PART TWO

Theory and Adaptation
Microcosm and Macrocasm: Framing The Picture of Man

The Christian humanists were emphatic in their demand that a man who wishes to know himself must realize that he is a little world that reflects on a smaller scale the larger world of the universe. Thus, for instance, said Du Bartas in the influential account he gave of the Creation and the beginnings of man in *The Divine Weeks* (Sir Joshua Sylvester's translation):

> There's under sun, as Delphos' god did show,  
> No better knowledge than ourselves to know.  
> There's no theme more plentiful to scan  
> Than is the glorious, goodly frame of man;  
> For in man's self is fire, air, earth, and sea.  
> Man's, in a word, the world's epitome  
> Or little map, which here my Muse doth try  
> By the grand pattern to exemplify.  

The twin theme of microcosm and macrocosm was indeed scanned plentifully in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when poets and moralists were notoriously fond of drawing all sorts of parallels between the smaller frame and the larger. On the other hand, the whole idea of man as a microcosm was questioned by those who were not in sympathy with the medieval-classical synthesis created by the Christian humanists. Calvin found "the philosophers' microcosm" irrelevant to fallen man; Montaigne ridiculed it as a patchwork of brain-conceived illusions; and Bacon asked his contemporaries to turn away from studying the microcosm and apply themselves to unraveling the mysteries of external nature. Thus the concept of microcosm may be taken as central for the humanistic Renaissance, and the attacks on it as symptomatic of a dissatisfaction with this
kind of Renaissance. I should like to go further and suggest tentatively that this concept in its literal, humanistic form was central to the mentality that the art historians see behind the style they define as Renaissance and contrast with mannerism and baroque. However, I am not concerned with establishing absolute stylistic categories; I wish merely to explore the changing ideas about self-knowledge against the background of larger intellectual and artistic changes.

At any rate, a study of Renaissance patterns of self-knowledge requires an examination of the implications of the analogies between microcosm and macrocosm. This means glancing at some books that, like The Divine Weeks, deal as much or more with the universe than with man, and it means investigating the assumptions behind that set of medieval-Renaissance ideas that sometimes have been too exclusively identified with the Elizabethan world picture. Conventional forms of thought about man and the universe were being challenged in Shakespeare's time; yet certainly they were those that prevailed in his youth, and they provided him, at an impressionable age, with norms and standards. It is not amiss to investigate the assumptions of the traditional picture, provided that one remains aware that the picture was felt to be old-fashioned by some and irrelevant by others.

Du Bartas's verses are characteristic of what I think is the main feature of the humanistic appraisals of man as a microcosm: they appear to heighten and expand the self, but, in a deeper sense, they actually limit and circumscribe it. They do, of course, make man important in the whole pattern, and often, as is true for the context of the passage in The Divine Weeks, they depict him as the hero in the cosmic drama. But it is probably more significant that the analogies between man and the universe visualize both as well-defined entities. The beauteous pattern of the universe was to inspire man with confidence about the structure of his own frame, and the proportioned composition of his body was to reassure him of the purposeful pattern of the universe—the reasoning was circular, and therefore the desire for metaphysical assurance was bound to remain unfulfilled in the long run, the more so because the two frames were old models that new discoveries were making obsolete. As the Renaissance skeptics observed, faith in merely verbal constructs could not be sustained.

But, for a while at least, the analogies did provide some assurance. It is, I believe, instructive to investigate the ubiquitous concept of the frame for the semantic associations that supported this faith. The
word “frame” had not yet acquired—or was, at most, in the process of acquiring—its modern meaning of a border or case in which something is set; it generally denoted an underlying structure that upheld and shaped an object or idea. It thus reflected the Aristotelian notion of reality as matter given form and configuration by a spiritual design, a notion propagated by the medieval scholasticism that avoided the extremes of realism and nominalism. As a medieval-Renaissance encyclopedia explained, the angels were pure form, that is, spirit; men below them were both matter, that is, body, and form, that is, soul; the created world beneath them was arranged in a descending order of purity and strength of form down to the dregs of the universe.

One way to determine the connotations and denotations of “frame” in the meaning of “cosmos” for the Elizabethans is to investigate for what terms in other languages the word was used. One such term was *machina mundi*. In translations where “frame” was used in its place, the word sometimes conveyed the notion that the universe was an intricate engine in constant motion. So, for instance, in Ralph Robinson’s translation of Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia*, the Utopians study nature and expect from this endeavor the thanks and favor of God, “whom they think, according to the fashion of other artificers, to have set forth the marvelous and gorgeous frame of the world [*machina mundi*] for man with great affection intentively to behold.” But more often, the foreign words translated by “frame” signified architectural structures. Sir Joshua Sylvester rendered Du Bartas’s *bastiment* as “frame,” and as a look at Thomas Cooper’s *Thesaurus* (1565) shows, “frame,” “framing,” and “framer” were the words with which the Elizabethans translated the Latin *fabrica*, *fabricatio*, and *fabricator*. These were thus the English terms they chose for the corresponding Latin ones in accounts of the Creation by classical writers. They are, for instance, used in Arthur Golding’s translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*; but in his preceding Epistle, Golding made sure that the Christian God was properly credited with the “framing”: it was “God, the Father, that / Made all things, framing out the world according to the plat / Conceived everlastingly in mind.”

The universe was often likened to a building. None of these comparisons is more familiar to students of the drama than that between the world and the theater. The public theater, such as the Globe, was a frame, that is, a structure, that was enclosed by another frame, the
galleries of the spectators. As Nevill Coghill has noted, Hamlet's speech on "the goodly frame, the earth" had a direct relevance to the Globe Theater, named for the Renaissance *topos* that the stage is the world and the world the stage: the actor reciting Hamlet's speech could with a sweeping gesture draw in the circumference of the wooden O, which symbolized the world; he could point up to the "heavens," represented by the star-spangled ceiling of the stage above him, and at the elevated platform, the "promontory," beneath him. When he then gestured toward himself as he turned to the "piece of work" that is a man, he had placed the microcosm in its macrocosmic context.  

In descriptions of the earth itself, analogies to paintings prevailed. Du Bartas took delight in the "landscape, various, rich, and rare," painted on a large canvas by God. In admiring this work, man admired God, whom it reflected "as in a glass." Castiglione waxed enthusiastic about "the ensign of this world that we behold with a large sky, so bright with shining stars, and, in the midst, the earth, environed with the seas, severed in parts with hills, dales, and rivers, and so decked with diverse trees, beautiful flowers and herbs—a man may say it to be a noble and great painting, drawn with the hand of nature and of God." The divine achievement, Castiglione noted, reflected an indirect glory on the human art of painting. In narrative descriptions of the earth as a landscape, the brushstrokes of the divine painter were generally made visible by borrowing terms from biblical and theological accounts of the Creation. This is true for Hamlet's appraisal of "the goodly frame, the earth." Although the speech must have evoked in Shakespeare's theater some architectural associations of the cosmic frame, its details are the pictorial ones of the Creation. 

Related to pictorial and architectural conceptualizations of the universe were the geometrical ones. Renaissance art depended on line, perspective, and mathematical ratios. This geometrical mode of vision encouraged some moralists to give man a calculable place in the total design. In *Of the Knowledge Which Maketh a Wise Man* (1533), Sir Thomas Elyot based man's understanding of his position in nature on a kind of innate sense of perspective that enabled him to reconstruct the order of the universe. Self-knowledge, he argued, made it possible for man to know others and, through his immortal soul, the essence of God and the working of His providence. Through the order in himself, which reflects God's purposes, man could understand the order of nature, which "like a straight line issueth out of
providence, and passeth directly through all things that be created." Man was set "in the highest degree of the line," and the place of things and creatures on it depended on their usefulness to him; a deviation from the line violated the divine order.  

Geometrical principles were sometimes thought to determine the configuration of the microcosm similar to the way they determined the proportions and outlines of the human figure in Renaissance drawings. This visual mode was adopted, not surprisingly, by the mathematician and astronomer John Dee in his Preface to a translation of Euclid (1570). Dee demanded that geometrical and numerical principles be applied to the study of man and that thus a science of "anthropography" be established, which is to provide "the description of the number, measure, weight, figure, situation, and color of every diverse thing in the perfect body of man." Noting that there were several sciences to describe the universe, such as astronomy, geography, and cosmography, Dee asked why there was no single science of man that was analogous to "the description of the whole universal frame of the world": "Why should not the description of him who is the less world and from the beginning called microcosmus (that is, the less world) and for whose sake and service all bodily creatures else where created, who participateth with the spirits and angels, and [who] is made to the image and similitude of God, have his peculiar art?" All sciences could contribute to this new science, an "art of arts," and testify to man's "harmonious and microcosmical constitution." Dee recommended to begin the study with Albrecht Dürer's De Symmetria Humani Corporis and with Noah's ark (!) and then to proceed further: "Remember the Delphical Oracle, nosce teipsum (know thyself), so long ago pronounced, of so many philosophers repeated, and of the wisest attempted, and then you will perceive how long ago you have been called to the school where this art might be learned."  

Shakespeare's sonnet 24 gives evidence of his apprenticeship to the particular school of self-knowledge that attempted to establish the ideal proportions of man and to place him in the perspective of a structured frame. According to the sonnet's opening conceit, the poet's eye "hath play'd the painter," delineating in his heart the beauty of the friend: "My body is the frame wherin 'tis held, / And perspective is best painter's art." The perspective, one might say, is less of the eye and heart than of the geometrical intellect. Here and in Hamlet's speech, Shakespeare adopted the Renaissance habit of
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depicting man as a symmetrically constructed figure placed in an orderly composition with coherent space. This placement gave him a prominent, firm, and significant position with a clear orientation toward the universe, analogous to the manner in which the Elizabethan actor of Hamlet was poised in full view on the promontory platform surrounded by the frame of the theater.

A very similar conception of man’s cosmic position is symbolized by the early seventeenth-century emblem bearing the title nosce teipsum: the picture shows an erect human figure in the midst of a circle, representing the earth; his lifted arm almost touches the circumference; two smaller circles above the larger one represent the sun and the moon, which shed their lights on the center. The motto draws the moral: “O man, you most worthy part of the world, do not diminish your exalted position by servile behavior; in you is apparent a perfect image of the heavens and the earth. Learn from that your glory and your endowments.”

The humanists’ prescriptions for self-knowledge posited an anthropocentric universe, which it was man’s duty to admire as divinely created. The world was cosmos or mundus, that is, an ornament glorifying the Creator but designed for man’s reasonable use. Just as he was asked to contemplate the world’s beauty, so he was held to admire the purposeful arrangement of the microcosm, Sylvester’s epitome of the world or Du Bartas’s tableau racourci. Shakespeare properly commended these two frames; he used epithets like “fine” and “wondrous” for both. Man’s frame was for him a “composed wonder” and “framed in the prodigality of nature.” Even Hamlet calls the larger frame “goodly” and knows that he is supposed to take delight in both frames. His inability to do so can be attributed to his melancholy, but it should also be said that the play in which he is the hero belongs to a period in Shakespeare’s work when the landscapes take on gloomier hues and when the Renaissance certainties inspire less confidence than they inspired earlier. We shall deal with this problem later; for the present we need to recall merely that the speech is constructed in the pattern of humanistic orations on the dignity of man, a pattern with which the Elizabethans were familiar.

I do not wish to imply that most Elizabethans were Panglossian optimists. Probably very few were. For one thing, the age was too conscious of original sin and of the confusion and death it was thought to have brought into man’s life and into nature to indulge in pagan glorifications of man and the world. The analogies between
microcosm and macrocosm were in fact quite often given a somber turn by focusing on the misery of man's life. An early seventeenth-century emblem, similar in appearance to that mentioned previously, symbolizes this darker view. In the picture, man is framed not merely by the circle of the universe but also by angry clouds that surround it; the motto is Job 14:1: "Man that is born of a woman is of short continuance and full of trouble." All that was thought wrong with man could be seen reflected in the universe just as well as everything thought to be right. Contemptus mundi pessimism propagated the idea that the world, like man, was shrinking and decaying and that the orbits of sun and moon were drawing closer to the earth in a slow disintegration of the cosmic system. Natural catastrophes and strange occurrences were apt to be interpreted as signs of the approaching end, as, for instance, by Abraham Fleming, who took them as "a token that the world was sick after the manner of man, who is therefore called a little world." Man's wickedness was thought to be a symptom of this fatal illness or even a factor in bringing about a speedier demise. In this vein, Hamlet sees his mother's corruption reflected in a universe destined to perish by fire, as it was generally believed it would perish:

Heaven's face does glow
O'er this solidity and compound mass
With heated visage, as against the doom—
Is thought-sick at the act.

(III.iv.48-51)

One cannot escape the feeling that Hamlet projects his own unwholesome mind into the universe. But if so, there were many Hamlets in the last years of Elizabeth and the early years of James, when the decay of the world was gloomily diagnosed by many prophets of doom. This metaphysical pessimism was abetted by the political and religious discords that threatened to break the frame of order. It is hardly accidental that in Shakespeare's later plays references to a microcosmic or macrocosmic frame occur generally in a context that suggests its being twisted or broken. A huge passion "shakes" Othello's "frame" (V.ii.47). Lear's "frame of nature" is "like an engine, wrench'd . . . From the fix'd place" (I.iv.267-68), and Macbeth swears that he will let "the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer" rather than endure the terrible dreams that shake him nightly (III.ii.16).
But even those who preached the decay of the world asserted the significance of man. The process of decay had been caused by man’s transgression; because of him nature had been corrupted and had, so to speak, become human. In *A Discourse of the Felicity of Man* (1598), Richard Barckley described, in spite of the book’s misleading title, an almost Timonesque world—in fact, his account of Timon’s life, which may have been one of the sources of Shakespeare’s tragedy, is one of the few that show some sympathy with the misanthrope’s pessimism. For Barckley, wickedness and misery dominated the human scene, and all striving for felicity through worldly means, even through virtue and contemplation, was vanity. Yet even he declared that God had placed man “as the end of the whole frame of the world in this goodly theater.”

It appears that the confidence in the significance of man drew some support from the Ptolemaic system of the universe, which prevailed in Elizabethan consciousness. Man was placed on the central body, the one sphere that was not turning but around which all the others, the moon, the sun, the individual planets, and the fixed stars, turned in regular circular orbits. Yet there was no automatic connection between metaphysical confidence and the geocentric theory since man also could be visualized as being farthest removed from God. Even in Shakespeare’s beautiful evocation of the Ptolemaic system in Lorenzo’s hymn to love (*Merchant of Venice*, V.i.54 ff.), man is depicted as being prevented from hearing the harmony of the spheres by his “muddy vesture of decay.” The geocentric theory at any rate encouraged looking for the key to the system of the universe in the earth. Here was “the center” where Polonius claimed he would dig out the truth no matter how deeply hidden (II.ii.157). But perhaps it is not fortuitous that in *Hamlet*, which shows much influence of philosophical skepticism, this geocentric self-confidence is that of Polonius, whose sensitivity to truth is weak. The old system also encouraged geometrical analogies between the frame of the world and the circle (for that matter, “frame” was regularly used to translate *sphaera*), analogies which were also applied to the microcosm. These could be spun *ad nauseam*, as was done by John Davies of Hereford, for whom man was a circle in the larger circles of the earth and the universe; he had a body that was also a circle and a soul that was a circle in it. But God, being perfection, was also symbolized by the circle, the most perfect figure, and when He dwelt in man’s mind,
He was the innermost circle. This geometrical madness was intended to instill in man a desire to achieve a perfection analogous to the symmetrical harmony of the universe; but by 1603, the date of Davies's *Microcosmos*, the *nosce teipsum* geometry was becoming an exercise in metaphor. Many elements in Shakespeare's world, as William Elton has noted, "point towards the incipient dis-ordering or breakdown of the analogical and pre-Cartesian tradition." To this breakdown the spread of the Copernican theory was a contributing influence since it dislodged man from his favored place in the center. But it was not so immediately. The first acquaintance with the Copernican theory does not seem to have shaken the Renaissance belief in the anthropocentric order. Some of the astronomers in the vanguard of the revolution advertised the new cosmology as being so symmetrical and orderly as to inspire man with even greater awe and humility than the old. Its acceptance would enable him to control his beastly nature and rise to the height of the angels. New philosophy called all in doubt only when, as in Donne, it became leagued with a skeptical epistemology and a *contemptus mundi* attitude.

The analogies included not only man and the universe but also the state. As Barckley had it, "There are three bodily worlds coupled together one with another as if it were with a chain of gold: the greater, the less, and man's commonwealth between them both." The state could be looked upon as a microcosm of the universe or a macrocosm of man; or, for that matter, the universe could be viewed as a macrocosm, and man as a microcosm, of the state. In Shakespeare's political theorizing, the analogies between the state and the body prevailed; the sound state was a healthy body; the disordered state was a diseased one. The England of Henry V is a "little body with a mighty heart" (II. Prol. 17), that of his father a "foul" body in which "rank diseases grow" (*Henry IV*, III.i.39). The organic conception of the state explained temporary and even continued breakdowns.

Ultimately, the disorder in all organisms could be attributed to man's original sin and God's ensuing wrath. This was Barckley's explanation. God, he said, had originally created all things from heaven to earth "in such exact order and uniformity to the production of things in their most perfection and beauty so as it might be likened to that *aurea catena*, as Homer calleth it"; but after the Fall He withdrew his benign influence and cursed the earth so that it "doth so much degenerate from his former estate that it resembleth
a chain rent in pieces, whose links are many lost and broken and the rest so slightly fastened as they will hardly hang together." 26 Here is one example of that elusive chain of being—the only example in Elizabethan literature I know in which the metaphor of the chain is used in this manner—but, alas, it happens to be a broken chain.

Yet even to pessimistic viewers of the human scene like Barckley it appeared that God's original order was at least in some sort reflected on earth. It showed itself, for instance, in the way certain units were linked and yet clearly demarcated from each other. As Luciana says in The Comedy of Errors (II.i.16-17), "There's nothing situate under heaven's eye / But hath his bound." It is a bound that, as she argues, links husband and wife but also separates them because man is the superior of woman. Renaissance paintings express a similar mode of perception, one that entails what has aptly been described as an "harmonious adjustment of clearly bounded units with absolute clarity of statement." 27 This way of looking at the world shows itself not only in the canvases of a Raphael or a Dürer, with their sharply outlined and proportioned details, but also in Du Bartas's and Castiglione's descriptions of the world as a painting. And it is also in evidence in Shakespeare's earlier plays.

The measured and limited units of the cosmic frame were governed in their relationship to each other by universal laws, the laws of God and of nature, on which all other laws depended. Basic to this system, of which Richard Hooker was the great Elizabethan apologist, was the philosophical concept of the law of nature. It had evolved from classical philosophers, such as Cicero, and medieval theologians, particularly Aquinas. This law regulated the relationship of men to each other and to nature on the assumption that God had created a rational and harmonious system with man as the central figure. On the psychological level, the law demanded the rule of passion by reason; on the governmental level, it sanctioned the rule of the queen and her officers; on the international level, it regulated the relationship of states to each other. Or, to put it from the perspective of man, the law asked him to curb his appetites; it demanded that he obey lawful authorities; and it enjoined him to respect the rights not only of men of his own nation but also those of other nations. 28 In short, it required him to "frame" himself to a moral and reasonable design. Thomas Cooper's Thesaurus quoted some of the pertinent key phrases from Cicero's De Officiis under "Dirigo: . . . to order, to direct: . . . Ad rationem dirigere alicud. To frame or
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rule according to reason. . . . Ad naturam leges hominum diriguntur. Men's laws are framed and made agreeable to nature."

The humanistic view of the state and the world demanded that all ranks and professions, from the lowest to the highest, adjust themselves to this rational design. By referring to Cooper again, one finds that English "to frame" was used for the Latin conformare and accommodare and, when education was meant, instituere. Elizabethan society paid much attention to the framing of the upper classes, of the aristocracy and the royalty, and made some special stipulations for it; but the general process did include a son of a tradesman in Stratford-on-Avon, as was Shakespeare. When he went to grammar school, as one might expect from his father's status alone that he did, he faced a master who was hired to "frame" (formare) his pupils' manners and minds. The greatest effort, it is true, went into "framing" (componere) the young boys' Latin writing and speeches; but the Christian humanists' emphasis on grammar and rhetoric was connected with their moral and philosophical goals. They believed that any kind of composition, a sentence, a question, an answer, a letter, an essay, or a drama had to be invented, arranged, and structured to fit into the frame of a world ordered for the instruction of man. Shakespeare's Henry V knows this, even though his education is by no means orthodox; once a king, he knows how to frame his life (dirigere vitam) and his speeches (componere orationem) in the way expected of him—for which some critics have not forgiven him. By contrast, the melancholy and maddened Richard II does not know how to put his discourse in some frame—for which some critics have declared him to be a great poet.

The order to be achieved in all major frames—man, the state, and the universe—was not thought to be one of equals. It was assumed to be God's design that the head ruled the belly, the soul the body, the king the state; that fire was above air, air above water, and water above earth; that the sun was enthroned above the moon; and that beyond these spheres there was a heavenly region in which the angels kept their exemplary hierarchical order. The usual term for the superiority of one part of the created world over another was the biblical "preeminence." Shakespeare's Luciana uses it in her speech on the husband's control over his wife: he is preeminent over her just as men are preeminent over animals. Elizabethan lawyers were apt to argue the subjection of women in such fashion and to prove
male prerogatives by analogies to the preeminences at different levels of the cosmic system.  

Yet it should be noted that the Elizabethans did not think of the cosmic system as static; they did not deny the presence of tension and strife. The harmony established by God, said Sir John Davies, included “disagreeing strings.” Palingenius had said similarly that

The world in such a wondrous sort the almighty Lord did frame
That many things do well agree as joined in the same.
And many things do disagree and keep continual fight,
Whereby some men have surely thought that strife and friendship
might
Be justly called beginnings chief, by which all things are wrought.

In a Platonic vein, Spenser in “An Hymn of Love” allegorized the beginning of the world as the linking of the “contrary dislikes” of the four elements through the power of love. For the Renaissance as for the Middle Ages, the world was framed of opposites (conjunctus), physical, psychic, societal, and cosmic. These were tied together in a harmony that was often symbolized by a golden chain; of the varied uses to which the aurea catena was put, this was by far the most frequent.

Humanistic self-knowledge required that man understand the universal conjunctio oppositorum, beginning with the discordia concors of himself, a creature of body and soul, so that he might lead a life that ratified God’s harmonious design. As La Primaudaye said, “during this conjunction, as all things that move within this general globe are maintained by agreeing discords, even so, of necessity, there must be such a harmony between the body and the soul that by the help of the one the other subsisteth and abideth, and that through their continual striving sometimes the one and then the other in the end be obeyed.” To be aware of the nature of the two opposites and to use them accordingly was a fundamental postulate of nasce teipsum. In his Epistle to the Reader of The Anatomy of the Mind, Thomas Rogers declared it evident that

he which thoroughly would know himself must as well know his body as his mind; the body to put him in mind of his slavery, the mind of his sovereignty; the body of his misery, the mind of his felicity, the body of his mortality, the mind of his eternity. For by the one we participate the nature of beasts; by the other, of angels. By the one we are for a time; by the other we continue for ever.
On this confidence in a purposive antithesis of man's composition, a confidence anchored in a belief of a universal discors concors, the Christian humanists founded their conviction that man could know himself better than he could know anything else. Palingenius, for instance, was skeptical about man's ability to unravel the divine mysteries, but he was confident that man understood his exact place in the universal scheme of things: he was a conjunction of slime, mud, and earth with an invisible, immortal, and celestial substance. And Sir John Davies's Nosce Teipsum opens with an account of the vanity and uncertainty of knowledge, which leads up to several emphatic stanzas that overcome all doubt by the triumphant assertion that he knows himself a man, that is, a linkage of body and soul.

This realization was thought to imply the acknowledgment that the mind must rule over the body; to put this rule into effect was practical self-knowledge. The task was difficult because, since the Fall, when man had permitted his body and the lower parts of his soul to dominate his reason, he inclined to disobedience. He had delivered himself to death through sin; preeminent above the animals, he had tried to rise even higher by attempting to become a god; capable of ranging himself through his immortal soul with the angels, he had polluted it with the filth of his body, and he was in constant danger of reenacting this rebellion. We know all this from Milton, whose concept of self-knowledge puts him in line with the Christian humanists as perhaps their last great representative.

That Shakespeare also based self-knowledge on the realization that man was a conjunctio oppositorum proceeds from the way in which some of his good and self-possessed characters demonstrate their knowledge of the doctrine. Viola in Twelfth Night, for instance, decides to trust the Captain's offer to help her although she is quite aware how deceptive outward appearance is; the difference between the two substances joined in man, she knows, can be great:

There is a fair behaviour in thee, Captain;  
And though that nature with a beauteous wall  
Doth oft close in pollution, yet of thee  
I will believe thou hast a mind that suits  
With this thy fair and outward character.  

(I.ii.47-51)

But Viola's brother, Sebastian, demonstrates his knowledge of the relationship of body and soul even more effectively than his sister.
When he appears at the end of the play, Viola, who had thought him drowned, cannot believe her eyes: "If spirits can assume both form and suit, / You come to fright us." Whereupon Sebastian properly identifies himself as a man:

A spirit I am indeed,
But am in that dimension grossly clad
Which from the womb I did participate.

(V.i.227-30)

It may not be amiss to point out how very technical these few lines are in indicating Sebastian's knowledge of his composition as a man. In *Tusculan Disputations* (I.54 ff.), Cicero had argued that self-knowledge, that is, the soul's knowledge of itself, depended on realizing that its beginning was different from a birth. As Beroaldus commented on this passage, Cicero meant that one should examine such questions on the nature of the soul as the following: Was it physical or nonphysical? Was it simple or composed of several elements? Was it created from something or nothing? Was it transmitted together with the body or did it come from the outside in finished form to be clothed with a body in the mother's womb? Sebastian chooses to reassure his sister on his identity as if she had asked some such question as Beroaldus. He affirms that he is primarily a soul and thus an incorporeal spirit, "clad" (*induatur*) with the body "from the womb" (*inter visca muliebra*). When he says that he "did participate" the body from the womb, he asserts the dominance and preexistence of the soul. He is theologically sound in knowing that the soul is infused in the body rather than inherited ("traduced") from the parents. Moreover, Sebastian knows that, unlike other spirits, he has a body that has a "dimension" (and not "dimensions" as some would emend); Bartholomaeus Anglicus noted very similarly that incorporeal spirits differed from man by not having a "dimension."

The opposites in man to be harmonized were not only body and soul but also the forces of the soul itself. Its lower elements tended to league themselves with the body and threaten the soul's immortality. Although Shakespeare and the Elizabethans were familiar with the tripartition of the soul into rational, sensible, and nutritive parts, in common practice they reduced it to a bipartition in conformity with the Pauline dichotomy of spirit and flesh. The rational
Microcosm and Macrocosm: Framing the Picture of Man

part, sometimes called "mind" and more often simply "soul," was contrasted with the irrational part, generally called "sense." In the theological language of Friar Lawrence, the components are "grace" and "rude will"; in Brutus's Roman idiom, they are "the Genius" and "the mortal instruments." Regardless of the terms chosen for these elements, strife between them was thought inevitable. The danger to man's stability lay in the lower elements, the senses and the passions, rebelling against the higher part, reason, and thus bringing about sin and damnation. Like man, the soul was a junction of opposites; its health depended on the organic cooperation of its discordant elements. But this harmony had to be achieved by the direction of the mind, and, because the soul was the vitalizing principle of the whole human organism, the mind also was responsible for the total harmony of man. It was harmony, and thus it could not contain the disharmony that threatened the breakup of other substances. As Sir John Davies said, "what can be contrary to the mind, / Which holds all contraries in concord still?" This was one of Davies's arguments for the essential immortality of the mind or rational soul.

Shakespeare was familiar with such reasoning and based on it his sonnet 146, his most explicit statement on self-knowledge as knowledge and control of the human *conjunctio oppositorum*. In a sort of dramatic monologue, the poet addresses his "poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth," which is "arrayed," that is, dressed (and presumably also threatened with battle) by "these rebel pow'rs." He asks the soul why it has suffered internal want and painted its "outward walls so costly gay." To prevent it from spending too much on the fading mansion of the body, he evokes the worms that will inherit "this excess" and contrasts the body's end with the survival of the soul after its servant's loss. He enjoins upon himself to feed his soul, which feeds on Death, who feeds on man. Thus, punningly, Death will be removed and only the immortal soul will remain: "And, Death once dead, there's no more dying then."

This sonnet is hardly a favorite of modern critics, who tend to read it as a relapse into a medieval commonplace and hurry on to the poet's passionate outcry in the next: "My love is as a fever." Yet sonnet 146 must have struck Shakespeare's contemporaries (and why not Shakespeare?) as essential for the story. The episode of the dark lady, to which it belongs, dramatizes and particularizes the discord between reason and passion, soul and body; it is a record of
the poet's failures to make the former prevail over the latter. Sonnet 146 dramatizes and generalizes the ideal concord of man; it is the poet's assertion as a Christian and Renaissance humanist that man must identify himself with his better part, his mind. The moral should not be missed.

In summarizing this discussion of the cosmic and metaphysical implications of the humanists' concept of self-knowledge, we may recall that this concept required man to be aware of his central position and to acknowledge that he was framed according to principles analogous to those of the universe. His health, character, success, happiness, even his salvation could in some sense be said to be determined by the effect these principles had on him or by the way he made them work. It will be appropriate to restate them and characterize their role in Shakespeare's play worlds.

The principles that have emerged in the preceding pages can be grouped under four major headings: strife or tension, hierarchy or degree, measure or proportion, and balance or harmony. According to their predisposition and particular purpose, Renaissance writers tended to stress one or the other of these, with the result sometimes of breaking up the humanistic synthesis. All four principles occur in Shakespeare's play worlds, but which of them is dominant is a question not easy to answer. One must resist the temptation to answer it according to the relative regard in which these principles are held in one's own time, and one must not assume that Shakespeare's emphasis was necessarily the same from play to play. Yet I believe that a general answer can be given for Shakespeare's works and a more specific one for the earlier plays even when observing these precautions. A good way of showing the relative importance of the structural principles of the frame of order is to compare Shakespeare with some signal exponents of each of the four.

The first principle, that of strife or tension, was perhaps most boldly espoused by the French humanist Louis Leroy (Regius) in De la Vicissitude, which was translated by Robert Ashley as Of the Interchangeable Course or Variety of Things (1594). Leroy saw in nature a continuing conflict of forces. These had, throughout history, effected political and cultural changes, which Leroy welcomed as vicissitude or variety. The greatest variety could be brought about by the utmost development of arms and letters, the two opposite qualities that determined the excellence of a state. Man, by making himself an instrument of this change, could aspire to perfec-
tion. His own age was for Leroy one of maximum change and variety because it flourished in arms as well as in letters. He considered Tamburlaine to have been the warrior who ushered in this glorious period, and he described his career; therefore it has been plausibly argued that Marlowe evolved his character of the Scythian conqueror and particularly the speech on the warring elements in nature and man from *De la Vicissitude.* But such glorification of the aspiring mind was, as we noted, akin to Machiavellism. In its joyous affirmation of earthly warfare and its total disregard of human depravity, it led away from Christian humanism.

The second organizing principle of the frame, that of degree or hierarchy, was, as noted, usually evoked by the Elizabethans when they argued the subjection of women. Its other frequent application was political. Some Tudor moralists and theologians, afraid of new political unrest and perhaps also eager to please their sovereigns, who had good reason for fearing disorder, appealed to the principle of degree as forbidding revolt and usurpation. The sermons on disobedience and rebellion in the official homilies proclaimed preeminence as the rule of macrocosmic order. But it also should be noted that there was a rival to this Christian-Platonic conception of order in the pragmatic Aristotelian approach to politics that recognized several constitutional models as justifiable and concerned itself primarily with their organic functioning and with changes from one political system to another. Also, too strong an emphasis disagreed with the humanistic premise of the basic equality of all flesh; in practice, of course, it led to out-and-out absolutism. This is what happened under James. Unlike her successor, Queen Elizabeth was wise enough not to evoke the royal prerogative too often to alienate those who looked to Parliament for political, and to Puritan preachers for religious, direction.

Richard Hooker may be cited as a witness for the third principle, that of measure and proportion. His was a finite and limited world. It was full of "riches," but it did not achieve "plenitude" in the sense of being so full of objects and creatures as to make a more comprehensive world inconceivable. Like other Elizabethan theologians, Hooker felt that a world of plenitude was irreconcilable with the idea of an all-powerful God that could create as he wished—the advocates of plenitude had argued that a totally full world was the only possible one for an all-good God to create. As Hooker discusses this matter, his Renaissance sense of measure and proportion asserts itself:
If it therefore be demanded why God, having power and ability infinite, the effects notwithstanding of that power are all so limited as they are, the reason hereof is the end which He has proposed and the law whereby His wisdom hath stinted the effects of His power in such sort that it does not work infinitely, but correspondently unto that end for which it worketh even all things, χρυσός, in most decent and comely sort, "all things in measure, number, and weight." 46

Hooker's admiration for the proportioned world contrasts with the contempt for it by those who saw nothing but universal decay; but it does not go as far as the uninhibited glorification of universal beauty one finds in some Platonizing tracts like Annibale Romei's The Courtier's Academy (translated by J. Kepler in 1598), where one of the discussants calls proportion the principal cause in creating and preserving the physical and the spiritual worlds. 47 Hooker stayed with the humanistic mean.

Hooker can serve also as an exponent of the fourth principle of Renaissance natural order, that of harmony. In a time that was growing more and more contentious, he sought to reestablish the Erasmian balance of reason and faith. Unlike Calvin, he did not see human reason as deeply corrupted by the Fall. Reason could still ascertain the laws of nature and determine their congruence with the laws of God. Hooker's concept of order, it is true, included a "gradual disposition," but it was intended to produce an organic unity: "The very Deity itself both keepeth and requireth for ever this to be kept as a law that, wheresoever there is a coagmentation of many, the lowest be knit to the highest, by that which is interjacent may cause each to cleave to the other, and so all continue one." 48 The principle of balance and harmony can be traced also in Hooker's ideas of political and ecclesiastical order: he saw the essence of the former in government by the sovereign in conjunction with Parliament, that of the latter in assent between the sovereign and the Convocation. Although few of Hooker's contemporaries were willing to accept this kind of balance in church and state government, Hooker's general insistence on political and religious harmony places him in the mainstream of Christian humanism and Elizabethan thought.

In assessing the relative importance Shakespeare gave to the four principles of order, it is immediately obvious that he did not glorify strife in the fashion of Leroy and Marlowe. He accepted it as a reality—in some plays, particularly the later tragedies, it may appear
to be the dominant reality—but never as a joyful one. And when he created an aspiring mind like Coriolanus, he took a critical attitude toward him.

The second principle, degree or hierarchy, does appear occasionally in Shakespeare's theoretical formulations. He certainly was a man of his time in being a royalist and in believing that nature had ordained some for commanding and others for obeying. But, a few humorous passages on the subjection of women aside, he does not appear to me to have argued this principle strongly; and he certainly did not emphasize it to the exclusion of other principles as did the homilies. The reading of the history plays as apologies of the Tudor myth has become suspect, and justly so, and the often-quoted apotheosis of degree and obedience by Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida* (I.iii.78 ff.) has been shown to be suffused with ambiguities and ironies. Ulysses lacks credentials for being considered a mouthpiece of Shakespeare, and the satirical and skeptical tone of the play makes it difficult to evaluate the validity of any concept it examines.

This leaves the principles of measure or proportion and balance or harmony, the principles most prominent in Renaissance artistic composition. My reader will not be unaware that I consider these strongly present in Shakespeare's early plays. I shall in the following chapters argue that the search for self-knowledge in these plays proceeds in a universe that by its proportioned measure and harmonious balance resembles Hooker's ideal model. I shall be concerned only incidentally with the ways in which these principles are reflected in the rhetorical and dramatic structures of the plays; my intention is to show primarily how they support the search for self-knowledge on the part of their heroes and other characters by positing an intelligible universe in which man can hope to find himself by properly framing the picture of man. The universe or—as I think we had better say—universes of the later plays are more opaque, and they do not offer the seeker for self-knowledge a readable cosmic map; they appear indifferent and even hostile toward this search. But this need not concern us at present.