Poets are by no means alone in being prepared to see new places in settled ways and to describe them in received images. Outer regions will be assimilated into dynasties, never mind the hostility of the natives. The ancient wilderness of the Mediterranean and certain biblical expectations of what burning bushes, gods, and shepherds shall exist everywhere encroach upon the deserts of Utah and California. Those who travel there see them and other new landscapes in terms of old myths of place and descriptive topoi; and their descriptions take on the structure, tonality, and nomenclature of the past, their language as much recollection as greeting.

In Professor Toliver's view, the concern of the literary historian is with, in part, that ever renewed past as it is introduced under the new conditions that poets confront, and is, therefore, with the parallel movement of literary and social history. Literature, he reminds us, is inseparable from the rest of discourse (as the study of signs in the past decade has made clearer), but is, nevertheless, distinct from social history in that poets look less to common discourse for their models than to specific literary predecessors. Careful observers of place, they seek to bring what is distinct and valuable in it within some sort of verbal compass and relationship with the speaker. They bring with them, however, formulas and a loyalty to a cultural heritage that both complicate and confound the lyric address to place.

The Renaissance writers who are the subjects of Professor Toliver's fascinating study—Donne, Herbert, Marvell, Vaughan, and Milton—saw their own localities and historical moments in the figures and kinds of Theocritus, Horace, Martial, Ovid, Virgil, and the Bible—models suggested by a given genre or decorum that provided points of departure from which their imitators were often carried

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