

"HERMETIC INFLUENCES IN
RALEGH'S THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD"

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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September 1972



Madness fascinates because it is knowledge. It is knowledge, first, because all these absurd figures are in reality elements of a difficult, hermetic, esoteric learning...This knowledge, so inaccessible, so formidable, the Fool, in his innocent idocy, already possesses. While the man of reason and wisdom perceives only fragmentary and all the more unnerving images of it, the Fool bears it intact as an unbroken sphere: that crystal ball which for all others is empty is in his eyes filled with the density of an invisible knowledge.

--Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization

ABBREVIATIONS

<u>HW</u>	Sir Walter Raleigh, <u>The History of the World</u> (London: Walter Burre, 1614).
<u>JHI</u>	<u>Journal of the History of Ideas</u>
<u>SRen</u>	<u>Studies in the Renaissance</u>
<u>SP</u>	<u>Studies in Philology</u>
<u>ELH</u>	<u>English Literary History</u>
<u>HLQ</u>	<u>Huntington Library Quarterly</u>
<u>JWCI</u>	<u>Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes</u>

INTRODUCTION

In England during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, a serious problem arose among intellectuals. The old conception of a fixed, hierarchical universe was being challenged, not only by fresh cosmological discoveries, but by political, social, economic and religious changes as well. Old explanations for the workings of the universe no longer sufficed; what was needed was a new system, one which could combine the still-workable elements of the old with the new and rapidly changing physical circumstances. This is the problem that permeates the thought of the time.

Pressure for change evidently induced some Englishmen to develop radically different cosmological perspectives. Thus, it is clear that William Gilbert and Thomas Digges along with other advanced thinkers went over to the Copernical world view. Yet even so revolutionary a thinker as Francis Bacon refused to accept a heliocentric view. Indeed, the majority of Elizabethan thinkers clung to the medieval cosmological conception of a fixed system of hierarchical, concentric spheres with the earth at the center of the universe. What they did modify, however, of the medieval plan was the idea of causality. In their scheme, it was the stars and elements as much as it was God that controlled the workings of the universe. In other words, natural explanations, however determined they were, were being

for divine cuasation under certain circumstances .

With such changes in the cncception of the physical order, doubts about the metaphysical foundations of the world arose. Perhaps, men thought, there is no higher order, no immutable God; perhaps all is cháos. Given the ir belief in the affinity and correspondence between the celestial and physical worlds, the poets and philosophers of the Renaissance were forced to question certainty when the once-stable heavens appeared to lack this attribute.

Changes were occurring in the political life of England during these times also. Although the Queen remained a dominant element in government, the assertiveness of Parliament began to increase. This change did not appear quite as early as the new star in Cassiopeia had, but its impact was no less sudden and dramatic in 1603 when James ascended to the throne. No longer was the king the central, dominating figure at the top of the governmental hierarchy, try as James did to make it so. The challenge of Parliament to monarchy had begun.

The social classes also appeared to be in a state of change. The gentry was rising as a powerful group and the yeoman farmer's importance was increasing. The preeminence of the aristocracy was coming into question. Class lines were becoming more fluid; one could rise through wealth and connections as well as through birth. In other words, the stratified, hierarchical social ladder was shaking. This, in turn, influenced and was influenced by economic factors.

The religious controversies that had plagued England since the reign of Henry VIII had not been settled. Indeed, the Puritans, a new militant Protestant party appeared in the reign of Elizabeth. Despite Elizabeth's persecution Puritanism was a vital force in England by the end of her reign, a force which tended to undermine both episcopal and royal authority.

In the midst of these changes, intellectuals needed to construct a system, a philosophy, which would explain the new circumstances while retaining a hold on a concept of unity, security, and order. This problem has been thoroughly studied from the perspective of literature, but little attention has been paid to the area of historiography. One would certainly expect that Renaissance historians would confront this problem in the works and attempt an explanation and a solution which would enable people to understand the universe once again. Sir Walter Raleigh, a fine example of the many-faceted English Renaissance intellectual, is presented here as one who attempted to reconcile old beliefs and new discoveries. The History of the World, which first appeared in 1614, was the fruit of his thirteen years in the Tower. It is a universal history, dealing with events from the Creation to the end of the Punic Wars, and containing such diverse treatises as the location of Paradise, the composition of the Ark, judgments on kings and ancient gods, along with a treasure of geographical, mythological and theological diversions. Too often historians have concentrated on only one aspect of this work and thus made it difficult to see a philosophy in the History. It is precisely because of the syncretic nature of the work,

however, that we can see to the center of Raleigh's thought. One of the major philosophical currents in the Renaissance, the Hermetic tradition, has such a universal base, and as such, was able to reconcile many conflicting elements in the thought of this time. It combined a hierarchical religious order with a concept of change. Although an ancient philosophy, it did not contradict the new scientific discoveries; if anything, it was their base. Its claim to being Egyptian in origin added to its appeal. Thus Hermetism was accepted by scientists and poets alike. It has not, however, been approached by historians as a guide to Renaissance historiography, and it is in this framework that Raleigh's The History of the World is examined here.

My thesis, then, is that Hermetic philosophy, as seen in Raleigh's History, was a system adopted by Renaissance intellectuals to explain the changes occurring around them, especially in cosmology. The first chapter is a study of Renaissance historiography approached geographically. It attempts to explain why the problem of change was more acute in England than either in France or Italy, using the study of history as an index. In the second chapter the previous research on Raleigh and his History is presented; it demonstrates the wide range of interpretation given to him, while also showing the deficiencies of each system. Chapter Three is devoted to an examination of the Hermetic philosophy, stressing its origins, development and implications during the Renaissance. Raleigh's circle of friends, through whom he came into contact with the Hermetic

tradition, forms the subject matter of Chapter Four. The opposition to the philosophy in England is a strong consideration in studying Raleigh, and this is presented in Chapter Five. Chapter Six is concerned directly with the content of The History of the World: it deals with Raleigh's expressed attitude towards Hermetism, and with his more esoteric handling of the Hermetic soul doctrine. The conclusion attempts, in addition to bringing together the diverse strains presented here, to examine the possible implications of a link between the Hermetic philosophy and the rise of modern science.

I have chosen to use the spelling "Raleigh" instead of the North American "Raleigh". He himself used many different spellings, but in the first edition of the History, the one used here, it is "Raleigh", and this is the form I have followed.

CHAPTER ONE: A SURVEY OF RENAISSANCE HISTORIOGRAPHY

History during the Renaissance was more than mere chronicling of events; it had the further purpose of explaining those events. The three countries that produced a significant number of historical works in this period--Italy, France, and England--each developed its own method of explanation, and because of this, the character of the three historiographies differ radically. These differences arose chiefly as a result of unique political and social phenomena, as well as intellectual developments in the three countries. The three approaches to historical change reflect the extent to which the historiographers of France, Italy, and England were able to comprehend the changes of the Renaissance. England, it will be seen, had the greatest problem in this area, and a study of her historiography throws light upon some of the reasons for this.

The medieval explanations for events did not take a causal approach, in the sense that we understand causation today. Events and man's participation in those events did not necessarily lead to other events; rather, the historical process was of God's design, and He was the sole cause.¹ As a result, there was little analysis of political, social, economic, or intellectual currents in medieval history-writing. These were secondary to the chronicling of God's plan.² The historical process was viewed as universally the same, for everywhere God's purpose was being worked out. Thus

¹R.G. Collingwood, The Idea of History (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), p. 48.

²Frederick B. Artz, The Mind of the Middle Ages (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), p. 366.

there was no real center of gravity in medieval historiography.³ Even the monastic chronicles were universal, as the microcosmic world described was only a part of the total plan.

The very perceptual basis of medieval thought was thus determined by the divine causation theory. The history of the time was, as William J. Brandt has pointed out, "spatial": the physical universe was seen as a field of discrete points, connected not by any inherent relationship, but rather by an external force.⁴ Objects and events were not seen in relation to one another, but rather as separate manifestations of God's will. The material world, then, was simply described, not explained: events illustrated the divine plan and there was simply no need to explain these explanations. Order was imposed from without; all actions and events were placed within this framework. There was no problem explaining change, since one did not have to search for its development in the physical world. Changes were referred immediately back to God as their cause.

The view that the Renaissance constituted an attack on authority in the areas of science, religion and philosophy has been extended to the field of history.⁵ The medieval theory of transcendent causation was challenged by men who began to see order in the physical world and could explain material

³Collingwood, p. 49.

⁴William J. Brandt, The Shape of Medieval History: Studies in Modes of Perception (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 33.

⁵See A.C. Crombie, "Historians and the Scientific Revolution", Endeavour, XIX (1960), 10, and G. Wylie Sypher, "Similarities Between the Scientific and the Historical Revolutions at the End of the Renaissance", JHI, XXVI (1965), 354.

changes without reference to God.⁶ Not that Renaissance thinkers--even scientists--rejected the notion of a Deity; rather, they began to see a difference between primary and secondary causes. In spiritual matters, still primary in intellectuals' minds, God reigned supreme: He had made the world and its movements were manifestations of His will. In day-to-day matters and in the natural world, however, connections were being drawn between objects and events. All began to fit together rationally; physical explanations were possible. Furthermore, the two--primary and secondary causation--did not necessarily contradict each other. Much of the acceptance of the new scientific methodology lay in the fact that it seemed to prove, through the discovery of natural laws, the existence of a Deity. In short, what had happened was that man began to see immanent as well as transcendent causes in the physical world. However, along with this new belief in changing, rather than eternal, phenomena came the danger that things might not all logically fall into a pattern. This very insecurity is what helped to provoke the crisis described earlier. One must, of course, bear in mind when the attack on authority argument is raised that Renaissance intellectuals did not completely embrace the new belief in the validity of secondary causation. They remained for the most part in the middle of the two worlds, unable to retain full belief in authority and afraid to totally embrace reason.

⁶Of course it is true that Aristotelian physics was widely studied in the medieval universities and that the medievals in consequence had a strong sense of causation. Indeed, on that basis they were to develop a quite sophisticated natural science. On the other hand, it was not until the fifteenth century, that is, in the early Renaissance, that this empirical and naturalist tradition began to liberate itself from the transcendental assumptions of medieval philosophy. See J.H. Randall, The Career of Philosophy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), vol. I, pp. 284-307.

Weisinger has postulated six ideas of history in the Renaissance: the idea of progress, the theory of the plenitude of nature, the climatic theory of history, the cyclical theory, the doctrine of uniformitarianism, and the idea of decline.⁷ Although each theory is quite different from the others, a common factor is their reference to secondary causation. In all of these, history is understood in relation to physical objects and events, not by resorting to transcendent philosophical speculation.

Neoplatonism and Hermetism are good examples of forms of thought intermediate between medieval and modern philosophy. Theistic though they were, their vitalist presuppositions gave these systems of thought a strong practical bent towards alchemy, astrology, and geometrical and numerical symbolism. Pico della Mirandola, for instance, attempted to reconcile all existing philosophies by finding common factors in each. He tried, as Frances Yates has pointed out, to find a scientific key to knowledge, and through this, to control destiny.⁸ It should be noted further that the universal quality of these philosophies enhanced their scientific tendencies because of their generalizing quality. The main point, however, is the notion of the possibility of man's control; it is the key idea differentiating the Renaissance from the Medieval.

In Italy the new concept of history was adopted early in the Renaissance. The humanistic search for ancient texts affected history by allowing

⁷Herbert Weisinger, "Ideas of History During the Renaissance" in Paul O. Kristeller and Philip P. Wiener (eds.), Renaissance Essays (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1968), pp. 75-93. These theories indicate the wide range of ideas of history in this time. I do not agree with Weisinger that they encompass all kinds of history written in the Renaissance.

⁸Frances A. Yates, Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), pp. 116, 144.

the past to be reconstructed from its own physical remains. As a result the men of the Italian Renaissance were more able to distinguish periods of history than ever before. Petrarch, for example, clearly saw the differences between the classical and medieval worlds through his study of Roman letters. He viewed the Italy of the time as still in the "dark" ages, but felt that through an examination of the more perfect classical scholarship she could soon effect a rebirth of learning.⁹ Thus for Petrarch history had a moral value: past perfection could be used as a guide to improving the present. What he objected to in the present, of course, was the rigidity of scholastic methodology; he did not in any way reject the medieval idea of God in favor of a return to classical paganism.

Leonardo Bruni and the civic humanists extended Petrarch's erudite view of the lessons of history to the political arena. In Italy at this time there was no governmental stability. The constant political tensions and upheavals provoked an intense dissatisfaction. The civic humanists, therefore, looked to Roman history for an example of the way a state should be run and a connection between history and politics was forged that remained the chief characteristic of Italian Renaissance historiography. Bruni's histories are political in nature; he thought this the most important factor accounting for change.¹⁰ Thus by using ancient political actions as exemplars for present conduct the histories of the civic humanists were past-oriented and cyclical, hoping to effect a return to a better order.

⁹Theodore E. Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages'", Speculum, XVI (1942), 240.

¹⁰Donald J. Wilcox, The Development of Florentine Humanist Historiography in The Fifteenth Century (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 38.

Two of the more well-known Italian Renaissance historians, Machiavelli and Guicciardini, both saw history as a practical guide to political behavior. Machiavelli's The Prince issues instructions to the would-be ruler on how to keep his state intact; it is a political science he is developing, using as evidence the mistakes of others.¹¹ A certain element of predictability in the area of human nature was therefore seen by Machiavelli, but predictability of events had not yet become a part of history. Guicciardini also subordinated history to politics by giving the latter prominence. As Gilbert has pointed out, "history in the Renaissance was not important per se; it provided illustrative material for the teaching of moral philosophy."¹² In the Florentine historical sphere, moral philosophy and politics served the same function: to effect a return to a glorious and secure past. The belief in the predictability of human nature stressed by Machiavelli, however, was not totally accepted by Guicciardini. Although he saw causation as the intersection of multiple series of physical events, he did not believe the intellect to be capable of penetrating to an ultimate understanding of the processes of history.¹³ This belonged to the realm of first or transcendent causes. Guicciardini is thus another example of the dual nature of

¹¹Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince (London: Dent, 1950), translated by W.K. Marriott.

¹²Felix Gilbert, "The Renaissance Interest in History" in Charles S. Singleton (ed.), Art, Science, and History in the Renaissance (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), p. 376. For amplification of this idea see Gilbert's Machiavelli and Guicciardini: Politics and History in Sixteenth Century Florence (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).

¹³Myron P. Gilmore, "Freedom and Determinism in Renaissance Historians," SRen, III (1956), 54.

thought in the Renaissance.

The role of legal studies in the development of an historical consciousness cannot be underestimated. In Italy the mos Italicus school of law emphasized the application of the rules derived from ancient texts to the present.¹⁴ This was humanist-oriented: its primary task was to restore Roman law to its former splendour through a critical analysis of the Digest. The method of textual exegesis they used created an historical sense by clearing away the "layers of opinion" deposited by the scholastic commentators.¹⁵ By seeing the original text of the Digest and comparing it to its medieval successors, the idea of distinct historical periods was strengthened. The Italian legal school also emphasized the application of the Roman law, once freed from its medieval shackles, to the present. It was not, therefore, historicist in the true sense, as the French legal school became, but rather pointed to a cyclical approach to history. There remained a standard to follow, the ancient law, and therefore only three ages in history had occurred: the glorious past, the medieval corruption of that past, and the future return to purity. Each age was not studied as a separate entity, but in comparison to each other.

Just as legal studies in Italy enabled an historical sense to emerge, the ancient feud between rhetoric and philosophy which was reborn in the Renaissance had the same result. Rhetoric was connected in men's minds with sense-data, with that which was in flux. One heard a speech and re-

¹⁴ Myron P. Gilmore, "The Renaissance Conception of the Lessons of History" in William H. Werkmeister (ed.), Facets of the Renaissance (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1959), p. 83.

¹⁵ Donald R. Kelley, "Legal Humanism and the Sense of History", SRen, XIII (1966), 187-189.

sponded to the power of the language, by action hopefully. Philosophy, on the other hand, was concerned with the eternally true; it was wisdom, not eloquence, a belief, not an action. Throughout the Middle Ages, rhetoric, although operative, was under the domination of theology, just as in history secondary causes (sense-data) were subordinated to primary causes (God's plan). As Struever has noted, the Renaissance brought a new freedom of rhetoric which contributed to the growing historical awareness: "rhetorical concepts of discourse emphasize change, not permanence, the many, not the one, the particular, not the universal--emphases which are essential in a serious committment to historical understanding."¹⁶ The humanist position, however, sought to channel this change and its manifestations, and through rhetoric they hoped to return to the ancient, not medieval, wisdom. Again the Italian concept of history saw periodization, but did not approach change phenomenologically. History had its purpose: to effect a return to an uncorrupted way of life.

Italian Renaissance historiography, therefore, had a strongly practical character. An idea of historical process, of distinct periods, was operating, but this was cyclical in nature. The civic humanists saw in the past a political standard to which they wanted to return. Machiavelli and Guicciardini, too, desired a change away from ineffective governments by using historical evidence as indicators of how human nature reacts to events, and thus as a means to control those reactions. While not distinctly postulating a cyclical theory of history, they both saw in the past a better standard of

¹⁶Nancy S. Struever, The Language of History in the Renaissance: Rhetoric and Historical Consciousness in Florentine Humanism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 37.

action than the present.

In France, the mos gallicus school of legal studies determined to a large extent the nature of French Renaissance historiography. It too studied classical law using historical resources, but less attention was paid to the application of that law.¹⁷ In fact, Roman law was approached as a "battered relic", even before the additions of the scholastic commentators; it was not viewed by the French school as the perfect system the Italians believed it was.¹⁸ Thus the mos gallicus school regarded the classical legal system as a product of its time, ancient Rome, and did not consider it to be easily adaptable to sixteenth-century France. Through the study of law French jurists developed a view of historical uniqueness. One single legal system had not endured in France; she had experienced not only Roman law, but Old French law as well.¹⁹ As a result, there was a tendency among scholars to see each system as a product of its own times.

This historical approach to law spread to the general study of history as well, and the unique character of French institutions was stressed. Kelley has called this approach an early form of historicism, and if we use his

¹⁷ Gilmore, "The Renaissance Conception of the Lessons of History", p. 83.

¹⁸ Donald R. Kelley, Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship: Language, Law, and History in the French Renaissance (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 67.

¹⁹ F. Smith Fussner, The Historical Revolution: English Historical Writing and Thought, 1580-1640 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 28. See also George Huppert, The Idea of Perfect History: Historical Erudition and Historical Philosophy in Renaissance France (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970), pp. 152-154.

definition, the term is quite apt.

'Historicism' refers to that cast of mind which, consciously or not, turns not to nature but to the world of man's making; which seeks out not the typical but the unique; which emphasizes the variety rather than the uniformity of human nature; which is interested less in similarities than in differences; and which is impressed not with permanence but with change.²⁰

The development of this "new history" had a political basis as well as an intellectual one. In 1559 upon the death of King Henri II a profound constitutional crisis occurred; the most venerable institutions of France had to be justified. The vehicle for justification was history, and hence we see a new importance placed on historical studies. The past was now used as a justification for the present, thus initiating a real developmental approach to historical causation. For example, Estienne Pasquier's Recherches de la France, which appeared in 1560, went beyond the rule of the French kings, back to Gaul, to show the continuity of French institutions.²¹ This was definitely a different perspective than that of the Italian historians who thought to change the present in view of the past. The French view could not be cyclical: the past was no more than the predecessor of the present.

The degree of historicism among the French varied from the strictly legal view of François Hotman that laws vary in terms of geography and history to the more extreme view of Guillaume Budé, who believed that each natural group and each age had its own characteristic style that could not

²⁰Kelley, pp. 4-5.

²¹Huppert, p. 38.

be repeated in any other situation. Each period had its own life-cycle of civilization that ultimately ended and could not be resurrected.²²

The very nature of universal history was changed through the development of this view, and this was clearly represented by Jean Bodin's Methodus, published in 1566. An historical work was no longer considered universal because of its chronological completeness as in the Middle Ages; the new universal history was such because it took into account all known societies, past and present. Bodin included in the Methodus Chaldeans, Assyrians, Egyptians and Phoenicians, as well as a study of scholastic philosophy, the science of numbers and Jewish mysticism.²³ Each society was approached in a spirit of cultural relativism, that is, viewed as a complete and detached whole. There was to be no arbitrary standard by which to judge the customs and actions of another nation; that would only reflect the historian's own socially-determined consciousness. This was the point of La Popelinière's Idea of Perfect History written in the 1570's: history must guard against subjectivity, and include every aspect of life. Everything must be explained in a convincing manner so that there can be no disagreement about the facts.²⁴

The realm of divine history, however, was not ignored by the French Renaissance historians, and the problem of the relationship of physical and sacred causation troubled even these modern-oriented men. Bodin, for instance, put history into four categories: divine, mathematical, natural,

²²Kelley, pp. 63-64.

²³Huppert, pp. 100-101.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 135-142.

and human. Only the last, he said, was confused and mutable and so we must orient ourselves by determining the relation of human history with the divine, mathematical and natural categories, each absolute.²⁵

Early French historiography, therefore, was characterized by its attempt to comprehend motion and flux. Events had their causes in the past, but that past was not to be repeated. Customs and laws were merely products of historical development; there was no natural or absolute standard in human history. Approached in this way, the true facts could be known. History thus consisted of separate, distinct, and ever-changing cultures for the men of the French Renaissance. Each civilization was to be approached on its own and the facts about each objectively sought. It truly was an historicist position.

The character of English Renaissance history also was unique. The medieval chronicle tradition had not disappeared in England by the fifteenth century, although it had gradually changed from the monastic type to a locally or territorially centered narrative.²⁶ The approach to history remained much the same, however: description rather than causal analysis predominated. It is Fussner's thesis that between 1580 and 1640--already late when compared to similar Continental developments--a "historiographical revolution" occurred in England. This consisted of the creation of modern historical attitudes, that is, the adaptation of a new "scientific temper"

²⁵ Leonard F. Dean, "Bodin's Methodus in England Before 1625", SP, XXXIX (1942), 162.

²⁶ James W. Thompson, A History of Historical Writing, vol. I (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1942), p. 591.

in the writing of history.²⁷

The scholastically-oriented chronicle, even after its secularization, was more concerned with the identification of "eternal verities than with the transitory flux of human events", as Levy suggests.²⁸ The historical revolution was marked by a growing interest in these transitory human events. The rise of antiquarian researches and the consolidation of libraries, both products of the spread of humanist influence to England, led to a new sense of history, one based on artifacts and documents, and one associated with a sense of perspective and process. Scholars were beginning to recognize differences in local institutions and customs through this more empirical, rather than speculative, approach to the past.²⁹

As we have seen, the study of history in Renaissance Italy and France was strongly influenced by the peculiar nature of the evolution of the legal systems of each society. In Italy the study of law in a humanist context allowed the Italian Renaissance historians to develop a cyclical view of historical events. On the other hand, the open nature of the legal tradition in France gave French historians the possibility to see the past in a developmental and indeed historicist perspective. On the contrary, in England the Common Law tradition constituted a barrier to

²⁷Fussner, pp. xxii-xxiii.

²⁸F.J. Levy, Tudor Historical Thought (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1967), p. 9.

²⁹Arthur B. Ferguson, "Circumstances and the Sense of History in Tudor England: The Coming of the Historical Revolution", Medieval and Renaissance Studies, III (1967), 173.

the emergence of new historical perspectives. Like the Medieval chronicle, the Common Law, unchallenged by other legal systems, sought for the universals in history, secular though they might have been, stressing continuity and similarity through the ages.

Ferguson has posed the problem as such: "The central problem in historical thought was the very old one of reconciling the fact of change and the relativity of human experience with the presumed existence of an eternal and immutable order of nature."³⁰ Two approaches to history were thus in conflict in Renaissance England: the old universal methodology which stressed continuity, and the new antiquarian researches which pointed to change. It is this duality and its attendant problems that condition the historical thought of the period, paralleling the more general problems of adjustment to change facing England at the time.

Early in the English Renaissance the conflict of methodology was solved by stressing the continuity of history in spite of change. These changes were not denied, they simply were not made into dominant elements. In his history of Richard III, for instance, Sir Thomas More treated the transformations occurring within a single reign. His method of unifying included the use of a dominant thematic motif as well as psychology, that is, generalizations about human nature. Polydore Vergil used similar methods when he attempted to link several reigns into a coherent whole.³¹

The uses of history in Renaissance England soon became clear. Tradi-

³⁰ Arthur B. Ferguson, "The Historical Thought of Samuel Daniel: A Study in Renaissance Ambivalence", JHI, XXXII (1971), 187.

³¹ Levy, p. 78.

tion was to be justified, but primarily history was to be employed to show how to act in the present. It was different from the Italian practice, however, because it did not admit to change: the past and the present were one. This was the basis of the common law as we have seen where precedent was the deciding factor in judgment. The practice of finding in history precedents for current practices began at least with the Act of Restraint of Appeals in 1534. The question posed, whether or not Christianity in England was originally Roman, was answered by both sides, each finding historical justifications.³² Similarly, antiquarians wrote off the Norman Conquest as being of negligible importance; the only change in the English legal system, they argued, was one of terminology.³³

The outcome of this approach was a concentration on, and a glorification of, England. The subject of study was widened to the whole island in place of the city or regional chronicle. William Camden's strong patriotism, for example, was clearly reflected in his Brittania, published in 1586. Through his antiquarian researches he went back to Roman Britain and in this way attempted to show the continuity of English tradition.³⁴ The more continuous the history of a country, the stronger it was considered to be and the more immortal.³⁵ History thus became "an encourager to success"

³² Ibid., p. 79.

³³ Ibid., pp. 112-138.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 152.

³⁵ Edwin B. Benjamin, "Fame, Poetry and the Order of History in the Literature of the English Renaissance", SRen, VI (1959), 70.

to the Elizabethan middle-class.³⁶ Thus the aspects of her history which were ever-present and universal within the limited sphere of England, were continually the substance for much of the historical writing of the period.

In spite of its insistence on continuity, the new history was becoming more objective, more scientific. Polydore Vergil, an Italian who arrived at the English court about 1501 as a papal envoy and remained for fifty years, has usually been credited with promoting the new history in England.³⁷ He used both manuscripts and printed books as source material; when utilizing oral histories he clearly distinguishes it as such. Hay has called the Anglica Historia a "history-book of a modern sort" mainly due to Vergil's method.³⁸ There is some evidence, however, that not all English historians adopted Polydore's methods. He was accused by Lambarde of not resolving his history with Scripture. Polydore had claimed that the Britons were indigenous, but Lambarde, himself an antiquarian, was quick to point out that Scripture said that all men had come from one race. He was also attacked by Humphrey Lloyd and Sir John Price.³⁹ This criticism, however, could well be due to the fact that Vergil wrote primarily as a Catholic

³⁶Louis B. Wright, "The Elizabethan Middle-Class Taste for History", Journal of Modern History, III (1931), 175.

³⁷Lewis Einstein, The Italian Renaissance in England (New York: Burt Franklin, 1902), p. 289. See also Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare's "Histories": Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy (San Marino, Cal.: The Huntington Library, 1947), p. 59.

³⁸Denys Hay, Polydore Vergil: Renaissance Historian and Man of Letters (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), pp. 94-95.

³⁹A.L. Rowse, The England of Elizabeth (London: Macmillan, n.d.), p. 39.

European and not as a Protestant Englishman.⁴⁰

Francis Bacon was one of the first to associate history with the sciences by denying the validity of a priori reasoning. Fussner, however, accuses him of being "careless on facts", although admitting his methodology was modern.⁴¹ The strong element of prophecy, however, especially evident in Bacon's New Atlantis, makes one wonder whether he has not projected an a priori reasoning into the future instead of onto the past.⁴² John Selden, by using the criterion of internal coherence for judging historical truth, overcame some of the limitations of the common law approach to history.⁴³ By viewing evidence apart from traditional parallels he was a more modern historian than many of his colleagues.

Most students of English Renaissance historiography make the mistake of trying to fit men who wrote history into the camp of traditionalist or modern, which they presume are clearly separated from each other. But far worse, they fail to understand the distinctiveness of historical thought in this period which was neither medieval nor modern, neither committed to eter-

⁴⁰Hay, p. 157.

⁴¹Fussner, pp. 263-268.

⁴²Francis Bacon, Essays and New Atlantis (Roslyn, New York: Walter J. Black, 1942). See especially p. 151 on the discovery of America, p. 235 on planetary motion, and pp. 266-67 on the reasons why America is uncivilized. Prophecy necessarily involves extending present assumptions into the future. By linking the current beliefs about Atlantis with America, for example, Bacon saw its discovery as being foretold by Seneca, who said that one island would vanish and another rise. On the relationship between prophecy and history, see D. Kurze, "Prophecy and History", JWCI, XXI (1958), 63-85.

⁴³Fussner, pp. 278-291.

nal order nor unending change, but sought rather to discover the unchanging in change itself. Bodin, for example, who was widely read in England,⁴⁴ is an example of an historian who found the means of assimilating change implicit in human history by relating it to divine, mathematical and natural history.

It must be clear now why English historians had more trouble than the men on the Continent in adapting to the new science, economics, politics, and religion of the Renaissance. Both the Italian and the French had experienced change, most notably in their legal systems. The English common law tradition, however, had always stressed similarities throughout time; when indeed there was a change so great it could not be incorporated into their system instability and disorientation of perspective became a necessary result. The English had used the past to explain the present, not in causal terms, but in terms of parallels. To study in depth one of the histories that tried to solve the intellectual problems of the time will help us to understand the crisis of English Renaissance historiography and by extension of English Renaissance thought.

⁴⁴Dean, 166.

CHAPTER TWO: INTERPRETATIONS OF RALEGH

Sir Walter Raleigh has been the subject of much study. The bulk of the literature is mainly biographical, giving the reader the relevant data on his life and exploits. From these we learn that Raleigh was born probably between June and November of 1554¹ near Plymouth and that his father was one of the lesser Devon gentry. In 1568 he entered Oriel College, Oxford, and although enrolled for three years he was in France fighting with the Huguenots by March, 1569.² Despite the shortness of his stay at Oxford its influence remained with him. Although the new geography of Ortelius and Mercator was not yet known there, active religious contention thrived: Edmund Campion was Proctor and Robert Parsons was at Balliol.³ A history of the world had been written by Cooper of Christ Church; Raleigh might have recalled this years later in the Tower.⁴ He also met young Richard Hakluyt at Oxford. When in 1575 Raleigh attached himself to the Middle Temple, he

¹Agnes Latham, "A Birth-Date for Sir Walter Raleigh", Etudes Anglaises, IX (1956), 245.

²Raleigh himself presents the best evidence for this. In The History of the World he speaks of being present at the battle at Jarnac on March 13, 1569, and at the Huguenot defeat at Moncontour on October 3, 1569. See Bk. V, ch. 11, s. 6 and 8.

³For a discussion of Raleigh's later disputes with these Catholic polemicists, see Ernest A. Strathmann, Sir Walter Raleigh: A Study in Elizabethan Skepticism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), pp. 25-35.

⁴Norman Lloyd Williams, Sir Walter Raleigh (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 24.

became acquainted with his friend's uncle, also known as Richard Hakluyt, a lawyer who was passionately devoted to discovery and colonization. This could have been an early impetus to Raleigh's own Atlantic schemes.⁵

In 1576 Raleigh contributed verses to George Gascoigne's poem, The Steele Glass. Gascoigne, of Cambridge and Gray's Inn, appealed to Raleigh because of his swashing manner and worldly air. They talked together about metaphysics, history, politics, and theology, subjects close to Raleigh's own interests at the time--oratory and philosophy. The influence on Raleigh was so great that he later adopted Gascoigne's motto, "Tam marte quam Mercurio" as his own.⁶

By the end of 1577 Raleigh was already attached to the Court. An unsuccessful attempt in 1578 to reach North America in order to plant a colony by Sir Humphrey Gilbert, Raleigh's half-brother, included Raleigh as Captain of the Queen's ship, the Falcon. It is not known how near the West Indies he got, but he did stop at the Canary Islands.⁷ Although this was only the beginning of Raleigh's colonizing career, it was the farthest he himself physically came to reaching North America. By this time he was rapidly rising in favor with Elizabeth, and she would not allow him to risk his life in these kinds of adventures. A six-year patent to explore North America was given to him in 1583, but the ventures which followed consisted of sending out colonists to Virginia rather than any direct exploration on

⁵ Ibid., p. 25.

⁶ Irvin Anthony, Raleigh and his World (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), pp. 22-26.

⁷ D.B. Quinn, Raleigh and the British Empire (London: The English Universities Press Ltd., 1947), p. 29.

his part. It was only a decade later, after his position at Court had declined, that he sailed to explore Guiana.

The years between the unsuccessful Gilbert expedition and Raleigh's first voyage to Guiana, however, were filled with both rewards and punishments from the Queen. In 1580 he was sent to Ireland as Captain of a company of soldiers; because of his good service there, he returned to England in 1582. He became a Member of Parliament from Devonshire in 1584, and in the following year was knighted. His prominence in Elizabeth's court became obvious that year when he was made Captain of the Queen's Bodyguard, and thus became responsible for her personal safety. In these years, too, the financial rewards for being one of Elizabeth's favorites were large: by 1592 he had been given numerous estates, offices, and monopolies, among these Lord Warden of the Stanneries, Lord Lieutenant of Cornwall, and Vice-Admiral of the Western Counties.

The rise of Essex in 1589, however, saw Raleigh sent back to Ireland. This state of affairs was only temporary; he composed The Ocean's Love to Cynthia, and this pleased Elizabeth. The good favor did not last, however. In 1592 Raleigh was in the Tower for a period because of his marriage to Elizabeth Throckmorton, one of the Queen's ladies-in-waiting. Elizabeth the Queen had no patience when her favorites chose other women on whom to lavish their attentions. Her feminine sensitivities came out in times like these, and Raleigh was never reinstated to the high position he had once occupied.

It was soon after this that his thought once again turned to discovery. In December, 1594, he obtained a patent for the exploration of

Guiana. Although Quinn feels he went to search for El Dorado, the city of gold,⁸ his reasons appear to be more complex. Not only was Raleigh trying to prove himself to the Queen; he also seems to have had a genuine interest in prying that territory away from Spain.⁹

Elizabeth's death in 1603 ended Raleigh's favor at Court. James was not the monarch he was accustomed to, and James did not at all like Raleigh.¹⁰ Later that year he became implicated in the charges of treasonable conspiracy with Spain brought against his friend Lord Cobham. Cobham, to decrease the pressure on himself, lied about Raleigh's involvement and as a result, both men were condemned to death.¹¹ James, however, stopped the executions at the last moment, and Raleigh began his thirteen-year imprisonment in the Tower. It was in this period that he wrote The History of the World and conducted his chemical experiments. His hopes of obtaining gold from Guiana had not been extinguished, in spite of his long imprisonment, and at the end of 1616, he was released and began his preparations.

Raleigh fully realized the possible complications of his expedition. He was ordered not to attack any Spanish settlements for James was highly concerned about his relations with Spain. Raleigh was only to bring back gold. His good fortune did not last. He took sick on the ocean voyage and was not

⁸Ibid., p. 185.

⁹Williard M. Wallace, Sir Walter Raleigh (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), pp. 121-122.

¹⁰For a further discussion of Raleigh's relationship with James, see Chapter Five below.

¹¹Wallace, p. 194.

able to leave the ship once it reached Guiana. His son and his lieutenant, Lawrence Keymis, were put in charge. Unfortunately, they soon clashed with the Spaniards and while trying to occupy San Thomé, Raleigh's son was killed. To add to this, Raleigh's men could not locate his gold mine. He sailed back to England, a dead man, having disobeyed orders, failed to find his treasure, and lost his son. Spain was quick to demand Raleigh's head and on October 29, 1618, he was executed on the old charge of 1603.

It is of this life that numerous interpretations have been made. These evaluations cover at least six distinct categories. Some historians see Raleigh and his History as pre-modern. Others define him, respectively, as a typical Elizabethan, an embryo Commonwealthman, a consciously modern religious thinker and a Machiavellian. A rather small body of literature has placed him in the mainstream of the occult-scientific Renaissance continuum. The fact that scholars have drawn on The History of the World to support their theories of Raleigh's personality enables us to get a first idea of its rather murky quality. The categories of the critics are themselves murky, and are examined below in light of my intention to explore the complexity of a thinker whose mind is filled with empirical fact and providential and vitalist categories that are reconciled by symbolic, associative and logical thought. It is to examining each of these interpretations separately that we now turn.

A. RALEGH AS PRE-MODERN

Historians who assert that Raleigh was not into the mainstream of the

seventeenth century's modern approach to history will usually place him in the vague role of a transitional figure. This category differs very little from ones which place him in the medieval or modern approach, since they define "transitional" only as a combination of the other two, not as a distinctly separate category. An exception to this is the interpretation of James W. Thompson, who feels that Raleigh was returning to a more medieval type of chronicle. The lack of perspective in Raleigh's thought, he believes, was common to all Elizabethans. In his opinion, although Raleigh "did not approach his sources in a critical spirit, and viewed the past in the light of a moral lesson, he made a step forward in realizing the need of geographical study in connection with history."¹² It is interesting that Thompson will not admit to an Elizabethan sense of perspective in light of his belief that they had a sense of geography. Certainly the two had a close connection at this time.

Levy goes along with the idea of a medieval quality to Raleigh's History. He feels the arrangement of its books is in the tradition of the Middle Ages: beginning with the Seven Ages, it shifts over to the Third and Fourth of the Four Monarchies. It is, he says, essentially a medieval world chronicle. He will admit, however, that although history for Raleigh was the record of the workings of Providence, he was quite aware of the concept of anachronism and worried about the trustworthiness of his sources.¹³

¹²James W. Thompson, A History of Historical Writing (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1942), vol. I, pp. 602-611.

¹³Fred J. Levy, Tudor Historical Thought (San Marino, Cal.: The Huntington Library, 1967), pp. 289-292.

It is again the problem of sacred history and secular methodology, but Levy does not seem to see any contradiction in this.

Fussner comes closest to explaining this seeming paradox. Raleigh's History, he says, was "transitional in the sense that it reasserted medi-
eval ideas of universal history in terms which were meaningful to seven-
teenth century Christians."¹⁴ He then places Raleigh in a traditional re-
ligious framework: Raleigh, according to Fussner, believed that one cannot
be sure of anything except that known by faith. This leads Fussner to be-
lieve that Raleigh saw human nature as basically unchanging, a view that can
be sufficiently supported in the History.¹⁵ Fussner does not carry this ob-
servation quite far enough, however, and concludes by criticizing Raleigh:

To some extent Raleigh's uncompromising moral faith prevented him from understanding or even becoming curious about standards which were recognizably different from his own. Pagan customs and institutions were all too easily dismissed with contempt.¹⁶

It is my contention that it was just this faith and belief in the unchanging quality of human nature that enabled Raleigh to accept pagan customs and institutions as being early instances of and parallels of God's revelation. It is surprising that Fussner could miss the rich comparative mythology of the History. If Raleigh were as rigid as Fussner contends, he would not try to prove that Cain and Jupiter or Adam and Saturn were the

¹⁴ Frank Smith Fussner, The Historical Revolution: English Historical Writing and Thought, 1580-1640 (London: Routledge and Paul, 1962), p. 193.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 207.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 209.

same person.¹⁷

The impression that one is left with regarding this group of critics is that they are so interested in finding modern methodology or the lack of it in Renaissance historiography, they fail to see an imaginative, and quite undogmatic approach to history. There are enormous blocks which form the basis for a science of mythology in Raleigh, for instance, but since he is not careful of his sources, he is too easily dismissed as being medieval, or at the most, not yet modern.

B. RALEGH AS TYPICAL ELIZABETHAN

The scholars in this category are able to disregard the question of whether Raleigh was medieval or modern, dogmatic or scientific, a believer or an atheist. They can do this by simply terming him an "Elizabethan", a handy conglomerative label. For C.F. Tucker Brooke, both Elizabethan England and Raleigh were imbued with a sense of romanticism; their task "was to expand the world in which men live--the world of the senses and the world of the spirit."¹⁸ This, of course, is quite true, but actually tells us very little about Raleigh.

Edwards expands on this theme. He calls Raleigh "the ideal Renaissance case-history", and a perfect example of the "compleat gentleman". Raleigh was the man who tried to unite in his own life the practical, active, artistic, and intellectual ways of life.¹⁹ He then places Raleigh squarely into the

¹⁷ HW, Bk. I, ch. 6, s.4, p. 86.

¹⁸ C.F. Tucker Brooke, "Sir Walter Raleigh as Poet and Philosopher", ELH, V (1938), 109.

¹⁹ Philip Edwards, Sir Walter Raleigh (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1953), p. 47.

new historical revolution by suggesting that he might have been an official member of the Society of Antiquaries. At the least, Edwards contends, he did write to Sir Robert Cotton, prominent in the Society, from the Tower asking to borrow a list of books and manuscripts relating to British antiquity.²⁰ The inability here too of a scholar to see the contradictions inherent in this universal or conglomerative view of Raleigh limits his work. Renaissance men themselves saw the problem, but modern researchers too often do not.

One historian who does understand the dilemma is Herschel Baker. He, however, finds this to be characteristic of the Renaissance and does not seek out the contemporary solution of it. Raleigh, he says, "juxtaposed contradictory attitudes toward truth" which "together with his bent for reading history as the demonstration of divine control, establish his credentials as a Renaissance historian."²¹

The strong point in this approach is that it attempts to examine Raleigh in the context of the Elizabethan environment. "Romanticism" might not be the most fitting description, but Edwards' adoption of the "complete gentleman" idea to the History is understandable. The History of the World, he says, is a study of man, not only of events, but of all branches of learning.²² Although this interpretation neither is profound nor gives us a solution to the thorny problems involved in the History, it does remind us that the Elizabethan world was an open, expanding one.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 49-50.

²¹ Herschel Baker, The Race of Time: Three Lectures on Renaissance Historiography (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), p. 47.

²² Edwards, p. 150.

C. RALEGH AS EARLY COMMONWEALTHMAN

Attempts to place Raleigh in a more modern context have at times centered around the political aspects of the History. Campbell, for instance, has stressed the practical function of history as a "political mirror" and has concluded that Raleigh's work falls into this category.²³ She refers, however, only to the Preface of the History in her notes, and this is indeed more contemporaneously political than the body of the work, although it is not truly representative of it. The assumption that he was attempting through history to change the political situation remains unproven.

In many cases Raleigh is seen as a forerunner of the English Revolution and as one who suffered heavily under Stuart injustice. Charles H. Firth alludes to this view; his interpretation of Raleigh is mainly political. He contends that Raleigh's conception of history was quite similar to that of the Puritans because of its basis in Divine Providence.²⁴ Firth also maintains that Raleigh was convinced of the counterfeit quality of the pagan prophecies and implies that this places him as a modern historian.²⁵ In this view, then, Raleigh has an intellectual affinity with the Puritans, and also a political one. For instance, Cromwell recommended to his son Richard that he read the History. This, coupled with the fact that "as a

²³Lily Bess Campbell, Shakespeare's 'Histories': Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy (San Marino, Cal.: The Huntington Library, 1947), pp. 79-84.

²⁴Charles H. Firth, "Sir Walter Raleigh's History of the World", Proceedings of the British Academy, VIII (1917-18), 441.

²⁵Ibid., 436.

victim to the Stuarts he became a hero to the opposition",²⁶ allows Firth to place Raleigh in the ranks of embryo revolutionaries.

Firth's assertions, however, are easily refuted. First of all, the differences between Raleigh and the Puritans outweigh their similar belief in Divine Providence. Raleigh was a strong believer in man's power to change both his physical circumstances and his rank in the spiritual hierarchy; in these matters the hand of God was not uppermost.²⁷ His second point, that Raleigh realized the counterfeit quality of the prophecies, is many-times refuted in the History itself. His belief in the prisca theologia, or pagan forerunners of the Christian revelation,²⁸ and especially in the prophecies of Hermes Trismegistus²⁹ is adequate proof that Raleigh's brand of Christianity was quite different from that of the Puritans. The fact that he was seen as a Stuart martyr by the Commonwealthmen does not necessarily mean that his sympathies were there. A point, however, in favor of this case that has not yet been recognized is Raleigh's concept of government. The similarities between his views and those of Harrington later on certainly merit study.³⁰

The title of Trevor-Roper's essay on Raleigh misleads us: he calls

²⁶Ibid., 441.

²⁷See, for example, HW, Bk. II, ch. 4, s.6, p. 275 on man's reason.

²⁸HW, Preface (no pagination); Bk. I, ch.1, s.2, pp. 2-3.

²⁹HW, Bk. I, Ch. 6, s.7, p. 96; Bk. II, ch. 6; s.7, p. 324.

³⁰See HW, Bk. I, ch. 9, s.1 and 2, pp. 179-181.

him "the last Elizabethan". The position he takes, however, is that Raleigh was rather a forerunner to the Great Rebellion:

Raleigh, by his individualism, his isolation, his survival, became the hope of all whom the Cecil system excluded; and Cecil and his allies the Howards were convinced that, to complete their monopoly, Raleigh must be destroyed.³¹

This emphasis on Raleigh as an early rebel is weak. Indeed, he had enemies and did fall victim to Stuart (and Spanish) connivance. But Trevor-Roper gives him a conscious role and he nearly becomes a political leader in this essay.

This interpretation of Raleigh is more fully developed by Christopher Hill. His essay attempts to place Raleigh in the mainstream of the seventeenth century by references to his connections with religious toleration, modern science, and an aggressive foreign policy.³² In his opinion, Raleigh was a modern "despite occasional professions of belief in the decay of the world." "The whole emphasis of the History," he continues, "is on law against chance."³³ This affected his history, in Hill's opinion, by enabling him to concentrate on secondary causes³⁴ and to see in historical change a method of realigning political views.³⁵ Raleigh, then, is seen as primarily

³¹H.R. Trevor-Roper, Historical Essays (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1957), p. 105.

³²Christopher Hill, Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 132.

³³Ibid., p. 147.

³⁴Ibid., p. 181.

³⁵Ibid., p. 198.

a political thinker who began to see that through the use of rational historical research, political ideas could be changed.

The outstanding quality of Hill's article, however, lies not in his conclusions, but rather in his exposition of Raleigh's modern qualities. But just as other interpretations stress too much the orthodoxy of his thought, this view treats the traditional elements too lightly. His belief in the decay of the world was not simply "occasional"; it formed the basis of his treatment of secondary causes and as such permeates the History. By concentrating on only one of the two strains in Raleigh, the complete picture is lost.

D. RALEGH AS CONSCIENTIOUS RELIGIOUS THINKER

The great majority of critical studies of Raleigh center around his religious views. Accused of atheism arising from opinions expressed at a dinner party at the home of Sir George Trenchard,³⁶ and because of the notoriety of some of his acquaintances, this aspect of Raleigh has been extensively examined. The idea that he was an atheist has been thoroughly discredited. Beau has pointed out that the Elizabethan "atheist" was not necessarily a total disbeliever in God; Raleigh, in his opinion, possessed "a critical logic which confounded the dogmatic assertions of the Church."³⁷

³⁶On this occasion, Raleigh's brother Carew asked, during a discussion of the soul, "Soul, what is that?" and this question was further developed by Sir Walter.

³⁷J. Beau, "La Religion de Sir Walter Raleigh", Revue Anglo-Américaine, XI (1934), 410-413.

Thus we see Raleigh as a dissenter from the scholastic methodology.

His early disbelief, according to Rowse, was modified during his stay in the Tower: "With his later troubles and increasing age, he tried hard to bring what he thought to be true more in line with orthodox belief, and this is what is represented in the History of the World."³⁸ Wallace, too, notes a change in his beliefs. Raleigh, he says, became religious only on the eve of his first intended execution and then wrote "The Passionate Man's Pilgrimage."³⁹

These two opinions, which express a discontinuity in Raleigh's thought, simplify an understanding of the History. We are left with a changed man, and therefore any discrepancies between his past life and his life in the Tower can be erased. This view, however, does not account for the departures from orthodoxy that subtly permeate The History of the World. It indeed has much to do with Raleigh's past, and thus a simple explanation for this paradox will not suffice.

Strathmann has by far been the main exponent of the belief that Raleigh was a conscientious religious thinker. He terms him a "skeptic", but is quick to define the skepticism as "a tendency to question authority and to submit prescribed beliefs to the test of experience or experiment."⁴⁰ Raleigh's skepticism, he continues, was not in the realm of first causes, however, but in philosophical matters.⁴¹ This is Strathmann's method for

³⁸A.L. Rowse, Raleigh and the Throckmortons (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1962), p. 178.

³⁹Wallace, p. 221.

⁴⁰Strathmann, Sir Walter Raleigh, p. 7.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 219-220.

reconciling Raleigh's Platonism and defense of natural magic with an orthodox Christian religious viewpoint. He maintains that Raleigh is traditional in that he believes that man can know of the existence of God through reason, but cannot comprehend His Essence through reason.⁴² In the study of nature, a second cause, man can use his rational faculties to explain.⁴³ It is as a part of nature that astrology and natural magic are thus justified.

Therefore, Strathmann's conception of Raleigh pivots around a dualism between first and second causes. Raleigh, in this view, used both belief and reason as guides to human knowledge, but each had its own sphere of influence. In this way, too, his pessimism can be accounted for because of his philosophical skepticism without detracting from his belief in God.

This dualism, however, is not present in Raleigh's own mind, I believe; the world of first and second causes, the city of God and the city of man, do overlap and merge. Herein lies the importance of the study of Hermetism to Raleigh. The case for Renaissance skepticism is a valid one, but Strathmann's explanations ignore the real revolutionary aspect of the period. As Popkin has well shown, skepticism at that time was total: it involved metaphysics and theology as well as natural knowledge.⁴⁴ Men in the Renaissance were trying to overcome the contradictions with which their period presented them whether that meant the widespread use of paradox⁴⁵ or, as in Raleigh's

⁴² Ibid., pp. 101-102.

⁴³ Ernest A. Strathmann, "Sir Walter Raleigh on Natural Philosophy", Modern Language Quarterly, I (1940), 49.

⁴⁴ Richard H. Popkin, The History of Skepticism from Erasmus to Descartes (Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp., 1960), p. 111.

⁴⁵ For an interesting study of the methods of paradox, see Rosalie L. Colie, Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966).

case, a genuine attempt to reconcile logically. The juxtaposition of two worlds of causation simply did not satisfy them.

A study which differs only slightly from Strathmann's is that of Lillian Kabatt.⁴⁶ She too posits the dualism between theology and science, but in even stronger terms. Raleigh is made into the man of science in natural matters while remaining unquestioning with regard to Scripture.⁴⁷ But she too misunderstands Raleigh's usage of mythology, one of the keys to his philosophy. She asserts that he "felt a good deal of scorn for myth",⁴⁸ and says that he took myths literally.⁴⁹ As pointed out above,⁵⁰ these two statements are blatantly untrue in the context of The History of the World. It would have been impossible for Kabatt to posit the duality she has if she had been aware of Raleigh's constant use of and reference to the symbolic quality of myths.

E. RALEGH AS MACHIAVELLIAN

Pierre Lefranc's recent study of Raleigh is encyclopedic in scope. It

⁴⁶Lillian Trena Conan Kabatt, "The History of the World: Reason in the Historiography of Sir Walter Raleigh" (Unpublished PhD. dissertation: University of Southern California, 1968). She agrees almost totally with Strathmann, although arguing with him about the kind of classical skepticism Raleigh possessed. Besides presenting little original material, her bibliography is lacking in important sources.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 74.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 142.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 149.

⁵⁰See critique of Firth above, p. 34.

attempts to show all of his associations and beliefs, and as such, gives us a good idea of the complexity of the man. This, however, gives the book an air of factual analysis, at times even without the relevant facts. For example, he says that Thomas Hariot was perhaps involved in the production of the chronological table which appears at the end of the History. Any proof of this, however, is replaced by mere conjecture.⁵¹

Lefranc finds Raleigh deeply influenced by Machiavelli, and therefore pictures him as an eminently practical man, not terribly interested either in literature or speculation.⁵² He asserts that the History is permeated with self-interest and as such is filled with orthodox beliefs that lack any real conviction on Raleigh's part.⁵³ Lefranc can therefore see a line of continuity between ambitions as a younger man and those of his later life.

If indeed the History was used by Raleigh to further his ambitions, one would expect him to be sensitive to criticisms of the first edition of the work. Although it was immediately popular with the public, it roused James' anger; Raleigh had, in his opinion, been "too sawcie in censuring princes."⁵⁴ Since the book was revised in 1617 in its second edition, one would expect that if Raleigh had Machiavellian tendencies, he would have modified the controversial passages. I have compared the 1614 and 1617 editions at Yale and have found no significant changes in a sampling of passages that

⁵¹Pierre Lefranc, Sir Walter Raleigh, Écrivain, l'Oeuvre et les Idées (Quebec: Presses de L'Université Laval, 1968), p. 267.

⁵²Ibid., p. 568.

⁵³Ibid., p. 578.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 274.

could be classified as either theologically or politically controversial. Thus I find it difficult to believe that The History of the World was written to please James at the cost of Raleigh's principles. This does not blemish, however, the great quality of Lefranc's work; it is his conclusion that is not adequately expanded and proven.

Hiram Haydn also points to this quality in Raleigh. The History is not, in his opinion, a very original work; it simply advocated the conservative and orthodox values of the time.⁵⁵ His poetry, in Haydn's opinion, is Machiavellian; it shows a Raleigh "who is content to limit himself almost exclusively to what is practiced, and, without any evident qualms, to advocate a political ethic of pure expediency."⁵⁶ The description is not consistent, however; at other times he calls Raleigh "a naturalistic humanist",⁵⁷ and a man both passionate and religious.⁵⁸ The interpretation is neither developed nor proven, and one wonders exactly where Raleigh fits into the "Counter-Renaissance".

F. RALEGH AS OCCULTIST-SCIENTIST

Raleigh's association with the so-called "School of Night" has caused scholars to examine him in connection with the occult-scientific tradition identified with that group. The school was first investigated by Muriel

⁵⁵Hiram Haydn, The Counter-Renaissance (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 5.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 6.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 67.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 24.

Bradbrook in 1936; she claimed that it studied theology, philosophy, astronomy, geography and chemistry. Raleigh was the patron and Thomas Hariot the master of the group, which also included Northumberland, Derby, Marlowe, and Chapman.⁵⁹ She has also developed the idea of Raleigh's esotericism in the History as a result of his connection with the school.⁶⁰

The idea that such a school existed has been challenged by Strathmann. The reference Bradbrook used to prove its existence came from Shakespeare; Strathmann maintains that in only one place was the school referred to, and that this is an easily-mistaken passage.⁶¹ In a more recent study, however, the idea has been revived. Although the "School of Night" was not a close society, in the opinion of Walter Oakeshott, there was a group associated with Raleigh from 1591 to 1600 that gave rise to suspicions of being occultist.⁶²

Two other studies have been done expanding on Raleigh's connections with chemical experimentation.⁶³ These, however, do no more than point out

⁵⁹M.C. Bradbrook, The School of Night: A Study in the Literary Relationships of Sir Walter Raleigh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), p. 8.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 53.

⁶¹Ernest A. Strathmann, "The Textual Evidence for 'The School of Night'", Modern Language Notes, LVI(1941), 181.

⁶²Walter Oakeshott, The Queen and the Poet (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), p. 117.

⁶³John William Shirley, "The Scientific Experiments of Sir Walter Raleigh, the Wizard Earl, and the Three Magi in the Tower, 1603-1617", Ambix, IV (1949), 52-66; and G.R. Batho, "The Wizard Earl in the Tower, 1605-1621", History Today, VI (1956), 344-351. For a further development of these relationships see Chapter Four.

that he was interested in scientific experimentation and especially, alchemical distillations through his relationships with Northumberland and Hariot. A more ambitious study of this area of Raleigh's thought has been done by P.M. Rattansi. He has shown how the sections on natural magic in the History developed out of Raleigh's own interest in scientific experimentation and thus hints at a possible science-Hermetism link.⁶⁴

A closer look at this aspect of Raleigh's life and The History of the World is needed. The first step, however, is a closer look at the history of the Hermetic tradition and its main philosophical elements.

⁶⁴P.M. Rattansi, "Alchemy and Natural Magic in Raleigh's 'History of the World'", Ambix, XIII (1966), 122-138.

CHAPTER THREE: RENAISSANCE HERMETISM

The proper starting point in a discussion of Hermetism is with Hermes Trismegistus, the god for whom the philosophy is named. In the Renaissance it was believed that he was an Egyptian god who was thrice-great (Trismegistus), that is, philosopher, priest and king.¹ At this time interest in Egypt and her antiquities was high as a result of the trade flourishing between the Levant and Europe. Although actual Egyptian records were not deciphered until the nineteenth century, the vast Greek and Roman literature then surfacing often mentioned Egyptian matters.² This indirect method of discovery is probably the basis of the controversy that arose late in the Renaissance over the antiquity of Hermes Trismegistus. Even without the ability to read the Egyptian documents, suspicions eventually arose that he was actually a product of the early Neoplatonic period.

But for Marsilio Ficino and his Platonic Academy, however, Hermes was one of the early revelations of the Christian tradition, a member of the prisca theologia, believing, above all, in the immortality of the soul.³ In his introduction to the Corpus Hermeticum, Ficino elaborates this point:

¹Frances A. Yates, Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), p. 14.

²Karl H. Dannenfeldt, "Egypt and Egyptian Antiquities in the Renaissance", SRen, VI (1959), 7.

³Marsilio Ficino, Théologie Platonicienne de l'Immortalité des Ames (Paris: Société d'Édition « Les Belles Lettres » 1964), Bk. I, ch. 1, pp. 38-39. See also Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Heptaplus (Firenze: Vallecchi Editore, 1942), p. 170.

Mercurius Trismegistus was the first philosopher to raise himself above physics and mathematics to the contemplation of the divine...Therefore he was considered the original founder of theology. Orpheus followed him and held second place in ancient theology. Aglaophemus was initiated into the Orphic mysteries. Aglaophemus' successor in theology was Pythagoras, and his pupil was Philolaus, the master of our divine Plato. So six theologians, in wonderful order, formed a unique and coherent succession in ancient theology, beginning with Mercurius and ending with the divine Plato.⁴

It is easy to see here why the Renaissance Platonists so easily adopted the idea of the prisca theologia. With the revival of antiquity, and the emphasis that was placed on the desirability of this return, certain inconsistencies had to be reconciled. The men of the Renaissance were Christians, and could not deny this. How, then, could they reconcile the old belief in pagan gods with their religion except by making them forerunners of the Christian revelation? Petrarch used the same method when discussing his model Cicero. Cicero, he said, possessed all of the basic Christian beliefs; if he had been living in the time of Christ, he certainly would have become a Christian.⁵ In this same way, Ficino and those like him were able to see a continuity in belief throughout history. Their insistence on this unchanging aspect of man led them on to a belief in universals as the basis of history, as the link connecting the past to the present and the future.

The source of the belief in Hermes Trismegistus came from the Corpus Hermeticum, a collection of writings attributed to Hermes. Around the year

⁴Quoted in Paul O. Kristeller, The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), pp. 25-26.

⁵Francesco Petrarca, "On His Own Ignorance" in Ernst Cassirer, et. al. (eds.), The Renaissance Philosophy of Man (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 115.

1460 a monk, an agent of Cosimo de' Medici, brought to Florence from Macedonia a manuscript in Greek of the Corpus Hermeticum. Marsilio Ficino, one of Cosimo's translators, was busy at work translating Plato, but was ordered to do the Hermetic books first. Both men suspected Hermes Trismegistus was older than Plato, and thus deserved priority in translation.⁶ Hermetism was thus closely linked to Platonism during the Renaissance and, as we shall see, provided the latter with its historical justification and association with magic. The name Corpus Hermeticum is actually of medieval origin; it is simply a title given by commentators to a collection of about seventeen distinct documents. It made its first appearance as a collection in manuscripts of the fourteenth century, although the separate documents date back much farther. Scott suggests that the manuscript was brought together as early as 1050; it is probable, he says, that it was known as a whole to Psellus.⁷ The work of individual authors, the Corpus Hermeticum existed at least in part by 300 A.D.; both St. Augustine⁸ and Lactantius⁹ mention the works of Hermes Trismegistus and consider him to have been a real person endowed with knowledge of God. The men of the Renaissance, however, believed him to be

⁶Yates, pp. 12-13.

⁷Walter Scott (ed. and trans.), Hermetica (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), Introduction, p. 28.

⁸St. Augustine, City of God (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1958), Bk. VIII, ch. 23, p. 167.

⁹Lactantius, Epitome of the Divine Institutes (London: S.P.C.K., 1950), ch. 4, pp. 63-64.

of far greater antiquity than the early Christian period. He was an Egyptian, a believer not only in the One True God, but in the occult explanations and manifestations of that God so intimately connected with the mysterious, hieroglyphical Middle East.

Ficino's Platonic Academy, under the sponsorship of Cosimo de' Medici, was the source of Renaissance interest in Hermes Trismegistus and his occult philosophy. It studied the newly-discovered ancient texts of Plato and the Neoplatonists, as well as the other links in the chain of divine revelation, the prisca theologia. Its main aim, however, was not a detached analysis of these manuscripts, but rather a grand reconciliation of them with Christian doctrine. As Cassirer suggests, it was not a "mere revival of Platonic thought", but rather an adaptation of that thought. The teachings of Plato, he continues, "were transformed through a refracting medium."¹⁰ Nesca Robb, to go even further, does not even concede that there was a Renaissance Platonism: it was Neoplatonism simply because Plato was known to the humanists only through Latin authors and a few Latin translators.¹¹ Thus, the syncretic nature of the Academy served to unify the two opposite poles of Renaissance intellectual culture: Christian faith and heathen knowledge. Just as Neoplatonism was an extension of Platonism, Hermetism was a development of both philosophies. It carried Plato's ideas farther back into history, and indeed named him as one of the prisca theologia. But Hermetism also

¹⁰Ernst Cassirer, The Platonic Renaissance in England (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1953), p. 8.

¹¹Nesca Robb, Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1935), p. 11.

extended Platonic philosophy and Neoplatonic syncretism to the practical level, the level of experimentation. Through natural magic, alchemy, and numerology, the other two philosophies were able to be demonstrated practically.¹²

The main students of the Academy devoted their time not only to the study of the Corpus Hermeticum, but to the exposition of and commentary on it. Pico della Mirandola, for example, took one line from the Pimander, one of the Hermetic manuscripts, "A great miracle, Asclepius, is man", and expanded it into his Oration on the Dignity of Man. His Heptaplus, likewise, expands on the Hermetic accounts of hierarchy and creation. Perhaps the most detailed of the commentaries on the Creation is Francesco Giorgio's Harmonia Mundi, published in 1525. The book is structured as a musical composition, stressing the numerical and harmonical unity of the created world, the "music of the spheres". Indeed, the science of numbers played a large part in the Renaissance Hermetic tradition because it and other occult sciences were able to prove the basic harmony of the world.

As Kristeller has suggested, it is safe to say that all of educated Florence in the second half of the fifteenth century came under the influence of the Florentine Academy.¹³ This is not to imply that all Florentine intellectuals were Hermetics; it is rather an indication of how popular the

¹²The three terms are used here to denote three separate elements of the same tradition. Platonism refers to the basic ideas, the philosophy; Neoplatonism denotes the syncretic development, and Hermetism is used in reference to a combination of the two with its practical extensions.

¹³Kristeller, pp. 18-19.

syncretic philosophy stressed at the Academy actually was and how it satisfied the basic need of reconciling the old with the new.

Its influence, however, spread farther than simply Florence, and continued way beyond the fifteenth century. In England, as Sears Jayne has pointed out, a strong Neoplatonic tradition had existed for centuries before the birth of Ficino.¹⁴ Florentine Platonism thus fell on fertile ground. It made its influence felt indirectly, at first, reaching England through "the Italian and especially the French writers of belles-lettres who had made Ficinian doctrine a familiar literary subject."¹⁵ Cassirer, too, sees Florentine Platonism as influential in English thought: it reiterated the a priori, universal grounds of religion but on a more expansive framework than scholasticism.¹⁶ Thus men as diversified as John Colet, Thomas Traherne, Edmund Spenser and Robert Fludd were benefactors of this tradition. Although it cannot be ignored that much of this influence was indirect, and that perhaps many of the Englishmen involved knew only the beliefs, and not the name, of the philosophy they had adopted, in Raleigh's case there are references not merely to Ficino and Pico but to Hermes Trismegistus himself.¹⁷ Thus the Hermetic tradition had spread to England through the Platonic Academy and nourished a long-established way of thinking.

¹⁴Sears Jayne, "Ficino and the Platonism of the English Renaissance", Comparative Literature, IV (1952), 215.

¹⁵Ibid., 237-238.

¹⁶Cassirer, p. 24.

¹⁷Jayne, 218.

The syncretic nature of Renaissance Hermetism emphasized continuity throughout history, and therefore its theorists needed to show that in the wide space of time between Egyptian civilization and the Renaissance, the Hermetic philosophy had been known. This turned out to be a fairly simple project: there were many who believed in Hermes Trismegistus. Agrippa, although a contemporary of the Florentine Platonists, soon spread their influence by linking the philosophy with older and darker medieval traditions. He stressed the esoteric quality of the Hermetic tradition and associated it with medieval alchemy and philosophic skepticism. As Nauert has suggested, there is really nothing incompatible between skepticism and Hermetic magic: both agree that human reasoning is of shallow scope and only a certain kind of knowledge can really be known, that of the experimentally observed.¹⁸ Moreover, this belief in esotericism actually promoted the search for continuity: the Hermetics did not have to rely on direct references to Hermes; implied correspondences were seen as manifestations of the same tradition.

In their own tradition the English saw Roger Bacon as a Hermetic because of his belief in science and in universals.¹⁹ Because of its syncretism, the philosophy was inextricably intertwined with Platonic beliefs, and in this way Sir Thomas More was seen as a similar thinker. His admiration for Pico was obvious in his New Year's gift to Joyce Leigh, a nun.

¹⁸ Charles G. Nauert, Jr., Agrippa and the Crisis of Renaissance Thought (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), pp. 140-141.

¹⁹ Stewart C. Easton, Roger Bacon and his Search for a Universal Science (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), p. 77. For Bacon's influences on Ficino, see D.P. Walker, Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella (London: The Warburg Institute, 1958), p. 36.

He sent the works of Pico as an inspiration "as may bear witness of my tender love and zeal to the happy continuance and gracious increase of virtue in your soul."²⁰

It has been mentioned above that both St. Augustine and Lactantius knew of Hermes. Lactantius approved of the praise given to him "justly called Trismegistus, by reason of his virtue and knowledge of many arts."²¹ Dionysius the Areopagite, one of the last teachers of the Athenian Platonic school, was long praised by the Hermetics. Indeed, The Celestial Hierarchies bears a remarkable similarity to the Corpus Hermeticum.²²

In 1614 Isaac Casaubon published De rebus sacris et ecclesiasticis exercitationes XVI, in which he denied the antiquity of the Hermetic books. Although he does not deny that there may have been a man named Hermes Trismegistus in ancient Egypt, he denies that the Corpus Hermeticum was written by him. Because of internal evidence, he placed its composition at the end of the first century after Christ.²³ There was a new rash of credulity at the turn of the century, instigated by Flinders Petrie, who dated it between 500 and 200 B.C.²⁴ but today the Casaubon theory, that the Corpus

²⁰ Sir Thomas More, Pico della Mirandola in The English Works of Sir Thomas More (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1931), vol. I, p. 347. On More's influence on the Cambridge Platonists, see Cassirer, Platonic Renaissance, p. 23.

²¹ Lactantius, ch. 4, pp. 63-64.

²² Both sprang from the early Neoplatonic tradition, and therefore the similarities would, of course, be striking.

²³ Scott, pp. 41-42.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 45-46.

Hermeticum is actually the work of Alexandrian Neoplatonists and this explains the close similarity between it, Plato and the Neoplatonists, is generally accepted.

Contrary to modern scholarship, it does not appear that this doctrine was readily accepted among Renaissance intellectuals, particularly in England. Raleigh himself gives it no heed, although he does mention Casaubon.²⁵ This continued well into the 1650's: Thomas Traherne, Robert Fludd, and even Dr. John Everard continued to believe in the authenticity of Hermes Trismegistus. There are, I believe, two reasons which may account for their failure to accept Casaubon's scholarship. I have read sections of De rebus sacris. It is a vast theological tract, and the parts which refer to the Hermetic books are lost in the maze of argumentation. It is possible that the "discovery" was not even "discovered" by many immediately.²⁶ More probable, however, is the idea that the book was an attempt to discredit pagan mysteries. The whole tone of the book resembles James I's Daemonologie, and it is likely that Casaubon, a close friend of the King's, had entered into the witch-hunt. If this is true, the Renaissance Platonists could well have felt the need to deny the whole work. Casaubon's assault on Hermes Trismegistus was perhaps seen as merely a way to discredit those who were opposed to James.

²⁵Raleigh in fact contradicts Casaubon: "For it is manifest (if there be any truth in prophane antiquitie) that all the knowledge which the Greekes had, was transported out of Egypt or Phoenicia; and not out of Greece, nor by any Graecian into Aegypt." HW, Bk. II, ch. 6, s. 6, pp. 318-319.

²⁶Thomas has also suggested this. See Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), p. 225.

The very basic idea in Hermetic philosophy, the one that describes all the others, is analogy. Its method, finding similarities, links together seemingly disparate events and phenomena and thus buttresses the monistic assumptions of Hermetism. It takes many forms: continuity through history, the macrocosm-microcosm analogy, the use of symbols, the belief in myth, to name a few. More specifically, the Hermetic explained the unknown, the unexplainable, through the known. Thus the past could be explained by reference to the present, the earth in relation to the heavens, God through man (euhemerism), ideas through symbols and myths. It definitely involved a belief in an expressed order, one that could be demonstrated. Although it would seem that astrology would fit this description and thus be part of the Hermetic tradition, the truth is, that its main exponents differ and their opinion of the influence of the stars tends to be ambivalent. The moderate view seems to have been that the stars have control over reasonless things in the world; man, however, is beyond their control because his soul is free. Ficino, it appears, felt this way: through Providence, man's soul is above fate, but through nature, his body is subordinate to fate. This idea, then, adds another dimension to the analogy characteristic. Analogy implies

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S.K. Heninger, Jr., "Metaphor as Cosmic Correspondence", Medieval and Renaissance Studies, III (1967), 3.

28

Don Cameron Allen, The Star-Crossed Renaissance: The Quarrel about Astrology and its Influence in England (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1966), p. 153.

29

Ibid., p. 7.

permanence, or parallel, simultaneous change. The Hermetic philosophy asserts that only the divine can alter the analogy, and the soul of man is certainly divine.

The apparent changes in the heavens during the early modern period caused men to wonder exactly how stable the medieval macrocosm-microcosm analogy was. Hermetic theory was able to explain this, which accounts for much of its success. It asserts, like Platonism, that the earth, man, and all things material are constantly in flux; it is only God-ness that remains stable. "For things that come into being in heaven are immutable and imperishable, but those that come into being on earth are mutable and perishable." ³⁰ Movement in the heavens is only appearance, not reality; it is because we are in time that the unchangeable seems to be in motion:

Though eternity is stable, fixed, and motionless, yet since time is mobile, and its movement ever goes back into eternity, it results from this that eternity, also, though motionless in itself, appears to be in motion, on account of its relation to time; for eternity enters into time, and it is in time that all movement takes place.³¹

Thus the difference between changing appearance and eternal reality is explained and becomes one of the basic tenets of Hermetic philosophy. It is also why astrological predictions are not seen to be of the highest order:

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Hermetica, Libellus XI, p. 209.

31

Hermetica, Asclepius III, pp. 351-353.




the stars were considered by these men to be material objects put into operation by God, not God himself. Thus they are in time, not eternity, and are subject to change. Man, who is part material and part divine, can thus exercise some control over his astrological fate. In this way, the analogous relationship between the macrocosm and the microcosm was still workable, because the divine element in man remained constant in change.

The Hermetic theory of numbers is again a development of the basic analogical framework. Rather than exerting control, as the stars in astrology, numerical theory describes. Numbers can be compared to the Platonic forms, in that they are ideal descriptions of the composition of both the heavens and the earth. As such, they actually served two purposes: to understand the nature of being experimentally through the use of fixed symbols, and to describe those findings esoterically.

The theory is basically Pythagorean in nature. However, neither Pythagoras nor any of his immediate disciples left any writings because he insisted on oral transmission of his teachings; it is thus difficult to establish the origin of many of his beliefs. The basic unit in the Pythagorean theory of numbers is four: first of all, it composes the name of God in all languages; secondly, it provides the first geometrically solid body, viz.,

32

S.K. Heninger, Jr., "Some Renaissance Versions of the Pythagorean Tetrad", SRen, VIII (1961), 8.

the pyramid (.   ); and thirdly, it has a valuable relationship to the perfect number, ten ($1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10$). Thus it contains within itself the potentiality of perfection. Likewise, the tetrad is the basic pattern which subsists throughout the universe: there are four elements, four humors, four seasons, four ages of man, four corners of the world, four cardinal winds, four mental faculties and four cardinal virtues. In this way, the Pythagoreans could understand and explain the basic balance and harmony that exists in the universe.

The Christians added another basic number to the symbolism. St. Augustine postulated two numbers as the explainators of harmony: four and three. Four was the material element, the body, since it described basic properties; three was spiritual, the number of the Trinity, and constituted mind. The two together added up to a union of body and mind, the number seven. Multiplied, they produced twelve, the number of months in a year and signs in the zodiac.

In this way the use of numbers provided a structural guide to "reality". The order and harmony existent could be explained in this manner; the "music of the spheres" could be recorded through numerical notations. It explained and yet kept hidden from the unenlightened the basic secrets of the universe. Above all, it simply was.

33

Ibid., 17-18.

34

Maren-Sofie Røstvig, "The Shepherdes Calender--A Structural Analysis", Renaissance and Modern Studies, XIII (1969), 62-63.

Just as numbers were used symbolically, words served the same function. The Hermetics drew widely from the Jewish Cabalist tradition; by uttering a word, or a series of them, it was believed that the secret of the harmony was revealed. The Hebrew word for God (יהוה), the Tetragrammaton, became an important symbol in Hermetic iconology.³⁵ Hermes Trismegistus stresses the importance of the spoken word: "Translation will greatly distort the sense of the writings, and cause much obscurity. Expressed in our native language, the teaching conveys its meaning clearly; for the very quality of the sounds...; and when the Egyptian words are spoken, the force of the things signified works in them."³⁶ Again, it is the need for secrecy.

The two, numbers and words, are a few of the components of the natural magic associated with the Hermetic tradition. The end is, of course, truth, and these two were often catalysts in the procedure. White magic, as this is called, was an accepted part of the Christian tradition;³⁷ the Hermetics did not have to radically transform the idea in order to effect their reconciliation. There were perhaps two strains of natural magic operating in the Renaissance,

35

Yates, p. 92.

36

Hermetica, Libellus XVI, pp. 263-265.

37

For a full study of this, see C. Grant Loomis, White Magic: An Introduction to the Folklore of Christian Legend (Cambridge: The Medieval Academy of America, 1948).

spiritual and scientific. In the first category belong Pico della Mirandola and Ficino, who were trying to reach a contemplative level through the use of natural forces. In this sense, magic was closely allied to religion and prayers (of their own composition) and philosophic study constituted the means. Man, because he was part of the chain of nature, need only to see his true relation to the rest of the universe to experience truth. All is part of the One; through the magic of communication with the One we become part of the All. "There is communion between soul and soul", proclaims Hermes. "The souls of the gods are in communion with those of men, and the souls of men with those of the creatures without reason."³⁸ Discovering this is the true religious magic.

The scientific form of magic operated on the same principles. By communion with the hidden forces of nature, practical benefits could be obtained. This is the basis of Paracelsian medicine; nature's own forces could be found as cures for man's bodily ills, as well as his spiritual ones. Paracelsian cosmology postulated a universe whose parts were interrelated and explained by chemical analogies; thus the spiritual harmony was buttressed by a corresponding physical one.³⁹ One could, through magic, cure both the body and soul.

38

Hermetica, Libellus X, p. 203.

39

Allen G. Debus, The English Paracelsians (New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1966), p. 86.

The method of transformation was either purely physical, as in the case of alchemy, or by means of sympathetic magic. Campanella, for instance, furnished a sealed room with torches and candles to represent an undisturbed, normal celestial world, which was to counteract the effects of the dislocated reality outside.⁴⁰ Although alchemy had such a spiritual side, its methods were more physical. The search for the philosopher's stone, the substance that would transform base metals into pure gold, provided the opportunity for the development of scientific method and chemical equipment. But to find the apex of material perfection, that is, gold, meant far more: it signified the discovery, by analogy, of the highest spiritual perfection, God.⁴¹

Magic, therefore, was an important part of Hermetic philosophy. It raised man to the level of God, it enabled him to change both his physical and spiritual state and to see to the very crux of the universe. Its by-product was the development of a scientific method, and moreover, a scientific attitude, that man can know.

The whole tone of the idea of natural magic is mirrored in the Hermetic account of Creation. The world was created from a light "from which came forth a holy Word, which took its stand upon the watery substance." Pimander

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Walker, p. 256.

41

C.A. Burland, The Arts of the Alchemists (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), p. 39.

42
tells man to "fix your thought upon the Light and learn to know it." It
is thus a Cabalistic form of magic that begins the world. The watery sub-
stance was then transformed into an ordered world, "the elements being
separated out from it; and from the elements came form the brood of living
creatures."⁴³ Thus we see man as issuing from the four elements and
therefore being part of the tetrad that came from the word of God.

The first Mind, continues the account, was bisexual and gave birth
to another Mind, "a Maker of things", who created the seven planets. This
Mind, in creating the planets, thus had control over them. In this Mind was
the word of God "for the word was of one substance with that Mind." The
"downward-tending elements of nature" were left devoid of this reason and
so were mere matter.⁴⁴ Man, "in the Maker's sphere", originally contained
the substance of that mind, and as such had free will. Using this power, "He
willed to break through the bounding circle of their orbits; and he looked down
through the structure of the heavens, having broken through the sphere, and
showed to downward-tending Nature the beautiful form of God."⁴⁵ When man

42

Hermetica, Libellus I (Pimander), p. 115.

43

Ibid.

44

Ibid., p. 119.

45

Ibid., p. 121.

saw his own reflection in the waters, he loved it and wished to dwell there, in reasonless matter. "And that is why man, unlike all other living creatures upon the earth, is twofold. He is mortal by reason of his body; he is immortal by reason of the Man of eternal substance."⁴⁶ Here we have an important difference between the Hermetic and the Mosaic account of Genesis. In the Hermetic books man wills to live as a mortal, knowing the consequences of his Fall. Adam's fall is made in ignorance; he knows his fate only after he eats of the Tree of Knowledge. Furthermore, as Yates has pointed out, the Mosaic Adam's sin is one of disobedience, which itself shows his lack of power. The Hermetic fall is not punitive; the Hermetic Adam is treated as divine and allowed to do as he wishes, i.e., to fall.⁴⁷

Man continues to be bisexual for a period; then the male and female elements are separated in order to "increase and multiply abundantly." But this too serves as a reminder of his dual nature: "And let the man that has mind in him recognize that he is immortal, and that the cause of death is carnal desire. And he who has recognized himself enters into the Good."⁴⁸

46

Ibid., p. 123.

47

Yates, p. 27.

48

Hermetica, Libellus I (Pimander), p. 125.

Here, man is reminded of the consequences of his Free Fall. Although he is divine, he is still susceptible to mortal passions which detract from his immortal nature. Here, too, lies another difference between the Biblical and Hermetic accounts of creation: woman does not spring, in the Hermetic account, from man; they are rather two elements in the whole and separate simultaneously.

The main point in the Hermetic account of creation is that man remains a free being in spite of the world of mutability into which he has entered.⁴⁹ The divinity he once had remains in him, although brute matter is at work too. Francesco Giorgio expressed the idea well:

Considering that God is an intelligible sphere, and that all the world is made to be a round figure, it is necessary that man, too, who is in the middle between God and the world, is comprised and born of the same form, who imitates in his soul the intellectual sphere and in his body the sensible...⁵⁰

Thus the image of man in the circle, itself a symbol of the divine, aptly

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Festugière has divided the Hermetic books into two types of gnosis: pessimist gnosis, in which the material world is heavily impregnated with evil and optimist gnosis, in which the cosmos is filled with the divine. Although these two are theoretically in opposition to one another, Yates believes the contradiction was not apparent to Renaissance Hermetists. In other words, they blurred the distinction between the two gnosises and saw both the divine and mortal in the material world. See Yates, p. 33.

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Francesco Giorgio, L'Harmonie du Monde (Paris: Jean Macé, 1579), Bk. 6, ch. 2., p. 183. The first edition (Harmonia Mundi) appeared in 1525.

expresses the corporality of man enclosed by his own divinity. In other words, he is in control of his material body.

The soul is the piece of God in man and as such plays an extraordinary role in Hermetic philosophy. Ficino, in speaking of Plato, describes its importance:

Thus it is because he considers the soul like a mirror in which is easily reflected the image of God that when he gives his attention to looking for God...he turns ceaselessly towards the beauty of the soul, which accounts for the famous oracle "Know yourself".⁵¹

Because it shares in the divine, the soul can rise upward back to its origins and thus overcome the baseness of the body. This rising through the hierarchy of being is necessary, says Hermes:

If then you do not make yourself equal to God, you cannot apprehend God; for like is known by like. Leap clear of all that is corporeal, and make yourself grow to a like expanse with that greatness which is beyond all measure; rise above all time, and become eternal; then you will apprehend God. Think that for you too nothing is impossible...But if you shut up your soul in your body, and abase yourself, and say, "I know nothing, I can do nothing"...then, what have you to do with God?⁵²

If man does not free himself of his corporeal nature, he will be burdened with

51

Ficino, Vol. I, Preface, p. 35.

52

Hermetica, Libellus XI, pp. 221-223.

the "vice of the soul", that is, lack of knowledge.⁵³

From this idea it was not far to the belief in man as a unique and superior being. "Man is a marvel then, Asclepius;" says Hermes, "honor and reverence to such a being."⁵⁴ Pico della Mirandola extended this thought to show the omnipotent power of man:

O supreme generosity of God the Father, O highest and most marvelous felicity of man! To him is granted to have whatever he chooses, to be whatever he wills... On man when he came into life the Father conferred the germs of every way of life. Whatever seeds each man cultivates will grow to maturity and bear in him their own fruit.⁵⁵

The important difference, then, between the Hermetic and the Christian concept of the relationship between the soul and God is that in the former there is no mediator--no Christ, no Mary, no angels.⁵⁶ Dionysius the Areopagite explains: "(for) those who are wise in the sacred Mysteries,

53

Ibid., p. 225.

54

Hermetica, Asclepius, p. 295.

55

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Oration on the Dignity of Man in Ernst Cassirer, et. al. (eds.), The Renaissance Philosophy of Man (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 225.

56

Joseph B. Collins, Christian Mysticism in the Elizabethan Age with its Background in Mystical Methodology (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1940), p. 17.

the direct revelations of the Divine Light impart a greater protection than those bestowed through an intermediary."⁵⁷

One of the pitfalls of this euhemeristic tendency in Hermetism is that men become worshipped as gods. The belief that man has a divine element in him, warns Hermes, does not make him a god: "For it cannot be, my son, that a soul, should become a god while it abides in a human body; it must be changed, and then behold the beauty of the good, and therewith become a god."⁵⁸

The apparent dualism between mind and body that permeates the Hermetic doctrines is in reality a monistic view of nature. For those beings without a soul, there is no mind, only body; and for those with a soul, it triumphs over the body, which is only an outward appearance. The true nature of man, then, is divine; this is his reality. Around him is the appearance--a world of change, decay, and despair--but it is not real. The soul is what unifies, and erases the contradictions between matter and divinity, change and permanence because it is free: "Bid your soul travel to any land you choose, and sooner than you can bid it go, it will be there... And should you wish to break forth from the universe itself, and gaze on the things outside

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Dionysius the Areopagite, The Mystical Theology and the Celestial Hierarchies (Fintry, Brook, Surrey: The Shrine of Wisdom, 1965), p. 44. Dionysius, of course, was an important apologist for ecclesiastical hierarchy. His mysticism, however, offered a path beyond that hierarchy, one which was often followed in the Renaissance.

58

Hermetica, Libellus X, p. 191.

the Kosmos...even that is permitted to you."⁵⁹

This then is the essence of the Hermetic philosophy: in the midst of change, there is an eternal order that is housed in the soul of man. Man alone has the power to lift himself above the mobility of the world and there to comprehend reality. In this way man becomes magus and takes his place in the eternal order.

59

Hermetica, Libellus XI, p. 221.

CHAPTER FOUR: RALEGH'S CIRCLE

It is difficult to establish direct intellectual links between Raleigh and all of the main exponents of the English Neoplatonic and Hermetic tradition. With the notable exception of the diary of John Dee, records of cooperative activities and conversations were rarely kept by these men, due to the esotericism inherent in the philosophy. Given that all these men lived within the same short period of time and in the same place, it is highly probable that the works of one were read by the others. To establish connections between these men, then, two methods can be used. First of all, it can be shown that Raleigh knew these men, if not intimately, then at least indirectly. Secondly, we can look for an affinity of ideas in their works. In this way, the Hermetic group in England can be shown to be interrelated.

There was an interest in the occult in Raleigh's family itself. His half-brother, Adrian Gilbert, was involved in the more practical aspects of the Hermetic tradition. Taylor has identified him as an "amateur" in alchemy and the occult;¹ others have testified that he was also involved with astrology and necromancy.² The early correspondence of geo-

¹E.G.R. Taylor, Tudor Geography, 1485-1583 (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1930), p. 128.

²A.L. Rowse, Raleigh and the Throckmortons (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1962), p. 130, and Charlotte Fell-Smith, John Dee (1527-1608) (London: Constable & Company Ltd., 1909), p. 53.

graphical interests between Raleigh and the two Gilbert brothers, Adrian and Humphrey, could well have spread to the area of experimentation, as is strongly suggested by Raleigh's later alchemical investigations. The close relationship between the half-brothers indeed presents the possibility of exchange of ideas.

It is also possible that Raleigh acquired his taste for Hermetic philosophy while still at Oxford. Frances Yates has shown the relatively strong continuation of the Platonic tradition at Oxford well into the Renaissance, despite the revival of Aristotelianism there.³ Its main form then was the acceptance of the Copernican theory.⁴ Considering the obvious distaste for Aristotle that permeates the History, it is probable that some of the subtle Oxford Platonism was passed on to Raleigh. Yates' evidence strengthens this observation: Raleigh, she claims, was part of a group in which "a lively interest in the Copernican theory was to be found."⁵ It is known, too, that Raleigh's library contained an edition of Copernicus.⁶

Raleigh's relationship with Thomas Hariot is documented a bit better, and through this we can see the development of Raleigh's interests. After leaving Oxford in 1579, Hariot was engaged by Raleigh as a mathematical tutor,

³Frances A. Yates, "Giordano Bruno's Conflict with Oxford", JWCI, II (1938-39), 228.

⁴Ibid., 237.

⁵Ibid., 235.

⁶Walter Oakeshott, The Queen and the Poet (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), p. 18.

and was sent on the Virginia expedition of 1585. His proficiency as a geographer, astronomer and mathematician developed in these years, and in 1588 or 1589, Raleigh introduced him to the Earl of Northumberland.⁷ Hariot became Northumberland's tutor and scholar-in-residence soon after, but that was not the end to his involvement with Raleigh. Their relationship must have remained a close one because in 1599 Raleigh's grant of Sherbourne was witnessed by Hariot, and in 1603 Hariot was witness to a trust deed to secure the estate for Raleigh's son Wat.⁸ In a more mystical interpretation of the relationship Muriel Rukeyser has described it as one of father and son.⁹

Hariot has been identified as the master of the "School of Night" and was also one of the "Three Magi" associated with Northumberland in the Tower. Northumberland had been implicated, although not directly, in the Gunpowder Plot, and while imprisoned was allowed, like Raleigh, to conduct scientific experiments. The "three magi" were Thomas Hariot, Robert Hues and William Warner; although not prisoners themselves, they were allowed visiting privileges. The basis for the accounts of the three magi,

⁷ Robert Kargon, "Thomas Hariot, The Northumberland Circle and Early Atomism in England", JHI, XXVII (1966), 129.

⁸ P.A. Howe, "The Raleigh Papers at Sherbourne Castle", History Today, XXI (1971), 213-214.

⁹ Muriel Rukeyser, The Traces of Thomas Hariot (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 67. "The theatre of the new world", she says, "of which he [Raleigh] and Elizabeth are god-parents, or father and mother, and of which, since Raleigh himself was not allowed to go there, Hariot is the emblem and man and son."

Anthony à Wood's Athenae Oxonienses, sheds some light on Raleigh's involvement with the group:

...when the same earl was committed prisoner to the Tower of London in 1606, to remain there during life... our author [Thomas Hariot], Hues and Warner, were his constant companions, and were usually called the Earl of Northumberland's three magi. They had a table at the earl's charge, and the earl himself did constantly converse with them, either singly or all together, as Sir Walter, then in the Tower, did.¹⁰

Thus although Raleigh did not participate in Northumberland's experiments, he did conduct his own in the Tower, and often shared the services of Hariot. There is little doubt that the nature of this experimentation was alchemical, although this must not always be interpreted as a search for gold. Alchemy can be a symbolic and theoretical science, as well as a practical one. The Philosopher's Stone, the catalyst in alchemy, has a double meaning. On the one hand, it is a fine powder that transmutes base metals into pure gold; on the other, it has a much more literal meaning: the key to the secrets of life. It is this very thing, I believe, which gave rise to the rumors of a Fountain of Youth, so eagerly sought by Ponce de Leon. For John Dee it had the additional mystical meaning of the vehicle with which to reach the level of the spirits. Raleigh, it seems, thought of alchemy as a means by which to prolong life, since his experiments were largely medical. His "Royal Cordial" was administered to his young patron

¹⁰Quoted in John William Shirley, "The Scientific Experiments of Sir Walter Raleigh, the Wizard Earl, and the Three Magi in the Tower, 1603-1617", Ambix, IV (1949), 55-56.

Prince Henry on his deathbed in an attempt to save him. It is quite possible that Raleigh knew of this double purpose of alchemy; it certainly coincides with the philosophy developed in The History of the World. Alchemy was, as Fell-Smith has pointed out, "not only a science, it was a religion and a romance...It was a science of ideals. It ever led its followers on to scale illimitable heights of knowledge..."¹¹ It was through the Northumberland group, then, that Raleigh put his alchemical ideas into practice, and was assisted by Hariot.

The undisputed leader of the Hermetic learning in England was Dr. John Dee. As Elizabeth's astrologer, he set the time for her coronation,¹² and was often consulted by Dr. Bayly, the Queen's physician because "his profound hermetic studies gave him the prestige of a super-doctor."¹³ Dee's own occult interests had been strengthened when in his twenties at the University of Louvain, which was still under the spell of Agrippa, and in Paris, the center of the occult at that time.¹⁴ In 1564 he published Monas Hieroglyphica, which dealt with the hidden sympathies and antipathies of things, the existence of higher spiritual beings, and the relationship of

¹¹Fell-Smith, p. 62.

¹²Ibid., p. 31. This is a good example of the ambivalence of the Hermetics towards astrology as discussed in Chapter Three. The desire to be in harmony with the natural forces affecting the physical world is perhaps the best explanation of this instance of astrology's utilization.

¹³Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁴Walter I. Trattner, "God and Expansion in Elizabethan England: John Dee, 1527-1583", JHI, XXV (1964), 19.

the higher celestial world to the earth. Although the esotericism necessary to Hermetism was stressed, Dee disclosed many of the secrets contained in the book to Elizabeth.¹⁵

Dr. Dee was the undisputed head of the occult circle gathering strength in Elizabethan England. His most famous group, a study-circle in Neoplatonism and Renaissance magic, was composed of Sir Philip Sidney, the Earl of Bedford and many others at Court. It is not known if Raleigh participated in this group.

Despite his early interest in occult matters, Dee probably did not become aware of his psychic powers until 1581. He was not himself a medium, however, and his search for one led him to Edward Kelley. Kelley's credibility as a medium is questionable. The spirits appeared only to him, not to Dee, and on one occasion they ordered Kelley and Dee to exchange wives, an idea that Kelley was eager to promote. In any case, Kelley was not interested in any of the more spiritual rewards to be gained from the "angelic conversations" or from alchemy. He solely wanted the secret of transforming base metals into gold. This led the pair to Poland following their patron, Prince Albert Laski. Although Dee eventually returned to England and his spiritual-scientific pursuits, Kelley died miserably on the Continent, still seeking material wealth from alchemy.

¹⁵Richard Deacon, John Dee (London: Frederick Muller, 1968), p. 62.

Dee's residence in England, Mortlake, housed not only his family and scientific instruments, but his marvelous library as well. A catalogue of his manuscripts is in print and contains many distinctly Hermetic books, as well as older works in the occult tradition. For instance, there are many references to the works of Roger Bacon (Expositorius Rogeri Bachonis,¹⁶ Rogeri Bachonis speculum alchimae¹⁷) as well as Paracelsus (Ramundi Lulli liber de quinta essentia, to which is added "Non est Ramundi Lullii, sed collectanea diversa ex Paracelso"¹⁸), Robert of Gloucester, an English student at Ficino's Platonic Academy (Roberti Gloucestrensis chronica)¹⁹ and Plato himself, in particular the Timaeus.²⁰ The Hermetic works listed include Hermetis libri septem,²¹ Hermetis quadripartitum operis,²² Hermetis secreta,²³ and De quinta essentia Mercurii.²⁴ Although the catalogue of

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John Dee, The Private Diary of John Dee (London: Camden Society Publications, 1842), p. 65. The catalogue (Catalogus Librorum Bibliothecae Externae Mortlacensis D. Joh. Dee, A. 1583, 6 Sept.) is an appendix to this volume.

17

Ibid., p. 68.

24

Ibid., p. 85.

18

Ibid., p. 67.

19

Ibid., p. 72.

20

Ibid., p. 84.

21

Ibid., p. 66.

22

Ibid., p. 68.

23

Ibid., p. 70.

Dee's printed books is not in print, Yates testifies that it contains the Corpus Hermeticum, Ficino's Theologia Platonica, Lactantius, and Giorgio's De Harmonia Mundi.²⁵ Unfortunately, the widespread belief that Dee was a sorcerer led to the burning of his house by a mob while he was in Poland, and many of his books were lost.

Because of Dee's close connection with the Court and his close friendship with Adrian Gilbert, it is correct to assume that Raleigh knew him. Indeed, in the Diary there are three references to Sir Walter, each showing a different level of intimacy. In the first Raleigh fetches Dee for Elizabeth:

April 18th (1583), The Quene went from Richemond toward Grenwich, and at her going on horsbak, being new up, she called for me by Mr. Rawly his putting her in mynde, and she says "quod defertur non aufertur", and gave me her right hand to kiss.²⁶

The second reference shows a more personal relationship:

(July 31st, 1583), Mr. Rawlegh his letter unto me of her Majesties good disposition unto me..²⁷

and in the third, a closer friendship is suggested:

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Frances A. Yates, Theatre of the World (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 10-11.

26

Dee, p. 20.

27

Ibid., p. 21.

Oct. 9th (1595), I dined with Syr Walter Rawlegh
at Durham Howse.²⁸

Dee's relationship with Ralegh had more of an intellectual nature than a personal one. Dee was the teacher and librarian for a whole generation of Elizabethans, and his wide knowledge of the occult certainly was one of his attractions. Mortlake, as I.R.F. Calder has rightly pointed out, was "a frequent resort of Leicester, Sydney, Dyer, Ralegh, the Gilberts and other learned and influential nobles as well as navigators and technicians... a brilliant centre for intellectual, political and commercial enterprises of various kinds."²⁹ It is right to assume that Dee's contribution to Ralegh's intellectual development, culminating in The History of the World, was vast.

One of Ralegh's closer friends, Edmund Spenser, was also in the ranks of the Renaissance Neoplatonists. Ellrodt has shown the difficulties in distinguishing between the Platonic, Neoplatonic and Hermetic philosophies in relation to Spenser's work, but ultimately places him in the middle category. His poetry is less philosophical than Plato's work and not as occult as the Hermetic.³⁰ Røstvig, on the other hand, places him distinctly

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Ibid., p. 54.

29

I.R.F. Calder, "John Dee Studied as an English Neoplatonist" (Unpublished PhD. Dissertation: University of London, 1953), p. 734.

30

Robert Ellrodt, Neoplatonism in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser (Genève: Librairie E. Droz, 1960), pp. 8-11.

in the Hermetic tradition, primarily because of his emphasis on the occult significance of time and numbers.³¹

His close association with Raleigh is evidenced by the fact that the introductory letter of the Faerie Queen was addressed to Raleigh.³² Koller has suggested that the relationship was one of patron to poet, with a healthy exchange of ideas and support going both ways.³³ Indeed, Spenser's "Colin Clout's Come Home Again", about his meeting with Raleigh in Ireland, is no less than a declaration of support for his friend, when he was in bad favour with Elizabeth. It is to be assumed that the bond of friendship encouraged mutual sharing of ideas, and although neither can be said to have won the other over to Neoplatonism, it certainly has to be recognized as one of the links that united the two men.

The shadow of Giordano Bruno spreads over all the late Renaissance occult and scientific world. His simultaneous belief in the Copernican system and Hermetic philosophy suggest a strong internal relationship between the two. Raleigh, too, shared this double belief, and although it is difficult to prove any direct relationship between the two men, an indirect tie is possible.

Bruno was in England from 1583 to 1584 and is known to have had

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Maren-Sofie Røstvig, "The Shepheardes Calender--A Structural Analysis", Renaissance and Modern Studies, XIII (1969), 49-75.

32

Oakeshott, p. 84.

33

Katherine Koller, "Spenser and Raleigh", ELH, I (1934), 42.

34

Ibid., 37.

connections with Sidney, Greville, Dyer and Dee.³⁵ This certainly was one of the circles with which Raleigh had an association, and although it is not likely that he himself met Bruno, it is possible that further expositions of his work were passed on to Sir Walter. Certainly the tone of the conversations held between Bruno and the others was one similar to that of the History. For instance, in Bruno's La Cena de le Ceneri, an account of an actual dinner at Sidney's and published in London in 1584, there are four characters: Smitho ("gentiluomo inglese nella cui casa sembra svolgersi il dialogo"), presumably Sidney; Teofilo ("il filosofo stesso"), that is, Bruno himself; Prudenziò ("il pedante"), and Frullo ("servo di 'Smitho'").³⁶ As the conversation continues, it increasingly develops into a dialogue between Teofilo and Prudenziò as to the merits of the Copernican system and the scientific-occult, especially the significance of numbers. Prudenziò emerges as none other than a scholastic, a "pedant", terribly "prudent". Teofilo, on the other hand, is the open, modern scientist. This same dichotomy runs throughout the History and Raleigh takes the same point of view as Teofilo against the Aristotelians, the scholastics, the priests who turn pure ideas into rigid doctrines. Yates has written that Bruno's visit to England "strengthened a re-emergence of the genuine English Renaissance--that adaptation of humanist Platonism to the medieval tradition."³⁷ Raleigh, no doubt, was one of those who sup-

³⁵Robert McNulty, "Bruno at Oxford", Renaissance News, XIII (1960), 300.

³⁶Giordano Bruno, La Cena de le Ceneri (Firenze: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1955), p. 17.

³⁷Yates, "Giordano Bruno's Conflict with Oxford", 240.

ported this view.

Lefranc is the only historian who suggests that a meeting might have occurred between the two men because of Raleigh's contact with Castelnau, the French ambassador and Bruno's host in England.³⁸ As is typical in this book, however, this assertion is not supported by any convincing evidence, and as such must remain only in the realm of conjecture.

In discussing the relationship between Raleigh and the intellectuals of his time, it is necessary to resolve the controversy over whether the entire History was indeed written by Raleigh himself. Except for one passage in Ben Jonson's Conversations with Drummond, there is no contemporary hint that Raleigh was aided in writing the History. The question arose again, however, in 1763 in Algernon Sidney's Discourses Concerning Government and was further popularized in the nineteenth century by Isaac Disraeli in "The Secret History of Sir Walter Rawleigh". Disraeli claimed it was the work of several people, including Northumberland, Hariot, Jonson and Dr. R. Burrell.³⁹

This view has been put forward more recently by Arnold Williams, who claims that most of Raleigh's Biblical material was copied almost verbatim from commentaries in print at the time.⁴⁰ Lefranc takes the more

³⁸Lefranc, p. 353.

³⁹T.N. Brushfield, "Sir Walter Raleigh and his 'History of the World'", Reports and Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature, and Art, XIX (1887), 394-396.

⁴⁰Arnold Williams, "Commentaries on Genesis as a Basis for Hexaemeral Material in the Literature of the Late Renaissance", SP, XXXIV (1937), 200.

traditional borrowing idea and asserts throughout that others indeed did write parts of the History, but without adequate proof.

The whole question of stealing appears to be a typically Renaissance accusation. Even Camden was so accused by Ralph Brooke in A Discovery of Certain Errors in 1599. Brittania, he claimed, was taken from Burghley's library and from Leland's notes by Camden.⁴¹ It is easy to see how these men, in the early days of historical scholarship, could confuse conversation or consultation with collaboration. Indeed, a certain reference to authorities, whether it be in conversation or through books, is a necessary tool for the historian. Certainly the aid Raleigh obtained was mentioned in his preface, but large-scale copying of, for example, the Punic Wars, from Jonson, is unsubstantiated.

It was long accepted that the maps in the History, in addition to the frontispiece poem by Jonson, were the work of another. Oakeshott, however, is convinced that even these maps were Raleigh's own work. In his opinion, the working papers of the History erase any doubt that he had collaborators, as they contain a list of his library, a poem and a dozen manuscript maps.⁴²

It can be seen from this chapter that the intellectual climate in Elizabethan England promoted the spread of occult ideas. Raleigh was one of the beneficiaries of the tradition propagated by Dee, Bruno and others,

⁴¹A.L. Rowse, The England of Elizabeth (London: Macmillan, n.d.), p. 58.

⁴²W.F. Oakeshott, "The Working Papers for 'The History of the World'", The Times, 29 Nov. 1952, p. 7.

while himself helping in that spread. Indeed, the great importance of Raleigh's circle lies in its development and dissemination of Hermetic and Neoplatonic ideas about the nature of the universe. Raleigh was not unique in his beliefs; his ideas were merely the continuation of a long tradition just beginning to be recognized as commonplace in Renaissance England.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE OPPOSITION

Sir Walter Raleigh incurred opposition during the reign of James I for three reasons. First of all, the King heartily disliked Raleigh as a person. Secondly, the royal opposition to The History of the World was strong, and thirdly, the fear of witchcraft, which was associated with Hermetism, became widespread. In light of these matters, Raleigh was indeed placed in a precarious position, and his imprisonment and ultimate execution is not surprising.

Willson claims that when James became King he was "poisoned against" Raleigh, Cobham, and Northumberland by warnings of their enemy, Cecil. They would rather have seen him buried than crowned, he said.¹ The dislike of the Stuart monarch for these Elizabethans went even deeper than this, however; they represented a flamboyant, carefree Elizabethan court which by its very nature was in opposition to the austerity and rigidity to which James was accustomed. It is well known that Raleigh rode out to meet the King upon his entry into England, and that James did not receive him warmly. Once any man incurred the King's disfavor, it was a short step to imprisonment, and Raleigh was no exception. The charges against Raleigh in 1603--conspiracy to kill the King, raise rebellion, alter the religion

¹David Harris Willson, King James VI and I (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963), p. 157.

of the realm, and set Arabella Stuart on the throne--could well have been brought against anyone, such was the nature of the evidence. Catherine Drinker Bowen has well described the actualities of trial in those days:

Judicial duty, in the year 1603...meant bringing forward every damaging fact of character and circumstance which could be gathered in the King's favour--hearsay evidence, gossip at third hand, the confession of confederates. In treason cases smoke was hot as fire and bare suspicion tantamount to the act overt.²

Pardoned at the last moment, and imprisoned in the Tower for thirteen years, Raleigh was released in 1616 in order to make a second expedition to Guiana. James was persuaded by the anti-Spanish faction, undoubtedly for reasons other than the discovery of gold, to let him do this, although Raleigh was warned not to attack any Spanish possessions. To Spain's protestations, James replied that he would send a bound Raleigh to Spain if there was any abuse of their possessions.³ The second committee, which examined Raleigh after the Guiana fiasco, thought he had been plotting with France and believed the reason for the trip was not to find his gold mine, but to plunder the Spanish. Since a condemned man could not be retried by English law, the committee decided that this action

²Catherine Drinker Bowen, The Lion and the Throne: The Life and Times of Sir Edward Coke, 1552-1634 (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1957), pp. 165-166.

³Willson, pp. 368-370.

justified carrying out the 1603 sentence.⁴

Undoubtedly, James had Raleigh's end in mind from the first moments of his reign. The public recognized this, and saw Sir Walter as a victim to Stuart tyranny. In this way he was to become a great hero for the revolutionaries, not by virtue of his own thought, but rather because of his position as sacrificed pawn in the Stuart game.

The History of the World was begun in 1607 and entered in the Stationers' Register on April 15, 1611, but it did not appear until March, 1614. It was immediately popular, but roused James' anger. As a result, it was suppressed by George Abbott, Archbishop of Canterbury, on December 22, 1614. James was angry that Raleigh, a man "civilly dead" had the impudence to have his portrait engraved on the title-page. The government promised to rescind the suppression order if the title-page was removed to make the work anonymous. The first edition, without the portrait title-page (not to be confused with the allegorical title-page), was reissued, followed by a second edition in 1614 and two in 1617, one of which contained the portrait title-page.

But James was more disturbed by the content of the History than by the legal state of its author. Raleigh, in his Preface, had been "too sawcie in censuring princes". Carew Raleigh explained it this way to Sir William Sanderson in 1656: "...it is well known, King James forbad Sir

⁴ Ibid., p. 376.

⁵ John Racin, Jr., "The Early Editions of Sir Walter Raleigh's The History of the World", Studies in Bibliography, XVII (1964), 199-200.

Walter Raleigh's book, for some passages in it which offended the Spaniard, and for being too plain with the faults of Princes in his Preface."⁶ Certainly the main fear on James' part was that the references to unjust kings in past English history would be applied to the present by the reading public.

There can be no doubt that James was particularly annoyed at Raleigh's assertion that the evil of the father was passed down and punished in each succeeding generation. After Edward II's murder, Raleigh claimed, "the issue of bloud then made, though it had some times of stay and stopping, did again breake out; and that so often, and in such abundance, as all our Princes of the Masculine race (very few excepted) died of the same disease." And: "Now for Henrie the sixt, upon whom the great storme of his Grandfathers greevous faults fell..." Henry VIII's punishment, according to Raleigh, was the end of his line, the cumulative fault of all of his ancestors. It is no wonder, then, that James was furious at Raleigh, even though he had written of James: "His Majesty entred not by a breach, nor by bloud; but by the Ordinary gate, which his owne right set open..."⁷ Certainly James must have realized that, in Raleigh's opinion, he carried the sins of his fathers onto the throne; the claim that he was the start of a new line in England could not have assuaged him.

⁶Quoted in Pierre Lefranc, Sir Walter Raleigh, Ecrivain, l'Oeuvre et les Idées (Quebec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1968), p. 275.

⁷The above references are all from HW, Preface (no pagination).

In spite of Stuart anger, between 1614 and 1688 there were ten distinct editions of the History, with numerous variant issues.⁸ Perhaps some of the royal tolerance of it was due to young Prince Henry, who by 1604 had become the patron of men of learning. Raleigh was in communication with him by 1608, and actually wrote the History for him. Prince Henry wanted him to continue his narrative until the Roman Conquest of Britain and then make the history of England his chief subject.⁹ But Raleigh knew better than to write of contemporary history. In those times, historians were subjected to severe censorship and wrote under many restrictions. For reasons of foreign policy and internal security, modern history incurred suspicion, no matter what its point of view; Raleigh was wise enough to understand this.¹⁰ As he explained in the Preface:

I know that it will be said by many, that it might have been more pleasing to the Reader, if I had written the Story of mine owne times; having beene permitted to draw water as neare the well-head as another. To this I answere, that who-so-ever in writing a moderne Historie, shall follow truth too neare the heeles, it may happily strike out his teeth.¹¹

⁸A.L. Rowse, Raleigh and the Throckmortons (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1962), p. 271.

⁹Charles H. Firth, "Sir Walter Raleigh's History of the World", Proceedings of the British Academy, VIII (1917-18), 430-432.

¹⁰Ibid., 442.

¹¹HW, Preface.

Certainly what he wrote about the past was grave enough to rouse James' anger; in spite of its immense popularity with the public, the History was another mark against Sir Walter.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a growth of belief in witchcraft developed in Europe. Trevor-Roper has explained it as "a by-product, in specific social circumstances, of that hardening and extension of Aristotelianism...It is not a new force, generated by the decomposition of an old cosmology. It is the underside of that cosmology."¹² In this study he destroys the idea that witchcraft was an outcome of the Platonic and Hermetic traditions; they themselves tended to be open-minded and were opposed to the witch-craze. The attackers of the Hermetic tradition were those in favor of hunting the witches out.¹³ The witch hunts were in reality, according to Trevor-Roper, created out of a social situation, not a strictly philosophical tradition. It was the search for scapegoats, to be found in those social groups of different beliefs that Christian Europe was unable to assimilate.¹⁴ In other words, the more rigid the code of belief in an area, the higher incidence of witch hunting there was. In England at the beginning of the seventeenth century such a situation existed. Its most dramatic example was in the

¹²H.R. Trevor-Roper, The European Witch-Craze of the 16th and 17th Centuries (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 8.

¹³Ibid., p. 59.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 112.

person of the King himself. An outsider to begin with, he was in an insecure position with regard to the royal prerogative and power. The paranoia created by this situation was resolved not only by destroying political opponents, such as Raleigh, but was extended in one form or another, to any group that believed in principles other than those of the realm.¹⁵

James' direct involvement in this matter began in 1590. He discovered that the Earl of Bothwell had told witches in Scotland to kill him. Out of fear, James exerted great zeal in prosecuting them during the witch-trials of 1590-91.¹⁶ He later generalized his personal paranoia to matters of religion. As believers in a pagan mystery religion, seemingly at odds with rigid Protestant belief, the Hermetics began to be seen as heretics; not directly prosecuted and burned as witches, they too had to veil their beliefs in secrecy. This became in the Stuart period another reason for Hermetic esotericism.

James' belief in witches is evident throughout his Daemonologie, first published in 1597. He tries to prove they exist because they are spoken of in the Scriptures.¹⁷ Witches, in his view, are close to the Devil and "beare his Image." In the following section, it is easy to see the extent of the Devil's power and James' fear of them:

¹⁵Persecution in England, however, was not nearly as severe as on the Continent. See Trevor-Roper, pp. 89-90.

¹⁶Willson, p. 105.

¹⁷James I, Daemonologie (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966), Bk. I, ch. 1, p. 5.

And so whome he findes most simple, he plainiest discovers himself unto them. For hee being the enemie of man's Salvation, uses al the meanes he can to entrappe them so farre in his snares, as it may be unable to them thereafter (suppose they would) to rid themselves out of the same.¹⁸

He then, in a most important passage, extends his condemnation to magi: witches are the Devil's slaves, but necromancers are his masters.¹⁹ Although he later explains that there are such things as magicians "of the Lawe of God",²⁰ it did not stop people from considering men like John Dee as sorcerers, and destroying his property. Indeed, as Deacon has described it, the new century saw the beginning of a move away from the "enlightened, inquiring liberalism" of the Elizabethan age and the beginning of a nationwide drive against all suspected of magical practices of any sort.²¹ This kind of condemnation would point to many members of Raleigh's circle as participants in bewitching activities.

It is no wonder then that Raleigh felt the necessity to cover much of his actual thought in the History. His esotericism was directed not only towards the King, but towards the majority of his readers also. It has already been mentioned that Raleigh enjoyed a great vogue among the

¹⁸ Ibid., ch. 2, pp. 6-7.

¹⁹ Ibid., ch. 3, p. 9.

²⁰ Ibid., Bk. II, ch. 1, p. 29.

²¹ Richard Deacon, John Dee (London: Frederick Muller, 1968), p. 268.

populace because of the political views put forward in the Preface. The main body of the History is another matter entirely. The philosophy put forth there is "transparent", in Bradbrook's opinion, and that was its chief source of strength.²² Different ideas could be read into the History because of this quality, and thus it was supported by men of differing viewpoints. This also accounts for the wide range of explanations in historiography of Raleigh and his work.

It is necessary, however, to see this transparency as deliberate, as esotericism, as a cover for Hermetic ideas, which could readily be interpreted as heretic beliefs. Raleigh's position in the Stuart world was precarious without the extra label of witch applied to him. But when one understands Hermetic symbolism, it is difficult to deny that he indeed must be identified as one in the ranks of the magi--not the black witches, but the religious and scientific magicians. It is this task with which the next two chapters are concerned.

²²M.C. Bradbrook, The School of Night: A Study in the Literary Relationships of Sir Walter Raleigh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), p. 49.

CHAPTER SIX: THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD AND HERMETISM

Hermetic philosophy is at work in The History of the World in two distinct manners. Raleigh discusses Hermes Trismegistus and related occult ideas expressly, and this constitutes one of the ways to examine Hermetism in the context of the History. A second method consists of breaking through the esoteric shell of the work in order to see Raleigh's implicit use of the philosophy. This comes out most clearly in the doctrine of the soul, at once the most basic and yet obscure of the Hermetic ideas.

The first and more apparent method of analysis gives a good indication that Raleigh was not motivated by purely political considerations and felt free to discuss such matters as the antiquity of Hermes Trismegistus and the existence, even the necessity, of natural magic. The discussions, however, are kept on the purely intellectual level; Raleigh attempts to prove rationally some of the more practical Hermetic doctrines. In his esoteric exposition his very real belief in the philosophy is apparent.

Raleigh continues the Ficinian prisca theologia tradition. A title of one of the first sections of the History attests to this fact: "That the wisest of the Heathen, whose authoritie is not to be despised, have acknowledged the world to have been created by God." He gives as examples Hermes Trismegistus, Zoroaster, Orpheus and Pinder, and explains that this

was also believed by St. Paul.¹ Not only did Hermes prophesize the coming of Christ, he continues, he also foretold the Day of Judgment, and spoke of the Trinity.²

Thus the synthesis of paganism and Christianity so typical of Renaissance philosophy is present in The History of the World. Indeed, the very aim of Christianity for Raleigh was both to resolve current disputes as well as to historically reconcile.³ This synthetic approach, then, was Raleigh's chief method of reconciling differences. The pagan element in his historical synthesis, however, is certainly given predominance. Hermes is presented as wise because of his age, and of greater antiquity than that very wise man, Moses. Many have said that there were many Hermes, explains Raleigh, but:

It may bee, that the many yeares which he is said to have lived, to wit, three hundred yeares, gave occasion to some writers to finde him in one time, and to others in other times. But by those which have collected the grounds of the Aegyptian Phil-

¹HW, Bk. I, ch. 1, s. 2, pp. 2-3.

²HW, Bk. II, ch. 6, s. 7, p. 324.

³An excellent illustration of Raleigh's approach to factions within Christianity and, we might venture, to the general problem of the reconciliation of apparent divergences between different streams of thought may be seen in the following passage: "I think it the part of every Christian, rather to reconcile differences, where there is possibilitie of union, then out of froward subtletie, and prejudicate resolvednesse, to maintaine factions needlesse, and dangerous contentions." HW, Bk. I, ch. 8, s. 4, p. 157.

osophie and Divinitie, he is found more ancient than Moses: because he was the Inventor of the Aegyptian Wisédome, wherein it is said, that Moses was excellently learned.⁴

But Hermes, in Raleigh's opinion, was more than simply the first of the prisca theologia. Trismegistus was The Philosopher; this is a good indication that Raleigh may have considered himself a Hermetist, rather than merely a Neoplatonist:

And this is certain, that if we look into the wisdom of all ages, wee shall finde that there never was a man of said understanding or excellent judgement: never any man whose minde the art of education hath not bended; whose eyes a foolish superstition hath not afterward blinded; whose apprehensions are sober, and by pensive inspection advised; but that he hath found by an unresistable necessitie, one true God, and everlasting being, all for ever causing, and all for ever sustaining; which no man among the Heathen hath with more reverence acknowledged or more learnedly exprest, than that Aegyptian Hermes.⁵

In this passage not only is the element of reconciliation strong and thus a good clue to Raleigh's association with the Hermetic tradition, but Hermes is given predominance, a further indication of Raleigh's allegiance.

To buttress these remarks on Hermes Trismegistus, Raleigh quotes from the Corpus Hermeticum, and from Renaissance Hermetists. Early in the History

⁴HW, Bk. II, ch. 6, s. 6, p. 319.

⁵HW, Bk. I, ch. 6, s. 7, p. 96.

he repeats Asclepius, "man is the greatest wonder".⁶ Later he takes the definition of mind from Pimander: "a divine understanding, and an intellect or minde contemplative."⁷ His admiration for the Renaissance men who believed in the doctrine is spread throughout the History; he describes Pico, for example, as "a man for his yeares fuller of knowledge then any that this latter age hath brought forth..."⁸ In this way both Hermes and Pico share the same important characteristic: wisdom. This type of knowledge is deep, beyond time, a knowledge of magical things. Raleigh quotes Ficino on this subject of wisdom: "Oh thou fearefull one, why doubttest thou to use the name of Magus, a name gratuitous in the Gospell, which doth not signifie a Witch or Conjurer, but a wise man and a Priest?"⁹

Raleigh's sources then are in the Platonic-Neoplatonic-Hermetic tradition: Plato, Lactantius, Augustine, Ficino, Cusanus. Although the Bible is an important reference guide, the History is not Christ-centered. This is perhaps due to the reconciliatory quality of the work: not only does he wish to unite the pagan gods with the One God; he also seeks to joining the Hebraic and the Christian. He says of the Scriptures:

⁶HW, Bk. I, ch. 2, s. 1, p. 22.

⁷HW, Bk. I, ch. 2, s. 2, p. 25.

⁸HW, Bk. II, ch. 4, s. 11, p. 281.

⁹HW, Bk. I, ch. 11, s. 2, p. 205.

The old and new Testament differ in name, and in the meane and way proposed for attaining to salvation; as the old by workes, the new by grace: but in the thing it selfe, or object and remote end, they agree: which is, means happinesse and salvation.¹⁰

His sources are wide-ranging and comparative in content; it matters little to Raleigh whether ideas are ancient, medieval or modern. The thought is the important matter.

This reconciliatory quality of the History is the basis for one of Raleigh's most imaginative uses of Hermetic doctrine, mythology. Certainly the prisca theologia idea is one aspect of this; but he extends its composition to include lesser figures as well.¹¹ These men, as Raleigh quotes from Lactantius, were not earlier revelations of the Christian God as much as believers in "one Providence", "whether the same bee Nature, or light, or Reason, or understanding; or destinie or divine ordinance."¹² This now is a very important point: Raleigh is not merely attempting to reconcile the old pagan beliefs with a Christian God. He is rather trying to find common

10

HW, Bk. I, ch. 11, s.2, p. 201. Raleigh differs from the standard form of Christian exegesis in that he does not stress the prefiguration of Christ in the Old Testament. In fact, Christ is seen as only one of the many who saw the universal aspects of religious truth.

11

Included in Raleigh's list are Musaeus, Linus, Anaximenes, Anaxogoras, Empedocles, Melissus, Pherecydes, Thales, Cleanthes "and many others". HW, Preface.

12

HW, Preface.

elements in each, implying that the old gods in which these men believed were on the same level with God. All explanations of the divine are simply attempts to define the unknowable, simply symbols of one eternal unchanging order.

In this manner, then, he posits a comparative mythological system,¹³ complete with geneological charts. He is trying to show that no matter the name, the gods depicted in mythology are all simply explanations of the same Idea. Although he destroys such comparisons as "The first Jupiter, of the Ethnickes was then the same Cain, the sonne of Adam, who marrying his own sister (as also Jupiter is said to have done) inhabited the East...", and also "Adam was the ancient and first Saturne,"¹⁴ he later admits that "ever Pythagoras, or Plato or Orpheus, with many other ancient and excellently learned believed in any of these fooleries, it cannot be suspected."¹⁵ Later, however, he makes one of these very comparisons himself: "Neither do I see cause of doubt whether Osiris were the same with Mizraim." He continues in a different vein, "It is more necessarie, and hard to shew manifestly, how long Mizraim or Osiris reigned."¹⁶ It would certainly be

13

See, for instance, the geneology of Mercurius, showing his descent from the sun, Bk. I, ch. 6, s. 5, p. 92, and that of Hercules, following the chronological table at the end of Bk. V, n.p.

14

HW, Bk. I, ch. 6, s.4, p. 86.

15

HW, Bk. I, ch. 6, s. 7, p. 93. The priests, he felt, were responsible for these corruptions. See pp. 98-100.

16

HW, Bk. II, ch. 2, s. 4, p. 239.

unfortunate to interpret this as an indication that Raleigh was concerned with mere antiquarian fact. It is rather that he accepted the comparative point of view so totally that he felt that all apparent differences could and should be resolved. Again it is the unchanging nature of truth as compared with the unstable world of events. The latter can be explained and calculated; the eternal can only be accepted. Then again, it was much safer to concentrate one's inquiries on matters of chronology and the like rather than to dwell upon possibly controversial ones.

It is probable that this is the precise reason why Strathmann calls Raleigh an "atheist" in matters of secondary causation.¹⁷ But Raleigh did more than simply accept primary causation; indeed he tried to extend and show how it permeated even such things as chronologies and the history of kings. In a sense, then, he was explaining the eternal in terms of the mutable. This indeed is not a suitable definition of atheism. The way he did challenge customary religious beliefs, however, was in his syncretic approach to truth. Church dogma and its own hermeneutics was not, for Raleigh, the ultimate authority. Rather, universals and their continuity throughout history was his means of proof. Of course, given the sixteenth and seventeenth century definition of an atheist, that is, anyone who differed slightly from established belief, Raleigh was an atheist.

17

See pp. 37-38, above.

One of the basic controversies in mythology has always been whether myths are philological in origin, such as in the theory propounded by Max Muller in the nineteenth century, or whether they are symbolic attempts to explain universal qualities, as is the contention of Eliade and Jung.¹⁸ Already in the seventeenth century Raleigh was aware of this controversy, although he does not solve it: "Japetus (as the Poets fable) was the sonne of Heaven and Earth, so accounted, either because the names of his Parents had in the Greeke tongue such signification: or perhaps for his knowledge in Astronomie and Philosophie."¹⁹ There is good reason to believe, how ever, that Raleigh thought of mythology as being more than mere accident, as actually having a purpose. For example, he sees in those ancient myths in which man had the freedom to change his shape a symbolic significance: "For by the lively image of other creatures did those Ancients represent the variable passions, and affections of mortal men."²⁰ In other words, myths contained universal symbols.

Raleigh's position on astrology is not unlike that of the Italian Hermetics. The stars have influence over the reasonless mind, but not over the mind that is endowed with God's spirit.²¹ The affinity, however, between

¹⁸ See Max Muller, Chips from a German Workshop, vol. 4 (New York: Scribner, 1869); Mircea Eliade, Cosmos and History (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959), and C. Jung and C. Kerényi, Essays on a Science of Mythology (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).

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HW, Bk. II, ch. 17, s. 6, p. 473.

²⁰

HW, Bk. I, ch. 2, s. 6, p. 32.

²¹

HW, Bk. I, ch. 1, s. 11, p. 14.

astrological occurrences and events in earthly time is stressed. The Flood, he says, might have been foreseen by the stars:

...the like conjunction of Jupiter and Saturne, happened in the last degree of Cancer, against that constellation since called the ship of Argos; by which the flood of Noah might be foretold, because Cancer is both a Waterie sign, and the house of the Moone, which is the Ladie of the Sea, and of moisture, according to the rules of Astronomie, and common experience.²²

Man, however, is different; he is free from this fate. As part of Divinity man has the elements, the planets, and all things material as his servants. They are fated; man is not:

Were these (the seas, the sun, etc.,) as rebellious as man, for whose sake they were created, or did they once breake the law of their natures and formes, the whole world would then perish, and all returne to the first chaos, darknesse, and confusion.²³

The point Raleigh is making here is this: man in his divine nature is infinitely free, free even to choose chaos. The material world, on the other hand, cannot.

Astrology is one of Raleigh's categories of magic. It is, as we have seen, the controller of things material, but not divine. The other kinds of magic discussed in the History are natural and black magic. The latter includes necromancy ("an invocation at the graves of the deade"), conjuring up devils, and witchcraft.²⁴ But he is careful to make a distinction between a magus, one who works in tune with nature, and a witch, one who works against it:

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HW, Bk. I, ch. 7, s. 5, p. 105.

23

HW, Bk. II, ch. 4, s. 6, p. 274.

24

HW, Bk. I, ch. 11, s. 6, pp. 208-209.

It appeareth that there is a great difference between the doctrine of a Magician, and the abuse of the Word...For the Art of Magicke is of the wisdom of nature; other artes which undergoe that title were invented by the falsehood, subtletie and envie of the Devill.²⁵

He cites James's Daemonologie, But there is an underlying disagreement because while James feels most magic is witchcraft, Raleigh thinks it is basically noble. Magic is positive, in his view: "And (as Plato affirmeth) the art of Magicke is the art of worshipping God."²⁶

Natural magic, the art of working with nature and with God has, for Raleigh, a practical aspect, and in this he sees the link between science and magic:

For if we condemne naturall Magicke, or the wisdom of nature, because the Devill...doth also teach Witches and Poysoners the harmefull parts of hearbs, drugges, minerals, and excrements: then may we by the same rule condemne the Physition, and the Art of healing.²⁷

It is in this passage that we see Raleigh's theoretical position on the alchemy that he also practiced. For him, and for most Renaissance men, there was little contradiction between science and magic; their common bond was experimentation and the relating of its results to larger theorems.²⁸

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HW, Bk. I, ch. 11, s. 2, p. 204.

26

Ibid., p. 201.

27

HW, Bk. I, ch. 11, s. 3, p. 205.

28

George Boas, "Philosophies of Science in Renaissance Platonism" in Charles S. Singleton (ed.), Art, Science and History in the Renaissance (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), p. 243.

Of the incantations peculiar to religious magic, that is, the Cabala, Raleigh distinguishes between the secret and the true Cabala. The former is in his opinion the work of Priests, and is secret only because their closed society wanted to preserve its power over the people. The true cabala, on the other hand, "was not to be concealed from any; as being indeede the divine law revealed to the Patriarks, and from them delivered to the posteritie, when as yet it was unwritten."²⁹

This, by necessity, leads us to Raleigh's treatment of esotericism, another of the basic aspects of the Hermetic tradition. He distinguishes between the truth, which, although knowable by all men is not readily grasped by the impure, and those secrets perpetuated by priests for their own benefit. The secrets of divinity, says Raleigh, "ought not to be imparted to the unpure Vulgar. For as the cleanest meates in a foule stomach, are therein corrupted, so the most high and reserved mysteries are often perverted by an uncleane and defiled mind."³⁰ This, he continues, was the reason why the Aegyptians used hieroglyphics, "to the end that their secrets might be hidden from the vulgar."³¹ Thus truth, in its pure form, received directly from God, can be known by those who have recognized the God-ness in themselves.

²⁹ HW, Bk. II, ch. 4, s. 8, p. 277.

³⁰ HW, Bk. II, ch. 13, s. 3, p. 420.

³¹ Ibid., p. 421.

The esotericism perpetuated by priests, by middlemen between God and man, is, however, false. Raleigh is against even Christian images as corruptions of the Devil.³² The latter is the one who stands in the way of Truth, not because he is placing false images before man, but because he is raising unnecessary, and unconnected, obstacles to man's pursuit of knowledge. The philosophy of Hermes Trismegistus, Raleigh claims, was corrupted by the Egyptian priests. It was "at length by devilish pollicie of the Aegyptian Priests purposely obscured; who invented new Gods, and those innumerable, best sorting (as the Devill perswaded them) with vulgar capacities, and fittest to keepe in awe and order their common people."³³ In order to see to the truth, Raleigh advises reading the Hermetic books "with an even judgment"; only then is one able to differentiate between wisdom and corruption.³⁴

Not only do priests twist spiritual matters in order to raise their own prominence; they also bastardize history:

One great occasion of this obscurity [in the succession of the Egyptian kings] in the Aegyptian Storie, was the ambition of the Priests: who to magnifie their antiquities, filled the Recordes (which were in their hands) with many leafings: and recounted

³² HW, Bk. I, ch. 10, s.7, p. 198.

³³ HW, Bk. I, ch. 6, s. 7, p. 96.

³⁴ HW, Bk. II, ch. 6, s. 6, p. 319.

unto strangers, the names of many kings that never reigned.³⁵

What then, does this anti-clericalism suggest to us about Raleigh? Certainly it is an indication of his belief in religious individualism. But this rather general phrase can be associated both with Puritanism and with Hermetism, and the two beliefs are quite dissimilar. In the former, the figure of Christ is important; because of his close relationship with God, he is identified with Him, and as such is the mediator between God and man, since he contains both the Spirit and the flesh. In Puritanism also, man does come face to face with God, but since grace is conferred on only the elect, in theory man has little control over his destiny. Indeed in practice the situation was quite different: material prosperity was seen as a sign of probable election, and as men strove for wealth, they saw themselves as becoming closer to God. This represented an inversion, a gap between theory and practice. But then again it was a way for man, in the age of Renaissance and Reformation, to understand and somehow control the obvious insecurity which is at the base of Puritan theory.³⁶

Raleigh, however, does not fall into the category of Puritan. The figure of Christ is nearly non-existent in the History. He is replaced

³⁵HW, Bk. II, ch. 2, s. 1, p. 236.

³⁶This same observation has recently been made by Michael Walzer, The Revolution of the Saints (New York: Atheneum, 1970).

by man, who in himself is both Spirit and flesh. Raleigh's theory of man's soul, so obviously connected with Hermetic philosophy and the subject of the next section, transforms man into the master of his own fortunes. God is not malevolent, someone to be feared; He is rather a positive force, spreading His love to all that truly desire it. He quotes Plato early in the History and this represents the underlying unity of the work: "The love of God is the perpetuall knot, and linke or chaine of the world, and the immovable pillar of every part thereof, and the Basis and foundation of the universall."³⁷ This is the same kind of love stressed by Petrarch and by Ficino and the Renaissance Hermetists. Material prosperity, in Raleigh's opinion, is a deterrent to Truth; it is mutable and can in no way reflect the higher wisdom. The pride that men gain from this is not the same as truth: "And certainly, as Fame hath often beene dangerous to the living, so is it to the dead of no use at all; because separate from knowledge."³⁸

But to understand this fully, it is now important to examine the basis of both The History of the World and Hermetic philosophy, the soul doctrine.

37

HW, Bk. I, ch. 1, s. 13, p. 19.

38

HW, Bk. V, ch. 6, s. 12, p. 775.

The History of the World accepts both the historical existence of Hermes Trismegistus and the more practical aspects of Hermetic philosophy, such as natural magic. The most theoretical aspect of the doctrine, however, the theory of the soul, is not so readily apparent in any of the secondary Hermetic works, and Raleigh's History is no exception. But without an examination of this theory, it would be really quite difficult to label Raleigh as a believer in the Hermetic philosophy. This is simply because while being the most obscure of the Hermetic ideas, the theory of the soul is also its most basic.³⁹

Since the Pimander, the account of Creation, is the first of the Hermetic corpus, it is best to begin there and build the theory up from that starting point. It will be remembered that the Creation, in this account was largely alchemical: "The watery substance, having received the Word, was fashioned into an ordered world, the elements being separated out from it." From the water came fire, which produced air, which made the earth.⁴⁰ Compare this to a passage in the History: "then the Spirit of God moved upon the waters, and created in them their spirituality, and naturall motion;

39

It is important to stress here that Raleigh's acceptance of Hermetic doctrine is not obvious; indeed, at times he rejects some of its tenets, either because it was not politically expedient to accept them, or because he quite frankly could not go along with them. It is basic similarities we are looking for here.

40

Hermetica, Libellus I (Pimander), p. 117.

motion brought forth heat; and heat rarification, and subtilty of parts."⁴¹ Two things are common to both passages. First of all, the emphasis on elemental creation, substance transformed by substance, is the basis of alchemical procedure. Secondly, the importance of the Spirit in Creation is stressed, but It is not only Creator, It is Giver of form. In the passage from Raleigh, the Spirit of God created in the waters "their spirituality" and their "naturall motion". What this implies is not only the idea of an ordered universe, but one tied together by its own spirituality, its very own Godliness.

This is the basic point of the Hermetic Creation: God has infused His Spirit into the created world and this accounts for its order. It is this that is found in Raleigh's work too. The rest of the Hermetic account, however, is not found in the History; Raleigh does not speak of the hermaphroditic Adam, for instance. To assert this, in Jacobean England, would have spelled sure disaster even if Raleigh had believed it. But quietly infused throughout the work is the second important element in Hermetic Creation: the power of man. The Pimander spells it quite clearly: man "willed to break through the bounding circle" and "wished to dwell" on earth as a spiritual among mortal beings.⁴² Man can do this because of his soul, the part of him that is like

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HW, Bk. I, ch. 1, s. 6, p. 8.

42

Hermetica, Libellus I (Pimander), p. 121.

God, for although he sacrificed material divinity, he retained his Godly spirit. Man, says the Pimander, "is mortal by reason of his body; he is immortal by reason of the Man of eternal substance."⁴³ In other words, man is a dual creature, the divine and the material being reconciled in him. He takes on a material form, but his soul allows him to keep his divine nature. And so reasons Raleigh: "Man, thus compounded and formed by God, was an abstract or modell, or briefe Storie of the Universall: in w hom he made the last and most excellent of his creatures, being internally endued with a divine understanding." But, he continues, our bodies are "mutable, like the earth."⁴⁴

Raleigh never blatantly admits that man is a God, as do some passages in the Hermetic books. He simply states that man's soul is "by God himselfe beautified with the title of his own image and similtude."⁴⁵ This is obviously a Christian adaptation of the Corpus Hermeticum, and although significant, does not blur the similarities concerning the power of man's soul.

43

Ibid.

44

HW, Bk. I, ch. 2, s. 5, p. 30. In both the Middle Ages and the Renaissance "universal" denoted the eternal order, the celestial sphere. The word does not appear in the Hermetic books, although this could be attributed to the translator's own preference for "eternal". On the concept of "universal" see Maren-Sofie Røstvig, "'Upon Appleton House' and the Universal History of Man", English Studies, XLII (1961), 1.

45

HW, Bk. I, ch. 2, s. 5, p. 31.

Raleigh's emphasis on the universal, that is, man's connection with the divine, is evident in other passages also; it is the way he explains the macrocosm-microcosm affinity so important in the analogical thinking of Hermetism. "In the little frame of mans body," he says, "there is a representation of the Universall, and (by allusion) a kind of participation of all the parts thereof, therefore was man called Microcosmos, or the little world."⁴⁶ This, then, stresses the Hermetic link between the physical and heavenly worlds, and suggests that man is tied to the divine world through a similar attribute in himself. Another clue to this identification of God with man is his quotation from Nicholas of Cusa: "The world universal is nothing else but God exprest."⁴⁷

Raleigh, then, does connect God and man, and the bond between them is the soul, that part of man which partakes of divinity:

It is not therefore...by reason of Immortalitie, nor in Reason, nor in Dominion, nor in any of these by itselfe, nor in all these joynd, by any of which, or by all which we resemble, or may be called the Shadow of God, though by reason and understanding, with the other faculties of the Soule, we are made

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HW, Bk. I, ch. 2, s. 5, p. 30. This is certainly a baffling passage, for Raleigh seems to imply that man's body is a representation of the universal, while the universal in Raleigh always refers to the very opposite of the mutable. But if one stresses "In the frame of man's body", it is possible he means the soul within the body.

47

HW, Bk. I, ch. 1, s. 1, p. 2.

capable of the print; but chiefly in respect of the habit of Originall righteousness, most perfectly infused by God into the minde and soule of man in his first creation.⁴⁸

It is interesting to note here that Raleigh places reason and understanding not as things separate or even opposed to each other. Thus mystical understanding and rational knowledge are not seen as contradictory, nor even separate, since they coexist in the same place. Raleigh's solution, of course, is different from that of Aquinas, who tended to stress the power of reason. In his resolution, there is an interweaving, an internal balance between reason and will, not as one-sided as that of Aquinas. Raleigh's is a theory similar to Augustine's, that man's inner experience can lead to truth. Aquinas, on the other hand, did not make this identification of thought and being, that is, a link between how we know and what is to be known.⁴⁹

Thus, the emotional tie of man to God is important in Raleigh: "Yet as all humane affections, wherein due reference to God is wanting, are no better than obscure cloudes, hindring the influence of that blessed light, which clarifies the soul of man, and predisposeth it unto the brightness of eternall felicitie..."⁵⁰ But this should not be construed to mean

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HW, Bk. I, ch. 2, s. 2, p. 27.

49

For a discussion of the two approaches, see John H. Randall, The Career of Philosophy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), vol. I, pp. 23-31.

50

HW, Bk. III, ch. 1, s. 11, p. 21.

that the power of grace is all-important. This is precisely the mistake of those who see Raleigh as a Puritan. The rational part of the soul, the mind, has a power of its own:

Now, as the reasonable minde is the forme of man, so is he aptly moved to those things which his proper forme presenteth unto him: to wit, to that which right reason offereth; and the acts of right reason, are the acts of vertue: and in the breach of the rules of this reason, is man least excusable: as being a reasonable creature.⁵¹

But this acknowledgement of the power of reason should not be exaggerated: Raleigh thought the Aristotelian emphasis on reason too arrogant. "But for my selfe", he explains, "I shall never bee perswaded, that God hath shut up all light of Learning within the lanthorne of Aristotles braines."⁵² His attack on Aquinas' Philosopher is even sharper in another passage:

Now although this doctrine of Faith, touching the Creation in time (for by Faith we understand, that the world was made by the word of God) be too weighty a work for Aristotles rotten ground to beare up, upon which he hath (not withstanding) founded the Defences and Fortresses of all his Verball Doctrine...⁵³

What Raleigh is attempting is again a synthesis; he is trying to effect a balance between reason and revelation, between experience and faith, between two separate modes of thought.

Reason, however, is not for Raleigh the way to truth; it is too deceptive. It is again the appearance vs. reality idea stressed in Chapter 3. Since the

51

HW, Bk. II, ch. 4, s. 6, p. 275.

52

HW, Preface.

53

Ibid.

mind-soul of man is that which is rooted in the Divine and unchanging, that is the only important reality. The material world, so fickle, gives only the appearance of reality, and it is not to be taken seriously. Men, says Raleigh, "neglect the advice of God, while they enjoy life, or hope it; but they follow the counsell of Death, upon his first approach...Death which hateth and destroyeth man, is beleaved; God which hath made him and loves him, is always deferred. I have considered (saith Solomon) all the workes that are under the Sunne, and behold, all is vanitie..."⁵⁴

The same warning is given by Hermes. Those that do not know "for what purpose they have been made, nor by whom they have been made...they admire the things that are not worth looking at; they give heed only to their bodily pleasures and desires, and believe that man has been made for such things as these." Those that have seen the good "deem their soujourn here on earth a thing to be deplored."⁵⁵

So the soul and mind of man, although mirrors of the divine, are greatly tempted by bodily nature. Raleigh devotes a section of the History to this idea and entitles it: "Of the intellectual minde of man, in which there is much of the image of God; and that this image is much deformed by sinne."⁵⁶ The Hermetica explains it more fully: "It is impossible then for things in this world to be pure from evil; and that which is good in this world is that which

54

HW, Bk. V, ch. 6, s. 12, p. 776.

55

Hermetica, Libellus IV, p. 153.

56

HW, Bk. I, ch. 2. s. 2. p. 25.

has the smallest share of evil, for in this world the good becomes evil."⁵⁷

But man has his choice: his life "is alwaies either encreasing towards ripeness and perfection, or declining and decreasing towards rotnnesse and dissolution."⁵⁸

This whole question of change--Raleigh's sense of it and repulsion from it--reflect the instability of the Elizabethan world. In the History Raleigh's unease is occasionally expressed in an apocalyptic sense of his own times:

But it is certaine, that the Age of Time hath brought forth stranger and more incredible things, than the Infancie. For we have now greater Giants, for vice and injustice, than the world had in those daies, for bodily strength; for cottages and houses of clay and timber, we have raised Palaces of stone; we carve them, we paint them, and adorne them with gold; insomuch as men are rather knowne by their houses, than their houses by them; we are fallen from two dishes to two hundred; from water, to wine and drunknesse; from the covering of our bodies with the skinnes of beasts, not only to silke and gold, but to the very skinnes of men. But to conclude this digression, Time will also take re-venge of the excesse, which it hath brought forth.⁵⁹

Throughout the History it is man's pride in his bodily attributes that cause defeat in war and the downfall of civilizations. The term Raleigh uses for this is tyranny, the adapting of one's Godly power to things not divine. This indeed cannot be pure because it is not directed towards its own natural end. In a "Regall" government there is an even balance of supreme power and common right; that is, no one dominates the

⁵⁷ Hermetica, Libellus VI, pp. 167-169.

⁵⁸ HW, Bk. I, ch. 2, s. 5, p. 32.

⁵⁹ HW, Bk. V, ch. 1, s. 4, p. 324.

other. This Raleigh opposes to a tyrannical government, in which the monarchy's power overwhelms that of those whose power lay in common right and law.⁶⁰ Now, although this obviously has a political basis, the idea tells us quite a bit about Raleigh's concept of magic and justice, for what else is magic but power? We have seen how he approves of white magic, which lifts the soul out of its bodily prison up to its original nature. The harnessing of that same power, then, to things material can do no more than produce an adverse black magic; that is, tie man to his mortal side. When power is used in this way, it is man against man, king against kingdom--tyranny. And this is the very reason why the world, in Raleigh's opinion, was in a state of decline. Thus the Romans became tyrannical after the war with Perseus ("Now began the Romans to swell with the pride of their fortune...")⁶¹, and spread their tyranny to even their own people.⁶²

Raleigh, however, does not totally adhere to a theory of historical decline. The world has been slowly decaying, but more important, each civilization has its own individual cycle: "But unto all Dominions God hath set their periods: Who, though hee hath given unto Man the knowledge of those waies, by which Kingdomes rise and fall; yet hath left him subject unto the affections, which draw on these fatall changes, in their

⁶⁰ HW, Bk. I, ch. 9, s. 1, p. 179.

⁶¹ HW, Bk. V, ch. 6, s. 10, p. 761.

⁶² HW, Bk. V, ch. 2, s. 2, p. 379.

times appointed."⁶³

The continuation of decline through history is basically because of the karmic quality of sin. Just as in the Preface Raleigh stresses that the sins of the fathers are punished by the sons in English history, it is the same in all places and thus difficult to escape: "But Alexanders children had by no law of men deserved, to die for the Tyranie of their Father. Wherefore, though Cassander died in his bed, yet the divine Justice brought swords upon his wife and children, that well revenged the crueltie of this bloudie man, by destroying his whole house, as he had done his Masters."⁶⁴ Cyrus, on the other hand, escaped this because on his deathbed he told his sons "of the immortalitie of the soule, and of the punishments and rewards following the good and ill deserving of everie man in this life..."⁶⁵

Decadence, then, in Raleigh's view, is the result of the soul being tied to bodily passions. So too is the view in the Hermetic books, where as a result of this:

The gods will depart from mankind,--a greivous thing!--

⁶³HW, Bk. V, ch. 3, s. 13, p. 497. In this passage, there is a strong Providential element; again, as a Christian, Raleigh both believes this and at the same time must admit to it. This, of course, is one of the problems of such a syncretic philosophy.

⁶⁴HW, Bk. IV, ch. 6, s. 6, p. 285.

⁶⁵HW, Bk. III, ch. 3, s. 6, p. 39. Polydore Vergil shard this view. See Denys Hay, Polydore Vergil: Renaissance Historian and Man of Letters (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), p. 141. Hay admits to the non-Christian quality of this.

and only evil angels will remain, who will mingle with men, and drive the poor wretches by main force into all manner of reckless crime, into wars, and robberies, and frauds, and all things hostile to the nature of the soul... After this manner will old age come upon the world. Religion will be no more; all things will be disordered and awry; all good will disappear.⁶⁶

And so Raleigh ends his history with this apocalyptic view of Rome:

We have left it [Rome] flourishing in the middle of the field; having rooted up, or cut down, all that kept it from the eyes and admiration of the world. But after some continuance, it shall begin to lose the beauty it had; the stormes of ambition shall beat her great boughes and branches one against another; her leaves shall fall off, her limbes wither, and a rabble of barbarous Nations enter the field and cut her downe.⁶⁷

And what about the rebirth so much a part of the Hermetic philosophy? The Asclepius describes it as "the new birth of the Kosmos."⁶⁸ Raleigh left The History of the World unfinished, with Rome about to be destroyed, and leaves us no hint there. But if we may leave this work and look to one of his poems, his belief in his own personal rebirth can be seen:

And this is my eternall plea,
To him that made Heaven, Earth, and Sea,
Seeing my flesh must die so soone,
And want a head to dine next noone,

⁶⁶ Hermetica, Asclepius III, p. 345.

⁶⁷ HW, Bk. V, ch. 6, s. 12, p. 775.

⁶⁸ Hermetica, Asclepius III, p. 347.

Just at the stroke when my vaines start and spred
Set on my soule an everlasting head.
Then am I readie like a palmer fit, 69
To tread those blest paths which before I writ.

The theory of the soul that is expressed in the Hermetic books and that emerges in Raleigh's History is that the soul is divinity in a mortal body. By reason of its immortality, it has the power to transcend the purely physical world and bring its carrier up to greater heights of wisdom and understanding. This is what Raleigh sees as one form of magic. Because of his bodily nature, however, and because of the very nature of the physical world around him, this spiritual power is constantly in danger of being overpowered by it. The choice, however, is in man. He can choose between an eternal order, of which he will be a part through eternity, or an existence in time. The former is the only reality; the latter only appears to be so.

This can perhaps explain the apparent contradiction between Raleigh's arrogance and search for adventure and wealth, and his spirituality. There is no doubt in my mind that he was an adept in what is now called gamesmanship; witness, for instance, The Ocean's Love to Cynthia, a poem to Elizabeth. What is usually interpreted as Machiavellian political expedience here is really only Raleigh's own realization after years of

69 "The Passionate Man's Pilgrimage" in Agnes M.C. Latham (ed.), The Poems of Sir Walter Raleigh (London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1929), pp. 43-44.

sitting in prison that the material world is short and not of the importance of the eternal. His method was not to enter the ministry, but to rather "play the game" advocated by those in Eastern religions. In the first place, orthodoxy was not connected with religiousity in his mind; his mode of thought was much too syncretic for that. Raleigh, and others as well, rather believed in flowing with the physical world, the apparent reality, in the same way that one "rolls with the punch" in Karate, only to return the attack with greater force. In his life Raleigh played out his physical destiny, lived it to the fullest. His arrogance was none other than that of Pico, who rejoiced at what a wondrous creature was man. It was not a concentration on earthly passions to the exclusion of the spiritual. The dignity of man is his ability to have both and to find them reconciled in himself.

CONCLUSION

The central intellectual problem of the Renaissance was to somehow reconcile the old philosophy of an eternal order with swiftly changing political, economic, religious and scientific developments. Although some men were able either to hang on to the old order or to accept new situations, most intellectuals found that a more reconciliatory system was necessary to give meaning to their lives. Raleigh, among others, found this solution in the syncretic Hermetic philosophy, which offered, besides its great antiquity, coexistent concepts of immutable order and change. Its great attraction was that this philosophy was able to explain the seeming decadence of the world in a non-pessimistic manner. In other words, the changes that were occurring at the time could be explained as only apparent decay; the real world, that of God, was immutable as ever. Furthermore, man was by nature a part of that universal divinity because of his soul. Only his body was in decay. This idea, of course, is the basis of most religions, and therefore the more occult, even heretical beliefs of Hermetism, could be assimilated with ease. And indeed, the aspect of Hermetic philosophy that so appealed to these men, that is, the scope of man's own divine power, was definitely at odds with the former hierarchical beliefs. But this was the method by which the gap between the old and new was bridged: man himself was both divine and human, immutable and mutable, and could therefore choose to lift himself above the chaos whenever he pleased.

Indeed, this was how the more practical aspects of the Hermetic tradition provided the basis for a new experimental science in the seventeenth century. Although the differences between astrology and astronomy, and alchemy and chemistry are undoubtedly great, these earlier sciences associated with Hermetism were great ground-breakers. For once man realized his own power to experimentally explain, even through numerical symbolism, he was a step closer to, say, analytic geometry and physics. Above all, the Hermetic philosophy enabled man to see that he had no limits to his power when working in the world of nature. He himself was part of that nature, and by a bit of white magic, he could easily be in communication with it. It is not surprising, then, to discover that such a revolutionary figure as Copernicus himself was a believer in Hermetic philosophy.¹

History in the Renaissance was undergoing the same kind of revolutionary change. Both Italy and France were able to assimilate antiquarian findings and new facts into a coherent historical system. In England, however, men usually retained the common law-based universal history, in which the same principles reoccurred throughout time. As a result, English historiography was nowhere near advanced as that of French historicism. But this very resistance to change enabled English history to be a reconciling media. The universal principles common both to it and Hermetism wove a close bond between the two, and as a

¹Frances A. Yates, The Art of Memory (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 156.

result, Raleigh's The History of the World, as judged by its immense popularity, was able to effectively pose a solution to the central problem of the Renaissance.

The very fact that Hermetism and historiography have been so ignored gives Raleigh a prominent place in Renaissance intellectual history. He brought together in his own life history, science, and Hermetism, and showed that the links between the three are quite basic. History, by its very nature, deals with change, but since it is also a science, it must deal with principles deduced from observed fact. It must then concern itself with universals as well. The History of the World with its emphasis on man's own magical powers, effectively reconciles the two using as its framework Hermetic philosophy.

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