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“Nature’s Whole Analogies”: The Structure of Some Nineteenth Century Narratives

Of late, we’ve learned to celebrate the sacrament of misreading; to seek in the mystery of misprision the saving grace of meaning; to redeem ourselves through creative revisionism from the anxiety of influence. “What happens if one tries to write, or to teach, or to think, or even to read, without the sense of a tradition?” The question is Harold Bloom’s; the answer also:

Why, nothing at all happens, just nothing. You cannot write or teach or think or even read without imitation, and what you imitate is what another person has done, that person’s writing or teaching or thinking or reading.¹

Like Paul’s epistles, Bloom’s latest letters to the ephebe inspire extreme responses. They are counsels of perfection and despair, distressing and consoling, repulsive and compelling. Reading, he argues, “is a belated and all but impossible act, and if strong is always a misreading.”

The strong reader, whose readings will matter to others as well as to himself, is thus placed in the dilemmas of the revisionist, who wishes to find his own original relation to truth, whether in texts or in reality (which he treats as texts anyway), but also wishes to open received texts to his own sufferings, or what he wants to call the sufferings of history.²

Bloom, like Paul whose text was Christ, *is* a strong reader and his readings *do* matter to others as well as to himself because he is wholly committed to what he calls “the endless quest of ‘how to read.’”³ Beginning by reminding the ephebe that “all criticism is a metaphor for the act of reading,” Bloom proposes “to enrich criticism by finding a more comprehensive and suggestive trope for the act of interpretation.”

Does interpretation now begin with the reader’s anxiety? Is the reader now the vulnerable and belated one, fearful that he can only block his

own individuating by his reading? If these questions are to be answerable, we need to be less idealistic about interpretation than we generally are.⁴

After the distressing questions comes the consoling answer; after the repelling hypotheses, the truth that compels grateful acknowledgment.

Meditating on the act and art of misreading, Bloom asserts that criticism "is always an act of deciding, and what it tries to decide is meaning."⁵ This essay represents a decision; and the problem that preceded the decision (described in the essay) was to find an accurate and appropriate metaphor for the act of reading a sampling of nineteenth century narratives (not all of which can be discussed in what follows). If accurate, the metaphor decided upon — i.e., "Nature's whole analogies" — should answer two questions: the fundamental, general question of how to read; and the more specific question of how to read nineteenth century narratives. If appropriate, the metaphor should also enable the reader to make some assertions about the meaning of the works discussed. The consolations of Harold Bloom must, however, be kept in mind. No matter how accurate or appropriate the metaphor may be, it is only one out of many that might have been chosen. If we are to be less idealistic about interpretation than we generally are, this fact has to be acknowledged from the start.

When he comes to the Nineteenth Century, the critic engaged in the endless quest of how to read is confronted with a serious problem, the problem posed by the increasingly obvious breakdown of boundaries between literary genres. Though Geoffrey Hartman speaks contemptuously of "the gnat of genre distinction,"⁶ it persists in being a troublesome insect, irritating the minds of many fine critics. Frank Kermode, for example, begins a recent essay by stating that "We could save ourselves much trouble by agreeing that a novel is a fictional prose narrative of a certain length, which allows for a great deal of variation between novels."⁷ But even if we agree to adopt Kermode's labour-saving device — ignoring works like *Aurora Leigh*, *Amours de Voyage* and *The Ring and the Book*, all of which have justifiably been classified as novels in verse — the problem remains. As Kermode admits, his definition allows for a great deal of variation between novels; so great that the reader who learns how to read *Wuthering Heights* and assumes, because it's classified as a novel, that he now knows how to read novels, is bound to have his assumptions confounded when he turns to *Vanity Fair*, *Under the Greenwood Tree* and *The Way of All Flesh*. Walter Allen argues that *Wuthering Heights* exists in "a category of creation all its own," and that "the usual compass bearings of criticism do not apply" in discussions of Bronte's novel;⁸ in fact, he is arguing the case for a large number of nineteenth century narratives.

And the case is not confined to prose narratives. We encounter the same problem in reading long nineteenth century poems. Wordsworth called *The Prelude* simply "the poem to Coleridge," but critics see it as "an internalized epic," a poem that approximates epic structure. Byron claimed *Don Juan* as an epic; the critics are still uncertain whether it qualifies for that distinction. Browning thought of *Sordello* as a narrative poem; it has been rejected as incomprehensible and excused as "auto-psychology." At the heart of the problem, I think, lies the word *narrative*. The verb *to narrate* means quite simply to relate, recount, give an account of — but of what the OED does not say. It does not necessarily mean to tell a story; but even if it did, who could deny that *The Prelude* and *In Memoriam* tell stories and are therefore narratives according to the old-fashioned definition? Paull F. Baum's discussion of *In Memoriam* provides a particularly telling example of the critical confusion that arises from a reader's not knowing how to read a work because he's disoriented by the mixture of genres, modes and forms. Baum states that the form of *In Memoriam* "as *elegy* is well fitted both to the subject and to Tennyson's genius."

For a record of sorrowing moments and personal memories, the method — short lyrics *without noticeable connection* [italics mine] — is well chosen. But for a long philosophical poem it cannot be maintained that the method is a happy one. Moreover, the mixture of personal and universalizing elements is an 'inconvenience' . . . troublesome to both the poet and the reader.⁹

Incomprehensibly, Baum concludes that Tennyson's poem "lacks form and coherence."¹⁰

As Northrop Frye points out, the "study of genres, or the differentiating factors in literary experience, is not yet begun." He makes a brief beginning himself by distinguishing between "genres of imagery," "genres of narrative" and "genres of structure." Narrative genres he defines as "typical ways of beginning, proceeding, and ending."¹¹ This definition, since it describes a procedural method for the reader, is consistent with the basic hypothesis of structuralist critics about the relationship between literary experience and the process of reading. Jonathan Culler, reaffirming Barthes, puts it most succinctly: "structuralists of all persuasions would argue that reading is a structuring activity."¹² In other words, "a work has structure because it is read in a particular way."¹³ If all criticism is a metaphor for reading, and reading is a structuring activity, then the metaphor decided upon, if accurate and appropriate, must itself be a structuring device that functions as a synecdoche: a figure that implies *in parvo* the structure of the whole work for which it stands as an analogy.

In reading, the reader structures: that is, he organizes in his head the parts or elements of what he reads successively into some kind of whole in which all the parts operate simultaneously. The whole can be held in the mind only after the work has been read to its end; in many cases, and for most readers, the parts can be structured into an imagined whole only after the work has been read right through a number of times. This aspect of literary experience — the reading from beginning to end, and subsequent rereadings — is essentially linear, diachronic, syntagmatic. In the initial stages of his experience, the reader structures the more obvious elements (like words, sentences, beginnings, middles and ends) into a whole that has meaning. In the later stages, he structures more and more subtle elements (no longer discrete parts, even, but relationships between the parts) into the whole that gives aesthetic pleasure. This aspect of literary experience is essentially non-linear (Scholes calls it “vertical”),¹⁴ synchronic, paradigmatic. Because it functions as a synecdoche, the structural analogy chosen as metaphor for the act of reading implies both stages of the reader’s literary experience, providing him with an indication of how to read a work from beginning to end, and an image of the kind of whole such a reading is likely to leave in his imagination.

For example, if the reader approaches *In Memoriam* with the critical assumptions Paull Baum apparently makes about the poem — that it’s an elegy or a long philosophical poem — he will be forced into a reading which does not matter to others because it can only be described in a series of critical non-statements: namely, that it’s not really an elegy, or not an elegy according to accepted literary conventions, though it contains some elegiac elements; that it’s not (as Tennyson clearly indicates in lyric xlviii) a philosophical poem, or it’s bad philosophy. Such utterances are critical non-statements because they do not make Baum’s reading of *In Memoriam* matter to other readers; or help other readers decide for themselves how to read the poem; or suggest an image of the poem as a whole.

For my reading of *In Memoriam*, my sense of the poem as a whole, the best metaphor I can find is one of “Nature’s whole analogies”: the violet. It appears first in xviii, one of the early written lyrics.¹⁵ Section Two of the poem (ix-xx in Tennyson’s nine-part division) concerns the return of Hallam’s body to England and his burial at Clevedon. In xviii, the reader is invited to come and “hear the ritual of the dead.” What he hears when he listens is, of course, *In Memoriam* in which Tennyson reenacts that ritual.

Even the quickest reading of “The Order for the Burial of the Dead” in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* reveals how much Tennyson’s poem owes to that solemn ceremony. The poet’s initial declara-

tion of faith in the Prologue — “Strong Son of God . . . / Whom we . . . / By faith . . . embrace / Believing where we cannot prove” — invokes the opening words of the burial service: “I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live . . . ye believe in God, believe also in me.” The Prologue’s second stanza alludes twice to the burial service Lesson taken from St. Paul (I Corinthians, 15:20-58) — a text quite specifically referred to in cxx. The prayer at the end of the Prologue — “Forgive these wild and wandering cries” — reads like a direct response to the first psalm (39: *Dixi, custodiam*) in the service for the dead:

I said, I will take heed of my ways: that I offend not in my tongue . . .
Deliver me from mine offences.

The theme of verbal offences is taken up in v — “I sometimes hold it half a sin / To put in words the grief I feel” — and becomes a major issue throughout the poem, ironically laid to rest only in the final song that celebrates a marriage.

At the moment of interment, the priest intones the best-known phrases of the funeral service: “earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.” These phrases supply three recurrent and highly developed images in the poem. Two of them appear in the first stanza of xviii:

‘Tis well; ‘tis something; we may stand
Where he in English earth is laid,
And from his ashes may be made
The violet of his native land.

A perfect symbol for Hallam, “the flower of men” (xcix), the violet is also a structural analogy for what happens in Tennyson’s poem which is an “earthly song” (lxi) inspired by “an earthly Muse” (xxxvi), and which confronts the possibility that “dust and ashes [are] all that is” (xxxiv). The dust scattered by maniac Time is “the dust of change” (1); and Man, like thousands of other types or species, may be doomed to extinction, “blown about the desert dust, / Or sealed within the iron hills” (lvi). The “iron hills” are grim reminders of that “remorseless iron hour” which made earth of Hallam and transformed Emily Tennyson’s “orange flower” into “cypress” (lxxxiv).

This transformation, from bridal to funeral flower, from Christmas garland to “one wreath more” (xxix), can be and is, in the course of the poem, reversed. Hallam’s death “sicken’d every living bloom” (lxxii); in the extraordinary ninety-seventh lyric, Tennyson, thinking “of [his] spirit as of a wife” widowed (xvii, xli, lxxxv) by her husband’s “doom,” is left with nothing but memories: “She keeps the gifts of years before, / A withered violet is her bliss” (xcvii). Like the anemone, hyacinth

and lilac, the violet (because of its colour and shortness of life, its preference for the shade) is an emblem of death and mourning. This is the violet that grows from the ashes of grief and despair:

So seems it in my deep regret,
O my forsaken heart, with thee
And this poor flower of poesy
Which, little cared for, dies not yet.

But since it pleased a vanished eye,
I go to plant it on his tomb,
That if it can it there may bloom,
Or, dying, there at least may die.
(viii)

Though the meaning of the word *regret* has weakened with time, Tennyson presumably knew the earlier, Scottish form, *regrate*, which means a lamentation or complaint: to express grief, sorrow or distress. In Section Eight, the sequence recalling the Tennyson's move south from Somersby to Epping Forest, the poet turns to leave the landscape of his youth and, by implication, the landscape of love:

To leave the pleasant fields and farms;
They mix in one another's arms
To one pure image of regret.
(cii)

Celebrating Christmas in his new home, the poet muses on his "father's dust" left "silent under other snows": "There in due time the woodbine blows, / The violet comes, but we are gone" (cv). Having supplied, at the beginning of Section Nine, the crucial connection — the violet as "one pure image of regret," blooming when others are gone — the poet has now prepared the reader for the climactic transformations that occur in the remaining lyrics. Spring banishes "the last long streaks of snow" and "thick / By ashen roots the violets blow":

and in my breast
Spring wakens too, and my regret
Becomes an April violet,
And buds and blossoms like the rest.
(cxv)

The purple emblem of death becomes a sign of returning life, "life reorient out of dust" (cxvi).

But before the poet can transfigure the reader from mourner into a wedding-guest, one final metamorphosis must occur. Before "the happy thought, / Self-balanced on a lightsome wing" can be wrought from the "painful phrases" of the poet's preceding experience (lxv),

the violet, already changed into spring's promise of love, must change again. The change occurs in cxxii, a lyric which alludes to and pulls together many of the preceding lyrics. In xviii, while listening to the burial service, the poet wants to breathe life into and so resuscitate his dead friend: I would "thro' his lips impart / The life that almost dies in me." The adverb is crucial since the poet "dies not, but endures with pain, / And slowly forms the firmer mind." (Here, by the way, is another indication in the important eighteenth lyric of how to read *In Memoriam* which records the formation of a firmer mind.) In xviii, the poet's vital breath — respiration and inspiration — falters; in cxxii, it recovers full-blooded life. Addressing Hallam, he exclaims:

If thou wert with me, and the grave
Divide us not, be with me now,
And enter in at breast and brow,
Till all my blood, a fuller wave,

Be quickened with a livelier breath,
And like an inconsiderate boy,
As in some former flash of joy,
I slip the thoughts of life and death;

And all the breeze of Fancy blows,
.....
And every thought breaks out a rose.

Hallam, "the flower of men," identified with the "perfect flower of human time" (lxi), slips through thoughts of life and death, transcends in Tennyson's imagination the limitations of the natural world, and breaks out a rose, the beatified flower of Dante's *Paradiso*. (I take quite seriously Tennyson's description of *In Memoriam* as "a sort of Divine Comedy, cheerful at the close.")¹⁶ The full import of the last line in lyric xviii — "The words that are not heard again" — manifests itself in the first six stanzas of the so-called marriage-hymn which are a kind of palinode. "Regret is dead," the poet proclaims, no longer caring "to embalm / In dying songs a dead regret"; but "love is more" and makes the preceding one hundred and thirty one lyrics sound like "echoes out of weaker times," echoes of words that are not to be heard again. With "firmer mind," the poet buries "regret for buried times That keenlier in sweet April wakes" (xcvi), and with regret all the elegiac emblems and symbols of ephemerality. He turns his attention to "the bridal flower" who enters "glowing like the moon / Of Eden on its bridal bower." Paralleling Dante's Beatrice, she bends on the poet "her blissful eyes" that "brighten like the stars that shook / Betwixt the palms of Paradise":

O, when his life was yet in bud,
He too foretold the perfect rose.

Tennyson's ambiguous language here invites the kind of interpretation I offer. The purple flower that lurks "with all the children of the shade,"¹⁷ is transfigured finally into "the perfect rose," Dante's image of divine communion.

To pursue to their twig-tips all the ramifications of the violet as structural analogy for *In Memoriam* is impossible. I can only suggest how and why this kind of approach results in a more holistic and therefore satisfying reading than one which focuses on what the poem fails to be or does not do. Bloom, who accuses all kinds and schools of critics of reducing poems to "images, ideas, given things . . . phonemes . . . rival conceptualizations," insists that the true critical issue is how to avoid such reductions.¹⁸ One way of doing so is to acknowledge, with Michael Rifaterre, that parallelism, or "the recurrence of equivalent forms," is the basic relationship underlying poetry; and that "a poem is a verbal sequence wherein the same relations between constituents are repeated at various levels and the same story is told in several ways at the same time and at several times in the same way."¹⁹ In *In Memoriam*, for example, the evolutionary, or geological, lyrics are not extraneous to the poem as a whole. They cannot be read simply as biographical evidence of Tennyson's interest in science, or as historical evidence of his having been a man of his intellectual times. Retelling the poem's central story in yet another way, these lyrics culminate in one of the most powerful transformations in the entire work:

The hills are shadows, and they flow
From form to form, and nothing stands;
They melt like mist, the solid lands,
Like clouds they shape themselves and go.
(cxxii)

The several kinds of transformation that occur at different times in the poem — diurnal, seasonal, geological, astronomical, emotional, psychological, religious and literary — can always be referred back to the single story of regret-into-violet-into-rose because it is a synecdoche implying all the different versions in its wholeness, and the whole poem in its diverse but parallel parts.

Like all narratives, *In Memoriam* relates. What it relates is a series of transformations for which I have chosen one as a synecdoche. This critical choice is one way of structuring what is read, of organizing the parallel elements into a whole that makes sense. In other words, the reader, in relating parts, parallels the narrative of parts related. What I

now have to account for is the choice of "Nature's whole analogies" as a metaphor for my reading of some nineteenth century narratives.

From Rousseau's time on, says Frye, "a profound change in the cultural framework of the arts takes place. Man is thought of as a product of the energy of physical nature."²⁰ But, as Frye himself notes elsewhere, man's notions of physical nature, and his own relation to it, began to undergo the most radical revisions much earlier than Rousseau. Copernicus, whose heliocentric view of the universe was not generally accepted in England until Newton's time, nevertheless initiated what Frye calls "a revolution in perspective"²¹ which rearranged man's view of space and time as the dimensions of nature. Newton continued the Copernican revolution and, "after Newton, the reign of autocracies founded on [Nature as] a symbol of unchanging order is over."²² It was Newton and Leibniz who (with the help of Kepler) invented the differential calculus, defined by Bronowski as "the mathematics of change." The mathematics of change were essential to man if he was to provide himself with an accurate account of the laws of nature since the laws of nature, after Copernicus, Galileo and Newton, become "laws of motion, and nature herself becomes not a series of static frames but a moving process."²³ Darwin completed the "revolution in perspective," doing to man's sense of time what earlier scientists had done to this sense of space: the "doctrine of evolution made time as huge and frightening as space."²⁴

"Green in nature is one thing," observes the narrator of *Orlando*, "green in literature another."²⁵ This is obviously true; but Marvell's "green thought in a green shade" and Dylan Thomas's "fire green as grass" can scarcely make much sense to those unfamiliar with green in nature. Similarly, while it is obvious that man lives in two worlds "traditionally called nature and art," that "our physical environment in time and space" is the world "studied mainly by the natural or physical sciences,"²⁶ and that our imagined world is essentially mythological and created by the artist; nevertheless, it is equally obvious that the forms of the latter clearly owe something to the former. Wilde, of course, argues that "Nature, no less than Life, is an imitation of Art;"²⁷ that Life and Nature are, from the artistic point of view, failures because "so terribly deficient in form."²⁸ But the truth of Wilde's paradoxes, to be paradoxical, must work both ways — something Schiller anticipates in his brilliant letters *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*.²⁹ The Impressionists, says Wilde, have taught us how to see "those wonderful brown [London] fogs" just as Turner taught us how to see sunsets. "[N]ature is our creation. It is in our brain that she quickens to life."³⁰ What he means, of course, is quickens to aesthetic life. The green shade and the brown fog were not imagined by colour-

blind artists or those who have never seen nature — Homer notwithstanding. What is true of literary colours is also true of literary forms. To put it crudely, the beginnings, middles and ends of poems, plays and novels are metaphorical translations of births, life-spans and deaths determined by nature's laws. When the laws of nature undergo radical revisions, as they did between Copernicus and Darwin, we may expect to find similar revisions in the rules that regulate literary genres and structures. The old hierarchy of literary forms still upheld by Dryden, when he states that the heroic poem, or epic, "is undoubtedly the greatest work which the soul of man is capable to perform,"³¹ represents one of those autocracies founded on Nature as a symbol of God's unchanging order. But, as Nature gradually declares its independence from God and becomes "a moving process" unfolding in infinite space and time without a definitive beginning or end, the old hierarchies collapse. When the "old order changeth, yielding place to new," corresponding changes and breakdowns are to be looked for in the literary order which also gives place to the new — or the novel.

Evidence of man's changing view of and relationship to nature is most amply furnished by the rise of the novel which can be accounted for rather differently from the way Ian Watt accounts for it. From its very beginning, the novel sets out to confound the boundaries between nature and art, presenting itself to the world in the guise of history, biography, autobiography, collections of recently discovered letters or journals of verifiable events recorded by one who can claim "I was there." Furthermore, from the start, the novel has been what Virginia Woolf said it was in 1927: a "cannibal, which has devoured so many forms of art" and will, in the future, devour even more.³² To "the basic questions raised by eighteenth century critical discussion of the novel as a genre," the German Romanticists had, Eric Blackall informs us, "their own specific answers."

To the question whether the novel should follow the structural pattern of the epic or that of the drama their answer was that it should do both — indeed it should combine all genres within itself, it should be a "mixture of the dramatic, the epic and the lyric," according to Friedrich Schlegel.³³

The novel not only mixes genres and devours all forms, becoming what it eats; it also has an in-built device for self-destruction. For, as Kermode observes, "however you put it, the history of the novel is the history of forms rejected or modified, by parody, manifesto, neglect, as absurd. Nowhere else, perhaps are we so conscious of the dissidence between inherited forms and our own reality."³⁴

Nowhere else is "the belated critic," inhibited by the anxiety of influence, so conscious of the dissidence between inherited forms of criticism and the reality of his own reading experience as when he comes to the narratives of the nineteenth century, a century in which the novel appears to tyrannize over the long poem and the long poem to subvert the novel. How, then, does the critic "find his own original relation to truth" — the truth as *he* sees it — about the work he's reading or has read and wants to talk about? How does he make his readings matter to others as well as to himself, which he must do if he spends half his professional life teaching? He begins, if he's brave enough, by taking Wallace Stevens' advice:

Throw away the lights, the definitions
And say of what you see in the dark

That it is this or that it is that.
But do not use the rotted names.

"Nothing must stand." says Stevens. "Between you and the shapes you take / When the crust of shape has been destroyed."³⁵ Throwing away definitions dependent upon distinctions between verse and prose, for example, it takes courage (or maybe temerity) for the critic to assert that *Vanity Fair* reads more like *Don Juan* than *Tom Jones* or *Dombey and Son*; that *The Prelude* leaves him thinking more about *Frankenstein* than *The Seasons* or *The Ring and the Book*.

The shapes I take to express what I see in the act of reading a number of nineteenth century narratives are the shapes of "Nature's whole analogies." I take them because they suggest a way of reading each work without predetermining the reader's expectations as to what kind of narrative he is embarking upon, so that he will not (as Browning was afraid the reader would with *Paracelsus*) mistake the "performance for one of a class with which it has nothing in common — judge it by principles on which it has never been moulded, and subject it to a standard to which it was never meant to conform."³⁶ I take them because, as Bryon explains, "nature's whole analogies" are the best analogies for those things that bear within them "the very germ / Of Change."³⁷ Nineteenth century narratives are just such things. Considered as a whole, each one of these narratives projects nineteenth century man's changing view of nature as a process of change, unfolding in space without clear boundaries and in time without a definitive beginning or end. This fact helps to explain why, for example, George Eliot had such trouble ending her novels; why she thought that conclusions, "the weak point of most authors," were "at best a negation."³⁸ It also helps to explain why critics like Alan Friedman have begun to

discover and comment upon the increasing open endedness of nineteenth century narratives: "the endlessness has become an end. The new form for the novel exposes not only the heroes and antiheroes but readers, too, to an essentially unlimited experience."³⁹ Since they are themselves projections of or metaphors for change, it is not surprising that the major images which function as a structural analogies within these narratives are examples of "Nature's whole analogies," or that these analogies should, in their turn, function as synecdoches for the works in which they appear.

Beginning *The Prelude* I read: "and should the chosen guide / Be nothing better than a wandering cloud, / I cannot miss my way" (16-18).⁴⁰ One line later, "Trances of thought and mountings of the mind / Come fast upon me" (19-20). The first verse paragraph ends by asking, "shall some floating thing / Upon the river point me out my course?" (29-30) The answer is yes, for with astonishing consistency, Wordsworth endues the "airy phantasies / That had been floating loose about for years" (120-1) with "outward life": gives to "airy nothing[s] / A local habitation and a name" in the shape of clouds and floating things, rivers and mountains, using nature's whole analogies to inform his "song that winds / Through ever changing scenes" (180-1). The tale he chooses to tell "from [his] own heart," is a "variegated story, in the main / Lofty,"

but the unsubstantial structure melts
Before the very sun that brightens it,
Mist into air dissolving!
(222-7)

Imagination, that "awful power" (VI, 594) which is "reason in her most exalted mood" (XIV, 192), provides the poet's "clearest insight" into the kind of narrative he has it in him to relate; but that which illuminates the true subject-matter also threatens the envisioned structure. In other words, the poet feels nervous and uncertain about a long narrative, implying epic pretensions, with a domestic theme. His aspiration "mounts / . . . toward some philosophic song / Of truth that cherishes our daily life" (299-30).

The Prelude becomes precisely what the poet says it is — "mountings of the mind": mountains which the poet prepares to ascend, first checking out his equipment like a sensible mountaineer; then proceeding, as always on the lower slopes, with speed and enthusiasm. By the time he reaches Cambridge, it is enough to record

that I was mounting now
To such community with highest truth—
A track pursuing, not untrod before,

From strict analogies by thought supplied
 Or consciousnesses not to be subdued.
 (III, 121-6)

At Cambridge he can state: "here . . . have I retraced my life / Up to an eminence" (167-8). This feeling of elevation culminates in Book VI, "Cambridge and the Alps," at which time Europe was "thrilled with joy / France standing on the top of golden hours, / And human nature seeming born again" (339-41). The unveiled summit of Mont Blanc, however, proves to be a disappointment, "a soulless image on the eye / That had usurped upon a living thought / That never more could be" (526-8). The unnoticed traverse of the highest alpine pass ensues almost immediately: "our future course, all plain to sight, / Was downwards with the current of that stream" (584-5). What follows is the inevitable descent (analogous to the epic's underworld excursion) through the "anarchy and din, / Barbarian and infernal," of Bartholomew's Fair which is an emblem of London itself; through the disillusionment and despair of the three books describing the poet's "Residence in France":

I lost
 All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,
 Sick, wearied out with contrarities,
 Yielded up moral questions in despair.

This was the crisis of the strong disease,
 This was the soul's last and lowest ebb.
 (XI.302-7)

Looking for a "ladder for [his] spirit to reascend / To health and joy" (396-7), the poet withdraws, like an experienced mountain-climber, to one of the lower camps where he reviews the condition of his equipment and prepares for another assault on the summit. It comes at the start of Book XIV — the stunning account of the Snowdon ascent — and results in the longed-for apocalyptic view:

There I beheld the emblem of the mind
 That feeds upon infinity, that broods
 Over the dark abyss, intent to hear
 Its voices issuing forth to silent light
 In one continuous stream.
 (XIV, 70-4)

The final image is of "beauty exalted" (453) and the poet's mind resting in one of his famous "spots of time, / That with distinct pre-eminence retain / A renovating virtue" (XII, 208-10), high "above this frame of things" (XIV, 450), the earth. What is important to note is that

underneath the stable, structural analogy of the mountain which the poet's mind ascends, descends and reascends, lies "the changeful earth" (I, 559) on which "every season" unfolds its "transitory qualities" (II, 289-90). Earth changes "her images and forms / . . . fast as clouds are changed in heaven" (VI, 492-3). Danger and desire, fear and joy, make the "surface of the universal earth / . . . / Work like a sea" (I, 473-5). The "great Nature that exists in works / Of mighty poets" is created and kept in motion by

the motions of the viewless winds,
Embodied in the mystery of words:
There, darkness makes abode, and all the host
Of shadowy things work endless changes.
(V. 594-9)

"Oh, blank confusion!" cries Wordsworth after conjuring up an image of Bartholomew's Fair as the "true epitome / Of what the mighty City is herself" (VII, 722-3). But, though the blank confusion "wearies out the eye" and seems by nature "an unmanageable sight,"

It is not wholly so to him who looks
In steadiness, who hath among least things
An under-sense of greatest; sees the parts
As parts, but with a feeling of the whole.
(731-6)

Detached from the complex works in which they occur, Tennyson's violet and even Wordsworth's mountain appear to be "among the least things;" but, because the simple images are not simply images, because they are synecdoches or structural analogies, inherent in these smallest parts is "an under-sense of greatest" things — i.e. wholes. And because they are taken from the endlessly changing order of nature, and bear within themselves the germ of change, they function as signs to the reader of the changes he is likely to encounter in the work he is reading, and of the changing order of relationships between those works.

"For change of place, like growth of time, / Has broke the bond of dying use," declares the poet of *In Memoriam*; and instantly he goes on to ask, "who would keep an ancient form / Thro' which the spirit breathes no more?" (cv) His poetic, like his religious, faith is sundered from its ancient form (cxxvii); and he himself changes into one like the changed Lazarus, "Whose faith has centre everywhere, / Nor cares to fix itself to form" (xxxiii), a faith "hard to frame / In matter-moulded forms of speech" (xcv). Nature, says the poet Everard Hall in what can be considered a prefatory poem to *Idylls of the King*, "brings not back the Mastodon, / Nor we those times; and why should any man / Remodel models?"⁴¹ In the *Idylls*, as in *In Memoriam*, Tenny-

son "fuses old and new" (xvi) into what, for some readers, are "seeming-random forms" (cxviii); they are not, however, really random, as analysis makes clear. They have their own dynamics and express the poet's acute sense of old orders changing and yielding place to new. Similarly, when Wordsworth makes "rigorous inquisition" of himself with regard to his artistic qualifications and the suitability of his poetic equipment for the expedition he wants to embark on, he delays, passing his days in contradiction, unable to reconcile the vastness of his vague ambitions, which will take time to fulfill, and the intense immediacy of his impulse to write. The contradiction stems, as I've suggested, from his desire to "build up greatest things / From least suggestions" (XIV, 101-2), to exercise his mind "Upon the vulgar forms of present things, / The actual world of our familiar days" (XIII, 355-7), and, at the same time, to reveal in them the "Characters of the great Apocalypse, / The types and symbols of Eternity, / Of first, and last, and midst, and without end" (VI, 638-40).

And here we have it: on the one hand, the poet's and prophet's impulse toward the old and enduring symbols; on the other, the novelist's impulse toward the vulgar forms of transient things taking place in the "actual world of our familiar days." The contradictory desire to fuse these two impulses becomes more and more obvious to readers of nineteenth century narratives. Byron's Muse, as he avers, is "a glass of *Weatherology*" (XII, xliii); and, like the English climate, the form of his masterpiece is consistently unpredictable and terribly changeable. Forewarned by his experience with Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, however, the reader of *Don Juan* is unlikely to be taken in by Byron's ironic reiterations of narrative incompetence. Jerome J. McGann is surely right in asserting that the "effect to find the structure of *Don Juan* is . . . the single greatest difficulty we have with the poem."⁴² But I do not myself believe that the poem lacks structure. Byron's most persistent theme is change; and love, the primary occupation of his legendary hero, is simply one version of that theme:

Love bears within its breast the very germ
Of Change; and how should this be otherwise?
That violent things more quickly find a term
Is shown through Nature's whole analogies;
And how should the most fierce of all be firm?
Would you have endless lightning in the skies?
Methinks Love's very title says enough:
How should "the *tender* passion" e'er be *tough*?

Since lightning flashes and is by nature intermittent, we should be foolish to expect "endless lightning in the skies." What Byron offers in its place is *Don Juan*, "A nondescript and every-varying rhyme, / A

versified Aurora Borealis, / Which flashes o'er a waste and icy clime" (VII, ii). The narrator's lyrical recollections of youth and young love, his story of Juan and Haidee, his fanciful but wise and wonderfully witty commentary upon the progress of the writing of the poem, flash, like the constantly shifting, multi-coloured Northern Lights, across the "waste and icy clime" of Lord Byron's chilling social satire. That his structural analogy for the poem as a whole should be the Aurora Borealis is, of course, consistent with what his Muse, that "glass of *Weatherology*," dictates.

Perhaps the single most obvious example, amongst nineteenth century narratives, of the way in which an author, having chosen one of changeful nature's whole analogies, proceeds to structure a vast and complex work upon it, is *Dombey and Son*, on the second page of which Dickens writes: "The earth was made for Dombey and Son to trade in, and the sun and moon were made to give them light . . . stars and planets circled in their orbits, to preserve a system of which they were the centre."⁴³ It takes Dickens sixty-two chapters (more than seven hundred pages) to ring all the changes, work all the transformations, envision all the metamorphoses implicit in his analogy between the solar system and that which Dombey believes to centre on himself and Paul, the light of his life, too soon sunk in the darkness of the sea (on which the *Son and Heir* also founders), and ironically eclipsed by his sister (a sunflower) who becomes one flesh with a sailor and rises from the regenerating water having suffered a sea-change — son into daughter — providing her father with a second son and a second daughter upon whose face he "cannot bear to see a cloud" (penultimate paragraph of the novel). And perhaps the single most alarming exception amongst well-known nineteenth century narratives is *Vanity Fair* which is not structured on or made coherent by any single natural analogy or metaphor drawn from nature — for the simple reason that *Vanity Fair* and its inhabitants have, finally, turned their backs on nature.

NOTES

1. Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York, 1975), p. 32.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.
3. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York, 1973), p. 69.
4. *Map of Misreading*, p. 74.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
6. *Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays 1958-1970* (New Haven, 1970), p. 52.
7. "Novel and Narrative," in *The Theory of the Novel: New Essays*, edited by John Halperin (New York, 1974), p. 155.

8. *The English Novel: A Short Critical History* (London, 1958), p. 194.
9. *Tennyson Sixty Years After* (Chapel Hill, 1948), p. 120.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
11. "Charms and Riddles," in *Spiritus Mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society* (Bloomington, 1976), p. 123.
12. *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London, 1975), p. 241.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
14. *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (New Haven, 1974), p. 19.
15. *The Poems of Tennyson*, edited Christopher Ricks (London, 1969). See the note on p. 880. All subsequent quotations are from this text.
16. See Ricks, p. 859.
17. James Thomson, *The Seasons*, "Spring," l. 448.
18. Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, p. 94.
19. "Describing poetic structures: Two approaches to Baudelaire's *les Chats*," in *Structuralism*, Edited with an Introduction by Jacques Ehrmann (New York, 1970), p. 189.
20. "Lord Byron," in *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (New York, 1963), p. 187.
21. Frye, *Spiritus Mundi*, p. 75.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
23. *The Ascent of Man* (Boston, 1973), p. 187.
24. Frye, *Spiritus Mundi*, p. 88.
25. Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography* (London, 1928), p. 18.
26. Frye, *Spiritus Mundi*, p. 88.
27. *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, With an Introduction by Vyvyan Holland (London, 1966), p. 985.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 1034.
29. Translated with an Introduction by Reginald Snell (New York, 1965). Though all the letters are relevant to the discussion, I am thinking particularly of Letters 1-4, 8, 11, 26, 27.
30. Wilde, p. 986.
31. *Essays of John Dryden*, edited by W. P. Ker, 2 vols (Oxford, 1900), 2. 154.
32. "The Narrow Bridge of Art," in *Granite and Rainbow* (London, 1958) p. 18.
33. *Goethe and the Novel* (Ithaca, 1976), p. 140.
34. *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (London, 1968), pp. 129-30.
35. "The Man with the Blue Guitar," in *The Collected Poems* (London, 1955), p. 183.
36. Preface to the 1st edition (London, 1835).
37. *Don Juan*, Edited with an Introduction by Leslie A. Marchand (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), XIV, p. 401. All subsequent quotations are from this text.
38. Letter to John Blackwood, May 1, 1857. Reprinted in Miriam Allott, *Novelists on the Novel* (New York, 1959), p. 250.
39. *The Turn of the Novel: The Transition to Modern Fiction* (London, 1970), xiii.
40. *The Poetical Works of Wordsworth*, With an Introduction and Notes, Edited by Thomas Hutchinson, revised by Ernest de Selincourt (London, 1906). All subsequent quotations are from this text.
41. "The Epic [Morte d'Arthur]," Ricks, p. 584, 11.36-8.
42. "*Don Juan*" in *Context* (Chicago, 1976), p. 3.
43. Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Alan Horsman (Oxford, 1982), p. 2.