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The Theory of Transcendence A Movement in the Chain of Being Toward the Good

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The Theory of Transcendence
A Movement in the Chain of Being
Toward the Good

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DEDICATION

In Memory of

Henri Renard, S. J.

OMO Trasumanar

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PREFACE

The theory of transcendence is an examination of the nature of man, dual material/spiritual creature, and of his cosmic position on the Great Chain of Being, from which position he may move in the perfectibility of order toward an achievement of the good. Occupying a mid-point in the hierarchical spiral toward Omega, man may aspire to perfect himself according to his nature in the intrinsic orders of both virtue and rationality.

While the Great Chain of Being itself encompasses all matter, both animate and inanimate, those beings capable of movement on that chain in the perfectibility of order are those which are animate. The chain itself may be viewed variously as a ladder, spiral, scale, or even the Tree of Life. The intrinsic movement on the scale, however, may be likened to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, whose branches offer ascendancy or fall through the orders of virtue and vice. That the progress of being is to the ideal, to the light (sometimes seen hidden with a veil), or to the Absolute is a constant theory in all literature. An examination of the nature of being and the orders of virtue has been applied to major representative authors in literature, namely, Dante Alighieri, Edmund Spenser, William Shakespeare, and Walt Whitman.

For Dante Alighieri, the movement of man in the Divine Comedy was through the spherical ledges of vice, the placement on which was assigned by the magnitude of the effects of sin.[1] That man was to perfect himself in the orders of rationality and virtue in a movement toward the good may be seen in Dante's two guides up the twin peaks of Mt. Parnassus—Virgil, symbolizing the ascendancy of reason in the pagan world; and Beatrice, symbolizing the ascendancy of virtue in the Christian world. That the penultimate effects of sin may be seen in man is noted by Dante's vision of OMO, whose name signifies both man and his placement on the chain of being—from the O of origin, through the M of the transformational Terram, and back to the O of Omega.

Dante's hierarchical concept of being was based on that of the ancient Greeks and the scholasticism of Thomas Aquinas, which saw the imperfect levels of being as evidence presupposing the more perfect.[2] Dante's movement of being in the Divine Comedy is toward the Divine Point (Para. xxix. 12), the shared point of his concentric circles, which circles Dante saw in De Causis as indicative of divine nature.[3] The Divine Point is also noted as the summit of the universe, which summit contemporary philosopher Teilhard de Chardin was to call the Omega Point.

Edmund Spenser's view of man was that of a creature to be perfected in the moral orders of virtue and rationality in a movement toward his Omega Point—Cleopolis, the New Jerulsalem, or Mt. Parnassus. The schema of progress for Spenser was a series of knightly quests for virtue and perfectibility, which progress was challenged in the jousts against encountered evil. The ideal envisioned by Spenser was primarily in the achievement of the Aristotelian mean of virtue as opposed to its presented extreme of vice.

The ascendant movement of the real toward the ideal by Spenser may be noted in the Faerie Queene, the Four Hymnes, and in the Mutabilitie Cantos, the latter of which addresses the ultimate challenge to beings of "forme and matter" seeking constancy in a world of change. The final movement of the cantos is an acknowledgment of faith from the changing "unperfite" to the constancy of perfection in the Sabaoth God.

The Elizabethan interest in the chain of being may also be seen in William Shakespeare's panoramic portrayal of character in such plays as A Midsummer Night's Dream in which the gradation runs from the inanimate, to the two-dimensional representative stock figure, to the mythological and ethereal, and, finally, to the fully drawn human being.

The movement for Shakespeare is also in the orders of virtue and rationality, the perfectibility of which is challenged with assaults to rationality in The Tempest and to

justice and mercy in the Merchant of Venice and Measure for Measure.

In Love's Labours Lost, the systems of both virtue and rationality are examined in a comparative geometric movement with the Symposium of Plato. The Omega Point for William Shakespeare lies in the possibility of ultimate union, a coalescence of elements seen in the story of Pyramus and Thisbe and in the Phoenix and the Turtle.

In the Romantic era in literature, interest in the chain of being and its cyclical progression of both man and cosmos was piqued by the German philosophers of the day, such as Kant and Schelling. For Walt Whitman, son of the kosmos, the progress of being was an ascendant rise through a series of "transfers and promotions," until, with a centripetal/ centrifugal movement, the amalgamated union of matter and spirit was dissolved. Whitman's cyclical movement toward the City of Friends may be seen in such works as "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," "The Compost," and "Song of Myself." The concept of being for Whitman seems to be primarily one of metamorphosis as his primary elements return to the leaves of grass in a dissolution of being.

Chapter I

Theory of Transcendence

Thesis: The theory of transcendence presupposes an order or chain of being. While the movement on this chain may be both extrinsic and intrinsic, the subject of this thesis will be the intrinsic movement toward the good in the perfectibility of order through virtue.

The theory of transcendence may be viewed in a variety of ways—mathematically, as a series of infinite numbers, each higher than the next, which theory arrives not at the Absolute but at a constant "becoming"; scientifically, as seen in the material, biological evolution of the species as proposed by Darwin; philosophically, as in Plato's concept of plenitude or Aristotle's concept of continuity or gradation, which concepts prefigured the chain of being; or, finally, theologically, as Teilhard de Chardin's concept of the Omega Point, the transcendent focus of God's love to the world, the point toward which man moves in the perfectibility of being.

That there exists in the scale of being a dichotomy in the orders of the material and the spiritual is affirmed by the observation that man is more than the sum of his material parts. The mere laboratory compilation of his respective elements does not presume to transcend the barrier in the achievement of animation. In death, the extrinsic matter is divorced from

the intrinsic spirit—a division in what Thomas Aquinas called the dual nature of man, the essence and "to be."[1] From this duality in being, there exists both a material and a spiritual evolution of creatures struggling to perfect their order through natural selection and an affinity of being for being. The intrinsic movement in the order of being is achieved in man through the principles of love and virtue. The final transcendence of man in the chain is achieved through the degeneration of matter, or an "involutionary" process, in which the spiritual order is achieved through a negation of the material.

While historically a great chain of being cannot be confirmed per se, there appears to exist in the universe a scale or chain, a pyramid whose links intersect with one another extrinsically, and, in some degree, intrinsically, sharing properties. From Plato's theory of the creation of all possible forms, there derived Aristotle's concept of the integrated relationship of being to being and his concept of the gradation of being from lowest to highest.

Further application of the concept of the great chain of being may be seen in the works of Leibniz, who saw the universe advancing to a higher state of cultivation and the soul of man ripening from an earlier sensitive or animal soul. Following Leibniz was Lenz, whose First Principles of Morals in 1772 saw in man an urge toward completeness and the advancement of every individual and race along the Scale of Being, a philosophy

which Emerson echoed in his poem May Day noting that

> Striving to be man, the worm
> Mounts through all the spires of form.

For Lenz, the "urge toward completeness" meant that all creatures, from worm to seraph, must be capable of perfecting themselves.

Other theories in the progression of the chain of being were those of Kant, who saw a cosmic evolution of each being within the universe, whether it be a living being or an entire solar system; Robinet, who saw an eternal progress of matter by a driving force, as in the maturation of a germ; Hegel, whose world of change and strife was moving toward the ultimate synthesis, the Absolute; Schelling, who conceived of an evolutionary concept of metaphysics and theology; and, Bergson, whose L'Evolution creatrice envisioned a movement in being from a lower to a higher form.[2]

Ontologically, then, it is the concepts of being and becoming which seem to explain both existence per se and the movement in time toward fulfillment. Therefore, an examination of thought will be undertaken in order to illustrate this dual concept of the nature of man and his placement of order.

While the Atomists, early Greek thinkers, denied the reality of Becoming,[3] the Epicureans held that man ceased to exist at death for both his body and soul were seen as being dissoluble elementarily. It was for Plato, however, to affirm the concept of a World Soul, the ascendant of the numerical

series of beings, placed in mathematical order, evidencing both being and becoming in a dichotomy of nature.[4] Plato envisioned his world as being divided between the universal and ideal and the concrete and real. Commenting upon his concept of the real, Plato observed:

> The concrete world is constituted by the implanting of the Limit upon the unlimited; therefore, to be real is to be definite, orderly, uniform. Yet the mixture is dual; it is a union of order with chance.[5]

It was Plato's World of Ideas which represented the universal ideal, arrived at by abstracting individual differences. The Platonic God of the Republic[6] was seen as contemplating the eternal archetypes or ideas and implanting them into matter. Thus, at birth, man became a prisoner of corporeal reality, whose bonds he would strive to escape until death, returning, then, to the World of Ideas. For Plato, the number of souls always remained constant.[7] although their province and position might change.

Aristotle, however, felt that the material was the intermediary between Being and Non-Being, possibly the germ of actuality.[8] For Aristotle, "There is nothing real but that which is passing into actuality . . . . There is no transition from Nothingness into Being, but only from that which is not yet, the matter of potentiality."[9]

Matter, for Aristotle, like Plato's incarnated being, moved toward its end like iron towards a magnet.[10] Conceptually, Aristotle felt that being included both the biological scale, which evidenced its own gradations, and the cosmos, whose planets

were arranged in a circular hierarchy. Each planet possessed, paradoxically, its own Unmoved Mover, while the outermost planetary, cosmic spheres participated in neither Time nor Space.. For Aristotle, God was not a personal God [12] but the universal Prime Mover of Dante's Divine Comedy. His vision of the history of mankind could be seen as a repetitious megacycle of birth, maturity, and decay. [13]

The concept of Being discussed by Aristotle in his Metaphysics, envisioned the following categories: (1) Being which has no existence whatever outside the understanding; (2) Being of movement, generation, and corruption (a process through substance, destruction); (3) Being which has complete but dependent existence; (4) Being of the substances.[14]

The primary difference between the Platonic and the Aristotelian concept of Being is that Platonically, Being as Being is the ens perfectissimum; while for Aristotle, Being as Being was the ens commune.[15] Man was part of Aristotle's category of Being qua Being and Being ens commune, or being in its proper nature (for man, rationality) and being with its widest possible extension;[16] which concept prefigured Teilhard de Chardin's converging universe of beings sharing affinity in the movement toward Omega.

With the advent of Christianity into the world, philosophical inquiry attempted to examine the heretofore presented ideas of the ancient Greeks concerning the concepts of matter and spirit, reconciling them with Biblical teachings.

In the fourth century, Augustine centered his writings upon an examination of the nature of God and that of the human soul, feeling that upon these two problems, "All philosophical science—ethics, physics, dialectic—is made to converge."[17] For Augustine, souls required bodies, giving to them being and species. The perfection of man was in the order of virtue,[18] whose progress in hamanity was governed by the Divine plan (De Civitate Dei).[19]

The scholastic philosophy of the Middle Ages was perhaps best represented by Aquinas, who sought to amalgamate the teachings of Aristotle with those of the church. Aquinas' examination of being begins with the notation that all is either Being or Not-Being (nihil), and that Being itself is universal and transcendental, extending beyond all classes. Between the two poles of being—God, Who is pure actuality and materia prima, which is mere potency—exist all creatures; "For in everything created there is a dual composition of actuality and potency, actus et potentia."[20]

Thomas' dualism of being is seen in his concept of essence and "to be," or quiddity and act. Only in God, Actus Parnus,[21] are the two combined; for God's essence is his "to be."[22]

Thus, according to Thomas, "The proper name of God, then, is He Who Is, ... which was revealed to Moses when he asked the Lord God what His name was, And the Lord answered: 'I am Who am . . . . Tell them, He Who Is sent me to you.'"[23] Thus,

it can be said that the true nature or essence of God may be explained by His Biblical predication of _being_ with its grammatical definition, "to be." The Absolute, then, is the cause of its own "to be," while in finite, contingent being, the "to be" must be caused here and now by another.[24]

It is this dualism in creatures of the essence and "to be" which allows for both the extrinsic evolutionary progress of the material form, such as seen by Darwin, as well as the intrinsic involutionary progress of the spirit, alluded to by Teilhard de Chardin and the tenets of Christian philosophy.

This dualism is not the epistemological dualism of Bertrand Russell, with its theories of representative perception,[25] which presented the problem for A. O. Lovejoy of determining how we know what we know in a pluralistic, temporalistic universe.[26] Nor is it the Cartesian dualism of mind and body, which separates the mental and the physical,[27] yet proceeds to affirm one by the other: "Cogito, ergo sum."[28] It is the ontological dualism of the Thomistic essence and "to be" which allows for the progress of development, both extrinsically and intrinsically, in the perfectibility of order. Such a dualism may be suggested by the concept of hypostatic union—or the two distinct natures of Christ in the one person of Jesus,[29] a concept which Dante was to examine in his developing the _Divine Comedy_. It is precisely this dualism of being which answers the question of how an evolutionary, natural process can reach a supernatural end[30] in an involutionary, transcendent movement in the progress of being.[31] Ontologically,

the question is addressed in Teilhard's law of complexity-consciousness, founded on the without and the within of things:

> The without is the material aspect and the within, the spiritual aspect of a thing . . . . The material aspect or the without, then, is the basis for complexification; the spiritual aspect or the within, the basis for convergence.[32]

It was the spiritual convergence of Teilhard's within which would lead to his Omega Point, or the transcendent focus of God's love to the world.[33] The pyramid of the chain of being seen by Teilhard was a vision of a world not holding together "from below" but "from above."[34]

Like Bergson, Teilhard's idea of the synthesis leading toward perfection[35] also envisioned a "cosmos in process," [36] and a universe having the dual properties of both immanence and transcience. Noting the progress of mankind in the movement toward perfectibility, Teilhard was to say,

> In the process of evolution the elements increasingly pass out of themselves to become part of a growing common movement of life; in the process of entropy, the elements increasingly turn in on themselves to become increasingly isolated. [37]

For Teilhard, the "transcient" was the becoming, movement, process, or action.[38] It was his vision of the progress of mankind in the perfectibility of order. Commenting further on this "transcient" action, Teilhard was to say, "This process of transience or passing out of oneself is found in'the consecration of the individual to universal causes,' and expresses

the idea that 'the most logical term [of the process of passing out of oneself] in the end is death.'"[39] It is this paradox which is at the heart of Christianity and some Eastern thought, the loss of oneself in order to find oneself. The religious thought of Teilhard de Chardin is developed in the following passage:

> To gain an ultimate stability in God, one must first make the act of faith wherein one passes out of oneself, that is, each person must become completely transient: "there must be felt an absolute passing through (transience) into Omega, that is, not an iota of viscosity, of sticking to things (viscosity)." [40]

Teilhard extended his individual concept to a geocentric world view, characterized by the "hierarchial concept of order" with each cosmological movement passing from one sphere to the next.[41] His theory of cosmogenesis, or planetary evolution, saw the progress of life as moving ever higher "having once been lifted to its stage of thought." [42]

Bergson, who also held an evolutionary concept of the cycle of being, noted that,

> The alterations of generation and decay, the evolutions ever beginning over and over again, the infinite repetition of the cycles of celestial spheres—this all represents merely a certain fundamental deficit, in which materiality consists . . . . Things re-enter into each other. [43]

It is this view which Whitman was to adopt in his cyclical concept of metamorphosis, the generation and regeneration of such poems as "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" or "The Compost." Thus, Bergson's cyclical series of transfer and promotion may be contrasted with Hegel's view of the permanence of the

Platonic universals:

> But Plato mainly founds the idea of immortality on the fact that what is put together is liable to dissolution and decay, while the simple can in no manner be dissolved or destroyed; what is always like itself and the same, is, however, simple. The beautiful, the good, the like, being simple, are incapable of all change; that, on the contrary, in which these universals are, men, things, etc., are the changeable.[44]

Simply, then, the world of being is concomitant with the world of becoming—or, the phenomenon of the ethereal Thomistic "to be" coexists within the changing material essence. But, does this act or "to be" of Aquinas' creatures caught in the evolving, changing essence remain static or does it undergo change itself?

While the "to be" of creatures aspires to, but falls short of, the state of perfection of Thomas' Actus Parnus, for the reason that the unlimited perfection of the Absolute would be limited by its participation with the limited, they, nevertheless, seek to perfect their spiritual orders in the fulfillment of virtue according to their nature in the urge for completeness.

Thus, from the writings of the early Greeks, we see an emphasis on the order of virtue in the perfectibility of the species. These systems of virtue were primarily those of rationality and of ethics or morality. Plato presented his doctrine of virtue in the Phaedo as well as his ladder of intellect and love in the Symposium.

Aristotle developed his doctrine of moral and intellectual virtues which called for the achievement of the mean and the avoidance of the extreme. In a Hegelian synthesis between the extremes of defect and excess, Aristotle was to define his theory of moral virtue, such as courage, as the mean between two vices, such as cowardice and rashness.

Aristotle divided his classification of virtue between moral and intellectual virtue, addressing the highest nature of man, being qua being, and the possibility of his intrinsic development in the perfectibility of order.[45] Virtue, to Aristotle and many of the ancient Greeks, was not innate but acquired.[46] The observance of the mean was by right reason, a balance between the dual vices of excess and deficiency.[47]

Aristotle's theory of virtue perhaps reached its greatest application in Edmund Spenser's The Faerie Queen. Spenser's knightly quests became jousts between virtue and vice. His knights symbolized the gamut of virtues: holiness, temperance, chastity, justice, courtesy, mildness, serenity, truth, beauty, fertility, love. It was for Tennyson two centuries later to further develop these knightly quests in the search for virtue in his Idylls of the King.

Aristotle in his Ethics states that the supreme good of man is happiness, attained by and aspired to by reason and a life of virtue. For Aristotle, the virtues to be cultivated were courage, temperance, liberality, munificence, high-mindedness, right ambition, good temper, friendly civility, sincerity, wittiness, modesty, and just resentment (justice).

The practice of these virtues, though, was of less value than the practice of intellectual virtues.[48]

For Plato, the highest good to be achieved by man was happiness, the idea of the good, which concept we identify with God, the Absolute, or End. For Plato, virtue was the order and harmony of the soul; the four virtues which man should seek were wisdom, fortitude, temperance, and justice. The ascendant of the Platonic ladder toward which man aspired, the world soul, was expressly rejected by Aristotle,[49] who, nevertheless, recognized a definite teleological concept, a plan of development, to which the only obstacle is matter. For Aristotle, matter, by resisting the form, forces nature to be content with the next gradation of the better in lieu of the best. The striving of nature is through the less perfect to the more perfect.[50]

Dante's theory of progress, "ultime potenza," or the infinite productive power to reach capacity, was shown in his gradation of vice and virtue in the Divine Comedy. Dante's ladder of love ascending to God was reached through the guidance of Virgil, symbolizing reason, and through Beatrice, symbolizing love and virtue. For Dante, it was "Love which works good to all things, pre-existing over-flowingly in the Good . . . . moved itself to creation, as befits the superabundance by which all things are generated . . . . The Good by being extends its goodness to all things."[51]

Vision, for Plato as well as for Dante, was the highest order of rationality.[52] For their successor, Thomas Aquinas, knowledge and rationality were seen in the successive gradations of reason, revelation, and, finally, intuition.[53]

The penultimate examination of virtue, however, was perhaps undertaken by William Shakespeare who not only delineated the prevailing concepts of such virtues as justice and mercy but challenged their accepted applications, even pitting one against the other, such as, chastity against charity in Measure for Measure. The development of his hierarchy of virtue may also be seen in his use of Plato's Ladder of Intellect and Love from the Symposium, which Shakespeare incorporates into Love's Labors Lost.

From Socrates and the ancient Greeks, through the advent of Christianity and scholastic philosophy, the emphasis on virtue and on wisdom has been the cornerstone in the perfectibility of the intrinsic being. The twin virtues of love and knowledge, evidencing the highest nature of man, have been addressed by both philosophers, theologians, and chroniclers of civilization. Even the tripartite Christian trinity incorporates the intellectual emanation of the Word as well as the spiritual manifestation of Love, both arising from, and coesisting equally with, the Creative Father. It is the question of nature and relationship of the Absolute Being to the imperfect world which is seen by A. O. Lovejoy as the

basis of all philosophical inquiry.[54]

For Plotinus (205–270 B.C.), the perfect being, in the emanation of the good, must give rise to all beings[55] yet remain transcendent, immutable, and free of limitation.[56] All other being was constituted in a gradation of mixtures—reason, spirit, appetites—descending in order of purity. It was this concept which gave rise to the theory of the Great Chain of Being.[57]

Historically, the concept of ladders, spirals, or chains of being may be seen in the Biblical Jacob's ladder, Plato's Scale of Nature in the Timeus and his ladder of Intellect and Love in the Symposium, as well as Dante's spiral to the Beatific Vision or Milton's golden chain.

The composition of these chains may be seen through such concepts as that of Plato's theory of the creation of all possible forms—plenitude, Aristotle's view of the integrated relationship of being to being—continuity, or Aristotle's concept of a chain of being from lowest to highest—gradation.

Reaching its height of popularity in the Middle Ages and through the late 18th century, this hierarchical concept of a great chain of being was held by "many philosophers, most men of science, and, indeed, most educated men."[58] Within the chain itself were the further classifications of the inanimate, vegetative, sensitive, and the non-material.

Commenting upon these gradations in his Elizabethan World Picture, E. M. W. Tillyard described their composition in this way:

The first class or order was the inanimate, which included elements, liquids, and metals. Despite their common lack of life, the inanimate was vastly different in virtue; for example, water was viewed as being more noble than earth; rubies were more precious than topaz; and gold was more valuable than brass.

The second class was the vegetative class which again differed in degrees with the higher forms of plant life, e.g., the tree, held in greater esteem than the lower forms, e.g., the flower or bush.

The third class was the sensitive class, which was further divided into the following categories: (a) creatures, such as shellfish, which had touch but not memory or movement; (b) animals having touch, memory, and movement but not hearing, such as ants; (c) the higher animals, such as horses and cows, which had touch, memory, and movement; and, (d) man, having all of the previous qualities as well as understanding. It was man who was seen as incorporating the total faculties of earthly pehnomenon, a balance between the rational and the spiritual.

The fourth class was the non-material. To this class belonged beings who were not materially encumbered and who

held a freedom of spirit in the rational order, the angels.[59]

Physiologically, then, the Elizabethan man viewed as natural the progression in the chain of being as elements were absorbed into plants, plants into beasts, and beasts into men. Such a synthesis can be seen in the writers of the era, such as Shakespeare's notation in Hamlet's graveside speech on the skull of Yorick when Hamlet speaks of the metamorphosis of the dust of Alexanders and the clay of Ceasears into their transubstantiation of essence.[60]

In other works, Shakespeare presents a complex array of physiological links in the chain of being. Thus, in Midsummer Night's Dream, we see a potpourri of fairies (Oberon, Titania, Puck, etc.), humans (Lysander, Demetrius, Helena, and Hermia), mythological characters (Theseus and Hippolyte), and the personification of the inanimate (Quince, Bottom, Flute, Snout, Snug, Starvling, Wall, and Moonshine). The further juxtaposition of the animate with the inaminate may be seen in Henry IV, 2, as Shakespeare speaks of Justices, Shallow and Silence, as well as the satirized animate, Fang, Snare, Mouldy, Shadow, Wart, Feeble, and Bullcalf.

After Shakespeare, the philosopher Leibnitz (1646-1716) saw in man the developmental grades of perception envisoned by Plato—vegetative, animal, and rational.[61] Leibniz's theory predicted an unbroken series of a infinite number of developing monads, each mirroring the Absolute Monad in some way.[62] Another

philosopher at the end of the century, Hegel, also saw a progressive development of mankind in his Scala Natural.

The evolving process of an emerging universe was seen as well in the thought of Lamarck, who saw a "continuous, single, linear succession of natural objects," which arranged themselves in a hierarchy of simplest to most complex;[63] of Nietzsche, who held an eternal series of finite, absolutely identical, cyclical evolutions;[64] of Bergson, whose planetary evolution was one of divergence; of his successor, Teilhard de Chardin, whose planetary evolution was one of convergence toward the Absolute, Point Omega;[65] and, finally, of Schelling, who merely envisioned a Chain of Becoming.[66]

The problem of development or emergent progress in the chain of being may be noted by Aquinas who felt that,

> Plato erroneously held that there are multiple souls in the body and that this view is a consequence of, among other things, Plato's notion of separate Forms or Ideas existing apart from the sensible world. Furthermore, man must be absolutely one in Thomas' opinion; therefore, Plato's view that soul and body are not united as substantially one but rather as mover and moved, as an activity and a passivity, is also wrong. In the Platonic view, body and soul would be one only by accident, not substantially; thus, the predication of man as a rational animal would be merely accidental predication, not a case of essential predication, which Thomas, in accord with Aristotle, holds it to be.[67]

The importance of making the distinction between the essence and the "to be," the quiddity and the act, then,

becomes of primary importance; for, in man, they coexist corporeally in a hypostatic union with the spiritual, rational "to be," which alone is capable of progressing in virtue within its extrinsic, dissoluble essence, before it hierarchical, transcendent movement at death to the realm of the spirit.

In this century, the question of the nature of man and of his existence and essence was addressed by the existentialists. Noting the position of Heidegger, who held that man's "essence" lies in his existence,[68] such philosophers as Satre adopted the more Platonic concept that man's "existence precedes essence."[69] A further explanation of this concept is seen in the notation by Alfred Stern that, "In other words, his being here and now precedes his being something."[70] Simply, then, a repetition of the ancient antithesis between being and becoming is indicated in the process of the development of nature. Developing the case for the existentialists, Stern posits the theory that, while the concept of being is abstract and universal, existence itself is real, individual and concrete, a kind of being per se, or "being in the world."[71]

Further examining this dichotomy was Karl Jaspers (1883—) who felt that the crucial issue in existential philosophy was to make the transition from purely empirical being to being as existence—"directed-to-transcendence."[72]

Jaspers uses the word existenz to indicate potential being,[73] seemingly becoming, transcending the here and now, a metamorphical concept held even by Satre. "To talk of the 'transcendence' of the human existent is simply to point again to the fact that man is at any moment transcending or going beyond what he is at that moment."[74] This concept of becoming seems much like the natural, emergent development postulated in Aristotle's theory of being ens commume, or being with its widest possible extension.

Jaspers attempts to identify a concept of transcendence by stating variously: (1) It is "the expression for being in itself within the subject-object dichotomy";[75] (2)"Being 'is' Transcendence only for Existence, and unless one transcends to the level of Existenz, he cannot experience being as Transcendence ";[76] (3)or, "There is no Existenz without Transcendence."[77] Finally, Jaspers, seeking to further develop his thought, states that"Transcendence—which is not a cipher [symbol][78] but something we relate to in the cipher language, something unthinkable which we must think all the same—is as mere being as nothingness." [79]

Jasper's translation of cipher as possibly symbolic, a non-verbal representation, allows the interesting comparison with the Cambridge study on the theory of transcendence—a mathematical study of infinite numbers. Such an infinite series, however, arrives not at an Absolute, for another

number may always be added, but only becoming. Such an infinite series was addressed by Arthur Lovejoy, who cited it as problematic in any affirmation of a great chain of being.[80]

Such an infinite series of becoming is carried further by such existentialists as Paul Tillich. Tillich, while trying to arrive at a concept of God, was to postulate categorically the idea of "The God above God"[81]—which, upon literal examination, is a contradiction in terms.

The theory of transcendence with which we deal here, then, is not that of the mathematical series of infinite numbers, arriving never at the Absolute but in constant becoming. Nor is it the scientific, evolutionary theory of Darwin, who envisioned the extrinsic, material progression of the species in the order of essence. Rather, it is the intrinsic movement in the orders of virtue and rationality in the "to be" of man—a movement toward the good in the perfectibility of nature. Thus, the theory of transcendence postulates both the Platonic <u>ens perfectissimum</u> in its end as well as the Aristotelian <u>ens commune</u> in its movement to achieve that end. In addition, it notes a Teilhardian convolution of spirit in an involutionary movement toward material negation in the achievement of the next hierarchical step on the chain of being. For man, creature of the antipodal

essence and "to be," the movement on the chain is "trans-material,"[82] a theological and Platonic descent of spirit, passing through matter, before its centrifugal/centripetal dissolution to the spirit.

It was of such a dissolution of the material-spiritual bond that Walt Whitman spoke in a curious nineteenth century concept of the chain of being. While Whitman envisioned the movement toward the perfectibility of the American democratic society, the achievement of potential of man "En-Masse," he also saw an individual movement of being progressing toward his considered Omega Point--the City of Friends. The question of the recycling or metamorphosis of being is constantly present in the writings of Whitman who sees a continual change in form analogous to the grass which springs anew from the graves of those past. In "Song of Myself," the poet sees that from each present life is the "leavings of many deaths," and the poet himself as having died many times before. Rather than a movement forward in the chain of being, Whitman, then, basically sees only a change of appearance, a reincarnation. This presents the curious philosophical problem of a new being whose extrinsic elements have recombined and whose intrinsic spirit may be only an amalgamation of many other participating entities.

Admittedly, the hierarchical step to the realm of the non-material cannot be proven scientifically. It can only be suggested that there is an animating, intrinsic, elan vital

which moves toward spiritual fulfillment just as its counterpart, the material/extrinsic component moves toward perfectibility in the fulfillment of biological essence.

The eight-year study conducted by doctor of philosophy, Raymond Moody, Jr., of 150 cases of resuscitated persons at, or beyond, physical, clinical death notes a similarity of phenomenological reports of experience with death seen not as a sleep or a forgetfulness but as a transition from one state to the next—"an entry into a higher state of consciousness or being."[83] Almost universally, those reporting saw a separated spiritual element moving as through a tunnel of Dantesque, concentric circles, meeting, at the end, a being of light.[84] It was this being who asked an assessment of their material existence, their advancement in both virtue and in rationality;[85] the spiritual components of perfectibility in the movement in the chain of being.

Symbolically, the evolutionary/involutionary movement in the chain of being might be represented by the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The biological development of life was seen by Cuenot in his hierarchical Tree of Life of one species giving rise to the next.[86] In addition, Lamarck pictured a "continuous, single, linear succession of natural objects, "which arranged themselves hierarchically from simplest to most complex."[87]

While the concept of a Tree of Life represents the evolutionary material and extrinsic movement toward fulfillment,

the involutionary spiritual movement is represented by the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil which allows man to exercise his moral choice toward the good, answering the question posed by Dante in his Divine Comedy concerning free will in exercising moral choice. It is precisely this freedom of choice, without coercion, which allows for merit or blame. Thus, according to Kant, the foundation of virtue is represented in the choice for ethical good[88] allowing intrinsic freedom.

It is the movement toward good which allows advancement for man upon the chain of being:

> The Good must, according to Plato, be perfectly self-sufficint . . . . The perfect must be one, simple, ontologically independent of external relations to other entities, and, above all, free from mutability, from all activity or outreaching of volition.[89]

The Good, then, envisoned by Plato, is not the mean of Aristotelian virtue but the simple, absolute, the ens perfectissimum.

The movement toward the good is the end of man in the fulfillment of nature. While the movement toward the good may be both extrinsically and intrinsically, the theory of transcendence in this dissertation will be the intrinsic movement toward the good in the perfectibility of species.

Thus, the theory of transcendence postulates a hypostatic union of essence and "to be," the essence moving extrinsically in the fulfillment of material progress and the "to be" moving

intrinsically in the perfectibility of virtue. The movement toward the Good is toward the Platonic absolute or the Teilhardian Omega Point, which he sees as the "Transcendent focus of God's love to the world,"[90] answering the relationship of the perfect to the imperfect. For it is in the multiplicity of the good in its finite manifestations which allows even more good to the infinite. "Only by transcending the physical level (and that means considering not only that which is, but being qua being) is it possible to reach the Immobile."[91]

The theory of transcendence, then, posits an order or chain of being. While the movement upon this chain may be both extrinsic as well as intrinsic, the literary application will show an examination of intrinsic virtue, the perfectibility of which allows man to strive toward the completeness of potentiality. A concomitant defect in virtue, moreover, will hinder man's progress in the perfectibility of order. A comparative anaylsis of the chain of being and of man's progress upon it may be seen symbolically as the Tree of Life and as the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

The transcendent focus toward which beings move on the chain in the perfectibility of order may be termed the Absolute, or the Omega Point, whose properties are not shared with the other links but touch them only as Michaelangelo's finger of

God touching man at the creation. The chain of being and its transcendent movement toward the perfectibility of order thereon, then, remains a constant theory in the literature of mankind and may be seen in all eras.

CHAPTER II

Dante's The Divine Comedy

From Dis to Paradise

Fortutiously, Dante, in writing his original drama,[1] The Divine Comedy, termed it a commedia, a term coined from the Greek komos, a procession, allegory, or a light drama. The Divine Comedy is indeed all of these—a processional, allegorical movement, a drama of light. Both literally and mathematically, its progress is a journey upward from darkness toward the light. Its spiral is of concentric circles progressing forward in astrological and moral vision, a progress of black to white, or, what one critic termed a photographic positive from a photographic negative.[2]

Dante's Commedia, whose Divine was attached two hundred years later,[3] was the poetic vehicle for his vision of the progress of mankind and its movement toward the good, a progress of which he would use the term trasumanar, or, going beyond. That man's progress on the chain of being is a passage or transcendent movement from one state to the next is seen in this comment on the metamorphosis of being: "Can you not see that we are worms, each one born to become the Angelic butterfly that flies defenseless to the Judgment Throne?" (Purg. X, 121-3)

It is this cyclical metamorphosis, the trasumanar or going beyond, which sets the movement of the poem—from the dark worm of Dis, through the black and white checkerboard

of the transitional Purgatorio, and, finally, to the angelic vision of Eternal Light in Paradiso.

The accomplishment of his poetic vision is via a symbolic, allegorical framework to which he has appended a potpourri of juxtaposed, illustrative elements, drawn variously from the political, ideological conflicts of the Black-White factions, from the realm of the mythological and astrological, as well as from the tenets of the prevailing theological/philosophical systems which spoke of man's epic journey through life.

The epic which Dante begins opens, significantly, in medias res, the fashion of the epic poets. Extending his analogy, Dante begins both geographically in the Purgatorial center of the Comedy as well as in his own "middle of life," a life punctuated by such societal strife as evidenced by the warring factions of the Guelf party—the Blacks and Whites—whose membership in the latter caused Dante's exile in his party's loss.[4] Thus, the dark, lower regions of the Inferno evidence the habitation of not only beasts and monsters but also Dante's political enemies. The prevailing movement is from the circles of the Incontinenza, through the violent, and to the fraudulent, as governed by malizia or malicious intent.[5] It is to be noted that the spherical bottom of the Inferno is assigned to traitors, perhaps reflecting Dante's belief, compatible with the nobility of his character, in a strong sense of familial esteem, with betrayal the "gravest of all sins."[6]

Again, it is not by accident that the journey begins on Good Friday; for, allegorically, Dante, as Everyman, also symbolically takes up the theological cross of Christ whose death, resurrection, and ascension into Heaven parallels the movement of the poem, the movement toward the good.

The importance of the guides, moreover, is paramount for they guide the higher faculties of man—moral virtue and wisdom, upon which man's progress toward the good is pinned. It is Virgil, who represents the light of the pagan world in its accumulated wisdom, who first guides Dante. But it is Beatrice, whose name symbolizes beatitude, such as promulgated in the Sermon on the Mount of the eight (or seven[7]) beatitudes, who guides Dante upward toward the Beatific Vision. Just as Christ was to be the signpost to the pagan world, so Dante was to suggest the significance of man's moral progress in virtue as well as in the wisdom of the past.

Theologically, Dante, then, examines man's movement on the spiral scale of the comedy by virtue and its accompanying purgation of vice; or, in the words of St. Augustine, from sensual life through virtue to the vision of truth—a symbolic purgation, illunination, and consummation or union.[8]

Metaphysically, Dante, who was influenced by his contemporary Aquinas, as well as the ancient Greeks, might see the pilgrim's journey from the Omega of the Ideal, into the Terram of the Real, and back to the Omega—a journey symbolized by man, OMO.

The chain of being, moreover, moves through its dark, brutish replica, the Inferno, through the humanly fallible Purgatorio, and finally to the spiritual, ethereal light of Paradiso.

Dante, amalgam of the dual material/spiritual being, begins his journey at the age of 35 on Maundy Thursday in the year 1300 whereupon he finds himself in a "dark wood" of prevailing error as the Inferno begins.[9] Dante stated his purpose in writing his Commedia to be "to remove those who live in this life from the state of misery and direct them to the state of happiness."[10] The subject with which he was to deal would be the "state of souls after death," within the framework of a twofold allegory, which he mentioned in a letter to his mentor, Can Grande.[11] Dante's concept of the "state of souls after death" may be seen in his analogy of the metamorphosis of worm to butterfly—a symbol of an incomplete insect which must burst its shroud (Purg. X, 124–6).

Allegorically, the spiritual progress of the poet is guided by both the intellect seeking ultimate truth and by the beatific spirit of love, which transcends even reason, in a "stretching out of the soul"[12] toward its own first cause, God. Thus, Dante was to state in De Causis that

> Love, truly taken and subtly considered, is nought else than spiritual union of the soul and of the thing loved; to which union the soul, of her own nature, runs swift or slow, according as she's free or impeded.[13]

These impediments of the soul, noted by the scholastic and Christian traditions of Dante's influential contemporary, Thomas Aquinas, could lie within the body, the mind, or in the will. Man, the compound of matter and spirit, or the Thomistic "essence and 'to be,'" had two ultimate ends which Dante was to note in the Monarchia: "One as a compound of soul and body and the other as immortal spirit."[14]

Noting the tripartite nature of his poetic regions, Dante matched symbolically even the rime scheme; for we note the terza rima employed is a series of threes—"the two outer lines riming with the other, the inner line riming with the two outer lines of the next three . . . ."[15] Forerunner of this form was possibly the old Italian sirventese, whose proponents were much given to the device of cataloguing and enumeration.[16] Interestingly, the allegorical ends of the riming poetic trilogy are the three-faced devil of Dis and the Trinity of Paradise.

To date, extensive research has been devoted to the symbolic numerology of the comedy. For example, Beatrice, whom Dante met when both were approximately nine, has often been assigned that number, which, from the Vita Nuova, signified the root of the Trinity.[17] Thus, theologically, the observation might be made, also, that the basic root of man's spiritual progress toward heaven was through the beatitudes noted in the Sermon on the Mount. Or, perhaps it is that the

perfect adherence to those beatitudes symbolized by Beatrice allowed one to pass from the ninth step of the paradisaical ladder (Para. XXI, 25-33) to the tenth step of Empyrean, the step mentioned by John of the Cross, where the soul, in the clarity of vision, "goeth forth out of the body," becoming "a participation of God" (Noche escura del Alma)[18] thus mirroring the Psalm XXXV, 10 that "In thy light shall we see light."

The Inferno

Dante's journey through the Inferno begins with his rousing himself from sleep after losing the True Way. (Inf. I, 10-12). From the "dark wood" of error (Inf. I, 2-3), he finds himself at the gates of Hell, which is inhabited by the "wretched people who have lost the good of intellect" (Inf. III, 16-8). Guarding the entrance to the dark regions are a trilogy of representative beasts—a leopard, a lion, and a she-wolf—symbolizing, perhaps, usury, violence and pride, and the root of all evils, respectively.

As Aeneas before him, Dante's passage into Charon's ship of souls is questioned, for he is still amongst the living. It is only those having suffered the required death of the "evil seed of Adam" (Inf. III, 112) which may pass toward the lower regions. Crossing Acheron, from the vestibule of the indifferent, Dante and his guide Virgil pass through the circles of Limbo, the Lustful, the Gluttonous, the Avaricious and

the Prodigal, and, finally, the Wrathful before crossing the river Styx. The sinners of the first five circles are guilty, collectively, of incontinence, which, according to Aristotle's delineation of virtue, is less offensive than fraud.[19] In the sixth circle, they come upon the Walls of Dis, which boundary is similar to that described in the Aeneid.

In Canto VII, Dante observes the punishment of the violent—those who have sinned against their neighbor, themselves, and their God, breaking the cornerstone of the beatitudes of the love of God and the love of neighbor. Near the river of blood in the circle of the violent, Dante comes upon the centaurs. It is Virgil who confronts Chiron dove le due nature son consorti (where the centaur's two natures are consorted—at the breast or heart). Additionally, the duality of nature is again suggested by the appearance of the monster Geryon, who symbolizes duplicity[20] and who conducts them across the abyss to the eighth circle where the fraudulent are punished. In the circle of the Hypocrites, the duality of nature and the duplicity of appearances is noted in the lines, "If I were of leaded glass, I should not draw to me your outward semblance more quickly than I receive your inward." (Inf. XXIII, 1125-7).

Plunging downward to the ends of the earth, therefore, as drawn by Aristotle's magnetic pole into the maelstrom, Dante pens the notation that man must "consider your origin," for you were not made to live as brutes but to pursue virtue and knowledge (Inf. XXVI, 110-20).

Curiously, in the ring of the sowers of discord, Dante sees a trunk holding a head "like a lantern making a light of itself" (Inf. XXVIII, 121-6), a symbolic suggestion of the severance of the light of intellectual truth from its corporeal body.

At the bottom of Dis is found the three-faced devil, antithesis of the Trinity. Of the fallen angel, Lucifer, once bearer of light, Dante ascribes the term "worm of Evil." Passing the worm in a plunge to the bottom of Hell, Virgil and Dante pass from Paradise's antipodal realm of ice and darkness, being pulled through the ends of the earth, emerging upon the slopes of Purgatory before dawn on Easter Sunday, April 10, 1300. Thus, the allegorical journey has progressed from what one critic has termed the "Meserific Vision" of Hell to the "Beatific Vision" of heaven.[21] The darkness of error has been in the order of beastiality and vice with the light of virtue and reason being snuffed out like a hollowed trunk, once a tree of life.

The Purgatorio

Arriving again at the mid point of the Comedy, Virgil and Dante note the seven terraces of Purgatory. Located geographically in the undiscovered regions of the southern hemisphere, the symbolic spirals are arranged for each of the seven deadly sins: pride, avarice, gluttony, sloth, envy, lasciviousness, and wrath.

In Canto I, Virgil symbolically binds the waist of Dante with a reed which action is critically said to be the symbol of humility.[22] The reed of the scriptures at Easter time, however, is the reed of Palm Sunday, a symbol of praise. Perhaps, then, for Dante, it is in the subsequent breaking of this reed which signifies his journey from pride to humility. It may be important to consider that Dante felt that his own greatest hindrance to virtue was this same pride, the supposed root of all other sins. Perhaps in his journey to the light, it was the task of Dante to realize that the greatness of his gifts was not self-emanating, merely self-developed.

That Dante is to be purged of all possible transgressions is noted by his being signed by the angel with seven P's (Canto IX, 112-4) or peccatori, sins. His progress through Purgatory to Paradise is determined by the pilgrim himself who decides when his guilt at each level has been expiated with the symbolic P's being removed by the brush of the angel's wing. Significantly, Dante's cornerstone for culpability or reward was the doctrine of free will which allowed man to benefit from, or suffer the consequences for, virtue or vice because of his own intrinsic, rather than extrinsic, determination.[23] Commenting on this same idea, Dante had noted in a letter to Can Grande that man becomes liable to punishment or reward according to "The exercise of his free will."[24]

Dante begins his journey into the cornices of Purgatory with a metaphorical initiation of spiritual cleansing. Thus, we

see the ritual of Dante's purification is begun as he bends his tear-stained cheek to the dewy grass (Purg. I, 119), an action noted critically as a symbolic baptism but perhaps is merely a beginning sign of humility. It is the Angel Boatman who ferries them to the gates of Purgatory through whose seven terraces, like Thomas Merton's Seven Story Mountain,[25] they must pass. The movement in the black and white of Purgatory is also allegorical of man's movement from the dark, bestial nature to his light spiritual nature on the chain of being. Noting the emerging composition of man, Dante cites Plato's doctrine of multiple souls (Canto IV, 1-12) which stated that man has a composite of three different souls, vegetative, sensitive, and intellectual. It is this doctrine which both Aquinas and contemporary John Ciardi cite as being in opposition to the Christian doctrine of the unity of the soul.[26]

In Canto VI, Virgil cautions Dante that he will have a subsequent guide, Beatrice, who will "Become your lamp between the truth and mere intelligence" (Purg. VI, 47-8). The law of the ascent, then, as promulgated by Sordello, is to the absolutes of good and truth through the practice of virtue; and the ascent may be made only by the Divine Illumination of the Eternal Sun which shines only half of the time in Purgatory (Purg. VII, 40-60). It is to the yet undiscovered regions of the Southern Pole, the magnetic ends of the earth, that Dante in Canto VIII prophetically sees the three stars of the three theological virtues and the four stars of the four cardinal virtues (Purg. VIII, 85-90). Thus, the map of

the Purgatorio is not only geographical and astronomical but also moral in its reflection of the Thomistic and Aristotelian classifications of sin. The movement is from pride, nearest hell, to the procreative lust, nearest Eden.

It is significant that, in his pilgrimage from pride toward humility, that Dante would open Canto XI, the first cornice of the proud, with the "Our Father," for it is noted in the Lord's Prayer that the Father's will, not man's, be done (Purg.XI, 1-24). Armed with this inspiration, Dante is to pass the Angel of Humility in Canto XII, who then wisks away the first P from his forehead. That pride and man are virtually synonymous is noted in Canto XII (lines 25-63), whose Italian tercet lines form the pattern of the initial UOM sounds which Ciardi says signifies man..[27]

The vision of light, personified by the Angel Caritas, or love of others, is seen in Canto XV as the beatitude of the meek is sounded along with a commentary on love:

> How can each one of many who divide
> a single good have more of it, so shared,
> than if a few had kept it. He replied: (61-63)
> **
> As mirror reflects mirror, so, above,
> the more there are who join their souls, the more
> Love learns perfection, and the more they love. (73-75)

Commenting upon the secret of creation, then, Dante notes that while God is perfect in Himself, the Absolute Fulfillment of Love, He wished even more love, thus creating finite beings capable of bringing additional love into the world.

The movement toward the "True City" (Purg. XVI, 96) may be seen in the victory of the peacemakers over wrath in Canto XVI. It is here that Dante chronicles a discourse on both natural and spiritual love incorporated with the Platonic notion of the pre-existence of the soul in the world of the Ideal, which spirit is subsequently imprisoned bodily in the world of the real, and must strive to return to its former state (Purg. XVII, 85-6). Such a continuum on the scales of being and virtue was commented upon by Plato in both the Symposium and in the Phaedrus.[28] Thus, Dante appends the comment, "Love alone is the true seed of every merit in you, and of all acts for which you must atone (Purg. XVII, 103-5).

In the movement towards virtue, Dante notes that all beings are attracted to their first cause: "And since no being may exist alone and apart from the First Being, by their nature, all beings lack the power to hate That One " (Purg. XVII, 109-11). On the chain of being, each is related to the next in a kinship of love (Canto XVII):

> That summoning force is Love; and thus within you,
> through pleasure, a new natural bond is knit. (Purg. XVIII, 26-7)

Again, Dante comments further on the Aristotelian, Platonic, and Christian doctrines that moral philosophy is based upon free will:[29] "If love springs from outside the soul's own will, it being made to love, what merit is there in loving good or blame in loving ill?" (Purg. XVIII, 43-5)

Moving through the cornices of the slothful and the avaricious, Dante remarks, curiously, of the two births which had shaken mankind—the birth of Apollo (Purg. XX, 130–2) and the birth of Christ (Purg. XX, 140),[30] again juxtaposing the mythological and Christian elements. Appropriately, then, the mention of the birth of Christ is the new light for mankind, symbolically replacing the light of the pagan world represented by the Sun God, Apollo.

The literary allusion of the tree and the veil appear next in Canto XXII. It is the veil which must be rent in order to see the truth (lines 94–6). And the Tree of Life, or of Good and Evil, with its fruit nearest the top toward Eden, is symbolic of both the fruition of being at the top of the scale of life as well as the movement of man back toward the primordial garden of innocence. If, indeed, the tree is of "evil root" (Purg. XXIV, 115–7), which is later cited, then the allegorical comment of a return to Eden or a metamorphosis from the dark of bestiality to the fulfillment of the light of being is complete.

It is within the cornice of the gluttonous that the suggestion of the consequences of Adam's fall receives one of its most symbolic treatments. Those who are punished here have the cavernous appearance of death, the hollows of their faces carrying the skull-like lines of the letters OMO,[31] which is said to symbolize the mark of the Creator. Literally,

om or omo signifies both one and man.[32] Figuratively, the allegory is suggestive of man's fall from Eden by his appetite for the forbidden fruit and his resultant punishment of death. Extending the symbolism, the middele M represents the meta of metamorphosis as well as the M of Terram, upon which the Paradisaical spirit or dove was to land (Par. XVIII), indicating further the allegory of man's dual spiritual-material nature whose movement is from the O of origin , through the M of earth, to the O of Omega. OMO, then, symbolizes the very heart of Dante's allegorical movement toward the good.

Carrying forth the duality of the checkerboard Purgatory, composed itself both of light and dark, Dante interjects his meeting with his former political enemy Forese, a member of the opposite Black political party.[33] His punishment is noted by Dante, the political White. The black and white reference is further extended by Dante's references to the crucifixion, allowing man's salvation and portending his resurrection to the light, as well as to the notation of the mythological Apollo and Diana—rulers of the Sun and Moon, dichotomy of light and dark. Even religiously, the XXIII Canto of Dante is as symbolic as the XXIII Psalm.

Microcosmically, the chain of being is noted again in Canto XXV (34-108) as Statius comments upon the status of man in regard to generation, the birth of the soul, man's vegetative,

sensitive, and reflective faculties, and the nature of the spirit when the soul is free of the flesh at death. Again, Dante notes the god of light, Apollo, (Purg. XXV, 91-3) and his antipodal half, Diana, goddess of the moon (Purg. XXV, 130). It is also the position of Diana in this canto to serve as the inspiration of chastity within the cornices of the lustful whose transgressions may lead to the bestiality of Pasiphae (Purg. XXVI, 41-2), a step down from the ladder of virtue and being.

In Canto XXVII the last P is stricken from Dante's brow as the beatitude invoking the pure of heart (line 8) is sounded before the final purifying Wall of Fire (10-12). The golden prize, signified by the golden apples (line 116) is at hand, for man has purged himself of the faults plaguing his earthly shell. The waters of Lethe (Purg. XXVIII) will wash away the memory of his strife before entering his primordial earthly paradise, the "perfect garden" (140-1) of Parnassus where soon will be conjoined the "perfect circuit with The Primal Motion" (line 104).

The Heavenly Pageant begins in Canto XXIX, the allegorical procession, replete with its intertwined mythological and Christian allusions. It is here that we see the Griffon, which has the dual nature of both eagle and lion, drawing a chariot. Almost universally, critical comment suggests that the Griffon is symbolic of the dual nature of Christ, or, indeed, that

the Griffon itself is Christ.[34] It is to be noted, however, that the beforementioned two-natured centaur, Chiron, does not merit such an assigned position. Moreover, the Griffon is seen merely as a beast of burden, drawing the chariot. Perhaps a more appropriate predication might be that the Griffon is the mere vehicle for the god Apollo, who is often seen as riding a griffon,[35] or being drawn across the skies in a chariot. The analogy, then, would be to the mythological Apollo, son of the Greek King of Gods, and pagan antecedent of Christ, also a symbol of light. References to this Apollo, in close proximity to the image of the Griffon, are also found in speaking of the Sun (line 117) and of the "Sun's own chariot" (line 118).

The participants of the heavenly parade symbolize virtue and wisdom, twin components necessary in the allegorical movement toward the light of perfectibility. Also, appropriately, Virgil disappears then as the end of guidance by the limited human reason in an yet unredeemed world. His place is taken by Beatrice, whose symbolism is of achieved earthly beatitude and hoped for spiritual blessedness. To Dante, each is to tread the "True Way" pursuing the good by the gift of grace working to fulfill its own end (Purg. XXX, 109-11). The Beatific Vision of Beatrice is seen in Canto XXI as she removes her veil revealing Divine Love. The Divine Procession

departs in Canto XXXII, and the Tree of Good and Evil or the Tree of Life (58–60) bursts into blossom as the Griffon ties his empty chariot pole to it. Again, within close proximity (line 56) is a reference to the Sun's harnessing his team, suggesting, again, that the Griffon, while not Christ, is symbolic of his pagan counterpart, Apollo. The union of the chariot pole with the Tree of Life or the Tree of Good and Evil may indicate the movement from darkness to light, from bestiality to blessedness, or from evil soon to be redeemed by good.

The Purgatorio ends with its summary allusions in Canto XXXIII to the progress of man in the light and dark of this life—the first soul, Adam (line 61), the Tree of the Garden (line 56), the imprinted wax of man shaped by God's spirit (lines 79–81), and the seven virtues whose practice leads man back to the true garden (line 113). Symbolically washing away the memory of his former estate in Lethe, Dante prepares himself to enter the realm of the spiritual Paradise.

The Paradiso

In the first lines of the Paradiso, Dante mentions God as the "All-Mover," suggesting the scholastic teachings of his contemporary Aquinas who noted that, as motion indicates becoming, and, thus, change and implied imperfection, then

we proceed logically to a first mover or the unchanged perfection, the efficient cause of all motion, God. It is the light from this source, God, which is to guide Dante to the second peak of Parnassus (Para. I, 16–18), whose twin peaks is a strictly Dantesque invention.[36] Perhaps, of course, the twin peaks might best symbolize the twin heights to which man must aspire in the orders to wisdom, guided by Virgil, and virtue, guided by Beatrice.

Wondering at how to transcend other "light bodies" (Para. I, 98–99), Dante leaves open the question of his own material status for he seems to move freely through things—"trascenda questi corpi levi." Imprinted with the seal of Eternal Worth by the Creator (lines 106–8), he is to achieve the fulfillment of his nature, a uniting with the Divine Essence (Para. II, 37–42) whose being is distributed through all essences (Para. II, 114–7). It is through the orders of Angels that Dante will travel, through those beings which seem to be pure Intelligences, similar to the Platonic ethereal world of ideas; divorced from matter, they are seen only as sparks or receptacles of light.[37] These orders are placed on the scale of being in relationship to their perception of divine good.[38] In contrast to the lower estates of being, each of the angelic orders is fulfilled to its capacity with divine love which makes them content with their individual placement on the scale as their wills are bent to the King (Para. III, 64–84). As they are near the Primal Truth (Para. IV, 91–96),

the souls of Paradise cannot lie as they move toward the vision of the Good (Para. V, 4-6) made manifest in the lower orders by the Incarnation of the Son (Para. VII, 30), the Word of God, Verbo di Dio.

Noting the continuum of life in Canto X, Dante suggests that, "Since the ray of grace, by which true love is kindled and which then grows by loving shines so multiplied in you that it brings you up that stair which none descends but to mount again . . . . " (Para. X, 82-7).

"After each had come to the point of the circle where it was before, it stayed itself, as the taper in its stand" (Para. XI, 13-15), Dante notes of the angelic procession, in it movement toward the intuitive, clarifying, emphatic "Eternal Light" (Para. XI, 20). This passage seems to suggest the theory of "single illumination" suggested by Plato who felt that the soul would clarify and develop as it ascends the chain of being in the spiral of creation.[39]

In Canto XIII, Dante comments upon the mystery of the Holy Trinity, the undivided unity of three unlimited beings in one. Commenting upon this paradox, Dante notes that the Word of God is the intellectual manifestation of the Father while the Holy Spirit is the bond of love between the creative Father and His divine Son. As each virtue, both intellect and love, are but spiritual manifestations of the Father, they are, therefore, unlimiting and undividing.

> That which dies not and that which can die are naught but the splendor of that Idea which in His love our Sire begets; for that living light which so streams from its Lucent Source that it is not disunited from It, nor from the Love which is intrined with them, does of Its own goodness collect Its rays, as though reflected, in nine substances (nine angelic orders), Itself eternally remaining One. Thence It descends to the ultimate potentialities downward from act to act . . . .
> (Para. XIII, 52-62)

Thus, in the realm of act and "to be," all who proceed are imprinted with the divine stamp of their Creator and with His spiritual manifestations of intellect and love.

At the beginning of Canto XIV (lines 1-3), Dante pens the curious line: "From the center to the rim, and so from the rim to the center, the water in a round vessel moves, according as it is struck from without or within." The image presented is that of a continuum of the entire spiral or circular movement of the Comedy while also presented is Dante's concept of the relationship of cause to effect. This line is juxtaposed between the end of Canto XIII, where Dante suggests that one should not judge the worthiness of others, and the Canto XIV passage on death and eternal life: "Who so laments because we die here to live there on high has not seen there the refreshment of the eternal rain" (lines 25-7). Thus, Dante carries forward the image of the water of baptism or purification begun in the Purgatorio in the movement toward the Trinity—One, Two, and Three (lines 28-30). The final resurrection of a new glorified being in Paradise after its material dissolution is noted in the lines, "When the flesh,

glorious and sanctified, shall be clothed on us again, our persons will be more acceptable for being all complete . . . ." (Para. XIV, 43-45).

The final black and white of the book of salvation is never altered (Para. XV, 49-51). The shape of the spirits of the just, which hover like birds, alight in the final M of Terram (Para. XVIII, 91-99), like a movement of spirit and light, possibly suggesting the Descent of the Holy Spirit upon earth. It is this divine inspiration and remembrance of the eternal good to which all are drawn to the final Omega Point.

Each will be drawn to its own first cause, the illuminated Supreme Essence (Para. XXI, 79-90), from which its own light of virtue is reflected. Miraculously, those marked by divine intervention, like the descent of the Spirit upon the apostles, are drawn upward like a whirlwind (Para.XXII, 97-99), through the seven spheres of the contemplative. The Fellowship of the Lamb (Para. XXIV, 1-18) of which Dante writes is like the Biblical communion of those in grace partaking of the Lord's Supper.

Supported by the Faith of the Chief Centurion (Para. XXIV, 61-66), "the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen . . . .," Dante proceeds with the Hope of Paradise in the "sure expectation of future glory, which divine grace produces, and preceding merit" (Para. XXV, 67-68).

Dante, the pilgrim, assumes the white robe of salvation, the double garment of the united soul and the glorified body.[40] "On earth my body is earth, and there it shall be with the rest . . . . " (Para. XXV, 124-5), until the eternal purpose is fulfilled and "two lights" will ascend (Para. XXV, 127-9).

From faith and hope is born the activity of charity (Conv. XXX, xiv, 14).[41] "The good which satisfies this Court is Alpha and Omega of all the scripture which Love reads to me, either low or loud." (Para. XXVI, 16-18). Love imprints itself "for the good, inasmuch as it is good, kindles love in proportion as it is understood . . . . " (Para. XXVI, 27-30). The highest of all love "looks to God" (Para. XXVI, 48), the truthful Mirror reflecting all of creation (103-8). This is reminiscent of Virgil's analysis that the more who love well, the more love there is—giving back to each like a mirror.[42] The exile from the garden has not been only from the tasting of the forbidden fruit of the tree itself "but solely the overpassing of the bound." (Para. XXVI, 117). All who enter Paradise must give proper glory to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Para. XXVII, 1-2).

The spheres of the comedy through which the pilgrim has passed have been wide or narrow "according to the more or less of virtue which is diffused through all their parts." (Para. XXVIII, 64-66). The measure of virtue corresponds with

Intelligence (Para. XXVIII, 73-78), and the contemplation of Eternal Love opens into new loves (Para. XXIX, 17-18), in the divine act of creation, seen symbolically as the opening of a Heavenly Rose (Para. XXIX, 18), an opening of even greater beauty and love. The order of created form and matter, then, was decreed as potentiality, the lowest place on the chain of being. This was followed by potentiality tied with act, the Thomistic essence and "to be," the middle place on the chain of being represented by man; and finally, the summit of the pyramidal scale, the pure act of Omega. Metaphysically, their assignment in the Divine Comedy is seen, respectively, in the beastial Inferno, the more human, Purgatorio, and finally, the angelic, ethereal Paradiso. The fall of man had come from his unmerited attempt to scale the chain of being and in not recognizing his origin as being from Divine Goodness (Para. XXIX, 49-66).

The light of the Creator, visible to all creatures, comes only from the "summit of the Primum Movile [ninth heaven] which therefrom takes its life and potency . . . . " (Para. XXX, 106-8). It is the vision of this light, as from an ever-reflecting mirror, which is to be attained from the ladder of contemplation. It was such a ladder that was suggested by St. Bonaventure which he saw as mounting to God, whose Essence was reflected on each step.[43] Nothing can be an obstacle to the penetration of the Divine Light which all in the universe seek to apprehend (Para. XXXI, 22-24). Dante,

observing the ranks of the blessed, noted: "I saw faces all given to love, adorned by the light of Another, and by their own smile, and movements graced with every dignity" (Para. XXXI, 49-51). The place of Beatrice is in the third circle from the highest tier (Para. XXXI, 66-69). It is Bernard who is his final guide (Para. XXXI, 100-102).

The ranks of the blessed are assigned because of their sharpness of perception: "Wherefore, without merit of their own works, they are placed in different rank, differing only in the prime keeness of vision" (Para. XXXII, 73-75). It is they who have been stamped with the seal of the Almighty like wax taking shape from the seal of matter.[44]

Finally, it is the face of Mary who prepares the pilgrim to see Christ (Para. XXXII, 85-7);for, it is she who incorporates all mercy, pity, and munificence (Para. XXXIII, 19-21).

Recording the merging of his individual consciousness into the permeating consciousness of Love in the universe,[45] Dante sees all eyes turn to the Primal Love (Para. XXXII, 142) and the Eternal Light (Para. XXXIII, 43).

> I believe that because of the keeness of the living ray which I endured, I should have been lost if my eyes had been turned from it. (Para. XXXIII, 76-78)

Uniting his gaze with Infinite Goodness (Para. XXXIII, 79-81), Dante sees all the things of the universe: "Substances and accidents and their relations, as though fused together in

such a way that what I tell is but a simple light." (Para. XXXIII, 87–90). The rainbow of light is seen in three circles with three colors (Para. XXXIII, 115–120), the vision of the Eternal Trinity.

> I wished to see how the image conformed to the circle and how it has its place therein; but my own wings were not sufficient for that, save that my mind was smitten by a flash wherein its wish came to it. Here power failed the lofty phantasy; but already my desire and my will were revolved, like a wheel that is evenly moved, by the Love which moves the sun and the other stars.
>
> (Para. XXXIII, 137–145).

The progress of Dante, the pilgrim, is concluded. The allegorical movement has been from darkness into light, from beastiality, to unredeemed materiality, and, finally, to the light of spirituality. The symbolic development of the poet has been in the virtues of wisdom and virtue, guided by Virgil and Beatrice. Dante's trasumanar progress has been like OMO, in the shedding of the husk of materiality, in the movement toward Eternal Light.

CHAPTER III

Spenser's Concept of Constancy and Change

Almost three hundred years after the Divine Comedy, Edmund Spenser was also to embark upon Dante's epic journey of a movement toward the perfectibility of order in the Faerie Queene. Following his predecessor's cosmic vision , Spenser, as did Elyot and Castiglione before him, endeavored to present his ideal of perfection as a "gentleman or noble person" fashioned in "virtuous and gentle discipline."[1] The exemplar chosen by Spenser was to be Arthur, champion of state, the ideal knight, who personified the "twelve private moral virtues which Aristotle had devised."[2] The adherence to these virtues, then, and the overcoming of their opposing vices, would allow, through an ascendancy of virtue, achievement of the ideal state. The challenge to the Spenserian concept of a hierarchical rise from the real of change and becoming to the ideal of constancy and perfection may be seen in his summary poetic fragment, the Mutabilitie Cantos. It is here that the ideal state, so carefully prepared for and so painstakingly achieved in the Faerie Queene and in the Four Hymnes, meets its strongest challenge.

In the Faerie Queene, it had been Spenser's task to show that the perfectibility of order might be achieved by establishing the Aristotelian mean between the vices of the extreme. That these virtues were modified somewhat may be seen in Spenser's inclusion of Holiness and Humility, which, while not Aristotelian,[3] perhaps might be seen as Spenser's own ideal of virtuous foundation.[4]

While Aristotle's virtues may have been intended to have been grouped around the cardinal virtues,[5] the mean that they achieved was also indicative of the impending impasse with the Platonic Absolute of the hierarchical ideal.[6] Thus, the absolutes of beauty and truth, spoken of in the Four Hymnes, were not to be seen as the same virtues as achieved by the Aristotelian mean of the Faerie Queene.

The great chain of being helped to explain the structured pattern in which the Elizabethan man found himself. That the whole of creation had its assigned place was a constant view. While it was incumbent upon man to intrinsically attempt to perfect his nature in the Aristotelian virtues of moral virtue and of intellectual virtue, other extrinsic hierarchies of position, of power, or of birth did not allow him to move from his assigned place in the chain of being.

For Elizabethan man, the hierarchical pattern in the chain of being may be viewed as follows:

> Spenser and his readers saw the whole of creation as an ordered world, a world established by divine law and upheld by that law. This law was manifest in the hierarchical structure of the universe, each element of the hierarchy occupying a position assigned by divine law. The most general hierarchy way: mineral, vegetable, animal, human, angelic, divine (God, the creator of the hierarchy. [7]

The movement in the chain, intrinsically, was assigned according to one's possession of a nature "more or less near the perfection of God. There was, then, a sort of chain of command of creation.[8]

For Edmund Spenser, Elizabethan gentleman and exponent of the complete courtier, the chain of command and the ascendancy of virtue may be shown in his system of jousts in the Faerie Queene. It was the task of Spenser to portray his knights as embodying the ideal of virtue, whose task it was to combat the personification of presented vice in the challenge to the quest of the perfectibility of nature. The assault of vice may be both extrinsic and intrinsic as befitting the virtue personified. The final virtue of divine grace was enlisted in their support only when the possibility of defeat was imminent.

Thus, we may view Arthur as the foundation of all virtue and holiness in his assignment as divine grace. It was the task of Arthur, then, as providence, to save his

representative knights when they were most in need of help, being unable to overcome vice of their own strength. The Spenserian virtues were represented by Redcross, Holiness; Guyon, Temperance; Britomart, Chastity; Artegall, Justice; and Calidore, Courtesy. The tests of these knights of the first six of the proposed twelve books was in overcoming personified vice together with the aid of such minor characters as Una, the dwarf, and the palmer, who symbolize truth and reason, as well as other levels of the chain of being, such as fairies, witches, elves, and satyrs, who inhabited the Arthurian plains and woods.

That the schema of progress of virtue being tested by vice may be seen is noted in the progression of the Redcross knight in Book I: (1) Recross is chosen; (2) Redcross is challenged in the Den of Error; (3) Error is slain; (4) Redcross proceeds to the House of Archimago, Hypocrisy; (5) Sansfoy, "without faith," is slain; (6) Redcross proceeds to the House of Pride; (7) Sansjoy, "without joy" or despair, is felled; (8) Redcross proceeds to the dungeon of Orgoglio whose "puffed up" frame indicates a lack of love or humility; (9) Arthur's help allows Redcross to be victorious; (10) Redcross proceeds to the Cave of Despair; (11) barely overcoming Despair, Redcross is allowed to proceed to the House of Holiness; (12) Redcross's final challenge is the dragon whom he must pass to arrive at (13) the paradisiacal Garden of Eden.[9]

Thus, the vices combated by the knight of Holiness are

those of paganism and infidelity; lawlessness and despair (Sansfoy and Sansjoy); blind devotion (Corcea); Monastic Superstition (Abessa); Hypocrisy (Archimago); Falsehood (Duessa); False Pride or Conceit (Lucifera and Orgoglio, who might also represent the Papacy); the seven deadly sins (pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, sloth); Error (the dragon); and Satan. As Dante's pilgrimage, Redcross must pass from the House of Pride before he can achieve the beatific vision of contemplation in the House of Holiness.

Mirroring Dante's progress, Spenser adopts the plan of an Easter cycle with the fall of man, Christ's harrowing of hell,[10] and the movement back toward the perfection of virtue achieved by the Mt. Parnassus summit or the Christian's New Jerusalem. The pilgrim's progress is likened to the ascent up Jacob's ladder (I, 10, 52–9) toward the ideal garden of Cleopolis, capitol of the Faerie Queene.

The beatific vision of Una, like that of Beatrice, is achieved in Canto XII when she removes her veil, revealing the radiance of beauty and truth. The truth of Redcross's vision is to sustain him during the next six years of his service to the Faery Queen, together with the sustenance of the Well of Life and the Tree of Life of Revelation,[11] his spiritual food and drink.

That the intrinsically achieved holiness is to be balanced by the extrinsically achieved temperance, the Elizabethan concept of a balance of humours, is seen in Spenser's portrayal of Sir Guyon in Book II of the Faerie Queene. Aristotle, too, felt

humors must be in harmony with right reason,[12] signified by the palmer, in order for man to be virtuous.

As opposed to Redcross's intrinsic testing of virtue, then, Guyon is primarily attacked extrinsically, as in the Bower of Bliss (Canto xii) by Acrasia's attack on continence; in the Cave of Mammon and its diseased emphasis on avariciousness (Canto vii), seen as Christ's temptation by the devil;[13] the Castles of Medina (Canto ii) and Alma (Canto ix), whose three parts are likened to the soul,[14] which is attacked from without, as Medina is attacked from within; and by Maleger, son of the Earth from whence he derives his power, and whom even Arthur is able to defeat only by breaking his body and holding him aloft (Canto xi), a symbolic breaking of the material.

Spenser's movement from the material to the ethereal may perhaps be best seen in his Four Hymnes in honor of love and beauty. Reminiscent of Plato's doctrine in the Symposium[15] that "to love is to bring forth upon the beautiful," the movement seen in the poem is from lower to higher stages of being.[16]

As was his usual manner, Spenser incorporates the philosophy of the ancient Greeks with the Christian teachings of the day. Thus, the Four Hymnes may be seen as an amalgam of both accumulated wisdom of the ages and prevailing Christian and Elizabethan thinking.

> There was some common ground in the unrecognized Platonic element in the tradition of the Church, and still more community in the temper of thought, for Plato was not only the philosopher who taught, like the Church, that earth is but the shadow of heaven, but the philosopher of Love and Beauty and Desire . . . . [17]

The movement of the Hymnes, reflecting the Symposium's ascendancy of one level of love to the next, also is indicative of Dante's hierarchiacal pattern,[18] a pattern of pyramid structure of the nine divisions of heaven.[19] Spenser saw the universe as typical of the astronomy of the day—"a series of concentric spheres, with the earth as the center, a sphere called the primum mobile at the outer boundary, and spheres of the fixed stars and the various planets between."[20]

The poems were meant to be read as companion pieces showing Spenser's composite reflections on the gradations of physical love, Eros, in the Hymn in Honor of Love, ascending toward Agape, spiritual love, in the Hymn of Heavenly Beauty. In the second set of poems, Spenser depicted the contemplation of physical beauty in the Hymn in Honor of Beauty, which rises to the Platonic predication of beauty and truth in the Hymn of Heavenly Love, seen in the vision of Sapience (Wisdom), "beauty itself, the Son of God."[21] This image of truth and beauty was a common predication in the days of Spenser, an image taken from the book of Proverbs.[22]

The ascendancy of vision in the chain of being may best be seen in Spenser's lines from the Hymn of Heavenly Beauty:

> That still as every thing doth upward tend,
> And further is from earth, so still more clear.
> And fair it grows, till to his perfect end
> Of purest beauty it at last ascend (lines 44-47).

That the movement in the chain of being, then, is to the good as the perfect end may be seen in man's attempt to obtain intrinsic perfection in love, wisdom, and beauty.

It is perhaps in the Four Hymnes that Spenser's vision of the possibility of permanence is best shown in achieving virtue and perfection in being, a movement begun in the Faerie Queene, but challenged in the Mutabilitie Cantos, which some critics see as indicative of Spenser's feeling that permanence is not attainable.[23]

It is this challenge that is made by Mutabilitie—that change overcomes all challengers, for all, indeed, are subject to change, both on earth and in the heavens. It is this challenge of the heretofore presented thesis of Edmund Spenser that perfectibility is attainable through the accomplishment of virtue over vice, and through the movement of the intuition of of good of the real to the contemplation of the good of the ideal in beauty, truth, and love, that must be met in the Mutabilitie Cantos.

It is indeed problematic in Spenserian scholarship to determine whether the poems were meant to appear as part of the text of the Faerie Queene or as merely a separate reflection by the author.

Commenting upon this literary impasse is Leicester Bradner, who notes that ten years after Spenser's death, in 1609, the publisher Matthew Lounes brought forth the edition of the Faerie Queene in which appeared for the first time the Mutabilitie Cantos. In its form and stanza, it is reflective of the literary style which Spenser used only for the Faerie Queene. Bradner also

notes that, thematically, mutability is mentioned in the text of the Faerie Queene variously as appearance and as deterioration and regeneration.[24]

Commenting upon the cantos, also, is John Hughes in a 1715 edition of Spenser's Works of which he was the editor. Hughes calls the writing a "noble fragment of the remaining six books of the Faerie Queene. It is this

> . . . Poem, of the Faerie Queen, which was begun and continu'd at different Intervals of Time; and of which he at first publish'd only the Three first Books. To these were added three more in a following Edition; but the Six last Books (excepting the Two Canto's of Mutability) were unfortunately lost by his Servant, whom he had in haste sent before him [from Ireland] into England.[25]

Recent critic Janet Spens in Spenser's Faerie Queene states that evidence suggests that the Mutabilitie Cantos were intended for the last part "of the final book."[26] Or, again, as William Blissett suggests in "The Mutabilitie Cantos," they may either be a part of the originally intended twelve books or possibly "material left over from an earlier version."[27] For Graham Hough the lineage of Mutabilitie is already found in the annals of fairyland;[28] although almost none of Spenser's heroes appears in a book prior to his quest.[29]

For H. S. V. Jones in A Spenser Handbook, the matter of seeing the cantos as inclusive within the Faerie Queene may be noted in his comment "that the 'Legend of Constancie' in some form was designed for the Faerie Queene has been generally assumed on the grounds of Lounes's declaration, of its metrical

form, and of the following lines from stanza 37 of Canto VI:

> And were it not ill fitting for this file,
> To sing of hills and woods, mongst warres and knights,
> I would abate the sterneness of my stile,
> Mongst these sterne sounds to mingle soft delights. [30]

Thus, the question of form and matter may well be one of literary affinity. In the larger vein, however, it may also speak of the reflection on nature which Spenser was about to make. Thematically,

> The method of the Faerie Queene is to display each virtue completely in all its forms and phases, not as a simple characteristic, but as defined by the various actions proper to its possession, and, negatively, by the diverse vices and defects opposed to it.[31]

If the virtue to be depicted in the Mutabilitie Cantos is Constancy, then its concomitant vice is Mutability, also seen as Fortuna,[32] who claims dominion over all things both natural and supernatural. Curiously, the poem's inscription, whether devised by Spenser or appended by his editor who was familiar with Spenser's works, notes that the poem, "both for Forme and Matter, appear to be parcell of some following book of the Faerie Queene under the Legend of Constancie."[33] It is precisely this concept of Forme and Matter of which Spenser would speak in a challenge to constancy by its antithesis, change. Thus, whether the cantos be literally or philosophically inclusive or exclusive of the Faerie Queene, they do indeed reflect Spenser's summary vision of a world of time and change pitted against a world of constancy and being.

That Spenser, herald of the ideal faery kingdom of order and perfectibility, might suggest the possibility of a lack of permanence might be noted in his darkening vision of man's ability to significantly change the status quo or to significantly influence those in political power.[34] It is also to be noted that Spenser's own personal plight was far from ideal when, after being granted a pension and an Irish estate in 1586 by the pleased Elizabeth, the fortress from which he was to continue his literary career, his home would be sacked and burned, forcing him to return to England.[35] In addition, the English state, at that time, suffered from its external problems with Spain and from its internal problems of succession with its aging virgin queen.

Thematically, the Cantos were seen to be a philosophical poem, ontologically relating to the ethical theory governing the universe, which differed from the heretofore system of individual ethics governing the separate books of the Faerie Queene.[36]

That Spenser employs the image of the wheel is most significant, for it is indicative of the poem's circular movement and entire cyclical nature, the constant whirl of matter in the corporeal world. The image of both change and constancy may best be seen in the allusion to the wheel of time, whose cyclical movement is organized around its constant, stationary hub. Spenser's movement of time and change is note in his opening lines from Canto vi:

> What man that sees the ever-whirling wheel
> Of Change, the which all mortal things doth sway
> But that thereby doth find, and plainly feel,
> How Mutability in them doth play
> Her cruel sports to many men's decay.
>
> (Canto vi, 1-5)

The challenge, however, is not only to the world of corporeal reality but also to its ascendant link on the chain of being, the ethereal world of gods and angels.

> Proud Change, not pleased in mortal things
> Beneath the moon to reign,
> Pretends, as well of gods as men,
> To be the soverign.
>
> (Canto vi, Ins.)

The argument of Mutability, then, is that all things governed by time, change, or who are not their own "to be," responsible for their own existence, are governed by Mutability. Her challenges are to Cynthia, Jove himself, and to Nature, who, while called upon to hear the argument, is governed by the never-ending cycle of months and seasons. Curiously, those who are challenged are those whose end is sought in the Faerie Queene—Cleopolis, governed by Elizabeth, also referred to as Cynthia or Diana for her Chastity,[37] ruler of the ideal kingdom of state; Jove, supernatural king of the Gods of Mt. Parnassus, and survivor of his father Cronos (Time) who devoured his own offspring;[38] and, Nature, ruler of the physical universe, whose limits man was to overcome in an escape from eternal corruption and decay, toward his promised home in New Jerusalem.

It is not by accident that the challenge begins with Cynthia, for it was generally assumed that all beneath the moon

were mutable while the heavens above were immutable.[39] For Aristotle, commenting upon change in his Physics, was to observe that all Mutability is opposed to eternity.[40] The first challenge to Cynthia, then, represents not only a challenge to the ideal state but to the very gods themselves.

> Mutabilitie's struggle at the sphere of the moon represents the first sign of disorder in the cosmos, brought about by Adam's sin. In fact, her attack on Cynthia, her subverting of nature, represents her coming into existence: were there no Fall there would be no Mutability.[41]

Perhaps, also, as suggested in the opening inscription of Forme and Matter under the Legend of Constancie, Spenser was to answer the challenge with those things which appear to be constant. Spenser's concept of form may best be noted in his statement in the Hymn In Honor of Beauty:

> For of the soul the body form doth take;
> For soul is form, and doth the body make.
> (lines 131-2)

The existence of form, then, the spiritual self, would transcend mutability, a fact which Aquinas comments upon in his Summa Theologica (I, 75, 6, c.):

> It is clear that whatever belongs to a thing according to itself [secundum se] is inseparable from it. But "to be" belongs to a form which is an act by itself . . . . It is impossible, however, that a form could be separated from itself. Hence, it is impossible for a subsisting form [of itself] to cease to exist.[42]

The form, then, is in the existential nature of the "to be," while matter is in the essential nature of "essence."

Matter, moreover, is the constant substratum of the material existence. Aristotle, then, identifies "the form with the essence, the quiddity, the universal nature of the substance,"[43] which allows potency. The fact that matter is may be referred to as primary, and, as Aristotle's first matter, may exist without form.[44]

Spenser's concept of form and matter is addressed in the Garden of Adonis in Book III of the Faerie Queene. Commenting upon this passage is Susan Fox[45] who concludes from the text thusly that "substance returns to Adonis when form dies, and is planted deep into the soil of chaos to grow a thousand years."

> That substance is eterne, and biddeth so,
> Ne when the life decayes, and forme does fade,
> Doth it consume, and into nothing go,
> But changed is, and often altred to and fro.
> (F. Q. III. 6. 37. 6-9)

It is most probable, though, that Spenser's concept of the constancy and eternity of substance is similar to Aristotle's view of the quiddity, which may be either primary or secondary, as when it is in union with form. The problem of the absolute and unchanging nature of matter is, of course, confronted by those who see the universe as being created or the first movement concept of the "big bang" theorists. Therefore, while Aristotle is often seen to distinguish between matter and form, it is noteworthy that Plato, whose ideals Spenser followed in the Four Hymnes, separated the Idea from the phenomenon as well as distinguishing between the concepts of matter and form,[46] a further gradation in the chain of being.

The ascent of the Cantos is like that of the Four Hymnes, "following the scale of being upwards, through the world of phenomena, until it reaches non-contingent reality, the unchanging is."[47] The upward progress in the Mutabilitie Cantos is from the "mutable world, to the moon, to the planets, to the goddess Nature (herself a variant of Venus), and finally to God himself."[48]

The introduction of Mutabilitie in the poem comes with the notation of her ancestry amongst the Titans, those who have rebelled against the gods. She is of the family of Hecate, goddess of the underworld of corruption and decay, and of Bellona, goddess of war and chief provider for the underworld's inhabitants. It is these Titan children who have already challenged the laws of Nature, gaining sway after the fall of Adam (Canto vi, 5-6). That to man, now, victim of original sin, is the very mutability of being, death.

> O piteous work of Mutability!
> By which we all are subject to that curse,
> And death, instead of life, have sucked from our nurse.
> (Canto vi. 6. 7-9).

Passing through the ever-changing elements of air and fire, Mutability extends her challenge to Cynthia, attendant of both day and night (Canto vi.9.4). That Mutability attempts to pluck her from her ivory throne (Canto vi. 13. 3), plunging all again into Chaos (Canto vi. 14. 6), perhaps is an allusion to the order of state having been achieved by Arthur or to the attacks against the throne of Elizabeth.

The first hint of the impending challenge is Jove's question as to the sudden "lack of light" (Canto vi. 15. 5), thus sending

Mercury with his "caduceus," whose powers like the palmer's staff would signify the restoration of right reason (Canto vi. 18. 2), for "No more than Cynthia's self, but all their kingdoms sought" (Canto vi. 18. 9). The deeds of Mutability, descendant of Earth and Chaos (Canto vi. 26. 4–6), were reported to the gods, who viewed her transgressions as those resulting from the Earth's cursed seed (Canto vi. 20. 2). Skillfully hinting at the the challenge to come, Mutability, then, invokes Jove, "Father of gods and men by equal might," (Canto vi. 35. 5) to hear her case on Arlo Hill (Canto vi. 36. 4–6), Spenser's Irish Mt. Parnassus, where the "principles by which man lives in the physical world are set forth in their endlessly temporary shapes."[49]

The challenge to Cynthia is the compromise of her chastity, as evidenced in the divulgence of the bathing place of the "soverign queen" of woods and forests (Canto vi. 38. 7–8), to Faunus, Pan–like, the god of nature, who jeopardizes Cynthia's constancy in chasteness.

The second part of the tripartite challenge begins in Canto vii as Mutability notes that the evidence will show that her domain is "from Jove to Nature's bar" (Invocation). Mutability, whose other name is Alteration, hints that anything which changes cannot, therefore, be perfect and self–sufficient. Judging the case is veiled Nature, who, as Una before her, appears with her face covered to hide the brilliance of the truth. Her appearance with the three saints (Canto vii. 7. 6) is seen possibly as a

transfiguration scene (Canto vii. 7. 7) on Mount Tabor,[50] indicative of the possibility of ascendance from the natural to the supernatural.

Mutabilitie states that she has an equal right to rule in heaven as she already rules on earth (Canto vii. 15. 6–9), which only seems to be "unmoved and permanent" (Canto vii. 17. 7). In a reference to a metamorphosis of being, Mutabilitie states:

> Yet see we soon decay, and being dead,
> To turn again into their earthly slime.
> Yet out of their decay and mortal crime,
> We daily see new creatures to arise.
> (Canto vii. 18. 3–6)

Thus, to both men and beasts, change comes to mind and body (Canto vii. 19. 1–9). All elements and creatures change. Like the motion of the wheel, the cycle of elements, months, and hours begins, adding substance to Mutabilitie's challenge. Like Dante's Heavenly Pageant or Whitman's cycle of time in "Song of Myself," the heavenly procession passes until comes Day and Night, "riding together with equal pace." (Canto vii. 44. 1–2). Symbolically, they ride the same black and white steeds of the goddess Cynthia, ruler of the Moon. Their twins, Sleep and Darkness, pass; and, finally, Life and Death end the pageant of Nature, the final symbol of Mutability.

The argument of summation for Mutabilitie is launched.

> Lo, mighty mother, now be judge, and say
> Whether in all thy creatures more and less
> Change doth not reign and bear the greatest sway.
> For who sees not that Time on all doth prey.
> But times do change and move continually.
> So nothing here long standeth in one stay.
> Wherefore this lower world who can deny
> But to be subject still to Mutability.
> (Canto vii. 47. 2–9)

Jove responds to her challenge that all who are under heaven are changed of time, "who them all disseize of being" (Canto vii. 48. 2-4). Jove further comments that it is the gods who also rule virtue as well as being, noting, Platonically, that it is he who both moves and compels Time to keep his course over all "which pour that virtue from our heavenly cell" (Canto vii. 48. 1-9). He is countered by Mutabilitie who says that even the gods who rule the planets and are said to be immutable are ruled by Fate and change. Even Jove, "King of all the rest," was born (Canto vii. 53. 5); therefore, he is not the cause of his own being, an unmoved mover (Canto vii. 55. 1-9).

Commenting upon the Elizabethan concept of motion and being was English theologian Richard Hooker (1554-1600), contemporary of Spenser, who was to explain movment by its goal rather than by its source. Thus, all things have an

> 'Appetite or desire' for perfection, and thus they move and change towards an end, the perfection peculiar to their natures. Since God, the first mover, is absolute perfection, they seek to participate in Him as far as their natures permit. Law is not opposed to change, but regulates its mode and force. Love gives change direction; law gives it settled course. Nature's choice, then, is not between changelessness and change, but between the aimlessness of change for its own sake, and the constancy of movement directed by love and law towards a perfect goal.
>
> . . . all things conquer change by achieving a perfection implicit in their origin; they finally become what they were first created to be. Since God is the source and end of this movement, its efficient and its final cause, the movement is a circle. For creatures lacking reason, this is a natural process; their cycles are controlled by destiny. 51

Finally, it is to the argument that Nature responds to Mutabilitie.

> I will consider all that ye have said,
> And find that all things steadfastness do hate,
> And changed be. Yet being rightly weighed,
> They are not changed from their first estate,
> but by their change their being do dilate,
> And turning to themselves at length again,
> Do work their own perfection so by fate.
> Then over them Change doth not rule or reign,
> But they reign over Change, and do their states maintain.
>
> (Canto vii. 38.)

Thus, granting that all things change, Nature rules against Mutabilitie as governing that change, for each moves to the perfection of his Nature as decreed by fate and by his own being.

The final canto serves as a reflection upon the challenge of change, antithesis to constancy. Bowing to the argument of Mutabilitie that all things change, as "well it weigh" (Canto viii. 1. 2), Spenser, herald of the ideal world, harkens to an insight of faith—that the progress of man in the chain of being is to the Absolute; that the final constancy, indeed, is rest in the eternal, the Sabaoth God.

> For all that moveth doth in change delight,
> But thenceforth all shall rest eternally
> With him that is the God of Sabaoth hight.
> O that great Sabaoth God, grant me that Sabbath's sight.
>
> (Canto viii. 2. 6–9)

The constancie which Spenser sought to achieve in the cantos through an examination of the challenges to form and matter is like the hub of being, the unmoved Absolute. The whirling wheel of becoming, as suggested by the progressive cycle[52] of the pageants of change,[53] appear only as the moving rim. It is a

pattern of evolutionary movement, "symbolizing—desymbolizing—resymbolizing."[54]

Rather than affirm the oft presented critical explanation that "ritual change is circular and thus perfect,"[55] the affirmation of Spenser in his final canto's inscription is that it is "unperfite," but a movement toward the perfect in the final permanence with God.

CHAPTER IV

The Shakespearean Academy: "Let None Ignorant of Geometry Enter Here "

For William Shakespeare, penultimate observer of mankind and of his cosmic placement on the ladder of being and becoming, the Platonic admonition of "Let None Ignorant of Geometry Enter Here" would be appropriate for his readers. The caution which greeted thos who would enter the Academy of Plato indicated the standard by which they would be measured—the knowledge of proportion of lines; consideration of solids, surfaces, and angles; and of the inward relationships and affections of things.[1] For the reader of Shakespeare, the knowledge of both surface and inner relationships is paramount. It is this knowledge which allows the reader to assess the mathematical relationships on the Shakespearean chain of being as well as the inward relationships of his scale of virtue, which scale allowed for one's advancement of fall. The chain of being, then, may best be viewed in such plays as Midsummer Night's Dream and the Tempest, while the systems of moral and intellectual virtues may be addressed in Love's Labor's Lost, as well as in other important Shakespearean plays.

It is for Shakespeare to address the hierarchical pattern of virtues themselves, measuring them solidly one against the other, testing the lines of progression, considering both the surface and the solid. Thus, Shakespeare examines loyalty in Hamlet, wisdom in Othello, familial devotion in Lear, and honor in Coriolanus.

Perhaps his most exacting problem in the presentation of virtue is the assessment of justice and mercy in The Merchant of Venice and in Measure for Measure. It is in these two plays that the Pythagorean system of weights and measures in the achievement of the perfect balance is most closely examined.

The questions of both being and becoming, constancy and change, addressed by Spenser, are also examined by Shakespeare in a panoramic array of changing characters and disguises suggestive of both duality and duplicity.

Perhaps the problem of appearances and change in a movement toward truth and constancy may best be seen in Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's Dream, whose scale of being runs the gamut from the inanimate of walls and moonshine, to the supporting world of insects and flowers, through the ethereal fairies and sprites of the air and woods, to the mythological gods and goddesses, and finally to the world of humans.

The thread through the maze of being is presented by the weaver Bottom whose task it is to knit the raveling ends of the strange tale, allowing Theseus a final thread of truth.[2] Bottom's assessment of the potpourri of being is a "rare vision" assimilated from the various eyes of the play. The emphasis[3] on eyes is suggestive of the panaromic view which will be obtained at the end of the play, allowing for a constancy in synthesis seen again only in the Pheonix and the Turtle.

The labyrinth of the play, whose original counterpart was constructed by the aspiring Daedalus,[4] presents a series of tangled speeches, confused lovers, and questioned reality, suggestive in many ways of its chronological counterpart, Love's Labors Lost.

The historical background of the play seems to be based upon the double wedding of the daughters of the Earl of Worcester on November 8, 1596.[5] The common duality of lovers and situations, then, appropriately underlies the play. Even the mythological duality of being is suggested by the Symposium-like allusion to the affinity of Helena and Hermia, who had grown up together like a "double cherry" (III. ii. 209), their needles even creating "both one flower" (III. ii. 204). Their "union in partition" (III. ii. 210) is suggestive of the Symposium's reference to the once eight-limbed creature, man, who was cut in half by the gods to take away his power, yet not his life, in order that he might pay them further homage.[6] Thus, Diotima notes that Eros is the desire for what we lack,[7] a movement toward completion.

That deception and inconstancy will imperil true love is suggested by Hermia's early observation that it would be hell "to choose love by another's eyes" (I. i. 140); things once seen clearly may "come to confusion" (I. i. 149). The question of appearance and reality of vision is noted by Helena who states that "love can transpose to form and dignity/ Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind;/And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted blind" (I. i. 232-5).

The crossing of lovers is caused by Puck's mistaking the love potions administered to the sleeping lovers' eyes, duping vision, and even allowing Titania to become enamoured of Bottom, disguised as an ass. The crossing of lovers, then, is paralleled by a similar crossing of levels of being.

The personified inanimate and Shakespearean mechanicals make their appearance in the mythological play of Pyramus and Thisby, which play encompasses most of the fifth act. While it has been critically suggested that the thinness of this fable is inadequate for its entire-act placement,[8] a careful analysis will indicate that the myth enacted carries forth the Shakespearean theme of the possibility of union and the coalescence of elements repeated in the Phoenix and the Turtle. The ideal of truth and constancy is presented by the phoenix who loved the turtle (dove) not for what was "mortal and changing but eternal and true."

It is for Bottom to say at the conclusion of the play of ten words, Pythagoras' perfect number,[9] that the wall is down that parted their fathers (V. i, 351-2). Symbolically, this

statement is followed by the allusions to spirits roaming and "Triple Hecate's team," the threading together of heaven, earth, and the underworld (V. i. 381-4). Thus, the panoramic vision of all the elements of the chain of being are complete. That those who have been thwarted in union in life might achieve that union in death is seen by the final comingling of the bloods of Pyramus and Thisby which colors the flowers of the mulberry tree. It is this final union of the elements by fire which allows synthesis in the Phoenix and the Turtle (l. 55), a romantic fusion of the beautiful and good.[10]

The final suggestion of reality versus appearances in a world of Platonic shadows is noted by Puck, who, picking up Bottom's threaded pieces of a dream, addresses the audience as a shadow who mends and makes amends for the visions of all those who have "slumb'red here" (V. i. 425).

Geometrically, the chain of being may also be seen in the myriad relationships of those who populate Shakespeare's The Tempest. Shakespeare appends to this relationship, however, a concept of moral virtue by which man may progress on the scale of nature.

In writing the Tempest, whose Latin term "tempestas" means time,[11] Shakespeare attempted to observe the Aristotelian unities of time, place, and action. The unity of time demanded that the duration of hours involved in the play not exceed one day or twenty-four hours. A superficial examination of the play might

indicate that Shakespeare was successful; however, it must be noted that Ariel is freed two days after his first having asked. The unity of place, the island, exists; however, the unity of action is weakened by the existence of many subplots.[12]

For the background of his plot, Shakespeare drew from many sources. It is indeed probable that Shakespeare knew of the fate of an English ship sinking off the coast of Bermuda,[13] or of the 1606 (or 1609) voyage of a Virginia Company ship, which, being battered by a tempest, cast its voyagers upon an isle which they termed the Isle of Devils.[14]

Shakespeare's island of the Tempest holds the inhabitants of Prospero and Miranda, whose sojourn there had been for the past twelve years following the usurpation of Prospero's dukedom by his brother. Paradoxically, it is this brother, Antonio, who is cast ashore upon the same island at the opening of the play. With Antonio are Alonso, who is the King of Naples; Gonzalo, the honest councillor; and, separately, Stephano and Trinculo, and the King's son, Ferdinand. Allegorically, the island might be likened to the Garden of Eden, with its personification of innocence, Miranda. It has also been compared to Plato's prison of the body, complete with its symbolic cave or cell,[15] and its illusion or dream.[16] Possibly, it is the island of civilization, if one is to consider Caliban the "missing link,"[17] who provides fire for the higher creatures,

and whose task is taken by Ferdinand, who becomes corporeal slave in love to Miranda.

With the advent of Prospero and Miranda to the island, its ruler Sycorax, sometimes likened to Elizabeth,[18] who is the mother of Caliban and imprisoner of Ariel, had herself been subdued. With Sycorax having been changed into a tree, Prospero is allowed not only the command of the island but also the command of its inhabitants, Caliban and Ariel, corporeal and ethereal links on the chain of being. That the personality of Sycorax also hints at a dual nature may be seen in an examination of its Greek derivatives, the words for sow and raven,[19] whose positions on the scale of being parallel those of Caliban and Ariel. The magic which allows Prospero the command of the island is spoken of by C. S. Lewis as "white magic" in its use for the good.[20] For Prospero, the ability to subdue the material world in which he lives allows his God-like power, a power high in the orders of virtue and rationality, but which power must be perfected in the orders of love and mercy.

The system of virtues envisioned by Shakespeare was inclusive of those promulgated by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, although his reliance upon Aristotle was most noted. While Socrates had equated virtue with wisdom, Plato had placed wisdom as supreme among the virtues of fortitude, temperance, and justice.[21] Virtue for Aristotle was subdivided into moral and intellectual virtues. Moral virtues consisted of habits of the "faculty of choice

consisting in a mean suitable to our nature and fixed by reason in the manner in which a prudent man would fix it." Intellectual virtues, such as wisdom, science, understanding, art, etc., were also important in achieving happiness.[22] It is noteworthy that Shakespeare's own concept of virtue included that of morality and of being in his assessment that "vertue" was a "moral quality" or "potency" or "active principle."[23] Thus, Shakespeare addresses both the levels of being and becoming as well as those leading to intrinsic perfectibility in moral virtue.

An allegorical interpretation of the characters Prospero, Caliban, and Ariel views them as the personification of the rational (Prospero's reason aspiring to a knowledge of the good); sensitive, imaginative, or aesthetic (Ariel's spirit in a love of beauty); and vegetative, animal, or sensual (Caliban's lower nature.)[24] The threats to the rational, personified by Prospero, come in the person of Caliban (lower nature) and Stephano and Trinculo, whose drunkeness debauches rationality, a symbolic movement toward the lower order. The drunk Stephano says, "Thought is free,"[25] an ironic comment in view of Aristotle's statement in Physics that if there were no mind, there would be no time,[26] or a rational and temporal dissolution of the play and its players.

Aesthetically, it is Ariel who commands music and the banquet, which is similar to the Platonic banquet of the Phaedrus, 247. The entertainment is provided by nymphs and goddesses,

similar to those in Lyly's Comedies.[27] The goddesses, moreover, may carry further the allegorical interpretation of the spectrum of being: Juno, queen of the heavens; Ceres, ruler of earth and fields; and Iris, the aesthetic personification of the rainbow, touching both.

Ariel, the aesthetic, serves his rational master but inquires of him whether he is loved, a movement of the dual beauty and truth toward love. It is Ariel who asks of Prospero whether he be moved to tenderness and compassion by the repentance of the honest Gonzalo, a suggestion that rationality also be perfected in the order of moral virtue. The question for Shakespeare, then, the question which Portia had previously asked in the Merchant of Venice, was one of justice or mercy. Perhaps remembering Portia's admonition to Shylock that mercy is blessed, an attribute of God himself, a blessing on those who give it and those who receive it,[28] Prospero forgives those who have wronged him, a redemption achieved through love of one's fellow man.

> Though with their high wrongs I am struck to the quick,
> Yet with my nobler reason against my fury
> Do I take part. The rarer action is
> In virtue than in vengeance. They being penitent,
> The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
> Not a frown further. Go release them, Ariel.
> My charms I'll break, their senses I'll restore,
> And they shall be themselves. (V. i. 24-31)

In awakening the others upon whom Prospero has cast his spell, he allows himself, through the exercise of mercy rather

than the exactation of vengeance or justice, to be brought into Miranda's brave new world of innocence and beauty. Slipping only slightly on the rung of justice in the ascending ladder toward love, Prospero demands for himself the restitution of his dukedom; but remembering his allegorical ascendance toward the good, Prospero closes the Tempest with a request for spiritual release from the old order:

> Now my charms are all o'erthrown
> And what strength I have's mine own,
>
> **********
>
> Now I want spirits to enforce, art to enchant,
> And my ending is despair,
> Unless I be reliev's by prayer,
> Which pierces so, that it assualts
> Mercy itself, and frees all faults.
> As you from crimes would pardon'd be,
> Let your indulgence set me free. (Epilogue, ll. 1-20)

The ascendant spiral on the chain of being is further discussed in Shakespeare's play, Love's Labor's Lost. Rather than a progressive movement on the philosophical ladder toward the final synthesis of beauty and truth from the physical and intellectual levels of Plato's Symposium, Shakespeare seems to present a progression downward on the moral scale.

The Academy of Navarre is most likely patterned after the Platonic Academy and its subsequent versions of the Aristotelian, Neoplatonic, and French academies of the 15th century.[29] The Pythagoreans of Plato's Academy insisted upon celibacy and simplicity of dress.[30] The School of Night, antonym of the School of Light, thus seems to represent the stoical denial of the physical,[31] regarding the "Petrarchan worship of women as absurd

and eagar submission to love as destructive of the intellect."[32] The School of Night might also have been patterned after the school devised by Sir Walter Raleigh, which was called by Jesuit Father Parsons, "The School of Atheism,"[33] a system which Raleigh had said that he had investigated while at Oxford.[34] It was Raleigh's Academy which professed that it was "labor lost to speak of love."[35]

Throughout the Restoration and into the 18th century, Love's Labour's Lost was considered at best as uneven and at worst, as Collier was to say in 1699, "very silly," which comment was seconded by Charles Gildon in 1710, who called Love's Labour's Lost "one of the worst of Shakespeare's plays, nay I think I may say the very worst."[36]

Rather than to dismiss Love's Labour's Lost as exemplyfing only a "pleasant conceited comedie,"[37] or a visibly early effort,[38] Shakespeare himself was said to have called it a play with a "message."[39]

That the play will speak of wisdom, Aristotle and Plato's highest virtue in the order of rationality,[40] is suggested in the opening lines of Berowne considering the search for knowledge: "Light seeking light doth light of light beguile" (I. i. 77). The various manifestations of the light being sought are generally seen to be the light of wisdom, the light of intellect, the light of truth, and the lights of daylight and eyesight. It is probable that Shakespeare intended to include, at various points in the play, all of these symbols; however, the opening observation of

Navarre on the purpose of his Academy disallows the movement toward the Platonic ens perfectissimum, the good or perfect end.

> Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives,
> Live regist'red upon our brazen tombs,
> And then grace us in the disgrace of death;
> When spite of cormorant devouring Time,
> Th' endeavor of this present breath may buy
> That honor which shall bate his scythe's keen edge,
> And make us heirs of all eternity.
> (I. i. 1–7)

Rather than the use of knowledge to improve others, envisioned by Plato to be the best end of the pursuit of knowledge,[41] the purpose of the Academy of Navarre was to be the "wonder of the world" (I. i. 12), therefore indicating that the light being sought was the light of self-illumination, the personal honor of acclaim that might derive from the accumulation of knowledge. It is this interpretation of light, moreover, that Portia was to suggest in the Merchant of Venice—that one should give light, but not be light (V. i. 129). That the purpose of the quest is self-aggrandizement is further indicated in the ultimate term used in the academic Tower of Babel, honorificabilitudinitatibus, the state of being loaded with honors.

It is the statement of purpose of Navarre's Academy that "the mind shall banquet, though the body pine" (I. i. 25). Thus, the plan of perfection is a negation of the physical [women, food, and sleep (I. i. 31–20)] in search of the ethereal. Berowne, the voice of common sense (I. i. 56), cautions that one must seek true wisdom, and that one's own light must not grow dark "by losing of your eyes" (I. i. 75–9). Harkening to the ascendant

spiral of Plato and Spenser's vision of the rise from the level of physical beauty to the truth and beauty of the ideal, Berowne suggests that light be sought by the acknowledgment of beauty (I. i. 81-4) and not motivated by an adherence to fame (I. i. 92).

The antithetical test to the Stoical Academy is presented by the visitation of the Princess of France and her retinue, who by the courtesy of court convention, are allowed to stay nearby (I. i. 148). That beauty and truth are not always synonymous in the parlance of court conversation is noted by the Princess who says,

> Beauty is bought by judgment of the eye
> Not utt'red by base sale of chapmen's tongues.
>
> (II. i. 15-16)

Thus, even the truth inherent in conversation is challenged. The paraded "learning" of Holofernes, who serves possibly as a caricature of a schoolmaster which Shakespeare had at Stratford,[42] further serves to question the truth of knowledge in his mistaken Latin recitations. That words may indicate only a fragment of of the truth, moreover, is noted by Moth, page to the Spainard Armado, whose name means only a particle.[43]

The problem of equating beauty and truth is noted by Socrates, who suggests that one seek the "real thing in beauty" in place of the sham. Thus, the problem of the Academy is addressed in the movement toward a communion of beauty, truth, and love: if beauty cannot always be determined by truth, and truth cannot always be evidenced by beauty, and love cannot always be found in truth or in beauty, how is the ideal to be achieved.

The theme of the Platonic Academy was the idyllic search for knowledge and wisdom. That one might rise from the real to the ideal is the thesis of the Symposium, composed by Plato and based upon the observations of his mentor, Socrates. The format of the Symposium is a series of speeches in praise of, and on the nature of, love, showing the cyclical progression of man through birth, struggle, death, and possible rebirth.[44] The first sequence is on the nature and effect of love while the second sequence is a commentary on beauty and virtue. It is Diotima who addresses Socrates, who in turn addresses Agathon, concerning the spirit of love which exists between the "changing, mortal level of becoming, and the unchanging, immortal and divine level of being."[45] The ascent from the corporeal is through the body, a body, however, which both illuminates and obscures.[46] The progression indicated by Diotima is the replacement of the beautiful with the good,[47] for the love of beauty is not an end in itself, and its possession is "to him to whom the beautiful becomes."[48]

That final truth and wisdom are allowed to the court of Navarre is problematic; and the scale of the Academy seems pointed downward as it progresses from the false end of truth and wisdom, through the misidentification of beauty, and, finally, to the corporeal concerns of physical love.

The twin masques of the Muscovites and the Nine Worthies present the Shakespearean comment on love and virtue. The masque of the Russians, probably reflective of Ivan the Terrible's

quest for a wife in the court of Elizabeth in 1583,[49] presents the disguised participants not as individuals but as costumed personifications of the physical aspect of love. The elaboration of dress, strictly prohibited in the classical academy which demanded simplicity,[50] is further seen in the parade of the Nine Worthies, whose symbolic grouping is in threes, the progression of which is from paganism, to the Old Law, to that of the New Law.

That the ascending spiral has turned downward may be seen in the closing repartee on calves, legs, butts, and horns by Katharine, Longaville, Boyet, and Rosalinde (V. ii), with Katharine finally noting to Longaville, "I'll not be your half" (I. ii. 249), reminiscent of the Symposium's mythological creature.

The final reassessment of virtue and vice, truth and beauty, as well as the entire motivation of the endeavor, may be seen in Berowne's comment of the Academy's plight: "By light we lose light" (V. ii. 376). The adherence to nature disallows the movement to the supernatural. That the mind be moved from its search for natural light to the recovery of the divine light, suggested by Ficino,[51] is a progression thwarted at the first step of the ladder in the darkness of Rosaline's eyes (IV. ii. 248, 265).

The progression from one love to the next, "as a man climbs a ladder,"[52] must be retraced in the spectrum of human relationships. The replacement of self-motivation for altruism is suggested in the final dismissal to human service (V. ii).

The development of the classical Academy's emphasis on inner relationships and affections is noted so that from the concrete, corporeal beauty of the real world, the beauty of souls[53] through virtue may be achieved. The Academy of Navarre has failed for its search was for the light which obscures rather than the light of illumination.

The achievement of virtue in the search for intrinsic perfectibility is a constant quest in other writings of Shakespeare. The challenge of achieving a balance in the scales of justice and mercy, addressed at the end of Shakespeare's career in the Tempest, may be seen in the earlier Merchant of Venice and in Measure for Measure. To Pythagoreans, "justice is a number squared,"[54] or a number measured against itself. In the Merchant of Venice, however, the measure of justice of the Old Law of Shylock is pitted against the Christian concept of mercy under the New Law. That mercy is akin to love and thus of a higher order is an example not completely set by those Christians called upon to decide the fate of Shylock. If all are to be treated alike under the New Law of mercy as under the Old Law of justice, then should not Shylock be allowed to seek revenge for wrongs as do the Christians, for he is a man with eyes such as they (III. i. 51). The judgment of Shylock, though, is administered by Portia, whose disguise is suggestive of dual justice and mercy. The final Lear-like stripping is achieved with the rendered verdict of how does one "hope for mercy,

rend'ring none" (IV. i. 88). The loss to Shylock is of all his worldly goods, his daughter, and even his religion as he is forced to a Christian baptism, the mercy of which to Shylock can only be construed as an ultimate means to salvation.[55]

The system of virtue in Measure for Measure is complex, for justice is pitted against mercy and chastity against charity. The problem, again, is that of the Old Law challenged by the New Law as Shakespeare seems to ask—when is chastity not a charitable contribution. For the novice Isabella, chastity under the New Law is to be guarded at all costs. Her substitution of Marianna for herself to sleep with Marianna's perviously betrothed Angelo, a condition accepted under the Old Law, seems not to bother her conscience of the New Law.

The assignment of justice is to the Duke, who abdicates it to Angelo, whose propriety as an administrator is questioned[56] as he operates both above the law and below the moral system which it supports. The Duke is seen variously as Providence[57] and as a stage director[58] whose marriage to the willing Isabella at the end of the play seems indeed contrived.

The scales which William Shakespeare addresses in his plays of justice and mercy are those not completely balanced, for they operate under both the New Law and the Old Law, with the progression of the play nodding to one and then the other. The partition of the wall of virtue allows for some illumination of light leading toward the final Pyramus and Thisby synthesis

in the chain of being. Above the elements of justice, mercy, beauty, truth, and rarity lies the summit of virtue, love. From the Shakespearean scale of nature rises the possibility of perfectibility through virtue. The movement of the geometric lines is usually upward, but the intrinsic movement toward the good is always, for Shakespeare, in the inward relationships and affections of things.

Chapter V

"Puzzle of Puzzles"

Whitman's Concept of Being in "Song of Myself"

Exactly half way into his paradoxical poem, "Song of Myself," Whitman, significantly, calls attention to the problem—the problem shared by not only himself but by others. What exactly is Being and man's place within its circuit? Is its nature a cyclical metamorphosis—a series of perpetual "transfers and promotions"?[1] Is there a hierarchy or a chain of being from lowest to highest which allows for man's placement and movement in a transfer and promotion of essence?

While a great chain of being cannot be proven per se, the possibility of its existence may be suggested by the observation that, in the real world, there exists the spectrum of creatures which are inanimate, animate (composed of matter and a life principle, or spirit), and the possibility of creatures which exist only in spiritual form. It is the purpose of this examination to show that in "Song of Myself," Whitman presents a vision of a dual being—one composed of both a spiritual and a material nature—which polarity is separate in the Ideal or spiritual world; which spirit, at birth, combines with matter—a polar synthesis—entering the

Real world. It is this separation, combination, and subsequent progression on the chain of being back toward the spiritual order of which Whitman speaks in "Song of Myself." It is this combination of the spiritual/material being which Whitman sees caught in the pallid float of solution, and, which in a "centripetal"—"centrifugal"[2] movement (inward-outward movement), may once again filter out in dissolution.

Perhaps it is this duality of nature—the spiritual and material creature, inhabitant of both the Ideal and the Real world—which will save the poem from what some critics have perceived it to be—loosely arranged, unorganized, with no clarity of vision, and evidencing no dramatic progression.[3] Moreover, an evaluation of what Gay Wilson Allen sees as Whitman's use of both spiritual and material pantheism[4] will add to the view of duality, even though evidencing some philosophical problems. Generally speaking, Whitman's theory of transfer and promotions seems to suggest the change or metamorphosis of the material essence and the transcendence of the spiritual essence to the next level of being. The progress of man, then, is both evolutionary materially and involutionary spiritually.

The examination of what Whitman calls "the puzzle of puzzles, and that we call Being,[5] will proceed in two ways: first, by an analysis of the poem itself as representing an eternal cycle of progression in the evolution of being, and,

secondly, by an analysis of Whitman's own thoughts on the puzzle of being in "Song of Myself."

Within the poem itself, Whitman uses a series of cycles to indicate spiritual and material progress. Thus, we see examples of Platonic, mythological, cultural, natural, religious, and metaphysical illustrations to illuminate the involutionary/spiritual and evolutionary/material cycles.

The poet begins "Song of Myself" with an assertion of atomic empathy, a union of being with being: "For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you" (l. 3). Continuing the poem with the Platonic notion that his real material self is seeking union with its polar spiritual and Ideal self, Whitman states, "I loaf and invite my soul" (l. 4), the first indication that they are separate. Alluding to Tennyson's "Palace of Art," the poet sees the soul as wandering through a "pleasure house"[6] of perfumes, the rarefied ether of the ethereal beauty, truth, goodness, and knowledge.[7] Hastily retreating to the "bank by the wood" (l. 19), the poet seeks to immerse himself in the waters of forgetfulness (Lethe) for his impending journey into the material order.

Awakening to the senses in his newly combined material and spiritual self, a being of both "respiration and inspiration" (l. 23), the poet seeks to acquaint his reader with the "origin of all poems" (l. 33), the eternal ideals of beauty and truth found in the "Palace of Art."

Noting the antithesis of polarity in this new material-spiritual being, the poet suggests that "out of the dimness opposite equals advance" (l. 46); for, "clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul" (l. 52), the unseen "proved by the seen" (l. 53).

The poet celebrates his new, material, sensual dimension, being aware, however, that in the material world, there is often delusion in appearance (Stanza 4). The trappings of life for the poet, though, "are not the me myself" (l. 74). In the "pulling and hauling" (l. 75) apart stands the true essence, which the poet recognizes as from afar, as through a foggy, backward view of another life. The poem proceeds in Stanza 5 to a consideration of this new co-mingled material-spiritual being, the emerging child, personification of the "kelson of creation" (l. 95), which is love.

The poet then begins the cyclical metaphor of the grass in Stanza 6, symbolizing the impending Homeric odyssey into the world of the real from the Platonic world of the ideal. The grass, in addition, represents the child itself, "produced babe of the vegetation" (l. 105), Whitman's material metamorphosis. Growing from the graves of beings past, the grass speaks of the secrets of the universe. Of the grass, the poet notes: "And I perceive they do not come from the roofs of mouths for nothing."[8] (l. 120). Asking where have all the others gone (ll. 123-4), the poet answers himself by suggesting that, as the grass shows,

"there really is no death" (l. 126), only change; for all are "alive and well somewhere" (l. 125). Noting the perpetual evolution of the universe—"All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses" (l. 129)—Whitman seems to contradict his later "centripetal-centrifugal" (inward-outward) concept and the now current scientific theory predicting the black holes of space, consisting of tightly compacted, collapsed matter.[9]

In Stanza 7, the poet begins what may be termed his natural cycle of metamorphosis as he appears in his new material world, passing "death with the dying and birth with the new-wash'd babe, and am not contontained between my hat and boots" (l. 133). Assuming this mortal mantle for his immortal self, the poet begins his song of the cycle of life (Stanza 8) noting, significantly, the little one sleeping in its cradle (l. 148).

The poet then catalogues the cycles of nature which parallel his cycles of life. Thus, he begins a preview of the seasons, of occupations, of cultures, and of birth and death in Stanza 8. The seasonal cycle may be compactly seen in Stanza 14 as the poet speaks of the geese flying (fall), the wintry sky (winter), the press of his foot to the earth (spring), and the out-door growing (summer). His maturational, seasonal cycle may be seen in the recitation of the lunar 28-day cycle (Stanza 11), with its fertile pairings of male and female. His occupational cycle begins in Stanza 12 with the recounting of the work done by the butcher and the blacksmith, continuing on into Stanza 13

with the negro, and, in Stanza 15, with the contralto, carpenter, pilot, etc. The cultural cycle, begun in Stanza 10 with the marriage of the trapper and the Indian, continues on in the procession to America of the immigrants (l. 285) in Stanza 15.

That each is to fulfill its own cycle and its own destiny is hinted at by the poet's affirmation that one does not call "the tortoise unworthy because she is not something else" (l.242). The fulfillment of one's position on the scale of being is in the achievement of intrinsic, inherent potential, not in the striving to achieve fulfillment in some other nature.

Whitman begins his inward metamorphosis in Stanza 15 with the notation that both the living and the dead sleep for their time:

> And these tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them,
> And such as it is to be of these more or less I am.
> And of these one and all I weave the song of Myself.[10]
> (ll. 325-9)

The poet then notes, in Stanza 16, that he is one and yet separate, a part of all mankind, transcending age, sex, region, season, rank, and religion: "I resist any thing better than my own diversity" (l. 349). That he is a being which has transcended two spheres, the poet notes by saying: "The palpable is in its place and the impalpable is in its place" (l. 354). As the common, universal man, the poet thinks the thoughts and breathes the breath of all (Stanza 17). Lover of all, he invites everyone to his banquet table where the meal is "equally

set" [11] (l. 372). Curiously noting that this new sensual self must be fed, the poet analyzes his position on the chain of being where the health of one species might be derived at the expense of the level below. The possibility of reabsorbing properties is suggested in the line, "How is it I extract strength from the beef I eat."(l. 390). Seeing himself as the transcendent, material ("solid and sound") focus, the spokesman of all, the poet suggests:

> To me the converging objects of the universe perpetually flow,
> All are written to me, and I must get what the writing means. [12]
> (ll. 404-5)

Cosmically, the orbit of himself cannot be "swept by a carpenter's compass" (l. 407). Laughing at dissolution (l. 420), the poet of both the Body and the Soul (l. 422) is to translate his message into a new tongue (l. 424), declaring to all that in the development of life (l. 430), all will arrive "and still pass on" (l. 432). Colossus, partaker of both the intrinsic-extrinsic "influx and efflux," (l. 459), the poet sees the balance in one side and in its antipodal side (l. 470), the puzzle of the separate man, "En-masse" (l. 478), the relationship of Time, Reality, and Matter (Stanza 23) with the eternal.

Fully immersed into his robust, physical self, the poet states, half way through the poem (Stanza 24), that indeed he is materially limited and defined, the son of Manhattan, but also a citizen of the Kosmos, "one of the threads that connect the stars" (l. 512), a voice of the cycle of "preparation and

accretion" (l. 511), seeking to remove the veil'd view to a clarified, "transfigur'd" perception (l. 518).

The poet then begins the cycle of the sense, feeling that the knowledge of others might be found in their material, sensual apprehension, ". . . the spread of my own body, or any part of it/translucent mould of me it shall be you" (ll. 527-8). Thus, as moving forward on "libidinous prongs" (l. 525), the poet celebrates the sensual and material evolution. Adding further emphasis to this recitative of the senses, the poet devotes Stanzas 24, 24, 26, and 28 to the senses of sight, speech, hearing, and touch, sifting all experience through his Platonic shell (Stanza 27), to come to the problem—to the puzzle of puzzles, Being.

> To be in any form what is that.
> (Round and round we go, all of us, and ever come back thither)[13]
> (ll. 611-12)

Further hinting at the material metamorphosis of being, even suggesting reincarnation, the poet states that "the soggy clouds shall become lovers and lamps" (l. 657). That all has a purpose and a position on the scale of being to fulfill itself alone is noted in his continued view that the "leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars" (l. 663). Noting that his true being transcends all essences, the poet suggests that he incorporates "gneiss, coal, long-threaded moss," etc. (l. 670), endeavoring to spread his translucent mold to all forms of life.[14] Thus, he moves through all the different levels of the chain of

being—rocks, animals, oceans, birds, snakes, etc. (ll. 674-683), seeking an identity with all despite whether they have the same combined material-spiritual essence.

The poet then begins his cycle of vegetable and animal life[15] (Stanzas 32-33), noting their position upon the scale in relationship to man (l. 692). Pac-man Whitman, "fluid and swallowing soul" (l. 800), seeks an intimate union with all—a knowledge of all forms on the chain of being. "I help myself to the material and immaterial" (l. 802). Scaling the tree of knowledge, the poet seeks an emphatic union with the life of everyman—bridegroom, mother, slave, fisherman, the artillerist, etc. Suggesting his own impending divorce of soul, mind, and body, the poet, immersed in war, recalls a Cartesian dualism in the dying general's gasps of the impending separation between mind and body: "Mind not me—mind—the entrenchments" (l. 870).[16]

The repeating cycle of war (Stanzas 33-37) precipitates what the poet terms his or mankind's "usual mistake" (l. 962). In the combat, he is possessed, wounded, and imprisoned (Stanza 37—ironically, the age of the poet at the beginning of the poem). The repetition of the cycle of war may be seen in the face of Christ himself viewing the saga of man.[17] The poet, however, remembers that from the crucifixion comes the resurrection (ll. 966-969). Noting the charity of such sacrifice of life, the poet states also that "when I give I give myself" (l. 995). As Christ did, Whitman, the wound-dresser, seeks to raise the

dying in his care with a "tremendous breath" (l. 1014); for he himself is waiting to be "one of the supremes" (l. 1050).[18] In the cycle of deific sketches (l. 1036), ultimately, there will arise in a cycle of metamorphosis one greater from the "dung and dirt" (l. 1049).

Harkening to the imminent "climax and close" of his life (l. 1059), the poet alludes to his passage back across the River Styx, with "dimes on his eyes" (l. 1070), in the fashion of the ancient Romans. The rest of mankind, manikins and duplicates of himself, are likewise "deathless with me" (l. 1080); for they shall transcend their material limitations, possibly reappearing, as the poet himself, "after five thousand years" (l. 1099). All, though, belong to the "winders of the circuit of circuits" (l. 1110), the enbalmers of the dead, wrapping their circular funeral cloth in an eternal cyclical orb.

Indicating both an inward as well as an outward movement on the chain of being, the poet says that he is part of the "centripetal and centrifugal gang" (l. 1111) about to begin on another journey with the dissolution of the dual material-spiritual being. Thus, the outward expansion of his material mould will fuse with nature's vegetation and dirt, while the inward unwinding, similar to the involutionary movement as seen by Teilhard de Chardin,[19] will filter out the matter of solution, acceding to the realm of the spiritual. That there is a judgment of each being who is to pass the barrier is noted at the poet

optimistically states:

> Each who passes is consider'd, each who stops is consider'd, not a single one can it fail. (l. 1123)

With the final assessment at hand (Stanza 44), the poet now must explain himself in life, standing, Lear-like, while all is stripped away. Of life and of life after life, the poet states: "I am an acme of things accomplish'd, and I am an encloser of things to be" (l. 1148).

Mounting the stairs on the scale of being, in a transcendent movement from the material to the spiritual order, the poet sees, as through a lethargic mist, a progress from the "huge first Nothing" where his evolutionary material self was immersed into the "fetid carbon" (ll. 1153-1155). Preparing himself to cross over, the poet notes that, "Cycles ferried my cradle, rowing and rowing like cheerful boatmen" (a mythical allusion to Charon, l. 1159). From the cosmic, nebular orb, his being has evolved until now the poet is ready to move onward hearing the cry "Ahoy" (l. 1174). The expansion of being is to the "superior circuit" (l. 1188), moving, and again the paradox, "outward and outward and forever outward" (l. 1190). Each thing is but a part of the whole. The poet sets about to embark upon his "perpetual journey" (l. 1202), a journey which includes a rendezvous with the Lord to Whom he comes on "perfect terms" (l. 1199),[20] despite his lack of chair, church, or philosophy (l. 1205). All are to travel the roads themselves (ll. 1210-11),

finally to ascend, as the poet himself, the hill to heaven (l. 1220).

The poet then speaks to his spirit (body and soul here are not one) asking:

> When we become the enfolders of those orbs, and the pleasure and knowledge of every thing in them, shall we be fill'd and satisfied then?
> And my spirit said No, we but level that lift to pass and continue beyond. (ll. 1221-2)

As the birth-death cycle nears its end, the maternal spirit seeks to provide the poet sustenance for his impending journey. With a kiss, she then opens the "gate for your egress hence" (l. 1226). Waiting to cross to the other shore, the poet seeks an understanding of his life, a translation:

> I have said that the soul is not more than the body,
> And I have said that the body is not more than the soul,
> And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is....
> (ll. 1269-71)

In the spiritual pantheism of Allen, the poet sees God in all (l. 1281). As he waits by the "exquisite flexible doors" which open into and from life (l. 1292), the poet hints at the repeating material cycle, suggesting that his corpse is good manure, and hinting at a new cycle of life, a rebirth, in the allusion to the "polish'd breasts of melons" (l. 1296), which the babe first sees upon reintering life. The culmination of the natural life-death cycle, then, is the new life, evolved from the "leavings of many deaths" (l. 1297).

Referring to the evolutionary cycle of the cosmos, the poet sees change in the stars and suns, just as in the earthly grass

of graves (l. 1300). From the "turbid pool," through the "black stems that decay in the muck," (l. 1302-4), the poet ascends in the evolutionary process. It is the perpetual metamorphosis of "transfers and promotions" (l. 1300).

The final wrenching apart of the material-spiritual self occurs; the body sleeps (l. 1310). All is seen in outline, as the eternal plan (l. 1318), the poet, in Dantesque fashion, transcending to his next "fold of the future" in the process of life (l. 1320). Contradicting, or negating his material self (l. 1325), the poet moves as a hawk, shadow'd in vapor and dusk, his spirit departing as the air (ll. 1335-7). Curiously stating that, "I too am untranslatable," (l. 1333), the poet in material dissolution finally comments:

> I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.
> I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
> If you want me again look for me under your bootsoles.
> (ll. 1338-40)

Indicating a complete recycling of self, a synthesis or reincarnation of the antithetical parts of one's being into another, he poet suggests the complete metamorphosis:

> I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
> And filter and fibre [of] your blood.
> (ll. 1342-3)

From the poetic analysis, then, Whitman's concept of the puzzle of being seems to be that of a dual material-spiritual being, whose pantheistic evidence may be seen both materially and spiritually, and whose progress in life is cyclical—a

progress of "perpetual transfers and promotions," a movement from one state to the next. Seeking to infuse himself into all parts of the chain of being, the poet gathers insight and strength to finally come to the "apex of the apices of the stairs" (l. 1149). Then, in the "centripetal-centrifugal," or inward-outward movment, the wrenching apart of the polar entity is accomplished.

Following the poetic analysis, an examination of what Whitman himself envisioned his "I" or being to be will be conducted. It is important to note that Whitman was neither a scientist, a philosopher, nor a religious person (even though his biographer Bucke commented on a mystical experience at the time of writing the poem).[21]

What actually is the Whitman "I"? A certain confusion seems to exist for Whitman himself has spoken of the "I" as the one, Body and Soul, as well as the two, my soul and I. Perhaps, then, a satisfactory solution may be arrived at by concluding that, at some time, the body and the soul are two while at some time they are one—the concept of a dual material-spiritual being.

Obviously, Whitman's "I" is not only personal but also cosmic, not only particular and material but also general, spiritual, and universal. Whitman's spiritual-material polar union of the antithetical body and soul achieves a blending in the physical, material world of the real having evolved from the

Platonic, spiritual world of the ideal. Whitman, himself, made both of the following statements:

> Go, said the Soul,
> Such verses for my Body write (for we are one),
> That, should I back again return unseen, or centuries hence,
> I shall with pleas'd smile resume all those verses,
> And fully confirm them.[22]

And, "I cannot understand the mystery, but I am always conscious of myself as two—as my soul and I—and I reckon it is the same with all men and women."[23] A hint of the polar union of body and soul is suggested by the critic Reed who asks how else is Whitman to blend body and soul without wuch a dualism.[24]

Allen suggests that Whitman, moreover, was heir to the Cartesian system of dualism which separated mind and body, "a dualism which no theory has satisfactorily explained."[25] Allen, of course, must be unfamiliar with the writings of Plato and Aquinas who see a separation in the spiritual-material being, Aquinas' concept of the essence and "to be." It is precisely this dualism which establishes the unity of the poem and its dramatic progression—the progress of the spirit becoming immersed in matter, the growth of the blended new form, and the final wrenching apart of the polar union in the death and the subsequent movement of being to the next level.

Contrary to Christian philosophy, Whitman's movement to the eternal happiness of the next level seems to indicate that all will pass, no matter what the merit. He, himself, has sought to be worthy of such passage by his pervading love of all,

even the lowly and the prostitute, treating all equally at his banquet table,[26] never chastizing one level of being for not being something else. Whitman's principles of sympathetic and intuitive union are suggested by Dante, Plato, and the Indian philosophies, the latter of which see the evolution of the spirit by annulling and transcending opposition, dissolving the boundaries between the known and the unknown, between knower and known.[27]

For Whitman, this empapathy is the knit of identity—a philosophy shared by both learn'd and unlearn'd (ll. 46-7). That sympathy for all, the substratum of love, is important in spiritual progress is noted by the poet's comment that, "And whoever walks a furlong without sympathy walks to his own funeral drest in his shroud" (1273).

If a flaw exists in Whitman's own personal philosophy, it probably lies only in his all-consuming desire for the intimate knowledge of everything, quizzically projecting his spirit into all forms, even those without spirit, such as rocks. Whitman, the poet of vice and virtue, must strike the balance between the antipodal sides. Is the emphatic union and subsequent intuitive knowledge of love for all only for knowledge's sake? Does his pride cast him precariously upon a limb on the tree of knowledge. His reciprocal charity, moreover, of allowing equal intuition seems curiously to be lacking; for, he comments, "My final merit I refuse you, I refuse putting from me what I really am/

Encompass worlds, but never try to encompass me" (ll. 576-7).

Whitman's movement on the chain of being also bears examination; for, while speaking of both influx and efflux and of both a "centripetal and centrifugal" movement, he also states that progress is always outward, forever outward, with nothing collapsing. More logically, his centripetal-centrifugal movement, the inward and the outward unwinding of being, would more closely parallel the concept of a dual soul and body, matter and spirit, achieving both the material-evolutionary and the spiritual-involutionary progress, such as seen by, respectively, Darwin and by Teilhard de Chardin. It is Teilhard de Chardin's involutionary movement of spirit, as seen as progressing toward the Omega Point, or the transcendent focus of God's love to the world, which seems to have more in common with the progress of Whitman's own philosophy of the importance of sympathy and love in achieving the City of Friends.

Moreover, Whitman's concept of the recycling or metamorphosis of self into a reincarnated being also presents a metaphysical dilemma, for what emerges is a new being whose extrinsic material elements have recombined into a new material form but whose recombined intrinsic spiritual self results in a being of many participating spiritual entities.

Whitman's "Song of Myself" achieves both artistic and intrinsic unity in its analysis of man, his immersion into

the pallid float of life, his centripetal and centrifugal filtering out of solution, and his transcendence on the chain of being to the next order. For Walt Whitman, defined and limited son of Manhattan, as well as universal citizen of the kosmos, a consistent concept of being might still be a puzzle. The "puzzle of puzzles," however, is not his alone but is one shared by all men in all ages.

CONCLUSION

The theory of transcendence is the involutionary movement of the spiritual being in the order of "to be" toward the good of its nature. It is not the evolutionary movement of the material being in the order of essence, striving to perfect its extrinsic nature. The hierarchical scale, or chain of being, upon which creatures are placed allows for their movement toward fulfillment—a movement termed by Aristotle as *epagoge*[1] and by Dante as *trasumanar*.

The relationship of being and becoming may be seen in such literary works as the *Divine Comedy* and the *Mutability Cantos* as the relationship of cyclical progression concentrically revolving around its constant, unchanging hub of being. In man, dual creature of spirituality/materiality, or "to be" and essence, the movement toward perfectibility is in his intrinsic nature in the orders of virtue and rationality—the twin peaks of Dante's Mt. Parnassus. The intrinsic movement in the chain of being, then, paradoxically, is a movement of becoming toward the perfectibility of species in the finite order of "to be," a progression toward the infinite Thomistic *Actus Parnus*.

While the interest in the Great Chain of Being *per se* reached its literary culmination in the Romantic period, the

concept of the emerging being caught in a space-time gradation moving toward the eternal may still be seen in such works as Samuel Alexander's 1966 treatise, Space, Time, and Diety, whose hierarchical pattern is as follows: (1) D_1 Motions, (2) D_2 Materiality with primary, constant qualities, (3) D_3 Materiality with secondary, variable qualities, (4) D_4 Life (organic), (5) D_5 Mind (consciousness), (6) D_6 Diety.[2]

The transcendent focus toward which beings move in the perfectibility of order, whether it be termed Alexander's D_6 or the Absolute, however, is a point whose properties are not shared by other limited creatures, but only reflected by them, just as Michaelangelo's finger of God touching man at the creation.

That the theory of transcendence, the intrinsic movement toward the good of order, then, is a constant theory in all eras of literature. The urge for completeness, the progress toward the Platonic ens perfectissimum, or the good of nature, may be seen as the movement toward Dante's Divine Point, Spenser's New Jerulsalem, Shakespeare's union of elements, Whitman's City of Friends, or Teilhard de Chardin's Omega Point, the transcendent focus of God's love to the world.

PREFACE

Notes

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Chapter I

Notes

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Chapter V

Notes

[Annotated]

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[2]Whitman, l. 1111, p. 79. Following a comment on the "winders of the circuit of circuits," Whitman interestingly comments on the inward-outward dissolution of being, wrapped in its shroud, the soul beginning its journey. Kant also spoke of the windings and unwindings in the progression of the universe.

[3]Malcolm Cowley, "'Song of Myself" and Indian Philosophy," in A Century of Whitman Criticism, ed. Edwin Haviland Miller (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), pp. 236-7.

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[5]Whitman, ll. 609-10, p. 56. [Stanza 26 is exactly half-way through Whitman's poem of 52 stanzas, indicating the dichotomy of being.]

[6]Alfred Tennyson, "The Palace of Art," in Tennyson's Poetry (New York: W. W. Norton, Co., 1971), l. 1, p. 27. [The poet builds for his soul a "lordly pleasure house" where it contemplates eternal beauty and truth from the knowledge of particular manifestations.]

[7]G. A. Grube, Plato's Thought (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), pp. 22-3. [The Platonic interpretation of "The Palace of Art" would reflect the philosopher's thought that one should not mistake the beauty of the participated form in reality with the ideal form in the absolute since no form in the changing physical world retains its qualities absolutely.]

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[10]Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," in Whitman's "Song of Myself"—Origin, Growth, Meaning, ed. James E. Miller, Jr. (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1964), l. 329. Whitman added these title lines to the 1892 version.

[11]Ibid. Lines 372 change—in 1855 the mean is "pleasantly" set and in 1892 the meal is "equally set."

[12]James Tanner, "The Lamarckian Theory of Progress in Leaves of Grass," Walt Whitman Review, 9, No. 1, (March, 1963) 3-10.

[Tanner sees Whitman's ideas of a perpetual life process as being similar to Bergson's elan vital.]

[13]Whitman in Miller's Whitman's "Song of Myself" adds this line to the 1892 version.

[14]Loren Eiseley, Darwin's Century (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1958), pp. 48-69. [The movement is seen through different levels of being.]

[15]Gay Wilson Allen, Walt Whitman as Man, Poet, and Legend (Carbondale: Southern University Press, 1961), p. 65. [Ascend- the chain of being is seen as a cyclical metaphor of eternal becoming.]

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[17]Walt Whitman, "Sight in Camp," p. 306. [Whitman sees the ages of man in the three faces of the dead—an eternal cycle of life and death.]

[18]Richard M. Bucke, Richard Maurice Bucke, medical mystic (Detroit: Wayne State U. Press, 1977), p. 169. [Bucke addresses Whitman's concept of moral elevation of positive faculties and a transformation from brute to man to demigod.] Reprinted.

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[21]Malcolm Cowley, p. 233. Cowley comments on Whitman's experience of June 1853 or 1854.

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CONCLUSION

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