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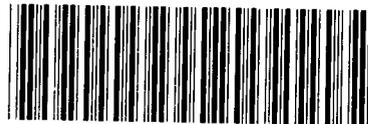
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Concepts of Harmony in Five Metaphysical Poets
Disertační práce

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Prohlašuji, že jsem disertační práci vykonal samostatně a s využitím uvedených pramenů a literatury.

Tomáš Šejna



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Introduction

My interest in metaphysical poetry has always been tainted with a sense of amazement and awe: the poetry of the School of Donne, indeed, poses fundamental questions about the nature of modern poetry and the mission of a poet within a *disenchanted* world. The slow abandonment of the old Pythagorean system of harmonious spheres rotating around a stable earth and the acceptance of the heliocentric Copernican-Keplerean universe marked a true “breaking of the circle of perfection” – to use the term of Marjorie Nicholson - and entailed a complex breach in the nature of representational arts. The old cosmology depicted the universe as truly *universal*, i.e. turning around a single axis, a single principle, or a clearly defined centre. The order of creation was granted by the gradual chain of being, uniting the lowest with the highest in a scale of perfection. The nature of representational arts was, primarily, to re-present the order of creation: i.e. finding a means of transfer between the static order of *universe* and human understanding. Classical Renaissance literary theory – in fact, inherited from Antiquity – emphasised that poetry as the art of making was to “teach and delight”: its delightfulness had to be firmly bound with instruction and initiation into to the order of harmonious cosmos. Indeed, Sidney emphasised that poetry must *not* be dull and has to delight; however, there was no room for any kind of *l’art pour l’art* movement in Renaissance poetics. What mattered was *balance*, a sense of *decorum*, which secured a truly proportionate and, after all, classically “objective” art. What Renaissance thinkers associated with nature was obviously *bella natura*, i.e. *embelished* nature, not a wild and unbound nature of the Romantics. Nevertheless, in the framework of this concept, art could always aspire to a sense of classical proportion: i.e. harmony granted by the concept it was meant to re-present. The Renaissance inherited this concept from Antiquity: it is the concept of harmonious order of universe as attributed to the teachings of Pythagoras of Samos. Classical Renaissance poetic theory is fully a poetics of correspondence: the order of universe – granted by the

immaterial substance of number – could be re-presented everywhere. This cosmological speculation secured the unity of creation precisely by its infinite repeatability: the whole was to be seen in part and vice versa. The new discoveries of Copernicus, Galileo and Kepler, however, made this concept unverifiable. Although Kepler himself - as we shall see later on – could not fully abandon the inherited lore, his discoveries managed to make the Pythagorean concept a mere *metaphor*, an abstract carrier of meaning with no apparent reference.

This, indeed, is the world in which the Metaphysicals find their new, surprising conceits. Once the mere re-presentation becomes impossible, the means of poetic work changes: metaphor and its nature become the prime focus of orientation. Indeed, the very possibility of *harmonizing* reality brings along a number of surprising discoveries: the indecorum of the Metaphysicals is not meant to undermine the old system. After all, its relevance is granted in the nature of our *harmonizing* intuition, in the intuition of correspondence, in the “naturalness” of metaphor making. What the Metaphysicals attempt to do is re-shaping poetic work in such a way, that it becomes apparent to what extent it is an act of *conscious transformation* of reality. In other words, to what extent our perception of harmony, of correspondence and proportion, is to be *created*. The *universe* of the Metaphysicals – I want to argue - is thus *perverted*; it rotates around an *ad libitum* centre. With the re-shaping of the notion of infinity – from the prophetic intuition of Cusanus to the classical concepts of Descartes – the notion of the centre of *universe* became less and less plausible. This turned the interest of the poets primarily to the questions of language, to the very process of generating a meaningful, harmonized and animated *universe* of man.

The metaphysical school is seen primarily as a breach from the old poetics of correspondence – as e.g. S.K. Heninger says quite clearly in his classic book. This premise can be accepted only as long as we bear in mind the later developments of the respective theme: all the main aspects of Pythagorean cosmological lore are, indeed, still eminently

present in metaphysical poetry. It is still the world upon which the new one is to be built. This breach is in fact much more an act of re-building the ruined building of the old system into a new context. In the end, the transformation struggled to keep the original intuition of the Pythagorean system: i.e. the fundamental harmoniousness of reality even though facing the mute universe of strangely wandering planets. This harmony, however, is much more *an act*: it is an act of accepting a certain metaphor as an epitome of reality. Such a harmony cannot be granted from outside: the shared *universe* of ideas, of one common belief, undergoes a transformation into a *universe of language*, since language – as a living tool of reasoning – becomes the prime means of sharing the ruined, de-centred and dis-encharmed *universe*. Language cannot grant the unity of *universe*, it can, however, create a platform *on which even an imaginary and non-existent world* (i.e. a world fully created by man) *can be shared*. In that sense, the dramatic change taking place at the birth of the modern era marks the new correspondence of human *microcosm* and heavenly *macrocosm*: the correspondence starts to work the other way round. The Metaphysicals make the *universe* speak, instead of serving as sensitive vessel of its language. The fragmentariness and “inordinate excess” of much of Donne’s verse starts depicting an individual cosmos amongst a multitude of other cosmoi, whose connection with the inherited lore is *the intuition of harmony in the very act of making*. Thus an individual cosmos calls for a renewed sense of language in such a way that the individual cosmos supersedes its initial brokenness and becomes an entity to be shared. In that sense, T. S. Eliot’s re-discovery of metaphysical poetry in the 1920s only *revealed* the substantial kinship of “modern” or – to be more precise – “contemporary poetry” and its roots in the curious, and often perverse conceits of the School of Donne.

This present inquiry aims at showing the way in which the old Pythagorean musical cosmos was being reshaped in the work of 5 main poets of the metaphysical school: Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Marvell and Crashaw. Indeed, the choice of the poets could have been

wider – it could have included Traherne, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, Cowley, Benlowes and, indeed, early Milton. The reason for limiting the examination only to the five mentioned ones is mainly traditional: they are most often noted as the prime representatives of the school. The others are either poets of minor significance, or are associated with the Metaphysicals only partially.¹ Moreover - as we shall see in the course of this study - Richard Crashaw in many ways marks the peak of metaphysical poetry. This becomes clear in the examination of the sparkingly witty, but basically empty conceits of Cleveland, Carew, Suckling and some of the other gallant poets of the middle of the 17th century. The development later – as I attempt to show – de-constructed the wit of the School of Donne: the dramatic roughness and excess of its language experimenting was to be soothed into “pleasing” exactness of the Restoration, making poetry more and more a type of popular entertainment.

In Part One I deal with philosophical and theoretical aspects of the problem of harmony and its reflection within the poetic theory of the Renaissance. I start with an examination of the two main concepts of harmony that have developed in the western tradition: the hidden harmony of Heraclitus and the overwhelming harmony of Pythagoras. I proceed into later developments of the theme of harmony in the thought of Plato and Aristotle, and the impact of the Pythagorean concept on the main thinkers of the Renaissance. This theoretical preparation paves the road towards the examination of Renaissance English poetics, as this can be done given the scarcity of sources and its rather unscholarly form. I deal mainly with the two main treatises of the English Renaissance, Sidney’s Defence of Poesie (written c. 1583, first publ. 1595), and Puttenham’s The Arte of English Poesie (1589). Nevertheless, I refer to other treatises of the time: Gascoigne’s Certayne Notes of Instruction Concerning the Making of Verse or Ryme in English, (1575), John Hoskins’s Directions for Speech and Style (publ. 1600) and Ben Jonson’s Timber or Discoveries (1641). The problems

¹ As regards Traherne, for example, Elrod denies that he is a true metaphysical poet at all. See Les Poètes métaphysiques anglais, p. 391-2

of poetics are discussed in relation to the problems of conceit, emblem and wit. The specific position of the Metaphysicals in the spiritual turmoil of the time - as epitomized in the tension between the traditionalist thinking of Thomas Browne's Religio Medici (1642), and the plans for a major reformation of sciences in Bacon's The Advancement of Learning (publ. 1605) - is meant to explain and *préciser* the historical and cultural situation of metaphysical poetry.

Part Two deals with separate analyses of the 5 major representatives of the metaphysical school. In all of the analyses I recall the theoretical basis of my earlier examination: in this way I attempt to show the specific developments in respective poets' concepts of harmony. In the course of the examination it was becoming clear, that the initial impulse of John Donne was worked out differently in the other poets of the school, with different respective accents; and that the initial impulse had also a certain dynamics, which so clearly comes into foreground in the Baroque conceits of Richard Crashaw. Along the way, many other questions had to be taken into consideration, mainly numerous theological issues and controversies. The initial impetus for the study - cosmological change as reflected in the change of poetics - drew my attention more and more to the problems of language. As I show in my analysis of Crashaw's verse, the dual nature of reception of the old Pythagorean system called for a specific *logic of language*. The Baroque interest in blending different means of representation, e.g. the tending of verse to a status of sculpture, makes language a means more *universal*, since its examination uncovers the basic structure of the paradox between representational and ontological status of the word. In fact, the theological context of the problem shows the issue as having wider relevance than just a matter of specific poetics. The new, post-Tridentine devotion made the experience of Christian faith centred upon the inner apprehension of God's divine grace, or - to put in cosmological terms - the *theo-* and *christocentric* perception of reality. The *infinity* and ineffability of God became a challenge to all *definite* concepts of reality. In fact, the paradox of Crashaw's verse shows the multiplicity

of Creation in their diverse centres as partakers on the infinite plan of God *abounding in its paradoxical musicality*. In that sense, the story of metaphysical poetry describes a full circle.

PART ONE

I. The Conceit of Harmony: Harmony as the Principle of Cosmos

I.1. Heraclitus and Pythagoras: towards a concept of harmony

I.1.1. Introduction

Two distinct concepts of harmony developed in the sixth century B.C. – first one based on the teachings of Pythagoras and a radically opposing one of Heraclitus. Their mutual interdependence is difficult to define, nevertheless, two Heraclitean fragments mention Pythagoras, and both rather unfavourably.² Pythagoras of Samos seems to have preceded Heraclitus by about a generation and an ancient tradition claims that Heraclitus of Ephesus was in fact a pupil of the Pythagorean philosopher Hippasus of Metapontum. This tradition, however, is rather dubious.³

I shall first deal with the concept of Heraclitus as its significance for Renaissance thinking and aesthetics is comparatively less important.⁴ Pythagorean concept of harmony on the other hand deserves a much more thorough discussion because its impulses were later elaborated in Plato's thought and its influence on Western tradition (and especially during the Renaissance) has been truly substantial.⁵

I.1.2. The hidden harmony of Heraclitus

"So closely has Heraclitus' name been associated in Western philosophical tradition with the related themes of change and paradox, that there has often been a tendency to

² "Much learning does not teach understanding; if it did, it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, and again Xenophanes and Hecataeus." (fr. 63)

³ "(Pythagoras was) the pioneer of swindles." (fr. 81) Quoted from Hussey, p. 63

⁴ "The tradition is too shaky to stand as evidence, however; for some scholars regard Hippasus as having postdated Heraclitus, and moreover Iamblichus in his *Life of Pythagoras* discredits his Pythagoreanism. The two firm facts about Hippasus are that he had been at one time a member of the Pythagorean brotherhood, and that like Heraclitus he believed that the universe is in a state of incessant change and that it consists in fire as its primal element." Wheelwright, P.: *Heraclitus*. Atheneum: New York, 1964, p. 9

⁵ However, as we shall see later on, Marie Antoinette Manca attempted at using the Heraclitean concept of harmony for her analysis of some of Shakespeare's plays. See Manca, M. A.: *Harmony and the Poet: The Creative Ordering of Reality*. Mouton Publishers: The Hague, 1978. Concepts of paradoxical or hidden harmony (whose origins may be more or less traced to Heraclitus) are to be found in much of hermetical writings and are often employed in the poetry of Henry Vaughan.

overlook the peculiar emphasis which he gives to the unity, in a qualified and paradoxical sense, of all things," says Philip Wheelwright in his book on Heraclitus.⁶ Indeed, Heraclitus' thought carries a heavy load of contradictions that make him perhaps the most obscure of all Pre-Socratic philosophers. The more surprising and challenging it is to tackle his concept of harmony hidden underneath its apparent opposites.

The Greek word *αρμονια* is derived from the verb *αρμοζειν* which originally had nothing to do with music or even cosmology. Its meaning was simply "fitting together" or "joining" and they were used as carpenter terms:

Both the Greeks and Indians have a carpenter god; the Christian God is a mason, but his son was a *carpenter*... The fact that wood is the primary life-stuff, "of which all things are made", shows it no historical accident but a mythical necessity that the God be referred to as *carpenter*...⁷

This is, indeed, the meaning that appears in Homer – however, even there it acquires secondary political associations: it is used also in the sense of "treaty" or "covenant".⁸ Heraclitus seems to activate primarily the former meaning of the word - he talks about joining of opposites, about strife producing concord:

People do not understand how that which is at variance with itself agrees with itself.
There is a harmony in the bending back, as in the case of the bow and the lyre.
(D 51; By 45)

Opposition brings concord. Out of discord comes the fairest harmony.
(D 8; By 46)⁹

Discord is the word that marks the beginning of harmony in Heraclitus' thought. A sense of struggle is present here – one that expresses the very principle of carpenter's work. Rough wood is to be cut to build a house in which humans can dwell.

⁵ See the discussion of Leo Spitzer in his magnificent study Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony. The John Hopkins Press: Baltimore, 1963

⁶ Wheelwright, P. : Heraclitus. Atheneum: New York, 1964

⁷ Shipley, J. T.: The origins of English words: a discursive dictionary of Indo-European roots. John Hopkins UP: Baltimore 1984. Cf. Wheelwright, p. 102

Moreover, discord is not there just to be overcome: discord is omnipresent and inseparable or even distinguishable from concord. They mysteriously co-exist together. The conflict of the two extremes is the guarantee of its paradoxical "fitting together". There is, however, one point on the top of it all:

The hidden harmony is better than the obvious.

(D 54; By 47)

Even sleepers are workers and collaborators in what goes on in the universe.

(D 75; By 90)

Heraclitus seems to suggest that harmony is ultimately beyond our utterable distinctions and partisan views, and that it stands for a pure and neutral LOGOS¹⁰, which is the amorphous source of being. Moreover, even the unconscious participants enhance this harmony. The ultimate reality is neither "this" nor "that"; and as long as its conceptual purity is maintained, life can steadily proceed from this source.

The special difficulty posed by Heraclitean thinking – apart from the scarcity of fragments (and their questionable reliability) - is the fluidity of its concepts, which leaves it open to numberless interpretations. An easier way to approach them might be the *via negativa*: in other words, find out what they seem to be attacking and what sort of thinking they refuse.

Heraclitus definitely refuses an exhaustive, positive philosophy of being, which disregards the fundamental ambiguity of reality. He embraces the idea of God and the Oneness of things but doubts its stability:

⁸ Hussey, p.43

⁹ Manca, p. 15

¹⁰ "Listening not to me but to the Logos, it is wise to acknowledge that all things are one." (D 50; By 1)

God is day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, satiety and want. But he undergoes transformations, just as *****, when it is mixed with a fragrance, is named according to the particular savour [that is introduced].

(D 67;By 36)

Heraclitus teaches an art of careful discernment of wisdom, an art of minute distinctions that aims at more than just attainment of knowledge. It seems to teach inner discipline, constant scrutiny and struggle towards wisdom. It is no surprise therefore that Heraclitean fragments resemble omens and portends. The path of wisdom for Heraclitus is bound with the hearing of the LOGOS and perhaps also with initiation. The existing philosophies somehow fail to respond to the call of the LOGOS:

With this logos which is for ever human people are out of touch [*axunetoi*] both before they hear it and once first they heard it; for although all things take place in accordance with this **logos**, they are like beginners experimenting with both words and practices such as these that I am going through as I divide each thing according to nature and say how it is. But it eludes other people what they are doing when they are awake, just as it eludes them what they want do when asleep.

(D1, By 2)¹¹

In that respect, Heraclitus has a quality of a mystical author of the negative tradition. Reason necessarily accompanies the path of the soul to achieve beatific vision, however, only as long as it acknowledges analogous quality of its findings.¹² The theological concept of the *via negativa* can thus, indeed, help to explain the core of Heraclitean thought.

While discussing religious rituals, Heraclitus carefully distinguishes the propriety and impropriety of things: divine worship is something different to mere human handling, however, there is also a striking similarity. The subtle difference of the two points of view teaches the discernment of the appropriate way of conduct:

The same actions are either sense or nonsense depending on whether they are sacred or secular. This kind of observation about the contextual dependence of significance is familiar in many other Heraclitean sayings: sea water is pure for fish and impure for humans; the road up and the road down is one and the same; the actions of cutting,

¹¹quoted from *Routledge History of Philosophy: From the Beginning to Plato*. Vol. I. Ed. C.C. W. Taylor, Routledge: London, 1997, p. 97

¹² See the excellent study of T. Merton on St John of the Cross: *The Ascent to Truth*. Harcourt Brace: New York, 1981

burning and inflicting pain are good when performed in a case of surgery, and bad in a case of torture.¹³

This duality is often misunderstood because it immediately faces the challenge of conceptualization. That, however, Heraclitus cannot allow because it could easily slip back into the monist illusion. Heraclitean harmony is hidden and beyond, it cannot be "achieved". It defies proportion with any model (as is the case with the Pythagorean-Platonic tradition). The One of Heraclitus is divided and the tension of its division paradoxically secures its Being. The path of thinking – in accordance with the mysticism of the night – has to fail. Thinking cannot grasp the totality of being, yet it has to be performed and exercised to avoid misconceptions.

Heraclitean LOGOS seems to show some similarities with the concept of *das Umgreifende* in the thought of German existentialist Karl Jaspers. Jaspers defines the existential condition of man as fatally divided into Subject and Object, which leaves us with the task of looking for the *Chiffren der Transzendenz*. The reality for Heraclitus is also mysterious, and perhaps just as Jaspers could not accept the finality of Christian dogmas (although he claimed to be otherwise "an ordinary Protestant") Heraclitus posits the *Aufgabe des Denkens* as a safeguarding activity of a conscious individual.

In that sense, it seems clear that Heraclitean harmony always involves contrast – there cannot be a harmony of just one single entity because harmony is a process and state of "fitting together".¹⁴ Harmony is unthinkable without division.

Marie-Antoinette Manca¹⁵ stresses the duality of the concept of harmony in Western tradition (Heraclitean x Platonic) and uses it to define two distinct approaches to the "creative ordering of reality" in literature. She makes an interesting case arguing the Heraclitean nature

¹³ Routledge History of Philosophy, p. 92

¹⁴ See further discussion in Wheelwright, p. 108

¹⁵ in her book Harmony and the Poet: The Creative Ordering of Reality. Mouton Publishers: The Hague, 1978

of some of Shakespeare's later dramatic works, namely Julius Caesar, Hamlet, King Lear, Macbeth, Measure for Measure, Timon of Athens, Othello, Anthony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus, Troilus and Cressida, and The Tempest. Although Shakespeare definitely draws upon the inherited ancient lore of Pythagorean harmony (especially in Twelfth Night and The Merchant of Venice)¹⁶, his plays often show a world of flux and constant strife to balance the fatal instability of our world. The process of "untuning" expressed in the famous speech of Ulysses in Troilus and Cressida (*Take but degree away, untune that string,/ And, hark, what discord follows! Each thing melts/ In mere oppugnancy.* I.3.109-111) does not aim to reproduce or remind us of the reality of Pythagorean harmony, it stresses the fatality of the need to combat this "untuning" because the world is permanently endangered:

...the order of which Ulysses speaks, it should be noted, is not the state of complete resolution of opposing tensions advanced in the Platonic vision of harmony. Ulysses in effect describes what W.B. Yeats has called 'the Shakespearean vision of horror', the state of social and moral chaos that emerges when order breaks down. Beyond this state of horror, however, the nature of the ultimate order envisaged is Heraclitean rather than Platonic. It is the state of justice that emerges from the 'endless jar' of opposing tensions. Harmony consists in the precarious balance which, once destroyed, leads to the primeval state of chaos...¹⁷

In that respect, it can be argued that Heraclitean universe is a universe of phenomenal change, a universe of the present, which defies any *a priori* conceptualization:

... it may generally be said that the appearance of harmony in its Heraclitean meaning most often occurs when phenomenal change is accepted as an integral and *real* factor in human experience.¹⁸

¹⁶ See the discussion of Hollander, J.: The Untuning of the Sky: Ideas of Music in English Poetry 1500-1700. Princeton UP: Hamden, 1993, pp. 150-61. Hollander points out the sophistication of the use of music in The Merchant of Venice: the elaborate use of practical music is contrasted with the unhearable and immortal *musica speculativa* of the heavenly harmony. In Twelfth Night, it is primarily Boethian *musica humana*: the way the abstract order of the universe is reflected in human beings. The temperament of different characters is defined in relation to their appetite. Hollander argues that in the play practical music "becomes justified in itself." (p. 161)

¹⁷ Manca, p. 74

¹⁸ Manca, p. 21

The creative ordering of reality in Heraclitean fashion thus always involves some degree of uneasiness with the idea of the final reconciliation of opposites – quite the contrary: it involves an assertion of phenomenal change. Theatricality can therefore become the more visible: indeed, if opposites cannot be resolved in a triadic model¹⁹, the actions on stage acquire phenomenal realism, which surpasses mere representation. In other words, such an ordering of reality problematizes the dichotomy *stage x audience*.

Manca's analysis of The Tempest defies the traditional understanding of late Shakespeare's plays: the nature of reconciliation at the end of the play has perhaps been overemphasised. Prospero leaves the stage with his famous final gesture and the world of the play somehow re-enters the primeval world of flux.

The point Manca tries to make may become easily comprehensible if we take into account the opposite concept. The Platonic version of harmony (based on Pythagorean concepts – see later discussion) is represented with Dante's Commedia divina. Dante – the poet of the ultimate reality²⁰ – obviously presents the "past" present, the eternal return and dissolution of all tensions at the same time in the idea of the One:

Dante's journey is a quest for that peace which resides in the resolution of all tensions and contradictions. This resolutions and peace, or total harmony – the merging of the multiplicity of different wills into the unity of the One – is indeed the meaning of Paradise.²¹

He is a religious poet par excellence, the poet of *re-ligio*: the "reality" for him is thus always binding and harmonious. The portrayal of human striving in Dante can acquire a sense of strong compassion, deep understanding and sharing the pathos of human existence²²,

¹⁹ as it is the case in Aristotelian tradition

²⁰ See the discussion of T.S. Eliot in his Clerk's Lectures (publ. as The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry. Ed. R. Schuchard. Faber and Faber: London, 1993): "I want to show, if I can, how the acceptance of one orderly system of thought and feeling results, in Dante and his friends, in a simple, direct and even austere manner of speech, while the maintenance in suspension of a number of philosophies, attitudes and partial theories which are enjoyed rather than believed, results in Donne in some of our contemporaries, in an affected, tortuous, often over-elaborated and ingenious manner of speech" (p. 120).

²¹ Manca, p. 60

²² See E. Auerbach discussion in Mimesis.

nevertheless, it is constantly confronted with the mirror of the ultimate and inescapable reality of God's eternal decrees. The dynamics of Commedia divina is thus primarily in the process of discovery of this harmonious reality, which is the beginning and the end of all.

I.1.3. The overwhelming harmony of the Pythagoreans

"In the development of Western philosophy as the Renaissance saw it the sect of Pythagoreans had played a definite and important role, a role much more important than is generally conceded today," says S.K. Heninger Jr. in his excellent book on Pythagorean cosmology and Renaissance poetics.²³ The problem is perhaps due to misunderstanding of the influence of the Pythagoreans on Plato, whose thought dominated the period.

Pythagoras of Samos, the founder of the school, is a rather mysterious character. In Antiquity he acquired a reputation of a sage with almost divine characteristics and his words were regarded equivalent or even truer than those of Apollo's oracles.²⁴ None of his works have survived, however, and the classical Pythagorean doctrine has been transmitted to us through the works of his followers.

The problem of the early Greek philosophers in Ionia was searching for the prime material, out of which all entities evolve and to which they return at the end. However, they failed to tackle the problem of the constant flux of things: if everything is a subject of change, can we acquire any ultimate knowledge of this world? In that sense, the Ionian materialists in fact embraced epistemological scepticism.

Pythagoras posits a fundamental dichotomy by distinguishing the phenomenal world of becoming and the world of abstract concepts. This enabled him to revisit the problem

²³ Heninger, S.K., Jr.: Touches Of Sweet Harmony: Pythagorean Cosmology and Renaissance Poetics, The Huntington Library: San Marino, 1974

²⁴ As Roman miscellanist Aelianus records "Such as were present at his lectures, disputations, and reasonings gave great credit unto him, and believed his words which they esteemed equivalent, and countervailable in truth, with Apollo's Oracles." Register of hystories, tr. Abraham Fleming (London, 1576), quoted from Heninger

posed by the Ionian materialists: instead of the material substance, Pythagoras declares the immaterial the basis of things. The doctrine of numbers – elaborated on the principles of early mathematics and geometry – opened a possibility to describe physical world as a system of mathematical relations. As Aristotle says in his Metaphysics this was, indeed, a more efficient means to detect analogues of what is and comes into being.²⁵ The doctrine of numbers managed to unite the old Ionian idea of substance (based on principles and elements) with an elaborate set of relations and proportions, which describe the physical world. This, consequently, paved the road towards a unified, harmonious and altogether musical cosmos.

Pythagorean teaching developed in four main directions: in the study of arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy. Proclus specifies the different aspects of the mentioned sciences in regard to the original doctrine:

The Pythagoreans considered all mathematical science to be divided into four parts: one half they marked off as concerned with quantity ($\pi\sigma\acute{o}\nu$), the other half with magnitude ($\pi\eta\lambda\acute{\iota}\kappa\omicron\nu$); and each of these they posited as twofold. A quantity can be considered in regard to its character by itself or in relation to another quantity, magnitudes as wither stationary or in motion. Arithmetic, then, studies quantity as such, music the relations between quantities, geometry magnitude at rest, spherics magnitude inherently moving.²⁶

This division became the later curriculum for the *quadrivium*, the second level of education after completing the *trivium*. In that respect also the influence of Pythagorean teaching on the history of Western civilization has been truly substantial.

²⁵ Aristotle, Metaphysics (985b23-986a3)

“... the so-called Pythagoreans, who were the first to take up mathematics, not only advanced this study, but also having been brought up in it they thought its principles were the principles of all things. Since of these principles numbers are by nature the first, and in numbers they seemed to see many resemblances to the things that exist and come into being – more than in fire and earth and water (such and such a modification of numbers being justice, another being soul and reason, another being opportunity – and similarly almost all other things being numerically expressible); since, again, they saw that the modifications and the ratios of the musical scales were expressible in numbers; - since then, all other things seemed in their whole nature to be modelled on numbers, and numbers seemed to be the first things in the whole of nature, they supposed the elements of numbers to be the elements of all things and the whole heaven to be musical scale and a number.” Aristotle, The Complete Works of Aristotle. Vol. VIII. *Metaphysica*. Transl. W. D. Ross. Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1963

²⁶ Proclus, A Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements. Transl. G. R. Morrow. Princeton UP: Princeton, 1970, pp. 29-30

Pythagorean arithmetic divided numbers into *odds* and *evens*. While the evens can be divided, the odds are undividable. It was suggested therefore that the odds reflect integrity and unity, while the evens are numbers only extended, derived from the odds. The duality of this principle – reflected in the notion of the monad and dyad - was then used to mark the qualities of entities in cosmos. The odds came to be associated with the perfect and the divine, which was masculine in virtue. This is why they were thought to guarantee unity and concord. The evens – needless to say - carried the opposite qualities: defectiveness, femininity and physicality – and were seen as susceptible to discord²⁷.

The monad and the dyad create arithmetical lines: in this respect, number 3 is of particular importance. Indeed, it is the first odd extended, a monad composed of units: the metaphysical quality of this number (later identified with the Christian trinitarian doctrine in St Augustine's treatises) determined how particular entities were to be regarded.

The science of geometry could expand into number four, as it marked the joining of four points and the creation of a spatial object. This number was then in a similar fashion associated with the finality of physical universe: four elements (air, fire, earth and water), four basic qualities of things (hot, dry, cold and moist), four seasons (spring, summer, autumn, winter), and the first four numbers (1, 2, 3, 4) which – when added – equal 10. Number ten marked the limit of physical universe.

Music from Antiquity all the way to the Renaissance was, indeed, an abstract science, dealing – as Proclus suggests – with proportions. The genesis of Pythagoras' musical lore has traditionally been based on a story, in which the acclaimed teacher passes by a blacksmith's shop and hears hammers of different sizes hitting an anvil. The proportion of size to sound could thus be established - to put it simply: the bigger the hammer, the deeper the sound. This discovery was later elaborated in experiments with the monochord. Plucking of a string in

²⁷ E.g. the allegory of Una and Duessa in Book I of Spenser's *The Fairie Queene*

certain ratios, indeed, produced a set of mathematical relations and vice versa. These relations were then used to describe the principles of sound production.

The tonal system of ancient Greek music preferred intervals that matched these qualities: the octave (or *dia pason*, 2:1), the fifth (or *dia pente*, 3:1) and the fourth (or *dia tesseron*, 4:3). These intervals remained the key ones well into the Middle Ages. The third (6:5) was refused by Plato as he thought – in accordance with the Pythagoreans – that 5 was an "unharmonic" number, although Archytas had already discovered this proportion. The rediscovery of the third was accomplished – as Leo Spitzer shows in his classic study - by Welsh musicologists no sooner than 1200.²⁸

The Antiquity and the Renaissance knew the mystery of tuning the 8-stringed lyre of Pythagoras, which basically elaborated on the basic proportions given above. This was to have substantial influence on the development of the concepts of world harmony: in cosmology, musicology, ethics, psychology, medicine and other sciences.

Porphyry gives a picture of Pythagoras who – as the only mortal in history – could hear celestial harmony: the proportions of heavenly bodies in regard to one another were thought to follow the rules of musical diapason, which Pythagoras discovered. Moreover, Pythagorean experiments established a dependable proportion between the finite and the infinite. The complex of harmonic relations could be thus used to define the nature of the relations between the earthly and the celestial.

The last ancient philosopher and the first medieval philosopher, Boethius, managed to translate the classical lore about proportions into the Christian Middle Ages. In his treatise *De Musica*, he establishes three types of musical relations in cosmos: *musica mundana*, *musica humana* and *musica instrumentalis*:

The first, the music of the universe, is especially to be studied in the combining of the elements and the variety of the seasons which are observed in the heavens. How indeed could the swift mechanism of the sky move silently in its course ? ... What

²⁸ See Spitzer, L.: Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony, p. 37

human music is, anyone may understand by examining his own nature. For what is that which unites the incorporeal activity of the reason with the body, unless it be a certain mutual adaptation and as it were a tempering of low and high sounds into a single consonance ? ... The third kind of music is that which is described as residing in certain instruments. This is produced by tension, as in strings, or by blowing ... or by some kind of percussion.²⁹

The penetrating quality of this harmony generated a cosmological system of correspondences, just as instruments mediated the experience of absolute music, which no one but Pythagoras could hear. The little reflected the great: cosmos was harmonically organized and everything neatly fitted the scheme. The geocentric structuring of the universe developed into a strict system of proportions: and although there were some minor differences (such as whether there were eight or nine spheres), the core of the system remained the same. It was a geometrical cosmos carefully organized according to a divine plan.

The uttermost sphere came to be called the *primum mobile* according to Aristotle. It marked the end of the finite universe: indeed, it was the *first mover* in the Aristotelian definition of the deity. It was followed by a sphere of fixed stars, usually called the *Firmament*. This sphere no longer rotated around the earth. Right bellow the Firmament were 7 spheres of rotating heavenly bodies (Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn). The earth stood still in the middle. It was suggested that the organization of the universe followed the scale of weight, density and clarity – the further from the earth, the lighter and clearer the air, until it reached the sphere of the fixed stars. Between the sphere of the fixed stars and the *primum mobile*, usually one more sphere was included during the Renaissance, called the *crystalline sphere*, which was to stress the transition into the sphere of the deity. Above the *primum mobile*, was the immobile empyrean, the actual seat of the deity.³⁰ This, indeed, follows the arithmetical idea of number 10 being the limit of the

²⁹ Boethius: *De Musica* I.ii, transl. S.K.Heninger, quoted from Heninger

³⁰ See e.g. engraving in Johannes von Eck's edition of Aristotle's treatise *Libri de coelo*, Augsburg 1519, fol. 29, submitted to this dissertation, Appendix 1

physical universe. The sphere beyond is thus no longer physical but *stricto sensu* META-physical, as it is truly the world BEYOND.

Following the omniscient microcosm-macrocosm analogy, the position of heavenly bodies became immensely important. The "science" of astrology has never been practised "more widely or fervidly than it was in the late Renaissance."³¹ Clearly, the basis of the authority of astrology and other occult sciences in this era stemmed out of the primary quality of the universe: its ability to harmonize, its ability to be a *kosmos*.

Diogenes and Plutarch ascribed to Pythagoras the first usage of the word "cosmos" – in the sense of orderly, beautiful design. The unity of *kosmos* guaranteed the order in the mode usually referred to as either *discordia concors* or *e pluribus unum*. This unity always managed to suppress the discord, or the discord in the wider context helped to a clearer and more *symphonic* order.

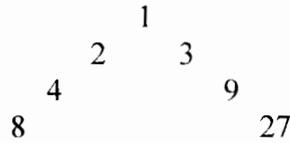
The power of this harmonious cosmos surpassed even the old Pythagorean-Ptolemaic geocentric universe. Copernicus in *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (Nuremberg 1543) still constructs a geometric universe, and Johannes Kepler in *Harmonices Mundi* (Linz 1619) - although his orbits are no longer round (as the Copernican ones still were) - but elliptical, restructures the old myth of the music of the spheres and argues that heavenly bodies do not just produce a single note (as in the old cosmology), but a melodic fragment. He thus identifies celestial music with the then dominant tradition of Renaissance polyphonic music³².

The Pythagoreans addressed also the issues of creation and time. These were obviously very important questions because they yet again faced the tension between the finite and the infinite, their mutual relationship, as well as the process of progression of basic forms towards the more complicated ones. The core of the Pythagorean teaching is based on the idea of progression from the monad. Numeral one – the monad (beginning, the unity)

³¹ See Heninger, p. 148

dominates the scheme, which then progresses in two lines in the shape of the Greek letter lambda “λ”. (See diagram 1 bellow.) The right side shows the progression of evens, the left side then the progression of odds.

Diagram 1:



The numerical progression marks the process of unfolding the universe³³ from its source. The first even “2” refers to a basic two-dimensional extension – a straight line, 4 the four points of a square, and the next extension 8 defines the cube. The progression of the odds starts with 3, the first real odd, which enables an inner progression itself (i.e. has a beginning, a middle (or a mean) and an end). Following the progression of the evens, number nine signifies a square; and 27 a cube.

The linking towards the idea of time is transformed by the first extended even – 4. The fourth dimension – so beyond the spatial progression a^3 – is the progression of time. The first four numerals 1, 2, 3, 4 – when counted – give 10, the boundary of the finite. Indeed, the fourth progression, the progression of time, provides a link towards the notion of eternity. In other words, if eternity is to be “transformed” into the boundaries of the finite, it needs to take the form of time. The process of creation is the process whereby the idea of progression, discussed above, is started off. The ancient notion of *aion*, translated into Latin as *aevum*, referred to eternity, whereas *chronos* – lat. *tempus* to the time that progresses and can be measured and indefinitely divided. Interestingly enough, in gnostic teaching *aion* came to be associated with the progression of the soul through a system of phases, not in a linear chronological progression. The act of creation turned on the machine of time, however, the cycles (seen as organized by the tetrad – e.g. the four seasons) managed to relate the reality to

³² See the interesting discussion in Hollander, pp. 39-40. As elsewhere, Hollander convincingly shows the interdependence of practical and speculative music.

eternity again. The wheel of time showed *tempus* and *aevum* as just two faces of the same: the *aevum* is the constant, the process of return³⁴, the *tempus* is the dynamic principle, which, however, gets annulled by the return of the *aevum*.³⁵

Moreover, as time came to be emblematically envisaged as a wheel, a circle or a serpent biting its own tail, the progression was united back into the idea of eternity. Indeed, a circle lacks an end, it is an overwhelming symbol of the infinite.

The circle – as a unifying principle of reference – breaks down with the discoveries of the New Science, in particular with Newtonian physics and the notion of infinite universe. This issue will be discussed later on, however, let it for now be summarized in a pointed conclusion of Marjorie Hope Nicolson: "The Idea of Infinity had demolished the Circle of Perfection."³⁶

The doctrine of numerical progression had also an important *ethical* aspect. Indeed, the Pythagoreans for their contemporaries were mainly known as a strict ascetic sect, which subordinated their mathematical explorations to a vigorous discipline.³⁷ The harmony of the world was to be realized and incarnated in a human being. This is obviously the importance of *musica humana* in Boethius' thought. The doctrine of *ethos*, following the Pythagoreans, was based on a set of relationships between the parts and the whole. Body and soul had to be – as it were – "attuned" to the harmonious universal organism. In that sense, it is worth noting that the Pythagoreans created an active ethics based on constant scrutiny and introspection. The Pythagorean "temperance" is way far to the Stoic ideal of mere calmness of mind.³⁸

³³ This is, indeed, the basic thesis of Nicolas Cusanus.

³⁴ See also the discussion of time in Eliadu, M. *Le mythe de l'éternel retour; archétypes et répétition*. Gallimard: Paris, 1969

³⁵ Heninger points out the interesting etymological experiment of John Swan (*Speculum mundi*. Cambridge, 1635), who tried to relate etymologically the words "*annus*" and "*anulus*" "because we may say of it, *revolvitur ut anulus*." See Heninger, p. 221

³⁶ Nicolson, M. H.: *The Breaking of the Circle: Studies in the Effect of the New Science on Seventeenth-Century Poetry*, Columbia UP: New York, 1960, p.165

³⁷ See e.g. Hussey, pp. 64-65

³⁸ Heninger, p. 258, see also an interesting discussion of the problem in Kohák, E.: *Člověk, dobro a zlo*. Ježek: Praha 1993, p. 88

The inscription over the Delphic oracle: *γνῶθι σαυτόν* or *nosce teipsum*, as it was rendered into Latin became the first commandment of the Pythagoreans. The dictum enjoyed enormous popularity during the Renaissance. In England, it was Sir John Davies who published a long philosophical poem entitled the same *Nosce Teipsum* in 1599 and John Dee (in a Preface to Billingsley's translation of Euclid's Elements in 1570) even suggested a science called *anthropography*, which was to be concerned with a strict mathematical-ethical description of man:

Anthropographie, is the description of the Number, Measure, Waight, figure, Situation, and colour of every diverse thing, contayned in the perfect body of MAN: with certain knowledge of the Symmetrie, figure, waight, Characterization, and due locall motion, of any parcell of the sayd body, assigned: and of Numbers, to the sayd parcell appertainyng.³⁹

As suggested, the principle is again based on macro-microcosm analogy: the perfect man is a one that *realizes* the symmetry of the universe and gets attuned to the overwhelming harmony of cosmos.⁴⁰ It is perhaps no wonder that musical scales were assigned also a particular type of ethical significance. John Hollander makes an interesting case in discussing the difference between the ethos of the ancient Greeks and other cultures:

... it is not the Western Classical world alone whose musical systems embody the notion of modal ethos. Aside from Judeo-Arabic modal systems, and the Hindu *ragas*, which bear close affinities with Greek music, amazingly intricate sets of correspondences were maintained in ancient Chinese music between pitches, mystical numbers, physical elements, directions, seasons, constellations, divinational trigrams, and hexagrams etc. But the Greek theory of the character of each of the various musical scales, and of the effects of these inherent characters upon any listener, remained always within the realm of the theory of practical music.⁴¹

A number of names of the Greek scales have been preserved: Dorian, Lydian, Phrygian, Mixolydian and other. Each of them carried a specific ethical significance, since

³⁹ "Mathematicall preface", in Euclid, Elements, tr. Henry Billingsley (London 1570), quoted from Heninger, pp. 199-200

⁴⁰ P. Wheelwright mentions the problem of translating *αρμονια* into English: while most authors prefer the word "harmony" (e.g. Fairbanks, Freeman, Lattimore), Burnett prefers the translation of "attunment", since ancient

each of them was appropriate for use in a different situation. Perhaps the best discussion of this theme is in Plato's Republic⁴². Plato acknowledged the power of music to sooth and stir passions (this was after all the topic of the two most famous Classical myths about music – Orpheus and his ability to animate lifeless objects and that of Amphion whose lyre playing made the walls of Thebes form again from scattered stones) and ordered the specific use of given scales in given situations.⁴³

The importance of ethics in the scheme was made even more important during the age of the Renaissance. The transition between the medieval *studia divina* and the Renaissance *studia humana* was marked with the central importance of man for the understanding of the universe. It was, indeed, humanity that formed Pythagorean mean of the tripartite division of the world, as well as the central position in the Boethius' division of the three *musicas*: *Musica humana* is where the harmonic Pythagorean system is made accessible to us:

During the renaissance, for one of the rare moments in history, science and ethics were incorporated into a single philosophical system, into the "divine Philosophy" of Pythagoras. Though science was subordinated to a higher purpose, it was nonetheless the essential first step in the *via humana*. For this reason, the Pythagorean doctrine appealed so strongly to the renaissance. Without diminishing the central importance of man or the possibility of his perfection, it urged the study of physics.⁴⁴

Renaissance medicine (particularly in the work of Paracelsus) was based on the idea of proportion of the four main liquids within the human body (phlegm, blood, cholera and melancholy) – the imbalance of which was seen as the cause of various diseases. This elaborate doctrine was then developed into the theory of humours: a prevalent liquid (humour) creates a correspondent character. The theory of humours, indeed, significantly influenced the

Greek music did not have a concept for simultaneously sounding tones (which developed only later in the Middle Ages). (See Wheelwright, p. 153) The controversy is mentioned also in Manca, p. 24

⁴¹ Hollander, pp. 31-2

⁴² See the discussion in the next chapter

⁴³ Plato, Republic, Book III. He banishes Lydian and Ionian scales (or harmonies), because they are "relaxed" and "soft", on the other hand the Dorian and Phrygian scales are embraced as they are warlike and stimulate courage and manliness.

⁴⁴ Heninger, p. 33

development of English drama, particularly the work of Ben Jonson, as Czech theatrologist Milan Lukeš shows in his classic study.⁴⁵

The simplified scheme of Boethius used in the Renaissance presents a dichotomy between *musica speculativa* and *musica practica*. Needless to say that the study of speculative music was the core of a true musicianship. The curriculum of the *trivium* (grammar, logic and rhetoric) incorporated a course of practical music, which was then to be developed in the *quadrivium* with a specific focus on speculative music. It is no wonder that practical music suffered numerous attacks since its knowledge could not grant any insight into the "reality" of things. Certain radical thinkers in the English Renaissance even discouraged the study of *musica practica*, as they saw it as too profane an object to deal with for a devout Protestant. An interesting example of this can be found in the work of Stephen Gosson:

Pythagoras bequethes them a clokebagge, and condemnes them for fooles that judge musike by sound and eare. If you will bee good scholers, and profite well in the arte of musike, shut your fidels in their cases, and looke uppe to Heaven: the order of the spheres, the unfallible motion of the planets, the juste course of the yeere, and varietie of seasons, the concorde of the elementes and their qualities, fyre, water, ayre, earth, heate, colde, moisture and drought concurring together to the constitution of earthly bodies and sustenance of every creature.⁴⁶

Some saw practical music as potentially weakening – e.g. Roger Ascham in the first dialogue of *Toxophilus* (1545) discredited music in favour of his chosen subject, archery. All of these treatises in way or another expanded upon the Classical lore: either the positive or the negative evaluation of practical music.⁴⁷ In fact, it only proves the centrality of the concept of *musica speculativa* in medieval and Renaissance thinking on the subject.

The Pythagorean tradition – together with Platonic and Neoplatonic expansions – made it possible for music to occupy central position in the hierarchy of the arts. It would not

⁴⁵ E.g. in his plays *Every Man in His Humour*, *Every Man Out of His Humour* and others. See excellent discussion of this theme in Dr. Lukeš's essay "Jonsonova teorie komedie" in *Alžbětinské divadlo II*. Odeon: Praha, 1980, pp. 205-226

⁴⁶ Gosson, S.: *The Schoole of Abuse*. Shakespeare Society of London Publications. Vol. 15: *The Stage Attacked*. Kraus Reprint: Nedeln, Liechenstein, p. 16

be far from truth to claim that the Renaissance constantly aspired toward the condition of music: indeed, the overwhelming harmony of the Pythagorean school transformed this aspiration into a truly spiritual quest: a quest for the final truth about the universe.

I.2. Socrates and Plato – the aspiration to song

The influence of Pythagoras on Socrates and Plato has been widely acknowledged and can hardly be disputed. In Book VII of the Republic Socrates says:

...for I conceive that as the eyes are designed to look up at the stars, so are the ears to hear harmonious motions; and these are sister sciences – as the Pythagoreans say, and we, Glaucon, agree with them ?
Yes, he replied.⁴⁸

Both Socrates and Plato embraced the primary distinction between the phenomenal world on the one hand and the world beyond on the other. The *maieutic* technique of Socrates was deeply suspicious of any *apriori* foreknowledge: it was actually a process of questioning which aimed at problematizing the *seeming* reality of things. While the Sophists claimed that knowledge consisted in eloquence and ability to persuade with no particular relation to the truth, Socrates insisted on introspection and questioning. Harmony for Socrates is a constant effort to get attuned to the heavens. In that respect he is very critical to the efforts of poets to imprison this harmony into the dead discourse of a written language. In describing the circle of reincarnations, or the process of gradual deterioration of the vision of heavenly things, he attributes poets a very unfavourable sixth position, just before the seventh artisan or farmer, eighth Sophist or a demagogue and finally the ninth tyrant.⁴⁹ In fact, a kind of irony is involved here: by alluding to the original meaning of the word *αρμολζειν* "fit together, join"⁵⁰ (which is made clear by the juxtaposition with the seventh artisan), the word is to emphasise

⁴⁷ More on this subject in Hollander, pp. 104-122

⁴⁸ Plato: Republic, 530d, quoted from Plato: The Portable Plato: Protagoras, Phaedo, Symposium, The Republic. Ed. Scott Buchanan. Transl. Benjamin Jowett. The Viking Press: New York, 1963.

⁴⁹ See Plato: Timaeus, 32c-37c

to what an extant a poet actually lacks harmony if he needs to imitate a carpenter's job and try to fit together disparate parts. Harmony cannot be achieved, it can only be aspired to in the process of constant questioning. In that respect, "Socrates confirms his reputation as an enemy of poetry."⁵¹

In the Republic, Socrates relates harmony with justice: only the soul that has mastered itself can enter into the harmonious relation with the universe:

a man... should dispose well of what in the true sense of the word is properly his own, and having first attained to self-mastering and beautiful order within himself, and having harmonized these three principles, the notes or intervals of three terms quite literally the lowest, the highest, and the mean, and all others there may be between them, and having linked and bound all three together and made of himself a unit, one man instead of many, self-controlled and in unison, he should then and then only turn to practice.⁵²

The mentioned critique of practical music and eloquence of poets, indeed, stems from a basic disrespect for poetry, which produces imitations of imitations; and which cannot aspire to the "true musicianship" of a philosopher. In Phaedrus Socrates distinguishes earthly and heavenly music by referring to the Greek word *νομος* – which means – as G.M.A. Grube points out - both *song* and *law*.⁵³ This is the crucial difference: the ethical dimension is the most important imperative of Socratic-Platonic⁵⁴ world. Indeed, it is the good that should be sought in the first place.

Plato in the Republic and Laws admits that there are some who are unfit to aspire to the state of speculative harmony. For such "ordinary" people, studying practical music is a necessity. Teaching practical music – namely playing the lyre - can help to make good citizens. The ethical motif is clear here - instruction in practical music was important for maintaining the observance of rituals that secured the City.

⁵⁰ See also the discussion above

⁵¹ Berley, M.: After the Heavenly Tune: English Poetry and the Aspiration to Song. Duquesne UP: Pittsburgh, 2000, p. 33

⁵² Plato: Republic, 443d

⁵³ Berley, p. 36

In the 10th book of the Republic, Plato puts forward his vision of heavenly harmony, which later became the classic articulation of the myth of the harmony of spheres. Er, the son of Armenius, who felled in a battle and was to be buried, came to life again and tells a story of a heavenly journey he underwent in the time between. He enjoys a wonderful vision of celestial harmony and describes its order – Necessity holds a spindle on her knees and around this spindle heavenly bodies revolve:

...on the upper surface of each circle is a siren, who goes round with them, hymning a single tone or note. The eight together form one harmony...⁵⁵

However much the idea of a fixed order might have later been used for political purposes⁵⁶ Plato has articulated in philosophical language the perception that harmony is not just joining and fitting of things together but rather a *process of imitating and realizing the order of the universe*.

Nevertheless, as the characters drink from the River of Forgetfulness, they are no longer "attuned" to this ultimate harmony beyond our sensual perception and are left with nostalgia for this state. In a mortal body, the soul seeks its immortality through a process of enquiry. This enquiry, however, faces the problem of death, in which our speech ultimately fails. In Pheadrus (276e-277a), Socrates shows as the only possibility a sense of fertile speech, which goes forth and multiplies:

words... instead of remaining barren contain a seed whence new words grow up in new characters, whereby the seed is vouchsafed immortality, and its possessor the fullest measure of blessedness that man can attain unto...

⁵⁴ The doctrine of Plato is in many ways hardly distinguishable from that of Socrates because it is obviously Plato who lets Socrates speak in his dialogues.

⁵⁵ Plato: Republic, 617b

⁵⁶ See e.g. the interesting discussion of the problem in Hollander. It is definitely noteworthy that the word *concord* had come to mean "political harmony", although it is primarily a musical term.

Socrates and Plato show a world, in which one should *aspire* to a state of song, yet cannot accomplish this aspiration in a form of discourse. In that sense, Socrates clearly could not have left any writings because it would have contradicted his basic philosophical orientation of the "follower of Muses" (*φιλοκαλος*). Wisdom cannot be possessed.

Cicero based his attack on Socrates precisely on this very point: if wisdom cannot be possessed, the relationship between truth and eloquence has been severed.⁵⁷ Cicero insisted that rhetoric and poetic art shape our consciousness. Can universal harmony be reconstructed?

I.3. Aristotle and the notion of *mimesis* (*μίμησις*)

In Book II of De Coelo, Aristotle refutes the old myth of the harmony of spheres: it cannot hold since there is no clear indication why the movement of the stars should produce any kind of harmonious or concordant sound:

From all this it is clear that the theory that the movement of the stars produces a harmony, i.e. that the sounds they make are concordant, in spite of the grace and originality with which it has been stated, is nevertheless untrue. Some thinkers suppose that the motion of bodies of that size must produce a noise, since on our earth the motion of bodies far inferior in size and in speed of movement has that effect. Also, when the sun and the moon, they say, and all the stars, so great in number and in size, are moving with so rapid a motion, how should they not produce a sound immensely great?

...But, as we said before, melodious and poetical as the theory is, it cannot be a true account of the facts. There is not only the absurdity of our hearing nothing, the ground of which they try to remove, but also the fact that no effect other than sensitive is produced upon us. Excessive noises, we know, shatter the solid bodies even of inanimate things...⁵⁸

Aristotle's notion of harmony is based on his overwhelming teleology: harmony is no so much a binding power of universe; it is the balance of all parts appertaining to one ultimate goal. This notion of harmony is then projected also into the act of poetry, the act of making (*ποιεῖν*). Aristotle is not concerned with the speculative harmonious lore, although in De

⁵⁷ Berley, p. 54, based on Cicero, De Oratore, book 3

Coelo he proves his thorough knowledge of the Pythagorean tradition. The concept of poetry, which Aristotle puts forward in his Poetics, is more concerned with the efficacy and teleology of a poet's work.

The concept of Aristotle's *mimesis* bases its authority on the inherent human desire to imitate or represent things of his/her world in order to get to know them better:

On the one hand the desire to 'imitate or represent' is instinctive in man from childhood; in fact one of man's distinguishing marks is that he is the most mimetic of all animals, and it is through his mimetic activity that he first begins to learn.⁵⁹

The delight of imitating stems out of the fact that representation allows one to experience the thing-ness (*ουσια*) of things. In other words, representation allows recognition: this is so-and-so. In an act of poetry, the general human disposition for taking delight in imitating is mixed with the "anthropological constants"⁶⁰ of rhythm and harmonic intervals. The degree to which a poet is able to use the skill makes his art more or less efficient.

The chief focus of Aristotle in Poetics⁶¹ is tragedy. Aristotle deals shortly also with epic and comedy, however, these are thought to be inferior types of poetry; and thus did not seem to deserve any longer discussion. Teleological bent is present here as well: indeed, tragedy is a genre of prime importance because it produces *katharsis* (*καθαρσις*)- the final purgation of emotions, chiefly pity and fear. As P. Wheelwright remarks, *katharsis* reconciles and transforms into a more harmonious state:

...Aristotle's conception of *katharsis*, regardless of the precise weight we assign to its medical or religious overtones, is that by inducing a stylized and controlled discharge of certain excess emotions it results in a new psychic equilibrium, so that men depart from the theatre with more harmonious souls than when they entered.⁶²

⁵⁸ Aristotle: The Works of Aristotle. Vol. II. *Physica, De Coelo, De Generatione et Corruptione*. Ed. D. Ross. Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1962, 292b12-22, 292b30-35

⁵⁹ Aristotle: The Art of Poetry (iv), Wheelwright's translation, p. 293

⁶⁰ Mukařovský, J.: „Estetická funkce, norma a hodnota jako sociální fakty“, in Studie z estetiky. Ed. K. Chvatik. Odeon: Praha 1966, pp. 17-54

⁶¹ or The Art of Poetry as P. Wheelwright translates

⁶² P. Wheelwright's introduction to his translation of the main works of Aristotle, p. xlv

To achieve this goal, a poet should properly master his argument and, if possible, control the response of his audience. Even the Aristotelian notion of the truth of poetry is primarily concerned with the “skilful exploitation of a fallacy”: “A plausible impossibility is always preferable to an implausible possibility.”⁶³

As far as the role of poetic diction is concerned, Aristotle unambiguously prefers lucidity: obscurity should be avoided. Mastery of metaphor, however, is the mark of a true genius (*εὐφροσύνη*): “... to be good at metaphor is to be intuitively aware of hidden resemblances.”⁶⁴

The most important feature of a poetic work of art for Aristotle is its *unity*: he elaborated a system of theatrical unities, which later had major influence on the development of drama in the Renaissance. Moreover, in the proper unification of the various elements, the final aim (*τέλος*) can be better achieved. The preference for tragedy is obviously motivated also by its tighter unity. Proper tragedy confines itself “to a single revolution of the sun or not much more of that”; its effect is more powerful than epic poetry since “tragic *mimesis* attains its end in shorter compass than epic; and a concentrated effect is more pleasurable than one that is diffused by being spread out over a long period of time.”⁶⁵

Aristotelian poetics is both unity and efficacy: indeed, only a truly unified effect can aspire to a desirable aim. Mark Berley summarizes it as follows:

His is a practical skill conceived not in accordance with heavenly harmony but rather with probability and other requirements for accommodation.⁶⁶

I.4. Platonism and Neoplatonic frenzy - the commonplaces and the shifters

Neoplatonism is based on the teaching of Plotinus (204-270). While accepting the main tenants of Platonism – in particular the doctrine of the world of ideas – he shifted the

⁶³ *The Art of Poetry* (xxiv), p. 320

⁶⁴ *The Art of Poetry*, (xxii), p. 317

⁶⁵ *The Art of Poetry* (xxvi), p. 325

⁶⁶ Berley, p. 44

emphasis for the possibility to experience the Closeness of the Ideal in an aesthetic, artificial object. In The Enneads, he makes a clear point about this difference:

Let us go to the realm of magnitudes: - suppose two blocks of stone lying side by side: one is unpatterned, quite untouched by art; the other had been minutely wrought by the craftsman's hands into some statue of god or man, a Grace or a Muse, or if a human being, not a portrait but a creation in which the sculptor's art has concentrated all loveliness.

Now it must be seen that the stone thus brought under the artist's hand to the beauty of form is beautiful not as a stone - for so the crude block would be as pleasant - but in virtue of the Form or Idea introduced by the art. This form is not in the material; it is in the designer before ever it enters the stone; and the artificer holds it not by his equipment of eyes and hands but by his participation in his art. The beauty, therefore, exists in a far higher state in the art.⁶⁷

Art thus becomes the threshold of the experience of the Ideal, and the artist, indeed, the interpreter of this experience. Therefore, Plotinus puts immense emphasis on a work of art, since it is the ultimate worldly possibility to communicate the ideal. The difference between Pythagorean and Plotinus' notion of harmony is exactly in this emphasis. For Pythagoreans - whom Plotinus knew as we can assume from *passim* remarks - *the concept of harmony preceded the concept of the Beautiful*. Aphrodite Alexandrakis shows⁶⁸, that this was due to Pythagorean emphasis on the relation between harmony and symmetry. Plotinus rejects symmetry as a component of beauty⁶⁹: The One is Beauty (*καλλος*), and the One has no parts.⁷⁰ Plotinus embraces the notion of the singular nature of the Pythagorean One, however, his actual teaching about world harmony differs; and the unity of the parts is expressed almost in Heraclitean terms. The Reason-Principle which emanates from the complete unity of the divine Mind is unable to communicate itself properly to its subject. The outcome of this is strife of conflicting elements:

⁶⁷ Plotinus. The Enneads. [V.viii,1]Tr. S. McKenna. Faber and Faber: London, 1962, p. 422

⁶⁸ Alexandrakis, A.: „The Notion of Beauty in the Structure of the Universe: Pythagorean influences on Plotinus“. Neoplatonism and Nature: Studies in Plotinus Enneads. Ed. M. F. Wagner. State U of New York P: New York, 2002, pp. 149-155

⁶⁹ Cf. Anton, J.: „Plotinus' Refutation of Beauty as Symmetry.“ Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 23 (1964-65), pp. 233-37

⁷⁰ Ennead I.v.6., Cf. Alexandrakis, p. 152

At war with itself in the parts which it now exhibits, it has the unity, or harmony, of a drama torn with struggle. The drama of course, brings the conflicting elements to one final harmony, weaving the entire story of the clashing characters into one thing; while in the Logos the conflict of the divergent rises within the one element, the Reason-Principle: the comparison therefore is rather with a harmony emerging directly from the conflicting elements themselves, and the question becomes what introduces clashing elements among these Reason-Principles.⁷¹

Harmony is granted because the conflicting elements take part in the grand scheme of the totality of a given Reason-Principle:

...the Universe is a self-accordant entity, its members everywhere clashing but the total being the manifestation of a Reason-Principle. That one Reason-Principle, then, must be the unification of conflicting Reason-Principles whose very opposition is the support of its coherence and, almost, of its Being.⁷²

In that sense, Plotinus is no Heraclitean: his sense of harmony is not paradoxical. *Harmonia* is a "peace-maker",⁷³ a glue holding the clashing parts together. The Pythagoreans "employed rather the term 'harmony' in place of beauty."⁷⁴ For Plotinus, nevertheless, beauty is the essential attribute of the One. In other words, because the One is beautiful, it is also necessarily harmonious.

Plotinus' thought had a profound influence on the Renaissance. The eclectic and unhistorical nature of Renaissance thinking in fact found it sometimes difficult to fully acknowledge the difference between Platonism and Neo-platonism:

...what they found, even when they read Plato's own words should be still primarily the religious Neoplatonic Plato-Plotinus rather than the dialogues as we understand them today...⁷⁵

It is therefore important to posit the main difference in the thinking of the two philosophical schools as reflected in contemporary thinking. The greatest Neoplatonic

⁷¹ The Enneads, III.ii.16, p. 175

⁷² The Enneads, III.ii.16, p. 175

⁷³ Alexandrakis, p. 153

⁷⁴ Tatrakiewicz, W. History of Aesthetics I, Mouton: Paris, 1970, p. 80

⁷⁵ General Introduction The Renaissance Philosophy of Man, Ed. E. Cassirer, P. O. Kristeller and J. H. Randall, Chicago : U of Chicago P, 1948. p. 6

philosopher of the Renaissance was undoubtedly Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), the founder of the Platonic Academy in Florence, who became the supreme interpreter of Plato for his contemporaries. Ficino was attracted by Platonism because he conceived it to be in harmony with the Christian faith. However, he did not quite comprehend the basic difference between Socratic/Platonic love of wisdom and the orientation towards self-rule. His Platonism is driven by divine frenzy; and a work of art, especially poetry and music, become images of divine harmony. Indeed, in the experience of the power of music and harmony, the soul is deeply stimulated to take off into the realm of the ideal, the realm that is its home:

By the ears, as I have already said, the soul receives the echoes of that incomparable music, by which it is led back to the deep and silent memory of the harmony which it previously enjoyed. The whole soul then kindles with desire to fly back to its rightful home, so that it may enjoy that true music again.⁷⁶

While for Plato music cannot heal the wound, because it cannot properly attune one's soul to the harmony of universe; for Ficino, music and poetry have a magical capacity to elevate the soul of man from the baseness of his dis-harmonious fleshly existence. He referred to the authority of the elders who – according to him - confirm the same experience:

The Pythagoreans used to do wonderful things in the manner of Pheobus and Orpheus with words, songs, and sounds. The ancient doctors of the Hebrews considered this most important, and all poets sing and make wonderful things with their songs.⁷⁷

For Ficino – in as much as for Plotinus – there is a way to bridge the gap between the universal harmony behind and the harsh reality of this world. The bridge is the aesthetic, orderly experience of a work of art which imitates the patterns of the ideal. It is therefore clear how much emphasis puts Ficino and other Renaissance Neoplatonists on the task of the author, for he masters the ability to convey the truth behind. As we shall see later on – discussing English Renaissance poetics – this becomes one of the key issues in the

⁷⁶ *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*. Trans. The Language Department of the School of Economic Science, London, Vol.1. Shephard-Walwyn: London, 1975, p. 45. Berley, p. 47

controversy against the enemies of poetry who were blaming poets for lying, deceiving and diverting the masses from the way of the Truth.

The analogy Ficino was seeking – i.e. analogy between the pagan philosophy of Plato and Christianity – basically followed the same efforts of the early Fathers of the Church. Their influence on the Renaissance and Reformation – particularly St Augustine's – was vital and substantial. Leo Spitzer makes an interesting point in tracing the history of harmonic thought of the Fathers: by making a difference between St Augustine and his great predecessor St Ambrose, he defines two distinct concepts of musical speculation in patristic thinking:

Augustine, the encyclopedist, who, in all branches of human knowledge worked toward unity, is one Christian possibility; the width and fullness of Ambrose, another. Two ways are open to Christianity: the one, inherited from Plato, turning its back on the *saeculum*, aspiring toward monotheistic monody; the other transforming pantheistic fullness into Catholic polyphony.⁷⁸

For Ambrose – Spitzer says - one gets tuned to the overwhelmingness of universal harmony in the experience of beautiful nature. The idea of the Creator-Artist makes it possible to acknowledge the capacity of *musica practica* to achieve the heights of speculation, grasped only by reason. Spitzer discusses a passage from St Ambrose's treatise Hexameron which meditates on the wonderful harmony of the universe after God has created the world:

The peculiarly Christian trend in this passage is the upward striving from the visible world harmony to the invisible will of the Creator, which only reason, not the senses, can grasp: "ego tamen non oculis aestimatum creaturae decorem arbitror." The description of the sea in its manifold aspects and its pictorial richness culminates first in a musical world harmony ("sonus... grata et consona resultatio") then the "harmonious echo" answers to the reasonable will of the Creator-Artist ("secundum rationem operationis iudicio operatoris convenire, et congruere definitum" - the echo of the creation to the Creator is also marked by the repetition of the word stem of *operare*). The creation is good and beautiful as is the Creator-Artist...⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Ficino, Marsilio: The Book of Life. Trans. Ch. Boer (Irving, Texas: Spring Publications, 1980), p. 159, Berley, p. 49

⁷⁸ Spitzer, pp. 32-33

⁷⁹ Spitzer, p. 22

On the other hand, Augustine always stressed One before Many, his God realizes himself *in time*⁸⁰. Time marks the drama of the ascent to Truth – the external always tends to the inner, to the sanctuary of a truly monotheistic God. The genre is thus much more a drama than a spectacle:

There is less of a universal theater of the world before our eyes than a universal drama progressing to the end, appealing to the spectator's "time sense." There is no widening of the keyboard as with Ambrose, *there is only the spiritualization of the instrument of the soul.*⁸¹

St Augustine thus prolongs the tradition of Plato: for Plato, the "true musician" is an ethical philosopher who strives to tune his innermost soul.⁸² Pythagorean harmony for him is primarily an Idea of Beauty, i.e. a metaphysical concept, which absolutely transcends any work of art. The shift of Neoplatonism is a shift towards "spiritualization" of our experience of the multitudinous creation and its reflection in the work of art. Neoplatonic philosophers – particularly in the Renaissance – tried to re-establish the position of art as the emanation of the Beauty of the One.

It is, indeed, true, that their notions of Neoplatonism were unhistorical and more often than not failed to distinguish properly between the respective emphases of ancient philosophical authorities. Thus not just Platonic and Neoplatonic ideas got mixed together, but also – as we shall see – also the Neoplatonic and Aristotelian emphases.

⁸⁰ Cf. e.g. the story of his conversion in Confessiones

⁸¹ Spitzer, p. 32, emphasis is mine

⁸² Berley, p. 30

II. The Conceit of English Renaissance Poetics – how harmonies blend together

II.1. Introduction

The English Renaissance inherited the Classical harmony lore of the ancients. With the renewed interest in the original Greek texts, that marked the Age of Humanism, it became possible to access texts in their original language. However, the Renaissance obviously lacked the sense of historicism that we have; and the old texts were interpreted in an unhistorical or we could say meta-historical sense. There were, moreover, no critical canons of ancient texts, and what was known was deeply influenced by contemporary commentaries.

In that sense, it is hardly surprising that aesthetic thinking in the English Renaissance was very eclectic and tended to mix ideas from very different sources, which would in fact contradict themselves if seen side by side. Paradoxically, however, the specific type of Renaissance eclecticism managed to unify these diverse inspirations into a new unity.

II.2. The problem of conceit

The most important English Renaissance critic and "defender" of poetry, Sir Philip Sidney, author of The Apology for Poetrie or The Defense of Poesie (written c. 1583, first published 1595) refers the genesis of a poetic work of art to an *idea*, which is then developed or "unfolded" in the poetic argument. The capacity to put forward such an idea resembles the creative act of God and it should therefore be considered as the supreme capacity of humanity:

...for any vnderstanding knoweth the skil of the [poetic] Artificer standeth in that *Idea*, or fore-conceite of the work, and not in the work it selfe. And the Poet hath that Idea is manifest, by deliuering them forth in such excellencie as hee hath imagined them.

...Neyther let it be deemed too sawcie a comparison to ballance the highest poynt of mans wit with the efficacie of Nature: but rather giue right honor to the heavenly

Maker of the maker, who, hauing made man to his owne likenes, set him beyond and ouer all the workes of that second nature, which in nothing hee sheweth so much as in Poetrie, when with the force of a diuine breath he bringeth things forth far surpassing her dooings, with no small argument to the incredulous of that first accursed fall of Adam...⁸³

Idea or conceit is an essential part of a poetic work because it touches the realm of the divine. Talking about the Psalms, Sidney equates them to "a heauenlie poesie, wherein almost hee [David] sheweth himslefe a passionate loue of that vnspeakable and euerlasting beutie to be seen by the eyes of the minde, onely cleared by fayth."⁸⁴ In the process of unfolding this original conceit, the poet – in the original Pythagorean sense – extends his fore-conceit born from the glimpse of the divine into our time-space continuum⁸⁵ and the orderly pattern becomes visible.

In the second most important critical treatise of the Elizabethan age, George Puttenham's The Arte of English Poesie (published 1589), conceit is alluded to in discussing the subject matter of poetry. Indeed, Puttenham's tedious didacticism relates conceit towards more down-to-earth aims:

Hauing sufficiently sayd of the dignitie of Poets and Poefie, now it is tyme to speake of the matter or subiect of Poesie, which to myne intent is what foeuer wittie and delicate conceit of man meet or worthy to be put in written verse, for any necessary vse of the present time, or good instruction of the posteritie.⁸⁶

The word "conceit" has many equivalents in contemporary literary theory. George Gascoigne starts off his discussion in Certayne Notes of Instruction Concerning the Making of Verse or Ryme in English, published 1575, with the emphasis on a general idea which he calls "invention" or "device":

The first and most necessarie poynt that euer I founde meete to be considered in making of a delectable poeme is this, to grounde it upon some fine inuention. For it is

⁸³ Sir Philip Sidney. "An Apology for Poetry." Elizabethan Critical Essays. Ed. G. G. Smith. Vol. I. OUP: London, 1964, p. 157

⁸⁴ Elizabethan Critical Essays, Vol. I. p. 155

⁸⁵ Heninger, p. 294

⁸⁶ Puttenham, G.: The Arte of English Poesie. Ed. E. Arber, Southgate, London, 1869, p. 39

not inough to roll in pleasant woordes, nor yet to thunder in *Rym, Ram, Ruff* by letter (quoth my master *Chaucer*), nor yet abounde in apt vocables or epythetes, vnlesse the Inuention haue in it also *aliquid salis*. By this *aliquid salis* I meane some good and fine deuise, shewing the quicke capacitie of a writer: and where I say some *good and fine inuention* I meane that I would haue it both fine and good.⁸⁷

Ben Johnson in *Timber or Discoveries* uses the term "Fable": (echoing Italian critics), which in fact resembles Aristotelian "plot":

A *Poet* is that, which by the Greeks is call'd **κατ'ἑξήν, ὁ Ποιητής**, a Maker, or a fainer: his Art, an Art of imitation, or faining; expressing the life of man in fit measure, numbers, and harmony, according to *Aristotle*: From the word ποιειη, which signifies to make or fayne. Hence, hee is call'd a *Poet*, not hee which writeth in measure only; but that fayneth and formeth a fable, and writes things like the Truth. For, the Fable and Fiction is (as it were) the forme and Soule of any Poeticall worke, or *Poeme*.⁸⁸

Nevertheless, perhaps the most interesting definition of conceit in the Elizabethan Age is to be found in John Hoskins' Directions for Speech and Style (published 1600). He refers to it as "inventing matter of agreement in things most unlike."⁸⁹

It is in fact this definition that shows the other side of the problem of conceit – its Aristotelian roots. Aristotle in Poetics talks about metaphor as insight:

While the proper use of all these various poetic devices is important, by far the greatest thing for a poet is to be a master of metaphor. Such mastery is the one thing that cannot be learned from others. It is a mark of genius (*euphuia*), for to be good at metaphor is to be intuitively aware of hidden resemblances.⁹⁰

Classical Roman rhetoric (Horace in particular) on the other hand stressed the relation of metaphor to decoration and ornament. Conceit interprets the insight of the poet and makes it possible to relate it to the realm of the ideal.

⁸⁷ Gascoigne, Elizabethan Critical Essays, Vol. I, p. 47

⁸⁸ Jonson, B. Discoveries (1641) Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden (1619). Elizabethan and Jacobean Quartos. Ed. G. B. Harrison. Edinburgh UP: Edinburgh, 1966. p. 89.

⁸⁹ Hosikns, J.: Directions for Speech and Style (1600). Ed. H. H. Hoyt. Princeton UP: Princeton, 1935. p. 18

⁹⁰ Aristotle: 'The Art of Poetry.' Aristotle. Containing Selections from Seven of the Most Important Books of ARISTOTLE. Transl. P. Wheelwright. The Odyssey Press: New York, 1951, p. 317

Indeed, even Sidney's Neoplatonism is blended with an air of Aristotelianism: he refers to the Aristotelian notion of *mimesis* and the process of imitation by which natural objects can attain a universal quality. Nature is thus embraced – following Augustine and the early Fathers who referred to nature as the second book of revelation -, yet it is a nature redeemed by an insight into the ideal, and thus an *improved* one:

Nature neuer set forth the earth in so rich a tapistry as diuers Poets haue done, neither with pleasant riuers, fruitful trees, sweet smelling flowers, nor whatsoeuer els may make the too much loued earth more loeuly. Her world is brasen, the Poets only deliuer a golden.⁹¹

Puttenham treatise offers a similar treatment: nevertheless, he seems to vaguely recognize the difference between Aristotelian and Neoplatonic roots of the respective theories:

In some cafes we say arte is an ayde and coadiutor to nature, and a furtherer of her actions to good effect, or peradventure a meane to supply her wants, by renforcing the causes wherein shee is impotent and defectiue...

...In another respect arte is not only an aide and coadiutor to nature in all her actions but an alterer of them, and in some fort a surmounter of her skill, fo as by meanes of it her owne effects shall appeare more beautifull or straunge and miraculous...

In another respect we say arte is neither an aider nor a surmounter but onely a bare immitatour of natures works, following and counterfeyting her actions and effects...

Finally, in another respect arte is, as it were, an encounterer and contrary to nature, producing effects neither like to hers, nor by participation with her operations, nor by imitation of her paternes, but makes things and produceth effects altogether strange and diuerse, of such forme & qualitie (nature alwaies supplying stuffe) as she neuer would nor could haue done of her selfe...⁹²

The former two definitions would suggest Neoplatonic inspirations, the third definition roughly matches Aristotelian aesthetics, and the fourth returns back to Neoplatonic mysticism. However much Puttenham strives to separate the respective theories, they, in the end, blend together. Unhistorical or metahistorical understanding of classical texts was prevalent in the Renaissance. Classical authorities tended to be indiscriminately used to prove the author's point. Eclecticism was a necessary result of this juxtaposition – in that sense,

⁹¹ Sidney, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Vol. I., p. 156

⁹² Puttenham, pp. 308-310

however, certain assumptions tended to be commonplace. English Renaissance poetics, therefore emerged as a fairly unified set of widely shared ideas.

The dynamic of *mimesis* in Sidney's Apology is based on metaphorical language representation and the old notion *ut pictura poesis* – in Sidney's words "a speaking picture". In distinguishing three distinct types of poetry - vatic or prophetic poetry ("that did imitate the inconceivable excellences of GOD"), philosophical ("that deale with matters Philosophicall") and thirdly "indeed right Poets" who "most properly do imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be: but range, onely rayned with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of *what may be, and should be*" - Sidney formulates his idea of proper poetic representation. The central importance of conceit is here stressed again: indeed, Aristotelian *mimesis* and Platonic *furor* collide and blend: poetry is defended because it can re-unite and harmonize the aspirations of nature and humanity. In that sense, it is hardly surprising that Sidney – in a direct contrast to Plato – praises poetry and associates poetry with the supreme aspiration of humanity, namely immortality. The unhistorical nature of such thinking stems from a definitive image of a stable finite universe as presented by the tradition of Pythagorean cosmological speculation.

The conceit is not just to be expanded upon (unfolded in time-space continuum), it is to allow a regress back to the original thought, to the divine insight of the author. The conceit thus again enhances the macro-microcosm relationship. The original numerical expansion – discovered by Pythagoras – becomes a line of progression, a line of creation. Poetry is meant to realize the universal in the particular and vice versa. The specific type of blending of disparate thoughts into a new unity – i.e. Renaissance eclecticism – is therefore used effectively to prove the point: *the intuition of harmony supersedes the disparate*. The monad dominates the dyad.

II.2.1. Types of conceit

K.K. Ruthven in his valuable summary⁹³ distinguishes some common types of 16th and 17th century conceits. Regardless whether or not these types can aspire to encompass the complexity of the theme, they definitely manage to point out the common themes. Indeed, originality of an author lied more in the ability to produce a poem using one of the acclaimed conceits, which, however, could surpass the others in sophistication or width of imagination. After all, Puttenham bases its distinction of good and bad poets ("versifiers" or in Jonson's term "poetasters")⁹⁴ on their ability to come up with a truly ingenious conceit.⁹⁵

The basic type of Elizabethan conceits is associated with the great fashion and spree of **sonneteering**. Indeed, Elizabethan sonneteering evolved around a few basic themes:

- 1) *lover's malady*, the plagues of loving : love is a volatile experience, it is subject to constant change, it is irrational and unpredictable, and it causes pain. This had been, of course, a traditional theme of medieval poetry, since the first Provençal troubadours. Structurally speaking, it often uses oxymoron, to stress paradoxical nature of the experience of love.
- 2) *the Sonnet Lady* in Elizabethan poetry uses more or less standardized images of Petrarchan lady: blonde hair, sparkling eyes, lilies-and-roses complexion and so on. These images were then developed in a number of different ways – eyes are compared with the stars of heaven, hair becomes a web of golden wires which ensnare the lover etc. All these conceits had become so popular and commonplace that they were often parodied. Donne's and Herbert's poetry – as we shall see later on – excels in the art of parody and the distinctions and shifts between the way

⁹³ Ruthven, K.K. *The Conceit*. Methuen: London, 1969. See pp. 17-51

⁹⁴ Name used for mediocre poets, notably amplified in Ben Jonson's famous comedy *The Poetaster or The Arraignment*. (Quarto 1620, however, the play was first produced 1601)

⁹⁵ George Puttenham warns poets that "poesie ought not to be abafed and imployed vpon any vnworthy matter and subiect, nor vfed to vaine purposes, which neuthelisse is dayly seene, and that is to vtter conceits infamous and vicious or ridiculous and foolish, or of no good example and doctrine." Puttenham. p. 38

conceit is understood in classical Elizabethan poetry and in the Metaphysical school have traditionally been used to mark the differences and similarities between the two schools.

- 3) *Pastoral hyperbole* had been based on a long-established tradition (since Theocritus onwards) of a sympathetic relationship between man and his environment. Indeed, the state of mind reflects the state of nature and vice versa. The ideal pastoral landscape in Elizabethan poetry, indeed, tends to coalesce with the ideal world of shepherds and shepherdesses. The landscape is made out of the same matter, it is a projection of the cosmic correspondences. The human and the natural world live in a wonderful symbiosis.

Heraldic conceits in Ruthven's typology form another important theme. Elizabethan poems were, indeed, written primarily for the nobility, quite often by noblemen, or poets associated with the court or a nobleman's house. In fact, the phenomenon of sponsoring was undoubtedly one of the main stimulus of the great achievements of this age. Perhaps the finest example is Shakespeare's use of the Yorkist-Lancaster heraldic imagery in his *Henriad* (*Henry VI, I,II,III* and *Richard III*). Heraldic images were used by Sidney (in *Astrophil and Stella*), Barnes (in *Parthenophil and Perthenope* 1593) and others.

Etymological conceits are based on an old belief summed up in the proverb "*nomen-omen*". Insight into the original meaning – however learned or fake it might have been – should have presented a more or less cathartic discovery of the nature of things. The universe was, of course, a web of correspondences – indeed, language provided a vital embarking point.

Perhaps the most famous and also most sensational of the etymological conceits in the English Renaissance is to be found in Sir Walter Raleigh's *The Ocean to Cynthia*: **Water** was

the pet-word used by Queen Elizabeth to address this great Renaissance gentleman.⁹⁶ Numerous examples include the works of so dissimilar poets as Ben Jonson, John Donne and in a very special way John Milton.

The great Christian tradition of typological understanding of the Scripture – the classical exposition of which is to be found in St Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* and *The City of God* - greatly influenced Elizabethan and 17th century religious poetry. The events of the Old Testament were seen in the light of the New Testament, or acquiring their true meaning in the light of the latter. *Typological conceits* form one of the key conceits of religious poetry and their examples would count in hundreds if not thousands.

Religious significance is present also in the "*conceiti predicabili*" ("preachable conceits").⁹⁷ Those were meant – in the classical phrasing of John Milton – "to justify the ways of God to men". A religious author always struggles to present a glimpse of the impenetrable wit of God and to expand from there on. Metaphysical poetry – for the most part dealing with metaphysical and religious topics – often thematizes the strife to accommodate the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* of God. The remarkable achievements of poetry based on this conceit among the Metaphysicals are the contents of Part Two.⁹⁸

The typical Renaissance phenomenon of emblems – introduced by Andrea Alciati's book *Emblemata* (first publ. 1531⁹⁹) follows the Horatian notion *ut pictura poesis*¹⁰⁰. Indeed, the conceit stems out of an image and returns to it. Alciati's *Emblemata* and numerous other emblem books¹⁰¹ comprised both an image and text: the text expanded the meaning into another dimension.

⁹⁶ Ruthven, p. 39

⁹⁷ See the discussion in Praz: 'Crashaw and the Baroque' in *The Flaming Heart*, p. 209n.

⁹⁸ Namely the achievements of George Herbert and John Donne.

⁹⁹ "To complete the picture, it should be observed that Alciati's emblem book, which went through 175 editions between 1531 and 1750 (of which 125 were before 1600, influenced directly and indirectly, many other such books in many other languages...)", Hollander, p. 49.

¹⁰⁰ from his *Epistula ad Pisones*

¹⁰¹ See the discussion of emblem books in Hollander pp. 47-50

Sidney in his Apology refers to "speaking picture"¹⁰² – i.e. poetic technique to create images of things. The emblem allowed a creation of a more complex symbolic structure, which would expand the original meaning on many different layers. The symbolic complexity to be found in such works as Spenser's The Fairie Queene managed to condense a multiplicity of meanings in vivid images. The relationship between conceit and its unfolding thus acquires yet another significance: *das Anderssterben*¹⁰³ - i.e. it approaches another art.¹⁰⁴

Emblem books presented an image with a subsequent moral – in other words, taught by delighting. In that sense, it is hardly surprising that Alciati treated *emblem*, *epigram* and *conceit* as "roughly interchangeable terms."¹⁰⁵ Emblematic conceits are a matter of highest importance for the understanding of metaphysical poetry. Indeed, many critics were trying to relate the poetry of the metaphysicals, particularly the work of Richard Crashaw, to the emblematic tradition.¹⁰⁶

The examples of such a conceit in the English Renaissance and in metaphysical poetry in particular are abundant. Therefore, later in this study we shall discuss the respective conceit in more detail on concrete examples.

Ruthven distinguishes one specific type of 17th century English poetry – based on H. Levin's study *John Cleveland and the Conceit*¹⁰⁷ - which he calls *The Clevelandism*. John Cleveland (1613-1658) was a peculiar minor poet, inspired by the Metaphysical school,

¹⁰² Puttenham uses the term "mute poeſie."

¹⁰³ to use the term used of German Romantic philosophers to explain the relations between different arts

¹⁰⁴ I am referring to W. Pater's excellent discussion in The Renaissance: "But although each art has its own specific order of impressions, and an untranslatable charm, while a just apprehension of the ultimate differences of the arts is the beginning of aesthetic criticism; yet it is noticeable that, in its special mode of handling its given material, each art may be observed to pass into the condition of some other art, by what German critics term an *Anderssterben* – a partial alienation from its own limitations, through which the arts are able, not indeed to supply the place of each other, but reciprocally to lend each other new forces." Pater, W. The Renaissance. Boni and Liveright: New York, 1919, p. 110

¹⁰⁵ Ruthven, p. 34

¹⁰⁶ Warren, A.: Richard Crashaw: A Study in Baroque Sensibility. Ann Arbor Books (U of Michigan P): Michigan, 1957 (pp. 69-76), Hollander: The Untuning of the Sky (p. 231), Praz, M.: The Flaming Heart: Peter Smith: Gloucester, 1966, p. 207. To my knowledge the best discussion of emblems and its significance for seventeenth century is Praz's monumental study and bibliography of emblems entitled Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery, Rome, 1964.

¹⁰⁷ published in Criterion, xiv (1950), pp. 40-53

mainly by their display of wit. However, he suppressed the impassioned element of the Metaphysicals and supplanted the emotional by intellectual brilliance.¹⁰⁸ The most typical rhetorical device of Cleveland – as John Dryden pointed out – was *katachresis* (καταχρησις). The grotesqueness thus accomplished underlines a startling display of wit. In fact, Clevelandism could be presented as decadence of the metaphysical style: wit is intensified to the utmost and imagery suppressed to become as subservient to speculation as possible. The fine line between the world of phenomena and the world of ideas, the very dynamics of this relation is broken. However much is Clevelandism associated specifically with the work of Cleveland, there are indeed instances of the use of *katachresis* in some later metaphysical poets – Vaughan and Cowley – which show the parallelisms and the limits of metaphysical style.¹⁰⁹

II.3. The problem of metaphor in Pythagorean scheme

The set of specific conceits and poetic devices in classical Elizabethan poetry marked the limits of individual style: indeed, this set of conceits in many ways reflected the pre-individual state of poetics. As S.K. Heninger aptly says:

The creative act rests more in selecting the prefabricated metaphor which is most expressive, rather than in devising with uniqueness or even novelty. For the poet, therefore, the framing of metaphors is an act of discovery and choice more than creating *ex nihilo*.¹¹⁰

The poetics of correspondence is of course faced with the issue of truth – to what extent does poetry truly reflect the world? Since it should do so, it has to aspire to be – in

¹⁰⁸ Ruthven, p. 50

¹⁰⁹ See e.g. Vaughan's *Retreat* from *Silex Scintillans*: "But (ah!) my soul with too much stay / Is drunk, and staggers in the way." or Cowley in *Love and Life* from *The Mistress*:

Now, sure, within this twelve-month past,
I have loved at least some twenty years or more:
Th' account of love runs much more fast
Than that, with which our life does score:
So though my life be short, yet I may prove
The great Methusalem of love." quoted from Ruthven, p. 50

Sidney's words - an art of "true doctrine, not lyes." In that sense, poetry teaches and as such is defensible against the commonplace attack of the Puritan *misomousoi*¹¹¹. The issue of metaphor thus incorporates both ontological and epistemological issues: the ontology of a Renaissance metaphor is predetermined by Pythagorean cosmology and epistemology then subsequently bases its claims on the actual system of correspondences as deployed by the Creator.¹¹² A poem becomes a microcosm condensing the reality of the macrocosm and should aspire to present the divine design – it un-covers it and re-presents it in a universal and timeless contraction.

The belief in the Great Chain of Being¹¹³ allowed a multiplicity of correspondences to be developed between correspondent layers of being – human/subhuman, earthly/heavenly. In the end, the basic intuition of this thinking is that metaphors can work only as long as this basic correspondence is acclaimed and believed in. Whatever the actual matrix of reading a metaphor may be¹¹⁴, after all it has to conform. If the truth is "out there", impressed in eternal images, stable and constant, neither conceits nor metaphors can aspire to more than eloquent arguments. The value of the *decorum* was also based on a belief that limits are set and are to be followed. Failing to observe the rules of *decorum*, excessive individuality and grotesqueness were to be avoided. Puttenham stresses this point by discussing the issue of decorum at the end of his famous treatise. Just before the final *Conclusion* and a conventional homage to Queen Elizabeth, he sums up the theme as follows:

Therefore shall our Poet receaue prayte for both, but more by knowing of his arte then by vnreaſonable vſing it, and be more commended for his naturall eloquence then for

¹¹⁰ Heninger, p. 338

¹¹¹ As G. Gregory Smith aptly points out: "Elizabethan criticism arose in controversy." See his introduction to *Elizabethan critical essays*, Vol. I, p. xiv

¹¹² Heninger, p. 339

¹¹³ See the discussions of this theme in Lovejoy's *The Great Chain of Being* (pp. 67-144), or in Tillyard's *The Elizabethan World Picture* (pp. 23-76)

¹¹⁴ In this respect, Elizabethan authors had to make sure – in the light of the fierce Puritan critique – that their correspondences are not just fancies. The problem of signification in the early modern England is primarily this challenge of the Calvinist mistrust in human language to properly represent the truth. This is also the central dilemma of Milton's *Paradise Lost*: can fallen human language properly represent an unfallen state? How?

his artificiall, and more for his artificiall wee difembled, then for the fame ouermuch affested and groffely or vndiscretly bewrayed, as many makers and Oratours do.¹¹⁵

The critique of the Metaphysicals – e.g. Jonson's condemnation of Donne's conceit of his *Anniversaries* in the Conversations with Drummond of Hawthornden or the classical reproach of John Dryden¹¹⁶ – emphasized this inappropriate excess, unnaturalness and blasphemy.¹¹⁷ In that sense, even the famous classicist criticism of Samuel Johnson in Life of Cowley matches the basic line of the argument. By distinguishing the natural wit and the wit of the Metaphysicals, he defines metaphysical poetry in these terms:

The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions; their learning instructs, and their subtlety surprises; but the reader commonly thinks his improvement dearly bought, and though he sometimes admires, is seldom pleased.¹¹⁸

Pythagorean poetics in the English Renaissance – as represented by the major treatises of Sidney and Puttenham – was designed to involve the reader and provoke his response. Only in that sense could the metaphor making aspire to the state of truth – challenge the reader and strive to harmonize with his/her own observation. Teaching and delighting are thus two sides of the same coin: poetry teaches because it has no minor aspiration than the truth itself, and delights because it presents (or re-presents) the delightful experience of cosmic security.

Cosmos, if it is a *universe*, somehow necessarily invites the idea of macro-microcosm correspondence and the Great Chain of Being. The strife of John Donne in his *Anniversaries* is, indeed, the strife with a world that lost its *logos*, its unifying, binding force. Here – as in

¹¹⁵ Puttenham, p. 313

¹¹⁶ "He [Donne] affects the metaphysics, not only in satires, but in his amorous verses, where nature only should reign; and perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their hearts, and entertain them with the softnesses of love." in Discourse of Satire (1693), in Critical Opinions of John Dryden. Comp. J. M. Aden. Vanderbilt U P: Nashville, 1963. p.54

¹¹⁷ "That Donnes Anniversarie was profane and full of Blasphemies: that he told Mr. Donne, if it had been written of the Virgin Marie it had been something; to which he answered, that he described / the Idea of Woman, and not as she was." Ben Jonson's Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden. Ed. R.F. Patterson. Blackie and Son: London, 1923, p.5

many other metaphysical poems – we can see the unfolding of a dis-harmonious world, the expansion of the infinity without any boundaries¹¹⁹, with no apparent centre, without the redeeming force of music. Metaphysical poetry in this respect presents the world in-between the old musical and the modern “untuned” one. As we shall see later on, it both embraces and despises its heroic task.

II.4. Pre-modern self and the act of poetry

Poetry as making – as defined classically by both Sidney and Puttenham – stressed primarily poet’s responsibility for his “unwanted vocation” in a transhistorical perspective. Macro-microcosmic correspondence was meant to stress the ability or vocation of a poet to expand and unfold the Book of Creation. Poet thus unfolds God’s plan – or “progresses” from the primary conceit hidden in the Book of Creation – to enable his reader to “reduce”¹²⁰ its conceit back to its origin. In that sense, poet always assumes a sacred task, the act of poetry and true eloquence being bound with a liturgical significance. French Renaissance theorist Pierre de la Primaudaye (c. 1545-c. 1610) in his L’Académie Française (translated into English in parts by T. Bowes¹²¹) stressed the theological aspiration of a proper conceit:

For hee onely is to bee accompted eloquent, who can conceiue well in his spirite and minde that which he ought to speake, and then is able to expresse it well, both by apt words, and by sentences that are well tied and knit together...
... Nowe if wee vnderstand all these things well, they may help very much to instruct and confirme vs in the doctrine of the Trinitie of persons, of the Vnitie of the Godhead, and of the eternall generation of the Sonne of God, who is his diuine and euerlasting word. Likewise they will cause vs to concieue more easily, how this heavenly and eternall word, namely Iesus Christ is the Image and Character of God, the expresse and ingraued forme of his person, as it is in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and not in shadow or painting. For the glorie, maiestie, and vertue of the Father is alwaies hid from vs, but only so farre foorth as it sheweth it slefe ingrued in his sonne and in his word, as the image of the minde appeareth imprinted and ingrauen in the speech that is vttered. And as the internall word bred in the minde departeth not form

¹¹⁸ Jonson as Critic. Ed. J. Wain. Routledge: London, 1973, p. 254, more on the issue of wit, see bellow

¹¹⁹ Cf. the topical association with the cosmological system of Giordano Bruno

¹²⁰ I am here referring to the meaning as employed in St Bonaventure’s treatise De reductione artium ad theologiam. (i.e. in the original etymological sense “reductio” as “bringing back”).

¹²¹ The French Academie (1586) and The Second Part of the French Academie (1594)

it, neither is separated, and yet it imprinteth an image thereof in the mindes of the hearers, to whom it is declared: so the diuine and eternall worde begotten of the Father, is always resident in God, and yet imprinteth his image in the heartes and mindes of men, to whome it is manifested by those means which hee hath appointed for that purpose. ...¹²²

The act of uttering or unfolding one's conceit finds its ultimate prefiguration in the eternal act of uttering the Word by God the Father: i.e. in the paradox of ineffable God expressing himself, taking human proportion and descending to humanity. In this revealed Word humanity can participate on the ultimate Otherness of God.

The act of poetry – conceived as an act of making *par excellence* – acquires liturgical signification of re-presenting the creative act of God. The reader is invited to share in the poetry making in reverse: he "reduces" metaphors back to the original One in the Pythagorean scheme of progression. It only follows that self-revelation in the sense, in which it is understood in modern poetry (starting with the early modern reversals of John Donne) is not the interest of pre-modern poets. The excess of individuality was seen as hindering the very act of comprehension – indeed, the rules of *decorum* were designed to avoid excessive attention to the technique of the author. In that sense, the mentioned didactic tediousness of Puttenham's treatise is a typically modern concern of a modern reader – if a conceit is to be delivered properly, it has to stick to the rules and fulfil the ultimate goal of poetry. Didacticism is just a form of uttering this fundamental Elizabethan aspiration of poetry to teach.

M.H. Abrams sums up the relation between the vision of the artist and the ultimate Idea in Renaissance poetry in his book The Mirror and the Lamp as follows:

... Renaissance Platonism guaranteed the impersonality of the artist's vision by making metaphysical provision for linking the Idea in the individual mind to the universal and unchanging ideas of the world pattern. The connection might be established by positing the existence of memory-traces of the divine archetype, said to have been stamped into the intellect before birth; it was sometimes supported by an

¹²² From the edition of 1594, p. 88, quoted from Hoyt's notes to his edition of Hoskins's Directions for Speech and Style, pp. 55-56

elaborate optical analogy, according to which rays of archetypal beauty, streaming from the countenance of God, are reflected in three mirrors, one in the angels, a second in the souls of men, a third in the material world.¹²³

The notion of poet as maker is re-presentational in the original sense of the word – it is de-centred and meant to be de-centred from the self. The poet makes because he repeats: the “individuality” is not about the agency of writing but about its efficacy.

Sidney’s apologetic tone, however, signals a sense of uncertainty with the act of poetry, or – to be more precise - with the sense, in which the agency of the author always enters the creative process. The distorted duality of fallen human language makes it unclear to what extent poet “makes” or “creates” and to what extent he falsifies and pretends – or creates “simulacras” in the Platonic sense¹²⁴. Puritan attack and radical Protestants in general tended to emphasize the Word of God revealed in the Scripture as the only true agent of truth which cannot be re-presented in any other way¹²⁵. The abstraction of this creative act and the general Puritan phobia of signification made it difficult for poets to claim their aspiration for a participation on Revelation; or for meditation, e.g. as it was understood in the Catholic tradition, particularly after the significant developments of the Council of Trent. The dilemma of poetry to represent and how to represent was indeed also the dilemma of creation: can an act of poetic creation claim the nature of an event, of a discovery? Has the act of unfolding in poetry any significance in making the general scheme of God’s plan understandable?

Poet is a maker as long as he can claim to be making *something*, to be truly representing. The polemic with the Puritans in many ways helped to shape the notion of the poetic self: one that ultimately points clearly to the Metaphysicals and their understanding of wit.

¹²³ Abrams, M.H.: The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition. Norton: New York, 1958, p. 43-4

¹²⁴ as Plato defines a “non-reality” a “sham” in The Republic

¹²⁵ This is in fact the core of the polemic around the Eucharistic presence. To what extent can the sacrifice of Christ on the cross be re-presented in a way which is not idolatrous?

III. Towards the concept of metaphysical poetry

III.1. Introduction

This study aims at showing the way in which metaphysical poetry in its most acclaimed personalities (Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Marvell and Crashaw) expands on the classical Renaissance tradition of conceiving poetry on the matrix of Pythagorean harmonic lore; and in what way is this poetic in fact a radical deviation from this tradition. As has numerous times been said before, the very attempts to define metaphysical poetry (or *The School of Donne*) have usually been associated with the notion of *harmony* and *decorum*, as understood by the contemporaries (most notably in the criticism of Ben Jonson) but also by the later generations (from the Restoration onwards). Shifts in the perception of the Metaphysicals in many respects mark the self-reflections of the respective generations. The re-discovery of the Metaphysicals in the 20th century (especially since the famous essays and lectures of T.S. Eliot) has thus re-opened the basic dilemma of poetry between reflecting the harmony of the universe (its intrinsic harmonic "truth") or creating this harmony for itself. This problem is obviously manifold. However, the two main problems are the nature of poet as maker and metaphor by which he condenses the universe of his/her world. It is therefore clear that we must start with the discussion of these themes.

III.2. The rhetorical problem

John Hoskins's treatise Directions for Speech and Style shows in an interesting way the tensions and problems later encountered in regard to metaphysical style. John Hoskins was "a man of keen wit, of remarkable versatility, and of unconventional career."¹²⁶ Although his primary career was law, he managed to pursue another career with writing. He became

¹²⁶ Hoyt's introduction p. xii

well known in the circle of important late Elizabethan writers and poets (he was a drinking companion of Ben Jonson, Sir Benjamin Rudyard and Richard Martin and an acquaintance of John Donne, John Selden and Samuel Daniel.)¹²⁷ Directions for Speech and Style is a remarkable adaptation of classical authors, whose names are recalled by Hoskins himself in the *Introduction*. The main sources are "Aristotle, Hermogenes, Quintillian, Demosthenes, Cicero, and some later, as Sturmius and Talleus."¹²⁸ There are, however, as the editor Hudson. H. Hoyt points out, numerous other rhetorical treatises he might have been familiar with: Erasmus' compilation De Duplici Copia Verborum ac Rerum (1511), Epitome Troporum ac Schematum by Joannes Susenbrotus (d. 1543), Lipsius' Epistolica institutio (Leyden, 1591), with the work of Omar Talon (c. 1510-1562), Antoine Fouqueline and also two Classical English treatises: Thomas Wilson's Arte of Rhetorique (1553) and Abraham Fraunce's Arcadian Rhetorike (1588 ?).¹²⁹

Although his treatise remained unpublished during his lifetime, it exercised significant influence, since we can find parts of the manuscript printed in three important treatises published later, namely Jonson's Timber (1641), Thomas Blount's Academy of Eloquence, from which parts were copied to John Smith's The Myserie of Rhetorique Unvail'd (1657). Thus Hoskins' ideas were carried onwards by the thinkers of the coming age.

To document his analysis, he uses extracts primarily from Sidney's Arcadia, nevertheless, he mentions other authors as well. The introduction starts off with a discussion of the problem of conceit:

The conceits of the mind are pictures of things and the tongue is interpreter of those pictures. The order of God's creatures in themselves is not only admirable and glorious, but eloquent; then he that could apprehend the consequence of things, in their truth, and utter his apprehensions as truly were a right orator.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ *ibid*

¹²⁸ Hoskins, p. 3.

¹²⁹ Hoyt's introduction, p. xxv-xxvii

¹³⁰ Hoskins, p. 2

It is, indeed, the ability of an accomplished user of language to "unfold" the conceit of the mind (the Augustinian *verbum interius*) in a time-space continuum. In so doing, he imitates the harmonious order, the eloquence of God.

The main tenor of Hoskins' work is a sense of appropriateness and adequacy in expressing oneself. Incapability of doing so results in a harm done more to natural "coherence of things" and "right proportion" than to the actual speaker:

... disordered speech is not so much injury to the lips which give it forth or the thoughts which put it forth as to the right proportion and coherence of things in themselves, so wrongfully expressed...¹³¹

When discussing metaphor, Hoskins stresses Aristotelian maxim¹³² that "the rule of a metaphor is that it be not too bold nor too far-fetched", however, at that point he also recognizes the epistemological significance of metaphor:

And though all metaphors go beyond the signification of things, yet are they requisite to match the compassing sweetness of men's minds, that are not content to fix themselves upon one thing but they must wander into the confines; like the eye, that cannot choose but view the whole knot when it beholds but one flower in a garden of purpose; or like an archer that, knowing his bow will overcast or carry too short, takes an aim on this or beyond his mark.¹³³

In other words, metaphor conveys knowledge:

Besides, a metaphor is pleasant because it enricheth our knowledge with two things at once, with the truth and with similitude...¹³⁴

The problem of *truth* becomes – for Hoskins as for Sidney – a matter of prime importance. However, Hoskins attacks the tediousness of repeating the same metaphors, even though they may be acknowledged as true:

¹³¹ Hoskins, p. 2

¹³² referring to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Book 3, verse 12: "Further, in naming something that does not have a proper name of its own, metaphor should be used, and [should] not be far-fetched but taken from things that are related and of similar species, so that it is clear the term is related..." *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. Trans. G. A. Kennedy. OUP: Oxford, 1991, p. 224. For this note, I am grateful to H. H. Hoyt's explanatory notes at the end of his edition of Hoskins. (p. 61)

¹³³ Hoskins, p. 8

¹³⁴ Hoskins, p. 8

And of a truth, if the times gives itself too much to anyone to flourish, it makes it a toy and bars a learned man's writings from it, lest it seem to come more of the general humor than the private judgment.¹³⁵

The art of parody in metaphysical poetry quite often targets the emptiness of stock metaphors and shows the "truth" of such a metaphor from many different angles to disharmonize that truth. Perhaps the best example is Donne's poem *The Broken Heart*, in which Donne explores the possibilities of this overused cliché and makes it into an ingenious conceit. The last stanza points out the peculiarity of such an endeavour:

Yet nothing can to nothing fall,
Nor any place be empty quite,
Therefore I think my breast hath all
Those pieces still, though be not unite;
And now, as broken glasses show
A hundred lesser faces, so,
My rags of heart can like, wish, and adore,
But after one such love, can love no more.¹³⁶

When speaking about *synæciosis* (*συννοικίωσις*), explained as "composition of contraries"¹³⁷, he alludes to a rhetorical device aiming at a special sensation or surprise in the reader. It is "an easy figure now in fashion, not like ever to be so usual."¹³⁸ The explanation is as follows:

This is a fine course to stir admiration in the hearer and make them think it a *strange harmony*¹³⁹ which must be expressed in such discords... (36)

This *strange harmony*, indeed, incorporates a paradox: how can harmony be achieved in "discords"? If this is granted, a sense of *discovery* "stirring admiration" is granted as well. A similar figure, *sententia*, exhibits wit and a surprising turn of things. However, Hoskins does not fail to add:

¹³⁵ Hoskins, p. 17

¹³⁶ Donne, J.: *The Complete English Poems*, ed. A. J. Smith. Penguin: 1971. Hereafter "Donne, CEP", pp. 46-7

¹³⁷ Hoskins, p. 36

¹³⁸ Hoskins, p. 37

¹³⁹ Emphasis is mine.

It is very true that a sentence is a pearl in a discourse; but is it a good discourse that is all pearl? It is like an eye in the body; but is it not monstrous to be all eyes?¹⁴⁰

To sum it up: excess is definitely to be avoided. A right proportion should always prevail. Hoskins' treatise interestingly opens up rhetorical issues concerned with the metaphysical school: paradoxes, unexpected conceits, sense of discovery, surprise, discords, and strange harmony. These characteristics can be used and, indeed, have been used in regards to the Metaphysicals.

The problem of conceit and eloquence is deeply associated with the issue of *wit*. As most other concepts so far discussed, this word has enjoyed an ambivalent acceptance in the late sixteenth- and especially seventeenth-century English poetic theory. As we shall see, the importance of wit for poetry was never disputed, however, the extent to which wit was to be crucial for poetic creation shifted with times.

III.3. The problem of wit in early modern English theory

The definition of wit always incorporates two basic characteristics: it is the ability to express oneself in a way that shows both the "resemblance and congruity of ideas"¹⁴¹, but also an element of disparity. The tension between the two defines the extremes of its possible effect: it can turn out to be either startlingly ingenious, or comic, up to mere ridiculousness. George Williamson¹⁴² shows this problem when discussing the history of wit in the seventeenth century from the Jacobean to the Augustan: the ingenious wit of Donne slowly deteriorates into decadence in the Caroline and Interregnum period (particularly in the poetry of John Cleveland); and this paves the road towards the paradoxical effects of Dryden's tragicomedies. Indeed, "when the disparity between the terms of a metaphor becomes real

¹⁴⁰ Hoskins, p. 39

¹⁴¹ See Addison, J. *True and False Wit*. (essay publ. May 7, 1711 in *The Spectator*) *Critical Essays from The Spectator*. Ed. D. F. Bond. OUP: Oxford, 1970, p. 17

¹⁴² *The Proper Wit of Poetry*. Faber and Faber: London, 1961. I am referring especially to the first chapter called "The Poet's Feigning Wit:", p. 11-21

incongruity, the serious effect is threatened."¹⁴³ Hoskins' middle road between boldness and farfetchedness thus acquires yet another significance.

For the Elizabethans, it was John Lyly's Euphues or The Anatomy of Wit (publ. 1578, expanded 1579), which presented an unrivalled display of wit. Euphuistic dialectic style originates, as Leah Scragg points out

...in part, in the scholastic disputations which formed the principal educational instrument in the sixteenth century, and debate (or the consideration of 'questions') supplies much of the incidental interest of both part of Euphues, while informing the larger framework of the narrative.¹⁴⁴

Lyly's work is not, however, primarily concerned with the issues of style. Its main concern is the *tension between wit and wisdom*. In that sense, Lyly reiterates the traditional humanist distrust for elaborate scholastic arguments. Euphues is a witty and eloquent character, however, his practice of wit is deceitful: the wittier he is, the less truth he can achieve. He finally entraps himself into his own tricks, unable to see clearly to what end wit should properly be exercised. At that point, he recalls the words of Eubulus - a typified character of an old sage - who at the outset of the story calls Euphues to examine his conscience. This becomes the moment of recognition: his eloquence turns out to be futile, as it has so far been solely exercised in deceit:

If wit be employed in the honest study of learning, what thing so precious as wit? If in the idle trade of love, what thing more pestilent than wit?¹⁴⁵

The reclaimed prodigal son Euphues amends, gets to understand the necessity of education - "Philosophy, physic and divinity shall be my study."¹⁴⁶ - and in the second part of the book he gives useful counsels to future gentlemen. Indeed, the moral is summed up in the very title: "Euphues. The Anatomy of Wit. Very pleasant for all Gentleman to reade, and most

¹⁴³ Williamson, G.: The Proper Wit of Poetry, p. 25

¹⁴⁴ Scragg's introduction to his edition of Lyly's Euphues. Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit and Euphues and his England. Manchester U P: Manchester, 2000. p. 4. All quotes are from this edition.

¹⁴⁵ Lyly: Euphues, p. 84

¹⁴⁶ *ibid*

necessary to remember, wherein are contained the delights that Wit followeth in his youth, by the pleasantness of love, and the happiness he reapeth in age, by the perfectness of Wisdom."

Euphuism is by no means original work¹⁴⁷, particularly in the handling of the story and the conclusion: it follows the Humanistic pattern set by Petrarch in On his own ignorance and amplified by Erasmus' Ciceronianus¹⁴⁸ and indirectly The Praise of Folly. The main point of these treatises can be summarized in a simple statement: wit is no guarantee of wisdom.

As far as the actual style of Euphuism is concerned, the study of Croll and Clemons¹⁴⁹ explains its main features:

Euphuism is a style characterized by the figures known in ancient and medieval rhetoric as *schemes (schemata)*¹⁵⁰, and more specifically by the word-schemes (*schemata verborum*), in contrast with those known as *tropes*; that is to say, in effect, by the figures of sound, or vocal ornament. The most important of these figures are three which can be used, and in Euphuism are often and characteristically used, in combination in the same form of words: first, isocolon, or equality of members (successive phrases or clauses of about the same *length*); secondly, parison, or equality of sound (successive or corresponding members of the same *form*, so that word corresponds to word, adjective to adjective, noun to noun, verb to verb, etc.); thirdly paromoion, similarity of sound between words or syllables, usually occurring between words in the same positions in parisonic members, and having the form either of alliteration, similarity at the beginning, or *homoioteleuton (similiter cadentes or desinentes)*, similarity at the end, or, as often in Euphuism, of both of these at once. Other *schemata* are also frequently and characteristically used, such as simple *word-repetition*, and *polyptoton* (the repetition of the same stem two or more times within the same clause or sentence, each time with a different inflectional ending); but these need not be detailed. The essential feature of the style – to repeat – is a vocal, or oral, pattern, and *all its other characteristics, such as the use of antithesis, and the constant use of simile*¹⁵¹ are only means by which the Euphuist effects his various devices of sound design.¹⁵²

As we can see, even here the definition of wit is bound with the tension between resemblance and disparity. The antithetic style is, indeed, a very powerful means of discriminating meaning, since it sharpens one's perception of identity of a given object. In

¹⁴⁷ "Substantial sections of both The Anatomy of Wit and Euphuism and his England are either direct translations of Latin texts or are borrowed (sometimes with minimal alteration) from contemporary writers." Scragg's introduction to his edition of Euphuism, p. 11

¹⁴⁸ For this note, I am indebted to an excellent study of Richard A. McCabe: "Wit, Wisdom and Eloquence in Euphuism: The Anatomy of Wit." Studies in Philology. 81.3., p. 323.

¹⁴⁹ I am referring to their introduction of their edition of Euphuism: The Anatomy of Wit. Euphuism and His England, Russel and Russel: New York, 1964

¹⁵⁰ Croll and Clemons, p. xvii.

¹⁵¹ Emphasis is mine.

¹⁵² Croll and Clemons, p. xv-xvi

that sense, it is one of the key elements of wit: it brings an element of surprise, discovery, or recognition. It suspends the meaning by showing its inner tension between arbitrariness and givenness. The antithesis is, indeed, a very popular device with the Metaphysicals. In the elaborate Marinistic conceits of Richard Crashaw – as we shall see later on – the antithesis is meant to explore its limits, taking them often to the very edge of the bearable.

Polemic with Schoolmen and the Scholastic method (which still lurks behind Lyly's work) becomes the target for Francis Bacon in The Advancement of Learning (publ. 1605):

And indeed, as many solid substances putrefy into a number of subtle, idle and vermicular questions, that have a certain quickness of life, and spirit, but no strength of matter, or excellence of quality, This kind of degenerate learning chiefly reigned among the schoolmen; who, having subtle and strong capacities, abundance of leisure, and but a small variety of reading, their minds being shut up in a few authors, as their bodies were in the cells of their monasteries, and thus kept ignorant both of the history of nature and times; they, with infinite agitation of wit, spun out of a small quantity of matter, those laborious webs of learning which are extant in their books. For the human mind, if it acts upon matter, and contemplates the nature of things, and the works of God, operates according to the stuff, and is limited thereby; but if it works upon itself, as the spider does, then it has no end; but produces cobwebs of learning, admirable for the fineness of thread and work, but of no substance or profit.¹⁵³

Bacon attacks the abstraction of intellectual reasoning from observation. Wit cannot cross the line of the "natural coherence" of things as displayed in God's creation. An effort to bypass the more or less "pre-made" correspondences ends in error. In that sense, these witty metaphors become idols of perception and potentially distort our understanding of the way the world has been made.

... the idols of the market give the greatest disturbance, and, from a tacit agreement among mankind, with regard to the imposition of words and names, insinuate themselves into the understanding: for words are generally given according to vulgar conceptions, and divide things by such differences as the common people are capable of: but when a more acute understanding, or a more careful observation, would distinguish things better, words murmur against it. The remedy of this lies in definitions; but these themselves are in many respects irremediable, as consisting of words: for words generate words, however men may imagine they have a command over words, and can easily say they will speak with the vulgar, and think with the wise.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Bacon, F.: The Advancement of Learning and Novum Organum. The Colonial Press: New York, 1899, p. 17

¹⁵⁴ Bacon, p. 158

Bacon obviously became the inspirational force of *The Royal Society* (founded 1660) and the later English Empiricism. Sprat's *History of the Royal Society* (1667) expands on Bacon in claiming:

To this purpose I must premise, that it is requir'd in the best, and most delightful Wit; that it be founded on such images which are generally known, and are able to bring a strong, and a sensible impression on the *mind*.¹⁵⁵

In that sense, the later 17th century repeats – although in a radically changed context – the premises of the Elizabethans and many Jacobean. This kind of wit – associated with excess and violation of propriety - was to be limited only to certain poetic genres. George Puttenham's definition of epigram (nicknamed as *witty scoffe*) is as follows:

...poet deuifed a prety fahioned poeme fhort and fweete (as we are wont to fay) and called it *Epigramma*, in which euey mery conceited man might, without any long studie or tedious ambage, make his frend sport, and anger his foe, and giue a prettie nip, or shew a sharpe conceit in few verfes...¹⁵⁶

William Drummond of Hawthornden in his letter to Dr. Arthur Johnston – not surprisingly – therefore describes Donne as primarily “an epigrammatist”¹⁵⁷:

Donne among the Anacreontick Lyrics, is second to none, and far from all Second; But as Anacreon doth not approach Callimachus, tho' he excels in his kind, nor Horace to Virgil; no more can I be brought to thank him to excel either Alexander's or Sidney's Verses: They can hardly be compared together, treading diverse Paths; the one flying swift, but low; the other, like the Eagle, surpassing the Clouds. I think, if he would, he might easily be the best Epigrammatist we have found in English; of which I have not yet seen any come near the Ancients.¹⁵⁸

The association of wit with an epigram thus seems to reiterate the premise, that wit as displayed by e.g. Donne cannot have a truly epistemological relevance. It is dismissed because it is ultimately just an ornament, a trick to emphasize the point which the epigram is

¹⁵⁵ Williamson, p. 88

¹⁵⁶ Puttenham, p. 68

¹⁵⁷ In Jonson's dialogues with William Drummond of Hawthornden, there is an interesting juxtaposition of Donne's grandfather on the mother side Jasper Heywood and Donne himself: “Dones Grandfather on the mother side was Heywood the Eppigrammatist, that Done himself for not being understood would perish.”

Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden (1619). Elizabethan and Jacobean Quartos. p. 9

¹⁵⁸ quoted from Williamson, p. 44-5

making. Therefore this premise approaches the "dissociation of sensibility" of the later generation, in which the epistemological relevance of poetry was disputed. Because of that, obviously, poetry emerged as a specific discourse, qualitatively different from e.g. the discourse of philosophy or the humanities in general. The truth of poetry was, however, more and more confined to its own rules and its direct ontological aspiration became more problematic. Hellegers's discussion of the relationship between metaphor and power in Handmaid to Divinity: Natural Philosophy, Poetry, and Gender in Seventeenth-Century England shows this problem in a wider philosophical context:

If for Montaigne philosophy was but "sophisticated poetry", for Donne poetry is the highest form of philosophy. In contrast to a natural philosophy that denies the mediating role of metaphor and the limitations of the human interpreter, poetry provides a model for human knowledge and creation – and for good government.¹⁵⁹

In that sense, metaphysical poetry was the last attempt to save this relationship. The Restoration and Augustan periods display the ultimate sealing of this dissociation between metaphor and its ontological relevance. Thus metaphor ceased to aspire for a mediating role in the process of acquiring knowledge.

Ben Jonson's Timber or Discoveries (1641) discusses the issue of wit first in the Humanist tradition. He indicates his preference for wisdom before eloquence:

Of the two (if either were to bee wisht) I would rather have a plaine downe-right wisdome, then a foolish and affected eloquence.¹⁶⁰

He obviously alludes to the fashion of wit and being witty, which in fact means distorting natural language and the natural proportion of things:

I doe heare them say often: Some men are not witty; because they are not every where witty; then which nothing is more foolish. If an eye or a nose bee an excellent part in the face, therefore be all eye or nose ? I thinke the eye-brow, the fore-head, the cheeke, chyn, lip, or any part else, are as necessary, and naturall in the place. But now nothing is good that is naturall: Right and naturall language seeme to have least of the wit in it; that which is writth'd

¹⁵⁹ Hellegers, D.: Handmaid to Divinity: Natural Philosophy, Poetry and Gender in Seventeenth-Century England, U of Oklahoma P: Norman, 2000, p. 23

¹⁶⁰ Timber, p. 17

and tortur'd, is counted the more exquisite. Cloath of Bodkin, or Tissue, must be imbrodered; as if no face were faire, that were not pouldered, or painted ? No beauty to be had, but in wresting, and writhing our owne tongue ? Nothing is fashionable, till it bee deform'd; and this is to write like a Gentlemen. All must bee as affected. and preposterous as our Gallants cloathes, sweet bags, and night-dressings: in which you would thinke our men lay in; like Ladies: it is so curious.¹⁶¹

This excess of wit Jonson interestingly associates with William Shakespeare. Although he repeats his assessment of the Bard as a great poet (which he did already in the dedicatory poem to Shakespeare's First Folio in 1623), he assumes that Shakespeare could not find the right proportion between his "Phantsie; brave notions, and gentle expressions" and a sense of decorum:

His wit was in his owne power; would the rule of it had beene so too. Many times hee fell into those things, could not escape laughter: As when hee said in the person of Caesar, one speaking to him; *Caesar thou dost me wrong*. Hee replied: *Caesar did never wrong, but with just cause*: and such like, which were ridiculous.¹⁶²

He soothes his criticism by saying that "hee redeemed his vices, with his vertues", yet this remark proves that Jonson's leanings were traditionally Humanist. His assessment of Donne's poetry in Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden (1619) is on the one hand very favourable – he is described as "the first poet in the World in some things"¹⁶³, yet in one of his pedagogical remarks in Timber he points out that Donne's poetry is to be read later, because it requires certain preparation:

Therefore youth ought to be instructed betimes, and in the best things: for we hold those longest, wee take sonnest. As the first sent of a Vessel lasts: and that tinct the wooll first receives. Therefore a Master should temper his owne powers, and descend to the others infirmity. If you powre a glut of water upon a Bottle, it receives little of it; but with a Funnel, and by degrees, you shall fill many of them, and spill little of your owne: to their capacity they will all receive, and be full. And as it is fit to reade the best Authors to youth first, so let them be of the openest, and clearest. As *Livy* before *Salust*, *Sydney* before *Donne*...¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Timber or Discoveries, pp. 25-6

¹⁶² p. 27

¹⁶³ Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden, p. 6

¹⁶⁴ Timber, p. 69

His poetics does not cross the boundaries of the mainstream Elizabethan criticism I have shown above. Jonson repeats Sidney: A poet's art is "an Art of imitation, or faining; expressing the life of man in fit measure, numbers, and harmony, according to *Aristotle*..."¹⁶⁵ In the end, his aspirations are neither re-defining wit, nor contributing significantly to current controversies about it.

III.4. Metaphysical wit

Metaphysical wit has traditionally been associated with the concept *discordia concors*. The act of harmonizing dissimilar things, indeed, results in *discoveries*: the truth exposed by poetry is not simply "out there", it is hidden. It is the "strange harmony" which Hoskins so succinctly termed when discussing "the composition of contraries" as a rhetorical device. This harmonizing ability of the metaphor shows these opposites both in tension and in unity. In that sense, it reiterates the old philosophical dispute between the Pythagorean world of correspondences and the Heraclitean bow, "in which contraries are locked in perpetual strife."¹⁶⁶ By positing a paradox, the Metaphysicals very often disturb an everyday sense of trivial harmony: they do not always destroy or parody stock metaphors and stereotypical images, they chastise our perception. Wit in Metaphysical poetry, therefore, becomes much more than just a rhetorical tool: it is in many ways the basic principle on which it is built. Rosamund Tuve makes a distinction between the ornamental wit of the Elizabethans and the functional wit of the Metaphysicals.¹⁶⁷ What in the Elizabethan Age was a tool of rhetoric to give conceits a distinct shape, becomes a real tool of wisdom and insight with the Metaphysicals. The old dispute between wit and wisdom thus acquires a new significance.

¹⁶⁵ Timber, p. 89

¹⁶⁶ Wanamaker, M. C.: *Discordia Concors: The Wit of Metaphysical Poetry*. National University Publications: Washington, 1977, p. 125

¹⁶⁷ in her classic book *Elizabethan and metaphysical imagery: renaissance poetic and twentieth-century critics*. U of Chicago P: Chicago, 1947

Instances of metaphysical wit can be traced back to the introduction of hieroglyphs into Western thinking. When in 1505 Aldus Mantius introduced them to European audience with the publication of The Hieroglyphics of Horapollo of the Nile, "it sponsored a cult."¹⁶⁸ Aldus did not understand the nature of the hieroglyphics; therefore he invested them with occult meanings and saw them as signs for universal truth. His book inspired a number of treatises dealing with esoterism: their popularity was motivated with a belief that these visual "conceits" appeal to the faculty of understanding directly without the mediation of the fallen sensual powers. Egyptian hieroglyphics were seen as tokens of original Adamic language, which communicated the very nature of things, rather than just their representations.

The theorists of the *impressa* in the latter half of the 16th century¹⁶⁹ pointed out that creating such an image requires special aptitude to recognize similitudes between things¹⁷⁰: because, indeed, they are to be found in different categories of being. Man is endowed by his Creator to read across the orders of things and thus rediscover his sympathy with the rest of the creation. This faculty of man can be perfected to attain the knowledge of the sacred. Indeed, the more enigmatic the image is, the more likely to communicate the divine. And "divine things must be held occult," says Valeriano.¹⁷¹

The passion for the occult and the *arcana dei* penetrated the discussion on many different levels. Hieroglyphics and *imprese* mediated the relationship between the physical and the metaphysical world. In fact, human capacity to create these occult correspondences proves the ability of reason to aspire beyond the grossness of the body. Wit is, thus, somehow always connected with the realm of *meta* – physics.

One of the most influential 17th century theorist of wit, Bartolomeo Gracián, the author of numerous times reprinted book Agudeza y Arte de Ingenio en que se Explican Todos los

¹⁶⁸ Smith, A.J.: Metaphysical Wit. CUP: Cambridge, 1991, p. 30

¹⁶⁹ B. Arnigio (Rime di gli Academici Occulti noc le loro Imprese et Discorsi, Brescia 1568), S. Bargagli (Dell' Impresse, Venice 1589), P. Aresi (Delle Imprese Sacre, Verona 1616) et alii

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Bargagli, p. 79, quoted and discussed by A.J. Smith: Metaphysical Wit, p. 36;

Modos y Diferencias de Conceptos (first published 1642), sees the main criterion of wit not primarily in truth, but in "harmonious concordance between extreme terms."¹⁷² Tesauro's Cannocchiale Aristotelico (Venice, 1655) took the issue of wit as far as not distinguishing between sane and insane metaphor making. Indeed, Tesauro saw madness as a special conditioning "to invent exhilarating metaphors and witty symbols."¹⁷³ In fact, he claims that his conception of wit is nothing new but goes back to Alexandrian Church Fathers and its literary traditions. Although we could certainly find instances of "metaphysical" wit in the whole of the patristic tradition (St Ambrose, St Augustine amongst others), the issue of wit had never before been formulated so sharply.¹⁷⁴

Gracián defines three basic distinct modes of *agudeza* or wit: correlation, contrariety and surprise. *Correlation* stresses the likeness of things in different categories, *contrariety* their unlikeness, and finally *surprise* brings about an unexpected turn, which results in paradoxes, reversals and perplexing connections. Gracián shows these modes quoting examples from contemporary Spanish poetry – Lope de Vega, Bartolomé Leonardo, Salinas y Azpicuela etc. His radical sense of wit emphasizes the contradictory element, because it is contradiction that shapes our sense of subtlety:

To unite by the force of discourse two contradictory extremes is an exceptional argument of subtlety.¹⁷⁵

Tesauro's emphasis is more on the actual *difficulty of linking* unlike things in distant categories of being. This linking necessarily involves an element of logical fallacy: witticisms cannot be logical in the same sense as scholastic syllogisms are. In fact, the more distant the

¹⁷¹ Valeriano: Hieroglyphica, Basle, 1556, p. 94, Trans. A.J. Smith, Metaphysical Wit, p. 38

¹⁷² Smith, 47

¹⁷³ Tesauro, p. 97. Cf. Praz, M.: "Crashaw and the Baroque." The Flaming Heart: Essays on Crashaw, Machiavelli, and Other Studies in the Relations between Italian and English literature from Chaucer to T.S. Eliot, Peter Smith: Gloucester, 1966, pp. 204-263

¹⁷⁴ Mazzeo, p. 32

¹⁷⁵ Smith's trans., Metaphysical Wit, p. 53

image is, the better. His discussion of *argutezza* turns to the problem of *impressa*¹⁷⁶. Louis XII's emblem of porcupine, with the motto *Cominus et eminus*, becomes an embodiment of this tension between logic and wit. The heraldic conceit links the quality of the animal and the king: proposition "The porcupine hurts enemies near and far off" can be linked with the knightly valour of king Louis XII, and thus, indeed, the two propositions get linked together in the final *impressa* which establishes the identity between the king and the animal. The logical fallacy of such reasoning, however, creates a pleasing effect for those, who are able to understand it. Wit is this quality of linking the unlike. Tesauro praises the emblem, however, he also shows its weaknesses: the problem is that the motto could be used for a different emblem as well:

...the property of wounding near and afar is not a quality proper to the porcupine, since the same motto may be written about the javelin, the arquebes, and above all Archimedes' engine, which (as we said) wounded near and afar.¹⁷⁷

This point emphasises the uniqueness of a proper *impressa*: its wit is based on a unique correspondence, on a firm identity, that cannot be substituted with anything else. It is the sign of a true and dignified nobleman to aspire to this degree of clarity and refinement: the unique unity of an emblem embodies the capacity for insight, for the occult, the hidden and the marvellous.

Seventeenth century theorists of wit discussed even the degree of freedom in using witty metaphors. Tesauro objected to filling sermons with *argutezze* as one thinks; Pellegrini expressed a similar concern. The question arose if the use wit could actually be overdone in a prose discourse.¹⁷⁸ In that sense, the discussion of wit in the work of these theorists still returns to rhetorical issues – wit is a function of a proper and successful discourse. Because of

¹⁷⁶ An emblem is a picture, which is accompanied by *impressa*. The *impressa* or device should summarise the image and give it a sharp resonance, a unique meaning. Because of that, the two things cannot be separated: it is both the image and the inscription that form the identity of the metaphor.

¹⁷⁷ Praz's translation, *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery*, p. 65

¹⁷⁸ Smith, A.J.: *Metaphysical Wit*, p. 62.

that, it should be used accordingly, i.e. sparingly. Too extensive use of wit would spoil the text by drawing far too much attention to its witticisms.

Joseph Mazzeo bases its discussion of metaphysical wit on the larger problem of conceit and metaphor. As he says, these two terms were synonymous.¹⁷⁹ The classical theory of the *cinquecento* and Humanism, with their emphasis on "content", was slowly being replaced by an emphasis on the form of a work of art:

While art for *cinquecento* criticism consisted in a representation of nature which would possess "verisimilitude" or capture the idea or essence of the subject, for the *seicento* the essence of poetry lay in a formal relationship of words and statements together.¹⁸⁰

Ontological aspiration of poetry in capturing the essence of things was shifting more towards the understanding of their correspondences in the universe. Wit became the tool of attaining them: in other words, the way in which the universe of mere representations was to be transformed into a universe of conceits. The world was already created with these correspondences; it is only necessary to find them. The process of finding those always provides a sense of surprise, or what Tesauro calls *mirabile*. In this sense, wit becomes an important element in our de-coding of the universe: it brings clarity and order into situations, in which there have so far been only mystery and darkness. Wit imitates the creative act of God by pointing out the hidden, strange harmonies of things.

For Mazzeo, the Metaphysicals still pursue a world of correspondences, however distant they might seem. The understanding of metaphor as "insight", as discussed by seventeenth century theorists, indeed, points out one way or another towards meta-physical conceits, and thus towards "the act of wit", on which they based their bold claims. In many metaphysical poems - as we shall see later on - this tension of wit is thematized: metaphors as understood by the Metaphysicals are still units in this original metaphorical sense,

¹⁷⁹ Mazzeo, J.: "A Seventeenth Century Theory of Metaphysical Poetry", Renaissance and Seventeenth Century Studies, 1964, p. 30

nevertheless, in the process of dissolution. Modern logic understands metaphors as something, which hinders communication, because it presents things in a way that is confusing and vague for the perception of the identity of things.¹⁸¹ For the Metaphysicals - as I will attempt to show - metaphors are still unified images, not mere attributes. However, as the belief in cosmic correspondences slowly deteriorates with the coming of the New Science, the correspondences tend to more extreme and radical metaphors, "yoked together by violence." It is therefore no wonder that metaphysical wit degenerated into elaborate, but shallow conceits of Cleveland and later on into the ridiculousness of the mock-heroic.

Arguably, most seventeenth century theorists in fact expand upon the foundations given already in the 16th century. The passion for the hermetic and the occult had been an indispensable part of the Renaissance, just as the emphasis on rhetoric and wit. The seventeenth century theorists, however, often preferred modern authors to the ancients. The moderns, indeed, used more ingenious conceits and in their creations displayed a more elaborate wit.¹⁸² The rise of the *conceitismo* in Europe obviously stressed not just the importance of (anonymous) "wit", but created a cult of individuals who possessed *furor poeticus* and thus were able to produce such ingenious works of art. The shift in the understanding of wit is thus accordingly reflected in the "uniqueness" of the individual poetic achievements. As has been said before, the capacity to see metaphors in the seventeenth century was associated with the unique, refined and extravagant sense of where analogies and metaphors were to be sought. This uniqueness was the mark of a truly *individual* style - the insight corresponding to Gracián's concept of *ingenio*. The genius sees and in front of him the world is created again. He re-creates the mysterious, occult design of God's universe. In that sense, his metaphors are not mere representations but aspire to the vision of the ineffable. The

¹⁸⁰ Mazzeo, p. 32

¹⁸¹ Cohen, M. R.: *A Preface to Logic*. Meridian Books New York: 1944, p. 83

¹⁸² Hellegers, D.: *Handmaid to Divinity: Natural Philosophy, Poetry, and Gender in Seventeenth-Century England*, p. 121

old maxim of Aeropagite's theology of God's names: the more extravagant names God gets, the closer to the paradox of the unspeakable, and thus closer to the truth.

In this respect, the wit of the Metaphysicals reinstates this forgotten tradition of European thinking: the negative path of mysticism, indeed, plays an indispensable role in their writings. The uniqueness, however, makes them truly "modern": their taste was an individual one.

It is interesting to see how the critique of his contemporaries as well as the later Restoration and Augustan generation (notably Butler and Dryden, later Pope and Johnson) accused the Metaphysicals - and Donne especially-, of impropriety. In the end, decorum is always somehow in conflict with wit. The discussed classical Italian seventeenth century theorists show this dilemma more than abundantly.

IV. Breaking the Circle of Perfection

The old Renaissance poetics of correspondence was primarily a universe of metaphors: as we have seen, the insistence on the power of metaphor and conceit made it a very effective means of communication. The world of metaphors was comprehensible, because its being incorporated into a world, which was believed to be based on the system of mysterious conceits of God the Almighty. In that sense, it was obviously still an *organic* universe; and the idea of the microcosmic resonance of the macrocosmic design – just as human body was still “a little world made cunningly” (to use a famous phrase from Donne’s Holy Sonnets) – was more than just a rhetorical embellishment of a learned discourse. This basic macro-metaphor of the universe as a body necessarily invited other metaphors, since the very idea of analogical representation was carried out with a sense of animation or re-creation of the animate design of the whole.

One of the most interesting documents of this reading of the universe is Sir Thomas Browne’s Religio Medici (first published 1642). Browne shows the versatility of the old system of correspondences, although by his time it had already been powerfully attacked in Bacon’s Advancement of Learning (published more than 35 years ago). Browne was an educated medical doctor who spent two formative years in the best medical schools of the day in Montpellier and Padua between 1631 and 1633. At that point he obviously must have encountered the free spirit of enquiry, particularly in Padua, with its specific emphasis on anatomy. The study of anatomy was still opposed to by traditionalists who were stubbornly refusing any notion of dismembering the microcosm of the human body. Browne was at odds with these developments; and his prose retains the spirit of old Scholastic disputations about the miraculous nature of the universe of correspondences. In that sense, a closer analysis

would help us understand the traditional Renaissance lore as it faced the challenge of the early modern science.

Bacon's basic assumption about the nature of modern science is the *association of knowledge and power*. To know is to master and dominate the Creation – the New Learning was, indeed, designed to help people acquire a sense of knowledge that could finally aspire to change the face of the earth. Browne's basic approach on the other hand is that of *awe* before the inscrutable and ultimately incomprehensible mystery of human existence. His questioning thus looks much more as reading the signs and omens of nature, than pursuing to solve them. The fundamental aim of human existence for him is, after all, the contemplation of enigmatic, but ultimately static universe. It is still a universe, in the original sense of the word – *unus* (one), *vertere* (turn about). Therefore, there can be no identity between knowledge and power – "knowledge" is to know the essences of things, which always point out to God.

In Part I, Section 9, Browne states quite resolutely:

As for those wingy mysteries in divinity and airy subtleties of religion, which have unhinged the brains of better heads, they never stretch the pia mater of mine. Methinks there be not impossibilities enough in religion for an active faith. The deepest mysteries ours contains have not only been illustrated but maintained by syllogism and the rule of reason. I love to lose myself in a mystery, to pursue my reason to an *O altitudo* ! 'Tis my solitary recreation to pose my apprehension with those involved enigmas and riddles of the Trinity, with Incarnation and Resurrection.¹⁸³

It is, indeed, St Paul's sense of the depth of creation¹⁸⁴ that drives the intellectual appetite of Sir Thomas Browne. Any scepticism about the nature of signs cannot be allowed as faith and the invisible world absolutely surpass the visible proofs for the truths of faith. In that sense, it is not surprising that in the same section Browne alludes to the famous statement of Tertullian "*Certum est, quia impossibile est.*" It is, moreover, not primarily an issue of doubt that cannot solve certain mysteries – Browne, interestingly, suggests that one should

¹⁸³ Browne, T.: *Religio Medici*. Ed. J. Winny. CUP: Cambridge, 1963, p. 11

dispute about the matters of faith only with the less learned.¹⁸⁵ It is this drive towards the incomprehensible and the ultimate infinity that makes such a world still more appealing than the disenchanted world of scientific evidence. This merely repeats old Thomistic maxim:

The activity happiness [*beatitudo magis*] is in the theoretical rather than the practical intelligence. This is evident for three reasons.

First, given that happiness is an activity, then it ought to be man's best activity, that is to say when his highest power is engaged with its highest object. Man's mind is his highest power, and its highest object is divine good, an object for its seeing, not for its doing in practice. Hence the activity of contemplating the things of God is principal in happiness.¹⁸⁶

Everything is to be reduced to a system of correspondences; it is utterly impossible to study the effects of nature without an effort to make it a sign of God's mysterious omnipotence. If we studied nature – as Bacon obviously suggests – only in itself, we would lose the vital glue of harmonious universe:

And thus 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 honour of the principle agent upon the instrument: which if by reason we may do, then let our hammers rise up and boast they have built our houses, and our pens receive the honour of our writings.¹⁸⁷

Macro-microcosm analogy¹⁸⁸ in Browne acquires a sense of a pleasant surprise: this classical Renaissance commonplace was "discovered" by Browne. Although he expresses his initial scepticism about the nature of this metaphor, this scepticism is just to underline the truth of the final "discovery":

¹⁸⁴ Romans, 11, 33: O altitudo divitiarum et sapientiae et scientiae Dei! Quam incomprehensibilia sunt iudicia eius, et investigabiles viae eius!

¹⁸⁵ "... to confirm and establish our opinions 'tis best to argue with judgements below our own, that the frequent spoils and victories over their reasons may settle in ourselves an esteem and confirmed opinion of our own." p. 12

¹⁸⁶ Aquinas, Thomas St. *Summa Theologiae*. Bilingual edition. Engl. transl. T. Gilby O.P. Blackfriars: Cambridge, p. 75

¹⁸⁷ *Religio Medici*, p. 19

¹⁸⁸ Cf. In *The Advancement of Learning* (II, X, 2), Bacon dismisses the idea of man as microcosm and the whole concept on which the poetic of correspondence was based: "The ancient opinion that man was microcosmos, an abstract model of the world, hath been fantastically strained by Paracelsus and the alchemists, as if there were to be found in man's body certain correspondences and paralleled, which should have respect to all varieties of things, as stars, plants, minerals, which are extant in the great world."

That we are the breath and similitude of God, it is indisputable and upon record of holy Scripture; but to call ourselves a microcosm or little world, I thought it only a pleasant trope of rhetoric till my nearer judgment and second thoughts told me there was a real truth therein.¹⁸⁹

The "individuality" of Browne is to be seen more in relation to these commonplace assumptions about the nature of things: although he attributes these "discoveries" to himself, his "self" is still more or less a type of a "confused and vague" metaphor for an ideal gentleman. James Winny compares the approaches of Browne and Montaigne as follows:

...Browne was not attempting to examine himself with the critical discernment which Montaigne had brought to the task. He sees himself as a uniquely individual being, but also as a representative man in whom the attributes and characteristic experiences of a species are stored. Browne cannot overlook the formal dignity of his position at the centre of the universal stage, or the moral drama of man's divided nature in which he finds himself involved.

... Browne places himself at the centre of this universal concept: a private individuality bearing a cosmic significance and illustrating the moral tradition which saw in man the most splendid and the most tragic of God's creatures.¹⁹⁰

An important image in Browne's Religio Medici is the image of a *circle*. Everything is subjected to a universal circular motion of the wheel of fortune:

For the lives not only of men, but of commonweals and the whole world, run not upon an helix that still enlargeth but on a circle, where, arriving to their meridian, they decline in obscurity and fall under the horizon again.¹⁹¹

It is only God, that encompasses the circle in himself; and his kindness upholds the unity of multitudinous creation:

And to speak more narrowly, there is no such thing as solitude, nor anything that can be said to be alone and by itself but God, who is his own circle, and can subsist by himself. All others – besides their dissimilarity and heterogeneous parts, which in a manner multiply their natures – cannot subsist without the concurrence of God and the society of that hand which uphold their natures.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Religio Medici, p. 42

¹⁹⁰ Introduction to Religio Medici, p. vi

¹⁹¹ Religio Medici, pp. 21-22

¹⁹² Religio Medici p. 89

When talking about art, Browne sees it as a circular process of regeneration – in a Neoplatonic sense art keeps the images alive beyond the “devouring element” of time:

A plant or vegetable consumed to ashes, to a contemplative and School philosopher seems utterly destroyed, and the form to have taken his leave for ever: but to a sensible artist the forms are not perished but withdrawn into their incombustible part, where they lie secure from the action of that devouring element. This is made good by experience, which can from the ashes of a plant revivify the plant, and from its cinders recall it into its stalk and leaves again. What the art of man can do in these inferior pieces, what blasphemy is it to affirm the finger of God cannot do in these more perfect and sensible structures!¹⁹³

The image of a circle serves as a metaphor for a universal sympathy of things, which penetrates the philosophy of Browne’s *Religio*, although Browne himself was not a Hermetical philosopher. It is exactly this “naive” belief in the chain of correspondences that understandably becomes a target for Francis Bacon in *Novum Organum*. Indeed, the old Pythagorean cosmology becomes a hindrance for a thorough scientific inquiry, which cannot accept any *a priori* philosophical statement.

The human understanding is of its own nature prone to suppose the existence of more order and regularity in the world than it finds. And though there be many things in nature which are singular and unmatched, yet it devises for them parallels and conjugates and relatives which do not exist.¹⁹⁴

For Browne, there is still one world, which can be reduced to the singular Oneness of God. This basic pattern – as is the case of Pythagorean cosmology in general – is to project this singular oneness into the multitudinous items of phenomenal world. Religion is the ultimate guarantee of this unity.

Browne admits difficulties with the statements of faith and stories of the Scripture. He is, nevertheless, certain in giving absolute preference to the case of divinity:

I confess there are in Scripture stories that do exceed the fables of poets, and to a captious reader sound like Gargantua or Bevis. Search all the legends of times past and the fabulous conceits of these present, and ‘twill be hard to find one that deserves to

¹⁹³ *Religio Medici*, p. 59

¹⁹⁴ *Novum Organum*, XLV. Quoted from Bacon, F. *The New Organon and Related Writings*. Ed. F. H. Anderson. The Liberal Art Press: New York, 1960, p. 50

carry the buckler unto Samson; yet is all this of an easy possibility if we conceive a divine concurrence or an influence but from the little finger of the Almighty.

...Myself could show a catalogue of doubts never yet imagined nor questioned by any, as I know, which are not resolved at the first hearing; not queries fantastic or objections of air: for I cannot hear of atoms in divinity.[...] There are a bundle of curiosities, not only in philosophy but in divinity, proposed and discussed by men of the most supposed abilities, which indeed are not worthy our vacant hours, much less out more serious studies: pieces only fit to be placed in Pantagruel's library, or bound up with Tartaretus' *De modo cacandi*.¹⁹⁵

It is this basic misunderstanding and confusion of discourses from the post-modern point of view that makes the whole issue so interesting. For Browne there is still one ultimate discourse – divinity – which legitimizes all others, and invites them to harmonize with it. For Bacon, there is already a clear sense of distinction between the world of science and the world of “confused and vague” metaphors, or idols, that stand in the way of a proper scientific inquiry. The division of the two discourses in the writings of the Royal Society in early Restoration years, which urged their members “to put aside ‘the language of Wits and scholars’ and adopt a clearer, simpler style modelled upon that of ‘Mechanicks and Artisans’”¹⁹⁶ sealed the fate of metaphor as a means of direct communication with the living soul of a living world. Marjorie Hope Nicolson summarizes the outcome of the influence of New Science on literary discourse:

A more profound change has come about in attitudes toward Nature. The earlier poets did not need to develop a self-conscious “philosophy of Nature,” as did Wordsworth and Tennyson. They were inextricably involved in a world and a universe that lived as they lived, in which they found exact analogies for their organic and bodily functions and for the power of their souls. Man was in little all the sphere. As he grew and flourished, so did his world; as he decayed and died, so too his world. God's pattern was eternally repeated in macrocosm, geocosm, microcosm. Man's head was a copy of God and the universe, not only in its shape, but in its being the seat of Reason. Man the epitome of God and the world, was rational; so were the world and the universe, into which God had imparted some of His own rationality. Each of the three worlds had its individuality, yet each was involved with the others, and all partook of God.

¹⁹⁵ *Religio Medici*, pp. 26-7

¹⁹⁶ Nicolson, M. H.: *The Breaking of the Circle: Studies in the Effect of the New Science on Seventeenth-Century Poetry*, p. 124

Only since the seventeenth century has the poet felt the necessity of bringing together what the shears of a scientific philosophy cut apart.¹⁹⁷

The world of the Metaphysicals in many respects tries to recover and restore the authority of metaphor in the grand scheme of universe. However violent their metaphors may be, they are still nurtured by a belief in the power of language, that can overcome the necessities of political expediency present in the dis-enchanting world of Francis Bacon. Knowledge for the Metaphysicals – as I will attempt to show – is subsumed by meditation: it is the participation in the enigma of God’s creation.

The ability of metaphor to transcend the limits of discourse is only possible in a world that at least intuitively believes in the sympathy or ultimate circle of things. The problem of this circular chaining in the late Renaissance was, however, also challenged by infinistic cosmology: if the world is not in the centre of the universe, there can be many worlds. If this premise is true, how do these worlds relate?

Although the theory of the plurality of worlds was not a novelty in the beginning of the 17th century: it was theoretically explored both by Cusanus and Giordano Bruno in the preceding century; moreover, in 1620 Ben Jonson presented a mask “News from the New World discovered in the Moon”. However, the old Pythagorean/Ptolemaic universe was still very much part of the popular notion of cosmos even in the second half of the century. It is therefore no wonder that it caused intellectual contention. The vice-president of the Royal Society, John Wilkins, published a book called The Discovery of a World in the Moone, or A Discourse Tending to Prove That ‘Tis Probable There May Be Another Habitable World in That Planet in 1638, followed by a similar treatise A Discourse Concerning a New Planet in 1640. His work was challenged by a conservative clergyman Alexander Ross who published a fierce anti-Copernican pamphlet: New Planet, No Planet in 1646. Ross’s critique was primarily aimed at the dubious double perspective of the theory: the truth of the Scripture

¹⁹⁷ Nicolson, p. 124

should not be challenged even as regards the natural world since the fundamental nature of truth is its unity. Wilkins maintained a middle position between the fideist stand of the Baconian party (characterized by a division between the language of faith and the language of philosophy) and the scriptural fundamentalists. He argued that truths of philosophy and truths of faith were discoverable by different means.¹⁹⁸ The contention itself, however, shows the sharpness of the issue. Pythagorean cosmology was deeply embroidered into the biblical framework of Creation: in fact, it confirmed the truth of Creation in making the world a metaphor of God. The double-sidedness of the new theory significantly disturbed the main tenants of the pre-scientific world and its Pythagorean cosmology: unity and finality. The infiniteness threatened with the problem of eternal regress: Pascalian double infinity of the world and of the self. This double-worldness marks the specific nature of metaphysical poetry.

¹⁹⁸ Shapiro, B. John Wilkins 1614-1672: An Intellectual Biography. U of California P: Berkeley, 1969, p. 53

PART TWO

I. John Donne – provocation of the metaphysical style

I.1. Introduction

John Donne (1572-1631) is unanimously regarded as the father of the metaphysical method in English poetry, although distinctive marks of this method can be identified earlier. In the work of Robert Southwell, a Jesuit beheaded during one of the numerous Elizabethan crusades against Catholics in 1595, one can find traces of what later came to be called “metaphysical conceit.” Nevertheless, his poetry is still very tentative, and despite significant achievements (e.g. his poem *The Burning Babe*) it did not have the power to found a new school. It is John Donne who manages to synthesize earlier impulses and thus create a brand new „code“ of English poetry: this concerns his new understanding of metaphor, but also his new poetic consciousness. These achievements, however, are eminently bound with his harmonic thought.

I.2. The problem of unity

As has already been shown, the key idea of Pythagorean harmonic metaphysics is its overwhelming unity. Both the progression and the regression of the monad is grounded on the basis of a *qualitative* unity. John Donne’s work presents a powerful challenge to this concept: using the language of Aquinas’ metaphysics, he aims to deconstruct its basic tenets. The first instance of this is his metaphysics of sexual love.

In *Break of Day* the unity of rhythm granted by regular alternating of day and night, private and public sphere is turned upside down:

‘Tis true, ‘tis day, what though it be?
O wilt thou therefore rise from me?
Why should we rise, because ‘tis light?
Did we lie down, because ‘twas night?
Love which in spite of darkness brought us hither,
Should in despite of light keep us together.

Light hath no tongue, but is all eye;
If it could speak as well as spy,
This were the worst, that it could say,
That being well, I fain would stay,
And that I loved my heart and honour so,
That I would not from him, that had them, go.

Must business thee from hence remove?
Oh, that's the worst disease of love,
The poor, the foul, the false, love can
Admit but not the busied man.
He which hath business, and makes love, doth do
Such wrong, as when a married man doth woo.¹⁹⁹

The subject of love becomes the centre, the monad, unmoved by any external matters. The connection between this subject and the world is no longer granted, it is yet to be established. The following poem from Songs and Sonnets *The Broken Heart* exploits one of the most worn-out clichés of courting. Indeed, this metaphor is also based on the idea of unity: the pain of the break is caused by the apparent necessity of unity. In other words, the “break” is to stress and underline the essential unity of love. Donne’s exposition of the theme, however, shows a different picture: Love causes a rupture which can hardly be recovered and re-united:

Yet nothing can to nothing fall,
Nor any place be empty quite,
Therefore I think my breast hath all
Those pieces still, though they be not unite;
And now as broken glasses show
A hundred lesser faces, so
My rags of heart can like, wish, and adore,
But after one such love, can love no more.²⁰⁰

Love is no longer the force of unity, the power of the universe,²⁰¹ but much rather a force mysteriously joining dissimilar elements. *The Broken Heart* shows “hundred lesser

¹⁹⁹ Donne, CEP, pp. 45-6

²⁰⁰ Donne, CEP, pp. 46-7

faces” of love, however, the ideality of the ideal vanishes. Obviously, the power of the original metaphor was to stress the ideal nature of love never to be completely achieved. Donne programmatically destroys this ideality right from the beginning. The ideal nature of “spiritual unity of love” is radically overtaken by the cynical details of sexual love.

In *Confined Love* Donne attacks the concept of the basic unity of man and woman - known from several mythological traditions and, indeed, from the Genesis’ report on the creation of humankind:

Some man unworthy to be possessor
Of old or new love, himself being false or weak,
Thought his pain and shame would be lesser,
If on womankind he might his anger wreak,
And thence a law did grow,
One should but one man know;
But are other creatures so?²⁰²

Donne does not induce his conclusion from the eternal, given law of God. In his conceit he follows the deductive method, which – as we have seen – entailed a breach with the ancient and medieval concept of the universe. The law of the “unity of man and woman” is questioned by the very nature of natural world: “beasts do no jointures lose.” The process of joining (the old basis of *αρμοζειν*) does not re-affirm the building of the unity, but freely develops further. It transforms the concept – the jointures are accompanied by loose relations outside -; and the unity is granted by PARADOX:

Good is not good, unless
A thousand it possess,
But doth waste with greediness.²⁰³

²⁰¹ as it is the case in perhaps the most classical of all English Renaissance harmonious poems J. Davies’s *The Orchestra or a Poem of Dancing* (1596)

²⁰² Donne, CEP, p. 49

²⁰³ Donne, CEP, p. 50

The cynical reality of this „natural law“ becomes the conceit of *The Indifferent*: loving faithfully is nonsense, and all women are loveable on the basis of their sex. In the end, things will turn out to be as follows:

'Alas, some two or three
Poor heretics in love there be,
Which think to establish dangerous constancy.
But I have told them, "Since you will be true,
You shall be true to them, who are false to you."²⁰⁴

In *The Undertaking* Donne disputes even the idea of a specific "inherent" quality of the feminine and the masculine. In fact, the "hidden", obscure reality of the poet's love makes the nature of sexual difference irrelevant:

If, as I have, you also do
Virtue attired in woman see,
And dare love that, and say so too,
And forget the He and She (...)²⁰⁵

The idea of unity distorts also the idea of coherence and order. Donne re-establishes the traditional opposition *centre/periphery*. In *The Good Morrow* love making in a little room transforms the whole perception of space: "For love, all love of other sights controls,/ And makes one little room, an every where." Yet things are even more complicated: this one-world's unity in love is defined by *two* centres: "Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one." The basic tenant of Pythagorean cosmology - the belief that a dyad is weaker than a stable monad - is thus questioned, because it is in fact the double-sidedness of love, which creates its unity. Things cannot be totally related back to the monad:

If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Donne, CEP, p. 61

²⁰⁵ Donne, CEP, p. 83

²⁰⁶ Donne, CEP, p. 60

The cosmology of love in Songs and Sonnets is turned upside down: in fact neither the earth nor the sun becomes the centre: it is the love itself; or, rather more cynically as in *The Sun-Rising*, the lover's bed:

(...) Thy beams, so reverend, and strong
Why shouldst thou think?
I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink (...)
(stanza 2)

(...) In that the world's contracted thus;
Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be
To warm the world, that's done in warming us.
Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;
This bed thy centre is, these walls, thy sphere.
(stanza 3)²⁰⁷

The universe is *contracted*; it exists as a projection of the ancient concepts of harmony. Macro-microcosm analogy – the very basis of Pythagorean lore – switches its centre. A tear can become a spot to view the whole of the universe:

On a round ball
A workman that hath copies by, can lay
An Europe, Afric, and an Asia,
And quickly make that, which was nothing all.
So doth each tear,
Which thee doth wear,
A globe, yea world by that impression grow,
Till thy tears mixed with mine do overflow
This world, by waters sent from thee, my heaven dissolved so.
(*A Valediction: of Weeping*)²⁰⁸

There are, indeed, numerous other instances of such contractions in Donne's work. In *The Flea*, the little insect becomes a contracted epitome of the lover's love: in an ingenious metaphor it is a symbol of sexual union of the restricted couple. Similarly in *Elegy 19*, entitled *To his Mistress Going to Bed*, the naked body of the woman re-discovers all the treasures of the world: again, it is a *contracted* universe *sui generis*:

²⁰⁷ Donne, CEP, p. 80

²⁰⁸ Donne, CEP, p. 89

O my America, my new found land,
My kingdom, safeliest when with one man manned,
My mine of precious stones, my empery,
How blessed am I in this discovering thee!²⁰⁹

The contraction is an act of per-verting the traditional poetics of correspondence: obviously, this poetics is thinkable only as long as a fundamental unity of the matter is presupposed. In fact, Pythagorean harmonic cosmology is a kind of hermeneutic cycle: the fundamental, prime substance of matter is number, since its relation to the world of material phenomena is an independent one. In other words, number grants unity. This concept, however, is attacked and ridiculed in Donne's poems: *its power to convey a message is tantamount to its power to become a metaphor*. In the end, the only unity of a poem is a unity of language and its power.

In *Siphon to Philaenis* this metaphor of correspondence cannot be easily applied on the poet's lover: it is to be *thought*. In the first part of the poem, it is clear that the authority of the poet is established:

Thoughts, my mind's creatures, often are with thee,
But I, their maker, want their liberty.
Only thine image, in my heart, doth sit,
But that is wax, and fires environ it.²¹⁰

Donne creates a microcosm defined by the author as the centre and the images freely flowing around him. A sense of a fundamental expectation is aroused: these images are yet to be joined, harmonized into a meaningful whole:

For, if we justly call each silly man
A little world, what shall we call thee then?²¹¹

There is an ultimate shortage of metaphors to describe the "specific", "individual" beauty of his lover. She repels all metaphors, nevertheless, *she does so by attracting them*:

²⁰⁹ Donne, CEP, p. 125

²¹⁰ Donne, CEP, p. 127

²¹¹ Donne, CEP, p. 128

many are examined, yet they all fall. The final failure of all these attempts can be summarised in a paradoxically sterile statement: *she is... she*. To strengthen this supposed poetic impotence, the argument develops as follows:

... thy right hand, and cheek, and eye, only
Are like thy other hand, and cheek, and eye.²¹²

The poet's love is his capacity to create metaphors, this "loving madness", however, alienates him from his own creative self. Thus the final paradox of the poem "unites" both the "distance" and the "closeness" in a creative tension:

And so be change, and sickness, far from thee,
As thou by coming near, keep'st them from me.²¹³

I.3. Dynamism of love as the dynamism of language

In this contracted world of Donne, the universe is to be tuned to the only harmonious reality – poet's love. The old metaphors emptied themselves by being over-worn. In *A Valediction: of the Book* it is the outside world which is to gather knowledge from the *abundant* capacity of love present in the given love relationship: "... in this universe/ Schools might learn sciences, spheres music, angels verse."²¹⁴

The abundance of love is also its capacity for change: in the old cosmology of Pythagoras, it was eternal stability that produced musical concord. Donne's poems show a different concept. Love is naturally dynamic and in this dynamism everything is subject to change, as it is aptly expressed in *Elegy 3 Change*:

...change is the nursery
Of music, joy, life and eternity.²¹⁵

²¹² ibid

²¹³ Donne, CEP, p. 129

²¹⁴ Donne, CEP, p. 86

²¹⁵ Donne, CEP, p. 98

This attitude is typical of many other poems: in fact, the “grand” Pythagorean universe of the ancients becomes no more than a background of a dynamic metaphor-making process. Whatever may have been Donne’s attitude towards the old cosmological system, what remains, is an ingenious game of arguments. In *Elegy 12 His Parting from Her* Donne wittily exploits the one of the contemporary meanings of the word *pole*. Oxford English Dictionary gives the following explanation:

The poles „are each of the two points in the celestial sphere ... about which as fixed points the stars seem to revolve; being the points at which the earth’s axis produced meets the celestial sphere.”²¹⁶

These poles in Donne’s poem, however, serve as no more than a witty metaphor to explain the fluid nature of love: “The poles shall move to teach me ere I start;/ And when I change my love, I’ll change my heart.” Similarly so in *Elegy 18 Love’s Progress*, the cosmological terms are primarily matter for creation – no fixed phenomena which are to be meditated:

Search every sphere
And firmament, our Cupid is not there.²¹⁷

The contracted world is just enough to be meditated upon, it is the *hic et nunc* of our being. Regardless of what may happen in the celestial world, this world of ours is what we are to contemplate:

Although we see celestial bodies move
Above the earth, the earth we till and love:
So we her airs contemplate, words and heart,
And virtues; but we love the centric part.²¹⁸

The contraction is an act of making the physical world and the details of love in themselves a universe with a specific infinity. Macro-microcosm analogy is thus re-interpreted in a radically new way. In *Ecstasy* the microcosm of the body assumes the main qualities of the celestial universe:

²¹⁶ Cf. A.J. Smith’s notes to his edition of Donne’s *Complete English Poems*, p. 433

²¹⁷ Donne, CEP, p. 122

But O alas, so long, so far
Our bodies why do we forbear?
They are ours, though they are not we, we are
The intelligences, they the sphere.²¹⁹

Indeed, the correspondence is still present. What is missing, however, is the *response*: Donne disputes the necessity of the body to *cor-respond* to the outside world; to re-create the eternal truth embodied in the structuring of the universe. The contraction thus necessarily becomes an act of *separation*: the little world of change can be *harmonized*, however, can hardly be made *con-sonant* with the metaphysical “reality”. It is harmonized in the original sense of the word: it is just “joined together” and so *tested*. Language dynamics is to either re-affirm or refute the metaphors it produces. And so the microcosm of the body tests also the old *cor-respondent* metaphors. In *A Fever* the beauty of the lover “and all the parts, which are thee/Are unchangeable firmament.”²²⁰ The infiniteness of love, in fact, becomes a major theme for Donne’s early poetry. In a poem with a similar title, *Lovers’ Infiniteness*, the poet exploits the potency of the metaphor of infinity in relation to sexual love. The “all” of love is paradoxical, since “all” is the epitome of “no more”: there can be no “all”, if there is a *definite* aim of love. The only solution of the problem is the paradoxical nature of love: to be “one in love” is to be “one another’s all.”²²¹ In *Love’s Growth* the cosmological argument is used to widen the scope of the microscopic nature of Donne’s love:

Love by the spring is grown;
As, in the firmament,
Stars by the sun are not enlarged, but shown,
Gentle love deeds, as blossoms on a bough,
From love’s awakened root do bud out now.
If, as in water stirred more circles be
Produced by one, love such additions take,
Those like so many spheres, but one heaven make,
For, they are all concentric unto thee,
And though each spring do add to love new heat,

²¹⁸ Donne, CEP, p. 123

²¹⁹ Donne, CEP, p. 55

²²⁰ Donne, CEP, p. 58

²²¹ Donne, CEP, p. 64

As princes do in times of action get
New taxes, and remit them not in peace,
No winter shall abate the spring's increase.²²²

To put it simply: all these learned arguments are "true", according to the dominant cosmology of the day. But in poetry their usage becomes an act of metaphor: the very fact that they can be used in poetry at all, makes them an event in the history of poetic art. Signor Mario Praz in one of his illuminating essays on Donne's position within the context of the poetry of his time²²³ puts forward a remarkable idea that Donne's technique resembles that of a "lawyer choosing the fittest arguments for a case in hand; not like a searcher after a universally valid truth."²²⁴ This brings him to a following conclusion:

The scientific theories having only a value of conjectures or plausible speculations in his curious mind do not belong to a world entirely distinct from the world of fancy, as they would in an era of settled convictions. Rather there is a continuous interchange of suggestions from fancy to scientific thought and vice versa; and Donne is enabled to mix, in the same kaleidoscope, broken pieces of lore either old or new, and images properly belonging to the world of poetry.²²⁵

In fact even the top Restoration poet John Dryden 60 years after the first publication of Donne's poems doubted the appropriateness of the usage of certain arguments in poetry. It was, indeed, a critique based on later Classicist Restoration poetics, however, the main stream of the critique points out the main reservations against metaphysical poetry in general:

He [Donne] affects the metaphysics, not only in satires, but in his amorous verses, where nature only should reign; and perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their hearts, and entertain them with the softnesses of love.²²⁶

²²² Donne, CEP, p. 69

²²³ Donne's relation to the Poetry of His Time, originally published in *A Garland for John Donne*, ed. T. Spencer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1931); revised and enlarged for inclusion in *The Flaming Heart* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958). Here I quote from *John Donne: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. H. Gardner, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, p. 61-76

²²⁴ *ibid*, p. 68

²²⁵ *ibid*

²²⁶ *Discourse of Satire* (1693), in *Critical Opinions of John Dryden*. Comp. J. M. Aden. Vanderbilt U P: Nashville, 1963, p. 54

As I have shown elsewhere, the critique of Samuel Jonson, followed a similar path. This inordinate excess is, indeed, one of the distinctive characteristics of metaphysical poetry as such. The cosmological arguments, which can be found scattered in many of Donne's poems, aim at making the experience of sexual love an act touching the infinity. *An Epithalamion, or Marriage Song of the Lady Elizabeth and Count Palatine being married on St Valentine's Day* envisages the coming love-making of the newly-wed as a major cosmic event. The beautifully adorned Lady Elizabeth becomes "a constellation" of stars, and as such she is to meet Frederick, as both will "to an inseparable union grow":

Since separation
Falls not on such things as are infinite
Nor things which are but one, can disunite.²²⁷

It is in fact the idea of such infiniteness that makes the power of metaphor in Donne's poetry so strong: language of poetry is in a constant need of metaphors, since its substance is the dynamism of language itself. The reputed "far-fetched" metaphors of the Metaphysicals can thus be understood as a means of a new (re)discovery of this very power. The criticism of the metaphysical style, which has been discussed in the preceding part of this dissertation, aimed particularly at this liberating of the language power. It was the famous interviewer of Ben Jonson, William Drummond of Hawthornden, who expressed a contempt for Donne's conceited poems as the "fancie of the tyme." In an undated letter to Dr. Arthur Johnston²²⁸ he clearly attacks the language innovation, the new understanding of poetry which emerged with the dawn of the metaphysical style:

In vain have some Men of late (Transformers of every Thing) consulted upon her Reformation, and endeavoured to abstract her to *Metaphysical Ideas*, and *Scholastical Quiddities*, denuding her of her own Habits, and those Ornaments with which she hath amused the World some Thousand Years. *Poesy* is not a Thing that is yet in the finding and search, or which may otherwise found out, being already condescended

²²⁷ Donne, CEP, p. 137

²²⁸ The letter was published in the folio edition of his *Works* (publ. 1711, p. 143). For this reference I am indebted to an excellent study of J.B. Leishman: *Donne and Seventeenth Century Poetry*, publ. in *John Donne: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. H. Gardner, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, p. 112

upon by all Nations, and as it were established *jure Gentium*, amongst *Greeks, Romans, Italians, French, Spaniards*. Neither do I think that a good Piece of *Poesy*, which *Homer, Virgil, Ovid, Petrarch, Bartas, Ronsard, Boscan, Garcilasso* (if they were alive, and had that Language) could not understand, and reach the Sense of the Writer. Suppose these Men could find out some other new *Idea* like *Poesy*, it should be held as if Nature should bring forth some new *Animal*, neither Man, Horse, Lyon, Dog, but which had some Members of all, if they had been proportionably and by right Symmetry set together. What is not like the Ancients and conform to the Rules which hath been agreed unto by all Times, may (indeed) be something like unto *Poesy*, but it is no more *Poesy* than a Monster is a Man. Monsters breed Admiration at the First, but have ever some strange Loathsomeness in them at last.

The argument pursues a general line of the Elizabethan doctrine of the *decorum*. Donne's poetry for Hawthornden is *erroneous*, because it is not based on the "reality" of the world and the reality of the poet's calling. The *decorum* as such is after all a belief that poetry cannot be the aim in itself, and it should still adhere to a **definite** and thus ultimately *finite* layout of the universe. The remarkable newness, or the provocation of the metaphysical style with the emergence of Donne's poetry, re-establishes the art of poetry as the art of *making* par excellence. The consequences of this basically biblical belief in the *creatio ex nihilo* will be discussed later in the analysis of Donne's *Divine poems*. The process of metaphorising the old static cosmology, or in other words re-making it into a powerful means of understanding the human condition becomes by far the most typical of Donne's attitudes towards the traditional cosmological lore. Thus in the first of the two verse letters *To the Countess of Huntingdon* the poet polemises with the traditional theological treatment of women, which excluded them from holding an ecclesiastical office because of their innate incapacity. The argument follows the assumption that firmament, or the sphere of the fixed stars, kept all stars in a firm position. If something was to happen in this unchangeable sphere, it was possible only as a miracle. This, indeed, is the argument of the poem:

In woman so perchance mild innocence
A seldom comet is, but active good
A miracle, which reason 'scapes, and sense;
For, art and nature this in them withstood.²²⁹

The Countess is the embodiment of virtue that has fled into heaven in this last age of the world. This virtue is now “amassed, *contracted*²³⁰ in a few”. The virtue of the Countess makes her overcome the low fate of a woman: the arguments of the old philosophy are used to de-construct their reasoning, since the outcome is contradictory to the general assumption. Moreover, the last part of the poem stresses that it is not the flattery of the poet based on his wit, but the real truth of what God instilled into the Countess in His providential wisdom. The poet is a “recorder”, or a “speaker of the universe”, because it is “not I, but you and fame, that make this verse.”²³¹ What is really worthy of praise, is “God in you.” The ending is wonderfully ambiguous: is it an ironical statement or a kind of *modestia poetarum*? It is definitely true, nevertheless, the act of making is the poet's. It is him that makes the argument, and makes it into a meaningful whole. He is the “ministerial notary” of God who helps things work out. He is the SPEAKER – he makes language reach its harmony.

I.4. Harmony as an act of inscription

The poetic of correspondence based on the Pythagorean concept of number and proportion always tended to presuppose a given harmony of the universe. The story of the anvils and the discovery of musical proportion entailed a key to understand all phenomena of the world by putting forward a non-material principle which was to describe everything. It is the idea of number that was tacitly used to harmonize even problematic and disturbing things of this world. As I have shown, the study of *musica speculativa* in the medieval *quadrivium* guaranteed a sense of cor-responding *kosmos*, which can be judged from a single centre.

²²⁹ Donne, CEP, p. 236

²³⁰ Emphasis is mine.

Donne's poetry, however, is a poetic realisation of the architectural discovery of ellipsis. Indeed, ellipsis problematizes the very idea of centre and periphery, since it has 2 centres. Donne dares to open even disturbing questions of the dual nature of the world and its elliptical nature. In *Elegy upon the untimely death of the incomparable Prince Henry* the key issue is the conceit of 2 centres – faith and reason. The death of the young son of King James I was a major blow for the Protestant cause in Europe at that time. This can clearly be seen in the poem itself: "...he/Whose reputation was an ecstasy/On neighbour States (...)." In that sense – adds A.J.Smith – "Such an event as Prince Henry's death, however, disturbs both centres by its apparent unreasonableness; it shakes our faith in a reasonable universe and in a divine providence."²³² Indeed, the problem is the double sidedness and "disproportion" of things:

Quotidian things, and equidistant hence,
 Shut in, for man, in one circumference.
 But, for th' enormous greatneses, which are
 So *disproportioned*, and so angular,
 As is God's essence, place, and providence (...)²³³

The disproportion stems out of the nature of the event – the infinite ineffability of God makes the shocking event of the Prince's death a paradoxical unveiling of His power to destroy human aspirations. The great hopes of English Calvinists that Henry will "convey and tie/This soul of peace, through Christianity" have been shattered to the utmost: "now this faith is a heresy". The question of the nature of God and faith gains a new importance:

Oh, is God prodigal? hath he spent his store
 Of plagues, on us, and only now, when more
 Would ease us much, doth he grudge misery,
 And will not let us enjoy our curse, to die?²³⁴

The poem has no clear conclusion. It fails to reconcile the apparent tension between the two centres, as if God Himself was a paradoxical being leaving the enquiring mind in a

²³¹ Donne, CEP, p. 238

²³² A. J. Smith's notes to his edition of the *Complete Poems of J.D.*, p. 580

²³³ Donne, CEP, p. 253, emphasis is mine

state of insoluble mystery. The dating of the poem coincides closely with the *Anniversaries* and *Obsequies to the Lord Harrington*, which were written between 1611 and 1614 and present the very key to Donne's concept of harmony. Indeed, all of the poems deal with "untimely" deaths of their protagonists: Prince Henry was 18, Lord Harrington 22 and Elizabeth Drury only 14. The unreasonableness makes Donne re-state and re-inscribe the notions of Pythagorean harmony. I want to argue that Donne's main concept is *the act of inscribing*: once the world has ceased to be *de-scribed* as harmonious, it has to be *in-scribed* so.

The path to achieve the new "inner" harmony is marked with a number of difficulties. Firstly, the old system cannot be refuted altogether, it is still the background upon which the new system is to be understood. As I have argued before, the striking difference between the cosmological principles which can be found in e.g. Davies' *Orchestra or a Poem of Dancing* and the work of John Donne is the *shrunk perspective*. In all of the poems discussed, the ideas of harmony are tested on a small scale; they are so to speak "zoomed" on the "contracted" little world of man. Prince Henry is the starting point of a sweeping analysis of a new awareness of faith. So is it – in a slightly altered point of view – the case of Lord Harrington and the unfortunate Elizabeth. In all of the poems, what harmony is to be seen on a *human being*. It is an *incarnate* harmony, a harmony of being. *Obsequies to the Lord Harrington, brother to the Lady Lucy, Countess of Bedford* start with a theological concept of "infused" harmony of the soul given by God to every human being at birth. However, what is this "infused" harmony? The idea of harmony always implies 2 actors, which are to be in ideal proportion. The theological concept of the soul being a gift of God was, nevertheless, problematized by the concupiscence of the body since the fall. This ancient doctrine of the Church was even more emphasised by the Protestants and the Calvinists in particular (e.g. in

²³⁴ Donne, CEP, p. 254

the famous *Confessio Augustana* of 1530²³⁵). The theological problem of disharmony in human life is the problem of fatal separation of the eternal aspiration of the soul and the fallen body. This, however, is not the argument Donne puts forward. Lord Harrington is the embodiment of an invisible harmonious soul,²³⁶ whose visibility is granted by the works of flesh, by his actions:

Though God be our true glass, through which we see
All, since the being of all things is he,
Yet are the trunks which do to us derive
Things, in proportion fit, by perspective,
Deeds of good men; for by their living here,
Virtues, indeed remote, seem to be near.²³⁷

The most important idea embroidered into the argumentation framework of the poem is the fact that Harrington's life is an *inscription* of harmony within an altogether disharmonious world. The tragedy of his death is a tragedy of a forsaken world: such a one in which "tempests can no longer be becalmed"²³⁸, and where the models of virtue have gone away. *There is no proportion, because the very measure is lacking*. The world has shrunk; cities have become "anthills" and churchyards our "cities". Indeed, the poet finishes with an homage to the deceased one as deserving heavenly "triumph", however, a sense of abandonment has not been erased. Since the eternal departure of Lord Harrington it seems as if God Himself has forsaken His world:

Why shouldst thou then, whose battles were to win
Thyself, from those straits nature put thee in,
And to deliver up to God that state,
Of which he gave thee the vicariate,
(Which is thy soul and body) as entire
As he, who takes endeavours, doth require,

²³⁵ Also known as *The Augsburg Confession*. I here refer specifically to Article II: *Of Original Sin*: „Also they (i.e. Protestant Churches) that since the fall of Adam all men begotten in the natural way are born with sin, that is, without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with concupiscence; and that this disease, or vice of origin, is truly sin, even now condemning and bringing eternal death upon those not born again through Baptism and the Holy Ghost.“ Taken from a leaflet *The Lutheran Confessions* for The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Published on the internet http://lcms.org/book_of_concord/augsburgconfession.asp

²³⁶ in Aquinas' doctrine, body is the form of the soul.

²³⁷ Donne, CEP, p. 257

²³⁸ Cf. line 102

But didst not stay, to enlarge his kingdom too,
By making others, what thou didst, to do;
Why shouldst thou triumph now, when heaven no more
Hath got, by getting thee, than it had before?²³⁹

The harmony of Lord Harrington's life is God's *inscription* within a decayed world, Donne's homage being the act by which this inscription is accomplished. Harmony thus seems to be no longer perceivable and readable from the Book of Creation, as St Augustine amply describes in Book One of *De Doctrina Christiana*. The poet is thus *inscribing* the world, since the measure of description is no longer there.

This idea is, indeed, the very central theme of Donne's longest and most disturbing poems, the *Anniversaries*. These two poems, which according to initial plan were to be written every year to commemorate the unfortunate death of Donne's friends' daughter, the Drurys. The main paradox of the poem is the tension between the concrete fate of the young Elizabeth (of whom Donne knew next to nothing), and the general decay of the world. Interestingly enough, in the first of the *Anniversaries* Donne uses the form of *anatomy*; he describes the state of the world after the death of Miss Elizabeth. This sad *description* of the "carcase of the old world"²⁴⁰ becomes an *inscription* of the shocking conclusion of the two poems: Elizabeth was as if the very principle of the world:

The cement which did faithfully compact
And glue of all virtues, now resolved, and slacked
Thought it some blasphemy to say she'was dead;
Or that our weakness was discovered
In that confession; therefore spoke no more
Than tongues, the soul being gone, the loss deplore.
But though it be too late to succour thee,
Sick world, yea dead, yea putrefied, since she
Thy 'intrinsic balm, and thy preservative,
Can never be renewed, thou never live,
I (since no man can make thee live) will try,
What we may gain by thy anatomy.²⁴¹

²³⁹ Donne, CEP, p. 262

²⁴⁰ line 75

This provocative general conceit, however, is based on the old Pythagorean poetics of correspondence. Indeed, the state of the world *is* in some relation to the state of Elizabeth and vice versa. The anatomy of the world is *inscribed* with the death of the young girl: it still *reflects* in one way or another the situation of the body. Moreover, there even *seems* to be a kind of proportion between the two phenomena. Yet the correspondence – as we may also gather from the topical reaction of Ben Jonson²⁴² - works the other way round. The classical maxim stressed that the world is *to be reflected* in the layout of the body²⁴³. Is that, nevertheless, so in *The Anatomy of the World*? Clearly not. Donne puts forward a universal scansion of the various elements of the world, disharmoniously strained from one another. Indeed, anatomy is always an act of looking at a collection of basically separated elements, which have lost its “intrinsic balm.”²⁴⁴ It is a *dead* body: a body in which the interplay of the various particles can no longer be seen. All the “infirmities” of the world can be reduced to the broken monad of Elizabeth’s life. It is interesting to notice how the disturbing events of the contemporary world stem precisely from this clearly *finite* principle, from the life of a *created human being*. The general Donnean play with the cosmological arguments of the day, which I have shown in my previous analyses, acquires a so far unseen gravity:

...new philosophy calls all in doubt,
 The element of fire is quite put out;
 The sun is lost, and th’ earth, and no man’s wit
 Can well direct him where to look for it.
 And freely men confess that this world’s spent,
 When in the planets, and the firmament
 They seek so many new; they see that this
 Is crumbled out again to his atomies.
 ‘Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone (...)²⁴⁵

²⁴¹ Donne, CEP, pp. 271-2, l. 49-60

²⁴² namely in his Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden

²⁴³ see e.g. Plate 40 published in Robert Fludd’s *Utriusque cosmi majoris scilicet et minoris metaphysica, physica atque technica historia*, 4 vols. (Oppenheim, 1617-19), submitted to this dissertation, Appendix 2

²⁴⁴ verse 57

²⁴⁵ Donne, CEP, p. 276, l. 205-213

The element of change, which challenged the old static concept of the world in some of Donne's earlier "bawdy" poems is here questioned as it also a *world with no apparent meaning*. This meaning is *inscribed* with the blasphemous idea that this world is – as I have said before - just a microcosm of Elizabeth:

She to whom this world must itself refer,
As suburbs, or *the microcosm of her*,
She, she is dead; she's dead: when thou knows't this,
Thou knows't how lame a cripple this world is.²⁴⁶

The mentioned critique of Ben Jonson aimed exactly at this very point: this is a major "profanation" of the basically sacred canon of Pythagorean esthetics. Donne, indeed, was to reply that "he described / the Idea of Woman, and not as she was," nevertheless, the scandal of the conceit has not been erased. Later in the poem Donne says:

She by whose lines proportion should be
Examined, measure of all symmetry,
Whom had that ancient seen, who thought souls made
Of harmony was she, and thence infer,
That souls were but resultances from her,
And did from her into our bodies go,
As to our eyes, the forms from objects flow (...) ²⁴⁷

This is obviously a clear allusion to the Pythagorean system and to the concept of harmony it formulates. If all souls are "but resultances from her", however, the link between the system and its outcome is strained. It is again an *inscribed* harmony; and the way Donne uses the old system is precisely just to strain the link between the metaphor and its referent. This world depended on the fate of the young Elizabeth: since she is now gone, the only remaining trace of the "proportion" and "coherence" is the poet's ability to *recreate* the world. This act of *recreation* – as we have seen – is, however, equal to an act of *creatio ex nihilo*, as there is no longer anything safe and fixed. The various elements of the forsaken world are nothing in itself; they are just empty carriers of meaning gone long time ago.

²⁴⁶ *ibid.*, l. 235-238, emphasis is mine

However problematic it may seem from a theological point of view, Elizabeth's position in the *Anniversaries* resembles that of a *logos sui generis*. She is portrayed as the model of the world, spotless and innocent; the only blame she was to take was the original sin of Adam and Eve (*Second Anniversary* l. 457-8). William Empson explicitly formulated this view in his book English Pastoral Poetry: "... the only way to make the poem sensible is to accept Elizabeth Drury as the Logos."²⁴⁸ As such – indeed – is Donne's poem blasphemous because the measure of harmony and proportion in the world is not given by God, but *inscribed* by the poet: Elizabeth is made to serve as a model of harmony. *The world corresponds to the state of her body*; and a singular death acquires a universal meaning. L.L. Martz in The poetry of meditation²⁴⁹ questions such a reading of the poem as it leaves out the major point of his treatise, namely, the practice of various religious exercises. He tries to refer the position of the girl in the poems to the Petrarchan tradition. Grieving for Laura is an act of traditional medieval *contemptus mundi*: his world is worth nothing if it cannot treasure such a heavenly creature as Petrarch's beloved woman. This comparison, however, has major flaws; the most important one being the different type of contempt in Donne and Petrarch. Petrarch longs for her lover and her absence makes him despise the world around. Donne, however, despises the *situation of the world*, which he *inscribes* as having been caused by the death of the young girl. The position of the girl, moreover, clearly surpasses a standard devotional practice. The recurring lamentations "she, she is dead" can be seen as rhythmical patterns present in different religious exercises (such as e.g. the rosary), yet the major point of the poems is unambiguous: it *is* the death of the young girl that opened the situation as it is. Martz's effort to inscribe the tradition of the exercises within the framework of the two *Anniversaries* fails. Even if we were to accept the division of the work as he suggests it with

²⁴⁷ Donne, CEP, pp. 278-9, l. 309-316, emphasis is mine

²⁴⁸ Empson, W.: English Pastoral Poetry. W. W. Norton: New York, 1938, p. 84

²⁴⁹ Martz, L. L.: The poetry of meditation : a study in English religious literature of the seventeenth century. Yale UP : New Haven, 1954, pp. 220-3, 228-48

different pious meditations on various topics, it is clear that the contemporary reception it got from B. Jonson suggests it could not have been taken as a standard piece. On the contrary: a sense of major provocation was aroused. It is the profanity of the poem, which causes the problem. The whole meditation is, indeed, based on a thoroughly *profane* topic: Elizabeth Drury is *inscribed* with a sense of contracted infinity of a fragile human being.

All the meditations start off with a *sacred infinity* of an innocent life spanning the whole world. In the *Second Anniversary* this becomes explicit:

She, in whose body (if we dare prefer
This low world, to so high a mark as she),
The western treasure, eastern spicery,
Europe, and Afric, and the unknown rest
Were easily found, or what in them was best (...)²⁵⁰

Whatever may have been Donne's intentions when writing the poem, it is not important to what extent the poem describes Elizabeth or "the Idea of Woman".²⁵¹ The important thing is the *equation*, the very act of predication which equates this "Idea" with Elizabeth. The world is, first of all, a world to be seen *contracted* from a singular perspective: infinity of a human definition of the world. Experience of faith and longing for the world to come is based on this perspective and starts here below: man meets his infinity in his/her very constitution. The Pythagorean concept of harmony can thus achieve a new awareness of its metaphorical nature. The celestial journey described in the latter part of *The Second Anniversary*²⁵² re-activates the old metaphor of the celestial harmony and the doctrine of the

²⁵⁰ Donne, CEP, p. 293, l. 226-230

²⁵¹ Marjorie Hope Nicolson has an interesting commentary to this problem in her book on the effect of the „new science“ upon seventeenth century poetry: „The difference between „she“ and what I call „double shee“ holds good throughout both *Anniversaries*, and may briefly be stated thus: when Donne uses the more common „she“ he is speaking of a real person. When he uses the „double shee,“ he is writing in symbolic, universal, and abstract terms about what he himself called „the Idea of a Woman.“ in *The Breaking of the Circle: Studies in the effect of the „new science“ upon seventeenth-century poetry*, p. 87-88

²⁵² entitled *Of the Progress of the Soul*

spheres. The journey itself takes a form of an ecstatic experience; the soul is purified to achieve a unity with God. In that sense, says C. E. Hammil²⁵³:

The harmony of the Spheres, with the increasing acceptance of the idea of the heliocentric universe and with the development of increasingly sophisticated and efficient telescopes, became a metaphor of the process of that purification gained by the soul in ecstasy. It came to express the long standing concepts of harmony and unity within the universe as a symbol of that harmony and unity between God and man, between men, and within a man.²⁵⁴

This harmony, however, is a paradoxical entity: for human measures it is a basically disharmonious state. In the very beginning of the *Second Anniversary*²⁵⁵ Donne puts forward an image of a beheaded man whose unity has thus been strained. The body presents its last few motions referring to its former unity before the integrity of the soul and the body is finally broken. This is accompanied with a musical image stressing the disharmonious state:

His soul; when all these motions which we saw,
Are but as ice, which crackles at a thaw:
Or as a lute, which in moist weather, rings
Her knell alone, by cracking of her strings (...)²⁵⁶

The entrance section of the poem ends with a refrain referring to the *First Anniversary*: "She, she is gone; she is gone; when thou knows't this,/ What fragmentary rubbish this world is/ Thou knows't..." This "contemplation of our state in our deathbed" opens with a remarkably paradoxical allusion to the Pythagorean concept of harmony:

And think those broken and soft notes to be
Division, and thy happiest harmony.²⁵⁷

Interestingly enough, almost at the end of the poem Donne refers to the Pythagorean system again, and associates Elizabeth's death with the former "proportion" of the world. The "joy" of heaven of which she is now partaking is, however, distant:

²⁵³ *The Celestial Journey and the Harmony of the Spheres*. Texas Christian UP, Arlington: 1980

²⁵⁴ *ibid*, p. 130

²⁵⁵ also known as *Of the Progress of the Soul*

²⁵⁶ Donne, CEP, p. 288, l. 17-20

But could this low world joys essential touch,
Heaven's accidental joys would pass them much.²⁵⁸

There is NO metaphor for heaven, yet the process of the "Progress of the Soul" is, indeed, full of metaphors referring to the afterworld. This new harmony of death re-establishes the power of the metaphor. While referring to the other world, the human concept of harmony fails in accommodating the new reality. Its metaphorical structure has been stripped to its basic paradox. Indeed, "sed sicut scriptum est quod oculus non vidit nec auris audivit nec in cor hominis ascendit quae praeparavit Deus his qui diligunt illum" (1 Cor, 2,9). Donne's inscription of harmony into this frail world therefore includes a process of re-harmonizing the very metaphor of harmony as known from the Pythagorean system. This new awareness of harmony, its metaphorical nature *par excellence*, must be held together by a new awareness of faith. The inner workings of grace find unusual metaphors since they are no longer stock images to be contemplated. They are a *process* of inner transformation, which is to restore the image of God *inside*.

1.5. Harmonizing faith – Donne's *Divine poems*

Donne's *Divine poems* constantly strive to capture the dynamics of paradox in the act of Christian faith. William Kerrigan called this act "*accommodating*": indeed, the question is how to keep the experience of faith a dynamic act even in the act of poetic creation. Donne's solution – primarily in his *Divine Meditations* – shows that the ineffability of God can be approximated best by the most dissimilar images, as in the tradition of *via negativa*. The classical monument of early Christian mysticism, Aeropagite's *De divinis nominibus*, initiated the tradition of naming God in the most far-fetched metaphors imaginable. Donne re-activates

²⁵⁷ Donne, CEP, p. 290, l. 91-2

²⁵⁸ Donne, CEP, p. 300, l. 471-2

this tradition: his is however not just the act of naming but also the act *making*: Donne *makes* God do extraordinary things; things totally dissimilar to the stock images of religious poetry.

Perhaps the most obvious case of this is the case of *Meditations* 14 and 18. Both of the poems have a strong sexual connotation – in both of them the vices of men become virtues of God and the Church. *Batter my heart three-personed God* (Meditation 14) builds its conceit on the imagery of supposed conquering of a fortified town which, however, turns out to be a description of a rape. The bettering ram of God, which is to “ravish” the “usurped town” of the poet’s soul, creates a seemingly gross image of God’s penis:

Batter my heart, three-personed God; for, you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise, and stand, o’throw me, and bend
Your force, to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
I, like an usurped town, to another due,
Labour to admit you, but oh, to no end,
Reason your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captived, and proves weak or untrue,
Yet dearly’I love you, and would be loved fain,
But am betrothed unto your enemy,
Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.²⁵⁹

Imperatives used throughout the poem recall the early imperatives used for his mistresses.²⁶⁰ The “order of grace”, to use the famous term of Thomas Merton, transforms the hierarchy of natural order. The conceit of *Meditation 18* is similarly blasphemous: Donne questions one of the key problems of his time - the claim of the 3 main churches of the day (Lutherans, Calvinists and Roman Catholics) to being the true church of Christ. Donne’s solution of the problem is a provocative theological idea: the true church of Christ is the one that is “embraced and open to most men.” Thus a true church of Christ, his “spouse, so bright and clear”, is most true (meaning “faithful”) if it acts as a human prostitute. The rough

²⁵⁹ Donne, CEP, pp. 314-5

paradox of the final couplet marks a special feature of Donne's religious poetry in general: Christianity as a religion is a *religion of paradox*, this paradox being an insoluble problem in the very heart of its doctrines. If poetry is to capture the sharpness of its incomprehensible language, it has to re-vitalise the heart of religious utterance: its metaphor. Not all Donne's religious metaphors are far-fetched, but all of them tend to dis-harmonize a sense of "pious meditation". Even the stock metaphors of Christian faith are shown as paradoxes, as metaphors par excellence: that is as *carriers of meaning ultimately distant*.²⁶¹ In that sense, metaphors are truly venerated as the ultimate, however insufficient means of conveying meaning. It is no surprise therefore – as I have shown above - that even the term "harmony" is associated with a radically different meaning than the one known from the Pythagorean tradition.²⁶²

Donne first of all presents the experience of faith in a new light: it is primarily a personal relationship surpassing all other doctrines. In *A Litany* Donne uses the association of prayer and music.²⁶³ The call to God for answering a petition is pleasing to God more than the heavenly apparatus known from the Pythagorean system:

Hear us, O hear us Lord; to thee
 A sinner is more music, when he prays,
 Then spheres, or angels' praises be,
 In panegyric alleluias,
 Hear us, for till thou hear us, Lord
 We know not what to say.
 Thine ear to our sighs, tears, thoughts gives voice and word.
 O thou who Satan heard'st in Job's sick day,
 Hear thyself now, for thou in us dost pray.²⁶⁴

The capacity of religious metaphor to capture a glimpse of the mystery takes its power from God's response, since He is the one and only initiator and source of metaphors. On the

²⁶⁰ Cf. the analysis of W. Kerrigan „The fearful accommodations of John Donne“ in *John Donne and the Seventeenth-Century Metaphysical Poets*. Ed. H. Bloom. Chelsea House Publ.: New York, 1986, pp. 37-50

²⁶¹ A good example is his meditation on *The Cross*

²⁶² See also the discussion of John Carey in *John Donne: Life, Art and Mind*, p. 165.

other hand, hermeneutical circle requires an innate capacity of man to react. Such is the “music of thy promises” in the following stanza XXIV, which recalls the Platonic doctrine of “remembering” the initial harmonic state of humankind. A. J. Smith associates this section with the famous allusion to the respective doctrine in Act V, scene 1 of Shakespeare’s Merchant of Venice: “Such harmony is in immortal souls;/ But whilst this muddy vesture of decay/ Doth grossly close in it, we cannot hear it.” (l. 63-5) However, in Donne’s poem it is a dynamic, bipolar act: the act of prayer can “make” God respond and thus reactivate created capacities of man. It is no mere one-way traffic. The new awareness of faith is a radically uncertain path.

Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward is an interesting example of Donne’s capacity to explore the metaphorical power of Pythagorean cosmology. It starts off with a plain statement: “let man’s soul be a sphere.” This cosmological metaphor is taken for a simile of man’s journey through this frail world. Such as “foreign motions” cause celestial bodies to divert from their given orbits, so is the poet’s soul “carried” in different directions: after all, Good Friday as the memorial of Christ’s death on the Cross seems to comprise both of the extremes. Riding west coincides with the soul’s longing in the opposite direction, just as the cross of Christ becomes both the setting and the rising of light.²⁶⁵ This “spectacle” is too much for the poet to bear since “Who sees God’s face, that is self life, must die (...)”²⁶⁶ The harmony of God’s creation and the inner harmony of God Himself is problematized:

Could I behold those hands which span the poles,
And turn all spheres at once, pierced with those holes?²⁶⁷

²⁶³ As I show elsewhere, this is a stock metaphor for the Metaphysicals. See my later analyses of Herbert and Vaughan.

²⁶⁴ Donne, CEP, p. 324, l. 199-207

²⁶⁵ A similar idea reappears in *Hymn to God, my God, in my Sickness*:

What shall my west hurt me? As west and east
In all flat maps (and I am one) are one,
So death doth touch the resurrection. (Donne, CEP, p. 348)

²⁶⁶ Donne, CEP, p. 330, l. 17

Modern editors are divided on the word “turn” in this line. Early versions (1633-69) all use “tune” instead. Helen Gardner thus distinguishes “tuning” as the act of Wisdom which “sweetly ordereth all things” and “turning” as indicating the all-powerful first mover. Grierson does not see a significant difference between the two.²⁶⁸ Either way, the pun on Pythagorean cosmological conceit is clear. The first mover is equated with the helpless man on the cross, yet Christ, indeed, still *remains* the first mover and the measure of harmony. The conceit of the poem thus strives to engraft a powerful emotional image onto a stock doctrinal statement. The in-decorum of the image creates the very dynamism of the metaphor – its basic infiniteness, its endless rotation.

An occasional piece called *Upon the translation of the Psalms by Sir Philip Sidney, and the Countess of Pembroke, his sister* refers to the same problem again: in fact, it starts with the problem of accommodating God into human language. Looking for “new expressions” ends in “circling the square”. The Sidneys are described as the “organ” of God the “harmony.” The traditional celestial apparatus known from Pythagoras is worth nothing for men, if there is nobody to translate the unreachable “song” of heaven:

They (*i.e. the Sidneys*) show us Islanders our joy, our King,
 They tell us why, and teach us how to sing;
 Make all this all, three choirs, heaven, earth, and spheres;
 The first, heaven, hath a song, but no man hears,
 The spheres have music, but they have no tongue,
 Their harmony is rather danced than sung;

But our third choir, to which the first gives ear,
 (For, angels learn by what the church does here)
 This choir hath all.²⁶⁹

The notion of “tuning” in the poem is associated with Christ who “hath tuned God and man.” The theological concept of revelation as one of the basic tenets of Christianity thus becomes here an epitome of the paradox of speaking about the unspeakable. *It is the free act*

²⁶⁷ *ibid.*, l. 21-22

²⁶⁸ See A. J. Smith’s notes to his edition of Donne’s poems, p. 652

of Revelation more than anything else that legitimizes human language to attempt for the ineffable. The Revelation itself made language worthy of interpreting the mysteries of God. Thus the praise for the Psalms as monuments of the Word of God, as well as for their outstanding English translators, points out again towards the power of language itself. It is the power of metaphor to re-vitalise our sense of Logos. The ending three lines of the poem sum up Donne's theological "doctrine" of language:

These their sweet learned labours, all the way
Be as our tuning, that, when hence we part
We may fall in with them, and sing our part.²⁷⁰

A good religious metaphor is a one that lasts and "aspires towards the condition of music".²⁷¹ Such concept thus paves road towards a concept of religious poetry as "Wesen des Singens": a specific theology of song harmonized by the very act of praise.²⁷² It is the "organ" of speaking, the liberating force of language which makes the difference. Language itself is thus venerated as a *process* of reaching towards the ineffable, its goal being in praising its very power. Such is also the "theology" of one Donne's most personal poems – according to Walton written on his deathbed:

Since I am coming to that holy room,
Where, with thy choir of saints for evermore,
I shall be made thy music; as I come
I tune the instrument here at the door,
And what I must do then, think here before.²⁷³

The powers of the poet are melted into the choir of angels. The musical metaphor emphasises transformation of the poet's capacity into a "pure act" of singing. The other end of the paradox is the mere fact that ineffable God cannot be truly captured in the act of poetry *at all*. A religious poem aspires substantially towards its devotional meaning: it is a means of

²⁶⁹ Donne, CEP, p. 333, l. 21-29

²⁷⁰ Donne, CEP, p. 334, l. 54-56

²⁷¹ Cf. Pater, W.: *The Renaissance*, Boni and Liveright publ. New York, 1919, p. 111

²⁷² For more, see my later analysis of Herbert's poetry

²⁷³ Donne, CEP, p. 347

praising God. The act of joining – the original meaning of the verb *αρμολζειν* – is the act of the final harmony of heaven: “making” – the original meaning of the verb *ποιειν* – is “joining.” The instrument of argument becomes the instrument of music. Metaphor vanishes and the stream of music takes over. God – harmony and Logos at the same time – is at work.

II. Towards the Harmony of Religious Experience – The Adventure of George Herbert

II.1. From *Geocentricism* to *Theocentricism*

One of the early poems of the one and only collection of **George Herbert** (1593-1633) The Temple (first published 1633 by his friend Nicholas Ferrar) *The Altar* takes up the traditional graphic form mentioned by Puttenham in his Arte of English Poesie (publ. 1589), a *Pillar*:

The "Pillar", Pillaster or Cillinder.

The Pillar is a figure among all the rest of the Geometricall most beautifull, in respect that he is tall and vpright and of one bignesse from the bottom to the toppe. In Architecture he is considered with two accessarie parts, a pedestall or base, and a chapter or head, the body is the shaft. By this figure is signified stay, support, rest, state and magnificence, your dittie then being reduced into the forme of the Pillar, his base will require to beare the breath of a meetre of six or seven or eight fillables: the shaft of foure: the chapter egall with the base (...)²⁷⁴

Puttenham gives 2 examples of this form – the first one is an homage to Queen Elizabeth, the other one is a mediocre love poem:

*Her Maiestie resembled to the crown-
ed pillar. Ye must read vprward.*

*Is blisse with immortalitie.
Her trymest top of all ye see,
Garnish the crowne
Her iust renowne
Chapter and head,
Part that maintain
And womanhead
Her maiden raigne
In te gri tie :
In ho nour and
With ve ri tie :
Her roundnes stand
Strehgthen the state.*

*Philo to the Lady Calia, sendeth this
Odolet of her prayse in forme of a Pil-
ler, which ye must read downeward.*

*Thy Princely port and Maiestie
Is my ter rene dei tie,
Thy wit and sence
Ther streame & source
Of e lo quence
And deepe discours,
The faire eyes are
My bright loadstarre,
Thy speeche a darte
Percing my harte,
Thy face a las,
My loo king glasse,
Thy loue ly looks
My prayer bookes*

²⁷⁴ Puttenham, p. 110

*By their increase
 With out de bate
 Concorde and peace
 Of her sup port,
 They be the base
 With stedfastnesse
 Vertue and grace
 Stay and comfort
 Of Albi ons rest
 The sounde Pillar
 And seene a farre
 Is plainly exprest
 Tall stately and strayt
 By this no ble pour trayt*

*Thy pleasant cheare
 My sunshine cleare
 Thy ru full sight
 My darke midnight,
 Thy will the stent
 Of my con tent,
 Thy glo rye flour
 Of myne ho nour,
 Thy loue dothe giue
 The lyfe I lyve,
 Thy lyfe it is
 Mine earthly bliss :
 But grace & fauour in thine eies
 My bodies soule & souls paradise.*

Herbert in *The Altar*, however, transforms the form to suit his peculiar design. In fact, its content does not correspond to its form. His altar is a "broken one" and, indeed, it stands only as a metaphor for "heart":

A broken A L T A R, Lord, thy servant rears,
 Made of a heart, and cemented with tears:
 Whose parts are as thy hand did frame;
 No workman's tool hath touch'd the same.
 A H E A R T alone
 Is such a stone,
 As nothing but
 Thy pow'r doth cut.
 Wherefore each part
 Of my hard heart
 Meets in this frame
 To praise thy name
 That if I chance to hold my peace
 These stones to praise thee may not cease
 O let thy blessed S A C R I F I C E be mine,
 And sanctify this A L T A R to be thine.²⁷⁵

Herbert's poems were once called "self-consuming artifacts"²⁷⁶. This, indeed, characterises the way Herbert creates and consequently "devours" his own poetic creations. Herbert's world of religious experience in that sense is a revolutionary one: the "mock-love"

²⁷⁵ All quotations are from the edition of Ann Pasternak Slater *The complete English works*. London, 1995. (Hereafter "Herbert, CEW"), p. 23

poetry strives to capture a world for which there are no set metaphors; a world which is ultimately only a world of metaphor and analogy. Harmony for Herbert becomes the act of tuning to the Word of God: the one and only Metaphor of God.

In that sense, the act of creation resembles the act of tuning in its musical connotation: after all Christian life is based on St Paul's maxim in Gal 2, 20: "vivo autem iam non ego, vivit in me Christus..." And it is this dynamic imitation of Christ which shapes Herbert's concept of harmony.

Herbert's harmonic thinking distinguishes 2 main ideas: his notion of tuning and music, and his specific use of conceit. His use of Pythagorean cosmological lore climaxes in its specific *perverting*: Herbert's cosmology is a move from *geocentrism* towards *theocentrism*.

II.2. "The doctrine tun'd by Christ" – Herbert's musicality

In his famous biography of George Herbert, Izaak Walton, stresses music as the "chiefest recreation" of the priest-poet:

"His chiefest recreation was music, in which heavenly art he was a most excellent master, and did himself compose many divine hymns and anthems, which he set and sung to his lute or viol, and though he was a lover of retiredness, yet his love of music was such, that he went usually twice every week on certain appointed days to the cathedral church in Salisbury; and at his return would say, that his time spent in prayer and cathedral music elevated his soul, and was his heaven upon earth. But before his return thence to Bemerton, he would usually sing and play his part at an appointed private music meeting; and, to justify this practice, he would often say, religion does not banish mirth, but only moderates and sets rules to it."²⁷⁷

Moreover, Walton makes Herbert use Pythagorean harmonic speculation in a very special connotation: after helping a poor man, his musical friends were surprised at his appearance ("so soiled and discomposed"), and he was to reply the following:

²⁷⁶ Cf. Fish S. E.: „Letting Go: The Dialectic of the Self in Herbert's Poetry" in John Donne and the Seventeenth-Century Metaphysical Poets, pp. 87-102

²⁷⁷ Herbert, CEW, pp. 371-2

“... the thought of what he had done would prove music to him at midnight, and that the omission of it would be upbraided and made discord in his conscience, whensoever he should pass by that place. 'For if I be bound to pray for all that be in distress, I am sure that I am bound, as far as it is in my power, to practise what I pray for. And though I do not wish for the like occasion every day, yet let me tell you, I would not willingly pass one day of my life without comforting a sad soul, or showing mercy; and I praise God for this occasion. And now let's tune our instruments.”²⁷⁸

This wonderful piece of writing shows at least how much the time of Herbert was still penetrated by the powerful concept of Pythagorean harmonic cosmology. So is it the case of Herbert's poetry. There are, nevertheless, important developments: most importantly the use of the traditional conceit of harmony as a fundamentally *metaphoric* structure, stressing the religious nature of "attuning" to the universal chime of Creation. It is not a static, cold concept, a kind of "*Weltanschauung*": it always touches the very heart of the most intimate relation with God. To put it simply, the concept thematises an important distinction between the dis-harmonious state of the world immersed in sin and suffering and the wonderful workings of grace which restore the original harmonious state. The dynamism of this basic concept is based on a deep theological maxim: Christianity does not just RESTORE the original pre-Fall situation, since Christ overcame the state of being under Law. Pauline theology talks about "new creation in Christ".²⁷⁹ There is more than just restoration, the world is thrown into a new reality.

Herbert's one and only book of English poetry is neither mere coincidence, nor a logical outcome of his relatively short life. It is the one and only book of his because of its principal conceit – The Temple is an epitome of the author's spiritual longing to erect God a temple in his own heart: to make his own heart a true "heart of flesh" in which Christ can live. Since, indeed, "... vivo autem iam non ego, vivit in me Christus..." (Gal 2, 20). In that sense, many of Herbert's conceits rotate around the motif of tuning oneself to Christ.

But thou wilt sin and grief destroy;

²⁷⁸ Herbert, CEW, p. 373

²⁷⁹ „in Christo enim Iesu neque circumcisio aliquid valet neque praepitium sed *nova creatura*“ (Gal 6, 15)

That so the broken bones may joy,
And tune together in a well-set song,
Full of praises,
Who dead man raises;
Fractures well cur'd make us more strong.

*Repentance*²⁸⁰

This basic theme uses the traditional lore in many different aspects. The idea of tuning - as we have seen - was traditionally associated with the concept of harmony of humours in human body. The "temperance" of various bodily humours was believed to secure healthy development of the body. Also, different tempers - in the old Galenic humereal psychology - defined "temperament" of a given person. There is an interesting correspondence between the act of "tuning" and the act of "tempering" the body in Herbert's poem *The Temper (I)*: the "music of the body" predisposes the personality to produce harmonious rhymes, a true and adequate praise of the living God:

Yet take thy way; for sure thy way is best:
Stretch or contract me, thy poor debtor:
This is nut tuning of my breast,
To make the music better.²⁸¹

Moreover, the new cosmology of "praise" reaches the totality of Creation: the "loci communes" of the spheres are abolished in the light of the general consort of *Weltall*:

Whether I fly with angels, fall with dust,
Thy hands made both, and I am there:
Thy power and love, my love and trust
Make one place ev'ry where.

This poem's last line, indeed, echoes Donne's famous *Sun-Rising*, and thus creates an interesting metaphorical tension between the two texts. Donne strives to de-construct the traditional positioning of the centre: it is no longer the rhythm of the day and night, or the firm

²⁸⁰ Herbert, CEW, p. 47

²⁸¹ Herbert, CEW, p. 53

structuring of the heavenly spheres which is to measure time. The lovers' bed becomes the centre:

Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;
This bed thy centre is, these walls, thy sphere.²⁸²

For Herbert, "ev'ry where" is a belief in the omnipresence of God: the "Sun" is Providence re-structuring the traditional opposition of the centre and the periphery. It is no longer the God in the unattainable Empyreum: it is the God inside, the presence of God in the heart of man.

In the next poem where this theme comes up, *Providence*, this becomes the key situation: God's Providence pierces the universe of things, yet they all acquire their relevance only in relation to Man:

Beasts fain would sing; birds ditty to their notes;
Trees would be tuning on their native lute
To thy renown: but all their hands and throats
Are brought to Man, while they are lame and mute.
(3rd stanza)²⁸³

The concord of creation is an altogether harmonious, musical one. However, the table of Creation is unthinkable without Man, without his ability to express the music, the "praise" of Creation:

Nothing escapes them both; all must appear,
And be dispos'd, and dress'd, and tun'd by thee,
Who sweetly temper'st all. If we could hear
Thy skill and art, what music would it be!
(stanza 10)²⁸⁴

But who hath praise enough? nay who hath any?
None can express thy works, but he that knows them:
And none can know thy works, which are so many,
And so complete, but only he that owes them.
(stanza 36)²⁸⁵

²⁸² Donne, CEP, p. 81

²⁸³ Herbert, CEW, p. 113

²⁸⁴ Herbert, CEW, p. 114

²⁸⁵ Herbert, CEW, p. 117

In that sense, the world is present to Man in God, and God can be present to Man in his praise and in his ability to read the signs of his presence. In other words, Providence can be present only if Man recognises this presence. The world inside, the "little world of man" is where God takes his centre. From there on the act of creation in the act of metaphor takes its root. The world is de-centralized by becoming radically an act of metaphor depending on the creative powers of man. Traditional metaphors thus acquire a new significance: the significance of *language as the means of attaining to the unspeakable language of God*. This is also the basis of the traditional belief in the unutterable sighs of the Holy Spirit interceding to God. In *Grieve not the Holy Spirit, &c.* based on Ephes. 4.30²⁸⁶, the grieves of the Spirit ("whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption", as the verse runs) becomes paradoxically the redemptive music of God's: the Spirit grieves, so that man can be redeemed. The act of tuning in this case is an act of tuning to "groans", to un-musical sounds, which, however, should never cease:

Oh take thy lute, and tune it to a strain,
 Which may with thee
 All day complain.
 There can no discord but in ceasing be.
 Marbles can weep; and surely strings
 More bowels have, than such hard things.²⁸⁷

In *The Search*, both of the latter ideas are joined together: sighs are 'tuned' to 'groans' in an exhausting search for hidden God. The piercing of skies, the sphere or the centre brings no relief: God seems to be lost :

My knees pierce th' earth, mine eyes the sky;
 Yet the sphere
 And centre both to me deny
 That thou art there.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁶ „et nolite contristare Spiritum Sanctum Dei in quo signati estis in die redemptionis“

²⁸⁷ Herbert, CEW, p. 132

²⁸⁸ Herbert, CEW, p. 158

"Where is my God?" asks Herbert. No place is secured for God. The centre-periphery distinction can only be defined as the "distance" and "nearness" of God. These measures are, however, centred by the position of Man. He is to define the distance and the "nearness": Pythagorean cosmology is turned upside down by becoming a metaphor:

When thou dost turn, and wilt be near;
 What edge so keen,
What point so piercing can appear
 To come between?

For as thy absence doth excel
 All distance known:
So doth thy nearness bear the bell,
 Making two one.²⁸⁹

Distance and nearness are joined metaphorically as the two distinct epitomes of the presence of God: God is truly infinite, regardless whether he is infinitely near or infinitely far. Only a true metaphor can capture the infinite "unspeakability" of God's infiniteness. In that sense, the question "Where is my God?" is a question "Where is he not?" There is no PLACE. God lives in relation to man. Thus can he only be present.

Aaron is a poem summarising the basic ideas of Herbert's thinking of "harmony": being tuned to Christ, becoming the place where God resides and takes its centre. By comparing the Old Testament's priest Aaron – the epitome of a truly saintly priesthood - and his weak abilities, the only solution is to be firmly tuned to Christ, the only source of life, whose music enlivens. Remarkably, the poem keeps the pattern of the name AARON, it has 5 stanzas of 5 lines.

Holiness on the head,
Light and perfections on the breast,
Harmonious bells bellow, raising the dead
To lead them unto life and rest.
Thus are true Aarons drest.

Profaneness in my head,
Defects and darkness in my breast,
A noise of passions ringing me for dead

²⁸⁹ Herbert, CEW, p. 159

Unto a place where is no rest,
Poor priest thus am I drest.

Only another head
I have, another heart and breast,
Another music, making live not dead,
Without whom I could have no rest:
In him I am well drest.

Christ is my only head,
My alone only heart and breast,
My only music, striking me ev'n dead;
That to the old man I may rest,
And be in him new drest.

So holy in my head,
Perfect and light in my dear breast,
My doctrine tun'd by Christ (who is not dead,
But lives in me while I do rest)
Come people; Aaron's drest.²⁹⁰

"The doctrine tun'd by Christ" is a metaphor of this presence – after all, it is a living presence "making live not dead". The living, dynamic presence of God is to be kept by a living relationship, which in the Christian tradition takes the name of prayer. Prayer in Herbert is "a kind of tune, which all things hear and fear" (*Prayer I*)²⁹¹, which again – in the other poem with the same title (*Prayer II*)²⁹², – discovers the power of God "tacking the centre to the sphere."²⁹³ "Just as God's arm can span the uttermost points of the compass, so it can link the centre of the universe to its outmost rim," explains Herbert's editor Ann Pasternak Slater this interesting metaphor²⁹⁴. There is, however, one important addition: in prayer, this living relationship is maintained. Moreover, man is thus given a share on the transforming power of God:

Since then these three wait on thy throne,
Ease, Power, and Love; I value prayer so,
That were I to leave all but one,
Wealth, fame, endowments, virtues, all should go;

²⁹⁰ Herbert, CEW, p. 170

²⁹¹ Herbert, CEW, p. 49

²⁹² Herbert, CEW, p. 100

²⁹³ Cf. Herbert, CEW, p. 100

²⁹⁴ Herbert, CEW, p. 440

I and dear prayer would together dwell,
And quickly gain, for each inch lost, an ell.²⁹⁵

It is the paradoxical richness of God: by possessing all, He is independent of all. The poem stresses the paradoxical nature of God's freedom: the final words of the poem summarise "the doctrine tun'd by Christ". *A prayer makes religious experience an adventure of WORDS, a way for a METAPHOR, a re-creation of the unspeakable.* Stressing the paradoxical nature of religious experience, the metaphysical horizon in Herbert becomes a milieu where *man becomes the centre*. The inner presence of God calls for new metaphors, since it is ultimately below and above any verbal expression. The centre which is "everywhere" as if rotates around man's ability to express it, to verbalise it. Thus Herbert's musical metaphors – whose Pythagorean motivation is without doubt – aspire to yet a new quality. Herbert's musicality is, indeed, speculative in another sense: he strives to a kind of "theology of song", as it was presented already in St Augustine's exegesis of verse 3 of Psalm 23: "Bene cantate ei cum iubilatione" in his Ennerationes in psalmos:

Quid est in iubilatione canere ? Intelligere, verbis explicare non posse quod canitur corde. Etenim illi qui cantant, sive in messe, sive in vinea, sive in aliquo opere ferventi, cum coeperint in verbis canticorum exsultare laetitia, ut eam verbis explicare non possint, avertunt se a syllabis verborum, et eunt in sonum iubilationis. *Jubilum sonus quidam est significans cor parturire quod dicere not potest.*²⁹⁶ Et quem decet ista iubilatio, nisi ineffabilem Deum ? Ineffabilis enim est, quem fari non potest: et si eum fari non potest, et tacere non debes, quid restat nisi ut jubiles; ut gaudeat cor sine verbis, et immensa latitudo gaudiorum metas non habeat syllabarum?

"*Jubilum sonus quidam est significans cor parturire quod dicere not potest,*" is the classical exposition of the doctrine of "iubilatio." The aspiration of poetry in Herbert often takes the form of a song, however, song, which resembles a pure act. It is the "Wesen des Singens", as Cardinal Ratzinger (today Pope Benedict XVI) calls it. The inadequacy of words to express the mystery of the ineffable God, or the inability to do so, thus acquires a radically *positive* quality. Moreover, music is seen as the means of adequate conveying of the

²⁹⁵ Herbert, CEW, p. 100

Similarly in Herbert, his Easter "songs" represent the redeemed situation of response.

Singing is the adequate response to an experience of joy, singing which cannot be postponed:

Rise heart; thy Lord is risen. Sing his praise
Without delays,
Who takes thee by the hand, that thou likewise
With him mayst rise:
That, as his death calcined thee to dust,
His life may make thee gold, and much more just.

Awake, my lute, and struggle for thy part
With all thy art.
The cross taught all wood to resound his name
Who bore the same.
His stretched sinews taught all strings, what key
Is best to celebrate this most high day.
(Easter)³⁰¹

There are, indeed, other examples where the act of singing is associated with joy (*Man's Medley, Easter wings, Providence*). In a typically metaphysical manner Herbert also transforms this *iubilatio*: the inability to praise God can often take the paradoxical form of "sighs" and "groans". Those metaphors become epitomes for the pure sounds of one's incapability. In Sion "groans" aspire to be taken as "music for a king":

And truly brass and stones are heavy things,
Tombs for the dead, not temples fit for thee:
But groans are quick, and full of wings,
And all their motions upward be;
And ever as they mount, like larks they sing;
The note is sad, yet music for a king.³⁰²

Similarly in *The Cross* – the author's "groans" would like to aspire to a kind of harmony ("if once my groans/ Could be allow'd for harmony"³⁰³); in *Gratefulness* "groans" and "sighs" are elevated to a special status, since Christ "made a sigh and groan" His "joys".³⁰⁴ Because of that, the groans and sighs of the poet can become His "praise". In

³⁰¹ Herbert, CEW, p. 39

³⁰² Herbert, CEW, p. 103

³⁰³ Herbert, CEW, p. 161

³⁰⁴ Cf. Herbert, CEW, p. 120

Dooms-day the "broken consort" of humanity when raised by God – Herbert prays – can become "music" again.³⁰⁵

Herbert's musicality thus draws a metaphysical circle: static Pythagorean concepts are brought into a new theological perspective. "Singing" is not just a proportion of a perfect system, and music is not an automatic quality of cosmos – it is a meaningful metaphor, which takes its power from the metaphor making itself: the annihilation of proper expression in *iubilatio* marks the borders of *re-creatio*. Music is the limit, not the measure of creation. Music is the "*Anderssterben*" – the aspiration of literature to achieve the state of music.³⁰⁶

II.3. Sweet phrases, lovely metaphors – the ingenuity of Herbert's conceits

Herbert's conceits follow Donne's metaphysical pattern: looking for God for him is an effort to find appropriate language to accommodate religious experience. Herbert uses traditional scope of religious metaphors carried down via tradition. However, the process of re-harmonizing them is an effort to enliven their language, to liberate most of the ultimately analogous way of talking about God. Thus, the process is de-centralized: it is primarily the power of language which takes over and its possibility to convey messages however problematic they might be. In that sense, the "self-consuming" artifacts of Herbert's poems acquire its special drive: the effort has to fail in the end, so what matters is HOW this failing of human language works. Language communicates if it can communicate even the experience of its failure. The paradox of communicating the incommunicable is a challenge of Herbert's metaphysical poems.

Herbert explores the possibilities of language for new surprising meanings – he thus aspires to re-establish the sense of surprise that invaded Europe with the introduction of the hieroglyphics. The unknown language of the Egyptians – as it was then perceived – was

³⁰⁵ Cf. Herbert, CEW, p. 183

³⁰⁶ Cf. Pater, W.: *The Renaissance*. Boni and Liveright publ.: New York, 1919, pp. 110-111: „All art constantly aspires towards the state of music.“

believed to pave the road towards the original Adamic language. The hieroglyphics were to produce a sense of immediate apprehension of the divine truth, unhindered by sensual representation. Herbert's ingenious conceits based on language experimenting strive to achieve this immediate sensation within the boundaries of "fallen language". Thus even the means of the Babel's misunderstanding gets purified for the wonderful enigmas of God. The hieroglyphic relationship is therefore sought within the process of signification itself, or - more precisely - within the creative act of the poet who can achieve such an outstanding effect.

JESU is a clear pun on the conceit of Donne's *Broken Heart*. This well-worn cliché of love poetry, however, in both of the poems acquires a new, surprising meaning: Donne's "broken heart" cannot love any more, since it is torn to pieces and cannot recover its former unity. Herbert's "broken heart" shows the opposite movement: while the four letters of Jesus' name lie scattered on the floor, they re-gain a new significance:

And first I found the corner, where was J,
After, were E S, and next where U was graved.
When I had got these parcels, instantly
I sat me down to spell them, and perceived
That to my broken heart he was *I ease you*,
And to my whole is *J E S U*.³⁰⁷

The destruction of the name is a process of "re-harmonizing", since, indeed, restructuring of the letters is an opportunity to expand on the traditional structures of meaning. After all, the name of Jesus is not explained, neither etymologized. It is powerful in as much it can become *a means of a NEW metaphor*, a new creation. Almost the same conceit runs through *Love-joy*: the two letters J and C on vine drops are at first enigmatic. The poet's assumption that they stand for Joy and Charity proves to be erroneous, since their true meaning is Jesus Christ. Yet the interesting tension between the first intuition and the final reconciliation provide a sense of almost sensual surprise. Similarly in perhaps the most

³⁰⁷ Herbert, CEW, p. 109

exciting conceit of The Temple, Paradise, Herbert expands on the possibility of words to convey and hide new meanings. The whole poem is based on the conceit of "pruning" trees to make them bear more fruit, and concentrate all their powers on producing fruit. The pruning process is, however, "imprinted" in the poem in the idea of triplet rhymes, each of which drops one letter. The pruning process thus "mines" the language for new meanings:

I bless thee, Lord, because I G R O W
Among thy trees, which in a R O W
To thee both fruit and order OW.

What open force, or hidden C H A R M
Can blast my fruit, or bring me H A R M,
While the enclosure is thy A R M

Enclose me still for fear I S T A R T.
Be to me rather sharp or T A R T,
Than let me want thy hand and A R T.

When thou dost greater judgements S P A R E
And with thy knife but prune and P A R E
Ev'n fruitful trees more fruitful A R E.

Such sharpness shows the sweetest F R E N D,
Such cuttings rather heal than R E N D,
And such beginnings touch their E N D.³⁰⁸

In a short poem *Anagram*, the four letters of Jesus' mother name, Mary, are transformed into a surprising new meaning just by shuffling the letters. Again, the idea of hidden meaning yet to be discovered is activated here:

How well her name an *Army* doth present,
In whom the *Lord of hosts* did pitch his tent!³⁰⁹

Language experimenting for Herbert is a means of conveying the hieroglyphic nature of the world. Metaphor making is thus also the process of *re-establishing this "hieroglyphic" relationship*. Language becomes an ever-new process, whereby the world is harmonized: in

³⁰⁸ Herbert, CEW, p. 129

³⁰⁹ Herbert, CEW, p. 74

such a situation, language loses its firm reference function and becomes a process itself. Young in his recent book Doctrine and Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Poetry stresses the element of Herbert's attentiveness to the idea of God's providence: God's design transcends mere intellectual performance of man. "But again the point – the *wit* – of Herbert's poem is to insist that the anagram is not merely coincidence, not purely equivocal: it is the effect of God's providential ordering of the realm of contingent being in harmony with divine purposes."³¹⁰ To imitate the language of God, the poet is to imitate the creative process *ex nihilo*: in other words the process by which God "speaks" himself as a free being and turns flat matter into language.

In that sense, providential design is a process of freedom, which is being unfolded in dialogue with creatures that are able to perceive its language. Herbert's main theological emphasis – the workings of grace – is thus expanded upon as a thorough conceit of God's saving freedom. Some of his conceits balance on the verge of the grotesque: e.g. *The Bag* tells the story of man's salvation while making Christ a kind of "heavenly postman"³¹¹. Christ's pierced side becomes a peculiar mailbag for delivery:

If ye have any thing to send or write
 (I have no bag, but here is a room)
 Unto my father's hands and sight
 (Believe me) it shall safely come.
 That I shall mind what you impart,
Look, you may put it very near my heart.³¹²

The grotesque effect is produced by showing the limit of the traditional association of a person's inner self with the heart, but also in the deliberately repulsive, almost perverse imagery. The theological maxim of the free gift of grace includes here an element of surprise, a new reality, which has not hitherto been known. It is to be discovered, in as much as it

³¹⁰ Young, p. 134

³¹¹ See Ann Pasternak Slater's notes to her edition of Herbert, Herbert, CEW, p. 466. She also mentions Rosemund Tuve's note that the Latin word *saccus* referred both to a purse and a bag for straining wine. (See Tuve, R.: A Reading of George Herbert. Chicago, 1952)

³¹² Herbert, CEW, p. 148

freely given out. There are other such instances in the work of Herbert: e.g. the paradox of the Christian “ordo amoris” is aptly extrapolated in *Clasping of hands*. The theological concept of love is strengthened with the repeating rhymes “mine x thine”. The microcosm of the poem thematises again the problem of the centre: the identity of a man is inextricably bound to his tuning to the centre, which is in Christ. The aspects of the dialogue of love are a paradox expressed at the end of the two stanzas. The first emphasises that the absence of God entails immediately also the absence of one’s identity:

If I without thee would be mine,
I neither should be mine nor thine.³¹³

The end of the second stanza tries to abolish the strict difference between the two realms of “mine” and “thine”. Oxford English Dictionary (OED) explains that the expressions “meum” and “tuum” were used to delineate the laws of property. This law is overturned in this poem³¹⁴, the centre is de-centralised:

O be mine still ! still make me thine!
Or rather make no Thine and Mine!³¹⁵

There are no laws of property in the loving relationship of God and man. The conceit achieves its triumph in its sophisticated naivety: indeed, the surprise is not in an elaborate argument as in the case of Donne’s poems. It is the ability to un-cover, or dis-cover the hidden designs of God’s active grace within the limit of traditional metaphors. This is also the case of *The Son*, a poem about the grace of the English language: it is only English that has the same sound for “sun” and “son”. The hidden conceit to be found is intertwined within the framework of language itself: in other words, even a fallen language can capture the metaphoric equating of sun with the Son of God. The act of metaphor pretends to re-establish this correspondence, which, however, was not given beforehand. It can only be “achieved” in the process of signification. The looseness of the poetics of correspondence in Herbert’s work

³¹³ Herbert, CEW, p. 153

³¹⁴ Cf. Ann Pasternak Slater’s notes to her edition of Herbert, Herbert, CEW, p. 469

is best seen in the poems where the very concept of Pythagorean cosmos becomes part of the poetic argument. In *The Sinner* the cosmology of the soul is reversed: whereas the Pythagorean cosmos (and quite clearly the “outward” cosmos of Herbert’s own day) is *geocentric*, his soul is and ought to be radically *theocentric*: “...there the circumference earth is, heav’n the centre.”³¹⁶ It is after all not that important to what extant one or the other systems of cosmology are *epistemologically* true: yet the world within, the *theocentric* revolving of the soul marks the beginning and the end of Christian life. In *Man* the whole Pythagorean concept of the relationship between the earth and heavens is exposed:

Man is all symmetry,
Full of proportions, one limb to another,
And to all the world besides:
Each part may call the furthest, brother:
For head with foot hath private amity,
And both with moon and tides.

...

For us the winds do blow,
The earth doth rest, heav’n move, and fountains flow.(...)³¹⁷

The ending, however, stresses the de-centralising effect of building “a brave Palace” within the heart of man: the given Pythagorean conceit is to *un-cover*, or *dis-cover* the eternal task of humanity. The calling to serve God – i.e. the contents of the final stanza of the poem – as if legitimises the metaphor of universal harmony. If it is primarily a metaphor, it is, after all, a world-to-be, an insight into the providential and free designs of the Living God.

Herbert’s “wicked” naivety is a conscious gesture of poetic ingenuity. When thematising the art of alchemy, he strives to *per-vert* the idea of a “technology” of salvation for a kind of perverse transubstantiation: it is the “new life” in Christ that matters, the “transubstantiation” initiated by God himself. It is grafted onto the famous ending of St Paul’s grand song of love in his first letter to the Corinthians, 13, 9-12: “videmus nunc per speculum

³¹⁵ Herbert, CEW, p. 153

³¹⁶ Herbert, CEW, p. 35

in enigmatē, tunc autem facie ad faciem. Nunc cognosco ex parte, tunc autem cognoscam sicut et cognitus sum.” Our understanding of God’s will is a matter of eschatology, not a magic formula. This Pauline maxim is clearly to be seen in the 3rd stanza:

A man that looks on glass,
On it may stay his eye;
Or if he pleaseth, through it pass,
And then the heav’n espy.³¹⁸

In that sense, there is not a difference between the “knowledgeable” and the “primitives”. The end is *yet-to-come*, it is unknown, since God himself has not deigned to make it known. Doing the will of God makes one “partake” on the gradual process of unfolding the transubstantiation. Alchemy can thus be *re-established, re-conceited* to convey a “new, purified” language:

All may of thee partake:
Nothing can be so mean,
Which with this tincture (for thy sake)
Will not grow bright and clean.

A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine:
Who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,
Makes that and th’ action fine.

This is the famous stone
That turneth all to gold:
For that which God doth touch and own
Cannot for less be told.³¹⁹

Herbert thus often emphasises his apparent incompetence in reference to poetic techniques and the art of metaphor. His eloquence also seems to aspire to a state of negative *iubilatio* (just as the “groans” and “sighs”): if there is no adequate expression of the Ineffable, the adequate expression can be radically in-adequate and yet perfectly proper. In *A True Hymn* the basic idea is the correspondence of the soul and the words:

³¹⁷ Herbert, CEW, pp. 88-9

³¹⁸ Herbert, CEW, p. 180

³¹⁹ *ibid*

The fineness which a hymn or psalm affords,
Is, when the soul unto the lines accords.³²⁰

God can accept even a broken verse, as long as it is “tuned” into Him. Ultimately it is
God who speaks:

Whereas if th' heart be moved,
Although the verse be somewhat scant.
God doth supply th want.
As when th' heart says (sighing to be approved)
O could I love! and stops: God writeth, Loved.³²¹

In *The Forerunners*, the poem rotates around a simple confession “Thou art still my
God.” The lofty metaphors of love poetry have been profaned, so even such a simple sentence
does its part. After all, there is not much that can be added to it, anyway:

Let foolish lovers, if they will love dung,
With canvas, not with arras clothe their shame:
Let folly speak in her own native tongue.
True beauty dwells on high: ours is a flame
But borrow'd thence to light us thither.
Beauty and beauteous words should go together.

Yet if you go, I pass not; take your way:
For Thou art still my God is all that ye
Perhaps with more embellishment can say.
Go birds of spring: let winter have his fee,
Let a bleak paleness chalk the door,
So all within be livelier than before.³²²

It is interesting to note the element of fire: “ours is a flame”, since it connotes a
basically Herclitean notion. Fire is the element of consumption and renewal. It is, indeed,
also a term used by the mystics, namely the Spanish mystic St John of the Cross. It is the
power of God's mysterious life in one's life, grafted onto Christ. In the given poem, the
expectation of the coming end of life makes the power to produce “sweet phrases, lovely
metaphors” a ridiculously secular enterprise. The repeated simple confession devours the

³²⁰ Herbert, CEW, p. 164

³²¹ Herbert, CEW, p. 165

³²² Herbert, CEW, p. 173

poem as a “self-consuming artifact” in as much the power of fire is the epitome of the process of unification with God, the giver of life. The unspeakable is to be self-consumed; it is to inspire the movement of praise, which ends in the paradox of *iubilatio*: a confession is an act of love, not eloquence. The metaphysical tension between the two thus recalls the Herclitean notion of paradoxes being united in the Logos. The Pythagorean notion of harmony thus arguably suffers a similar stroke, which it had already suffered in the first attack of Heraclitus on the notion. Herbert’s triumph of conceit is its failure.

III. Henry Vaughan or the problem of transubstantiation

III.1. Introduction

The position of **Henry Vaughan** (1621-1695) within the metaphysical school is a special one – one group of critics describes him as a mere imitator of Herbert, another one sees him as a distinct poet occupying a specific place within the school³²³. He might lack the power of Donne's metaphor or the grace and sophistication of Herbert's conceits, nevertheless, his poetry undoubtedly enlarges the scope of English metaphysical poetry. Vaughan's relations to hermetic philosophy stress an important aspect of his work: the reality of faith transcends the finite world in creating a place of new beginning. It is the harmony to come, the freedom of a newly-born Christian.

III.2. The problem of conversion

Henry Vaughan's first two books of poetry resemble much of the educated poetry of the time as well as the general interests of a university graduate in the first half of the 17th century.³²⁴ His first book of poetry Poems with the Tenth Satire of Juvenal Englished (1646) is dedicated "To All Ingenious Lovers of Poetry" and contains a mix of occasional pieces and a felicitous translation of Juvenal's *Tenth Satire*. His second collection *Olor Iscanus* is of more interest – indeed, its very name refers to an important topos of Vaughan's poetry, his country retreat around the river Usk. *To the River Isca*, the first poem of the collection, ushers the reader into the intimate mystery of the place where most of the poems were written. It is a *retreat*, a secluded place, fresh and, indeed, *harmonious*. A spree of musical metaphors is used to express the music of the river's flowing; and the poem ends in a benediction:

³²³ Notably Elizabeth Holmes, in her interesting book length study Henry Vaughan and the Hermetic Philosophy, Haskell House: New York, 1966.

Honour, Beauty,
Faith and Duty,
Delight and Truth,
With Love, and Youth
 Crown all about thee! And what ever *Fate*
 Impose elsewhere, whether the graver state,
 Or some toy else, may those *loud*, and *anxious cares*
 For *dead* and *dying things* (the common wares
 And *shows* of time) ne'er break thy peace, nor make
 Thy *reposed arms* to a new war awake!
 But *freedom, safety, joy and bliss*
 United in one loving *kiss*
 Surround thee quite, and *style* thy borders
 *The land redeemed from all disorders!*³²⁵

In the Latin preface, Vaughan explains his personal history "Ad Posterios"; in particular, he mentions he "lived at a time when religious schism had divided and fragmented the English people, amongst the furies of priest and populace."³²⁶ His choice of the retreat is a conscious decision, for "it is a land *redeemed* from all disorders," a place of peaceful contemplation on the nature of Creation. *To His Retired Friend, an Invitation to Brecknock* is driven by a sense of sharp distinction between the worlds of "towns" and the paradise-like life at Brecknock. The intimate contact with the natural world gives life its true *Maß*: it is a place one was born for, and where he is able to ripen and mature:

Come then! and while the slow icicle hangs
 At the stiff thatch, and winter's frosty pangs
 Benumb the year, blithe (as of old) let us
 'Midst noise and war, of peace, and mirth discuss.
 This portion thou wert born for: why should we
 Vex at the time's ridiculous misery?³²⁷

This sense of difference is vitally important for the whole of Vaughan's poetry; or – so to speak – for the gentle subtlety of his genius. As in Donne's poetry, Vaughan's cosmos is a *contracted* one. The contraction takes place within a *con-verted* universe, in the original sense

³²⁴ In fact, it is only generally assumed that Vaughan underwent training in Oxford. There is a record of his brother Thomas' residence there in 1638 and Henry's presence is thus expected. However, no clear evidence exists.

³²⁵ Vaughan, H. *The Complete Poems*. Ed. A. Rudrum. Penguin, 1976 (hereafter "Vaughan, CP"), p. 71-2

³²⁶ Vaughan, CP, p. 64

³²⁷ Vaughan, CP, p. 79

of the word. His concept of harmony is thus always a harmony within a clearly delineated universe: this world can be taken as harmonious only within a specific environment. Thus the nature of Vaughan's conversion is deeply affected by his feeling for the hermetic meanings of natural phenomena.

The rest of the mentioned collection comprises of mainly occasional pieces: elegies and critical poems honouring various poets and playwrights (notably Shakespeare's collaborator John Fletcher, poet William Cartwright, or perhaps the most popular of all Jacobean masks' librettists Sir William Davenant). The last part of the collection contains Vaughan's translations of Ovid's poems from his exile in Tomis near the Black Sea, Ausonius' *Cupido*, 13 parts from the famous Boethius' treatise *Consolation of Philosophy*, and last but not least 7 odes, originally written by a Polish Jesuit Casimir Sarbiewski. The choice of the poems is not a random one: indeed, the red thread of all of the pieces is a sense of nostalgia for a place of rest, for what Comenius so ingeniously calls *centrum securitatis*. Ovid's exile (in Vaughan's actualising edition) is marked by a deep feeling of loss of his poetic companions (*Tristia V iii – To His Fellow-Poets at Rome upon the Birth-Day of Bacchus*), loss of his friend's credibility (*Ex Ponto III vii – To His Friends (after His Many Solicitations) Refusing to Petition Caesar for His Release*), or his "inconstancy" (*Ex Ponto IV iii – To His Inconstant Friend*). Interestingly enough, in the last piece mentioned, Vaughan adds a short subtitle to the translation: "translated for the use of all Judases of this touch-stone age." In the last poem from Ovid (*Tristia III, iii – To His Wife at Rome, When He Was Sick*), the poet asks his beloved wife not to mourn after his death; and to keep a sober remembrance of him for the posterity. Ausonius' *Cupido* is based on a painting of crucified Cupid: his victims revenge his unwelcome attacks. In the end, Cupid's punishment exceeds his "crimes", and he gets loose to plan his mischievous activities. However, he has been made "innocent" and Fate is to take responsibility for his "crimes." The poem can be interpreted on

a number of levels; the sense of a blind fortune ruling over human events being perhaps the most obvious one, the more so because of the image of the blinded Cupid. The search for a *centrum securitatis* in the light of this world's vain exploits is also the theme of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. In philosophical contemplation on the nature of this unstable world one attains a sense of detachment which grants a peaceful retreat even in face of appalling life circumstances. Boethius' contemplations in Vaughan's rendering (or one might even say "adaptations") acquire a much more dramatic resonance than the sober prose of the original. In the second translation, for example, Vaughan changes Boethius' philosophical reference into an astrological one; and – interestingly enough – in line 20 of the very same poem changes Boethius' *stabilem* (i.e. steadfast) into "harmonious", stressing thus the ambiguity of the poem. While asking about the "spirit" wheeling "the harmonious world", the poem ends in an image of a "chained soul":

And the brave soul lies chained about
 With outward cares, whose pensive weight
 Sinks down her eyes from their first height,
 And clean contrary to her birth
 Pores on this vile and foolish earth.³²⁸

Th instability of human dealings is the chief theme of the fourth translation from Boethius': God has given everything its proper order, yet "Only human actions thou/ Hast no care of, but to the flow/ And ebb of Fortune leav'st them all (...)".³²⁹ The God invoked here is nameless and unknown: "Who e'er thou art, that from above/ Dost in such order all things move!" The poem ends in a call for a harmonious settling of the human world:

But with that faith thou guid'st the heaven,
 Settle this earth, and make them even.³³⁰

The rest of the translations follow the same themes: instability of human life (using the old image of the Wheel of Fortune) sharpens the difference between mortality and

³²⁸ Vaughan, CP, p. 113

³²⁹ Vaughan, CP, p. 114

³³⁰ Vaughan, CP, p. 115

immortality (since 'tis enacted by this divine decree/ That nothing mortal shall eternal be.³³¹), and finally longs for the lost innocence of the mythical Golden Age. In *II v* Vaughan edits Boethius' text by adding the modifier "white" in the first line: "Happy that first *white* age," stressing its blessedness and innocence.³³² The theme of nostalgia for the innocent, original state of mankind in perfect harmony with its Creator, indeed, becomes one of the key themes of Vaughan's devotional poetry; and marks a significant aspect of his conversion. In the last translation from Book II, Chapter viii, Vaughan extends Boethius' meaning by referring to the state of contemporary England:

O happy Nation then were you
If love which doth all things subdue,
That rules the spacious heaven, and brings
Plenty and Peace upon his wings,
Might rule you too! and without guile
Settle once more this floating Isle!³³³

More specifically religious poems, as it were, are Vaughan's translations of "Casimir". The themes of the poems mark all the main aspects of his future poetic development: longing for an innocent world fulfilling God's commands, a deep sense of peace at the core of Creation, retreating into nature and, finally, the themes of eternity and light. The very last of his translations from Casimir is his *Epode iii* based on Horace's Ode "Beatus ille qui procul negotiis." It is, indeed, a praise "of a religious life" in which one contemplates "the *green fields, and bowers, / Where he in veils, and shades doth see / The back parts of the Deity.*"³³⁴ The poem is followed by a Latin Ode on the River Usk, the place of Vaughan's retreat and his child's innocence. Its conceit is a musical one: it talks about the various sounds produced by the river. Its final climax recalls the myth of the Thracian poet Orpheus whose music attracted and tamed even the wild beasts.³³⁵ His body was torn to pieces and his head and lyre was sent

³³¹ *II iii*, Vaughan, CP, p. 118

³³² Cf. Rudrum's notes to his edition of Vaughan's *Complete Poems*, p. 519, italics is mine

³³³ Vaughan, CP, p. 122

³³⁴ Vaughan, CP, p. 128

³³⁵ See *Metamorphoses*, Book X

on the river Hebrus. The Usk in Vaughan's poem is equated with the mythical river, as it is believed to move Orpheus' dismembered parts "along the waters", together with his famous lyre.³³⁶

All the mentioned topics mark the various aspects of Vaughan's specific conversion to Christianity. His faith is, indeed, a faith in the fundamentally hermetic contents of Creation which is to be sought under the "shades and veils" of natural phenomena. His faith is marked by a deep sense of disharmony of this life which, however, liberates an even greater longing for the "world in tune". His numerous allusions to Pythagorean harmonious cosmology acquire a specific gravity in becoming hermetic symbols of the *theocentric universe*: the act of *αρμοζειν* as the act of joining for Henry Vaughan is an *act of faith*. Conversion is a re-centring of the entire cosmos: the infinity outside is to correspond to the infinity inside. "As above, so below," is the first hermetic maxim according to Dion Fortune.³³⁷ The sense of harmony is ignited with the hermetic Divine Spark, as it is aptly depicted in the title as well as the initial emblem of Silex Scintillans. In that sense, Vaughan's decision for harmony and a set of metaphorical concepts connected with it is an original contribution to the vast array of meanings associated with harmony in English metaphysical poetry.

III.3. Vaughan's "re-formation"

In the initial Latin poem of the first part of Vaughan's opus magnum Silex Scintillans, the poet talks about his "reformation by another means" (*alia das renovare via*). His heart of rock had to be overcome with an even greater force: God's thunderbolt strikes it, and flames consume the flint of the heart so that it can become a heart of flesh. In *The Author's Preface to the Following Hymns* Vaughan repeats Herbert's complaint about the state of contemporary English poetry and the aspirations of English poets:

³³⁶ See *Ad Fluvium Iscam*, Vaughan, CP, p. 130

³³⁷ See Fortune, Dion and Knight, Gareth: Principles of Hermetic Philosophy. Thoთ Publications: Loughborough: 1999, p. 14

"That this kingdom hath abounded with those ingenious persons, which in the late notion are termed *wits*, is too well known. Many of them having cast away all their fair portion of time, in no better employments, than a deliberate search, or excogitation of *idle words*, and a most vain, insatiable desire to be reputed *poets*; leaving behind them no other monuments of those excellent abilities conferred upon them, but such as they may (with a *predecessor* of theirs) term *parricides*, and a soul-killing issue; for that is the *Βραβεῖον*, and laureate *crowns*, which *idle poems* will certainly bring to their unrelenting authors."³³⁸

Poetry is, indeed, to serve God's decrees: no minor poetry is worthy of such a noble title. In that sense, Vaughan's conversion is driven by a deep sense of a total *re-formation* of himself as well as of all the poetic production of the time. It is no surprise therefore that so many of Vaughan's poems reiterate this basic reformation. Numerous titles of his poems contain words with the *re-* prefix: *Regeneration, Resurrection and Immortality, Man's Fall and Recovery, The Retreat, The Relapse, The Resolve, Repentance, Retirement (I and II), Recovery* and *The Revival*. Even more numerous are these prefixes in the texture of the poems. Let us now look more closely at the re-formation principle in Vaughan's poetry.

The third poem of the first *Silex, Regeneration*, tells a story of a mysterious conversion. It has a close affinity with his brother Thomas' hermetic work *Lumen de lumine*, and recalls various mystical stories based on the topos of a path. The soul enters a "grove" of "stately height, whose branches met/ And mixed on every side" where it meets its "new spring." This new existence is marked by archetypal images of garden-paradise: spicy air, azure heaven ("chequered with snowy fleeces"), garlands, fountain and, indeed, *music*. Interestingly enough, Vaughan uses here a strong metaphysical image in regards to music:

Only a little fountain lent
 Some use for ears,
 And on the dumb shades language spent
 The music of her tears (...)³³⁹

The very process of regeneration is associated with a new feeling for Creation: indeed, the Creation itself is made readable to a regenerate Christian. Musicality of tears is being

³³⁸ Vaughan, CP, p. 138

³³⁹ Vaughan, CP, p. 148

joined here with the power of the fountain, which clearly alludes on John 4, 14: "sed aqua quam dabo ei fiet in eo fons aquae salientis in vitam aeternam." Tears are *harmonized* since they are orchestrated into the fountain of God's grace. As in a number of other poems, Vaughan gives here also a clear Scriptural reference of the poem. It is taken from the fourth chapter of The Song of Songs (or The Song of Solomon): "Arise O north, and come thou south-wind, and blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out." The Song of Songs is a song of passionate love, traditionally taken as an allegorical expression of God's love for human soul. The act of *re-generation* thus acquires numerous meanings: it is - first of all - a *re-birth*: a new beginning. It is also a *re-storation* of the original calling of Creation, and thus also humanity. It is a *harmonious* world: a world which has been made into language, which has become a *communication* in the original sense of the word: a *sharing*. The act of language, indeed, seals the general harmony, since it is *language itself* which is to grant and *communicate* the *joining* of things. As in Donne, the act of *αρμοζειν* touches the very principle of *ποιειν*: in a *re-generate* world *ποιειν* is tantamount to *αρμοζειν*, since it is the very process of *communication*.

The communication of Creation, or more precisely, the *communicability* of Creation as the actual language of God's communication with man is to be *re-stored*. This cannot be done unless man *re-forms* his ways. An apt example of Vaughan's attitude to language is *Religion*: the basic conceit of the poem is based precisely on understanding the Creation as the language of God:

My God, when I walk in those groves,
 And leaves thy spirit doth still fan,
 I see in each shade that there grows
 An Angel talking with a man.³⁴⁰

Everything has been made into language: in fact, numerous natural phenomena always seem to tell a biblical story, and thus Vaughan *joins* the contemporary and the biblical time-

space. The question Vaughan asks is whether the "truce" of God known from the Old Testament and obviously sealed in the sacrifice of His Son, has been "broke"? The problem is not human dis-ability to read the signs of God's presence, but the *actualising* of God's language by miracles. They seem to have ceased, although they were meant to "stay/ The tokens of the Church, and peace (...)"³⁴¹ In the explanation given, Vaughan reiterates the myth of the loss of the Golden Age and the gradual decadence of the original state:

But in her (i.e. *the Church's*) long, and hidden course
Passing through the earth's dark veins,
Grows still from better unto worse,
And both her taste, and colour stains (...)³⁴²

The decadence is interestingly accompanied by "false *echoes*, and confused sounds" which mark their dis-harmonious nature. The only way of *re-storing* the state of direct communication with God - i.e. such a one in which the act of Creation constantly continues in ever-new revelations and miracles - is to *re-form* humanity, or as Vaughan says, to *heal*. The last stanza of the poem brings forward a complex audio-visual image which both *veils* and *unveils* the mystery of *transubstantiation*:

Heal then these waters, Lord; or bring thy flock,
Since these are troubled, to thy springing rock,
Look down great Master of the feast; O shine,
And turn once more our *Water* into *Wine!*³⁴³

The mystery is con-centrated into a complex sensual image, yet the event itself is extra-sensual: the theological meaning of the sacrament as a visible sign of invisible grace acquires here a new relevance. Indeed, the sacrament here offered to be transubstantiated is not just "matter", but the entire humanity. The *re-form* therefore touches the existential, *substantial* nature of human being. The meaning fuses both the theological as well as alchemical and hermetic aspects: *re-form* is an act of a *new* creation, or the *presence* of

³⁴⁰ Vaughan, CP, p. 155

³⁴¹ Vaughan, CP, p. 156, l. 28

³⁴² Vaughan, CP, p. 156, l. 33-36

Creation. Young's Doctrine and Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Poetry reaches a similar conclusion in regards to the general Vaughan's labelling as a "mystical poet":

Mysticism's definitive characteristics is not ecstatic passion, but rather the apprehension through grace of God's timeless presence.³⁴⁴

Mysticism is the quality of re-formed spiritual sight: it is the state in which God *communicates*, i.e. *creates*. Since His Creation is primarily *creatio ex nihilo*, it is always a true miracle.

One of Vaughan's most celebrated poems *The Morning-Watch* expands on the mystical intuition of the direct apprehension of God's creative and restorative act in the Book of Creation. A vision of dawn or a re-generate day opens a rich sensual spectacle of visual and sound sensations:

O joys! Infinite sweetness! with what flowers,
And shoots of glory, my soul breaks, and buds!
 All the long hours
 Of night, and rest
 Through the still shrouds
 Of sleep, and clouds,
 This dew fell on my breast;
 O how it *bloods*,
And *spirits* all my earth! hark! In what rings,
And *hymning circulations* the quick world
 Awakes, and sings;
 The rising winds,
 And falling springs,
 Birds, beasts, all things
 Adore him in their kinds.
 Thus all is hurled
In scared *hymns*, and *order*, the great *chime*
And *symphony* of nature. Prayer is
 The world in tune,
 A spirit-voice,
 And vocal joys
 Whose *echo* is heaven's bliss.
 O let me climb
When I lie down! The pious soul by night
Is like a clouded star, whose beams though said
 To shed their light
 Under some cloud

³⁴³ Vaughan, CP, p. 156, l. 49-52

³⁴⁴ Young, p. 67

Yet are above,
 And shine, and move
 Beyond that misty shroud
 So in my bed
 That curtained grave, though sleep, like ashes, hide
 My lamp, and life, both shall in thee abide.³⁴⁵

The complex conceit of this poem shows a harmonious order of Creation. It is worth noting – as E. C. Pettet does in his book Of Paradise and Light³⁴⁶ - that the poem falls into nine sections, which, indeed, is the number of heavenly spheres and the choirs of angels. So the reference to a harmonious universe is granted in the very structure of the poem. Such a harmony of Creation is a situation of "joy and infinite sweetness"; in other words, this fallen *finite* world has been *transubstantiated* and already partakes on God's *infiniteness*. The act of *transubstantiation* calls even the unconscious parts of Creation into the *consonance* or "symphony of nature".³⁴⁷ Indeed, it is a "quick world", and *animated* one in the hermetic sense of the word. Prayer becomes the central concept of the poem: "Prayer is/ The world in tune (...)." Prayer as such is an act of communication with God on a personal level. As it is understood here, it is no mere soothsaying: it is an act of *sharing* in which Creation becomes an infinite abundance of language. The animated nature of all creatures is opened for a *tuned* instrument. The old doctrine of sympathetic vibration³⁴⁸ is here re-constructed: man in prayer becomes the *centre* "whose *echo* is heaven's bliss." It is the man himself who is endowed with the capacity for harmonizing "dis-similar" images; however, this is done within a radically *theocentric* universe, since this is so in a specifically *focused* environment, in the act of prayer. Vaughan's *re-formation* is microcosmic; since the microcosmic nature of his micro-dramas of faith is eminently individual. This individuality, however, shows the drama of the

³⁴⁵ Vaughan, CP, p. 179

³⁴⁶ Pettet, E.C.: Of Paradise and Light: A Study of Vaughan's Silex Scintillans, CUP, 1960, p. 118-37. I am indebted for this reference to Rudrum's notes to his edition of Vaughan's poems.

³⁴⁷ Interestingly, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) sees this phenomenon as substantial part of the Christian doctrine of Creation: "Alles, was ist, ist seinem Ursprung und der tragende Grund aller Dinge. Alles, was ist, nach vernünftig, weil aus der schöpferischen Vernunft kommend." Salz der Erde. Ein Gespräch mit Peter Seewald. Wilhelm Heyne Verlag: München, 2004, p. 58

³⁴⁸ See also the relevant chapter about the problem in Hollander's book Untuning of the Sky, pp. 137-8

"double infinity" of Blaise Pascal: the outer and inner infinity. In the inner infinity one finds the *Vorbild* of the infinity of Creation.

III.4. Vaughan's hermetic world – innocence of the first intuition

Vaughan's feeling for Creation and the entire *Weltall* is – as has already been said – a hermetic one. The point of departure of hermetic teaching is a belief that natural world is entirely sentient. Elizabeth Holmes characterises Vaughan's hermetic approach to Nature in the following words:

"His intercourse with this (i.e. *sentient*) Nature alternates between conscious discipleship and a kind of unconscious interpenetration of himself with a 'Spirit' which his special philosophy taught him to find in the objects of Nature, but which he could not have found had not some inner experience of his own sharpened his investigation."³⁴⁹

Vaughan's hermeticism was definitely deeply influenced by his brother Thomas, who, having been deprived of his clerical living by Cromwell's Independents, pursued a study of alchemy and Agrippa's Hermetic philosophy. He studied alchemy in Oxford and London and wrote treatises on hermetic problems – e.g. Anima Magica Abscondita, Anthroposofia Theomagica, Magia Adamica or Lumen de lumine. For Holmes, Henry's hermeticism is "less credulous on some points" than that of his brother's, "but more religious".³⁵⁰ His conversion is – as I have tried to show – substantially understood as *re-generation* or *re-birth*. It is a point of waking up, of igniting the Divine Spark in his heart, which has the power of *re-collection* the original Unity of Creation.³⁵¹ The imagery associated with this *re-formation-re-collection* is usually accompanied with a strong visual image, typically a *ray of light*:

(...) Stars are of mighty use: the night
Is dark, and long;
The road foul, and where one goes right,
Six may go wrong.
One twinkling *ray*
Shot o'er some cloud,

³⁴⁹ Holmes, Elizabeth: Henry Vaughan and the Hermetic Philosophy, Haskell House: New York, 1966, p. 6

³⁵⁰ *ibid*, p. 16

³⁵¹ See Fortune, D. and Knight, G.: Principles of Hermetic Philosophy, p. 16

May clear much way
And guide a crowd.
(*'Joy of my life! while left me here'*)³⁵²

(...) And walking from his sun, when past
That glimmering *ray*
Cuts through the heavy mists in haste
Back to his day (...)
(*'Silence, and stealth of days'*)³⁵³

(...) Affliction thus, mere pleasure is,
And hap that will,
If thou be in't, 'tis welcome still;
But since thy *rays*
In sunny days
Thou dost thus lend
And freely spend,
Ah! what shall I return for this?
(*'Cheerfulness'*)³⁵⁴

The world is to be *lit* with the *rays* and *beams* of heavenly light, and in this light the animated (and *contracted*) world again becomes a readable script of the Book of Creation. In that sense the recurring image of eternity is almost always accompanied by a visual effect ("bright *shoots* of eternity", "a white, celestial thought", "The heavens (some say)/ Are a fiery-liquid light (...)", "I saw Eternity the other night/ Like a great *Ring* of pure and endless light (...)" etc.). This *ray of light* re-settles the reality, and "dismembered" parts re-join the general sympathy of things. Vaughan's poetry is characteristic for its sensitiveness to the *universal* affinity of things, the "tie of bodies". As I have already remarked, the problem of regeneration in Vaughan is also connected with the doctrine of Divine Spark. Both hermetic and Christian teachings stress the importance of *re-birth*, and return to the original childlike innocence of vision. Perhaps the best instance of this is the poem *Resurrection and Immortality*:

(...) For no thing can to *Nothing* fall, but still
Incorporates by skill,
And then returns, and from the womb of things

³⁵² Vaughan, CP, p. 177, italics is mine.

³⁵³ Vaughan, CP, p. 181, italics is mine.

³⁵⁴ Vaughan, CP, p. 184, italics is mine.

Such treasure brings
 As *Pheonix*-like renew'th
 Both life, and youth
 For a preserving spirit doth still pass
 Untainted through this mass,
 Which doth resolve, produce, and ripen all
 That to it fall;
 Nor are those births which we
 Thus suffering see
 Destroyed at all; but when time's restless wave
 Their substance doth deprave
 And the more noble *Essence* finds his house
 Sickly, and loose,
 He, ever young, doth wing
 Unto that spring,
 And *source* of spirits, where he takes his lot
 Till time no more shall rot
 His passive cottage; which (though laid aside,)
 Like some spruce bride,
 Shall one day rise, and clothed with shining light
 All pure, and bright
 Re-marry to the soul, for 'tis most plain
 Thou only fall'st to be refined again.³⁵⁵

The *re-birth* is granted because "the womb of things" continually *re-generates* "life, and youth". The energy of life, "a preserving spirit", does not allow things to fall into oblivion; their *essence* stays on. Christian belief in the "resurrection of the body" is understood here as an alchemical act: a *re-finement*. The *sympathy* of things is, clearly, based on the One and Only "womb" of things; because of the primeval unity of essence, the *trans-substantiation* in both its alchemical and Christian meanings is possible. The harmonious reality - the insoluble unity of the Pythagorean monad – thus starts off as an act of *initiation* into the teaching, inasmuch the Christian conversion marks the new *initiatio*, a new *beginning*. The progression of the monad, the act of creation, is thus clearly based on an *act of faith*: it is a *decision, an intuition of harmony*.

This basic essence of hermeticism is usually referred to as "*quintessence*". Apart from the four traditional essences of things (water, fire, air and earth), this is a *refined* essence *beyond* the visible *Gestalt* of the matter. In The Three Principles of Divine Essence Jacob

Böhme identifies the quintessence with the "pure and clear" essence, the outcome of the last process of alchemical refinement:

... a thing that separateth, and bringeth the pure and cleere, from the impure: and that bringeth the life of all sorts of Spirits, or all sorts of Essences, into its highest... degree... Yea it is the cause of the shining, or of the lustre: it is a cause that all creatures see and live.³⁵⁶

This pure and clear vision of the unity of things interpenetrates Vaughan's work: it is not, however, a *chain of Being*, a scale of things from the basest towards the highest. It is much more this sense of universal polyphonic harmony orchestrating the world. In *Repentance* the conceit circulates around all the respective themes – a ray of divine light ignites the poet's sense of Creation. Its unity and magnificence even more emphasize his sense of guilt:

(...) Wherefore, pierced through with grief, my sad
Seduced soul sighs up to thee,
To thee who with true light art clad
And seest all things just as they be.
(...)

It was last day
(Touched with the guilt of my own way)
I sat alone, and taking up
The bitter cup,
Through all thy fair, and various store
Sought out what might outvie my score.
The blades of grass, thy creatures feeding,
The trees, their leaves; the flowers, their seeding;
The dust, of which I am a part
The stones much softer than my heart,
The drops of rain, the sighs of wind,
The stars to which I am stark blind,
The dew thy herbs drink up by night,
The beams they warm them at i'the light,
All that have signature or life,
I summoned to decide this strife,
And lest I should lack for arrears,
A spring ran by, I told her tears,
But when these came unto the scale,
My sins alone outweighed them all.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁵ Vaughan, CP, pp. 152-3

³⁵⁶ Böhme, J.: *The Three Principles of the Divine Essence*, trans. J. Sparrow, London, 1648, p. 105, for this I am indebted to A. Rudrum

³⁵⁷ Vaughan, CP, pp. 206-7

In fact, the inability to *join* the orchestra of Creation, makes the sense of unity even stronger. The vision of Creation, after all, is the intuition of innocence. Vaughan's reference to childhood and children's sensibility thus acquire its *original* biblical meaning. The "rebirth" to "become little children" is to restore the original, initial vision of the magnificence and sacredness of all being. In *Child-hood*, the original experience of a child becomes a "dazzling" vision:

I cannot reach it; and my striving eye
Dazzles at it, as at eternity.
Were now that chronicle alive,
Those white designs which children drive,
And the thoughts of each harmless hour,
With their content too in my power,
Quickly would I make my path even,
And by mere playing go to Heaven.³⁵⁸

The rest of the poem polemises with the ideology of "business and weighty action" as superior to child-playing, for, indeed, it is childhood in which the mysteries of God are "open" to sight:

An age of mysteries! which he
Must live twice, that would God's face see;
Which *Angels* guard, and with it play,
Angels! which foul men drive away.³⁵⁹

It is, actually, the *narrow way* of the Gospel to return back to one's childhood and "scan/ Thee (i.e. *the childhood*), more than ere I studied man" (l. 40). The intuition of the first innocence is the intuition of unity as the soul leaves "the sea of light" (as in *The Water-fall*). The innocent vision of the primeval light is also the intuition and the key to the concept of harmony as it is found in Vaughan's work.

III.5. Harmony as an experience of faith

In *Church-Service* Vaughan invokes God as the "God of harmony, and love." The conceit – as in some of Herbert's poems – rotates around the theme of "sighs and groans": the

³⁵⁸ Vaughan, CP, p. 288

groans of the "holy dove" find their echo in the "sighs and groans" of the poet. The vision of harmony, however, is based on the traditional topos of a "choir of souls", in which the poet finds himself helpless, as he cannot properly join. His hope is the longing of Creation "by thy martyrs' blood/ Sealed and made good/ Present" which are echoed in his effort. As in other poems, harmony for Vaughan is experienced in faith: God *joins* things together, and in the act of faith (which is at the same time an act of vision) the harmony of universe is to be seen. In part II of *Christ's Nativity* the consort of universe (the music of the spheres) – in the Pythagorean sense – responds to the re-formation of a sinner:

How kind is heaven to man! If here
 One sinner doth amend
 Straight is joy, and every sphere
 In music doth contend (...) ³⁶⁰

The conversion, or *opening up to the act of faith*, makes the universe respond in a stock Pythagorean image of the music of spheres. Indeed, the God's music is something substantially different from the "music and mirth" of man. Vaughan uses the traditional division between *musica speculativa* and *musica practica* and their ethical evaluation, and incorporates them into the world of faith. In *The Tempest*, the concord of Creation is attacked only by the intemperate man who longs for vain "discoveries", although the "trees, flowers, all/ Strive upwards still, and point him (i.e. *the man*) the way home." His decision is unmusical, it is an act of rejection the consort of Creation:

Yet hugs he still his dirt; the *stuff* he wears
 And painted trimming takes down both his eyes,
 Heaven hath less beauty than the dust he spies,
 And money better music than the *spheres*. ³⁶¹

In the preceding poem with a typically Herbertian title, *Affliction (I)*, the notion of concord seem to suffer almost a Heraclitean stroke: "Vicissitude plays all the game./ Nothing

³⁵⁹ Vaughan, CP, p. 289

³⁶⁰ Vaughan, CP, p. 200

³⁶¹ Vaughan, CP, p. 221

that stirs,/ Or hath a name,/ But waits upon this wheel (...) ³⁶² The conceit, however, soothes the conflict: it is God's act by which he aims at "keying disordered man":

Thus doth God *key* disordered man
(Which none else can,)
Tuning his breast to rise, or fall;
And by a sacred, needful art
Like strings, stretch every part
Making the whole most musical. ³⁶³

In faith all these "afflictions" are understandable; they are to restore man into conformity with God's initial plan, his harmonious constitution. Thus even the paradox of suffering finds its successful rendering in the paradoxical harmony of dis-order: in fact, the metaphor becomes even stronger because the apparent absence makes the desire *a free act of faith*. In *Ascension-Hymn*, the conceit of ascension takes a form of mystical ascent, as known from orthodox Christian mysticism (e.g. the work of St John of the Cross). Man must "undress" its former clothing, the body of "dust and clay". The story of ascent is based on a commonplace cosmological simile:

If a star
Should leave the sphere,
She must first mar
Her flaming wear,
And after fall, for in her dress
Of glory, she cannot transgress. ³⁶⁴

A star is fixed with her "flaming wear". The transgression is impossible if it still reflects the ray of God's original light, his "glory". So it is the case of man: his Eden being was "intimate with Heaven, as light", nevertheless, he had fallen and his body is now "soiled" and cannot be recovered, unless the alchemist-like God, "the Refiner" comes and "breaks forth." His fire creates and re-creates at the same time: He will create man's new body of bright light, He can re-harmonize the weight of the body and "make clay ascend more quick than light." This transformation, or alchemical transubstantiation, however, takes place within

³⁶² Vaughan, CP, p. 219

³⁶³ Vaughan, CP, p. 220

a clearly defined world of faith: indeed, the hymn itself being an act of faith. The use of the cosmological simile is powerful precisely because of the pre-conceived harmony of faith.

In fact, this is perhaps the specifically Vaughnian concept of harmony: in the carefully delineated, "contracted" world, formed by an unconditional conversion, everything undergoes a *substantial change*. This change is marked by a *substantial* difference between what *seems to be* (as interpreted by the evidence of the senses), and what IS when the eyes of faith are open. As in the case of other metaphysicals, Vaughan is well aware that this change must be *re-interpreted*: stock metaphors can bear meaning only as long as they are re-activated, re-founded and re-thought. The images of harmony and the Pythagorean cosmological system, after all, takes its power precisely from the deep acknowledgement that it is a METAPHOR. Becoming metaphor liberates the power of language to convey meanings and images. What Vaughan does, is thus similar to the effort of all metaphysicals: the *transubstantiation* of this fallen world makes it closer to the act of Creation *ex nihilo*. Everything that IS, takes its origin in the process of generating the Son from the Father. The task of a poet is to help *transubstantiate* the world: the world of firm matter CAN become a world ever-new-generated, as long as it is a living language, in other words as long as it is ANIMATED. This is, after all, the starting point of the hermetic tradition, which for Vaughan became not only the *path of knowledge*, but also the *path of language*.

³⁶⁴ Vaughan, CP, p. 245

IV. Andrew Marvell – the garden of words

IV.1. Introduction

The poetry of **Andrew Marvell** (1621-1678) – as the poetry of Donne – was almost unknown before his death. During his lifetime, only occasional and satirical pieces were known. His position in the context of contemporary English culture and politics was marked by his involvement in politics; he was Milton's secretary during Cromwell's dictatorship and a popular MP after the Restoration. His poetry is deeply intimate; it is a report on subtle psychological and spiritual problems. Indeed, as in other metaphysicals, it is a private undertaking, a *microcosm viewing the macrocosm*. Or – to be more precise - his poetics of retreat is a means of understanding the whole. The concept of harmony is thus again *re-centred*: the sense of deep nostalgia, which characterises some of Marvell's most ingenious poems (notably *The Definition of Love* and *To His Coy Mistress*), touches the unattainable notion of infinity. This abyss is marked with the paradoxical incapacity of language. Indeed, the genius of Marvell is the genius of metaphor.

IV.2. Inverted cosmology – *heaven's the centre of the soul*

Marvell's arguably first poem³⁶⁵ *A Dialogue between Thyrsis and Dorinda* is a pastoral dialogue about "Elysium". A sense of deep curiosity, but also anxiety runs through the poem: Dorinda asks what happens after death and wonders about the nature of Elysium. Thyrsis uses the stock metaphor of celestial journey, which, however, proves insufficient as Dorinda – being bound by the earth – cannot imitate the ascent of birds. Thyrsis responds by explaining the substance of celestial journey: "heaven's the centre of the soul". Macrocosmic

³⁶⁵ All quotations of Marvell's poems are from the Penguin edition, prepared by Elizabeth Story Donno, Professor of English at the University of Columbia. In the *Preface*, she talks about editorial difficulties facing all of Marvell's editors. Among the many, it is also the problem of the date of origin. Her ordering of poems is

journey becomes a journey into the infinity of her own being: the centre is INSIDE. Interestingly enough, Marvell uses other stock metaphors associated with the Pythagorean cosmological system:

Oh, there's neither hope nor fear,
There's no wolf, no fox, no bear.
No need of dog to fetch our stray,
Our Lightfoot we may give away;
No oat-pipe's needful; *there thy ears*
*May sleep with music of the spheres.*³⁶⁶

The poem, however, has a dramatic ending. Dorinda faints and wants to be ascertained about the truth of the statements about Elysium by challenging Thyrsis to die with her. Thyrsis agrees and they both silently pass away.

Then let us give Corillo charge o' the sheep,
And thou and I'll pick poppies, and them steep
In wine, and drink on't even till we weep,
So shall we smoothly pass away in sleep.³⁶⁷

The joint suicide offers numerous interpretations: the one that is most plausible is the one of a spiritual *vertigo*: the re-centred world is difficult to master and needs a witness; it is a world substantially dialogical. The truth of the metaphors must be ascertained by an act; it must be sealed as the bond of love. In other words, Dorinda lives in an ambiguous situation, BEFORE the metaphors can be ascertained, BEFORE they can make their sense. There is an abyss between the seeming, the *twice-told* stories and the reality, which is created by a conscious act. In fact, it is an interesting mix of Bacon's *via experimentalis* with the poetics of correspondence. To put it simply, the condition of these metaphors of paradise is a capacity for paradox. In that sense – as in many other Marvell's poems – the old poetics of correspondence is deeply ambiguous, and opens a double infinity OUTSIDE and INSIDE as two equal centres of the Self.

chronological, "in so far as this can be ascertained. As a general rule the copy-text is that of the first printing."
(Hereafter "Marvell, CP"), p. 11

³⁶⁶ Marvell, CP, p. 22

³⁶⁷ Marvell, CP, p. 23

In *A Dialogue, between the Resolved Soul and Created Pleasure* Marvell re-enlivens the medieval form of *disputatio*. Pleasure offers the Resolved Soul all sorts of pleasures of this world: music being one of them. However, as in other instances in metaphysical poetry, this music is deceiving and binding:

PLEASURE

Hark how music then prepares
For thy stay these charming airs;
Which the posting winds recall,
And suspend the river's fall.

SOUL

Had I but any time to lose,
On this I would it all dispose.
Cease, tempter. None can chain a mind
Whom this sweet chordage cannot bind.³⁶⁸

The last offer Pleasure makes to the Resolved Soul is a *via experimentalis* again: before departing for heaven, try the earthly pleasures, because that makes you well aware of what you lose:

Thou shalt know each hidden cause;
And see the future time:
Try what depth the centre draws;
And then to heaven climb.³⁶⁹

As expected, the Soul refuses, however, the ascent is not an act of "knowledge, but humility." Moreover, the centre of universe for Pleasure is still the earth, whereas for the Soul, it is undoubtedly Heaven. It is the *resolution* which counts, not knowledge; and that finally gains her the victory. The *subject* is to win: it is *via experimentalis* the other way round. As Christopher Dawson points out interestingly in his book on the Reformation, *via experimentalis* marked both the efforts of 17th century scientists as well as spiritual masters.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁸ Marvell, CP, p. 26

³⁶⁹ Marvell, CP, p. 27

³⁷⁰ Cf. Dawson, Ch.: *Rozdělení, nebo reforma západního křesťanstva?* Trans. M. Kratochvíl. Vyšehrad: Praha, 1998, p. 174

In fact, the old spiritual warfare is thus a warfare to win one's own soul in conscious effort and experiment. It is an act conceiving the world in paradox.

In one of Marvell's most celebrated poems, *The Definition of Love*, the double-centring of Love is both a paradox and double infinity. The inability to define what "his" love is makes Marvell use a complicated conceit. The topos of the tension between Fate and Love proves insufficient: Fate has, indeed, parted the lovers, yet their union is, in fact, even greater than if they were together. The lovers as two distant poles become the axis of rotation of the world: their impossible union is equal to a "convulsion" of the spherical universe, by which "the world/ Be cramped into a planisphere." The ending is a paradox: Fate having caused the infinity of division paradoxically created the infinity of Love as something never-to-be-attained:

Therefore the love which us doth bind,
But Fate so enviously debars,
Is the conjunction of the mind,
And the opposition of the stars.³⁷¹

This paradoxical union is something created: the terrible infinity of Fate can be overcome only by a conscious effort, by an act of creating. Creating a metaphor is thus something like the projection of the sphere onto a plane, or in the words of the poet "It was begotten by Despair/ Upon Impossibility." Such an impossibility is typical of Marvell, in fact, his metaphors are ingenious in terms of their apparent contradiction. That is what makes his metaphors so live and fresh. The use of stock metaphors tested in the amalgam of contradiction creates a space of free imagination.

The next poem, by far the best known and arguably one of the best poems ever written in the English language, *To His Coy Mistress* is based on a similar concept: the coyness of the mistress makes Marvell create decades of metaphors of impossibility. In fact, "vast eternity" is something so unattainable and beyond imagination that only metaphors can properly

³⁷¹ Marvell, CP, p. 50

interpret this *no-nameness*. The poet keeps persuading his lady to yield to his love, since not doing so makes life just a tedious waiting for death:

The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.³⁷²

In fact, embracing microcosm, the insidedness of love, is the only way to escape from the pressing question of eternity without any measure. It is the new concept of infinity that makes the experience of humanity so pressingly impossible: the act of embracing the lover is, indeed, an act of losing innocence. The abyss of the double infinity of man – the one outside and the vague idea one has in mind³⁷³ - is wide open. It is remarkable that the ending couplet of the poem rehearses a cosmological commonplace:

Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.³⁷⁴

Both possibilities are ridiculous, even though Marvell possibly puns on Joshua's war against Gibeon in Joshua 10,12. The sun – in the old system – is obviously a rotating entity which can neither be stopped (because it would stop the alternating of day and night), nor made to run (because – of course – it is eternally in motion). The metaphor, however, shows the limit of the old concept, as well as the precedence of subject in presenting it: the power of the metaphor again is its impossibility, its sheer literariness. The poet creates a new world inside, impossible as it is, as a sheer fruit of imagination. Marvell, however, is no dadaist: his wordplay is there to *mark the limit and the possibilities of language to join dissimilar images*, things totally impossible in reality. The reality can be distanced by reflection, and thus can itself become a projected world of the inside. Marvell's genius stands at the threshold of the modern era, marking the double reflection of the world's infiniteness.

³⁷² Marvell, CP, p. 51

³⁷³ This is, in fact, Decartes uses this idea as a proof of God's existence in his *Meditationes de prima philosophia*.

IV.3. Green thought in a green shade – Marvell's retreats

One of the most distinguished of contemporary critics of Andrew Marvell, James Dixon Hunt, noted the interesting correspondence of late English Renaissance poetry with contemporary garden theories.³⁷⁵ In fact, the theory of the garden in Marvell is an essential part of his microcosmic viewing of the *universe*. For Marvell, garden is a *secluded* place, sheltered from the *busi-ness* of the outside world. This basic difference is spotted in all of his poems about gardens and – in a peculiar way – also in his *Mower* series. The poem with a simple title *The Garden*³⁷⁶ is basically a pastoral poem: it is a bucolic vision of an innocent world of nature, providing all necessary things for man, including a place of retreat. In fact, the controversy with the outer world of *busi-ness* is at the heart of the poem:

How vainly men themselves amaze
To win the palm, the oak, or bays,
And their uncessant labours see
Crowned from some single herb or tree,
Whose short and narrow vergèd shade
Does prudently their toils upbraid,
While all flow'rs and all trees do close
To weave the garlands of repose.

(stanza I)

(...)

Society is all but rude,
To this delicious solitude.

(stanza II)

Such was that happy garden-state,
While man there walked without a mate (...)
(stanza VIII)³⁷⁷

The climax of the poem is rather surprising: the happy garden state is a one *without* a mate: without the dialogical principle of the early *disputations*. It is, moreover, a world immersed in imagination, "a green thought in a green shade." In fact, introspection, which

³⁷⁴ *ibid*

³⁷⁵ See e.g. Hunt, J. D.: *Garden and grove : the Italian Renaissance garden in the English imagination 1600-1750*, London : Dent, 1986.

³⁷⁶ Marvell also wrote a similar poem in Latin, *Hortus*, which more or less follows the conceit of the English poem.

³⁷⁷ Marvell, CP, p. 100-101

David Reid and indeed, L.L. Martz identified as one of the key characteristics of the metaphysical style³⁷⁸ is the radical projection of the Cartesian integrity of the Self. In fact, this is the re-centring, in which man *projects* the world in the act of contemplation. It is a place of retreat, because the imagination grants the integrity of the projected, created world. Metaphorical richness of the poem is an act of *re-creatio*, since, indeed, the garden in the poem is a mental state which is not to be shared and, perhaps, *cannot* be shared:

But 'twas beyond a mortal's share
To wander solitary there:
Two paradises 'twere in one
To live in paradise alone.³⁷⁹

In *Upon Appleton House* the situation is almost the same: it is again a meditation and a chain of metaphors on a *secluded place of retreat*, bound with numerous allusions on contemporary and ancient events and stories. It is a projected place – as says the very beginning of the poem – it is a "work of no foreign architect". It is a place carefully laid-out, something *dem Menschen Gemäßes*:

Humility alone designs
Those short but admirable lines,
By which, ungirt and unconstrained,
Things greater are in less contained.
Let others vainly strive t'immure
The circle in the quadrature!
The holy mathematics can
In every figure equal man.³⁸⁰

The house reflects its Master, since it is his projection. Indeed, the house has its own peculiar history – it used to be women's Cistercian Priory before the Reformation – nevertheless, its current state is primarily to be associated with the Fairfax family. Lord Fairfax himself retreated to Nun's Appleton House after he had given up his military duties (Marvell's allusion to it can be found in l. 345-360). The house is guarded from the outside

³⁷⁸ See Reid, D.: *The Metaphysical Poets*. Longman: 2000, or Martz, L. L. : *The poetry of meditation : a study in English religious literature of the seventeenth century*. Yale: 1954

³⁷⁹ Marvell, CP, p. 101

³⁸⁰ Marvell, CP, p. 76

world: in stanza 41, there is an allusion on the "garden-state" in the garden of Eden seen (quite heretically in fact) as a place of "exclusion" from the outside world. Nevertheless, this house – being a wonderful work of a wonderful and truly delicate architect – is a place quite *like* the old paradise. Actually, all sorts of unbelievable things are going on in it:

Let others tell the paradox,
How eels now bellow in the ox;
How horses at their tails do kick,
Turned as they hang to leeches quick;
How boats can over bridges sail;
And fishes to the stables scale.
How salmons trespassing are found;
And pikes are taken in the pound.
(stanza 60)³⁸¹

The wonderful richness of life, which Marvell attributes to the old estate of the Fairfaxes, is – again – caused by the *secluded, introspective* nature of the garden. It is a place of imagination, where unlike, dissimilar things can be *joined together* and create a new unity. It is a contracted world *par excellence*, since it is clearly described as a made-up world. Indeed, it is also a place of music ("the wingèd choirs/ Echo about their tunèd fires"(l. 511-12), the nightingale sings "the trials of her voice"(l. 514), stock-doves produce "yet more pleasing sound" (l.521) etc.). The poet addresses himself as an "easy philosopher"(l. 561), however, "wanting" language. The abundant nature of the phenomena as if creates its own language, its own syntax by which it is *joined* in ever new associations. The climax of the poem comes at the moment, when Lord Fairfax's daughter, Maria, enters the garden: the poet is disturbed in his meditation, however, he is at the same time amazed at the kind of response she is getting from the garden:

See how loose Nature, in respect
To her, itself doth recollect;
And everything so whisht and fine,
Starts forthwith to its *bonne mine*.
The sun himself, of her aware,
Seems to descend with greater care;
And lest she see him go to bed,

³⁸¹ Marvell, CP, p. 90

In blushing clouds conceals his head.³⁸²

The complex conceit of the poem climaxes in her: she (similarly to the young Elizabeth in Donne's *Anniversaries*) seems to be the *Maß*: she can project the beauties of the garden, in fact "'tis she that to these gardens gave/ That wondrous beauty which they have" (l. 690). She "counts her beauty to converse/ In all the languages as hers" (l. 707-8). Being the heavenly creature she is, the whole estate reflects, "recollects" her beauty. The final paradox (in fact just as heretical as the preceding one) is making Nun Appleton better than the prelapsarian garden state (sic!): on the one hand, a totally dis-harmonious "rude heap together hurled" and on the other hand the measure of prefectness, Nun Appleton's House:

'Tis not, what once it was, the world,
But a rude heap together hurled,
All negligently overthrown,
Gulfs, deserts, precipices, stone.
Your lesser world contains the same,
But in more decent order tame;
You, heaven's centre, Nature's lap,
And paradise's only map.

(stanza 96)³⁸³

The *re-centring* is complete: the man as a microcosm projects the macrocosm, only to stress his independence on the concept of universe. Making Nun Appleton the centre of the universe and "paradise's only map" is *per-verting* the order of Pythagorean cosmology in an exclusive sense. The measure of the world is *res cogitans* projecting, and in many ways creating (*ποιειν*) the otherwise foreign world. This kind of poetics of correspondence, however, by making man the *uni-verse sui generis* with a double sense of infinity can only ascertain the position of man within a carefully laid-out space, a garden, *hortus*, secluded from the outer world. The *SKANDALON* (*σκανδαλον*) of empty space is wide open.

Marvell's wonderful series of poems starring the Mower, may perhaps, throw a little more light on this complex problem. In *Damon the Mower* the macro-microcosm

³⁸² Marvell, CP, p. 96

³⁸³ Marvell, CP, p. 99

correspondence plays an ingenious paradoxical conceit: the heat of the sun is juxtaposed with "Juliana's scorching beams". All metaphors used in the poem play the role of similes: the central image of the scythe keeps re-appearing as the image of harvesting, conquest and, finally, death. The pastoral idyll is a self-destructing conceit: the scythe both conquers ("This scythe of mine discovers wide/ More ground than all his sheep do hide." l. 51-2) but also hurts and destroys. However, it is love that kills:

Only for him no cure is found,
Whom Juliana's eyes do wound.
'Tis death alone that this must do:
For Death thou art a Mower too.' (l. 85-8)³⁸⁴

The parallel images of love and mowing are finally self-consumed: the *mower mows himself*. The unity is an act of annihilating and the peace of the microcosm (of the garden-like idyll) is destroyed by the impossibility of love. *The Mower to the Glowworms* explains this theme further: the microcosm of the mower's world is lit by glowworms. However, their light is vain, and they fail in their "illuminating" function: "Since Juliana here is come,/ For she my mind hath so displaced/ That I shall never find my home."³⁸⁵ *The Mower's Song* clearly projects the work of the protagonist as the state of his mind:

My mind was once the true survey
Of all these meadows fresh and gay,
And in the greenness of the grass
Did see its hopes as in a glass (...)

However, Juliana destroys the idyll, for she in fact imitates what the Mower does to the meadows:

When Juliana came, and she
What I do to the grass, does to my thoughts and me.³⁸⁶

Love cannot be thought and projected, since it faces two centres, which – in the context of this radically microcosmic poetics – are irreconcilable. The Mower blames the

³⁸⁴ Marvell, CP, p. 108

³⁸⁵ Marvell, CP, p. 109, l. 14-16

meadows for the failure of his love relationship and projects his wrath onto the innocent grass. The green thought of the "happy garden-state" becomes only a carrier of meaning already lost, since the garden-state is possible only within a subjective *universe* of introspection. The centring of the world is no longer clear, in fact, is *perverted* in love. The tragic ambiguity of Marvell's poems is the question-mark on the new cosmology – the projected world of imagination is free, but also radically immured in the boundaries of its own. In fact the danger of the estrangement, or alienation of man in projection its own peculiar world – as, indeed, Bacon suggested already in Novum Organum – becomes the conceit of the very first of the Mower series, *The Mower Against Gardens*. The Mower protests against man's inquietude in searching "another world" (l. 17), in manipulating the laws of nature and proudly aspiring to be the one and only master of nature. The poem ends in praising the wild freedom of creatures, which however grants the presence of "gods", so the loneliness of the vulgar self-centring of modern man is overcome by the mysterious presence of the powers of imagination. Thus the metaphor is becoming conscious of itself, but as such it is also estranged from a clear designation, and its communicative power is radically questionable. It is a world within an infinity of other worlds, impenetrable monads floating in infinite space. The retreat is thus just a green thought in a green shade of imagination.

VI.4. Of tears and music – harmony within infinity of worlds

Another group of Marvell's poems rotates around the theme of microcosm: these are his poems on dew and tears. Both of them represent little worlds through which the Whole is to be viewed; both of them are fortuitous centres to become the centres of the *universe*. *Eyes and tears* are based on a parallel conceit of the inner integrity of the two phenomena. Eyes are both the organ of sight, but also of weeping, expressing sorrow (stanza 1). Their mutual necessity is in fact a reflection of one in the other: when the sight cannot reach "seeing", it is

³⁸⁶ Marvell, CP, p. 109

tears, which "better measure all" (stanza 2). Moreover, "What in the world most fair appears,/ Yea, even laughter, turns to tears..." (stanza 4). The little round balls of tears reflect, properly "see, or view" the Whole. This is just a reflection of the workings of the "all-seeing sun", which distils the world and returns the "tears" of showers (stanza 6). The macrocosm somehow does not just get reflected in the microcosm, as in a manner of minting a coin. Indeed, one that has retained his/her capacity to weep, preserved "their sight more true" (stanza 7). The similes then follow in a wonderful series: the pun on the tears of Mary Magdalene (stanza 8), on the capacity for mercy (stanza 10), and on stars as the tears of heavenly light (stanza 11). The end of the poem brings an interesting turn:

13
Now, like two clouds dissolving, drop,
And at each tear in distance stop:
Now, like two fountains, trickle down;
Now, like two floods o'etern and drown.

14
Thus let your streams o'erflow your springs,
Till eyes and tears be the same things:
And each the other's difference bears;
Those weeping eyes, those seeing tears.³⁸⁷

The tears overflow and soak the eyes in such a way as the difference becomes non-existent. Yet the apparent sameness is deceiving, or – more precisely – the difference cannot disappear, for the whole point would disappear. The two worlds of tears and eyes are not in a macro-microcosm relationship: they are in fact two separate facets of an infinitely changing macrocosm. The interdependence of eyes and tears is to be thought as an *interdependence of meaning*. In other words, their relationship is dynamic in much the same way as the old Heraclitean concept of harmony.

On a Drop of Dew is based more specifically upon a cosmological conceit: the drop is a microcosm which reflects the "clear region where 'twas born"; however, it "shines with a mournful light", like a planet-tear "divided from the sphere." However, a stock Marvellian

metaphor ("heaven's the centre of the soul") is activated: indeed, the drop stands for "a soul" recollecting its former height. This soul excludes the world around and – as it seems - focuses just on its being heavenward bound:

So the soul, that drop, that ray
Of the clear fountain of eternal day,
Could it within the human flow'r be seen,
Remembering still its former height,
Shuns the sweet leaves and blossoms green,
And recollecting its own light,
Does, in its pure and circling thoughts, express
The greater heaven in an heaven less.
In how coy a figure wound,
Every way it turns away:
So the world excluding round,
Yet receiving in the day,
Dark beneath, but right above,
Here disdainful, there in love.
How loose and easy hence to go,
How girt and ready to ascend,
Moving but on a point below,
It all about does upwards bend.
Such did the manna's sacred dew distil,
White and entire, though congealed and chill.
Congealed on earth: but does, dissolving, run
Into the glories of th' almighty sun.³⁸⁸

It is a *contracted* world of a subtle metaphor that finally self-consume itself. The dew as a symbol of the soul "dissolves"; and the Platonic cosmological commonplace becomes a carrier of a language game. As in the Mower series, the two centres, the two "heavens" of the poem are mutually exclusive, and the final annihilating process is inevitable. It is interesting to see that in a Latin version of the poem, the metaphorising of this old macro-microcosmic poetics of correspondence is stronger: the process of introspection, of an inward-journey is emphasised:

Tota sed in proprii secedens luminis arcem,
Colligit in gyros se sinuosa breves.
Magnorumque sequens animo convexa deorum,
Syderum parvo fingit in orbe globum.

³⁸⁷ Marvell, CP, pp. 53-4

³⁸⁸ Marvell, CP, pp. 102-3

(But withdrawing completely into the fortress of its own light,
It draws inward, closing upon itself.
Conforming in its nature with the arching heaven of the great gods,
It builds a starry heaven in its small sphere.)³⁸⁹

The soul, however, remains "upwards bend", and the process of becoming a separate entity ("closing upon itself"), a self-generating monad with its own sphere and its own heaven cannot be fully accomplished. The reason may be the "stretching", the aspiration of the monad to *acquire* the state of being an absolute monad. The dissolution brings an irreconcilable paradox: the soul undergoes a spiritual refinement, which is, in fact, the same as annihilation.

Nevertheless, Marvell's concept of harmony – in a more specifically Pythagorean, musical sense – has also another important face: a power-struggle bound with his veneration of Oliver Cromwell. *The First Anniversary of the Government under His Highness the Lord Protector, 1655* is a political poem wherein the old Pythagorean concept is seen primarily as *ethos held together by power*. Marvell sees Cromwell as the English Amphion, who in his clear vision managed to establish a harmonious system. He does not hide that the victory of harmony in the former Kingdom of England has been achieved in a violent struggle: quite the opposite – Cromwell is clearly alluded to as a "conqueror". In that sense, the allusion to the old myth of Amphion is just a violent and altogether ridiculous exposition of the old myth, for the enchanting music of Amphion's lyre was obviously something totally different to the military terror of the late Lord Protector. The musical metaphor, however, runs throughout the second part of the poem: the vying parties of the Carolinian regime are finally put together in a fitting establishment: once Cromwell "tuned the ruling Instrument" (l. 68), "The Commonwealth then first together came" (l. 75):

So when Amphion did the lute command,
Which the god gave him, with his gentle hand,
The rougher stones, unto his measures hewed,

³⁸⁹ Marvell, CP, pp. 208 and 210, English translation William A. McQueen and Kiffin A. Rockwell, originally published in U of North Carolina P.

Danced up in order from the querries rude;
This took a lower, that an higher place,
As he the treble altered, or the bass:
No note he struck, but a new stone was laid,
And the great work ascended while he played.

The listening structures he with wonder eyed,
And still new stops to various time applied:
Now through the strings a martial rage he throws,
And joining straight the Theban tower arose;
Then as he strokes them with a touch more sweet,
The flocking marbles in a palace meet;
But for he most the graver notes did try,
Therefore the temples reared their columns high:
Thus, ere he ceased, his sacred lute creates
Th' harmonious city of the seven gates.

Such was that wondrous order and consent,
When Cromwell tuned the ruling Instrument,
While tedious statesmen many years did hack,
Framing a liberty that still went back,
Whose numerous gorge could swallow in an hour
That island, which the sea cannot devour:
Then our Amphion issues out and sings,
And once he struck, and twice, the powerful strings.³⁹⁰

On the other hand, of course, the falling of Cromwell is an act of "overthrowing Nature's self:

It seemed the earth did form the centre tear;
It seemed the sun was fall'n out of the sphere (...) ³⁹¹

A cosmological simile then goes on to describing "a dismal silence" of the forlorn, altogether non-harmonious commonwealth of today. The concept of harmony is used to defend a rather problematic political engagement: in fact, the cosmological conceit is straightforwardly used as *just a metaphor*, since, indeed, this was a general and inherited form of conveying similar ideas. The paradox of its usage is twofold: first of all, it is an act of legitimising a regime, and thus – secondly – a clearly subjective and self-expedient way of using this powerful concept of Antiquity. It is a privated cosmology within an apparently disharmonious world. Platonic recollection of the ideal state in the world of ideas does not create here a sense of nostalgia by *re-creating* the past: quite the opposite. The recollection is to

³⁹⁰ Marvell, CP, pp. 127-8

create something new: a politically efficient system, using understandable means of manipulating the public. Indeed, such an undertaking must be a conscious act controllable precisely by the difference between reality and simulacrum. In that sense, what Marvell does in this particular poem is the other side of the metaphysical courage for metaphor: the re-creating of language is fused here with its ability to fix and re-fix the non-existent. The political expediency of the simile is, indeed, achieved by *taking the metaphor as a whole, not as a dynamic process of language* – which, as I have attempted to show, characterises the metaphysical method. In that sense, this "definition" of the state of England under Cromwell "was begotten by Despair/ Upon Impossibility" as in *The Definition of Love*. It is exactly the impossibility of the metaphor that makes it so successful an undertaking. The vying parties in the major power-struggle of the day do not generate a unifying consensus, a sense of harmonious proportion of single parts towards a greater whole. Or – in a more Pythagorean language – the parts are not an extension of the monad. They are separate entities, separate monads with no apparent relation to the others. Their relation must be inscribed – harmony, thus, exists always *conditionally*. Cromwell re-establishes harmony in England, since he has *seized* it. The complexity of the old metaphor as a living concept of the universe is thus drastically *reduced*. The message of the poem after all is a simple statement: Cromwell granted harmony, because he was on guard against chaos.

Indeed, Marvell's most direct allusion on the musicality of cosmos is driven by a similar idea: in *Music's Empire* Marvell alludes to the Genesis story in 4, 21: "et nomen fratris eius Iubal ipse fuit pater canentium cithara et organo." Jubal *made* the "wilder notes" of the primeaval chaos "agree", Jubal struck the chaos with a clear vision of harmony. Thereafter follows a story of the genesis of music:

3
Each sought a consort in that lovely place;
And virgin trebles wed the manly base.

³⁹¹ Marvell, CP, p. 131

From whence the progeny of numbers new
Into harmonious colonies withdrew.

4

Some to the lute, some to the viol went,
And others chose the cornet eloquent,
These practising the wind, and those the wire,
To sing men's triumphs, or in heaven's choir.

5

Then, music, the mosaic of the air,
Did of all these a solemn noise prepare:
With which she gained the empire of the ear,
Including all between the earth and sphere.

6

Victorious sounds! Yet here your homage do
Unto a gentler conqueror than you:
Who though he flies the music of his praise,
Would with you heaven's hallelujahs raise.³⁹²

The genesis of music is thus also bound with an *act of power*. The different, scattered sounds choose their respective functions as the subjects of the late Cromwellian dictatorship. In fact, the similarities between the two poems are striking: both in imagery and the language of power. This led a few scholars to suspect the fifth stanza of *Music's Empire* to be a tribute to Lord Protector. Indeed, the imagery of "empire" of music is just as violent as the Amfion imagery of the former poem. Music is understood as a means of power, means of disciplining chaos. The Pythagorean intuition on the other hand is quite opposite: music is an *inherent* characteristics of the world. It is the proportion of things; and phenomena are subject to music's empire as long as they reflect the prime number structuring of the universe. Marvellian universe of power and music is disciplined by a violent act: the infinite variety of jarring little worlds is made to respond to the project of a deeply self-conscious individual, a genius *sui generis*. In that sense the power of Marvellian metaphors seems to be lost in their regression back to the stock *closeness* of an archetype. Lord Protector's rule does not create a space of free metaphor-making: his rule has to be first of all verified and legitimised. The task

³⁹² Marvell, CP, p. 111

of the poet is the exact opposite of the free a liberating nature of metaphysical poetics of metaphor.

The paradox of Marvellian concept of harmony is both its strange ambiguity and, on the other hand, its unanimous resoluteness: infinity of worlds creates a liberating space for imagination. Yet the imagination cannot in itself create a world of its own: it is constantly endangered with the vicissitudes of the *reflected* world. The means for crossing the abyss is twofold: annihilation or a discipline of power. To put it simply: harmony is created in the imagination of the poet, however, once it is tested on the ambiguous, infinite reality of monads, it either annihilates itself, or it is subject to a discipline of harmony as in the case of Cromwellian dictatorship. The Pythagorean concept of harmony is thus clearly an unattainable ideal: its metaphorical power is acknowledged, but the means of aiming at a harmonious state of being has changed. In that sense, the ambiguity of freedom and necessity – indeed, the key problem of Renaissance philosophy as Ernst Cassirer shows in his classic study³⁹³ - marks the difference also between the free powers of imagination and their disciplining to serve a preconceived aim. This is a complex task, and the case of Marvell shows how deeply paradoxical ends it can have. Precisely because of this quality is Marvell's poetry such rich, such difficult, but also such charming read.

³⁹³ See Cassirer, E.: *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*. Trans. M. Domandi. Dover Publications, Inc., New York, 2000, p. 73-122

V. Richard Crashaw – the triumph of the Baroque

V.I. Introduction

Richard Crashaw (1612/13-1649) is a peculiar phenomenon not just within 17th century English poetry, but within the whole English literary tradition. There is something deeply non-English on his verse, although the influences of Donne and Herbert are substantial. Even though the strict Classicist Alexander Pope praised his “thoughts”³⁹⁴, he found him more a “Versifier” than a poet. Nineteenth-century critics, namely Hazlitt and Swinburne emphasises his “fervors of fanaticism” and “fantastic devotion” respectively, but also his ingeniousness.³⁹⁵ In his famous essay on *Seven Types of Ambiguity*³⁹⁶ Empson alludes on Crashaw’s popular epigram *Blessed be the paps which Thou hast sucked* and in a rather psychoanalytic approach points out “a wide variety of sexual perversions which can be included in the notion of sucking a long bloody teat which is also a wound.”³⁹⁷ A more positive critical appreciation came from Yvor Winters in *Primitivism and Decadence*, and, indeed, Austin Warren, the author of the famous biography of Crashaw. In mentioned recent Kerrigan’s essay on Donne’s accommodations is Crashaw’s work again seen as verbose and

³⁹⁴ „His thoughts one may observe, in the main, are pretty; but oftentime farfetch’d, and too often strained and stiffened to make them appear the greater (...).“

³⁹⁵ Hazlitt: “Crashaw was a writer... whose imagination was rendered inflammable by the fervors of fanaticism, and having been converted from Protestantism to Popery (a weakness to which the “seething brains” of the poets of this period were prone) by some visionary appearance of the Virgin Mary, poured out his devout raptures and zealous enthusiasm in a torrent of poetical hyperboles. The celebrated Latin Epigram on the miracle of our Saviour, “The water blushed into wine,” is in his usual *hectic* manner. His translation of the contest between the Musician and the Nightingale is the best specimen of his powers.” *Lectures on the Comic Writers*, 1819
A.C. Swinburne: “Theophile in France and Crashaw in England had many merits and faults in common. Crashaw is a Christianized Theophile, steeped in Catholic sentiment and deformed by fantastic devotion; he is a far smaller figure, a much weaker and perverser man; but in fancy and melody, in grace and charm of exquisite words and notes, he may rank next him and near him. He is far more ingenious and elaborate; if elaboration and ingenuity be qualities commendable in a poet. His studies are more fleshless and formless...” *Letters*, 1852

³⁹⁶ first published 1930

³⁹⁷ „The second couplet is „primitive“ enough; a wide variety of sexual perversions which can be included in the notion of sucking a long bloody teat which is also a wound. The sacrificial idea is aligned with incest, the infantile pleasures, and cannibalism; we contemplate the god with a sort of savage chuckle; he is made to flower, a monstrous hermaphrodite deity, in the glare of a short-circuiting of the human order. Those African carvings, and the more lurid forms of Limerick, inhabit the same world.”

neurotic.³⁹⁸ Crashaw's figure is definitely a complex phenomenon, however, I here attempt to show the drama of his work as the last stage of the metaphysical method, the ultimate possibility of per-verting the Pythagorean system as a means of achieving a dynamic harmony on the very edge of the thinkable.

V.2. The joy of weeping – harmony turned upside down

Reading Crashaw's verse is a fantastic undertaking inbetween heightened emotions and strict rational speculation behind his symbols, allegories and carefully laid-out conceits. The images he presents are both shocking and strikingly logical: in fact the paradox as he puts it forward seems to be just as obvious as things far less extravagant. This "fantastic devotion" is, indeed, thinkable only within a world of its own, in which the inner sensibility and the heightened emotionality are *transformed* by the statements of faith. This emotionality is theologically efficient, since the "out-worldliness" of much of Crashaw verse is a mixture of his innermost mystical experiences and a radically different "logic of heaven". Because of that, the old concepts of Pythagorean cosmology in his verse are carefully re-structured to fit his peculiar design.

In the first poem of his first and most important collection Steps to the Temple, *The Weeper*³⁹⁹, Crashaw casts his favourite saint, St Mary Magdalene. The conceit of the poem is based on a per-verted cosmology: Mary's tears are "ever-falling stars" falling from the heavens of her "fair Eyes":

³⁹⁸ „the tactless exercises in accommodated devotion we find in Crashaw, daring with no sense of danger, creating neither mystery nor wit, but leaving us aghast at the combination of great verbal power, unquestioned faith, neurosis, and stupidity.” W. Kerrigan „The fearful accommodations of John Donne“ in John Donne and the Seventeenth-Century Metaphysical Poets. Ed. H. Bloom. Chelsea House Publ.: New York, 1986, p. 47

³⁹⁹ In the last collection of his verse *Carmen Deo Nostro* (first publ. 1652 in Paris), Crashaw re-edited this poem, made it one together with the *The Tear* and gave it a new title *Saint Mary Magdalene or The Weeper*. Apart from differences in the order of stanzas, different capitalising, differences in punctuation, Crashaw added an emblem of Mary Magdalene in tears with a wounded winged heart with a following inscription:

„Lo where a Wounded Heart with Bleeding Eyes conspire.
Is she a Flaming Fountain, or a Weeping fire!“

'Tis seed-time still with thee
And stars thou sow'st whose harvest dares
Promise the earth; to countershine
Whatever makes Heaven's forehead fine.⁴⁰⁰

The traditional opposition between heavens and earth (as between “bellow” and “above”) is, however, turned upside down: “we are deceived all”: in the contracted *universe* of Mary's eyes tears fall “upwards” to heaven. There they create a “Crystal Ocean” from which “a brisk Cherub something sips/ Whose soft influence/ Adds sweetness to his sweetest lips.” This *per*-verted cosmology is, nevertheless, harmoniously musical:

Then to his Music, and his song
tastes of this breakfast all day long.⁴⁰¹

The conceit does not, however, end in a *bon mot*: Crashaw re-creates his cosmology very carefully and with a subtle intellectual discipline. Tears of Mary become a “looking glasse” in which they are viewed in a new and new perspective. Thus the tears are compared to “Jewels” (stanza 8), “sweetness so sad, sadness so sweet” (stanza 9), “Balsam” (stanza 12 and 13), “rivers” (stanza 14). They “melt the year/ Into a weeping motion” and make time “precious” (stanza 16). The tears become a universal symbol of a contracted universe, and the simple theme of weeping exhausts the universe of reality. In stanza 22 Crashaw dramatises the question of their falling:

Whither away so fast?
O whither? for the sluttish Earth
Your sweetness cannot taste
Nor does the dust deserve your Birth.
Whither haste ye then? o say
Why ye trip so fast away?

The answer is surprising as it is obviously logical: they, indeed, do fall down, yet the object of their falling transforms even the nature of its movement: they fall – as expected – on

⁴⁰⁰ All quotations from the works of Richard Crashaw are taken from *The Verse in English of RICHARD CRASHAW*. Grove Press: New York City, 1949. Hereafter “Crashaw, ViE”. This citation is taken from p. 33

⁴⁰¹ Crashaw, ViE, p. 34

the feet of Christ. The heightened imagination of the rest of the poem achieves here its most paradoxical unity:

We go not to seek
The darlings of *Aurora's* bed,
The Rose's modest cheek
Nor the Violet's humble head.
No such thing; we go to meet
A worthier object, *Our Lord's* feet.⁴⁰²

The unity of the "fantastic" conceit is achieved in its *perverted geocentrism*: the Presence of Jesus makes the movement upwards and downwards one and the same movement of adoration. This theme – I want to argue – becomes the central theme of Crashaw's cosmology, as it is also the basis of the Eucharistic celebration of the Catholic Mass. This topic, however, will be dealt with later on, once we come to the actual poems of Eucharistic devotion.

The next poem in the first collection, *The Tear*, expands more specifically on the cosmological reference of the first Magdalene piece. The sacred nature of Mary's tears – the object of typically Baroque devotion – makes the question about the actual substance of her tears problematic: is it a tear or not? The enigmatic, truly hieroglyphic nature of the object is recalled by passionate cosmological etymologising:

1 What bright soft thing is this?
 Sweet *Mary* thy fair Eyes' expense?
 A moist spark it is,
 A wat'ry Diamond; from whence
The very Term, I think, was found
The water of a *Diamond*.

2 O 'tis not a Tear,
 'Tis a star about to drop
 From thine eye its sphere;
 The Sun will stoop and take it up.
Proud will his sister be to wear
This thine eyes' Jewel in her Ear.

3 O 'tis a tear

⁴⁰² Crashaw, ViE, pp. 36-7

Too true a Tear; for no sad eyne.
How sad so e'er
Rain so true a Tear as thine;
Each Drop leaving a place so dear,
Weeps for itself, is its own Tear.

4 Such a Pearl as this is,
(Slipt from *Aurora's* dewy Breast)
The Rose bud's sweet lip kisses;
And such the Rose its self when vexy
With ungentle flames, does shed,
Sweating in too warm a Bed.

5 Such the Maiden Gem
By the wanton Spring put on,
Peeps from her Parent stem,
And blushes on the manly Sun:
This wat'ry Blossom of the Eyne
Ripe, will make the richer Wine.

6 Fair Drop, why quak'st thou so?
'Cause thou straight must lay thy Head
In the Dust? o no;
The Dust shall never be thy Bed:
A pillow for thee will I bring,
Stuft with Down of Angel's wing,

7 Thus carried up on high,
(For to Heaven thou must go)
Sweetly shalt thou lie,
And in soft slumbers bathe thy woe;
Till the singing Orbs awake thee,
And one of their bright *Chorus* make thee.

8 There thyself shalt be
An eye, but not a weeping one,
Yet I doubt of thee,
Whither thou'dst rather there have shone
An eye of Heaven; or still shine here
In th' Heaven of *Mary's* eye, a *Tear*.⁴⁰³

The tear again acquires a multitudinous reference: it is a "pearl", a "rose", "maiden gem" and finally it becomes "an eye of Heaven". It is taken up to heaven – mark the same movement as in *The Weeper* – to join the choirs of angles. However, the paradox of the substance does not seem to be solved: the cosmological reference to the outer world is

⁴⁰³ Crashaw, ViE, pp. 37-8

legitimised only as long as it is still the very same eye of Mary Magdalene. The *contracted* and *concentrated* "Heaven of *Mary's* eye" is the centre from which the outer world can be spotted: heavenly aspiration of her sainthood makes her tears objects worthy of devotion. In them the question of cosmological hierarchy is transformed into the question of the infinity of God's centrality. The paradox of this paradox is in the final seemingly banal tautology: *it is, indeed, a tear*. There is a crucial difference to be spotted here, however: the tear has been transformed, it has been filled with the infinite presence of God. Its centre is nowhere and its circumference everywhere. It is a *theocentric* world, and the drama of its motion is dictated by the omniscient presence of God.

A similar movement is to be seen in one of Crashaw's divine epigrams *On the Blessed Virgin's bashfulness*: Mary's bashfulness is perfectly acceptable as an act of devotion since she does not need to "look up" to adore the Living God. The Presence of God in her womb re-shaped the hierarchy of the universe: she *looks down* since the centre is paradoxically united with the sphere:

That on her lap she casts her humble Eye;
 'Tis the sweet pride of her Humility.
 The fair star is well fixt, for where, o where
 Could she have fixt it on a fairer Sphere?
 'Tis Heav'n 'tis Heaven she sees, Heaven's God there lies
 She can see heaven, and ne'er lift up her eyes:
 This new Guest to her Eyes new Laws hath given,
 'Twas once *look up*, 'tis now *look down* to Heaven.⁴⁰⁴

In Crashaw's rendering of the famous *Psalms* 23 the problem of the de-centralising the sphere reappears in an identical connotation: again the sphere of *concentration* is the presence of God inside which re-creates the *universe*:

About my Paths, so shall I find
 The fair Center of my mind
 Thy Temple, and those lovely walls
 Bright ever with a beam that falls
 Fresh from the pure glance of thine eye,
 Lighting to Eternity.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁴ Crashaw, ViE, p. 42

In *On a Prayer Book Sent to Mrs. M.R.* the “temple of the heart” is to be constantly guarded against the attacks of the “beguiling” Enemy. The centre-sphere tension is to be seen on the fight between the presence of God and Satan. Prayer re-enlivens the power of God’s presence in the soul of man. Languishing in prayer on the other hand causes de-centralising of the spiritual self:

Amongst the gay mates of the god of flies;
 To take her pleasures, and to play
 And to keep the devil’s holy day.
To dance in the Sunshine of some smiling
 But beguiling
Sphere of sweet, and sugar’d lies,
 Some slippery pair,
 Of false perhaps as fair
Flattering but forswearing eyes

Doubtless some other heart
 Will get the start,
 And stepping in before,
Will take possession of the sacred store
 Of hidden sweets, and holy joys,
 Words which are not heard with ears,
(These tumultuous shops of noise)
 Effectual whispers whose still voice,
The soul itself more feels than (*sic!*) hears.⁴⁰⁶

Indeed, the poem finishes in a paradoxical statement making the commonplace language of talking about God problematic. The pleasures of the soul in God’s hands go beyond the “heavens” of old:

Happy soul she shall discover,
 What joy, what bliss,
 How many heavens at once it is,
To have a God become her lover.⁴⁰⁷

Once the objects find their hierarchy in the ever-renewed story of Salvation, paradox is an eminent sign of the “other language of God”. Paradox is seeing accord in dissimilar things. It is a *seeming disharmony to be broken by the power of language*. The new logic of paradox

⁴⁰⁵ Crashaw, ViE, p. 55

⁴⁰⁶ Crashaw, ViE, p. 78

⁴⁰⁷ Crashaw, ViE, p. 80

uncovers the powers of language to create a different world as we have clearly seen in Crashaw's poems on St Mary Magdalene. The "joy of weeping" is spotting the infinite possibilities of man to tempt the mystery of the ineffable, but also see its boundaries. The "joy of weeping" is the tension between the two: indeed, what we are usually accustomed to call poetry.

V.3. Un-selfing of the Self – the logic of ecstasy

Another important part of Crashaw's verse is made up with poems discussing the problem of love ecstasy. The soul of the devotee is taken into the whirl of mystic ecstasy; and in consuming the joys of *unio mystica* it loses a firm conscience of being ONE-self. The fulfilment of one's longing to be ONE-self is thus its opposite: winning IS losing, and losing IS winning.⁴⁰⁸ The logic of the self is strangely distorted: the centre of the self – marked by the perception of the difference between one-self and the rest of the world – is blurred. Indeed, there is no longer any *definite* self, the soul becomes one with the *infinity* of God: thus the *definition* is no longer needed, but it is also no longer *possible*. What remains is the actual movement, the whirl of ecstasy. Crashaw's genius as a poet is the act of interpreting this experience into the whirl of language: for it is a drama of language reaching for the ineffable.

Perhaps the most famous of Crashaw's poems *The Flaming Heart Upon the Book and Picture of the Seraphical Saint Teresa*⁴⁰⁹ is based on the traditional way of depicting the ecstasy of St Theresa of Jesus⁴¹⁰: a seraph is drawing an arrow from the heart of the saint. The conceit of the poem is a paradoxical critique of this way of "expressing" her (e.g. the famous

⁴⁰⁸ There is, indeed, a clear reference to the word of the Scriptures : „Amen amen dico vobis nisi granum frumenti cadens in terram mortuum fuerit ipsum solum manet si autem mortuum fuerit multum fructum adfert. Qui amat animam suam perdet eam et qui odit animam suam in hoc mundo in vitam aeternam custodit eam.“ (John 12, 24-25)

⁴⁰⁹ There is also a subtitle to this poem in brackets „As she is usually expressed with a Seraphim beside her.“

⁴¹⁰ Also known as St Theresa of Avila

marble statue of Gian Lorenzo Bernini in the Coronaro chapel of Santa Maria della Vittoria church in Rome⁴¹¹): this is a mistake, a “fair-cheekt fallacy”:

You must transpose the picture quite,
And spell it wrong to read it right;
Read *Him* for her, and her for him;
And call the *Saint* the *Seraphim*.⁴¹²

The first of the “transpositions” is the change of her sex: indeed, throughout the poem Theresa is depicted as “manly”: “Why man, this speaks pure mortal frame;/ And mocks with female *Frost* love’s manly flame./ One would suspect thou meant’st to paint/ Some weak, inferior, woman saint.” Another transposition is the transposition of the task: Theresa should no longer be the veiled one and the seraph should no longer hold the “*Dart*”: it is the other way round:

Give *Him* the veil; that he may cover
The Red cheeks of a rivall’d lover.
Asham’d that our world, now, can show
Nests of new Seraphims here bellow.
Give her the *Dart* for it is she
(Fair youth) shoots both thy shaft and *Thee*
Say, all ye wise and well-pierc’t hearts
That live and die amidst her darts,
What is’t your tasteful spirits do prove
In that rare life of Her, and love?
Say and bear witness. Sends she not
A *Seraphim* at every shot?⁴¹³

The change in the task of the two actors marks also the crucial change in the order of activity: Theresa takes over the active part, yet in a paradoxical simile. *She is active, since she is passive*:

For in love’s field was never found
A nobler weapon than a *Wound*.
Love’s passives are his activ’st part.
The wounded is the wounding heart.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹¹ Bernini worked on the work between 1647-1652.

⁴¹² Crashaw, ViE, p. 208

⁴¹³ Crashaw, ViE, p. 209

⁴¹⁴ *ibid*

The logic of love ecstasy is altogether different: since the centre of the self is decentralised, things reacquire their being in distance. The logic of *things* is transformed into the *logic of language*: this distance cannot be *grasped*, it can only be *mediated*. Love is a constant movement to un-self one's self, i.e. to gain in losing. Language however ascertains the tension between the state of being and the actual process of attaining it: indeed, the final paradox of the poem shows the incompatibility of life and death:

By all of *Him* we have in *Thee*;
Leave nothing of my *Self* in me.
Let me so read thy life, that I
Unto all life of mine may die.⁴¹⁵

If life is marked with the process of being, death is a mere state of non-being. The paradox of the couplet is its impossibility: life is incommensurably superior to death, for life IS and death IS NOT. The final quatrain of the poem thus carries the final message of the power of language: in the process of becoming "un-selfed" ("By all of *Him* we have in *Thee*"), life of the *individual*⁴¹⁶ self appears as an insufficient entity, as a *mere state*. It is because of this state that what is usually called life is in fact no more than an *enduring* death. This is to be overcome: "Let me so read thy life, that I / Unto all life of mine may die." The power of the argument – indeed, the power of language itself – shows the radical incompatibility of life and death. Only the power of language can attain to meaning in its very process, in the *logic of language*.

This logic is also the logic of martyrdom, as it is aptly rendered in *A Hymn to the Name and Honor of the Admirable Teresa* and Crashaw's free translation of a Latin poem by the Jesuit Famianus Strada (1572-1649), *Music's Duel*. In both of the poems the central theme is that of sacrificial self-destruction. In the former poem, Theresa is to undergo a specific type of martyrdom: it is not to be the "traditional" one in the hands of the heathens. It is to be a martyrdom of genuine love which cannot but consume itself in the very act of loving:

⁴¹⁵ Crashaw, ViE, p. 211

Blest pow'rs forbid, Thy tender life
 Should bleed upon a barbarous knife;
 Or some base hand have power to race
 Thy Breast's chaste cabinet, and uncase
 A soul kept there so sweet, o no;
 Wise heav'n will never have it so.
 Thou art love's victim; and must die
 A death more mystical and high.
 Into love's arms thou shalt let fall
 A still-surviving funeral.
 His is the *Dart* must make the *Death*
 Whose stroke shall taste thy hallow'd breath;
 A Dart thrice dipt in that rich flame
 Which writes thy spouse's radiant Name
 Upon the roof of Heav'n; where ay
 It shines, and with a sovereign ray
 Beats bright upon the burning faces
 Of souls which in that name's sweet graces
 Find everlasting smiles. So rare,
 So spiritual, pure, and fair
 Must be th'immortal instrument
 Upon whose choice point shall be sent
 A life so lov'd; And that there be
 Fit executioners for Thee,
 The fair'st and first-born sons of fire
 Blest *Seraphim*, shall leave their choir
 And turn love's soldiers, upon *Thee*
 To exercise their archery.
 O how oft shalt thou complain
 Of a sweet and subtle *Pain*.
 Of intolerable *Joys*;
 Of a *Death*, in which who dies
 Loves his death, and dies again.
 And would forever so be slain.
 And lives, and dies; and knows not why
 To live, But that he thus may never leave to Die.⁴¹⁷

"A still surviving-funeral" is another way of expressing the radical un-selfing of Theresa's martyrdom of love: it is a *process* of becoming nothing in the order of self-centered world. The hierarchy of the *universe* is to be changed: the self being *informed* from inside loses its integrity but – at the same time – loses its liability to death: "...of a *Death*, in which who dies/ Loves his death, and dies again." Death loses its power in the act of repetition and

⁴¹⁶ I am using this word in the original meaning: „in-dividuum“, i.e. „indivisible“.

⁴¹⁷ Crashaw, ViE, pp. 204-5

becomes a sign of life, language being a medium of a new logic in which death can thus be overcome.

Music's Duel, the opening poem of Crashaw's second collection of poems *The Delights of the Muses* (first published together with *Steps to the Temple* in 1647), the fight between a "Lute-master" and a nightingale climaxes in an act of self-destruction by total absorption of the nightingale's being-itself and being-unto-its-purpose⁴¹⁸. A carefully laid out conceit stresses the dynamic of the struggle: the player is a well-trained musician, a virtuoso, playing a complicated multi-voiced instrument. On the other hand the nightingale is a weak, tiny bird singing in a single voice, however, its performance has a remarkable quality: it is able to leave the boundaries of the conscious control and ecstatically identify with its singing:

Thus high, thus low, as if her silver throat
Would reach the brazen voice of war's hoarse Bird;
Her little soul is ravisht: and so pour'd
Into loose ecstasies, that she is plac't
Above herself, Music's *Enthusiast*.⁴¹⁹

The nightingale is absorbed by its music; it is identified with the purpose of its creation. The Musician is surprised at the ability of the nightingale; and its singing motivates the player to yet a better performance. At times, the two contestants seem to blend and mutually accompany each other in "a fury so harmonious". Towards the end of the poem, the lutenist is taken into a similar ecstasy:

The Lute's light *Genius* now does proudly rise,
Heav'd on the surges of swoll'n Rhapsodies.
Whose flourish (Meteor-like) doth surl the air
With flash of high-born fancies: here and there
Dancing in lofty measures, and anon
Creeps on the soft touch of a tender tone:
Whose trembling murmurs melting in wild airs
Runs to and fro, complaining his sweet cares
Because those precious mysteries that dwell,
In music's ravisht soul he dare not tell,

⁴¹⁸ So, to find a theological parallel in Christology, the unity of the economic and ontological aspect of God's Incarnation.

⁴¹⁹ Crashaw, ViE, p. 103

But whisper to the world: thus do they vary
 Each string his Note, as if they meant to carry
 Their Master's blest soul (snatched out at his Ears
 By a strong Ecstasy) through all the spheres
 Of Music's heaven; and seat it there on high
 In *th' Empyræum* of pure Harmony.⁴²⁰

The nightingale managed to communicate the ineffable mystery of its own created being: the dynamic of expression has been passed on to the "Lute-Master". In that sense the nightingale is the epitome of the *Wesen des Singens*, a pure substance of singing; it thus fulfills the maxim of St Augustine's theology of the song as expressed in his Ennerationes in Psalmos. The end of the poem underlines the dual process of self-destruction and self-fulfilment: the nightingale climaxes in "a Natural Tone", dies, and falls onto the lute:

Alas! in vain! for while (sweet soul) she tries
 To measure all those wild diversities
 Of chatt'ring strings, by the small size of one
 Poor simple voice, rais'd in a Natural Tone;
 She fails, and failing grieves, and grieving dies.
 She dies; and leaves her life the Victor's prize,
 Falling upon his Lute; o fit to have
 (That liv'd so sweetly) dead, so sweet a Grave!⁴²¹

The dual identity is achieved in paradox: however, the logic of language makes it a clear story of a gradual identification. The order of states is being transformed into an order of dynamic being: a level of identity which cannot be achieved in the order of the earthly existence. It is a level of identity referred to by the very dynamic of the contest: a struggle for a firm identity of the functional and the ontological. This – translated into the order of language - means: the full identity of referent and the object referred to. In other words, language which is being. The *SUM* which is both and act of being and creation.⁴²²

The *logic of ecstasy* in Crashaw is radically beyond the level of given entities. It is radically in the order of process, of the ineffable infinity of Love, or God. The self-

⁴²⁰ Crashaw, ViE, p. 104

⁴²¹ Crashaw, ViE, p. 105

destruction, which is the same as *self-absorption*, uses the mediation of language as the transforming milieu, upon which the order of “*Schon-und-noch-nicht*” can only be attempted. Language becomes the prime carrier of the whirl of existence and thus also the whirl of Creation. The identity of this “*Schon-und-noch-nicht*” in Crashaw’s verse is eminently bound with his concept of the Eucharistic presence of Christ. So we now turn our attention to examining this important topic.

V.4. The problem of Presence – Crashaw’s Christology

One of Crashaw’s most enigmatic poems *To the Name above Every Name, The Name of Jesus, A Hymn* is a poem eminently concerned with the problem of language. The name of Jesus cannot be uttered as any other name, since it is no “name” in the commonplace meaning of the word:

I Sing the *Name* which None can say
But toucht with An interior *Ray*:
The Name of our New *Peace*; our Good:
Our Bliss: and Supernatural Blood:
The Name of All our Lives and Loves.
Hearken, And Help, ye holy Doves!
The high-born Brood of Day; you bright
Candidates of blissful Light,
The *Heirs* Elect of Love; whose Names belong
Unto The everlasting life of Song;
All ye wise *Souls*, who in the wealthy Breast
Of this unbounded *Name* build your warm Nest.⁴²³

The name of Jesus is “unbounded”; the poem constantly strives to refer to it without uttering it. The result is a chain, a “cramp” of expressions trying to catch the glimpse of the name above every name. The poem – in order to stress the un-utterability of the name in the order of commonplace reference – moves into the ontological aspect of its utterance, the aspect of *adoration*:

⁴²² Coleridge puts forward a similar notion in – what I would call - his theology of literature in his *Biographia Litteraria*.

⁴²³ Crashaw, ViE, p. 148

Awake and sing
 And be All Wing;
 Bring hither the whole *Self*, and let me see
 What of thy Parent *Heav'n* yet speaks in thee.
 O thou art Poor
 Of noble *Pow'rs*, I see,
 And full of nothing else but empty *Me*,
 Narrow, and low, and infinitely less
 Then this *Great* morning's mighty Business.
 One little *World* or two
 (Alas) will never do.
 We must have store.⁴²⁴

The act of *adoration* in the poem incorporates the whole of Creation, since the self of the adorator cannot properly respond to the aspiration of the adoration: the multitude of worlds and phenomena has to unite to rise up in a harmonious act of adoration. Indeed, the act of adoration – as the different etymologies of the original Latin and Greek words show – points in two simultaneous directions. The Greek word *proskynesis* (προσκυνησις) means *submission, recognition of God as the norm*, while the Latin word *ad-oratio* refers to an intimate contact, a kiss or an embrace.⁴²⁵ Both these aspects are present in the poem: incapacity to utter the name is the act of recognition the unbounded nature of God's name. Nevertheless, the act of utterance – if this needs to be done – is an act of love. This indeed is the deep Eucharistic reference of the poem: as the one body of love, the act of adoration being an act of submission and love at the same time, can come true:

Vessels of vocal Joys,
 Or You, more noble Architects of Intellectual Noise,
 Cymbals of Heav'n, or Human spheres,

⁴²⁴ *ibid*

⁴²⁵ Cf. the homily of Pope Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger) at Cologne-Marienberg at the occasion of the WYD, August 21st, 2005: „The Greek word is *proskynesis*. It refers to the gesture of submission, the recognition of God as our true measure, supplying the norm that we choose to follow. It means that freedom is not simply about enjoying life in total autonomy, but rather about living by the measure of truth and goodness, so that we ourselves can become true and good. This gesture is necessary even if initially our yearning for freedom makes us inclined to resist it.

We can only fully accept it when we take the second step that the Last Supper proposes to us. The Latin word for adoration is *ad-oratio* – mouth to mouth contact, a kiss, an embrace, and hence, ultimately love. Submission becomes union, because he to whom we submit is Love. In this way submission acquires a meaning, because it does not impose anything on us from the outside, but liberates us deep within.“ Taken from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20050821_20th-world-youth-day_en.html

Solicitors of *Souls* or *Ears*;
 And when you're come, with All
 That you can bring or we can call;
 O may you fix
 Forever here, and mix
 Yourselves into the long
 And everlasting series of a deathless *Song*;
 Mix All your many *Worlds*, Above,
 And loose them into *One* of Love.⁴²⁶

Crashaw goes on to use powerful images of Christ's presence – the prerequisite of any act of adoration – these are the images of *nest*, *bee-hive* and *perfume*. All these words point out to a notion of a centre of radiation, a centre which re-creates the world *from within*. In fact the typical Crashavian “sweets” are bound with the *Christocentrism* of its spiritual cosmology:

Leave All thy native Glories in their Gorgeous Nest,
 And give Thyself a while The gracious Guest
 Of humble Souls, that seek to find
 The hidden Sweets
 Which man's heart meets
 When Thou art Master of the Mind.⁴²⁷

The presence of the Name in the poem is thus postponed, as it is in the theology of the Eucharist. The presence of Christ in school theology is explained as being threefold – *the historical presence*, *the presence in the Eucharist*, and *the presence-in-the-coming*, the so-called “Second Coming of Christ” at the end of the ages. The poem incorporates all the types of Christ's presence in an act of *rotating around the infinity*. Indeed, linguistically speaking, the name of Jesus is carefully avoided in the poem: the act of adoration is an act of inviting Christ into the world. The old meaning of naming in the sense “making present”, is here wonderfully retained and yet avoided. The “All-adored Name” of Jesus enters the world in a paradox of an un-named substance.⁴²⁸ As I have shown before, the identity of the name and

⁴²⁶ Crashaw, ViE, p. 150

⁴²⁷ Crashaw, ViE, p. 151

⁴²⁸ R.V. Young remarks that „the hymn invokes not the signified behind the signifier but the signifier itself, the NAME of Jesus.“ in *Doctrine and Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Poetry*, p. 163. In that sense the eucharistic

being – so, economy and ontology – has been accomplished in a *sophisticated logic of language*. The multiplicity of reference and the dynamic of expression help to sharpen the sense of the Impossible. To bridge the abyss, the medium of language acquires prime importance.

In the Glorious Epiphany of Our Lord God is another of Crashaw's longer poems which thematises the problem of Christ's presence in the world; in this case with a complex system of images associated with the *problem of harmony*. At the heart of this "Hymn Sung as by the three Kings" - as the subtitle says – is a clear *christocentric* cosmology of Christ's presence in the world as shown in the feast of his "Glorious Epiphany". This presence is interpreted again in an *act of adoration*. The three kings – following the story in the Gospel of St Matthew – came to worship the new-born king: "et intrantes domum invenurunt puerum cum Maria matre eius et procidentibus adoraverunt eum et apertis thesauris suis obtulerunt ei munera aurum tus et murrum." (Mt 2, 11) In the poem – based on a dramatic structure alternating the three kings and a Chorus – the act of adoration is tantamount to an act of invocation; it is an eminently *linguistic undertaking*. The old *geocentric* cosmology of spheres is used to refer to Christ's eminent presence in the world as revealed in the Epiphany:

Cho. To *Thee*, thou *Day* of night! thou east of west!
 Lo we at last have found the way.
 To thee, the world's great universal east.
 The General and indifferent *Day*.

1. All-circling point. All cent'ring sphere.
 The world's one, round, Eternal year.

2. Whose full and all-unwrinkled face
 Nor sinks nor swells with time or place;

3. But every where and every while
 Is One Consistent solid smile;

1. Not vexed and tost

2. 'Twixt spring and frost,

3. Nor by alternate shreds of light
 Sordidly shifting hands with shades and night.

Cho. O little all! in thy embrace

presence of Christ surpasses the critique posed by Derrida's notion of the *differance*: as Young says later on „Jesus is the name of the Logos incarnate, the material presence of the Deity.“ (p. 165) This remark – as I have attempted to show – has a prime importance in understanding the genius of Crashaw's poetry.

The world lies warm, and likes his place.
Nor does his full Globe fail to be
Kist on Both his cheeks by Thee.
Time is too narrow for thy *Year*
Nor makes the whole *World* thy half-sphere.⁴²⁹

In this short extract, the basic concept of Crashaw's *christocentric* cosmology is to be seen: the little babe in the crib is "a little all": a microcosm holding the macrocosm *from within*. It is at the same time an "All-circling point" and an "All cent'ring sphere." The world rotates around Jesus as the eminent centre, which draws all deviating spheres to Himself. As such it is obviously a harmonious and musical cosmos: the only hindrance protecting us from hearing the overwhelming cosmic harmony was sin:

Cho. Nor was't our deafness, but our sins, that thus
Long made th'Harmonious orbs all mute to us.⁴³⁰

The "All-cent'ring sphere" transforms our perception of space, since the unbounded nature of Christ's presence, as a presence of the Logos incarnate revealed at the Epiphany marks its limits as un-limited.⁴³¹ The notion of music is thus associated not with the order of Creation but with its shocking *abundance*: muteness is a critical lack of sound. Crashaw's harmonious orbs thus *abound* with music: the power of grace re-creates the order of Creation. Since Christ's Incarnation the orbs are tuned from within and – as in the hymn *To the Name of Jesus* – adoring Jesus is an "unbounded All-embracing Song."⁴³² Precisely this spasm of expressions, or the abundance of similes pointing towards infinity defines the new order of grace as the anticipation of what-is-to-come. In the words of A.D. Cousins "Crashaw again and again depicts heavenly beatitude, or anticipatory sensation of it, as a spiritual union with Christ, the ecstasy of that oneness often being suggested through images of incandescence or

⁴²⁹ Crashaw, ViE, pp. 160-1

⁴³⁰ Crashaw, ViE, p. 161

⁴³¹ Young remarks that „Mysticism's definitive characteristic is not ecstatic passion, but rather the apprehension through grace of God's timeless presence.“ *Doctrine and Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Poetry*, p. 67

⁴³² Crashaw, ViE, p. 150

of musical harmony.”⁴³³ As the ecstasy partakes on God’s abundance of being (the theological concept of the *superabundantia*), the re-created universe abounds with harmony. Indeed, the muteness of the world of sin shows that the new cosmology of grace within a broken world must be re-lived: the paradoxical epiphany of an un-named God unites *deitas et materia*. It proportions, or “tunes” *materia* as a substantial part of the *deitas* and vice versa. It is a transformation from within the very mystery of Creation. Theologically speaking, God’s presence in the act of Creation re-turns at the Incarnation as revealed to the Three Magi. This time it is an act of *superabundantia*, since the old has not been abolished but *renewed* and *surmounted*.

Thus it offers a solution to the problem of the *logic of language*: its paradoxical illogicality is its aspiration to an ontological status, to the status of *materia*. Crashaw shows this dynamic again and again: in that sense, he uses the rhetorical and poetical elements of the Baroque to the utmost. Just as a Baroque statue aspires to a state of movement, Crashaw tunes his language to aspire to an animated being, a living *materia*. The apparent failure of such an undertaking, however, shows its triumph: language, indeed, *re-presents this aspiration*. The presence of language after all is primarily the presence of this struggle, this longing for the ineffable, and this *paradox at work*. Thus the ultimate abundance of meaning is fully efficient.

V.5. Images and music – the measure of abundance

Within the circle of the Metaphysicals, Crashaw’s re-creation of the Pythagorean scheme reaches in many aspects its ultimate possibility. Indeed, Crashaw’s musicality is eminently connected with his use of emblems. As I have noted earlier, the emblem allowed a creation of a more complex symbolic structure, which would expand the original meaning on many different layers.

⁴³³ The Catholic Religious Poets from Southwell to Crashaw. Sheed & Ward: London, 1991, p. 129

Crashaw uses two “typical” emblems (i.e. an image with a subsequent moral): in *To the Noblest and best of Ladies, the Countess of Denbigh*⁴³⁴ and in *Saint Mary Magdalene or The Weeper*. However, features of emblematic technique are detectable elsewhere, namely in *The Flaming Heart* and in the poem about the *Name of Jesus*. All of the poems are commentaries on clear images, trying to re-create their “speaking” quality, as in the Horatian maxim *ut pictura poesis*. As I have shown before, however, what Crashaw does is not just an explanative commentary on the “true” meaning of the emblem, but a stream of metaphors as if re-generated from the mysterious source of the object’s reference. The “Tears” series on the one hand concentrates fully on the “*Diamond*” of the tear, on the other hand produces a multitude of various dissimilar images. It is interesting to note that the second edition of *The Weeper called Saint Mary Magdalene or The Weeper* incorporated the two earlier poems from *Steps to the Temple* into one, however, re-shuffling of the order of stanzas resulted in a minimal change in the overall meaning of the piece. The unity of the picture and the text is granted in the *unity of the centre*. The process of generating starts in the pre-conceived harmony of the two elements. They explain each other as two mirroring faces of the same.

However, Crashaw’s emblematic poems do not reconcile picture and textual commentary, they tend to show the abundant capacity to re-structure our perception of the object. Since the “tear” enters new and new contexts (whose identity is granted only in the identity of its focus, of “the same”, or - to follow our previous examination - the “presence” of its reference), it simultaneously plays on many different layers. The logic of emblem is here fully compatible with the *logic of language*: it is the dynamism of expression, the over-abundance of language reaching for the ungraspable mysterious centre. The conceited style draws thus our attention towards the very process of language as exhibited in the eloquence of the author.

⁴³⁴ The full title continues as follows: *Persuading her to resolution in Religion and to render herself without further delay into the Communion of the Catholic Church*

The question of harmony in Crashaw is therefore a question of the measure of abundance: the multitude of reality has to be embraced by a firm belief in the unity of the object. Not incidentally therefore, music in Crashaw appears in this logic of abundance: it springs out of the infinity of the object, inasmuch it fulfils the same role as the pictorial commentary to a particular emblem. This is, indeed, the case of the hymn *To the Name of Jesus*: the emblematic and unutterable quality of Christ's name is *sung*. Since, however, the name cannot be pronounced unless one is "toucht with an interior *Ray*", the implication is clear: the music springs out of a *christocentric* heart. Thus the quality of its "music" is a quality of abundance of its "unbounded" centre:

All ye wise *Souls*, who in the wealthy Breast
Of this unbounded *Name* build your warm Nest.
Awake, *My* glory. *Soul*, (if such thou be,
And That fair *Word* at all refer to Thee)
 Awake and sing
 And be All Wing;
Bring hither thy whole *Self*, and let me see
What of thy Parent *Heav'n* speaks in thee.⁴³⁵

The *con-vocatio* of Creation a few lines later has a similar role: the unbounded Name of Jesus is to be *sung* by the whole of Creation, since it is the song of its *harmonizing* centre.

Wake *Lute* and *Harp*
And every sweet-lipp't Thing;
That talks with a tuneful string,
Start into life, And leap with me
Into a hasty Fit-tun'd Harmony.
Nor must you think it much
T'obey my bolder touch,
I have Authority in *Love's* name to take you
And to the work of Love this morning wake you;
Wake; In the Name
Of *Him* who never sleeps, All Things that Are,
Or, what's the same,
Are Musical;
Answer my Call
And come along;
Help me meditate mine Immortal Song.
Come, ye soft ministers of sweet sad mirth,
Bring All your household stuff of Heav'n on earth;

⁴³⁵ Crashaw, ViE, p. 148

O you, my Soul's most certain Wings,
Complaining Pipes, and prattling Strings,
Bring All the store
Of *Sweets* you have; And murmur that you have no more.⁴³⁶

Creation thus sings its song beyond its ontological status: the quality of singing stems out of the abundance of God's grace in its heart. "All Things that Are,/ Or, what's the same,/ Are Musical", i.e. *its proportionate status is to be measured by its improportion*, since the quality of its music is an act of praise. The abundance of being, the pure "proportion" of its created *in*-formation *abounds* into music: indeed, Creation is *con-vocated* into relationship with God which is not purely *automatism* or *mechanicism*. It sings its measure, its centre. The sublime un-utterability of God's name is its living centre abounding in its unboundedness. In that sense, it re-touches the problem of infinity discussed above.

The emblem for Crashaw – or the deliberate lack of it in this case – is a speaking image. Its centre is its *interior Ray*; its focus on the speaking quality is stressed by the tension between the visual and the literary. This interior Ray illuminates the world, since it tends to generate new and new similes of the object. A Crashavian emblem restores the infinite abundance of language stemming out of a *concentrated* vision. The stanzas of *The Weeper* can easily be reshuffled into a new unity – as it is the case of *Saint Mary Magdalene* or *The Weeper*. The dynamism of its language is its pointing towards the ultimate paradox – in that sense, obviously it *does* matter what the last stanza is. As we have seen, its final paradox is the reversal of its initial *perverted* cosmology marked by weeping upwards: Mary is weeping in a normal way, however, the sense of uneasiness with the classical cosmology is present. Christ as the adored centre of the *universe* is unbounded and the motions upwards and downwards blend into one. If we focus on the emblem itself – showing weeping Mary with a winged bleeding heart in a circle of light – we read the following inscription:

*Lo where a Wounded Heart with Bleeding Eyes conspire.
Is she a Flaming Fountain, or a Weeping fire!*⁴³⁷

⁴³⁶ Crashaw, ViE, p. 149

The emblem does not explain the picture, as the classical Renaissance ones did, it is not just a witticism: it is a *stream of paradoxes*. The second sentence unexpectedly climaxes in an exclamation mark, although it is clearly a question. What the emblem does is augmenting the mystery, the unspeakable. It generates paradoxical meanings, which are, however, startlingly precise: indeed, it still *presents* the picture. The *stream of paradoxes* is thus the mystery at work, the liberating power of language to achieve for new meanings and, most importantly, to the *unspeakable*. The emblem retains its power as a picture, i.e. as an expression *sui generis*, which can hardly be reduced to a language commentary. On the other hand, the commentary shatters the certainty of the static medium of the picture: the concentrated vision of a static depiction *transforms* into the *motion* of language and vice versa in infinite circulation. The vision of the centre *abounds* in new *joinings*, its harmony is dynamic in the original sense of the word: the *unspeakable* centre of reality is tuned in its abundance, in its inexhaustible capacity for making sense.

This, indeed, applies for the other “visual” emblem in *To the Noblest and Best of Ladies, the Countess of Denbigh (Persuading her to Resolution in Religion and to render herself without further delay into the Communion with the Catholic Church)*: the image of a locked heart is accompanied with the following inscription:

*'Tis not the work of force but skill
 To find the way into man's will.
 'Tis love alone can hearts unlock.
 Who knows the Word, he needs not knock.*⁴³⁸

The image responds to the inscription and vice versa: indeed, the mass of the object presented and the abstract idea expressed in verse create a sense of tension. The simile of the resistance of the material and the liberating force of the “word” unlocking the locked heart without the need to come to terms with the *materia* of the object. The focus of attention in the

⁴³⁷ Crashaw, ViE, p. 196

poem is matters of religion, or – more precisely - the resistance of the heart to the grace of God mediated through the Catholic Church. The emblem stays in the background of the poem as the indissoluble image of the difficulty. The meaning is thus the tension created BETWEEN the two; and this tension is not to be broken. It is this tension that abounds in metaphors and – in fact – creates the poem as such. The emblem – being a similar structure to the conceit as we have seen – becomes the centre of the poem's focus.

In *Psalm 137*, an interesting rendering of the Hebrew text in English, Crashaw uses musical imagery for a powerful simile of gloom:

Sing? play? to whom (ah) shall we sing or play,
If not *Jerusalem* to thee?
Ah thee *Jerusalem!* ah sooner may
This hand forget the mastery
Of Music's dainty touch, then I
The Music of thy memory.⁴³⁹

The association of music and abundance is clear here as well: it is both the emphasis on the performative quality of music (i.e. its capacity for creating emotions), and its emphasis on the abundance of emotions. The "Music of thy memory", indeed, is the *iubilatio*, the abundance of emotions which cannot be fully interpreted in the medium of words. Thus it re-enlivens the old maxim of St Augustine from his *Ennerationes in Psalmos*: "*Jubilum sonus quidam est significans cor parturire quod dicere not potest.*" The emotions of the weeping Isreal „on the proud banks of great Euphrates' flood“ abound in music.

In *Psalm 23* the association of centre and music is made explicit *expressis verbis*: the contended soul of the „psalmist“ singing of the shepherding hand of God in the beginning is juxtaposed with a clear presence of God in his heart:

At the whisper of thy Word
Crown'd abundance spreads my Board:
While I feast, my foes do feed
Their rank malice not their need,

⁴³⁸ Crashaw, ViE, p. 145

⁴³⁹ Crashaw, ViE, p. 56

So that with the selfsame bread
 They are starv'd, and I am fed.
 How my head in ointment swims!
 How my cup o'erlooks her Brims!
 So, even so still may I move
 By the Line of thy dear Love;
 Still may thy sweet mercy spread
 A shady Arm above my head,
 About my Paths, so shall I find
 The fair Center of my mind
 Thy Temple, and those lovely walls
 Bright ever with a beam that falls
 Fresh from the pure glance of thine eye,
 Lighting to Eternity.⁴⁴⁰

This inner music of abundance is the ultimate expression of the metaphysical rendering of the Pythagorean lore. Harmony is the quality of the centre, the measure of presence of God the unbounded. Therefore the sense of proportion, or *decorum* is the measure of language. One is tempted to say that what Crashaw achieved is the unity of the Pythagorean and Heraclitean concepts of harmony: the sense of proportion (the Pythagorean part) is eminently bound with a sense of tension of two opposite centres, with PARADOX. To make this paradox work, there needs to be a language holding the opposites in constant check. This is the measure: to keep the check. The surprising abundance of language, which characterises the whole of the metaphysical school, stems out of this prime condition: the concept of harmony must be a living one, and thus constantly in a state of paradox.

Heraclitus associated harmony with LOGOS, with the WORD. So did the Metaphysicals. By transforming the hermetic meanings of tradition, they managed to save it from oblivion; and early modern Christianity - the religion of LOGOS - from sinking into mere ideology. The equilibrium of wit and emotionality - the firm sensibility of the intellect - is the measure of the Metaphysical in its ultimate expression. Its ultimate possibility - as regards the conceited style - was achieved in the work of Crashaw. The orchestrated *perverted universe* inside re-locates the Pythagorean into the paradoxical infiniteness of God.

If the centre is everywhere, the circumference is nowhere. This is still a logical statement, although no reference can be found. The logical relation between a simple circle and an infinite one is retained, however, the *logic of language* celebrates the victory. Indeed, language ultimately transcends the possibility of reference and thus can constantly aspire towards the unspeakable.

⁴⁴⁰ Crashaw, ViE, p. 55

Conclusion

We have seen the development of the concepts of harmony in five major metaphysical poets. The examination showed the specific lines of transformation of Pythagorean musical cosmology into a complex metaphorical structure: indeed, the Pythagorean system had not been erased; it had only shifted its emphasis towards organic unity of a specific language. A static cosmological system transformed into a new enquiry about the nature of the *harmonizing task of the poet*. In a heliocentric, disproportionate *universe* the inherited position of the Pythagorean cosmology necessarily had to undergo major shiftings: the believed and shared cosmos had broken down, but the *harmonizing intuition* was to be retained. This resulted in a new enquiry into the very technique of poetic creation: into the *structure of poetic language*. The genius of metaphysical poetry is thus primarily a genius of a new re-discovery of the *power of language to create and re-create*.

Ernst Cassirer in his classic study The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy comes to a similar conclusion when discussing the dynamics of the new concept of certainty in Renaissance philosophy:

The new principle of knowledge born of Cusanus' philosophy, and the new norm of certainty established by him destroy the Aristotelian image of the world with its fixed central points and its interpenetrating spheres *by conceiving of it as a mere image*. But precisely because of this destruction, the task of reconstructing a total order of being and happening out of the powers and means proper to the intellect becomes so much the more urgent. The intellect must learn to move in its own medium, in the free aether of thought, without the help and support of the senses, so that it will be able, by virtue of this movement, to master the senses and to raise them up to itself. Thus, compared with Aristotelian-Scholastic physics, the order of problems has been reversed. What had been the starting point there now becomes the end, the objective of cosmological observation. Once the relativity of all local determination is recognized in principle, we may no longer ask how we can establish fixed *points* in the universe; instead, we must ask how fixed *laws* of change may be ascertained in this realm of complete mutual relationship and of limitless variability in which we now stand. The determination of any 'place' now presupposes, and can only be made within, a system of universal *rules* of movement. The unity of the universe as an *universum contractum* is based upon the unity of these rules. For what distinguishes the 'contracted' unity of the world from the absolute unity of God is that in the former, identity is never present as a substantial sameness, but rather is only relative, i.e. it is identity only in relation to

'otherness'. Unity can be grasped only through the medium of multiplicity; and permanence can be understood only through the medium of change. These determinations are not separated in such a way as to be proper to different spheres of the universe, so that change would dominate in the one and unity and uniformity in the other. Such a spatial distinction would conflict with the conceptual principle of *correlativity* as it is now established. In the cosmos of Cusanus there is no longer any individual existence that does not indissolubly unite within itself both determinations: that of 'unity' and that of 'otherness'; duration and constant change. In this cosmos, then there is no longer any individual part 'outside', 'above', or 'below' any other; the principle of 'everything in everything' (*quodlibet in quodlibet*) prevails. If the universe is recognized to be a totality of movements interacting with each other according to definite laws, there can no longer be any 'above' or 'below'; nor can there be anything eternal and necessary that is separate from the temporal and accidental. Rather, all empirical reality is characterized precisely by the coincidence of these opposites. As a qualitative interaction, this coincidence must either be or not be. It cannot be present to a higher degree in one place and to a lower degree in another.⁴⁴¹

Indeed, this general characteristics of Cusanus' philosophy in many ways resembles the situation of the Metaphysicals in their effort to bridge the old certainty of medieval cosmos of correspondence with the coming concept of early modern physics, that of "disenchanted" reality. It is a matter of a brand new poetics of cosmology: these two concepts – as I have attempted to show – are closely related.

Nevertheless, this general characteristic has to be confronted with the specific achievements of the respective poets. The initial impetus of John Donne was by no means just repeated, or recycled in the mentioned poets. With their special interests and orientations, they re-created, or multiplied this impetus. Early modern devotional practices – most especially various religious exercises – had changed the face of religious literature and religious poetry in particular. George Herbert's kind Anglicanism is a typical example of this tendency: the shift, or the new rediscovery of Christianity as a poetic topic is to be seen on his emphasis on the paradoxical nature of religious experience, and most especially on the new *theocentric* world. His cosmology is "tuned by Christ"; by the inner, *central*, experience of God's saving grace. This re-discovery of the Christian faith leaves also an important mark on the way he works with the Pythagorean lore: Pythagorean concepts are used for a different type of

⁴⁴¹ Cassirer, E.: *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, pp. 178-9

cosmological structure. As such they retain their metaphorical power, since as such they were still to be understood as the background of any harmonizing effort. The more specifically musical allusions in Herbert's "self-consuming" world are to be understood as an instance of a distinct *theology of song*: the act of singing aspires to a state of a pure *Wesen*, or *Wesen des Singens* to use the words of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger.

The work of Henry Vaughan deals more specifically with the hermetic meanings of reality in face of a major regeneration which takes place in an unconditional conversion. This drives him to explore the possibilities of hermetic concepts to become the tokens of this new harmony of faith. In that sense, indeed, the intuition of harmony is to be bound with an act of faith: it is within this contracted world of faith, where things can be meaningfully joined together. Re-generation, i.e. re-birth, is thus eminently bound with conversion: within a disenchanted world the only place to retain the old Pythagorean intuition is the world of deepened spirituality touching the great paradoxes of Christianity.

Andrew Marvell's contribution is marked with a peculiar duality: on the one hand, he embraces the dialogical principle of early Donne, on the other hand the projection of the subject within infinity of worlds ultimately mars this effort. In that sense, there is a disturbing ambiguity running through his work: the power of his imagination is still in a state of threat, since it is primarily a kind of private heresy. Indeed, the infinity of worlds – as Marvell aptly points out – makes it exceptionally difficult to restore a common platform of meaning. The faculty of imagination is to flow infinitely in an empty space. However, Marvell's genius bridges the abyss with his exceptional faculty of metaphor making: for Marvell, the emphasis on language becomes primarily an emphasis on the very dynamics of language. As such the vicissitudes of the disenchanted world can still be confronted with the common shared faculty of communication.

The work of Richard Crashaw, incorporating both the domestic impetus of his English predecessors – namely Donne and Herbert – and the continental traditions of major Counter-Reformation Catholic poets (St Therese of Avila, St John of the Cross, Famiianus Strada and Giambattista Marino in particular), marks the limit of the metaphysical conceit in taking the original impetus to its ultimate expression. The conceited style of Crashaw develops a new intuition of harmony: harmony is an abundant quality of infinitely redeemed cosmos. The dynamics of the previous concepts – namely the concepts of *contraction*, and *internalization* of the Pythagorean lore – reaches its ultimate point of dissolution. Indeed, what Crashaw achieved, was a point in which the two conflicting ancient concepts of harmony describe a full circle and seem to be the two sides of the selfsame coin. The later developments – as I have shown – degenerate into dissociation: the wit of the Cavalier poets and the Augustans aims primarily at a refined form and precise expressive and rhetorical quality. In that sense, the difficult middle position of the Metaphysicals on the threshold of the modern was too impossible to be taken any further.

This study's main objective was to stress the importance of the concept of harmony for our understanding of metaphysical poetry and, indeed, modern poetry as such. The interest in metaphysical poetry today is motivated – in my opinion - by the fine line between the referential and the emotional function of language. A poetic school always re-discovers language: in fact, the whole tradition of the modern literary theory proves this basic point. The impetus of the Russian formalists was to be incorporated into the structuralist understanding, and this to be overtaken by the vicissitudes of postmodern poststructuralism. My attempt was to show the necessity to study poetic language in the process of *generation*: the paradoxical nature of metaphysical language shows the absence and presence of language in double perspective. The first one being the absence of clear reference, in other words the art of *inscription*. Derrida's study of the *écriture* showed the problem of the presence of language

on the study of writing⁴⁴². The act of speaking leaves behind its trace, which complicates the presence: in fact, it is the sign of the fundamental absence of it. However, the dynamic space of the Metaphysicals shows the dynamic of language in *generation*: in opposition to the shared commonplace metaphors it emphasised *the process of language and its dynamics*. In that sense, the absence of clear reference can be regarded as the presence of the dynamic nature of language production. On the other hand, touching the truly metaphysical themes of metaphysical poetry, the religious experience and the longing for the ineffable, transforms the language of the Christian faith. The unattainability of God calls for a language that uncovers both the structure of the longing but also its ultimate impossibility. In this respect, the “fearful accommodations of John Donne” as well as the “self-consuming artifacts” of Herbert’s and some of Marvell’s poems show their specific genius. In the poems of Crashaw, the Roman Catholic, the absence and presence of Jesus’ name re-vitalizes the dogma of the Eucharistic presence of Christ as the presence-in-the-coming. In that sense again, the tension between the two extremes reaches its ultimate point in his work.

The Pythagorean scheme as an integral model of cosmos undergoes a similar transformation: the model of cosmos as the intuition of harmony was retained in the Metaphysicals precisely *because of the drastic relecture of its basic tenets*. In that sense, the sense of decorum, i.e. the sense of the ultimate *harmonious* order of the *universe*, was transformed into a *new logic of language*. The difference between the logic of things, i.e. the determination of things in the logic of natural laws (as interpreted by the *via experimentalis* of the early modern science), and the liberating power of language (and – indeed, the *relecture* of the ancient dogma of God’s saving grace) marks the beginning of the new *Aufgabe des Dichters*. The logic of language is the presence of harmony in an otherwise disharmonious world. In that sense, the old question about the task of the poet – whether he *reads* the signs of harmony or *creates* them – finds its new articulation. *Die Aufgabe des Dichters* - according to

⁴⁴² I am referring primarily to his analyses in his opus magnum, *De la grammatologie*.

the Metaphysicals – is to retain in its longing for an ontological status. This longing can thus aspire to a state of an event, as showed by the prophetic intuition of Martin Heidegger. The poet is the warrior of humanity between automatism and mechanicism. This measure is the ultimate measure of abundance.

In that sense, the problem of harmony has been the key issue of all poetry ever since.

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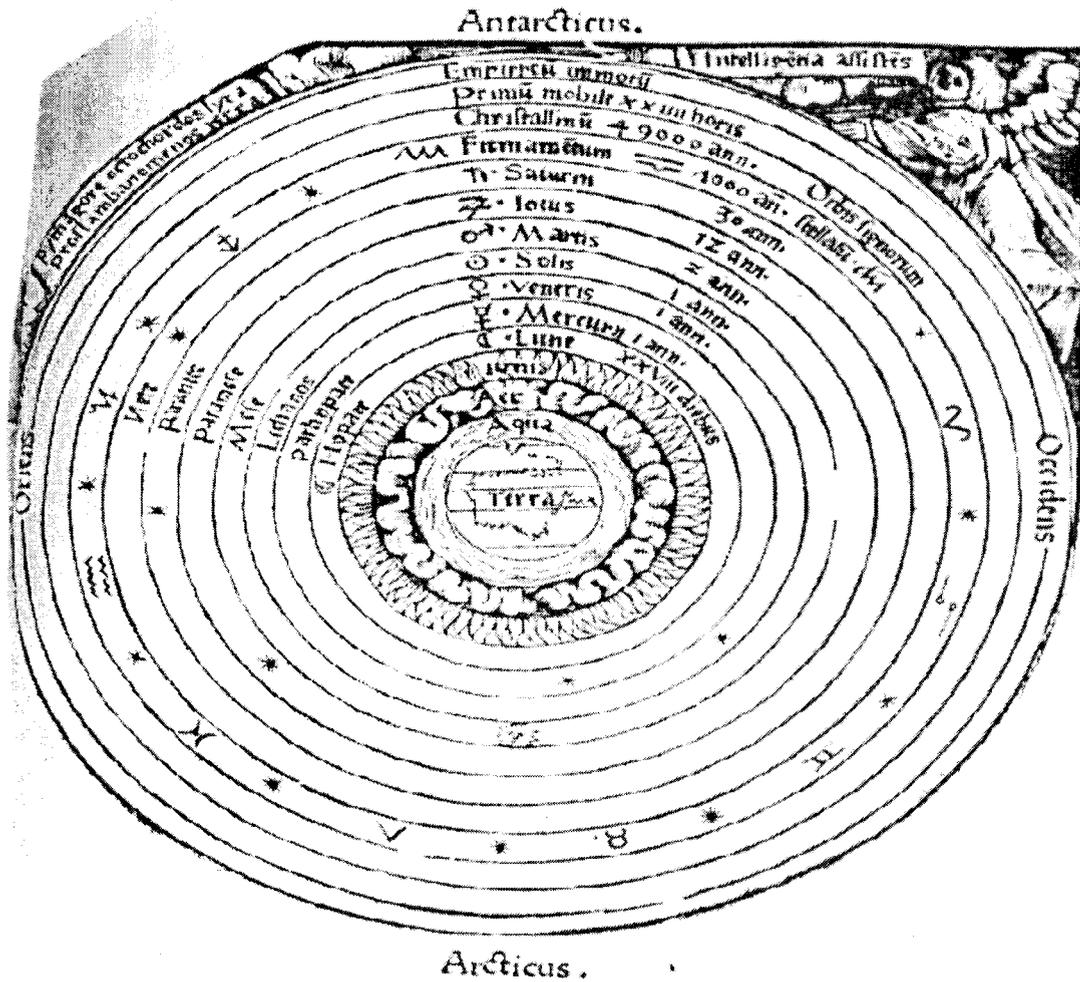
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Appendix 1



Engraving in Johannes von Eck's edition of Aristotle's treatise *Libri de coelo*, showing the universe in its entirety as a Ptolemaic astronomer would describe it, Augsburg 1519, fol. 29, reprinted from Hening, p. 123

Appendix 2

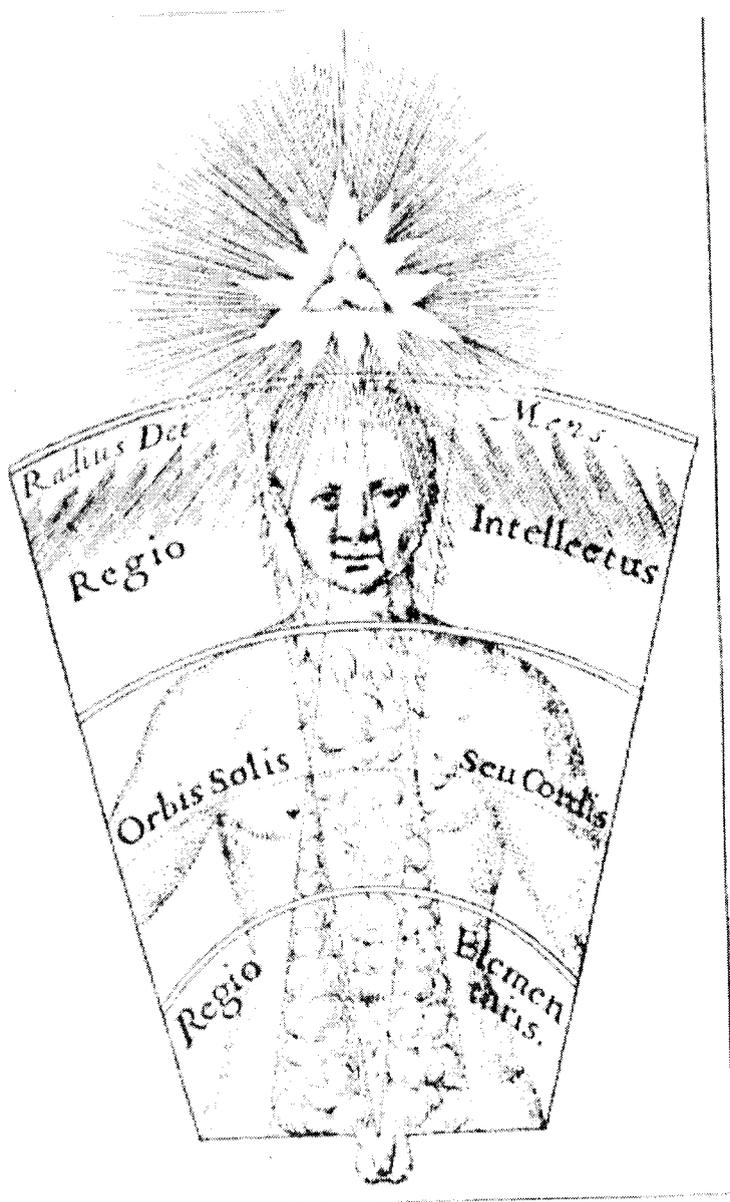


Plate 40 published in Robert Fludd's *Utriusque cosmi majoris scilicet et minoris metaphysica, physica atque technica historia*, 4 vols. (Oppenheim, 1617-19), showing geometrically by two intersecting triangles how sensuality decreases as spirituality increases and vice versa, reprinted from Heninger, p. 150

České resumé

Překládaná dizertační práce analyzuje význam pythagorejské harmonické kosmologie pro způsob vnímání člověka a světa v anglické renesanci. Chápe ji jako klíčový pojem pro renesanční umění, a to zejména pro hudbu a poezii. Postupný rozpad víry v pythagorejský koncept univerzální kosmické harmonie se výrazně projevuje v tvorbě tzv. metafyzických básníků, kteří vedou zápas o udržení její metaforické síly důrazem na vlastní proces své jazykové práce. Tím však postupně dochází k procesu celkové metaforizace světa: úkol básníkův se přesouvá od tlumočení univerzálních pravd o světě a lidském údělu v něm spíše k udržování síly básnického jazyka jako výsostného nástroje této metaforizace.

První díl se zabývá teoretickými a historickými předpoklady takového zkoumání. První kapitola analyzuje dva významné koncepty harmonie ve starověku, koncept Hérakleitův a Pythagorův. Význam Hérakleitův není pro renesanci zásadní, přesto – jak se ukazuje v pozdější vlastní analýze – můžeme najít náznaky Hérakleitova pojetí v díle Donneově. Naproti tomu myšlení Pythagorovo je renesanci centrální, a proto je mu v předkládané práci věnována větší pozornost. Je zdůrazněn význam Pythagorova pojetí *číslo* jako komunikačního prostředku mezi světem pozemských fenoménů a abstraktních idejí. Toto základní filozofické východisko Pythagorejci rozvinuli v komplexní nauku o významu čísel v aplikaci na fenomenální svět. Pythagorovi je také přisuzováno objevení principu poměru v hudební teorii, jako klíče k definici hudebních intervalů. Vztah hudební teorie a praxe založil zásadní rozdělení studia hudby, alespoň tak, jak nám ho na konci starověku odkázal Boethius: *musica mundana* (harmonický princip světa), *musica humana* (harmonické uspořádání lidské bytosti jako mikrokosmos světa) a *musica instrumentalis*, která se zabývala vlastní hudební praxí. Toto rozdělení je přijímáno i v renesanci, jak o tom svědčí např. spis anglického skladatele Thomase Morleyho *A Plain and Easy Introduction to Practical Music* z roku 1597. V dalších

kapitolách první části se zmiňuje percepce pythagorejského myšlení u Sokrata a Platóna (2. kapitola), u Aristotela (3. kapitola) a konečně u novoplatoniků (4. kapitola). Je zdůrazněn nehistorický charakter renesančního novoplatonizmu, který vnímal Platónovy dialogy novoplatónskou mřížkou.

V druhé části se analyzuje anglická renesanční poetika, zejména ve vztahu k pojmu *conceit*. Význam tohoto pojmu nebyl vždy zcela doceněn, přestože vychází z pythagorejského konceptu rozvoje z původní monády, a také zpětné *re-dukci* expanze do monády. Hranice doporučovaných *conceits* byla vymezena pojmem *dekorum*. Autor upozorňuje na tento pojem v souvislosti s pokusem definovat pojem metafyzického básnictví, protože obvinění z porušení *dekora* byl častou výhradou proti jejich tvorbě.

Ve třetí a poslední části prvního dílu se pojem *metafyzická poezie* definuje blíže, tak jak se ukazuje v dobové literatuře i v pozdější historické perspektivě. Zdůrazňuje se odpoutání metafyziků od původní pythagorejské nauky a poetiky korespondence, ovšem ve smyslu obratu pozornosti k vlastnímu způsobu metaforické práce. Tím – jak autor dokládá – byl učiněn pokus zachránit intuici velké pythagorejské metafory světové harmonie.

V druhém díle se analyzují díla jednotlivých básníků : J. Donnea, G. Herberta, H. Vaughana, A. Marvella a R. Crashawa. U **Donnea** (1572-1635) je zdůrazněn inciační impulz metafyzické poezie – kontrakce světa, metaforizace pythagorejského konceptu i jeho pervertované parafráze. Jeho ranou poetiku charakterizuje *problematizace pojmu univerzální jednoty, dynamismus jazyka jako nástroje dynamiky milostného vztahu, akt inskripce harmonické skutečnosti do skutečnosti dis-harmonické*, a konečně *snaha nalézt nový jazyk náboženské poezie*. U **Herberta** (1593-1633) je typickým jevem *posun od geo-centrizmu k teo-centrizmu* založené na obnoveném smyslu pro Boží přítomnost v niterné vztahu. *Svět jako takový je nahlížen z perspektivy nového centra „laděného Kristem“*, je re-centrován a rotuje kolem této Boží přítomnosti. Je analyzován také *Herbertův smysl pro conceits*, který je

založen na důmyslném pokusu pojmut náboženskou skutečnost: jakkoli byly jeho básně nazvány „sebepožírajícími artefakty“ (S. Fish), jítí náš smysl pro zkušenost nevyslovitelného. V poezii **Henryho Vaughana** (1621-1695) je významný vliv hermetický, *jeho křesťanství nese pečeť transformované skutečnosti, která proniká skrze zdánlivou dis-harmonii světa*. Ve víře svět dosahuje své původní harmonie: je osvětlen, zažehnut božskou jiskrou, z níž se zrodil a do níž se navrácí. **Marvellova** (1621-1678) lyrická poezie je soustředěna na mikrosvět zahrad a lidských mikrodramat. Marvell obrací pohled na tento *mikrosvět jako místo, kde se ukazuje nekonečnost světa*. Je to ale už ona pascalovská dvojí nekonečnost: nekonečnost vnější i vnitřní. *Svět jako harmonie vzniká před-mítáním světa proměněného subjektem*. Takový svět je ale křehký: tam, kde chybí jistota o harmonii jako světovém řádu, je harmonie buď jen dílem básnickovy imaginace, nebo je do světa vepsána násilím jako politikum. U **Crashawa** se zdůrazňuje jeho *mysticismus slz*, které obracejí klasickou hierarchizaci světa nahoře-dole, dále *extatická imaginace sebe-odvlastnění, eucharistická přítomnost jako klíč ke Crashawově kristologii*, a konečně *hudba jako měřítko hojnosti*. Harmonie vyrůstá ze samého centra nového stvoření: je jejím “produktem”, znamením sjednocení. V tom smyslu chápe autor Crashawovo dílo jako poslední fázi metafyzické poezie, jako její konečnou, poslední možnost. V nekonečném vesmíru – v němž je centrum kdekoliv a obvod nikde – existuje radikální nepoměr mezi označovaným a označujícím. Logika této výpovědi radikálně pokulhává za jejími referenčními možnostmi. Poměr jako dědictví pythagorejské kosmologie je svázán s jazykem: logika jazyka transcenduje odkazování. A v tom smyslu se metaforická práce básníka (*conceit*) odhaluje poměr mezi námi a naším poznáním.

V závěru autor odkazuje ke studii *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, kde E. Cassirer dospívá k podobnému závěru ve vztahu k filozofii objevitele nekonečnosti a paradoxu, M. Kusánského: vesmír sfér se stává pouze *obrazem*. U metafyziků

se ale hranice mezi poznáním a pouhou referenční funkcí jazyka uchovává v dramatickém napětí: ukazují jazyk ve stavu *zrodu*. V tom otevírají poezii nové perspektivy a v tom je jejich poezie stále tak populární.