Blake's Golden Load

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How many bards gild the lapses of time ! (Keats)

At the threshold of William Blake's poetic career we find a small, much-mined volume of poems called *Poetical Sketches* (1784). His only work published in conventional letterpress, it begins with a little poem of beginnings, *To Spring*, followed by three other poems addressed to each of the remaining seasons. On the face of it, these poems would seem to be eminently simple and comprehensible as representations of a human voice as it changes and develops in an ongoing relationship with an external Nature. But like the rest of the volume, these poems are unreadable—save in the most banal sense--unless we locate them in a context of discourse mapped by codes of literary practices Considered as the clearly imitative and derivative work of a late eighteenth-century adolescent, to bring them under the reins of interpretive control seemed at first to pose few problems.[1] But as Blake's reputation for 'originality' and 'creative genius' has grown in the last few decades, the situation has become more problematic. How can the point/place/moment of origin of an original genius be a belated scene of copying or imitation ? A reading of origins is clearly called for, and interpreters of Blake have answered,

There are several lines approach that tempt Blake scholars when confronting the *Poetical Sketches* One of the most popular has been dismissed by Robert Gleckner as the "anticipative fallacy" (*Prelude* 2), an apt phrase for those like Harold Bloom who maintain (ed) that "at an astonishingly early age, Blake has grasped in sure potential all the fundamentals of his great program and theme" (*Apocalypse* 17) Even Gleckner himself cannot resist anticipation's power when he comes to Blake's season poems, which for him embody a theme "clearly anticipative of Blake's states of Innocence and Experience...... it (the theme) anticipates Los the creator and Urizen, the destructive, tyrannical 'god of this world." (63—64).

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Most critics do not limit themselves to looking forward but—Janus-like—look backwards to Blake's sources. Here too a special form of double-reading seems inevitable. Prowling through the Bible, works of Spenser and Shakespeare, various Elizabethan songs, Milton, Thomson Young, Collint, Gray, Beattie and the Wartons, Chatterton and the Ossianic prose poems, we can collect an impressive flood of words, phrases and images that reappear in the *Poetical Sketches.* As we do so, we find Blake sounding more and more like his precursors, becoming not an origin but an echo. Fortunately, through the miracle of interpretive ingenuity, we have ways to show that the more he sounds like them the more different he is from them. For example, Geoffrey Hartman can read the last two lines of *To Winter* ("till heaven smiles, and the monster/ Is driv'n yelling to his caves beneath mount Hecla.") as deliberately conventional, so that they become in his oxymoronic formulation "an inspired period cliche" ('Progress" 204). Or, to borrow foom Gleckner again, we find Blake ' amid the remnants of conventional, even hackneyed, phraseology and diction" (68) engaged in "ostensible apishness" (12) which manages somehow to transform "the verbal and imagistic traditions he inherited" into "vision inspired and articulated by true art" (12). Blake seems to have anticipated Borges' Pierre Menard, whose "*visible* work" is unexceptionable and conventional, but whose "other work..... perhaps the most significant of our time" is a "subterranean" project ' to produce a few pages which would coincide—word for word and line for line—with those of Miguel de Cervantes......" Cervantes' text and Menard's are verbally identical, but the second is almost infinitely richer. (More ambiguous, his detractors will say, but ambiguity is richness.)" (38 42). For Menard, the technique of the "deliberate anachronism" allows him to trope his precursor ; it is a technique that "fills the most placid works with adventure" and "has enriched......the halting and rudimentary art of reading" (44) which concerns us here, as would-be miners of textual riches.

Blake's text appears in a context where copying and allusion, or 'imitation,' was not only an expected first stage in any artistic career, but an essential part of the poetic enterprise as an accepted style or mode of composition.2 For Blake to offer us "echoes and themes from the Bilble, the classics, and even the high odic tradition of the eighteenth century" is not simply "poetic diction in search of its truth" (Hartman 194) but poetry in search of a *context*, and finding one in an 'echo chamber' where it is impossible to echo the Bible directly, without also echoing a style or mode of echoing in which the original souce of sound has long been lost. The

task of the reader is similarly difficult, if s/he wants to hear the voice of a controlling and self-contained individual poet escaping all the forces that undermine and challenge his individuality. How can we grant Blake a distance from the conventions he seems to invoke, granting him that origin—ality that means 'being present' at the time and place of a *new* beginning ? There is more at stake here than a reading of a few individual poems : we are contemplating the birth of an 'original poetic career, one which signals the coming of the new era of Romanticism. To seek this understanding is to contemplate a poetic act as a rebirth of language itself, comparable to the originary event that might have generated the first human utterance ; and since individual words can do their work only in a field of discursivity, we must locate Blake's work in a completely new context rather than as a moment in a series that is governed by prior organization and differentiation. We must do this in spite of the fact that the discourse of Romanticism was not yet in place (though it is for us, hence we may well bring it with us *to* Blake), and in spite of the fact that the external form or surface of Blake's work presents itself to us in a form which Hartman can call a "splendid pastiche" (194). Splendid or not, a "pastiche" is a work that imitates the style of prior works, a style which is itself a principle of organization where 'orignality' is either not valued or not possible. Finally, what if a text represents itself to us as an echo of a series of echoes of an originary voice, echo invoking the master-trope of irony, to distance itself from the naieve presumption of saying something new ?

Morris Eaves has tried a reading of Blake's "theory" which argues for a "radical" Blakean transformation, where he "may in some respects seem to echo Reynolds and Opie," but in fact is "not recycling classicism but performing a critical experiment in encoding radical romantic ideas in an Enlightenment vocabulary."

> It is fair to say that Blake parodies Enlightenment criticism in such instances but essential to see also that the parody is in another way true. The method involves nothing more unusual .. than retaining the manner of the object of parody while altering the matter, or, more specifically, silently shifting the grounds on which decorum rests. Reynold's concessions to truth for the sake of oversetting truth are grounded in Enlightenmet mimesis, Blake's truth in romantic expression. (159)

For Eaves the same terms can function as "mimesis" or "expression" through some kind of shift of "grounds" which doesn't involve the *surface*

of the text, which functions only as a mask. We mihgt well ask how "parody" (which is dependent on its object) can either signal or effect a shift of grounds. Similar problems are found if we invoke the trope of irony, a rhetorical mask which signals the metalinguistic code which is either the most distant from the essence of an autnnomous expressive subject (the *eiron* is not responsible for what he says) or the closes to it (his *personal* meaning is not determined by the conventional meanings of the words he uses). In the ironic mode only the speaker knows what he really means, and sometimes perhaps even he does not know.

What we have in these approaches is a system of similarities and difference, where even the most extreme similarity is seen as superficial, while the difference claimed is radical. In the precursor text the poetic surface hides error, while in Blake it reveals truth. In one case any simplicity of the surface reveals radical simplicity, but in another it proves radical complexity. Writing of "To the Muses" in the same volume, Gleckner notes "the fundamental Augustan conventionality of the diction," yet claims that "it owes virtually nothing to any poetic model and achieves a bold complexity belied by its limpid surfrce" (29). Even the conventional tropes of eighteenth-century verse can be transformed if we egree with Bloom, who claims that "Thomson's personifications are clear and simple," but Blake's "become actual mythmaking" (*Apocalypse* 1).

Were I to develop it here, my own interpretation of the season poems might in some ways provide a similar instance, since it would doubtless sound *like* various aspects of other readings. I do agree with the general view that these poems are early and vigorous instances of what Blake would later call "Mental Fight"—not "the mental warfare that resurrects the crucified truth" or "demands that we fly with him on his plumed wide wings to the realms of truth" (Gleckner 11, 13-14). To put it another way, Blake does not give us *his* "golden load" of song and truth, but rather follows in an epitomizing and ironic way the seasonal and tropological system for producing "truth" that prevailed in the 18th century. One of the problems of fully appreciating parody is that we cannot understand it unless we have some minimal sense of the original. A parody (*paroidia*) is a song written alongside another song, as though in the margins or between the lines of a prior book. The qualities we associate with style or 'voice' are important for its recognition, and Blake gives a great deal of attention to qualities of voice throughout the *Sketches*. His attention is not merely to isolated nuances or repetitions of prior voices in the form of verbal echoes, but to the power and potential of those voices as they are

inscribed in and practiced within a systematized code of poetic discourse — including those rhetorical techniques or strategies (like apostrophe, use of the pentameter) that operate to create the representational effect of a 'speaking voice' In the *Sketches* Blake may be read as 'trying on' a variety of voices, not in the superficial manner that one can try on a suit of clothing, but in the manner of his advice to God : "If you have formd a Circle to go into / Go into it yourself & see how you would do" (516).

Such trials do not in every case have to be critical or ironic, even if they are self-conscious and tentative. In *L'Allegro* Milton pretends to test the Allegro mode partly to see how it would do ("These delights, if thou canst give, / Mirth with thee, I mean to live."), but also to find grounds to bid it go "hence," to trope on it in order to *turn from* it to the pleasures of the melancholy prophetic mode in *Il Penseroso*. Like all poets after Milton, Blake tries both modes, but in doing so—in a poem like "Memory, hither come" – he shows that he understands how the two modes have been structured by Milton and his followers into a system, a poetic progression from the "merry notes" of the music of day to "places fit for woe ; / Walking along the darken'd valley, / With silent Melancholy." Blak's "Mad Song" shows signs of discomfort with and in the systematic progression, representing the singer's awareness that even though the system is constituted by his own song ("My notes......strike the ear of night, / Make weep the eyes of day ; / They make mad the roaring winds, / And with tempests play.") he can imagine no way out of a system which links his potential for song with a cyclical diurnal progression. He must continually "turn" his back to the illusory "comforts" of the east, the daily return of the sun and the annual return of spring and eros, in order to remain in a metaphoric night of his own making.

> I turn my back to the east,
> From whence comforts have increas'd ;
> For light doth seize my brain
> With frantic pain.

The conventional seasonal invocation begins with an apostrophic address *to* the "east," with the poet figuratively turning his back to the implied audience. There is then a 'rhetorical' madness in Blake's song, where the fictive singer while trying to turn against the system can only turn within it. Light, whether the false light of the physical sun, or the metaphorical "light" of philosophical insight, seizes his *brain* in its epistemological grasp. He is much more like a lyrical photophobic

Edward Young than the Elizabethans with whom he is so often compared. The song "How sweet I roam'd" is quite different in tone and effect, but deserves comparison on a number of points. Chief among them is that recurring shock of recognition each time we read the poem and realize that *this* is the "song" that is sung *in* the "golden cage," with its "golden pleasures" and its "golden wing" incapable of free poetic flight. In it we can simultaneously hear Blake singing the song, indulging in its golden pleasure, and taking the role of the Phoebus who

> loves to sit and hear me sing
> Then, laughing, sports and plays with me ;
> Then stretches out my golden wing,
> And mocks my loss of liberty.

There is a complex system of poetic power at work here, in which the seductive force of a poetic mode is inextricably intertwined with the powerlessness of that mode.

The seasons poems give us a three—fold use of the word "golden," with the third instance concluding the third season, as Autumn departs leaving behind his "golden load" or harvest of song.

TO SPRING

> O deck her forth with thy fair fingers ; pour
> Thy soft kisses on her bosom ; and put
> Thy golden crown upon her languishd' head,
> Whose modest tresses were bound up for thee !

TO SUMMER

> O thou, who passest thro' our vallies in
> Thy strength, curb thy fierce steeds, allay the heat
> That flames from their large nostrils ! thou, O Summer,
> Oft pitched'st here thy golden tent, and oft
> Beneath our oaks hast slept, while we beheld
> With joy, thy ruddy limbs and flourishing hair.

TO AUTUMN

> O Autumn, laden with fruit, and stained
> With the blood of the grape, pass not, but sit
> Beneath my shady roof........
> Sing now the lusty song of fruits and flowers.
>
> "The narraw bud opens her beauties to
> "The sun, and love runs in her thrilling veins ;
> "Blossoms hang round the brown of morning, and

"Flourish down the bright cheek of modest eve,
"Till clust' ring Summer breaks forth into singing,
"And feather'd clouds strew flowers round her head.

"The spirits of the air live on the smells
"Of fruit; and joy, with pinions light, roves round
"The gardens, or sits singing in the trees."
Thus sang the jolly Autumn as he sat,
Then rose, girded himself, and o'er the bleak
Hills fled from our sight; but left his golden load.

Clearly there is here some version of a 'progress of poesy, that we must understand in order to read the poem The Spring-Summer-Fall progression his tempted many critics to perceive a poetic alchemy in which Blake transforms his raw material into what Bloom calls "This 'golden load' " of lyricism, which "the departing poet bequeaths us" before leaving. Whereas 'How sweet I roam'd" is for Bloom an account of "the deceptions of nature as the responsible agent of transition" (19), he detects in *To Autumn* "a mature harvest bard who sings a song of fruition" (16).

Gleckner's assay of Blake's golden load determines, as so many readings do, that the Spring-Summer-Autumn series is superior visionary poetry, complete in itself, representing "the imaginative achievement of oneness, fullness, end joy" (69) in "a vision of what eternally exists really and unchangeably" (68). At the end "Autumn flees, but only from corporeal vision" (68), in a move that escapes the seasonal cycle which for Blake represents "error." Blake is thus deconstructing the "prevailing seasonal paradigm" (70) and "the conventional framework of the cycle" (71) which asserts "the comforts of a conventional rebirth of Spring to console our sense of loss in Winter the very mythological construct and tradition Blake is at some pains to subvert. Time is not *the* Time" (73). In thus raising the question of Blake's relationship to discursive structures, and in particular to "seasonal and diurnal paradigms," Gleckner is moving towards an important context. However, by not having an adequate sense of those seasonal and diurnal paradigms—as they are embodied in 18th-century works such as Thomson's *Seasons*, Young's *Night Thoughts*, and Cowper's *The Task*, Gleckner is unable to perceive either the similarities *or* the differences that might profitably guide our attention. In missing the point, he re-enacts the seasonal paradigm itself, ironically (for us) attributing that re-enactment to Blake, and confirming one of the basic truths of the paradigm—that what is most attractive in nature is also the most dangerous.

A more careful reading of Blake's precursors would show that the season of Winter was important for them precisely because it was the season *within* the seasons that forced a rupture of the otherwise endless cycle of the physical ratio. Winter provided the opportunity to experience the rupture of the moral sublime, in the form of a felt experience of the incomensurability between the empirical and the spiritual or rational, an experience that was occasioned by external sense yet forced a recognition of the need to transcend the limitations of external sense. Poets of the eighteenth century had already made a turn that Gleckner and others have missed, contrasting the authentic colors of Nature with the 'colours of rhetoric,' which were figurative only. But with the epistemology of Locke, linked with the discoveries of Newton in the *Opticks*, the colors of Nature were themselves brought into the realm of human language and rhetoric, requiring a new reading and opening the way to a new writing. The seasons themselves could thus be read as tropes – or 'turns' in a rhetorical progression and a tropological curriculum in which the *absence* of color (wintry whiteness for Thomson and Cowper, the blackness of night for Young) is the final trope of insight. Thomson's claim that his song called "Spring" is *painted'* by Spring means that it is colored by the same "bright enchantment" that deceives those who do not have the "sage-instructed eye" which can separate the "ethereal" colors of the rainbow from the "white mingling maze" that cannot be directly perceived by the human eye or expressed in human language.3

The apostrophic trope that opens most poems addressed to seasons has the appearance of an authentic event, an act of power and participation. As a 'turn' (*apo—strophe*, turning away) from the reader to Nature, the poet can discover that the seasons are themselves turns in the year, consequences of the turns in the circuit of the sun. In apostrophizing Spring, Blak's opening poem turns to Spring ("our longing eyes are turned/ Up to thy bright pavillions") to ask Spring to "turn/ Thine angel eyes upon our western isle." For the first three seasons, natural event seems to correspond with and the respond to poetic event, responsive to the pathos of human desire, until we reach Winter where "He hears me not" and "I dare not lift mine eyes"—unable to perform the turning gesture which inaugurated the re-turn of Spring. Or did it ? Turn in Winter is a turn in the circuit of communication which emphasizes a *break* in that circuit, and raises the possibility that the turning eyes and voice in the apostrophic discourse were united only in a contingent and illusory union.

Blake's Season poems need to be read in the context of a self-consious use of figurative language in the interests of a verbal self-negation that

marks so much of the poetry of his precursors, and leads them to locate their vantage-point in Winter, on the metatropological level of irony which, though having to continue to use the naive tropes can, by using them self-consciously, evoke a difference that is expressed as the non-expressible, or represented as the non-representable. The "natural" seasonal turn to winter becomes a rhetorical turn to the trope of irony and difference, a turn away from the naive tropes of resemblance and contiguity that produce an illusory metaphoric golden load as the unproblematic affirmative fruit of the union of Logos and Eros—a turn that anticipates Elliot's world-weary equivalent of Blake's "Mad Song" which experiences April as "the cruelest month" and tries to turn its back to the east, as well as the humorous perspective of Burns' ode to spring in *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*:

Latona's Sun looks liquorish on
  Dame Nature's Grand impetus
Till his pego rise, then westward flies
  To roger Madame Thetis

If we return now to Gleckner's reading of Blake's seasons, we can see more clearly some of the problems he has in adequately defining for Blake a "vision" that "is complete with the end of *To Autumn*, in its totality inherent in and symbolized by Autumn's 'golden load.'" The negative truth that Gleckner attributes to that vision is Blake's discovery of the 'error' of a contrary vision based on the paradigm of the natural cycle. This truth requires a final 'turn' *To winter*, and our reading of it as "a spectrous parody, in proper sequence, of Spring-Summer Autumn" (70). Such a reading, while claiming to define a Blake different from his seasonal precursors, unwittingly locates him in a prior discourse of Truth, already inscribed in a rhetorical system especially designed to produce it, so that interpreters can recognize its familiar iterbility at the same time that they insist that it comes forth with the novelty and freshness of a new spring. In such a system, the same truth needs the same error, time after time, and cannot exist without it. The cycle of Truth ("coming and going . . . united") is inseparable from the cycle of Error. The truth that language can express in sensory images to express the truth.

Readers can 'find' this message in Blake's poems, not because they are different from the tropological curriculum of other season poems, but because they are in fact so much like them in general outline and technique. No doubt Blake was trying on the seasonal paradigm. going into and repeating its progression 'to see how he would do, and to see how *it*

would do. I imagine him therefore in a much more problematic and interesting situation, feeling strongly the tug of what Vico called "sensory topics," the libidinal tug of the East, and of the Sun continually rising as "the unique, irreplaceable, natural referent, around which everything must turn, toward which everything must turn" (Derrida, *Margins* 251). But I imagine Blake also feeling the counter-tug, of the sun as the paradigm of metaphor, the sensory sun which may exist in poetic discourse only as metaphor, that heliotropism which is both a movement turned toward the sun and the turning movement of the natural sun that *sets* each day as surely as it rises. Blake ambivalently contemplates this ambiguous "golden load," left behind by his troping precursors and by the ever-westering Sun. Then he too flees from our sight, leaving a rhetorical "golden load" for our assay.

II. MADE IN THE SHADE

> *Sol tibi signa dabit. solem quis dicere falsum audeat* ? (Vergil)

> Begin, ephebe, by perceiving the idea
> Of this invention, this invented world,
> The inconceivable idea of the sun (Wallace Stevens

> What we want is to . . . re-establish the living organic connections with the cosmos, the sun and earth, with mankind and nation and family. Start with the sun, and the rest will slowly, slowly happen. (D.H. Lawrence)

> The sun is the sensory object par excellence. It is the paradigm of the sensory *and* of metaphor: it regularly turns (itself) and hides (itself). As the metaphoric trope always implies a sensory kernel, or rather something like the sensory, which can always not be present in act and in person, and since the sun in this respect is the sensory signifier of the sensory par excellence, that is, the sensory model of the sensory . . . then the turning of the sun always will have been the trajectory of metaphor. (Derrida)

> Phoebus is dead, ephebe. But phoebus was
> A name for something that never could be named.
> There was a project for the sun and is. (Wallace Stevens)

One of the most widely shared views of the eighteenth century was that civilization and the arts flourish best, and could only have started, in a temperate zone. In an imagined golden age before the fall, when the ecliptic and equatorial circles coincided, this special relationship with the sun would have been perpetually maintained in certain favored

equinoctial areas where sowing and harvest could follow their own rhythm. With the tilting of the earth's axis, the ecliptic became oblique, and the alternations of the seasons began. Whether Christian or pagan, seasonal poetry must locate itself in a special relationship to the sun in order to flourish. We can see Blake's test carefully defining this relationship in *To Summer*, in preparation for the 'fruitful' song of Autumn:

> Beneath our thickest shades we oft have heard
> Thy voice, when noon upon his fervid car
> Rode o'er the deep of heaven; beside our springs
> Sit down . . . , .
>
> Our bards are fam'd who strike the silver wire:
> Our youth [s] are bolder than the southern swains:
> Our maidens fairer in the sprightly dance:
> We lack not songs, nor instruments of joy,
> Nor echoes sweet, nor waters clear as heaven,
> Nor laurel wreaths against the sultry heat.

The sun leaves Virgo near the end of August to enter Libra, where the autumnal equinox coincides with the 'time' of Blake's *Autumn.* Blake's "shades" here are autumnal, as the song of jolly Autumn evokes the full vegetable spectrum from spring to harvest. It is a special kind of shade conducive to poetry, but it is also the special 'shade' of the laurel wreath, the shade of pastoral poetry, which defines a situation close to but protected from nature; not a transitory diurnal shade, or a seasonal equinox, but a literary *topos* (i.e. "place") which presumes to escape the contingencies of a fallen natural world and reconstitute of the golden age before the fall. By Blake's time, as recorded in Gray's "The Progress of Poesy" (1768), the "track" of pastoral had followed the sun westward, leaving 'parnassus' for the Latian plains, "moving north to "climes beyond the solar road" so that Shakespeare could be born "far from the sun and summer-gale."

It is by locating Blake's inaugural poems in the context of pastoral poetic tropes that we can best see his point of entry into the practice of poetry, and see his work as paradigmatic for poetry and its interpretation. Pastoral has a special place among the genres as a set of organizing and enabling conventions and a hallowed function as the organizing genre for the progression of the poetic 'career.' As such part of its function is to be ostensibly left behind by the poet, while its organizing effects, though hidden, continue to determine the fate of poetry. "What is the pastoral convention, then, if not the enternal separation between the mind that distinguishes, negates, legislates, and the originary simplicity

of the natural ? . . . . There is no doubt that the pastoral theme is, in fact, they only poetic theme, that it is poetry itself" (de Man, *Blindness* 239).

This 'convention' was inaugurated in England by Spenser's *Shepheardes calender* (1579), confirming the vergilian 'progression' and making pastoral the inevitable beginning point for a poetic career. In this tradition the young poet finds his starting-point to be situated by the pastoral *umbra* and especially prepared for his beginning efforts.[5] Although sheltered, it is a place in a dynamic system which turns, moving the poet forward, so that the beginning gesture in the genre receives the promise of self-transcendence: "to invoke it is already to assume the insufficiency of the tradition in the very act of rehearsing its tropes" (Fish, 6) "That is, the desire of the poet to rise above the pastoral is itself a pastoral convention and when the speaker . . . gives voice to that desire he succeeds only in demonstrating the extent to which his thoughts and actions are already inscribed in the tradition from which he would be separate . . . he is only playing out the role assigned him in a drama not of his making" (Fish, 10). Pastoral is thus continuously aiming at (or turning, troping towards) something it is not, something absent, something greater on the ascending scale of genric progression. But it is much easier to get into this pastoral machine than to get out of it, as the singer in Blake's "golden cage" ("How sweet I roam'd . . . ") found out too late.

A comparison of the infant's entry into language (*infans*, incapable speech) with the poet's entry into poetic discourse can add a certain emphasis to this point. Both are instances of the individual's assumption of the place produced for him by a complex of discursive formations; and in both cases what appears to be a new beginning reveals that the subject always already finds itself and its discourses in place.[6] As tales of origin, both take the same form of a "diachronic fable of a synchronic functioning" (MacCabe 87). In the development of a child there is a moment when the child enters language by becoming aware of certain places which s/he can occupy as a speaking subject; these places are identity-producing points of insertion into language In pastoral winter is typically represented as a time before speech is possible, the silence before speech blossoms in spring and to which it returns in the cycle ("He withers all in silence" *To Winter*). In the meantime there is a 'temperate' zone of poetic utterance, that pastoral zone which defines-in de Man's phrase--the only poetic theme . . . poetry itself."

Vergils first *Eclogue*, in the pastoral convention that provides the aegis for all seasonal poems, had articulated the poet's place as that occupied by Tityrus (*Lentus in umbra*, "relaxed in the shade"), whose special

location allows uninterrupted fertility for his crops and flocks, and the corresponding leisure for poetic production. In this he differs markedly from Meliboeus, whose lack of protection means he must drive his goats on an unending path, a slave to the seasonal sun, ranging the world from the torrid deserts of Africa to the frigid climes of England (*At nos hinc alii sitientes ibimus Afros . . . et Penitus toto divison orbe Britannos*). Commentary has speculated since Servius on the human identity of the absent protector / benefactor who provides Tityrus with his creative *libertas*, but I would like to suggest as a metaphorical alternative that the absent benefactor is the sun, whose *absence* (as natural force and object) is necessary to provide an artistic place of *libertas* for the free reign of the poet's tropes.

If the possible subject of poetic enunciation is already inscribed in the synchronic pastoral machine which constantly provides the only and already-available position characteristic of any discursive formation, then that position can be seen to have a special relationship to the sun, a prototypical relationship characteristic of that between all signifiers and their 'real' signifieds, which are mental constructs rather than the natural objects with which they have only a rhetorical relationship. Our experience of the natural sun embodies this relationship of presence / absence with unusual clarity, so that the natural relation has become exemplary for poetic troping.[7] we are affected by the sun without seeing it directly, and our mediated perception (in the 'shade' of language) is *figured* by the literal impossibility of looking directly at the sun without becoming blind. Lucretius warning that the sun will blind you if you gaze at it (*sol etiam caecat, contra si tendere pergas*) can only be ignored in language used as allegory:

> Last of all, he would be able to look at the sun and contemplate its nature, not as it appears when reflected in water or any alien medium, but as it is in itself in its own domain. (230)

Plato's metaphor for ultimate philosophical insight here does not contradict the fact that "unmediated expression is a philosophical impossibility" (de Man, *Blindness* 9) but embodies that fact in its language-mediated troping on the equation between natural blindness and philosophical insight.

The epistemological model of this relationship was worked out by a number of thinkers in the seventeenth century, with Descartes third meditation being one of the clearest and most accessible examples. The distinction he makes between "adventitious ideas" (that appear" foreign to me and coming from without"), ideas that are "innate," and those that are "made or invented by me" (196-7) leads him to the example of the sun as exemplary instance :

> For example, I find present to me two completely diverse ideas of the Sun; the one in which the Sun appears to me as extremely small is, it would seem, derived from the senses, and to be counted as belonging to the class of *adventitious ideas*; the other, in which the Sun is taken by me to be many times larger than the whole Earth, has been. arrived at by way of astronomical reasonings, that is to say, elicited from certain notions *innate in me*, or *formed by me in some other manner*. Certainly, these two ideas of the Sun cannot both resemble the same Sun; and reason constrains me to believe that the one which seems to have emanated from it in a direct manner is the more unlike . (198-99 italics added) [8]

Since the 'made' sun (one of the *factae vel factitiae* 19) has "more objective reality" than the natural sun, it can be carried over metaphorically to figure the "innate" idea of the sun which hides its rhetorical origins in the image of the "inhexhaustible light" of a God who dazzles the powers of the human mind as the natural sun dazzles its powers of sensory perception. [9]

Hobbes echoes the dynamic aspect of this 'constructed' sun by finding the model for its making already in the mediated structure of sensory experience. For him our sense of outword forms comes neither directly from external objects nor from the "divers motions" exerted by those objects on the senses. Instead, it is the "resistance or counter-pressure, or endeavour of the heart, to deliver itself" of the pressure of those motions (85). What we call "sense . . . in all cases, is nothing else but originall fancy, and our image making faculty ["Imagination"] is what "is called *Sight*; and seemeth not to be mere Imagination, but the Body itself without us" (85, 657). Imagination is a faculty of mediation (i. e. an *umbra*) which functions in the *absence* of the objects of sense perception: "and the motion made by this pressure, continuing after the object is removed, is that we call *Imagination* and *Memory*" (658).

For Hobbes our "image" of the sun, like our "idea" of it, is known only through the inward motions of the heart, an inward imagination that produces light in spite of the 'blindness' of natural perception. Imagination, or "decaying sense" (88) can reappropriate as metaphor the solar phenomenon of the eclipse as an external image of internal phenomena: "The decay of Sense in men wakig, is not the decay of the motion made in sense; but an obscuring of it, in such manner, as the light of the Sun obscureth the light of the Starres, which starres do no less exercise their vertue by which they are visible, in the day, than in the night" (88).

These two models, the ontological and the epistemological, exhibit the conceptual basis for the endless set pieces on the sun that shine out with special brilliance in seventeenth- and eighteenth century poetry. Cut off from sensory perceptions, safe in the rhetorical shade of his nocturnal *umbra* ("from objects free, from passion cool . . . these tutelary shades/ Are man's asylum") Young revels in the "Darkness [that] strikes thought inward . . . drives back the soul/ To settle on herself, our point supreme !" (*Night V*, 120 130). From this withdrawn vantage point the domain of language turns heliotropically towards the "dominions" of the sun:

> Full ample the dominions of the sun !
> Full glorious to behold ! How far, how wide,
> The matchless monarch, from his flaming throne,
> Lavish of lustre, throws his beams about him,
> Farther and faster than a thought can fly,
> And feeds his planets with eternal fires !
>
> (*Night* IX, 1617-22)

The dazzling radiance of the absent sun becomes an implicit figure for the poet, also "lavish of lustre," who throws out his tropes like rays of light emitted from the sun. In both cases the *effect* of presence and familiarity hides by its brightness and vividness the absence that makes it possible:

> Behold the light emitted from the Sun,
> What more familiar, and what more unknown ?
> While by its spreading Radiance it reveals
> All Nature's Face, it still itself conceals.
>
> Blackmore ii/ 386-9)

If we can leap now, from Descartes in his little room and Edward Young at his midnight desk, to Proust in his corklined study, we find him writing a passage in *Swann's Hay* that both hides and reveals his scene of writing. Having resisted his grandmother's suggestion that he go outside to play, Marcel finds his place "stretched out on [his] bed, with a book, in [his] room which sheltered, tremblingly, its transparent and fragile coolness from the afternoon sun."[10] The only light in the room is a "glimmer of daylight" which is captured in the image of "Yellow wings" as it remains "motionless . . . poised like a butterfly."

> It was hardly light enough to read, and the sensation of the light's splendor was given me only by the noise of Camus . . . and also by the flies executing their little concert, the chamber music of summer: evocative not in the manner of a human tune that, heard *perchance* during the summer, afterwards reminds you of it but *connected to summer by a more necessary link*: born from beautiful days, resurrecting only when they return, *containing some of their essence*, it does not only awaken their image in our memory it guarantees their return, *their actual, persistent, unmediated presence.*
>
> The dark coolness of my room related to the full sunlight of the street as the shadow relates to the ray of light, that is to say it was just as luminous and it gave my imagination the total spectacle of the summer, whereas my senses, if I had been on a walk, could only have enjoyed it by fragments . . . . (italics added).

De Man gives this passage what he calls "a rhetorically conscious reading" (*Allegories* 15) by following the movement of its tropes as they express two different way of evoking the natural experience of summer--the difference between chance/contiguity (metonomy) and necessity/ analogy (metaphor). For my purposes here the names of the tropes are not as important as the underlying distinction, which is the same one that marks the crucial Romantic opposition between symbol and allegory. For Coleridge the symbol is a motivated sign; "it always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative," while allegorical signs are "but empty echoes which the fancy arbitrarily associates with the apparitions of matter" (30).[11] For proust the indirect sunlight and the music of the flies seem at first

to offfer the necessary link" of the motivated sign or symbol, free from the fortuitous chance of sensory experience which can yield only fragme-nts. The passage can be seen as self- referential in its implicit claims to have transcended the contingent natural world through the kind of mastery by which a lepidopterist captures a specimen and mounts it on a board. But de Man exposes the dependence of this dominion (of essential figures of substitution) on contingent figures of substitution, so that the "return" or "resurrection" of the flies in the text is a "rhetorical mystification" in which "metaphor becomes a blind metonymy" (102).

De Man's concern here with the battle between the tropes can create its own mystification, but it can also help us to see that the real battle being staged is between 'nature' and 'art'. In this encou-nter *both* metaphor and metonymy are crucial weapons, but each has a drawback which makes it inadequate alone to create the illusion of permanently present value. Metaphor, which relies on resemblance and analogy, can create the effect of an unchanging relationship in the absence of one of its terms or elements; but the other side of this effectiven-ess is that its terms must always be separate and distinct-- I can assert "x is y" metaphorically when x is *not y* (otherwise I would be making a literal sta-tement, not a figurative one). So if I write "Love is golden," only cert-ain parts of the 'gold" are carried over in the metaphoric transfer because--as Midas found out--love and gold are different. As signifiers both words are present in my discourse, their signifieds absent; yet I can claim a link or relationship that obtains between "love" and "gold" even if there is neither love nor gold in the world. If I write "the air is golden" (even though at the moment it is raining) my implicit claim is that the sun is shining or glimmering through the air; the air will be golden only as long as the contingent relationships (sun, air and clouds, my position, etc.) remain the same. But these are notoriously transitory.

As the metaphor finds a permanent link dependent on separation metonymy finds a contingent link, a moment of proximity that cannot, remain in a world of comings and goings. With this distinction in mind, we can now see more clearly the strategy of proust's text, which is to achieve the *combined* effect of metaphor and metonomy, thereby convin-cing us that Marcel *really was* in that room as described. Of course that fleeting moment ("fragile . . . poised like a butterfly") is gone: but its departure testifies to its authenticity, since it must have been there to

fade. It can be "resurrected" in the 'present' text being written by "Marcel" ("I *had* stretched out...)" and the resurrection confirms for us that Marcel *was* there in the shade "with a book" that he was writing about "a book" that he was reading *in the same shade.* But the real 'Marcel' for us is Proust, whom we must read and 'resurrect' in *our* shade.

The important opposition here is not simply between metaphor and metonymy for both are, in spite of their differences, merely tropes. The difference is between "the chamber music *of* summer" and a "human tune" only "heard perchance during the summer" which therefore will only "remind you" by an accidental association. For Coleridge this was the distinction between the Imagination (which worked like nature in achieving its organic unities) and the Fancy, which was arbitrary and mechanical. We can see in it also the contrast between the plenitude of nature with its motivated signs and the emptiness of human writing, the arbitrariness of human signifiers. It is precisely this distinction that allows writing to triumph over nature by losing to nature, since the Nature that triumphs over art is itself an *effect* produced by an art that hides its artfulness. Proust's text must suggest the evocative quality of the "flies little concert," which in turn is evocative of summer because the song is "born from beautiful days, ressurrecting only when they return, containing some of their essence." The text's change at this point to the present tense emphasizes the paradoxical *identity* of the two modes of song which are being contrasted ; what was is, and will always be, because of the "necessary link" between the flies' "little concert" and beautiful days. The ambiguous reference of the pronoun ("it does not only awaken their image in our memory ; it guarantees their return, their actual, persistent, unmediated presence"/ "*elle n'en reveille pas seulement l image dans notre memoire, elle en certifie le retour la presence effective, ambiante*, immediatement accessible") and the emphatic shift to the present tense wagers a redemptive identity between the music of the flies and the evocative power of the text. The punning trope "chamber music of summer" ("*la musique de chambre*") shows that the music, like the flies themselves, can exist for us only as textual effects, chamber music produced and consumed in the pastoral *umbra* of a darkened room ("*dans ma chambre Cette obscure frocheur de ma chambre*"). For we too are figured in the triumph of the text, produced as readers who like Marcel turn our backs on nature for the text which has captured and unified its essence.

At this point we could linger over Proust's text, and listen also to the 'chamber music' of Keats's "small gnats" that provide their similar fragile