UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

'THINGS WHICH ARE NOT': IDEAS OF NOTHING IN RENAISSANCE
LITERARY AND PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, in
the Department of English, Faculty of Arts

March, 1997.

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ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF ARTS

ENGLISH

Doctor of Philosophy

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This thesis attempts, using both well-known and unfamiliar textual sources, to account for the literary theme of 'Nothing' during the Renaissance. Humanist, neo-Latin writings reveal that nihil was a topic of interest to poets from about 1550, and to philosophers throughout the seventeenth century. The study traces inter-connections between the numerous and diverse semantic implications of nihil and its vernacular equivalents in early-modern European texts. A wide range of metaphoric uses of the word 'nothing' in English Renaissance verse is also explored, with particular attention to Shakespeare's thematic use of 'nothing' in his plays.

Nihil was a subject of philosophical and theological debate in the late medieval period, and became associated with creation-myths, mysticism, millenarianism, and alchemy in the Renaissance. In intellectual discourses of the period, 'nothing' could name a metaphysical level of being, the spiritual realm, or the ideas of infinite and empty space.

Some medieval dialecticians had disputed whether nihil could logically be a name at all, so that the term had become a common focus of logical problems. Such sophisms in turn were to inspire Renaissance poets, who made semantic play on 'nothing' in numerous epigrams and a series of poems in praise of nothing, which have hitherto been considered as neo-classical in form. Those poems show the 'nothing' theme crossing from Latin to vernacular, from high to low culture.

The least familiar manifestation of the interest in nothing - a sequence of cross-disciplinary university debates on the topic - shows the development of the theme during the seventeenth century. Those texts are set in the broader context of mainstream scientific and philosophical changes.

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PREFACE & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Some initial understanding of the origins and ends of my
research into 'nothing' might facilitate the reading of this
thesis. There were, at the outset, two catalysts to my
investigation. The first was my awareness of medieval
discussions on the subject, especially in the field of logic.
The second was the text of King Lear, which had intrigued me
by its repetitions of the word 'nothing'. Whilst not
following any agenda of showing that Shakespeare was somehow
directly 'influenced' by medieval logic, I was curious
whether any connections might be made between medieval
logicians' interest in 'nothing' and Shakespeare's
preoccupation with the word. Research into that initial
question has led me along various avenues, some of which were
quite unforeseen. It appears that not only were many other
English poets showing interest in 'nothing', but there was
also considerable humanist interest in the philosophical
issues inherited from medieval scholastic thought. My
investigations excavated a series of academic discussions
about nothing which were continuing in Northern European
universities during the seventeenth century. The thesis does
not address those debates fully until the final chapter; the
preceding chapters provide a number of contexts in which the
philosophical debates might be understood, ranging from
popular culture to neo-classicism.

In the case of King Lear, a text to which the thesis
returns repeatedly, I have been conscious of the dangers of
reductive readings of the play's psychological or ideological
undercurrents. Instead, I have attempted to provide a
successively layered reading, since King Lear is a play

which, by virtue of its thematic inclusiveness, impacts upon the whole narrative of the thesis. It seems, however, that _King Lear_ was not an isolated example of Shakespeare's preoccupation with 'nothing', and I have attempted to show how the word conveyed various interconnected meanings in his plays.

The greatest difficulty in presenting the thesis has been in ordering satisfactorily the wide range of material and ideas involved. There are several types of study here - beginning with a broadly Marxist reading of certain Renaissance texts, then giving the thesis over to a less tendentious historical (re)construction of philosophical ideas and poetic themes. With regard to the latter, poetic aspect, I was much influenced by the methodology of Ernst Robert Curtius, in his eclectic rummaging through the _topoi_ of post-classical literature. I tried to follow Curtius's example of showing how poetry (for Curtius, 'literature') tends to set up themes which cross over the boundaries of different discourses. I have been interested more in making connections between discourses than in explaining or interpreting those connections. However, it has been irresistible to conclude that twentieth-century philological attitudes to 'Literature' had much in common with late humanists' attitudes to poetry and rhetoric.

My sweep through medieval Christian theology in Chapter 2 focusses upon mainstream figures and general movements, in order to give a brief account of pertinent developments in the 'history of ideas'. In the area of medieval logic, however, I have had to abstract certain key points from often abstruse material, written by sometimes unfamiliar figures. I was aided greatly in this task by the teaching of Medieval Logic by Desmond Henry at Manchester University some fifteen years ago. More latterly, his advice and encouragement were very important at the early stages of research.

EDITORIAL NOTE

My policy with regard to Latin references has been to include translations in the text for the majority of cases, with the original Latin in the endnotes. The chief exception to this rule has been with verse quotations, which are included in the text, with my translation below. For reasons of economy, French quotations are left untranslated, with the exception of some early modern verses.

List of Abbreviations used in thesis

OED: Oxford English Dictionary

PL: Patrologia latinae

CHLMP: Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy, edited by A. Kenny, N.Kretzmann, & J.Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982)

CHRP: Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy, edited by C.B.Schmitt, & Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988)

GBD: General Biographical Dictionary, edited by Alexander Chalmers (London, 1816)

CHAPTER ONE

'Nothing' metaphors: personal, social, economic

Introduction

Colloquially, the words 'nothing' and 'something' are
often predicated of people. Admiration would be conveyed by
'she's really something', and we are encouraged to 'make
something' of ourselves. Conversely, calling someone a
nothing is a common insult (current vernacular English yields
a similar slur - calling someone a 'no-mark'). On a recent
television documentary, a woman complained of the
authorities, 'they treated me like I was nothing.'[1] The
metaphor can also imply alienation, as in this Irish
Catholic's account of growing up in Manchester: 'you're
culturally torn ... you are transparent, a nothing.'[2] When
applied to people, the uses of 'something' and 'nothing' are
similar to those nominal uses of 'somebody' to imply
importance, and of 'nobody' to imply insignificance. There
seem to be slight differences, however, in the two usages.
'Somebody' and 'nobody' tend specifically to indicate social
status, whereas 'something' and 'nothing' might express
moral, social, or economic valuations. Like Pooter, blameless
and contentedly well-off, one might be quite happy to be a
nobody, but to be called (or to feel that one is) a nothing,
is to be deemed miserably worthless. Calling someone nothing
is an absolute term of abuse or devaluation; to feel one is
nothing is to feel complete exclusion, utter alienation. The
colloquial use of 'nonentity' is similar, when implying 'a
person of no significance, consequence or importance' (OED)[3]

The metaphor of 'nothing' applied to people will usually imply, therefore, a value-system, involving beliefs about what it means to be a worthwhile human being. It will be seen in this chapter that in the common English idiom of four hundred years ago, 'nothing', or 'nought', could similarly express the low worth of a person. An epigram written by John Davies of Hereford provided a vivid example:

> Nought hath no savour. That I deny
> Some are stark naught that smell most filthily.[4]

'Naught' in this context was clearly intended to bring to mind unwashed, destitute, degraded humanity, whose example is supposed to refute the proverb, 'Naught hath no savour.' The connotation of moral or social unacceptability is evident. Metaphorical uses of the term will always suggest something of the value-system of the writer: in Davies's case, it seems to have betrayed an uncharitably scathing attitude to the poor. During this chapter I wish to explore the valuations implicit in some early modern texts where 'nothing' is predicated of a person. I will also consider how other evaluative uses of 'nothing' may have had historically-specific economic or social connotations. In early modern Europe, the 'personal nothing' metaphor constituted more than an idiom - it was a poetic theme. The first section shows that the implications of that theme were inflected by the values of early modern culture, especially those of Humanism and Protestantism. Cultural values, I argue, were in turn determined partly by certain socio-economic conditions specific to that period. Therefore the chapter presents an historical perspective upon the theme which, in the manner of Marxist criticism, takes culture and economics to be dialectically related.[5] The second and third sections consider money in the abstract as well as historically, in relation to metaphors of nothing which appear in some of Shakespeare's plays. The fourth section examines the metaphors of nothingness and 'thingness' in King Lear. Instances from

English drama, and Northern-European neo-Latin texts, are compared in a consideration of whether the nihilistic theme of King Lear - and the general poetic theme of nothing - might have had reference to socio-economic conditions of the time.

1. 'That's something yet' - the status of the individual in early modern literature

> There was an old woman
> And nothing she had,
> And so this old woman was said to be mad.
> She'd nothing to eat,
> She'd nothing to wear,
> She'd nothing to lose,
> She'd nothing to fear,
> She'd nothing to ask,
> And nothing to give,
> And when she did die,
> She'd nothing to leave. (Nursery rhyme: traditional)[6]

Jean Passerat's most famous poem, 'Nihil', is invariably cited when commentators refer to the Renaissance topic of 'nothing.'[7] Passerat was a humanist, on the fringe of the Parisian Pléiade group. The poem's broad range of themes will receive fuller attention below, but here I wish to examine one theme in particular - the idea of 'happy the person who is nothing'(25). Passerat glossed 'Felix cui nihil est,' (which he attributed to Tibullus) with the observation that if one is nothing, one has little to worry about.[8] The implications of Passerat's remarks, which appear to convey a standard topos, have a bearing on the identity of the

individual in early modern society. There are various aspects to that *topos*, ranging from the theological to the economic, and in the work of more sophisticated poets, there are numerous inflections and ironic inversions of its conventional, reactionary message.

The Christian variant on the theme of being nothing expressed either a penitent self-denial or a general anti-humanism. The commonplace that man is nothing, or less, compared to God, is seen in much devotional poetry of the period. An extension of the Christian themes *omnia vanitas* or *de contemptu mundi*, the conceit found frequent expression in religious poems and epigrams.[9] In *The Triumph of Death* (1605), John Davies of Hereford gloomily concluded that 'We best are nought that breathe',[10] and in his *Summa Totalis* (1603), played on associations of sin with nothing:

> O help us weakings, Lord of *Hoasts*, to fight,
> Els we to *Nothing* must be captive bound:
> For *Nothing* (*Synne*) doth nothing Day and Night
> But make us worse then Nothing by her spight.
> (Grosart, b, p.11)

The Protestant author of *Divine Fancies*, Francis Quarles (1592-1644), used the same pious hyperbole in the epigram, 'On Man':

> By nature, Lord, men worse than nothing be,
> And lesse than Nothing, if compared with thee;
> If lesse and worse then Nothing, tell me than,
> Where is that something, thou so boasts, proud man[11]

The theme was popular not only with Protestants: it had appealed also to the penitential fervour of French Catholics in the sixteenth century, who had also declared themselves 'less than nothing'.[12] The desire for self-abasement and atonement was a common impulse of Catholics and Protestants during the Reformation and its aftermath (see below, p.42).

John Donne liked to recall our origins from nothing, as in his letter 'To the Countess of Salisbury': after the characteristically fey posturing of 'All the world's frame

being crumbled into sand', he wrote of men

> All trying by love of littlenesse
> To make abridgments, and to draw to lesse,
> Even that nothing, which at first we were.[13]

The same sentiment was expressed by Donne in 'The Calme':

> What are wee then? How little more alas
> Is man now, than before he was? he was
> Nothing; for us, wee are for nothing fit.(Donne, p.256)

But the theme was most thoroughly explored in his 'Anatomy of the World':

> Of nothing he made us, and we strive too
> To bring ourselves to nothing back ...
> If man were anything, he's nothing now.[14]

In these verses of praise or elegy, the conceit was not so much a sign of piety or modesty as a rhetorical device. In Donne's _Divine Poems_, however, there is a desperate earnest about the idea of being nothing. In his later years, in the face of illness and approaching death, Donne's language veered towards a more theological figuring of the personal nothing. Nothingness, he wrote in his essays, is further from God even than hell; to be nothing would be a greater malediction than being in hell.[15] 'Nothing' here is not a relative term - 'nothing compared to God' - but an absolute one, which goes beyond the conventional deference of the devout.[16]

There is a secular equivalent of these denigrations of mankind in John Marston's 'A Cynicke Satyre' (1599), which begins, 'A man, a man, a kingdom for a man'.[17] Men, to the satirist, are all non-entities:

> These are no men, but Apparitions,
> Ignes fatui, Glowormes, Fictions,
> Meteors, Ratts of Nilus, Fantasies
> Colosses, Pictures, Shades, Resemblances (Marston, p.66)

and ultimately man is a 'huge nothing' (p.95). But if the trope of man as nothing was common in the context of religious writing or satire, the notion of being happy to be nothing established a new and paradoxical conceit. The

conceit seems to derive from a conflation of 'being nothing' and 'having nothing'. Passerat's own French translation of Nihil' demonstrates this conflation, rendering 'felix cui nihil est' as 'happy the person who has nothing':

> Heureux qui a rien, et a qui rien ne greve
> Celui ne craint les feux larcins ny embuches. ('Rien')
> [Happy the person who has nothing, and whom nothing
> burdens; he has no fear of guns, thefts or ambushes.]

The change makes the sentiment of the lines very similar to a commonplace of the time, 'He who has nothing can lose nothing'.[18] Specifically economic implications of the theme are emphasized, creating echoes also of one of Cicero's much-published Paradoxa: 'that it is better to be poor than to be rich.'[19] That paradox was replicated in the first of Ortensio Landi's Paradossi, which itself was translated into both French (1553) and English (1602).[20] Such sentiments could be, and were, Christianised, by reference to the rich man's difficult access to heaven, or the sentiments of the Beatitudes. He who is last shall be first, and the earthly nobody shall inherit the kingdom of God.[21] In an allegorical play by Marguerite de Navarre from the 1530s, this attitude was presented via the characters Trop, Prou [Beaucoup], Peu and Moins.[22] The fat, rich pair - Trop and Prou - are miserable: the lean, poor duo contented and looking forward to the day of judgment. Gerta Calmann, in her monograph upon 'The Picture of Nobody', cited a Portuguese interlude in a similar vein, from 1532, in which the 'Ninguam' [Nobody] figure acts as counterpoint to the Everyman figure, 'Todo o Mondo'.[23]

But there is little or no religiosity about Passerat's poem, and if, therefore, it is suggesting that being nothing is really an advantage in this life, it is surely ironic. The tension between a Christian interpretation of the personal nothing, and one concerned with the realities of mortal existence, could be seen in earlier sixteenth-century

French culture. The popular culture of the <u>Farce</u> provided two examples, whose texts are found in a collection from the mid-century, featuring a character called 'Rien'. In the <u>Farces</u> of <u>Rien, Chascun</u> and <u>Tout</u>, and <u>Jenin, Fils de Rien</u>, the wry folk-wisdom of 'He who has nothing has nothing to lose,' is developed into a more sophisticated piece of social comment.[24] Furthermore, some of the assumptions of Marguerite de Navarre's piece are challenged. It may even be that the later, unattributed farces are making fun of such condescending portrayals of the dispossessed as that of the wealthy Marguerite de Navarre. In <u>Rien, Chascun, Tout</u>, Chascun is the Everyman figure, a mediator, whilst Rien and Tout argue over who is the better. In response to the claim by Tout that 'Il est bien heureux qui a tout', Rien replies, with dubious logic, that if he who has little is contented, then he who has nothing must be happier still:

> Qui na rien ne se souscie
> Il na point paour de perdre rien
> (<u>Nouvelles Farces</u>, No.56)

To be nothing is equated with having nothing; possessions are the source of misery: therefore, to be nothing is to be happy. Two opposite interpretations of this sanguine syllogising offer themselves: a quietistic message of sufferance to the poor, or an ironic <u>reductio ad absurdum</u>. In England, the former sentiment was undoubtedly commonplace; the John Vicars epigram, 'Little, Nothing, Too-much, Enough' sums up this attitude, with its moral that from the beggar to the rich man, no-one thinks he has enough.[25] However, in the context of these French <u>farces</u>, I am inclined towards the alternative reading. The traditional <u>farces</u>, which flourished in the fifteenth century, were street entertainments, unlike the 'farces' written by the Queen of Navarre. They tended rather towards social realism and satire than to complacent moral precepts, despite the protestations of their being 'tresbonne moralle'.[26] It may be that this tendency was common

in French popular culture of the period: Bernadette Rey-Flaud has suggested that the farces of the sixteenth century express alienation born of a 'menacing determinism'.[27] Konrad Schoell called the genre 'realist and direct', noting the democratic, almost sociological interests they expressed.[28] In his study of another medium of popular French culture, folk-tales, Robert Darnton has suggested that these appear distinctly subversive in comparison to the earnest tone of their German equivalents.[29]

Jenin, Fils de Rien illustrated the radicalism of the genre. The son in question is a bastard, and there is the risqué but conventional suggestion that his mother was a 'femme de prêtre'. The central conceit of the piece is that Jenin, in doubt of his parentage, begins to doubt his own existence. Jenin is, according to André Tissier, a 'badin' or 'sot' figure, but his foolishness scarcely disguises the very real personal problem he expresses (Tissier, I, p.254). The play presents his perspective upon the question of illegitimacy, and represents his experience of rejection and exclusion. There is surely pathos as well as humour in the climactic, concluding speech from Jenin, addressed to the audience:

> A! Vrayement doncques, par mon ame,
> Je suis Jenin filz de rien.
> Adoncques, pour l'entendre bien
> Jenin n'est point le filz sa mère;
> Aussi n'est point le filz son père;
> Ergo donc je ne suis pas filz,
> Ne père ne mère, vresbis!
> Donc Jenin n'est point Jenin.
> Qui suis-je donc? ... (Tissier, p.279)

Jenin then produces a ridiculous list of people he might be, refuting each one in turn: God, the Virgin Mary, the Devil, Saint Peter and Saint Thomas. But the pathos returns when he declares that he would be happier were he born of a horse or a dog. And in the penultimate line of his speech and the play, the poignantly understated, 'Plusieurs sont à moy

ressemblans', switches attention from Jenin the fool to a general social phenomenon. His implication, that to be excluded by society as illegitimate was effectively to be nothing, carries with it no external judgments or condemnation. The dramatic device of letting Jenin express his own feelings of alienation enables the figure of the social nothing to be reappropriated from those, like the Queen of Navarre, who would conveniently present such suffering as a state of grace. There is no joy to be got from being a son of nothing, and the only consolation for Rien himself was that death would be the great leveller:

> Et en la fin tout vient a rien
> Voyla que cest de nostre vie
> Prenez en gre ie vous supplie.   (Tissier, p.280)
> [And in the end all comes to nothing;
> such is our life, take it or leave it.]

Those final lines, like those of Jenin, Fils de Rien, have a wry edge which distinguish them from platitudes about being happy to be nothing.

To return to the 1580s, and to English writings, Edward Daunce wrote an enigmatic poem, 'The Prayse of Nothing' (1585) which was published before Passerat's 'Nihil' (1587). There are elements of the felix nihil theme in a passage, after a biblically-inspired onslaught upon the rich, which discourses on poverty:

The affinitie which hath beene ever betweene nothing, and the poverty of men, maketh the one hardly to be discerned from the other in the possession of their owners: the effectes of both, being the cause of good arts, and invention of some newe matter profitable to the world.[30]

The blithe interpretation of poverty aside, the synonymy of nothingness and poverty was evidently taken for granted.[31] A nineteenth-century editor of the English essay linked it to a poem from around 1550, 'In lode di noncovelle', by Francisco Beccuti.[32] Daunce's remarks on nothing's proximity to poverty may well have inspired by Beccuti's claim that noncovelle is

antagonistic to wealth, and more akin to beggary:

> né per ciò se ne gonfia, anzi è nimico
> de' superbi e de' ricchi, e'l vedrai gire
> sempre con qualche fallito o mendico. (37)

Elsewhere there is a version of the theme of being happy to be nothing: if you have nothing on your back, 'non ti bisogna temer d'assassini'(48). Beccuti's piece would seem to be a likely source for Passerat's poem too, suggesting a wide dissemination of the trope within the humanist community across Europe.

In summary, the material considered so far, whether religious or secular in its concerns, popular or academic in its origins, made the something-nothing issue partly a matter of wealth and possessions, but also one entailing wider social implications of reputation and social status. There were two distinct ways in which Renaissance writers spoke of people being nothings: the one in relation to God, and the other in relation to other people or things, i.e. socially and economically. The general humanism and commercialism of the age lent an increased weight to the latter usage, but the religious trope persisted alongside it. Shakespeare showed a consciousness of the religious usage in The Winter's Tale, when Cleomenes articulates his response to the Oracle, one of a feeling of human pusillanimity in the face of divine power:

> ... the ear-deaf'ning voice o'th' oracle,
> Kin to Jove's thunder, so surprised my sense
> That I was nothing. (III.1.2)

There was a third perspective, that of gender, which might be thought of as intersecting both the religious and the humanistic metaphors of the personal nothing. If men described themselves as nothing relative to God, their rhetoric sometimes implied a similar relation between women and men. The usage emerges often from the perspective of the rejected, and embittered, male, as in the epigram 'Philaristo' by John Vicars, which was itself an imitation of one by John Harington:

> You sent a gift, and Nothing it was,
> I nothing send to you:
> You gave yourself, your self to you
> I send back, so adieu. (Vicars, I, 73)

Such verses expose a gendered aspect of the nothing↔all
polarity: the patriarchal all and the female nothing. Davies
of Hereford produced a distinctive reading of the personal
nothing in one of his epigrams, 'Of Nell that was married to
some Thing, herself having Nothing', which contorts the
familiar Socratic saying about knowing that one knows
nothing:

> Nell no thing hath, which breeds her husband lothing:
> Then this he onely knowes, that he knowes nothing.[33]

This play on the idea of sexual knowledge also points to a
slang use of 'nothing' to connote vagina, a meaning derived
from the figure of zero. The consequences of this have been
explored by several Shakespeare critics since Thomas Pyles's
discovery of 'yonic symbolism' in 'the veneral vernacular of
the day'.[34] It would be wrong to ignore the possibility of
more positive sub-textual - even sub-conscious - implications
issuing from this symbolism: the vagina as origin, the
nothing from which we are born. But such implications are
sublimated by Davies into an overt misogyny. Exactly why the
husband of the epigram hates his wife is not clear: whether
because she is poor, or simply because she is a woman.[35]

The Pyles theory is certainly substantiated by the
number of references to the penis as a 'thing', notably in
Shakespeare's Sonnet No.20, to the 'master-mistress' of his
passion, to whose body nature had added 'one thing to my
purpose nothing' (12). Davies of Hereford played on the word
in his mock-epitaph 'On a roaring boy called Thing', and
Henry Parrot, in his collection of epigrams, Springes for
Woodcocks (1613) used the association to produce a comic
elaboration on the theme, 'Ex nihilo nihil':

> T'wer wondrous, Niger should so long neglect
> To take a wife, either for wealth or wit,

> But that 'twas knowne he had some close defect,
> Which from his very rising hindred it:
> For what to women most content should bring
> Was flatly found in him to prove no Thing.[36]

Although in this example, male sexuality is the object of the joke, the homocentricity of the idiom is obvious. One of John Davies of Hereford's sonnets makes this quite explicit: addressing an 'unkinde' lover, he concludes,

> So, thou art nothing, sith all Beeings fitt
> The endes, to which, as Meanes, they were assigned;
> Women, are Meanes that Men Bee, are not then
> As Nothing, but with Something, bring some Men.[37]

The obverse of this anti-feminist usage in sixteenth-century verse was another stock male device conveying modest self-deprecation. When John Donne repeatedly, in both his secular poems and his prose, called himself a nothing, it was often as an ingratiating ploy, as in one of his poems to the Countess of Bedford: 'nothings, as I am, may \ Pay all they have, and yet have all to pay' (p.73). For Donne it was just as easily a topos appropriate for his male friends, as in the opening of 'The Storme', addressed to his friend Christopher Brooke: 'Thou which art I ('tis nothing to be soe)' (p.250). The insistence of Donne on self-negation - in his letters too - is formal politeness on the surface, but there is something contradictorily grand about it too. His personal nothingnesses are contrived to suggest macrocosmic implications, as in 'The Broken Heart', when the speaker declares of his heart that 'nothing can to nothing fall' (p.95). In 'A nocturnall upon S.Lucies day', the effect of 'I, by loves limbecke, am the grave \ Of all, that's nothing', or 'oft did we grow \ To be two Chaosses' (p.91) is not so much portentous, as melodramatic.[38]

John Marston, in What You Will, used the cynical Quadrato to mock poetic self-indulgence in the suitor Lampatho. The nothingness of the lover/ poet is both lauded and mocked, especially by the 'epicurean' Quadrato. The

implications of Quadrato's satirical attacks are brought to a
poetic climax in this exchange between Meletza and Lampatho:

> M. How would it please you that I should respect yee.
> L. As anything, *What You Will*, as nothing.
> M. As nothing, how will you valew my love.
> L. Why just as you respect me, as nothing, for out of
> nothing, nothing is bred, so nothing shall not beget
> any-thing, any-thing bring nothing, nothing bring any-
> thing, any-thing and nothing shall be What You Will, my
> speech mounting to the valieu of myself, which is -
> M. What, sweete?
> L. Your nothing. light as your selfe, scencelesse as
> your sex, and just as you would ha me, nothing.
> <div align="right">(Marston, <u>Plays</u>, II, 280)</div>

Lampatho's coy declarations that he is worthless are
ironically true, and validate Quadrato's scorn of his
'perfum'd words.' Moreover, they are disingenuous: such
negations of self are necessarily compromised by their own
self-consciousness.

Shakespeare showed his awareness of self-negation as an
unreliable, and often specious rhetorical figure in <u>The Two
Gentlemen of Verona</u>. Valentine identifies his self completely
with his beloved Silvia, with the consequence that he must
cease to exist when parted from her:

> She is my essence, and I leave to be
> If I be not by her fair influence
> Fostered, illumined, cherished, kept alive.
> <div align="center">(<u>Two Gentlemen of Verona</u>, III.1.182)</div>

In the subsequent exchange, as he is chased by Proteus and
Lance, the sense of this metaphysical conceit is challenged:

> PROTEUS: Valentine?
> VALENTINE: No.
> PROTEUS: Who then? His spirit?
> VALENTINE: Neither.
> PROTEUS: What then?
> VALENTINE: Nothing.
> LANCE: Can nothing speak? Master, shall I strike?
> PROTEUS: Who wouldst thou strike?
> LANCE: Nothing.
> PROTEUS: Villain, forbear.
> LANCE: Why, sir, I'll strike nothing. (III.1.193.)

Lance's common-sense, literalistic response to the hyperbole

from Valentine deflates the situation to the level of farce, undercutting the nothing-metaphor. Shakespeare was scathing of such plausible male rhetoric, but in the face of real, rather than self-indulgently imagined, death, the trope can be used in earnest. In Cymbeline, Innogen, seeing the body of Cloten, at first hopes it is 'a bolt of nothing, shot from nothing', but then realises it is 'not imagined, felt' (IV.2.302). Even then, she qualifies her response to the question from Lucius, 'Who is't? What art thou?'. 'I am nothing,' she says, 'or if not, Nothing would be better' (IV.2.369).

Rhetorically, such male self-abnegation produces ironic inversions of humanistic self-affirmation, or the negation of the female other. Several of the sonnets in Michael Drayton's Idea (1609) explored the conflict between male assertiveness and the self-negation involved in love. 'Nothing but no and I, and I and no' plays on the homophony of 'I' and 'aye'; in response to his lover's 'affirming no, denying I', Drayton declares, 'No, I am I'.[39] The unmistakeable echo of Yahweh's 'Ego sum qui sum' to Moses seems to confirm Bacon's verdict that in this modern age 'man is a God to man'.[40]

It appears, in summary, that there was often irony involved in the use, by the educated élite of English poets, of the personal nothing metaphor. The humanistic trope set up a semi-autonomous and changeable hierarchy of values which was at once bolstered and undermined by the material poles of poverty and wealth. Meanwhile, the gendered aspect of the trope related ambivalently to its hierarchical undercurrents, sometimes reinforcing misogyny, but sometimes questioning masculine identity. In the next section we will see that social change and changeability were expressed in Shakespeare's adaptations and interpretations of the personal nothing metaphor.

2. Changing values and exchange value in the language of Shakespeare

Examples of the 'personal nothing' cited above indicate that the trope, having been long established in Christian discourses, was responding in various ways to the phenomenon of Renaissance individualism. Jacob Burckhardt produced the seminal account of this process in Renaissance Italy - a growth of individualism which expressed itself culturally, artistically, politically.[41] There have been other, socio-economic, accounts of the same period which describe the 'transition from feudalism to capitalism' from about the late fourteenth century to the industrial revolution.[42] By these accounts, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries marked a crucial stage of rapid expansion in commerce, international trade and industrial capital.[43] By the same accounts, the late medieval period saw the beginnings of the bourgeoisie, another emergent group of individualists (Dobb, pp.83-122).

In post-feudal Europe, when the hierarchy of social 'degree' was complicated by commerce, professionalisation, and the money-market, there was increasing movement between the social poles which had been implied by Rien and Tout. It may still have been easy to say who was nothing (the poor, the alien, the outcast) but less so to decide who belonged at the top of the hierarchy. One can perceive something of the changes in the different uses of 'nothing' by the King in Richard II, and by Orlando in As You Like It. The fourteenth-century king's words at his being deposed, 'I must nothing be' (Richard II, IV.1.201), convey the magnitude of a fall from the top of the feudal hierarchy - a move from all to nothing; they recall Lear's complaint, 'they told me I was everything' (King Lear, IV.5.104). In the opening scene of As You Like It, Orlando expresses his exclusion from society as the youngest son in the absolute terms of all and nothing;

Jaques, the second son, is at least something:

> But I, his brother, gain nothing under him but growth,
> for which the animals on his dunghills are as much bound
> to him as I. Besides this nothing that he so plentifully
> gives me, the something that nature gave me his
> countenance seems to take from me.
>
> (As You Like It, I.1.12)

Orlando feels he is at the bottom of the hierarchy of social being; on Oliver's entrance the point is forced home:

> OLIVER: Now, sir, what make you here?
> ORLANDO: Nothing. I am not taught to make anything.
> OLIVER: What mar you then?
> ORLANDO: Marry, sir, I am helping you to mar that which
> God made, a poor unworthy brother of yours, with
> idleness.
> OLIVER: Marry, sir, be better employed, and be nought
> awhile. (I.1.27)

Interestingly, though, Orlando is not concerned merely with the inequities of primogeniture, which might represent traditional patriarchal structures. His emphasis is upon his lack of usefulness, that he has not been taught to make anything. In the context of late sixteenth-century English society, this speaks of the values of a changing culture in which social position can be attained by work as much as by birth. Of course, Orlando does not wish to become an artisan, but he does want to 'make' something of himself. In practical terms, this meant making money, therefore it is not surprising that anxieties about money and about personal worth become entwined in the metaphorics of nothing and something.

Socio-economic changes had fostered an emergent group of individualists, in both secular and religious spheres.[44] By the mid-sixteenth century, lawyers had joined the clergy in gaining 'professional' status, and merchants too were part of a non-landed élite.[45] As Marlowe's Barabas illustrated, money meant power, and unbounded personal yearning was not exclusively intellectual or spiritual: 'infinite riches in a little room' was enough for some. According to Stephen

Greenblatt, sixteenth-century individualism in England produced widespread desire for autonomy, expressions of self-consciousness, and strategies of self-construction.[46] From the university-educated poets cited above, there was certainly evidence of self-consciousness, and an assertiveness which was often in tension with traditional Christian doctrine, which counselled, 'know yourself', but also, 'know your limits'.

When writing on Shakespeare's imagery of 'nothing', Terry Eagleton described Coriolanus as a 'bourgeois individualist', involved in a constant process of self-definition.[47] Coriolanus is 'author of himself' (even to the extent that he becomes inscribed with scars) but he 'forbad all names; \ He was a kind of nothing, titleless, \ Till he had forg'd himself a name.' He is a typical, self-fashioning, as Greenblatt would have it, Renaissance humanist; but as Eagleton has observed,

The paradox of such private enterprise of the self is that although it regards personal identity as private, autonomous and non-exchangeable, it is historically bound up with the full-blown exchange economy of commodity production. What gets exchanged in this form of society are material goods, which become 'social' at the point where they are made private. The reciprocity of commodity exchange stands in, so to speak, for the relational bonds between persons; and though Shakespeare's work is far from admiring this condition, it does at least lay the basis for a kind of social 'order'. (Eagleton, p.74)

The consequences of Shakespeare's equivocal attitude to exchange value can be seen in a close analysis of the value-systems associated with nothing in his plays.

In King Lear, because of its feudal setting, there is to some extent a simple, hierarchical social structure, which is put in crisis by the action. The King, who was all, becomes nothing, as the Fool so often tells him. The reason, on one level, is that he has lost his social position; that done, even the socially marginal figure of the minstrel jester

becomes superior: 'I am better than thou art now. I am a fool; thou art nothing.' (King Lear, I.4.175) The Fool uses the image of an egg to illustrate his point, recalling alchemic connotations of all and nothing, but weaving into the metaphor word-play on 'crowns'. Lear has given away the meat - the potentia - of the egg, and is left only with the two halves of the shell: traces of a lost everything. On a personal level, there is loss of identity and purpose. This works macrocosmically too: the King's fall is symbolic of an endangered social, even cosmic, order, as the repeated allusions to gods and fate indicate. But in Shakespeare's use of 'nothing' here, there is more than either grand symbolism or the more personal connotations of selfhood seen in Donne. There is an aspect concerned not with reality and truth, universal order, or existential validation, but with value. This is the point at which the semantic and poetic implications of 'zero' are superimposed upon those of nothing.

Value may have been conceived as an absolute in theological terms, but it was increasingly difficult in Shakespeare's time not to think of value as relative on a social level. The growth of commerce, but more significantly of that free-floating value-system of money-markets, created a radically new ethos. A paradigmatic expression of this is Mosca's speech about parasites in Volpone: the whole of society is described as parasitic, each person upon the other, following their own interests and desires.[48] Daunce had made the same judgment of men as 'wolves to one another'.[49] This is, of course, a recurrent image in King Lear, one of wolvish daughters and unnatural sons, monsters preying on themselves, biting the hand that feeds them. As in Volpone explicitly, there seems to be implicit in King Lear - in its metaphorics of 'nothing' - a parable of the death of stable value caused by capitalism.

Brian Rotman, in discussing the semiotic history of zero, equated the 'nothing' re-iterated in King Lear with 'zero'.[50] Whilst such an equation may be only partly valid, Rotman's analysis of King Lear based on this assumption is nevertheless fruitful. It emphasises the quantificational aspect of 'nothing', reading into the initial exchanges between Lear and his daughters a capitalistic scenario: 'a promissory deal, a transactional charade, whose unreal premise involves an exchange of material goods for spoken signs' (Rotman, p.79). Rotman argued that, in post-medieval thinking, paper money had a different kind of meaning from that of solid coinage. Once money had begun to enter into a relation with itself and become a commodity per se, then it began to destroy old notions of value (see Rotman, p.24).[51] Rotman's distinction between gold money and paper money is rather exaggerated, for there is an unreality about the value attributed to gold too. But the written promise of paper money certainly distances the bearer still further from an increasingly undetermined value. Rotman referred to the new promissory money emerging in mercantile states such as Venice as 'imaginary money'. He concluded that 'in relation to the signs of gold money, imaginary money is, like zero ... a certain sort of meta-sign' (p.25).

Rotman was not the first to consider the sociological effects of this phenomenon. Alexander Murray explored the close connection between the introduction of Arabic numerals and the rise of mercantilism in the West.[52] The new system - its innovative zero figure apparently demonised by more conservative elements - was suppressed, even within the financial institutions, until the sixteenth century. In progressive Italy, it was not until 1494 that financiers completely converted their accounts to Arabic numerals, and in sixteenth-century England the Exchequer remained with the Roman system. Therefore, the figure of zero signified, in an

historically specific way, the world and values of commerce.

In addition to his thorough detailing of the occurrences of 'nothing' in King Lear, Rotman focussed interestingly on 'the language of arithmetic, in which his train of followers is counted down to nothing' and which 'becomes the vehicle and image of the destruction of Lear's self and of natural love' (Rotman, p.83).[53] Rotman perhaps missed the dramatic irony here, that in a sense Regan and Goneril are right in their account of Lear's needs. What need one servant? Only the King's social position is dependent upon it, not his existence. The zero to which he is reduced is only an abstract, economic nothing: he, the thing itself, remains. There is an echoing of the first scene here: Lear trying, for a second time, to get the highest bid out of his daughters. It is only when he has come to a fuller appreciation of 'need' that he will see the chimeral nature of his once-privileged position.

One of the Fool's jibes at Lear is 'Thou art an O without a figure' (I.4.174). Here, the symbolism of zero takes over from that of nothing: it is not an image of nothing as an opposite of something, or all; instead, it introduces another complex set of ambiguous relations. The Fool's remark actually employs a vernacular usage which dates back to at least the thirteenth-century and Gautier de Coinci, who twice refers to people being 'ciffres en augorisme' - that is, like ciphers in algorism (arithmetic).[54] In English, the earliest example is Thomas Usk's allusion to 'a sypher in augrim' in The Testament of Love; Langland used it too, in Richard the Redeless.[55] In most of these cases, it implied vacuity or literal insignificance, as in Langland's use:

> Than satte summe • as siphre doth in awgrym,
> That noteth a place • and no-thing availith.[56]

In the early seventeenth century, Francis Quarles had used

the image in a familiar religious context of self-effacement, asking God to be the 'figure' to his 'cypher' (Quarles, p.222: 'On a cypher'). Thomas Usk had seen a more subtle implication of the cipher, however, which seemed to contradict its own negativity. Usk explained his reference thus: 'Although a sypher in augrim have no might in significacioun of it-selve, yet he yeveth power in significacioun to other.'[57]

The same complex interpretation of the metaphor was given by Shakespeare in The Winter's Tale, when Polixenes greets Leontes, setting up a nexus not only between words and money, but also between words and zero:

> Nine changes of the wat'ry star hath been
> The shepherd's note since we hath left our throne
> Without a burden. Time as long again
> Would be filled up, my brother, with our thanks,
> And yet we should for perpetuity
> Go hence in debt. And therefore, like a cipher,
> Yet standing in rich place, I multiply
> With one 'We thank you' many thousands more
> That go before it. (The Winter's Tale, I.2.1)

In other words, his thanks are as nothing, but like a zero after a mathematical figure, it can multiply that value. The reference to 'debt' places this in a specifically monetary context - the profligacy of words matches that of money.[58] Shakespeare was able to figure the ancient language-truth problem through a new and equally intractable economic relation, one which overlays the negativity of nothing with a still more equivocal value system. This is the distinctive aspect of Shakespeare's metaphor of the personal nothing, a metaphor which incorporates old oppositions and new negotiations.

Bacon was to make the same metaphoric connection between words and money in his Novum Organon, when he gave the title of 'idola fori' [idols of the market-place] to those misleading fictions specific to words. As he states after his attack on the circularity of definitions in general, many of

these idols are of non-existent things, names without objects.[59] Whilst this is, on one level, a typically Baconian jibe at scholastic logic, there is another dimension added by his enigmatic use of the market metaphor. Bacon had, in Aphorism 14, called words 'notionum tesserae' [tokens of thoughts] and here he suggests that the exchange of such tokens produces distortions and confusions.[60] Thus he might have found himself in strange alliance with Montaigne, who had warned of the emptiness of words, but with his own eye on Rhetoric rather than Logic.[61] The specifically theatrical market-value of words was also appreciated by Thomas Dekker: in The Guls Hornebooke (1609), he remarked that words are a 'light commodity', and 'the theatre is your Poets Royal Exchange'.[62]

3. The Merchant of Venice: the price of everything and the value of nothing

If some of Shakespeare's references to nothing carry with them implicit connotations of exchange value, The Merchant of Venice makes the connection explicitly. By doing so, the play produces a self-satirising commentary upon the love-comedy genre. The play's title encapsulates the cross-currents of humanist individualism and commodification which characterised early modern Europe. Money and power had been inextricably linked in Italian city states such as Florence, where the Medici had moved from banking to political control in the late fifteenth century.[63] The wealthy mercantile state of Venice was at an advanced stage of capitalism: the second phase of 'primitive accumulation', in marxist terms (see Dobb, pp.177-220). Merchants were also examples of the self-

made men which Greenblatt described as the new breed of the
Renaissance, and Venice was a model of humanistic endeavour -
a uniquely successful republic. As late as the mid-
seventeenth century, it was being held up as an example for
England to follow. Yet even as the mito di Venezia was being
formed, a counter-myth was challenging its idealization,
according to Robert Finlay and other historians.[64] A French
ambassador at the Diet of Augsburg called the Venetians
'merchants of human blood', and Pope Pius II attacked their
'avarice, greed, ambition, envy, cruelty, lust and all
wickedness' (Finlay, pp.36, 37). Venice was, in addition, a
place of inequity, where slavery, and the ghettoizing and
persecution of Jews were accepted.[65] Whilst on the one hand,
there were attempts by the state to control poverty, the
expulsion of beggars from the city was a part of this policy
(see Pullan, pp.296-323). The myth of harmony and stability,
of an 'immortal commonwealth ... forever uncapable of
corruption' as John Harrington would later call it, was
undercut by some of the political realities, as suggested by
an early sixteenth-century proverb, 'A Venetian law lasts but
a week'.[66]

Venice was a place, too, where 'imaginary money' was
common currency; as Brian Vickers has observed in relation to
The Merchant of Venice, many transactions were made 'on
trust', that is, on credit.[67] Sixteenth-century Venice was
also a place where social and economic changes coincided: Ugo
Tucci has described how mercantile trade shifted its base
from the nobility to a new middle-class, the cittadini.[68] The
setting invites marxist readings; Nick Potter has placed the
play in a broad historical context, writing that
'schematically the play presents the historical contradiction
between the feudal social order and developing capitalism.'[69]
In contrast, Vickers suggested that the play shows how
commodity-trading and money-lending in Venice were socially

and morally beneficial, a benign form of social exchange based on 'an ethos of trust and mutuality'.[70] It is easier to concur that the ethos of the market and of human relations in the play is the same, than to see how this ethos is necessarily beneficial to all. Historically, it does not appear to be true to say that there was anything more than a superficial harmony in Venetian society. And Shakespeare's use of 'nothing' might suggest a more critical attitude than Vickers, with his consciously anti-marxist reading of 'exchange-value', has acknowledged. The metaphor of 'nothing', we will see, both marks the fissures between myth and reality and also illustrates the way money-value can hide those fissures.

The nothingness of words is established early in The Merchant of Venice in relation to Gratiano, who 'speaks an infinite deal of nothing' (I.1.114). 'Nothing' in this play takes on a specifically monetary meaning when Bassanio confesses to Portia his indebtedness to Antonio:

> Rating myself at nothing, you shall see
> How much I was a braggart. When I told you
> My state was nothing, I should then have told you
> That I was worse than nothing. (II.2.255)

This is not only the false modesty of Valentine or Lampatho (though it is that too). To speak of 'less than nothing' is to employ the discourse of commerce. In terms of the absolute, ontological nothing, it could only be an extravagant hyperbole, recalling the imagery of penitential verse, since in reality there can be no 'less than nothing'. But Antonio's words relate to the semantics of 'zero', of plus and minus, of credit and debt. This homology between the different forms of exchange in the play was seen as evidence of social cohesion by Vickers, but the way both verbal and monetary exchange are figured as 'nothing' seems to subvert the myth of a Venetian society grounded in stable values.[71]

The speakers in Act III Scene 2 confuse two sets of

values: one based on the absolutes of romantic love, and the other on money. The first system is, on the dramatic surface, embraced by Bassanio and Portia, but Bassanio's soliloquy deconstructs his own position: 'So may the outward shows be least themselves' (III.2.73). He is about to reject gold and silver on that basis, but it was Antonio's golden ducats which had put him in a position to woo Portia. The return on this financial investment (figured by Bassanio's metaphor of shooting a second arrow after the lost one in the first scene) will be 'a lady richly left' (I.1.161). The dramatic irony of that speech is only increased by his subsequent analogies:

> In law, what plea so tainted and corrupt
> But, being seasoned with a gracious voice,
> Obscures the show of evil? In religion,
> What damned error but some sober brow
> Will bless it and approve it with a text,
> Hiding the grossness with fair ornament? (III.2.75)

This premonition of the injustices meted out to Shylock stands also as a reminder of the falseness of words. Behind the ritual order there is complete confusion of motives: those of filial duty and sexual submissiveness for Portia, and social advancement for Bassanio, combine with expressions of physical attraction and romantic idealising. The sophisticated lovers sustain each other's false consciousness. 'Madam, you have bereft me of all words', says Bassanio, before launching into another epic simile, which ironically reflects on his own rhetoric:

> And there is such confusion in my powers,
> As, after some oration fairly spoke
> By a beloved prince there doth appear
> Among the buzzing pleased multitude
> Where every something, being blent together,
> Turns to a wild of nothing, save of joy,
> Expressed and not expressed. (III.2.177)

There is some confusion as to the cause of this jouissance: his love, her money, or the dizzying power of his own poetry?

Portia's language shamelessly mixes coyness and
commerciality:

> I would be trebled twenty times myself,
> A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times more
> rich,
> That only to stand high in your account
> I might in virtues, beauties, livings, friends,
> Exceed account. But the full sum of me
> Is sum of something which, to term in gross,
> Is an unlessoned girl, unschooled, unpractised.
> (III.2.153)

Her extravagant self-reification ('sum of something' provides
the apotheosis) imitates the promiscuity of money itself.[72]

Marxist language most aptly applies to The Merchant of
Venice, where the qualities of money as perceived by Marx are
the driving forces of the action. In a short piece 'On Money'
in his 1844 manuscripts, Marx wrote that Shakespeare showed
money to be

the visible god-head, the transformation of all human and
natural qualities into their opposites, the general confusion
and inversion of things; it makes impossibilities fraternize.
(McLellan, p.110)

The fraternizing of love and money is the paradigm of these
impossibilities, and Bassanio knows it, judging by his
description of silver as a 'common drudge' (III.2.103)
between people. Nick Potter has called Bassanio's verdict on
silver 'a striking anticipation of Marx's description of the
destruction of the feudal relationships by capitalism in The
Manifesto of the Communist Party (1848)' (Potter, pp.163-4).
But Potter was perhaps getting things the wrong way round:
rather than Shakespeare having 'anticipated' Marx, it was
Marx who had been reading Shakespeare. In the same section of
the 1844 manuscripts quoted above, Marx had quoted and
glossed a passage of Timon of Athens, in which gold is
called, 'Thou common whore of mankind.'[73] Marx's own remarks
on money consciously echoed, then, both Timon's on gold and
Bassanio's on silver. Timon's soliloquy was about the way

gold confuses values, making 'Black white, foul fair, wrong right, \ Base noble,' a sentiment developed in his later words, 'Thou visible God, that sold'rst close impossibilities' (Timon of Athens, IV.3.389).[74] All this is reiterated in Marx's analysis.

It is interesting that Timon of Athens also yields a number of nothing metaphors which denote value, notably when Timon calls his fair-weather friends to a final dinner of water and stones:

> For these my present friends, as they are to me nothing,
> So in nothing bless them and to nothing they are
> welcome. (II.7.82)

Furthermore, there is the same monetary valuation of words, as in Flavius's judgment on his master,

> His promises fly so beyond his state
> That what he speaks is all in debt, he owes
> For every word.   (I.2.197)

The metaphor is extended later by a servant, after the lapidary feast:

> Slink all away, leave their false vows with him
> Like empty purses picked.   (IV.2.11)

The value of those vows - made both by Timon and by his friends - and the value of money, are exposed simultaneously as insubstantial, empty.

In The Merchant of Venice, the three-way connection of words and money with nothingness is graphically shown by the symbolism of rings. In the final scene, the rings obtained from Bassanio and Graziano by Portia and Nerissa become, by virtue of their shape, their substance, and their dramatic use, triple signs of meaning and value. The exchange motif had been established at the conclusion of the court scene: Portia says, 'And for your love I'll take this ring from you,' to the anxious Bassanio, who replies, 'There's more depends on this than on the value' (IV.1.424). What depends on it, of course, is his vow to Portia, and vows are the

promissory notes of love.[75] When Graziano tries to excuse his
own relinquishing of Nerissa's ring, the symbolism is further
concretized by the fact of the posy written on it - 'Love me
and leave me not' (V.1.150). Shakespeare re-used the conceit
in As You Like It, when Jaques suggests, punningly, that
Orlando learnt his sentimental language from such gold rings:

> You are full of pretty answers. Have you not been
> acquainted with goldsmiths' wives, and conned them out
> of rings?   (As You Like It, III.2.265)

The double meanings of both 'conned' and 'rings' impute both
mendacity and indecency to the transaction symbolized by the
ring. Likewise, Hamlet asks at the beginning of 'The
Mousetrap', 'Is this a prologue, or the posy of a ring?'
(Hamlet, III.2.145), with the implication that such
sentiments are empty.

In the context of The Merchant of Venice, rings would
have been especially evocative, for in the annual Ascension
Day ceremony of 'The marriage of the sea', a gold ring was
thrown into the waters of the lagoon, in remembrance of the
(economic) dependence of Venetians on the sea. Historical
sources relate that the patriarch of Castello said the words
'We espouse thee, O sea, as a sign of true and perpetual
dominion' as he dropped the ring into the Adriatic.[76] It was
called the Vera - a symbol then, not only, as Edward Muir has
described, of 'joining, continuity, eternity, and fertility',
but also of truth (Muir, p.125). So in Act V, which began
with the parody from Jessica and Lorenzo of lovers'
extravagant language, the 'hoop of gold' becomes loaded with
significance. It is a symbol of eternal love, or of wealth;
of everything, or of nought. It signifies cultural and social
order, the self-perpetuating unity of institution, ideology
and economics, as well as human feelings; but it also tells
of romance as fiction, of marriage as economic, of human
relations externalized.[77] In the specific context of Venice,
moreover, the symbolic ring would have had a further,

patriarchal force, according to Edward Muir:

The marriage of the sea was so richly symbolic precisely
because it imitated a universal and socially meaningful
contractual relationship. In Venetian law the husband was the
padrone of his wife: his authority was considered to be the
most ancient, preceding the authority of fathers over
children, masters over servants, and princes over subjects:
and it was supported by the divine law of the Bible and the
civil law of Rome. (Muir, p.125)

Whilst exchange-value is one semiotic association to be
drawn from the nothing references, there was an additional
historical connection with the rings, since they were made of
gold. There was a double-edged irony in the current belief
that uncorruptible gold, unlike base metals, but like the
angels, had been created directly from nothing.[78] So, like
Donne's angel, 'some lovely glorious nothing' (Donne, p.66),
gold was elevated to a moral purity by its proximity to
nothing. An extra irony is provided by the fact that an
'angel' was the name for a gold coin of the time. But in
Shakespeare's plays the absolute value of gold is as much in
question as that of paper money, or promises of love; this is
the aspect of the money/ nothing trope which Rotman, seeking
a special significance in 'imaginary' money, missed. The
supposed purity and incorruptibility of gold had especial
resonance in a time when many were heralding the approach of
a new Golden Age, or at least extolling the innocence of the
one past.[79] In the cyclical vision of British history
presented by Thomas Heywood's Troia Brittanica (1609), for
example, the Golden Age had emerged, unsullied, from the
originary nothing, and was returning with James's unifying
accession.[80]

The other 'Golden Age' of the sixteenth century,
however, was that of merchandise, money-lending and profit-
making, rather than pastoral romance, or some utopia in which
wealth is despised. Other playwrights saw the irony of the
notion of a new Golden Age. Marston's What You Will, another

play pointedly set in Venice, has Albano return from the dead like a mercantile Odysseus to find his home full of suitors to his wife. He declares that love is 'hollow-vaulted', and blames one thing:

> The first pure time, the golden age, is fled!
> Heaven knows I lie, tis now the age of gold,
> For all it marreth and even virtues sold.
> (Marston, Plays, III, 280)

In Arden of Feversham the same ironic treatment of the humanist trope is voiced by Mosbie, along with yet another echo of the felix cui nihil est theme:

> My golden time was when I had no gold;
> Though then I wanted, yet I slept secure.[81]

Thus the proximity of gold to nothing proves a double-edged sword; the apparent absoluteness of its value, like the mythical harmony of the Venetian world, is illusory, and dependent on nothing more stable than words.

These personal, pragmatic problems of the wealthy in an acquisitive society are not the main focus of the nothing-gold nexus in The Merchant of Venice. Instead, the exchange of gold love-tokens dramatises the hypocrisy and general moral corruption which surrounds gold, and particularly the way it compromises personal relations. The rhetoric of Portia and Bassanio obscures the incompatibility of economics and romantic notions of selfless love, giving a decidedly false ring to the final, ostensibly optimistic, act of the play. Act V seems, by its dramatic closure, to remedy the alienation of the merchant and the money-lender in the main plot, but the lovers (including, of course, the thieving Jessica and Lorenzo) are complicit in the ethic of acquisitiveness which caused that alienation.

Shakespeare is consistent in his use of the ring's symbolic value in the sub-plot. Shylock has to lose his money before he can realise the real, emotional, value of his own ring, given to him by his wife:

> I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor. I would not have
> given it for a wilderness of monkeys. (III.1.113)

Dramatically, that statement is one of the most affecting
moments in the play: we suddenly can see that Shylock's
hoarding of gold has been a hopeless effort to replace his
lost love. He is not a monster, but a victim of the false
promise of money. There is also a more fundamental reality
than love at stake for Shylock - the corporeality of
Antonio's flesh; 'he would rather have Antonio's flesh \ Than
twenty times the value of the sum that he did owe him'
(III.2.287). By valuing, in his disillusion with filial love,
the body higher than gold, he makes a perversely subversive
gesture - one which places him momentarily outside the value-
system in which he had been an ambiguous agent. The whole
court scene becomes an allegory of the insubstantial natures
of money and words. The move effected by Portia in the
judicial proceedings is not only from justice to mercy, but
also from money to words. Just as the value of money is
deconstructed by Shylock ('If every ducat in six thousand
ducats \ Were in six parts and every part a ducat, I would
not draw them' - IV.1.84), the absoluteness of 'a decree
established' is dissolved by Portia's analysis of 'the very
words' of the bond. Her reading of the law book performs the
same function as money in the play - not establishing moral
standards, but covering over their traces.

And yet, in spite of the moral mise-en-abîme created by
the ubiquity of exchange-value in the play, there is also
some kind of equilibrium created by it.[82] Not a communitarian
reciprocity, as Vickers suggested, but an uneasy balance
between competing personal interests and the blandishing
ideology of romantic love. The romantic vision of the final
act is therefore an epitome of the romantic, idealised view
of Venice. The easily compromised vows of Bassanio and
Gratiano are set in perplexing contrast to the apparent

absoluteness of Antonio's bond, but the consequences of
neither prove cataclysmic. Moral contradictions are embraced
by the characters: Lorenzo and Jessica show this most
starkly. The lovers' exchange in Act V provides an ironic
commentary on both their own and their hosts' condition.
Their accumulation of romantic classical allusions culminates
in a bathetic reminder of the venal, mercenary behaviour they
had displayed earlier in the action:

> L: In such a night
> Did Jessica steal from the wealthy Jew,
> And with an unthrift love did run from Venice
> As far as Belmont.
> J: In such a night
> Did young Lorenzo swear he loved her well,
> Stealing her soul with many vows of faith,
> And ne'er a true one.
> L: In such a night
> Did pretty Jessica (like a little shrew!)
> Slander her love, and he forgave her.   (V.1.14.)

In spite of the apparently neat closure of the triple
wedding, the play is therefore ethically ambivalent. As in
the actual Venice of the sixteenth-century, a sort of order
seems to prevail - the grand illusion of capitalism. But the
ending leaves not only ethical questions unanswered - there
is still the question of Antonio's unhappiness. 'In sooth, I
know not why I am so sad,' were the words which opened the
play, and the problem of that sadness is never resolved, nor
even fully addressed, in the action of the play. The key to
identifying his sadness is located, surely, in the alienating
effect of his work: in marxist terms, his 'species being' is,
like Shylock's, defined by money, and money is nothing. The
Christian merchant of Venice is just as alienated from people
as the Jewish money-lender, and both are left isolated and
miserable at the end. Money's intrinsic emptiness is shown to
infect people with another kind of nothingness, ethical and
emotional - at the opposite pole from that of poverty, but
equally destructive.

4. Fearing nothing in early modern Europe

On the individual level, the 'personal nothings' in
Shakespeare proclaim not only the contingency of human
existence but also the inequities within that contingent
existence. Dramatic and historical implications are located
in that complex of metaphors which overlays the conventional
poetics of nothing. King Lear is set against a backdrop on
which a society's ills are painted; in this respect, it is
extraordinary amongst his plays. Social injustice and unequal
wealth-distribution were not Shakespeare's favourite dramatic
or poetic material. Elsewhere in his plays there are only
passing allusions to the unhappy lot of those outside the
walls of the theatre, as when Duke Senior responds,
ungrammatically but kindly, to news of the starving old man:

> This wide and universal theatre
> Presents more woeful pageants than the scene
> Wherein we play in. (As You Like It, II.7.137)

It was one of the social phenomena of the late sixteenth
century that the sight of hungry, often vagrant people was
noticeably increasing. The Poor Laws of 1598 and 1601 would
have focussed attention on this as a pressing social issue.
Keith Wrightson has described a poverty which was different
in extent and kind to that which had been seen before 1580,
suggesting that this was the first emergence of a permanent
proletariat: 'the poor were no longer the destitute victims
of misfortune or old age, but a substantial proportion of the
population living in constant danger of destitution, many of
them full-time wage-labourers.'[83]

Yet Shakespeare rarely concerned himself with this
section of society, and when he did, as Brents Stirling's
study showed, he tended to portray them unsympathetically.
Stirling considered the Cade scenes in 2 Henry VI, the Roman
populace in Julius Caesar, and the hungry plebeians in
Coriolanus, drawing on a variety of antipopular literature of

the same period in order to relate them 'to a contemporary
political scene'.[84] He rightly claimed that traditional
interpretations of Shakespeare's attitude to the hoi polloi
have often smoothed over or ignored the problem plays which
he cited. Stirling pointed to fears about Nonconformists, and
Anabaptists in particular, in England at the time, and
specific incidents such as the enclosure riots of 1607. The
claim that the date of the enclosure riots and the probable
date of Coriolanus 'sufficiently coincide' to justify a
connection, is probably a superfluous argument. More
convincing is his documentary evidence of antipopular
propaganda being produced in the last decade of the sixteenth
century and the first decade of the next (Stirling, p.42).

Stirling's work focussed upon the fear of the mob in
late Elizabethan England, but vagrancy too was seen as a
threat to social order.[85] The typical response of the English
authorities to the poor was to associate them with immorality
and crime.[86] In this case, in King Lear, which probably dates
from the same year as Coriolanus, Edgar provides by his
soliloquy a remarkably sympathetic account of the destitute
of the time, describing how they mutilated themselves and
acted insane to gain pity.[87] Of course, Edgar is not genuinely
a beggar, but this does not discredit what is in effect an
act of empathy, of literally feeling what wretches feel. The
dramatic effect might be to enable an audience to imagine
better the experience of beggary, to empathize with the 'the
low'st, most dejected thing' (IV.1.3).

Edgar also focusses attention on an opposition between
the social values of 'something' and 'nothing'. The emphasis
he puts on the real value of even the beggars' degraded
bodies subverts the conventional association of poverty with
'nothing'. Another epigram from John Davies of Hereford
encapsulated the dominant attitude, elaborating on what he
quotes as an English proverb - 'Who serves the people nothing

serves'.[88] Edgar's soliloquy replaces the ideology of such
social and political values with a materialist attitude: to
be 'the basest and most poorest shape \ That ever penury in
contempt of man \ Brought near to beast,' is still to be
'something yet' (II.2.173-184). On the one level, this is
true simply because his scarred body will earn him charity;
on another, it is an assertion of his humanity.[89] Conversely,
it is his old, socially-constructed self which is nothing -
'Edgar I nothing am' (II.2.184). Social nothingness is a
relative value, the only absolute nothing is death: 'The
worst is not \ So long as we can say "This is the worst"'
(III.7.28) - that is, so long as we are alive. There had been
heavy irony in Lear's earlier, self-deluding claim that 'Our
basest beggars \ Are in poorest thing superfluous'(II.2.439).
But seeing - or feeling - the relation between Edgar's
exposed body and his own, forces Lear to reassess the
judgment, 'Allow not nature more than nature needs, \ Man's
life's as cheap as beast's,' (II.2.441) and to conclude
instead that this is 'the thing itself. Unaccommodated man'
(III.4.100). He may be a poor, bare, forked animal, but his
life is not cheapened by this; even thought he is 'stark
nought' by the standards of Davies of Hereford, Edgar still
demands Lear's love and care.

The personal crisis of Lear is continually linked,
usually through his own speeches, with the social wrongs to
which he once acquiesced. Even before meeeting Edgar, he
perceives the reality of injustice:

> Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
> That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
> How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
> Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you
> Against such seasons as these? O, I have ta'en
> Too little care of this. Take physic, pomp,
> Expose yourself to feel what wretches feel,
> That thou mayst shake the superflux to them
> And show the heavens more just. (III.4.28)

The King also comes to see that his whole perception of the social hierarchy was artificial, and in a sense unreal; 'They told me I was everything; 'tis a lie, I am not ague-proof.'(IV.5.104) The only unambiguous reality is the physical, the bodily; the only absolute he now recognizes is human need. All superfluous things are relative in value: 'The art of our necessities is strange, \ And can make vile things precious.'(III.2.70) 'Thingness' becomes the ultimate, material value of life; all else is mystification, talk of 'the mystery of things' (V.3.16) merely idle chatter.

In spite of his negativity, it is not necessary to say that Lear's vision is apocalyptic. Some critics have suggested that King Lear is about the threat to political and social order of weak kingship, or a reaction to contemporary fears of a general moral degeneration.[90] Gloucester almost echoes Donne in nihilistic mode with his plaint, 'This great world shall so wear out to naught' (IV.5.130). Some have perceived apocalyptic allusions in the questions asked by Kent and Edgar on seeing Lear with the body of Cordelia:

> KENT: Is this the promised end?
> EDGAR: Or image of that horror?   (V.3.238)[91]

The nothing theme in the play might seem to support such a view. In eschatological narrative, annihilation was heralded by chaos - by a general reign of evil as well as by the specific phenomenon of war. Gloucester's astrological commentaries and the storm on the heath portray the general, cosmic picture of disorder, and this can be supported by a macrocosmic interpretation of the King's madness. These, along with the entrance of Edgar to the sound of trumpets in the final act, might all be seen as apocalyptic signs, suggesting an inevitable fall toward nihilation.[92] One might regard apocalyptic fears as the macrocosmic counterpart of the man-as-nothing theme. It is the ultimate reminder of the transience of mortal things, and of man's insignificance on

earth; Gloucester saw not only signs of impending doom but also 'such a fellow... which made me think a man a worm' (IV.2.33). 'As flies to wanton boys', he continues, in his fatalistic despair. Relating this to the intellectual currents of the age, Lawrence Danson has written of the 'cosmic upheaval' suggested by the play and, quoting Pascal, claimed that 'the play stretches us "between the two abysses of infinity and nothingness."'[93]

Yet King Lear was, at least in part, a play about Shakespeare's own times, and the material conditions of the people in England when he was writing this play would not seem to justify such desperate pessimism. Recent historians have concurred in the application of the term 'dearths' in preference to 'famine' to characterise the temporary and local shortages of food which were endured in early modern England.[94] Subsequent historians have examined more closely this socio-economic group and modified Wrightson's conclusion that the 1594-8 harvest disasters 'brought dearths of national proportions.'[95] It seems, from the evidence of mortality rates, that the situation was less cataclysmic - there were localised dearths and poverty specific to identifiable groups (See Walter & Schofield, pp.21-45). Whilst the late 1590s had been a period of widespread and in places devastating dearth and disease, the first decade of the new century was a period of stability. Apart from an outbreak of plague, in London and elsewhere, in 1603, which might have fitted the Doomsday scenario, there were only localised incidences of social unrest, and there were abundant harvests to compensate for the crop-failures of 1595-8. Though the whole period from 1580 to 1630 has been described as one of developing crisis, this middle decade was one of relative order.

The anonymous play No-body and Some-body provides a valuable comparison with King Lear, which it probably pre-

dates. Published in 1606 'as it hath beene acted by the
Queenes Majesties Servants', its plot put a topical twist on
the already established associations of nothing with
poverty.[96] It is set in the context of an England under
tyrannical rule, a situation described by the Lords Martianus
and Cornwall in near-apocalyptic terms:

> M: Alls nought already, yet these unripe ills
> Have not their full growth, and by their next degree
> Must needs be worse than nought, and by what name do
> you call that?
> C. I know none bad enough.
> Base, vild, notorious, ugly, monstrous, slavish,
> Intollerable, abhorred, damnable;
> Tis worse than bad ...[97]

Yet whilst the problem for the lords is Archigallo's tyranny,
the ordinary people have more material crises, and these are
expressed by the characters of Some-body and No-body. The No-
body character of this play is somewhat anomalous in respect
of the traditional sixteenth-century figure of popular
culture. The figure of Nemo was popularised in pamphlets and
broadsheets by German humanists, usually with a Protestant
bias, as Gerta Calmann's research has shown.[98] The moral
messages conveyed by the pictures and poems are not all
consistent with each other, but amongst them were the
admonitions to be patient and to take responsibility for ones
actions. To some extent, this theme is peripheral to the main
associations of the 'personal nothing' metaphor: there is not
any emphasis upon poverty or alienation. But there is an
intersection of the two themes in No-body and Some-body, in
which Some-body is an uncaring landowner, and No-body a
caring one. Its argument is that those who are 'somebody'
have a duty to take responsibility for the sick, the
dispossessed and the unfortunate. This makes it a secular and
social counterpart to that religious emphasis upon personal
accountability which was associated with the Protestant
figure.

Although Some-body is a fat landowner in the line of
Marguerite de Navarre's Trop and Tout, No-body is not, then,
the expected opposite, after the fashion of Peu (and nor is
he a figure of ridicule or of pity, like his German
counterpart). No-body's appearance on stage is heralded by a
speech which apparently praises the character, but with an
obvious double meaning:

> Come twentie poore men to his gate at once,
> Nobody gives them money, meate and drinke;
> If they be naked, clothes, then come poore souldiers,
> Sick, maymd, and shot from forraine warres,
> Nobody takes them in, ...(sig.B4^r)

and so on with a litany of good deeds done by No-body - with
the fairly clear sub-text that they are not done by anybody.
The anger against social injustice is not entirely hidden by
the joke, but in spite of the negative implications of this
word-play, there is a constructive message in the play. The
sub-plot - which effectively usurps the main plot about King
Elidure's return to the throne - is about those in positions
of power taking responsibility for those beneath. As with
Lear's admonition to shake the superflux to the poor, there
is, in the description of No-body, an optimistic
undercurrent. It portrays what might be, by depicting (sub-,
or anti-textually) an ideal, munificent, Christian lord:

> His barns are full, and when the Cormorants
> And welthy farmers hoord up all the graine,
> He empties all his Garners to the poore
> Under the stretcht price that the Market yeelds,
> Nobody racks no rents, doth not oppresse
> His tenants with extortions. (sig.B4^r).

The final double negative spoils the word-play, drawing
attention to the positive implications of the No-body figure,
who was not as idealised as one might imagine.

One of the features of English society which acted
against widespread famine conditions in these decades was,
according to John Walter, the giving or sale below market
price of grain by landlords to the poor during periods of

dearth:

Apart from the promptings of church and conscience, ... it was often in the self-interest of the 'better sort' to lend to the poor in conditions of dearth which highlighted inequalities and bred resentment. ... The distribution of grain at under-prices by members of the gentry shaded into more obvious examples of outright benevolence and charity.[99]

In this case, the play was advocating a fairly common practice, and castigating those who, anti-socially, refused to help those in need, to shake the superflux to men. And this brings us back to Coriolanus, for in the opening scene the same demands were being made by the Citizens that the authorities 'would yield us but the superfluity' (Coriolanus, I.1.16). The citizen's speech recalls not only No-body's charity, but also the lessons learnt by Lear, Gloucester and Edgar:

> ...They ne'er cared for us yet: suffer us to famish, and their storehouses crammed with grain; make edicts for usury to support usurers; repeal daily any wholesome act established against the rich; and provide more piercing statutes daily to chain up and restrain the poor.
>   (Coriolanus, I.1.77)

It is unwise, therefore, to assume that Shakespeare was concerned only with presenting a negative view of the populace in Coriolanus, in spite of their fickle and selfish behaviour. There is just as much stress upon the causes of popular discontent, and their remedy, which is in material goods rather than empty words.

It is useful to contrast these English responses to economic hardship with the way poets on the continent were expressing anxieties about social conditions in the same period. Walter and Schofield have argued that the 'ecology of famine' in England at the end of the sixteenth century was very different to that in continental Europe. The mitigating features of social, technological and agrarian change seen in England were not perceived in France until the later part of the seventeenth-century (see Walter & Schofield, pp.48-58).

On the other side of the Channel, the more extreme effects of disease and famine expressed themselves culturally. The apocalyptic vision of a poem from 1594, written by Jean Demons, portrayed the whole of French society as nihilating itself.[100] The style perhaps owed something to the penitential tradition, but it had specific socio-economic referents in the last decade of the century. Demons wrote of France, 'Elle vient au néant pour estre RIENTIFIQUE', which pun on 'scientifique' combines a judgment on the age of science with a conventional Christian warning against vain knowledge. The chaotic scenario breathlessly described by Demons ends in divine judgment:

> Cy bas les seules phalanges
> Des peruers et mauvais Anges
> Demeurent avec nous,
> Et comme troupes d'abeilles
> Bruient dedans nos oreilles
> Et nous incitent tous
> A mutuelle ruine
> Par feu par sang par famine
> Sans nulle humanité:
> Les uns aux autres nuisibles
> Par mille crimes horribles
> Devant la Deité ...[101]

Yet whether Doomsday will bring annihilation or reformation is left undecided in the prophetic conclusion:

> Puis un discord frenetique
> Pire qu'un chaos antique,
> Plein de confusion,
> Viendra du ciel pour refondre
> Ou peutestre pour confondre
> Toute la region.
> Helas! bon Dieu quel orage
> Sur la France son naufrage
> Me consume d'esmoy.[102]

Demons acknowledged Passerat in his poem, which he had conceived as the fourth part in a series which included the two sequels to 'Rien', 'Quelquechose' and 'Tout'.[103] The apocalyptic theme in this sequel points us towards a material historical context of Passerat's poem, and another Latin poem

on nothing from the 1580s. Together, they support an impression that the philosophical and poetic theme tended to surface during periods and in places of social disorder.[104]

The Paris in which Passerat was writing at the end of 1581 had been more than usually chaotic, and this fed an easily-provoked enthusiasm for eschatology. Crises in the grain supply of 1579-81 had brought numerous bread riots in the city, and the same was to occur between 1585 and 1590; Frederick Baumgartner has explained the socio-political effects thus:

> The common people of this period saw the wrath of God in famines as the punishment for their sins, but in the 1580s Parisians denounced the presence of heresy as the cause of famine. Much of the blame was transferred to the King for his failure to eradicate the evil.[105]

The religious situation complicated this perception. Ever since the massacre in Paris of Huguenots on St Bartholemew's Day, 1572, there had also been a series of religious riots. In response, the Catholic League had been established, an organisation of nobles which was eventually to become so antagonistic to Henry III that it provoked the King's assassination in Paris in 1589.

The Paris situation typified a general disorder throughout the Kingdom: peasant revolts, plague, and bread riots were seen across the country during what J.H.M. Salmon has called 'the drift to anarchy' in this period.[106] Denis Crouzet has described in detail the millenarianist fears which these experiences aroused, with some help from the Church, in the populace. The first phase was in 1583: an explosion of 'angoisse eschatologique' in the wake of the creation of the League: penitential processions began throughout France, in preparation for the second coming of Christ. The white robes of the Pèlerins became a common sight; Crouzet considered that they were 'a panic response of the Catholic people in the face of signs from God, precursors

of the Time of Retribution.'[107] An eclipse in 1585 provoked terrible predictions, plague and famine continued in Paris and elsewhere, and 1588-9 saw a revival of the panic of five years earlier:

Subsiste la certitude biblique, lue dans les astres, du détournement toujours plus grand du peuple des commandements divins. Le devenir, plus que jamais, est déséquilibré vers le malheur et une totale négativité.   (Crouzet, p.236)

Passerat made no explicit references to apocalypse, but eschatology might be read as an antithetical sub-text of his praise of nothing. There is reference in the poem to war - 'In bello sanctum NIHIL est, Martisque tumultu' [nothing is sacred in war, and the confusion of battle]. In the French version especially, a description of alchemists bringing all to nothing had a similarly ominous effect:

> Combien a il de gens qui avec que grand cure
> Fondent les mineraux a l'ayde de mercure
> Et apres long travaux dilapidans leur bien
> Par infinies nuitz reduisent tout a RIEN?[108]

If the writings on nothing by Passerat and Jean Demons were inspired by the Parisian situation in successive decades, the same conclusion might be drawn with regard to the reply by Ludolphus Pithopoeius, whose Latin poem was published in 1583. A Calvinist academic, Pithopoeius had been a victim of the religious factionalism which was turning the Netherlands into a war-zone in the 1580s. At the age of twenty-eight he had been forced to leave his home town of Deventer to take refuge in Heidelberg, where his brother was a Professor of Logic. The death of the Elector Palatine in 1567 forced him to move again to Neustadt, where he was still living in 1583 when his reply to Passerat was written. The following year he was able to return to Heidelberg.[109] The published poem identified 'Lambertus Ludolphus Pithopoeius Daventriensis' with his home town. The events at Deventer in the five years preceding might have had a bearing on the writer's response to Passerat. The city from which he was

exiled had, since an occupying Spanish force had been
defeated in 1578, seen an uneasy year of peace, followed by
the pillaging of churches, monasteries and hospitals in 1580.
Catholics had been forced to flee the city amidst scenes of
violent destruction.[110]

Protestantism, of course, fostered as much eschatology
as did Papism in the sixteenth century: the image of the Pope
as Antichrist was commonplace Protestant propaganda. The
conceit of the Pithopoeius poem is one of opposition to
nothing, and it frequently employs images of disorder and
disease. Moreover, it uses overtly apocalyptic imagery:
'Tristius est saeva peste fameque Nihil' [Nothing is more
sorrowful than cruel pestilence and famine].[111] However, there
are some more specific social comments which seem to lie
below the surface, as is suggested by this list of
disabilities and diseases:

> Surdis & mutis, claudisque & lumine cassis,
> Flebilius Nihil est, debiliusque Nihil.
> Chiragra Nihil est crudelius atque podagra.
> [Nothing is more wretched and none more disabled than
> the deaf, the dumb, the lame, and those deprived of
> light; Nothing is more cruel than gout of the hands, and
> even more so gout of the feet]. (Dornavius, I, 737)

Surely the incongruous juxtaposition of natural disabilities
with the gout - the scourge of the rich and self-indulgent,
is a deliberate irony. Earlier in the poem is the remark that
'Nothing more grave is found in the world than poverty',
followed by the devastating line: 'Dives ubique placet,
pauper ubique iacet' [Everywhere, the rich man is welcome:
everywhere the poor man is cast down] (I, 737). The word-
play, which superficially holds the poem together, barely
disguises the deeper concerns of the poem with social and
moral corruption. It seems, then, that the nihil theme of
late sixteenth century Latin poetry was, if not cataclysmic
in its implications, at least responsive to such contemporary
fears. Even Daunce's English poem of the 1580s, despite its

putative recreational aim, had a thoroughly pessimistic, indeed apocalyptic sting in its tail: annihilation was the unhappy precursor of his yearned-for Golden Age. The world having already been reduced to chaotic 'iniquitye', the options for the godly were 'eyther to returne to that of which al things were created, or to be stil endowed with the simple of the first creation.'[112]

Twenty years later, at the beginning of James I's reign, however, there was less foreboding of moral or economic crisis and fear in England. As the creation-from-nothing narrative of Troia Brittanica illustrated, there were expressions of hopefulness to set against Donne's nihilism, providing a more positive mise en scène for King Lear. If social degeneration were truly a sign of impending annihilation, then only personal penitence could save one for the life to come, but the words of Lear and Gloucester posit at least the possibility of the restitution of an earthly harmony. It seems clear then that the play was not following conventional apocalyptic mode, but instead refiguring apocalypse as a humanly resolvable problematic: 'distribution should undo excess, \ And each man have enough' (King Lear, IV.1.64). The chaos which portended, for some, a return to primal nothing, was, for Shakespeare as for the author of No-body and Some-body, receptive to human agency: order was recuperable. The deterministic idea that the gods play with us for their sport was replaced by a humanistic optimism. The suffering of this world was considered remediable, rather than being the price inevitably paid for access to the next.[113]

Chapter 1 has described the relationship, both in popular idiom and in humanist verse, of nothing metaphors with the social and economic values, or anxieties, of early modern Europe. The personal, however, is only one of many aspects of the signification of 'nothing' in early modern

discourses. The economic connotations emerging from zero, which dominated my analysis of The Merchant of Venice, were late-medieval accretions to an already well-established philosophical and theological discourse about nothing, or nihil. In order to understand fully the allusiveness of 'nothing' in poetry of the time, considerable background knowledge is needed, of what is generically referred to as 'history of ideas'. Some familiarity is required of the medieval intellectual and mystical heritage, and Renaissance currents of neoplatonism, hermeticism and alchemy. Helpful, too, will be an acquaintance with developments in mainstream Natural Philosophy with regard to space, vacuums, materiality, and generation. The next three chapters will attempt to explain the way the connotations of 'nothing' encompassed all of those intellectual spheres.

CHAPTER TWO

Aspects of the Medieval discussions about Nothing

Introduction

Because philosophy was not treated as a distinct
discipline in the Christian West until the later Middle Ages,
the seeds of the nothing question in Latin philosophy are to
be found in early church writings. The project of the
patristic writers - adapting Greek philosophy to Christian
scripture and doctrine - maintained the question of being and
not being at the forefront of theology.[1] God was defined
variously in Christian writings as the Plotinian Good, or
One, or as absolute 'Being'. The latter definition was
favoured by Thomas Aquinas, who asserted that there was no
real distinction between God's essence and his existence.[2] In
these medieval Latin writings, the ideas of negation and of
'not being', of non-entity and nothingness, coalesced in a
single term, nihil. That word in itself seemed to raise
fundamental questions of ontology, theology and logic. To
some thinkers, Nihil was as mysterious and awesome as the
names of God; to some, nihil marked the boundaries of
existence; to others, it demonstrated the limitations of
human language. This chapter will provide a preliminary
account of those three strands from medieval ideas whose
influence on Renaissance writings will be seen below.

1. 'O mighty Nothing': <u>Creatio ex nihilo</u> and negative theology

The Christian doctrine of creation from nothing is a curious one, because it does not seem to have been demanded by Scripture, and probably only emerged in the fifth century with Augustine of Hippo.[3] E.O.James, in his overview of the world's creation myths, remarked that the Christian conception of creation <u>ex nihilo</u> seems to emerge from the Hebrew doctrine of Yahweh as the exclusive creator of all existence, since Scripture referred only to creation from 'chaos'.[4] During the Middle Ages, however, there developed a highly influential view of Theology as having two branches, the positive and the negative. Whilst Augustine did not expressly formulate a negative theology, his insistence on the doctrine of <u>creatio ex nihilo</u> might be considered a point of origin for this way of thinking about God and his relation to humankind. The point of the doctrine was that God was the sole cause of the world's coming into existence; the ambiguity of the teaching lay in the notion that there had been 'nothing' before the creation of the world. Augustine specifically warned against speculations about what there was before the creation, claiming that 'before the creation' was meaningless. Since, he wrote, 'the world and time had one beginning', it was fruitless to ask what there was before the world was made.[5]

Nevertheless, one of the effects of the doctrine was that it established an opposition between pre-creation negativity and the positivity of God's creations. It seemed, moreover, that this negativity persisted, in time, after the creation. Augustine's own observations on the nature of evil, that it was analogous to darkness and to nothingness, reinforced the notion of a creation in constant struggle

against negation, evil and darkness. In his discussions of
the creation, in Book 10 of <u>The City of God</u>, Augustine
specifically identified darkness with evil. He observed that
whilst Scripture says, after the naming of the light 'day'
and the darkness 'night', that 'God saw the light that it was
good', there is no such validation given to darkness.[6] He
added that darkness is 'voluntarily', rather than 'naturally'
evil, a distinction repeated when he described 'the two
different societies of angels, not unfitly termed light and
darkness.'[7] The study of Augustine's works by Marcia Colish
has led her to this general view on the matter:

In his frequent anti-Manichean analyses of the creation story
in Genesis, Augustine attacks the claim that there is a
metaphysical power responsible for the creation of evil,
whose activities are denoted by the void (<u>inanitas</u>) over
which the spirit of the deity hovered, by the creation of
negative entities such as darkness (<u>tenebrae</u>) or by the very
existence of the nothingness (<u>nihil</u>) out of which all sub-
divine beings were created.[8]

There was a general blurring of the extent to which this
terminology is metaphorical (the meaning of 'denoted by'
above is unclear), and a tendency towards literalistic
interpretations by Augustinian commentators was to make this
a common field of contention. The dominating issue at the
root of these discussions was the existence, or otherwise, of
evil in the world. If evil, and darkness, could be called
only the negations, or privations, of real existents, then
the problem of God having created evil in the world was
addressed, at least at the level of semantics. As Colish has
put it, for Augustine, the terms <u>inanitas</u>, <u>nihil</u>, and
<u>tenebrae</u> 'denote the absence of species, not the presence of
some kind of negative species.'[9]

These traces of Augustine's abandoned Manicheism were
not easily erased, and persisted in various forms. Whilst one
response to such an oppositional theology might be to

demonize the negative, a more sophisticated approach was to recuperate it, by integration into the definition of God. Such a methodology was espoused by the fifth-century Greek writer whose writings were attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite, a disciple of St. Paul. It was his work, particularly On the Names of God, which led Christian mystics such as the ninth-century John Scotus Eriugena and the twelfth-century Richard of St. Victor towards the via negativa. This was a way of approaching the idea of God not via his creations or his positive attributes, but via that which God was not, i.e., mortal, finite, temporal, contingent, mutable. By allowing negative terms into accounts of God, negative ideas such as infinity and eternity seemed somehow concretised. The totality of things - in accordance with Aristotle's assertion that everything either was, or was not - seemed to encompass even negativities. Interest in negative theology was maintained throughout the medieval period, owing in particular to the popularity of the teachings of Pseudo-Dionysius. The question of whether evil is nothing, derived from Augustinian theology, was given a particular prominence in The Divine Names, a whole chapter of which addresses the ways in which evil might be said to be non-existent.[10] Either via this tradition of negative theology or more directly from Augustine, it became a commonplace that evil, and indeed sin, are nothing.[11]

In the more dialectically-inclined theology of the eleventh-century Anselm of Canterbury there was at least the spirit of the via negativa - the negative way of approaching God. This spirit was evident in the famed 'ontological argument' of Proslogion, with its description of God as 'that than which a greater cannot be thought'.[12] The whole argument relies on the assumption that one cannot properly conceptualise God, even though one can describe Him, through

negative terms, as is shown in this section of the reply of
the author to the a critic's reply on behalf of the Fool (who
had said in his heart, 'there is no God'):

just as nothing prevents one from saying 'ineffable', even
though one cannot specify what is said to be ineffable; and
just as one can think of the inconceivable - although one
cannot think of what 'inconceivable' applies to - so also,
when 'that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought' is spoken
of, there is no doubt at all that what is heard can be
thought of and understood even if the thing itself cannot be
thought of and understood.[13]

Such meditations upon God's ineffability and inconceivability
owe much to negative theology, and it is significant too that
immediately after his argument against the Fool, Anselm
refers to the fact that God, existing alone, had made
everything else from nothing.[14]

In the late thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas gave the
stamp of orthodoxy to this eccentric theology, agreeing that
imperfect human reason might have nearer access to God's
negative attributes than to his positive attributes, the
Transcendentals. On the 'Question concerning the names of
God', at the beginning of the Summa Theologiae, Thomas
repeated the views of Dionysius in support of the argument
'quod nullum nomen dicatur de Deo substantialiter' [that no
name is attributed to God in his essence].[15] However, in the
manner typical of the Summa's dialectical structure, these
views are balanced by others later in the Quaestio which are
in favour of affirmative theology.[16] Elsewhere, in De
potentia, Aquinas addressed the creation question directly,
discussing the ambiguity of the phrase 'created out of
nothing', which could imply not being created at all, rather
than its correct meaning, 'created, not out of anything'.
F.C. Copleston brought together various sources to explain
the Thomist views on creation, which attempted to address
some of the questions which Augustine had proscribed, or

perhaps to elaborate on his conclusion that the world and time had one beginning. In De potentia, the Angelic Doctor claimed (in opposition to Bonaventure) that the creation and eternity of the world are compatible theses. In De aeternitate mundi he suggested that 'there is no contradiction in affirming that a thing was created and also that it was never non-existent.'[17]

These mainstream scholastic figures were not the chief bearers of Negative Theology into the Renaissance, however.[18] Its place was in the mystical tradition, which was always at the margins of Christian orthodoxy, but was attractive to humanists such as Nicholas of Cusa in the fifteenth century and Giordano Bruno in the sixteenth. Eriugena, as the earliest Latin exponent of Dionysian doctrines, came back to more general prominence in the seventeenth century, and his Periphyseon, now entitled De divisione naturae, was re-published in 1681. In Eriugena's dialogue between Alumnus and Nutritor, there is an exposition of Pseudo-Dionysius's work on the names of God, which gives primacy to negative names. A typical consequence of his thinking is seen in his remarks concerning shadow, which hark back, as all negative theology does, to the Creation:

they are wrong who think that shadow perishes when it is not apparent to the senses. For shadow is not nothing, it is something. If it were not so, Scripture would not say, 'And God called the light day, and the darkness night', for God does not give a name to anything that is not from himself...[19]

This appears to be a direct challenge to that gloss on the same passage of Scripture in The City of God; Augustine would have eschewed such a realist position, with its dangerous implication that privations such as darkness have real existence. So also would Thomas Aquinas, who was constantly exploring the polysemy of scripture, playing off one reading against another. What might be called the 'literalistic'

approach of the mystical tradition was a crucial feature
which placed it at the margins of mainstream Christian
ideology during the Middle Ages.

2. Metaphysics or mysticism? nothing as a level of being

According to Arthur Lovejoy's work, The Great Chain of
Being, 'medieval thought' placed nothingness at the base of a
metaphysical, even a cosmological hierarchy of being.[20]
Lovejoy suggested the influence of Aristotle's zoological and
psychological gradations in De generatione animalium and De
anima. Christianised by late medieval commentators,
Aristotle's ideas provided the basis of a grand scheme, which
included the celestial hierarchy too. A connection with the
via negativa is also hinted at when Lovejoy claims that
Aristotle had a 'vague notion of an ontological scale',
whereby everything, except God, has in it some measure of
privation, and unrealised potential, so that 'all individual
things may be graded according to the degree to which they
are infected with [mere] potentiality' (Lovejoy, p.59). There
is a degree of creative extrapolation here from the Physics
and Metaphysics, which establish that below being there is
non-being, or the privation of 'being'. The idea of 'being',
used as an abstract noun, itself has a long and complicated
history, as Christopher Stead's study has shown.[21] 'Ousia',
the Greek word which 'being' translates, had many
connotations in ancient philosophy.[22] It was in the sense of
an abstract noun meaning existence, or reality, that it was
set against the still more abstract noun 'non-being'. Materia
could be identified as a kind of non-being - one which
mediates between being and absolute non-being, as though

these were all rungs on an ontological ladder.

The idea of materia as an intermediate stage between non-being and being is consistent with Aristotle's account of becoming and privation in Books I and II of the Physics.[23] According to that account, unformed matter has being, if only in potentia. At the same time, matter is not itself privation - it contains the privation of being. Friedrich Solmsen has suggested that Aristotle used the idea of privation, which more directly than materia implies not-being, to overcome problems posed by his own teaching on matter (or the 'substratum') and form.[24] In the Aristotelian system, there is natural movement from privation to form, e.g. from not-white to white, but privation is not identical with matter:

It is important that even though the substratum may not have full being, no connotations of not-being are allowed to come near its nature. Not-being is definitely associated with privation.[25]

If at the bottom, material end of our supposed hierarchy we find the influence of Aristotle, at the other, celestial end, there was a more Platonic influence at work. For Plato it was the unchanging objects of knowledge, the Ideas, which constituted true being/ ousia, and these were quite distinct from impermanent, particular things of the material world (see Stead, p.27). Aristotle's cosmology likewise produced a complete separation, in ontological terms, between the substances of the sub-lunary and super-lunary spheres. Questions about degrees of reality amongst existing things provided additional complications, therefore. By late antiquity, according to Stead, ousia could mean either immaterial reality or material substance, and it seems that only by mixing these two usages could one establish any ontological sequence of being (see Stead, pp.138-145). It was the immanence of the spiritual in the material world which made possible a hierarchy which crossed the boundary between

the divine and the mortal, or celestial and terrestrial - via the angels, and the immaterial souls of men, animals and plants. Below all substance, whether spiritual or material, was non-being, but how one was to understand 'non-being' remained a perplexing philosophical question.

The way negative theology found a place for nihil in its scheme of things was to by-pass philosophical minutiae. Out of the neoplatonic aspects of Pseudo-Dionysius and others, a mystical account was constructed by Eriugena and his followers, in which nihil was assigned a grand, poetic status. As the title of one of his works, Expositions on the Celestial Hierarchy of the Pseudo-Dionysius, suggests, the key to this structure was still hierarchy. The mystical - and often incomprehensible - aspect of this hierarchy was that nothing seemed to be at both ends. Eriugena's major work was Periphyseon, which begins with the assumption that 'nihil' is a name, then obscures the inevitable difficulty of this by means of a poetic mystification. At one point in Periphyseon, Alumnus asks Nutritor what Holy Theology means, in saying that God made things from nothing, by that name 'nothing'. He thereby begs the question which more logically-concerned commentators were to challenge during the Middle Ages - whether 'nothing' [nihil] is indeed a name. The answer given by Nutritor betrays no such worries:

I should believe that by that name is signified the ineffable and incomprehensible and inaccessible brilliance of the Divine Goodness which is unknown to all intellects. (Eriugena, p.307)

In itself, nihil 'neither is, nor was, nor shall be', but in mystical meditation, it seems, 'it alone is found to be in all things, and it is and was and shall be' (p.308). Contemplation can take one down the order of things, beyond the 'primordial causes' all the way to nothingness, and thereby to an appreciation of everything which came from it.

This reverse path to God is still dependent, though, on the hierarchical oppositions and gradations of conventional theology.

The metaphysical oppositions established by Christian theology systems have attracted the recent attention of 'post-structuralist' critical theorists. Some have even ventured to appropriate negative theology for their cause. Post-modern thinking in general promotes the possibilities of stepping outside the constraints of rationality, therefore it has a certain homology with mysticism in general, and negative theology in particular. Kevin Hart has argued that the transcendence of pseudo-dionysian theology was an attempt, like deconstruction, to be unmetaphysical. Hart quoted Derrida's essay on 'différance' in Margins of Philosophy, where the author acknowledges a 'syntactic' similarity between the processes of deconstruction and negative theology.[26] But as Derrida insisted on the very same page, negative theologies, unlike his own method, are 'concerned with disengaging a superessentiality beyond the finite categories of essence and existence.'[27] In a later essay from Margins, Derrida expressed scepticism about attempts to rehabilitate negative theology. With his thoughts no doubt on more recent philosophers, he remarked on the metaphysician's typical fondness for negative terms:

in dissolving any finite determination, negative concepts break the tie which binds them to the meaning of any particular being, that is, to the totality of what is. Thereby they suspend their apparent metaphoricity.[28]

In similar vein, Terry Eagleton has recently suggested that Eriugena was somehow independent of the logocentrism of traditional theology. Eagleton's response to Eriugena's style is that he indulged in 'an utterly gratuitous, non-linear world in which an infinite play of signifiers communicates ceaselessly with itself,'.[29] Such an analysis seems to give

insufficient weight to the dependence upon binary oppositions of what is, for all its allusions to infinity, a totalising system. For Eriugena, God is the creator of both similarities and differences, but those differences will be eliminated at the end of history. Book V is all about 'return', unification, the end of difference:

> ... there will no more be any distinction between good and evil because evil will be no more: and he who resides in the Good and for whom God is all things no longer shall desire to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Therefore, if the end shall be brought back to the beginning, and the outcome of all things shall be related to their origin ... all sense of evil being removed and converted into purity, God alone, Who is One will become for it all things. (Eriugena, p.605)

Mortal human existence, though, involves a world in which good and evil co-exist in almost Manicheistic terms. Difference and negation are the means by which we can nearest approach an understanding of God, but this diversion from wholeness and positivity presupposes an ultimate return. It is worth asking whether, rather than deconstructing Augustine's thought, as Eagleton suggested, Eriugena was merely producing a metaphoric embellishment of it. Eriugena's mystical nothing provides only a provisional detour from the conventional hierarchy of mainstream Christian thought, just as all metaphor diverges temporarily from the literal.

More mainstream theologians were not apt to place nothingness at the base of any notional hierarchy of being. Thomas Aquinas was the arch-integrator of Aristotle, and exemplified the Christianising of the Philosopher's hierarchy of Being, ordered according to degrees of realised potential. But the Thomist hierarchy, which ended with God - pure act - began with prime matter - sheer potentiality - rather than with nothingness.[30] Furthermore, Lovejoy's composite picture in which all the different kinds of hierarchies (celestial,

natural, ontological, and even moral) were co-extensive, produced an over-reductive account of 'medieval thought'. What we have to think of as the bequest from medieval to early modern thought is a number of different hierarchies, rather than one grand scheme. But at the extremities, the margins, of these systems, whether in its transcendent mystical manifestation of theophany, or suppressed in Thomist thought - lay the notion of nothingness.

3. A History of medieval logical debates about Nihil

The third, least documented, but in some respect the most mainstream of the philosophical strands issuing from the Augustinian corpus, was the logical/ linguistic one. Theologians had made nihil a name, but a unique and mysterious name which defied grammar, logic, and rational thought. In medieval Christianity (as in Judaism or Islam), faith and doctrine were never independent of reason. From Anselm onwards, dialectic was applied to theological topics to the extent that the practice of dialectical reasoning became increasingly a valid discipline unto itself. In the twelfth century, Humanism in the cathedral schools, together with the dissemination in the West of the Logica Nova, encouraged the independent, secularised study of Logic. Although, with its aspirations to being the study of truth, it could never detach itself completely from Christian theology, Logic established itself not only as a distinct discourse but also as the primary academic discipline.

The priority of the Trivium in the medieval curriculum was functional: Grammar, Rhetoric and Logic gave students the basic tools to tackle the higher disciplines, including (and

notwithstanding its special status) Theology. The medieval
dominance of Logic within those linguistic disciplines may
have been in part thanks to the propagandist efforts of
dialecticians such as Anselm and Abelard at the end of the
eleventh century. Writing in the generation before the spread
of the 'new' Aristotle, they could appeal only to two books
of the Organon, Categoria and De interpretatione, but once
the Logica Nova was introduced to western Christian thought,
there was a massive expansion of writing on Logic, securing
its status.[31] Not only was it considered to be a discipline
concerned exclusively with matters of truth; its tenets were
taken as the starting point for metaphysical speculation and
for theories of natural philosophy. Furthermore, the ideal of
a harmony between faith and reason which prompted Anselm's
'credo ut intelligam' [I believe in order to understand] and
shaped the Summa Theologiae of Thomas Aquinas, implied a
conformity between Theology and Logic.[32] Thus the theologian
might use logic (and, indeed, grammar and rhetoric at times)
to show how human reason could accord with the divine ratio.[33]
The idea that human language was capable of different ways of
signifying - modi significandi - implied always both its
imperfection and the contrasting univocality of the word of
God. The early medieval dialecticians Abelard of Bath and
Anselm of Canterbury were, however, pointing to Logic as more
than just another way of signifying. They felt that it was a
'truer' discourse than natural language which relied only on
the descriptive rules of grammar.[34] This would prove to be
especially important in discussions of the 'nothing' problem.

With regard to 'nothing', Theology did not always
discover an easy concord with Logic. In logical terms,
'being' could, as Aristotle had observed, have several
different ways of signifying, but none of those involved
reference to the Divinity.[35] But for theologians, abstractions

such as 'being', which were divine attributes, 'transcendentals', brought to mind the absolute being of the divine essence. This made the notion of non-being seem equally mysterious, almost as awesome: hence the mysticism of the 'via negativa'. Since 'nothing' and 'non/ not-being' were often treated as equivalents, theology and metaphysics were drawn into the logical and linguistic debate. As was noted above (p.49), the problems of naming and existence associated with nihil were also closely related to the question of evil. Importantly, the medieval logicians did attempt to address the question of whether 'ens', and even 'nihil' were names on their own (metaphysical) terms, unlike mathematical logicians of this century, who have tended to reject them as meaningless.

Desmond Henry is a historian of logic who has always given the medievals the benefit of the doubt, and found that they were making meaningful, logical statements about metaphysical abstractions such as universals and transcendentals.[36] Henry's researches have also identified and traced a logical/ linguistic debate about nihil from the fifth century to the fourteenth.[37] The significance of the term 'nihil' for the dialectician had a number of aspects, but it began with the problem of naming, which, following Aristotle, had become the primary stage of logical analysis. The 'nothing' problem was closely associated with disputes about what are sometimes referred to as 'empty names'. Certain names had problematic referents: among these were the fictional, e.g. 'Chimera', 'Pegasus'; the questionable, e.g. 'vacuum', 'Antichrist'; the 'paronymous' (adjectival), e.g. 'white', 'literate'; and the negative, which might include both 'privative' names and 'infinite' or 'indefinite' names. The question of which category 'nothing' fell into was the occasion of some debate in medieval logical writings.

The status of nihil was uniquely problematic amongst empty terms, because it was defined in a multitude of ways. It was thought of as meaning variously, and often simultaneously, 'not an object' (nulla res), 'not-something' (non aliquid); 'non-being' (non ens, which might also be translated as 'non-object'). The English abstract noun 'nothingness' enables us to distinguish the nominal form, but Latin conflated all the possible meanings in one word. Each definition entailed its own set of problems. In De interpretatione, Aristotle had written that negative terms such as 'non-man' are not properly names at all, and not negations, but 'infinite' (or 'indefinite') names.[38] And yet, of course, 'nothing' is commonly used, syntactically, as if it is a name, quite aside from the arcane usage of negative theologians. Consequently, some medieval logicians were willing to treat it in certain uses as an empty name, that is, as a name with no existent referent. At other times, 'nothing', in spite of its apparent nominal use, clearly has the effect of negating a proposition. In such cases, an appeal to the 'not something' equivalence was used to explain the logical sense, as will be seen with Anselm below. A further complication arose out of the desire of some medieval philosophers, following Augustine, to classify 'nothing' with terms like 'evil', or 'blindness', which were normally considered to be 'privative' terms. A privative term is one which is defined in terms of a positive term, of which it is the lack or absence; therefore, 'evil' is the privation of good, and 'blindness' is the privation of sight. If applied to 'nothing', this Augustine-inspired account would seem to be at odds with any classification of 'nothing' as an 'infinite name', in the Aristotelian sense. The foregoing précis of the logical issues can be elucidated by reference to their particular manifestations in medieval philosophical

writings.

Augustine's embracing of the creatio ex nihilo doctrine
in his Confessions is well known, but it was in his less
familiar De magistro that he introduced to medieval
philosophy the problem of nihil's signification. Early in
this dialogue, ostensibly between Augustine and his son,
Adeodatus, the peculiarity of nihil as a signifier is raised.
Augustine uses for analysis a line from Vergil's Aeneid, 'Si
nihil ex tanta superis placet urbe relinqui?' [If it pleases
the gods that nothing be left of so great a city].[39] The use
of a pagan author for the example is, I would suggest,
significant, in that it distinguishes Augustine's
specifically semantic concerns here from all those
theological issues surrounding nihil which have been
described above.

Adeodatus agrees that signs ought to signify something;
nihil, therefore, seems to contravene the teaching that words
are signs. The matter is left undecided: Augustine at first
draws from their deliberations the twin possibilities that
'we falsely concluded that all words are signs, or that all
signs signify something.'[40] Augustine, then, uses the example
of nihil both to challenge the connection of res and verba
and to introduce the alternative possibility - that words
might name some 'affectio animi' [movement of the soul].
Marcia Colish suggested that this is evidence of Augustine
reflecting the Stoic theory of signification, with its
distinction between the spoken word and lekta, the objects of
Logic.[41] This may be so, but Augustine's choice of words does
also echo the 'passiones animae' which spoken words denote
according to the Latin Aristotle.[42] At any rate, Aristotle's
definition of 'noun' was certainly influential on later,
renaissance attempts to address the signification of nihil.

Marcia Colish's general account of Augustinian attitudes

to language has a considerable bearing on this thesis. The
Stoics, whose influence on Augustine Colish perceived, had
distinguished between corporeal speech and incorporeal
concepts. The latter were the concern of logic. For
Augustine, to emphasize its corporeality was also to
emphasize the emphemeracy and imperfection of language. Hence
Augustine's notion of ænigma in relation to God's
inexpressibility - that aspect of his thought which in
negative theology becomes central. Words in general take on
the same qualities as speech; they are 'transient auditory
forms, whose sensuous reverberations are continually falling
away into nothingness in order to make way for each other.'[43]
Colish was there paraphrasing lines from Book 4, Chapter 11
of the Confessions, which contrast the everlasting word of
God to Augustine's own words, leaving his mouth only to be
replaced by more. And it is not only God's being which is
ineffable; language is inadequate 'as a means of adumbrating
sustained and non-discursive realities', and there is an
'opaque residuum of inexpressibility when a man tries to
signify verbally his internal states of being'.[44] Therefore,
the ineffability of God, and of nothing, follows from the
nature of language itself, as a mere system of signs which
'serve merely to suggest that we look for realities', rather
than that we have actually identified them.[45] Colish's account
suggests, then, that Augustinian linguistic theory actually
provided the seeds of negative theology's mysticism.

Like Augustine, John Scotus Eriugena meditated, in a
less mystical vein than usual, upon what is meant by saying
that God made the world from nothing. During a discussion
between teacher and pupil redolent of that seen in De
magistro, Nutritor eventually gives this definitive statement
on the issue:

that word 'Nothing' is taken to mean not some matter, not a

certain cause of existing things, not anything that went
before or occurred of which the establishment of things was a
consequence, nor something coessential or coeternal with God,
nor something apart from God subsisting on its own or on
another from which God took as it were a kind of material
from which to construct the world; but it is the name for the
total privation of the whole of essence and, to speak more
accurately, it is the word for the absence of the whole of
essence; for privation means the removal of possession... [46]

Eriugena seems ill at ease with the vocabulary of logic: what
he means by the term 'privation' as opposed to 'absence' is
not made clear. Yet he ironically signals a source of
considerable logical wrangling and misunderstanding right up
to the seventeenth century: the meaning of Aristotle's
distinction between privation and negation. The major logical
bone of contention, however, was simply the treatment of
'nothing' as a name, a problem which Eriugena's mystical
methodology ultimately transcends.

Epistola de nihilo et tenebris, by the ninth-century
writer Fredegisus of Tours, has been suggested as a likely
source for the later work by Anselm on the subject of
'whether nothing is something'. Fredegisus seemed to have
found the question intractable because he treated 'nothing'
as a finite name, like 'stone' and 'wood', and also made the
assumption that 'all signification is of that which is. He
concluded, '"nothing" signifies something, hence the
signification of "nothing" is that which is, that is, it
signifies something which exists.'[47] Henry's translation
introduces punctuation - the quotation-marks - which removes
at least one kind of ambiguity (the sort which Lear exploits,
of course, in his reply to Cordelia's 'Nothing'). The
conclusion which Fredegisus reached, however, remains
contradictory, leaving a conundrum which was addressed
subsequently by Anselm.

We have seen that Anselm owed something to the Dionysian

tradition for his 'ontological argument' for the existence of
God. He also touched on the signification of nihil in three
of his shorter logically-concerned works: Monologion, De
grammatico, and De casu diaboli. In these works Anselm took
up positions which would appear to challenge the tendency of
negative theology to accept nihil as a name. In all three
cases, nihil is used as evidence to support Anselm's
arguments with regard to, respectively, God's creation; that
all names do not signify both substance and accident; that
malum does not name a real thing. One of the features of
Anselm's approach is to equate nihil with non aliquid [not-
something]: he does so in Monologion when denying that to say
that nothing existed before God is to imply the existence of
nothingness.[48] Anselm introduced what he treated as an
analogous proposition, 'Nihil me docuit volare' [Nothing
taught me to fly.], to effect a reductio ad absurdum.
Substituting the equivalent 'non aliquid' for nihil, Anselm
produced the logically acceptable alternative reading, 'Non
me docuit aliquid volare' ['It is not the case that something
taught me to fly'].[49] Henry has pointed out that such
'quantificational' treatment is comparable to modern logical
approaches which would replace 'nothing' in this context with
a propositional negation and an existential quantifier
('There exists an x such that...').[50]

The same principle - of seeking 'true' or logical
meanings behind grammatically acceptable but semantically
problematic expressions - was applied to the problem of the
signification of malum [evil] in De casu diaboli. Anselm's
argument that 'evil' has no existent referent derived from
his association of evil with nothing. As Augustine and
Fredegisus had observed, nihil does seem to signify
something, in the manner of a name, but Anselm suggested that
this apparently nominal usage does not speak of signification

'secundum rem' [according to how things are] but rather
'secundum formam loquendi [according to the form of
speaking]. It is the latter formula he appealed to when he
associated 'nothing' and 'evil', allowing them quasi-nominal
status to explain usage but denying the real existence of
both (evil being 'not-good'); as Henry explains, 'Anselm is
here making an important point, namely the distinction
between the merely grammatical form and the real or logical
form of an utterance.'[51] This, as Henry has also observed, is
a modus operandi which has echoes first in Russell's
distinction between grammatical and logical form, and then in
Chomsky's notion of sentences having 'deep' and 'surface'
structures.[52]

Of course, Anselm was also using his logical analysis to
overcome a clash between common usage and Christian doctrine.
And if the implication is that 'evil' really means 'not good'
just as 'nothing' means 'not something', this is as good as
treating 'nothing' as what Aristotle called an 'infinite
name' such as 'not-man' - that is, not a name at all. So
'malum' is not a true name. But there is a complication here,
and one which will persist beyond medieval logic. The
relation of evil to good is clearly not one which can be
accounted for simply by nominal negation: 'evil' implies more
than simply 'not good'. By linking nihil with malum, and
elsewhere caecitas (blindness), Anselm was suggesting that it
is a 'privation'. Aristotle had identified blindness as a
privation in Book 1 of the Physics, 'privatio' being a
translation of Aristotle's term used to describe gradations
of difference between things. In medieval logic, privatio
became a technical term in contradistinction from simple
negatio. Negation simply implied the prefixing of 'not' to a
term or proposition, but privations were typically thought of
as in opposition to a habitus, that is, a natural condition

or disposition in a person or thing. It is the lack of
something which once existed or might potentially exist. This
distinction - effectively a normative one, would not be
expressible in formal logic. But for those who inherited the
scholastic corpus, the idea that 'nothing' could be either a
privation or a negation was a recurrent theme, and its
consequent association with evil apparently validated by
logic itself.

Anselm's approach proved to be archetypal in the
medieval period, as later examples will show. Meanwhile,
Logic's intimate involvement in theological and metaphysical
matters, such as whether evil exists, is another feature
which would persist throughout the period. Marcia Colish has
claimed that Augustine's real interest in De magistro, as
with Anselm in De veritate, was in the moral problem of lying
and falsehood rather than semantic problems.[53] Certainly, the
notion of truth is never far from the nihil debate, and
Anselm's distinction between types of truth in De veritate is
an extension of that between usage and logical meaning. After
Anselm's analyses of nihil, it was not prominent as a logical
problem until the thirteenth century. In the twelfth century,
by contrast, one can see the parallel development of the
mystical aspect of nothing amongst neoplatonists. But it was
Aristotle who was to influence the progress of the logical/
semantic question.

In the sequence followed by Aristotle's logical works,
the classification of terms the first phase, proceeding to
types of propositions, and thence to the more complex matters
of valid and invalid inferences. Medieval writers adopted
this format, building on and explicating the conclusions of
the 'Organon', the five books which were eventually
established as Aristotle's logical works.[54] From the twelfth
century onwards (before then, only the Categoriae and De

interpretatione were known in the West) a favourite medium for commentary or expansion upon the Aristotelian logical corpus was the problem proposition, or sophisma. This format - of expounding logical doctrines via fallacious or ambiguous examples - was inspired by the rediscovery of the Boethius translation of Aristotle's De sophisticis elenchis [On sophistical refutations] in 1128. Sophisms became, from the teaching point of view, logical exercises, designed to test the rules of syllogistic in practice - that is to say, in real (if not always everyday) language. By the thirteenth century, 'sophism' had come to refer to a single proposition, which was normally the false or questionable conclusion of a syllogism. A sophism might, as with 'God was created', contradict some putatively irrefutable truth, or it might make an absurd claim such as 'Socrates is a donkey'.[55] The sophisms of relevance to the nothing topic are those which focussed mainly on problems (often arising from the Categoriae) of the signification of names, rather than on the more advanced study of syllogistic inference.

As Rita Guerlac has remarked, these sophisms quickly progressed from being a teaching device to being of interest in themselves to logicians:

Enthusiasm for the De sophisticis elenchis had stimulated an interest in logical and verbal puzzles and ambiguities that was to flower in France a hundred years later in the Logica Moderna.[56]

By the thirteenth century many sophisms which used 'nihil' or its equivalents had been invented (see above, p237). Their areas of concern were semantic: the Logica Moderna consisted of the doctrine of the properties of terms - subjects or predicates of propositions - and the study of 'syncategorematic' terms; this all came under the the study of 'supposition'.[57] Since suppositio was about what a name stands for in any particular proposition, it is no surprise

that *nihil* figured largely among the problem-case *sophismata*. Most of them clearly focus on the ambiguities caused by treating 'nothing' as a name, but other interesting associations accrete to some. For example, 'Nothing is in the box,' has resonances of the empty space/ vacuum controversy, and those about knowing that you know nothing have sceptical implications, and were derived from the renowned Socratic saying, 'I know only this, that I know nothing' (see above, p.237).

The treatment of 'nothing' by 'speculative grammarians' involves a slight diversion from the mainstream logical debate, but is important in illustrating the extent of the interest shown in the topic. This mainly Parisian group, led by Boethius of Dacia, were also known as the 'modistae', because of their systems of 'modes of signification' [*modi significandi*].[58] Henry has drawn a link between the approaches of Anselm and Boethius of Dacia who, in his *Modi Significandi*, used the example of 'nothing' to refute the teaching of the traditional grammarian Priscian that all names signify substance.[59] In fact, names signify a '*conceptus mentis*', which in turn derives from the properties of things, and even the test case 'nothing' can be explained this way. Thus Boethius of Dacia was able to avoid commitment to the thesis that all names have things as referents, taking up a position similar to Anselm's stance against the *grammatici antiqui*.

The most famous follower of Boethius of Dacia was Thomas of Erfurt, who worked in Paris and in Erfurt at the end of the thirteenth century. An account both of the methodology of the *modistae*, and of Thomas's treatment of 'nothing', has been given by Roy Harris and Talbot Taylor:

By means of grammar, the mind sets up correlations between a sound on one hand and some 'property or mode of being' on the other. It is no objection to this, argues Thomas, that we

have words designating non-existent things, or even absences of certain things or properties. A word like chimaera, which designates an imaginary beast, gets its significance not from the animal... but from the parts (head of lion, tail of dragon, etc.) of which we imagine it to be composed, and which do exist. As for words designating negations (for example, nothing) although they correspond to no positive entity outside the mind, nevertheless they do correspond to a positive entity conceptualized in the mind itself. For to conceive of the absence of something in the external world is not a negative but a positive mental act.[60]

Such an approach to the question of empty names echoed both Augustine's De Magistro, which had suggested the affectio animi solution to what nihil signified, and Aristotle's De Interpretatione, which stated that all spoken words denoted mental experiences [passiones animae]. The seventh-century Roman Boethius, whose interpretations of Aristotle were so influential in the Middle Ages, had also used this solution to explain the word 'Gargulus', which he claimed could refer to 'aliquam animi conceptionem' [some conception of the mind].[61] Of course, the recourse to this theory does not necessarily simplify the problem: the 'concept of nothing' in the mind is surely as elusive as the phenomenon of nothing in the world. Or, in Thomas of Erfurt's terms, imagining the Chimera is surely less problematic than imagining absence itself. Thomas's explanation preserves, then, the vagueness of earlier attempts to locate the nothing problem within the 'empty terms' debate.

The concentration upon the properties of terms by fourteenth-century logicians was destined to maintain the high profile of nihil. The dominating concern of these logicians with the problems of naming is signalled by their commonly used label of 'Nominalists' (also known as 'Terminists'). Whilst this had a specific reference to their assertion that 'universals' such as the genus 'Animal' or the species 'Man' were simply 'names of names', it was closely

related as a problem to the nihil question.[62] These universal

names could also be called terms of 'second intention', with

the implication that their referents were mental rather than,

as the realists would have it, separately existing either in

the physical world or in the Platonic realm of ideas. Hence

the recurrent tendency for the linguistic problem to become a

question about the operations of the mind. Paul Spade

recognized this tendency in his remarks on the nominalists'

interest in a 'mental language':

the traditional problems for nominalists are epistemological
ones: If the world is the way the nominalists say it is, how
is it possible to have any general knowledge of it? How can
our general terms and concepts have any real grounding in the
external world? Once the emphasis is shifted in this way to
the question of the possibility and extent of human
knowledge, it is easy to see why there was a special
interests among the nominalists in mental language, of which
that knowledge consisted.[63]

The particular object of Spade's attention, Peter of Ailly

(c.1350-1420), dwelt at length on the relations between

words, mental terms, and 'things' (see Spade, pp.16-34).

The attachment of meanings to concepts rather than

things was typical of William of Ockham, who avoided some of

the pitfalls of this strategy by calling nihil - along with

other empty, negative or privative terms - 'connotative'

rather than directly 'denotative'. In his Summa Logicae

Ockham considered the problem of definitions with respect to

fictional or negative names, such as vacuum, non ens,

impossibile, infinitum and hircocervus (goat-stag).[64] He

decided, in contrast to the Modistae, that it is invalid to

define, for example, a chimera as an animal composed of a

goat and a bull, when such an animal does not exist. He

suggested that for a valid definition, it must be prefaced by

an existential component: 'If a chimera is something, then,

etc.'. Later, he considers the general use of 'non-entities'

in propositions, citing the same list of fictional names

(Ockham, II:14). Without the existential element, propositions predicating anything of an empty name must be false, even ones which might seem to be valid, such as, 'Chimæra est non ens' or 'Chimæra est chimæra'.[65] Henry has drawn comparisons between this strategy and that of Bertrand Russell with regard to empty terms (e.g., the infamous sentence, 'The present King of France is bald.') in his 'Theory of Definite Descriptions'. [66]

As a final example of the nominalist approach, Walter Burleigh in his De puritate artis logicae used the sophisms, 'Not-something is what you are, and you are a donkey'; 'Nothing is nothing'; and 'Nothing and the chimera are brothers.' These absurd propositions highlighted a discrepancy between what is allowed by grammar or common usage (usus loquendi), and what is allowed to be logically true, in a manner similar to that of Anselm already described.[67] The first of these sophisms is prefaced by some remarks on the difference between propositional and nominal negation:

> ...the negation 'not' can be taken either merely negatively or infinitively. When it is taken merely negatively, then it always negates some propositional complex or something which is essential to the structure of the proposition. But when it is taken infinitively, then it negates some nominal element in the proposition, namely the subject or predicate.[68]

Burleigh proceeded to explain that the first sophism above confuses a nominal negation, 'not something'/ 'nothing', with a negation of the whole conjunctive proposition, 'something is what you are and you are a donkey', which would be valid. His subsequent remarks about nominal negation are an interesting advance on Anselm's verdict about nihil. As I indicated above, Anselm's analysis left some unanswered questions about how nothing can be classed along with the privative terms 'evil' or 'blindness'. Burleigh effectively

refuted this attribution of equivalence.[69] Furthermore, he realised that there is a special case amongst infinite names (e.g., non-man) in the example of non ens / 'non-being' because unlike 'non-man', which, following Boethius, could refer, 'remotively', to any thing in the world apart from a man, there is no thing to which 'non-being' could thus refer. So, it would seem that 'nothing', taken in the sense of 'non-being', does not seem to be assertible of any subject.[70] Such a conclusion would clearly have consequences for the language of negative theology, which spoke of 'nothing' with exactly that abstract connotation of 'non-being'.

Burleigh proceeds with a familiar analysis of one of the old stock of sophisms, 'Nihil est nihil', separating the supposedly nominal use of 'nothing' from its function of negating a proposition. Burleigh's reading of the first nihil of 'Nihil est nihil' is, as Henry has put it, 'analogous to the 'No' of 'No a is b ' rather than to a name which could figure as a substituend for the 'a' in a form such as 'a is b'.'[71] So, a clearer expression of its 'true' meaning would be 'it is not the case that something is nothing'. A similar procedure is followed with another classic sophism, 'Nothing and the Chimera are brothers', which appears to be true because the contrary, 'Something and the Chimera are brothers' is necessarily false.[72] Of course, again, the correct, or less ambiguous, contradiction of 'Something and the Chimera are brothers' must make it clear that the whole proposition is being negated, as in, 'It is not true that something and the Chimera are brothers.'

The main point of logic issuing from the debates about nihil is that that term, like its English equivalent, could produce confusion, especially in common language, of the two types of negation - nominal and propositional. It therefore highlighted the illogicality of ordinary language, or from

the viewpoints of some commentators, the incoherence of
traditional grammatical accounts of language. The dependence
of medieval logic upon ordinary language made the nihil's
ambiguity an occasion of what might seem absurd wranglings.
That sense of absurdity is tempered, however, by the fact
that this century too philosophers have made the word a
battle-ground. Another aspect of the discussions recounted
above - the suggestion that certain words might name 'second
intentions' or abstract concepts - would become particularly
prominent in the early modern period. Such explanations of
the signification of nihil were changing the terms of the
debate, and shifting its focus towards 'mental language'.

The chapter has presented three strands, drawn from
medieval philosophy and theology. They have been separated,
notionally, in order to trace different themes which arose
from their particular perspective on the nothing question.
The first, a mainstream, orthodox Christian belief in
creation ex nihilo, rejected the idea that nihil stood for
anything existent, but was willing to make connections,
perhaps metaphoric, between nihil, tenebrae, and malum. A
more esoteric, and marginal, theology claimed that nihil
named a transcendent 'nothingness', understood literally (and
therefore mystically). Finally, an intellectual (eventually
academic) study, of logico-linguistic problems, questioned
the validity of treating nihil as a name, whether in
theological propositions or common locutions. Subsequent
chapters examine the survival of these three strands, and
their integration or adaptation by Renaissance discourses.

CHAPTER THREE

Creation from Nothing: variations on a theme

Introduction

Humanist interest in neoplatonism during a period of
religious reform contributed to the emergence of a modified
Christian creation myth in the late sixteenth century. This
chapter looks first at some variations of the myth which
appeared in vernacular poetry. Secondly, the contemporary
secular, 'scientific' interest in the world's creation, and
its material substance, is shown to have intersected with
those specifically religious aspects of the creation poetry.
The consequences of that interaction are explained, in the
perceived position of nothing in relation to 'prime matter'
in sixteenth-century natural philosophy. The third section
shows that alchemic theory assigned an especially important
rôle to nihil in its account of generation, and considers the
relation between nihil and spiritus in alchemic jargon. The
fourth section suggests that these early modern discourses
drew attention to human creativity, particularly by analogy
between human and divine creation. As employed by poets and
playwrights, that analogy had implications for humanistic
attitudes to authorship and literary theory. Shakespeare's
metaphors of the imagination as a creative nothing are
explored in relation to contemporary psychology.

1. Christian theology and poetic interpretations

To understand the importance of the doctrine of ex
nihilo creation in the early modern period, it is necessary
to see it as a cosmological view as well as a theological
position. As Milton Munitz has observed, the same issue is
alive today in the context of 'Big Bang' theories and the
quantum mechanical 'vacuum state' out of which the universe
might have been born.[1] Medieval cosmology had been inseparably
allied to theology, but the increasing influence of pre-
Christian philosophy and literature prompted some questioning
of the Genesis creation myth. During the sixteenth century,
the revival of classical literature and thought was in
constant tension with Christian theology. However, in a
period of theological radicalism, Christian writers followed
a policy of adaptation and appropriation rather than outright
rejection. Authoritative figures such as Erasmus and More
defended classical learning, and yet there was in some areas
an uneasy co-existence between the Christian and the pre-
Christian world-view.[2]

One problematic theological crux arose from the revival
of Platonist and neo-platonist thought, which had been
sustained during the Middle Ages by Islamic and Jewish
philosophers. The chief source for medieval writers was
Plato's Timaeus, which was the best-known of Plato's works in
the West. In this passage, the ordering of 'primitive chaos'
is described:

Before that [the elements] were all without proportion or
measure; fire, water, earth and air bore some traces of their
proper nature, but were in the disorganized state to be
expected of anything which God has not touched, and his first
step when he set about reducing them to order was to give
them a definite pattern of shape and number.[3]

Timaeus's monotheistic account made it convenient to
Christian theology, but Plato's image of corn in a winnowing

basket separating out when shaken was a long way from Augustine's ex nihilo version. The emphasis of Reformation thought upon return to an authentic, original creed was likely to impact upon the perceived conflict between competing versions of the creation story. In a religiously-motivated poem of 1585, Edward Daunce wrote of the quarrel,

not yet ended, which hath risen amongst the anciente Phylosophers, touching the originall of the worlde, which some will have to concerne only the earth, & hir contents: others the mighty frame of the universall.'[4]

Daunce felt the need to defend creatio ex nihilo doctrine against the 'prophane antiquitie', Nihil ex Nihilo fit, re-affirming 'the wonderfull omnipotencie of God, who by his divine wisdome, composed the universall substance of nothing' (sig.Bii[r]).

The infiltration into Christian thought of alternative creation stories had been seen as early as the twelfth century in the somewhat eccentric writings of Bernard Sylvester. His Cosmographia, with its macrocosmic creation myth, exemplifies the clash of early Humanism with Augustinian orthodoxy. Bernard's allegorical synthesis of Hermeticism and Christian theology was an early model for later cosmological projects.[5] The Cosmographia describes creation as the imposition of order onto 'Hyle' or 'Silva', a primal disordered mass:

Silva, intractable, a formless chaos, a hostile coalescence, the motley appearance of being, a mass discordant with itself, longs in her turbulence for a tempering power; in her crudity for form; in her rankness for cultivation. Yearning to emerge from her ancient confusion, she demands the shaping influence of number and the bonds of harmony.

(Wetherbee, p.67)

Brian Stock has argued that the Cosmographia was primarily a work of literary imagination rather than a scholastic work, but at the same time it was not secular.[6] Although Plato's Timaeus was clearly one source, Winthrop Wetherbee has suggested that the Christian/ neoplatonic elements are likely

to have been derived from the the ninth-century writings of John Scotus Eriugena (Wetherbee, p.32). From the evidence of the Periphyseon, Eriugena had considered the problem to be partly a matter of biblical interpretation. As well as pondering nihil, the mystical theologian dwelt on the semantic possibilities offered by 'void', 'waste' and 'abyss' - words used in Genesis to denote pre-creation states (Eriugena, pp.149-152).

The creation-from-chaos doctrine was still religious in impulse when it reappeared in late sixteenth-century literature. Although its revival was due in part to neoplatonist philosophies, the chaos myth tended to be associated with the reformed religions. As was noted above, the Biblical account would seem to be more compatible with a Platonic, or Hermetic, view of the cosmos fashioned from pre-existent matter.[7] It is perhaps strange, then, that many Protestant writers, whose tendency was always to return to untainted biblical authority, were also insisting upon the doctrine of creation ex nihilo, and even citing dubious scriptural support for it. A significant factor in the survival of creatio ex nihilo as the orthodox Christian position was, without much doubt, the persistent authoritative status of Saint Augustine. The continuity of negative theology, especially in Germany, during the Middle Ages, also maintained an academic interest in the originary nothingness. A third consideration would be the effect of the sixteenth-century interest in Kabbalistic approaches to the supreme Being, which have clear similarities to Christian negative theology. In Walter Pagel's account of these arcana, the infinite Being of Kabbalistic tradition was envisaged as an absolute negation, which is called 'Nothing' (Ayin) because it is beyond human understanding:

it was through an impulse towards creation that God undid the secret inaccessibility of His abstract Being and this impulse is called *Nothing* ... *In* this absolute Nothing creation *from*

Nothing unfolds itself, and the Nothing is in some places called aboriginal *Will*.[8]

The idea that German mysticism contributed to the emphasis upon nothing as the origin of the world is supported by a late sixteenth-century translation of the Proverbia of Niclas Hendrik. The first chapter of these 'mysticall sentences' dwells upon the nothing whence the world was created, and offers an explanation linked to the myth of Adam's sin:

And that same which was nothing, was the Evell or Ungodlynes which the Man, in his falling-away from God, fil-unto wher-through also, the same knowledge wrought in the Man the Evell or that which is ungodlie because hee knewe or understoode not that same which is nothing as nothing, and sawe not into it as Nothing: but accepted the same for Something and understood or conceaved the same Knowledge, partlie for Good and partlie for Evell.[9]

The good part, it seems, was the via negativa - the way by which the concept of nothing could lead us back to God. The 'evel or ungodlynes' was sin, whose equivalence to 'nothing' was commonly asserted in English religious verse (see above, p.50). The analogy was made in one of Davies of Hereford's pious poems, 'A sinner's acknowledgment of his vileness and mutabilitie':

> Spare me (deare Lord) my daies as nothing be,
> Consum'd in sin, then which is nothing worse:
> Yet sin is nothing: yet can well agree
> With nothing but thy vengeance and thy curse.
> <div align="right">(Grosart, 1, p.9)</div>

Another epigrammatist of the period, John Heath (fl.1610-19), showed an awareness of the intellectual debate behind the saying that sin is nothing, in his 'De Peccato':

> By sinne from blisse our common parents fell,
> And we with them incurr'd the paines of hell.
> Yet this, which all mankind did so enthral,
> Some a privation, some a nothing cal.
> With iustice selfe how could it then agree
> For nothing so to plague mortalitee?[10]

Heath was encapsulating, even down to the 'privation' issue, the logical/ theological dilemma which was inherited from Augustinian teachings.[11]

It is clear that the creatio ex nihilo theme of English Renaissance poetry drew on medieval theological discussions. John Davies of Hereford focussed on the concept of nothing as origin of the world in Mirum in Modum (1602).[12] Two stanzas of that poem argue in detail the theological case that God created the world from nothing. Nothing could not have been in time, since time involves motion, 'For *Nothing* hath no motion and much lesse \ Can *Nothing* make of nothing, *Something*' (sig.Giv^v). God's creation of the world from nothing emphasises his greatness, the poem continues. The word 'nothing' is repeated over and again, before a shift to the more philosophical terms, 'being' and 'not-being':

> But the creator ever beeing had,
> To pull out from Not-beeing who can wade?
> (Beeing a depth so infinite profound)
> But that he was, and is, and cannot fade?
> This Beeing infinite, this Deapth must sound
> To lift up all to Beeing, there beeing dround. (sig.Giv^v)

Davies showed a concern for theological argument rather than for the dramatic narrative of neoplatonic creation myth. He also appreciated the poetic potential of that abstraction which mystical theology called 'nothing'.

Some early modern texts concerned with creation suggest a desire to preserve both accounts of creation - from nothing and from chaos - and to effect a synthesis. John Donne expressed what was a more or less orthodox position in his Essays on Theology. There, as Mary Paton Ramsay observed in her detailed study of Donne's theology, he described creation as having been in two stages, from nothing to prime matter/ chaos, and thence to created material things.[13] This did not, of course, account for immaterial creations, such as angels and human souls, which were created from nothing without intermediary.[14] By some accounts, chaos could itself be

defined as nothingness - or 'not-thingness' - because chaos lacks the determining form which causes things to be. Donne made such a use of the word 'nothing' in this brief allusion to creation in a 'Letter to the Countess of Huntingdon':

> As all things were one nothing, dull and weake,
> Untill this raw disordered heape did breake,
>
> And severall desire led parts away,
> Water declin'd with earth, the ayre did stay...
> (Donne, p.312)

So, in spite of references to primeval chaos, Donne's accounts of creation held on to the ex nihilo theme, and several contemporaries of Donne engaged upon whole works whose focus was the creation of the world. A significant influence for most of these later poems was the Semaines of the French Protestant humanist, Du Bartas. The first week, La Semaine ou Création du monde, had been translated as early as 1595 and, as Susan Snyder has demonstrated, the Weeks was already an established classic by the time Josuah Sylvester published his 1605 English translation.[15] In the meantime, two long poems on the same theme appeared in English.

Henoch Clapham's derivative Elohim Triune (1601) begins with the production of prime matter from nothing:

> For things which now have Being, once were not.
> And if not once, of nothing then they rose:
> Even that something, which termed is *Chaos*.[16]

Then follows an account of the primal scene and a description of chaos:

> A rude informed lump, unbeautified:
> Fowre Elements (as subject to the rest)
> fowre mixt in One and all un-purified.
> This unlickt masse doth tumble into place. (sig.Bii^v)

Sylvester's Weeks echoed that account:

> That first World (yet) was a most forme-less Forme,
> A confus'd Heape, a Chaos most diforme,
> A Gulph of Gulphes, a body ill compact,
> An ugly medly, where all difference lackt.[17]

Clapham's _materia prima_ is next bounded by space and time, and brought to life by God's spirit like an egg being hatched - the same image used in the _Weeks_. Clapham eschewed the epicurean atomism expounded by Du Bartas, insisting that there was no void between material things. But both poems insist that the possibility of a return to nothingness has been banished by creation. As Sylvester's _Weeks_ put it, the act of creation salvaged a nature 'Tending to nothing: nothing lesse than nought':

> This natur'd lump (had not the spirit spread)
> To nothing or to Nought would have declin'd
> The father by his word did give it head:
> Breath of his mouth preserves it in his kinde,
> that so preservd, in future time may rise
> a winged work, more fit Creators eyes.
>   (Snyder, sig.Biii)

A work by William Lisle, published in 1603, was almost certainly indebted to Du Bartas, whose works Lisle later translated. The first part of Lisle's piece, entitled _Nothing for a New Yeares Gift_, explains how nothing is the ground for everything, using this as a starting point for a re-telling of the creation story, the history of sin, and man's redemption by Christ. The cryptic opening lines suggest a number of influences, including the medieval tradition of vision poetry:

> Out of the depths of my greeved spirit
> And from the depths of serious contemplation
> Why blooming virtue should black envy merit,
> My troubled thoughts recall the first creation;
> Searching Arts secret, at last I found
> Nothing to be of everything the ground.
> Excesse of studie in a traunce denies
> My ravisht soule her Angel-winged flight:
> Struggling with Nothing, thus my bodie lies
> Panting for breath, deprived of sences might,
> At length recovered by this pleasant slumber
> The straunge effects from Nothing, thus I wonder.[18]

'Arts secret' alludes, presumably, to caballistic arts, which lead to nothingness, but the reason for a contemplation of

envy having provoked these thoughts is obscure. It might be
found in the contemporary epigram, 'Envy is blind, and can do
nothing but dispraise virtue', or it might be conflating envy
and jealousy, which was itself said to be nothing.[19] It is
difficult to know how seriously to take remarks such as
'struggling with Nothing', but some passages are obviously
concerned with elevated matters. The very next lines, indeed,
seem deliberately to conflate Nothing with the deity in the
manner of negative theology:

> That power of powers, great, good, pure, bodiles,
> Who uncontained, yet in himselfe confinde:
> That lively word, which no word can expresse. (Ibid.)

The notion of originary nothingness itself seems to confirm
God's ineffability. Such a stance places the poem in a rather
different category from Clapham's; its attitude to nothing is
more akin to Crashaw's enthusiastic meditation on Matthew 27
('And he answered them nothing'):

> O mighty nothing! Unto thee,
> Nothing, we owe all things that bee.
> God spake once, when he all things made,
> He sav'd all then with Nothings aid.
> The world was made of nothing then;
> 'Tis made by Nothing now againe.[20]

The second part of the New Yeares Gift is 'The effects
proceeding from Nothing', another version of the creation
story, this time focussing on the civilising of Adam and,
oddly, the taming of his first horse. This conceit was
probably inspired by another poem in what I.D. McFarlane
called the genre of 'scientific' poetry – Maurice Scève's
Microcosme (1562).[21] That poem had begun with an account of ex
nihilo creation, though with an almost emanationist slant,
Nature soon taking over from the Creator as the generative
force. 'The effects proceeding from nothing' celebrates human
achievements in a manner which is characteristic of the
genre, describing Adam's progress through the world astride
his newly tamed horse.[22] Interest in the originary nothing has

long since disappeared by this stage in Lisle's poem: in both
parts of <u>Nothing for a New Yeares Gift</u>, the nothing theme was
used as a point of departure for a quasi-biblical
<u>divertissement</u>.

Whilst these poems might be called 'scientific' in their
ambitions to depict a conspectus of human achievements from
the beginnings of time, they were rarely addressing
contemporary scientific issues. Rather, they often seem to
have derived from a theological response - either suggesting
that the world was saved from nothing by God's act of
creation, or praising a transcendent, numinous nothing.
Daunce and Lisle, however, were certainly emphasising human
as well as divine achievements. This aspect of the genre was
perhaps expressed most overtly in <u>Kosmobrephia</u> (1558), a
reprise of the creation poem tradition by Nicholas
Billingsley.[23] The opening of his poem is redolent of the
creation-myths from the turn of the century:

> God, when besides himself there nothing was
> But a rude Chaos, a confused mass,
> Of things disordered; all together hurl'd,
> Did by his providence ordaine the world.
> <div align="right">(Billingsley, p.1)</div>

There is not that detailed description of chaos which was
seen in the earlier poems, but the creative process itself is
portrayed in similar terms to the account in <u>Timaeus</u>. If the
main body of the poem was in that respect conventional, the
'Praise of Nothing', was strikingly new, in that seven of its
nine sections are devoted to botanical, ornithological, and
generally taxonomic descriptions of the natural world. These
included the most recent and exotic of discoveries: the new
found natural wealth of foreign lands. Though disguised as a
eulogy to God's creation, the poem was also a celebration of
man's ever-increasing knowledge of the natural world. The
sub-text surfaces in the final section, an anatomical account
of 'the little world' which is man, including the marvels of
his digestive system (Billingsley, p.43).

The theme of 'ex nihil nihil fit' alluded to by Daunce
in 1585 was to develop, therefore, less abstract and
theological, and instead increasingly 'scientific'
implications. After God's initial naming of things, it seemed
now that humans were taking on the same task, in response to
an expanding world. And as we shall see in the next section,
it was in this context of 'natural philosophy' - Aristotelian
rather than Platonist - that the nothing problem would become
an intractable one.

2. Natural philosophy and the problem of materiality

'Ex nihil nihil fit' was a medieval commonplace, which
seems to have earned itself particular notoriety in the late
sixteenth century, and has often been attributed to
Aristotle. Attention to what Aristotle actually asserted in
the Metaphysics and the Physics might offer a clearer picture
than this derivative maxim. There is in the Metaphysics a
description of matter as undetermined being - it has
existence but no form.[24] It is affirmed in the Physics that
nothing can be generated from non-being 'qua non being', but
Aristotle concedes that inasmuch as a thing comes to be from
a privation of that thing, then things do come from what is
not. This statement was consistent with Aristotle's doctrine
that all generated things are a conjunction of matter and
form, and that things come into being from privation (see
above, p.53). The attribution to Aristotle of the dictum
'nothing will come of nothing' was frequently made in the
Renaissance, and after, as if it had some bearing on the
creation issue. Yet, as Charles Lohr has pointed out in

relation to the Renaissance conflicts between science and theology, Aristotle 'knew nothing of creation' - not in the way most Christian writers of the period would have understood that term.[25] In The Physics, Aristotle was concerned with generation within the natural world, rather than with the origins of the world. So also when in Metaphysics he defined 'nature' as the primary material or genesis of growing things (see Barnes, II, 1602).

It appears that this distinction between creation and generation was not always acknowledged. As Edward Grant has observed, Guericke saw himself as following Aristotle in dividing all existent things into the created and the uncreated. The corollary, claimed Guericke, was that an uncreated something is effectively a nothing (E.Grant, p.216). Furthermore, the identification of Aristotle's 'matter' with Plato's 'chaos' produced a conception of matter as a prior, inferior level of being, which could be thought of as existing, or as having existed at some time, if only as potentiality. An early humanist engagement with the problem came from Charles de Bouelles (1479-1553).[26] This mathematician and theologian, a student of Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples renowned in sixteenth-century humanist circles, produced his extraordinary Libellus de Nichilo in 1609.[27] The frontispiece shows God blowing his creative spirit into the dark void, instantly producing all his creatures (see Fig.I). The text, however, addresses the nature of the substances involved in the created world. Matter is described as an intermediate state, which is neither being nor non-being.[28] In some ways, Bouelles's description of materia is closely akin to the late sixteenth-century poetic accounts, betraying the common elements of their intellectual heritage:

Materia is in fact a total emptiness and privation of differentiation, very similar to that unformed and confused mass and form of everything, in which Empedocles asserted that all things were hidden and out of which in time they will emerge.[29]

Plate I

CHARLES DE BOUELLES: GOD CREATING THE UNIVERSE FROM NOTHING

[Frontispiece, Libellus de Nichilo]

¶ Subſtātia prima deus ¶ Momentanea   Eternus
  Nichilaliud   Fluxequalitates   Infinitus
¶ Rerū durationes   ¶ Euum   Increatus
  Eternitas   Primum   Creator oīm
  Euum   Secundum   ¶ Creatura
  Tempus   ¶ In primo   Non eterna
  Momentum   Nichil creatum   Fini ta
¶ Eterna   ¶ In ſecundo   Facta a deo
  Solus deus   Omnia creata   Nichil creās
¶ Euiterna   Angeli   ¶ Theologia
  Angeli   Materia   Senſibilis
  Rationales aie   Subſiſtentia   Intellectualis
  Materia   Viuentia   Prophetica
¶ Temporanea   Senſibilia   Affirmatiua
  Irrationales aie   Rationalia   Negatiua
  Actus eſſendi   ¶ Deus

i iij

The idea that there was an intermediate stage between originary nothingness and created being became a standard position in the texts dealing with nothing on a philosophical level. As well as the idea of prime matter, this notion encompassed potential being and possible being, therefore it was an issue which crossed the boundary between physics and metaphysics. As we shall see in Chapter 6 below, it was an issue which continued to occupy the minds of thinkers well into the seventeenth century. In his 1608 collection of philosophical theses about nihil, Cornelius Götz would suggest that there might be a real order of existence between nothing and thing, between non-being and the world.[30] A dissertation on 'Nothing, nearly nothing, and less than nothing' (1634) by the French humanist Jacques Gaffarel called this 'possibilitas ad ens'.[31] In 1661, Marten Schoock asked if there could be a medium between ens and nihil, and if so, what form it would take.[32] The influence of Bouelles's book was still being felt after a century and a half.

The works of Theophrastus Paracelsus (1493-1541) had also stirred up controversy upon this topic, according to Walter Pagel, who has examined the views of an English commentator writing in 1585.[33] The Paracelsian version of creation is one in which chaos, or materia prima, is 'a frontier separating no-thing from thing - the field in which the challenge for the Creator, the "seam" (limbus) at which materialisation and separation of individual species and objects takes place'.[34] But Pagel also concluded that for Paracelsus, materia prima 'is not matter in the usual sense, but the ideal pattern and spiritual prelude to the material world', an interpretation which adds yet another level of complexity to this vexed question.[35] Paracelsianism provides a reminder of the way natural and supernatural agencies could still be treated as being equally valid explanations of things within these humanistic discourses. These were

inclusive, encyclopedic, syncretic, crossing over the
boundaries of theology, physics, and cosmology.

A renowned English exponent of cosmological alchemy was
Robert Fludd (1574-1637), who gave both diagrammatic and
written accounts of the emergence of chaos from the dark
abyss, and the eventual creation of the heavens and earth
from what he refers to, as did Bernard Sylvester, as 'Hyle' -
that is, 'a confused matter and undigested mass'.[36] Fludd made
clear his position on the materia prima question, insisting
that since what is unformed is not created, then prime matter
is not created.[37] What he lost by such obscurities, Fludd
compensated for in the stylish visual representations of the
appearances first of light, then the chaos of the elements,
into an infinite darkness.[38] His use of tenebrae parallels
Augustine's use of nihil or malum in the creation story. For
Fludd, light was literally the life-giving celestial virtue,
which takes away the privation which is darkness: 'omnis
privatio est tenebrae' [darkness is the privation of
everything].[39] Fludd's graphic depiction and description of
the creation demonstrates the overlapping of alchemy with the
Christian/ Platonic creation myths of the period.

The issue of Lucretian or Epicurean atomism was another
influence on the development of the creation-from-nothing
theme. There was no doubt some seventeenth-century interest
in the world-view presented by Lucretius in his De Rerum
Natura, but his ideas concerning generation were no more in
conflict with Christian doctrine than were Aristotle's, and
should not have significantly modified attitudes to the
creation question. By explicitly denying that things could be
produced from nothing by divine power, Lucretius might have
seemed to be contradicting Christian orthodoxy, but he was
nowhere in his poem concerned with explaining the origins of
the universe. In his usage, the terms 'create' [creo] and
'generate' [geno] were synonyms, which helps to blur the

distinction between theology and natural philosophy.

In any case, the influence of Lucretius, especially upon English literature, has been exaggerated. Although De rerum natura had been rediscovered in the late fifteenth century, and printed in several editions during the sixteenth century, it was not translated into English until the seventeenth. Even L.C. Martin, who decided that Lucretius was probably at least an indirect influence on the later plays of Shakespeare, admitted that 'the Elizabethans had taken far less notice of Lucretius than of other Latin poets.'[40] Claims that King Lear's 'nothing can come of nothing' is evidence of Lucretian influence are unconvincing. The saying was a medieval commonplace, rather than an idea specific to Renaissance thought. An equivalent phrase could be found in the late fifteenth-century Proverbia communia, and it had appeared in English literature as early as Chaucer's Boece.[41] The early-modern influence of Lucretius was chiefly in the realm of natural philosophy - he was the main channel for the spread of Epicurean atomism. Epicurean theory about the constitution of the universe involved the notion of intra-mundane void spaces, and was influential on the rise of materialism in the seventeenth century.[42] Even so, his influence on the theme - whether cosmological or poetic - of nihil, seems to have been at most peripheral.

3. Eggs, seeds or spiritus? - theories of generation

The macrocosmic schemes and creation myths available to sixteenth-century western thought all had a place for 'nothing', and it is not surprising to find microcosmic equivalences. There was clearly an extension of the creatio ex nihilo issue found in sixteenth-century theories of natural generation and reproduction. In a parallel to the notion that God was sole cause of creation, the phenomenon of natural propagation was normally attributed to the agency of some spiritual substance. Furthermore there was a particular analogue of creatio ex nihilo in the common belief that spontaneous generation occurred in, for example, the corpses of animals.[43]

Inheriting twelfth-century theories about the operation of the soul on the body, Jean Fernel (1497-1558) devised a bio-medical theory of 'spiritus', the life-giving substance or force. James Bono has concluded from his research that, during the Renaissance, there was a range of interpretations of 'spiritus', from a medium between bodily matter and the soul to a quasi-divine substance.[44] This recalls the notion, encountered in Charles de Bouelles, that a 'privative nothing' was mediator between absolute nothing and things. There is an overlap here with metaphysical questions: it was the same species of difficulty which faced theologians contemplating the origins of the world. The overlap was seen by Cornelius Götz, a German academic writing in 1608, to lie in the problematics of the seed, which appears to be the origin of life, but itself must have an origin.[45] Götz even drew a direct comparison with the ex nihilo problem, asking whether, if seed must be generated from 'not-seed', being must be generated from not-being. His answer was that both are generated from something - God (Dornavius, I, 732). Götz was treading a fine line between a heterodox emanationism and

the standard affirmation of God as first cause. Despite its controversial aspects, the seed theory held considerable sway until the middle of the seventeenth century (see CHRP, pp.571-3).

Even in medieval accounts of human generation this causal explanation could slip into an identification of semen with the quasi-divine spiritus: Bernard Silvester, in Cosmographia, suggests as much in his description of the 'shining seed' issuing from 'twin genii' (Wetherbee, p.126). The Plotinian theory of 'seminal reasons' encouraged the conflation. The adoption of that theory by Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) was to influence the more mystical version of things produced by Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) a century later (see CHRP, p.293). Between these two philosophers, whose concerns were chiefly with metaphysics and theology, there was the figure of Paracelsus, who was interested in medicine as well as natural philosophy. Rejecting Galenic teaching, Paracelsus gave an account of the hidden principles of life, 'semina'. His biological theory placed a neoplatonic emphasis on the spiritual, as Walter Pagel has observed.[46] This life-giving spiritual seed became a standard Hermetic explanation of the natural world; for example, Robert Fludd used the idea of spiritus in his Philosophicall Key (c.1619) to explain the apparent phenomenon of spontaneous generation.[47]

Whilst Jean Fernel and his successors followed Galenic teachings rather than a Paracelsian faith in experientia and magic, there were certainly common assumptions made by alchemists about the generative principle. Paracelsus had used the image of the yolk of an egg to explain pre-creation chaos, but the connection with alchemic theory was more than a metaphoric one. The egg's being, as Jonson's Subtle explains, 'a chicken in potentia', was more than just analogous to the alchemists' belief that all metals were potentially gold, it was evidence of the great alchemical

scheme which unified all the natural world.[48] The concerns of
this early experimental science were exactly those - of
generation and life-forces - which had been addressed by more
orthodox theoretical approaches typified by Jean Fernel. On a
more mundane level, the Philosophic Egg was the name given to
the sealed vessel in which hapless alchemists heated their
own materia prima.

The two strands of alchemy prevailing in the sixteenth
century were that which was concerned with transmutation and
that which was devoted to chemical medicine. In their more
popular manifestations, these had associations with
necromancy or quackery respectively, as evidenced in Jonson's
1610 play, or Donne's remark that 'oft Alchimists doe coyners
prove' (Donne, p.449). However, despite (or perhaps because
of) the extravagant Hermetic speculations involved in
alchemy, it was appropriated by Christian discourse. In 1621,
John Thornborough, Bishop of Gloucester, published his three-
part book, Nihil, Aliquid, Omnia, which demonstrated the
harmony between alchemical and Christian doctrine. The first
part identifies Nihil as 'the key to all the arts', the
starting point of a progression from nothing to something
thence to all, imitating the natural progress from darkness
to light, or death to life.[49] As well as being evidence of the
pervasive symbolic resonance which Nihil possessed in the
period, effectively Thornborough's book reduces the spiritual
fifth essence to the nothing out of which something is
generated.

Thornborough also used the egg metaphor, remarking 'Mali
corvi malum ovum' (From a bad raven, a bad egg).[50] Nothingness
is not here simply a mental abstraction like absence or lack;
as in the bio-medical theories about spiritus, it has
reality, as does the yolk of an egg. The alchemic egg image
was particularly apposite by virtue of its relation to
nothing, or zero. Rosalie Colie observed of the the egg's

iconography that it both 'bore the shape of zero', and could encapsulate, via its emptiness and closure, the ideas of all and nothing together, or the idea of all *from* nothing.[51] Lear's Fool used the image of an egg broken into two 'crowns' to suggest that the King's all had been reduced to nothing (King Lear, I.4.138). The circle itself was, of course, strongly symbolic, of perfection and harmony, as in the case of the gold rings. In alchemic imagery the circular Ouroborus figure participated in the same ambivalent symbolism. The image of the snake swallowing its own tail was on one level symbolic of unity - 'from the one to the one' - but, like that other alchemic symbol, the sol hieroglyph [⊙] it was open to other, negative readings.

The simplest iconographic representation of originary nothing was that adopted by Robert Fludd in his De macrocosmi principiis. Chapter V, 'De tenebris et privatione', is headed by a black-inked square, with the legend, 'et sic in inifinitum' [and so on to infinity] along each side (see Fig.II).[52] The Bouelles illustration had shown a black circle, within which a circular universe was created (see Fig.I). The imagery is contradictory, since not only is the circle of nothingness bounded just as the universe is, but its circularity also suggests perfection and wholeness. Fludd's choice of a square for nothingness, into which circles of light and then substances appear, makes the circle less ambivalently positive in its symbolism. In alchemical discourse, however, blackness [nigredo] was not merely symbolic, recalling the pre-creation tenebrae, but something chemically identifiable, like materia prima. Alchemy, then, provided two powerful images - in the egg and in blackness - of a nothing which was paradoxically full of mystery and fecundity.

Plate II

ROBERT FLUDD: BEFORE THE CREATION ['Et sic in infinitum']
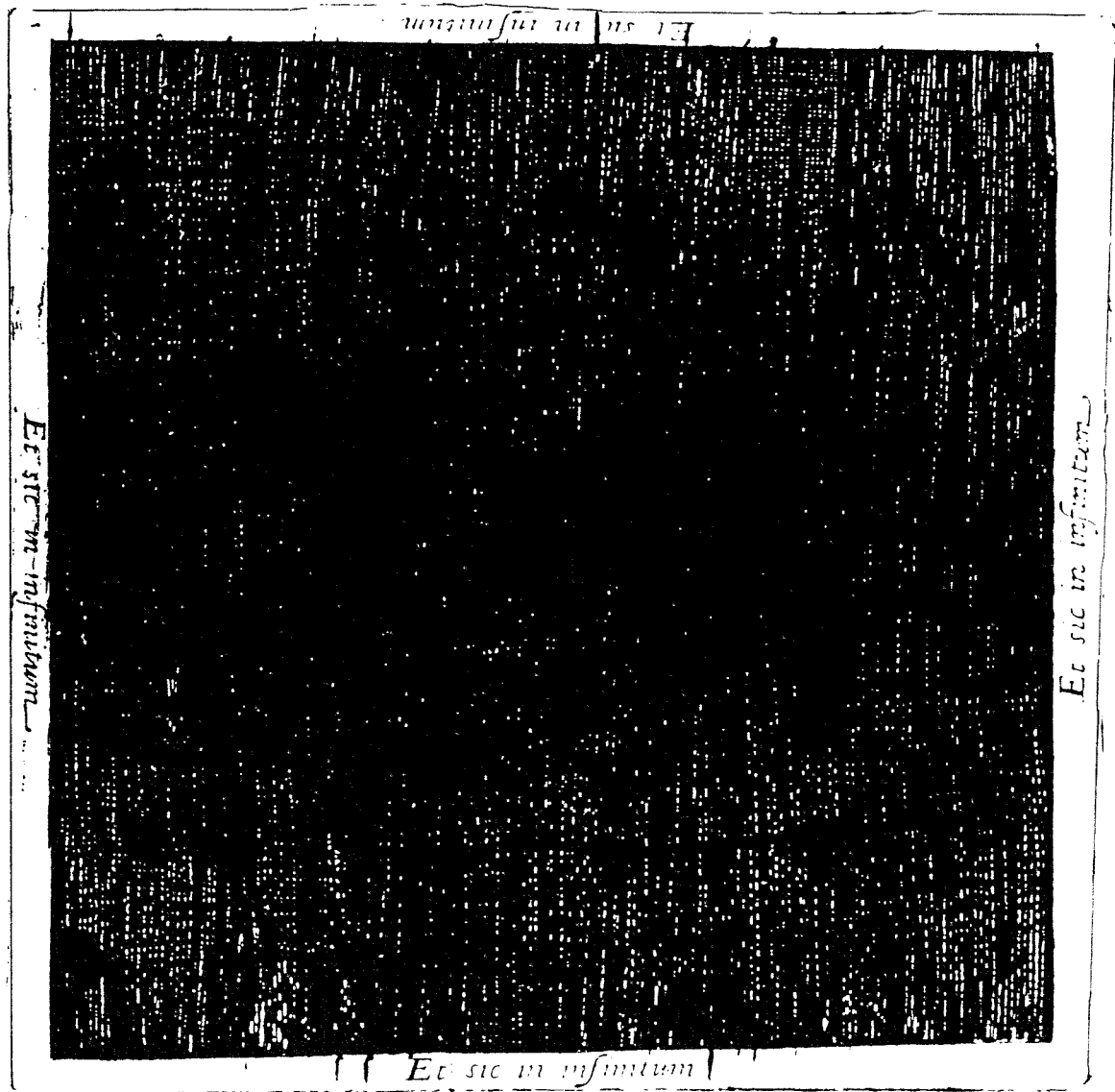
4. 'From airy nothing': artistic creation and Humanism

The motif of creation in Renaissance English poetry had certain political overtones as well as theological or scientific. Viewed as the conferring of harmonious form onto chaos, it was a powerful metaphor in an age notoriously prone to anxiety about order on the social and political level.[53] The theme was also interpreted on a psychological plane: conventionally, the reason brought order to the rebellious, irrational faculties of the soul. The microcosmic model has reason keeping control of the natural, elemental mix of humours in everyone - an attitude embodied in Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy. The approach of Burton's near contemporary, Francis Bacon, was an extension of this attitude to the world, treating the aim of philosophy as the bringing of order to the chaos of human experience.

Bacon's natural philosophy did not, however, conceive of humans as creative, their mission being to discover the laws of nature, and to avoid vain fancy.[54] Bacon repeatedly scorned the 'degenerate' sciences of magic, alchemy and astrology, which followed 'high and vaporous imaginations, instead of a laborious & sober inquiry of truth' (Bacon, III, 362). Burton registered the decidedly negative attributes of imagination, which he listed as one of his causes of melancholy: 'In melancholy men this faculty is most Powerfull and strong, and often hurts, producing many monstrous and prodigious things.'[55] Burton also cited Caesar Vannius's association of the imagination with 'the devil's illusions' - that is, strange visions. He proceeds,

The like effects almost are to be seen in such as are awake: how many chimeras, antics, golden mountains and castles in the air do they build unto themselves? I appeal to painters, mechanicians, mathematicians. (Burton, I, 251)

Such polemical attacks were perhaps a response specifically to that psychological redescription of the faculty seen

during the sixteenth century. The rôles of the faculty in relation to the intellect and the senses were being reinterpreted. The power to reproduce and combine already existing images was traditionally ascribed to imagination: on this point the 'New Organon' of Bacon was in agreement with the old scholastic psychology. But, as Katharine Park has observed, imaginatio had, by the sixteenth century, developed a much higher profile than in the medieval period, as a faculty mediating between the senses and reason.[56] Anxieties may have been exacerbated by a new tendency to think of imagination as a semi-autonomous faculty, rather than one entirely subordinate to the judgments of the intellect. As Bacon had put it in The Advancement of Learning (1605), 'Neither is the imagination simply and only a messenger; but is invested with or at leastwise usurpeth no small authority in itself, besides the duty of the message' (Bacon, III, 382). The metaphor of usurpation betrays a degree of antipathy for the faculty. Thus imagination could be considered suspect on the same grounds that Augustine had attacked the faculty of will - both being influenced strongly by the senses, they were both liable to lead the morally weak into sinfulness.

In medieval thought the imagination, being one of the intellective faculties, had not carried with it the traditionally negative associations of the will, i.e. corruptibility and errancy. In Langland's fourteenth-century dissection of the soul, Piers Plowman, the allegorical character of Imaginatif represents a power of the higher intellect guiding the will, encouraging devout patience and study, and attacking material wealth.[57] Coincidentally, he even berates Will (the poet himself) for his time-wasting verses:

> And thow medlest the with makynges   . and myghtest go
> sey thi sauter,
> And bid for hem that giveth the bred .[58]

It is remarkable, then, that for some prominent sixteenth-century English writers, the imagination seemed to be an altogether less positively-conceived mental faculty than it had been in the medieval period. In Piers Plowman, the fact that Will's visions and dreams are not physically experienced does not cast doubt on their value, but in The Faerie Queene unreal, fantastic products of the mind could lead to evil, in spite of the reliance of the poem upon the dream-vision tradition.[59] It is not difficult to see why Protestants should have seen dangers in glorifying human imagination: the excesses of Baroque and Rococo art and architecture, the exercises of Ignatius Loyola, or the extravagant language of scholasticism, were products of the imagination, and also symptoms of a decadent Catholicism.[60]

The medium of theatre seems to have provoked most anxiety about fancy in early modern England. This antagonism often arose from religious reformist zeal. We see it being legitimized in Dudley Fenner's Art of Logicke and Rhethoricke (1584) which replaced the sophisms of medieval logic with either Biblical phrases or outrageous propagandist syllogisms, such as this 'fallacian':

> Some player is a roge,
> Every vagabond is a player,
> Therefore, every player is a roge.[61]

This, coming from the author of 'Lawful and unlawful recreations', is evidence of the way Protestant anti-theatrical rhetoric was rooted in an anxious defence of the Rule of Reason. Fenner had demanded that all recreations be 'indifferent', unlike 'the taking up of the iesture, behaviour or speech of evil men: or the feining of them in plaies'.[62] Puritan attacks on theatre began in England in the second half of the sixteenth century and were refuelled during the Interregnum. The language of these condemnations of the theatre makes explicit the conflation of the poetic and the mendacious, as in this from 1580:

The notablest poet is become the best poet; he that can make
the most notorious lie, and disguise falsehood in such sort
that he may pass unperceived, is held the best writer ... Our
nature is led away with vanity, which the author perceiving
frames himself with novelties and strange trifles to content
the vain humours of his rude auditors, feigning countries
never heard of; monsters and prodigious creatures that are
not ...[63]

Such sentiments were expressed, however, by poets themselves,
both Catholic and Protestant. Robert Southwell, in Saint
Peter's Complaint, wrote of dreams,

> Creating strange chimaeras, faining frights;
> Of day-discourses giving fancy themes,
> To make dumb-shows with worlds of antic sights;
> Casting true griefs in fancy's forging mould,
> Brokenly telling tales rightly foretold.[64]

Imagination is a false forger, and it produces things which
are strange, to be feared as alien. In late sixteenth-century
English poetry, there are numerous manifestations of such
paranoic rationalism. Sir Edward Dyer's 'My mind to me a
kingdom is' or Robert Southwell's derivative 'My mind to me
an empire is' suggest a retreat into the stockade of the
soul, and especially the intellect, which is embattled not so
much by an errant will, the classic medieval trope, as by a
rampant imagination.[65] Joseph Hall concurred with his fellow
poets in one of his 'Poetical Satyrs':

> Great is the folly of a feeble brain,
> O'erruled by love, and tyrannous disdain:
> For love, however in the basest breast,
> It breeds high thoughts that feed the fancy best.[66]

In 'Nosce Teipsum' (1599), Sir John Davies combined orthodox
scholastic ideas about the soul, including the corruption of
the will, with a specific attack on the imagination's
tendency to reproduce images of non-entities. The mind which
'in strange things delites' is a 'sluttish house'; 'strange
chymeraes', 'monsters' and 'toyes' are symptoms of its
corruption.[67]

Attitudes to the powers of the imagination were also

affected by discussions of its apparent effects upon the physical well-being of people. The treatise, De Viribus Imaginationis (1608) by Thomas Fienus, set out the main issues, about whether a non-material intellectual faculty could have an effect upon a physical body. He concluded that the imagination can be a 'remote cause, per accidens', of physical illness, via changes in the humours and spirits.[68] Burton addressed the same questions with a range of citations, including Fienus, suggesting considerable early-modern interest in the topic (Burton, I, 250-255). Burton summed up, too, a contemporary paranoic mistrust of imagination on moral grounds:

Some ascribe all vices to a false and corrupting imagination, anger, revenge, lust, ambition, covetousness, which prefers falsehood before that which is right and good, deluding the soul with false shows and suppositions. (Burton, I, 251)

Both the medieval and Renaissance psychologies were strongly rationalist, but the rôle of imagination had switched from being an essential part of the ratiocinative process to posing a threat to that process.

It is in such contexts that we might read the apologetic nature of English works on poetry in the late sixteenth century. In the opening section of his Apologie for Poetrie, Sidney preferred the rhetorical term 'invention' to 'imagination'.[69] He attempted to associate imagination with the reasoning faculties by referring to the 'imaginative and iudging powre' (p.18), and distinguished his criterion of imitation from 'fantasy' which is vulnerable to the accusation of falsehood (p.20). The Apologie creates the image of a 'reasonable', morally responsible poetic imagination, aloof from negative associations such as 'the Comick, whom naughtie Play-makers and Stage-keepers have iustly made odious'(p.30). It is tempting to read the connotations of 'nought' into the epithet 'naughtie', but certainly it is remarkable how little mention is made in the

Apologie of imagination itself. Following a more traditional
psychology than that espoused by Shakespeare or Marston, the
poet's creative faculty is lauded as 'the highest poynt of
mans wit' - that is, his intellect (p.9). The Augustinian
slant of Sidney's apologia is also evident in his opposition
of that wit to man's 'infected will', which prevents him from
reaching pefection in his arts (p.9). Sidney established
early in the Apologie that the poet's work 'is not wholie
imaginative, as we are wont to say by them that build castles
in the ayre,' though the poet is, he concurs with the Greeks,
a 'maker' (p.7).

Sidney's focus was upon the effects of poetry rather
than its origins, an approach consistent with the humanist
approach to language in general. Poetry is functional -
imitative, but instructive. Like oratory, poetry is primarily
persuasive, therefore the onus is on the poet to observe
decorous standards. This removes attention from the listener,
or the reader; the threat of an active, re-active audience
recedes accordingly. It was in similar vein that Thomas
Heywood defended comic plays as the 'imitation of life, the
glasse of custome, and the image of truth'.[70] In Heywood's
Apologie for Actors, a tale is related reminiscent of
Hamlet's, about a woman confessing to her husband's murder
after seeing a similar scene enacted upon the stage.[71] The
function of theatre is reduced to proving the dubious
sententia, 'murder will out'.

The conflict of these attitudes was played out in the
course of William Strode's play, acted in 1636, The Floating
Island.[72] The piece had been written at the request of Bishop
Laud, to be played before Charles I at Oxford. The characters
are all allegorical figures, not unlike those of Langland's
poem, and a major protagonist is Fancie, a 'new instated
Queen'. In the early part of the play, when she flirts with
Malevolo, Sir Amorous and Audax after the king's deposition,

she fits the negative stereotype not only of women but of imagination. She is repeatedly associated with the passions and the senses, as when her supporters discuss the prospect of her rule:

> Aud. No better choice: for Fancie neerest is
>   To unyoak'd Passion.
> Amor. And 'tis most proper,
>   That since by Passion this revolt is made
>   From Reason unto Sense, the Rule should passe
>   From man to woman. (Strode, p.160)

Sir Amorous also suggests that Fancie has a tendency towards irresponsible inventiveness:

> Amor. She'll be a pleasant Mistresse
>   Rather than Governesse, leading each Passion
>   Whether himself inclines. Nay she'l invent
>   New Objects for their several content. (Ibid.)

But if Fancie appears to have only pejorative connotations in the opening acts, by the end of the play she is reconciled with King Prudentius. In Act III, Scene 3, the Queen makes a persuasive speech extolling the virtues of invention, exploration and discovery, displaying another, positive side of her persona. Her final lines suggest not so much fickle whimsy as ambitious enterprise: 'We spend ourselves too much upon the Taylour; \ I rather would new mold new fashion Nature' (Strode, p.186). In contrast to Bacon, Strode was suggesting that imagination was of central importance to scientific progress.

Some poets, then, offered an alternative perspective on the psyche, involving a much more optimistic view of the imagination. Sir Thomas Browne, both poet and experimental scientist (especially in the area of embryology) represented a moderate viewpoint, allowing imagination to combine with reason and the evidence of the senses, in order to give birth to truths:

... fly not only upon the wings of imagination; Joyn Sense unto Reason, and Experiment unto Speculation, and so give life unto Embryon truths, and Verities yet in their Chaos.[73]

Alchemy also provided both a metaphor for artistic creation
and a source of poetic images: the references to light and
darkness, to black and white, to spirits and eggs, produced a
language in which the line between literal and metaphoric was
especially indistinct. The same might be said of those
creation poems, which occupied a space between poetic myth
and scientific history.[74] Conversely, the metaphysical and
scientific conundrum of creation from nothing provided a set
of tropes for lyric poetry in other areas of concern,
especially that of love, and self-reflexively, the art of
poetry itself. The image of a technical, and yet magical,
skill was appealing to the poet, as also were alchemy's
images of transformation, corruption and purification.

The alchemy of love theme was used twice by John Donne,
in 'Loves Alchemy' and in 'A Nocturnall', where the poet
showed his awareness of the significance of 'nothing' to
alchemic discourse:

> For I am every dead thing,
> In whom love wrought new Alchimie.
> For his art did expresse
> A quintessence even from nothingnesse,
> From dull privations, and lean emptinesse. (Donne, p.90)

The cleverness, and the equivocation, of Donne's image lies
in the fact that 'express' might refer either to his own
poetry, or to the material process of alchemy.[75] We are
familiar with the metapoetic trope of distillation from
Shakespeare's Sonnets. No.114 uses the love-alchemy
connection, but distillation does not necessarily imply
mysterious or ethereal transactions. The image of 'flow'rs
distilled' in Sonnet No.5 (Shakespeare, p.849) was taken from
the mundane process of perfume-making. Donne's imagery
elevated human powers of productiveness to a quasi-divine
level. The theme of creation ex nihilo provided an attractive
metaphor for the more assertive poets who engaged in a
defence of imagination. In a sense, the theme was an

extension of microcosmic thinking. Just as, in Bernard
Silvester's account, human procreation imitated the primal
ordering of Hyla, so the Renaissance humanist poet could see
his work as creation ex nihilo.

Such an analogy emphasized the autonomy of the author in
a way which was always going to verge on hubris. Our post-
Romantic notion of an autonomously creative human imagination
could not have been constructed in the context of a dominant
theology which made God the ultimate cause of eveything. The
creatio ex nihilo doctrine symbolised man's relation to God
by its exclusivity: only the absolute power of God could
create something from nothing. Everyone, everything else was
subject to the natural laws, which dictated that things could
neither be created nor destroyed. These assumptions, and
medieval Christianity in general, perceived humankind as weak
and imperfect in faculties, impeded by an errant will and
misled by a fallible reason. And yet, there was also the
doctrine that man was made in God's image, and thereby might
claim to have at least a pale imitation of the divine powers.
The development of any theories of human creativity was
effectively suppressed in the Middle Ages by admonitions
about superbia, bolstered by a set of rigid conventions for
writers with regard to claims of authorship.[76] The growth of
Humanism was eventually to erode these conventions, and the
imperative of authorial self-negation which underpinned them.

Thomas Heywood's Troia Brittanica (1607) illustrated
this point well. The poem was an interesting variation on
those creation-from-nothing stories, being instead a history
of Britain and a history of the world, which uses Greek epic
as a continuous analogue to British history. Its opening
canto, however, is an account of the beginnings of the world,
incorporating both Biblical and Greek mythology. Having
denied that the universe was created from the elements, or
'vacuitie and atoms', and that it is eternal, Heywood insists

that 'this most glorious Universe, was made \ Of nothing, by
the great Creators will.'[77] But there is an ambiguity about
those words, which is explicated in Canto VIII where the poet
is credited with quasi-divine powers:

> Poets are makers; had great Homer pleased,
> Penelope had been a wanton, Helen chaste,
> The Spartan King the mutinous host appeased,
> And smooth Ulysses with the horn disgrac'd ...
> O Homer! 'twas in thee Troy to subdue,
> Thy pen, not Greece, the Trojans overthrew.
>
> (Heywood, p.171)

Heywood's rhetoric was curiously similar to the medieval
arguments that God, by his omnipotence, could decree
otherwise than he has; for example, as John Buridan remarked,
he could make fire cold.[78] In the context of the quasi-
historical story which has preceded it, this assertion seems
to be suggesting that poets make history. Heywood exemplified
the way Renaissance attitudes to authorship and originality
were tentatively challenging the medieval norm of authorial
self-erasure. One might make the same observation of all the
creation stories of this period: they imitated the divine
progress of creation itself.[79] Their ordering of the
historical material - both biblical and pagan - was analogous
to God's bestowing of shape and order onto the primal chaos.
The very form of their archetype, the Weeks of Du Bartas,
declares this explicitly, as the poem grows from day to day,
like its subject-matter, the world.

There seems to have been a further metapoetic
significance in these narratives: the poets were laying
emphasis upon nothing as origin, in a sense, of their own
works. The message of Lisle's New Year's Gift was that all
human achievements are 'effects proceeding from nothing'
(title-page). This complicates somewhat the simple view that
Renaissance Humanism fostered the rise of the author. It
brings the problems of authorship and authority together into
focus alongside that dialectic between origin and originality

which David Quint has identified as an expression of secular
individualism in the Renaissance.[80] The typical medieval
acknowledgment of God as first cause is replaced by a
reminder than our origin, and therefore the work's origin, is
nothing. The implications of this, even in Heywood's work,
are ambiguous. The historical account is massively dependent
upon classical literature, and yet it stresses that its own
origin is nothing. All the creation narratives appear to
proclaim the power and autonomy of the author, at the same
time as grounding his authority in nothing - a nicely
sceptical turn on humanist self-importance. Such artistic
self-examination was seen amongst French humanists of the
period. Du Bartas was a contemporary of the Pléiade poets,
but Ronsard disliked the encyclopedic knowledge exhibited in
the Semaines. As Robert Clements recounts, Ronsard thought
the poem too grand in its ambitions for vernacular verse for
though the Pléiade movement had at first embraced the
glorification of the author, it subsequently preached 'anti-
glory'.[81]

We should not be surprised, then, to see a sophisticated
reflexivity about English poets' imagery of creativity and
origination. Shakespeare's observations on glory were
similarly subtle, as in Henry VI, Part 1, when Joan of Arc
declared,

> Glory is like a circle in the water,
> Which never ceaseth to enlarge itself
> Till, by broad spreading, it disperse to naught.
> (1 Henry VI, I.3.112)

The notion of a hyperbolic, self-aggrandizing, and yet
ultimately self-defeating humanistic attitude is conveyed by
the expanding figure of nought. The artist's self-referring
use of the creation-from-nothing trope was most common in the
rapidly developing medium of the early modern English
theatre. The Prologue of No-body and Some-body (1606) had
boldly expressed this conceit:

> A subject, of no subject, we present,
> For no-body, is Nothing:
> Who of nothing can something make?
> It is a worke beyond the power of wit,
> And yet invention is ripe   (sig.A1^r)

Human invention, it seemed, might reach beyond powers of intellect, and the constraints of orderly reason. The most thorough exploitation of the theme came from Shakespeare. His views on artistic creation were expressed most famously in Hamlet's lines to the players, and perhaps most subtly in The Winter's Tale. Art's ability to hold a mirror up to nature is complicated there by the example of the gillyflower cited by Polixenes. The variagated hybrid symbolizes the conjunction of nature's 'art' and humankind's own artistic (or artful) nature. The opposition of art and nature is made untenable:

> This is an art
> Which does mend nature - change it rather - but
> The art itself is nature. (The Winter's Tale, IV.4.95.)

In other words, artistic creation is natural to humans, therefore in reflecting nature, art only reflects itself.

When attempting to deal with these reflexive issues of art and imagination, Shakespeare frequently resorted to the metaphor of 'nothing', sometimes in reference to the products of human art, and sometimes as their origin. Those latter instances concern me here, whilst the former will be examined in the next chapter. The 1954 essay by Paul Jorgensen, 'Much Ado About *Nothing*', recognised that there was something to be gained from comparing the occurences of 'nothing' from different plays by Shakespeare.[82] Jorgensen noted some of the theological and philosophical connotations of the word, but stopped short of exploring specific historical meanings. Instead, he focussed on Shakespeare's 'rhetorical chicanery' or his particular poetic or dramatic employment of 'nothing'. The essay's most important observation was on the link between 'nothing' and imagination. Jorgensen cited Mercutio's speech about dreams, to which Romeo replies, 'Thou talk'st of

nothing,' bringing this rejoinder:

> True, I talk of dreams:
> Which are the children of an idle brain,
> Begot of nothing but vain fantasy;
> Which is as thin of substance as the air.
> (Romeo & Juliet, I.4.97.)

Jorgensen's verdict about his collection of examples was, I
think, too cautious; he decided that 'one must not, of
course, try to build Shakespeare's concept of imaginative
creation upon the fanciful, and at best figurative,
references to Nothing in these passages' (Jorgensen, p.294).
Agreed, there is no simplistic equivalence with divine
creation being promoted; indeed, the act of creation is not
even the main concern. Instead, it was exactly those
pejorative implications of 'the fanciful and at best
figurative' which were put into question by Shakespeare's
usage.

There seems little doubt that Shakespeare considered
imagination to be an active - indeed, a pro-active - faculty.
He was conscious enough of the fact that the audience's
imagination was the target for his drama.[83] In Pericles,
Gower, acting as a chorus, directly appeals to the audience:
'In your imagination hold \ This stage the ship' (Pericles,
10.58) and again, 'Imagine Pericles arrived at Tyre' (15.1).
Gower also takes our imagination 'from bourn to bourn, region
to region' in scene 18, and appeals to our 'fancies' in the
final scene. In The Winter's Tale, Time makes the appeal,
'imagine me, gentle spectators' (IV.1.19); the opening of
Henry V has the Chorus asking permission to work on the
audience's 'imaginary forces'. The audience, then, was
complicit in a fabrication of reality which, though
politically dangerous, could also be potentially liberating.
The audience was being empowered to decide what is real, or
true, about the plays, to distinguish for itself between what
is something and what is nothing. There is always a challenge

to the social hierarchies involved in such a democratic attitude. It is these bold appeals to an actively participating audience which make Shakespeare's defence of the theatrical experience distinctive.[84]

The defence of the poet's/ playwright's imagination also had political implications, as critics have pointed out in relation to Midsummer Night's Dream. Duncan Salkeld concluded that Theseus was validating reason and berating irrational fancy with his words, 'The lunatic, the lover and the poet \ Are of imagination all compact' (V.1.7).[85] But it would not seem to be enough to say that this passage is just a plea for 'cool reason'; after that pair of lines, the subject is not reason or madness, but poetic creation:

> The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
> And as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them into shapes, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name.
> (Midsummer Night's Dream, V.1.12)

This account of the function of imagination from Theseus seems unremarkable from a twentieth-century perspective, but its presumption that the faculty can give shape to 'things unknown' or even 'airy nothing' is strikingly unorthodox in the context of that sixteenth-century psychology which has been described above. Shakespeare was implying much more than mediation between senses and intellect. Even if imagination was now thought of as semi-autonomous, its images still had to be explained in terms of 'efficient causes', as the example of Fienus's De viribus imaginationis illustrated.

The idea of the poet as maker was common enough in humanistic discourse since Dante, but the location of the creative power itself in the imagination was a much later phenomenon. As in the Prologue to No-body and Some-body, an implicit comparison with divine creation was being made by Theseus's account. The imaginative act, working on 'nothing',

creates things and then bestows names upon them. Such
rhetoric was presumably not considered sacriligeous, since,
as Jorgensen noted, 'analogy with the doctrine of divine
creation' was used not only consistently by Shakespeare, but
also in The Arte of English Poesie by Puttenham, and even by
the usually cautious Sidney.[86] The trope was also used in John
Marston's What You Will, which was published after Midsummer
Night's Dream, and only a year before the first appearance in
print of King Lear. We saw above how What You Will reveals
contradictions in humanistic rhetoric, particularly that of
the poet. But in a speech which echoes Theseus strongly,
Quadratus makes these claims for the imagination:

> By it we shape a new creation,
> Of things as yet unborne, by it wee feede
> Our ravenous memory, our intention feast
> Slid he thats not Phantasticall's a beast.
> (Marston, Plays, III, 250)

As in Shakespeare's plays, imagination was described as a
mysterious, ineffable, but productive force, and one which is
essential to our identity as humans.

Shakespeare's description of the imagination as nothing
was analogous to Eriugena's description of the divine
ineffability: both were mysterious, originary. Alchemy could
provide another occult parallel to the creative capacities of
the human mind. The nothing-something nexus - whether
theological or alchemical - seems to be refigured, in
Shakespeare's plays, as an account of the creative
imagination. This train of thought appears to have begun with
A Midsummer Night's Dream, and to have been developed in
several of Shakespeare's later plays. In King Lear, we have
seen above (p.110) human invention, and intervention, was
vital to the solution of social ills, and this was
represented metonymically by human art. The example of Edgar
showed this metadramatically: Gloucester's renewal of hope
comes because, he thinks, the gods have intervened to save

him: they attend to even the fall of a sparrow. But Edgar was really the agent; his filial love, and his poetic creation of the scenes from the top and then the bottom of the cliff, effected the renewal of hope. Lear's madness should be perceived from this perspective too: if Theseus's speech about 'the lunatic, the lover and the poet' was really lauding the imagination, then Lear's madness is akin to poetic inspiration. The optimism of Shakespeare's vision seems, therefore, to issue from a faith in human creativity - a belief that human nature is imaginatively creative (as well as destructive) and that self-creation is social.

Shakespeare's attitude also seems to be anti-deterministic, interventionist: as we saw in the example of King Lear, social change is possible because it is imaginable. The social aspect of the crisis in King Lear enables the play to progress beyond the solipsistic, existential crisis of Hamlet. John Danby's suggestion, in Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature, that an almost prophetic pessimism is embodied in Edmund, the 'New Man' of nascent capitalism, ignored the quiet triumph of Edgar in the play.[87] Edgar, and the Fool, transmute the theme of nothing, and all its associations of disorder, poverty, alienation, death, apocalypse, through a theatrical world which engaged the emotions and imaginations of the audience. By showing the positive potential of the human imagination, drama could succeed on the psychological and social level where alchemy had failed on the experimental, in generating something from nothing.

CHAPTER FOUR

Renaissance Negotiations of Nihil

Introduction

The tendency of certain medieval writers to treat nihil
as a name became all the more common in the Renaissance.
Theological and poetic associations of nihil with creation
and origins were not in themselves examining the nature of
the mystical notion 'nothingness', either in metaphysical
terms or in terms of the phenomenal world. This chapter
provides a brief account of some ontological approaches to
nothingness and cosmological approaches to void space in the
sixteenth century. The second and third sections argue that
there were related developments in contemporary attitudes to
the human mind and its products.

Renaissance accounts of creation from nothing tended
towards a basic hierarchical conceptualisation of the world,
beginning from nothingness, passing into a world of things,
and thence to plenitude, or the absolute divine Being. John
Thornborough's translation of alchemic discourse into a
reductive tripartite, or triune, structure - nihil, aliquid,
omnia - was typical.[1] It was this triad which framed much of
the poetic symbolism of nihil, but the hierarchizing tendency
was counter to other movements, both intellectual and social,
in the early modern period. In the social sphere, it might
appear that the decline of feudalism, the rise of capitalism
and the religious reformation were all democratizing
influences. Meanwhile, in intellectual circles, two trends
affecting the 'chain of being' - and nothing's place therein
- might be described. Firstly, the notion of infinity began
to impinge upon the perceived relation between man and the

cosmos. Secondly, an increasingly anthropocentric perspective upon that universe tended to focus attention on the nature of the substances or 'things' which comprised the world, rather than on its creator.

A by-product of that attention to things in relation to people was an increasing interest in the mental realm - to which some medieval grammarians as well as logicians had assigned nihil. Questions about the degree or nature of reality attributable to creations of the human mind would clearly inflect attitudes to poetry and drama too. The idea with which the last chapter closed - that the poet was creating something from nothing - was therefore itself in question. Another connection between the physical and mental realms in early modern thought was established via the notion of infinity. The poetic idea of the mind as an infinite space was in part metaphorical but, I will argue, also a natural consequence of the concept of infinity.

1. Disruptions of the hierarchy of Being

The status of nothing within the cosmic order was to be modified by certain ideas from humanist thought. One which, according to Alexandre Koyré, had a deep impact upon Renaissance culture, was the cosmological notion of infinite space. Charles de Bouelles's account of materia prima has already been mentioned, but the Libellus de Nichilo offered more than mere creation myth or negative theology. Drawing on various medieval as well as classical sources, it constructed, out of the premiss that the world was created out of nothing, a temporal and ontological plan of the created universe.[2] The language was not, however, the mystical poeticism of Eriugena; Bouelles was treating nihil as having

a place in that order of things which was the concern of scientia. Since nihil, taken as a name, had been previously a mystical, anti-rational notion, this attempt to bring it within the scope of mathematics was quite innovative.

Bouelles's project was schematic and literally all-encompassing. The text of the Libellus incorporates several diagramatic representations, using the logician's 'square of equipollence' in conjunction with various circular and linear plans (see Figs.3, 4). The squares and circles emphasized unity and totality, whilst the linear schemes pointed either to temporal sequence or to levels of existence. Less geometrical, and perhaps inspired by the neoplatonic Tree of Porphyry, are the arbor astructa, arbor exterminata and substantie arbor (see Figs.5, 7).[3] One diagram which appends nichil to the Porphyrian scheme is the substantialis ordo, a hierarchy of substance from God to 'Nichil', where 'nichil' denotes what we might call 'nothingness', or in scholastic terminology 'non-being' (See Fig.4). It is this hierarchical approach which underlies the mathematical structures and might seem to place the book in a medieval tradition, that of the 'Great Chain of Being'.

Arthur Lovejoy's grand view of medieval thought requires, I have suggested above (p.53), some qualification. It seems to have been a retrospective early-modern view of the old order; Lovejoy's only examples of a clear expression of this total cosmic view were from the eighteenth century - from Pope and Thomson.[4] Those citations did, however, illustrate the persistent poetic attraction of a cosmic picture which held the absolute being of God at one end, and 'nothing' at the other. Lovejoy quoted from Pope's Essay on Man:

> Vast chain of being! which from God began,
> Natures ethereal, human, angel, man,
> Beast, bird, fish, insect, what no eye can see,
> No glass can reach; from infinite to thee,
> From thee to nothing. (Lovejoy, p.60)

Plate III   BOUELLES: STRUCTURES OF BEING AND NON-BEING
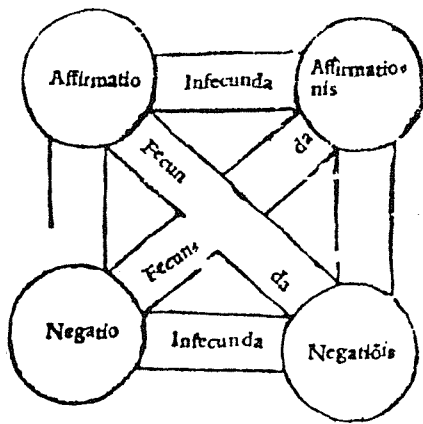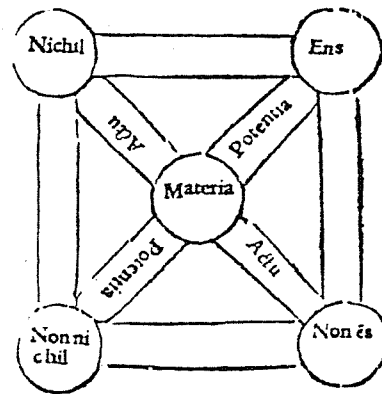

Fig.3 Square of equipollence
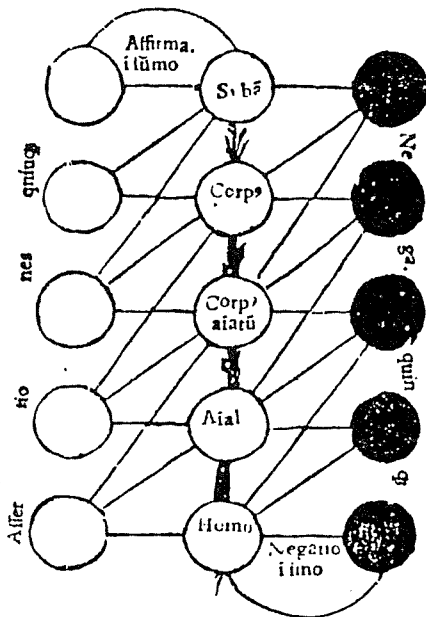

Fig.4 'Materia est entis et nihili medium'
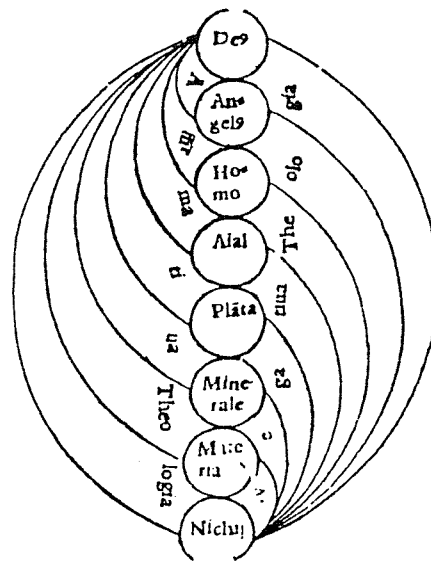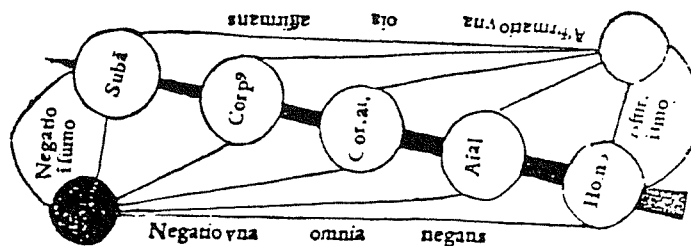

Fig.5 Tree of substance

Fig.6 Order of substances

Tree of addition⇓

Fig.7

Tree of extermination⇑

and from Thomson's The Seasons:

> Has any seen
> The mighty chain of being, lessening down
> From infinite perfection to the brink
> Of dreary nothing, desolate abyss!
> From which astonished thought, recoiling, turns? (p.61)

The answer to Thomson's question, surely, had to be 'no', in
spite of Lovejoy's claim that this conception of the universe
was intimately related to the history of classificatory
science. The new, empirical science had little to do with the
ladder from heaven to earth, which remained in the ethereal
realm. A simpler genealogy for the taxonomic propensities of
the seventeenth-century natural scientists is traceable
directly to Aristotle's Physics and De generatione animalium.
And the idea that the social scale was co-extensive with
Jacob's Ladder is equally problematic. In considering the
political implications of the chain of being, E.R.Talbert
accepted the general picture offered by Lovejoy, but
cautioned that 'Montaigne and others might question such a
simplified scale'.[5] Hierarchy was more of an ideal than a
description of actuality, and actuality was increasingly the
concern of philosophers. Lovejoy's assertion that the Great
Chain of Being was not 'merely the occasion for poetic
rhapsodies' (p.61) would seem to be exactly wrong, if that
chain is understood as a continuum including both spiritual
and material realms. Bouelles, meanwhile, was working at the
most abstract, mathematical/ metaphysical level when
describing his hierarchical universe: he did not descend to
the level of dealing with mere particulars.

In spite of its pseudo-rationalist methodology,
Bouelles's 'Handbook about Nothing' did owe much to negative
theology. There are frequent citations of St Denys,
particularly in the final three chapters, which involve
comparisons between God and Nichil. Bouelles claimed, for
example, that Nichil, like God whose being is infinite in act

and dimension, is similarly infinite in its non-being.[6] The
final chapter especially uses the language of negative
theology, dealing with inferences of a positive and a
negative kind which can be made of God and of Nichil.[7] The
close association - almost to the extent of them being
interchangeable - of these two ontological poles, seems to
undermine the hierarchical implications of the schemata. In
the language of negative theology, the identity of God and
nothing is a mystical truth, and therefore beyond rational
explanation - ineffable, as Eriugena had said. Bouelles's
epistemology, therefore, seems deeply contradictory: either
we can understand nihil mathematically or mystically, but
surely not both at once.

The way Bouelles preserves the affinity of absolute
being and absolute nothing, even within his quasi-scientific
discourse, suggests another influence, from the ideas about
infinity current at the end of the fifteenth century. As
Alexandre Koyré has observed, the increasing influence of the
idea of an infinite universe was to subvert medieval
hierarchical structures even within negative theology.
Nicholas of Cusa [1401-1464], one of the strongest influences
on Bouelles, was the earliest, by Koyré's account, to
articulate this view:

The absolute, infinite maximum does not any more than the
absolute, infinite minimum, belong to the series of the great
and the small. They are outside it, and therefore, as
Nicholas of Cusa boldly concludes, they coincide.[8]

Charles Lohr has also remarked upon the fundamental impact of
this change in perception of the world:

From the absolute *maximum* everything else is infinitely far
removed. This ... implied the rejection of the hierarchical
conception of reality which medieval thinkers had borrowed
from Platonic sources to support their view of society. If
the distance between God and created things is infinite, then
each individual thing in the world will be at an infinite
distance from him and no creature, as such, more perfect than
another.[9]

The English verses of Pope and Thomson showed that in this new way of viewing the universe, infinity could be posited at either end of the metaphysical chain of being. The created world is suspended between these infinite extremes, as though it remains surrounded by the nothingness which had received it at the close of the 'first age': 'as a result everything is in nothing, fullness in emptiness, being in non-being, each in its place, as it were' (Magnard, p.84). As Pierre Magnard expressed it, 'Le néant c'est la suffisance du monde, l'ombre que laisse le retrait de Dieu quand il se cache' (p.4). Nothingness is the terminus a quo of all reality (p.26). If this makes Bouelles sound like a precursor of Sartre, the omnipresence of God is re-asserted in the final two chapters: neither vacuums, nor emptiness, nor nothingness, subsists outside God's own infinity.[10]

That remark reminds us of the importance of the concept of vacuum, or void space, in the scheme of things in the sixteenth century. The idea that nature abhors a vacuum, though it was a doctrine derived from ancient Greek philosophy, took on a special significance in the light of Augustinian theology. The void was identified with evil and darkness. As Edward Grant has demonstrated by his thorough examination of early modern theories of cosmic voids, this was a particularly controversial area for sixteenth-century philosophers and theologians.[11] The Scottish philosopher John Major (1467/9-1550) posited an infinite imaginary space beyond the heavens in which God existed. Major had also asked the questions whether God could create a vacuum, and if so, whether He would be in that place where it existed. Moreover, if God could create a vacuum, would that vacuum be something or nothing? Circularity ensues from the fact that if a vacuum is considered to be a privation (of matter in space) then it cannot be a creation of God. The conventional, Augustinian position was exemplified by Thomas Erastus (1523-1583), who

thought it little short of blasphemous to posit an absolute
vacuum, which amounted to non-being, in the created world.[12]

Later in the century, the problem, and the same
terminology about 'imaginary space', was taken up by Jesuit
theologians. Pedro da Fonseca (1528-1599) argued against the
idea of space as three-dimensional or as a quantity; space,
he said, is 'external', and not a true being. Furthermore,
space must be infinite, because it can contain all bodies of
any size that God might produce, even to infinity. In a move
which was to be influential on late sixteenth-century Jesuit
thinking, he called [void] spaces 'pure negations', as
oppposed to 'privations' which would need a subject (i.e., a
body) of which they were a privation (E.Grant, p.159). In the
theological history of 'nothing', this validation of an idea
of pure negativity suggests a radical shift away from the
Augustinian position on nihil. The Coimbra Jesuits slightly
modified Fonseca's account of space, calling it a special
negation which had the capacity to receive bodies. Grant has
explained the theological imperative which drove them to
these conclusions:

> To avoid the path Spinoza would take [i.e., making God a
> corporeal being] scholastics who identified imaginary
> infinite space with God's immensity were compelled to grope
> for some means of describing a nondimensional space that, by
> its very association with God, had to be conceived as an
> existent something ... they were eventually led to describe
> it as some kind of negation.   (E.Grant, p.164)

The influence of these esoteric theories upon the popular
theme of nothing in vernacular literature was probably
marginal. Even so, Edward Daunce's poem contained a
digression about vacuum being 'the natural element, or
residence, of nothing', asking whether since nature abhors a
vacuum, it must also abhor nothing. Daunce's rather elusive
reply to this was that nothing is enemy only to bad things in
nature.[13] If the idea of vacuum was problematic, its doubtful

existence made it less controversial than materia, which
palpably did exist in some sense, and yet, by definition, did
not have full 'being'. According to Bouelles's system, matter
is incorporated into the hierarchy: as the intermediate stage
between nothing and the creation of sensible things, it takes
its place on the second rung of an ontological ladder (see
Fig.4). Whilst this construction of the cosmos involves its
share of binary oppositions, there is a superimposed
Aristotelian framework which bridges those oppositions by
infinite gradation. Chaos, then, becomes a necessary
ontological link between abhorrent nothingness and the
created world of things.

An important theological consequence of the way chaos
and nothingness were thereby associated is seen in
Microcosmos (1603) by John Davies of Hereford. The
association of nothing with evil is transferred, it seems, to
its near relation, matter:

> ... nought can more against the soul rebel
> Then matter, which the soule doth hate as Hell.
> (Microcosmos, p.225)

The connotations of 'matter' are extended by Davies to
include the created, material body, in contrast to the
spiritual soul. He was expanding upon a conventional,
Augustinian theme which set the spirit against the flesh. The
immortality of the soul, which Davies was keen to emphasize,
confers on it a higher level of reality than that of
corruptible matter. It is in this sense that the material
body will return to its origins at death, whilst for the soul
it is not true 'that shee must fly \ (Sith shee was made of
nought) to nought agen' (p.227). Davies was reformulating the
'dust to dust' theme so as to give it a cosmic rather than
simply terrestrial or personal significance. Moreover, it
placed materiality in a continual conflict with the
immaterial celestial order. These ideas were less likely to
be derived from Augustine than from the early sixteenth-

century Italian neoplatonists, for whom the higher reality of spiritus was set against the transient corporeal world.[14]

In the early seventeenth century, of course, there were radical shifts in perspective taking place with regard to cosmology, and the effect of these on the belief in an ontological scale of being cannot be ignored. As Fernand Hallyn has observed, the moves towards valuing 'symmetry' and centrality over that which is uppermost produced a shift 'from the mid-point to the centre'.[15] The old, geocentric universe had made ambiguous the value of centrality, because not only was the centre of the earth/ universe the lowest, and the region of hell, but also there were several centres, or mid-points, along the vertical axis between regions. The 'solar myth' which grew during the sixteenth century, and which alchemy drew upon, was itself, therefore, disrupting the hierarchical view of the world. Heliocentrism made the earth a mid-point, and man too; as Descartes was to put it, 'Je suis comme un milieu entre Dieu et le néant, c'est a dire placé de telle sorte entre le souverain être et le non être.'[16]

As the example of Descartes' philosophy would demonstrate, anthropocentrism fostered an interest in epistemology. The changes could already be seen in the way metaphysical discourse dealt with the notion of nothing in the late sixteenth century. By the end of that century, the rise of scepticism, the religious Reformation, and widespread academic reforms, all contributed to a questioning of the unanimity which had previously been assumed of academic disciplines. It was perhaps these intellectual upheavals which brought the nihil question to the fore in Northern European universities, since the nature of being itself was receiving renewed attention. One feature of the separation of disciplines in the sixteenth century was the loss by Metaphysics of its status as the study of being in general

(ens qua ens). As Charles Lohr has explained, this was
replaced by a tripartite division of being into ens increatum
(God), ens creatum materiale (the world) and ens creatum
immateriale (the soul and the spiritual): 'Philosophy thus
became metaphysics, while the subject-matter which had
belonged to Aristotelian physics was free to become natural
science.'[17] This paved the way for the development of
alternative and competing accounts of what constituted a
thing and, therefore, what was nothing.

2. 'Horrible imaginings': fears, fictions, and the thought of nothing

One aspect of the new ontological order which impinged
on the question of nothing was that a specific kind of being
was attributed to things mental, or imaginary. Amongst the
numerous textbooks and treatises which attempted to order the
subject-matter of Metaphysics during the Counter-Reformation,
the first to assign a specific metaphysical category to the
imaginary world was the Disputationes Metaphysicae (1597) of
Francisco Suarez.[18] The final chapter of that work addresses
this ontological category under the heading of 'ens rationis'
[being of reason].[19] As Earline Ashworth has remarked,
sixteenth-century Thomists held that entia rationis were the
specific concern of Logic.[20] This was because of a remark in
Aquinas's commentaries on Book 4 of Aristotle's Physics.[21] The
issue arises from the Angelic Doctor's desire to distinguish
between ens rationis and ens naturae, the subject-matter of
Logic and Physics respectively.[22] Ens rationis, as the term

was used there, is the realm of intentiones (the relevance of 'second intentions' to the logical debate about nihil has been described above, p.68). In a preceding section of the commentary, Thomas had established that negation and privation are 'tantum in ratione'.[23] It was from these few remarks that ens rationis grew into a distinct category of being, with privations and negations amongst its occupants.[24] Suarez was concerned with establishing the causes of these beings; having ruled out the higher intellect, the senses and appetitus, he concluded that they derive from imaginatio (Suarez, p.1023).

One could interpret the popularity of this terminology in the seventeenth century as part of a rationalist reaction against empiricism; Descartes himself was influenced by the psychology of Suarez.[25] However, the Renaissance demonisation of imagination described in Chapter 3 had its own consequences for ontology. At the same time as attacks on the faculty, there was a corresponding uneasiness about its products. Even in medieval psychology, when the imagination was considered only to 'picture' thoughts, especially memories, there was a philosophical difficulty. An aspect of this faculty which distinguished it from memory was that it sometimes pictured things which do not, never did, and even never could exist. Which returns us to the logical problems of fictional or empty names, of non-ens and nihil. This was the potentially dangerous realm, as Plato's Republic would have it, of poetic fiction.[26] But the realm of chimeras, and goat-stags, and winged horses, was also that of Homeric myth, whose popularity had not greatly suffered as a result of Plato's objections. Though humanist reformers had ridiculed scholastic ponderings about chimeras, they were simultaneously defending the literature which had produced those figments of the imagination.

Interrogation of the category of the imagined in the

areas of science and theology was coeval with, and perhaps related to, that Puritanical propaganda against the moral dangers of 'fancy' seen in England from the late sixteenth century to the Interregnum. Philosophically, the relationship is not at all mysterious. With regard to questions of what is and what is not, the imaginary becomes easily associated with the unreal, and thereby with the false. This conflation has a long history, originating in Greek philosophy: it is observable in Plato's The Sophist, where the discussion of false-seeming runs smoothly on to the problem of being and not-being, as inherited from Parmenides.[27] As R.E.Allen has observed, this elision is a semantic one: there was no distinction between what would now be called the existential and the 'verdictive' is, because in Greek 'to say what is true is to say what is, and to say what is false is to say what is not.'[28] Plato stressed the dangers of poetry for exactly these reasons, expressing his distrust of superficial resemblance in artistic representation. As he put it, art is at third remove from reality, and therefore at third remove from truth.[29] The consequences of this for later Latin discussions of being and not-being are seen, for example, in Augustine's discussion of nihil in De magistro, which, as Marcia Colish has highlighted, was at once concerned with the existence of things, and part of a larger question of truth and falsehood.[30] In this context, it would seem that Suarez, by establishing the ontological category ens rationis, was attempting to recuperate the whole discredited realm of the imaginary.

This feature of counter-reformationist thought contrasts with the largely Protestant attitudes of English Renaissance literature, where the nexus of imaginary and false was figured as the theme of false appearances. John Davies of Hereford claimed, rather vaguely, that 'the Accademicks' advised mistrust of the imagination 'sith Things seeme, Not

as they bee,' relating this to the fallibility of the senses
(Grosart, h, p.9). This commonplace was re-iterated later in
the century by Descartes and by Locke in their attempts to
ascertain the scope of human knowledge.

As we saw in the previous chapter, poets often addressed
the moral and philosophical validity of their own works. John
Donne displayed, in his sermons, an intolerant, or at least
suspicious, attitude to the world of the imagination:

The mind implies consideration, deliberation, conclusion upon
premisses; and wee never come to that ... they onely imagine,
fancy a vain thing, which is but a waking dreame, for the
fancy is the seat, the scene, the theatre of dreames.[31]

'Vain' here implies 'empty'; Donne was trying to separate the
imagined not only from the real but also from the
intellectual. The association with dreams, moreover, implies
that the imagination is some involuntary function, beyond
control of waking reason. How this attitude squares with his
own fanciful yet closely reasoned poetry is difficult to see.
Donne's poems often suggest a highly ambiguous relation
between words and things - both real and imagined. In, for
example, 'Goe, and catch a falling star' (Donne, p.50), the
distinctions between truth and falsehood, fantasy and
reality, are all conflated.

Within the realm of imagined things, negative ideas are
prominent in Donne's poetry, as in 'A Nocturnall upon St
Lucies Day'. Were his 'things which are not' products of the
imagination, or of reasoned deliberation? 'A Nocturnall'
turns scholastic distinctions into metaphors for grief by
citing 'dull privations':

> If I an ordinary nothing were
> As shadow, a light, and body must be here.
> But I am none. (Donne, pp.91-2)

The darkness which pervades the poem provides theological
resonances - tenebrae was an analogue of nihil and malum. As
a standard example of a privation, darkness was cited in

metaphysical and logical discourse too. But the nothingness described by Donne is more like the 'pure' negativity of Fonseca and Vasquez (see E.Grant, p.260). That nothingness, of course, was identified by late scholastic thought as 'imaginary' - a fact which demonstrates the contradictions in the poet's stance against fancy. His nothing is figured as an impossible shadow, lacking not only light but also any body to create it, without any point of reference except its own negativity. If on the one hand Donne intellectualizes the metaphor, on the other, he was imitating a mystical style of discourse about nothingness. In 'A Nocturnall', as in 'Negative Love', negation is used to suggest extremity of emotion. The reality of emotional experience is under examination, and the nearest analogue the poet can find is the ineffability of the numinous. John Davies of Hereford effectively refuted such metaphysical conceits with his own poem about negative love: 'I cannot love no love, nor love that love \ That's like Privation, drawing near to nought' (Grosart, h, p.15). Oscillating between the insubstantiality of love and its irresistible power, the poet is unable to resolve the question of its reality.

In John Marston's What You Will, a nexus of love, imagination and nothingness was developed, but if it took its cue from Midsummer Night's Dream, there were also echoes of the philosophical arguments about nihil. The play opens with the topic of the 'phantasticall', and sustains it as a structuring theme. As though confirming Theseus's claim that the poet, the madman and the lover are 'of imagination all compact', a natural continuum is assumed between the madness of the lover Iacomo and the wit of a poet. Actors too are susceptible to the madness of fantasy: 'hee's madde most palpable, \ He speakes like a player, hah! poeticall.' (Marston, p.238). Iacomo's suspect poeticism is expressed by Quadrato in terms familiar from the medieval 'empty names'

discussions:

> He calls for strange Chymeras, fictions
> That have no being since the curse of death
> Was throwne on man. (p.238)

Fictions are non-entities, and as such are associated with man's fallen state of sin.[32] Quadratus goes on to call Iacomo's love, like all wordly things, 'nothing', yet in the second act Quadratus defends that same 'phantasticknesse', explicitly alluding to the new psychology:

> That which the natural Sophysters tearme
> Phantusia incomplexa, is a function
> Even of the bright immortal part of man.
> It is the common passe, the sacred dore,
> Unto the prive chamber of the soule:
> That bar'd: nought passeth past the baser Court
> Of outward scence: by it th'inamorate
> Most lively thinkes he sees the absent beauties
> Of his lov'd mistres. (p.250)

The positive picturing of the 'real' is set, therefore, against the madness of imagined non-entities. The nothing theme develops via the learned lover Lampatha, who signals his connection with intellectual discourse by his word-play, 'I know, I know naught, but I naught do know' (p.258).[33] Later, Lampatha even suggests that lovers themselves, by virtue of their fantastical tendencies, are nothing. In the context of the numerous references to 'nothing', a particular significance attaches to what would otherwise be a conventional comic classroom scene. Grammar is being taught, and the definition of a noun given by Battus - 'the name of a thing that may be seene felt heard or understood' (p.253) - begs all those questions about language and logic which arose from the case of 'nothing'. The scene highlights the fact that at the root of the ontological problem of 'fictions that have no being' lay a linguistic one of names and definitions.

Shakespeare was less academic in his vocabulary than Donne or Marston, but his imagery of 'nothing' also addresses the question of the reality of fiction. William Elton saw an

example of the theme in the way 'something' and 'nothing' are 'ironically substitutable' in King Lear. He claimed that this pairing is 'analogous to Shakespeare's "shadow" and "substance" and to the appearance-versus-reality motif which fills his dramas.'[34] Yet the moral certainty which that theme expressed was often subverted in Shakespeare's drama. In Hamlet, there is an overlap between the question 'To be or not to be' and the opposition of truth and falsehood, but there is no moral or ontological certainty. 'Seems, madam? Nay, it is. I know not seems,' the Prince declares, but soon pretence and seeming are his modus operandi, and his imaginings, especially in his mother's chamber, take on an almost sensual reality. Similarly, in the staging of 'The Mousetrap', it is 'false fire' which frightens Claudius, exposing the truth, and in its aftermath the Ghost is said by Gertrude to be a 'bodiless creation ecstasy \ Is very cunning in.' That Platonic assuredness of the true and the real, in absolute distinction from the apparent or the represented, is nowhere to be found on Shakespeare's stage.

In Hamlet, Shakespeare used the ghost, and its nothingness, to plant seeds of doubt with regard to two kinds of being - the spiritual and the imaginary. In the final appearance of Old Hamlet, it is unclear which category the ghost falls into. The exchange between the Queen and her son nicely highlights the nothing/ imagination dialectic:

> Hamlet - Do you see nothing there?
> Gertrude - Nothing at all, yet all that is I see.
> Hamlet - Nor did you nothing hear?
> Gertrude - No, nothing but ourselves. (Hamlet, III.4.123)

Jacques Derrida has made some valuable remarks regarding the visions seen by Hamlet. In his figuring of Marxism as Old Hamlet's ghost, Derrida unearthed the deep structure of the relationship between Hamlet and the ghost - it allegorizes our relationship with the notion of 'the spirit of man'.[35] The ghost is not quite spirit, because it is partly corporeal,

'cette *chose* qu'on appelle l'esprit' (Derrida, p.25)
Referring to Valéry, Derrida remarked about this 'spirit'
that it is difficult to name, it is not properly known, or
even known if it exists. Derrida proceeded to quote the
exchange of Marcellus and Barnardo,

> Marcellus: What, has this thing appear'd againe tonight?
> Barnardo: I have seene nothing.

with the gloss, 'La chose est encore invisible, elle *n*'est
rien de visible' (p.26) Derrida's characteristically oracular
description of the ghost/ thing might prove substitutable
with the Shakespearian 'nothing', at least in the context of
this chapter's concerns, but perhaps beyond:

Voici - ou voilà, là bas, une chose innommable ou presque:
quelquechose, entre quelquchose et quelqu'un, quiconque ou
quelconque, quelquechose, cette chose-ci, "this thing", cette
chose pourtant et non une autre, cette chose qui nous regarde
vient à défier la sémantique autant que l'ontologie, la
psychanalyse autant que la philosophie. (p.26)

Derrida's use of the term 'non-objet' in the same passage
recalled medieval logical discourse in its attempts to define
the imaginary. Moreover, the discussion exemplifies how the
big problem, for psychology as well as for ontology, is
always the identification of the 'thing'.

In King Lear, I suggested above (p.36), 'thingness' was
material in a marxist sense; in Hamlet a less anachronistic
'materialism' is expressed. An uncertainty about the status
of mortal 'things' nags at Hamlet throughout the play: man is
'no other thing to me than a foul congregation of vapours'
(II.2.633); 'the king is a thing ... a thing of nothing'
(IV.2.26).[36] But it is the basic problem of what is,
epitomised by the 'To be or not to be' soliloquy, which
underlies his particular anxieties. 'There are more things in
heaven and earth ... Than are dreamt of in our philosophy,'
Hamlet concludes after his first encounter with the ghost
(I.5.168). 'Our philosophy', in this context is presumably
that increasingly empirical Natural Philosophy, which the

Wittenberg students might have encountered; therefore the ghost of his father might embody [disembody?] the old, 'spiritual' order.[37] If this were so, it would be a rare reference by Shakespeare to contemporary academic debates, but the question of reality arose frequently within his plays - whether the play is truly the thing.

Most distinctive about Shakespeare's usage is his employment of the 'nothing' metaphor in relation to the imagined stage world. The playwright's explicit allusions to the active, creative capacities of imagination carry with them implicit ontological assumptions. Whether conceived of as a philosophical defence of imagination and the imagined, or as a response to anti-theatre propaganda, there is a coherence about these attitudes which suggests Shakespeare's self-conscious examination of his theatrical world. We are always aware in Shakespeare's plays of the tension between the constructed world of the stage, and the natural, phenomenal world. The reversible world/ stage metaphor, becomes a familiar Shakespearian trope - of the world as a stage, or life as a play. The nothing/ something dichotomy introduces an interesting dimension to the drama/ life metaphor, adding a further metadramatic level - the inner world of the mind. These ideas develop a narrative familiar from the semantic problems with nihil: if drama is imaginary can it actually be anything? Surely a play is evidently a thing, with real participants and real effects. Hamlet certainly thought so, and was vindicated by the success of The Mousetrap. If this nothing is real only in the mind, how can its effect be felt by the body, in emotional and other responses?

Some of these issues were addressed obliquely in the Queen's conversation with Bushy in Richard II.[38] This fascinating exchange is of no great plot significance, inserted into the story at the point when Richard is leaving

for Ireland. It is a meditation on the nature of grief and absence: two 'privations', like Donne's 'things that are not', or two Sartrian 'négatités'.[39] Like Macbeth, with his 'horrible imaginings', the Queen is made uneasy not by anything substantial, but by creations of her mind:

> Some unborn sorrow, ripe in fortune's womb,
> Is coming towards me; and my inward soul
> At nothing trembles. With something it grieves
> More than with parting from my lord the King.
> (Richard II, II.2.10)

The opposition of something and nothing is taken up by Bushy in language similar to Theseus's; grief distorts the shapes in the mind, giving apparent reality to what is in fact 'naught but shadows \ Of what it is not' (II.2.23). As in Donne's poetry, the shadow image recalls the medieval homology of nihil and tenebrae. Grief is a source of error in the imagination, leading her to see more than the departure of her husband, 'with false sorrow's eye \ Which for things true weeps things imaginary' (II.2.26). On one level, this is posing as masculine logic versus feminine emotion, but at another it expresses a distrust of the imagination per se. Bushy mimics the arguments, even the language, of Puritan detractors of imagination. The Queen is not satisfied with this verdict; again her 'inward soul' persuades her that what Bushy calls 'naught' is very real:

> I cannot but be sad: so heavy-sad
> As thought - on thinking on no thought I think -
> Makes me with heavy nothing faint and shrink. (II.2.30)

How, in other words, can nothing be a cause of something - her emotional reaction? And, how could she have been thinking of nothing, of no-thought?

The word-play continues in the next exchange, when to Bushy's ''tis nothing but conceit' the Queen replies, ''Tis nothing less' (II.2.34), her point being that 'conceit' is itself real. What follows inverts the standard 'something from nothing' paradox, throwing into confusion the something/

nothing opposition with regard to the workings of the mind:

> For nothing hath begot my something grief -
> Or something hath the nothing that I grieve -
> 'Tis in reversion that I do possess -
> But what it is that is not yet known what,
> I cannot name; 'tis nameless woe, I wot. (II.2.36)

That the mind can contain things unknown echoes in the Theseus speech. It is note-worthy that Richard II followed shortly after A Midsummer Night's Dream, delving further, it seems, into some of the implications of the earlier play.[40]

Those final lines of the scene had resonances beyond the psychological, however: there was the reference to nothing begetting something, with its implication of either a theological or alchemic nature, and also the conclusion that this nothing cannot be named. The namelessness of her fears raises the issue which so much scholastic philosophy debated, the relation between names and things. Even if her imaginings are nothing, they must have been caused by something, but this cannot be named, because to name something is to know it. The reference to the origins and cause of her grief as nothing brings us back, too, to the metapoetic creation-from-nothing trope. As in Theseus's bodying forth of things unknown, the Queen is suggesting that the mind has access to a pre-verbal level of experience. The speeches of Theseus and the Queen argue that this ineffable realm is a source both of imaginative creation and of emotion. Drama being necessarily emotive as well as imaginative, the connection of imagination with emotion was important to the playwright.

From the evidence of some of his later plays, Shakespeare was certainly not offering a naive defence of the world of the imagination. The Winter's Tale and Othello are about the fallibility as well as the power of the imagination.[41] In both plays the protagonist creates an entirely imaginary situation - the infidelity of his wife. Othello's imagination enables him to think opposites at once,

flouting the dictates of logic:

> I think my wife be honest, and think she is not,
> I think that thou art just, and think thou art not.
>   (Othello, III.3.390.

Leontes is a more extreme example because there is no Iago to put images in his head; his own mind alone produces the jealous fantasies. Convinced that he is 'deceived \ In that which seems so,' Leontes assails Camillo with his sordid, unfounded imaginings. When Camillo defends Hermione, suggesting that Leontes is wrong, this ranting speech highlights again the issue raised in earlier plays:

>   Is whispering nothing?
> Is leaning cheek to cheek? is meeting noses?
> Kissing with inside lip? stopping the career
> Of laughter with a sigh (a note infallible
> Of breaking honesty)? horsing foot on foot?
> Skulking in corners? wishing clocks more swift?
> Hours, minutes? noon, midnight? and all eyes
> Blind with the pin and web, but theirs; theirs only.
> That would unseen be wicked? is this nothing?
> Why then the world, and all that's in't, is nothing,
> The covering sky is nothing, Bohemia nothing,
> My wife is nothing, nor nothing have these nothings,
> If this be nothing. (The Winter's Tale, I.2.287)

If on one level these are the rantings of an obssessively jealous man, on another they ask a question which was current in philosophy - about the reality status of things conceived by the mind compared to things perceived by the senses.

Not only does the speech recapitulate ideas about the equivocal status of the imaginary, and the link between what seems and what is, but it also makes the metadramatic gesture which explicitly links the imaginings of Leontes with the dramatic performance. If his fantasies throw into relief the errancy of the imaginative faculty, then they undermine too the theatre's licence to exploit the imaginations of the audience. When The Winter's Tale was played at the Globe in 1611, the references to 'the world, and all that's in't', and to 'the covering sky' must have had the same immediate

implications that we attribute to Hamlet's lines,

> this goodly frame the earth seems to me a sterile
> promontory, this most excellent canopy the air, look
> you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical
> roof fretted with golden fire...   (Hamlet, II.2.298)

By the time of his writing The Winter's Tale, Shakespeare had already turned this image into a trope, with the speech of Jaques in As You Like It, 'All the world's a stage'. The rhetorical decline into 'mere oblivion ... sans everything' might have referred to theatrical experience as much as life (As You Like It, II.7.165). A more damning verdict was given in Macbeth, where the despairing usurper draws the conclusion that if life is like a play, then it is nothing:

> Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
> And then is heard no more. It is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing. (Macbeth, V.5.23)

These lines are so familiar that their metadramatic implications are usually overlooked; to the wretched murderer facing imminent death, life is meaningless, but so, it seems to say, is the play itself. It is in similar vein in the opening of Henry V that the reality of the whole 'world of the theatre' is mischievously cast into doubt by the phrase, 'this wooden "O"'. Like the alchemic symbols of ouroborus or the egg, the stage world can be either everything or nothing.

Plays such as Othello and The Winter's Tale seem to have been acknowledging current anxieties about the imaginative realm. And yet the raison d'être, even the existence, of these plays undercuts any apparent gestures towards rationalism. Challenging absolute oppositions of the real and the unreal, and their conflation with the true-false opposition, might offer validation to the theatrical world. Via his mediating metaphor of nothingness, Shakespeare was able to address questions of reality and truth at the levels of psychology, drama/ poetry, and metaphysics.

3. 'To infinity and beyond': negative spaces, possible worlds

I have suggested, in this chapter and the last, that Shakespeare's metaphorical references to nothing in relation to the imagination are redolent of alchemical discourse. Shakespeare may have felt an affinity with alchemic discourse exactly because hermeticism tended to elevate the imagination to a quasi-transcendent realm. Thomas Traherne, a poet also influenced by hermetic ideas, articulated a near-veneration of the world of the mind. His poem 'Dreams' expresses a child-like awe at 'what is there in \ The narrow confines of my skin':

> O what a Thing is Thought!
> Which seems a Dream; yea, seemeth Nought,
> Yet doth the Mind
> Affect as much as what we find
> Most near and tru! Sure Men are blind,
> And can't the forcible Reality
> Of things that Secret are within them see.
>
> Thought! Surely Thoughts art tru;
> They pleas as much as Things can do:
> Nay Things are dead
> And in themselves are severed
> From souls; nor can they fill the Head
> Without our Thoughts. Thoughts are the Reall things
> From whence all Joy, from whence all Sorrow spring.
>   (p.139)

Traherne's neoplatonism made the ideal, and therefore the mental world, the real and true, an approach which turned the tables on critics of 'vain fancy'.

Traherne's poetry presented some striking echoes and expansions of Shakespeare's earlier depictions of the imagination, and a recurrent figuring of the mind in spatial terms. There had been, as early as the fourteenth century, the use of the term 'spatium imaginarium' to convey the infinite void in which God would have existed before creation. As Edward Grant has explained, the ontological status of imaginary space was controversial, but for

theologians it was 'anything but a mental fiction or a
chimera. As God's immensity, it could hardly be a mere
nothing or fiction' (E.Grant, p.260). We have seen above that
there was more than a metaphorical connection between space,
nothingness, and imagination. In his account of Ens Rationis,
Suarez had cited both nihil and spatium imaginarium as
examples of things existing only in the mind.[42] Furthermore,
the idea of space free of matter was thought compatible with
the idea of (divine) spiritual substance subsisting there:
apprehensible by thought alone. John Abbot's 1647 work,
Divine Rhapsodies, shows this jargon of Latin philosophy
transferred to secular verse:

> Fancy some vast imaginary space,
> The centre, and circumference of that place
> Is God. Imagine thousand vaster, there
> God must be'e [sic] involved the surrounding sphere
> All intimate to all things, yet all without
> All things; though nothing can be, if God be out.[43]

This use of 'imaginary' implied not so much 'fictional' as
'non-sensible', but it made a connection between imagination
and infinity which appealed to the poet. The idea of infinity
was, as we saw above, entering into accounts of the cosmos in
the Renaissance. Rosalie Colie thought the appeal of the
'paradox' of infinity was still essentially theological in
the seventeenth century (Colie, pp.145-168), but it also had
poetic appeal. Brian Vickers, writing of Donne's 'tactic of
juxtaposing zero and infinity' in his poetry, saw that
opposition (or, more precisely, one between 'nothing' and
'all', which he takes as equivalent) as inspiring a 'rhetoric
of hyperbole.'[44] A third aspect of the idea of the infinite
was its psychological dimension: its application to the
capacities of the mind.

Traherne was probably the seventeenth-century poet most
influenced by the idea of infinity. Traherne expanded the
familar trope of the poet as imitator of divine creativity to
include all minds:

> ... He givs us an Almighty Power
> To pleas Him so, that could we worlds creäte,
> Or more New visible Earths and Hev'ens make,
> 'Twould be far short of this. ('The Inference', p.142)

The poet made a more specific association between his soul/mind/self and God in 'My Spirit':

> But being simple, like the Deity
> In its own center is a sphere
> Not limited, but evry-where. (p.51)

This is God as described by Nicholas of Cusa in De docta ignorantia: 'an infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere.'[45] Traherne extolled a 'wondrous self' which, unlike Sir John Davies's house of the soul, was always beyond knowledge, since it was always in motion. The mind was 'the empty, like to a large and vacant Room for fancy to enlarge in.'[46] If this image of an expanding mental universe recalled earlier poetic images of the mind as a kingdom or an empire (see above, p.88), Traherne's imagery is usually distinctive. The poetic interplay between notions of internal mental and external geographic space seen in Davies of Hereford and Southwell suggested enclosure, and boundaries. In contrast, Traherne repeatedly described a mental space with no bounds, no limits:

> This busy, vast, enquiring Soul
> Brooks no controul.
> No limits will endure,
> Nor any Rest; It will all see,
> Not time alone, but ev'n Eternity.
> What is it? Endless sure. ('Insatiableness', p.146)

The Faustian tendencies of the human mind are mitigated, however, by the acknowledgment that these are a sign of human discontent with the mortal world. Thought, whilst capable of transcending the mundane, of turning 'from Nothing to Infinitie' ('Thoughts.III', p.176) in a moment, is always vacillating between these extremes in a condition of yearning.

The same might be said of Traherne's 'Thought' as was said by Vickers of Donne's hyperbole, that it 'admits of no

intermediate stages between zero and infinity.'[47] Thought is
'the hony and the stings ... Tis such, that it may all or
nothing be ... the very best or Worst of Things' ('Thoughts.
III', pp.175-6). It is this restlessness of the mind,
however, which makes it productive: 'We sundry things invent,
\ That may our fancy giv content' ('Consummation', p.147).
Only in the kingdom of God will invention cease, and the mind
be sated. So Traherne's poems relate simultaneously a
narrative of the progress of the soul towards beatific bliss,
and a psycho-dynamic theory. In its scientific aspect,
Traherne's endless space of the mind was the psychical
counterpart to that 'autoptic vision' of the Renaissance body
which has been described by Jonathan Sawday (Sawday, p.6). As
well as hymning the realm of the spiritual, or gaping at the
paradox of infinity, the poet was anatomising his intra-
mental world.

In scholastic discourse, 'spatium imaginarium' referred
to extra-mundane space, to the vast infinite unknown beyond
the sub-lunary sphere. But there was also a temporal unknown,
a terra incognita, which presented itself to the imagination
in this age of exploration. The spatial metaphor presented
poets with yet another variation on the something-from-
nothing theme: that of discovery. There was in a sense a
continuum between scientific and geographic discovery, as can
be seen in the imaginative projections of alternative worlds
which occupied writers during the seventeenth century.[48]
Joseph Hall (1574-1656) described a 'World different and the
same' which was 'discovered' as though by voyaging abroad.
Yet at the same time, that world was the product of the
author's imagination, as the name of his ship, Phantasia,
declared.[49] Robert Fludd extended the rôle of imagination
still further: in his De macrocosmi historia there is an
illustration of the oculis imaginationis perceiving various
scenes and objects: heaven, the tower of Babel, and a ship on

the high seas.[50] Invention, exploration and celestial visions
are thereby placed within the scope of the same mental
faculty. Francis Bacon was apt to play down the rôle of fancy
in this inductive process, but his metaphors sometimes
suggested that his conception of the human mind was
compatible with Fludd's. Bacon wrote of man 'tossing on the
waves of experience' (Bacon, IV, 30), upon which the
intellect acts, recalling Burton's account of the imagination
as 'astrum hominis', the rudder of the mind (Burton, I, 166).
Furthermore, says Bacon 'our stock of experience has
increased to an infinite amount' (Bacon, IV, 73). Traherne's
thoughts, which 'appear \ Freely to move within a Sphere \ Of
endless reach' (Traherne, p.147), likewise conveyed the
roving ambitions of the explorer.

The notion of an active and inventive, rather than
merely reflective, imagination might be seen as either cause
or effect of the notion of imaginary infinite space. Only an
imagination given licence to roam beyond immediate experience
could project the idea of infinity; conversely, infinity had
to be assigned a space in the imagination if it were to be
rescued from the realm of a mystical theology. This
liberation of imagination might be seen as intrinsic to that
re-thinking of ontological boundaries which we call the
scientific revolution. But one can perceive expressions of
the same notions in English poetry written before Bacon and
Fludd. Something of the psychological 'opening up', as Koyré
has put it, of the universe, was suggested by Hamlet's
exclamation, 'O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and
count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I
have bad dreams'(Hamlet, II.2.255). In a speech which
Traherne echoed in 'The Inference', Hamlet claims that man is
'infinite in faculty' and god-like in 'apprehension'
(II.2.305).[51] That which might enable him to be king of
infinite space is his imagination, but instead it produces

bad dreams in which the whole of Demark is enclosed like a
prison. Hamlet's mind is not, therefore, limited by
terrestrial metaphors of kingdom or empire: he looks beyond
the stars, beyond the knowable. This is, moreover, the
consequence of that restless, creative urge which, according
to Ficino, distinguished us as human.[52]

For Shakespeare, heroic representations of the
imagination carried with them the tragic burden of mortality.
The rub is always that any dominion over infinity is
impossible, and horror vacui can translate easily into fear
of death - that imaginary space from whose bourne no
traveller returns. So long as Hamlet cannot know, cannot
imagine, what comes after death, it might as well be
nothingness: 'not to be'. So instead of, like Descartes,
thinking of himself betweeen nothingness and absolute being,
the young Dane is left in proto-existentialist angst, between
nothingness and nothingness.

Fear of eternal damnation adds another, religious
dimension to the infinite negative space of the 'afterlife'.
If death is negation of mortal life, then hell is further
negation still; as John Davies of Hereford described it in
John Davies of Hereford, Mirum in Modum (London, 1602),

> ... lowest hell, where highest horror is,
> For in Not-beeings bottome, being fast,
> Ought would to worse than nought unworen wast. (sig.Li)

It is difficult, of course, to separate out the psychological
from the spiritual aspects of these attempts to grasp the
notion of death. Louis Martz cited Hamlet's gravedigger
speech as an example comparable with the meditations of Donne
and Herbert, which were inspired by the Jesuit ars moriendi.[53]
Donne's meditations upon death in the Holy Sonnets, however,
were characteristically negative: about the negation of this
world rather than about attempting to imagine the next. As in
Donne's secular analogue to the via negativa, 'Negative
love', certain religious experiences can be expressed only by

negatives, because of the incapacities of either the mind or language. It is in this respect that both Donne and Shakespeare differed from Traherne, and that Traherne's visionary mysticism is distinguished from that of negative theology: there seems to be no 'ineffable' for Traherne.

The Shakespearean tragedy which most explicitly focusses on the theme of the heroic imagination is Macbeth. Bad dreams and strange visions are suffered by both protagonists. From his first appearance, Macbeth is haunted by 'fantastical' thoughts of murder which would be transformed into reality. Early in the action, contemplating the 'two truths' told by the witches, Macbeth declares that 'nothing is but what is not' (I.3.140). Doubts about the absoluteness of that opposition - the one upon which Hamlet's rationalism depends - are raised again by the phantasmal dagger: 'art thou but \ A dagger of the mind, a false creation ... there's no such thing' (II.1.37). As in Hamlet, the imagination is described in spatial terms, of expansion and enclosure; when he hears that Fleance has escaped, Macbeth declares that instead of being 'as broad and general as the casing air' he is 'cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in \ To saucy doubts and fears.' (Macbeth, II.4.23.) The confining limit to his imagination is, again, death; in a speech closely echoing Hamlet's 'To be or not to be', Macbeth ponders his murderous intent, imaging himself as on the edge of an abyss:

> ... that but this blow
> Might be the be-all and the end-all, here,
> But here upon this bank and shoal of time,
> We'd jump the life to come. (I.7.4.)

These tragic portrayals of the human imagination, as a faculty straining towards the unknowable, both heroic and hopeless, complement that more optimistic vision offered in some of the comedies.

A hybrid, perhaps, of imaginary space and nothing, which epitomises the thematic links I am suggesting, was the

utopia: the no-place which might-be. The utopia might seem to be a peculiarly positive concept. Richard Helgerson, however, has attempted to explain the relation between 'the mental act of negation' and the utopic notion of a perfection.[54] He suggested that the utopia was a product of the same kind of thinking as negative theology, which also posits a perfect being that, mystically, is not. Helgerson also saw that in the context of sixteenth-century thought, this negating impulse was inseparable from political radicalism and from 'the stale image of an Age of Discovery' (Helgerson, p.102). Inverting the metaphor of the mind as kingdom, the utopia was a kingdom located in the mind.

From More's Utopia to Swift's deconstruction of the genre in Gulliver's Travels, there were numerous attempts to imagine new, better worlds, which might make that alchemic transition from nothing to something.[55] Prospero's island, Fletcher's The Purple Island, Wilkins's Discovery of a New World, were both fantastic and yet suggestive of possibilities. Helgerson called More and Rabelais 'the Columbus and De Gama of these New Worlds, the discoverers of our negative space' (Helgerson, p.116). Alexandre Koyré connected this theme to scientific discovery in the early modern period, but there were political implications too. One can see the value of utopianism being explored in The Tempest, whose setting combines the imaginary and the non-existent, but is hardly utopian. Such political optimism is voiced only by Gonzalo, who describes his ideal commonwealth:

> All things in common nature should produce
> Without sweat or endeavour. Treason, felony,
> Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine,
> Would I not have; but nature should bring forth
> Of its own kind all foison, all abundance,
> To feed my innocent people. (II.1.165.)

In the face of Antonio's cynical 'Thou dost talk nothing to me' (II.1.176), Gonzalo retorts that it is typical of such men to laugh at nothing. Gonzalo's nothing may be fanciful,

but it also essential to the ambiguity of the play's politics. However naive, his fantasy is that potential something which is a prerequisite of political optimism. The counterpart to Prospero's autocratic construction of a society, with its inequities and enslavements, Gonzalo's ideal reminds the audience of the relative realism of Prospero's apparently fantastic world. The drudgery of Ariel and the slavery of Caliban undercut any reading of the island itself as utopian; these were not 'things unknown' but facts of seventeenth-century life. So if Shakespeare was, as I have suggested, an ontological apologist for theatrical drama, asserting the reality of the imagined, this could not be divorced from the political implications of imagining alternative worlds.

This chapter and the last have presented some thematic interconnections between early modern English poetry and contemporary philosophy. If this methodology has tended to produce a 'poetics' of Renaissance thought, it is prompted in part by the conflation of poetry and philosophy witnessed in Renaissance writing. Examining the fate of the third strand of medieval interest in nothing - the linguistic - will require a closer, more formal analysis of poems and plays.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Semiotics of 'Nothing'

Introduction

Of the three strands of medieval philosophy concerned
with nihil, the passage into early modern thought was the
most turbulent for logical questions. Hitherto, there has
been little if any acknowledgment of their influence on the
poetic topic of nothing. The theological and metaphysical
aspects are familiar enough to critics who have tried to
place Shakespeare's concern with 'nothing' in the context of
Renaissance ideas.[1] Whether in relation to the putative
revival of pre-socratic philosophies, or because of the
persistence of negative theology, it has been supposed that
'nothing' as a poetic theme was drawing chiefly on long-
established theological or metaphysical traditions.[2] Of
course, this was often the case, as we have seen in the
examples of creation myths, the metaphysical poetry of John
Donne, and even some English epigrams. But Donne's
metaphysics, like all those ontological questions raised in
the last chapter, repeatedly returned to problems regarding
the signification of names. It was the fashion for epigram
writing which highlighted the nexus of logic enquiry and
word-play, as epitomised by those epigrams written about
nothing by university-educated poets. Their word-play owed
much to that long-standing logical interest in the ambiguity
of 'nothing', which had been explored in the sophisms of
academic text-books.

But there was also a distinct and quite new genre of

nothing poem which emerged in the late sixteenth century, in
the wake of Jean Passerat's 'Nihil' (1587). A review of
Passerat's mock-encomium of nothing, and a survey of
subsequent derivative works, will show the genre to have been
formally distinguishable from other neo-classical mock-
encomia by virtue of their style of word-play. The double
argument of this chapter is, therefore, that a major factor
in the emergence of 'nothing' as a poetic theme was its
convenience for word-play, and this fact related the poems to
a medieval tradition of semantic analysis, rather than, as
has been argued in recent years, to a neo-classical tradition
of paradox.[3]

1. 'To laugh at nothing': the semiology of word-play

Whilst it is clear that many of the poetic references to
nothing cited above were engaging in verbal play, the
connection with logic is probably less evident. The
connection was visible even at the genesis of the semantic
question of nihil: in De magistro, Augustine, having pondered
the referentiality of the term, says to Adeodatus that they
should move on to another point, in case something absurd
happens. Asked by his son what he means, Augustine replies,
'Si nihil nos teneat et moras patiamur' [If nothing holds us
up and yet we are delayed].[4] The semantic problem was always
inseparable from humour, because it was the absurd
consequences of, in Anselm's words, usus loquendi, which
forced upon the logician a deeper analysis than apparent or
surface meanings.[5] Anselm's own example, 'Nothing taught me to
fly', illustrates the point: it is, as Desmond Henry has

pointed out, analogous to the messenger's 'Nobody walks
faster than I do' (with the rejoinder from the King that then
Nobody would have arrived first) in Lewis Carroll's Through
the Looking-Glass.[6]

The semantic difficulties with 'nobody' are of exactly
the same kind as with 'nothing': in certain usages, both
terms can appear to be nominal subjects. For that reason, I
would suggest that the most immediate literary source of the
nihil joke was the word-play about Nemo from Ulrich von
Hutten in his 1518 poem. Compare the form of his lines,
'Nobody subjugates all Germans under one law', or 'Nobody on
earth is more powerful than the German Emperor'[7], to a pair of
lines from Passerat,

RIEN est plus puissant que la foudre maligne;
RIEN s'estend au dehors l'enclos de l'univers.[8]

This kind of word-play, where the apparent nominal status of
the word produces equivocation or absurdity, was repeated in
all of the Nemo poems in the Amphitheatrum sapientiae
Socraticae joco-seriae (Hanover, 1619). The joke becomes
tediously reiterative, always relying on the same kind of
double entendre, as the following examples will demonstrate.
'Nemo loquitur' comprises a series of mock-attributions to
Nobody, such as 'Nemo in amore sapit, Nemo est in amore
fidelis.' [Nobody is wise, and Nobody is faithful in love.]
(Dornavius, I, 757) In 'Carmen de Nemine', there is the
scriptural joke, 'Nemo potest dominis simul inservire duobus'
[Nobody can serve two gods at once] (I, 761). Amongst the
similarly repetitive equivocations in 'Lusus de Nemine' is
one which recalls Anselm's absurdity: 'Nudus enim pennis,
Nemo volare potest' [Even without any feathers, Nobody can
fly.] (I, 759) We shall see below that the poems in praise of
nothing inspired by Passerat were all reliant on the same
form of word-play.

The significance of word-play per se has hardly been

appreciated at all by commentators on Passerat's 'Nihil'. Yet it seems clear that the attraction of nihil (and its vernacular equivalents) was its comic potential. An important historical question is why this extraordinary interest should have developed in the sixteenth century. In the medieval period, the semantic problem emerged out of, even if eventually diverging from, what were primarily theological questions. One might point to the Reformation as having refocussed attention upon the theological aspect, whilst socio-economic history, I suggested in Chapter 1 above, might have prompted the general theme of nihilism. But what of the semantic question? In a sense, one does not require an explanation for the popularity of word-play: once established, it takes on a life of its own, independent of any ideological or material causes. The same effect was witnessed with the 'Nobody' theme: as Gerta Calmann's exposition demonstrated, it was adapted to different political and religious ends during a century of evolution (Calmann, p.83).

There were numerous examples from non-academic literature of word-play on 'nothing' - in comic tales, proverbs, riddles and epigrams which date at least from the fifteenth century. The tale 'Of hym that solde ryght nought' appears in A Hundred Mery Talys which date from the late sixteenth century; Nothing and Nobody feature in the folk-tales or riddles of many cultures, including non-European.[9] 'Nihil' is the answer to the medieval riddle from Germany, 'Quid est quod est et non est?' [What is it that is and is not?] and 'Nobody' is the answer to one in Archer Taylor's collection of pre-1600 riddles.[10] John Heywood's 1546 collection of 'all the proverbes in the englishe tongue' included thirteen which made play with either 'nothing' or 'nought'.[11]

There is an intellectual, and more specifically an

academic, context in which this phenomenon needs to be placed. Proverbs and classical epigrams were closely related. As well as there being a formal similarity, many proverbs and epigrams had a common source. Proverbs might be part of a continuation of received ideas, or 'wisdom', but in spite of their closeness to folklore and oral tradition, some had their origins in ecclesiastical or academic spheres. They were in many cases also indistinguishable from the classical 'commonplaces', stock arguments employed in oratory, which Cicero traced back to Gorgias and Protagoras.[12] The Latin tradition of a discrete study of communes loci dates back to Quintilian. These provided a model for the sixteenth-century Logicians' Loci or Places. For Ramus, two of the branches of dialectic were the study of established or 'common' places, and the invention of new places, or topics of argument.[13] Epigrams, meanwhile, were derived from a Greek model, whose emphasis was on witty observation rather than Quintilian's 'sedes argumentorum'.[14] The chief Roman model for late sixteenth-century epigrammatists was Martial, who was translated and imitated widely. But where they were not simply derivative of antique epigrams, Renaissance epigrams encompassed a variety of modes, including that of the sententia, which had been popular in medieval literature. The sententiae, in turn, had often become proverbial, so that distinctions between these various apophthegmatic forms cease to be very meaningful by the time of Renaissance.[15]

The proverbs 'Who can do nothing shall have nothing', 'Nought venture, nought have,' and 'As good seek nought as seek and find nought,' have a rhetorical form similar to that of the epigram. John Heywood (1497-1578) exploited this relation himself in his 300 Epigrammes upon 300 Proverbs (1652). Like John Davies of Hereford later, Heywood integrated English proverbs into the classical form; proverbs using the word 'nothing' were targeted for their

possibilities for witty word-play.[16] There are two epigrams formed in reply to the proverb, 'Nothing hath no savour'.[17] The first epigram mocks the self-evidence of the statement:

> Nothing hath no saver, which saverles show
> Shewth nothing better than sum thyng that we knowe,

and the second draws a wry conclusion from it:

> Nothing hath no saver, as yl is this othing [one thing]
> Ill saverd sumthing, as unsaverd nothing. (p.20)

Whilst these two establish an opposition of 'nothing' to 'something', another opposes it to 'althyng':

> Where nothing is, a little thyng can please;
> Where althyng is, nothing can fully please, (p.29)

The epigram's nicely balanced juxtaposition alludes to the grateful poor and the insatiate rich. The play with 'something' and 'nothing' might even echo the language of medieval logicians, though the context is far more down-to-earth.

After Heywood, the next generation of university-educated epigrammatists were more obviously influenced by the language of medieval logic. Several of these have already been quoted in previous chapters, but perhaps most influential on the nothing topos was John Owen (c.1564-1628), the Welsh writer of ten books of epigrams in imitation of Martial published between 1607 and 1622. The epigram-books of John Vicars (1619), Robert Hayman (1628), and Thomas Pecke (1659) were English versions of those Latin works. Owen's early influence can also be seen in the epigrams of Henry Parrot, and his fellow Welshman, John Davies of Hereford. If we want to trace a source for the specific kind of word-play on 'nothing' in epigrams, the academic backgrounds of the epigrammatists seem to provide clues. John Heywood, John Owen, John Davies of Hereford, John Heath, Robert Hayman and John Vicars all studied at Oxford; Thomas Pecke, Francis Quarles and Robert Heath were at Cambridge. That their play

on 'nothing' derived from the equivalent ambiguities of nihil
is quite explicit in many epigrams. Parrot's Latin titles,
'Ex nihilo nihil' or 'Hoc aliquid nihil' announce the
connection, as, of course, do all those which derive from
Owen's word-play. One might, therefore, look to the classical
models for precedents, since Owen's epigrams were based on
those of Martial. But although word-play, especially
involving sexual innuendo, was a feature of Martial's
epigrams, it seems that the nihil jokes, including those
indecent allusions to genitals noted above (p.11) are all
early-modern innovations.

An alternative to the classical genealogy might be
suggested for epigrammatic play on 'nothing': it might be
traced back to those deliberations about empty names which
had characterised the medieval logical interest in nihil. It
is important to note that word-play on nihil was not always
used for comic effect. A quite opposite effect was achieved,
for example, by Sir John Davies's grim epitaph on the death
of his young, disabled son:

> Qui iacet hic fuit ille aliquid, fuit et nihil ille;
> Spe fuit ille aliquid, re fuit ille nihil.
> [Who lies here was something and was nothing;
> Hope was that something; the reality was nothing.][18]

There is something either poignant or disturbing about this
word-play, depending on whether one can accept it as a medium
for serious ideas.

Epigrams playing upon the word 'nothing' often alluded
explicitly to the philosophical background, and not merely to
the extent of repeating theological positions on creation, or
sin, which we saw above in Chapter 3. Owen applied a reductio
ad absurdum to the theological commonplace that sin is
nothing, in 'De Poena et Culpa':

> Doctores peccata inter non-entia ponunt;
> Cur non peccati poeni sit ergo nihil?
> [Learned Doctors categorize sins as non-entities;
> So why isn't the punishment for sin, nothing?][19]

Robert Hayman and Thomas Pecke both produced versions of Owen's epigram meditating upon the Socratic 'I know only that I know nothing' theme. Hayman's effort was the more compact:

> Nothing thou know'st, yet that thing thou dost know.
> Thou know'st some thing, and that's nothing I trow.
> This something's nothing, nothing's something tho.[20]

Compare that epigram to the twelfth century sophismata, 'You know that you know nothing, but if you know, you know nothing' or 'If you know that you know nothing, you know nothing'.[21] Robert Heath (fl.1634) wrote an epigram about having nothing in his purse, which also hinted at the academic debates: 'In crumena vacuum an non?' [Is there a vacuum in the purse or not?]. John Davies of Hereford made a similar allusion to vacuums in purses in one of his epigrams, 'Felix qui nihil debet' [Happy the person who owes nothing].[22] Perhaps the sophism 'Nihil est in archa' [Nothing is in the box] is remembered in Robert Watkins's, 'The world's an empty chest, where nothing lies'.[23]

Davies of Hereford's Scourge of Folly contained some satirical epigrams 'Upon English Proverbs' in the fashion of Heywood, but his poems also frequently alluded to academic issues. For example, in a poem 'Of Good and Ill' he recalled the place of malum in the nihil debates:

> But, is Ill nought? why then it IS, though nought:
> But Nought is nothing: then, IS nothing? No.
> Yet it is nought, descending still from Ought:
> So, then it is, and yet, it is not so.
> All this is true: ergo, then, Nothing IS,
> Which cannot Bee: and yet it IS amisse.[24]

The reductio ad absurdum had passed from being a means of argument to being a source of clever humour. Scholastic logic had fed into humanistic play, which now celebrated the potential for absurdity in language, reformulating sophisms as jokes.

There might be objections to this theory: most of the epigrammatists I have cited were at university in the 1590s

or later, and it is usually assumed that the 'scholastic' logic was obsolete by this time. Whilst it is true, however, that curricular reforms had impacted greatly upon the fate of the logical problem of nothing, the questions had not gone away. Explaining how it happened that they could have been transmitted into epigrammatic writings, requires an account of those changes, especially in the teaching of the Trivium, which spread through Northern Europe during the sixteenth century.

2. The Trivium: reform and ridicule in the sixteenth century

The sixteenth century witnessed massive curricular reforms in the universities, but these were gradual and piecemeal rather than revolutionary. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the primary stage of university teaching both in England and in other Northern European countries was still (however much the discipline had been transformed) Logic or Dialectic. As Thomas Healey observed, in the Cambridge of the 1630s, Richard Crashaw's main subjects of study would have been Logic, Ethics, and Physics.[25] The eight or nine hundred students a year entering Oxford and Cambridge Universities from 1580 to 1640 were all being taught Logic in their first year.[26] Only those who progressed to doctoral level would study higher disciplines such as Law, Theology, Philosophy, or Medicine. Although a range of classical reading was expected of students in addition to the requirements of the main disciplines, the esoteric concerns of the new natural philosophers were not a standard part of the curriculum.[27] Logic was, then, the discipline which furnished a basic training - or at least a set of memorized

propositions - common to undergraduates from different universities and even countries. This provided common ground not only in the specifically academic discourses of Northern Europe, but also for all those extra-academic literary productions of university-educated poets.

By the late medieval period, nihil was a well-established logical problem - one which would have arisen frequently in the teaching of sophisms and their solutions. However, late fifteenth-century reformers began to question the efficacy of sophisms as teaching-tools. Thanks to their abstruse or bizarre references, they became a focus for discontent with academic teaching methods.[28] John of Salisbury, the twelfth-century humanist, had claimed that sophistical argument was indispensable to the philosopher: it is useful so long as truth, not verbosity, is its aim.[29] Whilst warning of the dangers of merely seeming wise through sophistry, he noted that it was especially accessible to youngsters. It is therefore rather ironic that a major argument of anti-scholastic propaganda was that sophismata were incomprehensible to young university students.

The usual, humanist, attack came as part and parcel of the anti-barbarism campaigns, from the fifteenth century Lorenzo Valla onwards.[30] They both prompted and justified the curricular reforms which were to transform teaching of the Trivium during the sixteenth century.[31] The reformers took advantage of the expansion of printing, bringing in new text-books to compete with, if not replace, the old, scholastic standards. The century saw a streamlining of dialectic teaching - a fusion of Aristotelian syllogistic with the non-deductive argumentative strategies of classical rhetoric. The new system was based on Quintilian's Institutes of Oratory and Cicero's Topics, and developed, most successfully by Pierre de la Ramée (Ramus).[32] In the course of these reforms, according to Earline Ashworth, 'Logic came to embrace much of

what had traditionally regarded as belonging to rhetoric',
whilst Rhetoric in turn was seen as merely ornamentation.[33]
The reforms signalled a new attitude to language.[34] This
amounted to a move away from inquiry into the grounds of
language and towards an exploration of its use in argument.[35]
According to Wilbur Howell's study, the influence in England
of Ramist logic lasted well into the seventeenth century.[36]

Sophisms had come to represent everything that was most
corrupt and least accessible in scholastic philosophy, and
this was in part because of the strange names which had been
used in these propositions as a matter of convention for
centuries. Even completely meaningless names, such as 'baff',
were invented in order to stand for non-signifying subjects.[37]
The bizarre choice of exemplars such as 'Antichrist' and
'Pegasus' laid these sophisms open to misrepresentation as
frivolous nonsense. The standard text-book of logic at
Cambridge and Oxford from the fifteenth to the mid-sixteenth
century was the Libellus sophistarum.[38] That gothic monster, a
patched-together collection of disconnected logical writings,
some of which were quite unattributed, justified some of the
criticism of scholastic discourse. Earline Ashworth has been
particularly scathing about this collection:

here if anywhere we can find the mindless adherence to
misunderstood scholastic doctrines of which supporters of
humanism are so prone to accuse late medieval universities.
It is little wonder that humanist teachings were so easily
absorbed by English universities.[39]

Juan Luis Vives complained about the 'corrupt' Latin,
portentous vocabulary and ubiquitous donkeys (as in 'Socrates
asinus est') of his early education in dialectic. Yet there
was perhaps a degree of philistinism about the humanist case,
however much Vives tried to pre-empt this criticism in his
Adversus pseudodialecticos:

If I were not familiar with these things that foolish men are
proud of, I should not dare even to mention them; for I know
that they will quickly say, with their usual arrogance, 'He

condemns because he does not understand.'[40]

Petty objections about 'barbaric' Latin - with their rather
dubious appeals to linguistic purity - are a less convincing
excuse for reform than the pragmatic concerns about an
appropriate curriculum for boys. Some teaching texts had
become virtually unreadable. However, even granted the
validity of those complaints, the anti-scholastics were
throwing out the baby with the bath-water. The much-maligned
infant was not talking complete nonsense. It should be
remembered that if modern symbolic notation is substituted
for Chimeras and donkeys, the logical deliberations of the
Scholastici appear less absurd. Historians of medieval logic
have been engaged in this sort of translation since the
1930s.[41] Medieval logicians, however, had to use certain
standard, representative terms as subjects and predicates,
not having developed the kind of symbolic system which
mathematics would later provide. The donkey, which so
irritated Vives, was universally used as the standard example
when making the man/ animal (or, rational/ non-rational
animal) categorial distinction.

The curiously popular Chimera, a dragon-like monster of
Greek myth, was customarily used as the logician's
representative example of a fictitious name (this
contributed, no doubt, to its current metonymic use). It was
also explicable - more easily than nihil - as a name, because
it could be said to refer to the real composite parts rather
than the unreal whole (see above, p.62). We have also seen
above that in the early seventeenth century Sir John Davies,
Southwell, Marston, Burton and Bacon had all used the chimera
as a symbol of the fictitious or imaginary realm. The
typically negative connotation of the chimera in those
examples suggests a real connection between the fin de siècle
phobia of 'fancy', and the anti-sophistical reforms which had
virtually eradicated the chimera from logical discussion.

Semiotically, the chimera held an intriguingly crucial
position in humanist discourse, betraying the tensions caused
by the Renaissance absorption of an alien culture. It was, as
we have seen, part of the scholastic jargon which was
considered by humanists to be corrupt and corrupting, and it
was also a metaphor for all kinds of subversively fanciful or
threateningly alien ideas. But at the same time, humanists
were apt to recall its origins in Greek literature, so that,
ironically, the chimera carried with it the kudos of a Golden
Age of human creativity.

To complete this picture of a Trivium in flux, the
position of Grammar, especially in relation to Logic,
requires some attention. In spite of the efforts of
'Speculative Grammarians', the purely descriptive grammar of
Donatus and Priscian was dominant throughout the Middle Ages.
'Grammar' usually meant Latin Grammar, although vernacular
grammar-books were appearing in the late sixteenth century.[42]
It was not really until the early seventeenth century that
ideas about a 'universal' grammar were to be developed.[43]
However, the modistae, though they worked only within the
Latin language, have been described by recent commentators as
an early movement towards a universal grammar.[44] Others,
meanwhile, have linked this analytic, 'causal', grammar with
parallel developments coming from the direction of scholastic
propositional logic. Such logicians, from Anselm onwards,
seem to have regarded logic as going to a deeper level of
language than did (traditional) grammar. For example, a sub-
text to Anselm's De grammatico is the privileging of logical
(secundum rem) over grammatical (secundum formam loquendi)
analysis. Desmond Henry has suggested that rivalry between
the two disciplines was evident also in Abelard's Dialectica,
which distinguishes between logical and grammatical sense,
and Burleigh's De puritate artis logicae, which distinguishes
between grammatical and logical subjects.[45]

G.A. Padley has observed that the sixteenth-century 'scientific' approaches to Grammar of Scaliger and Sanctius have certain basic tenets in common with the twentieth-century linguistic theories of Noam Chomsky and Ferdinand de Saussure.[46] Logical Grammar had its ascendancy in the mid-seventeenth century with the Port-Royal movement, but Padley has suggested that this was only following through the consequences of the doctrine of 'ellipse' which Linacre and Sanctius had developed.[47] Whilst it is true that traditional, 'descriptive' grammars were far more popular than these esoteric methods, it is interesting to observe how, coming from a different discipline, they adopted a method similar to the logical one of Anselm and his followers. This method assumed that in common usage we abbreviate what we truly mean: we say 'triste' rather than 'tristis res', 'pluit' rather than 'Deus pluit' or 'pluvia pluvit' (Padley, p.54). Though they did not concern themselves specifically with the 'nothing' question, these examples show that Grammar too was engaged in a debate about the surface meaning of language expressed in common usage as opposed to its deeper, structural or 'rational' meaning.

Ramist redefinitions of logic in the sixteenth century tended to blur any distinctions between grammatical and logical meaning. Ramist Grammar, though systematic, was not concerned with 'causes' in the manner of Scaliger. The new, rhetorical slant of language-teaching tended rather to emphasize effects: the 'moving' of an audience or reader.[48] The principle of improving the quality of written Latin was undoubtedly a driving force in the humanist project. However, Padley has pointed out that there were conflicting attitudes even amongst humanists. Vives and Erasmus played down the role of Grammar, but Melanchthon and others pleaded for its emphasis in school teaching. Generally, though, the priority given to Rhetoric was the most significant factor:

The immediate aim of the early Humanist grammarians was
undoubtedly the establishment of norms of correct grammar for
rhetorical ends, as is amply demonstrated by the common
definition of grammar as an ars recte loquendi, an art of
correct speaking. (Padley, p.16)

Whether being swallowed up by humanist Rhetoric or scorned by
scholastic logicians, Grammar was the poor relation within
the Trivium.

Return to the question which prompted this historical
contextualisation, I would suggest that it was the move
towards rhetoric which brought joking, and therefore word-
play, within the parameters of academic discourse. This had
been seen before, in classical academies, in the mode of the
serio-ludere, which aimed to convey serious, moral points
through humour. Marsilio Ficino had, in his commentaries on
Plato, claimed that 'joking seriously' was a feature of Greek
philosophy.[49] By 'iocare' or 'ludere' in this context, Ficino
seems to have meant any kind of figurative language used by
philosophers (e.g. Plato's cave in Republic). There was,
however, a more explicit treatment of the jest/ earnest theme
by Roman poets from the Augustan period onwards, as Ernst
Robert Curtius described in a chapter of his European
Literature and the Latin Middle Ages.[50] What we encounter in
Livy, or Ovid, is jest and earnest, like comedy and tragedy,
as rhetorical or poetic modes, but also, Curtius pointed out,
as an ideal of life: the balancing of these two aspects of
living (Curtius, p.418). One way in which jest and earnest
worked together in later classical literature was that comic
effects were used to convey a serious, often moral point:
ridendo dicere verum. Curtius traced the mode back to the
Cynics and the Stoics; the Roman satires of Horace and
Juvenal provided models for Renaissance writers. The epigram
was thought to be of the same stock, according to John Owen
and his translators:

Satyrs are Epigrams, but larger droven,
Epigrams Satyrs, but closer woven.[51]

Another form of the serio-ludere, which is again related to satire, was the mock-serious encomium, in which an unlikely object (a louse, or envy, or poverty) is praised in the same formal, formulaic way used in the genuine eulogy. Curtius found that the classical joco-serious style had all but disappeared during the Middle Ages, when the polarity between jest and earnest was effectively superseded by a more rigid opposition between the sacred and the profane.[52] The Renaissance brought a return of satire, and of the mock-encomium, spreading north from Italy. Cicero's defence of wit and laughter provided an intellectual basis for the revival. Passerat's Praefatiuncula in Disputationem de Ridiculis (1594), was a response to Cicero's treatment of 'iocus et facetiae' in Book 2 of De Oratore.[53] To such humanists, the issue of laughter, irony and intellectual play was important in itself, as well as being a useful weapon against their degenerate opponents.

By implication, all the texts assembled by Dornavius in his Amphitheatrum sapientiae belonged to this joco-serious trdaition. Some pieces, however, were more ludic than others. Alongside Erasmus and More, there are authors of purely secular interests, whose contributions made no pretence of even sub-textual moralizing. De peditu ['On farting'] and Problemata de crepitu ventris ['Questions about flatulence'] - which was by a German academic, Rudolphus Goclenius - are representative examples of this frivolousness.[54] Many of the joco-serious texts suggest that beyond the classical ideal there was another agenda - one of anti-scholastic parody. Goclenius's pseudo-academic analysis of flatulence employed distinctions between de rei and de nominis definition, notions of efficient and artificial causes, and the typically scholastic Quaestio, such as 'Quomodo crepitus ventris confertur cum fulmine?' [Why is flatulence compared to thunder?].(Dornavius, I.349-50) In case anyone might be in

doubt, Goclenius confessed to his facetiousness in De physiologie risus et ridiculi, which comprises twenty-one theses about laughter and humour (I.776).[55] The thirteenth thesis labelled as 'insolent' and 'indecorous' such examples of humour as mock-scholastic doctrines about farting.

Mockery of the scholastic style of debate and its terminology is something which could be seen throughout the growth of Humanism in the sixteenth century. As in the case of the mock-serious treatises by Goclenius, this ridicule often took the form of parodic imitation of scholastic jargon. Parody relating to the specific topic of nihil found a place alongside the more poetically resonant term chimæra at an early stage in this satirical tradition. Both words seem to have signalled to reformers the ludicrous excesses of that logic which they had been taught in their youth, and they were often linked in Logic teaching by their status as 'empty terms'. The irony is that the scholastic were clearly conscious of the comic potential of this material, which gave a certain colour to an otherwise dry subject-matter. One might even ask whether it was the humanists who were being po-faced; certainly there were political as well as pedagoguic aspects to the reformists' agenda.

The history of German humanists' attacks on the style of language used by scholastics dates from the fifteenth century. The poet and classicist Conrad Celtis had been taught briefly by Rudolph Agricola at Heidelberg in the 1480s, and by the time of his inaugural oration at the University of Ingolstadt in 1492 he had developed both a nationalistic fervour and a conviction that emulating the culture of the old Roman Empire would eliminate the 'barbarism' he perceived in the new empire. He dismissed contemporary philosophy, which deformed nature into 'incorporeal concepts, monstrous abstractions, and certain empty Chimeras'.[56] Writing in 1519, Juan Luis Vives, in a

work, <u>Adversus pseudodialecticos</u>, whose whole aim was to lambast the <u>scholastici</u>, continued the assault in parodic vein.[57] As Rita Guerlac has shown, Thomas More had anticipated this satirical onslaught in his own letter to Martin Dorp of 1515 (see Guerlac, pp.166-195). But whilst More had cited genuine 'sophistical nonsenses', Vives used a degree of rhetorical licence, caricaturing the scholastic practice through numerous mock-sophisms 'which are nothing but empty and stupid' (see Guerlac, p.46). Of course, it is not easy to parody sophisms successfully, since most are already absurd, but he made a good effort with the following: 'The Antichrist and the Chimera are brothers' (p.58), 'Nothing and no-man devour each other in a sack', and 'The donkey of the Antichrist is the son of the Chimera' (p.59).

The influence of Vives, who taught for two years at Oxford, would have been mainly intra-academic, but François Rabelais had a wider and, importantly, vernacular readership. In 1532, Rabelais's <u>Pantagruel</u> first appeared, containing much mockery of scholastic education and sophistry. An example of the latter, amongst all the ridiculous titles listed from the Library of St Victor, is the following: 'A most subtle question: whether the Chimera buzzing about in a vacuum can consume second intentions, it having been battered about for ten weeks at the Council of Constance.'[58] Several ingredients from the logical debates about <u>nihil</u> were mixed there: the Chimera, the vacuum, and 'second intentions' (abstract concepts). It appears that the vilification of nothing-related sophisms had become a standard approach for anti-scholastic satire by the mid-sixteenth century.

3. Taking nothing seriously: the survival of the sophism

If the logical questions relating to nihil were
notorious from a humanist standpoint, they still received
serious consideration in some quarters. Old books containing
sophismata were still being published in the sixteenth
century, although no new ones were being produced.[59] Whilst it
would be an exaggeration to say that the old works were
superseded by the textbooks of humanist dialectic which
appeared in the mid-century, there was clearly a gradual
shift away from their use. In her observations upon the late
sixteenth-century Oxford curriculum, Earline Ashworth
remarked,

the disputations... seem to have changed in character. Gone
is the late medieval emphasis on logical subtleties and the
deft handling of sophisms; and in its place is an emphasis on
the presentation of straightforward, clear arguments.[60]

Lisa Jardine's accounts of the sixteenth-century curriculum
at Cambridge have painted a similar picture of the
infiltration of Ramist and other humanistic influences upon
the teaching of 'Dialectic'.[61]

In spite of this shift in the balance of discourses, we
should not exaggerate the hold of Humanism on the academies,
nor underestimate the persistence of old ideas and old texts,
especially in England, where the 'barbari Brittani' were slow
to relinquish their archaic scholarly heritage.[62] And it was
not only the survival of medieval logic which was to maintain
an interest in the semantic problem of nihil. Some reformers,
who had returned to a purged Aristotle in preference to the
new Ramist dialectic, would have found in De sophistici
elenchis the models for later sophismata. An examination of
some of the teaching-texts still being used in Northern
European universities in the sixteenth century shows that the
logical problems related to 'nothing' would still have been
familiar to students.

In Northern Europe, the last popularly-used text books of Logic to contain sophisms were probably the Sophismata of fourteenth-century nominalist Jean Buridan and his pupil, Albert of Saxony, both of which were still being published well into the sixteenth century. These texts were popular in Paris - the centre for 'scholastic' Logic in the sixteenth century. Albert of Saxony had taken the teachings of Buridan, his teacher, from Paris into Germany in the fourteenth century, and their Sophismata had sustained academic interest throughout the next century.

Jean Buridan's Sophismata include some classic chimæra sophisms, and some using other empty names such as 'vacuum', which, as we have seen in Ockham's logic, were often considered to be terms of the same class.[63] The sophisms deal with matters of signification, specifically suppositio (standing-for). The conclusion drawn from 'This name 'chimera' signifies nothing' (Scott, p.66), and 'Chimeras are complex signifiables'(p.68), was that 'these complex signifiables were absolutely nothing' (pp.69-70). In both, 'A chimera is a chimera' and 'A vacuum is a place', the subject is shown to stand for nothing (pp.84-5). In the case of 'Antichrist is', the word 'Antichrist', naming only a potentiality, is again 'a term standing for nothing' (pp.146-7). In these, and other examples such as 'Non-being is known' (p.52), and 'This can be true: man is non-man'(p.65), the empty or negative names provide test-cases for the relation between words and truth, particularly where questions of existence and negation are at stake.

The Sophismata textbook of Albert of Saxony, comprises 257 sophisms and their solutions, and is an especially noteworthy source of nihil sophisms. A dozen sophisms use nihil or its equivalents, non aliquid and non ens, three use chimæra, and other negative names such as infinitas figure largely.[64] Most are taken from the Logica Moderna or from more

recent logicians, and again, they focus on the ambiguities which arise from linguistic usage.[65] In sophisms such as 'Either not-something or a man is a donkey' (see below, p.233) we see the non aliquid formulation being employed to expose the standard negative-name problem. Because 'not-something' appears to be a subject-term in the proposition, it seems to produce two absurd alternatives. The controversial 'Ex nihil nihil fit' also appears in this fifteenth-century collection. It might have been one of those sophisms which notoriously had begun to err from strictly logical concerns, but it was also a classic case of nihil's semantic ambiguity when treated as a substantive.

Those two books of Sophismata were the main late medieval textbooks dealing specifically with sophisms. Like the Libellus sophistarum at the English Universities, they were still in use, but certainly part of the 'old school', and falling into disuse by the end of the century. And yet as the title of William Costello's The Scholastic Curriculum at Early Seventeenth-Century Cambridge suggests, there was a decidedly medieval feel to some areas of what we call 'early modern' academia, especially in the English universities.[66] The diaries and autobiography of Symonds D'Ewes reveal that even in the 1618 the sixteen-year old Cambridge student was struggling over Seton's Dialectica,[67] which has been called 'virtually the last major document in the history of schlastic logic in England'.[68] Although Ramus was amongst those in vogue at that time in Cambridge, so was the more Aristotelian logic textbook of Keckermann, which even dealt with the medieval theory of supposition.[69]

Robert Sanderson's new English Logic textbook, the Logicae artis compendium, published in Oxford in 1618, was also strongly Aristotelian rather than Ramist. Costello notes the common use at Oxford of books of 'fallacies', which were derivative of the old sophism textbooks (Costello, p.52).

Furthermore, there are at least two teaching texts which, in spite of the contemporary trends, indicated a continued interest in the sophism. The first was English, the De sophismatum of Thomas Oliver, whose sub-title declared that the book was warning against the deceptions of sophisms: 'De cavendis præstigijs sophismatum'.[70] Earline Ashworth has referred to this selection of insolubles and sophisms in relation to revivals of the Liar Paradox.[71] The final chapter, however, addresses certain cases arising directly from Aristotle's logic, and in particular the problem of infinite names appearing in syllogisms. This problem led Oliver to consider certain confusions caused by the terms non aliquid, non animal, and non homo, and the reference of nihil.[72]

Still more interesting is a work of 1597 by Rudolphus Goclenius, who was less renowned for his facetious writings cited above, than for being Professor of Logic at Marburg from 1598 to 1609. He had made his mark with Praxis logica (1595) which had shown the influence of Ramus. But what we see, extraordinarily, in Problemata logicorum, his first publication on arriving at Marburg, is the return of the sophism in humanist disguise.[73] As L.W. Spitz has observed,

The traditional account of a fierce battle in the universities between the scholastics ... and the humanists has been largely discredited, for many professors were half-scholastic and half-humanistic.[74]

We might identify the polymath Rodolphus Goclenius as one of these professors, and it seems that he contributed to the survival into the seventeenth century of the medieval logical debate concerning nihil.

His willingness to use scholastic formulations led Goclenius first to the Chimera and thence to Nihil when dealing with the logical problem of being and non-being. The initial question is 'An Ens et Non ens sint contradicentia,' [if being and not-being are contradictions]. Goclenius did not rely only upon Aristotle for his argument. He encroached

onto the medieval concerns about fictional names, asking whether 'Cerberus' is non-being, or the negation of a thing.[75] He was conflating, as we have seen that logicians such as Ockham did, the issue of non-being and 'negative names' with that of fictitious names such as 'Cerberus', 'Utopia', and the ubiquitous 'Chimæra'. Goclenius even introduced, to help unravel the complications which this produced, two 'sophisms whose solutions could be useful'. Two complete syllogisms are produced, rather than the single propositions which usually constituted a sophism:

> 1. Chimæra est nomen positivum, cum non significet negationem alicuius. Ergo non est non ens.
> ['Chimera' is a positive name, since it does not signify the negation of anything. Therefore it is not not-being.]
> 2. Non ens est negatium. Chimæra est non ens. Ergo Chimæra est nomen negativem.
> ['Not-being' is a negation. A Chimera is not being. Therefore 'Chimera' is a negative name.]

The middle term of the second proposition recalls the sophisms of Buridan and Albert of Saxony, of Ockham and Burleigh, and even of the twelfth century Logica Moderna (see Appendix). Problem 75 surrounds the problem of nihil itself - specifically, how the examples of nihil and non nihil seem to jeopardise the principle that the negation of a negation produces an affirmation.

A notably unscholastic part of Goclenius's treatment of the topic was in his rather contrived gesture to the humanist cause - an explanation of why Homer used 'Chimæra' as a name, even though it did not exist. In defence of Homer, Goclenius argued that one cannot infer a thing's existence from its being named, nor from its having qualities attributed to it. He cited as false inferences, 'Paries est albus. Ergo paries est. Deus est beatus. Ergo Deus est.' [The wall is white, therefore the wall exists, and God is blessed, therefore God exists.] (Prob.74) These might recall certain absurd propositions from the Libellus sophistarum, such as,

'Antichristus non est albus, vel antichristus est coloratus'
[Either the Antichrist is not white, or the Antichrist is
coloured].[76] The earlier reference to Homer hints, however, at
that aspect of this whole issue which is always at the
margins of the debate, but usually excluded from the
discourse: the poetic. The classical intrusion signals that
partial dissolution of barriers between discourses which had
been seen in epigrams about nothing. A poetic discourse whose
references were philosophical now co-existed with a
philosophical discourse which could cite poets as
authorities.

4. In praise of nothing: the texts

Two Latin poems about nihil from the early 1580s, and a
prose imitation from 1609, were collated by Caspar Dornavius
in Amphitheatrum sapientiae Socraticae joco-seriae (Hanover,
1619). To Dornavius, they fell into the category of the
serio-ludere. All three works had been produced within the
academies or by academics but, as will be seen from the
reception of Passerat's poem, their readership was not always
restricted to academia. All adopted the 'encomium' form -
that is, they were in praise of nothing. The earliest
Renaissance Nothing encomium appears to have been Francisco
Beccuti's joking poem, which was written between 1546 and
1553 (see above, p.9).[77] That poem made various jokes about
the mysterious 'noncovelle', in a riddle-like fashion,
providing a succession of clues to the nature of 'qualche
cosa' which is in fact 'nulla e zero' (Chiorboli, 297; 295).
As well as the connection of nothing with poverty, a number
of other themes found in later encomia - such as the
antiquity of nothing - can be seen in Beccuti's poem.

It seems that the intellectual heritage informing
Beccuti's poem was not dissimilar to that of the creation
poems. There is also the remark that nothing is 'fratel de la
materia prima.'[78] The connection of 'Nothing' with materia
prima points to that tradition exemplified by the Libellus de
Nichilo of Charles de Bouelles.[28] It is remarkable that
Bouelles's work has attracted no attention from those writing
about the theme of nothing in the Renaissance, since there is
a direct line of descent between Bouelles and the Pléiade
group of which Passerat was a peripheral member later in the
century. As well as his theological and mathematical works,
Bouelles published a treatise on the French language, showing
himself to be an early champion of vernacular literature.[79]
Whilst he was not widely published later in the sixteenth
century, his work was known to like-minded humanists such as
Henri Estienne, friend and teacher of Passerat.[80] There is
also internal evidence from Passerat's poem that he used, or
was inspired by, his compatriot's work. These lines might
have been an allusion to the French geometrician:

> Nul iuste mesureur peut ce grand rien comprendre,
> N'y l'arithmeticien le parfait nombre entendre.
> [No exact measurer can comprehend this great nothing,
> Nor can the arithmetician grasp the perfect number.]
> (Passerat, 'Rien',36)

Bouelles's concern with questions of infinity and the cosmos
is also suggested in the line, 'RIEN s'estend au dehors
l'enclos de l'univers' [Nothing extends beyond the boundary
of the universe] (45).

Passerat's poem was clearly more influential - on both
Latin and English writings about nothing - than Bouelles's
work. Most significant in the recent history of its reception
is the fact that Passerat's was among the eight Latin pieces
on nihil in the 1619 compilation by Dornavius. Passerat's
poem, and the reply from Ludolphus Pithopoeius, have been
considered above in relation to socio-economic conditions

which prevailed at the time and place of their production
(see above, pp.37-40). The intra-academic contexts of these
poets and their writings give an alternative perspective on
Passerat, Pithopoeius, and other texts in the section on
Nihil.

Passerat was an academic - Professor of Latin at the
Collège de France, and also a friend of Ronsard, the major
figure in the Pléiade.[81] He wrote commentaries on Catullus,
Tibullus and Propertius, and was also a contributor to the
Satire Menipée. In view of the Pléiade's concern for
promoting French literature, it is not surprising that he
translated his poem into the vernacular himself (the version
from which I will quote) and published both versions in 1587.
The poem, and its equally facetious companion-pieces,
'Aliquid' [also, in French, 'Quelquechose'] 'Omnia' [Tout]
and 'Nemo', ran into several editions before the first
edition of Passerat's Poèmes complètes in 1602.[82] Passerat's
'Nihil' is a clever, lightly satirical poem, packed with
classical and contemporary allusions, but formally
distinguished by its use of the doubles entendres provided by
the word nihil. These conveniently translated well into the
French, as indeed they would later into English. The
considerable renown, and admiration, which 'Nihil' attained,
is indicated by the fact that Théodore de Bèze, a prominent
humanist theologian, wrote a laudatory epigram in response.
This epigram was first published alongside Passerat's poem in
a collection of 1597, after which they seem to have been
regarded as a pair.[83] A much more substantial riposte had
already come in the poem which follows Beza's epigram in the
Amphitheatrum sapientiae. This was written by the Calvinist
poet and academic Lambertus Ludolphus Pithopoeius (1535-
1596). Academically, he was best known for his translation of
the Heidelberg Catechism from German into Latin.
Pithopoeius's poem on Nihil is dated 1583 in the text, and

since it was a reply to Passerat, whose poem was first published six years later, but written in January 1582, it may be that both had circulated first in manuscript form amongst a group of poet-academics.

Wriiten partly in the form of a contradiction of Passerat's praise of nothing, Pithopoeius's 'cornucopia of nothings' adopts the same facetious style. In spite of the possible associations of nihilation which were noted in Chapter 1 above, both poems are often flippant. Pithopoeius's running joke, like Passerat's, typically involves the double meaning created by the word nihil in combination with a comparative adjective. Classic examples are this mysogynistic aside,

> Est uxore Nihil peius in orbe mala
> Intolerabilius Nihil est quam foemina dives.
> [In a wicked world, nothing is worse than a wife;
> Nothing is more irritating than a rich woman.]
> (Dornavius, I.736)

and this jibe at drunkenness,

> Et mage ridiculum Nihil est, atque ebrius, usum
> Qui nullum linguae nec rationis habet.
> [Nothing is more ridiculous than being drunk:
> A state of having no capacity for speech or reasoning.]
> (I.736)

Pithopoeius did show awareness too of the intellectual background to the nothing question: mention is made of the supposedly Aristotelian doctrine of ex nihil nihil fit. References are also made to the views of grammarians, logicians, rhetoricians and poets, as well as to nihil being 'nomen inane' - that is, an empty name.[84] The author mocks the inability of grammarians to cope with the term 'nothing', with the aid of some puns on 'decline' and 'conjugate':

> ...solus reliquos inter stultissimus omnes
> Grammaticus triste hoc pergit habere Nihil.
> Coniugat infelix Nihil haud declinat, et ipse
> Perpetuo nota peccat in arte miser.
> Nam bene Grammatici declinant omnia, solum
> Declinare Nihil Grammatici nequeunt.

[left alone amongst all the most foolish, the sad
grammarian hangs on to "nothing". He joins the unhappy
"nothing", certainly doesn't decline it, and I myself
continue this notorious evil within the wretched
discipline. For the good grammarians decline everything;
it is only nothing that they cannot decline.][85]

The lines suggest that subordinate position which was widely
assigned to grammar in the sixteenth-century trivium. The
'unhappy grammarian' tag is actually of antique origin - a
facetious verse by Ausonius.[86] It was evidently also a
Renaissance commonplace: Burton used the same allusion when
considering study as a cause of melancholy.[87] The serious
point behind the word-play was that traditional grammarians
treated the word as an 'undeclinable noun'; even the more
logically-inclined of grammarians tried to preserve its
nominal status - hence their medieval clash with logicians.

The final encomium in the nihil section, evidently a
rather later addition to the series, is De Nihili antiquitate
et multipliciti potestate [On the Antiquity of Nothing and
its manifold powers] by Franciscus Portus. Portus was
Professor of Greek at the University of Geneva (the home of
Calvinism) in the first decade of the seventeenth century.
Amongst his publications were an edition of the Iliad and a
commentary on Aristotle's Rhetoric. The preceding dedication
from Aemilius Portus, his son, is dated 1609, which makes it
possible that the proceedings at Marburg in the previous year
inspired this publication. Nevertheless, in style it clearly
follows Passerat and Pithopoeius; the evidence suggests that
Portus was familiar with one or both of the previous poems
when he wrote his prose contribution to the sequence.

The antiquity theme might have been borrowed from
Beccuti, but Portus's treatise relied heavily on that play on
words which had so entertained Passerat's readership thirty
years earlier. The author played a clever variation on an
already hackneyed theme, bringing into centre-stage the
standard theological controversy about creation. The gist of

the mock-serious argument is that as the world was created
from nothing, then nothing is as ancient as God, or more so.
This is a nice piece of false or confused syllogistic,
depending on the mixed use of 'nothing' as meaning either
'not-something' or an abstract entity 'nothingness'. Rather
than explicate this ambiguity as a scholastic logician might
have, Portus merely uses it for epideictic effect:

illud sciendum: Aeterno deo Nihil antiquius esse. Quia Nihil
creatumest ante deum. Hinc igitur aperte patet quanta sit
Nihili antiquitas. Illa ad multiplicem Nihili potestatem
accedamus.
[This is to be known: that Nothing is older than eternal God.
Because nothing is created before God. From this therefore
the great antiquity of Nothing is shown clearly. And thereby
we come to the manifold powers of Nothing.] (Dornavius, I,
737)

This witty word-play had, of course, its correlatives in
medieval logic and theology: the question of what existed
before creation was much discussed throughout the Middle
Ages, ever since Augustine had warned against asking such
questions in The City of God (see above, p.48). The question
was considered as a problem of logic by Peter of Ailly in the
late fourteenth century, and appeared in Beccuti's Italian
encomium, which was rendered in English, with a certain élan,
by the nineteenth-century Renaissance enthusiast Edward
Utterson:

> Its virtue is most wondrously displayed
> For in the Bible, we all know, 'tis said
> God out of Nothing all creation made.
> Yet nothing has no head, tail, back, nor shoulder,
> And though than the great dixit it is older
> It shall survive when all things else shall moulder.[88]

Utterson's Englishing of Beccuti leads us neatly into
the several English works derived from Passerat, for that
doggerel translation appeared in Utterson's introduction to
an edition of The Prayse of Nothing (1585). A rather
eccentric English addition to the series, it was believed in
the nineteenth century to be by Sir Edward Dyer, but has

since been established as the work of Edward Daunce.[89] Its theme is 'the good effects which come of nothing'. The title, and the date of publication, necessitate that we consider it as being related to the Latin texts, even though internal evidence suggests other influences. The work combines encomium with creation myth. When he rediscovered the text, of which there is only one known copy, Utterson called it 'an imitation of the Moriae Encomium' of Erasmus, which had been translated into English some years before'.[90] Erasmus's work may well have inspired the title, but Daunce's essay explicitly warns against Utterson's reading of it as 'a mere joke' (a description hardly appropriate for Erasmus's work, in any case). Daunce announces from the outset that he 'endevored to shun Agrippa's vanities, and Erasmus follyes' (Daunce, sig.Aiii). In fact, Daunce was unremittingly earnest throughout most of the treatise, in spite of his suggesting that he followed those who 'recreate themselves from their graver studies' by treating of light topics (sig.Aii). These words were surely either disingenuous or a rather desperate sales-pitch (one which, from the evidence of its very brief publishing history, persuaded few).[91] It was only in the concluding pages of the essay that Daunce began to use word-play in a way reminiscent of Passerat's poem, yet with a decidedly polemical Protestant message:

Neither had thy provinces poore Belgia, being the sweete harbourough of many nations, suffered so many violences by the incursions of the Italian, and the Spanishe Armies, had their leaders loved nothing, as they did the sweetnes of the soyle, their rich cities, and beautifull buildings. (sig.Giv)

The part which is most reminiscent of Passerat in its word-play is a digression near the end which indulges in these lumbering doubles entendres:

... if we looke into the reasonable substance of man, & apt composition of his body, nothing is more absolute in every part then he; if into the courage of the Lyon, or force and docilitie of the elephant, nothing doth appeare of more

fortitude, strength, and aptnes then either: and againe if we regard fidelitie, meeknes and prudence of the Dog, Dove and Serpent: nothing goes beyond them in their severall properties. (sig.Giv)

The question of whether Daunce had read Passerat's poem is intractable: the Latin poem was written in 1582, but not published or translated until five years later. Daunce might have taken his cue instead from the Italian poem of Francisco Beccuti, although his own acknowledgments are of the 'phantasies' of 'Merlinus Cocaius' (pseudonym of the Italian poet, Teofilo Folengo), and François Rabelais. Neither of those vernacular writers wrote specifically upon the nothing topic. If Daunce had known Passerat's poem, only the word-play late in his essay betrays any influence. The final lines, moreover, return to a dour earnestness, lacking any of that levity characteristic of Passerat:

of which as the excellent substance of the earth were at the first created: so shall they within few revolutions of yeares returne, as unto their first matter: from that time forth shall iniquitye be unhorsed, that now overruneth the godly with many tiranies, and then shall the good people of God tryumph wyth the Lambe for ever.
                (sig.Hii)

Daunce's poem reminds us that the distinction I have used between creation poems and encomia is not also one between serious and non-serious poems - the notion of the 'joco-serious' in humanistic writings makes this opposition quite untenable. Lisle's Nothing for a New Year's Gift had demonstrated this: in spite of its biblical story-line, its very title used a joke about giving nothing which was common in epigrams of the period.[92]

The first English poem which is indisputably derived from Passerat rather than Beccuti was that of Sir William Cornwallis published in 1616.[93] Although it retains some of the humanistic flourishes and classical allusions, Cornwallis's piece is derivative of, rather than a direct translation of, the Passerat poem.[94] Direct borrowings can be

seen at several points, for example in these lines -

> Nothing more ioyous is to us than light;
> Or the Springs flowrie mantle all bedight
> With pinks, and Primrose, when sweet Zephirs breath
> Inspireth life after long Winters death.
>
> <div align="right">(Cornwallis, sig.E3^v)</div>

which echo a section of Passerat's 'Rien':

> Rien plus que le clair iour est au monde agreable,
> Rien plus que le printemps et iardin delectable,
> Florissant que les prez, et doux que le Zephire.[95]

In spite of a passing reference to creation, Cornwallis owed little if anything to the creation-myth form, but much to the word-play of Passerat. There is no single theme - instead, there are a series of apothegmatic digressions held together only by the word 'nothing'. As in Passerat's poem, these provide a witty base for mainly gentle satire of judges, alchemists, intellectuals, doctors and lovers.

Of the same lineage, certainly, are two songs in the Roxburghe Ballads dating from the early seventeenth century, both entitled 'The Praise of Nothing'.[96] In spite of its lightness of theme, the first two verses of the first part have the sobering burden, 'For all shall come to nothing'. In the fourth verse there is a vaguely Passeratian feel to 'Nothing is swifter than the wind, \ Or lighter than a feather.'(I.25) The song thereafter degenerates into a combination of misognyy and moralising, in the familiar ballad territory of love-sickness, harlots and cuckoldry. The Second Part ('to the same tune') more obviously suggests a Passeratian genealogy. The song moralises about wealth, gold, misers and sin, about the benefits of desiring nothing and wanting nothing. There is an obvious link with its antecedents in the jokes,

> In heat of war, nothing is safe,
> In peace nothing respected, (II.49)

The lines could echo either Cornwallis's 'Nothing is safe in warre, Nothing in peace is iust' (sig.E4^r) or Passerat's

>Rien chaste, rien est saint lors que la guerre tire,
>Rien iuste en plaine paix, Rien asseuré en trêve. (26)

The English ballad - if intended for public performance -
suggests that the praise of nothing had already been
transformed from a topic of intellectual wits to a genuinely
popular form (popular enough for a second part to be added to
the first song). One can hardly, I think, attribute this
popularity to its erudite eclecticism, nor to any thought-
provoking paradoxes it might have brought to mind. The word-
play is clever without being over-subtle - ideal for the
medium of song.[97]

H.K.Miller quoted from a 'poor burlesque of Cornwallis'
poem' published in 1653 by S.S. (Miller, p.164), but there
was a more interesting reprise of the genre with Nicholas
Billingsley's 'Praise of Nothing' in Kosmobrephia (1658).
This, as we saw above (p.84), owed much more to the Du
Bartas/ Daunce tradition than to the ballad, being part of a
larger work describing 'The infancy of the world'. The first
section of 'The Praise of Nothing', however, recalls Beccuti
in its 'What am I?' riddle form:

>The black spot on a beane, a flea, a fly
>An Ant, a Nutt, is not so small as I. (p.73)

The riddle incorporates some theological ideas too:

>I'me Alpha, and Omega; from me springs
>Both the beginning, and the end, of things. (p.75)

and it concludes in a manner which echoes the sentiment
repeated in both parts of the Roxburghe ballad - that all
will come to nothing:

>Al things of nothing made, to nothing tend,
>And what hath a beginning must have end. (p.77)

Billingsley's poem seems, therefore, to be a hybrid of the
creation-poems and the lighter, jocular poems derived from
Beccuti.

Finally, at least in the seventeenth century, the Earl
of Rochester published his satirical poem, 'Upon Nothing'.[98]

Rochester's poem has neither the classical allusions nor the style of word-play seen in the Beccuti/ Passerat tradition. And whilst it begins with a description of 'primitive nothing', it does not belong to the creation-story group of poems. Rather, the poem stands back from 'mysteries' and 'dull Philosophies', locating the theme in the actual world, of politicians and monarchs, wealth and power (Rochester, p.44). Any promise of thoughtful satire evaporates into what seems a xenophobic and generally misanthropic coda:

> French Truth, Dutch prowess, Brittish policy,
> Hibernian learning, Scotch civility,
> Spaniards Dispatch, Danes Wit, are mainly seen in thee.
>
> The Great Man's Gratitude to his best friend,
> King's promises, whores vows, towards thee bend,
> Flow swiftly into thee, and in thee ever end. (p.44)

Whilst this is certainly as facetious as any poems of the Passerat lineage, Rochester eschewed their usual, and indeed over-used, style of word-play. Instead of playing on the ambiguity of the word, he treats 'nothing' throughout as a name, calling it in a pseudo-mystical fashion a 'Great Negative' (p.44). Beccuti has been suggested as Rochester's source (Miller, p.165) and there are certainly some poetic as well as thematic connections between their two poems.

The foregoing account of 'joco-serious' texts on nothing has explained certain relations between various literary forms, both within academic discourse and beyond. Like the epigrams seen above, the Latin mock-encomia included some reference to the medieval tradition, and even to the logical strand of interest in nihil. The joco-serious humanistic works always blended together their word-play with an awareness that that it obliquely signalled a whole history of logical, ontological and theological debate. The transition of the encomium to English tended to purge it of some of the intellectual allusions, whilst preserving the verbal play. The references of the English versions were either, as in the

case of alchemy, more contemporary or, as in the cases of
war, poverty, and sexual discord, more quotidian than their
Latin ancestors.

The nihil encomium had no classical antecedents,
therefore it is misleading to associate it closely with the
contemporary revival of Cierconian paradoxes. Instead, it was
a format which had provided, for poets like Passerat, at best
a conveniently oblique medium for satire, at worst a site for
empty word-play. The aspects of the nothing encomia which
linked them to logical/ semantic problems, also distinguished
them from other mock-encomia of the period (with the
exception of the Nemo poems). A collision of the sophism with
the rhetorical encomium had therefore enabled logico-
linguistic problems to be hijacked for their rhetorical -
including comic - potential. Humanists were using for
entertainment that same discrepancy between usus loquendi and
logical sense which scholastics had preferred to analyse. The
epigrams which employed the same word-play, and even made
allusions to the academic debates, might be thought of as an
intermediate form between the sophisms and the encomia.

One might state this differently from an intra-academic
perspective - that 'nothing', being an equally intractable
problem for both Grammar and the new Logic, was excluded and
marginalised by mockery. Pithopoeius had acknowledged its
unconformity to linguistic rules when he mocked the inability
of Grammarians to decline the word (even though writers
typically did inflect it). In 1608, Cornelius Götz, dealing
with the rhetorical use of the term, claimed that nihil is
'an improper and metaphoric mode of speech'.[99] Nihil
symbolised the inadequacies of grammar and the old logic, or
even of language itself. The word had long marked the site of
conflict between disciplines and discourses, a conflict which
the poetic discourse, by its embracing of verbal ambiguity,
seems to have embodied rather than resolved.

5. Reinterpreting 'the mystery of things' in King Lear

In the last chapter, I suggested that there was a humanistic optimism deep in the story of King Lear, where Edgar's poetic, and theatrical, inventiveness brings peace to his father, restores order to the country. Even Lear's madness is akin to the poet's inspired vision of truth. Yet for Shakespeare an artist whose malleable but untrustworthy materials were words and emotions, there would necessarily be a tension within such a neat schema. Edgar's blithe, concluding, 'speak what we feel' seems all too glib: do not his subsequent words, their formal oratory, betray the insoluble problematic which has run through the play? There is always, especially in the public sphere, this separation between verbal and emotional truth. Lear's madness breaches that gap, by expressing what is felt without inhibition. But in social terms, that is no solution - it provides only an embarrassing reminder of the failure of language to express emotion. In his madness of Act 4 Scene 5, Lear's speeches repeatedly break down into either meaningless words or incoherent repetitions. In the final scene, Lear's disturbing explosion of grief, 'Howl, howl, howl, howl' (V.3.232) could, at the same time as showing the limits of language, speak of primal emotions, untainted by articulate expression. Even an animal can express pain, unlike the 'men of stones' around him. The howl of pain lies at the opposite emotional extreme to Bassanio's joy, 'expressed and not expressed' (see above, p.25); between them, perhaps was the Queen's more articulate 'nothing' in Richard II. All three examples pointed towards some emotional remainder, when there are no more words, but still something to be said.

Lear's next words are 'O, you are men of stones', therefore it is interesting that J.H.Prynne has written of the emphatic 'O' in English as 'seemingly sub-articulate utterance' used in 'circumstances of anguish and

desolation'.[100] From King Lear, Prynne cited Gloucester's 'O
ruined piece of nature' (IV.5.130), and Edgar's 'world,
world, O world' (IV.1.9), suggesting that they contained
'deeply buried puns'.[101] The same might be said of, in the
first act, Kent's 'O princes' (I.1.185), or Lear's 'O Lear,
Lear, Lear' (I.4.249). Just prior to Lear's cry, the Fool had
called him 'an O without a figure' (I.4.174). The ironic
point of both Kent's and Lear's words is that the zero
implication of 'O' is exactly contrary to the apostrophic
effect: a cipher will only multiply a figure which precedes
it. The implications of Kent's attack on Oswald as an
'unnecessary letter' (II.2.63) might be considered in the
same context, as part of Shakespeare's sub-textual
examination of words and meanings, which is most obviously
signalled by the repetitions of 'nothing'. And yet, there is
clearly a strong concern, on the dramatic surface of the
play, with questions of language, communication and truth.
One effect of the reiterations is to push those questions
continually to the surface of the play's language as it is
being spoken. These assumptions about the function of
'nothing' in the play challenge a number of previous
ideologically-based interpretations.

Rosalie Colie had wanted to read a 'stoic value system'
into Ortensio Landi's Paradossi; she felt that they were
assertions of the freedom of the human spirit from worldly
bonds (Colie, p.642). She made this questionable
interpretation justify a like-minded reading of the paradoxes
in King Lear, because, she claimed, Lear's words to Cordelia
allude to an ancient paradox (Colie, p.471). Elton, likewise,
was sure that 'nothing' was 'a basic paradox of King Lear
(Elton, p.181). There are, without doubt, numerous
paradoxical ideas voiced by characters in the play, but as I
argued in the case of the 'felix cui nihil est' theme,
Shakespeare was apt to examine such commonplaces critically.

Even if Shakspeare had been reading Landi's paradoxes at the time of writing King Lear, as Brian Vickers has speculated, I am inclined more to hope that the playwright saw them as trite and conventional than to believe that he was inspired by them.[102] The most obvious allusion to the standard inversions of orthodoxy is surely one which Vickers ommitted to mention, France's list of antitheses describing Cordelia:

> Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich, being poor;
> Most choice, forsaken; and most loved, despised.
>   (I.1.241)

The blandness of such rhetorical figures is in contrast to the Fool's constant flow of word-play - puns, double meanings and riddling. Word-play on 'nothing' was what had made it an entertaining topic for contemporary verses and was also, I would suggest, what made it interesting to Shakespeare. The interest of 'nothing' was thematic as well as entertaining, for King Lear is a play in which the theme of empty words is centrally important. It is therefore a brilliant ploy to make the archetypal empty word, 'nothing', the one which is so often spoken ambiguously.

Furthermore, Lear's words, 'Nothing will come of nothing' are not necessarily paradoxical. At the risk of labouring a point which has arisen in other contexts above, 'Nothing will come of nothing' was a medieval commonplace (see above, p.90). This proverbial truism would, by entering into the vernacular, have long lost any philosophical connotations of a source which is, in any case, by no means certain.[103] Henry Fielding, in the eighteenth century, wrote that 'there is nothing falser than that old Proverb, which (like many other Falsehoods) is in every one's Mouth, "Ex Nihilo nihil fit", thus translated by Shakespeare, in *Lear*: "Nothing can come of nothing".'[104] But in this century, the same utterance has been typically identified by Shakespeare scholars as 'a translation of the Aristotelian dictum', or 'a classical statement that can be traced back to Lucretius'.[105]

I have explained the inaccuracy of the first account (see above, p.90), whilst L.C.Martin's sensible analysis of the likely influence of Lucretius on Shakespeare ought to have ended speculations on the second view. [106]

Dramatic readings of the first scene have also succumbed to the improbable belief that Shakespeare's audiences would have been up-to-date on the Lucretius controversy. William Elton quoted approvingly Paul Jorgensen's comment that Lear's 'nothing will come of nothing' would 'have struck original audiences as seriously, even ironically wrong. In its pagan doctrine it opposed a vital Christian tenet.'[107] Although Elton rightly observes that the theme of ex nihilo creation was a popular one for poets, such extrapolations about theatre audiences seem gratuitous. The enthusiasm which literary critics have shown for unpacking the deep significance of the King's remarks is quite wearying, and apt to emphasize the truth of the dictum itself.[108] My reading of Lear's 'Nothing will come of nothing' is therefore deliberately superficial.

The dramatic significance of Lear's words to Cordelia is not fully grasped unless it is realised that the King is making a joke. It is a sharp riposte to what could also be a wry joke from his daughter: in saying 'Nothing', she says something - an ironic inversion of what she has just heard her sisters doing.[109] Lear's joke is little more than a defensive evasion in the face of embarrassment. The joke might even include an oblique reference to the commonplace that, as Herrick put it, 'Maids nay's are nothing' - Shakespeare's own early verse shows his familiarity with the saying.[110] Certainly, by the fourth scene, when Lear repeats to the Fool his glib reply (I.4.131), the words have accumulated various layers of meaning - on the microcosmic and macrocosmic levels - but even in that instance it is part of a jesting verbal contest.

One could read an extra dramatic significance to the

King's easy resort to certain certainties of 'old proverbs'.
The rhetorical power of both the proverbial and the old is
soon proved ephemeral. The Fool's constant riddling both
undermines commonplace truths and highlights the
unreliability of words in general; it is at once a foil to
falsehood and a benign instance of it. By I.4.131, 'Nothing
can be made out of nothing' has ceased to be reassuringly
familiar, and has become disconcertingly equivocal, as are
all uses of the word 'nothing'. Of the thirty-odd occurrences
of the word 'nothing' in King Lear, about half are in the
context of joking. That fact alone suggests suggests a
particular focus by the playwright on semantic ambiguity
rather than metaphysical, or, indeed, apocalyptic,
implications.

The unreliability of words is repeatedly highlighted by
the references, in themselves ambiguous, to saying nothing,
or saying 'nothing'. Cordelia says 'nothing' (I.1.89); the
Fool observes wryly that Goneril says nothing (I.4.177);
Edgar assures his brother truthfully that he has said nothing
against Albany, whilst Gloucester, with dramatic irony, tells
the false-worded Edmond to say nothing (III.3.8). Lear, at
length, is beginning to recognize the worthlessness of words
when he decides, 'I will be the pattern of all patience. \ I
will say nothing.'[111] Empty words, meanwhile, produce instant,
if short-lived, profits for Goneril, Regan and Edmond. In
these examples, the semantic question overlaps with the
question of truth and lying, as it had in Augustine's De
Magistro.[112] The moral, evaluative connotation of 'nothing'
finds its expression in the play, through a distinctive usage
of 'naught'. Like the personal metaphors of nothingness,
'naught' and 'naughty' imply either evil or worthlessness. To
Regan, Lear says of Goneril, 'Thy sister's naught'
(II.2.306); the Fool calls it a 'naughty night' (III.4.104);
Gloucester calls Regan a 'naughty lady' (III.7.36).

The spoken form of these nothings recalls Augustine's
other remarks, in his Confessions (IV.11), about the
impermanency of spoken words, compared to God's words (see
above, p.63). The very corporeality of human speech is what
makes it insubstantial, ephemeral - 'like the breath of an
unfee'd lawyer', as the Fool says to Lear (I.2.148). In
Hamlet, the Prince's exchange with Claudius at The Mousetrap
had also echoed Augustine's description of words leaving his
mouth to be lost, and replaced by others:

> H: ...I eat the air, promise-crammed ...
> C: I have nothing with this answer, Hamlet. These words
> are not mine.
> H: No, nor mine now. (Hamlet, III.2.90)

In King Lear, the theme even spills over into the sub-plot,
when Gloucester encounters Edmund, whose written words are as
suspect as the speech of Goneril and Regan:

> G: What paper were you reading?
> E: Nothing, my lord.
> G: What needs of it then that terrible dispatch of it
> into your pocket? The quality of nothing hath not such
> need to hide itself. Come, if it be nothing I shall not
> need spectacles! (King Lear, I.2.33)

There are two previous uses of the same form of word-play by
Shakespeare, in Two Gentlemen of Verona (V.1.70) and Richard
II (V.2.58), where the person who says 'nothing' is obviously
lying. These earlier instances establish an expectation of
relations between words and truth which is complicated
ingeniously by Edmund's equivocation. His 'nothing' is both
true and false, confirming what we know from the main plot,
that honesty is not just about words.

King Lear is invariably read as a metaphysical play, and
rightly so.[113] This fact gives a special resonance to the use
of 'nothing', where word-play marks the sites of deeper
crises. To reprieve the scholastic jargon, it is a play about
privations: absence, silence, blindness, poverty, insanity,
evil, darkness, death.[114] Gloucester's blindness is especially
apposite, caecitas being a standard example to compare with

nihil.[115] His turn from 'all dark and comfortless' (III.7.83) to 'I stumbled when I saw' (IV.1.19) becomes a paradigm of all those inversions and conversions which take place in the play. Cordelia's silence speaks, at least to Kent and the Fool; his daughter's absence eventually makes Lear realise her value; Edgar's poverty betrays the real value of 'the thing itself'; Lear's madness brings perspicacity; defects prove commodities; even Edmund's evil can hide its obverse at the last. But though binary oppositions may be deconstructed, there are meanings to that process which are less abstract than the metaphysical, and more critical than the anodyne conventionality of France's antitheses.

The word-play is, on one level at least, about words themselves. Brian Rotman, in establishing the distinctiveness of his own methodology, pointed towards the lack of a satisfactorily historical approach to the semiotics of 'nothing'. He observed that Rosalie Colie had been less'interested in the semantic implications of 'nothing' than in its metaphysical and theological problematics. His own interests were 'the purely semiotic fecundity of the mathematical sign zero, its ability to serve as an origin, not of paradox, but of sign creation' (Rotman, p.58). But Rotman's trans-historical deconstruction of 'zero' forced him into a contrived ploy when dealing with Renaissance texts. For example, he claimed that the semiotics of zero are hidden beneath, for example, the 'nothing' of King Lear:

The play shows the destruction of a world and a self by a force derived from 'nothing'; a force wearing the mask... of zero. (p.80)

Thus Rotman by-passed any historical study of the semiotics of 'nothing' in favour of a study of the mathematical sign, whose universality transcends history, except in its economic manifestations. I have indicated that there are various historical contexts which should be considered in relation to the semiotic question: the way the Augustinian attitude to

language stressed the inadequacies of words as signs; the shifts in emphasis within the teaching of the Trivium; the relation between logic and word-play. But in a sense, I too am offering a trans-historical significance to the occurrence of 'nothing' in Lear, since ambiguity, and an uncertain relation between words and truth, is a universal feature of language. In his book on Shakespeare, Terry Eagleton saw that the attraction of 'nothing' was its non-referentiality, and wrote of Othello's jealousy in terms of 'a chain of empty signifiers.'[116] It seems valid to speak of Shakespeare's usage in this post-structuralist vocabulary when dealing with the word 'nothing'. Malcolm Evans, in similar vein, wrote of 'a delirious plenitude of selves and meanings' occasioned by the use of 'nothing' in King Lear.[117] More than 'a signifier without a referent', as Eagleton called it, 'nothing' seems to be a signifier without even a signified - that is, without any corresponding image or idea in the mind. Seventeenth-century epistemology would attempt to address that problem too.

Puns might appear to provide material for that 'purely semiotic' study of 'nothing' suggested by Rotman. I remarked at the beginning of this chapter that word-play can operate independently of its ideological contexts. Even so, those words which are subjected to play always carry with them the authoritativeness of proper meaning. Word-play is therefore raely 'purely' word-play, and is always potentially subversive. Keith Thomas, writing of early modern jest-books, has remarked that

Much of the humour in these jest-books is purely verbal, punning and repartee. But, like the comedy of the Londson stage, the jokes always reveal the social tensions of the time.[118]

Eagleton observed the political aspect of Shakespeare's 'flamboyant punning, troping and riddling' (Eagleton, p.1). The semantic instability which word-play exploits can have

socio-political implications, and especially, I would add, in the context of a public theatre. The Fool's puns on 'nothing' in King Lear, with their ironic reference to his relationship with the King, (see above, p.17) could then be read as aggressive challenges to authoritative power. Undermining the authority of language at the start of the play begins a process which, for Lear, leads via the questioning of ideology to complete self-nihilation. The remainder, however, is the emotional residue of the drama itself: our recognition of a love which could have caused his heart to break. His nihilistic howls, therefore, become, in theatre, affirmations of human values which are beyond the range of language or reason.

The case of King Lear seems to confirm the conclusions towards which this chapter has driven. At a time of flux in the nature of academic discourse (characterised typically as a scholastic/ humanist conflict), a term as slippery and chimeral as 'nothing' seems to have provided a metaphor for anxieties about language, meaning and reality. If these anxieties were, to some degree, displaced into a facetious poetic discourse, the multidisciplinary interests of humanist poet-academics enabled the semantic instability of nihil to become a paradigm of the philosophical uncertainty which characterised their age. This was mainly because nihil carried with it a baggage of medieval logical inquiry which had dug deep into the relationship between language and truth. The fluidity of movement and interaction between the numerous discourses at this time meant that logical cruces inherited from the Middle Ages could linger beneath the surface of the most flippant epigram or trivial song which made play with nihil, or rien, or 'nothing'. In King Lear, the surface was broken by Cordelia's 'nothing', sending semiotic ripples not only through the language of the play, but towards the very margins of language.

CHAPTER SIX

Seventeenth-century Developments

Introduction

This chapter will address some mutations of the nihil/ nothing theme in seventeenth-century philosophical thought. These changes might be described in terms of the fate of those humanistic discourses which had provided a medium for 'nothing' as a theme in the Renaissance. We have seen that there were four major factors leading to the humanistic interest in nothing: the survival of negative theology, the development of alchemy and kaballistic theory, speculations about space, and the reforms of the linguistic disciplines. These developments also contributed to, or at least inflected, a wider poetic and vernacular usage, which, as we saw in Chapter 1, had related more generally and materially to people's lives. We have seen that 'nothing' became a poetic topic by the accident of its semantic ambiguity, and its resulting potential for amusement. But once it had gained such a status, 'nothing' forced itself once again upon the attention of philosophers. These are the contexts in which Cornelius Götz presented his Disputatio de Nihilo at the University of Marburg in 1608. The transcript of that debate, perhaps exactly because it was republished later in the Amphitheatrum sapientiae (1619), was to establish the agenda for humanists writing on the topic throughout the century. During this chapter, I will examine those writings, and that agenda, and how they were affected by some of the intellectual developments of the seventeenth century.

1. All for nothing: the fading of a humanistic ideal

In seventeenth-century writings, one can still find residual traces of what Jean Seznec called 'the encyclopedic tradition'.[1] This is often thought of as a late medieval phenomenon, but as the examples of Dornavius's Amphitheatrum sapientiae, or Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy, would suggest, the compilation was a popular form in the early seventeenth century. Collections of various literary forms were appearing - books of riddles and tales, of proverbs, epigrams or common-places. Works which drew together disparate materials complemented the aims of the humanist project which, ever since Lorenzo Valla, had been one of 'fostering a single art which would be of use to the human sciences of medicine, law, politics, poetry and history.'[2] Cesare Vasoli has written of 'the resurrection of the classical ideal, neatly caught in the famous dictum of Cicero's, of a single *sapientia* which holds withing itself the "knowledge of all things human and divine" and knows how to express them with all the persuasive powers of eloquentia.'[3] Notwithstanding a certain commercial factor in these early modern productions, there was still behind the notion of the summa, or the compendium, an intellectual agenda: 'reduction of the diversity of the universe to unity.'[4] The ordering of the material in The Anatomy of Melancholy demonstrated a similar agenda: as the parts of the body are to the whole, so was each piece of knowledge about the world related to the sum of all knowledge.[5]

Cornelius Götz's Disputatio was presented as a Summa Nihili, a collection of views on nothing taken from all the academic disciples. The description 'Vagans per omnes disciplinas' declared its eclecticism. A new genre was

thereby created: a joco-serious branch of the encyclopedic tradition. The contradictions embodied in this literary form are similar to those in Browne's Pseudodoxia Epidemica, which Patrick Grant described as an 'anti-encyclopedia dedicated to the advancement of learning.'[6] In the holistic scheme of the encyclopedia, numbers often took on a significance which was more than symbolic, indicating the structure and harmony of the universe.[7] The mathematical order of the universe was essential to the new cosmology of Brahe, Copernicus and Galileo. This gave an extra irony to the encyclopedic treatment of nothing, even if the nothing of Arabic algebra, 'zero', was not traditionally part of the nihil perplex.

Calling this genre 'joco-serious' is not to deny its real intellectual interest, either then or now. The philosophical issues collated by Götz in 1608 were revived and transformed in a series of Latin publications during the seventeenth century. So, what prompted the serious philosophical interest in nihil at this time? Was it the current prominence afforded nihil by mysticism or alchemy? The absence of any references to these discourses in the course of the debate would seem to suggest otherwise. The reason for its philosophical interest does not appear to be restricted to any particular discipline, being located instead in the very ambiguity of the term. Nihil always highlighted dissonances between discourses, a fact which has been evident throughout this historical account. Anselm had used its ambiguity to denigrate the traditional grammatical approach to language in favour of his own preference for dialectical analysis. The fact that people spoke about 'nothing' as if it existed caused consternation amongst Augustinian theologians who felt that this must have ethical consequences. The mere fact of talking about 'non-being' as an abstract noun had been problematic to medieval terminist logicians. Science and theology had also competed to

establish the nature of the pre-creation 'nothing'.

A particular interest in the term's semantic peculiarities had maintained the high profile of nihil as an issue in academia. Rudolphus Goclenius's book of logical problems proved that this interest had persisted into the late sixteenth century, and it was this same Professor who presided over the Marburg debate on nihil in 1608. Goclenius was well-qualified to oversee a multi-disciplinary discussion. During his tenure at the University of Marburg, he had presided over academic disputations of a wide variety, mainly of a philosophical or theological nature. He had already published works on Ethics, Physics, Philosophy, Theology and Politics, in addition to the logical works; his later Lexicon philosophicum (1613) became a standard reference work (see CHRP, p.821).

The source of the Disputatio as it appears in Dornavius's Amphitheatrum sapientiae has hitherto been obscure. In Paradoxia Epidemica, Rosalie Colie claimed that it was presented at Wittenberg.[8] However, the text first appeared, in identical form, in the published proceedings of the 1608 Disputationes at Marburg.[9] Colie dismissed the debate as a mere exercise in wit, associating it with the paradoxical encomia which appeared alongside it in the Amphitheatrum Sapientiae. She claimed that Cornelius Götz, who delivered his 'long, elegant discourse ... before Goclenius at Wittenberg' produced 'a fine display of (useless) learning' (Colie, p.228). In other words, it was to be valued only for its epideictic skill. These comments seem to have deflected any further interest in the Latin text, for I can find no mention of Götz in relation to the topic since Colie's publication of 1966.

It was part of the Logic Quaestio which Colie cited to support her judgment, calling it a 'pretty' piece of word-play, and a 'mysterious paradox' (Colie, p.228). If we take

Götz's logical problem as a test case, we can see that the
form is familiar:

> Principium materiale mundi est non nihil: enunciatum
> affirmatum falsum est. Principium materiale mundi non
> est nihil. Enunciatum negatum verum est.[10]
> [Prime matter is non-nothing: the affirmative
> proposition is false. It is not the case that prime
> matter is nothing: the negative proposition is true.]

The first proposition - 'Prime matter is non-nothing' -
focusses, like many of the medieval sophisms, on the
ambiguous functions of 'nihil' and 'non' in propositions.[85]
There are two logical problems presented by the first
proposition: firstly, that 'nothing' is being treated as a
predicate, and secondly, that it appears to be negated by
'non'. A solution is offered in the second proposition,
moving the position of 'non' so that it no longer appears to
negate 'nothing', but instead negates the whole proposition,
'prime matter is nothing.' Such an analysis draws on that
distinction between nominal and propositional negation which
medieval logicians had seen to be at the heart of the problem
of usage regarding nihil. Colie had translated these
convoluted sentences in a way which failed to appreciate the
significance of the syntactic change caused by the movement
of 'non'. Instead, she maintained the same word-order in her
translation:

> The primary material of the world is not-nothing. Stated
> affirmatively it is false. The primary material of the
> world is-not nothing. Stated negatively it is true.
> (Colie, p.228)

The Quaestio was more than the flippant word-play which Colie
claimed, it was a genuine logical problem, even if rather
elliptical in exposition. This example supports my belief
that the whole debate merits closer attention, as a
philosophical discussion rather than as an example of
rhetorical over-indulgence.

Götz opened the Disputatio with a dedicatory epistle. The conventionally polite apologia therein is addressed to 'Mæcenas, inclute princeps' (presumably Goclenius), which allusion - to the patron of Horace and Virgil - places him in a decidedly humanist camp (Dornavius I, 730). The ornate wordplay of these lines of verse is, however, followed by a notable change of style. There are forty-six numbered theses, in prose, on and around the topic of Nihil, after which Götz engaged in a closer examination of relevant issues under the headings of different academic disciplines, in the form of Quaestiones. Those are also in prose, but a third stage of the treatise remains - further elaboration of the theme in verse, under the headings, 'Metaphysics', 'Physics', 'Ethics' and 'Logic', then a verse epilogue, closing on a moralistic note. The section ends, then, in the same rhetorical style as it had started, but in the interim Götz had enlisted material from well outside the normal domain of the humanist. Attempts to trace a structure to the sequence of theses are soon frustrated. Rather than the kind of order which one might expect either on the model of scholastic debate or of Ramist dialectic method, there seems to be a linguistic sequentiality which promiscuously crosses boundaries between discourses. This is at times bewilderingly erratic, but one can follow a train of thought in the sequence as given.

The very title of the debate should put us on our guard: 'A debate about nothing, which is not about nothing'.[11] In similar vein, the third of the theses suggests, mischievously, that the discussion is 'schola', [a debate] 'de re nullius momenti seu inani' [about a thing of no importance, or about vanity].[12] Because 'schola' also has the possible connotation of 'learned leisure', the suggestion is that the whole debate is a dilettante intellectual diversion. The sixth thesis, however, picks up the word 'inane' and takes its alternative, more technical meaning of void or

vacuum: 'That is said to be a void which, though it seems to be something, yet it is nothing , either in itself or in its effect.'[13] Here we have moved to that identification of 'nihil' with 'inane' which was common in medieval logical discourse; it was a manifestation of nothingness which would soon attract especial attention from philosophers on a scientific rather than a logical plane.

After several more logical/ metaphysical theses, there is suddenly an interpolation of biblical and theological discourse. Thesis No.10 cites Augustine's Confessions, paraphrasing his declaration that God exists in him and he in God.[14] No.11 remarks that 'all life is nothing with regard to God'[15] - a conventional theme, but also an echo of the fifth chapter of Charles de Bouelles's Libellus de Nichilo: 'That all are nothing next to God'.[16] No.12 gives a gloss on St. Paul's remark about false gods, 'Idolum nihil est'.[17] Götz proposed than an idol in the sense of a statue can be a thing (stone) but not in the abstract sense of idolatry. Such an approach to the Bible is quite typical of the Protestant re-examination of the biblical text, preferring philological investigation to a medieval style of allegorical exegesis. If the choice of St.Paul's remark to illustrate the meaning of nihil seems rather arbitrary, there was a lecture given on the subject at Oxford, probably on the occasion of Queen Elizabeth's visit in 1575. There is no detailed record of what was actually said in that lecture - only the tantalising evidence of a facetious poem by Sir John Harington, 'On learning nothing at a lecture'.[18]

From these theological, almost poetic, uses of nihil, Götz then switched again to the more rigorous distinctions of medieval logic. Thesis No.13 suggests that 'being in potency pertains to some mode of non-being, or nothing, or something potential and imperfect,' which addresses the Aristotelian/ Thomist definition of matter (as pure potentia) and apply it

to nihil.[19] This accords with other theses which make the
materia prima-nihil connection. In No.15 there is the claim
that 'Non being in itself, taken simply, is said by
Scholastics to be negative nothing.'[20] What is to be
understood by the phrase 'negative nothing' is difficult to
appreciate except by way of a comparison with its counterpart
in Thesis No.25, which is about 'privative nothing'; Götz is
appealing to a distinction between negation and privation
derived from Aristotle.[21] For reasons, presumably, of the
trans-disciplinary structure of the Disputatio, the
distinction is not drawn out immediately. The immediate
source for this supposedly scholastic thesis, and its
counterpart No.25, is possibly the president of the debate
himself, who, in Problematum logicorum, had considered the
alternative propositions, 'non ens negativum est' [Non-being
is negative] and 'non ens privatio est' [Non-being is
privative].[22]

Before privation is directly mentioned, the theses
digress into a consideration of the ubiquitous 'ex nihil
nihil fit', whose application, variously, to physics,
theology, and logic was a prime example of the way discourse
about nothing shifted back and forth from one discipline to
another. Götz addressed the semantic difficulty of the
proposition first, suggesting that 'ex nihil' could mean 'non
ex aliquo' [not from something].[23] The putatively Aristotelian
dictum is then set against the doctrine of ex-nihilo
creation, making a confusion which was common in theological
discussions (see above, p.77).

Thesis No.19 suggests that in actuality, things are
created from a level of being between absolute nothingness
and the created world.[24] The positioning of Nihil at the
bottom of a hierarchy of being whose next level is materia is
reminiscent of, if not directly taken from, Charles de
Bouelles (see Fig.6). At the end of the same thesis is yet

another change of tack, however, in the assertion that unlike
materia, nihil exists only in the mind, as ens rationis.[25] We
have encountered this term in relation to the imaginary
realm, entia rationis being a late medieval equivalent of
'second intentions' (see above, p.123). It seems likely that
Götz was influenced in his usage by the recently published
Disputationes metaphysicae of Francisco Suarez, the Jesuit
philosopher.[26] Allusion to this kind of being was to become a
recurrent feature of the nihil debate as it developed during
the seventeenth century.

   Götz next complicated the issue by implying that
unformed matter can be thought of as a kind of non-being - a
privative kind, and therefore a nothing. This was not an
unfamiliar notion to some late sixteenth-century poets (see
above, p.88), and was derived from Book I of Aristotle's
Physics, but Götz attributed it vaguely to the Scholastici:
'Non-being accidentally [as opposed to essentially] is said
by Scholastics to be privative nothing, the lack of form in
matter.'[27]

   A combination of theological, ethical and logical issues
comes to the fore in the next four theses, which are all
concerned with aspects of privation. The classic Augustinian/
Anselmian examples are cited: bonum [good], malum [evil],
peccatum [sin], and 'whether blindness is located in the
material of the eye'; in addition, there is the question of
whether death is a privation of life.[28] These are familiar
enough issues, and show that Götz was conscious of them as
logical as well as theological questions, though his source
might again have been Goclenius rather than the medieval
disputants.[29]

   Yet another switch between disciplines follows, when the
'privation' idea is used to support a proposition about
annihilation: 'Annihilation, which is the abolition of the
thing into nothing, is said by scholastics to be privative

nothing.'[30] The possibility of annihilation could be treated
as a problem of Aristotelian physics, questioning the dictum
that matter can neither be generated nor destroyed. But in
view of the millenarianist propaganda around at the time from
both Catholics and Protestants, it was also a question for
contemporary theology.[31] Margaret Jacob has observed that
there was even an association of these two perspectives in
late seventeenth-century thought.[32] Via a consideration of
whether annihilation must involve the destruction of both
substance and accident [qualities] of a thing, word-
association leads the debate into another, contemporary,
dispute over substance and accident - the transubstantiation
question.[33] This theological issue is then used as a link into
matters of natural philosophy - transelementation and
corruption. Aristotelian Physics is again cited to
distinguish between natural changes of state and the
supernatural one involved in transubstantiation.[34] Another,
related branch of enquiry appears in a later section which
asks whether, if even seed is generated from something ('not
seed'), so must being be generated from not-being.[35] Aristotle
had dealt with the potential existence of the seed, but its
mention signals a whole new area of experimental
investigation in the seventeenth century - into the physics,
the chemistry, and the biology of generation.

Even climatology makes a rather dubious contribution to
the debate: in a final rhetorical flourish, Götz asked if
rain were an instance of transelementation (Thesis 44).
Whether this is a deliberate, facetious non-sequitur, or a
final loss of direction to the Disputatio, is difficult to
gauge. What is remarkable about the collection of theses is
that they flit from one one way of talking about nothing to
another in such a way as to force onto the reader the
impression that they are speaking of the same thing (or
nothing). If one's impulse on reading them is to separate out

the logical questions from the theological, or the
scientific, perhaps the layout was expressly intended to
question such an approach. It may be that the debate is an
experiment in crossing the linguistic barriers between
disciplines.

Following his chain-link progress through the academic
discourses, Götz - or perhaps a later editor of the debate
material - attempted some categorisation of the material
under discussion. The sub-titles of the question and answer
section are as follows: 'metaphysical', 'metaphysico-
theological', 'physical', 'political', 'logical',
'rhetorical', 'grammatical'. The political category may be a
rather contrived humanist addition, but the others are all
areas in which medieval thought had addressed the nothing
issue. A medieval writer would not, however, have tried to
bring together distinct disciplines in this manner. The
quaestiones in this section arise from the issues raised by
the theses; they are less apothegmatic in form than the
theses, but they too attempt to compress a wide range of
ideas. The metaphysical section, for example, reprises the
questions of whether nothing is something, whether evil and
sin are non-being, and whether the world will be annihilated.

After the contributions from Cornelius Götz, there is a
return to a more decidedly humanist style, and to that
intellectual word-play which has coloured the critical
judgments of subsequent commentators.[36] There is a brief
response in verse from the overseer of the debate, the final
lines of which are, 'Destroy whatever is nothing; what is not
nothing, build up: and out of nothing you will become
something; out of something, something great.'[37] Thereafter
are two epigrams, each eight lines of verse, by Caspar
Sturmius, Professor of Theology at Marburg. He picks up on
one of the forty-six theses - St Paul's 'Idolum nihil est' -
interpreting it with a decidedly Protestant slant, as an

attack not just on false gods, the usual reading, but on statues generally.[38] But the main point of his contribution is to make an elaborate and contrived compliment to Götz, along the lines of, 'You may be my idol, but you're not a stone statue'.[39] The fourteen lines which follow from Georgius Thalmullerus, 'friend and teacher' of Götz, are in the same vein, praising the effulgent brilliance of his pupil's treatise. Whilst to Sturmius, Götz was Mercury, to Thalmullerus he is Phoebus: neither sheds any more light on the theme itself.[40]

This summary of the contents of the debate shows that the main body of the text, comprising the theses, drew on a variety of intellectual sources: Augustinian theology; Aristotelian physics and metaphysics; scholastic logic and metaphysics; natural philosophy and contemporary theology. There is no suggestion, even in the rhetorical additions which graced the published text, of any debt to Passerat and the encomium genre. The Marburg debate signalled a new departure, therefore, in the history of the topic. There do not seem to have been any new publications on nihil until the 1620s; it might be that the wider readership it received after the appearance of the Amphitheatrum sapientiae prompted the later fad for cross-disciplinary discussions of the topic.

It was at another German university, Wittenberg, that the second effort to circumscribe nothing was made, in a public lecture by Jacob Musselius on the Quinta essentia de Nihilo.[41] This conceit, of quintessence of nothing, was not entirely original, as the 1595 poem of Jean Demons reminds us, but it is, apart from an introductory section concerned with the antiquity of nothing, quite a different enterprise from those poetic endeavours.[42] It sub-divides the senses of nihil by showing its uses in different academic disciplines -

in rebus humanis, *in medicina*, *in judicio et curia utile*, *in
metaphysica*, *in ethica*, *in Logica*, and *in Arithmetica*. This
expands, then, on the Götz model, stressing the humanities
especially. But in spite of the formal similarities to Götz's
work, Musselius showed no interest in reviving scholastic
logical argument, and the approach of his *Oratio* is
intellectually light-weight in comparison to its antecedent.
The items in the Logic section are merely rules of logic
which happen to use the word 'nothing', for example, 'Nothing
is in a conclusion that was not in a premiss', and 'Nothing
is without a cause'.[43] Musselius's piece was sufficient to
provoke further academic discussions at Lipsius in 1628, by
which time the works on nothing were beginning to be
perceived as a series which included the ealier poetic
works.[44]

The encyclopedic genre had certainly been established by
1634, when two works on nothing were published in Venice. One
is by a minor humanist writer Luigi Manzini, and the other by
a French humanist, Jacques Gaffarel, who was visiting Venice
at that time.[45] One must surely conclude that the pair were
acquainted, especially since their texts share certain
characteristics. They both reintroduce the mystical aspects
of the nothing theme, which had been prominent in poems but
quite absent from the Marburg and Wittenberg discussions.
Manzini's *Discorso*, 'Il Niente', again offers a multi-faceted
perspective, considering such aspects as the grammatical and,
drawing into the concept of nothing the previously
unassimilated concept of zero, the mathematical. But there is
also a strong theological influence on this conspectus:
Niente is compared to antiquity, eternity, and omnipotence.[46]
This brings to mind the concerns of Charles de Bouelles and
Nicholas of Cusa, and the negative theology which had
informed the creation-from-nothing poems.

The small but stylish book on nothing published in the

same year by Jacques Gaffarel is typical of the earlier texts in its format: a sequence of 'Positiones' on nihil, crossing a range of disciplines.[47] His consideration of issues such as annihilation and generation suggests a debt to Götz. But there are other distinctive features: amongst the humanist citations are, for the first time, Pseudo-Dionysius and Charles de Bouelles himself. The full title translates as 'Nothing, almost nothing, and less than nothing, or Concerning being, non-being and the medium between being and non-being'; this signals the current Aristotelian concerns about ontological hierarchy (see above, p.113). Whilst this, and the references to Juvenal and pre-Socratic Greek philosophy, confirm that Gaffarel's treatise is a humanist endeavour, it is also marked by an increasing interest in, and a real understanding of, medieval, scholastic treament of nihil. The work explains the problems with sophisms such as 'Nihil est nihil' and 'Ens est non nihil' and discusses the status of privations such as caecitas relative to nihil.[48] Another advance by Gaffarel was to actually name one of the 'Scholastici' whose doctrines were so regularly being collectively misrepresented. Duns Scotus, who would have represented the realist side of the nominalist-realist divide, gets an honourable mention, but without any specific reference, on the topic of the difference between nihil and non-ens. Also, like Manzini, Gaffarel acknowledged the equivalence of Zero to nihil.[49] Gaffarel's book, by drawing together the academic disciplines with negative theology, goes further than the Marburg debate in its discursive inclusiveness. It even moves into areas which might be decribed as metaphor, when 'alternative worlds' are included in the discussion of 'possible nothings'.[50]

Marten Schoock (1614-1665), a renowned Dutch philosopher and opponent of Descartes, produced a still more extensive examination of nihil in 1661.[51] His chief innovation was to

preface the philosophical debate with a thorough etymological and philological account of the word 'nihil' and its equivalents in various languages, going far beyond the cursory grammatical comments by Götz.[52] The preface to Schoock's Tractatus praises the Ciceronian style of Passerat and, following Gaffarel's long overdue acknowledgment of his influence, the skill of Charles de Bouelles (Schoock, p.1). The importance of the Libellus de Nichilo is emphasized by the fact that it is reprinted along with Schoock's text. Schoock's range of reference is impressively eclectic: Plato, Aristotle, Tertullian, Fonseca, Augustine, and Hermes Trismegistus. Again Duns Scotus is cited, with a specific reference to his Ordinationes, on the subject of whether God's immensity necessarily followed from his omnipotence, and therefore whether there was an 'imaginary infinite vacuum' before the creation of the world.[53] The re-appearance of Scotus corroborates the theory that the nihil problem was perceived as being related to the realist-nominalist dispute over universal names.

Schoock was very much in the same polymathic mould as the earlier, Renaissance humanists: his range extended even to a treatise on the subject of turf, and perhaps more pertinently, a work 'On eggs and chickens'.[54] In spite of its encyclopedic pretensions, however, the Tractatus does betray demarcationist tendencies. The fact is that Schoock's idea of 'philosophia', whilst it includes etymology, logic, metaphysics, antique cosmology and Aristotelian physics, does not include the progressive, empirically-grounded natural philosophy. When, in Chapter 26, he asked 'Quale Nihilum vacuum sit?', he cited not Guericke, nor even Pascal, but Heraclitus and Epicurus. The reactionary character of his thought is also suggested by his Admiranda Methodus (1643), an ironic response to Descartes' Discourse on Method, apparently produced at the request of the Dutch Protestant

theologian, Gisbertus Voëtius.[55]

At Jena, on 23 September, 1674, there was a public
debate 'De Nihilo' presented by a little-known academic,
Hermann Steding.[56] Twenty-two theses about nihil were offered,
many of which reprised the standard issues. No.1 asks whether
'purum nihil' can be imagined, and decides, against the
theologian David Derodonus, that it cannot (sig.A1^r). No.3
identifies nihil with non ens; No.4 suggests that the word
nihil signifies an ens rationis or, following Aristotle, ens
potentia (sig.A2^r). The next six theses concentrate on
examining the Aristotelian position with regard to potential
and possible as opposed to real being (sig.A2^v-B2^v). Theses 11
to 17 address questions of privation, negation, and, as in
Suarez's account of entia rationis, 'relations'(sig.B3^r-B3^v).
No.18 asserts that one cannot conceive or know impossibilia ,
and No.20 digresses briefly onto the reality of angels
(sig.B4^v).

The final two theses are particularly interesting in
relation to the shifting focus on the mind's capacity to
imagine nothingness. In No.21, Steding made an unusual
comparison of these three oppositions:

$$\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{ens reale} & - & \text{ens ratione} \\
\text{brutus} & - & \text{homo} \\
\text{animal non intelligens} & - & \text{animal intelligens}
\end{array}$$

Such a schema implies that humans have access to a level of
reality outside the range of other animals, but that this is
not an objective reality (sig.C1^v). In the final, lengthy
return to the initial question of whether a negation can be
thought, Steding fell back on scholastic terminology. Using
what was presumably a facetious proposition (effectively, a
sophism) 'Derodon est non lapis' [Derodonus is a non-stone],
he concluded that since one can understand the truth of this,
then one must be able to imagine non lapis, or non asinum, or
any other negation, including nihil (sig.C2^v). How seriously
this was meant is difficult to ascertain, but of course

Steding's conclusion is quite illogical. It relies upon an
ambiguity in his sophism, which would be meaningful only if
translated as 'It is not the case that Derodonus is a stone',
i.e. as a propositional negation.

The last in a line of cross-disciplinary treatises,
published in 1702, continued the trend seen in Steding, of an
increased focus upon the mental realm. Parts of Samuel
Lucius's public lecture on Nihil might have been in response
to Schoock, since it adopts Cartesian language. Lucius (1678-
1728), later to become Professor of Eloquence at Danzig, was
in the early years of an academic career when he produced
this, his third publication; others were on religious or
philosophical topics.[57] The references made to medieval logic,
imaginary space and 'ens rationis', and indeed the familiar
format of numbered paragraphs, suggest at least some debt to
the preceding nihil texts. Lucius clearly had a preference
for the metaphysical and theological aspects of nothing, but
not in relation to Bouelles or Pseudo-Dionysius; he cited
recent 'rational' theologians Paulus Voet (1619-1667) and
Pierre Poiret (1646-1719), rather than the humanist
standards.[58] Voet, son of Gisbertus Voëtius, and Poiret, a
Heidelberg-trained Protestant pastor, were both much
influenced by mysticism, but also by Descartes.[59]

The Dutch connection continued with Poiret, who had
written his Cogitationem rationalium de Deo, Anima et Malo
whilst taking refuge in Holland from Louis XIV's aggression
on France's north-eastern borders.[60] The second edition of the
Objections and Responses to the First Edition contains a
lengthy digression from the ostensible topic of sin onto the
reality status of the 'idea of nothing'.[61] Paul Voet, in his
Theologia Naturalis Reformata, had also been occupied with
non entia and ficta impossibilia.[62] Both Poiret's Cartesian
vocabulary and Voet's concern with fictions are suggestive of
the rationalist complexion of their thought. Cartesianism

was, it seems, amenable to mystical theology in a way which scholastic logic had not been. Lucius is not explicitly responding to Schoock, but his references to the 'idea nihili' - for him, idea, conceptus and ens rationis are substitutable terms - suggests that Cartesian vocabulary had subsumed scholastic jargon.

It is easy to lose sight of the facetious aspect of the nihil texts, especially when they addressed theological matters. But such treatises must have seeemed all the more ironic in the second half of the seventeenth century, when various philosophers were attempting to assess the origins and scope of all human knowledge. In spite of their self-mocking ambivalence, the nihil texts were responding to these general philosophical developments, as the increased prominence of 'ideas' showed. The sequence of works, which had begun as encyclopedic in scope, had narrowed its focus to the mental or spiritual realms. For empiricial scientists during the same period, the problem of nothing was being transfigured into a phenomenological one of space and the vacuum. This was a consequence of changes in early modern perceptions of the universe - as Patrick Grant has put it, 'the book of the world ... conceived not primarily as the bearer of ontological mystery, but as a configuration of things in space.'[63] Meanwhile, continued theological interest in a metaphysical, or mystical, idea of nothing pointed towards that polarising of science and religion which was partly to define the Enlightenment.[64] The remainder of this chapter will give an account of these general changes, and what some of the main figures in Northern European philosophy had to say about the questions raised by our eccentric treatises on nihil.

2. 'Things that us affect': visions and divisions

We have seen that during the sixteenth century there was a perceived overlap of the theological idea of creation and the biological or alchemical idea of generation, especially with regard to the putative opposition of creatio ex nihilo and ex nihil nihil fit. That period which we designate as 'early modern', however, was one when such conflations of the theological and the scientific would become less common. On the one hand, there was a sceptical assault on the human aspiration to knowledge, and the privileging of faith in Scripture over what Cornelius Agrippa had famously called the 'vanity' of the human Arts. This phenomenon might include the docta ignorantia of Nicholas of Cusa as well as the nouveau pyrrhonisme of Montaigne.[65] In tension with, or direct antagonism to such attitudes was the tendency to privilege a specific discourse within those disciplines - one which we now call 'scientific'. By the eighteenth century, I have suggested, it was only in poetic discourse that one could present the sort of unified picture of the universe posited by Arthur Lovejoy. Empirical science, a mechanistic view of the world, provided one set of discourses, which had little to do with hierarchy. If there was a chain of being in the natural world it was linear, and open-ended, expressing the infinity of creation. The taxonomy which Lovejoy identified as the characteristic concern of the early modern philosopher need not be interpreted as hierarchical. Michel Foucault's account of the medieval world order focusses rather on 'similitudes'; the chain of being was established by the inter-connection of everything, in 'the vast syntax of the world'.[66] Alternatively, things were arranged by division and sub-division: Such a view of the world was supported by the distinctive encyclopedic methodology of John Norden in Vicissitudo rerum (1600). The poem is not about stable, fixed

hierarchy, but about intersecting movements, opposites, differences and divisions. Norden wrote of things 'divers', and in 'discord excellent':

> Yet perfit is Dame Natures art in things
> For by dissent, she true assenting brings.[67]

Jonathan Sawday has called this characteristically Renaissance perspective, 'the seemingly endless partitioning of the world and all that it contained'.[68] That world, however, was the natural, physical world, and the 'panoptic, telescopic proto-scientific imagination' of Robert Burton's Anatomy was panoptic only within the boundaries of the human sciences.[69] Scientific study also accepted that its objects of knowledge were not universal, eternal truths, but the ever-changing things of the natural world. Such mundane interests were quite at odds with the more pious treatment given to the same theme by John Davies of Hereford: 'Life is wretched both in Bale, and Blisse!'[70] The world's mutability had been seen as the imperfection of the world by those inclined to a theological view, but was a virtue to the natural scientists.

Another set of discourses, whether theological or poetic, and following scholastic or neoplatonic models, may have conveyed a unified understanding of the universe, but at the expense of concerning themselves with the temporal and the mundane. It was these discourses which held onto a hierarchical view of things. There was a spiritual hierarchy, 'from the lowest, innermost circles of Hell, through the intermediate domain of man's temorary abode in an earthly vestibule between two eternities, to the highest zones of Heaven where dwell the blessed immortal souls of men, the angels, and the Infinite Mind of God.'[71] Whereas the old medieval, and indeed early Renaissance systems of thought, with their graded 'levels of Being', had enabled philosophers to accept on a single scale the existence of God, of angels, and matter, and even of things in the mind, a new,

positivistic discourse wanted a more stringent, exclusive account of reality.

It was not that the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century ended the speculation about nothing, but that it separated out once and for all the various ways of talking about nothing into distinct discourses - the scientific, the theological, the metaphysical and the poetic - which could no longer be thought of as congruent, as forming one fluent and all-encompassing schema. The ostensible aim of encyclopedic knowledge about nothing might suggest a parody of the Ciceronian ideal, or a self-inflicted coup de grâce: if not everything, then nothing. The synthesizing ambitions of humanists seem to have been counter-acted by the functional approach to language which some also embraced: attempts to establish one, proper way of speaking about the world tended only to distinguish different ways. Hobbes, for example, was in tune with his taxonomic times when he insisted upon 'the necessity of definitions' and the centrality of names to rational thought, but his dismissive account of negative terms demonstrated an exclusive attitude to the use of language:

There also be other Names, called Negative; which are notes to signifie that a word is not the name of the thing in question; as these words Nothing, no man, infinite, indocible, three want four, and the like; which are nevertheless of use in reckoning, or in correcting of reckoning; and call to mind our past cogitations, though they be not names of any thing; because they make us refuse to admit of Names not rightly used.[72]

The Essay upon Nothing written by Henry Fielding in the 1740s provides a valuable insight into that polarisation of perspectives caused by seventeenth-century developments. Fielding's essay was clearly, in spite of its flippancy, informed by considerable erudition. It was also constructed very much in the style of those sixteenth-century humanist encomia, beginning with an apologia, and continuing by

examination of different qualities of nothing. The title of
Section One, 'Of the Antiquity of Nothing', might recall the
works of Franciscus Portus or Luigi Manzini, but Fielding's
retrospective glance back at the nothing debate concentrates
on what was then perceived as a clear bifurcation amongst
intellectual discourses in seventeenth-century England. He
remarked that 'Philosophers of all Sects' ponder 'whether
Something made the World out of Nothing, or Nothing out of
Something':

Indeed the Wits of all Ages seem to have ranged themselves on
each Side of this Question, as their Genius tended more or
less to the Spiritual or Material Substance. For those of the
more Spiritual species have inclined to the former, and those
whose Genius hath partaken more of the chief Properties of
matter, such as Solidity, Thickness, &c. have embraced the
latter.[73]

The parting of the ways caricatured here had not come
suddenly during the previous century, but it did certainly
occur.[74] On the one side, there were those of either religious
or Platonic persuasion, who at the least would insist that
spirit was something and at the extreme would say that matter
is nothing. On the other side, those we would now perceive as
being more scientific, either denied the existence of spirit,
or dismissed the question from the proper considerations of
philosophy. The 'Materialism' of the seventeenth century was
perceived, at least by later observers, as countering the
animist leanings of the Platonists, who had gained a
following in England in the seventeenth century.[75]

Fielding's essay also shows that even in the mid-
eighteenth century, the nothing issue was inseparable from
the question of the creation of the world:

But whether Nothing was the Artifex or Materies only, it is
plain in either Case, it [nothing] will have a right to claim
for itself the Origination of all Things. (Fielding, p.181)

Fielding's construction of the philosophical problem is
paradigmatic: the nothing question is about creation and

about the spirit/ matter debate. The nothing problem became a
convenient battleground, then, for antagonistic discourses:
broadly speaking, the spiritual and/or religious, against the
materialist and/or scientific. Hobbes's Leviathan is a locus
classicus of this conflict; in the author's consideration of
the signification of certain scriptural terms, the
commonplace 'Idolum nihil est' is audaciously turned against
'those of the more spiritual species':

... in the sense of common people, not all the universe is
called body, but only such parts thereof as they can discern
by the sense of feeling ... or by the sense of their Eyes ...
Therefore in the common language of man, Aire and aeriall
substances, use not to be taken for Bodies, but (as often as
men are sensible of their effects) are called Wind or breath
or (because the same are called in the Latine spiritus)
Spirits ... But for those Idols of the brain, which represent
Bodies to us, where there are not, as in a looking-glasse, in
a Dream,, or to a distempered brain waking, they are (as the
apostle saith generally of all Idols) nothing; Nothing at all
I say, there where they seem to be; and in the brain itself,
nothing but tumult ...[76]

Of course, that was exactly the sort of language used by
Puritans against the dangers of fancy; spiritualism in
religion was being placed on the same level as poetic
fiction. How poetic discourse was to align itself, or be
aligned, in this quarrel is therefore an overlapping
historical strand.[77] If, in the late sixteenth-century, verse
was a favoured mode of expression for humanists wishing to
give a unifying description of the world, the movements of
the seventeenth century were to limit its scope in a lasting
way. When Donne alluded to his soul in his Holy Sonnets, the
language was still unproblematic; when he referred to
'spirit' or souls in his love poems, the slippage from
literal into metaphorical was also from religious to secular.
More accurately, that distinction was irrelevant; the sort of
view of the world presented by pre-empirical 'scientists' had
conflated the poetic and the literalistic, as did much
'Metaphysical' English poetry. The developments of the

seventeenth century, however, were likely to focus on the compatibility of poetry, which had long been associated with theology, with the new and ostensibly unmetaphorical discourse of empirical science.

Poetry had been very important in the humanists' flirtations with the topic of nothing, but they had tended towards metaphysical or mystical interpretations. According to Patrick Grant, Thomas Browne's Religio Medici (1642) displayed the tensions between the old, Christian, metaphysical view of things, and the new, sceptical, empiricist attitude (P.Grant, p.16). Lucretius's De natura rerum, however, had provided a poetic model for natural philosophy. English writers began producing a new, less theologically-based, kind of scientific poem. John Norden's De vicissitudo rerum and the Microcosmos of John Davies of Hereford (1603) expounded theories about the order of the universe. Alchemy, too, found frequent expression in verse, as witnessed by Elias Ashmole's compilation of English alchemical texts, Theatrum Chemicum Brittanicum (1652). Later in the century, Margaret Cavendish would produce an eccentric collection of poems which attempted to maintain poetry's place within scientific discourse. This, however, was an exception; scientific language became increasingly prosaic - technical and unmetaphorical, notwithstanding a certain mythological aspect to the new linguistic virtue of 'plainness'.[78]

Those who tried to re-assert a philosophical, rather than poetic, Platonism, such as the Cambridge group in the mid-century, were not so much following Cusanus and Bruno as reacting to the materialism of the new natural scientists. The main figures in this group were Henry More, Benjamin Whichcote and Ralph Cudworth, whose Intellectual System of the Universe (1st Part, 1678) was initially a reply to Hobbes, and formulates the classic Christian objection to 'ex

nihilo nihil fit', which he calls 'the Atheist's Achilles'.[79] After some putatively logical argument regarding the generation of souls, Cudworth concludes that 'Nothing cannot cause anything, either efficiently or materially, and this conclusion rather proves the existence of God than impugns it.'[80] This atheism charge was, as we have seen, something of a straw man; Cudworth's defensiveness demonstrates the anxiety felt by the religiously committed about the growing influence of merely mechanistic descriptions of the universe.[81] The anti-humanistic severity of Cudworth's philosophy is seen in his concept of thought itself, which is the process of activating the ideas in the mind of God, and therefore precludes the possibility of creating new thoughts.[82] Meanwhile, his insistence that 'life, thought, and sense' are essential attributes of incorporeal substance, or spirit, illustrates the conflation which this sort of theology made between the rational and the spiritual, and its completely antithetical position in relation to Hobbes's Leviathan.[83]

A poet often associated with the Cambridge Platonists was Thomas Traherne, but, as Jonathan Sawday has observed, he also expressed a 'scientific' interest in the sensual world.[84] Whilst his eulogies on the infinite capacity of the human mind might have been expressed in a religious, even mystical register, there was another aspect to his poetry. At once elevating the ideal world above the material, and yet glorying in the sensual world, Traherne refused to be aligned with either side on the 'nothing' question. Rhetorically, the poet bridged the sensory and the mental spheres, not only by virtue of his spatial imagery, but also by a virtual conflation of 'things' and 'thoughts' in several poems. Thoughts are 'brisk Divine and living Things', or 'the Things that us affect', 'reall Goods' and 'Material delights'.[85] This use of language deconstructed the opposition which had

enabled Hobbes to attack 'idols of the brain' as 'nothings'. The polarities of material and spiritual continued, however, to figure largely in the seventeenth-century discussions of generation.

3. Spirit in a material world

For Renaissance philosophers, there was a distinction between the terrestrial and the super-lunary hierarchies of being. The latter were thought of as ethereal and quintessential, the former as elemental and material. Renaissance thought, however, sustained models of the universe which incorporated both the spiritual and the material: both were accepted as real. Alchemy was convinced that the spiritual and the material could interact, and that between the two substances was nihil, or nigredo, a strange, transitional stage in generation. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, however, philosophy was on the brink of separating out the material and spiritual spheres, and the knowledge we could have of each. Serious challenges to the notion of spiritual substance had been made as early as Pomponazzi's de immortalitate animae in 1516. Even so, it would not be until the second half of the seventeenth century that the schism between the materialists and the spiritualists was fully felt. Thomas Browne's Religio Medici had manifested the intellectual dilemma, and a desire to effect some balance, or median course, between the material and the spiritual. Uniquely amongst creatures, humans could participate in both realms - 'that amphibious piece betweene a corporall and spirituall essence, that middle frame that links those two together.'[86] However, Cartesian dualism would work against such a view of humans as mediators. Instead,

they were themeselves divided, by a basic, ontological
separation of thought and extension - the essences of soul
and body respectively.

There had been a general acceptance in the Renaissance
period that the natural - and, indeed, the alchemical -
generation of things involved a 'spiritual' agency. Theories
of generation had to be revised as the idea of spiritual
substance itself was to lose general credence.[87] Early in the
seventeenth century, Francis Bacon had scorned those who by
their methodology are often thought of as proto-scientists,
the 'Alchemists and magicians, and such-like light, idle,
ignorant, credulous, and fantastical wits and sects' (Bacon,
III, 223). Alchemy, along with magic and astrology, was
acccused of having had 'better confederacy and intelligence
with the imagination of man than with his reason' (see Bacon,
III, 343). We saw above (p.96) how both the bio-medical and
alchemic theories of spiritus current in the early
seventeenth century were explicitly expressed in terms of an
originary nothingness. Increasingly subject to experiment and
demonstration, the 'nothing' question was no longer confined
to the realms of speculation, but now thought of as part of
the phenomenal world. A new, mechanical way of explaining the
world eventually made obsolete those alchemic theories which
involved the immediate agency of a spiritual substance in
material change. By the beginning of the eighteenth century,
'enthusistic preachers' and alchemical physicians alike were
being satirized by Jonathan Swift in 'A discourse concerning
the mechanical operation of the spirit' (1704):

However Spiritual Intrigues begin, they generally conclude
like all others; they may branch up towards Heaven, but the
root is in the earth. Too intense a contemplation is not the
business of flesh and blood; it must by the necessary course
of things, in a little time, let go its hold, and fall into
matter.[88]

Allen Debus has suggested that there developed two
facets to alchemy in the late sixteenth century: that

mystical study by 'chemical philosophers' of the grand design
of the universe, and the more experimental movement, of the
'practical iatrochemists', who were primarily interested in
medicine. There were some amongst these who wanted to
dispense with questionable mystical aspects and concentrate
on the chemistry. Their champion was Joan Baptista van
Helmont, to whom the speculations about macrocosm and
microcosm exemplified in the early seventeenth century by
Robert Fludd, were 'phantastical, hypochondriacal and mad'.[89]
On the other side of the spirit-matter divide, Christian
orthodoxy entrenched itself; Thornborough's treatment of
nihil might be contrasted with Thomas Browne's assertion, in
Religio Medici, that nothing, being the opposite of things,
must be contrary to God, the creator of all things.[90]

New investigations into animal and human generation
challenged the Galenic or Aristotelian received wisdom about
where things, including people, came from. The donné of God
as first cause was set aside in the search for more immediate
explanations of origin. As Linda Deer has observed, before
the middle of the seventeenth century the medical curriculum
was still based on classical texts - Plato, Aristotle
(especially De generatione) Galen and Hippocrates - and their
commentaries.[91] But curriculum change often lags behind
scientific innovation; early in the century questions were
being asked which demanded empirical demonstration.[92]
Biologists of the seventeenth century were not all so easily
satisfied by an easy recourse to supernatural explanations.
Focus was shifted towards natural causes of generation rather
than dependence upon the divine will, and the apparent
phenomenon of spontaneous generation received particular
attention for this reason.[93] Aristotle's theory of motion from
privation toward form, expressed in De Generatione, and also
central to hermetic doctrines, was gradually being superseded
in the light of new discoveries or theories.

More mechanistic - if, as Charles Bodemer has pointed out, still not empirical - explanations of generation came in the course of the seventeenth century.[94] Kenelm Digby's 1644 work on generation produced mechanistic explanations of embryo development, but was forced into an epigenetic account (growth having external cause) by the conviction that vermin bred out of living bodies, and frogs out of the air.[95] Up to the middle of the century, the growth of the seed was treated as the central question of generation; Nathaniel Highmore's The History of Generation (1651) explained spontaneous generation in terms of 'seminal principles' which were wakened in putrifying matter.[96] Linda Deer has proposed that it was the discovery of spermatozoa around 1650 which changed perceptions of generation.[97] The usual historical account gives prominence to a book appearing in the same year as Highmore's, the Exercitationes de generatione animalium of William Harvey. Carrying the legend 'ex ovo omnia' on its frontispiece, it marked a shift in the focus of embryology towards the study of egg-development. This work has been considered a landmark in the history of embyrology, though its motto, of course, was borrowed from the recondite discourse of alchemy.[98]

Bodemer's comments on the 'experimental' credentials of seventeenth-century embryologists are certainly borne out by Harvey's 1651 work. Perhaps the most remarkable part is the appended 'De Conceptione', which gives a literalistic version of Browne's claim that the imagination could produce 'embryon truths'. The poetic connection of two kinds of 'conceiving' became an actual connection, in his rather tentatively posited hypothesis. Harvey suggested that a phantasma or appetitus in the brain might be the immaterial cause of the generation of the egg, citing as corroborating evidence his observation that the substances of the brain and of the uterus were physically similar![99] This raised the usual

questions of whether a material effect could be felt from an immaterial cause, but at least it avoided recourse to spiritual explanations, locating the causes within the brain. Harvey could also have called upon the theory of Thomas Fienus that imagination could be a 'remote cause, per accidens' of bodily change. As Fienus said in Conclusion 32 of _De viribus imaginationis_ (Louvain, 1608),'the imagination changes and transforms bodies through the movement of the humors and spirits.'[100]

Whilst he may have been the first to challenge Aristotelian biology, Harvey was unable to say for certain, having ruled out either material or spiritual causes, what was the cause of generation.[101] He simply suggested that his idea was as good as the other explanations - the atomists', those which invoked incorporeal spirits, and those which regarded conception as a process of fermenation.[102] The chicken/ egg paradox was never more perplexing, it seems, than in this period, and the transition from _ex nihilo omnia_ to _ex ovo omnia_ was not a simple one from a theological to a scientific view of things. At the same time, according to Elizabeth Gasking, the way Harvey's _De generatione_ was published without any storms was in part 'due to a complete change in the intellectual climate of the times ... The whole Aristotelian framework had crumpled and a new outlook had been accepted.'[103]

4. Negative thoughts: void space and other non-entities

There was still a last refuge for the idea of nothing in the material world: the elusive notion of void space. For this reason, a key factor in the discursive shift with regard to _nihil_ was the technological innovation of Otto von

Guericke and Evangelista Toricelli, famed for their
experimental demonstrations of the effects of an artificially
created vacuum. These began in the third decade of the
seventeenth century, and reached their zenith in the
demonstration of the Magdeburg hemispheres before Ferdinand
III in 1654.[104] As the research of Lynn Thorndike and Edward
Grant has shown, there had been a history of experiment
relating to vacuums throughout the Middle Ages, always
conducted in the shadow of the Parmenidean dictat that nature
abhors a vacuum.[105] The phenomena which suggested this rule
were largely hydro-mechanical: for example, that when one
sucks air out of a siphon tube, nature demands that water
replace it. In the twelfth century, Adelard of Bath commented
on the apparent vacuum created when a full, sealed bag of
water is suspended in the air and a hole is made in the
bottom. Water does not steadily flow out, but air is forced
through it to the top of the bag, as though sucked up by the
vacuum at the top. Alexander Neckham repeated this experiment
and conducted others with siphons, but Roger Bacon most
famously used such experiments to justify replacing the old
horror vacui doctrine with his own theory about the
'continuity' of the universe.[106]

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, very little
progress was made with regard to establishing the vacuum's
existence, which was still widely doubted. It did, however,
begin to appear in cosmological theories, because of its
reputed qualities of attraction (as in Adelard's experiment,
mentioned above).[107] An immaterial analogue of magnetism, it
was used to explain such phenomena as orbits. C.B.Schmitt has
suggested that during the sixteenth century little was added
to medieval or even ancient knowledge about vacuums. His
research led him to conclude that 'there seems to be ...
confusion ... as to what would constitute empirical evidence
for the actual existence of a vacuum.'[108] The research of

Thorndike and Schmitt together shows that, despite their long history, experiments had hardly advanced since antiquity. In the third decade of the seventeenth century, the innovatory demonstrations of the force of a vacuum by Toricelli and Guericke brought a consensus, at least amongst other 'mechanical' scientists, about what constituted reliable evidence.

The growing faith in experiment as the methodology of science, and the influence of Hobbesian materialism and Newtonian mechanism, obviated the need for supernatural interpretations of vacuum. This was a natural, albeit astonishing, phenomenon, demystified by the fact of demonstration. The 'London group' of scientists were discussing the Toricellian experiment as early as 1645 (see Webster, p.57). Newton, who followed the atomist/ corpuscular theories of matter, decided that 'if all the solid particles of all bodies are of the same density ... then a void space, or vacuum, must be granted.'[109] And scientists having proved that empty space could occur naturally and terrestrially, the idea of space per se became the transferred object of scientific, mathematical and philosophical enquiry.

If the concept of intra-mundane empty space was difficult to square with the apparent laws of nature, that of extra-mundane void carried with it theological difficulties, and pushed a wedge between the two emerging alternative discourses. In spite of its associations with nihil, and therefore with malum, sixteenth-century Jesuits, however, had been quite literally making a space, albeit an imaginary one, for nihil in their cosmos. There had been something of an overlap between notions of the void and that generative spiritus which was at the heart of sixteenth-century biology. Both carried connotations of the numinous; the void was frequently identified with God, particularly in the context of 'extra-mundane space'. This cosmic idea of vacuum remained

a subject of dispute throughout the seventeenth century, in spite of the progress with regard to experimental demonstration.[110]

At the end of the century, Leibniz was still maintaining the ancient theory of a 'plenum' - the universe as a completely full, continuous space. Newton rejected this, claiming that 'the main business of natural Philosophy is to argue from Phaenomena without feigning Hypotheses'. In the same passage, Newton moved from the question, 'What is there in places almost empty of matter?' on to the immaterial first cause of the mechanical universe:

does it not appear from Phaenomena that there is a Being incorporeal, living, intelligent, omnipresent, who in infinite space ... sees the things themselves intimately, and thoroughly perceives them, and comprehends them wholly by their immediate presence to himself.[111]

Newton's point here was to stress that, though his task was to deduce causes from effects, only those things perceptible to human sense lay within our immediate knowledge. One could demonstrate to the senses a vacuum, but evidence of God's subsistence therein was only circumstantial. The incorporeality of the deity could not be an immediate object of knowledge, but understanding of the mechanical world 'brings us nearer to it, and on that account is to be highly valued'.[112] The vocabulary of discourse about voids was shifting from negative terms - about its immensity and infinity, or its threat to the plenum - towards the notion of measurable space: 'dimension' and 'extension' being the new key terms.[113] The move from negative to positive was, then, simultaneous with that from imaginary to demonstrable: the ineffability which had made nihil both mystical and poetic was, in one of its aspects at least, under threat. In an age of exploration, expansion, and discovery in numerous spheres of human activity, the spatial metaphor was ubiquitous, and often positively dynamic (see above, p.134).

What effect this had upon the topic of 'nothing' is difficult to gauge: there seemed to have been little response from our humanist commentators to the experimental aspects of the vacuum issue. Yet there was an area of common concern, and overlapping discourse, on the theoretical aspects of empty space. One of the points of disagreement between the Cambridge Platonist Henry More and René Descartes had been, as Alexandre Koyré has observed, the possibility of a vacuum. The thoughts of Descartes about vacuums were clearly constrained by an archaic vocabulary inherited from late scholastic theology.[114] In his reply to More of 1649, Descartes claimed that an extended thing is understood as something 'imaginable (be it an ens rationis or a real thing).'[115] Such terms recall the vocabulary of late medieval writers on empty space and dimension, who were dealing entirely in speculation, usually about the heavens. Charles H. Lohr has suggested that Suarez introduced the notion of ens rationis to elucidate certain distinctions within the category of 'real' being:

Suarez attempted to clarify this concept of real being as that which can be thought of as possibly existing by distinguishing it from entia rationis, like figments and chimeras. (CHRP, p.614)

By categorising together the chimera, nihil, and 'imaginary space' [spatium imaginarium] as entia rationis, Suarez assigned them a level of being, albeit one without actuality, having no formal or final cause.[116]

In the following decades, attention began to veer from metaphysical consideration of ens rationis to a concern with its psychological implications. Götz's reference to nihil as ens rationis in 1608 has been noted above; evidence from the academic debates of the early seventeenth century suggest that this terminology was becoming the norm. In his 1618 Disputatio de Ente Rationis, Caspar Barlaei grouped together for consideration three classes of entia rationis:

... so Goat-stag, Chimaera, Cerberus, Geryon, Minotaur are called [entia rationis] in a weak manner, just as blindness, vacuum, darkness are said to be privations, in the manner of nothing; so also the examples ...purgatory, Plato's Republic, Apuleus's ass, etc., etc.[117]

It is less the metaphysical questions of being, or logical questions about naming, which preoccupied the disputant, than the issue of how the mind can produce negative or privative ideas, or how Homer could produce his fantastic creatures. This change of perspective on the issue was seen also in the 1624 lecture from Jacobus Musselius, Quinta Essentia de Nihilo, in which he asserted that nothing, since it does not originate from the senses, must be in the intellect.[118] The example of Nihil could be used to prove that concepts cannot all be derived from the senses. The same year at Wittenberg had seen a debate on the soul which focussed on questions such as 'If the soul is substance' and 'If the soul is correctly said to be the form of the body'.[119] In the backgound to these discussions, therefore, the mind/ body problem was looming, and the desire to explain the status of 'things in the mind' (one possible translation of entia rationis) ran parallel with the desire to establish the nature of that mind. Questions about the operations of the mind, its scope and its limitations, were naturally part of the humanist's concerns. In this regard, nihil marked the outer perimeter of what the mind could imagine, and therefore what could be known and could be expressed.[120]

The experimental demonstration of voids would also change things; alternative ways of speaking about space had to be found. The possibility of a measurable 'pure' extension (without matter) was espoused by Henry More, epitomising the epistemological revolution which was in progress. Eventually, in his arguments with Descartes, More separated out the conflated concepts of immaterial extension and spiritual substance, so that the former could be called measurable

without being called real:

This imagination of *Space* is not the imagination of any real thing, but only of the large and immense capacity of the potentiality of the Matter, which we cannot free our minds from but must necessarily acknowledge that there is indeed such a possibility of *Matter* to be measured upward, downward, everyway *in infinitum*, whether this corporeal matter were there or no.[121]

Edward Grant, in the concuding words of Much Ado about Nothing, wrote that 'with God's departure, physical scientists finally had an infinite, three-dimensional, void frame within which they could study the motion of bodies without the need to do theology as well' (E.Grant, p.264). If this was the situation by the eighteenth century, seventeenth-century thinkers were not always able to leave God out of the equation. Rosalie Colie has described the anxieties about void space caused for and by the mathematician Blaise Pascal, when he conducted his experiments with barometers in 1646.[122] His Jesuit opponent Père Noël wanted him to use the term 'l'espace immaginaire' to avoid some of the implications for Christian thought of a real void-in-nature. The number of works written on the topic throughout Europe suggests huge interest in its consequences, especially in the way it seemed to confirm the validity of atomism.[123] It also explains the appearance of references to imaginary space in the later treatises on nothing, by Marten Schoock and Samuel Lucius.[124]

As illustration of the longevity of this debate, it is worth noting Alexandre Koyré's account of the arguments between Leibniz and Dr Samuel Clarke about space in 1715, which dwelt on the imaginary/ real dichotomy. Leibniz, who was convinced that space is a function of bodies, nicely turned the late scholastic idea of imaginary space back on itself, wryly asserting that not only extra-mundane space, but all empty space was imaginary - that is, a complete fiction (Koyré, p.250). Clarke angrily replied that '*Extra*-

mundane Space (if the material would be finite in its dimensions) is not *imaginary*, but *Real*. Nor are void Spaces in the World, merely imaginary' (Koyré, p.254).

What is perhaps most interesting about this discussion is that Leibniz was able unambiguously to imply the fictionality of empty space by calling it 'imaginary'. The term could no longer be used convincingly to denote a possible but undemonstrable reality. And yet, as Margula Perl has observed, for Leibniz, body itself was not a true entity, fully real, but 'a mere ens rationis of phenomenal being.'[125] Perl argued that Newton's lack of any ontological commitment means that one should not speak of a metaphysical disagreement between the physicist and the rationalist philosopher:

For Newton, such a metaphysical account of the world is superfluous. What is not properly accounted for in natural philosophy is readily accounted for by God, and any metaphysical account is in his view, replete with fictions.

(Yolton, p.512)

Perl suggested that in fact there was a clear similarity between Newton's and Leibniz's notions of 'absolute space', although their criteria for defining reality were different (Yolton, p.517). They were, in twentieth-century terms, playing different language-games.

John Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690) also demonstrated the new and different concerns of philosophical inquiry. Locke insisted that the very fact of our having a distinct idea of vacuum, or 'an Idea of Space distinct from Solidity' provides a form of knowledge.[126] Our shared ideas constitute a more or less reliable understanding of the world, and so long as we can agree on names for these ideas, there should be no confusion. Locke suggested, for example, that to avoid confusion about 'space' and 'extension', one could use the term 'expansion' for 'Space in general, with or without matter possessing it, so as to say

Space is expanded, and Body extended' (Locke, p.180). Locke's attitude to vacuums - that 'it is not necessary to prove the real existence of a Vacuum, but the Idea of it' (p.178) - is obviously very unlike the traditional, metaphysical approach. Such emphasis upon 'human understanding', rather than upon being in itself, would present a different set of criteria with regard to other problematic names, including 'nothing'. The medieval problem of definition seemed to dissolve in the face of Locke's assertion that 'a Definition is nothing else, but the shewing the meaning of one Word by several other not synonymous Terms,' whilst for meanings of terms we can only refer back to our ideas (Locke, p.422).

Descartes, similarly, had established a clear distinction between the reality of ideas and the reality of things:

Now, with respect to ideas, if these are considered only in themselves, and are not referred to any object beyond them, they cannot, properly speaking, be false; for whether I imagine a goat or a chimera, it is not the less true that I imagine the one than the other.[127]

This does not necessarily make any useful contribution to the logical or semantic question, however, and his uses of 'true' and 'false' should not be conflated with logical usage. If ideas are neither 'like or conformed to the things that are external to us', it would be pointless appealing to them to define non-entities. Instead, Descartes preferred to focus on the fact of us having an idea, which need not, as the examples of God and angels demonstrate, be a corporeal image.[128] An abstruse passage of Meditation IV refers to how the author has a 'negative' idea of nihil, 'which is infinitely removed from any kind of pefection'.[129] This seems no more clear than the mystical accounts of negative theologians, and is at best presumptuous about the reader's shared understanding of this idea.

Locke, in his account of privations, was also willing to

brush over questions about the external causes of ideas. He cut through the scholastic jargon to assert that one could have a clear and distinct idea of what was typically defined as a privation, namely the colour black:

A Painter or Dyer, who never enquired into their causes, hath the *Ideas* of White and Black, and other Colours, as clearly, perfectly and distinctly in his understanding, and perhaps more distinctly, than the philosopher, who hath busied himself in considering their Natures, and thinks he knows how far either of them is in its cause positive or privative.

(Locke, p.133)

By an appeal 'to everyone's own experience', the argument proceeds that we have as clear an idea of a shadow as of the light whose lack is its cause: 'the Picture of a Shadow, is a positive thing' he adds (p.133). Up to this point, the argument might be convincing, but in his attempt to apply the same approach to 'negative names', there are rather too many semantic conflations:

Indeed, we have *negative names*, which stand not directly for positive ideas, but for their absence, such as *Insipid*, *silence*, *Nihil*, etc. which Words denote positive *Ideas; v.g. Tast, Sound, Being*, with a signification of their absence. And thus one may truly be said to see Darkness.

(p.133)

The distinction Locke was drawing between 'shadow' and 'insipid' is not an obvious one; can we not, then, have a positive idea of insipidity, or silence? (One might also ask if we can have a clear and distinct idea of 'Being', never mind Nihil.) Furthermore, the assumption that nihil is a 'negative name' which names a privation only serves to revive the medieval problem about distinguishing negations from privations. Locke's later allusion to the problem was hardly more helpful, when he observed that certain names stand for 'the want or absence of some *Ideas*':

such as are *Nihil* in Latin, and in English, *Ignorance* and *Barrenness*. All which negative or privative Words, cannot be said properly to belong to, or signify no *Ideas*: for then they would be perfectly insignificant sounds; but they relate to positive *Ideas*, and signify their absence. (Locke, p.403)

Again, he was by-passing the question of whether nihil is a
privation or a negation; in the imprecise world of ideas, it
seems, such logical distinctions were unnecessary. Desmond
Henry has criticized Locke's dismissive treatment of the
logical problems, 'A vacuum is a vacuum' and 'a chimera is a
chimera' as 'no better than trifling' (Locke, p.611).[130] Locke
refused to address the logical problems of naming and
existence. Neither could Locke's approach have dealt with the
objection of Musselius, that the concept of nothing cannot be
derived from the senses. Locke's teaching necessitates that
the idea of nothing must be an object of either sensation or
reflection - but as with his idea of vacuum, the problem of
'real existence' is avoided thanks to the apparently
irrefutable existence of the idea.

The evidence of this chapter suggests that the aspect of
the medieval debate which attracted most attention in the
seventeenth century was the nominalistic association of nihil
with 'second intentions'. It also, however, demonstrates that
the logical questions were superseded by an interest in ideas
themselves, expressed in a new philosophical language which
was able to gloss over some of the semantic problems. The
'idea nihili', disentangled from logical sophistry, continued
to be used by theologians, as of course did the notion of
spirit, which was gradually pushed out of an increasingly
empirical scientific vocabulary. The vacuum, meanwhile, was
being treated as an object of empirical science, rather than
as an analogue of nihil, with all its attendant logical or
theological implications. The all-inclusive ambitions of
early humanists were fading, and would soon be replaced by a
narrower encyclopedic project - one which restricted itself
exclusively to a consideration of things.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Demarcations: Logic & Science; Metaphysics and Poetry

The humanistic attempts to classify and define nihil were surely related to the general taxonomic interests of Renaissance natural philosophers. The naming of things seemed to have no limits - the infinite variety of the world was at the mercy of the scientist's anatomizing eye. Attempts to anatomize nihil, however, seemed to be forever frustrated, since it could not properly be included in the order of things. Only by transferred reference to terms such as 'vacuum', 'space', 'spirit', 'imagination', 'matter', 'poverty', 'death' could it be classified. In that moment of transference, though, its identity was also lost; in itself, the term was resistant to science, as it had been to logic or grammar. The encyclopedic efforts with nihil might, by that token, be seen as a rearguard action against an encroaching scientific positivism. But the old 'empty names' debate was being superseded by the new taxonomic project, which was concerned with naming things rather than analysing what constitutes 'a thing'.

The subsumption of logic by scientific discourse is a familiar scenario in relation to twentieth-century philosophy. In 1931, Rudolph Carnap, Logical Positivist member of the Vienna Circle, wrote an essay entitled, 'The elimination of Metaphysics through logical analysis of language'.[1] The chief example of language analysed was the term das nichts, and in particular the phrase 'Das nichts nichtet', used by Heidegger in his essay of 1929, 'What is Metaphysics?'.[2] Heidegger had used das nichts to exemplify the

metaphysical mode of discourse, in contrast to the scientific: 'Science wishes to know nothing of Nothing,' he wrote (Heidegger, p.359). According to Heidegger, Science claimed to be concerned only with 'what-is' (das seiende), whilst Metaphysics, dealing with 'what-is-in-totality' (da-sein) must give consideration to that which Science abandons (Heidegger, P.377). Carnap's argument, conversely, was that such language as 'das nichts nichtet' (translated as 'the nothing noths' or 'nothing nothings') is nonsensical, because it implies that 'nothing' is a nominal subject (Carnap, pp.69-71). Comparing this Heideggerian extravagance to a common 'ordinary language' example, 'Nothing is outside', Carnap showed the 'logically correct' version to be 'there does not exist anything which is outside'. This is quite different from metaphysical statements such as 'We seek the Nothing' or 'The Nothing nothings', which cannot be expressed meaningfully at all (Carnap, p.70).

The parallels to medieval discussions are clear. Heidegger's nichts, like the transcendental nihil of Pseudo-Dionysius or Eriugena, is treated, against logic, as a name. Meanwhile, Carnap's 'ordinary language' example of ambiguous usage recalls medieval sophisms such as 'Nothing is in the box.' In the Middle Ages, nihil had marked the site of conflict between grammar and logic, but in the twentieth century the term opened up a different intellectual divide. Carnap's response to Heidegger on das nichts was given a general significance when it became supporting evidence for the logician's verdict about 'the meaninglessness of all metaphysics' (Carnap, p.79). Both writers wanted to distinguish, and privilege, their way of speaking about the world. It is noteworthy also that both felt the need to define that which they saw as antithetical to their own approach: for Heidegger, 'Science', and for Carnap, 'Metaphysics'. Their two texts epitomised, therefore, one of

the chief polarisations within philosophy in the twentieth century - of the metaphysical and the logico-scientific.

Heidegger's attitude to das nichts, along with the corresponding centrality of sein, was derived from Hegel, whose works effectively relegitimated what medievals, following Aristotle, knew as 'Metaphysics' - that is, the study of being. According to Hegelian thinking, the dialectic between abstract being and not-being leads us to concepts of particular existence, or determinate being. Heidegger maintained that centrality to philosophy of 'being', but redescribed it and its counterpart, 'nothing'. He claimed to have reached his concept of nothing by a questioning of the assumption of mathematical logic that negation is prior to nothingness: 'Nothing is the source of negation, not the other way about' (p.372). The experience of nothing in the world - manifested through angst, and a feeling of the 'uncanny' - must be the source for 'the very possibility of negation as an act of reason' (Heidegger, p.361) Jean-Paul Sartre took much from this 'phenomenological' treatment of das nichts, turning it into a major theme of his own philosophical writings - le néant.[3] This kind of philosophy eliminates the disjunctions between the actual and the ideal, the concrete and the abstract, the real and the imagined, which logical positivism would have held dear.

Carnap, perhaps with some justification with regard to the poetically-inclined Heidegger, suggested that metaphysics was merely an extension of myth, and analogous to poetry. It might even be considered 'a substitute, albeit an inadequate one, for art,' he wrote (Carnap, p.80). Carnap's position was typical of the demarcationist tendency of twentieth-century rationalists. To the mathematically-based logic of Russell and Wittgenstein, 'nothing', if taken to signify some abstract 'nothingness', would be quite without meaning. In 'What is Metpahysics?', Heidegger asked the question, 'Does

Nothing "exist" only because the Not, i.e. negation, exists?' and decided that, on the contrary, 'nothing' is prior to negation.[4] To mathematical logic, where negation is a given function within a system, without any need for an external origin, this whole way of speaking is nonsense. In answer to the question, 'Can we put "not" before a name?' Wittgenstein wrote that 'The reason why " ~ Socrates" means nothing is that "~ x" does not express a property of x.'[5] From that, we might infer that 'non-thing' and 'non-being', the commonly cited equivalents to 'nothing', are likewise meaningless. Meanwhile, there was a related conclusion from Bertrand Russell, whose 'Theory of Definite Descriptions' pushed fictional terms such as 'Pegasus' and 'The present King of France' out of the sphere of logical concerns. His position, which again affects the use of 'nothing' as a subject term, was that empty nominal grammatical subjects cannot be genuine logical subjects.[6] Carnap was applying similarly stringent logical standards to linguistic usage when he objected to Heidegger's pseudo-nominal use of 'nothing'. Metaphysical statements about 'nothing' or its equivalents were irreducible to any meaningful logical expression, at least by means of the Russell/ Whitehead system.

The word 'nothing' had, therefore, again become the battleground for conflicting notions of truth. The twentieth-century dispute, as in the Renaissance and earlier, might be reducible to semantic differences, as we can see by re-examining the assertions of Heidegger and Carnap. The scientist will have nothing to do with nothing, Heidegger claimed. Yet, if one were to substitute 'vacuum' for 'nothing', then this assumption would be seen to be incorrect: scientists are interested still in the notion of empty space. If, as was typically assumed in medieval writings, the terms 'nothing' and 'vacuum' are synonymous, then the clash is only terminological; the scientist is

playing a different language-game from that of the metaphysician. Conversely, one might say that if a Heidegger or a Sartre experiences nothing in the world, and if others can understand this notion, then it is false to claim, as does Carnap, that talk about nothing is meaningless.

Another perspective on the problem is that certain twentieth-century definitions of Logic are themselves over-restrictive. This has been the view of Desmond Henry, whose examination of 'metaphysical logic' according to the anti-formalist, 'interpreted' system of the Polish logician S. Lesniewski (1886-1939) has challenged the perceived incompatibility of logic and ontology.[7] In order to make logical statements about 'being in general', the philosopher must distinguish, according to Henry, 'between a formalist approach to axiomatised systems (which treats them as uninterpreted systems of rule-manipulable marks) and the metaphysical approach to logical systems, which sees them as interconnected and interpreted bodies of truths, right from the start.'[8] The alternative - to treat logic as some enclosed system which can only produce a set of tautologies - might be useful to the mathematician but would be of little help to the philosopher. The persistence of such attitudes demonstrates that the twentieth-century bifurcation of Logic and Metaphysics has not been absolute or unanimous.

2. 'The conclusion, in which nothing is concluded'
(Samuel Johnson, Rasselas, Ch.XLIX)

Interest in 'nothing' has seemed always to issue from unresolved questions about the scope of philosophy, logic, science, and (simultaneously) the scope of language. Exclusive approaches to language, meaning and truth were not the medieval way. A medieval logician might have considered that the grammarian had a relatively superficial approach to meaning, but not that their approaches were ultimately incompatible. The notion of equivoce always presupposed the possibility of univocal truth. It appears, historically, that theological discourse has attempted to transcend the isssue of linguistic or disciplinary boundaries. For Christian philosophers there was, however much tension there might have been between ways of talking about the world, a perceived unity in the desire to approach as near as possible to the unattainable truth found in God. This was an ideal not so much of a univocal language, as of a common end to all modes of expression. The distinct but parallel ways of expressing mortal understanding might converge and be perfected only after death in the ultimate, and simple, divine truth. In this context, the word 'nothing' was a constant reminder that human language was inadequate to the task of accounting for all aspects of reality.

Poetic discourse in the Renaissance did not so much transcend as confuse the issues. In specific reference to the humanistic and the vernacular poetry of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, there would seem to be a profitable point of comparison with the Heidegger/ Carnap debate. The example of 'metaphysical poetry' demonstrated the same elision of boundaries to which Carnap alluded when belittling metaphysical language. Metaphor and metaphysics were increasingly interchangeable in the seventeenth-century

discourse about nothing. The gulf between the humanist and the logical positivist views of language is seen in the fact that even logical and scientific accounts of nothing could be subsumed by poetic discourse in early modern literature and drama: from sophism to epigram; from alchemy to imagery. Moreover, the way a non-poetic text like Thornborough's Nihil, Aliquid, Omnia could blend the metaphoric, the scientific and the theological, illustrates the fluidity which humanistic discourse permitted. The demarcation of scientific language would come gradually in the course of the seventeenth century. Meanwhile, there was ongoing dispute as to what constituted literal, and what poetic, in describing phenomena such as vacuums or theoretical substances such as spirit.

The evidence of the trans-disciplinary Marburg debate, and the tradition it spawned, indicates that a major factor in the attractiveness of 'Nothing' as a poetic topic was its amenability to a humanistic ideal of language. All discourses struggled to find a place for the word, and so it became a place of meeting, where various language-games overlapped. This thesis might seem to be merely a revival of that tradition - another summa nihili - and indeed the model set by Götz, with its diversity in unity, its emphasis upon the differences between discourses, is not an inconvenient analogue. But there are no claims to all-inclusiveness or unifying wholeness in my drawing together of materials. The interconnections are simply demanded by language - by the word 'nothing'.

My emphasis upon the linguistic aspects of the topic has not been in order to assert their historical primacy: as I have demonstrated, the semantic problem is as old as the words nihil and 'nothing', and little altered from the fifth century to the twentieth. In this sense, the thesis has not been about a merely historical issue - it has been about

language and perceptions of the world, about a desire of language always to name, but also about reaching towards a realm outside linguistic definition. This reaching leads along a path which by-passes accounts of 'what is', and typically diverges into either poeticism or mystical 'hyper-ontology'. These ways can only ultimately veer back on themselves, but they seem to offer a glimpse of the ineffable, hinting at the possibility of human transcendence over mere things. The common experience of that possibility has been expressed (or not expressed, as Bassanio put it) in a variety of discourses - as the numinous, the magical, the spiritual, the subconscious, the uncanny, the transcendent. 'Nothing' has thereby become a sign of that supplement to our material being which identifies us as human. The tantalising hope represented, in this way, by the concept of nothingness, is what makes the whole subject an open-ended one, as the infinity of 'things' pushes 'nothing' always to the margins of thought and language. It might also have produced a topic which is endlessly repetitious, reformulating itself in response to the vicissitudo rerum; and not only to the changes in things: also to the changing ways of talking about things. Therefore, any route to discovering the significance of 'nothing' will always be via the current answer, at any particular time, to that other vital question posed by Heidegger - 'What is a thing?'[9]

APPENDIX

A selection of nihil sophisms, 11th - 16th century

This appendix provides a representative sample, rather than an exhaustive list, of problem sentences involving nihil, used in treatises or teaching texts. Except in the case of Buridan, I have provided translations. Since it is the very ambiguity of the sophisms which is at stake, these translations cannot be definitive: instead they supply one possible rendering of the Latin.

11th century:

Anselm of Canterbury
[Since Aristotle's De sophisticis elenchis was unknown to Anselm, it is anachronistic to call his logical problem sentences 'sophismata'. However, they served the same purpose as their sophistical descendants.]

Monologion 19
Nihil me docuit volare. [Nothing taught me to fly.]
De Casu Diaboli
Necesse est nihil esse nihil. [It is necessary that nothing is nothing.]

12th century:

Logica Moderna (see de Rijk, Part 2, Vols. I & II)

Nihil est in archa.   [Nothing is in the box.]

Si nihil est, aliquid est.   [If nothing is, it is something.]

Nihil nihil est, sive nihil nulla res est. [Nothing is nothing, or nothing is no thing.]

De nihilo, nihil est verum. [Nothing is true about nothing.]

Nihil et chimæra sunt fratres. [Nothing and the chimera are brothers.]

Tu scis quod nihil scis, quod si scis, nihil scis. [You know the fact that you know nothing, but if you know, you know nothing.]

Item. Si tu scis quod nihil scis, nihil scis. [Likewise, if you know that you know nothing, you know nothing.]

Nihil est chimæra. [Nothing is a chimera.]

Nihil quod fuit in preterito, erit in futuro. [Nothing which was in the past, will be in the future]

Falsum est aliquod argumentum nihil esse et aliquid. [It is false for any argument to be nothing and something.]

Nihil est conveniens quod non sit aliqua ratio. [?]

Nihil est verum nisi in hoc instanti. [Nothing is true except in this instance.]

Nihil a nihilo differt. [Nothing differs from nothing.]

Aliquid currit vel nihil movetur. [Something runs or nothing moves.]

Aliquid est opinabile et illud nihil est. [Something is a matter of opinion, and that thing is nothing.]

Aliquid dicitur, et illud nihil est. [Something is said, and that thing is nothing.]

Aliquid possibile est et illud nihil est. [Something is possible, and that thing is nothing.]

De nihilo verum est nihil esse.

13th-century:

Nicholas of Paris, Syncategoremata

Nihil est nihil. [Nothing is nothing]

Nihil est verum nisi in hoc instanti. [Nothing is true unless in this instance]

14th century:

William of Ockham Summa logicae, II:14

Chimæra est non-ens. [A chimera is non-being/ a non-object.]

Walter Burleigh De puritate artis Logicae, Tractatus brevior

Nihil est nihil. [Nothing is nothing]

Non aliquid es et tu es asinus. [Not something is, and you are an ass.]

Nihil et chimæra sunt fratres. [Nothing and the chimera are brothers.]

Jean Buridan Sophismata (translations by T.K. Scott)

This name 'chimera' signifies nothing.

I read and I read nothing.

I see and I see nothing.

I understand and I understand nothing.

A chimera is non-being.

Non-being is known.

Albert of Saxony Sophismata, 2nd Part (Numbered as in text)

iii. Quod non est, est. [That which is not, is.]

iv. Non aliquid vel homo est asinus. [Either not something or a man is a donkey.]

vi. Non aliquid est vel tu es homo. [Not something is or else you are a man.]

vii. Non aliquid est et tu es asinus. [Not something is and you are a donkey.]

xviii. Nihil est nihil. [Nothing is nothing.]

xix.   Ex nihil nihil fit. [Nothing is made out of nothing.]

xx.   Nihil et chymera sunt fratres. [Nothing and the Chimera are brothers.]

xxi.   Nihil est si aliquid est. [Nothing is if something is.]

xxii. Si nihil est, aliquid est. [If nothing is, something is.]

xxiii. Si tu scis quod nihil scis tu nihil scis. [If you know that you know nothing, you know nothing.]

xxiiii. Nihil est verum nisi in hoc instanti. [Nothing is true except in this instance.]

16th century:

Rudolphus Goclenius   Problematum logicorum

1. Chimæra est nomen positivum, cum non significet negatione alicuius. Ergo non est non ens. ['Chimera' is a positive name, since it does not signify the negation of anything. Therefore it is not not-being.

2. Non ens est negatium. Chimera est non ens. Ergo Chimaera est nomen negativem. ['Not being' is a negation. A Chimera is a non-being. Therefore 'Chimera' is a negative name.

Notes, Chapter 1

[1]. 'Dispatches', Channel 4, 23.11.96.

[2]. Paul Gallagher and Terry Christian, Brothers (London: Virgin, 1996), p.208.

[3]. OED cites Steele in The Tatler, 1710, as the earliest example of the personal use of 'non-entity'.

[4]. Alexander B. Grosart, editor, The Complete Works of John Davies of Hereford, 2 vols. (Chertsey Worthies Library, 1878), k, p.43: 'Upon English Proverbs', No.93; compare also No.173 (k, p.45). Except where stated, all references to works by John Davies of Hereford will cite Grosart's edition, which uses the following alphabetic key:
a - Mirum in Modum (London, 1602)
b - Summa Totalis (London, 1607)
c - Microcosmos (London, 1603)
e - Humour's Heaven (London, 1609)
f - Muses Teares (London, 1613)
h - Wittes Pilgrimage (London, 1605)
k - Scourge of Folly (London, 1610)
l - Muses' Sacrifice (London, 1612)

[5]. See Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp.75-141; Terry Eagleton, Marxism and Literary Criticism (London: Routledge, 1976), pp.1-19.

[6]. See Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes, edited by Iona & Peter Opie (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p.430.

[7]. Jean Passerat, 'Nihil' (Paris, 1587). The prominence of this poem in English literary criticism is probably thanks to Samuel Johnson, who quotes it in full, proposing it as a source for Rochester's 'Upon Nothing': see Samuel Jonson,

<u>Works</u>, 11 vols. (London, 1787), II, 202-3.

[8]. Passerat, in Johnson, p.202: 'Non timet infidias: fures, incendia temnit...'.

[9]. See, for example, John Vicars (d.1652), <u>Epigrams... of John Owen</u> (London, 1619), I, 120: 'All-things are Nothing': Hee which made all of Nought, himself is All \ And what God made of Nought, we Nought may call.' See also Davies of Hereford, 'Sic transit gloria Mundi', in Grosart, h, p.44,: 'To nothing next, or Nothing's like to this'; Grosart, f, p.6: 'Life's but a supposition, or non-ENS.'

[10]. Davies of Hereford, <u>The Triumph of Death, or The Picture of the Plague, as it was in Anno Domini 1603</u> (London, 1605), Grosart, e, p.49.

[11]. Francis Quarles, <u>Divine Fancies</u> (London, 1632), II.15, in <u>Complete Works</u>, edited by Alexander B. Grosart, 3 vols. (New York: AMS Press, 1967), II, 216.

[12]. Nicolle Bargedé, <u>Les Odes Penitentes du moins que Rien</u> (Paris, 1550).

[13]. John Donne, <u>The Complete Poems</u>, edited by C.A.Patrides (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1985), p.307: 'To the Countess of Salisbury', 19. All subsequent references to Donne's poems will be to this edition.

[14]. Donne, p.333. William Elton, in <i>King Lear and the Gods</i> (San Marino, California: Huntingdon, 1966), p.180, noted the very close similarity of Antonio's lines in <u>The Duchess of Malfi</u>, III.5.97.

[15]. Donne in Mary Paton Ramsay, <u>Les Doctrines médiévales chez Donne</u> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924), p.138. Ramsay quotes also a letter to Goodyer from 1608, about being nothing.

[16]. As Ramsay's research (see n.17) has shown, this imagery derived from Donne's extensive reading of medieval philosophy and theology.

[17]. John Marston, The Scourge of Villanie (London, 1599), p.65.

[18]. See also Richard Jente, editor, Proverbia communia (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1947), 238, p.171: 'He who has nothing can lose nothing.' For a twentieth-century version of the same idea, see Bob Dylan's song, 'Like a Rolling Stone.'

[19]. See Cicero, Paradoxa stoicorum, edited by A.G.Lee (London, 1953); see also English translation by Thomas Newton (London, 1569).

[20]. Ortensio Landi, Paradossi (Bergamo, 1594), 1st Paradox: 'Che meglio e l'essere povero che ricco'; Charles Estienne, Paradoxes (Paris, 1553); Anthony Munday, Defence of Contraries (London, 1593).

[21]. Compare Thomas Newton's variation on a Ciceronian paradox, in Paradoxes (London, 1569), 2: 'In whomsoever virtue is, there lacketh nothing els to bring him to lead an happy life'.

[22]. See Verdun L. Saulnier, editor, Théâtre profane (Paris: Librairie Droz, 1946), pp.135-200.

[23]. Gerta Calmann, 'The Picture of Nobody, an Iconographical Study', Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute 23 (1960). Calmann does not mention any French equivalents.

[24]. Farce Nouvelle tresbonne et fort ioyeuse a troys personnages Cestassavoir. Tout. Rien. Et Chascun (Paris, 1550?); subsequent references will be to the collection of Farces in the British Museum Library (c.20.e.13); from same collection: Jenin, fils de Rien; subsequent references will be to André Tissier, La Farce en France de 1450 à 1550, 2

vols. (Paris: Centre de Documentation Universitaire, 1976),
II, 251-280.

[25]. See Vicars, III, 35: 'The poor have little, Beggers none,
\ The Rich Too-much, Enough not one.'

[26]. See G.Gregory Smith, The Transition Period (Edinburgh:
William Blackwood & Sons, 1900), p.268: 'A large percentage
of the Farces are political or politico-social satires. They
offered a ready opportunity for the expression of public
feeling on all questions.'

[27]. Bernadette Rey-Flaud, La Farce, ou la machine à rire
(Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1984), p.298. One might add that the
medieval fabliaux were often equally ruthless in their
satire.

[28]. Konrad Schoell, La Farce du quinzième siècle (Tubingen:
G.Narr, 1992), p.13: 'Elle [la farce] présente des types de
différents états de la société et leurs conflits dans le
mariage, dans l'école, dans l'exercise du métier, dans les
rapports sociaux et économiques.' Schoell suggests (p.10)
that Rey-Flaud under-stated the critical and satirical
elements of the farce.

[29]. See Robert Darnton, The Great Cat Massacre (London: Allen
Lane, 1984), p.54: 'No discernible morality governs the world
... at least not in the French tales, where cunning takes the
place of the pietism in the German.'

[30]. Edward Daunce, The Prayse of Nothing (London, 1585),
sig.Eii.

[31]. Compare John Marston, Plays, edited by H.Harvey Wood, 3
vols. (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1938), III, 239: 'He that is
poore is firmly sped, \ He shall never be flattered, \ All
thinges are error, durt and nothing.'

32. See Francisco Beccuti, Rime, edited by Ezio Chiorboli (Bari, 1912), pp.295-7.

33. John Davies of Hereford, Wits Bedlam (London, 1617), sig.B5ᵛ; compare sig.B5: 'Against wives that will not worship Baal'.

34. See Thomas Pyles, 'Ophelia's "Nothing"', Modern Language Notes 64 (1949), pp.322-3; Robert Fleisner, 'The "Nothing" element in King Lear', Shakespeare Quarterly 13 (1962), pp.67-70.

35. There are Freudian readings of Othello and Hamlet based on this idea in Terry Eagleton, William Shakespeare (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp.64-75.

36. Davies of Hereford, Wits Bedlam, sig.K7ᵛ; Henry Parrot, Laquei Ridiculosi, or Springes for Woodcocks (London, 1613), I, 44; compare II, 66, 'Venus': 'the least Thing makes her sweat'; see also Robert Hayman, Certain epigrams out of the 1st foure bookes of... John Owen (London, 1628), I, 127-128.

37. Davies of Hereford, Wittes Pilgrimage, sig.C4.

38. Rosalie Colie cited Donne calling his poems 'nothings', in a letter to a friend; see Colie, Paradoxia Epidemica (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p.34.

39. Michael Drayton, Poems, edited by John Burton, 3 vols. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), I, 4; see also p.3: 'My heart was slaine, and none but you and I,' and p.6: 'You not alone, when you are still alone'. Compare Grosart, h, p.9 (Sonnet No.70): 'No, I deny it ...'

40. Vulgate Bible (1592) Exodus 3. 14: 'dixit Deus ad Mosen ego sum qui sum'; Authorized Version (1611): 'And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM'; Francis Bacon, Works, 13 vols., edited by James Spedding, R.L. Ellis & D.D. Heath (London, 1857-1872), IV, 113. Subsequent references to Bacon will be

to this edition.

[41]. See Jacob Burckhardt, <u>The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy</u>, translated by S.G.C.Middlemore (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944).

[42]. See Rodney Hilton, editor, <u>The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism</u>, (London: Verso, 1978).

[43]. See Maurice Dobb, <u>Studies in the Development of Capitalism</u> (London: Routledge, 1946), pp.123-220.

[44]. On the relationship between religious reform and the emergence of the bourgeoisie, see R.H.Tawney, <u>Religion and the Rise of Capitalism</u> (London: J.Murray, 1926).

[45]. See J.A.Sharpe, <u>Early Modern England: A Social History 1550-1760</u> (London: Edward Arnold, 1987). Sharpe questions the accuracy of referring to 'professions' in the period (p.176).

[46]. Stephen Greenblatt, <u>Renaissance Self-Fashioning</u> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp.1-8.

[47]. Eagleton, <u>William Shakespeare</u>, p.74.

[48]. Ben Jonson, <u>Volpone</u> (1605), III.1.11, in <u>Plays</u>, edited by G.A.Wilkes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p.47 : 'Almost \ All the wise world is little else, in nature, \ But parasites, or sub-parasites'. Subsequent references to Jonson's plays will be to this edition.

[49]. Daunce, sig.Dii.

[50]. See Brian Rotman, <u>Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero</u> (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), pp.78-86.

[51]. See also David McLellan, editor, <u>Karl Marx, Selected Writings</u> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp.445-451.

[52]. Alexander Murray, <u>Reason and Society in the Middle Ages</u> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

[53]. Edward Tayler also perceived this scene, and others in King Lear, as showing 'division into nothing', without seeing the economic implications: Tayler, 'King Lear and Negation', English Literary Renaissance 20:1 (1990), pp.17-39, p.23.

[54]. Alexander Murray identified the French antecedents: see Murray, p.173.

[55]. For other examples from 15th and 16th centuries, see B.J.Whiting, Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968).

[56]. See William Langland, Piers the Plowman / Richard the Redeless, edited by Walter W. Skeat, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1886) I, 627.

[57]. Thomas Usk, The Testament of Love, 72; 82-4. See Walter W. Skeat, Chaucerian and Other Pieces (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1897).

[58]. See also Henry V Prol., 17-18: the Chorus will act as 'ciphers to this great accompt'. The reference was noted by Jorgensen (p.293).

[59]. Francis Bacon, Works, I, 159. Bacon acknowledged the influence of Aristotle on his attitude to words in Of the Advancement of Learning (London, 1605): see Bacon, III, 399.

[60]. Bacon, I, 60: 'In verbis autem gradus sunt quidam pravitatis et erroris' [There are, however, degrees of distortion and error in words]. See also IV, 62.

[61]. Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, Essais edited by Robert Barral (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967), I.51: 'De la vanité des parolles'. The economic metaphor is used throughout Hobbes's discussions of words in Leviathan, Part I.

[62]. See Thomas Dekker, Plays, edited by E.D.Pendry, Stratford Library 4 (London: Edward Arnold, 1967), p.98. Compare Hayman, I, 39, 'New Rhetoricke': 'Good arguments without

Coyne will not stick \ To pay and not to say, is best
Rhetorick.'

[63]. See Myron P. Gilmore, The World of Humanism, 1453-1517
(New York: Harper, 1952), pp.56-60.

[64]. See Robert Finlay, Politics in Renaissance Venice (London:
Ernest Benn, 1980); see also Brian Pullman, 'Service to the
Venetian State', Studi Secenteschi 5 (1964), 95-148.

[65]. Harrington, in Brian Pullan, Rich and Poor in Renaissance
Venice (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), p.5; pp.510-537.

[66]. Pullan, p.37. On the later development of the idealised
myth of Venice, see William J. Bouwsma, Venice and the
Defense of Republican Liberty: Renaissance values in the age
of the Counter-Reformation (Berkeley: University of
California Press, 1968). On sixteenth-century accounts, see
Myron Gilmore, 'Myth and Reality in Venetian Political
Theory', in J.R.Hale, Renaissance Venice (London: Faber &
Faber, 1973), pp.431-444.

[67]. See Brian Vickers, 'The Idea of Exchange in *The Merchant
of Venice*', in l'Image de Venise au temps de la renaissance,
edited by M.T.Jones-Davies (Paris, 1989), pp.17-23.

[68]. Ugo Tucci, 'The Psychology of the Venetian Merchant in the
Sixteenth-century', in Hale, Renaissance Venice, pp.346-378,
p.360.

[69]. Nick Potter, 'The Merchant of Venice', in Graham
Holderness, Nick Potter, John Turner, Shakespeare: the play
of history (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p.178.

[70]. Vickers, 'The Idea of Exchange in *The Merchant of Venice*',
p.23.

[71]. Compare Richard II, IV.1.266: 'If my words be sterling yet
in England.'

[72]. To Brian Vickers, Portia's value-system is quite unmercenary. See Vickers, 'The Idea of Exchange in *The Merchant of Venice*', p.45.

[73]. See Karl Marx, <u>Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844</u> (Moscow: Foreign Language Publications House, 1959), pp.136-141.

[74]. Compare <u>Romeo & Juliet</u>, V.1.80.

[75]. There is a possible <u>double entendre</u> in Portia's, 'I will have nothing else,' (IV.1.429) which could mean, 'Otherwise, I will have nothing'.

[76]. Edward Muir, <u>Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p.122.

[77]. Compare Webster, <u>Duchess of Malfi</u>, I.i.462-477; see John Webster, <u>Complete Works</u>, edited by F.L.Lucas, 4 vols. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1927), II, 48.

[78]. This was part of alchemical lore, but see also Daunce, <u>The Prayse of Nothing</u>, sig.Biii.

[79]. The meaninglessness of the value attached to gold was commented upon by Thomas More in <u>Utopia</u>; to emphasize this, the Utopians make their chamberpots from it. See Edward Surtz & T.H.Hexter, editors, <u>The Complete Works of Sir Thomas More</u>, 15 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), IV, 153.

[80]. Thomas Heywood, <u>Brytaines Troy</u> (London, 1609), Argumentum, Canto 17: '... royal James claymes his Monarchall seate; \ In whom three kingdomes, first by Brute devided, \ United are, and by one scepter guided.'

[81]. <u>Arden of Feversham</u>, edited by Martin White (London: Ernest Benn, 1982), III.5.11.

[82]. Marilyn French has observed, similarly, that money makes the world of Belmont both harmonious, and morally flexible: see French, <u>Shakespeare's Division of Experience</u> (London:

Jonathan Cape, 1981), Ch.6.

[83]. Keith Wrightson, English Society, 1580-1680 (London: Routledge, 1993), p.141.

[84]. Brents Stirling, The Populace in Shakespeare (New York: AMS Press, 1965).

[85]. See Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson, Order and Disorder in Early Modern England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[86]. See James Sharpe, Early Modern England (London: Edward Arnold, 1987), pp.113, 218.

[87]. King Lear, II.2.438. References will be to the text of The Tragedy of King Lear in The Oxford Shakespeare.

[88]. Grosart, k, p.46: 'Upon English Proverbs', No.237.

[89]. See Georgio Melchiori, Shakespeare's Dramatic Meditations (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p.194: Melchiori asserts that for Shakespeare the body is 'the only constant, and therefore true, thing in an arbitrary universe.'

[90]. See David Margolies, Monsters of the Deep: Social Dissolution in Shakespeare's Tragedies (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp.14-42.

[91]. See Mary Lascelles, 'King Lear and Doomsday', Shakespeare Survey 26 (1973) and Joseph Wittreich, '"Image of that horror": the Apocalypse in King Lear', in The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature, edited by C.A.Patrides & Joseph Wittreich (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

[92]. There is a general view of the apocalypse theme in Shakespeare in Cynthia Marshall, Last Things and Last Plays: Shakespearean eschatology (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991).

93. Lawrence Danson, 'King Lear and the Two Abysses', in Danson, editor, On King Lear (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp.119-135; p.123.

94. See John Walter and Roger Schofield, editors, Famine, Disease and the Social Order in Early Modern Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

95. Wrightson, p.143. Wrightson qualified his remarks by saying that only the 1597/8 dearth brought near-crisis on a national scale (see p.145).

96. No-body and Some-body, 'Printed for John Trundle and are to be sold at his shop in Barbican, at the sign of No-body' (London, 1606).

97. No-body and Some-body, sig.B1^v.

98. See Calmann, 'The Picture of Nobody'.

99. Walter & Schofield, pp.105, 107; see pp.104-113 for the evidence of these practices.

100. Little is known about Demons, but that he came from Amiens. See Biographie universelle (Paris: Michaud), X, 387.

101. Jean Demons, 'La Demonstration de la Quatriesme Partie de Rien, et quelquechose, et tout, avec La Quintessence tiree du quart de rien et de ses dependances ... pour trouver l'origine des maux de France et les remedes d'iceux' (Paris, 1594), p.2: 'There below the sole hosts of depraved and wicked Angels live amonst us, and like swarms of bees buzz in our ears and incite us to mutual ruin, by fire, by bloodshed, by famine, without any humanity, all injuring each other by a thousand horrible crimes before God.' Demons also published a sequel, the Sextessence (Paris, 1595).

102. Demons, pp.32-3: 'Then a frenetic discord, worse than ancient, confusion-filled chaos, will come from the heavens for the reconstruction, or perhaps the destruction, of the

whole region. Alas! Good Lord, this storm against his shipwrecked France consumes me with anguish.'

[103]. Alternative sequences were also compiled, e.g. Le Bon-iour de R. de B. en reponce aux Nihil (JP). Nemo. (Theodorus Marcilius) Quelquechose. (Philipppe Girard) Tout. Le Moyen. Si peu que rien. On. (Paris, 1599).

[104]. Compare Jean-Paul Sartre's writing of l'Étre et le Néant during World War 2.

[105]. Frederick Baumgartner, Radical Reactionaries: The political thought of the French Catholic League (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1975).

[106]. See J.H.M.Salmon, Society in Crisis: France in the sixteenth century (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1975), pp.206-211.

[107]. Denis Crouzet, Les Guerriers de Dieu: La violence au temps des troubles de religion, vers 1525 - vers 1610, 2 vols. (Seysel: Champ Vallon, 1990), II, 326.

[108]. Passerat, 'Rien' (Paris, 1587). Compare Hamlet's remarks upon man being 'this quintessence of dust' (II.2.309); see also Hayman, IV, 132, 'Alchymists' Folly': 'God at the first nothing all things wrought: \ Our alchymysts reduce all things to nought.

[109]. Nieuw Nederlandsch Biografisch Woordenboek (Leiden), IV, col.1074.

[110]. A.C.F.Koch, 'Reformation at Deventer in 1579-1580, in Acta Historiae Neerlandicae 6 (1973), 27-39.

[111]. Lambertus Ludolphus Pithopoeius, Nihili utopiensi, (1583); this and subsequent citations of the poem will be to the printing in Caspar Dornavius, Amphitheatrum sapientiae Socraticae joco-seriae (Hanover, 1619), I, 736.

[112]. Daunce, sig.Biii.

[113]. Compare Rosalie Colie, 'Biblical echo in *King Lear*', in Rosalie Colie & F.T.Flahiff, editors, <u>Some Facets of King Lear</u> (London: Heinemann, 1974), pp.117-144; Colie argued, to the contrary, that the play is an argument for 'Christian Stoicism' - 'celebrating humanity in the grip of irremediable suffering' (142).

Notes, Chapter 2

[1]. See John Marenbon, Early Medieval Philosophy (London: Routledge, 1988), pp.13-19.

[2]. See Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, (Turin: Marietti, 1950), I, 74. All subsequent references are to this edition.

[3]. See Eugene Portalie, A Guide to the Thought of St Augustine (London: Burns & Oates, 1960), p.102; Portalie cites four works in which Augustine upholds the doctrine.

[4]. E.O.James, Creation and Cosmology (Leiden, 1969), p.93: James identifies II Maccabees vi.28. as the first occurrence of the idea of creatio ex nihilo in Jewish scriptures.

[5]. Augustine, The City of God, translated by John Healey (London: J.M.Dent, 1931), pp.177-181. [PL XLI, 319-322]

[6]. Ibid., pp.199-200 [PL, X. 20].

[7]. Ibid., p.218 [PL, X. 33].

[8]. Marcia Colish, The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages, 2 vols. (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1985), II, 185.

[9]. Ibid., pp.185-6.

[10]. See Dionysius the Areopagite on the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology, translated by C.E.Rolt (London: Macmillan, 1920), p.109.

[11]. Geoffrey Chaucer, in Boece (III, 151) brought the saying into English; see Riverside Chaucer, p.438.

[12]. See A. Hyman & James J. Walsh, Philosophy in the Middle Ages (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), p.150.

[13]. Hyman & Walsh, pp.161-2.

[14]. Anselm, _Proslogion_ V, in _Opera Omnia_, edited by F.S. Schmitt, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1946), I, 104: 'solus existens per se omnia alia faciat de nihilo.' All subsequent citations of Anselm's works will be to this edition, unless stated otherwise.

[15]. Thomas Aquinas, _Summa Theologiae_, I, 64.

[16]. One name cited by Thomas Aquinas (ibid.) is that given to Moses: 'Qui est'; this also corroborates Thomas's claim that God's existence is part of his essence, i.e., that which defines him.

[17]. F.C.Copleston, _Aquinas_ (Penguin, 1955), pp.136-8.

[18]. Some recent commentators have mistakenly cited Aquinas as a source for early modern notions of negative theology. See Rotman, p.64; Richard Helgerson, 'Inventing Noplace, or the Power of Negative Thinking', in Stephen Greenblatt, editor, _The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance_ (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1982), pp.101-121, p.101. Helgerson was citing Helen Gardner on Donne.

[19]. Eriugena, _Periphyseon_, translated by I.P.Sheldon-Williams, revised by John J.O'Meara (Montréal: Bellarmin, 1987), p.96.

[20]. Arthur O.Lovejoy, _The Great Chain of Being_ (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1948), pp.58-64.

[21]. See Aristotle, _Works, translated into English_, edited by W.D.Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), II, _Physica_ I.8.

[22]. See Christopher Stead, _Divine Substance_ (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

[23]. On privation, see Ross, VIII: _Metaphysics_, V, 22; Jonathan Barnes, editor, _Complete Works of Aristotle_, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), II, 1615.

[24]. Friedrich Solmsen, _Aristotle's System of the Physical World_ (New York: Cornell University Press, 1960), p.77.

[25]. For Aristotle on nature/ substance, see Barnes, II, 1602.

[26]. Kevin Hart, _The Trespass of the Sign_ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp.xi; 186.

[27]. Jacques Derrida, 'Différance', in _Margins of Philosophy_, translated by Alan Bass (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), p.6.

[28]. Jacques Derrida, 'White Mythology: Metaphor in the text of Philosophy', in _Margins of Philosophy_, p.212.

[29]. Terry Eagleton, 'The Irish Sublime' (unpublished essay), p.2.

[30]. See Copleston, _Aquinas_, p.95.

[31]. The Organon, or 'Tool' of medieval (Aristotelian) Logic teaching comprised the _Logica Vetus_: the _Categoriae_ and _De Interpretatione_, and the _Logica Nova_: the _Prior & Posterior Analytics_, the _Topics_, and the _De Sophisticis Elenchis_.

[32]. Anselm, I, 100, _Proslogion_ 1: 'Neque enim quaero intelligere ut credam, sed credo ut intelligam'.

[33]. For Aquinas on _Recta ratio_ ['right reason'], see _Summa Theologiae_, II, 254; 2, 79; 286. On its survival into the 16th century, see Robert Hoopes, _Right Reason in the English Renaissance_ (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962).

[34]. See, for a summary of the situation, Desmond Henry, 'The Old Logic', in CHLMP, pp.135-139; also Henry, 'Two Medieval Critics of Traditional Grammar', _Historiographia Linguistica_ 7 (1980), 1/2, pp.85-107.

[35]. See Barnes, II, 1584: 'There are many senses in which a thing may be said to "be"'; see also pp.1623 & 1721.

[36]. See Desmond Henry, 'The Grammar of Quiddity', in Dino Buzzetti & Maurizio Ferriani, editors, <u>Speculative Grammar, Universal Grammar, and Philosophical Analysis of Language</u> (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1987), pp.1-22; 'The logical grammar of the transcendentals', <u>Philosophical Quarterly</u> Vol. 43, No.173 (1993), pp.431-446.

[37]. See, for a brief account, Henry, 'The Old Logic', in CHLMP, pp.133-142. See also Henry, <u>The Logic of St Anselm</u> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp.207-219; <u>Medieval Logic & Metaphysics</u> (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1972), pp.75-88; <u>Commentary on De Grammatico</u> (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1974), 335-345; <u>Quaestio Subtilissima</u> (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 149-155.

[38]. Aristotle, <u>Categories and De interpretatione</u>, translated by J.L. Ackrill (Oxford: Clarendon Press Press, 1963), p.44.

[39]. Augustine, <u>De magistro</u>, edited by K.D.Daur (Turnholt: Corpus Christianorum, 1970), p.160.

[40]. Ibid: 'falso inter nos constitit quod omnia verba signa sint aut omne signum aliquid significet'.

[41]. See Marcia Colish, 'The Stoic Theory of Signification', in Lucie Brind 'Amour & Eugene Vance, editors, <u>Archéologie du signe</u> (Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1983), pp.38-40.

[42]. Aristotle, <u>De interpretatione</u> (Venice, 1562), I: 'Sunt ergo ea, quae sunt in voce, earum, quae sunt in anima passionum notae'.

[43]. Marcia Colish, <u>The Mirror of Language: A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge</u> (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), p.19.

[44]. Ibid., p.19.

[45]. Ibid., p.39.

[46]. Eriugena, _Periphyseon_, p.252.

[47]. Fredegisus of Tours (_PL_, 105, 751s): 'Omnis significatio est quod est. Nihil autem aliquid significat. Igitur nihil ejus significatio est quid est, id est, rei existentis'; see also, Henry, _The Logic of St Anselm_, p.208.

[48]. Anselm, I, pp.1-88: _Monologion_ 19.

[49]. Anselm, I, pp.33-5.

[50]. Henry, 'Predicables and Categories', in _CHLMP_, p.141.

[51]. Henry, _Medieval Logic and Metaphysics_, p.78.

[52]. See, for example, Henry, _Medieval Logic & Metaphysics_, p.10.

[53]. Colish, 'Stoic Theory of Signification', pp.26-27.

[54]. For a general account of the later medieval systems of logic, see Alexander Broadie, _Introduction to Medieval Logic_ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). For primary source, William of Sherwood, _Introduction to Logic_, translated by Norman Kretzmann (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966).

[55]. On the connection between logical argument and the absurd, see W.C.Salmon, _Zeno's Paradoxes_ (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1970). See also below, p.147.

[56]. Rita Guerlac, _Juan Luis Vives: Against the Pseudodialecticians_ (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1978), p.5.

[57]. See L.M. de Rijk, editor, _Logica Moderna_, 3 vols. (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1967). See, on 'supposition theory', Guerlac, pp.3-9.

[58]. See Jan Pinborg, 'Speculative Grammar', in CHLMP, pp.254-269.

[59]. Henry, Quaestio Subtilissima, pp.144-9.

[60]. Roy Harris and Talbot J. Taylor, Landmarks of Linguistic Thought (London: Routledge, 1989), p.79.

[61]. Boethius in Henry, Quaestio Subtilissima, pp.2-3.

[62]. For an explanation of 'second intentions' see Henry, Quaestio Subtilissima, pp.14-15. Henry cites the probable origin of the 'nominum nomina' tag - in Boethius's commentary on Aristotle's Categoriae.

[63]. Paul Vincent Spade, editor & translator, Peter of Ailly: Concepts and Insolubles (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1980), p.3.

[64]. William of Ockham, Summa Logicae, edited by Philotheus Boehner, 2 vols. (New York: Franciscan Institute, 1954), I, 26.

[65]. Ockham, Opera Omnia (New York, 1974), I, 286-8.

[66]. Henry, Quaestio Subtilisssima, pp.91-123.

[67]. Ibid., p.153; also, Henry, Medieval Logic and Metaphysics, pp.80-85.

[68]. Burleigh in Henry, Medieval Logic & Metaphysics, pp.79-80.

[69]. See Henry, Medieval Logic and Metaphysics, p.83.

[70]. Ibid., pp.84-5.

[71]. Ibid., p.81.

[72]. See Henry, Quaestio Subtilissima, p.153.

Notes, Chapter 3

[1]. Milton K. Munitz, Cosmic Understanding: Philosophy and Science of the Universe (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp.131-137. Munitz remarks that the originary vacuum state of quantum mechanics is not 'absolute nothing' - it 'must have its own type of reality' (p.137).

[2]. See Erasmus, The Antibarbarians, translated by Robert Parker, in English Humanism, edited by Joanna Martindale (London: Croom Helm, 1985), pp. 98-109.

[3]. Plato, Timaeus and Critias, translated by Desmond Lee (Penguin, 1975), pp.72-3.

[4]. Edward Daunce, The Prayse of Nothing (London, 1585), sig.Bi.

[5]. Winthrop Wetherbee, editor & translator, The Cosmographia of Bernardus Silvestris (New York and London: Columbia University Press), p.3. Wetherbee suggests Plato's Timaeus as the source which structures the work, although Aristotle too accepted the chaos story, quoting Hesiod in Metaphysics, I.

[6]. See Brian Stock, Myth and Science in the Twelfth Century (Princeton, New Jersey, 1972), pp.14-62.

[7]. Hermetic doctrine held that in the beginning there was God, matter and spirit. See Stock, p.103.

[8]. Walter Pagel, 'The Prime Matter of Paracelsus', in Religion and Neoplatonism in Renaissance Medicine, edited by Marianne Winder (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985), VII, 133. See, for a fuller account of the place of Ayin in the Kaballah, Z'ev

ben Shimon Halevi, Kabbalah: tradition of hidden knowledge (London: Thames & Hudson, 1979), pp.5-6.

[9]. Niclas Hendrik, Proverbia: the Proverbs & Mysticall Sentences of H.N., translated from the German [1575?].

[10]. John Heath, Two Centuries of Epigrammes (London, 1610).

[11]. See also Donne, p.467: 'As sin is nothing, let it no where be' ('The Litanie'). Compare OED: 'Non-entity', 3: 'Sin being a defect or privation, and soe a kinde of none entity' (1653).

[12]. Davies of Hereford, Mirum in Modum, sig.Giv^v.

[13]. See Ramsay, Les Doctrines médiévales chez Donne, pp.128-135.

[14]. Donne (in Ramsay, p.134) appealed to Averroistic teaching on prime matter: 'id ens quod mediat inter non esse penitus et esse actu.' [That being which mediates between complete non-being and actual being.] John Abbot repeated the distinction between angelic and earthly creation in Devout Rhapsodies (1647), p.9.

[15]. See Susan Snyder, editor, The Divine Weeks and Works of Guillaume de Saluste, Sieur du Bartas, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

[16]. Henoch Clapham, Elohim Triune (London, 1601), sig.Bii^v.

[17]. Du Bartas, The Divine Weeks, translated by Josuah Sylvester (London, 1605); see Snyder, I, 118.

[18]. William Lisle, 'Nothing for a New Yeares Gift' (London, 1603): in Fugitive Tracts V, 2nd series, 1600-1700, printed for private circulation (London: Chiswick Press, 1875), I.

[19]. See Grosart, h, p.41; William Strode (1600-1645), Poetical Works, edited by Bertram Dobell (London, 1907), p.49: 'a thing that nothing is ... doth feed on nothing but itself.'

20. See Richard Crashaw, Complete Poetry, edited by George Walton Williams (New York: New York University Press, 1972), p.22, on Matthew 27 'And he answered them nothing'.

21. I.D. McFarlane, A Literary History of France: Renaissance France (London: Ernst Benn, 1974), p.379.

22. Maurice Scève, Microcosme, edited by Enzo Giudici (Paris: Librairie Philosophique Vrin, 1976): 'Premier en son Rien clos se celoit en son Tout, \ Commencement de soy sans principe, et sans bout.'

23. Nicholas Billingsley, Kosmobrephia, or The Infancy of the World (London, 1658).

24 See Barnes, II, 1645: 'by matter, I mean that which not being a "this" actually, is potentially a "this"'.

25. Charles H. Lohr, Shapes of Knowledge, p.51.

26. On the author's reputation in the sixteenth century, see J.M. Victor, Charles de Bouelles, an intellectual biography (Geneva, 1978).

27. For a copy of the text with French parallel translation, see Pierre Magnard, Le Livre du Néant (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1983). On his reputation, see pp.34-5.

28. Charles de Bouelles, Le Livre du Néant, translated by Pierre Magnard (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1983), p.42: 'Materia est entis et nichili medium. Nam neque ens est materia neque non ens.' Subsequent references will be to Magnard's edition.

29. Magnard, pp.42-44: 'Materia vero totius differentie vacuitas et privatio est, persimilis illi omnium informi et confuissime speciei ac moli, in qua Empedocles omnia prius delituisse et ex ea tandem emersisse predicabat.'

30. See Cornelius Götz, Disputatio de Nihilo (Marburg, 1608), Thesis 19.

[31]. Jacques Gaffarel, Nihil, fere nihil, minus nihilo: sive De Ente, non Ente, & Medio inter Ens et non Ens (Venice, 1634), VI.

[32]. Marten Schoock, Tractatus Philosophicus de Nihilo (Gröningen, 1661), IX. p.31: 'An inter Ens & nihil possit dari medium, & quale illud sit?'

[33]. Walter Pagel, 'The Prime Matter of Paracelsus', in Religion and Neoplatonism in Renaissance Medicine, VII, 124-129.

[34]. Walter Pagel, 'Renaissance Naturalism', in Winder, IX, 107.

[35]. Walter Pagel, 'The Prime Matter of Paracelsus', in Winder, VII, 129.

[36]. Robert Fludd, De macrocosmi historia (Frankfurt, 1617), Tractatus Tomus I: Lib.I, De macrocosmi principiis Chap.X, 'De Chaos': 'materia confusa et indigesta moles.'

[37]. Fludd, II, 24: 'quod informe est non creatur: sed hyle est informis: Ergo hyle non est creatur.'

[38]. For reproductions of many of these images, see Joscelin Godwin, Robert Fludd, hermetic philosopher and surveyor of two worlds (London: Thames & Hudson, 1979).

[39]. Fludd (II.24) explains that there are two philosophical ways of describing darkness, 'In priori significatione traditur ab Moyse esse per faciem abyssi: in secunda pro lucis privatione habetur.'

[40]. See L.C. Martin, 'Shakespeare, Lucretius, and the Commonplaces', Review of English Studies 21 (1945), 174-182, p.177.

[41]. See Jente, Proverbia communia, 514; see also Chaucer, Boece V, 1, in Riverside Chaucer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.457.

[42]. See Lucretius, _De rerum natura_, I, 150, with English translation by W.H.D.Rouse (London: Heinemann, 1925), p.13: 'nullam rem e nilo gigni divinitus umquam' [no thing is ever brought forth from nothing by divine influence] The apparent incompatibility of this with Christian doctrine is compounded by his subsequent use of the verb 'creo' instead of 'gigno'/ 'geno': 'nil posse creari de nilo' (155).

[43]. Compare Hamlet's remark about the sun breeding maggots in a dead dog: _Hamlet_ II.2.182.

[44]. James Joseph Bono, 'The languages of life: Jean Fernel and _spiritus_ in pre-Harveian bio-medical thought' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1981), pp.55-88.

[45]. Cornelius Götz, _Disputatio de Nihilo_ (Marburg, 1608): _Quaestio Metaphysica: An ut semen ex non semine generatur, ita ens ex non ente?_ Subsequent references will be to the printing in Dornavius, _Amphitheatrum Sapientiae_, I, 730-3.

[46]. Walter Pagel, 'Paracelsus and the Neoplatonic and Gnostic Tradition', in _Religion and Neoplatonism in Renaissance Medicine_, edited by Marianne Winder (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985), VI, 130.

[47]. Compare Shakespeare, p.870, Sonnet No.129: 'Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame'.

[48]. John Thornborough, _Nihil, Aliquid, Omnia_ (Oxford, 1621): 'Omnia inquit Aristoteles appetunt bonum, & omnia tendunt in finem suum. Bonum autem, & finis uniuscuiusque imperfecti metalli, est ipsa auri perfectio.'

[49]. Thornborough, p.14: 'Itaque qui recte cupit procedere, sedeat primus sub umbra tenebrarum, et mortis, ut lucem, et vitam, quam quaerit, inveniat laetus.'

[50]. Compare Ben Jonson, _The Alchemist_, II.3.133, in _Complete Plays_, edited by G.A.Wilkes, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press

1982), III. Subsequent references to the plays will be to this edition.

[51]. Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica*, p.226.

[52]. Robert Fludd, *De macrocosmi historia*, Tractatus Tomus I: Lib.I, *De macrocosmi principiis*, Chap. V.

[53]. See, for example, Ernest William Talbert, *The Problem of Order: Elizabethan Political Commonplaces and an Example of Shakespeare's Art* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962; Fletcher & Stevenson, *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*.

[54]. In *Novum Organon*, Bacon tellingly named the old, failed discourses 'idols' - a favourite target of Protestants: see Bacon, IV, 53.

[55]. Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, edited by Thomas C.Faulkner, Nicolas K.Kiessling & Rhonda L.Blair, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1989), I, 134. Subsequent references will be to this edition.

[56]. See Katharine Park, 'The Imagination in Renaissance Psychology' (unpublished M.Phil. dissertation: Warburg Institute, 1974).

[57]. See, for a more detailed interpretation of this, A.J. Minnis, 'Langland's Ymaginatif and Late-Medieval Theories of Imagination', *Comparative Criticism* 3 (1981), 71-103.

[58]. William Langland, *The Vision of William, concerning Piers the Plowman*, edited by Walter W. Skeat, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1886), I, p.366.

[59] See John N. King, *Spenser and the Reformation Tradition* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp.79-109, on 'true idols and false in the Fairie Queen'.

[60]. This was where Bacon's attacks on 'idola' coincided with Protestantism's iconoclastic urges: a favourite theme was 'idolum nihil est', taken from St Paul; see above, p.196.

[61]. Dudley Fenner, The Artes of Logicke and Rhethoricke (London, 1584), sig.E3. Fenner associated sophistry, or 'the feined art of ... coloured reasons' with Papists: see sig.E1^v.

[62]. Dudley Fenner, A Short and Profitable Treatise of lawfull and unlawfull recreations (London, 1587), p.186. See, on Puritan anti-theatrical rhetoric, Jean Howard, The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England (London: Routledge, 1994).

[63]. John Dover Wilson, Life in Shakespeare's England (London: Penguin, 1944), p.204.

[64]. See Edward Lucie-Smith, editor, Penguin Book of Elizabethan Verse (Penguin, 1965), p.248.

[65]. See Lucie-Smith, p.112; see also Davies of Hereford's sonnet, 'My mind to me a mighty kingdom is', Grosart, h, p.12.

[66]. See Joseph Hall, Virgidemiarum (London, 1597), p.15.

[67]. Sir John Davies, Poems, edited by R. Krueger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p.10.

[68]. See, for a translation of relevant sections of De viribus imaginationis, J. Rather, 'Thomas Fienus' (1567-1631) dialectical investigation of the imagination as cause and cure of bodily disease', Bulletin of History of Medicine Vol. 41, No.4 (1967), pp.349-367: pp.355-367.

[69]. Sir Philip Sidney, Apologie for Poetry (Olney's 1594 text), edited by Evelyn S. Shuckburgh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1905).

[70]. Thomas Heywood, An Apology for Actors (London, 1612), edited by Richard H. Perkinson (New York: Scholar's Facsimiles, 1978), sig.F1.

[71]. Ibid.

[72.] See Strode, Poetical Works, pp.141-206.

[73]. Thomas Browne, Religio Medici & other works, edited by L.C.Martin (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1964), p.221; see also p.208.

[74]. See Fernand Hallyn, The Poetic Structure of the World, translated by Donald M. Leslie (New York: Zone Books, 1993), pp.7-31.

[75]. Donne was familiar with the idea of evil and sin being privations, or nothings, like night and darkness; this issue was a lasting concern for Donne; as late as 1624, he gave a sermon on 'malum, nihil, et peccatum': see Ramsay, p.141.

[76]. See A.J. Minnis, Medieval Theory of Authorship (London: Scolar Press, 1984): Minnis examines the relationship between the medieval auctores and the notion of auctoritas, through a study of the commentary tradition.

[77]. Thomas Heywood, Troia Brittanica, or Great Britaines Troy (London, 1609); Anglistica & Americana reprints (New York: Georg Olms, 1974), p.2. The 'vacuitie and atoms' reference is clearly to the Lucretian/ Epicurist theories in fashion at the time.

[78]. John Buridan, in Hyman & Walsh, p.753; see also William of Ockham, who distinguished between the absolute and the ordained power of God (see Hyman & Walsh, p.650).

[79] See Dorothy Koenigsberger, Renaissance Man and Creative Thinking (Hassocks: Harvester, 1979).

[80]. See David Quint, Origin and Originality in Renaissance Literature (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1983); see also Marian Rothstein, 'Etymology, Genealogy and the Immutability of Origins', Renaissance Quarterly 43 (1990), pp.332-347.

81. Robert J. Clements, <u>Critical Theory and Practice of the Pléiade</u> (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1942), p.14.

82. Paul A. Jorgensen, 'Much Ado About *Nothing*', <u>Shakespeare Quarterly</u> (1954), pp.287-295. See also, Judie Ann Davis, 'The word "nothing": its infinite variety in Shakespeare's plays' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis: Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 1981).

83. See Paul Reyher, <u>Essais sur les idées dans l'oeuvre de Shakespeare</u> (Paris: Didier, 1947): Reyher writes of 'cette collaboration de l'artiste et du public' (p.176).

84. See Anne Righter, <u>Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play</u> (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962), pp.76-88, on 'The New Attitude Towards the Audience'.

85. See Duncan Salkeld, <u>Madness and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare</u> (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp.50-52.

86. Paul A. Jorgensen, 'Much ado about *nothing*', <u>Shakespeare Quarterly</u> (1954), 294. See Sidney, <u>An Apologie for Poetrie</u>, p.8: 'Onely the poet, ... lifted up with the vigor of his owne invention, dooth growe in effect into another nature, in making things better than Nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the Heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies, and such like.'

87. John F. Danby, <u>Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature</u> (London: Faber & Faber, 1949), pp.31-101. According to Danby, Edmund's Machiavellian values are set only against the medieval values of 'pity, love and fear' (p.98).

Notes, Chapter 4

1. In Dornavius, Amphitheatrum sapientiae, there are seven Latin pieces on Omnia and three on Aliquid, immediately preceding the Nihil texts (I, 719-730).

2. The frontispiece provides an iconic representation of God creating the universe: see Figure 1. Subsequent citations will be from Magnard, Le Livre du Néant.

3. For a medieval illustration of the Tree of Porphyry see Peter of Spain's Predicables, in Cambridge Translations of Medieval Philosophical Texts, edited by Norman Kretzmann and Elenore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.83. Porphyry enjoyed a revival, along with other neoplatonists, at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

4. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being, p.60.

5. Ernest William Talbert, The Problem of Order (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), p.12.

6. Magnard, p.88: 'Nichil vero est pariter non esse actu infinitum.' Compare Aristotle in Metaphysics: 'the infinite and the void... are said to exist potentially' (Barnes, II, 1655).

7. Magnard, p.114: De vi affirmationis et negationis: ex deo et nichilo. [On the power of affirmation and negation with respect to God and nothing.]

8. Alexandre Koyré, From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1957), pp.9-10.

9. Charles H. Lohr, 'Metaphysics', in CHRP, p.522.

10. Magnard, p.95: 'Extra deum nichil relinquatur: neque vacuum, neque nichil neque inane.'

11. See Edward Grant, Much Ado About Nothing (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp.116-159.

[12]. Thomas Erastus, Disputationum de medicina nova, in Thorndike, V, 688: 'Parum abest a blasphemia quis quis in creatis rebus vacuum simpliciter sive non ens ponit.'

[13]. Edward Daunce, The Prayse of Nothing (London, 1585), sig.Giii.

[14]. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola 'stressed that matter was the single cause of disorder, irregularity and imperfection in the terrestrial sphere' (Alfonso Ingegno, 'The new philosophy of nature', in CHRP, p.240).

[15]. Fernand Hallyn, The Poetic Structure of the World (New York: Zone Books, 1993), p.129.

[16]. René Descartes, Oeuvres philosophiques, edited by Ferdinand Alquié, 3 vols. (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1967), II, 457.

[17]. Lohr, 'Metaphysics', in CHRP, p.605.

[18]. For a general account of 'Metaphysics as the science of being', see Lohr in CHRP, pp. 584-638.

[19]. Francisco Suarez, Disputationes metaphysicae, 2 vols. (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1965), II, 1014-1041.

[20]. Ashworth, Language and Logic, p.33.

[21]. Thomas Aquinas, In duodecim libros metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio, edited by by M.R. Cathala (Turin: Marietti, 1950), p.160: 'Et huiusmodi, scilicet ens rationis, est proprie subiectum logicae'.

[22]. Ibid., p.160: '... ens duplex: ens scilicet rationis et ens naturae.'

[23]. Ibid., p.152.

[24]. See Suarez, II, 1026: three categories of ens rationis are considered - privations, negations, and relations.

[25]. See Norman J. Wells, 'Objective Reality of Ideas in Descartes, Caterus and Suarez', Journal of the History of Ideas, 27 (1989), 1, pp.33-61.

[26]. Plato, The Republic, translated by Desmond Lee (Penguin, 1955, 1974), pp.129-157.

[27]. See Stanley Rosen, Plato's The Sophist: the drama of original and image (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1983), pp.152-5. As Rosen summarizes, 'images in general "are and are not", and are thus all associated with non-being and falsehood.' (p.173).

[28]. Plato's Parmenides, translated and analysed by R.E. Allen (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p.285.

[29]. Plato, The Republic, p.425.

[30]. See Marcia Colish, 'The Stoic theory of signification', in Archéologie du signe, edited by Lucie Brind'Amour & Eugène Vance (Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1983), pp.40-41.

[31]. John Donne, Sermons: Selected Passages, edited by L.P. Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1919), p.96.

[32]. Suarez himself made this conflation, with a strong echo of certain nihil-related sophisms: 'Chymæra est non ens; nam si est ens fictum, ergo est non ens.' [A chimera is a non-being; for if it is a fictional being, it is therefore not a being] (Suarez, p.1035).

[33]. Compare the logical sophism, 'Tu scis quod nihil scis, quod si scis, nihil scis': see below, p.232.

[34]. William R. Elton, *King Lear and the Gods* (San Marino, California: Huntingdon Library, 1966), p.179.

35. See Jacques Derrida, Spectres de Marx (Paris: Galilée, 1993), Chap.1.

[36]. On possible sources (including Montaigne) of this phrase,

see, John Erskine Hawkins, Backgrounds of Shakespeare's Thought (Harvester, 1978), pp.158-161. His citation of Psalm 144:4 is probably the pertinent one; compare John Davies of Hereford, The Triumph of Death (London, 1605), p.228; The Scourge of Folly, p.145.

37. I owe to discussions with Jonathan Sawday the notion of Hamlet as empiricist, testing out his theory by experiment. Further relevant discussion of the Ghost's existence is found in Stanley Cavell, Disowning Knowledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp.179-191.

38. Jorgensen wrote that this is about 'The Queen's fearful thought of non-being', which grasps only one side of the point; the other is, rather, 'the non-being of thought'. (Jorgensen, 'Much ado about nothing', p.292)

39. See Jean-Paul Sartre, Essays in Existentialism (New York: Citadel Press, 1990): 'négatités' is the word he coins for 'realities like absence, change, otherness, repulsion, regret, distraction, etc.' (p.106).

40. An interesting connection to investigate is Freud's views on the relation between negation and the subconscious. See Sigmund Freud, On Metapsychology: The theory of psychoanalysis, edited by Angela Richards (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), pp.437-442.

41. See Othello, III.3., especially lines 35, 93, 112, 135-8, 152, 162, 176.

42. Suarez, II, pp.1030; 1035; 1023.

43. John Abbot [also known as J.A.Rivers], Divine Rhapsodies (London, 1647), I.2., p.8.

44. Brian Vickers, 'The "Songs and Sonnets" and the Rhetoric of Hyperbole', in A.J.Smith, editor, John Donne: Essays in celebration (London, 1972), p.149.

45. Lohr, 'Metaphysics' in CHRP, p.552.

46. Thomas Traherne, Centuries, Poems, and Thanksgivings, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1958), II, 64. Subsequent page-references are to this edition.

47. Vickers, 'The "Songs and Sonnets" and the Rhetoric of Hyperbole', p.150.

48. See also, Margaret Cavendish, 'Of many Worlds in this World'; 'It is hard to believe, that there are other Worlds in this World', in Poems and Fancies (London, 1653), pp.43-45.

49. Joseph Hall, Mundus Alter et Idem (London, 1605), in Works, 12 vols. (Oxford: D.A. Talboys, 1889), XII, 7. The work was 'Englished' by John Healy in 1609. See, for recent English translation, John Millar Wands, editor, Joseph Hall's Mundus Alter et Idem (New Haven, 1981).

50. Robert Fludd, De macrocosmi historia, Tract.I, p.47.

51. Compare Traherne, p.141: 'O! What are Men, who can such Things produce, / So excellent in Nature, Valu, Use?', etc.

52. Charles Lohr has written that, for Ficino, 'Man's creativity situates him at the centre of the universe, between spiritual and sensible reality': Lohr, in CHRP, p.574.

53. See Louis L. Martz, The Poetry of Meditation (New York: Yale University Press, 1954), p.137.

54. Helgerson, 'Inventing Noplace', pp.101-3.

55. See Claire Jowitt, 'Old Worlds and New Worlds: Renaissance Voyages of Discovery' (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis: University of Southampton, 1995), p.127ff.

Notes, Chapter 5

[1]. See, for example, Paul A. Jorgensen, 'Much ado about *nothing*', Shakespeare Quarterly 5 (1954), 287-295; Elton, King Lear and the Gods (San Marino, California: Huntingdon, 1966).

[2]. A less historically-based alternative reading has been offered in Kang-Sok Han, 'Shakespeare's idea of Nothing', (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis: University of Calgary, 1994), which, according to its abstract, relates Shakespeare's creative nothing to a Taoist Ch'i 'airy' conception of humanity.

[3]. See H.K.Miller, 'The Paradoxical Encomium 1600-1800' Modern Philology 53 (1956), 145-178; Rosalie Colie, Paradoxia Epidemica, pp.224-6.

[4]. Augustine, De magistro II, 3, in Corpus Christianorum 29, p.161.

[5]. The inferring of absurd consequences (Reductio ad absurdum) has been a feature of logical argument at least since Parmenides and Zeno; see Edward Hussey, The Presocratics (London: Duckworth, 1974), pp.78-104.

[6]. See Henry, Quaestio Subtilissima, p.151.

[7]. See Calmann, 'The Picture of Nobody', p.80.

[8]. Passerat, 'Rien', (Paris, 1587).

[9]. See W.C. Hazlitt, editor, Shakespeare Jest-Books (London: Henry Sotheran & Co., 1881), p.71; Stith Thompson, editor, Motif-Index of Folk Literature, 6 vols. (Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press, 1975), VI, 545.

[10]. See Tomas Tomasek, <u>Das Deutsche Rätsel im Mittelalter</u> (Tubingen: Niemeyer, 1994), p.298; Archer Taylor, <u>The Literary Riddle before 1600</u> (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1948), p.82.

[11]. See John Heywood, <u>A Dialogue of Proverbs</u> (London, 1546), edited by Rudolph E. Habenicht (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).

[12]. See <u>Oxford Classical Dictionary</u> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p.276.

[13]. See W.J. Ong, <u>Ramus: Method and the Decay of Dialogue</u> (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1958/83), pp.63-5; 116-127.

[14]. See, on the history of the epigram, Anne Baynes Coiro, <u>Robert Herrick's Hesperides and the Epigram Tradition</u> (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

[15]. Ann Moss has recently explored the close relation too of the proverb and the 'commonplace': see Ann Moss, <u>Printed Commonplace Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought</u> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); see also Ong, p.315, on how 'topics' or 'places' supplanted <u>sententiae</u> or aphorisms.

[16]. See John Heywood, <u>300 Epigrammes upon 300 Proverbs</u> (London, 1562).

[17]. See also Heywood, <u>A Dialogue of Proverbs</u>, 462.

[18]. Sir John Davies, <u>Poems</u>, p.299.

[19]. John Owen, <u>Epigrammata</u>, IX, 14.

[20]. Robert Hayman, <u>Certain epigrams</u>... (London, 1628), III, 191; compare Thomas Pecke, <u>Parnassi Puerperium</u> (London, 1659), III, 191.

[21]. 'Tu scis quod nihil scis, quod si scis, nihil scis. Item. Si tu scis quod nihil scis, nihil scis' (see Appendix).

[22] Davies of Hereford, <u>Wittes Pilrimage</u>, sig.F1-ᵛF1 ; compare Pecke, II,72, p.16: 'Nature defies a vacuum ...'.

[23]. R. Watkins's, <u>Flamma sine fumo</u> (London, 1662), p.89; Watkins also produced an alternative to Parrot's epigram, 'Frustra timet, qui sperat nihil' [Who hopes for nothing, has no reason for fear] - 'Qui nihil sperat, desperet nihil' (p.41) [Who hopes for nothing, despairs at nothing].

[24]. Grosart, k, p.7: 'Passages before the Booke'; see also Sonnet 19 in <u>Wittes Pilgrimage</u> (h, p.8), on 'all' and 'nothing' in Stoic philosophy.

[25]. Thomas Healey, <u>Richard Crashaw</u> (Leiden: Brill, 1986), p.44.

[26]. Numbers of entrants to the universities peaked during this period; see Sharpe, <u>Early Modern England</u>, pp.256-263.

[27]. See <u>Life in the Times of James the First, as illustrated by an unpublished diary of Sir Symonds D'Ewes</u> (London: John W. Parker & Son, 1851), p.18.

[28]. See, for example, Domingo de Soto, <u>Introductiones dialecticae</u> (Burgis, 1529). See also, Ashworth, <u>CHRP</u>, p.166.

[29]. John of Salisbury, <u>Metalogicon</u> IV, Ch.22, edited by J.B. Hall, Corpus Christianorum 98 (Turnholt, 1991): 'Ita tamen ut veritas non verbositas sit huius exercitii fructus.'

[30]. See Lisa Jardine, 'Lorenzo Valla and the Intellectual Origins of Humanist Dialectic,' <u>Journal of the History of Philosophy 15</u> (1977), pp.143-164.

[31]. For an over-view, see Ashworth, <u>Language and Logic in the Post-Medieval Period</u> (1974).

[32]. See Ong, <u>Ramus: Method and the Decay of Dialogue</u>; on his influence in England, see Wilbur Samuel Howell, <u>Logic and Rhetoric in England</u>, 1500-1700 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1956), pp.173-281.

[33]. E.J. Ashworth, editor, <u>Robert Sanderson's Logicae Artis Compendium</u> (Bologna: CLUEB, 1985) p.xx.

[34]. See W. Keith Percival, 'Changes in the Appproach to Language', in <u>CHLMP</u>, pp.808-817.

[35]. See Lisa Jardine, 'Humanistic Logic', in <u>CHRP</u>, pp.173-198.

[36]. See Howell, pp.173-281.

[37]. See Scott, <u>Sophisms on Meaning and Truth</u>, p.67.

[38]. <u>Libellus sophistarum ad usum Oxoniensem</u> (Oxford, 15th cent.)

[39]. E.J. Ashworth, 'Logica Oxoniensis', <u>Vivarium</u> 17 (1979), pp.134-158

[40]. Rita Guerlac, <u>Juan Luis Vives against the pseudodialecticians</u> (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1978), pp.48-9.

[41]. See Philotheus Boehner, <u>Medieval Logic</u> (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1952); Boehner showed how the logic of Whitehead and Russell expressed in <u>Principia Mathematica</u> could illuminate scholastic logic.

[42]. For details, see G.A.Padley, <u>Grammatical Theory in Western Europe 1500-1700: Trends in vernacular grammar</u> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[43]. See G.A.Padley, <u>Grammatical Theory in Western Europe: The Latin Tradition</u> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp.219-324.

[44]. See D.Buzzetti & M.Ferriani, editors, <u>Speculative Grammar, Universal Grammar, and the Philosophical Analysis of Language</u> (Amsterdam, 1987), pp.1-22.

[45]. See John Burleigh, <u>De puritate artis logicae</u>, edited by Philotheus Boehner (New York: Franciscan Institute, 1955); see also Henry, <u>Quaestio Subtilissima</u>, pp.12-13.

[46]. Padley, The Latin Tradition, pp.75; 85; 107.

[47]. Padley, The Latin Tradition, pp. 54, 102-3; see also Terence Heath, 'Logical Grammar, Grammatical Logic, and Humanism in three German universities', Journal of History of Ideas 18 (1971) pp.41-58.

[48]. See Brian Vickers, 'Rhetoric and Poetics', in CHRP, pp. 715-745.

[49]. See Paula Findlen, 'Jokes of Nature and Jokes of Knowledge: Playfulness of Scientific Discourse in Early Modern Europe', Renaissance Quarterly (1990), 292-331, p.294.

[50]. Ernst Robert Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, translated by Willard R. Trask (New York: Bollingen, 1953), p.417.

[51]. Hayman, Certain epigrams... II, 181.

[52]. According to Curtius (p.420), the Benedictine admonition against laughter was powerfully felt in the medieval Church.

[53]. Jean Passerat, Praefatiuncula in disputationem de ridiculis (Leyden, 1594); Cicero, De oratore, II, 54-71.

[54]. See Dornavius, I, 349-359. Other, English poems on the fart, were gathered in 'The Muses Recreation' (London, 1656), pp.40-2; 66-72.

[55]. Dornavius, I, 776 - incorrectly paginated as 766. Immediately prior to Goclenius's piece, at I, 774 [764], is Caspar Diepelius, 'Quaestio: an ridere liceat' (Frankfurt, 1582).

[56]. See Conrad Celtis, Selections, edited with translation by Leonard Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), p.57.

[57]. See Guerlac, pp.160-165.

[58]. François Rabelais, _Pantagruel_, edited by Verdun L. Saulnier (Paris: Librairie Droz, 1946), p.39: 'Quaestio subtilissima, utrum Chimæra, in vacuo bombinans, possit comedere secundas intentiones, et fuit debatuta per decem hebdemodas in Concilio Constantiensi.' For the historical context of the Council of Constance, see Marc Berlioz, _Rabelais Restitué 1: Pantagruel_ (Paris: Didier Erudition, 1979), p.98.

[59]. The latest editions in the British Library are: Albertus de Saxonia, _Sophismata_ (Paris, 1495); _Sophismata Buridani_ (Paris, 1493).

[60]. Ashworth, _Logicae artis compendium_, xxxv.

[61]. See Lisa Jardine, 'The place of dialectic teaching in 16th-century Cambridge', _Studies in the Renaissance_ 21 (1974), 31-62.

[62]. See John M. Fletcher, 'Change and resistance to change: a consideration of the development of English and German Universities during the sixteenth century,' in _The History of Universities_ I. (Avebury, 1981), pp.1-36, p.15.

[63]. See T.K.Scott, _Sophisms on Meaning and Truth_ (New York: Meredith, 1966).

[64]. Albertus de Saxonia, _Sophismata_ (1495); see above, p.235.

[65]. Boehner, _Medieval Logic_ (Appendix), explains 'A donkey is not-man', in relation to his supposition theory, according to which 'a term made infinite by a negation has confused and distributive supposition.'

[66]. See William T. Costello, _The Scholastic Curriculum at Early Seventeenth-century Cambridge_ (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1958).

[67]. See D'Ewes, _College Life...._, p.5.

[68.] See also John A.Trentman, 'Scholasticism in the seventeenth century', in CHLMP, pp.818-837.

[69]. See D'Ewes, College Life, p.18, p.64. See also James Orchard Halliwell, editor, Autobiography of Sir Simonds D'Ewes, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1845), I, 121.

[70]. Oliver was imitating Aristotle's own 'Sophistici Elenchi' (Sophistical Refutations).

[71]. Ashworth, Language and Logic, p.117.

[72]. Thomas Oliver, De sophismatum (Cambridge, 1604), pp.44-5.

[73]. Rudolphus Goclenius, Problemata logicorum (Marburg, 1597).

[74]. L.W.Spitz, 'Humanism in Germany', in The Impact of Humanism on Western Europe, edited by A.Goodman and A.MacKay (New York: Longman, 1990), p.207.

[75]. Goclenius, Problemata logicorum, Part 1, Problem 73. 'Dico quidem: Cerberus est non ens, sed non: leo est non ens. Ergo non ens non est negatium entis, ut positivi nominis.'

[76]. Libellus sophistarum ad usum Oxoniensem (Oxford, 15th century).

[77.] See Ezio Chiorboli, editor, Beccuti, Rime (Bari: Gius. Lateza & Sons, 1912), p.295.

[78]. Utterson's facility for terza rima is stretched to the limit by these lines: 'Nothing is brother to primaeval matter, \ On which philosophers their brains may batter, \ But still they neither nearer are, nor fatter.' (Utterson, v.) Compare Chiorboli, p.295.

[79]. Charles de Bouelles, Sur les langues vulgaires et la variété de la langue francaise, translated into French by Colette Dumont-Demaizière (Strasbourg: Librairie Klincksieck, 1973).

80. Ibid., Chap. 9: Estienne is cited as mentioning Bouelles in his own work, La precellence du langage français (1579). For further details of his status, see Maurice de Gandillac, 'Lefèvre d'Etaples et Charles de Bouelles' in L'Humanisme français au debut de la Renaissance (Paris, 1973).

81. See Biographie Universelle (Paris: Michaud) Vol.32, pp.226-7.

82. Both Passerat's own additions, and other authors' contributions, to the genre were collated in various volumes. See Tchemerzine, S. & A., Bibliographie d'Editions Originales et Rares d'Auteurs Français, 10 vols. (Paris, 1927-33), IX, 108.

83. See Eloquentiae Professoris, et interpretis regii Kalendae Ianuariae & Varia quaedam poemata (Paris, 1597/9),sig. 24ʳ.

84. Dornavius, I, 735: 'nihil est, prater nomen inane, schola' ['Nothing' is more than an empty name, it is a topic of scholarly debate.]

85. Such metaphorical use of grammatical terms was itself a classical rhetorical figure: see Curtius, European Literature, p.414.

86. See Ausonius, Opera Omnia (London, 1823), I, 151:

> Felix grammaticus non est: sed nec fuit unquam;
> Nec quisquam est felix nomine Gramaticus.
> At si quis felix prater fatum extitit unquam
> Is demum excessit Grammaticos canonas.

87. See Robert Burton, Anatomy of Melancholy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), I, 308.

88. See Peter of Ailly, Concepts and Insolubles, edited by Paul Vincent Spade (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1980), pp.54-57; E.V.Utterson, Sir Edward Dyer's The Praise of Nothing (No known publisher, 1840) p.iv. See also Jacobus Musselius, Oratio de Nihilo (Wittenberg, 1624).

[89]. See Ralph M. Sargent, 'The authorship of *The Prayse of Nothing*', Library, 4th ser., XII (1931), pp.322-331.

[90]. Utterson, p.iv; Edward Daunce, The Prayse of Nothing (London, 1585). The only known copy is in Bishop Tanner's Collection, Bodleian Library.

[91]. I am inclined to agree with Henry Knight Miller's judgment that Daunce had produced a 'grave essay', a product of 'pious ingenuity' (Miller, 'The Paradoxical Encomium 1600-1800', p.164).

[92]. See John Harington, Elegant and Witty Epigrams (London, 1618), sig.B3, Epigs. 9-11: 'Of one that begd nothing, and had his sute granted'; 'Of liberality in giving nothing'.

[93]. Sir William Cornwallis, 'The Prayse of Nothing', in Essayes, or rather Encomiums (London, 1616), sig.E3^v.

[94]. Cornwallis acknowledges both Passerat and Beza at the end of the poem (Ibid., sig.E4^v).

[95]. Passerat, 'Rien' (Paris, 1587), 11-13.

[96]. Roxburghe Collection I, 328; 329.

[97]. See Roxburghe Ballads, 9 vols. (New York: Ams Press, 1966), II, 339. Although the earliest printing is probably after 1630, it might have been circulating for much longer, possibly even pre-dating Cornwallis. See also 'A Song Made of Nothing', with a verse in support of Charles I (Roxburghe Collection 372, 373).

[98]. Rochester, Lord Wilmot, Earl of, Poems, edited by Keith Waller (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), p.62.

[99]. Cornelius Götz, Disputatio de Nihilo (Marburg, 1608), 'Quaestione Rhetorica'.

[100]. J.H.Prynne, 'English Poetry and Emphatical Language', Proceedings of the British Academy 1988, 135-169.

[101]. There are 28 instances of the emphatic 'O' in the last two acts of King Lear. See also the servant's death at III.7.80., and Lear's 'O, reason not the need', which follows Regan's 'What need one?' (II.2.438)

[102]. Vickers (p.313) observes, for example, the ironic similarity between one of Landi's benefits of blindness - not needing spectacles - and Gloucester's joke to Edmund at I.2.34.

[103]. As Descartes remarked in his Meditations, the phrase 'ex nihil nihil fit' was so accepted by his age as to be considered an irrefutable truth: see Descartes, Philosophical Writings, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff & Dugald Murdoch, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.116.

[104]. Henry Fielding, 'Essay Upon Nothing' (1743), in Miscellanies, edited by H.K.Miller, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), I, pp.179-90.

[105]. See Tayler, 'King Lear and Negation', p.25; Robert F. Fleissner, 'The Nothing Element in King Lear', Shakespeare Quarterly 13 (1962), 67-70; 68.

[106]. L.C. Martin, 'Shakespeare, Lucretius and the Commonplaces', Review of English Studies 21 (1945), pp.174-182.

[107]. See William Elton, King Lear and the Gods, pp.181-188; Martin, p.182.

[108]. See, for example, Jon Loren Summers, 'The Nature of Nothingness in King Lear' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Missouri, Columbia, 1975). One of the most convincing readings is from Tayler (1995) who focusses on Lear's words as a 'symbolic or emblematic gesture' (p.25), but still over-stresses the significance of Lucretian philosophy.

[109]. There is an intriguing echo in this exchange of the fifteenth-century debates over whether the self-referential spoken proposition, 'I am silent' was an insolubilium. See Ashworth, Language and Logic, pp.102-3.

[110]. See The Passionate Pilgrim, 'Have you not heard it said full oft \ A woman's nay doth stand for nought' (Shakespeare, p.886).

[111]. Compare Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, 'De la vanité des parolles', in Essais I.51, Oeuvres Complètes, edited by Robert Barral (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1967), pp.134-5.

[112]. See Marcia Colish's analysis of De magistro in 'The Stoic theory of signification', p.26. A more recent ancestor of this was Peter of Ailly's logical problem, 'Whether a false sentence is something or nothing'. See Paul Vincent Spade, editor, Peter of Ailly: Concepts and Insolubles, (Dordrecht, 1980), pp.182-188.

[113]. John F. Danby, Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature; Paul A. Jorgensen, 'Much Ado about Nothing,' Shakespeare Quarterly 5 (1954), 287-295.

[114]. Over-stating the scholastic influence may be a danger, but confusion arises without proper appreciation of its jargon. Paul Jorgensen, for example, called the 'naughtiness' connotation of 'nothing' its 'privative' sense, in contrast to 'the explanation of evil as mere negation' of Christian monism (p.291, & p.291, n.14). However, as seen in Chap 1 above, Christian orthodoxy described evil and sin as privations.

[115]. Peter of Ailly also dealt with the question of how the word 'blind' signifies, concluding that it 'supposits' (stands for) a blind thing, but connotes sight: Spade, p.24. Compare Colie, Paradoxia Epidemica, pp.476-7, where blindness is treated as simply another paradoxical theme in the play.

[116]. Eagleton, *William Shakespeare*, p.67.

[117]. Malcolm Evans, *Signifying Nothing* (Brighton: Harvester, 1986), p.117.

[118]. Keith Thomas, 'The place of laughter in Tudor and Stuart England', *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 Jan 1977, p.77.

Notes, Chapter 6

[1]. See Jean Seznec, The Survival of the Pagan Gods, translated by Barbara F. Sessions (New York: Bollingen, 1953), p.122.

[2]. Ashworth, Language and Logic, p.6.

[3]. See also Cesare Vasoli, 'The Renaissance Concept of Philosophy', CHRP, p.61.

[4]. Seznec, p.123.

[5]. These implications of the Anatomy's structure are explored in Jonathan Sawday, 'Shapeless Elegance: Robert Burton's Anatomy of Knowledge' (unpublished essay).

[6]. See Patrick Grant, Literature and the Discovery of Method in Early Modern England (London: Macmillan, 1985), p.109.

[7]. See Seznec, pp.123-143; see also Giorgio di Santillana, The Origins of Scientific Thought from Anaximander to Proclus (New York, 1961), p.242.

[8]. Colie, Paradoxia Epidemica, p.228

[9]. Unlike the English universities at that time, Marburg and Wittenberg published transcriptions of disputationes and orationes annually.

[10]. Cornelius Götz, Disputatio de Nihilo (Marburg, 1608), Quaestio Logica. Citations of the Disputatio will be to the same text in Dornavius, I, pp.730-734.

[11]. 'Disputatio de nihilo, qui non est de nihilo' (Dornavius, I, 730).

[12]. Dornavius I, 730, Thesis 3. Theses of Disputatio (pp.730-2) will subsequently be referred to by number only.

13. Thesis 6: 'Inane etiam dicitur, quod, cum videatur aliquid esse, nihil tamen est, vel re ipsa vel effectu.'

14. 'Non ergo essem, Deus meus non omnino essem, nisi esses in me.' Augustine, Confessions 1.2 PL 32, pp.661-2.

15. Thesis 11: 'Nihil est omnis vita, respectu Dei.'

16. Bouelles, V (Magnard, p.74): 'Quod omnia ad deo nichil sunt.'

17. See St. Paul, 1 Corinthians 8: 'scimus quia nihil est idolum in mundo, et quod nullus est Deus, nisi unus' [we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no God but one.]

18. Sir John Harington, Elegant & Witty Epigrams (1618), sig.B3 ℣ 'Of learning nothing at a Lecture, upon occasion of Dr.Reynolds at Oxford, afore my Lord of Essex, and divers Ladies and Courtiers, at the Queenes last beeing there, on these words: Idolunc nihil est, An idol is Nothing.'

19. Thesis 13: 'Ad aliquo modo non ens seu nihil pertinet ens in potentia, seu potentiale & imperfectum.'

20. Thesis 15: 'Non ens per se, seu simpliciter, dicitur a[b] Scholasticis Nihil negatium.'

21. See Aristotle, Works, VIII, Metaphysica, translated by W.D.Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), Δ , 22.

22. Goclenius, Problematum Logicorum, Prob.73.

23. Thesis 17: 'Produci igitur vel emergere rem ex nihilo, intelligitur negative, id est, non ex aliquo praesupposito praejacente.'

24. Thesis 19: 'Dico diserte: qua intelligitur, quia non est imaginandum, realem esse ordinem inter nihilum & rem (inter non ens & mundum) cum inter haec tantum sit ordo secundum nostrum, modum intelligendi, quo componimus ipsum nihil ut terminum a quo productionis rei, quae creatur.'

25. Thesis 19: 'Unde recte dicitur, de hoc: Per operationem intellectus ipsum nihil apprehendimus, ut ens rationis.'

26. Suarez, Disputationes Metaphysicae, pp.438-90.

27. Thesis 25: 'Non-ens per accidens dicitur ab Scholasticis nihil privatium, defectus formae in materia.'

28. Theses 29: 'sicut caecitas est in materia oculi.'

29. See, for example, Goclenius, Problematum logicorum, Prob.73: 'Caecum enim ita significat negatione indeterminato subjecto.'

30. Thesis 30: 'A Nihilo privative dicitur Scholasticorum annihilatio quae abolitio est rei in nihilum.'

31. Annihilation was also a medieval concern, especially for Thomas Aquinas in De potentia; see James F. Ross, 'Aquinas on Annihilation', in John F. Wippel, editor, Studies in Medieval Philosophy (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987), pp.177-199.

32. See Margaret C. Jacob, 'Millenarianism and Science in the late Seventeenth Century', in John Yolton, editor, Philosophy, Religion, and Science in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (New York: University of Rochester, 1990), pp.493-499.

33. Thesis 33: 'Annihilari ... est recidere seu transire in nihil, id est, rem aliquam omnino destrui, ut nihil illius maneat nec substantia nec accidens aliquod.'

34. Thesis 36: 'Differt annihilatio ... a[b] corruptione & transubstantiatione, cui subiicitur transelementatio. Cum res corrumpitur; materia prima Aristoteli non regiditur ad nihilum: sed suo quasi consistens nutu fultuque dimissis formis, quas corruptio demolitur, in momento protinus adscissit induitque alias quas generatio inducit.'

35. Götz, Disputatio de Nihilo, 'Quaestio Metaphysica': 'Q: An ut semen ex non semine generatur, ita ens ex non ente? R:

Negate, quia non semen est subiectum negatum præexistens, et non ens non est subiectum.'

36. Apart from the Logic Quaestio discussed above, Colie quoted only from these verse responses to Götz, rather than the debate.

37. Rodolphus Goclenius, in Götz, Disputatio de Nihilo, 'Praeses ad Respondentem': 'Destrue quod nihil est: quod non nihil, astrue: fies ex nihiloque aliquid, magnus ex aliquo.'

38. See commentary on 1 Corinthians by William F. Orr and J.A. Walther (New York: Anchor Bible Series, 1976), p.233, which links this remark to another in Galatians, 4:8, where pagan gods, who are no gods at all, are compared to the God of the Christians.

39. Caspar Sturmius, in Götz, Disputatio de Nihilo, 'Epigram': '... mihi Mercurius, non mihi marmor eris.'

40. Georgius Thalmullerus, in Götz, Disputatio de Nihilo, 'Epigram': 'Ex nihilo Phœbus, invenum doctissime Goetzi \ Te tulit, in Musis et dedit esse Aliquid.'

41. Jacob Musselius, Oratio de Nihilo: Quinta essentia de nihilo, prolata et demonstrata in oratione publica (Wittenburg, 1624).

42. See Jean Demons, 'La quintessence tiree du quart de rien, etc.'.

43. Musselius, Oratio de Nihilo, sig.E4^v.

44. See Benedictus Mauricius, Principium Principiorum Aliquid oratione publica commendatum ... Cui accessit Oratio de Nihilo [J. Musselius]; duo item idyllia, alterum J. Passeratii de Nihilo, alterum C.Coleri de Aliquo (Lipsius, 1628).

45. See Biographie Universelle, Ancienne et Moderne (Paris: Michaud, 1856), XV, 347-8.

46. Luigi Manzini, Il Niente (Venice, 1634), p.8.

47. Jacques Gaffarel, _Nihil, fere Nihil, minus Nihil, seu De Ente, non ente, & medio inter ens et non ens. positiones xxvi_ (Venice, 1634).

48. Gaffarel, pp.7; 10; 15.

49. See Jacques Gaffarel, _Nihil, etc._, XI; Luigi Manzini, _Il Niente_ (Venice, 1634), p.19.

50. Gaffarel, VI: 'Alter vero mundus... est Nihil Possibile.'

51. Martinus Schoockius, _Tractatus Philosophicus de Nihilo_ (Groningen, 1661). For detail of his disputes with Descartes, see Theo Verbeek, _la querelle d'Utrecht_ (Paris: Les Impressions Nouvelles, 1988).

52. Schoock, I-III, pp.2-14.

53. Schoock, Ch.6, p.30. Scotus was adamant that there was no such vacuum; see Duns Scotus, Ordinatio I, Distinctione 37, Qu.1, _Opera omnia_ (Vatican City, 1963) VI, 302: 'Confirmatur etiam, quia ante creationem mundi non est imaginandum vacuum infinitum ...'.

54. See _General Biographical Dictionary_, edited by Alexander Chalmers (London, 1816) 27, pp.258-9.

55. Ibid., p.259.

56. Hermann Gerhard Steding, _De Nihilo_ , public debate, presided over by Henry William Scharff (Jena, 1674).

57. See Christian Gottlieb Jöchers, _Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon_ VIII (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1961), col.43.

58. Samuel Lucius, 'QDBV NIHIL publice proponent Praeses M.Samuel Lucius & Respondens M.Michael Haendtschky' (Wittenberg, 1702).

59. See Émile G. Léonard, _Histoire générale du protestantisme_, 3 vols. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), I, 76-7; _Nieuw Nederlandsch Biografiscg Woordenboek_ III (Leiden,

1914), col.1329.

60. Ibid., p.77.

61. Pierre Poiret: Cogitationum rationalium de Deo, Anima, et Malo, 2nd Edition (Amsterdam, 1685), Book IV, p.584. 'Q: An detur idea nihil? Ad hoc respondeo, dari ideam nihili, quae quatenus est idea et cogitatio, est aliquid reale...'

62. Paul Voet, Theologia naturalis reformata (1656), p.308.

63. Patrick Grant, p.9.

64. See John Hedley Brooke, Science and Religion: some historical perspectives (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

65. See Richard H. Popkin, 'Theories of Knowledge', in CHRP, pp.673-684; Richard H. Popkin, The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes (Assen, 1960).

66. Michel Foucault, The Order of Things (London: Routledge, 1989), p.18.

67. John Norden, Vicissitudo Rerum: an elegiacall poeme of the interchangeable courses and varietie of things in this world (London, 1600).

68. Jonathan Sawday, The Body Emblazoned: The Renaissance Culture of Sissection (London: Routledge, 1995), p.2.

69. Sawday, The Body Emblazoned, p.3.

70. See Davies of Hereford, Wittes Pilgrimage, sig.W1: 'Omnium rerum vicissitudo est'.

71. Milton K. Munitz, Cosmic Understanding: Philosophy and Science of the Universe (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), p.11.

72. Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan (1651) edited by A.R.Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge Universiy Press, 1935), p.19.

[73]. Fielding, Miscellanies I, 280.

[74]. The persistent conflation of metaphysical and chemical language is evident in, for example, Guerner Rolfinck's Non Ens Chimicum, Mercurius Metallorum (Jena, 1670).

[75]. See Ernst Cassirer, The Platonic Renaissance in England (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1953); C.A.Patrides, editor, The Cambridge Platonists (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

[76]. Hobbes, Leviathan, p.286.

[77]. See Patrick Grant, p.16.

[78]. See Vickers, Rhetoric and the Pursuit of Truth, p.45: Vickers claims that the Royal Society, in league with the English Church, used the 'myth of plainness' as a weapon against opponents such as the Cambridge Platonists.

[79]. Ralph Cudworth, The Intellectual System of the Universe, Part I (1678), Section 3: 'Against the 2nd atheistic objection - ex nihilo nihil fit', in The Philosophy of Ralph Cudworth, edited by Charles E. Lowrey (New York, 1884), p.110.

[80]. Ibid., p.112.

[81]. The theological controversy persisted well into the eighteenth century, for example in an assessment of the consequences of ex nihil nihil fit on the doctrine of creation, by Johann Jacob Haas (Alltdorf, 1732).

[82]. See Lydia Gysi, Platonism and Cartesianism in the Philosohy of Ralph Cudworth (Bern: Herbert Lang, 1962), p.33; Note 1.

[83]. Vickers considered the antipathy towards Platonists to have been religiously inspired; see Vickers, Rhetoric and the Pursuit of Truth, p.43.

[84]. See Sawday, The Body Emblazoned, pp.256-60.

[85]. See Traherne, 'Thoughts I', p.169; 'Thoughts III', 21, p.175; 'The Inference', II.6, p.141. Compare 'Imaginations Reall

are': 'The Review', 6, p.152.

86. Browne in Patrick Grant, p.106.

87. For a historical account, see Thomas S. Hall, Ideas of Life and Matter, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), Vol.I.

88. Jonathan Swift, Prose Works, edited by Herbert Davis, 14 vols.(Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), I, 189.

89. Joan Baptista van Helmont, Oriatrike or Physicke Refined, translated John Chandler (London, 1662), 323; see Elias Ashmole's Theatrum Chemicum Brittanicum (1652), edited by Allen G. Debus (London: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1967), xvii.

90. Sir Thomas Browne, Religio Medici and other writings, edited by L.C.Martin, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1964), I, 35.

91. Linda Allen Deer, 'Academic theories of generation in the Renaissance: The contemporaries and successors of Jean Fernel' (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis: Warburg Institute, 1980), p.8.

92. See, for the English situation, Charles Webster, The Great Instauration (London: Duckworth, 1975), pp.136-140.

93. See John Farley , The Spontaneous Generation Controversy from Descartes to Oparin (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press).

94. Charles W. Bodemer, 'Embryological Thought in Seventeenth Century England' in Medical Investigation in Seventeenth Century England, Clark Library Seminar Papers (Los Angeles: University of California, 1968), pp.12-13.

95. Ibid., p.8.

96. Nathaniel Highmore, The History of Generation (London, 1651), p.27.

97. Deer, p.18.

[98]. Farley (op. cit.) claims that it was Harvey's 'ovism' which led to the general denial of spontaneous generation by the end of the seventeenth century. James Bono also saw Harvey's ideas as superseding the spiritus theory of Jean Fernel: James J. Bono, 'Reform and the languages of Renaissance Theoretical Medicine: Harvey versus Fernel', Journal of the History of Biology Vol.23, No.3 (1990), 341-387.

[99]. William Harvey, 'De Conceptione': Exercitations de generatione animalium (Amsterdam, 1651), pp.406-7: 'Cumque adeo substantia uteri ad concipiendum parati sit cerebri constitutioni persimilis: quid ni mei... suspicari liceat, utriusque etiam functionem esse similem.'

[100]. See L.J.Rather, 'Thomas Fienus' (1567-1631) Dialectical investigation of the imagination as cause and cure of bodily disease', p.357; see also Emily Michael & Fred S.Michael, 'Early Modern Concepts of Mind', Journal of the History of Philsosophy 27 (1989), p.39.

[101]. See Elizabeth Gasking, Investigations into Generation 1651-1828 (London: Hutchinson, 1968), pp.16-50.

[102]. See William Harvey, 'On Conception', The Works of William Harvey translated by Robert Willis (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), p.580.

[103]. Gasking, p.35.

[104]. See Lynne Thorndike, History of Magic and Experimental Science, 6 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923), VI.

[105]. As well as Thorndike's volumes, see Edward Grant, 'Medieval explanations and interpretations of the dictum that "Nature abhors a vacuum"', Traditio 29 (1973), pp.327-355.

[106]. See, for further details on 12th and 13th-century experiment, Thorndike, Vol.II.

[107]. For further details on experiments in 14th and 15th centuries, see Thorndike, Vols.III & IV.

[108]. C.B. Schmitt, 'The Experimental Evidence for and against a Void: the 16th century arguments', Isis, Vol.58, Part 3 (1968), 352-366 (p.362). See also Thorndike, Vol.V.

[109]. Newton, in Alexandre Koyré, From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957), p.172.

[110]. A helpful summary of the complex arguments is found in Edward Grant, Much Ado About Nothing, pp.259-264.

[111]. Newton, in Koyré, pp.208-9.

[112]. Ibid. This was a substantially different approach to the medieval methodology of 'saving the appearances', which aimed to accommodate phenomena within a preconceived hypothetical universe. See A.C.Crombie, Augustine to Galileo, 2 vols. (London: Heinemann, 1952), II, 174.

[113]. There were, as Edward Grant has detailed, sixteenth-century, and earlier, precedents for 'the equation of space with material extension' in the abstract notion of 'internal space': Edward Grant, Much Ado About Nothing, p.14.

[114]. F.C. Copleston, A History of Philosophy, 12 vols. (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne) IV, Introduction: Copleston notes that Descartes uses scholastic vocabulary, but often with un-medieval connotations.

[115]. Descartes in Koyré, p.116.

[116]. Suarez, Disp. Metaph., pp.1014-1041.

[117]. Caspar Barlaei, De Ente Rationis (Leiden, 1618): '...ut Hircocervus, Chimæra, Cerberus, Geryon, Minotaurus vocentur, modo tam debilis, ut caecitas, vacuum, tenebrae, privatio dicantur, modo tam nullius, ut qui exempla horum daturi sunt, purgatorium, Platonis rempublicam, Apulei asinus, etc., etc.';

see also Petrus Joachim Schumacherus, 'De Ente Rationis' (Wittenberg, 1648), which discusses 'notiones secundae, Hicocervus, Purgatorium, et similia' (Theorum I).

118. 'Nihil est in intellectu, quod non prius in sensu' Jacobus Musselius, Oratio de Nihilo, (Wittenberg, 1624), sig.E1^v.

119. Disputatio physica de anima (Wittenberg, 1624); Quaestiones de anima (Wittenberg, 1624).

120. Fielding also saw that this was a major issue, addressing the 'Idea of Nothing' as one section of his Essay Upon Nothing.

121. Henry More, 'Antidote against Atheism', in Koyré, p.136.

122. Colie, pp.252-272. For further detail, see Jean-Pierre Fanton d'Anton, L'horreur du vide (Paris, 1978).

123. See, for instance, Jacobus Pierius, An detur vacuum in rerum natura? (Rouen, 1647); Antonius Deusingius, Disquisitio physico-mathematica de vacuo (Amsterdam, 1661); Paolo Casati, Vacuum proscriptum. Disputatio physica (Genoa, 1678) Joseph Jackson, An Essay concerning a vacuum ... by a lover of the corpuscular philosophy (London, 1697).

124. See Schoock, Tractatus de Nihilo, p.28: 'Ad idem hoc nihilum pertinet spatia, vulgo imaginaria dicta'; Lucius, Nihil, XXXVII: he cites Ebelius, Vasquez, and Scheibler.

125. Margula R.Perl, 'Physics and Metaphysics in Newton, Leibniz, and Clarke', in Yolton, Philosophy, Religion, and Science, pp.500-519, p.513.

126. John Locke, Essay on Human Understanding edited by Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), II.4, p.179.

127. René Descartes, Philosophical Writings, II, 26.

128. Descartes, Philosophical Writings, II, 126-7.

129 Descartes, Oeuvres, VII, 54: 'ejus quod ab omni perfectione summe abest.'

130. Henry, _Quaestio Subtilissima_, p.115.

Notes, Conclusions

[1.] Rudolph Carnap, 'The elimination of metaphysics through logical analysis of language', translated by Arthur Pap, in Logical Positivism, edited by A.J. Ayer (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969).

[2.] Martin Heidegger, 'What is metaphysics?', translated by R.F.C. Hull & Alan Crick in Existence and Being (London: Vision Press, 1949), pp.355-392.

[3.] Jean-Paul Sartre, Essays in Existentialism edited by Wade Baskin (New York: Citadel, 1990) , pp.77-146.

[4.] Heidegger, 'What is Metaphysics?'

[5.] See Ludwig Wittgenstein, Notebooks, 1914-16, 2nd Edition, edited by G.H. von Wright & G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), p.98.

[6.] See Bertrand Russell, 'On Denoting', Mind 1905, reprinted in R.C. Marsh, editor, Logic and Knowledge (London: G.Allen & Unwin, 1956), pp.41-56.

[7.] See E.Agazzi, editor, Modern Logic - a survey (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1980).

[8.] Desmond Henry, 'Mereology & Metaphysics', in K. Szaniawski, editor, The Vienna Circle and the Lvov-Warsaw School (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), p.220.

[9.] See Martin Heidegger, What is a Thing?, translated by W.B. Barton, Jr. & Vera Deutsch (Lanham: University Press of America, 1967).

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