

# *Rhythmic Groves: Romanticism and Modal Theology*

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## ABSTRACT

We in the West are now living in an age that has been called both post-Romantic and post-Christian, and in order to converse with those of other traditions and other cultures (like ours, *informed* by religion but not always dominated by such), we must first seek ourselves, in looking “before and after” Romanticism and Christianity. The human being, as the Romantics discovered, is a creature *in time*, partaking of duration; thus, though we can look to the past in order to prescribe a path for the future, it is inevitably the present with which we are concerned, as our sole reality. This paper attempts to draw together several convergent tendencies in the history of modern ideas—as encapsulated, evoked, and transmitted by and through diverse figures from a spectrum of callings—in order to gain a clearer picture of the situation and possibilities of postmodern theological and cultural thought. This is done primarily via a critical examination and evaluation of Romanticism, in particular, as a definitive yet sometimes neglected source for contemporary religious and philosophical thought.

*There is no science of man, man being essentially the bearer of a rhythm.*

– Blaise Cendrars

The Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas*, composed, it is thought, in the second or early third century C.E., but made up of a list of Jesus’ sayings which, in their frequent correlation with his words in the Synoptics, hint at a shared reliance upon the Q source, is a remarkable example of not only the diversity of Christian speculation and belief in the early centuries, but of the divisions, fractures, and subsequent battles that would come to dictate orthodoxy in the Church *in aeternum*. In our own age, we are relatively free (at least in the safe walls of academia) to re-examine the long-shots and the near-misses that make up the so-called Other Bible. It can be for us a fertile source, a virtual storehouse of the diversity of belief that exploded when (Near) East met West two thousand years ago, irredeemably shaping the Occidental world. There is a danger, of course, of exulting heresiarchs *ex post facto*, out of sympathy for their travails, but whatever their opinions on the sacred mysteries, the burnt flesh of Giordano Bruno, Jeanne d’Arc and the *Fraticelli* mingles with the blood of St. Stephen, St. Perpetua and the blessed *Confessum* to send us a potent message, at once visceral and human—and one, perhaps, partakes of the divine.

In the past, despite limited access to works of apostasy, many writers, poets, and thinkers—even seemingly the most orthodox—developed their own idiosyncratic ideas and “Christian” beliefs. Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, when read with a critical eye, is beautifully but undeniably weird—the apotheosis of the very human, very embodied Beatrice to Seraphic heights in the Heavenly Spheres being only the most obvious case in point. And then there is Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, whose hero, as Blake and most readers have recognized, is not God nor Jesus but Satan,<sup>1</sup> and is a poem that cannot escape its “Miltonianism” (Harold Bloom: Milton was a “sect of one”). In the modern period, heresy becomes less dangerous: Goethe could pen, without apology, his Gnostic-pagan *Faust*; while in England, an engraver and sometime painter, William Blake, worked on his very own set of scriptures, which, for all their reliance upon the Judaeo-Christian Bible, were clearly set within a tradition of apocryphal, Kabbalistic, and pseudepigraphical texts such as the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Book of Enoch*.

In short, “Christianity,” even beyond the obvious divisions (Protestant-Catholic-Orthodox; Trinitarian-Unitarian, and so on), is, and has always been, a multiform

and multifluous entity, one which, *pace* Pius IX, changes with changing cultural “moods,” and is changed by them; sometimes, of course, though less so of late, being integral to the change itself. Moreover, the Christian faith has always been as deeply embedded in personal creeds as in rules of orthodoxy; Christianity has been *incarnated* in the believer—the “poet”—as much as it has been *promulgated* by the specialist—the priest, preacher or theologian. Perhaps, with the waning power of the religious institutions, this has never been more evident. John Dunne remarks that “[i]t is almost as though personal religion and personal creeds ha[ve] replaced the great religions and the common creeds.”<sup>2</sup>

Whether this is indeed the case, at this point in Christian, Western, and world history, the mood among many individuals and institutions, it seems, is increasingly pluralistic or ecumenical. Of course, this is not to deny the strength and growth of fundamentalism and concomitant exclusivism, but the incredibly shrinking world, transformed by global communications and an increasing mobility of persons, is with every day provoking the confrontation of heterogeneity—for better or worse. Hardly an academic question, this confrontation, and the resultant tension between a (re)surgent *poly* and a still-hegemonic *mono*, will become, if it has not already become, “a basic tension at the heart of the experience of all men and women.”<sup>3</sup> More and more are people—ordinary, everyday people—being confronted with religious and ideological value systems, and styles of thought, belief, and behavior, which bespeak of difference, often radical difference. In order to confront sometimes radical Otherness with any sort of adequacy, we must get to “know ourselves” (to borrow from the Delphic oracle) a bit better. Just to be clear, by “we” I speak for those ensconced within the mesh that is the inherited Western tradition; Christian, perhaps, but also Jewish, pagan, humanist, Enlightenment, Romantic, atheist. This paper, in looking at the possibilities of so-called “modal thinking” in terms of the heritage of modern aesthetics, is a small attempt, more *intermezzo* than *contrapuncto*, to bridge some of the intra-familial gaps by hearkening to a shared cultural past, one which has roots in the pre-Socratics and Near Eastern mystery cults, extends through the development of Greek tragedy and philosophy, the growth, triumph, and “decline” of Christianity, the Reformation, Renaissance and Enlightenment, through the emergence of “modernity,” down to our own Chaotic Age.<sup>4</sup>

## Passing Over

*Become passers-by.*

– Jesus (*Gospel of Thomas*, §42)

Christian theologian Paul Knitter, in a response to the pluralism of Hans Küng, asks whether Küng crosses a “theological Rubicon” when he extends his perspective to grant universal relevance to the “definitive regulating factors” (i.e., Jesus, Muhammad, Gautama Buddha) of all believers. The idea (implied, if not directly asserted, by Küng) that Jesus Christ somehow finalizes or supplements other faiths, is, according to Knitter, an “inclusive Christianity” which is really no different (and in fact more insidious because more subtle) than the “anonymous Christianity” Küng so rightly disparages. Knitter urges Küng to take a *real* step across the Rubicon, to quit wading in the shallow waters, uncertain; to take, in short, the (Kierkegaardian?) leap into the unknown, for the sake of a true religious dialogue “between equals.”<sup>5</sup> Perhaps Knitter wants Küng, and all who share the pluralist mood, to become a “passer-by”: to bring the lives, values, and beliefs of Others to ourselves, in order, not to accept or reject them *in toto*, but to see ourselves in a new light, with new eyes.

Passing-by, or, perhaps, passing-over, requires two related modes of being, or attentions towards the Other, the first positive, the second negative. In the positive sense, passing-over is used by John Dunne (in his *The Way of All the Earth*) to connote a “technique... based on the process of eliciting images from one’s feeling, attaining insights into the images, and then turning insight into a guide of life.”<sup>6</sup> A matter of sympathy, or in its heaviest meaning—“care”—passing-over is a dialogic activity, or at very least an interpersonal one: as well as becoming receptive to one’s own “images,” it involves becoming “receptive to the images which give expression to [the] feelings [of the Other], attain[ing] insight into those images, and then coming back enriched by this insight...” The image-orientation is a call to an aesthetic of sorts, a transfigurative aesthetic. For the negative corollary to this point, it is useful to turn to that great apostle of transfigurative aesthetics, Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>7</sup> Passing-over, in this second sense, is what the parable of the Good Samaritan is all about, and is evoked in the self-proclaimed Anti-Christ’s concept of the “innocence of becoming” which imbues the “noble man” with the ability to forget: not merely to *forgive* one’s hurts and humiliations, one’s impotences, but what is more to *forget* them, to be able to *pass over* the past and welcome the rushes of the present. Thus one must forget the past, as personified in the visage of the enemy/Other, in order to truly care for him as a human being—a mortal and potentially suffering being, like oneself—at the same time as one passes-over by exposing oneself to the ways of the Other, his values and beliefs... his *styles*.

#### **Intra-Perspicacity – Real Present(t)ce**

*One of most important differences between the modern and the ancient worlds may be that we have become too unsuperstitious and careful in our modern thought-patterns to be able again to accept such a total and exclusive religious revelation as Christianity was, with its conspicuous omission or rejection of so many aspects of our religious instincts or of our imaginative ideals.*

– Colin Falck

Thus, in order the better to see ourselves, in our eclectic fusion of Jewish, Christian, Hellenistic, and pagan ways, we must be willing to recognize the viability, first and foremost, of all of the diverse components of our modern Western being; we

must learn to swim in our various Occidental streams before attempting the Rubicon.<sup>8</sup> John Cobb, in an article in Leonard Swidler’s *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*, adopts H. Richard Niebuhr’s historical relativism (from his *Meaning of Revelation*), making a claim for the centrality of history—history not as static incidents, but as living process—in understanding the truth about a person or faith. In short, according to Niebuhr, what *one* is, or what *Christianity* is, is determined by a study of history and of present understandings and interpretations of that history. “To speak of revelation now is not to retreat to modes of thought established in earlier generations but to endeavour to deal faithfully with the problem set for Christians in our time by the knowledge of our historical relativity.”<sup>9</sup> Jesus is the *center* of Christian history, but he is not the *whole* of history, even for Christians, a history which runs from Genesis to the present hour, and is even now in the making. The problem, Cobb says, is the narrowness of our historical vision, which becomes sectarian even within Christianity, and certainly within the West viewed as solely Christian—as if Christianity means anything divorced from its roots in Jewish history and Hellenic thought, from paganism, and from its own deviants and heretics. Perhaps what we need is more intra-perspicacity; a hermeneutic of our own past lives (Carlos Fuentes: “It takes several lives to make one person”).

#### **Styles of Thinking: Ways of Being**

*Peoples cannot love one another unless they love the same ideas.*

– George Santayana

George Santayana, famed for his own epigram regarding the folly of forgetting the past, says that peoples cannot expect to love one another unless they “love the same ideas”<sup>10</sup>; but notice the stress on *love* rather than, say, *share*, or even *recognize*. Nietzsche proclaims that “there is always some madness in love,” but, he continues, slyly, “there is always, also, some method in madness.”<sup>11</sup> This idea, that “the more emotions we allow to speak in a given matter... the greater our ‘objectivity’,”<sup>12</sup> combines with one of Cobb’s warnings to set the task of our next section, on the turn to modal thinking. Cobb bemoans the too-readily made assumption (among religious pluralists, and dialogists more generally) that “difference in image and concept” belies a greater harmony at the core; i.e., that, for all the tricks of appearance, there is no difference in the reality which is being referred to in divergent theologies and ways of speaking about transcendency, ultimacy, or transfiguration.<sup>13</sup> This hypothesis, of an *Ur*-reality to which all religions (and ideologies?) ultimately point (suggested for example, by Paul Knitter) is itself founded on an *a priori* assumption that metaphysics cannot be pluralistic but must ultimately be united across cultures and epochs. But this is to dissociate, in some sort of Platonic fashion, *form* from *content*; it is to relegate *style* to a secondary position *vis-à-vis* something to which style points, or rests upon, or evokes.

Cobb rightly complains that such a stance stops too soon: it fails to take us deep enough into the waters of the Rubicon, which is not always calm and inviting, and does not always mirror our own visage, as much as we, Narcissus-like, might wish to see ourselves therein. If we *do* see ourselves, it is not in the pupils of the Other, standing on the shore (or, more amenably, wading in towards us, but still at some remove), but in the water which swirls around our chest and neck when we call for assistance. Dialogue may well, should, even, provoke not only a re-evaluation of one’s theology and history but *also*

of one's metaphysics and epistemology—i.e., of one's own foundations, the sand upon which one stands (or stumbles) as the water rises. Cobb follows H. Richard Niebuhr once again, when the latter says: "Metaphysics, and doubtless logic and epistemology, are as historical as ethics."<sup>14</sup> The metaphysical ground of our thought cannot be held any more sacred than the theological, ritual, and historical aspects of our particular way. An evocation of the divergent styles of thinking, should, in fact, be extended, or rather *intended* to Western culture itself, and it is to one such Occidental way that I shall now turn—Romanticism, and the aesthetics of transfiguration as evoked by the trope of Poetic Wisdom, in particular.

### **Heuriskos and Tranfiguration**

*If postmodernism is analytic and de(con)structive, modal will be synthetic and constructive. After therapy, wholeness.*

– Joseph C. McLelland

As we have seen, passing-over is a call to healing; in some sense, to *transfiguration*. It is, at heart, an ethical mandate, which for Dunne involves an exercise of *heuriskos*: passing-over to other ways as a way of lifting ourselves (as the *Gospel of Thomas* would have it) out of this corrupt existence, or (as per Kant) out of our "dogmatic slumber." *Heuriskos* involves risk, of course (the Greek itself informs us English-speakers of that), but the transition from caring for a sickness to caring for our returned health is never an easy one, nor is recognizing the change (from sickness to health) when it occurs, for healing is a process of gradations. Lamenting the present state of the world, and of Western modernity (as the root of all evil) in particular, is of course not a new phenomenon, and as the recent millenium passed we heard more from latter-day doomsayers than prophets of hope. Postmodernity, that loose and baggy monster which is often put forth (sometimes with lament, sometimes with joy) as the rubric of our age, has provided, in the breakdown of the hegemonies, in the death of all absolutes, new lease to rebuild as well as to lament; we have done enough of the latter, it is time to try our skills as *bricoleurs*. Joseph McLelland, who speaks of the heuristic element of a new way, or style of thinking—*modalism*—claims that it is time to put an end to the "dandyism" of postmodernity, which has been co-opted by a (mostly French) "deconstructive-eliminative" clique of thinkers and their sycophantic hordes in the world of graduate study,<sup>15</sup> and to put forth some answers, though these may be rather re-formed questions.<sup>16</sup> "It is the 'constructive-revisionary,'" says McLelland, "that informs modal thinking and impels exploration of alternative forms of universal validity."<sup>17</sup>

Jean-François Lyotard provided a motto for the postmodern project when he claimed that "the project of modernity (the realization of universality) has not been forsaken but destroyed, 'liquidated'."<sup>18</sup> Lyotard may be right, but perhaps this liquidation involves a rethinking of what is meant by *universality*, or for that matter, what is meant by *project*. A "true postmodernism" (Colin Falck) would not be afraid of the ghosts of the past, who can still, perhaps, be useful to us as we stand on our Esplanade, facing Nietzsche's "open sea."<sup>19</sup> As Dunne says, in our day "experiments with truth" are the only way of finding out about God and the human; these "combine the way of religions and of memoirs,"<sup>20</sup> looking both to heterodox poets and orthodox priests for inspiration towards a portrait of the holy poly.

### **Revenge of the *Kulturkritik***

In Anglo-American cultural criticism, the reaction against the perceived sterility of the continental thought of Derrida, Lacan, Kristeva and Foucault has been marked and severe, and is, in large part, a reaction against their rejection of the spiritual and transcendent, as well as the body, the physical being, the *humanun*—or anything, for that matter, that lies outside "the text." A diverse coterie of (for lack of an appropriate English appellation) *Kulturkritiker*, such as Colin Falck and Camille Paglia, have joined *doyens* Harold Bloom, Frank Kermode, and George Steiner in denouncing the lifelessness, ahistoricity, circularity, elitism, and general irrelevance of the bulk of so-called postmodern scholarship of the past several decades. With Nietzsche, these counter-critics cry that "scholarship today has neither faith in itself nor an ideal beyond itself."<sup>21</sup> Bloom, in his recent demagogic, bombastic, occasionally paranoid but ultimately intriguing tome *The Western Canon*, hearkens back to the good old days of the Dead White Male Canon. Paglia, the ever-obstreperous firebrand anti-feminist feminist and anti-intellectual smart-ass, who disresembles her mentor Bloom in every possible way but ends up striking very similar chords, looks to a neopagan revival at the death of Christianity. Falck, whose brilliant and ground-breaking *Myth, Truth and Literature* (called by Paglia "a map for the future") spans cultural epochs and every possible discipline of the humanities, heralds a rebirth of Romanticism as palpable paradigm for post-postmodernity.

### **Falck's Challenge: Modal Aesthetics**

Falck makes no bones about extending his conclusions beyond the closeted realm of aesthetics (as traditionally conceived) and literary criticism. Humans, Westerners in particular, must reclaim the lost spiritual dimension of their lives, once given in paganism and, at certain points, by Christianity in its most embodied (often, sadly, read heretical) forms, but largely faded in modernity, save the intrusion and influence of Romanticism. It is not, Falck, suggests, the task of religion to heal, nor is it the prerogative of science; the dual project of tranfiguration and transcendence must fall rather to the spirit of art and literature:

In so far as religions themselves—and in particular Christianity—have increasingly tended to "internalize" or to "de-mythologize" themselves and to abandon their claims to be descriptive forms of truth about the world, a way is in fact conveniently open whereby our spiritual awareness can begin to be "re-mythologized" through the imaginative insights of poetry or literature. The only "religious scriptures" that can now be authentic for us may be the poetry or literature to which our own culture gives us access.<sup>22</sup>

Falck's point is well taken. The call to de-mythologize Christianity, as heard in many quarters (e.g., Iris Murdoch, in her *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*), is exactly what is *not* needed. But perhaps Falck gives up too easily, and could learn something from neo-Romantics like Bloom and the late Northrop Frye, who, following Blake, see in the Judaeo-Christian Bible an inexhaustible source for creative inspiration—the Great Code of Art. For is not the Bible, with Shakespeare, Dante, and Milton, at the center of our inherited Canon? And this is not in any way a reduction of the Bible to the "merely" aesthetic, if by *aesthetic* is implied, *mutatis mutandis*, the same sense of tranfiguration, praise, and general sense of ultimacy and transcendence that enlives religion, especially Christianity.

Thus, Colin Falck sets a challenge not only to the scribes and grammatologists of postmodernity, but to theologians and religious writers, and even to ordinary believers; a challenge which must be taken up in earnest. From this point I shall attempt to draw a picture of the *modal* as a response to Falck, while at the same time offering his own thoughts and the insights of Romanticism as a supplement and bridge to what might be called a poetics of modality or even a modal aesthetics. After briefly examining the roots and historical manifestations of modalism in Western thought, in terms of both logic and theology, I will turn to the roots of modal aesthetics in the trope of *poetic wisdom* as developed in the work of Giambattista Vico, J. G. Herder, and the Romantic poets, before arriving at the crisis of modernity and the reaction to such in philosophy, poetry, literature, and painting.

### Modal Logic: Roots and Prospects

*While the assertoric or simple categorical proposition simply asserts (or denies) the predicate of the subjective...the modal proposition not only asserts (or denies) the predicate of the subject, but also states the manner or mode in which the predicate is identified with the subject or denied to the subject.*

– Raymond McCall, *Basic Logic*

Translating the above, in less abstruse terms, one might simply say: a modal proposition states not simply the *that*, but the *how* of a proposition. However, as Leszek Kolakowski reminds us, following Nietzsche,<sup>23</sup> religion is not a set of propositions, but is rather the “realm... wherein understanding, knowledge, the feeling of participation in the ultimate reality... and moral commitment appear as a single act”<sup>24</sup>—in short, religion is an entire ‘way’ of being. Thus, modal *propositions* are not enough; only an entire *logic* will suffice, one that is modal in scope, attitude, and feeling. This does not prevent us from looking to other paths in the history of logic, however. As far back as Aristotle—with his tetrad of modes: necessity, contingency, impossibility, and possibility; and his levels of causality: first, and second-material, second-formal, second-efficient—we see flashes of a wider appreciation of modalities in logic. These alternatives were swept away, however, out of the need for simplicity; Western logic being reduced, in the modern age, to a shadow of its former self. What we now know as classical logic (or, most often, just logic) is assuredly more modern (i.e., Cartesian) than classical (i.e., Aristotelian).

### Hartshorne and the Logic of Contingency

In *The Logic of Perfection*, Charles Hartshorne offers a neo-classical alternative to the classical (i.e., modern) metaphysics of Descartes. Whereas the Cartesian model involves “a metaphysics of being, substance, absoluteness, and necessity as primary conceptions,” the neo-classical model is attuned to the modal, emphasizing “the metaphysics of creative becoming, event, relativity, and possibility.”<sup>25</sup> This reflects McLelland’s comment that the modal acknowledges Bertrand Russell’s remark that the mono-model—the universalist, rational, modern, Cartesian/Baconian model—has “paid too much attention to substantives and adjectives and too little to verbs and propositions, thus concentrating on the logic of *qualities* to the neglect of the logic of *relations*.”<sup>26</sup> Ironically, the system of philosophy instigated by Descartes, beginning with universal doubt, does not doubt itself fully enough. Santayana has summed this up well:

[Descartes’s] mind was not plastic nor mystical enough to be profoundly sceptical, even histrionically... [he] could not lend himself to the disintegration of reason, and never doubted his principle of explanation.... Nor was this the worst; for [he] was not content to assume that reason governs the world—a notion scandalously contrary to fact, and at bottom contrary to reason itself, which is but the grammar of human discourse and aspiration linking new essences. He set accidental limits to his scepticism even about facts.<sup>27</sup>

Modal logic, contra the Cartesian system, is a logic not of *therefore* but of *if*—it is the logic of possibility, of conditionality, of contingency, and, ironically, of perfection.<sup>28</sup> Another aspect of Hartshorne’s argument, more explicitly theological, emphasizes the paradoxical necessity of God’s contingency: “God *merely* as necessary,” he argues, would be a limited Deity, “less than any contingent thing whatever.”<sup>29</sup> God, to be truly God, must be a partaker in *contingency*, and thus in humanity, rather than staying confined to the spheres of (unreachable and inhuman) *necessity*. Knowing, as human beings, and particularly after Camus and Sartre, the often inexplicable character of human life, the absurdity of the rhythms of existence, modal logic seems to be more logical, and perhaps, for believers, even more orthodox than the style of thinking and relating, believing and being based upon the monotony of classical logic, its more renowned and respected brother.

### Modalism as Heresy: Sabellianism

*We believe in bodily miracles, but not in mental impossibilities.*

– G. K. Chesterton

Even within Christian history one finds outbreaks of modalism, the most prominent being the heresy associated with Sabellus, sometimes called Monarchianism or Sabellianism, anathematized by Pope Callistus in the 4th century. This group claimed that God in His own Nature was one person only, who took on different modes in relating to the world. As the Catholic *Handbook of Heresies* puts it, the Sabellians went on to explain that “the Three Persons of the Christian Trinity... were not realities as relations in the Godhead, but merely relations of God to mankind.” The three modes were, in effect, three “masks” of God, and once the work of the third mask, the Spirit/Paraclete, was accomplished, “the triune personality... would disappear and the undifferentiated God would remain in His simplicity.”<sup>30</sup> These notions were unacceptable (or, at any rate, *became* unacceptable after the stigma of heresy was placed upon the Sabellians, a common fate to potential avenues in early Christian thought and belief) to the orthodox Trinitarianism being formulated at the time, as they did not respect enough the distinctions of the Three Persons. Although similar ideas can be found in Origen, and the Alexandrian school (and, to some extent, in Eastern Orthodoxy) more generally, association with the Sabellians tainted their use in Western orthodox (Trinitarian) Christian thought up to our own day.

### Modalism as Orthodoxy: Joseph C. McLelland

Joseph McLelland wants to revive the spirit of modalism in theology and Christian thought. This does not, however, mean bringing back Sabellianism, but looking beyond the Sabellians to other forms of *Logos* christology that insist “on a mode of divine being that maintains universality *at the same time as* the mode of human being.”<sup>31</sup> This new “theo-logic” is a call for radical attunement to the universe, to the possibility of, and arrangements for the reality of other worlds. Most of all, it is a call to a re-conceptualization which is, in some sense, itself a transfiguration—to a new way of seeing, speaking (and

therefore) being. As per John Cobb, a new vision of christology, and an acknowledgement of the implication of such in terms of religious pluralism, is crucial. Yet, such need not be heretical, even by the often unwieldy standards of the Roman Church (as we shall see in Chesterton's impassioned argument for a more orthodox—i.e., more magical and modal—*Orthodoxy*). As Meister Eckhart proclaimed when defending himself against his challengers, heresy should be a matter of intention, and though this leaves room for interpretation, the father of modern theology concurs. “Many,” Schleiermacher says in *The Nature of Religion*, “while contending for the defence of their own opinion, may use a heretical expression without meaning anything heretical.”<sup>32</sup> Even without this proviso, if we examine modalism from the perspective it offers, that is, through modal eyes, we shall perhaps see that it is telling us things we already know, but in new, radically new ways (as Maurice Boutin says of modal thinking, it “helps situate the questions we have and the answers being offered”<sup>33</sup>—once again, *heuriskos*.)

Condemning modal thinking from the standpoint of non-modal thinking is easy, but rather absurd; first we must experience “temporary conversion” or “suspension of disbelief” before we can pass judgement on modality. This is, one might say, a pragmatic maneuver. Maurice Boutin claims that modal thinking “stands at the threshold between semantics and pragmatics,”<sup>34</sup> and nowhere is this more evident than in modal’s emphasis on the aim of thought as being neither mere action nor further thought but, in a sense, to be more fully alive; to be, in the words of William James, the father of Pragmatism: “more attuned to the possibilities of mystery, morality, and melioration.”<sup>35</sup> McLelland invokes the Muses of Art for this conversion: “[C]hristology,” he says, “developed in impressionistic style,” but this is no longer adequate to our age: it “must become not expressionistic but cubist, even surreal.”<sup>36</sup> Imagist, one might add, or, perhaps, Symbolist, or Modernist... but what are all of these if not branches from a grand tree which sprouted from the ready soil of post-Enlightenment Europe in 1774; i.e., *Romanticism*. In order to gain perspective, we must first travel there and see what the fuss is all about.

### A Poetics of Modalism I: Historical Excursus

*[I]s it not true that those elements—all the residuum of reality which we are obliged to keep to ourselves, which cannot be transmitted in talk, even from friend to friend, from master to disciple, from lover to mistress, that ineffable something which differentiates qualitatively what each of us has felt and what he is obliged to leave behind at the threshold of the phrases in which he can communicate with others only by limiting himself to externals, common to all and of no interest—one brought out by art... which exteriorises in the colours of the intimate composition of those worlds which we call individuals and which without the aid of art, we should never know?*

– Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*

Giambattista Vico, Italian jurist, philosopher, and Renaissance Man, is best known today for his metahistorical speculations regarding the cycles of social history: the division of time into distinct epochs—Anarchic, Theocratic, Aristocratic, Democratic—which eternally recur. Vico’s cycles are not merely political, however; they involve radical changes in the dominant or hegemonic mood—the *Zeitgeist* or what Charles Taylor would call the “social imaginary. Here Vico goes beyond Marxian dialectical materialism to prefigure Oswald Spengler’s

Nietzschean *Decline of the West* and Sir J. G. Frazer’s epic *Golden Bough*: each Age corresponds to a certain way of thinking: from imagination, superstition, and custom to rational understanding and the decadence of rationality, followed by imagination and a new cycle. In developing this cyclical theory of history Vico is the first modern to give voice to a notion of poetic logic or poetic wisdom, a style of thinking in contradistinction to classical ways, but not necessarily irrational, or reliant on the divine in any simplified or direct causal sense.

In “primitive times, Vico argues in *The New Science* (1725), human beings did not need to invoke the imagination in order to give utterance to their understanding of the spiritual realm, they did not have to clothe the transcendent in images (which become “diminutive signs”) – they “did the opposite and more sublime thing: they attributed senses and passions... to bodies... as vast as sky, sea, and earth.”<sup>37</sup> Whatever the historical accuracy of such a picture, Vico makes an interesting (pre-Nietzschean) distinction between various types of knowledge and wisdom, the former “scientific,” the latter “poetic,” but, *because* of this, eminently practical: “[T]hose who excel in knowledge seek a single cause to explain many natural effects, but those who excel in practical wisdom seek as many causes as possible for a single deed.”<sup>38</sup> Here Vico echoes George Santayana, who in *Scepticism and Animal Faith* derives the notion of “animal faith” as true *reason* and the real *common-sense*. Animal faith, which is “active intuition,” expresses an “instinctive reason, the waxing faith of an animal living in a world which he can observe and sometimes remodel.”<sup>39</sup> Poetic or animal faith supplements reason, arising, says Santayana, out of a “vital constitutional necessity... to belief in discourse, in experience, in substance, in truth, and in spirit.”

Thus Vico evokes the possibility of a wisdom or spirit of reality-comprehension that is not split into a conceptual or abstract *meaning* and a concrete—but (merely) allegorical—*image* as illustration. In his *Ancient Wisdom*, Vico contrasts this wisdom—again, popular, poetic, and practical—with modern knowledge that is sophisticated, philosophical, and theoretical, and therefore less grounded in human reality. The Viconian notion of “imaginative universals” is interesting in light of the logics of art and aesthetics, as is his more general thesis that “[t]here is no fixed human nature that remains identical regardless of time, place, and circumstance; human nature develops in accordance with self-knowledge and with insight into the essences of things.”<sup>40</sup> Moreover, though it is Divine Providence that grants to human nature these nonrational (not irrational) creative capacities, it is they themselves that, operating on associative principles, produce false (i.e., unverifiable or non-demonstratable) beliefs *from which will emerge greater truths* (cf. Picasso: “Art is a lie that makes us realize truth”). It is not Divine Providence that itself *provides* wisdom, but rather *inspires* such, acting as an Aristotelian first cause, from which the poetic nonrational wisdom springs.

Another important contribution of Vico was his “discovery” of the unity between philosophy and philology, a connection exploited in our own post-Nietzschean and post-Wittgensteinian day, where Western philosophy has taken a linguistic turn. J. G. Herder, known for being the protégé of Hamann and mentor of Goethe, picked up on this Viconian intimation and ran with it, emphasizing (and this is critical when we look at the disembodied state of the linguistic turn in deconstructionist and poststructuralist thought) not only the linguistic constitution of thought but the concomitant *embodiment* of thought and language: “Thought,” Herder proclaims, “being necessarily linguistic, can take place only as

an expressive activity and in a behavioural medium, and must necessarily be physically embodied, located, and concrete.<sup>41</sup> This last notion makes Herder, in some sense, a father of modern pluralism, given his recognition of the embeddedness of language, and therefore of thought (and truth?) within peoples, cultures, and epochs. Colin Falck sees in the Herderian view a warning: while acknowledging the centrality of language in our thinking and being, it raises questions about the *adequacy* of our concepts *vis-à-vis* the “previously unarticulated awareness which we make use of them to express.”<sup>42</sup> In other words, we must not forget that we do have an awareness of reality, as human animals, which may be, or seems to be, prelinguistic, or intuitive.

Herder was nothing if not syncretistic, catalysing—in his alchemical fusion of the Enlightenment, Rousseau, humanism and Christianity—*das Romantische* and the German classical revival, both embodied in his star pupil: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Goethe combines Vico’s poetic logic and his notion of “imaginative universals” with Herderian linguistic embodiment. As a “Great European” (T. S. Eliot), he combines amplitude, abundance, universality, representativeness, and wisdom, but unlike, say, the disembodied (if, aesthetically superior) Shakespeare, Goethe *lived* these things even more than he *wrote* them.<sup>43</sup> Besides the incarnational aspect of Goethe, crucial to our examination of the poetics of modality is his distinction, to become a trope of Romantic and post-Romantic theory, between *symbol* and *allegory*. The particular, Goethe argues, *contains* the universal, it is not merely an *illustration* of a general truth nor an immanent *pointer* to an inaccessible realm of ideas. “If you wish to advance into the infinite, explore the finite in all directions.”<sup>44</sup>

It makes a great difference whether the poet seeks the particular for the universal or beholds the universal in the particular. From the first procedure originates allegory, where the particular is considered only as an illustration, as an example of the universal. The latter, however, is properly the nature of poetry: it expresses something particular without thinking of the universal or pointing to it. Whoever grasps this particular in a living way will simultaneously receive the universal too, without even becoming aware of it—or realize it later.<sup>45</sup>

This distinction forms a hub upon which Goethe’s Romanticism rests, and which distinguishes it from the highly Platonistic and allegorical effusions of later Romantics and post-Romantics. Goethe’s is a Romanticism informed by the classic, in Nietzsche’s terms, his Dionysianism is tempered by his Apollonianism; it is a High Romanticism in being less fully romantic (i.e., uninspired by nationalistic or patriotic sentiment; unmoved by a self-conscious cult of Beauty or Philosophy of Poetry)—a vitalism closer to that of Walt Whitman, William Blake, or Nietzsche than of Keats, Wagner or the *poète maudits* of France. *Grasping the particular in a living way*, in order to receive the universal, through the back door, as it were—that is Goethe’s message.

In England, William Blake, unbeknownst to Goethe (or to anyone, for that matter) was creating his own “bible” out of material very similar to the German’s. “If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character,” he pronounces in characteristic fashion, “the Philosophic and Experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things, and stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again.”<sup>46</sup> A prophet of the Imagination, Blake echoes the Goethean distinction noted

above and agrees with McLelland’s recommendation of Russell’s comment (on switching from the logic of *qualities* to the logic of *relations*), when he says that “[a]ll symbolism that deals with qualities has too many qualities of its own to be of any use to art.”<sup>47</sup> Allegory, in Northrop Frye’s terms—“art the meaning of which points away from itself toward something else which is not art”—is for Blake a “profane abomination.”<sup>48</sup> The Bible for Blake is “not Allegory, but Eternal Vision or Imagination of All that Exists.”<sup>49</sup> In short, the truth of religion can be presented only in its essential form, which is that of imaginative vision; i.e., it can only *show* itself through a poetic recreation of the original myths. It was Blake’s lifelong mission to raise others into a perception of the infinite, which could be attained only when “the doors of perception” are “cleansed,” and all appears as it truly is: “infinite & holy.”<sup>50</sup> Jesus for Blake is important, not historically, but as a present possibility of imaginative perfection (e.g., “Jesus was all virtue, & acted from impulse, not from rules”).<sup>51</sup> Colin Falck lauds the Blakean conception of religion as imaginative vision. In this and other ideas, he says, Blake “leaves most of modern theology trailing behind him, although there are affinities between his ideas and those of his near-contemporary Schleiermacher.”<sup>52</sup>

Friedrich Schleiermacher is, of course, often considered the father of modern theology, yet his *Speeches to [Religion’s] Cultured Despisers* (1800) is a Romantic Manifesto, evoking, in its lack of systematic rigor, a freshness and richness forfeited by his later works like *Glaubenslehre* (Doctrine of Faith, 1822). Though known for his conception of absolute dependence on God (later taken up by Karl Barth), in his early work Schleiermacher is less concerned with this than he is with his attempt to show (i.e., not prove, or justify) that if one experienced the world in a state of deep emotion (Goethe’s “living way”), as intuition and feeling, then one would experience the world *as it is* (Blake’s “infinite and holy”); and if one were profoundly affected (“awed”) by one’s relation to the particularities of creation, such an affective state, or *attunement*, is worth more than knowledge and action put together, as it connects and transcends both.

An immanentist like Blake and Goethe, the goal of the religious life is for Schleiermacher:

not the immortality that is outside of time, behind it, or rather after it, and which still is in time. It is the immortality which we can now have in this temporal life; it is the problem in the solution of which we are ever to be engaged. In the midst of finitude to be one with the Infinite and in every moment to be eternal is the immortality of religion.<sup>53</sup>

Further, “religion does not, even once, desire to bring those who believe and feel to one belief and one feeling... because each seer is a new priest, a new mediator, a new organ, he flees with repugnance the cold uniformity which would again destroy this divine abundance.”<sup>54</sup> Rather shockingly, Schleiermacher goes on to suggest that he prefers Heathen Rome in many instances to Christian Rome, on account of the former’s “boundless mixture of religions,” and the latter’s “godlessness,” exemplified in its inhuman treatment of heretics. The establishment of the limits of what it means to be Christian, he proclaims in the face of a legacy of Inquisitors and the *Malleus Malificarum*, “has nothing to do with the treatment of persons.”<sup>55</sup> A true Romantic, Schleiermacher could not abide the inhuman, even—or, *especially*—when practiced in the name of God or Truth.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, a younger English Romantic, became enamoured with Goethe and brought Romantic theorizing to an earthly level, grounding the Romantic hymn to creative activity in a radical socio-political vision. Though at all times a virulent atheist, Shelley often echoes the theological visions of both Schleiermacher and Blake. “The great secret of morals is love,” he says in the seminal *Defense of Poetry* (1822, the same year as Schleiermacher’s turn away from Schlegel and the Romantics in his *Glaubenslehre*), “a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own... [and t]he great instrument of moral good is the imagination.”<sup>56</sup> Shelley is astonished by the superabundance of life, which we too often take for granted: “the mist of familiarity obscures from us the wonder of our being.”<sup>57</sup> He made it his calling to re-evolve the strangeness of Life and the World, obscured by logic, rationalist thinking, materialism and the “miserable love of system [which] rejects what is strange.”<sup>58</sup> Though we may be struck with admiration at some of its “transient modification,” it is Life itself, in its capacity for modality and strangeness, that is the “great miracle.”<sup>59</sup> The miraculosity of the world becomes its familiarity, which inevitably breeds a certain amount of contempt, systematized in the quest for singularity and consistency that is the materialist’s credo.

Shelley concurs with Vico’s and Herder’s recognition of the limits of language, denouncing the vanity of the conviction that words can “penetrate the mystery of our being.”<sup>60</sup> Only “signs” used in the sense of Goethean or Blakean symbolism can evoke the mystery of being, and universality—“in this... sense almost all familiar objects are signs, standing not for themselves but for others, in their capacity of suggesting one thought, which shall lead to a train of thoughts.”<sup>61</sup> The evocation of new thoughts, of other eyes, is the truth to which the sign points, however indirectly. The poetic use of language, and art more generally, are for Shelley the First Cause (Vico’s Divine Providence) from which the miracles of Life spring.

### Heirs to Romanticism: From Symbolism to Phenomenology

Having spent a considerable amount of space providing exposure to these four paradigm Romantics—one Christian-pagan, one gnostic-Christian, one Romantic Christian, and one atheist—let me now turn briefly to their heirs, the so-called moderns. One could say that every post-Romantic movement, even Goethe’s neo-classicism in Germany, owes something to the Romantic revolution in aesthetics. Romantic theorists (often themselves poets) extended the bounds of the aesthetic to include the totality of human existence; in fusing art and life, they bypassed traditional forms of religion; by denying materialistic and rationalistic thinking, they inspired a new vision of science and its limits; by popularizing poetry (fusing high lyric with folk-song and traditional ballads), they, at least in theory, democratized the will to create. “Poetry should be made by all!” shouts Lautréamont, a proto-surrealist French poet of the 19th century. Even surrealism is an extreme outgrowth of the Romantic quest, as are Symbolism, Cubism, and Orphism in art and poetry, modernism in literature, and phenomenology in philosophy.

Modern art is largely the spawn of Cézanne (and, one could say, Kandinsky, who codified the inspiration of Cézanne into a manifesto for modernism, aiming to re-evolve the *Spiritual in Art*). And Cézanne is an heir to Romanticism of

the Goethean/Blakean sort: “Cézanne imposes his style on Nature all the more forcefully as he was not concerned with inventing a style, but with discovering in Nature, in that world of thick, voluminous matter permeated with light and color that is the very world of the painter, a working secret as singular as his own self.”<sup>62</sup> Revelling in this joint revelation of Things and creative subjectivity, Cézanne is the great witness to “the poetic sense in painting”; evoking the reality of the universe, not as static and logical but as dynamic, in time, and always changing, he captures the universe *in the act of seeing* and as such stands as the liberating figure in contemporary art.

From the side of Cézanne sprang Cubism, like Athena from Zeus, though not quite so fully formed, in 1906, with Picasso’s *Demoiselles d’Avignon*. Along with Georges Braque, Picasso sought an art for the new century—one that was simultaneously representational and anti-naturalistic. Naturalism for the Cubists was the bane of true art (like allegory for the Romantics); it was a degenerate realism, contra a true realism which would involve geometric breakdown and thus a more accurate evocation of the world as it is received by our creative intuition; i.e., the world in duration, in the flux of time. In *Demoiselles*, Picasso had walked 180° around his subject and had synthesized his impressions into a single, simultaneous vision.

Out of Cubism arose a splinter movement, Orphism, christened by the French poet (and the man who had introduced Picasso to Braque in 1906) Guillaume Apollinaire. The Orphists, in particular Frank Kupka and Robert Delaunay, took the Cubist revolution one step further, dispensing with recognizable subject-matter and relying on form and color to communicate meaning and emotion. Kupka linked 19th-century Symbolism (influenced by Gustave Moreau) with Cubism, bringing insights from eastern art and mysticism to his modern paintings. Like Goethe, Blake, and the Indian Vedanta, the infinite could be found in the minuscule; the universal transcendent in the particular immanent, if attuned to in a living way.<sup>63</sup> Orphism rests on the assumption that the act of seeing, “insofar as it creates consciousness, is in itself meaningful and that the painting which demands this ‘pure’ seeing is *not* simply decorative.”<sup>64</sup> According to Virginia Spate, the Orphists, if nothing else, captured the *raison d’être* of modern art: for the artist, confirmation of his or her being through the act of painting; for the spectator, consciousness through the self-forgetting, yet self-aware “absorption into the ‘otherness’ of the painting.”

Evoking the Muse of Orpheus in another art-form was Rainer Maria Rilke, who attempted, in a sense, to “write” Cézanne, who, with Nietzsche, was his dearest teacher. A late Romantic in the spirit of Hölderlin, Rilke sought to evoke the “imaginative universals” of Vico, or Jacques Maritain’s “immediately illuminating image” which, “without the intermediacy of any concept,” illuminates because “it is illuminated both by the Illuminating Intellect and by poetic intuition.”<sup>65</sup> Since Mallarmé, poetry had pulled itself away from the social world, its words having divorced themselves from referential meaning. As such poetry was held by poets like Rilke to have more ultimate meaning for humans: art as less a visionary recital than a *practice*. Rilke wanted to write poems “not about feelings, but about things felt”<sup>66</sup>; poems about observing (Martin Buber: “All real living is meeting”) animals, people and paintings, in which the focus was thrown off the lyrical speaker of the poem and onto the thing seen; a move from the transcendental subject-object relationship to the *Lebenswelten* of revealed Being (the ‘holy’).

The point of art is to show or to say, which is, in Rilkean terms, to *praise*; singing, revealing is *being*; it creates our presence and affirms the “real presence” of the world.<sup>67</sup> There is a sense here of both the Augustinian revolt against *concupiscentia*, the grasping after objects (Heidegger’s obsessive *Neugier*—“lust for novelty”) and a primitivist transcendence-in-immanence (“now it is true that gods come walking out”) that brings to mind Mircea Eliade on the presumably sacralized life of the “primitive mind,” as well as the Shinto conception of the *kami* that inhere in all worldly things of significance. Rilke: “To allow the completion of every impression, every germ of a feeling deep within, in darkness beyond words, in the realm of instinct unattainable by logic, to await humbly and patiently the hour of the descent of a new clarity: that alone is to live one’s art, in the realm of understanding as in that of creativity.”<sup>68</sup> If art is indeed a way of life, it must involve not only creation but understanding, and is one that we can to some extent prepare ourselves for, and that is the point where Martin Heidegger took up the dual challenge of Rilke and his teacher Edmund Husserl, responding with his phenomenology of *in-die-Welt-sein*—“being-in-the-world.”

### Modalism as Magic Realism

*Fantasy abandoned by reason produces impossible monsters; united with it, she is the mother of the arts and origin of its marvels.*

— Francisco Goya

Phenomenology is the philosophical movement, or once again, perhaps, *mood*, which complements the modernist turn in literature (Conrad, Proust, Joyce, Woolf), the Symbolist-Expressivist turn in poetry (Rilke) and the development of modern art in its various forms (Cézanne, Kandinsky, Picasso). Edmund Husserl, the father of phenomenology, was critical of the modern (Cartesian) *Weltanschauung*; in his celebrated (1935) lectures in Vienna and Prague on the “Crisis of European Humanity,” he chastised the one-sided nature of European science and scientific thinking which “reduced the world to a mere object of technical and mathematical investigation and put the concrete world of life, *die Lebenswelt*... beyond the horizon.”<sup>69</sup>

The Crisis of Modernity felt by Husserl is the recognition of its belated demise at the hands of the Romantic critique, which, as we have shown, had been going on for almost two centuries. Romanticism represents a convulsion, a cataclysm in the European Spirit whose effects are still being felt. Isaiah Berlin, in *Some Sources of Romanticism*, speaks of “a shift in consciousness” that “cracked the backbone of European thought.”<sup>70</sup> This was, in some sense, the collective backbone of Bacon, Descartes, and the spirits of rationalism, empiricism, and materialism; of the long-standing belief in the power of human reason to govern all actions and solve all problems, and the concomitant reliance upon the sole reality of the material world as atomistic objects that could be captured, studied, and manipulated “objectively,” out of time, and out of the human. Yet the counter-spirit of the Romantics had, by the Great War, dimmed somewhat, losing its vitality and assertiveness and plunging into the self-conscious erethism of *l’art pour l’art* and *fin-de-siècle* decadence. By the end of the Great War, the Light had failed, and “The Waste Land” and *The Castle* were to be the new European homes; a sense of spiritual, moral, and aesthetic vacuity the new Occidental mood. The European world had lost its hope, and thus its sense of magic, the essential tensions between

tradition and revolution, old and new, reason and faith, faith and imagination, *ratio* and imagination, were torn asunder.

In speaking of Husserl and the Crisis of Modernity, Czech novelist and essayist Milan Kundera invokes the “Depreciated Legacy of Cervantes” as a remedy which the founder of phenomenology (and his pupil Heidegger) seem to have missed. According to Kundera, *Don Quixote* investigates “forgotten being” at the dawn of the Modern Era, setting in motion a further aesthetic investigation in the work of Richardson, Balzac, Flaubert, Tolstoy, Proust, Joyce, by which, “through its own logic, the novel discovered the various dimensions of experience one by one.”<sup>71</sup> If Husserl’s “passion to know” was the essence of European spirituality, art, and the novel in particular, became its principle weapon, its perennial lance against the windmills of fate. Kundera raises this *raison d’être* of the novel as an ethical mandate: “A novel that does not discover a hitherto unknown segment of existence is immoral.”

The Hidalgo of La Mancha set forth on his journey in 1605 (the same year as Hamlet, Prince of Modern Introspection, was unleashed unto the world),<sup>72</sup> at the dawn of the Modern World that eventually witnessed the victory of Reason over Faith. *Don Quixote* does not set forth a moral position, but makes an inquiry; it questions, but not didactically. The Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance, who was not (until his final disillusionment) “sorrowful” at all, grasps particulars in a living, if crazy way, which cannot be encapsulated by the logic of either/or (La Rochefoucauld: “Sometimes in life situations develop that only the half-crazy can get out of”). As Wittgenstein tells us in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, the either-or sentence does not give a picture of the world, but is a tautology, and thus a pseudo-sentence, which, instead of just showing its sense in a possible state of affairs, tries to say something *necessary* about the forms and limits of sense.<sup>73</sup> Such reductionism has no place in aesthetics, or in the reality of human life, for it betokens “an inability to tolerate the essential relativity of things human, an inability to look squarely at the absence of the Supreme Judge”—whether that be God, Science, Reason, or even Art or Poetry; any Absolute Prestidigitator. *Don Quixote*, which may well be the first modern novel, identifies the wisdom of the novel – the “wisdom of uncertainty,”<sup>74</sup> which is, in terms of Romantic poetry, the “negative capability” of John Keats: “when man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubt, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.”<sup>75</sup>

Don Quixote is the hero and tragic martyr of what can be called the aesthetic, or even the *logic* of Magic Realism, which was hinted at by Vico’s Poetic Wisdom, Goethe’s fusion of the Romantic and the classic in his Symbolism, and Cézanne’s Dual Illumination of subject and object. In Magic Realism can be found the Legacy of Cervantes, as well as of Romanticism in the terms of Goethe, Blake, Schleiermacher, and Shelley, and of Cubism in art; it is the basis for a connection between art (and the concomitant awareness of beauty in life and nature) and what has traditionally been considered a *religious* experience of the world. Religion, or faith, has too-often submitted to the claims of science; perhaps it is time to re-evaluate religious thinking, and religious imaging in terms of its more natural ally: art.

For the Romantics, as per early Wittgenstein, “ethics and aesthetics are one.”<sup>76</sup> The aesthetic lies at the very basis of what it means to be human; it involves, says Falck, “a radical function of the whole psyche.”<sup>77</sup> Clearly there is more than an ethic here, but even an instigation to a spiritual renewal of some sort, such as we see thinly veiled in the

Phenomenological project's "openness to Being." The logic of allegory is the logic of realism—and as such is the aesthetic equivalent of materialism and Blake's Ratio; but the world is not realistic in this sense, as Virginia Woolf, in criticizing the fictional world of Arnold Bennet, realized: "[t]here is not so much as a draught between the frames of the windows, or a crack in the boards... [a]nd yet—if life should refuse to live there?"<sup>78</sup> In such a "realist" world, as per the realism of Bennet, H. G. Wells, and sundry Victorian writers and critics like Matthew Arnold, "[I]f life escapes; and perhaps without life nothing else is worth while."

Magic Realism invokes the (il)logic of Symbolism, which in allowing us to receive the universal by a certain (relativistic, or rather, perspectival) attunement to the particular, is the true poetic logic of the Romantic Legacy. Magic Realism sees the transcendent in the immanent, and sees the immanent in time as well as in space. It is a realism of first-impressions, of (Blakean-Rilkean) innocence and (Whitmanian-Dickensonian) radical openness; of *mood* and *attunement*: the rhythm of life as creation, as seen through receptively creative eyes.

The Imagism of D.H. Lawrence, at times Blakean in its esotericism, has been called a great expression of feeling about reality. In disparaging Lawrence's novel *The Plumed Serpent* (1924), the critic Ronald G. Walker states that "[i]n practical terms, a novel's mythic design requires only that the fictional events seem *possible*, so that their underlying truth may be entertained; but a fundamental convention of realistic narrative is that the rendering of fictional events be *probable*, the standard of probability being of course the world of actuality."<sup>79</sup> But what is this "world of actuality"—is this explanation not a Wittgensteinian either/or tautology? Magic realists and Modalists would rejoin, with Goethe's friend and accomplice Friedrich Schiller: "What you according to your idea of the matter, call limitation, I, according to mine, call *expansion*."<sup>80</sup> According to David Lewis, if a world is *possible*, then in some sense it is already *actual*. Hartshorne, as well, with his logic of consistency, would agree that the possible, the contingent, is what breathes *life* into awareness, of God, and of the world. Speaking Bergsonianly (whom we will come to in the next section), *possibility* breathes *time*, or the (human) element of *duration*, into a work, and into a world. Proust's (Bergsonian) world in *À la recherche de temps perdu* is not unrealistic, but is assuredly a world of possibles, not of probables. This world is evoked in the writings of G. K. Chesterton, particularly his 1909 work *Orthodoxy*, in which GK attempts to justify Magic Realism in the eyes of Christianity.

### Chesterton and the Ethics of Elfland

The main problem of *Orthodoxy* is the dilemma of all modern thinking persons: "How can we continue to be at once astonished at the world and yet at home in it?"<sup>81</sup> In other words, how can we sing, with Whitman, of the world our home, while being wary, with Kafka, of the home which is frightening in being not really ours. This trope, of a Wonder that remains somewhat detached, crops up in all Chesterton's books in some form or another; it is the attempt to preserve both fascination without anxiety, and comfort without apathy—the accommodation of universality and heterogeneity. *Orthodoxy* is one man's answer to this "double spiritual need"; but not just one man's, for GK is convinced that his vision coincides miraculously with the vision of the Christian Church through the ages.

A great fan of the twin kings of Victorian Nonsense, Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, GK wants to evoke the wonder of Alice, who finds herself in a curious yet fascinating world, one which she tries (with mixed success) to make her own. GK recognizes the magic that is already contained in the world, and that only has to be evoked, not invented. Life must be "active and imaginative... picturesque and full of poetical curiosity," because the world is strange and absurd—this is its *reality*, its *truth*. As such, Chesterton is spiritual brother to Spanish fabulist Miguel de Unamuno (his exact contemporary), and father (with Unamuno and Kafka) to Jorge Luis Borges, the greatest of the formidable band of 20th century magic realists coming out of Latin America, in the tradition of that great tragic hero of fantasy realism, Don Quixote. A self-proclaimed Quixotist—"I am the man who with the utmost daring discovered what had been discovered before... I am the fool of this story"<sup>82</sup>—GK provides a credo for magic realism, which befits not only the above named Hispanic writers but also Russian literature in the wake of Gogol:

It is one thing to describe an interview with a gorgon or a griffin, a creature who does not exist. It is another thing to discover that the rhinoceros does exist and then take pleasure in the fact that he looks as if he didn't.<sup>83</sup>

The most evocative and essential part of *Orthodoxy* is the chapter entitled "The Ethics of Elfland," where GK puts forth his conviction that fairy-tales are storehouses of common-sense and practicable ethics and philosophy, and evoke more accurately the real world than do all of science and materialistic philosophies. The ethics of elfland do not reject logic, but append *imagination* to reasonableness. Thus, though it is clearly illogical (i.e. unimaginable) for 2 and 1 to equal 4; it is easy (and fruitful) to imagine trees growing, not fruit, but golden candlesticks or hanging tigers. According to elfin ethics, all virtue is an *if*, all happiness is bright but brittle; this is "The Doctrine of Conditional Joy." The step from elfland to Christianity is a short leap, according to Chesterton, for if we believe, as we do as children, that the world is *magical*, it is natural and logical to look for a *magician*. In summary, he gives four conclusions: 1. that this world does not explain itself; it is magic; 2. magic involves meaning, and thus a meaner; there is something personal in the world, as in a work of art; 3. this purpose, despite its defects, is beautiful; and 4. the proper form of thanks to it is praise, which is humility and restraint.

"To accept everything is an exercise, to understand everything a strain."<sup>84</sup> Thus spake GK, in words which are reminiscent of his loathed precursor Friedrich Nietzsche. A fideist in the tradition of Pascal and Kierkegaard, Chesterton seeks, like these two, not to renounce reason so much as to dethrone its absolutist pretensions; to make it remains reasonable by keeping it human; i.e., more in tune with the world, and with the interpretation of the world given in Christian orthodoxy. "Materialists and madmen," he proclaims, "never have doubts"—and doubts are essential to belief. Making a plea for perspectivism, the stereoscopic vision which is in fact the perfectly ordinary mode of awareness, GK avers that just as "the morbid logician seeks to make everything lucid, and succeeds in making everything mysterious, [so t]he mystic allows one things to be mysterious, and everything becomes lucid."<sup>85</sup> Condemning the titans of modern thought, personified in their extremes by Tolstoy (Buddhistic interiority and Schopenhaurian pessimism) and

Nietzsche (self-absorbed creativity and nihilistic excess), GK evokes the vision of the Maid of Orléans, Jeanne d'Arc, who was, he says, more peasant than Tolstoy and more warrior than Nietzsche, at one and the same time, while remaining a true Christian. In this way she resembles the Crucified, the ultimate paradox in a religion of enigmas and a world of mystery, whom moderns have had to tear into "silly strips" in order to understand, being "equally puzzled by his insane magnificence and his insane meekness."<sup>86</sup>

The crux? To take an interest in life; to take the oath of loyalty to life. Against a Christianity (or a Buddhism) of the Inner Light, GK's "orthodoxy" must look outwards, to the world. By dividing God from the cosmos, he proclaims, Christianity relieved humankind from the curse of pantheism; in making the world, God separates, thus setting the world free. Thus GK's own awakening: his discovery that we must love the world without becoming absorbed by it; without becoming *worldly*; loving the world in the way St. Francis, the Poor Man of God, loved it, gratuitously, expecting nothing, and thereby receiving everything from the world. Christianity is an "eternal revolution," for it practices reform with a fixed ideal; it attempts to change the real to suit its ideal, contra the modern reformists and revolutionaries who are constantly changing our ideals in the name of what is real. GK's credo of reform: not *consistency* do we require, but *constancy*: "Man must have just enough faith in himself to have adventures, and just enough doubt of himself to enjoy them."<sup>87</sup> The only defect of orthodoxy, says Chesterton, is that it is too much of an abstraction, and not enough of a *way of life* for Christians. Once you get beyond its rigid fortifications, the ramparts and barbicans of ethical abnegations and its Stentorian guards—the professional priests—it is in fact "the only frame for pagan freedom."<sup>88</sup>

### Re-Mythologization of the Everyday

What this boils down to is a call for a remythologization of religion in terms of the everyday. As per the Doctrine of Conditional Joy of Magic Realism, life is immensely richer than our intellectual cognition of it.<sup>89</sup> Henri Bergson:

A new idea may be clear because it presents to us, simply arranged in a new order, elementary ideas which we already possessed. Our intelligence, finding only the old in the new, feels itself on familiar ground; it is at ease; it "understands." Such is the clarity we desire, are looking for, and for which we are always most grateful to whoever presents it to us. There is another kind that we submit to, and which, moreover, imposes itself only with time. It is the clarity of the radically new and absolutely simple idea, which catches as it were an intuition.<sup>90</sup>

Bergson supplements "intellection properly so-called" with "creative intuition": as in reading, philosophy, or life, "[o]ne knows, one understands, only what one can in some measure reinvent," or what is reinvented in the act of understanding or knowing.<sup>91</sup> Intuition seeks to "recapture, to get back the movement and rhythm of the composition, to live again in creative evolution by being at one with it in sympathy." We are back to Vico and the Herderian (Wittgensteinian) proviso about the limits of language, as well the phenomenology of Rilke and Husserl. Bergson ends his essay on "The Possible and the Real" with a Rilkean litany to transformation: "Humbled heretofore in an attitude of obedience, slaves of certain vaguely-felt natural necessities, we shall once more stand erect, masters

associated with a greater Master... [this] can be a preparation for the art of living."<sup>92</sup>

Martin Heidegger transformed the self-understanding of phenomenology. Holding on to the intuitionism of Husserl (and Bergson), he relieved phenomenology of its claims to be methodical and set it free for the task of "new thinking." The centrality of poetry and art more generally for Heidegger is crucial, as art is a "thinking that memorializes and responds."<sup>93</sup> As such (for Heidegger, *knowing is being*) a new authentic way of existing is envisaged "as mortal to other mortals, to earth and sky, to the divinities present and absent"; it means "to let each of these be... and to hold oneself open to its being, recognizing it and responding to it appropriately in one's own being, the way in which one oneself goes on, lives." If phenomenologists are neither philosophers nor scientists, they are *Denker* (thinkers) caught in the radical astonishment of being, but always "*en route* to the Being of beings, that is, being with respect to Being."<sup>94</sup> Heidegger clarifies the phenomenological fence-sitting, and the similar transcendence of duality found in Magic Realism and Romantic Symbolism: neither of the two historical legacies of Western thought, the idealist-metaphysical (of Plato) nor the scientific-technological (of Aristotle) satisfies the original, authentic condition and task of thought, which is to experience, to "think through the nature of existence," the "Beingness of being." To maintain a pretense of scientific distance and analytical objectivity is to remain within the circle which perpetuates the modern world's "forgetting of being" that has made unavoidable "the alienated, unhoused, recurrently barbaric estate of modern technological and mass-consumption man." Thinkers must answer to the questions of being—through *dialogue*.

Perhaps, says Heidegger in "The Origin of the Work of Art," "what we call feeling or mood... is more reasonable—that is, more intelligently perceptive—because more open to Being than all that reason which, having meanwhile become *ratio* [a favourite foil of Blake's] was misinterpreted as being rational."<sup>95</sup> Where knowledge (Cioran's "crime of indiscretion") is no longer decisive with respect to "unhiddenness" (from the Greek word for truth: *aletheia*), we must turn to belief, defined as "a holding in the true [*Sichhalten im Wahren*] and so a holding in the double sense of giving support [*einen Halt geben*] and preserving an attitude [*eine Haltung bewahren*]."<sup>96</sup> Belief then is not to be thought of as a level of cognition, but rather as an attitude [*Haltung*] assumed when one does not adhere to something that has been fixed, and so does not dogmatically adhere to beings or look for final foundations among beings.

### A True (Alexandrian) Post-Modernism

*Direct Magic—a magic which through an equilibrium between human imagination and technique, through an extreme preliminary complexity and by becoming as simple as would be, for a child who had seen sugar dissolves in water, the miracle that he himself does not dissolve in his bath.*

— Jean Cocteau, on his film *Orphée*

Jorge Luis Borges, Argentine fabulist and Magic Realist, calls us to a New Alexandrianism in our thinking and living. E. M. Cioran says of Borges that, like God, his center is everywhere and his circumference nowhere; with his ability to "give its true meaning to the word *select*," he might become, says the normally cynical and despairing Cioran—"the symbol of a humanity without dogmas or systems."<sup>97</sup> But what does it mean to be Borgesian? It means a) to be Orphic, mystic,

pagan—but never to be wholly or simply one; b) to be a realist, but a magic realist; and even, c) to be a Christian, but one who makes choices, original choices—a *heresiarch* (Gk. *hairesis*, action of taking + arche, a beginning). In short, to be *human*, in the sense of a radical attunement to the *humanum*.

To be Orphic means to have an Orphic attunement or consciousness means to praise Orpheus, the greatest singer and musician of Greek mythology, son of the Muse Calliope and Apollo, thus progeny of Art and Order. Like any great artist or poet, Orpheus's music is not arbitrary or capricious, but is developed out of models and the rules of his craft, to new heights of originality and creativity. His lyre can charm, but not deceive; with it he is able to free his beloved Eurydice from captivity in the Underworld, on the condition that, as they leave Hades, Orpheus is not to look upon his beloved, even once, on pain of losing her forever. Just before reaching the upper world, of course, his love overcomes, and the Singer loses his Song. His crime was looking, and though past interpreters have denounced his cowardice, from a Hellenistic perspective (Plato), or abused him for striving after earthly pleasures (like Lot's Wife, he looked back), from a Christian-Stoic perspective (Boethius). It is more human to view the story from Orphic eyes, and lament, as does Rilke, the injustice of the command, whether divine or infernal: "Do not gaze upon what you love," with the dire penalty of eternal loss. His disobedience in the face of absurdity, the whim of the god, is a lesson, one which counteracts the Kierkegaardian hierarchy with the divine imperative vetoing the merely ethical. With the Orphic Shelley, the aesthetic and the ethical are one, and together they are also the divine, contra the whimsy of the lords of the Underworld, Persephone and Dis. As Rilke puts it: "er gehorcht, indem er überschreitet" ("it is in overstepping that he obeys").<sup>98</sup>

What does it mean to be mystic? This does not entail becoming a mystic, in the sense of hiding from the world to explore ineffable union with the Godhead, but rather to retain a mystic consciousness toward the world and things. It is as Antonin Artaud, *auteur maudit*, a heresiarch and madman *par excellence* (excommunicated and anathematized from the surrealists!), says:

What we have lost on the strictly mystical side we can make up in the intellectual side. But in order to do so we must learn to be mystics again... we must rid ourselves of all reality, all verisimilitude, but even of all logic, if at the end of illogic we can still catch a glimpse of life.<sup>99</sup>

Even in the airy realms of Meister Eckhart, the trope of detachment or disinterest (*Abgeschiedenheit*)—the negative aspect of passing-over—does not preclude, but actually enjoins activity, engagement. In a sermon on Martha and Mary, Eckhart conflates the two senses of passing-over when he reverses traditional interpretations by holding up Martha as the role model: sufficiently one with God that she is appropriately active in the world, yet sufficiently detached that she is not attached, even to the teachings of Jesus.<sup>100</sup> Mystical experiences, after all, are rare, even for full-time mystics like Eckhart. It was an Eckhartian principle that, when one is in the Seventh Sphere, and at the door one hears the knock of a beggar requiring bread or water, it would be the most grievous sin to remain among the heavenly hierarchies and not answer the door: quite literally, heaven can wait. Even Jakob Boehme spent most of his time, after all, mending shoes, and watching the feet of Görlitzers walk past his basement shop windows.

It is another mystic who gives us a hint for our third attunement: the pagan or polytheistic consciousness. "My friend," says Angelus Silesius, "if all together we utter but one tone, what music would that be, all sung in monotone?"<sup>101</sup> So Silesius is no Goethe when it comes to poetry, but it is Goethe who is the master of the polyphonism he prescribes; his deepest need was to experiment, to explore what sometimes turned out to be a dead end, a windmill and not a castle after all, but to remain constant in purpose, if inconsistent in style and habits; thus to be original in the truest sense.<sup>102</sup> Along similar lines, Camille Paglia endorses a "pagan education" that would "sharpen the mind, steel the will, and seduce the senses."<sup>103</sup> As per Eckhart, Paglia's neo-paganism is both contemplative and *engagé*, even "pugilistic." "Conflict cannot be evaded, but perhaps it can be confined to a mental theatre"<sup>104</sup>—thus aligning her with Shleiermacher, for whom heresy, the choice of difference, has nothing to do with human treatment, cruelty, or neglect. Moreover, a pagan consciousness means syncretism: "In point of fact," says Paglia, "we belong to an Alexandrian age of syncretism, in which multicultural allusions fuse to make eccentric new wholes."<sup>105</sup> In similar fashion, David Miller's *New Polytheism* (1974) hearkens to Nietzsche's words in *The Gay Science*: "In polytheism man's free-thinking and many-sided thinking has a prototype set up: the power to create for himself new and individual [Proust: "art's thousand"] eyes, always newer and more individualized."<sup>106</sup> Evoking the Gods and Goddesses ("archaizing," says Paglia, *not* the condescendingly irreverent postmodern "appropriating"), gives one distance, perspective "on the morass of contemporary confusions..."

not from the standpoint of well-known religions or philosophical systems, but from the multifaceted richness of Greek structures of consciousness which, though long forgotten or at least sneered at, nonetheless are the roots of meaning and being in Western thinking and understanding.<sup>107</sup>

### **Sorge – Disinterestedness, Care and Concern in Truth**

Goethe, sobered somewhat after the high *Sturm und Drang* of his youth, eventually turned his back on Romanticism (it had become, he said, *das Kranke*, a disease), perhaps a distant early warning of the slippery-slope from *Sturm und Drang* to *Blut und Erd* and beyond, through Nietzsche's foil Wagner and the proto-Nazi *Volkisch* movement to Hitlerism. The bane of the Romantic ideal, as Nietzsche foresaw, was that, in the end, *pace* Schiller's *homo ludens*, Romantics took themselves too seriously, and fled from the tyranny of Reason to other, often worse tyrannies. Such, in Nietzschean terms, "weak nihilism," is a decadence that is either apathetic or fascistic, but never human; never caring. *Sorge*—"to care," or "have concern for"—is a Heideggerian trope, central to his phenomenological development of the responsibilities of *das Denker*.

Having *concern* for the phenomena one studies (or questions) sounds like a rather vague or banal precept, but is, in a sense, the essence of the phenomenological code as artistically conceived. According to Heidegger,

Care is always concern and solicitude, even if only privately... In willing, an entity which is understood—that is, one which has been projected upon its possibility—gets seized upon, either as something with which one may concern oneself, or as something which is to be brought into its being through solicitude.<sup>108</sup>

Moreover, *care* is the existential mode in and through which being “*grasps its necessary location and implication in the world.*” As George Steiner puts it, to be-in-the-world is to be *besorgt* (careful, care-full); it is *Sorge* that makes human life meaningful.<sup>109</sup> This is the deeper foundation or metatheology of Heideggerian phenomenology, and it states quite clearly that there must be a limit to disinterestedness. Yet, as Colin Falck comments on *Sorge* and its use in historical religions, for whatever reasons, these have tended to emphasize the difficulty and joylessness/renunciation/world-denying aspects of this requirement. Concern has won out over care, which does not bespeak of anxiety so much as play and levity, but “has been noticeably absent from almost all traditional religions.”<sup>110</sup> Nietzsche, once again:

What destroys more quickly than to work, to think, to feel without inner necessity, without a deep personal choice, without *joy* as an automaton of “duty”? It is virtually a *recipe* for *décadence*, even for idiocy... Kant became an idiot. —And that was the contemporary of *Goethe!*<sup>111</sup>

To retain the Spirit of Levity does not mean to revoke responsibility; *homo ludens* is not (necessarily) *homo apatheia*. Heidegger speaks of what is “worthy of being questioned”; i.e., that which “dignifies the question and the questioner” by making of the process of interrogation and response “an ever-renewed dialogue and counterpoint.”<sup>112</sup> The difficulty is of course knowing *when* to show a concern that transcends concern for the phenomena, or the dialogue itself, but there can be no question about there being such a point. Heidegger was not completely disinterested; he denied not only doing theology but also objective science, which in its indifferentism must degenerate into the nihilism which has brought on our present state of technological terror. In fact, for Heidegger the single most crucial need of the hour is much more thinking through of the basic religious concepts and phenomena: “the cognitive clarification of the meaning of words such as God or the holy.”<sup>113</sup>

#### *Divinus sum, et humani nihil a me alienum est*

E. M. Cioran, while praising Borges for his Alexandrian scope, makes the comment that his (Cioran’s) friend and fellow Romanian Mircea Eliade, a man of insatiable curiosity—“one of the most brilliant representatives of a new Alexandrianism that... puts all beliefs on the same level”—in spite, or rather *because of this*, says Cioran, “cannot inspire them [i.e., the beliefs or gods] with life, [having] extracted all their sap.”<sup>114</sup> Then, of course, there remains the dark splotches which besmirch the mantles of so many thinkers and writers of the 20th century: the taint of fascism that marks, to varying degrees, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, D. H. Lawrence, and G. K. Chesterton, as well as Martin Heidegger, whose complicity with and silence about the greatest forgetting of being in modern—the Holocaust—has not gone unnoticed. It would seem in Heidegger’s case that *Sorge* has not become the religious imperative to care: to help, as per the Good Samaritan, the fallen Jew, regardless of creed, regardless of laws, divine or human.

Nietzsche and the Gnostic Jesus of *Thomas* concur quite remarkably as to the meaning of the Kingdom of God. It is, says the former, “not something one waits for; it has no yesterday or tomorrow, it does not come ‘in a thousand years’—it is an experience of the heart; it is everywhere, it is nowhere....”<sup>115</sup> For

the latter, the Kingdom “will not come by waiting for it. It will not be a matter of saying ‘Here it is’ or ‘There it is’. Rather, the Kingdom of the Father is spread out upon the earth, and men do not see it.”<sup>116</sup> Perhaps the *humanum* is the sole *Ur-focus*, the sole universal to which we can aspire. Is mere humanism enough? It is, if humans are more than “mere”—but filled with the potential that is creative transformation, the Alexandrian spirit. We see what connects religion and art; but what distinguishes them? Rather than Kierkegaard, who for all his stylishness puts forth an anti-aesthetic, we should perhaps look to Schleiermacher, and the Romantics, who, as much as orthodox Christianity (and even more so since the late 18th century) are our true spiritual progenitors, as well as Nietzsche, whom we may find is an antipode well worth possessing.<sup>117</sup> The difference may come down to the ethical call made by religion—*Sorge*—which art, as transformative and illuminating but ultimately more *descriptive* than *prescriptive*, cannot make claims to. Art *shows* what cannot be spoken; religion attempts to *speak* what cannot be said, to see what cannot be seen—to conceive the invisible and demand the impossible—and thus, as per Kierkegaard, it is an absurdity, as are Don Quixote, a child’s fable, and the sin of Orpheus, but an absurdity which, as Wittgenstein’s self-destroying *Tractatus*, insinuates, colors, warns, and reveals. Religion, when it confronts all of its streams and channels, the diversity in its so-called Unity, *shows* at a higher, and therefore more human level: the Divine. By raising *Sorge*, care, over (purely rational, analytical, materialist, realist) understanding, a modalistic theology speaks the promise of a true postmodernity, not of ghosts, machines, or grammatologists, but of human beings.

#### Conclusions

I Postmodernity suffers from dandyism, and has become largely sterile and irrelevant.

I.1 To breathe life into postmodern thinking we need, *pace* Heidegger, to demand, not less, but *more* of philosophy, or rather, of thinking.

I.1.1 This means conceiving the invisible: rethinking what religion, and terms such as holiness, divinity, God, and incarnation, can mean; and demanding the impossible: rooting all thinking in ethics, in a call towards reconciliation between what is Other.

I.1.1.1 Reconciliation does not mean an erasure of difference, but an acknowledgement of the necessity of contraries (Blake) in terms of styles and moods.

I.2 A true postmodernism must begin within; it must be historical, as well as embodied; it must be heuristic.

I.3 Romanticism is the dominant mood of modern consciousness, though its full implications have yet to be explored; Romanticism has been co-opted by its foes or has become degenerate or dangerous, unable to retain the element of concern.

I.3.1 Romanticism remains a fertile channel of Occidentalism, as a link between various streams of Western culture.

I.3.2 Occidentalism also has many channels, but those most pertinent are those most syncretistic of the many streams: pagan, Jewish, Christian, and Hellenistic.

I.4 Without diversity all withers.

II Theology, to survive, must answer the challenge of the secular *Kulturkritiks*: theology must face the confrontation of heterogeneity.

II.1 The *modal* as a way—epistemological, aesthetic, and ethical—is *kerygmatic*: it is a rhetoric that is at once

- metaphorical and existential, and as such is a potential vehicle for transcendence.
- II.11 Modal thinking, though only hinted at in the past, finds links with a strong tradition in Western aesthetics, and Romanticism in particular.
- II.111 Modal thinking, and more specifically modal theology, can benefit from the Romantic tropes of Poetic Wisdom, the transfigurative power of art and beauty, the joyful responsibility of art, of a Symbolism that is not allegory, a logic that is more practical and human than that of Descartes, and a realism that, in being magical rather than materialist, bespeaks a vision of the world as it is, in time, human, and holy.
- III Inter-religious dialogue must begin within, expanding its own historical nexus before moving outward; it must become intra-perspicacious.
- III.1 Inter-religious and inter-ideological dialogue, when attempted from an Occidental standpoint outwards, must be Alexandrian; i.e., Orphic, mystic, pagan.
- III.2 The *humanum* is the *Ur*-ground at which all dialogue rests; it is the sole universal, and, as such, partakes of the divine.
- III.21 Dialogists must be prepared, as per the Good Samaritan parable, to pass-over in two senses: forgetting the past for the sake of the present; and remembering that the Other, like oneself, is subject to the way of all things.
- IV A true postmodernity seeks not universality or divisive relativity, but *pluversity*.\*

\**pluversity*—pluralism with diversity, but under the auspices of the *humanum*; derived from a) “plus,” “with the addition of,” and b) *plus* (Fr. and L. = “more,” and perhaps “several”; also Av. = “abundance”), as in, “demand more of philosophy, of thinking” or “Be Realistic! Demand the Impossible!” (19th century anarchist slogan); c) “verse,” “a line in poetry,” drawing to the trope of poetic wisdom; and d) “verso,” “the back of the leaf of a book, being the side presented to the eye when the leaf has been turned over,” thus, in effect, seeing the old, the text that is the world, as more than a “text”; seeing the old in new ways by intra-perspicacity; e) “versatile,” as in changeable, heuristic, constancy without the necessity of consistency; f) “vertex,” the highest point, i.e., the *humanum* as the highest point to which we can aspire in dialogue; g) *vers* (Fr. and L. *versus* = towards), continual revolution, as Chesterton says Christianity must be, continual movement; h) more generally connotes a move away from *universality* (as the elimination of difference, such as we find in so-called anonymous or inclusive Christianity) and away from the *university*, being more existential, i.e., engaged in the problems of the non-academic world, which is very much a world (or worlds) “outside the text” and the playful fancies of deconstructionists; i) “verve,” as in alacrity, spirit, dash, vigour; and last but not least, j) *vers* in the sense of (Fr.) “worm,” as in Poe’s Conqueror Worm: human mortality.

#### Appendix: 12 Apostles of a True Postmodernism

**Orpheus** (Classical Greece-present) – Greek mythical figure; famous for his musical ability; symbol of immortality as his head was preserved after his death and set out to sea with his

lyre by the Muses; lost his love, (Eurydice) by loving too much; like St. Francis able to charm beasts, having a good rapport with nature.

**Francis of Assisi** (Italian 1181-1226) – Christian saint and poet, perhaps, after Mary, the most adored saint of the calendar; friend of animals and nature; singer, dancer, *jongleur* of God; contra the irascible St. Dominic; spiritual father of Western Art (Giotto) and Western poetry (Dante); an unabashedly sensual spiritualist.

**Erasmus of Rotterdam** (Dutch 1469-1536) – Father of Humanism in Northern Europe; committed to the life of Jesus over against pure fideism; mentor of Luther (though eventually scorned by him); attempted to reform the Church from within; spiritual father of Nietzsche, and of Cervantes and thus of Don Quixote.

**Don Quixote** (Spanish 1605-present) – Muse of Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Unamuno, Chesterton, Kafka, Borges, Fuentes, Kundera...; tells us that being modern is not a question of sacrificing the past in favour of the new, nor of re-evoking a purified (and thus mythical) past, but of maintaining, comparing, and remembering old values, making them modern so as not to lose the value of the modern.

**Johann Wolfgang von Goethe** (German 1749-1832) – Most influential poet, dramatist, essayist, novelist, travel writer, and Olympian personality of Germany; lived his art like no other; a Nietzschean Overman and perennial vitalist; above all, an Orphist and pagan who was not afraid to change.

**William Blake** (English 1757-1827) – Mystical poet, painter and engraver who sought to re-enliven the spark of a lapsed Christianity by re-mythologizing it, creating a new Paradise out of the universal symbolism latent in the Great Code of Art, the Judeo-Christian Bible; cryptic, but prophetic, and most interesting of the British Romantics.

**Nikolai V. Gogol** (Russian 1809-1852) – Father of Russian prose fiction; compared a great work of art to “an uttered prayer”; wary of the “dark moments” in life; his aesthetic epitaph: “in everything try to find its inward meaning, and most of all endeavour to obtain an understanding of the high mystery of creation” (“The Portrait”).

**Emily Dickinson** (American 1830-1886) – With Whitman, the foremost American poet; unrivalled in her ability to evoke, in a few short and sharp words, truths about Life, Love, and Nature; a religious poet, though not on the surface; her poems invite us to be in awe of the world around us; her words are as sharp as knives, she is indeed Amherst’s and America’s “Madame de Sade” (Paglia).

**Paul Cézanne** (French 1839-1906) – Father of modern art, influenced Kandinsky and the Cubists, as well as Rilke in poetry; plays with space, moving away from realism and naturalistic painting to try to convey the world “in the act of seeing,” in time as well as in space; meets the world half-way, illuminating and being illuminated at the same time.

**Guillaume Apollinaire** (Polish-French 1880-1918) – Poet and vibrant personality; catalyst of Cubism; father of Orphism; in his poetry syntactic units are strongly articulated with an intrinsic “rhythmic logic,” to be perceived in their relationship with the intervening and surrounding blank spaces; attempt, like Cézanne, to imitate the flux of consciousness.

**Franz Kafka** (Czech-Jewish 1883-1924) – Herald of the death of modernity; evokes the paranoia of totalitarian regimes of the 20th century as well as the illogical logic of modern bureaucracy; creates, for our age, a modern scripture, underlain with religious tones; in his starkness, much dark humour and a certain vivacity.

**Jorge Luis Borges** (Argentine 1899-1986) – Follower of Kafka, and a father of modern Latin American fiction, including the work of magic realists like Marquez; a gnomist, he wrote no novels or even long stories, but short parables; a Quixotist and a Bergsonian; last of the great universal writers, unfixed to a place or an epoch; a model for a humanity without dogma?

## Notes

1. Blake: “The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil’s party without knowing it» (Blake, “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell»).
2. Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth*, 3.
3. Miller, *New Polytheism*, 11.
4. I have borrowed from Harold Bloom, who in his recent *The Western Canon*, resurrects Giambattista Vico’s ages of human history—Anarchic, Theocratic, Aristocratic, and Democratic—and adds another, the Chaotic Age, to designate our own post-Kafkan times of disillusion, disintegration, and discontent. Bloom, however, fears a relapse into a new Theocratic Age more than he laments our present state of indeterminacy; indeed, his dire predictions verge on paranoia throughout *The Western Canon*.
5. Knitter, “Hans Küng’s Theological Rubicon,” 228.
6. Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth*, ix.
7. “One thing is needful.— To give style to one’s character — a great and rare art! ... For one thing is needful: that a human being should attain satisfaction with himself, whether it be by means of this or that poetry and art; only then is a human being at all tolerable to behold. Whoever is dissatisfied with himself is continually ready for revenge, and we others will be his victims, if only by having to endure his ugly sight. For the sight of what is ugly makes one bad and gloomy” (Nietzsche, *Gay Science* §290). Walter Kaufmann: “[This passage] brings out beautifully [Nietzsche’s] close association of power with self-control and style, and of lack of self-control with weakness. Note also the suggestion that resentment is rooted in an inability to accept oneself” (editor’s note 16 to *Gay Science* §290).
8. Nineteenth-century aesthete (and spiritual father of Oscar Wilde and Virginia Woolf) Walter Pater, effuses on the syncretic ways of *Sophia* in his *Marius the Epicurean*: “‘Wisdom’ was dealing, as with the dust of creeds and philosophies, so also with the dust of outworn religious usage, like the very spirit of life itself, organizing soul and body out of the lime and clay of the earth. In a generous eclecticism, within the bounds of her liberty, and as by some providential power within her, she gathers and serviceably adopts, as in other matters so in ritual, one thing here, another there, from various sources—Gnostic, Jewish, Pagan—to adorn and beautify the greatest act of worship the world has seen” (Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, 212).
9. Niebuhr, *Meaning of Revelation*, 22.
10. Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, 251.
11. Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, §1.7.
12. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* §III.12.
13. Cobb, “Christocentric Catholic Theology,” 97.
14. Niebuhr, *Meaning of Revelation*, 12.
15. Camille Paglia vociferates, *ad nauseum* but convincingly, on the sterility of post-structuralism, pulling no punches in her attack on the big three—Derrida, Lacan, and Foucault—in

particular: “French theory, far from being a symbol of the 1960s, was on the contrary a useful defensive strategy for well-positioned, pedantic professors actively resisting the ethnic and cultural revolution of that subversive decade” (*Vamps & Tramps*, 99).

16. “Modal thinking does not answer questions. It does not simply add questions to those we might already have. It helps situate the questions we have and the answers being offered. Modal thinking is heuristic thinking.” (Boutin, “Conceiving the Invisible,” 25).
17. McLelland, “Via Postmoderna,” 6.
18. Lyotard, *Postmodern Explained*, 19.
19. The lone voyager faced with the terrors of the abyss, or the open sea, is a High Romantic trope, as seen in the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich; *The Traveller*, for instance, which bedecks the cover of the Penguin Classic edition of Nietzsche’s autobiographical testament, *Ecce Homo*. Nietzsche: “Indeed, we philosophers and ‘free spirits’ feel, when we hear the news that ‘the old god is dead’, as if a new dawn shone on us; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, premonitions, expectation. At long last the horizon appears free to us again... perhaps there has never yet been such an ‘open sea’—” (*Gay Science* §280).
20. Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth*, 5.
21. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* §III.23.
22. Falck, *Myth, Truth and Literature*, xvi.
23. Here the ‘Anti-Christ’ comes out strongly in defense of the “real” message of “The Crucified”: “It is false to the point of absurdity to see in a ‘belief’, perchance the belief in redemption through Christ, the distinguishing characteristic of the Christian: only Christian *practice*, a life such as he who died on the Cross *lived*, is Christian... Even today *such* a life is possible, for *certain* men even necessary: genuine, primitive Christianity will be possible at all times... *Not* a belief but a doing, above all a *not-doing* of many things, a different *being*... States of consciousness, beliefs of any kind, holding something to be true for example – every psychologist knows this – are a matter of complete indifference and of the fifth rank compared with the value of the instincts: to speak more strictly, the whole concept of spiritual causality is false. To reduce being a Christian, Christianness, to a holding something to be true, to a mere phenomenality of consciousness, means to negate Christianness...” (*The Anti-Christ* §151).
24. Kolakowski, *Religion*, 165.
25. Hartshorne, *Logic of Perfection*, ix-xiii.
26. McLelland, “Via Postmoderna,” 5.
27. Santayana, *Scepticism*, 289.
28. McLelland, “Via Postmoderna,” 3.
29. Hartshorne, *Logic of Perfection*, 102.
30. *Handbook of Heresies*, 28-29. The idea of a masked God, or a God of masks, is developed delightfully in G. K. Chesterton’s spy-novel-cum-cosmic-joke *The Man Who Was Thursday*. God, or “Sunday” as he is known in this book, is always slightly out of focus, not quite a *Deus Abscondus*, he is never fully in view, or in space, for that matter.
31. McLelland, “Via Postmoderna,” 5.
32. Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 55.
33. Boutin, “Conceiving the Invisible,” 25.
33. Boutin, “Conceiving the Invisible,” 25.
34. Boutin, “Conceiving the Invisible,” 11.
35. West, *American Evasion*, 56.
36. McLelland, “Via Postmoderna,” 5.
37. Vico, *New Science*, 128; cf. Blake: “The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling

- them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could perceive" ("The Marriage of Heaven & Hell").
38. Vico, *New Science*, 248.
  39. Santayana, *Scepticism*, 309.
  40. Vico, *New Science*, 247.
  41. Herder, quoted in Falck, *Myth, Truth and Literature*, 186.
  42. Falck, *Myth, Truth and Literature*, 187.
  43. Goethe's constant refrain is embodied in the maxim: "What is important in life is life and not a result of life." As such he personifies Benedetto Croce's trope of the lyricality of art—its instantiation in the life, movement, emotion, fire, and feeling of the artist, in *the rhythms of human life*. According to Harold Bloom, Goethe's vitalism mirrors that of the Yahweh of the Biblical "J" writer, as well as his/her (Bloom believes J to have been a woman in Solomon's court) creation Jacob, whose agon at Jabbok is symbolic of the continuing struggle for Yahweh's Blessing—which is, simply, "more life" (*The Book of J; Ruin the Sacred Truths; The Western Canon*).
  44. Goethe, *Selected Verse*, 280.
  45. Goethe, *Maxims*, quoted in Falck, *Myth, Truth and Literature*, 183.
  46. Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell."
  47. Frye *Fearful Symmetry*, 117.
  48. Frye *Fearful Symmetry*, 118.
  49. Frye *Fearful Symmetry*, 116.
  50. Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell."
  51. Cf. Nietzsche on Jesus: "What he bequeathed to mankind is his *practice*; his bearing before the judges, before the guards, before the accusers and every kind of calumny and mockery – his bearing on the *Cross*" (*Anti-Christ* §147-8 [35]). Nietzsche's own Zarathustra is meant to be inspiration, not domination; he could say, like Blake's Jesus and the American bard Walt Whitman: "I and mine do not convince by arguments, similes, rhymes, We convince by our presence" ("Song of the Open Road").
  52. Falck, *Myth, Truth and Literature*, 197.
  53. Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 101.
  54. Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 55.
  55. Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 55, note.
  56. Shelley, *Poetry and Prose*, 111.
  57. Shelley, *Poetry and Prose*, 474.
  58. Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 55.
  59. Shelley, *Poetry and Prose*, 474.
  60. Shelley, *Poetry and Prose*, 475.
  61. Shelley, *Poetry and Prose*, 477.
  62. Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, 30-31.
  63. The influence of Blake, as a painter, comes through the Pre-Raphaelites and Symbolism to Cézanne and the Cubism of Braque, in his play with space. Blake's figures, however conventional, inhabit a dream world in which all normal rules are suspended, for the sake of the strong and evocative image-symbol.
  64. Spate, "Orphism," 95.
  65. Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, 329.
  66. Rilke, *Selected Poetry*, xii.
  67. Important for Rilke is the trope of "mirroring"—he imagines the artist as a polished surface, disinterested, who mirrors the world back to itself, and *by wanting nothing of it, makes it real* (*Selected Poetry*, xv).
  68. Rilke, *Selected Poetry*, 26.
  69. Kundera, *Art of the Novel*, 3.
  70. Falck, *Myth, Truth and Literature*, 160.
  71. Kundera, *Art of the Novel*, 5-6.
  72. Incidentally, it is thought that Don Quixote's and Hamlet's creators died on the same day: 23 April 1616.
  73. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* §4.46–4.4661.
  74. Kundera, *Art of the Novel*, 7.
  75. Falck, *Myth, Truth and Literature*, 202.
  76. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* §6.421.
  77. Falck, *Myth, Truth and Literature*, xvi.
  78. Woolf, "Modern Fiction," 2338-39.
  79. Lawrence, *Plumed Serpent*, 27.
  80. Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, 105.
  81. GK's *Orthodoxy* is not a systematic justification of faith by deductions but a series of "mental pictures" which culminate in a grand photo-montage of belief. Essentially, it tells the story, in nine enthralling chapter-essays, of how a skeptical humanist saw the scales fall from his eyes—his realization that what he had long believed, by reason and by intuition, was not as idiosyncratic or as novel as he had long thought, but was in fact contained, and contained much more beautifully and fully, in Christian "orthodoxy". *Orthodoxy* is the tale not of a conversion but of an *awakening*.
  82. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 18.
  83. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 19.
  84. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 29.
  85. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 49.
  86. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 80.
  87. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 210.
  88. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 261.
  89. Blake: "Man's perceptions are not bounded by organs of perception; he perceives more than sense (tho' ever so acute) can discover" ("The Marriage of Heaven and Hell").
  90. Bergson, *Creative Mind*, 35.
  91. Bergson, *Creative Mind*, 86-87.
  92. Bergson, *Creative Mind*, 105-106.
  93. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, x.
  94. Steiner, *Martin Heidegger*, 28.
  95. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 25.
  96. Grassi, *Heidegger and the Question*, 8.
  97. Cioran, *Anathemas*, 206.
  98. Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus* I, 5, ll. 232-3.
  99. Artaud, *Selected Writings*, 261.
  100. It is a trope in some forms of Mahayana Buddhism, especially Zen, that one must disobey *all* masters, in order to obey most fully: "If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him!"
  101. Silesius, "The Cherubic Wanderer," 268.
  102. David Luke, in speaking of Goethe, says that "[o]riginality is after all not the absence of models, but what one can make of one's models; it is the recognition of kinship and the capacity to transform; above all it is the refusal to imitate oneself" (Luke, in Goethe, *Selected Verse*, xix). Nietzsche: "Most intolerable, to be sure, and the horrible *par excellence* would be for me a life entirely devoid of habits, a life that would demand perpetual improvisation" (*Gay Science*, §237 [295])... Dionysius as well as Apollo.
  103. Paglia, *Vamps & Tramps*, 94.
  104. Paglia, *Vamps & Tramps*, 86.
  105. Paglia, *Vamps & Tramps*, 343.
  106. Miller, *New Polytheism*, 179.
  107. Miller, *New Polytheism*, ix.
  108. Steiner, *Martin Heidegger*, 101.
  109. Steiner, *Martin Heidegger*, 101.
  110. Falck, *Myth, Truth and Literature*, 103.
  111. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ* §122 [11].
  112. Steiner, *Martin Heidegger*, 106.
  113. Buber, *Eclipse of God*, 71.

114. Cioran, *Anathemas*, 108.  
 115. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ* §147 [34].  
 116. *Gospel of Thomas*, §113.  
 117. Nietzsche makes the following comment on Renan, author of a popular 19th-century *Vie de Jesus*,... “[Renan’s] words are so totally *antipodal* to my ears and habits that when I discovered them my immediate anger wrote beside them ‘*la niaiserie religieuse par excellence!*’ – until my subsequent anger actually began to like them, these words with their upside-down-truth! It is so pleasant, so distinguishing, to possess one’s own antipodes!” (*Beyond Good and Evil* §78 [48]).

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