Raffles Institution
Y6 Literature 2024 (Arts/Science)
Renaissance Unseen

Renaissance Unseen – Summary Lecture

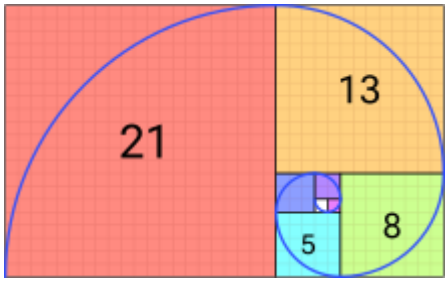
Today's lecture is meant to act as a summary for the material we have covered in class, and give you some concrete handles with which you can approach the Renaissance Unseen. This is in light of the upcoming TPs, so that you have some frameworks for revision, and things to pay attention to.

We are going to do that by looking at the historical context of the English Renaissance, because that will alert us to the general patterns which are present in the texts we study.

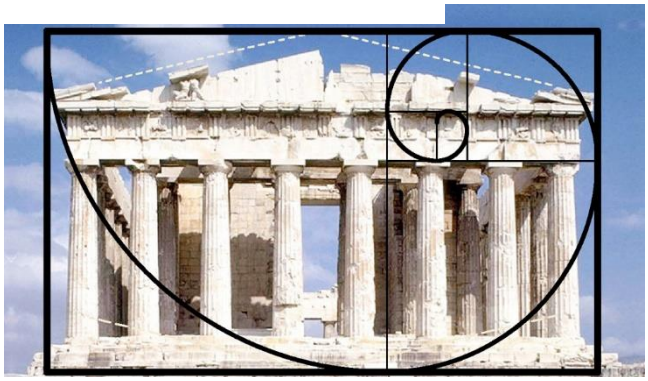
Principles and patterns of the classics

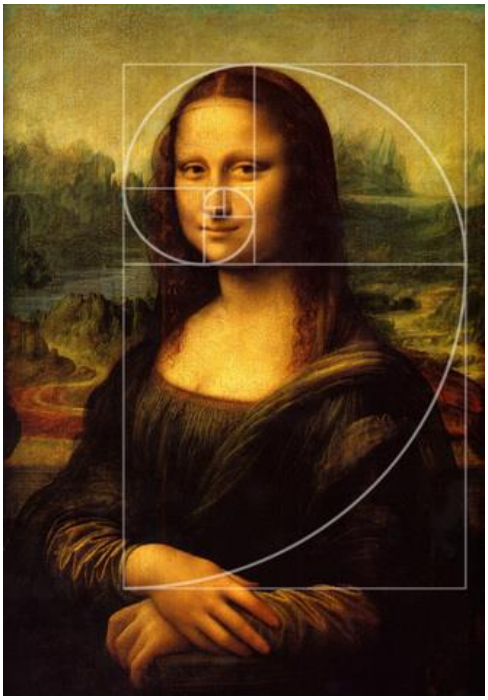
We know that the English Renaissance grows out of the general Renaissance movement of the rediscovery of the classics. The classical aesthetic was built on the elements of order, balance, proportion, and symmetry. The golden ratio, first mentioned by Euclid (the most prominent mathematician of Greco-Roman antiquity, best known for his treatise on geometry, the *Elements*), is an expression of this.The golden ratio, also known as the golden number, golden proportion or the divine proportion, is a ratio between two numbers that equals approximately 1.618. It became known as a mathematical distillation of what was aesthetically pleasing, with architects, artists, and various other professions either discovering the golden ratio in nature, or employing it in their creations. It is one of the ways the elements of order, balance, proportion, and symmetry were achieved.

When it comes to Renaissance literature, then, we should also look for the adherence to the proverbial golden ratio in the texts we come across. A sensitivity to these classical elements is what we aim to develop.



The golden ratio.


The Parthenon in Athens, a temple dedicated to Athena.


The Mona Lisa *by Leonardo da Vinci.*

What is rhetoric?

The root of the word rhetoric is the Greek word "*rhētōr"*, which means 'the speaker in the assembly'. Rhetoric is the art of using language for persuasion, in speaking, writing, and especially in oratory. The Classical theoreticians codified rhetoric very thoroughly. With the Renaissance rippling through Europe, this would become a core part of the classical education that was extremely fashionable at the time. Peter Womack expresses it neatly when he says that

> the conventionally stated aim of rhetoric was 'the moving of men's minds': it was meant to be effective in having an effect on the thoughts and perceptions of those who heard it. It was thus an instrument of influence: when religious and political codes were enforced, or altered, or contested, it was through the medium of rhetoric. (*English Renaissance Drama*, 2008.)

Here is an extract about Renaissance culture, which serves as a primer on the history and nature of rhetoric.

Rowland, Ingrid D. "High Culture". *A Companion to the Worlds of the Renaissance*, edited by Guido Ruggiero, Blackwell Publishing, 2007, pp. 321-324.

In the fields of rhetoric, literature, art, architecture, and behavior in particular, the existence of evident standards by which to compare contemporary achievements with the work of the ancients led to what might almost be termed an archaeological appreciation of ancient ways. But the standards set by the ancients exerted powerful influence in music and technology as well, where today the resemblance between ancient works and their Renaissance counterparts may seem particularly far-fetched; most of our own contemporaries would never mistake an opera by Monteverdi (1567-1643) for a Greek tragedy, nor see the utility of an ancient manual of war for the age of gunpowder. But humanism was not only a search for concrete facts of ancient life; it was also a search for systems, what Machiavelli (1469-1527), among many others, called *modi e ordini*, "methods and orders": ways of doing things and the sequence in which they are done.

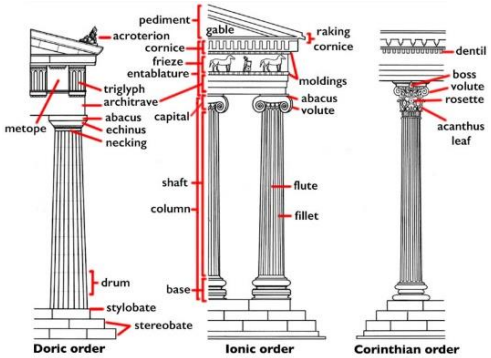
The classical aesthetic system to which the humanists and their contemporaries looked for guidance was rooted in ancient rhetoric. Rhetoric provided the basic training that educated Greeks (including citizens of the expansive Hellenistic world created after the conquests of Alexander the Great, and subsequently Romans, shared as essential preparation for participation in civic life. Formal training in rhetoric was minutely systematic, and it was designed above all to create persuasive public speakers. Instruction therefore included honing such arts as currying favor with the audience (*captatio benivolentiae*), glossing over weak arguments, and unabashed appeal to the emotions through the deft use of dramatic changes in the voice, graceful gestures, and direct personal appeals (*apostrophe*). Rhetorical questions provided yet another effective technique for driving away boredom and winning over the audience.

Just as importantly, however, classical rhetoric emphasized the need for a coherent underlying structure (arrangement, Greek *taxis*, Latin *dispositio*) whether for an individual argument in the public arena or for an entire legal case, whose final summation might go on for six or seven hours - all, ideally, delivered from memory. As the ultimate development of that coherent structure, rhetoric also placed great importance on ornament. (The word "decoration" derived from the same word as "decorum" and meant imparting a final polish through appropriate expression.) The training, moreover, worked. The orators of the ancient Greco-Roman world were phenomenally successful lawyers and leaders. But then most of the rules invoked by ancient rhetoricians - coherent organization, clarity of argument, clear

pronunciation, delivery from memory, appropriateness - operate just as effectively today. They were practical rules for any age.

The same technical terms applied by ancient rhetoricians to the art of public speaking were adopted by ancient writers on the other arts to establish similar criteria for quality. Aristotle's *Poetics* defined the persuasive power of Greek tragedy as the ability to strike "pity and fear" into the audience, a remarkably analytical assessment of what had been primarily a religious ritual. The Roman architect Vitruvius called for buildings to exhibit "firmness, utility, and concision" - they could almost be speeches. The ancient Roman poet Horace expressed this interconnection of the arts, or at least of ancient thinking about the arts, in a line of poetry that quickly became a cliché among humanists (and has remained a cliché among scholars who write on the Renaissance): "*ut pictura poesis*" ("poetry is like painting"). Coherent structure or design (*dispositio* again) applied to laying out the basic framework of buildings, statues, or musical compositions no less than speeches, and as with speeches refined ornament crowned each design's development, so that, if successful, the result moved the emotions, and, ultimately, persuaded. Effects analogous to those of a successful speech were thus demanded of successful paintings, sculptures, and buildings: indeed, in theory, rhetorical criteria defined the success of works in these other media. The development of humanism in the fifteenth century thus revived not only a set of standards for elegant Latin, but at the same time learned from the ancients to apply these same standards for composition and evaluation to a whole range of creative activities.

Another crucial element in the classical rhetorical system served as the basic guideline in developing a speech or a design from *dispositio* to final ornament. This was the concept that the Greeks called *genos* and the Romans *genus*; in both languages the word meant "family" or "clan," and its closest English equivalent is probably "kind," with that word's double sense of classification and of kinship. Like members of a human family, the members of a rhetorical family displayed both shared characteristics and individual quirks; the concept of *genus*, or more precisely, the practice of composition by *genus*, allowed for creative variety within certain definite boundaries. *Genera* (this was the Latin plural) were as ubiquitous and as varied as the whole world of human creativity. They included: epic and lyric genera ("genres") of poetry; Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian genera ("orders") of columns; Dorian, Lydian, and Phrygian genera ("modes") of music; high, medium, and low genera ("styles") of rhetoric. It was *genus* that defined standards of appropriateness for proportional systems in art, scales in music, sentence structure in speeches, ornament in every creative work. It was at once a remarkably strict and remarkably open idea. Combining two genera to create a third, however, could breed either brilliant inventions, like the Corinthian column, or monsters; there was no certain means to distinguish one from the other beforehand. For that matter, there was no fixed standard for distinguishing good taste from bad except by discovering how effectively a work persuaded - whatever persuasion might be. Generic composition therefore gave humanistic culture a tool that was both suggestive and almost perfectly ambiguous; to that very ambiguity it probably owed its long success.



Ancient rhetoricians, and, by extension, dramatists, painters, and sculptors often judged persuasiveness by a specific criterion: truth to nature, whether nature in its actual state or nature distilled to some idealized essence. The great Greek painter Zeuxis reportedly portrayed grapes of such realistically juicy appearance that birds pecked at them. Indeed, persuading the animals, as Orpheus did with his lyre, seems to have served ancient critics as supreme evidence of successful human creativity: truth to nature proven by nature's own testimony. When called upon to paint a picture of Aphrodite, the great Zeuxis asked that a series of beautiful youths and maidens be paraded before him so that he could take the best of each of their features and combine them himself into something more beautiful still - nature's quirks ironed out to create the image of divinity. Similarly, the sculptor Praxiteles carved a marble Aphrodite so voluptuous that men hurled themselves upon the statue and were rebuffed by cold marble in place of warm flesh. In an endlessly repeating chorus, ancient and Renaissance writers on the arts were to praise statues or paintings as "seemingly about to speak," "lifelike," "almost breathing." Again, the criterion for success was wonderfully suggestive - and totally imprecise.

By the same reasoning, truth to nature served as touchstone for the quality of architectural form: Vitruvius, in a profoundly influential passage of his Ten Books on Architecture, traced the classical column types to the human body in all its variety: Doric to the robust body of a young man, Ionic to a matron, Corinthian to a slender maiden. Extrapolating in the same vein in the early sixteenth century, the painter Raphael, in a famous letter to Pope Leo X, gave the Gothic pointed arch qualified praise because it derived, so he said, from the interlacing of the branches of trees in the forest. Another passage from Vitruvius denounced the wall-painting of his own generation (circa 25 CE) as hopelessly decadent precisely because it deviated from nature, portraying strange creatures and impossibly delicate architectural fantasies. Like their ancient Roman predecessors, Renaissance artists read his fulminations - and ignored them; these painted fantasies persuaded everyone but Vitruvian purists through the sheer delight of beholding them.

Proportion served as another crucial component of the classical aesthetic system, based again, initially, on rhetorical principles. Both the capacity of human lungs and the human attention span put definite quantitative limits on the length of spoken phrases and the structure of comprehensible arguments. In the same way, ancient architects measured states and buildings alike by the scale of the human body. The proportion of breadth to height in a true classical column fell within a comparatively narrow range, whereas Romanesque or Gothic columns exhibited infinite freedom to become slender or stumpy. Vitruvius' outcry against contemporary painting stressed its violations of proportion alongside its failure to imitate nature, two sides of the same deficiency.

A quick scan of classical order in Renaissance literature

A neat example of the classical aesthetic in literature is the quotation attributed to Julius Caesar: “Veni, vidi, vici” (“I came, I saw, I conquered”).

Here is an extract from Mark Antony’s speech in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar.* What are the classical elements that you can spot in it?

> Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;
> I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
> The evil that men do lives after them;
> The good is oft interred with their bones;
> So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus
> Hath told you Caesar was ambitious:
> If it were so, it was a grievous fault,
> And grievously hath Caesar answer’d it.

In his essay ‘Of Studies’, Francis Bacon (an English statesman and philosopher, oft acknowledged as the father of empiricism), adopts this same classical aesthetic. Note his use of the tricolon, which in form is parallel to classical architectural order.

> Studies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability. Their chief use for delight, is in privateness and retiring[1]; for ornament, is in discourse; and for ability, is in the judgment, and disposition of business. For expert men can execute, and perhaps judge of particulars, one by one; but the general counsels, and the plots and marshalling of affairs, come best, from those that are learned. To spend too much time in studies is sloth; to use them too much for ornament, is affectation; to make judgment wholly by their rules, is the humor of a scholar. They perfect nature, and are perfected by experience: for natural abilities are like natural plants, that need pruning, by study; and studies themselves, do give forth directions too much at large, except they be bounded in by experience. Crafty men contemn studies, simple men admire them, and wise men use them; for they teach not their own use; but that is a wisdom without them, and above them, won by observation. Read not to contradict and confute; nor to believe and take for granted; nor to find talk and discourse; but to weigh and consider. Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested; that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously; and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention. Some books also may be read by deputy, and extracts made of them by others; but that would be only in the less important arguments, and the meaner sort of books, else distilled books are like common distilled waters[2], flashy things. Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man. And therefore, if a man write little, he had need have a great memory; if he confer little, he had need have a present wit: and if he read little, he had need have much cunning, to seem to know, that he doth not. Histories make men wise; poets witty; the mathematics subtle; natural philosophy deep; moral grave; logic and rhetoric able to contend. *Abeunt studia in mores*[3]. Nay, there is no stond[4] or impediment in the wit, but may be wrought out by fit studies; like as diseases of the

[1] Retiring is used in the sense of retiring from public business
[2] Distilled vegetable juices, which are taken for medicinal purposes
[3] This means “studies pass into character”, and is a quote from Ovid, a Roman poet at the time of Augustus Caesar
[4] obstacle

body, may have appropriate exercises. Bowling is good for the stone[5] and reins[6]; shooting for the lungs and breast; gentle walking for the stomach; riding for the head; and the like. So if a man's wit be wandering, let him study the mathematics; for in demonstrations, if his wit be called away never so little, he must begin again. If his wit be not apt to distinguish or find differences, let him study the Schoolmen; for they are *cymini sectores*[7]. If he be not apt to beat over[8] matters, and to call up one thing to prove and illustrate another, let him study the lawyers' cases. So every defect of the mind, may have a special receipt[9].

[5] Kidney stone
[6] kidney
[7] Splitters of cumin seeds, which is to say, minute matters.
[8] To beat over is to debate.
[9] remedy

Modes of Persuasion

The modes of persuasion, modes of appeal, or rhetorical appeals are strategies of rhetoric that classify a speaker's or writer's appeal to their audience. These include ethos, pathos, and logos, all three of which appear in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. (Wikipedia)

Understanding these three modes of persuasion will allow you to quickly identify the nature of the arguments that any given writer might be making, and the grounds upon which these arguments are made.

Ethos

Ethos is the appeal to authority and credibility. The appeal can be made based on different kinds of authority: divine authority, institutional authority, national authority, and moral authority are some of the common bases of authority that writers use. This is usually done in reference to a set of ideals that govern a given community, for example, a nation, or a set of beliefs.

In 'The Defense of Poesy', Sir Philip Sidney argues that poetry is the most excellent of all sciences, and that the poet is the highest of all professions. He masterfully invokes different models of authority to strengthen his claim:

> But now let us see how the Greeks named it and how they deemed of it. The Greeks called him "a poet," which name has, as the most excellent, gone through other languages.
>
> Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done; neither with pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too-much-loved earth more lovely; her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.
>
> Neither let it be deemed too saucy a comparison to balance the highest point of man's wit with the efficacy of nature; but rather give right honor to the Heavenly Maker of that maker, who, having made man to His own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature.

Pathos

Pathos is the appeal to the emotions. This is usually done by deliberately awakening strong emotions within the audience, in order to evoke a desired response. Pity, sympathy, fear, horror, and sorrow are some of the common emotional touchstones which writers employ.

Here is an example from Thomas Dekker's *The Wonderful Year:*

> Let me behold your ghastly visages, that my paper may receive their true pictures. Echo forth your groans through the hollow trunk of my pen, and rain down your gummy tears into mine ink, that even marble bosoms may be shaken with terror, and hearts of adamant melt into compassion.

Logos

Logos is the appeal via logic, where the writer leads the reader to follow a logical trail of reasoning, both deductive (where valid inferences are drawn from logical premises) and inductive (where broad generalisations and principles are derived from a set of observations). Here is a quick illustration:

> Deductive reasoning is making an inference based on widely accepted facts or premises. If a beverage is defined as "drinkable through a straw," one could use deduction to determine soup to be a beverage. Inductive reasoning, is making an inference based on an observation, often of a sample. You can induce that the soup is tasty if you observe all of your friends consuming it. Abductive reasoning is making a probable conclusion from what you know. If you see an abandoned bowl of hot soup on the table, you can use abduction to conclude the owner of the soup is likely returning soon. ("'Deduction' vs. 'Induction' vs. 'Abduction.'" *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, 2024.)

Sir Francis Bacon's 'Of Custom And Education' is built on such logical appeal. His claims are built on observation and inductive reasoning, runs the gamut of historical evidence to establish the inerrancy of his claims, and many of his points are expressed in tricolon, of which the completeness suggested in the syntax mirrors a completeness in the structure of his argument.

> Men's thoughts, are much according to their inclination; their discourse and speeches, according to their learning and infused opinions; but their deeds, are after as they have been accustomed. And therefore, as Machiavel[10] well noteth (though in an evil-favored instance), there is no trusting to the force of nature, nor to the bravery of words, except it be corroborate by custom. His instance is, that for the achieving of a desperate conspiracy, a man should not rest upon the fierceness of any man's nature, or his resolute undertakings; but take such an one, as hath had his hands formerly in blood. But Machiavel knew not of a Friar Clement, nor a Ravillac, nor a Jaureguy, nor a Baltazar Gerard[11]; yet his rule holdeth still, that nature, nor the engagement of words, are not so forcible, as custom. Only superstition is now so well advanced, that men of the first blood[12], are as firm as butchers by occupation; and votary resolution[13], is made equipollent[14] to custom, even in matter of blood. In other things, the predominancy of custom is everywhere visible; insomuch as a man would wonder, to hear men profess, protest, engage, give great words, and then do, just as they have done before; as if they were dead images, and engines moved only by the wheels of custom. We see also the reign or tyranny of custom, what it is. The Indians (I mean the sect of their wise men[15]) lay themselves quietly upon a stock of wood, and so sacrifice themselves by fire. Nay, the wives strive to be burned, with the corpses of their husbands. The lads of Sparta, of ancient time, were wont to be scourged upon the altar of Diana, without so much as quecking[16]. I remember, in the beginning of Queen Elizabeth's time of England, an Irish rebel condemned, put up a petition to the deputy, that he might be hanged in a withe[17], and not in an halter; because it had been so used, with former rebels. There be monks in Russia, for

[10] Niccolo Machiavelli, Florentine statesman and political theorist
[11] All four of these men attempted to murder a reigning monarch
[12] Men who are committing their first murder
[13] vow
[14] Equal in power
[15] A reference to the Gymnosophists, an ancient school of Hindu philosophers
[16] twitching with pain
[17] A band made of branches twisted together

penance, that will sit a whole night in a vessel of water, till they be engaged with hard ice. Many examples may be put of the force of custom, both upon mind and body. Therefore, since custom is the principal magistrate of man's life, let men by all means endeavor, to obtain good customs. Certainly custom is most perfect, when it beginneth in young years: this we call education; which is, in effect, but an early custom. So we see, in languages, the tongue is more pliant to all expressions and sounds, the joints are more supple, to all feats of activity and motions, in youth than afterwards. For it is true, that late learners cannot so well take the ply[18]; except it be in some minds, that have not suffered themselves to fix, but have kept themselves open, and prepared to receive continual amendment, which is exceeding rare. But if the force of custom simple and separate, be great, the force of custom copulate[19] and conjoined and collegiate, is far greater. For there example teacheth, company comforteth, emulation quickeneth, glory raiseth: so as in such places the force of custom is in his exaltation. Certainly the great multiplication of virtues upon human nature, resteth upon societies well ordained and disciplined. For commonwealths, and good governments, do nourish virtue grown but do not much mend the deeds. But the misery is, that the most effectual means, are now applied to the ends, least to be desired.

[18] Change their habits
[19] unite

The Renaissance Imagination

Understanding how the Renaissance imagination functions allows us to tap into the cultural consciousness of the time, and helps us to pick on the critical elements within the texts that we see.

Natural imagery

One strain of thought common in the Renaissance was to see truth expressed in nature. Sir Thomas Elyot wrote *The Book Named the Governor*, which was a text on political theory, first addressing the defining of a public weal, which is to say, the public good. Having defined the public good as containing a sensible order, he then proves the validity of his argument by pointing to the same presence of order as created by God within nature (a very similar argument to 'An Exhortation Concerning Good Order'). Observe how the examples Elyot employs are all drawn from nature, nature being the canvas upon which God paints the structure of order (and by extension, the truth of existence) upon:

> But now to prove, by example of those things that be within only among men but also with God, albeit His wisdom, bounty, and magnificence can be with no tongue or pen sufficiently expressed. Hath not He set degrees and estates in all His glorious works?
>
> First in His heavenly ministers, whom, as the Church affirmeth, He hath constituted to be in divers degrees called hierarchs[20]. Also Christ saith by His evangelist that in the house of His Father (which is God) be many mansions[21]. But to treat of that which by natural understanding may be comprehended. Behold the four elements whereof the body of man is compact, how they be set in their places called spheres, higher or lower according to the sovereignty of their natures, that is to say, the fire as the most pure element, having in it nothing that is corruptible, in his place is highest and above other elements. The air, which next to the fire is most pure in substance, is in the second sphere or place. The water, which is somewhat consolidate, and approacheth to corruption, is next unto the earth. The earth, which is of substance gross and ponderous, is set of all elements most lowest.
>
> Behold also the order that God hath put generally in all His creatures, beginning at the most inferior or base, and ascending upward. He made not only herbs to garnish the earth, but also trees of a more eminent stature than herbs, and yet in the one and the other be degrees of qualities: some pleasant to behold, some delicate or good in taste, other wholesome and medicinable, some commodious and necessary. Semblably in birds, beasts, and fishes, some be good for the sustenance of man, some bear things profitable to sundry uses, other be apt to occupation and labour; in divers is strength and fierceness only; in many is both strength and commodity; some other serve for plea-sure; none of them hath all these qualities; few have the more part or many, specially beauty, strength, and profit. But where any is found that hath many of the said properties, he is more set by than all the other, and by that estimation the order of his place and degree evidently appeareth; so that every kind of trees, herbs, birds, beasts, and fishes, beside their diversity of forms, have (as who saith) a peculiar disposition appropered[22] unto them by God their creator: so that in everything is order, and without order may be nothing stable or

[20] a chief priest, archbishop, or other leader
[21] John 14:2
[22] appropriated

> permanent; and it may not be called order, except it do contain in it degrees, high and base, according to the merit or estimation of the thing that is ordered.

Bear in mind that the converse can also be true – it does not mean that every reference to nature is positive. In some instances, wild nature can contrast with the rigidity and restrictions of city life, while in other instances the very same wild nature can be associated with a beast, as opposed to the rationality that characterises a man. To have a look at this, let us return to Thomas Dekker's *The Wonderful Year*, where the convention of nature expressing truth is also employed, albeit in a manner where the hideous and damaged flora set on a ghastly stage is indicative of the horrific condition of London:

> What an unmatchable torment were it for a man to be barred up every night in a vast silent charnel-house? Hung (to make it more hideous) with lamps dimly and slowly burning, in hollow and glimmering corners; where all the pavement should, in stead of green rushes, be strewed with blasted rosemary, withered hyacinths, fatal cypress and yew, thickly mingled with heaps of dead men's bones; the bare ribs of a father that begat him, lying there; here the chapless[23] hollow skull of a mother that bore him; round about him a thousand corpses, some standing bolt upright in their knotted winding sheets, others half moulded in rotten coffins, that should suddenly yawn wide open, filling his nostrils with noisome stench, and his eyes with the sight of nothing but crawling worms. And to keep such a poor wretch waking, he should hear no noise but of toads croaking, screech-owls howling, mandrakes shrieking; were not this an infernal prison? Would not the strongest-hearted man (beset with such a ghastly horror) look wild? and run mad? and die? And even such a formidable shape did the diseased city appear in.

[23] Having no lower jaw

Science and discovery

While the modern worldview (particularly after industrialisation and the advent of specialisation) tends towards a dichotomous view of science of art, to think of the Renaissance as limited to culture would be a great disservice. The Renaissance was also a time of discovery, and in particular a delight and fascination with novelty. The cosmos and mechanical discoveries were all phenomena to be classed and studied. Medicine, mathematics, the human body, and astronomy were all fields of productive study, and writers often found in these subjects metaphors suitable for expression of other thought.

Have a look at George Herbert's poem *The Pulley*, in which the mechanisms of the titular pulley are critical in articulating Herbert's point about the tension inherent in man's restlessness existence on earth and the desire for rest. This is a good example of how breaking down the literal mechanism of an object allows for insight into the point that the writer is making.

The Pulley

When God at first made man,
Having a glass of blessings standing by,
"Let us," said he, "pour on him all we can.
Let the world's riches, which dispersèd lie,
Contract into a span."

So strength first made a way;
Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honor, pleasure.
When almost all was out, God made a stay,
Perceiving that, alone of all his treasure,
Rest in the bottom lay.

"For if I should," said he,
"Bestow this jewel also on my creature,
He would adore my gifts instead of me,
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature;
So both should losers be.

"Yet let him keep the rest,
But keep them with repining restlessness.
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to my breast."

The classical imagination

Often the classical imagination is invoked, with an eye on the epic, the mythic, the monstrous. Consider what we have seen of the Homeric epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* thus far, as well as all the references to the Olympian pantheon. The characters and creatures of Greco-Roman myth would be of common knowledge, and were often used to indicate a heightened scale.

John Lyly wrote *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*, where the central character is Euphues. In this extract, which is a preface to the actual fiction, Lyly draws upon the classical tradition to make the point that he is representing the character in as truthful a manner as possible. While he could simply put that sentiment across plainly, the references to the inhabitants of the classics add new dimensions to his argument, imbuing them with a greater scale and range, and thus granting him greater rhetorical force.

> Parchasius'[24] drawing the counterfeit of Helen[25], Right Honourable, made the attire of her head loose; who being demanded why he did so he answered she was loose. Vulcan[26] was painted curiously, yet with a polt-foot[27]; Venus cunningly, yet with her mole. Alexander[28] having a scar in his cheek held his finger upon it that Apelles[29] might not paint it. Apelles painted him with his finger cleaving to his face. "Why," quoth Alexander, "I laid my finger on my scar because I would not have thee see it." "Yea," said Apelles, "and I drew it there because none else should perceive it; for if thy finger had been away either thy scar would have been seen or my art misliked." Whereby I gather that in all perfect works as well the fault as the face is to be shown. The fairest leopard is set down with his spots, the sweetest rose with his prickles, the finest velvet with his brack[30]. Seeing then that in every counterfeit as well the blemish as the beauty is coloured I hope I shall not incur the displeasure of the wise in that in the discourse of Euphues I have as well touched the vanities of his love as the virtues of his life. The Persians, who above all their kings most honoured Cyrus, caused him to be engraven as well with his hooked nose as his high forehead. He that loved Homer best concealed not his flattering; and he that praised Alexander most bewrayed[31] his quaffing[32]. Demonides must have a crooked shoe for his wry foot, Damocles a smooth glove for his straight hand. For as every painter that shadoweth a man in all parts giveth every piece his just proportion, so he that deciphereth the qualities of the mind ought as well to show every humour[33] in his kind as the other doth every part in his colour. The surgeon that maketh the anatomy showeth as well the muscles in the heel as the veins of the heart.

[24] A Greek painter of the 5th century BCE
[25] Helen of Troy
[26] The Roman god of fire and volcanoes and the forge, whose Greek counterpart is Hephaestus
[27] Club-foot
[28] Alexander the Great
[29] A Greek painter of the 4th century BCE
[30] flaw
[31] To bewray is to reveal unintentionally
[32] Quaffing refers to his high alcohol consumption
[33] Diposition. This draws on the theory of humorism, where body contains blood (associated with the sanguine, i.e. optimistic and positive), phlegm (associated with the phlegmatic, i.e. unemotional and stolid), yellow bile (the choleric, i.e. bad-tempered and irritable), and black bile (associated with the melancholic). The body depends heavily on the four humors because their balanced combination helps to keep people in good health. Having the right amount of humor is essential for health. The pathophysiology of disease is consequently brought on by humor excesses and/or deficiencies. (Hippocrates, *On the Nature of Man*)

The religious imagination

One of the cultural touchstones of the English Renaissance was *The Book of Common Prayer.* This text established the official order of worship for the Church of England. This was a text that every member of English society would have been familiar with. The biblical text was another piece of the literary foundation. Phrases such as "speak now or forever hold your peace" and “till death do us part” in marriage liturgy, and "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust" from the funeral service have found their way into modern English.

Naturally, any references to the Bible would carry spiritual authority. This can be taken as a given in the context of the English Renaissance, where Protestant Christianity was the dominant strain of religion. Queen Elizabeth’s first speech before her coronation is an example of this, where her reference to being “God’s creature” and to being “the minister of his heavenly will” aligns her rule with the divine rule of God:

> My lords, the law of nature moveth me to sorrow for my sister; the burden that is fallen upon me maketh me amazed; and yet, considering I am God's creature, ordained to obey His appointment, I will thereto yield, desiring from the bottom of my heart that I may have assistance of His grace to be the minister of his heavenly will in this office now committed to me. And as I am but one body naturally considered, though by His permission a body politic to govern, so I shall desire you all, my lords (chiefly you of the nobility, everyone in his degree and power), to be assistant to me, that I with my ruling and you with your service may make a good account to almighty God and leave some comfort to our posterity in earth. I mean to direct all my actions by good advice and counsel. And therefore, considering that divers of you be of the ancient nobility, having your beginnings and estates of my progenitors, kings of this realm, and thereby ought in honor to have the more natural care for maintaining of my estate and this commonwealth; some others have been of long experience in governance and enabled by my father of noble memory, my brother, and my late sister to bear office; the rest of you being upon special trust lately called to her service only and trust, for your service considered and rewarded; my meaning is to require of you all nothing more but faithful hearts in such service as from time to time shall be in your powers towards the preservation of me and this commonwealth. And for counsel and advice I shall accept you of my nobility, and such others of you the rest as in consultation I shall think meet and shortly appoint, to the which also, with their advice, I will join to their aid, and for ease of their burden, others meet for my service. And they which I shall not appoint, let them not think the same for any disability in them, but for that I do consider a multitude doth make rather discord and confusion than good counsel. And of my goodwill you shall not doubt, using yourselves as appertaineth to good and loving subjects.

References to stories and characters would also be used to emphasise certain virtues or cautionary lessons. Think of these as functioning in the same way as fable and allegory: vehicles for a moral lesson. Other than religious references conveying a sense of spiritual authority, they could also be used to lend moral weight to a writer's argument, which can be seen in Rachel Speght's *A Muzzle for Melatomus*[34], which was a reply to an outrageous attack on women called *Araignment of Lewde, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women*.

> From standing water, which soon putrefies, can no good fish be expected; for it produceth no other creatures but those that are venomous or noisome, as snakes, adders, and such like. Semblably, no better stream can we look, should issue from your idle corrupt brain, then that whereto the ruffe of your fury (to use your own words) hath moved you to open the sluice. In which excrement of your raving cogitations you have used such irregularities touching concordance, and observed so disordered a method, as I doubt not to tell you, that a very Accidence Scholar[35] would have quite put you down in both. You appear herein not unlike that Painter, who seriously indevouring to portray Cupid's Bow, forgot the String: for you being greedy to botch up your mingle mangle invective against Women, have not therein observed, in many places, so much as a Grammar sense. But the emptiest Barrel makes the loudest sound; and so we will account of you.
>
> Many propositions have you framed, which (as you think) make much against Women, but if one would make a Logical assumption, the conclusion would be flat against your own Sex. Your dealing wants so much discretion, that I doubt whether to bestow so good a name as the Dunce upon you: but Minority bids me keep within my bounds; and therefore I only say unto you, that your corrupt Heart and railing Tongue, hath made you a fit scribe for the Devil.
>
> In that you have termed your virulent foam, the *Beare-bayting of Women*, you have plainly displayed your own disposition to be Cynical, in that there appears no other Dog or Bull, to bait them, but your self. Good had it been for you to have put on that Muzzle, which Saint James would have all Christians to wear; *Speake not evil one of another*[36]: and then had you not seemed so like the Serpent *Porphirus*[37], as now you doe; which, though full of deadly poison, yet being toothless, hurteth none so much as himself. For you having gone beyond the limits not of Humanity alone, but of Christianity, have done greater harm unto your own soul, then unto women, as may plainly appear. First, in dishonoring of God by palpable blasphemy, wresting and perverting every place of Scripture, that you have alleged; which by the testimony of Saint Peter, is to the destruction of them that so do[38]. Secondly, it appears by your disparaging of, and opprobrious speeches against that excellent work of God's hands, which in his great love he perfected for the comfort of man. Thirdly, and lastly, by this your hodge-podge of heathenish Sentences, Similies, and Examples, you have set forth your self in your right colours, unto the view of the world: and I doubt not but the Judicious will account of you according to your demerit: As for the Vulgar sort, which have no more learning then you have shewed in your Book, it is likely they will applaud you for your pains.

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[34] Literally, 'black mouth'
[35] Latin grammar schoolboy
[36] James 4:11, "Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it."
[37] A reference to the ouroboros, the serpent which eats its own tail
[38] 1 Peter 3:15-16, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, **16** keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."

The Renaissance imagination coming together

Often writers would draw from multiple traditions in order to demonstrate their literary skill. Here is an extract from John Donne's *Essays in Divinity*, which employs maritime navigation as a metaphor for the search for God.

> Men which seek God by reason and natural strength (though we do not deny common notions and general impressions of a sovereign power) are like mariners which voyaged before the invention of the compass, which were but coasters, and unwillingly left the sight of the land. Such are they which would arrive at God by this world, and contemplate him only in his creatures, and seeming demonstration. Certainly every creature shows God, as a glass, but glimmeringly and transitorily, by the frailty both of the receiver, and beholder[39]. Ourselves have his image, as medals, permanently and preciously delivered. But by these meditations we get no further than to know what he doth, not what he is. But as by the use of the compass men safely despatch Ulysses' dangerous ten years' travel[40] in so many days, and have found out a new world richer than the old, so doth faith, as soon as our hearts are touched with it, direct and inform us in that great search of the discovery of God's essence, and the new Jerusalem[41], which reason durst not attempt. And though the faithfulest heart is not ever directly and constantly upon God, but that it sometimes descends also to reason, yet it is [not) thereby so departed from him but that it still looks towards him, though not fully to him, as the compass is ever northward, though it decline and have often variations towards east and west. By this faith, as by reason, I know that God is all that which all men can say of all good; I believe he is somewhat which no man can say nor know.

The various elements of the Renaissance imagination coming together can also be seen in poetry. Once again Donne is our exemplar. In the poem below, Donne makes reference to the explorer Magellan and the enterprise of nautical discovery, where the journey again becomes a metaphor for the soul's movement towards death. Yet Donne's manipulation of this geographical metaphor is not limited to movement and discovery, but also very cleverly in the negotiation of space (of which geography must study) – except, in Donne's case, the space that he is mapping is spiritual and not physical.

[39] This is a reference to 1 Corinthians 13:12, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." Donne is suggesting that we see God through a glass, and if the image is distorted "darkly", it is because of the faults of our sight.

[40] Homer's *Odyssey* has Odysseus journey for ten years before he returns home to Ithaca. This journey was epic and filled with many dangers.

[41] The "new Jerusalem" is a reference to the city of God, where God dwells with mankind.

Hymn to God, My God, in My Sickness

Since I am coming to that holy room,
Where, with thy choir of saints for evermore,
I shall be made thy music; as I come
I tune the instrument here at the door,
And what I must do then, think here before.

Whilst my physicians by their love are grown
Cosmographers, and I their map, who lie
Flat on this bed, that by them may be shown
That this is my south-west discovery,
Per fretum febris[42], by these straits to die,

I joy, that in these straits I see my west;
For, though their currents yield return to none,
What shall my west hurt me? As west and east
In all flat maps (and I am one) are one,
So death doth touch the resurrection.

Is the Pacific Sea my home? Or are
The eastern riches? Is Jerusalem?
Anyan[43], and Magellan[44], and Gibraltar[45],
All straits, and none but straits, are ways to them,
Whether where Japhet dwelt, or Cham, or Shem[46].

We think that Paradise and Calvary,
Christ's cross, and Adam's tree, stood in one place;
Look, Lord, and find both Adams met in me;
As the first Adam's sweat surrounds my face,
May the last Adam's[47] blood my soul embrace.

So, in his purple wrapp'd, receive me, Lord;
By these his thorns[48], give me his other crown[49];
And as to others' souls I preach'd thy word,
Be this my text, my sermon to mine own:
"Therefore that he may raise, the Lord throws down."

[42] *Per fretum febris* – Latin for "through the pains of fever", which is how Magellan, who made the "south-west discovery" of the Magellan Straits, died before his goal of circumnavigating the globe
[43] *Anyan* - semi-mythical strait, documented from around 1560, that was believed by early modern cartographers to mark the boundary between North America and Asia and to permit access to a Northwest Passage from the Arctic Ocean to the Pacific
[44] *Magellan* – strait that connects the Pacific to the Atlantic
[45] *Gilbraltar* – strait that connects the Atlantic to the Mediterranean
[46] Japhet, Cham, and Shem were Noah's sons at the time of the biblical flood
[47] The "*last Adam*" is a reference to Christ
[48] The Roman soldiers made Jesus wear a crown of thorns when he was crucified, to mock him as the "king of the Jews".
[49] The "other crown" refers to the crown of life (James 1:12), i.e. the gift of eternal life promised by Jesus to believers.