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THE PROSE STYLE OF SIR THOMAS BROWNE.

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THE PROSE STYLE OF SIR THOMAS BROWNE

by

Robert DiYanni

A dissertation submitted to
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CHAPTER I

STYLE & MEANING

Any study of prose style must necessarily depend upon assumptions about style and its relation to meaning. My purpose in this chapter will be to explain one view of the relationship.

No single definition encompasses every significant aspect of style. Diverse definitions present different but complementary approaches to a complex phenomenon. Most approaches to style express a view about the relationship between style and meaning. At some point each definition of style must address itself to the following fundamental questions: Is style the "dress" or the "body" of thought; is it an embellishment, an "accident," or is it "essential" to meaning and substantially integrated with it? Or, in a slightly different form, are style and meaning, expression and idea, distinct and separable; or are they an indistinguishable and indivisible unit?

At the risk of stating the obvious, let me first mention that, basically, style involves a way of saying

something. The problem, of course, is whether to isolate the "something" which is said, or the "manner" of saying it, a difficulty which itself raises practical problems for the analyst of prose. If for example, a critic emphasizes the manner of statements while he ignores their meaning, tone, or idea, he is liable to reduce his critical performance to a mere play of forms. In a recent book on Francis Bacon's prose, Brian Vickers voices dissatisfaction with such substanceless critical formal play as it occurs in George Williamson's The Senecan Amble. "The interest of The Senecan Amble," Vickers suggests, "is almost entirely in sentence structure and sound patterns divorced from meaning or the writer's imaginative vision."¹ But Vickers, in his useful and intelligent study, too often uses a discussion of specific stylistic traits as springboards to discuss non-stylistic matters. He conveniently discards analysis of prose style once he has broached his real subject, the content and meaning of Bacon's arguments. As a result, a shift of emphasis blurs the apparent intention, which was to explain how Bacon's style achieves and affects meaning.²

To return to the original question: What is the relationship between style and meaning? In my view, it is one of identity. A change of words, however slight, is a change of meaning, however slight.³ To paraphrase Graham

Hough: Isn't each different way of saying, in fact, the saying of a different thing?⁴ The implication of course, is that it is. To take a simplified example, the sentence "Socrates was wise" differs slightly in meaning from the almost identical, "Socrates was a wise man." It differs also from another variant, "Socrates possessed wisdom." The first two statements contain slightly different quantities of specified information; the second is slightly more specific since it includes an extra bit of information, that Socrates was a man. To express the information given in the second example another way, one could say: "Socrates was wise and a man" or "Socrates was a man who was wise." But, in both cases there is a difference of emphasis, and consequently of meaning. My original second and third examples differ less in emphasis than in the nature and quality of the virtue they name, "wise" and "wisdom." The difference between being wise and having wisdom is the difference simply between "being" and "having," or more precisely, between "doing" and "having." "Wise" suggests virtue in action; "wisdom" implies virtue at rest, which, however, has expressed itself in action before. One cannot make wise judgments and decisions without possessing wisdom; yet one is recognized as having wisdom because of wise actions performed or wise decisions rendered. Thus, wisdom is expressed or demonstrated in action. Ultimately, the difference between being wise and

having wisdom is slight, with one being actual, the other potential in emphasis.

But even a slight change of emphasis involves a change in meaning. W. K. Wimsatt notes, for example, that an inkwell stands on the table by virtue of not falling off; it stands on perhaps rather than below the table; it rests on the table rather on the desk or the floor.⁵ It is of course context which tells us which of these emphases is intended, and hence which of the slightly different meanings is expressed.

Wimsatt aptly suggests the close relation between style and meaning in another way when he quotes Newman on their organic relationship: "Matter and expression are parts of one: style is a thinking out into language."⁶ Newman's remark, however, suggests an additional dimension of style, that it actively affects thought, even changes it as the thought is being generated. A similar idea is expressed by Stephan Ullman who remarks that "language and thought are not only indissolubly intertwined but they may actually stimulate each other, and there are cases, especially in poetry, where language precedes and to some extent predetermines the idea which it is supposed to express."⁷

None of these observations completely explains the mysterious interpenetration of form and content in

style. But at least the views expressed are consistent in their assumption that style and meaning are neither separate nor different, but instead form an organic whole, which can be viewed from the aspect now of style, now of meaning. Yet some additional things need to be said. First, that expressiveness, the effect of style, is not something added to meaning; it is not something which embellishes or decorates a separable and more substantial content. Rather, it is an integral part of meaning. A style's expressiveness is an individual way of saying something which, ultimately, is indivisible from what is said. Stephan Ullman, for one, would seem to have it otherwise when he suggests that the features of expressiveness "do not directly affect the meaning of utterance, the actual information which it conveys."⁸ Ullman identifies meaning with information, but this identification is reductive. It is necessary to distinguish between information in the sense of verifiable content, or of propositional content, and "meaning," of which information is only one aspect, and perhaps not always or even often, the most important one. Moreover, the literary and stylistic devices that embody meaning cannot be split off from a message without altering its meaning. In short, stylistic features function in more important ways than merely or only to compel attention to propositional sense.

More acceptable is Richard Ohmann's observation that even though two different propositions may express the same facts, they are only partially equivalent in meaning. There is equivalence in one phase of meaning: information.⁹ Ohmann goes on to suggest that language and style involve adjustments in meaning and that both these adjustments and the root idea are true meanings. Thus, although two different utterances may contain the same proposition or fact, and even though they might express congruent thoughts, they nevertheless mean different things. Formally different utterances are often equivalent as to some partial phase of meaning, but the overall meanings of two similar but formally different utterances are not the same. The problem for the analyst of prose style thus becomes: which parts of the meaning are in phase (with various possible stylistic alternatives), and which are out of phase? Or, to put the question somewhat differently: how different are "different ways of saying the 'same thing,'" and what are the meaning-effects of variations in phrasing, syntax, imagery and diction?

In accord with the view that a change of words is a change of meaning is W. K. Wimsatt's definition of style as "the last and most detailed elaboration of meaning," as "the furthest elaboration of meaning."¹⁰ This definition suggests that style and meaning are inseparable, and

that a change in one necessarily involves a change in the other. Their relationship, to use a biological metaphor, is symbiotic. Moreover, since as Wimsatt notes, "each thing insofar as it is, must be, have being, according to its nature," and further, since "the nature of words is to mean, a poem is through its meaning," that is, through its words. Thus, a change in words or their arrangement is a change in meaning.¹¹ At the risk of altering slightly Mr. Wimsatt's meaning, we can substitute the word "utterance" or "statement" for "poem," and thus extend his remarks to include all elaborations of meaning in language.

The notion of style as meaning receives confirmation from the speech act theory of J. L. Austin and John Searle,¹² a theory in Stanley Fish's words, "that turns traditional philosophy around by denying the primacy of and even the existence of pure or context-free statements."¹³ Every utterance, according to this theory, involves purposeful actions such as promising, commanding, requesting, questioning, warning, stating, greeting, etc. As such, an utterance possesses an illocutionary potential (an indication of how it is to be understood). For example, the sentence "I will come" might be construed as a promise, an assertion, a threat, etc., and consequently, its different illocutions, dependent upon context, are

not different expressions of the same meaning; instead they are different meanings. The changing illocutionary force of "I will come" involves changes in meaning. Analogously, a change in wording or emphasis, which is a change in style is also a change in meaning that is both dependent upon and a product of changing contexts.

II

Another difficult problem paces the analyst of prose style. It can be phrased variously as: what is a true feature of style? How does one distinguish between a writer's uniquely peculiar traits of style and the conventions of the language he is using? How does one separate trivial, accidental linguistic habits from profoundly important imaginative means of expression? When does a verbal mannerism become a significant expressive form, if ever, and how does one tell the difference between them?¹⁴

These questions, though similar and related are not identical. (Their different forms suggest that.) To examine them at great length is beyond the scope of this chapter. I raise them because they constitute a practical problem for the student of prose style, and because I want to make clear my assumptions about them. (First, one should distinguish between "verbal

mannerisms" or rhetorical habits that are virtually without significant meaning, and those that are not, since some traits of style entail larger, more serious adjustments of meaning than others; some signify, or simply "mean" more than others.) Since no simple formula exists for making the distinction, one must rely on literary tact. In distinguishing between mannered and complex styles, Nelson Goodman has remarked that "an obvious style easily identified by some superficial quirk is properly decried as a mere mannerism. A complex and subtle style, like a trenchant metaphor, resists reduction to a literal formula."¹⁵ And E. D. Hirsch, Jr. sensibly puts forward the notion that "a linguistic trait becomes a feature of style only with respect to a higher level meaning for which it is the vehicle, but lower-level features are not always functional at a higher level."¹⁶

There is thus no hard and fast "scientific" rule enabling one to pick out significant, meaning-related stylistic features. The reader must puzzle out the meaning, using his tacit knowledge of literary conventions and of the resources of language, and then decide which of the verbal configurations and patterns, which syntactic, lexical and rhetorical figures carry the burden of meaning.

In general, the stylistic elements that affect both the root meanings of individual statements and at

the same time contribute to the temper of a writer's outlook, I consider as significant traits of style. Such rhetorical characteristics as imagery, metaphor, syntactic forms, diction, structure, paradox, irony, allusiveness, factuality, etc. should be investigated, with Leo Spitzer's caveat that such categories must not be imposed on an author's work willy-nilly in a forced effort to yield significance. Spitzer's own critical method relied less on formula than on intuition and literary tact in discerning which elements of style were significant in a particular writer.¹⁷

Richard Ohmann has suggested that when any pattern of expression is repeated with unusual frequency it signals a habit of meaning.¹⁸ This seems reasonable enough, but it is not the only guide we have, since frequency is not the only measure of the importance of a stylistic trait. Even single occurrences of unusual linguistic structure, particularly in crucial places,¹⁹ can point to significant areas of meaning. In suggesting that such "linguistic oddities" can point to what might be called "temporary epistemologies," Ohmann introduces one other important aspect of style, namely, that it is the result of a particular way of experiencing the world, that it is the product of a peculiar and uniquely developed personality. Both John Middleton Murry and J. Hillis Miller echo this

view. First, Murry: "An individual way of feeling and seeing will compel an individual way of using language . . . a true style originates in a mode of emotional or intellectual experience peculiar to each individual writer."²⁰ Style is thus the means by which this particular and highly individual manner of seeing, thinking and feeling is expressed in language.²¹ Then, Miller:

It [style] is the embodiment in words of a certain very special way of experiencing the world. The pervasive stylistic traits of a writer, his recurrent words and images, his special cadence and tone, are as personal to him as his face or his way of walking. His style is his own way of living in the world given a verbal form.²²

In this very rich sense, the style reflects the man.

This emphasis, however, on a writer's way of knowing and thinking, is partly a result of the language in which he thinks and writes. Particular languages contain built-in epistemological biases that both restrict and encourage particular modes of seeing, feeling, thinking, and knowing, and subsequently, of writing. How far the nature of a given language is "responsible" for a particular writer's style is a complicated issue. It raises the question of whether the stylistic possibilities of a given language are limited by the boundaries imposed by the nature of that language. Whether or not a particular language (or all languages) can accommodate themselves to diverse patterns of thought, and how they accomplish this,

are problems for social linguists to answer. For the analyst of prose style, the point at issue involves the way the writer exploits the linguistic resources open to him rather than the nature of those resources themselves.

My view of the matter rests upon the following assumption: that language in general and English in particular is not a synchronically static storehouse from which the writer collects images, theories, forms of syntax and diction etc. It is rather a diachronically dynamic "tradition" which the writer himself modifies as he exploits the linguistic possibilities open to him. He creates, through the pressure of his imagination, by means of the amalgamation and combination of linguistic structures available, both new meanings and new forms of discourse. This kind of energy and urgency involve a radically creative engagement with language that can result in expressive and original prose.

The main assumption then, upon which this study rests is that style creates an extra-semantic element in meaning that can be called stylistic meaning. This is stylistic meaning that is often ignored in studies of prose style in favor of discussion of root ideas. Sometimes aspects of style are merely enumerated without explanation of their significance. Sometimes, on the other hand, they are given an ad hoc, arbitrary explanation

which makes unjustified interpretive claims.

In a recent article on stylistics, Stanley Fish cautions against the arbitrary manner in which some stylisticians move from description of their data to interpretation.²³ He warns also against using descriptive stylistics as the springboard for systematically relating devices of style to an author's personality. Although Fish has other caveats and criticisms to make in his witty and trenchant essay, I will stop with these and extrapolate from his remarks to suggest three things. One, that there is no absolute, one-to-one correspondence between stylistic features and an author's meaning. There can be no a priori matching up of given grammatical structures with specific rhetorical effects, because such an enterprise ignores the crucial use of literary and grammatical structures in context, which is an important determiner of meaning. Two, some stylistic features do serve to do more than underline or emphasize meaning; they can serve to reflect as well as embody an author's conceptual orientation. Third, interpretive criticism based on style is subjective rather than scientific, and the best guides a careful reader has in such matters are an understanding of literary conventions, a careful observation of text and context, and the exercise of logical deduction and literary tact.

III

Of questions still to be raised perhaps the most complex is that of tone, which, in my view, is not a supererogatory embellishment added on to the meaning of a statement, but an integral part of the meaning itself. It does not simply change or modify the abstractable meaning; it is an essential element in that meaning.

Although a writer's tone in general and his tone in particular passages are difficult to isolate and analyze, it is necessary to observe how elements of syntax, diction, imagery and detail work to create tone. In the sense that these and other stylistic elements are exploited in various ways by the writer as he creates a unique voice, one might say that the tone is the style is the man. His tone thus is both a product and a consequence of specific strategies of composition. It is an aspect of style that serves to establish an attitude which itself assumes an important function in the expression of meaning; it becomes an aspect of that meaning. As the beginning student of literature soon learns, the tone of a work is sometimes quite other than it first appears. It is often perhaps the most elusive element of a writer's style and the least easily abstractable. Since tone is determined by syntactic forms in context as well as by word choices, and since it is modified by the combination of these with

other rhetorical elements such as rhythm and imagery, it is crucial to meaning, the literal or surface level of which, tone sometimes subverts.

Unlike tone, which in the broadest sense is equivalent to style, genre is both a product of stylistic choices and strategies and a pre-existing structural category of which style forms a part. More particularly, genre represents the forms of literary and rhetorical convention which create in the reader expectations about what the work should do, or even how it should develop. Genre signals a larger context against which individual passages must be understood. This is particularly important for Browne's works since they often modify and combine conventional genres. As a result, writings like Religio Medici, Urn-Burial and Garden of Cyrus are sui generis. They suspend in solution two or more genres simultaneously, a suspension which helps establish a tension of form which reflects the tension of ideas dramatized within.

V

Since my approach is literary critical rather than either historical or descriptively analytical, I have discussed the linguistic approaches in this theoretical chapter and have presented, as an appendix, the

historical circumstances and the rhetorical contexts in which Browne wrote. I will refer to aspects of Renaissance rhetorical theory and terminology only insofar as they are helpful in understanding how Browne's prose works. My approach relies more on modern critical theory as an aid to illuminate the style of a great writer. Moreover, I have read Browne as a creative artist, almost as one would read a poet.²⁴ In addition, I have read him from the standpoint of a modern sensibility while keeping in mind the forms and force of seventeenth-century rhetoric.

Rather than dealing with individual works in isolation, I examine aspects of Browne's style as they occur throughout his imaginative writings. I do this for two reasons. First, because the existing criticism of Browne's works discusses each independently.²⁵ This segregating approach allows for coherence as it focuses on the meaning of a single work. At the same time, however, it often results in a lack of sufficient distinction and qualification about aspects of Browne's style since such generalizations about his rhetoric are often made on the basis of a single work. From cross-cutting among the works, on the other hand, one gains a kind of anatomy of Browne's style, the cross-sections of which are more complex and more various than have previously been recognized.

I will not employ arguments based on statistical evidence. A repeated device is of course a useful initial guide to the possible significance of a stylistic feature. But whether it is truly meaningful is determined by its use in a context. Rene Wellek made the point well when he stated that "statistical frequency necessarily ignores the crucial aesthetic problem, the use of a device in its context. No single stylistic device is invariable: it is always changed by its particular context."²⁶

Recognizing the fact that literary analysis begins where linguistic analysis ends, Marie Boroff in using the example of Robert Lowell's poetry, makes explicit her step from the descriptive linguistic fact to the "existential arena portrayed by language."²⁷ Professor Boroff notes that one can make descriptive statements about the diction and syntax of Lowell's poetic discourse, that his language, for example, is "concrete and specific in a precise, measurable way, that his range of diction is wide; that he signalizes certain details by using verbs denoting action in the present . . ."²⁸ Such descriptive verbal analysis, though necessary, is not sufficient as literary criticism. It becomes interpretive and critical only when she states that Lowell's language is "vivid, highly charged, mordant, agonized, obsessive."²⁹

Without this kind of interpretive conclusion, the merely descriptive linguistic analysis of Lowell's, or of any writer's language, tends to empty that language of the content of human values.³⁰ Something of the kind, perhaps, Michael Riffaterre had in mind, when he observed that "no grammatical analysis of a poem can give us more than the grammar of the poem."³¹

A few final remarks. My general intention is to provide a thorough and systematic study of Browne's prose style. Contrary to what is often assumed, there have been few serious attempts to come to grips with the intricacies of his style. Much as been written about Browne's place in intellectual history, his scientific theories and explanation, his skepticism, his transcendentalism and his religious philosophy.³² Of the few essays devoted to his prose, some are concerned with its rhythm, some with its "beauty." Few deal in any thorough way with how his style achieves meaning.³³ In most discussions of Browne's prose there is little actual analysis and even less interpretation.

Basically, I am interested in the expressiveness of Browne's writing, in how specific configurations of language are used for aesthetic and semantic purposes. My emphasis will be on the details of style, and how, through particular uses of imagery, through special choices

of vocabulary and specific syntactic strategies, they achieve form and meaning. One of my designated details of style, "structure," may cause some surprise. Treating it as an aspect of style, I have accorded structure as much importance as imagery, diction, syntax and detail, and more significance than allusion and word play. The evidence for this view comprises the argument of the following chapter.

NOTES

¹Brian Vickers, Francis Bacon and Renaissance Prose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 25.

²Both Vickers and Williamson share a similar interest, however, in rehearsing classical sources of rhetoric and explaining technical rhetorical terms. This information, interesting and valuable enough in its own right, does not substitute for close and rigorous analysis of prose style.

³W. K. Wimsatt, The Prose Style of Samuel Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), p. 15.

⁴Graham Hough, Style and Stylistics (London: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1969), p. 5.

⁵Wimsatt, p. 10.

⁶Ibid., pp. 1-2.

⁷Stephen Ullman, Language and Style (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), p. 152. It is one of the virtues of Vickers' study of Bacon's prose that he shows places where Bacon's prose works just this way.

⁸Ibid., p. 111.

⁹Richard Ohmann, "Prolegomena to the Analysis of Prose Style," in Style in Prose Fiction, ed. Harold Martin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 18.

¹⁰Wimsatt, pp. 63, 11.

¹¹Ibid., p. 4. One would have to qualify slightly, however, since in classical Latin and in other highly inflected languages, syntactic arrangement is less important as a carrier of meaning than is morphology. But the point holds even for Latin, for which "odi et amo" does not carry exactly the same meaning as "amo et odi."

¹²Austin's theory is explained in How to do Things with Words (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962). John Searle's elaboration comes in Speech

Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969).

¹³ Stanley E. Fish, "What is Stylistics and Why Are They Saying Such Terrible Things About It?" in Approaches to Poetics, ed. Seymour Chatman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), p. 136.

¹⁴ Somewhat relevant here is the problem of conscious and unconscious choice of stylistic choice and rhetorical habit as they have been characterized by Louis T. Milic. See his "Rhetorical Choice and Stylistic Option: the Conscious and Unconscious Poles," in Literary Style, ed. Seymour Chatman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 77-88.

¹⁵ Nelson Goodman, "The Status of Style," Critical Inquiry 1 (1975), 799-812.

¹⁶ E. D. Hirsh, Jr. "Stylistics and Synonymity," Critical Inquiry, 1 (1975), 3.

¹⁷ Leo Spitzer, Linguistics and Literary History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), pp. 1-33.

¹⁸ Ohmann, "Prolegomena," p. 14.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 14.

²⁰ John Middleton Murry, The Problem of Style (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1922), pp. 13, 21.

²¹ Ibid., p. 13.

²² J. Hillis Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), pp. ix-x.

²³ Fish, "What is Stylistics," pp. 110-113.

²⁴ Leonard Nathanson suggests that Browne is more of a poet than a philosopher. The Strategy of Truth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 9.

²⁵ Both Nathanson's and Frank Huntley's books are organized this way, although Huntley treats Urn-Burial and Garden of Cyrus together with very good results. F. L. Huntley, Sir Thomas Browne: A Biographical and Critical Study (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962).

Two books less useful for their critical insights than those of Huntley and Nathanson, books that also discuss each work independently are Sir Thomas Browne, J. S. Finch (New York: Henry Schuman, 1950) and Joan Bennett, Sir Thomas Browne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962).

²⁶Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1942 revised 1956), p. 182. In another context, on another occasion, Wellek suggests that stylistics is a descriptive discipline whose aim is observation, classification and characterization of verbal styles and verbal devices. It strives for objectivity, as it renounces interpretation and the formulation of critical value judgments. Stylistics relies heavily on quantitative methods which cannot define a work's central meaning, its historical, social or human import. This formulation closely follows Wellek's wording in "Stylistics, Poetics and Criticism," in Literary Theory and Structure, eds. Brady, Palmer and Price (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1973), p. 71.

²⁷Marie Boroff, "Words, Language and Form" in Literary Theory and Structure, p. 77.

²⁸Ibid., p. 77.

²⁹Ibid., p. 77.

³⁰Stanley Fish, "How Ordinary is Ordinary Language," New Literary History, 5 (1973), 41-53.

³¹Quoted by Rene Wellek, "Stylistics, Poetics and Criticism," p. 73.

³²Some of the more useful studies of this kind include: Frank L. Huntley, Sir Thomas Browne (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962); Huntley, "Sir Thomas Browne and the Metaphor of the Circle," Journal of the History of Ideas, 14 (1953), 353-364. R. F. Jones, Ancients and Moderns (St. Louis: Washington University Press, 2nd ed., 1961); E. S. Merton, Science and Imagination in Sir Thomas Browne (New York: King's Crown Press, 1949); William P. Dunn, Sir Thomas Browne: A Study in Religious Philosophy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1950).

³³Exceptions are Stanley Fish who constructs a theory of the reader's involvement with the author's

style which he calls "Affective Stylistics" (Self-Consuming Artifacts, pp. 383-427; and Austin Warren, whose "The Styles of Sir Thomas Browne," is the best brief introduction to Browne's style. See his Connections (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970), pp. 11-23.

CHAPTER II

STRUCTURE

Critics of prose often separate style from structure as they sometimes dichotomize style and meaning. Such a split between structure and style occurs in part because structure is often thought of either as a skeleton upon which ideas hang, or as a pattern around which or within which they are arranged. Hardly ever is the structure considered a necessary and integral part of the meaning. As a result, the relationships among style, structure and meaning are ignored. But the discrepancy between style and structure need not necessarily obtain. If it is extravagant to suggest that structure, like diction or syntax, constitutes an integral element of style, it is nevertheless useful to view structure as an aspect of style that, at the very least, influences meaning, and which is often a significant part of meaning.

Thus, it seems necessary to emphasize that a work's various structures, or levels of structure, partly comprise its meaning, and that anything which affects meaning must be considered an aspect of style. Syntax, for example, is a structural aspect of style that

both limits and is limited by the determinate meaning of a statement. In short, a statement's meaning is bounded by its syntax. And, even though its syntax is not equivalent to its meaning, the syntax significantly controls the meaning as it, in part, creates that meaning. If the syntax of a statement is changed even slightly, there is a consequent (though not always equivalently significant) shift of meaning. Poets and lawyers are particularly sensitive to this fact of language: poets, because they realize that complex, and often desired, ambiguities can be obtained with slight alterations of syntax; lawyers, since their elaborate and often painful syntactic distortions attempt to avoid dangerous ambiguity.

As an organizational form, syntax provides a small-scale structure for the expression of ideas; it functions as a microstructure which controls meaning. What is more often thought of by the term, structure, however, is a pattern of organization for an entire work. One speaks, for example, of how a section forms part of the pattern of the whole; one asks what function a particular section assumes in the totality of a work, and how it contributes to its overall effect. Critics often study the structures of an artistic work both as a whole and as a series of smaller patterns of sentences, lines

or phrases. The territory in between, though, has been less frequently subjected to structural charting. This is particularly true for prose, especially non-fictional prose.¹ By comparison, the middle structures of poetry are analyzed much more frequently and more carefully than the middle structures of prose. Critics of Milton and Pope, for example have explained the importance of their verse paragraphs for the logical and aesthetic structuring of ideas. Such attention to prose's middle structures is needed also, especially in a writer like Browne, who on one hand conspicuously divides his works into parts and sections often co-incident with paragraphs, and who on the other, is not always clear about just where his writing is going or how it is getting there.

II

One pervasive principle of organization in Browne's writing is that of association. He moves among ideas alogically, linking them associationally, often without providing the reader with clear signposts for the direction his thinking is taking. As a result, the reader is hardly ever certain where the thought will turn. Consider the movement among ideas in the following passage.

Nor do I so forget God, as to adore the name
of Nature; which I define not with the Schooles,

the Principle of motion and rest, but, that straight and regular line, that settled and constant course the wisdom of God hath ordained the actions of his creatures, according to their severall kinds. To make a revolution every day is the nature of the Sun, because it is that necessary course which God hath ordained it, from which it cannot swerve, but by a faculty from that voyce which first did give it motion. Now this course of Nature God seldome alters or perverts, but like an excellent Artist hath so contrived his worke, that with the selfe same instrument, without a new creation hee may effect his obscurest designs. Thus he sweet'nd the water with a wood, preserved the creatures in the Arke, which the blast of his mouth might have as easily created: for God is like a skillfull Geometrician, who when more easily, and with one stroke of his Compasse, he might describe, or divide a right line, had yet rather doe this, though in a circle or longer way, according to the constituted and forelaid principles of his art: yet this rule of his hee doth sometimes pervert, to acquaint the world with his prerogative, lest the arrogancy of our reason should question his power, and conclude he could not; and this I call the effects of nature the works of God, whose hand and instrument she only is; and therefore to ascribe his actions unto her, is to devolve the honor of God, the principall agent, upon the instrument; which if with reason we may doe, then let our hammers rise up and boast they have built our houses, and our pens receive the honour of our writings.²

This kind of writing hardly accentuates a single idea to which related thoughts are subordinated. Instead, Browne presents his general idea, the relation between God and nature, and elaborates by casual expansion rather than rigorous explanation. His periods are comprised of a series of ramifying clauses which branch away from the original thought. Morris Croll has used the term "trailing period" or "linked period" to describe such

writing.³ In such a style, an originating idea is qualified or explained, the qualification or explanation itself then assuming the importance of a central idea, which is then similarly qualified or explained by another clause which also acquires significance. Subordination, as a result, is effectively destroyed, since ideas and examples become interchangeable and assume equal prominence. Examples become ideas; they develop beyond their initial illustrative value. Rather than remaining static tableaux supporting a central idea, they are transformed into ideas themselves.

The passage continues with an abrupt change of subject:

I hold there is a general beauty in all the works of God, and therefore no deformity in any kind of species of creature whatsoever: I cannot tell by what Logick we call a Toad, a Beare, or an Elephant, ugly; they being created in those outward shapes and figures which best expresse the actions of their inward formes; and having past with approbation that generall visitation of God, who saw that all that he had made was good, that is, conformable to his will, which abhors deformity, and is the rule of order and beauty. There is therefore no deformity but in monstrosity, wherein notwithstanding there is a kind of beauty, Nature so ingeniously contriving those irregular parts, as they become sometimes more remarkable than the principle Fabrick. To speake yet more narrowly, there was never anything ugly, or mis-shapen, but he Chaos; wherin, notwithstanding, to speake strictly, there was no deformity, because no forme; nor was it yet impregnate by the voice of God: Now nature is not at variance with art, nor art with nature; they being both the servants of his providence: Art is the perfection of Nature: Were the world now as it was the

sixth day, there were yet a Chaos: Nature hath made one world, and Art another. In briefe, all things are artificiall, for Nature is the Art of God. (RMI, 76; Works, I, 25, 26)

In the second part of this passage, as in the first, Browne characteristically avoids smooth transitional phrases between his sentences. Instead, he uses a word like "now" to signal a change of direction. But such a signal is not really very helpful. Its abruptness and conversational quality give it the character of a token, pseudo-connector, which does not really function as it seems to. Similarly, the words "therefore" and "thus," while sometimes serving as legitimate logical markers of Browne's development of ideas, occasionally fail the test of logic by attempting to bridge a gap too wide for them to span. The result, in part, is a kind of partly logical, partly pseudo-logical progression of ideas which sometimes disorients the reader as he decides which logical terms and which syntactic connectors are legitimate and which are not.⁴

It is clear from this characteristic passage that even when Browne is making an argument, his prose follows less a syllogistic than an associational pattern. He proceeds less by subordination than by co-ordination of ideas, which is more the method of the poet than the philosopher or the logician. And, on many occasions in Browne's writings, this kind of non-syllogistic co-ordinating

linkage of ideas results in a meditation in which the writer's thoughts circle loosely around a central idea. Yet even when this is not the case, Browne's paragraphs rarely proceed according to a pre-determined or a pre-announced plan. His writing, consequently, is frequently characterized by surprise, which provides one source of its vitality. In accounting in part for the vitality and surprise of Browne's style, Samuel Johnson in his "Life of Browne," wrote:

on whatever subject he employed his mind, there started up immediately so many images before him, that he lost one by grasping another. His memory supplied him with so many illustrations, parallel or dependent notions, that he was always starting into collateral considerations: but the spirit and vigour of his pursuit always give delight; and the reader follows him without reluctance through his mazes, in themselves flowery and pleasing, and ending at the point originally in view.

III

On result of such a loosely organized structure is a kind of continuousness or ongoingness of discourse. The reader experiences the prose not as a structural beginning, middle and end with rhetorical signals marking the various boundaries, but as a continuing movement among ideas which hesitate here and there, stopping seemingly where they will. It is not unlike the experience of reading Montaigne's Essays, and although Montaigne's posturing and easy familiarity are not always characteristic

of Browne's writing, neither are they entirely foreign to it.

The movement of Brown'e prose, to illustrate the point by contrast, differs from the movement of Francis Bacon's writing. Bacon's paragraphs, unlike Browne's often proceed syllogistically. They map out their own development, providing the reader with an idea of their design as they simultaneously reveal their direction and intention. Enclosing thought in discrete portions of discourse, Bacon's paragraphs and sentences follow one another according to a clearly recognizable plan. The following passage illustrates the method of partitio which Bacon borrowed from ancient rhetoricians, and which he employed to organize and elaborate his ideas.

There be therefore chiefly three vanities in studies, whereby learning hath been most traduced. For those things we do esteem vain, which are either false or frivolous, those which either have no truth or no use: and those persons we esteem vain, which are either credulous or curious; and curiosity is either in matter or words: so that in reason as well as in experience, there fall out to be these three distempers (as I may term them) of learning; the first, fantastical learning; the second, contentious learning, and the last, delicate learning; vain imaginations, vain altercations, and vain affectations; and with the last I will begin.⁶

Foreign to Browne's procedure, the method of stylized structuring and categorizing (false or frivolous . . . credulous or curious . . . in matter or words . . . fantastical, contentious and delicate learning), contrasts

strongly with the less clearly outlined and classified movement among ideas in the previously quoted passage from the Religio Medici. Unlike Bacon's sentences, Browne's tend to overlap, with various aspects of his subject appearing in no predictable order. Missing in Browne's writing is the strict division and parceling of subject exemplified in Bacon's prose. Browne does not treat one aspect of his subject conclusively in one part of his discourse; he does not, like Bacon, finish with one point so he can move to another. Rather, he returns to various aspects of his topic again and again, developing his ideas more by accretion than by filling in a carefully outlined structure.

To move from an examination of paragraph structure to a discussion of larger middle structure, we will consider the thought-outline of both parts of the Religio, the overall structure of which is bipartite, with part I examining Faith and part II, Charity. Although the overall structure is relatively simple, the structure of each section is not. In addition, the two parts are not so much complementary as developmental; the second on charity grows out of the first on faith in a structural relationship which corresponds to the 'real-life' relationship of these two poles of Christian religious existence. From another standpoint, we can say that part II is an

illustration of and a prescription for acting out in practice the more theoretical ideas of part I. There is, from this standpoint then, an overall movement in the Religio from general to particular, from abstract to concrete, from thinking and believing, from contemplating to doing.

But to return to the middle structures, the levels of organization within each part. In the second half of the work, the subject, charity, is not organized, divided and then explained in a rigorously systematic fashion. Instead, the subject comes in and out of focus, and develops something like this: 1) charity and tolerance; 2) motives for charity; 3) charity and the community of learning, with differences and quibbling denounced; 4) offenses against charity; 5) the love of friends; 6) friends; 7) human nature as uncharitable, and sin as non-charity; 8) sin as pride; 9) marriage, sex, and beauty, harmony and order; 10) good and evil intermixed; 11) dreaming and waking; body and soul; 12) sleep and death; 13) alms-giving as charity; 14) charity and love of God and love of neighbor; 15) happiness (true and false).

This outline reveals both a circular structure which begins and ends with charity and a linear one which progresses while it also doubles back to its original idea. The subject, charity, occasionally disappears from view as

Browne's mind wanders to other more or less related subjects, to Dr. Johnson's "collaterall considerations." Yet there is a fundamental but gradual progress by accumulation as Browne ends with an enriched idea of charity and its importance for true happiness. Looking at this part of the Religio another way, one might see it as an extended definition of charity. From that standpoint, its structure is a product of its method: an elaboration of what for Browne, constitutes the elements of charity. Such qualities as tolerance and such virtues as friendship comprise not so much ancillary or corollary subjects as aspects of charity within which they are subsumed, and for which they represent concrete and specific actualizations. Browne's organizational method here is thus one of specifying, detailing and pointing to these significant examples of charity, which itself is the all-embracing and more abstract concept. In short, it is a kind of extended definition.

The first part of the Religio is less circular than linear in structure. Although the subject, faith, comes in and out of focus as charity does in part II, there is more of a straight-forward movement beginning with faith as a belief in Christ and his Church, then moving to the subjects of heresy, the nature of God, and the idea of providence, before concluding with discussions of

Scripture and death, judgment and salvation. Although the line of development isn't a logically necessary one, and more importantly, even though the reader's experience of this first part of the Religio doesn't sustain any feeling of linear thematic movement, a substratum of direction does exist. Moreover, there is a kind of Christian 'logic' to this section which makes salvation the reward for faith, as the reward for charity in part II was happiness.

But there is something more. By allowing a seemingly surface random organization, Browne forces the reader to look both forward and back simultaneously, He thus involves the reader more in the discourse than some critics have given him credit for doing. Moreover, the tension between randomness and order which characterize Browne's style at the middle structural levels of paragraph and section, reflect the larger concern with order and harmony as these ideas appear as theme and image throughout his works, as they reflect the contest between science and religion, between faith and reason, which form, in large part both the subject and the intellectual action of the Religio.⁸ Finally, Browne's formal organization is one way of representing rational and emotional order, control and providential grace, as his conclusion to randomness in digression represent the

peculiarities of a private temperament.

To take Browne's concern for structural order just one step further, let us look at the third chapter of Garden of Cyrus. Although this chapter focuses on the idea of the quincunx in nature,⁹ it does so in a manner which is more linear and progressive than circular. In fact, there are two kinds of progression. The first involves a movement up the ladder of creation as Browne lists examples of quincunxes in inorganic and organic matter. Beginning with the mineral world, he progresses upward on a life-complexity scale: vegetable life (seeds, flowers, trees), and then to insects, animals, and finally to man. Included within this development is a relatively brief digression¹⁰ on generation following the discussion of seeds which serves to qualify the linearity of the progress. But the digression only momentarily interrupts the progressional movement. After concluding his discussion of the quincunx, Browne stops his ascension of the scale of creatures and moves laterally to discuss quincunxes formed in the motion of man and animals. (When a man walks, his body forms a quincunx with the decussation at his genitals.) From his notion, Browne proceeds to what seems like a further digression, but which is really another kind of progression: a discussion of different types of correspondences, proportions and

harmonies besides that of the quincunx. There are thus two progressive movements: the first, up the chain of being; the second, beginning with the end of this chain, forms one link in a similar chain connecting the various types of correspondences in mineral, vegetable, animal and spiritual life. This last series concludes with the harmony, proportion and order of creation.¹¹

IV

This kind of progressive movement is only one mode of structure discernable in Browne's works. A more pervasive and characteristic structure involves a process of alternation between two subjects, two kinds of detail, or two types of statement. In the Letter to a Friend, for example, Browne alternates statements about the circumstances surrounding the death of a particular man with general comments about death as a universal experience. Similarly, in Religio Medici, he consistently alternates between providing personal references and furnishing general commentary about a broad range of subjects. His autobiographical references in the Religio thus correspond structurally, to the particular references to the dead man of the Letter, and in a different way, to the admonitory statements of Christian Morals, which alternate with statements of general observation. Alternation

between historical allusion and natural observation furnishes one of the structural methods of Urn-Burial and Garden of Cyrus. In addition, in both treatises, there is the thematic alternation of life and death both within each work and between them.¹²

Alternations of this kind are significant for two reasons. First, they reveal that Browne is not satisfied with merely cataloguing items in specific detail. He has a need to generalize, to interpret and connect the particular fact with other specific details in the construction of larger and more meaningful wholes. One could say of Browne what Emerson said of Thoreau: "Every fact lay in glory in his mind, a type of the order and beauty of the whole."¹³ Such a remark suggests the inclination to find correspondences between the particular and the general, as it reveals a symbolic imagination which views particular facts as more than themselves, as signifying that there is connection and relationship among individual facts, and that finally, such connection and correspondence is grounded in a universe both meaningful and purposeful.

By extension, this stylistic feature of alternating between particular and general, shows Browne to be a man of the two worlds of sense and reason; it reveals Browne's view of man living in divided and distinguished

worlds of spiritual essence and brute fact. Although his desire is to unify the two realms of matter and spirit, sense and reason, he is unable totally to accomplish this. Unlike Emerson and Thoreau (who in Walden especially) were able to find for factual phenomena, spiritual correlatives, symbolic meanings, Browne has to settle for the split between sense and spirit as he settles, but not without a fight, for the split between faith and reason.

Finally, to be more practical about the matter, the kinds of alternations mentioned above reveal Browne's instinctive skill as a writer. Rhetorical and expressiveness are achieved in part, by variety, which Browne achieved by means of the antiphonal dialogue of long and short sentences, of question and statement, of particular and general, of observation and admonition. Some specific examples are in order.

First, a passage alternating conditional and categorical statements.

If they dyed by violent hands, and were thrust into their Urnes, these bones become considerable, and some old philosophers would honour them, whose souls they conceived most pure . . . If they fell by long and aged decay, yet wrapt up in the bundle of time, they fall into indistinction, and make but one blot with infants. If we begin to die when we live, and long life be but a prolongation of death, our life is a sad composition. We live with death and die not in a moment. How many pulses made up the life of Methuselah, were work for Archimedes: Common Counters summe up the life of Moses his man. Our dayes become considerable like petty sums by minute accumulations . . .

If the nearnesse of our last necessity brought a nearer conformity unto it, there were a happiness in hoary hairs, and no calamity in half senses. But the long habit of living indisposeth us for dying; When Avarice makes us the sport of death; When even David grew politickly cruell; and Solomon could hardly be said to be the wisest of men. But many are too early old, and before the date of age. Adversity stretcheth our dayes, misery makes Alcmanas nights and time hath no wings unto it . . .

(UB, V; Works, I, 164-165)

In this example, the conditional sentences are both long and relatively specific. The categorically affirmative statements, brief and more general, are balanced by the more elaborate conditionals. The long and involved hypothetical sentences set the reader up, so to speak, for the cryptic declarative ones, as the conditionals allow for a categorical response. In effectively modulating from one kind of statement to the other, Browne satisfies the reader's need for variety of sentence style, structure and function, as he simultaneously controls the reader's response. Moreover, he sets up a rhythmic pattern between sentences as well as within them, a rhythmic pattern which is rendered even more eloquent as it is partly created by the subtle use of repetition of sound, word and phrase.

One final comment on this passage. In the first of these two paragraphs, there is a curious pseudo-hypothetical use of the conditional form. The first two apparently conditional statements are truly hypothetical.

The third only pretends to be, since the phrase "If we begin to die when we live . . ." contains an affirmative statement within a hypothetical frame. Its semi-hypothetical character modulates into the assertions which follow as its declarative force is momentarily suspended. The paragraph need not follow the psuedo-hypothetical sentence with a qualifying direction-changing "but" or "yet"; instead he moves directly into affirmation.

Much of Browne's discourse, like most discourse, is simply declarative. That is, it makes statements that provide information in a more or less straightforward manner. But, on occasion, Browne employes a deliberate and careful micro-structure of conditional statements alternating with affirmative and categorical ones to heighten his language. The result, ultimately, is a strengthening of the declarative force of Browne's assertions. In a singularly subtle and eloquently elusive way, the movement from conditional to sentence forms, deepens the tone of certainty and faith that Browne establishes and maintains throughout much of his writing.

Paralleling the alternation between conditional and indicative sentences is that between interrogatives and declaratives. Sometimes, the framing of questions constitutes a micro-structural principle, as in the

following passage from Urn-Burial, V:

But the iniquity of oblivion blindly scatter-
 eith her poppy . . . Who can but pity the founder
 of the Pyramids? Herostratus lives that burnt
 the Temple of Diana, he is almost lost that built
 it; Time that spared the epitaph of Hadrian's
 horce, confounded that of himself. In vain we
 compare our felicities by the advantage of our
 good names, since both have equall durations;
 and Thersites is like to live as long as there
 be not more remarkable persons forgot, than any
 that stand remembred in the known account of
 time? . . .

The number of the dead long exceedeth all that
 shall live. The night of time far surpasseth
 the day, and who knows when was the Aequinox?
 (Works I, 167)

In this instance questions punctuate a heavy and
 impressive series of assertions and are integrated tonally
 with them. Browne's questions function rhetorically to
 evoke the reader's intellectual assent and his emotional
 commitment, and thematically, to prepare him for the
 succeeding declarative statements. As it does in much
 of Browne's writing, the interrogative works here as a
 form of suspension, momentarily postponing the assertions
 that inevitably follow, for Browne's writing is heavily
 assertive. Questions strengthen the argument which they
 in part form as they also vary the rhythm and tone of the
 prose.

But questions have other functions. Sometimes
 they can acquire a cumulative force of their own as in
 the central section of Garden of Cyrus, V. Here, the
 accumulation of queries occupies three pages, ranging

over such subjects as Biblical history, Jewish theology, magic, geography, geomancy, and natural observation. Reinforced by the image of the "Labyrinth of Truth," these questions induce in the reader a sense of skepticism ultimately derivable from both their unanswerability and from their sheer number and variety.¹⁴

Pace of discourse is another factor influenced by the movement, the alternation between question and statement. In the following passage the rapidly successive questions and statements hurry the reader along:

indeed what reason may not goe to Schoole to the widedome of Bees, Aunts, and Spiders? what wise hand teacheth them to doe what reason cannot teach us? ruder heads stand amazed at those prodigious pieces of nature, Whales, Elephants, Dromidaries and Camels; these I confesse, are the Colossus and Majestick pieces of her hand; but in these narrow Engines there is more curious Mathematicks, and the civilitie of these little Citizens, more neatly sets forthe the wisdom of their Maker; Who admires not Regio-Montanus his Fly beyond his Eagle, or wonders not more at the operation of two soules in those little bodies, than but one in the trunck of a Cedar?

After the final question, which is longer and more complex than the previous ones, Browne continues the section with a pair of personal statements culminating in a series of related metaphors:

I could never content my contemplation with those generall pieces of wonder, the flux and reflux of the sea, the encrease of the Nile, the conversion of the Needle to the North; and, therefore, have studied to match and parallel those in the more obvious and neglected pieces

of Nature, which without further travell I can doe in the Cosmography of my selfe; wee carry with us the wonders, wee seeke without us: There is all Africa, and her prodigies in us; we are that bold and adventurous piece of nature, which he that studies wisely learns in a compendium, what others labour at in a divided piece and endless volume.

(RM I, 15; Works I, 24)

This careful modulation from question to statement shows Browne to be in absolute control of his discourse. The speed of the accumulated questions gives way to the more leisurely autobiographical statement which in turn is replaced by a general slowing down into metaphor. The result is a successful conclusion to a section whose organization alternates between questions and statement, in a structural pattern that regulates the tone and the pace of Browne's writing as it further extends its emphatic and expressive range.

V

So far my discussion has centered around types of structures existing within sections and chapters of Browne's works. I have tried to show that Browne's discourse is often developed in an alogical, associational or meditative manner. I have also tried to show that he is able to use progressive structures when they suit his purposes, and finally that the structural method of alternation in its various forms, is his most prevalent

organizational method.

I would like now to attend to two related aspects of structure, which, while not furnishing overall organizational patterns or methods for given sections, nevertheless reveal striking structural habits of style. First, is what I will call paragraph overture¹⁵ since it concerns the way paragraphs and sections begin.

Browne often binds together units of discourse by using a series of similar opening statements. In Christian Morals, for example, he begins each section with either a general observation or a hortatory admonition. To begin a paragraph or even a series of paragraphs this way is not an unusual rhetorical strategy. But to begin almost every paragraph in this manner quickly calls attention to the fact. The effect of the repeated use of the same kind of strongly assertive opening sentence is to establish the certainty of the writer's convictions, although the monotony of it may try the reader's patience. Let me quote the initial sentences of the first few sections of Christian Morals to suggest this effect of monotony.

Punish not thy self with Pleasure; Blunt not
they sense with palative Delights; nor revenge
the contempt of temperance by the penalty of
Satiety . . .

Bring candid Eyes unto the perusal of men's
works, and let not Zoilism or Detraction blast
well-intended labours . . .

Let well-weighed Considerations, not stiff and
peremptory Assumptions, guide thy discourses,
Pen and Actions . . .

Value the Judicious, and let not mere acquests
in minor parts of Learning gain thy preexistimation . . .

Let thy Studies be free as thy thoughts and
Contemplations, but fly not only upon the wings of
Imagination; Joyn Sense unto Reason, and Experiment
unto Speculation, and so give life unto Embryon
Truths, and Verities yet in their Chaos . . .

Despise not the obliquieies of younger ways,
nor despair of better things whereof there is yet
no prospect . . .

(CM, II, 1-6; Works I, 259-263)

This selection only hints at the kind of deadness
engendered by an admonitory form constantly repeated.
And although the imagery of individual sentences moment-
arily redeem them, the metaphors are buried under the
weight of a stiff and predictably unvarying admonition.

It is interesting to note here that although
Bacon, in his Essays, uses similar imperative and
admonitory forms, they do not have the saturating effect
of Browne's. Part of the reason is that Bacon is both
less insistent and less persistent in their use. In
addition, however, he varies the kinds of statment used,
much more frequently than Browne does, combining specific,
particular examples with general observation and admon-
ition, something that Browne does to admirable effect
in Religio Medici and in Letter to a Friend.

Yet there are occasions when Browne's use of
sentence patterns similar in form and tone are rhetorically
effective. Sentences which open paragraphs in Urn-Burial,

V, for example, more often declare than implore, as their purpose and tone differ from those of Christian Morals. Furthermore, the series of declarative sentences initiating paragraphs continues for only a short time. Moreover, they are preceded by other paragraphs which open variously with questions, conditionals and since-clauses. The variety of opening sentence forms in these paragraphs allows Browne to create a succession of like-paragraph beginnings in the paragraphs that follow, without incurring monotony. First I quote the varied context which precedes the similar paragraph beginnings.

If the nearness of our last necessity brought a newer conformity unto it there were a happinesse in hoary hairs, and no calamity in half senses . . .

What Song the Syrens sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, though puzzling Questions, are not beyond all conjecture. What time the persons of Ossuaries entered the famous nations of the Dead, and slept with Princes and Counsellours, might admit a wide solution . . .

And therefore, restlesse Inquietude for the diuturnity of our memories unto present considerations seems a vanity almost out of date, and superannuated peece of folly.¹⁶

(UB V; Works I, 164-166)

The variety of sentence forms here, a conditional, an inversion beginning with a noun clause, and a statement of logical conclusion, prepare for the argument and conclusion which follow as they allow for a hammer-like rhythm of declarative statements in parallel series which open a succession of highly charged paragraphs.

Circles and right lines limit and close all bodies, and the mortall right-lined circle must conclude and shut up all . . .

To be nameless in worthy deeds excee an infamous history . . .

But the iniquity of oblivion blindly scattereth her poppy, and deals with the memory of men without distinction to merit of perpetuity . . .

Oblivion is not to be hired: The greater part must be content to be as though they had not been, to be found in the Register of God, not in the record of man . . .

Darkness and light divide the course of time, and oblivion shares with memory a great part even of our living beings . . .

In vain do individuals hope for Immortality, or any patent from oblivion, in preservations below the Moon . . .

There is nothing strictly immortall, but immortality, whatever hath no beginning may be confident of no end . . .

Life is a pure flame, and we live by an invisible Sun within us . . .

(UB V; Works I, 166-169)

These opening sentences and the paragraphs which complete them share a remarkable richness of eloquent rhetoric. We find here Browne's emphatic doublings ("right lines limit and close" . . . "the right-lined circle must conclude and shut up all"); cadenced phrases ("iniquity of oblivion," merit of perpetuity); repetition of key concepts ("oblivion"); balanced phrasing ("Register of God" . . . "record of man," "whatever hath no beginning can be confident of no end"); imagery of light and darkness.

Noteworthy also is the position of this passage near the conclusion of Urn-Burial. Both in this work and in Garden of Cyrus, Browne reserves the mystical consideration of his theme and his most majestic efforts of style

for last. In the final chapters of these twin treatises, he lifts the discussion of death and the quincunx beyond both natural and historical fact, beyond nature and custom to a concern with immortality. In freeing himself from the factual to which he bound himself so closely in the earlier chapters of both works, Browne elevates his discourse in accordance with the Renaissance concept of decorum, and soars into an imaginative and lyrical statement. And, of course, as E. S. Merton has noted, Browne was always at his artistic and imaginative best when writing about death.¹⁷

But there is something more. The vigorous declaratives of this final section create an emphatic and assured tone which, although enhanced by imagery and repetition, is largely attributable to its syntactic structural regularity. The result is an engaging succession of statements relentless in their drive toward certainty. Mercifully, they modulate from the darkness and iniquity of oblivion to the hope of immortality. Ultimately, they provide an affirmative declaration of faith in the Christian concept of an after-life. The passages' majestic march of cadenced, unqualified declarative forms merge eloquently with its content of belief.

VI

Corresponding to the patterns with which Browne begins paragraphs are his methods of concluding them. In his works, closure is of even more structural significance than overture. But it is not simply because his endings of sections and paragraphs are always successful. Sometimes, even in his most artistically realized work, there is a falling off of expressive impact at the ends of various kinds of sections. At his most successful and expressively forceful, Browne concludes his paragraphs of allusions and sections with paradox, imagery or with climactic accumulation of allusions. Since such endings occur throughout his writings, my choice of examples will attempt to illustrate the varieties of closural forms and effects he achieves as they cut across the various genres of his imaginative works.

First, let me take an example from the Letter to a Friend, where imagery is the dominant factor. Browne applauds Christians who look on "Death not only as the sting, but the period and end of Sin, the Horizon and Isthmus between this Life and a better, and the Death of this World but as a Nativity of another." (L; Works I, 112.) This closural use of metaphor and antithesis serves to intensify the expressive impact of Browne's ideas and to help the paragraph end rather than merely stop. Paradoxically, the paragraph ends with an image of

death as birth, which is itself a paradox. The idea of death as the end of sin gives way to the image of death as a kind of bridge between this world and the next, for which death is a nativity. Echoing here also is the nativity of Christ as well as the Biblical context of St. Paul's question "Death where is thy victory? Death where is thy sting?"

A second successful instance of imagery enhancing a conclusion occurs in Religio Medici, where, Browne completes a discussion about the various temptations of reason against faith which he had experienced.

Thus the Devill playd at Chesse with mee,
and yeelding a pawne, thought to gaine a Queen
of me, taking advantage of my honest endeavours;
and whilst I labour'd to raise the structure of
my reason, hee striv'd to undermine the edifice
of my faith.

(RM I, 19; Works I, 253)

Browne thus concludes his paragraph by modulating from the abstractness and generaltiy of the sentences which precede this passage to a particularized idea rendered concrete by his use of imagery. Also, in this example as in many of Browne's uses of imagery, symmetrical syntax and balanced antitheses accompany the images.

Ending paragraphs with antithesis furnishes a closural strategy Browne practiced frequently whether or not imagery was used. Sometimes the antithesis is slight, as in the following example from Christian Morals where

the adversity is one merely of single words. Browne writes that "the old tetrick Philosophers . . . were tempted unto angry Opinions, that Affairs were ordered more by Stars than Reason, and that things went on rather by Lottery than Election." (CM I, 26; Works I, 253)

In other places Browne concludes with a much more elaborate kind of antithesis, one which involves a series of adversely stated phrases and statements. The conclusion to the seventh paragraph of the Letter to a Friend is a characteristic example:

Most men are begotten in the Night, most Animals in the Day; but whether more Persons have been born in the Night or the Day; were a curiosity undecidable, tho more have perished by violent Deaths in the Day; yet in natural Dissolutions both Times may hold an Indifferency, at least but contingent Inequality. The whole course of Time runs out in the Nativity and Death of Things; which whether they happen by Succession or Coincidence are best computed by the natural not artificial Day.

(LF; Works I, 104)

In both the smaller and larger uses of antithesis as conclusion, there is a feeling of resolution and completion, which, of course, is only fully experienced in the reading of the entire section. But even out of context, the structure of an antithesis, its balance and its closed form, make it a natural concluding device. (Similar devices may be seen in the antithetically balanced lines that conclude scenes of plays, and in the concluding couplet of the Shakespearean sonnet.)

Besides using antithesis and imagery in his conclusions, Browne employs allusion, historical, Biblical, and mythological, exploiting its resources as a closural strategy.¹⁸ Although an allusion doesn't possess the built-in finality of either a vivid image or a strong antithesis, it nevertheless can expressively elevate a concluding statement. Urn-Burial V provides a good example: "In vain we compute our felicities by the advantage of our good names, since bad have equal duration; and Thersites is like to live as long as Agamemnon . . . Without the favor of the everlasting Register the first man had been as unknown as the last, and Methuselah's long life had been his only Chronicle. (Works I, 167)

In Christian Morals one finds numerous classical and mythological references, many of which are used to clinch the expression of an idea. In the following example Browne alludes to both historical and mythological personages. Also, in a different circumlocutory manner, he alludes to death (that hour when all men shall be poor). He writes: "There may be an Atropos of thy Fortunes before that of thy Life and thy wealth cut off before that hour, when all Men shall be poor; for the Justice of Death looks equally upon the dead, and Charon expects no more from Alexander than from Irus."

(CM, I, 5; Works I, 245) Noteworthy here once again also, are the balanced syntactic forms within which concluding images and allusions are most often contained, and the doubled statement of idea, once abstract (an Atropos of thy Fortunes), and once concrete (thy wealth cut off).

Much less frequently used as a method of closure in Browne's works overall, but one heavily employed in Religio Medici, is paradox. As a form of word and thought-play which reveals Browne's metaphysical imagination, paradox is one of his most forceful rhetorical strategies. Since a more thorough discussion of paradox is presented in Chapter Six, I will suggest here, through one brief example, how Browne uses it as a climactic device of conclusion. Consider the following example:

Before Abraham was, I am, is the saying of Christ; yet it is true in some sense if I say it of my selfe, for I was not onely before my selfe, but I am, that is, in the Idea of God, and the decree of that Synod held from all Eternity, and in this sense, I say, the world was before the Creation, and at an end before it had a beginning; and thus was I dead before I was alive; though my grave be England, my dying place was Paradise, and Eve miscarried of mee before she conceiv'd of Cain.

(RM I, 59; Works I, 68).

Browne playfully but seriously takes a Christian mystery, the eternal existence of God, relates it to himself, perhaps arrogantly, and as applied to himself, and by extension to all men, emphasizes its paradoxical nature. In playing out the paradoxical ramifications of this

notion, Browne exploits the antithetical ideas of life and death (the world was at end before it had a beginning; "thus was I dead before I was alive"). The point of the logic here is that it is not logical. But part of Browne's wit depends upon exceeding the bounds of logic, especially in his uses of paradox. On this point more will be said later.

In general, paradox seems particularly well-suited to conclude units of discourse because its seemingly faulty and sometimes actually faulty logic, besides engaging the reader's attentive response, forces him to slow down to achieve full comprehension. In addition, paradox turns the reader back into the discourse, since a concluding paradox accumulates its force of meaning, in part, from the explanation preceding it. It is a strategy that momentarily arrests the reader's forward movement, since it demands both a redirection and an intensification of his response. It compels him to make sense of apparent contradiction.

VII

I do not, with these varied examples of successful endings, wish to suggest that Browne always concludes successfully. Many of his sections and paragraphs do not conclude; some merely stop. Yet it is worth noting that

most of the less effectively concluded sections do not employ paradox, antithesis, imagery or allusion. Instead they often trail off with bits of antiquarian lore or fragments of unelaborated speculation. Let me illustrate with a few examples of rhetorically weak endings. The first is from the Letter to a Friend. It is a passage in which, while discussing the idea of a man dying on the same date as he is born, Browne introduces a striking image:

But in Persons who out-live many Years,
and when there are no less than three hundred
sixty five days to determine their lives in
every Year; that the first day should make
the last, that the Tail of the Snake should
return into its Mouth precisely at that time;
and that they should wind up upon the day of
their Nativity, is indeed a remarkable Coinci-
dence.

(LF; Works I, 105)

With a slight grammatical alteration Browne could have ended with this vividly illustrative image. Instead, he continues with a comment which detracts from the rhetorical effect he has, up to this point, created. This idea is, as he continues, "indeed a remarkable one which tho Astrology hath taken witty pains to salve, yet hath it been very wary in making Predictions of it." Now, as an idea, such a remark is not a detraction. In fact, one would prefer to keep the appended thought if only for the "witty pains" invoked. But as a conclusion, as an aspect of a literary form in miniature, Browne's image of

the snake would have been more artistically opportune, without the added remark.

A more interesting and more important example of a non-climactic use of closure can be illustrated from the Religio. Browne muses:

thus is man that great and true Amphibium,
whose nature is disposed to live not onely like
other creatures in divers elements, but in divided
and distinguished worlds; for though there bee
but one world to sensee, there are two to reason;
the one visible, the other invisible.
(RM, I, 34; Works I, 45)

After this striking and poetic image, Browne continues more prosaically with an explanation which has the effect of dulling the writing's expressive impact. Browne could have done two different things at this point, both of which would have been artistically more viable than what he actually decided to do. He could have ended with his image of the Amphibium or he could have continued in the same vein for one or two sentences more, perhaps elaborating on the notion of visible and invisible, but in the same mode of rhythm and image. Instead, in a direct fall from the expressiveness of his image, he continues and concludes with an explanation:

whereof Moses seems to have left no description
and of the other so obscurely that some parts
thereof are yet in controversie; and truly for
those first chapters of Genesis, I must confesse
a great deale of obscurity, though Divines have
the power of humane reason endeavored to make
all goe in a literall meaning; yet these allegoricall

interpretations are also probable, and perhaps the mysticall method of Moses bred up in the Hieroglyphicall Schooles of the Egyptians.
(RM I, 34; Works I, 45)

The final remark in this passage is one which I don't think we would readily do without, since it reveals Browne's characteristic tendency to speculate on the origins and causes of phenomena. Occurring in Browne's writings, this kind of appended philosophical speculation, is a stylistic habit suited to the kind of meditative style and temper of the Religio Medici. From a strictly formalist standpoint, such a tendency serves to undermine the poetic unity and force of Browne's imaginative writing. Yet this seeking for causes and appending explanations is ultimately more characteristic of Browne's writing than is his use of the image. Moreover, such a stylistic feature shows that Browne was less concerned with creating formal artistic wholes than he was with explaining himself and discovering the reasons for things, even when he was only guessing at and approximating what he thought was the truth.

I want to include one more larger scale example of this tendency taken from the final two paragraphs of Garden of Cyrus, IV. Like the previous Religio example, this one shows Browne appending a thought, a speculation, to an idea whose explanation and expression are essentially complete. Both statements, consequently, have the effect

of afterthoughts. What is more interesting about the final paragraph of Garden of Cyrus, IV, however, is that, like its final sentence, it also has an added-on quality. The penultimate paragraph of that chapter which I will quote first, would have made a climactic ending for that section.

Of this Figure [the quincunx] Plato made choice to illustrate the motion of the soul, both of the world and man; while he delivereth that God divided the whole conjunction length-wise, according to the figure of a Greek and then turning it about reflected it into a circle; implying the uniform motion of the first Orb, and the right lines, the planetical and various motions within it. And this also with application unto the soul of man, which hath a double aspect, one right, whereby it beholdeth the body, and objects without; another circular and reciprocal, whereby it beholdeth it self; The circle declaring the motion of the indivisible soul, simple, according to the divinity of its nature, and returning into it self; the right lines respecting the motion pertaining unto sense, and vegetation, and the central decussation, the wondrous connexion of the severall unity and duality of the soul, and made out the three substances so much considered by him; That is, the indivisible or divine, the divisible or corporeal, and that third, which was the Systasis or harmony of those two, in the mystical decussation.

The "and" initiating the conclusion suggests the addendum quality of the final paragraph.

And if that were clearly made out which Justin Martyr took for granted, this figure hath had the honour to characterize and notifie our blessed Saviour, as he delivereth in that borrowed expression from Plato; Decussavit cum in universo, the hint whereof he would have Plato derive from the figure of the brazen Serpent, and to have mistaken the Letter X for T, whereas it is not improbable, he learned these and other mystical

expressions in his Learned Observations of Aegypt, where he might obviously behold the Mercurial characters, the handed crosses, and other mysteries not thoroughly understood in the sacred Letter X, which being derivative from the Stork, one of the ten sacred animals, might be originally Aegyptian, and brought into Greece by Cadmus of that Countrey. (GC, IV; Works I, 220-221)

If Browne had exchanged the positions of these penultimate and ultimate paragraphs, he would have devised a more structurally viable, more logically developed and more artistically forceful ending to this chapter. As a result, his tendency to add on quaint bits of information, if it is not a weakness of style, is at least a weakness of structure. In instances like this one, a chapter's extension beyond a climactic paragraph, and a paragraph's continuation beyond a resounding thump of epigram or a striking series of images, antitheses or allusions usually results in a falling off of expressive impact and a thinning out of meaning. On the other hand, they give us something quintessentially Brownian: a mind obsessed with the truth of things, a mind whose unbounded curiosity works incessantly, searching for causes, spinning out explanations, a mind which, in the words of Morris Croll "seeks new and different tones and emphasis, each expressing a uniquely particular apprehension of the truth."¹⁹

VII

I have said almost nothing about the larger structural aspects of Browne's writing, primarily because this has been done by others.²⁰ But there are a few things to be noted. First, although Browne does not possess an "architectonic imagination,"²¹ like Milton, he nevertheless does possess some sense of a work's overall structure. Furthermore, it is a structural sense which expresses itself differently as it varies with the purpose and genre of a particular work. The Pseudodoxia Epidemica, for example, is almost as elaborately mapped out and as intricately organized as Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy,²² while it simultaneously suggests the compendia-like quality of Burton's work. Both Garden of Cyrus and Urn-Burial combine historical references with natural observation in the early chapters and mythological and Biblical allusion with meditative and speculative fancy in their later parts. Both works devote sections of their five chapters to the various levels of being, reflecting the seventeenth-century hierarchical view of the universe. Each focuses for a time on art and artifact, on nature, on history and myth, while each also ranges widely in thought. In short, both works are far from formless, though Browne's development and structuring of ideas by association, contributes to a

sense of ad hoc formlessness. His smaller-scale developmental methods, usually at odds with his larger designs, often subvert them.

In the more loosely organized Religio Medici, there is, of course, the two-part structure, forming separate discussions of Faith and Charity. But in both of these large sections there is the kind of progressive structures I outlined above. In addition, there is a strong autobiographical cast to the work. Yet the personal element of Religio Medici is consistently and usefully modified with the inclusion of many diverse general and abstract speculations which function to enlarge the work's imaginative and philosophical scope. Resulting from the alternation between and combination of diverse kinds of material, is a work which is both autobiography and religious philosophy. In one sense its structure is a continuous movement between them.

What I have been trying to suggest is that Browne often employs multiple structural methods in a given work. This is the case with the Religio as it is with most of his completed works, and is especially true of a neglected work, Letter to a Friend, which is organized, as I noted earlier, around the subject of death. Browne alternates remarks about the universality and generality of the experience with information and speculation about the

death of a particular man. But there is a second overlapping structure. As in Christian Morals, the advice of the Letter is split off from its generalization. Coming at the end of the work, the admonitory statements initiate a dramatic change of tone which causes a structural break in the form, style and content of the work. In addition to these two complementary structures, there is a tripartite "school" division into introduction, narrative and eulogy.²³ This third organizational outline is a requirement of the genre, "a very unusual medical version of the traditional consolatory letter."²⁴

One might object that three different structural patterns in a single work signify organizational chaos. I think, instead, that the multiple structures found in Browne's works reveal, if not a high degree of formal literary unity, at least a more general, informal unity which accommodates his digressive and meditative style. And further, the use of multiple structural methods and patterns reflects the multiple genres of works like Religio Medici, Letter to A Friend, Urn-Burial and Garden of Cyrus. Part of the interest generated by these works derives from their uniqueness; part of their uniqueness derives from their variety of structure and style. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Browne's uses of structure correspond with and reinforces other aspects of his style, especially his imagery and syntax.

NOTES

¹Brian Vickers has written of Bacon's structural methods. He is one of few who have seriously treated structure as an aspect of prose style. See his Francis Bacon and Renaissance Prose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

²Sir Thomas Browne, Religio Medici, in the Works of Sir Thomas Browne, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), I. 25-26. Citations are to this four-volume edition.

³Morris Croll, "The Baroque Style in Prose," in Seventeenth-Century Prose, ed. Stanley E. Fish (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 38.

⁴Cf. Stanley Fish's discussion of Browne's illegitimate playing with ideas in his Self-Consuming Artifacts (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 359 ff.

⁵Samuel Johnson, "The Life of Sir Thomas Browne," in The Works of Sir Thomas Browne, ed. Simon Wilkin (London: George Bell and Sons, 1836), I, xxxii.

⁶Francis Bacon, The Advancement of Learning, in Selected Writings of Francis Bacon, ed. Hugh G. Dick (New York: Random House, 1955), p. 180.

⁷Both Stanley Fish and Gilbert Phelps suggest that the proper response to Browne's prose is admiration and detached curiosity rather than involvement since his rhetorical pyrotechnics are ends in themselves. Fish, Self-Consuming Artifacts, p. 363; Phelps, "The Prose of Donne and Browne," in From to Donne to Marvel, ed. Boris Ford (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin, 1958), p. 120.

⁸Leonard Nathanson, The Strategy of Truth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

⁹Frank L. Huntley views the overall structure of Garden of Cyrus as a quincunx with the long third chapter on nature as the decussating center. Sir Thomas Browne (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), pp. 205-206.

¹⁰In his Science and Imagination in Sir Thomas Browne, E. S. Merton suggests that Browne's digressions are a structural method in themselves. But, it seems to me, that the problem of whether he digresses intentionally is less important than the question of how relevant, thematically and stylistically, such digressions are.

¹¹In taking a different perspective on this chapter, one might suggest that two of Browne's major preoccupations are given fundamentally different structural treatments: the concept of generation is developed in a lengthy aside; the idea of nature's order and harmony climaxes and culminates all that has gone before.

¹²For a discussion of the relationship between Urn-Burial and Garden of Cyrus, see Huntley, Sir Thomas Browne, pp. 204-223.

¹³Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Thoreau," in The Portable Emerson, ed., Mark Van Doren (New York: Viking, 1946), p. 580.

¹⁴Works I, 224-226.

¹⁵The idea of paragraph closure and of its analogue, paragraph overture, I have derived and adapted from Barbara Hernstein Smith's Poetic Closure (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

¹⁶The "if" in this sentence is not really a signal of the hypothetical. Rather it is a non-conditional "if," a pseudo-hypothetical one, because its context strongly suggests that the contrary is true. Its function is both to alert the reader to the proper response and to momentarily delay until it comes in the following sentence: "But the long habit of living indisposeth us for dying."

¹⁷Merton, pp. 120-121.

¹⁸Allusion in Browne's writings assumes other important functions, one of which is to anchor abstract and general discourse in concrete particulars. These other uses of allusion are considered in a later chapter concerning the factuality of Browne's prose. Here, my concern is strictly limited to its effect on paragraph closure.

¹⁹Cross, "Baroque Style," p. 31.

²⁰See especially Huntley, Sir Thomas Browne, pp. 104-130, 146-178, 204-223; Nathanson, and Margaret Heideman, "Hydriotaphia and the Garden of Cyrus: A Paradox and a Cosmic Vision," University of Toronto Quarterly, 19 (1950), 235-246.

²¹Merton, p. 149.

²²See Rosalie Colie's work on Burton and on Renaissance genre in general. For Burton: Paradoxia Epidemica (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966). For Genre: Resources of Kind (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

²³Norman J. Endicott makes this observation in his essay "Sir Thomas Browne's Letter to a Friend," University of Toronto Quarterly, 36 (1966), 70.

²⁴Endicott, p. 68.

CHAPTER III

SYNTAX

Two observations are frequently made about Browne's style: first, that it is highly Latinate; second, that it is asymmetrical. Both need to be qualified. Although Browne's writing, like Milton's is Latinate in style, its Latinity, unlike Milton's, is due almost exclusively to its diction. Browne's word order is thoroughly English with his sentences proceeding from subject through predicate to complement. And although he occasionally achieves striking effects by delaying predication, and thus suspending meaning, his sentences do not generally conform to the periodicity of a typical Ciceronian sentence. (Browne's suspended syntax will be examined later in this chapter; the Latinate element of his style will be discussed in the following chapter on diction). This chapter will attempt to qualify the assertion that Browne's style is characterized by asymmetrical syntax, "exploded periods," and a generally loose Senecan style in which asymmetrical periodic members, seemingly unplanned, proceed with co-ordinating rather than subordinating conjunctions as they imitate the

movement of the mind in the process of thought.¹

Although this description fits some of Browne's writing in the Religio Medici, it does not always adequately characterize the syntax either of the Religio throughout, or of his other writings generally. Browne exploited symmetrical syntax as often as he exploded asymmetrical periods. In fact, symmetrical syntax was for him, a general and consistent stylistic tendency which takes one of three forms: parallelism or balance, antithesis, and inversion. And while each of these three syntactic strategies represents a different kind of emphatic form which reinforces and underlines meaning, each functions in a slightly different manner.

But before considering each of these forms in detail, two general observations should be made. First, the degree of parallelism in forming a sentence depends both on the number of parallel elements in each member and on the number of members in each sentence. The greater the number of sentence members and the greater the number of parallel elements within them, the more significant the balance is stylistically.² Second, degree of parallelism is a relative measure. Compared with the writings of Hazlitt, Burton, Milton or Donne, Browne's writing reveals a more balanced style; compared with the works of Samuel Johnson, they are less parallel.

Just as important a measure for characterizing style, however, as degree of parallelism, are the frequency, range and context of its occurrence. A few examples from different works can illustrate both the range and variety of parallel syntactic structure. Let us begin with a simple example in which two different pairs are balanced: "As there were many Reformers, so likewise many Reformations; every Country proceeding in a peculiar Method according as their national interest together with their constitution and clime inclined them; some angrily and with extremitie, others calmly, and with mediocrity . . ." (RM I, 4; Works I, 13).

In the first member there are two parallel elements: "many Reformers, many Reformations"; in the last there are four: "angrily," "calmly" and "with extremitie," "with mediocrity." Although the balanced phrases are separated and elliptical, they preserve a tight, precise parallelism which is prevented from hardening into stylized predictability by the interpolated statement "every Country proceeding etc. . . ." The parallelism is both simple and natural. In an example from the Pseudodoxia Epidemica, the balances are more elaborate with a longer parallel series overall (whether . . . whether . . . whether . . . etc.), more intricate structuring of syntax within, and the use of antithetical

parallels within the overall parallel series (Eve seducing . . . Adam seduced; in deceiving her husband . . . in being deceived herself). Here is the passage:

And therefore whether the Sin of our First Parents were the greatest of any since; whether the transgression of Eve seducing, did not exceed that of Adam seduced; or whether the resistibility of this Reason, did not equivalence the facility of her Seduction; we shall refer it to the Schoolman; whether there was not in Eve as great injustice in deceiving her husband, as imprudence in being deceived herself . . . we leave it unto the Moralist. Whether the hwole relation be not Allegoricall . . . we leave it unto the Thalmudist. Whether there were any Policy in the Devil to tempt them before the Conjunction, or whether the Issue before temptation, might in justice suffer with those after, we leave it unto the Lawyer. Whether Adam foreknew the advent of Christ, or the reparation of his Error by his Savior . . . Whether if they had tasted the Tree of life, before that of Good and Evil, they had yet suffered the curse of Mortality: or whether the efficacy of the one had not over-powered the penalty of the other, we leave it unto God.

(PE Book I, section I: Works II, 20)

The balances and parallelisms alluded above are echoed in small ways by balanced words (injustice . . . imprudence; efficacy . . . penalty; of the one . . . of the other). Noteworthy also is the nature of the questions which are referred to theologian, philosopher and lawyer, and ultimately, because they do not admit of certain and absolute answers, to God. Using an inverted syntactic parallel series, Browne accumulates a collection of ultimately unanswerable questions. Parallelism of word, phrase and clause helps to intensify the nature of the

skepticism implicit in Browne's questions. One final noteworthy aspect of the parallelism employed in this passage is the quality of litany created. It was a quality which Browne exploited elsewhere as the following, very different example from the Religio demonstrates; "This is the day that must make good that great attribute of God his Justice; that must reconcile those unanswerable doubts which torment the wisest understandings . . . This is that one day, that shall include and comprehend all that went before it . . . This is the day whose memory hath only power to make us honest in the dark, and to be virtuous with a witness." (RM I, 46; Works I, 57).

There is a liturgical quality created by the litany and reinforced by the subject, and although such litanic anaphora can have a strong incantatory effect (as in Eliot's "Ash Wednesday"), the repetitions in this passage are more emphatic than incantatory.³ Its balances function primarily as aids to emphasis. In a sense, they stop the movement of the discourse and the development of its ideas to elaborate a single idea, to underline and reinforce it. The repetitive form suggests that Browne is both declaring his belief that the day of judgment will provide a culmination of all that has gone before, as it also suggests that he hopes this will be true. The repetitions, in their declarative insistence, reveal

Browne's yearning for a resolution of doubt as much as they reveal his faith in the final vision.

But Browne's parallelisms are not always of these forms and do not always possess the movement of the examples described thus far. In the early sections of Religio Medici the balances are both elaborate and complex. They often retain a sense of progression. To take one example:

. . . I am of that reformed new cast Religion, wherein I dislike nothing but the name; of the same believe (which) our Saviour taught, the Apostles disseminated, the Fathers authorised, and the Martyrs confirmed-
(RM I, 1; Works I, 11).

There are two progressions here. The proper nouns trace an historical movement while the verbs reveal an increasing force of action. The passage continues with a more complex series of parallels: "But by the sinister ends of Princes, the ambition and avarice of Prelates, and the fatal corruption of times, so decayed, impaired and fallen from its native beauty." The triple phrase parallel of the first part (ending with "times,"), functions first, as a double parallel with emphasis on "Princes" and "Prelates" who corrupt the times, and second, as a balancing of ends and means (the sinister ends of Princes with both their own implied means and with the means of the Prelates, "ambition and avarice"). The triple balance of verbs concluding the example

("decayed . . . impaired . . . fallen"), refers to the corruption of the original form of Christ's religion. But the use of three similar words is not idle. Besides emphasizing the corruption described, each word entails a slight modification of meaning. "Decayed" and "fallen" contain powerful and vivid visual and spatial images with, of course, "fallen" carrying strong theological and moral overtones. "Impaired," though it is more abstract and less vividly visual than the two words between which it is sandwiched, nevertheless conveys a sense of disability and disfunction.

One final example of parallelism from Christian Morals reveals one other function of this rhetorical device. Showing how forms of syntax can imitate the idea being expressed, this example of parallelism illustrates a kind of mimetic syntax.

Many Positions seem quodlibetically constituted
and like a Delphian Blade will cut on both sides.
Some Truths seem almost Falsehoods, and some
Falsehoods almost Truths wherein Falsehood and
Truth seem almost aequilibriously stated . . .
(CM II, 3; Works I, 261)

Here, I think the balances of syntax, the filling of like syntactic slots both with similarly formed words ("quodlibetically constituted," "aequilibriously stated"), and with opposite terms ("truth and falsehood"), creates less an opposition than an exchange of the words' meanings. For the balanced syntax enacts the idea that some statements

themselves balance truth and falsehood, that they can be described as either both true and false simultaneously, or as neither true nor false. A view of reality and truth that is both complex and ambiguous and ultimately skeptical is implied here. The allusive image of the Delphian Blade underlines the double-edged character of many intellectual positions, emphasizing their capacity for containing both truths and errors. But Browne is not suggesting here that there are no true and false views. Rather, he indicates that only an apparent equivalence exists between truth and falsehood, not a real identity. The separation of real truth from apparent truth (falsehood) is the job of all thinking men. Knowledge of real truth is also ultimately impossible, according to Browne, and hence must be left to God who will reveal all things on the last day. Even so, one is obligated to distinguish true from false and seemingly true notions as far as one is able.

More prevalent in Browne's writing and a more characteristic trait of his style than simple parallelism is antithetical parallelism, or simply antithesis. One can detect in both his simple or balance parallelism and in his antithesis a predilection for setting one thing off against another, for seeing one idea in competitive relation to another. The following passage, whose

antithesis and balances I have marked, illustrates this tendency.

I would not live over my houres past, or beginne againe the tred of my dayes: not upon Cicero's ground, because I have lived them well, but for feare I should live them worse: I find my growing Judgement dayly instructs me how to be better, but my untamed affections and confirmed Vitiosity make me dayly doe worse; I finde in my comfirmed age the same sinnes I discovered in my youth. I committed many then because (I was a child) and because I commit them still (I am yet an infant).

(RM I, 42, Works I, 53)

The mixture here of regret and honesty, of past hopes dashed by present weakness : supported syntactically by antitheses of phrase (my growing judgement . . . my untamed affections . . . how to be better . . . make me doe worse). Such antitheses in turn reflect, in small rhetorical form, one of the underlying concerns of the Religio in particular and of Browne's thought in general: the war between reason and passion, the struggle between the body and soul. These examples reveal what one often finds in Browne's uses of antithetical syntax: an opposition of thematic elements which are reflected by and embodied in antagonisms of syntax.

II

Short antithetical statements occur throughout Browne's writings, but are especially prominent in Letter to a Friend, Religio Medici, and Christian Morals.

Sometimes the tightness of antithesis approaches aphorism; "obstinacy is a bad cause, is but constancy in a good." (RM I, 25; Works I, 36). Occasionally, the short-form antitheses are bunched together to develop and emphasize an idea:

the practice of men holds not an equal pace,
yea, often runnes counter to their theory; we
naturally know what is good, but naturally pursue
what is evill; the Rhetorike wherewith I perswade
another cannot perswade myselfe.
(RM I, 55; Works I, 66)

Often they function to make distinctions, as in the following example:

Nor doth the similitude of creatures dis-
parage the variety of nature, nor any way confound
the workes of God. For even in things alike there
is diversitie, and those that doe seeme to accord,
doe manifestly disagree.
(RM II, 2; Works I, 73)

In this last example, antithesis of the second sentence serves as an explanation for the distinction made in the first.⁴ A similar usage occurs in the following example:

But age doth not rectifie but incurvate our
natures, turning bad dispositions into worsen
habits, and (like diseases) brings on incurable
vices; for every day as we grow weaker in age,
we grow stronger in sinne; and the number of our
dayes doth but make our sinnes innumerable.
(RM I, 42; Works I, 52)

In addition to the second part explaining the first, there is also, in the first section, progression among the parallel nouns and adjectives. The language moves from the general to the specific, from "dispositions"

to "habits" to "vices." It also describes a situation which gets progressively worse; things go from "bad" to "worsen" to "incurable."

Two variations in Browne's use of antithetical joining may be illustrated from the Letter to a Friend. One sentence of the Letter contains a phrase "miserable Life" upon which hinges two different but related antitheses. The first involves the miserable Life's opposition with Death; the second is its contrast with a virtuous life. "But to be content with Death may be better than to desire it, a miserable Life may make us wish for Death, but a virtuous one to rest in it." (LF; Works I, 111). There is, of course, the further antithesis between the verbs of the first part: "to be content with" and "to desire," and of the last "to wish for" and "to rest." But the antitheses are made apparent only by the context, since the two sets of opposite terms themselves are not inherently contradictory. It is, of course, Browne's particular use in context of an antithetical syntactic structure that invests the pairs of verbs with contradictory significance.

Finally, one ought to note that the antithesis of this short example involves both noun and verb oppositions. In the example cited prior to this one, there is antithesis of verbs in one part and of nouns

in another, but not of both together. And this is the more commonly used form of opposition in Browne's works. Yet there are occasions when he has gone one step further in the complexity of antithetic forms. Speaking of the ancient Martyrs, he notes that they "thought it more Wisdom to crucifie their Lusts than their Bodies, to curcumcise than stab their Hearts, and to moritifie than kill themselves. (LF; Works I, 112). In this passage, nouns and verbs are antithetically combined. The grammatical units refuse to stay in their respective places, merging and mixing, instead, in an antithetical series which surprises. The reader both responds to the emphatic note of the antitheses and is kept alert by Browne's shifts in their grammar. Instead of settling into a comfortably balanced and predictable antithetical pattern based on the initial opposition between "Lusts" and "Bodies" (which I believe the reader experiences as a shock anyway, since what could as easily have been presented is a verbal counterpart to "crucifie"), Browne shifts to a verbal opposition between "circumsise" and "stab" rather than retaining the noun antithesis that he established with the first phrase. Yet he does retain the term "their Hearts" to balance "their Bodies." Moreover, in this second antithetical pair, there is shortening of phrase and a consequent

sharpening of opposition ("to circumsise than stab"). Browne then retains this antithetical form in the third phrase ("to mortifie than kill"), and at the cost of losing surprise, gains emphasis. He thus capitalizes on the advantages of antithetical phrasing while avoiding two of its principal dangers--predictability and monotony.

Before proceeding to examples of more elaborate symmetrical antithesis, I would like to note that much of Browne's use of both parallelism and antithesis is asymmetrical, almost casual. It might be described as 'loose antithesis' or 'loose parallelism with antithesis.' I have stressed the tighter, more structured examples because they have been neglected by other critics. But an example of the loose style of antithesis such as the following is frequent in Browne, although one must distinguish between its frequency in the Religio and the Letter, and its relative absence in Christian Morals, Pseudodoxia Epidemica, and the early chapters of Urn-Burial and Garden of Cyrus. Browne writes:

These opinions I never maintained with pertinacity, or endeavored to enveagle any mans beliefe unto mine, nor so much as ever revealed or disputed them with my dearest friends; by which meanes I neither propogated them in others, nor confirmed them in my selfe, but suffering them to flame upon their owne substance, without addition of new fuell, they went out insensibly of themselves; therefore these opinions, though condemned by lawfull councels, were not Heresies in me, but bare Errors, and single Lapses of my

understanding, without a joynt depravity of my will. Those have not only depraved understandings but diseased affections, which cannot enjoy a Singularity without a Heresie, or be the author or an opinion, without they be of a Sect also. (RM I, 7; Works I, 17).

There is considerable use of balanced verb forms in this passage (I never maintained . . . or endeavored to enveagle . . . nor so much as ever revealed or disputed . . . I neither propogated . . . nor confirmed); of balanced phrases and clauses (propogated them in others . . . confirmed them in my selfe . . . not Heresies in me but bare Errors . . . and Single Lapses of my understanding); of terms (depraved understandings . . . diseased affections . . . Singularity . . . Heresie . . . Opinion . . . Sect). But these balances, both parallel and antithetical, exist in the context of a pair of long periods which serve to qualify and explain Browne's defense of his 'heresies.' The loose style of discourse is appropriate for such an explanation as it creates the impression that Browne is working through his defense as he is writing it. The balances (really doublets of phrase) add a sense of fullness, of copiousness, and hence of weight to Browne's view as the antithetical parallels are necessarily used to make important distinctions upon which his case ultimately rests.

The parallels and balancings of such a characteristic passage of Browne's writing can be related to the

Renaissance concept of copia or fullness as a rhetorical strategy, derived from Roman oratory, especially from Cicero. At the same time, such structures reveal Browne's concern with order which is reflected in his works as subject, theme, and image. Finally the fullness of explanation couched in these balanced forms indicates Browne's need to clarify his views, to be understood, a need which frequently in his work shows itself in elaborate and intricate elaborating and qualifying rhetoric.

Often occurring as sections within such loosely balanced prose are highly structured and formal, almost stylized antitheses. Consider the following example from Christian Morals: "For Fortune lays the Plot of our Adversities in the foundation of our Felicities, blessing us in the first quadrate, to blast us more sharply in the last. (CM II, 10; Works I, 266) In this sentence, simple balanced opposition helps to mark the important relation between adversity and prosperity. Emphasis falls on the words "Plot," "Adversities," "foundation" and "Felicities." The antithesis between "Adversities" and "Felicities" is exact since the words convey opposite meanings while they reveal a similar form and maintain parallel positions in their respective phrases. This is not true for "Plot" and "foundation," since the words are different in form and not in meaning. They balance one

another occupying similar syntactic slots and, in one sense, sharing a related meaning.⁵

Yet a form of antithetical inexactness dominates the second half of the sentence. The two antithetical verbs assume different forms: one is a participle, the other an infinitive. In addition, the balanced phrases, "in the first quadrate" and "in the last" are also inexact since they are separated by an intervening adverbial modifier, "more sharply." Although there is a concern in this sentence with balanced and antithetical phrasing, the perfection of antithetical form is subordinate to that of meaning. There is no attempt to achieve the kind of perfection of balance and antithesis in morphology and syntax that Dr. Johnson, for example, consistently attained. Yet the forms of Browne's chosen words and their positions in his phrases and sentences serve to sharpen their adverse relationships. Antithesis reinforces the underlying contrast of ideas resulting in a significant expression of meaning. It provides an important strategy of emphasis.

Perhaps less emphatic but certainly nonetheless significant are the few examples of what is sometimes taken to be the epitome of antithesis, chiasmus. It seems contradictory to suggest that chiasmus can be both the most elaborately constructed type of antithesis and also one of

its less emphatic forms. But the point, I think, holds true, since what the reader often experiences in chiasmus is either 1) a sense of its artistry with a concomitant neglect of meaning, or 2) a lack of recognition of the antithesis since it can be buried in an intricately developed but scarcely noticed opposition. That is, the very complexity of the chiasmus can undermine the emphatic function of its antithesis. Browne's chiasmic forms are less subject to these limitations than those of Johnson, whose antitheses are more elaborate and intricate. A few of them are worth noting, however, since they have been generally neglected, and since they are distinctive for reasons about to be suggested.

The first example continues the passage about Fortune quoted above. Browne suggests that

since in the highest felicities there lieth a capacity for the lowest miseries, she hath this advantage from our happiness to make us truly miserable: for to become acutely miserable we are to be first happy.
(CM II, 10; Works I, 266).

This sentence derives its power from its final phrase which completes the antithesis ("to become miserable we are to be first happy"). Since this remark repeats key words which occur almost immediately before ("highest felicities . . . lowest miseries"), and more importantly since it expresses a paradox, it engages the reader, forcing him both to examine its 'logic' and its meaning

by examining its context. In doing this he becomes aware of the sentence's chiasmic organization.

A second use of modified chiasmus from the Religio Medici reveals Browne's penchant for dualities: "As Reason is rebell unto Faith, so Passion unto Reason: As the propositions of Faith seeme absurd unto Reason, so the Theorems of Reason unto Passion, and both unto Faith." (RM I, 19; Works I, 29) Browne sets off "passion," "Reason" and "Faith" against one another, as he constructs two pairs of antitheses. A writer, like Bacon, less inclined to dualities might simply have listed the three terms, discussing each in turn. Browne instead creates antagonism among the terms which reflect the conflicting realities they represent. Moreover, in exploiting the inherent antithetical possibilities of his terms both in relation of one to another and of two (reason and passion) to one (faith), he provides a miniature illustration of the traditional seventeenth century "faculty psychology." And, in the form of this modified chiasmus, he reinforces one of the predominant beliefs of the faculty psychology: that these three aspects of the soul war against one another. The conflict of ideas is thus enacted in the opposition of syntax. It is one more example of form and content, sense and syntax working together.

Finally, to make a larger connection, one can relate this passage to the wonderful image of man as an amphibium who lives in the divided and distinguished worlds of sense and reason, of body and spirit. And, as the tripartite parallel series of Passion, Reason and Faith is set up as a pair of conflicting antitheses between Passion and Reason, Reason and Faith, so too does Browne's elaboration of his famous image break down into three parts in which sense is opposed first to reason then to spirit.⁶

Perhaps the most striking use of balance and antithesis in Browne's works occurs in a passage notable for its statement of paradox:

Life it self is but the shadow of death, and
 souls departed but the shadow of the living;
 All things fall under this name
 The Sun it self is but the dark simulacrum and
 light but the shadow of God,
 (GC IV; Works I, 218)

The repetitions of the word "shadow" are reinforced by the alliterative and parallel pair "dark" and "death." There is a balance of phrase: "Life it self is but," "souls departed but," and "light but." More important, however, are the inherent antitheses between life and death and between light and darkness which Browne exploits in the twin paradoxes that light is dark and that life is a form of death. In addition, since the passage occurs in Garden of Cyrus, it is noteworthy that

it forms a modified quincunx with a central decussating statement: "All things fall under this name."

I do not mean to suggest that antithetical form is the most important or indeed the only stylistic trait operating in this passage, or for that matter, in all of my previous examples. Not at all. The effects of this particular passage, for instance, derive from other things besides syntax, or perhaps, from other stylistic elements working in combination with syntax. The monosyllabic vocabulary, with a few disyllabic variations and their conjunctions with repeated words, creates an incantatory effect. The passage reads like a prayer, specifically a litany. In addition, there are, of course, the richly symbolic terms, "light" and "dark," and their more specific and concrete counterparts, "sun" and "shadow." Moreover, the tone of the passage and its rhythm are controlled by all of these elements and are partly modified by its simple declarative forms. It is thus in most of Browne's best writing. Forms of syntax do not work independently. In his finest elaborations of syntax, he invokes striking allusions and creates powerful images or he exploits significant paradoxes. In his best writing, syntax, diction, image and idea qualify and reinforce one another, creating a resourceful and expressive prose.

III

In conjunction with habitual and stylistically expressive uses of parallelism and antithesis, one finds in Browne's writing, a tendency to invert syntax. Generally, syntactic inversion takes one of two related forms; sentences begin with either "that" or with "where." Both forms have a similar function: they enable the writer to make assertions which can be significantly modified rather than merely emphasized by the final words of the sentence. In addition, Browne uses inversion to delay predication and consequently to suspend momentarily the meaning of his sentence.

More specifically, by delaying predication, he postpones final judgment, thus creating for the reader a temporary uncertainty about the status of the developing statement. Is it to be affirmed or denied? Is it to be ridiculed, praised or skeptically doubted? A few examples are in order. Speaking of the burial urns found in Walsingham, Browne remarks: "that these were the Urnes of Romanes from the common custom and place where they were found, is no obscure conjecture." And about the possibility of their Roman origin: "that Britain was notably populous is undeniable, from that expression of Caesar. That the Romanes themselves were early in no small Numbers . . . affords sure account."

Both examples, after a slight delay, conclude with certainty. But the inverted form as Browne uses it can be just employed for expressions of denial. "Than the time of these Urnes deposited, or precise Antiquity of these Reliques, nothing of more uncertainty. . . . whether this practice was onely then left by Emperours and great persons, generally about Rome, and not in other provinces, we hold no authentick account . . . whether they were the bones of men or women or children no authentick decision from ancient custom in distant places of buriall." (UB II; Works I, 141, 143)

In the instances of both affirmation and denial, the inverse form allows Browne to highlight the problem by stating it first, as it also enables him to emphasize the degree of belief or doubt he attaches to it.

Besides making affirmations and denials, Browne used the inverted form to make moral judgments. Writing about the diversity of funeral customs, he remarks.

That they buried their dead on their backs, or in a supine position, seems agreeable unto profound sleep, and common posture of dying; contrary to the most natural way of birth . . . That they carried them out of the world with their feet forward, not inconsonant unto reason That they sucked in the last breath of their expiring friends, was surely a practice of no med icall institution, but a loose opinion. . . . That they poured oyle on the pyre was a tolerable practice. . . . But to place good omens in the quick and speedy burning, to sacrifice unto the windes for a dispatch in this office, was a low

form of superstition. . . . That they buried a peece of money with them as a Fee of the Elysian Ferryman, was a practice full of folly.
(UB IV; Works I, 159-160)

The form and effect of the inversions are the same here as in the examples cited above. But there are occasions when inverted statements neither affirm nor deny but suspend judgment along with predication: "Whether the Brittaines (Probably descended from them, of like Religion, Language and Manner) did sometimes make use of burning; or whether at least such as were after civilized unto the Romane life and manners, conformed not unto this practice, we have no historical assertion of denial." (UB II; Works I, 146). In any case, inversion as it is used in Urn-Burial signals a concern for evaluating either the historicity of a custom or a judgment about its ethical, moral or religious value.

Although inversion is primarily an emphatic form, it has other consequences as well. By its very nature, inversion hesitates, it delays. It does not necessarily, however, imply skepticism, as my previous examples from Urn-Burial show. But it nevertheless can be used with skeptical intent and effect as Stanley Fish has cogently argued about the Religio.⁷ Fish's argument about Religio Medici in general and the following inverted passage in particular is that its rhetoric undercuts its argument, that its rhetoric is display for its own

sake, and finally that the reader, tossed between affirmation and denial, between probability and possibility, is left stranded in uncertainty. In fact, "the more information the reader is given, the less inclined he is to draw conclusions from it."⁸ Here is the passage:

That Miracles are ceased, I can neither prove, nor absolutely deny, much lesse define the time and period of their cessation, that they survived Christ, is manifest upon record of Scripture, that they outlived the Apostles also, and were revived at the conversions of Nations, many years after, we cannot deny, if wee shall not question those writers whose testimonies wee doe not controvert, in points that make for our owne opinions: therefore that may have some truth in it that is reported of the Jesuites and their Miracles in the Indies, I could wish it were true, or had any other testimony then their owne Pennes.
(RM I, 27; Works I, 37)

What this passage does with its give and take, with its 'now I accept miracles, now I don't,' is to undercut the reader's secure resting in certainties. Hedging with qualifications ("I can neither affirm nor deny" . . . "if we shall not question" . . . "I could wish it were true"), Browne denies the reader (and himself) sureness and stability but gains intellectual integrity and honesty. The writing here, in its controlled ambivalence, reflects and illustrates one aspect of Browne's attitude toward truth: that truth is ambiguous, subtle, not easily discoverable, in short, empirically elusive. And further, that Browne's occasional endings in uncertainties, his

skepticism, become at times a spiritual weapon to undermine the more surely felt positions of those of his contemporaries whose religious convictions they killed one another to defend.⁹

In these and similar examples, Browne's inverted syntax is characterized by repetition and accumulation which form a litany, sometimes of affirmation, sometimes of denial, sometimes of judgment. It is these forms of accumulated inversion which are most frequent in Browne and most interesting, if occasionally problematic. In isolation, however, single sentence examples of inverted syntax often fail by being unemphatic. The opening sentence of Garden of Cyrus, for instance contains a fading inversion, one whose reversed syntactic form dulls the statement's expressive impact.

That Vulcan gave arrows unto Apollo and
Diana the fourth day after their Nativities,
according to Gentile Theology, may passe for no
blinde apprehension of the creation of the Sunne
and Moon in the work of the fourth day; When the
diffused light contracted into Orbes, and shoot-
ing rayes, of those Luminaries.
(GC, I; Works I, 179)

This inverted form fades primarily because it is too drawn out. A profusion of additives, "ands" and "ofs" and an excess of phrases and clauses appended to the main thought, inhibit the expressive force of the inversion. Compare some of Samuel Johnson's inverted sentences for their more tightly knit structure and their greater

emphasis: "That he who spends more than he receives must in time become indigent, cannot be doubted." Or again, "Whether perfect happiness would be procured by perfect goodness, said Nekayah, this world will never afford an opportunity of deciding." And, finally, "From this inattention so general and so mischievous, let it be every man's study to exempt himself."¹⁰

In these characteristic Johnsonian examples, the inversion is more regular, controlled, balanced and ultimately more emphatic than the fading single-sentence inversion quoted from Garden of Cyrus. But Browne's use of inversion in Urn-Burial and Religio Medici quoted above do not fade. They are brief enough to be emphatic and to suspend meaning without attenuating it. Also, those inverted forms gain added urgency and power from being grouped together. The litany of accumulated inverted forms signals a stylized rhetorical pattern which Browne exploits frequently throughout his works.

There are dangers in a style which employs a high degree of parallel structures or a habitual antithetical manner. And there are merits. Although Browne usually escaped most of the dangers of antithesis, he also failed to capitalize on all of the advantages of the form. A writer like Johnson whose antitheses are more consistently intricate and sustained, produces work

generally characterized by tight logic, coherence, regularity and emphatic articulation. Such are not the usual merits of Browne's prose. On the other hand, neither does Browne have the faults of abruptness, fragmentation, and a general lack of discursive continuity. A qualification, however, must be made here. In the Christian Morals Browne's writing consistently achieves few of the virtues and almost all of the vices of a rigidly insistent use of parallel and antithesis. In his other major works, especially Religio Medici and Urn-Burial, parallelism and antithesis are employed skillfully and variously.

IV

In moving on to a discussion of the non-parallel, non-antithetical aspects of Browne's syntax, a convenient starting point is the common characterization of his prose as asymmetrical. It has been described as proceeding by annexation and parenthesis and by association rather than according to an outlined plan. Consequently the prose has a tendency toward lengthy sentences and a sinuous and ramifying pursuit of clauses.¹¹ Also, Browne's prose, this line of thought goes, represents not a finished thought, but the mind thinking; it represents not a completed action but a process.¹²

Although the thrust of this chapter is to suggest the ways in which this description of Browne's writing is inadequate, it nevertheless does express an important idea concerning Browne's writing, namely, that it relies less on subordinating than co-ordinating conjunctive forms. I think this is generally true, and that it applies to every one of Browne's works regardless of subject, genre or temper. And, in addition, it is these co-ordinating elements that create both the fullness of the prose, its copiousness, and its ongoing quality, its continuity. But two further points should be made. One is that Browne uses coordination most heavily and consistently in recording facts. Thus the early chapters of Urn-Burial and Garden of Cyrus are laced with co-ordinate conjunctions which permit him to easily record large quantities of natural and historical data. The second point is that the co-ordinate syntax of Religio Medici and the Letter on one hand, and that of the early chapters of Urn-Burial and Garden of Cyrus on the other, differ strikingly. In Religio Medici and the Letter, the co-ordinators function less as a merely pedestrian allowance for accumulation of facts than as a bridge for explaining an idea or for extending it in unpredictable directions. Thus, they serve for more than a simple addition of one idea to another. Browne often exploits

co-ordinate forms as tenuous links between disparate subjects; he sometimes makes unusual connections. The co-ordinate conjunctions provide him with a micro-grammatical element which allows him to yoke together widely divergent ideas, attitudes and feelings, as it permits him to extend his ideas at length since co-ordination supplies a form conducive to both lengthy and meditative discourse.

V

Assymmetrical syntax appears in Browne's writing in one of three general forms: as winding syntax, leaping or "hopping" syntax, and suspended syntax (not the inverted variety). Each of these three forms is suited to a meditative and speculative frame of mind, and as might be expected, each is found most consistently in the Religio and the Letter. My first example is the opening sentence from the Letter.

Give me leave to wonder that News of this nature should have such heavy Wings, that you should hear so little concerning your dearest Friend, and that I must make that unwilling Repetition to tell you

Ad portam regidos calces extendit

that he is Dead and Buried, and by this time no Puny among the might Nations of the Dead; for tho he left this World not very many days past, yet every hour you know largely addeth unto that dark Society; and considering the incessant Mortality

of Mankind, you cannot conceive there dieth in
the whole Earth so few as a thousand an hour.
(LE; Works I, 101).

Beginning with a modified imperative, the sentence expands outward with a series of clauses (. . . that you should have . . . that I must make . . . that he is Dead). It is only in the third clause that the fact of his death is announced. The winding nature of the sentences softens the impact of the hard fact. In addition, the Latin quotation also muffles the effect of the news, as it both elevates the language and distances the reader from this event. But the sentence does not conclude with the announcement of the man's death. In fact, almost before the idea can be fully accepted, the syntax spins off to introduce a number of new ideas, each of which functions as a consolation. The syntax thus winds its way around the information instead of addressing the fact of death directly. And then, once the fact has been acknowledged, the syntax immediately changes course, retreating into a traditional form of consolation.

Winding syntax, of course, has other functions and follows different patterns, particularly in Religio Medici where it is frequently used in the more self-revelatory passages. Consider the following example:

I could never divide my selfe from any man upon the difference of an opinion, or be angry with his judgement for not agreeing with me in that, from which perhaps within a few days I should dissent my selfe: I have no Genius to disputes in Religion, and have often thought wisdom to decline them, especially upon a disadvantage, or when the cause of truth might suffer in the weakenesse of my patronage: where we desire to be informed, 'tis good to contest with men above ourselves; but to confirme and establish our opinions, 'tis best to argue with judgments below our own, that the frequent spoyles and victories over their reasons may settle in our selves an esteeme, and confirmed opinion of our owne. . . . A man may be in as just possession of Truth as of a City, and yet bee forced to surrender; tis therefore farre better to enjoy her with peace, then to hazzard her on a battell: If therefore there rise any doubts in my way, I doe forget them, or at least defer them, till my better settled judgement, and more manly reason be able to resolve them . . . In Philosophy where truth seemes double-faced, there is no man more paradoxicall than my self; but in Divinity I love to keepe the road, and though not in an implicite, yet an humble faith, follow the great wheele of the Church, by which I move, not reserving any proper poles or motion from the epicycle of my owne braine; by this meanes I leave no gap for Heresies, Schismes, or Errors, of which, at present, I hope I shall not injure Truth to say, I have no taint or tincture; I must confesse my greener studies have been polluted with two or three, not any begotten in the latter Centuries, but old and obsolete, such as could never have been revived, but by such extravagant and irregular heads as mine; for indeed Heresies perish not with their Authors, but like the River Arethusa, though they lose their currents in one place they rise up againe in another: one generall Councell is not able to extirpate one single Heresie, it may be canceled for the present, but revolution of time and the like aspects of Heaven, will restore it, when it will flourish till it be condemned againe, for as though there were Metempsychosis, and the soule of one man passed into another, opinions doe finde after certaine revolutions, men and mindes like those that first begat them. To see our

selves againe wee neede not looke for Platoes
 yeare, every man is not only himselfe; there have
 beene many Diogenes, and as many Tymons, though
 but few of that name; men are lived over againe;
 the world is now as it was in ages past; there
 was none then, but there hath been some one since
 that parallels him, and is, as it were, his re-
 vived selfe.

(RM I, 6; Works I, 15-16)

Beginning with a justification for his tolerance, Browne jumps to a statement about the value of argument with men more and less intelligent than ourselves. He then abruptly shifts to a discussion of religious doubts characterizing himself as one who holds to orthodox theological teaching while allowing his philosophical proclivities to remain paradoxically unsettled. From here, he slides over to the subject of heresy. (He is careful to note that his heresies were harmless follies of his youth.) With his personal remark about heresy he associates a general idea which he proceeds to develop with two extended analogies, which he further develops with declarative general statements that have been conditioned by his analogies and which function to conclude his argument. The passage as a whole begins in autobiographical statement and ends with philosophical speculation, in a structural mode that winds further and further from where it began.

Whatever the purpose or context, winding syntax eschews elaborate balance and antithesis, maintaining

in its place an ongoingness which continually allows for the exploration of disparate ideas, for the projection of various facets of the writer's self, and for frequent changes in the direction of highly speculative thought. The central idea on passages of this kind becomes lost either in a wealth of supporting ideas or in a series of other co-ordinated, organized notions which gain equal prominence with the beginning idea, so that one idea gives way to another, and then another.

Preserving less continuity than winding syntax, leaping or "hopping"¹³ syntax is characterized both by asymmetry and by an absence of syntactic ligatures. It provides one variation of the curt style as described by Morris Croll.¹⁴ Here is one of many examples from

Religio Medici:

The heart of man is the place the devyl dwells in; I feele sometimes a hell within me selfe, Lucifer keeps his court in my brest; Legion is revived in me. There are as many hells as Anaxagoras conceited world; there was more than one hell in Magdalen, when there were seven devils;
(RM I, 51; Works I, 62)

Here, the method of development is expansion without qualification. Instead of explanation through elaborate and careful discrimination, which he provides in his "loose" style, Browne develops this passage by repetition and accumulation. But it is repetition with a difference. Each rephrasing of the initial idea

either adds specificity or lends it authoritative support. The remark, "I feele sometimes a hell within my selfe," provides autobiographical support, the authority of personal experience. The references to Anaxagoras and Magdalen furnish Browne's idea with philosophical and Biblical groundings respectively. Furthermore, the lack of syntactic ligature, the use of repetition with variation (there are . . . there was . . . there were . . .), and the extreme briefness of the period's members, contribute to the intensity of the feeling expressed.¹⁵

Let us take a second example of hopping syntax, from the end of Religio Medici I,6, in which curtness and fragmentation contrast nicely with the longer more leisurely and discursive sentences which immediately precede it.

To see our selves againe we neede not looke for Platoes yeare, every man is not onely himselfe; there have been many Diogenes, and as many Tymons, though but few of that name; men are lived over againe; the world is now as it was in ages past; there was none then, but there hath been one since that parallels him, and is, as it were, his revived self.
(Works I, 16).

This exploded period¹⁶ in the curt style is composed of six members which function as an explanation of the idea as initially stated: "To see ourselves againe we neede not looke for Platoes yeare." Clarification of this vague statement ensues with the remark that "every

man is not onely himself." But this too is mysterious and needs clarification which Browne provides with varied restatement of the idea, with specific allusive reference to Diogenes and Tymon, and especially with his final comment about the "revived self."

Both of these examples of the curt style's hopping syntax imply a view of truth, or more precisely of a way of getting at the truth, that is based on accretion and accumulation. The carefully phrased units and fragments that Browne binds together, collectively express and embody the truth more closely than any one of them could do individually. Allusion is important in this respect, since it provides a historical or mythological analogue which validates Browne's claim, generalizing and universalizing it.

The third and perhaps most important form of asymmetrical syntax in Browne's work is what I will call "suspended syntax." It is the meaning of the sentence, of course, that is suspended. In his book on the syntax of English poetry, Donald Davie discusses a form of suspended syntax in which the propositional sense is delayed, not because the meaning has to be qualified, but because the writer wants to achieve the kind of tension that music achieves through dissonance.¹⁷ Browne's suspensions are only occasionally of this kind. Although any

syntactic suspension of meaning creates a sense of tension and a consequent dissonance which is resolved with the full expression of meaning, Browne sometimes delays full meaning precisely because he has qualifications of that meaning to make. The full sense of a particular idea is incomplete until the end of the period because it proceeds by the expansions of clarification, explanation and qualification, all of which serve to modify, sometimes even to redirect the thrust of a statement's meaning. Consider the opening sentence of Religio Medici:

For my religion, though there be severall circumstances that might perswade the world I have none at all, as the generall scandall of my profession, the natural course of my studies, the indifferency of my behavior, and discourse in matters of Religion, neither violently defending the one, nor with the common ardour of contention opposing another; yet in despite hereof I dare, wihtout usurpation, assume the honourable stile of a Christian: not that I meerely owe this title to the Font, my education, or Clime wherein I was borne, as being bred up either to confirme those principles my Parents instilled into my unwary understanding; or by a generall consent proceed in the Religion of my Countrey: But [that] having in my riper yeares, and confirmed judgement, seene and examined all, I finde my selfe obliged by the principles of Grace, and the law of mine owne reason to embrace no other name but this; neither doth herein my zeale so farre make me forget the generall charitie I owe into humanity, as rather to hate than pity Turkes, Infidels, and what is worse) the Jewes, rather contenting my selfe to enjoy that happy stile, then maligning those who refuse so glorious a title.

(RM I, 1; Works I, 5)

The Religio, and this opening sentence, begin, as Leonard Nathanson has noted, "in medias res."¹⁸ The first words suggest that something else has been the subject and now there will be a new topic considered. The effect is of a rapid shift to a new series of ideas. The syntax of the first part of the sentence is elaborate and intricate, including a series of subordinations and parallel examples (as the general scandall . . . the natural course . . . studies . . . The indifferency . . . behavior) which are commented upon in a somewhat parenthetical remark (neither . . . defending one, nor . . . opposing another). These negatives and syntactic elaborations however, lead up to a more simple and direct positive assertion: "I dare, without usurpation, assume the honorable stile of a Christian." And here it would seem, things should end. The "dissonance" of the early members has been resolved. An assertion has been made. But Browne is not finished. He follows his statement with a clarification as if the reader might make an incorrect assumption from the statement as it stands. Thus he elaborates: "not that I merely owe this title to the Font . . . or the Clime." He then proceeds to explain more fully each of these new ideas, of Climate and the Font as influences on his religious outlook and the development. Both parental and

environmental influence are mentioned only to be denied as the sole or even most significant determiner of his religious position. Then the true reason is introduced with the extended "But," and the sense has once again been completed. But, not entirely, since there is a further qualifying elaboration, in which Browne again is at pains not to be misunderstood ("neither doth herein my zeale so farre make me forget the general charitie I owe unto humanity . . ."). In fact his explanation of why he is a Christian is considerably more important to him than the fact that he is a Christian. Browne's explanation surrounds his assertion of Christian identity, and is most fully developed after that statement. The explanation itself is not a neatly compartmentalized one in which each aspect of religious influence is given separate and complete treatment, as they might be in Bacon or Dryden. Rather, the presumed or apparent religious influences are bunched together to be more readily distinguished from the real reason which itself is a product of both grace and reason, of both God and of Browne himself.

The kind of elaborate and explanatory qualification illustrated both in this passage and in others cited above, reveals Browne's concern for expressing his state of mind as precisely as possible, and in addition, a

clear sense of the inadequacy of simple statement. The tendency to qualify and continue an explanation once an assertion is made, depends fundamentally on a theory which regards reality as complex, multiple, even ambiguous rather than objective, simple and singular. The fullness and subtlety of truth are approximated in the full and detailed explanation. Rather than trying to find the exact word, the mot juste or phrase juste, Browne tries to surround the idea with words, to use words and phrases that express similar but not synonymous ideas or aspects of ideas, in order to repeat, to allude, to accumulate facts to refine and multiply reasons so that in the accreted mass of language, the truth of reality is reflected.

The kind of suspension I have been describing (which occurs incidentally most frequently in personal and speculative passages, especially in the Religio and the Letter), is unlike the suspension of a Latinate syntactic period in which the propositional sense is delayed due to the postponement of the verb. Browne's suspensions are almost always delays of his full propositional meaning because that meaning is complex, subtle and contains shades and nuances of meaning that demand explanatory qualification.

VI

One final aspect of Browne's syntax remains: his use of the genitive construction. In his book on Johnson's prose style, W. K. Wimsatt has noted and explained Johnson's habitual use of genitives. They are found in his work as subjective, objective, qualitative and appositional genitives.¹⁹ For Browne, genitives are less a significant and expressive characteristic of style than rhetorical habit. Yet they do have two effects; one involves rhythm, the other abstraction.

Browne's rhythmic cadences are often forms of the genitive. Phrases like "raptures of futurity," "merit of perpetuity," "the iniquity of oblivion," and "angles of contingency," are euphonious. Their repetition of both vowel and consonant sounds coupled with their rhythmic pulse serve to elevate the discourse, identifying it as the high style suitable for the tone and attitude Browne found for the subject of death.

Sometimes the rhythm of such genitive phrases (especially in Urn-Burial, V) creates, by their simple repetition of cadence, an incantatory effect. The writing at such points "persuades" by its rhythm rather than by its logic; its phrases are beautiful, elegant and eloquent. And it is worth noting that such passages are composed almost entirely of simple declarative

statements which are virtually unchallengeable in content. That is, Browne uses these cadenced rhythms in passages concerned with a serious subject in which he is making simple uncontrovertible assertions. Urn-Burial, V provides the best example.

But there are two other very different effects of the genitive. The first concerns its metaphoric uses. Brown speaks in the Religio, for example, of "the Conspiracie of Passion and Reason"; in Garden of Cyrus I, of "they eye of his ambition"; and in Christian Morals of "This Exantlation of Truth." (RM I, 29; Works I, 29; GC I, Works I, 180; CM II, Works I, 262). With this third we have, I think, a tendency toward abstraction which occurs more strongly in other less metaphorical genitive constructions in Browne's writings. In Garden of Cyrus, for instance, where he is discussing trees, rhombuses and right angles, Browne writes: "For neither in the root doth nature affect this angle, which shooting downward for the stability of the plant, doth best effect the same by Figures of Inclination; (GC IV; Works I, 214-215). A second equally abstract example occurs in the more scientific Pseudodogia Epidemica, Browne is discussing the reactions to the unmasking of error and "what cold requital others have found in their several redemptions of truth; and how their ingenious Enquiries have

been dismissed with censure, and obloquie of singularities." (PE "To the Reader"; Works II, 6). In each of these examples, an abstraction, formed with the genitive, serves to pull the reader away from the statement's clearly reasoned arguments of the statement. In both cases the genitive phrase leads into confusion through the channel of abstraction. In both, expression is impeded by the abstract genitive form.²⁰

The abstract quality of these examples is only partly attributable to their genitives forms. It is attributable also to the diction, to the words themselves, irrespective of their syntactic arrangement. But that is the subject of the following chapter.

NOTES

¹Morris Croll, "The Baroque Style in Prose," in Seventeenth Century Prose ed. Stanley E. Fish (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 28-29.

²W. K. Wimsatt, The Prose Style of Samuel Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), p. 13.

³A similar style of anaphora is used elsewhere in Religio Medici but with different effects. Many of the autobiographical passages, for example, use various forms of repetition to emphasize the first person singular. See for instance RM II, 3 and I, 42 in Works I, 74, 53.

⁴This kind of rhetorical development, in which the second part explains the first, is related to Browne's use of doublets. See Chapter Four, diction. Also, it is not uncommonly used in metaphor, especially where the metaphor is not strong or complex enough to 'live' without the added explanation. The early novels of Dickens contain many two part metaphors, the second part of which explains discursively the more imaginative first part. The metaphors of his later novels move beyond the need for explanation.

⁵In the seventeenth century the word "plot" had a number of different meanings, of which three taken from the OGD seem relevant here:

"An area of piece (of small or moderate size) of ground or of what grows or lies upon it . . ."

"The place on which a building, town, city, etc., is situated, site, situation."

"A plan or scheme for the constitution or accomplishment of anything; a purpose, device, design, scheme."

⁶Yet, the opposition is really fundamentally a duality. There is a division, a split between the world of sense and that of supersense. This invisible, supersensible world is the world of both reason and of spirit; contrasted with the sensible physical world are the intellectual and the religious experience.

⁷Stanley E. Fish, "The Bad Physician: The Case of Sir Thomas Browne," in Self-Consuming Artifacts (Berkeley: University of Cal. Press, 1973), pp. 353-373.

⁸Fish, p. 357.

⁹Joseph Summers, "Stanley Fish's Reading of Seventeenth Century Literature," Modern Language Quarterly 35 (1974), 409.

¹⁰Quoted in Wimsatt, Prose Style, pp. 68-69.

¹¹Edwin Morgan, "Strong Lines and Strong Minds: Reflections on the Prose of Browne and Johnson," The Cambridge Journal 4 (151), 484.

¹²Croll, "Baroque Style," p. 29.

¹³I borrow the term from George Williamson's chapter "Lipsius, His Hopping Style," in his The Senecan Amble (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).

¹⁴Croll, pp. 31-33.

¹⁵Stanley Fish argues that Browne is not serious here, that he is playing with the idea in a display of rhetoric for its own sake. I agree that there is verbal play here; but it has a serious edge, as the examples Browne adduces are not mere rhetoricogymnastics, but are items intended to persuade. Fish, op. cit., pp. 357-364.

¹⁶See Morris Croll's discussion of the "exploded period" in his "Baroque Style," p. 31.

¹⁷Donald Davie, Articulate Energy (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955), p. 21.

¹⁸Leonard Nathanson, The Strategy of Truth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 85.

¹⁹Wimsatt, p. 56.

²⁰In some cases such as the following in Urn-Burial IV, the genitive construction is eloquent and expressive. Speaking about the reaction to the death of a friend, Browne writes: "But their iterated clamations to excitate their dying or dead, friends, or revoke them into life again was a vanity of affection." (He sounds somewhat like Johnson here.)

CHAPTER IV

DICTION

Diction is perhaps the most easily isolatable, the most conspicuous and noteworthy element of Browne's prose style. Heavily Latinate and polysyllabic, Browne's diction is responsible, in large part, for both the remarkably successful "purple passages" of Urn-Burial and the equally distinctive and sometimes notoriously monotonous writing of Christian Morals. Yet even though Browne's diction marks his style as unmistakably Latinate, to emphasize this attribute is only of marginal value in ascertaining the distinctive nature and effects of his prose. To remark, for example, that Browne shows a fondness for words ending in "ion" is not an adequate explanation of this stylistic habit. As W. K. Wimsatt reminds us, a lexical principle is neither a stylistic nor an expressive one.¹

The analyst of style, consequently, is less concerned with categorizing and typing diction than with determining how a particular kind of diction is used and to what effect. Simple descriptive typing of vocabulary provides only a starting point for a study of diction.

Much of Browne's diction is philosophical and mathematical, so that his language tends to be both general and abstract. Although this is a wide generalization to which I do not subscribe without qualification² it nevertheless points toward a way of characterizing Browne's vocabulary choices.

A Latinate and philosophical vocabulary is a useful tool for generalization. Indeed, one would have a hard time generalizing without such language. In Religio Medici, Browne makes use of Latin-based words to explain something about happiness:

'Tis, I confesse, the common fate of men of singular gifts of mind, to be destitute of those of fortune; which doth not anyway reject the spirits of wiser judgements, who . . . being enriched with higher donatives, cast a mere carelesse eye on those vulgar parts of felicity.
(RM I, Works I, 28)

In this passage the polysyllabic Latinate nouns bear the weight of meaning. Although the subject is philosophical in a broad sense, the diction is not especially so. In this second passage, however, the vocabulary is distinctively philosophical:

God, who knowes me truly, knowes that I am nothing; for hee onely beholds me, and all the world, who lookes not on us through a derived ray, or a "trajection" of a sensible species, but beholds the substance without the helpe of accidents, and the formes of things, as wee their operations.
(RM II, 4; Works I, 77)

Here Browne couches his explanation in formal Aristotelian and scholastic terms. He enlivens the passage with a Platonic image of light, and varies it further with the scientific term "trajection." Both the diction and the subject are specifically philosophical and technical rather than general. His term "sensible species," for example, occurs in seventeenth century optics.

And even though the Latinate words do not call attention to themselves individually, when taken together, they create a philosophical emphasis.

In both of these instances, and as a general rule, the use of a heavily Latinized diction bolsters Browne's argument, lending it an air of seriousness and importance. Since in each of these passages, the subject itself is serious, the weight of the diction is warranted. Because Browne's writing consistently broaches subjects of universal import, his diction and his style cannot, I think, legitimately be described as inflated. There are instances, to be sure, where he loses control of his philosophical and mathematical diction and the result is an opacity of meaning. In the examples quoted above that is not the case. And before, illustrating the kind of excesses such a heavily Latinate diction can result in, I wish to quote a passage from Religio Medici in which Browne avoids polysyllabic Latinate terminology entirely.

Surely there are in every mans Life certaine
 rubs, doublings and wrenches which pass awhile
 under the effects of change, but at the last,
 well examined, prove the meere hand of God.
 (RM I, 17; Works I, 27)

Such sentences occur frequently enough to counterpoint his more ornate and polysyllabic style. Yet the simplicity of diction is counterbalanced by a subtlety of rhythm which enhances Browne's thought. At times, such writing can rise to heights of eloquence matched only by the finest of Browne's sustained flights of Latinate prose. There is, for example, in the following passage, an elegant simplicity of diction which both enhances and allows for the subtlety of rhythm:

Thus we are men, and we know not how; There
 is something in us, that cannot be without us,
 and will be after us, though it is strange that
 it hath no history what it was before us, nor
 can tell how it entred in us.³
 (RM I, 36; Works I, 46)

Although such writing does not reflect habitual forms of Browne's diction, it occurs at significant places in the discourse and reveals Browne's masterful control of the pace of his prose, a control of repetition and variation, of rhythm and cadence which informs his more Latinically grounded writing, and for which he is justly famous. In such eloquently simple passages, Browne has achieved what lies at the heart of H. W. Fowler's definition of rhythm: "a sentence or passage is

rhythmical if, when said aloud, it falls naturally into groups of words each well fitted by its length and intonation for its place in the whole and its relation to its neighbors."⁴ The key is the word "naturally," for in passages like these, the integrity and harmonious relations between parts seem both natural and necessary. The important words occur where they sound important; they are emphatic. And the right idea is in the right place.

II

One of the consequences of a vocabulary derived from Latin is a high degree of abstraction. Now abstract diction in itself of course, is neither stylistically good nor bad; context and use determine its degree of effectiveness. Yet among the dangers of abstraction is the creation of a vague and inflated prose. While this is a relative matter which is often hard to pin down, in passages like the following, vagueness predominates. Beginning with writing that is clear, concrete and strong, Browne describes the friend's outlook on life:

his sober contempt of the World wrought no
Democriticism or Cynicism, no laughing or snarling
at it, as well understanding there are not [real]
Felicities [enough] in this World to satisfie a
serious Mind;

But the strength and clarity of language do not last.

and therefore to soften the stream of our Lives, we are fain to take in the reputed Contentations of this World, to unite with the Crown in their Beatitudes, and to make ourselves happy by Consortion, Opinion, or Co-existement: for strictly to separate from received and customary Felicities, and to confine unto the rigor of Realities, were to contract the Consolation of our Beings unto too uncomfortable Circumscriptions.
(LF; Works I, 111).

From a sharp and lively characterization of the friend's viewpoint, Browne lapses into mechanical and vague abstraction. The turning point is the phrase "the reputed Contentations of this World." The abstract diction accumulates, until keyed by the word "for," Browne concludes with a generalization which further intensifies the vagueness.

III

Latinate diction, with its impedimenta of abstraction and generality, also informs the more scientific passages of Browne's prose. In discussing animal movement, for example, he relies on polysyllabic Latin terms and includes the corollary Saxon terms only for their explanatory value. In Pseudodoxia Epidemica, he writes:

Other Animals swim in the same manner as they go, and need no other way of motion for natation in the water, then for progression upon the land. And this is true whether they move per latera, that is, two legs of one side together, which is Tollutation or ambling; or per diametrum, lifting one foot before, and the cross foot behind, which is succussation or trotting . . .
(PE IV, 6; Works II, 287)

Noteworthy here is the purely scientific quality of the Latinate words. They provide an alternate and more technically precise way of saying what their Saxon counterparts mean. The doublings of Latin and Saxon terms endow the passage with a fullness it would not otherwise possess. Moreover, the two kinds of diction generally indicate Browne's desire to express two sides of his personality, the scientific and the personal. Finally, it is possible that in passages of extravagant Latinity, Browne is showing off his ability to use language as he is showing off his learning.

While the inclusion of a scientific Latinate vocabulary is not surprising in a scientific work like the Pseudodoxia, Browne's Latin terminology savors of science and mathematics even in his non-scientific writings. Consider the following example from the Religio:

for in this materiall world, there are bodies that persist invincible in the powerfulllest flames, and though by the action of fire they fall into ignition and liquation, yet will they never suffer a destruction.

(RM I, 50; Works I, 61)

Here, the "ion" Latinate scientific words do more than merely elevate the prose. Rather, they mark precise states of chemical change which Browne distinguishes from "destruction." And although the terms marking the distinction between "ignition" and "liquation" are not

concrete, they are nevertheless specific and scientifically accurate. They raise the prose to the level of scientific generalization.

But neither scientific diction nor philosophic terminology with a scientific cast prevail in Browne's writing. Of more frequent and more significant is Browne's mathematical language, especially the vocabulary of geometry. The following pair of examples, taken not surprisingly from the Garden of Cyrus, reveal a strong concern for a precision of mathematical diction, an exactness which tends paradoxically to multiply geometrical terms to the point of confusion. Speaking of the planting patterns of trees, Browne writes:

But besides these rurall commodities, it cannot be meanly delectable in the variety of Figures, which these orders, open and closed, do make. Whilst every inclosure makes a Rhombus the figures obliquely takes a Rhumboides, the intervals bounded with parallel lines, and each intersection built upon a square, affording two triangles or Pyramids vertically conjoyned; which in the strict Quincunciall order doe oppositely make acute and blunt Angles.

The highly specific nature of the vocabulary here is in the service of a descriptive mapping out of geometrical patterns. There is some difficulty in the passage due to the density of highly specific and mathematically technical terms. The difficulty increases as the terms continue to proliferate even though Browne goes beyond pure description as he suggests natural examples of

quincuncial order.

The cylindrical figure of Trees is virtually contained and latent in this order. A Cylinder or long round being made by the conversion or turning of a Parallelogram and most handsomely by a long Square, which makes an equal, strong, and lasting figure in Trees, agreeable unto the body and motive parts of animals, the greatest number of Plants, and almost all roots, though their stalks be angular and of many corners, which seem not to follow the figure of their Seeds.
(GC III; Works I, 198-199)

The heavy saturation of geometrical terminology renders the prose abstruse. The reader is forced to focus on them one at a time as he exacts their highly specific meanings. There is thus both a slowing down of the discourse for this accommodation of meaning, and a concomitant deadening of the philosophical overtones and psychological suggestiveness of the prose. Since the diction of such passages is laced with strongly denotative terminology, there is a corresponding lack of emotional richness and reverberation. Finally, there is a thinness of texture in the prose as the writing is limited by its scientific descriptive accuracy.

Such writing and such effects pervade the opening chapters of Garden of Cyrus. It is not until the final two chapters that Browne alters the texture of his prose, in part by sharply decreasing the use of geometrical terms as denotative markers and in part by endowing them with imagistic and metaphoric significance. Yet it is possible to read even these early chapters,

scientific and factual as they are, as reflecting the more general philosophical ideas which Browne develops later. Taken together, the two selections quoted here reveal two of the dominant impulses both of Browne's geometrical diction and of his writing in general: 1) his attempt to see the universe and its myriad forms of life as illustrations of the divine order in general, and of the quincunciall order in particular; 2) his abiding interest in analyzing the figure of the quincunx itself, breaking it down into its constituent geometrical parts, which he can then relate to other mathematical forms and other forms of life. Both are forms of metaphysical and analogizing, a habit of mind which Browne shared with metaphysical poets like Donne and Herbert and which subsequently entered into the minds of American Transcendentalist writers like Emerson and Thoreau.

Persistent and extended use of geometrical diction, while establishing a uniquely scientific tone for the Garden of Cyrus, is also responsible for some of its most drugelike and opaque prose. Browne, however, occasionally redeems these mathematics-logged passages with illustration and imagery. Take, for example, the following passage in which he describes the shape of the decussated plot:

Wherein the decusses is made within a longi-laterall square, with opposite angles, acute and obtuse at the intersection, and so upon progression making a Rhombus or Lozenge figuration; Answerable whereunto we observe the decussated characters in many consulary Coynes, and even in those of Constantine and his Sons, which pretend their pattern in the Sky; the crucigerous Ensigne carried this figure, not transversely or rectangularly intersected, but in a decussation, after the form of an Andrian or Burgundian cross, which answereth this description.
(GC I; Works I, 181-182)

Here the mathematically abstract diction is rendered concrete by the use of illustration.⁵ And even though there is a distinct split between the abstract language and the concrete details of the passage, there is enough pull in the direction of the specific and the actual to make the writing comprehensible. Not so with other sections of Garden of Cyrus. In a passage which makes some attempt to anchor the abstraction of both scientific and mathematical diction in concrete examples, Browne explains how physicians employ the decussation:

Physicians are not without the use of this decussation in several operations, in ligatures and union of dissolved continuities. Mechanicks make use here of in forcipall Organs, and Instruments of Incision, whereas who can but magnifie the power of decussation, inservient to contrary ends, solution and consolidation, union and divisions, illustrable from Aristotle in the old Nucifrugium or Nutcracker, and the Instruments of Evulsion, compression or incision; which consisting of Vectes or armes, converted towards each other, the innitency and stresse being made upon the hypomochlion or fulciment in the decussation, the greater compression is made by the union of two impulsors.
(GC II; Works I, 189)

This is scientific diction in the raw. It uses an accumulation of scientific terminology in an irremediably abstract manner. Although Aristotle's nutcracker is specific, it is hardly concrete. And it simply does not compensate for the abstract diction surrounding it. Wedged between two precise but hardly comprehensible rocks of technical explanation, the nutcracker understandably breaks. The concrete is overcome by the abstract.

There is another way in which particular and specific terms and examples fail to save abstract ones from vagueness. In a type of unintegrated and unassimilated abstract diction, Browne mixes scientific explanation with concrete particular examples, which occur not as illustrations, but as addenda of fact that inform rather than explain. The following passage describing the maturation of various kinds of seeds, provides an example.

. . . in the maturative progresse of Seeds, wherein at first may be discerned a flatuous distension of the husk, afterwards a thin liquor, which longer time digesteth into a pulp of Kernell observable in Almonds and large Nuts. And some way answered in the progressionall perfection of animal semination, in its spermaticall maturation, from crude pubescency unto perfection. And even that seeds themselves in their rudementall discoveries appear in foliaceous suriles or sprouts within their coverings, in a diaphonous gellie, before deeper incrassation, is also visibly verified in Cherries, Acorns, Plums.
(GC III; Works I, 198)

The specific fruits and nuts of Browne's paragraph, while furnishing examples of where this process occurs, nevertheless do not actually help to specify and clarify the process itself. That process instead remains couched in a generally unmodified abstract and scientific vocabulary. A wedge is driven between abstract and concrete, splitting off explanation from example.

In an interesting variation of mixtures⁶ of types of diction Browne blends three types of words: scientific, mathematical and Biblical:

This Reticulate or Network was also considerable in the inward parts of man, not only from the first subtegmen or way of his formation, but in the netty fibers of the veins and vessels of life; wherein according to common Anatomy the right and transverse fibers are decussated by the oblique fibers; and so must frame a Reticulate and Quincunciall Figure by their Obliquations, Emphatically extending that Elegant expression of Scripture: Thou hast curiously embroydered me, thou hast wrought me up after the finest way of texture and as it were a Needle.⁸
(GC III; Works I, 204)

The appended Biblical quotation works to validate Browne's scientific observation. The curiously embroidered quincunciall pattern, described in precise yet abstractly geometrical terminology, receives a sanctification from the Biblical phraseology. There is a momentary shift away from a detached scientific observation to an emphatic religious verbal grounding. The Biblical diction anchors Browne's abstract language in the concrete as it points

to the providential hand responsible for the intricate and ubiquitous quincunciall design. Moreover, the Biblical reference evidences Browne's conviction that the hand of God guides the hand of man, as it highlights his belief in the universal order ordained by the Creator of the mystical mathematics of Heaven.

IV

Perhaps the most notable and certainly the most common form of mixed diction in Browne's writing is his combination of Latin and Saxon derived words. Although Browne was fond of coupling nouns in this fashion, his verbs, adjectives and adverbs also tend to be predominantly Latinate. But it is the noun pairs which, at this point, I wish to discuss, especially his stylization of the pairs or "doublets" as they are sometimes called.

Frank Huntley, in his excellent critical biography of Browne, has suggested that Browne's doublets vary so much in function that they are simply too numerous to categorize.⁷ He notes, for example, that some pairs spatialize a concept and then give it psychological qualification, that some differ in connotation but are similar in denotation, that others divide intellectual meaning while producing a single emotional effect,⁸ Without undervaluing Professor Huntley's observations,

I wish to note a few different things about Browne's doublets. The first is that they have four basic functions: concrete particularization, distinction, emphasis, and rhythmic or sound effects. Second, Browne's fondness for using word pairs, while sometimes merely a familiar rhetorical habit, is more often an important strategy of meaning. Third, the word pairs are usually not tautologous, there being some subtle distinction between the members.⁹

Sometimes, of course, these functions overlap; sometimes also it is not clear how strictly Browne wishes to distinguish terms that differ only slightly in meaning. In the Religio, for instance, when Browne mentions "allurements and baits of superstition" (I,3; Works I, 13), he does not appear to be deliberately distinguishing the terms.¹⁰ In this and similar instances, the Saxon word works to concretize the more abstract "allurements." Coming after the more general term, it images and specifies it; but it also defines it, limiting its meaning, and thus explains the sense in which the more general word is to be taken.

It is a slightly different matter with another type of doublet in which the second term, which is Latinate like its counterpart, specifies and limits the meaning of the first without making it any more concrete.

Here is one example: "such extravagant and irregular heads as Mine." (RM I, 6; Works I, 15). In this type of doublet, the second member defines the first. When the two words mean almost the same thing (and have no striking connotative differences) as in the first example, the result is merely emphatic; when there is a discrepancy of meaning between the two terms, the second term often provides a clarification, qualification or definition of the first.¹¹ Thus, the second forms a micro-context in which the first must be understood, as the first term's reverberative significances are reined in by the second. Simple emphasis is the result of some of Browne's more famous doublets such as the one describing angels as "the Magisterall and masterpieces of creation." (RM I, 34; Works I, 44). In this example, the emphasis is expressed in a Saxon translation of the Latin-based "Magisteriall." Sometimes one can easily recognize this combination of Latin and Saxon elements, especially when one is a translation of the other. Related to this kind of doubling is a coupling of word and phrase in which the similar meanings of the doublet parts result in varied restatement. There are, for example, both "wingy mysteries in Divinity," and Aery subtilities in Religion." There is "the common Road and Appian way of knowledge by Information." And there

are the "orchestra and noblest seats of Heaven." (RM I, 9; LF; UB, IV; Works I, 18, 102, 163). In examples like these, the difference of meaning between the two parts of the doublet is minimal, and thus stylistically insignificant. There is no meaningful advance or change of idea or of feeling from the first part of the doublet to the last. These terms thus are synonymous in the context in which Browne has placed them. Their effect is one of underscoring an idea through repetition.

To show how common this habit was in Browne's writing, I quote part of one sentence from the Religio which contains three doublets:

I leave no gap for Heresies, Schisms, or Errors, of which, at present, I hope I shall not injure Truth to say, I have no taint or tincture; I must confesse my greener studies have been polluted with two or three, not any begotten in the latter Centuries, but old and obsolete, such as never have been revived, but by extravagant and irregular heads as mine.

(RM I, 6; Works I, 15)

The final doublet I have already commented on.¹² "Old and obsolete" marks an emphasis with a clarification in the second term. "Taint or tincture" I take to be simple emphasis with the sound effects predominating. Yet even in both of these relatively simple examples, there is more of a difference than meets the eye (or ear). "Obsolete," for example, contains as part of its meaning, the idea of being old, but it also has an additional

element of meaning. Thus, in the doublet, "old and obsolete" there is no synonymity because the second term adds something to the meaning of the first. Even in the phrase "taint or tincture" there is a difference of connotation between the two words, a difference which is partly exploited and echoed by Browne when he uses the word "polluted" to describe his early heretical beliefs.

A recent critical view, proposed by Edmund Whallon, argues that Browne's penchant for word and phrase pairings is a habit ultimately derivable from Hebraic Biblical style which he then calls "Hebraic Synonymy." Whallon contends that Browne's use of this stylistic device possesses no more than rhythmic value. He believes that doublet phrases similar in meaning contribute no more to the effect of Browne's prose than does the semantic rhythm of the Hebraic idiom.¹³ I admit that this doubling does not create the most important and moving effects of Browne's prose, but it does have an observable effect on meaning, as I have illustrated with my examples above. Every change of words, however slight, is a change of meaning, however slight. And in numerous instances, the change of meaning is less slight than Mr. Whallon's suggests. Let me illustrate with one of Whallon's examples. He quotes Browne: "But who knows the fate of his bones, or how

often he is to be buried? Who hath the oracle of his ashes, or whither they are to be scattered?" He comments: "The two cola of this period are a perfect specimen of synonymy; in addition, the second comma of each colon is a partially synonymous restatement of the first."¹⁴

Yes, of course, there is a stylized syntax here. Browne balances the various phrases of his clauses to create a rhythmically effective statement. But it seems to me that the significant thing about this writing is not that Browne is saying the same thing twice (or two things twice), but that in each of the two parts of his sentence, the second phrase (initiated by "or") is a specification, an explanation, a "definition," of the first.¹⁵ The second part of the doublet phrase thus furnishes a subtle and slight but nonetheless important alteration and extension of meaning. It provides a context for the first phrase which further limits and sharpens its meaning. This is the usual effect of Browne's doublets.

A stronger criticism than "synonymy" however, has been levelled against Browne's diction by Samuel Johnson. In his "Life of Sir Thomas Browne" Johnson writes:

[He] poured in a multitude of exotick words, many indeed, useful and significant, which, if rejected, must be supplied by circumlocution, such as commensality for the state of many at the same table, but many superfluous as a paralogical for an unreasonable doubt; and some so obscure, that they conceal his meaning rather than explain it,

as arthritical analogies for parts that serve some animals in place of joints.¹⁶

Johnson understood the dangers of philosophic and general diction because he occasionally succumbed to their temptations himself. Seizing upon the first observation in this series, W. K. Wimsatt elaborates on Johnson's criticism by noting that the tendency of Browne's diction is constantly "toward the particular, the recondite, the freakish, the unheard-of. He deals in the bric-a-brac of philosophic terminology." Wimsatt continues with severity:

And even his terms of general philosophy are so mixed with Pharaoh and mummy or the powder of the golden calf, or spotted with scorpion and salamander, that the whole texture of his writing suggests strange places and bizarre experiences. He deserves the name "exotick" which Johnson applies to him.¹⁷

This criticism though valid, applies to the worst of Browne's writing. Both Johnson and Wimsatt have seized on Browne's fondness for the recondite, out-of-the-way, antiquarian example and his penchant for mystical and metaphysical speculation, which he often presents in a casual even playful manner. Such a tendency contributes in part to Browne's exoticism. And while it is a habit of style that interferes, as I have suggested above, with the rhetorical and structural unity of Browne's works, at the same time, it helps mark the writing as

unmistakably his. Furthermore, when Browne integrates the recondite with the more familiar, when he fuses fact, observation, and speculation in image and metaphor, and tempers it with meaningful allusion, his writing can be powerful indeed.

But whatever the criticism of Browne's diction, it is the one element of his style that remains consistent throughout the variety of his works. The opening section of the Pseudodoxia Epidemica, "To the Reader," is as consistently Latinate and general in diction as stretches of religio-philosophical speculation of the Religio Medici or the sustained rhetorical flights of Urn-Burial's final chapter. Within individual works that vary widely in tone and style, like Garden of Cyrus and Urn-Burial, doublets occur from the first chapter through the last, permeating an unremittingly maintained Latinate vocabulary. Finally, whether he writes in the "high," the "low," or the "middle" style, and whatever the demands of his chosen genre, Browne uses words of Latin extraction habitually. They give his style less a special flavor than a recognizable pattern. What distinguishes his writing from the work of others with similar tendencies of diction, is the way in which he uses his chosen vocabulary to counterpoint exotic examples, to modify and generalize particular illustrations, to create a

distinctive stance and tone, and overall, to create a tension between word and thing, image and idea, that gives edge to his writing and makes it a powerful emotion-stimulating instrument.

NOTES

¹W. K. Wimsatt, The Prose Style of Samuel Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), p. 52.

²My qualifications are two: 1) In Religio Medici and The Letter to a Friend, Browne alternates between the general and the specific; 2) The kind of philosophical diction of the Religio and Letter differ from that of Urn-Burial, Garden of Cyrus and the Pseudodoxia. The language of the Religio and the Letter, like that of Christian Morals, is philosophical. This can be said only of the concluding chapters of Urn-Burial and Garden of Cyrus, whose early chapters (I-III) use philosophical diction of a scientific and mathematical cast, which at many points resembles the diction of the Pseudodoxia.

Word choice, of course, is related to subject, which to some degree, explains my grouping of Browne's works. But it is not the only or perhaps even the most significant factor determining choices of diction. There is, for example, a good deal of mathematical diction in the Religio and Letter which are distinctly not mathematical or scientific in subject.

³See also the passage at the end of Garden of Cyrus, IV, which I quoted above in my discussion of syntax.

⁴Wimsatt, Prose Style, p. 56.

⁵Although this is not one of the best examples, it does reveal Browne's ability to anchor various kinds of abstractions in concrete particulars. He accomplishes this in other ways besides using examples, but these will be discussed in a later chapter which will consider, among other things, the factuality of Browne's prose.

⁶In addition to these examples of mixed diction there are a number of passages in the Religio in which Browne combines philosophical and colloquial diction.

⁷Frank L. Huntley, Sir Thomas Browne: A Biographical and Critical Study (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), pp. 120-121.

⁸Ibid., p. 121.

⁹Brian Vickers says substantially the same thing of Bacon's fondness for word pairs, p. 120.

¹⁰This is perhaps an example to which one can apply Huntley's suggested description similar denotation with varied connotation.

¹¹Another example is the doublet "revolution and vicissitude" in the passage "because the glory of one's state depends upon the ruins of another, there is a revolution and vicissitude of their greatness." Works I, 27. In this instance, "vicissitude" specifies the way "revolution" is to be understood. Cf. "alternation and vicissitude." in Works II, 158.

¹²I might add here, however, that Browne often uses a word like "extravagant" in its original Latin sense. Some other examples will be discussed in Chapter 6, "Wit."

¹³William Whallon, "Hebraic Synonymy in Sir Thomas Browne," ELH (28), 1961, 338.

¹⁴Whallon, p. 341.

¹⁵Noteworthy also is the fact that both phrases, "the fate of his bones," and "the Oracle of his ashes," reveal Browne's fondness for the genitive construction.

¹⁶Quoted in Wimsatt, Prose Style, p. 118.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 119.

CHAPTER V

IMAGERY

Imagery can provide one entrance into a writer's imaginative and stylistic world. It can be used as a gauge for both the tone and direction of a given work as it also furnishes one specific element of its style. And, of course, through the interpretative reading of imagery, a critic may discover and then elucidate general philosophical views made concrete and vivid by means of that imagery.

It is true that the study of imagery has in the past led to unsupported conclusions and extravagant generalizations about the life of an author (vide Caroline Spurgeon's study of Shakespeare's imagery),¹ but these dangers can be avoided if the student of imagery confines himself to what can be known and conducts his analysis with the utmost rigor. He must, first of all, distinguish between the uses of imagery in fictive works and its use in non-fictive writing. The temptation to form fallacious biographical hypotheses on the basis of imagery is more easily succumbed to by the reader of fictive literature than by one reading non-fictive

literary works.² The imagery of Volpone and what it reveals about the play and its characters applies to the world of that play only. Similarly, Volpone's speeches and comments reflect the views of a created dramatic character, a fiction; his views whether expressed through imagery or not, do not necessarily represent those of Ben Jonson.³

Although some of Thomas Browne's works can be classified as literature, they are different from works of imagination involving plot and character, drama and fiction.⁴ Thus, in reading Browne's works, a reader can more readily assume that imagery expresses an aspect of the writer's own views.

Another important restriction guiding studies in imagery requires that it not be analyzed in a vacuum; it should be circumscribed by and conjoined with analysis of diction, syntax, tone, structure and mood. When bounded by such stylistic considerations, and when coupled with a sense of the limits of imagery's significance, imagistic analysis can be useful and revealing. On the level of style, imagery can provide some indication of how close a writer is to the rhetorical tradition of his time. It can also help sort out the ways in which he is different in his treatment of traditional images. More generally, a study of imagery may help to specify and

clarify both the central concerns of a writer and his attitudes toward those concerns.

But there are further caveats. A basic problem in any discussion of imagery is the question of exactly what is being discussed. One must define just how the term is being used. Without getting into an unwarranted lengthy theoretical discussion, I will briefly note, as a prelude to considering Browne's imagery, how the term can be used and how I use it with respect to Browne's writings.

II

Imagery, as Wellek and Warren note, is a topic which belongs both to psychology and to literature.⁵ They state that "in psychology, an image means a mental reproduction, a memory, of a past sensation or perceptual experience."⁶ Such images are not restricted to the visual; they may be derived from any of the senses. But imagery can mean something other than the expression of sense experiences channelled through sight, smell, touch, etc. In only one sense is an image the record of a particular sensation. In another sense, a sense in which it is used by Banks,⁷ Rugoff,⁸ and Fogle,⁹ in their studies of the imagery of Milton, Donne and Keats and Shelley respectively, an image is essentially, an analogy,

a comparison.

Emphasizing the importance of the analogical aspect of imagery, Wellek and Warren, in their influential Theory of Literature, suggest that analogy and comparison are at the heart of the act of literary creation.¹⁰ Quoting various pronouncements on literature, they conclude that all of them stress the union of different and sometimes disparate ideas rather than the sensuous embodiment of an experience. Even when an image represents a sensation or a perception, it also stands, they note, for something else: "It also 'stands for,' refers to, something invisible, something 'inner.' It can be presentation and representation at once . . . The image may exist as 'description' or as . . . metaphor."¹¹

In light of this notion of imagery as comparison, my discussion of Browne's imagery will often center around his ways of talking about one thing (subject) in terms of another (analogue).¹² And although some of my examples contain sensuous imagery, my focus will be on how Browne uses analogy both implicitly and explicitly. Sometimes, of course, it is difficult to determine whether one is looking at an image, a metaphor or a symbol,¹³ And for practical purposes in reading Browne, it is not necessary to decide. Whether one calls the "great amphibium" an image or a symbol, or something else, hardly matters.

What counts far more, is what Browne says by using such a comparison, and how much is gained in Browne's metaphorical expression of an idea similar to the idea as it is expressed without analogy by Ficino.¹⁴ Thus, I will use the terms "image" and "imagery" in a broad sense to include simile and metaphor, analogy and symbol. Finally, I will discuss kinds of images ("traditional," "metaphysical,") and their specific areas of reference, as well as how such images function in Browne's work.

III

Most of Browne's imagery is traditional in the sense that it relies on previously recognized combinations of image and idea. He inherited many of his images from Platonism and from Hermeticism¹⁵ as well as from the Christian tradition. Images of harmony and order, of light and darkness, of sleeping and waking, all of which are common to the Renaissance, pervade Browne's writings, revealing his attitude toward the world, toward man's place in it and toward his relation to its creator. The most conspicuous uses of Platonic and Hermetic images occur in Religio Medici, Browne's mystical and idealistic (in both senses of the word) apologia for his particular style of Anglicanism.

Let us begin with Plato. Explaining his own belief in immortality, along with the Platonic and Christian paradox that death is the beginning of "real" life, Browne uses the imagery of sleep to suggest an attenuated form of death:

surely it is not a melancholy conceite to thinke we are all asleepe in this world, and that the conceits of this life are as neare dreames to those of the next, as the Phantasmes of the night, to the conceits of the day. There is an equall delusion in both, and the one doth but seeme to bee the embleme and picture of the other; we are somewhat more than our selves in our sleepes, and the slumber of the body seemes to bee but the waking of the soule. It is the ligation of sense, but the liberty of reason, and our waking conceptions doe not match the fancies of our sleepes.
(RM II, 2; Works I, 186)

Browne alludes, here, to the Platonic notion that our experiences in our waking physical life are something other and something less than our ideal experiences in our meta-physical life, which is the real life. For Plato, of course, the real world was the realm of spiritual, immaterial ideas rather than the world of sense. Implicit in this passage also, is Plato's notion that the body imprisons the soul, which will attain its release only in death. Browne transforms these ideas while alluding to them, using sleep as his vehicle for suggesting that the soul has both a higher purpose and a more richly meaningful existence than the limits of our bodily experience would let us realize. Hints of such an existence are given when

the body's pressures are temporarily suspended in sleep, as they will be finally ended in death, when the soul can "really" live. According to this view, "our waking conceptions do not match the fancies of our sleepes," because the soul, reined in, contained, even overwhelmed by the body during our waking life, (life) is allowed freedom and full range of expression and experience only in sleep (death).

Plato turns up everywhere in the Religio and he is almost always referred to with imagery that is appropriate to, if not actually derived from his own work. Consider, for example, his notion of the individual soul as a kind of battleground with warring factions representing different human impulses. In Browne's version, the idea takes the following form:

For there is in our soule a kind of Triumvirate, or triple government of three competitors, which distract the peace of this our Common-wealth, not lesse than did that other the State of Rome . . .

As Reason is a rebell unto Faith, so Passion unto Reason: As the propositions of Faith seem absurd unto Reason, so the Theorems of Reason unto passion, and both unto Faith.

(RM I, 19; Works I, 29)

Here, the faculty psychology prevalent during the seventeenth century finds itself coupled with a traditional metaphor, as Browne continues by emphasizing not the conflicts among the three faculties, faith, reason and passion, but their harmonious resolution:

yet a moderate and peaceable discretion may so state and order the matter, that they may bee all kings, and yet make but one Monarchy, every one exercising his sovereignty and Prerogative in a due time and place, according to the restraint and limit of circumstance.
(RM I, 19; Works I, 29)

But Browne's imagery derives as much from various strains of mysticism as it does from Platonism. Quoting Hermes Trismegistus whose language and image he is appropriating, Browne describes God as "sphaera cuius centrum ubique circumferentia nullibi." (RM I, 15; Works I, 26) And, in a more elaborate example, Browne appropriates the famous Pythagorean notion of the music of the spheres, and uses it in a new way. In a curious reversal of image and idea, Browne, instead of having music symbolize harmony and order, turns things around and has order represent music. He writes:

For there is a musicke were-ever there is a harmony, order, or proportion; and thus farre we may maintain the music of the spheares; for those well ordered motions; and regular paces, though they give no sound unto the eare, yet to the understanding they strike a note most full of harmony. . . . It is an Hieroglyphicall and shadowed lesson of the whole world, and the Creatures of God; such a melody to the eare, as the whole world well understood, would afford the understanding. In briefe it is a sensible fit of the Harmony which intellectually sounds in the eares of God.
(RM II, 19; Works I, 84)

In expressing this familiar Renaissance commonplace, Browne changes the emphasis and direction of meaning from idea, to a movement from fact (order) to symbol (music),

even as he avoids tampering with the essential meaning of the notion: that there is an abstract music, a metaphysical music whose harmony is an intellectual one which is equivalent to understanding.

With this analogy of musical harmony and intellectual, spiritual and world order, Browne reveals his belief in the idea of correspondence between the realms of matter and spirit, between the inner and outer forms of things, between the visible and the invisible, the sensible and the intellectual. For Browne, material form had a counterpart in immaterial substance; concrete physical data embodied immaterial, spiritual meanings.¹⁶

Yet Browne, of course, was only one of many seventeenth-century writers who made use of the idea of the music of the spheres. In his own time, Donne, Herbert and Dryden all used it in different and satisfying ways, as John Hollander has pointed out in his excellent study of the idea of music in Renaissance literature, The Untuning of the Sky.¹⁷ And even though Donne's use of the image was more philosophically intricate, Herbert's more personal, and Dryden's more elaborate, Browne's appropriation of the notion reflects his strong conviction that the world itself and everything in it is harmoniously ordered.

In his rage for order, Browne didn't confine himself to these two powerful but traditional images of harmony. His passion for an intelligible and meaningful universe, structured and designed by a skillfull and providential creator, is reflected perhaps most vigorously in his numerous references to geometry. Indeed, allusions to mathematics, especially to the lines and circles of geometry, inform most of Browne's images of order in both the Garden of Cyrus and in Christian Morals. Furthermore, a comparison of the uses of geometrical imagery in the two works, and also with their use in the Religio is instructive since the flavor of those references differ from work to work, though their source and subject remain the same.

In Christian Morals, Browne enlists geometrical imagery in an only partially successful effort to enliven his moral didacticism: "Hang early plummetts upon the heels of Pride, and let Ambition have but an Epicycle and narrow circuit in thee." (CM I, 19; Works I, 249) Another image is abstract enough to obstruct the reader's understanding: "Fools which are Antipodes unto the Wise conceive themselves to be but their Perioeci, and in the same parallel with them." (CM I, 22; Works I, 251). Throughout Christian Morals, similar kinds of geometrical images serve to enhance moral exhortation.

Many lack resonance, eloquence and vitality. The work overall justly deserves Austin Warren's condemnation of it as a work in which "wit has lost its resourcefulness and gaiety," and one in which its literary devices have become both predictable and tedious.¹⁸

In the Religio, references to geometry assume a different character. Generally longer than those in Christian Morals, they are both more reflective in tone and more philosophical in substance. In the following characteristic example of such imagery in the Religio, Browne bolsters the popular medieval notion of the wheel of fortune with the language of geometry.

all cannot be happy at once: for because the glory of one State depends upon the ruine of another, there is a revolution and vicissitude of their greatnesse, which must obey the swing of that wheele, not moved by intelligences, but by the hand of God, whereby all States arise to their Zenith, and verticall points, according to their predestinated periods. For the lives not onely of men, but of Commonweales, and the whole world, run not upon a Helix that still enlargeth; but on a Circle, where arriving to their Meridian, they decline in obscurity, and fall under the Horizon againe.

(RM I, 17; Works I, 27)

In this example the geometrical image is developed rather than simply stated and abandoned; it is used to explain a concept which needs the elaboration Browne grants it. Moreover, the image resonates, carrying overtones of other images and ideas common to Browne. The emphasis on the harmonious correspondence between the human,

political and natural, for example, is suggested ("the lives of men . . . of Commonweales . . . and the whole world run upon . . . a circle") as are the notions of both the chain of being and of god's providential control ("accordinating to their predestinated periods").


In the Garden of Cyrus, Browne selects numerous brief examples which "do neatly declare how nature Geometrized, and observeth order in all things." (GC III; Works I, 202) One lengthy and characteristic example should illustrate the uses to which geometry is put in this work.

The sexangular Cels in the Honeycombs of Bees are disposed after this, [the quincunx] . . . Much there is not of wonder in the confused House of Pismires though much in their basic life and actions; more in the edificial Palaces of Bees and Monarchical spirits; who make their combs six-corner'd, declining a circle; where of many stand not close together, and compleatly fill the area of the place; But rather affecting a six-sided figure, whereby every cell affords a common side unto six more, and also a fit receptacle for the Bee itself, which gathering into a Cylindrical Figure, aptly enters into its sexangular house, more nearly approaching a circular figure, than either doth the Square or Triangle, And the combs themselves so regularly contriv'd, that their mutual intersections make three Lozenges at the bottom of every Cell; which severally regarded make three rows of neat Rhomboidall Figures, connected at the angles, and so continue three several chains throughout the whole comb. (GC III; Works I, 202)

What distinguishes the imagery of this passage, and that of the Garden of Cyrus overall, from that of Browne's other works, is its hard factual core. Although it

illustrates the universal order and the mystical mathematics of heaven, the imagery of this work does so in a decidedly descriptive fashion. Consider the following passage in which after generalizing that "right lines and circles make out the bulk of plants," (GC III; Works I, 207), Browne expands by providing numerous specific details. Among them are "Helicall or spirall roundles, voluta's conicall Sections, circular Pyramids, and frustums of Archimedes . . . the flat and narrower sides in the tender shoots of the Ashe, or the regular inequality of bignesse in the five-leaved flowers of Henbane, and something like in the calicular leaves of Tucson."

This particular example is interesting because, in the final section of Urn-Burial, Browne uses an almost identical sentence in the midst of a meditatively speculative passage: "Circles and right lines limit and close all bodies, and the mortall right-lined circle, must conclude and shut up all." This philosophical use of geometric references in UB V, and its contrasting scientific, factual in Garden of Cyrus III exemplify the diversity and range of mathematical imagery in Browne's works, as well as its importance for his way of perceiving and ordering the world.

But these two particular examples, while utilizing the basic figures of circle and line in isolation, must serve as a prelude to one final complex example of their use in the figure, , an emblem which brings together philosophy, mathematics and mysticism. In what is the most elaborate use of the imagery of geometry in the Garden of Cyrus, toward which much of the work has been pointing, Browne explains both the origins and significance of the higher geometry by means of this figure.

Of this Figure Plato made choice to illustrate the motion of the soul, both of the world and man; while he delivereth that God divided the whole conjunction lengthwise, according to the figure of a Greek X and then turning it about reflected it into a circle; By the circle implying the uniform motion of the first Orb, and by the right lines, the planetical and various motions within it. And this also with application unto the soul of man, which hath a double aspect, one right, whereby it beholdeth the body, and objects without; another circular and reciprocal, whereby it beholdeth it self. The circle declaring the motion of the indivisible soul, simple, according to the divinity of its nature, and returning into it self; the right lines respecting the motion pertaining unto sense, and vegetation, and the central decussation, the wondrous connexion of the severall faculties conjointly in one substance. And so conjoynd the unity and duality of the soul, and made out the three substances so much considered by him; That is, the indivisible or divine, the divisible or corporeal, and that third, which was the Systasis or harmony of those two, in the mystical decussation.

(GC IV; Works I, 220)

A modern critic of Browne, Frank Huntley, clarifies the meaning of the symbol further by explaining it as an

adjunct of the Greek theta, θ , "which is thanatos or death; the circle is God, perfection, immortality; the horizontal represents the corporal, divisible, death."¹⁹ He continues by suggesting that there is a third adjunct: "The quincunx, the chiasma, the cross, the only antidote for Brown to the opium of time." Or, as Huntley puts it later in his book: "God's infinity is the circle which our lives, in the horizontal line that crosses, touch at two points, birth and death."²⁰

Both the imagery of geometry and the traditional images such as the chain of being and music of the spheres, testify to Browne's consistent and persistent belief in the harmony, beauty and prudential plan of the universe. Near the end of the Garden of Cyrus, Browne states his idea with rhythmic eloquence: "All things began in order, so shall they end, and so shall they begin again; according to the ordainer of order and mystical Mathematics of the City of Heaven." (GC V; Works I, 226)

IV

If images of and references to geometry occur with greatest frequency in Browne's writings, those of light and darkness enjoy equal thematic importance. Browne tends to make use of these traditional and powerfully evocative images at high points of his discourses.

Lending themselves easily to philosophical and theological themes, images of light and darkness help to clarify philosophical meanings as well as to evoke complex intellectual and emotional responses, for both writer and reader. This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the closing chapters of Urn-Burial and Garden of Cyrus, the twin treatises whose conception and execution, in significant part, depend upon light imagery. In such passages, Browne rises to heights of eloquence appropriate to the seriousness and the universality of his themes. First, Cyrus.

Light that makes things seen, makes some things invisible: were it not for darknesse and the shadow of the earth, the noblest part of the creation had remained unseen . . . The greatest mystery of Religion is expressed by adumbration, and in the noblest part of Jewish Types, we find the Cherubim's shadowing the Mercy-seat: Life it self is but the shadow of death; and souls departed but the shadow of the living: All things fall under this name. The Sunne it self is but the dark simulacrum, and light but the shadow of God.
(GC IV; Works I, 218)

Here, powerful resonant images balance one another as the rhythm, due to an accumulation of monosyllables, slowly marks time. The words "life" and "death," "light" and "shadow," are strategically placed at emphatic terminal points of sentence and phrase in deceptive simplicity. Browne's diction, balancing Latin and Saxon words, polysyllabic and monosyllabic ones, contributes to the arresting quality of the writing.

Unlike this compact but thoroughly developed light image, representative of its use in the Garden of Cyrus, is a driving use of such imagery with brief repeated examples, characteristic of Urn-Burial. Near the end of that work, for instance, we find the following forms of the image rapidly succeeding one another: "The night of time far surpasseth the day, and who Knows when was the Qequinox"; "Darkness and light divide the course of time, and oblivion shares with memory a great part even of our living beings"; "life is a pure flame, and we live by an invisible Sun within us." And finally,

Since our longest Sunne sets at right descensions and makes byt winter arches, and therefore it cannot be long before we lie down in darknesse, and have our light in ashes.

(UB V; Works I, 167, 68, 69, 69)

After piling up the images in this manner, Browne relentlessly proceeds to his inevitable conclusion, a conclusion prepared for by his imagery: "Since the brother of death daily haunts us with dying mementos, and time that grows old it self, bids us hope no long duration, Diuturnity is a dream and folly of expectation."

(UB V; Works I, 168; Cf. also CM III, 30; Works I, 290).

There is thus a kind of argument by means of imagery, in which a series of brief, sharply focused light images, simply by their cumulative force, progressively push toward the culminating idea of Browne's argument.²¹

V

Related to light imagery is the imagery of vision which occurs only occasionally in Browne's writing. Its forms and uses vary. In Christian Morals, for example, Browne uses images of vision and sight as occasions for moral instruction. In the first example to follow, vision is made the sine qua non of ethically approved behavior. There is a Socratic overtone in the implicit equation between seeing-knowing and virtue.

Look upon Vices and vicious Objects with
Hyperbolical Eyes . . . that their unseen Deformi-
ties may not escape thy sense, . . . for the
undiscerned Particles and Atome of Evil deceive
us, and we are undone by the Invisibles of seeming
Goodness. We are only deceived in what is not
discerned, and to Err is but to be Blind or Dim-
sighted as to some Perceptions.
(CM III, 3, Works I, 273)

Also assumed here is a traditional, orthodox Catholic view that evil is chosen because it "appears" to be good; if apparent good could be distinguished from the real thing by means of accurate and discerning vision, acceptable behavior would inevitably follow. In another passage from the same work, Browne urges the reader to "Behold thyself by inward Opticks and the Crystalline of thy Soul." He continues, shifting from exhortation to instruction in which both the image and the idea are traditional:

the greatest imperfection is in our inward sight, that is, to be Ghosts unto our Eyes, and while we are so sharp-sighted as to look through others, to be invisible unto our selves; for the inward Eyes are more fallacious than the outward.

(CM III, 15; Works I, 281)

What makes Browne's presentation of this relatively common idea his own is the strikingly phrased image within an image, "to be Ghosts unto our Eyes," which is followed by an elaboration of the idea with both generalization and original image: "Avarice, Pride, Falsehood lye undiscerned and blindly in us, even to the age of blindness: and therefore, to see our selves interiourly, we are fain to borrow other Mens Eyes." (CM III, 15; Works I, 281).

In Religio Medici images of vision, of the visible and invisible, are cast more philosophically, as in the following example:

The severe schools shall never laugh me out of the Philosophy of Hermes, that this visible world is but a picture of the invisible, wherein as in a pourtract, things are not truely, but in equivocall shapes, and as they counterfeit some more reall substance in that Invisible fabrick.

(RM I, 12; Works I, 21)

Yet, for the most part, Browne's concern in using imagery of vision is primarily moral. It involves both a seeing into the soul and a seeing beyond mortality. The impulse of such uses is as often hortatory and didactic as it is explanatory.

VI

Although Browne could develop an image thoroughly and extensively, allowing it to embrace a larger arc of idea as it progressed, he frequently left his images unelaborated. Sometimes the rapid shifting among brief images results in a discontinuity of idea, in a fragmenting of theme, even when the substratum of subject remains constant. This type of discontinuity characterizes much of the imagery of Christian Morals, of which the following passage is representative.

Persons lightly dipt, not grain'd in generous
Honesty, are but pale in Goodness. And faint hued
in Integrity. But be thou what thou vertuously
art, and let not the Ocean wash away the Tincture.
Stand magnetically upon that Axis, where prudent
simplicity hath fixt thee; and let no attraction
invert the Poles of thy Honesty. That Vice may
be uneasy and even monstrous into thee, let
iterated good Acts and long confirmed habits make
Virtue almost natural, or a second nature in
thee. . . . They who thus timely descend into
themselves, and cultivate the good seeds which
nature hath in them, prove not shrubs but Cedars
in their generation.

(CM I, 9; Works I, 246)

There is a continuous shifting here from images of color, to those of polar magnetism, to images of seeds and forests. The rapid series of brief undeveloped images creates an abruptness of style and a truncation of thought.

A different kind of shifting image, one which does as much to violence to continuity of idea, involves a series of unconnected images with in the confines of

a single period. By changing images so quickly and successively in such a short space, Browne turns the reader's head so often than he loses the thread of the writer's idea.

There are . . . solemnities, and ceremonies, whereof the wiser zeales doe make a Christian use, and stand condemned by us; not as evill in themselves, but as allurements and baits of superstition to those vulgar heads that looke asquint on the face of truth, and those unstable judgments that cannot consist in the narrow point and centre of vertue without a reele or stagger to the circumference.

(RM I, 3; Works I, 13)

In addition to Browne's quickly changing images, his habit of doubling and his use of synecdoche work to distract and confuse rather than to clarify.

Although accumulation of images is common in Browne's prose, his most famous image is a single developed metaphor rather than a series of short undeveloped images. Emphasizing the dual nature of man, and simultaneously placing him on the ladder of creation, Browne describes man as an "amphibium."

we are onely that amphibious piece between a corporall and spirituall essence, that middle frame that linkes those two together, and makes good the method of God and nature.

(RM I, 34; Works I, 44)

And a bit later:

thus is man that great and true Amphibium, whose nature is disposed to live not onely like other creatures in divers elements, but in divided and distinguished worlds.

(RM I, 34; Works I, 44)

Taking this idea further, Browne makes man a kind of via media standing between the worlds of matter and spirit, while joining them together, uniting "as it jumps not from extremes . . . the incomparable distances by some middle and participating natures." (RM I, 34; Works I, 44). Functioning to bridge the gap between the material and spiritual, the image of the amphibium, serves as a poetic attempt to unify science and religion, the two poles between which the Religio oscillates in an action of intellectual tension.²²

VII

It must be said that Browne's uses of imagery, especially of metaphor, sustained analogy and symbolism, are less prevalent and less complex than those of other important seventeenth-century prose writers. His images lack the intensity and energy of those of both Donne and Burton. Moreover, his writing lacks consistently correlative images in which an entire sphere of experience is systematically and imaginatively transcribed in terms of another as in the exchange of religious and erotic image and subject in Donne.

Although Browne, like Burton, often employed groups of brief shifting images, relatively undeveloped, Browne's shorter images do not usually possess collective

cohesiveness. Also, Burton's images, again unlike Browne's, are consistently reductive; they debunk ideas, institutions, and forms of social intercourse and behavior in pursuit of Burton's satirical purpose. Browne's images, on the other hand, are generally elevatory rather than reductive. They tend to follow the line of Renaissance rhetorical theory advocated by Hoskins that metaphor be formed from a thing of equal or greater dignity.²³ Thus Browne tended to observe decorum in his imagery, unlike Burton, and also unlike Bacon, who sometimes exploited the full range of associations beyond the bounds of decorum.²⁴

Furthermore, Browne lacks the extraordinary ease of reference and analogy exemplified by Bacon and later by Dryden. The naturalness of Dryden's imagery, for example in the Preface to the Fables, and the quiet yet intricate way in which the images are worked out²⁵ contrasts with Browne's less facile imagistic realization. For all his natural philosophy, Browne's images, unlike Bacon's, are not consistently drawn from nature. Images of water and growth, so abundant in Bacon, are almost totally absent in Browne.²⁶ For all his scientific work, Browne rarely uses scientific imagery. Except for a few biological images in the Religio, images from the sciences are to be found chiefly in Christian Morals.²⁷

Yet, while imagery is not one of the main attractions of Browne's prose, upon occasion it does intensify the power of his writing. His image of man as the great amphibium, both original and provocative, is by far his happiest. In addition, in his uses of the traditional Renaissance imagery, and especially with images of geometry, Browne expressed attitudes toward his subjects, revealing a passionate commitment to and search for order, design and purpose in the universe and in his own life. Through his imagery, Browne attempted to reconcile the inherently conflicting tensions between science and religion, reason and faith, order and disorder, and ultimately between life and death.

NOTES

¹Caroline Spurgeon, Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Teaches Us (New York: Macmillan, 1935).

²One can make two distinctions here: first, between fictive and non-fictive works; second, between literature and non-literature. Although Browne's works are non-fictive, they qualify as literature. (At least Urn-Burial and Religio Medici do.)

³In any event, the relationships among the various elements are far from simple.

⁴Leonard Nathanson, in his The Strategy of Truth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), reads the Religio and Urn-Burial as mimetic essays in which the "plot" consists of ideas in developing tension. Although I don't totally disagree with this view, I think that the Religio achieves literary status as does Urn-Burial, for other reasons. See chapter 7 on the factuality of Browne's writing.

⁵See Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature, third edition (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1956), p. 186.

⁶Ibid., pp. 186-87.

⁷Theodore Howard Banks, Milton's Imagery (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), p. xi.

⁸Milton Allan Rugoff, Donne's Imagery (New York: Corporate Press, 1939), p. 13.

⁹Richard Harter Fogle, The Imagery of Keats and Shelley (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1949), p. 3.

¹⁰Wellek and Warren, pp. 187-211.

¹¹Ibid., p. 188. Cf. Fogle's comment: "The principle of poetic imagery lies not in the sensuous . . . but in comparison," p. 10.

¹²I. A. Richards uses the terms "tenor" and "vehicle" to refer to essentially the same thing. The

Philosophy of Rhetoric (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 96.

¹³Lawrence Perrine makes this simple but useful distinction: "Image, metaphor and symbol shade into each other and are sometimes difficult to distinguish. In general, however, an image means only what it is; a metaphor means something other than it is; and a symbol means what it is and something more too." Sound and Sense (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1969), p. 83.

¹⁴Nathanson, p. 50. See also, note 22.

¹⁵A good study of Browne's thought detailing these influences is William Dunn's Sir Thomas Browne: A Study in Religious Philosophy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1926).

¹⁶Consider another example: "for there are mystically in our faces certain characters which carry in them the motto of our Soules, wherein he that cannot A.B.C. may read our natures. I hold moreover that there is a Phytognomy, or Physiognomy, not only of men, but of Plants, and Vegetables, and in every one of them, some outward figures which hang as signes or bushes of their inward formes." (RM II, 2; Works I, 72-73).

¹⁷(New York: Norton, 1960), passim.

¹⁸Austin Warren, "The Styles of Sir Thomas Browne," in Connections (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970), p. 5.

¹⁹Frank L. Huntley, Sir Thomas Browne (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), pp. 207-208.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 218-219.

²¹Brian Vickers discusses the manner in which Bacon's imagery conditions his arguments. It emotionally prepares and influences the reader as it simultaneously reveals Bacon's attitudes and feelings about his subject. Francis Bacon and Renaissance Prose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

²²Nathanson, pp. 50-52. It is important to note that his discussion of the passage concerns the central portion of the quotation a part which is framed by the two amphibium images. Nathanson's purpose is to show the

close similarity of Browne's writing here to a passage from Ficino's Theologia Platonica, which he does convincingly enough. What strikes me as important, however, once the debt to intellectual history is paid, is to see what, in Browne's passage, is not indebted to Ficino. This, of course, is the image of the amphibium.

²³Vickers, pp. 150-151.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 160-163. Vickers shows how Bacon's images develop, taking on a life of their own.

²⁵John Dryden, Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays ed. George Watson (London: Dent, 1962), II, 127, 269, 271, 280, 290.

²⁶Vickers, p. 175.

²⁷S. Merton, Sir Thomas Browne (New York: King's Crown Press, 1949), p. 114.

CHAPTER VI

FORMS OF WIT

Here lies a King that rul'd as he thought fit
The universal Monarchy of Wit.

Thomas Carew

In his *Elegy on Donne*, Thomas Carew recognizes Donne's contribution to the history and practice of poetry. He makes the point that at the heart of Donne's poetic impulse was his wit, a wit which expressed itself in paradox and pun, and which was fond of exchanging the language of one realm of experience for that of another, as for example, occurs in a poem like "Batter My Heart," in which erotic language is pressed into the service of a religious subject. In calling attention to Donne's wit, Carew signals an important feature of seventeenth-century poetry generally. And though Donne's poetry embodies and employs wit perhaps more successfully than other poets of his age, he certainly had no monopoly on it. In fact, his own poetry of wit was one of the chief catalysts for the subsequent metaphysical reaction in which wit became the most important single source and strategy of poetic practice.

"Wit," of course, did not mean the same thing for the earlier Renaissance as it did for the seventeenth century, or for that matter, as it did for the ages of Dryden, Pope and Johnson. One critic, in fact, has suggested that a history of the definition of "wit" would be equivalent, ultimately to a history of taste.¹ But since the history of taste is not my subject here, I will confine myself to a brief discussion of the changing definitions of "wit" during the seventeenth century and immediately after.

In their magisterial survey, Literary Criticism, Cleanth Brooks and William K. Wimsatt describe the various meanings of wit in the seventeenth century. It was a term which meant, etymologically, "the faculty of knowing in general (with either mind or senses) and which about the time of Shakespeare comes to mean smart knowing, joking, or repartee, invention or ingenuity, and even poetic keenness or fancy."² As the idea of ingenuity became central for seventeenth-century poetry in the form of the metaphysical discordia concors, "wit" became in practice, if not then in definition, the faculty of seeing resemblances between widely different objects and the exploration and exploitation of those resemblances through such verbal resources as extended metaphor and conceit.³ For this definition of "wit" we are largely

indebted to Samuel Johnson, who in his biography of Cowley wrote that wit "may be more rigorously and philosophically considered a kind of *discordia concors*, a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike."⁴ Creating what has since become the most familiar brief definition of metaphysical wit, Johnson wrote that in metaphysical poetry, "the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together."⁵ This description has provided the touchstone for subsequent critical discussion of much seventeenth-century writing, especially of course, the poetry of the school of Donne. But the term "wit" would not keep to these meanings, resisting especially its definition as *discordia concors*; its meaning changed toward the later part of the century to what Dryden described as both "the faculty of imagination in the writer,"⁶ and "a propriety of thoughts and words; or, in other terms, thought and words elegantly adapted to the subject."⁷ This taming of the definition of "wit" ultimately yielded Dr. Johnson's description of wit as at once both natural and new, "that which, though not obvious, is upon its first production, acknowledged to be just."⁸ Buried in this explanation is the notion that the ingenuity of wit had to be tempered with a correspondence to reality, that the originality and brilliance

of wit were only as good as its accuracy, its truthfulness.

But even toward the end of the seventeenth century, when "wit" became associated with Dryden's "propriety," even then, decorum and fitness to nature asserted themselves as characteristics of wit. Such concepts were allied with what, for the later seventeenth and the eighteenth century became a necessary element of "wit," namely "judgment." Earlier in the century, "wit" was primarily considered to be a process of conceiving resemblances between things; it was thought of as an inventive and a synthetic activity which was distinguished from the more analytic activity of judgment, which served to discriminate and distinguish.⁹ But there were problems in aligning the meanings of the two terms, and of keeping them straight. In Leviathan, for example, Hobbes distinguishes between "Wit" and "Judgement"; however, he also seems to unite them, implying that both are necessary for what we might call "true wit." But his statements, which I quote below, seem contradictory.

1. Those that observe their similitudes, in case they be such as are but rarely observed by others, are sayd to have a Good Wit; by which, in this occasion, is meant a Good Fancy. But they that observe their differences, and dissimilitudes; which is called Distinguishing, and Discerning, and Judging between thing and thing; in case such

discerning be not easie, are said to have
good Judgement. . . .

2. In a good Poem . . . both Judgement and
 Fancy are required; But the Fancy must be
 more eminent
3. In a good History, the Judgement must be
 eminent. . . .
4. And in any Discourse whatsoever, if the
 defect of Discretion be apparent, how extrava-
 gant soever the Fancy be, the whole discourse
 will be taken for a signe of want of wit; and
 so will it never when this Discretion is mani-
 fest, though the Fancy be never so ordinary. . . .
5. Judgement therefore without Fancy is Wit, but
 Fancy without Judgement not.¹⁰

The contradiction seems to result from an uncharacter-
 istically Hobbesian carelessness of definition, in which
 Hobbes at one point equates wit with fancy (1) as he
 distinguishes it from judgement. At another point, he
 denies their equivalence (5), instead equating it with
 judgment, thus uniting the two terms he began by dis-
 tinguishing.

Such confusion about the term "wit" and such
 seriousness in its treatment decreased toward the end of
 the eighteenth century when, "wit was well on its way
 to becoming only a relic of serious criticism."¹¹ During
 that time, the term began to embody more frequently a
 meaning which attached to it somewhat earlier, during the
 Restoration, and one which has become perhaps the
 dominant meaning in our own day, namely, wit as "repartee"

or "joke."¹² But such an emphasis did not occur until Pope, in his Essay on Criticism, offered such gradations and oppositions of meanings as "poet, critic, salon joker--mind, thinking, speech--what is brilliant, inventive, poetic--what is critical, moking, affected, specious, frivolous."¹³

II

This brief sketch of some of the changing meanings of "wit" will serve to provide the background against which I wish to discuss metaphysical wit in general, and such wit as it appears in Browne's writing. And the place to begin is with the wit-judgment confusion alluded to above. For this we have the help of two modern critics who have resolved the problem by suggesting that the wit of metaphysical poetry is comprised of both syntehsis and analysis; it is comprised of both inventive ingenuity and of reasoned judgment. According to A. Alvarez, wit is "an individual power by which the poet syntehsizes and discriminates his material."¹⁴ Earl Miner suggests that there is both a wit of judgment serving to distinguish generally similar things, and a wit of imagination which points out unusual resemblances.¹⁵ In one case, judgment is made an aspect of wit; in the other, an ally. In neither explanation is judgment an antagonist of wit;

in neither definition is judgment something qualitatively different from wit which competes with it, as was suggested in several of Hobbes' remarks.

In trying to pinpoint the essential nature of metaphysical wit, that type of wit found at its most inventive in the works of Donne, Herbert and Marvell, but which is also discernable in Browne, we must single out five specific characteristics which, in various ways, combine and intermix. They are: 1) a combination of levity and seriousness; 2) a concern for the contradictory nature of experience; 3) an ingenious pursuit of an idea to its furthest ramifications; 4) an attempt to yoke together widely divergent objects and ideas by means of metaphor, analogy, and conceit; and, 5) an intellectual character which is shown in fine psychological insight (Donne and Herbert), "tough reasonableness" (Donne and Marvell), learned imagery, and wide-ranging and diverse allusion.¹⁶

Let me begin with the last characteristic, the intellectual character of wit, which shows itself to be a process of thought involving abstract ideas as often as it does images. And images, when they appear, are used for their thought value; they are pressed in the service of an idea as often as they serve the more conventional imagistic function of evoking the responses

of one or more of the senses. Donne's famous compass image in "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning," and his image of the twisting eyebeams in "The Ecstasy," are both intellectual in nature; they function as part of the argument of their respective poems. When the ideas are imageless, as they are in my next pair of examples, their wit resides in their novel, striking or even bizarre use.¹⁷ Consider first, Browne: "there is one thought that dejects me, that my acquired parts must perish with my selfe, nor can be Legacyed among my honoured Friends." (RM.II, 3; Works I). And now Marvell:

My love is of a birth as rare
As 'tis for object, strange and high;
It was begotten by Despiar
Upon Impossibility.

(The Definition of Love)

In each of these examples, whether of imaged or imageless wit, there is a strong intellectual cast, ideas are expressed and arguments are made.

The conceit, of course, exemplifies the intellectual character of wit, as it also furnishes another of the attributes of metaphysical wit: the yoking together of opposites by violence. Donne's compasses provide perhaps the most famous example, but Herbert's pulley and even Browne's amphibium, different as they are from one another, illustrate occult resemblances between dissimilar things. As an abstract idea rather than a sensuous

image,¹⁸ the conceit is usually worked out in careful detail, since if one sees "occult resemblances in things unlike, one is bound to specify in some detail the nature of the observations that make the idea relevant."¹⁹

To be intellectually consistent and emotionally powerful, to be both valid and meaningful, the levity and ingenuity of far-fetched analogies must be tempered by both judgment and seriousness. There must be evidence of discernment, tact and accuracy in the depiction of experience. T. S. Eliot has expressed this combination nicely in his description of Marvell's poetry as possessing a "tough reasonableness beneath the slight lyric grace."²⁰ The lyric grace of the playful surface combines with a reality quotient of tough reasonableness to produce verse which is, in Eliot's words once again, "an alliance of levity and seriousness."²¹ We might say, then, that the wit of metaphysical writing at its best, displays a tone of jest in pursuing a serious purpose. To adapt a phrase from Johan Huizinga, it plays on the borderline between jest and earnest,²² partaking of both, and offering the advantages of both.

Johnson described the metaphysicals as writers pursuing thoughts "to their last ramifications."²³ Sometimes this pursuit is accomplished within the form of a conceit, sometimes in a form less easily classified.

Donne's image of "gold to aery thinness beat," pursues an idea syntetically, by means of comparison. Browne often works differently, pursuing thoughts to their logical boundaries without benefit of image or conceit. He suggests, for example, that although God knows all things he doesn't know his own end, since both his being and his knowledge are endless. (Psuedodoxia Epidemica Bk VI, Ch. I; Works II, 410). He pursues another idea to its limits, namely that "all flesh is grasse," when he notes that it is not only metaphorically, but literally true. In these and other examples, Browne works back from image to idea. He literalizes the image, thereby explaining in what senses such a statement is true, in what specific ways it corresponds with reality.

My final characteristic of metaphysical writing is its reliance on the contradictory nature of experience. Of metaphysical wit, in this connection, Eliot has written: "it [wit] involves, a recognition, implicit in the expression of every experience, of other kinds of experience which are possible."²⁴ Donne's poetry is rich in this quality, giving his work a complexity of feeling and a richness of meaning that escapes most of the other metaphysical writers, with the exceptions of Marvell, Herbert and Browne. This concern of the metaphysicals with the contradictory nature of experience,

with the recognition that different realms of experience have their respective claims, that each claim often excludes the other and yet that both claims are valid,²⁵ is, in large part, responsible for the intensity and the stab of reality that their best writing possesses. In Donne, this concern sometimes takes the form of dramatic contrast, sometimes of dramatic contest, sometimes of paradox or extended conceit. In Browne, it takes the forms of juxtaposing the familiar and the esoteric, the formally elevated and the colloquial, the oratorically elaborate with a direct simplicity.²⁶ But it also, as in Donne, expresses itself in paradox. In general, the recognition of competing realms of experience such as religion and science, or thought and feeling, and the attempt to give these competing claims their due, yet at the same time to unify them, while neither diluting nor ignoring nor alternating their pressures--this recognition and attempt are distinctive features of the metaphysical style.

III

With some qualifying modifications, Browne's writings exemplify all five of our characteristics of metaphysical wit. Yet what is perhaps the most important of these characteristics, the yoking together of opposites

and dissimilars in striking analogies, is of little importance and of infrequent occurrence in Browne's writing, with the exception of course of the image of the great amphibium. The other characteristics, however, Browne more generally exemplifies. He exhibits a combination of levity and seriousness, particularly in the Religio, and especially with respect to himself; he reveals a concern for the competing claims of different aspects of experience; (the tension of the Religio derives from the competing claims of faith and reason, religion and science); he takes ideas to their logical breaking point, often stretching the minds of his readers as he does this; and, with his diffused and diversified allusions, with his philosophical subjects and themes, he reveals an intelligence at work, a mind constantly active and engaging as it registers, digests, and assimilates the data of experience.

Wit assumes a variety of forms in Browne's works, ranging from simple witty allusions to the more complex modes of paradox and irony. Sometimes his wit is evidenced in word play, occasionally in an extravagant or unusual argument, often in simple antithesis. All are forms of play which Browne usually, but not always, uses for serious purposes. Taken together they give his writing a metaphysical cast as they help create his uniquely

personal voice.

In an essay entitled, "Wit and Poetry and Pope,"²⁷ Maynard Mack includes juxtaposition and allusion as examples of Pope's wit. Browne uses both of these, though not with Pope's incisive, satirical thrust.

For a brief example of playful, non-serious allusive wit, consider Browne's humorous remark about Heraclitus: "Some bones make best Skeletons, some bodies quick and speediest ashes: Who would expect a quick flame from Hydropticall Heraclitus"? (UB III; Works I, 154). Or again, consider what is said almost immediately after: "And if the burthen of Isaac were sufficient for an holocaust, a man may carry his own pyre." (UB III; Works I, 154). In each of these allusions, there is a quiet irony, which in part carries the wit. Each remark is playful, and though each may allude to something serious, Browne's use of the allusions is hardly indicative either of "tough reasonableness" or of complex feeling. He tended to avoid such complexities in this kind of brief simple allusion, reserving them for different kinds of treatment.

Juxtaposition of antithetical examples and ideas provides a second, small-scale type of wit often used by Browne. The very nature of antithesis, especially balanced and stylish antithesis, embodies wit, since the

antithetically placed statements illustrate and emphasize in both form and content, a distinction or a resemblance, a judgment or an imaginative association. They can take the form either of wit of imagination, or of wit of judgment. As the following show, Browne uses both.

It is as compleate a piece of madnesse to miscall and rave against the times, as think to recall men to reason by a fit of passion: Democritus that thought to laugh the times into goodnesse, seems to mee as deeply Hypochondriack, as Heraclitus that bewailed them.
(RM II, 4; Works I, 76)

How many wounds have beene given, and credits stained for the poore victory of an opinion or beggarly conquest of a distinction? Scholars are men of peace, they beare no armes, but their tongues are sharper than Actius his razor.
(RM II, 3; Works I, 75)

We naturally know what is good, but naturally pursue what is evil.
(RM I, 55; Works I, 66)

I beleeeve many are saved who to man seemed reprobated, and many reprobated who in the opinion and sentence of men, stand elected;
(RM II, 57; Works I, 67).

More complex than either juxtaposition or allusion as forms of Browne's wit, are his forms of word-play, which includes his sense of etymology. In an implicit kind of etymological work-play, Browne sometimes calls up connotations of Latin-derived words, as when he describes the dying friend's last days as a "deliberate and creeping progress unto the Grave." (LF; Works I, 110).

Deliberate here means "slow," "leisurely," rather than consciously intended. Three hundred years later, Thoreau, who evidenced an even stronger concern for etymology than Browne, used the word in much the same way, when he wrote that "I went to the woods because I wanted to live deliberately."²⁸ In both uses there is an added meaning of "with careful consideration," although it seems to be stronger in Thoreau than in Browne. But Browne's sentence carries an additional example of word-play in the double meaning of progress. As Browne's friend is getting closer to death, progressing toward it, from a medical standpoint he is regressing,

In a still different kind of word play, Browne ends the Religio with a prayer, which is a serious form of word-play. With it, Browne dramatically shifts his tone. Discoursing of happiness, he writes:

That wherein God himselfe is happy, the holy Angels are happy, in whose defect the Devils are unhappy; that dare I call happinesse: whatsoever conduceth unto this, may with an easie Metaphor deserve that name; whatsoever else the world termes happiness, is to me a story out of Pliny, an apparition, or neat delusion, wherin there is no more of happinesse than the name.

Abruptly, Browne shifts into a prayer which itself concludes with a witty form of word-play:

Blesse mee in this life but with the peace of my conscience, command of my affections, the love of they selfe and my dearest friend, and I shall be happy enough to pity Caesar. These are O Lord the

humble desires of my most reasonable ambition
 and all I dare call happinesse on earth: wherein
 I set no rule or limit to thy hand or providence.
 Dispose of me according to the wisdom of thy
 pleasure. Thy will bee done, though in my owne
 undoing.

(RM II, 15; Works I, 93)

Even at his most serious, Browne can't or won't resist the desire to play with language and with ideas. There is jest even in his earnestness; or perhaps to put it more accurately, his play is more than mere play; it is often fundamentally both serious, and significant.

But not always. Consider the following examples:

"To strenuous Minds there is an inquietude in overquietness, and no laboriousness in labor. . . . impotent Satyrs write Satyrs upon Lust. . . . thy good works, not they goods will follow thee. . . . Lead thine own captivity captive." (CM I, 33; I, 3; I, 7; I, 2; Works I, 256-7; 244; 245) Christian Morals is filled with examples of this kind of formal play with the sounds of words, with their similar shapes and forms, which often call attention to disparity or distinction. In one variation of this kind of word-play by repetition, rather than using similar words to indicate distinction, Browne uses a series of words different in sound, shape and sense to describe the same thing:

And if . . . any have been so happy as truly to understand Christian annihilation, extasis, exolution, liquefaction, transformation, the

kidde of the Spouse, gustation of God, and ingression into the divine shadow, thay have already had an handsome anticipation of heaven.²⁹
 (UB, V, Works I, 171)

Here the play is serious indeed, as Browne compiles a list of condensed metaphors, each offering a somewhat different view of death.

Such an accumulation derives rhetorically from the Renaissance concept of copia or fullness which suggests that a thing is neither fully stated nor fully explained until it has been turned through the imagination from every angle. Philosophically, this accumulation derives from an attitude toward truth which suggests that the truth about something is the sum of what can be said about it. Implied in such an epistemological assumption is a measure of skepticism, since the final sum of knowledge is impossible of accumulation; one can never finish "saying" about anything.

IV

Paradox, particularly prevalent in Religio Medici, furnishes the most traditional kind of word play found in Browne's writings. The source of many of Browne's paradoxes is his Christian faith, which provides their content. The following examples are taken from the Religio:

'Tis my solitary recreation to pose my apprehension with those involved aenigma's and riddles of the Trinity, with Incarnation, and Resurrection. I can answer all the objections of Satan, and my rebellious reason, with that odde resolution I learned of Tertullian, Certum est quia impossibile est.

(RM I, 9; Works I, 18)

For a Pagan there may bee some motives to bee in love with life; but for a Christian to be amazed at death, I see not how hee can escape this Dilemma, that he is too sensible of this life, or hopelesse of the life to come.

(RM I, 38; Works I, 49)

. . . our ashes shall enjoy the fruits of our pious endeavours . . .

(RM I, 47; Works I, 58)

There is nothing particularly astonishing about these examples, except for the last, as they all turn on fundamental articles of Christian faith: incarnation, resurrection, after-life. In the last example, it is not the paradox that astonishes, but the image in which it is expressed.

The first of these three examples, however, is different from the others, since it concerns mysteries that are beyond reason. Browne's conclusion of their certainty, certum est quia impossibile est, eludes rational explanation, so that the paradox turns the reader's attention from the logic of the explanation to its witty expression.

But Browne's paradoxes are not always traditionally based. Sometimes, in paradoxes like the following,

Browne expresses an original viewpoint which he must then elaborate since the meanings of the paradoxes are not self-evident. Discussing one of the commandments, he writes:

Non occides is the Commandment of God, yet scarce observed by any man; for I perceive every man is his owne Atropos, and lends a hand to cut the thread of his owne dayes. Cain was not therefore the first murthurer but Adam, who brought in death . . .
(RM II, 4; Works I, 77)

But the explanation itself is a paradox, and the reader is left to this case with paradox deepending paradox. Sometimes, Browne really does explain the paradox.

for first there is a strong bond of affection betweene us and our parents, yet . . . we betake ourselves to a woman, forgetting our mothers in a wife . . . our affection leaves the levell it held before [for our wives] and sinkes from our bed unto our issue and picture of posterity. . . . They growing up in yeares . . . applying themselves to a woman, take a lawfull way to love another better than our selves. Thus I perceive a man may bee buried alive, and behold his grave in his owne issue.
(RM II, 14; Works I, 92)

Since the thought, in each of these examples, is distinctive, and since the paradoxical sentence is both idiosyncratic and non-traditional, explanation is necessary.

Sometimes Browne uses paradox as a closural device. One particularly rich example, occurs near the end of the first part of the Religio. Generating a series of paradoxes from an initial idea rather than driving toward a single paradoxical statement, Browne

writes:

"Before Abraham was, I am," is the saying of Christ, yet is it true in some sense if I say it of my selfe, for I was not onely before my selfe, but Adam, that is, in the Idea of God, and the decree of that Synod from all Eternity. And in this sense, I say, the world was before the Creation, and at an end before it had a beginning; and thus was I dead before I was alive; though my grave be England, my dying place was Paradise, and Eve miscarried of mee before shee conceiv'd of Cain.

(RM I, 59; Works I, 68)

Noteworthy here, also, is Browne's delight in specifying the result of accepting the initial idea that he was "before" Adam. And though the series of paradoxes that follow from this initial idea is qualified by an "as if" ("in this sense, I say . . ."), the specific concrete examples which Browne presents ("Eve miscarried of me before she conceiv'd of Cain"), overwhelm that tenuous qualifying phrase. Thus, in working out the implications of his original notion, Browne effects a provocative extension of the idea up to its logical boundary.

In stretching ideas to their logical limits, Browne sometimes pushes beyond them. Such a tendency is not always expressed with paradox. In such cases Browne works out the implications of a non-paradoxical idea, often in a non-serious manner. Consider the following examples:

. . . in the midst of all my endeavors there is but one thought that dejects me, that my acquired parts must perish with my selfe, nor can be Legacyed among my honoured Friends.
(RM II, 3; Works I, 74)

. . . I love and honour my owne soule, and have, mee thinkes, two armes too few to embrace my selfe.
(RM II, 13; Works I, 91)

Similarly, at one point, he considers himself "as wholesome a morsell for the worms as any." (RM I, 40; Works I, 51). This kind of exaggeration is employed for more serious purposes also, usually at greater length and usually with a more traditional idea as its source. For example, Browne suggests that "to call our selves a Microcosme, or little world, I thought it surely a pleasant trope of Rhetorick, till my nearer judgment and second thoughts told me there was a real truth therein." And then, once he has noted the fact of this real truth, he specifies it further by explaining in what way he considers it to be true when he continues:

for first we are a rude masse, and in the ranke of creatures, which onely are, and have a dull kinde of being, not yet priviliged with life, or preferred to sense or reason; next we live the life of plants, the life of animals, the life of men, and at last the life of spirits.
(RM I, 34; Works I, 44-45)

The source of the idea here, of course, is traditional. But what makes it uniquely Brownian is a literalizing of the metaphor. Taking the idea of man as microcosm at its literal value, Browne spells out the implications

and applications suggested in the comparison. And he does the same thing elsewhere. Using allegory and analogy, as a starting point, he explains their implications: "We are what we all abhorre, Anthropagi and Cannibals, devourers not onely of men, but of our selves; and that not in an allegory, but in a positive truth; for all this masse of flesh which we behold, came in at our mouths." (RM I, 37; Works I, 48). And similarly, "all flesh is grasse," is not onely metaphorically, but literally true, for all those creatures which we behold, are but the hearbs of the field, digested into flesh in them, or more remotely carnified in our selves." (RM I, 37; Works I, 48)

Extravagance of idea is united with concrete illustration in my next example which evidences a grotesquely humorous wit. Writing about the advantages of being burned rather than buried, Browne remarks: "To be gnaw'd out of our graves, to have our sculs made drinking-bowls, and our bones turned into Pipes, to delight and sport our Enemies, are Tragicall abominations, escaped in burning Burials." (UB III; Works I, 155).

In all of these examples, the wit of the writing is a result of a literalizing imagination which specifies and which presents the unusual example or the far-fetched idea, and then shows how it is not so unusual or so

far-fetched. This is the kind of imaginative act which Dr. Johnson characterized as "pursuing thoughts to their last ramifications."³⁰

Sometimes, both in his more personal moments of self-revelation ("I have two armes too few to embrace myself . . . I thank God . . . I have escaped . . . pride"), and in his more shocking examples, Browne trespasses, against decorum. But, as Earl Miner reminds us, such an exceeding of the bounds of decorum is "of the very essence of wit."³¹ On other occasions, Browne's wit takes the form of quiet understatement rather than of outright exaggeration. Browne is capable, that is, of irony, and though it is not a form of wit which figures prominently in his writing, a few examples are noteworthy. The following is a comparatively simple and direct example: "Who can but pity the mercifull intention of those hands that doe destroy themselves? the devill, were it in his power, would doe the like; which being impossible his mercies are endlesse." and at this point, Browne spells out the irony, taking it one degree further: "and he suffers most in that attribute, wherein he is impassible, his immortality." (RM I, 51; Works I, 63)

Other examples of irony of circumstance derive from the notion of the transience of worldly things,

including reputations; moreover, such examples derive from the normal reversal of expectations that irony embodies: "Thersites is like to live as long as Agamemnon; Time hath spared the Epitaph of Adrian's horse, confounded that of himself." (UB V; Works I, 167). Perhaps the most striking example of irony in all of Browne's writing is his depiction of man as "a Noble Animal, splendid in ashes, and pompous in the grave, solemnizing Nativities and Deaths with equall lustre, nor omitting Ceremonies of bravery, in the infamy of his nature." (UB V; Works I, 169). In its balance of sympathy and judgment, such a remark asserts man's dignity while undermining it. Man is noble; but he is an animal nonetheless. He is dignified, but his dignity is diminished by the pomp with which he celebrates himself. Contributing to the ironic effect of Browne's sentence is its context. Occurring near the end of Urn-Burial, and following Browne's ringing oration on the passing of all things, his ironic criticism of man gains added force.

V

I have tried to show how Browne's writing is steeped in wit, and have attempted also both to define and to illustrate the metaphysical character of that

wit. I have suggested certain affinities, in this respect, with the metaphysical poets, without claiming that Browne's wit functions always in the same ways. His images, for example, are not as uniquely individual, nor are they as compact as Herbert's. His ironies are rarely as complex or as richly suggestive as Marvell's. And his paradoxes generally have neither the persuasiveness nor the rigor of Donne's. Moreover, unlike Donne, who usually uses paradox to introduce a problem, which then becomes the central focus of argument, Browne's paradoxes tend to function either as asides or as conclusions. They clinch argument rather than initiate or advance it.

Yet this is not to suggest that Browne's wit is either simple or predictable. Part of his originality resides in the way he pushes commonly known and accepted ideas to their logical limits. Occasionally there is a striking use of image, as with the great amphibium. But perhaps two of the most significant carriers of his wit are his syntax and the one work very much neglected in this chapter, Garden of Cyrus. The ways in which Browne's syntax surprises, especially the manner in which he uses co-ordination, I have discussed in an earlier chapter. And, the Garden of Cyrus, though it does not have the consistency or the variety of wit to be found in the

Religio, and though it does not provide as startling and memorable examples as Urn-Burial, it nevertheless embodies wit in its conception and design. The very nature of the enterprise as well as its result prompted Coleridge's exclamation, ". . . Quincunxes in Heaven above, Quincunxes in Earth below, and Quincunxes in the water beneath the Earth; Quincunxes in Deity, Quincunxes in the mindofman; Quincunxes in bones, in optic nerves, in Roots of Trees, in leaves, in petals, in everything!"³⁶ Such an enterprise embodies the most astonishing large-scale example of Browne's wit.

NOTES

¹William Van O'Connor, "Wit," in Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics eds. Alex Preminger, Frank J. Warnke, and O. B. Hardison Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 897-898.

²Literary Criticism: A Short History (New York: Random House, 1957), p. 229.

³Ibid.

⁴Samuel Johnson, "Cowley," Lives of the Poets (London: Dutton, 1925) I, 14.

⁵Ibid.

⁶John Dryden, Preface to "Annus Mirabilis" in Dryden's Essays ed. Walter P. Ker, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), I, 14. Cited in Wimsatt and Brooks, p. 230.

⁷Ker I, 190. Cited in Brooks and Wimsatt, p. 230.

⁸Johnson, "Cowley," Lives I, 33.

⁹Brooks and Wimsatt, p. 229.

¹⁰Leviathan, chapter 8. Cited in Brooks and Wimsatt, p. 231.

¹¹Brooks and Wimsatt, p. 243.

¹²Melissa C. Wanamaker, Discordia Concors: The Wit of Metaphysical Poetry (Port Washington, N. Y.: Kennikat Press, 1975), p. 3.

¹³Brooks and Wimsatt, p. 240.

¹⁴The School of Donne (New York: New American Library, Mentor, 1961), p. 103.

¹⁵Earl Miner, "Wit: Definition and Dialectic," Seventeenth-Century Poetry: Essays in Criticism ed. W. R. Keast (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 64-65.

¹⁶I have taken these five characteristics from a variety of discussions of metaphysical poetry including Alvarez and Johnson. T. S. Eliot's phraseology is appropriated for numbers 1 and 5. See his "The Metaphysical Poets," and "Andrew Marvell," in Selected Essays (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1932). Sir Herbert Grierson's Introduction to Metaphysical Poems and Lyrics of the Seventeenth Century (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), contributes to number 5.

¹⁷Miner, p. 45.

¹⁸Frank Warnke, ed. "Introduction," European Metaphysical Poetry (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), p. 6.

¹⁹Maynard Mack, "Wit and Poetry and Pope," Eighteenth-Century English Literature ed. James L. Clifford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 24. Eliot calls this an elaboration, in contrast to a condensation, of an image. Selected Essays, p. 242.

²⁰Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 252.

²¹Ibid., p. 255.

²²Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture (Boston: Beacon, 1950), p. 5.

²³Johnson, "Cowley," Lives I, 36.

²⁴Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 262.

²⁵I have followed Warnke's wording closely here. Metaphysical Poetry, p. 8.

²⁶Witherspoon and Warnke eds. "Introduction," Prose and Poetry of the Seventeenth Century (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1957), p. 9.

²⁷Eighteenth Century Literature, ed. Clifford, pp. 30-31.

²⁸Walden, ed. Owen Thomas (New York: Norton, 1956), p. 61.

²⁹Cf. Christian Morals III, 30; Works I, 290.

³⁰Johnson, "Cowley," Lives I, 33.

³¹Miner, p. 51.

³²Samuel Taylor Coleridge, cited in Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century ed. Roberta Brinkley (Durham, N.C., 1955), p. 449.

CHAPTER VII

FACT AND DETAIL

Two related aspects of literary structure, fact and detail, have received scant critical attention. In an article on fact in literature, Frank Brady said that "almost no literary critic has ever tried to define fact."¹ Current discussions of fact and literature restrict themselves to the problematic relationship between fact and fiction, while virtually ignoring the place of fact in non-fictive discourse.² Moreover, nonfictive literature has been neglected by critics who approach literature through linguistics. Richard Ohmann, for example, who has made applications of the speech act theory of Austin and Searle to the analysis of literary texts, and who has studied the relationship between real-life speech acts and their fictive representation, has not concerned himself with the place of fact or of speech acts in non-fictive literature.³

Simple fact presents theoretical problems for the literary critic, who, ironically, stands on more solid ground when dealing with fictive works of the imagination.

Yet because some factual works are recognizably literature, Boswell's Life of Johnson and Gibbon's Decline and Fall, for example, the question of how such factual works transcend the limitations of fact to become literature, becomes significant.

Like the works of Gibbon and Boswell, Browne's writings are factual; unlike them, however, Browne's works are factual expositions rather than factual narratives. Consequently, the kinds of resemblances that exist between drama and fiction on one hand, and factual narrative on the other, such as plot, character, setting, dialogue, point of view, are either absent or appreciably altered in Browne's non-narrative works. Thus, in the sense that his writings are neither narrative nor fictive, they are doubly removed from the realm of literature inhabited by drama and fiction. But it is the presence of fact more than the absence of narrative movement that creates suspicion and confusion about the literary status that should be accorded his works. And although both Urn-Burial and Religio Medici have received the imprimatur of literary distinction, it is not entirely clear why. Their style, of course, makes them literary, but does their style make them literature? Since both are factual works, shouldn't their stubborn, various and resistant facts be taken into account in any discussion of their

literary distinction? How do Browne's works transcend descriptive factuality while simultaneously presenting facts?

In attempting a tentative answer to these questions, I must turn to theory. And in doing this, I must make clear from the outset that the idea of literature may simply not admit of satisfactory definition. Of the two basic approaches to the definition of literature, the descriptive and the evaluative, my concern here is with the evaluative, since defining literature descriptively by classification avoids the kinds of important theoretical issues raised by significant factual works. Thus, I find Wellek and Warren's definition of literature accurate and unproblematic, but also not particularly helpful for the kind of problem I am raising. "It seems," they say, "best to consider as literature only works in which the aesthetic function is dominant, while we can recognize that there are aesthetic elements, such as style and composition, in works which have a completely different non-aesthetic purpose."⁴

Although it is true as Wellek and Warren suggest, that "the center of literary art is obviously to be found in the traditional genres of the lyric, the epic, the drama," in which there is "reference . . . to a world of fiction, of imagination,"⁵ yet there is a fundamental

inequity in a definition in which the poorest work of fiction is considered as literature, while the greatest works of factual discourse, works of "imagination" in a higher sense, are considered something else. The alternative is to define literature evaluatively and to have the same criteria for literary distinction apply for both fictive and factual works. In working toward such a description of literature, we must begin again with fact.

In his perceptive essay entitled "Fact and Factuality in Literature," Frank Brady describes three kinds of fact: historic, literary and universal.⁶ Historic fact is "some thing that exists or occurs in the present or has in the past."⁷ Literary fact is a factual statement in a fictive work, for example, "Mary washed the dishes, dried them and put them on the shelves." Here, we have sense without reference, as no such historical act occurred. Universal fact is of the type of statement such as "all men are mortal," a class of statements which includes laws or general propositions of truth.⁸ Such statements may be scientific or philosophical, but they cannot be equated with the more minute finite particularity of the first two types.

Related to the three kinds of fact are three pleasures of factuality: information, verisimilitude, and truth-to life.⁹ The first and third of these pleasure

obtain in both fictive and non-fictive discourse; the second, verisimilitude, implies an imitation or a representation of reality which is foreign to non-fictive literature. I wish to suggest that a factual non-mimetic work cannot be considered as literature unless it first provides both information and universal meanings. It must, in addition to presenting descriptive facts, also make universal statements which engage by their truthfulness, their correspondence with things as they are. Second, factual works must coherently order their factual detail so that there is an organic unity or symbolic development out from and beyond the discrete bits of factual data. There must be an internal coherence created and sustained by the facts presented. Third, there must be a pattern of meaning embodied in the coherently formed detail, which represents to the imagination a concrete, self-intelligible cause of emotion.¹⁰ These conditions do not of course provide a watertight definition. But at least they furnish a standpoint from which to assess factual literature. But let us consider a specific case.

In an essay on factual narrative with Boswell's Life of Johnson as his text, Ralph Rader demonstrates how factual narratives whose primary commitment is non-literary, can nevertheless become literature. His

argument, briefly, is that the central subject (in Boswell's case Johnson) must be rendered both concrete and universal; that it must be presented as a "concrete and universal aspect of human fact so as to render it inherently the cause of a distinct effect."¹¹ In explaining his assertion, Rader observes that "Boswell's book is literature because it lifts an aspect of human reality from the contingency of history and displays it as a concrete universal¹² - self-validating, self-intelligible, inherently moving, permanently valuable."¹³

Rader contends, moreover, that the subject of Johnson's book is not the life of Johnson, but rather his character as revealed in the facts of his life; and further, that Boswell's purpose is to make us feel both admiration and reverence which are the natural consequences of a full empathetic perception of Johnson's character. Finally, Rader suggests that the image of Johnson, an image created by Boswell's meticulous selection and arrangement of detail, "constructs the facts, and the facts in turn construct the image; the process, circular and progressive, constitutes the linear coherence and material unity of the Life."¹⁴

Although such a summary does not do justice to the range and subtlety of Rader's argument, it highlights the theoretical implications and their practical consequences

for reading factual narratives aspiring to the status of literature. The problem with applying Rader's theory to Browne lies in the fact that Browne's writings are works of factual exposition rather than examples of factual narrative, like Gibbon's Decline and Fall or Boswell's Life. Yet, even so, Rader's notion of the concrete universal as a cause of a particular thought-feeling effect, can be applied to many species of literary composition, fictive or factual, expository or narrative, poetic, dramatic or didactic, mythical or allegorical and any combinations thereof.

Let us pursue the matter of fact in literature by attending briefly to how the philosophy of language concerns itself with the fact in discourse. Many recent discussions of the relationship of fact to fiction utilize distinctions made originally by J. L. Austin. Some of the work of both Richard Ohmann and John Searle derive from and expand upon Austin's theoretical views.¹⁵ Both evidence a healthy respect for fact but both neglect the literary status of some factual discourse. Literature, they seem to suggest is one thing, and factual discourse another, even though literature may use facts and utterances for its own purposes.

According to Ohmann, factual, actual, referential speech acts actually do something. In Austin's terminology,

they have illocutionary force. (They assert, promise, beg, warn etc.). Speech acts in fiction, on the other hand, prepresent or imitate actual speech and they imitate its consequences. Similarly, Searle says that such speech acts pretend to be referential, without actually being so. Both men drive a wedge between factual and fictional discourse, intimating that, in order to be literature, a work must be fictive. Ohmann makes the point explicit when he suggests that "the main point . . . is that if we attend to illocutionary acts, we can identify a perfectly clean cognitive break between literature - poems, plays, novels, jokes, fairy tales, fantasies etc. - and discourses that are not literature."¹⁶ Conspicuously omitted here are works of literature which use language factually, referentially, such as histories or biographies. Ohmann seems to lock such works out of the literary canon, since they fail to meet his definition of literary works as "discourses with the usual illocutionary rules suspended," as "acts without consequences of the usual sort, sayings liberated from the usual burden of social bond and responsibility."¹⁷ Thus while much of what Ohmann says in his shrewd applications of speech act theory to literature is persuasive, he has allowed no place for the perplexing issue of speech acts in non-fictive literary works.

Searle allows factual discourse slightly more status when he admits that fiction is not synonymous with literature. But he believes that because "the literary is continuous with the nonliterary," and because "there is no trait or set of traits which all works of literature have in common and which could constitute the necessary and sufficient conditions for being a work of literature,"¹⁸ then the concept "literature" is impossible to define. And he illustrates the lack of boundary between literature and non-literature by referring to Thucydides' and Gibbon's histories, factual narratives, which Searle concludes "we may or may not treat as works of literature."¹⁹ Searle's view here is very close to that of Barbara Herrnstein Smith, a view which holds that factual works may be taken as both literature and non-literature, but not at the same time.²⁰ And in one sense, this position is tenable. We may, read the Bible, for example, as literature, as theology, as spiritual sustenance, as history or as myth. Or, to take another example, we may look at a lake aesthetically, or we may view it more practically, perhaps as a source of irrigation or as a problem in military logistics. Yet in admitting the validity and usefulness of such an approach, I am still troubled by saying that the Life of Johnson is now biography, now literature, but not both

at the same time. My fear is that in suggesting that such factual works are now literature, now something else, we assign them to a literary limbo from which they will never be released.

But it is worth following Professor Smith's arguments a bit further. She assigns utterances and compositions to one of two classes: they are either natural or fictive (natural utterances have historical referentiality, fictive ones do not).²¹ And further, the work or utterance has "meaning and consequence only insofar as those concerned with it share certain assumptions regarding how it is to be identified and interpreted, how it is to be taken."²² And, of course, this matter of perception and inference is very important in our determination of genre and in our consequent reading of a work. It is certainly true as Professor Smith suggests that conventions influence how one classifies what one sees, that how we subsequently react toward what we perceive depends upon "what we see something as."²³ Problems arise, however, with works which exhibit internally contradictory or ambiguous features that amalgamate both natural and fictive uses of language. Is Wordsworth's Prelude, for example, versified autobiography and thus natural discourse, or is it "the representation of a possible autobiography, and thus fictive?"²⁴ And what

of the Life of Johnson? Is it fictive or is it factual? And, ignoring for the moment, the problem of occasional factual inaccuracy, how does its factuality affect its literary status, and how does its factuality influence the dynamics of reader response?

Is it true that "the classification one chooses will differentially direct, or be directed by, one's experience of the work and the manner in which one interprets it?"²⁵ Rather than suggest that the Prelude, the Life or the Decline and Fall can be interpreted either as natural discourse or as fictive, I incline to a view which suggests that such works can be read as natural discourse having actual referentiality, as works which simultaneously present facts and transcend them by lifting aspects of human reality from the contingencies of history in which originated.²⁶ These works display fact in such a way that the work becomes a "concrete universal";²⁷ they embody universalized and internally coherent meanings which are more than the sum of their facts. If they are to be classified as literature, such works must select and arrange factual details so as to create a coherent and viable image which evokes specific emotional-intellectual responses. (As all literature must do, whether fictive or factual). The images which they create are not fictive as is Dickens' representation

of London. They are actual, referring to historical particulars. In both cases an image is presented to the imagination. In one case the details are non-referential; they pretend to be actual; they imitate the actual. In the other, the details are actually referential. In both cases there is representation, although in fictive literature the representation is an imitation, whereas in factual literature it is a re-presentation. But what makes both kinds of works literature is the concrete universality of the images they create, and the validity and intensity of the responses they evoke. In factual literature, facts are referential; but they are something more as well; they are either symbolic or internally coherent or both. If they are not integrated with universal statements, or if they do not, in their conjunction and amalgamation, create a concrete and universal image, they retain only a specific referentiality, and they remain mere brute facts, the meanings of which do not transcend their referents.

In short, I am suggesting that if we wish to define literature evaluatively rather than descriptively, then, whatever the criteria for literary distinction are for fictive works, they will be the same for factual works as well. From an aesthetic viewpoint there is little difference between an autobiography in which a narrator

actually reports, describes and refers, and a novel in which the author represents the verbal action of a man reporting, describing and referring. One really refers, and one pretends to refer to actuality. Consequently, in the case of a novel, the rules of referentiality are suspended. Both the novel and the autobiography may be verbal artworks, even though one is an event in nature and one is an imitation of such an event. And it is the conditions they must satisfy to make them verbal artworks, and the resistance of details of language and structure they must overcome which make works of factual and fictive literature more alike than the exigencies of fiction and fact seem to allow. Professor Smith herself, seems to suggest something like this, when she observes that, when responding to verbal structures, we make functional discriminations in terms of implicit covert categories which cut through explicit distinctions such as fictive and factual.²⁸

II

Browne's writings are incontrovertibly factual. They derive from, refer to, use and display detailed particulars which are either naturally or historically referential. But exactly how does Browne use facts? What is the nature and function of detail in his works? Once

more, I turn briefly to theory.

In a discriminating essay, W. K. Wimsatt has classified three styles of writing, and three corresponding levels at which detail may occur. They are:

1. The abstract or less than specific substantive style: e.g., implement.
2. The minimum-concrete or specific substantive style: e.g., spade.
3. The extra-concrete, the detailed, or more than specific style: e.g., rusty garden spade.²⁹

In my chapter on diction, I tried to show how Browne's vocabulary reveals tendencies toward the abstract, particularly evidenced by Garden of Cyrus and Christian Morals, but also by occasional passages in the Religio.³⁰ Yet even though some of his writing is on this level of abstraction, it is inaccurate to suggest that Browne's style is consistently or even preponderantly of this nature. The evidence of both Urn-Burial and Garden of Cyrus too often argues just the opposite, since factual and specific detail saturates the early chapters of both works. Yet while factual detail often keeps Browne's writing from becoming overly abstract, Browne rarely establishes his detail at the extra-concrete or more than specific level, as Defoe, for example, often does.³¹ Moreover, although one encounters abundance of detail, and proliferation of fact and observation in works like Garden of Cyrus, Urn-Burial and The Pseudodoxia, one does

not find a corresponding high degree of specificity, of extra-concrete particularity in the facts presented. In fact, most of Browne's detail in the works just cited occurs at Wimsatt's second level, the minimum-concrete or specific substantive level. Consider two highly characteristic passages, one from Urn-Burial, the other from the Garden of Cyrus. First Cyrus:

The beds of the antients were corded somewhat after this fashion: (the quincunx) that is not directly, as ours at present, but obliquely, from side to side, and after the manner of network . . .

And as they lay in crossed beds, so they sat upon seeming crosslegg'd seats: in which form the noblest thereof were formed: observable in the triumphall seats, the sella curulis, or Aedyle Chagris, in the coynes of Cestius, Sylla and Julius. That they sat crosse legg'd many noble draughts declare; and in this figure the sitting gods and goddesses are drawn in medalls and medallions. And beside this kinde of worke in Retiarie and hanging textures, in embroderies and eminent needle-works; the like is obvious unto every eye in glass-windows. Nor only in Glassie contrivances, but also in Lattice and Stone-work, conceived in the Temple of Solomon; wherein the windows are termed fenestra reticulatae, or lights framed like nets . . .

One is impressed more by the collocation of examples, in this passage, by their range and variety, than by their degree of specificity. Beds, coynes, medalls, chairs, windows, nets: none are highly particularized on the substantive level of discourse. When greater precision or exactitude is needed he relies on other strategies of specification such as illustration, example and allusion,

but even they occur substantively, without extra-concrete detail.

In the passage from Urn-Burial, Browne's substantive style works in a similar manner.

Among these Urnes we could obtain no good account of their coverings. Onely one seemed arched over with some kinde of brickwork. Of those found at Buxton some were covered with flints, some in other parts with tiles, those at Yarmouth Caster, were closed with Romane bricks; And some have proper earthen covers adapted and fitted to them . . . And such as had no covers might have the earth closely pressed into them, after which disposure were probably some of these, wherein we found the bones and ashes half mortered unto the sand and sides of the Urne; and some long roots of Quiche, or Dogs-grass wreathed about the bones . . .

In sundry Graves and Sepulchres, we meet with Rings, Coynes and Chalices. Ancient furgality was so severe, that they allowed no gold to attend the Corps, but only that which served to fasten their teeth. Whether the opaline stone in this Urne were burnt upon the finger of the dead or cast into the fire by some affectionate friend, it will consist with either custom. But other incinerable substances were found so fresh, that they could feel no sindge from fire. These upon view were judged to be wood, but sinking in water and tried by the fire, we found them to be bone or Ivory.

(UB III; Works I, 148-149).

In this passage, as in the previous one, Browne relies upon substantives, namely wood, ivory, stone, rings, coins, chalices, to describe what he sees before him. And though these are actual physical objects immediately observed, rather than historical examples, as were those described in Cyrus, both sets of descriptive facts enjoy the same substantive status.

In addition to facts of natural observation, references to objects, and historical examples, one finds historical, mythological and Biblical allusions scattered throughout the pages of Browne's works. References to people are abundant, and indeed, naming is the most pervasive and common mode of specification used by Browne. Most often, the name refers to an historical personage; usually, it functions as example or illustration, although on occasion a name may serve as a symbol or as an authority to validate an argument. Some examples are in order.

In the Letter to a Friend, Browne refers indirectly to both Aristotle and Saint Paul when he uses their concepts of the "true Gentleman" and the "noble Christian" to illustrate a standard of virtuous behavior. He does not elaborate, seeing no need to specify more than the main point of his illustration. Similarly, in both Urn-Burial and Religio Medici, Browne frequently uses names to specify and exemplify ideas. In explaining the difference between maintaining unorthodox opinions and establishing a sect, Browne names Lucifer, "who was not content to erre alone, but drew into his faction many Legions of Spirits." (RM I, 7; Works 1, 17). In Urn-Burial V, Browne illustrates his notions of the democracy and the fortuitousness of fate by making explicit

references to particular historical and mythological figures:

Herostratus lives that burnt the Temple of Diana, he is almost, lost that built it; Time hath spared the Epitaph of Adrians horse, confounded that of himself. In vain we compute our felicities by the advantage of our good names, since bad have equall durations; and Thersites is like to live as long as Agamemmon.

(Works I, 167).

This use of names as example is the most prevalent form of detail in Browne's writings. And, although there is perhaps a heavier density of factual detail, especially details of natural observation, in the early chapters of both Urn-Burial and Garden of Cyrus, naming is the mode of detail Browne resorted to most easily and most frequently in the varied contexts of his different works.

Browne often uses names as authorities, to buttress or dignify an argument. He relies on Tacitus' account of Roman influence on British stock to deduce that "they [the Britons] conformed also unto their religious rites and customes in burials." (UB II; Works I, 146). Tacitus is called upon again in the next sentence to sustain the assertion that the Germans used to burn "their Princes and great persons." (Works I, 146). But the most interesting examples of names as authorities occur in Pseudodoxia Epidemica where Browne refers to specific authorities as often to indicate their error, to refute them, as he does

to enlist their support. I can give here but one brief example which illustrates both of these uses of authority simultaneously.

Such a Story as the Basilisk is that of the Wolf concerning priority of vision, that a man becomes hoarse or dumb, if a Wolf have the advantage first to eye him. And this is a plain language affirmed by Pliny: In Italia ut creditur, Luporum visus est noxius, vocemque homini, quem prius contemplatur adimere; so is it made out, what is delivered by Theocritus, and after him by Virgil:

Vox quoque Moerim
Jam fugit ipsa, Lupi Moerim videre priores.

Thus is the Proverb to be understood, when during the discourse, if the party or subject interveneth, and there ensueth a sudden silence, it is usually said, Lupus est in fabula. Which conceit being already convicted, not only by Scaliger, Riolanus, and others; but daily confutable almost everywhere out of England, we shall not further refute.
(PE III, 8; Works II, 179)

Finally, names approach symbolic significance in the following passage where persons and places are used representatively.

whatsoever is beyond, [the articles of Anglican belief] as points indifferent, I observe according to the rules of my private reason, or the humor and fashion of my devotion, neither believing this because Luther affirmed it, nor disapproving that because Calvin hath disavouched it. I condemne not all things in the Councill of Trent, nor approve all in the Synod of Dort. In briefe, where the Scripture is silent, the Church is my Text; where that speakes, 'tis but my comment; where there is a joynt silence of both, I borrow not the rules of my Religion from Rome or Geneva, but the dictates of my own reason.
(RM I, 5; Works I, 14).

In this example, as in the others quoted above, names serve to concretize abstract ideas to anchor them in a

more easily apprehendable reality. Functioning as shorthand forms of reference, names particularize the general and embody the abstract. In short, they help both to advance and to enrich Browne's argument.

But naming isn't the only significant mode of specification Browne exploited. Perhaps more important as will be seen above, are the various kinds of detail found within a given work and the differing types of facts enlisted therein. In Garden of Cyrus I, for example, Browne's details are descriptive facts based on custom, on what is conventional, and in Browne's sense, artificial. Chapters three and four contain facts of natural observation which illustrate God's creative ordering of nature according to the quincunciall pattern, as those of the first two chapters exemplify man's tendency to replicate the quincunx design in his own artifacts. And while the general purpose of this substantively centered detail is the same, to illustrate the quincunx, its specific purposes differ roughly as historical fact differs from empirical fact. Let me illustrate with a pair of examples, one from chapter two, one from chapter three of Cyrus. First, the detail of custom:

The same [quincunciall pattern] is not forgot by Lapidaries while they cut their gems pyramidally, or by aequicrural triangles. Perspective picturers, in their Base, Horison, and lines of distances, cannot escape these Rhomboidall decussations. Sculptors in

their strongest shadows cannot escape these Rhomboidall decussations.
(GC II; Works I, 188).

Next, facts of natural observation:

But the Firre and Pinetree from their fruits do naturally dictate this position. The Rhomboidall protuberances in Pineapples maintaining this Quincunciall order unto each other, and each Rhombus in it selfe. Thus are also disposed the triangular foliations, in the conicall fruit of the firre tree, orderly shadowing and protecting the winged seeds below them.
(GC III; Works I, 194).

Differing from the kinds of acts presented in both of these passages, are the details of the final chapter of Garden of Cyrus. Rather than a catalogue of actual facts, empirically or historically referential, Cyrus V contains, in part, a series of speculations, in which Browne approaches the quincunx mystically. Consider the opening of this final chapter:

To enlarge this contemplation unto all the mysteries and secrets, accomodable unto this number, were inexcusable Pythagorisme, yet cannot omit the ancient conceit of five surnamed the number of justice, as justly dividing between the digits, and hanging in the centre of Nine, described by square numeration, which angularly divided will make the decussated number; and so agreeable unto the Quincunciall Ordination, and rows divided by Equality, and just decorum, in the whole complantation; And might be the Originall of that common game among us, wherein the fifth place is Sovereigne, and carrieth intention. The Ancients wisely instructing youth, even in their recreations unto virtue, that is, early to drive at the middle point and Central Seat of justice . . .

And though a sharper mystery might be implied in in the Number of the five wise and foolish Virgins,

which were to meet the Bridegroom, yet was the same agreeable unto the Conjugall Number, which ancient Numerists made out by two and three, the first parity and imparity, the active and passive digits, the materiall and formall principles in generative Societies . . .
 (GC V: Works 1, 222).

Browne does not develop this kind of speculation in the remainder of this final chapter. Instead, about midway through, he reverses direction, turning once again to historical and natural examples of the quincunx. He refuses to speculate directly on the meaning of his examples, instead raising questions about their significance:

More considerable there are in this mysticall account, which we must not insist on. And therefore why the radicall Letters in the Pentateuch should equall the number of the Soldiery of the Tribes; Why our Saviour in the Wildernesse fed five thousand persons with five Barley Loaves, and again, but four thousand with no lesse than seven of Wheat? Why Joseph designed five changes of Rayment unto Benjamin? and David took just five pibbles out of the Brook against the Pagan Champion? We leave it unto Arithmeticall Divinity and Theologicall explanation.

Yet if any delight in new Problems, or think it worth the enquiry, whether the Criticall Physician hath rightly hit the nominal notation of Quinque; why the Ancients mixed five or three but not four parts of water unto their Wine: And Hippocrates observed a fifth proportion in the mixture of water with milk, as in Dysenteries and bloody fluxes . . . He may meet with abstrusities of no ready resolution.

(GC V; Works 1, 224).

Such details are significant for a number of reasons. First, they intensify Browne's central concern in the book as a whole: to illustrate the range and variety

of the quincunciall order as he finds it in the worlds of history, myth, mathematics, natural science and natural philosophy. That is, even though the questions admit of no definite answers, their very accumulation nevertheless serves to reinforce Browne's artificiall, natural and historical examples. Second, such questions illustrate a cardinal habit of Browne's mind, namely the tendency to speculate on origins and causes of phenomena, a tendency that we observed earlier in his structural and syntactic stylistic habits. One gets the feeling that Browne does have answers to some of these questions, although they are not strictly factual answers, which, in any event, he refuses to reveal. Indeed, he thinks the question so important, that as he ends the series of accumulated problems, he suggests that whoever attempts to solve them "shall not fall on trite or triviall disquisitions." (GC, V; Works 1, 225). But since the resolution of such problematic questions is too ambitious for one man, Browne asks obliquely for help when he notes that

A large field is yet left unto sharper discerners to enlarge upon this order, to search out the quaternio's and figured draughts of this nature, and moderating the study of names, and meer nomenclature of plants, to erest generalities, disclose unobserved proprieties, not only in the vegetable shop, but the whole volume of nature; affording delightful Truths, confirmable by sense and Ocular Observation, which seems to me the surest path, to trace the Labyrinth of Truth. For though discursive enquiry and rationally conjecture may leave handsome

gashes and fleshwounds, yet without conjunction of this expect no mortal or dispatching blows unto error. (GC V; Works I, 225-6).

Like Bacon, Browne advocates a concerted intellectual effort to combat error and to erect a foundation for the systematic advancement of knowledge.³² And, as for Bacon, for whom facts were a necessary but not a sufficient condition for establishing a science, Browne suggests that reason and deduction are necessary to make sense out of accumulated facts. Such a statement and approach are consistent with Browne's attack on error in Pseudodoxia Epidemica, in which he designs the tests of sense, authority and reason to correct error.³³

The kinds of detail in Urn-Burial reflect a similar variety of nature and purpose. The first two chapters exemplify the two primary ways of disposing the dead: burning or burying them. The detail here is almost exclusively historical, and although Browne sometimes explains the reasons underlying particular forms of disposal, he generally reserves explanation and speculation for chapters four and five. My example, however, factual though it is, also illustrates Browne's concern with the relationship between custom and reason,³⁴ as it shows how, in presenting historical facts, he weaves in explanation.

Now as all customes were founded upon some bottome of Reason, so there wanted not grounds for this; according to severall apprehensions of the

most rationally dissolution. Some being of the opinion of Thales, that water was the original of all things, thought it most equal to submit unto the principle of putrefaction, and conclude in a moist relentment. Others conceived it most natural to end in fire, as due unto the master principle in the composition, according to the doctrine of Heraclitus. And therefore heaped up large piles, more actively to waft them toward that Element, whereby they also declined a visible degeneration into worms, and left a lasting parcel of their composition.

(UB I; Works I, 37).

Since chapter three concerns itself with a description of the urns found at Walsingham and also with a catalogue of their contents, the nature of the detail in that chapter is necessarily empirical. The portion of Urn-Burial quoted earlier to illustrate substantive discourse can serve also to exemplify the nature of this kind of detail.

With chapters four and five of Urn-Burial, the nature and function of detail changes. Chapter four mixes historical example with facts of natural observation, and, in addition, exercises Browne's hypothetical imagination, much as the accumulated questions do in Garden of Cyrus IV. But Urn-Burial's final chapter is something else entirely. Both professional critics and general readers are right in separating this final chapter from the body of the work, and responding to its wonderfully cadenced and powerfully evocative language. The facts of this chapter are of a different order from those of the earlier chapters. We get a hint

of what is to come in the final chapter, when, toward the end of UB IV, Browne writes: "Were the happiness of the next world as closely apprehended as the felicities of this, it were a martyrdom to live; and unto such as consider none hereafter, it must be more than death to dye . . ." (UB IV; Works I, 162).

Urn-Burial and Garden of Cyrus incorporate facts of the first type, information, in the two forms I have mentioned above, namely facts of natural observation and facts of historical reference. Both have actual referentiality. The detail of Garden of Cyrus IV, which I have not yet discussed, is similar to that of Urn-Burial V. Both chapters engage the reader with philosophical detail, with facts as universals. And although Urn-Burial's final chapter is more consistently factual in this sense, than is the Garden of Cyrus IV, the Garden's philosophical factuality is no less powerful.

Darknesse and light hold interchangeable dominion, and alternately rule the seminal state of things. Light unto Pluto is darknesse unto Jupiter. Legions of seminall Idea's lye in their second Chaos and Orcus of Hippocrates, till putting on the habits of their forms, they show themselves upon the stage of the world . . .
(GC IV: Works I, 218).

And, almost immediately after, in what sounds very much like the language of Urn-Burial's final chapter, one discovers the same kind of universal statements:

. . . Light that makes things seen, makes some things invisible: were it not for darknesse and the shadow of the earth, the noblest part of the Creation had remained unseen . . . The greatest mystery of Religion is expressed by adumbration . . . Life it self is but the shadow of death, and souls departed but the shadows of the living: All things fall under this name. The Sunne it self is but the dark simulacrum, and light but the shadow of God.

(GC IV; Works I, 218)

The truth of these statements is only partly a truth of correspondence on the literal level, as in "light that makes things seen, makes some things invisible." (For example, the sun's light makes other stars invisible by day.) More essential, however, to this type of discourse, is truth of coherence, in which there is a feeling of truth-fullnes, of truth-to-life, of things as they are. Yet there is no empirical way of measuring these truths, these facts of universality.

To illustrate fully the universal facts of Urn-Burial V, I would have to quote almost the entire chapter. I will be content to suggest a few highlights.

If the nearnesse of our last necessity brought a nearer conformity unto it, there were a happinesse in hoary hairs, and no calamity in half senses. But the living habit of living indisposeth us for dying . . .

And therefore restlesse inquietude for the diuturnity of our memories unto present considerations, seems a vanity almost out of date, and superannuated peece of folly . . .

There is no antidote against the Opium of time, which temporally considereth all things; Our Fathers finde their graves in our short memories, and sadly tell us how we may be buried in our Survivors . . .

Although Christian Morals and the Letter to a Friend exhibit literary characteristics such as imagery, syntactic patterning, structure, wit, tone, etc., they do not succeed, as Urn-Burial and the Religio do, in integrating the concrete and the universal. Nor do the Morals and the Letter create distinct and powerful effects by means of the integrated arrangement of their factual details. In the Garden of Cyrus, there is a general ordering of detail into quincunx examples drawn from nature and custom, and there is mystical speculation about the examples. In addition, there is a universalizing beyond the facts; there is a larger fact to which they point: the order and design of creation provided by the ordainer of the "mystical mathematics." And, although the expository method of the book yields a relentless, even tedious illustration of this single idea which overwhelms the reader with multiplicity of detail, the work is both unified and monolithic. Its vast and repetitious accumulation, however, astonish, amaze and delight. Browne's amalgamation of such disparate examples evoke admiration for his design, astonishment at his uncanny eye for detail, and wonder and amazement at the reality of such a pattern, and the diversity of examples, natural, historical, mythical, Biblical and mystical, which Browne presents.

split in its structure. That is, detail begins as example illustrating idea, but winds up as admonition.³⁵ In fact, the Letter, in part at least, is made the occasion for instruction in Christian attitude and behavior. Such instruction is alternated with references to the dead friend throughout the early parts of the work, but ultimately overwhelms these references, as the Letter becomes increasingly didactic and aphoristically admonitory.

The nature of detail in the Religio is harder to pin down. Allusive examples pervade the work, especially in Part I where they serve to situate Browne's philosophical speculations in a Platonic context. His use of detail, however, is much greater in Part II, on charity, where the work is more heavily autobiographical, more freely self-revelatory, than in the more philosophically speculative section on faith.

Because the Religio is multi-generic, its details are not of a single texture. They encompass historical references, Biblical and mythological allusion, names, autobiographical facts of thought, feeling and behavior, prayers, poems, and articles of belief, to cite the important types. There is almost nothing of either the naturally observed empirical factuality of Garden of Cyrus and Urn-Burial, or of the universals so important to the conclusions of those works.

But the iniquity of oblivion blindly scattereth
her poppy and deals with the memory of men without
distinction to merit of perpetuity . . .

Darknesse and light divide the course of time,
and oblivion shares with memory a great part even
of our living beings . . .
(Works I, 165-168)

And finally, in what perhaps best sums up the whole
direction, thrust, theme and tone of Urn-Burial, Browne
writes: "There is nothing strictly immortal but immortal-
ity; whatever hath no beginning may be confident of no
end. All others have a dependent being, and [are] within
the reach of destruction." (Works I, 169; UB V)

I have tried to account earlier for the power of some
of these passages. Such elements as the balance of
monosyllabic Saxon with polysyllabic Latin words, the
cadential rhythms, the universality of subject and theme,
the wit, the balanced phrasings and repetitions, along
with powerfully evocative universal images of light and
dark--all contribute to but do not exhaustively explain
the success of such writing.

As we have already observed, the purposes which
details serve vary from word to work as they change within
a work as well. The Letter to a Friend provides no
exception. But what makes the Letter different from both
Urn-Burial and Garden of Cyrus is its structure, which is
not readily apparent. Detail in the Letter serves as a
clue to the work's intention as it underscores the basic

The effects of reading Urn-Burial are different, as are its literary characteristics. Its literary status is due partly to universality of subject and theme. Perhaps even more important is the manner in which the accumulated factual details of the early chapters enlarge and deepen in significance as Browne approaches his final chapter. Unlike the final chapter of Garden of Cyrus, which continues to illustrate the idea exemplified in the four previous chapters, chapter five of Urn-Burial gathers up the specific factual details of the earlier chapters which had been put in the service of specific ideas such as showing the general consensus concerning customs for disposal of the dead, and the diversity of reasoning behind these customs. In his final chapter, Browne takes such details, along with those describing the specific Walsingham urns which provide the occasion for Urn-Burial, and rises above them, turning the work naturally, even inevitably into a meditation on death. Browne, thus, universalizes and enlarges his subject, as he, at this point also draws the reader more fully into the work. Rather than, as in the earlier chapters, presenting specific facts which the reader objectively observed and evaluated, Browne makes universal statements about a universal subject, death, to which the reader's response is considerably more emotional and subjective. The

effort, made in an eloquently rhythmic and powerfully resonant prose, evokes in the reader a complex of emotional-intellectual effects, including awe, fear, as well as a grudging recognition of the truth of Browne's statements. The effect is curiously both frightening and consoling as the reader is reminded of the inevitability of his own death which brings with it an end to the struggles of life. Religious faith, of course, is important here also, as its presence or absence as well as its degree of intensity in the reader, influences his response to Browne's meditation.

The Religio achieves literary status for yet another reason. It represents, in its selection and arrangement of factual detail, the mind of Sir Thomas Browne, a particular man who thought and felt in a certain complex and uniquely individual manner. It concretizes, illustrates, portrays this mind in the process of thinking. Moreover, Browne presents himself as an Anglican Christian who has solved for himself the problem of belief without abdicating his reason, at the same time as he dramatizes the conflict between his reason and his faith. Leonard Nathanson is right to locate one source of the Religio's interest and value in the tension between science and religion,³⁶ as he is right to suggest that the drama of their opposition and their eventual resolution constitute

the equivalence of what in fiction, would be plot, dialogue and dramatic action. Yet this intellectual action, however mimetic, is not fictive, having for its actual source and referent, the mind of Sir Thomas Browne.

Unlike Bunyan's autobiographical Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, the dramatic center of which is Bunyan's emotional psychological character, Browne's work is more a philosophical essay which concretizes universal and abstract issues by presenting them as occurring in the quicksilverish mind of a particular man who comes to represent something more than himself. The Religio thus takes an abstract and universal philosophical problem, the incongruity between science and religious faith, concretizes it by dramatizing their opposition in the mind of a particular man, and invites the reader to participate in the attempt to resolve them.

As I suggested earlier, neither Christian Morals nor the Letter to a Friend qualify as literature, for failing precisely where Urn-Burial, Cyrus and the Religio succeed. Both the Morals and the Letter fail to achieve a unified effect, integrating their factual detail and their examples, in pursuit of a universal theme with coherent and distinct intellectual-emotional consequences. "Language works by signs; art means by designs," wrote Josephine Miles in a recent essay.³⁷ Browne raised the

language of fact to the level of art by carefully designing his works to transcend facts while presenting them, to anchor the abstract and the universal in the concrete data of experience and in the process created imaginative works of the first rank.

NOTES

¹Frank Brady, "Fact and Factuality in Literature," Directions in Literary Criticism, eds. Stanley Weintraub and Philip Young (University Park, Pa: Penn State University Press, 1973), p. 93.

²See, for example: J. P. Day, "Artistic Verisimilitude," Dialogue, 1 (1962); Mary McCarthy, "The Fact in Fiction," in On the Contrary (N.Y.: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1961); W. K. Wimsatt, The Verbal Icon (Lexington, Ky.: University of Kentucky Press, 1967); Erich Auerbach, Mimesis, trans. Willard Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953); Martin Price, "The Irrelevant Detail and the Emergence of Form," Aspects of Narrative, ed. J. Hillis Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971); Robert M. Adams, Strains of Discord (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958).

³See especially Richard Ohmann, "Literature as Act," Approaches to Poetics, ed. Seymour Chatman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), pp. 241-253; "Speech, Literature and the Space Between," NLH 4 (1972), 47-64; "Speech Acts and the Definition of Literature," Philosophy and Rhetoric 4 (1971), 1-19; "Speech, Action and Style," Literary Style, ed. Seymour Chatman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 241-253.

⁴Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1956), p. 25.

⁵Ibid., p. 26.

⁶Brady, p. 95.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰I am following a theory proposed by Ralph Rader. See his "Literary Form and Factual Narrative," in Essays in Eighteenth-Century Biography, ed. Philip B. Daghljan (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1968), 3-41.

- ¹¹Ibid., p. 4.
- ¹²See W. K. Wimsatt's, "The Concrete Universal," in The Verbal Icon, pp. 69-84.
- ¹³Rader, p. 35.
- ¹⁴Ibid., p. 17.
- ¹⁵John Searle, Speech Acts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). See note 3 for reference to Ohmann's articles.
- ¹⁶Ohmann, "Speech, Literature and the Space Between," NLH 4 (1972), 53.
- ¹⁷Ibid.
- ¹⁸John Searle, "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," NLH, 6 (1975), 322.
- ¹⁹Ibid.
- ²⁰Barbara Hernstein Smith, "In the Margins of Discourse," Critical Inquiry, 1 (1975), 775.
- ²¹Ibid.
- ²²Ibid.
- ²³Ibid.
- ²⁴Ibid.
- ²⁵Ibid.
- ²⁶Rader, *passim*.
- ²⁷W. K. Wimsatt, "The Concrete Universal," The Verbal Icon (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), pp. 69-84.
- ²⁸Smith, p. 772.
- ²⁹Wimsatt, "The Substantive Level," The Verbal Icon, p. 138.
- ³⁰Consider, for example, "God being all things is contrary unto nothing out of which were made all things

and so nothing became something, and Omneity formed Nullity into an essence." (RM I, 35; Works I, 46).

³¹On this point see Brady, "Fact and Factuality," where he suggests that the primary function of the extra-concrete style is to establish authenticity, to elicit credibility in the reader.

³²The Advancement of Learning, Book I.

³³See for example, PE, Book I, 3; Works II, 25-31; and Book V, 1, Works II, 338-340.

³⁴On this point, see Leonard Nathanson, The Strategy of Truth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

³⁵At the point where this insistent use of admonition begins Norman Endicott ends his test of the Letter, arguing that the didactic section really belongs with Christian Morals. See his edition of The Prose of Sir Thomas Browne (New York: Norton, 1967), pp. 529-530; and also his essay "Sir Thomas Browne's Letter to a Friend," UTQ 36 (1966), 66-86.

³⁶Nathanson, Strategy of Truth, passim.

³⁷Josephine Miles, "Forest and Trees, or The Sense at the Surface," NLH 4 (1973), 44.

APPENDIX

BROWNE'S STYLE IN HIS TIME

In studying the form and force of Browne's imaginative works, one needs to know the historical and rhetorical contexts out of which they emerged. In this connection, the work of both George Williamson¹ and Morris Croll² furnish valuable information and useful insights. Without providing a full discussion and analysis of Renaissance rhetoric, I wish here at least to outline the basic Renaissance stylistic categories.

Ciceronian and anti-Ciceronian, Ciceronian and Senecan, Asiatic and Attic, Euphuistic and Baroque, genus grande and genus humile, provide some of the pairs of rhetorical categories which have been used to classify seventeenth-century prose. The basic division splits the plain from the ornate, the straightforward essay style from the more elaborate oratorical style. Croll points out that the term "Asiatic" describes the florid style of Cicero's early orations as well as any style distinguished by a similar use of periodic form and stylized rhetorical figures.³ "Attic" on the other hand, refers to a more abbreviated prose style which cultivates antithesis,

disjunction and brevity. Yet it is not a plain, simple style. "It is no more a bare unadorned, unimaginative style than the oratorical style is; it aims, just as oratory does, to move and please, as well as to teach, but is distinguished from oratory by the fact that it owes its persuasive power to a vivid and acute portrayal of individual experience rather than to the histrionic and sensuous expression of general ideas."⁴ It is the difference between a style which imitates the process of thought and one which displays its product. As a result, Attic style involves an emergent rather than a premeditated order of periodic members.⁵

Quintilian distinguished these two rhetorical schools, characterizing the Attic as concisely healthy with an absence of superfluity and the Asiatic as inflated and empty. Furthermore he offered a social-psychological reason for the difference: the Asiatics, given to bombast and ostentation were vain gloriously and elaborately eloquent; the polished and refined Athenians refused to tolerate emptiness and redundancy.⁶

If "Ciceronian" can be used as a corollary descriptive term for the Asiatic style, "Senecan" can be substituted generally for "Attic." The style developed by Seneca, imitated and modified by sixteenth and seventeenth-century English and French writers, presents what is

perhaps the strongest form of anti-Ciceronian rhetorical theory and practice. This Attic style extends backward from Seneca and Tacitus to Lysias and Brutus,⁷ and forward to Muretus, Lipsius, Montaigne and Bacon.

Senecan style, differs from Ciceronian in the way its periods develop: Ciceronian periods build climaxes; Senecan periods make points.⁸ The Ciceronian period can be described as circular and cumulative; it creates its effect "by means of rhetorical gradation, implemented by subordination and by more continuous arrangement, which parallelism is not allowed to interrupt."⁹ In such an arrangement, the period members are all placed with reference to the central or climactic member; they point forward or back toward it as they give it emphasis. The Senecan period, on the other hand, is co-ordinate rather than subordinate in structure. "It derives its periodology from extended antithesis or parallelism in which its members acquire their mutual support and rhythm."¹⁰ Compare the Ciceronian writing of Jeremy Taylor, in these respects, with the Senecan style of Browne.

Since stay not here, being people but of a day's abode, and our age is like that of a fly and con-temporary with a gourd, we must look somewhere else for an abiding city, a place in another country to fix our house in, whose walls and foundation is God, where we must ever rest, or else be rest-less forever.¹¹ (Taylor)

I would not live over my houres past, or beginne againe the tred of my dayes: not upon Cicero's ground, because I have lived them well, but for feare I should live them worse; I find my growing Judgement dayly instructs me how to be better, but my untamed affections and confirmed Vitiosity make me dayly doe worse.¹²
 (RM I, 42; Works I, 50)

Perhaps a more important feature distinguishing the Senecan curt style from the Ciceronian, is the syntactic disjunction and consequent concision and abruptness of the Senecan style. Ciceronian syntax, conversely, is conjunctive; it adds and builds to flowing orotundity. Seneca's syntax is characterized by discontinuity and lack of connectives, and because it utilizes antithesis and epigram, it gives an effect of speed and intensity.¹³ It eschews the suavity, formalism, copiousness and ease of Ciceronian syntax. Examples, once again come from Taylor and Browne. First, Taylor:

For whatsoever ease we can have or fancy here is shortly to be changed into sadness or tediousness: it goes away too soon, like the periods of our life: or stays too long, like the sorrows of a sinner: its own weariness, or a contrary disturbance, is its load; or it is eased by its revolution into vanity and foregetfulness; and where either there is sorrow or an end of joy, there can be no true felicity: which because it must be had by some instrument and in some period of our duration, we must carry up our affections to the mansions prepared for us above, where eternity is the measure, felicity is the state, angels are the company, the Lamb is the light, and God is the portion and inheritance.¹⁴

Then, Browne:

The heart of man is the place the devil dwells
in; I feele sometimes a hell within my selfe;
Lucifer deeps his court in my brest; Legion is
revived in me. There are as many hells as
Anaxagoras conceited worlds; there was more than
one hell in Magdalen.

(RM I, 51; Works I, 62)

Although both styles can be cumulative, they accumulate in different ways. The subordinating period of the Ciceronian style places its members with reference to the central climactic member. The Senecan, disjunctive style, whether curt or loose, accumulates fragments in no apparent, pre-ordained order. In the Ciceronian period, the accumulation functions to suspend the final sense of the period; in the Senecan style, the period works to qualify continuously in an effort to clarify, or to illustrate, and sometimes, it seems, even to discover the sense. At the same time, nevertheless, there is, in the Senecan style, a frequent use of point or wit to turn phrases and mark antitheses. The style cultivates sententious brevity in the form of rhetorical "sententiae."¹⁶ Here are a few varied examples.

1. A good wife is a man's best movable, a scion incorporate with the stock, bringing sweet fruit, one that to her husband is more than a friend, less than a trouble; an equal with him in the yoke.¹⁷ (Sir Thomas Overbury)
2. All passions are like rapid torrents: they swell the more for meeting with a dam in their

violence. . . . It often falls out that the end of passion is the beginning of repentance.¹⁸
(Owen Felltham)

3. Civil complacency consists with decent honesty: Flattery is a Juggler and no Kin unto Sincerity. (Browne; CM I, 23; Works I, 255)
4. In venemous Natures something may be amiable: Pysons afford Antipoysons: nothing is totally or uselessly bad. Notable Virtues are sometimes dashed with norotious Vices. (Browne; CM I, 28; Works I, 258)
5. Crafty men condemn studies, simple men admire them, and wise men use them. . . . Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested.¹⁹

Francis Bacon criticized the Senecan style precisely for its use of pointed wit. Influenced by the ancient split between rhetoric and dialectic, Bacon thought that the sententiae and the oxymorons, paradoxes, and metaphors which characterized them, made certain passages written in such a style, seem more witty and weighty than they actually were.²⁰ This stricture is not inconsistent with Bacon's criticism of Ciceronian style on the grounds that its rhetoric calls attention to itself. According to Bacon, both Seneca and Cicero at times set words above matter, rhetoric above philosophy.²¹ Both men evidence a rhetorical vanity which in being peremptorily and self-assuredly "magisterial," precludes thought in favor of authoritative eloquence. Such a rhetoric, in Bacon's view, was antithetical to the "probative" way and the philosophical style which

delivered knowledge to be examined rather than believed.²²

The "pointed brevity," with which Bacon found fault, and in which wit becomes schematized, distinguishes Senecan brevity from the more plain brevity of the Attic style.²³ Both styles employ antithesis, but the Senecan antitheses are more deliberately cultivated, more playfully and pointedly expressed. There is more frequent and more artful word play in the Senecan than in the Attic plain style. The difference between pointed and plain brevity, can be illustrated by comparing the writing of Lancelot Andrews and Francis Bacon. First, the plain brevity of Bacon's comments on old and young men:

Young men are fitter to invent than to judge, fitter for execution than for counsel, and fitter for new projects than for settled business; for the experience of age, in things that fall within the compass of it, directeth them; but in new things abuseth them. The errors of young men are the ruin of business; but the errors of aged men amount but to this, that more might have been done, or sooner.

Young men . . . embrace more than they can hold, stir more than they can quiet; fly to the end, without consideration of the means and degrees . . . use extreme remedies at first. . . . Men of age object too much, consult too long, adventure too little, repent too soon, and seldom drive business home to the full period, but content themselves with a mediocrity of success.²⁴

Next, the pointed brevity of Andrewes:

It is not commanded to stand 'gazing up into Heaven (Acts I,ii) too long; not on Christ Himself ascending, much less on his star. For they sat not still gazing on his star. Their vidimus begat venimus; their seeing made them come, come

a great journey. Venimus is soon said, but a short word; but many a wide and weary step they made before they could come to say Venimus, Lo "we are come"; come, and at our journey's end.²⁵

A relative of this curt Senecan style, but one which is not so pointed or sharply antithetical, might be called the "loose Senecan style." Its period begins without premeditation as it states its idea in the first form in which the idea first occurs. The period's second member is determined or at least influenced by the situation in which the mind finds itself after the first has been written. Such a period, according to the prevailing explanation, is not made--it becomes. Croll likens this loose period to a chain to which links are consecutively added, and calls it a trailing or linked period. It develops by association, with the previous period member's thought rather than a central thought providing the impetus for its continuation.²⁶

Although both the curt and the loose Senecan style are disjunctive with relaxed syntactic ligatures, and although both present an emergent rather than a premeditated order of members, their effects are different. The loose style is more natural, more informal and lends itself better to meditative prose. The curt style, with its studied brevity of members,²⁷ its hovering imaginative order, its asymmetry and omission of syntactic ligature, results in concision and abruptness, and sometimes

in truncation and obscurity, which became hallmarks of Tacitean style.

Browne uses the curt style in the following passage:

To see our selves againe wee neede not looke for Platoes yeare, every man is not onely himselfe; there have beene many Diogenes, and as many Tymons, though but few of that name; men are lived over againe; the world is now as it was in ages past; there was none then, but there hath been some one since that parallels him, and is, as it were, his revived selfe.

(RM I, 6; Works I, 16)

In this next passage, Browne begins with the curt style, but then shifts into the more rambling, co-ordinating, loose Senecan style:

I make not therefore my head a grave, but a treasure of knowledge; I intend no Monopoly, but a Community in learning; I study not for my owne sake onely, but for theirs that study not for themselves. I envy no man that knowes more than my selfe, but pity those that know less. . . . I cannot fall out or contemne a man for an errorr, or conceive why a difference in opinion should divide our affection: for controversies, disputes, and argumentations, both in Philosophy and in Divinity, if they meete with discreet and peaceable natures, doe not infringe the Lawes of Charity; in all disputes, so much as there is of passion, so much there is of nothing to the purpose; for then reason like a bad hound spends upon a false sent, and forsakes the question first started. And that is one reason why controversies are never determined, for though they be amply proposed, they are scarce at all handled, they doe so swell with unnecessary Digressions, and the Parenthesis on the party is often as large as hte maine discourse upon the Subject.

(RM II, 3; Works I, 74)

Williamson introduces order into the confusion generated by the proliferation of Senecan styles mentioned thus far. Consolidating them, he suggests that the curt Senecan style be viewed as the norm, from which style can move in two directions.³⁰ It can either become "loose," adding length and connection to members, or "obscure" (Tacitean) by becoming more compressed, elliptical and truncated. To clarify the forms of abbreviated style, Williamson suggests a threefold classification: plain brevity, which corresponds to what was previously described as Attic prose;³¹ pointed brevity, which characterizes the schematic wit of Seneca's curt style; obscure brevity, the Tacitean form with its excessive abridgement and contraction. The essay form sought to achieve plain brevity; the character and more witty forms exploited pointed brevity, sometimes to the point of obscurity.

II

But what were the motivating forces behind these contending forms of seventeenth-century prose style? In an essay on Muretus, Croll mentions that Ciceronianism was not an isolated phenomenon, but was rather a representation in rhetorical theory of a series of similar and related dogmas in the various subjects of sixteenth-century learning.³² The rhetorical doctrine of Ciceronianism

made common cause with a philosophical and religious orthodoxy in which the love of authority and the single standard of reference characterized the still flourishing medieval mind of the sixteenth century.³³ One of the central rhetorical ideas of the anti-Ciceronian movement, on the other hand, was that "style and thought should be adapted to the differences of men and times." The great modern principle of unending change and development of language was implicit in its rhetorical theory.³⁴

In connecting the rise of the anti-Ciceronian prose style with the emergence of modern rationalism, Croll limits his discussion of the movement to its humanistic form. But one cannot overlook the development of science and its influence on the changing forms of seventeenth-century prose style. Unlike the humanists who were developing a psychological and subjective basis for a theory of language, the scientists "were seeking an objective and materialistic language basis."³⁵ The difference was reflected in the forms of brevity developed by the two groups: "To the scientist brevity meant the excision of all rhetorical devices; to the others it meant studied brevity such as aphorisms, point and the like."³⁶ For the scientist, the periodic structure of oratory could no more record events accurately than the syllogism could take philosophical hold, for them, of

objective reality.³⁷ Distrusting the imagination, the scientist insisted upon the primacy of reason, seeing in language, as R. F. Jones has written, "only an instrument for the expression of intellectual concepts."³⁸ Such suspicion of language derived mainly from the forms of inquiry and expression of the older science which depended more upon rhetoric than upon observation of nature, as well as out of feeling that language obscured reality rather than described it.³⁹

Because the truth of ideas depended upon verbal accuracy, precision and clarity of language were necessary for scientific advancement. Such verbal exactness was to be achieved by a constant narrowing of terms through strict definition. Hobbes as well as Bacon was insistent in the demand for precise definition. In the Leviathan he wrote:

a man that seeketh precise truth had need remember what every name he uses stands for, and to place it accordingly, or else he will find himself entangled in words, as a bird in lime twigs, the more he struggles, the more belimed. And therefore in geometry, which is the only science that it hath pleased God hitherto to bestow on mankind, men begin at setting the signification of their words; which settling of signification they call definition, and place them at the beginning of their reckoning.⁴⁰

Extended much further, such a view demanded the equivalence of word and thing which, in the famous motto of the Royal Society, "res et verba" asked for "so many things

almost in an equal number of words."⁴¹

Antithetical in spirit and style to the demand that words should stand for things, the classical strain of anti-Ciceronianism attempted in its prose style to portray a sense of the processes of thought as well as to present its products, to convey a sense of the man as well as a sense of his ideas. Montaigne, for example, strove to exhume the natural man buried in his self, and attempted to find his way toward a theory of style which allowed a large scope of freedom for the expression of individual character. He achieved this with the greatest possible naturalness of style,⁴² a naturalness that highlighted individuality rather than obscured it.

A similar point is made by Wesley Trimpi in his fine book on Ben Jonson's style. Trimpi distinguishes the classical plain style from that sought by the Royal Society. The scientists' plainness, in his view, was an attempt to describe the physical world as objectively as possible without the intrusion of the writer; in classical plain style the writer revealed himself, portraying his individual personality⁴³--and, one might add, often glorying in it.

Yet, the simplicity sought by both these groups must be further distinguished from that sought by a third, the religious sects. Both Puritanism and Quietism strove

for a bare, unadorned prose style in keeping with their religious outlooks. The literary spirit which animated the Renaissance humanists was alien to the religious sects as was the spirit of scientific rationalism, which in part underlay the new prose demands of the Royal Society. Consequently, science as well as rhetorical eloquence were suspect as violations of the ascetic and utilitarian religious spirit,⁴⁴ which demanded an unadorned form of writing, stripped of decoration and of wit.

Having its origin in the ancient controversy between rhetoric and dialectic, the plain style sought by both the sects and the scientists had, as its intention, to teach the truth. But since the Senecan style strove for rhetorical effect as well as for truth, since it used antithesis and wit in its pursuit and shaping of truth, it was rejected by the sects for the same reason Ciceronianism was rejected: the contamination of truth (dialectic) with verbal schemes (rhetoric).

III

Not to be overlooked in any discussion of the plain style is the principle of decorum or keeping, which informed both ancient and Renaissance rhetoric. In antiquity, the plain style was referred to as *genus humile*, and its purpose

was to teach. The genus medium or middle style was, according to Cicero, geared primarily to delight. The genus grande or high style was used to convince and move to action.⁴⁵ Instruction, pleasure, persuasion--such were the effects of the three styles.⁴⁶

Complicating matters, however, was the ultimate breakdown of restrictions tying a given stylistic level to a particular subject. The genus humile simply refused to stay where it belonged, treating low characters in low situations, and avoiding affairs of divinity and state. The poets, chiefly the satirists Horace, Persius and Juvenal along with the epigrammatist, Martial, were largely responsible for the intrusion into the high style, of low or vulgar subjects.⁴⁷ But the influence of the satirists extended to other forms of writing as well, and by the later Renaissance there was something of a breakdown of the ancient character of style due to the gradual extension of the range of subject matter which could be treated decorously in the plain style.⁴⁸

Such were the central premises and arguments animating the contending rhetorical principles underlying seventeenth-century prose. In the midst of these divergent standards, and in the company of a wide diversity of prose styles, Browne produced his imaginative and extraordinary works. Precisely where his writings stand

in relation to the dominant trends of seventeenth-century prose style is a more complex problem than has previously been recognized. There is no doubt that, for one thing he is a master of the Senecan loose style; he does write "Baroque" prose according to Croll's definition of the term.⁴⁹ Moreover, he exemplifies, to some degree, a writer whose works uphold the principle of decorum. One can generally agree with Austin Warren that "Browne has at least three styles--a low, a middle, and a high--the low represented by Vulgar Errors, the high by the Garden of Cyrus, the medium by Religio Medici and (in decadent form) by Christian Morals.⁵⁰ Yet, in each of his major works, especially in Urn-Burial and Religio Medici, Browne writes in more than one style. Sometimes, although infrequently, his writing approaches the Ciceronian, sometimes it is Baroque; frequently it involves a shifting between curt and loose forms of Senecan style. Moreover, when Browne writes in the more abbreviated style, sometimes the brevity is plain, sometimes it is pointed, occasionally it is obscure. In general, there is more variety of tone, more diversity of style, and more latitude in expressive effect than critics have been willing to grant his writing.

Part of my purpose in analyzing Browne's style has been to try to determine where he uses different

stylistic forms and to explain their rhetorical effects. I have not attempted to demonstrate that Browne writes, for example in the loose style "x" percent of the time; nor have I been concerned with identifying a particular work as being written predominantly in one of the stylistic modes described above. I have shown instead, I think, how Browne used different styles within the same work and within the same chapter of certain works. And also, how Browne's stylistic traits cut across the different genres and tempers of his imaginative writings.

In trying to make a case for the complexity and diversity of his style, I have suggested that one element of his originality as a writer was his ability to break through the barriers of conventional genres to cheat something new. His two greatest works, Religio Medici and Urn-Burial, combine multiple generic features as they employ more than one style. And these two features contribute largely to their interest, in addition to making both works difficult to classify. Finally, it is this kind of amalgamation of prose forms coupled with a breadth of stylistic traits that make Browne a far more interesting writer than the praisers of his purple passages have made him out to be.

NOTES

¹George Williamson, The Senecan Amble (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).

²Morris Croll, Style, Rhetoric and Rhythm, eds. J. Max Patrick and Robert O. Evans with John M. Wallace and R. J. Schoek (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966).

³Croll, "Attic Prose: Lipsius, Montaigne, Bacon," in Style, p. 69.

⁴Ibid., p. 89. In another essay from the same collection, "The Baroque Style in Prose," Croll writes: "Baroque style . . . preferred the forms that express the energy and labor of minds seeking the truth to the forms that express a contented sense of its enjoyment and possession." p. 208.

⁵Williamson, p. 200.

⁶Marcus Fabius Quintilianus, Institutio Oratoria, trans. H. E. Butler (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1921) IV, 459.

⁷Octave Navarre, Essai sur la rhétorique grecque avant l'Aristotle (Paris, 1900), passim.

⁸Williamson, p. 188. In an earlier chapter, Williamson remarks that "the anti-Ciceronian wanted his sentence to be unlike the period of Cicero--not to put off conclusion, but to begin at the point," p. 149.

⁹Croll, Style, p. 224.

¹⁰Williamson, p. 45.

¹¹The Rule and Exercise of Holy Dying, quoted in Seventeenth-Century Prose and Poetry, eds. Alexander M. Witherspoon and Frank J. Warnke (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963), p. 9.

¹³Williamson, p. 188.

¹⁴Taylor, "Holy Dying," Prose and Poetry, p. 9.

¹⁶Williamson, p. 82.

¹⁷"A Good Wife," Sir Thomas Overbury His Wife,
quoted in Prose and Poetry, p. 199.

¹⁸"Of Reprehension," Resolves; Divine, Moral and Political, cited in Prose and Poetry, p. 319.

¹⁹Francis Bacon, "Of Studies," cited in Prose and Poetry, p. 50.

²⁰"The Advancement of Learning," in Selected Writings, ed. Hugh C. Dick (New York: Random House, 1955), p. 300 ff.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Williamson acutely notes that there is a kind of Asianism that results from a constant effort to speak with point and significance, p. 69.

²⁴"Of Youth and Age," Selected Writings, p. 110.

²⁵XCVI Sermons, cited in Poetry and Prose, p. 30.

²⁶One must distinguish with Williamson, between the Lipsian hop and the Senecan amble: "The hopping of Lipsius . . . suggests the more extreme appositive style of Tacitus, which is more elliptical than Seneca's, less given to balanced phrasing . . . where the Lipsian hop stresses the discontinuous movement, the Senecan amble stresses the antithetic movement," p. 148.

²⁷These four characteristics of the curt style are enumerated and explained by Croll in Style, p. 214.

³⁰Williamson, p. 190.

³¹What Williamson describes as Stoic prose can also be included here, pp. 150-186.

³²Croll, p. 119.

³³Ibid., pp. 120-121.

³⁴Ibid., p. 185.

³⁵R. F. Jones, "Science and Language in England of the Mid-Seventeenth Century," in The Seventeenth

Century, eds. Marjorie Nicolson et al. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1951), p. 150.

³⁶Ibid., p. 107.

³⁷Wesley Trimpi, Ben Jonson's Poems: A Study of the Plain Style (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1962), pp. 405.

³⁹Ibid., p. 156. One thinks, of course, in this connection, of Bacon and his criticism of ancient science, of his inductive method, and of his scientific program overall.

⁴⁰Leviathan, Chapter 4, "Of Speech."

⁴¹Cited in A. C. Howell, "Res et Verba: Words and Things," in Seventeenth-Century Prose, ed. Stanley E. Fish (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 195. Howell's essay traces comprehensively and intelligently the use of "res" and "verba" as a technical and rhetorical term of classical writers through its adoption by the Royal Society, and its subsequent treatment at the hands of Swift.

⁴²Croll, p. 181.

⁴³Trimpi, p. 91.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 90.

⁴⁵Croll, p. 78. Cf. also, Cicero, Orator xx. 60-xx 71, and Quintilian, Institutes IV, Book xii. x. 58.

⁴⁶Fraser Mitchell, English Pulpit Oratory from Andrewes to Tillotson, (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), p. 104, observes that the three purposes of sacred oratory, to teach, convince and persuade, were responsible for the chief parts of a sermon: explication, confirmation, and application. The parallel with the three levels of style would be exact but for the expected lack of a pleasure principle.

⁴⁷Trimpi, pp. 11-18.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 70.

⁴⁹Croll, "Baroque," in Style.

⁵⁰Austin Warren, "The Styles of Sir Thomas Browne," in Connections (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970), p. 15.

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