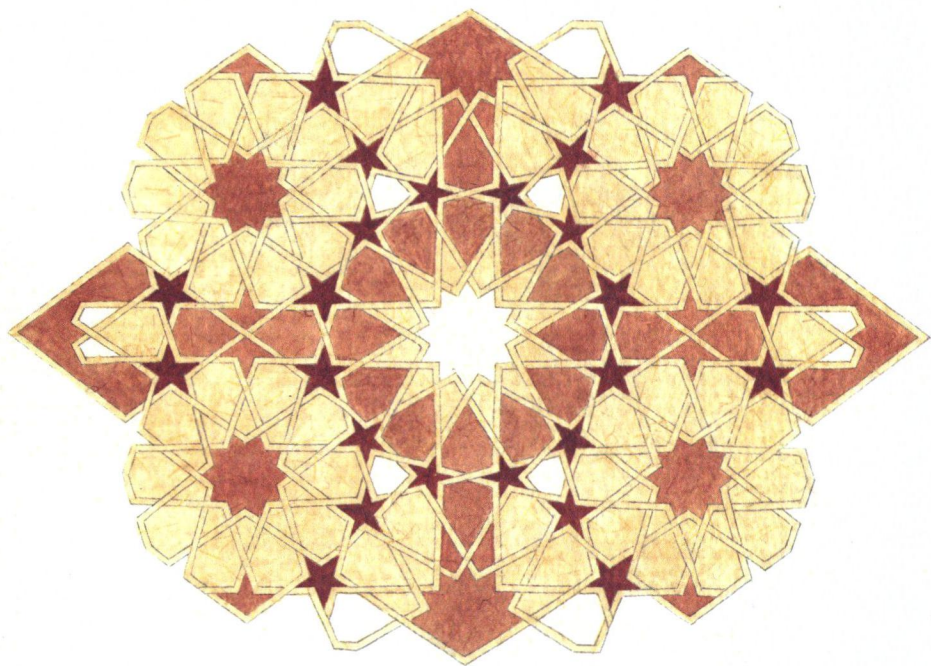


TEMENOS



Gennadi Aygi, Ahmeena Ahmed Ahuja, Richard Baez, Thomas Blackburn,
Robert Bly, John Carey, William C. Chittick, Henry Corbin,
Keith Critchlow, Stephen Cross, Gilbert Durand, Joscelyn Godwin,
Vinayak Krishna Gokak, Jonathan Griffin, Wilson Harris,
Leonard Lewisohn, Grevel Lindop, Jean MacVean, Caitlin Matthews,
John Matthews, Brian Merrikin Hill, John Michell,
Juan Negrín, Patrick Pye, Josef Pieper, Kathleen Raine,
Jeremy Reed, James Roose-Evans, William Radice,
Peter Russell, Robin Skelton

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A REVIEW DEVOTED TO THE ARTS OF THE IMAGINATION

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Cosmos as Order and Adornment


A Commentary on the cover design for Temenos 10

KEITH CRITCHLOW

Geometry, number and harmony are part of the objective languages shared by the sacred art forms of Christianity, Buddhism, Shintoism, Islam, Hinduism, and more sparingly Judaism.

This cover design is an exercise in the Islamic pattern tradition and as such it is different than the 'other' traditions of sacred art. Yet we have incorporated within it, the other sacred traditions through the objective language of number. Echos, we might call them, of the shared objective aspects of the Unity of Being and the mysterious Oneness within the magnificent variety and wonder of diversity.

- (a) The main character of this pattern is made up of a central 'heart' flower of twelve petals flanked by four radiant tenfold flowers.
- (b) As with all Islamic patterns they are parts of repeating geometrical orders that can extend indefinitely indicating thereby a sense of the infinite within the finite. Hence geometry acts as a bridge between the outward and sensible and the inner or intelligible.
- (c) The outer limits of the pattern are bounded by a large diamond body within which the two diagonals form a right angled cross meeting at the twelvefold heart of the design. Alluding to both Buddhism and Christianity respectively.
- (d) As the 'wheels of time' we can see the rhythms of the cosmic order represented in the intervals or symmetry of the 'flower' patterns. Twelve in the centre represents the monthly intervals created by the moon against a single annual cycle of the sun which in turn has created our twelve zodiacal positions.
- (e) The four tenfold 'flowers' flanking the central twelve can be taken in a special sense of representing the forty days and intervals of forty that recur throughout the Judaic and Christian Bibles. Ten are the commandments shared by their two revelations. Four and ten are also

the fundamental aspects of the Pythagorean sacred diagram of ten dots in four levels which was called by them the Tetraktys. 


(f) The five pointed stars that lie between these wheels are twenty four in number which represent the hourly intervals in one full day's cycle. This image is sometimes taken as an image of 'natural' humanity.

(g) The fan form at the base of the design is made up of seven petals (one of which is darker as it helps form the cross). This sevenness reflects the rhythm or quarter of a moon cycle that we call a week. Each of the seven petals can be taken to represent a planetary archetype. The same sevenfold fan reflects symmetrically at the top.

(h) The central twelvefold 'flower' can also be taken as the 'heart wheel' or *chakra* which is the central meditation of the unitary principle of Advaita in the Vedic tradition. Buddhism shares the vision of the subtle body with the heart centre being represented by the twelve 'petals'.

(i) In the Christian tradition the pattern of twelve around the centre has been taken to represent the 'round Dance' of Jesus. The twelve disciples surrounding Christ as the central controlling figure – which in the pattern is in itself a radiant pattern of twelve although one.

(j) Each pair of the tenfold flanking 'flowers' with their central 'eleventh' aspect together make twenty two – the number of the root intervals of the sacred alphabets of Judaism, Christianity and Islam inherited from the Phoenicians.

(k) As the five pointed stars are to the pentatonic scale in music, so the eight arrows  are to the diatonic scale and the central twelve 'flower' is to the chromatic scale.

(l) Finally the central flower or twelvefoldness with its 'heart of light' can be taken to represent the companions of the prophet (Mohammed) on the one hand and the twelveness of Shia' terminology on the other, the central light representing the Prophet of Islam. The pattern is in the discipline of visual Islamic Art yet it has been devised to reflect the universality and Unity of Divine Being.

May it not offend and may it be an instrument of Peace.

On the Language of the Mirandum

JOSEF PIEPER

It seems to be rather easy to translate 'Scholarly Letters' adequately into German. Every year the German Academy for Language and Poetry awards a prize for 'wissenschaftliche prosa,' and what this phrase means is precisely identical with the meaning of 'Scholarly Letters.' Nevertheless, there is, in this characteristically different wording, a hidden problem. One becomes aware of it once one tries to retranslate the German phrase back into English. Then it might become almost impossible to recognize the 'Scholarly Letters' at all: 'scientific prose' is obviously quite a different thing! It is, however, exactly this difference which I have in mind to scrutinize a bit, in order to make clear what I feel is the distinguishing mark, the *differentia specifica* of a philosophical language, in contra-distinction to the language of science. True, both are languages of course. But I would venture to name the language of science 'terminology' – consisting of terms – whereas the philosopher is speaking a real language, consisting not of terms but of words. And allow me, please, to make a few remarks on the difference between terminology and language.

For decades, logical positivism has been demanding that philosophers use an exact artificial terminology, like the physicists, instead of the supposedly inexact, naturally grown language. It is indeed an advantage of terminology to be more precise than language. But there exists a preciseness that philosophy is unable to bring about, that philosophy cannot even wish to achieve. 'Precise' literally means 'cut off' and 'cut out' – out of the whole of a special event or of a piece of reality. But it is this very whole in which philosophy is explicitly interested. When physicians speak to each other of 'exitus,' they mean the precise physiological fact that a patient's life is ending. 'Exitus' is a term which leaves out everything that is happening in addition to the

Josef Pieper received the Award for Scholarly Letters on 5 November 1987. The article above is the text of his address at the 1987 Ingersoll Prizes Awards Banquet, and is reprinted from 'Chronicles' A Magazine of American Culture, April 1988.

physiological event whenever a man dies. The 'word' of the living natural historical language which corresponds to the term 'exitus' is 'death.' And this word means and names the whole, including the incomprehensible, of what happens in the dying of a human being. Of course, the language of philosophy also has to be clear, and the world 'death' is absolutely clear but is not at all precise. Moreover, it is far richer; it grasps much more reality than even the most precise term can ever do.

T. S. Eliot ironically compares a special well-known kind of modern art with a special kind of philosophy which is eager to imitate the natural sciences; he says the one seems to provide a method of producing works of art without imagination, and the other seems to provide a method of philosophizing without insight and wisdom. The sharpest dictum, however, comes from an unexpected quarter. It is Alfred North Whitehead, co-author of the *Principia Mathematica* in his early years, but later a real philosopher in the spirit of the great Western tradition – it is he, who concluded his public farewell lecture on Immortality (it was, by the way, the Ingersoll Lecture at Harvard University) – he ended it with the provocative sentence: 'Exactness is a fake.'

The difficulty of understanding a book can have remarkably different reasons. I have been told that perhaps only twenty people in the world are capable of understanding the writings of Albert Einstein on the theory of relativity. Here the difficulty obviously lies in the extreme complication of the subject matter. And so there may be many scientific books which only experts are able to understand. One could possibly also say that the difficulty has to do with the lack of knowledge of the specific terminology. But this terminology, normally based on a conventional agreement among the scientists, can and has to be acquired by learning. And therefore the real obstacle to understanding is not the terminological language itself. Also in philosophy, though only in its 'outer court,' a special kind of scientific terminology can have its legitimate place. And this terminology too can be acquired by learning; one can and perhaps has to be an expert – again so the language would no longer be an obstacle to understanding. But now we are approaching the border line of a region wherein language itself is the main, if not the only, obstacle to understanding. In his own house, beyond the 'outer court' (of, let us say, formal logic

or linguistic analysis) the philosopher is dealing with and speaking of matters which by their very nature do not concern experts, but the human being as such, which means everybody. Of course, I do not maintain that everybody would or should be able to grasp, quickly and easily, what philosophers say. On the contrary, there may exist enormous difficulties of understanding, which possibly cannot be overcome by an effort of conceptual thinking but rather only by silent meditation. It remains true, however, that in a genuine philosophical utterance one thing is important (and perhaps very demanding): namely, to make perceivable the clarifying and illuminating power of the naturally developed language in such a way that the object of man's search for wisdom, concerning not only experts but everybody, becomes and remains clear. Therefore, the language of philosophy, of the loving search for wisdom, has to be a plain language which must not be an obstacle but the vehicle to understanding. It is here, however, in the very centre of the philosophical field, where we are facing the phenomenon of a linguistic idiom that is neither terminology nor language but a frightening kind of jargon, an arbitrarily constructed mode of speaking that makes understanding and communication impossible. Strangely enough, the obstacle is nothing but the language itself!

None of my great heroes in philosophy speaks jargon, not even a terminology. All of them – Lao-tse, Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas – express whatever they have to say in a plain language. This is, by the way, why they are much more readable than their commentators.

Two of those great philosophers – this shall be my concluding remark – Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, both extremely sober and realistic minds, surprisingly speak of an essential affinity and agreement between philosophy and poetry. And this again has to do with plainness of language. But first of all I have to say what Aristotle and Thomas mean. They mean what they say: Philosophy and poetry are both dealing with what they call the *mirandum*. The *mirandum* means that which gives rise, or which ought to give rise, to astonishment and wonder; it means the non-self-evidency of what seems to be obvious. This idea is based on the conviction that being itself is a mystery – inexhaustible by any language or terminology. And this is one of the ideas that have consequences for the language of philosophy as well.

Not that philosophy should use a poetical way of expression; nor that philosophy would be a kind of conceptual poetry. No, the affinity means that the language of philosophy, in spite of its plainness, must not cover up the unfathomability of being, but on the contrary ought to keep it within the range of vision – as poetry also does.

The false mysticism of an arbitrarily constructed jargon as well as the exactness of a pseudo-philosophical scientific terminology – both are making us forget that the road leading from true philosophy to genuine poetry has already been paved: it is only the water of plain language, by its undemanding simplicity permitting the light to penetrate it to the bottom, that is capable of being changed into the wine of poetry.



Emblematic Cities

A response to the images of Henri Steirlin*

HENRY CORBIN

The *Parmenides* has the reputation of being one of Plato's most difficult dialogues; only Proclus – the most profound metaphysician of the School – knew (in his great Commentary) – how to give life to the setting and the dramatic presentation. This he did by uncovering their symbolic intentions, implicit in the places of origin of the characters, the order of their appearance, and the place of their encounter: Athens.

On the one hand there are philosophers of the School of Ionia; these come from Clazomene. Now the philosophers of the Ionic school have studied every aspect of Nature, but they have scarcely given a thought to spiritual matters, to 'intelligible and intellectual substances'. And there are, on the other hand, philosophers of the Italian School, represented above all by Parmenides and Zeno. These are exclusively concerned with things of the intelligible order. Between the two is the Attic school, which holds a middle position, because, under the stimulus of Socrates and Plato, a synthesis has been made between the findings of the two other Schools. Ionia is thus the symbol of the school of Nature, Italy of the intellectual; the middle ground is symbolized by Athens, by whose mediation awakened souls ascend from the world of Nature to that of nous, intellect. Thus it is in Athens – and therein lies the fundamental symbol – that the philosophers of Ionia, bringing their knowledge of the physical order, meet with the Italian philosophers, bringing their understanding of the intelligible and intellectual, for just as physical species participate in intelligibles through the intermediary of the psyche, so it is through the intermediary of the Attic philosophers that the drama of the Platonic dialogue makes the philosophy of the Italian school known to the Ionians, and enables them to participate in contemplative philosophy and in mystical vision.

* ISPAHAN. *Image du Paradis* Bibliothèque des arts, Editions SIGMA, Geneva 1976.

These Clazomenians are types of those souls who have descended into this world who really are in need of the aid of the *daimons*, who are, in the hierarchy of being, contiguous to them. This is why they abandon their house, the body: they emigrate to Athens, because they have the good fortune to be the object of the solicitude of Athene. So they set out on the way from ignorance to knowledge, from *agnosis* to *gnosis*, that is, Athens, where the pilgrim philosophers have not come in order to hold formal discussions, but to participate in the festival of the Panatheneia. They come for the Goddess, whose sacred *peplum* is carried in the *theoria*, or procession of the Panatheneia in celebration of victory over the Titans who unloose chaos. The aim of the *Parmenides* is precisely to reunite everything to the One, and to demonstrate how all things proceed from the One. All the symbolism of the dramatic arrangement of the dialogue is thus illuminated by Proclus: the cast of characters effect in turn their encounter, proceeding from plurality to duality, then to the unique One. Each has his own rôle, each typifies a degree of aptitude or a moment in the reascent of souls towards the divine worlds. For such persons, to come to Athens is to come to the festival of the Panatheneia; for to come to this festival is, for them, to know that it is within the soul that the battle of the giants takes place, in which the goddess is victorious. It is the Panathenians who bring the philosophers together in a place which no longer belongs to the topography of this world: Athens is an emblematic city.

Let us follow now another route, no longer the way leading the philosophers to the Panatheneia but the way taken for hundreds of years by the pilgrims of St. James of Compostella. Here we find the great alchemist, Nicholas Flamel, making that pilgrimage in the fourteenth century, just as the philosophers of Clazomene travelled to Athens. Taking the pilgrim's cloak and staff, he set out, and it was only on his return, after he had received the mystic benediction of the Apostle James, that he was able to decipher Abraham the Jew's book of hieroglyphic figures. This is because in reality the pilgrimage to Compostella is the symbolic description of the preparation of the Stone. The alchemist is a pilgrim, all his research is a pilgrimage, a symbolic journey, accomplished in the oratory-laboratory which he may not abandon for an instant. Day and night he must watch over the flask, tend the fire. According to the authentic tradition deriving from

Jābir ibn Hayyān the alchemical work consists in making apparent what is hidden by concealing the apparent, a bringing to light which occurs in the first place within the alchemist himself. Such is the preparation demanded for the transmutation of common mercury into philosophical mercury. And it is at Compostella that the transformation takes place, but a city of Compostella which is no longer situated in the land of Spain, but in that hidden land which is the innermost being of the alchemist-philosopher. Compostella is an emblematic city.

No doubt that same road of St. James communicates with other emblematic cities, for it is in following that road that we discover the spirit, the hidden significance of which a body, or a building, is only one typification. And this is why, in the poems of William Blake, amid the jumble of unknown worlds, the turmoil of skies and heavenly beings with strange names, the reader suddenly comes upon places whose names are familiar, unexpectedly inserted into those mystic worlds. For, beneath the appearance of day-to-day London, William Blake discerns a London more real than the London visible to bodily eyes, and for which it is accountable. Hence all the removals from one district to another, just as from one geographical country to another, are transformed into so many conquests of the *mundus imaginalis*. This is because different visionary experiences correspond to as many different districts, each district having in some sense its especial visionary vocation. Taken together these regions constitute an emblematic city, and the emblematic cities intercommunicate with one another. Thus, in the long poem *Jerusalem: the Emanation of the Giant Albion*, by the super-imposition of two cities, London and Jerusalem are 'imaginalized' into the City of Golgonooza. By virtue of the visionary vocation of each place, each word of the Bible signifies a living message in the present. Thus the map of Jerusalem enables us to decipher the map of London. But the cartography is that of the *mundus imaginalis*. London and Jerusalem are now emblematic cities.

For Proclus, the Athens of Plato's *Parmenides* was emblematic of the interworld, the meeting-place between philosophers of nature and philosophers of Ideas. For Nicholas Flamel the emblematic city was the city of Compostella hidden within the pilgrim himself. For William Blake the emblematic city, by placing in correspondence two cities of this world, translates both to the realm of the visionary

interworld. In every case it is not sensible perception which determines this, but an 'image' which precedes and imposes order on all empirical perceptions. The dominant 'Image' in the examples here given emerges as the *Imago Templi*.

As author of this preface I shall avoid, in these pages, the attraction presented by variations on a favourite theme. I have attempted to evoke, by allusion, considerations suggested at the time when Henri Steirlin kindly came to show me his 'images' of Isfahan, collected in the present book. The unique – incomparable – quality of these must have its secret. If a painter had produced them he would have been congratulated on his 'visionary' gifts. But here they are produced by the medium of one of those 'mechanisms' included under the general malediction incurred by technology. But for the visions of Isfahan which we owe to Henri Steirlin, the camera is merely what it is: all depends on the visionary gift of the user. Henri Steirlin's gift is already clear in his earlier books. Here again certain chapters of his text illuminate in depth the secret of the *Imago Templi*. Finally, from certain references to myself, I foresaw that we were to be partners in a single effort to elucidate the secret message of the spiritual world of Iran. From this point how could I refuse to accept his kind invitation to participate, in a few introductory pages to this book devoted to the enchantments, indeed the 'magic' of Isfahan, that same magic which makes it an emblematic city?

I have joined the words – as they are joined in Jacob Boehme – *imago-magia*. And I believe that this corresponds perfectly to the intention of Henri Steirlin. I would say that for him architectural monuments must be transposed to images in order that we may perceive all their perfections, virtues, and virtualities. Therein lies what I see as our complicity, for, as one who seeks in metaphysics for the *Imago* and the active imagination, I had already divined this in the subtitle of the book, 'Image of Paradise'. The author is at pains to inform us that for him it is a question of 'deciphering the message left us by the builders of Isfahan who, between the eleventh and the eighteenth centuries, made that unique city one of the architectural wonders of the world'. A message to be deciphered implies a secret to rediscover. The mission Henri Steirlin has thus set himself can only succeed on condition that we accompany him to this rendezvous; a rendezvous at which the mere historical tourist is fated never to arrive.

It is now thirty years since, at a sharp bend of the road, a traveller arriving from the south by the Shiraz road, suddenly beheld the 'emerald vision' of the gardens of Isfahan, its 'paradises', above which rose only the domes – themselves greenish in colour – of its mosques and *madrasah*. To be sure, our Iranian friends had been vigilant in the preservation of whatever it was possible to preserve, but it is virtually impossible that urbanization should leave everything intact. Yet one can still find in modern Isfahan a structure of space which is the form imposed by a certain way of life. This Henri Steirlin analyses methodically, drawing attention to the differences from the aspect of a modern Western city, where the houses are as it were in relief, whereas here there is by contrast rather a continuous plane surface from which open islands forming spaces of courts and squares. One passes from one enclosed space to another without break in continuity, for these enclosed spaces simply form a rhythm on the continuous surface. To pass through them is an adventure – already perhaps a symbolic journey.

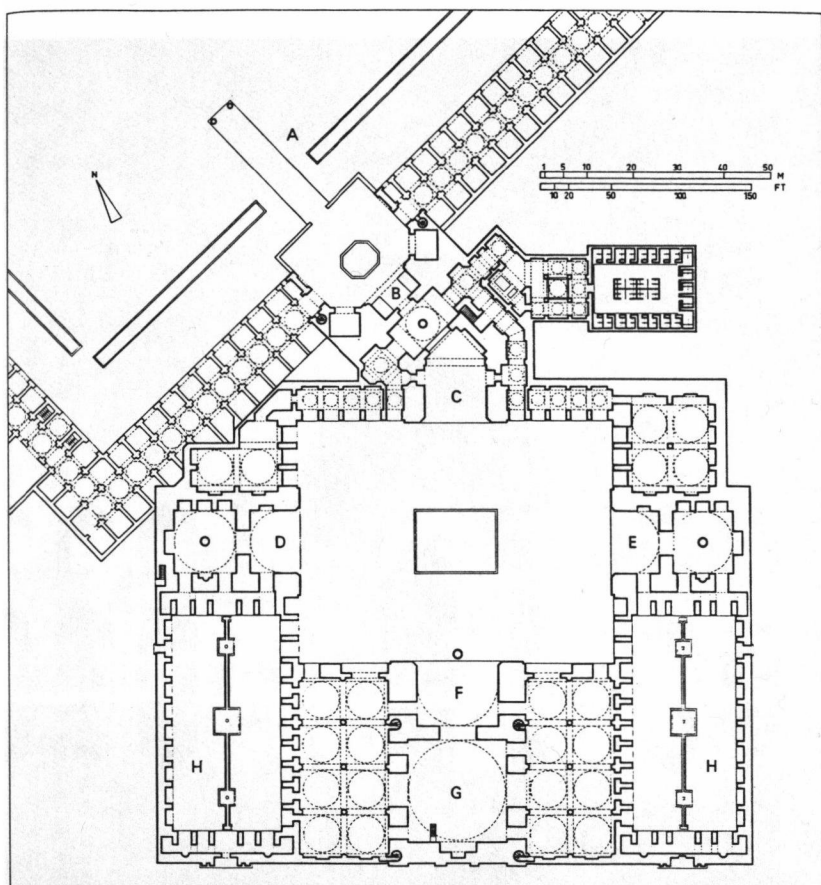
Among these spaces, the space *par excellence* is that of the Persian mosque. In Isfahan the mosque *par excellence*, the Royal Mosque (*Masjad-e Shâh*) and the so-called Friday Mosque (*Jom'eh*). The author reminds us here of the technicalities of the structure: a square or rectangular court forming four internal façades; in the centre of each of these façades rises a great vaulted niche, named *iwân*, each opening into a vast hall. The vast enclosed space of the Persian mosque is thus ordered according to a cruciform plan with a rigorous double axiality, and it is within this enclosed space that the surface of polychrome ceramics is displayed. Nevertheless this space open to the sky is neither an atrium nor a narthex – 'we are at the heart of the edifice. It is a space designed to put the believer in communication with divinity.'

It seems to me that it is precisely by this structure of its space that the Persian mosque arises from the original idea of the *templum*, the *temenos*. Originally there was the idea of a space imaginatively circumscribed in the sky, there to observe and interpret the flight of birds. The temple is a terrestrial projection of this heavenly *templum*, through which indeed the terrestrial temple is the place of communication between heaven and earth. This communication is the very concept of the temple, which 'temenology' may discover wherever this *Imago*

Templi is established, that is to say no less when we are considering the Temple of Solomon than the future Temple of Ezekiel, or the Temple of the Graal on Mont Salvat.

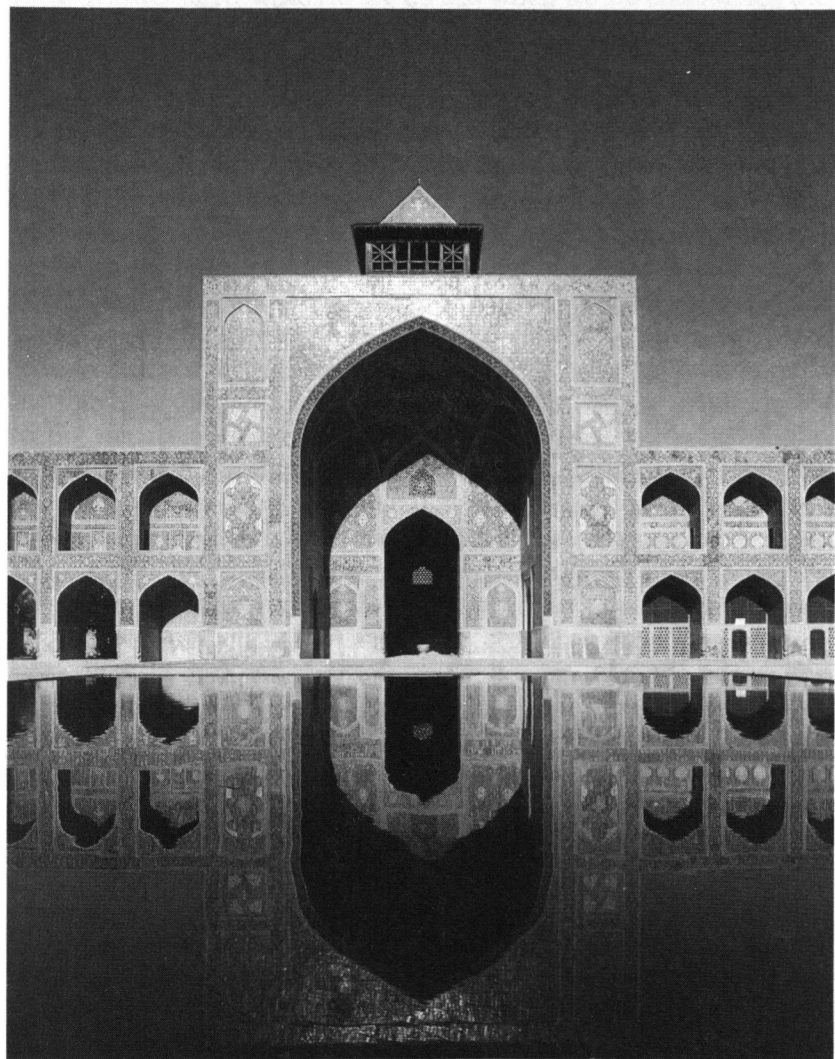
This essential function of the Temple is ensured in a specific manner in the concept of space which determines the structure of the Iranian mosque. At the geometrical centre of the enclosure we find a basin whose fresh water is perpetually renewed. This is a water-mirror reflecting at the same time the dome of heaven, which is the real dome of the *templum*, and the many-coloured ceramic tiles which cover the surfaces. It is by means of this mirror that the *templum* brings about the meeting of heaven and earth. The mirror of water here polarizes the symbol of the centre. Now this phenomenon of the mirror at the centre of the structure of the *Templum* is also central to the metaphysics professed by a whole lineage of Iranian philosophers, among whom the most famous lived, at one time or another, in Isafahan. Thus there must certainly have been a link between the different forms of the same Iranian conception of the world, perhaps a link so essential that it will explain how the painters and miniaturists of Islamic Iran in no way felt that their art was subject to the traditional anti-iconic interdict. They had produced neither sculptures in space nor easel-paintings. All their images are appearances in a mirror, the mirroring surface of a wall, or the page of a book. How is it possible to exercise iconoclasm against a semblance?

Everywhere there is an insistence on the essential phenomenon of the mirror. The four cardinal points (north, south, east and west) are given by the four *îwâns*. These remain horizontal: it is the mirror which gives the vertical dimension, from the nadir to the zenith. Then what really happens, since the centre of the basin is inaccessible, if we place ourselves on the axis of one of the four *îwâns*? We look at the same time at its reversed image in the water. But this inverse image is the result of the virtual image produced in the first place by its reflection on a mirroring surface. Let us now transpose this idea of a virtual image to the plane of a mystical reflection. To transpose the image of virtuality into actuality is to accomplish the very operation which, for metaphysicians of the school of Sohrawardî, signifies penetration into the *mundus imaginalis* (*‘âlam al-mithâl*), the ‘eighth clime’ or world intermediate between that of pure ideas and the world of sense-perception.



Great mosque of the Shah, Isfahan (Iran), built 1612–30 by Shah Abbas the Great.

Because of the necessity for the mihrab to point east the mosque forms an angle of 45° with the Maidan-i Shah (A), on to which the entrance portal (B) gives. C) north iwan, D) west iwan, E) east iwan, F) main iwan, G) domed sanctuary, H) lateral madrasahs.



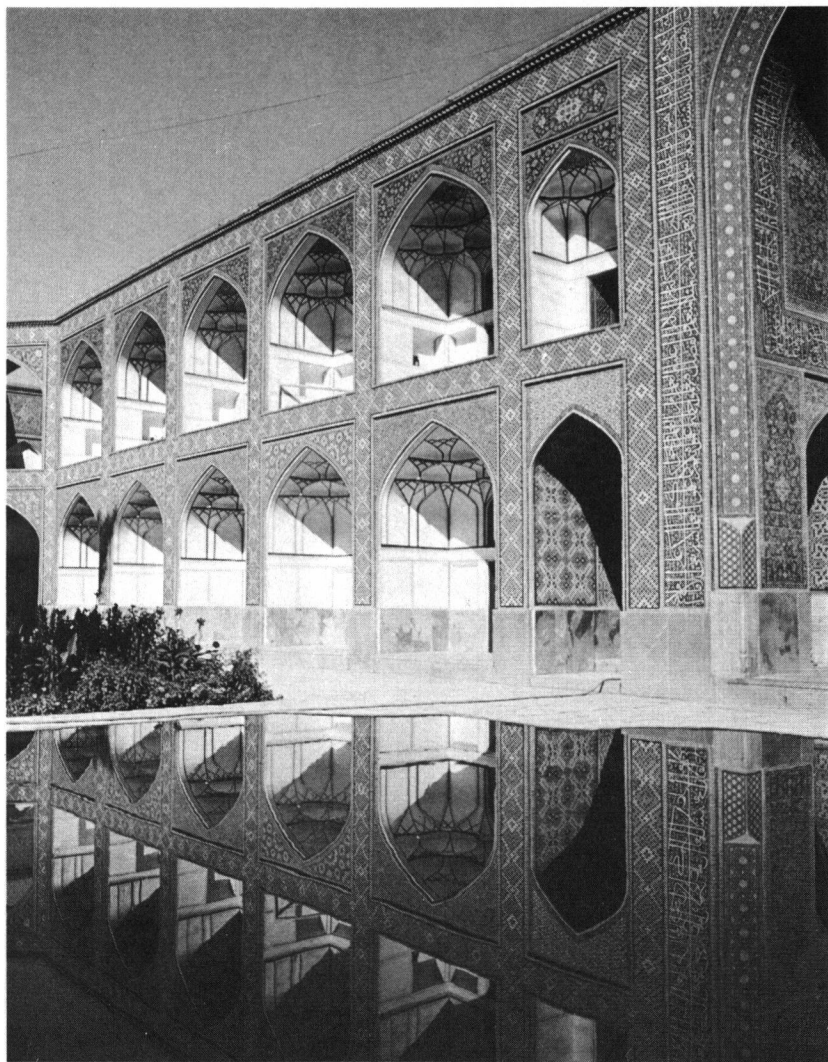
Photograph: Henri Steirlin

The west iwan of the Great Mosque of the Shah, Isfahan



Photograph: Henri Steirlin

The west iwan of the Friday Mosque, Isfahan



Photograph: Henri Steirlin

The arcades opening in the court of the madrasah
of Shah Sultan Husain, Isfahan

The phenomenon of the mirror enables us to understand the internal dimension of an object or a building situated in the space of this world, because it leads us to grasp its spiritual dimension, the metaphysical image which precedes and shapes all empirical perception. It enables us, at the same time, to understand the mode in which the whole spiritual entity is present within the world of volumes perceived by the senses. Cosmology is the succession of apparitional forms, hierophanies, in as many places of apparition (*mazâhir*) as constitute what we call 'matter'. To see things in the mirror is, as an Iranian Sheikh expresses it, 'to see things in Hûrqalyâ', highest of the mystic cities of the *mundus imaginalis*, or 'eighth clime'. The mirror simply shows us the way to enter Hûrqalyâ. Fascinating, in this context, is the photograph of the west *îwân* of the Royal Mosque lit by the rising sun and reflected in the water of the central basin. I had never before known what that power was (as it is presented to us by Henri Steirlin) of opening inexhaustible dwelling-places to contemplation. And there are others throughout the book. Of these the attentive reader may make the stages of his inner pilgrimage, meditating on them and penetrating them as we do before a mandala.

This exemplification of the *Imago Templi* presented by the Iranian mosques is still further defined by the structural allusions to the number twelve, the key-number of the arithmosophy of duodecimal Shi'ism. The minute analysis of the geometric and mathematical structure of the enclosed space of the mosque, allows the author to draw attention to many indications of this. These indications are confirmed (should confirmation be needed) in the wide band of script surrounding the south *îwân* of the Friday Mosque, dating from Shâh Tahmasp and carrying invocations to each of the 'Fourteen Immaculate Ones' (the twelve Imâms, the Prophet, and his daughter Fâtima). The Shi'ite intention is clear. Qâzi Sa'id Qommî, one of the great philosophers of the School of Isfâhan, equated the twelve edges of the structure of the cubic temple of the Ka'aba to the pleroma of the Twelve Imâms' secret message of the Temple, which renders it an emblematic Temple.

To decipher this message completely would involve deciphering the motifs which cover the immense surfaces of glazed tiles. Pure ornament, or symbolism? We are grateful to the author for his efforts to discover the origin (in Kashan, whence the term *kâshî*) and the

technique of this ceramic art, still a living tradition in Iran to this day. As a thoughtful pilgrim I stood for a long time, one day, before those semblances of high windows, or doors, entirely covered with glazed tiles. False windows? False doors? I mentally recalled a cathedral window filtering the external light, only admitting the subtle quintessence, coloured with its own colour, to penetrate the interior space of the Temple. Must we then qualify as false openings the high windows whose embrasure is entirely made up of a surface of glazed tiles? But in what sense can we say they open 'onto nothing'? In reality the substitution of a tiled surface for a window does not for that reason make them pseudo-openings. If the surface is contemplated as if in a mirror, it opens to the observer the whole space of its interior being, which it illuminates in order that the observer may there complete his symbolic pilgrimage, like the pilgrim-chemist of Compostella. That space is the 'eighth clime', that which Sohrevardî designated – again in Persia – *Nâ-kojâ-âbâd*, 'the country of no-where', that is to say, nowhere in this world. Thus it is on this 'no-where in this world' that the high windows with their glazed surfaces open, if we regard them as a mirror.

Neither did the *vâr*, or paradisaal enclosure of Yima (Jamshid), sovereign original source, open on the exterior. It too conceals its own light. The Iranian surface of glazed tiles, like the Byzantine mosaic surface, secretes its own light. Some years ago the School of Ravenna exhibited in Tehran a number of reproductions of mosaics, whose tradition is still preserved there. The very keen interest which our Iranian friends showed in these Ravenna mosaics suggested to the investigator that there must be something in common between the two traditions. Indeed is not the proper function of emblematic spaces precisely to communicate in secret ways which owe nothing to the jurisdiction of History? Some years ago I walked through the interior of the Royal Mosque in the company of an eminent Iranian scholar. Our conversation turned to the religious Orders known by the term *fotovvat*. My companion said to me, 'You may be sure that such a building would not have been possible but for these knightly builders'. 'You delight me', I replied, 'we say the same thing about our cathedrals'.

As I accompanied Henri Steirlin through his text and his visionary 'imagery', I felt that we were companioned by all those philosophers

and mystics whom I have already proposed to group under the name of the School of Isfahan. A strange fact: would anyone venture to speak of Greek civilization in ignorance of all its philosophers and Schools of thought? The *madrasah* where these philosophers taught are still there – the *Sadr Madrasah* where Mîr Dâmâd taught, the master of a whole generation; the *Shaykh ‘Abdollâh madrasah*, where Mohsen Fayz Kâshânî taught, the most celebrated pupil of the master whose personality dominated the school as a whole – Mollâ Sadrâ Shîrâzî (d.1640). So it remained until the vicissitudes of time led at the beginning of the 19th century to the founding of the School of Tehran, replacing that of Isfahan. Other Schools also sprang up at Khorazan and at Kerman.

As for Sadrâ Shîrâzî, he, and others contemporary with him and after him, continued the line of Sohrevardî (d.1191) who, in the twelfth century, deliberately set about the revival, in Islamic Iran, of the philosophy of Light professed by the Sages of ancient Persia. He it was who first established the ontological basis, in Iranian Islamic philosophy, of that interworld which is mid-way between the world of pure Intelligence and the world perceived by the senses. This is the *mundus imaginalis*, already mentioned above, so essential in its function: the ‘eighth clime’ (in addition to the seven of classical geography) the *imaginal* world, which it is essential not to confuse with the *imaginary*. And it is to the *Ishrâqiyyân-e Irân*, the Persian Platonists (as described in my works) that the Irano-Islamic philosophy owes the birth and the profound investigation of a metaphysic of the Image and of the active Imagination, without which, according to Sohrevardî, all the visionary experiences of the prophets and mystics would have no basis in the place where they ‘take place’, and thereby lose the reality proper to them. Of that interworld Western rationalism has deprived our philosophy for many generations; so that now there is no differentiation between fantasy and vision!

Our *ishrâqiyyân* philosophers of the interworld are present throughout this book, since the project conceived and executed by Henri Steirlin goes alongside that metaphysic of the imaginative vision professed by our Persian Platonists. The philosophy of *Ishrâq* is the ‘Oriental Philosophy’ (the word *Ishrâq* signifies the light of a star as it rises). The *Ishrâqiyyân* are the ‘oriental’ philosophers not in the geographical but in the metaphysical sense of the word. The philosophy of *Ishrâq* itself sets

out to be an interworld, an intermediary (*barzakh*) whose task is not to separate but to conjoin and to cumulate the research of the philosophers and the experience of the mystics. In the same way the *mundus imaginalis*, as the *leitmotif* of its metaphysics, is the interworld necessary for communication between the intelligible and the sensible.

So, therefore, perhaps, through the connivance of the 'imager' and the philosopher, we are in a position to envisage Isfahan as itself an 'emblematic city' par excellence. To come to Isfahan will be to come to the Royal Mosque as a place of encounter between the *imaginal* universe of Hûrqalyâ, highest of the 'emerald cities', and the architectural marvel perceived by the senses. It is also to come to the *ishrâqiyan* philosophers whose metaphysics of the Imagination makes that encounter possible because it opens to us that interworld which intermediates between pure intelligibles and the senses. Henceforth to come to Isfahan will be for us what their visit to the emblematic city of Athens, meeting-place of the philosophies of the schools of Ionia and Italy, was for the pilgrim philosophers of the Parmenides. Henceforth we will also know that to travel to Isfahan is a symbolic journey, like that of Nicholas Flamel the alchemist to an emblematic city of Compostella, which was within himself. And this because we will have learned to read the topography of Jerusalem.

It is written 'Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee!, (Gen.12.1.) The pilgrim of emblematic cities will hear this call as if addressed to himself. Perhaps he will hear as a response Blake's verse (in the poem *Milton*)

And if he move his dwelling-place, his heavens also move
Where'er he goes . . . (M.29.12-13.)

Translated by Kathleen Raine

Fernando Pessoa: a brief study of his dominant quest

JONATHAN GRIFFIN

I stop at the edge of me and I lean over . . .
Abyss . . . And in that abyss the Universe,
With its time and its space it is a star, and
In it are other universes, other
Forms of Being with other times, spaces
And other lives distinctive from this life . . .

The spirit's another star . . . Thinkable God
Is a sun . . . And there are more Gods, more spirits
Of other essences of Reality . . .

I throw myself into the abyss, and stay
In me . . . And never fall. And shut my eyes
And dream – and I awake to, tune to Nature . . .
So I return to myself and to Life . . .

.....

God Himself does not comprehend Himself.
His origin is more divine than He is.
And He has not the origin which words
Think to make us think . . .
The abstract Being [in its] abstract idea
Has gone out, and I've strayed in the eternal night:
I and the Mystery – face to face . . .

(6th November, 1912)

Reproduced from *Comparative Criticism* No. 4, 'Fragments for a Faust' by Jonathan Griffin, Introduction and translations. By permission of Cambridge University Press.

This startling and (surely) complete poem is shoved in among Pessoa's fragments for a Faust play, and he added a date (as if he had indeed gone to the edge of himself and leaned over). What mattered most in Pessoa's thinking was religion. Which religion was the truth, or nearest

to the truth? Christianity did appeal to him, but its Church alienated him. This poem is monotheistic, but explorative, occultist. He was also beckoned by paganism. The date on the poem is important – 1912. In a year and a half he was to cross the date he came to consider (as we all do) the key date of his life: March 8th, 1914. It was then that the imaginary Alberto Caeiro, the first and chief of his ‘heteronyms’ (the three imaginary poets whose complete works he wrote) came to life in him. (On that day Pessoa wrote thirty poems by Caeiro, plus six of his own.) Caeiro was a peasant, a splendid shepherd who lived in the wide pastures south of the Tagus. Caeiro’s own poems express the religion in which Pessoa longed to believe, a noble paganism.

Yet Pessoa’s quest still clung to Christianity, as, published entire in 1916, the major poem *Passos da Cruz* shows, by its title and by its form (14 sonnets).

Stations of the Cross

I

I lose count of the hours strayed across . . .
Autumn ekes out despairs in the small hills
And lays a vague purple over the rills . . .
A host of awe the soul, all of it roads . . .

The landscape happened to me, sepulchre-
Sorceresses in orgy . . . Black hair rims
The heavens of your face, and, through the dim
Arcades, sunset’s aftermath-tones sigh secrets . . .

In the cloister sequestering Lucidness,
A spasm extinguished in hatred of lust
Sheds days of islands seen from the afterdeck,

On my lost weariness there’s venturing of frosts,
And autumn’s hue is an obsequy of wreck-
cries down the highway of my dissonance.

II

There is a poet in me, whom God said me . . .
Spring has left behind in the steep gullies
The garlands, which she carried from the valleys,
Of her ephemeral spectral gaiety . . .

Boys and girls over the dew-wet mead
 Set their clogs thumping the more cheerfully . . .
 Poor anxious people cooped in banks hear hourly
 Chimes like someone who might smile ahead . . .

Day's bloom melting the capitals of Light . . .
 Violins of silence, counterpointed . . .
 Boredom whence only boredom will seduce one . . .

My soul kisses the picture I have painted . . .
 I sit at lost centuries' feet, and muse on
 Their profile of inertia and flight . . .

III

Their jewellery off ancient finery, daggers . . .
 I opalesced to cherishing in rare
 Hands, in memory-of-altars' fever-auras,
 The deck, deserted, and crowded with baggage . . .

The intimate silence of the opals
 Leads orients to reach for jewels, treasured,
 And my own craving moves along the clear-roads
 Of a grand dream of indolence and deep halls . . .

The imperial cortège passes, and the people
 All the way – merely from the lance-heads' space –
 Know their tyrant is passing; then their cheering

They let fly and, to see, lift high their children . . .
 But on the keyboard your two hands have paused
 And, for indefinitely long, reposed . . .

IV

O girl touching the harp, if I could kiss
 Your gesture but without kissing your hands!
 And could, by the kissing it, descend
 Searching the lofts of dreams till I'd found this

Turned into Pure Gesture, the sinister
 Medallion's gesture-face, Christian kings joined
 In kneeling – enemies and brothers – when
 The processional litter tottered past . . .

Your gesture which plucks and in delight swoons . . .
 This complete gesture of yours, chill moon
 Ascending – and below, black, the reeds . . .

Stalactite labyrinth cavern, your gesture . . .
 I powerless to take it and must needs
 See it and lose it . . . And dream is the rest . . .

v

Slender, chafing silks hour after hour,
 Your rustling figure passes and forgets
 And day by day you adjourn, at prayer's hest,
 The rite whose rhythm you alone make flower . . .

A sea far off and nearby softly wets
 Your lips where, more than in you, you lose colour . . .
 And winged, airy, above the grief you suffer,
 Evening without noticing you sets . . .

In fore-moonlight wanders the voice of lakes . . .
 Waters are gurgling on the boundless farmlands . . .
 To my pain in the vague dusk they're opaque,

My empire governs the uneven hours,
 And at my tread there twitch the eel-grass-quakes,
 Which are, beyond our own being, autumnal.

vi

I come from far and carry in my profile
 – True, in a form that's misty and remote –
 The profile of another being, foe to
 The human and cheap silhouette I now fill.

Once, it may be, I was – not Boabdil,
 Simply the backward last look he bestowed
 On the face of Granada, from the road:
 Under unbroken indigo a cold silhouette . . .

Today I am the imperial yearning for
 What I did see in my own distance . . .
 I myself am the thing which I have lost . . .

And along the road leading to Foreign
 There bloom in narrow glory on each verge
 The sunflowers of empire deceased . . .

VII

Might I be only, don't know where or how,
A thing just existing not living,
Life's night without a morning ever
Among the quicksands of my gilded outset . . .

Tenuous gnome, or fairy of hurt and flout,
Might I be fated to belong never –
My design be a glorying in having
The one apple, tree of my wearing out . . .

Might I be simply, solely a metaphor
Scratched by an old poet in a ghost
Book to whose music alien scales lay claims,

But ailing and, at a twilight of swords,
Dying among drooped flags on the ultimate
Evenfall of an empire in flames . . .

VIII

Unknown neglected I would have my destiny
Stay, under cloaks (with the bridge in sight always),
And – a ring clasped by sparks of amethyst –
Let the style of my last hymn talk away . . .

I hope that in my smooth craziness may
Have flowered the conquest-stairways' wedding-feast
Whose cautious laziness edges away
Souls clear of my impulse made of crystal . . .

My sumptuous leisures – might they be so, villas
In Rome's campagna, may the toga map
Out on my slope, anonymous (mishap

Life is!) curves under hands ever unstill . . .
And would that everything which lacks Cleopatra
Had come to an end near where dawn shoots out rays . . .

IX

A portico that's set sail my heart is,
Giving excessively over the sea –
The vain rigs passing in my soul I see,
And each sail passes as a feeling does.

An inclination of shadows and noise,
 In the air's solitude of transparency,
 Evokes stars to stand over night and be
 The portico gone into routed skies . . .

And among palm-groves of Antilles lushness
 Glimpsed – across, (look!) with hands separated,
 Dreams that have amethyst as their curtaining –

The imperfect relish of counter-balancing
 The great space 'mid the trophies elevated
 At centre of the triumph, in noise and crush . . .

X

This life has happened to me from the height
 Of the infinite. Through fogbanks of unseeing,
 Primitive smokes of my own wilderness-being,
 I came, earning – and through outlandish rites

Made with shadow, and occasional light,
 And cries faint in the distance and fits, fleeting,
 Of unknown longing – some divine thing's greeting
 Torches – this lacklustre outlaw life . . .

Rain has fallen in pasts which I have been.
 There have been plains with sky low and the air
 Fog in some sort of soul of what is mine.

To shadow I told me and found no me living.
 Today I know me as the desert where,
 Once, God had His capital of oblivion . . .

XI

I'm not the one I describe. Am the web –
 There's colouring someone in me a hidden hand.
 I've put my soul to thread her losing's labyrinth,
 And my beginning has flowered in End.

Is tedium's frost inside me of any consequence?
 And finery, and ivory, and light Autumn?
 And that self-veiling, a soul's congruence,
 Like the dream world's canopies of satin?

I disperse . . . And the hour, like a fan, folds . . .
My soul's an ark, her freight-and-keep the ocean . . .
Tedium? heartbreak? life? dream? Left behind . . .

Opening wings over Re-innovation,
The desolate shadow of the flight begun
Is flickering on the deserted fields.

XII

There she went, quiet little shepherd-girl,
Along the pathway of my imperfection . . .
There followed her, like some forgiving action,
That flock of hers, the yearning that I feel.

'In far-off lands you will be queen, you will,'
I said to her one day, but ineffectually . . .
Her form becomes lost in the obscurity . . .
Before my feet just her shadow walks still . . .

God gives you lilies in exchange for this
Hour! In lands far from what I sense today
You will be, queen no, just a shepherdess –

Some little girl still shepherd-faring for'ard,
And I'll be your return, that dim
Abyss between my dream and my tomorrow.

XIII

Emissary of an unknown king,
I obey formless instructions from beyond:
To my lips rough phrases find their way and
Tune me to a fresh sense, deviating . . .

Myself unconsciously I keep dividing
Between me and the mission I contain,
It is my King's glory gives me disdain
Towards his human people in whom I swink . . .

I don't know if the King who sent me exists,
My mission will be I when I forget:
My pride the desert in me I am in . . .

Yet – ha! – I feel I'm high traditions stemming
From before time and space, life, any this . . .
Already my sensations have seen God . . .

XIV

Like a fountain's voice happening to cease
 (And to each other, at a loss, our gazes
 Wondered), beyond my dream's groves of palm-trees
 The voice that is born of my weariness

Stopped . . . Now without distant music's disguise,
 Wings on wings in the air, there has
 Appeared the mystery, silent like seas
 When the wind's died and the calm's out at grass . . .

The distant landscape exists solely to have
 In it a silence about to sail off
 Bound for mystery, a silence the hour attends . . .

And, near or far, broad lake uttering no sound,
 The world, the formless world in which is life . . .
 And God, the Great Gothic Arch at all's-end.

* * * *

Pessoa wrote, perhaps in 1913, another great poem of the search for a religion he could follow. But here the religion is an occult one. The poem's title is *Alem-Deus* (Beyond-God). Light is thrown on the thinking behind it by a letter Pessoa wrote later (6th December, 1915) to his friend the poet Sá-Carneiro. A few brief extracts:

I am physically besieged . . . The possibility that the truth may lie there, in Theosophy, *me hante* . . . This is a grave crisis in a mind that is luckily able to take such crises . . .

. . . Theosophy is an ultra Christian system – in the sense that it contains the Christian principles elevated to a point where they melt into some kind of beyond-God – and think of how much in it is fundamentally incompatible with my essential paganism.

(Note: fuller extracts are to be found in the Introduction to *Fernando Pessoa: Selected Poems* Penguin Books).

Beyond-God

I Abyss

I gaze at the Tagus so
That gaze forgets me gazing.
And, suddenly, a blow
Collides with my musing:
A river – what is it, to be it
And flow? or be I and see it?

Abruptly I find narrow,
Empty, the moment, the place.
Abruptly all is hollow –
Even my pausing for thought.
All – I and the wide
World – stays more-than-outside.

Staying loses all being, and
My thinking comes to the same.
I stay, and can bind no being,
Idea or soul by name
To me, earth, skies . . . And sud-
denly I encounter God.

II It Passed by

It passed by, outside When
And Why and Passing by.
Whirlwind of Unknown,
And without having spun . . .

Vast beyond the Vast
And yet not self-aghast . . .

The Universe is its vestige . . .
God is the shadow it cast . . .

III The Voice of God

In the night a voice-gleam . . .
From in the Out There, hear it . . .
O Universe, I am
You . . . Horror of the cheer in
This dread, of the torch-beam
Which guides me, disappearing . . .

Ashes of thought and of name
 In me, and the voice: O world,
Beingly in you I am – *Mere* . . .
 Mere echo of me, I flood me
 With waves of black light
 In which am sinking Godward.

iv The Fall

From my idea of the world
 I fell . . .
 Void beyond depth,
 Sans I, sans There as well . . .

Void with no oneself, chaos
 Of being thought out as being . . .
 Pure stairway with no stairs . . .
 Vision there is no seeing . . .

Beyond-God! Beyond-God! Black calm . . .
 Lightning, the Stranger's own . . .
 All has another meaning, O soul,
 Even the having meant one . . .

v Arm Without Body Brandishing a Sword

Between the tree and viewing it
 Where stands dream?
 What arch of the bridge is still veiling
 God? . . . And I stay gloomy
 For not knowing if the curve of the bridge
 Is the curve of the horizon . . .

Between what lives and life
 Which way runs the river?
 A tree dressed in leaf –
 Between this and Tree any thread?
 Doves flying – their dovecote
 Still stands to right of them, or is it real?

God is a great Interval,
 But between what and what?
 Do I exist between what I say
 And what I hold silent? Who can see me?
 I miss me . . . And the tall dovecote – is it
 Around the dove, or aside?

Pessoa was born on June 13th, 1888: he died on November 30th, 1935. When a boy, he lost his father. His mother soon remarried. The step-father was Portuguese Consul in Durban, and Fernando Pessoa was educated at the English school at Durban (where already he used to converse with an imaginary friend). Soon after passing his exams he moved to Lisbon. There he stayed almost without a break – his extensive travels being done for him by the poems of his third heteronym, a sailor-poet called Alvaro de Campos.

He earned his living in an office where his job was to write business letters for Lisbon firms to their contacts abroad. This kept him free to create poetry. He was very active in the literary life of Lisbon (also sometimes in politics), but then he would go home to the real work, alone.

Why did he leave a great part of his poetry – the thing he valued most – in a wild mess? That major poet and scholar, the late Jorge de Sena, told me a story told him by Raul Leal, an occultist: Pessoa had cast a horoscope for Leal and another for himself. Both horoscopes were correctly done, except that Pessoa had got his sums wrong: the date of death he predicted for Leal was too early. Leal, still alive, showed Sena the date he obtained when he corrected Pessoa's figures: it had not yet come up, but would. (It disconcerted Sena that Leal did die when he had said he would.) And Pessoa's own death came two years earlier than he predicted it would. This would explain why he had, when he died, already started putting his work in order, but, mis-reading his horoscope, had left it too late.

The often successive nights of work and of apparitions, or of frustration and long waking loneliness, evidently joined to build up in him unbearable strains. There must have been times when he could not go on unless he turned to drink. The cumulative effect was to overstrain his liver. This killed him.

Here, to conclude, are a few of his shorter poems, of which some (probably many) must have come during those nocturnal sessions.

I've in me like a Cloud

I've in me, like a cloud
Which is and contains nothing,
The longing for no thing,
The desire for some good.

By it I'm being wrapped
As though by a fog looming –
I see the last star gleaming
Over my ashtray's tip.

I've smoked my life. What a tangle
All that I've seen and read is!
The world a huge book – spread, it
Smiles me an unknown language.

16.7.34

Still it is not Night

Still it is not night and
The sky is cold already.
The indolent lash of the wind
Wraps my tedium round.

What victories lost! – and why?
For not having wanted them.
How many lost lives!
And the has-not-been dream . . .

Rise, wind, from the wilderness
Of the night coming in.
There is a silence, limitless,
Behind what's vanishing.

Sobbing, as memory rouses
Dream after futile dream,
Each useless, utterly useless –
Who'll tell me who I am?

27.5.26

By the Sea

Lucky ones – someone waving
A goodbye handkerchief!
They're happy: they are grieving . . .
I suffer life without grief.

In where I think, I suffer
And the pain now is thought,
A suspended dream's orphan
On the tide going out . . .

And there rises to me – now gluttoned
With torments one can't use,
On the jetty I never quit –
The sea smell of the days.

?.1927

They Pass in the Street

They pass in the street, the processions
Of persons with existence.
Some go to grasp occasions,
Others to change their destiny,
Others are intelligent.

Of them all I know not one.
Nor myself do I know.
I watch them with no disdain.
I also shall change my destiny.
I live and forget also.

They pass in the street with me,
And I and they are we.
All of us have some home,
All make a change of destiny,
But Ow! we're naked alone.

26.8.30

If, by Chance, Estranged

If, by chance, estranged even from what I've dreamed,
 I meet me in this world – alone – no fellow –
 And, true to what I myself disesteemed,
 Treat as true my false footsteps, and follow,

There wakes in me, counter to the hope I saw
 In this species of flight, or simply harbour,
 No fitting myself to external law,
 But taking that law as a doom – hard labour.

Then, actually through hope lifting
 Free from this world of forms and of shifting,
 I touch, through grief and faith, tentatively

Some other world, where dream and life are
 Nought in a nothingness, equal in faintness:
 And, at all's end, the Sunrise of what is.

28.9.33

At Night when I can't Sleep

At night when I can't sleep
 The clock is likewise
 Not dormant.
 Pus in my soul I squeeze.
 What the dark will hold
 Is enormous.

Soul-putrescence, busy dying
 Of what I thought I was, I
 Listen to the world.
 It's a wind – a dull ground-bass
 Which, from the profound abyss,
 Keeps my dying veiled.

Indifferent I assist
 At the cadavrifying
 Of what I am:
 In what soul or body exist?
 Go to sleep or waken wide?
 Where persist if don't persist?

Nothing. In the dark from which the doom
 Clock is talking,
 There's a great anonymous hall,
 A great dark full of silence falling,
 A great good that's bad at knowing,
 A life busy growing unequal,
 A death not knowing what it equals.

13.3.33

Don't Know how Many

Don't know how many souls I have,
 Every moment I have changed –
 Continually self-estranged.
 Never have seen or found myself,
 Have, from so much being, mere soul –
 Who has soul is without still.
 Who sees is only what he sees,
 Who feels is not the one he is.

Intent on what I am and see
 I turn into them, not me.
 Every dream or desire of mine
 's not mine, belongs to the being born.
 I am a landscape of my own,
 The present of my passing there –
 Diverse, mobile and alone,
 Can't feel myself stay anywhere.

Therefore, alien, I go on reading
 (As if page by page) my being,
 What may come next never foreseeing,
 And forgetting what's receding.

In the margin I always note
 What I thought I felt at the time.
 Re-read it and say: 'Was that me?'
 God knows, because He wrote it.

24.8.30

The Child I was

I

The child I was is weeping in the street,
I left there when I grew who I am now:
Today, though, seeing what I am is nought,
I would go seek who I was where I stirred.

Ah, how is one to meet him? A man strayed
Arrives to find he's strayed back to his start.
Now don't know whence I came nor where I stand.
The not knowing has kept my soul stood-still.

If at least one could reach a high wild spot
From which, gazing out, one's finally
Reminded of a place he has forgotten.

An absence, at the least, I'd know, of me
And find, in seeing far-off what I was,
Part of the time when so I used to be.

II

Day by day we change into the one
We shall not see tomorrow. Hour by hour
Our diverse and successive somebody
Is now descending an enormous stairway.

It is a multitude descends, not one
Of whom knows other – I see them as mine and outside.
Ah, what a horrible likeness they all own!
They are a multiple same, self-unknown.

I look at them. Am none of them, being all's.
And alien seeing me, the multitude swells –
I can't make out from where it keeps expanding.

Inside me, moving me, I feel them all,
And I – numberless, prolix – go on descending
Until I pass through them all and lose myself.

III

My God! My God! who am I, I who don't
Know what I feel I am? Who I want to be
Dwells far away, where I forget my own
Being – departs, remote, to not have me.

A Note on the Myth of the Golden Age and its Implications

GILBERT DURAND

The myth of the Golden Age, together with its corollary, the myth of the Emperor who 'returns', are to be found at the heart of many cultural paleontologies. There is the hidden Celtic kingdom of Arthur; the Ghibelline imperial legend of medieval Europe; the myth of the Empire in Rome; the return of Shayosant in Mazdeism; the wait for the hidden Imam in Twelver Shiism; the legend of Prester John and Sebastianism in Portugal during the Conquests; and, finally, the return of the Avatara, Kalkie, at the end of the Kali Yuga. These examples, and many others, point to the universality of this Myth and prompt us to explore its significance.

Firstly, the nature of the myth must be stated and defined. We note first and foremost that initially it appears to be based on the great mythological theme of the 'Return', the 'Eternal Return', a subject on which my late friend Mircea Eliade wrote an illuminating study in 1949. It is the best-known myth in the Indian civilization, and the foundation of its entire cosmology. The 'Return' of the ages of the world is rooted in the deepest level of the Indo-European mind, from the doctrine of the *Kalpa* and the *Yuga* to the Nietzschean concept of it (a perfunctory enough concept, it must be said), not forgetting the astronomical/astrological theories of the 'great year' or 'precessional cycle' which lasts 25920 years. Throughout, the Western imagination has dwelt on the possibility of a return.

It would appear that this mythological theme conflicts with the other theme, forward-looking and messianic, upheld in Europe by the Judaeo-Christian religions, and which lent such scope to the doctrine of the three theological ages formulated by the obscure abbot, Joachim of Fiore (cf. H. Mottu, *La Manifestation de l'Esprit selon Joachim de Flore*, Geneva 1977). It has proved an easy task for Henri de Lubac, S. J., to compile a list of the resurgences of this chronological

'tritheism' which spans more than eight centuries (cf. H. de Lubac, *La Postérité Spirituelle de Joachim de Flore*, Paris 1981). As I said, this conflict is only apparent, for these two mythological themes – that of the 'progress' of the ages of the world and that of their 'return' – come together in many millenarian doctrines. The Christian apocalyptic tradition certainly points to a 'return' in the second coming of Christ, and the history of the Jewish people was punctuated by 'exoduses' to the Promised Land following in the wake of 'exiles'. Moreover, this 'osmosis' between the forward-looking impulse and the 'return' – an 'exodus' – of the lucky days, of the happy era, exists from the writings of Joachim of Fiore onwards. For, as well as announcing the imminence (in 1260!) of the Third Age of the Holy Spirit (following the two ages of the Father and the Son), the Revelation of the Eternal Gospel, and the enthronement of the Angelic Pope, the 'prophecy' of this Cistercian from Calabrese returns to the famous prophecy of Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar (*Daniel* 2, 37–44), interpreting the King's dream of an idol with a golden head, a brass and silver body, and feet of iron and clay, which is suddenly consumed. For Daniel, the four metals and their collapse herald the disappearance of the four Empires, later identified by the exegetes as the Empires of Assyria, Persia, the Greece of Alexander, and Rome, and the coming of the *Fifth Empire*. The image of this Fifth Empire was to be an immensely fertile one for the Franciscan diaspora of Joachimism, particularly in the history of Portugal: the *Quinto Imperio* 'which will never be destroyed and the sovereignty of which will never pass into the hands of another nation: it will break and wipe out all the others, but will itself exist to eternity.' Thus, in Daniel we see two seemingly conflicting mythological themes coming smoothly together: the myth of the 'return' gives him the decline of the four ages of gold, silver, bronze and iron.

Following the tradition of Messianic prophecy, the Fifth moment will witness the definitive advance of an imperial policy based on the sacredness of a totally monarchist society and on the angelizing of the Pope, whose rôle had hitherto been considerably compromised in the temporal struggles between the Papacy and the Empire.

The Latin people were fully aware that the Golden Age myth had connotations for the civilization of the West. It could be said that in Rome, up to the reign of Augustus (and to an even greater degree after that, as we will see later), the myth of a 'return' during a 'great year' in

history was reinforced by the liturgy of the 'little year', the tropical year consisting of 365 and a half days. The 16th day of the January Calends (the month of Janus who, like the Hindu Ganesh, is the god of beginnings and hence of doors, 'calends', and who was the first King of Latium; (cf. Macrobius, *Saturnalia*; G. Dumézil, *La Religion Romaine Archaique*, Paris 1966) – that is, the 17th December in our Gregorian calendar – was the start of the Saturnalia, a festival, according to Macrobius, which was founded by Janus himself, and which was extended for a seven-day period by the Emperor Augustus, who was conceived under the sign of Capricorn which has Saturn as its master, and was born under the sign of Libra, of which Saturn, after Venus, is also the master. It was 'king' Janus who welcomed Saturn and hid him when he was driven off Olympus by Jupiter; and Saturn established himself in the Capitol and, long before Romulus, founded the first city, Saturnia. It was this god (already at this stage the hidden god), Caturus, who ruled over the natives of Latium, and to whom they owe their knowledge of agriculture and vine-pruning. Often confused with the Greek Cronos (who is himself confused with Chronos or Time), Saturn was to give his name to the 7th and last planetary circle, and is in spite of himself the ancestor of the theogonic succession of the Gods (cf. Hesiod); and he is also at the limit of time. He is 'outside time', which explains his ability to return. I cannot resist comparing this 'magical' power in the God Saturn to that of Shiva Mahakala, 'master of the great time'. We know that it is through the addition of his shakti, symbolized graphically by the letter i, that Shiva, the 'corpse', the putrefying act, is as it were 'resuscitated' and invested with the power of the Supreme Lord to 'bring the dead back to life'. We should note the leading part played in Hinduism by the divine 'feminine' part – a part that was somewhat obscured in Rome, but which seems to have been preserved in the Celtic tradition, where the 'power' of woman was again manifested in the female bearers of the Grail. Like all festivals of 'renewal', in this case the winter solstice, the Saturnalia was a time for merrymaking and for the exchanging of gifts (a custom preserved in our Christmas, New Year's Day or Befana); above all, these days were a time when the hierarchies were reversed: slaves went in before their masters, women took over the management of things, and so on. Thus the distinguishing features of the Saturnalia were reversal, abundance and merrymaking.

This merrymaking and reversal are to be found occurring over and over again in Western Christianity in the 'Feasts of madmen' and in the various Brotherhoods (which the Church endlessly suppressed but which were endlessly being revived), such as that of the Mad Mother of Dijon, or of the Prince of Love, Prince of Madmen at Lille in Douai. These festivals, too, took place in January, round about Epiphany, the feast of the Holy Innocents and the feast of St Etienne, or, as in Aix, at the end of the Feast of Corpus Christi, the Fête Dieu, in the octave of Pentecost. Similarly, the feast of the Imperios in the Azores occurs during this season. True, the Church had made Christ's birth fall on the very date of the Saturnalia; but on the other hand, Epiphany, which for Western Christians had become the 'Feast of the Kings', was fast turning into the custom of crowning the 'kings of the Feast' (cf. Du Tillot, *Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire de la Fête des Fous*, Dijon 1750; P. J. de Haize, *L'esprit du Cérémonial d'Aix en la Célébration de la Fête Dieu*, Aix 1708).

How did the transition occur from these carnival festivals, all basically rather commonplace, and from the solstice-related 'return' of the 'little year', to the concept of the 'great return', the return of the Golden Age of Saturn, the blessed Age?

It is certainly the case that, from Hesiod to Plutarch, the great image of the King, Saturn/Cronos, hidden or asleep in the Isles of the Blessed – the beneficent king who betokens abundance – haunted the imagination of an antiquity which was fully prepared to accept the idea of a return. Thanks particularly to René Guénon's *Le Roi du Monde*, we are familiar with the image of a place which is hidden or protected and where the king of the Golden Age is waiting – an image common to many traditions: the Island of Sûrya in Homer, the Vishnuite tradition of the White Island, the tradition of the Celts, the Green Island in Iran.

In Rome, however, as my young colleague and friend Joël Thomas has clearly shown in his *Structures de l'Imaginaire dans l'Enéide*, (Paris 1981), the myth of the 'return' of the realm of Saturn was handled with genius in the noble legacy of Virgil, the great poet, in the service of a great Emperor, Augustus. In the *Georgics* (II: 583, VI: 792, VIII: 319 ff., and 357 ff.), especially in the famous Fourth Eclogue, the poet skilfully makes the return of the Golden Age implicit in the person of Octavius Augustus. The 'genius' of the Emperor is divinized, and consequently he himself, through his institution of the Pax Romana and his

restoration of the city, is perceived as *Saturnus redivivus*. The *Aeneid* with its twelve cantos – a veritable zodiac of initiation – was itself Roman man's poetic charter of the *vir romanus*, a heroic model of which the archetype was Hercules confronting 'barbarism' (cf. Y. A. Dauge, *Le Barbare*, Brussels 1981). Without going any deeper into the symbolic parallels of the 'Return of Saturn', we are now in a position to define the essential 'mythical components' – the smaller but significant units of narrative, all of which together go to make up the myth – that characterise the myth of the Golden Age.

1. The first of these components is a 'past, lost royalty', exemplified by the kings Janus/Saturn before the beginning of time, even of theogonic time – the component, that is, of nostalgia, involving Janus, 'king of all beginnings', and his host Saturn, king of Saturnia long before the history of Rome. Also involved is the connotation of a decline within time, expressed in the dethronement and even the castration of Cronos by his Olympian descendants. Paradoxically, the Saturn of astrology inherited only the image of an enfeebled, sick and aged king; and this great image of the fallen kingdom of an 'afflicted' 'King' (*méhaigné*) (affected, in the case of Amfortas, in his reproductive parts) was to haunt the entire romanesque Breton cycle, in the themes of the 'waste land' and the 'barren tree', which wait to be redeemed by the return.

2. The second mythical component is that of the 'hidden king' (*occultus, latus*), whose hiding place is frequently an Island or in the heart of a mountain. King Arthur is hidden in the Isle of Avalon, the last Imam in the Green Island, Paraçu-Rama in the Mahendra, and finally, in the Ghibelline legend, the Emperor – whether Barbarossa or Frederic II – is concealed in the Kyferberg. This was the mysterious kingdom of Prester John which was to fascinate the Lusitanian conquerors of the world.

3. This king, living in his Blessed Isle, is (or was) the king of a 'land of Cocaigne', a land of abundance, peace and harmony. His kingdom, the earthly Paradise or Arcadia, is the political archetype of the happy, rich and holy City. In the case of the Jews, this mythical component merged with that of the Promised Land, with Moses in the role of Saturn; and in the case of the Christian Apocalypse it merged with the theme of the future Jerusalem, the Heavenly Jerusalem. In this connection, much could be written about the 'Seven prophets'

considered by Islam as the institutors or restorers of the *shariat* or law (comparable to the *dharmā*): Moses, whom we have already mentioned, his predecessors Abraham, Noah and Adam, and after him David, Jesus and the paracletic Mahomet (cf. H. Corbin, *Physiologie de l'Homme de Lumière*). All of them seek to restore the sacredness of the world, in decline after a fall, enslavement, flood or invasion; and they all partake of the nature of 'Saturn'.

4. The fourth mythical component is the essential one, for it links the myth to the theme of the 'return' or cycle. This 'hidden king', dethroned though he is, has the power to return – the power, that is, to overthrow time. In Judaeo-Christian terminology, he is the ruler of Exodus. It is also worth noting how similar this mythological theme is to the theme of Shiva Mahakāla, 'the Great Time', who, as Heinrich Zimmer wrote, is he who triumphs over death (*yamaankara*), and in so doing 'puts an end to his reign'. He is like Moses, Ruler of the Exodus, and he is, above all, like the Christ of the Christian Easter, victorious over death. This power is symbolized in many legends, and particularly in the Grail legend (see J. Evola, *Le Mystère du Graal et l'Idée Impériale Gibeline*, Paris 1970), by an object – a celestial stone, a cup, an immaterial object – which possesses some virtue: of healing and cleansing wounds, of assuring victory and the *regnum*, of maintaining 'life' symbolized by food, of illuminating spiritually and 'in wisdom' whoever has it in his keeping. It is unnecessary to point out that the miraculous transforming nature of the 'power' of the returning King corresponds to the Christian and especially to the Paracletic miracles (cf. *Veni Sancte spiritus* . . .) Very shortly the Grail was to be confused with the chalice and the ciborium of transubstantiation. But possession or contemplation of such an object implies a fifth virtue: a moral 'qualification' is necessary if the object possessed is to be beneficial, otherwise he who seizes hold of it, the usurper, like Moïset in the tale of Joseph of Aramithea, is struck down and swallowed up by the abyss. As Evola says, 'The strength of the Grail destroys all those who try to seize it without the necessary qualifications, who try in some way to usurp it, and who thereby repeat the act of the Titans, of Lucifer and of Prometheus.' Thus, candidature for the *regnum* and access to miraculous blessings require one to be qualified.

5. Besides purity, disinterestedness, 'good will', and above all the absence of indifference which impels the hero to ask the famous

'question', all of them qualities which are as it were innate, there is a need for an 'operative' asceticism. This can be either the heroic type of asceticism, modelled on the twelve labours of Heracles/Hercules, the twelve cantos of the Aeneid, or the chivalry of the Grail (Percival, Galahad); or it can be the 'alchemical' type. It should not be forgotten that the latter is known as the 'royal art', signifying the renewal of the impure Saturn, the turning of lead into gold, as expressed in the delightful title of a work by the alchemist Huginus of Barma: *The Reign of Saturn turned into the golden age*. Let us note with the alchemist Philalethes that, while it is true that the adept finds his 'matter' in the 'race of Saturn', it is only after adding sulphur (in Greek sulphur = *theion*, divine, and is the active principle that the eighteenth century Hermetist Dom Parnaty likens to 'good will') that the Saturnian 'black stone' changes both into 'gold' and into the 'philosopher's stone', which possesses the same powers of revival, of healing and finally of transformation as the Grail. Thus a dual qualification is needed. One is natural: purity of origin, reminiscent of caste segregation, and by which is meant not simply natural ability but the educational conditioning implied by family and heredity; and the other is dependent on the will and on deliberate training.

Let us return for a moment to the correspondence between the myth of the return and the forward-looking myth in Judaism and Christianity. We have already drawn attention to the fact that both these mythological themes are based on the prophecy of Daniel, which was later taken up again by Joachim of Fiore. The forward-looking theory of the three theophanic ages is connected to the apocalyptic vision of the coming, or rather the 'return', of the Fifth Empire. Julius Evola (op. cit., p.179), who cannot be accused of an indulgent attitude towards Christianity, has nevertheless explained how, during the first centuries of Constantinian Christianity, the current of thought that he calls 'Nordic-Pagan' but which is better termed Indo-European, and which contained the mythologies of recurrence and return, was confused, corrupt and feeble: '... as soon as it came into contact with Christianity and with the symbol of Rome, a change took place... In spite of everything (sic!) Christianity revived the general sense of a transcendent and supernatural order of things. The symbol of Rome supplied the idea of a universal *regnum*, of an *aeternitas* possessed by an imperial power.' We should add that the

imperial Constantinian idea of restoring to honour – of ‘putting back’ as it were – the hereditary division of labour, particularly in the case of the clergy, was a probably unconscious remodelling of the immemorial caste system (*chatur varnya*).

After that, the symbiosis (I should like to call it ‘synchresis’ in order to shock those purists who believe that such a thing as a ‘pure’ tradition exists) was effected between the Indo-European mythology of the ‘return’ (reinforced in Europe by the ‘success’ of the Roman Empire, at any rate that of Augustus, *Saturnus redivivus*), and the eschatological Christian mythology of progress. For the Joachimites, in particular, this ‘progress’ was to take place through the coming of the Third Age of the world, the age of the Holy Spirit, of the Fifth Empire, and of the Angelic Pope.

The great ‘Ghibelline’ fantasy, which was rapidly disappointed by the failings, obstacles and impossibilities of the new Roman-Germanic ‘Empire’, existed throughout the last part of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth, and persisted during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the Grail romances, which were continually being revived – by Chrétien de Troyes, Robert de Boron, Gautier de Doullons, Mannessier, Gerbert de Montreuil, Wolfram von Eschenbach, Malory, Albrecht von Scharffenberg, Heinrich von dem Turlin . . . It was a Romanesque melting pot in which, as Jean Marx has clearly shown in his *La Légende Arthurienne et le Graal* (Paris 1952), the ‘Nordic-Pagan’ in this case Celtic, imaginative current, and the problematic dogma of the Church of Rome came together to form a new hotch-potch.

For most of the nations of Europe, engaged in the mortal struggle between Papacy and Empire, this ‘synchresis’ existed as a dream ideal, an ideal which was increasingly taking refuge in the Romanesque imagination and in poetry, or even ‘hiding’ under the guise of manuals of the Royal Art (cf. P. G. Sansonetti, *Graal et Alchimie*, Paris 1982). On the practical level, it inspired all the millenarian ferment contained in the writings of the obscure abbot of Fiore, which was immediately adopted by the rapidly expanding Brotherhoods of Francis of Assisi. It was the Franciscans – and a Saint at that, Bernardine of Siena – who made themselves the propagandists of Joachim’s doctrines. And we know that very shortly, under the guidance of the fourth successor of the Poverello of Assisi, Michel de

Cesena, the Order of St Francis entered into open rebellion against Rome on the side of Louis II, Emperor of the Holy Empire. We also know that this Order, full of grandiose dreams about the coming of an angelic pope, was the teacher and the spiritual inspiration of the new European monarchy of Portugal. Dom Dinis, husband of the Holy Queen Isabella of Aragon who established the cult of the Holy Spirit at Alenquer; Alfonso IV; Peter the Cruel (who is immortalized in history for his love affair with Ines de Castro); Ferdinand I: all were Tertiaries of St Francis. Up till the time of John II the Franciscans were the official confessors to all the kings. It is with good reason that the patron saint of the capital is St Antony of Lisbon (Padua 1195–1231). Needless to say, this European 'synchresis' threw up other examples of the attempt to bring back the Golden Age, such as the revival of the myth during the fourteenth century by the Fedeli d'Amore (see G. Rosetti, *Il Misterio dell'Amor Platonico nel Medioevo*, London 1840; L. Valli, *Il Linguaggio Segreto di Dante e dei Fedeli d'Amore*, Roma 1928); or the Hermetic tradition with its astonishing scope, which embraced Greeks, Latins, Arabs and medieval Latins, and its continuation from the second and third centuries right through to the eighteenth (see Françoise Bonardel, *l'Hermétisme*, Paris 1985; Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, London 1978); or the exemplary venture of the Rosicrucian 'Fama fraternitatis' in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (R. Edighoffer, *Les Rose-Croix*, Paris 1982; B. Goreix, *La Bible des Rose-Croix*, Paris 1970). But it seems to me that the Portuguese fantasy is more clearly and more completely paradigmatic of the Myth of the Golden Age.

The reason for this is that, unlike all the other European nations which were content to dream of the Golden Age and the return of Saturn, Portugal employed all its profound creativity in a ceaseless attempt to realize, in its cities and in the consciousness of its poetic genius, the *Quinto Imperio*. This *Imperio* was inscribed forever on the Portuguese soul through the prophetic vision of Christ which appeared to Don Alfonso Henriques, Burgundian founder of the First Dynasty, on the eve of the decisive battle of Ourique: 'I am the builder and the disposer of Empires . . . I wish to establish my Own Empire in you and in your descendants.' We must, however, draw attention to the curious veil of secrecy which has been drawn over a fundamental work (and pointed out by Lima de Freitas in his important article

'Considérations portugaises autour du Prêtre Jean'): the Lusitanian file on the Golden Age, the *Quinto Imperio*, Prester John, and which is concerned in general with the extraordinary continuation in Portugal of the Joachimite ideal. Neither René Guénon in his *Roi du Monde*, nor Julius Evola in *Le Mystère du Graal*, nor Mircea Eliade (who even lived in Lisbon) in his *Aspects du Mythe*, nor Norman Cohn in *The Pursuit of the Millenium*, nor, we may add, Henri de Lubac who in his two-volume survey entitled *La Postérité Spirituelle de Joachim de Flore* (Paris 1979) 'forgets' about the crucial fact of Lusitanian Joachimism – none of these writers so much as mentions the only nation in Europe whose fertile imagination, for seven or eight centuries, preserved the idea of the 'King of the World', of the 'imperial idea', of the 'return' of the 'hidden' political redeemer – Lusitania, whose entire political destiny was pervaded by the 'posterity of Joachim of Fiore'.

We will not dwell here on this remarkable Lusitanian epiphany of the Golden Age, for we have already gone into it in detail elsewhere (see 'Tradition de l'Age d'Or et Créativité portugaise', *Actes du Colloque Traditions: a Continual Renewal*, New Delhi, February/March 1987). Let us simply say that it has continued to exist in the Portuguese imagination from the time of the 'prophecy of Ourique' down to the contemporary artists and thinkers Fernando Pessoa and Lima de Freitas. It has had its powerful moments: it was the inspiration which launched the caravels of Prince Henry the Navigator on the route to India in search of the 'Kingdom of Prester John' – a truly paracletic Golden Age; and it was, above all, the force behind the 'Sebastianism' of the seventeenth century, when Portuguese nationalism, buttressed by the Jesuits and in particular by Father Antonio Vieira, was absorbed in the wait for the king – a king 'encombertó', 'hidden', since the disaster of Alkacer Kebir in 1578, and who was expected to come and establish the Empire of the Holy Spirit, the *Quinto Imperio*.

In conclusion, let us return to the tradition in which the essential component of the Golden Age myth seems most fully preserved.

In Hinduism, the doctrine of the four ages of the world is deeply rooted, but (and this is a fundamental limitation) it exists within the framework of an Eternal Return: socio-historical considerations are minimised in favour of subjective salvation. Nevertheless, it contains a figure who is in some ways evocative of the 'King of the Golden Age'. He is the last – the Tenth – Avatar of Vishnu, Kalki (cf. *Visnupurāṇa*, III,

17–18; *Bhāgavata purāna*, XI, 4–22). Michel Hulin ('Décadence et Renouveau: la Doctrine des Âges du Monde dans l'Hindouisme', *Erano Jahrbuch*, vol. 54, Insel Verlag 1985) has clearly shown the connection, or better still the interlinking, between the 'clock of the dharma', which is in some sense a mechanical movement like a *fatum*, regulated by the double beat of the *yuga* and above all of the *kalpa* (the *yuga* multiplied 1000 times); and the play of the avatars of Vishnu, particularly of the last two who belong to our own age of *Kali yuga* (the first of these avatars is a curiously negative figure: the 'Buddha of false doctrines', the ultimate destroyer of the *dharma*). The last brahman/warrior, Kalkin, symbolizes 'the union of the two upper castes, the pledge of the restoration of the social Order' (M. Hulin, loc. cit.). This exceptional dual association with two castes explains the restorer's curious name: 'Kalkin' means 'the defiled one'. As Michel Hulin explains, 'he must "soil his hands" in order to exterminate the corrupt beings. And the image of him brandishing a sword and mounted on a white horse must inevitably evoke (even though strictly speaking they are not related) the Horsemen of the Apocalypse (= revelation), particularly as one of his epithets is *pramiti*, meaning "revelation" (cf. E. Abegg, *Der Messias Glauben in India und Iran*, Berlin 1928).' In this connection we may think of Prester John, who is also a member of two 'castes': he is priest and king, brahman and Kshatria. Kalkin is thus at the head of the small group of those who have remained pure, who have preserved their hearing from the sirens (buddhists). He confronts the army of the wicked, which is led by a certain Kali (= the *Kali yuga*). But Michel Hulin is right in emphasizing the difference between Kalkin, who is simply a cog in the cosmic clock, and a 'Saviour' such as the Saoshyant of Mazdeism or the Hidden Imam of Twelver Shiism – or, we should add, like the King of the Golden Age who comes for evermore, like the paracletic Emperor or like the Priest-King John, suffused by the hagiographic legend of his patron Saint with the quality of eternity. 'Kalkin merely ensures the transition from one age of the world to the next'. Is there then an unbridgeable gulf between the fatidic return of the *Kalpa* and the *Yuga*, and the definitive, triumphal coming of the paracletic Emperor – of what Jakob Böhme, recalling Joachim, called the Age of Lilies succeeding the age of roses and the age of thorns and nettles?

In spite of the nuances and the differences that exist between the

Hindu concept of the last Avatar, Kalkin, subject to the wheel of time, and the Semitic-European concept (this is a misnomer since it unfairly excludes Mazdeism) of the definitive return of a 'King of the Golden Age', we may still assume that they possess a metaphysical inspiration which is common to them both. For even though in Hinduism the avatars, particularly Kalkin, are immersed in the 'pendular' (as Michel Hulin puts it) ebb and flow of the Kalpa (= 'elements of order'), there is something over and above this ineluctable *fatum*. This is the *dharma*, whose meta-physical legitimacy (and its translation into ritual; cf. R. Pannikar, *Le Mystère du Culte*, Carfe. 1970) ensures what Michel Hulin calls the indestructibility of the *dharma* (we can translate this, I think, as 'the law of Goodness'): 'humanity and its *dharma* are, as such, indestructible . . . The derided *dharma* (in the *Kali yuga*) is not a crushed or dying *dharma*, but one which is compressed, if one may put it so, and ready to expand once more'. Now, the 'Western' – the Celtic/Persian/Semitic/Roman/Christian – belief in the preservation, even a hidden preservation, of the restorative powers and virtues of the Golden Age and its king proceeds from the same acknowledgement of 'indestructibility'. Properly speaking, what is in question is a meta-physical being, a being, that is, who escapes the entropy of *phusis*, generation and corruption, *samsâra*, and which Hinduism expresses in speaking of *sanâtana dharma*, Eternal Dharma. Brahman, the Absolute, produces 'a superior power above Himself, the *dharma*, which is to say the Sovereignty of Sovereignities. For this reason there is nothing superior to the *dharma*'. (*Brihad-âranyaha Upanishad*, I, 4–15. An anthology of definitions of the Dharma can be found in J. Herbert, *Spiritualité Hindoue*, Albin Michel 1947/1972).

Sovereignty of Sovereignities, says the *Upanishad*. Yet this is precisely the definition – and the problem! – of the Golden Age and of the royalty of Saturn – and of the royalty, also, of Arthur, of Prester John, of the Joachimite dream of a 'Fifth Empire', taken from Daniel, and lastly of the great Ghibelline issue of the Empire, an issue which was apparently resolved by Augustus and also possibly by Constantine, but which tore Christianity apart throughout the Middle Ages, when the Church assumed temporal powers. Furthermore, through comparison with the Hindu tradition of the *dharma* we can perceive that there is always a recourse against the degradation, the confusion and the flattening effects of the *Kali yuga*, and this is the guarantee, by the

Supreme Being, of distinct qualities in each action and in each actor of the *dharma*. As we have seen, these qualities depend both on 'natural' circumstances, on hereditary aptitude and training, and also on the prowess of the will in preserving the indestructible, which is symbolized by Gold.

It is obvious that what is apparently insignificant reflection on the myth of the Golden Age can have very practical and even political implications that provide a metaphysical ruling for man's temporal, concrete actions, all of which are regulated by a strictly defined 'duty' (*dharma*). In particular, we are led to the conclusion that this 'Sovereignty of Sovereignities' must be defined and incarnated in a supreme Power, in the Emperor who is the Master of Justice, pledge of the city's wealth (*Augustus*), model of, and modelled on, the Divine (*divus*), and guarantor of the social order – that is, of the qualified and synarchic hierarchies (*Varna*) which define the respective status of clerks and Levites, warders and warriors, producers in all spheres and merchants, and, finally, of 'servants', the category which in Europe is known by the name of functionaries of public or private 'Services'!

Translated by Liadain Sherrard



Extract from a novel in progress, tentatively called

The Four Banks of the River of Space

WILSON HARRIS

And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his
right hand, and the other on his left. Mark 15: 27

It was a shock to see Penelope and Ross standing in the doorway of the cathedral as if the long day of the twentieth century were inscribed into the very day that the king of thieves had presided over the burial of the dead. It was as if their dinner invitation to me that day which I had been unable to accept remained nevertheless suspended in time within the Imaginary Theatre of a Century that I was building. Now it was as if they came forward to greet me as warmly as they would have done then had I accepted their hospitality. Penelope was smiling the half-crooked enchanting smile I knew so well and Ross had his hand outstretched toward me. They had returned to England from South America in 1966 or thereabouts, had retired and died in the early 1980s. I had never travelled from Essex to Kent to visit them but we had kept in touch by letter.

The Mission House in which they had lived in the Potaro, South America, had been abandoned after their departure. Canaima of the Macusi tribe had set it on fire soon after they left when pictures appeared in the popular press of a child dying of starvation. No one had dared to touch the blackened shell of a Mission House until I perceived it in my Imaginary City of God as a museum loaf of bread within the fast of memory upon which transubstantial love floats up from the first bank to the second bank of the river of space. Transubstantial bread I could at last break with Penelope and Ross into parallel lives (parallel life and death as well) in the refectory of the cathedral.

Despite the warmth of their greeting I hesitated, drew back, a little uncertain whether it would all vanish into nothingness, the entire scene, the Imaginary Theatre, everything that I visualized. I clung to the genesis of hope in cross-cultural community around the globe, the

solemn occasion, one's entry into the first post-colonial, post-Christendom cathedral on earth, as if I were about to meet the last missionaries from Europe into Central and South America. I clung to the cathedral I was building within myself on the ruins of an English Mission House.

What does one mean by 'last missionaries' within the long day of the twentieth century? Had there not been *last governors*, *last governor-generals* etc., etc., of Spanish empires within the long day of the nineteenth century? No one had truly visualized what the 'last' meant. The last was as much an ironic statistic as the first in the archives of chameleon politics. Would there come a moment when a chameleon newspaper would carry a vast headline THE LAST CHILD STARVES TO DEATH. STARVATION ENDS. THE LAST BATTLE FOUGHT. WAR ENDS.

I knew it appeared absurd. And yet within such absurdities may lie a reflection of terrifying truth. Unless one visualizes the impossible last descendant in the lineage of the tormented in every sphere one cannot do justice to the masses who have perished without a trace of self-recognition of their ancestry of spirit. . . . In the last tormented may lie the fullest, truest, everlasting poignancy of the changed or changing heart of Man within the kingdom of heaven. For the last tormented suggests (or should suggest) something more than a harrowing transition from pain (the ancestral pain of the last child who starves to death) to a museum cradle, a museum refinement, a museum skeleton, a museum bone. For if one were to settle ABSOLUTELY for the pains of starvation – ABSOLUTELY for a museum refinement or sublimation of starvation when starvation seems a thing of the past – then one would have imprisoned oneself in one or the other false eternity and eclipsed the genuine mystery of parallel thresholds into sustaining otherness, parallel pain and release from pain, by which the architect in the City of God animates a gulf, an abyss, yet a crossing between the lack of food, on one hand, the meaningless bounty of food on the other.

In the same token if one were to settle for the last missionaries on earth as a broken-backed Atlas (the desolation of love, the adventure of love unfulfilled) on one hand, a museum church or statistic of endeavour on the other, then one would have forfeited entirely the quantum mystery of parallel desolations through which the architect in the City of God animates a gulf, an abyss, yet a crossing between adventure unfulfilled and the visualization of love nevertheless as the

supreme creative power that holds the long, traveller's day and the long, traveller's night together within every envelope of soul or frailty of flesh-and-blood.

In this way – by seizing upon the mystery of quantum, parallel lives, parallel formations – I found it possible to pull the last missionaries back into my canvases of imagination, sculptures, shapes with which I animated allegorical presences in the original Greek sense of speaking otherwise, presenting others in diverse shapes of myself, other selves within as much as without oneself. Penelope and Ross re-emerged from the margins of nothingness into which they had almost vanished. The depletions of spiritual memory, the curious fast of memory that I endured, strengthened in a paradoxical way the open, broken yet flowering seed of visualized presences within me, before me. As though the hollow materialistic age or day within which I lived revealed itself as possessing – in its uttermost cavities of nascent, cross-cultural myth, uttermost reaches of emptiness – unsuspected room for original sensation, unsuspected and piercing ironies of spirit that nailed one into the congregation of all one's characters and even into the shoes of the king of thieves. One is obsessed by every being one visualizes whether apparently evil or apparently good. One bears the wounds of the past into the future and the present. One is oneself and other than oneself. . . . It was thus that I limped, as though nailed upon an Imaginary walking tree in stained glass window that I painted, into the presence of the last missionaries on earth in the post-Christendom cathedral and refectory that I was building.

I heard Penelope speak plainly but her voice seemed changed by the acoustic of spiritual being, the acoustic of hollow, echoing being, and this gave daemonic absurdity yet revelation to her utterance.

'Three of us are here instead of two Anselm. My two husbands and me! That is the beauty of breaking bread so late in this twentieth century day. Shadows acquire substance as the twentieth century draws to a close. Substance acquires new shadow. Ross is my second husband. Simon, my first, died in 1944 in the Normandy campaign. He was my epic lover, my epic soldier.' Her lips crinkled a little with a trace of self-mockery and she whispered almost under her breath – 'I shall tell you later about some of the terrible things he did to me despite the many decorations he wore on his chest. But that's for another moment, another painted moment. Not now. Poor Simon!' She paused for a

fraction of an instant then spoke up loudly again – ‘Ross is my good angel. We got married in 1946. That very year we left England to work in South America. We built a mission in the Potaro, two of us, but we hid Simon in ourselves.

‘A wise precaution for had we declared that all three of us were solidly there (Simon’s shadow was quite solid, believe me!) on the first bank of the river of space, why – think of it – everyone would have said we had come to South America, the three of us, not to be missionaries but to live in sin. One woman and her two husbands! Imagine the pain and the scandal of love.’ Penelope was laughing and Ross and I and Simon (with the king of thieves inserted between us upon a slab of gold that floated in space) could not help laughing too. Laughter echoes sometimes on the lips of solid grief and frail men and women within the feast day music of the gods whether ancient Greek, or ancient pre-Columbian, allegory.

We were now within the refectory and had taken our places at a great dining table.

‘Look,’ Penelope said, ‘I have been slaving at a coat for many a month, many a year, in this day or century. A coat that is woven of the fabric of sunset, the stillness, the transience of flame. A coat that is woven of every long rift in the cloudy blue of space that precedes the suspended fall of night. The coat of Wisdom when impermanence is well-nigh graspable beauty. This has been my task since Ross died in 1981 and I in 1982. You painted me into the day of my age, the cathedral of stained glass window sunset, as if the needle with which I work and sew were a match. The match of sunset. And because of the impermanence of darkness and light the match of sunrise as well. The coat never fits Ross or Simon perfectly. I must tell you all this Anselm. For it is the way you appear to see us. The coat never quite fits. Always a sleeve of element or a fluid stitch that’s out of joint.’ She moved as she spoke and I saw the faint but indelible colour of bruises on the soft, bright flesh of her arm as she lifted it away from the side of her body. The gesture appeared to tighten a close-fitting garment upon her breasts.

‘Yes,’ she continued, ‘always a discrepancy. And as a consequence I unravel the work I have done, unstitch everything, and start all over again from the very beginning whenever that was. I unravel my Day and start all over again. Who knows the coat may at last fit Ross perfectly – or Simon (who can say) – and then,’ she paused with a triumphant smile, ‘I

shall be an emancipated woman in heaven. Ageless sunset and sunrise woman for all I know. A status of Wisdom, a status of elemental wisdom, not easily achievable on earth! The perfect fit, the perfect marriage between light and darkness, Night and Day. No divorce, no separation from the obscure beauty one loves best out of many ephemeral lights with whom one may have slept in anticipation of dawn.

'And he – the husband or lover whom the coat fits – may then vanquish the king of thieves forever. Not so! I am joking. You know that Anselm, don't you? Seriously joking or is it joking seriously? Creation's a curious and a serious comedy, and divine comedy (as I see it) is more genuinely disturbing than tragedy. For in divinity's shadow arises the daemon of freedom that rends the human imagination with a sense of lost paradise, a sense of miraculously regained entry into paradise. . . . As I said I was joking when I spoke of my husband or lover – whom the coat may fit – as the one who would vanquish the king of thieves. Not so! For the king of thieves is a reformed character in the City of God. And though I also spoke of heaven a moment or two ago I perceive certain distinctions in your city. It's a city of inner regeneration, the inner and slowly changing heart, is it not? Not to be confused with a complacent outer paradise or state of prosperity.

'So even my perfect coat may be an approximation when measured in other inner, unsuspected lights. All tradition is an approximation. . . . It may prove a garment that the king of thieves pulls away from me, within his reformation, to cover the rags of a hollow materialism. Thus I may find myself in the company of three men, rather than two, on my pilgrimage. Ross, Simon, and the thief, I call king, who turned his face away from Christ and was to pursue his lost paradise in many incarnations across the centuries into this very Day. . . . He possessed an even older line of descent that you bring to light in your Imaginary Theatre, don't you Anselm? And perhaps even four – in the company of four – if I include you. But I am not sure. You may have other plans for yourself.

'Are you satisfied with your Imaginary paintings, sculptures etc.? Are you satisfied with your subversive creation? The enigma of love! Tell me. Are you satisfied?'

I was astonished. Penelope was weeping. Her tears broke into my heart, such gentle tears yet such shocking revelation of the enigma of

love. 'It's not only the enigma of love,' I declared, as I tried to comfort her, 'it's the enigma of creation. Do you not see that I am as vulnerable as you? I have pulled you back from the margins of nothingness but it's as if you too have pulled me, have drawn me, into your canvas across an abyss.'

Suddenly I felt a stab, the stab of parallel ages. 'You may remember your suitors in another age. Another Penelope! Suitors, lovers, call them by any name. The truth is your husband may have returned from the Trojan war to vanquish your suitors. But you remained central to every canvas. You were Wisdom, feminine Wisdom. You pulled him there across the seas into the loom that you wove, unravelled, stitched. . . . And who were the suitors in your elaborate design? Thieves! They hoped to gain your hand in marriage and to rob you of everything you possessed. As far as they were concerned you were little more than a black slave on a new world/old world auction block.

'They (the suitors) are – in my Imaginary Cathedral – a collective equation across the long Night of the centuries to the king of thieves with whom you say you now travel.

'A collective parallel to one of the thieves beside Christ – our king of thieves in my Imaginary Theatre – who turned his face away from paradise.

'Fate crucified that collective, your suitors, when Ulysses returned, when Ulysses was drawn into the loom that you wove. But fate, in the shape of your all-conquering design, never entirely vanquished them. For they were to descend from the pagan rafters of their woven cross and set alight new wars, new slave raids, new piracies in the long day, or is it the long night, of the centuries.

'The distinction between being vanquished and returning again stronger than ever to man the bastions of trade and industry is one we know only too well as the twentieth century draws to a close across the Pacific, the Atlantic, the Mediterranean.

'As a consequence – in drawing you out of the margins of nothingness into visualized being – I needed to bridge the centuries' long Night, the Night of ancient Greece into North African desert Night where Simon, your first husband, fought in Montgomery's army, the Night of Spain into the Night of South America where the re-incarnated thief ransacked the gold of the Incas.

'I needed a dark comedy of blind warriors and suitors. You are an

emancipated woman, an emancipated centre, around whom and which your husbands, your lovers, and the thief – that thief who stole the coat you made – revolve on the second bank of the river of space. Who comes first, who comes last? In this late cycle of cosmic Capital are there not rich, desirable slave women (enslaved to systems of money) with a dozen suitors, divorced husbands and lovers, rich, desirable slave men (enslaved to the Stock Market) with two dozen mistresses, all fighting, arguing, over fortunes that have been made or spent by this or that besieged spouse they loved, loathed, envied?

‘It is true you Penelope – as inimitable twentieth century spouse of missionary endeavour whose vocation lay in a foreign and a starved continent – know in your heart of hearts that a genuine choice is necessary. A true sacrament, a true marriage, is necessary. That is the purpose of the loom, the coat of tradition.

‘But how can you discover the chosen one unless you weave unsuspected variations upon the pain and ecstasy of freedom? How can you know what true sacrament is unless you find the key that the king of thieves let slip from a pocket in the coat that he snatched from you as you stood under the pagan rafters of every cross?’

I was startled by the sudden question that came upon my lips like an inspiration. ‘Did you really put that key there Penelope in the loom of tradition without knowing you had done so – the coat of tradition that never quite seems to fit the globe? And as a consequence we travel, we all travel, in search of . . . of what?’

Penelope hesitated. She was searching into the depths of hollow yet brimming religious impulse by which she was led to travel into foreign lands, the lands of the living, the lands of the dying.

We were searching together for the key to the adventure of love unfulfilled, a key inscribed into the foundations of blind empires, still blind in this Day to the past and to the present but susceptible nevertheless as never before to a new crumb or piercing light in the mutual body of Wisdom that one broke into bread.

ROBERT BLY

Men, Women, and Earth

Early in the morning the hermit wakes,
 hearing the roots of the fir tree stir beneath his floor.
 Someone is there. That strength buried
 in earth carries up the summer world.
 When a man loves a woman, he nourishes her.
 Dancers strew the lawns with the light of their feet.
 When a woman loves the earth, she nourishes it.
 Earth nourishes what no one can see.

Ramage for Awakening Sorrow

If staying up is all, then what is sorrow for?
 It is a storehouse for wheat, barley, corn, and tears.
 One steps to the door on a round stone;
 and the storehouse feeds all the birds of sorrow.
 And I say to myself: Will you have
 sorrow at last? Go on, be cheerful in autumn,
 be stoic, yes, be tranquil, calm,
 or in the valley of sorrows spread your wings.

Childhood Fears

No one spared us. Do you remember
 the precarious life we lived as infants,
 so easily drowned, in water or air?
 Carib men and women frightened the Spaniards
 sometimes by eating them . . . Our mother
 stood by the oven, and outdoors we saw
 the tracks of the berry-gatherers, wandering
 in pairs through the woods, eating and being eaten.

The Boy by the Ocean

No beginning or end, the bees as they wind home.
 Are there flights with no wings? 'The pinions
 creak in the night.' 'The peony opens
 all summer.' Wind finds its simple way
 over the ocean, where the sound of the sand
 makes the boy imagine women in the distance.
 Two seals dive as a woman glances up.
 Sideways moonlight enters the inner house.

Men and Women in Love

Water turns nimbly as it falls, curling
 into a glass, bringing the below above. Some things
 open immensities in us. Falling in love
 is one, water pours out of stone,
 rushes over beds. Men, some men, feel
 themselves drawn under rocks, implicated
 and drowning. But to a woman, some women,
 all this water is buoyancy and simplicity.

Men and Women

Men wrong women, because women want the two things
 Joined, but the man wants sawn boards,
 He wants roads diverging and jackdaws flying, heaven
 And earth parted. Women wrong men, because
 A woman wants doves returning at dusk,
 Cloth folding, and giants sitting down at table.
 Each wants a divine river, and each wants
 A river that makes its own way to the ocean.

Conversation

'As soon as the master is untied, the bird soars.'
 'But not all birds can soar,' you said, and recited:
 'In the sad heat of noon the pheasant chicks
 spread their new wings in the moon dust.'
 'Some are like me,' I said, 'winter is too strong.
 Even though the snow can bury, some, the guinea fowl,
 the pheasant cocks, the hens,
 turn their backs to the snow, hide in the great storm.'

The Thistle of Grief

December's foolishness, embers fall, the spendthrift
 flies up into the dreamt palace. All moves slowly
 in the soul. There is so much time
 we can stay in grieving another hundred years.
 The first tune came from an empty turtle.
 The sand thistle that has given up its flowering
 stays there, and its stem teaches us to go down.
 Forget the flower, learn to know the sand.

KATHLEEN RAINE

Departure and Return

1.

Full circle – was all between
 Beginning and end of time's span
 A dream, undone
 When we wake to the light of another sun?

Dreams are soul's country,
 Intangible, immeasurable,
 Not ruled by time, eternal
 To the knower, the sufferer of heaven and hell.

But whose thought this? Not mine, not mine
 I plead who am the enactor of the crime
 Of life, that travels on,
 Bearing one or another name.

Enactors of the story
 We tell ourselves, we cry
 And laugh and love and die:
 At the end I ask, was that story I?

2.

Yet there is joy!
 Near or far, we stray
 From that lost beginning,
 Seeking to return

To a place before
 We, who seek, were,
 Joy our pole star, far
 Light of our unknowing.

Whose that joy we remember?
 Who the rejoicer?
 Not I! Not I!

This

The poem can begin anywhere –
 This lined yellow paper, this worn cloth spotted with ink or grease,
 Dust, wool, why should I have preference
 For this or that, look round my room for flower or leaf,
 Or glowing fire, my books, or Samuel Palmer's 'Lonely Tower' –
 All is epiphany, all is enigma
 Plain before blind eyes, eyes blind to what is,
 Is, and sings its music, weaves light's beams
 Into this presence whose glory I saw once, or once saw always,
 Now dwindled to a commonplace.
 My sight has grown dim, but not with years,
 Oh, not with years and use, but worse,
 My soul is blind, in life's enacted dream
 Cast away, lost from myself, who cannot forgive
 That self I am for what I have become and been.
 All tell the same,
 Leaf, flower, dancing flame,
 Dust, paper – this!

Memory of Sarnak

(For Marco Pallis)

It was the face, they say, of the Enlightened One
 Recalled, his first disciples, unconvinced
 By words, whose countenance,
 Blissful as life and calm as death, tells all
 And nothing to generations of our kind.
 Carved in wood or stone, or cast in bronze,
 Silver or gold, great civilizations have adorned
 With all the treasures of the soul
 That plenitude of emptiness, the known unknown,
 The unknown known all know and are. That prince
 Who fled by night his palaces and gardens
 Fathomed our mystery, whose scripture is a smile
 All read, and know its doctrine to be true:
 Being itself, unbounded as the stars.

Time-lag

Remembering my long-ago friend Tambi

Words spoken long ago, unheard, unheeded then,
Voices of friends unprired in time's day-to-day,
Only now in this long-after where I am
I have received messages from the long gone
Whose past is in my present always.

And before life-time memories
Those spacious regions of the mind,
A once familiar land that opens in this room
That immemorial imagined city
Where deathless words were spoken,
Heard here and now, a world away.

Drawn to our times and places, who can say
What law of that remembered country we obey,
Those friends who come and go, knowing no more than we
What purposes join hands and hearts
From the ends of the earth, from the beginning of time?

No truth of the living,
Spoken or unspoken, can cease to be,
And will, on some predestined day
Be understood, as I from beyond years
Have overheard the wisdom that circles the world
Speaking immortal words in loved familiar voices.

A Head of Parvati

Parvati, whose likeness dreaming hands have wrought
From dried clay of India, who are you, whence
That beauty, noble and peaceful face of love?
Whose that serene presence, present
Here in my room? From what mind, what thought
That aspect of beatitude? Whose love? For whom?
Mystery of love we both receive and give,
That goddess-face comes from high and far
Still mountain-lake reflecting
Clouds, storms, stars, silences, night: her native place.

All This

All this – a story we have told one another
And in the telling made to be
A world, the Book of Life, raised altar and tower,
Traced lineaments of beauty and power
That stare back at us with deep goddess-eyes,
Or stone regard. We have made them other
To tell ourselves of our loves, our triumphs, our terror.

Told the thousand-and-one stories to enchant ourselves,
Hold converse with gods, animals, demon-kings,
Dragons, oracular birds, and burning mountains,
Fought in the Great Battle, travelled the Desert Journey,
Aglong our quest for the Holy Grail, the Lapis, the Rose-garden,
We have descended into Hell, been visited by angels,
Drunk from the fountains.

Temples we have built, stone by miraculous stone,
Mirroring the heavenly order; how beautiful
Those mirroring mosques, rose-windows onto other worlds,
Dreadful and dire those dead-end streets where the night-lost
Howl our despair's violent insatiable desires,
And oh! the tears we weep
As we declaim our tragedies, line by irretractable line.

Now it seems we can no longer stop
The nightmare, neither wake ourselves nor sleep
Nor save the poor sufferers whose parts we play,
We, the frenzied tellers, the doomed enactors
Of all world's deeds of wisdom and folly.
We who have seen the Holy Face, the holocaust,
Still must press on to know what happens in the end.

With what splendours and miseries we have amazed ourselves
Shakespeare has told, and the Lord Krishna,
And the old, who are once and for ever,
Wonder why we did not tell a different story –
Too many tears there have been, and too much sorrow,
Yet, as I have turned the pages of my days,
Each has unfolded the one mystery, incomprehensible, boundless.

Star-born

What music of what star
Did Schubert hear?
What celestial power
Touched Shelley's lyre?

What heavenly order
Raised spires of stone,
Moulded sculptured feature,
Gothic saint and king?

Dear human voices,
Faces loved and known,
From what unseen realm
Is that beauty born?

Advent

As the dawn comes
Above the city's glare
Of lights left on all night
Where no-one is,
The aircraft flashing green and red,
A star.

Although I cannot tell
If there is any to receive,
Because the heart must love,
I, being what I am,
Address as if there were
That being all hearts desire.

An absence that eludes
Summons and shapes the soul
To subtleties of sense and thought,
Of wisdom and delight
Travelling from an unknown source
To an end unknown.

Late in Time

Returning from the Hades places of night
I draw my curtain to let in the light
Of this world, anew-created before my eyes,
And I would enter the unblemished distances
Of morning sky, but there's a dimness
Reminding me of the low haze
From Chernobyl that passed over Italy
As I with friends conversed of the true and the beautiful
Among the orange-trees, by Ninfa's streams.

London smog is less deadly, but acid rain
Blows from our power-stations to the north-east
To blight the legendary forests of Germany
The morning aeroplanes making for Heathrow
Pass overhead, and I watch the vapour-trails of white
Unnatural cloud from violent engines disperse,
Polluting the invisible air, where even now the geese
Fly on their mysterious journeys in nature's heavens,
Where in the night-sky we can see machines
Circling earth in their sinister orbits,
Metaphors of our dominion of fear, symbolic images
We ourselves have set among the stars.

Now we may ask, do even earthquakes speak
Of what is amiss with us? 'Acts of God'
Is a term merely for what no-one can be blamed for,
Apocalypse a banality of the morning news
On radio-waves informing the whole earth
Of what at heart we know already – no surprise
Accompanies our bored response to what merely occurs.

But if I knew, would I not tell the soul
The story she still lives by, that there is
Blessing beyond our promised end, a hope
Implanted by a wisdom greater than ours,
A love whose sacred source we ever seek?

Prelude to a Fugue

Reflections on Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge*, Opus 133

JOSCELYN GODWIN

In contemplating the fate of those mythic works, Beethoven's late string quartets, more than one writer has had recourse to mythic images, evoking perhaps the desert Sphinx awaiting an Oedipus to fathom her riddles, or the tomb of Christian Rosenkreuz with its legend 'Post CXX annos patebo' ('I will be opened after 120 years.') For the first time in history a composer has genuinely written for posterity, as distinct from those who, like J. S. Bach and Schubert, wrote for a small but appreciative coterie and later found universal acclaim.

The peculiar beauties of these works were becoming perceptible by the mid-nineteenth century to the most advanced ears, trained in the schools of Berlioz and Liszt. A century after their creation, in the 1920s, complete cycles of Beethoven's quartets were being given, and the last ones were the cynosure of the avant-garde. Aldous Huxley's heroes listened to them on 78 r.p.m. records, and T. S. Eliot referred to them in the title and form of his own last poems. Since the Second World War – after exactly 120 years, in fact – they have been common currency among the musically educated, and no historian would hesitate now to rank them among the very greatest achievements of Western civilization. This does not mean, however, that they are understood, any more than Botticelli's symbolic paintings or Shakespeare's last plays are understood: each epoch has its own response to such works, which in themselves seem to be inexhaustible. The different epochs betray by their responses their own concerns, their particular strengths and weaknesses. Walter Pater's *Primavera* is not Edgar Wind's. Likewise Hector Berlioz's reactions to the late quartets, in the 1860s, are poles apart from Professor Joseph Kerman's, in the 1960s. The style of reaction has changed, as the styles of dress and of discourse have changed, though the vibrations that strike eye and ear remain, like the human body, invariant. Anyone

who reacted to works of art as Pater and Berlioz did would simply not be published nowadays.

If there is a lesson in this, it is humility. Beethoven's music will certainly outlast us, and our reaction to it will be a historical curiosity, if it does not seem plain idiocy, a century hence. If I write about it, it is merely to represent the few people who do not accept the current fashion, according to which musical understanding is best served by the careful analysis of note-patterns.

Let us recall, for completeness' sake, that Beethoven wrote five quartets in the years 1825–26, and that they are:

Quartet in E-flat major, Opus 127

Quartet in B-flat major, Opus 130, which includes the *Grosse Fuge* ('Great Fugue') later published as Opus 133

Quartet in C-sharp minor, Opus 131

Quartet in A minor, Opus 132

Quartet in F major, Opus 135

This article centres on the *Grosse Fuge* because it is the most problematic of all these difficult works, and has been the slowest in finding favour with players and listeners; indeed, one might say that it is the problem work of all time. Its history, in brief, is that it was composed in 1825 as the sixth and last movement of the Quartet in B-flat, Opus 130. At the quartet's first performance in 1826, the reception was so uncomprehending that Beethoven accepted his publisher's suggestion to issue the fugue separately (hence its designation as 'Opus 133'), and to supply the quartet with an alternative finale.

Until comparatively recently, the B-flat quartet was generally performed with this much easier and shorter close. But the new concern for historical authenticity has changed the situation, to the extent that performers of Opus 130 now feel that they have to excuse themselves for not playing the *Grosse Fuge* as a finale – for not going the whole hog, as it were, and honouring Beethoven's original plan.

A performance of the *Grosse Fuge*, especially at the end of an already long quartet, puts a strain on the listeners and makes an extraordinary demand on the performers. The strain involved is not like that, say, of listening to *Die Götterdämmerung* or of singing Bach's B-minor Mass. Unlike those great works, the *Grosse Fuge* is, for much of its length, quite disagreeable to listen to. The four instruments are made to play

fast and *fortissimo* for page after page without any respite whatever from the dense and tortured progress of the fugue, or rather of two separate but related fugues. The questions facing both players and listeners are, first, why Beethoven should have chosen to put them through this physically and emotionally exhausting ordeal, and secondly why he should have capped a quartet containing so many lovely moments with such a horrid and chaotic finale. Of course the same question is posed by countless works of the twentieth century, but those who listen to the quartets of Schoenberg or Bartók at least know what they are getting into from the start.

At this point I must review the events of the *Grosse Fuge* to refresh the memories of those who already know the piece. Others, if they read to the end, may feel curious enough to listen to it. Analysts have divided the movement in various ways on the basis of the adventures that befall its different themes, but I approach it here purely from the point of view of the adventures it offers the listener.

1. In an introduction, called by Beethoven 'Overtura', the composer pretends to be showing us his sketchbook: we hear several different ideas for beginning a piece. Beethoven had done this in his piano sonatas Opus 101 and Opus 106, as well as in the finale of the Ninth Symphony. The presumption that listeners should have any interest in a composer's mental processes might seem very modern, but probably similar things were done in the tradition of extemporized performance, of which Beethoven was an acknowledged master.

2. After those four (or five) false starts comes the first fugue (in B-flat), very long and directed to be played so loudly that it is well-nigh impossible to follow the interweaving of parts as one expects to do in a fugue. Until one knows it extremely well, one's reaction is bound to be puzzlement and annoyance, perhaps ending in anaesthesia.

3. A serene *Andante* (in G-flat) follows as the grossest possible contrast to the fugue, contradicting it in volume, in metre, in speed, texture and key.

4. The fast pace resumes in a light and tuneful scherzo (in B-flat), which might well have ended the movement were Beethoven not to cut it short after 32 bars, in order to put us through the whole process once more.

5. A second fugue (in A-flat), more condensed, more chaotic and no less noisy than the first, brings intensive development of the fugal themes.

6. A second version of the *Andante* (in A-flat) is not soft and tentative but full-blooded and ranging over the whole compass of the instruments.

7. The scherzo returns unchanged (in B-flat), then develops further within the same mood.

8. Themes from 1, 2, and 3 are briefly reviewed in the manner of the Overture.

9. The scherzo mood resumes and ends the work.

The 32 bars of the scherzo (4) are the only music in the whole *Grosse Fuge* that is repeated note for note. I have found no explanation of this, though it is mentioned as an anomaly by some commentators. To my mind, this is the key to comprehending the work. I say 'comprehending' advisedly, as distinct from the 'understanding' of the analyst, because my eventual goal is to experience this piece of music in purely musical terms, that is to say without any visualizations or verbalizations. I want to grasp it as a whole, so that I can listen with full consent to the sequence of its parts. The ingenuities of Beethoven's fugal technique I take for granted; I can see them in the score, but I am not interested in clogging my mind by thinking about them while I am listening. One can find ingenuities anywhere, but nowhere in music is there a comparable sequence of those ambiances, atmospheres, or states of soul which for brevity I call 'moods'.

Among the many moods that Beethoven cultivated to perfection in his best-known and best-loved works, I would single out three. The first of these is the mood of heroic struggle and the conquest of superhuman obstacles. One hears it in the Third ('Eroica') and Fifth Symphonies, the 'Appassionata' piano sonata, and many other works from Beethoven's middle period (1803–17). One cannot think about these titanic works without remembering Beethoven's own struggles against deafness, loneliness, and despair. This is the Beethoven who will always hold centre-stage even for the most unreflective listener, for few can resist being swept up in the vortex of his Promethean energy.

The second mood is best described as 'reverence'. In the slow movements of the early and middle works it is often announced by

hymnlike themes, as for instance in the 'Appassionata', the Fifth Piano Concerto ('Emperor'), or the second 'Rasumovksy' quartet. Beethoven seems to be advising us that this is holy ground, and that we had better conduct ourselves fittingly. Later he will discover more subtle ways to create this mood.

The conquering hero has a right to expect his reward, and traditionally this has been a triumphal celebration. Beethoven's middle-period works usually end with movements in this mood: the Fifth and Seventh Symphonies and the 'Emperor' are obvious examples, and even the Ninth Symphony has recourse to it in the end. This is perhaps the mood that has worn the least well in an age of disillusion and anti-heroism.

The works of Beethoven's last period (1818–1826) open up new dimensions of the titanic and reverential moods, especially in the *Missa solemnis* and its coeval piano sonatas Opus 106, 109, 110 and 111. In the 'Hammerklavier' sonata, Opus 106, an extremely elevated slow movement is followed by a fugue of unprecedented length, in which the struggle is not only depicted objectively in the music, but also incarnated in the enormous difficulties it causes the player. This brings us to an important point. Beethoven's piano sonatas and chamber music were not composed for performance at public concerts, but were written for connoisseurs to play to themselves, or at most to other connoisseurs. The string quartets were written for the private or semi-private string quartet parties that flourished in a golden age of gifted amateurs. Beethoven's first consideration is therefore the psychological effect of these works on the player or players, rather than on the audience as in the case of symphonies and concertos. So one must ask why Beethoven makes a pianist go through the ordeal of the 'Hammerklavier' finale, without even the reward of having his virtuosity appreciated.

I can only say that there is a positive value to be found in this kind of musical exhaustion. When the connoisseur – Beethoven had in mind his devoted patron, the Archduke Rudolph – plays the 'Hammerklavier' right through and reaches the slow D major episode in the fugue, he has an experience unattainable through simpler means. The gentle phrases are heard in a quasi-weightless condition, and they really do seem to be the conversation of angels. Likewise in the *Grosse Fuge*, after ears and fiddles have been battered almost beyond endurance, the

tranquil *Andante* (3) is heard in an altered state of consciousness. Beethoven's device reminds me of certain spiritual exercises in which physical exhaustion is used to open the mind to other states.

Beethoven based his last piano sonata, Opus 111, entirely on this contrast. Here, as also in the E major sonata, Opus 109, he took the bold step of ending the work in a mood of profound reverence. (The English publisher of Opus 111 asked him if he had forgotten to send the finale.) But why did he not use this kind of ending in any of his last quartets? I think the reason is that they hold yet another lesson for us.

With the exception of the opening fugue of the C-sharp minor quartet, the most profound slow movements of these works (Opus 127, II; Opus 130, V; Opus 131, IV; Opus 132, III; Opus 135, III) are all followed by something wry, clumsy, or bizarre. If we consider this in the light of the previous observation, it seems that these quirky movements may take on quite a different meaning when prepared for by prayerful contemplation.

In the B-flat quartet, the very religious *Cavatina* gives way either to the most chirrupy and inconsequential of all the late finales, if one takes the alternative ending, or else, if one plays the *Grosse Fuge*, to the most titanic one. In the latter case, the four players are put through an intensified version of the 'Hammerklavier' experience. Let us hear what it feels like to them, as described by Eric Lewis, first violinist of the Manhattan Quartet, who has been playing the work for nearly twenty years.

When I am inside the *Grosse Fuge*, Op.133, it is a journey through a Black Hole. That piece is beyond all analogy in art, and so I reach for this image – a cosmic storm where the laws of the universe are transmuted in gravitational tides so strong they destroy the known laws of harmony. The G-flat section is a reprise between the two event horizons where time is non-existent. Paradoxical states of consciousness are made understandable and prepare one for the final journey through the A-flat fugue to a vision of a parallel universe in another dimension. I am sure Beethoven took that journey and left his impressions of that universe in Opus 131.

Perhaps the most paradoxical thing of all is the glimpse, in between the two titanic fugues, of the scherzo (4) that knows nothing either of cosmic storms or of timeless contemplation. Now, in that 'parallel universe', each of the three moods, the titanic, the reverent and the

playful, comes to its own fruition. In the A-flat fugue (5) the struggle intensifies as the Titans heave Pelion on Ossa – and the music certainly makes us fear that the structure may collapse at any moment. The G-flat *Andante*, formerly cold and lunar, now blazes in solar glory (6). The scherzo, on the other hand, comes back exactly as it was (7), and goes on being a scherzo, like a child who will never grow up. The question now is, which mood will have the last word? It seems for a moment, in the grand unison statement that refers back to the *Overtura* (8), that the final note will be one of triumph. But anyone who knew the other late quartets would be sceptical of such a gesture. They will not be surprised when Beethoven chooses to give his most titanic work an explicitly untitanic ending. He does not end it with a Bacchic rout, like the Ninth Symphony, nor by sinking into *samadhi*, like Opus 111. He ends the *Grosse Fuge* as he ends every one of the late quartets: with a sublime whimsy, an elusive mercurial joy, which I am not the first to identify with the transfiguring ‘gaiety’ of the Taoist sages on Yeats’ lapis lazuli mountain.

The quintessence of this mood is invariably found in a quiet passage very near the end of the work. Here are those moments as they occur in each of the late quartets:

Opus 127



Opus 130 (*Grosse Fuge*)



Opus 131



Opus 132



Opus 135



These magical passages seem to me to reveal one secret, at least, of the Grosse Fuge, coming as it does at the end of the most whimsical and elusive of all these works. *Per ardua ad astra*: yes, of course it carries that message; but in the end the cosmic voyager returns quietly home,

transfigured by an inextinguishable inner joy. How far Beethoven has come from the triumphalist myth that dominated his middle period!

The substitute finale that Beethoven provided for Opus 130, which was the last movement completed before his death, obviously belongs to this same childlike state. People have raised their eyebrows at its simplicity, just as at the little scherzo and the German dance earlier in the quartet. Most of us, unlike Beethoven, are not able to hear these pieces in a state of grace. Until we can do so, our best approach to that condition is to let Beethoven lead us by the hand, through the Black Hole and back to earth again.

This essay is based on a lecture-recital given with the Manhattan String Quartet at Colgate University in February, 1988. I am grateful to Eric Lewis, first violinist of this quartet, for permission to quote from his unpublished essay, 'Night on Music Mountain'.





Thomas Blackburn's cottage in Wales.
Drawing by his wife Margaret.

Thomas Blackburn: Inroads on Dying

JEAN MACVEAN

The end of Thomas Blackburn's life was recorded in a day by day account written later by his wife, Peggy, and in his own notebook, much of it completed on the night he died. His very moving testament, in a wavering but still legible hand, shows the poet at the very entrance to death, balancing between the two states. An extraordinary document, it represents the summit of his life and thinking following a visionary experience in his Welsh cottage some three years earlier.

He had described this in *Light*, Winter 1974*, in these words:

The experience I am going to relate took place in the early morning of August in our small Welsh cottage, some twelve miles from Snowdon. . . . I mention first certain hospital experiences, as they had brought me to a concern with death of more than usual intensity; a kindly sister allowed me while recuperating to assist in the wards for geriatrics with other patients who were on the road to recovery. It was an unforgettable experience and one that convinced me of the folly of the contemporary attitude to dying, and of the necessity of libidinising this experience if we are to live with greater serenity.

I did not have much time to consider my hospital experiences till the long summer vacation in our Welsh cottage when, cornered by the exceptionally wet summer, I did a great deal of writing often working through till the beauty of the first light over our neighbouring mountain. I noticed that both my poems and prose seemed obsessed by an attempt to come as close as I could to the experience of dying, not in a suicidal sense, but with an extreme interest. I see now that this concern was relevant to the vision which followed since, although I never pray except in the sense of writing poetry, the effortful longing was a condition of the half dream half vision which was granted to me.

It took place about two in the morning and started as a dream of

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exceptional intensity and then continued as a vision, half spoken to my inward ear by an invisible chronicler, half projected in coloured images on the whitewashed wall opposite the bed in which I was sitting.

. . . In my dream I was dying and for a few moments felt an extreme terror, sensing an invisible hand feeling for certain nerves in the region of my throat. There was a slight gripping sensation and I felt the fingers were undoing a ganglion, almost a knot of nerves. The knot came free, there was a click and my next impression was one of blinding light after the mist I had been enduring. The light was particularly associated with flowers, lilies and irises of blue and red, although the whole light was of an intense gold I have only seen on some dawn in the Italian Dolomites. I knew that part of my job – and it soon dawned on me this was by no means a state of being associated with that nauseating phrase ‘Rest in Peace’, but of intense and strenuous though delectable activity – was to realize these colours with an ever increasing power of vision, including the blue of the sea, since my unpractised eyes were only aware of a minute part of the capacity for seeing. It will be realized that I use such terms as touch, see or walk, in order to help the reader, whereas in fact all sense seemed blended into a single sense whether of speaking, hearing, walking or touching. A voice, or rather a direct communication to my brain since there was no speech here or language, only a direct communication of thought and feeling, seemed to be insisting that I stroke the flowers and in doing so increase my vision.

At the same time I saw a silver garment suitable for either male or female, and if it fitted me, then I would already have achieved a certain wholeness, in that I would have come into communion with the female component of my soul. I merely state this last fact and confess that although familiar with Plato I am not fully aware of this extremely important garment and its meaning. One thing was clear, that there was no sex in this – to use a shop-soiled but necessary word – celestial being. This absence of sexuality was the opposite of repression and implied that the communion attainable between inhabitants of this region was of such fulfilled intensity as to imply sexuality but to make its localization in the genitals without meaning.

... One last vision appeared on the whitewashed screen. It was of heart and cancer cases moving in the terminal ward of a hospital. A voice said to my inward ear: 'Do you think that is the nearest state to death?' On the contrary it is life in extremis, the greatest inrootedness in the traffic of the human body. What is nearest to eternity are the intense moments of living, whether in creation, love, relationships, mountains, thought or contemplation, where you are almost (you will never have it entirely here) at one with your activity.

I have tried to set down as accurately as I can this experience between sleep and waking, whether or not it is valid for eternity or, that useful label for the unknowable, 'The Unconscious'. All I am certain of is the joy it has brought me and the sense that although I wish to live as long and fully as possible, the process of ageing is no longer a fear to me but a source of considerable happiness.

He was told that he would soon return. He believed that he had crossed over into death and the Welsh cottage began to represent the place where 'I died' and also where he had begun to 'learn dying', since

I could not learn dying
Among taxis and buses,
Its colour, its ardour
Of being and seeing
A musical order.

Before he left for Wales in August, 1977, he wrote to me:

I see a whole concept of forgiveness. You can only be free of your guilt if you forgive what Yeats called 'the mirror of malicious eyes'.

How in the name of heaven can he escape
That defiling and disfiguring shape
The mirror of malicious eyes
Casts upon his eye until at last
He thinks that shape to be his shape?

He believed that it was essential for him to reach the very deep level of forgiveness, which would enable him to accept his father, whose image had haunted his mind and warped his life. Only in this way could he save his own soul.

In the same letter, he described winning his battle with alcoholism:

I seem to have kicked the booze, though it was a struggle, as if when the possessing demons are touched by the white fingers of verity, they writhe and cut themselves with sharp stones and cry: 'What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou son of David?'

He had expressed this in a very remarkable poem, *Legion*:

What have I to do with thee?

To a god, the demoniac man
Pinpointed by verity
And starting again to be human,
Through his fractured persona gibbered
The parasitical horde
And he muttered and raved and bled
Pierced by the light of the Lord.

They had entered in through the fission
Of his personality
To feast there and wanton and batten
To escape immortality,
But his selfhood from the distance
Returned as a wayfarer.
The ghosts heard him speak from the silence
And began to fury and swear.

But the finger of God was at work
And they fled, half blind, from that stranger
To rage by themselves in the dark
The death that they could not bear,
While alive not growing to it.
The new man felt the old self enter
His body where the demons had been,
And thirst ending, drank living water,
Wiser than before and more serene,
Hearing joy in heaven, celestial laughter.

In the same letter he wrote that he had been back before birth and talked to the 'Self, Om, Mind or God' and that he had been forward after his death on to the other side, but wanted to know far more about that, and what really happened. 'It is strange to be prying about the Ultimates'.

In August, Thomas and his wife drove to Wales and their cottage in Snowdonia. It was a clear beautiful evening and they could see the Cnicht, the mountain near the cottage, from twenty miles away. Aptly

named, this huge sleeping Knight lies like an armoured crusader, the helmeted head to the west, the crossed greaves and ironclad feet pointing east, and the Snowdon ranges canopied his head.

Thomas knew every ridge and scree-shoot, every col and outcrop, every pinnacle and peak. He loved the resounding historic names: Crib Goch, the Castle of the Birds, Bristly Ridge, the Glyders and Cwm Glas, the blue gorge; the Crag of Craving, the Bird's Crag and the Devil's Kitchen. A mountaineer, he had often climbed them, though they had become too much for him after a back injury. He had, however, found compensations:

Botterills Slab, the great gully of the Crag of Craving,
These I sort out today from many another
To celebrate the tincture and odour climbs are
In a moment that is like unsingeing burning.

By this, as by night in dreams,
I constantly follow the perpetual and aerial rockways,
How can it be that I am not learning to praise
The motion towards dying that just now seems

Like a closeness more life into itself gathering
In the last decade or so of my being here?
The translation into literate dying drawing near
I think of my last climb, Schiara, Golden Ring.

The summer evening was still bright when they reached the cottage, and the little house seemed warm and welcoming, but Margaret Blackburn was aware of a strange brooding atmosphere and felt 'laden with forebodings'.

Thomas, on the contrary, was in radiant good spirits. He said repeatedly that he was at last experiencing total earthly happiness. He seemed to be free of his depressions and from the Furies, which had torn and ravaged him.

The Welsh valley where they had spent so many summers seemed more beautiful than ever. On the mountainside the colours changed every moment, and walking up the Roman Road to the nearest of the fells they could look at the sea, the distant horizon: shimmering, boundless light.

The next day when they went to Harlech College for an art exhibition, Thomas seemed unusually remote. During an hour they

spent on the beach, he looked neither at the sea nor at the sea birds he loved. He sat on a sand-dune among lavender and marram grass with his back to the water, apparently oblivious both of Margaret and of his surroundings.

'That hour,' Margaret wrote, 'will always be vivid to me. The brightness of the sea and the scent of the herbs, the white clouds and the mellow-walled castle basking like an old lion in the sun. But looming over all this was the long-drawn silence and the presence of a once-warm, living man who was not with me at all.'

It was that afternoon and evening that Thomas wrote *Morituri*, the serene and beautiful poem which the poet R. S. Thomas was to read at his graveside.

Such beatitudes of water
Where the scree falls to the sand
In the August sun they glitter
One might think world without end,
But tomorrow the sun may be dark and
The waters running with foam,
But it's all a grace and a godsend
And the exile's going home.

Blake said the vegetable copy
Of eternity this world is,
There humans and flowers and the oak-tree
Shall shine with intensities.
This mundane shell the five senses
Curtails. In death sensuality
Shall enlarge and distances
And nearnesses we shall see
As they really are if the stress
Is endured. We are born to suffer,
So blessed we learn to bless.

The next day he seemed to Margaret to be restless and still preoccupied, as though he was waiting for something or somebody. He did not, however, appear depressed, and in the afternoon sat down and read *Morituri* to her. She said again how much she admired it 'and somehow we both became happier, as though a bitter cup had passed from us.'

Beautiful *Morituri*, however, was not to sustain either of them through the long night. Thomas came to say goodnight with his blue notebook

under his arm. He was again remote. Margaret watched him bend his head under the low doorway, listened to the owls hooting around the ash trees and finally fell asleep.

She was woken by a terrible cry, so terrible that she thought Thomas might have gone out of his mind. Her first reaction was terror. She had no protection. The door itself was paper and matchwood.

There was no movement, but another brief sound made her get up. She went towards the silence of Thomas's room. The first cry, she believed later, had been the spirit's departure and the second the body's.

Thomas lay on the floor between a dark window and a rumpled bed. He looked 'massive, a stone-faced giant with pale eyes, which stared at me without expression. His heart had stopped.'

Margaret muttered the prayer: 'De Profundis . . . May God have mercy on us.' She stooped and felt the lifeless pulse, and held on to the great hand till it grew cold.

'I begged God to help us both and felt the awful pain of loneliness and anguish which parting brings.'

Dawn came slowly. Faint lights rose from behind the Cnicht. The candle flame flickered and grew dim. 'The world,' she wrote, 'seemed a strange, empty place.'

The coroner's verdict was that death was due to an overdose of the psychiatric drug Parstellin and an excess of alcohol. The coroner added this extraordinary rider: 'Thomas Blackburn was to me a poet, a near genius, who sought to stimulate the imagination beyond the bounds of human containment.' It is, in fact, quite possible that Blackburn resorted once more to alcohol as a means to further vision.

His own record written in the blue notebook on the last night of his life is in a letter originally written as an attempt to end the estrangement between himself and his brother, the writer John Blackburn. This was for him the last urgent task:

I write this because you are a missing piece in the jigsaw of my life.

He was offering and pleading for forgiveness, the denial of which he had recognised as the last obstacle.

With siblings, though miles apart, one should achieve psychically some benevolent ceremony of the blood, or regress into the absurdity of the mediaeval feud.

He continued:

I went to bed quite early the night before last, but woke at six to the dawn and the sea birds. I wrote from seven a.m. to six p.m. Only now have I reached the serenity I then had not attained. I had fobbed off the solution with a clatter of futile euphemisms.

... Six fifteen and undrugged but unskinned by three months' absence from alcoholism that to me was poison. I watched the sea birds drift in as if nerved by a single hand, as they do every first light. Then a single magpie lighted two or three yards from my typewriter and I thought: one for sorrow, and tugged my forelock, but another came, and it was mirth, the two brisking about in the rinsed light, all gold and glory. Now a third came and it was the funeral of sorrow and mirth in the tragic joy of all opposition that includes but exceeds understanding.

... A good August and a beautiful morning. It seems that what was meant to be a poem and a short but loving letter has turned into a long essay seeing it's from the novel wishing to love, in the present of at last learning to love. Pace, breakfast, a walk, talk, sleep and 'humility, humility is endless.'

I have talked with my selfness, the godhead of my birth, and it seemed that Eliel and Adelaide [his parents], though my hair pricked at the prospect, were there. ... Recently I have in dreams met again the godhead and going recalled coming. I heard him speak as he spoke at first, desiring to be born into that by no means easy conjunction of Blackburn and Fenwick, Eliel and Adelaide.

'So,' said the voice, 'you have indeed come through. I thought at times it might be intolerable, but now you have grown into the Thou of the intention, will grow here, no more need the Iron Maiden of Carnality. Dear child, I have worked with you and now you will grow where the eternal are to further dyings and further birth in the dominion of spirit.'

Thou hast delivered my soul from birth
My darling from the power of the dog
Natale finite
Finite natale.
Pace. Pace. Pace.

Down to earth after just meaning to write a short letter of love and of the wish to pardon, but the shaper in writing the mystery of himself took over and I have relived on the page the frightening and complete blackness leading, supported by the virgilian girdle,

through the hairy scrotum of the King of Darkness to rock, wan light, sun light, gloria.

Well, my dears, after twelve hours of strange travel from dawn to dawn, though still the mind burns, I must lie in a horizontal position and breathe long and deep.

In the next page I found these solitary lines:

I have come to terms with the silence,
Made peace with the violences
And it is this now, but growing for ever, for evermore.

On yet another page is his tribute to Kathleen Raine who had helped him to find a Jungian analyst in the last year of his life.

The poet Kathleen Raine, friend and avatar, set my foot on the Dantesque descent or ascent through the reaches of hell, the Devil's hairy genitalia, through and upwards to the starlit air and on to widened unalcoholized energy to purgatory, and with Beatrice's occasional vista, I have glimpsed the celestial.

The poem he intended to send his brother is also in the notebook.

Purgatorial

Tonight through the leafage of a tree a single star.
I saw it with eyes unskinned as perhaps it is
A mineral diagram of the numinous
Glittering down from where the eternal are.

It was an image of what I had written today
Of Dante supported by Virgil fainting through
The excrement of Satan and his crew,
Then rock, a star, the purgatorial way.

I also have my Virgil and my words
And travelled recently a similar road
Through my own dung and claustrophobic blood,
Then faint, a star, a symphony of birds.

The carnal is congealed ghost, but the stress
Of being carnal need not be too great,
Though over sixty it is not too late
To learn, constant in blessing, how to bless.

THOMAS BLACKBURN

Dried Out

A month ago I would not have thought
Of life without drink's panacea,
But now unshaking hand, head clear,
The lesson finally learnt
That poison for me is alcohol,
Infinitely beautiful
I find life with my sense unburnt.

It was a slow and arduous climb
To leave the fantasy of it
And reach my personality
With undoped sensibility
And like a benison to me.
Sadness remained as with all of us,
But leavened by the numinous.

I mean I dreamt and dreaming saw
The antecedent of my birth,
My way of being after death.
Is it possible to ask for more
Than knowledge absolute as this?

The enamelled glory of the rose
The secret of becoming knows
Of novel unblemished intensities.
After such seas, at last landfall:
The terminus of alcohol.

Pre-Birth

I who wrestled from dawn to midnight with a beast at Ephesus,
With my shadow self reflected clearer than in any glass,
Suicide the ultimate enemy, sawing the throat the succubus,

Heard quite clearly, just at first light: 'You, dear child, belong to us.
Don't ill treat yourself. Your enemy you may hate for he it was
Who brought you, child of my heart, to this bitter sombre pass.

Hating though, use understanding of the good and bad he is
Whose perverse ministration only then can be seen as lies,
And remember that you chose him before birth as life's dwelling place.

Good and bad in you and in him, see that, or it never dies,
Your black image on the water in finalities of alas.
Knowing is a kind of loving, know your father as he is.'

This to me, first light, was granted by a more than human voice.

Pardon

Now after a long cold winter and late summer,
The sun is bursting down with sempiternal heat
And the image of freezing becomes thinner
And Hermes that sandalled god walks with delicate feet

Over the pavements and the warm grass verges
With his reed and sandals and helmet with dual wing
And Demeter celebrates the six pages
Of her daughter Persephone's returning.

It is good having tea in the garden
With the pyrocanthus tree and the lion's stone head
And watch the taut rosebuds soften
For their blossoming in this May that's almost shed.

This vegetable world is only a copy,
Blake said, for the world of imagination we meet when dead.
If so it is worthy of extreme study
With all the details to be interpreted.

I have talked before birth with my selfhood
About coming down to my father's torn regimen
And of this the wisdom and acumen
Very quietly and I myself chose my birthhood.

And the self promised to be with me all the time,
Making just possible the terrible impasse
By a lifting that was joy from irrefragible loss
And transcended my impossible father and his crime.

But now since I would not remain the idiot
 That his perverse judgment imposed without let,
 On hindsight choose to forgive if not forget,
 Since only by forgiveness can I not be the drunken sot

He identified with me, and I, blaming, am bound to accept;
 After all, I chose him for my sire,
 A Nessus shirt of corrosive fire,
 But at dodging pain I was the supreme adept.

So forgiving is all and understanding
 In order that I may know myself and come clean
 Of the impositions on me that were obscene
 And with my peers be not ashamed of anything.

Laburnums grow in a corner of the garden,
 The daffodils and tulips are quite done
 Waiting on next spring's novel rejuvenation;
 However hard it seems, I must ask for pardon.

Rifugio Settimo Alpini

Cyclamen and gentian by the passes
 To the Settimo Alpini from Casa Bortot
 Decking the precipices;
 A steep pull to that high mountain hut.
 But the glissading glitter of water
 Whirling down to an engraved pool,
 Eased our going to the far Schiara
 (In English The Golden Ring),
 They were our constant companions –
 Shall that walk ever have an ending?

There was a shepherd's hut in ruins
 And lizards, repulsive and black,
 Just before the final pull up to
 A crucifix in the thin, violet air
 And the Signor and Signora
 Waiting in the hut to welcome us there.

That night there were flashes of summer lightning
Burning and blazing on the yellow rock
Walls of the Schiara and detailing
The slabs of dolomite of tomorrow's route;
Though I longed for the bow of good morning
Its arrows of gold to shoot,
We two by the blazing window,
There was no small virtue in that.

Then dawn and bread and black coffee
And I swarmed up yards of blond scree
Then was on the mountain and climbing,
It was steep as it was easy
Like every Via Ferrata;
Did I wish that you were there with me,
My wife down below, by some shoot of water?
Absence is for strangers and for them only.

Near to the summit I at last saw,
Traversing three thousand feet of nothing,
Two carefully arranged strands of steel wire
And inched over enjoying their safety
And the solitude, too, and then came
To the summit Guisella (or Needle),
Free rock that couldn't be climbed alone.
But the solitude had been worth that missing
Of a great spire in the Italian Dolomite;
So much is the chatter and careless spilling
Of words that really get nothing said.

Then after two hours of heavy scrambling
I met my wife again at the wooden hut
And drank up with her to help me
Two litres of thin cool white wine.
Then we stored our packs and began the
Long walk back in the cool of the evening
Through clumps of gentian and cyclamen
And knew it could never be over.
Such days are engraved on the brain.

We drank two, I think, glasses of grappa
At Casa Bortot and ate a rank goat cheese
On the quiet patio outside the pin-tabled bar

And saw the small bats glitter and flitter
In the silence that those days had become our habit
And then back to the city of Belluno
In the platitude of my old car,
Knowing that going in a sense we did not go;
Since such days are and are forever.

Spinal

All day I had watched the mountain
Etched under a summer sky
And felt how much was the gain
Of spinal injury,
For the clouds in trawling over
The fellside from the sea
A form of words uncover
Articulate to me.

To know the language of silence
Is to be co-present with those
To whom death has done no violence,
For it's merely another pose
Sustained without any breath
And breath's an impediment:
One could well do without
The effort that on breath's spent
And the lungs are busy about.

It doesn't seem any more natural
Than the beating of the heart,
And if it's stopped up one nostril
Then you have to draw air through your mouth.
We are congealed here and breathing,
But when I'm delivered from meat,
There'll be no question of losing,
But of life that is more complete,
As the clouds in trawling over
The fellside from the sea
A form of words uncover
Articulate to me.

Unsleeping

I thought I had a body but a skeleton
Was what lay underneath my writing hand,
A sterile diagram of ideas alone,
Neither water nor earth, but sterilities of sand.

Ideas must incarnate themselves in images
And images be also soaked in thought,
But I had made no such effective marriage,
And as a result no poem at all was caught.

It's three o'clock, but knowing I am sleepless,
I see no reason why I should go to bed,
It's time to follow living more and rules less,
Not the dominion of the head.

I am retired and can sleep tomorrow
Should the occasion arise as well it may,
As it is on a new attitude to sorrow,
I'll sit in my chair and brood the night away.

For sorrow, my sister and grief, my brother,
Run from I will no more, no, never again,
Since it's my daemon and I have no other
And thinking of it like this sops up the pain.

So that I feel now it's day brooding in my study
The possibility of becoming more entire,
Stretch out my writing hand and find it steady
And think of Pentecost and the tongues of fire.

There

Where the flowers are, where the birds are, water for them, bits of bread
In our garden where the roses grow serene, unblemished,
Purple aubretia on the rockery, clumps of it and widely spread
And a poisonous laburnum hangs down low its golden head:

Images of the more brilliant colours we shall know when we are dead.
Flowers, when we learn to see them, far more golden, purple, red,
Than the vegetable copies which down here are nourished,
Far less brilliant than in the condition of our dying are stated,

Where to feel's to speak though no specific language is stated
And since we see without a dark glass can't be misinterpreted,
Where no subterfuge is possible so we can't be cheated,
Ego and its complex confusions of bad chance at last being shed,
Who would not unhinge material for the freedom of the dead?

Peonies are in our front garden scarlet and infoliated,
Twenty of them from death's kingdom accurately copied
And the white enamoured roses by the sunlight unfurled,
Crackling fire about the body and you're free at last instead
Of the need for the unquiet, and your breath and daily bread.

Posthumous

Walking, the beautiful men and women
Are printed in time till their time runs away
And they go into an accustomed novelty
With which strangely they are strangely familiar.

Even now when they are wonderful
More shall they be in their ecstasy
Of transformation where it is possible to see
With no dark glass and so more meaningfully,

As they come out of time into the transfiguration,
Into their beauty and where they are most serene
With never any detritus to come between
Their capacity for the fullest communion.

As those who are young and beautiful,
So shall it be with those who are lined with old,
Backwards their temporal being is unrolled,
Till like the moon they are and at the full.

It is only passing from one room to another
And that has been happening always and is not remarkable,
Though of infernos the silly stories tell.
All shall be well except with those rooted in matter

Who return here for another session in the material
In the hope of at last seeing as it is
The ephemera of being as half fantasies,
Till they comprehend life's story is not all.

But for the beautiful and serene, there is no returning,
Who die in death as they died in their lives,
Like an undulation of sea waves,
An unseiging and unwithering forever of burning.

Night Thoughts

It is the precarious hour of 3 a.m.,
The time many set out on the road of dying,
There is no need to say mercy on them,
Since into fresh vitality they're passing.

I'd like to see my daughter in Amsterdam,
Since she brims with life like an evergreen river,
And since she loves, does not need to be where I am,
Since love exists in its time and place and is forever.

And you in your bedroom quietly sleeping,
My heart, who with no dumb disapproval,
Condemn these night vigils I love keeping,
Premonitions, they are, of after my funeral.

It's so good not to be frightened of dying,
Should I thank God or the unconscious for those visions that stopped fear
The point is there is no need for anything but rejoicing,
Living, dying, it is largely a question of nomenclature.

I have been reading philosophy for the sake of knowing
About those men with extremely high I.Q.s
Chockful of anxiety as to what they are doing and where they are going
They trace diagrams of darkness, like those trees

Outside my window choked with smothering,
Since there's a mist, it's coming from the sea.
Only dying when alive can stop you worrying
On death which is our primal certainty.

I remember in that last hospital I was in
Being stopped by a lunatic who cried: 'You're dead, you're dead.'
Then took his hand from my throat and to sing began.
'I'm the only man in the world left alive.' Interpreted

Silence is the extreme form of speaking,
Glowing suddenly in a pause, out of great quiet,
Like what I miss now, the orison of bird song.

The equations in the end will all come out.
About an hour now for the shivering light,
Such blurred details of being and right and wrong:
You say 'Good morning' since you say 'Good night'.

Naming

Your name is my name and has been since together
We came, rubbing salt out of our eyes, from the unchiding sea,
Being, at times, most ourselves when with each other;
There is little to be said that living does not say,
Whether tropical we share or intolerable freezing weather.
We leave in travelling wakes of history,
A stain that celebrates not without some honour
The journeying of those who indeed do journey,
Although the point is always on and further.

The scars are needed. They herald novelty
And are shed when it hardens into scars again
And cease to suggest the living tissue;
In this sense Genesis is synonymous with Amen,
Particularly here etched with blood, bone, excrement.
Although I enjoy the terms of I and You,
And even glimpse, summer lightning, what they represent,
Will you really be sorry that at least for some brief, if few,
Instants you will be without corporeal let or impediment?

Agate tonight from our oak table glistens,
Blue stone upon your finger, the gold ring,
Our old dog – 4 a.m. – looks up and listens
And shakes his head when I say: 'Henry, there's nothing',
Imagining footsteps stopping at our door.
A year or so and as on the mountains of his going
He'll stop and wait for me and move no more.

Death on my tongue tonight seems, well, unimportant,
Margaret sleeping above me, you are right, dying no untruth is,
But it does not mean being pressed forward by one instant.
No, I have been there, have sensed intensities
Of feeling and knowing, uncircumscribed by any moment.
How wrong they are who see behind the tissue
Only a platitude of bone and that terrible headstone.
It's what uses the bone and so on that is you,
That is me, salt-caked, but forever someone.

Midsummer Day

What a cold summer,
June like November,
Warm clothes we wear and
Without end shiver,
Dampness its kind
Repeating forever
Though red and white roses
On the clay soil flourish.

Their beauty erases
The damps where we perish,
Who need heat
Our lungs to dry out,
Sempiternal heartbeat.

It was hot as coals
Last zero summer,
They could not nourish the lambs
Because of heat's shimmer.

Inconstant weather
Is where we are
Growing together,
A constant star.



The World of Imagination and Poetic Imagery according to Ibn al-'Arabî

WILLIAM C. CHITTICK

As Henry Corbin has shown in his pioneering studies, imagination plays a fundamental role in the world views of many important Muslim thinkers. The great Sufi Ibn al-'Arabî (d. A.H. 638/C.E. 1240) considered imagination as the underlying stuff of both the universe and the human soul and insisted upon placing imaginal perception on an equal footing with rational understanding. In Ibn al-'Arabî's view, reason or intellect ('aql) can provide knowledge of only one-half of reality; unless the seeker after knowledge sees with both the eye of intellect and the eye of imagination, he will never understand God, the cosmos, or himself.

Ibn al-'Arabî was the author of several hundred prose works, including the monumental *Futûḥât al-makkiyya*. He was also one of the most prolific of Arab poets, composing at least three diwans and many thousands of additional verses scattered throughout his prose writings. As the greatest Muslim theoretician of imagination, he was able to utilize the possibilities of poetical expression gained through the active imagination with perfect awareness of what he was doing. Poetry, he knew, was a gift to the poet from the sphere of Venus and the prophet Joseph, and he himself had received this gift during his ascents through the celestial spheres to God.

So far as is known, Ibn al-'Arabî has not explained systematically or in detail the relationship between imagination on a cosmic scale and the mode in which the poet's imagination makes use of the possibilities of language to express invisible realities. However, he alludes to this process in many passages of his works and discusses it rather explicitly in *Dhakhâ'ir al-a'lâq*, his own commentary on his diwan, *Tarjûmân al-ashwâq*. R. A. Nicholson realized the importance of these two works eighty years ago and published a complete translation of the *Tarjûmân* with selections from the commentary.¹ However, Nicholson provides no theoretical introduction to the translation, nor does

he make any attempt to explain the technical nature of much of the terminology employed. In fact, if we want to appreciate the depth and complexity of Ibn al-Arabî's commentary in the context of thirteenth century Islamic thought, we would need a major book on Ibn al-Arabî's concept of imagination including a detailed discussion of the manner in which it relates to his metaphysics, cosmology, and psychology. Since that book has not yet been written, I would like to provide here its introduction, outlining some of the many topics which would have to be covered.² I suspect that only this type of analysis will allow us to begin to unravel the world of meanings behind the literary forms of the Sufi poets, not only in Arabic, but also in Persian, Turkish, and other Islamic languages. At the same time, we may be able to learn something about the imagery employed by poets who had no claims to Sufi affiliations. Given the deeply Islamic character of the intellectual context in which poetry was composed, certain dimensions of the Islamic world view are always portrayed, and the roots of these were best expressed by Islam's own mystical theoreticians.

As is well known, Ibn al-Arabî wrote his commentary on the *Tarjumân al-ashwâq* to refute the claim of a certain jurist that the work did not deal with the 'divine mysteries' but rather with sensual love. Nicholson, in contrast to some earlier scholars, had no doubt as to Ibn al-Arabî's sincerity, and he expresses his gratitude to the skeptic who caused Ibn al-Arabî to write the commentary. As Nicholson remarks, 'Without [Ibn al-Arabî's] guidance the most sympathetic readers would seldom have hit upon the hidden meanings which his fantastic ingenuity elicits from the conventional phrases of an Arabic *qasîda*.' Then Nicholson tells us that the author has 'overshot the mark' and 'take[s] refuge in far-fetched verbal analogies and . . . descend[s] with startling rapidity from the sublime to the ridiculous'.³ While expressing our gratitude to Nicholson for his pioneering contribution to scholarship in translating this work, we may still be allowed to question his evaluation by asking how Ibn al-Arabî's commentary on the *Tarjumân* would have been perceived within the intellectual climate of his own day, and more particularly, within the context of Ibn al-Arabî's own teachings. From this perspective, Ibn al-Arabî's 'ingenuity' does not seem nearly so 'fantastic' as Nicholson believed, since, in the *Futûhât al-makkiyya* alone, Ibn al-Arabî provides about

15,000 more pages of the same sort of 'far-fetched verbal analogies'. If one were to drop *Dhakhā'ir al-a'lāq* into the middle of the *Futūḥāt*, no one would notice. The only thing 'ridiculous' here is that Nicholson should have judged Ibn al-'Arabī from within the cognitive blinkers of British rationalism.

In providing selections from Ibn al-'Arabī's commentary, Nicholson leads us to believe that he has given us all the significant sections. He says, 'I have rendered the interesting and important passages nearly word for word'.⁴ But Nicholson's evaluation of the 'interesting and important' rested on the concerns of the scholarship of his day. It is sufficient to read Ibn al-'Arabī's commentary in relation to the *Futūḥāt* to see that in fact Nicholson left out most of what was 'interesting and important' for Ibn al-'Arabī and his followers and that much of what Nicholson no doubt considered as a 'descent to the ridiculous' provides the key to situating the poetry within the context of Islamic thought. Everything that Ibn al-'Arabī says about his *qaṣīdas* has a firm grounding in the Koran and the Hadith, mystical theology, cosmology, and the Muslim experience of God.

* * *

The first line of the *Tarjumān* reads, 'Would that I were aware whether they knew what heart they possessed!' Ibn al-'Arabī's commentary tells us that the word 'they' refers to *al-manāẓir al-'ulā*, a term which Nicholson translates as 'the Divine Ideas', without any explanation as to what these ideas might signify. Though often called by different names, these 'ideas' reappear in the commentary with frequency. But our first mistake, which precludes any understanding of what is going on in the rest of the work, is to translate *manāẓir* as 'ideas' and *'ulā* as 'divine'. *Manāẓir* is the plural of *manẓar*, from the root *nazara*, which means primarily, 'to look, to view, to perceive with the eyes'.⁵ The literal sense of the term *manẓar* is 'a place in which a thing is looked upon' or a 'locus of vision'. *'Ulā* is the plural of *a'lā*, meaning 'higher'. Hence, the *manāẓir al-'ulā* are the 'higher loci of vision'. As a technical term in cosmology, 'higher' is contrasted with 'lower' (*asfal*); the 'higher world' is the invisible realm, inhabited by angels and spirits. The 'lower world' is the visible realm, inhabited by corporeal bodies. Hence the 'lower loci of vision' (*al-manāẓir al-suffā*) would be the things which we perceive through our eyes or sight (*baṣar*), while the 'higher

loci of vision' are the things we perceive through the inward, spiritual faculty called by such names as insight (*baṣīra*), unveiling (*kashf*), and tasting (*dhawq*). The 'organ' through which a human being perceives the invisible and higher things is the heart (*qalb*). Even God Himself may be seen with the heart, and in his commentary Ibn al-Arabī frequently reminds us of the famous ḥadīth qudsī, 'Neither My heavens nor My earth encompass Me, but the heart of My believing servant does encompass Me.'

Ibn al-Arabī employs the form *manẓar* or 'locus of vision' to indicate that here we are dealing in fact with two realities, a reality which is seen (*manẓûr*) and the level (*martaba*) at which it is seen. The ultimate object of vision is God Himself. But God in Himself is absolutely invisible and indefinable; He is seen not in His unknowable Essence (*dhât*), but in His manifestation (*ẓuhûr*) or self-disclosure (*tajallî*), and this takes place within a form, which is the 'locus' (*maḥall*) in which vision occurs. The form may be called by many names, such as 'imaginal form' (*ṣûra khayâliyya* or *ṣûra mithâliyya*), 'locus of witnessing' (*mashhad*), 'locus of manifestation' (*maẓhar*), 'locus of self-disclosure' (*majlâ* or *mutajallâ fih*), 'spirituality' (*rûḥâniyya*), and so on. Each of these terms has special nuances and needs to be discussed in its own context. The present paper will allow us only to touch on some of them.⁶

The 'higher loci of vision' which Ibn al-Arabī mentions at the very beginning form the subject of the whole commentary. In effect, each poem represents the description of God's self-disclosures as they appeared to the poet in the invisible world. By not providing an introduction and beginning the commentary with the term 'Divine Ideas', Nicholson makes it nearly impossible for anyone not thoroughly versed in Ibn al-Arabī's world view to realize what the commentary is all about, and thus Nicholson's claim that the interpretations are 'far-fetched' seems quite reasonable.

It was natural enough for Nicholson to talk of 'ideas', given the context of Western intellectual history, where all thinking considered significant has been based upon logic and ratiocination. Nor was it strange for him to translate 'higher' as 'divine', given the fact that the intermediate worlds have been all but banished from the mainstream of Western thought, so that we are left basically with only two levels of being, God and the physical realm. But given the studies of Corbin

and others, it is now generally known that the Muslims never lost sight of the worlds that separate the visible from God Himself. These are basically two, the world of the spirits or angels and the world of imagination. Ibn al-'Arabî's works have to be read with a clear understanding of the nature of these intermediate realms of existence. In the present paper, we will concentrate on imagination, since it is closer to our own perception and has a more immediate effect upon poetic imagery.

One of the basic differences between 'ideas' and 'loci of vision' or 'images' is that the former are thought about, while the latter are seen, heard, touched, tasted, and smelled. The imaginal realm is a sensory realm, while the rational realm is disengaged from all sensory attributes. The rational faculty – *al-'aql* – works by a process of stringing concepts together and drawing conclusions, but the imaginal faculty – *al-khayâl* – works through an inward perception analogous to sense perception. For an Ibn al-'Arabî the subject matter of poetry is not something that one thinks about as one might think about a problem in scholastic theology (*Kalâm*), but it is something which is seen with the inward eye and heard with the inward ear, and only then described.

These basic points may not seem strange to those familiar with the 'poetic imagination' in general, but most people are certainly not familiar with the elaborate and extremely detailed metaphysics, theology, cosmology, and psychology upon which Ibn al-'Arabî bases his views. In this brief introduction, it will only be possible to provide the barest outline of a few of the concepts necessary to grasp Ibn al-'Arabî's position on the relationship between the poet's imaginal world and the thinker's rational world – between 'ideas' and 'loci of vision'.

Imagination

Ibn al-'Arabî's concept of imagination needs to be approached from at least two directions: as a subjective human experience and an objective phenomenon in the cosmos. We will have a better chance of grasping the nature of imagination by situating it within Ibn al-'Arabî's overall view of the universe, since imagination's cosmological situation determines the manner in which human beings experience it. It should be remarked in passing that most of what Ibn

al-'Arabî says concerning imagination has precedents in earlier Muslim thinkers.

But first, how can imagination be defined, without regard to the place within which it manifests itself? In Ibn al-'Arabî's view, the outstanding feature of imagination is its intrinsic ambiguity, deriving from the fact that it dwells in an intermediary situation; it is a *barzakh* – an 'isthmus' or 'interworld' – or a reality standing between two other realities and needing to be defined in terms of both. Ibn al-'Arabî, like others, commonly points to dreams as the most familiar example of imaginal realities. The image seen in a dream needs to be described in terms of both our subjective experience and the objective content. If you see a friend in a dream, you are seeing your friend on the one hand and your own self on the other; the content of your dream is subjective, yet it also has a certain objective validity, since you are seeing that particular friend and not another. We must affirm your vision as both true and untrue, since in one sense you see a specific thing, and in another sense you do not. In the following passage, Ibn al-'Arabî explains the ambiguous nature of imagination by describing the image seen in a mirror, one of the most common examples provided in the texts.

Imagination is neither existent nor nonexistent, neither known nor unknown, neither affirmed nor denied. For example, a person perceives his own form in a mirror. He knows for certain that he has perceived his form in one respect and he knows for certain that he has not perceived his form in another respect . . . He cannot deny that he has seen his form, and he knows that his form is not in the mirror, nor is it between himself and the mirror . . . Hence he is neither a truth-teller nor a liar in his words, 'I saw my form, I did not see my form.'⁷

In short, wherever we meet imagination, we are faced with ambiguity. If we affirm something about it, we will probably have to deny the same thing with only a slight shift in point of view. This same feature marks imagination when it is considered on a cosmic scale. Here Ibn al-'Arabî employs the term in two basic senses. In the first sense, everything other than God is imagination, since the universe or what we commonly call 'existence' is that which stands between the Absolute Being of God and absolute nothingness. If we say that God is 'existent', we cannot say the same thing about the cosmos in the same

sense, so the cosmos must be considered 'nonexistent'; yet we know that it does exist in some respect, or else we would not be here to speak about it. As a result, the universe is neither existent nor nonexistent; or it is both existent and nonexistent. Moreover, we know for certain that the cosmos, while being 'other than God', tells us something about God, since God's 'signs' (*âyat*) – which reflect His names and attributes – are displayed within it. In other words, the cosmos is in some sense the self-manifestation or self-disclosure of God. Hence, when Ibn al-'Arabî calls the universe 'imagination', he has in view the ambiguous status of all that exists apart from God and the fact that the universe displays God, just as an image in a mirror displays the reality of him who looks into the mirror. This is the sense of the following verses from the *Fuṣūṣ*:

The engendered universe is nothing but imagination,
yet in reality, it is God.

He who understands this point
has grasped the mysteries of the Path.⁸

In a second cosmological sense, imagination is the intermediate world between the two fundamental created worlds, that is, the spiritual world and the corporeal world. The contrast between spirits and bodies is expressed in terms of many pairs of opposites, such as luminous and dark, unseen and visible, inward and outward, non-manifest and manifest, high and low, subtle and dense. In every case imagination is an intermediary reality or *barzakh* between the two sides, possessing attributes of both. Hence the 'World of Imagination' needs to be described as 'neither/nor' or as 'both/and'. It is neither luminous nor dark, or both luminous and dark. It is neither unseen nor visible, or both unseen and visible.

For example, the *jinn* are intermediate beings, dwelling in the World of Imagination. Hence they are neither angels nor corporeal things, while they have qualities that are both angelic and corporeal, both luminous and dark. This is expressed mythically by the idea that the angels are created of light, mankind of clay, and the *jinn* of fire. Fire is an intermediate state between light and clay; it is subtle and dense at one and the same time. Fire shows its freedom from clay in the way it shoots up towards the sky, but it is tied to clay by the substance which burns. So also the *jinn* are both luminous and dark,

subtle and dense, unseen and visible. They have bodily forms, so they are corporeal, yet they can change their bodily forms at will, so they are free of many of the characteristics of corporeality.

We said above that a distinguishing feature of imagination is its intermediate status and intrinsic ambiguity. When we observe the lesser world of imagination – the intermediary realm between the world of spirits and the world of corporeal bodies – we see that this distinguishing feature has to do with the fact that imagination brings spiritual entities into relationship with corporeal entities. The way in which imagination does this is to display the incorporeal realities at its own level by giving them the attributes of corporeal things. In other words, imagination brings about the corporealization (*tajassud*) of immaterial things, though they do not gain all the attributes of corporeality, remaining 'both/and'. In Ibn al-'Arabi's own words, 'The reality of imagination is to embody that which is not properly a body'.⁹ Thus, for example, in dreams we see our own souls embodied in the form of images. It is only because of imagination that unseen realities can be described through attributes pertaining to the visible world, as when angels are described as having wings. But this description is not metaphorical, since unseen things actually take on visible forms in the imaginal realm independent of the observer. Thus within the world of imagination the angels assume bodily shape and appear in visions to the prophets and the friends of God, and within this same world the souls of human beings become corporealized after death to experience the delights and torments of the grave.¹⁰

When we look at imagination as a reality within the human microcosm, we see the term being used in two closely related meanings. In the first sense, imagination is the inward realm of human beings which acts as the intermediary between the luminous and immaterial divine spirit – which God 'breathed' into man (Koran 32:9) – and the dark and dense body, made out of clay. But spirit and body – light and clay – have no common measure by which they might come together. The spirit is one, luminous, subtle, high, and invisible, while the body is many, dark, dense, low, and visible. Hence God created the soul as the *barzakh* or interworld between spirit and body. It is both one and many, luminous and dark, subtle and dense, high and low, invisible and visible. The soul, in other words, is built of imagination, which helps explain its affinity to the jinn – Satan in particular. In this

broad sense, imagination is the microcosmic equivalent of the World of Imagination in the outside world. The human task is to strengthen the luminous side of the soul by moving in the direction of the spirit and to weaken the controlling power of the body. Since the spirit is one reality while the body is built of many parts, the strengthening of the spiritual dimension of the soul is a process whereby man moves toward unity and integration, while the domination of the corporeal side of the soul is a movement toward multiplicity and dispersion. In the next stage of life – the *barzakh* or interworld between death and resurrection – the happiness and wholeness of the human state depends upon the degree of integration which has been achieved in this world.

Finally, in the fourth and narrowest sense, imagination corresponds more or less to the human faculty known by this name in English. It is a specific power of the soul which builds bridges between the spiritual and the corporeal. On the one hand, it 'spiritualizes' the corporeal things perceived by the senses and stores them in memory; on the other hand, it 'corporealizes' the spiritual things perceived in the heart by giving them shape and form. The 'storehouse of imagination' (*khizānat al-khayāl*) within the soul is a treasury full of images derived both from the outward and the inward worlds. Each image is a mixture of subtlety and density, luminosity and darkness, clarity and murkiness.

Imagination versus Intellect

Whether we consider imagination as the whole universe, as the domain lying between spirits and bodies, as the human soul, or as a specific faculty of the soul, its ultimate significance can only be understood in terms of its relationship to the Divine Reality from which it comes forth. One of the most important of the many concepts through which Ibn al-Arabī describes the coming into existence of the cosmos and the soul is the above-mentioned *tajallī* – 'self-disclosure' or 'self-unveiling' (from the same root as *jilwa*, or the unveiling of a bride on her wedding night). Both in the macrocosm and the microcosm, God discloses Himself by manifesting the properties of His names and attributes.

The Muslim scholastic theologians place tremendous emphasis upon God's transcendence or 'incomparability' (*tanzīh*), while the

Sufis, Ibn al-'Arabī in particular, stress equally God's immanence or 'similarity' (*tashbīh*). 'Wherever you turn,' Ibn al-'Arabī likes to quote from the Koran, 'there is the face of God' (2:115). Because everything in the cosmos is God's self-disclosure, we gain a valid knowledge of God through studying the cosmos and seeing God's face in all things. God is 'similar' to all things because He manifests His own qualities through them. But He is 'incomparable' with all things because in Himself He stands infinitely beyond every created thing. At one and the same time He is both transcendent and immanent.

In Ibn al-'Arabī's view, intellect (*al-'aql*) – the primary tool of the theologians – easily proves God's incomparability, but cannot grasp His similarity. In contrast, imagination perceives His similarity, but knows nothing of His incomparability. Imagination is able to 'see' God in His self-disclosure and similarity, while intellect 'knows' God in His incomparability. In Ibn al-'Arabī's words,

The sensory and imaginative faculties demand by their essences to see Him who brought them into existence, while intellects demand by their essences and their proofs . . . to know Him who brought them into existence.¹¹

Perfect knowledge involves both knowing God through intellect and perceiving Him through imagination. We cannot understand God as both transcendent and immanent unless we employ the two faculties at once. Either faculty employed alone provides us with a distorted picture of reality. Exclusive stress upon incomparability cuts God off from the cosmos, while exclusive stress on similarity makes a person lose sight of the unity of the Real and leads to polytheism and 'associationism' (*shirk*).

God's *tajallī* or self-disclosure embraces everything that exists: From the human point of view, it has two dimensions, the manifest and the nonmanifest. The manifest dimension is the visible world, and the nonmanifest dimension the invisible world. Human beings are microcosms containing within themselves all the worlds. Hence the human body is a visible self-disclosure of God, spirit is an invisible self-disclosure, and soul stands half-way between the visible and invisible realms.

In the spiritual journey, the Sufis strive to integrate the body and the soul into the spirit, such that unity dominates and man becomes a

perfect mirror reflecting the whole of reality. The movement toward integration takes place within the soul, and the soul is an intermediary reality, woven of imagination. The psychological and spiritual states of the soul, which are the self-disclosures of God to the human microcosm, cannot be satisfactorily described through the rational approach, since intellect's genius lies in abstraction. In other words, intellect understands only God's incomparability, so it strips qualities away from Him by declaring that 'nothing is like Him' (Koran 42:11). But this is only half the knowledge of God. Perfect knowledge demands knowledge of similarity as well as incomparability. Through knowing their own souls, the adepts gain knowledge of God's self-disclosure, of His similarity and immanence in themselves. Ibn al-'Arabî interprets the famous prophetic saying 'He who knows himself knows his Lord' to mean that through knowing oneself, one knows God's self-disclosures in one's body, soul, and spirit – though one can never know God in Himself, in His very Essence, since, as intellect affirms, He is incomparable with all things. And, on the level of the soul, this knowledge of God's self-disclosure can only be grasped through imagination, which perceives concretely by an inward vision that is both spiritual (since inward and invisible) and corporeal (since sensory in form).

In the *Futûḥât* Ibn al-'Arabî provides countless examples and illustrations of the nature of the self-disclosures of God that take place in the hearts of the gnostics. Sufis long before him had already divided the types of self-disclosure into a large number of categories, often describing these in terms of the 'stations' (*maqâmât*) of the spiritual path. Ibn al-'Arabî expands upon these categories in lengthy passages, all the while tying in earlier material with his own particular mode of expressing the nature of reality. In effect, the *Futûḥât* is an enormous compendium on the science of visions and the knowledge of God's incomparability; it maps the spiritual stations and visionary experiences of the 'friends of God' in tremendous detail. In relation to the *Futûḥât*, the *Tarjumân al-ashwâq* appears as an illustration of a few of these stations in the poetical and imaginal language which pertains to the visionary realm. In order to provide a taste of the type of description and analysis of the world of imagination which Ibn al-'Arabî provides, I will quote a few short passages from the *Futûḥât* and the commentary on the *Tarjumân*.

Self-disclosure and Witnessing

Within his own self, a human being has access to all the worlds. Through his external senses, he perceives only the visible world, but through his internal senses, he is able to perceive the whole of the microcosm, which includes the levels of body, soul, and spirit. God may disclose Himself to man at any of these levels, but to the extent that perception of the inward worlds is expressible in human language, it must pertain to the imaginal realm of the soul. In other words, the traveller may perceive God's self-manifestation at the level of the spirit, but if he is able to speak of this, he will do so through the imaginal effect which this perception leaves within his soul.

One question that the sceptical reader will immediately ask concerning the use of imagery to refer to the divine self-disclosures is why Ibn al-Arabî does not say what he means. If he is referring to God and not to beautiful women, why should he not say so? There are a number of answers to this question. One is that these are divine self-disclosures, not God Himself. By definition we are dealing not with God as such but God inasmuch as He shows Himself. Hence the adept speaks in terms of his perception of God's manifestation, and this perception takes place through the medium of imaginal forms. This is the level of *tashbih*, of the divine similarity to the soul, and *tashbih* can only be grasped in relationship to created things, so creation determines our point of reference. God in Himself is beyond human knowledge.

Second, the poet wants to convey his vision to the reader in a language which the reader will be able to understand. He cannot use the language of theology, since that is the language of intellect and abstraction and has no way to express the divine self-disclosures, preferring rather to deny them. The perception of God's self-disclosures takes place within the imaginal realm in terms of the five senses, so it is only sensual language which can express what has been perceived. Rational explanation of the imagery would take the reader away from the reality of the self-disclosure, rather than closer to it.

Third, Ibn al-Arabî felt that he had a message to deliver to his contemporaries concerning the spiritual life, so he tried to speak in a language which would attract his listeners and bring about some sort of awakening in those souls who had sufficient spiritual aptitude. As he himself remarks:

I allude [in the *Tarjumân al-ashwâq*] to lordly gnostic sciences, divine lights, spiritual mysteries, intellectual sciences, and Shari'ite admonishments. But I have expressed all this in the tongue of erotic love and amatory affairs, since souls are enamored of such expressions.¹²

A fourth important point has to do with 'courtesy' (*adab*), which is one of the primary attributes of the perfect human being (*al-insân al-kâmil*), intimately connected with his 'wisdom' (*hikma*), which puts everything in its proper place. Ibn al-Arabî stresses the role of courtesy in speaking of God while discussing his words in the *Tarjumân*, 'her speech restores to life, as tho' she, in giving life thereby, were Jesus'.¹³ He explains that this is a reference to the Koranic verse, 'I breathed into him from My spirit' (15:29) or to the verse, 'Our only word when We desire a thing is to say to it, "Be!", and it is' (16:40). The reason 'her speech' is compared to Jesus and not to the life-giving breath of God expressed in these verses is 'courtesy': 'For we do not resort to declaring anything similar to the Divine Presence unless we find nothing in created existence to which similarity can be declared'.¹⁴

However this may be, Ibn al-Arabî tells us frequently in the commentary that he is in fact describing God's self-disclosures. In the context of visionary experience, he defines these 'self-disclosures' as 'the lights of unseen things that are unveiled to hearts'.¹⁵ He frequently describes self-disclosure in terms of the locus of manifestation (*mazhar*), that is the 'place' or form within which God manifests Himself. The term *mazhar* derives from the same root as the divine name *al-zâhir*, the 'Manifest', which contrasts with God as *al-bâṭin*, the 'Nonmanifest'. As the Essence, God is forever incomparable and nonmanifest, but as the self-revealing God, He is similar to created things and His face is visible within the forms of the sensory and the imaginal worlds.

The divine loci of self-manifestation (*al-mazâhir al-ilâhiyya*) are called 'self-disclosures'. The fundamental Light [of the Essence] is nonmanifest within them and unseen by us, while the forms in which self-disclosure occurs are the places wherein the loci of manifestation become manifest. Hence our sight falls upon the loci of manifestation.¹⁶

In the *Tarjumân*, Ibn al-'Arabî often employs the term *mithâl* or 'image' and its derivatives to refer to the World of Imagination, which he calls *ḥadrat al-mithâl* (the 'Presence of Images') and *âlam al-tamthîl* or *âlam al-tamaththul* (the 'world of imaginalization'). For example, in explaining a verse which begins, 'she said', he writes, 'In other words, this divine reality within this imaginal form (*al-ṣûrat al-mithâliyya*) said . . .'.¹⁷ In commenting on another verse, he writes, 'Various sciences became manifest to me in corporealized form within the world of imaginalization'.¹⁸ He speaks of the realities of the 'high spirits' which enter into the heart, while making reference to the hadith according to which Gabriel used to appear to the Prophet in the form of Dihya Kalbî, the most beautiful man of the time: 'The realities become manifest within imaginal bodies in the world of imaginalization – like the form of Gabriel within the form of Dihya'.¹⁹

The divine loci of vision wherein God's self-disclosures are seen are often referred to as *mashhad*, 'locus of witnessing' (from *shuhûd*, an important technical term). 'Imaginal witnessing' takes place within the world of imagination or *barzakh*. Explaining the significance of the word 'moon' (*qamar*), Ibn al-'Arabî writes, 'The poet compares God to the *qamar*, which is a state between the full moon (*badr*) and the crescent moon (*hilâl*). This is a *barzakhî*, imaginal, formal locus of witnessing apprehended by the imagination'.²⁰

Vision of the divine self-disclosures provides the spiritual traveller with knowledge of God. To support this claim, Ibn al-'Arabî frequently makes reference to various hadiths which speak of the visionary experiences of the Prophet and his companions. One in particular is especially explicit. The Prophet reported that in a dream he was given a glass of milk, so he drank it. He was asked how he interpreted the milk. He replied, 'Knowledge'. Ibn al-'Arabî refers to this hadith in explaining a series of verses whose imagery refers to various degrees of sciences bestowed upon the gnostic through his visions of the unseen realm. He wants to explain why a certain specific imagery is employed in the following two verses:

[Boughs] trailing skirts of haughtiness; clad in embroidered garments of beauty;

Which from modesty grudge to bestow their loveliness; which give old heirlooms and new gifts.

He writes that the imagery of the verse represents the actual form in which he perceived the knowledge which was given to him through the self-disclosure.

Since these gnostic sciences are provided to the gnostic from the Presence of Imagination – just as knowledge was provided [to the Prophet] in the form of milk – the poet describes the sciences in the form in which they disclosed themselves to him.²¹

He alludes to the same hadith in commenting on the verses, 'A woman slender, lissome, of fresh beauty, for whom the heart of the sad lover is longing. The assembly is filled with fragrance at the mention of her, and every tongue utters her name':

The poet says: This knowledge [given by the vision being expressed in the poem] has as its object a [divine] attribute which, when it discloses itself in the world of imaginalization, is harmonious in character, inclining toward him who loves it, and fresh in beauty. Hearts in which the fire of uprooting (*iṣṭilām*) has been kindled long for it. Whenever it is mentioned in an assembly, its mention fills the assembly with fragrance, because of the pleasantness of its aroma. Hence it is loved by every tongue, for each is refreshed by speaking about it.

Hence this [divine] attribute is one which can be grasped by verbal expression (*'ibāra*). The reason for this is that it becomes manifest within the world of imaginalization and becomes delimited by description. However, the knowing listener recognizes that to which allusion is made through the description which is expressed, just as the reality of knowledge is recognized in 'milk'.²²

In an interesting passage in the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn al-'Arabī makes an explicit connection between poets and the world of imagination through a visionary description of the ascent (*mi'rāj*) of the soul to the divine presence. Following the hadiths concerning the Prophet's *mi'rāj*, Ibn al-'Arabī places a specific prophet in each of the celestial spheres, then discusses the special sciences pertaining to that prophet and acquired by the traveller when he reaches that sphere in his own ascent. The third sphere, that of Venus, is inhabited by Joseph, the great dream interpreter. Hence in this level one acquires knowledge of the world of imagination and how to interpret images, and it is from this sphere that the poets gain their inspiration.

When the traveller reaches the planet Venus, Venus takes him before Joseph, who casts to him the sciences which God had singled out for him, that is, those connected to the forms of imaginalization (*tamaththul*) and imagination (*khayâl*). For Joseph was one of the great masters of the science of interpretation (*ta'bîr*), so God made present before him the earth which He created from the left-over of Adam's clay, the Market of the Garden, and the imaginal bodies of the spirits made of light and fire and of the high meanings (*al-ma'ânî al-'ilwiyya*);²³ He made known to him their yardsticks, measures, relationships, and lineages. He showed him years in the form of cows, the fertility of the years in the form of the cows' fatness, drought in the form of their leanness, knowledge in the form of milk, and firmness in religion in the form of a fetter.²⁴ God never ceased teaching him the corporealization of meanings within the forms of sense perception and sensory objects, and He gave him the knowledge of interpretation (*ta'wîl*) in all of that.

This is the celestial sphere of complete form-giving (*al-taṣwîr al-tâmm*) and harmonious arrangement (*al-niẓâm*). From this sphere are derived assistance (*imdâd*) for poets. From it also arrive arrangement, proper fashioning, and geometrical forms (*al-ṣuwar al-handasiyya*) within corporeal bodies and the giving of forms to these bodies within the soul . . . From this sphere is known the meaning of proper fashioning, correct making, the beauty whose existence comprises wisdom, and the beauty which is desired by and agreeable to a specific human constitution.²⁵

Not every self-disclosure of God enters into verbal expression, since self-disclosure may take place within the spirit beyond the world of imagination and leave no expressible trace within the soul. Ibn al-'Arabî often attributes this sort of self-disclosure to the Divine Essence, which is utterly incomparable and inexpressible. In both the *Tarjumân* and the *Futûḥât*, he commonly compares this self-disclosure of the Essence to 'lightning'. He explains the rationale for this comparison by saying, 'Flashes of lightning are compared to the loci of witnessing the Essence (*al-mashâhid al-dhâtiyya*) in that they have no subsistence (*baqâ'*)'.²⁶ In the *Tarjumân*, while commenting on the verse, 'Thy lightning never breaks its promise of rain except with me', he writes,

Here the poet alludes to the fact that he attained to a high station to which none of his peers had attained. 'Lightning' is a locus of

witnessing the Essence. Its giving rain refers to the gnostic sciences to which it gives rise when they are actualized within the heart of him who witnesses it. To say that it gives rain tells us that it is a locus of witnessing the Essence within an imaginal veil (*hijāb mumaththal*), just as God has said concerning Gabriel: 'He imaginalized himself to her [Mary] as a man without fault' (Koran 19:17). Through this imaginalization, Gabriel gave Jesus to her. In the same way, God gave various forms of gnostic sciences through 'rain' within the locus in which lightning was witnessed to everyone but me.

The poet says, 'For thy lightning breaks its promise'. In other words, no knowledge is actualized in the soul of the witnesser through this locus of witnessing the Essence, since it is a self-disclosure without material form (*ṣūra mādiyya*). Hence imagination has nothing to retain and intellect has nothing to understand, since this self-disclosure does not enter under 'how', 'how many', state, description, or attribute.²⁷

Ibn al-Arabī amplifies his explanation of the difference between 'lightning' or the locus of witnessing the Essence and imaginal unveiling in his commentary on the line, 'And when they promise you aught, you see that its lightning gives a false promise of rain'.²⁸ The 'they' under discussion are the 'winds', which refer to different forms of self-disclosure which arise from the Divine Breath.²⁹

The poet says, 'when they make promises, it is like the lightning which breaks its promise', that is, the lightning which has neither thunder nor rain, so it produces no result, like the 'barren wind' (Koran 51:41). Here 'their promise' comes through a locus of witnessing the Essence, which is why it is compared to lightning. The locus of witnessing the Essence yields no result in the heart of the servant, since it is not retained; nothing is actualized through it except the heart's witnessing, while the heart beats wildly. For this locus of witnessing is far exalted above being constrained by any created thing. It contrasts with self-disclosure within a form in the world of imaginalization, since [in the latter case] the viewer retains the form of that which discloses itself to him and he is able to express it – as shown by many examples in the hadith literature of things which have no sensory form.³⁰

In the *Futūḥāt* Ibn al-Arabī frequently refers to the relevant hadiths, derived mainly from the standard collections, such as the already

mentioned milk in the form of knowledge. Other examples are death in the form of a piebald ram, Islam in the form of a dome or a pillar, the Koran in the form of butter or honey, religion in the form of a cord, and God in the form of a light or a human being.

Self-disclosure within the locus of witnessing is determined and defined by two sides, as befits an imaginal reality. On the one hand, God discloses Himself. On the other hand, the servant perceives Him. But as Rûmî has reminded us in a similar context, 'If you pour the ocean into a cup, how much will it hold? One day's store.'³¹ The vision of God always becomes delimited by the preparedness (*isti'dâd*) of the viewer. Moreover, God reveals Himself under an infinite variety of aspects, in keeping with the axiom, 'Self-disclosure never repeats itself' (*lâ takrâr fi'l-tajallî*). Nevertheless, there are modalities or general categories of self-disclosure, as we have just seen in the distinction between the locus of witnessing the Essence and witnessing within the imaginal, *barzakhî* world.

In the *Futûḥât* Ibn al-Arabî classifies self-disclosures and loci of witnessing in great detail and from many different points of view. In order to provide a taste of this sort of discussion, I quote a typical visionary passage in which he explains the difference between two different types of light which are perceived through self-disclosure, light which is 'radiant' (*shā'shā'ânî*) and light 'which has no rays' (*mā lahu shu'ā'*). In his usual fashion, Ibn al-Arabî finds sources for these terms in the prophetic literature. At the end of the passage, he shows how these two visions are connected to incomparability and similarity. Since God is incomparable, the eyes are blinded, but the intellect is able to understand this; since He is similar, the eyes are able to see Him, but the intellect cannot fathom how this is possible. Perfect knowledge involves both perceptions at once.

Lights are of two kinds: a light which has no rays, and a radiant light. If self-disclosure takes place within radiant light, it takes away the sight. The Messenger of God alluded to this light when it was said to him, 'Hast thou seen thy Lord?' He replied, 'He is a light. How should I see Him?' In other words, He is radiant light, since the rays take away sight and prevent the viewer from perceiving Him from whom the rays derive. This is the same light to which the Prophet alluded when he said, 'God has seventy thousand veils of light and darkness; were He to remove them,

the splendors of His face would incinerate everything perceived by the sight of His creatures.' Here the 'splendors' are the lights of His Reality (*ḥaqīqa*), for the 'face' of a thing is its reality.

As for the light which has no rays, that is the light within which self-disclosure takes place without rays so that its brightness does not go outside of itself; the viewer perceives it with utmost clarity and lucidity without any doubt, while the presence in which he dwells remains in utmost clarity and limpidness, such that nothing of it becomes absent from him. Concerning this self-disclosure the Prophet said, 'You shall see your Lord just as you see the moon on the night when it is full.' Hence he declared the seeing of God similar to seeing the moon; one of the things he meant by this is that the moon itself is perceived because the rays of the moon are too weak to prevent it from being perceived . . .

Then the Prophet said in the continuation of the same hadith, 'or just as you see the sun at noon when there is no cloud before it.' At this time the sun's light is strongest, so all things become manifest through it and sight perceives everything it falls upon when this noonday sun is unveiled to it. But when sight desires to verify its vision of the sun in this state, it cannot do so. The comparison shows that this self-disclosure does not prevent people from seeing one another, that is, they will not be annihilated. That is why the Prophet made the comparison with both the vision of the full moon and the vision of the sun, and he did not restrict himself to one of the two. He emphasized that people will subsist in this locus of witnessing by his words in the rest of the hadith, 'You will not be harmed and you will not be crowded.'

When I entered into this waystation, the self-disclosure in the light without rays fell upon me, so I saw it knowingly. I saw myself through it and I saw all things through myself and through the lights which things carry in their essences and which are given to them by their realities, not through any extraneous light. I saw a tremendous place of witnessing, in sensory form – not intelligible form – , a form of God, not a meaning (*ma'nā*). In this self-disclosure there became manifest to me the way in which the small expands in order for the large to enter into it, while it remains small and the large remains large, like the camel which passes through the eye of the needle.³² That is contemplated in sensory, not imaginal, form.³³ The small embraces the large; you do not know how, but you do not deny what you see. So glory be

to Him who is exalted high beyond a perception that satisfies intellects and who preferred the eyes over intellects! 'There is no god but He, the Mighty, the Wise' (Koran 3:6).

Through this self-disclosure – which makes the power of the eyes manifest and prefers them over intellects – God made manifest the incapacity of intellects. And through His self-disclosure in radiant light He made manifest the incapacity of the eyes and the power of the intellects, preferring them over the eyes. Thus everything is qualified by incapacity, and God alone possesses the perfection of the Essence.³⁴

In short, when Ibn al-'Arabî says in the first line of the *Tarjumân*, 'Would that I were aware whether they knew what heart they possessed!', this is not some poetical conceit, but a description of an inward, imaginal experience. When he tells us that 'they' refer to the 'higher loci of vision', he is making this statement within the context of a metaphysical, cosmological, and psychological world view which has been developed by himself and earlier Muslim authorities to high degrees of sophistication. There is nothing 'far-fetched' or 'ridiculous' about his explanations, so long as one takes the trouble to study the visionary experience and doctrines upon which it is based.

Notes

¹ The *Tarjumân al-Ashwâq: A Collection of Mystical Odes by Muhyi'ddin ibn al-'Arabî*, 2nd edition, London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1978.

² Corbin's *Creative Imagination in the Šūfism of Ibn 'Arabî* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969) brings out the importance of imagination in Ibn al-'Arabî's writings but provides relatively little discussion of how imagination relates contextually to Ibn al-'Arabî's teachings.

³ *Tarjumân*, pp. 6–7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵ It is true that we have *nazar 'aqlî*, which can be translated as 'rational speculation' or simply 'reason' and was a primary concern of the theologians, and Nicholson may have thought that it was this sort of *nazar* that Ibn al-'Arabî had in mind. But Ibn al-'Arabî rarely suggests that the Muslim theologians achieve anything of real value through their rational approach to the analysis of scripture.

⁶ Fuller explanations can be found in W. C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabî's Metaphysics of Imagination*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1989.

- ⁷ *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d., vol. I, p. 304.16; also, ed. Othman Yahya, Cairo: al-Hay'at al-Miṣriyyat al-Āmma li'l-Kitāb, 1972-, vol. 4, p. 407.
- ⁸ *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. A. Āfīfī, Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Arabī, 1946, p. 159; cf. R. W. J. Austin, *Ibn al-Arabī: The Bezels of Wisdom*, New York: Paulist Press, 1980, p. 197.
- ⁹ *Futūḥāt* II 379.3.
- ¹⁰ On the grave as an imaginal realm, see W. C. Chittick, 'Death and the World of Imagination: Ibn al-Arabī's Eschatology,' *Muslim World* LXXVIII, 1988, pp. 51-82; also Chittick, 'Eschatology,' in S. H. Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, New York: Crossroad, 1987, pp. 378-409.
- ¹¹ *Futūḥāt* II 307.21.
- ¹² *Dhakhā'ir al-a'lāq*, ed. M. 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Kurdi, Cairo, 1968, p. 5.
- ¹³ *Tarjumān* 49 (II 4).
- ¹⁴ *Dhakhā'ir* 13.
- ¹⁵ *Futūḥāt* II 485.20.
- ¹⁶ *Futūḥāt* II 575.17.
- ¹⁷ *Tarjumān* 57 (IV 6); *Dhakhā'ir* 27.
- ¹⁸ *Tarjumān* 124 (XXXIX 1); *Dhakhā'ir* 204.
- ¹⁹ *Tarjumān* 112 (XXX 31); *Dhakhā'ir* 188.
- ²⁰ *Tarjumān* 98 (XXV 5); *Dhakhā'ir* 143-44.
- ²¹ *Tarjumān* 107 (XXIX 3-4); *Dhakhā'ir* 169.
- ²² *Tarjumān* 117 (XXXI 5-6); *Dhakhā'ir* 192.
- ²³ The world created from the remainder of Adam's clay is a visionary, imaginal world experienced by the gnostics (cf. Chapter 8 of the *Futūḥāt*). The 'Market of the Garden', mentioned in the hadith literature, is a market in paradise wherein are displayed beautiful forms; when one of the felicitous desires a form on display, he enters into it. Ibn al-Arabī frequently discusses this market as an explicit reference to the ruling power of imagination in the next world (e.g., *Futūḥāt* II 183.22, 312.26, 628.3; III 518.22). Spirits of light are angels, while spirits of fire are jinn; the 'bodies' of both appear in the imaginal world.
- ²⁴ The Koran refers to Joseph's dream interpretation in 12:46-49. By deriving the last two examples of Joseph's knowledge from prophetic hadith, Ibn al-Arabī alludes to the permanence of the symbolic forms in the imaginal world.
- ²⁵ *Futūḥāt* II 275.12.
- ²⁶ *Futūḥāt* II 98.21.
- ²⁷ *Tarjumān* 96 (XXIV 4); *Dhakhā'ir* 138.
- ²⁸ *Tarjumān* 111 (XXX 17).
- ²⁹ *Dhakhā'ir* 180.
- ³⁰ *Dhakhā'ir* 182-83.
- ³¹ *Mathnawī* I 20.
- ³² Allusion to Koran 7:40: 'Nor shall they enter the Garden until the camel passes through the eye of the needle.'
- ³³ Since Ibn al-Arabī describes imagination itself as a 'sensory' (*ḥissī*) realm, it is not clear why he contrasts the sensory and the imaginal (*khayālī*) in this passage, unless perhaps he is contrasting individual 'imagination' (technically called 'contiguous imagination', *khayāl muttasil*), which may be dominated by the distorting vision of the ego, and the World of Imagination ('discontiguous imagination', *khayāl munfaṣil*), in which vision is determined far more by the objective contents of imagination than the ego's subjectivity.
- ³⁴ *Futūḥāt* II 632-33.

GENNADY AYGI

Poems from 'Černa Hodinka'

Translated by Peter France

Translator's note. 'Černa hodinka' is a Czech expression meaning literally a 'black little hour' – but more colloquially a 'talk at twilight'. Gennady Aygi gave the title to a poem of 1970 about Kafka's grave, and then to a cycle written between 1970 and 1973, from which the following poems are taken.

Aygi was born in 1934, in the Chuvash Republic of the Soviet Union. The Chuvash people, who are related in origin to the ancient Huns and Bulgars, have been settled for centuries in a part of European Russia on the great bend of the Volga some four hundred miles to the east of Moscow. They are a pastoral and agricultural people, whose ancient 'pagan' religion has been gradually replaced by Christianity over the last two or three centuries, but whose non-Slavonic language is still very much alive. Aygi attaches immense value to his Chuvash culture, which involves a close relationship with the natural world, but he has been writing poetry in Russian since about 1960. He now lives in Moscow. His Chuvash writings and translations have been published in his native land, but until recently almost none of his Russian poetry had been published in the Soviet Union. The last year or so, however, has witnessed a growing official recognition of this work. Almost all his poems written before 1980 have been published by Syntaxis publishers in Paris, and his poetry has been extensively translated into several European languages. For an introduction to his work see my book *Poets of Modern Russia* (Cambridge University Press, 1982).

Roses: Abandonment

but with whiteness-chill
ever purer:

as if fainting! –

ever more we seem – left behind! –

as if
nearby
you conceal the instant:

which: being: seems past to us! –

and as if
in nature
we felt:

the evident place of the unrevealed God:

and we recognise
where this was
only when He has abandoned . . . –

oh sorrow from you! –

always it is
like sensation of holy abandonment! –

and you its pure vessel

1970

Field: Mist

to my sister Eva

but the heart fails! – suddenly – I see the states of mist:

definitions – like grief and happiness simple:

mist – merely 'I love':

it touches the wood-pile – ('I would give my soul for this!'):

it dampens the stubble – ('I mourn'):

it spreads – ('I weep . . . – as if all my life I were saying goodbye to the
Dear Poor one in her dear-sad dress:
for-ever-and-ever-homespun:

mourning with pain
already for ever – in this state'):

'I weep' – (and it spreads – just as dear – and as lonely – the mist)

1971

And Once More: Hawthorn

to V. Silvestrov*

oh voices-places of the forest! –

again
like some anniversary
the time of their clearness
and strength:

again
they are in that same gathering
where there are now
for them no losses! –

like an image of such an hour
shining among them
that we want to cry out: time of happiness! –

the place of the hawthorn sings:

the always-youngest Voice sings:

like that of God himself!
and more and more itself:

the voice that as God leads:

uniting the 'I'-voices! –

in a gathering of singing places in the forest
still sings the divinity! –

coming to be

1971

* Valentin Silvestrov, Russian composer, born 1937

Again: Return of Terror

to K. Bogatyryov*

friend

we know a second in midnight waking
resembling
a brilliant cell! –

where we shudder:

as with surface of material terror! –

with the face! – already become like the place where the race expires!
oh my friend how sensitive it is! it is feeling itself:
oh when bursting through beyond faces – as into
Skyglow-Soul – and splintering the point of
consciousness-love – will appear That which is behind
Life-as-thing? –

when they blind
and destroy:

the highest vision I-am-that-I-am:

with cold so tense – resembling Spirit –
immense as that ultimate land
brilliant and inescapable:

as with essence of That Place? –

when its origin –
as if hiding the idea! – is opened
to the deep reservoirs of fear:

burning the I-thought! –

to depths of Jahweh

1971

* Konstantin Petrovich Bogatyryov (1925–1976), translator of Kästner and Rilke (murdered in 1976).

Two Birches

but precious
is light of the heart
when – unmixed and weak! –

oh to see you in that light! –

birches (two – behind gates that are lonely – like the being of one dead – with
the sad sign 'Crèche'):

birches (like water
that is turned to ice)! –

oh to see in you
the essence of poverty:

as with purified vision:

oh: simply: purity! –

:

(such – as if pronounced by God! –

and in purity
of heart
it continues) . . . –

but in transparency
personal
mortal
to preserve it – in oblivion:

resembling
this conjunction of words:

'Lord Have Mercy . . .'

such
is your shining . . . – in air – a lightness:

(my whisper – Thou knowest . . .):

like – a place of the Spirit

1972

Field: Jasmine in Flower

but how
can that
Foundation not be which is everywhere present for thought: like some
Skeleton not-of-the-universe! –

that like God-Presence:

being felt: is irrevocable:

how can it not be here: behind momentary fusion of-Place-and-of-Time:

and: of-our-Cordiality! –

as it is (like foundation of thoughts)
here: behind each revealed island
of white (as of a second incandescence: having outlived colour: once more
become only idea!):

at dawn how clear this Skeleton not-of-the-universe! –

it is Seen it Shines: through islands
of white: in the field: ever whiter

1971

At Night: Shuddering

to A.M.

at Night, unexpectedly,
 I see, shuddering, – between pillow and face – the face of a buried friend:
 it is – like wrapping paper (the contents removed):
 features – like folds . . . unbearable these mutilated traces! . . .
 grief itself unliving! – all – seems made of a thing – that is more and more
 dead . . . –
 and pain is abolished – without trace – by new pain only: its lifeless
 successiveness! . . . –
 existence – like an action? – of crumpling – as if calculated! . . .
 ‘all’ – like a concept? – is – like a wrapping! . . . in order to rustle and be
 mutilated . . .

1971

Field: In the Full Blaze of Winter

to René Char

god-pyre! – this open field
 letting all things pass through (mile posts and wind and distant specks of mills:
 all more and more – as if from this world – not in waking –
 gathering distance: oh all these are sparks – not rending the flame of the
 pyre-that-is-not-of-this-universe)
 ‘I am’ – without trace of anything whatever
 not-of-this-universe shining
 god-pyre

1970

The Intellectual Act in El Greco's Work*

PATRICK PYE

El Greco regarded painting as an enterprise in the pursuit of knowledge. This was the revelation of his Italian sojourn. Even though local artists in the Toledo which hosted El Greco plied their craft without such pretensions, there were many educated citizens who were prepared to take El Greco's work at his own evaluation, and who were able to share in the perspectives opened up by it. But the 'knowledge' that El Greco credited to painting was not just that pertaining to the natural laws acquired during the Renaissance. It also comprised the theological knowledge of the reform movement we now call the 'Counter Reformation'. Extraordinary to relate, El Greco was the only artist to take the concerns of this movement convincingly to heart.

Modern art criticism is a development of 19th Century criticism which was almost totally absorbed with the categories of naturalism and their relation to the artist's sensibility. When El Greco's works were first rediscovered last century there was no intellectual background to which they could be related. Their power was felt, but because of the distance of modern Europe from the specifically Christian and Catholic concepts of the 16th Century, critics tended to concentrate on the extraordinary 'matter' of the paintings to the neglect of any intellectual content they might have. The selectiveness of their critical approach was, of course, governed by the 19th Century view of the intellectual plausibility of religion as a whole, which was that – it had none. In the 19th Century the concepts of science were allowed to take religious concepts to court and try them according to their own law. By this crude process the knowledge and wisdom of Christianity were disallowed to have an intellectual content and were shorn of all authority outside the subjective one of our own hearts. By this ruling, 'intuition' was personalized and the arts were driven to the subjectivism and aestheticism which have typified them for our time.

* This paper is a chapter from a work in progress 'The Time Gatherer'.

Catholicism provides a subtle and wide ranging intellectual structure for the faithful to cope with their experience. In studying the work of El Greco it would be vain to let any contemporary prejudice discount the value of this structure in coming to an understanding of his work. El Greco's concept of knowledge may be only 'intuitive', but it is meaningless unless we accept it as part of the whole structure of the Catholic teaching of his time. Mysteries of religion such as the Virgin Birth, the abiding of God and man in the Person of Christ, or the Eucharist, cannot be understood by anything less than the 'speculation' (as El Greco called it) of intuition. 'Intuition' for the Catholic is not inhibited by doctrine, because it partakes of the same content, the same 'knowledge'. The faithfulness or orthodoxy of an intuition does not rob the knowledge gained of its authentic truth, or, for that matter, make less 'intuitive' what is known. It is, I believe, only the all-pervasiveness of certain assumptions of modern criticism that has heightened for us the solitude of El Greco's position within the European heritage and appeared to deprive him of the community he shared with the intuition of his time. The 19th Century within us may not approve of El Greco's concept of 'knowledge', but for El Greco to posit an intuitive art was a normal thing to do in his age.

It had been done before by Michelangelo whose influence in the 16th Century was unavoidable. It is well to remember here the problems caused for artists and patrons alike by that series of discoveries in the skill of painting to attain verisimilitude during the period from Masaccio (d.1428) to Michelangelo. How much were these discoveries appropriate in depicting the life of Christ and the saints? The more you individualize the participants in a universal drama the harder it is to maintain its universality. How can you sustain the emotional temperature fitting for a sacred representation while flattering your patron with a vivid profile of him coming up the steps? Painters were not insensitive to the problems they encountered: they heatedly recommended their own solutions, and positions were taken. The position that Michelangelo adopted was that painting and sculpture partook of the universality of poetry and myth. By the mental act we describe as 'intuition' the artist conceives a world which takes its symbols from nature, but is otherwise an artifice of his own. The validity of that world lies in the unity of its emotional and imaginative temperature, and the consistency of its space.

Michelangelo, like El Greco, had very definite ideas about art which we are told peppered his conversation, but in a busy life were never committed to writing. We know he was widely read in 'poetics' and a strong component of his thinking was probably his ambition to equate the two arts and bring to the visual the status of the word. We know his attitude in that ever recurring dispute between the measure wrought by the artist's eye, and those who advocated the use of rules and calipers before the model. He believed in the authority of the artist's eye. To take a measure to get a head 'right' was to betray the authority by which the rest of the figure had got its vitality. El Greco quoted Michelangelo on the authority of 'the artist's eye' and was obviously indebted to him in the liberties he himself learnt to take. But above all was his debt to Michelangelo's supreme example in making a universal art based on poetic intuition, and for restoring the idea of art as invention in the days when those who espoused the cause of art as the 'mirror of nature' were heady with new triumphs.

Alas, Michelangelo was only partially successful in his aim to make a mythic art. First of all he was not a painter but a sculptor. This meant that his greatest imaginative effort was made under protest in an art form he abjured. More important, he only satisfied one of the criteria for those who are so rash as to intuit an imaginative world. He satisfied the unity required by the emotional temperature of his figures to live a convincing life, but he placed them in a vacancy, a 'no space' where they rattle about without home in heaven or earth. So powerful was Michelangelo's personality, so humble his sincerity, that the next generation swallowed his art whole. Not being poets like the great man they tied themselves in a terrible knot – and Mannerism was born.

El Greco, for all his indebtedness to Michelangelo, never lost an opportunity to disparage the master's paintings. His admiration for the atmosphere-soaked painting of Titian forbade him making those allowances for the great man that his Roman contemporaries made. El Greco had been tutored in 'painterly painting', a craft of brushwork in which the world has to be a totality, and the totality has to be made sensible. In Venice he had learnt what colour can achieve and the utilitarian role that Michelangelo assigns to colour in his frescoes must have seemed a wilful demeaning of its function. When the academies finally stamped Raphael's indifference to colour on European painting practice colour was shoved under a mat of fateful orthodoxy. Every

time a colourist was born the constant simmering between the colourists and the draughtsmen would flare into a battle royal. Now, however, that the academies have been routed and the dust of many misunderstandings has settled with the victory of the colourists, perhaps we may allow El Greco's percipience in calling a coloured drawing by its true name without disrespect to the master who made such an extraordinary thing of it.

The example of Michelangelo greatly complicated the practice of those who came after him. They missed the fundamental simplicity of the great man's spirit and turned his artistic bequest into a series of technical and aesthetic problems to which they applied themselves myopically. It was a period of 'cadenza' art when the painter showed off what he knew; his expertise in foreshortening, his acquaintance with the antique, or his ability to make startling compositions with groups of figures. It was a time of intense intellectual polemic when artists and savants began to speculate about the artistic process itself. Granted that area of liberty in the 'liberal arts' greatness does not usually accommodate itself to succession. The achievement of their predecessors was a drain on the spirit, so painters took refuge in the 'interesting' and the novel, which is a certain hell that can await them betimes. El Greco shared in these sophistications and anxieties and it may well be that, but for his Cretan background, he would not have survived them better than his contemporaries. The greatness of his predecessors was not quite his problem in the same way it was Rosso Fiorentino's or Beccafumi's: to be Greek could be an incalculable advantage. But he was a son of his time and he believed, as they did, that the 'glory' of art lay in tackling the most 'difficult' artistic problems. The apparently effortless solution of such a difficulty denoted the possession of 'grazia', a hard word to translate, but suggesting the beauty of the spirit made visible demonstrated by an apparent facility. It is noticeable the El Greco's praise of 'grazia' contains no comparable alarm to the apprehension the word 'facility' now raises in artistic breasts. For us 'facility' brings with it the suspicion that the object and content of such ease of execution must be derivative. For El Greco, however, the solution to difficulties with 'grazia' was a mark of the intellectuality of the artist.

Throughout his career El Greco is at pains to find the irreconcilables and to reconcile them. The possessor of one of the most

controlled techniques ever mastered, he is always anxious that the brush work must appear fresh and spontaneous. He sensed that the appearance of spontaneity was what most helped the spectator to share the form depicted as an experience in distinction to the appropriation that a hard-edged verisimilitude might inspire. This scruple was a constant for the duration of his artistic practice. An example of this control within apparent freedom is the early 'St Veronica' in the Sta. Cruz Museum at Toledo. The face is painted with a nervous sensibility suggesting the tenderest solicitude while the veil that lightly frames it is painted like gossamer with a rapid flickering notation. El Greco was able to do a second version (in the Caturla collection) without any sign of labour or loss of the acute sensibility of the original work. It is evident from this that El Greco did not look on spontaneity the way our culture regards it. Spontaneity in his eyes did not exist for the self expression of the artist, but for the spectator to share more immediately and sensibly in the content of the subject matter. It was for El Greco an attribute of the artifice of the world the painter created in his picture, an extra dimension to its 'seeming'. Once again his thinking was in line with the ideals of the age, this spontaneity being just an aspect of that 'facility in solving difficult problems' in a way that gives delight to the spectator. It is worth remarking, however, that the brilliance of Greco's brushwork is quite different in intention from a naturalist's like Velazquez. Velazquez' brushwork will serve to bind a homogeneous world in one atmosphere, while in a painting by our master all the parts will be consciously painted in a variety of ways to characterize their dramatic rôle and meaning in the work as a whole.

Another major preoccupation that El Greco shared with his time was his delight in the 'figura serpentina', a perception of the critic Lommazo who discovered it in the figures of Michelangelo. He noticed that a certain flame-like spiral movement animated the figures created by the great man. This was seen to bestow on the figure its 'furia' or soul, and was conceived by the Mannerists to be a sign of great vitality. Its prestige was immense and it is to be found as a basic unit of almost any Mannerist composition of the 16th Century. El Greco's use of it is unique because in his work it becomes a regenerative symbol in its own right. It contains the symbolic analogy felt unconsciously by all those who have attributed a mystical inten-

tion to the artist's work. Alert as one becomes to El Greco's own intense self awareness and deliberation I see no reason to quite discount this association simply because it has a genesis in the aesthetics of the Mannerist period.

If the foregoing seems to show how much El Greco was a man of his time, it would be quite misleading to see him circumscribed by it. The *cadenza* art of the Mannerists found a very uneasy place in the Church, whereas, by a happy alchemy, when El Greco tossed all these contemporary preoccupations together he made them subserve a form and content that were deeply Catholic. Before we discuss his art in relation to its religious background there is a further matter in which our own period is indebted to his canny percipience: I refer to the 'difficulty of colour'. It was not just that El Greco sought out the formal and technical difficulties of his chosen art form. Beyond that he sought out the very difficulties of the visual language itself.

There is no doubt that the primitive and original act of man-the-artist is to draw. Drawing comes from pointing. When man has identified an object of his interest he points at it, and if the chap beside him is a bit dumb he naturally grunts some exclamation and describes what he is looking at by following a contour with his index finger. Thus Adam makes his first drawing. It is as though there had been silence and now there is a word, but better than a word, because it has a 'likeness' to what is described. This is not the 'magic of verisimilitude' but the magic of recognition which precedes it. For original man it is magic indeed, for he is then able to indentify the things he needs and plot their acquisition. This is good for 'active' man: it is not so good for his brother, contemplative man, for how is he to restore what he has identified to the great cosmos from which he has just torn it? Drawing separates, but colour unites what has been separated. Colour erodes the edges of drawing and marks the relationship of things. Colour remakes a cosmos of relationships by a sensible and formal analogy between those relationships and its own.

El Greco saw that dichotomy plainly in the two main traditions of painting in Italy, the Florentine and the Venetian. He realized that though hundreds of Florentine painters used colour, and many used it with some taste, the true rôle assigned to it was merely to reinforce their drawing. Down in Rome they followed the Florentine practice, with the added sophistications that we have described. Alone among

his Roman contemporaries El Greco held that the virtuosity required for drawing spectacular foreshortenings is still not to be compared to the intellectual unity to be established by treating space as a totality. Hence the artist's insistence at the edges of his figures that the contour binds the figure to its background. Likewise, when El Greco uses the strongest contrasts of tone the effect of the opposition is unity rather than distinction. Ingloriously the academies of art that sprang up in the 16th Century perpetuated the errors of their fathers (their Florentine and Roman fathers) and taught colour as the adjunct of drawing. El Greco's insight remained unexplored till the advent of the Post-impressionists and the Fauves at the commencement of our own era.

II

'The Burial of Count Orgaz' is often taken as an example of the mysticism typical of El Greco's work. Hanging in the little antichapel sealed off from the rest of San Tome it creates an unforgettable impression from which hardly any visitor to Toledo is exempt. The painting is a celebration of the virtue and efficacy of charitable acts for which the redoubtable Count is honoured at his entombment by the miraculous assistance of St. Stephen and St. Augustine. The painting is divided half way up by a row of heads, each cocooned in the ruff typical of the Toledan gentry of the period. Above this the panoply of Heaven opens to receive the soul of the Count, while in the foreground his body is being respectfully lowered by a martyr and a doctor of the historical church into a sepulchre originally situated below the painting. Manual Cossio, who wrote one of the earliest studies of the artist (1911) described the 'Burial of Count Orgaz' thus:

The subject is not in itself mystical, but merely religious . . . but what is mystical is the interpretation, in the most real and direct sense of mysticism, because every element in the painting, notwithstanding the transparent realism, is treated ecstatically, mysteriously, and devoutly. And not only is there mysticism, but Castilian mysticism, because, starting with a funeral story of purely local interest . . . and ending with the murky hidden background, all is inward, intimate, serious, sad. All is inward-looking, all is essentially commonplace, and the corpse, the saints, the monks, the priests and the gentlemen all appear as if enclosed in their 'inner dwelling' and rejoicing in it.

Cossio's eloquent language is well suited to express a poetical idea, but I wonder if it would be acceptable to anyone privileged with a mystical experience. The Spain of the time of this piece of writing was suffering a major crisis of identity, and a retrenchment of the national spirit. Cossio himself was one of the 'Generation of '98', a group of writers and artists who felt indebted to El Greco as an example of the national spirit, passionate, mystical and austere. If there was a short-coming in their appreciation of El Greco it may have been in the certain poetic of the work that they grasped to the exclusion of the content and matter of which it was but part. I propose that we should take mysticism seriously. Many people have had mystical experiences and I see no reason to scorn their testimonies because ones own experience holds nothing comparable to theirs. But we must be precise too: all we can be sure of is that El Greco was a painter. There are no diaries, there are only works of art. The work of art places the experience it describes in a parenthesis. The theme of a painting is something described for our contemplation. It does not thereby become denatured, but the imagination has recreated whatever might have been the experience of the men behind it. I see no reason because of this, to say that the 'as if' proposed by the work of art is purely aesthetic: only mathematics is that. But once the painter has transformed his triangles and cubes into living geometry they are burdened with the real emotional possibilities through the equivalents and correspondences recognised by imagination. These 'equivalents' do not beat us over the head: they merely await our growing.

I suspect that if you were in receipt of mysteries you would find Cossio's interpretation unserious, maybe frivolous. To separate an act of charity from the mystery of God and attribute it to the rule of religion would at least be tendentious theology. But possibly the whole tone of Cossio's theo-nationalism would offend you. To propose a Castilian mysticism is immediately to suggest that the subject is a mystic because he is a Castilian. Mystical vision is a free gift addressed solely to the receiver, an onerous sweetness to his personal faith. What makes a Christian mystic is the mystery of the God/Man, Christ. The mystical experience is of the bride with her lover and its authenticity resides solely in the gratuity with which the ineffable distance between them has been gulfed. To propose a natural mysticism is immediately to wipe out that gulf: to say that those light

years that the lover has so lightly traversed never existed. True love can only exist within the category of free choice. Tell a bride that her feelings are due to genes and chromosomes and you have shorn her of the only self-image that can support her. No doubt of its nature the world will always speculate about lovers. The speculation of art, however, always has a certain impersonality: it is not whether something 'happened' that matters, but in what way for a person such a happening is constituted.

Nature, of course, is subject to divine transformations at times. If nature is the creation of a Creator it must be so. We feel very strongly that it is so, and that is where national mysticisms can be misleading: our own pantheistic urge to transcendence becomes so easily confused in them. The major body of El Greco's work, I believe, shares in a very pure spirituality, but it is possible the universal appeal of 'The Burial . . .' owes a debt to something less pure. The poetic condition that Manuel Cossio describes so eloquently belongs not to the Church's spiritual repository, but to a magic moment of history when El Greco's friends vicariously attended the Count's funeral, providing the painter with that row of discreet heads pitched in undertaker's black, at the centre of his painting. It is they who cast the prevailing atmosphere of a heroic generation over the obligatory and timeless obsequies of the Church. Nevertheless there is a certain unresolved ambiguity about the presence of these gentlemen. There is perhaps just a slight bit too much 'knowing' in the melancholy fervour of these citizens, a certain self-regardingness in their piety. There is no malice or satire in El Greco's representation: just a sparing economy in the telling of the way we were then. The ruffs, the artifice of a civilization, are symbolically effective in isolating the human beings behind them from the miraculously aided ceremony they witness. There is the suggestion that perhaps their 'inner dwelling' is not quite what they thought it was.

Of all El Greco's large paintings it is fair to say that 'The Burial' is the least typical of the master. It is the only one in which he allowed the world of his patrons to obtrude; a habitual Renaissance flattery that he had resolutely turned his back on. It is the only painting he made for a public place of worship, all his other work being seen only within closed communities. Further, it was the only major painting theme to which he never returned as was his habit with all the other themes he

treated. His constant harking back to compositions has nothing to do with a menial repetition required by his clients, but with the imaginative authority bestowed on certain compositions by their sacred theme. In this realm of creation in the borderline between two worlds, Sir Kenneth Clark observed . . . 'once the image is charged with its meaning it need not, or must not, be varied.' 'The Burial . . .' is an immense 'sport', an occasional piece of Shakespearian proportions in tribute to its times, but it does not quite carry the spiritual authority of some of his other works. The immaculate and tender recording of the two heavenly visitants, Ss. Stephen and Augustine, as a statement, does not quite survive the pyrotechnics of the upper regions.

It is fitting to commence a discussion of El Greco's relation to the teaching of the Church with a look at his most famous painting. It is the painting by which most people identify the artist, and if we have been able to sort our way through some of its ambiguities we may be on a better track for exploring the general nature of the work El Greco undertook.

By the end of his life El Greco must have been very theologically 'literate' because all his schemes for altar pieces bore instructive purposes that had been discussed in detail between the artist and the client. There is no evidence that El Greco balked at such close cooperation with his clients, and his signed contracts bear witness to the right of the patron to terminate the contract at the first sign of displeasure with the work accomplished – a legal position which, understandably, would not be tolerated by our contemporaries. El Greco must have had a great self confidence which in its turn must have comprised a shared experience with his clients across which they could understand each other – a psychological position rare for our contemporaries. It was very important to the Tridentine Church that its art should be a manifestation of true doctrine in the most appropriate form possible. When El Greco arrived in Toledo he was the only painter of calibre in the city. His first big commission came from one of its foremost authorities (the dean of the Cathedral), so once his reputation in Toledo was secured by the masterpieces of the '70's it is most probable that he became part of the 'reforming' establishment himself.

Somehow church commissions do not have the prestige now that they had then. To us it is almost unthinkable that so distinguished an



Courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago

El Greco. 'The Assumption of the Virgin'

artist should have worked closely and willingly with one. Let us suspend our disbelief, and remember that the Church was the repository of knowledge and wisdom, and the creative dynamic of the time. It was quite natural for artists to serve so pre-eminent an institution. While today a paternal arts council watches over the scrupulous examination of our subjectivity, in those days the artist was an adept of beauty, itself an image and radiance of truth. It is difficult for us to understand now how little personality had to do – for them – with the formation of style. Style was not ‘the man’, but more the accidental mark evolved in the friction between the character of a job to be done and the means available to do it. Rather than search for the originality of El Greco’s art in some arresting aspect of his personality, or some putative mysticism, we should better ask what he set out to do. If the Church was involved with his art in such a consultative rôle to what extent was he the interpreter of his clients wishes or just their illustrator?

Theology (as the theology of Alouso de Orozco bears witness) was differently conducted in 16th Century Toledo than in our century. The Church was not under the same cultural pressure to rationalize its explanations, and since the powers of the land partook of its sacraments, its conflict with the State was not a political or ideological one, but simply one of executive roles and legal rights. Theology was conducted seriously and enthusiastically with a view to the person of Christ. The characters of sacred history were examined at all levels – spiritual, analogical and literal, and a new realism about human motives acted as a challenge to exegetists to put sacred history into a convincing perspective. The theology of the time was more a spirituality than a metaphysic or a philosophy of God. At the heart of it the person of Christ was allowed to address in quite realistic terms the person of the reader. Biblical exegesis worked hard to establish the freedom of the sinner by showing just how profound was the condescension of the Father in the gift of His Son, and how generous and authentic was the obedience of the Son in fulfilling the work of the Father. Since this is addressed to a Person rather than a savant or philosopher it is perhaps fair to describe the time as an age of ‘ascents’ rather than schemas, an age for inner life rather than for explanations. At the heart of Tridentine spirituality was the gasp of wonder at the Father who, through the ineffable gift of His Son – Love made

palpable through the human form divine – supersedes the Law, and makes men heir to His freedom.

El Greco shared the (timeless) apprehensions of his time, and throughout his life sought to hold in inseparable unity the freedom bequeathed by Love and the palpable form of this gift in Jesus, God made man. The language of his style is an attempt to hold the distance traversed by God's condescension in a unity that will move us by its urgent relevance for our human condition in three distinct ways. Firstly, the matter of this style has to provide an opportunity where the devotee of Christ can identify with the mystery of Divine Love sensuously; where the image of Christ brings home to men the palpable care of the Father. Secondly, the drama of the God/Man contract has to be expressed with classical simplicity in the traditional sacred acts at the heart of the Church's life. Thirdly, El Greco seeks to make an art where the soul of the penitent can find an image for itself on which its own transformation may be modelled.

The first matter (the 'palpable' sense of the divine) accounts for the importance El Greco attached to spontaneity and the sensuousness of his forms. If you remember what we said of the differences between drawing and painting you will notice that El Greco resists the identifying role implicit in drawing, just for the acquisitive element that may lurk there. The spontaneity of the brushwork skates over the form rather than describing it. Even in his sometimes very realistic portraits the image is experienced rather than possessed. Things in El Greco's world are not to be enjoyed for our recognition of them, but for their place in a total cosmos. We have seen how he will alternate within one canvas between an apparent realism and the artifice he finds proper to the sacred drama. It is only when we look into this realism that we discover the brushwork is serving some quite remote dramatic role in abstract relation to the whole. What we have enjoyed in his realism is the human flavour and experience of the detail rather than a description. Indeed, the relationship between image and reality, or copy and model, is rendered untraceable, and the form of the sacred dance subsumes every representation. The sacred dance is impersonal, but made alive by a heightened personal sensibility. El Greco's insistence on the spontaneity of any true experience comprises an insistence on the humanity of the Incarnation which gives the gift of our life back to us (sensibly, even) with our divinised and transformed humanity.

The second means determining El Greco's style (the lucid and simple exposition of sacred acts) pertains to the contemporary idea of a church itself being a theatre where the sacred event is re-enacted. This is the sphere where every form is immutable, where art partakes in the ceremony of rite. Here the artist is required to be strictly selfless in following the undividedness and purity of a traditional will to form. And, with all the remoteness of El Greco's figures they unerringly record the sacred act required. The figures occupy the full space without distraction and the composition is set by the gestures of the dramatic act. The strange low relief in which the figures move and have their being alerts us to the autonomy of a heavenly world, a world that has a being other than our own, but a world where, once entered, the action reads with its own consistency. How different, it may be remarked, is this 'classicism' from what we normally understand to be a classical style! This apparent odour of 'difference' I take to have evolved from the tension within the artist's situation between a classical acceptance of the Church's traditional teaching and the reformist needs of the Church in Tridentine times. The reformer is under threat, and the threat forces him to a new self-consciousness. It is this which impels him to cut away the extraneous growth by making a more radical definition of his cause. Such was El Greco's situation confronted by the extraneous skills of verisimilitude that a historical development had forced on an unwary church. His insistence on the involvement of sensibility (hitherto deemed too earthly a category) with the divinisation of the human, was an attempt to make specific certain Catholic scruples that had remained silent before the onslaught of new human sciences. The originality of El Greco's solution to a historical dilemma lay in not clinging to an empty form of classical exposition, but in ensuring that the dramatic content that enlivened his new rhetorical language was indeed classical, simple and pure. In his best work this proved an inexhaustible source of its strength, for where the followers of Raphael appear as conservatives holding on to forms the inner meaning and logic of which became ever more remote as time separated them from their genesis, the challenge of the tension between form and content in Greco's work keeps it ever contemporary.

The third accomplishment of El Greco's style is the one by which he is most popularly identified, and the one that has suggested to so

many its background in mystical experience. This is the powerful visual metaphor of the '*figura serpentina*' for the flame of penitent desire. This metaphor is never spelt out, it never becomes a symbol, but is left open. Exposed to it without the interference of the conscious intelligence, it works on us with extraordinary and troubling power. The perpetual movement of this flame is the sign of inner life, of that potential afforded by the Kingdom within us for an upward and infinite ascent. This movement is like the rise and fall of melody, with a long slow ascent; a break; a rise through a long arc; a turning back and a rise again. In the paintings of full-length saints, sometimes single and sometimes in pairs, this movement is allowed its fullest autonomy, but in the larger paintings on themes central to the Church's teaching this movement is particularized to reinforce the dramatic action. The figures of the Christian drama itself partake of this Christian 'becoming', but discretely, and never to deprive them of the almost neutral expression that the Mediterranean Christian world deemed appropriate to sacred personae.

These paintings afford us a self-image for the transformation wrought in the soul by conversion. In this El Greco responded to the spirituality of the day, a faith-oriented spirituality. It was faith which prepared the space in the soul where charity might reside: faith which had an 'essential likeness' to God, which is yet only our means to bring about that desirable transformation. If faith is the 'royal way' then the art that celebrates it has to represent the world as a concourse, a passage in a two way contract. Gone, then, is the resplendent vision of a definitive Heaven to which the Medievals gave their allegiance: gone, the poised gestures of the Elect. If there is a gesture in El Greco's figures that is specially his creation, (and most of that gesture language can be found in Michelangelo and his followers) it is the gesture of the upraised arm with the palm up-raised. It is the gesture for transmitting grace and its ownership is usually angelic. This figure appears diminutively in the last version of 'Christ Driving the Traders out of the Temple'. Entering the 'wrong' side of the painting (that is, on the side of the painting occupied by the Jews who have rejected Christ), the late art historian, Rudolf Wittkower shows that here the artist indicates that 'redemption is not just the prerogative of those who live in the Faith, but that those siding with evil may be redeemed if they experience an inner conversion.'

In the old Mediterranean world authority and wisdom were seen in the abiding, the still, the image of the Unmoved Mover of the world. True, this stillness had to be a living stillness and, though rarely achieved, it haunted that world, Christian and Pagan alike. It is hard to appreciate how radically new El Greco's image of Christian becoming was to the world of the 16th Century. There is, however, a humanism implicit in his imagery of Transformation that immediately sets it apart from the absoluteness of Raphael's Renaissance synthesis. Instead of the Christian being defined by an identity of allegiance, however august it may be, he is, for the first time, defined by his pilgrim nature. Conversion is seen to be what it is, sans termination. Modern man who recognises in the disestablishment of the Christian the sign of his authentic allegiance to a kingdom not of his world, is much more ready to accept the religious category symbolised by the pilgrim than any other way.

At this point I hear my reader with well-intentioned scepticism enquire, 'And did El Greco consciously decide to paint this way to fulfil the programme you have described?' to which I can only reply, 'Substantially, yes!' What convinces me, against all the romantic allegiance of my youth, is the intellectual passion present in his apprehension of form. The world that first greets us from the various paintings that comprised the San Domingo el Antiguo altarpiece is so rigorously consistent, so poised and confident in its marriage of bold conception with brilliant handling, that we can only say 'Here is a mind in possession of itself.' Doubtless El Greco did not sit down and programme a specification for a required form of painting. There must have been some inspiration in which all the loose impressions, the disconnected strands that he picked up (like litmus paper) from his contemporaries, suddenly made a new whole. In some intuition he must have coalesced a ground where all those intellectual difficulties that were such a problem to the successors of Michelangelo could be held together in a meaningful way. He did, after all, have the great man's example before him to prove the equality of painting with the arts of the word. Michelangelo was the closest to him spiritually of all the Italians, and he had the great advantage of discovering him as a Greek. In his second exile he would recreate Michelangelo after the practice and craft of the Venetian colourists, according to the new and vivid lights of Counter Reformation theology.

There is a romantic little story you may set aside as you like, in which his good friend in Rome, Giulio Clovio, called one spring day to draw him out to one of those endless fiestas that accompany every saint's day in the Italian calendar. He found Domenikos sitting with the blinds drawn and some putty figures on wires arranged on his table. Domenikos would not be tempted out: 'I must stay,' he said, 'with my inner world.'

The patron of El Greco's last great works in Toledo was the administrator of the Tavera Hospital, Pedro Salazar de Mendoza. Salazar was an able and humane administrator, but also a respected ecclesiastical scholar devoted to maintaining the prestige of the city. His chief preoccupation at this time was the rehabilitation of the late Archbishop Carrenza who had in 1559 suffered imprisonment from the authorities of the Inquisition, had after many years been pardoned, but was never fully cleared of the charges laid against him. The archbishop had been popular and respected for his piety, so the whole episode had been a very unhappy occasion for the Toledan church. Salazar wrote a biography in vindication of Carrenza so what more natural consequence but to employ a painter to exemplify the theology of the deceased archbishop.

Salazar had a collection of paintings among which numbered works by El Greco.

'Paintings provide very powerful persuasion,' he said, 'greater than that which is taken from writing, as long as they accord with tradition and historical accounts . . . because painting stirs and elevates the spirit more than writing.'

As the hospital was dedicated to St. John the Baptist, Salazar asked El Greco to make three retables on the theme of 'rebirth'. Following discussions which began as early as 1595, a scheme was agreed based on three events, 'The Annuciation' (or, as the Church of the time liked to call it, 'The Incarnation'), 'The Baptism of Christ', and the 'Revelation of St. John the Evangelist'. Unfortunately, at the time of the contract (1608) El Greco only had six more years to live. The first and last works of the set were incomplete at his death, and it took Jorge Manuel another ten years of haggling with the hospital authorities before they were handed over. By that time Salazar had moved to some other position and another artist had been engaged to complete

the scheme. While the great 'Baptism' has always hung in the Hospital the original placement of the three works was never adhered to.

The most extraordinary and haunting of the paintings in this scheme is the 'Vision of St. John the Evangelist' now in the Metropolitan Museum of New York. The iconography of this work is still a matter of dispute. Originally Cossio identified its theme as 'The opening of the Fifth Seal' from the ninth chapter of the Apocalypse, but recently Richard Mann has made a convincing case for its interpretation as the 'Resurrection of the Just'. Carranza's theology was much taken up with St. John's vision of the end of time, so it would have been very natural for Salazar to choose this theme as part of his own vindication of the archbishop, in the hope that one day heaven's judgement would overturn the verdict of misguided men. El Greco's imagery of the translucent bodies corresponds to Carrenza's description of the four graces which will characterise the Just in heaven: spirituality, lightness, radiance and freedom from pain. The mysterious draperies that envelope the Just, and that they do not seem to have quite accustomed themselves to, likewise originate in Carrenza's description. Endorsing St. Paul's imagery of putting on the new imperishable garments of immortality, Carrenza emphasised that this heavenly clothing would not be needed to cover the body or protect it against the elements, but its sole function would be to mark the glorious state of the Elect. The little putti who so gracefully donate clothing to the Just are souls of the Just who have come to inhabit their resurrected bodies. Salazar's own writings make the distinction between the properties of bodies subject to death and souls which exist eternally. Since the soul bore a natural immortality its association with bodies was entirely dependent on its state before God. Salazar criticised most pictures of the resurrection because they did not show the reunion of souls with bodies.

El Greco's imagery transpires to have been a quite literal transcription of his patron's interests. But how unlike the Elect in any other Christian representation are these Just who wait at the confines of Heaven! Obedient this imagery may be to Carrenza's theology, but every component of it has been recreated from the inside. The immense St. John bears no relation to any vision-receiving saint in art. He is not beholden to a vision that stays outside him: he is 'rapt', as consumed in God as that other St. John was who wrote the 'Ascent of



The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1956. [56.48]

El Greco. 'The Vision of St John'

Mount Carmel'. The figure of the saint and the souls of the Just who are the object of his vision are totally devoid of ecclesial or cultural rhetoric, quite without reference to anything we comfortably know, except our Christian hope. Here for the first time in El Greco's art is a completely fluid world where all divisions have been superseded and the artist, the saint and the Just share the same ecstatic 'being' before God.

It must be acknowledged, however, that this strange painting, acting in the borders of life and death, is unfinished. Perhaps the painting was unfinishable, and we must be grateful to Jorge Manuel for leaving his father's work untampered with. There are some ambiguities in the colour: why should so commanding a figure be in so 'passive' a colour as blue-grey? Rather than any further development of the image, the painting surely awaited a few final glazes.

Two effects of this painting have a full maturity of artistic practice behind them: the artist's ability to make us share an experience and his corresponding ability to leave out everything that we normally regard as the necessary furniture of experience. We have already referred to this ability of El Greco in our discussion of his brushwork. He seems to give us a disembodied experience and it is to this uncanny faculty that we should now address ourselves.

We know from the record of Pacheco's visit to the ageing artist that El Greco was a 'bit of a philosopher'. He wrote a treatise on architecture and another on painting, and though, unfortunately, these are lost, recently his own copy of Vitruvius' 'On Architecture' has come to light with quite extensive annotations in his own hand. Two quotations may be helpful if we can allow for the formality and courtesy of 16th Century language:

Painting is the only thing that can judge everything else . . . (it) occupies the position of prudent moderator of all that is visible.

Painting because of its universality, becomes speculative and never lacks substance to speculate on . . .

Painting acting as a 'prudent moderator', joining things which in nature seem separate: why do we need things to be 'joined'? What is the separateness that threatens unity and universality? The 'prudent moderator' suggests one who brings the claims of rival faculties around a conference table: something in our carnal knowing separ-

ates whereas, in a word, it is imagination which allows different faculties to be, as it were, represented in the one image.

The 'speculation' of this image making 'moderatorship' would be different from an act of discursive intelligence. Discursive intelligence rules by division, by identifying and comparing: it presupposes a subject to which it establishes an objective relation. The 'speculation' of this (should we call it?) intuition is intellectually a 'gathering' act in which the discursive intellect cannot be too busy. The speculation of this intuition sits on

... the shore
of the wide world (alone . . . and thinks)
till love and fame to nothingness do sink.

I believe Keats will forgive me this paraphrase for his words describe so well that agent of the understanding heart of which the Gospels speak.

I believe we are quite entitled to find in the activity of the discursive intellect a certain cruelty. The intellect divides us from what we know, and divides what we know from its brothers, the better by making it an object. The more rigorously the intellect scrutinises the object the more the object evades the person of the knower. Intellect is masculine: intellect strides on the high steps of dialectic, while imagination gathers what is known among the personal faculties of the knower. Imagination is feminine and acts receptively to the transcendence of the 'idea', casting a web among the faculties so that the imperial inner realm may get a delicate and shining concreteness. Imagination may be tempted – what 'imminence' is not subject to temptation? But guided by a pure heart it has the power to find forms – through an exactly felt system of correspondence and analogy, through the precision of its omissions as much as the inclusiveness of its faculties – that are an equivalent for any fact or state that may exist. Facts of nature may be more or less comforting or pleasing to see expressed in corresponding form, but 'states' of being? They are the unique prerogative of the imaginative act. It is imagination that relates the 'inner' to the 'outer'; it is imagination that gathers our life into a new totality and throws it to some 'overwhelming question'.

The classical world was a bit sanguine about imagination. From Plato on it was generally regarded as a function of the lower soul,

dependent upon sense perceptions from which the soul must purify itself in the course of its ascent to immortality. The only word they possessed to describe imagination was 'phantasia' which translates ignominiously for us as the Walter Mitty-like capacity of 'fantasy' to escape into its own wish fulfilment. Plato's noble and curious heart being almost equally divided between the poet and the idealist within him, he was anxious, and therefore unremittingly harsh, about the dangers of the poetic imagination: nor were Christian clerics slow in quoting Plato to keep art in its place – the market-place of illusion. The archbishop who followed Carrenza in Toledo, Gaspar de Quiroga, was a reformer in the Tridentine mould, and the first thing he did on assuming office was to ban mime and drama from the Cathedral. However, he did not ban El Greco, and may we not recognise here the great 'and yet...' that floats suspended (and continues to float) over the question of artistic imagination? This 'and yet...' represents the universal consensus that in practice imagination cannot be adequately described as 'fantasy', and that some art has always had the task of 'raising the spirit', and of saying things that the most elevated intellectual discourse can only approach quite clumsily.

We do not understand the way the spirit works in the vehicle that nature offers it, and, possibly, it is salutary that we cannot. Imagination is such a vehicle and perhaps a certain unknowing is the one guarantee that it needs for its essential secrecy. History again and again reveals that, without grace in our hearts, the human faculties heap up jealously against each other just like the rest of us. An artist may be forgiven for pointing out that the intellect is no exception.

Despite the lowliness that the philosophers ascribed to imagination there was one voice raised in respite for it. Plotinus¹ still takes intellection as the appropriate means for knowledge, but he does allow that imagination can arrive at 'equivalents'. To the question of whether imagination is involved in mental acts, Plotinus answers:

If in fact every mental act is accompanied by an image, we may well believe that when this image, which would be as it were a picture of the thought, remains on, this would explain how an

¹ In all the subsequent discussion of imagination I am indebted to Dr. John Dillon's essay 'Plotinus and the Transcendental Imagination', from *Religious Imagination*, ed. Mackey, Edinburgh University Press.

object of knowledge takes place. But if this is not the case another suggestion may be made. Perhaps memory would be the reception into the imagination of the discursive sequel (*logos*) to an act of intuitive thought (*noêma*). The thought itself being indivisible and never, as it were, rising to the exterior of consciousness, remains hidden within, but the *logos*, unfolding and preceding from the thought into the imagination, displays the thought as in a mirror . . .

In other words, the images that imagination makes to represent the thoughts of intellect to itself can be genuine equivalents.

Plotinus believed that imagination is not capable of a 'pure intellectual act' itself, but that it is capable of mirroring it for the soul in an image. The soul had to be calm and free of passion, but in that state it possessed a transcendental orientation. This led Plotinus' thinking to conceive the imagination as a Janus faced faculty with its upper limit bordering on the life of the intellect and its lower limit bordering on the senses. In his description of Nature as the emanation of the World Soul he places imagination at the mid point of the soul's life:

For this reason Nature does not possess even imagination. Intellection is superior to imagination. Imagination is between the levels of Nature and Intellection. Nature does not have consciousness of anything, while imagination has consciousness of what is external to it; for it allows that which has the image to have knowledge of what it has experienced.

He about-turns between identifying imagination as one faculty facing in two directions, and postulating two faculties, a higher and a lower imagination. In the latter case he allows that the two faculties may, in certain propitious circumstances, work together, the light of the lower being, as it were, absorbed in the light of the higher. This anticipates across the ages the thinking of the early Nineteenth Century poet, Coleridge, who never tires of reminding his countrymen that 'imaginative fantasy' was a contradiction of terms. Fantasy, he held, makes images for our personal desires which so rudely experience the limits of impersonal nature, whereas imagination make images which gather the disparate faculties of the soul in the experience of a universal imagination. Fantasy acts on the level of nature for the advantage of the Self, cossetting it against its little deaths, while

imagination enables the mind to contemplate new wholes between the dualities of Spirit and Nature.

Benighted as we are Wisdom has constantly been among us. The Ancients also knew of the difficult 'apartness' of the intellect (its 'certain cruelty'), and its need for the watering of imagination. Iamblichus of the classical/Early Christian period writes in *De Mysteriis* about the branch of divination known as 'drawing down the light', which

illuminates the aetherial and luminous vehicle of the real with divine light, so that divine images take hold of our imagination, stimulated by the will of the gods. For the whole life of the soul and all the faculties in it are subject to the gods and moved by them in accordance with the wish of the conductors.

The 'conductor' (of the light) does not lose consciousness: imagination just receives its extra dimension. He goes on to point out how the divine light bypasses the reflective consciousness on its way to the imagination, because the reflective consciousness would 'interpose a degree of self consciousness.'

Most of the philosophers following Plotinus (though obviously not Porphyry or Iamblichus) reverted to Plato's anathema on imagination. An academic idealism is a much safer place for an intellectual to reside, because any sort of drawing down of 'light' requires spiritual discernment... and who can be trusted with that! Nevertheless Plotinus remained one of the most influential philosophers coming up to El Greco's time, as he was among the Renaissance Platonists whose wisdom supplied Michelangelo with such comfort.

Nature for Plotinus' contemporaries was the creation of God and it related to Him as a pale and inefficient likeness to His ideas. The work of the artist who imitated nature had the prestige of an imitation of an imitation. Hence the special prestige of any intuitive prototype lay in the spiritual authority of its inspiration. The iconographers did not stylize nature to make it 'spiritual' (as Victorian idealists believed) but strictly followed an intuition of vision where things existed as they showed them. If things in nature were the unreliable imitation of an 'Idea', and if God's face was necessarily withdrawn and invisible, in between were, however, all the correspondences which imagination might divine between these elusive extremities. Should an artist

choose to represent the god he must have the mind to conceive an affective 'as if'. 'Phidias', says Plotinus, 'wrought the Zeus in Olympia upon no model of things of sense, but by approaching what form Zeus must take if he chose to become manifest to sight.' In other words, the artist must have sufficient taste for heavenly things to know what might be involved for a god in a certain godly choice.

Light was one of the two or three central symbols dominating men's minds from Antiquity to the Renaissance. El Greco was specially interested in this symbolism which had been infused in him from Dionysius whose *Celestial Hierarchies* was in his library. Plotinus likewise was a major source for this symbolism, and in the course of his *Tractates* he expounds spiritual exercises to bring alive his points of doctrine. They require the active use of imagination for the grasping of a truth which transcends ordinary perception, though we are invited to start with physical images in our ascent to understanding.

... imagine a small luminous mass serving as centre to a transparent sphere, so that the light within shows on the entire outer surface, otherwise unlit; we surely agree that the inner core of light, intact and immobile reaches out over the entire outer extension; the simple light of that small centre illuminates the whole field. The diffused light is not due to any bodily magnitude of that central point which illuminates not as body, but as body lit, that is by another kind of power than corporeal quality; let us then abstract the corporeal mass, retaining the light as power: we can no longer speak of the light in any particular spot; it is equally diffused within and throughout the entire sphere. We can no longer name the spot it occupied so as to say whence it came or how it is present; we can but seek and wonder as the search shows us the light simultaneously present at each and every point of the sphere. (trans. Stephen McKenna)

The similarity of the spiritualization proposed by this exercise to the spiritualization offered in the paintings of El Greco is surely striking. If we take the artists brushwork to correspond to the living flame as being the means by which he ensures that we are impressed with sharing his experience (sensuously, as it were), he then, under our nose, deprives that sensibility of the reference we would expect to

substantiate it, and fills that emptiness with the content of his spiritual contemplation.

This is not some magic, but a discipline in which the 'speculation' of imagination is purged of any subjectivity. It is a method of meditation among others. I do not believe we need be unduly anxious that it is not a specifically Christian one. El Greco here is using a procedure of meditating on a totally Christian content with the discerning permission of his patrons in the reforming Church. It is worth noting that, according to Louis Marx in his book, 'The Poetry of Meditation,' one period when such meditation flourished coincides exactly with the flourishing of English religious poetry. Talking about the poet George Herbert, T. S. Eliot says,

All poetry is difficult, almost impossible, to write: and one of the great permanent causes of error in writing poetry is the difficulty of distinguishing between what one really feels and what one would like to feel, and between the moments of genuine feeling and the moments of falsity. This is the danger of all poetry: but it is a peculiarly grave danger in the writing of devotional verse.

Personally I prefer the description 'religious' verse to 'devotional', since devotion, however 'lifted' its subject, is always from a self. But a special benefit of meditation may well be that it secures the art – whether painting or poetry – from the sort of self-consciousness that later religious expressions in all forms fell prey to.

The underlying theme of all El Greco's work is Corpus Christi. The importance of his example to the Church is not his style or even the audacity of his solution to creating a 'reformist' art, but in the significance the artist attached to 'embodiment'. The human race, Christians believe, stands indebted to the embodiment of God in the Son. This vital doctrine of the Tridentine Church was used by some to justify the degree of naturalism employed by the artists of the Renaissance. In that embodiment rest all the possibilities of grace – for us. If the Son's body was the Temple of the Holy Spirit, so may ours be. El Greco saw, however, the egotism that attaches to bodies and developed his art to anticipate the pantheism of our relish in the identification of holy and natural conjoinings. He saw his contemporaries treat the Incarnate One as a hero and realized that this was the height of Humanism's comprehension of the Son's universality and

sacredness. El Greco, like the iconographers of his original homeland, saw the Son not as a hero, but as the sacred manifestation to men. That manifestation became the model of his art. That is why he insists in his paintings on the inviolable nature of Christ's flesh; because He is the sovereign good above all accidents of nature, above the relativity of contingency. It is to reinforce the distinction of the sacred that he creates a disembodied world in honour of embodiment.



An Iconography of Vision

JOHN CAREY

Scattered among the soaring peaks and precipitous canyons of the Sierra Madre Occidental, in a territory spanning the boundary of the Mexican states of Nayarit and Jalisco, live the bearers of a culture which has remained essentially intact since before the coming of the Spanish, a culture older in all likelihood than the Toltec and Aztec empires. A few specimens of this people's art appear in the present issue of *Temenos*; in what follows I have made an effort – unavoidably inadequate – to provide some context for these remarkable and unfamiliar works.

The Huichol Indians (in their own language *Wixaritari*) comprise three distinct tribal groups, differing (though closely akin) in speech and mode of life: the *Wautüari*, *Tuapuritari* and *Tateikitari*. Legends suggest that they originally inhabited a kingdom named *Hiiicuripa* in the modern state of San Luis Potosí, a region which they visit still as pilgrims; their migration to the mountains was probably due to pressure from the Nahua peoples, whose authority extended to this area in the eighth century AD.

In the remote and inhospitable country which has remained their homeland, they were virtually unaffected by the invasions of the *conquistadores*. It was not until the early eighteenth century that the Spanish undertook to impose their sovereignty directly on the tribes of the Sierra; and when government forces crushed the warlike Cora Indians in 1722 the Huichol were able, by collaborating with the invaders, to retain title to their own communal lands. The subsequent establishment of Franciscan missions had little lasting effect on the lives or beliefs of the people: the Huichol found no difficulty in assigning subordinate roles in their own rich mythology to the Christian God and the Virgin of Guadalupe; and they remained, in their isolated ranches, elusive and largely inaccessible to the friars.

The decentralization of the Huichol communities, inevitable in a land of narrow valleys and few roads, affects existence at every level. Office in the tribal government (conferred by *cawiteros* or elders upon those designated by their dreams) is perceived not as a coveted prize

but as an onerous religious duty, depriving its holder of the opportunity for gainful labour. Units closer to the immediate interests of the Huichol are the clans, each of which maintains a *tukipa* or ceremonial centre as a place of religious and political assembly. Apart from ritual gatherings at the *tukipa*, however, every family functions independently, meeting nearly all of its own material and spiritual needs. Autonomy, and frequent solitude, are deeply ingrained in the Huichol character.

The traditional livelihood of the Huichol is attuned to the delicate ecology of their environment: symbiotic cultivation of beans, maize, squash and amaranth, supplemented by hunting in the forests and gathering in the ravines. This simple economy is closely interwoven with the manifold duties and observances of religion: pilgrimages, sacrifices, dances, recitations, and for some the years of instruction in sacred lore which are required in order to become a *maracame* ('shaman' or singing-priest).

In Huichol religion, doctrine and experience are inseparable. Only the aspirant who has proved his sincerity by the performance of exacting rituals is trusted with the many-layered elaboration of the esoteric teachings – in the absence of such commitment, a father will not hesitate to give deceptive answers to his own son's questions – and the teachings themselves are anchored and focused by the holy places which are objects of pilgrimage within the Huichol territory and beyond. The final initiation lies beyond normal language and cognition entirely: in visions experienced after ingesting the psychotropic cactus peyote, a sacrament only consumed under the most solemn religious auspices, following prolonged vigils and fasts.

This combination of an ancient and intricate body of sacred teachings with deeply personal visionary experience conjoins in Huichol awareness an enormous metaphysical subtlety with a creative freshness which is perpetually renewed. Besides 'life' (*tucari*) and 'soul' (*cupuri*), the Huichol psyche includes two transcendental faculties: *iyari*, the 'heart' which contains transpersonal memory of the primordial realities; and *nierica*, the eye or mirror through which vision passes between the worlds.

Two of the axes which orient the Huichol cosmos run from west to east and from nadir to zenith; the former links the places of pilgrimage beyond the Huichol Sierra. In the west is the sea, dwelling-place of Our Mother Ocean and of the Rain Mothers who bring water to the

mountain fields, rising into the air in the shapes of serpents with lightning in their wombs; it is to the sea, as some myths hold, that *Tatēi Yurianaca*, 'Our Mother Moist Earth', retreated when her work on land was done. In the east is *Wiricuta*, the desert of San Luis Potosí to which pilgrims journey to gather the peyote. Each journey to *Wiricuta* imitates the journey undertaken by the gods in the first times, and the stony landscape is full of the petrified remains of heedless pilgrims who faltered in fulfilment of their vows.

Sacred duty moves along the horizontal axis, sacred history along the vertical; and the two are linked by an intricate play of metaphysical analogy. Below the world is *Watetüapa*, the inchoate realm where all things once existed in a state of potency: there there was no difference between life and death, between man and beast; there the species were not yet articulated, nor had light or words been born. When the gods or Ancestors escaped from *Watetüapa* – clambering through a volcano or a hollow reed, or up the ladder of a deer's tail – its fluidity hardened into the semblance of a skull, and its master *Tucácame* became the lord of death.

Upon the plane of manifestation, our world of *Heriepa*, the Ancestors ordained the forms and usages which uphold the order of the universe. For our sake they died physically, leaving behind their dismembered bodies as components of the reality which we inhabit, and ascended in spirit to *Taheimá*, the domain of the individual soul, a realm embodied and symbolized by a soaring, double-headed eagle. This absolute self-immolation imposes upon us in turn the perpetual obligation of sacrifice: the weight of inescapable duty lies sternly across all sacred practice.

Mediating between the Ancestors and mankind is the bearer of all words, *Tamatsi Cauyumarie* ('Our Elder Brother Fawn of the Sun'), leader of the emergence from *Watetüapa*. He is one of a triad of deer-Ancestors, together with *Tamatsi Maxacuaxí*, 'Our Elder Brother Deer-Tail', along whose tail the Ancestors climbed into *Heriepa*; and with *Tamatsi Maxayuave*, 'Our Elder Brother Blue Deer', physical progenitor of all living deer, the willing sacrifice whose blood gave the power of speech to the ritual instruments. The deer's flesh is a sacramental food symbolically identified with the staple crop of maize, and with the psychic food peyote – peyote, indeed, is stalked like a deer in *Wiricuta*, and transfixed when found with arrows. *Tamatsi Cauyumarie* is the most

ubiquitous and elusive of the three: trickster and saviour, vessel and vehicle of all knowledge, voice of gods and men.

The arts – dance and music, weaving and carving – have always been fundamental to Huichol existence, by their very nature bound up with experience of the sacred. In 1902, the anthropologist Carl Lumholtz wrote that

Religious feeling pervades the thoughts of the Huichol so completely that every bit of decoration he puts on the most trivial of his everyday garments or utensils is a request for some benefit, a prayer for protection against evil, or an expression of adoration of some deity. In other words, the people always carry their prayers and devotional sentiments with them in visible form.¹

A generation or so later, semi-urbanized Huichol living in the slums of Tepic and Guadalajara adapted inherited techniques to create a new art-form. A traditional method of decorating votive gourd-bowls and symbolic *niericate* had been to cover them with a thin layer of wax, produced by a stingless bee native to the mountains; into this wax were pressed patterns of grains, seeds and plant fibres, and eventually glass beads and strands of commercial yarn as well. Now deracinated Huichol craftsmen began to produce 'yarn-paintings' (*tablas*, *cuadros*) by spreading the beeswax on plywood boards and creating pictures entirely of yarn, pressed into the wax – preferably strand by strand – with the thumbnail. These *tablas* first appeared on the market in the 1950s as 'Indian crafts': although they drew on traditional material for their subjects, they were generally of slight artistic or spiritual value. The medium had come into being under commercial auspices, and its expressive range was cheapened by the exploitation and lack of discernment of entrepreneurial middlemen. A few stereotyped themes were endlessly repeated, with an often deliberate disregard for sacred meanings; the craftsmen themselves, sundered from their ancestral environment and from the rituals of the Sierra, had for the most part lost touch with the beliefs and culture of their people.

A crucial figure in the recent transfiguration of the *tabla* has been the Mexican artist and student of religion Juan Negrín. Upon becoming aware of Huichol art early in the last decade, he embarked upon an exhaustive search for those artists who were truly creative, those whose work provided inspiration for the myriad copies of the craft-shops.

These men were – by no means coincidentally – still tied to their heritage by strong spiritual bonds; and Negrín dedicated himself to renewing and deepening that connection, encouraging their best work and urging them to return to involvement in their people's myths and rituals. The result has been an astonishing artistic flowering, of which the pictures included here can give only a glancing hint: what Negrín has called 'the adventurous double pursuit of beauty and deep religious meaning'.²

In the ensuing years Negrín has worked closely with the Huichol of the Sierra: undertaking pilgrimages, studying traditions, and advocating the interests of the Indians to an often uncomprehending outside world. He has, in the course of the last few years, been responsible for establishing in the Tuapuri community a workshop (equipped with an innovative solar kiln) for wood treatment and carpentry: a project which holds out the hope of an economic autonomy for the Huichol compatible with the survival of their fragile environment.

The art of the Huichol conveys meanings for which normal language is an inadequate vehicle; this is true both within Huichol culture, where votive emblems join mortals to the Ancestors, and beyond it, where the vivid beauty of the *tablas* – themselves the work of men trapped between cultures – provides our secular society with its only glimpse into the heart of an immemorial esoteric tradition. Symbolically, the *tabla* itself can be a *nierica*, mirroring the supernatural; or a design painted on the cheek of *Tamatsi Cayumarie*; or an *itari*, a prayer-mat on which the Ancestors alight: out of the union of ancient mythology and personal supernatural encounters has emerged an iconography of vision.

As has been mentioned, all of the artists whose works are here reproduced have intimate links with their ancestral traditions; with the strengthening of these links, their art has deepened in sophistication and intensity.

Tutukila Carrillo Carrillo (his Huichol name is *Niucame*, 'Sprouting Corn') was born in 1949 on a ranch in the territory of the *Tuapuritari*. In 1963 he sought a formal education, and also began to produce *tablas*; after less than a year and a half he returned to the mountains to seek instruction in the myths from his father, and to undertake pilgrimages. Tutukila, who has had a tremendous influence on other Huichol artists, has created extended sequences of *tablas* in which he gives visual

expression to some of the great mythical narratives of his people; early in his work with Negrín, he was obliged to perform special rituals in order to obtain supernatural sanction for the disclosure of these sacred truths.

Juan Ríos Martínez (Taurri Mutuani, 'Painted Red'), born in 1930, grew up among displaced Huichol living in the mountains which overlook the Great Santiago River. Early in his life he was 'summoned' by the spirit of the *kieri* tree (a dangerous psychotropic plant native to the Huichol Sierra) to serve it for five years; he emerged from this service endowed with musical abilities – especially virtuosity in playing the *xaweri*, a Huichol version of the violin – which he has retained ever since. Although he decided that the path of a *maraacame* was too demanding for him, he has performed the pilgrimage to Wiricuta, and has remained faithful to his religious duties; his *tablas* are much influenced by his dreams, and by conversations with a *maraacame* uncle.

Guadalupe González Ríos (Ketsetemahé Teucariya, 'Godson of the Mating Iguanas') was born around 1920 in the country to the west of the Sierra, an area in which many hold that his father was the most notable *maraacame*. A lifelong devotee of the *kieri*, he has produced works almost wholly votive in character – visible prayers and appeals for mercy to the Ancestors. Emblematic offerings, and punishments inflicted upon the transgressor, are schematized in constellations of fear and piety.

José Benítez Sánchez (Yucauye Cucame, 'Silent Walker') was born in 1938 in the community of Wautüa, and was raised by his adoptive father (a practising *maraacame*) and by his maternal grandfather. As a boy he was prepared to become a *maraacame* himself, a path into which he was initiated by inhaling the last breath of a dying deer; but his training was interrupted when he was forced into an arranged marriage at the age of fourteen. He fled into modern civilization, supporting himself at first with janitorial jobs but gradually gaining increasing recognition for his manifold artistic gifts. The most celebrated of the 'yarn-painters', he is possessed of an apparently limitless creative power – a power manifested to some extent in his remarkable productivity, but more significantly in the endless inventiveness of his imagery and style. No selection can do justice to the range of his vision, and the examples given here touch upon only a few facets of his astonishingly variegated output.

The plates which follow are accompanied by brief texts contributed

by Juan Negrín, which seek to provide some explanation and background for the scenes portrayed. It must be stressed that much is left unsaid: quite apart from hermetic meanings inaccessible to an outsider, even the exoteric symbology is so rich and so subtly deployed that it has proved feasible to supply only the barest skeleton of commentary.³

Notes

¹ *Unknown Mexico* (New York, 1902), vol. 2, p. 213.

² *The Huichol Creation of the World* (Sacramento, 1975), p. 4.

³ I am grateful to Stephen Aldrich and John Bowles for their generous assistance and advice when I was working on this essay, and to the artists and collectors who have made the pictures reproduced in this issue available to *Temenos*. My greatest debt is to Juan Negrín, upon whose writings and lectures these prolegomena are based; all inadequacies and inaccuracies are, of course, my own responsibility.



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1. Tutukila Carrillo Carrillo 'The journey of Xiciuacame'

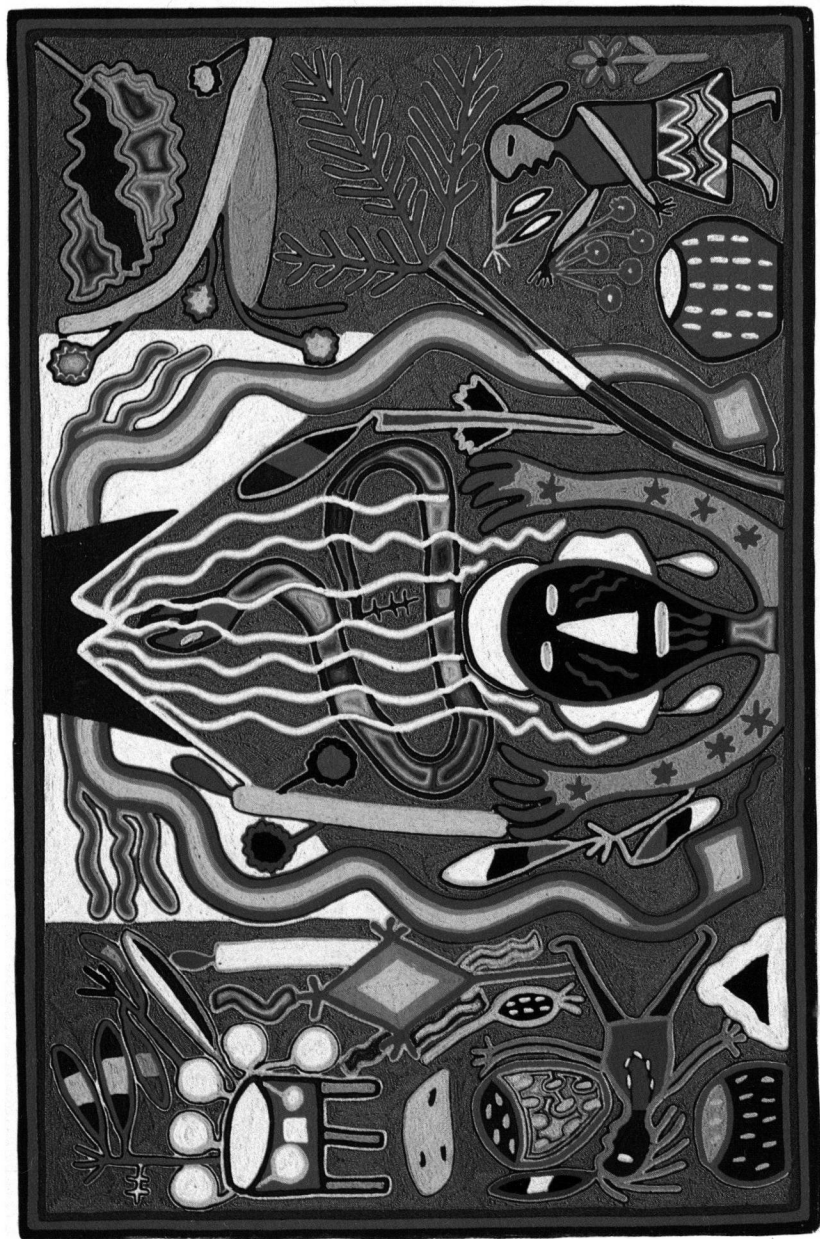
2. Tumbela Carrillo Carrillo 'The journey of Xicliacame'





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3. Juan Ríos Martínez 'The harvest of weeds'



© The Artist and Juan Negrín

4. Juan Ríos Martínez 'Nuariwame's revenge'



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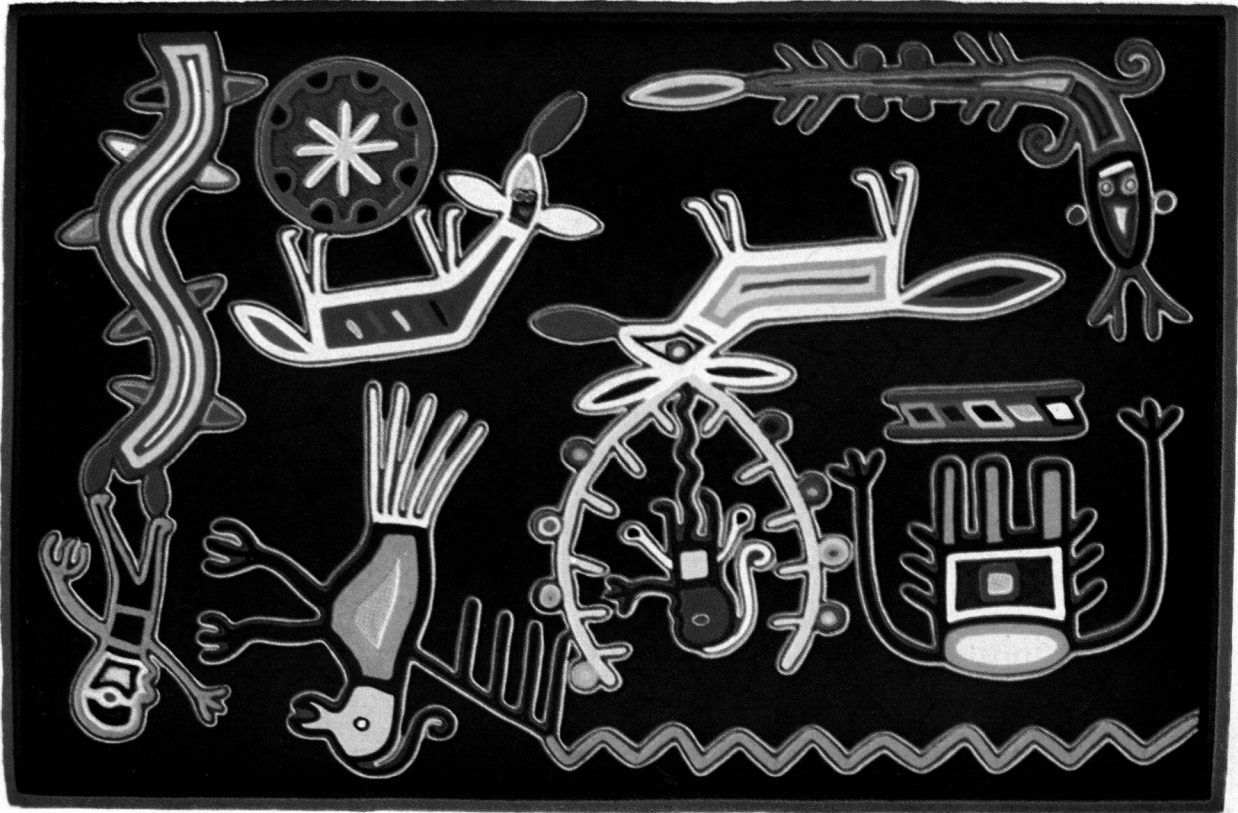
5. Guadalupe González Ríos 'The maracame renews his vows to the deer'

6. Guadalupe Gonzalez Rios 'Altar to the peyote spirit'



© The Artist and Juan Negrin

7. José Benítez Sánchez 'The Blue Deer carries children on his antlers'



8. José Benítez Sánchez "The spirit eye of Tatuisi Maxacuaxi"



Interpretations

JUAN NEGRÍN

1 & 2 'The journey of Xicüacame' Tutukila Carrillo Carrillo

120 × 80 cm Spring 1973–Winter 1974/5

Collection of George Howell, Arlington, Massachusetts

Reproduced here are the first two in a series of five *tablas*, which depict Xicüacame's progress from his childhood home to apotheosis as a lightning-god in the sacred desert of Wiricuta.

In the first *tabla* he is shown emerging from the earth at the spot called Puguari Mantayunixu (figure below rainbow with bow and arrow), where he formed a large waterhole. On the water's surface he made patterns of decaying plant matter, from which those who followed him could learn the place's sacred qualities. To amuse himself he shot arrows through the leaves of the shrub *weekí* (a plant often struck by lightning): he shot five plants at once, five being the sacred number.

He journeyed onward beneath the earth, creating the veins of water which feed the waterholes, until he came to the god-house at Nuari Manatawe (top right). He consecrated the place by leaving the serpent Haixacuu there in the form of a *tepari* (lava disk on which the gods may rest), and tested his arrows by transforming them into dragonflies (top left, bottom right), creatures which imbue water with soul (*cupuri*). From Nuari Manatawe he saw a rainbow, which revealed to him other places needing water.

His mother Tatéi Nuariwame ('Our Mother Messenger of Rains') appeared to him in the form of a cloud (top centre), asking him to return to her. His reply rose as vapour from the *weekí* leaves pierced by his arrows: he would not return until his journey was accomplished. (Nuariwame knew all along that it was her son's destiny to become the lightning; by asking him to return, she was testing his strength and firmness of purpose.)

Xicüacame was pursued always by his elder brother Xiráunime (white-centred figure at far left), who followed the clover blossoms which

grew above the boy's subterranean path; but *Xiciacame* continued to elude him.

In the second *tabla*, the god-house at *Nuari Manatawe* appears to the left. *Xiciacame* and the master of *Nuari Manatawe*, a being named *Hacuieca*, agreed that a waterhole should be opened beside the temple. *Hacuieca* lived in the fields as an animal which would not allow itself to be seen; with the coming of the cold weather he froze, and became 'the ice that walked'. He entered the waterhole, but warmth generated by the guardian serpent *Haixacuu* (not shown) caused him to melt and rise into the air (winged lavender figure); his vital energy (*tucari*) was not dispersed, however. *Hacuieca* later moved elsewhere, but his influence at *Nuari Manatawe* endured; patches of ice still form upon the water there.

From *Hacuieca's* god-house *Xiciacame* saw a *cawí*, a rock-formation where a deity's power is localized (far right). From a distance, *Waacuri Kitenie* (spirit of a hill which guards the entrance to *Wiricuta*) poured forth power from this *cawí*, and told *Xiciacame* that a waterhole should be opened at the foot of the peak. *Xiciacame* shot an arrow at the spot where the waterhole would appear (lower right).

He dove once more beneath the earth (seen diving as red figure at centre), and emerged as a caiman looking up from the water (half-serpent figure, lower right); the waterhole was named *Hāxi Mutinieri* ('Caiman Coming Out of the Water'). He consecrated the spot by leaving *Haixacuu* there as a *tepari*, and again left patterns upon the water's surface (dark lines).

Xiráunime (bottom left) still followed the trail of clover blossoms, guided by his mother's servant *Cuuyawime* ('Blue Serpent'; upper left). *Cuuyawime* also encouraged *Xiciacame* by revealing to him more and more of his destiny. Showers of rain descended from the serpent's body.

3 'The harvest of weeds' Juan Ríos Martínez

120 × 80 cm Spring 1974

Private collection, California

The Mother of Corn had two sons-in-law: *Ura Tewiyari* ('Roadrunner Person') and *Tuamuxawi* (the first cultivator). To *Ura Tewiyari* she gave many seeds and grains to plant, but for *Tuamuxawi* she had only chaff.

Ura Tewiyari seemed like a hard worker, for he would stay out all day and often return with broken tools. In fact he was very lazy: he would break the tools deliberately, cook and eat the seed corn, and spend the day asleep.

At the time of the harvest, the Mother of Corn found only weeds growing in Ura's fields. In her rage she urinated into his cooking-pot, at which he awoke and remarked that now he need not even add water when cooking the corn. She chased and thrashed him, and he became the roadrunner or 'lazy bird' (Mexican Spanish *pájaro flojo*) – so called because it runs instead of flying. At upper left is Ura Tewiyari's wife: she had come to bring her husband a gourd of water, but now stands weeping in shame above his broken and neglected tools.

Tuamuxawi, although he had been given only chaff to plant, gathered a fine harvest.

4 'Nuariwame's revenge' Juan Ríos Martínez

120 × 80 cm Spring 1974

Kolla-Landwehr Collection, Southwest Museum, Los Angeles

Once Nuariwame was a little girl who cried constantly. At last her exasperated mother took her out behind the house and left her there. When, much later, her family remembered Nuariwame, they found that she had crawled away to the bank of a river, and was playing with little hills which she had made from dirt; but when they tried to take hold of her, she escaped into the water. She refused to return, saying that they had despised her: she would come back only if they prepared elaborate offerings, and awaited her there in five days.

In the *tabla*, Nuariwame's brother, mother and sister (lower left, centre and right) are shown with many offerings, including a drum with *muvi*ri ('prayer-arrow', a sacred implement) and votive candles (upper left), a *tsicuri* or 'god's eye' (diamond shape to right of drum), and gourds of corn beer (in bottom corners). Nuariwame has returned, but has assumed the aspect of a devastating rainstorm: she is now *Tatēi Nuariwame*, 'Our Mother Messenger of Rains'. White streams of water pour from the skies, and lightning bolts like snakes blast the tree between mother and sister, and cover the mother's face with blood.

Above the mother's head is Nuariwame herself, the serpent spirit of the storm: her reunion with her family is the consummation of her vengeance.

5 'The maraacame renews his vows to the deer'

Guadalupe González Ríos

60 × 60 cm January 1974

Kolla-Landwehr Collection, Southwest Museum, Los Angeles

Because a maraacame has broken his vows, Tamatsi Maxayuave ('Our Elder Brother Blue Deer') has sent a scorpion to sting him. Now the maraacame, who had not realised his failure until he was stung, seeks healing and reconciliation. He appears on the right, with the scorpion below him; the deer's words are borne to him by the winds (white wavy lines rising from lower margin). To the maraacame's left appears his muvieri, and some of his offerings are shown below (from left to right: an ear of maize, an arrow, a votive candle) and above (a drop of chocolate by the deer's tail, star-shaped blossoms of the clover and Mexican carnation). Within the deer itself are more blossoms, and its iyari (heart-memory) is represented by pink dots. The tree above its back represents the pine woods where the deer conceal themselves.

6 'Altar to the peyote spirit' Guadalupe González Ríos

120 × 120 cm Winter 1974/5

Kolla-Landwehr Collection, Southwest Museum, Los Angeles

The maraacame (yellow-headed figure at upper right) has been guided along his path (knotted pink line below him), following the deer's tracks and the sounds of the wind, to the place of the peyote (hicuri; horned face in upper centre).

Assuming the form of a rattlesnake, the peyote issues from the mouth of Tamatsi Maxayuave (upper left). The maraacame gestures with his muvieri to still the apparition. Maxayuave then grants him spiritual vision in the form of a nierica (yellow disk depending from his snout); the grateful maraacame makes offerings in return.

On the altar (lower centre) the peyote manifests itself as a multi-coloured ear of maize, flanked by primordial candles which have become mountain peaks near *Wiricuta*. As a warning, the peyote also reveals the lost soul of a votary who failed in his ritual obligations (figure below deer). In the upper left-hand corner appears the owl, beside the red rays of the sacred fire; throughout the *tabla* are shown the peyote's reptile and insect allies, and the *maracame's* offerings.

7 'The Blue Deer carries children on his antlers'

José Benítez Sánchez

120 × 80 cm Autumn 1973

Collection of Joel Stein, Chico, California

When *Tamatsi Maxayuave* had completed the arduous pilgrimage from the ocean to *Wiricuta*, he was told that he must henceforth journey to and fro, bearing blessings between *Tatéi Matinieri* ('Our Mother Who Watches Over Us'; the sacred waterhole of the desert) and *Tatéi Haramara* ('Our Mother Ocean'; represented by serpent at lower left). On his tongue he carries sweet water to the ocean, and then returns with salt water to the waterhole, where his mate awaits him.

Beside the ocean *Maxayuave* met a *maracame* (shown between his antlers), who told him that it had been revealed to the people that their children would sicken unless they were taken to *Wiricuta*; but the parents did not know the way. He asked if *Maxayuave* would take them, since he had made the journey before. *Maxayuave* answered that he had already sent the Blue Eagle (*Wérica Yuave*) to ask if he might do this to grant them life; even as he spoke, word came from *Waacuri Kitenie* (far right), instructing him to bring the children.

At *Tatéi Neixa*, the feast of the first fruits, *Maxayuave* carries the children of the Huichol (shown as orange balls on his antlers) to *Wiricuta*; as the *maracame* sings and beats the drum (shown at upper left; below it is an *itari* or prayer-mat), and the harvest's fruits are sanctified, they are borne through the air to the holy desert. On earth and in the sky the serpent and eagle watch over them.

8 'The spirit eye of Tatutsí Maxacuaxí' José Benítez Sánchez

120 × 80 cm Spring 1979

Collection of Juan and Yvonne Negrin, Guadalajara

Tatutsí Maxacuaxí ('Our Great-Grandfather Deer-Tail') rises like a squash-vine out of the primeval underworld of Watetüapa. Upon entering our plane of Heriepa, he opens his ears with arrows (wedge shapes above his ears), granting hearing to the world as well as to himself.

Above the arrows are antlers in the form of deer-tails. His tail grants the deer-spirit the power to change his form. The white flash from a deer's lifted tail, communicating its presence in the instant of its flight, symbolizes divine revelation.

Tatutsí Maxacuaxí embodies tribal law as well as inspiration: his body became the first god-house, and his flesh the sacred deer. Through the sacraments of deer meat and peyote his *nierica* is revealed (disk in upper centre); but its attainment is difficult and dangerous. The wavy lines in the upper grey area represent the futile paths, leading nowhere, of seekers who have gone astray.

On the right are the female powers of moisture and fertility, symbolized by flowers and gourd-bowls: this realm is presided over by Tatéi Nuariwame (blue female figure at far right). She opened the path on which children travel to Wiricuta (wavy green diagonal to top right corner): back along it flow life, increase and rain (symbolized respectively by hearts, flowers and serpents).

Along the *tabla's* left border, initiated pilgrims return from Wiricuta under the protection of Tamatsi Maxacuaxí ('Our Elder Brother Deer-Tail'; top left corner), the dynamic aspect of Tatutsí Maxacuaxí. With their deer-tail-shaped antlers the pilgrims relay messages through a humming-bird to a *maracame* who sits beside a calabash gourd (marked with a scorpion to symbolize the abstention from water required of pilgrims) and a bull (sacrificed in thanksgiving at the feast of first fruits). Above the *maracame* is a deer-headed serpent to which he has entrusted his spirit and his supernatural abilities: they are preserved in the double squash-vine ending in two flowers.

PETER RUSSELL

Quintilii Apocalypseôs Fragmenta

Black Krishna, Jesus-child, Ísu
Keeps goading me on to be
The Apostle of goose-girls

He has sent me through flowery meadows

The old Bull chased me
I ran away

Into sheep pastures

The old Ram
Butted me

Into the pig pen

The Lord surely will hear the cry
Even of the descendants
Of victorious soap manufacturers

The goose-girls slip through my fingers
The shepherdesses have pelted me with stones

The flower of the field
Is crushed by engines

The sheep themselves
Trample Psalliota

I am an old puffball
Grey-green inside

Butter is dripping from the cow-girls' fingers
When shall I have issue?

At dawn on Good Friday I have woken up
Spattered with mud in the darkness of Gadara

Is it permitted for a mortal to pray to the Gods for soap?

This field at the edge of a dark thicket
This pinfold of hogs

Is it the Plain of Truth?
Is it the Field of Er?
And where is the Garden of the Muses?

What is the map reference of the Resurrection?
The site of the next Last Judgment?

The learned doctors are still disputing this
The soap manufacturers' clerks
Are making out invoices
The Sirens themselves gaze in their magic mirrors
But can't see their pig-snouts

Nobody seems satisfied with his life

Naked and dirty a little boy is playing
With daisies as big as suns

And the nymphs and the dryads timid as gazelles
Are gazing on the child-god's
Blazing beauty

And an old man with hairy thighs
Babbling

Codex Disco

The Divine Self Portrait

RICHARD BAEZ

'Blessed are the eyes which see what you see!
for he who has seen Me has seen the Father'
(Luke 10:23 and John 14:9)

The whole universe is contained in man who stands between the spiritual and material creations partaking of them both. The spiritual and the animal world are reflected in him. Being a microcosm, his task is to reconcile and harmonize the noetic and the material realms, to bring them to unity, to spiritualize the material. Man as mediator is the one in whom the world is summed up and through whom the world is offered back to God. So man is able to reshape and alter the world and to endue it with fresh meaning. Man co-operates by rehearsing the final restoration when the whole material order will be one day transformed.

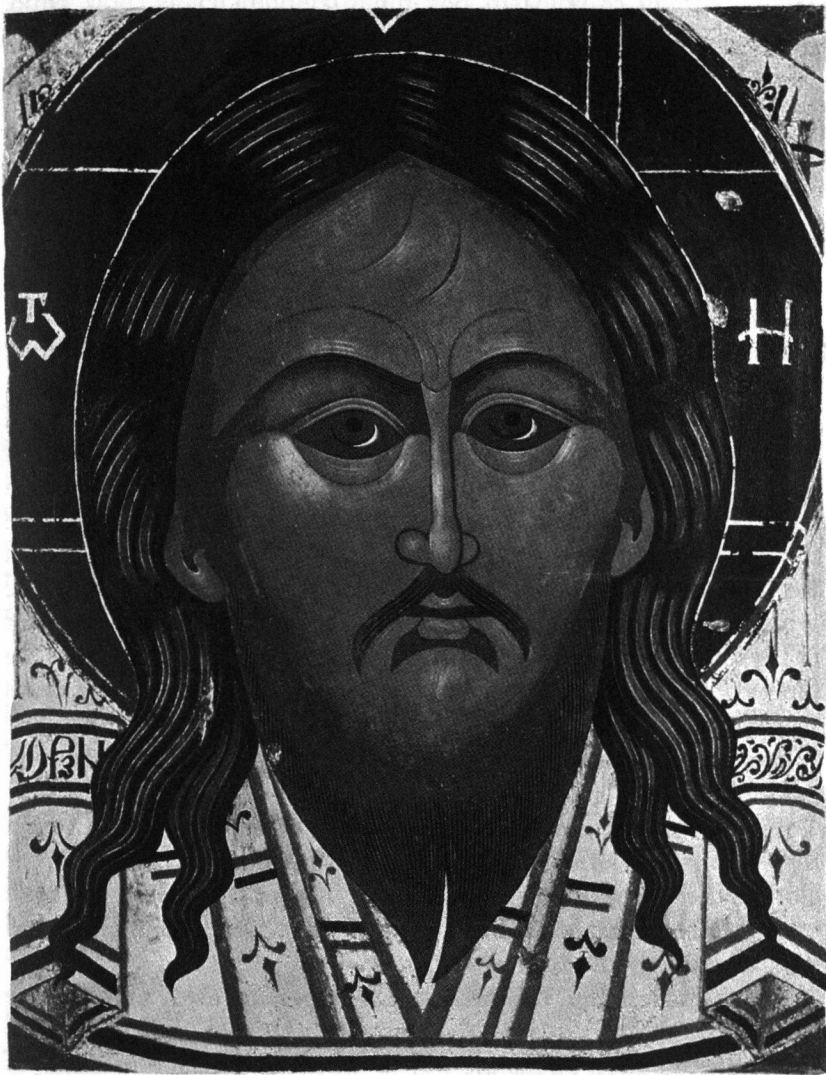
Through craftsmanship, the writing of books, the painting of icons etc., man gives material things a voice and renders the creation articulate in praise of God. This pontifical function is beautifully described by St Leontius of Cyprus when he says: 'Through heaven and earth and sea, through wood and stone, through all creation visible and invisible, I offer veneration to the Creator and Maker of all things. For the creation does not venerate the Maker directly and by itself, but it is through me that heavens declare the glory of God, through me the moon worships God, through me the stars glorify Him, through me the water and showers of rain, the dews and all creation, venerate God and give Him glory.'¹

Man being made in the image of God, he is the means by which God acts in the creation. It is precisely in this divine image that the cosmic meaning of man is revealed. Creation participates in the spiritual life through man just as man participates in creation through his spiritual life. This interchange takes place through the artist who co-operates in the process of deification of nature.

The icon painter is well aware of the fact that 'we are fellow workers with God.'² This traditional form of art of portraying the Word is, in the Eastern tradition of Christianity, a way of making the Gospel visible. 'The tradition of the sacred image is related to established prototypes . . . it comprises a doctrine, that is to say, a dogmatic definition of the sacred image, and an artistic method which allows the prototype to be reproduced in a manner conformable to its meaning. The artistic method presupposes a spiritual discipline.'³ The icon painter is inspired by faith and the object of his inspiration must become visible. In order to externalize his inner perception his mind and heart must be free from fantasy and mental images so that the 'intellect can be established in its true nature, ready to contemplate whatever is full of delight, spiritual and close to God.'⁴ 'Works of spiritual art presuppose a certain inner state. They can be produced only by an artist, even though he be unlettered, who fasts, prays, and lives in a state of contrition and humility. For only then is the soul imbued with grace, soars upward with spiritual wings and becomes capable of representing the deep realm of mysteries.'⁵

The revelation of the world of Truth in an icon is a metaphysical experience, an inner contact with the Logos and Sophia-Word and Wisdom. The perfume of such experience embraces the icon with a miraculous power, and he who, being in the right spiritual attitude, contemplates a holy image, may see through it as if it were a window to the world of the spirit. And this is theophany; 'the unfolding of the Infinite in the bosom of the finite. The divine image is a sacramental crystalization of this miraculous meeting, whence its lightning-like (clarity), resembling that inward miracle.'⁶

There are many icons famous for their power and among them is the one called 'Mandylion', 'not made by human hands'. Its origin goes back to the times of Christ and the legend can be summarized as follows: Edessa, the capital city of Osroene – a small country between the Tigris and the Euphrates – was ruled by a King called Abgar. Abgar was a leper who heard of the miracles of Christ and so he sent to Him his archivist with a letter in which he asked Christ to come to Edessa to heal him. Hannan, the archivist, was a painter too, so he was commissioned by Abgar to make a portrait of Christ. Hannan found Christ surrounded by a large crowd and therefore could not approach Him. So he climbed up on a rock from which he could see Him better.



A copy of the 'Mandylion', Novgorod (Monastery School),
18th century.

Here he tried to make the portrait, but he could not because of the indescribable glory of His face that he observed to be changing through grace as he watched. Aware that Hannan wanted to make a portrait of Him, Christ asked for some water, washed himself, wiped His face with a piece of linen and His features remained on this linen. Christ gave it to Hannan and told him to take it, with a letter, to the person who had sent him. In the letter, Christ refused to go to Edessa since He had a mission to fulfil. The towel cured the King at the moment he touched it. On the miraculous Self-portrait of Christ, Abgar wrote: 'O Christ God, he who trusts in Thee will not die.'

This event is told first by Eusebius, the father of Church history. Dionysius of Fortuna (18th century), the icon painter, refers to this story too. In his 'Instructions to him who wishes to learn the art of painting' in the 'Painter's manual', he says that the following prayer should be said before selecting the materials with which to paint an icon: 'Lord Jesus Christ our Lord, uncircumscribed in your divine nature, having become inexpressibly incarnate for the salvation of man from the last things by the Virgin Mother of God, Mary, hast become worthy of circumscription. Who having imprinted the sacred character of thy immaculate face on the holy veil, and through this healing of the illness of the governor Abgar and bringing about enlightenment of his soul into the full knowledge of our true God . . .'⁷

This supernatural 'artistic expression' defies any traditional canon of painting.

It is proper to say that the entire universe is the artwork of God but the 'Mandyllion' is the Self-portrait of the Artist Himself. His face on the cloth is the proof of His presence on earth and His image has been transferred to humanity. This icon shows that God became man and that, accordingly, the Spirit is with us.

This revelation finds its microcosmic expression every time that the divine face of the Artist is recognized within the individual. This sudden recognition opens the way to the metaphysical dimension of both individual and universal beauty.

The icon painter recreates images of gratitude and love. His work is a liturgy of mystery and beauty that represents the victory over chaos and self-interest. Thus, the pontifical function of man becomes evident in these artists. Their function is to complement the human image by giving to man a mirror where he can see his 'true face'. Icons suggest the

'other side' which renders depth and meaning to human nature. Without this dimension the 'image' never becomes 'likeness', so man confines himself to his chaotic individuality.

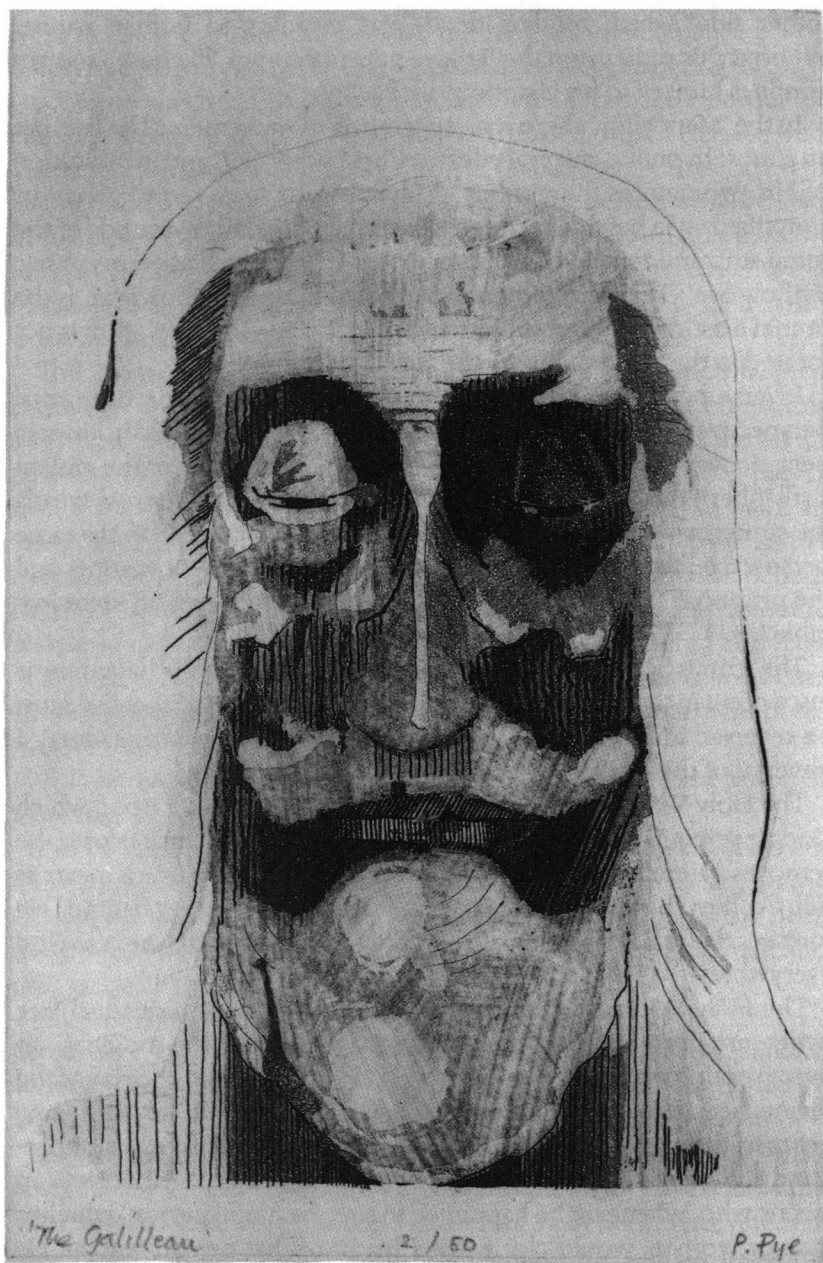
In the 'Mandylion' there is no suggestion of movement. The face has an almost hypnotic, magical effect as Christ stares at us and in indication of His two natures the nimbus changes colour from red to green. Its simplified style heightens the air of mystery; the rattling sounds of the mind stop and remain as if petrified by the Presence that seems to say: 'Follow Me'. The third dimension absent in this icon, however, is the tunnel existing between subject and object. The vanishing point is not located in the icon but before the spectator himself.

Inverse perspective is in iconography a willful rejection of normal perspective. 'But in the Gospel everything is, so to speak, in inverse perspective: "The first shall be the last", the meek and not the violent shall inherit the earth, and the supreme humiliation of the cross is truly the supreme victory. Thus the life of the Christian is placed in the same perspective: the death of the martyr is his victory, his coronation, and the privations of the ascetic struggle are transformed into an incomparable joy.'⁸

The icon is both a means and a path to follow that at the beginning is just a point in the human heart from which our whole perspective must be reversed and this is the meaning of the Greek word 'metanoia', a 'reversal of the intellect'.

The Holy Veil can be understood as being the universe upon which God imprints His image. The contemplative is like an art restorer; he removes patiently all the over-painting until the original one appears in full. To him the universe is like a gallery of icons to be restored. He foresees the real image beneath all 'fakes'. In other words, he sees God everywhere.

The Holy Veil is also the original human face, each individual face being no more than a later addition that blurs the original, an over-painting which has to be removed in order to see the beauty of the divine face. This symbolic removal depends upon the way of seeing because through the beauty of created things God makes us understand His uncreated beauty. St John of the Ladder says: '... there was an ascetic who, whenever he happened to see a beautiful person, whether man or woman, would glorify the Creator of that person with all his heart, and from a mere glance his love for God would spring afresh and



"The Galilean". Etching by Patrick Pye

he would pour out of his account a fountain of tears. And one marvelled, seeing this happen, that for this man what would cause the soul of another to stink had become a reason for crowns and an ascent above nature. Whoever perceives beauty in this fashion is already incorruptible even before the dead shall rise in the common Resurrection.⁹

The spiritual discipline of the icon painter helps him to lift the veil that covers the real human face and to recognize the common face in every man. St Maximus the Confessor tells us that '... every intellect endowed by the grace of Christ with discriminative and penetrating vision, always desires and seeks the face of the Lord. The face of the Lord is true contemplation and spiritual knowledge of divine things attained through virtue. When one seeks this contemplation and knowledge one learns the cause of one's destitution and dearth. For just as the face is the distinctive feature of each person, so spiritual knowledge is the special characteristic of what is divine. He who seeks such knowledge is said to seek the face of the Lord.'¹⁰

Also the Holy Veil is the human heart from where the 'image' has to be rescued and restored to its 'likeness'. The 'Mandylyon' has to be externalized but this process requires an internalization.

The externalization of the internal starts from the loss of self on the part of man in his encounter with the icon. The vanishing point mentioned before disappears, leaving instead the fullness of the image. Man is then absorbed and fused into the external object itself. He dies to himself to be reborn in the spiritual reality of the icon expressed by the three letters of the nimbus which say: 'I am the Being'¹¹ as it appears in a copy of the 'Mandylyon'.¹²

In the case of the internalization of the external, the observer eventually comes to the realization that what he has thought to be 'external' to himself is in truth 'internal'. He discovers that 'the Kingdom of Heaven is within'. Everything he imagined taking place outside himself has in reality been taking place in an interior space. This double process can be likened to the perception of our image in a mirror; when the image takes our attention, we externalize the internal, but when we understand that what we perceive is our image, we internalize the external. The abyss between these two gestures of consciousness unites and separates the two poles of existence.

Man can transform himself by an internal effort and make of himself

a living icon. A saint is a living icon of God and the painted icon is an expression of his holiness, of his deified human nature.

Many icon painters have deified themselves through this art. In the creation of an icon nothing can replace the concrete and personal experience of grace. This realization through art has been recognized by the Orthodox Church canonizing iconographers whose art was considered to be obvious evidence of holiness. However, since the 'Mandylion' was created by God rather than painted by human hands, the Artist necessarily transcends canonization.

To contemplate the divine face of the 'Mandylion' is to contemplate the prototype of the universe as macrocosm and the human heart as microcosm. The face of the Lord is true contemplation and spiritual knowledge.

Notes

¹ Quoted by Fr. Kallistos Ware in 'The Orthodox Way', St Vladimir's Seminary Press, NY 1980, p. 70.

² I Cor. 3:9.

³ Titus Burckhardt 'Sacred Art in East and West', Perennial Books, Middlesex, p. 65.

⁴ The Philokalia, Vol. I, Faber & Faber, p. 178.

⁵ C. Cavarinos, 'Byzantine Art and Thought', Mass. 1980, p. 77.

⁶ F. Schuon, 'Logic and Transcendence', Perennial Books, London, p. 237.

⁷ D. of Fortuna, 'Painters Manual', Sagitarius Press, London 1981, p. 4.

⁸ L. Ouspensky, 'Theology of the Icon', St Vladimir's Press, NY 1978, p. 225.

⁹ P. Kontoglu, 'What Orthodox Iconography is', Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Mass. p. 8.

¹⁰ The Philokalia, Vol. II, Faber & Faber, p. 267.

¹¹ Exod. 3:14.

¹² The 'Mandylion' had been preserved at Constantinople until it disappeared when the town was pillaged by the Latin Crusaders (see note 3).

Shabestari's Garden of Mysteries

The Aesthetics and Hermeneutics of Sufi Poetry

LEONARD LEWISOHN

لفظ چون و گُرسْت و معنی طایرست
جسم جوی و روح آب سایرست

Words are only nests. Meanings winged creatures
afflight. Bodies are rivers,
the Spirit their steady current.
– Rumi (Mathnawi II: 3292)

I. The Symbolist Tradition in Classical Persian Sufi Poetry

There are basically two schools of thought in the field of classical Persian literary criticism of the Sufi *ghazal* (amatory elegy):

1. Scholars such as A. J. Arberry, and more recently, Michael Hillmann, and Annemarie Schimmel,¹ who treat the Persian *ghazal* from primarily an aesthetic and literary standpoint, usually interpret the Sufi motifs in the *ghazal* as – to use a term devised by Rosemund Tuve – an ‘imposed allegory.’² The truly allegorical quality in Sufi poetry is seen as a disguise for eroticism, and the metaphysical, archetypal nature of the *ghazal* is considered as a whitewash over a profane romancing. They speak of tensions to resolve the dichotomy of erotic and metaphysical love,³ hence using concepts which unconsciously reflect, as Henry Corbin observed, the situation of a conscience *malheureuse*,⁴ mainly derived from the study of Western pietistic poets such as Donne or Marvell.⁵

2. Those who approach the *ghazal* as a statement of archetypal logopoeia,⁶ that is to say, as a communication derived from the imaginal world (*‘alam-e methâl*) or the realm of archetypal significances (*‘alam-e ma’nâ*), understand it as an expression of precise symbolic meanings working systematically at a supraconscious associative level.

Although scholars such as Toshihiko Izutsu, S. H. Nasr, and Henry Corbin⁷ have examined Persian philosophical doctrines from this point of view, no one has done so for the Persian *ghazal*, even though this is the mode of classical literary criticism employed by the Sufis themselves.

Considering the importance of symbolic structure and meaning as the main criterion of assessing a poem's ultimate meaning among the Sufis,⁸ it seems worthwhile to investigate the underlying philosophical assumptions of this poetic symbolism, the study of which has been neglected by both Iranian scholars and Western orientalists.⁹ For this purpose, I will discuss two books in this paper which have a direct bearing on the interpretation of Sufi symbolism expounding the Sufi theory of archetypal significances: *ma'āni*, with unusual clarity. The first of these is Maḥmud Shabestari's (d. 1340) *Garden of Mysteries* (*Golshan-e rāz*). Shabestari was educated at Tabriz and deeply versed in the symbolic terminology and mystical theosophy of Moḥya'l-Din Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240). He composed the *Garden of Mysteries* in the early 14th century in *mathnawi* (rhyming couplets) verse amounting to about one thousand lines, in order to answer fifteen metaphysical queries posed to him by another great Sufi master of his day: Mir Ḥosseini Harawi (d. 1318). According to Annemarie Schimmel, the *Garden of Mysteries* is 'the handiest introduction to the thought of post-Ibn-'Arabi Sufism.'¹⁰ The second book to be discussed is Moḥammad Lāhijī's (d. 1506) *Commentary on The Garden of Mysteries* (the *Mafātiḥ al-e-jāz fi sharḥ-e golshan-e rāz*),¹¹ Lāhijī's commentary has been recently acknowledged to be 'in its scope and content . . . a veritable compendium of Sufism'¹² whereas the *Garden of Mysteries* has been described as 'one of the best manuals of Sufi Theosophy which exist, especially when taken in conjunction with the excellent commentary by . . . Lāhijī.'¹³

Although Shabestari's verses in the *Garden of Mysteries* might appear to the uninitiated sensibility as a series of abstract and often unrelated flashes of mystical ideas, Lāhijī, in his commentary, like a translator of a forgotten language, fluently evokes the spiritual necessity animating each verse. It is also significant that Lāhijī, in the course of his commentary constantly cites the poetry of Moḥammad Maghrebi (d. 1407), a Tabrizi Sufi symbolist poet who was, in many ways, as much Shabestari's spiritual grandson, as his literary heir,¹⁴ in order to adumbrate and illustrate the hidden meanings in Shabestari's work.

This fact alone informs us of the existence of a homogeneous symbolist tradition in Persian mystical poetry, which aims at expressing and recapitulating ever more articulately fundamental theosophical doctrines, based on precise symbolic terminology.

II. The Aesthetic Theory of Shabestari

The following translation of 24 verses from Shabestari's *Garden of Mysteries*, is a key document in the Sufi aesthetic theory, constituting a pivotal point for analysis of all subsequent Sufi poets in 15th and 16th century Iran.¹⁵ Lāhijī's ensuing commentary on these lines (examined in section 4) encapsulates, in one sense, the entire theosophy of poetic inspiration and creative intuition (*dhauq*) of all the major Sufi poets in this period in Tabriz: Kamāl Khojandi (d. 1400), Qāsim Anwār (d. 1433), Moḥammad 'Aṣṣār (d. 1391), 'Abd al-Rahim Khalwati ('Mashreqi') (d. 1454), and Moḥammad Maghrebi – as well as those deeply influenced by this genre of symbolic poetry, such as Jāmi (d. 1492).

Poetic inspiration arises from creative intuition or *dhauq*, a term that literally means *tasting*, but which refers in Sufism to a faculty of heart-vision that can 'savour' truths beyond the physical senses, considered in particular by Shabestari as the central factor in the Sufi theory of inspiration. The psychological detail of the great Ruzbehān Baqlī's (d. 1210) eloquent allegory of *dhauq*, whose theories, as Annemarie Schimmel notes, 'form the basis for our understanding of most Persian poetry',¹⁶ – merits citation in this regard:

The first station experienced by lovers is the drinking from ocean-like goblets of mystical illumination (*tajalli*). As they contemplate the radiance of Divine intimacy in their hearts, redolent with fragrant breezes wafted from the Invisible Realm, the wide plains of the Divine Qualities' illumination is revealed to them. As the transconscious ground (*asrār*) of their Spirits inclines towards intimacy with God, they realize the purity of creative intuition (*dhauq*) and experience the radiance of contemplative vision.¹⁷

It is this spiritual appreciation alone, which allows one to recall the original sense of poetic metaphors, to rediscover the veridical meanings in physical imagery, to transcend the letter and understand the

'archetypal significance.' In his *Commentary on the Paradoxes of the Sufis*, Ruzbehân furthermore comments, that 'dhaug is the beginning of shorb (drinking). Its reality consists in the heart finding the sweetness of purity during union.'¹⁸ 'Ezzo'l-Din Maḥmud Kāshāni (d. 1334), the author of an important manual of Sufi doctrine, accounts dhaug as the first of three stages of intoxication, the next two being respectively, shorb and rayy (quenching the thirst).¹⁹ This definition is derived from Shihab al-Din Sohrawardi's (d. 1234) statement in the *'Awarif al-ma'arif*²⁰ that dhaug corresponds to faith (imān), shorb to knowledge ('elm), and rayy to ecstatic consciousness (ḥāl).²¹ Dhaug is a fundamental element in the Sufi gnosticism of Ebn 'Arabi as well, according to whom 'the knowledge of mystical conditions cannot be attained to save by dhaug, nor can the reason of man define it, nor arrive at any cognizance of it by deduction, as is also the case with the knowledge of the sweetness of honey, the bitterness of patience, the joy of union, love, passion or desire, which one cannot know unless one be qualified by it or taste (dhaug) it directly.'²² Tahānawi (d. 1745), the great encyclopedist of gnostic terminology, describes dhaug as 'the first degree of contemplative vision (shohud) of God within God. It is accompanied by continual flashes of lightning occurring at short intervals. Whenever dhaug becomes excessive, it is transformed into the station of shohud, which is called shorb. The ultimate degree of dhaug is called rayy, which is experienced when one's innermost consciousness is freed from reflection on other than God.'²³

From these definitions, it appears that dhaug is the spiritual intuition without which the understanding of Sufi poetry is impossible. It is the central concept in Shabestari's aesthetics of poetry and Lāhijī's exegesis. In the term dhaug, we encounter a theory of aesthetics in which the concept of artistic taste and appreciation is inseparably connected with the idea of drunkenness and the symbol of wine. Thus dhaug may be defined as a kind of wit within a spiritually intoxicated temperament, a concept much more psychologically sophisticated than mere creative intuition or artistic 'Taste'.²⁴ So the doctrine elucidated by Shabestari in line 7 below (see section 3) is reflected throughout all Sufi poetry:

The mystical significance unveiled,
Experienced by heart-savour (dhaug),
No philological interpretation reveals.

It is a fundamental theme in the *ghazals* of Shâh Ne'mato'llâh (d. 1430), and Maghrebi, and is even expressed by Shabestari's great contemporary, the Sufi poet Homâm Tabrizi (d. 1314), in identical terms:

In a straitjacket of words and syntax
Spiritual savour's (*dhaug*) expressions can't be fitted;
Above and beyond speech and sound
The waystations of these intuitions are found.²⁵

The concept of *dhaug* as heart-savour, rather than intellectual taste (as the Persian dictionaries define it) is originally Peripatetic. 'In Aristotelian psychology,' writes James Hillmann, 'the organ of aisthesis is the heart, passages from all sense organs run to it; there the soul is "set on fire" . . . This link between the heart and the organs of sense is not simple mechanical sensationalism; it is aesthetic. That is, the activity of perception or sensation in Greek is aisthesis which means at root "taking in" and "breathing in" – a "gasp", that primary aesthetic response . . . "Taking in" means taking to heart, interiorizing, becoming intimate with . . . interiorizing the object into itself, into its image so that its imagination is activated (rather than ours), so that it shows its heart and reveals its soul.'²⁶ This archetypal psychology based on an aesthetics of the heart was picked up from Aristotle by Avicenna (d. 1037) and then passed into Sufi theosophy. The heady ratiocinative bias of our society, however, makes it very difficult for us to understand a concept so gentle, subtle, and spiritual as heart-savour. In Hillmann's words:

We are bereft in our culture of an adequate psychology and philosophy of the heart, and therefore also of the imagination. Our hearts cannot apprehend that they are imaginatively thinking hearts, because we have so long been told that the mind thinks and the heart feels . . . If we would recover the imaginal, we must first recover its organ, the heart, and its kind of philosophy.²⁷

According to Lahiji,

The humanity of a human being is in the heart (*del*). It is the locus of the particularization (*tafsil*) of the knowledge and perfections of the Spirit (*ruh*) and a manifestation of the transpositions of the Divine theophanies (*zohurât*) through the creative acts of the Divine Essence. Hence it is called 'that which changes' (*qalb*) . . . This heart every moment displays another effect and quality, and is transformed from quality to quality. A further reason why the heart is a

transformer (*monqaleb*) is that as one aspect of it faces God, another aspect of it is turned towards creation, so that it receives grace from God, and channels it back towards creation. (SGR 3-4)

Lāhijī furthermore notes that gnosis is situated in the heart, and,

Just as one may see objects by means of a lamp at night, likewise in the darkness of multiplicity (*kethrat*), vision of the Divine Unity (*waḥdat*) may be obtained only by means of the heart's purity. (*ibid.*)

In the light of Hillmann's remarks on the heart's significance in Aristotle's aesthetics and Lāhijī's explanation of the heart in Shabestari's thought, it will be obvious to the reader how cognitively significant, psychologically precise, not merely ornamental, are terms such as 'breath', 'drinking' and 'heart' in Sufi poetry. Consider, for instance, the following *ghazal* by Shabestari's follower: Maghrebi –

The Religion of the Heart

Ah, with every breath, our heart
 professes an inner taste anew,
 Adopts anew a creed of faith,
 confesses religion and rite anew.
 With every breath the heart imbibes
 another cup from the beloved's lip.
 Each cup it takes, each glass it sips
 it drinks down with another lip.
 Never will the heart seek the same
 theme or aim, two breaths at once.
 Each moment-breath the heart selects
 a theme afresh to pursue.
 The lovely witness of the heart, besides
 this body, down, and mole, and double chin,
 Another body owns, another kind
 of down and mole and double chin.
 Each breath a soul arrives afresh
 from the lip of the Oversoul, to bless
 The heart. Each soul thus gained a frame
 of flesh the heart receives again.
 There is another sphere and sun
 in the heavens of our heart;
 Another earth and firmament and throne
 and other stars and solar-systems shown.
 Beyond this present day you see,
 another day the heart possesses.

Beyond this night you know and sense,
 another night the heart intuits.
 The heart's a cavalier that when
 it strains to hear, on every side
 It hearkens, senses another steed
 is mounted, dispatched upon the way.

The heart of Maghrebi is like
 The slate of fate and destiny
 Wherein the school of the Friend, it's etched –
 'The heart another school does have.'

(OR. I 1686; fol. 23b)

The form of 'anagogic' metaphor employed by a Shabestari, or by Maghrebi in the above verses, though perhaps not in its basic intent and aspiration, is quite unlike the vague personalistic symbolism of the French Symbolist poets such as Baudelaire and Mallarmé.²⁸ The archetypal symbolism of Sufi poetry arises out of a practical, psychologically documented spiritual discipline (the *soluk*): it is not derived from purely personal emotions. In this regard, T. Izutsu has observed that 'The frequent use of metaphors in metaphysics, is one of the characteristic marks of Islamic philosophy . . . It must not be taken as a poetic ornament.'²⁹ This 'cognitively rigorous' use of metaphor, as Marcus B. Hester has termed it,³⁰ is characteristic of the imagery of both medieval European poets such as Dante and the 17th century English metaphysical poets.³¹ But it should be stressed that these anagogic metaphors and analogies are archetypal, envisioned by the heart, intuited only by adepts of the heart. For this reason Shabestari in line 8 of the text below declares:

The archetypal meaning – the esoteric sens
 Through analogies and correspondences
 The heart's initiates may best explicate.

The *ma'nâ-lafz* dichotomy: archetype versus type, *significatio* vs. sensory fact, intensity of signification vs. extension of expression – also permeates Shabestari's aesthetic theory. 'The poetic use of the terms *ma'nâ*, *ma'nawî*,' writes Julie Scott Meisami (about classical Persian poetry) 'suggests something similar to the *significatio* or *sen* referred to by the medieval European poets as the "deeper meaning" underlying the surface of the poem.'³² *Ma'nâ* signifies primarily the archetypal meaning of a poetic metaphor. *Ma'nâ* may also be defined as the 'spiritual meaning'

or 'ideal reality'³³ (when juxtaposed to its antonym: *ṣurat* or appearance). Its rhetorical meaning in non-mystical Persian poetry however, refers to the non-physical traits of any expression (that is to say: its 'tenor') and the inner content of a metaphor. In this respect, it is antonymous to *lafz* (= word, the 'letter', phoneme, verbum, *lexis*) just as the English term *sense* is contrasted to *syntax*. The recent study by C. A. M. Versteegh on the influence of Greek thought on Arabic grammar, finds the concept of *ma'nâ* in Islamic philosophy derived from several sources. The main source of the Sufi theories seems to be the Stoics, who 'made a strict distinction between the phonetic and the semantic aspect of the linguistic sign . . . *Sēmaînon* is the signifying, i.e. phonetic aspect (= *phônè*) and the *lekton* is its semantic correlate (*sēmainomenon*). In Arabic grammar *lafz* and *ma'nâ* are used exactly in the same way.'³⁴ However, the concept of *ma'nâ* elaborated by Shabestari below seems derived from Ibn Sinâ (Avicenna) who considered *ma'âni* (pl. of *ma'nâ*) as 'intentiones universales in the objects, put there by Allah, and forming the material for the thinking mind, . . . *ma'âni* are those elements in the objects which are not perceived by the physical senses, but only by some sort of perceiving faculty of the mind (called by Ibn Rushd *quwwa mutafakkira* and by Ibn Sinâ *quwwa batina*).'³⁵

According to the Sufis, *ma'âni* are transcendental, understood only when seen in Vision (*shohud*) or through theophany (*tajalli*). Shabestari's view of archetypal significances, in lines 6 and 7 below for instance, bears a striking resemblance to C. G. Jung's later theory of archetypes:

. . . the statements of the conscious mind may easily be snares and delusions, lies, or arbitrary opinions, but this certainly is not true of statements of the soul: to begin with they always go over our heads because they point to realities that transcend consciousness. These *entia* are the archetypes of the collective unconscious, and they precipitate complexes of ideas in the form of mythological motifs.³⁶

Paul Piehler, in his study of medieval allegory: *The Visionary Landscape*, describes a concept similar to *ma'nâ* in the poetic metaphysics of the Sufis, postulating that

The mind can function as an organ for the perception of autonomous psychic powers, felt as external to the perceiver, but making their appearances chiefly in the perceiver's internal world

– the world of vision and dream. They manifest themselves in the form of images drawn from the external world but enhanced and transfigured by an infusion of spiritual meaning.³⁷

– This last sentence is an exact description of what constitutes *ma'āni* as understood by Shabestari and Lâhijî.

The fact that archetypal significances may only be understood by analogy, as Shabestari in verse 8 below explains, also resembles Jung's view of the 'supra-personal' character of true symbolic poetry, whose images 'have the value of genuine symbols, because they are the best possible expressions of something as yet unknown – bridges thrown out towards an invisible shore.'³⁸

In Sufi poetry, rhetoric without heart-savour, reason without inspiration (or as the Persians would say: the 'letter': *lafz*, without the 'spirit': *ma'nâ*) is formally unacceptable. In fact, the only type of literary criticism to which the Persian Sufis condescended to lend their approbation was the hermeneutic exegesis (*ta'wil*) of poetry.³⁹ Although *ta'wil* originally referred to a method of symbolic, esoteric exegesis applied by the Sufis to the Koran,⁴⁰ it may also be applied to philosophical works, as Henry Corbin's study of Avicenna has shown.⁴¹ In this respect, Lâhijî's commentary on the *Garden of Mysteries* is fundamentally a *ta'wil* of poetry, that is to say, a process of allegorical interpretation which leads the word or letter 'descended' (*tanzil*) into the sensible condition where it is trapped as a lexical item or phoneme, 'back to its origin' (*ta'wil*) in the domain of archetypal significances. Lâhijî insists that the original sense of poetic images can only be comprehended by *ta'wil*. The necessity for *ta'wil* to bridge the dichotomy between letter (*lafz*) and spirit (*ma'nâ*) in Sufi theosophy has been expressed by T. Izutsu quite succinctly:

The word belongs in the world of material and sensible things (*mulk*), while the meaning properly is of the world of immateriality (*malakut*). Compared with the vast field of meaning that lies behind each word, the latter is nothing more than an insignificant, tiny point. The word is but a narrow gate through which the human mind steps into a boundless domain of meaning. Moreover, the meaning is something that has, so to speak, its own life. It has no fixity. Quite independently of the word which indicates it, the meaning develops as it were of its own accord with amazing flexibility in accordance with the degree of depth of man's

experience and consciousness. The meaning with such characteristics is poured into the ready-made mould of a word. By simply observing from outside the word thus employed, one could hardly judge the width and depth of the meaning that is intended to be conveyed by it. This is particularly true when the meaning that has been poured into the mould of a word happens to be backed by a profound mystical experience . . . For one is here required to use the given word as a springboard by which to dive into the depth of the meaning. As long as one remains trying to understand the meaning *from* the word, one can never hope to obtain it.⁴²

From the merely literal interpretation or lexical exegesis (*ta'bir-e lafzi*) one must leap into the transconscious realm of archetypal significances and from thence apprehend the spirit animating the letter.

Hence, no appreciation of this symbolist tradition in classical Persian Sufi poetry, or, indeed, any understanding of the other mystical poets under the sway of Shabestari's aesthetic thought, is possible without consideration of the ideas expressed in the following text, which after all, but recapitulate the classical Sufi outlook on the relation of poetic inspiration to metaphysical imagination.

III. Translation of the Text – The Poetics of 'Archetypal Significances'

Question (posed by Mir Ḥosseini)

- i. What does the man of spiritual sense signify
By poetical tropes and epithets as 'lips' and 'eyes'?
- ii. With down or marks-of-beauty, tresses' tips, what use
Is there for one who fares within the inner states
Of heart, engaged upon the stations of the Way?

Answer (composed by Maḥmud Shabestari)

- 1 Whatever is plain to see in this world that's visible
Is all facsimile: a reflection cast by
That world's sun – yonder and invisible.
- 2 The world's like a line of down, or like an eyebrow,
A beauty-mark or curl: everything is perfect, beautiful
In its own proper place.
- 3 Because the theophanic light shines, sometimes through Wrath,

- Sometimes with Beauty irradiates: the 'face' and 'tress'
 Convey such sense, with all their sheen is arrayed.
- 4 Such sublime qualities that Reality does possess –
 Aspects of benign beauty/violent majesty –
 The female faces, the curls of beloved idols express.
 - 5 Letters and words are sensible when heard at first:
 To purely sensible things their primal assignation attests.
 - 6 The *mundus archetypus* is endless, infinite,
 Words quite unfit to interpret it,
 No exegesis its ultimate extent can express.
 - 7 The mystical significance unveiled,
 Experienced by heart-savour
 No philological interpretation reveals.
 - 8 The archetypal meaning – the esoteric *sens*
 Through analogies and correspondences
 The heart's initiates may best explicate.
 - 9 These objects, real to sense, are tenous shadows, shades
 That world projects. This world an infant appears;
 The world yonder acts the part of Wetnurse.
 - 10 A more primordial sense to me these words instate:
 Those archetypal meanings – although at first
 Their designation did to sensible things relate.
 - 11 Yet boorish, vulgar man just sensible things understands.
 What hope the common man should comprehend
 The *sens*, *intentio*,⁴³ or Archetypal Meaning?
 - 12 This sensible *nomen* was all the word of Vision
 The adept contemplates: words narrated, turns
 Of speech from *kosmos noetos*⁴⁴ related. Then
 - 13 As archetypal *sens* descended into *lexis*
 Philosophers through Correspondence conformed Spirit to letter.
 - 14 Yet universal correspondence⁴⁵ doesn't exist:
 Abate your quest for it.
 - 15 No one may controvert your inner taste
 For *sens* or archetypal meaning – here the priest
 And pontiff-of-Faith, only Truth itself may be.
 - 16 However, beware, beware, if of any I-ness
 You are aware, if still with self prepossessed –
 The outer word and sense of the *shari'* at you profess.

- 17 Indulgence in speech is granted to initiates-in-heart
In three spiritual states only: Intoxication,
Lovelorn Infatuation – or else – Annihilation.
- 18 Only those mystics intimate with these three States
Initiate – realize words' application,
Will know their ultimate signification.
- 19 Since to you ecstasy is alien, rapture foreign
Beware, lest you, by dumb mimicry of gnostics, become
In ignorant pretense an infidel as well.
- 20 Reality's spiritual states aren't fanciful
Figures of speech, the *arcana* of the Path
The common man can never understand.
- 21 O friend! inflated lies, hyperbole, gnostics
Never did preach. Heart-conviction, heart's vision
Alone to you this truth can teach.
- 22 Of both the vocal letter – archetypal *sens* –
Their primal imposition. Later application
I've spoken in brief: attend until you understand.
- 23 Plumb the spirit's depth, the ultimate within *intentio*
Conceive. Within each simile, each analogy
Perceive therein the divine, unique anagogy.
- 24 Let metaphors you strike be types precise;
The anagogy you make of tropes concise;
In mode and type other analogies dismiss.⁴⁶

IV. Lâhijî's Exegesis – A Study in the Hermeneutics of Sufi Poetry

Mir Hosseini's question (lines i & ii above) concerns the value of symbolism, being an inquiry into the use of erotic imagery in mystical poetry. According to Shabestari's explanation and Lâhijî's exegesis upon it, each bodily part is endowed with a 'real' ontological status (and hence 'Divine' according to believers in the doctrine of the 'unity of being': *waḥdat al-wojud*). As Henry Corbin explains, this doctrine is neither pantheism, nor does it 'signify an "existential monism"' (it has no connection either with Hegel or with Haeckel) but refers to the

transcendental unity of being. The act of being does not take on different meanings; it remains unique, while multiplying itself in the actualities of the beings that it causes to be; an unconditioned Subject which is never itself *caused-to-be*.⁴⁷

Commenting on verses 1 and 2 of Shabestari's answer, Lāhijī elucidates this doctrine as follows:

Because all the atoms of creation are manifestations of the Divine Names, Attributes, and Essence, which in turn cast their illumination upon the mirrors of the 'determined archetypes' of possible being [i.e. this world] – therefore everything visible and manifest in this world resembles a reflection of light cast by the sun of That World [of the Divine Essence, Names, and Attributes].

... Now the Universal Human Form is an epitome and compendium of all the other forms of creation. In this form appear the features of 'eye, lip, curl, down, and mole' which bestow human perfection ... Each of these bodily parts is an exemplar and a theophanic form (*mazhar*) embodying a particular meaning pertaining to the one true Divine Essence ... thus he has declared that the world is like the curl, down, mole, and eyebrow. By the term world, he indicates the respective degrees of beings and it is these degrees which are analogous to a curl, the down, mole, and eyebrow. Each of these bodily parts is a pointer and an exemplar of a particular sense of one of the Divine Names and Attributes ... While each of these bodily parts is utterly different and contrary to each other during human maturation, yet they are all intrinsically necessary to complete his growth and effectuate his formal and spiritual perfection. Each of these bodily parts exhibits, in fact, to the extremity of its essence, the utmost loveliness, the absence of which parts would certainly cause his outer form to be blemished. Likewise, phenomenal physical forms serve as a witness and demonstration of those intelligible archetypal significances (*ma'āni ma'qūla*), each of which, on their respective levels, are realities of a heterogeneous nature, perfect in themselves. (SGR 550–51)

Concerning line 3, Lahijī comments:

Lovely visages of moonlike beauty, proportionate to their grace, radiance, and gentleness, are analogous to a theophany of Divine Beauty (*tajalli jamāli*), while the tresses of coquettish, bewitching idols (*botān*), proportionate to their darkness, turbidity, and hiddenness, resemble a theophany of Divine Wrath (*tajalli jalāli*). The visage and tress of loved ones are hence a veritable likeness

and exemplar of Divine Beauty and Wrath, or rather, in actual essence, they are utterly identical with these theophanies. (SGR 553)

Concerning line 4, Lâhiji observes:

God Almighty possesses certain qualities of Clemency or Grace (*loft*) – Gentleness, Light, Guidance, Nourishment, Life, and many others. He also possesses certain qualities of Constraint or Wrath (*qahr*) – Restriction, Constriction . . . etc. Thus it is that the tresses of ‘moon-visaged idols’ [see Maghrebi’s poem below], according to the comprehensive nature of their humanity, are endowed with these two contrasting qualities. (SGR 553)

It is quite significant that Lâhiji illustrates his exposition of this verse by citing the following five couplets from an eight line *ghazal* from Maghrebi’s *Divan*. Such citation of Maghrebi’s poetry demonstrates the fact that for Lâhiji, Maghrebi’s work furnishes explicit literary evidence of the veracity of Shabestari’s doctrine of the ‘supra-sensible’ and transcendent nature of Sufi poetic imagery. This relationship between Lâhiji, Shabestari, and Maghrebi is more than a literary influence being an overt example of what Dr. Zarrinkub has seen as a continuous link of symbolic theory and inspiration stemming from Rumi.⁴⁸ One of Shabestari’s closest associates was a certain Ismâ’il Sisi (d. 1383), who was, significantly, the initiator and master of Maghrebi in Sufism. Thus, there is a unity to be seen in this Sufi tradition of symbolic poetry, based on an initiatory and oral tradition.

Her face’s epiphanic glory in the faces
of every heart-bewitching beauty is clear,
Not just one way this glory appears;
on every side it is clear.

Another moon-visaged beauty in every breath
Snares me with her curl’s lasso, bears me off . . .
Yet in every hairtip’s snare it’s clear
To behold: it’s only her hair.

What spell her magic eyes upon my eyes haved fixed
isn’t obvious, yet to my eyes all that’s clear
are her eyes, bewitching eyes.

Her features’ epiphanic glory led me on
How else would I have stumbled
out of the darkness of her braids’ tangles?

Since only her eyebrow appears to me
 In the moonlike features of the fair
 My regard remains riveted, unrelaxed
 Upon the eyebrows of the fair, the beauteous.

(OR 11686 fol. 37b)

Shabestari's 5th verse espouses the classical Sufi outlook on the epistemology of poetic images, the belief in the precedence of allegory to fable, a doctrine Shabestari holds in common with Rumi.⁴⁹ Lâhiji remarks:

Literal poetic expressions (*alfâz*) such as 'face', 'tress', 'down', 'mole', 'eye', and 'eyebrow' are to be primarily defined with a sensible meaning since they are, in the first place, 'objects of sense' insofar as they all share the common condition of sensibility. By *wadh'* (assigination, designation) is implied the special designation of a word to be equivalent to a certain meaning, so that whenever it is read or heard, that same meaning is inferred from it . . .⁵⁰ In any case, these words were originally defined with these exclusively sensible meanings. (SGR 554)

Lâhiji views line 6 as confirming this standpoint of the initial 'sensibility' of poetic metaphors; the boundlessness of the domain of archetypal significances being too immense to be comprehended by any verbal expression:

The world of archetypal significances (*'âlam-e ma'nâ*) – meaning the world of the Divine Essence, Attributes, and Names, which is of infinite nature – admits of no finite boundary. Each of these 'archetypal significances' contains as well, within itself, an infinite variety of hierarchial degrees, and hence they can never be accommodated by any vessel fashioned of words (*lafz*). (SGR 555)

The transcendence of poetic inspiration to ratiocination is the subject of verse 7, Lâhiji's commentary on which emphasizes the importance of creative intuition or heart-savour (*dhaug*), the result of contemplative vision (*shohud*) and interior revelation (*kashf*). Lâhiji's eloquent exegesis of verse 8 merits full citation:

Whenever people of the heart (*ahl-e del*), who have attained a realization of archetypal meanings (*ma'âni*) and acquired gnosis through purification and illumination of the heart, wish to interpret and express these significances revealed to their hearts, they never express them directly, because aspirants on the Sufi

path, and others who are worthy, are better instructed by indirect expressions. Their praiseworthy custom, however, consists in inventing a suitable analogy and equivocation (*moshâbehat*) as an intermediary between the intuited spiritual significance (*ma'nâ*) and the sensible facts (*omur-e mahsusa*) under consideration. The heart's adepts exhibit these archetypal significances in the raiment of 'objects of the senses' for the perusal of initiates and to be contemplated by adepts. It is for this reason that the exoteric viewers – observing only the external facade, lacking the aptitude to apprehend the archetypal significance – interpret the symbolic allusions of the Sufis as mystical nonsense (*tâmât*) and through sheer ignorance and obstinacy, permit themselves to reject and ridicule the states and statements of the Sufis. (SGR 556)

The doctrine of indirect expression expounded by Lâhijî in this passage is a common theme in other neo-Platonic poetic and philosophical traditions as has been shown by M.-D. Chenu's studies.⁵¹ It was vigorously defended by John Bunyan in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, for instance.

By Metaphors I speak? were not God's Laws,
His Gospel-Laws, in olden times held forth
By Types, Shadows, and Metaphors? Yet loth
Will any sober Man be to find fault
With them lest he be found to assault
The highest Wisdom . . .

At this point in his commentary, Lâhijî cites the following two verses by Maghrebi which occur in the poet's autobiographical introduction to his *Divan*, accompanying all the most ancient and modern MSS of that work. The entire poem to which these verses belong is fully translated at the conclusion of this paper. Once again, Lâhijî's citation of Maghrebi's verses in his commentary makes one sense the presence of the archetypal and non-personalistic unity in Sufi poetry.

Oh, within each and every phoneme of mine
a live soul resides,
within every lexis, an *animus* there is,
a soul alive within each word,
in every letter a cosmos concealed.

You should seek its spirit – its flesh reject,
its noumenon pursue and Named-Essence adopt –
its phenomenon do not claim.

These verses, which are not merely coincidentally composed in the same *bahr-e hazaj* metre as Shabestari's *Garden of Secrets*, appear as a kind of amplification and exegesis in Persian symbolic imagery of some Arabic verses by Ebn 'Arabi in his *Tarjuman al-Ashwâq*, cited by Maghrebi in his autobiographical introduction to demonstrate his adherence to Ebn 'Arabi's philosophy.⁵² In these lines the 'greatest Shaikh' spells out the hermeneutics of his own erotic poetry. By citing these particular verses by Maghrebi, it would seem that Lâhiji is obliquely informing us that Maghrebi's poetic practice and Shabestari's poetic theory are, indeed, of an identical visionary and symbolic nature. Furthermore, these verses indicate that the understanding of Sufi symbolic poetry requires a process of hermeneutical exegesis (*ta'wil*), as already explained (p. 185).

If we are to grasp the unity in the Persian Sufi *ghazal*, we must recognize in it the existence of a hidden 'presidency of meaning'⁵³ and in its imagery detect a series of symbols to be interpreted with a sense of the archetypal reality overlying it – the soul, in Rumi's words, hovering over the body of the poetic text:

Words are only nests. Meanings winged creatures
afflight. Bodies are rivers,
the Spirit their steady current.⁵⁴

Maghrebi's *Divan*, reappearing at this point in Lâhiji's commentary, reveals itself to be a manifesto of the theories of creative inspiration professed by the Sufi symbolists in 15th century Tabriz. Such an interfluence of ideas among metaphysical poets is, in fact, quite common. The reader may recall the influence of George Herbert on Richard Crashaw.⁵⁵

In his commentary on line 9, while employing the terminology of Ebn 'Arabi, Lâhiji explains that 'the world of archetypal significances (*âlam-e ma'nâ*) is the basis of the realm of the senses which is mere form . . . Just as a shadow, which would otherwise be non-existent, is revealed by light, so the entire world is illumined and apparent to view through the theophany (*tajalli*) and brilliance of the lights of the Divine Names and Attributes. The sensory realm is to be considered as an infant and the spiritual world as its nurse, because all evolution and perfection in this world derives from that world.' (SGR 556)

The epistemological debate briefly raised in line five concerning the

sensible and physical versus the archetypal and metaphysical origin of Sufi poetic imagery, is examined in greater depth by Lâhiji in his exegesis of line 10:

It is right to use words in general to refer to objects of the senses, as well as to refer to those archetypal meanings (*ma'âni*) by way of hermeneutical exegesis (*ta'wil*) . . . However, in actual fact, these 'phonemes' (*alfâz*) which were said to have been referred only allegorically (*ta'wil*) to those archetypal meanings, were primarily and originally intended to refer to those meanings . . . For these archetypal meanings are, in fact, the primordial origin of Being itself, and 'objects of the senses' stem from them in a merely derivative and secondary manner. (SGR 556–57)

The Platonic doctrine preached by Lâhiji in this passage⁵⁶ was first elaborated in the Latin West by Pseudo-Dionysius, whose doctrine is best described by M.-D. Chenu as 'essentially a method of approach to intelligible reality, not an explanation of the world of sense by means of that reality. But for him this method was to be conceived as an ascent that began from the lowest material level, on which the mind of man found its connatural objects – objects whose value for knowledge, for sacred knowledge, lay not in their coarse material natures but in their symbolic capacity, their "anagogy" . . . This *anagoge*, this upwards reference of things was constituted precisely by their natural dynamism as symbols. The image of the transcendent was not some pleasant addition to their natures; rather, rooted in the "dissimilar similitudes" of the hierarchial ladder, it was their very reality and reason for being.'⁵⁷

Swedenborg's theory of scriptural hermeneutics, elaborated in his *Arcana Coelestia* (2995) also resembles Lâhiji's doctrine and seems to be in this same neo-Platonic, Pseudo-Dionysian tradition:

Since the people of the earliest church habitually saw something spiritual and heavenly in the details of nature (to the point that natural phenomena served them simply as concrete means of thinking about spiritual and heavenly realities) they were able to talk with angels and to be present with them in the Lord's kingdom in the heavens at the same time they were present in His kingdom on earth, the church. For them, natural things were so united with spiritual ones that they were utterly responsive . . . Further, nothing under any circumstances occurs in this created world that does not have a correspondence with things that exist in the

spiritual world, and that does not therefore in its own way portray something in the Lord's kingdom. This is the source and emergence of everything.⁵⁸

In his exegesis of line 11, Lâhiji comments:

The attribution of a purely sensual meaning to these words or expressions (*lafz*) related to objects of the senses, is a mode of expression pertaining to the slang of the vulgar. What do the vulgar understand of the meanings originally intended and established for these words? The vulgar understanding cannot fathom this depth; comprehension of that archetypal significance is reserved for adepts.

One should realize that whenever a particular expression's original meaning is shifted to another meaning, and the former meaning becomes obsolete, then, providing that the speaker be giving utterance to the vulgar sense, it is designated as 'a translation of the vulgar' (*manqul-e 'orfi*). An instance of this is the word *dabba*, which originally meant every moving creature on the earth's surface. The vulgar usage shifted the meaning of this word to refer exclusively to quadrupeds, such as the horse, donkey, camel, etc. The Shaikh states that connecting these [poetic] words with these objects of the senses is typical of the vulgar usage and slang, such that now their primary [spiritual] significance has been abandoned . . . But to 'realizers' (*mohaqqeq*), who are adepts in interior vision, these words still remain 'designated' to convey their original archetypal significance. (SGR 557)

Those familiar with Coleridge, Shelley, and other of the English Romantic poets will have noted how similar Shabestari's theory is to William Blake's 'Visionary Fancy, or Imagination.' For Shabestari, as for Blake, "vision" or "Imagination" . . . is the sole aesthetic faculty.⁵⁹ Just as Lâhiji had stated, commenting on line 10, that 'these archetypal significances are the primordial origin of Being itself', so Blake declared:

The Nature of Visionary Fancy, or Imagination, is very little Known & the Eternal nature & permanence of its ever Existent Images is consider'd as less permanent than the things of Vegetative and Generative Nature; yet the Oak dies as well as the Lettuce, but Its Eternal Image & Individuality never dies, but renews its seed; just so the Imaginative Image returns by the seed of Contemplative Thought.⁶⁰

Interpreting the 13th verse, Lâhijî asserts that suitable terms must be found to maintain the proper 'correspondence' (*tanâsob*) between the supra-sensual, 'real' realm of Vision, and the sensual, 'metaphorical' realm of imagery. Shabestari's aesthetics of poetry, one could say in our modern terminology, represents the 'cognitive' rather than the 'emotive' type of poetic metaphor.⁶¹

Concerning the following verse (14), Lâhijî comments that since the sensible and intellectual realms are at opposite poles, no one is able to arrive at a proper 'universal analogy' evocative of both.⁶²

Lâhijî finds in the following line (15) an allusion to the *tanzih-tashbih* dichotomy – the debate prevalent in Islamic theology between those who believed God is beyond all likeness and analogy, a Being inviolable (*tanzih*), and those who claim to find His likeness (*tashbih*) in creation. But mystical states (*aḥwâl*),⁶³ Lâhijî reiterates, cannot be adequately assessed in terms of these artificial theological concepts. The religion of love, found in 'Ain al-Qoḍhât Hamadâni (d. 1131),⁶⁴ and later in the writings of Ebn 'Arabi, transcends these scholastic dogmas, employs different, antinomian standards. To explain this doctrine, Lâhijî resorts to Rumi's renowned verse:

Love's state is apart
from religions and faiths;
God is the lover's religion –
God is the lover's state.⁶⁵

Interpreting this apparently libertine doctrine, Lâhijî however, admonishes

That which is revealed to masters of mystical states by way of interior revelation is beyond the comprehension of the intellect, and religious duties only apply to people of the intellect. No one, however, has any authority to impose any religious duty upon those who have realized the station of mystical absorption (*esteghrâq*) and selflessness . . . (SGR 559)

What appears on the surface to be an individualistic view of poetic inspiration, 'heart-savour' and mystical revelation, is clarified by Lâhijî's interpretation of line 16:

Although the 'pontiff of the faith' (*ṣâḥeb-e mazhab*) at this hierarchial level is exclusively God or Truth, however, as long as the wayfarer remains self-conscious and his reason ('*aql*) steadily balanced, he is

prohibited from giving utterance to any words or expressions which contradict the religious law (*sharh*). (SGR 559)

Albeit expressed in the context of an exoteric Islamic theology, line 17 resembles Socrates' doctrine of poetry as a form of the 'Divine Madness', as stated in the *Phaedrus* (545A):

He who knocks at the gate of poetry untouched by the madness of the Muses, believing that art alone will make him an accomplished poet, will be denied access to the mysteries, and his sober compositions will be eclipsed by the creations of inspired madness.⁶⁶

Poetic expressions uttered in the subjective state of annihilation (*fanâ'*) intoxication (*sokr*), and infatuation (*dalâl*) differ from literal statements of ordinary consciousness. Lâhijî explains *dalâl* (infatuation, enticement) as a state of selflessness brought on by deep spiritual anxiety and aroused through an excess of love and heart-savour (*dhauq*) which affects the Sufi during contemplation. 'Whatever flashes upon his heart, he involuntarily cries out . . .' (SGR 561) *Dalâl* is exemplified in the state of the shepherd whom Moses reproaches in Rumi's tale in the *Mathnawî* (Book II: 1720–1815; Nicholson's edition) for his blasphemous comparison (*tashbih*) of God to a human beloved. Moses' objections are later criticized by God himself, who explains that the 'religion of lovers' transcends the 'religion of reasoners'.

Commenting on the following three lines (18, 19, 20) Lâhijî cautions that,

If you don't have these three kinds of ecstatic states – beware, a hundred times over, beware! – that you don't become an infidel by imitation of those who have realized them . . . All the scholars of the *Ṭariqat* (the Sufi Path) and the *Shari'at* (religious law) are in accordance that whoever utters these words without the corresponding mystical state is to be condemned for blasphemy as a matter of course. (SGR 563–64)

Lâhijî's exegesis of these verses shows that the science of Sufi symbolism is more an intuited experiential practice than a rational theoretical doctrine. Lâhijî recapitulates the purport of line 20 by asserting that the poetic imagery of the Sufis

expresses without a doubt, a genuine spiritual state. No one should entertain the vain fancy that such allusions are mere poetical

metaphors (*majāz*) or the product of a deluded mind, rather, they are true (*ḥaqīqī*), expressing states of consciousness understood by the Perfect, realized and manifested to them in revelation (*kashf*) and vision (*shohud*). (SGR 564)

Some of the ethical and spiritual qualities necessary to comprehend this spiritual state, Lāhijī enumerates as follows: innate aptitude (*qābeliyāt fetri*), a master's direction, mystical and ethical conduct or discipline (*soluk*), ascetic self-restraint (*zohd*), experiencing the spiritual stations acknowledged by the classical masters, God's grace, and spiritual strength, adding

Many are the wayfarers,
the wayknowers, the wayseers few;
in one hundred thousand wayfarers
one man the road knew.

By 'the arcana of the Path' (*asrār-e ṭarīqat*), the poet refers to esoteric states of Reality, the *Ṭarīqat* being an introduction to the attainment of *Ḥaqīqat* (Reality). Just as the Sufi Path is the inner mystery of the *shari'at* (religious law), so Reality is the inner mystery of the Sufi Path. It is totally neurotic (*waswasa*) to follow the Sufi Path without the religious law, and blasphemy to contemplate Reality without the Sufi Path. However, those people whose minds are sound, whose reasons are fully developed will realize of course, that the masters of the Sufi Path have undergone severe austerities, and attained the total spiritual result thereof, for without taking such troubles no such result can be reaped. (SGR 565)

Lāhijī's exegesis of the 21st verse elaborates that there are two possible ways to understand Sufi symbolic poetry:

1. Either a person, by way of actually experiencing the spiritual discipline (*soluk*) and perfect guidance of the Sufis, attains the station of interior revelation and contemplative vision, and thus witnesses these states personally for himself, and thus comes to realize that whatever the Sufis have said, was the outcome of insight and observation, or –
2. Through Divine Grace, one attains to 'conviction of the heart' (*taṣdiq*) concerning the sayings of the saints and gain certain realization that all that they have pronounced was by direct contemplative vision (*āin-e shohud*). (SGR 565)

Concerning the key term 'gnostics' (*ahl-e taḥqiq*) in this line, Lāhijī had explained earlier in his commentary that the true Sufi poet is

that perfect being unto whom the Reality of everything 'as it is' is revealed. This archetypal significance can only be comprehended by one who has realized the degree of Divine revelation and with direct vision has seen that the reality of everything is God, and, except for One Absolute Being, no other being exists. (SGR 58)

In line 22, Shabestari reconfirms his earlier statement, that these archetypal significances (*ma'āni*) are not merely metaphors, but contain an esoteric aspect which not everyone can grasp. One must plumb to the depths of the spirit to fathom these significances, comments Lāhijī on the last two lines: 23 and 24, in order to distinguish just how far analogy or equivocation (*tashbih*) is applicable, and how far God's inviolability (*tanzih*) should be observed. There is a definite *sacra regula*, in short, to be followed in the Sufi manual of poetic theosophy.

In his commentary on line 24, Lāhijī explains that 'one should only employ metaphors in a particular style or mode [i.e. which evokes the archetypal and metaphysical origins of ordinary words].' The concept of the 'type precise' (*wajh-e khaṣṣ*) of striking similes, Lāhijī elucidates in particularly exact detail:

In this verse, the poet implies that types precise should be employed which accord with the requirements of each of the levels of archetypal significances in striking similes (*tashbih*), and only use words which definitely denote that particular significance. Steer clear of all other aspects necessarily included in [the hierarchial and metaphysical nature of] these levels. For example, when one uses the word 'eye' (*cheshm*) intending to express the quality of vision (*baṣīrī*) – insofar as during the final degrees of the appearance of Divine theophanies and revelation, vision requires an eye (*baṣar*), you should strike your simile with this precise aspect in mind and abstain from all other aspects, i.e.: imagining that such an eye is corporeal and thus subject to the conditions of corporality. (SGR 506–07)

Finally, in order to overcome the *tashbih-tanzih* dichotomy, Lāhijī comments that in reality God totally transcends all the demonstrable meanings of words (*lafz*) and expressions (*ēbārat*) on the level of the Divine Essence. However, on the level of the descent of the Divine Acts and Effects (*athār wa af'āl*), it is God who appears in the form of various

things, and is displayed in the image of everything. He goes on to remark that equivocation (*tashbih*) and annulment of comparison (*tanzih*) are ultimately illusions; they are only phenomenal in nature. 'Since nothing actually exists but God, with what may one compare Him? From what, in fact, should His comparability with, be annulled?' (SGR 567)

V. Conclusion – The Hermeneutic Tradition

What is heart-savour? – a realization of
 Archetypal Significances,
 Neither preaching piety, nor issuing fiats.

(Attâr – *Moṣibat-nâma*)

Shabestari's theory of aesthetics is based on a science of mystical states, rather than the study of rhetoric and prosody. It is an aesthetics of intoxication, an awareness of the non-sensible and supranatural, the heart's own humour, an *aesthesis* and appreciation of beauty to which the external eye and ear are only a mute audience, rather than direct participants. Every word, phrase, or turn of speech in the lexicon of the Sufi symbolist poets conveys an intricate ecstatic 'taste' to the heart, and relays a subtle noetic light to the soul. It is necessary to be aware of the precise symbolic implications their metaphors contain. To trace the historical origin of such imagery, or to analyse their allusions from a purely aesthetic standpoint is insufficient.⁶⁷ The function of such images for the Sufis themselves is as a mystical mandala to be contemplated, as well as a means to intuitively penetrate, by spiritual audition (*samâ'*), the domain of archetypal significances. After the foregoing study of Lâhijî's commentary, it seems obvious how inaccurate is the following statement by E. J. W. Gibb in his still classic summary of Sufi theosophy (in Vol. I of his *History of Ottoman Poetry*):

The Sufi teachers have reduced their system to a science which bristles with a complicated and generally obscure terminology. Into this, it is unnecessary we should enter, as it has little direct bearing upon their poetry. The poet who is imbued, as most poets are, with the Sufistic mysticism, pays scant heed to these technicalities.⁶⁸

Rather, the reverse is true; Persian symbolist poetry is directly inspired by Sufism. The view expressed below concerning Hâfez's poetry by Eric Schroeder is even truer in regard to the verse of symbolists such as Maghrebi or Shabestari:

Hafez' Divan is permeated with Sufism, and the meaning of his life and work is primarily religious and metaphysical. Even an aesthetic critique of his verse which fails to show the intricacy of his metaphysical reference is aesthetically shallow.⁶⁹

Perhaps the most comprehensive summary in classical Persian literature of this 'symbolist mentality' characteristic of poets of Shabestari's school, are eighteen couplets written by Maghrebi. These verses represent a kind of manifesto of the philosophy of Sufi symbolism. They are also cited by Lâhiji in the portion of his commentary here translated (see page 185) to expound this philosophy. Published only once in Persian, never before translated or mentioned in any European language study of Sufi poetry, perhaps they may best communicate to us the feeling of this still living hermeneutic tradition.

The Hermeneutic Tradition

So if you see in this tome of verse
name and sign of vintner and wine,
of rack and ruin,
of 'haunters of taverns'
the legend of the Magus
and Mazdaism, crosses and icons,
the tale of cloisters and totems,
Christian rosaries, pagan cinctures,
hear a glass praised
or enamel decanter discussed,
talk of wine, and 'witnesses
in flesh' of what's divine;
If candle I cry
praising chapels and cells,
speak of harp's whine,
hail drunkard's clamour,
refer to wine and winehouses,
to 'rogues of the Ruin'
of ascetics at prayer, declare
I cupbearers adore
or an organ chord if I note,
praising the flute's poignant cry,

summon a 'dawn-cordial' be served up,
 mention 'pass round the cup'
 or utter 'goblet', 'pitcher'
 vat, or cup, or vintner;
 Of rites of drinking, comportment with wine –
 write, of fleeing mosques,
 of resting in taverns and taking refuge in pubs . . .

Should I ever say, 'To wine myself I've pledged'
 and profess to relinquish
 this spirit, this flesh
 for love of wine,
 or praise the parterre,
 consort with flowers
 of arboretums write,
 reckon account of cypresses,
 the dewdrop's tale recite
 the anemone's inner life,
 trace the rain's tale,
 yarn of the hail,
 relate the hoarfrost's history . . .

Then of down and beauty-spots should I speak,
 The eyebrow's bend and towering statures praise,
 Take note of cheeks and cheekbone,
 Impudent eyes, and teeth, lovely waists;
 Of faces and braids should I sing
 Or else of cuff and fist insist you listen
 At such idioms be flustered not;
 Of their object inquire.
 Of long and short feet,
 Of my phrases' morphology don't ask
 If with symbolists you'd be confidante,
 Into hermeneutics an initiate.

Rectify your eye –
 You'll see straight.
 Perfect your insight –
 You'll see right.
 Reject the rind –
 The nut you'll find.

Unless the crust you reject
 Howsoever will you become a Kabbalist?

Oh, within each and every phoneme of mine
 a live soul resides

within every lexis, an *animus* there is
 a soul alive within each word,
 in every letter a cosmos concealed.

You should seek its spirit, its flesh reject,
 its noumenon pursue and Named-Essence adopt,
 its phenomenon do not claim.

Neglect no Minute Particular
 If in the truths of the symbolists
 You'd become adept.

(OR 11686 fol.3b-4a)

Notes

¹ Arberry's studies of Sufi poetry include: *Fifty Poems of Hafez* (Cambridge University Press, 1977 rpt.); 'Orient Pearls At Random Strung', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 11 (1948). In the first work, Sufism is dismissed as a 'philosophy of unreason' and in the last, all mention of it omitted. Michael Hillmann's main work is *Unity in the Ghazals of Hafez* (Chicago, 1976). Dr. Schimmel's works include a sensitive and refined study of Islamic poetry: *As Through A Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) and a comprehensive opus on Sufi philosophy and literature: *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, 1975).

This same purely aesthetic approach is also adopted by Persian scholars such as Dr. Zarrinkub's *Naqd-e adabi* (2 vols.; Tehran, 1976), except for a few pages on mystical inspiration (Vol. I, 52-58) and Sufi poetic theory (Vol. I, 251-55). Dr. Kadkani's *Sowar-e khiyâl dar she'r-e farsi* (Tehran, 1970) is also exclusively concerned with the aesthetic and social realm of Sufi poetic imagery.

² *Allegorical Imagery: Some Medieval Books And Their Renaissance Posterity* (Princeton University Press, 1966), Chap. 4.

³ As for example, Eric Schroeder's comparison of John Donne to Hâfez, in his article 'Verse Translation and Hafez', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 7 (1948) or Dr. Schimmel's view that Sufi poets, merely because of 'the ambiguity of the experience of love' employed erotic symbolism, then imposed upon 'a basic symbolism of earthly love' a gradual process of allegorization, until 'eventually, the charm of a quatrain is lost in the heavy chains of a terminology stemming from Ibn Arabi.' - *Mystical Dimensions*, p. 301.

It is highly questionable, in my opinion, whether the puritanical concepts of 'sacred' and 'profane' can be directly juxtaposed to apply to Islamic poetry at all. (Cf. A. Bouhdiba's *Sexuality in Islam*, translated from French by Alan Sheridan, London, 1985; chap. 8, 'The sexual and the sacral'). The whole endeavour of the Sufi poets seems more hierophanic (to use Mircea Eliade's term: *The Sacred and The Profane*, New York: 1961, p. 11) than strictly religious; it is an attempt to envision everything 'profane' as sacred in

terms of its being (wojud). Vincent Buckley has argued convincingly, in my opinion, that there is no separate genre of religious or sacred poetry; observing, apropos of 16th and 17th century English poetry, that "'sacred poetry" as a completely separate category is something of a psychological monstrosity.' – *Poetry And The Sacred* (London, 1968), p. 29.

⁴ Ruzbehan Baqli, *Le Jasmin des Fidèles d'Amour* (Kitāb-e 'abhar al-'āsheqin), edited by Henry Corbin and M. Mo'in (Tehran, 1981); Corbin's introduction, p. 5.

⁵ Cf. S. H. Nasr's preface to *Fakhraddin Iraqi: Divine Flashes*, translated into English by William C. Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson (London: SPCK, 1982), p. xiii.

⁶ On logopoeia, see Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (London, Faber & Faber, 1979), p. 63.

⁷ The works of these three scholars considered in this paper are: Izutsu's 'The Basic Structure of Metaphysical Thinking in Islam' in *Collected Papers on Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism*, edited by H. Landolt (Tehran, 1971), pp. 41–72 and his 'Mysticism and the Linguistic Problem of Equivocation in the Thought of 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadani' in *Studia Islamica*, Vol. 31 (1970), pp. 153–70; S. H. Nasr's article 'Metaphysics, Poetry, and Logic in Oriental Traditions' in *Sophia Perennis*, Vol. 3, no. 2 (1977), pp. 119–28; from Henry Corbin's *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, translated from French by W. R. Trask (London, Kegan Paul, 1961).

⁸ The importance of symbolism in Sufi poetry is exemplified in a unique dialogue between two great Tabrizi Sufi poets and masters: Maghrebi and Kamāl Khojandi, mentioned by Jāmi in his *Nafahāt al-ons*, ed. Mehdi Tauhidpur (Tehran, 1964), p. 613.

⁹ Both Iranian literati and Western orientalists generally regard Sufi theories of poetic imagery as too incredible and esoteric to merit discussion. The most significant work in this field, after Ja'far Sajjadi's *Farhang-e loḡhāt wa eṣṭelāḡhāt wa ta'bīrāt-e erfāni* (Tehran, 1960), is Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh's *Farhang-e Nurbakhsh: eṣṭelāḡhāt-e taṣawwuf* (London: 1983–): of which nine volumes out of a planned 12-volume series have so far been published. Our translation of Vol. I (entitled *Sufi Symbolism I*, London: 1986), treating the esoteric symbolism of the parts of the Beloved's body, and the allegorical meanings of imagery relating to wine, convivial gatherings, and ecstasy, is the only in-depth study of Sufi poetic symbolism in English.

¹⁰ *Mystical Dimensions*, p. 280. This work is quite well-known in the West, having been translated into German in 1838 by Von Hammer-Purgstall, and later into English by E. H. Whinfield (*Gulshan i Raz: The Mystic Rose Garden*). The Persian text with an English translation (London: Trubner & Co., 1880).

¹¹ Edited by Kaiwān Sami'ie (Tehran: 1958) = SGR.

¹² Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, translated from French by N. Pearson (London: 1978), p. 110.

¹³ E. G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia* (Cambridge University Press, 1957 rpt.), III, p. 148.

¹⁴ Maghrebi's relationship to Shabestari is outlined by Ehn Karbalā'i's *Rauḡhāt al-janān wa jannat al-janān*, ed. Ja'far Solṭān al-Qarā'i (Tehran: 1965), II, pp. 88–95 and by Dr. Zarrinkub, *Jostaju dar taṣawwuf-e Iran* (Tehran: 1978), p. 319.

Lāhiji's commentary runs to 721 printed pages of small Persian type; his citations of Maghrebi occur approximately every 14 pages. He quotes from a total number of 40 different ghazals by Maghrebi, which is to say that Lāhiji, when extemporizing his commentary, had memorized almost 1/5 of Maghrebi's *Divan* (= 200 ghazals). Because of the unreliability of all published Persian editions of Maghrebi's *Divan*, I have compiled an accurate edition from the most ancient MSS (London: forthcoming 1989). All references to Maghrebi's *Divan* in this article are to British Library MS 'OR 11686' (mentioned in the *Meredith-Owens Handlist of Persian MSS in the British Library: 1895–1966*, London: 1968; p. 64).

- ¹⁵ These verses are also cited in full by Dr. Qâsem Ghani in his pioneering work on Hâfez: *Baḥṭh dar âthâr wa âfkâr wa aḥwâl-e Hâfez: târikh-e taṣawwuf dar islâm tâ 'asr-e Hâfez* (Tehran: 1961), II, pp. 334–35, to illustrate the unique technical and symbolic style elaborated in the Sufi ghazal during this period.
- ¹⁶ *As Through A Veil*, p. 54.
- ¹⁷ From the *Mashrab al-arwâḥ* (The Fount of Spirits), Ruzbehân's encyclopedic work in Arabic on the spiritual stations in Sufism. Cited by Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh, *Farhang-e Nurbakhsh* (London: 1984), II, p. 99.
- ¹⁸ *Sharḥ-e shāḥiyât*, edited by Henry Corbin (Tehran: 1981), p. 627.
- ¹⁹ *Meṣbâḥ al-hedâya wa meftâḥ al-kafâya*, edited by Jalâl al-Din Homâ'i (Tehran: 1964), p. 137.
- ²⁰ This book was partially translated into English (so ungracefully, however, as to be practically unreadable) by H. Wilberforce Clarke, under the title of *The 'Awârifu-l-Ma'ârif* (Calcutta, 1891).
- ²¹ *Meṣbâḥ al-hedâya*, p. 137n (cited by the editor).
- ²² *Al-Futuḥât al-makkiyya* (Cairo 1329 H.) I, 31; cited by R. J. W. Austin in his 1965 London Ph.D. thesis: *The Spiritual Heart: Studies in the Mâhiyat al-Qalb of Ibn al-'Arabi*, p. 42.
- ²³ *Kashshâf eṣṭelâḥât al-fonun* (A Dictionary of the Technical Terms Used in the Sciences of the Musalmans). Edited by M. Wajih, 'Abd al-Haqq, & Gholam Kadir, under the superintendence of A. Sprenger & W. Nassua Lees. (Calcutta: 1862) I, p. 514. Cited in *Farhang-e Nurbakhsh*, II, p. 98.
- ²⁴ Cf. 'Taste' in A. Preminger (ed.) in the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986; enlarged edition).
- ²⁵ *Divân-e Homâm Tabrizi*, edited by Dr. Rashidi 'Aiwardhi (Tabriz: 1970), p. 68.
- ²⁶ *The Thought of the Heart* (Ascona: Eranos Foundation, 1981), pp. 31–32.
- ²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 3.
- ²⁸ Cf. C. M. Bowra, *The Heritage of Symbolism* (London: 1951), p. 12, and Kamal Abu Deeb, *Al-Jurjani's Theory of Poetic Imagery* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1979), pp. 124–42. The function of anagogy in Western literature is discussed in great detail by Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 118–22.
- ²⁹ 'The Basic Structure . . .', p. 59.
- ³⁰ *The Meaning of Poetic Metaphor* (The Hague, 1967), p. 14. Cited by Izutsu, *ibid.*
- ³¹ See Paul Piehler, *The Visionary Landscape: A Study in Medieval Allegory* (London: 1971), pp. 42–45, 134. Also cf. Louis Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Religious Literature of the 17th Century* (Yale University Press, 1976, 6th rpt.), pp. 202–03, 342.
- ³² 'Allegorical Gardens in the Persian Poetic Traditions', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 17, no. 2 (1985), p. 259, n. 71.
- ³³ This resembles the traditional Christian outlook on poetic knowledge, which according to J. Maritain, 'is an emotion as form, which being one with the creative intuition, gives form to the poem, and which is intentional, as an idea is, or carries within itself infinitely more than itself. (I use the word "intentional" in the Thomistic sense . . . which refers to the purely tendential existence through which a thing . . . is present, in an immaterial or suprasubjective manner) . . . an idea for instance, which, insofar as it determines the act of knowing, is a mere immaterial tendency or intentio towards the object.' – *Creative Intuition in Art And Poetry* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953; Bollingen Series 35.1), pp. 119–20.
- ³⁴ *Greek Elements in Arabic Linguistic Thinking* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), p. 185.
- ³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 189.
- ³⁶ *Answer to Job*, in the *Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Vol. 2, p. 551, cited by Kathleen Raine, *The Human Face of God: William Blake and the Book of Job* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1982), p. 270.

- ³⁷ *The Visionary Landscape*, p. 17.
- ³⁸ From 'On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetic Art' in *Contributions to Analytical Psychology* (London: 1928), p. 244.
- ³⁹ This point is eloquently argued by Dr. Zarrinkub, *Naqd-e adabi*, I, p. 251.
- ⁴⁰ See P. Nwyia, *Exégèse Coranique et Langue Mystique* (Beirut: 1970), pp. 33, 59–61, 145–46.
- ⁴¹ *Avicenna And The Visionary Recital*, pp. 28–35 ('Ta'wil as Exegesis of the Soul').
- ⁴² 'Mysticism and the Linguistic Problem', pp. 158–59.
- ⁴³ This Latin term, like *significatio* and *sen*, was often employed by medieval European scholastic philosophers for *ma'nâ* – Corbin, *Avicenna* . . . , p. 301n.
- ⁴⁴ *Jahân-e 'aql*, the World of the Intellect: *kosmos noetos*.
- ⁴⁵ Shabestari's verse here contradicts Baudelaire's view (which is actually a misrepresentation of Swedenborg's doctrine of Correspondence) that 'l'imagination est la plus scientifique des facultés, parce que, seule, elle comprend l'analogie universelle, ou ce qu'une religion mystique appelle la Correspondance.' – Quoted by K. Abu Deeb, *op. cit.*, p. 125.
- ⁴⁶ *Golshan-e râz*, edited with introduction, notes, and commentary by Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh (Tehran: 1976), pp. 47–48. Whinfield's version seriously mistranslates lines 8, 12, 14 above, which my translation has amended.
- ⁴⁷ *The Man of Light*, pp. 115–16.
- ⁴⁸ *Jostaju dar taşawwuf*, p. 313.
- ⁴⁹ Cf. *Mathnawi ma'nawi*, Nicholson's edition, IV: 1359–72.
- ⁵⁰ The history of medieval Arabic grammatical terms such as *waḥd* is discussed by Versteegh, *op. cit.*, pp. 29ff.
- ⁵¹ See Chenu's *Nature, Man, and Society in the 12th Century*, translated from French by J. Taylor and L. K. Little (University of Chicago Press, 1968), Chap. 3 'The Symbolist Mentality'.
- ⁵² *The Tarjumân al-Ashwâq: A Collection of Mystical Odes by Muhyi'd-Din Ibn Al-'Arabi*, trans. and ed. by R. A. Nicholson (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1978 rpt.), p. 13, lines 1–16.
- ⁵³ E. Schroeder, 'Verse Translation and Hafez', p. 220.
- ⁵⁴ *Mathnawi ma'nawi*, II: 3292, my translation.
- ⁵⁵ Richard Crashaw entitled one of his collections of poetry *Steps to the Temple* in emulation of George Herbert's *The Temple*. Other similar influences in 17th century mystical poetry are discussed in Frank J. Warnke's introduction to his *European Metaphysical Poetry* (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 1961).
- ⁵⁶ The influence of Plato's thought on Arabic theories of *lafz* and *ma'nâ*, especially the rôle of his dialogue: *Cratylus* (On the Correctness of Names), is discussed by Versteegh, *op. cit.*, pp. 173, 187.
- ⁵⁷ Chenu, *op. cit.*, pp. 82, 123.
- ⁵⁸ From Emmanuel Swedenborg: *The Universal Human and Soul-Body Interaction*, edited and translated by G. Dole (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), pp. 39–41.
- ⁵⁹ Frederic Will, *Intelligible Beauty in Aesthetic Thought: From Winkelmann to Victor Cousin* (Tubingen, 1958), p. 37.
- ⁶⁰ 'A Vision of the Last Judgement' in *Blake: Complete Writings*, edited by G. Keynes (London: O.U.P., 1972), p. 605.
- ⁶¹ Hester, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
- ⁶² Baudelaire's belief in the existence of such an 'analogie universelle' (see no. 45 above) involves, in fact, a confusion of synaesthesia (interfusion of sensory images) with 'correspondence' characteristic of the Sufi use of poetic metaphors (Abu Deeb, *op. cit.*, pp. 124–34). It is to mistake, as T. Izutsu written, the multidimensional 'vertical

polysemy' found in Sufi theosophy with our ordinary one-dimensional linguistically literal 'horizontal polysemy' (Izutsu, 'Mysticism and the Linguistic Problem . . .', p. 159).

⁶³ See Dr. Nurbakhsh, *Spiritual Poverty in Sufism*, translated from Persian by Leonard Lewisohn (London: 1984), Chap. 4: 'Mystical States'.

⁶⁴ See Carl Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany: SUNY, 1985), pp. 74-75.

⁶⁵ *Mathnawi ma'nawi* II: 1770.

⁶⁶ Cited by Anton-Hermann Chroust, 'Inspiration in Ancient Greece' in *Charismatic Revival*, edited by E. O'Connor (London: SPCK, 1978), p. 49.

⁶⁷ Our translation of Dr. Nurbakhsh's encyclopedia of Sufi terminology: *Sufi Symbolism I* has finally proven how barren and insipid such an approach is. Dr. Kadkani's excellent study of *Imagery in Persian Poetry* (*Sowar-e khiyâl dar she'r-e farsi*), aside from a short chapter on Nâser Khosrau (d. after 1060) utterly ignores the metaphysical imagination which concerns the Sufi poets. Hence his discussion of imagination (*khiyâl*) is limited to its meaning of 'phantasy' or 'fancy'. The difference between archetypal imagination and fancy is discussed in Elémire Zolla's article: 'The Uses of Imagination and the Decline of the West', *Sophia Perennis*, Vol. 1, no. 1 (1975).

⁶⁸ (London: Luzac & Co., 1958 rpt.), p. 65.

⁶⁹ Schroeder, art. cit., p. 216.



WILLIAM RADICE

from Eight Shakespearean Sonnets

II

King Lear IV.3. 'Ay, sir; she took them . . .'

Deathly forebodings came to her after,
 Not before, her first child was born. She would wonder,
 Often, was there some natural instruction
 Forbidding, before one bore a child, perception
 Of the horror of life? Otherwise who would inflict it
 On another, and on one with so little to protect it,
 Whether crawling half-blind over unknown floors,
 Whether lying, as now, asleep? There were tears
 In her eyes as she stood, having made sure
 The child was covered, by the open door
 To the landing, smiling at its beauty but also praying
 For its future. What a time to be living!
 Such dangers! Such cruelties! Such injustices!
 The light from the landing seemed to embrace
 The child as if with her love, shining into the darkness
 As if from her own moist eyes, soft as her kiss.

III

The Merchant of Venice V.1. 'In such a night . . .'

A Midsummer Night's Dream V.1. 'More strange than true . . .'

When Dido stood on the shore to waft back her lover again,
 Women gave birth to babies in blood and squalor and pain
 And do so still.

When Shakespeare gave his frenzy's tricks their name and form,
 Women suckled their babes and cleaned them and kept them warm
 And do so still.

When men went off to build their Empires and fight their wars,
Women remained at home to struggle with squabbles and chores
And do so still.

And though one sees an eccentric man or two who shares,
Women find out that the longest job in the world is theirs.
They do it still,
And probably always will.

V

The Merchant of Venice IV.1. 'The quality of mercy is not strain'd . . .'

When, in their youth, he seemed so far away,
A dreamy child, not taking in what she would say,
There was, still, something princely in his pensiveness,
And something noble in his handsomeness,
So that loving him, she forgave him; forgiving him, loved him.

And when War came to take him truly far away,
And he betrayed her more than he would say,
There was a power in his letters' boyishness,
A kingly image still to guide her loneliness,
So that loving him, she forgave him; forgiving him, loved him.

And when, as children grew, he looked elsewhere for play,
And seized each opportunity to stray,
She still saw something godlike in his childishness,
A guileless innocence in his ruthlessness,
So that loving him, she forgave him; forgiving him, loved him.

And when, white-haired, his passions slipped away,
And there was little left to fill his day,
She found him childlike in his touchy idleness,
But royal in his aged sturdiness,
So that loving him, she forgave him; forgiving him, loved him.

And then she died, too soon. Now she was gone away.
Oh had she seen the old remorseful tears he shed each day,
She would have found them recompense for faithfulness,
A twice blest token of her mercy's heavenliness,
Who loving him, forgave him; forgiving him, loved him.

VI

King Lear IV.1. 'But who comes here? ...'

A prayer for this crawling earth,
 For all who make me think a man a worm,
 For all who are the worst,
 Like the suckling mother who makes
 The Bombay traffic lights so slow to change
 And me the more superfluous the more I wait,
 Ignoring her pleading hands
 Outside my taxi-window; yet even she is glad
 She is not the worst; so a prayer for the limbless man
 I fastidiously step round
 As I thread the Chowringhee crowds:
 Blind Gloucester was the furthest down
 For Shakespeare,
 Yet he gave him Edgar:
 A prayer for all for whom there is even no Mother Teresa,
 And for me, too, if in some unimaginable blinded time
 There is no wife, no daughter, no God to come
 And say, 'Give me thy arm.'

VII

The Tempest I.2. 'Full fathom five ...'

It seemed to the lovers
 That the bed in which they lay
 Was a deep sea-bed,
 That they turned as if by waves
 Majestically, that their bodies
 Were rich and strange,
 That their eyes were jewels in the darkness,
 That their drops of sweat were pearls,
 That their momentary rigidity was scarlet coral,
 That their gasps for breath
 United Life and Death.

JEREMY REED

The Room

for Kathleen Raine

Once we've been granted access to explore,
we have to dismantle preconceptions
and the logistics of room dimensions,
for there's no table and chair, no window
at easy hand, despite the flooding light
of rich mosaics and no floor
on which to discover a footprint, there
one touches on pointed toes, and the heel
is dispensed with as a support.
Silence is the prerequisite, the room
is like the spiral chamber of a shell
whose contours are imagined like the door
we take on trust as opening out to light.
Once we're inside we are inside ourselves,
a diver's-bell, a bathyscope, depth-cell
in which we are our own discovery,
microcosmic psyche with antennae
reading the images until one slows
to a suspended mirror-face,
an occupant of imaginal space
come to acquaint itself with our journey
to the interior. And once we know
that sanctuary's without limitations,
we come to think of it as home, a place
to fill with roses, a candle and book,
and live as a cosmographer whose chart
is incomplete, for the discovery
leads always to still other worlds, and we
increase our light, eyes closed, gone through
to the unknown that we may learn to see.

Cloudland

A boat calls once a year and stands offshore
in violet water, and its semaphore
is answered from the castle where they fly
a white cloud on a flagpole in the sky
to grant passage to a motor-dinghy
that cuts an arrowhead through a glass sea
towards a stone town of blue belvederes
and gazebos turreted above piers
fallen into disuse, their launching slips
once accommodated Homer's black ships
after a week of storm, the flood-surf's roar
rattling shield and helmet across the shore
to swash-churned debris. Charted on no map,
you reach Cloudland by sailing through a gap
in the radar-scan, and black cranes escort
the ship through channels guarded by a fort
from which the red silk banner of St. Jude
proclaims guardianship in this solitude,
pine-cones bobbing the current, cinquecento
fanfares reduced now to a custom's show
of ermine bunting. It's further inland
the people grow more nebulous, a hand
escaping into smoke, a misty face
blown away as a cloud without a trace,
vaporous beings tinted by the light,
the harbourmaster gusted into flight
from his perch on a cannon to appear
above the battlements, blown without fear
into a windy circle. Those who came
here learnt the process as a casual game,
and grew to levitate by slow degrees,
and sit like nesting birds in aspen trees,
amazed at their facility to stay
as a cloud person until blown away
into the measurement of gravity.
We disembarked at sunset when a red
cloud blazed in following the governor's head,
and shaped itself into a minah-bird.
It sang the variations we had heard
in great poets, and later changed to black.
A night of starlight greeted us, the slack

tide sleeked to a moleskin, and when the guide
led us up to high rooms, it was his pride
of office impressed, and he knew us all
from divination in a crystal ball,
and had shown Helen up this spiral stair,
and in the morning found a golden hair
on the canopy; but he left us sleep,
tomorrow we would fly above the deep,
learn with what ease a cloud forms and float high
over our moorings in an azure sky.

Reformulations

We can't contain expansiveness of mental space,
the years accelerate leaving behind
the I constricted to a radius
memory constellates; I can't catch up
with what I've done to situate
myself in such irretrievable flux,
afloat on a river whose coils unwind
with humming regularity –
too fast, too sleek, an eel graduating
whip-thin to the Sargasso sea.

With things it's otherwise – they're here to stay,
my books, possessions are locatably
tangible in the space I occupy,
indexed by use they will outlive
my being here, and yet they are cargo
committed to my head, packed for the push
downstream to retrieve what I've lost –
the head and tail of life and not
its thorny spine, propelled to meet the rush,
rapid-glitter of foaming wash
breaking on land somewhere I will not see,
until arrived from the journey,
I piece together fragments of a pot,
and have its turquoise glaze reflect the light,
compact and shaped to contain memory.

Hermes

The way uphill was shocked with goldenrod,
and if I stumbled, the blue grass was warm,
the air steamy as though a geyser smoked
out of a fault, quick vapour of a god,
the fast one steadying in fluid dream
to a reality.

For weeks I'd seen
through obstacles, learnt their transparency,
how stones were crystals, and the light a glass
in which I was reflected on both sides.
I was so springy that I could push through,
but needed support from the nimble guide
with his caduceus, gold talaria.

I'd reached my journey's end and left the jeep
parked off the road. The years I'd lived had grown
to a pressure-point in my back,
a wall of water that I knew would break
and leave me buoyant in a dark-blue sleep
preparatory of change. My nerves went slack

in waiting for the painless-one,
the master-thief, psychopomp, psychagogue,
animated, volatilized,
the journeyer through inner space,
followed for his impartiality,
his neutral, binding resolution shown
in the unfaltering speed of his pace.

Windows

The sky opens out like a blue window
on how we envisage the fictional
possibility we become at death,
earth-steps, red clay-feet left behind, the mind
achieving light the way a flower
opens out, radius from corolla –
a trellised purple clematis, complete
at that moment.

The wish-potential's there to discover,
for this one it means climbing a high stair
in trains of white net and red taffeta
to hear a nocturne, and claim for the face
the mask that lived within, for another
completion is where language stops
for the myth's taken over.
Here a gold hand unites with a silver,
the sunset's a wind-storm of red ibis.

And by a temporal window at twilight,
someone moons at the glass, half expectant
of a dramatic change – the feeling's there
to go beyond the moment, and they rush,
zigzagging swallows in crazy scythed streaks
for the invisible rift, the way through
the window that the watcher knows is there,
and opens simultaneous
with their disappearance, leans to the blue,
and windows are opening out everywhere.

KATHLEEN RAINE

Distant Paradise

1 Persephone Remembers

How did I lose my way
 From those bright fields
 Of memory's unfading flowers?
 I see them in mind's eye,
 Buttercups, clover, burnet-rose,
 In unmown meadows once
 Blooming eternally
 But gone from here and now where I am always.

There they still delight,
 Those flowers of paradise,
 One sunny day,
 A little girl strayed, unawares,
 To re-enact lost innocence,
 Who will again,
 Far from home, unloved,
 Eat those pomegranate seeds,

For such a few only
 Of time's innumerable days
 To lose that happy place!
 'If only she had known!'
 I used to sorrow when I read
 Her story in my book of myths.
 Not she, but the story knew that what must be
 Is what has been.

2 Paradise-Seed

Where the seed
 Of the tree felled,
 Of the woods burned,

Or living root
 Under ash and cinder?
 From woven bud

What last leaf strives
Into life, last
Shrivelled flower?

Is fruit of our harvest,
Our long labour
Dust to the core?

To what far, fair land
Borne on the wind
What winged seed

Or spark of fire
From holocaust
To kindle a star?

3 No-Where

There is a place
More real than here
That is no-where.

From regions of memory
Boundless joy
Opens its distances,

Regions of loss
Vast as love, high
As heart aspires.

Far, far
And wide as absence
Those groves and fields,

Long as departure
Its rivers flow
Beyond hope's reach.

Realms of elsewhere
Whose time is once
Whose place is away.

In long-ago gardens
Those bird-voices
Sing of our loves

That never were,
Yet deep as life,
Yet all that we are.

4 The Human Dream

What land is native to us but a dream
We have told one another leaf by leaf,
Golden bough and golden flower,
Fountain and tree and stream,
That Paradise unseen.

Its unheard music we have sung
Lover to lover,
In sunlit glades we have depicted Her,
Our Eve, our Primavera,
And sweet Virgin Mary with all her babes,

Whose bliss is ours – not that our fingers played
With strand of golden hair
Or reached for that ripe fruit
She offers, or lily-flower,
Holy mother to holy child,

But we have made it so,
Those angels, sinless saints,
Souls who, purified by death,
Dwell in our images for ever, neither come
Nor go from that imagined place.

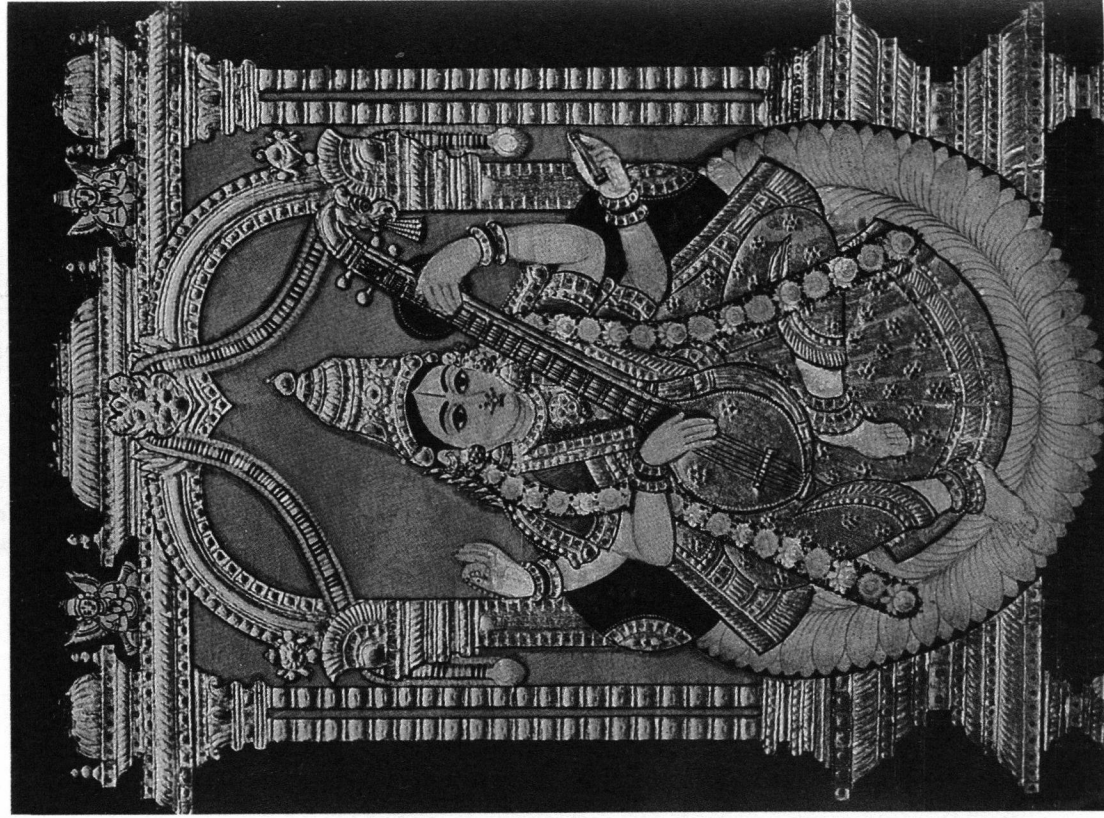
We, who have loved and known
Eternal beauty only as we have traced
Those unseen presences
Robed and adorned with beyond-price jewels
Of our imagining,

Is it that we are
Semblances in the enactment of a dream
That dreams us, life by shadowy life,
In Eden, under those bright boughs,
Beside that flowing stream?

5

Little Children have known always
What Plotinus taught the wise,
That the world we see, we are,
Soul's country beyond time and space,
Our own bright image in a glass,
Tree, leaf and flower,
Sun, moon and farthest star.

To my transient self I say,
'You have not written, nor will ever,
'The untold of all women
'Who have been and will be,
'Through whom for a while in me
'Life has received and given
'Love's mystery.'



Saraswati, Goddess of Learning and Wisdom.
Thanjavur painting

(Photograph by Ajay Pall)

The Vedic Legend and Symbol of the Origin of Poetry

VINAYAK KRISHNA GOKAK

The Rigveda speaks of five goddesses who are the rays of an inner sun, Surya Savitri, master of the supreme truth of being, knowledge and movement, the all-seer and illuminator. His rays are supramental activities – revelation or truth-vision as symbolized by the goddess Ilā, inspiration or truth-audition as represented by Saraswati, pure intuitive perception as seen in Saramā – and luminous discernment or a divine discrimination as revealed in Daxinā. These rays descend into the human mentality and build at its summit a world of light and luminous intelligence, a heaven of which Indra himself is lord. There is a fifth ray, symbolized as goddess Bhārati, the impeller of happy truths, a widely covering thought power.

Surya Savitri is the Causal Idea in Infinite Being. The action of this Causal Idea brings out, by the pressure of consciousness on its own being, that which lies concealed in it. It brings to the mind the illuminations of truth and gives to man 'a clear discernment of things in their totality'. Men therefore apply all their erring thoughts to this light manifested in them so that it may illumine what is obscure. Thus Surya manifests in the human consciousness its concealed heavenly summit. He follows the march of Ushā, the Goddess of Dawn, and illumines all the regions of our being.

That Saramā, the Goddess of Intuition, was a hound is a later image. In the Rigveda she is also primarily the Goddess of Intuition, the 'forerunner of the dawn of Truth' in the human mind. Knowledge comes to her even before vision springs up, for she is the Goddess of Intuition.

Saraswati is inspiration, rich in the substance of thought. She is the slayer of the Paṇis, the evil ones in the realms of the subconscious. Paṇis are slain by the Word and she is the inspiration behind the Word.

Ilā, the Goddess of Revelation, is the mother of the Herds of the Sun

– the glowing moments of Spirit known to the seer. She is the seer's vision that attains the Truth.

Daxinā, the Goddess of Discrimination, is mental judgement on the plane of Mind and intuitional discernment on the plane of the Truth or Causal Idea.

Bhārati, the impeller of happy truths, represents the largeness of the infinity of being in our own human system and she contains the Truth or Causal Idea in herself.

Ushā, the Goddess of Dawn, is a form of the Supreme Light. She reveals the luminous godhead or the Causal Idea in man's activities by throwing off veil after veil. She occupies the thought and word of the seer as a power of knowledge. She illuminates the pure mentality through the realizing word and enters into the mental and bodily consciousness with the Truth. Her dawns are but the descent upon mortal nature of that Immortal Truth, Surya Savitri. They are the constant openings of the divine light on the human being. She is Chandrarathā, for the crescent moon is the boat she sails in. She pours Ananda, Soma, the wine of Beatitude, into the human system.

These six goddesses preside over the prenatal mystery of poetry and tend the child even as it is being formed in the womb. Saramā, pure intuition, becomes the *sakti* or power of spirit in it. Ilā is the truth revealed in it and Bharati is the infinity of being, life itself, through which Truth is manifested in poetry. Ushā, the goddess in the crescent boat, brings Delight into poetry. Saraswati, who is the goddess of the Word, presides over Beauty and Daxinā, the Goddess of Discrimination, brings Propriety or Good Sense into poetry.

Sri Aurobindo who, in his *The Secret of the Veda*, has spoken of these six goddesses as the rays of the inner sun, Surya Savitri, also refers to the five suns of poetry in his *The Future Poetry* – Spirit, Life, Truth, the Moon of Beauty and Delight, and Vayu or the Breath of Life. He speaks only of the five suns of Poetry. But a sixth is also needed, for Good Sense or Propriety is an essential element of Poetry and it has to be distinguished from Poetic Truth as such. The sphere of the sixth sun may be assigned to Daxinā.

We thus see that the birth of poetry within the poet's consciousness is presided over by the six goddesses who are the rays of the inner sun, Surya Savitri: Saramā, Ilā, Bhārati, Saraswati, Ushā and Daxinā. The birth of poetry in a concrete form, its birth as poetry in words, is presided

over by Spirit, ushā or Sakti, Vayu, Surya, Soma and Daxinā, for they stand respectively for Spirit, Life, Truth, Delight, Beauty (Soma* doing double duty and representing Beauty as well as Delight) and Propriety.

Saramā is one of the six goddesses connected with the birth of poetry in the poet's consciousness and she functions as Shakti or Spirit when it comes to speaking of the regular composition of poetry or of poetry in the concrete. Those readers who are not familiar with Vedic symbols may be expected to have known Francis Thompson's celebrated poem, 'The Hound of Heaven'. Now, in a later Vedic legend, Sarama figures as the hound that discovers the path and the secret hold in the mountain and locates the lost Herds of the Sun. The Hound of Heaven is a familiar phrase. It throws a bridge of understanding across the complexities of Vedic legend.

* Soma: the juice of the Soma plant, its stalks being collected by moonlight on certain mountains; also personified as one of the most important of Vedic gods; also sometimes identified with the moon.



E. B. Havell and the Art of India

STEPHEN CROSS

The name of E. B. Havell is not widely known today, yet he was one of that small group, of whom Coomaraswamy and Eric Gill are perhaps best known, who in the earlier years of this century brought about a revival of the idea of tradition, particularly as this applies to the arts. Havell was older than Coomaraswamy and Gill, and in some respects his attitudes anticipate both men. Although his chosen field was the visual art of India, and it is for an understanding of this that his work is most valuable, much of what he says has also a broader application. Havell believed that in India traditional art still existed as a living force, though neglected by British rulers and Western-educated Indians alike. In 1908 he wrote:

India, unlike Europe, has a still living, traditional and national art, intimately bound up with the social and religious life of the people . . . But the secularised and denationalised art of Europe has no affinity with the living art of India, and we, aliens in race, thought, and religion, have never taken anything but a dilettante, archeological, or commercial interest in it. Its deeper meanings are hidden from us, and those spiritual longings and desires, which come straight from the heart of a people, to find expression in their poetry, music, and their art, strike no chord of sympathy in ours.

Havell wrote from a long experience of India and wide knowledge of her culture. He came from a family of artists; his father was a painter, and his great-uncle another, well-known for his scenes of life in India and China. Havell studied at the Royal College of Art and in Paris and Italy, and went to India in 1884, when he was twenty-three, as the Superintendent of the Madras School of Arts. Twelve years later he became Principal of the Calcutta Art School and Keeper of the Art Gallery in that city. While in Madras, he had been responsible for a government report on the condition of the indigenous crafts, and had become aware that many old traditions remained alive though dying

for lack of patronage. In one of his later books he mentions the discovery by O. C. Gangoly that in the Tanjore district there still existed a colony of temple image-makers, descended from the great school of craftsmen who had built, carved and furnished the famous temple of Tanjore, with its superb image of Shiva Nataraja. It was, Havell wrote, as if one discovered in England a school of craftsmen in direct descent from the builders of Westminster Abbey, and then just ignored them. Like Gill and Coomaraswamy, and William Morris before them, Havell was concerned not simply with the so-called 'fine arts', a distinction which he did not admit, but with the loss of traditions and skills across the entire range of the crafts which had resulted from the Industrial Revolution. The same process was now taking place in India, and was all the more disturbing for being introduced from outside:

If the springs of Indian craftsmanship, which have flowed spontaneously for ages, must always be harnessed to Western machinery, driven by European art-mechanics, the inevitable consequence is that they will sooner or later be pumped as dry as similar English springs have been made by the same mechanical process. Indians who care anything for art must, above all things, prevent the mechanising of their traditional schools of craftsmanship.

With this in mind, Havell initiated a movement for the revival of hand-loom weaving, which was later taken up and made famous by Gandhi. Havell believed that the British, as India's rulers, had a responsibility to preserve not just the monuments of India but the living traditions which had made them possible, and that they were neglecting this. He traced the cause to the educational policy of Anglicisation, which in the field of the arts had been entirely destructive. Havell contrasted this with the policy of the Moghul Empire, when a similarly alien culture, that of Islam, had made full use of native Indian skills and produced the splendid school of Moghul painting and one of the world's great architectural styles as a result. Had the British followed a similar policy, he believed, India would have seen a great artistic revival under their rule, instead of a sad decline. It became his purpose to assert the value of traditional Indian art, and to do what he could to preserve the ancient lines of craftsmanship:

A vital art tradition once lost is lost for centuries, and can hardly ever be revived. It cannot be taught by schools, exhibitions or museums, or recovered by the fulfilment of political hopes . . . For real lovers of art it must always seem more important, before classifying Indian art according to schools and epochs after the method of the European historian, to realise that India has an unbroken artistic tradition going back for thousands of years. The discovery of a living Indian artist or craftsman, learned in the Silpa-shastras and connected by a long line of ancestors with the most famous artists and craftsmen of antiquity, gives hope of keeping the springs of Indian craftsmanship flowing and an opportunity of historical study which is altogether denied to European art critics, even to those who search in our English villages for the last vestiges of traditional folk-music and art.

Since Calcutta was at that time the capital of British India, Havell was in a potentially influential situation, and he made the most of it. In the face of much opposition – not least from Westernized Indians – he revolutionised the teaching methods at the art school, removing the antique casts and second-rate copies of European paintings which had been the models, and substituting the study of Indian art; out of this grew what came to be known as the New School of Indian Painting (with such artists as Abanindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose), perhaps the principal Indian art movement of the twentieth century. At the Calcutta Museum he built up a fine collection of Indian sculpture and painting, and used it both in his teaching and to illustrate his books. Later he took a leading part in the controversy over the building of New Delhi, seeing this as an ideal opportunity to revive the traditional arts. He organised a petition with signatures ranging from Bernard Shaw to Coomaraswamy, seeking to have the work placed in the hands of Indian master-builders, and that the opportunity was lost was a deep disappointment to him.

Calcutta was also the centre of intellectual life in India, and Havell formed a circle which developed into the Indian Society of Oriental Art, and which included Rabindranath Tagore and other members of the Tagore family, Sir John Woodroffe (famous as Avalon, the author of *The Serpent Power*), Stella Kramrisch, who later wrote the definitive book on the Hindu temple, the critic O. C. Gangoly, and, on his frequent visits to India, the young Coomaraswamy.¹ It requires some

effort of the imagination to reconstruct the climate in which Havell and those round him were working, and the attitudes towards the arts of India which were then prevalent. Ruskin, for example, thought Indian art 'in great part diseased and frightful' and claimed that even where it had succeeded, as with the bold use of colour, it was simply because of 'their glorious ignorance of all rules'. Fergusson, whose study of Indian architecture was an important work, warned his readers that 'it cannot, of course, be for one moment contended that India ever reached the intellectual supremacy of Greece or the moral greatness of Rome'. B. G. Baden-Powell in 1872 warned that 'in a country like this we must not expect to find anything that appeals to mind or to deep feeling'. Vincent Smith, in an early book, could refer to 'the feeble conventionalism of ordinary Indian art', and write that it 'has scarcely at any time essayed an attempt to give visible form to any divine ideal'. And the official handbook to the Indian section of the Victoria and Albert Museum stated that 'sculpture and painting are unknown, as fine arts, in India... Nowhere does their figure-sculpture show the inspiration of true art. They seem to have no feeling for it...'. Both Havell and Coomaraswamy delighted in collecting passages of this sort. What is significant is that they are not the views of philistines, but of men who were eminent scholars, some of them specialising in Indian art and keenly interested in its history. And it was views such as these which were determining British policy towards the arts in India.

There were several reasons for such views. One was political. It was an assumption of European rule in all parts of the world that the subject peoples were at an inferior level of development, whatever the actual truth in a given case might be. That Indian art was intrinsically inferior to that of Europe was therefore a natural assumption, and could hardly be doubted. To allow, along with Havell (and later Coomaraswamy), that Indian art was on a level with that of Europe was to undermine the moral authority of British rule; ultimately it implied the surrender of control of the sub-continent, as indeed was the course of events. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that even at the time of his death in 1934, Havell had not been forgiven by many. His obituary in *The Times* refers to 'his vehement hates and irrational exclusiveness', his 'zeal that bordered on fanaticism', his 'vehement and relentless opposition to every trace of

European influence, and with constant denunciations of what Havell deemed to be utter ignorance on the part of his fellow countrymen of Indian art and civilization.²

That Havell did at times overstate his case is a widely held view; even Coomaraswamy accused him at one point of oversimplifying, and Roger Lipsey, in his book on Coomaraswamy, is uncomfortable with Havell's claims that 'the best Indian sculpture touched a deeper note of feeling and finer sentiments than the best Greek', and that the sculptures of Borobudur were 'rarely equalled, and never excelled' by European art.³ But Havell was fighting an entrenched opinion, and it was at times necessary to shout to make oneself heard; Coomaraswamy himself did the same, at least in his earlier work. Regrettable though it may be, ideas have to be fought for. Nor was Havell unaware of what he was doing: 'how illogical it is,' he wrote to Coomaraswamy, 'to expect Indian art to survive unless Indians can sincerely believe it is as good as (or better than) any other art the world ever produced.'⁴ Further, that the best Indian sculpture touches deeper feelings than that of Greece, or that the finest reliefs at Borobudur compare favourably with Ghiberti's doors at Florence (as Havell also claimed), is certainly a matter open to debate, but it is not something which can be ruled out without consideration; to do so is simply to show that the old conviction of the innate superiority of European art persists. Havell was acutely aware of the role that suggestion plays in questions of this sort, and the way it has been weighted in favour of Classical and Renaissance art. Of the reliefs at Borobudur he writes,

It can hardly be doubted that had these sculptures been labelled 'Greek', 'Roman', or 'Italian', the volumes of criticism and commentaries on them would have filled many libraries; casts of them would be found in every European art-school and museum; tourists would have flocked to inscribe their names on them or chip off fragments as souvenirs.

Moreover, Havell believed that the fixation which Europe developed at the time of the Renaissance on the art of classical antiquity was to a large extent misplaced, because Europe – the Europe of the humanists who came to dominate the Renaissance – had not understood the spirit of that antiquity; a spirit which, properly understood, was closer to that of Indian art than generally recognised. He saw that the harsh judgements passed on Indian art were made not on the

basis of its own purposes, but by the criteria of European art, and this at a time when European art had become far removed from its original sources of inspiration and, to a large degree, trapped within a superficial academicism. The most frequent accusation levelled at Indian art was its lack of naturalism: for Ruskin, Indians had 'wilfully sealed up for themselves the book of life', and nobody at all could abide the extra limbs with which Indian gods are so generously endowed. For this Havell offered two responses. First, Indian artists were by no means unable to produce first-rate naturalistic effects when they wished; for example, the portrayal of animal life both in Hindu sculpture and in Moghul painting was of a high order, showing a deep sympathy with and delight in the natural world. As for the extra limbs, how in principle do they differ from the wings of European angels or the composite bodies of centaurs or satyrs, for in both cases the symbolic intent is clear? Second, and more fundamentally, if Indian art has never produced a Phidias it is not because such naturalism was beyond its grasp, but because it deliberately chose imaginative rather than naturalistic ideals. It is true that this involves a certain price, and that Indian art, being entirely creative and imaginative, does not have like European art the safety-net of naturalism ('this resource of mediocrity', adds Havell); but in this it is closer to the fundamental nature of art, which is to communicate by means of convention and suggestion. As Havell put it,

Art will always be caviare to the vulgar, but those who would really learn to understand it should begin with Indian art, for true Indian art is pure art stripped of the superfluities and vulgarities which delight the uneducated eye.

The differences between European and Indian art, says Havell, go back to the different answers these two civilisations give to the question, What is reality? Indian art could not be realist in more than an incidental way because of India's understanding of the doctrine of *maya*, or illusion: it was what lay behind the natural forms, not the forms themselves, which was the essential. Like ancient Egyptian art or the Gothic art of Europe, it is always striving to realise something of the universal, and to suggest the formless infinity which is hidden behind the world of forms (it was for this reason, wrote Coomaraswamy, that Plato ranked the formal and canonical art of Egypt far above the humanistic Greek art⁵). The art of India is first and foremost

an art of spiritual contemplation – Havell wrote that the whole philosophy of Indian art is to be found in these two words – essentially idealistic, symbolic, and transcendental, striving to realise the spirituality and abstraction of a supra-terrestrial sphere. In contrast,

European art, since the Renaissance, has, as it were, its wings clipped: it knows only the beauty of earthly things. Indian art . . . is ever trying to bring down to earth something of the beauty of the things above.

Havell quotes from an old Indian text, the *Sukranitisara*, to make his point:

In order that the form of an image may be brought out fully and clearly upon the mind, the image-maker must meditate, and his success will be in proportion to his meditation. No other way, not even seeing the object itself, will answer this purpose . . . The artist should attain to images of the gods by means of spiritual contemplation only. The spiritual vision is the best and truest standard for him. He should depend upon it and not at all upon the visible objects perceived by external senses. It is always commendable for the artist to draw the images of the Gods. To make human figures is bad, and even irreligious. It is far better to present the figure of a god, though it is not beautiful, than to reproduce a remarkably handsome human figure.

The commonest form that the prevailing attitude to Indian art took was in a misconception as to its origins, and a misplaced emphasis on the importance of the Gandharan School. Gandharan art consists of Buddhist carvings, mostly on a small scale, dating around the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D., and found in the mountainous regions to the north-west of India. This region bordered the Sassanian Empire and Gandharan sculpture shows strong Graeco-Roman influence; and in the nineteenth century it was the prevailing view that it marks the beginning of fine art in India, or at least of all that was valuable in it. Once again it is the classical bias at work: sculpture and painting, as fine arts, were introduced to India through Greek and Roman influence, and they ceased to have value as that Western influence waned. For Havell, this was a massive misunderstanding of both the nature and the origins of Indian art – he called it looking at the whole matter through the wrong end of the telescope – and it had led to

hopeless confusion, and to misconception of the motives of Indian artists. It was, he said, the substitution of archeology for a real attempt to understand Indian art. The Gandharan School was a local development in Indian art, not without its own merits, though these had been exaggerated, but somewhat trivial in relation to the whole. It owed its reputation to the classical influences it showed, and to the accident that being in stone its carvings had survived, whereas other early work in India was in wood and had perished. It is true that in the treatment of draperies it had left a permanent mark on Buddhist art, but such questions of how one school has borrowed forms and fashions from its neighbour, as a tailor or dressmaker might, belong more to the realm of archeology than to the understanding of art. They have their interest and importance for the historian, but at bottom they are no more than a kind of inventory of the artist's stock-in-trade, and help very little to discover the real source of his art which lies always in the world of ideas. 'Anglo-India', he concluded, 'needs more art in its archeology and less archeology in its art.'

In contrast to this limited but easily identified kind of influence is the infinitely more potent influence which comes from the transmission of a great idea. And India, far from being dependent on Mediterranean sources for its inspiration, was the primal source from which the main current of artistic idealism flowed, inspiring the art of the whole of Asia (and, Havell suggests, influencing Europe more than we have acknowledged). In the early centuries of the present era, under the impulse of Mahayana Buddhism, India was not in a state of pupilage to anyone, as the Gandhara theory would suppose, but the teacher of all Asia. The great universities at Takshasila, Benares, Shridhanya Kataka and Nalanda were the culture-centres of the East, and to them and to many other centres of learning in India came students from all parts of Asia; and from them missionaries took Indian philosophy, science and art to the most distant parts of the continent, laying the foundations of the great schools of Buddhist art in Java, Cambodia, Siam, Tibet, Korea, China and Japan. 'It was India who first worked out the whole philosophy of Asiatic art,' said Havell, 'in the great philosophical schools of India, China came to learn, and what she learnt she taught to Japan.'

Havell withdrew from the Calcutta Art School in 1906, leaving his work there to be continued by Abanindranath Tagore, and between

that year and 1924 he produced a series of books in which his ideas were developed, and which remain a valuable guide to Indian art and the ideas underlying it. Of these *Indian Sculpture and Painting*, published in 1908, was especially influential – Coomaraswamy called it ‘the first serious attempt to understand and appreciate Indian art.’⁶ On the opening page Havell placed an epigram, a passage from Taine’s *Voyage en Italie*, ‘Quand on veut comprendre un art, il faut regarder l’ame du public auquel il s’adressait,’ and it became his first principle in interpreting Indian art to relate it systematically to the mainstream of Indian thought – something which had not been done previously. The key to Indian art, Havell considered, was to be found in the original Vedic ideal, enshrined in the Upanishads. Certainly there were, at various periods, influences from outside, but this is the central source of Indian civilisation and never far away in her art.

Havell’s book was a direct challenge to the received opinions, and it could not be ignored; moreover, it appeared at a critical moment when all ideas about art were under examination, and when the traditional forms of European art were, for good or ill, starting to fragment. In the same year Coomaraswamy’s first significant book *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art* appeared, as did Laurence Binyon’s *Painting in the Far East*. Roger Fry took these three books, together with Gaston Migeon’s *Manuel d’Art Musulman*, as the basis for an article in *The Quarterly Review* in which he tried to assess the whole question of the status of non-European art. His verdict was that ‘we can no longer hide behind the Elgin marbles.’ Eastern art, he said, in a phrase which revealed his limitations, could provide us with ‘a vast mass of new aesthetic experience.’⁷

But it was not ‘new aesthetic experience’ which prompted Havell’s – any more than Coomaraswamy’s – interest in Indian art; although as a trained artist Havell was certainly sensitive to aesthetic factors, and in this respect his writing is often superior to Coomaraswamy’s. He saw something of broader value and richer meaning: an unbroken artistic tradition stretching back two thousand years and more, and deeply rooted in the life and beliefs of the people. There was in this art, as in all traditional art, an ethical value – a value also to be found in the classical art of the Mediterranean, though missed by modern interpreters. For the people of India it constituted a popular language of much greater intellectual and moral influence than book-learning. Far from

being 'art for art's sake', that catchy-cry of Havell's day, it was a means of instruction and inspiration for the whole community. It had penetrated deeply into the national life with the result that the Indian peasantry, though illiterate in the Western sense, were among the most cultured of their class anywhere in the world:

Hindu art was not addressed, like modern Western art, to a narrow coterie of literati for their pleasure and distraction. Its intention was to make the central ideas of Hindu religion and philosophy intelligible to all Hinduism, to satisfy the unlettered but not unlearned Hindu peasant as well as the intellectual Brahmin.

And in return this art, again like all traditional art, drew its strength from the life and beliefs of the people – 'Indian art,' said Havell, 'was born in the village and nurtured in the pilgrim's camp.' Havell saw in India a vision of something that Europe had lost, her arts forming an integral part of a great traditional culture, intimately bound up with the religion and daily life of the great mass of the people. Contrasting this with the situation in Europe, he again quotes a passage from Taine:

The sculptor speaks no more to a religious city, but to a crowd of inquisitive individuals; he ceases to be, for his part, citizen and priest – he is only a man and artist. He insists upon the anatomical detail which will attract the connoisseur and on the striking expression which will be understood by the ignorant. He is a superior kind of shopkeeper, who wishes to compel public attention and to keep it. He makes a simple work of art, and not a work of national art. The spectator pays him in praise and he pays the spectator in pleasure.⁸

Havell made use of Taine's term 'national art'. By this he meant not nationalism in the modern sense, but an art in which the whole population could and did participate fully, in which stood revealed the inner secrets of the people's mind so that it could truly be said to express, in Ruskin's phrase, 'the passions of dead myriads.' In such an art the artist was at one with the society, its natural and unselfconscious voice:

It is one of the characteristics of a healthy national art that the artist has no need of vulgar extraneous efforts to make himself appreciated by his public. He is the exponent of national art

culture, not a specialist shut up in a narrow domain of knowledge from which the world at large is excluded.

Things have gone so far in Europe, says Havell, that a middleman, an art critic, is now necessary to explain to the public what the artist is doing, and 'art limps badly upon these literary crutches.' To find still in existence in India a national art of this ideal type, an art such as Europe had once known in the Gothic period, and yet to watch it dying, was for Havell a moving experience, and it does much to explain the urgency with which he wrote. He could not help contrasting again and again the situation in Europe:

Europe of the present day has more to learn from India in art than to teach. Religious art in Europe is altogether lost: it perished in our so-called Renaissance. In India the true spirit of it still lives.

When art gave up its birthright as the ethical teacher and spiritual helper of mankind, only to minister to the vanity and self-indulgence of the wealthy and indolent; when man ceased to use his highest creative faculties in the daily worship of his Creator, the Decadence, miscalled in Europe the Renaissance, had already begun.

In India there still existed,

... a great hereditary artistic tradition, compared with that of the petty individualistic art of modern Europe, with all its narrowness, self-consciousness, and provincialism.

This art, though neglected and downtrodden – Havell speaks of modern India as 'the wreckage of a great civilisation and culture' – was still alive. Its bearers were the traditional craftsmen, organised in castes, and still to be found across the length and breadth of the land. In spite of their depressed condition, Havell observed, these men were often more highly cultured intellectually and spiritually than the average Indian graduate; and by them the long lines of transmission, carefully passed from one generation to the next, were maintained. But this art was dying from lack of patronage, for sculpture and the other arts cannot flourish while cut off from their roots in the craft of building, and for British administrators the Indian master-builder, who had wrought such marvels under the Moghuls and could do so again, simply did not exist. 'Nothing can excuse the crushing out of all the splendid artistry, of the technical lore and skill of hand inherited

from former generations,' wrote Havell, 'simply for the want of an intelligent adaptation of official machinery for making use of it.' When a public building was required the British preferred their pseudo-classical designs ('primitive archeological experiments', Havell dubbed them) built by themselves or by anglicised Indians. Nor was the new elite class of British-educated Indians any better:

Modern 'educated' Indians, to their shame be it said, are mostly ignorant of or indifferent to this great science, the traditions of which are kept alive by the artistic castes of the present day; though they are fast being crushed under the vandal heel of what we miscall civilisation, just as the traditions of the medieval artists and craftsmen have been extinguished by a barbarous and godless commercialism.

The controversy started by Havell's book came to a head at a meeting of the Royal Society of Arts in London in 1910. Havell was the principal speaker, and was supported by Coomaraswamy and the artist Walter Crane. The chairman was Sir George Birdwood, a man born in India and with vast experience of the country (he had, in fact, been responsible for Havell's original appointment at Madras), who had written with deep sympathy on it and whose work in gaining recognition for Indian crafts was widely acknowledged. But Birdwood could not concede that such a thing as fine art existed in 'the India of the Hindus', and went on to describe a photograph of a seated Buddha from Borobudur which Havell had placed on display in the following way:

This senseless similitude, in its immemorial fixed pose, is nothing more than an uninspired brazen image, vacuously squinting down its nose to its thumbs, knees, and toes. A boiled suet pudding would serve equally well as a symbol of passionless purity and serenity of soul.⁹

This outburst had repercussions, and a little later a letter appeared in *The Times* signed by well-known figures in the arts and asserting, 'we find in the best art of India a lofty and adequate expression of the religious emotion of the people' and in the image of the Buddha 'one of the great artistic inspirations of the world.'¹⁰ An editorial in the paper broadly consented to this view. The meeting also prompted Coomaraswamy and Havell, together with Roger Fry, William Rothenstein and others, to form in London the India Society, which quickly

became instrumental in spreading the appreciation of Indian art by publishing high quality reproductions, the earliest series being edited by Havell or Coomaraswamy. 'The Discovery of Asia,' said Coomaraswamy, 'has become to Europe no longer a piratical expedition, but a spiritual adventure'¹¹; and by 1981 Havell felt justified in writing that 'my interpretation of Indian art has won the general assent of my fellow artists in Europe.'

* * *

We will conclude by turning from Havell's broad attitude to Indian art to a group of ideas which he came to believe are central to its interpretation, providing an important key to its symbolism. They are ideas of a distinctively traditional type.

Havell considered that the Indian artist, whether builder or sculptor, deals with metaphysical ideas of a type which in the West are often held to be beyond the limitations of art, and that Indian art cannot be appreciated for what it is without an understanding of these concepts, and of the cosmological and mythological forms into which they are cast. A central idea, as we have seen, is that of *maya*; we may take it for present purposes as a belief that the forms of the world are relatively, but not absolutely real: they derive from higher levels of reality, and ultimately from the only absolute Reality, the Unmanifest, which is by definition beyond form. For Indian thought, then, form itself is ultimately illusion, but it can be used to convey truths of a metaphysical nature.

A well-known image which embodies this concept is that of Vishnu, or Narayana, the self-existent spirit, who is depicted slumbering upon the primeval serpent Sesha (also called Ananta, 'endless') in the depths of the cosmic ocean which precedes creation, and into which creation is periodically resumed. This ocean is that of universal possibility, and from the naval of the dreaming God arises the long, curving stem of a lotus; the flower of the lotus floats upon the surface of the waters, and upon it as on a throne is seated the creator-god, Brahma. The lotus is itself rich in symbolism – Havell calls it nature's own symbol of the spiritual process – rooted obscurely in the muddy depths, it makes its way upwards towards the light, its gleaming white flower an unsurpassed image of purity as it opens its heart to the sun.

The world, then, is a lotus which appears for a time, shining with beauty and light as it floats on the 'waters', before it is again withdrawn. This lotus, Havell points out, is found in Indian art as a pedestal upon which almost every sacred image, whether Hindu, Jain, or Buddhist, rests.

The concept is explicit in Indian texts and was known to European scholars before Havell's time, though they gave it little emphasis. Not known was a development of the idea which centres on the Himalayas. This great wall of mountains which shuts in their land to the north is, says Havell, the aspect of nature which has made the deepest impression on the Indian mind; even a cursory survey of Indian literature will reveal the centrality of the Himalayas. In poetry and myth they recur continually, and under constantly shifting images. For Kalidasa they are at one time the cosmic pillar, 'Earth's stately pillar girt about with cloud', or they are pictured as filling the sky like lotus flowers, or as the throne of Brahma, or of Vishnu, or of Shiva, or they are these gods themselves. Even the Ganges derives its sanctity from its source in the Himalayas, and still in modern India the villagers of the plains look on the forests of the Himalayan slopes as a half-magical world, the dwelling place of the holiest mystics and a source of inspiration, while it is the high Himalayan shrines such as Badrinath and Kedarnath which are the ultimate goal of the pilgrim. Havell writes,

Then, as now, Shiva's followers climbed the winding pathway up the steep Himalayan slopes, through a paradise of tree and flower, above the dark forests of mighty deodar, to the region of cloud and mist and eternal ice and snow.

Not only are the mighty snow-clad mountains natural symbols of the spiritual heights, they are also the source of life for the plains of India. From them descend the great rivers, the Ganges, the Yamuna, the Sutlej, the Indus, the Brahmaputra and the rest, the waters of which sustain the whole of northern India throughout the burning summer: for India the Himalayas are the eternal spring from which the waters of life flow. It is not surprising, then, that this great mass of mountains crowding upwards towards the heavens should have been conceived as the heart of the giant lotus which is the world. The high peaks glistening with eternal snow, Havell tells us, are conceived as the shining, upraised inner petals cupped around the centre of the

lotus flower, where, in the words of the *Vishnu Purana*, the Creator, Brahma, has his throne 'like the seed-vessel of a lotus.' To understand this symbolism, says Havell, and to recognise its connection with the ideas of Hinduism and Buddhism, is to add very much to the interest of Indian art.

Nor is this all, for in the heart of this central region is a vast lake, whose beautiful, regularly indented shores are themselves said to resemble a lotus. This is the lake Manasarovara, 'the lake of the mind' (*manas* = mind), upon the shores of which it is said that the Vedas were first taught. It is the Creator's Well, source of the world's life-stream, for from it according to the traditional cosmology the four world-rivers (physical counterparts of the four Vedas) flow forth: the Indus to the west, the Brahmaputra ('son of Brahma') to the east, the Ganges to the south, while what is thought of as the northern river is less clear – Havell suggests it may have been the Oxus. This sacred lake, Manasarovara, is not fabulous but is a fact of geography. Situated deep within the Himalayas at fifteen-thousand feet, it is the highest body of water of its size in the world; it may be found on modern maps under the name of Managolowa Ch'ih, and while they do not actually flow forth from the lake it is remarkable that the first three rivers mentioned above do indeed rise in its general vicinity.

Around this still centre, in the Indian conception, cluster the great peaks of the Himalayas, and beyond these the giant world-lotus spreads its four immense outer petals. The western petal is Iran and the lands beyond it; the northern petal Turkestan and the steppes of Central Asia, the eastern petal China and the adjacent territories; and the southern petal is India, which does indeed conform to the shape of a vast flower-petal. The wild geese (called *hamsa* in Sanskrit, and often translated as 'swan') which wing their way to this lake on the monsoon winds are seen as an image of the soul returning to its home, as in the lines by Kabir:

The swan has taken its flight
To the lake beyond the mountains;
Why should it search for the pools
Or the ditches any more?¹²

Yet more sacred than the lake itself is the great mountain which rises above it. This is Mount Kailasha, which towers seven thousand feet above the surface of the lake, and for the devout Hindu it is the

most tremendous fact of all. For Kailasha is the abode of Shiva, and the very hub of the world; it is identified by some Hindus with the fabulous Mount Meru, and is in all probability its physical prototype. Yet this great central shrine of Hinduism, the nave of the universal wheel, the focus of world forces, which in theory was the ultimate goal of the greater northern pilgrimage – for Hindus, says Havell, the holiest spot on earth – was attained by no more than a hundred or two pilgrims in a year, its extreme inaccessibility, now, even more than formerly, for like Lake Manasarovara it is in Chinese-occupied Tibet) adding to the awe in which it was held. The mountain is crowned by a striking pyramidal snow-cap, and to the eyes of pilgrims this has the shape of a forest hermit's hut. Shiva is conceived as within this mountain hut, seated in the eternal meditation which sustains the world. This, says Havell, is the divine image which the Indian artist brought down to earth.

Such was the power of this image that it survived the transition to Buddhism. When, in Mahayana Buddhism, the Buddha was deified he was translated to Mount Kailasha, and thereafter this most hazardous and demanding of pilgrimages became the goal of Buddhists as of Hindus. Havell quotes a passage from a book, *Three Years in Tibet*, by Ekai Kawaguchi, the learned abbot of a Japanese Buddhist monastery, which is worth reproducing:

About thirteen miles onward a view opened before us which I shall never forget, so exquisitely grand was its scenery. In short, we were now in the presence of the sacred lake Manasarovara. A huge octagon in shape, with marvellously symmetrical indentations, Lake Manasarovara, with its clear, placid waters and the Mount Kailasa guarding its north-western corner, form a picture which is at once unique and sublime, and well worthy of its dignified surroundings, calm, dustless, and rugged. Mount Kailasa itself towers so majestically above the peaks around that I fancied I saw in it the image of our mighty Lord Buddha, calmly addressing His five-hundred disciples. Verily, verily, it was a natural mandala. The hunger and thirst, the perils of dashing streams and freezing blizzard, the pain of writhing under heavy burdens, the anxiety of wandering over trackless wilds, the exhaustion and the lacerations, all the troubles and sufferings I had just come through, seemed like dust which was washed away and purified by the spiritual waters of the lake; and thus I attained

to the spiritual plane of the Non-Ego, together with this scenery showing Its-own-reality.¹³

From this powerful concept of Mount Kailash as the centre, and also the summit, of the world, and the gigantic figure of the Deity meditating within it, Havell says, come the two greatest archetypes of Indian art: the form of the Hindu and Jain temple on the one hand, and the sculptured figure of the Buddha seated in meditation on the other. The image of the seated Buddha has of course given rise to innumerable masterpieces of art, not only in its original home of India but across the whole of Asia: Havell points to the great statue at Anuradhapura in Ceylon as being closest to the austere original concept, which was afterwards softened in Chinese and other art. It may be argued that no other human conception has been as productive of great art as this image of the meditating Buddha. What is the origin of this imaginative power? Its seed, says Havell, is to be found at least in part in the idea of the Divine Yogi – the spiritual power at the hub of the universe – engaged in eternal meditation within his Himalayan cell of Mount Kailasha. This vision, long contemplated by the collective mind of India, was released into outward form by we know not what catalyst, perhaps by the religious shift to Buddhism, and the imaginative power which had built up around it for centuries carried it to the farthest shores of Asia. 'The vision of the Great Thinker,' writes Havell, 'ruling the world from the heights of Kailasha is the Divine ideal which has inspired the whole art of Asia.' At the highest point of the famous stupa at Borobudur in Java, itself a man-made holy mountain, the culminating image of the Buddha is entirely enclosed within masonry and cannot be seen. Like the Great Yogi of Kailasha, it is invisible to all but the inner eye of the pilgrim.

Havell's second point is that the concept of the sacred mountain, and specifically Mount Kailasha, is the inspiration for the form of the Hindu temple, and that this is true even in far away Cambodia or Java. The temple is a representation of the mountain and of the spiritual heights it symbolises, built so that the worshipper for whom the physical journey is impossible might nonetheless make a spiritual and symbolic journey to the sacred centre. This is the key to its form. Sometimes, as in South India, the central building of the temple complex is one mighty tower rising skywards in a single sweep. At other times, as in the North Indian style, the temple is a series of

clustering rooves piling up rhythmically one behind the other like the peaks of a Himalayan range, and building up to the soaring main tower or *shikara* – a word which means ‘peak’ or ‘crest’. This in turn is always placed directly over the sanctuary of the temple where the god is installed – it is its function to mark it; and this sanctuary, which is invariably small and dark and surrounded by great masses of masonry, is built to evoke the idea of a cave. Thus every Hindu temple is, in its essence, the sacred mountain, the world axis, and at its heart is the yogi’s cave, the dwelling place of the spirit. Since the temple is the principal manifestation of the visual arts in India, and since all other traditional arts are linked to it, this understanding of its meaning has wide implications.

Havell gives as an example the famous and beautiful temple cut in the eighth century out of the living rock at Ellora in the Deccan. This temple is named Kailasanatha – ‘Lord of Kailasa’, or in other words Shiva – and is situated near a striking waterfall. Havell suggests that the waterfall may be the reason for the siting of the temple, for it acts as a reminder of the heavenly stream (an idea in its turn linked to the Milky Way), the Ganges, falling to the earth; as the story is told in the *Puranas*, the force of its fall, which was too great for the earth to sustain, was caught by Shiva upon his head as he sat in his mountain abode, and from the locks of Shiva the Ganges flowed gently into the world. Havell reproduces a photograph of Mount Kailasha alongside a drawing of the side elevation of the temple, and points to the close correspondence of the two outlines as evidence that the temple is a conscious and deliberate representation of the sacred mountain. Moreover, the entire exterior of the temple was originally plastered with a fine white coating, so that it glittered dazzlingly in the sunlight like the snow-peaks of the Himalayas; Mount Kailasha is called ‘the silver mountain’. Since the publication of Stella Kramrisch’s book, *The Hindu Temple*, this conception of the Indian temple as a symbolic representation of the mountain has come to be accepted; nevertheless, when Havell first advanced the idea it seemed to many far-fetched. Looking back on Havell’s work, we find that this is a common pattern: many of Havell’s views about Indian art are now accepted, and if this is often due to the activity of subsequent writers, and above all of Coomaraswamy, it was nevertheless Havell’s intuition and courage which initially gave the direction. Havell’s work lacks the

intellectual rigour and discipline which would have enabled him to claim a permanent place in the world of scholarship, but that was not his aim. His books set out to persuade, and his purpose was a practical and urgent one: to enable people to see the meaning and value inherent in Indian art, so that it might be rescued from neglect. Havell never ceased to be an artist by temperament, and his books are those of an artist and not of a scholar – lively, sensitive, and intuitive. His passionate advocacy of traditional art in India undoubtedly played a part in the broader revival of the idea of tradition. His books are still perhaps the best general guide to Indian art and the spirit which animates it, so that the fact that not one has been available in Britain or America for many years is a loss (there are, however, Indian reprints). In some respects, Havell has proved over-optimistic. The New School of Indian Painting did not develop into the force he hoped, and the removal of British control in India did not result in the dramatic revival of traditional art he dreamed of. In one respect, however, his hopes have been fulfilled. His greatest wish was not that the West should come to a truer understanding of Indian art, though that was important enough, but that Indians themselves would come to realise the greatness of their own artistic traditions. In this he has been largely justified. Rabindranath Tagore put it better than anyone, at the time of Havell's death:

E. B. Havell has passed away. The guiding spirit that led the revival of true Indian art ceases to be. This great Englishman came to show us the right path with his lamp of sympathy and understanding when we had lost confidence in our power to create and cherished a pathetic faith in the imitation of the West. With infinite patience he taught us to bring our offerings to the altar of our own gods.¹⁴

Notes

¹ For a fuller description of this group see Roger Lipsey, *Coomaraswamy, His Life and Work*, Bollingen Series, Princeton University Press, 1977, pp. 85–6.

² *The Times*, 1st January 1935.

³ Lipsey, *op. cit.* pp. 64–6.

⁴ Cited in Lipsey, *op. cit.* p. 65.

⁵ Plato, *Laws* 657AB, 665C, 700C. Cited by Coomaraswamy in *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought*, Luzac, London, 1946.

⁶ The Hindustan Review (1910), p. 271. Cited in Lipsey, op. cit. p. 63.

⁷ 'Oriental Art' in The Quarterly Review, No. 422 (1910), p. 226. Cited by Lipsey, op. cit. p. 68.

⁸ H. A. Taine, *Voyage en Italie*, vol. ii, p. 165.

⁹ Journal of the Royal Society of Arts, Vol. 58 (4th February 1910), p. 287. Information on this meeting and its aftermath is drawn from Lipsey, op. cit. pp. 69–72.

¹⁰ The Times, 28th February 1910. Cited in Lipsey, op. cit. p. 71.

¹¹ Art and Swadeshi, Ganesh Press, Madras, 1911. Cited in Lipsey, op. cit. p. 72.

¹² Translated by H. P. Shastri in Indian Mystic Verse, Shanti Sadan, London, 1963, p. 46.

¹³ Three Years in Tibet, Adyar, Madras, 1909, pp. 140–1.

¹⁴ Cited by Pramod Chandra in his Preface to The Art Heritage of India (a reprint of Havell's Indian Sculpture and Painting and Ideals of Indian Art), Taraporevala Press, Bombay, 1964.



Aphorisms

ROBIN SKELTON

The majority of religions are merely diets

*

True religion has principles, not rules.

*

Zealots are the hit-men of religion.

*

We follow light, and the light follows.

*

Belief and Knowledge live in different houses.

*

You cannot measure light with a ruler.

*

Orthodoxies prevent perceptions.

*

Poetry, like life, is trapped by its own discoveries.

*

In the mirror nobody sees clearly.

*

Theology contains more politics than piety.

*

Beware of an idealist in power.

*

The Bible had to be edited before it could be believed.

*

Death is the only mystery we all solve.

*

Normality is the only fantasy we all accept.

*

The music of speech reorders memory.

*

We more often believe what we say than say what we believe.

*

Death is an entrance, not an exit.

*

We trivialize what we dare not understand.

*

Splendour is a grief in the mind.

*

True poetry conveys more than it states.

*

Beliefs are intensified assumptions.

*

Loneliness is a crowded place.

*

Problems are gateways.

*

Never rely on those who trust your judgement.

*

No true poet can be a populist.

*

Art enhances; commerce trivializes.

*

Our language is being destroyed by terminology.

*

Consistency is a characteristic, not a virtue.

*

Never believe what you cannot doubt.

*

Confidence is armoured, but Hope runs naked.

*

The contained cannot comprehend the container.

*

Learning is not necessary to wisdom.

*

The narrower the view, the stronger the cult

*

Anxiety hints, Fear beckons, Terror embraces.

*

One cannot end one's life; one can only change it.

*

Morality exposes what it dare not explore.

*

The wheel must throw the urn whoever breaks it.

*

Kneel to nobody; bow to everyone.

*

The wise man listens twice.

*

One all too often worships the bucket, not the well.

*

Religion is not belief, but perception.

*

It is easier to face one's guilt than one's stupidity.

*

We are taught to persecute ourselves.

*

One cannot run away from one's own feet.

*

We are transition and Time is our echo.

*

Guilt invents suffering.

*

Unanimity is a liar.

*

Only arrogance condemns.

*

One cannot kill the past; one can only anaesthetize it.

*

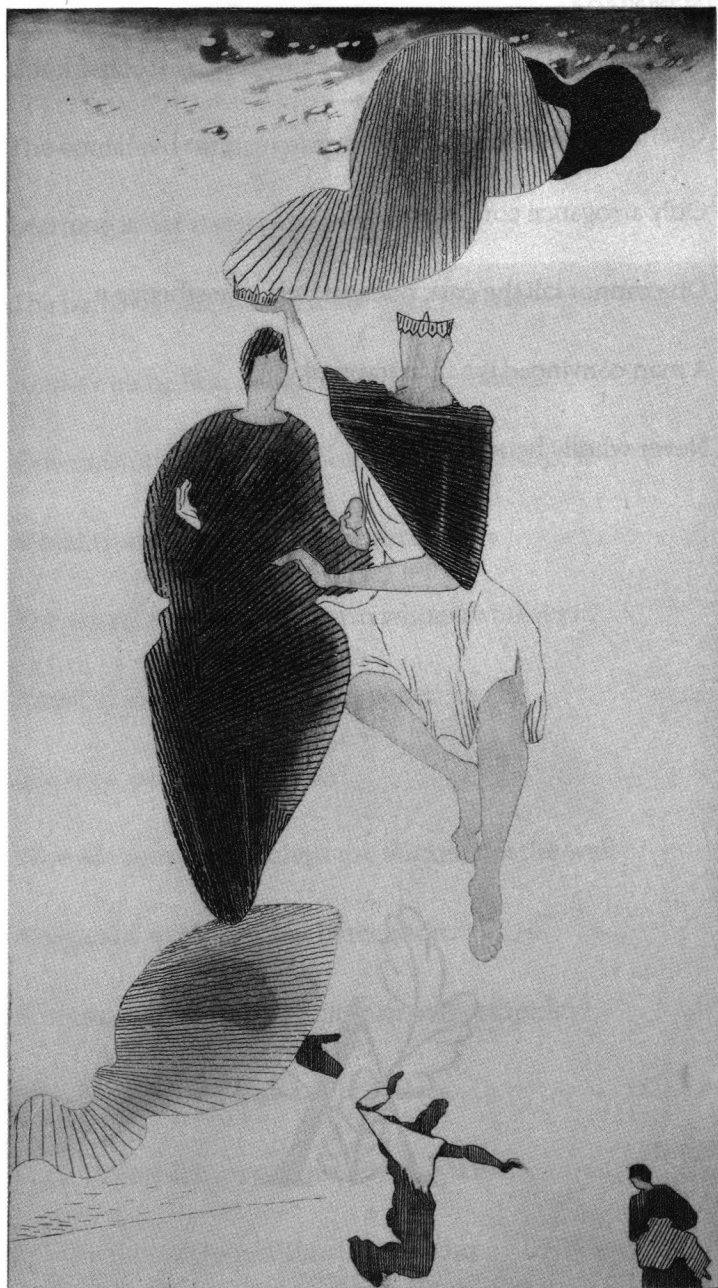
A man convinced is a man trapped.

*

Never wholly believe a book

*





'The Maid of Israel'. Etching by Patrick Pye

Reviews

Images as Viewed by Angels

HUMPHREY JENNINGS: *Pandaemonium, The Coming of the Machine as seen by contemporary observers*. Edited by Mary-Lou Jennings and Charles Madge, 376 pp, illust; André Deutsch (1985) £12.95; also Picador £3.95.

Pandaemonium is one of the most important books to have appeared in Britain during the last fifty years and needs to be read and considered in the various ways that Humphrey Jennings intended. To make the mind and the imagination receptive and active the reader needs the mental discipline of considering Lewis Mumford's *The Myth of the Machine* and the mental agility to understand passages as autobiography, history or sociology and at the same time see them as images, because Jennings presents the coming of the machine as it was seen and (at times dimly) perceived by contemporary observers in a way that stirs us to see as they saw and also to watch them seeing. We are enabled both to get inside the brain of contemporary observers and to stand outside them and begin to make our judgment of what in fact occurred. And what in fact occurred has determined the present situation of mankind and unless understood will determine its future, if indeed it has a future as anything resembling what for many centuries before 1650 human thinkers believed humanity to be. Two concepts need to be borne in mind when contemplating the vast panorama that Jennings constructed – the effect of the machine on human life and being and the effect of the developing view of animals and human beings as themselves machines. The story is one of conflict between the devotees and admirers of the machine, the technocrats whose view of life came to be materialist and mechanist, and the poetic, imaginative, animist, religious view. The triumph of the machine may come to be not its effective service to man but its replacement of man as poets and prophets regard him – or should one now reluctantly say 'regarded him'? – though Jennings, while at times lamenting that poetry had been expropriated, still believed that the means of production and the means of vision co-existed. The material is not arranged to argue one point of view or another; this anthology is greater than that: it presents the images. Charles Madge, who has painstakingly and imaginatively edited the book, is careful to point out that Jennings did not propagandize one view or the other because he could not irrevocably make up his mind between them. MacDiarmid said that 'poetry is human existence come to life'; in this book a whole historical process intensely important to all our thinking 'comes to life'. The value of the book is that we see it in action: we are not told what to

do about it, though it becomes increasingly urgent that we decide that for ourselves and our fellow human beings, since if we seek to know why the arts of the imagination have come to seem marginal, we shall here find an answer: to the society worshipping the machine as the servant of man with a devotion which regards man as a machine to work with machines, anything that is not a machine is merely the scrollwork decorating its frame and any activity not part of the materialist commercialism that accompanied the rise of the machine is irrelevant to modern existence, though possibly tolerated on its edges, like poppies near the fence of a field. When, in an unjustly neglected few paragraphs of the Communist Manifesto (not quoted by Jennings) Marx attacked the capitalist cash-nexus that replaced the feudal association of a more human era with a purely materialistic economic bonding he was not, however, recommending a return to the medieval; and we cannot abolish the machine (can we now do without it and do we wish to?). But can we re-establish man as a tool-making animal before he irrevocably becomes a tool-serving tool? This book vividly describes how we came to be on the road we are on – or on the railway we are on. I am reminded of a poem in which Stanley Cook addresses children in New Ireland:

Be sorry for us, children the other side
The world that goes, like Stephenson, on wheels.
Get out of the way of the train we can't get off.

The children in New Ireland are, however, by now on our train since, to invent a surrealist image, it is a ubiquitously absorbent train pursuing a magnetic and magnetising course in spiralling arcs around the globe – if the wheels don't get you the accountant in the guard's van will. Yet, as Jennings saw, we do not wish to miss the train; the whole is like a threatening cartoon of a train by Arthur Wragg in one of his now neglected books 'dedicated to all those who still believe in something' or like the journey into nothingness of the space-ship in Harry Martinson's *Aniara*. Jennings, in words edited or reconstructed by Madge, puts the problem:

In what sense have the Means of Vision kept pace with these alterations? I am referring not to the Arts as a commodity for Bond Street, or as a piece of snobbery in Mayfair, or as a means of propaganda in Bloomsbury, or as a method of escapism in Hampstead . . . but to the Means of Vision by which 'the emotional side of our nature' (Darwin's phrase) is kept alive and satisfied and fed – our nature as Human Beings in the anthracite drifts of South Wales, in the cotton belt of Lancashire, in the forges of Motherwell – how the emotional side of their nature has been used, altered, tempered, appealed to in these two hundred years.

Man as we see him today lives by production and by vision. It is doubtful if he can live by one alone. He has occasionally however tried. Dr Ure

speaks of a factory as ideally 'a vast automaton, composed of various mechanical and intellectual organs, acting in an uninterrupted concern for the production of a common object, all of them being subordinated to a self-regulated moving force'.

At the other extreme we have the Tibetan living naked in the caves of the Himalayas, eating only nettles and devoting himself to contemplation, and turning green in consequence. But in fact the factory man is living on the vision of others and the Buddhist Yogi on the production of others. In some societies (civilisations) the two have been mixed, in others clearly distinguishable. The relationship of production to vision and vision to production has been mankind's greatest problem.

(pp xxxviii–xxxix)

We can see how far the train has travelled by the way that some of these examples date and realize how human beings are either inside a factory such as Dr Ure hymns (quoted by Marx in *Das Kapital* as 'the Pindar of the automatic factory') or left outside to rot.

Chronologically, the 372 images (for that is what they are and not illustrative quotations) date from 1660 (Milton's *Building of Pandaemonium*) to 1886. Presented thus they give a series of pictures with which the human imagination, which Jennings regarded as not yet dead, can work. The images are also arrangeable according to themes – the Man of Science, Poetry and Science, Theology and Science, Industrial Man, Daemons at Work, Miners, Population and Subsistence, the Power to Come, Man-Animal-Machine, the Weather in the Soul, Music and Architecture, Earth and Creation, Light, the Railway, Men and Molecules, London. This arrangement has been achieved by Charles Madge as a realization of Jennings's intention and I give the titles in full to indicate the range of the collection. It is, of course, to be expected that we have Huxley, Darwin, Smiles, Clerk-Maxwell, Faraday, Ruskin, Dickens, Galton, Jefferies and Morris – these are authors we would ourselves have looked at – but what is arresting and surprising is the significant extracts Jennings found in the papers of Sir William Petty (1660), the Funeral Sermon on the Felling Colliery Sufferers spoken in 1813, *Travels in the Air* by James Glaisher (1871), or the *Life of Mary Anne SchimmelPenninck* edited by Christina Hankin in 1858. These are treasures of human experience and reaction which are important as giving an intimate humanity to the images and provoking wonder, sympathy, thought – and also rage. I say 'rage' because Sir William Petty in 'Of Doubling the People in 25 Years' (no. 24) wrote, in all practical innocence, some of the most appalling words about mothers and illegitimate children as economic chattels that I have ever read (so that I use them in an unpublished poem on 1930's Tyneside) – words that show how our use of 'workforce' may have been tainted since 1687 and the peculiar alliance between self-righteous puritanism and commercial profit may have been founded in well-meaning unconscious hypocrisy.

towards the end of the seventeenth century. Petty hoped that God would be 'much honored' by our finding out the use of the fixed stars, investigating germination, generation by male and female and the 'paines and evils which animals suffer', but for him the poor were not persons but fodder for factory or field, to be 'valued' like implements – they were, in fact, self-generating machines. No wonder that, two centuries later, Carlyle recommended Thomas Cooper to write prose about facts, as 'We have too horrible a Practical Chaos round us; out of which every man is called by the birth of him to make a bit of *Cosmos*: that seems to me the real Poem for a man – especially at present. I always grudge to see any portions of a man's musical talent (which is the real intellect, the real vitality, or life of him) expended on making mere words rhyme.' It was, however, the poetic and musical faculty that Carlyle hoped would 'irradiate into harmony far profitabler things than what are commonly called "Poems"', which had by that time in their nature as popularly understood become marginal because they had deserted their true imaginal function.

This amazing collection was assembled and thought over by Jennings between 1937 and 1950. It has been lovingly and efficiently re-marshalled by Mary-Lou Jennings and Charles Madge, whose imaginative insight into Jennings's intention and vision is itself remarkable – as is the painstaking effort of both editors. It is strangely characteristic that it had to wait till 1985 to be published, after six outright rejections and four regrettable mishaps, but we should be grateful to André Deutsch and Picador that it is now available. It is also peculiarly appropriate that a grant was made towards the typing and editorial costs by the Elephant Trust, as this was founded by Sir Roland Penrose's sale to the Tate of Max Ernst's *Elephant-Celebes* which I see lurking in the minds and writings of sundry actors in the images. One could herald the fundamentals in prophecies or satires from Blake, Shelley or Ruskin or the perceptions of Clerk-Maxwell, but possibly one is more moved by the end of a letter from Fanny Kemble to a friend after visiting the West India Dock and the Thames Tunnel: 'I think it is better for me, however, to look at the trees, and the sun, moon, and stars, than at tunnels and docks; they make me too humanity proud.' But the clue lies in being 'humanity proud' in another sense: humanity survived the greatest assault against it yet, the fifth column of the mechanists, though it remains for us to solve the problem of the relationship between production and vision and by seeing what was the place of imagination in the making of the modern world achieve the place of the imagination in that world now. The final words of Lewis Mumford in *The Myth of the Machine* (Secker & Warburg 1967) are still there to warn us; he is talking of the megamachine, that organization which in ancient times tyrannised over individual humanity:

From the sixteenth century on the secret of the megamachine was slowly re-discovered. In a series of empirical fumbings and improvisations, with little sense of the ultimate end toward which society was moving, that great

mechanical Leviathan was fished up out of the depths of history. The expansion of the megamachine – its kingdom, its power, its glory – became progressively the chief end, or at least the fixed obsession, of Western Man.

The machine, 'advanced' thinkers began to hold, not merely served as the ideal model for explaining and eventually controlling all organic activities, but its wholesale fabrication and its continued improvement were what alone could give meaning to human existence. Within a century or two, the ideological fabric that supported the ancient megamachine had been reconstructed on a new and improved model. Power, speed, motion, standardisation, mass production, quantification, regimentation, precision, uniformity, astronomical regularity, control, above all control – these became the passwords of modern society in the new Western style.

Only one thing was needed to assemble and polarize all the new components of the megamachine: the birth of the Sun God. And in the sixteenth century, with Kepler, Tycho Brahe, and Copernicus officiating as accoucheurs, the new Sun God was born.

For the 'Sun God' we might now read 'the Space God'.

Mumford points out that Leonardo Da Vinci is, probably rightly, credited with inventions that herald and forecasts that predict the modern world of machines – but he also had nightmares of a monster that would deprive parents of their children, separate husband from wife, and ultimately annihilate mankind. Yet, near to death at Le Clos Lucé in Amboise Leonardo said, 'Nul être ne va au néant.' Simple faith may tell us we are in the hands of God but Rilke suggested that we are also those hands. *Pandæmonium*, properly regarded, helps to make us his eyes. Though from a bird's eye view or an airplane's view, we may see a city as an anthill or a machine with working beetles as cogs and pinions, divine eyes will see into the beings of the alleged gear-wheels.

Brian Merrikin Hill.

England's Last Great Poet

DAVID GASCOYNE: *Collected Poems* 1988. Oxford University Press, 229 pp., £7.95

This collection includes all his poems, up to the present, which David Gascoyne wishes to preserve – not only poems written since 1963 (date of the previous *Collected Poems* edited by Robin Skelton) but a number of hitherto unpublished early poems from *Roman Balcony*, the poet's first collection, published when he was only seventeen. Some of these are very beautiful and

already manifest David Gascoyne's inimitable use of the English language – a simple diction enriched by those coruscating images, in which the rare and the everywhere-to-be-found are blended and transmuted into a texture of poetic discourse the like of which this century has not seen. The commonplace is made so by the mind, and so is the rarest beauty. From first to last David Gascoyne's poems are an outpouring of the abundance of that world of the imagination – the soul's country – his genius inhabits – it knows no other. It is as though some angelic being were, with gravity and love, translating for us from the language of angels in which the record of this world is kept; a recording angel at times shaken with sorrow at what is here done, at others reflecting with simple joy some rare or unnoticed humble beauty – innocently amused at times even, by the human comedy.

David Gascoyne is at this time England's one great poet, perhaps Europe's greatest poet. At eighty I make such a judgment with the full weight of my own lifetime's experience. A great poet, as I use the word, is one who encompasses the enduring themes of man's spiritual destiny, and therefore also of history. He speaks of universal things, takes upon himself an imaginative appraisal of his time and place, his world in its totality – as did Dante, as did Milton, Blake, Shelley, Rilke, Yeats, Eliot. Some of these were actually engaged in the political and national events of their times; but unlike 'political' poets, who see these events from a historical and relative standpoint, the 'unacknowledged legislators' see the world's events from the standpoint of the imagination, they are the recorders and judges not of the outer events of history but of the inner events of the soul world. It is the Imagination alone that is witness and final judge of 'the politics of time' in the light of 'the politics of eternity'. David did indeed eagerly engage himself '*au service de la Révolution*' as the Surrealist manifesto has it; he went to Spain at the time of the Spanish Civil War; he began to write a poetic political drama (the only completed section of which is here published for the first time) but eventually came to realize (as Blake had done before him) that the only true 'revolution' must be an apokatastasis, an inner transformation within mankind and a restoration of our true humanity.

I find it difficult to find words in which to write objectively about a poet, and about poems, that have been a part of my life for over fifty years. I have seen poets and poetic fashions come and go, and how the fashionable become period-pieces while by some mysterious process whatever comes from the timeless world of the Imagination we come eventually to participate and inhabit, as we do the whole cultural heritage of our nation and our world. David Gascoyne has long been recognized in Europe for what he is; and it is encouraging evidence that 'the deadly sleep' of Albion is not absolute, that this collection has already been reprinted. David Gascoyne has suffered in his life-time, and for many years intense mental stress prevented him from writing. Not being half-a-poet, with one foot in the world, he has never deviated from that imaginative mode of experience through which he has in his work – his

œuvre as a whole – accomplished a perfect and total transmutation into the timeless world of poetry.

The time-world will always adopt Matthew Arnold's opinion of the poet – Shelley in that instance – as an 'ineffectual angel'. But no angel is ineffectual, as Rilke knew when he wrote that 'every angel is terrible'. David Gascoyne's work has proved to be not ineffectual but terrible as the judgment of love itself, in its unmasking of our lies and falsities. Who but the Imagination (Blake's term is 'Jesus the Imagination', the Divine Humanity – the divine in every man) can bring the light of reality to bear on our pretenses and pretensions?

The names and aspects of 'spiritual wickedness in high places' change in every age; for our generation they bore the name of 'fascism', by which David Gascoyne denounced as did Dante and Blake and Shelley the tyrannic agents of their times. From his earliest emergence (for poets, like avatars, are born, not made) David plunged into the mainstream of the inner life of world-events, and above all the Surréalist movement; for at that time it was France that most fully represented and created the living spirit of the age. Indeed Philippe Soupault once said to me of David 'He is not an English poet, he is a French poet who writes in English'. That is a French point of view, and does David great honour; but he himself denies this, feeling himself, as he does, to be the inheritor of the England of the Imagination, its language and its inner kingdom. He was associated with Mass-Observation, (in many ways the English, more pragmatic, equivalent of the Surréalist movement) and especially with Humphrey Jennings, whose inspired anthology on the Industrial Revolution, *Pandemonium*, is reviewed on another page). Humphrey, like his fellow film-director Tarkovsky, worked not with symbols but with images; and this way of seeing the world, the imaginative scanning of the objective 'real' which will always bring to the poet that inevitable, and as it seems inspired, image which resonates a whole range of meanings, associations, over- and undertones, was characteristic of *surréalisme*. Breton spoke of the '*objet trouvé*'; C. G. Jung was to speculate on the nature of 'synchronicity' which at certain times of intense psychic activity appears to use the outer world in such a way as to produce significant events and objects in a more than coincidental manner. The secret of Picasso's 'I do not seek, I find' has always been known to the imaginative genius, and David Gascoyne's images come to him with the seeming ease of leaves on a tree. These images pour themselves into his poems in rich profusion – for him the 'real' Paris or London is but a region of the imagination, a keyboard on which to sound the unheard music. This is a technique the film-makers of this visual century have made familiar; and David Gascoyne's eloquent image-language is the magic through which his thought is communicated, not discursively but from a ground beyond words.

The enduring value of the Surréalist movement lies surely less on its 'service of the Revolution' – of Communism that is, and like political leftist causes in Europe – than its realization, and demonstration, of the mode of thinking in

images emerging from the ground of the mind itself – also being demonstrated at that time by Freud, and later by Jung. In David Gascoyne's very rich and interesting Surrealist poems we see the poet practising his art, diving into the preverbal world and emerging with treasures, corals and pearls from the deeps of the mind, which in these early experiments are allowed to take their own order. It seems that he outgrew this unstructured irrationalism and discovered, sometime before 1937, a new ordering principle. The materialist premisses of Communism and Freud were not adequate to a poetry in which the full stature of man can be expressed. Imagination itself implies and imposes not a psychological but a spiritual ground. In his magnificent (and now well-known) *Miserere* sequence David Gascoyne finds a language of the gravity and nobility of major poetry. This celebration of the eternal crucifixion in the world of the 'Divine Humanity' in all humankind at once affirms the eternal Christ and rejects the externalities of institutional religion:

Involved in their own sophistry
The black priest and the upright man
Faced by subversive truth shall be struck dumb.
Christ of Revolution and of Poetry,
While the rejected and condemned become
Agents of the divine.

– the age-old voice of all poet-prophets, from Dante to Blake to Shelley to David Gascoyne and doubtless to the end of history.

The value of David's early exercises in 'irrationality' through which the surrealist poet seeks out the very springs of thought itself becomes clear in all his subsequent work (from about 1937 on). Indeed his poetic scope – another mark of a poet's stature – is very great, the more so when one considers that his whole output (other than his very fine translations) does not exceed 230 pages. From political and historical themes of war's dark years, to the metaphysical and the mystical, to the sheer beauty of Venetian Nocturnes, to the happy word-play of his light verse, David Gascoyne's work abounds in poems of outstanding splendour in many modes. His voice at its most characteristic is grave and tender. Though he loves beauty (and therefore nature) he is above all a poet of the human city. His superb 'radiophonic poem' *Night Thoughts* reminds of Blake's 'spiritual fourfold London' of the city within the lives of its inhabitants, for which in this great poet's *œuvre* the visible city serves merely to reflect inner states.

Each poem carries its full weight, there is no repetition. It is superfluous to quote from poems so many of which have already taken their place within the edifice of the inheritance of English poetry. One might speak (no doubt others will) of his inimitable style, the urgent power of his (often alexandrine) flexible lines, the assonances and alliterations that give richness both of sound and of meaning, affinities and differences suggested or explored. He is a master of

style, but style is only the signature of genius, individual or of an age. Certainly it was in France that the genius of the quarter-century after the first world-war in which David Gascoyne so fully participated, flourished; and the influence of the French poets – Eluard, Jouve, Breton – of this time is strong. He is, I suppose, the last English poet working within the European mainstream – as were Eliot and Yeats, Edwin Muir and Humphrey Jennings, Malcolm Lowry and others of their generation. England has become provincial – not to say marginal to the point of insignificance – in terms of those values David Gascoyne is the last in this country to embody and represent.

In his later poems (1958–86, some of which have appeared in *Temenos*) – there is a prophetic gravity akin to that silence known to musicians, and of the essence of all supreme art:

Primal matrix: insatiable grave. Unalterably other. Unlikeness extending out of sight.

Triumphant rise, fall and crash of a last billow against the definitive deserted shore: all too human imagining, that no incarnate consciousness can ever realize. (The Unspeakable Sea)

David Gascoyne stands alone at this time in his power to express with the full weight and authority of man's tragedy and dignity those themes that touch the sublime.

Kathleen Raine

Penultimate Judgments

Titus Burckhardt, *Mirror of the Intellect – Essays on Traditional Science and Sacred Art*, trans. and ed. William Stoddart, Cambridge, Quinta Essentia, 1987, 263 pp.

Philip Sherrard, *The Rape of Man and Nature – An Enquiry into the Origins and Consequences of Modern Science*, Ipswich, Golgonooza Press, 1987, 124 pp.

Martin Lings, *The Eleventh Hour – The Spiritual Crisis of the Modern World in the Light of Tradition and Prophecy*, Cambridge, Quinta Essentia, 1987, 124 pp.

The three books under review mark an important addition to the existing corpus of writings which look upon and criticize the modern world in the light of tradition and which seek to make various aspects of traditional teachings better known to the contemporary world. The collected essays of Burckhardt, assembled and translated with great care and through a labour of love by William Stoddart, constitute a most precious volume of the writings of one of the foremost traditional authors of this century. Stoddart has translated and assembled nearly all of Burckhardt's essays which had appeared over a period

of almost half a century in German and French in many different journals and collections and has classified them under four main categories: Traditional Cosmology and the Modern World, Christian Themes, Symbolism and Mythology and Islamic Themes. The collection commences with a biographical introduction by the editor and terminates with a 'Letter on Spiritual Method', which is in fact based on the teachings of Frithjof Schuon with whom Burckhardt was intimately associated from early childhood until his death, and an excellent bibliography of the works of the author in various European languages. Unfortunately the writings of the Burckhardt in such non-European languages as Arabic, Persian and Urdu have not been included.

The collection reveals at once the breadth and depth of Burckhardt's intellectual vision. In the first section he deals in a masterly fashion with traditional cosmology on the basis of which he provides one of the most acute criticisms ever made of modern science, including not only physics but also the theory of evolution in biology and both Freudian and Jungian psychology. The grasp of traditional metaphysics and cosmology by Burckhardt is as remarkable as his comprehension of what lies at the heart of the modern theories which he criticizes with such penetration and lucidity.

In the second section on Christian themes, Burckhardt reveals his mastery of both Christian art and doctrine. His analysis of the symbolism of the West Door of the Chartres Cathedral and explanation of the relation of the Seven Liberal Arts to the Virgin is astounding while his long essay entitled 'Because Dante is Right' is one of the most moving and revealing essays ever written on the Florentine poet. It seems that being born in Florence himself, Burckhardt possessed such an inner affinity for the Italian poet that in a mysterious fashion Dante himself guided him through the vast panorama of the *Divine Comedy*. One only wishes that with such inner affinity and his vast metaphysical and cosmological knowledge, Burckhardt could have commented upon the whole of this supreme masterpiece of European literature.

In the section on Christianity, Stoddart has also included a short essay of the author on Teilhard de Chardin wherein he brings out once again as he has done in the first section, the errors of evolutionism and its especially dangerous character when it becomes shrouded in a pseudo-religious garb as in the case of Teilhard. Burckhardt has rendered the greatest service to Christian theology in revealing the true nature of Teilhardism. If only more readers were to turn to his expose of one of the most anti-traditional currents of modern thought parading as Christian theology.

In the third section on symbolism and mythology, Burckhardt reveals his rarely paralleled mastery of the language of symbolism and myth. Drawing from his vast knowledge of many traditions ranging from Christianity to the religion of the American Indians, he elucidates the symbolism of the mirror and water, of alchemy and of chess, of the sacred mask in traditional theatre and of the journey of Ulysses in Greek literature, concluding with a stimulating

study of the American Indian Sun Dance. In the hands of Burckhardt, symbols become transparent, revealing their archetypal reality and their role as bridges between the worlds of becoming and Being. All of these studies possess both a religious and an artistic significance and reflect the commanding authority of their author in the domain of traditional art.

The final part of the main section of the work and also the longest contains Burckhardt's numerous essays on Islamic themes. Half of these essays are devoted to various aspects of Islamic art and complement the author's masterpiece, the *Art of Islam*. The others deal with the traditional sciences in Fez, the famous prayer of the Moroccan Sufi Ibn Mashish concerning the Prophet of Islam, the analysis of the term *barzakh*, or intermediary state, and an exposition of its metaphysical significance and finally a beautiful commentary upon Ghazzālī's treatise on the Ninety Nine Names of God. In all those essays Burckhardt reveals his profound understanding of the Islamic tradition and his penetration into its heart. His words somehow echo a half century of living with the spiritual reality of that tradition, his numerous journeys to Muslim lands and his encounters with authorities of the Islamic tradition ranging from spiritual masters to master craftsmen in the bazaar of Fez.

The title of this work, *Mirror of the Intellect*, could also be given to the author. Burckhardt was indeed himself the mirror of the Intellect. His mind was transparent before the Truth which reaches man through the Intellect, as traditionally understood. With his remarkable humility, he was able to explain the sublimest truths in a precise and clear formulation. He was also at once a metaphysician and an artist and as a result one of the foremost expositors of the traditional metaphysics of art. All those interested in traditional art as well as the traditional sciences and the metaphysical principles which underly both the arts and the sciences as traditionally understood will be grateful to William Stoddart for having made available these precious essays in a single volume for the English speaking audience.

Sherrard's book in a sense continues the theme of the first part of Burckhardt's book in extending the criticism made against modern science. However, whereas the criticism of Burckhardt is based upon universal metaphysical principles found at the heart of all religions, Sherrard bases himself upon the specifically Christian point of view and more especially the Christian anthropology of St Maximos the Confessor. In the first chapter entitled 'the Human Image', Sherrard deals in a clear and incisive manner with this anthropology and also Christology at whose heart lies the doctrine of the co-penetration of the uncreated and created in Christ and through him the human state, the doctrine known traditionally as *perichoresis*. He writes, 'The word which perhaps most fully conveys the degree of reciprocity involved in the idea of Christ's divine humanity is the Greek word *perichoresis*—a word which expresses the dynamic co-penetration of the uncreated and the created, the divine and the human, and so something more than is implied by the phrase,

communicatio idiomatum, with which it is sometimes equated. Fundamentally, Christ substantiates such a *perichoresis*: the synthesis of two natures or two substances each with its individual qualities to form a single person or hypostasis who is, as it were, the perfection of both.' (pp. 25–26). According to the author, it is the loss of the awareness of this reality and therefore the identity of man that has caused modern man to forget his role as mediator between heaven and earth, thus bringing about alienation between man and nature.

The second chapter 'Christian Theology and the Eclipse of Man,' deals with the historical process through which the Christian anthropology based upon the doctrine of *perichoresis* was gradually criticized and attacked until it became completely forgotten. Sherrard takes his criticism of Christian theology in the West concerning the nature of man back to St Augustine with whom the dichotomy between body and soul begins, preparing the ground for the complete destruction of this doctrine of co-penetration in Thomism and other forms of Christian Aristotelianism. In fact, the acceptance of the Aristotelian definition of substance made the doctrine of *perichoresis* as understood in Eastern orthodox theology meaningless.

The participation of the human in the divine in Christ could 'no longer be conceived as the union of two substances, each preserving its own integral identity in and through the union: the whole idea of the *perichoresis* as envisaged by the Greek Fathers was precluded, as also was the idea that Christ can be the ultimate ground or subject of each single person, who is thereby deified. . . . The idea of Christ as a universal in the Platonic sense was now more or less meaningless, and so for the same reason was the whole ancient doctrine of the universal and divine Logos, according to which the divine can be actually present in all things without those things on that account losing their own substantial identity.' (p. 52). From here it was but a step to Cartesian dualism and the total separation of body and soul or mind; hence the complete estrangement of the soul from both the nature within and without and a loss of the sense of identity of the human state.

In the third and fourth chapters entitled 'Modern Science and the Dehumanization of Man' and 'The Desanctification of Nature' the author portrays in vivid colours the result of the loss of the earlier Christian anthropology in the rise of a science, which cannot but dehumanize man although it is created by him, and in the forgetfulness of the 'sacramental idea of nature' which is in a sense both the cause and the result of the desanctification of man and the separation of the world from God. One of the most important points made in this part of the book is that the changes being brought about in modern physics today will not necessarily lead to the spiritual point of view and that although some scientists now speak of consciousness as a necessary component of the cosmos, the framework of the most recent science still remains that of the 17th century Scientific Revolution. Sherrard makes it clear that this science will not by itself lead to the realm of the Spirit, a realm which is accessible only through

revelation and the grace which issues from it. In a short epilogue, Sherrard asks whether we can reverse this process of dehumanization and desanctification and points to the conditions necessary for human beings to survive on this planet.

This forceful critique of the modern world by Sherrard is carried out in the context of the Christian tradition, but despite the author's claim that it was the doctrine of incarnation which made possible the spiritual relation between man and the world about him, his critique applies not only to the Western world but to the non-Christian segments of humanity as well. The chapter on modern science and dehumanization of man in fact was translated into Persian some years ago and was received with great interest by a public of a predominantly Muslim background.

The traditional doctrine of man can be envisaged outside the specifically Christian doctrine of incarnation and criticisms of modern science made by Sherrard are pertinent even in worlds which do not accept the concept of incarnation. Nor does the reconstitution of a traditional science of man mean returning to the doctrine of incarnation. There are other doctrines such as that of the Universal Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) whose acceptance can bestow upon man once again his pontifical role in the cosmos. Sherrard's emphasis upon Christian anthropology based on the doctrine of incarnation and its subsequent destruction leading to the modern conception of man alienated from both God and nature is a profound commentary upon the underlying causes for the rise of modern science in the west, but it is not universal enough to embrace other traditional perspectives on man held in civilizations which are facing the consequences of modern science practically as much as the West itself. Yet, the critique of modern science and the conception of nature to which it is related is of universal import and makes this well-written and moving book of interest to a wider world than that which was heir to the Christian anthropology of St Maximos the Confessor and the tradition to which he belonged.

We have turned to Martin Lings' *The Eleventh Hour* at the end of this review because in a sense the state of the world described by him is the consequence of that rape of man and nature described by Sherrard and the forgetfulness of those metaphysical and cosmological doctrines discussed by Burckhardt. The book of Lings is of an apocalyptic tone for it discusses the eleventh hour of the history of humanity. Moreover it is written in a language of great elegance, power and beauty and on the basis of knowledge of a traditional order rather than sentiments or the type of pseudo-esoteric claims common in certain circles today.

In a brief preface the author reminds the reader that according to all religions on the Day of Judgment 'it will not be possible to plead ignorance of the basic truths of religion,' for man contains in the very substance of his being or his heart, as traditionally understood, the truths which revelation states in an

objective mode. Lings appeals to this 'heart knowledge' which despite its eclipse survives within man and seeks to re-establish the hierarchy between various human faculties according to which reason is subservient to the authority of the intellect. His purpose in composing the book is 'to fan the flame of that glimmering and thus to restore the lost balance, first of all by seeking to persuade minds that they have nothing to lose and everything to gain from a re-establishment of the normal hierarchical relationships.' (p. 4). With this goal in mind he sets out to describe on the basis of strictly traditional teachings the state of the world in its eleventh hour and the approach of both an end and a beginning.

In the first chapter 'Signs of the Times,' he speaks of millennial prophecies in various religions and the weakening of faith in the Scriptures today. Yet, the Western world is no less expectant that the 'end' is not far away for 'the end is "in the air," existentially sensed.' (p. 7). In the second chapter 'The Vineyard and the Marketplace,' the author interprets the parable of 'the labourers in the vineyard' from the Gospel of St Matthew to refer to the spiritual elite who in the present state of the world must completely separate themselves from the profane world of the marketplace which will be destroyed at the end. Lings provides arguments why there are in fact certain spiritual advantages during the latter days when the macrocosm itself is under the sentence of death.

The long third chapter 'And from him that hath not . . .' turns to the question of why 'the cup of God's anger' has been brought to the brink of overflow. The author deals with the deviations and perversions of thought which have separated man from God, devoting most of the chapter to the criticism of the theory of evolution and the devastating effect this theory has had upon modern man's religious life and his appreciation of his own theomorphic nature as well as the true relation between God and the world. The author summarizes in an eloquent fashion the ideas to which he had turned in some of his earlier writings concerning evolutionism.

In the next chapter entitled 'The Political Extreme,' criticism is turned to the decomposition of the traditional political institutions of the West and forgetfulness of the philosophy which supported them. Lings traces the stages by which Western traditional political institutions were subverted, leading through several revolutions to the anti-traditional and religiously subversive regimes which during the past two centuries have also set out to destroy what has survived of the traditional order in other civilizations. This chapter contains one of the most notable criticisms of political institutions and ideas written by a traditional author and should be read by all those interested in how the so-called political progress of modern Western man is viewed from the perspective of the perennial traditional teachings of mankind.

Chapter five, 'The Spirit of the Times,' treats the question of the old age of the macrocosm with its concomitant advantages in the same way that human old age combines frailty of the body with the advantage of spiritual maturity and

detachment. Lings speaks of many of the advantages of this old age, this eleventh hour, in which we live. In his words, 'There is yet another feature of normal old age, the most positive of all, which likewise has its macrocosmic equivalent, in virtue of which our times are unique. It is sometimes said of spiritual men and women at the end of their lives that they have 'one foot already in Paradise' . . . hagiography teaches us that the last days of sanctified souls can be remarkably luminous and transparent. . . . The mellowing of spirituality, which is highest aspect of old age in itself, is thus crowned with an illumination which belongs more to youth than old age . . . analogously, in the macrocosm, the nearness of the new Golden Age cannot fail to make itself mysteriously felt before the end of the old cycle. . . . We have here, in this junction of ending with beginning, yet another reason, perhaps the most powerful of all, why 'the last shall be first.' " (p. 66).

During this exceptional period, many who would in normal times follow the way of exoterism are led to esoterism and the esoteric teachings at the heart of various religions are made manifest. In connection with this process and as a particularly significant sign of these times, Lings discusses the works of Guénon, Coomaraswamy and Schuon. His comments here are of exceptional interest because of his profound knowledge of their works for over half a century and his close personal acquaintance with both Guénon and Schuon about whom he writes, 'It could be said, again at the risk of simplification, that if Coomaraswamy represents truth in which commitment is implicit, and if Guénon represents both truth and commitment, it was left to Schuon to add his insistence on the need for total commitment, while at the same time, as regards doctrinal truth, his works are a self-sufficient whole.' (p. 91). 'Again and again, about this or about that, one has the impression that Schuon has said the last word. On the other hand we are conscious of the meeting of extremes and of a light that is primordial as well as terminal.' (p. 93)

In a short final chapter 'the Restorer,' the author speaks of the traditional figure who will restore the truth near the end of the present age and speaks of the figure of the Mahdi who is the Restorer according to the Islamic tradition. The work concludes with two appendices, the first on the work of Schuon, *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence* and the second on the spiritual master. Finally, there is added a valuable bibliography of traditional writings in the English language.

According to a saying of the Prophet of Islam, whoever predicts the Hour is a liar. The actual moment of the arrival of the Hour is in God's Hands and known only to Him. The book of Lings, therefore, does not predict the Hour; yet he speaks with such authority and certainty about events leading to the Hour that one 'feels' the truth of the message contained therein. The purpose of the book, which is to awaken the spark of 'heart knowledge' within man to enable him to join the golden kernel which already belongs to the new Dawn rather than the withering husk which shall perish, is accomplished through powerful arguments based upon traditional sources and appealing to the still glimmering

light of the intellect in human hearts. Moreover, the style is of such elegance and beauty as to remind the reader that even in this eleventh hour in which all aspects of culture including language are debased and degraded, it is possible to write in an English which belongs to the peaks of expression of this rich language.

Quinta Essentia and the Golgonooza Press should be congratulated in making these works of great importance available in a form that is worthy of their content. Both the printing and binding are of high quality and represent that personal care and attention that is so rare to find in the publishing trade today.

H. S. Nasr

What is Theatre?

PETER BROOK: *The Shifting Point – Forty years of theatrical exploring 1946–1987*. Methuen, £14.95

At a time when publishers are said to have paid £50,000 advance for the memoirs of a young actor who is not yet thirty it is all too easy, given such hype, to overlook the authority and more lasting importance of a book such as this by one of the most outstanding and radical of theatre directors in the Western world.

Being a director means taking charge, making decisions but even more, as Brook demonstrates throughout this book, it is a matter of maintaining a right direction. Like Prospero in *The Tempest* the director in the theatre undertakes 'to deliver all', and so he needs to have studied the maps. Where does this sense of direction come from and how does it differ from an imposed directorial concept? A directorial concept is an image imposed on a play from the start, which is how Brook himself first worked as a young director. Intensely visual, he loved playing with models and making sets. When he was preparing his production of *Love's Labour's Lost* he was influenced by Watteau and felt that the figure of Mercade at the end of the play was like the dark figure seen in many of Watteau's paintings and often thought to be the artist himself. For all who saw that production this directorial concept resulted in a most stunning image. It was evening, the lights were going down, when, suddenly, over a rise at the back of the stage, there appeared a man in black, who entered a very pretty summery stage with everybody in pale pastel Watteau costumes, and the glow of the setting sun. It was very disturbing and at once the atmosphere was transformed. However, around the time of Brook's *King Lear* with Paul Scofield at the RSC, everything changed. Just before rehearsals started he destroyed the model of the set and started out from scratch. From that moment onwards Brook's 'sense of direction' only crystallized into an image at the very end of the rehearsal process. 'The director needs only one conception – which he must

find in life, not in art – which comes from asking himself what an act of theatre is doing in the world, why it is there. The director may have to spend his life searching for the answer, his work feeding his life, his life feeding his work.'

A director's task is to explore the sub-text of a play, its hidden and unspoken meanings. Actors are too easily tempted to impose their own fantasies or projections and the director must know what to encourage and what to oppose. 'He must,' says Brook, 'help the actor to be both himself and to go beyond himself.' Above all, the actor must never forget that the play is greater than himself. If he thinks he can grasp the play he will cut it down to his own size, something we witness all too frequently as television actors attempt to essay roles in the theatre. If, however, says Brook, the actor respects the play's mystery and, consequently, that of the character he is playing, as being always beyond his grasp, he will recognise that his 'feelings' are a very treacherous guide. This, of course, is as true of all art as it is of spirituality. It is here that a sympathetic but rigorous director (or, I would add, spiritual director) can help him distinguish between those intuitions that lead to truth and those feelings which are self-indulgent.

The worlds of the unconscious, and of the sub-conscious, call for skilful guides, and twentieth century theatre still drags its heels in story-telling naturalism, as I have observed in *Experimental Theatre*, limping far behind the discoveries of the visual arts, dance and music. As early as 1955 I was searching for new forms that would charter the realms of the archetype in theatre, and as early as 1960 Brook was writing:

I believe that the future of theatre must lie in its transcending the surface of reality . . . I am convinced that in the theatre, even more than in the cinema, we need no longer be bound at all by time, character or plot.

One of the pioneers here was the Polish director, Jerzy Grotowski, but whereas his work led him to do away with the actor, the audience, leaving only a solitary man playing out his ultimate drama alone, for Brook the way of theatre led him in an opposite direction, toward a perception that is heightened because it is shared.

A strong presence of actors and a strong presence of spectators can produce a circle of unique intensity in which barriers can be broken and the invisible becomes real. Then public truth and private truth become inseparable parts of the same essential experience.

Writing of contemporary theatre Brook has this to say: 'The whole problem of theatre today is just this: how can we make plays dense in experience?' His answer makes essential reading for any playwright, and it leads him to a masterly analysis of the work of Shakespeare, the depth and variety of whose range has been equalled by no other playwright.

In this collection he writes with affection and vivid detail of such legendary figures as Sir John Gielgud and Gordon Craig, of his work in films, of his

experiments in documentary theatre (US, about the Vietnam war, being a prime example), and his first experimental laboratory under the auspices of the RSC, the *Theatre of Cruelty* season at LAMDA, of which his *Marat-Sade* was one of the first fruits. Then, finally, inevitably, in 1970 he set up his own International Centre for Theatre Research in Paris. His aim from the start was to bring together a group of disparate persons and talents, allowing contradictory views to sharpen themselves one against the other. 'The Centre was a point where different cultures could converge; the Centre was also a Nomad, taking its mixed group on long journeys to interact with peoples never touched by a normal theatrical tour.' Their aim was to make culture, in the sense of culture that turns milk into yoghurt, creating a nucleus of actors who could bring ferment to any group with whom they worked.

In order to establish a relationship with its audiences an international group must be a small world, not consisting of people who understand each other easily, but dependent on diversity and contrast, a diversity which mirrors the audience.

Too often theatre groups are formed which seek mutual agreement as their basis, rather like church groups, instead of looking for conflicts, and the tension of opposites. And so, on Dec. 1st 1972 a group of thirty people: actors, technicians and auxiliaries, left France for Africa with Brook on a three month journey of experimental work and research. With the group went a movie crew, a photographer Mary Ellen Mark, and the English writer and journalist John Heilpern. In Africa, in France, in America, playing in isolated villages and tough urban areas, for racial minorities, old people, children, delinquents, the mentally handicapped, the deaf, the blind, they learned how to improvise each performance afresh before that audience. They learned that improvisation is an exceptionally difficult and precise technique and very different from the generalized idea of a spontaneous happening. 'Genuine improvisation leading up to a real encounter with the audience only occurs when the spectators feel that they are loved and respected by the actors'.

They would enter each village, having no idea at all of what they would be doing, allowing themselves to be influenced by the presence of the people, the place, the time of day, the light, and so creating a true meeting. 'When that fusion takes place there is a theatre event.' Sadly, all too often in theatre, as in a recent revival of *Uncle Vanya* in the West End, in 1988, no such fusion takes place between the actors or between the actors and the spectators. For Brook and his actors the question: What is theatre? became one that had continually to be faced and answered; and the lesson which was constantly being learned was that the audience is always 'the other person', as vital as the other person in speech or love. Perhaps this explains also something of the great appeal of the comedienne Joyce Grenfell. When she first entered theatre she was amazed how in general actors regard the audiences as their enemy, to be wooed,

attacked, won over, brought to heel. Through her Christian Science she learned how to embrace the audience, knowing that performer and spectator are one.

Brook's trip to Africa opened up exciting new possibilities for cultural exchange which are still largely ignored by official bodies.

Hundreds of groups could, if they wished – very inexpensively too – go up and down the continent, playing in this way, and meeting nothing but appreciation. Then something very active would happen, quite different from what happens on the level of official culture. Because official culture is mostly ridiculous. All sorts of countries have sent ballet companies, opera companies – England has sent Shakespeare companies – but where to? To the big cities. So the performances unfold to an audience largely made up of government officials and the European diplomatic corps. And why they go there is highly suspect. In any event, no relation is made. And for an act of relation to be made which is different from the relation between outsiders and Africans over all the centuries could have meaning. If in a year a great number of groups from different countries were doing this, it could have quite a different meaning.

All you need is a group of actors with nothing at all (we carried a carpet but you don't even need that to play on). You've only to go there and start. The moment you accept that it opens up a possibility. It is something with enormous richness in all directions. You have to give and take. You're not showing and you're not teaching and you're not imitating. What did we learn? you ask. I think the truer question is: What did we share?

This strikes me as, politically, the most profound statement in this book. Big organizations, government and arts funding bodies, look too much to the big names, the prestige companies, whereas it is the quieter voices, those of gifted but less fashionable artists, who often prove to be the best diplomats, meeting with others as fellow human beings, and not as representatives of this culture or that. Indeed, what do we mean by culture? In the middle of Africa Peter Brook scandalised an anthropologist by suggesting that we all have an Africa inside us.

Man is more than his culture defines; cultural habits go deeper than the clothes he wears, but they are still only garments to which an unknown life gives body. Each culture expresses a different portion of the inner atlas: the complete human truth is global, and the theatre is the place in which the jig-saw can be pieced together.

In the years since the founding of the International Centre for Theatre Research in Paris Brook has tried to use the world as a can opener. He has tried to let the sounds, shapes and attitudes of different parts of the world play on the actor's organism, and in his most recent work, *The Mahabharata*, we see the fruit of all this research. When in India Brook asked an old actor: I'd like to know what you imagine when you're performing and the actor replied, 'It's very

simple. I try to bring together all that I have experienced in my life, so as to make what I am doing a witness of what I have felt and what I have understood.' In many ways this production is a summation of Brook's own life.

If at the turn of this century Constantin Stanislavsky was the great patriarchal figure not only of Russian but of world theatre, there is little doubt that Peter Brook will dominate the close of this century when he will be seventy five. Brook is among those who see that deep change is necessary but he no longer believes that conventional theatre can provide such a change.

Since, in the total sickness of the society we are living in, the possibility of affirmation through the conventional theatre is virtually excluded, it is therefore essential to re-discover the roots of both theatre and human experience.

So, at the Théâtre des Bouffes in Paris he continues his attempt to 're-unite the community, in all its diversity, within the same shared experience', working with his company of actors drawn from different cultures and backgrounds. 'Each human being,' he says,

carries within her or himself all the continents, but each of us knows only one of them. So when a person with one known continent and a mass of dark continents meets someone else whose condition is the same, and they communicate, there is illumination for each.

In a production such as *The Mahabharata*, in particular, one can see Brook drawing upon the richness of each cultural tradition within his company. If at times the United Nations approach to an acting ensemble produces some over-acting, poor acting, and, most especially, poor diction (with the result that often the text is unintelligible) it may well be that these faults cannot be rectified within one generation. What Brook is attempting is so new and radical that the full fruits of his research may not be realised for some years. The search today remains, as Brook expressed it in 1972 in *The Empty Space*, for 'a necessary theatre, one which is an urgent presence in our lives, speaking to a man in his wholeness.' As part of this search, *The Mahabharata* is perhaps its most extra-ordinary expression. An ancient Sanskrit manuscript, fifteen times longer than the Bible, it is a vision of a society much like our own, in discord and at the brink of destruction. The production, reflecting popular theatre traditions, martial art forms, and Asian dance, is the most spectacular of all Brook's productions since 1970 and yet, at the same time, represents the ultimate refinement of his use of minimal scenery; although the programme note makes unjustified claims for Brook:

The result of these years of performance and research is that Brook is able to apply the utmost simplicity of means to complex and subtle ends. In *The Mahabharata* a piece of cloth becomes a cloud or lake, a single wheel a war chariot, a stick a sheaf of magic arrows.

Such a combination of sophistication and simplicity is, however, far from new. From Copeau to Brecht, Martha Graham to Shared Experience, Grotowski to Barba, each has sought for an austere and pure form of theatre, while the Kathakali dance drama has been doing this for centuries! In the Kathakali tradition an actor will take a bench and, by his varying use of it, appeal to our imagination to complete the picture. If he crouches behind the bench, rising up slowly, and finally stepping onto it, he has climbed the Himalayas; if he lies down to sleep on it, then it has become his bed; if he sits in lotus position before it, it is his altar; if he turns it upside down and sits in it, he is paddling his canoe down the rapids; if he upends it and climbs it, it has become the tallest tree in the forest. Always it is a bench but he pretends, and we pretend, that it is a mountain range, a bed, an altar, a canoe, a tree.

In *The Shifting Point* we witness Peter Brook's willingness to follow any likely path, not in a restless pursuit of change like Meyerhold, but continually adding to his own store of knowledge. It is not surprising that Brook should have made a film, *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, based upon the life of that remarkable twentieth century teacher, Gurdjieff. Brook himself has met many remarkable men and women on his own way, although he is not over generous in acknowledging them! He remains not only an outstanding director but, like many great artists, also a pathfinder and a master.

James Roose-Evans

Melodies Heard and Unheard

JOSCELYN GODWIN: *Harmonies of Heaven and Earth*. Thames & Hudson, 1987, 208 pp, £14.

KENNETH SYLVAN GUTHRIE & DAVID FIDELER (eds.): *The Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library*. Phanes Press, Michigan, 1987, 361 pp, \$30 cloth, \$17 paper.

G. R. S. MEAD: *The Complete Echoes from the Gnosis*. Edited by Stephen Ronan, Chthonios Books, 259 pp, £19.50.

Music, said Plato, is the most influential of the arts. It effects both the individual soul and the entire order of society. 'The forms of music determine the forms of government.' In times when human psychology was better understood than it is now, music was the principal medium of control. The ancient priestly rulers specified certain musical harmonies, and established them by law as the basis for all music within the realm. Both the tunes and the lyrics of popular songs were strictly regulated, and so were the appropriate times for their performance – at the sacred festivals which marked the course of the year. The purpose of such firm insistence on a unified standard of music is indicated by

Plato's equation of 'songs' with 'charms' and of 'chants' with 'enchantment'. It was to create and maintain a magical spell. An entire country was made to resonate with a single chant, constantly changing to reflect the seasons and cycles, but always derived from the same canon of harmonies, the harmonies of the heavenly spheres.

The use of music for purposes of enchantment – for keeping societies in tune with the cosmos – is an important theme in Plato's writings, especially in the *Republic* and *Laws* where his subject is ideal political reform. Ten years ago Ernest McClain showed in his book, *The Pythagorean Plato*, that Plato's allegories and numerical puzzles, which have long baffled his commentators, can be interpreted as modes of music, those which ennoble the human mind and produce the best possible form of society. McClain's work was well founded but highly specialized. His conclusions required a deeper context, and this is supplied in Joscelyn Godwin's literally wonderful new book.

Godwin is well known to students of mysticism through his previous studies, of Kircher, Fludd and the ancient Mystery religions. He is a rare good writer, clear headed, humane, anecdotal, with expert knowledge of his subjects and spiritually attuned to them. This book, parts of which were published in *Temenos*, is his masterpiece. The gist of it is a summary of musical systems, from antiquity to the present day, through which composers and philosophers have tried to represent the ideal cosmos and expose humanity to the influence of celestial harmony. Musical cosmologies, from Plato's to those of Gurdjieff and Rudolf Steiner, are examined in detail to expose the principles which inspired Richard Wagner, Alexander Scriabin and others of equal ambition with the vision of renaissance through the medium of sacred music. It is a vast and daunting subject, complex with numbers, ratios and astrological symbolism, but Godwin is so well versed in these mysteries that he can explain them simply. The picture he gives is of an esoteric tradition, going back to the time of Orpheus and revelation from nature, which lies behind the teachings of the great masters in all ages.

To prepare his readers for the breath-taking experience of entering the world of musical philosophy, Godwin begins with an entertaining discourse on the power of sound over all forms of life and matter. Legends are told of the music that moved the megaliths, that tamed wild beasts and madmen, that enchanted forests and mountains; and these are not mere poetic fictions, for the truth behind them has been attested by modern science. Hans Jenny demonstrated the formative influence of sound on matter, and there are numerous proofs of how music effects the welfare of animals and the growth of plants. We even know, thanks to the experiments of Dorothy Retallack in Colorado some 20 years ago, the kinds of music which appeal to plants and those from which they avert their faces. Indian sitar and classical string music rate highly among them; hard rock is their least favourite sound. In other words, they prefer music to noise. Human nature has the same innate preference. Cacophony disorders the

mind, while true, well pitched harmonies soothe and refine it. Godwin has much to say about the use of music in therapy; and beyond its effect on the individual is its potential for raising the tone of whole civilizations.

Here we approach the crux of the matter. If music indeed has the powers attributed to it, why do we not emulate the ancients in banning disruptive noise and encouraging the music that promotes harmony? The answer, perhaps, is that our modern authorities are so bound to the doctrine of materialism that the spiritual causes of things are beyond their perception. Yet spontaneous, if unwelcome, tributes to the power of musicians have been offered by modern dictators, notably Stalin and Hitler, in persecuting those whose tones they found dangerous to their regimes, and martial bands have always been important items of military equipment. This suggests a more sinister notion, that perhaps the noise and drivel which is broadcast today through every medium of mass communication is deliberately designed to debase the public mentality. That certainly is the effect, but surely it is absurd to attribute such a degree of malevolent cunning to any human organization. Fashions in popular music today are not set from above, or restrained by any tradition, but arise through the efforts of catchpenny hucksters to exploit the lowest level of sensibility. Turning on his radio at random, Godwin heard the wailings of 'several whores, two hermaphrodites in distress, a street-fighter, and a few lachrymose labourers.' Such people, he says, would not be welcome in his house, so 'who could possibly want to let such voices, sinister carriers of psychic influence, into their minds?' This lamentable state of affairs is, he suggests, a necessary stage in the process of cultural transmutation. In alchemical terms it is the Putrefaction or Purging which must precede a renewal of the quest for paradise on earth.

People today, as they were in ancient times, are held in thrall by the type of music that pervades their lives, and their entire outlook on the world is conditioned thereby. It appears, then, that the simplest and most profitable acts of social reform are in the musical realm. It is just a question of substituting one spell for another. In his second chapter, 'Hearing Secret Harmonies', Godwin inquires into the origin of the music by which humanity was first enchanted, and locates it in the fairies and elementals of earth and the angelic choirs above. This is not mere fancy but a matter of repeated record. In Celtic and Nordic countries traditional songs and reels were first learnt from the fairies, and on certain ancient mounds on the right day their tunes can be heard again. Music from this source continued up to quite recent times to refresh the local tradition. Church music and chant has also been enriched by nature through the sensitivity of mystics. An angelic chant, heard and taken down by a ninth-century monk at St Michael's sanctuary on Monte Gargano, was added soon afterwards to the Roman liturgy, and the plainchant of medieval monasteries imitated the voices of angels. So effective was the constantly sustained monkish chant that the countryside around grew fertile and

prosperous. The monks slept few hours, ate sparsely and spent most of their lives singing, transported above worldly fatigue. They were not cut off from the world, but at the very centre of it, sanctifying it with their chant. In England the monastic estates that flourished up to the Reformation were better husbanded and more contentedly populous than any which have been known since.

Plainchant, best known in its Gregorian branch, is Godwin's recommendation as the music for transcendence. The Miracle of the Dark Ages was the emergence of chant from the simple hymns of the Church Fathers. Its origin is mysterious, for it belongs to no particular age, and it may have passed into Roman Christianity through the Celtic Church from the earlier Druid religion. In one of the old Welsh Triads is a reference to three perpetual choirs, where choruses of holy men maintained a sacred liturgy day and night and throughout the year. This was the time of the famous Enchantment of Britain and the presence of the Grail. Part of the Grail legend is the prophecy that one day the enchantment will be restored. From the depths of the modern wasteland it is hard to foresee how this may come about, but the spell that binds us today is no more permanent than the type of music that supports it, and when the music changes, the collective state of mind and all that is produced from it will change accordingly.

The Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library is a ready-made classic, a distinguished addition to anyone's library and a necessary possession for all who are interested in the philosophy and mysteries of the Primordial Tradition.

Here we have a modern product of that philosophical 'golden chain' which stretches back into remote antiquity, is first known to us through the teachings of Pythagoras, and has been associated with every subsequent renaissance of culture. The modern links in that chain include Thomas Taylor (1758–1835) the devout English Platonist, Kenneth Guthrie, the great American translator of Proclus and the neo-Platonists in the earlier part of this century, and Joscelyn Godwin, Steve Miller, Arthur Versluis and David Fideler who are still young and active. All these have made contributions to *The Pythagorean Sourcebook*. This is a work with many stories behind it, and it is impossible to review it adequately without reference to some of the characters who have been involved in its production.

Starting with the moderns, David Fideler is the founder of Phanes Press, which in distant (from us) Michigan devotes itself whole-heartedly to the dissemination of genuine philosophical literature, published in a manner which is worthy of the contents. Fideler began his literary career as a teen-age devotee of Charles Fort, writing for *Fortean Times* and other 'mystery-and-monster' magazines before starting his own journal on anomalous phenomena in his native state of Michigan. Fascination with life's miracles – the odd events which run counter to every rational system of science or religion – has always been a characteristic of natural philosophers, and it is one of the gateways of

initiation into philosophy itself. Fideler entered by it into the world of Platonism, devoted his student years to Greek, Hebrew, music and mathematics, and is now, while still in his twenties, the foremost publisher of works in the Pythagorean tradition. His contribution to this book includes an enlightening introduction to the Pythagorean science of number, explanatory notes to the contents and an invaluable bibliography, compiled with Joscelyn Godwin, of works relevant to the study of Pythagoras' life and philosophy.

The *Pythagorean Sourcebook* compiles all the ancient accounts of the Master and his sayings, together with the often fragmentary writings of his direct followers. Most of these were translated from Greek by Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie (1871–1940) who made a noble, though financially unprofitable, use of his life by spending it in 'making accessible to the public the neglected treasures of Neo-platonism'. Unpatronized, in constant poverty, he dispensed the ancient wisdom in small, mimeographed editions. The *Sourcebook* was first published in 1920. According to Guthrie's declaration in his preface, 'It was undertaken for no purpose other than the benefit of humanity that had for so long been deprived of this its precious heritage'. One would like to know more about this saintly person, and the only criticism one can possibly make of this augmented and vastly improved edition of the *Sourcebook* is that it omits an overdue tribute to the work of Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie.

Finally we come to Pythagoras himself, the man with the golden thigh, the master of bi-location, the charmer of wild beasts, who glided rather than walked across the earth and declared that the essence of everything is number. Because modern science, like the Pythagorean, is based on number, he is often claimed as its father; but the Pythagorean understanding of number was quite different from that of today. In the famous school of Pythagoras, where his teachings and disciplines were perpetuated for a thousand years (the same period as from the Norman Conquest to the present), mathematics was studied in its highest branch, as the purest expression of nature's code of law.

When the elderly shaman, Abaris, came down from the North to be instructed by him, Pythagoras taught him the correct use of number for invoking the gods, and amazed him by showing detailed knowledge of Abaris's own temple to Apollo in the distant country of the Hyperboreans. Abaris presented Pythagoras with his magical dart and revered him as a type of Apollo. If, as some have thought, Abaris was a Druid priest, his dart a neolithic arrow or axe-head, and his temple the great stone circle on Salisbury Plain, one can pleasantly imagine Pythagoras and Abaris discussing the cosmological symbolism of Stonehenge.

Like his eastern contemporary, Confucius, Pythagoras was conscious of living in decadent times, and undertook the mission of discovering and codifying standards for the maintenance of civilization. To qualify himself for the task he spent the first half of his hundred-year life among the sages and magi of the East, gaining initiation into the deepest mysteries of sacred science. He

was not an innovator but a revivalist, and his gift to the world was not western science but the traditions of an earlier system, the ancient science of attuning humanity to the cosmos. Less than a generation ago, interest in that science was limited to a small band of mystical scholars and poets. Today there is an obvious necessity for a science and world-view which answers the concerns of ecology, and the spirit of Pythagoras is abroad in the land. By their reverence for it, as shown by the quality of this and their other philosophical publications, Phanes Press give pleasure and great hope for the future. This note of optimism is sustained in Joscelyn Godwin's Foreword to the *Sourcebook*, where he foresees a new birth of Pythagoras, and concludes: 'If he failed as the avatar of the passing age, perhaps he is coming into his own as a new one dawns.'

'Those who would enter the spiritual fire of Gnosis, Christian and Pagan, which the orthodox Church fought so hard to suppress, could find no better guide than Mead and no finer introduction than *The Complete Echoes from the Gnosis*.' So says the 'blurb' to this book, and it is a fair claim. Among scholars of pagan and early Christian mysticism, G. R. S. Mead (1863–1933) had a unique understanding of the Gnostic mentality, and was thus qualified to expound the relics of ancient sacred writings which his academic contemporaries mostly regarded as worthless and unintelligible. In the 3 volumes of his *Thrice Greatest Hermes* (1906) he presented the extant works of Trismegistos, and his *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten* is still the best introduction to Gnostic literature. His third major work, *Echoes from the Gnosis*, was designed to spread the light of Gnosis, to awaken in readers 'some echoes of the mystical experiences and initiatory lore of their spiritual ancestry' and to provide them with 'stepping-stones to higher things'. It appeared in 11 separate volumes (though with the numerically perfect 12 sections) between 1906 and 1908. Here, for the first time, the complete set of volumes is put into one binding, and a work of the highest value and interest thus emerges from its previous obscurity. We are indebted to its present publishers for their enlightened enterprise.

Included in this book are the pagan and Christian Gnostic texts which Mead considered most likely to stimulate wider interest in the ancient wisdom. They are well chosen for that purpose, for their common theme is the path to enlightenment through personal experience of death and rebirth. That experience was available in the Mystery initiation ritual. According to Plutarch, its climax was a subterranean journey through the terrors of darkness towards a place of beautiful lights, sounds and images, an imitation of paradise. There the perfected initiate 'reaches his full freedom, and passing everywhere at will, receives the crown, and accomplishes his mystery, in communion with the holy and pure; gazing down at the unpurified multitude of the uninitiated who are still in life, wallowing in the deep mire and mist. . .' This is quoted in Mead's commentary on the Vision of Aridaeus, the most remarkable of those ancient tales of a person who comes back to life after a journey to the world beyond.

Like Plato's story of the otherworldly adventures of Er, it describes a universal process, exemplified on many different levels: as a typical account of the 'near-death experience', an alchemical operation, the passage to initiation or a cosmological diagram. Complementing it in this book are treatises on the mysteries and ritual of Mithra, the Hymns of Hermes, the Chaldean Oracles and other pagan expressions of the universal Mystery tradition. The same tradition informs the early Christian Hymn of the Robe of Glory, the Hymn of Jesus, the Gnostic Crucifixion and the Wedding Song of Wisdom. Conveyed through these writings is the spirit of the first Christian scholars, who sought to revive the ancient wisdom with the light and energy of Christ.

John Michell

Vision of Paradise

WILLIAM ANDERSON: Cecil Collins, *The Quest for the Great Happiness*. Barrie & Jenkins, 1988. 192 pp., £25.

The ability of art to act as a reminder of the lost Paradisal realm which was once the heritage of all humanity is how the work of Cecil Collins should be seen. He represents, above all, the artist as Magician and imager, gifted with glimpses of the numinous which allow him to convey, if only fragmentedly, the joy of that primal state.

The memory of the lost Paradise is a constant rebuke to us for what we have let our minds and hearts become . . . Its memory is also a constant stimulus to the creativity of man because it drives us . . . to try to recover the state of wholeness that we have lost. The real purpose of our lives can be said to be the quest for the eternally existing Paradise for which [Cecil Collins'] name is the Great Happiness

Thus people starved of a deeper reality than that offered to them by conventional spiritual paths, may turn to art and literature for something more. In the work of Cecil Collins they find, above all, an abiding sense of the numinous, of a deep inner awareness of the shared inheritance that unites all peoples, irrespective of race or creed. For Collins is, before all else, a painter of the imaginal world, a world of abundant richness, of unquenchable vision, and of overwhelming passion. And through this landscape the figure of the Fool, perhaps Collins' greatest single image, moves in a series of divine adventures, representing all that is purest of our own visionary lives, as well as reflecting the artist's personal quest for the Paradisal reality.

William Anderson gives an admirably clear, unfussy account of Cecil Collins' life, from his childhood in Devon, through the years at Art School, his brief

flirtation with Surrealism and his later years in Cambridge and in London where he has latterly lived and taught a curriculum of brilliant and challenging classes at the Central School of Art.

This is followed by a review of much of the most important work produced by Collins over this lengthy period – though Anderson himself admits that this is probably only a third of what actually exists.

Very little of Collins' work is in public collections (the Tate Gallery being a notable exception) so that much of what is to be found within these pages will be new to many people. This is in several ways unfortunate, because apart from the obvious wish to see more of the work of this important and gifted artist, many of the pictures are not shown to their best advantage. This is in part due to variable colour reproduction, and in part to a somewhat erratic choice of sizing which has resulted in some pictures being reproduced too small while others are given undue prominence. However this does not detract from the power of the images themselves which, irrespective of colour, layout, and the general poor quality of reproduction are, quite literally, stunning. One feels more than a little overwhelmed by the sheer energy of line, colour and feeling with which each single image is imbued. These are true glimpses of the inner world which is everywhere around us, though generally unseen. In particular such pictures as *Landscape with Hills and River* (1943), *The Invocation* (1944), *The Forest* (1942), *The Return* (1942), *Hymn to Night* (1951) and *Landscape of the Unknown God* (1960) are among the most poignant reconstructions of the otherworld.

In the catalogue notes to his 1959 retrospective exhibition Collins wrote:

I am not much interested in what is called 'pure painting' or objets d'art.

I am concerned with art as poetic consciousness, or as metaphysical experience.

It is this intent which produces the depths and vitality of his work, and which, as Anderson perceptively observes, gives to certain images in Cecil Collins' work the ability to evoke dislike or even fear in certain people, even though,

the same people may respond enthusiastically to the outright violence in the subjects of much modern painting.

Such people, who live in a world bereft of beauty, truth and the holy, are often deeply fearful of what is, to them, not only unfashionable but also alien.

In fact, Collins' work is full of compassion for such people; there is nothing sinister in it at all, simply the overwhelming presence of a reality outside the experience of the majority, and which is virtually inexpressible in words. Indeed, as with the literature of the Grail, there comes a point when only images or sound (music) can convey the deeper truths, the very truths with which Cecil Collins has been concerned throughout his long life as a painter.

Collins is indeed an immensely well-read and highly educated man, the range of whose work is correspondingly vast. William Anderson has made light

of much of this, bringing his own not inconsiderable gifts as a scholar (his excellent *Dante the Maker* was published by Routledge in 1980) to bear upon the richness of Collins' work. Finally, however, it is the works themselves which bear testimony to the depths and vision of the artist. Since the death of David Jones there is no-one producing works of such consistently numinous brilliance (the two respected one another despite certain fundamental differences). With the exhibition at the Anthony D'Offay Gallery in June 1988 and the eagerly awaited retrospective at the Tate Gallery this year this is a timely book which will, it is hoped, bring Cecil Collins work to the attention of a larger public. Possibly it will be met with the same failure to understand the true nature of his work that has all too often been the case; yet in the changing universe in which we live there is a far greater possibility than ever before for Cecil Collins' work to be recognised as the major contribution to our perceptions of that universe. It is profoundly to be hoped that this will be the case.

John Matthews

Mirrors of Paradise

KATHLEEN RAINE: *The Presence* – Poems 1984–87. Golgonooza Press

Imaginative poetry, and by that I mean a creative engagement in which the poet is the mediating force between inner and outer worlds, and for the period of composition universalized, is a gift given to few, for it requires an openness to the realization that one is always more than the sum of who one is, and particularly so in the moment of inspiration. Poetry is the great shape-lifter, it shows things as they really are apprehended by the psyche, instructing what was previously known and forgotten in the measure of a cosmic dance.

Kathleen Raine's new collection is informed by the presence, the Rilkean angel, the ineffable dazzle of the invisible messenger who is both the bearer of poetry and the light that surrounds the poem, radiating from the nucleus or corolla, and thus written into the poem the way light chases out the eddies in a stream, so that it appears to be light that is flowing and not water. While the presence is timeless, it is made immediate by the poem – it manifests itself in the sudden illuminative flash in which the nebulous crystallizes into form and contained energy. It is here, urgently, instantly, in the beautiful 'Light Over Water':

Brilliant

Myriad instantaneous alighting raindrops on a stream

That has run unbroken down and on

Since this once familiar place was home,

Each in its alighting flashes sun's glitter and is gone

As another, and another and another come to meet me,
 Angel after angel after angel, its dancing-point
 Always here and now,
 The same bright innumerable company arriving,
 Anew the present always absolving from time's flow.

The seamless unity established by these lines is masterful, light and water elide, collide, enter the same source – the down-run of a stream, but in a metamorphic glitter that is angelophanic – the prismatic mirror realizing an angel in its flow, a dancing-point on which the elements marry. The note sounded in this poem, and throughout the book is that of the timeless present – 'Always here and now.'

I would link this poem with 'In Paralda's Kingdom', a sequence that celebrates 'the high fells, the wind's kingdom', but in a way that involves the poet with the universal spirit, so that the watcher or self in the poem is part of the wind's text, the cloud's buoyancy, the great stars' mineral kingdom. The writing is so pure, so lyrically transparent, so unencumbered by descriptive consonants, that its immediacy is a state of poetry, rather than an attempt to achieve lyric expression.

At rest in changing:
 Across the blue they move
 Passive in the embrace of the winds of heaven,
 Visible melting into invisible, to reappear
 In wisp and fringe of pure
 Vapour of whitest mist as slowly they gather and
 come together
 In serene for ever
 Unbroken commingling consummation of water and air.

It takes a lifetime to arrive at such expression, and throughout *The Presence* one is conscious not only of a continuity with the work gathered in *Collected Poems* 1981, but of an effortless surety of tone, hard won, but now consummate in its expression, and an eloquence so at one with its theme that there is no recognisable separation between the two.

The book's long elegiac opening poem 'A Departure' – the valediction being to a cottage and all that it has come to symbolize over the years in terms of its being a house of poetry, as well as an eye into the natural world, again establishes a belief in the permanence and continuity of memory-places, impermanent in finite terms, but inexhaustibly rich in terms of their becoming the ever-present, freed of physical location and therefore translated into inner space – that country we grow to inhabit by realising that it is within us always and is what we carry with us on the journey out of life accompanied by still another messenger – the blue robe and star-shot caduceus that belongs to Hermes.

Poetry which evades all concrete definition – we can no more say what it is than we can explain who we are, is present in this book as light, sound, the evocation of memory known by the scent of mimosa or lily-of-the valley, or as a startling awareness that we are not alone in our moment of perception, others are there, and one in particular, the poet's daimon.

Present, ever-present presence,
Never have you not been
Here and now in every now and here,
And still you bring
From your treasury of colour, of light,
Of scents, of notes, the evening blackbird's song,
How clear among the green and fragrant leaves,
As in childhood always new, anew.

Voiced here in the book's title poem is that sense of undiminished surprise at the things of this world, without which we cannot write poetry. No matter how often we hear the blackbird's song we never capture it; we attempt to interpret what is spontaneously delivered from an instinctive consciousness quite different from our own – and it is only through poetry that we arrive at some sensory correlative, some attempt to create an interworld between separate lives. The presence is the enlightener; the resourcefulness of the poet is to narrow the division between illumination and the thing perceived by that directed light, between poet and poem, and to make of the experience an articulate circle, a light-ring that eliminates every detail extraneous to its radial centre.

Into what future do we pursue them
Who are already speeding
Into the past, with scarcely time to greet them
In the moment's meeting. We look beyond them
Into the never-to-be, where we seek them
Who are already gone, were with us only
In some unregarded here and now, their precinct.
In the unvalued present their sacred advent
Unheeded, yet made clear now we have lost them.

We are both here and now, past and future, everywhere and nowhere, but consciousness recognises 'the precinct': what we know may have occurred on a time-film, but the image lived as a photographic negative and can be developed under conditions favourable to its exposure. To undervalue the present is to reduce conditions favourable to the poem; we must be forever alive to the stream of consciousness, to its flow and counterflow, and learn to calculate the speed of a poem's arrival – an area not often discussed by critics – but vital to a poet's success. Poems arrive at different velocities, some crystallize

slowly by an expansion of meditative thought, others arrive meteorically and are sometimes only partially salvaged, while others are too quick to be arrested. Speed in association to the image in mental space is very much the concern of these poems, some of which are retrieved by memory, but most of which are alive to the flash, and apprehend an area of experience which is the hardest to stabilize – the flight of the momentarily-present into the timeless-future.

One of the poems that best exemplifies this method is 'A Dream', where inner and outer worlds are naturally conflated, and the resultant imagery is coloured according to trans or interworlds.

Peacocks

Adorning miniatures of Brindavan, or Persian pages
 Painted with two squirrel-hairs by craftsmen
 Skilled in marvels,
 Are they of inner or of outer skies,
 Nature's splendour, or memory's?
 Or are earth's peacocks' jewelled ocelli
 Mirrors of paradise?

That sense of confusion created by a dream landscape, which for the time we experience it provides a non-comparative reality – we don't think we're dreaming – is not dissimilar to the process of writing poetry, which disrupts rational thinking and has us participate as active intermediaries in constructing a speech between the living and dead, a bridge between the temporal and imaginal states of consciousness. 'A Dream' is to my mind the most imposing of the poems gathered in this collection – its jewelled ocelli, extravagant colours speaking of that multicoloured hallucinatory palette which is proper to dream both in its night and day states. Its reality is the suprasensory dimension in which the imagination thrives – and in the way that we accommodate flowers to the right soil, so poems are nurtured by imaginary spaces in which they constellate and transmit a resonance to which the poet is sensitive.

The flower poems in this book, 'Mimosa-Spray', 'Lily-Of-The-Valley', 'Wood-ruff' and 'Blue Columbines' are not poems descriptive of flowers, but prompters to memory-associations, metaphysical constructs that open out from corolla to world. The 'flower-gold dust' of mimosa, that yellow shock-scented shrub that catches fire under blue skies is here the meditative centre to an imaginative exchange between daughter and mother, between an intended gift, and a real one that can no longer be given. And in 'Lily-Of-The-Valley' – the elegiac note finds perfect lyric expression.

No, it is not different,
 Now I am old,
 The meaning and promise
 Of a fragrance that told

Of love to come
To the young and beautiful:

For the poet, age is irrelevant, those things of the imagination present an extended childlike vision, a magnified rather than decreased beauty, for poetry demands the pact that we never desert the child in us, that it complements our maturity, and is the continual finder of poetic substance. 'Woodruff' observed now in a London garden rather than in a spring wood is more than a flower, it is an event granted to the senses by the presence, a gift so to speak, to the eye and senses. The minute, ivory-white funnel-shaped flowers are alive by virtue of their being illuminated by the invisible guide, they are a token of the effulgent present.

Today the Presence
Has set before me
Woodruff's white foam
Of petals immaculate,
Fourfold stars numberless
Open life's centres

And by life here one also means the imagination which opens out into the consciousness of a flower and so adopts its shape for the time of writing. We lift things into the mind so that they mirror on a heightened plane their objective reality. When the mind-flower and the earth-flower meet we have the poem. 'The Invisible Kingdom' expresses this perfectly.

We know more than we know
Who see always the bewildering proliferating
Multiplicity of the common show.

There come to the artist's hands
Such subtleties of form, of light,
Gardens, presences,

Faces so tenderly beautiful
We wonder with what untaught knowledge seen,
Beyond the commonplace the hidden

Aspects of mystery, secrets
Known only to the soul,
Known only to love, immeasurable

Wisdom from our own hands' work grown . . .

This note of transcendence, affirmative praise of the qualitative beauty of the transforming imagination, is the persistent note throughout *The Presence*, one that speaks with the clarity of the blackbird or mistle-thrush, only the voice is a

sky-voice, the song of a bird singing to us from the high reaches. When we hear it we imagine a sky-bird, bright turquoise, shaped out of air. That bird often drops the lyric-seed of the poem into the mind.

'Named' and 'Nataraja' pursue themes of uneasy tension, they explore the light and dark, asking no easy escape from experience, but rather a pursuing of things until they are realized and known no matter how disquieting the journey. To be named in a dream is to be singled out, the awesome realization that we belong and belonged, are known and have been known by worlds and actions that we have forgotten. To be named implies a particular responsibility to being and a corresponding fear that we have forgotten who we are and the nature of our purpose here. Did we not all once run across the face of the earth with our hands reddened like Cain, shelterless beneath the implacable skies, awaiting a voice to call us to task? We have been all things and nothing – one of the poem's functions is to explore and excavate hidden sites, places in which we buried evidence of our actions, labyrinths in which we lost ourselves, hypogea in which we decomposed around a crown and ring.

Perfect or marred,
The foot of the God
Is on the world,

Terrible dancer
Whose trampling tread
Crushes evil and good,

The flow of his river
Is in our blood,

End and beginning,
A beat of the heart
Our all, our nothing.

Poetry demands that sort of total submission; we cannot easily separate evil from good, light from dark, the two are intertwined in us, and the poet must learn of both or else suffer an imbalance which is experientially invalid. We don't ask for our findings in life – and here I use the word life as interchangeable with the poem – rather we are brought into contact with areas of experience that it is necessary, at whatever risk, to explore. The 'terrible dancer's' rhythm is in our blood; we must make of the beat what we can. And those who value Kathleen Raine's poetry for its predominant light must also acknowledge its shadow-side, the dark kingdom which is explored for the alchemical sun which rises from its depths. One of the distinctions of this book is its refusal to accept complacency, its rejection of all comfortable schemas for a continuing search into the great enigmas of life and death. The business of poetry is exploration, the sounding of depths that are still unfathomed, the bringing

back whatever small comfort can be derived from so hazardous an undertaking. These poems are informed by a humility in the face of the presence, a willingness to undergo still another and another journey in which no surety is ever offered, and at best the consolation is in having survived the experience, returned with a gold feather or poem as evidence of the crossing.

The fine poem, divided into two sections, 'What of life?' and 'What is death?' is the cyclical pivot around which the book revolves. Both states of being are questionable, and we know as little of one as the other, for consciousness is preoccupied only with what feeds it at the instant of apprehension. In the questioning of death I detect an affirmative courage.

What is death?
Where shall I go?
There is only here
And now is always.
Shall I remember
This life, this place?
What I have forgotten
Shall I know,
What I know
Shall I have forgotten?
Must I cease?
The music flows on.
Who then was I?
The eternal Presence
Moves through the grass.

We shift dimension, without the certainty that we shall recollect who we were on the day a particular poem or moment alighted. Was it someone else who stood in the grasses listening to skylarks bubble in the blue air, or watching the clouds blow slowly over the summits, graduating by degrees towards the horizon? Perhaps we will never know – all we can do is to give voice to the presence, to the arrested moment that shines like a gold sun-spot in consciousness and opens out into the living voice of the poem.

Jeremy Reed

Heavenly Cities

JOHN MICHELL: *The Dimensions of Paradise*. Thames & Hudson, 216 pp, £14.95

This volume recently published by Thames & Hudson may become the essential Michell. It contains an up-to-date summary of all the research insights and scholarly analysis he has achieved over the years since *The View Over Atlantis* in 1969.

Michell has courageously ventured into realms where many who wanted to be taken seriously have not gone; however, he strikes his own claims to freedom allowing what might be called the law of correspondences to guide his exceptional intuition rather than the stony ground of safe logic or 'academic' scholarship.

The Dimensions of Paradise represents his serious contribution and deserves to be taken in the true Platonic sense, as 'likely' a story as any; particularly as compared with the more barren modern claims that ask to be placed under the ancient and revered title of cosmology.

If you, dear Reader, take the universe to have no higher intelligence than the living human mind ('The Ascent of Man' proposition), then this is less likely to be for you. However it in no way diminishes the objectivity of the basis of Michell's discoveries. What is at stake is how and why one should find intelligent models of the cosmological principles encoded in certain words by transposition of the numerical values. 'There are more things in Heaven and Earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy' said Hamlet. Without the 'imaginal realm' as Henri Corbin described it, in the structure of our universe, or an intelligible realm upon which the sensible (physical) realm depends, the universe is reduced to dry bones. If survival of the fittest is really any criterion for survival or evolution what is more fit to survive than a rock? as Fritz Schumacher put it so succinctly.

This volume makes a valuable excursion into:

- a) the Heavenly City as eternal standard: covering the New Jerusalem, Glastonbury, Stonehenge and the sacred measures.
- b) Number in sacred science: the canon, gematria, the names and numbers of God, symbolic and sacred geometry, and an analysis of A. Dürer's 'Melancholia'.
- c) Number and Measure: covering the lengths and units of ancient measure, the priority of the foot as an anthropocosmic measure, and astronomy.
- d) The Cities of Plato; the 5040 citizens of Magnesia. From circle to square: the city brought to earth. New Atlantis studies. Plato's cosmos and the wanderings of the soul. Heavenly music. Number in the creation myth of Timaeus. The harmonic composition of the World-Soul, and so on.
- e) Symbolic numbers 864, 3168, 1224, 153, 1080, 666, 1746 and their connections with foundation, perimeter of Jerusalem, Paradise, fishes in the

net, the lunar number, the solar number, the Beast, and the number of fusion. In addition the sacred names from the dimensions of the New Jerusalem.

f) The ancient and future cosmology: the role of the New Jerusalem and its invocation and modern function.

The index of names and numbers at the back is an invaluable addition for the contemporary arithmologist.

The opening paragraph goes straight to the point: modern use of number is quite different from the ancient reverence for number. Of the ancients Michell says: 'they inhabited a living universe, a creature of divine fabrication designed in accordance with reason and thus to some extent comprehensible by the human mind'. Number, he goes on to say, is a divine mediator or 'mean term in the progression from divine reason to its imperfect reflection in humanity.' There is no ancient civilization that did not revere number. The trivialization of number goes hand in hand with the trivialization of the creation.

The canon of number for Michell is the 'natural bond' which holds together the entire universe, and therefore is not a matter of passing style or interest but central to the understanding of both the nature of being human and the nature of the universe – and, most important, the harmony that does or can exist between them.

We can highly recommend to any serious student of the ancient or timeless philosophical wisdom this compact and full volume of the outcome of its author's quest pursued over many years, motivated by the legendary key to universal knowledge alluded to in the esoteric traditions. However theory alone is not enough; as the last chapter makes clear a cosmology that is not 'practised' is not yet wisdom but only speculation. The ancient wisdom as with all authentic traditions needs discipline – self discipline – there is much food for work here. May the leaves of this book assist the genuine seeker!

Keith Critchlow

'The Keystone Splintering'

THOMAS BLACKBURN: *The Adjacent Kingdom: Collected Last Poems*. Edited and with an introduction by Jean MacVean, Peter Owen, 94 pp. £7.50

Thomas Blackburn's life was a difficult pilgrimage. His father was a clergyman of dominating and intolerant personality; his mother seems to have been overprotective, hiding her own anxieties under an unshakeably placid surface. He felt himself the inheritor of his parents' unresolved problems. Even in adult life, when he could see, intellectually, the absurdity of the situation, he remained terrified of his father and too dependent upon his mother. Not surprisingly these pressures drove him to alcoholism: drink first presented itself as an escape-route when, at his father's insistence, he was miserably studying law at Cambridge. A providential nervous breakdown was followed,

mercifully, by a change of direction: psychoanalysis, avid reading of poetry and philosophy, and a degree in English at Durham University. Despite recurrent psychiatric problems, he became an English teacher of genius, a mountaineer (he was fully aware of the implied symbolism, but this mountaineer of the spirit also introduced Chris Bonington to climbing) and, above all, a poet.

Blackburn published twelve collections of poems between 1956 and his death in 1977 at the age of sixty-one, yet his name was and is surprisingly little-known, perhaps because much of his work appeared at a time when public and critical attention was held by the poets of the 'Movement'. Blackburn's work shares certain qualities with the better side of 'Movement' poetry; it has often a plain directness, a workmanlike simplicity of vocabulary and a straightforward willingness to place its insights amongst the details of daily life – driving a car, buying cigarettes, going in to teach at college. But as Jean MacVean stresses in her excellent introduction to this volume, his poems are 'attempts to understand man, his problems and his destiny,' and his influences, felt in the movement of thought more than in choice of words, were 'Browning, Wordsworth, Blake, Eliot and Hopkins' – not the most fashionable ones in the 1950s or even the early '60s.

His poems are not, of course, entirely uncharacteristic of the period when he began to publish. Sometimes his heightened perceptions of the mundane recall, in the plainness of their joy, another fine and neglected poet, Patrick Kavanagh, who, in hospital after an ascent from alcoholism and misery not unlike Blackburn's, could rejoice in the visionary radiance of 'The main gate that was bent by a heavy lorry,/The seat at the back of a shed that was a suntrap', or the 'green waters of the canal/Pouring redemption for me'. There is kinship too with Elizabeth Jennings, once oddly grouped with the 'Movement' but in reality a contemplative poet of much insight and compassion, who like Blackburn has experienced the ordeal of mental illness and shares his instinct for the visionary hidden within the fallen world – 'One single comet polished by its fall/Rather than countless, untouched galaxies'.

Yet Blackburn's poems have an unmistakable, individual flavour, the distillation of an intense but very lightly-handled sincerity – one could call it a purity of heart. He always wants passionately to know the nature and meaning of the present moment, or of the course of his life, or of a relationship, and the poem is the instrument by which he intends to find out. The result is a style at once urgent and relaxed, that seems as spontaneous as a diary-jotting but rises effortlessly to classic power of utterance. Here is his comment on the writing of poetry:

If ever I've said anything
That was accurate and not ephemeral
And has at least the lineaments of a poem,
It was spoken through me and the art was all in the waiting.
It is not I who speak, not I at all.

Here, from 'Resurge', is his summary of a year during which he had endured the psychiatric hospital and physical illness:

Horror my brother, nausea my sister
 In this year's dark half
 Enduring the fissure
 Of what had seemed myself;
 Hospitalisation,
 Then slowly the brightening
 Dawn of creation,
 The keystone splintering
 And novelty, quickness.

The cycle of human moods, of the seasons, of the day, the polarities of darkness and light, male and female, creation and destruction, the end and beginning of the world – all are poised there, effortlessly touched into life, pivoting around that colourless modern word 'Hospitalisation' – a word, one would think, to sink almost any poem but here becoming an enigmatic turning-point between decline and healing, its very drabness keeping the poem in contact with our least-loved, least-redeemed attitudes and experiences. As for the keystone, is it not the Ego – that balancing-point of immense pressures, human and cosmic, which can fracture so terrifyingly into schizophrenia and yet (as Blake knew) is 'a Selfhood which must be put off & annihilated away' if blessed light and life are to flood our enclosed mental spaces? Here, Blackburn's choice of a lightweight, almost inconclusive final line suggests liberation: the unforeseen movement of the truly living.

Blake figures explicitly in a number of these poems, and he is well-used. Here is the middle stanza of 'The Pearl':

Energy to him was delight eternal
 And he created all through his long life
 Diagrams of the celestial and infernal,
 Trees in their foliage lovely as his wife.

As we read, we see how the apparently spontaneous blossoming of the fourth line depends on the rocky stumbling, the slightly odd syntax and recalcitrant vocabulary of the preceding three. Spontaneous beauty grows from labour and discipline with uncompromising materials; Blackburn's reading of Schopenhauer, Plato and Nietzsche had not been in vain, any more than Blake's of Boehmé, Paracelsus and Swedenborg. As Yeats put it, thinking of those 'celestial and infernal' diagrams, 'We can (those hard symbolic bones under the skin) substitute for a treatise on logic the Divine Comedy, or some little song about a rose, or be content to live our thought.' Blackburn's lines have perhaps more to them still. The 'pearl' of the poem's title is peace of mind, and there is an appropriateness in this not explicitly noticed in the poem, for the oyster's

pearl grows from an irritant, and is a lovely solution to a gritty discomfort. In Blackburn's poem, the flowering of that limpid line from the careful reflection that precedes it in this and earlier stanzas is the blossoming of tranquillity, whose value is known only through the wearing anxieties that are its context.

Such processes, such poetic patterns, seem a microcosm of Thomas Blackburn's life. One of the victories his poems share with us is the victory over the baleful alliance of circumstances and self-pity, for increasingly, by way of poem, dream and vision, he came to accept his life and problems without recrimination and even to believe (what so few can ever bear to see) that he had himself in some profound way chosen the circumstances of his own life. In particular, he could no longer blame his father, for by

Directing against me all that could abuse the soul
He speeded the process by which I could become serene and whole . . .
[And] though I castigate him in red letters,
It was I myself who chose the thumbscrew and the fetters;
For it was myself decided to go down there.

These lines are from 'Pre-Natal', which seems to me, quite simply, a great poem. By this I mean that it enunciates in vivid and appropriate language a profound truth which has not in our culture been so clearly stated before. Accordingly I cannot imagine anyone reading it attentively and remaining altogether unchanged.

'Pre-Natal' makes it clear that, like Milton in Blake's epic, Blackburn at last healed himself by forgiving and facing his 'Satan' – all in himself and others that he had previously feared and condemned. Towards the end of his life, moreover, he experienced 'a dream of exceptional intensity [which] then continued as a vision', in which he seemed to undergo death, followed by a revelation of intense light and colour; he was offered 'a silver garment suitable for either a male or a female' which he understood as a vehicle for 'communion with the female component of my soul'. Blake might have called it his emanation; and indeed, from the standpoint of eternity, how far is Blake's cottage at Felpham in 1803 from Blackburn's cottage in North Wales in the 1970s?

Appropriately, one of the most startling and illuminating moments in these poems occurs at the end of 'With You', a tender address to his wife. The poem acknowledges recent mental disturbance, as well as anxiety at the thought of one day losing her, but concludes:

But it is the ordinariness of communion I enjoy,
Sitting silent and then the word not too idle,
As it was in our flowering garden yesterday,
For you see it is all a myth, all a fable.

The poignant shock given to the conventional order of values is profound. That

'ordinariness' may be best; that 'ordinariness' itself can participate in myth and fable; that myth and fable can be more (not less) real than the factual – these insights are offered so gently and in such rapid succession that they slip past the logic of the superficial mind and as we read we feel them reverberate through the psyche like pebbles dropped into a healing well we had forgotten was there.

A glance at the standard reference works suggests that almost all of Thomas Blackburn's work is now out of print. It is fortunate, then, that *The Adjacent Kingdom* can be unconditionally recommended to all readers, whether or not they have encountered his poems before. The book is equally fine considered as either a completion of, or an introduction to, the work of this courageous and healing poet. 'In my end is my beginning'.

Grevel Lindop

Shakespeare and Broadmoor

MURRAY COX & ALICE THEILGAARD: *Mutative Metaphors in Psychotherapy: The Aeolian Mode*. Tavistock, 251 pp., £14.95.

This book, with its daunting title and rigorously clinical vocabulary and presentation may well discourage the non-professional reader, such as myself. There are indeed long passages that even with re-reading I found difficult to translate into terms which would make sense outside a professional context. The basic assumptions of the authors are psychoanalytical (Freudian) rather than Jungian, but not rigidly so, and appear to draw from a fund of more recent writings, and, above all, practical experience. Alice Theilgaard is chief psychologist of the University Clinic of Psychology in Copenhagen. Murray Cox is a consultant psychotherapist at Broadmoor Hospital. Both authors have many previous publications to their names.

Despite its difficulty of access, this is one of the most penetrating books known to me on the nature and power of poetic images; and one might add one of the most illuminating studies of Shakespeare's use of images. What has Shakespeare to do, you may ask, with Broadmoor? A very great deal. Shakespeare's characters plumbed the depths; many of Shakespeare's characters – Hamlet as well as Macbeth, Brutus as well as Richard III, Montagues and Capulets, kings and their counsellors no less than the old lag Barnardine knew what it was to find themselves murderers; or at the brink of suicide, Ophelia at the outset, Cleopatra at the end of a woman's life. Among the murderers the noble Othello and the vile Iago. It could happen to anyone. Now we think of murderers as a category apart – foreign 'terrorists' not noble patriots, or members of 'the criminal class'. Or we neutralize the tragedy of murder by

trivialization (detective fiction) or by the distancing vocabulary of psychological jargon – the use of words like schizophrenia, paranoia, psychopath, ‘disturbed’ and the rest, thereby making a human experience remote from humanity; just as in the middle ages devils (probably the same thing) were distanced by barbarous names, and could likewise by the professional skills of the day be ‘cast out’. It isn’t like that in Shakespeare; nor in *Broadmoor*, where the murderers and the rapists and the rest must treat one another as human or cease to be so. Murray Cox gives us a glimpse of that abyss, and in it the poetry and grandeur of tragedy and the hope of redemption.

As in Shakespeare, ‘offender patients’ tend to experience their deepest and most dreaded realizations through images. The authors of this book, through prolonged collaboration with its Director, Professor Philip Brockbank, were appointed as Honorary Research Fellows at the Shakespeare Institute at the University of Birmingham. Nor is Shakespeare the only poet called to their aid – Emily Dickinson, Edwin Muir, Eliot and Yeats, Akhmatova, Theodore Roethke and many more move through this remarkable book whose theme (‘the Aeolian mode’) is the power of the poetic image to resonate, like the Aeolian lyre in the wind, with the depths of the mind. The power of the poetic image is to ‘touch the depths before it stirs the surface’. The words are those of the phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard, author of those remarkable books on the poetics of earth, air, fire and water, and space, seminal works which have revolutionized our understanding of the pre-verbal language of the elements and images of nature. These are themselves ‘words’ – (‘sermons in stones, books in the running brooks’) – and communicate meanings at once at the deepest and the simplest level. An ‘offender-patient’ in a therapy group went to the heart of the matter:

‘I want to talk about something . . . but I want you to start it off, because I don’t know how. I can’t start, I could use psychological jargon, like “positive” or “negative” feeling, but that is impersonal and uninvolved’

‘How about loving and hating?’

‘That’s nearer’.

‘Or fire and ice?’

‘That’s it, that’s me all over. There is no inbetween.’

The ‘Aeolian mode’ – the authors use the word ‘poiesis’ rather than ‘poetry’ – the process rather than the product – reaches the depths; or rather – hence their use in healing the soul without wounding and assaulting – ‘they do NOT REACH the depths because they START there’. The immeasurable clinical value of this is obvious in the case of the ‘offender-patient’ reluctant to expose or indeed to contemplate his (or her) story. The right image can serve as a kind of depth-charge; with us too of course, hence the necessity of the poetic image to civilization.

The depths these patients reveal are indeed Shakespearean: ‘She didn’t say

anything. So I killed her. Then nothing was said' may stand beside 'Put out the light, and then put out the light'. Or the girl who went from shop-lifting to stabbing, who remarked, 'I took perfume'. It is unlikely she knew Lady Macbeth's 'All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand' but, in Akhmatova's words, 'Blood smells of blood alone'. Or Shakespeare's puns, as with the girl returning from the hairdresser, referring to her 'natural parting', who was asked by another patient in the group 'What about your un-natural parting?' (she had committed a murder). One wonders if Othello himself might not have been close to the murderer who said, 'I just went on killing her. It never occurred to me that she'd die'.

Metaphors may illuminate but there are metaphors too to avoid the issue, as in military euphemisms like 'the enemy' or 'the target' (in both cases human beings) or the offender-patient who wraps up his story in phrases like 'The time had come to face the music, the chips were down, my finger was on the trigger of my aggression, so I blew my top and sent him flying into the middle of next week' and so on. At this the sense of sheer human honesty of another patient was outraged: 'I don't understand all these images, I killed a man of sixty-eight, what did you do?' That too is Shakespearean in its way – they probably talked like that at the Court of Denmark, though courtly euphuisms were less vulgar.

One of the most striking insights is into the use of 'archaic language' in which deep revelations and consolations will often come. 'It was familiar because it was there before you were' one patient said 'It's a legacy . . . how we used to think when we were very alone; when we were trees, and when we were rocks'. A patient whose formal education was minimal could make a statement inexplicable in terms of her trivial daily mind: 'The world's a dying ember. That's my estimation of the world'. Besides that powerful cosmic image we might expect from King Lear or from his Fool, the word 'estimation' is one totally unexpected from an old woman normally unable to express anything beyond simple biological wants. Whence arise such images, such words? Jung also somewhere notes that the 'voices' of the unconscious often speak in high heiratic tones, as if beyond our everyday selves there are other regions where a wiser and graver discourse is natural. In our secular world everything is on one level – and so alas is most so-called poetry written at this time – and the notion of a 'sacred language' is remote. Yet both Hebrew and Sanskrit are deemed 'sacred' languages because their words carry meanings on several (four to be specific) levels. Are we all capable, when the power of deepest feeling or capacity to understand stirs those depths in us, of speaking even a few words from a higher source of the Imagination?

It seems that 'the Aeolian mode' can help the healing-process of making the unbearable bearable. And the unbearable is something to be found in the world, and not just in Broadmoor. Is not this the very root of the art of poesis? One may wonder how—or if—bringing the appalling back into consciousness can heal; for if we are what we have done, what release can that knowledge

bring us? Yet the authors seem to work in what can but be called 'faith' that within some larger whole there is both meaning and mercy. I doubt that an atheist (unless a Buddhist perhaps?) could believe this to be so. Unless it be possible (in Blake's words) to 'Distinguish between the man and his present state'; to believe that 'Man passes on, but States remain for Ever; he passes thro' them like a traveller . . .'

In this period in which a nadir of trivialization of language and an impoverishment of images has surely been reached, a look into those depths where 'The worst is not so long as we can say This is the worst' might be salutary. Beyond, there is only Lear's 'Howl! Howl! Howl!' – that 'silent howling' to which the authors of this book bear witness, an inner holocaust more terrible than slaughter of the body. Those who adopt – or usurp – the name of poet must relearn to understand the profound transformative power of 'poiesis'. How many psychiatrists themselves possess this insight may be questioned; one suspects that Murray Cox, like the interpreter of dreams in the Book of Job is 'one among a thousand'.

Kathleen Raine

P.B.

PAUL BRUNTON: *The Notebooks*, Vol. 9: *Human Experience and The Arts in Culture*. Burdett, New York: Larson Publications, 1987. 360 pp. Distributed by Element Books. Paperback £8.95. (Subscription rates to the hardcover edition available from the publisher.)

As the sixteen volumes of his posthumous notes appear, this incomparable philosopher turns out to have had something not merely interesting but really fundamental to say on practically every worthwhile subject. P.B. (as he preferred to be called) considered himself a creative artist in prose, and the 'note' was the chosen medium of his last 30 years. These sentences, paragraphs, and miniature essays on the arts suggest that he would have gone all the way with *Temenos* – and some way beyond.

It is refreshing to read such an unashamed Platonist, who takes it for granted that the arts exist to give us beauty, because beauty nourishes the soul and recalls it to its homeland. If this is the case, the perpetrators and admirers of the ugly and vulgar, the neurotic and the meaningless, are not showing their freedom and modernity so much as betraying their bondage to a collective sickness of the soul. Anyone who agrees with this will find here an arsenal of powerful aphorisms. In culture as a whole, P.B. unfashionably admires elegance and the refinement of taste and manners, as providing at least a basis for developing spiritual sensibilities. Likewise he values the traditional arts and crafts as part of a spiritual path. But above these is the inspired and inspiring

originality that comes from a genuine experience of illumination, necessarily supported by the artist's technique and intellect.

Although the path of beauty can often serve as a substitute for religion, P.B. holds that art can never be the ultimate goal, because it does not demand moral purification or the transcendence of the ego. And since the arts, by definition, belong to the world of the senses, 'none of these has ever evoked the Real. For that everything else must be banished – only the Void, Silence, and Stillness may Be; nothing to see or touch.' So both art and religious devotion are but preludes to mysticism – and mysticism, in turn, to what P.B. calls 'philosophy'.

P.B.'s responses to specific arts and artists are unconditioned by any obligation to school, editor or critic, only by his allegiance to philosophy. 'I am not alone', he says, referring to Plato, 'in regarding the mystical deliverances of poets with special caution. Quite unconsciously, and because they are carried away by emotion, their sense of truth becomes impaired, their capacity for judgement imperilled. Moreover, poetry is concerned with personal feelings; prose can ascend higher and express the impersonal and the universal.' His observations on art and architecture, theatre and cinema, ballet and music are always finely perceptive of their effects on the soul: the kind of criticism, in other words, that no one can get away with in the media today. In many respects P.B.'s aesthetic is the same as A. K. Coomaraswamy's, but it is less encrusted with learning, more sympathetic to the possibilities of the twentieth century, and so simple and direct in expression that no reader can miss following his point to the end.

The other category included with *The Arts in Culture*, 'Human Experience', is about carrying the Quest into practical life, with all its suffering and opportunity. It is a book of sublime practical wisdom, setting out the larger context within which the arts should function. But if P.B.'s previsions of 'World Crisis' are true, we may not be able to indulge in them much longer.

Joscelyn Godwin

Two Women Poets

E. J. SCOVELL: *Collected Poems*. Carcanet, 1988, 241 pp, £16.95.

ANNE RIDLER: *New & Selected Poems*. Faber, 1988, 101 pp, £10.95, h/b. £4.95 p/b.

The women whose work is considered here possess distinct, individual voices and neither of them, I imagine, would care to be lumped together as 'women poets', as though there were only one genre of verse available to the female sex.

However, each of them reveals a facet of that mysterious response to their poetic vocation which is clearly feminine in nature. E. J. Scovell's collection spans a whole lifetime and hers, perhaps, is the more distinctly feminine. Her

verse reveals the eternal transubstantiation of physical perception into imaginal archetype, of temporal circumstance into timeless response. The course of her life could be instantly reconstructed by reference to her poetry. For her, moments of eternal fusion are forever captured in the attitude of memory, as here, where she records the immanence within her baby:

Only for a moment your cavernous human brow
Will dwell in the world of sense as naturally as now,
Beautiful with no meaning, but that it commands
Those to love, who hold you in their hands.

(‘A Baby’s Head’)

But this is not verse of domestic still life, rather it derives from that attention to the fusion of inner and outer life which all women will recognize, but which few trouble to record as clearly as here. She excels in exactitude of description. Her verse is often syllabically crowded and unfashionably loose in the line, but this style perfectly reflects her own interior world of perception. It is interesting to read her translations of the Italian poet, Giovanni Pascoli, and compare them with her own work. Pascoli’s verse is translated with surety and skill, and with considerably more confidence than she allows her own poetry. It is as though the lamp-bearer became the torch that she carried, and that such verve and empowerment were not to be appropriated for her own use:

With tears I ask: Why does it not sing,
The treble comb, as it did long ago?
Gentle, she echoes me, wondering:
Why does it not sing?
And: O my love – says, weeping, weeping –
Have they not told you? Do you not know?
I have no life now but in your keeping.

(‘The Weaver’)

Anne Ridler’s verse, on the other hand, is crisp and literate. Her poem on Lyme Regis shows her sure and biting use of consonants, so different from E. J. Scovell’s gentle assonance:

The Cobb curves like a fossil, ridged and gray,
That sickle hook, which once held navies in its crook,
Still shields the town, and reaps the golden stalks
That spring in the wave . . .

She too, as mother and poet, speaks of her child:

Strong vessel of peace, and plenty promised,
Into whose unsounded depths I pour
This alien power:

Frail vessel, launched with a shawl for sail,
 Whose guiding spirit keeps his needle-quivering
 Poise between trust and terror . . .

(‘Choosing a Name’)

Anne Ridler is the mistress of half-rhyme and of a subtle, pointed irony which rises quirkily from her writing. She shows a consistent self-possession and confidence in her work. She deserves a place among the foremost of her peers.

Caitlin Matthews

A Major Oeuvre

RAJA RAO: *The Chessmaster and his Moves*. Vision Books, New Delhi, 275 rupees.

The 708 closely printed pages of *The Chessmaster and his Moves* are but the first part of a trilogy whose next two volumes the author, as he approaches his eightieth year, is already revising. We rejoice that the committee of the prestigious Neustadt International Award has singled out this work of India's great novelist and metaphysician rather than some one or another of those Indian novels popular in the West for the very reason that they reflect Western not Indian values. All the same there is no more intellectually demanding writer than Raja Rao, and readers, whether in India or in the West, who possess the requisite knowledge in the many fields in which his thought moves with such ease, must be few. Of course the book is too diffuse and irrelevant trivia abound; the author is less a literary artist than a thinker on many levels. He weaves together many strands of intellectual learning, spiritual tradition, Indian and Western world-history of the years following the Second World War. Raja Rao first went to France at the age of nineteen, there to study literature and philosophy at the University of Avignon and the Sorbonne, published his first stories in French and in English, and subsequently lived for many years in France. Parmenides, Aristotle and Aquinas are as familiar to him as the Upanishads and India's illustrious philosophers of the last hundred years, from Ramakrishna and Vivekananda to Sri Aurobindo, as are the mathematical theories of Einstein, Hardy, and Ramanujan. He quotes freely in many languages, Sanskrit and Hindi, French, Provençal and Latin. Racine, Balzac, Mallarmé, Guénon and Gurdjieff, Sartre and Camus he cites with equal ease. A long 'letter' to André Malraux, Minister for Culture under de Gaulle, is a work of virtuosity – indeed all the leading ideas of the decade which saw the golden era of de Gaulle's

Presidency in France and the beginnings of Indian Independence are the background against which his characters play their parts.

The scene of the novel is for the most part laid in Paris (with excursions to London and to India). Malraux was restoring and cleaning the city's buildings; there were heroes and heroines of the *Résistance*, and unhealed wounds of survivors of the Holocaust. These and many other themes are woven into a work which must be seen not as a period-piece but as an *œuvre* which evaluates, situates, a period, on many levels. Nor is this a novel of fictionalized history, or of philosophy, but a major work of the imagination, grounded in metaphysical thought, in which India's age-old wisdom is brought to bear on the prestigious West. Raja Rao's confrontation of Indian and Western modes of thought and feeling is at the highest level of both cultures. His is rather a metaphysical than a poetic mind. His hero is a mathematician, whose abstract search for 'truth absolute' is counterbalanced by a tender and reverent – and deeply Indian – insight into woman – and women – both on the erotic and spiritual planes. Nor does any writer so well understand the underlying simplicities of India's closely woven texture of tradition – of *dharma* – which binds together – or once bound together – a whole society, from the princely caste to the village women of *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao's first novel. It is fitting that it is India that in this major commentary passes its penultimate judgment on our time; for Raja Rao sees India – as he has stated fully in his earlier novel, *The Serpent and the Rope* – not, in the same sense as England or France, a country, but as a state of mind, a universal human potential representing the farthest reach of the human spirit: the India of the Imagination is there for all who can attain it.

Yet in this ambitious study of ideas the author works strictly within the terms of the novel, with the interplay of characters on one another, at many levels. His central character, Sivarama Shastri – a brahmin without the brahmin's traditional religious faith but with all the brahmin's zeal for ultimate truth – is working in Paris at the Institut International de Mathématique Pure where, one is given to understand, he is held in high regard. He venerates especially the Indian mathematician, Ramanujan, (who died young, in Cambridge.) Much of the book concerns Sivarama's speculations on the wider implications for our respective civilizations of the Indian contribution to mathematics – the concept of zero – a non-spatial atemporal concept, (of which the Buddha's theme of nirvana is one expression) – as against the Western theory of 'infinity' which multiplies times and places and objects endlessly – perhaps René Guénon's 'reign of quantity'. Siva, his brahmin sense of intellectual mastery notwithstanding, is neither happy nor serene; whatever ultimate his zero represents it is not the *ananda* – bliss – of those Indian sages his father (retired from his service of the British Raj) has gone to seek out in their forest retreats above Rishikesh. Indeed the reader is left with the chilling doubt as to whether Siva's zero be not a nihil. (Is it significant that his name is that of India's god who 'dances in the crematorium'?)

Much like the hero of *The Serpent and the Rope* Siva is held to India by his deep love for a Rajput princess, married, and, in terms of the world, inaccessible. Neither he nor she would dream of destroying the structure of relationships and conventions that hold them apart. Raja Rao's writings illustrate and support Yeats's lines,

How but in custom and in ceremony
Are innocence and beauty born?

Is it not precisely the firm lines drawn by the code that permit as it were an inner freedom on a vertical (spiritual) axis? The natural life is less, but the soul more free within a culture which assumes spirit's immortality, and many lifetimes on each soul's inner pilgrimage.

Old lovers yet may have
All that time denied

But Sivarama's quest for ultimates could not in its nature permit him any comfort from the prolongation of an illusory world through many lives. No half-way reunions in future lives could add to – or take away from – that absolute, that zero, their love must aspire to here and now, if at all. The zero theme informs the human situation of Princess Jayalakshmi's likely death. (She has scarcely arrived in England but she has to undergo an operation for a brain-tumour). Yet is Siva's truth perhaps but a half-truth to the heart, which has other 'reasons'?

The other main Indian character is Siva's loveable, innocent, spontaneous sister, Uma, whose life is a way rather of being than of knowing. She comes to Paris to consult a gynaecologist in the hope that her sterility may be cured. On the Western side are Suzanne, a young actress at the Comédie Française, Siva's mistress; his mistress's 'best friend', a half Greek communist heroine of the *résistance*, married to a rather coarse womanizing voyeur of a doctor of mixed Algerian origin; a Jewish philologist, who has survived the holocaust, in love with Suzanne. The period occupied by the narrative (if such it can be called) is but a few weeks, and ends with Princess Jaya flying away to India. Nothing is resolved, nothing very much has 'happened', though much has been thought and felt and experienced, in all life's many dimensions. It is for the reader to wonder what outcome there will be, if any, for those pawns in the power of an unknown and unknowable player of the game of life. The moves of the Chessmaster – the invisible Self – are the more unpredictable since it is we ourselves who move his pieces.

No outline of a 'plot' can begin to suggest the immense richness of texture of this book. Metaphysical and mathematical speculations merge into detailed digressions, stories from Breton folk-lore or the Mahabharata, or into the inexhaustible trivia of life, the habits of Siva's concierge or Uma's Muslim chauffeur, or Tiger the watch-dog, or a tiger-hunt, an endless ramification of

human paths that cross and part throughout world-without-end times and places. There is a running commentary on world-affairs; a positively Platonic dialogue between Siva and the exiled Algerian freedom-fighter Abd'el Krim, in which Mahatma Gandhi's warfare of non-violence is contrasted with the Muslim 'holy war'; and an even more remarkable confrontation of the Hindu world-view with the Jewish – the two religious traditions that have respectively determined two world civilizations. All the seemingly unstructured diversity of life is incorporated into this new *comédie humaine*.

We are made to remember in reading Raja Rao's novels that in India the erotic is held sacred, whereas within Christendom it has never been so regarded, and secular 'permissiveness' is quite another thing from the Indian understanding that sexuality has a 'vertical' – spiritual and metaphysical – dimension. The chaste and enduring bond between Siva and his Rajput princess is, paradoxically by Western standards, the enduring, abiding reality which lifts the lovers beyond mutability and death itself. It is not a renunciatory love, in the Christian sense, since nothing is 'renounced'; nor is it the death-bent Wagnerian love of Tristan and Isolde, prototype of the romantic cult. The possibilities of personal relationship are more circumscribed and determined by a cultural context than the individualistic West is prepared to recognize. It is not that Sivarama loves a particular princess – he could love only in an Indian context in that way. Such a relationship is inconceivable within terms of a materialist view of man. But 'l'amour' too has its culture, if not as a spiritual path, at all events as an art of civilization, a mode of feeling more akin to music, painting and poetry than to the crude modern Anglo-American idea of 'having sex', something understood in terms of mere physiology – a 'drive', or 'chemistry' as it is said, unless a more obscene word be used, indicating the dishonour in which the creative act is held in the West.

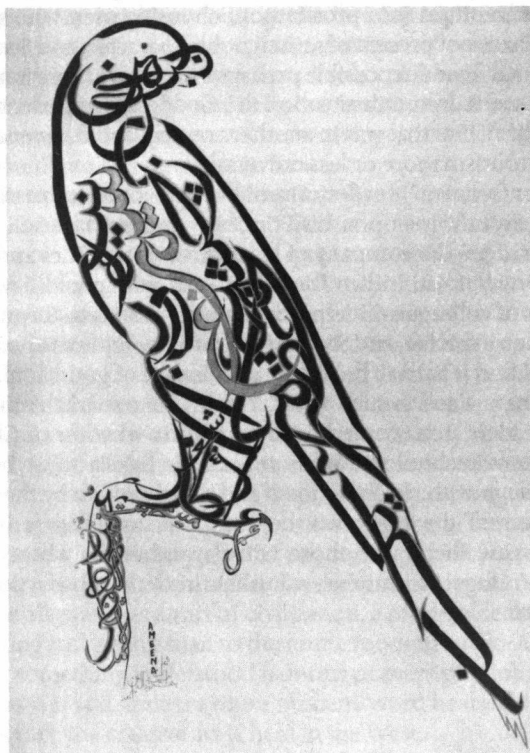
The cultured Parisian bohemia in which Sivarama moves has no equivalent elsewhere – after all 'Notre Dame de Paris' is a woman and signifies surely an enduring feminine element of refinement in French culture. Lovers walk hand in hand in the Jardin de Luxembourg; make love ('faire l'amour') in some atelier on the Sième étage, the young *comédienne* rising from her lover's embrace to rehearse her part in *Andromaque*, or a new play by Sartre, or to take coffee at the Café de Flore where Sartre himself, or the philosopher Merleau-Ponty might sit at an adjacent table – a Paris where little has changed since Balzac. In this society (Paris has always been intellectually cosmopolitan) Sivarama finds his natural place in a world not bound by conventional values but where artists and writers, students and scholars, seek, in diverse ways, their truth, or truths. Suzanne's quest has brought her into the 'work' of Gurdjieff; her mother is a follower of René Guénon, in terms of whose theories she sees Siva as a living embodiment of India's 'sacred tradition'!

Yet l'amour is likely to end in tears or in marriage, and for that Siva is unprepared. He is meanwhile seduced by Mireille, Suzanne's a-moral friend,

for whom sex is 'experience', and also generosity: women of the *Résistance* gave themselves to men about to die. Now married with three children she nevertheless adventures into prostitution, choosing men who seem to need consolation. She is not presented as an ignoble character; and Siva experiences with her that total freedom possible perhaps only where there is no personal or social commitment. In such a situation the Goddess is experienced, so to say, 'toute entière'. Eliot's 'But that was in another country, and the wench is dead' is a kind of erotic tourism more or less universal.

The Western (woman?) reader cannot but feel some embarrassment at the way in which Siva thrusts upon his Princess – and perhaps still worse on his unsuspecting sister – the company of his mistresses as guides and chaperones. Had he no conventional Indian friends in Paris who could have played that part? Or wives of colleagues? It is perhaps a male fantasy to throw together the different women in his life, and Siva suffers from – or rejoices in – a good deal of sexual vanity. I find it hard to believe that an Indian of good family in the early 1950's would have acted in such a way. Yet this is a remarkable, a major work. To Western readers, accustomed to the comforts whether of Christianity, or those of modern technology, Siva's *recherche de l'absolu* must be a daunting adventure, though with much richness and delight of life by the way. But few Western readers of the book will be equipped to follow a brahmin who breathes with ease there, into those Himalayan heights where the Goddess herself, only 'refuge of sinners', vanishes into the abstraction of India's mysterious zero.

Kathleen Raine



The Parrot's Excuse

I have no desire to see this simurgh
One drop from the Khiza's stream is all I need

Calligraphic painting by Ameena Ahmed Ahuja

Notes on Contributors

Ameena Ahmed Ahuja. Born in India, her father Indian her mother English. Her childhood spent in Delhi and London, read Philosophy at London University, Ph.D in comparative Philology from Moscow University, studied painting at Camberwell School of Art, the Slade School of Art and the Courtauld Institute. Her work is widely exhibited in India, and also shown in London, Tokio, New York, Moscow and Caracas, and represented in both public and private collections in New York, the Gulf States, Moscow, Jordan and India.

Richard Baez studied Philosophy, Psychology and Education in Buenos Aires, Argentina where he received a Masters degree in 1975. Since then he has specialized in Oriental philosophies and has published the following works: *Hacia una Ecoligia Metafisica* (Buenos Aires, 1977), *Introduction to Oriental Metaphysics* (Sydney, 1983) and *The Soul Journey after Life* (Sydney, 1984). He is also the author of several essays on various aspects of traditional wisdom. He has lectured extensively in several countries and from 1980 until 1985 has been the co-director of the HAWA Centre of Philosophical Studies in Sydney. He is now living and lecturing in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Robert Bly, born 1926, was educated at Harvard and the University of Iowa, but turned his back on the Academic world in order to affirm human and spiritual values that have no part in contemporary Academia. Founded The Sixties Press, and in his magazine *The Sixties* has entered the Great Battle against the cerebral and unimaginative world of American verse and criticism. He is a prolific translator and his 'versions' include poems by Kabir, Neruda, Rilke, Trakl, Ekelöf, Lagerlöf, Ibsen, Ibn Hazu, and the great South American poets of this century. He has published only two volumes of his own verse, *In the Snowy Fields* and *Light Around the Body*.

John Carey is a lecturer in the Department of Celtic at Harvard University. Besides his articles in *Temenos*, he has contributed to various journals specializing in folklore and Celtic studies.

William C. Chittick teaches religious studies at the State University of New York at Stow Brook. Among his published books are *A Shi'ite Anthology*, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* and *The Psalms of Islam*.

Henry Corbin: The following works by the late Henry Corbin, the great Iranian scholar, himself worthy to be included within the Sufi tradition on which he has written with learning and insight, are at present available in English translations: *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, (Bollingen Series, LXVI), New York, 1960, tr. W. R. Trask. (Reprint ed: Spring Books, Dallas, 1980). *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, (Bollingen Series, XCI), Princeton, 1969, tr. Ralph Manheim. *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran*, (Bollingen Series, XCI:2), Princeton, 1977, tr. N. Pearson. *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, Shambhala Press, Boulder and London, 1978, tr. N. Pearson. *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, Kegan Paul International in association with Islamic Publications (Islamic Texts and Contexts Series, The Institute of Ismaili Studies), London, 1983, tr. R. Manheim and J. Morris. *Temple and Contemplation* (Tr. Philip Sherrard) Kegan Paul International in association with Islamic Publications London, 1986.

A complete Bibliography of the writings of Henry Corbin is to be found in Henry Corbin, *Les Cahiers de l'Herne*, Paris, 1981.

Recently published in France: *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (Gallimard, Collection Folio/Essais) (1986) *L'alchimie comme art hiératique* (L'Herne, Bibliothèque des mythes et des religions) (1986) and *Sohravardi's La Livre de la Sagesse Orientale* (Verdier, 1987). *Le livre des pénétrations métaphysiques*. Molla Sadra Shirazi, tr. Henry Corbin (Verdier, 1988).

Keith Critchlow is a geometer who emphasizes the sacred and its applications in architecture. His published works include: *Time Stands Still*, *A New Light on Megalithic Science*, *Order in Space*, *Islamic Patterns*, *The Soul as Sphere and Androgyne*, *Tradition Proportion and Architecture*. Co-founder of *Temenos*, and of *Kairos*, a Society whose object is 'to investigate, study, record and promote traditional values of Science and Art'. Teaches Islamic art at the Royal College of Art.

Stephen Cross is a student of Indian traditions and a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society. He has written and produced films for the BBC and other organizations on the poets T. S. Eliot and W. B. Yeats, the painters Odilon Redon and Cecil Collins, and a series on *The Traditional Wisdom of Islam*. He now lives in Australia.

Gilbert Durand: was founder-director of the *Centre de Recherche sur l'Imaginaire* at the Université de Savoie, and is general editor of *L'Isle Verte*, a series of books on the Imagination (published by Berg International) which includes his own *Figures Mythiques et Visages de l'Oeuvre*, and *Science de l'Homme et Tradition*. At the end of the Second World War he studied at the Sorbonne under Gaston Bachelard, and was later closely associated with Henry Corbin in his Université St Jean de Jérusalem, and a frequent lecturer at the Eranos conferences at Ascona.

Joscelyn Godwin, Professor of Music at Colgate University (New York State), author of books on Robert Fludd, Athanasius Kircher, *Mystery Religions in the Ancient World* (Thames and Hudson). Forthcoming books include: *Cosmic Music: Three Approaches to the Musical Interpretation of Reality* (Lindisfarne Press); *Music, Mysticism and Magic: A Sourcebook* (Routledge and Kegan Paul); *Harmonies of Heaven and Earth* (Thames and Hudson), and an edition of Michael Maier's *Atalanta Furiens* (Magnum Opus Hermetic Sourcebooks).

Vinayak Krishna Gokak, born 1909. Retired Professor, Director, Vice-chancellor. Ex-President of the Indian Literary Akademi. Author of *In Life's Temple* (poems), *An Integral View of Poetry* (Abhinav), *Coleridge's Aesthetics* (Abhinav), *Narahari Prophet of New India* (novel, Georgia U.S.A.), *Pathways to the Unity of Indian Literature* (forthcoming) etc.

Jonathan Griffin is the translator and introducer of the recently reissued Penguin edition of Fernando Pessoa, and has translated from many other Portuguese poets, mostly modern. He has been honoured by the President of Portugal with a Knighthood of the Order of St. James of the Sword.

The books of his original poems are *The Oath*, *In Time of Crowding*, *In This Transparent Forest*, *Outsizing the Howling*, *The Fact of Music* and *Commonsense of the Senses*. In the U.S.A. the National Poetry Foundation will shortly be publishing his *Collected Poems*.

Wilson Harris, born 1921 New Amsterdam, British Guiana (now Guyana), South America. As a young man led many survey and engineering expeditions into the heart of the Guiana rainforests and savannahs. Has lived in England since 1959. His wife Margaret, a lyricist and radio dramatist, was born in Edinburgh. His novels include *The Guyana Quartet*, *Heartland*, *Tumatumari*, *The Sleepers of Roraima*, *Black Marsden*, *Carnival* and *The Infinite Rehearsal*. *Carnival* was awarded The Guyana Prize for Fiction (1987). Hon.D.Litt. University of the West Indies (1984). Hon.D.Litt. University of Kent at Canterbury (1988).

Brian Merrikin Hill, a former headmaster, is now engaged in writing and translating Pierre Emmanuel and Saint-Pol-Roux. His own poems have appeared in reviews since 1942. Recent publications are *Wakeful in the Sleep of Time* (Taxus Press 1984), *Local History*, poems, (Littlewood Press 1985) and *The Unifying Prism*, Selected Poems of Saint-Pol-Roux, (Mammon Press 1986). It is hoped that *The European Letters* and a collection of translations from Pierre Emmanuel will appear soon. He edits *Pennine Platform*, a poetry review now in its twentieth year.

Leonard Lewisohn lived in Shiraz, Iran for five years studying Persian culture and literature. He has translated many books from Persian, including *Truths of*

Love, *Spiritual Poverty in Sufism, Sufi Women, and Sufi Symbolism I*, all by Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh. He completed his Ph.D. thesis on the Persian poetry of Maghrebi in 1988 at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

Grevel Lindop, born Liverpool, 1948, read English at Wadham College, Oxford. Now senior lecturer in English Literature at Manchester University, where he teaches a special course on Blake. Publications: *Fool's Paradise* (Poems, Carcanet New Press, 1977), *The Opium Eater: A Life of Thomas De Quincey* (Dent, 1981), *A selection of De Quincey* (World's Classics Series 1985).

Jean MacVean, poet, radio playwright, novelist. Her novel *The Intermediaries* was based on Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*. Edited Thomas Blackburn's *Last Poems*. Malory enthusiast.

Caitlín Matthews is a writer, singer and harpist. She was educated at Webber-Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art and her publications include a two-volume study of the British mythic cycle of *The Mabinogion: Mabon and the Mysteries of Britain and Arthur and the Sovereignty of Britain* (Arkana, 1987 and 1989 forthcoming). She also wrote a two-volume history of the Western Esoteric Tradition, *The Western Way* (Arkana, 1985, 1986) with John Matthews, her partner in the mythic and Arthurian fields. With him she has also written *The Aquarian Guide to British and Irish Mythology* (Aquarian, forthcoming) and designed with him, *The Arthurian Tarot* (Aquarian, 1990, forthcoming). She has published essays, stories and poetry in many journals.

John Matthews, born 1948. He has written widely in the field of Arthurian Literature, specializing in the Grail legends, on which he has produced three books: *The Grail, Quest for the Eternal* (Thames & Hudson, 1981), *At the Table of the Grail* (Arkana, 1987) and *The Grail Seeker's Companion* (written with Marian Green, Aquarian Press, 1986). He has also written a volume of poetry, *Merlin in Calydon* (Bran's Head, 1981) and numerous short stories on Arthurian and related themes. His latest book, *Warriors of Arthur*, presents the Dark Age Arthur in an uniquely imaginative way. (With Bob Stewart, Blandford Press, 1987.) A sequel to this book, *The Quest For Legendary Britain*, is in preparation.

John Michell is the author of some sixteen books, the best known being *View Over Atlantis*, *City of Revelation*, and *The Dimensions of Paradise* (reviewed on p. 288) and other works on ancient science and learning, and their relevance today. Another side of his versatile talent is the humorous melancholy of his *Megalithomania*, *Life of Blight*, *Eccentric Lives* and *Peculiar Notions*, on the careers of some favourite madcap thinkers. Into this category falls his latest publication *Euphonics*, a Poet's Dictionary of Sounds.

Josef Pieper is Professor of Philosophy in the Department of Philosophy and Anthropology in the University of Münster, has spent time as a visiting professor at Notre Dame and Stanford Universities in the USA and also in Canada, Japan and India. His works have been translated into many languages. His best known works include a *Guide to Thomas Aquinas*, an essay on Plato's *Phaedrus* (*Enthusiasm and the Divine Madness*) and *Leisure the Basis of Culture*. The third and concluding volume of an autobiography has just appeared (in German) and 'Was heisst "Sakrale"?"

Patrick Pye, native of Dublin, painter, stained glass artist and etcher. Windows and paintings in churches throughout Ireland and in St. Thomas More's, Dulwich. Publication: *Apples and Angels* (Veritas, 1981). Forthcoming: *The Time Gatherer*.

William Radice is best known for his translation of *Selected Poems of Tagore*, published by Penguin in 1985 (rev. 1987). He has also published three books of verse, *Eight Sections* (1974), *Strivings* (1980) and *Louring Skies* (1985); a book of Bengali children's stories, *The Stupid Tiger and Other Tales* (1981, reissued 1988); and co-edited with Barbara Reynolds *The Translator's Art, Essays in Honour of Betty Radice* (Penguin, 1987). He lectures in Bengali at SOAS, London. With the Indian musician Param Vir he is working on an opera (already performed in Delhi in a version for children) on the childhood of Krishna, and other musical projects. His collection of short stories by Tagore will shortly be published and a new book of his own poems is in preparation.

Kathleen Raine, poet, Blake scholar, etc. Her most recent publications are *Yeats the Initiate* (Dolmen Press, Dublin, George Allen and Unwin (London) and a new edition of her critical essays, *Defending Ancient Springs* (Golgonooza Press in conjunction with Lindisfarne Press, U.S.A. 1967), the third volume of her autobiography, *The Lion's Mouth* (French translation by Pierre Leyris, Mercure de France). *Selected Poems* and *The Presence* (poems) (1987 Golgonooza Press and Lindisfarne Press) and a further collection of her papers is forthcoming. Her *Selected Poems* are forthcoming in Italian translation by Francesca Romana Paci (Longanesi). An account of her experiences of India, *India Seen Afar* will be published in 1989 (Green Books).

Jeremy Reed's most recent collection of poems is *Engaging Form* published by Jonathan Cape in July of this year. Amongst his books in print are *Selected Poems* from Penguin and a novel *Blue Rock* published by Cape. This year Peter Owen is to publish his essays *Madness: The Price of Poetry* and Cape his novel *Red Eclipse*. He was born in Jersey and lives in London.

James Roose-Evans, author of *Inner Journey, Outer Journey* (Rider) and *Experimental Theatre* (new revised edition 1989, Routledge), and seventh volume of the quest series, *The Adventures of Odd and Elsewhere*, published by Andre Deutsch in their new *Children's Classics* series. He is founder of the Hampstead Theatre, described in *The Sunday Times* as 'one of the chief creative directors of the British theatre'. He directed both in the West End and on Broadway his own award winning adaptation of Helene Hanff's *84 Charing Cross Road*. In 1988 he directed Sir John Gielgud in Hugh Whitmore's *The Best of Friends*, and in the autumn of 1989 will be directing Edwige Feuillere in the Paris production at the Theatre des Champs-Élysées. He is also to direct *The Tempest* in Japan in 1990. He is the founder and chairman of The Bleddfa Trust – A Centre for Caring and the Arts, in Mid-Wales. He has also edited *Darling Ma*, the letters of Joyce Grenfell to her mother (Hodder & Stoughton 1988) and written the entertainment *Re: Joyce!* which opened in the West End in September 1988.

Peter Russell, poet, translator, one-time editor of the *Poetry Review Nine*. Until the overthrow of the Shah he was teaching in association with the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy in Tehran. His most recent collection of poems, *All for the Wolves* was published by the Anvil Press in 1984. He is at present engaged in a translation of poems of Novalis. He was a friend of, and is an authority on, Ezra Pound.

Robin Skelton, Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Victoria, B.C.; he founded and for many years edited the *Malahat Review* from which he retired in 1983. He has published many volumes of verse and written a number of critical and scholarly books, mainly on J. M. Synge and other Irish subjects.

