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# SIR THOMAS BROWNE AND THE NEO-PLATONIC THEORY OF THE MICROCOSM

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APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

BY



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# SIR THOMAS BROWNE AND THE NEO-PLATONIC THEORY OF THE MICROCOSM

## INTRODUCTION

Rudolf Allers finds the common element of Renaissance periods to be Neo-Platonism.[1] The Great Renaissance, he says, was not simply Platonic, but owing to the prominent place given the theories of the microcosm, it was decidedly Neo-Platonistic. Plato has little to say about the correspondence between the little world of man and the great world, although there is a cursory treatment of this doctrine in the Timaeus. The dualistic split in Platonism is too vast, too broad to entertain a doctrine which could see a reflection of man in the Cosmos, or a reflection of the Cosmos in man, not simply a metaphorical relationship, but an actual part-by-part correspondence. Neo-Platonism, however, particularly the Neo-Platonism of the Great Renaissance, with its bridging of the vast dualistic gap between God and man, could and did find "in man's nature the sum, the 'quintessence' of the cosmical powers."[2] If

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[1]Rudolf Allers, "Microcosmus: from Anaximandros to Paracelsus," Traditio, II (1944), 319-321.

[2]W. Windelbrand, A History of Philosophy; With Especial Reference to the Formation and Development of its Problems and Conceptions, trans. James H. Tufts (2d ed., rev.; New York: The MacMillan Co., 1910), p. 369.

the world was composed of four elements, man was also composed of four elements; if the world was composed of three souls, man was composed of three souls. Said Paracelsus, "Now, the limbus [formless matter] is heaven and earth, the upper and lower sphere of the cosmos, the four elements, and everything they comprise; therefore it is just to identify it with the microcosm, for it too is the whole world."[3] This macro-microcosm correspondence is central to the Neo-Platonistic philosophies of Agrippa von Nettesheim, Pico della Mirandola, Nicholas Cusanas, Giordano Bruno, and Jacob Boehme. The doctrine of the macrocosm "mirrored" in the microcosm was the essence of the Great Renaissance endeavor to reconcile the realms of the sensuous and the supersensuous.[4]

In the Middle Ages, faith and philosophy had been assigned to separate, closed compartments: "Everything supersensuous had been relegated to the realm of dogma, and as the object of philosophy there remained only the world of experience."[5] In the face of such a bifurcation there was no way of really "knowing" the existence of God. Through the doctrine of God being reflected in his creation (macrocosm) and through the doctrine of man (microcosm) being a duplication of the greater creation, Renaissance Neo-Platonists

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[3]Paracelsus: Selected Writings, ed. Jolande Jacobi, trans. Norbert Guterman (Bollingen Series XXVIII; New York: Pantheon Books, 1951), p. 91.

[4]Windelbrand, loc. cit., p. 367.

[5]Ibid., p. 366.

effected a reconciliation of faith and philosophy. Said Agrippa von Nettesheim in his Occult Philosophy,

> Whosoever therefore shall know himself, shall know all things in himself; especially he shall know God, according to whose Image he was made; he shall know the world, with which he symboliseth; and what comfort he can have and obtain, from Stones, Plants, Animals, elements, Heavens, from Spirits (a demonibus), Angels, and everything.[6]

The separation between faith and reason that had ushered in the Renaissance had been reconciled by the Neo-Platonists and their doctrine of the microcosm. Toward the end of the Renaissance there again appeared a split, this time as a result of the influence of the "new science." This movement, with "Bacon as its prophet and Descartes as its theoriser,"[7] set about to resuscitate science from decay and superstition. The "old science" had suffered, the new scientists thought, from its tie with religion and theology. The solution then was to cut science away from faith, thereby marking off a workable territory for empirical investigations. Therefore, in the seventeenth century, faith and reason were again well on their way to division: transcendentals were relegated to the realm of faith, and science claimed as its inviolable own the realm of the particular and the sensuous.

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[6]Agrippa von Nettesheim, Occult Philosophy, p. 460, quoted in Elizabeth Holmes, Henry Vaughan and the Hermetic Philosophy (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1932), p. 30.

[7]Paul Elmer More, "Sir Thomas Browne," Shelburn Essays (sixth series; New York: Princeton University Press, 1909), p. 106.

Men of science came to be looked on, understandably enough, as atheists; this was particularly true of physicians. Yet, in Sir Thomas Browne we meet a physician who was also a man of faith; he was indeed a man who lived in "divided and distinguished worlds."

How controversial must have been the first book that Browne published, Religio Medici, A Physician's Faith. As the title of this work suggests, Religio Medici was Sir Thomas' attempt to reconcile the split realms of faith and science. The first sentence of the book is a reassurance to the reader that, even though it is unique, the author is truly both a man of science and a Christian:

> For my Religion, though there be several Circumstances that might persuade the world I have none at all, as the general scandal of my Profession, the natural course of my Studies, the indifference of my Behaviour and Discourse in matters of Religion, neither violently Defending one, nor with common ardour Opposing another; yet, in despight hereof, I dare without usurpation assume the honourable Stile of a Christian (Works, I, 5).[8]

To reconcile the divided worlds Browne turns, as Mirandola, Agrippa, and Bruno had done earlier, to the philosophy of Neo-Platonism and its theories of the microcosm. The Religio is a thoroughly Neo-Platonic book, and Browne is, above all things, a Neo-Platonist. Just as the earlier Neo-Platonists

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[8]All citations to Browne's writings refer to The Works of Sir Thomas Browne, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (New York: William Edwin Rudge, 1928-31), 6 vols. Citations to volume and page of this edition are given in parenthesis when the reader might have some difficulty in finding the quotation.

had reconciled the realms of matter and spirit with their theory of macro-microcosm, Browne dedicates his three great works, Religio Medici, Hydriotaphia, and The Garden of Cyrus, to an exposition of the Neo-Platonic theory of microcosmism, and, as a consequence, to a demonstration of the mutual inclusiveness of the two realms of science and faith, matter and spirit. These two are discursively reconciled in the Religio Medici. However, the reconciliation is presentationally or artistically demonstrated in Hydriotaphia and The Garden of Cyrus and in their relationship to one another.

## CHAPTER I

## SIR THOMAS BROWNE AND NEO-PLATONISM

### Sources of Browne's Neo-Platonism

Although the library of Sir Thomas Browne contained such Neo-Platonic items as the works of Philo of Alexandria and a collection of the works of Dionysius the Areopagite,[9] it was probably through his contact with and interest in alchemy and Hermeticism that he assimilated Neo-Platonistic doctrine. As Windelbrand points out, alchemy and Hermeticism, "transcendental" alchemy, were nothing more than logical developments of Neo-Platonistic doctrine.[10] Neo-Platonism stated that before the creation of the world, all material existed in a formless chaos. God, through an extension of himself, gave form to this chaotic material, finally impregnating all form at the end of six days. The great creation of God, the world or the macrocosmos, had as its foundation ordered form and harmonious law which was

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[9] A Catalogue to the Libraries of the Learned Sir Thomas Browne, and Dr. Edward Browne, his Son, Late President of the College of Physicians (London, 1710-11) lists Philonis Judaei Opera and S. Dionyfii Alexandr. Opera omnia as items 12 and 16, respectively, on p. 1.

[10] Windelbrand, loc. cit., pp. 373-374.

identical to the order to be found in man, the microcosmos. The macrocosm was an exact duplicate of the microcosm, and the essential nature of both was God-ordained form. If one could abstract the structure of man from his flesh, then one could get a glimpse of the divine principle of the world. Consequently, if the alchemist could reduce an object in nature to its essence, thus freeing its divine form, he could then influence "magically" the essence of either the macrocosm or the microcosm. In his Theatrium Chemicum Britannicum, Ashmole says that the alchemist can so handle "the universal and all-piercing spirit [form]" that God infused into the primal chaos "as to take it from corpority, free it from captivity, and let it loose that it may freely work as doth in aethereal bodies."[11] This was the object of alchemy. Usually, practitioners of this occult science sought to cut away "corpority" from an ordinary stone, which was called prima materia.[12] The object of alchemical operations was to reduce this prima materia to essential form by subjecting it to a series of transformations. First, the stone was put through a process of disintegration; the

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[11]Elias Ashmole, Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum, containing several pieces of our famous Philosophers who have written the Hermetique Mysteries in their own Ancient Language (1652), p. 447.

[12]The source for the summary of alchemical procedure is taken from Carl Jung, The Integration of the Personality, trans. Stanley Dell (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1949), p. 208f.

resultant material was white. This whitening was called albedo. The substance was then subjected to a process of reddening (rubedo), followed by yellowing (citrinitas). If the alchemist had been successful, the prima materia had been transformed into the "philosopher's stone," which was "the universal and all-piercing spirit" to which Ashmole refers; "it was to heal all diseases, transmute all substances into gold [pure metallic form], conjure all spirits [forms] into the powers of its possessor."[13]

Alchemy, then, was an attempt to apply the logical extension of Neo-Platonism to empirical activity. The occult doctrine which accompanied directions for materialistic processes in alchemical manuscripts was known as Hermetic doctrine. It is an anachronism to state that Hermeticism was an outgrowth of Neo-Platonism. However, generically the two philosophies are one, and any ontological argument as to which doctrine preceded the other ultimately resolves itself into, "which came first, the chicken or the egg?"

The mythical Hermes Trismegistus is said to be the founder of Hermeticism, and the origins of this doctrine are associated with Egypt. The identity of Hermeticism with Neo-Platonism is indicated in the title John David Chambers gives to his translation of fragments of ancient writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, The Theological and Philosophical

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[13]Windelbrand, loc. cit., p. 374.

Works of Hermes Trismegistus, Christian Neo-Platonist.[14] As with Renaissance Neo-Platonism and alchemy, "at the heart of the [Hermetic] tradition was the conception of Nature as a symbol of the divine Mind, a key to the secret union with God, as well as to the mastery of the material world."[15] Therefore, in the light of this doctrinal identity, it is no error in logic to state that Sir Thomas Browne probably absorbed the greater part of his Neo-Platonism from alchemy and its twin, Hermeticism.

Browne mentions directly the influence of Hermeticism on his philosophy three times in the Religio Medici,[16] the most important being his statement of the Neo-Platonistic paradox of the real, invisible and the unreal, visible.

> The severe Schools shall never laugh me out of the Philosophy of Hermes, that this visible world is but a Picture of the invisible, wherein, as in a Pourtraict, things are not truely, but in equivocal shapes; and as they counterfeit some more real substance in that invisible Fabrick (Works, I, 17).

Moreover, one finds in Sir Thomas' library such Hermetical items as Hermetical Banquest drest by a Spagyrical Cook and Arthur Dee's Fasciculus Chemicus Hermeticae Scientiae.[17]

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[14]The Theological and Philosophical Works of Hermes Trismegistus, Christian Neo-Platonist, ed. John D. Chambers (Edinburough: T. & T. Clark, 1882).

[15]Wilson O. Clough, "Henry Vaughan and the Hermetic Philosophy," PMLA, XLVIII (1933), p. 1110.

[16]These three passages are the following : Works, I, 14; Works, I, 17; and Works, I, 40.

[17]A Catalogue of the Libraries of the Learned Sir Thomas Browne . . . , p. 51, no. 113, and p. 27, no. 56.

Even though Browne realized that the alchemists' philosopher's stone was "something more than the perfect exaltation of gold" (Works, I, 49), his interest in alchemy was life-long. This interest was not at all unique, says William P. Dunn, in an age when Kenelm Digby, "although a member of the Royal Society, was advertising a power of sympathy that cured from a distance, and reporting that burning glasses could gather light into a purple power," and Boyle "was still looking for the philosopher's stone."[18] However, unlike Digby and Boyle, Browne was capable of maintaining a balance in these occult matters; he was able to abstract the philosophical truth from alchemy on the one hand, and on the other eliminate the elements of chicanery and charlatanism in this "science." It is significant that this man, so absorbed in empirical investigation and scientific experimentation, should have never actually practiced the art of alchemy. Sir Thomas could separate the true "Egyptians" from the "vagabond and counterfeit Egyptians" (Works, I, 75).

Browne's first contact with alchemy and Hermetic philosophy probably came during his stay at the University of Leyden in 1633. Also a student in this year was the later-eminent-professor Sylvius, the disciple of Baptiste

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[18]William P. Dunn, Sir Thomas Browne: A Study in Religious Philosophy (2d rev. ed.; Minneapolis: Univ. of Minn. Press, 1950), p. 10.

van Helmont (1577-1644), the man who had, as it were, revived the teachings of Aureolus Philippus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, or Paracelsus (1492-1541). Whether Browne ever met Sylvius is not known. However, he probably felt an intellectual kinship with this man and his Paracelsian doctrine, as the great number of Sylvius' books in Browne's library would seem to attest. It is not at all unlikely that Browne's important contact with Paracelsus was through Sylvius. As Edmund Gosse points out, Browne was "full of the doctrine of Paracelsus, a philosopher who appears . . . to have exercised a commanding influence over Browne's intelligence."[19]

In some ways Paracelsus was a man much like Sir Thomas Browne. He was a physician, yet, at the same time, a deeply religious man. He was aware of the split made by scholasticism between faith and reason, just as Browne in the seventeenth century was keenly aware of the tremendous split threatened by the "new science." However, beyond these few circumstances, these two men differed violently, mainly because Paracelsus was the epitome of the German temperament, even as Browne was the epitome of the English. Paracelsus, as myth tells us, for he became a myth even in his own lifetime, was a vain, violent, tempestuous man. His name Bombastus became the adjective bombast, which characterizes

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[19]Edmund Gosse, Sir Thomas Browne (English Men of Letters; New York: The MacMillan Co., 1905), p. 40.

the attitude of his age toward him. Hated and hunted by almost all Germany from the age of forty-five till his death four years later, Paracelsus was an enemy of the Galenist school of medicine, a searcher for the philosopher's stone (and, as tradition has it, a possessor of this stone), and a student of nature. Almost a monomaniac during the last years of his life, "he claimed for Hermetist medicine cure impossible under the older system, and he advocated that the physician seek knowledge from nature."[20] How unlike the retiring and modest Sir Thomas Browne's temperament was that of Paracelsus!

Paracelsus' doctrine was basically Neo-Platonic, and legend has it that his teacher was actually Agrippa von Nettesheim.[21] As with other Renaissance Neo-Platonists, the macro-microcosm doctrine was central to the philosophy of Paracelsus. George P. Conger points out, "Of all who have held that man is a microcosm, no one has been more thorough-going than Paracelsus."[22] Man and the world, said Paracelsus, are both self-enclosed bodies, one being a duplicate of the other. Both are animate, consisting of two natures: the infinite nature, the soul "which springs from the breath of

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[20]Clough, op. cit., p. 1114.

[21]Paracelsus, op. cit., p. 71.

[22]George P. Conger, Theories of Macrocosmos and Microcosmos in the History of Philosophies (New York: Columbia Univ. Press), p. 55.

God" and the finite, or the corporeal body. Both macrocosm and microcosm are composed of the four ancient elements; and like man's body, the world is composed of mercury, sulphur, and salt. As man has a soul, so also does the macrocosm; these two, however, are not identical. In all created things God breathes indirectly a soul; this is the world soul. However, in man, God directly infuses His spirit. Let us go directly to the works of Paracelsus to see how he handles this problem of God's spirit in man:

> And all this [the world] became the matrix womb of man; in it God created man in order to give His Spirit a dwelling place in flesh . . . . Before heaven and earth were created, the Spirit of God brooded upon the water and was carried by it. This water was the matrix; for it is in the water that heaven and earth were created and in no other matrix. By it the Spirit of God was borne, that is to say, that Spirit which lives in man, and which is lacking in other creatures . . . . Therefore the Spirit of God comes to dwell in man, and is of God and returns to God.[23]

In handling the problem of the world soul and the soul of man, Browne seems to employ the diction of the above passage; it is almost as if he had had before him a copy of the physician's occult work:

> Now, besides these particular and divided Spirits, there may be (for ought I know) an universal and common Spirit to the whole World . . . . However, I am sure there is a common Spirit that plays within us, yet makes no part of us; and that is, the Spirit of God, the fire and scintillation of that noble and mighty Essence, which is the life and radical heat of Spirits . . . . This is that gentle heat that brooded on the waters, and in six days hatched the World (Works, I, 40).

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[23] Paracelsus, op. cit., pp. 87-8.

There exists in Paracelsian Neo-Platonism, with the exception of the quality of the souls, a one-to-one correspondence between the parts of the macrocosm and the microcosm; the two have the same essence, order, or form. An infirmed body, said Paracelsus, is one in which the God-created order has become dis-ordered; to cure diseases, the physician must only restore order. Where does one apprehend the essential order of the microcosm? Paracelsus tells physicians to devote themselves to the study of nature, for there, by a proper interpretation of outward "signatures," they may abstract the internal essence which is duplicated in man.

> There is nothing that nature has not signed in such a way that man may discover its essence.[24]
> . . . . . .
> Therefore you can discover man's immortal part in his visible, innate, characteristic signs, and you can know him even by his appearance; for the outer reveals the inner.[25]

As we can readily see, the doctrine of the correspondence of the macrocosm and the microcosm was central to all of Paracelsus' philosophical and medical theories. In fact, "the term 'microcosmos' or its equivalent is used by Paracelsus more often than by any other writer—perhaps as much as by all the writers up to his time taken together. He was perhaps the originator of the term 'macrocosmos.'"[26]

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[24] Ibid., p. 195.

[25] Ibid., p. 200.

[26] Conger, op. cit., p. 57.

In addition to the Neo-Platonic doctrine Browne might have picked up through his contacts with the writings of Paracelsus and the writings of his disciples, such as van Helmont and Sylvius, there is another, deeper contact with Neo-Platonism, through alchemy and Hermeticism, that met Browne on his return from the Continent in 1633. This was his close friendship in Norwich with Dr. Arthur Dee, son of the Dr. John Dee who was alchemist to Queen Elizabeth. Browne settled in Norwich in 1636, and Arthur Dee died in 1651; therefore, the contact Browne had with his alchemist neighbor occurred sometime within this fifteen-year span. The scanty record of this relationship is to be found in the correspondence between Browne and Elias Ashmole.

In 1657 Mr. (later, Sir William) Dugdale began to write to Sir Thomas requesting information regarding the natural history of the area around Norwich, which information he intended to incorporate in the book on which he was working, History of Imbanking and Draining of divers Fens and Marshes (1662). Browne, in turn, wrote letters to Dugdale requesting information about urns and Roman coins which Dugdale had turned up in his explorations. In early 1658, Dugdale was laid up with scurvy for several weeks. Elias Ashmole seized this opportunity to correspond for his father-in-law, and also to ask for details regarding the life of Dr. John Dee. Although Ashmole does not appear to have had a very profound understanding of the significance of alchemy

and Hermeticism, he was interested in such curiosities, for such he considered them, all his life. Evidence of this is found in his translation, from Latin, of Arthur Dee's Arcanum of Hermetic Philosophy, and his own Hermetic collection, Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum, containing several pieces of our famous Philosophers who have written the Hermetique Mysteries in their own Ancient Language (1652); a copy of the latter is found in Sir Thomas Browne's library.[27] This is the same Ashmole who, in 1677, presented his library to Oxford University, his library forming the nucleus of the Ashmolean Museum.

In his correspondence with Ashmole, Browne tells him more about Arthur Dee, his one-time neighbor, than he does about John Dee. Sir Thomas calls Arthur Dee his "familiar friend" (Works, VI, 321) and tells us that he "was very well acquainted with Dr. Arthur Dee" (Works, VI, 324). Of Arthur Dee himself, Browne writes Ashmole:

> Hee was a persevering student in Hermeticall philosophy and had noe small encouragement, having seen projection made; And with the highest asservations hee confirmed unto his death, that he had ocularly, undecevably, and frequently beheld it in Bohemia . . . (Works, VI, 321).

At his death in 1651, Dee awarded his friend Browne the custody of nine Hermetic manuscripts.

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[27] A Catalogue of the Libraries of the Learned Sir Thomas Browne . . . , p. 47, no. 56.

## Neo-Platonistic Thought in Religio Medici

If there is a single ground of agreement among the critics of Religio Medici surely it is that here is a highly disorganized book. But, as Browne confesses to the reader, the Religio was a "private exercise" executed for his own satisfaction. We should not, therefore, expect such a work to be a highly organized philosophical treatise. Consequently, the following section will attempt to reconstruct, as faithfully as possible, from the Religio Medici Sir Thomas Browne's underlying Neo-Platonic philosophy.

While Bacon, the great prophet of the "new science," was limiting man's area of knowledge and stating that penultimately man could know nothing of transcendent reality, Sir Thomas Browne was maintaining that the only reality worthy of man's apprehension, the only truth that man should concern himself with was the evidence of God in his creations. This was the debt man's reason owed to God, and it was the way in which man's intellect caught sight of God's Intellect. And although Browne is a scientist, "the 'reason' of his science is dedicated to the uses of religion."[28] Bacon, Hobbes, and Descartes maintained that the province of man's reason was the particular. Man, they said, was a finite being living in a finite world; therefore, his knowledge could only be of the finite. However, Browne employed his

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[28]Egon S. Merton, Science and Imagination of Sir Thomas Browne (New York: King's Crown Press, 1949), p. 93.

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study of the finite as a mode of gaining access to the infinite. The world was made for the use of man, maintained Bacon; hence man must direct his active energies solely toward the perfection of his natural home. Man could not possibly know the infinite. As a consequence, man-centered "men began to distinguish sharply between reason and faith, man and nature, natural and supernatural, microcosm and macrocosm, and to insist on different laws for each and different way of discovering truth in all."[29] This line of thinking eventually ushered in a mechanistic conception of the universe. But for Browne the universe was animate; it was living, and was as much an organic creation of God as was man. Both were creations of the Infinite, and man, said Browne, must never lose sight of this fact, because to do so would be to create for himself a hell. Man, it must be remembered, was the crucial link in the great chain of being, uniting the finite and the infinite. Consequently, Browne replies to the new science that it has forgotten the infinite, the invisible world known by reason. Bacon and his followers did deny or ignore the invisible infinite, and concentrated on the finite world which was visible to the senses. The new scientists were concerned only with sensuous particulars, particulars in and for themselves. Browne, too, unlike the Cambridge Platonists, was concerned with

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[29]Victor Harris, All Coherence Gone (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1949), p. 6.

particulars; yet these, while important and significant in themselves, had a far greater significance as symbols which led him to an apprehension of transcendent reality, a knowledge of God. So Browne, as the earlier Neo-Platonists, was attempting to bridge the gap between reason and faith.

Bacon saw nature as a machine-like condition which man must learn to manipulate for the welfare of all mankind. For Browne "Nature is the Art of God" (Works, I, 23), and to study nature was to gain some insight into the Intellect which created it. Whatever finite good might come to mankind as a result of Browne's scientific study was incidental to him, for the world he counted "not an Inn, but an Hospital; and a place not to live, but to dye in" (Works, I, 91). Bacon and his followers saw the world as a place to live in, an Inn, and directed all their endeavors toward the scientific "redecoration" of that Inn. However, Browne was about scientific endeavor as he was about virtue or charity. He regarded both as sterile if man-centered; that is, if these were actions not first consecrated to God. Of the seeming "goodness" of Seneca's stoicism, Browne said, "Herein I found there was nought but moral honesty, and this was not to be vertuous for his sake who must reward us at last" (Works, I, 58). And when Browne met a beggar, he gave aid, not as a result of sympathy for the wretch's condition, but as a result of his love for God: "I give no alms only to satisfie the hunger of my Brother, but to fulfill

and accomplish the Will and Command of my God: I draw not my purse for his sake that demands it, but His that enjoyned it . . . " (Works I, 74). Thus we see that all forms of activity, all truth is one-sided and worthless unless it is anchored in a pious worship of God. "Without this, all Religion is a Fallacy, and those impieties of Lucian, Euripides, and Julian, are no blasphemies, but subtle verities, and Atheists have been the onely Philosophers" (Works I, 58). Browne intimates what Donne had expressed so forcefully in his "First Anniversary," that the new science had divorced faith and reason; and, as a result, worldly values had been turned upside down.

On the surface Browne's conception of animate nature seems very close to pantheism, for he says that God is all things; whatever has no being is not God. In this conception of nature, he is following the occult, Neo-Platonic doctrine of "immanence"; that is, that God created through an extension of himself into chaos; as a result, God is all things. "God being all things, is contrary unto nothing, out of which were made all things, and so nothing became something, and Omneity informed Nullity into an Essence" (Works I, 45). If God is all things, then God is also nature. This conception would seem to be a contradiction of Browne's animate and "sensible nature," for nature, being organic, must decay and change. How can the Omnipotent be subject to decay and putrefaction? The resolution of this

seeming paradox rests with Browne's special, Neo-Platonic use of the word creation. When an artist creates, he fuses both matter and form into a production. If he be a sculptor, then his matter is perhaps clay, and upon this clay he imposes a form which gives the shapeless material its meaning. The clay may decay and be destroyed, yet nothing can destroy the sculptor's imparted form, even if this form is no longer visible. So it is with the creations of God: He fused both matter and form into a whole, and produced the creation. Matter will change, but the essential form, the Idea (which, we shall discover, Browne identifies with God) will remain. Thus it is that the Garden of Eden may have long disappeared from the earth, yet the pattern, the "quincuncial lozenge," remains. The larger creation of God, the wedding of matter and Idea, Browne calls the world; the smaller creation, the wedding of flesh and Idea, he calls man.

Browne's theory of creation seems to find its origin in Paracelsus. Paracelsus had said that before the creation, the world was a formless lump of matter, a chaos. To create the world God extended himself, causing this original matter to take shape by division. God is an artist, said Paracelsus, like a woodcarver "who is able to carve out of wood whatever he pleases provided he can separate the wood from that which does not belong to it."[30] After God had caused matter to

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[30]Paracelsus, op. cit., p. 88.

have a form, he indirectly gave it a soul; this is the world soul. Man, as the other creatures of God, was created from the prima materia; yet God made man's flesh for a repository of His spirit. This spirit is unlike the world soul, for it is given directly to man, so long as his flesh shall inclose it. At man's death, his soul returns to God. Browne, too, makes a distinction between the soul of things other than man and man's soul, doing this, as we have seen, in almost the same terms used by Paracelsus. But he deviated from Paracelsus in his conception of God as artist. Browne, it would seem, feels that God did not create by causing a separation of the matter of chaos into forms, but rather He directly imposed forms on formless matter. And for this reason, Browne places more emphasis on the concept of the Idea than does Paracelsus.

Browne remarks that the fusion of two natures in one person (whether it be the macrocosm or the microcosm) is one of the three great mystical unions (Works, I, 82). His explanation of this union of two natures (finite and infinite, body and soul) is Neo-Platonic, involving him in the invisible real, the visible unreal paradox. The Platonic concept of this paradox divorces the two—reality exists in the mind of God, and objects on earth are but imperfect copies of this unknowable reality. Neo-Platonism, and particularly Hermeticism, bridged this vast dualistic gulf, not by eliminating the theory of the Idea, but by maintaining

that all created form is of God. This form is clothed in mortality on earth; to get at the changeless and immutable Idea of God, one has only to look beyond the mortality of bodies. "Do but extract from the corpulency of bodies, or resolve things beyond their first matter, and you discover the habitation of the Angels, which if I call the ubiquitary and omnipresent Essence of God, I hope I shall not offend Divinity" (Works, I, 44). Browne equates the "omnipresent Essence of God" with immutable forms, and it is not until God chooses to destroy these forms or Ideas that either man or the world can be destroyed (Works, I, 50). The Idea resting in the intellect of God, then, is made manifest in indestructible forms. If the Idea of God existed before the creation, then reasons Browne, he too existed before the creation; the world existed before the creation.

> Before Abraham was, I am, is the saying of Christ; yet it is true in some sense, if I say it of my self; for I was not onely before my self, but Adam, that is, in the Idea of God, and the decree of that Synod held before all Eternity. And in this sense, I say, the World was before the Creation, and at an end before it had a beginning (Works, I, 70).

In the intelligence of "the ordainer of order and mystical Mathematicks of the City of Heaven" (Works, IV, 125) resides the Idea; and because the Idea rests in "Eternity there is no distinction of Tenses" (Works, I, 16), that is, "there is a settled and pre-ordered course of effects" (Works, I, 24). For this reason Browne thinks it not ridiculous to say a prayer before "a game at Tables"; in

this case the prayer is not a supplication, but a devotion. In many matters, such as the harmony and order of the progression of the seasons, man can detect the regularity inherent in the eternal Idea. However, often in matters of greatest uncertainty, men feel themselves victims of chance. Foolish men call this fortune. But in God's creation there is no chance—all beings, all actions are predestined:

> And therefore that terrible term Predestination, which hath troubled so many weak heads to conceive and the wisest to explain, is in respect to God no prescious determination of our Estates to come, but a definitive blast of his Will already fulfilled, and at that instant that he first decreed it; for to his Eternity, which is indivisible and all together, the last Trump is already sounded, the reprobates in the flame, and the blessed in Abraham's bosome (Works, I, 16).

In Browne's world all is harmony, all is order. There is no deformity nor monstrosity in this world because "God is like a skilful Geometrician" (Works, I, 22), and He has imparted an organized beauty to his creation. Browne says, "There was never anything ugly or mis-shapen, but the Chaos; wherein, not withstanding, to speak strictly, there was no deformity, because no form; nor was it yet impregnate by the voice of God" (Works, I, 22). This preoccupation with design and form led Browne to an appreciation of numbers and numerical correspondences. "I have often admired the mystical way of Pythagoras," he says, "an the secret Magick of numbers" (Works, I, 17). Neo-Platonists, especially Nicholas Cusanus, saw in harmony and in the Pythagorean concept of justice and numerical proportion a reflection of God's order in the

universe, in the world, and in man. Browne, making use of this doctrine, finds a correspondence between the unheard music of the spheres and "Tavern-Musick." This latter, he says, strikes in him "a deep fit of devotion, and a profound contemplation of the First Composer" (Works, I, 88).

> There is something in it of Divinity more than the ear discovers: it is an Hieroglyphical and shadowed lesson of the whole World, and the creatures of God; such a melody to the ear, as the whole World, well understood, would afford the understanding (Works, I, 88).

As Windelbrand informs us, the essence of Renaissance Neo-Platonism was the "reading" of nature as if it were Scripture, and the apprehension, with admiration, of God's revelation in nature.[31] This theme is found in Paracelsus as a constant exhortation to go to nature, and to seek there the efficient cause, which is God. Browne says that there are two books from whence he collects his divinity, "besides that written one of God, another of his servant Nature, that universal and publick Manuscript, that lies expans'd unto the Eyes of all" (Works, I, 21). If men view nature only through the senses, as the new scientists, then they are only aware of their existences as animals are aware of theirs. The new scientists, with their mechanistic view of nature, Browne probably would have called "vulgar Heads that rudely stare about" (Works, I, 18). To study the world only in a sensate manner was never to know the invisible world. The

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[31] Windelbrand, op. cit., p. 367.

outer world must be seen as a symbol of the inner world which is the essence of God. And to study nature in this symbolistical way is to come as near an understanding of God as the finite mind can come. But it is not by the senses that one comes to know the inner reality of the world, but through the reason. To rationally get at the transcendental through a contemplation of the finite creations of God is "the Debt of our Reasons we owe unto God" (Works, I, 18). Since man is the only creature of God who shares sensate life in common with the animals and rational life with the angels, he must translate, by means of his reason, those objects visible to his senses into reality. The heathens knew better how "to suck Divinity from the flowers of Nature" than we today do, says Browne. They "knew better how to joyn and read these mystical Letters than we Christians" (Works, I, 21). The "mystical Letters" are apparent to the senses, but if one is to reconstruct the essence of divinity, then one must use his reason. In the first book of the Religio Medici, Browne describes the pre-ordained course of nature as a circle (Works, I, 22); this is the circle of the body and the flesh. If one is to understand the ordering of nature within this circle, one must go beyond the flesh and the sensate; this man does through reason. Again picking up this image of the circle in book two, Browne says that although the three hundred and sixty degrees limit his flesh, they do not limit his mind (Works, I, 91). So it is the reason, which man

shares with the angels, that enables Browne to interpret the visible "signatures" of nature and to understand the invisible "essences" which are God.

## Microcosmism in "Religio Medici"

In his article on the microcosm, Rudolf Allers distinguishes six variations of the theory of epitomization, adding that in one way or another all of these have been employed by Neo-Platonists.[32] It is significant, Allers thinks, that all of these theories appear to a greater extent during the Great Renaissance than in other Renaissance periods. After examining the close relationship between macro-microcosmistic theories and Neo-Platonism, Allers concludes that the Great Renaissance was a distinctively Neo-Platonic period. The six forms of microcosmism that he discusses in his article are these: "elementaristic," "structural," "holistic," "symbolistic," "psychological," and "metaphorical" microcosmism.

"Elementaristic" microcosmism is the simplest form of the theory of the correspondence between the "great world" and the "little world," stating as it does that "man contains within his being all the elements of which the world consists."[33] Man, as well as the great world, is twofold, "visible according to the body, invisible according to the

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[32] Allers, op. cit., pp. 319-407.

[33] Ibid., p. 321.

soule or spirit."[34] In common with the body of the macrocosm, man shares the life of plants and animals, and with the spirit in the macrocosm, man shares rational powers of the angels. Man is the only creature in the macrocosm that carries within him the stages of existence which are comprehended in that great world; as a consequence, man's position in the universe is unique—he is the middle link in the great chain of being, living as he does as a link between the spheres of matter and spirit. It is for this reason that the concept of the chain of being plays such an important part in microcosmistic theories. This concept is central to the Neo-Platonism of Browne.

The basic doctrine of man as compendium of the levels of existence is found in its pure state in the Religio Medici. In this work Browne says that although there is only one world to the sense (that is, only the world's body is known by the senses), "there are two to reason, the one visible [body] and the other invisible [soul]" (Works, I, 43). Because of all of God's creatures only man lives in both worlds, he is called by Browne "that great and true Amphibium, whose nature is disposed to live not onely like other creatures in diverse elements, but in divided and distinguished worlds" (Works, I, 43). "We are," Browne says, "onely that amphibious piece between a corporal

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[34]Valentine Weigel, Astrologie Theological (1649), p. 5, quoted in Holmes, op. cit., p. 32.

and Essence, that middle form that links those two together, and makes good the Method of God and Nature" (Works, I, 43). Man's unique position in the center of the chain of being was to Browne an unquestionable axiom. Of this chain he said,

> There is in this Universe a Stair, or manifest Scale of creatures, rising not disorderly, or in confusion, but with a comely method and proportion. Between creatures of meer existence, and things of life, there is a large disproportion of nature; between plants, and animals or creatures of sense, a wider difference; between them and man, a far greater: and if the porportion hold on, between Man and Angels there should be yet a greater (Works, I, 41).

Man comprehends the five kinds of existences in his being. So integrated in Browne's philosophy was the chain of being that in one of the few heated passages in Religio Medici Browne denounces those who would destroy this chain by denying the existence of witches (Works, I, 38). Witches he said were "Spirits," and to deny them would be to bring the orderly chain to disorder. Browne's strong necessity to believe in witches can perhaps explain his part in the witch trial of Amy Duny and Rose Cullender at Bury St. Edmunds in 1664.

The second theory of microcosmism that Allers defines is "structural." This theory is simply an advanced development of the "elementaristic," and states that not only do the parts of the micorcosm 'mirror' the parts of the macrocosm but also duplicate the context and principles prevailing in the "large world." Two forms of this structural

microcosmism are found: the first, whereby the man corresponds to the universe, is called cosmocentric microcosmism; and the second is called anthropocentric microcosmism, whereby the universe is compared to the man. Browne combines these two concepts in such a way that it is often difficult to separate them; however, it would seem that he is more often antropocentric than cosmocentric. For instance, he says that "Man is the whole World" (Works, I, 87) and that "there is no man alone, because every man is a Microcosm, and carries the whole World about him" (Works, I, 90). Furthermore, "We carry with us the wonders we seek without us; we are that bold and adventurous piece of Nature; which he that studies wisely learns in a compendium what others labour at in a divided piece and endless volume" (Works, I, 21). "The world that I regard is my self; it is the Microcosm of my own frame that I cast my eye on; for the other, I use it like my Globe, and turn it round sometimes for my recreation" (Works, I, 91).

"Holistic" microcosmism is the third variation defined by Allers. This is the creation of order in one's life which reflects the order of the macrocosm. This, as Frank L. Huntley points out, Browne certainly did!

> He loved the Anglican communion. Not to mesh one's life in that greater wheel [the macrocosm], and that wheel in the wheel of God, is to lose its even motion for the chaotic jerkiness of one's private judgement.[35]

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[35]Frank L. Huntley, "Sir Thomas Browne and the Metaphor of the Circle," JHI, XIV (1954), 363.

Judgments made by those who do not pattern their lives after God's order are unstable and "cannot consist in the narrow point and center of Virtue without a reel or stagger to the Circumference" (Works, I, 8).

Quite crucial to the Neo-Platonic philosophy of Browne is Aller's fourth type of microcosmism, "symbolistic." This is the interpretation of the outward structure of nature in such a way that one may apprehend the inward essence which is identified with God; or as Browne puts it, it is the sucking of Divinity from the flowers of nature (Works, I, 21). To interpret nature in this way is to "extract from the corpulency of bodies, or resolve things beyond their first matter" (Works, I, 44). If one does this, one may discover the essential structure and meaning of God's creation; and, Browne says, "This is the cause I grope after in the works of Nature; on this hangs the Providence of God" (Works, I, 19). As Allers points out, "The symbolistic interpretation looks for a higher reality, very much different from the one of immediate experience."[36] This doctrine is the Hermetic doctrine of "signatures." "For there are mystically in our faces certain Characters which carry in them the motto of our Souls, wherein he that cannot read A. B. C. may read our natures" (Works, I, 74-75). There are also mystically in nature "Characters" which, properly interpreted, enable one

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[36]Allers, op. cit., p. 327.

to discern the divine essence:

> For in this Mass of Nature there is a set of things that carry in their Front, though not in Capital Letters, yet in Stenography and short Characters, something of Divinity, which to wiser Reasons serve as Luminaries in the Abyss of Knowledge, and to judicious beliefs as Scales and Roundles to mount the Pinacles and highest pieces of Divinity. The severe Schools shall never laugh me out of the Philosophy of Hermes, that this visible World is but a Picture of the invisible, wherein, as in a Pourtraict, things are not truely, but in equivocal shapes, and as they counterfeit some more real substance in that invisible Fabrick" (Works, I, 17).

The "signatures" which are carried by all creatures of God are, then, much like a divine code. How does one translate this code? This is done by an anagogical interpretation of the sensate world. As the Middle Ages brought to the Scriptures four levels of interpretation (the literal, the allegorical, the moral, and the anagogical) so also does the Neo-Platonist bring to nature a four-fold mode of interpretation; the anagogical is the translation of signatures into a reality quite beyond the sensible world.

There is little, if any, evidence of Browne's use of the final two types of microcosmism. These are the "psychological" and the "metaphorical." Neither is as closely associated with Neo-Platonism as the other forms discussed. "Psychological" microcosmism is the idea that man contains within himself, without knowing it, the whole universe; a complete knowledge of this universe can exist only potentially. And "metaphorical" microcosmism is properly not to be considered as being grounded in philosophy at all.

The author employing this doctrine draws parallels between man and the universe only in a poetical manner; he does not really intend that his metaphors be taken as serious metaphysical statements. Dewey Kiper Ziegler[37] has attempted to prove that Sir Thomas Browne's Neo-Platonism is nothing more than metaphorical microcosmism. It is Zeigler's hypothesis that Browne was fundamentally a scientist of the Baconian school, and that he was not a religious man, but rather that religion had an "emotional attraction" for him. That Browne was primarily a religious thinker and a devotional scientist; that he was undoubtedly anti-Baconian, we have already attempted to point out. And it is inconceivable that such a highly detailed form of Neo-Platonic microcosmism as we find in Religio Medici, Hydriotaphia, and The Garden of Cyrus should be nothing more than one infinitely extended metaphor. Not only was Browne thoroughly philosophical in his use of the doctrine of the macro-microcosm, but also, as we have shown, there is a striking correspondence between the theories which clustered around this concept and Browne's Neo-Platonism.

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[37] Dewey Kiper Ziegler, In Divided and Distinguished Worlds: Religion and Rhetoric in the Writings of Sir Thomas Browne (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Printing Office, 1943).

## CHAPTER II

## THE RECONCILIATION OF MATTER AND SPIRIT IN HYDRIOTAPHIA AND THE GARDEN OF CYRUS

### The Relationship of Hydriotaphia to The Garden of Cyrus

In the first section of this paper it was our attempt to demonstrate the crucial role played by Neo-Platonism in the history of Renaissance philosophy and to show how strongly this doctrine influenced Sir Thomas Browne. Neo-Platonism in Renaissance periods enabled philosophers to reconcile the realms of spirit and matter. But, in the Great Renaissance it was not enough that Neo-Platonism could effect this reconciliation; during that period it was necessary to bring together spirit and matter in a definitive fashion which would encompass both the world and man, to find a meeting ground for the infinite and the finite not only in the world but also in man. This Renaissance Neo-Platonists did through the doctrine of microcosmism. Man became "a little World," in every way a reflection of the larger world. As a result of this parallel, any statement made regarding the mutual inclusiveness of the flesh and spirit was true of the world's matter and spirit, and any reconciliation made between the two natures of the macrocosm was likewise true

of the microcosm.

We examined Browne's Neo-Platonism as revealed in the Religio Medici and saw that he, too, utilized this doctrine to bring together the polarities of spirit and matter, faith and science, infinite and finite. Because the apex of his devotional philosophy was microcosmism, Browne was able to see the mystical union of two natures in man as a reflection of the mystical union of two matures in the world. Man was "that amphibious piece between a corporal and spiritual Essence" (Works, I, 43), even as the world was composed of two natures; for this reason man was an epitome, "a compendium," of the macrocosm, and, as such, was unlike the other creatures of God, being the middle link in the chain of being. To summarize, then, Browne established in the Religio Medici the parallel between the microcosm and the macrocosm to be that of the mutual inclusiveness of matter and spirit. He did this in discursive prose. However, in Hydriotaphia and The Garden of Cyrus, Browne's infinitely subtle diptych, for such it must be considered, the exploration of the realm of matter in the microcosm and the macrocosm (Hydriotaphia) and the realm of the spirit (The Garden of Cyrus) is accomplished in a symbolic or purely artistic manner.

## *Hydriotaphia* and *The Garden of Cyrus*: "a right lin'd circle"

In 1658 Sir Thomas Browne published together in one volume *Hydriotaphia* and *The Garden of Cyrus*. And as Geoffrey Keynes points out in his edition of the two works,

> Until comparatively recent times *Hydriotaphia* and *The Garden of Cyrus* were not printed separately, having been properly recognized as twin stars in the firmament of literature which might not be divorced, although their subjects were so diverse as the burial customs of the ancients and the biology of the quincunx (*Works*, IV, viii).

Further than this simple statement of affiliation, Keynes does not speculate on the relation between the two essays. Why, then, had he called these "twin stars in the firmament of literature"? Surely his was not the position which Gosse had taken in *Sir Thomas Browne*, that "*Urn-Burial* was too short to be published by itself, and therefore there was added to it a treatise [*The Garden of Cyrus*] on which Browne, apparently at the same time, had been working."[38] Certainly the relation of the two essays is not simply a textual relationship, but rather a relation of subject matter. Oddly enough, it has not been until within the last ten years that there have been any significant attempts to uphold the internal integrity of *Hydriotaphia* and *The Garden of Cyrus*. Of these attempts,[39] by far the most

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[38]Gosse, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

[39]Although it is maintained that *Hydriotaphia* is not complete without *The Garden of Cyrus* in William P. Dunn, *op. cit.*, p. 176, this work by no means presents an exhaustive

complete has been Frank L. Huntley's. However, "Sir Thomas Browne: The Relationship of Urn-Burial to Garden of Cyrus" suffers from the author's failure to associate these essays with the larger background of Browne's Neo-Platonism.

That Browne intended these two essays to be read together, he himself indicates in "The Epistle Dedicatory" of The Garden of Cyrus:

> That we conjoyn these parts of different Subjects, or that this [The Garden of Cyrus] should succeed the other [Hydriotaphia]; Your judgement will admit without impute of incongruity; Since the delightfull world comes after death, and Paradise suceeds the Grave. Since the verdant state of things is the Symbole of the Resurrection, and to flourish in the state of Glory, we must first be sown in corruption (Works, IV, 67).

This passage not only indicates the relationship of Hydriotaphia to The Garden of Cyrus but also indicates the microcosm-macrocosm relation in these essays. The "Grave" is the place in which the microcosm is nothing but matter; the spirit sleeps—this is associated with "corruption in the macrocosm." Likewise, the purely spiritual state of the microcosm, "Paradise," is associated with "the verdant state of things" in the macrocosm.

As Browne had reconciled faith and science in the Religio Medici, he now unifies the polarity existing between

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treatment of the relation between the two essays. More complete treatments of this problem are found in Margaret A. Heideman, "Hydriotaphia and The Garden of Cyrus: A Paradox and a Cosmic Vision," Univ. of Toronto Quarterly, XIX (1950), 235-46, and, the more complete, Frank L. Huntley, "Sir Thomas Browne: The Realtionship of Urn Burial to Garden of Cyrus," SP, LIII (1956), 204-219.

matter and spirit in Hydriotaphia and The Garden of Cyrus. The symbol which he employs for this purpose is the "right lin'd circle":

> Of this Figure Plato made choice to illustrate the motion of the soul, both of the world and man [italics mine]; while he delivered that God divided the whole conjunction length-wise, according to figure of a Greek χ, and then turning it about reflected it into a circle; By the circle implying the uniform motion of the first Orb, and by the right lines, the planetical and various motions within it. And this also with application unto the soul of man, which hath a double aspect, one right, whereby it beholdeth the body, and object without; another circular and reciprocal, whereby it beholdeth it self. The circle declaring the motion of the indivisible soul, simple, according to the divinity of its nature, and returning into it self; the right lines respecting the motion pertaining unto sense, and vegetation, and the central decussation, the wonderous connecxion of the severall faculties conjointly in one substance. And so conjoyned the unity and duality of the soul, and made out of three substances so much considered by him; That is, the indivisible or divine, the divisible or corporeal, and that third, which was the Systasis or harmony of those two, in the mystical decussation (Works, IV, 117).

This symbol, which Browne picked up from his reading of the Timaeus, then, as a close reading of the above passage will reveal, pictures the image of the spirit as a circle and, within this, the image of matter as another circle. The circle of spirit comprehends the circle of matter; these are joined twice at right-angles. Browne calls these connections, these "mystical decussations," "the Systasis or harmony" of the finite and infinite circles. Therefore, this circle-within-circle becomes the epitome of Browne's Neo-Platonic attempt to unify the duality of spirit and matter. As we have already noted in quoting from the dedication of The

Garden of Cyrus, Browne associated Hydriotaphia with the absence of spirit in both man and nature, and The Garden of Cyrus with the presence of spirit in both. This alone would enable us to realize that Hydriotaphia is an exploration of the inner circle and that The Garden of Cyrus is an exploration of the outer circle. However, conclusive proof of this relationship is found in a structural examination of the two essays.

From his innumerable references to Pythagoras in both essays and in the Religio Medici, we are not surprised to discover that numerically considered Hydriotaphia and The Garden of Cyrus are seen to be complementary parts of a whole. Each treatise has five chapters, the number which Browne says "is remarkable in every Circle" (Works, IV, 95). Both essays are parts; together they make ten, which Browne undoubtedly knew was the Pythagorean number of totality. As there can only be totality in a combination of matter and spirit, there can only be totality if the five chapters of the one essay are added to the five of the other. As a consequence, to separate Hydriotaphia from The Garden of Cyrus is to separate the inner circle from the outer circle; it is to separate matter from spirit, the finite from the infinite. The relation of these two essays is the relation of the right line to the circle; Hydriotaphia and The Garden of Cyrus together are "a right lin'd circle."

The organization of both essays reflects their subject matters. Hydriotaphia is the inner circle of matter from which God's spirit is absent; it is the primordial chaos.

The organization of the material in this essay is chaotic—its division into five chapters is arbitrary and meaningless. There is no continuity, no logical development in Hydriotaphia; in short, as chaos, it has no form. Disorder is a fitting "organization" for an essay which treats of spiritless matter and a man-centered world. The Garden of Cyrus, on the other hand, is a highly organized work. This is fitting in a work which, William P. Dunn points out, has as its "golden theme—'All things began in order; so shall they end, and so shall they begin again'" (Works, IV, 125).[40] The subject of this treatise is a search for the Quincunx (design) in the production of man, in nature, and in the Idea of God. Setting forth the proposed order of the essay, Browne sub-titles The Garden of Cyrus, The Quincuncial Lozenge, or Net-Work of the Ancients, Artificially, Naturally, Mystically Considered. And although the essay has five chapters, Browne divides it into three corresponding parts. Frank L. Huntley delineates these three parts for us: "The first two chapters are the"artificial"; the central chapter, the "natural"; and the final two chapters, the "mystical" considerations of the quincunx."[41] Each of these divisions is approximately twenty pages in length. Thus we see that through the structure and organization Browne unmistakably indicates that these two essays are parts of a whole, "a right lin'd circle." Hydriotaphia represents "the right

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[40]Dunn, op. cit., p. 129.

[41]Huntley, "The Relationship of Urn Burial to Garden of Cyrus," 206, fn. 12.

lines respecting the motion pertaining unto sense, and Vegetation" (Works, IV, 117); The Garden of Cyrus is "the circle declaring the motion of the indivisible soul, simple, according to the divinity of its nature, and returning unto it self" (Works, IV, 117).

Of the relationship between Hydriotaphia and The Garden of Cyrus Huntley says, "One concerns death, the other life; one the body, the other the soul; one passions, the other reason; one accident, the other design; one substance, the other form."[42] As Browne pointed out in the dedication to The Garden of Cyrus, Hydriotaphia is a picture of death in the world and man, existence without spirit. The Garden of Cyrus is a picture of life in the world and in man. The former work is the "Grave," and the latter, "Paradise." Spirit is absent in both the world and in man in the one, and present in the other. Hydriotaphia treats of a man-centered world; The Garden of Cyrus treats of a God-centered world. The tone of Hydriotaphia is one of gloom, depression, and darkness—it is the picture of the blackness of a dark physical and material world. On the other hand, The Garden of Cyrus is an optimistic presentation of the spiritual nature of man's existence in God's world. In this work, Browne is telling his readers that man can see in nature the design of God; he only has to look beyond Man. If, however,

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[42] Ibid., 208.

he looks only at Man and regards him as not a medium for the Holy Spirit, then he will live in the atmosphere of Hydriotaphia.

Since both essays are concerned with the spirit of God, its absence or presence, we would do well to recall Browne's Neo-Platonic conception of this spirit in the world and the Holy Spirit in man. When God created the world, his first decree was, "Let there be Light," and with this illumination, order came into the macrocosm. The formless chaos was given form, which Browne calls "that streight and regular line, that settled and constant course the Wisdom of God hath ordained the actions of his creatures according to their several kinds" (Works, I, 21). This ordering spirit in the macrocosm Browne symbolizes by the sun and its light. When darkness shall again descend and the sun cease to light the world, chaos shall again come to the matter of the earth. Thus Browne associates God's projection of the Idea in his Intellect with the light of the sun.

The Holy Spirit in man, as we have already shown, is unlike the world spirit. Spirit in man is a "light invisible" and qualitatively unlike the symbolic light of the sun, which is visible. However, in one of the deeply Hermetic poems in the Religio Medici, Browne, much as Henry Vaughan, makes a metaphorical association between the light from the sun illuminating nature and the light from God "illuminating" man:

> As, when the labouring Sun hath wrought his track
> Up to the top of lofty Cancer's back,
> The ycie Ocean cracks, the frozen pole
> Thaws with the heat of the Celestial coale;
> So, when Thy absent beams begin t'impart
> Again a Solstice on my frozen heart,
> My winter's ov'r, my drooping spirits sing,
> And every part revives into a Spring.
> But if Thy quickning beams a while decline,
> And with their light bless not this Orb of mine,
> A chilly frost surpriseth every member,
> And in the midst of June I feel December.
> O how this earthly temper doth debase
> The noble Soul, in this her humble place;
> Whose wingy nature ever doth aspire
> To reach that place whence first it took its fire.
> These flames I feel, which in my heart doth dwell,
> Are not Thy beams, but take their fire from Hell:
> O quench them all, and let Thy Light divine
> Be as the Sun to this poor Orb of mine;
> And to Thy sacred Spirit convert those fires,
> Whose earthly fumes choak my devout aspires
> (Works, I, 40-41).

The difference between the macrocosmistic spirit and the microcosmistic spirit is the difference between the indirect and the direct extension of God. This is the reason that the latter is referred to as the Holy Spirit. Order in the world and in the universe is ordained by God—it is a fixed attribute. In man, order is connected with the faculty to perceive it; that is, man can either refuse to recognize that part of divinity in himself, thus living in a Hell, or he can create a Heaven for himself.

> Thus the Soul of man may be in Heaven any where, even within the limits of his own proper body; and when it ceaseth to live in the body, it may remain in its own soul, that is, its Creator: and thus we may say that St. Paul, whether in the body, or out of the body, was yet in Heaven (Works, I, 61).

It is therefore man's choice whether he will make of his life

a Heaven or a Hell. The former is the life of the senses; the latter, the life of intelligence and reason.

Thus it is that man may either be an "animal" or an "angel." As the "great and true Amphibium" man shares the faculty of the senses with the animals and that of reason and intelligence with the angels. He may ignore the "warm gale and gentle ventilation" of the Holy Spirit and know only the visible world. Or he may, like the angels, exercise his reason, "know things by forms," and become aware of the invisible world, knowing "the Spirit of God, the fire and scintillation of that noble and mighty Essence, which is the life and radical heat of Spirits" (Works, I, 40). As we have already pointed out, reason, through the interpretation of signatures, enables man to know God; it enables man to transcend his circle of flesh and know his origin. Flesh is the prison house of the soul, says Browne, and men must exercise their reasons for the knowledge and the glorification of God. Reason, rightly directed, makes life a worship of God:

> Search while thou wilt, and let thy Reason go
> To ransome Truth, even to th' Abyss below;
> Rally the scattered Causes; and that line,
> Which Nature twists, be able to untwine.
> It is thy Maker's will, for unto none
> But unto Reason can he e'er be known.
> The Devils do know thee, but those damn'd Meteors
> Build not thy Glory, but confound thy Creatures.
> Teach my indeavours so thy work to read,
> That learning them in thee, I may proceed.
> Give thou my reason that instructive flight,
> Whose weary wings may on thy hands light.
> Teach me to soar aloft, yet ever so,

When neer the Sun, to stoop again below.
Thus shall my humble Feathers safely hover,
And, though near Earth, more than the Heavens discover.
And then at last, when homeward I shall drive
Rich with the Spoils of Nature to my Hive,
There will I sit like that industrious Flie,
Buzzing Thy Praises, which shall never die,
Till Death abrupts them, and succeeding Glory
Bid me go on in a more lasting story (Works, I, 18-19).

## Hydriotaphia: "the right line"

Hydriotaphia is an examination of the inner circle of matter in both the macrocosm and the microcosm. This is the circle of flesh and chaos; it is the dark material world without spirit. Man does not seek his God in this world; he does not use his reason, but only his senses. He directs his energies toward the glorification of himself, the perpetuation of himself. For this reason he vainly and pathetically strives after immortality in the realm of mortality, seeks eternity in the time-bound flesh. The world in which he lives is visible to the senses; but, ironically, man perceives the world as animals do when he relies only on his senses. Hydriotaphia is the world without spirit or form. And the man who lives herein is a man without God; his life is the vanity of human life turned in upon itself.

The men in Hydriotaphia know only through immediate sense perception—they do not exercise their intelligences in the interpretation of divinity reflected in the world. Hence they are animals—this is one of the themes of the essay:

> But man is a noble Animal, splendid in ashes, and pompous in the grave, solemnizing Nativities and Deaths with equal luster, nor omitting Ceremonies of bravery, in the infamy of his nature (Works, IV, 48).

To live as an animal is to "begin to die when we live" (Works, IV, 48). Animals cannot know the Christian hope of Resurrection, and life without this hope is 'vanity and a striving after the wind.'

The somber theme of Hydriotaphia is this: 'All is vanity and a striving after the wind' unless man's life be God-directed. This work is Browne's Ecclesiastes. The most frequently occurring word is vain. And, he says, life without the knowledge of the Crucifixion is "vain-glory" and death, because without the knowledge of the sacrifice of Christ, there is no hope for life-after-death. Hydriotaphia is Browne's Old Testament, and its artistic method is irony. Though men strive for sensate knowledge in this world, their knowledge is not unlike "a Dialogue between two Infants in the Womb"; it is a "discourse in Plato's den."

This irony of the vanity of the knowledge by the senses is reflected in the 'knowledge' imparted by Hydriotaphia. Although Browne tells us that it is his intention to shed light on the discovery of "fourty or fifty Urnes" excavated "in a Field of old Walsingham not many months past" (Works, IV, 14), we come away from the essay with little more knowledge of these urns than we had before.

Purely sensate knowledge is vain not only because it

makes of man an animal but also because it is man-centered knowledge. It is knowledge which does not seek an understanding of God. Attempts to understand life-after-death if not directed and guided by the hope of Christian resurrection are likewise vain. The pagans who did not know Christ and who ventured to speculate on the nature of after-life were striving after the wind. Their ancient theories were based on conceptions of augmented earthly bliss. Of these gropings Browne says, "Were the happinesse of the next world as closely apprehended as the felicities of this, it were a martyrdome to live" (Works, IV, 40). On the other hand, Pagans who philosophically hoped for immortality lived "at that disadvantage of time, when men could say little for futurity, but from reason" (Works, IV, 41). They did not know Christ and Christian hope. One result of these misdirected, vain speculations was that a deceased person would be buried with his earthly goods, enabling him to continue his existence in the next world as he had done in this. These customs Browne demolishes with a flourish of masterful irony by saying that posterity will applaud these grave objects because they are of infinite value in compiling histories and chronologies (Works, IV, 38).

Pride had led some pagans to seek 'immortality' by establishing their names in mortal memory. This is the height of vanity, because most people have a longer life-span than the duration of their names after death. It is the

nature of man to forget; "there is no antidote against the Opium of time" (Works, IV, 45). Nevertheless, there have been names that have been preserved in the sessions of mortality. But what irony it is that a man's name should be remembered and his deeds forgotten or that most remembered are those who have been doers of evil deeds! Almost invariably, those names which are worthy of remembrance are those which are lost in the "iniquity of oblivion." In fact, says Browne, "Without the favor of the everlasting register the first man had been as unknown as the last, and Methuselah's long life had been his only Chronicle" (Works, IV, 46).

The vanity of the "hope for immortality, or any patent from oblivion, in preservations below the Moon" (Works, IV, 48) receives its ultimate expression in Browne's deliberate confusion of the Holy Spirit with the light from a burning funeral pyre:

> Life is a pure flame, and we live by an invisible Sun within us. A small fire sufficeth for life, great flames seemed too little after death, while men vainly affected precious pyres, and to burn like Sardanapalus . . . " (Works, IV, 48-49).

This image epitomizes, as it were, the vanity of the ancients who sought immortality within the circle of the flesh. They, of course, erred because they did not recognize the Holy Spirit as that part of divinity in themselves. This is the great error of the man-centered life, the sensual life of animals.

As J. M. Cline[43] points out, the atmosphere of Hydriotaphia is almost unbearably somber. All nature is dark and decaying. In this essay there is no vegetable growth; there is no light, save the flickering gleams from funeral pyres. All nature is sterile. However, this atmosphere is not, as Cline would seem to indicate, a reflection of Browne's total view of life. This is only half of Browne's attitude toward existence. Cline has made the error of taking the part for the whole because he does not read Hydriotaphia and The Garden of Cyrus as one. However, the primordial darkness which characterizes Hydriotaphia is a reflection of Browne's view of existence without God's spirit. And, more specifically, this atmospheric tone seems to be a reflection of the earth in a chaotic state, this state being characterized by the reign of darkness.

While the crepuscular atmosphere of Hydriotaphia suggests the gloom of chaos, Browne employs more immediately the urns as symbols of the formless condition of chaotic matter. This symbol is established through his identification of the urns with the womb in chapter three. We are told of the variety of urn shapes, some large, "containing above a gallon, Some not much above half that measure." Moreover, some have necks, but

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[43]James M. Cline, "Hydriotaphia," Five Studies in Literature (University of California Publications in English; vol. 8, no. 1; Berkely : Univ. of California Press, 1940), pp. 73-100.

> The common form with necks was a proper figure; nor much unlike the Urnes of our Nativity, while we lay in the nether part of the earth, and inward vault of our Microcosme" (Works, IV, 23).

In Religio Medici Browne had told us that "the Womb of our Mother" was "the truest Microcosm" (Works, I, 49). In that womb we had existed as de-formed material. This is the state of unformed material in the chaos of the macrocosm. And as nothing can be ascertained of this amorphous mass, Browne can shed no light on "these present Urnes" which are nothing more than the mute containers of "terra damnata and aged cinders." Although the Walsingham urns are the proper subject of Hydriotaphia, Browne finds that he can tell us nothing conclusive about them. It is "not improbable," he says, that these urns were burial containers of "Romans, or Brittains Romanized"; however, "there is no assured conclusions." Of the date of these urns, we are told that there is "nothing of more uncertainity." Most urns which are unearthed from a few feet below the roots of vegetables contain coins or metals which enable antiquarians to establish the urns' date of deposit. These urns, though, contained no such objects.

Hydriotaphia is, then, in structure, in organization, and in subject matter truly a picture of "the right lines respecting the motion pertaining unto sense, and vegetation."

## The Garden of Cyrus: "the circle"

If the urns in Hydriotaphia are the symbols of disorder in the matter of the macrocosm and of the microcosm, then the quincunxes of The Garden of Cyrus are the symbols of the God-created order in those worlds. The quincunx is "a disposition of five object so placed that four occupy the corners, and the fifth the center of a square or rectangle."[44] The quincuncial arrangement of objects reflects, for Browne, the quincuncial ordering pre-existent in the Idea of God. As such, it is a reflection of the spirit of God: it is found reflected in almost all of the creatures of God. If one would know the Creator, he has simply to look beyond himself and discern the "Essence" of God's art, the pure form which is the quincunx. This Browne does, discovering quincunxes in gardens, in groves of trees, in the structure of animals, in the movements of men, in art, in architecture, in weeds, in elephants, and even in the patterns created by eggs laid by insects. In this way, he sees the spirit of God everywhere; he utilizes his reason to extract from sense perceptions the essential five-fold order.

We have already discussed the vital relationship Browne's Neo-Platonism saw between order and spirit. These two are so closely associated that it is almost impossible to draw a distinction between them. Both seem to exist in

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[44]The Oxford Universal Dictionary, ed. C. T. Onions (3d rev. ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 1642.

the Idea of God: spirit in the macrocosm being divine symmetry, and in the microcosm, the Holy Spirit and the ability to perceive, with the angels, "the forms of things." No longer the animal of Hydriotaphia, man emerges in The Garden of Cyrus as a rational, intelligent creature who is able to detect that "part of divinity" within himself. He is able to see the order in finite structures as a reflection of the infinite harmony which is the method of God. The men of The Garden of Cyrus "extract from the corpulency of bodies, or resolve things beyond their first matter [italics mine], and . . . discover the habitation of angels" (Works, I, 35).

In chapter two of The Garden we find the theme of this essay; it is the detection of the invisible nature of God through the "glass" of his visible creations:

> And agreeable unto the Greek expression concerning Christ in the Canticles, looking through the nets, which ours hath rendered, He looketh forth at the windows; shewing himself through the lattesse; that is, partly seen and unseen, according to the visible and invisible side of his nature(Works, IV, 79).

The knowledge of the invisible nature of Christ gained through a reasonable interpretation of visible creations is, of course, the doctrine of "signatures." As Browne had told us earlier in this chapter, the net of lattice-work answers to the shape of the quincunx; so, here, in this metaphor can be seen the end and purpose of all exercise of man's intelligence: reasonable reconstruction of the articles of

faith through God-directed knowledge.

Unlike the chaotic matter in Hydriotaphia, the substance of the macrocosm is disposed in awe-inspiring order in The Garden of Cyrus. In the latter essay, God has extended his spirit to impart form to chaos. As an omnipotent artist, God has created the world, leaving his "signatures" on all objects. This "signature" is the quincunx. The quincunx was the array in which the Garden of Eden was laid out; even though the matter of the first garden has long since fallen into decay and dissolution, this five-fold pattern remains, having its being in the Idea of God. Also, codified by the Idea are the laws of the progressions of the seasons and the organization into day and night; in short, the harmonious disposition of world existed in the Idea of God before it was projected into the prima materia, before the creation. Order is the essence of God; and Browne says,

> All things began in order, so shall they end, and so shall they begin again; according to the ordainer of order and mystical Mathematicks of the City of Heaven (Works, IV, 125).

This order, as already pointed out, is mirrored in the structure and the organization of The Garden of Cyrus. However, we would suggest further that the pattern of this essay reflects the order of the "interchangeable dominions" of "darkness and light." The Garden begins in a blaze of "shooting rayes" from "the diffused light concentrated into

Orbes"; and ends as "the Quincunx of Heaven runs low." This order is repeated in the fourth chapter in Browne's discussion of the fecundity of "seminal principles":

> Legions of seminal Idea's lie in their second Chaos and Orcus of Hippocrates; till putting on the habits of their forms, they shew themselves upon the stage of the world, and open dominion of Jove (Works, IV, 115).

The whole of The Garden of Cyrus, then, is an ascending spiral which begins as a cycle of light into dark and contracts into the growth cycle of seeds.

Of course, unlike Hydriotaphia, The Garden of Cyrus is bathed in light—the reflection of the spirit of God. However, as in the somber essay, darkness appears in The Garden; this, nevertheless, is not the absence of spirit as it is in Hydriotaphia. As we have already discovered, this darkness is a manifestation of the orderliness of God's creation—this is spirit-impregnated darkness, and Browne says,

> . . . were it not for darkness and the shadow of the earth, the noblest part [italics mine] of the Creation had remained unseen, and the Stars in heaven as invisible as on the fourth day, when they were created above the Horizon, with the Sun, or there was not an eye to behold them (Works, IV, 115).

Moreover, as the night makes visible the "noblest part of Creation," it brings to human beings sleep, which releases the soul from the prison house of the flesh.[45] It is this state, Browne tells us in Religio Medici, "that best

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[45]Browne's attitude toward sleep is set forth in sections eleven and twelve of the second book of Religio Medici (Works, I, 91-94).

expresseth death . . . ," death being the complete release of the spirit from matter. This attitude toward sleep reinforces the conclusion to The Garden of Cyrus, in which we discover Browne making an analogy between sleep and death ("everlasting sleep"), and at the same time looking forward to that hour when man shall awaken eternally, to the Resurrection.

> But who can be drowsie at that hour which freed us from everlasting sleep? Or have slumbering thoughts at that time, when sleep it self must end, and as some conjecture all shall awake again? (Works, IV, 125)

So we see that The Garden of Cyrus is indeed an exploration of the ordering spirit in both the macrocosm and the microcosm; it is "the circle declaring the motion of the indivisible soul, simple, according to the divinity of its nature, and returning into it self." In the macrocosm, we discovered the perpetual cycle of the filling and refilling of form; and in the microcosm, we discovered the descent of the Holy Spirit into the flesh of man and its ascent again at death.

## CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to suggest the way in which Sir Thomas Browne, scientist, physician, and Anglican, effected a reconciliation of science and religion, of matter and spirit. Our hypothesis has been that Neo-Platonism with its theory of the microcosm enabled him to see the data of science as visible symbols of invisible reality; to see the order of the macrocosm as a reflection of that divine order within himself; and to see a reconciliation of matter and spirit in both the "large world" and the "small world."

Neo-Platonism turned Browne's science into divinity and an act of worship. He dedicated the uses of his science to the greater glorification of God. And in this way differed violently from the group of man-centered scientists that made up the Royal Society. I would further suggest that this gulf was possibly the reason Browne never became a member of that scientific body. It has been theorized that Browne was never admitted to the Royal Society because he was too closely associated with the occult, but this is true to an even greater extent of some of the Society's members such as Digby and Boyle. Some critics have maintained that, residing in Norwich, Browne lived too far away from London

for membership in the Royal Society to be convenient. However, in the light of his own conception of scientific endeavor, is it not probable that he simply refused to join this seminal scientific association on the grounds of his disapproval of their attempt to make science utilitarian and "finite"?

Those critics who would make of Browne a Baconian scientist invariably point to Pseudodoxia Epidemica as his great scientific work. Actually, this work is no scientific work at all; it is instead a work dedicated to the purging of the reason, the cleansing of the "cobwebs" of mortality from the faculty which man shares with the angels. This purpose he sets forth in book six of Pseudodoxia:

> Thus have I declared some private and probable conceptions in the enquiry of this truth; but the certainity hereof let the Arithmetick of the last day determine; and therefore expect no further belief than probablity and reason induce. Only desire men would not swallow dubiosities for certainties, and receive as Principles points mainly controvertible; for we are to adhere unto things doubtful in a dubious and opinative way; it being reasonable for every man to vary his opinion according to the variance of his reason, and to affirm one day what he denied another. Wherein although at last we miss of truth; we die notwithstanding in offensive errors; because we adhere unto that whereunto the examen of our reasons and honest enquiries induce us (Works, III, 206).

The device Browne employs in this work to measure vulgar errors is the tool of the rational apprehension of God's laws, regularity. This conception stems directly from his Neo-Platonism; he first apprehends the pattern of regularity in the macrocosm and then applies this perception to the

cleansing of the reason. For instance, he demolishes the vulgar error that beavers' legs are shorter on one side than on the other by pointing out that this is contrary to the construction of all of the other creatures of God; likewise, the myth of the Phoenix is in error because it is contrary to the laws of nature.

Thus we discover that Pseudodoxia Epidemica is not an exception to our picture of Browne as a devotional scientist. This work, along with his major works, Religio Medici, Hydriotaphia, and The Garden of Cyrus, demonstrates that Sir Thomas Browne was indeed deeply influenced by the Neo-Platonic theory of the microcosm.

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