

Thematic
Guide to **Biblical**
LITERATURE



Nancy M. Tischler

Thematic Guide to Biblical Literature

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*For Jim —
Big brother,
Great reader,
Good friend,
with enduring love.*

Introduction

The Bible has one pervasive theme, the relationship between God and humankind. The great drama that moves from the Creation to the final days is more than literature. It is the basis of millions of peoples' beliefs over thousands of years. Especially in the West, the Bible's influence on the culture has been so deep as to make the world-view of scripture a basic assumption for literature.

As a consequence, the influence of biblical themes on Western literature is subtle and foundational. Even when the literature is a perversion of the original biblical concepts or a rejection of them, the influence remains. For example, even when the admonition to keep the Sabbath holy has largely disappeared from American life, it retains its echoes in literature. The lapsed Catholic F. Scott Fitzgerald sets the most depraved scenes of *The Great Gatsby* on a Sunday afternoon, making the depravity seem even darker. And the Loman family in *Death of Salesman* choose Sunday to wash their car. This is a deliberate violation of the commandment to keep the Sabbath holy, typical behavior of a family that appears to retain no clear memories of Judeo-Christian faith. Having replaced Christianity with the American Cinderella myth, the Lomans believe that love of one another and of success is sufficient to give their lives meaning. Biblical thinking is so intrinsically intertwined in our thinking that we find ourselves using biblical phrases, ideas, people, and stories as a natural part of our speech, even in a "post-Christian" world. They are deeply imbedded in our culture.

The other strong thread of influence in Western thought is Hellenism, which strongly contrasts with Hebraism. For this reason, I have included examples of well-known Greek stories and ideas to contrast the scriptural ones, showing the differences in tastes, morality, theology, and activity. This is particularly important in the study of the hero figure. The Greeks loved the beautiful body as well as the cultured mind. The Hebrews believed that faith in God was the beginning of wisdom and of virtue. Appearance is seldom mentioned in Bible stories.

Using these influences, with major focus on the Bible, I have tried to trace a few of the typical examples of the various biblical themes in English and American literature and occasionally in their European counterparts. In each chapter, a handful

of individual works have detailed analysis for the purpose of demonstrating the continuing influence of biblical thought. The examples are by no means exhaustive, and the analyses are too brief to be fully satisfying; but they do provide samples of the transformation and persistence of the ideas through history.

I have approached this using the scriptural concept of typology. In other words, in scripture, all events point to one another in a mutually reinforcing manner. The New Testament writers considered the events and people and words of the Old Testament as types or foreshadowings of the further antitypes that were to come. These antitypes were the fully realized forms of the earlier figures. Thus, Paul considered Adam as a foreshadowing of Christ (Rom. 5:14), and Peter thought Christian baptism to be the antitype of God's salvation of mankind from the flood through Noah (1 Pet. 3:21; Frye, 78–79). These types then became the basis for much of Western literature, with Christ-figures too common to enumerate, and Eden innocence recurring in the imagination of every age.

Writers in the Western world, most of whom have been nurtured in the Judeo-Christian tradition, recognize and utilize the archetypes found in Scripture. Abraham, the father who is willing to sacrifice his beloved son for his faith, becomes a type of God-the-father, in the Christian Trinity. The Song of Solomon, a rich proclamation of sexual love, becomes a foreshadowing of Christ's love for his bride, the Church. The Royal Psalms are seen as an announcement of the coming of the Messiah.

These types, which are often parallel to types found in Greek and other cultures, often fall into patterns of revelation. Frye, in his book on this topic, *The Great Code*, describes seven phases: Creation, Revolution, Law, Wisdom, Prophecy, Gospel, and Apocalypse (Frye, 105–138). Because the Judeo-Christian view of existence is linear, moving from the beginning of time to the end of the world, I have ordered the chapters in a loosely chronological pattern, beginning with the stories of the Creation and ending with the Last Days. In between are a number of issues that involve the human interaction with the divine—fate and predestination, morality, love, worship, and so forth. There are many other themes that I might have included, themes such as dreams and visions, sacrifice, and salvation that the reader is free to explore for herself.

The segment of each entry that deals directly with scripture has few quotations but many citations, based on the assumption that the reader has a Bible for further study and thought. The citations are by no means complete; each chapter would require several volumes in order to provide an exhaustive account of the issues. Instead, the chapters explore only a few of the major ideas related to each topic. Some of the themes, like *love*, have hundreds of references in scripture.

For the literary parallels and influences, I have tried to select works by major authors that are well known and frequently anthologized. Although I began this study with careful attention to *The Bible as/in Literature*, a popular anthology by James S. Ackerman and Thayer S. Warsaw, I have used a number of others as well, quoting extensively from poetry. As a college teacher for half a century, I could not resist works that I enjoyed teaching students, even though they rarely appear in modern anthologies. Realizing that many of the readers would not have the poetry collections at hand, I have quoted entire poems when I thought them to be particularly relevant to the topic. Only a few exemplary literary works are included, usually with a modest effort to demonstrate how they echo, refute, or expand on biblical examples.

It was impossible to avoid overlaps: How can heroism be separated from war, or morality from sin? By using different examples and emphasizing different issues, I have sought to make the overlapping chapters mutually reinforcing and lively. Really

powerful literature is never so didactic nor so simple as to be easily reduced to the formula, "The moral of this story is...." Like scripture itself, the moral, or the theme, is often complicated by the circumstances and the characters involved. For example, the story of King David's adulterous affair with Bathsheba is not just about the violation of the marriage vow. It is also about murder, lying, abuse of power, and any number of other issues. Shakespeare's *King Lear* is not just a story of ungrateful children, who are failing to obey the commandment to honor their father. Such reductionist approaches do a disservice to the nuances of the play. The alert and sensitive reader must plow deeper and consider Lear's demands for flattery, his failure to rein in his own excesses, his abdication of responsibility, and other flaws in both him and his daughters. From the beginning of the play, we know he is misjudging the natures of his daughters and that his decision to divest himself of his authority is unwise and potentially tragic. The great writers all have this complexity, subtlety, power, and beauty that make them worth studying.

This book has been a pleasure to write. I have appreciated the people who were willing to look at chapters and give me advice, including my friend Kathy Adams; my pastor, Rev. David Hanson; and my tireless, meticulous, and wise editor, George Butler. I hope the essays help those teachers and students studying themes in scripture that also appear in other literature.

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Creation

Readings

Genesis 1–3

Job 38

John 1

Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe* (50 B.C.)

John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1667)

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1817)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (1817)

Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Defense of Poetry* (1821)

Robert Browning, "Abt Vogler" (1864)

Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (1932)

Introduction

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day. (Gen. 1:1–5)

The most famous lines in all of history are these opening words of the book of Genesis. Their poetic form with the balance, repetition, and variation suggest that this was once a creedal recitation among ancient peoples. Rich with meaning, the first phrases establish that God was eternally present before the creation, that this act marked the beginning of time. He created everything by fiat, by the sheer utterance of the Word, and his Spirit, which "brooded over the waters," was an actor in the

creation event. Christians interpret these opening words as a description of Creation as the act of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). This act of creation is echoed in the opening words of John: "In the beginning was the Word."

Writers and other artists are often fascinated by this creation story. The act of creation itself, whether out of the stuff of the writer's life or from some deep primordial rumblings, is in some ways parallel to God's action during the first week of the world. Whether the artist is a writer, painter, sculptor, or musician, the perennial dream is to create a work that transcends time. For every artist, this dream is frustrated: the manuscript is lost, the bowl is broken, and the note of music lingers on the air for less than a second. Many of the works of literature deal with this struggle to become more like God.

For scientists, who seek to discover the process of material creation and to replicate it, the puzzle is somewhat different. Medieval people thought the experiments of a Dr. Faustus to be a challenge to God. Marlowe's hero, in seeking to know everything, damns himself for eternity. In more recent times, with science's explosive progress, life's basic elements are now open to human manipulation. Both clergy and laypeople question how ethical it is to try to create human life artificially or to try to alter a fetus prior to birth. Writers have thought about these issues for at least two centuries. Genetic engineering, one of the great ethical dilemmas of the twenty-first century, reaches back to the very earliest verses in the Bible, challenging the very nature of God's creation of the fish, the birds, and the beasts, as well as man and woman.

Scripture

The first chapter of Genesis describes the sequence of creation as being rational, orderly, and good. Each of the six days of creation establishes a significant component of the world in which God finally placed mankind. The opening provides a summary of the first miracle: he created the heavens and the earth, which had no shape or light. On the first day, he created light, without which there could be no life, and by which time itself is calculated. He also gave names to the light and the darkness—*day* and *night*. (Later in Genesis, he delegated to Adam the task of naming the animals in the Garden.) On the second day, he created the firmament, which he called *Heaven*, the means by which he separated the waters, providing a second element for life. The waters below the earth provide springs and nourishment for plants and animals; the waters above the firmament bring the rains that revive the land. On the third day, he separated the waters from the land, thus providing dry land for his as yet uncreated creatures. On the land, he provided grass, herbs, fruit trees—the plant life that sustains his animate creatures. At each point, he provided the environment for life before bringing forth the creatures to inhabit it. On the fourth day, he set the sun, the moon, and the stars in the sky to provide regularity to light and darkness and the means for measuring time.

The passage opens with the repeated pattern of "And God said, Let there be ..." The change in the pattern with the beginning of animate life is interesting. Rather than creating these living things himself, he ordered the waters to "bring forth." Each section has a list of created items and includes the repeated judgment: "and God saw that it was good." It also contains a blessing and an admonition to "be fruitful and multiply." With the creation of the earth, he provided for "seed" so that the grass and the trees could multiply; but on the fifth day he commanded the lively creatures also to be fruitful.

The sixth day echoes the usual pattern, repeating the "bring forth" phrasing, this time saying "Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and

creeping thing, and the beast of the earth after its kind: and so it was." The judgment, "it was good," is repeated, but not the blessing, perhaps saving this for the climactic scene of the day, which does include the blessing:

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (Gen. 1:26–28)

This passage is so pregnant with implications that philosophers and poets over the ages have struggled with each word. The placement of man ("male and female") as the climactic segment, after the animals, and giving the human creature alone the "image of God" has led to long debate over whether humans are animals, whether men and women are equal, and what the nature of God's "image" is, whether it be male, female, or androgynous. Although the animal creations are "brought forth" from sky, water, or earth, the humans are not simply brought forth from the earth. They are God's individual and deliberately designed creation. The following chapter of Genesis speaks of God's forming them from the dust of the earth with his own hands.

On the one hand, the passage raises questions about the nature of the "dominion" that humans are granted over the rest of nature. On the other, it points to the bonds between humans and animals. The encouragement to "be fruitful" indicates that from the very moment of creation God expects humans as well as animals to reproduce.

The final day, the Lord rested. He blessed the seventh day, and "sanctified" it—thus providing the basis for the Sabbath and a precedent for worship of the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

These astonishing verses of Scripture, while portraying the act of creation itself, also portray God as the all-powerful creative force, with a delight in all the variety of life on his blessed earth. He plans for both the present, filling the earth with food, and for the future, providing for the propagation of the life he creates. He is also portrayed as a judging god, who decides whether things are "good." In the following scenes, when God speaks to these creatures and gives them directions and authority, this special relationship is reinforced. In the creation of man and woman, he proves himself a god capable of fellowship with these creatures who he made "in his own image."

Genesis 2 expands on the narrative of God's creation of humans: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." The story of Adam in the Garden of Eden, of the naming of the animals and of the creation of Eve, evolve in an anthropomorphic narrative form, ending with the Temptation and Expulsion. The tone and form of the second chapter of Genesis are dramatically different from the first. Whereas the first chapter reads like a poetic creed that could be recited by a congregation of believers, the second chapter is a more prosaic tale, which might have told around the campfire. This second telling became the narrative more frequently cited by poets and story-tellers over the ages. Sometimes it was as simple as African-American preachers, portraying God as a grandfatherly figure who walks with Adam in the cool of the day and talks with him

(as pictured by James Weldon Johnson in *God's Trombones*, 1927). Sometimes it as complex as the poetic narrative of *Paradise Lost*, by John Milton (1667).

Whether in prose or poetry, in sermons or stories, this narrative is the key to much of Western thought and art.

Together, these chapters provide the basic presuppositions of most of Hebraic and Christian thought about the nature of God, of humans, of the relationship between the sexes, of human relationships with nature and animals, and of the structure of the earth, the heavens, and the seas. The first two chapters of Genesis also provide two concepts of creation: (1) God spoke the Word and things came into being by fiat out of nothing; (2) by forming, out of the dust of the ground, and breathing the breath of life into his nostrils, God made man a "living soul." In a parallel "making," he took a rib out of Adam and made Eve, the "mother of all living."

The physical, repeated act of creating new life physically, through birth, seedtime, and harvest, furnishes the rhythm of scripture. Suddenly, this rhythm is broken by the story of the Incarnation, found in the Gospels, when Mary realized that "she was with child of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 1:18). In the various accounts of God's miraculous intervention in human history, we see the "begetting" of Jesus Christ, the "only begotten son" of God (John 3:16). John points back to the Genesis creation in his narrative of the new creation. He echoes the first chapter of Genesis with his first words, "In the beginning" before he describes the power of the Word. The "Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). As John says, Christ was born, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12). In Genesis, God spoke, and things happen. In John, the Word actually becomes flesh and dwells among men.

Finally the Bible promises a New Creation for all believers. In the Last Days, all of God's chosen will become new creatures, casting off their dusty flesh and putting on the sparkling white garments of the blessed. Revelation is full of images of this promise. "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea" (Rev. 21:1).

For the Jews, the two accounts of Creation in Genesis 1 and 2 are central to their thought and expression. The "priestly" account in chapter 1 and the "Jahwistic" account in chapters 2 and 3 provide the model for the poetry and prose in much of Hebrew scriptures. The powerful opening of Genesis, with its various forms of parallelism, furnished both the poetic structure and the thematic substance for many of the Psalms. The second account in Genesis 2 and 3, furnishes a narrative form, with characters, setting, plot, and intrigue that provide the shape of many Biblical narratives to follow: limited use of dialogue, sparse language, little descriptive detail, and bold actions. The use of foreshadowing, the heavy sense of types that are repeated throughout history, is also typical of the way that scripture is crafted. These ancient Creation stories were probably held for centuries as oral traditions, faithfully remembered by the believers in Yahweh and recited to their children from generation to generation.

Other parts of the Old Testament, notably Proverbs and Job, add to our awareness of other ancient traditions hinted at in the Creation story. Some believe that there were many more of these tales of Eden that were part of the oral tradition, which were eventually excluded from the canon of sacred scripture.

A monologue in Proverbs, for example, in which Wisdom describes how she was present from the beginning, raises interesting questions:

The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before the works of old.

I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.

When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. (Prov. 8:22–24)

Some see this passage as a reference to the *Logos*, or the Word, repeated in the Gospel of John, where the Word is present at the Creation. Since Wisdom is portrayed as feminine, feminists see this passage as a reaffirmation of the female (or at least androgynous) nature of God. More traditionally, Wisdom was interpreted as a personification that Solomon used to sum up his discoveries. Wisdom, after all, was considered his primary claim to fame.

Christian apologists have interpreted Wisdom as Christ. Matthew Henry, the seventeenth-century Puritan biblical scholar said, “Wisdom here is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” He goes on at some length to match this passage with attributes of Christ, including his allusion to “His agency in making the world. He not only had a being before the world, but he was present, not as a spectator, but as the architect, when the world was made.” Henry justifies this interpretation by quoting numerous passages from the New Testament, including Eph. 3:9; Heb 1:2; Col. 1:16. The chief source for this interpretation is clearly John’s Gospel, in which he states: “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:3–4).

The book of Job provides yet another interesting insight into the Hebrew view of Creation. Poor Job has been trying to understand why he is being tormented, finally challenging the great plan of creation itself. God responds, in a voice from a whirlwind: “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” In a lyrical segment, God describes the days of creation, “when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy.” He lists with obvious delight in his own creativity the wonders of the world, including the Behemoth and Leviathan (Job 40–41).

After an extended and beautiful account of the amazing acts of Creation, poor Job is overwhelmed. He responds, “I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know ... I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

In Revelation, John promises the coming of the New Creation, with a new heaven and a new earth after the first heaven and the first earth have passed away (Rev. 21). This vision of the future creation is splendid, with hope that there will be a new Jerusalem and a hope that in this new creation, there will be no more death and all our tears will be wiped away.

Literature

By contrast with many of the other creation stories of the ancient world, the book of Genesis is remarkable in several ways: God is distinct from his creation and his creatures. He exists prior to matter and creates the heavens and the earth out of nothing (*ex nihilo*); he creates by the power of his word rather than by making something out of pre-existent material. Yet he is also a maker, one who uses the matter he has created, shaping man of the dust, the woman of the rib. He orders the waters to bring forth moving creatures, and the earth to bring forth living creatures. This creation is not violent, random, or sexual like many primordial myths. It is logical, progressing toward the most complex creatures as the final act. It is also “good” and “blessed.”

Other ancient peoples had myths to explain the creation of the world and of the human race. The Babylonian *Enuma Elish*, often referred to as the “Babylonian Genesis,” praises Marduk, the god of Babylon. In this narrative, the creation is physical, sexual, violent, and chaotic. Apsu (the ocean) and Tiamat (primeval waters) lie together and eventually produce silt and slime, sky, earth, and heaven. In an extended and complex account of struggles, Marduk finally triumphs as the ruler of the earth.

Often in ancient myths, the primal creator is female, the creation is therefore a kind of birth, a begetting of the earth and all things in it. In the Old Babylonian myth (1750–1550 B.C.), for example, Nintu or Ninhursag, the goddess of earth, creates mankind. This is a plastic and generative creation, with both birth and shaping implied. The prayer to this wise goddess refers to her as the “mother-womb,” the one who creates mankind. This prayer indicates that the first man is formed out of clay, yet is animated with blood. For the many who believed in this enormously popular faith, an earth mother became central figure. The mystery and thrill of fecundity and birth led many peoples of the Mid-east to worship the Great Goddess in her various forms, considering her the source of fertility in humans, animals, and in the soil. In the Bible, she most often appears as Ashtar, the goddess frequently tolerated by the Hebrews, who was worshipped in the “high places” amidst groves of trees. The worship often involved temple prostitutes and sexual acts, and may provide the key to understanding the story of the prophet Hosea and his delinquent wife, Gomer. Some commentaries see her as a temple prostitute, not just a straying wife.

By contrast, some of the later civilizations thought the physical part of creation to be a curse. The Gnostics, for example, believed that the primal creation of matter must have been performed by a lesser god, or an evil one since their God was too spiritual to dabble in fleshly and material creation. Their philosophy, which originated in Hellenistic Egypt in the second century A.D., was to have considerable influence on early Christian thought. Trismegistus, whose ideas were popular throughout the Greco-Roman world, had a dualistic vision parallel to that of the Zoroastrians. He considered matter evil and believed that gnosis, or saving knowledge, was essential to educate people regarding the true origin of their souls and their need to escape evil matter to return to pure light. Unlike the Jews and Christians, the Gnostics believed that God intended mankind to be immortal, not needing to “be fruitful and multiply.”

The numerous ancient Greek and Roman myths are both lively and mutually contradictory. The Pelasgian Creation myth, for example (c. 3500 B.C.) shares the Near Eastern ideas of the creator rising out of chaos, the egg of creation being laid on the primeval waters, and the establishment of order with the controlling planetary powers. Many Greek myths are full of violence: divine forces battling one another, infanticide, castration, incest, treachery, and so forth. One generation follows another, with gods being cast into darkness by their children or adversaries. Some are allegorical, some seem to echo actual historical events in grotesque ways. By contrast, the Bible offers no biography of God, providing him with no ancestors and only one begotten son.

Hesiod's *Theogony* begins in a lyrical manner: “In the beginning, Euronome, the Goddess of All Things, rose naked from Chaos, but found nothing substantial for her feet to rest upon, and therefore divided the sea from the sky, dancing lonely upon its waves” (Sproul, 157).

The goddess is then impregnated by her son, a great serpent named Ophion, and lays the World Egg. The snake figure in this tale claims credit for the creation, leading to a sexual war with his wife-mother, who bruises his head and banishes him to the underworld.

This female creative force brings forth various elements through her union with other gods. In the Orphic myth of creation, Night, the Creatrix, lays a silver egg from which Love is hatched to set the universe in motion.

The creation of humans has less prominence in most of these other Near Eastern and Mediterranean stories than in Hebrew scripture. Most commonly, humans come from clay or dust. Egypt, Babylonia, and Greece all had such stories. In the Greek tale of Deucalion, he and his wife Pyrrha survive the great flood, finding mankind to have been obliterated. They are ordered to “throw the bones of your mother behind you.” They interpret this to mean that they are to throw the “bones,” or stones of Mother Earth behind them—from which rises up a new race of humans. This almost accidental creation of the race, without intent or purpose is quite different from the Hebrews’ story of creation.

Not all the intellectuals among the Greeks and Romans approved of these mythic creation narratives. Some preferred a more orderly, scientific explanation. The Roman author Lucretius, born in the first century before the Christian era, found the mythic explanations of the universe and its creation less than satisfying. In his study of the ancients, he discovered the ancient Greek philosopher Democritus, who had later been interpreted by the philosopher Epicurus. For these writers, the structure of the universe was materialistic, with nothing beyond atoms and space. The mechanism for creation was motion, which produced change and evolution of life.

In *De Rerum Natura* (*On the Nature of the Universe*, c. 50 B.C.), a long, didactic epic poem, Lucretius explains that everything is material—including humans and the gods. Everything is born, flourishes, and will die, with its atoms dispersing to form new shapes. He reveals himself to be a close observer of nature, eager to dispel fear of the gods and fear of death. A blessed kind of relief comes over him as he realizes that nothing lasts forever, that he can rest content in a kind of stoic peace. He argues that nothing can be created out of nothing by divine power. All living things, animals and plants, spring up and develop from atoms in an orderly fashion, according to fixed laws of nature, and there is also a fixed natural limit to their growth. Only matter is indestructible. For Lucretius, this scientific certainty provides a sense of peace.

More often, writers of Western Europe have believed in supernatural creation. In fact, one of the first bits of scripture translated from the Latin into Early English (Anglo-Saxon) was the creation story in Genesis. This was considered a fundamental text for Christians. Medieval and Renaissance art is full of portrayals of the Creation itself (as in Michelangelo’s fresco on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel) and of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. God, reaching out his hand to touch Adam, giving him the gift of life, as he cradles the uncreated Eve in his bosom, is a magnificent visual expression of Genesis.

In the Renaissance, the revival of classical literature and art led to a focus on human creativity, including God’s gift of inspiration and talent. The prophets had noted that God is the potter, and we are the clay. The image of God in man, for the artist, is clearly the creative power. Plato characterizes the artist as an inspired madman, driven into a frenzy by the gods who use him to produce works of art. Homer and Virgil invoke the muses to give them the words for their epics. Christian writers have been more inclined to follow Milton’s path and see themselves as inspired by God. Milton opens *Paradise Lost* with an invocation of the Holy Spirit:

Sing, Heavenly Muse, that, on the secret top
 Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
 That Shepherd who first taught the chosen seed
 In the beginning how the heavens and earth
 Rose out of Chaos....
 Instruct me, for Thou know'st; Thou from the first
 Wast present, and, with mighty wings outspread,
 Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast Abyss,
 And mad'st it pregnant.

(Milton, *Paradise Lost*)

The reader immediately notices Milton's blending of the scripture with pagan mythology here—the sexual creation, the heavens and the earth “rising” out of chaos. Milton's rendition in this epic poem of the creation of light is especially moving, undoubtedly enriched by his own blindness.

Hail, holy Light, offspring of Heav'n first born,
 Or of th' Eternal Coeternal beam
 May I express thee unblam'd? since God is light,
 And never but in unapproached light
 Dwelt from Eternity.

(Milton, *Paradise Lost*)

He goes on to describe those who dwell in darkness, including those damned souls who dwell with Satan in hell, ending with his delight in the celestial light that shines inward, irradiating the mind.

From the Renaissance on, writers, painters, and other artists became more introspective regarding their creative process. Considering themselves creators, much like God himself, they sought to understand the nature of creation, of the creator, and of the creative product. The eighteenth-century rationalists saw creation as a matter of shaping that which is generally known, “but ne'er so well expressed” in a suitable form (Pope, 140). Thus, the concern was with craftsmanship and form, not with the writer or painter himself or herself. Excess in emotion or in the presentation was considered bad form by writers like Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, or Dr. Samuel Johnson.

The Romantics, by contrast, saw themselves as the “unacknowledged legislators of the world,” unique people who were divinely inspired, capable of seeing into the very heart of things. Percy Bysshe Shelley's famous *Defense of Poetry* (1821) portrayed the poet as “more delicately organized than other men, and sensible to pain and pleasure, both his own and that of others, in a degree unknown to them.” He is “the author to others of the highest wisdom, pleasure, virtue, and glory, so he ought personally to be the happiest, the best, the wisest, and the most illustrious of men.” Thus, this remarkable person must proclaim to the world the insights that he alone has discovered. “A poet is a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his authors are as men entranced by the melody of this unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why.” The poetry rips off the veil of familiarity that hides the essence of the world's beauty from most folks.

The twentieth-century writer Arthur Koestler studied a large selection of creative people and examined their experiences. He determined that the act of creation involves visions, dreams, and inspiration. It appears to come from both without and