets; they were "the first priests, the first prophets, the first legislators and polititians . . . the first philosophers, the first astronomers and historiographers and oratours and musitiens of the world";<sup>136</sup> but he fails to assign divine infusion as the cause for the poets' success and, as befits the author of an Arte of English Poesie, he is uncertain of its necessity:

And this science [poetry] in his perfection can not grow but by some diuine instinct--the Platonicks call it furor; or by great subtiltie of the spirits & wit; or by much experience and obseruation of the world, and course of kind; or, peraduenture, by all or most part of them.<sup>137</sup>

The passage enables us to see the old belief in collision with the two beliefs, in wit and in experience, which will replace it. The introduction of experience as important reminds us that we are coming into the age of Bacon.

One last and regrettable example of the use of inspiration also conjures up the spirit of the Lord Chancellor. Drayton's friend Henry Reynolds uses it in his Mythomystes (1632) in what may be the English beginning of the quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns. The ancients, he argues, are superior to the moderns because they were divinely inspired and hid in their fables all that the philosophers were later to put into workaday prose.<sup>138</sup> This is the combination of

inspiration with the degenerative theory of man's development that Ronsard used in the "Ode à Michel de l'Hospital," and even Sidney was more ready to accept the ancients' claims to inspiration than the moderns'. But neither used it against his generation of poets: they were to recapture the ancient glory and, for Ronsard, they were as inspired as the ancients. Reynolds was not doing inspiration a favor by placing it on what could only be the losing side in the quarrel, though, of course, he was right. In the next chapter we will see how the leading ideas of the seventeenth-century "modernists" were opposed to the possibility of poetic rapture and contributed to its loss of credibility.

NOTES: CHAPTER FIVE

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3 Nancy Lenkeith, Dante and the Legend of Rome (London, 1952), pp. 40-41.

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24 Ibid., p. 130.

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- 73 Marcel Raymond, L'Influence de Ronsard sur la Poésie Française (Geneva, 1965), p. 104.
- 74 Joachim du Bellay, Oeuvres Poétiques, ed. Henri Chamard, 6 vol. (Paris, 1908-19), II, 170.
- 75 Joachim du Bellay, La Deffence et Illustration de la Langue Francoyse, ed. Henri Chamard (Paris, 1904), pp. 300-301.
- 76 Ibid., pp. 197-98.
- 77 Pierre de Ronsard, Oeuvres Completes, ed. Paul Laumonier, 8 vols. (Paris, 1914-19), IV, 311.

78 Metaphysics 981b in Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. Richard McKeon (New York, 1941), p. 690.

79 Because the spelling in Peletier is difficult, I have used the normalized versions presented in Patterson, p. 440. The original is in Jacques Peletier du Mans, Art Poétique, ed. Andre Boulanger (Paris, 1930), p. 69.

80 Patterson, p. 411; Peletier, pp. 73-74.

81 Ronsard, II, 119-48.

82 Ibid., IV, 311.

83 Ibid., VII, 45-46.

84 Ibid., VII, 52.

85 Ibid., VII, 80, 84, 90.

86 Ibid., V, 45-46.

87 Ibid., II, 169-70.

88 Raymond, pp. 315-316 in Jodelle's "L'Hyménée de Charles IX" (1565), the Muses say that they alone have power over verses and that if a prophecy comes from the human soul they have inspired it; cf. Raymond, pp. 274-5.

- 89 Lily B. Campbell, "The Christian Muse,"  
Huntington Library Bulletin, VIII (1935), 40.
- 90 Bartas: His Devine Weekes and Works, tr.  
Joshua Sylvester, ed. Francis C. Haber (Gainesville,  
1965), pp. 531, 533.
- 91 John Davies of Hereford, "The Muse's Sacrifice,  
or Divine Meditations," p. 8, in The Complete Works of  
John Davies of Hereford, ed. A. B. Grosart (Edinburgh,  
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- 92 Bartas, p. 536.
- 93 Ibid., p. 1-2.
- 94 Ibid., p. 146.
- 95 Theodore Agrippa d'Aubigné, Oeuvres Completes,  
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- 96 Theodore Agrippa d'Aubigné, Les Tragiques, ed.  
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- 97 Ibid., I, 35-36.
- 98 R. A. Sayce, The French Biblical Epic in the  
Seventeenth Century (Oxford, 1955), p. 16.
- 99 Les Tragiques, IV, 197.

100 Patterson, p. 753.

101 Cf. J. W. H. Atkins, English Literary Criticism: The Medieval Phase (London, 1952), p. 176. The O. E. D. lists only two uses of "inspire" before Skelton: both are from the fourteenth century and neither refers to poets.

102 John Skelton, The Poetical Works of John Skelton, ed. A. Dyce (New York, 1965), I, 221.

103 Ibid., I, 222.

104 Gilbert, p. 237.

105 John Rainolds, Oratio in Laudem Artis Poeticae, ed. William Ringler, tr. Walter Allen, Jr. (Princeton, 1940), p. 35.

106 Alexander Barclay, The Life of St. George, ed. William Nelson (London, 1960), p. 14.

107 The Poetical Works of Gavin Douglas, ed. John Small (Edinburgh, 1874), II, 17.

108 L. R. Merrill, The Life and Poems of Nicholas Grimald (New Haven, 1925), p. 111.

109 Smith, I, 47-8.

110 Theodore Beza, A Tragedie of Abrahams

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(Toronto, 1906), pp. 5-6.

111 Smith, I, 73.

112 Ibid., I, 71.

113 Ibid., I, 72.

114 Gilbert, p. 445.

115 The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney, ed. William  
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117 Charles S. Singleton, Dante Studies I  
(Cambridge, Mass., 1957), p. 91.

118 Gilbert, pp. 423, 413.

119 Ibid., p. 439.

120 Ibid., p. 414.

121 Ibid., p. 439.

122 The "Argument" to the "October" eclogue.

123 J. W. Bennett, The Evolution of the Faerie  
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- 124 The Satires of Persius, tr. W. S. Merwin  
(Bloomington, 1961), p. 52.
- 125 J. W. Bennett, "The Theme of Spenser's Fowre Hymnes," SP, XXVIII (1931), 18-57.
- 126 Michael Drayton, The Works of Michael Drayton,  
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- 127 Ibid., II, 297.
- 128 Ibid., I, 142.
- 129 Ibid., I, 3.
- 130 Smith, II, 301; J. E. Spingarn, Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century (Bloomington, 1957), I, 67.  
"Spingarn" in the following notes will refer to this collection.
- 131 Smith, II, 297.
- 132 The Complete Poems of Giles Fletcher, ed. A. B. Grosart (London, 1876), p. 126.
- 133 George Wither, The Poetry of George Wither, ed. Frank Sidgwick (London, 1902), I, 55.
- 134 Ibid., I, 60-61.
- 135 George Wither, Hallelujah, ed. Edward Farr

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136 Smith, II, 6, 8.

137 Ibid., II, 3-4.

138 Spingarn, I, 152.



## CHAPTER SIX

### METHOD AND THE DECLINE OF INSPIRATION

With a little hindsight, it is easy to see that the theory of inspiration was doomed from the start to a short if happy existence because the intellectual conditions it required, skepticism and eclecticism, lacked stability. If the Renaissance was a period in which philosophy's weakness allowed poetry to make its side of the ancient quarrel seriously heard, then the establishment of the new philosophy could only cause poetry to assume a modified defensive position which, as always, was on ground chosen by the enemy. Inspiration was not considered a viable defense, for many of the new philosophers, who leaned toward empiricism, materialism and mechanism, found it antipathetic. Moreover, beyond the doctrines of the new philosophy was a basic agreement of the nature of truth which, more than anything else, ruled out inspiration as a means of knowledge. Truth, the philosophers insisted, must be "methodical," and it is the implications of this word, a magical one for the seventeenth century, that we must

consider. In brief, the demand for method ruled out inspiration in two complementary ways: first, by rendering it impossible or at least unlikely, and second, by rendering it unnecessary.

It will not be the function of this chapter to chart the history of methodology or to discuss the various methods propounded by the predecessors of Bacon and Descartes: both have been done well elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> We are concerned rather with the methodologists' common ground: the argument that satisfactory knowledge can only result from a satisfactory method of arriving at it, and the further argument that since Truth is one and thinking minds are essentially the same, there should be only one basic thinking procedure. Still, some small history will be helpful at the start to relate the rise of method to Renaissance thought.

"Method" was first employed by the schoolmen as a term similar to "art." An "art," in normal medieval parlance, is a way of doing something, and a method is an art simplified and set out for maximum efficiency. "Method" was first used by Lambert of Auxerre (ca. 1250) and achieved importance in the influential Summulae Logicales of Peter of Spain, which opened with the famous dictum, echoing Lambert, that "Dialectica est ars artium et scientia scientiarum ab omnium methodorum principia viam habens." Dialectics, which

in Aristotle was merely the logic of the probable, was trumpeted as the method whereby one could learn and verify the contents of the arts and sciences.<sup>2</sup> In medieval logic the schoolmen found generally stated the procedures of thought which, they felt, could be applied to the particular arts. By 1426, Jean Gerson, chancellor of the University of Paris, could protest that grammarians were turning their study into logic and that logicians were applying their methods to metaphysics and theology.<sup>3</sup>

This movement toward monomethodology was arrested by the severe blows dealt medieval logic by nominalistic and negative theology, Euclidian geometry, and natural science, and by the eclecticism of the humanists. The recovery of Euclid, Galen and Plato led to the conclusion that the ancients spoke of diverse methods other than the Aristotelian and favored those humanists who, in Garin's overstatement, preferred to conceive "of an open world, discontinuous and full of contradictions, incessantly changing and hostile to any kind of systemization."<sup>4</sup> True to the pragmatism of their rhetorical training, the humanists wished to be free to use whatever means might work in a given situation and were, generally, more concerned with the effectiveness than with the validity or consistency of their positions. With rhetorical effect as a meeting ground, humanist

philosophy and poetry approached each other, and Pico della Mirandola and Lorenzo Valla, following the Platonic precedents, utilized in philosophical works fables geared to teach moral lessons about man's use of his free will.

Still, there were forces at work to interest the humanists in method. For one, they were teachers, and method was intimately bound up with instruction. Peter of Spain was concerned with method because he was writing a textbook for students of the trivium, and the humanists, as responsible pedagogues, were also out to simplify things for their students. However informal their discourses might be, their textbooks had to set up the subject in an easily apprehensible order, and method, particularly as handled by Ramus, was the equivalent of proper disposition.

Then, the humanists in general, and Protestant humanists like Melancthon and Ramus in particular, shared with the natural scientists a contempt for the pure and, they felt, fruitless intellection of the scholastics. Both scientists and humanists intended to turn knowledge to man's profit, both were concerned more with "knowhow" than with knowing why, and hence both were looking for efficacious procedures, or methods.

More important, however much Pico may occasionally

sound like Jean-Paul Sartre, Renaissance man could not rest happy in a state of skepticism. He had developed little of that "rage for chaos" which has characterized thinkers of the last two centuries, and for someone like John Donne, who was not the least hardy of thinkers, chaos, and not ataraxia, was the result of the new philosophy's calling all in doubt. Skepticism, which had been used by the fideists and others to defend existing order against innovations, was found to be dangerous to that order, for there seemed to be no limits to the extent to which man's certainty could be shaken. Descartes, in his Discourse on Method, plumbed the depths of uncertainty in order to arrive at an indubitable truth, on which basis and using which model he hoped to create a method for putting an end to skepticism.

Though opposed in theory, skepticism and the scientific method did contribute to each other's development. We have already seen that reawakening interest in geometry and in experimentalism helped to undermine the authority of the Organon and thereby helped to create an atmosphere in which skepticism and eclecticism could flourish, though, of course, it also generated the methodological controversies of the sixteenth century which culminated in the Baconian and

Cartesian solutions. Similarly, the methods developed out of and fed on the Renaissance situation.

Most of the Renaissance skepticism was directed away from the scientists and against their rivals, the metaphysicians. Ockham and his followers had explicit faith in sense-data and gave experimental science a likelihood of success while they emphasized the futility of speculation not based on sensation. Calvin did not declare man incapable of science, only of the higher pursuits of theology and morals. Following Calvin's lead, Bacon could argue that experimental science did not inflate but humbled the mind by submitting its powers to the rigors of methodical observation; hence the mind was free of that hubris which led to the Fall and, consequently, might gain God's blessing.<sup>5</sup>

Descartes and Bacon both begin with skepticism and use elements of it, but both use their methods to pass beyond it, Descartes hastily, like one fleeing from Hell, and Bacon slowly, like one passing through Purgatory. Both welcomed the skeptical attack on authority and both advocated doubt of what did not fall within the confines of the method. In addition, Descartes shows, as Gilson has pointed out, Augustine's influence in his devaluation of sense-data and in his avowal of innate ideas, which have a family resemblance to Augustine's seminal reasons.<sup>6</sup> To this we may add

that Descartes, like Augustine, underwent a skeptical phase only to escape from a foreign dogmatic authority and in the confidence that he could attain a more certain truth with which to defeat the skepticism. Certainly, the Cartesian method does not allow for any doubt but functions as an authority as dogmatic as any the author might have rejected; having established that one idea cannot be doubted without self-contradiction, Descartes went on to assert his series of innate ideas and to maintain these with a good deal of inflexibility. Bacon, on the other hand, utilized the opposing skepticism of pure intellection, and his method may be looked upon as a modification of Sextus Empiricus. Where Sextus opposed sense-data and intellection without choosing between them Bacon gives the edge to sense-data, and Sextus' suspension of judgment becomes in Baconian induction the refusal to theorize without a sufficient body of evidence. Bacon's skepticism, though, is, like Descartes', temporary, and no skepticism is to be directed against the conclusions reached through his method. Seventeenth-century thinkers might well conclude with Glanvill that method "is equally an Adversary to Scepticism and Credulity" and that in method "if any where, there is Certainty. . . ."7

From Renaissance eclecticism Descartes and Bacon

inherited the desire for a universal philosophy which could command a consensus gentium, but where the eclectics sought the consensus in what they believed to be common doctrine, the more sophisticated philosophers sought a universally applicable method which would compel it from anyone with average or better intelligence. Instead of seeking to escape from parochial authority by citing a host of authorities, they make only the method authoritative.

Nonetheless, the discontinuity between humanists and philosophers is, of course, greater than the continuity, and it is the discontinuity that influences the decline of inspiration and an alteration in the conception of poetry. The methodologists accomplished nothing less than a revolution in the way propositions were to be judged, for they took the emphasis off the source of a given statement and placed it on the procedure through which the statement appeared. Nothing was to be accepted on the authority of exalted individuals or of established organizations or, for that matter, on the authority of the sense or the reason.<sup>8</sup> The latter refusal is particularly significant, for it indicates a recognition that much heat and little light had been generated in epistemology by arguments seeking to build up or undermine the prestige of one faculty or another and that the skepticism the



methodologists were trying to defeat depended on the prevalence of such arguments. The skeptics argued that, in the last analysis, statements were accepted not on demonstration, for there was no criterion of truth, but on authority; a fideist was a skeptic turned dogmatist who accepted his beliefs on the authority of king or church. As skepticism arose out of the unsettling of scholastic logic, so it could only be defeated through the acceptance of a sounder procedure for verification. Truths could then depend on the proper application of the procedure, just as the conclusion of a series of syllogisms was considered valid if there had been no fallacious reasoning.

Of the rival epistemologies to the Aristotelian, the Neoplatonic and the Pauline, both of which flourished with the disintegration of the Thomist synthesis and both of which support the theory of inspiration, depend on considerations of source rather than of procedure. The Neoplatonists drew a variety of conclusions from the nobility of the reason and the inferiority of the corporeal senses, among them the Augustinian doctrine of illumination and the Palingenian argument for the existence of a Platonic otherworld. The Calvinists argued, as St. Paul had, that man's fallen wit could not possibly challenge what was given by the Spirit of

God. Both were open to skeptical and rationalist attack. Statements of authority could be pitted against each other and divine revelations could be regarded as spurious.

The Neoplatonists and Calvinists were particularly vulnerable in their fondness for private truths, a fondness developing from reliance on authority. Both assumed that the highest truths could only be the possession of a few. The Neoplatonists looked to a long line of gnostics who had hidden truths in allegory to which only the Neoplatonists had the key. A Calvinist could be sure only of his individual illumination and knew that the Spirit's testimony could only be received by the illuminated. Both groups had essentially aristocratic epistemologies: the possessors of the truth maintained their position by virtue of having been chosen by God or by virtue of some intellectual or moral superiority.

Bacon and Descartes, though, both disclaim any extraordinary intelligence and credit their achievements to their methods. Method produces a public, democratic truth: anyone of normal intelligence can repeat the procedure which produces and validates any statement produced by the method.<sup>9</sup> It is the lack of dependence on anything other than the method that makes the statement public and makes it possible for anyone to

check it. For the methodologists it is important that the consensus on a proposition be broad, while for the Neoplatonists it had to be deep. The difference, if one may make the analogy, is that between the popular appeal striven for by eighteenth-century poets and novelists and the "fit audience . . . though few" Milton hoped for.

It is not hard to see on which side poetry's claim to knowledge falls. The poets discussed in the last chapter who claimed a knowledge proper to poetry and inaccessible to philosophy were speaking about private truths. They based their assertions either on extraordinary wit, as in Sidney, or, more often, on inspiration. Inspiration, necessarily personal, is the most private of truths, and, being about matters else unknowable, depends entirely on authority, the Ipse dixit of God.

The poet's claim to private knowledge, then, could only run up against the "Uniformitarianism," which for Lovejoy "is the first and fundamental principle" of the new philosophy:

The reason, it is assumed to be evident, is identical in all men; and the life of the reason therefore, it is tacitly or explicitly inferred, must admit of no diversity.  
. . . Anything of which the intelligibility, verifiability, or actual affirmation is limited to men of a special age, race, temperament, tradition or condition is eo ipso without truth or value, or at all events without importance to a reasonable man.<sup>10</sup>

This "uniformitarianism" results in the appeal to

the consensus gentium which says, in effect, that the highest truth is the most public truth, "that which all men have at all times learned," and it is noteworthy that Hooker is ready to make this most public truth equivalent to "the sentence of God himself."<sup>11</sup> If God speaks through a consensus gentium, what need, Hooker implies, is there for him to speak through an individual person, even if a John Milton?

It is, at least in Hooker's case, no coincidence that a principle is embraced that will rule out private truths in general and inspiration in particular. Hooker's Ecclesiastical Polity is written, in large part, against the dissenting sects, who based their dissent on individual reception of the inner light, another name for which was "enthusiasm." Enthusiasm, whose possible spiritual origin was never seriously considered by its opponents, was regarded as a dangerous, disruptive force, socially and politically as well as psychologically and spiritually. Just as law formed the universe from chaos, so, Hooker felt, reason was the only remedy for emotional disorder, and reason, when purged of its accidental effects through the consensus gentium, was the voice of God. Hence, when a Calvinist argued that the testimony of the Spirit was necessary for belief in Scripture, Hooker could reply, Scripture indeed teacheth things above nature,

things which our reason by itself could not reach unto. Yet those things also we believe, knowing by reason that the Scripture is the word of God.<sup>12</sup>

Reason authorizes belief; faith must be built on reason and cannot be opposed to it.

Reason and faith could be harmonized, and the consensus gentium could work, because the "uniformitarianism" applied not only to the thinking subject but also to its object and to its procedure. The essential quality of intellects was only a special instance of the postulate that nature was everywhere and eternally the same. The universe, Hooker insisted, was ruled by unalterable divine law which stemmed from God's knowledge and not, as Calvinists might suppose, from His arbitrary will. George Rust explained, in his Discourse of Truth (1682), that God could not alter one of His laws without contradicting His omniscience; if what He knew for a law is no longer one, then He was in error, but He cannot be in error, and hence His laws are immutable.<sup>13</sup>

The principle of the uniformity of nature acted against inspiration by denying its possibility. Uniformity of nature meant, in effect, that God ran the universe through an economy of second causes; divine intervention was unneeded, and such intervention could only detract from the skill of the Workman who

had established the causal chain in the first place. Accordingly, the philosophers were embarrassed by the presumed historicity of miracles, and those who did not deny or forget about miracles entirely tried to reconcile them with the economy of second causes. Contrary to previous belief, they argued, a miracle need not imply that the First Cause had interfered with the functioning of natural law; rather He utilized esoteric and unknown laws to produce unusual effects through natural means.<sup>14</sup> In this way miracles were explained away as merely rare but not impossible happenings, natural law was inviolable, and the Divine Will was kept at a safe distance.

Inspiration represented a thorough violation of the philosophers' happy solution to the problem of miracles, for it was a miracle that obstinately refused to bend to real or imagined natural laws: the giving of thoughts to a person who could attain them by no other means, a deliberate flouting of the natural capacities of man's wits. Moreover, inspiration involved a close and personal relationship between the poet and God and thereby emphasized the operation of God's arbitrary will, and His love, in a specific instance, where the philosophers could deal with God's will and his love only by considering them abstractly as Providence or by

identifying them with law.

Though at least some of the philosophers felt the need to be circumspect in their treatment of miracles, and hence purely Christian inspiration was given some breathing space, they used no such caution toward less Christian spiritual manifestations. Pomponazzi invoked the uniformity of nature and Ockham's razor to rid the world of daemons: "In vain do we assume daemons; for it is ridiculous and foolish to forsake what is observable, and what can be proved by natural reason, to seek what is unobservable, and cannot be proved with any verisimilitude."<sup>15</sup> The neutral spiritual creatures, among whom can be counted the pagan Muses, were relegated to the realm of myth and superstition. Hence Milton has to make certain that his Urania will not be confused with the pagan goddess, who is but "an empty dream," and he may have been influenced in his rejection of the Spenserian epic subject of King Arthur by the unavailability, save as a fiction, of the more pagan Spenserian Muse.

Another form of superstition attacked by the rationalists which is relevant to inspiration is belief in diabolic possession. Inspiration, as Drayton rationalized it, was a form of angelic possession. Therefore the inspired poet and the witch are in somewhat similar positions, just as white magic and

black magic are related, and it is noteworthy that they have similar histories. Belief in witchcraft too was on the rise in the Renaissance and declined under rationalist assault in the seventeenth century. Reginald Scot's Discovery of Witchcraft (1584), like Castelvetro's attack on inspiration thirteen years earlier, was distinctly minority opinion in the sixteenth century; that arch-intellectual, England's James I, was both the translator and promoter of du Bartas' Urania and the author of what he regarded as a crushing rejoinder to Scot. By 1666, however, Glanvill shows that believers in witchcraft are very much on the defensive,<sup>16</sup> and it is clear that he defends the traditional beliefs not for themselves but as part of a larger defense of the existence of spiritual creatures, for Glanvill, like Henry More and Thomas Browne, regarded attacks on diabolic possession as attacks on the existence of the devil, which could be extended, furthermore, to denials of all spiritual existence. Witchcraft was just another area in which philosophers were following Pomponazzi's advice to seek natural causes and stop postulating invisible agents: by the Restoration the principle was being applied to angels as well as to pagan spirits.<sup>17</sup> As a result, witches, like enthusiasts, came to be regarded as naturally



insane. The movement in the change in conception of a witch from one in league with the devil to one with a natural mental disorder is, therefore, parallel to the movement in conception of the poet from one in league with the Muse to one with extraordinary natural wit. Both are special instances of the seventeenth-century drive to narrow "reality" down to what could be understood, a drive that foreshadows contemporary logical positivism and, like it, grows out of and is a means of defeating skepticism.

Spiritual agents had to be removed for the sake of regularity, and regularity was most important because method could only work if the universe depended on rule and was not subject to the will of spiritual agents. A method was primarily a set of rules that corresponded to natural law and hence was guaranteed efficacious. Because it was regular a method made scientific procedures repeatable and teachable, and repeatability and teachability, as signs of public truth, came to be regarded as necessary attributes of a knowledge-producing procedure. Inspiration, which was not within the poet's power, could not be repeated except by God's will, and no one could be taught to be inspired. In these as in other ways, inspiration clearly lay outside the scope of method.

Because inspiration was outside the scope of method,

and because truth came to be judged by the means of arriving at it, inspiration and truth were separated, and without truth as its object inspiration was not much different from enthusiasm. Moreover, the severed connection between inspiration and truth also pointed to a change in the character of truth.<sup>18</sup> Most discussions of scientific method, being empirical and hence materialistic in bias, seemed to at least some of the scientists and theologians to put the truths of the faith in danger, and they worked to save from Bacon what the Renaissance philosophers had sought to save from Aristotle. Bacon himself was well aware of the difficulties and, for the protection of both, wished to exclude theology from the province of his method, with interesting results:

For since the substance of the soul in its creation was not extracted or produced out of the mass of heaven and earth, but was immediately inspired from God; and since the laws of heaven and earth are the proper subjects of philosophy, how can we expect to obtain from philosophy the knowledge of the substance of the rational soul? It must be drawn from the same divine inspiration, from which that substance first proceeded.<sup>19</sup>

Bacon's defense of learning, we have already suggested, draws on Calvin's distinction between the metaphysical mind, which sinned through pride at the Fall and is now incompetent and the scientific mind, which remains humble by subjecting itself to the nature of things and

hence is still effective. In this passage he again follows Calvin in insisting that spiritual truths can only be known through inspiration; however, where Calvin lived in a universe very sensitive to the motions of God's will and where divine inspiration could be expected by the elect, Bacon was helping to make a universe in which God's will was inconsequential and in which inspiration was an anomaly if not an anathema. Bacon is working with an implicit theory of the double truth in which provision is made for the attainment and verification of scientific but not of theological truth.

His loyal disciple, Bishop Sprat, saw that there might be a conflict between being a bishop and being a Baconian but rejected the possibility. Experimental science, he assures the reader, has nothing to do with the doctrines of the primitive church. "It may be suggested that the sensible knowledge of things may in time abolish most of these doctrines, by insinuating into men's minds that they cannot stand before the impartiality of philosophical investigations. But this surmise has no manner of foundation."<sup>20</sup> At about the same time, however, Glanvill was recommending the application of the method to religious controversies. Where "Notional Knowledge" spun out of the mind alone has hindered the growth of science and caused religious disturbance, "Experimental Learning . . . will in its

progress dispose mens Spirits to more calmness and modesty, charity and prudence in the Differences of Religion, and even silence Disputes there. For the free sensible Knowledge tends to the altering the Crasis of mens minds, and so cures the Disease at the root; and true Philosophy is a Specifick against Disputes and Divisions."<sup>21</sup>

It is clear that method would not only do away with inspiration but replace it. Believers in method could not and would not keep it out of religion, for if method was the prime source of truth, surely religion must be based on truth like anything else. Moreover, the prime test of a method was its universality. Truth was one, and the true method was universally applicable; every area in which the method could not be applied detracted from its potency. Consequently, it was unlikely that theology or poetry should be exempt.

Because the true method was universal, the propounded of a potential method would never claim to be its inventor, merely its discoverer. Descartes argued that he was merely extending the principles of geometrical reasoning to the other sciences; Bacon looked to the pre-Socratics.<sup>22</sup> Ramus, their most important predecessor, was more ambitious in listing his sources:

. . . il n'y a qu'une seule methode qui a été celle de Platon et d'Aristote, . . . cette methode se trouve dans Virgile et dans Ciceron, dans Homère et dans Demosthene, elle preside aux mathematiques, à la philosophie, aux jugements et à la conduite des hommes. Elle n'est de l'invention d'Aristote ni de Ramus.<sup>23</sup>

Ramus lends his method the prestige of the foremost poets as well as that of the philosophers and orators. As a good humanist, he respects the poets too much to omit them, and, besides, if his method represents the workings of nature and of reason, and poetry is produced by these agents, then poetry must be methodical. Accordingly, he derives his method by "literary induction":

Il s'agit donc de chercher dans les chefs-d'oeuvres de l'esprit humain en tout genre, les lois naturelles du raisonnement et de mettre en préceptes les procédés employés, meme à leur insu, par les plus illustres génies de la poésie, de l'eloquence, de la philosophie et des mathematiques.<sup>24</sup>

In Ramus there is no question but that poetry is produced by reason, and it is partly in argument of this point and partly on the well-established educational principle of "sugarcoating" that the Ramist logics draw so heavily on poetry for their examples. Ramus is, then, rather like his rival Aristotle in finding a rational golden mean for poetry, for if the scholastics, like Plato, consider poetry beneath reason, and the Neoplatonists, like the early Greeks, consider it above

reason, Ramus, like Aristotle, considers it simply rational. Poetry is, like any other discipline, a source and product of the proper method.

The increasing prestige of method naturally favored the position of those critics who thought art more important than inspiration or wit. The influence of method can be seen in the gradually shifting grounds for the rules which the Italian critics derived from the tradition of Horatian and Aristotelian commentary. The rules were first promulgated on the joint authority of antiquity and of the Philosopher, and they were regarded as simplifying the process of imitation. However, in the seventeenth century, Aristotle's authority was under heavy attack on other fronts and pedantic imitation was subject to much ridicule, but the rules had more authority than ever. Even in the controversy between the Ancients and the Moderns, both sides accepted the rules and differed only on who had best applied them. The rules, that is, were regarded as constituting the poetic method, a method discovered by Aristotle in the works of the ancients, but established on no authority because not needing any, being a manifestation of reason and nature. In a circular argument, the rules were first given credit for the literary successes of the past and then derived their authority from their presumed past efficacy.

A major test-case for the rules in sixteenth-century Italy was occasioned by the romantic epic and particularly by the highly irregular and enormously successful Orlando Furioso of Ariosto. Ariosto's defenders argued that he was working in a new genre for which the ancients had established no rules.<sup>25</sup> Minturno, though, rebutted this argument by appealing to the uniformity of nature. If Aristotle and Horace,

using Homer's poetry as their example, have taught a true art of poetry, I do not see how another diverse from that can be set up, for the truth is one, and that which is once true must of necessity be true always and in every age; nor can the differences between various ages change what is true; though they may be able to change customs and life yet in all their mutations the truth still remains stable.<sup>26</sup>

A century later Dacier will make the point with more authority. Aristotle may be credited with the formulation of the rules, but their quality shows that they are above all relativism of time and place:

Humane laws expire or Change very often after the Deaths of their Authors, because Circumstances change, and the Interests of Men, whom they are made to serve, are different; but these still take new vigor, because they are the Laws of Nature, who always acts uniformly, renews them incessantly, and gives them a perpetual Existence.<sup>27</sup>

The neoclassicists are especially interesting in that they are the first to attempt to give criticism prestige by modelling it after the exact sciences. In

giving art the permanence and stasis of nature, they hoped to render it worthy of, and capable of, thorough analysis. Consequently, they promote more strongly than ever the analogy between biological and poetic kinds. Just as new biological species are, in the seventeenth century, regarded as monsters or as products of an unrestrained imagination, so Ariosto has, by giving his wit the rein, produced a literary monstrosity. A romantic epic or tragicomedy is, like the centaur, an unnatural combination. When a neoclassicist like Dennis takes up Sidney's analogy between the heavenly and the poetical maker, he does it with an effect the opposite of Sidney's. It is not the divine freedom but the divine regularity that the poet must imitate.<sup>28</sup>

Regularity was sought in content as well as in form, and regularity in content was enforced chiefly through the neoclassical understanding of verisimilitude, which, for Rapin and others, replaces the vaguer Elizabethan concept of "decorum" as a representation of the part judgment plays in poetic creation. The verisimilar had meant for most of the sixteenth-century critics whatever an audience might believe and, since the audience was usually conceived of as a popular audience or even, with Castelvetro and his followers, an ignorant audience, the verisimilar and the marvelous



could be reconciled through the presumption that the author was drawing on vulgar superstition.<sup>29</sup> The verisimilar was also taken to be the rational as opposed to the factual, a distinction made possible only by the widespread acceptance of Neoplatonism.<sup>30</sup> For seventeenth-century critics, however, there is no conflict between the factual and the rational, for there is no Platonic otherworld, and the scientists are proving that the world of facts manifests the superior reason of God. Moreover, the audience is now conceived to be made up of educated gentlemen with a fair grounding in contemporary science and with minds free of superstition. Verisimilitude, accordingly, comes more and more to mean likeness to fact, and the gap between it and the marvelous widens. Seventeenth-century critics and poets, as we shall see, justify the inclusion of the marvelous only by insisting that it be transparently fictitious.

Likeness to fact meant, in matters covered by the physical sciences, that one could not represent the breaking of a natural law; as Hobbes put it, "Beyond the actuall works of Nature a Poet may now go; but beyond the conceived possibility of Nature, never."<sup>31</sup> However, when it came to human nature, verisimilitude and regularity came from imitating the types established by the ancient authors, particularly by Horace and by the

comedians. Thus the literary method once again showed its descent from the Renaissance theory of imitation, but the types were now regarded as corresponding to social reality. In this manner, the content as well as the form of a poem was subject to elaborate classification.

The analogy between criticism and the sciences enabled the most narrowly prescriptive of critics to pretend to be engaged in description. The ornithologist, after all, does not speak about good or bad woodpeckers but merely judges whether or not the creature in front of him is a woodpecker. Similarly, the questions asked by the neoclassicists concern, ostensibly, not whether a given poem is good or bad but whether it is a recognizable poem at all, whether it bears the distinguishing features of a known species of poems. For Boileau there are no bad epics, simply epics and aborted epics or monstrosities pretending to be epics. Moreover, criticism of characters could be carried on through a comparison of the individual specimen with its representative type. In the most notorious example of this kind of criticism, Thomas Rymer attacked the character of Iago not for "the motive-hunting of motiveless malignity," which escapes him entirely, but because everyone knows that soldiers must be what Iago only seemed to be, open, honest, and straightforward. For Rymer, to present a

soldier with qualities the opposite of those expected of soldiers is equivalent to presenting a gentle, sheep-loving wolf.<sup>32</sup>

Such classification and analysis made the rules and a literary method possible. Method, in literature as elsewhere, was valued because it was expected to produce results. Pierre de Laudun early assures the poet that if he follows the Art Poétique, if he has a great patron, and if he knows the works of Homer and Virgil and the excellent moderns, "il ne peut venir qu'à bien." Scudery (1641) narrows down the requirements while maintaining the certainty. "Chaque art a ses regles certaines qui par des moyens infaillibles, menent à la fin qu'on se propose."<sup>33</sup> For Rapin, "the only certain way to please, is by Rules. . . ." The method established by Aristotle for dramatic, epic and other poems is, as the subtitle to Rapin's Reflections puts it, "Necessary, Rational and Universal," and in the body of the work he affirms

. . . That these Rules well considered, one shall find them made onely to reduce Nature into method, to trace it step by step, and not suffer the least mark of it to escape us. 'Tis onely by these Rules that the verisimilitude in Fictions is maintained, which is the soul of Poesie.<sup>34</sup>

Believers in literary method, like believers in scientific method, consider it more important than

extraordinary grace or wit. Those two enemies, Blackmore and Dennis, agree completely that the inferiority of modern to ancient epic is not to be traced to discrepancies in intelligence. "That the modern poets have been so unsuccessful has not," Blackmore imagines, ". . . proceeded so much from want of Genius as from their Ignorance of the Rules of writing such a Poem, or at least from their want of attending to them."<sup>35</sup> Dennis heads a chapter: "That Poetry is to be establish'd, by laying down the Rules." It is not lack of wit or of industry but lack of proper guidance that has crippled modern poetry.<sup>36</sup> Both Dennis and Blackmore, in other words, make the rules alone the difference between the great poetry of the ancients and the inferior poetry of the moderns. Similarly, a critic like Perrault, who is willing to regard the moderns as superior, bases his judgment on Homer's ignorance of the method.<sup>37</sup>

Perrault accompanies his judgment of Homer with a lengthy analysis of the ways in which Homer was unmethodical, and, in general, the neoclassical critics are at their best when pointing to lapses from the rules. Examinations of the part played by method in a successful work, however, are difficult to find. In the prefatorial apologies of Dryden, for example, the author often gives the impression that he succeeded in

spite of the rules rather than because of them;<sup>38</sup> his use of method is more ingenious than thorough, and he clearly does not place the heavy or sole reliance on it that some of the methodologists advocate.

When we compare the statements of the methodologists with the practice of the better poets, the former appear as so much wishful thinking. The mechanism which gave the idea of progress so much luster in the physical sciences did not obtain in literature; success in poetry could not be guaranteed, and poetry, unable to claim for itself the automatic glorious future assured Newtonian science, had to face instead the everpresent suspicion of decadence. It is no wonder that Dennis and Blackmore could cry that the rules had not been given a chance when, in fact, the century had seen the production of scores of regular and unreadable epics. How could poetry compete with science for the public eye if poetry were not progressive, and how could poetry be progressive if it were not methodical?

The neoclassicists were involved in the methodological dilemma largely because they had, under the influence of the scientific reasoning outlined earlier in the chapter, given up the theory of inspired poetry, but even if the theory had been available to them, it is unlikely that they would have been satisfied with

Ronsard's spirit of poetry, which appears and disappears like a will-of-the-wisp and which brings a progress immediate but not perpetual and great but not controlled to increase steadily. The ideal of progress is the ideal of a world which has recognized and embraced Becoming as its nature while giving up, perhaps in despair, all straining at a transcendent Being. The goal for human endeavor is no longer the closed world of static perfection but the infinite universe of accelerating melioration. Inspiration, as an epiphany of Being in a world of Becoming, has been abandoned, first as a possibility and then as a goal. Poetry, in the late seventeenth century, has to come to grips with a world of diminished possibilities, and it has to make a place for itself in that world.

Though method, in a sense, replaced inspiration, method could not by itself support, as the theory of inspiration did, a poetry meeting its age's standards of excellence. A methodical experiment was a good experiment, but a methodical poem might be a dull one. A poem is more than its technical elements, but method has to do almost entirely with technique; when, as in Hobbes and Rymer, method says something about content, it says something negative, tells the poet only what not to put into his poem. Invention is still important

to poetry, though the dominance of method alters the character and importance of invention.

One can see invention losing ground in literary discussions of the Restoration and early eighteenth century. Because method applies mostly to technique, and because many critics accepted the Ramist tidying-up of the disciplines that assigned invention to logic and removed it from rhetoric and poetics, and because the desired and recognized progress was in technique, poetry came closer than it had been since the Renaissance to being considered as purely formal, an instrument rather than a source of knowledge.

When Restoration critics talk of "the progress of poesy," they are not thinking of an increase in the diffusion or intensity of inspiration but of the refinement of their numbers and diction. This progress occurred because Waller and Denham initiated an improvement in method. Even Dryden, explaining why Dorset's satires are superior to Donne's, dwells on rhythm and words and deals with content only in terms of correctness; except for these methodological criteria, he admits Donne would at least equal Dorset.<sup>39</sup>

Bishop Sprat is unusual in holding out a promise for progress in poetic content, but his promise sells invention short. Since the traditional poetic subjects

have been worn out, let it turn to the celebration of scientific discovery; as science reveals the workings of the universe, poetry will become richer and truer in its imagery.<sup>40</sup> It will gain a glory as a handmaid of science that it may not achieve on its own. Sprat's poet-as-popularizer, then, is not far removed from the poet-as-technician encouraged by the methodologists. Similarly, if for Pope, poetry deals with "what oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed," then poetry is essentially expression rather than thought. The conclusion might be that of Swift's bee, who, speaking for the ancients, reproaches the modernist spider:

In that Building of yours, there might, for  
ought I know, have been Labor and Method  
enough, but by woful Experience for us both,  
'tis too plain, the Materials are nought, and  
I hope, you will henceforth take Warning, and  
consider Duration and matter, as well as  
method and Art.<sup>41</sup>

Still, Swift was a better maker than his spider, and however well Pope's line may explain why we can read the Essay on Man without great excitement, it is irrelevant to a reading of the satires. The neo-classicists at their best, or even at their second-best, knew there was more to poetry than technique. If Dryden admired Jonson, he loved Shakespeare, and it is well to remember that in the passages preceding that famous statement Dryden had established the two poets



as symbols of method and wit, respectively.<sup>42</sup> As method was rising, so was wit, and the rise of wit also contributed to the fall of inspiration and altered the nature of invention. Moreover, where method, with its concern for verisimilitude, kept poetry related to truth and to knowledge, even if the relation was only a parasitical one, wit, with its concern for admiration, drove poetry toward pure fiction or fantasy. Where method is basically an extraliterary phenomenon assimilated to the concept of imitation, wit is the opposite, a term that first comes into its own as it is applied to the conceitist and metaphysical poets and then is extended, by the Restoration, to creative people in other fields. In the next chapter, we consider how the English Augustans, like their Roman namesakes, came to replace inspiration with ingenium and analyze the consequences of that shift for poetry's claim to knowledge.

NOTES: CHAPTER SIX

1 N. W. Gilbert, Renaissance Concepts of Method (New York, 1960).

2 Etienne Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages (New York, 1955), pp. 318-19; Petrus Ramus, Dialectique (1555), ed. Michel Dassonville (Geneva, 1964), pp. 18-19.

3 Gilson, p. 529.

4 Eugenio Garin, Italian Humanism, tr. Peter Munz (New York, 1965), p. 10.

5 John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, tr. John Allen (Philadelphia, 1936), pp. 295-96; Paul H. Kocher, Science and Religion in Elizabethan England (San Marino, Calif., 1953), p. 10; The Works of Francis Bacon, ed. James Spedding, R. L. Ellis, and D. D. Heath (London, 1870), III, 264-65.

6 Etienne Gilson, Introduction à l'Étude de Saint Augustin (Paris, 1949), pp. 52-55.

7 "A Prefatory Answer to Mr. Henry Stubbe" quoted in Jackson Cope, Joseph Glanville, Anglican Apologist (St. Louis, 1956), p. 61.

8 Cf. Karl R. Popper, "On the Sources of Knowledge and of Ignorance," Conjectures and Refutations (New York, 1962), pp. 3-30. Popper regards the scientific method as the first method for verifying statements, and though I have tended to regard medieval scholasticism as having its "method" in Aristotelian logic, it may be noted that the schoolmen are only methodical in contrast to the Renaissance eclectics. J. H. Randall, Jr. points up their reliance on authority rather than verification in contrasting them with the Paduan founders of scientific method: "The scholastic theologians, like Thomas and Duns Scotus, had been led by their Augustinian Platonism to emphasize this power of intellectus to recognize the truth of principles. It is significant that at no time do the Paduan medical Aristotelians attribute any such perceptive powers to intellect. The method by which principles are arrived at is rather the guarantee of their validity. . . ." (The Development of Scientific Method in the School of Padua," JHI, I (1940), 194.

9 Bacon, IV, 409.

10 A. O. Lovejoy, Essays in the History of Ideas (New York, 1960), pp. 79-80.

11 Richard Hooker, Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical

Polity (London, 1963), I, 176.

12 Ibid., I, 319.

13 Cope, p. 46.

14 Garin, pp. 203-4, notes that Bruno, in de Magia, treats the miracles Moses performed before the pharaoh as superior examples of magic which Moses learned from the Egyptian magicians. It is not clear how Moses was able to best his former masters.

15 J. H. Randall, Jr., The Career of Philosophy (New York, 1962), I, 82.

16 The work referred to in Some Philosophical Considerations touching Witches and Witchcraft, which went through several enlargements and emerged in 1681 under its better-known title of Sadducismus Triumphatus. A modern edition edited by Coleman Parsons, was published in 1967.

17 Robert H. West, Milton and the Angels (Athens, Georgia, 1955), p. 15.

18 Madeleine Doran, "On Elizabethan 'Credulity' With Some Questions Concerning the use of the Marvelous in Literature," in The Elizabethan Age, ed. David L. Stevenson (Greenwich, Conn., 1966), p. 152, quotes the

following from William James's The Will to Believe on modern as opposed to Elizabethan science: "she has fallen so deeply in love with the method that one may even say she has ceased to care for truth by itself at all. It is only truth as technically verified that interests her. The truth of truths might come in merely affirmative form, and she would decline to touch it."

19 Bacon, IV, 398.

20 Thomas Sprat, History of the Royal Society (London, 1702), p. 355.

21 Cope, p. 58.

22 Philosophical Works of Descartes, tr. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (New York, 1955), I, 269; Bacon, IV, 72-108.

23 Ramus, p. 25.

24 Ibid., p. 24.

25 Cf. Giraldi Cinthio in Allen H. Gilbert, Literary Criticism: Platon to Dryden (Detroit, 1962), pp. 269-70.

26 Ibid., p. 285.

27 André Dacier, "The Preface to Aristotle's Art

of Poetry," Augustan Reprint Society, no. 76 (1959),  
Sig. A 4v.

28 Critical Works of John Dennis, ed. E. N.  
Hooker (Baltimore, 1939), I, 335.

29 Cf. above, chapter five, pp. 233-37.

30 Cf. John M. Steadman, "Allegory and Verisimilitude in Paradise Lost: The Problem of the 'Impossible Credible,'" PMLA, LXXVIII (1963), 36-39.

31 J. E. Spingarn, Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century (Bloomington, 1957), II, 62.

32 Critical Works of Thomas Rymer, ed. Curt A. Zimansky (New Haven, 1956), pp. 134-135.

33 Archimede Marni, Allegory in the French Heroic Poem of the Seventeenth Century (Princeton, 1936), pp. 74-75.

34 René Rapin, Reflections on Aristotle's Treatise of Poesie, tr. Thomas Rymer (London, 1674), pp. 14, 16-17.

35 Spingarn, III, 234.

36 Dennis, p. 335.

37 Charles Perrault, Parallels des Anciens et des Modernes en ce qui Regards les Arts et les Sciences (Munich, 1964), pp. 291ff.

38 E.g., the preface and prologues to Secret Love (1668), in John Dryden, Of Dramatic Poesy and other critical essays, ed. George Watson (London, 1962), pp. 104-109.

39 Ibid., II, 76.

40 Sprat, pp. 413-416.

41 The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, ed. Herbert Davis (Oxford, 1939), I, 149.

42 Dryden, I, 67-70.

CHAPTER SEVEN  
WIT AND THE DECLINE OF INSPIRATION

Beginning in the late sixteenth century and proceeding through the seventeenth century, the theory of inspiration declines. The claim to inspiration may be said to be a viable poetic tactic when a significant number of influential and not so influential but typical poets and critics find it useful and express a belief in it. It ceases to be viable not only when it ceases to obtain a suspension of disbelief but also when it is proven to be superfluous. The theory cannot be said to be moribund merely because it is under attack. The pagan Muse did not suffer from the attacks launched on her in the name of Christianity from Aldhelm to Milton; the attacks kept her alive, for only by being alive could she be rejected.<sup>1</sup> It is when no one bothers to attack or reject her, when there is no reason for attack because there is no necessity for defense, that she dies. Inspiration, then, suffers not only at the hands of those who deny its existence but also from those who trivialize or rationalize it and from those



who, placed in a situation where other poets invoked the Muse, refuse her aid.

One of the Muse's main functions, as we have seen, is to remove from fiction the opprobrium that might, in the Renaissance, attach itself to the made-up. The poet is both maker and vates: what he makes turns out to be an image of divine truth because he is inspired. Keats' hope that the product of the "Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream--he awoke and found it truth"<sup>2</sup> need not lack fulfillment if it is stipulated that the workings of the imagination are divinely sanctioned.

However, not all of the makers in the Renaissance were afraid of self-confessed fiction. The whole point of the fiction of Boccaccio's Filostrato seems to be that it should provide a transparent veil over the poet's self-expression. Surely divinity has nothing to do with Boccaccio's longing for his mistress and, consequently, he invokes no goddess, but, in the manner of Ovid and Propertius, his "nobilissima donna." To call on the goddess is to cast doubt on the sincerity of his love pangs, but to invoke his beloved in the goddess's place is to pay her a Petrarchan compliment. In thus trivializing the invocation, he casts doubt, whether purposely or not, on inspiration. If a woman can give him more help than the goddess, it may be

because the woman is flesh and blood while the goddess is mythical.

Ariosto too prefers to invoke his mistress, and in the one instance (III, 1-2) where he asks for celestial assistance it is to obtain words adequate for praise of the House of Este. He will not delegate credit or responsibility for his fiction; and perhaps because, much more than Tasso, Spenser or Milton, he is ready to regard his narrative as existing for itself alone, he is ready to glory in his role of maker. Durling regards Ariosto as the first popularizer in the Renaissance of the analogy between the poet and God and sharply distinguishes this analogy from the theory of the inspired poet. The god-like poet depends solely on his own wit;<sup>3</sup> however, Ariosto's poem is not so ambitious that he feels he must justify his wit or relate it to truth. The analogy is not at first a conscious substitution for inspiration.

Nor does Rabelais bother with the invocation, though, since Gargantua and Pantagruel is, among other things, a mock epic, he might have included one. Rather, as Erich Auerbach has masterfully pointed out, "The World in Pantagruel's Mouth" plays on the paradoxes of self-reference and emphasizes the relationship between the creator and his creation.<sup>4</sup> Poetic furor

for Rabelais is mockable lunacy which comes only from wine, the Oracle of the Bottle.<sup>5</sup> As for obtaining the reader's belief, Rabelais protests, at the close of the "Prologue" to the second book,

. . . I offer myself, body and soul, tripe and bowels, to a hundred thousand basket-loads of fine devils in case I lie in so much as a single word in the whole of this History. And, similarly, may St. Anthony's fire burn you, the epilepsy throw you, the thunder-stroke and leg-ulcers rack you, . . . and like Sodom and Gomorrah may you dissolve into sulphur, fire and the bottomless pit, in case you do not firmly believe everything that I tell you in this present chronicle.<sup>6</sup>

Rabelais' protestation functions ironically, much like Mark Twain's better-known threat to banish persons trying to find a moral in Huckleberry Finn. There is no danger of anyone's taking the story of Pantagruel for literal truth, and Rabelais is parodying the protests of authors who feel the need to instill in the reader such a belief. The Pantagruelist, whether author or reader, has nothing of the Puritan in him and can delight in fiction as fiction.

Still, not even Rabelais can be said to believe in wit-for-wit's sake: under the mask of the Pantagruelist is a moralist, and the Abbey of Thélème is all the more potent an ideal because the reader knows it is only ideal. Wit has emancipated itself from verisimilitude and from divinity, but it is not as free as Rabelais's

prologues pretend it is; it is not working in a moral vacuum; it is not altogether self-justifying. Nor does Rabelais found a school or imbue the next generation of authors with his courage. Wit is not yet ready to have its day.

For wit to have its day it not only had to free itself from inspiration but to take to itself the prestige of inspiration. Divine sanction had given invention scope and importance; inspiration and wit had formed a partnership to trade in profit and delight, truth and beauty. By the end of the sixteenth century the junior partner had begun to think himself strong enough to go it alone, and by the end of the seventeenth century he wrested control, though he found it useful to retain, as it were, his partner's name on the letterhead. "Inspiration," in other words, was not only to lose its place but, by undergoing a change in meaning, was to become identified with and to strengthen ingenium.

An early stage in the emancipation of wit from inspiration can be found in different forms in Sidney and in the Italian and Spanish conceitists whom Mazzeo has shown to have provided the theory for "metaphysical" poetry.<sup>7</sup> Sidney defends poetry as fiction and, as we have seen, though he is not averse to using the theory

of inspiration, he expresses disbelief in it. In its place he develops the analogy between the poet and Nature, God's viceroy. Poetry, he argues, is the best of arts because all the other arts must imitate imperfect nature; even abstract metaphysics uses nature as the basis of its conclusions.

Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as Heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies, and such like: so as he goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit.<sup>8</sup>

Sidney is at pains to keep the reader from thinking his argument to be "jestingly conceived," even though poetry produces fictions, "for any understanding knoweth that the skill of the artificer standeth in that idea or foreconceit of the work, and not in the work itself." The poet can create a more perfect world than nature because he is not, like nature, bound to embody his forms in resisting matter but can develop them immaterially in words. Moreover, his forms are not "wholly imaginative [Imaginary]" like "castles in the air" but, like Xenophon's Cyrus, are available for imitation and hence actualization by man: they are possibilities. Poetry is an instrument of knowledge

because it proceeds from man's "erected wit which  
maketh us know what perfection is. . . ."9

Sidney does not, however, leave his wit unsupported by divine sanctions, nor does he feel he can do without the language of inspiration. That one can compare "the highest point of man's wit with the efficacy of nature" is to the honor of "the heavenly Maker of that maker" who made man in His likeness and allowed him "with the force of a divine breath" to create works surpassing nature's.<sup>10</sup> The breath may no longer be literally divine, coming as it does from man rather than from God, but man himself has been allotted a certain amount of divinity by his Maker and, consequently, his wit is trustworthy. Man's resulting knowledge is not, perhaps, adequate for Paradise Lost, but it suffices to give poetry dignity as a teacher of forms of perfection.

Sidney's argument, though, has its weak spots. It is not clear whether the poet creates his own forms of perfection, in which case there is a question as to their existential status and validity, or whether he imitates those in the mind of God, in which case there is a question as to how he knows them. Sidney's own assumption that the Fall infected man's will but not his wit was anything but uncontested, and in the hands of a man less attracted to Platonism and more to

Calvinism his argument could only have a different force.

Bacon was such a man, and his reiteration of the argument points up its weakness. Poetry "was ever thought to have some participation of divinesse, because it doth raise and exert the Minde, by submitting the shewes of things to the desires of the Mind; whereas reason doth buckle and bowe the Mind unto the Nature of things."<sup>11</sup> For Bacon truth resides in Nature and in "things," and the mind of the scientist must bow down to it. The mind is no source of knowledge of reality and, if it is not careful, its desires will falsify reality. Poetry, or "feigned history," is just a conscious falsification of reality to satisfy the mind's desires for order and justice. Insofar as the mind can conceive of a higher order than the world is capable of, it is superior to the world, but its higher order exists only in Imagination, to which faculty Bacon assigns poetry. The subjects of poetry have no extramental existence, and poetry, having reference to nothing else, is not a means of knowledge, except for didactic parabolic poetry, in which the allegory is a simple one of "this for that" and in which the poetic fiction is meant to be discarded once one has gotten at the philosophic truth. This latter poetry does not proceed simply from the wit or imagination but derives

the knowledge it presents beneath the allegory from the methodical reason.

Bacon's preference for parabolic poetry is indicative of his preference for philosophy over poetry. He concludes his discussion of poetry with the thought that he has spent too much time in the theatre,<sup>12</sup> but he does not feel that one can spend too much time in the stoa. Poetry has for him no place in the advancement of learning except insofar as it ministers to philosophy: in this he returns to medieval theory. But in his giving fiction a psychological value he anticipates later developments in criticism.

While Bacon is moving Sidney's argument from the epistemological sphere to the psychological, the Italian and Spanish concettists focus on an aesthetic impact. As Mazzeo puts it, "the theorists agreed that the ingegno, although intimately connected with the understanding, did not aspire to simple, logical truth, but rather to a beauty or acutezza (wit) which it found in the relationship between the same knowable extremes that it discovered."<sup>13</sup> The form of the conceit is more important than its content: pleasure is more important than profit. It is noteworthy that Tesauro felt that the ingegno by itself could not arrive at the highest conceit unless it was aroused by a poetic furor. His is still, though, a theory of wit rather than one



of inspiration, for "the furore only served to put the faculty of ingegno into operation and was not itself a kind of preternatural visitation or illumination."<sup>14</sup> Wit is but borrowing mystery and grandeur from inspiration.

In judging poetry, the concettists favor the mirabile, or that which is new and surprising, over the true. Pallavicino argues that poetry takes its material from "first apprehension" before the operation of the judgment renders its opinion as to truth or falsity.<sup>15</sup>

Nonetheless, the concettists do not herald the complete divorce of poetry and truth, for, in an increasingly rationalistic age, each boosting of the marvelous was bound to bring forth a counter-movement toward the verisimilar. The age could not be comfortable with a merely aesthetic poetry: if a poem was not true, or did not at least pretend through verisimilitude to be true, then it could be taken to be either false or frivolous. On reading the many debates about the relative importance of the verisimilar and the marvelous, one is all too easily tempted to side with the marvelous, especially when one knows it to be the eventual winner, without realizing that the champions of verisimilitude were defending poetry as a means of knowledge and as something that would teach as well as delight. A

poetry purely marvelous would be a fiction to be appreciated only aesthetically or emotionally. Verisimilitude, however much it subjected poetry to scientific pedantry or a sometimes foolish common sense, made it responsible to the intellect.

The ideal solution, as it had been stated by Tasso and would be exemplified by Paradise Lost, relied on the theory of inspiration to combine the verisimilar and the marvelous. Truths relating to the actions of spiritual creatures were above reason and, hence, marvelous, but they could be known as true if they were given by God.<sup>16</sup> Without inspiration the marvelous would have to be fictional and would have to come into conflict with verisimilitude, for verisimilitude came from the following of a regular, expected order and the marvelous came from the breaking of that order. What the theory of inspiration joined, later critical theory polarized, and the polarization meant that wit, the inventor of the marvelous, could not be the sole creator of poetry. It had to have its polar opposite, judgment, to provide for verisimilitude.

Judgment drew its strength from the methodology and rationalism of the new science and, hence, science became wit's powerful ally in the defeat of inspiration. While methodology did condemn the untrammelled use of wit as the sin of the schoolmen, it was ready to tolerate

and even welcome a seemingly chastened wit, and it could have no truck with divine interference through inspiration. Moreover, though wit might, for a while, find its new partnership with judgment more cramping than its old partnership with inspiration, soon it would call on the prestige of that first tie, and, proclaiming itself "Genius," would burst free again.

For "inspiration" to become assimilable to wit, the word had to change meaning. It had to lose its connection with divinity and to become, like "wit," a psychological term. In doing so it would accommodate itself to the new rationalism and thereby acquire some measure of scientific respectability.

In other words, inspiration suffered not only from its ignorers and attackers but also from those who sought to "save" it by making it more comprehensible. The Renaissance veneration for antiquity would not allow the abandonment of such an ancient tradition as that of the inspired poet, but it would allow a destructive reinterpretation of that tradition.

The rationalization of inspiration commences with Girolamo Fracastoro. The discussion of poetic furor in Naugerius, sive de poetica dialogus (1555) begins after Navagero has suddenly recited a poem. Asked to explain Navagero's action and his own sadness, the philosopher

Della Torre replies, somewhat facetiously,

"This very air we breathe must be inhabited by diverse spirits, which dwell especially in these solitudes, woods, and fountains, where the poets say the gods themselves are present. These spirits go in and out of our bodies, and different ones affect us in different ways. Now I think it very likely that the spirit of Virgil dwelling here is agitating Navagero, but that the spirit of some philosopher who in life was given to melancholy is influencing me, either Democritus or someone more gloomy."

"If I may interpret these spirits of yours, Della Torre," said Bardulone, "you seem to mean this: that Navagero is by nature a poet, and you a philosopher."<sup>17</sup>

Fracastoro implies that all claims to inspiration are to be translated the way that Bardulone translated Della Torre's: the Muses are mere projections of natural talent. As the dialogue goes on, Navagero himself says that "if frenzy and madness are indeed poetical, how unjust it is to brand a friend with such marks,"<sup>18</sup> and, in the end, the speakers decide that what is called furor comes from the poet's reaction to his own work:

Hence, O friends, that Platonic madness (in the *Ion*) which Socrates thought heaven-sent. God is not the cause, but music itself, full of a sort of great exalting wonder which makes the pulse beat with the rhythm as if stirred by some violent frenzy, and takes away self-possession and rouses one to ecstasy. On account of this frenzy poets are called divine as if they had been touched by God, and are looked on as seers.<sup>19</sup>

Fracastoro accepts poetic madness as a fact to be explained, and explains it in such a way that the poet

cannot use it as the basis for any claims to knowledge. It is not connected with the composition of the poem, which comes rather, as his Bardulone said, from the poet's natural talent.

A more scientific rationalization comes from Juan Huarte, who, in his popular Examen de Ingenios, regards inspiration as a "natural distemper" in which the brain is overheated by choler. He cites the case of a man who had never written verse but who uttered only verse during an eight-day choleric fit. Huarte thus initiates the physiological investigation into poetic creativity. Never wholly without successors, he did not lack them in the seventeenth century. Mambrun (1652), for one, would explain inspiration as a rush of bile to the head.<sup>20</sup>

The less scientifically-minded were also ready to conflate divine and natural madness. Cornelius Agrippa writes that poets are not sacred oracles but are so mad that they think they are.<sup>21</sup> Shakespeare's Theseus applies this common-sense approach to both the poetic and erotic furors:

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet  
Are of imagination all compact,  
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold:  
That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,  
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.  
The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth  
to heaven;

And as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy  
nothing  
A local habitation and a name.  
(MND V, ii, 7-17)

Though line thirteen suggests a special knowledge, the remainder of the speech makes it clear that the poet is merely giving life to fictions, for, as Touchstone says, "The truest poetry is the most feigning." Indeed, Theseus began the speech doubting the veracity of the young lovers' nocturnal adventures, and it may be that the speech is to have a specific application to the poet Shakespeare and the airy nothings with whom his imagination has peopled the local woods. The playwright seems to have enjoyed having his characters make oblique criticisms of their plays,<sup>22</sup> and he no doubt provided an ironic rejoinder to Theseus's speech when he had Oberon and Titania bless the non-believer's marriage.

Inspiration as natural madness is not far from wit, for, as Dryden puts it, "Great wits are sure to madness near allied." Melancholy, transformed from one of the humors to that great Jacobean catch-all for what was not easily explicable, provided a meeting ground. As the seventeenth-century equivalent of the unconscious, it was said to be the source of both genius and furor; it was the third element which made

them, both equal to it, equal to each other.

However, before inspiration could be allied to wit, it had to cease being divine, to cease, in other words, being itself. This chapter will trace not the death of the term but the death of the meaning.

The early attacks on the concept already show the influence of the new science. Lionardo Salviati, Trattato della poetica (1564), rejects inspiration because he believes in the economy of second causes and in the uniformity of nature. God would not directly operate in an individual. Since the writing of poetry is a common activity, its cause must be regular, which furor is not. Furor also ~~interferes~~ with the orderly operation of the mind and, since poetry depends on judgment, furor cannot be its cause. Having denied that furor comes from God, Salviati can only see it as akin to madness and therefore opposed to art.<sup>23</sup> Tommaso Correa (1587), on similar grounds, argues that poetic madness can only prevent one from reaching the ideal of learned poetry with which it had hitherto been associated:

So far is the poet from being mad that  
nobody can write well unless he is wise.  
Indeed, every good and proper discourse must  
derive from the knowledge of things.

Only method provides the knowledge of things and, consequently, Correa insists that the quality most

necessary to the poet is not ingenium but prudentialia.<sup>24</sup>

Castelvetro also argues that poetry cannot come by chance, and that furor, coming by chance, cannot be the cause of poetry, but his more important arguments support his Aristotelian method rather than the uniformity of nature. Inspiration has leaned on Platonic authority the way the rules lean on the word of Aristotle, but Castelvetro, not content to oppose the authorities, seeks to demolish the Platonic support for inspiration. When Plato spoke of sacred furors, he was just joking, else he would not have thrown the divine poets out of his Republic. Castelvetro concludes by anticipating Gudeman's reading of Poetics 55a22: the poet is taught by art or has natural talent, but he is no madman.<sup>25</sup>

Girolamo Frachetta's Dialogo della furore poetico (1581) contains a more extended discussion of whether the Ion and the Republic are compatible. One speaker asserts that Plato did believe in divine madness but banished the poets because the truths they receive from inspiration are hidden under allegory where the ignorant cannot find them and because their writing is blameworthy when not inspired. The speaker who sins the argument says, citing Castelvetro, that divine inspiration means truth and truth means good poetry, which would not be banished. Either the ban is unjust or there is no poetic furor.



Everyone agrees that the latter is the case and that Aristotle knows more about poetry than Plato.<sup>26</sup>

In France, Plato's domination passed with that of the Pleiade. For Boileau, "La raison pour marcher n'a souvent qu'une voie,"<sup>27</sup> the way he attributed to Aristotle. A poem must be written methodically. If the poet lacks art, he can only rely on chance, and while chance may allow the fire of his wit an occasional high leap it cannot provide the staying power necessary for epic:

Mais souvent parmi nous un poète sans art,  
Qu'un beau feu quelquefois échauffe par hasard,  
Enflant d'un vain orgueil son esprit  
chimérique,  
Fièrement prend en main la trompette héroïque:  
Sa muse dérégulée, en ses vers vagabonds,  
Ne s'élève jamais par sauts et par bonds:  
Et son feu, dépourvu du sens et de lecture,  
S'éteint à chaque pas faute de nourriture.<sup>28</sup>

In France, unlike Italy or England, the concept of inspiration does not come under attack: the neoclassicists simply ignore it and attack instead more naturalistic doctrines which are often perversions of inspiration. They insist that a poem needs art as well as wit and regard the effort to do without art as resulting from inflation, an inflation that that owes more to vain pride than to a divine breath. Rapin simply denies that poetry has anything to do with madness without bothering to specify what kind of madness he means.<sup>29</sup>

Chapelain's defense of inspiration is really a defense of the invocation and is based more on tradition and usage than on reason. "Que si l'on voulait rejeter, comme contraire à l'Imitation & à la Vraysemblance, tout ce qui se fait par l'inspiration, ou par l'assistance des Cieux, où en seroit Homere, & apres lui toute la Famille Poetique . . . ?"<sup>30</sup> Inspiration is not believed by modern readers; the poet is hardly imitating Nature if he speaks of a deity descending to dictate his poem; but Chapelain hopes that the invocation can be accepted as a time-worn, conventional, and meaningless part of the epic.

Respecting tradition, the French neoclassicists were hardly prepared to reject anything so venerable as the invocation. Le Bossu provides a fine example of how an intelligent critic could handle the matter. His chapter on the invocation begins with a summary of the reasons for its necessity that Ronsard could have written:

Mais de quelque manière que ce soit, le Poëte ne peut omettre l'Invocation. Il dit des choses qu'il ne sauroit pas, si quelque Divinité ne les lui avoit inspirées: il doit à ses Lecteurs cet exemple d'une Piété, & d'une veneration qui est le fondement de toute la Morale. . . .<sup>31</sup>

However, le Bossu is concerned lest anyone take the invocation literally when it is meant allegorically:

Au-reste, il ne faut pas s'imaginer que ces Divinitez invoquées, soient considérées par les Poëtes mêmes, comme des Personnes Divines, dont ils attendent un veritable secours. Sous ce nom de Muse, il souhaitent le Génie de la Poesie, & toutes les conditions, & les circonstances nécessaires pour executer leur enterprise.<sup>32</sup>

Le Bossu advocates elsewhere the idea that pagan gods and goddesses make convenient poetic fictions which present no dangers of false belief but allow for allegorization and a touch of the marvelous necessary for epic. He will not say with Ronsard that the Muse is just a power of God under a pagan name, for he believes with Boileau that God should not enter into the fictional milieu of poetry. The Muse is no source of supernal aid, just a personification of whatever influences the poet as he writes. Like Castelvetro, le Bossu does not think the ancient poets believed their invocations. He cites as his example Lucretius, who invoked the Muse to inspire in him a poem developing the Epicurean doctrine that the gods do not mix in human affairs, a doctrine which undermines the premise of the invocation.<sup>33</sup>

Of course, Boileau and le Bossu were able to ignore the theory of inspiration because they had no use for it. Poetry is not for them a discoverer of truth: it is a teacher of moral commonplaces. The poet is not to be applauded for the lesson he teaches

but for the fiction embodying that lesson. The lesson makes the poetry "true," but the fiction has no pretensions to truth. In fact, Boileau and le Bossu are concerned to uphold the purity of poetic fictions, and attack the Christian marvelous ostensibly because they are afraid that the inclusion of God in a fiction will cast doubt on His believability but actually because they are afraid that the Christian marvelous, being too believable, will make poetry assert that which is not, or lie. The pagan gods are transparent fictions and preclude literal belief. In other words, to protect the poet from the charge of lying, they would do away with his freedom to assert something as literally true. Prose is to be the medium of truth (and of falsehood); poetry is fiction, which is to say, neither truth nor falsehood.

In seventeenth-century England the relationships between truth and poetry and inspiration are of particular interest because it will be in Paradise Lost that Tasso's theory of the Christian marvelous will receive its best defence and testimonial. It is also in England that inspiration has sufficient staying power to draw heavy attacks which throw light on the changing nature of poetry.

The neoclassical position is stated at the outset by Ben Jonson, whose influence did much to establish it

in later criticism. On the necessity for fiction, Jonson left no doubt. Timber states that "Fiction is (as it were) the forme and Soule of any Poeticall worke," and Jonson remarked to Drummond of the author of one of the most ambitious inspired poems "that he thought not Bartas a Poet but a Verser, because he wrote no Fiction."<sup>34</sup>

His contempt for inspiration is also clear. A poem in The Forrest discusses the value of the invocation:

And must I sing? what subject shall I chuse?  
Or whose great name in Poets heaven use,  
For the more countenance to my active Muse?<sup>35</sup>

Should the poet claim a divine sanction to put a better face on his undertaking? He proceeds to suggest various deities for invocation and to reject them. The "Muse" of the third line, we might point out, is no such deity; Jonson uses the term only in what we have called its Roman sense. A sympathetic scholar has remarked of Jonson's "Muse," "It refers to the subject described in the poem and sometimes to the mind that describes it, rather than to an impersonal and independent power which is to supply inspiration, whatever that may be."<sup>36</sup> So consistent is the poet's usage, in fact, that when, after rejecting the other gods, he comes to the Muses, in the original sense, he dismisses them under a metaphorical name:

Nor all the ladies of the Thespian lake,  
(Though they were crusht into one forme)

could make  
A beutie of that merit, that should take  
My Muse vp by commission: No, I bring  
My owne true fire. Now my thought takes wing,  
And now an Epode to deep eares I sing.<sup>37</sup>

For Jonson poetry is more of a craft than a calling, and in this poem he is ready to go to a realistic extreme and counter the claims of the inspirationalists. The poet, like any craftsman, works best for profit, and he is wholly self-reliant in his skill.

Like Boileau and like his Restoration admirers, Jonson expressed his sense that the epic was foreign to his age by writing a mock-epic. "The Famous Voyage" takes place in the environs of the polluted London waterfront. After describing the scene as a classical Hades, Jonson pauses:

but, me thinkes 'tis od,  
That all this while I haue forgot some god,  
Or goddesse to inuoke, to stuffe my verse;  
And with bombard-stile, and phrase, rehearse  
The many perills of this Port, and how  
Sans help of SYBIL, or a golden bough  
Or magick sacrifice, they past along.<sup>38</sup>

The invocation is for Jonson meaningless verbiage used to pad out a poem. It is, moreover, associated with inflated style, for the language appropriate to the mythical god or goddess always turns out, Jonson feels, to be bombast. "The Famous Voyage" is primarily an attack on bombast, its satire is directed more at epic conventions for being applicable to a base

incident than at the base incident for being unworthy of the epic conventions, and hence the rejection of the invocation is at the heart of the poem.

John Marston also regards the poetic furor as associated with a style too lofty for his satires,<sup>39</sup> and he no more believes in an imaginary deity than his friend Jonson does. Yet, he is fond of the invocation. The "Proemium in Librum Tertium" of The Scourge of Villanie (1598) refuses at length to invoke a Muse or "femall Angell" to raise the poet's "flagging wings" so that he may fly at folly but calls instead on the bare personification of "Grim Reproofe." The suggestion that the poet may need help is genuine, but the deity invoked is so patently one invented for the occasion that the poet is pointing to the mere conventionality of his utterance.

Marston attempted no epic but did write an epyllion, The Metamorphosis of Pigmaliions Image (1598). This poem, and indeed the genre it represents, is not mock-epic but may be regarded as anti-epic. The subject is mythical, not historical or pseudo-historical like that of the epic; i.e., it proclaims itself as a fiction. The poet seeks not to instruct through a story embodying moral norms but to delight through a tale of passion. He strives not for similes involving encyclopedic knowledge but for metaphors making witty comparisons. He looks

not to Tasso but to Ariosto, not to Virgil but to Ovid. He does not need an invocation and, when he has one, he uses it the way Boccaccio used it. Marston's invocation to his epyllion is addressed "To his Mistres":

O Beauteous Angell, daine thou to infuse  
A Sprightly wit, into my dulled Muse.  
I'll invoke none other Saint but thee,  
To grace the first bloomes of my Poesie.  
Thy fauours like Promethean sacred fire,  
In dead, and dull conceit can life inspire.  
Or like that rare and rich Elixar stone,  
Can turn to gold, leaden inuention:  
Be gracious then, and daine to show in mee,  
The mighty power of thy Deitie.<sup>41</sup>

The effectiveness of the poem as a witty compliment to the lady comes from the poet's understanding of what the genuine invocation is for. Marston's mistress, like the true Muse, will work primarily through the poet's power of invention, giving verve, or the sacred fire of wit, to his conceptions, and in giving life and sustaining it within his poem, she will be demonstrating her divinity. Nonetheless, his mistress is no Muse, and what is literal in the usual invocation is here a witty metaphor: the "fauours like Promethean sacred fire" will inspire by no such direct means as celestial infusion. Marston, like Propertius before him, wants us to know that he is more interested in the practical affairs of love than in writing "vast Iliads."<sup>42</sup>

Samuel Daniel argues in Musophilus (1599) that poets "only seeme out of themselves remov'd,"<sup>43</sup> and at



the start of The Civil Wars (1609) invokes Virtue to give his poem life and Memorie to make his poem accurate. Memorie he does not think of as mother of the Muses; he pointedly says "I no Muse . . . Invoke"; rather she is simply his historical knowledge. He asks her to reveal the events "Vnintermixt with fictions, fantasies" and concludes, "I versifie the troth; not Poetize."<sup>44</sup> Poetry and the Muse are connected with fiction; in versifying the truth he regards himself as eschewing poetry and needing the ability to see the right (Virtue) and knowledge of history (Memorie) but no inspiration. Daniel justifies his fellow poets' estimation of him as never daring to take flight.

In Marston and Daniel, Jonson's contemporaries and not his "sons," we have seen two poets who appreciate the rhetoric of the invocation but who do not feel they can invoke anything more than personified abstractions. The result is that the invocations, when not outright mockeries like Marston's "To his Mistres," appear to be gestures as insubstantial as the deities invoked. In the poetry of the "sons of Ben," we get little reference to inspiration and that little is conventional or doubt-ridden. Herrick does write a beguiling quatrain called "The departure of the good Daemon" in which he attributes his poetry to a spirit working through him:

What can I do in Poetry,  
Now the good Spirit's gone from me?  
Why nothing now, but lonely sit,  
And over-read what I have writ.<sup>45</sup>

And he does have some conventional pleas to the Muses.<sup>46</sup>  
Nonetheless, the reader's skepticism that the best of the  
"sons of Ben" and a poet's poet if ever there was one  
believed that he needed a daemon is validated by "His  
fare-well to Sack."

'Tis thou alone, who with thy Mistick Fan,  
Work'st more than Wisdom, Art or Nature can,  
To rouze the sacred madnesse; and awake  
The frost-bound-blood, and spirits; and to make  
Them frantick with thy raptures, flashing  
through  
The soule, like lightning, and as active too.  
'Tis not Apollo can, or those thrice three  
Castalian Sisters sing, if wanting thee.<sup>47</sup>

The last two lines make the point obvious, but even  
without them it would be clear. The song in praise of  
wine is a classical subgenre going back, as Herrick  
points out in the poem, to Anacreon and Horace. The  
notion that the poet can be inspired by wine as well as  
by the Muse also goes back to Horace and harmonizes  
rather well with his thinking; wine stimulates the  
ingenium and has nothing to do with a divine agent.  
The praise of sack, then, could have been as much of a  
mere exercise for Herrick as the invocations to the  
Muses, but it was not. The Muses have less reality for  
him than his imaginary Corinna and Julia, and sack has  
more.

Even more enlightening are the hesitant invocations of William Browne. He begins, "Thrice sacred Powers (if sacred Powers there be/ Whose mild aspect engyrlond Poesie) . . . ," and again, "Then if with sacred fire/ A passion ever did a Muse inspire. . . ."48 We do not need Touchstone discoursing on the virtues of an "if" in the avoidance of disagreement to see that the invocation is damaged if it is left up to the reader to decide whether he wants to believe in what is being requested or not.

Denham is one of the figures who bridge the gap between the age of Jonson and Bacon and that of the Restoration. He seems particularly to have taken Bacon to heart, and his work may be regarded as an effort to join poetry and Baconian truth. Without such truth, he feels, poetry is a contemptible form of lying. "To the Five Members of the Honourable House of Commons. The Humble Petition of the Poets" complains that the politicians have usurped the poets' privilege of passing off falsehood as truth:

Next, an old Custom, our Fathers did name it  
Poetical license, and alwaies did claim it.  
By this we have power to change age into  
Youth,  
Turn Non-sence to Sence, and Falsehood to  
Truth;  
In brief, to make good whatsoever is faulty,  
This art some Poet, or the Devil has taught  
ye. . . .49

Sidney has applauded poetry for improving on nature (making "good whatsoever is faulty"), but Denham regards such improvement and all "poeticall license" as akin to politicians' lies. The poet is ranked with the devil as father of lies.

A passage in Cooper's Hill condemns the workings of the imagination to produce non-existent creatures:

This scene had some bold Greek or British Bard  
Beheld of old, what stories had we heard,  
Of Fairies, Satyrs, and the Nymphs their Dames,  
Their feasts, their revels, and their amorous  
flames:

'Tis still the same, although their aery shape  
All but a quick Poetick sight escape.<sup>50</sup>

It is the old poetry, claiming inspiration ("some bold Greek or British bard"), which tried to convince its readers of the reality of what was seen only by the poetic eye. Denham endorses instead a new poetry, which will forsake inspiration and invention for the new truth. "The Progress of Learning," a poem with a Baconian title, employs a Baconian metaphor:

My early Mistress, now my antient Muse,  
That strong Circean liquor cease to infuse,  
Wherewith thou didst intoxicate my youth,  
Now stoop with dis-inchanted wings to  
Truth. . . .<sup>51</sup>

Truth had hitherto been, for Platonist or Christian, "up there," in heaven, to be apprehended, if at all, in an elevation of the soul, a divine madness. For Denham, intoxication, even if the Muse's, is opposed to

truth, for it is opposed to method, and method, having put truth within everyone's grasp and, conversely, having made being within everyone's grasp a criterion for truth, has put truth on earth. The high flight is now reserved for mistaken enthusiasm or for imaginative fiction, both of which Denham not only rejects but tends to equate. For Denham, as for Pope after him, one "stoops" to truth.

Whereas Sidneian truth was prescriptive and presents what should be, Baconian truth is descriptive, and, with Cooper's Hill, Denham initiates the soon-to-be-popular genre of the loco-descriptive poem, a poem founded on the visible reality of a landscape. Denham argues that it is easier for his fancy to take flight from a high place, but it is also clear that the hill provides his fancy with a place to land. He takes the traditional demand for an elevated subject literally because it is the only way he can arrive at elevation without leaving the ground of truth far behind.

Denham can be sure that his fancy will not fly too high because he is in complete control of its flight. It is no coincidence that the first poem of the new genre begins with an attack on inspiration based on the uniformity of nature:

Sure there are poets which did never dream  
Upon Parnassus, nor did tast the stream

Of Helicon, we therefore may suppose  
Those made not Poets, but the Poets those.  
And as Courts make not Kings, but Kings the  
Court,  
So where the Muses and their train resort,  
Parnassus stands; if I can be to thee  
A Poet, thou Parnassus art to me.

Just as Milton's Satan believes he can make a Heaven of Hell, so Denham believes he can make a Parnassus of Cooper's Hill. Both declarations come from pride, and pride, the homilists tell us, is the refusal to recognize higher power. The virtues of a place are not at issue: Parnassus is sacred not in itself but because the Muses dwell there; Hell is any place far removed from God. Denham, like Satan, sees himself as a source of power sufficient to accomplish his ends and looks for no grace. He lives in the modern relativistic universe where any poet, in any place, can be the center to which all refer, just as Satan, refusing to see God as absolute center, does not realize that, being always on the circumference, he must always be in Hell.

That the poet makes the Muse, and not vice-versa, is taken for granted by Davenant and Hobbes, neither of whom gives a thought to the possibility that there may be any reality behind the poet's claims and both of whom argue rather against feigning poetic madness than against believing in it. Davenant's Discourse upon Gondibert and

Hobbes's Answer to it, both appearing at mid-century, may be taken as the turning point in the fortunes of inspiration. They summarized what many poets and critics were coming to believe, and they helped, by their forthrightness, to hasten the decline of the old belief. After them the only important voice raised for inspiration is Milton's, and the most significant of the minor figures who rally to the old stand have Milton in mind.

There is some controversy as to the extent of the French influence on Davenant and Hobbes, but, in the matter of the invocation at least, they are on their own, and moved in part by the animus all Royalists felt against enthusiasm, which they saw as a great cause of their troubles. For the inspiration in poetry, like enthusiasm in religion, is primarily a means of exercising an unjustified power over men's minds by attributing one's notions to God. Davenant, true neoclassicist, argues that the principal ingredient in poetry is hard, methodical work and defends his painstaking poets against those who wish to see a different quality dominate:

Yet to such painfull Poets some upbraid the  
want of extemporary fury, or rather inspi-  
ration, a dangerous word which many have of  
late successfully us'd; and inspiration is a  
spirituall Fitt, deriv'd from the ancient  
Ethnick Poets, who then, as they were  
Priests, were statesmen too, and probably  
lov'd dominion: and as their well dissembling

of inspiration begot them reverence then equal to that which was paid to Laws, so these who now profess the same fury may perhaps by such authentick example pretend authority over the people . . . yet these . . . should not assume such saucy familiarity with a true God.<sup>53</sup>

Castelvetro's arguments are being stated with greater vehemence because Davenant sees and implies a parallel between the ancient poets, who were also dominion-loving priests, and the Presbyterians. He is sure there is no inspiration outside of scripture: the ancient poets dissembled as well as the moderns, but the moderns sin more because they offend against the true God by claiming He speaks through them while the ancients only abused fictions. He concludes that the invocation is an act of presumption, motivated by ambition and lust for power.

Davenant also has more purely literary reasons for rejecting inspiration. Like Denham, he is ready to regard empirical verifiability as a test of verisimilitude and frowns on the use of the Muse to countenance what might otherwise be improbable. The chief offender is Homer:

Some there are, that object that even in the likelyhoods of Story (and Story, where ever it seems most likely, growes most pleasant) he doth too frequently intermixe such Fables, as are objects lifted above the eyes of Nature; and as he often interrogates his Muse, not as his rationall Spirit but as a Familiar, separated from his body, so her replies bring him where he spends time in immortall conversation. . . .<sup>54</sup>



Davenant considers that Homer abuses poetic diction by making "Muse" refer to a goddess when he should follow the example of Ben Jonson say, and make it an allegorization of his mind. If the Muse is the mind, it cannot present anything that will exceed the mind's capacities and, therefore, it will never forsake the verisimilar, but Homer's Muse encourages him to pass off his poetry as conversation between the gods and thereby to exceed what Davenant regards as poetic propriety. Davenant is so thoroughly for wit and against inspiration that, when he introduces David as the leading poet in Astragon's library, in Book Two of Gondibert, he praises him as the first who "made inspiration wit."<sup>55</sup> David is thus transmogrified into a type of Davenant.

Needless to say, however much Gondibert may fail to conform to the more positive qualifications, it easily lives up to its author's demand that the epic eschew the invocation and any references to an inspiring deity. The problem of the source of the narrator's knowledge is ignored, save for a single statement that he reads Fame's "Rolls in her dark Closet,"<sup>56</sup> which appears more a slight, meaningless lapse than an effort to make the reader think of Clio or the goddess Fama. The poem also avoids the supernatural, and its use of magic, as when the dying Gondibert recovers through swallowing a

cordial administered by the aged Ulfin,<sup>57</sup> is of a sort that would be quite acceptable to such new scientists as Sir Kenelm Digby.

Hobbes, surprisingly enough, is not as harsh as Davenant in rejecting the invocation: he sees it as mere foolishness rather than as a bid for dominance. He does not attack the Greeks for wanting their works to pass as the word of Zeus.

But why a Christian should think it an ornament to his Poem, either to profane the true God or invoke a false one, I can imagine no cause but a reasonless imitation of Custom, of a foolish custome, by which a man, enabled to speak wisely from the principles of nature and his own meditation, loves rather to be thought to speak by inspiration, like a Bagpipe.<sup>58</sup>

Hobbes sees no meaning in the invocation because his view of the poet is the reverse of that presented in the Ion. Hobbes's poet is closer to Socrates than to Ion; he is wise and meditative and knows the principles of nature. His means of knowledge and, hence, his knowledge, do not differ from the philosopher's and, Hobbes implies, he has no need for inspiration because any knowledge which claims to be greater than the philosopher's is fraudulent. He writes to Descartes,

The term "great mental illumination" is metaphorical, and consequently is not adapted to the purposes of argument. Moreover, anyone who is free from doubt claims to possess a similar illumination, and in his will there is the same inclination to believe that of which he does not doubt, as in that of one who truly knows. Hence while this

illumination may be the cause that makes a man obstinately defend or hold some opinion, it is not the cause of his knowing it to be true.<sup>59</sup>

Belief in inspiration provides a baseless dogmatism because inspiration cannot produce knowledge, only a certainty which is inferior to "that of one who truly knows."

There is also for Hobbes a matter of pride: why should a wise man wish to be thought a bagpipe? The question is put in such a way as to omit reference to the bagpipe Player, but it is clear that Hobbes, like Satan, considers it better to be one's own man than God's instrument. This position follows from the other. If grace is not needed for knowledge, then the person who needs grace to acquire knowledge is weaker, not stronger, than the self-informed man.

Since he believed inspiration to be metaphoric, Hobbes was ready to enlist it in support of the imagination. He anticipates the eighteenth-century coalition of the imagined, the "inspired," and the sublime when he writes that "in Fancie consisteth the Sublimity of a Poet, which is that Poetical Fury which the Readers for the most part call for."<sup>60</sup> "Poetical Fury" becomes a trait of the poem rather than a trait of the poet; it is equivalent to "Sublimity" and an effect of the Fancy.

Hobbes's use of "sublime" where other authors would have used "marvelous" may be strategic. The "marvelous" is, we have said, opposed by definition to the "verisimilar," but the "sublime" is a broader and more flexible term that does not exclude the "verisimilar." The "marvelous" was fast coming to be thought of as inherently fictitious, while the "sublime" was, presumably, located first in reality and then in the art imitating that reality. The sublime may be natural as well as supernatural; therefore, the poet need not go "beyond the conceived possibility of nature,"<sup>61</sup> which Hobbes sets for his limit. Judgment still has its role: through science it knows what is possible and what is not possible and establishes bounds for the flights of Fancy.

11

It seems reasonable to assume that Davenant and Hobbes meant, through the publication of Gondibert with the two impressive critical prefaces, to signal a literary revolution in much the same way that Spenser's Shepheardes Calendar with E. K.'s notes had signalled an earlier revolution. Davenant and Hobbes, like Spenser and the Pléiade, call for a learned poetry, but each means something different by it. Spenser and the

Pléiade judge the poet's learning by its height and amplitude: the poem must contain Truth in its Platonic sense. Davenant and Hobbes want a much more mundane and derivative learning: Platonic Truth is too private and the poem must, above all, be credible. Methodical learning must replace fanciful superstition, principally because the superstition has been recognized as such. The classical myths are patent fictions, and where Boileau wanted them used for that reason, Davenant wishes to safeguard credibility; accordingly he congratulates himself for ridding the epic of the pagan gods, much as Carew had earlier praised Donne for ridding the lyric of them. At the same time, he accepts the identification of poetry and fiction and therefore is chary of introducing true spiritual creatures into his work. The result is to keep poetry well within "the conceived possibility of nature."

In the sixteen years after Gondibert, however, were to appear two Christian epics by two ambitious and talented poets, both expanding scriptural stories and both proclaiming that "Truth is truest Poesy." One was by the last son of the Renaissance, who thought Spenser "a better teacher than Aquinas";<sup>62</sup> the other was by a disciple of Bacon and Hobbes who wrote a tribute to Davenant. In comparing Milton's Paradise

Lost with Cowley's Davideis as solutions to the problems posed by the Christian epic, we will be able to see how the change in the relationship between poetry and knowledge effected a change in literary modes.

The contrast between Milton and Cowley is primarily that between an intense singlemindedness and a casual inconsistency. In Milton, as we shall see, everything points to Paradise Lost, but the Davideis represents a shift of opinion on Cowley's part. For preliminaries, the "Preface" to Poems (1656) may be taken as an epitome of Cowley's hesitancy. It is clear that Cowley's attitudes toward poetry in his general discussion and in his treatment of The Mistress differ from the attitudes expressed in his consideration of the Davideis. He begins by protesting that the volume contains his last work as a poet. "But as the Mariages of Infants do but rarely prosper, so no man ought to wonder at the diminution or decay of my affection to Poesie; to which I had contracted my self so much under age, and so much to my own prejudice in regard of those more profitable matches which I might have made among the richer Sciences."<sup>63</sup> In one sense of the words "profitable" and "richer," the passage may be dismissed as the conventional poet's complaint against the unremunerativeness of poetry; however, the

passage's other meaning cannot be ignored. Six years later, Cowley will publish A Proposition of the Advancement of Experimental Philosophy (1661) in which he will, Bacon-like, discourse on the material profits to be achieved by the new science and lay down plans for a reformed education centered in the experimental philosophy. Cowley would cut most poetry out of his curriculum, for it has fed the world only "with follies of love, or with the fables of gods and heroes," save for "scattered little parcels among the ancient poets that might serve for the advancement of natural science. . . ." <sup>64</sup> From this later discussion it appears that Cowley could dismiss even his own poetry as childishly unprofitable compared to the riches of knowledge presented by the new science.

Later passages in the "Preface" indicate that Cowley does not seriously consider poetry as a means of knowledge. He considers delight to be "the main end of Poesie." <sup>65</sup> He would not have any readers of The Mistress think that poetry is about the poet: "He professes too much the use of Fables (though without the malice of deceiving) to have his testimony taken even against himself." <sup>66</sup> In other words, the poet's defense (and his license) comes from the tacit assumption that he is not to be believed.

But when Cowley begins to write of the Davideis he loses his casual tone and content and starts preaching. Poetry is now a "Divine Science" wasting "all her inexhaustible riches of Wit and Eloquence" on base secular subjects.<sup>67</sup> He no longer considers the poet a fabulist: "There is not so great a lye to be found in any Poet, as the vulgar conceit of man, that Lying is Essential to good Poetry."<sup>68</sup> Poetry is now to play an important part in moral reform; there is no longer any question of its credibility or of its ability to teach. The last part of the "Preface" is not quite compatible with the rest of it.

In spite of the importance he attributes to poems like the Davideis Cowley writes that he does not "have Appetite at present to finish the work, or so much as to revise that part which is done with that care which I resolved to bestow upon it. . . ."<sup>69</sup> Our reading of the "Preface" suggests that Cowley lost his appetite because he had previously digested a fair amount of Hobbes and, consequently, could not be wholeheartedly committed to the view of poetry needed to support a work as ambitious as a Christian epic. A reading of his poetry suggests equally that the Davideis was crushed between two opposing critical views.

Apart from Davideis Cowley gives a particularly fine expression to the Hobbist position. In "Reason.



The use of it in Divine Matters," he attacks those who live in intellectual sloth waiting for an illusory word from God:

Visions and Inspirations some expect  
Their course here to direct,  
Like senseless Chymists their own wealth destroy,  
Imaginary Gold t'enjoy.  
So Stars appear to drop to us from skie,  
And gild the passage as they fly:  
But when they fall and meet th'opposing ground,  
What but a sordid slime is found?<sup>70</sup>

Just as the alchemist, unsatisfied with the wealth he can acquire by normal means, impoverishes himself through futile attempts to discover the philosopher's stone, so the would-be visionary, contemptuous of mortal knowledge, ends in blank ignorance or foolish error. Visions are like meteoric fool's gold in that they seem to be celestial in origin (gold, we recall, is made by the archemic sun), but they are actually terrestrial and of the base substance of the passions or imagination. To work out what may be an implied pun, one's thinking is well-grounded in reason, but inspiration, with its ambiguities and vaguaries, mires it in the slime.

The attitude toward enthusiasm in religion is naturally applied to the poetic furor. Of all poets, Cowley most admires Virgil,

Whose verse walks highest, but not flies,  
Who brought green Poesie to her perfect Age;  
And made that Art which was a Rage.<sup>71</sup>

The poem entitled "The Muse" has nothing to do with

inspiration. Cowley is as clear as he can be that the Muse is the poetic talent, which is further explained in terms of faculties and influences:

Go, the rich Chariot instantly prepare;  
The Queen, my Muse, will take the air;  
Unruly Phansie with strong Judgment trace,  
Put in nimble-footed Wit,  
Smooth-pac'ed Eloquence joyn with it,  
Sound Memory with young Invention place,  
Harness all the winged race.  
Let the Postillion Nature mount, and let  
The Coachman Art be set.<sup>72</sup>

Fancy and judgment, wit and eloquence, nature and art, are all traditional pairings. The coupling of memory and invention is new and suggests Hobbes' treatment of the imagination as decayed sense and akin to the memory.<sup>73</sup> Cowley seems to imply that the memory, the storehouse of past reality, should check invention, the maker of potential reality, the way that judgment curbs fancy or art guides nature.

Thus far, Cowley is not far from Davenant. However, a comparison of Davideis with Gondibert shows that Cowley is not willing to renounce as much as Davenant. The poem contains two invocations, each of which the author feels it necessary to defend in a note. The invocations are not altogether conventional and, even if they were, the notes would prevent them from being passed over and ignored. The note on the opening invocation presents what should be by now familiar material, but the manner

of presentation is less familiar:

The custom of beginning all Poems, with a proposition of the whole work, and an Invocation of some God for his assistance to go through with it, is so solemnly and religiously observed by all the ancient Poets, that though I could have found out a better way, I should not (I think) have ventured upon it. But there can be, I believe, none better; and that part, of the Invocation, if it became a Heathen, is no less necessary for a Christian Poet. A Jove principium, Musae; and it follows then very naturally, Jovis omnia plena. The whole work may reasonably hope to be filled with a Divine Spirit, when it begins with a prayer to be so.<sup>74</sup>

Cowley begins his defense of the invocation by appealing to custom, but he realizes that such an appeal robs the invocation of meaning. He then raises the question whether the invocation is the best way to begin the poem and points to the subjectivity and hesitancy of his affirmative by inserting "I think" and "I believe." Then he does not claim to be inspired but argues that it is reasonable for the reader to believe that he may be inspired when he begins with an invocation. He says the invocation means that the work hopes to be filled with the Divine Spirit, but he does not say that his work has been so filled. He is, in fact, leaving it to the reader to make such claims for him. Similarly, the invocation itself leaves some doubt as to the poet's inspiration. He addresses Christ:

Ev'en Thou my breast with such blest rage  
inspire,

As mov'd the tuneful strings of Dauids Lyre,  
Guid my bold steps with thine old trav'elling  
Flame,

In these untrodden paths to Sacred Fame;

Lo, this great work, a Temple to thy praise,  
On polisht Pillars of strong Verse I raise!  
A Temple, where if Thou vouchsafe to dwell,  
It Solomons, and Herods shall excel.  
Too long the Muses-land have Heathen bin;  
Their Gods too long were Dev'ls, and Vertues

Sin;

But Thou, Eternal Word, has call'd forth Me  
Th'Apostle, to convert that World to Thee;  
T'unbind the charms that in slight Fables lie,  
And teach that Truth is truest Poesie.<sup>75</sup>

That the poet requests inspiration and respects it is undeniable. If the Word dwells in his poem, his poem will be great. At the same time, though, he calls it "great" before he knows that it will have an indwelling god, and it is he who is polishing the "Pillars of strong Verse." The conclusion of the invocation seems to limit God's activity to calling the poet forth; it is the poet, not God working through him, who unleashes the power of poetry.

The second invocation is to the Muse and asks for information on the power of poetry:

Tell me, Oh Muse (for Thou, or none canst tell  
The mystick pow'ers that in blest Numbers  
dwell. . . .<sup>76</sup>

The note undercuts the invocation almost completely. Cowley explains that he has the Muse discuss the causes of poetry's might lest he be censured for parading his own learning. "For this second Invocation upon a

particular matter, I have the authority of Homer and Virgil; which nevertheless I should have omitted, had the digression been upon any subject but Musick."<sup>77</sup> He feels, in other words, that the Muse is qualified to instruct in no subject other than the formal aspects of poetry. The Muse is not equated with his talent, but, as inspiring deity, she knows no more than he, as skillful poet, knows. She appears in the poem not out of necessity but at the poet's convenience.

Cowley seems to include the invocation principally because it is traditional. It also serves a rhetorical function by establishing the narrator's piety and by allowing him to show off his learning without prideful self-reference. He recognizes that the invocation asks for divine sanction and is willing that the reader think his work has received it, but he is not willing to proclaim himself God's "bagpipe."

His prose notes reveal a Cowley who is at odds with the poet of the Davideis. Not only do they undercut the invocations; they also challenge the statement that "Truth is truest Poesie." Having placed Hell at earth's center and written, "No bound controls th'unwearied space," Cowley notes, "This must be taken in a Poetical sense; for else, making Hell to be in the Center of the Earth, it is far from infinitely large or deep. . . ."

He then quotes a number of contradictory accounts of Hell, implying that he does not know, and no one else can know, anything about Hell.<sup>78</sup> A later note on the music of the spheres explicitly dissociates what the poem proclaims and what the poet believes. "It is enough that the Doctrine . . . had been received very anciently. . . . And to speak according to common opinion, though it be false, is . . . far from being a fault in Poetry. . . ." He cites Seneca on a line of the Georgics to the effect "that Virgil did not look upon, what might be spoken most Truly, but what most gracefully; and aimed more at Delighting his Readers than at instructing Husbandmen. . . ."<sup>79</sup> A still later footnote proclaims, "In fine, whatever the truth be, this opinion makes a better Sound in Poetry."<sup>80</sup> Truth is the least true poetry.

However, even without the notes to cast doubt on its truth status, the reader would still not know how to take the Davideis. The poem disdains fiction but presents what may be easiest taken as fiction. It is not a straight biblical paraphrase, but there is no way for the reader to assure himself of the truth of what has been added. God's responsibility for the poem is indeterminate; He may have just commissioned it and then left the poet on his own. But if not through God,

how could Cowley obtain true knowledge about David's story that the reader could obtain only through him? The poem calls for a proclamation of the poet's inspiration, but Cowley hesitates because he does not believe in inspiration and because he cannot bring himself to attribute to God a work in which poetic fictions are preferred, as more delightful, to what the poet believes to be true. The poet who could write, "Our reasoning faculty as well as fancy, does but dream, when it is not guided by sensible objects,"<sup>81</sup> would have to consider his poem about an unseen past and unseen angels a dream, since he could not consider it inspired, and it would be an uncomfortable dream because its biblical subject matter forbade its being labelled a dream. Cowley seems to have proven for himself Boileau's dictum that the true God may not appear in poetic fiction. In the writing of the Davideis the traditional veneration of the high and true epic subject went down to defeat at the hands of a too modern sensibility.

Cowley was too receptive to an intellectual climate which made inspiration impossible. Milton, growing up in the same climate, was not uninfluenced by the Baconians, as several of the prolusions show. His interest in method extended to the writing of a Ramist logic. Yet he hung on to the old belief in divine

afflatus and proved its value in Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained, for neither could have been written without an inspired narrator.

Statements about poetic furor occur in Milton's work as early as some of the school exercises. The first prolusion makes the traditional point that poets, inspired by God, were the first to teach all matters to man. The Vacation Exercise of 1627 speaks of Milton's ambitions for his native language and, explaining where a fit subject may be found, develops the idea that "the deep transported mind may soare/ Above the wheeling poles, and at Heavn's dore/ Look in, and see each blissful Deitie. . . ." In the Elegia Quinta of the next year the poet claims such a transport for his own mind. Rapt by the coming of spring, it leaves the body and, carried up into the clouds, sees the secret places of the gods, scanning the divine actions on Olympus and the infernal ones in Tartarus. Another Latin poem of about the same time invokes the Muses to reveal the Platonic Idea used for the creation of Man.<sup>82</sup>

It is clear that Milton thinks of inspiration as providing knowledge primarily of the gods and of the first things. "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity" (1629) represents a shift from classical to Christian subject, which Milton signals by invoking for the first



time the Heavenly Muse whom he will prefer to the pagan Muses in his later writings. The Muse is needed to describe the birth of the second Adam and to catalogue, as she will in Paradise Lost, the false gods whom Christ banishes by his appearance.<sup>83</sup>

The discussion of poetry in The Reason of Church Government (1641) includes Milton's most developed statement of his theory of poetic creation. The epic poem can only be created by an able poet, and the abilities required for it "are the inspired gift of God, rarely bestow'd, but yet to some (though most abuse) in every Nation. . . ." <sup>83</sup> Talent is inspired in that it is given by God, but because it is not a temporary gift and one which the poet can use or abuse as he sees fit, it is not "inspired" in our sense of the word. Talent, learning, and exercise are all requisite for a poet, but for the great poem these are necessary but secondary factors, the primary being special inspiration by the divine spirit. For Milton, as for Ronsard, inspiration differentiates the poet from the poetaster. In a memorable passage, he promises his readers

a work not to be rays'd from the heat of youth, or the vapours of wine, like that which flows at wast from the pen of some vulgar Amorist, or the trencher fury of a riming parasite, nor to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her Siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that eternall Spirit who can enrich with all

utterance and knowledge, and sends out his  
Sepaphim with the hallow'd fire of his Altar  
to touch and purify the lips of whom he  
pleases: to this must be added industrious  
and select reading, steady observation,  
insight into all seemly and generous arts  
and affaires. . . .<sup>84</sup>

Though the poet has abundance of knowledge and skill, his work needs to be enriched by the touch of one who has all knowledge and skill. The inspiration and Milton's justification of it are strictly Christian, but his rejection of the classical Muses is more than just the repetition of a topos well-worn by writers of sacred poetry. By calling them "Dame Memory and her Siren daughters," he refers to the plagiarizing of the classics recommended by many of the neoclassical critics, the temptation to follow the Roman Muse instead of one's own and produce a neo-Virgilian epic, coming, as most pedantic attempts did, from the memory and not from the sovereign poetic faculty of the inspired imagination. He will not agree with Minturno that the only way to write poetry is the Virgilian way; divine inspiration sets the poet free of a prescribed method. The archetypal poet for Milton is David, a shepherd turned into a psalmist because he knew the Lord and not because he knew Aristotle.

Milton could be sure of God's assistance for his epics because he felt he had received it in lesser

works. Thus, he considers himself to be illuminated while he writes The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce<sup>85</sup> and, in the following Judgment of Martin Bucer, he goes so far as to say it was God who led him to Bucer. In the latter, he confesses, "Certainly if it be in mans discerning to sever providence from chance, I could allege many instances, wherein there would appear cause to esteem of me no other than a passive instrument under some power and counsel higher and better then can be human, working to a general good in the whole course of this matter."<sup>86</sup> In the Second Defense, he argues, as he will later in Paradise Lost III, that his blindness is no punishment but a preparation for the receiving of spiritual light, which would be less distinct if the seer could be distracted by the light of common day.<sup>87</sup>

The inability of fallen man to see spiritual reality lies at the heart of the narrator's function in Paradise Lost. A. D. Ferry points out that when Milton was thinking of making a drama about Adam's Fall he planned to introduce the character of Moses to relate the preceding events to an audience who could not "se [sic] Adam in the state of innocence by reason of thire sin."<sup>88</sup> Moses is a postlapsarian man best able to communicate with an audience of his kind and at the same time the inspired author of Genesis who has been

given by God a knowledge of supernal events that surpasses what fallen man can know. Similarly the narrator of the poem Paradise Lost begins by asking aid from the Heavenly Muse who taught the creation story to Moses. It is clear that the narrator will be to the epic what Moses would have been to the drama, a fallen man who is an exemplary beneficiary of God's mercy. Having ascertained through his experience the existence of mercy, he is concerned, like Moses, with God's other attribute, justice, in particular the justice of God's ways to men. He too will preach the necessity of humble obedience to the Creator's will.

At the same time, the narrator differs from Moses. He is not so exalted, a liberator of his people from prideful tyranny in wish alone, and a Christian but not a type of Christ. The narrator is not so awesome and foreign to his readers as Moses would be. Inspired, he is no longer one of us, but we are ready to accept his judgments as our own because we see the gap between him and us as not unbridgeable. He makes the process through which he has become removed from us clear and we see that we can share his experience, as we doubt we could share Moses's.

In the last analysis, the poem is closer to the Divine Comedy than one might think, for it deals with

and justifies the ways of God as much through the experience and education of the narrator as through those of Adam, and the poem is successful if the poet, like Plato's magnet, makes his readers accept his inspiration and voice as their own. The narration of the prelapsarian events must be more dramatic in the epic than it would have been in the drama, and Moses could only be an initially more credible but ultimately less successful historian than the present narrator. Moses would come on stage as a man of God whose inspiration was a given fact accepted by all devout spectators but, precisely for that reason, he could only relate the prelapsarian events as having occurred in the remote past. The narrator, on the other hand, acts out his inspiration for the reader and tells the story not from memory but as he sees it in his visionary journey through space-time.

It is clear that Milton's undertaking depends on the reader's acceptance of the narrator. The narrator is the medium through which the reader is to be presented with a truthful and vivid account of a crucial event that binds narrator and reader together as fallen men. The reader must not only accept what the narrator says as true but come to agree, in mind and spirit, with the judgment of the facts that he sees

informing the narrator's account. The truth of that account depends on inspiration, and the reader's agreement with the judgment passed depends on his acceptance of the possibility and actuality of the narrator's inspiration.

The invocations, then, carry two burdens and point two ways. On the one hand, they are directed to the inspiring power, Muse or Spirit, who alone can help the poet to realize his "great Argument," and, as such, they occur at vital points in the narrator's progress. On the other hand, they are indirectly pointed towards the reader and seek with implicit arguments to have him accept the reality of the poet's inspiration.

If the judgment is to be accurate, the reader must be sure he has obtained all the important facts; hence the narrator must first establish that he is in a position to know and pass on all of the important facts. He begins by stressing the benevolence and knowledge of the power he invokes. This is a Spirit who wishes to communicate his knowledge to the righteous, who taught Moses, and through him the "chosen Seed," the wonder of Creation. Good in itself, the Spirit only speaks to good men; thus, there is no chance of deception when the narrator asks,

And chiefly Thou O Spirit, that dost prefer  
Before all Temples th'upright heart and pure,  
Instruct me, for Thou know'st; thou from the  
first  
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread  
Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss  
And mad'st it pregnant: What in me is dark  
Illumine, and what is low raise and  
support. . . . (I, 17-23)

More important than the Spirit's desire to do good is its ability to do so. It knows everything because it was present at, and active in, the Creation. Then it sat "brooding," a word which suggests contemplation, the highest form of knowledge, and, connected as it is with "dove-like" and "mad'st it pregnant," the engendering of a brood. Surely, the narrator implies, a Spirit that can bring life out of nothingness can with greater ease impregnate his mind with wisdom, and a Spirit that can enable the light of order to banish the darkness of chaos can illuminate those parts of his mind where dark ignorance still reigns.

It should be noted, in accord with the passage quoted from The Reason of Church Government, that the Spirit will not do all the work. Not all of the poet's mind is dark and not all of it needs to be raised and supported. The poet contributes the best of human learning, and that learning is sanctified and perfected by the action of the Spirit. This is Milton's solution to du Bellay's problem of how to have one's cake and

eat it too. The poet is not one of Ion's tribe; he is learned and worthy of respect and, because he is so, God, Who forever gives to him who hath, will consider him worthy of inspiration.

Milton, moreover, does not end his argument with a statement like Cowley's "The whole work may reasonably hope to be filled with a Divine Spirit, when it begins with a prayer to be so."<sup>89</sup> Not all prayers are answered, even of the deserving, and Cowley seems to have been none too sure of his own. Consequently, the narrator of Paradise Lost has no sooner closed his invocation than he begins with a test of its efficacy:

Say first, for Heav'n hides nothing from thy  
view  
Nor the deep Tract of Hell, say first what  
cause  
Mov'd our Grand Parents in that happy State,  
Favor'd of Heav'n so highly, to fall off  
From their Creator, and transgress from his  
Will  
From one restraint, Lords of the World  
besides? (I, 27-32)

The answer to the question, if it comes at all, must come from the Spirit; when the narrator responds that the cause was "Th'infernal Serpent," his response is to be taken by the reader as inspired. Further proof follows immediately, for the first book and a half relate events seen in "the deep Tract of Hell," events that could only be seen through the Spirit's aid.

It must be confessed that Milton barely avoids the



circular argument of claiming that what he says is true because it is inspired<sup>3</sup> and inspired because it is true. By asking the Spirit to take the first step in the poem, he makes the mere fact of his proceeding a proof of inspiration and thereby avoids circularity.

The desire to make his inspiration plausible may also be partially behind the phenomenon noted by C. S. Lewis: though De Doctrina Christiana is apparently heterodox, Paradise Lost is so written that it "was accepted as orthodox by many generations of acute readers well grounded in theology."<sup>90</sup> Milton seems to have wished to keep his epic clear of extraneous doctrinal controversies, perhaps for the same reason that he gives equal hearings to the Ptolemaic and Copernican theories: he conceived of inspiration as a public event, God communicating to a people and not just to a man, and felt that the truth derived from inspiration must also be public, objective, certain, and open to general agreement. To have God or one of His angels enter into dubious battle on the plains of casuistry is to jeopardize needlessly the claim to inspiration: sophistry, Milton makes it clear, is the devil's province.

Milton's references to the difficulty of his endeavor also point to his inspiration. If his poem

intends to soar above those of Homer and Virgil, pursuing "Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhyme" (I, 16), it is not because he is claiming greater skill as a poet but because he is claiming greater inspiration. Odysseus and Aeneas go to and return from infernal realms, but only the narrator of Paradise Lost ascends to the celestial realm as well.<sup>91</sup> He has been

Taught by the heav'nly Muse to venture down  
The dark descent, and up to reascend,  
Though hard and rare. . . .

The opening of Book Three contains this acknowledgment of divine assistance. It echoes Satan's statement in the previous book that "long is the way/ And hard, that out of Hell leads up to light" (II, 432-3) as surely as both echo what the Sybil says to Aeneas and what Virgil says to Dante.<sup>92</sup> Between Satan's assertion of the difficulty of ascension made to the infernal parliament and the narrator's reassertion of it, Satan has proven through his own experience its accuracy. The narrator's chronicle, however, has been "through utter and through middle darkness borne" (III, 16) without Satan's difficulty, so superior are the flights of the Muse to those of the devil.

The invocation to Book Three has been regarded by some as Milton's most personal utterance, and it is with no denial that the pathos of his remarks is heartfelt

that we point out the tactical elements in the passage. Milton had too great a sense of decorum to allow the author's personality to intrude in an epic merely for self-expression, and, surely, if he had thought of Paradise Lost as a chance to air his grievances, he had many more grievances than his blindness. Eve and the apple are staples of anti-feminist literature, and Milton could, no doubt, have informed us of his marital woes in Book Ten with as great ease as he tells us of his eyes in Book Three. Rather the blindness is mentioned for ethos as much as for pathos.

Both passages on blindness are followed by the narrator's hopes for his poetic career. It appears that he is arguing for his being inspired by appealing to precedent. It is not enough that he is inspired because he is a good and learned man; he argues that his blindness may be a sign that God means him to be a bard. He recalls a tradition going back to Homer's accounts of Thamyris in the Iliad and Demodokos in the Odyssey, two to whom were transmitted the gift of poetry in exchange for their sight, and thinks as well of the blind prophets Tiresias and Phineus. These are equal to him in the hard fate of sightlessness and, it follows in his mind, "So were I equall'd with them in renown. . . ." (III, 34)

This is not to say that he does not regret his loss. He misses very much the pleasures of vision. He knows, moreover, that the sight is an important avenue of knowledge that has been closed to him. He is

for the Book of knowledge fair  
Presented with a universal blanc  
Of Nature's works to me expung'd and ras'd  
And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.  
(III, 47-50)

For some of Milton's contemporaries the sense which he was lacking provided the only sure means of knowledge, and the blind man, having difficulty checking his fancy against visual reality, could not hope to be a good poet. Milton, though, knows there is a way to higher and more certain knowledge and believes, and asks his readers to believe, that a just God will compensate him for the loss of his eyes:

So much the rather thou Celestial light  
Shine inward, and the mind through all her  
powers  
Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from  
thence  
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell  
Of things invisible to mortal sight.  
(III, 51-55)

Where Hobbesian materialism, for example, recognizes only one kind of light, the physical, and only one way of knowing, through the physical senses, Milton, drawing on an older tradition sometimes called "light metaphysics," acknowledges more than one medium of vision and more than one kind of seeing.<sup>93</sup>

The "Celestial Light" Milton invokes is not sunlight. St. Augustine, and with him most later light-metaphysicians, distinguishes between uncreated light and created light, which can be either spiritual or corporeal. The uncreated light is God, Who, as St. John wrote, is Light. Created corporeal light, the sun and stars, is not the light that the Bible records as God's first creation. The light is created spiritual light, which is God's effective agent and which Milton invokes.

Uncreated light cannot be seen by any eyes. Corresponding to the two kinds of created light are the eyes of the body and the eyes of the mind. (The "eyes of the mind," it may be noted, are one part of the same metaphoric complex that appears when one speaks of "illumination" and "visions.") Origen, who introduced the notion that there were two sets of eyes, felt that they were opposed; one might say that each functioned in inverse competence to the other. Hence comes St. Bonaventure's paradox that "Ex caecatio est summa illuminatio";<sup>94</sup> undistracted by the things of this world, the blind man develops his spiritual vision. Milton argues that his blindness, apparently a sign of weakness, may be a sign of unapparent God-given strength.

It may be noted that the contrast between external

and internal vision is central to all of Paradise Lost and not just to the invocation to Book III. Milton makes it clear that empiricism is the refuge of those who have fallen from, or turned away from, grace, for only they are limited to what they can arrive at through experience.<sup>95</sup> Satan first uses an empirical argument to deny what all faithful angels like Abdiel know as revealed truth, that the Son created the angels. Satan demands,

who saw  
When this creation was? remember'st thou  
Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?  
We know no time when we were not as now;  
Know none before us, self-begot, self-  
raised. . . . (V, 856-60)

Satan and his followers decide to make war, "by proof to try/ Who is our equal," though they could know, if they wished to, of God's omnipotence without putting it to the test. Even in Hell Satan can still refer to his abject defeat as the result of "dubious Battle" and can say of Omnipotence that "till then who knew/ The force of those dire Arms?" (I, 104, 93-4).

Satan, who has closed his eyes to the spiritual light, promises Eve that a bite of the apple will open her eyes to the secrets of Heaven, secrets which Raphael had announced in the preceding book to have been purposely removed by God "from human sense" (VIII, 119). When Adam and Eve first eat the fruit,

they find "their Eyes how op'n'd, and their minds/ How dark'n'd . . ." (IX, 1053-4). Fallen angels and men thus undergo a development that is the reverse of the narrator's: their sin closes the spiritual eye and makes them dependent on the physical eye; the narrator's reception of God's grace more than compensates for the loss of the physical eye. He is able to see places which the "Astronomer in the Sun's lucent Orbe/ Through his glaz'd Optic Tube yet never saw" (III 589-90), and when the angels come to banish Adam and Eve from Eden, he remarks, "A glorious Apparition, had not doubt/ And carnal fear that day dimm'd Adams eye" (XI, 211-12). Since he calls it glorious, the narrator can see the apparition, but fallen Adam can see it only dimly.<sup>97</sup> The inspired narrator is a humble Christian elevated by God. The proud and the sinful refuse or are unable to receive inspiration and, consequently, deny its reality, but the narrator presents himself as proof of their folly and of God's love. The attack on empiricism strengthens the case for the narrator's inspiration but also contributes to the larger meaning of the poem by condemning prideful self-sufficiency and underlining the need for grace.

It is clear that Milton is calling upon a wide range of beliefs to justify his assertion of inspiration;

he is allowing his reader to choose his grounds for accepting the poet's inspiration and, if the reader does not accept the notion of celestial light, for example, he need not reject what is behind that notion in the invocation to Book Three.

The invocation in Book Three is necessary because the narrator wishes to thank the Muse for lifting him out of Hell and to ask her assistance so that he may record such events in Heaven as the following conversation between the Father and the Son. In Book Seven he again asks her aid: he is at the midpoint of the epic, a convenient time for gathering energies for his second half; he is ready to descend from heaven to earth, where the rest of the action occurs; and he will be dealing in this particular book with the Creation, the subject on which his Muse has already informed Moses.

Book Seven provides yet another interpretation of the source of inspiration. The Muse's competence to deal with the subject immediately at hand is established:

Before the Hills appear'd, or Fountain flow'd  
Thou with Eternal Wisdom didst converse,  
Wisdom thy Sister, and with her didst play  
In presence of th'Almighty Father, pleas'd  
With thy Celestial Song. (VII, 8-12)

It is less important that the Muse's birth in Heaven antedated considerably the birth of the world. The more crucial statement is that the Muse converses with her



sister Wisdom, the personification of the Divine Mind coming from Proverbs VIII whose Hebraic and Neoplatonic history is too complicated to trace here, save to note that she is the same Sapience who appears at the high point of the soul's journey in Spenser's Fowre Hymnes and that a good case has been made for Origen as Milton's primary source.<sup>97</sup> The Muse, then, has access to all of the divine decrees, and mediates between Wisdom, who is more God's attribute than his agent, and man.

In the same invocation, the poet makes it clear that it is God and not Jove to whom his Muse is so close. He calls his Muse Urania to suggest not so much the ancient goddess of astronomy as the Christian Muse of du Bartas and the one who, for Spenser and others, presided over celestial knowledge in general and knowledge of Creation in particular. He wishes no confusion with the Greek deity, for he regards her, and imagines that his reader regards her, as a fiction. He wants to make it clear that there is no pretense in his inspiration; he expects from the reader genuine belief and not just a willing suspension of disbelief. His opening, "Descend from Heav'n Urania, by that name/ If rightly thou art call'd" (VII, 1-2), immediately indicates that he is not invoking the Greek goddess, about whose name there is no doubt. He goes on to make himself clearer:

The meaning, not the name I call: for thou  
Nor of the Muses nine, nor on the top  
Of old Olympus dwell'st, but heav'nly  
born. . . . (VII, 5-7)

For poets who regard the invocation as a conventional, classical requirement, the Muse is only a nomina, but Milton is a realist and believes there is a power to be invoked whose name is just a convenience. In saying that he calls the meaning not the name, he asserts that there is a meaning. He does the same when he says that he expects his Muse to protect him in the "evil days" of the Restoration though Calliope was unable to protect Orpheus from the Bacchic revellers, "For thou art heav'nly, shee an empty dream" (VII, 39).

In Book Nine, Milton argues once again that his poem has the potential to surpass the epics of the past because his subject is higher and more heroic than the traditional ones of national and religious conflict and because he is divinely inspired. Given the high subject, the poem will be successful

If answerable style I can obtain  
Of my Celestial Patroness, who deigns  
Her nightly visitation unimplor'd  
And dictates to me slumb'ring, or inspires  
Easy my unpremeditated Verse. . . . (IX, 20-24)

We may doubt that Milton's verse was unpremeditated, or that he wrote Paradise Lost in his sleep, and we may regard the passage quoted from The Reason of Church Government as a much better representation of the author's poetics, but it is clear that Milton, feeling

that Paradise Lost was no place to make distinctions between what the poet contributes and what the Muse, would rather have his reader assign the poem to the latter than to the former. Where Tasso and Cowley balked, Milton does not hesitate: he would rather be considered, in Hobbes' word, a "bagpipe" than leave the reader any reason to doubt the divine influence on and sanction of any part of the poem. He concludes by anticipating fame for his work

unless an age too late, or cold  
Climate, or Years damp my intended wing  
Deprest; and much they may, if all be mine,  
Not Hers who brings it nightly to my Ear.  
(IX, 44-47)

He fears that his particular location in time and space may prevent his success. The mid-seventeenth century may be too late in human history to produce any work which one can expect to last. "The great mutations of the world are acted," wrote Sir Thomas Browne, "or time may be too short for our designs."<sup>98</sup> The cold climate of England may douse the intelligence, which some thought of as mental fire. Moreover, the poet is what his age regarded as an old man, in his fifties, and his powers may fail him. The Muse, however, is untouched by time and space and, with her stamp on Paradise Lost, it cannot but last.

The invocation in Book Nine is the last in Paradise

Lost, probably because the subject of the later books is fallen man and Milton needs no special assistance to discourse on that subject. Paradise Regained opens with an invocation to the Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness. It need not detain us, except for us to notice that the request, "inspire/ As thou art wont, my prompted Song, else mute" (I, 11-12), is from a poet who has had similar requests granted before and expects as much from his present one. The continuity of the poem with Paradise Lost, established in its opening verse paragraph, allows the poet to establish his inspiration for the sequel by referring to his inspiration in the original. The casting of Samson Agonistes into dramatic form rules out any invocation by the poet, and the strictly human characters and subject make it relatively unnecessary.

The study of Milton shows that he regarded inspiration as the only source and guarantee of truth in supernal matters and as a means of producing a lasting work. Because he needed the belief, he sought to have his readers accept it, not through direct argument, which would be losing half the battle by admitting that inspiration was at issue, but through the indirect strategies of his invocations. If we do not find his strategies effectual, we must remember that he was

working for a cause lost two hundred years before we were born, and we can judge our distance from him by realizing that, though we can only accept his inspiration as a metaphor, this does not seriously damage our appreciation of the poem because the literal truth it vouched for we tend to accept as metaphor as well. In Milton's time, when literal truth was at issue, the inspiration was too.

iii

It is no coincidence that the two most important critical affirmations of inspiration after 1667 are connected with Milton. Edward Phillips, Milton's nephew, presents a routine statement in the "Preface" to Theatrum Poetarum (1675).<sup>99</sup> Charles Gildon, writing "To Mr. T. S. in Vindication of Mr. Milton's Paradise Lost" (1694), shows how completely he accepts the poem's argument for inspiration:

. . . 'tho the Composing such a compleat Poem on such a no less Obscure than weighty Subject was a task to be perform'd by Mr. Milton only, yet 'tis not out of doubt whether himself had even been able to so Sing of Unrevealed Heavenly Mysteries, had he not been altogether depriv'd of his Outward Sight, and thereby made capable of such continued Strenuous Inward Speculations as he who has the use of his Bodilly Eyes cannot possibly become possest with. This, however, must be granted as indubitably true: The bountiful Powers above did more than make him amends for their taking away his Sight, by so Illumining his mind as

to enable him most compleatly to sing of Matchless Beings, Matchless Things, before unknown to, and even unthought of, by the whole Race of Men. . . .<sup>100</sup>

Believing the poem to contain literal truth, Gildon believes in the poet's inspiration as well, for it is the only cause capable of producing such an effect.

Gildon, however, is an anachronism, a voice in the wilderness, a true believer born too late. He finds Paradise Lost possible in 1694 while some thinkers more in step with the times were, in a manner of speaking, proclaiming it impossible before it appeared.

After 1660 inspiration was more of a lost cause than republicanism, for inspiration was wedded in the popular mind with the "inner light" or "enthusiasm" of the religious left; and "enthusiasm," taken to mean the inability or refusal to reason, was a convenient scapegoat for the ills of the Civil War. As early as Hooker, England had been warned of the dangers presented by a rashly innovating inner light unchecked by traditional reason or the consensus gentium. The rise of the Puritan party brought attacks against the inner light and, from the Cambridge Platonists, efforts to distinguish between true inspiration and false. For John Smith, there is "one main Characteristical distinction between the Prophetical and pseudo-prophetical spirit, viz., that the Prophetical spirit

doth never alienate the Mind. . . ."101 Lord Falkland writes that God's grace does not infuse "a knowledge without reason, but works by it. . . ."102 Henry More writes a whole tract to prove that "inspiration" not responsible to reason is nothing but melancholic insanity. Any presumed inspiration is to be tested by "either the Common notions that all men in their wits agree upon, or the Evidence of outward Sense, or else a clear and distinct Deduction from these."103 The diction alludes to the Baconian and Cartesian methods, and since only these methods supply the truth-criterion, inspiration is superfluous. In identifying "true inspiration" with the workings of reason, all prepare for the conflation of inspiration and wit.

After 1660 the attacks become more self-righteous and the distinction between inspiration and enthusiasm tends to disappear, for no one cares to make it. The new thinkers have sprung from the dragon's teeth sown by Bacon: truths within the scope of the empirical method are to be validated and embraced; truths foreign to it are to be met with skepticism. Charles II's patronage of the Royal Society is a political act in which the new government identifies itself with the causes of methodical reasoning and material progress and crystallizes reaction against nonscientific mental

flights and mere theorizing, both of which are identified with the defeated Puritans.

Samuel Butler aptly satirizes the intellectual afflictions attributed to the Puritans. His *Hudibras* is the vain theorizer, and his Ralph is the enthusiast. Introducing Ralph, he writes:

His knowledge was not far behind  
The knight's, but of another kind,  
And another way he came by it;  
Some call it Gift, and some New Light,  
A liberal art, that costs no pains  
Of study, industry, or brains.<sup>104</sup>

Not being based on learning or method or wit, Ralph's is a private, and hence worthless, truth. In the next passage, Butler borrows the "bagpipe" metaphor from Hobbes and applies it, like Hobbes, to the inspired poet:

This light inspires, and plays upon  
The nose of saint like bagpipe drone,  
And speaks through hollow, empty soul  
As through a trunk or whispering hole,  
Such language as no mortal ear  
But spiritual eavesdroppers can hear.  
So Phoebus or some friendly Muse  
Into small poets song infuse,  
Which they at second hand rehearse  
Through reed or bagpipe, verse for verse.<sup>105</sup>

The inspired poet is "small" because, like Ralph, he has nothing to contribute, and because his inspiration, having no reality, is like wind whistling through a hollow tree or reed. Only the language that can be heard by mortal ear, sensuous knowledge, is objective and therefore "real."



The apologists for the Royal Society identify truth and philosophic progress with empiricism, and inspiration with a vain, unproductive dogmatism. For Joseph Glanvill, "the Visions, Voyces, Revelations of the Enthusiast . . . are but motions within the Cranium,"<sup>106</sup> and it is the function of the Royal Society "to free Philosophy from the vain Images and Compositions of Phansie, by making it palpable, and bringing it down to the plain objects of the Senses. . . ."<sup>107</sup> Robert Hooke and Robert Boyle, the two great scientists who help the society make a name for itself, both espouse Baconian philosophy. Hooke prefaces his Micrographia (1665) with the statement that a man who, like himself, has decided to employ "his Senses aright, may venture to compare the reality and usefulness of his services, toward the true Philosophy, with those of other men, that are of much stronger and more acute speculations, that shall not make use of the same method by the Senses."<sup>108</sup>

Samuel Parker, writing in the same year as Hooke, the year before the appearance of Paradise Lost, regards the experimental philosophy as possessing the only method for determining the truth. He considers supernal knowledge as philosophically impossible and consequently assumes that statements about spiritual creatures come from a supposed inspiration, which he believes is one

of the manifold follies bequeathed to the world by the Platonism he attacks. Where earlier Plato was taken as a chief prop of the divine madness, the furor now receives some of the slings and arrows Parker aims at him:

And if we will but reflect upon our own Thoughts, we must confess that we cannot perceive the Ideas of Beings that are not placed within the Horizon of Sense, and those that pretend to a discovery of them, had better pretend to Oracles, Prophecies, Illapses, and Divinations, then to the sober and steady Maximes of Philosophie. And therefore 'tis not unusual with the Platonists to pretend to a kind of Enthusiasme. . . . If they were in good earnest, we might expect strange discoveries indeed, but alas, these Sons of Imagination are as little troubled with Real Exstasies, as other men, onely they are pleased to express the Frenzies of their fiery and subtle Fancies by these Allusions. So that let them talk never so Seraphically of retiring from the trivial and common Entertainments of sense, they do but sit down in the Theatre of Fancy, and entertain themselves with the Idola Specus, or Images of their own Complexion. . . .<sup>109</sup>

Parker provides a direct confrontation between inspiration and the empiricism of the new science. He agrees with Milton, though for reasons other than the poet's theological ones, that only the inspired can know what is beyond "the Horizon of Sense," but he sees, as Milton will not, a conflict between inspiration and philosophy and settles this conflict by denying the actuality of inspiration. Those who claim inspiration, then, are doubly impoverished: they do not have what they claim and, having turned from sense-impressions to

obtain higher truths, they lack any source of knowledge and have only the errors of their fancies, which they mistake for truths. The only entrance for wisdom that Parker recognizes is one where wisdom is for Milton "quite shut out," and, of course, even if Milton were not blind, he could not see the persons or events of his epic. In Parker's scheme, Paradise Lost would be no vehicle for knowledge but merely a representation of the poet's Idols of the Cave, products of imagination having no necessary connection with reality.

A triumphant empiricism could hardly be restricted to scientific problems. Bishop Tillotson, among others, uses it to attack the doctrine of "real presence" in the Eucharist.<sup>110</sup> Bishop Sprat makes God an empiricist whose miracles are "Divine Experiments" to convince man of His presence through sense-data;<sup>111</sup> earlier Thomas Browne rejoiced that he was not alive when the miracles occurred, for sight of them would compel belief and not allow him to exercise his faith.<sup>112</sup> Faith, which was not paradoxical for Hooker, because like Aquinas he found it not against Reason, became paradoxical for Browne, because, like Ockham's, his Reason was much more dependent on the senses and much less competent to deal with spiritual matters.

If the effect of empiricism on religion was to

drive a wedge between belief and the grounds for belief, its effect on poetry was similarly to alter its relationship to belief. In the age of John Locke and after, the dichotomies between fact and fiction, judgment and wit, and instruction and delight would grow more polarized than they had been before, and literature would have to work out a new means of defending itself against philosophy.

The Restoration critics, and particularly John Dryden, are essentially conservative, for where Milton is a revolutionary reactionary going back to the Elizabethans, they try to accommodate the critical thinking of Hobbes and Davenant and the French neoclassicists to the new science. Inspiration cannot, of course, have any part in this accommodation; and the critics, whether professionals like Dryden or gentlemen-amateurs like Mulgrave, do not miss it. For the professional, poetry is a learned craft, for the amateur, a means of recreation; neither needs inspiration, for neither has a divine calling.

Where Milton felt himself to be picking up the epic mantle from Spenser, Dryden wrote a mock-epic which concludes with a burlesque of picking up mantles. MacFlecknoe is not an attack on Milton but it does ridicule its protagonists as inspired prophetic poets

and, because the mock-epic usually cuts two ways, it ridicules inspiration by presenting Flecknoe and Shadwell, dullness and ignorance, as its results. "The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy" (1679) contains an explicit denial that the poet can be divinely mad and follows Castelvetro in translating Poetics 55a22 to read that poetry "belongs to a witty man, but not to a madman."<sup>113</sup> (Before we urge that "Great Wits are sure to Madness near allied," we should recall that it is the closeness of that alliance that prevents Shaftesbury from finishing anything as well as he started it.)

For the Restoration critics there is but one kind of madness, and when they join madness and poetry, they apply the Aristotelian axiom that effects resemble causes. They presume that a raving poet can write only an irregular poem, and thus Mulgrave allows poetic furor only in the composition of the self-consciously irregular Pindaric ode. Dryden stresses the poet's need for learning; Rymer, in agreement with him on this point, denies that good poetry can come from "blind inspiration" when it must "be school'd and disciplin'd by Reason";<sup>114</sup> he seems to regard "blind inspiration" not as an oxymoron but as a near-tautology.

The critics have to decide the extent to which wit, the poetic faculty, is responsible to judgment, the

scientific determination of reality. Dryden first characterizes wit as a far-ranging spaniel, though later he retrenches and redefines it, evasively, as a propriety.<sup>115</sup> The spaniel is far-ranging, but it may not fly: it may race through all of nature making comparisons, but it may not transcend nature: vastness replaces height as the criterion of wit.

Others go further in the direction of binding wit to empirical reality. Edward Howard, in the preface to his British Princes, accepts the arguments against both the Christian marvelous and the pagan marvelous: it would be impious to include Christian spirits in a fiction, and the Muse and the Greek gods are no longer credible. He provides instead a "natural" religion.<sup>116</sup> Blackmore writes, "Nothing therefore should be an integral Part of an Epick Poem, but what is easy, natural, and probable; which will always be so, if nothing is admitted that does not frequently fall under Observation, and is the common Result of Physical and Moral Causes."<sup>117</sup>

Still, poetry had not ceased to be identified with the marvelous, and some thinkers felt it could not become scientifically respectable without losing its essence, and could not survive as marvelous in an enlightened Age. Sprat regards the new science as

banishing poetic fable:

The Poets began of old to impose the deceit.  
. . . on every Field, River, Grave, and Cave,  
they bestow'd a Fantasm of their own making:  
With these they amaz'd the world; these they  
cloth'd with what shapes they pleas'd; by  
these they pretended, that all Wars, and  
Consails, and Actions of men were administred.  
And in the modern Ages these Fantastical  
Forms were reviv'd, and possess'd Christendom,  
in the very height of the Scholeman's time.  
. . . But from the time in which the Real  
Philosophy has appear'd, there is scarce an  
whisper remaining of such honors: Every man  
is unshaken at those Tales, at which his  
Ancestors trembled: The cours of things  
goes quietly along, in its own true channel  
of Natural Causes and Effects. For this we  
are beholden to Experiments. . . .118

As the age read the intellectual history of mankind,  
the poets came first and the philosophers would come  
last. According to Vico, the ancient poets were to  
receive all credit for the establishment of human  
institutions and wisdom, but the perfection of those  
institutions and that wisdom was left to the later  
philosophers.<sup>119</sup> When there were no philosophers,  
poetry had and deserved immense power, for imagination,  
the poetic faculty, though inferior to reason, is better  
than mere sensation. Still, there was only one truth,  
and even if poetry could grasp it through intuition  
or imagination, only philosophy could understand it.  
Philosophy therefore rendered poetry superfluous, and  
as philosophy progressed, as the scientific method  
assured it would, poetry, losing more and more ground,

could only regress. Poetry had had its day. In 1754, the Abbé Trublet could write,

As reason is perfected, judgment will more and more be preferred to imagination, and, consequently, poets will be less and less appreciated. The first writers, it is said, were poets. I can well believe it; they could hardly be anything else. The last writers will be philosophers.<sup>120</sup>

Without inspiration, and with methodical verification as the criterion of truth, poetry could exist as the handmaiden but not as the rival of philosophy, and such would be its role if it gravitated toward the poles of fact, judgment and instruction. On the other hand, it could forsake its ancient quarrel with philosophy, give up the claim to knowledge, and gravitate toward the poles of fiction, wit and delight. Bacon had, after all, allowed poetry two possibilities in his scientific world: it could present scientific truth through allegory, or it could forget truth and submit "the shewes of things to the desires of the mind," and since he had assigned poetry to imagination and not to reason, the latter function might be deemed more proper to it. Imagination, however, had long been in disrepute as the deceiving producer of phantasms; the critics needed a term which could be opposed to the discursive, methodical "reason" of the philosophers without calling up irrelevant connotations of truth and deception. They



needed an aesthetic faculty to produce an aesthetic product.

As in the Renaissance, a new theory of the nature and purpose of poetry is associated with a new theory of its production. The new poetic faculty derives from the assimilation of inspiration to wit and therefore has as antecedents the earlier conjunctions of the two discussed in the first part of this chapter. It appears in the Restoration when Mulgrave speaks of

A Spirit which inspires the work throughout  
As that of Nature moves this world about:  
A heat that glows in every word thats writ,  
That's something of Divine, and more than  
wit. . . .

Mulgrave speaks the language of inspiration, but his spirit is closer to wit than it is to the divine:

Where dost thou dwell? What caverns of the  
Brain  
Can such a vast and mighty thing contain?<sup>121</sup>

He accepts the scientific "saving" of inspiration that makes it a motion within the brain instead of one into it. Under the influence, direct or indirect, of the newly popular Longinus, he makes inspiration the property of a "great soul."<sup>122</sup>

The more usual English term for "great soul" is "genius," a word which, like "Muse," originally meant an external spirit, but has now, probably through the false supposition of an etymological tie with ingenium,

become an exalted term for "wit." "Wit" originally was a synonym for "reason," but as reason was discovered to be in need of a method to verify its results, it split into two functions, one inventive, called "wit," and the other corrective, called "judgment." Wit now was thought of as the principle of associating ideas, primarily through recognition of some resemblance between them. It was the function of "judgment" to test associations for their applicability to reality; without "judgment" wit had no responsibilities to reality. "Genius" was high-powered wit, wit associating the greatest variety of ideas with maximum ease and swiftness, wit powered by what could be called "poetic furor."

Unlike "inspiration," genius had the advantage that it could be taken matter-of-factly as well as exaltedly; it did not necessarily have to involve the extraordinary, and could be described in terms that were scientifically unobjectionable. John Dennis, explaining what he would have like to include in the Remarks Upon Prince Arthur (1696), takes the matter-of-fact approach. He

design'd to have inserted a Discourse concerning Poetical genius, of which no one that I know of has hitherto treated. I design'd to show that this extraordinary thing in Poetry which has been hitherto taken for something Supernatural and Divine, is nothing but a very common Passion, or a complication of common Passions.<sup>123</sup>

There is no reason, Dennis feels, for the poet to look upon himself as special, and he explains poetic rapture as a simple outpouring of self-congratulation. When the mind conceives of "an extraordinary hint . . . it is exalted, there being nothing so proper to work on its own vanity; because it looks upon such a hint as a thing peculiar to it self, whereas what happens in Life to one Man, might as well have happn'd to another. . . ."124 In this way does Dennis present the creation of poetry as a human activity like any other and no more open to scientific objections than any other.

Dennis may, however, strike us as too prosaic and too calm in the face of poetic genius to be typical of the eighteenth-century attitude. Sir William Temple's Of Poetry (1690), though written six years earlier, comes closer to Pope and Addison. Temple first shows his rationality by adopting moderation in his view of poetry: if it is not an ordinary human product, neither is it divine:

But I can easily admire Poetry, and yet without adoring it: I can allow it to arise from the greatest Excellency of natural Temper or the greatest Race of Native Genius, without exceeding the reach of what is Human, or giving it any Approaches of Divinity, which is, I doubt, debased or dishonored by ascribing to it any thing that is in the compass of our Action or even Comprehension, unless it be raised by an immediate influence from it self.<sup>125</sup>

Poetry's great powers come from its combining the skills of oratory, painting and music, and not from its "divinity." Temple regards poetry as a human skill and believes, quite correctly, that to allow the Muse a part in its creation is to detract from the ability of the poet;<sup>126</sup> since poetry is no longer to receive all of its old veneration, the poet presumably needs all of the credit he can get. Genius, identified with the person in whose mind it lodges, gives the poet his proper share of glory. Temple arrives at his conclusion by denying the reality of inspiration and treating it as a metaphor:

The more true and natural Source of Poetry may be discovered by observing to what God this Inspiration was ascribed by the Antients, which was Apollo, or the Sun, esteemed among them the God of learning in general, but more particularly of Musick and of Poetry. The Mystery of this Fable means, I suppose, that a certain Noble and Vital Heat of Temper, but especially of the Brain, is the true Spring of these two Arts or Sciences. . . . From this arises that Elevation of Genius which can never be produced by any Art or study, by Pains or by Industry, which cannot be taught by Precepts or Examples, and therefore is agreed by all to be the pure and free Gift of Heaven or of Nature, and to be a fire kindled out of some hidden spark of the very first Conception.<sup>127</sup>

Toward the end of this passage, Temple begins to use traditional language and figures, once connected with inspiration, in praise of Genius, and we wonder what he means by them. Is Genius a gift of Heaven or of

Nature? Temple seems hesitant, or indifferent, but the distinction is worth making, for what is from Nature is more limited than what is from Heaven and also more unexceptionable. How is one man's genius related to a "spark of the very first Conception" and what does that phrase signify? The obscurity of the language may be intentional. Temple is out to invest genius with the mystery and grandeur of inspiration, but he does not wish any identification between the two, because the latter is scientifically suspect.

The Earl of Shaftesbury establishes the relationship between genius and inspiration for the eighteenth century. Like Dennis and Temple he is careful to state his disbelief in the Muse. When the Muses were worshipped "the poet might with probability feign an ecstasy, though he really felt none. . . ." The ancient poet, therefore, had a considerable advantage, for "to be able to move others we must first be moved ourselves, or at least seem to be so, upon some probable grounds."<sup>128</sup> Later in the essay, Shaftesbury will assert that "no poet . . . can do anything great in his own way without the imagination or supposition of a divine presence, which may raise him to some degree of this passion we are speaking of,"<sup>129</sup> and it will be clear that he is not urging the reality of inspiration but simply saying that

if the poet, or even if his audience, imagines himself inspired, he will raise the passion necessary for poetry. Poetry involves the communication of "vast" passions. These passions arise in the man of genius, and Shaftesbury finds the supposition of inspiration, rather than inspiration itself, a convenient means of explaining their existence. Even if the inspiration were real, he implies, it would do no more than raise the passions of genius.

Shaftesbury uses "enthusiasm" as a synonym for "inspiration" because it is merely the supposition of a divine presence that he finds effective. William Duff, in An Essay on Original Genius (1767), locates the source of enthusiasm in the poet's sensations:

The intenseness and vigor of his sensations produce that ENTHUSIASM of Imagination, which as it were hurries the mind out of itself; and which is vented in warm and vehement description, exciting in every susceptible breast the same emotions that were felt by the Author himself. It is this ENTHUSIASM which gives life and strength to poetical representations, renders them striking imitations of nature, and thereby produces that enchanting delight which genuine Poetry is calculated to inspire.<sup>130</sup>

Duff demonstrates how far eighteenth-century enthusiasm is from Platonic inspiration. For the Platonist, inspiration and sensation are opposites, and sensation can only obstruct but not cause inspiration. For the Platonist, inspiration has nothing to do with the vivid

description of nature; it describes the supernatural or prescribes the moral norms. It conveys ideas, not passions, and ministers to wisdom, not delight.

Still, Duff's enthusiasm is proper for much eighteenth-century poetry whose aim is to delight rather than to instruct. The critics and poets following the Restoration reacted against didactic poetry as smacking of Puritan earnestness. The conservative Dryden demands that the poet be learned and judiciously weighs the claims of the marvelous and the verisimilar, but he believes that "Delight is the chief, if not the only, end of poesy. . . ." For Rymer, the "end of all poetry is to please."<sup>131</sup> For Addison poetry provides some of the "Pleasures of the Imagination."

Thomas Warton observes that The Faerie Queene

engages the affections . . . of the heart, rather than the cold approbations of the head. If there be any poem, whose graces please, because they are situated beyond the reach of art, and where the force and faculties of creative imagination delight, because they are unassisted and unrestrained by those of deliberate judgment, it is this.<sup>132</sup>

Finally Richard Hurd defines the art of poetry as "such a way or method of treating a subject as is found most pleasing and delightful to us." He cites Bacon to show that poetry gratifies desire by avoiding "the nature of things" and confesses that he prefers a lively representation to a true one.<sup>133</sup>

As poetry comes to be more and more the producer of delight, critics profess a lack of interest in its truth or even in its credibility. Maurice Morgann considers it supreme praise of Macbeth that we "never once wake to the truth of things, or recognize the laws of existence, . . . [for Shakespeare creates] a more compendious nature."134 (The last clause suggests Sidney but its import is most unSidnean.) Duff, like the Wartons before him, admires "allegory" in general and The Faerie Queene in particular because it banishes all expectations of truth or verisimilitude and concentrates on "gratifying that curiosity so deeply implanted in the human mind, of becoming acquainted with new and marvelous events."135

Genius and poetic inspiration, in a famous passage by Sir Joshua Reynolds, mean removal from an unsatisfactory reality:

. . . Raffaele had more Taste and Fancy, Michael Angelo more Genius and Imagination. The one excelled in beauty, the other in energy. Michael Angelo has more of the Poetical Inspiration; his ideas are vast and sublime; his people are a superior order of beings; there is nothing about them, nothing in the air of their actions or their attitudes, or the style and cast of their limbs or features, that reminds us of their belonging to our own species. Raffaele's imagination is not so elevated; his figures are not so much disjoined from our own diminutive race of beings. . . .136

Art is once again elevated, off the ground, but only



because it no longer needs to be true.

Reynolds seems particularly effective in drawing up dichotomies, and that ability seems to be the blessing and curse of his century. The developments in poetry stem from the dichotomization of truth and fiction, wit and judgment, philosophy and poetry. Unable to survive as philosophy's rival, poetry redefines itself by taking the halves of the dichotomies rejected by philosophy. The "ancient quarrel" is temporarily over.

But has poetry won anything in withdrawing from its competition with philosophy? In accepting the place Bacon assigns to it, is not poetry also accepting Bacon's judgment of it as a "sport"? Before the Renaissance, poetry was considered to be principally the study of children; the philosophers of the Enlightenment regard poetry as proper to the childhood of mankind; the Wartons and Duff read The Faerie Queene as a fairy tale. Poetry has bought security by becoming innocuous; it has bought freedom by becoming impotent.

The concept of "genius" was obviously meant to shore up poetry's prestige through reminders of the time when poetry was inspired. Yet, causes resemble effects, and "genius" is well-suited to the poetry it is meant to produce. It is the product of passion and has no connection with truth or with a way of knowing

closed to non-poets. Being passionate, it is subjective rather than objective. As possessing a facility in making comparisons, it is better equipped for the making of metaphors, for the means of expression, than it is for argument. Its conclusions are to be judged not for their quality of justness but for their novelty and originality, two qualities which arouse wonder and delight in the audience and which are wholly aesthetic. The criteria of novelty and originality lead to poetic diversity, where the criterion of truth, since truth is one, has led to traditionalism. Most important, "genius" is a psychological term and "inspiration" is a theological one. In the older poetry, God is the center of knowledge and reality; in the new, each man is his own center.

We can now see that the theory of inspiration acted principally to retard the polarization that took place upon its decline. Inspiration and its underlying Platonic ontology joined poetry and reality, for God used poetry to reveal reality to man. It joined making and finding, for the divinely sanctioned poet could make a poem in which the eternal, unmade truths could be found. It joined the verisimilar and the marvelous by presenting the true supernatural. It joined, in other words, Beauty and Truth.

"Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty" is a problematic line for Keats but a statement of a credo literally held for Spenser. For Spenser, the "real" could still mean what it meant for the medieval realists: an extra-terrestrial realm where the Forms, unhampered by matter, were completely actualized, distinct, uncorrupt and hence unchanging, as opposed to this world where nothing is totally "realized," where everything is in a state of mixed potentiality and actuality and hence of mutability. Nothing in flux could have certain identity or reality for Spenser, but by the eighteenth century the natural laws produced by Newton and others gave the flux stability. The "real" was becoming what it is for the novel-writing realists, the world of observed experience. Where the old "reality" was beyond the capacity of the uninspired, the new "reality" was not closed to man because of his limitations but was tailored to correspond to those limitations. Hence Temple regards the claim to inspiration as absurd; man can know what is knowable through less esoteric processes; and when there is no saving skepticism to blur the line between reality and unreality, when people are sure of what is real and what is not, poetry comes to deal only with the imaginary, with fictions.

In terms of literary genres, the passing of

inspiration and poetry's claim to supernal knowledge meant that the poet could no longer achieve the height, depth or objectivity of knowledge necessary for the traditional epic. So Wordsworth recognized in Book One of The Prelude when he decided to postpone his epic and work instead on a poem whose truth he could vouch for. Wordsworth was to raise poetry to new and different heights by initiating a new truth-criterion and by making poetry a means of knowledge in a new way. Where the epic poet knows the universe, Wordsworth knows himself. Where the epic poem must have objectivity, or fidelity to the poet's knowledge of the universe, the romantic poem has sincerity, or fidelity to the poet's private vision. Where the universe is best embodied in the expansive narrative form of the epic, the poet's personality is best caught at moments of lyric intensity.

With the decline of the traditional epic came the rise of what Fielding called the "comic epic in prose," the novel. When, argues Durling, inspiration was no longer credible, the character of the narrator changed, and with it the character of the narrative:

For if the dominant convention of the epic is that its Narrator is a supernaturally inspired man who transmits a story received from outside himself, the dominant convention of the novel is that its Narrator (whether Author or character) is a natural man, limited to natural powers, who has (when Author) created the story out of his own experience

and observation.<sup>137</sup>

Durling's statement should not be taken to mean that novels are concealed autobiographies; he capitalizes "Author" to indicate not the writer as a living person but the writer as the one who speaks the story, a person known only from what he says. His point is that the novel's truth depends on no claims as special as inspiration. When we speak of a novel's truth, if we do, we tend to mean that it is true to experiences we have had or might have, if we were fortunate or unfortunate enough, and that the novel lacks certainty with which the Spenserian or Miltonic epic can magnify and generalize its truths. The novel, at least in its less recent manifestations, is more empirical and concerned with particulars; its method is inductive and it is not given to "feigning hypotheses"; the epic is concerned with general natures and is more rationalistic; it is based on intuitions of central truths and is not afraid to venture these truths.

The epic, in short, requires a special view of poetry to bring it forth. It requires the belief that poetry is a means of discovering, not just popularizing or teaching, a truth that eludes the capacities and hence the criticism of philosophy. This truth does not escape criticism because it is too private and individual

to be grasped by philosophical abstraction; it escapes it because philosophy is limited by the workings of mortal reason, the idols of the cave, but the truth of poetry is more objective, more significant and more certain because it comes from a supernal mind. Poetry is not regarded as an art producing works signed by the author's personality, but as an impersonal gift transmitted through the poet to mankind.

Such a view of poetry was possible when Spenser wrote The Faerie Queene and it was possible, though it had to be maintained with greater effort, when Milton wrote Paradise Lost. It was not open, for the most part, to medieval poets, because, though divine inspiration was considered possible, poetry was regarded as too humble a craft to need or desire it, and inspiration, like any other factor of the religious life, was presumed to occur only within the fabric of the universal church and not in secular activities. Medieval poets were able to proclaim inspiration only when they renounced poetry and claimed prophecy, like Alan of Lille, but they were able to achieve a fairly high didacticism through the less assertive, more ironically ambivalent form of the dream vision, a form which, we have argued, is analogous to the inspired poem. Poets after the Restoration, on the other hand, lacked both a belief in the possibility of

inspiration and a view of poetry as a means to a knowledge higher than that of philosophy. The skepticism and Platonism of the Renaissance philosophical interregnum had ended with the growth of a new philosophy that was to become more and more earthbound and more critical of nonphilosophical truth than any preceding it. The new poets, moreover, reacted by welcoming the tendencies of the new philosophy to inhibit a claim to knowledge because they no longer wished to aim for any special knowledge and because they had returned to the view of poetry as a craft. Wishing to take personal pride in their work, and not wishing to leave themselves open to attack from any other discipline, they identified poetry with the employment of specialized skills that were often diametrically opposed to those of the philosopher. The seventeenth century, then, marks an end to that view of poetry which spurred Spenser and Milton on to greatness and a beginning of the modern uncertainty about what poetry is and does.

NOTES: CHAPTER SEVEN

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