

AESTHETICS OF ANALOGY

Universal analogy as a principle which underlies a variety of intellectual sciences in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance has been a topic for students of this period for a long time and in a variety of ways. The doctrine of correspondences, the levels of allegory, the art of memory, Neo-Platonism, the metaphysical conceit, the political theology of king and state, alchemy, astrology, and hermeticism all, in one way or another, reveal the endemic characteristics of asserting and explaining a symbolic and harmonious relationship which prevails among many things. The consequences of this phenomenon seem to be limitless, both for the culture in question and for those who choose to give some account of it.

To speak of this symbolic trait I have used, rather loosely, the term "aesthetics," which I want to mean something like a purely poetic rationale distinct from other practical or metaphysical ends to which poetry may seem to aspire. The aesthetic orientation of Renaissance art is as pronounced, certainly, as Renaissance doctrines of correspondence. These two factors often seem, I think, to contradict each other. Are the intellectual and imaginative schema of the period designed to celebrate their own ingenuity?

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Or do they have what we might ineffectually call more “legitimate” motives?

The question which is posed here is in many ways a torment of contemporary thought. Are symbolic forms transitive or intransitive? That is, do they pass over to an object, do they enter a world of orthodox action or meaning; or do they remain restricted to their own integrity as subject, meaningful only insofar as self-celebration has meaning. The morphological activities of modern intellectual sciences betray an ambivalent urge to represent the structural truth of language, objects, or experiences by bracketing special forms of facticity which are purged somehow from the debilitating need to project themselves into a prejudiced existential circumstance. This celebration of actuality is ambivalent in that the brackets tend to imply dehumanized forms, which is still presumably an intolerable idea. Intransitive pertinency is a painful suggestion for even the modern mind. Forms must have functions beyond mere formality. There is another kind of ambivalence as well, which has to do with the status of the reduced field under scrutiny. Does the technique of reduction, no matter what the topic or object of analysis, aim at a radical demystification of experience (which is a characteristic claim); or is the new intellectualism in fact a new mannerism, the generation of a baroque play-world under the guise of a utopia of the actual?

I shall not presume to answer this question, but merely to suggest that such a question draws our attention to the possibility that the morphological or structural activity may have a symbolic or aesthetic basis; and that the problem of the relationship between the form of a structural system and its function is a province of special dimensions for the Renaissance poet, who characteristically chooses to display rather than resolve the issue. Insofar as medieval and Renaissance intellectual sciences are reducible to a kind of morphology of symbolic relations or analogy, and thus to an aesthetic concept, it may be suggested that the Renaissance poet was capable of transforming this multitude of systems which rely on analogy into the single, all-inclusive idea of symbolic relation. This transformation may be thought of as a distillation of the aesthetic principle which underlies a variety of analogical set-ups, so that the result is not a colosseum of intellectual sciences related to each other by their dependence on some kind of correspondence

doctrine, but a singular form of “knowledge” operating within the limitless freedom of its potential for making analogies.

Equiparation is a term provided by medieval jurisprudence. Although its immediate application as an analogical procedure is quite technical, it is possible to make use of its major traits in generalizing on the widespread intellectual habit of universal analogy. The term in part refers to the license of the legal agent or agency. In this context it may be defined as the ability “of applying the substance of one thing to another thing.”¹ Such a doctrine allowed the jurist to make relationships among many apparently dissimilar factors, to construct a network of legal fictions which were all justified in some mysterious way by their accord with the supreme order of Law. Medieval jurisprudence exercised this power, for example, to bring together the Church, a city, and a maniac under the category of minor “because none of them could handle his, or its, own affairs, and therefore all were in need of a guardian.”² The power to invent these equalities or overlapping orbits and at the same time to claim a perfect correspondence between divinely derived Natural Law and the temporal science of law establishes a particular kind of relationship between the lawyer and Nature. The powers of equiparation are by implication mimetic in the ambiguous sense of creating legal fictions out of nothing, and of imitating a divinely ordained system of relationships. The jurisprudent could claim for himself a mimetic relation with the absolute form of Law, which in turn justified and sanctioned the making of “legal fictions.” In this medieval legal practice, two vital aesthetic ideas appear in muted form: An intellectual agency which claims to stand in a mimetic relationship

¹ E.H. Kantorowicz, in “The Sovereignty of the Artist: A Note on Legal Maxims and Renaissance Theories of Art,” included in *De Artibus Opuscula XL: Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky*, ed. Millard Meiss (New York, 1961), p. 276, quotes this definition from the *Glossa ordinaria* to the Decretals. For additional references to the technique of equiparation by the same author, see: “Mysteries of State: An Absolutist Concept and its Late Medieval Origins,” *The Harvard Theological Review*, 48 (1955), 81; “Kingship Under the Impact of Scientific Jurisprudence,” in *Twelfth-Century Europe and the Foundations of Modern Society*, edd. M. Clagett, G. Post, R. Reynolds (Madison, Wisc., 1961), p. 92; and *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, 1957), pp. 49, 52. Although seldom so called, the theme of equiparation runs through virtually the whole body of Kantorowicz' work.

² Kantorowicz, “The Sovereignty of the Artist,” in *De Artibus*, ed. Millard Meiss (New York, 1961), p. 276.

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with the absolute: and the establishment of a universal exchange of qualities and substances, invented *ex nihilo* but mediating between two orders of being.

Self-acclamation or an elaborate liturgy of praise based either on traditional vocabularies of sovereignty or on a more original rhetoric of heightened and exalted claims was by no means the sole property of medieval jurisprudence. We must also include the domains of church and state as practitioners of the art of equiparation by which both pope and king arrogated to themselves mysterious and universal powers, likewise mimetic in character. The possible current of influences among the political, ecclesiastical, and legal hierarchies is quite unclear. We may tentatively conclude that the three domains betray the need for sovereign claims over nature; claims that involve the universal relevance of their powers, a capacity for making equations or analogies where none seem to exist, and a final appeal to some kind of absolute to which their temporal powers stand in a mimetic relationship. We may also pretty safely conclude that the sovereign claims of the Church precede the other claims, although one of the most significant aspects of the art of equiparation is the sharing of honorifics and power claims among the domains.

On a very large scale the entire dynamic of humanism reveals equiparation at work in order to relate the orbits of classicism and Christianity. The reciprocal or reversible possibilities of this technique show themselves in the habit of christianizing the pagan while at the same time paganizing the Christian. Equally indicative is the equiparation of the Christian and the chivalric, which has immense literary consequences, as well as a political, ecclesiastical, and legal application. The appeal to quasi-chivalric traits by pope, king, and legislator is instructive regarding the manner in which these domains could be related to each other—horizontally, so to speak; and at the same time make a kind of vertical claim for special, transcendent powers.

These domains were often acclaimed as “knighthoods.” The jurist would be a lord overseeing the knightood of the law. The king would draw upon the rhetoric of chivalry to create the exalted atmosphere of a military-political knightood. The Church would adopt the language of field and castle to produce the style and prerogatives of an ecclesiastical knightood. The three

knighthoods of church, state, and law could all enclose their particular domains in the military-holy aura of chivalry.

I use the acclamation, "knighthood," here to illustrate the mode of equiparating certain special claims from one orbit of society to another. The historical situation of course is much more complex. The king could adopt the style and rationale of sacramentalism, as well as more rational concepts of law and justice. The Church, similarly, could abandon its sacred claims in favor of some of the rhetoric and arguments of the rational monarchy.³ And the jurist found it convenient to defend his sovereignty on the double base of holy and rational law. The most curious aspect of this phenomenon is that the use of the arts of equiparation to transfer sovereignty claims from one domain to another was in no way designed to fuse opposites into new wholes. The state adopted the rhetoric of the Church, rather, to dissociate itself from the ecclesiastical. Making the state "sacred" by an act of equiparation had the effect of establishing a new domain with its own kind of "holiness."⁴

We may now add with a fair degree of obviousness the domain of poetry, or the arts in general. The sovereignty of the artist and his art is characteristically presented in terms of a universal relevance, an ability to make connections between many things; and in terms of mimesis. These are accomplished by acts of equiparation, for there may be claimed a poetic law comparable to law

³ "Medieval statecraft and political theory vacillated between two extreme solutions to the *Imitatio Christi*: priest-kingship, and royal priesthood. Neither was a true solution, and the problem by its very nature could not be solved in the political sphere at all. The history of the mediaeval state is, to a great extent, the history of the inter-changes between royal and sacerdotal offices, of the mutual exchange of symbols and claims. To the extent that the idea of kingship became sacerdotal, priesthood became regal." E. H. Kantorowicz, *Laudes Regiae: A Study of Liturgical Acclamations and Mediaeval Ruler Worship*. University of California Publications in History, xxxiii (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1946), p. 112. See also, "Mysteries of State," *The Harvard Theological Review*, 48 (1955), 65-6.

⁴ "...The sacred character of the empire, and of the emperor himself, no longer drew its strength from the idea of the *christus domini*, from the altar, or from the Church, but it was a secular sacredness *sui iuris* and *sui generis* apart from the Church, a concept which eventually found its most eloquent interpreter in Dante and his vision of two Paradises, one imperial-terrestrial and the other ecclesiastical-celestial." E. H. Kantorowicz, "Kingship under the Impact of Scientific Jurisprudence," in *Twelfth Century Europe*, edd. G. Post, et. al. (Madison, 1961), p. 101.

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politically, ecclesiastically or juristically understood. This poetic law unfolds a network of relationships in nature, the book of God, and is accomplished by an agent creating fictions in accord with an ideal plan. The mysteries of church, state, and jurisprudence are complemented by or equiparated with the mystery of art.

A strong line of influence running between theories of jurisprudence and theories of art has been sketched in by Kantorowicz.⁵ His argument is largely based on the relationship that prevailed in the 13th and 14th centuries between humanism and jurisprudence. The intelligentsia was largely made up of students of law. The humanist tradition of restoring and maintaining classical texts was reinforced by the legal glossators' elaborate commentaries on and interpretations of the body of Roman law. Thus, as Kantorowicz points out, "an antiquity which was systematically applied to daily life and even enforced by the authority of the law made its first appearance within the circles of jurisprudence." In addition, Kantorowicz notes a marked resemblance between the law-nature problem in legal theory and the art-nature problem in poetic theory.

The question of how some kind of ideal order of law could be reproduced in or restored to the temporal sphere by means of fictions is linked directly to the question of how poetic fiction can be an imitation of or restorer of truth. Puttenham's remark in *The Art of English Poesie* that "art is an aid and coadjutor to nature, and a furtherer of her actions to good effect, or peradventure a means to supply her wants, by reinforcing the causes wherein she is impotent or defective,"⁶ is equally relevant to the defense of the law. And, finally, Kantorowicz observes that sovereignty claims in the domain of poetry are similar to those in the other knight-hoods. Among Sidney's more obvious acclamations of poetry in his *Apology*, is the horizontal equiparation of poetry with history and philosophy, characteristically employed to separate rather than relate poetry to these other branches of learning. Sidney saves his vertical hyperbole for the acclamation of the golden over the brazen world.

Thus, we see that the arts of equiparation are employed (1) to

⁵ In "The Sovereignty of the Artist," in *De Artibus Opuscula*, ed. Millard Meiss (New York, 1961), pp. 267-79.

⁶ *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G.G. Smith (London, 1904), Vol. I, p. 187.

transfer claims from one dignitary to another: pope, king, lawyer, poet—with no precedence necessarily implied; (2) to establish a universal system of relatedness among substances and modes of being which gives the dignitary in question a kind of magical power over nature; and (3) to identify sovereign powers as mimetic and not actual in relation to the absolute. This last point provides a significant dimension of uncertainty within the mechanism of equiparation, for if nature and her special agents merely imitate the true, they are of necessity imperfect. A “universal system of exchange,”⁷ which is what equiparation in fact is, must apparently remain content with being merely an elaborate model of the absolute, participating in it but separate from it.

The implication that equiparation is an intellectual game played with the universe conceived of as a puzzle-globe which may be taken apart and put back together in an infinity of ways is substantiated by the central role of language in playing the game. The essential requirement of rhetoric is always present. Equiparation can only succeed in its aims if its terminologies have a rhetorical sovereignty of their own. We may even claim that equiparation *is* a rhetorical idea. It not only makes a pure use of rhetoric in the sense of persuading its audiences to agree to complex hyperbolic claims, but it casts the very universe into a figurative shape by implying that truths can only be realized in the play of tropes. The agents pope, king, lawyer, poet, and the domains they oversee are all circumscribed by the sovereignty of the rhetoric which acclaims them. To whatever practical or metaphysical ends the techniques of this universal exchange may aspire, they require a foundation of hyperbole. Consider the whole body of the law as a moral encyclopedia comparable to *The Divine Comedy* or *The Faerie Queene*, each poetically conceived, for that is the sole method of revealing the inexhaustible symbolic connections between heaven and earth. That is, it is not merely that figures or tropes are employed to construct a system of universal analogy and to persuade its relevance; but that the system itself is founded on the concept of the figurative, on the potential of metaphor.

⁷ This phrase is used by Edgar Wind in the related Neoplatonic context of love as a principle of universal relationships. *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (London, 1958), p. 41.

Insofar as equiparation participates in the general idea of universal analogy, it exercises two familiar traits: the horizontal connections among all aspects of the order of nature; and the vertical connection of all of nature with a higher order. The practical and metaphysical extensions of this doctrine have been extensive, to say the least. But what about the aesthetic character of the doctrine? With what style, setting, and motive do we find this conception operating in all its symbolic and figurative richness; independent, as it were, from ulterior motive? Although in the ecclesiastical, political and legal domains the aesthetic mechanism often draws more attention to itself than to the job it is supposed to be doing, it is nevertheless clear that the use of the science of symbolism is aimed at something more than an illumination of an aesthetic principle.

I should like to suggest that the domain of the poetic appropriates for itself this latter task. The use of the aesthetic principle of analogy to design a world which sheds light on nothing except its underlying principle is, indeed, the sovereign claim of the poetic. It is free to claim as one of its prerogatives the invention of a symbolic design which serves no master but the symbolic; it has, as Sidney suggests, no external commitments to do otherwise. This reflexive, self-regarding trait of poetry is by no means unique in the Renaissance, but it is there very pronounced—and largely unacknowledged in criticism. I have implied that in the domain of poetry the aesthetic or the purely symbolic rationale of the work becomes detached from any practical or metaphysical objectives which may be arbitrarily involved. It is perhaps better to say that the aesthetic and the metaphysical become fused, or that we can no longer distinguish one from the other. Aims which have to do with man's harmony with God, with woman, with nature; or with distinguishing good and evil, true and false, the real and the apparent; or with the restoration of losses in an ideal society; or with human flaws which precipitate catastrophe; or with the celebration of ideal virtues—these aims often become fused with aesthetic questions, questions having to do with the mediation between the symbolic and the actual.

I am not simply saying that the Renaissance poet found the play and potential of tropes more interesting than other topics, or that he found manner more eloquent than matter. The point is

that the aesthetic question of how poetic trope and image connect themselves to objective or ideal reality is the poet's overriding myth, and it influences style, setting and motive. The theological, royal, and legal myths (to name only three) are superseded by the poetic myth, which does not of course exclude the poet from inquiring into those other domains, distilling from them their symbolic themes.

The world of tropes for the Renaissance poet operates, as Miss Rosemond Tuve has said, "to furnish many meanings—which are possible, not compulsory, suggested, not stated, uncountable, not limited. They are not even any longer under the poet's own control, except as he reins them in with the tiny threads of the cooperating words. All tropes give the reader his head in this fashion. But it is precisely because they open all these dangerous possibilities that metaphors are so powerful an aid... to suggesting the significance of appearance, to in-sight as compared with sight."⁸

The significance of appearance, of the poetic image which artificially intercedes between the known and the unknown, is a justification of art, a testament to the poet's verbal ingeniousness which allows metaphor to make relations among many things. The possibility that this "office" of the poet derived from somewhat less magical offices is suggested by Kantorowicz: "It was a cascading of capacities, beginning from the abilities and prerogatives conceded *ex officio* to the incumbent of the sovereign office of legislator, spiritual or secular, to the individual and purely human abilities and prerogatives which the poet, and eventually the artist at large, enjoyed, *ex ingenio*."⁹

Aesthetic questions which have to do with the symbolic offices of poet and poetry are given both dramatic and lyric expression in this period. Shakespearean Romance in general, although it may address itself to a variety of moral and metaphysical ends easily identified because of their conventional character, adopts a more pronounced symbolic rationale in style and setting than the other plays. The uncertainty of symbol, whether it imitates and clarifies the truth, or whether it remains a self-deception, is largely a motive in these plays, too. The art and nature question is every-

⁸ *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* (Chicago, 1961), p. 100.

⁹ E. H. Kantorowicz, "The Sovereignty of the Artist," in *De Artistibus Opuscula*, ed. Millard Meiss (New York, 1961), p. 277.

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where in evidence; explicitly in *The Winter's Tale*, in a variety of forms in *Pericles*. Confusion between the true and false, the sweet and foul abound in the latter play; but a fusion of artificial and natural elements eventually takes place under a magical aegis. Cerimon's remarks are representative:

I hold it ever
Virtue and cunning were endowments greater
Than nobleness and riches. Careless heirs
May the two latter darken and expend,
But immortality attends the former,
Making man a god. 'Tis known, I ever
Have studied physic, through which secret art,
By turning o'er authorities, I have,
Together with my practice, made familiar
To me and to my aid the blest infusions
That dwells vegetives, in metals, stones;
And I can speak of the disturbances
That Nature works, and of her cures...

These are the offices of the poet, *ex ingenio*, equiparated in a traditional manner with magical and scientific skills. As in Bacon, the poetic imagination "may at pleasure joyne that which Nature hath severed, sever that which Nature hath joyned, and so make unlawful matches and divorces of things."¹⁰ Unlawful from one perspective, but lawful from another, as Prospero, who was "rapt in secret studies" instead of running his state, makes clear. Prospero's brother arrogated to himself "the outward face of royalty, / With all prerogative, hence his ambition growing." For Prospero, "my library / Was dukedom enough." Both the revealing of the afflictions of nature and the curing of her diseases are claimed as offices of the poet. This kind of dramatic presentation tends to draw attention to a natural order which is fundamentally aesthetic; that is, dependent for its harmonies on the operation of the offices of the artist in his equiparated roles.

A non-dramatic inquiry into the offices of the poet is presented in Donne's *First Anniversarie* where the fragmentary and eccentric nature of the world is both asserted and overcome. Elizabeth

¹⁰ *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Joel E. Spingarn (Oxford, 1908), Vol. I, p. 5.

Drury, or more properly the imprecise “shee” of the poem, may be taken as the essential term in the whole symbolic rationale of the work. She is made to bear, rather arbitrarily, the burdens of cosmic order and disorder; the first in her living form and in the potential of her virtuous spirit; the second in her death and its lack of acknowledgment. So outrageous is the positive and negative rhetoric generated by this shee-idea that the result is gaudy imprecision.

This hyperbolic excess is intentional, it serves the purpose of drawing our attention to an aesthetic idea by defeating our expectations of seeing a great analogical structure put to some use. Extravagant metaphysical claims are made for “shee,” so extravagant as to recommend themselves as merely symbolic claims. Although the anatomy of the world is negative, it continually refers to “shee” as an organizing principle, the key to the restoration of a universal system of analogy, a muse of relationship still present in spiritual potential, although physically dead.

Her death hath taught us dearly that thou art
Corrupt and mortal in thy purest part.
Let no man say, the world itself being dead,
'Tis labour lost to have discovered
The world's infirmities, since there is none
Alive to study this dissection;
For there's a kind of world remaining still...

Donne's task is to revive this world, thus the motive for the anatomy which follows is positive; the poem reveals the absence of order as a prelude to its restoration. “The matter and the stuff of this, / Her virtue, and the form our practice is.” Shee and the poet work together, one providing the substance, the other the form of order. The work is thus set up as an exercise of the poet's office; a display of creative ingenuity whereby the operation of a symbolic rationale may again operate in the dead world.

But in this case, unlike non-poetic systems of universal exchange or analogy, the use of the science of symbolism is gratuitous, it serves only its own metaphorical ends—to enthrone a deity of symbolic wholeness. There is irony in the fact that Elizabeth Drury is not a goddess of analogy until Donne makes her one. That she is in many ways a very unlikely candidate draws greater at-

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tention to the poet's ingenious offices. An aesthetic principle is invented and then invited to perform in the world.

Trying to discover what "shee" is, is like trying to discover what *Moby Dick* is. The whale's metaphysical extensions are so vast and magnificent that at a certain point they seem to lose themselves in Melville's potential to invent them. Elizabeth Drury, like the whale, becomes an immense poetic figure which testifies not to the meanings of symbols but the poet's capacity to invent them.

The deepest flaw in the anatomy of the world is the separation of heaven and earth:

What artist now dares boast that he can bring
Heaven hither, or constellate anything,
So as the influence of those stars may be
Imprisoned in an herb, or charm, or tree...
The art is lost and correspondence too...

Herb, charm, and tree,—humble objects but with infusions so blest that the universe may be imprisoned there. Shee, too, is humble, but by the offices of the poet she may be the imprisonment of art and correspondence too. As Donne says, "incomprehensibleness" could not deter him "from thus trying to imprison her," a poetic act which ironically creates a symbolic rationale while at the same time denying that it is at work in the world. This ambiguity is I think an index of the uncertainty which surrounds the concept of metaphor for the Renaissance poet. The ordering possibilities of trope are limitless from an aesthetic standpoint; but from the standpoint of the actual, the world is not a closed form of symbolic relations—it is fragmented and eccentric.

What Donne is doing in *The First Anniversarie*, as I suggested earlier in speaking of the domain of poetry, is inquiring into the nature of poetic trope rather than using poetic trope for ends beyond its own domain. The poem, like the entire Renaissance doctrine of analogy, is based on the concept of the figurative; its relative powers are measured against the state of the world. While it is true that the Renaissance doctrine of analogy is a science of symbol, it is only in the domain of poetry that it is construed as such—distinct from the particular ends which tropes serve in the

other domains. Law, theology, politics are what Frye would call “existential projections” of an aesthetic notion, while poetry may be content to regard only itself.

The phrase “aesthetics of equiparation” should now have two connotations. First, that the mediaeval and Renaissance techniques of analogy, comparison, equation, fusion are based upon the aesthetic idea of temporal, artificial forms containing universal truths. And second, that the motive of Renaissance poetry is often involved not with the application of this idea but rather with reflecting upon it, laying out its boundaries, testing it against the world by a counterpoint of exile and return. The example of equiparation as an analogical procedure has been used here to illustrate how poetry can completely possess and isolate itself within an essentially aesthetic rationale and remain viable in contemplating itself and nothing else—understood that “nothing else” means “everything else” indiscriminately and intransitively.

What bearing does this conclusion have on the question raised earlier regarding the ambivalence surrounding the notion of “intransitive pertinency” in modern consciousness? A poetic world such as that found in Donne’s poem presents us with a system of rhetorical correspondences, outrageously focused in Elizabeth Drury. That is, it provides us with a map of purely aesthetic activity, reflexive rather than transitive. That this may not be a luxury appropriate only to the sphere of the poetic must remain at this point an unresolved question. But if systems of relationships are aesthetically founded, and all morphologies are systems of relationships, then the so-called reduction of objects and experiences to “actuality” by means of structural analysis may in fact be a procedure as occult as medieval equiparation. The brackets which are designed to separate the actual from extraneous fouling may be reinterpreted as creating a new arcanum, disarmingly called facticity. It recalls the Neoplatonic view of nature as the book of God, with Ficino as the morphologist of this vast language. Whatever the nature and value of the energies presently at work, it is difficult to avoid the knowledge that morphological procedures are founded on the aesthetic idea of multiple elements combined in some kind of association which is manifestly unintelligible but, to the instructed, latently coherent.