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For Joanna,
my dearly loved daughter and the cellist

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

used in the text

BGE   Friedrich Nietzsche. (1990). *Beyond Good and Evil* (R. J. Hollingdale, Trans., M. Tanner, Introd.). London: Penguin Books.

BT   Martin Heidegger. (1985). *Being and Time* (J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, Trans.). London: Basil Blackwell.

EB   Martin Heidegger. (1949). *Existence and Being* (W. Brock, Ed.). Chicago: Henry Regnery.

EH   Friedrich Nietzsche. (1979). *Ecce Homo* (R.J. Hollingdale, Trans.). London: Penguin Books.

NSOED   *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1993). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

"OWA"   Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in: *Poetry, Language, Thought.*

P   Algernon Charles Swinburne. (1972). *The Poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne* (6 Vols.). Reprinted from the Chatto & Windus 1904--1905 edition, London. New York: AMS Press.

PLT   Martin Heidegger. (1971). *Poetry, Language, Thought* (A. Hofstadter, Trans. and Ed.). New York: Harper &Row.

TI   Friedrich Nietzsche. (1990). *Twilight of the Idols. The Anti-Christ* (R. J. Hollingdale, Trans.). London: Penguin Books.

W&K   Woolford, J. & Karlin, D. (Eds.). (1991). *The poems of Browning.* 2 Vols. London and New York: Longman.

WP   Friedrich Nietzsche. (1968). *The Will to Power* (W. Kaufmann and R. Hollingdale, Trans.). New York: Vintage Press.

Z   Friedrich Nietzsche. (1969). *Thus spoke Zarathustra* (R. J. Hollingdale, Trans.). London: Penguin Books.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Used in the text

PREFACE

> World is never an object that stands before us and can be seen.
> World is the ever non-objective to which we are subject as long as
> the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported
> into Being.
>
> Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*

> Language tells us: to be a human being is to be on the earth as a
> mortal, to dwell, doing the "building" that belongs to dwelling: cul-
> tivating growing things, constructing things that are built, and do-
> ing all this in the context of mortals who, living on earth and cher-
> ishing it, look to the sky and to the gods to find the measure of their
> dwelling. If man's being is dwelling, and if man look to the way the
> world fits together to find the measure by which he can determine
> his dwelling life, then man must dwell poetically.
>
> Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*

The principal aim of this study is the uncovering of the discourse of power in the poetry of two Victorian poets: Robert Browning (1812-1889) and Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909). The discourse has been rendered in the title of the book as "a cry over the abyss," the phrase signifying both a Derridean "plunge into the abysm" (*mise-en-abyme*), or black hole, of mere text, and a Nietzschean existential dance of a tight-rope dancer over the abyss.

The research problem is the rediscovery and reinterpretation of elements of philosophy, religion and history in the English Victorian poetry, as exemplified by the literary output of Browning and Swinburne, through uncovering what Martin Heidegger calls *dinglicher Unterbau* (the thingly foundation of human existence), and their coming to terms with consciousness of the de-centred man deposed from the privileged position in the world in which Renaissance humanism once placed him. Thus, man's new philosophy has to be thing's new philosophy. In Heidegger's words (1971, pp. 167-8): "What in the thing is thingly? What is the thing in itself? We shall not reach the thing in itself until our thinking has first reached the thing as a thing". And also (1971, p. 178): "Thinging, the thing stays the united four of

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earth, sky, divinities and mortals, in the simple onefold of their self-unified fourfold."

Focusing on Browning and Swinburne, the study covers the period from the beginnings of Victorian poetry (Browning) through the decadence of *fin de siècle* into pre-modernism (Swinburne), in which their philosophy of anti-totalitarianism, their obsession with power and law, "the mastering me/God" (e.g. in Browning's "Reverie" or Swinburne's "Ode to Mazzini," the line itself coming from Hopkins' "The Wreck of the Deutschland"), seem to be the elements in a long evolutionary path of philosophical thinking called ahumanism. Its essence rests apparently on Nietzsche's reflection on the perspectival character of human perception and history as Eternal Recurrence of the same (*die ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen*).

Another common element, prominent in the literary output of both Browning and Swinburne, is their alleged paganism conceived basically as a drift from a mainstream understanding of Christian faith or, in many instances particularly noticeable in Swinburne, as open blasphemy and atheism. Robert Browning evidently seeks assurance in a seemingly illogical and paradoxical attainment of faith through doubt ("Bishop Blougram's Apology"). This is also very much the case of Friedrich Nietzsche who categorically stated in *Ecce Homo* that "only *when you have all denied me will I return to you...*," thus signifying strengthening of faith – however understood – by doubting it. Similar examples can also be found in the seventeenth-century English metaphysical poetry.

Swinburne, on the other hand, was notorious for his atheism – which he himself called antitheism – and even though he accepted the idea of a great creative force or principle in general, yet he decidedly rejected the concept of an anthropomorphic deity, seeing in God "the supreme evil" (*Atalanta in Calydon*).

It is, indeed, a rare thing to associate these two Victorians (Browning is undoubtedly closer to Alfred Lord Tennyson, 1809-1892, and Swinburne to the precursor of Modernism, Gerald Manley Hopkins, 1844-1889), but the reason for the choice is the susceptibility of their poetry to both phenomenological and deconstructive analysis in a number of respects, which reveals their complex approach to a theology of morals, aesthetics and love, and also because of their attempt to re-discover man's place in the world as proposed by the nineteenth-century Western philosophers, Nietzsche, among others. What seems of significant importance in the poets' works is their ability to declare the Nietzschean war on "old" values (man-oriented, inauthentic discourse), and thus to make an aggressive, powerful gesture that enables them to listen to the authentic Voice of Earth. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to show that it is possible to talk about English

Victorian poetry, as exemplified by Browning and Swinburne, in terms of the process of the Revaluation of All Values, inaugurated by Friedrich Nietzsche and later continued by contemporary critical theory. The discourse of power, force and violence will prove that man is but a tiny element in the texture of the world and only through being in and with the landscape around him, is he able to discover/re-discover his thingly nature and then interpret it.

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INTRODUCTION

O Human Imagination, O Divine Body I have Crucified,
I have turned my back upon thee into the Wastes of Moral Law
There Babylon is Builded in the Waste, founded in Human desolation...

William Blake, *Jerusalem*

Robert Browning was born in 1812 at Camberwell in South London. Largely educated at home, Browning read widely among the books of his father's library. At 16 he began to study at the newly established London University, but returned home after a short time. He wrote verse from an early age, taking as his hero, Shelley, who influenced much of his work and prompted him to adopt vegetarian and atheist principles for a time. In 1833, he published anonymously *Pauline: A Fragment of a Confession*. It was briefly noticed in a few journals, but more important was the reaction of John Stuart Mill, who noted in the young poet "a more intense and morbid self-consciousness than ever knew in any human being" (quoted in Ryals 1993, p. 3). Mill's remark has often been considered by his biographers, William DeVane, Eleanor Cook, Roma King, to name just a few, influential in directing Browning toward the dramatic creation of character so typical of his poetry.

After a visit to Italy (1838), Browning published one of his most important and widely discussed poems, *Sordello* (1840), which concentrated on "the incidents in the development of a soul" as evinced in the life of the poet who was Dante's contemporary. From 1841 to 1846, Browning's work was published by Moxon as pamphlets in a series bearing a general title of *Bells and Pomegranates*. These included *Pipa Passes* (1841), *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845) and others. Many of Browning's best-known poems date from this early period: in *Dramatic Lyrics*, for instance, "My Last Duchess" was published along with "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" and "The Pied Piper of Hamerlin"; *Dramatic Romances* included, among other titles, "How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix," "Home Thoughts from Abroad" and "The Flight of the Duchess."

The next important step in Browning's literary career was the publication in 1855 of *Men and Women* which, even though it received grudging reviews, was enthusiastically read by quite a few poets, Dante Gabriel Rossetti among others. The collection *Men and Women* included "Fra Lippo Lippi," "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" and "Bishop Blougram's Apology." *Dramatis Personae* (1864) marked Browning's shift of interest from the Italian themes into English ones, and *The Ring and the Book*, published in monthly instalments from November 1868 to February 1869, brought the poet wide popularity.

Other poems published in the next stage of his literary career included: *Balaustion's Adventure* (1871), the first extended incursion into the field of classical mythology, *Fifine at the Fair* (1872), a study in erotic psychology, and *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country* (1873) in which Browning revealed his fascination with crime and the mentality of criminals. *The Inn Album* (1875) was another psychological study of villainy, and to the same year belongs also *Aristophane's Apology*, a defence of Browning's own poetic faith and practice. The year 1887 saw the publication of *Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in their Day* in which the poet presented seven major interests in his life: philosophy, history, poetry, painting, politics, Greek and music. Robert Browning died in 1889 as a literary celebrity and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

The other Victorian poet with whom this study will deal, Algernon Charles Swinburne, was born in London in 1837, and was educated at Eton and Oxford, which he left without a degree. Very early Swinburne showed interest in classical and Romance languages, as well as in the intricacies of poetic form. Among influences that shaped his future writings were such individualists as Mazzini, Hugo, Baudelaire, Rossetti and, later on, the infamous marquis de Sade.

Swinburne started his literary career as a playwright, publishing in 1860 two plays largely modelled on Jacobean drama, *The Queen Mother* and *Rosamund*, in which he revealed, for the first time, his favourite concept of love as a combination of pain and pleasure, violence and torment. Next, he published one of his best-known pieces, very controversial, *Atalanta in Calydon*, where the enunciation of his philosophy of rebellion culminates in indictment of "the supreme evil, God." But it was the year 1866 that raised him to notoriety with the publication of *Poems and Ballads* (which included such titles as "Garden of Proserpine," "Hymn to Proserpine" and "Laus Veneris," among others). The poems of this volume, with their themes of moral, spiritual and political rebellion, with their sadistic, blasphemous and sexually explicit subject matter, infuriated the prudish Victorian bourgeois society. With all their moral horrors and anarchy, *Poems and Ballads* constitute a

break with Victorian literary tradition and signal an advent of decadent poetics in English literature. Among Swinburne's vast poetic output, noteworthy are the subsequent series of *Poems and Ballads*, the second one (1878), touched greatly by his apparent paganism, and the third one (1889), as well as *Songs of the Springtides* and *Studies in Song*. He died in 1909.

Algernon Charles Swinburne, a rebellious spirit of the end of Victorian era, a spokesman of the new currents in English poetry, an experimenter with the poetic form and language, an advocate of art for art's sake, a great admirer of *Fleurs du Mal* and personal freedom, the "apostle of despair," as John Morley, *The Sunday Review* critic, described him in the 4 August 1866 issue, was largely misunderstood by his contemporaries since he did not fit the pattern. But was there a unique pattern of Victorian poetry? Were it at all possible to characterise in a nutshell such a vast period in English literary history as Victorianism, we would take the risk and say that its main feature was *absence*, the absence from the topicality of contemporary life and escape into obscurity of the past. There are numerous reasons accounting for that, reasons which may be broadly classified as philosophical, religious, scientific and social. In his book, *Victorian People and Ideas*, Richard Altick (1973, pp. 232-3) describes the effect Darwinism exerted on Victorian literary sensibility:

> To the literary imagination, the effect of Darwinism and of the new science generally was manifold and deep-reaching. It brought an awareness of mechanism to chill the warm sense of fruitful growth that permeated the romantic concept of cosmic process; it meant a drastic revision of man's view of his own nature and of his place in the universe, always a central topic of literature and now a far grimmer one – for different reasons – than had been current at any time since the Middle Ages. Above all, fulfilling the prescient fears of some romantics, science eliminated much of the poetic element from life, substituting the prosaic for the mysterious, the impersonal for the personal, the material for the impalpable. The romantic faith in the powers of the mind, broadly conceived, to command all knowledge gave way to an oppressive sense that the human intelligence, such as it was, had to content itself with a very limited comprehension of the universe in which it had its moments of ill-adapted existence. The only human certainties were that everything, in ethics, religion, history, experience, was relative, and that absolutes, if they did exist, were beyond man's grasp; and that since evolution was the basic law of life, all was flux. This was the mood in which a considerable body of mid- and late-Victorian literature was written. It formed the background of Swinburne's and Meredith's paganism, of the art for art's sake movement, of George Eliot's and Thomas Hardy's fiction.
>
> Despite science's sponsorship of ideas which eroded Christian faith, its prestige as an intellectual frame of reference steadily increased. Regarded as it was with veneration and hope [...], it finally made unbelief respectable. One's personal rejection of Christianity need no longer be kept to oneself or admitted in confidence to a few intimates. Doubt, frankly confessed, even made one a more interesting human being, as Browning's Bishop Blougram demonstrated in his own person.

Relativism, the crisis of faith, collapse of Christian dogmas, demystification of *God's revealed word*, fall of absolute truths, called for a fundamental

revision of all the foundations on which the Western world had relied for almost two thousand years. Thus, when in the second half of the 19th century Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) was constructing a project of sanitising Western philosophy, be it called the *Revaluation of All Values*, going *Beyond Good and Evil*, or *the Eternal Recurrence*, what was essentially at stake was a new health (*Genesung*) linked with the ability to listen to what was forced to vibrate and resonate, and which later found its trace, not quite accidentally, in Heideggerian hermeneutics and his idea of listening to the Voice of Earth. To attempt this one had to be able to come to terms with one's own consciousness of the de-centred man deposed from his privileged position in the world where Renaissance humanism once placed him. Thus, the new philosophy's task was to interrupt the centuries-long tradition that inscribed reality in the centralised system regulated by mental and emotional needs and measures of man. In practice it meant a business of finding an "opening" or, putting it more adequately, of being able to perform a powerful, aggressive gesture that would make possible the rupture of the shell of inauthentic discourse and inauthentic existence (as opposed to the authentic Being with which Heidegger's hermeneutic ontology is preoccupied. For more details, see Heidegger 1961 and 1962).

Victorian poetry or, more precisely, the poetry of Robert Browning and Algernon Charles Swinburne which the present study attempts to discuss, is that kind of discourse which allows an investigation into the nature of time, earth and things, and/or reinterpretations of man's position in the world and the relation of his thinking to the authentic Being as formulated by Martin Heidegger (1971, p. 10):

> To think being [...] means to respond to the appeal of its presence, in a response that stems from and releases itself toward the appeal. But this means to exist as a human being in authentic relationship as mortal to other mortals, to earth and sky, to the divinities present or absent, to things and plants and animals; it means, to let each of these be – to let it presence in openness, in the full appropriateness of its nature – and to hold oneself open to its being, recognising it and responding to it appropriately in one's own being, the way in which one oneself goes on, lives; and then, perhaps, in this ongoing life one may hear the call of the language that speaks of the being of all these beings and respond to it in a mortal language that speaks of what it hears.

In his times, Robert Browning was notorious for his apparent obscurity and radicalism. In *Irish Quarterly Review*, VI, 1856, for instance, we read: "Obscurity is the evil genius that is working the ruin of this poet: Browning is, preeminently, the King of Darkness." More importantly, however, his obscurity and radicalism found their issue in his critique of the traditional humanism. This resulted in his endeavouring to reconstruct, through meditation on the landscape surrounding him, be it natural or mental, and careful

observation of the things revealing themselves in it, an original unity between man and the world, the unity that had existed before the authoritarian power of the written/spoken word forced it into the realm of inauthenticity, thus revealing its existential emptiness. This is what he says in "Fra Lippo Lippi":

However, you're my man, you've seen the world
The beauty and the wonder and the power,
The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,
Changes, surprises, – and God made it all!
– For what? Do you feel thankful, ay or no [.]

With Swinburne the discourse of power assumes more moral and aesthetic value in the form of a theology of love. For instance, "Laus Veneris" shows the immortal agony of a man cast down from fearful hope to fearless despair – believing in Christ and bound to Venus – desirous of penitential pain and damned to joyless pleasure. The central motif of the poetry of both writers is a reinforcement of the temporal perspective in which man's history is but a line on canvas or a thread in tapestry in the process of becoming. It is precisely in this process that both poets, although in different ways, go through the unconcealment of what Heidegger calls "Nothing" (*Nichts*) to the authentic Being only to discover man's thingly nature in the face of landscape around them.

PART ONE

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

DISCOURSE ON THE DISCOURSE OF POWER:
IN SEARCH OF A THEORY

'Discourse is not life: its time is not your time; in it you will not be reconciled to death; you may have killed God beneath the weight of all that you have said; but don't imagine that, with all that you are saying, you will make a man that will live longer than he.'

Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*

Discourse is existentially equiprimordial with state-of-mind and understanding. The intelligibility of something has always been articulated even before there is any appropriative interpretation of it. Discourse is the Articulation of intelligibility.

Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*

Among much discussed concepts that constitute the rhetoric and substance of contemporary literary criticism is the concept of discourse [*le discours, die Rede*]. Like ideology and the non-referential account of signification, the notion of discourse has been imported into literary studies from non-literary disciplines. While ideology derives from Marxism, and speculations about the sign from structural and poststructural theory, the notion of discourse, closely associated with the notions of power and knowledge, has taken its beginning from what has been called "human sciences" [*les sciences humaines*] comprising such disciplines as psychology, sociology, history and cultural studies, and is attributed mainly to the work of Michel Foucault (cf. Lentricchia & McLaughlin 1990, p. 53 or Freadman and Miller 1992, p. 166).

Foucault himself, however, offered different accounts of discourse at different times, from the simplest definition: "For discourse is merely representation" (Foucault 1970) to a non-definition: "The description of the events of discourse poses a quite different question: how is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another" (Foucault 1972). Some theorists, Norris (*Discourse of Poetry*, 1993), Freadman and Miller (1992), Nead (1988), among

others, formulate a thesis that Foucault, throughout his long academic career, has not worked out a clear, operational definition, or sets of definitions, of what he has meant by this fundamental term for the history (or to use a favourite word from his glossary – *archéologie*) of Western systems of thought. What is more, Nead claims that he was inconsistent in the use of the term even within a single work, his much acclaimed three-volume *The History of Sexuality* (*La Volonté de savoir*) (see Lynda Nead 1988, p. 4).

In probably the most important book for the analysis of the meaning of discourse ever written by him, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) (*L'Archéologie du savoir*, 1969), Michel Foucault put to use the notion of discourses to denote "large groups of statements" based on the unity of "various strategic possibilities that permit the activation of incompatible themes or, again, the establishment of the same theme in different groups of statement" (1972, p. 37). As Jeremy Hawthorn (1994, p. 49) aptly argues, these "strategic possibilities" are

> comparable to a limited extent to one possible usage of the term REGISTER in Linguistics. Thus for Foucault at the given moment in the history of, say, France, there will be a particular discourse of medicine: a set of rules and CONVENTIONS and SYSTEMS of MEDIATION and transposition which govern the way illness and treatment are talked about, when, where, and by whom.

Thus, the definition, or we should say rather one of the usages of the term *register* as quoted above, seems to be commensurate enough also in the context of the discourse we are going to disclose in the subsequent chapters of this study — the discourse of power in nineteenth-century Victorian England: a certain set, or sets, of statements, concepts, ideas that are correlated, transformed, interwoven to reflect the way/ways such phenomena were comprehended, talked about and finally presented in the poetry of, first, Robert Browning, and then Algernon Charles Swinburne.

Our obviously fragmentary and, to a great extent, inadequate definition has certain parallels with what Foucault calls a *discursive formation*, a term he uses virtually interchangeably with *discourse* (1972, p. 38):

> Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a *discursive formation*.

What is essentially at stake in a handful of ideas concerning discourse formulated at different times by Foucault is that discourse basically denotes talk. *Collins English Dictionary* (Third Edition Updated 1994, p. 449) provides

us with a whole range of meanings of "discourse," the most obvious, as it seems, being "verbal communication; talk; conversation" (sense 1). Also the subsequent use (sense 2) – "a formal treatment of a subject in speech or writing, such as a sermon or dissertation" – corresponds largely to a commonsensical understanding of the term, and suits our purposes well (cf. the title of this study). The use of the noun "discourse" to denote "(a) talk; (a) conversation" is referred to by *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (*NSOED* 1993, p. 668) as "now literary or archaic". Such a prescriptive evaluation, paradoxically, is in line with what Jacques Derrida has had to offer in his tackling of the problem, but we shall address this issue later in this chapter. However, what is worth pointing out is that *NSOED* also defines "discourse" as "conversational *power*" [my emphasis] thus suggesting an existence of some sort of an organic link between discourse and power.

Nonetheless, there is still a question remaining unanswered whether all the possibilities inherent in the term discourse have been exhausted. Is it at all possible to come up with a convincing definition of the concept of discourse? Can we "identify" discourse in terms of a system (any system) of knowledge?

In his essay "Discourse," published in *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (Lentricchia & McLaughlin 1990, p. 53), Paul de Bové throws the discussion of discourse into the realm of 'non-being' by claiming that

> we can no longer easily ask such questions as, What is discourse? or What does discourse mean? In other words, an essay like the present one not only does not but *cannot* provide definitions, nor can it answer what come down to essentializing questions about the "meaning" or "identity" of some "concept" named "discourse".

And further on (p. 53):

> to ask them and to force an answer would be, in advance, hopelessly to prejudice the case against understanding the function of "discourse" either in its poststructuralist context or in its existence as an *institutionalized system for the production of knowledge in regulated language* [emphasis mine]. To be more precise, poststructuralists hold that these essentializing questions emerge from the very interpretative models of thought which the new focus on "discourse" [by Foucault] as a material practice aims to examine and trace.

This formalistic denial of any "essentializing meaning" of discourse shown above simultaneously emphasises its functional aspect. To understand the idea of discourse correctly as it is used in contemporary literary theory and practice, we have to attempt to position it within other analytic and theoretical concepts that exist as transformations of one another. The aim of discourse viewed functionally is, as it seems, to seek a linkage between knowledge, power and institutions as they intersect in the functions of systems of thought.

In Foucaultean poststructuralism these three constitutive elements of discourse, i.e. knowledge, power and social institutions, play a fundamental role in defining what is and what is not discourse. It has been a common thing to believe, at least within a broadly understood realm of literary studies, that everything is discourse, which, consequently, has led to a false assumption that everything is fictive since everything discursive is basically fictive. Even Foucault himself has been quoted as saying: "I am fully aware that I have never written anything other than fictions" (in Morris and Patton 1979, p. 74). Therefore, it seems indispensable in this place to clarify at least two fundamental premises from which stems discourse power theory. The first one is that we do not have access to independently existing reality, which, in turn, implies that discourse is not a medium to reflect the world faithfully as it stands before us and *is*. The second premise is that we cannot get outside of discourse and access anything beyond it. A corollary that follows is of a methodological character: discourse is all we can talk about or know (cf. Derrida's famous phrase *il n'y a pas de hors-texte* from his *De la grammatologie* or Freadman & Miller 1992, p. 162).

Thus, as has been stated before, knowledge, or what we know, is one of the key notions in Foucaultean discourse theory. Many theorists outside of Foucault's circle, however, have held knowledge to denote what is viewed to be a commonsensical understanding of the term, namely, the state of knowing or, more precisely, the state humans attain after discovering some (objective) truths about reality. There is no doubting that there is a false thread in that commonsense assertion for the simple reason that truth (or truths) cannot be conceived objectively, and remain very much part of the domain of relativity and subjectivity. Even if we refer to a dictionary (Collins 1994, p. 860), we shall not find anything much different from our position: "the facts, feelings or experiences known by a person or group of people" (sense 1), or: "awareness, consciousness, or familiarity gained by experience or learning" (sense 3). All these definitions presuppose knowledge to be something internal to the agent (the "knower"), whereas what Foucaultean poststructural discourse theory claims is that knowledge is externally given in a form (structured set) of "statements" or "large groups of statements" (we notice here a striking resemblance between what Foucault understands by discursive formation and knowledge in the above sense).

It must be admitted, however, that these "statements" do not need to be necessarily either true or false in an objective sense; they are considered to be perspectives characteristic of a given society, social group or institution (cf. functional aim of discourse). Consequently, no form of knowledge can be objective, and there is a definite distinction between reality (an outside world, an object) and discourse about knowledge of this reality. Thus, inevi-

tably, we are faced with a question about the conditions for discourse to be objectively true in relationships with reality and knowledge about this reality. Freadman and Miller (1992, p. 172) state conclusively that

> as soon as the discourse power theorist introduces the notion of reality at some level, and as soon as he/she distinguishes between reality and discourse about knowledge of that reality, then objective truth and falsehood necessarily enter the picture. That is, discourse will be objectively true if the world is as the discourse says it is; conversely it will be objectively false where the world is not as it is.

Obviously enough, it is not a defining condition of discourse to be objectively true; in a broadly understood discourse of poetry, for instance, it is quite natural to formulate statements that are by definition objectively false ("I, by loves limbecke, am the grave/of all, that's nothing." – John Donne, "A Nocturnall Upon S. Lucies Day, Being the Shortest Day"). The only necessary condition of discourse is that it possess meaning:

> The importance of this distinction [between meaning and truth] is that just as the notion of an objectively existing world, so the notion of meaning brings with it the notion of subject. This is because there is no such thing as meaning *per se*; there can only ever be meaning for some person or persons. Meaning, in other words, is inherently *subjective* [emphasis mine]: unlike trees and grass, it could not exist in a world without subjects. It follows, therefore, that the attempt to characterise discourse, and therefore meaning, as something wholly objective is mistaken. (Freadman and Miller, 1992, p. 173)

The second constitutive element in the Foucaultean model of discourse is *power*. However, since more attention will be devoted to this concept in subsequent chapters, we shall restrict ourselves only to a few introductory remarks and definitions at this stage.

There have been a lot of controversies in regard to the notion of power in literary theory, especially among those who somehow misunderstood or misinterpreted Foucault's classic statement: "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault 1978, p. 93). Some discourse power theorists (e.g. Said 1983) went to extremes by claiming that everything is power or that everything arises from power. In one of his major publications, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983), Edward W. Said, the most profound follower of Foucault in the U.S.A., emphasises the pressures (the "power") of reality which constrain the possibility of knowledge. Exploring the problematic of texts' "worldliness," he ultimately reaches a conclusion that all texts are "worldly" (referential) and they result from and are reflected by "ownership, authority, power and the imposition of force". Interestingly enough, Said argues that, although the power of the critic does not assume the form of an authority over the text, his/her role is to produce "powerful discourse".

Notwithstanding Foucault's (and Said's) claim of the "omnipresence of power" (Foucault 1978), our use of this master term in the "discourse of power" we are putting forward will decidedly be more restrictive. Says Foucault (1978, p. 92):

> It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system.

Our definition, however, will have much to do with the power of positive production, with the ability to open up possibilities of creative action, with a Nietzschean feeling of power which is achieved by tracing back something un*known* to something *known*, something from the realm of disquiet, anxiety and fear to something that can be accessed, tackled, got hold of, explained. Therefore, in the light of the above, our discourse of power is entering the stage where it is becoming a discourse of power to access power; we shall return to this point later on in subsequent chapters.

In other words, the power we shall be talking about will be the power to raise and put forth questions, the most fundamental questions of human existence, and, at the same time, it will be the power enabling us to formulate answers (although we are aware, following Heidegger's words contained in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* [English translation 1959], that the ability to construct questions is far more important than the ability to actually answer them). As Bové (p. 54) has it:

> the power of positive production: that is, a kind of power that generates certain kinds of questions, placed within systems that legitimate, support, and answer these questions; a kind of power that, in the process, includes within its systems all those it produces as agents capable of acting within them.

In our further discourse of(f)/on power (or with power on/off, to make use of an inevitable pun), we shall be dealing with this notion extensively not only in highly abstract contexts (such as the one above), but also, to a lesser extent, in the ones that would suggest denotations such as force (physical, mental or other), domination, aggression, repression or violence. It should be noted, however, that the notion of, for instance, aggression will basically be referred to as man's (the poet's/poets') ability to perform powerful (and also violent) gestures leading to perforation of the shell of inauthentic existence. Thus, aggression will be transgression, trespassing of someone else's territory, someone else's cell(f) in which he/she is confined. It will also be an ability to break free from a prison house of language, a leg-

acy of two and half millennia of logocenticism, and to endeavour a return to pre-Socratic, *pre-logical* discourse.

However, what needs emphasis at this preliminary point is that force, like power in Foucault, constitutes in Martin Heidegger's ontology a positive, constructive rather than destructive, element. In the process of thinking things through, the "through" assumes a force of *penetration* (one cannot fail to notice some underlying sexual overtones, later reminiscent of Algernon Charles Swinburne and Jacques Derrida, among others), and in effect every inanimate and animate presence becomes a clearing in which Being (*Sein*) manifests itself.

The discourse of power, or violence – as one may have it, will then be generated by gestures like these: the movement of pen(cil/is) on the body of paper/on the paper of body, a coming out of an unconcealment into the light, clearing (*Lichtung*), a (mad)man's cry or tight-rope dance. These and other Derridean, Heideggerian, Foucaultean and Nietzschean categories concerning violence and philosophy, such as, to add one more after a part of the title of Nietzsche's eleventh book,[1] "how to philosophise with a hammer" ("*wie man mit dem Hammer philosophiert*"), will be discussed at length in Chapter 3.

The last element in the functional definition of discourse modelled on Foucaultean poststructuralism as we have provided earlier are institutions as they intersect along with knowledge and power in the systems of thought. However, what is at stake in our discussion is not so much discourses of the institutions that produce them, as sociologists claim. Rather, and we agree here with what literary theorists assert, it is the discourses that produce institutions, and therefore those discourses will come into the focus of our attention. As argued by Foucault (see his *Histoire de la Folie*, 1961, translated into English as *Madness and Civilization. A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, 1967), those institutions only sustain and distribute discourses by and thanks to which they have been generated. Thus, we are not going to talk about institutions that have power in a very ordinary sense: in the sense that they are able to exert and exercise it over others, sometimes by coercion, sometimes by physical repression, persecution and psychological oppression (governments, prisons, schools, etc.). Rather, we are going to talk about discourses that make such forms of power possible; we mean here, among other things, the discourses that produced, created, and generated a new man – Nietzsche's *Übermensch* of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* or Aristotle's "magnanimous" man of *Nicomachaean Ethics* – the man of excess, of surplus of power. We are again referring to Paul A. Bové (in Lentricchia & McLaughlin 1990, p. 58) who pointedly remarks that

> [p]ower must not be thought of as negative, as repression, domination, or inhibition. On the contrary, it must always be seen as "a making possible," as an opening up of fields in

which certain kinds of action and production are brought about. As power disperses itself, it opens up specific fields of possibility; it constitutes entire domains of action, knowledge, and social being by shaping the institutions and disciplines in which, for the most part, we largely make ourselves.

To repeat the main point again: discourse produces knowledge about humans and their society and it is basically power, among other things, that makes possible certain kinds of questions and statements (or groups of statements). Discourses – if we consider different kinds of them characteristic of the institution[s] that [have been] produced [by] them – are discontinuous by nature, that is to say, they do not have either a specific, decisive beginning nor end. Their discontinuity so defined presupposes, in turn, their centrelessness, lack of origin, anonymity. In *L'Ordre du discours*, Foucault asserts categorically that

[d]iscourses must be treated as discontinuous practices which intersect and are sometimes juxtaposed, but which also know nothing of one another or exclude one another.[2]

Thus, we can conclusively state that discourse and the "realities" it constructs (hence the constructivism of a postmodernist approach) remain inherently anonymous, i.e. no given perspective depends upon the viewpoint of any actually existing person or group of people ("practices which [...] know nothing of one another"). That, of course, also excludes an ideological interpretation of discourse: discourse is not the product of a particular class (or class conflicts as Marxism may have it); it is rather sceptical and relativistic as are the 'truths' it constructs within the frames of disciplinary structures.

In Althusserian Marxism, however, discourse is viewed as a linguistic manifestation of ideology serving the interests of particular social classes or groups of people (a community – not unrelated individuals or any individual person). Based on the premise that ideology is that force which strategically obscures access to real states of affairs (or "realities" discourse constructs), which results in incapability of ideological texts of offering authentic representation of reality, Freadman and Miller (1992, p. 3) assert that literary texts

like any linguistic object, [...] can and do possess another kind of power: the power to construct or replicate accounts of the world that serve the interests of ascendant social classes or groups. This amounts to a kind of linguistic power in the service of political power, and the language which operates in this socially reproductive fashion (some claim that *all* language operates thus) is termed 'discourse'.

On this account, "ideologised" literature, that is to say, literature as an ideological category, ceases to be an object of literary theory and criticism and becomes its adversary. What is worth noting in Marxist notion of dis-

course, however, is the contention that language is (re)productive and as such is referred to as discourse.

And now we are arriving at a significant and consequential point in our considerations on discourse: since, as poststructuralists claim, it works to produce knowledge in language, and is, according to (Althusserian) Marxists, the language which operates in socially reproductive fashion, language therefore is what has essentially been understood by discourse in contemporary literary theory (theories). Although in numerous texts (Bové 1990, Freadman and Miller 1992 or Norris 1993) these two notions are treated as identical, Easthope (1983), in his analysis of a model of poetic discourse, postulates bringing out a difference between the two. He argues that (1983, p. 8)

Linguistics, the science which takes language as its object, can show how an utterance takes its place in the system of language at levels up to and including the sentence. It cannot show how and why one sentence connects with another into a cohesive whole: this is a matter of discourse.

In his conclusive statement we read:

Discourse, then, is a term which specifies the way the sentences form a consecutive order, take part in a whole which is homogeneous as well as heterogeneous. And just as sentences join together in discourse to make up an individual text, so texts themselves join others in a larger discourse.

Unmistakably, Easthope's understanding of theory is strongly grounded in what may be referred to as mainstream structuralist literary criticism. His definition of discourse relies heavily on the theoretical assumptions worked out by T. S. Eliot and articulated in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1966), where he describes the relation between tradition and the individual poem. Despite his claims to poststructuralism, Easthope's approach remains predominantly structuralist in constructing theoretical models of discourse based on the principle of its presupposed *order* which secures meaning, along with an assumption of a structural, vertical hierarchy, from a sentence, through an individual text, then texts to finally a larger discourse.

However structuralist his approach may seem, we have to agree with Easthope's general assertion (after Mukařovsky 1933) that, like language, "poetry is not to be treated as a discourse which refers to a reality" (1983, p. 17). Our conviction is that all texts, however defined, be they "poetic," "prosaic" or other (there is no fundamental difference between *genres* as texts, even authors are texts – to repeat Derrida's origin of catechism), do not have a referential character, at least as claimed by (de)constructivist antihumanist theory, nor can be defined in terms of any kind of reflectability. What they do have, however, is the ability to construct – but not to reflect or

describe – reality, or to be more precise, many "realities". Therefore, naturally, language, likewise texts and discourse, are denied representational power. We follow Freadman and Miller (1992, pp. 2-3) in arguing that

> language does not reflect or refer to some independently existing reality; rather, it somehow 'constructs' that reality. Since they are made of language, literary texts may participate in this construction of reality, but given that there is no reality independent of the activity of construction, they cannot, once again, possess authentic *representational power* [my emphasis].

We cannot thus simply claim that, as we have mentioned at the outset of this chapter, "discourse is mere representation" or that it possesses "representational power." The kind of power it does possess is basically the power deeply rooted in social relations, since, as many theorists before and after Foucault argued, the largest form of power is civil society and the state (see for instance Smart 1983, pp. 119-20). *In Key Concepts in Cultural Theory* (1999), Peter Sedgwick summarises Foucault's position in regard to the above and the idea of language as the key notion within his model of discourse (p. 117):

> On Foucault's view, various social practices and institutions (for example, those of education and politics, religion and the law) are both constituted by and situated within forms of discourse (that is, ways of speaking about the world of social experience). A discourse, on this view, is a means of both producing and organising meaning within a social context. **Language** is thus a key notion within this view, for it is language which embodies discourses. As such, a discourse constitutes a 'discursive formation', i.e. discourses are conceived of as signifying ways of systematically organising human experience of the social world in language and thereby constituting modes of knowledge.

If we look, therefore, at language not from the perspective of "linguistics, the science that takes language as its object" as suggested by Easthope, but from the wider perspective of what is called "human sciences," we shall undoubtedly come to a conclusion that language has become in recent decades a model for all understanding, having taken the place of all-encompassing reason. To a considerable extent this has been due to a failure of Kantian and post-Kantian idealism which took for granted man as the transcendental subject of knowledge and thus as both source and judge of his cognitive powers. The collapse and rejection of rationalism and later on of "subjective" and "objective" idealism as self-deceiving and self-deluding practices – since it is impossible to escape the relativity of knowledge by appealing to absolute, "disinterested" reason – gave rise to a renewed interest in language as a cognitive tool – we think here, for example, of Martin Heidegger's etymology on which he founded his phenomenology and ontology, Charles Peirce's semiology, or Jacques Derrida's grammatology.

Michel Foucault in *Les Mots et les Choses. Une archeologie des sciences humaines* (1966), translated into English as *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1970), formulated a general contention that language constitutes the very condition and ultimate horizon – the limit-point or condition of possibility of human knowledge. This contention, which remained for quite a long time a kind of motto or generally upheld view (to say the least) among poststructuralists, was fervently attacked by, among others, Christopher Norris (1993). Commenting upon the adherents of this view, among whom were also Symbolist poets (this view will be of particular importance in our analysis of Swinburne's poetry), and the effects of *mise-en-abyme* (literally, to throw into the abyss, denoting recurring internal duplication of images, the technique often used by experimental writers), Norris concludes:

> If indeed it is the case that all truth-claims and subject-positions are inscribed within a pre-existent discourse [he identifies here, after poststructuralists, discourse with language, R.W.], then clearly one cannot "step back" from that discourse in order to criticise its "meaning, its conditions, and its goals."[3]

It is noteworthy that in one of his last interviews with Paul Rabinow before his premature death, Foucault gave convincing evidence of a departure from the stronghold of his view that the dissolution of anthropocentric discourse has been manifested by the advent of language as the ultimate limit-point for thought by conceding the irreducibility of "thought" to "language": "The work of philosophical and historical reflection is put back into the field of the work of thought only on condition that one clearly grasps problematization not as an arrangement of representations but as a work of thought" (Interview 390, quoted in Greenfield 1993, p. 275). His latest doctrine, owing much to Nietzsche, referred to language as "the site of unending – if endlessly 'decentred' – struggles for power."

Language, the problematic of which seems to be of paramount importance for our further discussion on poetry, has been given a lot of attention by one of the most profound twentieth-century philosophers and thinkers (who humbly called himself *Sprachphilosoph* and *Kulturkritiker*) Martin Heidegger. George Steiner (1978, pp. 12-3) as early as in 1978 predicted Heidegger's enormous influence on contemporary literary theory, especially in terms of relations between thinking (*Denken*), poetry (*Dichtung*) and language (*Sprache*):

> Even more arrestingly, Heidegger's doctrines on the nature of language and poetry have marked literary theory in Germany, in France, in the United States [and obviously in other English-speaking countries today, R.W.], where the current debate over the 'nature

of a literary text', over the dialectical interactions between poet, reader, language are thoroughly Heideggerian.

It comes quite naturally, therefore, to acknowledge (paraphrasing Heidegger) that there is no other way to language than *in*, *through*, and *with* poetry: poetry is itself the primordial source of language and art.

However, we are constantly and repeatedly reminded, when reading Heidegger, that language is not, as it has been held for thousands of years, "the expression, produced by men, of their feelings and the world view that guides them" (Heidegger 1971, p. 196). What is more, "words and language are not wrappings in which things are packed for the commerce of those who write and speak. It is in words and language that things first come into being and are" (from *Zur Seinsfrage*, 1955, quoted in Steiner 1978, p. 41).

Out of Heidegger's numerous definitions and *non*definitions of language, and consequently of poetry and art in general, that he spelt out in the pre-war period of his philosophical life (though published after the war), the most meaningful are those contained in "The Origin of the Work of Art" (*Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, 1950), available in the collection *Poetry, Language, Thought* (hereafter cited as *PLT*). Contrary to what some structuralists (e.g. Widdowson 1975 or Coulthard 1977) claimed, much later, that language and with it discourse is a matter of communication, Heidegger (*PLT*, p. 73) asserts that

language is not only and not primarily an audible and written expression of what is to be communicated. It not only puts forth in words and statements what is overtly and covertly intended to be communicated; language alone brings what is, as something that is, into the Open for the first time. Where there is no language, as in the being of stone, plant, and animal, there is also no openness of what is, and consequently no openness either of that which is not and of the empty.

What should in the first place be emphasised in this quotation is the ontological character of language: it is *through* and *in* language (again stress is on penetration, but also one cannot avoid some "sacramental" associations) that Being reveals, discloses itself – comes out from an unconcealment – and lets itself be seen in the light (*Lichtung*) for the first time. Most importantly, this act of unconcealing has a character of primordial establishing, inaugural *naming* (pp. 73-4):

Language, by naming beings for the first time, first brings beings to word and to appearance. Only this naming nominates beings *to* their being *from out of* their being. Such saying is a projecting of the clearing, in which announcement is made of what it is that beings come into the Open *as*. Projecting is the release of a throw by which unconcealedness submits and infuses itself into what is as such. This projective announcement forthwith becomes a renunciation of all the dim confusion in which what is veils and withdraws itself.

Henceforth, Heidegger holds the view that language is essentially and primordially an act of naming, calling forth what has not been called yet; in other words, bringing closer to nearness what has previously been *un*called, *un*named, *un*brought to light. This "brings us closer" to Heidegger's often-quoted contention from "Language" (*Die Sprache*) that "Die Sprache spricht" – "language speaks" (*PLT*, p. 191), which he clarifies by saying that language speaks *in* and *through* man, and man speaks only as he responds to language.

Heidegger's conception of language, so different from what (post)structuralists claim, proved susceptible to criticism raised by some of them, notably Paul de Man, who changed the sentence "Die Sprache spricht" to read "Die Sprache verspricht (sich)" – by which he tried to render the idea that "language necessarily misleads, undoes or betrays itself to the extent that no intention can entirely govern its meaning or effects" (de Man 1979, p. 227). Also Jacques Derrida seriously questioned, not without however admitting certain indebtedness to him, Heidegger's metaphysical, post-theological phonocentrism – the primacy of the spoken over the written word – a challenge Derrida articulated particularly strenuously in *Of Grammatology* (*De la Grammatologie*, 1967) and *Writing and Difference* (*L'écriture et la différence*, 1967).

As regards discourse, Heidegger confirms in *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*, translated into English in 1962) our preliminary thesis that discourse denotes *talk* and is an existential foundation of language (p. 161):

> The existential-ontological foundation of language is discourse or talk [...]. *Discourse is existentially equiprimordial with state of mind or understanding* [...]. It underlines both interpretation and assertion.

Discourse, as specifically human phenomenon ("*existentially equiprimordial with state of mind and understanding*"), has been granted a significantly high status in Heidegger's ontology (we remember that it is in and through language that Being reveals itself in disclosedness, and the existential-ontological foundation of language is discourse, as stated above). As mentioned in one of this chapter's epigraphs, "discourse is the Articulation of intelligibility," and thus it is the basis for interpretation and assertion, two most cardinal intellectual activities of humans. Characteristically, he repeats in the same paragraph his argument on the connection between discourse and Being, paraphrasing it only slightly by designating discourse as "worldly" (p. 161):

> If discourse, as the Articulation of the intelligibility of the "there," is a primordial *existentiale* of disclosedness, and if disclosedness is primarily constituted by Being-in-the-world [Dasein, defined in the other place as, for instance, the inquirers into Being, in other

words – us, R.W.], then discourse too must have essentially a kind of Being which is specifically *worldly*.

What is basically at stake here is that discourse is "worldly" (possesses a "worldly" kind of Being) because it is an essential part of man's Being-in-the-world. "Worldly," therefore, denotes a state of belonging to the world, the world of Dasein [Being-there], which is patently and fundamentally *Being-there-in-the-world*. "Worldly" is thus the worldly of the world into which Being has been thrown and is part of it. Discourse is worldly means that it is characteristic of Dasein's *Being-in-the-world*, or in other words, (essential) part of man's life (in the world) is discourse, his ability to talk, which is as important a faculty, and specific for his Being, as reason (state-of-mind) and understanding.

Heidegger finishes off his argument by reiterating that "[t]he intelligibility of Being-in-the-world – an intelligibility which goes with a state-of-mind – *expresses itself as discourse*" (p. 161). The phrase "expresses itself" [spricht sich ... aus] is an intricate one, especially as far as its translation is concerned. Bearing in mind Heidegger's classic axiom "Die Sprache spricht" – language speaks – we would rather understand it as "speaks itself out" or at least as "expresses itself" (which, on the other hand, would signal some kind of inner force or *pressure* on part of "the intelligibility of Being-in-the-world" in its disclosedness, in its coming-out-of-concealment). This remark of ours is of particular significance especially in the context of Heidegger's insistence on Being's movement from wit*hin* to with*out*, emergence *from*, coming *out*, etc. Very frequently what in Heidegger is "being spoken *out*" is taken (or rather *mis*taken) for a pure verbalism, a rhetoric figure, an *expression* of something that is commonly, and erroneously, associated with words as "wrappings for things". Obviously, this is not only due to some kind of conscious misinterpretation of Heidegger's thought or unavoidable misreading (in Derrida's *expression*, "reading is misreading"), the difficulty lies here also, or perhaps first of all, in the impossibility of rendering Heidegger's highly abstract notions in (good) English. Consider this: "Die Hinausgesprochenheit der Rede ist die Sprache" (ibid.), which has been translated (by Macquarrie and Robinson, *Being and Time*, 1962) as "[t]he way in which discourse gets expressed is language," which, on the one hand, does not sound particularly well for someone who is not familiar with Heidegger's thought, but, on the other hand, is decidedly better than "the state of getting-spoken-out-of discourse is language," which is closer to (Heidegger's) truth.

Finally, Heidegger offers us a definition of discourse that concludes his argument in the part of *Sein und Zeit* devoted to discourse and language (p. 161):

> Discourse is existentially language, because that entity whose disclosedness it Articulates according to significations, has, as its kind of Being, Being-in-the-world, – a Being which has been thrown and submitted to the 'world'.

While reading Heidegger ("On Derrida Reading Heidegger Reading Nietzsche"), one cannot fail to notice a profound change, or turn (*Kehre*), his thinking underwent in the period marked by publication of *Sein und Zeit* (1927) and the publications of the second half of the 1930s, where a departure from "pure" ontology toward philosophy of language can clearly be seen.

In "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry" (1936), available in *Existence and Being* (1949), Heidegger declares that "Poetry is the foundation which suggests history" (*EB*, p. 283), which he later, in 1950 in "The Origin of the Work of Art" – "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes" being only a slightly revised version of the 1935/1936 lecture given in Freiburg and Zurich, reformulated to mean that poetry is the source of all art and language: "Art is history in the essential sense that it grounds history" ("OWA," p. 77).

Since history is a burden (its boundaries and methods deaden our vitality), he calls for its de-struction (*Destruktion*) as part of his attempt to revitalise, re-new, history, history of ontology in particular, by, as one might put it, creatively preserving it, i.e. getting rid of those elements that are unnecessary, obstructive, and preserving the ones that are progressive, that carry light, truth with them, that allow Being to shine in its unconcealment. It is worth noting in passing that Heidegger uses the word *Destruktion*, which should be rendered as "de-struction," not "destruction" for which the German has *Zerstörung*.

In *Phenomenology and Deconstruction* (1991, p. 5), Robert Denoon Cumming brings out similarities and differences between, most importantly, Heidegger's phenomenology and Derrida's deconstruction, arguing that

> what Heidegger is undertaking vis-à-vis history of philosophy is its *Destruktion*. Derrida has allowed his undertaking to be characterized in a similar fashion as "deconstruction." This has become the better-known term. In both the cases of Heidegger and Derrida the procedure has emerged as the history of philosophy reaches its end, though it is also in some sense the procedure by which this history is being brought to its end.

Thus, Heidegger was, in a true sense of the word, the first "deconstructivist," in contemporary times, of tradition and history, notably the history of ontology as articulated in *Being and Time* (see p. 44), and also, as viewed from the perspective of literary studies, the history and theory of literature and the study of language. Obviously, we do not mean here "linguistics" as a branch of science but rather the study of language as literature, a notion parallel to Richard Rorty's "philosophy-as-literature."

Destruktion, the word Heidegger uses throughout the argument presented *in Being and Time*, should not, however, be mistaken for "destruction" or even Derridean "deconstruction".[4] For Heidegger, *Destruktion* is that kind of positive (as opposed to negative) force and power to shake off unnecessary burden that hinders any creative growing of *Wissenschaft* (*knowledge* in a broad sense), blocks off access to genuine, authentic sources in which Truth (*aletheia*) originates and from which it emerges to the light (*Lichtung*), and stands to be seen and heard like a tree, wind or sea.

Thus, *Destruktion*, as mentioned above, is "*de*-struction" or rather "*de*-structuring" – that kind of structuring, re-structuring or building (*bauen*) which re-claims those elements of yesterday's knowledge (or wisdom, as in Nietzsche's *Gaia Scienza* – *Joyful Wisdom* or *Gay Science*), that remain topical and useful for today. As a result, Heidegger's *Destruktion* in the sense of "build(ing)" (*bauen*) is, as he himself characterises it in *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1982, p. 23), a "deconstruction" (*Abbau*). However, the German term *Abbau* – which is also worth noting – is translated into English usually as "dismantling" or "breakdown" – the terms that have obviously different connotations. We have to stress once again that the tradition Heidegger's philosophy "deconstructs" is not in any way similar to the tradition of phonocentrism and transcendental metaphysics Derrida's grammatology dismantles. But in both Derrida and Heidegger, it is looking for *a* way – not *the* way, or *any* way but a way, a path back to the foundation of Being and Truth, a country path through the wood, conceptualised in the notion of *Holzwege*, and also in *Feldweg, Unterweg* or *Wegmarken*. Hence, we have in Heideggerian philosophy a constant move to etymologising and uprooting in an attempt to return to a "well-spring of language" to reveal authentic intentions of human discourse. This procedure, so often employed in all his writings but probably best exposed in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, aims at revealing the power (*Macht*) that lies inside words that speak (we bear in mind that it is primordially language that speaks, not man).

Power, in the Heideggerian model of language, will be then that kind of force that reveals itself from the inside of words in the process of simultaneous disclosure of meaning from the concealment of words. Thus we may argue that by returning to the roots of words we are in fact returning to the original source of meaning, to Truth (*aletheia*), and the role that is attributed to man in this process is to *hear* meaning disclose itself. In other words, language as such speaks *in* and *through* man, and by going to "well-springs of language" we are in fact realising authentic intentions of human discourse, that is to say, bringing out the truth of Being from the concealment, from the darkness of forgetfulness into the light of revelation, of knowledge ("enlightenment"). As Steiner has it (1978, pp. 14-5):

Already in *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger etymologizes. The simple word, the antique vulgate will serve precisely because it contains (according to Heidegger) the greatest charge of initial and valid human perception. Thus the old and plain words are the richest in sense. It is we who have forgotten their fundamental incisiveness and existential witness. By pondering intensely and with a sort of vehement probing, the etymology and early history of a word, the thinker can compel it to yield its formidable quantum of illumination and energy.

The procedure of etymologising is the procedure of excavation, an arduous and painstaking going deep into individual syllables, words and phrases in quest for meaning. This, of course, does not mean that meaning is established once and for good, and, in result, the thinker's (poet's, critic's) task is to recover, retrieve it completely in its primitive, original form. Meaning, long-buried and eroded through centuries of transformations and transfigurations, language's wear and tear, use and abuse (Heidegger in *Zur Seinsfrage*: "language in general is worn out and used up"), is not readily accessible. Thus it is exactly through etymologising (Heidegger), gathering of archives (Foucault's archaeology) or study of ancient words (Browning) that meaning discloses itself in words in its most primal and radical sense.

The kind of methodology of inquiry Heidegger proposes calls for radical changes in language of argumentation. Since Socratic time, Western discourse has been based on the principle of *logos*, i.e. thinking established and grounded on God's revealed word, the consequence of which has been the centuries-long tradition of speaking and writing in terms of metaphysics and transcendence. Heidegger sees in dominant doctrines of Western thought, such as Platonic and Kantian idealism, Leibnizian determinism and Hegelian dialectic, as well as in Cartesian subjectivity and Nietzschean voluntarism, traps for language. The fundamental rule governing all post-Socratic (philosophic) discourse and understanding has been to proceed from the abstract to the real, from the mobile to the unmoving, from the sensory to the purely intelligible. Heidegger asserts, then, that the constraining conventions of Western metaphysical argument render the language available to him inadequate to his demands. Thus, speaking in *Identity and Difference* (1969) of his grand project of overcoming metaphysics, Heidegger points out one yet fundamental difficulty standing in the way to his goal (p. 73):

That difficulty lies in language. Our Western languages are languages of metaphysical thinking, each in its own way. It must remain an open question whether the nature of Western languages is in itself marked with the exclusive brand of metaphysics, and thus marked permanently by *onto-theo-logic* [emphasis mine], or whether these languages offer other possibilities of utterance – and that means at the same time of a telling silence.

The onto-theo-logical bias in Western thinking Heidegger is talking about is a decisive factor in philosophy's inability to construct a plausible

theory or theories that would describe both the knowing and the knower without making any kind of transcendental reference(s). So, what is at stake in doing away with metaphysical inhibitions is to stop talking (discoursing) in terms, for instance, of ideas and concepts (Platonism), "I think" and "I believe" (Cartesianism) or "want" and "will" (Nietzscheanism). The next step toward new philosophy (theory) would be to start searching/re-searching a language (again, *one* of many languages, but not just *any* one) that will overcome the vocabulary, the grammar, the semantic implications and constraining conventions of Western onto-theo-logical argument.

One of the possibilities of *a*metaphysical (as opposed to metaphysical) discourse is a return to and restoration of pre-Socratic tradition of discourse, and that is why Heidegger reaches for poetry of, on the one hand, Anaximander, Heraclites and Permenides, and on the other, the German-language poets, most notably, Hölderlin, Trakl and Rilke, discerning in their poetry an embodiment of his discursive principles.

Similarly, in Browning we can trace some serious attempts on his part to revive language (discourse) of poetry by plunging into obscurity of ancient words, which brought him a notorious reputation among the contemporary critics (*Irish Quarterly Review*, VI 1856) of "the King of Darkness" – the charge vigorously defended by Algernon Charles Swinburne in one of his critical essays[5] (interestingly enough, Heidegger would also bear a somewhat deprecating "title" of "the secret king of thought," see Steiner 1978, p. 14). Browning's idea was, however, to make "word pregnant with thing" (in Preface to *Agamemnon*), which he achieves, in Hillis Miller's opinion (1975, p. 118), by

> the plastic re-creation of the appearances of a scene, after the manner of Goethe or Keats, as in the deliberately classical frieze in the "Parleying with Gerard de Lairesse," where Browning is trying to show that he can, if he wants, be as lucid and sculptural as the Greek or Roman poets. More often he is not satisfied with such a distant vision of a scene. He wants the reader to feel what he describes as if it were part of his own body, and to achieve this he must appeal to the more intimate senses of taste, smell, and touch, and to the kinaesthetic sense whereby we make sympathetic muscular movements in response to the motion of things.

Browning's discourse, "pregnant with thing," is both rough and thick – filled with characters caught in the process of self-creation. Their certain shapelessness of form, diversity of the spoken idiom and multiplicity of consonant-cluster words seem to dominate his "heavy" language (pp. 118-9):

> All the ways in which Browning conveys his sense of being at the center of unformed matter are also used, with appropriate modifications, to express his experiences when he places himself at the inferior of particular forms. The pervasive qualities of Browning's

poetry are roughness and thickness. There are two opposite, yet related, causes for this texture. It expresses the shapeless bubbling chaos. It also expresses the substantial solidity of realized forms. [...] It is by imitation of the roughness of a thing that one has most chance to get inside it. Things are not made of smooth appearances, but of the dense inner core which is best approached through heavy language.

There is yet another possibility of discourse: you can either keep talking on end (Heideggerian *Viel-sprechen*) or maintain "a telling silence" – silence also "talks" even though no words are uttered, providing that you have something to say, that you potentially have words at your disposal. This kind of discourse has been elaborated and then formulated by Heidegger in *Being and Time* (p. 165):

Keeping silent is another essential possibility of discourse, and it has the same existential foundation. In talking with one another, the person who keeps silent can 'make one understand' (that is, he can develop an understanding), and he can do so more authentically than the person who is never short of words. Speaking at length [Viel-sprechen] about something does not offer the slightest guarantee that thereby understanding is advanced. On the contrary, talking extensively about something, covers it up and brings what is understood to a sham clarity – the unintelligibility of the trivial. But to keep silent does not mean to be dumb. On the contrary, if a man is dumb, he still has a tendency to 'speak.' [...] He who never says anything cannot keep silent at any given moment. Keeping silent authentically is possible only in genuine discoursing. To be able to keep silent, Dasein must have something to say – that is, it must have at its disposal an authentic and rich disclosedness of itself.

To conclude this chapter in which we attempted to discourse on various models of discourse in search of a theory, we refer to Easthope (1983, pp. 17-8):

The account of discourse proposed by this book [*Poetry as Discourse*] is intended to apply to all discourses. However, the theory is especially appropriate for the analysis of poetry since a poetic discourse is distinguishable from other, non-poetic discourses by the way it accords precedence to the signifier. To theorize poetry as a discourse entails that attention will not be focused on individual texts or even several texts grouped as the work of a single author. Instead, texts and passages will be looked at in terms of the discourse they each participate in and exemplify. *Poetry as Discourse* aims to be a work of *formalism* rather than *contentism*. It is written in the belief that poetry always occurs as a specific material discourse. Accordingly, the more closely analysis is directed at signifier (rather than the signified) and at the level of discourse (rather than that of the single text), the more likely it is to produce a systematic understanding and accurate knowledge of what it discusses.

In the discourse that we are proposing in this book (or we should rather say, in this *meta*discourse, like in *meta*language), we are going to treat *all* discourses of power equally, that is to say, that even though our particular attention will be concentrated on the texts of Robert Browning and Algernon Charles Swinburne at the level of discourse (as Easthope argues), other

discourses, relevant in direct or indirect way to the problem under scrutiny, especially the discourses of literary theory and criticism, philosophy of language, human sciences and others, will find space here. We do agree, however, that "texts and passages will be looked at in terms of the discourse they each participate in and exemplify," in our context – the discourse of power. The names of Browning and Swinburne will be employed in this collection of essays, after Heidegger, first of all for "inaugural naming" – making things (beings) "be-come" or "come-to-be" on these pages. Their texts, discourses, will help us uncover the kind of thinking of and writing about concepts (or just simply "things") characteristic of their *time* rather than specifically of their *names*.

CHAPTER TWO

MICHEL FOUCAULT AND THE POWER MODEL: THE DISCOURSE OF POWER, FORCE AND VIOLENCE

> Discourse has to be seen as the violence we do to things, or in any case as a practice which we impose upon them; and it is within that practice that events in discourse find the principle of their regularity.
>
> Michel Foucault, *L'Ordre du discours*

The previous chapter was, in the first place, an attempt to define discourse. In this one our task is far more multifarious. Based on the assumption (which is also one of the conclusions arrived at in the previous chapter) that discourse is involved in *power*, this chapter will therefore deal primarily with the notion of power and the categories assigned to it, as well as the notions with which power has traditionally been associated, such as oppression, repression, struggle or war. We are going to set off by discussing one of the main Foucaultean categories of power – violence. In so doing, we shall try to show that power and violence, in a non-oppressive sense, are intrinsically connected and serve to describe the relations of forces that we are to disclose in the textual analysis in the subsequent chapters.

In the previous chapter we arrived at the general conclusion that it is impossible, at least in the Foucaultean model, to talk about discourse without talking about power. Our point of departure will be an assertion, after Foucault (1980), that power is "neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered, but rather exercised, and that it only exists in action" (p. 89). This assertion, which runs counter to a historically understood notion of power as a "divine gift," as a sovereign's power over his/her subjects, is significant for our discussion for several reasons. First of all, it indicates a fundamental methodological approach that is to prevail in contemporary human sciences: nothing is "given," nothing is revealed (at best it "reveals" itself, emerges from

the concealment, as in Heidegger), nothing is lost therefore cannot be "recovered" (again, rather "dis-covered" or "un-covered"). What is at stake here, as it seems, is the general contention (Nietzschean, Derridean and also Foucaultean) of a lack of "origin," "beginning," "centre," a kind of "pre-source" of power from which it can be delivered, "given," to a recipient, be it a king or state.

The next issue in the above assertion is that power is "exercised," which means that our primary concern is no longer to define things but rather try to come forth with the *how* of them, so, as Foucault puts it, we should be concerned with the functioning of power rather than with its ontology.

Lastly, what Foucault says about power's being conditioned by its mobility ("it only exists in action") is a clear legacy of Nietzsche and constitutes part of the "manifesto" of the generation he voiced in his preface to the English edition of the *Anti-Oedipus* by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1984, p. xii):

Withdraw allegiance from the old categories of the Negative (law limit, castration, lack, lacuna), which Western thought has so long held sacred as a form of power and an access to reality. Prefer what is positive and multiple: difference over uniformity, flows over unities, mobile arrangements over systems. Believe that what is productive is not sedentary but nomadic.

Being nomadic, mobile, in action, as opposed to being sedentary, is what appealed to Nietzsche's imagination who, in *Twilight of the Idols*, in response to Flaubert's contention "On ne peut penser et écrire qu'assis" (one can think and write only when sitting) vociferates triumphantly: "Now I have you, nihilist!", and declares: "Assiduity (*das Sitzfleisch*) is the sin against the holy spirit. Only ideas won by walking have any value" (*TI*, "Maxims and Arrows," 34).

In Nietzsche, the apotheosis of walking had a very practical explanation: when fit and free from painful headaches which kept him in bed for most of his adult life, he used to walk up to eight hours a day, which in turn was his recipe for health and the only prescribed medicine and effective remedy. Yet, this is obviously only part of a larger picture: both Nietzsche and Foucault see in mobility an element of a new dynamic, energetic, active system which, in fact, is *not* a system. Later joined by Derrida, they attacked violently the corrupt Western dogma of the Negative (Foucault), nihilism and decadence (Nietzsche) and metaphysics (Derrida), offering instead positivity and productivity, multiplicity and difference, mobility and dispersion.

Their dislike for unities and uniformities, systems and structures should be viewed in a larger perspective as an attempt to free discourse of the limits imposed by conventional sciences and logocentrism, by hierarchies and

structures. Elsewhere, when discussing the exercise of power and its relation to knowledge, Foucault remarked sarcastically on the university hierarchy (1980, p. 52):

> The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power. The university hierarchy is only the most visible, the most sclerotic and least dangerous form of this phenomenon. One has to be really naive to imagine that the effects of power linked to knowledge have their culmination in university hierarchies. Diffused, entrenched and dangerous, they operate in other places than in the person of the old professor.

What Foucault proposes (to a great extent following Nietzsche) is a struggle, a war: knowledge versus the effects of the power of the scientific discourse, knowledge versus the institutions that produce scientific discourse. In the same lecture, he outlines the military strategy of the intellectual combat (p. 87):

> Our task [...] will be to expose and specify the issue at stake in this opposition, this struggle, this insurrection of knowledges against the institutions and against effects of the knowledge and power that invests scientific discourse.

The terminology he employs in this and the majority of other texts, such as "struggle" and "insurrection against the institutions," evoke instantly some military associations. Interestingly enough, although he flatly denied a conscious application of leftist rhetoric in his discourse, Foucault openly acknowledged some affinity with the military and juridico-political terminology. In his opinion, juridico-politico-economico-military notions form part of an administration (again, a politico-bureaucratic term) of knowledge. Hence, such terms as "territory," the area controlled by a certain kind of power, "region," again, the military area (derived from *regere*, to command), "province," a conquered territory (from *vincere*, to win) and also "field" (battlefield) very frequently crop up in his writings. Further, we have the discursive notions which, though not directly bound with the military, occupy a "strategic position" in Foucault's administration of knowledge: "displacement," "domain" or "horizon," to name just a few. The function of these notions in the "politics of knowledge," to borrow another term from Foucault's vocabulary, is to *disseminate* the effects of power and here Foucault is amazingly close in his strategy to Derridean dissemination of meaning in the textual practice. The warlike, combative, strategic notions reflect and shape, at the same time, the power relations designed by them, becoming, as Foucault puts it, "an indication of how the military and the administration actually come to inscribe themselves both on a material soil and within forms of discourse" (1989, p. 69).

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The other fundamental assertion, as formulated by Foucault in his analysis of power, is that "power is not primarily the maintenance and re-production of economic relations, but is above all a relation of force" (1980, p. 89). This assertion, again, is significant for at least two reasons: firstly, because it rejects the economic (thus political and ideological) definition of power, and secondly, because it formulates the first positive and the most universal definition of power in the non-economic sense: power is a relation of force. Therefore, power in Foucault and, as we shall later see, in Nietz-sche as well, should be basically understood as a relation between opposing forces, or to say the same thing the other way round, *every relation between forces is a power relation.*

Gilles Deleuze, about whom Foucault (1977, p. 165) has once said flatter-ingly: "Perhaps one day this century will be known as Deleuzian," elabo-rated the Foucaultean concept of power in *Foucault* (1988), one of his less publicised books in the English-speaking world. He states in it decisively that force, as one of the categories of power, is never singular and always exists in relation with other forces. Thus, he concludes, any force is a rela-tion, which means that any force is already power by the very fact of being a power relation.

This apparently tautological statement, so characteristic of the meta-physical way of thinking of Martin Heidegger, is clarified by a further com-ment, which brings out the difference between power and force, namely, that force has no other object or subject than other force, and no other Being than that of relation. In this context, violence appears to be, according to De-leuze (and Foucault), a *"concomitance or consequence of force"* (p. 70), but, characteristically, is not an element of it. The basic difference between vio-lence and force is that violence, in the Foucaultean power scheme, "acts on specific bodies, objects or beings whose form it destroys or changes, while force has no other object than that of other forces" (p. 70). Violence, then, is not identical either with power or force though, as we have already ob-served, violence is a consequence of force.

What seems to be of crucial importance here is the assertion that vio-lence "destroys or changes" the form of "specific bodies, objects or beings." Again, "destroy," "destruction" may suggest some negative connotations, but it is not always the case, as we have argued in the previous chapter in regard to Heidegger's *Destruktion.* Intellectual violence destroys in order, as it were, to build, or rather to re-build, re-construct, re-novate. And that is probably why it is in proximity to "change," for although the definition has "destroy" and "change" as an alternative, in fact they are not pure anto-nyms. What appears to be a common ground in both of them is the ability to

transform, re-shape; to become different, altered. We may conclude, there-fore, that force (as well as power) is an *a priori* condition of violence.

But still there remains a question of the *how* of force: how is it exercised, how is it practised? The answer to this question lies partially in the very definition of power ("power is a relation between forces") since it already gives us an idea that force (as previously noted) exists only in relation with other forces. Consequently, the very fact of a force being in a power relation to other forces determines the character of the relation: it is the relation of an affect – the power to affect other forces and, simultaneously, to be affected by other forces. Thus, we may argue that force is exercised as an affect, and affects (as in physics) can be active (to incite, provoke, produce, for in-stance), or reactive (to be incited, provoked or produced). Deleuze (1988) contends that reactive affects are not simply the "repercussion" or "passive side" of the active ones: rather, he maintains after Foucault, they are "the ir-reducible encounter" between the two. Then he declares that (p. 71):

> each force has the power to affect (others) and to be affected (by others again), such that each force implies power relations: and every field of forces distributes forces according to these relations and their variations. Spontaneity and receptivity now take on a new meaning: to affect or to be affected.

Further on, Deleuze adds that the power to be affected is like a matter of force, whereas the power to affect is like a function of force. However, he quickly admits the self-limitations of the function of force (p. 72):

> But it is a pure function, that is to say a non-formalized function, independent of the con-crete forms it assumes, the aims it serves and the means it employs: as a physics of action, it is a physics of abstract action. And it is also a pure unformed matter independent of the formed substances, qualified objects or beings which it enters: it is a physics of primary or bare matter. Categories of power are therefore determinations unique to the 'particular' action and its particular medium.

The stress on force being an "action" is further reinforced by a handful of definitions coming from Foucault (1982): force is "an action upon an ac-tion, on existing actions, or on those which may arise in the present or fu-ture," it is "a set of actions upon other actions," etc. But, again, what sort of action(s) is(are) at stake? Any actions?

POWER AS WAR

In the lecture delivered on 7 January, 1976, at the Collège de France, Mi-chel Foucault posed a question of strategic importance for the considera-tions on power and relations of forces (1980, p. 90):

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> if power is properly speaking the way in which relations of forces are deployed and given concrete expression, rather than analysing it in terms of cession, contract or alienation, or functionally in terms of its maintenance of the relations of production, should we not analyse it primarily in terms of *struggle, conflict and war*?

To prove the appropriateness of such a formulation of the power-question, Foucault reverses Clausewitz's famous assertion that war is politics continued by other means, by saying that power is *war*, war continued by other means. Thus, apart from the original hypothesis that power is essentially that which *represses* (Hegel, Freud, Reich), we are confronted here with the other power hypothesis to the effect that power is a continual war, an endless contest of strength. As Foucault has it further on (pp. 90-1):

> none of the political struggles, the conflicts waged over power, with power, for power, the alterations in the relations of forces, the favouring of certain tendencies, the reinforcements etc., etc., that come about within this 'civil peace' – [...] none of these phenomena in a political system should be interpreted except as the continuation of war. Even when one writes the history of peace and its institutions, it is always the history of this war that one is writing.

Obviously enough, it was not Clausewitz who served as the well-spring of Foucault's concept of *power as war*. As he himself explains in the same lecture, it was actually Nietzsche's hypothesis, that the basis of the relationship of power lies in the hostile engagement of forces, that gave rise to his own conception in the shape as above.

Foucault contends that the two hypotheses for the analysis of power, the one saying that power is repression ("power represses nature, the instinct, a class, individuals"), and the other one claiming that power is war ("a form of unspoken warfare"), do not stand in conflict; on the contrary, they seem to be somehow linked since, according to him, "repression could be seen as the political consequence of war, somewhat as oppression [...] was seen as the abuse of sovereignty in the juridical order" (p. 91). As a result, Foucault formulated two major *systems* (sic!) of approach to the analysis of power: the old one and the new one. The old one is, generally speaking, the system (or schema, as Foucault quickly corrects himself) in which power is viewed as an original right and contract to govern. It is called the *contract-oppression* schema because "a power so constituted risks becoming oppression whenever it over-extends itself, whenever – that is – it goes beyond the terms of the contract"(p. 91). The new system, called by Foucault the *domination-repression*, or *war-repression* schema, does not analyse power in terms of contract and oppression, but treats power as a relationship of force, a continual warfare, repression. At this point, Foucault warns us against identifying repression with oppression since the former does not constitute a limitation to power in the second schema as the latter does in the first one. Repression,

therefore, should not be understood as abuse of power as oppression is in the contract-oppression scheme. In Foucault's view, it is just a continuation of a relation of domination and "is none other than the realisation, within the continual warfare of this pseudo-peace, of a perpetual relationship of force" (p. 92).

Out of two systems for the analysis of power, the one – the contract-oppression schema, and the other one – the domination-repression/war-repression/struggle-repression schema, Foucault opted for the latter.

In this context we may inquire into relationships of love and formulate a question (which will be inescapable later in reading poetry) whether they are power relations. In the Foucaultean power model they evidently are, since, in most cases, we can find in them elements of domination and submission, but certainly it remains an open question if, at least from the linguistic point of view, the word "love" can be substituted by the word "power" (or "domination") in constructions like "I love you" – would it mean "I dominate you," "I have power over you"? Interestingly enough, if we convert the construction "I have power over you" from the first person singular into the third person singular – "he has power over her" – the power interpretation would, at least from a commonsensical (and feminist) viewpoint, sound more convincing: "he dominates her," "he has authority over her". Yet, it still remains an open question whether the phrase "I love you" can be rightly interpreted as "You have power over me" and, consequently, whether it is a sign of a subjective submissiveness in a traditionally understood "war of sexes." We shall devote more space and attention to this problem in the textual analysis of, for instance, Browning's "Porphyria's Lover" or *Pauline* in the subsequent part of the book.

MARXIST POWER

Obviously enough, Foucault's conception of power (even though it refers to the works of many prominent philosophers, most notably Nietzsche) does not, and cannot, exhaust a wide spectrum of contexts (environments) in which power and the notions associated with it (force, violence, repression, oppression, domination, etc.) can function. In discussing power in the nineteenth-century context, one cannot escape politics, and politics in the nineteenth century is, first and foremost, bound with the name of Karl Marx and Marxism.

In an interview with J.-J. Bronier entitled "Prison Talk," Foucault speaks, in the notorious and most frequently quoted passage by Marxists, of the importance of Marx's thought for the contemporary historians (1980, p. 53):

It is impossible at the present time to write history without using a whole range of concepts directly or indirectly linked to Marx's thought and situating oneself within a horizon of thought which has been defined and described by Marx. One might even wonder what difference there could ultimately be between being a historian and a Marxist.

But then he almost immediately proceeds to Nietzsche and explains the difference between Nietzsche's and Marx's notions of power (p. 53):

It was Nietzsche who specified the power relation as the general focus, shall we say, of philosophical discourse – whereas for Marx it was the production relation. Nietzsche is the philosopher of power, a philosopher who managed to think of power without having to confine himself within a political theory in order to do so.

Since the production relation as the focus of discourse is beyond the scope of this thesis, our attention will be concentrated, in the main, on the power relation. This, however, does not preclude a Marxist definition being provided here as a better illustration of the problem under scrutiny. The kind of definition of power Freadman and Miller (1992) are proposing takes into consideration human and social factors and bears a decidedly Althusserian mark. They maintain (p. 178) that

power is embedded, either directly or indirectly, in specific individual persons and groups of persons, and [...] such persons and groups exercise power, either directly or indirectly, in a manner that will serve their own desires, interests, beliefs, needs, ends and so on.

Freadman and Miller argue, contrary to discourse power theorists, that the notion of power has explanatory character when, and only when, linked with other notions like need, belief, interest, etc. In addition, they suggest (from the Althusserian Marxist position) that what is needed in the Foucaultean model of discourse power is "a more balanced and differentiated account of the social and cultural role of power" (p. 179).

To conclude our brief discussion on the Foucaultean model of power, we must recognise the fact that in general his work does not constitute a homogeneous theory which could be characterised by systematicity, formality and structure. He repeatedly emphasised that he hated to be called a "structuralist" and showed a complete dislike, as we have already pointed out, for the things formal or systematic. This does not mean that his thinking was incoherent, contradictory or chaotic. His philosophy, or to use his favourite term, archaeology, through its fragmentariness and lack of formal ramifications, imposed a new debating style in the human sciences.

Barry Smart, in the chapter called "Genealogy, Critique and the Analysis of Power" (1983), argues that because of fundamental differences between what Foucault proposes in the form of genealogical analysis and the Marxist theory, it is impossible to classify him as a historical materialist. For in-

stance, in Althusser's view, he maintains, Marx was responsible for an immense scientific revolution which opened up the continent of history for scientific examination, but for Foucault, he adds (p. 75),

> the work of Marx constitutes the source of a new discursive practice rather than the point of origin of a new science; furthermore, the work of Nietzsche is identified as being of equal, if not greater, significance for critical historical analysis.

As a result, he claims, we should view Foucault first of all as a critical theorist, whose prime object is a critical analysis of the relations of power.

And, finally, this is how James Miller, in his "unputdownable" (Valentine Cunningham, *The Observer*) study of Michel Foucault (Miller 1994), summarises Foucault's idea of power (p. 15):

> Like Nietzsche, his avowed model and precursor, he understood power not as a fixed quality of physical force, but rather as a stream of energy flowing through every living organism and every human society, its formless flux harnessed in various patterns of behavior, habits of introspection, and systems of knowledge, in addition to different types of political, social, and military organisations.

NIETZSCHE'S WORLD AS THE WILL TO POWER

Out of numerous texts in which Friedrich Nietzsche attempted to work out *his* concept of power within a wider network of power's relationships to force, the passage number 1067 in *The Will to Power* seems to be the most fundamental one. Here, his *Weltanschauung* incorporates both the notions of Eternal Recurrence, "Beyond Good and Evil" without aim, and the term which is now generally referred to as "the will to power" for the conclusion to his reflections on the world:

> And do you know what "the world" is? Shall I show it to you in my mirror? This world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; a fixed, brazen quantity of energy, which becomes neither bigger nor smaller, which does not consume itself [*die sich nicht verbraucht*], but only transforms itself; as a whole, of unalterable size, a household without losses and gains, but also without increases, without revenues; enclosed by "nothing" as by a boundary; not something vague or wasteful, not infinitely extended, but as a determined force enclosed in a determined space, and not a space that would be "empty" anywhere, but rather as force everywhere, as a play of forces and waves of force, at once one and many, increasing here and at the same time decreasing there, a sea of forces storming and raging in itself, eternally changing, eternally running back, over monstrous ages of recurrence, with an ebb and flow of its forms, out of the simplest forms striving toward the most complex, out of the stillest, most rigid, coldest forms come forth the hottest, most turbulent, most self-contradictory, and then back home again from the most abundant to the simplest, from the play of contradictions back to the pleasure of concord [*Einklangs*], still affirming itself in this similarity of its courses and ages, blessing itself as that which must recur eternally, as a becoming that knows no satiety, no disgust, no weariness –: this, my *dionysian* world of eternal self-creation, of eternal self-destruction, this

mystery of twofold bliss; this, my "beyond Good and Evil" without aim [*Ziel*], unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal, without will, unless a ring holds goodwill unto itself – would you like a *name* for this world? A solution to all its riddles? A *light* for you too, you most-concealed, strongest, most undaunted men of darkest midnight? – *This world is the will to power – and nothing else*! And even you yourselves are this will to power – and nothing else.

It seems now clear why Foucault claimed that power is everywhere – "force is everywhere," "a play of forces and waves of force," the world seen as "a sea of forces storming and raging in itself," the world as rage, as a violence done to things and people (bearing in mind man's *thingly* nature), physical force exerted on man – regrettably, how these words have come to be true at the beginning of the new millennium. The undeniable indebtedness Foucault has got in regard to Nietzsche cannot be, needless to say, overestimated. In *Key Concepts in Cultural Theory* (1999, pp. 304-5), Peter Sedgwick argues that Foucault, in re-working the whole concept of power, relied considerably on Nietzsche's ideas contained in the above-cited passage from *The Will to Power*:

> Foucault, following Nietzsche, seeks to redefine power in a way that is notably different from how it is conceived within more traditional theory [largely the proponents of the Hobbesian conception of power as a simple, quantitative capacity, R.W.]. Thus, power, in Nietzsche's view (see especially *The Will to Power*, 1968: section 1067), does not so much express differences in the relationships that exist between individuals or groups as permeate the entirety of reality and thereby become its essence. Likewise, Foucault conceives of power as existing *not* as something that is exercised over individuals or groups and hence equally of individual and group identity themselves. Important in Foucault's analysis is the claim that power is not only constitutive of social reality and of such social forms as **subjectivity**. He also claims that discourses of knowledge are in fact an expression of power relations and themselves embodiments of power [...].

Another interesting point in Nietzsche's discourse of power is the concept of the world as eternal self-creation and self-destruction, which will bring us closer to an idea of eternally repetitive cycle of life and death, being and non-being, but this will be discussed in subsequent parts and chapters.

PART TWO

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CHAPTER THREE

NIETZSCHE AND BROWNING: PHILOSOPHISING WITH A HAMMER VS. HAMMERING WITH PHILOSOPHY. THE DISCOURSE OF PHILOSOPHY AS POETRY/POETRY AS PHILOSOPHY

> I know there shall dawn a day
> – Is it here on homely earth?
> Is it yonder, worlds away,
> – Where the strange and new have birth,
> That Power comes full in play?
>
> Robert Browning, "Reverie"

> What is good? – All that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man.
> What is bad? – All that proceeds from weakness.
> What is happiness? – The feeling that power *increases* – that a resistance is overcome.
>
> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*

The first two chapters of this study contain some preliminary remarks on the problematic of discourse, particularly the discourse of power, as well as the theoretical comments on the categories of power in the Foucaultean/Nietzschean model such as force and violence. The main body of the discourse we are going to unfold in this chapter will basically aim, in its theoretical and later in the interpretive part, at uncovering, and discovering for ourselves, the power of the discourses of power, force and violence in two nineteenth-century prominent intellectual figures: the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, and the English poet, Robert Browning. Thus, by bringing into clearer focus the philosophical and intellectual environment in which Nietzsche and Browning (as well as Swinburne) lived, we shall endeavour to help to undo, in at least a minimal degree, some of the obfuscat-

ing effects commonly produced by the mention of Nietzsche in the context of no less obfuscating literary terms such as Victorianism.

One of the reasons for such an approach is that Browning, by many considered a kind of "philosophical poet" (Miller 1975, Erickson 1984, Ryals 1993 and others), and Nietzsche, apart from being one of the most profound and influential modern thinkers was also regarded as "probably Germany's greatest prose stylist" (Kaufmann 1992, p. 3) and – as it were – "poetic philosopher," are, to a great extent, examples of how the Heideggerian Truth of their times and thinking reveals itself in their writings and how calling, through inaugural naming performed on white sheets of paper, "brings the presence of what was previously uncalled into a nearness" (*PLT*, p. 198).

Both Nietzsche's philological philosophy (for some time he held a chair of classical philology at the Basel University) and Browning's philosophical philology (he showed a great interest in things ancient) are a grand declaration of *war* (Nietzschean *Kriegserklaerung*). This is the war understood, and very often *mis*understood by non-readers, not in a military, arbitrary sense, but rather as power directed against the nineteenth-century narrow bourgeois morality, be it Wilhelmine Prussian or Victorian.

Further, both Nietzsche and Browning were severely critical of Christianity and challenged God's mega/omnipotence, i.e. His grand power over man (and the world), which consequently led them to question God's mega/omnipresence in man (and in the world). This found its issue in the denial of man's divine likeness (semblance) and in the contention of man's loneliness in the world, from which God either disappeared (Browning) or died (Nietzsche).

But it would be a gross misinterpretation to consider their philosophies as the philosophies of rebellion and negation. Quite the opposite, their visions were the visions of the future. It is not a coincidence that Nietzsche's philosophy, as he said of it "for everyone and no one," declares itself as *Zukuntfphilosophie* (philosophy of the future) and that Browning's poetry, as well as Swinburne's, only recently finds its place in the wider nineteenth-century intellectual context, and not solely in the Victorian one beside Tennyson and Arnold.

Their visions are also the visions of a new man, which are founded upon an idea of excessiveness (excess of energy and knowledge – self-knowledge and self-analysis – in particular). Their visions were to a certain degree a fulfilment of the great dream of Romanticism, both European and English (Nietzsche was initially a keen follower of Richard Wagner, and Browning of Percy Bysshe Shelley). Little wonder, then, that Nietzsche's ideals, embodied by his *Übermensch*, and Browning's by *Paracelsus*, are to a great extent very much alike.

The reason for selecting Friedrich Nietzsche for the role of a "link" in this chapter – as well as in the whole project – between philosophy and poetry, between theory and textual analysis, is his exceptional position in the history of modern thought. It is hardly an exaggeration to assert that Martin Heidegger and many other prominent figures in European thought and literature (Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann, Karl Jaspers, and also to a considerable extent, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, to name just a few) would not have been who they were (and are) had they not *read* Nietzsche.

A great interest in Nietzsche, inaugurated after the Second World War in France by Georges Bataille's *Sur Nietzsche* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), bore fruit almost two decades later in the publication in (West) Germany of Heidegger's important two-volume book *Nietzsche* (Pfullingen: Verlag Günter Neske, 1961), followed by Gilles Deleuze's *Nietzsche et la philosophie* (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 1962). Finally, the international colloquium on Nietzsche organised at Royaumont, France, in which such celebrities as Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Gabriel Marcel, Jean Wahl and others participated, followed by the release of numerous publications on the same topic, marked an eruption of interest in Nietzsche interpretation. This fact alone was of considerable significance, particularly in the context of the post-war France where *ressentiment* in regard to Nietzsche, alongside the burden of Nazi ideology with which his name had been associated – allegations completely unfounded – was lively.

The outbreak of enthusiasm for Nietzsche in the 1960s in France uncovered a phenomenon of a far more serious consequence for the whole generation of philosophers: a departure from the strongholds so far occupied by the disciples of the great German "H" threesome: Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger. Yet Heidegger remained still very influential in Europe and the influence he exerted in the New World, particularly in the area of English critical studies, found its issue, among other things, in the acceptance by an American university of the first "deconstructive" (in the Heideggerian sense) Ph. D. dissertation in 1975 submitted by Paul A. Bové.[1]

The passage from one triumvirate to another (Nietzsche, Freud, Marx) signalled also, apart from a virtually mesmeric respect for a metaphysical concept of triads, cf. Holy Trinity, a major shift of interest in philosophical investigations which moved, according to Schrift, "toward a new awareness of the subject as a function of discourse within the space of interpretation" (Krell & Wood, 1988, p. 132).

One study of the links between Nietzsche and literature, Magnus, Stewart and Mileur's *Nietzsche's Case: Philosophy as/and Literature* (1993), while supporting our view that it is possible to talk, from a critical point of

view, of literature in terms of philosophy, adds that a definitely newer thing is to talk of philosophy in terms of critical theory and of literature (p. 133):

> Of course, there is nothing new in literary critics borrowing terms and ideas, or even attitudes, from philosophy; but the application of techniques of literary analysis to philosophical text is, if no longer surprising, at least newer; newer still is the recent interest of American philosophers in the value of critical theory and of literature itself in advancing discussion of "philosophical problems."

Consequently, the premise from which stems our discussion is to treat literature as philosophy and philosophy as literature hence the names of poets are used alongside the names of philosophers for, as we have stated before, "inaugural naming" to make an access to their texts possible from various perspectives. Our idea is to approach the "philosophical" texts as if they were "literary" and the "literary" texts as if they were "philosophical" since we hold a view that there is no difference between *any texts* and the difference between what is "philosophical" and "literary" is generally a matter of convention and, as in the case of Nietzsche, every so often impossible to tell.

The problematic of the discourse of power in Browning and Swinburne will, therefore, take us through various, sometimes very distinct and diverse, landscapes; we shall be, as it were, wandering, meandering in the labyrinth of words and discourses in which we shall attempt to find one (of the many) thread/s – we, the readers, listeners, critics, humans. Our path will never end since it *cannot* (of course, if we disregard the limitations imposed by space and time): as in Derrida's labyrinth, each word/sign/text/discourse we commit to paper opens up an endless, unrestrained series of its own labyrinths generated according to the rules of substitution, an unlimited, free play of signification. Our path is obviously *a* path, one of many – Heideggerian, country – paths leading to (something that is only conventionally called *the*) Truth – the multileveled, multifaceted thing that Nietzsche brilliantly reflected in the war-like phrase "a mobile army of metaphors and metonyms."

It is not our intent, however, to raise any claims as to any possible direct forms of "influence" of Nietzsche on Browning (although he had spent several years in Germany, Browning had not read any works by the German philosopher, and most likely had not heard of Nietzsche at all[2]). Rather, what we are proposing here is, very much in the Derridean sense, to trace what ideas the European philosopher, who died an intellectual death by collapsing mentally on 3 January, 1889, in Turin, Italy, and the English poet, who died a physical death on 12 December, 1889, in Venice, Italy, share particularly as far as discourse of power, force and violence is concerned.

Nietzsche's concept of power seems to be, to use his own expression, a "centre of gravity" of all his philosophy. However "grave" his power model

can be on the scale of seriousness and however "central" it may appear to his philosophy, it is decidedly not an undemanding task to present it in a non-controversial and straightforward way.

Firstly, it is so because Nietzsche has never defined "power" (*Macht*) in the way that, for instance, Foucault has; that is to say, he has never attempted to *analyse* power as a notion, as an element of a system, or as part of a larger theory ("I mistrust all systematizers and avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity," *TI*, 'Maxims and Arrows,' 26). Rather, what he did, particularly in *The Will to Power* (published posthumously in 1901 as *Der Wille zur Macht*) was an endeavour towards a critique of the modern world, of Christianity, of moral values, of nihilism, and, in effect, the notion of power has been taken and used *a priori*.

Next, Nietzsche's major philosophical works are, in the main, simply notes jotted hurriedly between one attack of headache and another, with no claims to any systematicity or academic clarity. It is also noteworthy that his philosophy of power was built over a long period of time with an intention to culminate ("to deliver a final blow") in the project he had planned for many years but never realised during his lifetime (*The Will to Power. Attempt at a Revaluation of all Values*, the plan which was sketched in Sils Maria in the summer of 1886). Thus, one of the implications of the fact that Nietzsche never worked it out completely is the philosophy's relative lack of homogeneity, which patently obscures Nietzsche's thought and, needless to say, hinders its unequivocal interpretation.

The problematic of power is present in almost all Nietzsche's philosophical works. His philosophy, though never taken seriously during his sane period of life, inspired the whole generations of intellectuals after him for whom the phrase "*der Wille zur Macht*" became a challenge to the metaphysical traditions of thinking in terms of divinities, divine purpose, good and evil. Paradoxically, the first, and also one of the last, definitions of the will to power was released in *Beyond Good and Evil* (BGE), where Nietzsche, after a lengthy reasoning and after having formulated a number of conditions, came to a conclusion that one has "acquired the right to define *all* efficient force unequivocally as: *will to power*." Then he adds, "The world seen from within, the world described and defined according to its 'intelligible character' – it would be 'will to power' and nothing else" (*BGE*, 36). Further on, in Section 259, Nietzsche's definitions are made explicit and more palpable: "the intrinsic will to power [...] is precisely the will of life" and even very blunt: "life is will to power" (*BGE*, 259).

Generally speaking, Nietzsche's concept of power, along with some elements of Schopenhauerian voluntarism which come into making of his "will to power," can be contained in the assertion that all living creatures –

be they animals or humans (*der Mensch*) – desire power, and this desire, biologically and physiologically motivated, goes in two directions: power over others and, what is a characteristically Nietzschean claim, power over themselves. The idea of "self-overcoming" has been developed in the second part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Z) as the considerations of the single individual. This is how the prophet Zarathustra reports his findings and how he teaches his religion (Z, II 'Of Self-Overcoming'):

> Listen now to my teaching, you wisest men! Test in earnest whether I have crept into the heart of life itself and down to the roots of its heart!
>
> Where I found a living creature, there I found will to power; and even in the will of the servant I found the will to be master.
>
> The will of the weaker persuades it to serve the stronger; its will wants to be master over those weaker still: this delight alone it is unwilling to forgo.
>
> [...]
>
> And life itself told me this secret: 'Behold,' it said, 'I am that *which must overcome itself again and again*'.

What Nietzsche says through Zarathustra's mouth is a general contention that will to power is *the* fundamental fact of life since, as it is stated further on, "only where life is, there is also will: not will to life, but – so I teach you – will to power" (Z, II).

But life does not seem to be the most valuable thing in the living creatures. Again, in Zarathustra's words: "The living creature values many things higher than life itself; yet out of this evaluation itself speaks – the will to power!" (Z, II) Thus, the definition of life itself as "that *which must overcome itself over and over again*" Zarathustra provides us with, and, the view of life as 'self-overcoming' or, in other words, as having power over itself, can undoubtedly be considered as Nietzsche's contribution to a general understanding of not only the idea of power but, in the broadest terms, of life itself. As R. J. Hollingdale (1973, p. 91) has it:

> The 'self-overcoming' of a nation for the sake of power is now seen as a general characteristic of life itself, to which the continuance of life itself is subordinate: the 'living creature' wants power – power over others and power over itself ('self-overcoming') – *more* than it wants mere existence. If this proposition is not quite self-evident, it is only because of the appearance in it of the concept of 'power': for all history and all private experience provides evidence that there is at any rate *something* men, women and animals desire more than they desire the simple continuance of life, and for the sake of which they are willing to risk life. Nietzsche's innovation is to suggest that this something – which unquestionably exists – is the feeling of enhanced power: and he ventures the generalization that it is the drive to attain this feeling which lies behind all activity.

Thus, we may argue that, on the whole, Nietzsche's concept of the "will to power" served his purpose to understand mankind and its achievements

mainly as products of the drive to the feeling of enhanced power (we notice here a decidedly Freudian trace in this phrase), power over other people, power over the world, and, eventually, power over oneself.

The most evident and the most frequently referred to example of will to power in man has been *superman*, *supra*man, *over*man – in other words – *Über*mensch. The term *Übermensch* denotes, in Nietzsche's own definition, a '*Typus höchster Wohlgeratenheit*' – a type that has turned out supremely well (*EH*, III. 1), and in our understanding it denotes man of *Über-*, that is to say, of *super/supra/over-*, man of excess, of surplus of power; the epitome of centuries-long dreams of mankind to approach the unapproachable, the transcendental, the divine, the *super*natural.

Contrary to a popular comic figure, however, superman is not the man endowed with supernatural power: he is a very much down-to-earth figure, "the embodiment of life-affirmation through acceptance of the totality of life, and especially of the suffering entailed in living" (Hollingdale 1973, p. 12). The *Übermensch* cannot, therefore, be viewed either as a divine figure (Nietzsche very frequently warned against seeing the divine in the human – "human, all too human") or a "perfect" man since this would mean the end of the process of becoming, which would, in turn, negate the dynamic aspect of human existence and man's constant "will to power."

The concept of "will to power" and the "drive to the feeling of enhanced power" are, clearly, only part of Nietzsche's philosophy of power, but nonetheless they seem to be the focus of his attention, and, simultaneously, the *modus vivendi* of his entire philosophy. The centrality of the idea of power in Nietzsche's philosophy has been confirmed, among others, by R. J. Hollingdale (1973, p. 79), who maintains that

> a large range of effects which it is suggested proceed from a single cause: gratitude, moral evaluations, the desire to arouse pity, humility, teasing, love of knowledge, production of works of art, philosophizing, lawgiving, the idea of justice, all taking their origin from some aspect of the possession of, or the drive to preserve, or the desire to enhance power.

To this long list of effects we may add at least one more, but of paramount importance, especially for the European metaphysical mind – religion. Nietzsche asserts (*WP*, 86) that "[t]he origin of religion lies in extreme feelings of power, because they are strange, take men by surprise." Accordingly, since he regarded himself as a great psychologist (though he seriously doubted the existence of the psyche – he also saw in this term too close an affinity with the original meaning denoting the science of the soul), he provides us with a psychological explanation of the origin of religion, too. But again, his psychology is the psychology of the *feeling of power* (*WP*, p. 86):

The psychological logic is this: When a man is suddenly and overwhelmingly suffused with the *feeling of power* – and this is what happens with all great affects – it raises in him a doubt about his own person: he does not dare to think himself the cause of this astonishing feeling – and so posits a stronger person, a divinity, to account for it.

We are once again referring to Hollingdale who, sketching Nietzsche's psychological portrait, concludes that (1973, p. 12)

[h]e was led to approve of 'strong will to power' and to deprecate [...] the enfeeblement of the aggressive instincts [...]; he was led to see in conflict, enmity, hardship, suffering, cruelty: in short in 'evil,' an essential component of the total economy of man without which a 'great human being' could no more be achieved than a sword could be forged without fire and *hammer-blows* [emphasis mine].

NIETZSCHE'S SILVER HAMMER

In the plan for the fourth book of *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche noted down (*WP*, p. 46):

The *greatest* struggle: for that a new *weapon* is needed. The hammer: to conjure up a terrible decision, to confront Europe with the final choice whether its will "wills" its own destruction [*Untergang*]. Prevention of the decline into mediocrity [*Vermittelmaessingung*]. Rather even destruction [*Lieber noch Untergang*]!

The hammer, originally a construction tool, is treated in Nietzsche, primarily, as a new *weapon*; a weapon of decision-making, confrontation, destruction, and, eventually, of prevention from the decline into weakness. His hammer of philosophy attacks, delivers blows, confronts, destroys, forces to make decisions, but, at the same time, is pre-emptive in its aggressiveness – it works like an injection of preventative medicine: it gives pain but concurrently protects against a serious collapse.

In *Beyond Good and Evil* (section 225), Nietzsche uses the metaphor of a hammer in an attempt to define man:

In man, *creature* and *creator* are united: in man there is matter, fragment, excess, clay, mud, madness, chaos; but in man there is also creator, sculptor, the *hardness of the hammer* [my emphasis], the divine spectator and the seventh day – do you understand this antithesis?

As can be noticed, the phrase 'the hardness of the hammer' employed in the passage is to describe the attributes of *creator* (as opposed to *creature*), the term traditionally reserved for God, and, most importantly, to express man's power to transform, re-mould, re-create. Thus, the hammer is not only and primarily a weapon of war, but basically a weapon of transformation and enhancement of power.

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THE HAMMER SPEAKS

In the passage originally taken from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Part III, 29, 'Of Old and New Law-Tables') and re-published with only minor variants in *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche resumed the theme of hardness and, using the language of biblical parables, brought forward the difference between the noble and the base, between the conquerors and the conquered, between the creators and the created. What unites the noblest, the conquerors, the creators is hardness, the hardness of the hammer:

> 'Why so hard?' the charcoal once said to the diamond; 'for are we not close relations?'
>
> Why so soft? O my brothers, thus I ask you: for are you not – my brothers?
>
> Why so soft, unresisting and yielding? Why is there so much denial and abnegation in your hearts? Why so little fate in your glances?
>
> And if you will not be fates, if you will not be inexorable: how can you – conquer with me?
>
> And if your hardness will not flash and cut and cut to pieces: how can you one day – create with me?
>
> For all creators are hard. And it must seem bliss to you to press your hand upon millennia as upon wax, bliss to write upon the will of millennia as upon metal – harder than metal, nobler than metal. Only the noblest is perfectly hard.
>
> This new law-table do I put over you. O my brothers: Become hard! (*TI*, 'The Hammer Speaks')

The hammer speaks through the mouth of Zarathustra, the prophet of a new religion (originally the name of the founder of the ancient Persian religion, conjectured to have lived in the seventh century B.C.), the religion of the *Übermensch*. The idea behind this passage is that, to put it at its broadest, you have to be hard, you have to will the will, you have to be uncompromising in order to conquer, to create, to be a new breed of man: the superman/overman/*Übermensch*, who, conceptually, is the highest product of the 'will to power,' the product with its creator's ambition to substitute God engraved on it.

THE HAMMER SOUNDS OUT

In the last book he himself saw printed, *Twilight of the Idols or How to Philosophize with a Hammer* (1889), Nietzsche, most importantly, pronounced a '*grand declaration of war*' but before he did that he went to great lengths to describe war's "curative power" which "lies even in the wounds one receives" ('Foreword'). Then, he confessed:

> Another form of recovery, in certain cases even more suited to me, is to *sound out idols* [...]. There are more idols in the world than there are realities: that is *my* 'evil eye' for this

world, that is also my 'evil ear' [...]. For once to pose questions here with a *hammer* and perhaps to receive for answer that famous hollow sound which speaks of inflated bowels – what a delight for one who has ears behind his ears – for an old psychologist and pied piper like me, in presence of whom precisely that which would like to stay silent *has to become audible* [...]. (*TI*, 'Foreword')

The hammer sounds out idols, the false gods, the "*eternal* idols which are here touched with the hammer as with a tuning fork" (*TI*, 'Foreword') only to demonstrate that they are completely hollow, void, empty, like a piece of pipe filled only with air. But you cannot tell which pipe is empty and which one is not unless you strike them with a hard object, with a tuning fork, with a *hammer*...

NIETZSCHE'S PHILOSOPHY AS/AND LITERATURE

Whatever one could say of the poetry of Nietzsche's philosophy and his discourse of power, one thing remains unquestionable: it is well and truly hard, if at all possible, to tell when and where he stops being a philosopher and starts being a poet (or the other way round). The question of the relationship between literature and philosophy has been the focus of interest of numerous literary theorists in recent decades. Paul de Man (1979), for instance, contended that no one was more aware than Nietzsche of the origins of philosophy in rhetoric, of the way in which metaphysics unwittingly turns effects of language into philosophical ideas. Yet, contrary to Alexander Nehamas (1985) and Richard Rorty (1989), he saw no possibility of any serious literary contributions to a debate on traditional philosophical questions.

On the other hand, one of Nehamas' main theses is that the Nietzschean perspectivism should be perceived not only as a condition of textualisation but, primarily, as a condition of understanding the world as if it were a text. So, as Nahamas maintains, the *Übermensch* is to be viewed as none other than a literary character which exists within writing and because of writing. Though a philosophical notion, the *Übermensch* is essentially a fictional character, not a realisation of the ideal of human being. And most importantly, Nehamas identifies Nietzsche's concept of "the will to power" with an ontology (a Heideggerian trait) of a literary character in the text which is not some essence but a sum of its effects. Nehamas (1985, p. 3) argues that

Nietzsche [...] looks at [the world] as if it were a literary text. And he arrives at many of his views of the world and the things within it, including his views of human beings, by generalizing to them ideas and principles that apply almost intuitively to the literary situation, to the creation and interpretation of literary texts and characters [...]. The most obvious connection [...] is [...] that literary texts can be interpreted equally well in vastly

different and deeply incompatible ways. Nietzsche [...] holds that exactly the same is true of the world itself and all the things within it. This view [...] motivates his perspectivism as well as aspects of his doctrine of the will to power.

One of the definite limitations of Nehamas' theory is the way he constructs and formulates the relationship between the text and the world. Contrary to what Nietzsche seemed to have been doing the whole life through, Nehamas ascribes to him the secure position of an observer of the world from "without," as if it were at all possible to have the world as an object of inquiry before one's eyes and investigate it without being actually engaged in its processes and its "body." The position Nietzsche assumed, at least as far as his texts indicate, was the position from "within" the world or, more precisely, from "within" an unfolding text, from "within" his discourse. Finally, not only does Nehamas' phrase "world itself" recall the Kantian "*Ding-am-sich*" with all its consequences, but simultaneously suggests the subordinate status of the literary text or, for that matter, *any* text.

Magnus, Stewart and Mileur (1993, pp. 137-8), in response to the concerns raised by de Man as to the inability of literary criticism to answer the questions of philosophy and the shortcomings of Nehamas' theory, propound to treat philosophy *and* literature not as close but distinct disciplines, but rather as *genres* of the same:

if we think of philosophy and literature as genres (or meta-genres) it makes no more (and no less) inherent sense to agonize over their differences than over the differences between comedy and tragedy. These literary genres reflect very different conceptions of our condition in the world [...]. Real differences between genres do not prevent us from mixing them in productive ways, ways that make dialogue and commentary of one on the other possible, without requiring that they be "reconciled" by reducing the terms of one to those of the other.

But, at the same time, Magnus, et al. (1993, pp. 137-8) are aware of the restrictions the generic conventions propelled by, mainly, the institutional ramifications, impose on the philosophy/literature integration:

That philosophy (arising out of the possibilities of idealization) and literary criticism (based on the possibilities of textualization) tend to treat their generic differences in natural kinds, and to harden these differences in the institutional transformation of genres into disciplines, is itself a sign of the powerful hold that the conventions of these genres have on the imaginations of their practitioners. That hold, we suggest, can only be loosened by self-conscious experiments in genre-mixing. It may also be the sign of a deep anxiety that, for some, fragmentation means incoherence. Despite the difficulties, however, a genuine and fruitful dialogue should be possible, especially in the case of Nietzsche, where both disciplines – literature and philosophy – can stake legitimate claims to the same body of work.

There is no doubting that Magnus et al. are generally right in their diagnosis of the situation, particularly in seeing some clinical symptoms among those who fear that the multiplicity of genres is to bring partiality of experience of each individual genre, which in sum may result in a total incoherence and inner inconsistency of the final product. An example of such a case may be a nineteenth-century text by Robert Browning entitled *Pauline: A Fragment of a Confession*, a text that we shall discuss at length in Chapter Four. Suffice here to say that, being basically a dramatic monologue, the poem of 1031 lines incorporates also two other genres, namely, the fragment and the confession, the result of which is a considerable inner inconsistency and a certain incoherence (the same can basically be said of his other lengthy poems, *Paracelsus* and *Sordello*).

We should also notice the use of the "Nietzschean" word "harden" used above along with the phrase "powerful hold" to emphasise the strength of the disuniting, disintegrating conventions. Nonetheless, our answer to the problem of the philosophy/literature relationship is concerned principally with the notion of discourse and then, if at all, with genre-mixing.

As argued in Chapter One, the main assumption that we have adopted in our discussion on discourse (after Foucault, 1972, p. 38) is that discourse (a "discursive formation") can be defined by a certain *regularity* ("an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations"). Another consequential supposition we have to provide here is that the discursive formations ("those large groups of statements") actually produce certain fields of knowledge "which we call *medicine, economics, grammar*" (p. 37) or, within our focus of interest, philosophy, literature, poetry, etc. Therefore, what seems to be of significance in dealing with the problem of cross-disciplinary relations is a certain regularity that can be traced in some large groups of statements (discourses) characteristic of the disciplines in questions. The integrating, uniting factor cannot be found, however, in their *identity*, or even similarity that would establish a ground for compatibility (regularity does not imply identity but rather transformation in recurrence). On the contrary, what prevails in those kinds of discourses is rather "series full of gaps, intertwined with one another, interplays of differences, distances, substitutions, transformations" (p. 37).

What, then, is the basis of unity? As Foucault argues, it is just *possibilities* (or, in his language, *strategic possibilities*) that constitute the foundation of a dialogic unity both within "those large groups of statements" and without them – hence, the possibility of discourse of the same theme within different groups of statements (discourses). Says Foucault (1972, p. 37):

> What one finds are rather various strategic possibilities that permit the activation of incompatible themes, or, again, the establishment of the same theme in different groups of statement.

Foucault's assertion that incompatible themes could be activated through certain possibilities as to discern in them a regulating order, a repeated transformation or any kind of correlation seems to emphasise an idea of *dispersion* as an organising system of discursive formations. As Foucault puts it (p. 37), developing further his thesis of establishing the same theme in different groups of statement:

> Hence the idea of describing these *dispersions* [emphasis mine] themselves; of discovering whether, between these elements, which are certainly not organized as a progressively deductive structure, nor as an enormous book that is being gradually and continuously written, nor as an *oeuvre* of a collective subject, one cannot discern a *regularity* [emphasis mine]: an order in their successive appearance, correlations in their simultaneity, assignable positions in a common space, a reciprocal functioning, linked and hierarchies transformations.

His line of reasoning reaches fruition in the concluding statements (p. 37):

> Such an analysis would not try to isolate small islands of *coherence* [emphasis mine] in order to describe their internal structure; it would not try to suspect and reveal latent conflicts; it would study forms of *division* [emphasis mine]. Or again: instead of reconstituting *chains of inference* (as one often does in the history of the sciences or of philosophy), instead of drawing up *tables of differences* (as the linguists do), it would describe *systems of dispersion*.

The Foucaultean "systems of dispersion" are none other than the embodiment of a deep anxiety, as expressed by Magnus et al., that, for some, fragmentation means incoherence. Incoherence, then, does not need to be a sign of a total collapse of order; on the contrary, as Foucault demonstrated, what a contemporary discourse of human sciences focuses on is not so much the analysis of coherent systems of unity but rather of fragmented systems of dispersion, where coherence is not a preliminary condition of the undertaking. Consequently, in the subsequent chapter we shall concentrate more fully on the problematic of the discourse of unreason and incoherence in a context of the power relations.

What Magnus et al. propose as genre mixing was practically realised in both Nietzsche's aphoristic writing (a mixture of note, letter and poem writing, with a dose of academic and prophetic discourse) and Browning's dramatic monologue (a generic mixture of drama and narrative monologue, where his ambition was to show action in character rather than character in action). As regards Swinburne's poetry, we deal, for the most part, with a reversal of a classical principle of decorum: Swinburne would deliberately choose light forms with regular versification for his perverse erotica (*Dolores*, for instance) thus suggesting, perhaps, that literary forms in themselves

do not carry meaning(s), nor do they possess intrinsic propensities to construct them or to evoke any definite moods. Obviously enough, it is not the genre but rather the discourse that draws the contemporary literary critic's attention in their writings, the discourse of the same theme within the systems of dispersion and difference.

Therefore, there arises a question whether we really need to mix genres – whether it is not enough to speak of one genre – *the* genre – or better, of the discourse of the human sciences, at least in regard to philosophy and literary criticism. With poetry, or art in general, the problem is more compound; although there is no *essential* distinction between the discourses of, say, poetry and philosophy, philosophy and literary criticism, the means, forms and techniques of expression may be and, very often, are diverse.

BROWNING'S HAMMERING WITH PHILOSOPHY

In Robert Browning's poetry the borderline between art and philosophy is much clearer than in Nietzsche. It happens so primarily because of the form and the technique of expression Browning used in most of his poetry to verbalise his ideas – the dramatic monologue, written mostly in blank verse and – not quite infrequently – in iambic pentameter as well. His art, therefore, belonged to the tradition of writing that in Victorian England was rather rigorously separated from a conventionally understood academic discipline called philosophy.

On the other hand, however, the text, the content, the subject-matter of most of his poems indicate Browning's persistent preoccupation and inner struggle towards unlocking the timeless mysteries of both the world within us – the human psyche, and the world beyond us – the eternity. His poetry, intellectual and undoubtedly too abstruse – or "incompatible," to use a word from the previous part of the chapter – for the general reader to comprehend, follows the Donnean tradition of the seventeenth-century argumentative poetry in which the speaker (in most cases the "I") casts his/her personality as a lover in various dramatic contexts. Those monologues ("dramatic," as the context indicates) were used by John Donne as the means for the articulation of his philosophical reflections on a variety of topics, ranging from the inevitability of death to the conception of the universe. That sort of poetry, as Cook argues in the Introduction to *The Works of Robert Browning* (Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1994, p. v),

> probably suggested to Browning the poetic form for which he is most famous, the 'dramatic monologue'. In his poems of this kind, he imagines himself into a great variety of characters and situations, designed to reveal individual human beings in all their com-

plexity, often at some important moment in their lives. Through what they say, as well as what they leave unsaid [cf. the discourse of silence], we are led, in a short space of time, to know them, to understand them and maybe to make a moral judgement on them.

Notwithstanding the form, our point of departure in this section is that Browning's poetic discourse is deeply rooted in philosophy, particularly in the solving of the relations between man, the truth, and the Absolute as the source of power. And we agree with Cook who says (1994, p. vii) that

> Browning was writing at a time when scientific advances in the work of Darwin and others were calling into question the basis of Christian belief. His contemporary Tennyson responded to this in poems like 'In Memoriam' in which he struggled to retain his faith, but which is infused with pessimistic melancholy and doubt despite its up-beat ending. Browning expresses, through characters such as the worldly Victorian cleric in 'Bishop Blougram's Apology' the doubts that any intellectual had to feel.

According to Ryals (1993, p. 10), as early as in the years 1829-1833, Browning, a self-educated lad at that time, discovered a few universal truths that proved meaningful in his future poetic writing on philosophical topics:

> During these years of self-cultivation Browning looked inward in an effort to locate his true self, a central core of being that was the real Robert Browning. What he discovered was that no stable centre of selfhood is accessible to the thinking subject. The subject, he learned, is accessible only obliquely, not in the continuity of its self-consciousness but in the discontinuity of its shifting forms, in the different interrogations to which it is submitted. As he followed the logic of this discovery, he perceived that truth and meaning are not fixed but, instead, are always becoming. The questions asked determine to no small degree the answers arrived at; the angle of viewing limits vision of the whole. Not enough questions can ever be asked, not enough points of view can ever be attained to yield a complete, encompassing overview of any matter. At best one gains approximations of the truth, which is always in advance of any formulation of it. Absolute truth, therefore, is not resident in the phenomenal world, although informing it. This means that the world known through the senses is to be regarded in relation to the Absolute.

Most of the conclusions that Ryals formulates in this passage seem to be like a brief synopsis of some major developments in contemporary literary theory. The beliefs he attributes to Browning look as if they were to confirm the philosophical axioms either discovered long before him (Copernican revolution) or the ones which were later revised, redefined and reformulated by the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century thinkers, the most evident example being the thesis of man's unknowability (see for instance Foucault) or a classic post-structuralist proposition (after Nietzsche) of unfixability of truth and meaning. When Ryals speaks of "the truth, which is always in advance of any formulation of it," he repeats (or at least seems to re-phrase) the de Saussurean concept of *signifiant* and *signifié*, later elaborated by the whole generations of linguists, literary theorists and philosophers of writing headed by, among others, Jacques Derrida.

The singular element that links Browning with the centuries-long tradition of metaphysical thinking, as tracked down by Ryals, is apparently his belief in "Absolute truth" or, more accurately, the Absolute. Such a conviction stands in a sharp contrariety to practically all previously indicated viewpoints, especially to the statement declaring that "truth and meaning are not fixed but, instead, are always becoming". What Ryals does not say in his *critical* biography of Browning (probably the most influential Browning book published in the previous decade) is an incessant psychological, philosophical and religious conflict in the matters of faith that resulted in "dramatic" monologues, far too long and too tedious to be considered sublime and lofty by his contemporaries, in which the characters Browning created tried to solve the problems relating to, among other things, selfhood, God and immortality. We are not to forget here a considerable influence that the rebellious atheism of Browning's adolescent poets-heroes, Byron and Shelley in particular, exerted on the mentality and the development of the worldview of the young writer. And even though his later philosophy took a decidedly Protestant stand, in which he was likened to Søren Kierkegaard (see for instance Drew 1974), for most of his life it was that territory in which many opposing forces clashed and clinched in the wait for a final discharge.

The discourse of power in Robert Browning's poetry, then, seems to be a direct effect of the numerous contradictory reflections, frequently recurring under the guise of such characters as Paracelsus, Sordello or Pippa, shared by a generation greatly disillusioned with Romanticism. "We live and breathe deceiving and deceived" (*Paracelsus*, 4. 625) could be a theorem of those who retreated into the mind in search of the source of strength, identity and truth. A great bulk of the poetic energy and aesthetic force was directed in the second half of the nineteenth century toward and concentrated on "the treatment of man, and of man alone" (Forman, *Fortnightly Review*, 5, 1869). Hence, as Faas (1988, p. 3) asserts, "a new 'Psychological School of Poetry' under the leadership of Robert Browning." But, was "the analysis of particular states of mind" indeed "the most important department in which the metaphysical science has been a pioneer for poetry," as W.J. Fox proclaimed in *Westminster Review* (14, 1831)?

The hammer of philosophy that fell on the minds of the readers of his poetry shocked and inflicted the emotional wounds. But Browningesque hammering was only a dramatic show of strength through weakness. As Chew and Altick (1967, p. 1400) put it:

> Strength comes from an obstructed road; assurance would breed torpor, but *difficulty increases power* [emphasis mine]. The thought is in line with German idealism which taught that the imagination creates evil in order that by combatting it the moral will may be strengthened.

Browning is here very close to Nietzsche since we remember what Nietzsche says in *The Anti-Christ* (2): "What is happiness? – The feeling that power increases –that a resistance is overcome." In *Paracelsus* (5. 683-8), for instance, we find the notion of knowledge as strengthened by love and love as being strong from weakness:

> Knowledge – not intuition, but the slow
> Uncertain fruit of an enhancing toil,
> Strengthened by love: love – not serenely pure,
> But power from weakness, like a chance-sown plant
> Which, cast on stubborn soil, puts forth changed buds
> And softer stains, unknown in happier climes.

We should also notice here a decidedly Nietzschean and Derridean trace which speaks of life being a matter of a chance (Nietzsche), and meaning being disseminated like a sower disseminates seeds (Derrida 1981).

Browning's philosophy, to a great extent grounded in the psychology of the mind, was largely a reaction against Rousseau's and Shelley's idea of human natural perfection and goodness. Like Nietzsche, Browning did not believe in perfection since such a belief would presuppose a definite limitation to human development and was contrary to the fundamental philosophical assertion shared by them both that the world is in a constant state of change, i.e. it is not "being" but "becoming". In the effect, the world can neither be *known* nor *comprehended*. Says Nietzsche (*WP*, 517):

> The character of the world in a state of becoming as incapable of formulation, as "false," as "self-contradictory." Knowledge and becoming exclude one another. Consequently, "knowledge" must be something else: there must first of all be a will to make knowable, a kind of becoming must itself create the deception of beings.

Then he concludes categorically that "a world in a state of becoming could not, in a strict sense, be 'comprehended' or 'known'" (*WP*, 520). Accordingly, Browning's discourse is, among other things, an articulation of dissatisfaction with the knowledge of the world that turned out to be, in the words of Paracelsus, "The foolish knowledge which I came to seek" (*Paracelsus*, 5. 218). The world deceives and

> We are so fooled, so cheated! Why even now
> I am not too secure against foul play
> The shadows deepen and the walls contract:
> No doubt some treachery is going on.
>
> (5. 203-6)

Paracelsus also admits that although "I, you, and God can comprehend each other" (5. 262), "All is confused/No doubt; but doubtless you will learn in time" (5. 486-7). The hope for the "true" knowledge coming directly

from God but which can be attained in time, as expressed here, is another of Browning's characteristically Victorian traits. The Victorians taught that aspiration, development is far more important that the actual achievement (cf. Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice*). In *Paracelsus* (5. 729-39), he manifested his strong belief in progress of man:

>   – progress is
> The law of life – man is not man as yet:
> Nor shall I deem his object served, his end
> Attain'd, his genuine strength put fairly out,
> While only here and there a star dispels
> The darkness – here and there a towering mind
> O'erlooks its prostrate fellows: when the host
> Is out at once to the despair of night,
> When all mankind is perfected alike,
> Equal in full-blown powers – then, not till then,
> Begins the general infancy of man.

As can be seen from these lines, the idea of man's progress is closely connected with the idea of an equal distribution of power ("Equal in full-blown powers") set as the ultimate goal of mankind. Paracelsus believes that man possesses an in-born power ("genuine strength") which he is still unable to unlock, disclose, reveal. There are, however, some outstanding individualities ("here and there a star dispels / The darkness") who either have accomplished, or are close to accomplish, the final objective. The power they are revealing, dispersing, disseminating ("dispelling," in Paracelsus' words) is of mental character ("a towering mind"). The imbalance of power is manifested in contrasting the "towering mind" with "its prostrate fellows." The adjective "towering" reminds us of a whole range of concepts associated with the word "tower" in Browning (to mention only the Dark Tower of "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came") and in the other Victorians (especially in Tennyson), nonetheless, we would rather read it here as indicating the disproportion in a mental size between the "mind" and its "fellows."

Another adjective of interest here is "prostrate" which describes "fellows." Of Latin origin, from *prosternere* to throw to the ground (*Collins English Dictionary*, 1994, p. 1246), it possesses a few meanings that are indicative of a range of interpretative possibilities of which Browning's discourse of power is susceptible and which may throw some more light on his philosophy in general.

Already the first denotation, as provided in *Collins*, suggests one of the Foucaultean power relations – submission: "lying with the face downwards, as in submission." Thus, after *Thesaurus*, we can count out several syno-

nyms within the meaning of "deferential" that may attributed to Paracelsus' "fellows": "docile," "subservient," "obedient," "passive," "resigned" or "accepting." They all are indicative of a recipient, a target or a victim of the imbalanced power relations, of an unequal distribution of forces.

It is quite understandable, therefore, to find another meaning of "prostrate" listed in *Collins* as "helpless or defenceless," which we shall aid with "overpowered," "crushed," "beaten" and "humbled" as the denotations of "prostrate" in the sense of "overcome" (note the Nietzschean "overcome" of his "self-overcoming" thesis). The last meaning disclosed in *Collins* is "exhausted physically or emotionally," which we shall again expand to "spent," "worn out" and "whipped".

"Exhausted," "exhaustion" denotes weakness – a feature typically condemned in Nietzsche and opposed to strength, happiness and health. When in *The Will to Power* (p. 46) he outlined "the order of rank as an order of power," Nietzsche, with a dose of irony, concluded: "The grandiose model: man in nature – the weakest, cleverest being making itself master and subjugating the more stupid elements." Browning's conclusion is, then, of a similar nature: man is not Man yet, he is still "face down," powerful (or rather powerless in the sense of real power) only over the organic world lower in rank.

POWER OF INTERPRETATION: INTERPRETATION AS POWER/FORCE/VIOLENCE

Before we proceed to disclose Browning's original philosophy of power in his poetic texts and try to see how Nietzsche's power discourse opens an almost endless range of possibilities of Browning interpretation, our endeavour will be to *elucidate* (after Heidegger's *erlautern* of his *Erlauterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, 1951) and clarify the notion of "interpretation" in the context of power relations.

Basically, interpretation, like discourse, is the violence we do to things. Martin Heidegger, in his consequential book, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1962, p. 207), argues that

> [i]t is true that in order to wrest from the actual words that which these words 'intend to say,' every interpretation must necessarily resort to *violence* [emphasis mine]. This violence, however, should not be confused with an action that is wholly arbitrary. The interpretation must be animated and guided by the power of an illuminative idea. Only through the power of this idea can an interpretation [...] get through to the unsaid.

Violence is, then, a necessary condition of every reading/interpreting. In Heidegger, violence is involved in the interpretive process of "stripping"

words of their cover (camouflage, veil, mask) and allowing them to come out of their concealment into the light. The power of an illuminative idea (again a metaphysical metaphor of light) facilitates the process of "dis-covering," "un-covering" the words' intent. Notwithstanding a notorious slogan of deconstruction (a paraphrase of an aphorism borrowed from Ni-etzsche) that "[t]here are no readings, only misreadings" (Bloom 1973, 1975 and 1979), we are rather inclined to insist that every reading is every inter-preting.

Steven Mailloux, in his essay "Interpretation" (in Lentricchia & Mc Laugh-lin 1990, p. 121), brings to our attention the fact that, apart from reading, ex-plicating and making sense – the names given to "interpretation" – etymol-ogically it also means *translation*:

> In Latin rhetoric, *interpretatio* referred to "the explanation of one word by another, the use of synonyms." *Interpretatio* was formed on *interpres*: "an intermediary, agent, go-between" and "an interpreter of foreign languages, a translator" (Glare 1982, p. 947). In its etymology, then, "interpretation" conveys the sense of a translation pointed in two di-rections simultaneously: *toward* a text to be interpreted and *for* an audience in need of the interpretation. That is, the interpreter mediates between the translated text and its new rendering *and* between the translated text and the audience desiring the translation.

In the textual practice utilised in this project, besides the role of a pro-ducer of critical discourse, we also assume the role of a mediator between the discourse we are interpreting and the interpreted discourse as well as between the interpreted discourse and the reader who interprets that dis-course of discourse, adding another element, a link, in the endless chain of interpretation.

BROWNING'S "WILL, POWER AND LOVE"

Viewed from a perspective of the reader, Browning's poetry, on the whole, is that kind of poetry which one hardly ever quotes from memory or recites without hesitation. Called by one contemporary critic, "a poet with-out an audience" (*Chamber's Journal*, 1863) he never really despaired his un-popularity among the reading public for most of his lifetime. On the con-trary, his poetic discourse was, as a matter of fact, directed toward an addressee that could not respond to it straight away, at least not from a critic's pen, an addressee whose prompt answer was never indeed expected, and who always remained *silent* – God, *his* God.

As he admitted in "La Saisiaz" (1878), Browning (providing that we are allowed to identify the narrator's voice with his own, which is not always the case) was certain of just two things: his own being, ("soul") and a power

outside and independent of himself, ("God"). Such a declaration was part of Browning's contribution to the debate on "The Soul and the Future Life," carried out in 1877 by the journal, *The Nineteenth Century*. The problem of power is, however, the theme that figures prominently in the poem:

> As the power, expect performance! God's be God's as mine is mine!
> God whose power made man and made man's wants, and made, to meet those wants,
> Heaven and earth which, through the body, prove the spirits ministrants,
> Excellently all, – did He lack power or was the will in fault
> When He let blue heaven be shrouded o'er by vapours of the vault...?
>
> (ll. 300-4)

Paradoxically, the challenge, or rather the doubt in God's omni-power, and a belief in his human (*all too human*, to borrow a phrase from Nietzsche) power, does not impede a final confession of faith in God, or at least in his existence: "Well? Why, he at least believed in Soul, was very sure of God" (l. 604). And, as Erickson (1984, p. 264) conclusively observed, "the poems ["La Saisiaz" among others] reaffirm Browning's belief that a man's true audiences are his beloved and *his* [emphasis mine] God." Love was also a constitutive element of Browning's philosophy. His confidence in the ultimate victory of "good" over "evil" was based on the belief in the divine love since, as he admits nostalgically in *Paracelsus* (5. 232), "sweet human love is gone!"

Such a conviction was promptly disposed of by Nietzsche who remarked sarcastically in *The Will to Power* (p. 21) that "one still believes in good and evil and experiences the triumph of the good and the annihilation of evil as a task (that is English; typical case: the flathead John Stuart Mill)." But Browning was, naturally, not so dismissive of the metaphysical vision of a dichotomised world in which power of good, light (*Deus font lucis est*, God is a fountain of light), fights the power of evil, darkness. In the second movement of the *Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in Their Day*, "With Christopher Smart," Browning contained an apotheosis of earth. He concludes the stanza IX (ll. 255-9) with a bidding:

> learn earth first ere presume
> To teach heaven legislation. Law must be
> Active in earth or nowhere: earth you see, –
> Or there or not at all, Will, Power and Love
> Admit discovery.

Even though we do not have here an explicitly declared "will to power" by the poet, the proximity of *will* and *power* in the line indicates an existence of a certain (or *organic*, as Nietzsche would say) affinity between them. The new element in the Nietzschean power model is love which in Browning ac-

quires the status of one of the principal components of human existence and a necessary supplement to will and power (the idea of love as power and/or power as love will be discussed at length in Chapter Six).

PARACELSUS: BROWNING'S *ÜBERMENSCH*

Browning, like Nietzsche, dreamed of becoming one of the "Makers of quite new men" (*Sordello*, 1. 27). But, unlike Nietzsche, his daring endeavour was directed rather toward creating a new kind of a poet than man in general. A typical view (according to Ryals, 1993, p. viii) of the mid-nineteenth-century critic's enterprise was expressed by the French critic, Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, in his *Causerie du Lundi* (1862), where he defines a poet as a *superior man* (*l'homme supérieur*) distinguished by his work. Obviously enough, the very phrase "superior man" sends us back to Nietzsche's "super/supra/superior man" or, simply, *der Übermensch*. In his definition of a poet, Sainte-Beuve joins two notions: man (*l'homme*) and work (*l'oeuvre*) thus to indicate their inseparability. Interestingly enough, one of Michel Foucault's main definitions of madness (*folie*) is "l'absence d'oeuvre" (the absence of work, Foucault, 1961, p. 21).

In *Paracelsus*, one of the central premises from which stems the poet's argument is a sense of unbelonging, an alienation from the humankind. In a debate with his friends, Festus and Michal, young Paracelsus confesses, addressing Festus (*W&K*, 1. 151-64):

> [...] I was not born
> Inform'd and fearless from the first, but shrank
> From aught which mark'd me out apart from men.
> I would have lived their life, and striven their strife –
> Eluding Destiny, if that might be –
> But you first guided me through doubt and fear,
> And taught me to know mankind and know myself;
> And now that I am strong and full of hope;
> That I can from my soul reject all aims,
> Save those your earnest words made plain to me;
> Now, that I touch the brink of my design,
> When I would have a triumph in their eyes,
> A glad cheer in their voices – Michal weeps,
> And Festus ponders gravely!

Paracelsus does not claim any inborn supernatural powers or innate features of superior nature or personality; on the contrary, he declares that he "shrank / From aught which mark'd [him] out apart from men." This seems to be indicative of Paracelsus' strong belief in essentially tragic character of human life typified by doubt, fear and hopelessness. He says that he

"would have lived their life and striven their strife," the idea he seems to abhor strongly, had it not been for Festus' guidance he had given him. Armed with the knowledge of mankind and of himself, he now does not have to fear or elude men's destiny: he derives his mental power and might from his soul, from his inner self. Now, hopeful as he is, he can concentrate on his aims, on his work which, inevitably, will bring him much awaited triumph. His plan, however, "in lack of better, for pursuing / The path which God's will seems to authorize" is "vague and ill defined enough" (1. 176-8), and, as Paracelsus humbly admits (1. 189-96),

> [...] I learn that, spite of all, there lurks
> Some innate and inexplicable germ
> Of failure in my scheme; so that at last
> It all amounts to this – the sovereign proof
> That we devote ourselves wholly to God
> Is in a life just as though no God there were:
> A life which, prompted by the sad and blind
> Folly of man, Festus abhors the most –

Paracelsus is conscious that his plan may not succeed because of human imperfect nature, the most abhorrent "blind Folly of man," which is not able to realise that there is that primitive, original, "fierce" energy which he and other *superior men* call God. But he is in a company of good friends who offer him their comforting words, believing in his power and strength. Says Faustus (1. 280-8):

> [...] after-signs disclosed, and you confirm'd,
> That you prepared to task to the uttermost
> Your strength, in furtherance of a certain aim,
> Which – while it bore the name your rivals gave
> To their most puny efforts – was so vast
> In scope that it included their best flights,
> Combined them, and desired to gain one prize
> In place of many – the secret of the world –
> Of man, and man's true purpose, path and fate [.]

The task to know "the secret of the world –/Of man, and man's true purpose, path and fate" seems virtually impossible to accomplish by human measure: in actuality it needs a *super*human strength and courage. Paracelsus does not fear anybody or anything, but his bold cry sounds like an echo over the abyss (1. 349-72):

> No; I have nought to fear! Who will may know
> The secret'st workings of my soul. What though
> It be so? – if indeed the strong desire
> Eclipse the aim in me? – if splendour break
> Upon the outset of my path alone,

And duskest shade succeed? What fairer seal
Shall I require to my authentic mission
Than this fierce energy? – this instinct striving
Because its nature is to strive? – enticed
By the security of no broad course –
Where error is not, but success is sure.
How know I else such glorious fate my own,
But in the restless irresistible force
That works within me? Is it for human will
To institute such impulses? – still less
To disregard their promptings! What should I
Do, kept among you all; your loves, your cares
Your life – all to be mine? Be sure that God
Ne'er dooms to waste the strength he deigns impart!
Ask the gier-eagle why she stoops at once
Into the vast and unexplored abyss!
What fullgrown power informs her from the first!
Why she not marvels, strenuously beating
The silent boundless regions of the sky!

Paracelsus' wording demonstrates a peculiar conglomerate of *powerful* ideas: "the strong desire" mixed with "this fierce energy" from God as a fair seal to his "authentic mission" and "the restless irresistible force/That works within [him]." In the context of "impulses" and "promptings," and "the strength [which God] deigns impart," we have the figure of the gier-eagle [or geier-eagle, a variant spelling recorded by *OED*], literally meaning 'vulture,' which is informed by "fullgrown power" and "strenuously beat-ing/The silent boundless regions of the sky [.]" Paracelsus' voice echoes the bird's beating of its wings, thus manifesting his power over the vastness of both the abyss and the world. Figuratively speaking, it seems that the abyss is then a territory of unexplored vastness of knowledge in which power is its most essential informing element.

Unlike *Übermensch*, Paracelsus believes in the power of Nature: "Let Nature be an example to us. As she works we must follow in imitation. Herein lies hidden medical science, all artifices, all arts, all animal industries" (in *W&K*, p. 146), and, possibly, that is why he sees in the gier-eagle a symbol of power he wants to imitate. Like *Übermensch*, he strongly supports the view that "[t]ruth is within ourselves" (1. 738) and that by "[w]atch[ing] narrowly /The demonstration of a truth, its birth/[...] you shall trace the effluence to its spring,/And source within us" (1. 749-52). Men are, at the same time, victors and losers in power warfare ...

In the face of his failure to acquire "*such an amount of Knowledge as will ef-fect the perfect happiness of mankind*" (*W&K*, p. 153), the superman's traits be-come a heavy burden for Paracelsus who, dreaming of having a rest at the

end, wishes to become an ordinary man again, however, without losing sight of power (2. 62-75):

> An end, a rest! strange how the notion, once
> Encounter'd, gathers strength by moments. Rest!
> Where has it kept so long? This throbbing brow
> To cease – this beating heart to cease – all cruel
> And gnawing thoughts to cease! – to dare let down
> My strung, so high-strung brain – to dare unnerve
> My harass'd o'ertask'd frame – to know my place,
> My portion, my reward, even my failure,
> Assign'd, made sure for ever! – to lose myself
> Among the common creatures of the world –
> To draw some gain from having been a man –
> Neither to hope nor fear – to live at length!
> Even in failure, rest! – but rest, in truth,
> And power, and recompense . . .

Life is a constant warfare: one cannot imagine to live and work – even for the benefit of the whole humankind – without an opposition, which he calls elsewhere "[b]lind opposition – brutal prejudice –/Bald ignorance" (5. 336-7), but Paracelsus is ready to confront them and defend himself vigorously and with scorn (4. 277-95):

> And if I please
> To spit on them, to trample them, what then?
> 'Tis sorry warfare truly, but the fools
> Provoke it: I ne'er sought to domineer;
> The mere asserting my supremacy
> Has little mortified their self-conceit;
> I took my natural station and no more:
> But if they *will* provoke me – will not suffer
> Forbearance on my part – if I can have
> No quality in the shade, but must put forth
> Power for power; my strength against theirs –
> Must teach them their own game with their own arms –
> Why be it so, and let them take their chance!
> I am above them like a God – there's no
> Hiding the fact – and, had I been but wise,
> Had ne'er concern'd myself with scruples, nor
> Communicated aught to such a race;
> But been content to own myself a man,
> And in my elevation man's would be . . .

Paracelsus' self-proclaimed ascendancy, his self-asserted God-like status, runs counter to a popularly held view in the nineteenth-century that power is *God-given* and as such inaccessible to man (see Foucault 1978), and this seems to be, in the main, one of the fundamental assumptions the poet is en-

deavouring to dismantle in the poem. In the final part, dying Paracelsus confesses bitterly (5. 834-47):

> What wonder if I saw no way to shun
> Despair? for power seem'd shut from man for ever.
> In this conjuncture, as I pray'd to die,
> A strange adventure made me know One Sin
> Had spotted my career from its uprise;
> And as the poor melodious wretch disburthen'd
> His heart, and moan'd his weakness in my ear,
> I learn'd my own deep error: love's undoing
> Taught me the worth of love in man's estate,
> And what proportion love should hold with power
> In his right constitution: love preceding
> Power – with much power always much more love;
> Love still too straiten'd in its present means,
> And earnest for new power to set it free.

The contention that "power seem'd shut for man for ever," particularly in the context of "One Sin" which had spotted Paracelsus' career from the very start, may be suggestive of the Original Sin, with which the Christians believe they are born, and through which the Paradise had been lost for the mankind, so had the power from God. But, then, Paracelsus discovers (re-discovers?) for himself the power *from* love. "The worth of love," as he calls it, seems to indicate not so much the value of love but rather the strength, the energy, the might of love man possesses, or used to possess. Hence, the clearly expressed urge for "new power to set it free," new power that most likely will not come from, or be given, by God.

Paracelsus' "liberating" call, alongside the ontological assertion that love actually precedes power, can be interpreted as a call to "revalue all values," though not exactly in the way Nietzsche understood it. Yet, the proportion he formulates between (human) love and (God's) power that "with much power always much more love" emphasises the significance and prevalence of an emotional, human(e) factor over an authoritarian, "given" one.

The antecedent of Paracelsus' power/love concept is to be found in the previous lines (5. 627-33), where the speaker claims to have known

> what God is, what we are,
> What life is – how God tastes an infinite joy
> In infinite ways – one everlasting bliss,
> From whom all being emanates, all power
> Proceeds; in whom is life for evermore,
> Yet whom existence in its lowest form
> Includes; where dwells enjoyment there is He.

God as the source of all power is not a new concept. That power is a Divine gift comes as no surprise, especially in the context of historicity which tells us of the sovereign's power as given directly from God (cf. Foucault 1978 and 1980). Paracelsus, like Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, does not possess any God-like power; on the contrary, the physicality of his decaying body only emphasises his eventual fall as a human. Waiting at his death-bed, Festus grieves (5. 4-11):

> Another night, and still no sigh has stirred
> That fall'n discolour'd mouth, no pang relit
> Those fixed eyes, quench'd by the decaying body,
> Like torch-flame choked in dust: while all beside
> Was breaking, to the last they held out bright,
> As a strong-hold where life intrench'd itself;
> But they are dead now – very blind and dead:
> He will drowse into death without a groan!

Life has been presented here as a force capable of defending itself. With "Eye/I" metaphor, Browning stressed the psychological, mental aspect of the construction of his *Übermensch*: "I's" – several egos, complex personality is denoted here as "a stronghold." We have also an optical metaphor: the eyes can be interpreted as the openings allowing a direct access to the brain, thus enabling a therapist/observer/Festus to diagnose the cause of an illness.

But Festus' sorrow is short-lived: he sees in Paracelsus a Christ-like figure, the earth's noblest, the champion, the creature-god, the features Nietzsche would have applauded much also in his *Übermensch*. This time Festus vociferates dramatically (5. 35-50):

> Ay, here!
> Here is earth's noblest, nobly garlanded –
> Her bravest champion with his well-won meed –
> Her best achievement, her sublime amends
> For countless generations fleeting fast
> And followed by no trace – the creature-god
> She instances when angels would dispute
> The title of her brood to rank with them.
> Angels, this is our angel! Those bright forms
> We clothe with purple, crown and call to thrones,
> Are human, but not his; those are but men
> Whom other men press round and kneel before;
> Those palaces are dwelt in by mankind;
> Higher provision is for him you seek
> Amid our pomps and glories: see it here!
> Behold earth's paragon! Now raise thee, clay!

The last line is of particular interest. Browning's "Behold earth's paragon!" seems to be none other than Nietzsche's "Ecce homo" – behold the man – a phrase he used to describe himself as a Christ-like figure in his autobiography *Ecce Homo. How One Becomes What One Is* (1979). In his book, Nietzsche made a clear reference to John's Gospel in which it is stated that Pilate, on having brought out Jesus wearing a crown of thorns for the Jews to see, said to them: "Behold the man!" Browning, like Nietzsche, sees in Paracelsus *the man* with the *Übermensch* qualities, a god-like figure or, rather, earth-like, which will be resurrected as did Christ on the third day after his death ("Now, raise thee, clay!").

Paracelsus, like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, is a teacher, too. Festus declares (5. 98-100):

> We are your students, noble master. Leave
> This wretched cell, what business have you here?
> Our class awaits you; come to us once more!

But being dissatisfied with his daring attempt to gain the Absolute knowledge ("The foolish knowledge which I came to seek"), he asks God to grant him this time "[t]he supernatural consciousness of strength" (5. 248-53):

> Thou art good,
> And I should be content. Yet – yet first show
> I have done wrong in daring! Rather give
> The supernatural consciousness of strength
> That fed my youth [...] one only hour of that
> With thee to help – O what should bar me then!

Thus, as Paracelsus concludes, a desire to power is not enough to make him equal with God – what he needs now is the supernatural *consciousness* of strength. Paracelsus understood that without psychological, mental strength, his desire, drive to "power, more power" is all in vain (5. 795-8):

> Power: I could not take my eyes from that –
> That only was to be preserved, increased
> At any risk; display'd, struck out at once –
> The sign, and note, and character of man.

CHAPTER FOUR

DEATH AND DISAPPEARANCE OF GOD: NIETZSCHE AND BROWNING. THE DISCOURSE OF GOD'S POWER, ABSENCE AND REVALUATION OF ALL VALUES

> *First Observation.* The word "tree," an assembly of four letters, is not the wooden object. This sign marks the absence of the object. What to get out of this observation: you cannot get out of it. This Is real....
> (For an era of black astral holes and antimatter and strange quarks and traces we require a philosophy of *absence.*)
>
> Vincent B. Leitch, *Deconstructive Criticism*

> Absence attempts to produce itself in the book and is lost in being pronounced; it knows itself as disappearing and lost, and to this extent it remains inaccessible and impenetrable. To gain access to it is to lose it; to show it is to hide it; to acknowledge it is to lie.
>
> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*

The history of the first Western and Eastern civilisations, at least in the period of the last 4,000 years, has also been the history of one major belief: the belief in a single divinity, be it called God, Yahweh or Allah. Containing the whole spectrum of meanings and being extremely flexible throughout the centuries, the notion of God has, in the main, been identified in Judaism, Christianity and Islam with the Supreme Being (Spirit) who created and rules the world, and whose power has been thought to be unlimited. Accordingly, the issue of God's unlimited power has its parallel belief in his immortality and the reign over time and death.

The most distinctive trait of divinity so defined is its transcendent character, that is to say, its having continuous existence outside the created world and thus being free from the limitations inherent in matter. God's

sphere, therefore, is an extra "reality" imposed onto the one that can be perceived and apprehended by human senses and reason. Interestingly enough, it was Christianity, the dominant religion of the Western civilisation in the last 2,000 years, that attempted to combine the two spheres – the divine and the human – in the incarnation of God in man. Thus, Catholic historians (e.g. Anne Carroll, 1994) consider the incarnation, i.e. the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who, as one of the most fundamental Christian dogmas has it, was both God and man, as the single most important event in human history. In Christianity, therefore, as well as in other monotheistic religions, God, however perceived – as the creator and ruler, redeemer or the crucified – is a sole object of worship and veneration.

The spread of Christianity in the Western world in the Common Era, first in Greece, where the first Scriptures were written for the Gentiles, and later in Rome, contributed substantially to the fact that most philosophies, particularly in the Middle Ages and after, based their principles on the thesis that there is another reality, another dimension, another world beyond the one we can objectively see. Hence we witnessed the astonishing popularity of metaphysics in predominantly Christian European thought (from the Greek *ta meta ta phusika*, the things after the physics, i.e. the things beyond nature and matter), the philosophical discipline and the way of thinking that allows to mix the real with the supernatural, the seen with the unseen, the knowable with the unknowable, the dogmatic, the inexplicable. Metaphysics – needless to say – had been born long before the spread of the new creed.

However, the task of philosophy in modern times (roughly from the seventeenth century onwards, as the product of the Copernican revolution launched by Kant) was formulated differently: it tried to pursue a goal that then seemed apparently untenable – to establish a universal philosophical system which would be based on reason rather than transcendentalism. There were numerous attempts by various philosophers at different periods of time (Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Marx, to name just a few in recent centuries), but it was not until the publication of Nietzsche's *The Will to Power* (1901) that his "Godless" philosophy gained notoriety.

In the chapter, entitled "The Death of God?", Karen Armstrong (1996, pp. 403-4) tries to propose some answers to the question of the death of God:

> During the nineteenth century, one major philosopher after another rose up to challenge the traditional view of God, at least the 'God' who prevailed in the West. They were particularly offended by the notion of a supernatural deity 'out-there' which had an objective existence. We have seen that though the idea of God as the Supreme Being had gained ascendancy in the West, other monotheistic traditions had gone out of their way to separate themselves from this type of theology. Jews, Muslims and Orthodox Christians had all in-

sisted in their different ways that our human idea of God did not correspond to the ineffable reality of which it was a mere symbol. All had suggested, at one time or another, that it was more accurate to describe God as 'Nothing' rather than the Supreme Being, since 'he' did not exist in any way that we could conceive. Over the centuries, the West had gradually lost sight of this more imaginative conception of God. Catholics and Protestants had come to regard 'him' as a Being who was another reality added on the world we know, overseeing our activities like a celestial Big Brother. Not surprisingly this notion of God was quite unacceptable to many people in the post-revolutionary world, since it seemed to condemn human beings to an ignoble servitude and an unworthy dependence that was incompatible with human dignity. The atheistic philosophers of the nineteenth century rebelled against this God with good reason. Their criticisms inspired many of their contemporaries to do the same.

The criticism of the idea of God as an actually existing Being had a prominent place in the history of the natural and human sciences in the nineteenth century (Darwin, Freud, Nietzsche, to name just a few most outstanding figures). In this chapter, however, we shall concentrate on raising a few questions concerning the problematic of God as power and the implications resulting from his death and/or disappearance rather than arguing for or against his existence in the real world (NB. we shall adhere to the personal/possessive pronouns "he/him/his" when talking about God, not the ultra modern, politically correct "he/she". One should note, however, that while it is typical of Christianity (and of English) to address God as "He," some other religions and languages [e.g. Hebrew, Arabic or French] preserve a gender balance in theological discourse).

The obvious choice for our considerations in this chapter will be the concept of the Christian God, essentially because Christianity, to a large extent, has been the product of *Western* civilisation, albeit born in the Near East, and European and English philosophy and literature in the nineteenth century practically limited itself to this one concept of the Deity.

Therefore, before we proceed to Browning's idea of God's disappearance, the stress will primarily be laid on Nietzsche and Freud rather than on Darwin, whose theory of natural selection, it is noteworthy, was flatly rejected by Nietzsche for the simple reason that, as he argued in *Beyond Good and Evil* (13), "life itself is will to power – : self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent consequences of it." In *Twilight of the Idols* (14), he elaborated his point arguing that

[a]s regards the celebrated 'struggle for *life*,' it seems to me for the present to have been rather asserted than proved. It does occur, but as the exception; the general aspect of life is *not* hunger and distress, but rather wealth, luxury, even absurd prodigality – where there is a struggle it is a struggle for power.

Although both Nietzsche and Darwin, directly or indirectly, rejected the idea of God as the creator and overseer of mankind, it would be wrong to

draw any close parallels between them. In his Introduction to *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (p. xii), Walter Kaufmann passes his judgement on the links between the two outstanding nineteenth-century minds, arguing that "[o]nce it was the fashion to link him [Nietzsche] with Darwin and evolutionary thought, but his reputation did not pass with this fashion, and it actually gained when more and more writers came to realize the inadequacy of such an interpretation."

The concepts, first, of God as power and, then, of God's death, disappearance and absence that we are going to uncover in this chapter will subsequently be applied to make the reading of Robert Browning's poetry possible from the existential perspective of the nineteenth-century disillusionment with lost human identity in a world deserted by God.

Robert Browning who, like Nietzsche and Freud and many other nineteenth-century intellectuals, had his own conceptions of that force "beyond my self," desired to come to terms with God in a highly idiosyncratic language reflecting the doubts, fear and despair of the generations left *beginningless, centreless* and *fatherless*. The language thus derived was in Browning, however, only part of the larger evolutionary process that literature, mainly European, was undergoing at that time. In Miller's words (1975, p. 6):

> In this evolution words have been gradually hollowed out, and have lost their substantial participation in material and spiritual reality. Just as the modern city is the creation of a set of people living without God in the world, so modern literature betrays in its very form the absence of God. God has become a *Deus abscontitus*, hidden somewhere behind the silence of infinite spaces, and our literary symbols can only make the most distant allusions to him, or to the natural world which used to be his abiding place and home.

Miller applies the term "modern" to almost all nineteenth-century literature, including the poetry of Browning. The measure of "modernism" in the nineteenth century is, according to, for instance, Hawthorn (1994), and also convincingly evident in Miller, a departure from realism and a generally self-reflexive character of the texts. As Hawthorn (pp. 120-1) has it:

> One of the qualities which distinguishes modernism from romanticism [...] is a generally more pessimistic, even tragic view of the world [...] a world seen as fragmented and decayed, in which communication between human beings is difficult or impossible. Our proposition in this chapter will be that the breakdown of communication between people that characterises the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature had been preceded by God's gradual disappearance from the world, manifested, among other things, by the incessant use of symbols and the symbolic language, which in literature, more often than not, designate an absence rather than a presence. *Deus absconditus*, as much as the Nietzschean *Gott ist tot*, betrays a dramatically altered balance of power between God, the all-powerful creator and ruler of the world, and man, his centuries-long servant and vassal.

GOD IS BORN

In the long history of the idea of God (god/s, divinity/ies), the beliefs taught by Jesus of Nazareth and later elaborated and developed by his followers (most notably Paul and, much later, Augustine) are, as we have already indicated, of perennial importance for the history and philosophy of the last two thousand years of Western civilisation. Based largely on Judaism and also on Zoroastrianism, the first dualistic religion ever, Christianity postulated the view of human existence in a unique and direct relationship to the one Absolute Being (God) who stood above and beyond all other beings as creator of the visible and invisible world. Christianity sees in God, therefore, the first and foremost, primeval and eternal *source of power*, whereas the other source, only slightly less mighty, is with Satan, the epitome of the forces of evil. This dualistic vision of the warring universe, the idea borrowed from Zoroastrianism and imported into Christianity via Judaism, has had an enormous impact on the development of the Western mind and constituted one single, incessantly recurring and probably most frequently quoted motif in the literature of the Western world.

Yet the most consequential element that Christianity brought about, and which constituted an original contribution to the world religions, was the belief in the incarnation of God in the figure of man. To make a detour here, it is noteworthy that the name of this man, for about sixteen centuries known in the Western world as Jesus, is one more instance of the erroneous translations that survived generations of readers and editors, and is, at the same time, a clear evidence of the power of tradition which is impossible to eradicate. Charles Pellegrino (1994), whose opinion is also shared by, for instance, N.A. Wilson (1993), argues that in the second century A.D., when the first translations of the New Testament into Greek, "the Hebrew name Joshua was incorrectly translated as Jesus, and by the time Saint Jerome prepared the Latin version of the Bible, about A.D. 400, the erroneous name had become too widely established to be altered" (p. 87). Further on, he concludes (p. 101):

> A similar situation has been with us since the Hebrew Bible was translated into the Greek Septuagint. "Moses" was originally "Mosheh"; Adam and Eve were "the man" and "Havva." In the original New Testament texts, Christ is not Jesus' (more correctly Joshua's) last name. "Christ" is a title translated as "the anointed one," the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *Messiah*. The proper name for Christianity's founding prophet is *Joshua, the Messiah*, but few today would tolerate the change.

Richard Tarnas' point of view of Christianity (1996, pp. 96-7) is that the *early* Church was that institution which alleged the materialisation of God

in the figure of Christ. But the challenge, as he asserts, first came from the carpenter's son himself:

> Jesus had challenged his fellow Jews to accept God's saving activity in history, an activity visible in his own person and ministry. This challenge was paralleled – developed, reformulated, magnified – by the early Church in its call to recognize Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah. Thus did Christianity claim to be the fulfillment of the Judaic hopes: The longed for future of God now entered history in Christ. In a paradoxical combination of the linear and the timeless, Christianity declared that Christ's presence in the world was the presence of God's promised future, just as God's future lay in the full realization of the presence of Christ.

This is exactly that presence of God and, on the whole, the metaphysical *presence* as such which became the target of attacks of philosophers in the more recent history of Western thought, but, as we shall see later in this chapter, long before God's presence in the human world was questioned seriously, it was rather God who somehow mysteriously faded away, and then eventually vanished from man's historical perspective. As Miller (1975, p. 4) has it:

> It may be that the disappearance of God has been caused not so much by man's turning his back on God, as by a strange withdrawal of God himself. It certainly has seemed so to many modern writers.

Christianity, as a religious and philosophical concept as well as a social phenomenon, seems to be that territory of human experience where the relations of power dominate. The power with which the Christian God had been endowed and said to possess was, dogmatically, a subject of envy from the side of God's favourite angel (a being standing between God and man in the hierarchy), which resulted in a power struggle – a coup or revolution in the modern political language. The stronger won (goodness was triumphant) and the weaker lost (evil was damned), thus remaining for centuries the symbols of an everlasting struggle between the forces of good (God) and evil (Satan). The fallen, rebellious angel, so convincingly depicted in, for instance, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, still possesses power and even preserves its noble title ("The Prince of Darkness"). And although the famous epic's opener sees the source of evil in "man's first disobedience, and the fruit/Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste/Brought death into the world," (Book I, ll. 1-3), the genuine reason, according to Milton, is with somebody else. When he speaks of "our grand parents" (l. 29) and asks "Who first seduced them to that foul revolt?" (l. 33), his answer is disarmingly straightforward (ll. 34-49):

> The infernal serpent; he it was whose guile,
> Stirred up with envy and revenge, deceived

The mother of mankind, what time his pride
Had cast him out of heaven, with all his host
Of rebel angels, by whose aid, aspiring
To set himself in glory above his peers,
He trusted to have equalled the most high,
If he opposed, and, with ambitious aim
Against the throne and monarchy of God,
Raised impious war in heaven and battle proud,
With vain attempt. Him the almighty power
Hurled headlong flaming from the ethereal sky,
With hideous ruin and combustion, down
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell
In adamantine chains and penal fire,
Who durst defy the omnipotent to arms.

The serpent – a symbol of power and evil – has traditionally been opposed to man, also, as the Book of Genesis asserts, because God ordained eternal enmity between reptiles and humans. But Pellegrino (1994, p. 45) sees it differently:

> Had the snakes remained hidden in the Earth, had they never spread across the continents and evolved into newer, deadlier forms, it is possible that lingering memories of an ancient hostility between reptiles and mammals, would have, in a fate similar to that of the human appendix [...], degenerated by dryopithecine times [...]. But on an African savannah in 20 million B.C., with cobras lurking in the grass, and crocodiles camouflaged to resemble logs at the edges of water holes, an easy way for a dryopithecine to die was to forget the fear of reptiles. So dark shapes rasped and hissed in the savage brain, and in the first books of the Bible, the serpent emerged as a symbol of power and evil; and in some small way, the dinosaurs were alive-seeming still.

And in the conclusion, Pellegrino argues that (p. 45):

> [t]he ironic feature of the coevolution of serpents and humans is that we mammals are at least partly responsible for the persistence of unpleasant memories. It was the very diversification and success of our ancestors that created a need to preserve images of hostile reptiles. By encouraging the emergence and diversification of snakes, the dryopithecines and their contemporaries had, in essence, become the creators of their own tormentors.

The excessive use of the serpent symbol in the Christian power model may signal an interpretative possibility that there is no real, authentic *presence* of power which the symbol is to denote. On the contrary, the symbolic presentation of evil in the guise of the serpent indicates rather an *absence* of the force thus denoted since, as may be argued, all symbols only represent but *are not* the things or ideas they stand for. This makes us look *beyond* symbolism and judgmental moral values, as the title of Nietzsche's book, *Beyond Good and Evil*, suggests in a search of the genuine will to power.

Finally, the concept of the Christian God appears to be also susceptible to the analysis of the relations between power and fear (of which more in

the subsequent chapters): the Lord – the power figure – is a sole dispenser of human life and, what is of paramount importance, of the alleged afterlife, and it is he in whom power (of salvation) and fear (of damnation) find their issue.

MAN IS BORN

With the creation of God there came the creation of man. The account that we find in Genesis 2:5-7 gives us an etymological clue as to the essential organic affinity between man and the earth (rather than God):

> At the time Yahweh God made earth and heaven, there was as yet no wild bush on the earth nor any wild plant yet sprung up, for Yahweh God had not sent rain on the earth nor was there any man to till the soil. However, a flood was rising from the earth and watering all the surface of the soil. Yahweh God fashioned man (*adam*) of dust from the soil (*adamah*). Then he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and thus man became a living being.

Man, instead of having been created from the same substance as his creator, is basically, according to a biblical writer, a composition (very much like a work of art) of earth (dust, ashes), water, and a divine breath. The etymological likeness between man (*adam*) and the earth (*adamah*) indicates a departure from the holistic vision upheld by the Antiquity and the Middle East religions that man and God (gods) have been made from the same matter and that there was no fundamental ontological difference between them save the difference in *power* and *immortality*. This is what Pindar (1969, p. 203) writes in one of his famous Olympic odes:

Single is the race, single
Of men and gods;
From a single mother we both draw breath.
But a difference of power in everything
Keeps us apart;
For one is as nothing, but the brazen sky
Stays a fixed habituation for ever.
Yet we can in greatness of mind
Or of body be like the Immortals.

The difference in power Pindar speaks about will remain, for the centuries to come, a sore point for those who dreamed of becoming gods, idols, Nietzschean *Götzen*. Also time will be the enemy of those who could only dream of divine immortality. It is also of interest here to stress the meaning of the first, officially documented name of the pre-Christian (Judaic) God. In the book of Exodus, God (Yahweh), when asked by Moses (Mosheh) what his name was, answered: "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to

the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14). In Hebrew "I am" is none other than "Yahweh," thus the very name of God, as we use it today, is this notorious metaphysical I am rather than I am not. We remember Parmenides's "Why is there anything rather than nothing?" and Heidegger's "Why are there essents rather than nothing?" This is the fundamental question of all metaphysics.

To recapitulate, the concept of God (god), as it came to us in the history of Western civilisation, distinguishes two fundamental differences between the supreme and human beings from which stem other, secondary differences, namely, the difference in power and immortality. Christianity developed the concept of God to such an extent that for over two millennia it has preoccupied the minds of philosophers who, having reached the religious extremes in constructing their theories of the world, proved unable to reject completely the concept of God (Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer and others).

NIETZSCHE'S CRITIQUE OF GOD AND CHRISTIANITY

It seems that the only nineteenth-century philosopher who succeeded in building a fairly complete philosophical system based on the total rejection of the idea of the supernatural being was Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). The version of the biblical story of creation differs considerably from the one presented in the book of Genesis. His arguments in the brilliant passage (48) of *The Antichrist* are based on the conviction that since God hellishly feared science he did not want man to *think* at all, and the whole process of creation stemmed from God's blunders out of which man was his greatest:

> The old God, all 'spirit', all high priest, all perfection, promenades in his garden: but he is bored. Against boredom the gods themselves fight in vain [from a famous line in Schiller's *Maid of Orleans*: 'Against stupidity the gods themselves fight in vain.']. What does he do? He invents man – man is entertaining. But, behold, man too is bored. God's sympathy with the only kind of distress found in every Paradise knows no bounds: he forthwith creates other animals. God's *first* blunder: man did not find the animals entertaining – he dominated them, he did not even want to be an 'animal'. – Consequently God created woman. And then indeed there was an end to boredom – but also to something else! Woman was God's *second* blunder. – 'Woman is in her essence serpent, Heva' – every priest knows that; '*every* evil comes into the world through woman' – every priest knows that likewise. '*Consequently, science* too comes into the world through her'. Only through woman did man learn to taste of the tree of knowledge. – What had happened? A mortal terror seized on the old God. Man himself had become God's *greatest* blunder; God had created for himself a rival, science makes equal to God – it is all over with priests and gods if man becomes scientific! *Moral:* science is the forbidden in itself – it alone is forbidden. Science is the *first* sin, the germ of all sins, *original* sin. *This alone constitutes morality.* – 'Thou shall *not* know' – the rest follows. God's mortal terror ["hellish fear" in Kaufmann's translation in *The Portable Nietzsche* (1982)] did not stop him from being shrewd.

> How can one *defend* oneself against science? – that was for long his chief problem. Answer: away with man out of Paradise! Happiness, leisure gives room for thought – all thoughts are bad thoughts. Man *shall* not think.

The effect of man's inability to think, in Nietzsche's assumption, led to a mental and moral slavery of Christianity, which, consequently, led man to believe that the whole Christian concept of God is totally degenerated and wrong. In *The Antichrist* (18), the German philosopher argues that

> [t]he Christian conception of God [...] is one of the most corrupt conceptions of God arrived at on earth: [...] God degenerated to the *contradiction of life*, instead of being its transfiguration and eternal Yes! In God a declaration of hostility towards life, nature, the will to life! God the formula for every calumny of 'this world,' for every lie about 'the next world'! In God nothingness deified, the will to nothingness sanctified!

Consequently, the corrupt Christian conception of God corrupted the whole idea of Christianity, against which Nietzsche declared in *The Will to Power* yet one more war, claiming this time that Christianity was the great unholy lie (passage number 200):

> I regard Christianity as the most fatal seductive lie that has yet existed, as the great unholy lie: I draw out the after-growth and sprouting of its ideal from beneath every form of disguise, I reject every compromise position with respect to it – I force a war against it.

However, Nietzsche's view of Christianity and the Christian concept of God was decidedly not so straightforward as it may seem at a first glance at the citations above. As a digression, we may recall at this moment the wish he had cherished for all of his sane adult life not to be called a saint, but, paradoxically, the author of *Der Antichrist* was buried to the sound of church bells, his coffin was decorated with a silver cross, and the last words of the benediction a large crowd of mourners had heard were: "Hallowed be thy name to all future generations" (Hayman, 1995, p. 350). This irony illustrates best a thesis put forth by Derrida that "we cannot formulate a single destructive proposition which has not had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implied hypothesis of exactly what it is trying to refute" (Derrida, 1978, p. 23). It was the same hand which penned a definition of Christianity to the effect that it is "an appalling mishmash of Greek philosophy and Judaism; asceticism; continual judging and condemning; order of rank, etc." (*WP*, 169), and which also wrote about "true Christianity" – Christianity as an idea which went terribly wrong: "something fundamentally different from what its founder died and desired" (*WP*, 195). Thus, it comes as no surprise that Nietzsche held the view that Christ was *not* God, but rather a kind of philosopher, prophet, people's leader, whose ideas had been largely misunderstood, misrepresented and prevaricated first by his disciples, and then by the generation of priests (*WP*, 169):

A god who died for our sins: redemption through faith; resurrection after death – all these are counterfeits of *true Christianity* [emphasis mine] for which that disastrous wrong-headed fellow [Paul] must be held responsible.

Elsewhere he remarked that "we suffer if we should happen to be so un-intelligent as to take sides against anything – Fundamentally, it is we scholars who today best fulfill the teaching of Christ" (*WP*, 218), proving in this way the accuracy of the statement of the idea of Christianity going awfully wrong.

Nietzsche's views in regard to the Christian faith were equally uncompromising. In *Beyond Good and Evil* (46) he declared that

[f]rom the start, the Christian faith is a sacrifice: a sacrifice of all freedom, all pride, all self-confidence of the spirit; at the same time, enslavement and self-mockery, self-mutilation. There is cruelty and religious Phoenicianism in this faith which is expected of an over-ripe, multiple, and much spoiled conscience: it presupposes that the subjection of the spirit *hurts* indescribably; that the whole past and the habits of such a spirit resist the *absurdissimum* which "faith" represents to it.

Then he went on to explain the origin of the primitive Christian faith in Rome (46):

It has always been not faith but the freedom from faith, that half-stoical and smiling unconcern with the seriousness of faith, that enraged slaves in their masters – against their masters. "Enlightenment" enrages: for the slave wants the unconditional; he understands only what is tyrannical, in morals, too; he loves as he hates, without nuance, to the depths, to the point of pain, of sickness – his abundant *concealed* suffering is enraged against the noble taste that seems to *deny* suffering.

Christianity is then regarded by Nietzsche as the slave philosophy, the philosophy "on the knees," the philosophy of the weak and exhausted, of those whose spirit is chained. All the values Nietzsche cherished throughout the whole of his lifetime, such as nobility, freedom, pride are, in his opinion, denied in Christianity. What it can offer instead is sacrifice, pain, sickness, suffering, tyranny, hatred, enslavement, rage, self-mockery and self-mutilation. The history of Christianity that had begun with the death on the cross was, in Nietzsche's opinion articulated in *The Antichrist* (37), the history of the misunderstanding of its original symbolism:

With every extension of Christianity over even broader, even ruder masses in whom the preconditions out of which it was born were more and more lacking, it became increasingly necessary to *vulgarize*, to *barbarize* Christianity – it absorbed the doctrines and rites of every subterranean cult of the *Imperium Romanum*, it absorbed the absurdities of every sort of morbid reason. The fate of Christianity lies in the necessity for its faith itself to grow as morbid, low and vulgar as the requirements it was intended to satisfy were morbid, low and vulgar. As the Church, this *morbid barbarism* itself finally assumes power –

the Church, that form of mortal hostility to all integrity, to all *loftiness* of soul, to discipline of spirit, to all open-hearted and benevolent humanity.

Nietzsche's unyielding attack on Christianity touches upon its institutionalised form, the Church, as the centre which concentrates – and generates – most power. However, we may argue, after Foucault, that it was the power Christianity gained throughout centuries, alongside the discourses typical of the social classes it accumulated, that created the Church. The original message of Jesus as the Redeemer was shattered, transformed, "vulgarized," therefore, as he concludes this section of *The Antichrist*, there was a need to restore the contrast between Christian and *noble* values, "the greatest that there is."

Christianity, as a religion which has no contact with the actual life here on earth, but instead promises something vaguely called "resurrection" somewhere there, somewhere "Beyond," is, in the words of Nietzsche, a mortal enemy of the "wisdom of the world," and God, as Paul created him, is a negation of God (47):

> What sets *us* apart is not that we recognize no God, either in history or in nature or behind nature – but that we find that which has been reverenced as God not 'godlike' but pitiable, absurd, harmful, not merely an error but a *crime against life*. [...] If this God of the Christians were *proved* to us to exist, we should know even less how to believe in him. – In a formula: *Deus, qualem Paulus creavit, dei negatio* [God, as Paul created him, is a denial of God]. – A religion like Christianity, which is at no point in contact with actuality, which crumbles away as soon as actuality comes into its own at any point whatever, must naturally be a mortal enemy of the 'wisdom of the world', that is to say of *science* – it will approve of all expedients by which disciplining of the intellect, clarity and severity in matters of intellectual conscience, noble coolness and freedom of intellect, can be poisoned and calumniated and *brought into ill repute*.

Essentially, what Nietzsche thought of the concept called "God" can be summarised briefly as one more manifestation of the will to power. The idea of God as the authoritarian/totalitarian power has been propelled, according to him, by the old habit of supposing that the goal of existence must be set up by an exterior power – a superhuman authority. God, according to Nietzsche, was born out of man's imagination, out of the separation of man's two sides, one strong and powerful he called "divine" and the other one – weak and powerless he called "human." His denunciation of the concept of God finds a convincing explanation in what he calls rudimentary psychology of the *homo religiosus* [religious man]: the belief that man is not the cause of his own power and credits some external forces with what he has got, which Nietzsche narrows down to an act of will: the conditions of power come without being willed: the will that is not free needs an external will. The result of this, he continues in *The Will to Power* (136), is religion as

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the product of a doubt concerning the unity of the person – a duality of the mind:

> [...] in so far as everything great and strong in man has been conceived as superhuman and external, man has belittled himself – he has separated the two sides of himself, one very paltry and weak, one very strong and astonishing, into two spheres, and called the former "man," the latter "God." [...] The Christian too divides his person into a mean and weak fiction which he calls man, and another which he calls God (redeemer, savior) –

The concept of God in Nietzsche thus seems to be none other than the psychological concept of man, where human "super I" or, to use the Freudian term, "super ego," has been projected into the sphere of the superhuman, supernatural, in other words – "divine". The strong part of human psyche is separated in this process from the weak one, which results in the arousal of a feeling of guilt and inferiority in humans, a kind of neurotic distortion of personality.

FREUD: THE TRUE NIETZSCHE

Sigmund Freud (1925), whom the novelist Arnold Zweig proclaimed as the *true* Nietzsche,[1] divided the human mental apparatus into three categories: an *ego* (System *Conscious*), a *super-ego* (System *Preconscious*), and an *id* (System *Unconscious*). The *super-ego*, in his words, "the heir of the Oedipus complex" and representing "the ethical standards of mankind" (1925), generates guilt. In his *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, Freud (1953-74, XXII, p. 77) sketches the position of the "I" with the mental apparatus scheme:

> We are warned by a proverb against serving two masters at the same time. The poor ego has things even worse: it serves three masters and does what it can to bring their claims and demands into harmony with one another. [...] Its three tyrannical masters are the external world, the super-ego and the id.

One of the tyrannical masters, the "super-I," can, from a psychoanalytical point of view, be considered as a father-figure resembling the image of God that Christianity and other religions have created. In his essay, *Leonardo Da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood,* Freud explicitly states that God is a father-figure (1953-74, XI, p. 123):

> Psycho-Analysis has made us familiar with the intimate connection between the father-complex and the belief in God; it has shown us that a personal God is, psychologically, nothing other than an exalted father, and it brings us evidence of how young people lose their religious beliefs as soon as their father's authority breaks down. Thus we recognize that the roots of the need for religion are in the parental complex; the almighty and just

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God [...] appear to us as grand sublimations of father and mother, or rather as revivals and restorations of the young child's ideas of them.

THE DEATH OF GOD

Nietzsche reached a climax of his religious reflections on the essence of existence in respect to God in *Gay Science*, where he, through the mouth of the madman, announced the death of God (*GS*, 125):

> Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place and cried incessantly: 'I am looking for God! I am looking for God!' – As many of those who did not believe in God were standing there he excited considerable laughter. Have you lost him then? said one. Did he lose his way like a child? said another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? or emigrated? – thus they shouted and laughed. The madman sprang into their midst and pierced them with his glances. 'Where has God gone?' he cried. 'I shall tell you. *We have killed him* –you and I. We are all his murderers.'

Interestingly enough, although the story of the madman bears some strong resemblance to a biblical gospel in its construction and the language, the main character definitely stands out from the biblical convention. Nietzsche deliberately chose the madman for the role of the messenger to deliver bad (good?) news of the death of God to the non-believers. The messianic, Christ-like figure of the madman, while announcing the death of God, carries with him a great burden of guilt. The accuser is at the same time the self-accused: "*We have killed him* – you and I," thus identifying himself with the populace, the collective consciousness.

The self-indictment of the madman (the so-called "reasonable" man would have never taken the blame on himself) is an indication of God's existential character, that is to say, that God had existed before He was killed by people in at least two senses: physically by the mob, the lowly, the politicians, the soldiers, priests, women, and spiritually, doctrinally, by the individuals, the scholarly, the unbelievers. The madman's story is the story of God-the-man, God-the-victim, God-the-*un*resurrected; it is most definitely not a philosopher's story of God's non-existence. In his book, *Nietzsche and Modern Literature. Themes in Yeats, Rilke, Mann and Lawrence* (1988, p. 144), Keith May argues that Nietzsche's notorious announcement of God's death has nothing to do with plain atheism; on the contrary, it still possesses a deeply moral meaning:

> Nietzsche's tale is about the murder of God, not His non-existence. This is far from commonplace atheism, for commonplace atheism, heedless atheism is itself under attack. Unbelievers generally assume that God was always an illusion, so that our modern repudiation of him can only increase our freedom. Nietzsche knows, on the contrary, that a

world without God must be wilderness as well as an opportunity. Nietzsche assumes that when God 'lived in men's hearts' He was alive in an exceedingly valuable sense. He was the Lord of all power and might, but now every sort of authority lies in the hands of ordinary people [the mob, the lower classes, R.W.]. They have nothing to look up but themselves, no one to question, and in particular they have no model of conduct. Human life has lost its moral meaning, but we still give it a moral interpretation.

It is noteworthy that Christ used to preach almost exclusively to the lower classes: the sinful, like prostitutes, adulterers, taxmen, and those unbelonging like lepers, foreigners, etc. That is probably why Nietzsche argued in *The Will to Power* (207) that

Christianity is also abolition of society: it prefers all that society counts of little worth, it grows up among outcasts and the condemned, among lepers of all kinds, "sinners," "publicans," prostitutes, the most stupid folk (the "fishers"); it disdains the rich, the learned, the noble, the virtuous, the "correct."

Derision, noise and laughter ("Has he gone on a voyage? or emigrated? – thus they shouted and laughed") traditionally accompany the unpopular teachings by people with little or no authority and respect. And that is why only a madman could have dared to speak to such a hostile throng and call them (and himself) murderers ("We are all his murderers").

Then the madman contemplates that critical moment for the entire humankind in a series of questions (*GS*, 125):

But how have we done this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What did we do when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving now? Away from all suns? Are we not perpetually falling? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is more and more night not coming on all the time? Must not lanterns be lit in the morning? Do we not hear anything yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we not smell anything yet of God's decomposition? – gods too decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.

The madman's questions sound doubtless incomprehensible to the gathering of unprepared onlookers since he, like Christ, speaks in parables, paraboles, or allegories. He ponders humankind's ability (strength, power) to conquer, enclose and "devour" the immeasurable, the infinite, the everlasting ("How were we able to drink up the sea?"). He wonders about the source of power to do away with the whole history of man ("Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon?") thus having prepared (cleaned) the ground for a completely new one.

Nietzsche's ambition to re-write the history of humankind finds its articulation in the madman's statement of almost Copernican value – the un-

chaining of the earth from the sun ("What did we do when we unchained this earth from its sun?"). The act of God's killing was an act of perennial importance and consequence for the attempts to free man from the fetters of the "beginning," of the only true Being, of the only "giver" of power. God's earth as the centre of all gravity and of all meaning lost irretrievably its privileged position with Copernicus's discovery that the earth is not the centre of the universe and the sun does not revolve around it. With the death of God ("the sun"), man ("the earth") loses this all-important original link with his centre, with the point of all reference, also linguistic reference.

The Nietzschean "death of God" marks God's (or for that matter – any divinity's) departure from man's world or, more precisely, his *absence* in it. But what is the consequence of this assertion for literary studies? Jeremy Hawthorn (1994, p. 31) formulates the following conclusion:

> The relevance of all this for students of literature is that Belsey reaches the conclusion that the epoch of the metaphysics of presence is doomed, 'and with it all the methods of analysis, explanation and interpretation which rest on a single unquestioned pre-Copernican *centre*' (1980, 137). In particular, the TEXT (literary or otherwise) is no longer seen as source and centre of its own MEANING; instead, the meaning of the text is detached from a fixed centre and thus deprived of that fixity that comes from self-identity. Such a position ties in with a number of other arguments which have a direct relevance to interpretation: the death of the AUTHOR and the movement from WORK to text.

From the predicament that the text is no longer seen as source and centre of its own meaning, therefore, stems our conviction that to interpret *a* text means to look beyond it in order to see the network of semantic connections interweaving one with another like in a texture (a word close to text).

The Nietzschean madman continues (*GS*, 125):

> How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, console ourselves? That which was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet possessed has bled to death under our knives – who will wipe this blood off us? With what water could we purify ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we need to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must not we ourselves become gods simply to seem worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed – and whoever shall be born after us, for the sake of this deed he shall be part of a higher history than all history hitherto.

The madman's discourse is only apparently the discourse of Christian penance and of guilt. When he speaks of "that which was holiest and *mightiest* [emphasis mine] of all that the world yet possessed" and laments "who will wipe this blood off us?", it turns out that he thinks of the God-killing in terms of "the greatness of this deed," and the problem he actually nurses is whether they "seem worthy of it." The conclusion of his considerations sounds unmistakably Nietzschean: since "there has never been a greater

deed [...] whoever shall be born after us [...] shall be part of a *higher* [emphasis mine] history than all history hitherto."

Here the madman fell silent and again regarded his listeners; and they too were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern to the ground and it broke and went out. 'I come too early,' he said then; 'my time has not yet come. This tremendous event is still on its way, still travelling – it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time, the light of the stars requires time, deeds require time after they have been done before they can be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars – *and yet they have done it themselves.*' It has been related further that on that same day the madman entered divers churches and there sang a *requiem aeternam deo*. Let out and quietened, he is said to have retorted each time: 'What are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchres of God?'(*GS*, 125).

The messianic madman says that, as a matter of fact, he is a prophet whose time has not come yet, the prophet of a philosophy of the future ("I come too early [...] my time has not yet come"). Thus, indirectly Nietzsche identified himself with the madman, since, as the subtitle to *Beyond Good and Evil* suggests, he regarded his philosophy as "a philosophy of the Future," and strongly believed that it is that kind of philosophy which "shall be part of a higher history than all history hitherto."

Further, in his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (First Part, "Zarathustra's Prologue," 2), Nietzsche confronts two opposing world views, the one traditional, voicing the love of God and adhered to by the man of the past, the saint, and the other one modern, articulating the need for a re-valuation of all values, propounded by the man of the future, Zarathustra. When challenged by Zarathustra's simple confession "I love man," the old man reacts sharply:

"Why," asked the saint, "did I go into the forest and the desert? Was it not because I loved man all-too-much? Now I love God; man I love not. Man is for me too imperfect a thing. Love of man would kill me."
[...]
"Do not go to man. Stay in the forest! Go rather even to the animals! Why do you not want to be as I am – a bear among bears, a bird among birds?"

"And what is the saint doing in the forest?" asked Zarathustra.

The saint answered: "I make songs and sing them; and when I make songs, I laugh, cry, and hum: thus I praise God. With singing, crying, laughing, and humming, I praise the god who is my god." [...] But when Zarathustra was alone he spoke thus to his heart: "Could it be possible? This old saint in the forest has not yet heard anything of this, that *God is dead!*"

The saint's metaphysical love of a God he had created himself ("I praise the god who is my god") seems to be motivated primarily by his bitter dis-

appointment he experienced with the love of man ("I loved man all-too-much"). The perfection of the Absolute Being, God, is, we may surmise, yet another illusion and deception he is nursing, but since we remember well the Browningesque "we live and breathe deceiving and deceived" (*Paracelsus*, 4. 625), all this does not come as a surprise to us. What did surprise Zarathustra was that the old man had not heard that his idol and the ultimate perfection, God, is dead, leaving the world purposeless and meaningless.

The idea of man's imperfection, so widely and fervently disseminated and preached by Christianity and its adherents, was referred to in Nietzsche's *Gay Science* as one (the first one) of the four errors (passage number 115):

> Man has been reared by his errors: first he never saw himself other than imperfectly, second he attributed to himself imaginary qualities, third he felt himself in a false order of rank with animals and nature, fourth he continually invented new tables of values and for a time took each of them to be eternal and unconditional, so that now this, now the human drive and state took first place and was, as a consequence of this evaluation, ennobled. If one deducts the effect of these four errors, one has also deducted away humanity, humaneness and 'human dignity.'

The death of God leaves the world purposeless and meaningless and somebody has to fill in the crater created by his departure. The obvious choice is not man but *super/supra/over*man, the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, God's successor.

Nietzsche's notorious slogan announcing the death of God has been seen by Heller (1988, p. 3) as a cry of both despair and triumph:

> The death of God he [Nietzsche] calls the greatest event in modern history and the cause of extreme danger. Note well the paradox contained in these words. He never said there was no God, but that the Eternal had been vanquished by Time and that the Immortal suffered death at the hands of mortals: God is dead. It is like a cry mingled of despair and triumph, reducing, by comparison, the whole story of atheism and agnosticism before and after him to the level of respectable mediocrity and making it sound like a collection of announcements by bankers who regret they are unable to invest in an unsafe proposition. Nietzsche, for the nineteenth century, brings to its *perverse* conclusion a line of religious thought and experience linked with the names of St. Paul, St. Augustine, Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Dostoevsky, minds for whom God was not simply the creator of an order of nature within which man has his clearly defined place, but to whom He came rather in order to challenge their natural being, making demands which appeared absurd in the light of natural reason.

BROWNING'S POWER OF GOD

Browning's concept of God originally derived mainly from his Protestant upbringing, but later, in the course of his self-education, it became

clearly unorthodox, with numerous elements which show close affinity with the idea of God as Great Nothingness. Discussing Browning's concept of God, Miller (1975, p. 82) argues that

> [j]ust as Browning has no separate individuality, so the universal substance of the world has no form. It is as shapeless as the sea, as the potter's clay, or as the primeval ooze from which all things have yet to be made. It is "one blank mud-mixture" (VII, 313). Just as Browning's language often seems about to collapse back into an incoherent mutter, so the world itself, for him, is always in danger of sinking back into shapelessness – for "the monstrous wild" is "a-hungered to resume/Its ancient sway, suck back the world into its womb" (IX, 235). Browning too, like the total world which is his huge body, has an impulse to return to this primal chaos, for he has "a need, a trust, a yearning after God" (I, 11), and the original slime is closer to God than any finite object. Any shaped thing betrays its failure to be everything. But the primal chaos is potentially anything and everything. It is a negative image of God.[2]

The shapelessness and formlessness of Browning's world, the image of which Miller presents here, invites an obvious comparison with the Judaico-Christian vision of the creation of the world depicted in the Book of Genesis (Gen. 1:1-2):

> In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

Browning's world ended at the moment of the creation or, more precisely, stops to return to the moment of the creation, to the shapelessness and formlessness, to the original and primitive. "It is time to start creating from the beginning," he seems to be saying, "nothing/Nothing has been completely finished; there is enough slime/dust/earth (*adamah*) and water to (re)create another man (*adam*)".

The pun that we have employed here (nothing/Nothing) sends us back the seventeenth-century idea of God as Primitive Nothing that preceded the Chaos that preceded the Creation (see, for instance, John Wilmot's "Upon Nothing" or John Donne's "A Nocturnal upon S. Lucy's Day"). It also expresses the idea of which Armstrong spoke in her chapter, "The Death of God?" (see the quotation on pp. 86-7).

In his early period, Browning shared much of his philosophy of God with the Greek pre-Socratic philosophers, like Permenides and Heraclitus, who believed in the total immanence, that is, the immediate presence of the divine *power* in nature. In effect, Browning's God has always been present – present in each and every point in the universe, and his power felt, primarily, as emanating from the most fundamental fact for the world history, that is to say, its beginning, the creation.

In "Johannes Agricola in Meditation," the speaker sees his own creation and, consequently, his existence as well closely connected with the mass of other created forms, and in this he tries to find a desired link between himself and God's everlastingness (ll. 11-20):

> I lie where I have always lain,
> God smiles as he has always smiled;
> Ere suns and moons could wax and wane,
> Ere stars were thundergirt, or piled
> The heavens, God thought on me his child;
> Ordained a life for me, arrayed
> Its circumstances every one
> To the minutest; ay, God said
> This head this hand should rest upon
> Thus, ere he fashioned star or sun.

The idea of being created ("thought on") in prehistoric or, more precisely, with an eye on paradox, in pre-creational times ("Ere suns and moons could wax and wane,/Ere stars were thundergirt"), may be attributed to the mechanistic (deistic, based on natural reason, not on revelation) vision of God as a great architect who, before creating the world, had set out a design for it, but did not interfere into its affairs hereafter. This also testifies to the superiority of idea over matter ("God thought on me [...] ere he fashioned star or sun"). We should note in this place the alleged unchangeability of God's as well as the speaker's position in time and space in the pre-created world ("I lie where I have always lain,/God smiles as he has always smiled;"), which may suggest an unwavering desire on the part of the speaker to participate in the timelessness of the Divine sphere, in God's everlastingness. "God smiles as he has always smiled" indicates, at the same time, an unconditionally assertive attitude towards, and the vision of, the Almighty as a kind-spirited, paternal figure, and of man as his child ("God thought on me his child").

The unchangeability of God's world, as well as man's – his child, the hierarchic order in nature, its constancy, is best perceived through the eyes of a child, the innocent Pippa. In "Song" from *Pippa Passes*, Browning paints a picture of the world at its dawn, awaken to life, orderly and everlasting (Karlin, ed., p. 21):

> The year's at the spring
> And day's at the morn;
> Morning 's at seven;
> The hill-side's dew-pearled;
> The lark's on the wing;
> the snail's on the thorn:

God's in his heaven –
All's right with the world!

But the reader knows, as the dramatic context makes it clear, that, to paraphrase the last line, "nothing's right with the world" since Pippa sings the song outside a room where, unknown to her, a woman and her lover are closeted together after killing the woman's husband. On the one hand, then, the optimism of the phrase "God's in his heaven" overseeing the world's business may sound somewhat ironic, but, on the other hand, it may indicate that, as the Bible has it, one must become an innocent child in order to enter the heavenly kingdom. The corrupt world and the sinful people have then to find the *will* to unite itself with God and seek his mercy.

In "Johannes Agricola in Meditation," we thus notice the intention and *will* of the created, in the hour of his death, to find an eternal home in the creator's "breast" after the days of earthly "dazzling glory" (ll. 6-10):

For I intend to get to God,
For 'tis to God I speed so fast,
For in God's breast, my own abode,
Those shoals of dazzling glory passed,
I lay my spirit at last.

Prompted by the prospect of his imminent death (a striking similarity to the circumstances of Paracelsus' momentous reflections on the meaning of life), Johannes Agricola, the speaker, returns, very much in the mood of the Nietzschean Eternal Recurrence, to the original state of things, which in Browning's other poem takes a contour of formlessness, that formless potency,

that originative force
Of nature, impulse stirring death to life,
Which, underlying law, seems lawlessness,
Yet is the outbreak which, ere order be,
Must thrill creation through, warm stocks and stones [...]. (VIII, 75)

God, as the source of all energy and of the ordering, organising power, seems to have inaugurated the creative process of both expansion and concentration: "Ere suns and moons could wax and wane" (l. 13). The word "wax," it is noteworthy – denoting "increase," "swell," "enlarge," "extend" and "grow" – signifies a tendency, particularly visible in the seventeenth-century baroque poetry, toward a multiplication of objects, and a movement from the within toward the without. At the same time, "waxing" – "increasing" or "growing" – is none other than "becoming": a gradual change-over, passage, progression from one state of being into another one. In Heideggerian language, "becoming" translates as "coming-to-be," which, on the

other hand, would mean that the being of the Being has not been reached yet, but is itself on its way toward itself. "Wane," almost a pure antonym of "wax," denotes "decline," "reduce," "abate," "decrease" or "contract", and is a manifestation of another tendency, also present in the seventeenth-century poetry, toward concentration, contraction, minuteness and detail. In Browning, God, the greatest architect, "Ordained a life for me, arrayed / Its circumstances *every one* / To the *minutest*; ay, God said / This *head* this *hand* [emphasis added] should rest upon / Thus". The details Browning multiplies in the poem suggest that in the Divine plan for mankind there was no room for improvisation, for any kind of taking chances: everything seemed to have been well-prepared and well-devised, both as the constitution of the human body is concerned and the direction in which to *head* (ll. 21-31):

> And having thus created me,
> Thus rooted me, he bade me grow,
> Guiltless for ever, like a tree
> That buds and blooms, nor seeks to know
> The law by which it prospers so:
> But sure that thought and word and deed
> All go to swell his love for me,
> Me, made because that love had need
> Of something irreversibly
> Pledged solely its content to be.
> Yes, yes, a tree which must ascend,

God's command given to the speaker to grow ("he bade me grow,/[...] like a tree / That buds and blooms") was, obviously, not supposed to be comprehended literally: God, the greatest and the most perfect poet, always spoke in parables, metaphors and similes, and, in the romantic (and post-romantic) apprehension of poetry, it was the poet's task to relate the Almighty's will to the folks. Thus, "grow" should rather be read as "advance," "develop," "progress". More than like a growing tree, man is to (a)rise, move upward (and forward), improve, conquer. The basic premise from which stems Browning's faith in man's progress is that God "is," whereas man "is coming-to-be," that is to say, "is *becoming*". As he said in another poem, progress is

> man's distinctive mark alone,
> Not God's, and not the beasts': God is, they are,
> Man partly is and wholly hopes to be. (IV,120)

Thus, what Browning says, through the character of Johannes Agricola, about God's order to grow may actually be comprehended as a rewriting of the Bible-based Protestant belief in progress which is to bring a wide-spread prosperity to all mankind. "Guiltless for ever" (l. 23), humanity will prosper

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as naturally as a tree which neither needs "nor seeks to know / The law by which it prospers so." Browning knew all too well the limitations of human knowledge, its inability to explain the mystery of existence, and that is why, as he articulated it in his early publications ("Johannes Agricola" first appeared in print in 1836 in W.J. Fox's liberal Unitarian journal, the *Monthly Repository*), he believed, apparently influenced by Agricola,[3] in "that originative force / [...] / Which, underlying law, seems lawlessness," but which is yet able to account for the world. The speaker's intention to "get to God" seems to be yet one more attempt to return to the source of all (power, splendour, everlastingness), but is it at all conceivable, and will God be there, in eternity? Or more importantly, is God with us here, in reality? Later, following the mystic tradition after his own religion had failed him, Browning tried to find God at the centre of his soul, or, in Freudian language, in his psyche. This step was of a paramount importance since it signalled a dramatic change in the direction within his own, private world: from the movement from *within* toward *without*, the poet decided to turn his attention toward the *within*.

And however pessimistic this may sound, his anticipated personal encounter with God at the centre of his soul, as we shall later see, will not bring either a long-awaited happiness or even consolation for his troubled mind. Browning will eventually discover that his painstaking attempts to expand himself to the proportions of God are futile and doomed to fail. Thus, instead of *ascending* ("a tree which must ascend"), he will be forced to *descend* to particulars, minute(st) details, plurality of multiplied words and phrases, the labyrinth of the language, and to try to find his God there. As a result, in his later poetry we shall have the proliferation of points of view and the multiplication of perspectives, especially in his dramatic monologues, but we shall not have words like "wax," "swell" or "grow," but rather existential "wane" or "decline". And also characteristically, he will not call for "heaven above" (l. 1), but rather for a "nest-like little chamber" (X, 107).

This gradual, psychological alienation from God, this building of a Donnean "little world" or Browningesque "little chamber" will bring us to a conclusion that God, as an ideal, as an aim, as an immanence, loses the essential bond with man. Man, too, lost interest in the Divine sphere. Miller (1975, p. 139) sees one of the reasons for the split in, among other things, the limitation of the human sphere by God as a result of man's building of a private world around himself:

> What has happened to the desire of created things to embody God in time and space, to express the infinite in the finite? In building a private world around themselves man and

beast have gradually cut themselves off from God, until, in the end, they cannot remember that there is anything but their own petty circle blotted out of infinite space. Within that narrow sphere they revolve endlessly, like animals in a cage, and ultimately their lives may stagnate for want of fresh air [...]. God seems to have condemned man to exclusion from God.

DISAPPEARANCE OF GOD

Miller's prominent contention that "post-medieval literature records, among other things, the gradual withdrawal of God from the world" (1975, p. 1) seems to evoke some other assertions of no less significance.

Firstly, the process of God's distancing himself from the human world will find a parallel in a universal disintegration of the unity between man and things, word and meaning, language and message. God who created the world/word also established a harmony between himself, man, nature and language, which, steadily and invariably, began to fall apart. But before he discovered the absence of God, man was fascinated with the idea of God incarnated in one of them, humans, Jesus of Nazareth. The Incarnation, the cornerstone of Christianity, was that moment in the history of the world which brought God back to earth, establishing the once cut off link between the natural and the supernatural, between the human and the divine, between the language and the meaning. God, embodied in the figure of Christ, was *present* among his people as he had been before the Fall, before Paradise had been lost. Then the communion between the sacred, the ethereal and the mundane, the earthly has been repeated on the altars of all Christendom in the re-enactment of the Incarnation. But the harmonious circle of both spheres had to eventually be broken. As Miller has it (pp. 5-6):

> In that old harmony man, society, nature, and language mirrored one another, like so many voices in a madrigal or fugue. The idea of the Incarnation was the ultimate basis for this harmony. But it was precisely belief in the Incarnation which gradually died out of the European consciousness. The Reformation, if not immediately, certainly in its ultimate effects, meant a weakening of belief in the sacrament of communion. Instead of being the literal transubstantiation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, the Eucharist came more and more to be seen in the Zwinglian or Calvinistic manner. To these reformers the bread and wine are mere signs commemorating the historical fact that Christ was once, long ago, *present* on earth: "This do in remembrance of me." Instead of being a sharing in the immediate presence of Christ, the communion service becomes the expression of an *absence* [emphasis mine].

Browning's philosophy of God and of his absence seems to be far less radical than Nietzsche's, but, it should be stressed here, is motivated by similar factual discoveries, and is based essentially on the same conviction of man's existential loneliness in the world.

As we have already indicated, being unable to expand, to embrace the vastness of the universe, and on failing to encounter both God's presence and his shaping, "originative" power in its fullness, Browning decided to turn to the inside of his psyche, the soul. But can he find God's presence there? Or, to put it another way round, *what* or *whom* can he find in his soul? Miller (1975, p. 98) seems to know the answers in arguing that

> when Browning turns inside himself, where the presence of God should be most close and intimate, he finds nothing but himself. When he tries to go outside, and to embrace the God who seems so manifest in the world, he sickens at last on the dead gulf of himself. This leads to a complete reversal of his original boisterous conviction that his "fierce energy" was the presence of God working in his soul. Now he finds that he knows nothing whatsoever about God. He has nothing but the incomprehensible intelligence of his own suffering.

His suffering repeatedly assumes a form of anxiety, dread or, not infrequently, fear. God, whom he treated more like an immanent character than a transcendent being, departed him, and the pain he felt after having realised his absence seriously shattered his own world, the moral values he cherished, the meaning of love, wisdom, goodness.

In the collection of poems, *Pacchiarotto and How he Worked in Distemper* (1876), we find the one which, as it seems, quite adequately reflects his state of mind and the dilemmas he faced in the later period of his poetic career. The poem "Fears and Scruples" is a nostalgic reflection on the love of an "unseen friend" (ll. 1-28):

Of old I used to love him,
This same unseen friend, before I knew:
Dream there was none like him, none above him, –
Wake to hope and trust my dream was true.

Loved I not his letters full of beauty?
Not his actions famous far and wide?
Absent, he would know I vowed him duty;
Present, he would find me at his side.

Pleasant fancy! for I had but letters,
Only knew of actions by hearsay:
He himself was busied with my betters;
What of that? My turn must come some day.

"Some day" proving – no day! Here's the puzzle.
Passed and passed my turn is. Why complain?
He's so busied! If I could but muzzle
People's foolish mouths that gave me pain!

"Letters?" (hear them!) "You a judge of writing?
Ask the experts! How they shake the head
O'er these characters, your friend's indicting –
Call them forgery from A to Z!"

"Actions? Where's your certain proof" (they bother)
"He, of all you find so great and good,
He, he only, claims this, that, the other
Action – claimed by men, a multitude?"

I can simply wish I might refute you,
Wish my friend would, – by a word, a wink, –
Bid me stop that foolish mouth, you brute you!
He keeps absent, – why, I cannot think.

And to finish on a high note, the speaking subject whispers (ll. 47-8):

Hush, I pray you!
What if this friend happened to be – God?

God, silent and absent, still puzzles the poet. He, as it were, ashamed of his apparently far-fetched conclusions, speaks in the language of question marks and hyphens ("What if this friend happened to be – God?") rather than certitude and firmness ("He keeps silent, – why, I cannot think"). The question marks and hyphens Browning uses so often in the poem are signs of reluctance, hesitation, doubt and uneasiness ("... Scruples"), which lead to the overwhelming feelings of concern, anxiety, consternation, and, consequently, to dread, fright and horror ("Fears ..."). His vision of the immanent God ("This same unseen friend") collapses again, and the only things God leaves on his disappearance that he may revere are *letters* ("for I had but letters"), the *visible* signs of *absence* and *death*.

GOD THAT DEPARTED: BROWNING'S *PAULINE*

The problematic of God's departure in Browning has found its issue in the genre he himself invented and mastered – dramatic monologue (see previous chapter). One of its most quintessential examples, which in the following case takes a form of a basically abstract self-analysis, is *Pauline: A Fragment of a Confession*, first published in March 1833. Interestingly enough, the poem – "dramatic" in principle as he claimed in the Preface of 1867 – combines the *confession* and the *fragment*, the two genres popular in eighteenth century and Romanticism. The former was basically a religious genre in which the autobiographer narrates the life he led to his conversion to the religious security he now enjoys (cf. St Augustine's *Confessions* and also less religious Rousseau's *Confessions*), while in the latter the fragmenting is characterised by either breaking off (e.g. Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," or Keats's "Hyperion," "The Eve of St Agnes," "La Belle Dame sans Merci" and the odes), or starting abruptly (e.g. Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey").

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Pauline starts with a brusque invocation to his Muse, listener and confessor (ll. 1-10):

> Pauline, mine own, bend o'er me – thy soft breast
> Shall pant to mine – bend o'er me – thy sweet eyes,
> And loosened hair, and breathing lips, and arms
> Drawing me to thee – these build up a screen
> To shut me in with thee, and from all fear,
> So that I might unlock the sleepless brood
> Of fancies from my soul, their lurking place,
> Nor doubt that each would pass, ne'er to return
> To one so watched, so loved, and so secured.
> But what can guard thee but thy naked love?

The atmosphere Browning builds up in this passage in many respects reminds us of the one he will create later in *Porphyria's Lover* (1836): the conflict between the feminine alleged submissiveness and masculine dominance as expressed here by the idea of possessiveness ("Pauline, mine *own*, bend o'er *me* [emphasis added]"), alongside sexual arousal ("thy soft breast / Shall pant to mine"), here reinforced by a meticulous presentation of a variety of body parts, each with an appropriate adjective ("soft breast," "sweet eyes," "loosened hair," "breathing lips," and "arms" which are "drawing," as it were, magnetically, or rather seductively, the narrator to his confessor). Of particular interest for us is the motif of "loosened hair" which in *Porphyria's Lover* will become the murder tool, and which will also incessantly recur in Swinburne's various poems. Yet, whereas in *Porphyria* ... "She shut the cold out and the storm" (l. 7), in *Pauline* the hair, lips and arms "build up a screen/To shut me in thee" (ll. 4-5). As it seems, the body of the female lover this time serves as a protective – not a magical or supernatural – shield, and also has other consequential function to fulfil: to let the male narrator "unlock the sleepless brood/Of fancies" from his soul. The latter role, therapeutic, remedial, psychoanalytical, was at the same time the most likely objective of this "Fragment of a Confession" to be achieved by the young poet himself who, through his elaborate discourse, plays with the language and ideas, wants to unleash the "sleepless" forces that lurk within his mind, to free the thoughts he has brooded over, hatched for some time. These thoughts, it is noteworthy, may have their equivalent in what John Milton called in *Samson Agonistes* (ll. 19-22):

> Restless thoughts, that like a deadly swarm
> Of hornets armed, no sooner found alone,
> But rush upon me thronging, and present
> Times past, what once I was, and what am now.

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It seems that both Milton's "restless thoughts" and Browning's "sleepless brood / Of fancies" are explicit indicators of their existential or, to say the least, ontological anxiety (Milton's "what once I was, and what am now" and Browning's "as I shall be no more," l. 27) reinforced by the use of strongly negatively marked modifiers ("restless" and "sleepless"). Also, the dynamic verb "rush" placed alongside the words suggestive of a 'military' siege ("deadly swarm/Of hornets armed," "thronging") creates the effect of apprehension, helplessness and isolation.

Towards the end of this part of Browning's young poet's argument, however, it becomes clear – paradoxically – that it is his listener who really needs protection. Her best protection and cover will be, it is argued, her "naked love" (l. 10), which, doubtless, implies not only a certain sensual and sexual indulgence, but also a complete transparency of emotions on the part of female, which consequently presupposes male supremacy and ascendancy. Thus, the inexperienced, young autobiographer confesses a vehement need of a protective guard of the body of a female listener in order to relieve himself "from all fear," only to claim eventually that *her* body needs a guardianship of "naked" – therefore exposed and defenceless – "love," most likely the love of *him*, and most definitely not *his* love. As a result, we are dealing here with a certain inversion of meaning: what is supposed to be protected is protective, and the one that should be defensive needs defence. The apparent helplessness of inexperience and youth seems to be just a veil behind which the narrator's conviction of the *power* of masculinity and female subservience is lurking.

With an aim to show strength in weakness, the professedly penitent youth sobbingly avows (ll. 89-98):

> Oh, Pauline! I am ruined! who believed
> That tho' my soul had floated from its sphere
> Of wide dominion into the dim orb
> Of self – that it was strong and free as ever: –
> It has conformed itself to that dim orb,
> Reflecting all its shades and shapes, and now
> Must stay where it alone can be adored.
> I have felt this in dreams – in dreams in which
> I seemed the fate from which I fled; I felt
> A strange delight in causing my decay [.]

The mystifying and bizarre display of *potency in ruin* is set off here by recalling one of the most fundamental and rudimentary Christian concepts of man and God as two mutually inclusive spheres, which is paradoxically called in Blaise Pascal, the seventeenth-century French philosopher, Small and Great Infinity, respectively. In his *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*,

John Donne (1624, pp. 54-5) develops the concept of the universal and inevitable decay as demonstrated by the concentric geometry of Nature:

This is *Natures nest of Boxes*; The Heavens containe the *Earth*, the *Earth*, *Cities*, *Cities*, *Men*. And all these are *Concentrique*; the common *center* to them all, is *decay*, *ruine*; only that is Eccentrique, which was never made; only that place, or garment rather, which we can *imagine*, but not *demonstrate*, That light, which is the very emanation of the light of God, in which the Saints shall dwell, with which the *Saints* shall be appareld, only that bends not to this *Center*, to *Ruine*; that which was not made of *Nothing*, is not threatned with this annihilation. All other things are; even *Angels*, even our *soules*; they move upon the same *poles*, they bend to the same *Center*; and if they were not made immortall by *preservation*, their Nature could not keep them from sinking to this *center*, *Annihilation*.

The concentric geometry of Nature is in Donne a peculiar network of relationships of *containability* that starts from the imaginary heaven through the earth and cities to finish off in a very physical individual body around which it is concentrated, or "con-*centr*-ated". Decay and ruin, nevertheless, remain "the common *center* to them all," which eventually denotes death and annihilation as the ultimate fate of man's body as well as of his soul should it not be made immortal by preservation, the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the ruined and decayed sinner through the act of faith in God and God's grace.

Browning, however, looks upon the young poet's soul, not without some justification according to the Protestant dogma, as the Divine sphere which he calls a "sphere/Of wide dominion" (ll. 90-1). In contrast, the human sphere, the Small Infinity, is referred to as "the dim orb/Of self" thus indicating its inherently *contrarious* character in regard to the former. The transformation of the seventeenth-century Divine sphere of Great Infinity into the nineteenth-century soul's sphere of "wide dominion" signifies a *Great Absence*: the absence and exclusion of God from the ontological concepts of the Universe. God's dethronement can only strengthen man, not weaken, since it is the human soul that seems to be of the superior value, power and *authority* universally. Even though the poet bemoans the transfer of his soul from "its sphere/Of wide dominion into the dim orb/Of self," it is not a *fall*, nor even a *descent* or *plunge* into the abyss of nothingness, nonbeing or hell; on the contrary, it is just a *float* ("my soul had floated from" l. 90), a possibly smooth and gentle movement that makes his soul levitate, heighten and stay afloat on the surface of the "dim orb" of the self.

The *potency in ruin* is then "[a] strange delight in causing my decay" as he confesses in line 98, which reminds us of Nietzsche's definition in *The Anti-Christ* of good as "[a]ll that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man." "A strange delight" that the young Browning's poet feels seems to be none other than the feeling of power that Nietzsche

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speaks of and which brings happiness ("What is happiness? – The feeling that power *increases* – that a resistance is overcome"). God departed and disappeared from the world and was deposed, or deposed himself, of the privileged position in which Christianity and other major religions had placed him; now it is time for the "self – that it was strong and free as ever" (l. 92), time for liberation and freedom, time for complete power.

Nevertheless, ruin, decay and destruction still remain quintessentially human – *all too human* –; and even replacing the body and soul with the concept of the "self" does not rescue it from falling into disintegration and corruption. Yet there is this "strange delight" in cutting up one's anatomy and seeing oneself dissected to reveal ruin and destruction ("Meditation, 9"):

> They have seene me, and heard mee, araing'd me in these fetters, and receiv'd the *evidence*; I have cut up mine *Anatomy*, dissected my selfe, they are gon to *read* upon me. O how manifold, and perplexed a thing, nay how wanton and various thing is *ruine* and *destruction*?

Very much like Donne and the seventeenth-century anatomists, Browning then sees the magnificence and lavishness of the self "[r]eflecting all its shades and shapes" (l. 94) in his ruin, and feels this irrational delight in causing his decay, which may be read as a manifestation of *his* power over *his* fate.

In an almost endless chain of Shelleyan transformations of identity and his insistence on the passage of time, the young poet recounts the variety of masks and veils he used to wear in his past starting from a devilish, masculine one (ll. 99-104):

> I was a fiend, in darkness chained for ever
> Within some ocean-cave; and ages rolled,
> Till thro' the cleft rock, like a moonbeam, came
> A white swan to remain with me; and ages
> Rolled, yet I tired not of my first joy
> In gazing on the peace of its pure wings.

Sacred to Apollo, the white swan, it is noteworthy, is one of multitudinous classical and post-classical motifs Browning employs in *Pauline*, and has been traditionally viewed as an emblem of poetry and poetic inspiration. The youth then attributes his jocund transformation from a devilish character to poetic figure to his "first joy / In gazing on the peace of its pure wings" (ll. 103-4), which may, accordingly, denote his first *sexual* pleasure in *gazing* on the purity of nakedness and perfection – *classical* perfection of the form – of the female (or male) body.

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Another transmogrification, this time to a feminine type, is exteriorised by an image of a young witch who "draws down a god" and sees him perish (ll. 112-9):

> And then I was a young witch, whose blue eyes,
> As she stood naked by the river springs,
> Drew down a god – I watched his radiant form
> Growing less radiant – and it gladdened me;
> Till one morn, as he sat in the sunshine
> Upon my knees, singing to me of heaven,
> He turned to look at me, ere I could lose
> The grin with which I viewed his perishing.

The triumphant female first seduces a god – a male god – by exposing her nakedness and using the power of her blue eyes, and then watches *his* luminous, effulgent power ("Christ was *fons lucis*, the fountain of all their light," John Donne, *Sermons*, 3, pp. 353-4) "Growing less radiant," that is to say, growing weaker and weaker to finally being reduced to nullity, which, again, brings her *joy* ("it gladdened me"). The total demise and destruction of the male god is further reinforced and completed by the contemptuous smirk with which she greets his sinking towards death, towards an unqualified annihilation. As a result, the ascendancy of the feminine temptress, the guise of whom the young Browning's poet wears, signifies markedly the *will to power* he craves for, the power of the highest possible nature – the power over god (God).

The archetype of the god presented here is, however, of a particular kind: it combines both the divine and human, *mortal* traits; he descends from heaven, sits in the sunshine, in the halo of his might's glory, yet his physicality is intensely tangible: he sits "[u]pon my knees, singing me of heaven" as an average lover – maybe with a touch of effeminacy – would do. The reversal of sexual roles – it is the male who sits on the female's knees – aims, as it seems, at the amplification of the archetype of a young female endowed with a certain occult power ("a young witch"), naked and exposing herself to a male gaze, the archetype in which a particular emphasis is placed on the notion of youth, and the power of the youthful body.

To give strength to his arguments, Browning utilises here some of the classical myths, particularly those which involve gods and female temptresses (the "woman" figure is discussed at length in Chapter Six "The Metaphor of 'Woman'"). In their comment on this passage, Woolford and Karlin (eds., 1991, p. 33) argue that

[t]here is a clear allusion to stories in Greek mythology about love between gods and mortals, but B[rowning] alters the usual *balance of power* [emphasis added] in such relationships in a way which recalls the tradition, in occult literature, that mortals can sum-

mon and control spirits. The dethronement of B[rowning]'s 'god' echoes that of Hyperion, and inverts the deification of Apollo, in Keats's *Hyperion* (see ll. 114-15n and l. 120n.); there are several myths involving Apollo's pursuit of river-nymphs (Daphne and Cyrene), and the association is strengthened by B[rowning]'s lifelong interest in the figure of Apollo as god of poetry (see esp. *Sordello* i 893-7). In addition, the 'young witch' who ruins a god or godlike hero recalls other temptresses, e.g. the Sirens, Circe, Eve, Delilah.

The young witch, having exerted her power over her godlike lover, sees how he sinks "at last" (ll. 120-3):

> And he shrieked and departed, and sat long
> By his deserted throne – but sunk at last,
> Murmuring, as I kissed his lips and curled
> Around him, "I am still a god – to thee."

A clear sign that in Victorian times sexuality replaced God was the fact that the death of god as god in Browning gave birth to a god as a lover; the god one may kiss and curl around, the god that has abandoned and forsaken *his* kingdom in heaven to the advantage of being close to the human. This fall, albeit we may call it yet another transformation, brings a certain comfort to the fallen god: on being kissed, his voice turns from a shriek to murmur as he assuredly confirms to himself that he is *still* a god, a masculine *idol* for a feminine lover (we may here recall the meaningful title of Nietzsche's book, *Götzen-Dämmerung, Twilight of the Idols*, being a parody of Richard Wagner's *Götterdämmerung, Twilight of the Gods*). The loss of universal power is somehow compensated by an individual adoration, the adoration of a "young witch," who possesses a different kind of power, the power of her youth, naked body, and of a kiss, which she places on his lips as a sign of her final triumph and a total domination.

This fragment of the confession finishes with a nostalgic, *existential* reflection on the value of life in the face of the ultimate judge – the passing time (ll. 131-6):

> As life wanes, all its cares, and strife, and toil,
> Seem strangely valueless, while the old trees
> Which grew by our youth's home – the waving mass
> Of climbing plants, heavy with bloom and dew –
> The morning swallows with their songs like words, –
> All these seem clear and only worth our thoughts.

These words reaffirm what Browning's poet seems to believe wholeheartedly: while life's cares, strife and toil seem, as he says, "strangely valueless," in the face of death, the world and life as they are within and without him, the old trees, climbing plants, bloom and dew – these are the *things* worthy of his thoughts, and in the thoughts they *authentically* exist. The poet

thus foreshadows what Martin Heidegger much later described as *der dinglischer Unterbau*, the thingly foundation of human existence from which God has been excluded, or in which he is markedly *absent*. There are no divine elements in man's passing away, in his sinking and downfall, in the corruption of his *youthful* body. Browning's poet says clearly that (ll. 124-30)

> [s]till I can lay my soul bare in its fall,
> For all the wandering and all the weakness
> Will be a saddest comment on the song.
> And if, that done, I can be young again,
> I will give up all gained as willingly
> As one gives up a charm which shuts him out
> From hope, or part, or care, in human kind.

By laying his soul bare, by revealing it in its nakedness, in its *authenticity*, the poet wants to reseize, repossess his youth, and by so doing become part of humankind again.

In the most, perhaps, acclaimed excerpt from this "Fragment of a Confession," the one in which Browning is prevalently said to pay homage to Shelley, "his God" at that time, the narrator directly addresses the Supreme Being in a form of a ceremonious prayer, in which some traces of at least a hyperbole, whether or not a mockery, may be pinpointed (ll. 151-60):

> Sun-treader – life and light be thine for ever;
> Thou art gone from us – years go by – and spring
> Gladdens, and the young earth is beautiful,
> Yet thy songs come not – other bards arise,
> But none like thee – they stand – thy majesties,
> Like mighty works which tell some Spirit there
> Has sat regardless of neglect and scorn,
> Till, its long task completed, it has risen
> And left us, never to return: and all
> Rush in to peer and praise when all in vain.

The key phrase, "Sun-treader," in itself offers a multitude of meanings, the most obvious one being the image of the narrator's idol treading on, that is to say, *triumphing* over, the sun. We notice here yet another parallel to the Nietzschean notion of happiness as the feeling that power increases and a resistance is overcome, the resistance of the sun-god, or God the sun (alternatively, God the Son). The idol, be it Shelley or any newly-born and basically *human* god, "treads" on the sun, "steps," "walks" on it, which may mean that he also "tramples" on the sun so as to put its flames out, douse it, stifle it, and eventually *extinguish* it. In effect, "Sun-treader" seems to denote the idea of both triumph and destruction, or, with an eye on paradox, triumphant, victorious destruction and/or destructive triumph, ascendancy.

The shift of power from the "Supreme Being," the everlasting and life-giving sun, to the idol who triumphantly "treads" on it, testifies the significance of the notion of "destruction" understood in the sense of Heidegger's *Destruktion*, "de-struction," "de-construction," rather than as "eradication," "annihilation." As mentioned in Chapter One, in his 1950 publication, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* (*The Origin of the Work of Art*), Martin Heidegger called for *de-struction* of history as part of an attempt to re-vitalise, re-new, re-*structure* it by getting rid of those elements that are ob*structive* and preserving the ones which are con*structive*, carry *light* and allow Being to *shine* in its unconcealment. *Destruktion*, then, is that kind of power which makes possible the shaking off of an unnecessary burden of the past experiences that may hinder an access to genuine, authentic sources of knowledge from which truth emerges to the light (*Lichtung*). Thus, when Browning's young poet emphatically, and maybe somewhat mockingly, calls out "Sun-treader – life and light be thine for ever" (l. 151), he refers to those destructively powerful elements that make the emergence of true, authentic Being and Art possible. Sun-treader, the embodiment of the power transformation, the builder of the new (in Heidegger, *Destruktion* is basically building, *bauen*), is referred to as the one who possesses (*is to possess*) eternal life and light, the light of truth, the light of power, the light of knowledge – "enlightenment" – Heidegger's *Wissenschaft*, or Nietzsche's *Gaia Scienza* – *Joyful Wisdom* or *Gay Science*. Interestingly enough, Browning himself uses in *Pauline* a notion very similar to that of Nietzsche, i.e., "this gay mastery of mind" (l. 86), thus indicating the most likely common root and source of both terms: *gai saber*, the Provençal name for the art of poetry.

Similarly, the passage of time, the physical time, as articulated in the line "Thou art gone from us – years go by –" (l. 152), is opposed here to the metaphorical, 'subjectified' one, the time of eternal present (ll. 161-6):

> The air seems bright with thy past presence yet,
> But thou art still for me, as thou hast been
> When I have stood with thee, as on the throne
> With all thy dim creations gathered round
> Like mountains, – and I felt of mould like them,
> Like things half-lived, catching and giving life.

This 'personalised' time of "thou art still for me, as thou hast been" implies a peculiar blend of the past with the present, the result of which is "thy past presence" grammatically expressed by the present perfect tense ("thou hast been"), combined with the idea of the eternal light the poet's idol carries with himself. "The air bright with thy past presence" seems to be none other than the saint's aura by which Christianity has always wanted to dis-

tinguish its most important figures. This 'borrowing' of yet another saintly, *religious* motif would, however, testify again how deeply Browning was trapped in the onto-theological blind alley of Christian metaphysics from which he desperately wished to free himself by, among other things, declaring himself an atheist (see for instance Ryals 1993). The poet's idol, this time wearing a guise of a saintly aura, "is," that is to say, simultaneously *was, is,* and *will be,* rendered here by the phrase "has been," which indicates both the eternity of the present and the contemporaneity of the past. Yet, most importantly, he *art,* as in the phrase "thou art still for me," which superficially read may be interpreted as "you still exist for me" or "you are still [alive] for me". Notwithstanding the obvious analogy between "art" and Art, which would lead us to an interpretation of this phrase as "your art is still [valuable, best, superior] for me" even though "Thou art gone from us," the essence of these words, it is believed, may be found in the very definition of God, in his name. When on Mt. Sinai, Moses, according to the Old Testament, asked God what his name was, the answer he received was "Yahweh" – "I am," or "I am what I am." Thus, bearing this in mind, we may argue that the young poet's idol is still divine for him, still possesses Being and is truly Being, an Absolute Being, hence "thou art."

Another element of Browning's onto-theological trap is the idea of an ascension to a throne, an elevation to at least a saintly, whether or not a divine, status of not only the idol but the narrator himself ("When I have stood with thee, as on a throne"), combined with their generative, creative – *ontological* – abilities ("all thy dim creations" and "creatures of my own were mixed with them"). Interestingly enough, these "things half-lived, catching and giving life," are "Like mountains," high, sky scraping, but never reaching the heights of their creators.

The ontologically sacred character of the young poet's idol is further reinforced in the subsequent lines (ll. 168-172) in which he is adored and worshipped by the one who yearns to hear his name:

> But thou art still for me, who have adored,
> Tho' single, panting but to hear thy name,
> Which I believed a spell to me alone,
> Scarce deeming thou wert as a star to men –
> As one should worship long a sacred spring
> [...]

The very act of naming, calling into existence, and then hearing the name reverberating in the caller's ear is basically an ontological procedure. The naming, alongside its audible effect, is likened here to a spell, charm, incantation that exerts some sort of *magical power* on the caller. The narrator,

after having cherished what seems to be a vain hope of him being the sole recipient of the idol's sorcery, quickly reflects on his grandeur of cosmic proportions. "Thou wert as a star to men" may, however, denote not only the "star" status in the contemporary meaning of the word but also the inextinguishable source of light and inspiration for generations of "men" (we notice here a visible sign of a clearly defined gender role typical of Browning and other Victorians).

Interestingly enough, the elements of pagan worship, mixed here with astral cosmology, are added to the predominantly Christian motifs. A "sacred spring" that "one should worship" as a "star," alongside "the young earth" (l. 153), and "some Spirit" indicate an uncertainty, tentativeness in regard to a general line of argument Browning's young poet is attempting to develop in his discourse. The cult of earth as the giver of life, pre-Christian and – as one may conjecture – post-Christian as well in its essence, reiterated in line 165 ("Like mountains, – and I felt of mould like them"), and opposed to the vague "Spirit," may signify a certain departure on the part of the poet from a stronghold of Christianity: the belief in one God, the vicarious sufferings of Christ, death and resurrection. The dogmas are gone, but instead the reader is presented with a vision of an enthroned idol with all his "dim creations gathered round/Like mountains [...] catching and giving life."

Browning's ontology seems to be an apotheosis of a primitive creative force, the life-giving *Power* that made possible the existence of various forms of natural life. And this is what brings the greatest joy for the narrator (ll. 174-90):

> And one small tree embowers droopingly
> Joying to see some wandering insects won,
> To live in its few rushes – or some locust
> To pasture on its boughs – or some wild bird
> Stoop for its freshness from the trackless air,
> And then should find it but the fountain-head,
> Long lost, of some great river – washing towns
> And towers, and seeing old woods which will live
> By its banks, untrod of human foot,
> Which, when the great sun sinks, lie quivering
> In light as some thing lieth half of life
> Before God's foot – waiting a wondrous change
> – Then girt with rocks which seek to turn or stay
> Its course in vain, for it does ever spread
> Like sea's arm as it goes rolling on,
> Being the pulse of some great country – so
> Wert thou to me – and art thou to the world.

The abundance of the forms of natural life demonstrates the poet's considerable fondness of detail, yet their indefiniteness ("some wandering in-

sect," "some locust," "some wild bird," "some great river," "some thing," "some great country," and also "trackless air") reveals a certain degree of vagueness in the articulation of the consciousness of man's natural habitat and of his descent. There is, one would say, "some trackless air" of a joyful vision of the triumphant power of Nature ("joying to see [...] insect won," "bird / [...] should find [...] the fountain-head / Long lost," "old woods which will live"), and the God-like power of "some great river" to bring back life to things as if they lie "half of life / Before God's foot – waiting a wondrous change". This original, magical, and healing power of nature, and of the vast, potent river, which easily overcomes obstacles in its course, "Being the pulse of some great country" at the same time, is finally imposed onto the poet's idol: "so / Wert thou to me – and art thou to the world," thus signalling the speaker's radical departure from the position he held when he declared "Thou art still for me." The shift from "art" to "Wert" may signify not only the change in grammatical tense from the present to the past but also in the attitude to the idol who no longer *is* but rather *was* for the young poet.

GOD THAT BECAME "SUN-TREADER"

In a most unusual and bizarre twist of narration in the subsequent parts of *Pauline*, the speaker abandons Pauline as his confessor, Muse and listener only to return to her towards the end of this long poem. His discourse is now primarily and exclusively directed to "Sun-treader," the archetypal idol, *his* God.

After a moment of hesitation, wavering, and doubt, the young poet resolutely decides that it is Sun-treader who is the epitome of all the values and ideals he wants to share and respect, of all the power he venerates most. In a prayerful tone, he admits that Sun-treader *is*, and salutes him, not without a shade of doubt, however (ll. 201-5):

Yet, Sun-treader, all hail! – from my heart's heart
I bid thee hail! – e'en in my wildest dreams
I am proud to feel I would have thrown up all
The wreathes of fame which seemed o'erhanging me,
To have seen thee, for a moment, as thou art.

The longing for a tangible, *visual* – if not bodily – contact with an icon does not come as a surprise; this dream has been with humankind since times immemorial, and practically only Christianity speaks about the Incarnation, whereas other religions peremptorily confine the divine to the realm

of the invisible. That Sun-treader is a spirit has been made clear in the following lines (ll. 206-9):

> And if thou livest – if thou lovest, spirit!
> Remember me, who set this final seal
> To wandering thought – that one so pure as thou
> Could never die.

The conditional clauses in which the poet's tentativeness in regards to Sun-treader's existence is verbalised here convinces us that the "wandering thought" to which "this final seal" has been allegedly set by the young confessor does not appear to be yet another rhetorical figure in his wavering ontological discourse, but basically a return – a kind of Nietzschean "eternal recurrence of the same" – of "some wild thought" (l. 14) with which he set off his daring confession. The synonym for life he uses here, i.e. love, seems to implicate a whole range of meanings apart from the ones that we take on their face value in the context of love such as affection, fondness, devotion or passion. Most importantly, love as the fundamental condition of life signifies here commitment, attachment, affinity, loyalty, a certain form of what later became known as the "brotherhood of men" – a brotherhood of souls and minds. "Remember me," therefore, sounds more like a cry of desperation, hopelessness and anxiety, an emotional outburst of a person deserted by the one with whom he feels a strong bonding, spiritually and mentally.

The conviction he formulates in the phrase "that one so pure as thou/ Could never die," most evidently referring to the Christian concept of purity as a virtue – absence of sins that guarantees salvation and immortality in the after-life – expresses, at the same time, the poet's disbelief in the finality of his idol's physical/mental/spiritual departure. It mingles here with the young poet's craving for a different level of existence – an intangible one – where death will not be a decisive factor determining life's character and time – its final limitation. Below he reiterates dramatically his outcry (ll. 219-29):

> Remember me – who praise thee e'en with tears,
> For never more shall I walk calm with thee;
> Thy sweet imaginings are as an air,
> A melody, some wond'rous singer sings,
> They dream not to essay; yet it not less,
> But more is honored. I was thine in shame,
> And now when all thy proud renown is out,
> I am a watcher, whose eyes have grown dim
> With looking for some star – which breaks on him,
> Altered, and worn, and weak, and full of tears.

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Weakness gives birth to power so the address to Sun-treader, the companion in loneliness and desperation, becomes more and more intimate and revealing (ll. 230-8):

> O dearest, if, indeed, I tell the past,
> May'st thou forget it as a sad sick dream;
> Or if it linger – my lost soul too soon
> Sinks to itself, and whispers, we shall be
> But closer linked – two creatures whom the earth
> Bears singly – with strange feelings, unrevealed
> But to each other; or two lonely things
> Created by some Power, whose reign is done,
> Having no part in God, or his bright world.

The loneliness of two people or, more precisely, "two lonely things" – as the young poet puts it – "whom the earth/Bears singly" testifies to a basically existential character of human life, and secondly that humans ("creatures") are essentially *things* (cf. Heidegger's *Dinglischer Unterbau* of human existence), an assertion of immense significance not only for our discourse of power, but also for the human sciences at the turn of the century.

Another important issue at stake is that those "two lonely things" have been "Created by some Power, whose reign is done." It may possibly refer, as Woolford and Karlin (eds., 1991, p. 41) suggest, to Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, where Prometheus and Asia, created during the reign of Saturn, resist and reject the world ruled by Jupiter, but, at the same time, it may refer to *any* god or to Christian God. When the narrator says that they, i.e., his idol and he, "[h]aving no part in God, or his bright world," consider themselves "two lonely things, he cannot make more explicit the situation of a complete alienation and estrangement, the cutting off of the ties not only with humanity but with God as well. If he claims they both have "no part in God," that may also mean they have never had, or desired, or wished to have any "part in God;" in other words, God has never played any significant role in their lives which were from the very start lonesome and sickly. The past, as the young penitent sees it, was "as a sad sick dream," and his "lost soul too soon / Sinks to itself," the phrases that indicate his sadness and despair, are forcefully alliterative, which strengthens the powerful effect on the reader. Moreover, "si/n/ck," i.e. the combination of "sick" and "sink," as well as of "sin" may be interpreted as an intentional pun.

That Browning's poetry is a "mental" one seems so evidently obvious, but that his poetry of the mind is also the poetry of the *will* or, after Nietzsche, the *will to power*, will sound less obvious. In a manner of the seventeenth-century anatomists, the young *Pauline* poet dissects his mind –

strips his mind bare – to uncover its "first elements" and disclose their operation (ll. 260-7):

> I strip my mind bare – whose first elements
> I shall unveil – not as they struggled forth
> In infancy, nor as they now exist,
> That I am grown above them, and can rule them,
> But in the middle stage, when they were full,
> Yet ere I had disposed them to my will;
> And then I shall show how these elements
> Produced my present state, and what it is.

These "first elements," the truly "first elements" of modern human psychology, are not just the traditional four elements of air, earth, fire and water with which, for instance, Sir Thomas Browne was so fascinated in *Religio Medici*. "Unveil," for instance, is such a mental element that basically denotes an idea of taking a veil off to reveal – expose – nakedness, the nakedness of the poet's mind, the authentic, genuine elements of his mind, the idea not very common even in the nineteenth century. Another "element" of the passage is the struggle of the elements of the mind as they, in the poet's words, "struggled forth" to produce his present state of mind. In the end, the disposition of the "elements to my will" is basically a *displacement* – Derridean displacement, their absence and death – and the rise of the will most certainly indicates Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

Sun-treader, the God-like figure, pure and immortal, the masculine replacement of the feminine confessor, the icon of power and poetic fame, the great river, is *not* God; on the contrary, it seems that it was God who gradually became Sun-treader as the poet's argument unfolded. In the climax of his long discourse, he confesses for the last time, ultimately disclosing the ideas and values he believes in (ll. 1020-1):

> Sun-treader, I believe in God, and truth,
> And love;

And for the readers he has the following announcement and final wish (ll. 1029-31):

> All in whom this wakes pleasant thoughts of me,
> Know my last state is happy – free from doubt,
> Or touch of fear. Love me and wish me well!

These words, however unconvincing they may sound if we take into account his discourse in *Pauline* as a whole, demonstrate, paradoxically, a certain truth – admittedly, one of many truths – that there is no one universal truth which may serve as an axiom, as a foundation ground, the Heidegge-

rian *Grund*, as the truth. If the narrator says, "Sun-treader, I believe in God, and truth," his words are actually a manifestation of *dis*belief, mistrust in a homogeneous concept of God and truth as Logos, as a revealed Word – not a revealing word. In effect, in his discourse, Sun-treader and anxiety take the place of the (Christian) God and revealed Truth, and the revealed Word becomes – is coming to be – a revealing word.

To recapitulate, in Browning's discourse of (God's) power and fear (of God) the characters who do the talking do not dare, as it were, physically "kill" God. What they do, however, is to silence God, suppress his discourse. The counter-power the characters use in dialogue with God is meant to out-balance God's omnipotence, and the gradual getting rid of God, pushing him onto the margins of discourse is to challenge his omnipresence. In Derridean language, we may already speak here of the transfer from phonocentrism to graphocentrism, since the discourse is organised around the *letter*.

Likewise, the disappearance of God from Browning's discourse of power can be attributed partially to his attempt to revive and modernise, as a self-proclaimed poet of the future, the poetic form and the language of poetry alongside its subject-matter, and partially to his endeavour to get rid of the troubling metaphysical presence of *Logos*, the revealed divine wor(l)d, the sacred centre at which all ideas were (or were supposed to be) anchored. God in Browning seems to have undergone a dramatic metamorphosis: from "that power which is beyond myself" became a shapeless, formless and primitive Original Nothing, the Nothing that had existed before the creation, before the chaos that preceded the creation. Browning's God does not reside in Heaven, nor does he dwell on earth.

At long last, Browning's poetry seems to be that sort of poetry which, through manifesting God's gradual disappearance and more and more visible absence from the human world and discourse, anticipated Modernism's asseveration, in response to Nietzsche's notorious "God is dead," of a total exclusion of God from the world and the man's ultimate and unquestionable triumph over the man-made "divinities". In this respect, Browning's poetry is yet another link between baroque poetry, in which the process of disintegration of the spiritual bond between God and man was inaugurated, and the modern times in which, in Kafka's words (1953, p. 42), "Es gibt ein Ziel, aber keinen Weg; was wir Weg nennen, ist Zögern" (there is a goal, but no way; what we call the way is only wavering).

PART THREE

PART THREE

NIETZSCHE/FOUCAULT AND BROWNING/SWINBURNE: THE DISCOURSE OF POWER OF MADNESS AND/OR MADNESS OF POWER

> Of what is great one must either be silent or speak with greatness. With greatness – that means cynically and with innocence.
>
> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*

> Oh great madness, you heavenly powers! Madness that at last I may believe in myself ...
>
> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Dawn*

> 'Reason' in language: oh what a deceitful old woman! I fear we are not getting rid of God because we still believe in grammar...
>
> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

This chapter is going to be, one hopes, a 'reasonable' one: reasonable although it is, indeed, a froward task to write of unreason (madness) in the language of reason and of impeccable academic clarity. Madness has been so intrinsically connected with the development of, among other things, Western civilisation and the shaping of the Western mind that it would be extremely difficult to state categorically and precisely when and why unreason and reason separated to form what remained to be the domain, on the one hand, of the "pathological," "irrational," "aberrant" and, on the other one, of the "healthy," "coherent," "normal".

Our interest in this chapter will focus on that kind of discourse which challenges the traditionally accepted categories (since the Greek times) of reason such as logic, truth and coherence. We shall try to demonstrate how the apparently "mad" nineteenth-century discourse speaks of the power of extreme emotions, of confusion and fear. Madness, the category which pat-

ently defies any clear rationalisation, and the discourse it produces (and it is produced by) can be typically incomprehensible or just badly comprehended. Suffice it here to recall the critical comments of one of Browning's contemporaries who, after having struggled in vain to make anything of *Sordello* as "sentence after sentence brought no consecutive thought to his brain" (Powell, 1849, p. 73), thought he had lost his mind. Similarly, the reading of Algernon Charles Swinburne's poems, such as "Dolores" or "Anactoria," was proclaimed as the way to "make you mad" (Henry Morley, in *Swinburne: Critical Heritage*, 1970, p. xxi). In addition, it was the poet who was declared to be basically mad. As the *Pall Mall Gazette* noted (p. xx), "there are many passages which bring before the mind the image of a *mere madman* [emphasis added], one who has got maudlin on lewd ideas and lascivious thoughts."

The "mad" discourse, as we shall see, is not necessarily the discourse of the mad, of the people clinically ill, or of the people pronounced mentally disturbed by the medical authorities. The "mad" discourse is the discourse which goes beyond what is conventionally called the "normal," the "moral," the "accepted". It is the discourse that trespasses the territory so far designated "sacred," "forbidden," or "disallowed". The "mad" discourse is the discourse of the *enforced* entry, of violence, of intrusion, of transgression. It is also the discourse of *power* or, more precisely, of the dream of an access to power.

Speaking of the people confined in asylums, Roy Porter (1996, p. 5) emphasises the fact of their inner and outer struggle to combat both the mental and physical enemies that exert their power on them. He argues that the voices of the mad "form the struggles of the despairing and powerless to exercise some control over those – devils, spooks, mad-doctors, priests – who had them in their power". Power-crazed delusions, so characteristic of those confined in *themselves/their cells*, are also indicative of the *will to power* to cross over the invisible, mobile line dividing the two worlds, one of the open space, the potency, the possibility, the might, and the other one, of the enclosure, the impotence, the impossible.

It will not be, however, a great exaggeration to argue that still, after centuries of the reign of mad-doctors, great varieties of curative methods and techniques, and the confinement of the madhouses, mental hospitals, psychiatric clinics, reason, rationality, sanity have not secured a complete sovereignty over madness. One could also say that unreason or insanity is the *other* of reason, i.e. is ineradicably marked by its trace. Moreover, it seems that hardly anyone can lay claims to having perfect mental health and being absolutely free from "unreason." On the contrary, we would rather agree with Nietzsche in saying that sickness differs from health only in the degree

of "sickness" and thus assert that health is also sickness but to a different degree.

What readily springs to mind in support of our contention here are the words of Blaise Pascal from his *Pensées* (also used by Foucault as the epigram for his remarkable book, *Madness and Civilization*) to the effect that "[m]en are so inevitably mad that not to be mad would be to give a mad twist to madness" (1966, fragment 414). Obviously, there always remains an open question of what is generally meant by "madness". To say the least, a definition of madness is culture-relative and, at the same time, culture-conditioned. However, if we think of madness and reason as a simple dichotomy, the answer will naturally be easier – madness is the other of reason.

"FROM TIME TO TIME ALL IS MAGIC"

In his "Introduction" to the 1995 edition of Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*, David Cooper formulated his own set of definitions (p. vii):

> The truth of madness is what madness is. What madness is is a form of vision that destroys itself by its own choice of oblivion in the face of existing forms of social tactics and strategy. Madness, for instance, is a matter of voicing the realization that I am (or you are) Christ.

That sort of definition agrees with what Nietzsche actually said and wrote himself shortly before his mental collapse in 1889, which, as if it were to conclude his theories, closes the sane period of his life. Being fascinated with the life and mission of Jesus Christ to redeem humankind, Nietzsche, toward the end of his lifetime, more and more strongly identified himself with the founder of Christianity, seeing in him the figure to imitate and follow. In Hayman (1995, p. 335) we read the description of the last "sane" day in his life, 3 January, 1889:

> the 'inspired clowning' which had already been hard to control by the end of November [1888] was now in unchallengeable possession of his mind. He wrote notes to the King of Italy ('My beloved Umberto'), the royal house of Baden ('My children'), and the Vatican Secretary of State. He would go to Rome on Tuesday, he said to meet the pope and the princes of Europe. [...] Writing to Gast, Brandes and Meta von Salis, Nietzsche signed himself 'The Crucified', and writing to Burckhardt, Overbeck and Cosima Wagner, signed himself 'Dionysus'. The note to Meta runs: 'The world is transfigured, for God is on the earth. Do you not see how all the heavens are rejoicing? I have just seized possession of my kingdom, am throwing the pope into prison, and having Wilhelm, Bismarck and Stoecker shot.' The note to Burckhardt starts: 'That was the little joke for which I condone my boredom at having created a world.'

Nietzsche's delusion of grandeur through "usurping" the power embodied by Christ (God) and the contemporary powerful figures of political

life is, as we have already remarked, one of the typical symptoms of madness and, in particular, of schizophrenia. Known earlier as *dementia praecox*, this mental condition was renamed schizophrenia by the nineteenth-century Zurich psychiatrist, Eugen Bleuler famous, among other things, for diagnosing as schizophrenics the composer Robert Schumann and the dancer Vaslav Nijinsky. The main trait of the disease, which can lead to profound changes in personality and behaviour including paranoia and hallucinations, is a severe divorce from reality in the patient's thinking (cf. *The Hutchinson Encyclopedia*, 1995, p. 925).

Nietzsche's insanity which took the form of impersonating the figures of power with a dose of (feigned? bantered?) murderous inclinations, expressed by his desire to have the "rivals" to power shot, found a good addressee in August Strindberg, the Swedish playwright. When Nietzsche, in an undated letter to him, wrote: 'I have ordered a convocation of princes in Rome. I want to have the young Kaiser shot', he signed it 'Nietzsche Caesar.' As Hayman (1995, p. 334) comments,

> [t]his is the last letter to include his own name in signature. Strindberg's reply, written entirely in Greek and Latin, started with a quotation from an Anacreontic poem, 'I want, I want to be mad,' and ended 'Meanwhile it is a joy to be mad.' It was signed 'Strindberg (Deus, optimus, maximus)'.

And finally the letter that is cited in the 1975 Berlin edition as the last one written by Nietzsche (quoted in Krell & Wood, 1988, p. xi) in which he exceeds the measures he so far used. He addressed the following letter to his long-time friend, Jacob Burckhardt:

> Dear Professor,
>
> In the end I would far rather be a Basle professor than God. But I did not dare on that account push my personal egoism so far as to leave the creation of the world undone. You see, one has to make sacrifices, depending on how and where one lives...
>
> What is unpleasant – and it diminishes my modesty – is the fact that at bottom every name of history I am.
>
> With heartfelt love,
>
> Yours,
>
> Nietzsche
>
> Tomorrow my son Umberto [the Italian King] is coming with the lovely Margerita, whom I also receive here, quite simply, in my shirtsleeves. The rest for Frau Cosima [Wagner's widow]...Ariadne...From time to time all is magic.

And this is how Krell and Wood comment on this letter:

> Its excesses are many: the elevation to divine status, a status inferior only to that of a Basle professorship; the creation of the universe as an act of *noblesse oblige* and personal sacrifice; and the identification with every name in history, an identification in which the

very syntax of the language is distorted: *dass im Grunde jeder Name in der Geschichte ich bin.* And yet it is all yoked by *irony* and by a certain *control* exercised by the rhetoric, releasing itself only to the figure of Ariadne. Beyond the names of history, the names of enchantment: *Von Zeit zu Zeit wird gezaubert.*

Strangely enough, Krell and Wood do not see any symptoms of madness in Nietzsche's letter – just numerous excesses (providing, of course, that excesses are *not* exactly madness). Our interest will concentrate, however, on Nietzsche's distorted language (syntax, in particular) as a sign of a defiance of grammatical rules or rules in general (we remember his aphorism to the effect that we shall never get rid of God if we still believe in grammar). When he writes "*jeder Name in der Geschichte ich bin,*" even for the language more flexible syntactically than English this sounds at least awkward, if not completely weird, especially the placement of the subject and the verb at the end of the sentence. We may surmise that what is here at stake is the sentence stress placed on the final word in the sentence "*bin*" ("am") to emphasise the ontological character of Nietzsche's belonging to history. Further, it can also be read in the way the definition of God was formulated in the Middle Ages: "Dei nomine *est*" (God's name *is*), contrary to the non-being of man, who does not possess God's being (we also remember the Jewish definition of God as *Yahweh* – "I am," see Chapter Four). Nietzsche seems to have trapped himself in the metaphysical (or onto-theo-metaphysical) labyrinth of defining/naming things: by elevating his name to a divine status he would start and finish with "I am," which inevitably leads to the biblical "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end," and eventually to a non-definition (or a tautological definition) "I am what I am". Nietzsche's "every name of history I am" is another link in *circulus vitiosus deus* – a vicious circle as God, or God as a vicious circle (*BGE*, 56) within which he enclosed himself on the last day of the "sane" period of his life.

In *Madness and Civilization*, Michel Foucault considers Nietzsche (alongside Dostoievsky) to be the one through whom Christ re-possessed, re-seized the power and glory of his madness. While discussing the theme of the madness of the Cross, he concludes that with Nietzsche the scandal of God incarnate and unreason recovered its power (pp. 78-9):

> The great theme of the madness of the Cross, which belonged so intimately to the Christian experience of the Renaissance, began to disappear in the seventeenth century, despite Jansenism and Pascal. Or rather, it subsisted, but changed and somehow inverted its meaning. It was no longer a matter of requiring human reason to abandon its pride and its certainties in order to lose itself in the great unreason of sacrifice. When classical Christianity speaks of the madness of the Cross, it is merely to humiliate false reason and add lustre to the eternal light of truth; the madness of God-in-man's-image is simply a wisdom not recognized by the men of unreason who live in this world.

We may thus argue, after Foucault, that, to a large extent, unreason in classical Christianity also signified certain conscious human inability, unwillingness or refusal to recognise God-in-man's-image; in other words, all those who relied on their *reason* ("false reason" according to the doctrine) in rejecting all that was beyond reason, were themselves ejected by the Church into, paradoxically, the realm of *unreason* (p. 79):

> Christian unreason was relegated by Christians themselves into the margins of a reason that had become identical with the wisdom of God incarnate. After Port-Royal, men would have to wait two centuries – until Dostoievsky and Nietzsche – for Christ to regain the glory of his madness, for scandal to recover its power as revelation, for unreason to cease being merely the public shame of reason.

The madness of the Cross, as a form of higher "reason" in the understanding of classical Christianity, is part of the madness of belief(s) in reality beyond reality, that is to say, in a real, tangible character of the things beyond sensual perception, beyond reason. Therefore, however we try to view the Incarnation ("the most important event in history"), we shall, doubtless, find ourselves in an awkward position of saying that the Christian philosophy and its system of values founded upon unreason must inevitably lead to its being regarded, conceptually and holistically, as madness.

MADNESS AND POWER (OF LOGIC) OF REPRESSION

In our discourse of power we have not so far mentioned madness in the context of power relationship. The simple reason is that madness does not seem to be directly connected with the notion of power as one of the forms of power relations, but is rather one of power's lasting *mental* effects, especially on humans. (If one thinks of power one often thinks of it in terms of madness and unreason, or at least, it happens that the power desire transfers one from the sphere of [relative] sanity to insanity.) It seems that the desire to enhanced power (as Nietzsche has it) quite frequently exceeds, surpasses, outdoes one's mental powers, thus pushing one onto the brink of insanity or, not quite infrequently, to a complete mental collapse. Again, the borderline between what is perfectly sane and insane is, in most cases, blurred and difficult to determine, and, to a certain degree, culturally conditioned. Therefore, not without some justification, we may assert that while, undeniably, the discourse of power is inseparable from the discourse of madness and insanity, it is, at the same time, strongly identifiable with the talk that cannot be classified in the "sane" categories of logic as *Logos*, the revealed word of God. As a result, when we talk about power very often our discourse becomes the discourse of madness, where the "pure" catego-

ries of reason (or the categories of "pure reason," to use a Kantian expression) are blurred, and the argument goes far beyond what is generally accepted as "moral," "normal" or "rational".

From the historical perspective, madness has for a long time been associated with a dream of, desire for or, to use a more modern psychoanalytical term, *drive* to power. For now suffice it to note that Sigismund Freud (it was not until he was 22 that he changed his name to Sigmund), probably the most popularly acclaimed dream-interpreter ever, regarded dreams as the representations of *wish-fulfilments*, even those which were *suppressed* or *repressed* (Freud 1900). We must not forget that repression and suppression are the forms of power and as such (as power relations) are already, according to Foucault, power. The focus of interest of our, to a certain degree Foucaultean, analysis of the relations between madness and power will be concentrated primarily on the area of the discursive formations – discourse – and not on the history of madness/power or on a specific medical (psychological, cultural) insight into them. To say the same thing in another way, we shall not be concerned with anything that exists *outside* discourse or that which cannot be regarded as coming into the making of it.

David Macey (1993, p. 202), while discussing the methodology of analysis applied by Michel Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, remarked that

> [t]he object of Foucault's analysis exists at the level of discourse and not at the level of empirical phenomena. Discourse is not to be interpreted in such a way as to reveal a history of the referent – of, that is, an object existing outside or prior to discourse. Archaeology is not concerned with physical objects, but with the discursive process which makes it possible to speak about objects such as madness or clinical medicine.

Like Foucault, we shall discuss the problem that remains to be solved here – the explication of the relationship between madness and power – exclusively at the level of *discursive formations*, that is to say, we shall not make any attempts to analyse madness and power as empirical phenomena; rather, the relationships between madness and power will be shown as a specific and unique kind of poetic discourse.

In *A Social History of Madness* (1996, p. 39), Roy Porter formulates a very significant thesis in which he argues that the "history of madness is the history of power. Because it imagines power, madness is both impotence and omnipotence. It requires power to control it. Threatening the normal structures of authority, insanity is engaged in an endless dialogue – a monomaniac monologue sometimes – about power." If we inverted the order of Porter's topic statement (as the *logic* allows), we would jump to a conclusion

that the history of power is the history of madness. If we went one more step further and left the same elements out in both phrases ("the history") as well, we might argue that power is madness and/or madness is power.

Naturally, this statement would be a serious oversimplification of the problems of madness and power and would do an injustice to both notions. On the other hand, however, this apparently "logical" way of thinking shows the reader the limitations of the Greek logic (reason) which asserts, among other things, that if "a" is "b," so "b" is "a". Little wonder, then, that it was the notion of logic that Nietzsche chose for one of the objects of his attacks in several books, most notably *Beyond Good and Evil*, *Gay Science* and *The Will to Power*. He set out by formulating one of his most consequential assertions, namely, the one which declares (*BGE*, 36) "that nothing is 'given' as real except our world of drives and passions, that we can rise and sink to no other 'reality' than the reality of our drives for thinking is only the relationship of these drives to one another." Thus, the course of logical thought is, according to Nietzsche, incongruous with the notions of *reality, objectivity* or *truth.*

In *Sordello*, Browning's power of defying conventional logic is particularly visible. In the final part (Book VI, ll. 590-603), the narrator addresses Sordello:[1]

Ah my Sordello, I this once befriend
And speak for you. A Power above him still
Which, utterly incomprehensible,
Is out of rivalry, which thus he can
Love, tho' unloving all conceived by Man –
What need! And of – none the minutest duct
To that out-Nature, nought that would instruct
And so let rivalry begin to live –
But of a Power its representative
Who, being for authority the same,
Communication different, should claim
A course the first chose and this last revealed –
This Human clear, as that Divine concealed –
The utter need!

If by logic in literature we understand cohesion and coherence – in other words, unity, harmony, congruity, integrity – the short passage from the very long poem provided above testifies to the contrary. Browning, by making the narrator say "I this once befriend / And speak for you," challenges the common understanding of what we normally call a phrase in poetry or a clause in grammar. "I this once befriend" does not make much sense as long as we take it literally, but should we modify it by, for instance, adding

an operator and an indefinite article, the meaning would be more readily at hand: "I'll this once be a friend (of yours)."

On the other hand, however, "befriend" in its original context is more intricate and "meaning-productive" since it leaves the meaning/meanings open for the reader and his/her interpretation. So, if we treat "befriend" as a verb (as it is apparently meant to be), then we may argue that what it lacks in a phrase like "I this once befriend" is a complement, an object (whom?). Also, what seems of consequence here is the placement of the word "be-friend" at the end of the line, which, in turn, makes an impression of "fin-ishedness" (especially, when we bear in mind that the next line starts with a capitalised conjunction "And"), and thus may baffle the reader. The "open-ness" of a seemingly "closed" phrase makes room for a plurality of mean-ings ("I this once befriend" you? an unseen Power? God?).

To add to the confusion, in the same "And" line (6. 591) the narrator uses two personal pronouns in two separate phrases: "you" in "And speak for you," which apparently refers to Sordello, and "him" in "A Power above him still," which, despite the fact that it inevitably sends us to a person "above whom there is still a higher Power," that is to say, the son of God – Jesus Christ – may leave the reader perplexed and guessing.

The inevitability of the "him" interpretation, although no specifically Christian context is provided for it here, is also prompted by the lines 6. 601-2: "A course the first chose" – God the Father (the creator – the *first*) de-cided to send to the world his son – "and this last revealed –" – Jesus re-vealed God's will (Jesus as God is the first and *last*, the Alpha and the Omega), and "This Human clear, as that Divine concealed –" which can be interpreted that while the human nature of Jesus' person remains doubtless, his divinity is concealed, and needs to be revealed and proven clearly – there is "What need!" (l. 6. 595) and "The utter need!" (l. 6. 603) for this. Je-sus, God Incarnated, "Who, being for authority the same" (l. 6. 599) with his Father is "of a Power its representative" (l. 6. 598) here, on earth. However, the immediate consequence of the Incarnation, i.e. of spirit becoming flesh, is that Jesus, as a human, is of "Communication different" (l. 6. 600), which in turn implies that the communication between him and the populace will be/is severely impaired by *language* as a means of communication with all its inadequacies, shortcomings, deficiencies, ambiguities and misconcep-tions. And that is why Jesus' power is rendered here as "utterly incompre-hensible," in other words, completely impossible to be understood and con-ceptualised in terms of language as such, and specifically in the language of *logic*. The more the narrator tries to verbalise the incomprehensibility of Je-sus' (Divine) power, the more incomprehensible his discourse of power be-comes. And since the narrator finds the language accessible to him too in-

adequate and too limited to convey the idea he himself, as we may surmise, is unable to grasp completely and to the end, we reach the point when we begin to realise that, paradoxically, the "utter incomprehensibility" of Divine power grows proportionally to the extent of how incomprehensible the narrator's discourse of power becomes.

Woolford and Karlin (eds., 1991, p. 751) assert that Browning

> argues that Sordello lacks an idea of the Incarnation of Christ as the basis for his own creativity. For while God the Father offers an image of power so transcendent that it is unattainable by Sordello, and which he can therefore love without envy, God the Son can form a model for the proper conduct of his life – not because Christ is a channel for the divine nature, since in that case Sordello would have access to an understanding of God and therefore be able to rival him, but because Christ is the 'representative' of God (l. 596); that is, he has the same authority but communicates it in human terms. This conception of the Incarnation as a model for human creativity is the subject of W. Whitla, *The Central Truth* (Toronto 1963), though he does not cite this passage. [...] The conception is unorthodox, and comes close to denying the divinity of Christ.

The presumable agnosticism of Browning finds its issue not only in his practical denial of the divinity of Christ, but, most importantly, in the way and direction his discourse of God's power goes towards *mad*, self-destructive *incomprehensibility*. One of the tentative conclusions may be that God's power is mad and incomprehensible in itself and, therefore, can only be expressed in such terms.

Anyway, our argument here is that a considerable incomprehensibility of the narrator's discourse of power as can be seen in the above-cited passage from *Sordello* has, as it were, a *self-reflective* character which manifests itself, firstly, in the choice of words the narrator makes to express God's power: thus, "A Power above him still" is "utterly incomprehensible" (l. 592), and as such "[i]s out of rivalry" (l. 593), and, secondly, in a very peculiar syntax that makes a unanimous rendition of the poem practically impossible. For instance, in the lines 6. 591-5 we read:

> A Power above him still
> Which, utterly incomprehensible,
> Is out of rivalry, which thus he can
> Love, tho' unloving all conceived by Man –
> What need!

Within one *grammatical* sentence (marked by a full-stop from the one side, and an exclamation mark from the other), Browning uses, for example, two relative pronouns "which," the meaning of *which* (i.e. the reference they make) is particularly ambiguous ("A Power [...] still/Which, [...],/[...], which [...]"). The nominally grammatical utterance becomes thus ungrammatical ("'Reason' in language: oh what a deceitful old woman! I fear we

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are not getting rid of God because we still believe in grammar," Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 5), but, most importantly, the whole set of referential relationships collapses, too. Also, the use of dashes before, for instance, exclamations ("[...] by Man –/What need!", ll. 594-5, or "concealed –/The utter need!", ll. 602-3) may be regarded as yet one more attempt not to "close" the phrases definitively and unequivocally, but rather to leave them "open" for more "meanings," and for more interpretive possibilities. Browning's use of dashes invites a comparison with Nietzsche who quite frequently employed them either with full-stops or instead of them.

In effect, what we are faced with, in reading the poem, is a collection of phrases only loosely connected one with another which do not show any particular *logical* correlation or sequence. It is, obviously, not indicative of a substandard or defective logic, but rather an attempt to find meaning beyond conventionally understood reasoning. In dismantling the above passage we did not want to argue that Browning's apparently "mad" or incomprehensible discourse is readable from a "sane" position, or that his discourse of power is, in most instances, insane and always impenetrable, especially as it is presented in *Sordello*. What we want to contend is that language itself, and specifically the discourse of power, carries in itself, and with itself, an element of self-destructive incomprehensibility. One, as it seems, cannot talk about power, particularly within a widely understood religious context, without lapsing into some sort of insanity, where comprehension and communication are either seriously limited, impaired or virtually lost.

Therefore, the problem posed in the above passage was, presumably, the search of a model of understanding of how power – "A Power" – and also Love (since the Incarnated God was sent so that "he can/Love," ll. 6. 593-4) may be adequately demonstrated in the external, phenomenal world. Thus, such phrases as "utterly incomprehensible," and "Communication different" indicate, as we have shown above, that other means than the classic logic and conventional language are required for an effective interaction. As Ryals (1993, p. 53) has it,

> [t]he irony that Browning embraced does not permit conclusion, in that it forms a cycle of contradictory senses perpetually defying the principle of non-contradiction. Where the irony is concerned, a thing is simultaneously that which it is and that which it is not: a is not only a but also *a becoming b*. In so far as the work of art is concerned, it affirms both the nullity of the work that it supports and inspires and the transcendent value of that work.

Our concern here is, obviously, with the relativity of truth of "a" is "a" or "a" is "b". A collorary from the above can be that, as a matter of fact, il-

logicality is the foundation of logic since it takes similar for identical. It is both erroneous and illogical for, as Nietzsche asserts, "nothing is identical in nature" (*GS*, III).

A FOUCAULTEAN BROWNING: REASON AND "TRUTHS"

In respect of the understanding of the notions of reason and truth, Browning shows an astonishing degree of modernity or, rather, "post-modernity." His views were, to a large extent, shaped under the impressions left by the reading of Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (first published in *Fraser's Magazine* in November 1833 – August 1834), the bible of the young generation who, having rejected Byronism and the doctrines of traditional Christianity, longed for the world of *change* and *becoming*. This is how Ryals (1993, p. 70) comments upon Browning's perception of reason and truth as the reaction towards the despotic Enlightenment:

> Like the later philosophers of the Frankfurt School, he [Browning] was convinced that reason can be emancipative only if it frees itself of the received norms of rationality that pass for truth. He believed that truth does not lie in an ahistorical and acontextual reason. As he shows in nearly all his work, we can understand 'truth' – the operation of reason – only when we perceive how it is historicized and psychologized, that is, placed within a context. Anticipating the work of Michel Foucault, Browning's poetry offers a plurality of counterpositions, of lifestyles, of points of view that constitute not 'truth' but 'truths'.

Browning's truth about truth was far from being unequivocal and markedly rational in anything he wrote. Unlike Nietzsche, however, he believed that truth, or rather Truth, is accessible providing it is, as Ryals rightly observed, historicised and psychologised. Thus his world of *change* and *becoming* is the historical (or pseudohistorical) world of *Paracelsus, Sordello, Strafford, Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangrau* and others in which a multitude of viewpoints are presented that defer, however, one absolute, incontestable and unambiguous interpretation. His Foucaultean approach to Truth resulted thus in his poetry being abundant in meaning(s) and a plurality of 'truths.'

Yet his "psychologising" of the characters and the patently incomprehensible syntax of some of his poems, especially those which we today call "dramatic monologues," earned Browning a notorious reputation for his obscurity, and, as we have already mentioned, his unblemished sanity was put – not infrequently – in question (see for instance Powell, 1849). Notwithstanding his contemporaries' sometimes harsh opinions, Browning's attempts at constructing his highly idiosyncratic model of communication with the Mind (outside) and the mind (inside) should be viewed from to-

day's perspective as his substantial contribution to, as Foucault put it, "dramatic debate" of humanity between what was generally considered perfectly rational, sober and sane, and the mysteriousness of madness with all its bizarre powers of persuasion, the debate that, from the times of the Enlightenment and the triumphant reason onwards, was hushed, suppressed and finally silenced. Foucault (1967, p. xiv) has found out that

> [i]n the Middle Ages and until the Renaissance, man's dispute with madness was a dramatic debate in which he confronted the secret powers of the world; the experience of madness was clouded by images of the Fall and the Will of God, of the Beast and the Metamorphoses, and of all the marvellous secrets of Knowledge.

What Foucault calls a "dramatic debate" can be read in Browning as a "dramatic monologue" with all the powers, interior and exterior to the human psyche, confronting man's history and destiny. Consequently, we may argue that, from the historical perspective, what we today call madness was at that time that territory of human experience and discourse in which a grand debate on humankind, its place in relation to Power, occurred. And most importantly, unlike how it happens in modern times, such a debate did not run counter to a well-established order, morals, hierarchy, and was not a violation of certain definite rules of behaviour and thinking, and, finally, was not a contradiction to Knowledge because it was a knowledge itself.

The nineteenth-century "psychological" poetry is, then, an instance of that kind of discourse of *mental* power which certainly encompasses more than is normally understood by the term "Victorian dramatic debate," or what W.J. Fox called, "the analysis of particular states of mind" (*Westminster Review* 14, January 1831). The advent of this trend within English Victorian poetry can be attributed, indirectly, to the rise of mental science (psychology, and later psychoanalysis and psychiatry), and, directly, to a deferred and delayed reaction to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century split between God and man, faith and science, reason and unreason.

While discussing the emergence of the dramatic monologue and its discursive modes in Chapter Three, we have argued that Robert Browning was probably one of the first "psychological" poets in the English language. Obviously, one cannot forget Shakespeare's dramas, such as *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* or *King Lear*, with their in-depth psychology of characters, and their real or feigned madness. Within the poetic and aesthetic tradition that directly influenced the psychological stream in Victorian poetry as represented by Browning, Tennyson and, later on, by Swinburne, we have to note the names of Wordsworth and Coleridge, their great Romantic precursors, and their lyrical attempts at analysing "particular states of mind" in, for in-

stance, "Tintern Abbey" or "Dejection: An Ode," respectively. Shelley – Browning's "sun treader" and his early poetic idol – offered Romantic, and later Victorian, poetry an important concept of the universal mind, God, as the unseen Power (cf. Ryals, 1993). Although Browning discarded most of Shelley's ideas, such as visions of mankind which he understood as dreams of wish-fulfilment, very much in the manner of Freud after him, or the mythic role of the poet as the redeemer of the world, the concept of *mind* as (unseen) *power* was to linger till the very last day of his intellectual life.

In his poetry, however, Browning's way "of photographing subtle and obscure phases of mental activity and emotion in condensed and artistic pictures," as J.A. Symonds observed (quoted in *Browning: Critical Heritage*, pp. 308-9), contributed substantially to the making of his image as a poet who is at the very least evidently enigmatic, if not completely obscure. But the problem does not seem to lie in the poet/speaker/character himself (herself); rather, we are assured, it springs from the interior conflict of *forces* within characters and, consequently, in the reader's comprehension of the *power* relations occurring in the character development. In effect, what we are actually dealing with in the very act of the characters' talking in the dramatic monologue is an instance of *discourse of power*, that is to say, an articulation of the relationships of power within and without characters. Ryals (1993, pp. 70-1) argues that

> [t]he dramatic monologue internalizes plot so that instead of an open conflict of forces as on the theatrical stage there is an interior conflict of which the speaker is frequently not consciously aware and, as often as not, a conflict in the reader/listener's understanding of the speaker. [...] As reader/listeners, we come upon the speaker in the act of talking to another person (or him- or herself), and as we listen we follow the speaker until we gain insight into his or her personality and hence his or her real as opposed to ostensible purpose for speaking. As a literary form, the dramatic monologue is fragmentary and open-ended.

The conflict of forces, then, or, as we should say after Foucault, the relations of opposing forces, are discernible not in the open space exterior to the character's mind, but, rather, in the enclosed space of the psyche, the character's consciousness. Thus, a vast range of themes covered by Browning's poetry comprise, principally, mental states of his numerous characters ("Action in Character rather than Character in Action," as he wrote in his preface to *Strafford*, or "the incidents in the development of a soul," as stressed in *Sordello*), not himself ("utterances of so many imaginary persons, not mine," are his words in the prefatory statement to *Dramatic Lyrics*). Some of them seem to suffer from a variety of mental conditions. As Ekbert Faas (1988, p. 51) asserts,

> almost all the pioneer specimens of this genre [dramatic monologue] deal with abnormal mental states of one kind or another. From the perspective of contemporary alienism, St. Lawrence, St. Simon Stylites, Johannes Agricola, and the speaker of "Remorse" all suffer from some form of total or incipient *religious insanity* [emphasis added], while Porphyria's murderer is an example par excellence of the morally insane.

Religious insanity, as alleged above, has been regarded, within a zealous Christian context, as nothing extraordinary or unusual. As a belief, Christianity presupposes a total commitment, both emotional and mental, from the side of the faithful in matters of their conscience which are, in effect, strongly marked with transcendence, mysticism and unreason. Not infrequently, therefore, do we come across descriptions of various saintly figures who either hear divine voices, or, in ecstasy, die out of love of Jesus. As Porter (1996, pp. 82-3) writes:

> It was, in consequence, easy to call a true Christian of this stamp 'mad'. Many Christians themselves had traditionally welcomed the label. After all, God himself had been mad to send His Son to be crucified for man's sake, and the 'madness of the cross' had been echoed in the Patristic idea that the spiritual 'ecstasy' of the true believer was itself a form of going out of one's mind or senses, through literally 'standing outside' oneself, being 'beside oneself'. 'Good' madness of this kind had a long and noble pedigree in Christian theology. Erasmus had drawn upon it in his *Praise of Folly*. And in England of the Reformation and the Puritan revolution, the godly and the pious – in particular the more antinomian of the 'Saints' – were widely reputed to be in touch with divine voices, to witness vision in dreams, utter prophetic truths, and above all to see the hand of God in everything.

From the perspective of contemporary psychiatry, Browning's "Johannes Agricola in Meditation" is, therefore, an instance of "mad" Christian discourse, where religious insanity is blended with the speaking subject's remarkably high idiosyncratic conviction of his kinship and propinquity to God. Like Nietzsche's Nietzsche, who wanted to greet and bless the crowds in an attempt to manifest his sovereign, God-like, ultimate power in the last day of his sanity, Browning's Agricola is overwhelmed by a feeling of *power* or, more precisely, "[b]y unexhausted power to bless" (ll. 41-5):

> For as I lie, smiled on, full-fed
> By unexhausted power to bless,
> I gaze below on hell's fierce bed,
> And those its waves of flame oppress,
> Swarming in ghastly wretchedness [.]

Agricola considers himself superior ("I gaze below") to those "on hell's fierce bed," who are already damned and suffer eternal perdition ("those its waves of flame oppress, / Swarming in ghastly wretchedness"). The picture of hell he sketches here is very much in line with the nineteenth-century common image which, at the same time, was congruent with the Church's

official doctrine, of the reality of hellfire punishment for the sinful. The tangibility of the place "below" and its unsurpassedly despicable character ("wretchedness") is emphasised by the use of such modifiers as "fierce" and "ghastly," which, in turn, were supposed to evoke and/or reflect a feeling of fear in the reader. "Waves of flame," the expression suggesting not only fire and, consequently, inferno, destruction and holocaust, but also passion, infatuation and ardour, verbalise what seems to be of particular significance here, namely, the relations of *power* since they "oppress" (we remember that oppression is one of the forms of power in the Foucaultean power model, and that any power relation is power itself).

Passion, as Foucault asserts in *Madness and Civilization*, has for many centuries been associated very closely with madness, and, from a contemporary perspective, it is alleged to form a basis for insanity. In Foucault's words (p. 88), "passion is no longer simply one of the causes – however powerful – of madness; rather it forms the basis for its very possibility." And further on, he notes the connection between madness, based on passion, and destruction (p. 89):

> Instituted by the unity of soul and body, madness turned against that unity and once again put it in question. Madness, made possible by passion, threatened by a movement proper to itself what had made passion itself possible. Madness was one of those unities in which laws were compromised, perverted, distorted – thereby manifesting such unity as evident and established, but also as fragile and already doomed to destruction.

The speaker's dominant position, therefore, is not yet another instance of mere solipsism; having its roots in passion, the dim orb of the self extending to God's sphere connects also those

> Whose life on earth aspired to be
> One altar-smoke, – so pure! – to win
> If not love like God's love for me,
> At least to keep his anger in;
> And all their striving turned to sin.

Agricola's ostensible self-importance ("If not love like God's love for me") is very likely indicative of a passion-turned-madness approach to his own life and the life of others. Speaking from a position of a God-like judge, he usurps God's *power* in predetermining the fate of those for whom "all their striving turned to sin":

> Priest, doctor, hermit, monk grown white
> With prayer, the broken-hearted nun,
> The martyr, the wan acolyte,
> The incense-swinging child, – undone
> Before God fashioned star or sun!

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Their fate decided "Before God fashioned star or sun!", everything seems to be clear: no-one will ever leave "hell's fierce bed" but him since he, as a sinless child of God endowed with his love ("God's love for me"), is "a tree which must ascend" (l. 31). An obvious question arises then: why he, Johannes Agricola, is to be saved, why not priest, doctor, hermit, monk, nun, martyr, or child? Is there any particular reason for this self-acclaimed superiority other than religious madness derived from a desire to a total, divine power, the power over eternal life?

As indicated earlier (see Chapter Four, footnote 3), Agricola, considered to be the founder of Antinomians (1535) – an extreme sect within Protestantism – believed, among other things, that salvation did not depend on human acts ("good works do not further, nor evil works hinder salvation") and that man's destiny had been predetermined, in the narrator's words, "Before God fashioned star or sun!" Also, God does not love man for his holiness, that is to say, God's love of man is not a result of man's good deeds, and salvation is, essentially, an act of Divine love and mercy alone. Consequently, when Agricola speaks in the poem that "all their striving turned to sin" and that they are "undone," he, doubtless, speaks about the "wicked" since, according to the Antinomians' dogma quoted in the poem's epigram, "murder, drunkenness, etc. are sins in the wicked but not in him."

The critique of (mainly) clergy, "[w]hose life on earth aspired to be/ One altar-smoke," is reinforced in the closing stanza of the poem, where Agricola concludes that God's love cannot be bought, either with prayer ("Priest, doctor, hermit, monk grown white/ With prayer") or money ("Paying a price"), nor can it be bargained ("And bargain for his love"):

> God, whom I praise; how could I praise,
> If such as I might understand,
> Make out and reckon on his ways,
> And bargain for his love, and stand,
> Paying a price, at his right hand?

"God, whom I praise" because of, presumably, his "love for me" seems to be an expression of the speaker's innermost desire: a craving for divine knowledge, power, and, ultimately, divine status (Strindberg's "Deus, optimus, maximus"). The person, as he says, "such as I" deserves special privileges since he has already been privileged by God: "God thought on me his child," the child who is "Guiltless for ever." To strengthen his point in the concluding stanza, the speaker opposes *mental* qualities that he allegedly possesses in regard to the perception (and imitation) of God, namely, the ability to "understand, / Make out and reckon on his ways," to the tradesman-like qualities of those who, as we may surmise, "bargain for his

love, and stand,/Paying a price, at his right hand"). The question mark with which he finishes the argument (and the poem too) strongly suggests the answer: he could not have praised God had God's love, and consequently eternal salvation, been subject to trade.

And finally, the split phrase "stand,/[...], at his right hand" seems to be closely connected with Agricola's utmost ambition which his discourse discloses – to be equal to God. A precedence has already been made in human history: Joshua/Jesus, the Son of God, who is believed to stand, or more precisely, to sit at, and *be*, God's right hand. If we compare the story of the Nazarene and the discourse of Johannes Agricola as presented in the poem, we should notice a few parallel concepts beside the one about standing/sitting at God's right hand. The other ones might be: "God thought on me his child" – Christ is claimed to be God's son; "Guiltless for ever" – Jesus as a divine person is considered to be sinless; "could I blend/All hideous sins, as in a cup, / To drink the mingled venoms up" – on the night of his crucifixion, Jesus drank from his cup as a sign of his consent to die for the mankind's sins; and "I lay my spirit down at last" – "Unto thy hands I commend my spirit."

To conclude, we may state that Agricola's belief in his divine status (standing at God's right hand) and his madness, like Nietzsche's, takes the form of religious insanity, where the speaking (writing) subject usurps the divine power and divine ancestry. A discourse of power and madness becomes thus the discourse of madness of power or, as we have remarked earlier, of the dream of an access to (divine) power.

In "Porphyria's Lover," the other of the *Madhouse Cells* soliloquies, the theme of love has been treated in such a way that the poem not only shocked the Victorian audiences, but earned its author a label of insanity, as well. The mix of love and power resulting in an atrocious crime makes Browning's discourse in the poem a genuine *tour de force*. The poem, however, starts very lyrically with a description of nature which appropriately sets the tone and atmosphere for further tragic (mad?) developments (ll. 1-5):

> The rain set early tonight,
> The sullen wind was soon awake,
> It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
> And did its worst to vex the lake:
> I listened with heart fit to break.

"Heart fit to break" suggests the narrator's ability and willingness both to love and, as it later becomes evident in the poem, *break* the other lover's life. In other words, he seems to be emotionally *fit* to experience an extreme form of passion that led him to committing an appalling act of felony:

> When glided in Porphyria; straight
> She shut the cold out and the storm
> And kneeled and made the cheerless grate
> Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;
> Which done, she rose, and from her form
> Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,
> And laid her soiled gloves by, untied
> Her hat and let her damp hair fall,
> And, last, she sat down by my side
> And called me.

Strangely enough, Porphyria, the female lover's name, is not only suggestive of Keats's *The Eve of St Agnes* and the name of the male lover (Porphyro), as many critics propose, Ryals (1993), among others, but porphyria is also, according to Porter (1996, p. 43), "an inherited metabolic disorder producing intense irritation and delirium," from which the English king, George III, suffered. Thus, with the name there come the passions:

> When no voice replied,
> She put my arm about her waist,
> And made her smooth white shoulder bare,
> And all her yellow hair displaced,
> And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,
> And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,
> Murmuring how she loved me – she
> Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,
> To set its struggling passion free
> From pride, and vainer ties dissever,
> And give herself to me for ever.

Porphyria, a seductively sensual lover, provocative and tempting ("made her smooth white shoulder bare"), seems to encourage her lover to make a physical contact by putting his arm on her body ("She put my arm about her waist"):

> But passion sometimes would prevail,
> Nor could tonight's gay feast restrain
> A sudden thought of one so pale
> For love of her, and all in vain:
> So, she was come through wind and rain.
> Be sure I looked up at her eyes
> Happy and proud; at last I knew
> Porphyria worshipped me; surprise
> Made my heart swell, and still it grew
> While I debated what to do.

When the narrator says "surprise / Made my heart swell," he, like Nietzsche, sounds to be overcome by the joy of a *feeling of power*, the power

which expressed itself in his conviction (awareness?) of being "worshipped" ("at last I knew / Porphyria worshipped me"). Here, again we have to do with a claim to a divine status, but this time it is set within the relationships of, as Freud would have it, sexual drives and desires, as well as of domination and repression – the Foucaultean relationships of power.

Moreover, Nietzsche's well-known definition from *The Anti-Christ* "What is happiness? – The feeling that power *increases* – that a resistance is overcome" is echoed in the narrator's admission "Be sure I looked up at her eyes / Happy and proud," and that is why he felt his "heart swell" and that "still it grew" – the resistance has been overcome, and his power over Porphyria increased.

It seems that Browning, in creating the characters of Porphyria and her lover, relied heavily on a simple dichotomy: a strong and powerful (male) lover who tries to completely dominate his partner – a weak and subservient female: "she/Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,/To set its struggling passion free/[...]/And to give herself to me for ever." If we again try to interpret this discourse in terms of Nietzsche's power definitions, we shall be forced to admit that Porphyria, as presented by Browning, is an impersonation of an idea of "bad," since, as Nietzsche argues, "What is bad? – All that proceeds from weakness." And Porphyria was weak, weak not only mentally, or in the sense that she did not possess "the will to power," but also in a purely physical meaning: she did not declare or confess her love to her partner but she was merely "Murmuring how she loved me." On the contrary, the male lover is a dominating character – is "good" ("What is good – All that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man"), and it is actually he who does the discoursing ("While I debating [with myself] what to do"). He is overcome by the idea of a total (mental and physical) ascendancy over her:

> That moment she was mine, mine, fair
> Perfectly pure and good: I found
> A thing to do, and all her hair
> In one yellow string I wound
> Three times her little throat around,
> And strangled her. No pain felt she;
> I am quite sure she felt no pain.
> As a shut bud that holds a bee,
> I warily oped her lids: again
> Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.

The moment he took a complete possession over her ("That moment she was mine, mine") he made up his mind as what to do next ("I found / A thing to do"). That may suggest that the decision was made in a spur of the

moment; not as a premeditated, deliberate, cold-blooded or *rational* move but a sort of emotional, *irrational*, or *insane* complement to or prolongation of "That [climactic] moment she was mine, mine." The excess of power he felt over her found its issue in an act of strangulation ("And strangled her"), the act of a total and violent suppression, a relation of *force*, which resulted in the lover's death. Thus, as it can be contended, the excess of power may lead to violence, irreversible destruction and a complete annihilation of life.

Yet the homicidal lover did not feel it that way: he does not seem to realise (mental and emotional problems? intellectually retarded?) what he actually did. Moreover, he is convinced that the act of deadly violence he performed on his lover did not harm her in fact ("No pain felt she;/I am quite sure she felt no pain"). He makes an impression that the doing away with her came as naturally as loving her, and that her dead body responded to it in the same natural way ("I warily oped her lids: again/Laughed the blue eyes without a stain").

Strangely enough, the murderous weapon used in the act is the lover's hair ("all her hair/In one yellow string I wound/Three times her little throat around,/And strangled her"), and, paradoxically, since Porphyria, in her lover's words, was "Too weak [...]/To set its struggling passion free / [...] / And give herself to me for ever," he uses a part of her *own* body to free (her? his?) passion by killing her. Characteristically, the fetish of feminine hair and its colour, as employed here ("her yellow hair"), is one of Browning's favourite motifs and can also be found in his other poems, most notably *Sordello* (ii 151-60),[2] and will be found in excess in Swinburne further on in the chapter.

> And I untightened next the tress
> About her neck; her cheek once more
> Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:
> I propped her head up as before,
> Only, this time my shoulder bore
> Her head, which droops upon it still:
> The smiling rosy little head,
> So glad it has its utmost will,
> That all it scorned at once is fled,
> And I, its love, am gained instead!
> Porphyria's love: she guessed not how
> Her darling one wish would be heard.
> And thus we sit together now,
> And all night long we have not stirred,
> And yet God has not said a word!

The hair untightened and her body dead, Porphyria's lover places a "burning kiss" on her cheek that "once more/Blushed bright," which,

again, clearly demonstrates a weird 'liveliness in deadliness,' an eerie necrophiliac mania exhibited by the narrator.

Yet, the fascination with the lover's dead body ("The smiling rosy little head," "Laughed the blue eyes without a stain," "we sit together now, / And all night long we have not stirred") seems also to suggest Porphyria's certain form of liberation in death from all her manifested and/or suppressed inhibitions in life ("That all it scorned at once is fled"). The psychoanalytic unconscious restraining of an impulse ("I, its love," "Porphyria's love") could be removed only by applying an equally strong form of *repression*, i.e. strangulation, according to Porphyria's lover. The narrator articulates his pride that in death Porphyria's *head*, the word used here to denote the psyche, is "[s]o glad it has its utmost will," the suppressed will, the *will to love*.

Although the final line "And yet God has not said a word!" most certainly challenges the Christian belief in heaven's immediate reprisal of a grievous deed or heinous, monstrous crime, by no means, however, does it try to justify it. Rather, we would argue, God's *silence* may be interpreted as a visible sign of *absence*, of his withdrawal from the world, of ultimate disappearance: had God been there, had he been present, he would have said something, he would have reacted somehow, he would have manifested his *being*, his *Dasein*, by uttering a "word." Language, then, has been made an audible (and visible) demonstration of one's presence, of one's *Being-there-in-the-world*, and nowhere else. If it is not the case, then it may be surmised that God, the Maker of the world, is no longer with it, has irrevocably lost his *Being-there-in-the-world* and *Being-there-with-the-world*, the two most fundamental indications of presence in Heidegger's understanding of metaphysics.

On the poetic, discursive plane, however, the narrator's defence of the act is motivated not so much by the fact that the strangling was committed out of love for the girl, but rather because it was performed in a moment of passion, the passion so great that even "God has not said a word!" of, as we may conjecture, disapproval.

All this, and the passion that pushed the speaker to murder along with self-justification of the crime, are indicative of a mental disorder or insanity of the poem's narrator. Ryals (1993), however, sees in both *Madhouse Cells* soliloquies a perfectly rational hand or, should we say, mind. They cannot be, he argues, just simple "mad" stories since in them the speakers express their own convictions which, from their perspective, look perfectly reasonable, sane, and thus justifiable (pp. 23-4):

> When looked at from the outside, both speakers in these poems appear to be little more than lunatics. But when looked at from the inside, so to speak, they evince how (in Browning's opinion at least) every person has his own conception of good that he uses to justify his deeds, no matter how wrong they appear in the eyes of the world. [...] In

Browning's view human individuals are always defensive of personal actions and give voice, to themselves and others, to justification of those actions. The young poet [the poems were published when Browning was not even twenty-four] had already arrived at the conclusion, which he never tired of displaying, that all ratiocination is rationalization, and to demonstrate this he was forced to resort to dramatic mode.

Michael Mason (in Armstrong, ed., 1974, p. 257) goes even further in justifying the suggestion that an apparently lunatic murderer may not be at all mad, or that his motives in strangling his lover were not completely insane. Rather, he argues, the murderous act might be the act of a *rational* person:

murderer is a lunatic, as this is the essential character of his model in the two sources [the commonly acclaimed sources of the poem are John Wilson's "Clearly Browning could not have failed to entertain the idea that Porphyria's Extracts from Gosschen's Diary no 1," published in *Blackwood's Magazine* iii (1818) and Bryan Waller Procter's *Marcian Colonna* (1820)]. But this is not tantamount to Browning's actually implementing the idea; indeed it might be that his murderer is, so to speak, an anti-lunatic, an illustration of how an act conventionally referable to insanity might be the act of a rational being.

There are unmistakably quite a few arguments in support of the thesis of a certain "rational" control evident in the act, one of them being, for instance, a "cold-blooded," extended reflection in the murderer in the form resembling a stream-of-consciousness technique instead of a conventional mad frenzy. Browning, in Mason's convincing opinion, does not treat madness as anomaly; rather, he tends to regard it as yet another possibility of character – "a logical and coherent extension of character." In Wilson's version (in Woolford and Karlin, eds., 1991, p. 328), the "insane" narrator finds *pleasure* (sexual and other) in the act of killing:

Do you think there was no pleasure in murdering her? I grasped her by that radiant, that golden hair, I bared those snow-white breasts, – I dragged her sweet body towards me, and, as God is my witness, I stabbed, and stabbed her with this dagger, forty times. She never so much as gave one shriek, for she was dead in a moment, – but she would not have shrieked had she endured pang after pang, for she saw my face of wrath turned upon her, – and she knew that my wrath was just, and that I did right to murder her who would have forsaken her lover in his insanity. I laid her down upon a bank of flowers, – that were soon stained with her blood. I saw the dim blue eyes beneath the half-closed lids, – that face so changeful in its living beauty was now fixed as ice, and the balmy breath came from her sweet lips no more. My joy, my happiness, was perfect.

From our perspective, however, it seems that, essentially, the discourse in which Porphyria's lover and Johannes Agricola communicate their reflections, emotions and passions are, as a matter of fact, none other than discourses of power or, after Nietzsche, of the will to enhanced power. It is to all intents and purposes a dream of divine-like power that occupies the mind and discourse of Johannes Agricola. This leads him to religious insanity and madness. Porphyria's lover does not dream: he desires. The strong

drive to more power over his lover, over her person being "perfectly pure and good" (a discernible religious overtone and an ironic post-Romantic figure), pushes him to murder and, as we may surmise, to a brink of moral insanity. It is noteworthy that the passage in *Gosschen's Diary* parallel to Browning's concluding line of the poem directly points to God as a source of the narrator's madness in the moment of crime (in Woolford and Karlin, eds., 1991, p. 331):

> I cried unto God, if God there be – Thou madest me a madman! Thou madest me a murderer! Thou foredoomest me to sin and to hell! [...] I have done thy will, – I have slain the most blissful of all thy creatures; – and am I a holy and commissioned priest, or am I an accursed and infidel murderer?

That this motif is not accidental in Browning's poetry is clearly demonstrated in a passage from the earlier poem, *Pauline*, with shows some clear affinities with this poem, particularly in the respect of the narrator's desire to combine love with murder (ll. 896-902):

> How the blood lies upon her cheek, all spread
> As thinned by kisses; only in her lips
> It wells and pulses like a living thing,
> And her neck looks like marble misted o'er
> With love-breath, a dear thing to kiss and love,
> Standing beneath me – looking out to me,
> As I might kill her and be loved for it.

SWINBURNE: THE PSYCHOPATHOLOGY OF POETIC POWER OF VISION

Dramatic monologue, as can be seen, was almost a perfect vehicle for voicing abnormal/unusual states of mind in poetry. The apparently insane discourse of poetic (dramatic) characters, frequently likened to incoherent jabber and gibberish of the madhouse, articulated the inarticulable, crossed over the boundaries of genres, blurred the difference between the world of the sane and the insane. Madness became fashionable. As Faas (1988, p. 177) plausibly remarked:

> Ever since Romanticism, poets like Coleridge and Wordsworth had shown an increasing interest in mad monks, mad mothers, and idiot boys, often by letting these subjects voice their own follies. So, in one sense, readers were well prepared for the publication of "Porphyria's Lover," "Johannes Agricola in Meditation," and "St. Simeon Stylites" [by Tennyson]. At the same time, there was something distinctly new about these poems. With the possible exception of Shakespeare, no one before Browning and Tennyson had ever portrayed insane subjects with comparable incisiveness and insistence. How diverse, even in these three poems, were the mental states portrayed and the poetic techniques of portraying them: a homicidal maniac, a religious megalomaniac, and a hallucinating visionary –

the first speaking of horrors with a frightening "matter-of-fact simplicity" (S. Orr); the second gloating over the imagined tortures of innocent men, women, and children preordained for damnation; the third [...] oscillating between fits of despair and hallucinatory ecstasy.

Swinburne, however close he may be associated with Browning in regard to various aspects of poetic output, shares his "fits of despair and hallucinatory ecstasy" more with Tennyson than with Browning. And as the dramatic monologue was one of several symptoms of the age's transition from introspection to psychoanalysis, Swinburne's poetry made one step further which resulted in the dramatic monologue being closer to mental pathology, lunacy and the perverse than ever before. Thus the publication of Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* (1866) marked the beginning of disintegration of the genre as conceived by Browning and other Victorian writers. Faas (1988, p. 17) concludes that

[w]here Tennyson and Browning used the dramatic monologue to portray abnormalities the way an alienist might observe and analyze a patient in his madhouse cell, Swinburne made it the mouthpiece of his blasphemous and perverse *poete maudit* predilections.

Whether or not Swinburne's poetry should be considered blasphemous and perverse, as Faas suggests, is obviously a matter of poetic taste and moral rather than critical judgement, but it is clear enough that Swinburne (or "Swine-born," as some of his contemporaries called him) seems to continue that stream within the tradition of Victorian poetry, inaugurated by Browning's "Porphyria's Lover" and Tennyson's Maud (originally *Maud, or, The Madness*, 1855), which can be characterised by hypersensitivity, hallucinations, dream, mental suffering, passion, violent emotions, and also explicit eroticism – the factors that often contribute to it being earmarked psychological or mental, and the poets – not quite infrequently – *insane* or *perverse*. Swinburne's case seems, therefore, to be particularly representative for a psychopathological trend in late-Victorian poetry.

In the majority of his poems, his colourful visions typify schizophrenic (psychopathological) hypersensitivity characteristic of people imbalanced emotionally. The hallucinations, being one of the main symptoms of the disease, provide the background of errors inseparable from madness, which, all within the dream convention, give the desired (?) effect. Foucault (1967, p. 106) contends that

[m]adness is precisely at the point of contact between the oneiric and the erroneous; it traverses, in its variations, the surface on which they meet, the surface which both joins and separates them. With error, madness shares non-truth, and arbitrariness in affirmation and negation; from the dream, madness borrows the flow of the images and the colorful presence of hallucinations. But while error is merely non-truth, while the dream neither affirms nor judges, madness fills the void of error with images, and links

hallucinations by affirmation of the false. In a sense, it is thus plenitude, joining to the figures of night the powers of the day, to the forms of the fantasy the activity of the waking mind; it links the dark content with the forms of light.

Foucault's formulation of "colorful presence of hallucinations" finds a particularly veracious reflection in Swinburne's "Aholibah" (*P1*, p. 267), where the Browningesque fetish of hair is given an additional, Swinburnian touch of colours:

> Thy garments upon thee were fair
> With scarlet and with yellow thread;
> Also the weaving of thine hair
> Was as fine gold upon thy head,
> And thy silk shoes were sewn with red.

His most favourite colour being "gold" and its derivatives – "yellow" and "fair" (the hair's colour), Swinburne also shows signs of interest in the colours of blood and pain – "scarlet" and "red," which has often been interpreted (see for instance Cassidy, 1964) as indicative of his psyche being oriented towards extreme feelings: pleasure and pain (he was also suspected of practising sadomasochism, hence his fascination with marquis de Sade, see above). Anyhow, the poem demonstrates clearly a characteristically Swinburnian mixture of sexual desire (pleasure) and bloodthirsty, pernicious perverse predilections (pain). We read (*P* 1, p. 270):

> Even he, O thou Aholibah,
> Made separate from thy desire,
> Shall cut thy nose and ears away
> And bruise thee for thy body's hire
> And burn the residue with fire.

The cases of drastic mutilation of the body ("Shall cut thy nose and ears away") and the physical violence ("And bruise thee") as a reward for male or female prostitution ("for thy body's hire") must have been well known for Swinburne. In *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* (London: Sinclaire-Stevenson, 1994), Peter Ackroyd describes the killing of Solomon Weil which occurred on 10 September, 1880 (p. 6):

> The old scholar had been mutilated in a most strange manner; his nose had been cut off and placed upon a small pewter plate, while his penis and testicles had been left upon the open page of a book which he must have been reading when he was so savagely disturbed. Or had the volume been left by the killer as some clue to his appetites?

Swinburne's descriptions are not so extreme and savage; in his discourse he does not specifically name, for instance, the sexual organs (although the nose might be meaningful as it is in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*), and of his heroine, Aholibah, speaks moderately in the following

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stanza that her name has "[g]rown old with soft adulteries." But in the closing stanzas, in which Swinburne returns to his favourite dream-like, hallucinatory convention, he is more explicit in his discourse of lust and colours:

> Also her bed was made of green,
> Her windows beautiful for glass
> That she had made her bed between:
> Yea, for pure lust her body was
> Made like white summer-coloured grass.

Swinburne contained here an interesting simile which compares the fe/male body to "white summer-coloured grass," and which later sends us back, via the idea of grass being naturally green, to the metaphor of *body* as *bed* ("her bed was made of green [grass]" and "her body was/Made like [green] grass"). Obviously, Swinburne's psychopathological discourse of colours, blood ("In chambers walled about with red") and desire ("pure lust") would not be complete without mentioning the idea of power – power as the embodiment of masculine ("strong man's") sexual appeal and strength:

> Also between the walls she had
> Fair faces of strong men portrayed;
> All girded round the loins, and clad
> With several cloths of woven braid
> And garments marvellously made.

As it seems, Swinburne uses here a few particularly strong sexual images to explore and highlight some inevitable ambiguities of the language. Let us take for instance the lines: "Also between the walls she had / Fair faces of strong men [portrayed]". Had the poet used the preposition "among" instead of "between" (since normally there are four walls in a room and "among" seems to be more appropriate of the two in this context), the image would have decidedly been more unequivocal. "Between," however, strongly suggests "two" (walls, pillars, legs), which in the context of the walls in the chamber being red ("In chambers walled about with red"), and the specific (ambiguous) syntax in which the verb "had" was used ("between the walls she had"/and then "Fair faces of strong men") *may* be indicative of Swinburne's attempt at a portrayal of some sexual activities that had occurred in that bedroom than the bedroom itself, especially bearing in mind the heroine's previous, as he says, "soft adulteries". Aholibah, as the collector of "Fair faces of strong men," was certainly stronger and more powerful than her "trophies" on the walls of her chamber/body.

In "Madonna Mia" (*P* 1, p. 273), Swinburne returns to the theme of hair and colours in a hallucinatory vision of a woman he calls "My Lady" ("Madonna Mia"):

> She hath no handmaid fair
> To draw her curled gold hair
> Through rings of gold that bear
> Her whole hair's weight;
> She has no maids to stand
> Gold-clothed on either hand;
> In all the great green land
> None is so great.

In a fairy-tale land of colours ("the great green land") nothing is real, and nothing is more majestic than a vision of *Madonna Mia* ("None is so great"). Her image seems to be a representation of that obsessive, sexually generated reflections of desires and drives, where the colourful hallucinations mingle with perversity (erotomania or necrophilia, for instance) and, additionally, with a fetish – in Swinburne, like in Browning, with the hair fetish:

> She hath no more to wear
> But one white hood of vair
> Drawn over eyes and hair,
> Wrought with strange gold,
> Made for some great queen's head,
> Some fair great queen since dead;
> And one strait gown of red
> Against the cold.

One of Swinburne's principal purposes in poetry, then, seems to be that of disclosing, uncovering and revealing – revealing anything that can be revealed about oneself, including one's deeply hidden desires and fantasies. This is how Faas (1988, pp. 189-190) comments upon this issue:

> In short, where Browning and Tennyson had opted for disguise, Swinburne spoke out more directly. This is not to say that what the older poets chose to hide was the same kind as what their younger successor preferred to reveal. [...] A poet of his stature [Tennyson], undisguisedly writing about his spectral visions, would no doubt have stirred up an uproar similar to that which Swinburne caused with his sadomasochistic and anti-Christian fantasies.

SWINBURNE: (A)MORAL INSANITY

While some of Browning's characters may be described as morally insane, Swinburne's are, doubtless, insane *amorally*, the difference being in-

sanity based on a total rejection of morality. In "The Leper," we are exposed to a variety of sadomasochistic, necrophiliac fantasies, which strangely contrast with the exquisite, sublime images and emotions the narrator of this supposedly love poem experiences while tending a corpse of a dead woman, himself living on water and grass. The reader, however, is not aware till later in the poem who the woman really is. The poem starts with a declaration that should not surprise:

> Nothing is better, I well think,
> Than love; the hidden well-water
> Is not so delicate to drink:
> This was well seen of me and her.
>
> I served her in a royal house;
> I served her wine and curious meat.
> For will to kiss between her brows,
> I had no heart to sleep or eat.

The social roles are clearly delineated here: a subservient and submissive male narrator, and the female object of his suppressed desire. Her descent is most likely aristocratic: she was served "wine and curious meat" "in a royal house," which is immediately contrasted with their current situation – they both have to survive on "the hidden well-water." The twice repeated phrase "I served her" gives the reader a very precise idea of how power is distributed here: it is "I" ascribing superiority to, laying at the door of "her." Yet, there is a glitch in it: now they both drink the same distasteful well-water, which makes them equal both in terms of social position and power.

Then, we are told that the feeling she had for him was not love ("Nothing is better [...]/Than love") but mere scorn:

> Mere scorn God knows she had of me,
> A poor scribe, nowise great or fair,
> Who plucked his clerk's hood back to see
> Her curled-up lips and amorous hair.
>
> I vex my head with thinking this.
> Yea, though God always hated me
> And hates me now that I can kiss
> Her eyes, plait up her hair to see
> How she then wore it on the brows [.]

Scorn, the feeling she *had* for him (we should emphasise the past form of "have"), makes his alleged love towards her look rather masochistic than genuine. Up to this moment there is little that can puzzle us in this poem; one may even say that this is typical Swinburne at work: a hair fetish, and the usual hatred of/towards God. But, then, the narrator confesses that

[y]et am I glad to have her dead
Here in this wretched wattled house
Where I can kiss her eyes and head.

Nothing is better, I well know,
Than love, no amber in cold sea
Or gathered berries under snow:
That is well seen of her and me.

The narrator's confession of him being "glad to have her dead" becomes clearer when we know the whole story he has to tell the readers:

Three thoughts I make my pleasure of:
First I take heart and think of this:
That knight's gold hair she chose to love,
His mouth she had such will to kiss.

Then I remember that sundawn
I brought him by a privy way
Out at her lattice, and thereon
What gracious words she found to say.

(Cold rushes for such little feet –
Both feet could lie into my hand.
A marvel was it of my sweet
Her upright body could so stand.)

"Sweet friend, God give you thank and grace;
Now am I clean and whole of shame,
Nor shall men burn me in the face
For my sweet fault that scandals them."

I tell you over word by word.
She, sitting edgewise on her bed,
Holding her feet, said thus. The third,
A sweeter thing than these, I said.

God, that makes time and ruins it
And alters not, abiding God,
Changed with disease her body sweet,
The body of love wherein she abode.

Love is more sweet and comelier
Then a dove's throat strained out to sing.
All they spat out and cursed at her
And cast her forth for a base thing.

They cursed her, seeing how God had wrought
This curse to plague her, a curse of his.
Fools were they surely, seeing not
How sweeter than all sweet she is.

He that had held her by the hair,
With kissing lips blinding her eyes,
Felt her bright bosom, strained and bare,
Sigh under him, with short mad cries

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Out of her throat and sobbing mouth
And body broken up with love,
With sweet hot tears his lips were loth
Her own should taste the savour of,

Yea, he inside whose grasp all night
Her fervent body leapt or lay,
Stained with sharp kisses red and white,
Found her a plague to spurn away.

I hid her in this wattled house,
I served her water and poor bread.

For joy between her brows
Time upon time I was nigh dead.

Bread failed; we got but well-water
And gathered grass with dropping seed.
I had such joy of kissing her,
I had small care to sleep or feed.

Sometimes when service made me glad
The sharp tears leapt between my lids,
Falling on her, such joy I had
To do the service God forbids.

"The service God forbids" seems to be an explicit expression of some sort of an illicit sexual intercourse, strengthened by "[t]he sharp tears," symbolic both of sudden pain and joy.

"I prey you let me be at peace,
Get hence, make room for me to die."
She said that: her poor lip would cease,
Put up to mine, and turn to cry.

I said, "Bethink yourself how love
Fared in us twain, what either did;
Shall I unclothe my soul thereof?
That I should do this, God forbid."

Yea, though God hateth us, he knows
That hardly in a little thing
Love faileth of the work it does
Till it grow ripe for gathering.

And now there comes the moment of revealing the narrator's necrophiliac preferences and reveal the true identity (or should we say the actual status) of his beloved:

Six months, and now my sweet is dead
A trouble takes me; I know not
If all were done well, all well said,
No word or tender deed forgot.

Too sweet, for the least part in her,
To have shed life out by fragments; yet,

> Could the close mouth catch breath and stir,
> I might see something I forget.
>
> Six months, and I sit still and hold
> In two cold palms her cold two feet.
> Her hair, half grey half ruined gold,
> Thrills me and burns me in kissing it.

Holding the dead lover's "cold two feet" suggests a kind of bizarre fetishism bordering with necrophilia, but there is even more to come in the next stanza:

> Love bites and stings me through, to see
> Her keen face made of sunken bones.
> Her worn-off eye-lids madden me,
> That were shot through with purple once.

The sexual perversion generates madness. It continues in the similar manner of a dialogue between the dead lover and the narrator:

> She said, "Be good with me; I grow
> So tired for shame's sake, I shall die
> If you say nothing:" even so.
> And she is dead now, and shame put by.
>
> Yea, and the scorn she had of me
> In the old time, doubtless vexed her then.
> I never should have kissed her. See
> What fools God's anger makes of men!

The most puzzling line "What fools God's anger makes of men!" has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Then, yet another bizarre twist in the narrated story:

> She might have loved me a little too,
> Had I been humbler for her sake.
> But that new shame could make love new
> She saw not – yet her shame did make.
>
> I took too much upon my love,
> Having for such mean service done
> Her beauty and all the ways thereof,
> Her face and all the sweet thereon.
>
> Yea, all this while I tended her,
> I know the old love held fast his part:
> I know the old scorn waxed heavier,
> Mixed with sad wonder, in her heart.

And the nonetheless puzzling finale the narrator offers in the concluding three stanzas of the poem:

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It may be all my love went wrong –
A scribe's work writ awry and blurred,
Scrawled after the blind evensong –
Spoilt music with no perfect word.

But surely I would fain have done
All things the best I could. Perchance
Because I failed, came short of one,
She kept at heart that other's man's.

I am grown blind with all these things:
It may be now she hath in sight
Some better knowledge; still there clings
The old question. Will not God do right?

The final question is followed by a long quotation in French from the 1505 *Grandes Chroniques de France* (p. 124) recounting the actual story on which the poem has been based. It is noteworthy that the chronicle woman, Yolande de Sallières, has been presented as a detestable sinner [*détestable pescheresse*] who died an "evil death" [*male mort*], later explained as leprosy, as a punishment from God. Just after her death, a clerk, out of great love to her, took care of the corpse for six months, washing, dressing and undressing it with his own hands [*après elle décéda ledist clerc qui pour grand amour l'avoyt six mois durant soignée, lavée, habillée et deshabillée tous les jours de ses mains propres*]. Moreover, as the mediaeval French chronicler observed, even though her great beauty had gone [*la grande beauté passée*] irrevocably, the passion in the clerk remained, and he kissed the lips of the leper and held her in his amorous arms [*la baiser sur sa bouche orde ce lépreuse et l'accoller doucement de ses mains amoureuses*].

This bizarre narrative shocked the Victorian audience. Henderson (1974) recounts that

[d]uring the summer of 1862, while staying at Fryston, Swinburne had recited "The Leper" and "Les Noyades" to an assembled company which included the Archbishop of York, Thackeray and his two daughters, one of whom, Lady Ritchie, became a lifelong friend. The archbishop was so shocked that Thackeray smiled and whispered to Milnes, and the two young ladies giggled in their excitement. Swinburne was offended, until his hostess appeased him by saying: 'Well, Mr Swinburne, if you must read such extraordinary things you must expect us to laugh.' But in the middle of "Les Noyades," the butler, 'like an avenging angel,' says Lady Ritchie, 'threw open the door and announced "Prayers, my lord!".' Lady Ritchie afterwards remembered Swinburne's 'kind and cordial ways' and said that she had never met anyone at once so disconcerting and so charming. Thackeray had already expressed admiration for his poems to Milnes.

In an on-line discussion, Stephen Colbourn and Ian Mackean (2000) argue that one of the possible objectives of the poem was to impress Swinburne's Pre-Raphaelite colleagues with some sort of anti-Tennysonian mockery of his "In Memoriam." Says Colbourn:

I wondered if the poet was being wickedly and deliberately anti-Victorian and, more specifically, anti-Tennysonian. A date would help. Swinburne expected to be made Laureate in 1896, but the job went to Alfred Austin of "Across the wires an electric message came; He is not better, he is much the same." Kipling had turned the post down and there wasn't much else about.

Swinburne, however, had been in trouble for thirty years because of his smutty verse: "Come down and redeem us from virtue, Dolores our Lady of Pain." He was an alcoholic, cared for by a friend in Putney, and morally dubious in Victorian terms – even claiming not to be a Christian. I believe he left a lot of unpublished verse, which was probably unpublishable at the time. What happened to it? The papers of his friend Sir Richard Burton, the explorer, were burned by an outraged wife; but Swinburne's went into a shoe box. [...] Is *The Leper* a parody of *In Memoriam*? Instead of harping on about the distant and cleanly remote dead, you have an example of a corpse. Two answers. No, in the literal sense of parody – otherwise ACS would have chosen Tennyson's stanza form of rime embrace in strict iambic tetrameter. But, yes, in that it satirises the Victorian love of mourning. By the end of the century, Tennyson was a joke.

The argument that Swinburne satirised the Victorian love of mourning that Colbourn formulates here certainly requires some commentary. There is little doubt that Tennyson treated his role as a poet very seriously – after all he was made the Poet Laureate in 1850 and admired by the Queen and most of his contemporaries. *In Memoriam*, the poem widely considered in his times as great and leading to the laureateship in the same year, was most likely an attempt at preserving an *ideal* Hallam in memory. In contrast, Swinburne seems to be that kind of a writer who believed strongly in challenges, intellectual provocations and confrontations. While, as it seems, in Tennyson, Hallam's body is presented in its immortal perfection, in Swinburne, the six-month-old decaying corpse of an unknown female is attempted to return to its long-gone perfection and, most shockingly, attempted to be possessed physically. Not only does Swinburne challenge the Victorian love of mourning, as Colbourn argues, but most importantly, the Victorian aestheticism, the view of what is and what is not "poetical."

Moreover, we cannot forget that Swinburne read extensively, and admired greatly, the French poets of the time, Baudelaire, Gautier, Verlaine and Rimbaud in particular, and one of their main aesthetic assumptions was to bring forth beauty from sickness, and "The Leper" seems to be a product of sickness – a "flower" of sickness, very much in style of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* (The Flowers of Evil). Our argument here is that Swinburne, through his fascination with the filthy, the sickly, the obscene, wished to manifest what the French call *Ennui* – a soul-deadening, pathological condition, which leads into the abyss of non-being.[3] Baudelaire's poem, "To the Reader" (1993, p. 5), may easily pass for Swinburne's artistic manifesto as well:

Folly and error, stinginess and sin
Possess our spirits and fatigue our flesh.
And like a pet we feed our tame remorse
As beggars take to nourishing their lice.

Our sins are stubborn, our contrition lax;
We offer lavishly our vows of faith
And turn back gladly to the path of filth,
Thinking mean tears will wash away our stains.

[...]

Truly the Devil pulls on our strings!
In the most repugnant objects we find charms;
Each day we're one step further into Hell,
Content to move across the stinking pit.

As a poor libertine will suck and kiss
The sad, tormented tit of some old whore,
We steal a furtive pleasure as we pass,
A shrivelled orange that we squeeze and press.

Close, swarming, like a million writhing worms,
A demon nation riots in our brains,
And, when we breathe, death flows into our lungs,
A secret stream of dull, lamenting cries.

[...]

"A secret stream of dull, lamenting cries" seems to be both an outburst of existential despair and an expression of Christian belief in eternal condemnation to hell. Bearing in mind that, strictly speaking, *ennui* also means "worry," "anxiety" (*The Wordsworth French Dictionary*, p. 144), *Ennui* – spelled with capital "E" as Baudelaire has it – seems, in an extra dimension, to be that territory where the drama of human existence occurs.

In the case of "The Leper," the other factors contributing to the bizarre mood of the poem are, doubtless, easily detectable homosexual cravings the narrator shows towards the third (male) person in the love triangle, which – in the initial stage of the poem – are themselves concealed sublimations of his libidinous feelings towards dead corpses. From this is just a small step to what Freud calls *dementia paranoides* (paranoia) or *dementia praecox* (in the fashionable language of the day – schizophrenia), for pathological madness, as it is defined, is a disease of thinking. Swinburne's narrator is such a thinker, and the actions he takes are just projections of what basically occurs in his mind.

In "Les Noyades," another necrophiliac poem, the narrator gives an account of a lover who rejoices at the prospect of being drowned tied breast to breast to a lady whom he adores but who despises him. Setting the plot in France in the age of terror, the poet seems to be saying that only death makes a true, genuine, authentic union of lovers possible (*P* 1, pp. 48-51):

Whatever a man of the sons of men
Shall say to his heart of the lords above,
They have shown man verily, once and again,
Marvellous mercies and infinite love.

In the wild fifth year of the change of things,
When France was glorious and blood-red, fair
With dust of battle and deaths of kings,
A queen of men, with helmeted hair.

Carrier came down to the Loire and slew,
Till all the ways and the waves waxed red:

Bound and drowned, slaying two by two,
Maidens and young men, naked and wed.

They brought on a day to his judgment-place
One rough with labour and red with fight,
And a lady noble by name and face,
Faultless, a maiden, wonderful, white.

The would-be lovers are of opposite social class: the male – a working class lad, "red with fight," whereas the female is gentle, well-behaved, "noble by name and face," which signifies a certain stereotype characteristic of Victorian poetry in general: women are idealised, attractive, "faultless" and, most importantly, "white." The female's whiteness is certainly a sign of difference as opposed to the male's roughness and redness, presumably, of the face – the effect of the physical labour in open air, the sign of uncouthness and of low social class status. As Hall (1997, p. 234) found out,

> [d]ifference matters because it is essential to meaning; without it, meaning could not exist. [...] We know what *black* means, Saussure argued, not because there is some essence of 'blackness' but because we can contrast it with its opposite – *white*. Meaning, he argued, is relational. It is the '*difference*' between *white* and *black* which signifies, which carries meaning.

In the case of Swinburne's "Les Noyades," the 'difference' of which Hall speaks is not so much important since it is not the race that is at stake in the poem but, rather, the difference that generates the power relationship within the binary opposition presented there. In a pair, one element is usually more powerful than the other, and that is why Hall (1997, p. 235) argues that "[t]here is always a relation of power between the poles of a binary opposition [Derrida 1974]. We should really write, **white**/black, **men**/women, **masculine**/feminine, **upper class**/lower class, **British**/alien to capture this power dimension in discourse." Contrary to Hall's arguments, not all elements in the binary oppositions we have in the poem are given the same prominence: it is "white" and "upper class," but not "men" and "masculine." In the above four stanzas, it is rather the feminine element that prevails: France (not **Britain**) personified as a woman ("A queen of men"),

"One rough with labour and red with fight" versus "a lady noble by name and face,/ Faultless, a maiden wonderful, white."

> She knew not, being for shame's sake blind,
> If his eyes were hot on her face hard by.
> And the judge bade strip and ship them, and bind
> Bosom to bosom, to drown and die.
>
> The white girl winced and whitened; but he
> Caught fire, waxed bright as a great bright flame
> Seen with thunder far out on the sea,
> Laughed hard as the glad blood went and came.
>
> Twice his lips quailed with delight, then said,
> "I have but a word to you all, one word;
> bear with me; surely I am but dead;"
> And all they laughed and mocked him and heard.
>
> "Judge, when they open the judgment-roll,
> I will stand upright before God and pray:
> 'Lord God, have mercy on one man's soul,
> For his mercy was great upon earth, I say.
>
> [...]
>
> "I have loved this woman my whole life long,
> And even for love's sake when have I said
> 'I love you'? when have I done you wrong,
> Living? But now I shall have you dead.
>
> "Yea, now, do I bid you love me, love?
> Love me or loathe, we are one not twain.
> But God be praised in his heaven above
> For this my pleasure and that my pain!
>
> "For never a man, being mean like me,
> Shall die like me till the whole world dies.
> I shall drown with her, laughing for love; and she
> Mix with me, touching me, lips and eyes.

In *Swinburne's Medievalism: A Study in Victorian Love Poetry* (p. 12), Anthony H. Harrison argues that the reason why Swinburne's characters fulfil their existential aims not until after death or/and through death is that death enables them to blend, amalgamate with organic and metaphysical nature:

> For Swinburne, as for courtly writers, the beloved woman is often a destructive force, and love possesses the power "to free the soul from the constraints of the world" as well as "the pains of the world." Indeed, Swinburne's personae who are ennobled in dying for causes they exalt – whether erotic or political – are ultimately freed from the bonds of discontinuous existence and demonstrate the fundamental interconnection of those causes, which they transcend through synthesis after death with organic and metaphysical nature, Swinburne's unitary life-force, Hertha.

When the male lover declares that he will "drown with her [...] and she / Mix with me," this declaration becomes a manifestation of his belief in a possibility of overcoming the discontinuity of existence through, as Harrison says, a synthesis with organic nature, in this case – water.

> "Shall she not know me and see me all through,
> Me, on whose heart as a worm she trod?
> You have given me, God requite it you,
> What man yet never was given of God."
>
> O sweet one love, O my life's delight,
> Dear, though the days have divided us,
> Lost beyond hope, taken far out of sight,
> Not twice in the world shall the gods do thus.
>
> Had it been so hard for my love? but I,
> Though the gods gave all that a god can give,
> I had chosen rather the gift to die,
> Cease, and be glad above all that live.

In *The Gift of Death* (1995), Jacques Derrida mulls over the paradox that responding responsibly to a singular "other" always involves a betrayal of one's responsibility to other "others." One of Derrida's principal conversation partners is Søren Kierkegaard's reading of Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22. The point is that to respond to the "wholly other" (God), Abraham must betray his responsibility to Isaac by killing him. In Swinburne's poem, however, the narrator sacrifices the gift of life he possesses in order to possess the "other," that is, his would-be lover in death. Thus, we are dealing here with a certain alienation of the speaking subject from himself: he separates from his "other" (his life) and betrays it by choosing, as he says, "the gift to die" in the want to respond responsibly to the other "other" – the woman. Consequently, there is yet another act of betrayal involved in the poem – the betrayal of the "wholly other" (God/gods) by him declaring that "Though the gods gave all that a god can give, / I had chosen rather the gift to die,/Cease, and be glad above all that live." Death, therefore, appears to be that territory – an abysmal vacuum – in which an authentic reunion of lovers (would-be lovers) can occur. The power to reject life, God's gift, seems to be the power to overcome oneself, in the first place, and God, in the other:

> For the Loire would have driven us down to the sea,
> And the sea would have pitched us from shoal to shoal;
> And I should have held you, and you held me,
> As flesh holds flesh, and the soul the soul.
>
> Could I change you, help you to love me, sweet,
> Could I give you the love that would sweeten death,

We should yield, go down, locked hands and feet,
Die, drown together, and breath catch breath;

But you would have felt my soul in a kiss,
And known that once if I loved you well;
And I would have given my soul for this
To burn for ever in burning hell.

THE SILENCE OF MADNESS:
THE DISCOURSE OF ENFORCED REASON

In the eighteenth century, with the separation of reason and unreason, convention and unconvention, the dialogue between the two was broken off. According to Foucault (1967), the separation resulted in the collapse of a common language and its division into, on the one hand, the language of reason, order, moral constraint and, eventually, power (physical, administrative), and, on the other, unreason, disorder, restraint and, ultimately, weakness, both in the physical and administrative sense: mad-doctors using excessive force to "pacify" (or perhaps just to repress) the patients and the rise of asylums marking the beginning of the era of the great confinement. This is what he asserts in the "Preface" *to Madness and Civilization* (1967, pp. xii-xiii):

> As for a common language, there is no such thing; or rather, there is no such thing any longer; the constitution of madness as a mental illness, at the end of the eighteenth century, affords the evidence of a broken dialogue, posits the separation as already effected, and thrusts into oblivion all those stammered, imperfect words without fixed syntax in which the exchange between madness and reason was made. The language of psychiatry, which is a monologue of reason about madness, has been established only on the basis of such a silence. I have not tried to write the history of that language, but rather the archaeology of that silence.

The silence of madness about which Foucault is writing is the silence of *non-dits* – of the unspoken, of the effect of repressive power. In *Paracelsus* (part five), Festus, Paracelsus' friend, maintains that the alternative to being discontent with life is madness:

> 'Tis fruitless for mankind
> To fret themselves with what concerns them not;
> They are no use that way: they should lie down
> Content as God has made them, nor go mad
> In thriveless cares to better what is ill.

Paracelsus embodies a figure of a scholar who, in search and desire for knowledge, "rushed/Madly upon a work beyond his wits". As he confesses to Festus (5. 145-56):

> Listen: there's shame and hissing and contempt,
> And none but laughs who names me, none but spits
> Measureless scorn upon me, me alone,
> The quack, the cheat, the liar, – all on me!
> And thus your famous plan to sink mankind
> In silence and despair, by teaching them
> One of their race had probed the inmost truth,
> Had done all man could do, yet failed no less –
> Your wise plan proves abortive. Men despair?
> Ha, ha! why, they are hooting the empiric,
> The ignorant and incapable fool who rushed
> Madly upon a work beyond his wits [.]

"To sink mankind / In silence and despair," in a broken off dialogue, suggests madness not only on the part of Paracelsus, "the ignorant and incapable fool who rushed / Madly upon a work beyond his wits," but also on the receiving end – humankind. Ridicule and insult, which also greeted Nietzsche's madman, are the signs of complete misunderstanding of a truly prophetic character of the discourses of both the madman announcing God's death, and Festus'/Paracelsus' teaching that "[o]ne of their race had probed the inmost truth" (5. 151). Instead of "silence and despair," which according to Browning would be an expected reaction, the populace turns to ridicule.

CHAPTER SIX

THE METAPHOR OF "WOMAN".
NIETZSCHE AND SWINBURNE:
THE DISCOURSE OF POWER OF LOVE/LOVE
OF POWER

> The complete woman perpetuates literature in the same way as she perpetuates a little sin: as an experiment, in passing, looking around to see if someone notices and *so that* someone may notice.
>
> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

> Women are considered deep – why? Because one can never discover any bottom to them. Women are not even shallow.
>
> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

> *My dog.* – I have given a name to my pain and call it a "dog": it is just as faithful, just as obtrusive and shameless, just as entertaining, just as clever as any other dog – and I can scold it and vent my moods on it, as others do with their dogs, servants, and wives.
>
> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 312

In the previous chapter we endeavoured to argue that discourse of power is organically connected and correlated with discourse of madness and insanity, albeit, unmistakably, both kinds of the discourses cannot be regarded as identical in a strict sense of the word. The comparative analysis of Nietzsche's and Foucault's discourses of power, on the one hand, and those of Browning and Swinburne, on the other, has clearly demonstrated that the elements of mad, insane, or abnormal discourse may be present in practically any apparently "healthy" and "normal" kind of discourses. This is particularly true in the case of, as we have already indicated, power discourses (we must not forget that in the Foucaultean model discourse itself is power), and religious discourses. The language used in the latter is basically

the language of violent passions – strongly motivated by unfulfilled love and unrealised dream of power – passions articulated in an interrupted, erratic, intermittent idiom more typical of the manner in which one thinks rather than speaks. Therefore, we may here talk about interior monologue, introspection, the "dialogue of the mind with itself" (Faas 1988, p. 120) – the techniques which at the end of the nineteenth century, with the publication of *Les Lauriers sont coupés* (1888) by the French novelist Edouard Dujardin, developed into the stream-of-consciousness technique. Basically a psychiatric term, stream of consciousness was adopted and widely used in, among others, the modern experimental novel (Marcel Proust, Virginia Wolf, James Joyce).

In this chapter we shall concentrate on a metaphor of "woman", that is to say, on that kind of discourse which takes the feminine, the womanly – in other words – the "unmanly" – as its theme. As it has been presented in the previous chapter, emotions, affections, passions are always to be uncovered in the human relationships, and always, at least in the majority of the nineteenth-century English texts, wear a "mask," a disguise of a "woman". From a position of a "masculine" narrator, the discourse that talks about passions, especially amorous ones, bears a decidedly feminine timbre/overtone. In other words, what is at stake here is the discourse of love as a "woman" or/and of a "woman" as love within a wider context of relations of power.

Yet, before we proceed to discussing poetry, it would be interesting to see what such terms as "woman", "love" or "passion" denote in Nietzsche's writings, and how they relate to each other. Also it seems of paramount importance that we try to see how his discourse of the will to power is underpinned by the above glossary with which, apparently, it has very little in common.

Our point of departure will be a general assertion which may be formulated to the effect that Nietzsche regarded females as a lower class of people, and in his hierarchy of values he placed them side by side with the classes he considered the lowest: the slaves and the non-nobles. Commenting upon Christianity in *The Will to Power*, he concluded that it "accommodated itself the religions of the lower classes, the *women* [emphasis added], the slaves, the non-noble classes" (*WP*, 196). This sociological definition affirms Nietzsche's long-standing belief in the non-noble origin and inferiority of women in a sense of them lacking the main and the most consequential trait of his *Übermensch* – the will to power. Consequently, a woman, alongside "the lower classes" and "the slaves," becomes more and more a "woman," that is to say, the synonym for the "inferior," for the lower, the unmanlike, the anti-masculine, the anti-powerful, the impotent.

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Vivian Green's views on women and their role in the early Christianity, as articulated in her recent book, *A New History of Christianity* (1996), seem to maintain a fair and relatively objective balance between Nietzsche's philosophical conjectures and historical truth. We read there (p. 12) that

> [i]t is doubtful whether Christianity made more than limited appeal to slaves and the desperate poor, and more probable that the majority of its followers were drawn from the humbler free classes. 'We see them,' Celsus, the second-century critic of the Christians wrote, 'wooldressers, cobblers, and fullers, the more uneducated and common individuals, not daring to say a word in the presence of their masters who are older and wiser. But, when get hold of the children in private, and *silly women* [emphasis added] with them, they are wonderfully eloquent.'

Further on, she quotes Athenagoras (c. 177) who, interestingly enough, sees a connection between the idea of Christianity, a lack of education and women (this time "old" – not "silly"):

> 'With us you will find unlettered people, tradesmen and *old women* [emphasis added], who though they are unable to express in words the advantages of our teaching demonstrate by acts the value of their principles.'

All these comments, as well as the "sociological" reading of Nietzsche's idiosyncratic definition, inevitably bring forth and fortify the gender elements of the term which, later in textual analysis, will come into the foreground and, to some extent, determine the meaning(s) of the text.

In another passage from *The Will to Power* (268), Nietzsche places women alongside sentimentality and other, as he says, "beautiful feelings" as part of decadent morality which "leads downwards." He argues that this type of morality "is enthusiastic, sentimental, full of secrets; it has the women and 'beautiful feelings' on its side (– primitive *Christianity* was such a morality)". The emergence of "women" as a metaphor for decadence, sentimentality, and other "beautiful feelings" that Nietzsche abhorred or, at least, mocked, proves "woman" to be a sign of weakness, "downwardness," and "*Christianity*." As regards the last designation, in a racy, parenthesised statement (145), he remarked in passing that "Mahammedanism, as a religion for men, is deeply contemptuous of the sentimentality and mendaciousness of Christianity – which it feels to be a woman's religion." "Woman," then, became synonymous in Nietzsche's language with "Christianity" – the greatest *lie*, as he had always maintained. Furthermore, he considered women hypocritical but, interestingly enough, classified them as the fourth "most skillful *conscious* hypocrites" (*WP*, 377): the first ones were, patently, priests, then princes and diplomats.

In *Twilight of the Idols* ('Maxims and Arrows'), Nietzsche articulated his contempt for women in a series of sparkling aphorisms, starting from an

'ontological' one: "Man created woman – but out of what? Out of a rib of his God, of his 'ideal'" (*TI*, 13), through to the 'war-of-the-sexes' ones: "Contentment protects one even from catching a cold. Has a woman who knew she was well dressed ever caught a cold? – I am assuming she was hardly dressed at all" (*TI*, 25), and "If a woman possesses manly virtues one should run away from her; and if she does not possess them she runs away herself" (*TI*, 28).

In the matters of love Nietzsche is even more hostile to women. In *The Will to Power* (777), we read:

> *Love.* – Look into it; women's love and sympathy – is there anything more egoistic? – And if they sacrifice themselves, their honor, their reputation, to whom do they sacrifice themselves? To the man? Or is it not rather to an unbridled urge? – These desires are just as selfish even if they please others and implant gratitude –

What Nietzsche is trying to convey here seems clear enough: women are not capable of love but rather only of selfishly succumbing to "an unbridled urge," a (sexual) desire. Interestingly enough, sexual love, as Nietzsche put it in the previous passage (number 776), belongs to one of the categories of the will to power since, in his words,

> it desires to overpower, to take possession, and it *appears* as self-surrender. Fundamentally it is only love of one's "instrument," of one's "steed" – the conviction that this or that belongs to one because one is in a position to use it.

The treatment of sexual love as merely "instrumental," that is to say, placing the emphasis on sexual organs, sets the tone for Nietzsche's further deliberations on love, marriage and power. It comes as no surprise, then, that marriage, according to him, "is not a matter of love, any more than it is a question of money; *no institution can be founded on love*" (732, emphasis added), or that "love as a passion – in the great meaning of the word – was *invented* for the aristocratic world."

Elsewhere, when he discusses "*Sensuality* in its disguises" (806), Nietzsche speaks of "the religion of love: 'a handsome young man, a beautiful woman,' somehow divine, a bridegroom, a bride of the soul." But the most significant passage on love is the one in which Nietzsche, utilising his favourite figure of speech (metaphor?) – dancing – introduces a distinction between love and "love" (807):

> What a tremendous amount can be accomplished by that intoxication which is called "love" but which is yet something other than love! – But everyone has his own knowledge of this. The muscular strength of a girl *increases* as soon as a man comes into her vicinity; there are instruments to measure this. When the sexes are in yet closer contact, as, e.g., at dances and other social events, this strength is augmented to such a degree that real feats of strength are possible: in the end one scarcely believes one's own eyes – or

one's watch. In such cases, to be sure, we must reckon with the fact that dancing in itself, like any other swift movement, brings with it a kind of intoxication of the whole vascular, nervous, and muscular system. So one has to reckon with the combined effects of a two-fold intoxication. – And how wise it is at times to be a little tipsy!

The conclusion naturally springing to mind is that Nietzsche, apart from postulating that love (or "love") is capable of stimulating, generating "real" *strength* (power) in women, establishes a direct link between a (sexual) love and the will to power. It may thus be contended that the discourse of the will to power finds its issue in the discourse of love or, in other words, the idea of power is an inherent part of the discourse of love.

Nietzsche's another consequential conclusion is that it is man who generates a feeling of increased strength in woman, and, as he observes, only then can we speak of "real feats of strength." Therefore, woman's real power does not derive from love or other "beautiful feelings" (we notice here his contempt for Romanticism and the Romantic view of love), but comes directly from a man, that is to say, from a man's *physical* presence, the presence of his body, and, what is also of significance, from the swift movement of the bodies – both female and male bodies.

It is noteworthy that the idea of two embracing bodies (be it in dancing or, for instance, in love-making) will be of particular significance the moment we come to discuss "woman" as goddess, especially within the context of Swinburne's poetic discourse of "woman." But, obviously, Nietzsche has got much more to say in his highly idiosyncratic discourse of love/"love" and power. Love is intoxication. An intoxication that

has done with reality to such a degree that in the consciousness of the lover the cause of it is extinguished and something else seems to have taken its place – a vibration and glittering of all the magic mirrors of Circe – (808).

Love as intoxication does not actually change the reality – it, as a matter of fact, only blurs it, or blurs the borderline between what is real and what is unreal, between the Kantian *thing-in-itself* and its origin ("the cause of it") and the reflection of the thing ("glittering of all the magic mirrors of Circe").

Furthermore, love is a *lie*. Love is about lying to the lover about itself. Love is the lie but it gives strength. Love, then, possesses the *power* to lie since (808)

even the love of God, the saintly love of "redeemed souls," remains the same in its roots: a fever that has good reason to transfigure itself, an intoxication that does well lie about itself – And in any case, one lies well when one loves, about oneself and to oneself: one seems to oneself transfigured, stronger, richer, more perfect, one is more perfect.

Nietzsche makes here a point similar to Browning who conceded that "We live and breathe deceiving and being deceived" (*Paracelsus*, 4. 625),

which can be paraphrased as "[w]e live and breathe lying and being lied to." This line of reasoning leads to a more general conclusion that there is a necessity of lies: man is unable to internalise the external world, to conceptualise more "compound" feelings, ideas, hence the need for simplifications, abbreviations, etc. Consequently, what we arrive at are *lies* and half-truths, but most certainly not "truths." Love, therefore, seems to be that kind of perspective appearance whose origin lies in us and which also *lies* to us about itself.

Yet, does that mean that we ought to completely do away with lying?

> But we should do wrong if we stopped with its power to lie: it does more than merely imagine; it even transposes values. And it is not only that it transposes the *feeling* of values: the lover is more valuable, is stronger. In animals this condition produces new weapons, pigments, colors, and forms; above all, new movements, new rhythms, new love calls and seductions. It is no different with man. His whole economy is richer than before, more powerful, more *complete* than in those who do not love. The lover becomes a squanderer: he is rich enough for it. Now he dares, becomes an adventurer, becomes an ass in magnanimity and innocence; he believes in God again, he believes in virtue, because he believes in love.

In section 864 of *The Will to Power*, subtitled "Why the weak conquer," Nietzsche contained his conclusion on a link between the ideas of "woman" and power:

> Finally: woman! One-half of mankind is weak, typically sick, changeable, inconstant – woman needs strength in order to cleave to it; she needs a religion of weakness that glorifies being weak, loving and being humble as divine: or better, she makes the strong weak – she rules when she succeeds in overcoming the strong. Woman has always conspired with the types of decadence, the priests, against the "powerful," the "strong," the men – (864).

And, ultimately, there comes the time to declare war against the weak, the effeminate, the womanly, that is, against all that may be metaphorically called "woman" (861):

> A declaration of war on the masses by *higher men* is needed! Everywhere the mediocre are combining in order to make themselves master! Everything that makes soft and effeminate, that serves the ends of the "people" or the "feminine," works in favor of *suffrage universal*, i.e., the dominion of *inferior* men. But we should take reprisal and bring this whole affair (which in Europe commenced with Christianity) to light and to the bar of judgment.

Of all strong feelings Nietzsche appreciated "lust for power," "the desire for the feeling of power" and "the love of power" (*Daybreak*, 204) most. As can be seen, the *sexual* terminology, "lust" and "desire," combined with a relatively neutral "love" and used in the context of "power," is yet another argument supporting a thesis that for Nietzsche a true meaning of strong

feelings (if we can at all speak of *true* meaning) was always power, or more precisely, "the feeling of enhanced power" (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I. 15).

SWINBURNE'S RELIGION OF "WOMEN"

In Swinburne's poetry, the metaphor of "woman" has had multifarious meanings and applications. What we have to admit straight away, however, is that since his poetry constituted that discursive territory in which various ideals, such as truth, freedom, love, etc., were to be apprehended, it will be difficult at times to insulate one definite use from the other. Also, if we bear in mind that Swinburne's "women," very frequently under the guises of ancient Greek goddesses, were more often than not identifiable with disparate kinds of *forces*, for instance Hertha ("Hertha" *P* 2, p. 80) with "the primordial and universal life-force of which man is the most highly evolved, and the only self-conscious, embodiment" (Harrison, 1990, p. 200), we may get a fairly adumbrative and confusing picture of Swinburne's "women."

In "Blessed Among Women" (*P* 2, p. 56), we discover what may be regarded as a kind of sacramental, religious parody of women, so characteristic of Swinburne. As it is known, "Blessed [art thou] among women" is part of the *Hail Mary*, one of basic prayers in the Catholic Church, and dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Swinburne's verse composition, however, even though its title bears a striking similarity to the prayer's fundamental phrase, is dedicated "To the Signora Cairoli," which, at the very start, makes it a meaningful parody.

The poem's initial stanzas sound truly godly and very ceremoniously, for instance, stanza 1:

> Blessed was she that bare,
> Hidden in flesh most fair,
> For all men's sake the likeness of all love;
> Holy that virgin's womb,
> The old record saith, on whom
> The glory of God alighted as a dove;
> Blessed, who brought to gracious birth
> The sweet-souled Saviour of a man-tormented earth.

The apparent "religiousness" of the poem is strengthened by the use of pious "maternal" imagery ("Holy that virgin's womb"), similes like "The glory of God alighted as a dove," and Homeric phraseology such as "The sweet-souled Saviour of man-tormented earth." But behind the veil of the "Blessed Virgin" lurks the face of another "woman", the woman who *bears* "thine equal name" (stanza 9):

That henceforth no man's breath,
Saying "Italy," but saith
In that most sovereign word equal name;
Nor can one speak of thee
But he saith "Italy,"
Seeing in two suns one co-eternal flame;
One heat, one heaven, one heart, one fire,
One light, one love, one benediction, one desire.

In the portrait of a "woman" sketched in this poem, we also notice some easily identifiable Nietzschean traits, particularly in regard to a belief in women's weakness and men's strength. Says Swinburne (*P 2*, p. 58):

The fair, strong, young men's strength,
Light of life-days and length,
And glory of earth seen under and stars above,
And years that bring to tame
Now the wild falcon fame,
Now, to stroke smooth, the dove-white breast of love;
The life unlived, the unsown seeds,
Suns unbeholden, songs unsung, and undone deeds.

The Nietzschean apotheosis of male strength ("The fair, strong, young men's strength"), though here with a subtle homosexual touch ("young men's ..."), is contrasted with, and, at the same time, complemented by an effeminate, "ladylike" notion of physical love ("to stroke smooth, the dove-like breast of love"). The consequence of this "powerful" and "ladylike" fusion of love is "The life unlived, the unsown seeds,/Suns unbeholden, songs unsung, and undone deeds," which strongly suggests (male) unfulfilment; that kind of Derridean *dissemination* in which seeds (semen) are scattered around or fall into the void and are wasted away irrevocably.

STYLISM: SWINBURNE'S MASCULINE FEMALE POWER

Morse Peckham, in *Romanticism. The Culture of the Nineteenth Century*, found that Swinburne's "Atalanta in Calydon" is an example of stylism – the term he prefers to Aesthetism – since it "provided no basis for moral responsibility, except its freedom from moral commitment and suffering" (p. 31). In the chapter entitled "The Dilemma of a Century," he states categorically that (pp. 29-30)

[t]here was no way to symbolize the experience of value which flowed from the naked encounter with unredeemable reality. For this reason, there was no defense against the hell of existence. It required a tough-mindedness which even the tough-minded could not endure, for it provided no mode of existence, of getting from day to day. The next, and in the nineteenth century final, stage of Romanticism solved all but the first of these prob-

lems [depravation of an individual of any imperative to action, R.W.]. [...] And, in a peculiar way, it even provided an imperative to action, though not to political, social or moral action. But it at least provided an imperative to live without illusion, the problem Ibsen exposed in *The Wild Duck*, though he did not there solve it.

The worth of Peckham's observations lies in the fact that he was able to see the significance of Nietzsche's Revaluation of All Values for the study of the nineteenth century, not only in the sense that Nietzsche returned morality to the study of history to which stylism, according to Peckham, did not belong ("[i]t had separated itself from history"), but also, and perhaps most importantly, in the very assertion that the search for meaning and value of the world is fundamentally futile and illusory (p. 32):

> It was Friedrich Nietzsche, whose achievement is only now [i.e. in the 1960s] being understood, who solved the problem and returned the Stylist to history. Each of the stages of Romanticism had been threatened by the static. It was Nietzsche who saw that the answer lay in the various metamorphoses of Romanticism. The fault was in the very search for a ground of value, the resting place from which the rest of the world might be moved. It was that primitive desire for a ground, a finality, an answer, that led to the debacle of Analogism, Transcendentalism, Objectivism, and Stylism, though Nietzsche also saw that Stylism, with its dandyism, its insouciance, its armor, had made an astounding contribution. The answer, therefore, lay in reversing this system, in the transvaluation of all values, and in the continuous transvaluation. The sorrow of the nineteenth century rose from its continuous failure to find a ground for value that would not gibe beneath the pressures put upon it. Nietzsche saw that to search for such a ground was to involve mankind in an infinite regress, a regress that took it farther and farther from the world, the only reality there is. If, therefore, one accepted the fact that there was no ground, that there was no justification for the search for order and meaning and value, that the world was quite meaningless, quite without value, in both Subject and Object – for Subject and Object are one – then sorrow could be converted to joy. Eternal recurrence was the answer, continuous renewal of identity by continuous transformation and transvaluation of style in art, in thought, and in individuality. Nietzsche realized that this is neither a world which once held value nor a world which ever will hold it. It is without value, without order, without meaning.

In "Atalanta in Calydon" (*P* 4, p. 247), the heroine is a virgin, the daughter of Iasius, the Arcadian, who represents an embodiment of male supremacy, an equivalent to god-like power. In the invocation, the chief huntsman makes a clear allusion to this:

> Maiden, and mistress of the months and stars
> Now folded in the flowerless fields of heaven,
> Goddess whom all gods love with threefold heart,
> Being treble in thy divided deity,
> A light for dead men and dark hours, a foot
> Swift on the hills as morning, and a hand
> To all things fierce and fleet that roar and range
> Mortal, with gentler shafts than snow or sleep;
> Hear now and help and lift no violent hand,

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But favourable and fair as thine eye's beam
Hidden and shown in heaven; for I all night
Amid the king's hounds and the hunting men
Have wrought and worshipped toward thee; nor shall man
See goodlier hounds or deadlier edge of spears;
But for the end, that lies unreached at yet
Between the hands and on the knees of gods.

The worship of a supposedly pagan goddess has here, as it is basically a rule in Swinburne, a sacrilegious character. If the chief huntsman speaks of a goddess who is loved by all gods "with threefold heart," and who is "treble in [her] divided deity" the pun is decidedly on number three. The Christian Holy Trinity does not allow for a female element as a constituent part of a triad, having instead two male and one neuter one. "Atalanta in Calydon," as Paglia (1990, p. 469) has it, "is both a celebration of and protest against the omnipotence of female nature. Meleager's farewell to his mother, delivered as he lies glamorously prone, like an odalisque, is a stunning archetypal flight":

Thou too, the bitter mother and mother-plague
Of this my weary body – thou too, queen,
The source and end, the sower and scythe,
The rain that ripens and the drought that slays,
The sand that swallows and the spring that feeds,
To make me and unmake me –

In the poem, then, we are essentially dealing with a peculiar reversal of sex roles: the masculine heroine and the feminine hero, the lesbian lover, the incestuous son and mother – Althaea, the mother, has an incestuous relationships with her son, Meleager – the relationship in which maternal ascendancy results in an act of killing, and necrophilia in which love is possible only when one of the lovers is dead. The reversal of sex roles may be viewed as a certain form of revaluation of values – the transvaluation of style in art of which Peckham spoke above, the "continuous renewal of identity." On the whole, as it seems, in Swinburne's poetry the feminine figure that most clearly embodies male strength and power in a female body is Atalanta who, as Swinburne's secret script of the male heroine has it, is at all times in ecstasy, be it emotional or sexual.

SADISTIC GOD: THE ART OF FLAGELLATION

Swinburne was familiar with various sadomasochistic and sadistic practices, flagellation among other things. His family home was the most likely source of his experiences with it mainly due to his relations with his stern

father, Rear-Admiral Charles Henry Swinburne and, later on, the family tutor whose excessive interest in punishment pushed Swinburne that way. Wilson (2000) believes that Swinburne's largely autobiographical novel *Lesbia Brandon* (1952) contains convincing clues as to the sources of his fascination with flagellation, arguing that it was Eton where he had received his initiation into the art of regular birching. He argues that (pp. 265-6):

> [b]y the time he was twelve Swinburne had been sent to Eton where, according to that novel [*Lesbia Brandon*, R.W.] and to the repeated and overwhelming testimony of nineteenth-century Etonians, flogging was exceptionally severe even by the standards of the times. Eton birches were grotesque instruments consisting of three feet of handle and two of a thick bunch of birch twigs. Birchings in both the Upper and the Lower schools were public. 'It was, in my time, so far from being a punishment administered on special occasions only, or with any degree of solemnity, that some half dozen boys were flogged every day. It was entirely public; any one who chose might drop in. I have sometimes been one of three spectators and sometimes one of a hundred,' recalled one Etonian [Gibson, 1978, p. 100] of the years 1841 to 1844.

Following Gibson, Wilson makes a direct link between Swinburne's sadomasochism and his hatred of Christianity, arguing that Swinburne's God is a sadist who, as the poet declares in "Atalanta in Calydon," "[s]mites without sword, and scourges without rod;/The supreme evil, God." Even though an undeviating connection between what we call today 'S and M' and unbelief cannot be proven to have been a general rule in Victorian England, in a number of nineteenth-century poems there is an undeniable smear of blasphemy stemming most likely from Christianity's denial of the body, which is most evidently seen in the above lines. It is interesting to note that at the vast majority of public schools in England at that time it was Greek and Latin literature – rather than English or European – that was taught to middle- and upper-class boys, and the classical cult of the body, including homosexuality, was certainly not foreign to them. Wilson (p. 270) sees a paradox in that fact that

> a man like Dr Arnold [Thomas Arnold], who believed it was his mission to make boys Christian, should have seen nothing odd about them spending the four or five most formative years of their lives being filled with knowledge of pre-Christian culture, made to learn odes of Horace in which it was asserted that, contrary to what St Paul believed, we are but dust and shadows, with no future life to look forward to. While English law, following St Paul, told them that homosexuality was the most heinous of sins, Plato and Sappho told them otherwise. While their Bibles told them to mortify the flesh, their Catullus told them to celebrate its joys while they could. A confusing diet.

Little wonder then that Swinburne produced lines that a respectable and God-fearing Christian should not even think of. *The Whippingham Papers* is a good example of Swinburne's delight in the power of the birch and pretty boys (p. 26):

A pretty boy with fair upturned face,
Dark eyebrows and dark eyes, and yellow hair,
With breeches down for flogging, in disgrace;
With the birch hanging over him in air,
With scar on scar and bloody trace on trace
Of flogging all across the parts laid bare,
All his fair limbs and features drawn with pain,
As the birch showered its strokes on him like rain.

Pain makes you cry (p. 62):

Oh, hold his shirt up, Algernon,
Hold the boy's shirt up high;
Let us all have a view of his bottom, Hugh,
Oh, doesn't the pain make him cry, by Jove!
Oh, doesn't the pain make him cry.

Paglia (1990, p. 472) considers Swinburne's fascination with sadomasochism a form of a perverse nature-cult:

The theme of male subordination to female authority is more consciously developed in Swinburne than in any other major artist. As with the Marquis de Sade, life and work dovetail, for Swinburne was apparently a masochist in its strict sense. That is, he liked to be whipped by women and visited brothels for this purpose. I resist the general perception that sadists and masochists are maladjusted. Like drag queens, they see through the sexual masks of society. Unlike drag queens, they quest for archaic nature. Swinburne's masochism had a metaphysical meaning. His recreational whippings were connected to his poetic cosmology, which restores the Great Mother to power. Self-flagellation was intrinsic to the ancient mother-cults. Flagellation, flogging, thrashing: threshing grain with a flail (from the Latin *flagrum* or *flagellum*, "a whip, scourge"). Swinburne's ritual flagellation mimicked the public operations of agriculture. Sadomasochism is perverse nature-cult. Surrendering himself to whipping, Swinburne theatrically formalized the hierarchical sexual relations of a universe activated by female force. Mind and body, pleasure and pain, mother and son were reunited in archaic sexual ceremony.

In Victorian England, the motif of flagellation constituted a relatively meaningful – though considerably undervalued – stream in the novel. Written in a form of a series of letters to a female friend, Margaret Anson's novel, *The Order of the Rod*, is a convincing example of this. The author – the pseudonymous Miss Margaret Anson, through showing an astonishing knowledge of the subject, that is, the art of flogging – presents herself a spot-on admirer of an atypically Victorian idea that sex, even in this "specialised" form, is a source of joy and pleasure, though not devoid of pain. She explores a variety of situations in which reproduction, contrary to Foucault's arguments mentioned in *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, was not even thought of as a distant possibility of the presented sexual practices. As in Foucault, however, these practices, exposure of bared buttocks, pain and pleasure, blood and tears, the penetratingly painful rod, were carefully con-

fined and moved into a room, with doors cautiously closed and guarded from both the inside and outside, and having described the main actress's appearance and set the scene, the female narrator proceeds to the male element of her erotic story (pp. 84-5):

> Presently M. Hauterville appeared to supplicate, and kissed the hands and feet of the little tyrant on the couch to no purpose: he was made to prepare for punishment by turning up the embroidered dressing-gown he wore. He had no more clothes on than his wife […]. When M. Hauterville had received his punishment, he took his pretty wife in his arms, and half smothered her with kisses, finally getting the rod from her, and threatening her with it as he would a child. Then ensued a singular scene. She got away from him, and he chased her round the room, she every now and then defying him in a pretty saucy fashion, perfectly bewitching to see. At last he caught her, and, laying her across his knee, he whipped her as she had done him, using the rod lightly enough, but still raising red marks on the firm white hips.

The description comes to an abrupt end here since, needless to say, it is a Victorian novel, not an early twentieth-first-century explicitly pornographic story. The narrator complains (p. 85): "What more we might have seen I don't know, for just as he threw down the rod, and folded her in his arms, crack went the branch on which we were sitting, and we narrowly escaped a terrible fall. [A]nd out went the light in the room above."

The presented scene seems to be of particular significance since it gives us a wide range of key terms pertinent to our discourse of the art of flagellation. First of all, there is "tyrant" – a typically male noun, denoting the position of power and, at the same time, the abuse of power. Here we are dealing with the female tyrant whose tiny body emphasises the contrast with the position of power in her relation with her husband: "little tyrant" seems to be an affectionate term of endearment which manifests the narrator's admiration of Madame Hauterville's power of the body and her supremacy over her male partner.

Then, there comes "punishment" which is treated here as an official reason of flagellation. In the case of the Hautervilles, there was no apparent reason to suspect that flagellation was in any possible way a sort of punishment; on the contrary, the narrator is positive that what was between them behind the cautiously guarded closed door was a *ritual*, a kind of religious and sexual *rite*, very distant from the *devotions*, the official version their maid offered the curious observers in the chateau.

Another one is "smothering" – suffocating, stifling, choking, asphyxiating, overwhelming, overpowering, oppressing, suffocating – the word also popularly used by some other Victorian writers. In Robert Browning's *Porphyria's Lover*, for instance, the male lover strangles his female lover with her tresses, apparently out of love for her, but in Anson we are dealing with

"half-smothering" with kisses of a "little tyrant" as a form of worship, a peculiar cult of the female, an adoration, a *devotion*, at last.

The weapon, the tool of pleasure and punishment, the instrument of discipline and exercising of power is the "rod." When M. Hauterville seizes the rod from his wife's hands, he seizes the attribute of power, authority, and supremacy. The rod is also a symbol of male sexuality; its shape's semblance to a penis seems obvious enough. He threatens her with the rod, which testifies to *fear* as an element of exercising of power. In the cited scene, M. Hauterville whips his wife with the rod, yet he employs it "lightly enough" so that he can still remain a gentleman despite the use of the weapon and physical force against the female. Interestingly enough, his whipping leaves "red marks on the firm white hips," which elsewhere are called "weals" – the symbols of the recipient's pain and the giver's power and triumph.

LESBIAN SADISM: "ANACTORIA"

"Anactoria," like many other poems discussed in this book, seems to fall a victim to Rousseauist literary studies, which expurgate in the name of liberalism: the poem rarely appears in university curricula or Victorian literary histories. In Paglia's opinion, "Anactoria" "is not only Swinburne's greatest poem but a supreme poem of the century" (p. 473). It starts with some avowals resembling those of Browning's Porphyria's lover, particularly in regard to the hair fetish and the lover's deadly stillness, like in the object of art (*P* 1, p. 57):

> My life is bitter with thy love; thine eyes
> Blind me, thy tresses burn me, thy sharp sighs
> Divide my flesh and spirit with soft sound,
> And my blood strengthens, and my veins abound.
> I pray thee sigh not, speak not, draw not breath;
> Let life burn down, and dream it is not death.
> I would the sea had hidden us, the fire
> (Wilt thou fear that, and fear not my desire?)
> Severed the bones that bleach, the flesh that cleaves,
> And let our sifted ashes drop like leaves.
> I feel thy blood against my blood: my pain
> Pains thee, and lips bruise lips, and vein stings vein.
> Let fruit be crushed on fruit, let flower on flower,
> Breast kindle breast, and either burn one hour.
> Why wilt thou follow lesser loves? are thine
> Too weak to bear these hands and lips of mine?
> I charge thee for my life's sake, O too sweet
> To crush love with thy cruel faultless feet,

I charge thee keep thy lips from hers or his,
Sweetest, till theirs be sweeter than my kiss:
Lest I too lure, a swallow for a dove,
Erotion or Erinna to my love.

In Swinburne, lesbian love has a lot in common with his notorious necrophiliac image of a lover's body being devoured by earth in a kind of bizarre intercourse, obviously aided by pain (*P* 1, p. 58):

I would my love could kill thee; I am satiated
With seeing thee live, and fain would have thee dead.
I would earth had thy body as fruit to eat,
And no mouth but some serpent's found thee sweet.
I would find grievous ways to have thee slain,
Intense device, and superflux of pain;
Vex thee with amorous agonies, and shake
Life at thy lips, and live it there to ache;
Strain out thy soul with pangs too soft to kill,
Intolerable interludes, and infinite ill;
Relapse and reluctation of the breath,
Dumb tunes and shuddering semitones of death.

A new element in his discourse of lesbian sadism is death, a purposefully inflicted death or, putting the thing right, *killing* ("would have thee dead" and "would find grievous ways to have thee slain"). There is this explicit air of homosexuality, but this time "strange ways" are preceded by a modifier "soft" thus indicating a "malleable" approach to love-making in lesbians. Yet the speaker is tired of this softness:

I am weary of all thy words and soft strange ways,
Of all love's fiery nights and all his days,
And all the broken kisses salt as brine
That shuddering lips make moist with waterish wine,
And eyes the bluer for all those hidden hours
That pleasure fills with tears and feeds from flowers,
Fierce at the heart with fire that half comes through,
But all the flowerlike white stained round with blue;
The fervent underlid, and that above
Lifted with laughter or abashed with love;
Thine amorous girdle, full of thee and fair,
And leavings of the lilies in thine hair.

Softness is replaced by violence, and sadism is an answer to love ("those hidden hours/That pleasure fills with tears'). The erotic instrument used in the play, the "amorous girdle," leaves visible marks upon the body ("all the flowerlike white stained round with blue").

Yea, all sweet words of thine and all thy ways,
And all the fruit of nights and flower of days,

And stinging lips wherein the hot sweet brine
That Love was born of burns and foams like wine,
And eyes insatiable of amorous hours,
Fervent as fire and delicate as flowers,
Coloured like night at heart, but cloven through
Like night with flame, dyed round like night with blue,
Clothed with deep eyelids and above –
Yea, all thy beauty sickens me with love;
Thy girdle empty of thee and now no fair,
And ruinous lilies in thy languid hair.

In one of the multifarious variants of his idiosyncratic divinities, Swin-burne elevates love (spelled in a capital L) to a position of a goddess, imper-sonating it in a kind of mediaeval dream allegory (p. 59):

[...] I beheld in sleep the light that is
In her high place in Paphos, heard the kiss
Of body and soul that mix with eager tears
And laughter stinging through the eyes and ears;
Saw Love, as burning flame from crown to feet,
Imperishable, upon her storied seat;
Clear eyelids lifted toward the north and south,
A mind of many colours, and a mouth
Of many tunes and kisses; and she bowed,
With all her subtle face laughing aloud,
Bowed upon me, saying, "Who doth thee wrong,
Sappho?" but thou – thy body is the song,
Thy mouth the music; thou art more than I,
Though my voice die not till the whole world die;
Though men that hear it madden; though love weep,
Though nature change, though shame be charmed to sleep.
Ah, wilt thou slay me lest I kiss thee dead?

Then, there follows a string of openly vampiric and cannibalistic wishes and confessions, mixed with lesbian lyricism, in a form of sacrilegious eulogy (pp. 60-1):

Ah that my mouth for Muses' milk were fed
On the sweet blood thy sweet small wounds had bled!
That with my tongue I felt them, and could taste
The faint flakes from thy bosom to the waist!
That I could drink thy veins as wine, and eat
Thy breasts like honey! that from face to feet
Thy body were abolished and consumed,
And in my flesh thy very flesh entombed!
Ah, ah, thy beauty! like a beast it bites,
Stings like an adder, like an arrow smites.
Ah sweet, and sweet again, and seven times sweet,
The paces and the pauses of thy feet!

In the subsequent part of the poem, these ideas are given more prominence and strength (p. 61):

Thy shoulders whiter than a fleece of white,
And flower-sweet fingers, good to bruise or bite
As honeycomb of the inmost honey-cells,
With almond-shaped and roseleaf-coloured shells
And blood like purple blossom at the tips
Quivering; and pain made perfect in thy lips
For my sake when I hurt thee; O that I
Durst crush thee out of life with love, and die,
Die of thy pain and my delight, and be
Mixed with thy blood and molten into thee!

There is an evident powerfully Nietzschean trait in Swinburne's idea of female power over male: the will to power, the will to even greater power, the will to overcome not so much oneself, as it is in Nietzsche, but the will to overcome the opponent, the partner, the lover – in most cases – of the same sex. And there is that food-love-power connection. Says Paglia (1990, p. 473):

Anactoria devours in imagination what remains untouched in reality. Sappho is an impe-rialist of aggressive orality, an amoral champion of pure poetic voice. For her, to speak is to eat is to make love. Swinburne makes poetry into the brute will-to-power, a Sadean rather than Rousseauist art form.

Finally, Paglia formulates a thesis concerning the main heroine's silence throughout the whole body of the poem, which sounds somewhat lame par-ticularly if we bear in mind the Heideggerian concept of the discourse of si-lence. She believes that it is the poet himself who stands veiled at centre stage for Anactoria (p. 478):

For why is the poem called Anactoria rather then [sic!] Sappho? Though she is probably present, like Baudelaire's girlish Hippolyte, Anactoria is invisible. She never speaks and is never even named. She is as mute as Christabel under the vampire's spell. My principle of sexual metathesis solves this problem. Anactoria takes its title from Swinburne's own sex-crossing persona. Author, author! The poet stands veiled at center stage.

THE "MOTHER" FIGURE

In *God in All Worlds. An Anthology of Contemporary Spiritual Writing* (1995, p. 219), Lucinda Vardey writes that

[t]here is no doubt that the feminine spiritual energy of the archetype of the Great Mother, the feminine side of God, the all-powerful protector and creator of the world, is sweeping through the collective unconscious in our world today. As the patriarchal sys-

tem, under which the world has been ruled for so long, breaks up, she returns after centuries of neglect.

It seems, indeed, that "the world today" has actually started well in the previous century with some of the Victorians (or post-Victorians), or is rather another form of, to use one of Nietzsche's master-terms, *die ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen* – the eternal recurrence of the same. The world of yesterday returns, though changed and corrupted, returns as it was centuries and thousands of years ago, and so does the goddess – the earth's mother. The balance of power, so cautiously and scrupulously maintained by Christianity in the Western world, seems to shift from the male to the female archetype of God, perhaps due to, as Vardey rightly observes, centuries of neglect or centuries of *silence* (again, we have to recall the significance of the Heideggerian discourse of silence, Ch. 1).

Camille Paglia (1990, p. 8) asserts that the status of women had been raised with the advance of the Judeo-Christian religion, the religion which is a sky-cult, as opposed to the earth-cult religions that venerated fruitful nature:

> The evolution from earth-cult to sky-cult shifts woman into the nether realm. Her mysterious procreative powers and the resemblance of her rounded breasts, belly, and hips to earth's contours put her at the center of early symbolism. She was the model for the Great Mother figures who crowded the birth of religion worldwide.

The "Mother" figure is probably the most frequently employed "woman" metaphor in Swinburne, the figure that seems to be the source of all other feminine types that were able to emerge from the shunned and hushed discourse of femininity and "woman" power in Victorian England. The "Mother" archetype probably stems from the ancient belief, shared by Swinburne and other Victorians, in the Mother Goddess who, for instance in Sumer, bore the name of NIN.HAR.SAG, meaning "Lady of the Head Mountain," and was considered to be the fountainhead of the power concept, very much like the male God was (and still is) in the Jewish and Christian worlds. As the impersonation of "the feminine side of God", Ninharsag, according to Alford (1998, pp. 190-1), assisted her half-brother Enki in the creation of man:

> Given our own twentieth century decoding of the human genome, we can understand the excitement and *power felt* [emphasis added] by Ninharsag [...]. Finally the perfect man was created. Ninharsag cried out "I have created! My hands have done it!". One text states quite explicitly that Ninharsag gave the new creation "a skin as the skin of a god". Having perfected the ideal man with a larger brain, enhanced digit ability and smooth skin, it was a simple next step to use cloning – now an established scientific process – to produce an army of primitive workers. [...] She also became known as the Mother Goddess, and became associated with numerous religious cults throughout the ancient world.

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Although Alford presents here only one of numerous hypotheses as to the incredible evolutionary leap from the lowly *Homo erectus* to the sophisticated, though still primitive, *Homo sapiens* of 200,000 years ago, the role he assigns to NIN.HAR.SAG (the transcription of the Sumerian spelling of her name is also noteworthy – looks like the late-twentieth-century Internet address!) is significant and worth considering more closely. The Mother Goddess, in the creation of a new man – or, shall we say, a version of the Nietzschean *Übermensch* – constituted a certain alternative to the Christian concept of the male creator of the world, God the Father.

Another female deity, who contributed substantially to the making of the "woman" metaphor in Swinburne's poetry, is the goddess known in Sumer as IN.ANNA (which means Anu's Beloved), in Greece as Aphrodite, and in Rome as Venus. This archetypal goddess of love and war was notorious for her promiscuity, and her sexual passions were one of the most popular themes both in Antiquity and Modern times. Commenting on Swinburne's fascination with the female, Paglia (1990, p. 460) calls him "a female monarchist":

> Swinburne sets Baudelaire's Decadent vampires in Sade's violent nature. Swinburne's world surges with natural power, because English high culture was and is capable of continental contempt for nature. Even when defining it as negative and destructive, the English artist, unlike the French, opens himself to nature, a pattern we see in Coleridge, Emily Brontë, and Swinburne. Swinburne's poetry demolishes Victorian society and plants matriarchy amid patriarchy. Swinburne is a female monarchist. The title of his first published work, *The Queen Mother* (1861), boldly fuses sex and hierarchy. Recreating the archaic mother-religions, Swinburne sweeps Christianity away, as Coleridge did in *Christabel*. Now earth-cult is given a new liturgy and body of prayer. Hence Swinburne's peculiar incantatory style, parodied from the moment it appeared. [...] Swinburne's poetry shows paganism as it really was, not idleness and frolic but a severe code of ritual limitation, curbing the dangerous daemonism of sex and nature.

THE GREAT WHORE

In pre-Christian societies, women and sexuality were associated with the sacred rather than the profane. It was with the emergence of Christianity as a system of dogmatic rules and its authoritarian power that sexuality (and women in general) were removed from the sphere of the revered and condemned for centuries to the sacrilegious and forbidden.

In her significant book, *Sacred Pleasure. Sex, Myth, and the Politics of the Body: New Paths to Power and Love* (1996), Riane Eisler formulates a thesis that there is a long-forgotten but still powerful connection between the sexual and the mystical, which is clearly evident in, for instance, *passion*, the word denoting both (sexual) desire and (mystical) ardour, devotion or pi-

ety. Furthermore, as she puts it (p. 15), female bodies were, and still nowadays should be considered, sacred:

> the evidence is compelling that for many thousands of years – much longer than the thirty to fifty centuries we call recorded history – this was the case. In traditions that go back to the dawn of civilization, the female vulva was revered as the magical portal of life, possessed of the power of both physical regeneration and spiritual illumination and transformation.

Like Alford, Eisler believes that woman has had her divine origin in, as she calls, her, the Great Goddess, and that her sexual organs symbolise the "source of life, pleasure and love" (p. 16):

> Far from being seen as a "dirty cunt," woman's pubic triangle was the sacred manifestation of creative sexual power. And far from being of a lower, base, or carnal order, it was a primary symbol of the powerful figure known in later Western history as the Great goddess: the divine source of life, pleasure, and love.

The amalgamation of the sacred and the sacrilegious, the mystical and the sexual has most likely stemmed from the belief that the goddess, be it "Great" or a "Whore," was responsible for the creation of a "perfected" man, which would account, at least in the opinions of the above authors, for the missing link between the *Homo erectus* and *Homo sapiens*. Eisler provides numerous examples of the archaeological finds, such as the one at Savignamo and Lake Trasimeno in northern Italy, which reveal, after Gimbutas (1989, p. 231), "a fusion of the phallus with the divine body of the Goddess," or the various pieces of sculpture, also found in Europe, representing a Goddess with some phallic motifs in a sexual act.

As it has already been mentioned, Venus is yet another name for the goddess of love and war, and as such she has been immortalised in Swinburne's poem "Laurs Veneris" (*P* 1, p. 11). In it, we are presented with the story of Venus of Horselberg – the god-whore – who, being "the world's delight," and, to use Eisler's words, "the divine source of life, pleasure and love," epitomised all the features of the goddesses exposed above, and because of this was to remain always a sacramental blasphemy for the Christians:

> Lo, this is she that was the world's delight;
> The old grey years were parcels of her might;
> The stewings of the ways wherein she trod
> Were the twain seasons of the day and night.
> Lo, she was thus when her clear limbs enticed
> All lips that now grow sad with kissing Christ,
> Stained with blood fallen from the feet of God,
> The feet and hands whereat our souls were priced.

The portrayal of the goddess, of her power over time and of her might the poet is sketching ("The old grey years were parcels of her might" and "The stewings of the ways wherein she trod / Were the twain seasons of the day and night"), takes another dimension when he presents her as an object of not only a common veneration ("the world's delight"), but of seduction and desire as well ("she was thus when her clear limbs enticed / All lips that now grow sad with kissing Christ"):

> Alas, Lord, surely thou art great and fair.
> But lo her wonderfully woven hair!
> And thou didst heal us with thy piteous kiss;
> But see now, Lord; her mouth is lovelier.

> She is right fair; what hath she done to thee?
> Nay, fair Lord Christ, lift thy eyes and see;
> Had now thy mother such a lip – like this?
> Thou knowest how sweet a thing it is to me.

The impious worship of the hair fetish, characteristic of both Swinburne and Browning (see the previous chapter), and as opposed to the apparently *pious* worship of "fair Lord Christ," may lead to a conclusion that the modifiers *pious/impious* cannot be characterised as being fundamentally different in meaning in Swinburne's poetry: he treats the "woman," the goddess, as reverently (or as irreverently) as he treats Jesus Christ, God Incarnated, the *Man* (we recall here the famous phrase from St John's gospel allegedly uttered by Pilate who had brought Jesus out with his crown of thorns for the Jews to see, and said to them, "Ecce homo [behold the man]", the phrase to which Nietzsche made a clear reference in his biography *Ecce Homo. How One Becomes What One Is*). Even though the narrator venerates God ("Lord, surely thou art great and fair"), his power is irreverently contrasted with the power of Venus's hair, and by this very fact denigrated. The depreciation of Jesus' might is deepened when his kiss, though healing ("And thou didst heal us"), is opposed to "her mouth [which] is lovelier."

In the previous stanza (*P* 1, p. 11), Swinburne writes about the *historicity* of these two figures (metaphors), and, again, the "woman" takes the precedence:

> Lo, she was thus when her clear limbs enticed
> All lips that now grow sad with kissing Christ,
> Stained with blood fallen from the feet of God,
> The feet and hands whereat our souls are priced.

By identifying Christ with God ("kissing Christ,/Stained with blood fallen from the feet of God"), the poet equates the *divine* status with the *human* one, or, more precisely, elevates humankind to the position of divinity.

But, on the other hand, humanity, as embodied by Christ, is disparaged when compared with the goddess who is also human and female as all proofs show ("her wonderfully woven hair", "her mouth is lovelier", etc).

Even historically, she is superior ("she was thus when her clear limbs enticed/ All lips that now grow sad with kissing Christ"), which may be interpreted that the lips, which *now* grow sad with kissing Christ, *were* enticed by Venus' limbs much earlier. The lips (a frequently recurring figure in Swinburne, possessing, as it were, a life of their own) are/were both the recipients and indicators of affection, be it from Venus or Jesus; in the first case – "her clear limbs enticed," in the other – Jesus makes the lips "now grow sad." What is also noteworthy is that the lips are "stained with blood fallen from the feet of God," which indicates, doubtless, the bloody sacrifice of Jesus and his vicarious sufferings for humankind. Yet, as it may seem, the phrase "stained with blood" does not generate a particularly attractive image of the object of veneration and/or love in both the narrator and the reader; the lips that kiss Christ are stained with blood from his feet and hands. Christ's divinity, therefore, seems to be very much belittled and narrowed down to a merely physical aspect, and his sufferings made look unattractive and unnecessary, if not repulsive.

Thus, we may conclude that by rejecting and ridiculing the dogmas of the Christian faith, Swinburne's parodies may be interpreted as his open attack on Christianity in which the poet condemns, as Margot Louis has it in her book *Swinburne and His Gods* (1990, p. 23), "the cruelty and violence of God, His Church, and His Creation."

"Dolores" is yet another instance of Swinburne's discourse of power of love in which the metaphor of "woman" figures prominently. The woman ("woman"), whose mysterious portrait is unveiled and exposed early in the poem (*P* 1, p. 154), symbolises pain and bears the name of "Our Lady of Pain," which is at the same time a refrain (again with a shade of ironic blasphemy):

> Cold eyelids that hide like a jewel
> Hard eyes that grow soft for an hour;
> The heavy white limbs, and the cruel
> Red mouth like a venomous flower;
> When these are gone by their glories,
> What shall rest of thee then, what remain,
> O mystic and sombre Dolores,
> Our Lady of Pain?

The colours the poet uses to draw the image of "mystic and sombre Dolores" are also "mystic and sombre," where coldness and hardness are mixed and mingled with whiteness and redness. As a result, we receive the

"woman" constructed, stereotypically, of "masculine" and "feminine" elements ("cold," "hard," and "heavy" as opposed to "jewel," "soft" and "white"), which found its issue in the phrases like "Hard eyes ["masculine"] that grow soft ["feminine"] for an hour," and "heavy ["masculine"] white ["feminine"] limbs". If "masculinity" denotes *power* in a broadest sense of the word (strength, supremacy), thus, the "masculine" modifiers ("hard," "heavy") transfer it, as it were, onto the "feminine" ones. This shift of power transforms "masculinity" into "femininity" or, shall we say, both these types melt into one "masculino-feminine" or/and "feminino-masculine" genus, in other words, an *androgyne* (there is going to be more about this issue in the subsequent sections of this chapter). Should it be possible to isolate *pure* "femininity" it would not only denote the quality of being a jewel, whiteness and softness, but also the quality of *growing* soft for a short period of time ("grow soft for an hour"). Such a brief metamorphosis may, in turn, suggest a sexual explanation, that is to say, the feminine submissiveness in an intimate act, since though "cruel," Dolores's mouth is "red," which may be read as a direct sign of sexual readiness.

In the same line of argument, the whole phrase "Red mouth like a venomous flower" strongly indicates that what is at stake here is the symbolic articulation of the *female power* of regeneration: the vulva represented as a flower (see Gimbutas 1989, p. 103). "Venomous flower" may, however, imply a sexual trap: the petals, while invitingly opening themselves, hide and then reveal a treacherous abyss of temptation to enter – a *vagina dentata* where men simultaneously desire and fear their downfall – so that a kiss placed on the enticingly red lips is all deadly and painful, as is "mystic and sombre Dolores,/Our Lady of Pain."

Dolores, *Notre-Dame des Sept Douleurs* (Our Lady of Seven Sorrows) as the subtitle suggests, is undoubtedly an exemplification of a goddess who combines the elements of the mystical, sacred (we notice the religious allusion in the French subtitle), and the sensual or openly provocative. In the second stanza, she is blatantly more blasphemous than saintly:

> Seven sorrows the priests give their Virgin;
> But thy sins, which are seventy times seven,
> Seven ages would fail thee to purge in,
> And then they would haunt thee in heaven:
> Fierce midnights and famishing morrows,
> And the loves that complete and control
> All the joys of the flesh, all the sorrows
> That wear out the soul.

"But thy sins, which are seventy times seven," "Fierce midnights and famishing morrows", and "All the joys of the flesh" that "the loves [...] com-

plete and control" put Dolores in a position of a "woman" Nietzsche has described in *The Will to Power*, the woman who understands love, in the first place, as a satisfaction of her sexual desires or, more precisely, as the one who treats love as a complement ("the loves that complete ...") and a controlling tool ("... and control") over "All the joys of the flesh." Swinburne, like Nietzsche, argues that love, or "love" ("the loves") can be an instrument in exercising power over the other person and over oneself. Thus, love, particularly a sexual love, can be an expression of the will to power, the power to overcome both the partner and oneself. That does not, obviously, mean that it must take place simultaneously: one overcomes a partner in order, as Nietzsche says (*WP*, 776), "to take possession," or one overcomes himself/herself in order to get the feeling of an increased power, the power over oneself; these two things may be absolutely autonomous. But in the subsequent stanza, Dolores is again both a "mystic rose" and a "house of unquenchable fire" (*P* 1, p. 155):

O mystical rose of the mire,
O house not of gold but of gain,
O house of unquenchable fire,
Our Lady of Pain!

The phrase "mystical rose of the mire" seems to be consequential not only because it denotes the "mystical" side of the goddess – Dolores who, this time, takes the shape of a rose – but because it indicates where she comes from – the *mire*: the primitive, primeval mud, ooze – the original, life-giving substance. Likewise Browning, Swinburne also seems to believe that man had originated from the primeval slime like the world which came to be and "is." Yet, at the same time, our goddess, the life-giving "Lady of Pain," is compared to a "house of unquenchable fire," which is reminiscent of the ancient goddesses, the bearers of eternal flame of life, but also it may suggest Dolores' insatiable, "quenchless" sexual desire.

In her chapter entitled "Romantic Shadows. Swinburne and Pater," Paglia sees in Dolores the embodiment of a virtually vampiric female power, the sources of which she finds in French decadent poets, most notably Baudelaire and Gautier, but also in Romantic Shelley (p. 461):

Dolores, long and serpent-shot, demonstrates the cultic character of Swinburne's poetry and its magnetic orientation towards female power. [...] Cold, hard jewel eyes: Dolores is Baudelaire's mineral and reptilian vampire. She is ritualistically visualized by the Decadent catalog, that itemizing/atomazing style Gautier invented in *A Night with Cleopatra*. The erotic object disintegrates into parts. Dolores' "heavy white limbs" surreally come into view between eyes and red mouth, as if she were a broken statue. We are in a dead city, a forest of fallen columns overrun by lizards and poison poppies. This opening se-

quence of cold luminous images recalls Shelley's *Epipsychidion*: aggression of the poet's eye leads to dissolution of the object and emotional dissociation of the perceiver.

Further, she adds that (pp. 461-2):

> [i]n form, *Dolores* is surely inspired by Baudelaire's "Litanies of Satan." Like Baudelaire, Swinburne appeals to hell rather than heaven, but his goal is more radical. He removes himself from the Christian world altogether by invoking an omnipotent goddess. Like Aubrey Beardsley's Swinburnian *Saint Rose of Lima, Dolores*, daemonizes the Virgin Mary, dispatching her into the past to meet her ancient precursors, from sexuality was not yet divorced. [...] *Dolores* systematically inverts the sacred epithets, creating an Anti-Mary, as Baudelaire's Satan is Antichrist. Dolores is the Whore of Babylon: "O garden where all men may dwell,/O tower not of ivory, builded / By hands that reach heaven from hell;/O mystical rose of the mire." Medieval Mary, the chaste walled garden, becomes the plundered bower of an urban brothel. Dolores is the arrogant tower, a self-made colossus rising from primeval mud to tear down heaven's gate.

Paglia's remarks seem, in the main, right, though it is somewhat controversial to claim a formal affinity between *Dolores* and Baudelaire's "Litanies of Satan," the latter written basically in couplets with a refrain – an invocation to Satan – after each one. Nonetheless, a careful reader will notice that in Baudelaire it is Satan "[w]ho sees that women's hearts and eyes sustain/ The love of rags, the cult of wounds and pain" (*The Flowers of Evil*, p. 273), which may indicate a common premise in regard to women, pain and the sacrilegious in both poets.

Two further examples of "woman" poems are "Quia Multum Amavit" (*P* 2, p. 112), in which we are dealing with the figure resembling, in language at least, that of the Great Whore: "foolish virgin," "harlot's breast," "prostitute," "fouler breast," or "bride of God" (p. 115), and "Before a Crucifix" (*P* 2, p. 82), in which we read about "women's withered out of sex" within a wider context of "God rotten to the bone". Again, what seems to be at stake is a "wedding" of the sacrilegious and the sacred in a blasphemous sacrament of (murderous) sex.

The transmogrification from the "beautiful" to the "beastly" that is evident in most of Swinburne's major poems, and which possesses a powerful religious, anti-Christian ramification, can also be found in his dramatic works, most notably the trilogy of plays *Chastelard, Bothwell*, and *Mary Stuart*. As Louis (1990, p. 15) has it,

> [i]n this sequence Swinburne begins by transforming the figure of Mary Stuart into a type of the Great Whore, and destructively criticizes two antagonistic forms of Christianity by showing that the god of their worship is really identical with His own demonic parody; then gradually, as the work progresses, Mary is revealed in a new light as a symbol of the human power to create our own order, to construct meaning.

Obviously, we do not need to think either in historical terms (after all, Swinburne was not a historical writer, and therefore Mary Stuart may be interpreted as "Mary Stuart", a metaphor of a "woman"), or in religious ones. Mary does not necessarily have to be identified with the Virgin Mary, the personification of divinely *human* power, the *Mother* of God. What seems to be at stake, however, is the acknowledgement, endorsement, confirmation of a dramatic change of meaning of "woman", the change from a "motherly" type to a "whorish" one. Louis sees in that transformation an element of Swinburne's post-Romanticism or, shall we say, anti-Romanticism, as opposed to the Blakean idea of the marriage of heaven and hell. In her words, it is an *integration* of hell and heaven that signals the death of the old Christian order (p. 20):

> Swinburne chooses to glorify the adulterous wife, and to deify the Great Whore, not only because of his personal devotion to "our Lady of Pain," but because the demonic element must be incorporated into the new deity; hell must be, not merely married to, but integrated with, heaven. For the instability of this woman-god's nature is the basis of the new typology; there is no more striking way of demonstrating the disappearance of the old order, which gives way now, not to new order, but to creative and destructive activity, perpetually trying to discover its own nature. By deifying the Whore, Swinburne announces the death of the old, Christian order.

The Swinburnian "death of the old, Christian order" seems to be none other than the notorious Nietzschean announcement of the death of God, the announcement actually intended to mean, besides the collapse of the Christian order, the proclamation of the birth of *new* man, the "higher" man, *der Übermensch*.

Concluding, the transformation of the "woman" symbol in Swinburne from the "Mother" type into the "Whore" one seems to be indicative of his sacrilegious vision of, and reaction to, (Christian) God, the Church and, possibly, the sanctity of the divine Mother. Louis (1990, p. 22), however, argues that the source of this shift does not lie strictly in Swinburne's rebellion against the Christian Church; it is rather the world typified as the "murderous mother" that is held responsible for the change:

> Yet the divine whore – as emblem of the formidably free human imagination – does not spring full-grown from Swinburne's brain at the beginning of his rebellion against the Church. On the contrary, Swinburne begins by presenting humanity as the honourable child, or innocent gallant lover, of a world best figured by the murderous mother, or the queenly *femme fatale*. In *Atalanta* and *Poems and Ballads*, a pessimistic, anti-sacramentalist vision of language itself is one aspect of a broad and bitter pessimism: God and nature as formidably hostile. When we have understood this, we can properly assess the resonance of Swinburne's eucharists of murder, whenever they appear, and whether they are served by Christian priests or by a goddess who celebrates and consumes herself. We can

also comprehend more fully the charges which Swinburne brings against the Christian vision, and against the language of the Church.

The tradition of sacrilege that Swinburne developed in his poetry, and of which Louis speaks in her book, seemed to serve for him as a substitute for the sacred, the eucharistic. Swinburne's goddesses were the embodiment of the "feminine", the womanly in the priests; the celebrants of love, power, and the sensual. Elsewhere, Louis alleges that "[a]s Swinburne experiments with various alternatives to the Christian sacramentalist vision, he develops eucharistic images of harmony which suggest that sacramental systems are created and organized by humans, rather than by God" (p. 4). Hence, we observe in Swinburne the multitude of replacements, substitutes of the things apparently profane, godless or openly pagan raised to a status of "divine" and "sacred" in the belief, as may be conjured, that it is man, not "God" (or "gods"), who makes himself "divine" through, as it were, the "sacramental" union with another (hu)man.

HERMAPHRODITISM: MEN'S FALL INTO (SEXUAL) CONFUSION

Hermaphroditus was raised by nymphs in Phrygia. He was remarkably handsome. One day, he was walking by a lake when the nymph of the lake fell in love with him. She made advances which the young man rebuffed. Hermaphroditus was attracted by the clear water, undressed himself and jumped into the lake. The nymph, Salmacis, saw him and embraced him, but he tried to get away. Salmacis prayed to the gods that they should never be separated, the gods granted this wish and fused them into one body. Hermaphroditus thereupon asked the gods that anybody who bathed in this lake should lose his virility, which was also granted.

Encyclopedia Mythica

The myth of the fallen Hermaphroditus in Swinburne's version is, essentially, a story of the fall of man, a fall, as Keri Weil formulates it in *Androgyny*, "from clear sexual division into sexual confusion" (p. 19). Based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and written in tribute to the statue at the Louvre, the four-sonnet sequence explores the idea of, as the poet declares himself, "Blind love that comes by night and casts out rest" (*P* 1, p. 79, l. 2). However, when in the fourth sonnet the narrator confesses, "Yea, love, I see; it is not love but fear," one is convinced that the love he is talking about is not, to use a contemporary colloquial expression, a "straight" one. The poem, broadly speaking, seems to combine themes of universal value and significance: life, death, the passing of time viewed from a perspective of human fundamental feelings such as love, despair, desire and dread – all melted in one human, double-gendered body. Despair and desire seem hardly interchangeable, but in Swinburne's poem, interestingly, they are. Ontologically,

it is despair that gives birth to a strong desire, which, in turn, casts out a great despair (*P* 1, p. 79):

> Lift up thy lips, turn round, look back for love,
> Blind love that comes by night and casts out rest;
> Of all things tired thy lips look weariest,
> Save the long smile that they are wearied of.
> Ah sweet, albeit no love be sweet enough,
> Choose of two loves and cleave unto the best;
> Two loves at either blossom of thy breast
> Strive until one be under and one above.
> Their breath is fire upon the amorous air,
> Fire in thine eyes and where thy lips suspire:
> And whosoever hath seen thee, being so fair,
> Two things turn all his life and blood to fire;
> A strong desire begot on great despair,
> A great despair cast out by strong desire.

The two loves "[s]trive until one be under and one above," thus indicating that a kind of play and/or *warfare* for dominance is going on between them, and Hermaphroditus, the poem's main hero, is supposed to "[c]hoose of two loves and cleave unto the best." The nature of these two loves or, to put it simply, of love's double face – its "doubleness," is more clearly articulated in the second sonnet (pp. 79-80):

> Where between sleep and life brief space is,
> With love like gold bound round about the head,
> Sex to sex with lips and limbs is wed,
> Turning the fruitful feud of hers and his
> To the waste wedlock of sterile kiss;
> Yet from them something like as fire is shed
> That shall not be assuaged till death be dead,
> Though neither life nor sleep can find out this.
> Love made himself of flesh that perisheth
> A pleasure-house for all the loves his kin;
> But on the one side sat a man like death,
> And on the other a woman sat like a sin.
> So with veiled eyes and sobs between his breath
> Love turned himself and would not enter.

The two loves are wed, "Sex to sex with lips to limbs," turning the love's fruitfulness to "[t]he waste wedlock of sterile kiss." Therefore, when in the third sonnet (ll. 9-10) the narrator poses a question, "To what strange end hath some strange god made fair / The double blossom of two fruitless flowers?" the reader is convinced that the drama of human life receives yet another – far more complex – dimension, a mixed-gender dimension. The

sexual confusion means that neither of them will be able to fulfil themselves as man or woman (p. 80):

> Love, is it love or sleep or shadow or light
> That lies between thine eyelids and thine eyes?
> Like a flower laid upon a flower it lies,
> Or like the night's dew laid upon the night.
> Love stands upon thy left hand and thy right,
> Yet by no sunset and by no moonrise
> Shall make thee man and ease woman's sighs,
> Or make thee woman for a man's delight.
> To what strange end hath some strange god made fair
> The double blossom of two fruitless flowers?
> Hid love in all the folds of all thy hair,
> Fed thee on summers, watered thee with showers,
> Given all the gold that the seasons wear
> To thee that art a thing of barren hours?

Being a "thing of barren hours" indicates the profound existential (and sexual) emptiness of a double-gendered body, and its fruitlessness. The question about the *raison d'être* of such a construct remains unanswered, so does the one about "some strange god." The ambiguity and confusion is further strengthened in the fourth, concluding sonnet, where we notice a play on the double identity of love and fear (pp. 80-1):

> Yea, love, I see; it is not love but fear.
> Nay, sweet, it is not fear but love, I know;
> Or wherefore should thy body's blossom blow
> So sweetly, or thine eyelids leave so clear
> Thy gracious eyes that never made a tear –
> Though for their love our tears like blood should flow,
> Though love and life and death should come and go,
> So dreadful, so desirable, so dear?
> Yea, sweet, I know in what swift wise
> Beneath the woman's and the water's kiss
> Thy moist limbs melted into Salmacis,
> And the large light turned tender in thine eyes,
> And all thy boy's breath softened into sighs;
> But Love being blind, how should he know of this?

It is, most definitely, a poem of not only man's fall into (sexual) confusion, but, more importantly, a poem of man's defeat in a sexual warfare with woman. The ambivalent, sexual innuendo in the final couplet of the poem to the effect that "all thy boy's breath softened into sighs" is suggestive of the effeminate male "turned tender" – a reversal of sexual roles – now instead of producing the sounds of a masculine, powerful breath in love-making, s/he produces just sighs/moans of a feminine, overpowered

satisfaction and fulfilment. In consequence, the "boyish," ignorant element within the hermaphrodite and love (or rather "Love") being blind may, as it seems, be held responsible for man's fall into the sexual confusion of androgyny and for him being reduced to the boy's proportion in the hermaphrodite's double-gendered body.

As the title suggests, the poem is, basically, about Hermaphroditus, a son of Hermes and Aphrodite who, as the Greek myth has it, merged with the nymph Salmacis to form one body. His name became synonymous with a person who has both male and female sexual characteristics and genitals. Further, a hermaphrodite is a person or thing in which two opposite *forces* are combined (after *Collins*, p. 728, emphasis added). The poem is, indeed, based on opposites (despair/desire; love/fear), but whether they remain binary oppositions in Swinburne's poem remains questionable; rather, as it seems, they are somehow melted into what may be expressed as "despairire" – a coin of despair and desire, and "lovear" – love and fear. (Characteristically, in her last drama *4.48 Psychosis* (2002), Sarah Kane coined a reflexive pronoun "hermself" to be used in the context of a hermaphrodite: "the broken hermaphrodite who trusted hermself alone finds the room in reality teeming and begs never to wake from the nightmare," p. 3). These opposite forces – the Foucaultean relationships of power – are, doubtless, the expression of the (suppressed) wish to form a sexless – neither male or female – homogeneous human, whose being would be harmonious as it had been before birth and is going to be after death – a "perfect spiritual hermaphrodite."

The Hermaphroditus myth has been made into a text that touched upon the problematic very close to Swinburne's profound interest – sexuality or, more precisely, *homoeroticism*. In her essay, "Perverse male bodies: Simeon Solomon and Algernon Charles Swinburne" (in *Outlooks: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities and Visual Cultures*, 1996), Thaïs E. Morgan argues that "Swinburne's aim [...] is to pursue his aesthetics of the 'perverse'" in an avant-gardist way which highlights a wide range of alternative sexual behaviours, including sado-masochism, necrophilia and lesbianism as well as homoeroticism (p. 79 and passim). Also Landow confirms the idea of Swinburne's aesthetics of the perverse, pinpointing rather androgyny then anything else as its chief manifestation (*Swinburne's Political Poetry*, 2003, on-line):

Swinburne's investigations of sexuality derive from a philosophical (or religious) position [...] and at the same time many of his male figures have traits usually considered feminine and his women have those considered male. Swinburne imagined a primordial sexlessness in man which precluded the strife of passions men now suffer. This ideal of the "perfect spiritual hermaphrodite" can be seen, like Yeats's Byzantine spirits, as a mystical vision of the prelaspsarian harmony of soul which characterized man before incarnation

[birth], or as the asexual organicism to which he returns after death. [. . .] As Swinburne remarks of Blake's conception of the eternal androgyne, that being is "male and female, who from of old was neither female nor male, but perfect man [ie human being] without division of flesh, until the setting of sex against sex by the malignity of animal creation." [. . .] Swinburne was hardly alone in his hermaphroditic quest. As A. J. L. Busst has demonstrated, the figure of the androgyne permeates nineteenth-century literature.

Swinburne's sexual preferences were not at all a great public secret, and his homosexual orientation was yet another challenge to the Victorian prudish, strait-laced morality. By writing texts like this one, he most likely intended to manifest his power over the society which had not popularised discourses of hermaphroditism or, generally, of sexuality. In *The History of Sexuality* (1978, pp. 3-4), Michel Foucault makes a comparison between the seventeenth-century open, "shameless" discourse of sexuality and the hushed, "silenced" discourse of the nineteenth century:

> For a long time, the story goes, we supported a Victorian regime, and we continue to be dominated by it even today. Thus the image of the imperial prude is emblazoned on our restrained, mute, and hypocritical sexuality.
>
> At the beginning of the seventeenth century a certain frankness was still common, it would seem. Sexual practices had little need of secrecy; words were said without undue reticence, and things were done without too much concealment; one had a tolerant familiarity with the illicit. Codes regulating the coarse, the obscene, and the indecent were quite lax compared to those of the nineteenth century. It was a time of direct gestures, shameless discourse, and open transgressions, when anatomies were shown and intermingled at will, and knowing children hung about amid the laughter of adults: it was a period when bodies "made a display of themselves."
>
> But twilight soon fell upon this bright day, followed by the monotonous nights of the Victorian bourgeoisie. Sexuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction. On the subject of sex, silence became the rule. The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law. The couple imposed itself as model, enforced the norm, safeguarded the truth, and reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy. A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household, but it was a utilitarian and fertile one: the parents' bedroom. The rest had only to remain vague; proper demeanor avoided contact with other bodies, and verbal decency sanitized one's speech. And sterile behavior carried the taint of abnormality; if it insisted on making itself too visible, it would be designated accordingly and would have to pay the penalty.

Victorian discourse of sexuality was, in the main, the discourse of silence, as Foucault argues, and Swinburne's poetry seems to be a dissident voice in the debate, and somehow contradict the general rule. In "Hermaphroditus," we notice the contact of the bodies, we hear the sensuous words being whispered, etc., which makes this poem a convincing example of an open discourse of (homo)sexuality and aesthetic transgression. The gay/lesbian discourse of today seems to have its roots and/or be a continuation of

the discourses of the nineteenth century, the century of aesthetic transgression (and aggression), change, the age that made a step towards liberation of discourse, also in sexual matters.

Speaking of proliferation of discourses in the nineteenth century, Foucault notices that it would be a mistake to see in this just a quantative phenomenon; more importantly – his argument goes – this transformation of sex into discourse not governed by the principle of strict economy of reproduction was far more significant. He sees in this a link between the Victorian times and the twentieth century, asserting that "[t]he nineteenth century and our own have been [...] the age of multiplication: a dispersion of sexualities, a strengthening of their disparate forms, a multiple implementation of 'perversions'" (p. 37). The discourse of (alternative) sexual behaviours, very much in the manner of Swinburne, was, therefore, a clear manifestation of the power and triumph of the nameless, fruitless pleasure, a genitally centred sexuality over procreation, over the power of nature, over a sexuality that is economically useful and doctrinally correct.

Foucault also gives an account of the sexual behaviours that were condemned by the law at that time, which included, among obvious offences such as adultery, rape or incest, also sodomy, the mutual caress and hermaphroditism (p. 38):

Doubtless acts "contrary to nature" were stamped as especially abominable, but they were perceived simply as an extreme form of acts "against the law"; they were infringements of decrees which were just as sacred as those of marriage, and which had been established for governing the order of things and the plan of beings. Prohibitions bearing on sex were essentially of a juridical nature. The "nature" on which they were based was still a kind of law. For a long time hermaphrodites were criminals, or crime's offspring, since their anatomical disposition, their very being, confounded the law that distinguished the sexes and prescribed their union.

There is yet another significant element in Swinburne's view of the world that is noteworthy – water which, like the Browningesque primitive, primeval mud, is that organic element from which man emerged and to which he is to return after death. As expressed in "[b]eneath the woman's kiss and the water's kiss," water appears to be the link between what was and what is going to be: the woman's kiss – the symbol of love, the beginning of life, and the water's kiss – the end, but, at the same time – the ultimate reunion with the organic substance from which man originated.

Finally, the last Browningesque link in this poem: the dramatic monologue. The dialogue the narrator is having with his narratee actually turns into a monologue, a *dramatic monologue*. This quality of Swinburne's verse has not been very frequently admitted among the critics worldwide, but it seems that dramatism of his lines is somehow concealed by the predomi-

nantly lyrical tone. George P. Landow, however, is one of those few who noticed not only the close affinity between the poetry of Browning and Swinburne, but also emphasised the efficacy of Swinburne's dramatic monologue (*Swinburne's Political Poetry*, 2003, on-line):

> Like Tennyson and Browning, he [Swinburne] often displayed Victorian high seriousness in poems about religious and philosophical matter. Like these poets, he had a deep knowledge of Classical and Renaissance literary forms, traditions, and myth, as well as of Christianity and biblical interpretation, and like them he tried to integrate such interest with a devotion to the great Romantics, particularly Shelley. Like them, he used the dramatic monologue to great effect, and like them, he also devoted considerable energy to writing verse drama.

FAUSTINE'S (LESBIAN) DEMI-GODLIKE POWER

Swinburne's "Faustine," an uncanny and bizarre poem, provides us, however, with a religious, or *quasi*religious, ritual in which his poetry seems to be returning to its origins in a form of repetitive, alliterative verse. Numerous repetitions, sometimes very tedious and dreary, are possibly meant to demonstrate and then reinforce demi-godlike power, be it under the guise of a female figure or someone who may pass for a female (*P* 1, p. 106):

Lean back, and get some minutes' peace;
Let your head lean
Back to the shoulder with its fleece
Of locks, Faustine.

The shapely silver shoulder stoops,
Weighed over clean
With state of splendid hair that droops
Each side, Faustine.

Let me go over good gifts
That crown you queen;
A queen whose kingdom ebbs and shifts
Each week, Faustine.

Bright heavy brows well gathered up:
White gloss and sheen;
Carved lips that make my lips a cup
To drink, Faustine,

Wine and rank poison, milk and blood,
Being mixed therein
Since first the devil threw dice with God
For you, Faustine.

Swinburne transgresses the boundaries between genders, good and evil and heaven and hell in an apparently open lesbian poem. The mix he offers the readers is of a peculiar type: he blends not only wine with poison, milk

with blood but unites Satan with God in a gamble for a "female." As a result, Faustine comes under the devil's power and (p. 110):

> Then after change of soaring feather
> And winnowing fin,
> You woke in weeks of feverish weather,
> A new Faustine.

"A new Faustine" is, then, a product of *change*; a change of not only "soaring feather/And winnowing fin" (an obvious allusion to the ancient myth) but, most importantly, the sexual orientation:

> The shameless nameless love that makes
> Hell's iron grin
> Shut on you like a trap that breaks
> The soul, Faustine.

Being destined for hell for the "shameless nameless love" (NB. the word "homosexuality" was not even in use well until the beginning of the twentieth century, and lesbianism was not punishable since Queen Victoria did not believe it existed at all), Faustine is then transformed into a vampire in a most bizarre sexual act (pp. 110-1):

> And when your veins were void and dead,
> What ghosts unclean
> Swarmed round the straitened barren bed
> That hid Faustine?
>
> What sterile growths of sexless root
> Or epicene?
> What flower of kisses without fruit
> Of love, Faustine?
>
> What adders came to shed their coats?
> What coiled obscene
> Small serpents with soft stretching throats
> Caressed Faustine?

As it was the case in "Hermaphroditus," the narrator also uses the glossary characteristic of the "hushed" discourse of sexual transgression: "epicene," "sterile," "sexless root," "kisses without fruit/Of love," adding to the list some sexually charged words, albeit not directly connected with a sexual act, like "to shed," "obscene," and "caressed." It goes without saying that the penile-like shape of adders and serpents are obvious even in the context of the heroine's "vampiric" mask she is wearing. Faustine's ultimate transformation is into a (lesbian) love-machine (p. 111):

> You seem a thing that hinges hold,
> A love-machine

With clockwork joints of supple gold –
No more, Faustine.

Discussing Swinburne's "woman" characters, Paglia (1990) holds that the promiscuous lesbianism of one of Baudelaire's female characters may account for a double or mixed identity of most of Swinburne's heroines, most notably Dolores and Faustine, finding in the them a "Shelley's Hermaphrodite," a nineteenth-century manufactured, inorganic androgyne (pp. 464-5):

> Swinburne's vampires inherit the promiscuous lesbianism of Baudelaire's Jeanne Duval, all the more atrocious for an English audience unprepared for such aberrations by a Balzac or Gautier. The women's plural sexuality comes from their multiple identities, flooding history. Dolores has lesbian adventures in Greek shadows of sexual ambiguity. "Stray breaths of Sapphic song" blow through Faustine, shaking her "fierce quivering blood." She seeks "sterile growths of sexless root or epicene," "kisses without fruit of love." She is "a thing that hinges hold,/A love-machine/With clockwork joints of supple gold." Ambisexual Faustine is drawn to lesbianism for its Baudelairean sterility, by which nature is self-devastated. Swinburne transforms Sapphism into the inorganic androgyne as nineteenth-century manufactured object, like Shelley's Hermaphrodite. Faustine's tyrannically mechanical meter is therefore form's response to content. The poem itself is an automaton driven by a robotlike female despot. Faustine is Faust, Mephistopheles, and Homunculus all in one, a barren bone mill whirring with daemonic internal transactions.

Paglia also argues that Faustine is that territory, a "playground," as she says, where the sexual warfare takes place, and sees in her an embodiment of transformation and change since "she is an early version of Swinburne's ocean-mother," the most primitive and original, life-giving – and, at the same time, blood-sucking – source. Faustine is, therefore, a version of a female vampiric despot who rules not only water and flux, but also the language which constantly *con*-structs and *de*-constructs, creates and *re*- creates her. She holds the power over the speaker's consciousness imprisoned to one focal point – (fe)male sex (pp. 463-4):

> Faustine is the vampire who cannot die, and her poem has an insomniac obsessiveness. [...] Faustine is the goddess Fortuna gambling with dead men's bones. She rules flux and change because she is an early version of Swinburne's ocean mother. Like all his Decadent centerfolds, she is not nymph dowager, a Belle Dame Sans Merci of ripe midlife heft. Her brow weighs like a thundercloud, bulging with omniscience. Venom runs in her veins. Under her regime, love and death are gaping hungry mouths. Faustine is nature's womb and tomb, the playground of sex war. "Nets caught the pike, pikes tore the net": mothers, sons, and lovers clash like gladiators, their mismatched genitals the tools of shredding and capture. *Faustine* is Swinburne's *Masque of the Red Death*: man's life drains with every breath, leaking from every pore. The earth is a sand pit of carnage, drinking up human blood to fertilize the insatiable all-mother. Like Dolores, Faustine is another Nero, a jaded Fate turning thumbs down on man for her own amusement. Death in the afternoon as the Queen Mother's high tea.

The name Faustine, closing each stanza, is repeated forty-one times, a malignant refrain. Swinburne's speaker is a Late Romantic imprisoned consciousness. The poem shows thought perpetually circling back to one sexual focal point. Each stanza is a paradigm of decadence, a decline or "falling away," for the lines rise up only to fall back with fatigue, like Sisyphus in his no-win labors. Language is a burden taken up and dropped again and again. All things return mechanically, compulsively to one female center, primary and corrupt. Faustine is a mass of female matter blocking the movement of mind, so that each stanza is an irrevocable *nostos*, a forced-march coming home. Carroll's Alice repeatedly tries to strike out through the garden, only to have the path seem to shake itself and fling her back toward the house. In *Faustine* a monstrous apparition awaits us at the door. [...] In *Faustine*, mind is too is a phantom, subdued and vaporized by the brute obduracy of the mother-stuff, the muddy morass from which all life has sprung.

Faustine is the most incantatory of Swinburne's poems and therefore the most overtly ritualistic. The lines are short and the meter harsh and relentless. *Faustine* provides a stylistic rationale for Swinburne's notorious and oft-derided alliterations. The most famous is from *Dolores*: "The lilies and languors of virtue / For the raptures and roses of vice." Swinburne's alliterations dramatize this repetition-compulsion, by which he constructs a vast world of female force. In Faustine, a terrible and uncanny poem, poetry returns to its origins in religious ritual. Few things in modern literature provide so intense a replication of primitive experience. Modern readers, eyeing *Faustine*'s somewhat sleazy locutions, may doubt this – until we try to read the poem aloud. The forty-one thudding returns of Faustine are literally unbearable. Even Poe's Ligeia returns only once!

Recent research – most notably, Allison Pease (1996), Thaïs E. Morgan (1996), Rikky Rooksby (1997), Kathy Alexis Psomiades (1997), and also Kari Weil (1992) – has proven that lesbianism is just a partial answer to Swinburne's heroines' double or compound sexual personalities. Inspired by Gilles Deleuze's ideas contained in his *Masochism* (1991), Weil, for instance, asserts that "[p]sychoanalysis equates androgyny with a repressed desire to return to the imaginary wholeness and self-sufficiency associated with the pre-Oedipal phase before sexual difference. The fantasy of the phallic mother is one manifestation of this desire that says that sexual difference is not an originary difference, that originally sexes were the same – i.e., the same as man – and that woman became 'different' as the result of a cut, hence of castration" (p. 3). Pease (1996), commenting upon this issue, is of the opinion that Swinburne's fascination with (sado)masochism and his profound interest in androgyny are an articulation of both his longing for the pre-Oedipal and the denial of difference.

To bring our discussion to a conclusion, we may assert that Swinburne's (homo)erotic discourse, having its antecedents in the art, mythology and literature of ancient Greece and Rome, frequently employing the images and metaphors that "whisper some message that [he] dares not speak aloud," the discourse concerning the "shameless nameless love," alongside the gender transgression, marked a significant shift in distribution of power between genders from the male to the fe-male and then to a hermaphroditic

type. All this placed him among the leading aesthetic *avant-garde* English poets of the nineteenth century. We repeat after Pease ("Questionable Figures: Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads*," 1996, on-line) that

> [b]y proclaiming the virility and masculinity of his poems, Swinburne [...] serves to reify the misogyny implicit in the myth of Hermaphroditus and his representations of sexually ambiguous personae. To the cry from [his contemporary] critics that he had threatened the privileged male sphere Swinburne triumphantly responded that in fact he had done no such thing, but rather that he had broadened the category, pioneered new territory, and discovered a virile land that was ready to be populated by men of discerning tastes.

PART FOUR

PART FOUR

A CRY OVER THE ABYSS: THE PATH ENDS

The delight of entering the vastly distant foreign pre-historic
land, accessible only through books, and of finding the whole
horizon painted with new colors and possibilities –

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 829

Man is in a trap [. . .] and goodness avails him nothing in the
new dispensation. There is nobody now to care one way or
the other. Good and evil, pessimism and optimism – are a
question of blood group, not angelic disposition. Whoever it
was that used to heed us and care for us, who had concern
for our fate and the world's, has been replaced by another
who glories in our servitude to matter, and to the basest part
of our own natures.

Lawrence Durrell, *Monsieur, or The Prince of Darkness*

In this final part, we are going to attempt to present some reflections re-
garding the Browningesque and Swinburnian discourse of power from the
perspective of, on the one hand, the Nietzschean *Zukunft Philosophie* – the
philosophy of the future and Heidegger's "default of God" alongside his
idea of abyss, and, on the other, the poststructuralist end of philosophy,
particularly Derrida's "The ends of man," articulated mainly in his *Margins
of Philosophy* (English translation, 1982). The existential void that the poets
felt after God's departure or/and death finds a strong philosophical foun-
dation in Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence and Derrida's decon-
structive project, particularly the concept of *mise-en-abyme*, a plunge into the
black hole of mere text. The fear that Browning so fervently denied in, for
instance *Pauline*, expresses itself audibly in the form of an existential cry in a
variety of his texts, in the discourse of his characters' dream of power.

Also, our aim in this chapter will be to offer some conclusions to our dis-
course of power, the discourse that led us, through its winding, meandering
paths, sometimes full of digressions and detours, to an end. Is this an end of
the discourse? Or is this just a new beginning? We shall also try to give

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some indications for the future of man, particularly in the context of Nietzsche's reiterated calls for a "higher man" and the perspectives of Christianity as he saw it.

FROM A DECONSTRUCTIVE PROJECT(ORY) INTO THE ABYSS

Jacques Derrida's principal intention in his deconstructive project has always been the "deconstruction of metaphysics." This does not obviously mean destroying or undoing its conditions of possibility; paradoxically, it may, to a certain extent, be considered a continuation of the western tradition of *thinking of one thing in terms of something else*. Basically, Derrida's deconstructive strategy starts where metaphysics ends.

Without going into too many a detail, we may contend that in Kant the centre of the pure concept of the understanding remains confined to the darkened abyss of the *unknowable*, this black space between two realms: the realm of things in themselves and the realm of appearances. Such categorisation is based on an underlying presupposed unity of the notion of representation, which in deconstruction deconstructs itself into *re*-presentation, the presentation of presentation.

Thus the question of Being and the reduplicative language of the question of the question – both of which easily comprise the most generally alienating element in Heidegger's thought – ground Heidegger's claim that he means "to take Nietzsche seriously as a thinker" (Heidegger 1977, pp. 54-5). In the same way, Nietzsche's philosophy can be seen as the "end of metaphysics" because "Nietzsche's philosophy closes the ring that is formed by the very course of inquiry into being as such and as a whole" (Heidegger 1984, p. 200). Heidegger argues that Nietzsche manifests the "end" of metaphysics because he does not think of the alternatives: either Being or Becoming or, in other words, Being or Coming-to-be, but unreservedly transforms the one into the other.

Furthermore, Nietzsche's word in Heidegger's interpretation ("God is Dead") expresses "the destining of two millennia of Western history" (Heidegger 1977, p. 58). Fink (1960), likewise, traces the implication of the declaration of God's death not in terms of its literary content, but in terms of the history of metaphysics as the fundamental outcome of metaphysical principles. Nietzsche's philosophy, he argues, is not the simple antipode of metaphysical idealism, or God conceived as the highest value, but the implied result or end of metaphysical thinking directed against or beyond the Greek *physis*, that is, *nature*.

Thus we arrive at the point of reflection upon nothingness, or abyss, into which, bereft of the directionality of a God-ordered world, all contemporary intellectual discourses must inevitably drift. What most critics of the Nietzschean thought call nihilism has nothing to do with the decline of "religious values." Rather, the reference to the power realm of the modern age invokes what is taken to have real power or genuine value and today that is more than a matter of mere "values," be they religious, moral, or family values. Instead, in this contemporary, electronic age, the rise of subjective judgement or value thinking means that "the authority of conscience" has utterly assumed "the position of the vanished authority of God and of the teaching Office of the Church" (Fink, 1960, p. 64). Nietzsche offered thus a decisive critique of metaphysics as it identified Being with the ideal, the truth, the good and thereby revealed ontology's involvement with theology and morality alike. With this revelation, Nietzsche effectively articulated a Derridean *"authentique révolution intellectuelle."*

In *Of Grammatology* (1974, p. 19), Jacques Derrida emphasised the importance of Nietzsche's contribution to contemporary deconstruction:

Radicalizing the concepts of *interpretation, perspective, evaluation, difference*, and all the "empiricist" or nonphilosophical motifs that have constantly tormented philosophy throughout the history of the West, and besides, have had nothing but the inevitable weakness of being produced in the field of philosophy, Nietzsche, far from remaining simply (with Hegel and as Heidegger wished) *within* metaphysics, contributed a great deal to the liberation of the signifier from its dependence or derivation with respect to the logos and the related concept of truth or the primary signified, in whatever sense it is understood.

Deconstruction, however we look at it, does not pretend to be able to formulate one true answer to all-encompassing visions of the world; on the contrary, Derrida, very much like Nietzsche before him, presents deconstruction not as a conclusive or "true" theory, but, rather, as a method for uncovering the contradictions at the heart of endeavours to work out such a theory. In terms of discourse of power, deconstruction, as Krupnick (ed., 1983, p. 3) has it, "enables a return of the repressed, unsettling the law that gives priority to voice, patriarchy, rational consciousness, and the Greek-Christian logos. Deconstruction unsettles the idealisms that provide the ideological justifications for relations of power."

These ideological justifications in our discourse are, primarily, the fundamental Christian doctrines, the very concept of Christian God among others. What deconstruction questions is the all-powerful concept of logos, the revealed (spoken rather than written) word of God, and Derrida, like Nietzsche and Heidegger, finds much meaning in the roots, etymologies, connotations and sounds of (written) words. The textual world can, therefore, re-

fer primarily to itself since it only exists in the text and because of it. Self-referentiality is disclosed in the margin of the text in a kind of *mise-en-abym*; the ending gives a new sense to the previous whole. But what we understand by *mise-en-abyme* as, after Derrida, a plunge into the black hole of mere text, has been defined by Baldick (1996, p. 138) as referring to "an internal reduplication of a literary work or part of a work. [...] The 'Chinese box' effect of *mise-en-abyme* often suggests an infinite regress, i.e. an endless succession of internal duplications. It has become a favourite device in postmodernist fictions by Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino, and others." Cuddon (1999, p. 513), is even more laconic: "[a] literary recursion: André Gide's coinage for the literary effect of infinite regression. Gide's own *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* (*The Counterfeiters*, 1926) established the device." At the turn of the millennium, Marshall Soules published online an article "Animating the Language Machine: Computers and Performance" (2002), in which he applied the core idea of this term to digital art works:

> Peter Lunenfeld recuperates a term from Lucien Dällenback through Gregory Ulmer – the *mise-en-abyme* – to describe another way of refiguring the digital performance space. The term *mise-en-abyme* "implies that a book, story, film, CD ROM, Web site, or hypertext contains selected passages that play out within themselves, in miniature, the process of the work as a whole. [...] The *mise-en-abyme* is a mini narrative that encapsulates or somehow reflects the larger structures within which it is held; it is a mirroring of the text by the subtext" (53-54). For example, my analogy using the verbot Sylvie at the beginning of this article attempts to encapsulate the foundational themes of the whole article. Lunenfeld notes the tendency in digital media towards strategies of compression, aphorism, and fragmentation, all within an "aesthetic of unfinish" (124), and the *mise-en-abyme* is a "sleight of structural hand" to generate "an almost infinitely regressing series of mirror reflections" of the work's central concerns. The notion that digital art works are (transforming) mirrors is widespread; in many cases, the form of the work encapsulates the artist's vision of networked digital communication.

The very word "abyss" contains in its essence the idea of unlimitedness, infiniteness, boundlessness. In Heidegger's metaphysical thinking, the idea of abyss (*Abgrund*) is closely connected with his notion of the "default of God," – God's disappearance from the world and the gradual decline of the world. In the section of *Poetry, Language, Thought* called "What are poets for?" (1971), Heidegger argues that the appearance and sacrificial death of Christ mark the beginning of the end of the day of the gods, and adds, (p. 91) "Night is falling. Ever since the 'united three' – Herakles, Dionysos, and Christ – have left the world, the evening of the world's age has been declining toward its night. The world's night is spreading its darkness. The era is defined by the god's failure to arrive, by the 'default of God'." He later explains what he precisely means by this term (p. 91):

The default of God means that no god any longer gathers men and things unto himself, visibly and unequivocally, and by such gathering disposes the world's history and man's sojourn in it. The default of God forebodes something even grimmer, however. Not only have the gods and the god fled, but the divine radiance has become extinguished in the world's history. The time of the world's night is the destitute time, because it becomes even more destitute. It has already grown so destitute, it can no longer discern the default of God as a default.

Consequently, this pessimistic vision of the world finds its reflection in his notion of abyss as *Abgrund* – "no ground," or, in other words, as no ground for the world to stand on (p. 92):

Because of this default, there fails to appear for the world the ground that grounds it. The word for abyss – *Abgrund* – originally means the soil and ground toward which, because it is undermost, a thing tends downward. But in what follows we shall think of the *Ab-* as the complete absence of the ground. The ground is the soil in which to strike root and to stand. The age for which the ground fails to come, hangs in the abyss.

In Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, abyss also signals danger. The prophet declares that "[m]an is a rope, tied between beast and overman – a rope over an abyss. A dangerous across, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking-back. A dangerous shuddering and stopping" (Prologue, sec. 4).

Nietzsche's concept of the world as "the eternal recurrence of the same," as an image in the mirror, an image of the finitude of self-reflection, a monster of energy, without beginning and without end, enclosed by "nothing" as a boundary, leaves an abyssal space of (im)possibilities for man. In his Introduction to Jacques Derrida's *Feu la cendre. Cinders*, Ned Lukacher (1987, pp. 5-6) argues that

Nietzsche forgets neither the distinction between *what* the world is and *that* it is nor between the world in the mirror and what lies on the other side. The task he sets for himself, however, is to *name* this world, to name its "whatness" without mistaking it for the name of what is beyond the boundary that he calls the "nothing" (*Nichts*). The ebb and flow of the world as will to power is contained, surrounded (*umschlossen*), by a border (*Grenze*) that gives the universe the shape of a circle or a ring, a defined space in which a defined quantity of energy, heat, and light works its way through its incessant cycles of creation and annihilation. It is the voracious appetite of the world within the ring that Nietzsche calls "the will to power."

DEATH OF GOD/DEATH OF MAN

Nietzsche's notorious slogan announcing the death of God has been seen by Heller (1988, p. 3) as a cry of both despair and triumph:

The death of God he [Nietzsche] calls the greatest event in modern history and the cause of extreme danger. Note well the paradox contained in these words. He never said there was no God, but that the Eternal had been vanquished by Time and that the Immortal

suffered death at the hands of mortals: God is dead. It is like a cry mingled of despair and triumph, reducing, by comparison, the whole story of atheism and agnosticism before and after him to the level of respectable mediocrity and making it sound like a collection of announcements by bankers who regret they are unable to invest in an unsafe proposition. Nietzsche, for the nineteenth century, brings to its *perverse* conclusion a line of religious thought and experience linked with the names of St. Paul, St. Augustine, Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Dostoevsky, minds for whom God was not simply the creator of an order of nature within which man has his clearly defined place, but to whom He came rather in order to challenge their natural being, making demands which appeared absurd in the light of natural reason.

Being a territory in which multitudinous opposing forces clashed and clinched, sometimes extremely violently and with an enormous amount of inner energy, the discourse of power in Robert Browning's poetry, seems, therewith, to be a direct effect of the numerous contradictory reflections, frequently recurring under the guise of such characters as Paracelsus, Sordello or Pippa, shared by a generation greatly disillusioned with Romanticism. "We live and breathe deceiving and deceived" (Paracelsus, 4.625) could be a theorem of those who retreated into the mind in search of the source of strength, identity and truth. A great bulk of the poetic energy and aesthetic force was directed in the second half of the nineteenth century toward, and concentrated on, "the treatment of man, and of man alone" (Forman, *Fortnightly Review*, 5, 1869).

In Swinburne's "The Garden of Proserpine" (1866) all these fears and anxieties find their sonorous, deep and resonant, voice in a vision of a garden so much different from the Judeo-Christian Garden of Eden (*P* 1, pp. 169-72):

Here, where the world is quiet;
Here, where all trouble seems
Dead winds' and spent waves' riot
In doubtful dreams of dreams;
I watch the green field growing
For reaping folk and sowing,
For harvest-time and mowing,
A sleepy world of streams.
[...]
Here life has death for neighbour
And far from eye or ear
Wan waves and wet winds labour,
Weak ships and spirits steer;
They drive adrift, and whither
They wot not who make thither;
But no such winds blow hither,
And no such things grow here.
[...]
Though one were strong as seven,

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He too with death shall dwell,
Nor wake with wings in heaven,
Nor weep for pains in hell;
Though one were fair as roses,
His beauty clouds and closes;
And well though love reposes,
In the end it is not well.
[...]
From too much love of living,
From hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever gods may be
That no life lives for ever;
That dead men rise up never;
That even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea.

Then star nor sun shall waken,
Nor any change of light:
Nor sound of waters shaken,
Nor any sound or sight:
Nor wintry leaves nor vernal,
Nor days nor things diurnal;
Only the sleep eternal
In an eternal night.

Basically devoted to the goddess of death, this poem contains Swinburne's reflections of profound importance in regard to man's end. His main line of argument is that since man can never be a measure of things (["i]n the end it is not well"), the only thing we, as people can do to, is to be thankful to "[w]hatever gods may be," that "no life lives for ever," "dead men [will] rise up never" and we shall not "wake with wings in heaven,/ Nor weep for pains in hell." All this openly expresses his deep unbelief in the Christian idea of resurrection of the dead. What he believes in is, however, a total and absolute end of all things and "[o]nly the sleep eternal/In an eternal night."

Commenting upon Swinburne's wish of an unlimited freedom in religious and political matters, Landow (2003, *Swinburne's political poetry*, online) observes that it markedly permeates his poetry alongside the leitmotif that all things, all civilisation (including God) will perish in the sea of time:

[t]his need to free oneself and others from bonds, whether of convention, religion, or political oppression, marks all Swinburne's poetry. Even when he draws upon conventional imagery and situations, the poet endows them with his own bleakness and sense of being beyond conventional limits. In fact, Swinburne, who creates an entire imaginative cosmos out of the notion of being wrecked in the sea of time, repeatedly emphasizes that all love, all life, all civilization sinks beneath these waters. As the "Hymn to Proserpine" (1866) ex-

plains to the old "Gods dethroned and deceased, cast forth, wiped out in a day" by the coming of Christianity, all things perish in the wastes of this ocean.

Swinburne's poetry characteristically combines the idea of God's immortality with a commonsensical and widely disseminated concept of death as eternal sleep, thus limiting his power over life and humans. In the final line of "Hymn to Proserpine" (*P* 1, p. 73), for instance, the poet concludes: "For there is no God found stronger than death; and death is a sleep," and in "Anactoria" (*P* 1, p. 63), where the speaking subject, reversing the biblical account of man's creation in which it was God who breathed the breath of life into man's nostrils, seems to challenge God's power and the sense of existence by boldly calling to "[p]ierce the cold lips of God with human breath,/And mix his immortality with death./Why hath he made us?" The faith seems to have no fundamental meaning for man since (p. 62), "[...] who shall change with prayers and thanksgivings/The mystery of the cruelty of things?" This question, in a clear way, undermines the basic principles of Christianity – the divine origin of the world – thus showing man's inability to transform the (material) world with the (transcendental) word. It emphasises, which Heidegger also observed later, the thingly nature of man and of man's world – man is essentially a thing, very much like stone, tree or water. Bearing in mind that cruelty is one of many relationships of power – its very showdown, we may ask ourselves whether there is anyone who has not experienced the cruelty of things (nature, man)? Falk Herrgott, the resident of Dresden, Germany, commenting on the flooding that devastated his city in 2002, said, "This is nature. It shows how unimportant we are" (*Newsweek*, 26 August 2002, p. 6).

Swinburne's another oddly ignored and largely forgotten nature poem is "A Nympholept" (available in *The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse*, No. 163), the poem devoted to the mythical god of shepherds and flocks, Pan, in which the poet articulates his theology of nature most accurately (ll. 8-14):

I dare not sleep for delight of the perfect hour,
Lest God be wroth that his gift should be scorned of man.
The face of the warm bright world is the face of a flower,
The word of the wind and the leaves that the light winds fan
As the word that quickened at first into flame, and ran,
Creative and subtle and fierce with invasive power,
Through darkness and cloud, from the breath of the one God, Pan.

The text exposes the central notions for the understanding of Swinburne's theology: the relationship between God, man, and the word – "creative and subtle and fierce with invasive power" (l. 13). In *The Penguin Dictionary*

of Classical Mythology (1991), Pierre Grimal depicts Pan – half man, half animal – as having "considerable sexual energy; he pursued Nymphs and boys, but settled for solitary pleasures if his amorous ambitions were frustrated" (p. 325). He also adds that "he was given the name Pan because he made them all [the gods from Olympus] feel happy (in popular etymology Pan is derived from the Greek *pan*, meaning 'all')" (p. 325). The narrator agrees that Pan is all: "In the naked and nymph-like dawn, O Pan, / And in each life living, O thou the God who art all" (ll. 125-6). Speaking of "the might of the noon" (l. 26) and "the strength of a dream" (l. 30), he prepares the ground for his *credo*, which is manifested in the following declaration (ll. 40-6):

> I seek not heaven with submission of lips and knees,
> With worship and prayer for a sign till it leap to light:
> I gaze on the gods about me, and call on these.
> I call on the gods hard by, the divine dim powers
> Whose likeness is here at hand, in the breathless air,
> In the pulseless peace of the fervid and silent flowers,
> In the faint sweet speech of the waters that whisper there.

The poet's explicitly declared faithfulness to pagan nature gods denies the concept of the (Christian) transcendental divinity ("Earth-born I know thee: but heaven is about me here" (l. 266), which, in consequence, denies the meaning of life after death in a Christian sense, too (ll. 232-8):

> An earth-born dreamer, constrained by the bonds of birth,
> Held fast by the flesh, compelled by the veins that beat
> And kindle to rapture or wrath, to desire or to mirth,
> May hear not surely the fall of immortal feet,
> May hear not surely if heaven upon earth be sweet;
> And here is my sense fulfilled of the joys of earth,
> Light, silence, bloom, shade, murmur of leaves that meet.

With the death of God he himself proclaimed, also Nietzsche believed that any meaning of life in a sense of supernatural purpose was gone and, therefore, it was up to people to decide what purpose in life they have and thus to raise above what he called *Allzumenschliches*, all-too-human.

To give prominence to the point that man cannot be treated as a constant, permanent phenomenon, a kind of "eternal truth" of history, in Section 1 (Aph. 2) of *Human, All-Too-Human*, entitled "Of First and Last Things," Nietzsche argues that man is not, and cannot be, a measure of things:

> *Congenial defect of philosophers*. All philosophers suffer from the same defect, in that they start with present-day man and think they can arrive at their goal by analyzing him. Instinctively they let "man" hover before them as an *aeterna veritas* [eternal truth], some-

thing unchanging in all turmoil, a secure measure of things. But everything the philosopher asserts about man is basically no more than a statement about man within a *very limited* time span. A lack of historical sense is the congenial defect of all philosophers. [...]

For Nietzsche, the very concept of God was, as he argues in *Twilight of the Idols*, the greatest objection to existence; therefore, by denying God, we remove this objection, cut off the ties and are – theoretically at least – liberated. Yet, still there remains the awkward question of Christianity ("the tremendous question mark called Christianity," *The Antichrist*, 35) and the priests – the "improvers" of mankind in Nietzsche's idiom. A Christian, in his definition ("The Improvers of Mankind," 2), is "sick, miserable, filled with ill-will towards himself; full of hatred for the impulses towards life, full of suspicion of all that [is] still strong and happy." He blames the Church for this since "it corrupted the human being, it weakened him – but it claimed to have 'improved' him."

The Judaeo-Christian morality, he further argues in *The Antichrist* (24), says no to everything on earth that represents the ascending tendency of life, to self-affirmation, to beauty and power, but, he adds, there is only one type of man who demands power in Judaism and Christianity – the priestly type, who "has a life interest in making mankind *sick* and in so twisting the concepts of god and evil, true and false, as to imperil life and slander the world." The consequence of this, he continues in Section 25, is the creation of the concept of God who, instead of being "at bottom the word for every happy inspiration of courage and self-confidence," is a demanding one: he demands obedience, submission, servility. But it is not enough to get rid of God to make man's existence better, more enjoyable, more "worldly"; on the contrary, God's departure marked just a beginning of a new, shadowy path across the abyss.

THE END OF MAN AND/OR OF THE WORLD?

In *The Will to Power* (30), Nietzsche expressed his great apprehension of the future of man and the world in the face of the death of God and two millennia of Christianity:

> The time has come when we have to pay for having been Christians for two thousand years: we are losing the center of gravity by virtue of which we lived; we are lost for a while. Abruptly we plunge into the opposite valuations, with all the energy that such an extreme overvaluation of man has generated in man. Now everything is false through and through, mere "words," chaotic, weak or extravagant.

The mood of an excess of concern that emanates from the passage illustrates the *fin de siècle* atmosphere of not only the continental Europe, but

also that which was common for the English poets spiritually linked with France, Italy and Germany, Swinburne among others. The nineteenth-century loss of direction and a generally felt sense of aimlessness remind us Nietzsche's contention in the wake of the madman's announcement of God's death: "Are we not perpetually falling? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions?" (*Gay Science*, 125). Like a lost generation of the mid-twentieth century, the Victorians and their continental contemporaries cried in despair and disbelief, perpetually falling as a result of having lost a stable ground of their faith and a clear vision of the future after death. The death of God left a vast majority of people fatherless, without a certainty of glorious, divine beginning, and offering them instead Darwinian theory of the origin of species and rather inglorious end. With their sense of security ripped apart, this additionally reinforced a feeling of loneliness and made the populace believe that they are abandoned and forsaken in the vastness of the Universe ("Do we not feel the breath of empty space?"). We follow Peckham (1965, pp. 32-3) in saying that

> [t]he world is nothing. Value and identity are the ultimate illusions. We emerge from nothingness and encounter the nothingness of the world and, in so doing, we create being. But being can be renewed only if we recognize that being is an illusion. With that recognition as our ultimate weapon we can re-create it, not from sorrow but from joy [cf. Nietzsche's *Joyful Wisdom*, R.W.] From the desire for value we create ourselves, but to renew that value, we must destroy ourselves. The profoundest satisfaction of the human mind is the creation of the world – out of nothingness. From that act of creation emerges the *sense* of value, the *sense* of identity, which are sources of joy, if we recognize them as illusions. The sense of order, the sense of meaning, and the sense of identity are but instruments for the act of creation. Thus the Romantic once again enters into history and human life, for to create is to choose, without ever knowing whether or not the choice is the right choice, for the act of choice changes the world. And so we can never know, even by hindsight, whether or not we chose rightly, for the situation in which we performed the act of creation and choice no longer exists. And this solves the problem of re-entry, for it is clear that alienation is the illusion of the Romantic.

Derrida most categorically dismisses all the above-mentioned "illusory" notions of western metaphysics such as history, value and identity as simply the other versions of the same *centre* alongside truth, purpose, beginning and end and many other centring principles. In dismantling these categories, it is important to note, Widdowson and Brooker (1997, p. 171) warn us, that

> Derrida does not assert the possibility of thinking outside such terms; any attempt to undo a particular concept is to become caught up in the terms which the concept depends on. For example, if we try to undo the centring concept of 'consciousness' by asserting the disruptive counterforce of the 'unconscious,' we are in danger of introducing a new centre, because we cannot choose but enter the conceptual system (conscious/unconscious) we are trying to dislodge. All we *can* do is to refuse to allow either pole in a system [...] to become the centre and guarantor of presence.

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Consequently, the death of the "old" (metaphysical) truth gives birth to a "new" one, a "truth" of God's death, the end of man, of morality, etc., which leads, ultimately, to an apocalyptic vision of the Big End (likewise the Big Bang). In order to avoid an unnecessary privileging of the beginning (of the world, man, etc.) – be it "new" or "old" since both are the same onto-theological notions, we should also avoid talking about the end (of the world, man, etc.). The Big End will be, therefore, a moment of a revelation of the Ultimate Truth, which is just a mask of the fear of the life's (free) play with death, of the signifier with the signified, and of an endless dissemination of meaning. Since there is no definite self-identifying presence, we cannot talk about the beginning and the end. However, what assures the transition between metaphysics and humanism (roughly understood as "human-reality," or in the sense of Sartre's notorious slogan "existentialism is a humanism"), Derrida (1982, p. 121) argues, is the *we* that cannot be simply overcome:

> *The thinking of the end of man, therefore, is already prescribed in metaphysics, in the thinking of the truth of man.* What is difficult to think today is an end of man which would not be organized by a dialectics of truth and negativity, an end of man which would not be a teleology in the first person plural. [...] The *we* is the unity of absolute knowledge and anthropology, of God and man, of onto-theo-teleology and humanism. *"Being"* and language – the group of languages – that the *we* governs or opens: such is the name of that which assures the transition between metaphysics and humanism via the *we*.

The only way out language wise, as it seems to Derrida (and Nietzsche), is to talk in terms that go somehow "beyond" the metaphysical ones and their simple opposites, hence Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*. In *The Order of Things,* also Foucault spoke about the future of man and envisaged it, gloomily, as coming to an end in a sense of his potential being gradually exhausted: "As the archeology of our thought easily shows, man is invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end" (p. 387). But Schrift (in Krell and Woods, eds., 1988, p. 146) argues that the end(s) of man Derrida (and also Foucault) mulled over is definitely neither a straightforward rejection of man as human being nor does it assume a systematic strategy of anti-humanism:

> Nietzsche's, Derrida's and Foucault's rejection of the subject of man will not take the form of an anti-humanism, for both humanism and anti-humanism remain within the same binary metaphysics and confront the same dilemmas. In appealing to Nietzsche and the end(s) of 'man,' Derrida and Foucault indicate means of escape – or temporary leave – from the closure of metaphysical humanism by sketching a form of human being based on multiplicity, play and difference, rather than the traditional humanistic/logocentric values of subjectivity, consciousness, autonomy and self-identity. In so doing, they reveal both their indebtedness to Nietzsche's thinking and their place in the history of philosophy as two of the 'philosophers of the future' to whom Nietzsche's writings were addressed.

VALUE AND VIOLENCE

Peckham sees in Nietzsche's philosophy that element which connects value with violence within a wider perspective of maintaining the tension of human experience: in order to achieve a value, that is, to destroy and re-achieve it, one has to resort to violence: the violence of others and the violence of ourselves (1965, p. 33):

> And so Nietzsche's work is the triumph of Romanticism, for he solved its problem of value and returned the Romantic to history, by showing that there is no ground to value and there is no escape from history. As the Romantic had always known but had never, until Nietzsche, been able to believe, reality is history, and only the experience of reality has value, an experience to be achieved by creating illusions so that we may live and by destroying them so that we may recover our freedom. Value is process, a perpetual weaving and unweaving of our own personalities. Sorrow is a sentimental lust for finality; joy is the penetration beyond that sentimentality into the valuelessness of reality, into its freedom, the achievement of which is inevitably its loss. Joy is the eternal recurrence of the same problem, forever solved and forever unsolvable. Nietzsche found what the Romantic had sought for a hundred years, a way of encompassing, without loss of tension, the contraries and paradoxes of human experience. The *feel* of reality, in the Subject, is tension and the sense of contradiction. As for violating others, that is the ultimate moral responsibility, for to maintain the tension of human experience, which is to achieve and destroy and re-achieve value, we must violate others – as we must violate ourselves.

Derrida, on the other hand, asserts that it is language that does practise violence within itself by means of an enforced silencing of dissident voices in discourse. Using Nietzschean "militaristic" terms, he argues in *Writing and Difference* (1978, p. 117) that there is war in between periods of peace in every discourse, and this peace is silence:

> There is war only after the opening of discourse, and war dies out only at the end of discourse. Peace, like silence, is the strange vocation of a language called outside itself by itself. But since *finite* silence is also the medium of violence, language can only indefinitely tend toward justice by acknowledging and practicing the violence within it. Violence against violence.

Deconstruction seems to be doing this by constantly overcoming dominant discourses in the name of justice that is called for by those who are silenced. A similar strategy was adopted by Swinburne as a means of overcoming the violence of Christianity and, especially, the Christian God. By introducing a set of strict binary oppositions, such as those between body and soul, the material and the transcendental, the discourse of Christianity has exerted a particular violence against all those who do not want to submit themselves to a definite set of (Christian) values, thus establishing a permanent oppressive condition.

In her monumental book, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (1993), Isobel Armstrong argues that, in order to find a way out of the Christian discourse, Swinburne followed one of his great masters, de Sade, the discourse of whom, she adds, resembles structurally the one of Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits (p. 404):

> The Sadean and Jesuit societies [*Sòcieté des Amis du Crime* and the Society of Jesus] share the condition of the enclosed retreat, hierarchical instruction, the organised theatrical scene of enactment, the existence of two classes only in a power relationship subservience (torturer/victim: instructor/exercitant); but above all they share the same inverse but parallel relationship between the sign and the body. The object of de Sadean ritual, on which the identity rests, is an intimate physical literalism, orgasm, ejaculation. The object of the Jesuit training of the sensory imagination is the conjuring of the body of Christ and its suffering in all its literalness. Both 'systems' terminate in a condition which is simultaneously material body and empty sign. Once the Sadean, as Harold Bloom has pointed out, has literalised the body and its sensations there can be no troping, no significations beyond its materiality. He is confronted with death. Once the body of Christ has entered the imagination it is an empty sign, a sign of emptiness and absence, indeed, unless it can be reinvested with spiritual meaning.

MAN OF TODAY VERSUS PREPARATORY MEN

Nietzsche's view of his contemporaries was, predictably, not favourable. In *The Antichrist* (38), he confessed that he was constantly haunted by *contempt of man* – the feeling "blacker than the blackest melancholy." Then he adds:

> And so as to leave no doubt as to *what* I despise, *whom* I despise: it is the man of today, the man with whom I am fatefully contemporary. The man of today – I suffocate of his impure breath. [...] With regard to the past I am, like all men of knowledge, of a large tolerance, that is to say a *magnanimous* self-control: I traverse the madhouse-world of entire millennia, be it called 'Christianity', 'Christian faith', 'Christian Church', with a gloomy circumspection – I take care not to make mankind responsible for its insanities. But my feelings suddenly alter, burst forth, immediately I enter the modern age, *our age*. Our age *knows*. [...] What was formerly merely morbid has today become indecent – it is indecent to be a Christian today. *And here is where my disgust commences*. [...] The priest knows as well as anyone that there is no longer any 'God', any 'sinner', any 'redeemer' – that 'free will', 'moral world-order' are lies – intellectual seriousness, the profound self-overcoming of the intellect, no longer *permits* anyone *not* to know about these things.

His further attack on the Church concentrates on the effects the clergymen's lies have on people, calling it the "state of human self-violation [...] which is capable of exciting disgust at the sight of humankind." Nietzsche sees the contemporary man as a victim of systematic tortures and cruelty exerted by the Church by virtue of which the priest has become the master, but, on the other hand, he blames the people for their inaction to change this and concludes that "[t]he practice of every hour, every instinct, every valua-

tion which leads to *action* is today anti-Christian: what a *monster of falsity* modern man must be that he is nonetheless *not ashamed* to be called a Christian!"

In *Gay Science* (283), Nietzsche contained a vision of the future and the future man so much different from the one above:

> *Preparatory men.* I welcome all signs that a more manly, a warlike, age is about to begin, an age which, above all, will give honor to valor once again. For this age shall prepare the way for one yet higher, and it shall gather the strength which this higher age will need one day – this age which is to carry heroism into the pursuit of knowledge and *wage wars* for the sake of thoughts and their consequences. To this end we now need many preparatory valorous men who cannot leap into being out of nothing – any more than out of the sand and slime of our present civilization and metropolitanism: men who are bent on seeking for that aspect in all things which must be *overcome*; men characterized by cheerfulness, patience, unpretentiousness, and contempt for all great vanities, as well as by magnanimity in victory and forbearance regarding the small vanities of the vanquished; men possessed of keen and free judgment concerning all victors and the share of chance in every victory and every fame; men who have their own festivals, their own weekdays, their own periods of mourning, who are accustomed to command with assurance and are no less ready to obey when necessary, in both cases equally proud and serving their own cause; men who are in greater danger, more fruitful, and happier! For, believe me, the secret of the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment of existence is: to *live dangerously*! Build your cities under Vesuvius! Send your ships into uncharted seas! Live at war with your peers and yourselves! Be robbers and conquerors, as long as you cannot be rulers and owners, you lovers of knowledge! Soon the age will be past when you could be satisfied to live like shy deer, hidden in the woods! At long last the pursuit of knowledge will reach out for its due: it will want to *rule* and *own*, and you with it!

"A more manly, a warlike, age" is supposed to be the age of knowledge, of a great competition in science, and, primarily, the age of decisive challenges to Christianity in an attempt to uncover the "truth" about it and the world around us. It will be the era of conquerors, rulers and owners of ideas, people so much different from his contemporaries, people who will be ashamed to be called Christians. The man of the future will be the one whose greatest enjoyment of existence will be "to live dangerously;" in other words, the one who, like in the *über* of the *Übermensch*, possesses a prankish exuberance, a lightness of mind, and who has an instinct which leads to *action*.

REVALUATION OF ALL VALUES:
A GOD AND THE WORLD OF THE FUTURE

Finally, there comes the revaluation of all values as pronounced in the last section of *The Anti-Christ* (62) – a total and unconditional condemnation of Christianity and the need to *re*-value all its values:

With that I have done and pronounce my judgement. I *condemn* Christianity, I bring against the Christian Church the most terrible charge any prosecutor has ever uttered. To me it is the extremest thinkable form of corruption, it has had the will to the ultimate corruption conceivably possible. The Christian Church has left nothing untouched by its depravity, it has made of every value a disvalue, of every truth a lie, of every kind of integrity a vileness of soul. [...] To cultivate out of *humanitas* a self-contradiction, an act of self-violation, a will to falsehood at any price, an antipathy, a contempt for every good and honest instinct! These are the blessings of Christianity! [...] I call Christianity the *one* great curse, the *one* great intrinsic depravity, the *one* great instinct for revenge for which no expedient is sufficiently poisonous, secret, subterranean, *petty* – I call it the one immortal blemish of mankind. [. . .]

   And one calculates *time* from the *dies nefastus* [unlucky day] on which this fatality arose – from the first day of Christianity! – *Why not rather from its last? – From today? –* Revaluation of all values!

The complete rejection of Christianity is just one of the possible interpretations of the concept Nietzsche calls the revaluation of all values. In *Ecce Homo*, the book immediately following *The Antichrist*, he contained another explanation of the term as *reversing perspectives*:

To see *healthier* concepts and values in the perspective of the sick, and conversely, to look down out of the abundance and self-assurance of a *rich* life to behold the secret doings of the instinct of decadence – in this I have had the longest training, my most characteristic experience: here, if anywhere, I became a master. Now this gift is mine, now I have the gift of *reversing perspectives*: the first reason why it is perhaps for me alone that a "revaluation of values' is at all possible today.

Nietzsche's project of sanitising Western philosophy and giving a new "health" to the Western mind aimed principally and fundamentally at getting rid of Christianity as, broadly speaking, the greatest lie of the two millennia. The war he waged against the values considered "Christian," the notion of "good," the image of woman and marriage, etc. stemmed, according to him, from the essentially mistaken idea of God as a supreme goodness or supreme being, whereas God is (or rather *was*) the supreme *power* (*WP*, 1037):

Let us remove supreme goodness from the concept of God: it is unworthy of a god. Let us also remove supreme wisdom: it is vanity of philosophers that is to be blamed for this mad notion of God as a monster of wisdom: he had to be as like them as possible. No! God the supreme power – that suffices! Everything follows from it, "the world" follows from it!

Nietzsche blames philosophers for creating a false image of God as a kind of transcendental impersonation of goodness, which is a contradictory notion particularly in Christianity where we are dealing with God who descended to earth and died on the cross, and so did the whole world along with him. Nietzsche's idea, however, was to think of a god who would stay

"beyond good and evil," who would have "light feet" and, in the words of Zarathustra, "could dance." We are constantly reminded throughout *The Will to Power* who we, his readers and students, are – pagans in faith (1034):

> We few or many who again dare to live in a dismoralized world, we pagans in faith: we are probably also the first to grasp what a pagan faith is: – to have to imagine higher creatures than man but beyond good and evil; to have to consider all being higher as being immoral. We believe in Olympus – and not in the "Crucified."

A god of the future will be emancipated from morality and will take into himself "the whole fullness of life's antitheses," as he says elsewhere. God, as the beyond and above the morality of "good and evil," will be the god we do not know today and, as such, cannot be demonstrated to us from the world we know today. Therefore, there is this urgent task, as he argues in the subsequent passage, to "devise for him a world we do *not* know" (1037).

In Nietzsche's eyes (61), Protestantism is a hindering force in bringing down Christianity: had it not been for Luther who, as a matter of fact, restored the Church, Christianity would have been abolished long time ago, it would have faded away. Yet, what man still faces today, as part of Nietzsche's heritage, is an enormous task to say Yes to life, to all daring and lofty things, to arts, to Ancients, since, as he complains in the previous section (60), "Christianity robbed us of the harvest of the culture of the ancient world, it later went on to rob us of the harvest of the culture of *Islam*."

Similarly, both Browning and Swinburne raised their doubts in regard to Christianity and its values. In, for instance, "Bishop Blougram's Apology," Browning poses a question of how an intelligent person can believe in Christianity. In his discourse, the Bishop ("He's no bad fellow, Blougram," l. 38, "the thing's his trade" l. 41) confesses to his interlocutor (ll. 58-64):

> – That, my ideal never can include,
> Upon that element of truth and worth
> Never be based! for say they make me Pope –
> (They can't – suppose it for our argument!)
> Why, there I'm at my tether's end, I've reached
> My height, and not a height that pleases you:
> An unbelieving Pope won't do, you say.

Bishop Blougram's scepticism in regards to faith ("I warrant, Blougram's sceptical at times," l. 42) is indicative of the complete exhaustion of his possibilities and capabilities as a Christian clergyman ("I've reached/ My height") and as a human, thus signalling the end of his secure path ("I'm at my tether's end"), which may be read as a hushed cry of despair, suppressed by his social and ecclesiastical position. "An unbelieving Pope"

seems none other than an articulation of a perspective of an ultimate collapse of the Roman Church in the matters of faith and dogmas, which would mark an end to almost two millennia of dogmatic thinking in terms of absolute truths. Then he proceeds to wage a fierce verbal attack on his interlocutor (ll. 149-59):

> Why first, you don't believe, you don't and can't,
> (Not statedly, that is, and fixedly
> And absolutely and exclusively)
> In any revelation called divine.
> No dogmas nail your faith; and what remains
> But say so, like the honest man you are?
> First, therefore, overhaul theology!
> Nay, I too, not a fool, you please to think,
> Must find believing every whit as hard;
> And if I do not frankly say as much,
> The ugly consequence is clear enough.

The call to "overhaul theology" seems to be a radical attempt to revamp, renovate, revalue all traditional, fixed, and absolute divine revelations and dogmas. The Bishop's theological stance, impossible to accept even for his interlocutor – not to mention the official line of the Church ("[t]he ugly consequence is clear enough"), presupposes a certain relativism in the matters of faith, which results in the rejection of fixed dogmas and absolute truths. There comes the moment of the most dramatic confession expressed in the simplest but most powerful words (ll. 160-9):

> Now wait, my friend: well, I do not believe –
> If you'll accept no faith that is not fixed,
> Absolute and exclusive, as you say,
> You're wrong – I mean to prove it in due time.
> Meanwhile I know where the difficulties lie
> I could not, cannot solve, nor even shall,
> So give up hope accordingly to solve –
> (To you and over the wine). Our dogmas then
> With both of us, though in unlike degree,
> Missing full credence – overboard with them!

With these confessions there come doubts as regards the future (ll. 172-97):

> And now what are we? unbelievers both,
> Calm and complete, determinately fixed
> To-day, to-morrow and for ever, pray?
> You'll guarantee me that? Not so, I think!
> In no wise!

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Swinburne's open rejection of Christianity casts no shade of doubt on his explicit anti-theism, which, primarily, concentrated on the violence and cruelty of God ("The supreme evil, God" in "Atalanta"), his Church and his creation, but also condemned the widespread hypocrisies of the (Christian) world. His philosophy evolved around life understood not as a preparatory stage to a superior kind of life, but life as an intermediary between non-being preceding and following life. In effect, Swinburne attempted to dismantle the Christian myths of salvation, the purpose of which has always been to conquer death by a promise of a future life after death, and demonstrated that no myths are necessary since natural law does this equally well.

Landow (*Swinburne's Political Poetry*, on-line) argues that, for its tyrannical dominion over men, the Christian Church has been selected as the main target of Swinburne's attack in "Before Crucifix":

> This same political intonation of Christian symbolism appears in "Before a Crucifix" (1871), which is one of Swinburne's most effective political poems. It begins as a meditation upon a weather-scarred roadside crucifix to which the poor bring their sorrows. After admitting that he has neither "tongue nor knee/ For prayer," Swinburne addresses the shrine as if it were Christ and demands if His coming has produced only a suffering race of men praying to a suffering image of man.
>
> Having thus bitterly questioned Christ, Swinburne turns to his main target, the Church, and explains to the wooden image of Christ that His supposed priests have used His suffering to establish their tyrannical dominion over men. Heaping up satirical analogies, types, and parodied types, the poet charges that priests and prelates have enslaved – and crucified – the people while enriching themselves. Having set forth the corruptions of religion, Swinburne ends "Before a Crucifix" by urging the people to free themselves from its bonds.

BROWNING AND SWINBURNE: TOMORROW'S POETS?

In a number of ways, Browning's poetry runs before its time, particularly in regard to the innovatory use of the language. Joseph Hillis Miller (1975, pp. 119-20) identifies some particular areas within Browning's – as he calls it – "heavy language" which contributes to the quality of "word pregnant with thing" (Browning, vol. VII, p. 234):

> Grotesque metaphors, ugly words heavy with consonants, stuttering alliteration, strong active verbs, breathless rhythms, onomatopoeia, images of rank smells, rough textures, and of the things fleshy, viscous, sticky, nubbly, slimy, shaggy, sharp, crawling, thorny, or prickly – all these work together in Browning's verse to create an effect of unparalleled thickness, harshness, and roughness. These elements are so constantly combined that it is difficult to demonstrate one of them in isolation, but their simultaneous effect gives Browning's verse its special flavor, and could be said to be the most important thing about it. They are the chief means by which he expresses his sense of what reality is like. No other poetry can be at once so ugly, so "rough, rude, robustious" (X, 248), and so full of joyous vitality.

The power of Browning's words can best be seen (and heard) in the use of the whole bunches of consonants in close proximity, which strengthens the audible effect upon the reader and listener: words are but vestures, not the things themselves; they "wrap, as tetter, morphew, furfair/ Wrap the flash" (*Paracelsus*, 4. 630-1). The language of *Paracelsus*, among a plethora of his other great poems, seems to be a sign of the approaching twentieth-century modernity, the times in which *thing*, Heideggerian *Ding*, will acquire a completely new status, a new *Being*. Like Nietzsche and Heidegger, Browning discards a Romantic (post-Romantic) idea of language as vision: words are not just symbols that allow to visualise things – they are the things in themselves. Ryals (1993, pp. 29-30) argues that Paracelsus adopts a new theory of language based on the doctrine of becoming:

> Like man's other attributes and experiences, language is generative. Words evoke responses, which in turn act as stimuli. This interanimation, which evolutionary and developmental, leads to new stages of linguistic ability where new things can be expressed [or can make themselves audible, R.W.]. Paracelsus learns not only that language is not static but also that words are not symbols mediating the noumenal and phenomenal: they do not permit 'vision' as the Romantics had taught; rather, they are signs that allow man to gain a larger grasp on himself and thus grow in understanding beyond present verbal constructs.

To repeat after *Chamber's Journal* (7-2-1863) that Browning was "a poet without public" because he had exceeded his time and, therefore, was not understood or, more often than not, misunderstood by his contemporaries would be a commonplace, but we may certainly concur with Ryals' opinion (1993, p. 73) that "[m]uch – in fact, most – of Browning's poetry is ambiguous, and to seek for determinate meaning in the narrative is misread his monologues" since, as he openly admits, "nearly everyone of Browning's monologists has a near obsession with words" (p. 73). This near obsession with words results, in most poems, in a lack of logical coherence and formal perfection – the most characteristic features of poetry of the past Browning wanted to get away from. For the Romantics, for instance, poetry was essentially and primarily a tool for autobiographical attempts, while Browning's characters present, in the main, some – sometimes hypothetical – states of human mind or undertake psychological investigations, like in *Pauline*, and therefore live lives of their own, thus the apparent impression of incongruity and incomprehensibility in the reader. In *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, XLVI (March 1836), John Foster argued that "Mr. Browning has the power of a great dramatic poet; we never think of Mr. Browning while we read his poem [*Paracelsus*]; we are not identified with him, but with the persons into whom he has flung his genius" (p. 308). Twenty years later, George Eliot, in *The Westminster Review*, 65 (January 1856) added that

"[w]e admire his power, we are not subdued by it. Language with him does not seem spontaneously to link itself into song, as sounds link themselves into melody in the mind of the creative musician; he rather seems by his commending powers to compel language into verse" (p. 296). Nonetheless, she elsewhere did justice to Browning's verse by admiring its difficulty and complexity (p. 290):

> Here he [the reader] will find no conventionality, no melodious commonplace, but freshness, originality, sometimes eccentricity of expression; no didactic laying-out of a subject, but dramatic indication, which requires the reader to trace by his own mental activity the underground stream of thought that jets out in elliptical and pithy verse. To read Browning he must exert himself, but he will exert himself to some purpose. If he finds the meaning difficult of access, it is always worth his effort – if he has to dive deep, 'he rises with his pearl.' Indeed, in Browning's best poems he makes us feel that what we took for obscurity in him was superficiality in ourselves.

Genuine, authentic communication in Browning's poetry is practically non-existent or, at best, suppressed while language serves as an instrument of deception and self-deception. In his narratives, he concentrates on 'Action in Character rather than Character in Action,' therefore, action lies largely in language and psychological development of character, particularly in the greatest poems such as *Paracelsus* or *Sordello*. Ryals stresses the deceptive role of language and the importance of the formative forces of the mind in the process of self-articulation of the characters in Browning's discourse (p. 39):

> In Browning's world language is a deceptive veil through which it is impossible fully to penetrate. At best, comprehension of meaning is approximate. Nevertheless, language is the means by which characters realize themselves [...]. In *Strafford*, more clearly than in his two previously published poems, Browning represents speech as the active, formative force of the mind in the process of self-articulation. Full of asides, interjections, partially completed statements, interruptions, the dialogue is characterized by numerous semantic breaks that offer possibilities for extension of meaning.

Browning's discourse of power is then an excellent example of how man understands himself in and through language, which in a modern meaning is generally considered to be a system of signs, not symbols permitting visions as Romantics would have it.

Swinburne has also been considered to be a poet greatly preoccupied with language experiments, being himself, in the opinion of Isabel Armstrong (1993, p. 403), "hypersensitively aware of the breakdown of language which [revealed itself] in terms of the collapse of form and content, the breaking apart of sign and referent." Further (p. 404), she added that the brute materiality of language meant for Swinburne

the non-transcendent world of brutal Christian materialism which leaves us with the literal sign and that only. Swinburne through the bringing together of spirit and matter in the symbol [attempts] to assuage this fracture, but [remains] with the sense of living in a closed system, a linguistic world without relationships beyond itself.

Swinburne's symbolist theory, as Armstrong notices further on, is expressed in mystical and theological terms as the inherence of meaning and sign, but for him meaning is beyond, outside. She concludes (p. 405):

> Thus words, the things of sense, have to yearn after an unreachable and unknown beyond which transcends their limits. The material sign, since linguistic and literal violence are virtually identical, is flayed, stung and trammelled into transcendence. Words have to transgress their limits and move beyond the boundaries constituted for them. Swinburne's habit of doubling a word with an alliterative synonym, and doubling that synonymous double with a synonymous alliterative phrase, is a way of dissolving the boundaries of language by coalescing distinctions of sound and meaning. The synonym chain produces an endless chain of substitutions in which doubled words and phrases blur and exchange semantic and aural attributes with libidinal energy, impelled by an insistent and self-perpetuating metrical form which has the physical shock-effect of the regular waves of the sea, a repeated image of transcendence in Swinburne's work.

Swinburne seems also to be the one who, in a predominantly Nietzschean way, tried to "revalue all values," chiefly the Christian ones. His idea was predominately to dissolve the tyranny of God and the power of Victorian morality and sexuality. He looked to France for ideals of sexual freedom, also freedom from totalitarian royal power, and the discourse of poetry was for him the right means for overcoming the multiplicity of tyrannies. As Harrison (1990, p. 191) has found out, "only in the poetic ability to perceive reality in terms of aesthetic transformations can the mind hope to overcome the tyrannies of time, death, and all the pains of loss and absence [...]," and for Swinburne "poetry constituted a discursive space in which the ideal of freedom could be apprehended and a form of immortality attained" (p. 200).

CODA:
THE LABYRINTH IN WHICH WE ARE LOST

> My youth and its brave hopes, all dead and gone,
> In tears which burn.
>
> Robert Browning, *Paracelsus* (2. 186-7)

The vision of the future Nietzsche presented in *Gay Science* (or *Joyful Wisdom*, as one may like it), was certainly not a picture of the English Victorian society; it was, most decidedly, a vision of a post-Christian society of the (post)modern, post-industrial era rather than anything else. Even though neither had Browning nor Swinburne ever created any formal system of ideas, their discourses, particularly the discourses of power, are so close to Nietzsche's discourse that we may identify them as fundamentally the same, obviously disregarding the temporal and spatial dimensions in which they occurred. Hence, both in Nietzsche and Browning, we have the idea of "becoming" instead of "being" since they both observed – rightly – that we are in an incessant process of progression (or regression) and change. The result of this is that there is no stable self, no identity, no centre: one has either to assume a false identity or to role-play. Speaking of Browning's "Pippa Passes," Ryals (1993, p. 60) notices that

> [w]hat he [Sebald, one of the characters] senses, dimly and never fully comprehendingly, is that the self in modern times is unstable. Without God in the world – without, that is, the order of the Great Chain of Being to which Pippa alludes – personal identity, the self, becomes problematic. Inner vacuity, the absence of Presence, makes role-playing inescapable.

In *English Poetry of the Victorian Period 1830-1890* (1999), Bernard Richards argues that

> [i]n the main poets that we have been considering [Arnold, Browning, Hopkins, Morris, Swinburne and Tennyson] doubt is the keynote. In its extreme form the pervasive doubt undermined faith not only in God, but in God's image reproduced in man. The enormous perspectives of geological time revealed that man as species has come onto the scene comparatively recently, and was possibly but one of a long series of dominant beings in

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the world. This was a severe blow to the classical, medieval, and Renaissance conceptions of the centrality of man in creation, and of the fixity of other species.

So, if there is no God in man, they asked, what is? The only reasonable answer which readily springs to mind is *power* or, to borrow a Foucaultean term, *relationships of power*. Browning's and Swinburne's discourses, which are to a considerable extent preoccupied with the ideas of power and strength, and which also show a variety of relationships of forces, present man as an embodiment of the primordial and universal life-force. Like Nietzsche (in *WP*, 1067), Browning believed that the world – a monster of energy that transforms itself perpetually, having no limitations or boundaries – is the scene of an eternal contest of forces, and man is just one of the minute elements in the whole network of its power relations. To find an unwavering ground in the world's constant state of flux needs a strong faith in a reliable maker, but Browning, contrary to for instance Hopkins, lacks such a God. Richards (1999, p. 224) rightly observes that

> for Browning [...] the universe was the scene of a never-ending struggle between immense forces locked in elemental combat, perhaps never to be reconciled. The earth is 'a teeming crust – / Air, flame, earth, wave at conflict'. The principles of individuation are there, but always ready to collapse, and besides, Browning finds nothing attractive in the idea of 'eternal petrifaction'. His overriding image is rather like Hopkin's [sic!] Heraclitean nightmare. A man of faith could posit a stable God in response to alarming states of flux, but unless he was capable of considerable mental agility this picture of a seething and unstable world would not naturally lead him to a concept of a firm and reliable maker.

Richards agrees that God is hidden from Browning, and that "man is like the asymptote – speeding towards God, but unable to reach him" (p. 224): the poet seems to be, in a true (post)modern sense, constantly chasing the meaning of the world which he is unable to reach.

Swinburne, in the poems like "By the North Sea" or "On the Cliffs," sees the destructive forces of nature as an underlying principle of the world's operation, from which a compassionate creator has been excluded, and his idea of a sea of forces, storming and raging, is reminiscent of Nietzsche's section 1067 of *The Will to Power* – it is the world of the dead God ("By the North Sea," ll. 431-8):

> "Where is man?" the cloister murmurs wailing;
> Back the mute shrine thunders – "Where is God?"
> Here is all the end of all his glory –
> Dust, and grass, and barren silent stones.
> Dead, like him, one hollow tower and hoary
> Naked in the sea-wind stands and moans,
> Filled and thrilled with its perpetual story:
> Here, where earth is dense with dead men's bones.

Both poets were, to use Nietzsche's expression, the preparatory men who enjoyed life "living dangerously" to the extreme, to their utmost capacities (Swinburne, unfortunately, in a particularly literal sense). Their intellectual paths almost always led across the abyss which they were forced to overcome in one way or another. They built their cities under Vesuvius, and sent their ships to the uncharted seas of emotions, sexual and moral freedoms, poetic and intellectual genius. Their voices, however, very much like Nietzsche's, were the solitary ones, never influenced the masses, never found much understanding among those who possessed *real*, tangible power both in *academia* and politics (although Nietzsche's philosophy was disastrously abused in Nazi Germany, particularly his idea of *der Übermensch*). Their voices, therefore, were just the voices of the "lovers of knowledge," and – like a cry over the abyss – expressed the anxieties, fears and worries of people who appreciated greatly "the primordial and universal life-force of which man is the most highly evolved embodiment."

Sharing Nietzsche's conviction of essentially antithetical construction of man ("[I]n man there is matter, fragment, excess, clay, mud, madness, chaos; but in man there is also creator, sculptor, the hardness of the hammer, the divine spectator and the seventh day [...]," *BGE*, 225), Browning's and Swinburne's discourses of power are, most certainly, an articulation of their beliefs in man's intellectual, artistic and creative potential. With the departure of God, they felt that it was man who was supposed to take the role of the creator, the sculptor and, at the same time, man himself was to be the tool for the execution of his plans and designs. Out of primeval chaos and madness, there emerges man out of man's invention, a "*Typus höchster Wohlgeratenheit* – a type that has turned out supremely well" (*EH*, III. 1) – Nietzsche's *Übermensch* and Browning's Paracelsus, and out of maritime foam – Swinburne's hermaphrodite – a product of his transgressive aesthetics. Possessing "the hardness of the hammer," it is within man's power to transform, re-mould, re-shape the things, the environments, the landscapes he has been living *with* and *in* for so many centuries. Nietzsche's hammer – originally the construction tool – becomes in his hands the weapon of war, the war on inauthentic discourse and inauthentic existence; the tool of destruction of old, inauthentic values, a weapon of transformation and enhancement of power.

"All is confused / No doubt, but doubtless you will learn in time" (*Paracelsus* 5. 486-7). We are still unable to overcome metaphysics of presence since we have been confined in/to the prison-house of the language. We still cannot get rid of God because we still believe in grammar. We have been lost, as humanity, in the arche-*ecritur*-al *Haus des Seiendes*, the twenty-first-century abysmal labyrinth of the *de*-constructed word/world. "Decon-

struction as he [Derrida] practices it allies itself with the voiceless, the marginal, the repressed, but it has no conviction that the old, bad (metaphysical) order can be transcended. The word is *déplacement* not *dépassement*. We may move things about, but we are not flattered into conceiving that we may 'pass beyond'" (Krupnick, ed., 1983, p. 2). Speaking of the (modern) human condition, Tarnas (1996, p. 389) noticed that the age

> addressed the most fundamental, naked concerns of human existence – suffering and death, loneliness and dread, guilt and conflict, spiritual emptiness and ontological insecurity, the void of absolute values or universal contexts, the sense of cosmic absurdity, the frailty of human reason, the tragic impasse of the human condition. Man was condemned to be free. He faced the necessity of choice and thus knew the continual burden of error. He lived in constant ignorance of his future, thrown into a finite existence bounded at each end by nothingness. The infinity of human aspiration was defeated before the finitude of human possibility. Man possessed no determining essence: only his existence was given, an existence engulfed by mortality, risk, fear ennui, contradiction, uncertainty. No transcendent Absolute guaranteed the fulfillment of human life or history. There was no eternal design or providential purpose. Things existed simply because they existed, and not for some "higher" or "deeper" reason. God was dead, and the universe was blind to human concerns, devoid of meaning or purpose. Man was abandoned, on his own. All was contingent. To be authentic one had to admit, and choose freely to encounter, the stark reality of life's meaninglessness. Struggle alone gave meaning.

Nietzsche's "will to power," alongside Browning's contention that "[a]s a man, you had / A certain share of strength, and that is gone" (*Paracelsus*, 2. 204-5) and Swinburne's "O / fools, he was God and / is dead" ("Hymn of Man") may serve as a brief summary the nineteenth-century atmosphere, on the one hand, of man's struggle to liberate themselves from the bonds imposed by the "greatest lie" and the meaninglessness of their lives devoid of any "higher" purpose or reason, on the other.

To conclude, bearing a plethora of meanings, abyss seems to be essentially a territory of man's psychological and existential isolation in the world, and man – deprived of a stable, reliable ground of his beliefs – a tight-rope dancer, like Nietzsche's *Seiltänzer* of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. A cry that man utters is enforced, violently sounded out, is a mark of both the will to power and his total powerlessness in the face of the existential void around him.

CONCLUSIONS

(1) Man is essentially a thing.

(2) Man has lost his centuries-long bond with what he used to call Supreme Being, Universal Mind or Omnipotent Power – God.

(3) God has either died (Nietzsche), disappeared (Browning) or has become a supreme evil (Swinburne).

(4) The absence of God is a clear sign of the end of metaphysics – the philosophy of presence – which dominated the Western mind for over two millennia.

(5) A new man (Nietzsche's *Übermensch* of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Aristotle's "magnanimous" man of *Nicomachaean Ethics*, as well as Browning's Paracelsus) is the man of excess, of surplus of power.

(6) The new man's ability to perform powerful, aggressive gestures leads to perforation of the shell of inauthentic existence and discourse.

(7) Abyss is the territory of man's psychological and existential isolation in the world, and man – a tight-rope dancer.

(8) The discourse of power is one of the main forms of expression in the poetry of Robert Browning and Algernon Charles Swinburne.

(9) The poetry of Browning and Swinburne is a nineteenth-century manifestation of the breakdown of language expressed in terms of collapse of traditionally understood form and content, the breaking apart of sign and referent (*signifiant* and *signifié*).

(10) With the Nietzschean proclamation of the "death of God," and a call for "revaluation of all values," the nineteenth-century philosophy and literature take a decisive step towards twentieth-century modernity.

MISCELLANEA

WORDS AND CRITICS

No discourse about literature is theory-free.

> Selden and Widdowson, *Introduction to Contemporary Literary Theory*

Continental theory has influenced our contemporary belief that it is impossible to think intelligently about literature without recourse to extraliterary knowledge. At the same time, this extraliterary knowledge (especially in the areas of linguistics, psychoanalysis, and philosophy) is not privileged in its relation to literature. It is itself problematized in the confrontation.

> Mark Krupnick, Introduction, *Displacement: Derrida and After.*

Criticism may not always be an act of judging, but it is always an act of deciding, and what it tries to decide is meaning.

> Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*

Phenomenology – a modern philosophical tendency which stresses the perceiver's central role in determining meaning. The proper object of philosophical investigation is the contents of our consciousness, not the object in the world.

> Selden and Widdowson, *Introduction to Contemporary Literary Theory*

[O]n the one hand, hermeneutics is thought of as the manifestation and the restoration of a meaning which is addressed to me in the manner of a message, a proclamation or, as it is sometimes called, a kerygma; on the other hand, it is conceived as a demystification, or a reduction of illusions.

> Paul Ricoeur, *De l'interprétation: Essai sur Freud*

The interpretation of the text does not propose its meaning as any substitutive entity; rather, it proposes that in the hypothesization of the narrative

links among its spectral names the reader is involved in the historical production of meaning, that is, in meaningful action. 'Meaning' here is something that a consciousness **does**, not something that a text or consciousness **has**, intrinsically.

<div align="right">Thomas Docherty, After Theory. Postmodernism, postmarxism</div>

Écriture – writing and writtenness – that is the signs on the page, self-existing quite apart from the presence of speakers or things — are the main, or the most important and truthful, essence of language, or at least the aspect to concentrate on if we are ever to escape from the delusions of centuries of Graeco-Christian metaphysics or logocentrism.

<div align="right">Valentine Cunningham, In the Reading Gaol. Postmodernity, Texts and History</div>

Derridean case is that meaning of words, writing, text is not ever successfully produced, presented, contained on-stage, as it were, so much as perpetually deferred back into mere linguisticity, into yet more writing. No **mise en scéne**; rather **a mise en abyme**, a plunge into the abysm, or black hole, of mere text.

<div align="right">Valentine Cunningham, In the Reading Gaol. Postmodernity, Texts and History</div>

[H]e [Derrida] and deconstruction dealt with 'things,' yes, things – real, resistant, historical, political things, in other words, referents.

<div align="right">Valentine Cunningham, In the Reading Gaol. Postmodernity, Texts and History</div>

Language is the precinct (templum), that is, the house of Being.

<div align="right">Martin Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought</div>

For twenty-five centuries, Western knowledge has tried to look upon the world. It has failed to understand that the world is not for the beholding. It is for hearing. It is not legible, but audible. [...] Nothing essential happens in the absence of noise. Today our sight has dimmed; it no longer sees our future, having constructed a present made of abstraction, nonsense and silence.

<div align="right">Jacques Attali, Noise: The Political Economy of Music.</div>

The figs are falling from the trees, they are fine and sweet: and as they fall their red skins split. I am a north wind to ripe figs.
Thus, like figs, do these teachings fall to you, my friends: now drink their juice and eat their sweet flesh! It is autumn all around and clear sky and afternoon –

<div align="right">Friedrich Nietzsche, Ecce Homo</div>

Christianity as antiquity. When we hear the ancient bells growling on a Sunday morning we ask ourselves: Is it really possible! this, for a Jew, crucified two thousand years ago, who said he was God's son. The proof of such a claim is lacking. Certainly the Christian religion is an antiquity projected into our times from remote prehistory; and the fact that the claim is believed – whereas one is otherwise so strict in examining pretensions – is perhaps the most ancient piece of this heritage. A god who begets children with a mortal woman; a sage who bids men work no more, have no more courts, but look for the signs of the impending end of the world; a justice that accepts the innocent as a vicarious sacrifice; someone who orders his disciples to drink his blood; prayers for miraculous interventions, sins perpetrated against a god, atoned for by a god; fear of a beyond to which death is the portal; the form of the cross as a symbol in a time that no longer knows the function and the ignominy of the cross – how ghoulishly all this touches us, as if from the tomb of the primeval past! Can one believe that such things are still believed?

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All-Too-Human*, 113

The European man and the destruction of nations. Commerce and industry, traffic in books and letters, the commonality of all higher culture, quick changes of locality and landscape, the present-day nomadic life of all nonlandowners – these conditions necessarily bring about a weakening and ultimately a destruction of nations, or at least of European nations; so that a mixed race, that of the European man, has to originate out of all of them, as a result of continual crossbreeding. The isolation of nations due to engendered *national* hostilities now works against this goal, consciously or unconsciously, but the mixing process goes on slowly, nevertheless, despite those intermittent countercurrents; this artificial nationalism, by the way, is as dangerous as artificial Catholicism was, for it is in essence a forcible state of emergency and martial law, imposed by the few on the many, and requiring cunning, lies, and force to remain respectable. [...]

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All-Too-Human*, 475

[...] "[W]ill to truth" does *not* mean "I will not let myself be deceived" but – there is no choice – "I will not deceive, not even myself": *and with this we are on the ground of morality.* For one should ask oneself carefully: "Why don't you want to deceive?" especially if it should appear – and it certainly does appear – that life depends on appearance; I mean, on error, simulation, deception, self-deception; and when life has, as a matter of fact, always shown itself to be on the side of the most unscrupulous *polytropoi.* Such an intent,

charitably interpreted, could perhaps be a quixotism, a little enthusiastic im-
pudence; but it could also be something worse, namely, a destructive princi-
ple, hostile to life. "Will to truth" – that might be a concealed will to death.

<div align="right">Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science, 344</div>

What alone can *our* teaching be? That no one *gives* a human being his quali-
ties: not God, not society, not his parents or ancestors, not *he himself* (– the
nonsensical idea here last rejected was propounded, as 'intelligible free-
dom', by Kant, and perhaps by Plato before him). *No one* is accountable for
existing at all, or for being constituted as he is, or for living in the circum-
stances and surroundings in which he lives. The fatality of his nature cannot
be disentangled from the fatality of all that which has been and will be. He
is *not* the result of special design, a will, a purpose; he is *not* the subject of an
attempt to attain to an 'ideal of man' or an 'ideal of happiness' or an 'ideal
of morality' – it is absurd to want to *hand over* his nature to some purpose or
other. *We* invented the concept 'purpose': in reality purpose is *lacking*. [...]
One is necessary, one is a piece of fate, one belongs to the whole, one *is* in
the whole – there exists nothing which could judge, measure, compare, con-
demn the whole. [...] *But nothing exists apart from the whole!* – That no one is
any longer made accountable , that the kind of being manifested cannot be
traced back to a *causa prima* [first cause], that the world is a unity neither as
sensorium nor as 'spirit', *this alone is the great liberation* – thus alone is the *in-
nocence* of becoming restored. [...] The concept 'God' has hitherto been the
greatest *objection* to existence. [...] We deny God; in denying God, we deny
accountability: only by doing *that* do we redeem the world. –

<div align="right">Friedrich Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols, "The Four Great Errors," 8</div>

[...] Formerly he [God] represented a people, the strength of a people, every-
thing aggressive and thirsting for power in the soul of a people: now he is
merely a good God. [...] There is in fact no other alternative for Gods: *either*
they are the will to power – and so long as they are that they will be na-
tional [people's] Gods – or else the impotence for power – and then they
necessarily become *good* [...].

<div align="right">Friedrich Nietzsche, The Anti-Christ, 16</div>

The Christian conception of God – God as God of the sick, God as spider,
God as spirit – is one of the most corrupt conceptions of God arrived at on
earth: perhaps it even represents the low-water mark in the descending de-
velopment of the God type. God degenerated to the *contradiction of life*, in-
stead of being its transfiguration and eternal *Yes*! In God a declaration of

hostility towards life, nature, the will to life! God the formula for every calumny of 'this world', for every lie about 'the next world'! In God nothingness deified, the will to nothingness sanctified!

<div align="right">Friedrich Nietzsche, The Anti-Christ, 18</div>

[...] Love is the state in which man sees things most of all as they are *not*. The illusion-creating force is there at its height, likewise the sweetening and *transforming* force. One endures more when in love than one otherwise would, one tolerates everything. The point was to devise a religion in which love is possible: with that one is beyond the worst that life can offer – one no longer sees it. [...]

<div align="right">Friedrich Nietzsche, The Anti-Christ, 23</div>

If one shifts the centre of gravity of life *out* of life into the 'Beyond" – into *nothingness* – one has deprived life as such of its centre of gravity. The great lie of personal immortality destroys all rationality, all naturalness of instinct – all that is salutary, all that is life-furthering, all that holds a guarantee of the future in the instincts henceforth excites mistrust. *So* to live that there is no longer any *meaning* in living: *that* now becomes the 'meaning' of life. [...]

<div align="right">Friedrich Nietzsche, The Anti-Christ, 43</div>

[...] The most spiritual men, as the *strongest*, find their happiness where others would find their destruction: in the labyrinth, in hardness against themselves and others, in experiments; their joy is self-conquest; asceticism becomes in them nature, need, and instinct. Difficult tasks are a privilege to them; to play with burdens which crush others, a recreation. Knowledge – a form of asceticism. They are the most venerable kind of man; that does not preclude their being the most cheerful and the kindliest. They rule not because they want to but because they *are*; they are not free to be second. [...]

<div align="right">Friedrich Nietzsche, The Anti-Christ, 57 in The Portable Nietzsche</div>

Islam is a thousand times right in despising Christianity: Islam presupposes *men*.

<div align="right">Friedrich Nietzsche, The Anti-Christ, 58 in The Portable Nietzsche</div>

Of what is great one must either be silent or speak with greatness. With greatness – that means cynically and with innocence.

<div align="right">Friedrich Nietzsche, The Will to Power, Preface, 1</div>

<div align="right">241</div>

[...] even our most noble creations – science, art, literature, religion – were products of a dark continent of unconscious *forces*, and our highest ideals were irremediably held captive by infantile desires. He [Freud] felt it was his task to complete the revolution begun when Copernicus ousted the earth from the centre of the universe, and when Darwin succeeded in closing the gap between humankind and the rest of creation. He felt that his mission was to effect the final *blow* to any vestiges of self-pretension to divinity that humanity might still possess. He did this by showing that human beings were nothing but products of nature, minds or souls equally being nature's products. Our human characteristics thus became merely transformed animal desires, and our 'higher powers' – our rationality, morality, self-consciousness – were only superficial epiphenomena resting uneasily upon their ultimate sources – irrationality, biological necessity, and the unconscious.

<div style="text-align: right;">J. N. Isbister, Freud: An Introduction to His Life and Work (2-3)</div>

Law 22: Use the surrender tactic: transform weakness into power.

When you are weaker, never fight for honor's sake; choose surrender instead. Surrender gives you time to recover, time to torment and irritate your conqueror, time to wait for his power to wane. Do not give him the satisfaction of fighting and defeating you – surrender first. By turning the other cheek you infuriate and unsettle him. Make surrender a tool of power.

<div style="text-align: right;">Robert Greene, The 48 Laws of Power</div>

If the world is like a giant scheming court and we are trapped inside it, there is no use in trying to opt out of the [power] game. That will only render you powerless, and powerlessness will make you miserable. Instead of struggling against the inevitable, instead of arguing and whining and feeling guilty, it is far better to excel at power. [...] If the game of power is inescapable, better to be an artist than a denier or a bungler.

<div style="text-align: right;">Robert Greene, The 48 Laws of Power</div>

Art has never shown, in any corner of the earth a condition of advancing strength but under this influence. I do not say observe, influence of "religion," but merely of a belief in some invisible power – god or goddess, fury or fate, saint or demon.

<div style="text-align: right;">John Ruskin, Academy Notes (1859)</div>

Your sages say "if human, therefore weak:"
If weak, more need to give myself entire

To my pursuit; and by its side, all else . . .
No matter: I deny myself but little
In waiving all assistance save its own –
And I regret it; there's no sacrifice
To make; the sages threw so much away,
While I must be content with gaining all.

<div align="right">Robert Browning, Paracelsus (1. 661-8)</div>

Man should be humble; you are very proud!
And God dethroned has doleful plagues for such!

<div align="right">Robert Browning, Paracelsus (1. 711-2)</div>

Knowledge comes only from within.

<div align="right">J. S. Mill, On Genius (1832)</div>

Crush not my mind, dear God, thou I be crush'd:
Hold me before the frequence of thy seraphs,
And say – "I crush'd him, lest he should disturb
"My law. Men must not know their strength: behold,
"Weak and alone, how he had raised himself!"

<div align="right">Robert Browning, Paracelsus (2. 236-40)</div>

NOTES

CHAPTER ONE

[1] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Götzen-Dämmerung. Oder: wie man mit dem Hammer philosophirt.* First published in 1889, translated into English by R. J. Hollingdale as *Twilight of the Idols. Or: How to Philosophize with a Hammer.* London: Penguin Books, 1990; see p. 29.

[2] Michel Foucault, *L'Ordre du discours.* Paris: Gallimard, 1971, pp. 54-55. Translated by R. Swyers as "Orders of Discourse," in *Social Sciences Information*, Vol. 10, No. 2, April 1971, republished as "The Discourse on Language," appendix to the U.S. Edition of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, pp. 215-237, and as "Order of Discourse," in M. Shapiro (ed.), *Language and Politics.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1984.

[3] Christopher Norris, "Foucault and Philosophy," in: *Southern Review*, Vol. 26, No. 2. July 1993. Adelaide: University of Adelaide.

[4] Derrida has always strongly opposed his strategy referred to as "deconstruction" to be in any serious way associated with Heidegger's "Destruktion." He has been very cautiously avoiding any affirmative statements or definitions what his philosophy of writing is; he would rather stick to what it is *not*. In her 1986 book *Derrida and the Economy of Différance*, Irene E. Harvey writes (p. 23): "Derrida defines deconstruction more by what it is not that what it is. A summary of this negative determination would include the following list as a minimal outline or sketch of the field we intend to analyze here: (Deconstruction is not) (a) metaphysics, as per the Western tradition; (b) "philosophizing with a hammer," as per Nietzsche; (c) "the destruction of metaphysics," as per Heidegger; (d) dialectics, as per Hegel; (e) semiology, as per Saussure; (f) structuralism, as per Lévi-Strauss; (g) archaeology, as per Foucault; (h) textual psychoanalysis, as per Freud; (i) literary criticism, as per "New Critics"; (j) philosophy or epistemology, as per Plato and Socrates; (k) a theory/logic/science of textuality, as per Barthes; (i) hermeneutics, as per Gadamer; (m) "Un Coup des Dès," as per Mallarmé; (n) transcendental phenomenology, as per Husserl; (o) a critique of pure reason, as per Kant; (p) an empiricism, as per Locke and Condillac; (q) a "theatre of cruelty," as per Artaud; (r) a commentary, as per Hyppolite; (s) a translation, as per Benjamin; (t) a signature, as per Ponge; (u) a corrective reading, as per Lacan; (v) a book of questions, as per Jabès; (w) an infinity exceeding all totality, as per Levinas; (x) a painting, as per Adami; (y) a journey to the castle, as per Kafka; nor (z) the celebration of a Wake, as per Joyce."

[5] Swinburne, in his *George Chapman: A Critical Essay* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1875, p. 16), shows his critical eloquence standing for Browning in the defence of the old master's great gift of perception and imagination, arguing that "[...] if there is any great quality more perceptible than another in Mr. Browning's intellect it is his decisive and incisive faculty of thought, his sureness and intensity of perception, his rapid and trenchant resolution of aim. To charge him with obscurity is about as accurate as to call Lynceus [one of the Argonauts, whose sight was so keen that he could see through the earth] purblind or to complain of the sluggish action of the telegraphic wire. He is something too much the reverse of obscure; he is too brilliant and subtle for the ready reader of a ready writer to follow with any certainty the track of an intelligence which moves with such incessant rapidity, or even to realize with spider-like swiftness and sagacity his building spirit leaps and lightens to and fro and backward and forward as it lives along the animated line of its labour,

springs from thread to thread and darts from centre to circumference of the glittering and quivering web of living thought woven from the inexhaustible stores of his perception and kindled from the inexhaustible fire of his imagination."

CHAPTER THREE

[1] In Leitch (1983, pp. 71-72), we read: "Paul Bové wrote the first 'deconstructive' dissertation accepted by an American university. In "A 'New Literary History' of Modern Poetry: History and Deconstruction in the Works of Whitman, Stevens, and Olson" (Ph. D. diss., State University of New York at Binghamton, 1975), Bové tries *destructive* readings of three major poets and of four major critics, including Cleanth Brooks, Harold Bloom, Walter Bate, and Paul de Man. His immediate aim is to *destroy* formalist and aesthetic criticism and to liberate the works of Whitman, Stevens, and Olson from stultifying misreadings."

[2] My conjecture is based on the fact of Browning's denial of any interest in 'elaborate metaphysics' – as he called the philosophy of one of the most recognised and influential philosophers of the nineteenth century, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, in a letter to Frederick J. Furnivall of 2 October, 1881. The letter was his reaction to John Bury's attempts to draw some kind of correspondence between his and Hegel's ontological concepts: "As for Hegel – I am rejoiced if our wits should jump – but *I never read a word of his* [emphasis added] – caring as little as you for elaborate metaphysics" (*Browning's Trumpeter: The Correspondence of Robert Browning and Frederick J. Furnivall, 1872-1889*. Ed. William Peterson. Washington, D.C.: Decatur House Press, 1979, p. 29). There is very little likelihood that Browning had heard of Nietzsche at all: in his adult life – before the mental collapse – Nietzsche lived in almost complete seclusion, kept a very low profile, and his books, the publication of which he financed himself, sold extremely poorly. We should also note in passing that Hegel's dialectic philosophy gave birth to Marxist radicalism, so there is a potential "radical" trace – or *fore*trace, as in the forecast – in Browning, and, as we shall later see, in Swinburne, as well.

CHAPTER FOUR

[1] Letter to Georg Groddeck 5:6:1917 (no. 176), *Letters*, p. 323.

[2] Numbers in parentheses after texts refer to volume and page numbers in the F.G. Kenyon edition (*The Works of Robert Browning*) in ten volumes, London, 1912.

[3] Johannes Agricola is quoted in Defoe's *Dictionary of all Religions* (1704) as the founder of a religious sect called antinomians. The following entry was included as an epigram with the original publication of the poem in the *Monthly Repository*:

Antinomians, so denominated for rejecting the Law as a thing of no use under the Gospel dispensation: they say, that good works do not further, nor evil works hinder salvation; that the child of God cannot sin, that God never chastiseth him, that murder, drunkenness, etc. are sins in the wicked but not in him, that the child of grace being assured of salvation, afterwards never doubteth ... that God doth not love any man for his holiness, that sanctification is no evidence of justification, etc. Pontanus, in his Catalogue of Heresies, says John Agricola was the author of this sect, A.D. 1535.

Antinomianism was viewed at that time as an extreme form of Protestantism, and the publication of the poem in the liberal journal was considered to be a satirical attack on it.

CHAPTER FIVE

[1] The text of lines 591 and 593, available in one of the recent editions of Browning's *Sordello, The Poetical Works of Robert Browning*, vol. 2, edited by Ian Jack and Margaret Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992, p. 483), reads as follows: "And speak for you. Of a Power above you still/ ... /Is out of

rivalry, which thus you can/. I have purposefully preserved and quoted the earlier, uncorrected versions of the passage.

[2] "In the poor snatch itself . . . our Elys, there,

("Her head that's sharp and perfect like a pear,
So close and smooth are laid the new fine locks
Coloured like honey oozed from topmost rocks
Sun-blanched the livelong summer") – if they heard
Just those two rhymes, assented at my word,
And loved them as I loved them who have run
These fingers through those fine locks, let the sun
Into the white cool skin . . . nay, thus I clutch
Those locks! – I needs must be a God to such."

[3] In the Explanatory Note to the poem "To the Reader" on p. 351 of the English translation of *The Flowers of Evil* (1993), we read that *Ennui* has been "frequently translated into English as 'boredom,' but 'boredom' seems not forceful enough for what Baudelaire intends. 'Ennui' in Baudelaire is a soul-deadening, pathological condition, the worst of many vices of mankind, which leads us into the abyss of non-being. Baudelaire recognizes Ennui in himself, and insists in this poem that the reader shares this vice. Here he personifies Ennui as a being drugging himself, smoking his water-pipe (hookah)."

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ABSTRACT

This study uses elements of the philosophies, methodologies and strategies of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Martin Heidegger, and Friedrich Nietzsche to examine the selected works of two English Victorian poets: Robert Browning and Algernon Charles Swinburne. The premise from which the following discourse stems is that Victorian poetry voiced strenuously a deep and profound existential crisis, particularly as regards faith, and the collapse of such traditional Western values and absolutes as truth, morality and God. The work argues that this necessitated the revaluation of all hierarchies, concepts and values and called for a new, modern self. As Browning's and Swinburne's poetry reveals, the process of a creation of a new man (such as Nietzsche's *Übermensch* or Browning's Paracelsus), long and painful, mostly concerned a shift in the relations of *power*. With the proclamation of the death of God (Nietzsche), God's disappearance (Browning), and God as a supreme evil (Swinburne), a new distribution of power, which enabled the creation of a new man, was inevitable.

Chapter I, being essentially a *discourse on the power discourse*, introduces the problems the study deals with, along with the necessary philosophical and critical categories and notions. The author concentrates on various forms of discourse, explaining also the methodology of critical literary research utilised in the project.

Chapter II (*Michel Foucault and the Power Model. The Discourse of Power, Force and Violence*) is an attempt at presenting Foucault's model of power along with the categories assigned to it. Attention is also given to a Marxist power model.

Chapter III (*Nietzsche and Browning: Philosophising with a Hammer vs. Hammering with Philosophy. The Discourse of Philosophy As Poetry/Poetry As Philosophy*) and Chapter IV (*Death and Disappearance of God. The Discourse of God's Power, Absence, and Transvaluation of All Values*) aim at uncovering the Nietzschean underpinning of the Browningesque concept of the disappearance of God, and the creation of new man as exemplified by Paracelsus. Abyss becomes a territory of unexplored vastness of knowledge in which power is its most essential informing element.

Chapter V (*Nietzsche/Foucault and Browning/Swinburne: The Discourse of Power of Madness and/or Madness of Power*) discusses the questions of power and madness from the perspective of "pre-logos" that existed before the split of Reason and Madness (here the Foucaultean category of madness as unreason is particularly helpful in textual analysis of selected poems).

Chapter VI (*The Metaphor of "Woman." Nietzsche and Swinburne: The Discourse of Power of Love/Love of Power*) examines the "woman" figure and the various faces it has in the poetry of Swinburne. The author formulates a thesis that the Nietzschean concept of revaluation of all values had its parallel in Swinburne's transvaluation of aesthetic values demonstrated in his poetry, particularly in his presentation of feminine male power and masculine female power, and the exploration of various sexual types including hermaphroditism (androgyne) and lesbianism.

Chapter VII (*A Cry Over the Abyss: The Path Ends*) aims at disclosing the concept of abyss both as an expression of existential fear and the Derridean *mise-en-abym*, or plunge into the black hole of mere text. It also formulates some theses, from the Nietzschean perspective, in regard to the future of man and the world. In his final assertion, the author concludes that abyss is the territory of man's psychological and existential isolation in the world, and man – deprived of a stable, reliable ground of his beliefs – is just a tightrope dancer. A cry that man utters is enforced, violently sounded out, and is a mark of both the will to power and his total powerlessness in the face of the existential void around him.

KRZYK NAD PRZEPAŚCIĄ: DYSKURS SIŁY/MOCY/WŁADZY W POEZJI ROBERTA BROWNINGA I ALGERNONA CHARLESA SWINBURNE'A

Streszczenie

Praca ta stosuje elementy filozofii, metodologii i strategii Michela Foucaulta, Martina Heideggera i Friedricha Nietzschego w celu zbadania wybranych dzieł dwóch angielskich poetów epoki wiktoriańskiej: Roberta Browninga i Algernona Charles'a Swinburne'a. Punktem wyjścia niniejszego dyskursu jest przekonanie, że poezja wiktoriańska głosiła w sposób zdecydowany głęboki i znaczący kryzys wiary i upadek takich tradycyjnych zachodnich wartości i absolutów, jak prawda, moralność czy Bóg. Autor stawia tezę, że spowodowało to konieczność przewartościowania wszystkich hierarchii, koncepcji i wartości, oraz uwidoczniło potrzebę stworzenia nowego (modernistycznego) modelu tożsamości. Jak pokazuje poezja, zarówno Browninga, jak i Swinburne'a, proces stwarzania nowego człowieka (takiego jak *Übermensch* Nietzschego czy Paracelsusa Browninga), długi i bolesny, dotyczył głównie zmiany w obrębie relacji *władzy/mocy/siły*. Wraz z ogłoszeniem śmierci Boga (Nietzsche), zniknięcia Boga (Browning), czy też nazwaniem Boga najwyższym złem (Swinburne), nowa dystrybucja władzy/mocy/siły – która umożliwiłaby stworzenie nowego człowieka – stała się nieunikniona.

Rozdział I, będący zasadniczo *dyskursem na temat dyskursu władzy/mocy/siły*, przedstawia problematykę, jaką podejmuje powyższa praca, wprowadzając niezbędny aparat filozoficzno-krytyczny. Autor koncentruje się na różnych formach dyskursu, wyjaśniając również metodologię badań literackich użytą w tym projekcie.

Rozdziału II (*Michel Foucault i model władzy/mocy/siły. Dyskurs władzy, siły i przemocy*) jest próbą prezentacji modelu władzy/mocy/siły Michela Foucaulta jak również kategorii wchodzących w jego skład. Poświęcono również uwagę marksowskiemu modelowi władzy/mocy/siły.

Celem **Rozdziału III** (*Nietzsche i Browning: Filozofowanie młotem kontra młotowanie filozofią. Dyskurs filozofii jako poezji/poezji jako filozofii*) i **Rozdziału IV** (*Śmierć i zniknięcie Boga. Dyskurs władzy/mocy/siły Boga, nieobecności i przewartościowania wszystkich wartości*) jest ujawnienie nietzscheańskich przesłanek browningowskiej koncepcji zniknięcia Boga i procesu tworzenia nowego człowieka na przykładzie Paracelsusa. Przepaść staje się w tym utworze terytorium niezbadanej obszerności wiedzy, w której władza/moc/siła jest najbardziej esencjonalnym elementem ją tworzącym.

Rozdział V (*Nietzsche/Foucault i Browning/Swinburne: Dyskurs władzy/mocy/siły szaleństwa i/czy szaleństwa władzy/mocy/siły*) dyskutuje kwestię relacji władzy/mocy/siły i szaleństwa z perspektywy „pre-logosu", jaki istniał przed rozdziałem Rozumu od Szaleństwa (tutaj foucauldiańska kategoria szaleństwa jako nie-rozumu jest szczególnie pomocna w tekstualnej analizie wybranych wierszy).

Rozdział VI (*Metafora „kobiety." Nietzsche i Swinburne: Dyskurs władzy/mocy/siły miłości/miłości władzy/mocy/siły*) analizuje postać „kobiety" i różnorodne maski, jakie przybiera ona w poezji Swinburne'a. Autor stawia tezę, że Nietzscheańska koncepcja przewartościowania wszelkich wartości miała swoją paralelę w Swinburnowskiej próbie transwaluacji wartości estetycznych, jaką zademonstrował w swojej poezji, szczególnie w prezentacji kobiecej męskiej władzy/mocy/siły i męskiej kobiecej władzy/mocy/siły oraz w eksplorowaniu różnych typów zachowań seksualnych, takich jak hermafrodytyzm i lesbianizm.

Rozdział VII (*Krzyk nad przepaścią: Ścieżka kończy się*) jest próbą przedstawienia koncepcji przepaści zarówno jako wyrażenia egzystencjonalnego strachu i derridiańskiego *mise-en-abyme*, czy też skoku w czarną dziurę samego tekstu. Autor również formułuje – z nietzscheańskiego punktu widzenia – pewne tezy dotyczące przyszłości człowieka i świata. W swoim końcowym stwierdzeniu autor konkluduje, że przepaść jest obszarem psychologicznej i egzystencjonalnej izolacji człowieka w świecie, a człowiek – pozbawiony stabilnego, pewnego gruntu swojej wiary – jest zaledwie tancerzem na linie. Krzyk, jaki człowiek wydaje, jest wymuszony, gwałtownie udźwięczniony, i jest znakiem zarówno woli do zyskania władzy/mocy/siły, jak i jego całkowitej bezsilności w obliczu pustki egzystencjonalnej wokół niego.