

PURCHAS'S «ΜΙΚΡΟΚΟΣΜΟΣ»

To write persuasively of urn burial, or vigorously of the liberty of unlicensed printing, were endeavours not beyond the abilities of a Browne or a Milton. In an age when «literature» was the Greek and Roman classics, and when the propriety and indeed feasibility of writing any serious work in English were still hotly debated, there could be no question, in a prose work at least, of aiming deliberately at literary fame. The information or the moral was the thing. No art for art's sake, no art, even, for archæology's sake. It is true that in the case of Browne we have something very close to archæology for art's sake; but Browne is by no means a representative writer. The fact that he did mix in such equal proportions æsthetic values and antiquarian values, or æsthetic values and religious values, gives him his special status as a «literary» figure, in a sense that Burton or Milton (in his prose) was not.

A neglected but more typical figure is Samuel Purchas. He has gained no great reputation in the handbooks of literature; there is not a word about him in Saintsbury's *History of English Prose Style*; the *Cambridge History* gives him a sentence, Douglas Bush's *Early Seventeenth Century Literature* gives him a sentence (as far as *Microcosmus* is concerned), and the *Cambridge Bibliography* omits all mention of his meditative masterpiece. It is an odd fate, for there are real excellences to be found in *Microcosmus*. A prolonged meditation on the nature of man (*meditatiunculæ*, Purchas calls it in his dedication to Bishop King), it is in fact the first of those seventeenth century prose treatises on the microcosm of which *Religio Medici*, *Manchester al Mondo*, and the *Anatomy* are the best known. And all three of these owe something to *Microcosmus*. In fact, that Purchas like Blake was «damned good to steal from» will become evident to anyone who takes the trouble to compare this treatise and the later *Purchas his Pilgrims* (especially the first cosmogonical chapters) with

the relevant portions of Browne, Burton and Milton. Some parts of *Paradise Lost* are almost Purchas in verse.

We know the fascination that the microcosm conceit had for the men of the post-Renaissance world. It helped them to feel more at home in a universe which, through the endeavours of the natural philosophers, was becoming increasingly alien to them. It appealed too, to that desire for self-sufficiency — Man his own World — of which the dark obverse is hinted at in the amazing wealth in seventeenth century writing of such phrases as «mine own Executioner»: for example, «mine own Sepulchre, a walking grave» (*Samson Agonistes*), «mine own Precipice» (Marvell, *Dialogue between the Resolved Soul and Created Pleasure*), «every man is his own Atropos» (*Religio Medici*), and, among the earliest, «the carkasse of thy selfe» (*Purchas his Pilgrims*) and the original of the Milton phrase, «the sepulchre of itself» (*ibid*), with, in *Microcosmus*, «the mouing Sepulchre of them-selues». This idea of the *vanity* of human self sufficiency, the self-petrification through which Man becomes, like Browne's crystal, the Gorgon of himself, is at the root of Purchas's argument in *Microcosmus*. «Man is the diminutive of himself», he cries. «There are, I confesse, that keep their Watches better, and liue indeed: but these, few, not by naturall power, not without many slips, not without continuall warre against themselues». For with all its «humility before the facts», the new spirit was essentially one of self-assertion, a championing of the human reason's claim to be sole judge of its destiny, sole discerner of the nature of things. As Augustus Hahn pointed out in 1827 (the year of Blake's death), rationalism «is the way of thinking according to which the human reason must be the only source and the only criterion of all species of knowledge. Consequently, it is only in appearance that any revelation is *supernatural*; in reality, it is always *natural*, and if its content is to have any pretence to truth, it must be limited by reason or natural religion». Thus the effort of Bacon and his followers was to avoid reference to any except secondary causes, and so, little by little, to deny the rôle of a first cause in the affairs of the universe. The religious spirit, with its acknowledgement of Man's littleness and weakness, is the antithesis of this. For though, as children of God, we are greater than we know, yet as creatures of Time we are smaller than we think, and need to be held in being by that Providence which equally sustains the whole universe. This paradox lies at the root of religious thinking.

Purchas, Browne, Milton and Manchester represent the reaction. Their aim, speaking generally, is to recall Man to a realisation of his weakness and dependency. There is an emphasis on the misery of «la condition humaine». Both Purchas and Browne, for instance, dwell on the «weakness of the changing body», its proneness to decay, and «know upon what tender filaments that Fabrick hangs». «In our study of Anatomy there is a mass of mysterious Philosophy», Browne asserts¹; and the first part of *Microcosmus* consists of a tour of the human frame. Purchas, indeed, carries to the last degree the metaphysical conceit of «mine own Cosmographer»; the great world (*Purchas his Pilgrims* and *Purchas his Pilgrimage*) and the little world (*Microcosmus, or the Historie of Man*) alike hide nothing from his view, and in him we have a unique amalgam of Hakluyt and Donne. Both the later volumes are conceived and carried out on the most grandiose scale; and *Purchas his Pilgrimage* begins, like the *Pseudodoxia*, with lengthy chapters on theology, cosmology, and Biblical criticism. Early in Chapter Two («Of Man, considered in his first state wherein he was created: and of Paradise, the place of his habitation»), the microcosmic note is struck:

Man therefore was last created, as the end of the rest, an Epitome and Mappe of the World, a compendious little other world, which leads directly into the opening theme of *Microcosmus*.

This body is a Microcosme, and created after the rest, as an Epitome of the whole Vniverse, and truest Mappe of the World, a summarie and compendious other World; the frame whereof hath not onely ministred awfull dread vnto the inferiour creatures, emulation to the superiour, (as by the nurserie and guard of good Angels, and by so many obsessions and bodily possessions of Devils, haue appeared) but astonishment and wonder vnto Man himself.

This astonishment and wonder run through the treatise and help to give it its peculiarly breathless style. For while dwelling upon *la misère humaine*, Purchas, again like Browne, does not lose sight of the fact that Man is a noble animal, and holds within himself a piece of divinity that was before the elements. Indeed, the whole purpose of *Microcosmus* is to trace Man's fall from his original grandeur, and point out the way of return. This is a great theme; and we cannot dismiss *Microcosmus*, as Bush does, as merely a prolonged Jeremiad.

1. Cf. *Microcosmus*, «the mysticall *Physicks* of the Microcosme».

The autobiographical note of the *Preface* alone redeems it from being only that:

And if it prooue Vanitie to all others, yet let it remaine to after-Ages, as the Book of my Confessions, who haue thus pleaded *guiltie* against My Selfe in the sense of Natures corruption; by this *straight gate* crowding (euen till I leaue my selfe behinde; for *Every Man is Vanitie*) that I may enter that *Palace of Verity*: to which Designe the Devill, and the World together, are not so much impediment, as Mans, beloued, magnified Selfe.

Here we have the personal note of *Religio Medici*; and, if one may venture to say so, a theme higher than Browne can reach, a more universal yearning («euen till I leaue my self behind») than ever exercised that genial and subtly selfish spirit.

Microcosmus, in fact, links up with the great myths of the world which trace the Fall and the Regeneration of Man — with much of the Upanishads, with (of course) Genesis, with Milton and Blake. It traces the diminution of the human *form* from its great original —

Man is the diminutue of himselfe, the crumbling mould, the vanishing dust of Man. And wel might *Adrian* in his Swan-like fatall Song quauer himself on the trembling Treble, *Animula, Vagula, Blandula*,

— to its present state of misery and corruption. This heavy change is treated of in the first two parts of the book «relating the Wonders of [Man's] Generation, the Vanities in his Degeneration»; and the third part, «the Necessity of his Regeneration», is Purchas's *Paradise Regained*.

Was Purchas equal to his great theme? The answer must be that he was not; and the reason for his failure is not very different from the reason for Milton's failure in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* — the inability to make virtue interesting within the chosen frame of reference. I mean by this that whereas (to extend the comparison) Dante succeeded in the *Paradiso* because his frame — the *Divina Comedia* — made possible a *thinking-out* of the basic material so that he could employ the only possible mode of realisation — the mystical — which is tolerable in poetry, Milton remains saddled with his cumbrous machinery (adequate enough in Hell and Eden), and Purchas groans dismally on (in Part Three) under the burden of satire and invective and Protestant theology which he has made the material of his first two parts. Like Milton, again, he deliberately renounces the «senses» of Scripture that would have stood him in good stead, and clings to the literal. He inveighs equally against «such mysticall Mist-all and Misse-all Interpreters

[as] are our Familists ouer the Scripture-sense»¹ as against the Hermetic speculations that delighted Browne: «hence haue we some learned Christians, that seeme to *lothe their Manna, and long for those Leekes, Cucumers, Onyons, and Garlicke of Egypt*». And together with this insistence on plain Bible Christianity, we find a rejection of another source of interest and illustration, avidly seized on by the poets and by Browne: the new discoveries. Always, of course, excepting the geographical. Nature is too highly magnified, he tells us, by recent research: «Naturall Philosophie fumes into Speculations»², and astronomy has drawn man's attention away from himself:

The STARRES are round, simple, lucid, and heauenly Bodies... But thou hast a STARRE, O Man, within thee, exceeding these in all these things; that SOVLE of thine³.

This is all very well, and no doubt all very true; but Browne or Donne would have accepted the truth and still gone on to make the one order of truth illuminate the other, «lest both should losers be». In refusing to make these connections — the Hermetic *quod infra ut supra* — Purchas handicaps himself from the start.

But let us see what he does achieve. To begin with, we are faced with a certain confusion; which is innate in the personality of Purchas himself. He is a divided mind — and, more than with Bacon and Donne, the basic division corresponds to the turn of the century. We don't know quite where to place Purchas. Is he an Elizabethan or a Metaphysical? At one time we find him writing with the rumbustiousness of Dekker or the preciousness of Lyly; at another, his prose, and the turns of his thought, take on the intellectual intricacies of Donne or a majesty of cadence that recalls Browne. His pedestrian style is plain, lucid, and flexible. It strongly resembles that of Browne in the *Pseudodoxia* and a good deal of *Religio Medici*. When Purchas rises above it, as he often does, it is not, like Browne, to lose himself in a mystery, or to wreath Neo-Platonic arabesques around the consideration, of mortality. It is man's decay while yet living that moves him to his finest tropes. These we shall investigate later; let us, for the moment, glance at the general level of his thought and style which

1. *Purchas his Pilgrimage*. But the idea can be paralleled in *Microcosmus*, from which the second passage is taken.

2. *Purchas his Pilgrimage*.

3. *Microcosmus*.

we find at the opening of the book. For Purchas is not, like Browne, a writer who is off the mark at top speed. He begins at a walk, warms up to a trot, and only occasionally reaches his Olympic and Olympian best. Here is his initial disquisition on the wonders of the human body :

Here wee may first obserue (as if Nature would teach vs not to set our hearts too much on our bellies) the little commerce which is betwixt these two so neere neighbouring Courts or *Venters*, not one open gate, only a few secret passages for priuate intelligence ; yea the *Gullet* it selfe is here in reputation of a Pedlar, not admitted to trucke or vnpacke by the way, permitted only his high-way tract and passage. Neither doth the *Midriff* in our imaginarie ascent from the lower Court, suffer vs to passe hither, through her partition wall, otherwise then in a priuie watch and imaginarie view.

The vivid, colloquial image is Elizabethan rather than Metaphysical ; but the purpose and method of the passage look back to Dante («our imaginarie ascent») and forward to Erasmus Darwin. The ever-popular pilgrimage idea has had no stranger application than this. Purchas disclaims any intention to teach anatomy, but his descriptions are firmly based on the medical knowledge of his time (he speaks admiringly of Harvey), curiously tinged with an Elizabethan exuberance :

The first thing you encounter after your entrance, is the *Mediastinum*, diuiding and seuering this Court in two parts (the one for the Chamberlaine's lodgings, the other for the Princes) both enuironed on the vtter parts like the *Brasilian* Towns walled with Earth, fortified with thicke-set Tree through the compasse, or like a wall of a house, full of studs and timbers, curiously rough-cast without, within lined with Wainscot : Such doe the *Muscles*, *Pleura*, and *Ribs* seeme to the Beholder, together with the glandulous and membranous *Paps*, raised as two pleasant Mounts or Bulwarkes, which in Men serue for Fortification, in Women also for Founts and Conduits, as two Hillocks of this Land now flowing with Milke and Honey, sweetly by Natures selfe attempered for their Infants necessities, for *ravishing satisfying delicacies to the Husband*, and may be termed the Forts and Turrets of Loue, vpon which she mounts and expatiates her selfe, twixt which she lyes in ambush, within which shee dwels and is enthronized.

We see that Purchas's liking for the Elizabethan conceit is counterpointed with an almost Brownesque ability to move in two world of reference at the same time. The main idea of the dividing wall is carefully developed ; supporting examples are brought in from Brazil, and from towers used for defence and delight ; at the same time the human note is not forgotten, and we are presented with an amorous image which might have come from Sidney or Lyly. Mathe-

matics, theology, the perfection of the sphere, and an echo of Marlowe, combine now to express the dignity of the heart,

which is euer mouing, like a heavenly Sphere... His forme is *Pyramoides*, a flatter globous Pyramis; an euidence of his imperfect perfection, which it seemes to seeke and can only find in that *Trinitie* and *Vnitie*, which this globous Triangle, in a mortall immortall figure represents.

This punning, Euphuistic style is, as we have said, Purchas's general level. But it is when he comes to consider man as a rational being, and as a spiritual being, that Purchas breaks free and gives us of his best. Here it is impossible to avoid a comparison with Browne. Purchas has nothing of Browne's magnanimity of speculation; his opinions are watertight, he frowns on mystical extravagances, and has some harsh things to say of Browne's favourite Hermes Trismegistus:

There are yet some other *Philosophers*, which may seem more dangerous then the former, as accounted more Diuine; *Zoroaster*, *Trismegist*, *Iamblichus*, *Porphyrie*, *Proclus* and other magnified *Grandes* in some conceits. It is not my part to rake out of their Graues, Men so long dead. Only I maruell, whence and how, after so many many Centuries, the Workes of the two former should be as it were new borne againe into the World. I euer suspect these long Sleepers.

The comment is a canny one. Purchas, like Alexander Ross whom he so much resembles, is all for the orthodox ways, for the well established names, Aristotle and Plato, for the good old times before Copernicus got busy with his theories and upset the order of the universe (with the consequence that men had to call in forgotten «demons»¹ like Hermes to redress the balance); as we have seen, Moses is good enough for him. But if he will not err in the direction of mysticism, neither will he stray after materialism; like Browne, he asserts the spirituality of the soul as «a viue representation and modell of the glorious Trinitie in incomprehensible Vnitie»; and he expatiates into a consideration of the excellence and powers of the soul that takes its place among the finest pieces of seventeenth century prose. Controlled, yet lyrical, Purchas's imagination ranges from «the great *Leuiathans*.... in those cold Polare Climats, in the Ocean Desarts, in the Forests of Icie Mountains», to the great First Cause Himself, «which dwells in Light inaccessible, that inuisible

1. «Mercurie the great *Egyptian Demon*» is an expression of Theophilus Gale's, *The Court of the Gentiles*, Book I, Chap. 3.

Maiestie, who hath sealed herein the impression of Himselfe, who being vnmouable, moueth all things». In reading these passages we must not think of them simply as theology versified or rhapsodised, but note that they are skirmishes in the great battle, which was already in full fling, between mechanism and vitalism; Purchas is preparing and sharpening, in 1619, the weapons which Milton is to wield almost half a century later against Thomas Hobbes.

Such was, then, the condition of the soul before the Fall. But with the thirteenth chapter these notes are changed to tragic. Man is a vain creature.

A Man is called vaine, as vanishing from that state wherin God created him, into this *Prorsus nihili* (so *Vatablus* reades this Text) worth nothing, worse then nothing.

He is conceived in vanity:

What greater *basenesse*, then to be so many moneths immured in a darke Prison, so strait a little Ease, where space, in so long space, is not giuen (which euen the *Graue* denies not) once to measure out and extend his owne little little *Length*; where it *growes* but as *Plantanimans*, like a sensitue Plant, or Shell-fish; not enabled to *moue out*, or (which *Snailles* can doe) to *remoue* with his shell?

The intricacy of the sentence-structure here, with clause involved in clause, produces an almost physical sense of restriction. How poised, too, is the irony, implicit in the play on words — «so strait a little Ease» — and on the temporal and spatial meanings of «space». The shellfish and the snail are brilliant touches of imagery, exactly adapted to the total effect. Purchas was fond of these illustrations from Nature; he loved particularly the marginal world between plant and animal, and he reminds us of Marvell in his feeling for the *mystique* of trees. Here he is again in a more Euphuistic vein:

Plants want Sense, but haue no sense of that want: wee degenerate into Plants; liuing, to liue; and growing, to grow; and yet how much higher, fairer, stronger, greater, more fruitfull, and more durable do they grow then we? The *sensitue* Creatures haue Sense indeed (sense indeed of Vanitie, of those euills, which with vs, for vs, from vs, they sustaine) but want Reason; Men, *cum ratione insaniunt*, make Reason become sensuall and senselesse; Wee neither haue their perfection of sense, nor they more sensuall imperfection then wee.

That is, perhaps, the Elizabethan in Purchas; and we could ill spare him. Robust, bombastical, crude, yet also Euphuistic, melodious, punning, he gives an earthy leaven to a book which might other-

wise sink under the weight of «metaphysical» questioning and subtlety. For Purchas is a «Metaphysical» too. That last passage shows him crossing the borderline: the intricacy of the prose is not simply an intricacy of verbal conceits: there is the movement of mind there, expressed in the flexibility of the clauses, in the capacity to meditate, to modify, to amplify, within the sentence-structure. The music — «Sense indeed (sense indeed of Vanitie...)» — is a music of ideas as well as of sounds, although in the music of sounds too he is (as previous quotation will have demonstrated) one of the most remarkable of our prose writers.

That Purchas is equally a master of the exact and pregnant epithet may be shown by a later paragraph, in which he is contrasting the helpless condition of the infant at birth with the well-provided entry of the lower animals into the world:

So willingly and bountifully doth she [Nature] furnish the *Fowles* with Downe, Feathers, Quills, to a miracle of delicacie, brauerie, vse; the *Beasts* with tougher *Hides*, or rougher *Haires*, or richer *Wool*, or Finer *Furres*; with *Manes*, in some creatures louely, in others, lordly and awfull; with angrie *Bristles*, with purueying and defensiu *Prickles*, with vindicative *Quills*, with comely and vsefull *Tailes*.

Purchas, we see, has noticed, compared, and pondered; and all Nature is a miracle, he tells us. It does not matter after this, any more than it matters with Browne, that he tells us that «of the marrow in a mans backbone is engendred a Serpent» and that beavers where hunted bite off their testicles. These are the common beliefs of his age.

But the moral of Purchas's admiration of nature is a derogation of man. Man in his degeneration «is a diuersified vanitie, a successiue variety of stinke». Stinking in his life, he is still more offensive in death, «making his Sepulchre a lothsome receptable of Wormes and excrements». And how laughable are the means by which man, proud man, meets with his end! In his delight in counting up the several exits, and recalling the extraordinary and grotesque historical fact, Purchas once again makes us think of *Religio Medici* and *Urn Burial*.

Fabius is strangled with a *haire* in his *Milke*; *Anacreon* with the *stone* of a Grape or Raisin; our Countri-man, Pope Adrian the fourth, with a *Fly*... and if Pharaoh, aske, *Who is the Lord?* *Flies*, *Lice*, *Grasse-hoppers*, and other the basest vermine shall bee his Challengers and Conquerors; shall aske, *Who is Pharaoh?*

I haue known death admitted in one by a Corn on the toe: and another, that seeming to haue conquered the Elements, the wild Ocean, wild Wildernes, wilder Beasts, wildest Men, hottest Climates, after sixteene yeeres absence, returned home and dyed of a hurt in his Thumbe.

Purchas belongs rather to the seventeenth than to the sixteenth century in the great meditation on death that follows. This is not the magniloquence of Browne: it is a new and original music. It will recall Andrewes, perhaps, in the convolutions of its movement; but the *Sermons* were not yet published. To get the full flavour of this sinuous prose it is necessary to quote at some length. As in the preceding passage the emphasis is on man's frailty: if he is self-sufficient, it is a self-sufficiency for death:

And how vaine must hee be, that comes one way into the World, goes millions of millions out of it? whose life is but a breath, an vncertaine breath, & therefore a certaine vanitie? in whom death hath ten thousand times as much as life? for all that is past, and all that is to come, are not, and therefore belong to Death; Our *now*, is but an instant, stayes not till the sillable *Now* may be written or spoken, and yet is all the space of life that any Man can at once possesse: this, lesse then time, is all we liue; vanisheth before it can be numbred or measured, and leaues nothing behind but this, that *euerie Man is vanitie*. Daily we shore this ruinous House of our *Bodie* with Food, with Rayment, with Exercise, Sleepe, and other both Natural and Physicall helpes; yet cannot preserue it from returning to Earth and Dust, to its Dust, a few feet of Earth, a few handfuls of Dust (*Ecce vix totam Hercules Impleuit urnam*). And how little a while, and that Dust is vanished, and resolued into the first and farthest Elements, the neerest proximitie to Nothing!

In those Houses of Death, *Diogenes* knowes not *King Philips* ashes from a beggars, or any other Mans. *They lie downe alike in the Dust, and the Wormes shall couer them*. The beautifull and deformed, the strong and the weake, and whatsoeuer names of difference Humanitie acknowledgeth, are not distinguishable in the dark and silent Graue. The greatest Tyrant findes there from the meanest none other salutation, but, *Art thou become like vnto us?*

This prose, which has the strength and skill of the greatest artists, was written some fifteen years before *Religio Medici*, some five years before Donne's *Devotions*, some twelve years before *Manchester al Mondo*, and more than half a century before John Howe's *The Vanity of this Mortal Life* (which in theme it most directly resembles). It is not only a sinuous but also a sinewy prose. Its majesty is derived from no straining after effect, but from a patent sincerity, an intensity of feeling that can clothe itself now in the cadences of the Old Testament, now in the colloquialism of the market-place. Behind it and through it we sense the movement of ratiocination. It is ex-

quisitely varied: in sentence form, in length of sentences, in the use of exclamation and question, in appropriate illustration. It has the suggestiveness of great art too: it can produce in us the species of excitement that Mr Bush has well termed «the metaphysical shudder». This thrill is elicited as much by the way in which the theme of death is presented as by the theme itself, if for purpose of exposition so crass a distinction may be permitted; it is, I mean, by the element of irony, and even by the deliberate hovering on the brink of an anticlimax, followed by so triumphant a recovery, that the mixture of horror and delight finds itself dramatically fused. I am referring especially to the last sentence but one where, with «the beautifull and deformed, the strong and the weake...» it appears that the great music is to be broken by a chain of bathetic parallels; but no, the recovery is made with subtle aplomb, to lead into the most magnificent cadence of all.

If Purchas does not often soar to these heights it is owing, in some measure, to the limitations of his scheme and, as I have suggested, to the rigidity with which he carries it out. None of Browne's amiable discursiveness for him. «The Historie of Man, Relating the Wonders of his Generation, the Vanities of his Degeneration, the Necessity of his Regeneration» — Purchas adheres closely to his threefold division, and while his Elizabethan vein expatiates freely in the first part («What a piece of work is Man!») and his metaphysical shudder enlivens the second, there is a decided collapse into the moral reflections of the closing section. But if Purchas wants Browne's discursive charm, he exhibits a taste for satire and a mastery of invective which few of his seventeenth century coævals can surpass. On the topic of fashions, for instance:

And what might this Traueller thinke of his Gargantuan *bellyed-Doublet* with huge huge sleeves, now with a contrarie smallnesse imprisoning the body? and then Ghost-like, Skin-close *Breeches*, since voluminously swolne into Rolles, Slops, Barratashes, Bambasted Plaits, and Sailers knee-sacks (as if we minded to act *Some-Body* and *No-Body*; or to keepe the Taylor for a continuall Nouice, in getting his Trade aswell as his Money). The fashions of *Blades* whereto wee are girded, our *Hangers, Girdles, Garters*, and that *Silken Maze* on the In-step, with the *Galoshaws, Cabands, Polony Coates*, would weary you....

or this, on Gluttony:

Vp, *Monsieur Belly*, mount the Towre, and bee the Throne. Dwell no longer in Obscuritie, in the centre of this Earth: It is Coronation Day of

Ladie Pleasure; shew now thy goodly Paunch, couer not that which my Pen shames to discover; bee thou (the head of Pleasure) the Bodies head too, and crowne thy selfe with Iuy: Downe *Head*, and hide thy Face, not with a ruddie Blush, or a mourning Blacke, but a ghastly, desperate Palenesse; let thy Braines turne into Guts, thy Mouth into Port *Exquiline*; Eyes, Eares, and other Noble Senses, muster your selues to do Dame Pleasure your best Pandar-Seruire; and thou braue *Heart*, bee Mediatour for this change of State Gouvernment; melt thy selfe in Lusts, euaporate thy selfe in Lusts, and let all this be called Loue, for the louely Bellyes sake.

Lastly, on Women:

We may indeed pitie the weaker, first-sinning, Sex; *Mulier* is so called a *mollicie* (*immutata & detracta litera, velut mollier*) saith *Lactantius* out of *Varro*; and is accordingly more pliant, waxen, mutable, more easily melted into new Formes, and cast into new Molds of Fashion. Weaker, said I! nay, how many of them are strong Holds and impregnable Fortresses on this kind? whom neither scorching Heat in Summer, nor pinching Cold in Winter, nor nipping vnseasonable Winds, nor that Haile-shot (Hell-shot) of lustfull Eyes, *fierie Darts*, can make so much as to interpose a Shield, or any Couering of Attire, before their delicates parts, the tender Pappes: except we call that a Couering, the false Brests, lately bought, not of the Dawber, Plaisterer, Painter, but the German Artificer (O Myserie of Iniquitie!) as the *nakednesse* of the Brest was before borrowed of the Italian Curtizan; which with better right might keepe open her shop-windowes, as professing common sale.

But if Purchas is to find readers today, it will be not by reason of his satire or his bombast, but by the attractions of his more meditative style. And it is not the self-revelatory meditation of Browne; in spite of the promise in the *Preface*, «let it remaine to after-Ages, as the BOOK OF MY CONFESSIONS», there is little of autobiography in *Microcosmus*. His «confessions» are cast consistently in the plural; he excels in spacious generalisations rather than close analysis. But it is from the wide sweep of these generalisations, and their reliance on cosmic images, that his peculiar music and his consistent force derive:

We are *Wandering Starres*, wandering and vanishing from euerie good way: not as the *Planets*, constant in their Wanderings, which for the Worlds greater good, are both moued with the Worlds Wheele, and haue besides a peculiar Motion of their owne; but in a singularitie of selfe-willed Pride, wee hold a constant wandering from God, from our Neighbours, from our selues (so the *Prodigall Wanderer*, at his Repentance, is first said to haue come to *himselfe*;) an inconstant wandering in and with the World (*Euerie Man for himselfe*;) haue a Motion of our owne, for our owne: as for others, *Non si fractus illabatur orbis*, let God care for all, or the Deuill take all, it is all one, for One is All, to vs.

It is a long involved sentence, but it is quite free from obscuritie. It follows closely the rhythms of the speaking voice, it persuades, it carries the overtones of regret, compassion, and judgement. The play of imagination moves from wandering stars to the Prodigal Son (yet another form of the universal myth referred to at the beginning of this essay) and back to the microcosm; readers of Browne will recognise an image incorporated in the Preface to *Pseudodoxia* and a key passage of *Religio Medici*. Purchas's intelligence is active on a number of levels; there is a constant expansion and retraction of the microcosm image to include the great world and the lesser, the world as a symbol of man's selfishness, and the same image as an expression of the human totality, «the lost traveller's dream under the hill»; and even the inner meanings of colloquial phrases are elucidated in grammatical asides. Like Andrewes, he loves to ponder and dissect his theme as he unravels it (and herein we catch an echo of those «few briefe Notes for a Lenten Sermon» which, he tells us, were the germ of the treatise) but his style is more plastic than Andrewes', as it is more continuous than Burton's. Let us consider, as our final specimen, the sustained imagery of the following passage, in which Purchas, who in Part One has followed Man's progress upward in the scale of being from senselessness, through the vegetative and animal existences, to a rational and finally a spiritual being, now shows the reverse process: degeneration perverts Man first into a beast, then a vegetable, a mere leaf:

Man is a Leefe, the last part of the Tree, which is parted from the same with the least force, a fading Leafe; and *We all* (the words are the eloquentest of the Prophets) *doe fade as a leafe, and our iniquities like the winde haue taken vs away*. Not a Tree, not a Shrub, not these Dead, not any kinde of Fruit, not the Blossome, but the *Leafe*, nor this in the Bud, not growing, but fading, yea *false*, yea carried, *carried away*, and that not by Beasts for meate, or Man for medicine, but by the insulting, carelesse, violent, remorselesse *Winde*!

Again it is the quality of the prose which engages our attention, rather than any striking idea: the quality (and call it rhetoric if you like) by which Purchas manages to suggest the very motion of the wind by his blending of impatience with delay, the rush of the clauses continually held up by afterthoughts and exceptions—the wind hurrying onwards, yet leaving behind it little eddies, which scoop out of their corners, as though by malevolent yet subhuman design, any stray leaves that may have been spared by the main

tornado. This is writing which, with all its vigour, its apparently careless élan, has been most skilfully premeditated. Examine that first sentence, its play on *leafe*, *least*, *part*, *parted*, its delicate lingering cadence. It is *contrapuntal* prose, writing that has undergone the discipline of music, in which a contexture of parts, none outdoing its fellows in importance, builds up a total effect with deceptive ease. The first sentence, «Man is a leafea fading Leafe», is a prelude. The sentence from Isaiah which follows we may regard as the «ground», upon which the next and most elaborate sentence executes a series of «divisions». The strictly musical construction is evident: first the statement: «not A, not B, not these C, not any kind of D, not E, *but* X; not F, not G, *but* Y (note the «imitation» here; then a short episode: *yea* H, *yea* J (J with a «relish», as it were)»; then back to «that *not* by K for k, or L for l, *but*....» and so the lesson comes to its sonorous close.

If this analysis be thought fanciful, and Purchas's dependence on the common «colours of rhetoric» deemed sufficient to account for the involution of his style, I could bring forward from *Microcosmus* many other examples, even more technically «musical» in construction, though less beautiful in themselves. But there is a limit to the readers's indulgence and to the space at my disposal. At least I hope I have shown that Purchas, as a stylist, is a figure to be reckoned with. Is he more than that? In the above pages I have tried to give a fairly full account of his little-known treatise; but again and again, it will be noted, I have been seduced from a consideration of his thought to an admiration of his expression. One cannot pretend that he was a bold thinker or a subtle thinker. He has lain forgotten a long time, and his own verdict confronts us: «I euer suspect these long Sleepers». No one imagines that he will ever be «set» for School Certificate or establish a new cult. There will be no Purchas Society, no «Age of Purchas». But he has some importance for the historian of thought, for the hunter of sources, and, more especially, for the anthologist. There is good stuff in him. He sounds a new note in English prose music; and, rich as our orchestra may be, we cannot neglect so rare an instrument.

No sweeter Lesson then *Lachryma*, no Meditation lesse vain, then this of Mans Vanitie. This makes the best Harmonie in a Consort of Mortified Passions... and all our Actions dance *the sober Measures of Mortalitie*.