TEMENOS


11

A REVIEW DEVOTED TO THE ARTS OF THE IMAGINATION
All manuscripts, correspondence and books for review should be addressed to the editorial office. Provision for return postage should accompany all manuscripts which will not otherwise be returned.
ARTICLES

Yasunari Takahashi  How to Present a Japanese Ghost  page  5
Jack Herbert  Poems  21
Wendell Berry  Sabbaths 1987  24
Angela Voss  The Renaissance Musician  31
Sachchitananda Vatsyayan  The Unmastered Lute  53
James Cowan  Letter from a Wild State  62
Translations from Dante  Jeremy Reed, Sam Milne and Tom Scott  71
Samuel Beckett  Poem  85
Suheil Bushrui  Samuel Beckett on the Word  86
Paul Davies  Twilight and Universal Vision: Samuel Beckett's Ill Seen, Ill Said  88
Keshav Malik  Poems  104
Brian Keeble  Images of the Unknown: Looking at Cecil Collins  113
Cecil Collins  Paintings reproduced in colour Between 128 & 129
Peter Russell  Poems  129
Grevel Lindop  Poems  130
Nirmal Verma  Kaya (Chapter from a novel, The Red Tin Roof)  132
Keith Critchlow  The Royal Statues of Chartres West Front  152
Akhtar Qamber  The Mirror Symbol in the Teachings and Writings of some Sufi Masters  163
Kapila Vatsyayan  Beginning a Spiritual Journey Toward Enlightenment  180
Peter Malekin  Imagination: The Reality of the Future  194
Jeremy Reed  The Azure: a study of Shelley's Blue Interworlds  205
Kathleen Raine  Poetry as Prophecy  223
## REVIEWS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noel Cobb</td>
<td><em>Technology's Dream of Abandoning Earth</em></td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noel Cobb</td>
<td><em>The Cosmos of Iron</em></td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathleen Raine</td>
<td><em>Entering the Waste Land</em></td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathleen Raine</td>
<td><em>Truth of the Imagination</em></td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur Versluis</td>
<td><em>A Land Transmuted</em></td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian Keeble</td>
<td><em>Eden in Doubt</em></td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean MacVean</td>
<td><em>Magical Mystery Tour</em></td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Matthews</td>
<td><em>News from the Otherworld</em></td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathleen Raine</td>
<td><em>Art in the New Age</em></td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Allitt</td>
<td><em>The Beauty of Great Art</em></td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy Reed</td>
<td><em>Depathologizing the Language</em></td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## BOOKS FROM INDIA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peter Malekin</td>
<td><em>Word and Meaning</em></td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keith Critchlow</td>
<td><em>Vedic Tradition</em></td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen Blacker</td>
<td><em>Indian Origins</em></td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Tavener</td>
<td><em>A Language of Music</em></td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piloo Nannavutty</td>
<td><em>A Miltonic Tyger</em></td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes on Contributors</td>
<td></td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgement. We gratefully thank the Connemara Trust for financial help in publishing this issue of Temenos.

Erratum We deeply regret the inadvertent but inexcusable discourtesy by which the name of the distinguished photographer Henri Stierlin, was incorrectly spelled in Henry Corbin's paper on Emblematic Cities, published in Temenos 10.


The tail-piece on p. 70 is by William Blake; an illustration to Stedman's Expedition to Surinam.
How to Present a Japanese Ghost: 
Touring Europe with a Noh Troupe 

YASUNARI TAKAHASHI 

In a paper which I gave at the International Beckett Conference in 1986 in Paris, I attempted a comparative analysis of Beckett's plays and Noh. This was followed by lectures on similar subjects in London, Stirling, and Cambridge, all of which finally resulted in the article 'The Ghost Trio: Beckett, Yeats, and Noh' published in The Cambridge Review (December 1986). It happened that the article caught the attention of Kathleen Raine, who invited me to take part in Temenos Conference 1988 in Dartington with a lecture/demonstration on Noh. Then started a long period of love's labour on both ends of the line; I was fortunately able to organize a superb troupe of three actors (including Hideo Kanze¹) and four musicians (a flute, two hand-drums, and a drum) who volunteered to join the project without fee; the end product was a tour of Warsaw, Vienna, London, Dartington, Oxford, Cambridge, and Norwich. How the truth of what Yeats called 'the fascination of what's difficult' was proved on the pulse of a scholar-critic turned a theatre manager will be of little interest, but a couple of episodes from our tour may serve for a starter before I go on to reproduce a version of my lecture notes.

Like Yeats's, our plays had to 'be set up in fifty ways'. An acting space had to be created ad hoc in accordance with the physical requirements of each venue. In Dartington, we performed in a sixteenth-century barn reformed into a theatre by the famous architect Corbusier, where the platform was too narrow to allow the indispensable hashigakari (a sort of corridor for entrance and exit) to be placed, as usual, to the left of the main stage, so that we had to lay the hashigakari carpet right at the back of it. Which, however, was a blessing in disguise, for we remembered as we worked on it that, in one of the oldest extant manuscripts illustrating a Noh production in the sixteenth century, hashigakari was shown exactly like that. The fixed structure of Noh stage as we know it today originated after the seventeenth century. We had a rare chance of testing how the old style worked, and it did.
Laying carpets as an extempore stage was always a delicate technical problem, but it was a joy to see the finished work: the empty space which had been merely bleak and untidy now looked permeated with serenity and order, a meaningful emptiness eager to be filled by some significant image. It was also interesting to observe how this transformation struck our European friends working as stage-hands; in fact it seemed that they came to have an even greater faith in the sacrosanctity of the stage than we did, so much so that they would shout in panic, forestalling the Japanese staff, at their fellow-countrymen who might inadvertently step on the carpet.

* * *

The origin of Noh is half lost in a mist of ancient history. What amounts to near certainty is that in the seventh century a crude form of performing art (sangaku) was brought over from China to Japan, a mixture of music, dance, singing, and acrobatics, without any dramatic or narrative structure. This, amalgamated with indigenous music and dance, came to be performed by groups of men attached to temples on religious occasions such as harvest rituals and other festivals. By the fourteenth century, the performing art called Noh (probably meaning ‘performance’) had become greatly popular in Kyoto, the then capital of the country. Strictly speaking, there were two schools (one was ‘Noh of dengaku’ and the other ‘Noh of sarugaku’), and there grew up fierce competitions between the two and inside each. Out of this ‘war of theatres’ emerged one victorious sarugaku company, based in Nara, and led by Kan’ami (1333-1384) who succeeded in creating a new form of musical drama by combining enticingly rhythmical dances, eventful narrative plots, lively conversations, and a degree of mimetic acting. One could have confidently said, ‘Enfin vint Kan’ ami’, and he would have surely monopolized the title of the founder of Noh as art, had he not been blessed with the son Zeami (1364-1443?) who proved to be a greater genius.

Zeami’s achievements were manifold. Sociologically, he raised the status of Noh actors almost out of recognition. This he was able to do through the patronage of the then Shogun Yoshimitsu Ashikaga (who built the famous Golden Temple), who, attending for the first time a production of Kan’ami’s company, was instantly enthralled by the beauty and skill of the eleven-year-old boy actor Zeami. The great
aesthete-statesman's fascination was such that one of the leading conservative aristocrats is known to have privately criticized the lord. To the eye of such people, acting was 'a beggar's job' and actors were no better than 'slaves of the temple'. Though Zeami's life itself ended in ignominy (he apparently died in exile, we do not know when or how), it was he who paved the way for the great respect which Noh and its actors were to enjoy in later history.

Zeami was a playwright with more than fifty plays (including adaptations of his father's work) to his credit; he was a composer, a choreographer, a director, and the leading actor of his company, besides being an owner-producer fighting for survival in a tough competition. Last but not least, he is the greatest theatre critic Japan has ever produced, arguably among the greatest in the world, whose manner and matter can range from wonderfully practical advices to breathtakingly poetic or metaphysical meditations. It may be said without exaggeration that he did far more jobs, single-handed, than did Shakespeare or Molière.

But we must concentrate on the most important of his achievements: the bringing to perfection of a particular genre of Noh drama. In the whole Noh repertory comprising about 240 plays, this type of play, classified as 'mugen-Noh', constitutes the core both quantitatively and qualitatively. 'Mu' means dream, and 'gen' vision: mugen-Noh is essentially about a dream, about a vision, about a ghost. It is a theatrical device whereby the audience is made to encounter a bodily manifestation of some profound desire. Our programme, with excerpts from three plays, was aimed at demonstrating the rich variety with which Noh dramatists present various ghosts.

The first play is entitled Izutsu, a typical mugen-Noh, generally considered one of Zeami's masterpieces. A simple wooden well-curb ('izutsu') is the only prop visible on the stage, apart from a tall Japanese pampas-grass attached to its corner which, being a popular symbol of autumn in Japan, seems to set the tone before the drama opens. Here is the plot:

A travelling priest (waki, a supporting character) visits the ruins of the famous poet Narihira's tomb, the same site where the poet used to live with his wife long ago. While the priest is praying for their souls, a
Izutsu

Photo: Ken Yoshikoshi
village woman (first shite, protagonist in the first part of the play) enters and draws water from the well to do memorial service for the dead. She tells the priest about the couple in such great detail that he is prompted to ask who she is. She confesses that she is none other than the poet's wife, upon which she disappears. After an interval during which the priest falls asleep, she reappears as second shite, her mask unchanged, but wearing a male robe and hat, her husband's relics. She dances reminiscently, looking down into the well at one moment, looking up at the autumnal moon at another. As the morning sky begins to whiten, the priest wakes up to find the ghost gone.

That is a mere skeleton of a narrative, which you might feel like forgetting about in order to be absorbed by the visual and the auditory. But that is not how it should be. Without a narrative framework, the visual and the auditory would not be what they are, and without a full understanding of the narrative building up of the emotion, the culminating moment of mugen-Noh, i.e. the dance in the second part, would lose half of its impact on the audience. The well-curb, for instance, is the focal point of the dramatic action in Izutsu. It transpires during the first part that the poet's wife used to play as a child with her future husband beside this well, enjoying their reflections in the water-mirror. It was also here that, meeting each other after more than ten years (she was then nineteen years old, as she herself tells with a pun on the number and the word 'izutsu'), they vowed love and marriage; in fact, the poems they exchanged then, with ingenious references to the spot, became so well known that people would call her 'the woman of the well-curb'. Their marriage was not apparently one of unalloyed happiness, for the husband at one time had a liaison with another woman, but the heroine waited with wise patience at home, beside this well, and finally regained his love. All this is narrated by first shite (assisted by the chorus), a ghost of a woman who has been dead two hundred years. The telescoping, or the fluidity, of time-scheme is pretty radical in contrast to the remarkable persistence of the physical object, a well-curb.

The well-curb becomes supremely significant in the second part when second shite stops dancing to look down into it, or, to put it another way, when the audience are urged to see in their mind's eye what she must be seeing down there with her physical eye: the same androgynous figure, of course, that the audience are looking at on the
stage. The ambiguity, inherent in any mirror-imagery, is complicated here not only by the double image of man-woman but also by the very process of transformation that has brought it about. The lines she chants are meant to explain how it happened: 'The robe of my dear dead husband touched me, / And lo! what a shame, / I, having possessed my man, find myself / Dancing a dance of possession…'

But the distinction between subject and object, active and passive, is characteristically blurred: is it not that the robe touched her as much as that she touched it? Logically, she first, intending to don the robe, touched it, which then touched her; but then what was it that moved her to touch it, in the beginning? And who is touching whom, finally? The same goes for the 'dance of possession': it seems impossible to be sure which has possessed which.

It is probably in the nature of any profound erotic desire that it annihilates the rational demarcation of subject/object, active/passive, and self/other which upholds the everyday world. True union with the beloved is a goal unattainable in this world. The ghostly embrace of Heathcliff and Catherine is one instance of achievement. Here a medieval Japanese play presents a ghost of a woman who has been waiting for her lover ever since her adolescence, as a girl, as a wife, as an old widow, and now as a ghost; it focuses on the moment when her desire, extending well beyond the grave and accumulated over the vast expanse of time, finally culminates in a vision of union, albeit in the form of strange transvestism and watery reflection.

To make the matter more complicated, there is an extra-textual theatrical fact, i.e. that it is a male actor who impersonates this woman who, donning a male costume and looking at a mirror, believes the image to be her lover. Indeed, far from making any attempt to conceal the fact, Noh makes the male actor's chin protrude prominently from under the female mask, as if aiming at a sort of alienation effect. This more than equals the complexity of Rosalind's disguise in As You Like It, where it is also to do with the interaction of theatrical illusion and fact, the question of histrionic imagination on the part of both actor and audience, but where, after all, disguise is a matter of conscious choice and complication is rationally explicable, no matter how intricate. Here in Izutsu, what is at stake is something at a deeper level, a subversion of clear-cut distinctions about gender, subject, identity, time, and reality. With all our awareness of the mannish chin under
the mask, we are face to face not with a mere disguise but with a possession, a metamorphosis, a magical sublimation of desire.

We shall realize, as we watch the heroine dance in the second part of the play, that it is only by dancing like that that her desire is to be sublimated. Or, perhaps we had better not be too sure, for the ending is deliberately vague. Whether the ghost has been finally liberated from the hell of unquenched fire of longing, or whether it is her unalterable fate to go on yearning, revisiting the well-curb, and recounting her story to a traveller, is left to us to judge. All that we are told by the chorus at the end is that 'the day had dawned on the ruined temple, and the dream is broken', and all that we see is the stage that has returned to its original emptiness.

* * *

Our second play, Dojoji, is very different from the last in many ways. The author is not Zeami but (probably) his nephew Kanze Nobumitsu (1435–1519), and it is not a mugen-Noh in the strict sense of the word. Nevertheless, the fact that it has a ghost for protagonist, together with a two-part structure typical of mugen-Noh, will allow us to regard it as a variation of the genre established by Zeami.

The scene is set in Dojoji, a temple famously closed to women, where the restoration of a large bell destroyed a long time ago is about to be celebrated (the stage is dominated by a large bell hung high above: the only Noh play with such a spectacular prop). It is spring and the festive mood is heightened by cherry blossoms in full bloom. Ignoring the prohibition, there enters a woman (first shite), a female professional dancer; while dancing under the bell, she utters malediction on it and brings it down on her, i.e. she jumps into the falling bell and disappears from view. A priest (waki) then enters to tell an old story of a woman forsaken by her priest-lover, who, escaping from her pursuit, hid himself in a famous large bell of this temple; transformed now by her passion into a huge serpent, the woman rolled her body round and round the bell till it became burning hot and killed the man inside. After this narration, the priests haul up the fallen bell, discovering a horrendous figure (second shite) crouching with a demonic mask and wearing a costume with a pattern of silvery triangles which suggests a reptilian body. A fight ensues in which the priest at last manages to expel the ghost.
Dōjōji

A terrifying story; it ought to be enough to cure anyone of an illusion about the legendary virtues of Japanese women, their quiet modesty, courteous humility, etc. What concerns us, however, is the qualities of the three dances performed by the heroine, two prior to and one after her entry into the bell.

The first one, called ran-byōshi (distracted tempo), is an extraordinary tour de force, almost an ultimate experiment in slow dance, probably unprecedented in the history of dance the world over. Only the small hand-drum accompanies it, and it looks as if the dancer and the musician are engaged in a ‘tug-of-war’, pulling an invisible rope that ties them together. Everything seems to depend on the inner tension between them. So little happens outwardly, such as a knee bent or a toe raised to one cry-and-beat from the drummer which happens after an incredibly long silence, that you would either be struck by the mere bizarreness of it or else easily fall asleep — unless you care willingly to suspend your disbelief and identify with the heroine to the extent that you feel the tension of her sinews as if they were yours.
Of course, the tension is not merely physical; what she is undergoing is clearly a psychic process whereby she is beginning to will herself, as it were, towards a metamorphosis: a transformation into a personified passion of jealousy. It cannot be an easy process; the slowness of her dance is nothing but a sign of the enormity of the barrier she must overcome in order to relinquish her present form, to pass from a temporary incarnation as first shite (though that is already a ghostly form) to an ultimate incarnation as second shite (a full revelation of her passion).

Tempo suddenly changes, music becomes tempestuous, and the dance now is quick and hectic, such a contrast to the preceding one. Obviously, the protagonist has entered a second stage in the process of building up her emotional intensity. When the dance has reached an unbearable point is also when she has acquired enough psychic power to bring down the bell. Then, inside the bell, during the priest’s narration, she changes her costume. (In our light-travelling production, we have to do without the bell and shite gets transformed only partially concealed from the audience’s eye, but again there is reason to surmise that this might be closer to the way the play was originally performed).

Needless to say, the dance this time will differ from the others both narratively and choreographically. Whereas the two dances in the first part were monologue-like expressions of what was happening inside shite, this one is a representation of a battle between her and the priest, between a power of transgression and a containing order, between evil and good. And the dance, accompanied by a fully instrumented music, is not choreographed in a fixed sort of way. Shite and waki weave an improvised pattern of motions according to the changing balances of relationship with each other, though, of course, the ending is preordained.

*   *   *

The ghost of a woman who has waited; a quiet, passive, though complex, transformation. The ghost of a woman who cannot but be aggressive; a violent and grotesque metamorphosis. Now we come to a third play which will introduce another type of ghost, another quality of dance. The play is Toru, another typical mugen-Noh by Zeami.
A travelling priest (waki) is enjoying the view of a ruined palace in Kyoto when an old labourer (first shite) enters with a pair of buckets, apparently carrying sea-water to a salt-oven. This is odd enough to invite a question, for the place is far from any sea coast and there is no point in carrying sea-water to a non-existent salt-oven anyway. The old man explains that it was here in the garden of his palace that Lord Toru (died 895), renowned for his refined taste, built a replica of a famous scenic beauty of Shiogama (salt-oven), a salt-producing town on the northern sea coast of Japan; Toru went so far as to have sea-water carried all the way from the nearest sea coast every day to make salt here. The old man reminisces about the gorgeous festivities of music and dance held here, deploring the decay that seized the place soon after Toru's death. When the old man disappears, a villager enters to give a more detailed and objective account of Toru and his palace, and asks the priest to pray for the old man who must have been the ghost of Toru. The priest falls asleep, expecting to dream of him. The end of the first part.

To deepen the irony embodied by first shite, it may be helpful to supply some facts that do not surface in the text of the play. Lord Toru came from the imperial family, and it is believed by some scholars that he could have become Emperor if all things had gone well. He did become the equivalent of today's prime minister, but apparently it did not satisfy his whole being. It may be that he was by nature a man of aesthetic sensibility whom fate had wrongly marked for the world of politics. His passion for pleasures of arts turned him into a perfect aesthete who outdid William Beckford in building a replica of a whole scenery which he had never seen and hiring three thousand workers to maintain it. One can only wonder what profound frustration of political or other desires impelled him to such a folly, if one may so choose to call it. Whatever that may be, the sight of his ghost as an old man tottering under bucketfuls of sea water to maintain the ghostly palace is pathetic and ironical. We need to have this image clearly printed on our retina before we move on to the performance of the second part.

Who but Zeami could have conceived the transformation of first shite into second shite, of a decrepit labourer into a young and resplendent courtier dancing ecstatically? A breathtaking flash-back, a jerk backward to what he was several centuries ago. And yet this is also the time
HOW TO PRESENT A JAPANESE GHOST

Photo: Ken Yoshikoshi

Tōru
present; it is here and now that the ghost is dancing a dance of sublimation; he is preparing himself for a devoutly wished release from all his resentiments, all his frustrated desires. It is essential at this point to draw attention to the image of the moon or moonlight, which, having steeped the scene from the very beginning of the play, is growing more prominent in the words sung by the hero and the chorus. It has functioned throughout as that central unifying poetic symbol which deeply fascinated Yeats when he first read Noh in translation. Now, towards the very end, the chorus sings of 'the Capital of the Moon' for which the hero is joyously departing at last.

The great principle of traditional Japanese aesthetics consists in a triad-structure of jo (slow beginning)/ha (change of tempo and mood)/kyu (finish in quick tempo). After Izutsu (jo) and Dojoji (ha), there could not possibly be a more felicitous kyu than Toru’s gracefully speedy dance, which brings our programme to an end.

Discussions with the audience after the performances were always stimulating. I shall mention, by way of conclusion or epilogue, some of the thoughts prompted by questions asked on those occasions. Masks understandably attracted immediate interest. The young woman's mask (ko-omote) worn by shite in Izutsu is sometimes characterized as 'neutral' or 'expressionless', but I would rather consider it an expression of a state of 'trance' or 'near-trance', a state which is seemingly devoid of expression but actually tense with possibilities of possession and transformation. This view would seem to be more compatible with the general impression that the mask changes its expression with surprising subtlety and variety according to the angles from which the spectator sees it. That was why I gladly qualified my description of second shite's mask (chujo) in Toru as 'young and resplendent' at the suggestion of more than one spectators who felt in it an ambivalence of youth and middle-age, splendour and darkness. The longer you look at it, the more it seems to tell of bitterness and disillusionment if not of nihilism. Even the mask of Dojoji (hannya) for that matter might hint at a certain sadness behind terror, as some pointed out.

The theme of waiting emphasized in Izutsu inevitably provoked
Noh Masks of the Ili Family:
Hannya by Kawachi Ieshige.
17th century.

Noh Masks of the Ili Family:
Zō-no-onna by Kawachi Ieshige.
17th century.
comparisons with *Waiting for Godot*. People seemed to show more interest in differences than in similarities: Zeami’s faith in the purpose and possibility of waiting on the one hand and Beckett’s vision of futility on the other, the prevalence of folklore belief in ghosts in medieval Japan as compared with the ‘death of god’ in modern Europe, etc. One could perhaps try to be more precise. The impossibility of epiphany in *Godot* is, from the point of dramaturgy, due to the absence of two factors which are indispensable for the coming of the ghost in *Izutsu*: a place fraught with intense memories of the past, and a person with a mediumistic power to call forth the spirit of the place (the priest’s vestigial, though not positive, shamanic power is revealed in his passive waiting for a dream-vision). The scene of *Godot* is deliberately specified as a kind of ‘nowhere’, and Didi and Gogo are patently amnesiac and characteristically afraid of dream; they do have a certain sensitivity to hear voices of the dead in the air (‘They make a
noise like feathers. / Like leaves. / Like ashes'), but it only serves as a foil to set off their impotence in matters spiritual as well as worldly. No one would credit them with a vestige of shamanic potency. Nevertheless, with all these differences, I would stress the importance of the fact that the two of the world's greatest dramatists should have chosen the same theme and, between them, explored to the utmost the possibility of dramatic representation of human fate.

Another related question was: why do so many Noh plays take place in ruins? One could have talked about Japanese aesthetics of wabi and sabi which, predating the European romantic taste for Gothic ruins by several centuries, theorized about the beauty of the blank, the bleak, and the desolate. But the best way to respond seemed to me to point to Yeats's seminal article 'Swedenborg, Mediums, and Desolate Places'. This was written in 1914: 'Last winter Mr. Ezra Pound was editing the late Professor Fenollosa's translations of the Noh Drama of Japan, and he read me a great deal of what he was doing.' Unmistakable is Yeats's excitement at finding that 'nearly all that my fat old woman in Soho learns from her familiars is there in an unsurpassed lyric poetry and in strange and poignant fables.' And the whole essay, together with his introduction to the Fenollosa-Pound translations, is one of the best attempts to place Noh in relation to the European spiritualist tradition as well as the best clue to understand how his plays like The Dreaming of the Bones or Purgatory, under the influence of Noh, make superb use of 'desolate places' and the device of conjuring up ghosts out of them.

'Nothing is more dramatic than a ghost', says one of the characters in T. S. Eliot's essay 'A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry'. We hope to have suggested that the medieval dramatists of Japan went much further than Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Ibsen (pace his Ghosts), and Eliot himself, to prove the truth of the dictum.

Notes

1 Hideo Kanze, the direct descendant of Zeami, is also active as director and actor in other fields than Noh. He has been invited to direct the Berliner Ensemble and the Abbey Theatre, Dublin.


Stanislavsky Addresses the Actors

I say to you what I have felt for years:

Wrap yourselves in cloaks of feeling
That scintillate, that rustle, that are true.

They swirl around you as you walk the stage,
Stand still or grimace, speak or move your hands.

Focus your mind upon the play’s great space,
Its inner steppes, its dark ravines.
Forget the audience beyond the lights,
Both what it thinks or what you think it thinks.
And quite ignore its restless shifts and turns.

Concentrate the circle of your mind
Upon this stage and all it represents.
Come three hours early to prepare yourself;
Enter the green-room’s calm, its mossy quietude,
Study your face within its mirror,
Those magic mirrors that questioned tell you all:
The restless thoughts which must be stilled,
The restless needs or greeds which must be brought
To a fine fierce burning point within your role.

Think of the Noh actor in his mask
Pondering himself in the clearness of glass
And learn from him.

Then let your passions speak.
Ancient Guardians

1
The snowy rush of a waterfall
Arching out of a blue sky:
Eyebrow of light above
Towering pinnacles of stone;
Descending as a falling column
To break into foliage of white water
Down, far down in the pool's dark cup
And spilling out and over
In a wide silvery scree
To lose itself in a forest of shadows.

2
Above the grassline, above the snowline,
Those ancient sequoias,
Guardians of the lost sierra-groves,
Catching the last flakes of sunlight
On their columns of sandstone-red;
As down in the forest of shadows,
Cascading hair over delicate shoulders,
Figures glide in dusklight through the birches,
Glancing back with eyes of wild hazel
As they flee away into thickets of shade.

3
White arms raised, white hands
Somewhere holding ready to pour
From a scrolled silver tankard
Brimful of berries, dewberries all,
Sprinkled with light out of the woods,
Glistening, odorous, suddenly tipped
From a marvellous horn of plenty:
A heap of nature's jewels
Spilling out over the peat-black pool
Of an ancient polished table.
4
Beyond the waterfall, beyond the snowline,
A shining cloudmass shadowy in places
Is riding a ring of mountains at dawn,
Riding always at dawn those mountains;
Till slowly, under the light’s transformation,
Like a winter palace it glitters in the thin air,
Like a strange remote potala of the hills.

Arrivals

At rest, at ease now,
The moored souls floated there;
Shadowy flotillas
Darkening the clear element
Of that amazing bay.

Nothing would touch them further:
Neither stranded on the shoals of time
Nor listing in love’s shallows.

Beneath them showed
The smooth and pearly beds
Of whitest sand which dazzled;
But dappled by the shades
Of these strange craft come home.

Yet some were there
Shadowless
Like leaves of light afloat;
And flowering shorelines
Were alight with gauzy wings.
WENDELL BERRY

Sabbaths 1987

I

Coming to the woods' edge
on my Sunday morning walk,
I stand resting a moment beside
a ragged half-dead wild plum
in bloom, its perfume
a moment enclosing me,
and standing side by side
with the old broken blooming tree
I almost understand,
I almost recognize as a friend
the great impertinence of beauty
that comes even to the dying,
even to the fallen, without reason
sweetening the air,

I walk on,
distracted by a letter accusing me
of distraction, which distracts me
only from the hundred things
that would otherwise distract me
from this whiteness, lightness,
sweetness in the air. The mind
is broken by the thousand
calling voices it is always too late
to answer, and that is why it yearns
for some hard task, lifelong, longer
than life, to concentrate it
and make it whole.

But where is the all-welcoming,
all-consecrating Sabbath
that would do the same? Where
the quietness of the heart
and the eye's clarity
that would be a friend's reply
to the white-blossoming plum tree?
II

I climb up through the thicket, a bird's song somewhere within it, the singer unfound within the song, resounding within itself and around itself; it might come from anywhere, from everywhere, the whole air vibrant with it, every leaf a tongue.

*  

I reach the last stand in my going of woodland never felled, a little patch of trees on ground too poor to plough, spared the belittlement of human intention from time before human thought. They bring that time to mind: their long standing, and our longing to understand. But a man is small before those who have stood so long. He stands under them, looks up, sees, knows, and knows that he does not know.

*  

Explanations topple into their events, merely other events, smaller and less significant. They disappear, or die away like little cries at sundown, and the old trees receive the night again in dignity and patience, present beyond the most complex lineages of cause and effect, each one lost to us in what it is. For us, the privilege is only to see, within the long shade, the present standing of what has come and is to come: the straight trunks aspiring between earth and sky, bearing upon all years the year's new leaves.

*  

Or we may see this valley as from above and outside, as from a distance off in time, as Cezanne might have seen it: the light stopped, at rest in its scintillation.
on the bright strokes of the leaves
also at rest, sight and light entering
from the same direction, so that we see it
shadowless, for all time, forever.

*

I come to a little bench, a mere shelf
of the slope, where four deer slept the night,
and I lie down in the deer's bed
and, warm in my old jacket in the cold
morning of late April, sleep a sleep as dark
and vast as the deer slept, or as the dead sleep,
simple and dreamless in their graves,
awaiting the dawn that will stand them
timeless as they stood in time, and at last
open my eyes to the bright sky, the luminous
small new leaves unfolding.

*

And we are lost in what we are. Our privilege
is the unrelenting effort of renewal
of sight and hope out of failure –
out of impatience, anger, haste, despair,
violence to strangers, unkindness to loved ones,
disappointment at the failure of expectations
that were, at the outset, unreasonable –
out of greed, arrogance, and ruin. Our privilege
is our sorrow: to know by blindness, by falling short,
the magnanimity of the world.

III (Santa Clara Valley)

I walked the deserted prospect of the modern mind
where nothing lived or happened that had not been foreseen.
What had been foreseen was the coming of the Stranger with Money.
All that had been before had been destroyed: the salt marsh
of unremembered time, the remembered homestead, orchard and pasture.
A new earth had appeared in place of the old, made entirely
according to plan. New palm trees stood all in a row, new pines
all in a row, confined in cement to keep them from straying.
New buildings, built to seal and preserve the inside against the outside, stood in the blatant outline of their purpose in the renounced light and air. Inside them were sealed cool people, the foreseen ones, who did not look or go in any way that they did not intend, waited upon by other people, trained in servility, who begged of the ones who had been foreseen: 'Is everything all right, sir? Have you enjoyed your dinner, sir? Have a nice evening, sir.' Here was no remembering of hands coming newly to the immortal work of hands, joining stone to stone, door to doorpost, man to woman.

Outside, what had been foreseen was roaring in the air. Roads and buildings roared in their places on the scraped and chartered earth; the sky roared with the passage of those who had been foreseen toward destinations they foresaw, unhindered by any place between. The highest good of that place was the control of temperature and light. The next highest was to touch or know or say no fundamental or necessary thing. The next highest was to see no thing that had not been foreseen, to spare no comely thing that had grown comely on its own. Some small human understanding seemed to have arrayed itself there without limit, and to have cast its grid upon the sky, the stars, the rising and the setting sun. I could not see past it but to its ruin.

I walked alone in that desert of unremitting purpose, feeling the despair of one who could no longer remember another valley where bodies and events took place and form not always foreseen by humans, and the humans themselves followed ways not altogether in the light, where all the land had not yet been consumed by intention, or the people by their understanding, where still there was forgiveness in time, so that whatever had been destroyed might yet return. Around me as I walked were dogs barking in resentment against the coming of the unforeseen.

And yet even there I was not beyond reminding, for I came upon a ditch where the old sea marsh, native to that place, had been confined below the sight of the only-foreseeing eye. What had been the overworld had become the underworld: the land risen from the sea
by no human intention, the drawing in and out of the water,  
the pulse of the great sea itself confined in a narrow ditch.

Where the Sabbath of that place kept itself in waiting,  
the herons of the night stood in their morning watch,  
and the herons of the day in silence stood  
by the living water in its strait. The coots and gallinules  
skulked in the reeds, the mother mallards and their little ones  
afloat on the seaward-sliding water to no purpose I had foreseen.  
The stilts were feeding in the shallows, and the killdeer  
treading with light feet the mud that was all ashine  
with the coming day. Volleys of swallows leapt  
in joyous flight out of the dark into the brightening air  
in eternal gratitude for life before time not foreseen,  
and the song of the song sparrow rang in its bush.

IV

And now the lowland grove is down, the trees  
Fallen that had unearthly power to please  
The earthly eye, and gave unearthly solace  
To minds grown quiet in that quiet place.  
To see them standing was to know a prayer  
Prayed to the Holy Spirit in the air  
By that same Spirit dwelling in the ground.  
The wind in their high branches gave the sound  
Of air replying to that prayer. The rayed  
Imperial light sang in the leaves it made.

To live as mourner of a human friend  
Is but to understand the common end  
Told by the steady counting in the wrist.  
For though the absent friend is mourned and missed  
At every pulse, it is a human loss  
In human time made well; our grief will bless  
At last the dear lost flesh and breath; it will  
Grow quiet as the body in the hill.

To live to mourn an ancient woodland, known  
Always, loved with an old love handed down,  
That is a grief that will outlast the griever,  
Grief as landmark, grief as a wearing river
That in its passing stays, biding in rhyme
Of year with year, time with returning time,
As though beyond the grave the soul will wait,
In long unrest, the shaping of the light
In branch and bole, through centuries that prepare
This ground to pray again its finest prayer.

V

May what I’ve written here
In sleepless grief and dread
Live in my children’s ears
To warn them of their need,
To ask them to forbear,
In time when I am dead,

So they may look and see
For past and future’s sake
The terms of victory
They cannot win or take
Except by charity
Toward what they cannot make.

VI

And now the remnant groves grow bright with praise.
They light around me like an old man’s days.

VII

Knowing that it happened once,
We cannot turn away the thought,
As we go out, cold, to our barns
Toward the long night’s end, that we
Ourselves are living in the world
It happened in when it first happened,
That we ourselves, opening a stall
(A latch thrown open countless times
Before), might find them breathing there,
Foreknown: the Child bedded in straw,
The mother kneeling over Him,
The husband standing in belief
He scarcely can believe, in light
That lights them from no source we see,
An April morning's light, the air
Around them joyful as a choir.
We stand with one hand on the door,
Looking into another world
That is this world, the pale daylight
Coming just as before, our chores
To do, the cattle all awake,
Our own white frozen breath hanging
In front of us; and we are here
As we have never been before,
Sighted as not before, our place
Holy, although we knew it not.
The Renaissance Musician

Speculations on the Performing Style of Marsilio Ficino

ANGELA VOSS

The Florentine philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) is chiefly remembered for being the first translator of the complete works of Plato into Latin, and thus standing at the forefront of the Humanist revival of classical learning known as the Renaissance. He founded the Platonic Academy in Florence, and dedicated his life to the reconciliation of Platonism with Christianity.

But not only was he a philosopher and theologian; he was also a practising astrologer, magician and musician, and invented a form of astrological music therapy which shows a depth of understanding of the human psyche unique for his time. His 'natural magic' is an integral, imaginative approach to harmonising one's inner self, using all manner of substances, plants, foods, colours in the right quantities and proportions to suit each individual. But most important of all was listening to the right sort of music; Ficino himself must have been an outstanding performer, for Lorenzo de' Medici called him the 'second Orpheus'. He improvised on his 'Orphic lyre' in varying modes and moods, connected with the different planetary energies, and thus influenced the state of mind of his clients.¹

I shall be considering possible examples of the sort of music he may have performed later. First, it is important to understand the Renaissance attitude towards the performer and his role in the new humanist vision of the nature and purpose of all Art — for it is an approach quite new to the average 20th century concert-goer, although his actual experience may be the same as his 15th century counterpart. But we have lost a spiritual awareness in favour of a psychological one.

To Ficino, both the Platonic concept of 'divine frenzy' and the cultivation of sprezzatura would have been essential ingredients in any performance which aimed at a directly beneficial effect on the audience. Through being in contact with the source of all creativity, and consciously cultivating an appearance of ease and total mastery,
the magical element of *grazia* can be manifest, the 'grace' whose quality is indefinable yet conspicuous in its absence. By means of *grazia* the listener is truly reminded of long-lost perfection; in Platonic terms, the Ideal world, in musical terms, the Music of the Spheres.  

Ficino's source for the concept of 'divine frenzy' is Plato's *Phaedrus*. Here Plato is concerned with the *furor amatoris*, or the 'madness of the lover':

> Madness, provided it comes as the gift of heaven, is the channel by which we receive the greatest blessings.

This is the key to the power of the inspired musician, for only by a shift away from the 'sane', every-day state of consciousness can one begin to 'wake up' to the levels normally inaccessible to the psyche. By becoming temporarily 'mad', one has access to higher realms of knowledge, and can communicate something of one's vision. The four paths to this state are exemplified in the ecstasies of the poet, the hierophant, the prophet and the lover, all of whom attain a state of consciousness which transcends ego-awareness and frees the soul from its earthly bonds.

We are concerned with the 'poetic madness', for this refers to the musician too. In ancient Greece lyric poetry was sung, and this was considered to be the most noble form of music-making. Orpheus was the idealized poet and lyre-player who could move even stones with the power of his music, and the concept of this power, only achieved by the unity of words and music, was revitalized in the Renaissance absorption of classical ideals. That Ficino identified himself with the mythical lyre-player is evident from both his own correspondence and others' reactions to his playing. Purely instrumental music was, in Plato's opinion, 'characteristic of uncultured and vulgar showmanship'; it was considered to be representational and imitative, and therefore if there were no words it was incapable of communicating clearly the intention of the poet.

Poetry then is both rhythm and melody, or harmony — not harmony in our modern sense of pitches sounded simultaneously within a chord, but the temporal sequence of pitches in a melodic phrase and the modes and tunings used to produce different effects. The madness of the inspired poet-musician, according to Plato, is potentially the most transforming of the four furores, for as he affects the
human mind with the meaning of his words, so his source of inspiration is none other than the Divine Mind itself. Furthermore, it is through this 'madness' that the other three all manifest:

\[
\text{No madman is content with simple speech: he bursts forth into clamouring and songs and poems. Any madness therefore, whether the prophetic, hieratic or amatory, justly seems to be released as poetic madness when it proceeds to songs and poems.}^{9}
\]

What is the nature of this frenzied state? In Platonic and Hermetic philosophy,\(^{10}\) we learn that the soul of man was once at one with God, but that through the desire and temptation for earthly things it fell from its lofty state and became buried in earthly existence, forgetful of its true nature. However, it can receive reminders of the realm it has left, once it has awoken to the realization that it does not belong on earth, and then it is filled with an indefinable longing to return.\(^{11}\) This state, the 'waking up' process, can be triggered by such an experience as falling in love, where one truly glimpses the divine in the beloved. In the Phaedrus Plato describes this awakening as the soul growing wings, which as they sprout produce unbearable itching and discomfort and thus provoke the 'frenzy', which to those still embedded in their husk, seems nothing short of madness.\(^{12}\)

Like the lover, the artist in his creative 'madness' can glimpse higher worlds, but he has the power to communicate something of this to others. Artistic creation in this sense can be the catalyst which, reflecting the beauty of Heaven, can spark off the 'divine discontent' of the soul and cause its wings to grow.

If this theory is to be considered a valid one, then all artistic activity becomes based on the certainty that something vitally important is being communicated on the spiritual level. Plato's elaborate metaphor can be seen to be relevant to lovers and artists of all time; but the essential requirement is that, to have a truly awakening effect, the artist who is communicating to others must himself be in the condition of 'frenzy', otherwise he has not the power to begin the 'itching' in his audience.

It is in this light that we must consider Ficino's own performance, as he was thoroughly immersed in Platonic doctrine and thus considered it the musician's duty to use his art solely for this noble purpose:
The whole soul is filled with discord and dissonance, therefore the first need is for poetic madness, which through musical tones arouses what is sleeping, through harmonic sweetness calms what is in turmoil, and finally through the blending of different things, quells dissonant discord and tempers the various parts of the soul.  

No less than this was the aim of his music therapy, and in a letter to a fellow Academician Peregrino Agli, Ficino elaborates on the power of music. After pointing out that music is more effective than art, as the eyes see only imitations of the Ideal whereas via the ears we actually hear echoes of divine music, he reaches the purpose of man's musical activity:

By the ears . . . the soul receives the echoes of that incomparable music, by which it is led back to the deep and silent memory of the harmony which it previously enjoyed. The whole soul then kindles with desire to fly back to its rightful home, so that it may enjoy that true magic again. It realizes that as long as it is enclosed in the dark abode of the body it can in no way reach the music. It therefore strives wholeheartedly to imitate it, because it cannot here enjoy its possession. Now with men this imitation is twofold. Some imitate the celestial music by harmony of voices and the sounds of various instruments, and these we call superficial and vulgar musicians. But some, who imitate the divine and heavenly harmony with deeper and sounder judgement, render a sense of its inner reason and knowledge into verse, feet and numbers. It is these who, inspired by the divine spirit, give forth with full voice the most solemn and glorious song. Plato calls this solemn music and poetry the most effective imitation of the celestial harmony... it expresses with fire the most profound and, as a poet would say, prophetic meanings, in the numbers of voice and movement. Thus not only does it delight the ear, but brings to the mind the finest nourishment, most like the food of the gods; and so seems to come very close to God.  

The purpose of Ficino's letter was to remind Agli, a poet, that his gifts spring from God, not himself. It is important to realize that his heaven-sent 'madness' has nothing to do with purely technical skill or craftsmanship, although these will be necessary ingredients for the effectiveness of the performances — but it is a 'fiery quickening of the soul' to which technique is in servitude:
But if a man comes to the door of poetry untouched by the madness of the Muses, believing that technique alone will make him a good poet, he and his sane compositions never reach perfection, but are utterly eclipsed by the performance of the inspired Madman.\(^6\)

We have all been to performances where this elusive quality is present, and to ones where, despite evident skill and virtuosity, it is conspicuously absent. Creative artists have often spoken of the experience of being an empty vessel, a channel for a creative source beyond themselves, and it is evident that for a performance of this nature a truly humbling quality is necessary. The performer is the mediator, the instrument, and the efficacy of this communication depends very much on his inner condition.

To complete our picture of the Renaissance musician, performing under the inspiration and rapture of 'madness', we must add the subtle and restraining quality of sprezzatura. The link between these seemingly opposite notions of total abandonment and consciously cultivated nonchalance (literally, 'disdain') is a subtle one, for without the artificiality of decorum 'madness' can hardly be manifest with grace. We receive the clearest definition of sprezzatura in Baldassare Castiglione's famous book, \textit{Il Cortegiano}, written between 1508 and 1516. It deals with the nature and characteristics of an ideal courtier of the time, as proposed by a group of the nobility at the Palace of Urbino. It is entertaining and lively, presenting us with the most highly-regarded attributes and accomplishments of the Renaissance man. The qualities to be prized are appropriate action, moderation in all things, the creation of the persona, perfect integrity and cultivated tastes. Intrinsic to the cultivation of the persona is sprezzatura, the notion of superb skill and nonchalance, complete confidence and mastery, yet with no hint of self-importance. It can be manifest in the cultivation of a literal 'self-consciousness'. In the words of Ludovico di Canossa:

\begin{quote}
I have discovered a universal rule which seems to apply more than any other in all human actions or words: namely, to steer away from affectation at all costs . . . and to practise in all things a certain nonchalance which conceals all artistry and makes whatever one says or does seem uncontrived and effortless.\(^7\)
\end{quote}
Appropriate gesture and movement is essential for the most effective delivery of the music. The theorist Gafori in 1496 even went so far to say:

an extravagant and indecorous movement of the head or hands reveals an unsound mind in a singer.\(^{18}\)

The image created by the performer should seem totally effortless and spontaneous, no matter how much work has been expended behind the scenes. As exemplified in the extravagant musical rituals of the Italian court entertainments and Intermedii, where complex machines worked out of sight to produce seemingly miraculous effects, a performance became no less than an attempt to reflect the harmony and order of the music of the spheres on an earthly plane.

Much could be said about the use of the imagination in 'magical' operations, and Ficino himself continually invites us\(^{19}\) to suspend our literal view of the world and adopt a psychological perspective. The individual performer, like the ceremonial magician (and Ficino indeed assumed this role in the practice of his 'natural magic) must be able to draw on this imaginal realm – he accomplishes his task with technical ease and mastery, yet gives the impression of being capable of still greater achievement. He consciously composes his art of performance, yet it is never affected as his appearance, style and bearing are all exactly appropriate for his task. He knows that he is merely an instrument, yet an instrument of the finest quality, the clearest material, to be worthy of his inspiration. Most important is the concealment of effort, for 'to reveal intense application and skill robs everything of grace'.\(^{20}\)

Grace, or *grazia*, as mentioned, is the magical quality manifest when the performer's own *dignità* and *gravità* of *sprezzatura* combine with his inner frenzy; then the *meraviglia* or marvel of the audience is invoked. They are astounded by the unaffected expertise and moved by the inspired communication of the music, and in the Platonic sense, their wings begin to grow. The very word *meraviglia* conjures up an attitude of surprise at new aspects of reality, a departure from normal experience, a startling flash of wonder at the combination of the human and divine, perfectly suiting the Renaissance love of paradox.

Castiglione has an interesting word to say on *sprezzatura* in music, where it refers to the element of spice produced by a perfectly judged discord:
This is because to continue in perfect consonances produces satiety and offers a harmony which is too affected; but this disappears when imperfect consonances are introduced to establish the contrast which keeps the listener in a state of expectancy, waiting for and enjoying the perfect consonances more eagerly and delighting in the discord of the second or seventh, as in a display of nonchalance.\textsuperscript{21}

We learn from Castiglione of the popularity of ‘singing to the viola’ and with the accompaniment of viols, whose sound he describes as soavissima e artificiosa (‘extremely sweet and skilfully cultivated’).\textsuperscript{22} ‘Viola’ could refer to any bowed, stringed instrument, namely a viola da braccio, viol, lira or lirone. We also learn of the therapeutic value of self-accompanied song:

If old men have the desire to sing to the viola, then let them do so in private with the object of shedding from their minds the disturbing thoughts and bitter vexations of which life is full, and of tasting the divinity which, I believe, Pythagoras and Socrates attributed to music.\textsuperscript{23}

This then is our completed picture of the Renaissance musician: his soul, freed from its sleeping state through frenzy, is a channel for divine music itself. By means of his skill and conscious creation of the appropriate persona he allows for the manifestation of grazia and the wonder of the listener, who for a moment is reminded of his heavenly origins.

That performers existed who were capable of such a lofty objective is well attested, such as the lutenists Pietrobono of Ferrara\textsuperscript{24} and Francesco da Milano (Il Divino), and the singers Bidone and Marco Cara:

Bidon’s style of singing is so skilful, quick, vehement and passionate, and of such melodious variety, that the spirits of those listening are excited and aroused, and feel so exalted that they seem to be drawn up to heaven. Then the singing of our own Marchetto Cara is just as moving, but its harmonies are softer; his voice is so serene and so full of plaintive sweetness that he gently touches and penetrates our souls, and they respond with great delight and emotion.\textsuperscript{25}

The harmonising effect of music on man was experienced with a new awareness and understanding of its philosophical and spiritual
implications. As in ancient Greece, there were at least select circles in which it was recognized that the true purpose of Art was for religious contemplation and spiritual education.

With this background in mind, Ficino's music-therapy, his antiquum ad Orphicam lryam carminum cantum ('ancient singing of poems to the Orphic lyre') becomes much more than a mere nostalgic fancy; by means of a thorough knowledge of an individual's horoscope, combined with improvisatory skill and true inspiration, it was for him a powerful means of bringing into harmony and balance the disparate elements of the soul; and it should be emphasized that Ficino recommended this sort of music therapy just as much for harmonising oneself, as for others.

In this sort of work, 'knowledge of a horoscope' would involve what we would now call a psychological approach to astrology; understanding how the individual brings together in his life the psychic energies symbolized by the planets on his birthchart, and seeing how imbalances caused by particular aspects or transiting planets could be compensated for or strengthened. In one of his letters to Lorenzo de' Medici, Ficino shows an extraordinary understanding of how the planetary energies work within the individual:

> for these celestial bodies are not to be sought by us outside in some other place; for the heavens in their entirety are within us, in whom the light of life and the origin of heaven dwell.

In exhorting Lorenzo to 'prudently temper within yourself the heavenly signs' he acknowledges the responsibility of the individual in avoiding being a prey to fate, by exercising rigorous self-awareness. As we shall see in his 'Rules for Composition', Ficino was presumably able to compose music to lead one on this very path, for 'we play the lyre precisely to avoid becoming unstrung'.

Ficino's Orphic singing most probably involved improvising to the lira da braccio in the established tradition, but with emphasis on the meaning of the text, for Ficino agreed with Plato that for music to be really effective it must serve the words at all times.

It is very likely that Ficino used for his texts the Orphic Hymns, addressed to different gods which were believed to date from pre-Pythagorean antiquity, and fragments of Orphic verse from various classical authors. As one correspondent writes to him:
You restored to the light the ancient sound of the lyre and the style of singing and the Orphic songs which had previously been consigned to oblivion.33

He was also exhorted by his patron, Cosimo de’ Medici, to bring his ‘orphic lyre’ when invited to visit.34

The cult of Orpheus was openly fostered in the Platonic Academy. Ficino’s belief in the literal existence of Orpheus as an ‘ancient theologian’35 and as author of the Hymns which were presumed to predate Plato, combined with the fact that he translated them himself, points to their suitability for his purpose.36

Although we now know that they date from a much later period and are by a variety of authors, the Orphic Hymns do almost certainly derive from the rites of a religious sect. The Hymns consist of strings of epithets in praise of each god in the form of a supplication to each one with its appropriate fumigation; for example, frankincense for the sun, storax for Jupiter, aromatic herbs for the moon. They form perfect vehicles for Ficino’s therapy, for as a neo-platonist he understood that the different gods simply constituted aspects of the One, and as a psychologist he knew that their energies must all be brought to balance within an individual.

We would imagine that the Hymns to the Sun, or Apollo, would be highest on Ficino’s list, for Apollo holds central place in the ‘seven steps to celestial things’.37 He believed that man’s nature is essentially solar (astrologically speaking, the Sun symbolizes his true inner nature, his will or higher Self) and thus can be strengthened through the application of solar music, such as the Orphic Hymn to Apollo. Although the other planets all have their roles to play in the tempering of the psyche, Ficino says that it is always one’s solar nature which is reached and affected via the harmonies of Jupiter, Venus or Mercury.

That Ficino also used self-composed texts is evident when we read his rules for composition in the Liber de Vita or Book of Life.38 These involve a detailed study of the individual horoscope and then application of suitable music. Ficino instructs the astrologer/musician to compose texts and music related to the meanings and aspects of the planets, both in themselves and in the horoscope of the individual, paying attention to their current positions and imitating their ‘powers’. He admits that this is not an easy process:
It would be an extremely difficult task to decide which tones go with which stars, or which composition of tones goes with which stars and agrees with which aspects. But we can pursue this, in part through our diligence, and in part through a kind of divine chance...

A thorough investigation of the astrological practice involved here is material for another article, but we can assume that Ficino is referring to a combination of a rigorous study of what the classical authorities have to say on the properties of modes and their associations with each planet, and an intuitive understanding, which he would see as divinely inspired, of the individual's need.

Ficino lived at a time when Italian music was undergoing a revitalization after the domination, for the major part of the century, by the Netherlanders who settled in Italy. Their style of writing was called Ars Perfecta (perhaps the most famous exponent being Josquin des Prés) due to the skill with which the composers wove the melodic lines in vocal polyphony. But alongside this highly 'artificial' and cultivated style, there had always existed a strong native tradition of improvisation: the improvisatori, instrumentalists and self-accompanied singers who recited poetry to the lute, viol or lira developed a highly skilled art of invention and embellishment. This native art, flourishing at elite social gatherings and patronized at the Courts of northern Italy, existed independently of the Netherlands school and of the indigenous tradition of 'canti carnascialeschi' (carnival songs), 'sacri rappresentazioni' (sacred dramas with musical interludes) and the famous Commedia dell'Arte which emerged during the first half of the next century.

At the end of the 15th century, inspired by the new enthusiasm for the ideas and musical practices of ancient Greece, and fostered by the artistic patronage of Isabella d'Este in Mantua, the art of the improvisatori flowered into the genre of the frottola. This distinctly Italian form of secular vocal composition, simple, direct and homophonic in reaction to the intricacies of the Northerners, is at once courtly and popular, artful yet uncontrived, and paved the way for the freer and more elaborate madrigal. The frottole were the first secular music ever printed, published by Petrucci in Venice between 1504 and 1514, and provide us with a rich and varied sample of the many kinds of secular and religious accompanied song in vogue around the turn of the
century. Since the roots of the frottola lie in popular performance practice, some of these compositions are examples of an older, more improvisatory style, and it is amongst this repertoire that we can perhaps glimpse something akin to Ficino's own music.

Of contemporary improvisations, of course nothing survives. With such importance given to the meaning of the words, one would imagine Ficino's song to be of a free, rhapsodic nature, perhaps half song, half chanting. I have selected some pieces from the frottola repertoire, purely speculatively, which it seems do reflect something of the qualities Ficino associates with the different planets. Since we can only make imaginative guesses from the evidence of an existing tradition and Ficino's own words on the nature of his improvisations, I have allowed my imagination to wander further and have set an Orphic Hymn to Jupiter in an improvisatory style, in, I hope, true Ficinian spirit.

I have of course compromised in this experiment and have chosen the extant pieces for their overall musical effect, not because of the unity of text and music – it is a general characteristic of the frottola that little attempt was made to express the content of the text musically. It is important to remember that the efficacy of Ficino's compositions depended on the relevance of the text to the individual and his state of mind at the time, on his own clarity and skill as a performer, and on the current planetary positions affecting the situation. It was an immediate, highly personal process, and any musical examples will of necessity merely hint at what must have been a magical experience.

Perhaps the most unique song amongst the published frottola repertoire, in its improvisatory, declamatory style, is Se mai per Maraveglia (example 1). Ficino says: 'If the songs are venerable, with grace and smoothness, simple and intense, they are considered Apollo’s.' As an example of solar music, this song contains all these qualities, and in style is the nearest written example we have of the improvised monody of the time. It is the one exception to rule, for the text certainly allows for 'affecting' interpretation. It is an anonymous setting of a text dramatically portraying the passion of Christ, and the only example of a freely-improvised 'capitolo' form of verse; this was a standard poetic form, the last line of the last quatrains normally set to different music. In this case, there is no indication of how to sing it – perhaps one solution would be to recite it. The fact
that this is left to the performer points to the piece belonging to the
tradition of self-accompanied narrative monody, each verse potraying
an emotion and giving scope to the singer to move the listener with
his skill. Each line is set to a new musical phrase, with improvisatory
lute interjections punctuating the verse (which would be of a more
sustained, chordal character on the lira da braccio). The vocal line is
stark and declamatory, giving the singer the opportunity to fully
characterize each verse.

Of Jupiter, Ficino says: 'Remember that all music comes from
Apollo. There is a Jovial music only to the extent that it agrees with
Apollo.' The Platonists believed Jove to be the father of the nine
Muses, and Apollo to be the divine interpreter of their music, who
causes the harmonious flow of nature and the well-balanced health of
man by his lyre-playing. Jovial music, according to Ficino, as well as
being composed of harmonies which are 'to a certain extent grave
and intense, or sweet and happy with their constancy' must also
conform to the solar qualities of venerability and grace. For an
illustration of this, I have included a Hymn to Jupiter (example 2) in
the Lydian mode (the mode ascribed to Jupiter by Ramos de Pareja
(1492) and Gafori (1500) paying as much attention as possible to
the qualities Ficino describes. Jupiter is the King of the gods;
astrologically he invokes the spirit of truth, justice, and nobility of
soul. One can imagine Ficino had such a god in mind when he wrote:

I often resort to the solemn sound of the lyre and to singing, to
avoid other sensual pleasures entirely. I do it also to banish
vexations of both soul and body, and to raise the mind to the
highest considerations and to God as much as I may.

I have aimed at a simple, direct setting, most apt for the delivery of
an Orphic Hymn; one must imagine the halo of sound produced by
the 'sweet' harmonies on a stringed instrument, and the uncompli
cated vocal line clearly declaiming the text. It would be interesting to
experiment further and compose a piece for a specific individual,
taking into account the planetary energies of their horoscope – but
such a composition would be uniquely personal and depend on the
interaction of the performer and listener for its effect, as well as
demand a skill which came from long practice.

Moving on to the planet Mercury, Ficino places its music with that
of the Sun, in between Jupiter and Venus. Mercurial songs are 'to a certain extent relaxed and enjoyable, but nonetheless strenuous and multiplex'. It is the nature of Mercury to be communicative, lively as quicksilver, many-faceted and changeable. So we must look for a piece which is energetic and varied, constantly moving yet relaxed. Chui Dicese (example 3) from Petrucci's 6th Book of 1505 contains all these features. It is an anonymous setting, but is in the improvisatory style of Leonardo Giustiniani (1383–1446), a poet-singer renowned for his improvisations to the lira. So Chui Dicese is an example of what was by 1505 an archaic form; the melismatic soprano line, three rather than four-part texture and cadential dissonances being the main characteristics. The two inner parts would be played on a lute or two viols, supporting the vocal line which is clearly the most important, and which simply uses the insubstantial text as a vehicle for its mercurial meanderings and syncopations. The unexpected discords before the cadence certainly illustrate our earlier quotation from Castiglione. Fleeting and ingenious, this song is like quicksilver, darting in all directions yet maintaining an overall unity and relaxed flow.

Lastly, the songs of Venus (Moon, Mars and Saturn, says Ficino, have voices but no song). Ficino tells us that Venus engenders 'lascivious songs and songs voluptuous with softness'. According to Plato, Venus has two opposite manifestations; heavenly and earthly love. In his Commentary on Plato's Symposium, Ficino similarly categorises Venusian music;

But there are said to be two types of melody in music; one serious and steady, the other soft and sensuous. The former is beneficial to those who hear it; the latter, Plato says . . . is harmful . . . the passion of the former is heavenly love, and that of the latter, earthly love.

However, in the Liber de Vita Ficino does not imply that Venus' music is actually harmful, merely of a light and sensual nature. Amongst the frottola repertoire lascivious songs are hard to find; we can find erotically suggestive texts, but the more bawdy, earthy songs are more likely to be found amongst the popular carnival and street songs of the time. It is easier to illustrate 'songs voluptuous with softness'. As
an invitation to the heavenly Venus, the Venus of Botticelli’s ‘Primavera’, the song *Vergine Bella* (example 4) must surely take the prize. Although set to a religious text by Petrarch, the nature of the music is pure softness and voluptuousness; the sustaining harmonies of viols or lirone combined with the filigree sound of the lute, interweaving through the texture, and the melody which now soars, now comes to rest, impassioned yet restrained, create an effect which is sensual and intoxicating; an invitation which cannot be refused.

With these pieces I have attempted to give a taste of how Ficino’s descriptions of different planetary music might be applied. Speculations on if and how his actual music-therapy, his ‘natural magic’, worked in practice would be the subject for another article. No actual music survives; I can only stress again that by its very nature his improvisation can only have been effective at the time and place it was performed and with the individual for whom it was intended. But with Ficino’s devotion to the ‘care of the soul’ and his intense piety, his skill as both musician and astrologer, and his conviction in the power of ‘natural magic’, we can hardly doubt that his clients were filled with meraviglia.
Ex. 1

SE MAI PER MARAVEGLIA

ANON
Ex. 2

HYMN TO JUPITER

Iuppiter, valde hone-ran-de-jn-car-rup-hi-bi-lis, haec ibi nos testi-no-ni-um mad-din-mus

lib-er-to-ri-um et vo-tum. O rex, per-tu-um caput appar-i-ere han-faci-le, terra

dea ma-ter me nt-i-um qui-gi-so-na. iu-ga et pon-tus et om-ni-a qua-sianque ac-tum in-ter or-di-

ne com-bi-net. Iu-pi-ter sa-tu-mi-e, aephi-te-nus, de-se-nor, mag-ni-me, am-ni-par-tens, pin-

cip-ium om-ni-um om-ni-umque fi-nis, concus-sores terrae, au-dor, purga-to-r, om-ni-a qua-tiens,
TRANSLATION OF HYMN

To Jupiter, fumigation storax

Jupiter, greatly to be honoured, incorruptible, we offer you this liberating testimony and prayer. O King, through your intellect these things easily appeared; the divine earth mother and the high-sounding crests of the mountains, and the ocean and everything heaven contains within its order. Saturnian Jupiter, sceptre-bearer, descender, magnanimous, bearing all things, the beginning of all things and the end of all things, earth-shaker, originator, purger of the earth, mover of all things, bringer of lightning, thunderer, deliverer of the thunderbolt, elemental Jupiter: hear me, many-formed one, and bestow blameless health and divine peace and the rightful glory of your riches.
Ex. 3a

CHUI DICESE NON L’AMARE

Ex. 3b
Ex. 4a

**VIRGINE BELLA**

**B. TROMBONCINO**

Ex. 4b
Notes

1 The source for Ficino’s ‘natural magic’ is his Liber de Vita, (Book of Life of 1489, particularly part III, De Vita Coelitus Comparanda, or How to fit your life to the Heavens. (English translation by C. Boer, Dallas, 1980.)
2 I am indebted to the lutenist and Renaissance specialist Anthony Rooley for the concept of ‘grazia’ in musical performance.
3 Plato, Phaedrus, 244.
5 Andrew Barker, Greek Musical Writings I, Cambridge, 1984, p. 126 (on lyric poetry) and p. 154 (on instrumental music).
7 Plato, Symposium, 204–5.
9 Ficino, Commentary on Phaedrus, in M. Allen, Marsilio Ficino and the Phaedran Charioteer, California, 1981, p. 84.
11 See Plato, Phaedrus, 248–250.
12 Ibid., 251–253.
13 Sears Jayne, Marsilio Ficino’s Commentary on Plato’s Symposium, Dallas, 1985, p. 231.
15 Ibid. p. 98.
16 Plato, Phaedrus, 245.
19 See Ficino, Liber de Vita op. cit.
20 The Book of the Courtier, p. 67.
21 Ibid. p. 69.
22 Ibid. p. 121. Original Italian from Il Libro del Cortegiano del Conte Baldassare Castiglione, 1556, p. 114.
23 The Book of the Courtier, p. 121.
24 Pietrobono inspired the poet Cornazano in 1459 to eulogise him in poem on a Sforza family wedding, in which he attributes to Pietrobono the musical skill of Orpheus and Apollo. (Cornazano, La Sforziade, Book IX); see Nino Pirrotta, Music and Cultural Tendencies in 15th Century Italy, JAMS XIX, 1966, pp. 127–161.
25 The Book of the Courtier p. 82.
26 Ficino, Opera Omnia, Basle, 1576, 944.
27 Planets are said to ‘transit’ as they move in their perpetual journey through the heavens; as they move into positions which form angles or ‘aspects’ to their positions at one’s birth, they are said to ‘transit’ those positions.
29 Ibid. p. 16.
The lira was a flat-bridged, violin-shaped instrument, with (normally) five strings on the finger-board and two drone strings. It was therefore designed for chordal, not melodic accompaniment. No actual written-out music for the instrument survives from this period, although there is an exquisite original instrument surviving by Giovanni d'Andrea da Verona, dated 1511. See article The New Groves, vol. 11, pp. 19–22.

See Andrew Barker, Greek Musical Writings I op cit. and Plato, Symposium, 204–5.

For the Latin translations of the Orphic Hymns attributed to Ficino, see I. Klutstein, Marsilio Ficino et le Théologie Ancienne, Florence, 1987.

Ficino, Opera Omnia, 871.

In his preface to the translation of the Hermetic text Poimandres, Ficino lists the genealogy of the ancient theologians as follows: Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, Aglaophemus, Pythagoras, Philolaus, Plato. Each one had direct connection with the last through discipleship. (see Kristeller, The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino, Columbia, 1943, p. 26).

Ficino's pupil, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, wrote: 'In natural magic nothing is more efficacious than the Hymns of Orpheus, if there be applied to them a suitable music, and disposition of soul, and other circumstances known to the wise'. (See Frances Yates, Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, London, 1964, p. 106).

Ficino, Book of Life, p. 159. The seven steps are: 1. MOON (stones, metals); 2. MERCURY (herbs, trees, gums, animals' limbs); 3. VENUS (vapours and powders, scents, unguents); 4. SUN-APOLLO (words, songs, sounds); 5. MARS (concepts of imagination, forms, movements); 6. JUPITER (discourses and deliberations of reason); 7. SATURN (secret intelligences joined to divine things).

By 'tones', Ficino is most likely meaning 'modes'; the various ways of organising pitches in melodies, which the ancient Greeks believed aroused different emotions and actions in the listener. See article in New Groves, vol. 12 pp. 376–397.


For Ficino's one excursion into music theory, see his letter 'De Rationibus Musice' in Supplementum Ficinianum ed. P. Kristeller, 1937, pp. 54–56. Here he makes an interesting analogy between musical intervals and astrological aspects.

See James Haar, Essays on Italian Poetry and Music in the Renaissance, Los Angeles, 1986, chapter IV.

The term frottola derives from the medieval Latin 'frocta', meaning 'a conglomeration of random thoughts' (NG) and covers the full range of secular polyphonic types of composition from 1470 to 1530. The various poetic forms found in the 11 books published by Petrucci include Laude, Barzellette, Strambotte, Ode (NG vol. 6, pp. 867–87).

Source: F. Bossinensis, Tenori e contrabassi intabulati col soprano in canto figurato per cantar e sonar col lauto, Libro Secundo, 1511.

The Book of Life p. 163.


I am indebted to Philip Weller at the Warburg Institute for the composition of the Hymn to Jupiter.


Petrucci's Sixth Book contains the only three settings in this style in the whole of the frottola repertoire, and since nos. 2 and 5 are definitely ascribed to Giustiniani, it seems probable that this one also stems from his pen. The popularity of his style is evident from Petrucci's use of the term 'Giustiniana' to indicate a composition in this florid style with improvisatory ornamentation. See James Haar, *Essay*, ch. II.


---

Woodcut from Luigi Pulci's 'Morgante Maggiore'. Florence, c. 1500.
Even the king rose up to make obeisance,
For surely, now that Priyamvada had arrived,
His own long-hoped-for dream would come to pass.
As the court stared at that gaunt and unkempt man
Whose home was a cave in the hills, whose robe a rug,
Bristling with hair, flung round him, the king nodded
And attendants rushed out and returned, in their serving hands
The lute that no man known had ever mastered;
They set it before the sage and the whole court stiffened,
All looks sweeping the scene, then fixing themselves
On Priyamvada's face.

'This lute was brought
Long years ago from the mountain wilderness
Of the country north where hermits in the woods
Tame their bodies. Yet this much we've heard:
The tree from which the great Vajrakirti carved it
Was the primal, strange Kiriti in whose ear
The snowpeaks whispered high secrets, on whose shoulders
Clouds came to rest, below whose branches, stout
As the trunks of elephants, whole herds could shelter
From the snow and sleet, while in his hollows bears
Could hibernate, on his bark lions came
To comb their manes; and -- we've heard too -- his roots
Reached to midearth, where on their scented coolness
Vasuki, the vast serpent rested his head
To sleep. From that tree great Vajrakirti
Fashioned it, carving all his life
To carry out his unrelenting irresistible vow
And, finishing the lute, he finished vow
And life at once.'
Sighing, the king went on:

'My famous artists — all have given up,
Their craft confounded and their pride put down;
That instrument has found no one to match it yet
And so is called by us The Obstinate Lute;
And yet, for all of this, we still believe
That Vajrakirti's disciplined devotion
Had a purpose and that the lute will surely speak.
Though only when that master who commands
Music like an essence takes it in his lap.
Wise Priyamvada! There's Vajrakirti's lute;
And here I am, and here the queen, the court,
The people waiting, taut as bow strings drawn.'

Priyamvada, with all eyes gripping him,
Unwrapped his bristling mat without a word,
And spreading it on the floor set down the lute
On it; eyes closed, he took a long deep breath
And gently joined his hands; then almost unseen,
So delicate was the move, he touched the chords
And said in a slow voice: 'But, Majesty,
I'm no musician, merely a supplicant,
A plodding learner of and would-be witness
To those truths alive beyond the grasp
Of words . . . Vajrakirti! And the ancient
Kiriti! This lute grained with a power
That's superhuman! These thoughts alone can shake
The base of being!'

Priyamvada paused:
The court had long since forgotten how to speak.
Lifting the instrument he cradled it,
This Seeker, on his lap, then slowly bent
To it until at last his forehead rested
On the strings. The court was shocked: Priyamvada too?
Was he asleep, fatigued? Or had he crumpled
Like all the rest, despite that prickly rug,
That discipline? Did the lute remain
Unchanged, unmastered, still unplayable?
But in the pounding silence, Priyamvada
Was taking the lute's full measure, or truer yet,
Was going back wide-eyed into himself;
He was, concerted in this solitude,
Giving himself to that Kiriti tree;  
For who was he, in fact, this Priyamvada,  
To set himself so brazenly before  
This deep-spelled instrument, wanting to play  
This lute that bodied a holy, given life?  
Thus on the spiky mat that was his fame  
He thought no more of king and court, withdrew  
Into a deep occulted round of self  
In which a solitary witness stood  
Before that tree on whose cool scented roots  
Was pillowed the huge Serpent in his sleep,  
On whose shoulders the clouds could come to rest,  
And in whose ears the snowpeaks whispered secrets,  
And Priyamvada made this wordless hymn:

O great tree!  
Form sprung with a million unfolding and falling of leaves,  
Blazoned in countless rains with countless fireflies,  
Whose days are hummed by bees,  
Nights by the cicada’s  
Endless benisons,  
Whose limbs, morning and evening,  
Have shaken to the pleasure  
Of innumerable families of birds,  
O huge figure,  
Older brother to the whole wilderness,  
Elder, companion, mentor, support,  
All-circling sanctuary,  
Embodied chorus  
Of a multitude of urgent wood-sounds –  
Let me just hear you,  
See you, meditate on you,  
Unblinking, stilled, contained, whole, and speechless:  
How shall I have power to touch you even?  
This lute, hewn from your body, pierced and bound,  
How can I dare  
With these hands to strike,  
To force from its chords  
By a blow, that richness of music for making  
Which how many gave their full-pulsed lives?

This lute resting on my lap – but no! –  
It is I myself who am
A delighted child at play in your lap,
O Prime Tree! Hold and steady me,
Let all my childish cries
Be stilled in an exultation
In which
I hear
And gather,
And, astonished, record in myself
Each midmost note of your being,
Sway, lost to myself, with each sway of your song:
Sing,
And may the quick air I breathe move to the cadence of you singing,
Breathing in and out, the breathing contained or at rest in release.

Sing!
Here rests the lute, your limb, a severed member!
But you are yet whole, inviolate, self-contained,
Essentially possessed.
Sing!
In the dark of my being let the light of remembrance
Wake up, memory
Of the essential sound:
Sing, then, oh tree, sing!

I remember now:
Bellying clouds — lightning-shot — the chatter of rain on leaves
In the pit of night the soft fall of the mahua berries;
The whimper of the startled nestling;
The soft amusement of the rippled stream
Swiftly caressing the rocks;
The holiday drum from the village on the hill,
Thumping through the valley mist.
The listless flute of a shepherd;
The woodpecker's knick; the urgent flutter of the humming-bird;
The fall of dew so soft it ends in a rain of star-flowers;
The ponds' brimming in fall, their waves a mere rustle;
The cranes' cranking, the plovers' drawn-out cry,
The hissing rush of swans in flight, their shapes like feathered darts
In pine woods the aimless clacking of the scent-drunk beetle;
The drone of cataracts, syncopated;
In stops between the cicada, frog, cuckoo, papiha, between creek, cry,
chirr, and click —
The hum of all, being born.
Yes, I remember:
The plunge and rush of black clouds from distant mountains,
Like herds of bellowing elephants;
The lunge of the rising flood;
The whoosh and gurgle of sand-banks falling;
The searing snort of the cyclone,
Trees ripped and crashing down;
The stinging slap of hail;
The crackle of dry grass-blades, honed by frost;
The melt of ice-caked clay, oozing in gentle sun;
Hoar-frost swabbing the earth’s cracked skin softly;
The rebounding boom
Of falling rock filling the valleys —
Stunning crash, dulled thud, echo softened, and sigh tapering off to silence.

I remember:
In the green glade, behind dwarf trees by the pond,
The sounds of many forest creatures, thirsty or sated; each at his appointed hour:
Roar, growl, cry, bark, howl, and chattering;
The quick patter of the water-fowl’s thief-step
On the spreading lotus leaves;
The splash of the frog’s startled leap;
The quick clop of the traveller’s horse;
The patient, unruffled thump of the hefty buffalo hoof.

I remember:
When daylight’s first tiptoe glimpse
Glistens on the dew drop —
The sudden astonished shiver of that instant:
And by noon, when
Small blossoms in the grass open unseen
To the soft roar of uncountable drunken bees —
The indolent stillness of that long-staying moment;
And in the evening
When the gleaming liqueescence of starshine
Rains intangibly
Like the blessings of innumerable young madonnas
Looking down with great gentle eyes —
The slow surrounding mystery of that moment.
I remember
And each recalled image
Overpowers and stuns me.
I hear
But every resonance sucks me out of myself;
Like some hymn-pervaded air I am carried away.
I remember
But I have forgotten myself:
I hear but that I listening is beyond me, a second self lost in the very
note.

No, not I, nowhere that I!
Oh, Tree, Forest,
Oh, warp and woof of music,
Fabric of cadenced being,
Tidal sweep of identity,
Forgive me – pass over my trivialness –
Give me cover, shelter, sanctuary;
My Refuge,
May my dumbness lose itself in the swell of your music.
Forgetting me, come,
Light upon the chords of the lute
And sing your self
To your self:
Let the birds you shelter have a voice,
The spring of the deer that keep to your shade a cadence;
For the rhythms of your sunlight and shade, your wind and rain,
Your leafing and flowering;
Give shape of song to the rings of your ages,
Sing your wiseness ingrained,
Oh, sing,
Compass your self, its finding, its losing,
Its being, becoming, its ever presence,
Oh, sing!

The king’s eyes widened, for as if in a trance
The musician had lifted up his arm and struck;
The lute, as one who stretches lazily
After a heavy sleep, awakened; notes
Like tiny seraphim flew up, their joy
Singing; for that hunter-sorcerer,
Stalking with soundless steps, drew in with sure
And careful hands his net of golden strings.
All at once, the lute's chords twanged, and a strange blaze
Flushed, cold and liquid, in the player's eyes;
And lightning shuddered through every man in court.
Something descended which, self-born in light,
To Brahma's massive silence endlessly
Gives shape: Light in one imperious sweep
Enveloped all those present. Then the flood
Held each one, separate, carried him across...
The king in his solitude heard
Victory whose body was fame.
Whose hand held a garland,
Who sang a lucky hymn
To the beat of far-off drums
And the crown sat lightly as the siris on his head
Envy, ambition, hate, and flattery
Peeled from him like rags, leaving gold alive with light,
Devoutly to be given away.

The queen heard lightning speak to her apart—
(The lightning, weaving garlands for her dusky cloud-lover's chest
Where she makes love, and wearying, finds repose
In perfect trust):
These rubies, necklaces, silks and brocades,
These brilliant bands and anklets that tinkle,
Are lumps of frosted dark! One light only there is—
To love constantly!
Which unchanging light, the queen devoutly will seek after.

In their singular solitudes others heard also:
To this one, musing,
It was the smallest crumb of compassion tossed from above:
To that other
A promise of no more fear;
To him
The clang of money in the safe;
To him the incredible odour of cooking after days of hunger;
One heard the shy clink of the new bride's ankle-bells;
Another the joyous babble of the new-born;
To another it came as the flapping of fish in a net;
To another a bird's call, far up and free;
Another heard it as the scrambled cries of competing stalls in the market
Another as the measured chime of the temple bells;
Another as the steady fall of the hammer on the hectic anvil;
The continual lapping of waves on a hull of a boat that chases at anchor
to one,
While to another it was the rough-shod foot mutely falling on the
village road,
Or, to this one, the water sluicing through the broken dyke
To that one the jingle of the dancer's ankle-bells calling;
For another battle clangour,
The clank of cow-bells at lowly twilight to him;
To him, doom striking with its sullen drums;
To another, being young, the very first sigh;
To another, Time yawning with swallowing jaws.
All were swamped, sucked under, floated a while,
Bobbed up, and left subdued and muted; each,
In his separate this-ness only, woke alone,
Became explicit, merged into the whole.
The lute was once more still.

'Oh, marvellous!
Marvellous!' The king stepped down, in awe,
From his high throne, the queen held out her necklace,
The seven-stringed one, the people cried with one
Charmed voice: 'Oh master, master, miracle!'

And he who made that music set the lute
Gently on the mat and covered it,
Like a mother who, laying her sleeping baby down
In his bed, withdraws a little and caresses him
With blessing eyes. The master then rose up
And, staying the king's advance with a lifted hand,
Said: 'Nothing in this is Cause for praising me,
For I myself was drowned in nothingness,
Gave myself up to the whole by playing,
So what you heard was not from me or even
From the lute itself, but rather from all things
In their being thus; all presence wholly
Here, sang of itself; the Infinite,
Of Silence in the Empty Infinite,
Not to be divided, or possessed,
Not to be reduced, not measurable,
Without a word or sound makes in all things
Their essential music!'
Priyamvada then
Folded his hands and bowed to everyone,
Rolled up the bristly mat and went back to his cave.
The court rose: king, courtier, commoner
All went about their business.

Times, too, changed.
You who read me, for this sufficient reason
My own voice finds its fitting silence now.
My Dear Friend,
I do apologise for not writing to you earlier. But my journey here into this wild state has been long and arduous, sometimes even dangerous, and filled with moments when I was forced to question my own motives for making such an expedition in the first place. It has therefore been impossible for me until now to achieve the necessary state of equilibrium in which to address your concerns for my wellbeing. Had I known that crossing the frontier into this new territory would have meant so much in terms of disrupting my normal mode of thought, I suspect that I might have had second thoughts about making this journey!

The truth is that entering into a wild state is fraught with risk. For people such as ourselves who have been, shall we say, long used to a certain scepticism with regard to belief, it is often difficult to come to terms with the existence of a so-called pristine environment such as exists out here. Nevertheless, the traditional custodians who live in this remote region of the world are at pains to view their land in this way. As far as I have been able to glean from them in our discussions there appears to be a numinous agent at work within the earth itself which predisposes these people to regard everything about them as sacred. You can imagine how strange I felt initially when I was confronted with this concept of 'sacred geography'. It was as if I were encountering for the first time certain illuminated manuscripts from the Middle Ages which suggested that Jerusalem was, in spite of all reason to the contrary, the Axis Mundi of the world.

Yet here I am, living in the middle of what can only be described as a fertile desert, an Eden. The waterhole I am camped beside is filled with a wide variety of bird-life, along with one ageing crocodile who
eyes me with a circumspection that one often finds among savage beasts bent upon stalking their prey. Wild buffalo forage in the shallows and sea-eagles occasionally luff in the warm, midday airs. At night I often hear wild boar burying their snouts in the mud by the billabong as they search for succulent roots. For the most part I live here alone. The birds in this primeval wonderland are my only consorts. Pelican and duck, stork and magpie geese, and a whole host of smaller birds all combine in a singular chorus to register their accord with my presence in their midst. Strangely enough they see me not as an interloper, but as someone who is able to celebrate with them the joy of being free.

Of course, when I originally crossed over the frontier into this wild state, I felt sure that I would be able to deal with anything that might arise. It did not occur to me that conditions would be so very different from where I had come. I was, after all, modern. My existence was derived from a contemporary infrastructure that sought to raise the idea of comfort to that of Holy Writ. The modern world with its penchant for gaudy ephemera had made me, like so many others, into one of its willing victims. I had no wish to turn my back on all this softness, all this undeniable extravagance and journey to a place where modernity was neither understood nor desired. Yet in spite of this, here I am inhabiting a region that has not yet bartered away its pristine condition in order to gain for itself a veneer of what we call 'civilization'.

Disturbing perhaps? Clearly bird feathers on a bush track bear no relation to a bulging bank account. Nor is it easy to equate the rough texture of a sun-dried buffalo skull to that of those vibrant fabrics that we wind about our mannequins. There is indeed so much out here that tests my ready assumptions about what we, in our world, find impossible to do without in order to survive. Journeying from a modern state into this wild state has forced me to come to terms with those golden calves of philosophy that I have always believed to be the veritable pride of the herd! The very principle of economics, for example, a mode of perception to which we all so slavishly adhere, now seems devoid of any interior dimension when I compare it to the seasonal migration of birds!

A madness you think, this confusion of one discipline with another? In the modern state we are loathe to equate the workings of
nature with those of man. For centuries we have learnt to celebrate the ability of the mind to detach itself from the workings of nature. Cartesian skullduggery has managed to weave its magic in the form of certain concepts such as 'thought preceding existence'? But when I look into the eyes of a snake, or when I stumble upon a towering anthill perfectly aligned with magnetic north, I begin to suspect that whatever 'thought' that precedes existence out here in the wilderness draws its energy from an entirely otherworldly source. I am led to the conclusion that life in the wild state is so thoroughly divorced from any rigid categories that it resists all our attempts to so define it.

Clearly I made this journey in order to discover whether those primordial qualities that one finds in a wild state might invoke in me some residue of innocence. I was looking to the infolding wings of a pelican or the morning bloom of a lotus to awaken me again to that curious wonder that one associates with childhood. You might ask: why revert to a mode of perception that has no need of relativities? Surely, you might argue, such a mode of perception precludes the value of utility. To observe as a child does denies nature of its potential to serve man in the way we have come to expect. And equally, not to regard nature as subservient to our desires is to condemn ourselves to those inchoate yearnings of our forbears.

I recall one celebrated sage who suggested that real power comes to those who regain for themselves a state of instinctivity. In this wild state I have noticed that all life relies in a large measure on what we choose to reject. Is it not strange that nature relies so much on the workings of instinct, whether it be the bee's innate ability to hexagon-alize its existence or the salmon's odyssean swim from river to sea? Without this order, without nature's ability to reproduce immemorial patterns I suspect that anarchy would be the norm of existence rather than an aberration.

I have no qualms about making such statements now that I have learnt to identify with nature. For once we are in collusion. I stand on the edge of this vast swampland, where the crocodile's inordinate hunger is as regenerative in its own way as the fructive gesture of the monsoon rains, and ask myself why it should be so. How is it that the crocodile can drag a kangaroo from the bank, crush it to death in its monstrous jaws, and yet find itself contributing to the regenerative process as much as do the seasonal rains? Death and rebirth are
forever locked in the jaws of this primeval carnivore, a fragile conjunctio that nevertheless holds all mysteries within its grasp.

You see, I have begun to recognize that we moderns have lost all sense of what is sacred. The nomads of this region assure me that the earthly envelope in which I find myself is one vast and tremulous icon. Morning dew on a spider's web clings to a form that merely echoes each mandala about the head of a Byzantine saint. See! All nature somehow celebrates sanctity by way of an esotericism that transcends even the symbol itself. I am constantly amazed by the easy mosaic made by leaves bent upon decorating those patient concentricities within wood that few of us are ever privileged to witness. It is this substance, I suppose, that is so visible in the wild state. For at each moment we are being confronted by the endless nurturing of form, the perfect delineation of what is clearly inexpressible by way of rational thought.

So, you say. My friend has reverted back to a primitive condition. He wishes to give up what we moderns have gained in the interests of pursuing some ephemeral idea of innocence. Rousseau's Noble Savage reincarnated! His escape into a wild state has done little more than enervate our own precarious position as lords of the world. Allowing himself to become seduced by illiterate nomads who are tethered by superstition to a set of inconsistent and often bizarre beliefs makes him a prime case for the title of embittered exile. Under these circumstances you condemn me to a life of wandering, impeded once more by my own instincts, an onlooker only in man's quest for material apotheosis.

But I say to you, think again! It is not for nothing that we are blessed with a pentagram of senses, the endless knot of sensations that together surround us as if they were the seductive wreath of Niniane's veil. For it was she who captivated Merlin and so imprisoned him forever in the Forest of Broceliande because of his desire to know all, to penetrate this veil. For he, like ourselves, wanted to unite with matter in his bid to achieve immortality. This heady concoction was to lead to his imprisonment, a victim of his own magic rather than the wiles of the forest sprite. She merely offered him her undying love in return for the secret of his wizardry. He, the great shaman, the hierophant, the husbandman of mysteries now found himself disenfranchised by the illusory beauty of Niniane, the very embodiment of
Maya. And I say to you that it is we who are prepared to destroy the wizardry of nature by way of ratiocination in our bid to see through this same illusory veil.

The custodians of the land here, men all of them whose very blackness syncopates the land upon which they walk, have attained to a certain dignity, a gravitas that we who inhabit the modern condition have long since dispelled from our repertoire of gestures. We no longer aspire to the honour of being regarded as a mekigar, a man of magic or tribal elder . . . indeed a saint! Moslems, I know, regard this special quality in a man as being god-given, a dispensation they call baraka (blessing). How is it that we no longer wish to breathe in this pure archaic ambiance which for many nomads is the very stuff of life? They will go down on their knees in the presence of a Master. They will whisper incantatory prayers in the expectation of his everlasting life. They will ask him for his blessing in the hope that their own lives might be enhanced. Such miracles I have witnessed while living among those whose instincts are so finely attuned to the special beneficence of grace. I know also that true men derive their feeling of fraternity from the knowledge that they all partake of what the great Mevlana called the 'element of congenenity' which draws one man to another.

Therefore I must inform you that living in a wild state has its own compensations. Here a rock, a cave, a pool in a river, even a sun-blasted gum tree retain what these nomads call djang. It has taken me some time to understand what djang is, since the word is always used in the context of something sacred. But after making a number of journeys in the company of these nomads I came to realize that the expression implied a metaphysical quality of numen that makes certain landforms more sacred than others. Here the Dreaming ancestors, the Mimi People and the Rainbow Serpent cohabit in a world of myth and symbol. They exist as ochred images on cave walls, in peculiar rock formations, in the echo of water as it tumbles over a waterfall. When you hear the eerie, soundless cry of a Mimi, so stick-like and fragile as it dances across a rock-face, then you begin to perceive what it is like to inhabit a truly wild state. The world of the spirit closes about you, caressing you with its contiguence now that you have begun to acknowledge its presence.

This, clearly, is what djang is all about. My nomad friends have been
at pains to inform me that this quality cannot be extracted from the earth as if it were an oyster from a shell. They agree with the great sage who suggested that its place is in the placeless, its trace in the traceless. For them djang embodies a special power (kurunba) that can only be felt by those susceptible to its presence. In this way my nomad friends are able to journey from one place to another without ever feeling that they are leaving their homeland. What they feel in the earth, what they hear in the trees are the primordial whispers emanating from an ancient source. And it is this source, linked as it is to their Dreaming, that they acknowledge each time they feel the presence of djang in the earth under their feet.

It may be said of these people that they continually feel the need of what does not exist. We, on the other hand, reject such a yearning as a weakness of the mind, a pre-cognitive fear that only serves to undermine the elaborate humanist edifice that we have built for ourselves. But I say to you that this yearning on the part of my nomad friends is not provoked by fear but by awe. They have long ago accepted with joy the role that the possession of a sense of wonder implies. They have no need to ask an object to explain or indeed justify its existence, except in terms of its participation in the cosmic game. Thus water is not made up of hydrogen and oxygen atoms but is instead the great baptismal douche of life itself. The Rainbow Serpent proceeds from its watery source and so creates the world. The monsoon rains celebrate a victory over aridity at the end of each dry season and so augment renewal. Thus these nomads are able to lift up the mystery in themselves towards the mystery in itself. They are able to perceive in themselves something equal to what is beyond them.

I trust that this might allay any fears that you may have for my sanity! Nevertheless for a man to pass over into a wild state he must give up much more than he realizes. It is no secret that wildness, by its nature, draws its sustenance from what we regard as primitive. Our incurable domesticity has lead us to suspect any movement towards dethroning the intellect in favour of the regality of the intuition. That is why we pay insurance premiums in order to eliminate from our lives the prospect of an accident! Cause and effect becomes the very stuff of modern existence, a philosophic premise that governs whatever we do. We are afraid to risk anything since to do so implies a failure of the rational intellect to juggle the alternatives.
But in a wild state one is constantly living in danger. On this waterhole I watch an interminable battle for survival being played out each day. Bird, fish and insect are involved in the weaving of a mighty web of death that is designed to catch all life in its sticky net. Even the giant crocodile, buttressed as it is by what seems like eternity, is able to contribute to this orchestration whenever its jaws are galvanized into action by hunger. Then muscle, bone and brute strength are drawn into the drama as a buffalo calf bellows out its last breath in the spuming, blood-filled shallows by the riverbank. When I see this happen I know that any causal effect that we like to attribute to such an event is far from the mark when it tries to explain the metaphysics of hunger.

As an Oriental sage once remarked, 'our entire past exists integrally in our present'. Living in a wild state, however, has made me conscious that the entirety of this past he speaks of is far more extensive than I had previously assumed it to be. The past he is talking about is not a personal past, but one that cloaks us from the very beginning of our collective human existence. He is talking about the profound beauty of sharing our origins within ourselves. The primeval ooze is a part of history. We have no need to discredit its role in making us what we are today. Thus dirt is as refined as gold-dust, and ashes more evocative of our origins than any well-cut diamond. When we are truly wild we can have no aversion to rubbing dirt on our bodies or decorating our brows with ashes. For these materials are what we are made of at the very moment when we entered into the history of becoming ourselves.

The wild state is clearly a part of a poetic universe. However much one wishes to impose upon this state any superficial laws of aestheticism, it is doomed to collapse under their weight. My nomad friends tell me that their survival rests not on fragile food resources, but on their ability to enter into the Dreaming whenever they so wish. Yet to codify this spirit-realm, to chart on a map the contours of the metaphysical land on which they live out their lives would be to destroy the mystery that for countless millenia they have fought to preserve. Indeed, more than anything, it is this mystery that they wish to protect because it signifies to them all the risks they must take in order to retain their primitivity, their wildness in the natural domain.

So my answer to you is, that I now acknowledge how beneficial it is
to live in a wild state. Here the borders are made up of seasons, the mating cries of bower-birds, swallows on the wing at dusk. To cross over into the world of nature is to enter into a condition where one is silently drawn by the stronger pull of what it is one really loves. Unknotting the energy of the sun and allowing it to permeate throughout one's being is to encounter what St John Perse calls the 'high free wave that no one harnesses or compels.' I like the idea of being a part of such freedom, even if it does mean that I may have to sacrifice those overly refined sensibilities known only to the eunuch. But we must acknowledge at some point in our lives whether we wish to procreate wonders, or whether we wish merely to adhere to a regime that propagates intellectual insights. I for one now know that in conversing with a crocodile, if only in the language of fear, I have begun to intuit dimensions to existence that in the past I would have dismissed. For I realize that this animal is not a creature of anguish in the way that I have always been. So that his snouty gaze, rippled as it is by the passage of a dragonfly swooping low over the water, intimates all the untrammeled strength of wildness from which we moderns have shied away.

Does this make sense? Or have I allowed myself to succumb to the lure of allowing my body to become synonymous with the earth? My nomad friends do not think so when they crouch by the fire beside me. They maintain that at last I have divorced myself from the need to observe, to be an onlooker only. In their eyes I am one of them. Under the spell of the Mimi I have entered into the spirit of their land. This, they say, is when a man begins to realize his true heritage as someone who carries paradise within himself. However wild these men might be, however primitive their lives might appear on the surface, I am nevertheless left with a profound debt of gratitude that I must somehow repay. At the same time I am reminded of the words of Marcilio Ficino when he said, 'it is spirit alone I seek, since I seek myself, who am indeed pure spirit.' My nomad friends, in their alliance with those forces of wildness, have made this the basis of their own conduct. I suspect it up to me now to embark upon a new journey of my own in order to discover the djang within myself.

And finally, I ask you to listen to the pleas of one of your own famed exemplars. The poet, Gerard de Nerval, gave his life in pursuit of the lost paradise within himself. Had he found it he would have
realized the verity of his own words when he wrote in ‘Vers Dorés’:

Respecte dans la bête un esprit agissant:
Chaque fleur est un âme à la Nature éclore;
Un mystère d’amour dans le métal repose;
‘Tout est sensible!’ Et tout sur ton être puissant.

‘Crains, dans la mur aveugle, un regard qui t’épie:
A la matière même un verbe est attaché . . .
Ne la fait pas servir a quelque usage impie!

Putting matter to impious use is clearly not a crime that my nomads are capable of. I only hope that we might finally gather the courage to desist from committing this crime ourselves.

Your good friend,

James Cowan
The sign-post at the tunnel entrance read,
abandon all hope, you who pass this gate
are perennial refugees of a state –
an institute where those who think they're dead
are subjected to torture. Here you must leave
all cowardice, the flag we fly is red.
I gripped my guide's hand and he marched ahead
undeterred by my straining at his sleeve.
At first I wept; the smoke was like eddies
of sand kicked up by a whirlwind, we heard
worse cries than a desert sky full of birds,
interspersed with those intermediaries,
the partly lost, who took no side. To die
and yet never know death was their sorrow,
a fierce nakedness that couldn't borrow
disguise from life or death. I watched one fly
an ensign, it unravelled like a hare
streaking its lightning bolt; behind it came
those whom death had undone, a constant rain
I couldn't number, they swarmed in the glare
and were dived by stinging hornets and wasps
that made their faces stream with blood, which splashed
the worm piles at their feet; the earth was mashed
to bogland. Through the red haze I could grasp
a crowd queueing upon Acheron's shore,
desperate with apprehension for Charon
whose voice barked at us from midstream, be gone,
you who are lost, we heard his churning oar,
and saw his white hair, as he pleyed his trade,
punting the dead into the final dark
where ice and fire contended for his bark
and a dead sun fumed blackly in the glade . . .

Seeing me as one who was still alive,
he told me I must go by other means,
by other craft across the coal-black stream,  
his passengers were numb bees in a hive.  
His eyes were circles of flame, and his cheeks  
dead to all emotion disclosed no trace  
of pity for those huddled in that place,  
naked, teeth-chattering, skin green as leeks,  
they blasphemed God, their parents, place, and time,  
the secretion of seed that caused their birth,  
the agony of their tenure on earth,  
they wished to be swallowed up by quicklime.  
Revenants herded into a corral,  
Charon sweeps them forward; like leaves come free  
of an autumn branch, they in misery  
are lashed by his oar, and at a signal,  
the ferry puts out and a new crowd waits  
to meet its judgement. In a crimson light  
we watched the wind fan the bark into flight,  
cries reached us on the air. It was too late.

The Inferno  Canto VI  after Dante.

And no escape. The third circle bites hard  
with a fetlock's constrictions; heavy rain  
intermingled with hailstones drums the plain;  
the hail in falling snaps to splintered shards;  
the ground's putrescent with its coat of scum.  
Wallowing in the wash, red eyes aglow,  
Cerberus shakes his black coat free of snow,  
his three mouths work to snare whatever runs  
across his line of vision, and he flays  
it meat from sinew. The men howl like dogs,  
prostrate, rain-plastered, they resemble logs  
nosing a swamp. Seeing us come his way,  
Cerberus crouched to spring with flexing claws,  
but Virgil pelted mud into each throat,  
so that we watched the dog's intestine bloat,  
ravenousous spittle flooded from its jaws,  
as it masticated expectant food.  
We picked our way over the somnolent,
beaten into submission; the lament
of one who sat up and seemed stiff as wood,
whined in my ears; I couldn’t recognize
his face, despite his importunacy
that he and I had shared the same city.
Observing him closely it was his size
informed me of the glutton Ciaccio,
his pumpkin belly beaten by the rain,
the fat in his cheeks whittled thin by pain.
Knowing him wise, I questioned him to know
the future of my divided city,
and he prophesied discord, rivalry,
the black faction would rout the white, and throw
them in a bloodbath, this within three suns,
pride, greed and envy were the sparking wire
igniting both camps with the hissing fire
of men intent upon disunion;
it seemed good and bad flowed in the lifestream,
inseparably braided into one vein.
Anxious for their welfare, I gave the names
of men I’d known and loved who lit my dreams
now they’d crossed the dark river, but he gave
no advice on this issue, warning me
that all sink to the bottom, heavy lees
that go on falling through a depthless grave.
He asked to be remembered to the minds
of men, stared off into the dark, then bent
his head, beaten by the increased torrent,
and rejoined his sad troop who cannot find
respite in death. We slogged back to the road,
I questioning the master as to why
pain should increase in death, and that to die
seemed only one more impossible load
upon our frailty. He said, some are lost
for ever, but through suffering come near
to the source of the light. We stopped in fear.
We’d come to Pluto’s kingdom of blue ghosts.
The Inferno Canto XXV after Dante

Unrepentant, simmering with white heat,
the man cursed the heavens, raising his fists,
snakes curled around his neck and round his wrists,
and bound a knotted rope around his feet.
I'd never known such rage, and when we fled,
a centaur arrived crying for his blood,
hooves kicking to stamp him into the mud,
a fire-breathing dragon wrapped round his head
lay flexing its volatile wings, its least
breath incinerated a stone to ash.
My master informed me this was Cacus,
a redoubtable, bloody mountain beast
who'd lived at the foot of the Aventine,
and pilfered beasts from Hercules who broke
his heavy skull upon the hundredth stroke,
his club split to the stringiness of twine . . .

The centaur rushed by pursued by three men,
who seeing us, cried, who are you who stand
upon this alien and scorching land? . . .

and one said, is Cianfa in his den?
and as we stared, a serpent with six feet
placed two upon his belly, two around
his arms, and rooted firmly on the ground
sank its teeth in his cheeks, and then on heat,
mounted between his thighs, its iron grip
inexorable as a climbing ivy
that chokes the bark of a pollarded tree;
tore the skin as it ravaged, strip by strip,
and as they struggled, so the two caught fire,
and crumpled as a sheet of paper flares
from brown to black to white, fanning the air,
they moulded like hot wax in the desire
to push their features into one ugly
simulacrum of the two; in their hate
they'd perfected a perverse duplicate,
a shambling, bestial monstrosity.
Seeing this hybrid union, the quick
eyes of a reptile, black as peppercorn,
livid, raging, raising its pointed horns, injected through that body with a flick of its tongue, and stiffened out dead. Buoso watched with indifference, but hypnotised, he of the two remaining thieves most prized his identity, and it came on slow this perfect transmutation, skin for skin, they responded like figures in a dance—reptile and man, each looked into a trance so that what was without entered within, the legs and thighs met no impediment, the cleft tail found its groove, the arms armpits, and smooth and hard became a perfect fit, and twisted together the reptile's bent hindlegs became its member, there were two phalli hanging as a gross parody of the human, and smoke that drifted free of their union was a sulphur blue; one had hair, one was bald, one stood upright, the other prostrate, both fashioned a face unequal to its dimensions of space, and I saw through that haze of coloured light, one push ears through his cheeks, and hurriedly botch a nose, while the prostrate one withdrew his ears as a snail does its horns, and blew his tongue into a fork. Dualities, monstrosities, the two fled down the road hissing like fireballs about to explode, and one turned, shouting, you who had pale knees, Buoso, shall now crawl down this road and feel the cinders bite. We stood and watched them go; with us stood Puccio Sciancato. I couldn't believe what we'd seen was real.

The Inferno Canto XXXII after Dante

Cold and its blighting blueness, past zero, we tramped the bottom of the world; no word approximates to what we saw or heard, figures buried like sheep in drifts of snow,
they were below the ice-line, heads wedged thick, we had to tiptoe so as not to press our feet on heads floating like watercress in a lake spread before us with its slick of ice, the polished blue of the Danube beneath a frigid sky; no pick-axe could have nicked an indentation, it was lead in corrugated patterns to its bed, and had enveloped a black straggling wood. Here the unfortunate foundered like frogs, livid with the cold, ungainly as storks, each head frozen into a shoulder’s fork, their weight if they stamped sounded like a log thumped in a grate. Looking down at my feet I saw two heads interlocked by their hair, their eyes webbed over by the frost’s blue glare, they looked like explorers wormed through by sleet, two goats fiercely entangled by their horns, butting to free the deadlock. And nearby, one with shorn ears, unlocked his mouth to try for words, and said, the two you see were born from one body, and justly plumb the cold, they lived as traitors, now as exhibits they stiffen, frantic for the ice to split, cooped up with others in this deep-freeze hold... At each step, faces stocked the frozen fords, and half stumbling, my boot clouted a face that cried out wailingly, you come to trace my whereabouts so that you may afford pleasure to my tormentors. Bending down, he cursed me for one living, and I took him by the scalp and gripped him like a rook a fledgling, shaking him, so he might own to some identity, tufts of his hair coiled in my hands, and he began to bark, inciting a voice to call from the dark, if that’s you Bocca, must you have us hear the wolf-yelp of your voice? That evil name stung me with anger, and made known, his tongue lashed out at others pinched in ice, or hung like fish upon a trot-line. Others came to notice at his pointing, and I saw two heads tearing each other in a hole,
bulldog-clamped, chewing on each other's skulls,
until the uppermost had gnawed a raw
wound to the spilling brains. Ugolino
I recognized, and stayed him like a dog
still lunging at the other snorting hog,
we were so horrified we could not go.

The Inferno  Canto XXXIII  after Dante

Raising his mouth from the gaping red wound
his teeth had inflicted, and still consumed
with bloody ferocity, he resumed
his narrative. There was no other sound.
I was Count Ugolino, put to death
by the machinations of the astute
Archbishop whose brains I've gnawed to the roots –
(the stench was terrible upon his breath);
I was shut up in a festering hole,
slippery with faeces, and the blueing bread
thrown to me and my sons was grey as lead,
and prodded to us spiked upon a pole.
Meanwhile, I dreamt the traitor and his hounds
were silk flying upon the mountain tops,
chasing the wolf, a steaming, sweat-stained mop,
winded, buckling on its legs, turning round
to hear the hooves' thunder. When I awoke
my sons were crying out from hunger pains,
they'd drawn their knees up hoping to restrain
the biting pangs; I could have fed them rope
or stone and they'd have mouthed it. A small ray
of light chinked through, and one drew his own blood,
commanding me to eat his flesh for food,
to which the others concurred. Day by day
they weakened and died, and in my great pain
I couldn't think them dead, hunger and grief
induced in me a state of disbelief.
At this, his canine teeth ripped at the brain
of the bored skull, and ground it on the ice,
kneading the forehead so it bounced down hard,
and with each new knock broke the ice to shards,
his steel jaws trapping it inside a vice.
We moved on, others suffered inwardly,
their agony intensified, their grief
was like an orange flame perceived beneath
pond ice, their eyes were crystals, lucently
reflecting on their loss. They lined the crust,
standing like gulls, and one who knew himself
dead to the upper world, poked from the shelf,
asking me to mix red fire with the dust
of Alberigo, now possessed the way
a wasp burrows into a rotten fruit;
the demon bound him like a barrel hoop,
his name would never chip free of decay...

The other wintering behind him had
no name, and fear of the tenacious pitch
boiling above Malebranche in a ditch
kept him silent. Alberigo was mad,
and but for his eyes glazed over with meat,
he would have pointed out the murderer
he wanted here, Ser Branca d’Oria;
we left him, a penguin with human feet.

The Inferno  Canto XXXIV  after Dante

Vexilla Regis prodeunt inferni.
Men shone out of glass cages with the light
of blazing straw. We walked the partial night
beneath the lowering of a foggy sky.
We’d come prepared for all apprehensions,
and discerned what appeared to be a mill
the wind turns, seen from the crest of a hill,
but now with the wind increasing, caution
had me step back behind my guide, and peer
at the contorted postures of the dead,
some twisted, others standing on their heads,
others implanted in the grounds like spears,
their souls were like the fungus fish attract,
nosing an opaque glass. Forewarningly,
my guide by quiet words instructed me
of Satan’s nearness, welded to a track
of black ice packed around the locked torso,
three faces gouged upon his savage head,
one yellow, one charred black, one fiery red,
the arms were distended wings, at each blow
they thrashed the air like sails, their bat texture
was ribbed with pinions, and at each wing beat
a river froze or reversed in retreat.
From his six eyes blood foamed through a fissure
and frothed away. But his voracity
was a whirlpool's eye. His victims went limp,
and like a crab feeding its mouth with shrimps,
he tore at what provoked the memory
of pogroms, helpless suffering. Nearby
stood others, lead-blue, helpless, vacuous,
Judas, Brutus in black, stark Cassius . . .

We left this ice-hole at a bound to fly
up craggy sides, out through a tunnelled rock,
and rested, looking back down at the lake,
its jammed streams frozen like paralysed snakes;
my teeth and knees still knocking from the shock.
We found a path, and soon familiar
landmarks could be distinguished, points of light
were flashing brightly in the blueback night,
we issued out to the white blaze of stars.

W. S. MILNE

Purgatorio I in Scots

Forth, wund-set, ower caller watters,
sheets o genius blawn,
oot frae the sea o scunners,
turn the steersman's helm,
the second kingdom peint,
sauls strippit for balm.
Oot frae its graaf, its feint,
Gairdians, ma poetry tak –
on heichts Calliope's eident –
cairry mi on your back,
on wings that swackit the magpies,
aa nine ootsung, hope rackit.
Pearly-blue, unclooed shades, whit hues!
frae noon’s heicht doucely blushing,
the sky-line ooze, slews,
te ma ain sicht brawlie rushing,
aince mair brings back whit’s richt,
lowsit frae the hert’s derk dungeon.

Love’s ain pluinet – bonnie sicht!
Fair Venus, the easten lift lit,
lauchan: the Feshes lost their mich.

Richt A turnit, te the poil that’s aewys fremyt,
saa fower stars there,
the ferst that ony peerit,
gart the hivens it seemit caauch fire –
o them, aneth the Ploo, sair world,
ye’re och said-wedowed foriver.

A dinna ken hoo, but roon A reeit,
the ither poil keekit, oor ain
– Charle Wan, the stars, strinkillit –
aside mi, a mannie alane:
fair auld he was but mensefae,
fatherly an caring.

In tats his baird hung spreckly,
siller tae, his hair was pairtit
– it triggit his shouthers smertly –
the halie sters fair thirlit,
glims an glints his face lit sterk:
the sun it seemit fine sperkillit.

‘An wha are you agin tide’s merk
the jyle irtual slippit?’ he speirt
– locks fair, distinguished, shuik –

‘Wha guidit ye, schewed ye richt
the wey frae deith’s vale scrammlit,
oot frae derk te licht?
Aw! The Chaasm tummillt?
Its laas? Niver! Hiven turnit teerie?
You! A sinner! houselled?’

Waukrife, ma guidar tuggit mi,
bi haund an wird gart mi boo:
luiks an action spalk it richtly
riverence here was mair than due.

‘An Hiven brocht mi, nae mesel,
a leddy grand schewed us the clue,’
ma maister answerit, 'Aye, ye're wilful,  
want te ken, aye, a bittie mair;  
weel aye, A'll be helpful –

his days nae ower, this mannie here  
oxter-deip in his wrangheidedness  
saa deith loom up, owemeir.

Let's ging ower it: in his gypitness,  
te bring him roond, A was sent for:  
Nae ither road like could lead us

Hell te schew, the guilty lour.

Next, this road, your ain, A'll tak him,  
schew him surgery, sauls wha scoor.

Whit wey A've brocht him owerlang in tellan,  
poorer frae abuinlichts his paith –  
yersel he'll see, keen te listen:

gentle mind, an dinna skaith.

Freedom he wints – nae finer thing  
as best they ken wha died te sauve.

In Utica aince – yersel ye ken –  
liberty's ca your ain haund forcit –  
ster te glint, Doomsday's fame.

Iverlastan still, the laa's nae brokit,  
this chiel breathes, frae Minos A'm free:  
whaur A move your Mercia's kennit,  
een gey chaste, nane mair lovely.

Straucht she sees your hert's still hers then,  
kens we're freens, you're ay kindly.

Your siven kinricks let us roam:  
whan A see her A'll say ye're fine like:  
dinna mind your name's in gloam.'

'Weel,' he answerit, 'ootower thon dyke  
Mercia's een fair kittlit me up:  
whitiver she wintit A niver boukit,

an noo she bides ootower the sump  
she canna reich mi – the laa's haird airm  
caist foriver whan A was dumpit.

Aid's te haund frae a leddy in hiven,  
moves ye, ye say, sae A'm nae use.

Eftir her esk, she needs nae fleichan,  
this mannie tak an band his wast

(use a risp gey jimpy) –  
he's awfà myrit, clairtit wi muck.

He canna appeir without a scrub
afore the Minister wi een aa clooded!
Waash him then for Hiven uptap.
Aa aroon this insch, doon on the beichheid
far ablow whaur the jauws mak waar
grouw the rashes, in saund they seed.
Nae ither plaunt like here could flourish,
nane that leaves, ootpits fine flooers
(the kin ye ken that watter dashes) –
Nae chiel, mind, this wey retours:
the sun's jist greikan, straiks a paith
upower the moontain, the tap lours.’
Swish he spak, was awa like a wraith:
up A stuid then, spak nae a wird –
up te ma guide wint, face te face.
‘Follow ahin mi, mind dinna scurr,
stick close bi mi, loonikie, birl;
the baiy curls roon, a sweep,’ he said.
The daan then crackit, aa owerhumnilt,
fleichan the morman, its haars, awa:
far aff the sea schored an schirit
as aff we straid, dour an raa.
The road fair lowsan, aff we waandered,
gangrels galumphan, hame te draa.
Up we cam then te dew aa sprinkillit,
a spot whaur sun was niver kent:
the yaird here was aewys drookit,
ma maister then wi loofs ootsprent
the swaard hard-pressit – gey cleir in mind
A saa at aince whit was meant.
Te him A turnit, ma face aa slimied
wi hell's damned camshacht –
ma teirs dichtit, ma face schined.
The shore we'd reichit, lanely, wanflaucht,
cove that niver a sailor speeit,
sheet nor air the wey back-trauchled: –
as Anither likit A was girdit.
A reed was tuggit – nae saener said
frae the selfsame divot
upsprang anither, hummel bled.
Frae Paradiso Thretty-three

O grace owreboundin whaurin I presumit
to fix my een upon yon licht ayebydan
for sae lang my sicht wes intil it devorit.

Deep in yon sea o eternal licht I govit
and saw in a yaefauld quair by love ingaithert
its pages throu the haill universe sae sparplit,
substancy, happenstance, and their ongaeins
inwappit aa thegither in sicna mainner
that whet I tell o is yae semple lowe.
The universal paitren o this wabbin
I'm suir that I clawcht sicht o, for as I say it,
I feel my hert fair licht up wi enjoyrie.
Yae meenit o't has gien ti me mair solace
nor aa the five-and-twenty hunder year sen
Neptune gawk at the overgaff o the Argo.
Sae tamtarriet, my mense aa sae devallit,
I stuid fair stotious, stickit and dumfounert,
and aye I wes enkendlit bi the ferlie.
Confrontit bi yon leam, ye cannae sweevil
awa frae it to see some lesser vizzy;
as gin some pouer keepit ye centrith on it . . .

O licht ayebydan, wonnin in yir lanesel,
nane but yirsel unnerstaunin, turn on yir ainsel,
sel unnerstuid, unnerstaunin, yir lovin and smilin.
Yon wheelin-roun that in yirsel sae seemit
consavit as some luminous reflection,
ti my een appeairit, tho limitit their seein,
itself sowpit in its sel same colour
yet nantheless pentit in the seemin o a human
sae that I wes held in lealtie til it.
As a geometry chiel that sets himsel the ettle
to square the circle, and syne finds he cannae,
for aa his engyne no jalousin the wey o't,
sae wes I at this new-farrant vision.
I wantit to see hou the circle and its image
micht conform, and there thegither mairry.
But my wings were just no fit for the challenge:  
and yet a gliff o insight cam intil me  
and I gat some inklin o the interfusion.  
Here, at the hevinly doorstane, my pouers failed me:  
but no afore I felt my will and greinin,  
like some ulyeit wheel, thegither rowed, bi  
the ardour kaas the Sun and the tither sterns.

challance: challenge  
gliff: glance  
doorstane: threshold  
greinin: longing, desire  
ulyeit: oiled  
rowed: rolled  
kaas: drives  
tither: other  
sterns: stars
Go where never before
no sooner there than there always
no matter where never before
no sooner there than there always

English translation by Beckett of a French quatrain entitled Là. Both versions of this poem were sent to James Knowlson with the dedication 'As a small token of my affection and gratitude'.
I met Samuel Beckett at a cafe on the Boulevard Saint-Jacques in Paris on 23 May 1987. During the two hours I spent with him, our discussion was not confined to either Irish or English literature, but covered literature in general. Beckett's remarks and observations about art, literature and poetry were expressed with great conviction, and I was moved when he said to me that Arabic poetry is among the greatest in the world – though of course he knew it only in translation. When he talked about Yeats and Joyce, he spoke with reverence and with great loyalty to their tradition and what they stood for. The greatness of Beckett seemed to come through by the way he regarded his great predecessors, and as he was expounding his views I could not help but compare his courtesy as a writer with the flippancy and unjustifiable arrogance of most contemporary professional critics.

At our meeting Beckett went on to say:

The work is finished. I am both happy and sad. It is a strange feeling. Others discover in my writing a secret of which I am unaware. It is a secret which is hidden from me. Many people come to see me, and I am the only one who does not know why. The word is immortal. The word continues. What has helped me to continue to write is my faith in the word. And if the word comes to an end, everything comes to an end. The word is an anchor.

As he spoke these words, his forefinger touched a page of his book and moved across a line. Time seemed to stand still for him, and it was as though he were writing invisible words on the printed page. He communicated to me a joy, a zest, as he touched the words before him, and I saw as never before what the phrase 'the living word' means. I thought to myself: It is the Logos we are talking about – the Logos of John, Chapter 1, Verse 1:
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

and the Logos of the Qur'an, Chapter 18, Verse 109:

If the ocean were ink (wherewith to write out) the words of my Lord, sooner would the ocean be exhausted than would the words of my Lord, even if we added another ocean like it, for its aid.

I said to Beckett: ‘As an Arab poet and scholar, I see your work in a different light from European critics. They’ve all read pessimism and despair in your work, but I have found you saying “We must not wait for God, but we must go to him.” Isn’t the message of your play: Forget the form of words, concentrate instead on the essence of words? Isn’t this the Logos? They have said that you are a disbeliever, but I say that you are a believer, in the same way as Blake was when he said: “The Imagination is the Christian Logos”. The Qur’an makes the same point: “Verily this is a revelation from the Lord of the Worlds: with it came down the Spirit of Faith and Truth to my heart and mind, that thou may admonish in the perspicuous Arabic tongue”.

Beckett smiled, and neither approving nor disapproving my remark, he said: ‘This is a very interesting and new way of looking at my work.’ The sense of affinity, the feeling that we were really together, seemed so obvious in this mystical and religious awareness of language, of words. Before I left him he said: ‘The word is energy, it kept me going. When it stops, everything stops. Today’s world is all images, no words.’
Twilight and Universal Vision: 
Samuel Beckett’s Ill Seen Ill Said

PAUL DAVIES

Beckett’s Metaphysical Valediction

Although Samuel Beckett was still writing when this article was written, his career is now at an end. A recognition of what his work means as a whole is bound to take a long time to come about, but as the late works come to offer themselves for comparison with all that have gone before, what he has to say will be understood better, and by more people, than is the case at the moment. Up to now, comments about Beckett’s work have mostly made the mistake of confusing two quite different things and treating them as though they were the same thing. One of them is a knowledge of and willingness to penetrate the dark and terrible spheres of human existence. The other is simply an endorsement of these spheres, or at the very least, a giving up – failure – in face of them. The one can rightly be attributed to Beckett; but any serious enquiry into his works won’t find the other a valid conclusion. It’s in this confusion that most opinions about Beckett’s ‘pessimism’ originate. His work has usually been termed great only by those writers and critics for whom such a pessimism is praiseworthy, but that very kind of commentary is liable to put off readers for whom it is not. It is absurd to give up on Beckett merely on the strength – or weakness – of reports that he has given up on existence. Has he really done so?

Thinking about any of the greatest works of Shakespeare, or Beethoven, or Dostoevsky, should remind us that we relinquish such masterpieces, lose them indeed, if in them we are looking only for messages of hope for mankind, or conversely, if we draw from them the conclusion that hope is a delusion which we amuse ourselves with in order to divert us from what we suppose is a meaningless universe. The most fundamental addresses to the human imagination have never taken the form of saying either ‘everything is all right’ or of
saying 'everything is all wrong'. But Beckett (because his works are not especially easy to read nor very widely available or often performed) has had a reputation spread for him by writers who perhaps with good reason reject the former view but are content to rest with the latter; or by people who think Beckett's refusal to express the former view means he is inflexibly of the latter.

Neither of these ways of approaching Beckett really meets the most interesting of his works, which I suggest are the trilogy of novels (Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable, published 1959); the short texts of the 1960s which describe people in various states of spiritual peril imprisoned in small rotunda-like chambers (All Strange Away, Imagination Dead Imagine, The Lost Ones, etc., published together in Collected Shorter Prose, 1984); and the short prose pieces mainly of the later 1970s and 80s (Still, Lessness, For To End Yet Again, Company, Ill Seen Ill Said),¹ which describe a move away from such reason-ridden consciousness as endangered the prisoners of the rotunda, and suggest the conditions for a spiritual vision in an anti-spiritual age. All these works have the qualities of tragedy: they cannot rest with what they succeed in stating, even after great imaginative effort: there is always the further attempt to overcome all that is confining in statements made about the 'human condition', and always a reluctance to play safe. This is what makes Beckett's final approach to higher spheres of knowledge so essentially able to address an age in which scepticism has stood in the way of an unconfined vision of reality.

Ill Seen Ill Said (1981), Beckett's second-to-last published prose work, is not concerned with any recapitulation of the non-essential matters of optimism and pessimism. If Ill Seen Ill Said has an essential theme, it is the changes in the universe revealed by the sinking sun and the rising dawn, and the night lying between, and their reflection in human consciousness:

... something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought...

(Wordsworth, Tintern Abbey)
It is down there in deep sleep that Beckett lives and where all of us live, but few in our time have been so expert in visiting that region, in staying there and bringing back a living report. It isn't just a matter of visiting – one needs a specially made, specially trimmed vocabulary to bring back true reports. One must understand the rhythms of the realm. One must bring back words and images, its particular music too.

(Robert Lax, letter to N. Zurbrugg, 1984)

These two poets' remarks say some of the most useful things that can be said about Beckett's works. Ill Seen Ill Said's essential factors are the threshold times of human existence, the half-death of sleep and its initiator, dusk; and the resurrection educed by the dawn.

Twilight: an Urphänomen

If this is what Ill Seen Ill Said is really about – and the insistence on these twilight times of day is obvious even on a first reading – then the evidence of preparation for it in Beckett's oeuvre pre-1982 is immense. From the end of Murphy (1938) onwards, hardly any memorable scene or perception occurs outside the hours of dusk or dawn. Watt, in the novel of that name (1945), is virtually only alive at night, or in the evening. (See particularly the first pages of Chapter IV.) In the trilogy, Molloy's reflections on the universe, on the 'eager planet rolling into winter' and on 'the sound the earth makes as it rides the deeps and wildernesses' all take place at dusk – 'the dying day when I always felt most alive' – in gardens under the open sky. Moran returns home at evening to his own garden, to his perished bees and to a recognition of the truth of his situation. It is at dusk and in the night that Malone remembers the sound of the stonemasons' hammers, on the hillside next to the sea. In How It Is (1964), Klopotstock's shadow grows gigantic in the westering sun. In the short works of the 60s concerned with the death of imagination, dawn and dusk become icons of the living universe, entering the 'void' where strictly speaking no being should enter. In the 70s prose pieces leading up to Company (1980), the evening is vibrantly present, with an effect so potent that it controls both universe and consciousness in Old Earth and the Still texts, and falls hardly short of being the balm of inspiration. In Company, the necessity and effect of the changing light of morning and evening, and
its link with heightened human perception, are evident in the beach and watch-face episodes (pp. 75, 80), and the childhood memories of light (p. 32). It is this power of daybreak and nightfall, of the change lived through by the universe and the 'mind of man' as light and shadows brighten and darken, that is, if anything is, Beckett's favourite theme: certainly more than the absurdist themes attributed to him solely on the evidence of two of his plays. Morning, evening and night are literally the crucial times for Beckett's fiction. They are crucial because pervasive, and crucial also by virtue of the fact that, as Company tells us, 'Christ at the ninth hour cried and died' (p. 77) and rose again in the early dawn. This is not to say that Beckett's work simply subserves a Christian interpretation, but rather to indicate that the Christ event, however it happened, is hardly ever ignored in western art.

From How It Is onwards, Beckett's fiction was to be more concerned with light, and, as several times earlier, with the distinction between normal light (of which dawn and dusk are examples) and artificial, 'sourceless' light. This can now more clearly be seen as a preoccupation of which Ill Seen Ill Said is the completion or outcome, particularly in view of the contrast between the two groups of 60s texts, one stream maintaining the 'convulsive', 'panting', 'oscillating' light associated with hell, and the other immersed in an 'endless equinox', in 'the afterglow', in the serene change from day into night and night into day, and in the 'flights at nightfall' of the cockchafer, or whatever being it is that flies in that form in Old Earth (1972). How It Is also has an interesting hint of what is to come, in its metafictional invocation of the word azure, and in its reference to Klopstock, whose shadow is said to be so long in the 'huge sun'. (The OED's entry for azure quotes Carlyle: 'Is not Klopstock, with his azure purity, ... a man of taste?') Whereas, in one sense or another, these texts (and all Beckett's earlier fiction) depended upon these crucial times, Ill Seen Ill Said revolves, and revolves around, the subject itself.

The realities of dawn and dusk, 'poetic' though they may seem, have never seemed merely adventitious in Beckett's work. Yet Ill Seen Ill Said makes us feel that the earlier settings were only groping their way towards this one, and were therefore emergent rather than complete. Ill Seen Ill Said illustrates, too, how great the contrast is between the fast, tortured breathing to which the rotunda's hell-light
is likened, and the deep slow breathing of the cosmic atmospheres symbolised by the changes of natural light in the world. For in Ill Seen Ill Said, whilst there is fear, frustration, isolation and impotence on the human scale, the world evoked is one of ‘silence merging into music infinitely far and as unbroken as silence’, ‘ceaseless celestial winds in unison’ and ‘endless evening’; in other words, of the calm, majesty and wisdom similarly evoked by the mountain which the boy in Company glimpses in the distance. The universe of Ill Seen Ill Said is sufficient to itself and complete, and is evoked with a power that is uncanny in view of the minimalist style the narrator adopts, and given the difficulty he finds in narrating the ‘story’. How far these pre-nocturnal and post-nocturnal phenomena are essentially connected with that hobby-horse of contemporary literary theory, the process of writing, is difficult to establish; but the pre-eminence of the light/no light question and its twilit scene seems to me obvious and almost totally ignored in discussions of Beckett’s late works.

In Ill Seen Ill Said, language is becoming related to something much further away from, and larger than, ‘the act of writing itself’. For that act is in a sense almost perversely tied to the ‘locality’ of the particular creator: ‘what matters in the later prose,’ says Susan Brienza, ‘is not the world but the mind creating a world; not the substance but the dynamics of its creation: style’. This assertion is typical of the current thinking on Beckett, and to an extent it frees readers of some unnecessary presuppositions. But such a ‘style’ is only worth anything when it brings forth a world, or, in Heidegger’s terms, when

We are able to characterise creation as follows: to create is to let something emerge as a thing that has been brought forth. The work’s becoming a work is a way in which truth becomes and happens. It all rests in the essence of truth . . . Truth is the unconcealedness of beings . . . Precisely where the artist and the process and circumstances of the genesis of the work remain unknown, the thrust, the ‘that it is’ of createdness, emerges most purely from the work.

(‘On the Origin of the Work of Art’)

In Ill Seen Ill Said, it is the ‘being’ that is to be ‘unconcealed’ which needs, if it also defies, comment, not the genesis and process which modern theorists assert is the be-all and end-all of Beckett’s artworks.
The issues raised and the explorations invited by the sunset and night – the ‘created centre’ of Ill Seen Ill Said – do not, however, contain any solution or answer to the question why these times of day should be so heavily concentrated upon, and why that centre should be there:

...deepening gloom.
...in the light of the moon.
...It is evening. Yet again.
...Silver shimmers some evenings when the skies are clear.
...At break or close of day.
...Suddenly it is evening. Or dawn.
...The buttonhook glimmers in the last rays.
...Quick enlarge and devour before night falls.
...It will always be evening. When not night.
...She casts toward the moon to come her long black shadow.
...Black night henceforward. And at dawn an empty place.
...This great silence evening and night.
...Shroud of radiant haze. Where to melt into Paradise.
...She lit aslant by the last rays.
...Winter evening in the pastures.
...Death again of deathless day.
...They cast to the east-north-east their long black shadows.
...Dazzling haze. Light in its might at last.
...The westering sun...the eastering earth.
...Day no sooner risen fallen.

The fact that such phrases as these span the whole of the work suggests, however, that Why? might be the wrong question. Goethe’s outlook as a scientist as well as an artist ran counter to the generally accepted inductive reasoning of why and wherefore:

Look for nothing behind phenomena: they themselves are what is to be learned.

(Maxims and Reflections, no. 488)

According to Owen Barfield, when the observer comes upon ‘primal phenomena’ (Urphänomene) he endeavours, using the Goethean view, ‘rather to sink himself in contemplation in that phenomenon than to form further thoughts about it. The blue of the sky, said Goethe, is the theory. To go further and weave a web of abstract ideas remote from anything we can perceive with our senses in order to “explain” this
blue – that is to darken counsel.’ It is meaningless to try to penetrate behind these apodictic Urphenomena, the true ‘laws of nature’. But if the observer is conscious in them, as Beckett is in the twilight in Ill Seen Ill Said, the contemplation will nevertheless yield counsel. Not all verbal moves towards the truth take the form of explanations; and it is in this fact more than any other that the essential relationship between truth, language and imagination becomes apparent. The essential attribute of a contemplation of twilight as an Urphenomen is that vision is involved: it cannot merely be a matter of words or reasoning. In vision we have the paradigm of sensory perception unified with imaginative or spiritual interpretation of phenomena. Heidegger sees lighting, unconcealment or opening (Lichtung, aletheia) as both a ‘primal phenomenon’ in the Goethean sense and a necessary condition for truth to be perceived:

Light can stream into the clearing, into its openness, and let brightness play with darkness in it. But light never first creates openness. Rather, light presupposes openness. However, the clearing, the open region, is not only free for brightness and darkness but also for resonance and echo, for sound and the diminishing of sound. The clearing is the open region for everything that becomes present and absent . . . Aletheia, unconcealment thought as opening, first grants the possibility of truth. For truth itself, just as Being and thinking, can be what it is only in the element of the opening.

Change

Another observation to make about dawn and twilight is that they are two of the most powerful expressions of change that there are in the world. Dusk is a period in which change floods human consciousness. From An Abandoned Work (1954) illustrates the characteristic Beckett day:

The sky would soon darken and the rain fall and go on falling, all day, till evening . . . Then blue and sun again a second, then night.

The rain is continuous (it goes on falling), as is the sky’s darkness. But the blue and sun only occur in the time of transition: ‘blue and sun again a second, then night.’ Enough (1966) hints mysteriously that
reality is a journey, a change, measured out by the periods of dawn and dusk:

Night. As long as day in this endless equinox. It falls and we go on. Before dawn we are gone.

Something similar obtains in Still (1973), whose opening sentence

Bright at last close of dark day the sun shines out at last and goes down.

indicates a period of change in which the journey of memory is undertaken by the old man in the chair in Sounds and Still 3. But where the old man goes, how long he has been away, are not known, and are referred to only by questions: 'whence when back no knowing'. In these texts what is clear is that impending night give birth to otherwise impossible intuitive knowledge. In Ill Seen Ill Said, the pervasive dusk is once again the only situation in which the mix of memory, fact and reflection resolves into something meaningful.

Recognition

Stars how much further from me fill my night.
Strange that she too should be inaccessible,
Who shares my sun. He curtains her from sight,
And but in darkness is she visible.

(William Empson, 'To An Old Lady')

Ill Seen Ill Said's 'story' describes a rememberer (the narrator), and an old woman remembered but continually evading memory. His upsurge of frustration is similar to that of the searcher in Still 3, who is looking through hundreds of half-remembered faces for the face. But just as 'why the dusk?' is the wrong question, so capture of the memory is the wrong aim. The memory can only be vouchsafed in the period of change, in the incertitudes of twilight. In both Ill Seen Ill Said and Still 3, a relationship between the rememberer and the person remembered is understood, and in Ill Seen Ill Said it feels as if the 'old so dying woman' still elicits a sense of guilt in the rememberer for not getting his leavetaking right or complete, or not distancing himself enough from a limitingly personal involvement in it: 'How say farewell? . . . How need? How need in the end?' (p. 16). There are no
other figures in the story: what seem to be shadows of other observers turn out to be manifestations of the same man as the observer/rememberer, the guilt-ridden son or lover of the woman. I am not extrapolating this detail in order to place the book simply in ‘biographical’ or ‘interpersonal’ terms: the autobiographical possibility is qualified by the possibility that Beckett may be recalling the image of the dead grandmother of Proust’s narrator: he mentions her twice in his early essay on Proust (1931): ‘this mad old woman, drowsing over her book, overburdened with years’:

Now a year after her burial, thanks to the mysterious action of involuntary memory, he learns that she is dead. But he had not merely extracted from this gesture the lost reality of his grandmother: he has recovered the lost reality of himself, the reality of his lost self.

This prefigures the narrator’s state in Ill Seen Ill Said remarkably.

If there is a value to Beckett’s memories – autobiographical or literary – here, it is that while not excluding readings which would cast recollection as merely subjective, Ill Seen Ill Said’s memories encourage an insight into the form of all recollection. This form is not a formula, nor a ‘question answered’, nor yet solely a Platonic ‘Form’, but a form or way of life, which in its turn answers many interesting questions other than ‘what is recollection itself?’ Just as the Goethean scientific principle ignored conventional deductive reasoning until it had gained full awareness of what a phenomenon is, and thus stood a better chance of one day lighting on an explanation, so the recollecting imagination in Ill Seen Ill Said gains more in effect from evoking the appearance and vanishing of the old woman in the twilight, than from probing immediately into what the pervasive twilight and the vision of the woman mean.

The search for recognition in Ill Seen Ill Said also depends on the changing light to succeed, just as it does in the Still texts. The recognition itself is elusive:

Quick the eyes . . . Suddenly they are there . . . thinly misted with washen blue. No trace of humour. None any more. Unseeing. As if dazzled by what seen behind the lids. The other [eye] plumbs its dark. Then opens in its turn. Dazed in its turn.

(Ill Seen Ill Said, p. 39)
At all times other than the momentary twilight, it is a matter of 'recognition lost' with no sure hope of a 'recognition regained' to counter it.

The Eye of Flesh

Another characteristic of the Urphänomen of twilight is that it offers rest to the tired physical eye, so that the imagination can free itself of the material world to which it is tied during the day. One of the advantages of dusk is that it does not consign the eye (and hence the human being) to reliance on the mind alone, since things are still visible; but neither does it tie the 'eye of flesh' to the flesh itself, to external objects. Ill Seen Ill Said makes much of 'the eye having no need of light to see', that is, the mind's eye. The eyes of people continually subjected to glaring light (in The Lost Ones and the related texts) dry up, dilate, redden, and desperately need rest, such as would be offered by the milder influence of dusk's natural light. The Rotunda's light, in The Lost Ones, was sufficient to render visible anything visible as an object, but it had no source and no perceptible rays: 'its omnipresence as though every square centimetre were agleam of the some twelve million of total surface.' For the 'eye of flesh', an eye divorced from its imaginative function, it is a strain to keep seeing these lurid objects, walls, tunnels and unrecognised other people. But it is characteristic of natural twilight falling on objects that it does not emphasise their objecthood so much as their existence as a term in a relationship of phenomena ranging from the material to the immaterial, all interacting. Objects lose their separateness — what Owen Barfield terms their 'outness' — in twilight, where what he calls 'idolatrous detachment' of consciousness is less of a danger.

This avoidance of separation between the material and immaterial is exactly what Company's strand scene (p. 75) achieved, whose connection to Ill Seen Ill Said's narrative and theme is obviously strong. The shadows in the 'dying light' are as much a part of the reality as the staff in the sand, upon whose shadow — the union of object, light and darkness — the reader is asked to concentrate. The objects only 'unconceal their being' in the light of the universe lighting them up. If Heidegger is right to say that 'at bottom, the ordinary is not ordinary; it is extra-ordinary' then the light of common day is the least fit of all
lights to give us an idea of the object’s extra-ordinariness. The mysterious dusk light is what shows the object to be ‘at bottom, extraordinary’. What lights Company’s staff and boots in the sand, and the entire scenario of Ill Seen Ill Said, is the changing light: ‘Blue and sun again a second, then night’. Thus, rest for the physical eye encourages the activity of the inner eye. Without co-operation from the imaginative eye, the narrator of Ill Seen Ill Said becomes a ‘widowed eye’ in both senses of the word: bereft of a human partner, and bereft of its ‘second sight’. Such a ‘widowed eye’ terminates the ‘marriage of spirit and sense’ that Owen Barfield, after Coleridge, calls the imagination.

Night, the permanent habitation of the onlooker and the woman, releases still more perceptions in the narrator as to the nature and danger of the physical eye, the ‘eye of flesh’ so often present earlier in Beckett’s prose. This eye first became sinister in All Strange Away, where it was ‘jammed open, glaring, unseeing’, and it remained so in Imagination Dead Imagine, Ping and The Lost Ones. In The Lost Ones it is revealed that none of the population in the cylinder recognises anything essentially human; the narrator could just as well be regulating and reporting on the social life of ants. In Company, mental activity has almost ceased for the man on his back in the dark, whose ‘eye of flesh’ is ‘hooded, bared, hooded again. Bared again.’ All these references suggest the limited vision of animals or insects; and a human consciousness which is dominated by physical modes of perception actually renders the eyes no better than photoelectric cells in the end. This is the lamentable condition symbolised by the failed recognitions referred to in Company (p. 58) and Ill Seen Ill Said. In the latter there is a very poignant double entendre in the words ‘no trace of humour’ used of the woman’s eyes (p. 39): the absence of an aqueous humour indicates the woman’s long-departed physical wholeness, and the absence of ‘humour’ indicates at the same time the death of sentiment. Each eye, dazed by the fact that in the other person’s eye it sees and is seen by a mere globe of flesh (‘Unspeakable globe. Unbearable’), closes to the outside world and in so doing closes on the inspiring possibility of either uniting object and light or establishing the lost relationship between the two protagonists. It is in this sense—of having described the plight of modern man’s consciousness—that Beckett is a modern tragedian, much more so than in the commonly accepted ‘absurd’ sense. The symbol of the engulfed pupil is almost as
 pervasive as that of the dusk. But the connection between them becomes clear when at dusk and at dawn the eye ceases its perfunctory registering. At such a moment the universe offers momentary repose and nourishment to a consciousness in thrall to its own history (that of western thought) and, incidentally, to its own choice in accepting the authority of the Zeitgeist in its characterisation of knowledge.

Ill Seen Ill Said's narrator dares in the end to take up a challenging attitude to the kind of eye that has suffered – and done – so much damage:

Close it for good this filthy eye of flesh. (p. 30)

Borrowing a phrase from the blinding of Gloucester in King Lear, Beckett further calls it 'the vile jelly'. According to empiricist thought, the agent of perception has always been the physical eye; but Beckett's negative portrayal of the physical eye suggests he follows Coleridge, Blake and Shelley, who took the agent of true perception to be the imagination or mind's eye.

The Motion of the Planets

The motion of the planets is at its most apparent at twilight. The earth turns and the stars and moon appear. This is a hint that at such a time the cosmos undergoes something approximating what the human undergoes in breathing. Thus the condition of the old woman, whom the observer contemplates, is absorbed into contemplation of the universe: if she no longer breathes, the changing light breathes for this 'old, so dying woman' her diffused being. Compare what happens to Lucy in one of Wordworth's Lyrical Ballads:

No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees.
Roll'd round in earth's diurnal course
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

('A Slumber did my Spirit Seal')

There are elements in Ill Seen Ill Said which correlate to virtually every detail in this stanza: motionlessness, frailty, the unseeing eye, the 'diurnal course' of the earth and lastly the 'zone of stones' (p. 13). The dead woman, 'not of this world', is a kind of oblique Lucy figure: she coincides in her appearance with the moonlight, ushered in by the
visible rendering of ‘earth’s diurnal course’ at nightfall, the ‘sun low in
the southwest sinking’ according to Still, the ‘eastering earth’ in Ill Seen
Ill Said’s remarkable phrase, again stressing the related motions of the
planets.

It cannot be a mere coincidence – if it is, then it is a meaningful one
– that, at precisely the times when the motion of the universe is most
clear to our eyes, Beckett always sees a ‘sudden gleam’: ‘sun again a
second, then night.’ Uncannily similar words float up in other of his
works where no evening scene is being depicted, but where the faint
stirrings of imagination in a grey world are taking place. They occur
first in The Unnamable: ‘gleams… measurements, gleams, as at dawn,
then dying, as at evening, or flaring up, they do that too’; then again in
All Strange Away: ‘But sudden gleam that whatever words given’;
(‘Sudden gleam’ in that context means ‘sudden thought’). Enough
furnishes another peculiarly apt gloss upon Ill Seen Ill Said’s world:
‘Now that I’m entering night I have kinds of gleams in my skull.’ All
these details suggest that the ‘sudden gleams’ associated with nightfall
in From An Abandoned Work, Still and Ill Seen Ill Said, and associated with
consciousness in Enough and For To End Yet Again, postulate a restored
link between man and the universe. In this way the gleams of sunset
or sunrise in Beckett’s characteristic day are equivalent to inspiration
as understood by the Romantics. Tintern Abbey speaks pointedly of ‘an
eye made quiet’, ‘the light of setting suns’ and ‘the mind of man’,
connecting the universal appearances, sky and sea, with conscious-
ness, ‘all thinking things, all objects of all thought.’ Ill Seen Ill Said is a
modern parallel.

Knowledge

The last aspect to consider of Beckett’s vision of dawn and dusk
concerns knowledge. Twilight is the time furthest removed from
certitude; and the physical eye’s perception is then at its most
unreliable. In Ill Seen Ill Said this is represented by the narrator's
struggle to recognise the woman, whenever she happens to become
visible in the gloom. Certitude, however, is a false friend in the world
of Beckett’s late prose, which concerns itself with a search for reality,
not merely for certitude. Imagination Dead Imagine (1966) brought home
the spiritual danger of confusing the two faculties which Coleridge
distinguishes as Fancy and Imagination. The Fancy's ravenous desire to ascertain, or to acquire certitude from nothing, had disastrous consequences for the people in the rotunda; and as Enough, the Still texts and Old Earth testify, the 'mystery of the without' which The Lost Ones fought shy of exploring is much more inspiring and less confining than the certitude which is 'within the cylinder alone to be found.' Certitude ends up no more genuine an article of knowledge than the idle speculator's drawing up of co-ordinates in a barren chamber. All this makes it quite plain that the late prose texts discussed here do not eschew the world for the sake of games with language as contemporary criticism on Beckett usually suggests they do. On the contrary, these works attempt the difficult task of referring to, or indicating, the universe in a non-confining manner. The negation in the Still texts and Ill Seen Ill Said is not the negation characteristic of nihilism, but rather that of Romanticism. Keats's 'negative capability', rather like Beckett's dusk, is an inspiring abeyance of certitude, an abeyance of that 'irritable reaching after fact and reason' which is sometimes evident to us in Beckett's less inspired, obsessively rationalistic moments. It is interesting that Keats's poetry, according in the same way as Ill Seen Ill Said does to the principle of negative capability, should also be so crepuscular in atmosphere.

Ill Seen Ill Said is notable for the fact that the terror of the rotunda's hell or purgatory is past: the narrator's and woman's faces are open to the sky and therefore capable of reading the phenomena and movements of the cosmos. In Company the narrating consciousness was often feeble, occupying the low level of the practically unthinking brain and virtually unseeing eye, in other words very much still in the trap of the skull/box/rotunda, and only roused from its torpor to record memories, but not integrated enough to move towards a knowledge won from contemplation as well as from reasoning. But in Ill Seen Ill Said the narrative consciousness is wide awake and alert (like the narrator of Sounds) for the slightest chance to receive the intuitive message he is convinced is about to appear somehow or somewhere, and is also in a position to understand it as knowledge. Fancy does not bog the speaker down in the pages of change-ringing that intrude even into as interesting a work as Company, and he is not fancy's slave, although acutely aware that, as a human consciousness, he is always
inclined to fancy at every turn, to 'that dislike of vacancy and that love of sloth, which are inherent in the human mind but which are not, as the writer of those words would be quick to add, insuperable. The idly speculative impulse is kept at bay in Ill Seen Ill Said by the tempering voice: 'Gently gently. On. Careful.' The legitimate activity of deduction is still acknowledged, but it is no longer the only accepted agent of knowledge.

The New Vision

Of the Urphänomen which we have contemplated from various points of view, Ill Seen Ill Said itself suggests, on page 49, 'the explanation at last': that what is seen with the eyes open and what is seen with the eyes closed are two different things. Beckett thus assumes another sight is possible – the possibility being to look through the eye instead of with it. The eye of flesh, open and staring, looks with itself, but sees, identifies, and understands nothing. But the eye's master, the soul, understands by virtue of having seen through the eye. The question of distinguishing the physically seen from the spiritually seen is addressed clearly for the first time in Beckett's prose:

Re-examined rid of light, the mouth changes... Between the two inspections the mouth unchanged. Utterly. Good. But in what way no longer the same? What there now that was not there? What there no more that was?

(p. 50)

Beckett shifts attention from the object to the mode of perception. Compare Blake: 'If perceptive organs vary, objects of perception seem to vary. If the perceptive organs close, their objects seem to close also.' In the passage from Ill Seen Ill Said quoted above, the sunset light is singled out as deceptive: 'True that light distorts. Particularly sunset.' The sunset light belongs to the crucial time, again, where perceiver and perceived cannot occupy fixed ontological positions. This is a liberation for consciousness.

This liberation is not gained at the expense of knowledge so much as to favour a rediscovery of knowledge. Imagination, as Ill Seen Ill Said illustrates, allows a fluid, interpenetrative ontological system. Mere linguistic constructs, on the other hand, produce fixed ontologies or
the excess bulk of Fancy’s ratiocinative inscriptions, and promote the feeling in narrator and reader that they are ultimately lies. As Blake put it in ‘Auguries of Innocence’:

We are led to Believe a Lie
When we see with not through the eye
Which was Born in Night to perish in a Night.

It is likely that, in a manner unthought of by many of the critics approaching Beckett’s late prose now, the preeminence of twilight does have an affinity with the process of creation. But it is light, the burgeoning and fading light, and not the individual creator, that brings the work into its existence.

Beckett’s art has been seen as a pessimistic art of failure, an art of the void, concerned with meaninglessness. But Beckett’s void is really the void of Jakob Böhme and St John of the Cross: an emptiness which is equivalent to receptivity and readiness for divine intuition. At the end of Ill Seen Ill Said, the longed-for ‘grace to breathe that void’ (p. 59) is the grace of acceptance of a ‘dark age’, in which, perhaps, the task of consciousness is to heal the wound caused by the division of man from the universe. In this sense, ‘grace’ is to accept one’s destiny of self-consciousness and carry through the effort of reintegration that ‘this age’ (p. 11) demands of man. Ill Seen Ill Said tries to use this dispensation of ‘grace’: to use consciousness in such a way as to transform it.

Notes

4 Sounds and Still 3 are published in Essays In Criticism 28 (1978) No. 2, pp. 156–7. They are the second and third parts of a work of which Still (in Collected Shorter Prose) is the first part.
5 Coleridge, Miscellanies, Aesthetic and Literary, London, 1911, p. 162.
Order, and a Manner

O builder of moods, build well,
order and manner in all —

the pair of air-pursuing silver blades,
in their thousand revolutions
in pursuit of perfection alone;

spirit irreversibly caught
in the eye of a revolving
mesmerising vortex!

O builder of moods
order that endures —
order, and a manner;
manner from birth to death,
to the flight of birds
to fish leaping the wave

a manner to falling snow
to hail and rain

manner to the overtaking sleep
and to the saline slowly slipping down
the cheek —

the heart’s humming stream
brimful in the body’s channels

a manner to the returning summers
to the evaporating, sun-mirroring waters
to warmth struggling
through the long winters,
a manner to all

O builder of moods . . .
the cherry branch weighed down
with blossom
Jamuna

distant views are best:
closer, the lines of my own face
quivering upon the reflecting waters.

face, amongst flotsam –
rubber-dolls, talcum-tins, immersed goddesses;
vestiges of the once adored –
all undergone revolution, white.

water-birds scatter as I approach,
to settle on sand-bar
or farther ashore –
even dogs and doves run or fly
at the advance of a shadow.

there’s nothing for it
but look once more
on the face liquefying,
taking on a watery root –

river-water, that carries away
its own – by the dead spiced,
by marigolds, with the silver-foil
of a noon-sun sheeted.

silver, no tinsel;
silver on silver –
silver the sounding of the steel-strings,
silver in the mouth of the man-on-the-moon,
on fish-plate, in the ant’s load of grain.

the cancerous river, still with a sufficient current
to sweep out in silver curves;
the mid-day breeze wherever it blow
tease silver to light –
in the leaf lying low, on skull sunk in mud-bank.
silver, and an all truce –
no war more.
Rite

I'm signing off now
and unwinding
for the rites of the night:
reversion
to the primary condition –
silence, star-light
being
at home in nothing
no wanting,
only the privilege
to pass beyond

Lay no finger on it

Music! – the gross body cast away,
and returning the air of mystery;
no thing announced, only pure being –
the one supremely itself;
sounding by electric poles
in far lone fields, the vacant lots;
heard in all zones,
on all five continents;
in jets flying high
above the clouds’ foam-cushion,
on racing cars, speeding trains –
its magic touching wing and wheel;
by words ungraspable, it still hovers here
in the abstracted mind;
lay no finger on it –
it, that finger will not find.
Stroke at Midnight

The stroke of midnight, and in my eye—
Row on row — all of Egypt's mummies lie;
Laid out en masse in sleep they rest
Behind my private museum's speckless glass.

But then, the glass in which Egypt's dark mummies lie
Is glass that suddenly holds up Time's mirror
To my own handsome face.
I halt and stare
Jerked out of my place
By a rude message.

In cheating circles of thought
Now I'm caught; am I here or there
Behind bars, in the stunned or stoned past?

My jaw falls,
The clean bone outline the cleaner.
In a flash Time has brushed off his small change
Of seconds, minutes, days, months, years — ages,
Back into his sack
And there is only one unnerving pause,
Both for the sleepers and he who is awake.

Surely this is a trick
Surely Time does not stop
But for ever tick tocks,
Surely the sleepers are there, far in eternity away,
And we are here in the rational day
It's a trick, it's a trick.

But Time stands still, frozen stiff,
Will not budge from east to west.
In my own hard breathing then
The breathing of a stranger is heard.

Time to wake up is yet far.
By Zigzag Paths

By zigzag paths
push out the shoots of the heart –
the heart knows no direct routes.

The heart has its well-guarded reasons,
has its clouded seasons.
Hence, not ask me keep
too close a watch or predict
each next step.

And if yet I keep a check
I know beyond the shadow of all doubt
that heart’s truth
will not out.

As I look back, I see a jagged line
on the heart’s chart – chain
on intricate chain,
linked peak and plain,
far as far, but on to origins
lost to my ken.

An Odd Pair

‘Be brief,’ so you prescribe.
‘Brief, the century’s ears are sorely taxed.

‘Long lines of speech-makers hereabouts
and only two ears to tap.

‘An ear can take in only so much
and not a decibel more.

‘But still the amplifiers blare
clamouring for the sole possession of that pair.

‘The two may, at a pinch, take in volumes,
but beware lest they cease to hear.
'So lower your pitch to a whisper, whittle down
your winding sentences to the dots and dashes of telegraphese.

'Tell you what, that hospitable odd pair
loves free speech, but simply adores

'the silence that lies thick
around the sea shores –

'of the babble of sea-surf, they would never
seem to have too much ever.

'Then brief, come to a speedy conclusion –
the way in lies

'in saying less and less
that means more and more.'

---

Passing Thought

There goes my host planet
an only one, I'm told,
in this bay of stars.

Planet, blue-shawled ghost,
womb and grave –
phosphorescent its ocean beds.

This once I view it
from a commanding height
in the enveloping void.

I see from where is no day no night
no up no down
nor right nor left.

A passing thought;
bare truth, white lie,
dust quickening into holy dust.
Graffito

Ink-bombs bloom over the mimic
of a desk blotter;
for weeks it faithfully mirrors
the contrary moods in reverse.

Grimacing faces, casual droppings off
leaky nibs,
scribbled hieroglyphics
are scattered about like discarded,
inert crabs;
absently conceived at troubling moments
will be
a doodled crop of asses heads,
ravens, swine,
demons resplendent with fearsome
buffaloes' horns.

Is this a way the Gothic worlds
make a break
from the barred mental ward?

In a day or two a brand-new absorbent
will replace the old congested soak-pit;
and fresh consignments of spooks
and spectres
be dumped thereon.

Evidently, there is the grotesque in
the human head:
owl hoots will always be overheard
from the rear
(as long as there is breath — good, bad)
beetle-blind associations fly out
helter-skelter,
like air-borne, lamp-lusting ants
gone berserk,
nowhere to make a mark, but here
on a dumb pad.
Mid-December

Mid-December, the year reels to its end.
Each weekend, I have provided myself much diversion:
fed squirrels nuts, counted bricks on the Moghul walls,
heard the gathering shadows of the past
whisper to the slackening beat of the heart.

Again, and yet again, fancying the saviour's coming,
imagined him descending
down a winding spiral stair.

Incantating under breath,
as if in hopes the unearthly overhead visitant hears,
grants me a token of that power for true prayer
that brings the vision of primal being
steeped in its holy fire.
But this is not yet!

Mid-December, the hours run –
hours I have talked to my pets, those forty thieves
ensconced in the jar of the self.
Does the talk refresh my will?

Two words per utterance
and then the full stop
then once more the forward step.

Do I wish to refashion a decrepit soul –
what mission of mercy, this?

Shall I take a round of the tombs
in the hope the vision in its kindness deigns to ascend,
risen like a Venus out of the fog of my head?

But time seems inopportune,
inner weather imperfect;
shall I have to train me like a Yogi, intent on hearing
the wild strains that resonate in all places
where human hand has moulded or hewn:
the clean-limbed Avalokiteswara in the snows of Tibet,
the bearded Mesopotamian,
the Egyptian Sphinx quizzing the khamsin?
Silence the precondition
for those who will hear the unheard music,
ears only lent to a Saraswati or a Minerva.

Silence, and the strain begins
to filter through –
silence, and you alone
with your hearing and seeing.

Yes, there above the piling disasters
and the wrecks of leviathans
an arrow still flies,
the stillness in movement.

Muscle in true wedlock with the essential bone –
galloping blood to fuel the man within man,
and in good time revealed the secret hid behind the dull walls;
in the night’s dark, the blaze
of the crown jewels of God.

In lost mounds, as below the surging Aegean,
heaped those fragments
that carry traces of the life-saving radium;
deep within obdurate rock
thick the veins running with true gold.

But first, its meet to break all other habit;
body yoked only to the onerous demands,
back bent in a severe penance.

Yes, my eyes must close
on the noman’s land on which I now stand;
and I take the obligatory vow,
undress for the night,
before I’m received into any privileged order.
The critical response to the Cecil Collins Retrospective Exhibition at the Tate Gallery last year was an adequate demonstration that the premises of modernism have little or nothing to contribute to an assessment of his work. We can only avoid bringing to the work of Collins's visionary imagination irrelevant pre-conceptions of appreciation and judgement if we make some attempt to situate that work in relation to those values and meanings to which he addressed himself in his life and work. And this process might usefully begin by viewing his achievement alongside that of a contemporary and friend who also is best appreciated according to values and meanings that go beyond the specifically modernist aesthetic.

Cecil Collins and David Jones are the two great 'outsiders' of modern British painting. To link them together in this way, far from being merely gratuitous, can not only illuminate the imaginative qualities they share — and which isolate them from the mainstream of modern art — but also those modes of expression which are idiosyncratic in each of them. There is a sense in which their respective visions were timely in that they could not have been realised at any other time in history. But there is a dimension inherent in the vision of both men that is never simply of its time. This double perspective moves in parallel throughout their work, constantly informing it and relating it to a level of meaning that transcends art as such.

As near contemporaries, and thus sharing the same historical period David Jones and Cecil Collins are positioned in relation to one another as two complementary faces of a single focal point which takes in the perspective of both the temporal and the timeless. The substance of Jones's art is largely taken from the history of European Christendom as it is ordered and transformed according to the a-historical significance of the Catholic Mass. With Collins, on the
other hand, the substance of his imaginative vision is that of the soul's immersion in the world of time, but with the ever-present possibility of its illumination by the divine. From this shared focal point Jones faces backwards and outwards; Collins forwards and inwards. Jones’s images are taken, for the most part from cultural history and from the world we observe. He is an Aristotelian and a scholastic for whom art is, predominantly, the perfection that is integral to work — integrity having here the sense of precision and correctness as well as that of unity. The presiding paradigm of his art is the analogy of the artist as maker who works in a likeness to God as the maker of all things.

Cecil Collins’s art, facing forwards and inwards, is of images of expectation and spiritual progress that are freighted with no historical context at all and which owe little to the appearance of observed reality. His images exist purely to act as the vehicle of a visionary world that is itself the instrument of self-transcendence. Collins is a neo-platonist for whom the image acts as an interior analogue which seeks to orientate and drive the viewer’s consciousness inwards to the realisation of its unawakened possibilities. In their import Collins’s images are iconic, and as such their presiding paradigm is the contemplation of the analogy of the human image as fashioned after that of the divine image. David Jones’s imaginative disposition is towards envisaging the outer world as charged with the traces of a divine transcendence, while Collins’s disposition is towards invoking the inner world of the soul as the theatre of our divine immanence. It would, however, be a mistake to see in their respective dispositions any incompatibility, since in the fullness of the reality they both address their imaginative perspectives are conformable at a level beyond artistic and aesthetic values.

There is another important way in which this juxtaposing of Jones and Collins may prove illuminating. It is part of the art of both men that their distinctive visions are realised against the implied background of the sense of loss and alienation which characterises the spiritual crisis of modern man. A comparison of the manifest signs of this implicit sense of loss and alienation shows each artist keeping faith with his own imaginative experience while at the same time pointing to the profound effect upon the human condition that the historic period in question has engendered. With David Jones the signs are a looking outwards to the external effects of the crisis and
finding them in the loss of a sense of place in the history and 'mythus' of the Christian cultural inheritance. In his pictures, and in his poetry Jones collects and concentrates, particularly in his most mature and elaborate works, the cultural history of the West in an effort to stave
off the loss of memory and rootedness to spiritual context that accompanies the collapse – the eclipse – of a civilization and its trans-historical values. To this extent his work is a resumé, a gathering together in an act of recognition and celebration, of what man has witnessed and embodied in his artefacts; those things he can no longer be and do by means of the same modes of cultural action and assimilation. This effort of recognition necessitates, for Jones, a pictorial structure or poetic narrative of, at times, extreme complexity which might at first sight seem over-elaborate, even excessive, but on closer acquaintance reveals itself as minutely articulated detail possessing that ‘characteristic evanescence, meeting and mingling of contours and planes of reality which characterise the Celtic genius’ (Jones’s words).

For Cecil Collins this same crisis is a loss of Paradise, an alienation from the intuition of pure consciousness. His is an art that expresses the need for purification in the face of worldly decay and impoverishment; not an escape into the private and subjective, but certainly a flight from all those modes of reflective consciousness that are determined and conditioned by the dualism of a mentality that pits itself against an external reality, and whose fruits now, historically, threaten to engulf us. Where David Jones evokes cultural pattern Collins invokes a lyrical consciousness that makes use of a simpler, more direct means of pictorial expression, frequently no more than one or two figures against a background of primordial simplicity – often no more than a single head. The cultural dynamic of Jones’s imagery is in Collins’s work complemented by a static gradation of mood that seeks to embody a given state of being. This inward movement of essentialization carries with it what might be called a metaphysical imperative, and Collins has left an eloquent testimony to his understanding of what is demanded by this imperative. In his essay Art and Modern Man he wrote,

The artist is concerned to personify experience, to reveal the identity, the nuance, the being of things, the presence. He is interested in transforming the thing in the spontaneous creative movement, the unexpected moment of eternity, the moment of freedom; unexpected, because the unexpected moment is the unpossessed moment. This is perhaps one of the deepest insights of the creative experience; whereas in process knowledge intel-
lectual possession is the essential condition prior to analysis. Therefore art is a kind of redemption of consciousness and environment.

Collins's vision of the need for this kind of healing redemption makes him the artist who truly divines the current of life at the end of the historic cycle that is the modern age – a current in which a certain 'metaphysical depreciation' is inevitable: the artist who perhaps most fully appreciates that even at the eleventh hour, when negative impulses seem to prevail over positive, there are compensatory possibilities of renewal at work in the deepest intuitions of imaginative consciousness. In their looking forward – not assuredly in terms of a passage through time but in the expectation of the individual soul's orientation towards the sacred – Collins's images bathe us in the true source of transformation of being. His Fools, Sibyls and Angels resonate with the presence of what is inviolate at the roots of our consciousness. They are auguries of that joy and innocence from the world's processes that tire and soil us, and which cast the inevitable shadow of insufficiency upon every form of worldly effort and distraction. In the presence of these images we are called to witness the final inadequacy of those processes to our full being, that unknown that continually relieves and freshens the burden of the known.

It is just this lack of the dimension of transformation and renewal that precludes the art of Francis Bacon, for instance – who might be considered artistically to be the polar opposite of Collins – from expressing the real nature of the human condition. In their depiction of the unattractive and the repellent, Bacon's images place us passively at the surface of things, for the shadow pre-supposes the light. Hell is the absence of that higher realm without which Hell itself would have no substance and therefore no meaning. Satan, we should not forget, is a fallen angel and not a power equal and opposite to God. An artist has perhaps earned the right to show us into Hell when he can also show us the way out. The proper condition of man has always been and remains that of relating to his essence – a question of self-identity, which identity Collins's imagery serves by withdrawing the viewer from the world of objects and sensations and reactions to them. So it is on the level of the soul that the human drama is played out, and Collins has called his art a 'theatre of the soul'. Those by whom it is
peopled have as their task to ‘search out and prefigure the mysterious unity of all life’, without which nothing is comprehensible, and life is reduced to a meaningless stream of sensations.

Cecil Collins’s art is supremely the art of the imaginatively, symbolic image. Both in his rejection of abstraction on the one hand and of naturalism on the other, Collins refuses, in effect, to repudiate the abiding and intimate connection between form and mind. If the aspiration towards the spiritual (in distinction from the simply immaterial) by means of images is to be effective then it follows that images must have a content. An image does not exist of itself. It is the appearance of something, it affirms something. An image is also a call to some form of action. A television commercial exhorts us to act outwardly; a Byzantine icon should move us to act inwardly.

When the images of art become self-regarding to the point where their sole obligation is to claim that they are no more or no less than what they are (as is the case with so-called ‘pure abstraction’) then they are shut off from the seamless matrix of values and meanings which gives them life. So they diminish their claim upon us and, ultimately, negate the very conditions for their own survival. They have to pretend that it is not the condition of human communication to involve intelligence, perception, convention, memory and so on. That is to say an image is not some sort of quasi-absolute, but carries a burden of meaning and so must, of necessity, stand in some relationship to truth. This relationship ultimately questions the ontological status of the imagination.

At its simplest the imagination is nothing more than the image making faculty of the mind. But images are a likeness of a reality, and what concerns us with Cecil Collins’s imaginative images is whether the reality in question leads us merely to the private psychology of the artist or towards the source of the Real itself. Artistic images are drawn from the whole world of apprehended appearances, whether they are made to imitate the appearance of external nature, or whether they borrow elements of that nature in order to serve what Collins has called ‘the vested interests of the ego’. In such cases the artist himself is the subject of the image. And this is no less true of naturalistic images – nature seen with not through the eye – than it is of abstract images where the image is unique, and so by definition has ‘no like’. But in the images of art that are inherently symbolic the artist’s
personality is transcended. Such images mirror the unmanifest truth that is the source of the Real itself. They embody, in other words, the correspondence between manifest existence and the hidden divine immanence that gives it life. In Collins’s own words, in his ‘attempt to manifest the Face of the God of Life’ the artist ‘sets free an instant of vision, things seen in their archetypal essence in the sacrament of image and colour’.

Thus, as Collins has stated, art is a ‘metaphysical activity’. That is why
the viewer who sees in his world of the Fool, the Angel, the Pilgrim, the Sibyl, the Eternal Bride, his trees, clouds, birds and rivers, nothing more than the expression of a private fantasy, has failed to grasp that these images arise from an intensity of vision that drives the viewer beyond the picture itself to the very source of conscious life. Yet even as they reject empirical observation as the arbiter of pictorial truth, as an imaginative language these images accord with the recognisable in so far as they envisage the unmanifest according to the modes of human perception. Such images exist concretely. They do not make use of existing things to represent other things. They exist to enhance our apprehension of those spiritual energies that are the life-giving property of the unknown. 'The Reality of life is incomprehensible and the Artist creates an incomprehensible image of it.' In this way Collins's images enact a mystery where an interiorizing vision is served by the language of analogy and invocation and where, conversely, ambiguity and obscurity are consumed in the clarity of primal vision. So there must always remain an irreducible hermetic essence in Collins's pictures which cannot fully disclose itself until we as viewers are transformed as participants in them.

'Painting is a metaphysical activity.' Nor is this to be understood as meaning that painting is an attempt to indulge the creative process as if it were a quasi-mystical experience. At its most mature and articulate, when it is informed by his most profound insight Collins's imaginative language emerges from and surmounts the creative process to exist objectively. It has a dialectic. It is the instrument of a level of experience that is communicable in terms that relate to the knowledge and wisdom of the saint and the mystic. By way of reservation it might be said that in his 'matrix' pictures something of the artist's personality remains caught up in the creative process so that the images remain nascent and inchoate – perhaps the rather less than fortunate influence of abstract expressionism. There are those who admire most the energy and the brilliance of these 'matrix' paintings, and it is through such works that his art is most likely to seem assimilable to modernist presuppositions, since it is in such works he is most like a number of his contemporaries. Nevertheless, Collins's mastery is undoubtedly at its quintessentially characteristic in the fully realized formal perfection of the iconic image. This is his unique contribution to the art of his time (and most likely will
confirm the measure of his significance beyond it), for in such works he may truly be said to be incomparable.

'Painting is a metaphysical activity' since each work is a 'place' where the life of the soul is enacted, each 'place' being a momentary pre-figuration of the hidden unity of life. Such places cannot be 'located' since we only see them in a moment of initiation in that imaginative space where we are already projected beyond the confines of our fragmentary, habitual world. Such imaginative moments must be lived on the plane at which they are realized – that is, 'where' they are. The Angel's sensuous beauty, the clothing of its presence in painterly attire, parades before us an intimation of what we have yet to become. It is the 'space' of the Angel that we must inhabit. Angel, Fool, Sibyl, Anima, each by its presence utters some pulsation of that hidden reality.

This is why the artist makes his most audacious claim: 'there are no objects in my paintings', so that we should not attempt to correlate the content of his pictures with the created world that comprises an indefinite number of discrete entities, the world of opposites and differentia where one thing is seen and known never to be another. The world inhabited by Collins's Angels, Fools, Pilgrims, trees, rivers, birds, etc. is never conditioned by this law of separated existence. Here we have to reverse the habits of outward perception to recognise that one thing has the possibility to become another. For these images are a series of evocative, resonant, correspondences of the unmanifest unity of existence experienced as states of the soul. Collins's 'scenery' is the soul's impalpable habitat as Fool, Angel, Pilgrim, and so on, are its figurative guises. All these figures and scenes are the instruments of a gnosis of association and relationship of the seamless continuity and connectedness that is the unity of life. Thus in many of the works that appears to be a structural device, the visual rhyme, has a further significance: the texture of a tree trunk is that of a river also, hair is like water, the foliage of a tree is the shape of a wing, an angel's wing is a leaf, grasses are flames or waves of the sea, tree trunks shoot up like volcanoes to burst into cloud-like foliage. A fool holds a butterfly that returns his gaze as from a 'human' face – an emblematic moment of the friendliness of all living things. Collins has described the initiatory moment that led him to find the pictorial analogy for the intuition of the primordial unity. 'One April afternoon,
there'd been a shower ... and the sun was just sinking behind the wood, and the light was shining on this bush ... it had drops of rain on the leaves and the light was shining through them. They were like diamonds. And on top was a thrush singing. I suddenly saw that this bush was the shape of the song of the bird.'

Collins's rejection of the 'puritanism' of abstraction is precisely on the grounds that it posits a world of mental forms torn away from the inclusive and indivisible abiding unity of life. The eloquence of this unity is, for this artist, no less present in an insect's wing, a bird, a mountain as they are contemplated in the soul, than it is in the
spectrum of colours refracted into the modes of poetic consciousness. Because 'imagination is the organ of the interior nature' the artist discovers in these modes of poetic consciousness, as they are realized in the particularity of their image, the beauty that is proper to the human. Plotinus states the doctrine: 'We ourselves possess Beauty when we are true to our own being, ugliness is going over to another order; knowing ourselves, we are beautiful, in self-ignorance we are ugly.'

With Collins's artistic language we must accustom our eyes to a world whose expression bears little or no resemblance to that of any other artist. To be sure he did not 'invent' the Angel, any more than the Eternal Bride. But at his touch they are infallibly of his vision. To play the game of source hunting and cross-checking of influences with other artists is already to defer to a slack, unfocused perception. Such is the nature of the iconic image that it demands all our attention or nothing, not as an idolatrous object, but because it discloses its inviolate substance only to our utmost response. In the totality of our absorption there must be no space to be occupied by those familiar forms and outlines we are accustomed to transpose either from nature or from the work of other artists. Given the recurrent figure of the Fool, whether caressing a bird, at prayer, or dancing the naked joy of his innocence, we should have no interval to clothe him with our pre-suppositions. In his gesture is the fecundity of the Spirit; at his touch the flower breathes forth its perfume; by his sight the bird discovers the colour of its plumage; by his kneeling the landscape is sanctified. His is no physical form. Clothed in the 'fantastic garments of love', beneath which there is no muscle or bone, there is nothing that could deceive us into imagining that his presence suffers the weight of corporeality, the obligations of a physical exertion. But we discern, nonetheless, qualities that inform the human: movement, rhythm, tenderness, elegance, gaiety. Such qualities transform the pen or brush stroke into a living reality. The Fool, no less than his companions in other works, is a 'station of transmission'. That is to say each pictorial image is the nodal point at which multiple levels of meaning cohere in the nuance of line, colour and shape. By this configuration on the picture surface they have their life and are perceived as transforming agents of consciousness. In the bending of the Fool to touch the flower is the moment of benediction in which we apprehend
the grace that is bestowed by the unity of inner and outer natures. The specific beauty of the painted image is the occasion of our recognition that the division of subject from object is already the tool of a reductive consciousness; as if through that beauty unity of being was able to fulfil itself.

Often we are given only the head of the Fool in whose implacable gaze is condensed the mystery of our birth into consciousness — our coming into being. His melancholy and openness are never wholly revealed in any one painting. His impersonal life is partly lived in all the other pictures in which he is present, each appearance implied in every other in an almost sequential inter-relatedness of images from picture to picture. This characteristic is shared by the whole of Collins's work. Each Angel is one of a community of Angels; each Pilgrim journeys part of the way that is only fully undertaken in the cumulative journey of each and every Pilgrim; each Sibyl utters her prophecy as the fragment of an omniscience known only to all Sibyls together. Each painting and drawing is a window onto a continually unfolding vision, inexhaustible in its nature.

All of which seems to suggest that the pictures themselves might be effete, sapped of the reality proper to them as works rendered in paint or pencil, like rarified ghosts of the artist's consciousness. But Cecil Collins has complete technical mastery of every medium he works with. Each picture, whether in ink, paint, pencil, or whatever, portrays ample evidence of the artist's proper concern and delight in the properties of his chosen medium. How could it be otherwise? No artist could adequately express such a depth of resonance as is here were he not able to take it for granted that no privation or hindrance would be imposed upon him by his own technical insufficiency. Collins's mastery has the effect of each picture living only in the medium in which it is created. You could not transpose a drawing, for instance, to the medium of paint without destroying the specific life of the image that is drawn, so indissoluble is the bond between applied technique and the realization of the image. Recessed beyond layer after layer of pigment and varnish, can we say that this head — Fool or Anima — is other than the physical substance of its rendering? Is the image given birth from the medium; has the artist been taken unawares to see the worked substance congeal into a living presence? Or, in the dry austerity of tempera, could it be that the tree, the bird
and the woman were already alive under the surface leaving the painter with only the task of brushing away the covering that concealed their presence? In the final analysis, moment of vision and rendered image, like the dancer and the dance, have no life apart from one another, each painted and drawn image intuits the miraculous gift of incarnation.

Collins's compelling technical mastery, both as colourist and as draughtsman, is never deployed for its own sake. He has spoken of such vacuity as producing 'visual confectionery'. For him technique has its own meditative content. How else are we to understand that an art devoted to invoking the spontaneity of intuitive consciousness should proceed by means of techniques that are as often as not deliberately slow and painstaking in their execution? In his composition Collins puts aside the more customary architectonic devices for ordering the picture plane. Instead, an almost musical notation comes
into play so that we find a picture is formally organized through the counterpoint of visual rhymes, motivic repetitions, and carefully modulated tonal ranges of colour with harmonic complements and discordant clashes.

In Hymn to Night (1951), a typical example, the depth and benevolence of ultramarine and cobalt collects and interiorizes our gaze, taking it inwards to a landscape in the foreground of which a feminine figure is poised by a tree. The one articulated rhythm of life’s energy is echoed throughout, flowing down the hair, then up the tree trunk, then spread abundantly in the leaves no less than in the river that flows in the middle distance. The seeming mirror image of the woman’s crossed hands is echoed repeatedly, as if from a pivotal point, in the dual image of the tree’s foliage, an angel’s wings, the raised wings of several swans and in the branches of the trees that cover a distant hill. Within the narrow spectrum of colour woman and landscape are possessed of a single tonal being. In Daybreak (1971) is the burden of hope that is present in green. Beyond the turbulent energy of generative waves, already receding before the onlooker, three feminine figures emerge from a placid sea. They proffer a token of new birth in the shape of a flowering plant whose blooms are already vivified with the chrome of the rising sun. A bird, emblem of the soul, held by one of the figures, has its sight fixed resolutely on the horizon, its breast, like that of the three faces, kindled by the sun’s light. In Wounded Angel (1967) the harmonic interval from orange to violet offers its sanctuary to an Angel which, in the lightness of its being, has returned to rest on the floor of Paradise, exhausted from the effort of witnessing the self-disfiguration of man’s forgetfulness of the divine. In the drawings, often the dynamism and energy of the theme is paradoxically enhanced by means of techniques that on examination, are evidently laborious and exact, the result of a meticulous application of thousands of single strokes of the pen or pencil.

Cecil Collins’s iconic perceptions have engendered a comparatively limited range of pictorial ideas which have nonetheless been explored with considerable penetration, not only in the pictures themselves, but in the artist’s writings, poems, and recorded statements. These texts, because they are integrally a part of the same visionary language, form a perfect complement to the visually executed works.
The pictures do not illustrate the thesis of these texts any more than the texts are a commentary upon the pictures.

The principal images in which Collins's vision is focussed and participated are the trinity of Fool, Angel and feminine Anima. About the Fool the artist has himself spoken in detail in his manifesto The Vision of the Fool (1947 and 1981). The Fool affirms that purity of consciousness in which knowledge absolute, pre-modal, unqualified plenitude, resides. Simple, innocent, vulnerable, the Fool bequeaths to us the ultimate freedom of our identity and destiny. His joy and essence are that charity of the heart that in love and beauty redeems the politics of time.

The winged Angel, agent of transformation and the divine wisdom, an intermediary of Truth, seeks only to awaken our assent. Ever watchful, guardian, guide, judge, the Angel, as companion to the Fool, is always about some action – its presence always purposeful – its role to pierce with the divine brightness the darkening substance that is the desolation of this world.

The Anima, Eternal Bride, often only a head, has a complex role. By contrast unmoving, rejecting nothing, virgilant, uncensorious, she reflects in her wise compassion an absorbed, unfathomable passivity. She is the subjective pole of the moment of intuitive imagination, the masculine pole of which is performed by the process of visualization which is the act of making these visionary images as objects. In virtue of the complementarity of these two poles the whole realm of Collins's art comes into existence. This situation is analogous to the traditional symbolism of the animus, masculine spirit, and anima, feminine soul, who, in their inter-relationship generate the world in so far as it is objectively knowable. Priestess and guardian, unmaternal, nonetheless from Collins's eternal feminine all actions flow and to her enduring benediction they return. In her is mirrored the mysterious depth of the human universe as an image of contemplation.

Cecil Collins's isolation as an artist is due not only to the unexpected nature of his visual language, but also to the fact that an imaginative vision such as his is without protection in the cultural concensus of modernism to which it is a rebuke. As if in answer to some inevitable summons, some objectifying instinct, and against the resistance of a malaise and a blindness, these images have been conjured into existence to pose the metaphysical imperative to an age
mesmerized by the surface of things. Yet planted within them are the seeds of what must take their place, to lift the malaise, to restore sight, and affirm their opposite. Collins's imaginative vision, which has no concern for the substance of history, by a supreme paradox has about it the air of historical necessity. For the beauty and the serenity of these images comprehend the true measure of our cultural exhaustion. In them we are finally given some purchase against the successive depredations of the secular, self-disfiguring patterns of our culture. In them we witness emblems of our true humanity as it is renewed and refreshed in the sacred unknown.

Illustrations
The illustrations accompanying this article have been selected because they have not before been reproduced, with the exception of colour plates 3, 4, and 6, which have previously appeared in monochrome.

The original paintings or drawings reproduced here as no's 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 12 are in private collections. No. 3 is owned by Mr Bryce Mackenzie-Smith, and no. 8 by Mrs David Gilmour.
2  Angel in Landscape  1946
The Artist's Wife Sewing 1948
5  Figures by the Seashore  1954
6 Hymn 1960
7 Woman in Landscape  c1980
8  The Offering of Dawn  1985
Quintilii Apocalypseōs Fragmenta

Augustus was much given, if not to vulgarisms, At least to the colloquial. The Christians from the first Exploited the language of the people, and now, Devils below!— For a hundred years we have had the unlettered Goths, From the Taifali in Emilia (thanks to Gratian) to Theodoric’s Protégés the Alamanni on the Po, to dismantle our spoken language, And leave it in pieces, teaching even our educated folk To talk in the sub-plebeian ideologies of foreign Mercenaries, a lingo neither Latin nor Greek nor Gothic. Caius venire, abire Sempronius, damme Marco,— Magari,— where will it end but in the universal Monkey chatter of market women and beggars? We are all So polluted by this simian idea that we should write As we speak that we are neither able to speak Nor to write. Augustine used to write well enough till he fell for the deadly heresy That it’s better to be taken to task by the grammarians than that the herd Should be unable to understand. And as for Hieronymus,— He had a bad dream in which the Eternal Judge Told him in plain words that he was a damned Ciceronian, not a Christian. He should have rejoiced.... The Almighty rarely passes a compliment.

tr. 27th July 1988

Quintilii Apocalypseōs Fragmenta

Troy of the Hundred Towers fell to the loitering Greeks. Triumph and burning, Priam slain, Cassandra mocked, Astyanax the child Thrown from the cliffs, Andomache and Hecuba for slaves To brazen masters brought, the brute Gods Feasting and whoring in Heaven

Where Is the good life, the good people where?
Baucis, Philemon, your cot? Even the Gods
Knew a good thing when they saw it . . .

The Gods are dead, and it is we
Who have killed them, as the crazed Goth, my adversary
Said. The new is always the evil, invading, conquering,
Overthrowing old boundary stones, old pieties. Only the old
Is good. The good men of every age
Dig the old ideas deep down, double trenching, husbandmen of the Spirit,
Bear fruit with them.

The new wine
Is drunk, never matures, the old
Is not yet. The land is exhausted –
The plough of evil always returns,
Fresh from unholy harrowing
Of Hell

tr. 12th July 1988

GREVEL LINDOP

The Beck

It was the boiling of white water drew me first:
a chant and turmoil in spate
under a scarlet-clustered rowan
that fluttered unceasingly, as if outside time,
vibrant and motionless at once in the beating of spray;
and the water foaming as if new-uttered that moment
from the earth’s interior. Palms on the lichened rocks
(which were alive too with the presence of water)
I lowered myself into the cleft and drank
from cupped hands with a sudden
fierce thirst, as if I had never drunk
water before. And never such stunningly cold,
piercingly pure, flavourless and, it seemed,
evanescence water had I swallowed
until that instant. I would think, I promised,
of that water reciting itself without pause
here, wherever I might be, however preoccupied,
tired or bored, I would remember this,
rock, rowan and water.

But in my dream,
months later, it was a silent thread falling
from a mountainside above me, only breaking
to sound and spray when it splashed on the page of a book
which lay drenched and open under its downpour;
my task to climb the tussocked grass and rock
to reach it. I woke, lifting the unblemished pages,
and knew it was time to leave, to begin the next
ascent, unprepared as always, except for the taste
in my mouth of that water about which nothing can be said.

The Welsh Poppy

Forgotten desires fulfilled
are the best kind:
her yellow silks uncrumpled
by the wind

out of their furred green case
the Welsh poppy now
unplanned, unasked, displays –
and unrelated to how

some years I scattered seed
in a different bed,
dug in roots, scrutinised,
but nothing happened.

Over starry leaves
green springs unfurl
from weedlike beginnings
in unpromising soil.

Perhaps there's hope:
it may be, happiness –
onece you have given up
hope – will come like this.
Kaya

Kaya opened her eyes, shut them again. Time dragged by. Her fingers clenched round a corner of her quilt. She lay rigid in her bed, possessed by a creepy thought that her head had moved round to her feet towards the door. This was, of course, preposterous: the head and the feet just could not be in one place together. She laughed to herself.

'Shh! What is it?'
'Nothing.'
'Why are you laughing?'

Chhote the little brother was too small to understand, but he nodded his head gravely like a wise old man. Actually, he pretended. He liked to delve deep into mysteries. Anything too hurtful to bear transformed into a tantalizing mystery for him. He could then cope with it. Even play.

He stretched out under the covers.

Out there on the dark veranda the floorboards growled. The planks resented even a slight pressure. The house was built of sawn logs. When a wind sprang it shook the whole structure in its frame. The veranda flooring, however, growled more than it shook.

'Who is it?' asked Chhote.

'No one,' said Kaya. Still, hope rose like a lump in her throat. Ever since Lama had left, they would let themselves imagine things. They pulled the door to at night on Lama's empty room and came away without slipping the bolt in place. Then they lay in their beds with bated breath, waiting for the door to be thrown open by wind, waiting for Lama to emerge and pace up and down the veranda as she used to when she was here. They thought they saw her in the moonlight, which poured down the mountainside to scatter in a golden dust on the rooftop, the eaves, the veranda. Whenever the veranda flooring shook, their hearts shook with it.
Was someone really out there?
She sat bolt upright in the dark. A big house, its doors rattled now and then and the roof shuddered. In the midst of all this, it was still possible to cling to hope, to peer into time past, to retrieve it, to relive it. Between now and then stretched away a nothingness in which everything was possible, and so their hope reached out as far as their terror: they swung between the two, from one extreme to the other.

'Someone turned on the light. Did you see it?'

'Which light?'

'The one over the stairs, between the corner room and the gallery.'

'Don't be silly,' said Kaya, shivering. 'It's the light inside the room that Mangtu turned on. The bathroom tap was turned on too. Didn't you hear the sound of running water?'

'Running water?' Chhote laughed, but his laughter was crazed with fear. 'What fibs you tell, Kaya! It's amazing.'

'I say I heard water running,' she insisted, her hackles up. 'I'd only closed my eyes, not stopped my ears. I could hear everything. I heard that too...' There was a tremor of excitement in her voice, as if to leap from one fib to another was a truthful act, a leap in mid-air, high above all self-deceptions.

'You must be mad! Tell me, what else did you hear?' At such moments Chhote cast aside his objections and became all eagerness. He would be eager to rise above his mean doubts, eager to be there with her, by her side, as she sat bathed in the luminous light of her wonderland.

'I'm mad? So!' said Kaya, shrinking away from him. 'You think I'm lying?'

'I didn't mean it!' Chhote's voice caught in his throat, plaintive, tearful. 'But you do think too much. You even think of things which are not there.'

'What's not there? If there's nothing, why are you sitting up in bed? Tell me what are you doing here? Tell me, Chhote!'

Chhote was tongue-tied. Never before had Kaya pitched at him a question so pointed. Together, they lay waiting for Lama every night in their room with the lights out and the windows open. The wind whistled outside. Dry October leaves and broken twigs scraped along the roof. Silence sibilant with echoes off the hills filled the space between their act of listening and of waiting, and, like hounds, they
set out in pursuit of the smells, the voices, the memories, buried out of sight like half-chewed bones in the dense woods of their childhood; they returned to chew at the bones again, unseen, in peace, in the dead of night.

Among these bones was one called Lama, their cousin, daughter of their father’s sister. She’d stayed with them a few months some time ago. She was put up in the room at the other end of the veranda. She was no longer here but her room had not been rearranged since, so that it seemed as if she was still somewhere about. She had left so much of her behind that it was difficult to think she was’nt among them any more.

Kaya threw back her quilt and tiptoed out into the veranda. There was no one there. The light over the stairs was on. The stairs led to Mrs Joshua’s on the ground floor. In the passage at the top of the staircase stood several pairs of shoes in a row – Babu’s, Chhote’s, her own. But these, in the dim light at this hour, seemed to fuse into a strange shapeless animal with Babu’s shoes as its head and her own chappals as its feet. It was usual for everyone in the family to leave his or her pair of shoes on the landing at night for Hariya to clean and polish early the next morning.

She stared at the empty spot at the end of the row of shoes where Lama’s chappals used to be. But it wasn’t really empty; it had been taken over by a layer of dust. It was strange, she thought, how the void left by people came to be strung with a tenacious gossamer web. Unnoticed, it still wound round Kaya, and she was convinced that Lama was still here, somewhere close by, seeing everything although no one could see her.

No, there’s no void, no empty space, Kaya told herself; no one ever goes away.  

Chhote waited impatiently for Kaya to come back. At last he went out too. The house looked sleepy. But Lama’s door swung open and slammed shut in the wind-swept silence. He sneaked up to Kaya and whispered: ‘Did you see anyone?’ Kaya did not answer. They stood in the dark, listening to the sound of their breaths. Kaya, on the alert, watchful, strained to reach out into all the dark corners. A trellis boxed in the house. Beyond it were the wooded hillsides merging
into a distant range of mountains. They could not see the chain of peaks; what they saw were isolated lights. It was difficult to say whether a certain light was a streetlamp or a star. When Lama was here, the three of them would sit by the bedroom window, trying to tell a star from a lamp. Lama once said that if one closed an eye and saw a light twinkle, it was a star; otherwise, it could be a street light or a house light or even the eye of an animal.

Lama never saw ghosts or spirits, only animals. All of us are an animal of one kind or another, although we do not see the animal in us, she would say; but sooner or later there comes a time when we’re face to face with the animal double, and then whatever we eat, drink or do is not for ourselves but for it, even though we might not admit it out of shame. But Lama had no shame, no fear.

Chhote shivered. How long were they going to keep standing? ‘Shouldn’t we go back to bed, Kaya?’ he said. He’d rather not go back in alone. He was afraid Kaya wouldn’t tell him afterwards what she saw when she was alone. He’d therefore hang about, and stick to his sister like a leech. He’d take no chances: who knew what might happen in his absence? Even when asleep, he’d be quick to jump out of his bed at the slightest knock of presentiment and follow his sister about.

But nothing was going to happen; for nothing ever did happen, Kaya thought. She let out a deep despairing breath laden with weariness of the day gone by. She turned towards Chhote and gripped his shoulders, as if demanding why he was still there. Didn’t he see there was nobody there? Was he so stupid as to believe Lama would somehow appear? She shook him, as if waking him from sleep. Chhote stared at her bleary-eyed. He was not angry with Kaya, he only pitied her. To wait up in the darkness till so late into the night, sleepless but not beyond sleep, listening to the rattle of doors – could anything be more pitiable than that? To nurture illusions, probe into them for happiness, and end up with something which was neither happiness nor a live illusion but a dead rat – what was there in it to be proud of? He wished he could catch hold of Kaya’s hands and tell her enough was enough, from now on he’d sleep in Mother’s room, she could do as she pleased, he didn’t care.

Didn’t he? The rat they took for dead opened its eyes and leered, as if claiming it had nine lives and would outlive them both. Where-
upon, their curious lonely wanderings between hope and despair began anew. He shuffled along behind Kaya back into their room.

*     *     *

In their room they had twin beds, one on either side of a tripod, and a writing desk piled with school books covered in dust. On the tripod lay an assortment of dead butterflies, Cadbury chocolate wrappers, roots. The roots gave off a sweet herbal scent. Chhote had not acquired this collection by deliberate choice or design; it just happened to be there, an unwilled yet unquestioned part of his life, an inward extension of the outside. The inner and the outer landscapes coalesced unobtrusively. The world was a ceaseless flux, a stream which overran banks brooking no barriers, carrying on its shimmering surface russet plane leaves, bamboo twigs or pine cones. Chhote’s collection reflected the varying moods of the seasons. Ginny, while she was alive, also contributed her mite. Grasped between her firm canine jaws, she brought animal bones, torn-down nests or snarls of hair to put by in her accustomed place under the desk they called Ginny’s corner. The nests once slimy with broken eggs, now dried and caked, lay in the corner but Ginny was no more.

It was dark in the room. Neither Kaya nor Chhote dared to switch on the light for fear it would arouse Mother’s anxiety about what was going on. She might say nothing, though; but that was another matter.

They lay down on their beds, without hope, waiting for sleep to overtake them. A wind traipsing down the mountains tapped on their door hesitantly. And old memory swelled into a sob in Kaya’s throat. She recalled how Babuji, back home from Delhi, knocked on the door before entering; she saw how he stooped over Chhote’s bed and stroked his forehead lightly so as not to awaken him; she watched him in the darkness, holding her breath, trying hard not to give herself away even as a fear gnawed at her heart that he might walk out after all without noticing her. At such moments she felt as if she were set on fire, and sat up to call out to him in agitation: ‘I’m over here.’ Her father turned round at once. ‘I know, I know,’ he said soothingly; ‘I didn’t realize you were awake.’ Boy, was she awake! Every pore in her body was alive to him in the dark, pleading wordlessly with him to stay, to live with them in the house where they could all see him all the time. Always.
'He used to knock in the same way, didn’t he? Do you remember, Chhote?'

Chhote remembered. All that was needed was to wind the key and his memories chugged out like a toy train on its tracks, carrying him past wayside stations which more or less resembled one another, year after year, from one season to the next. When Kaya talked about Babuji, the train pulled in at a summer station, sun-flooded, nestling among pines, the leaf cones honed to dazzling sharp points. It was, he was told, the season for migration to hill stations, and since Babuji also came home only during summers, he imagined him toiling up across ridge after ridge on the way and he'd be proud of him. It was a pity though, that the summer station was gone in a twinkling and the descent to the plains began again. Chhote saw what looked like swarms of ants marching downhill in a single file among yellowing pine trees away towards distant Delhi, Kanpur, Calcutta – faceless cities but from behind which peered one face: his Babuji's. Yes, Kaya, I remember, he said to himself in the dark; when summer came, he’d knock on the door in just the same way.

‘Do you know, Chhote,’ whispered Kaya, sharing a secret, her very own, a veritable treasure she’d been hugging to herself unknown to anyone, ‘He’ll be home during the Christmas holiday.’

Chhote almost started out of his bed. ‘How do you know?’ he demanded, his eyes lit up. It had never happened before; the train stopped only at the summer station, summer after short-lived summer, across a snow-misted interregnum, empty rooms, crooked branches of leafless trees, an endless expanse without a trace of Babuji anywhere.

Kaya did not think it necessary to answer. Already she had told him too much. She was deterred by a deep-seated superstition that if she aired her secret hope it would not come to pass quite the way she had expected. She was scared by the intensity of Chhote's reaction, and retreated hurriedly to bury her treasure underground and tamp the soil flat above it. Utterly flat, no tell-tale mound, no path uphill or away down the slopes, no snow-bound winter, no summer, only a stark tract where the wind wandered day and night. No one could ever detect the spot where she had buried the last day of their father's last visit.

Babuji’s luggage had been loaded on a rickshaw which would take
him to the railway station. Kaya was standing with Mrs Joshua on the veranda downstairs. It was a hot day. The sun filtered through the branches of trees in Mrs Joshua's compound and streamed into the veranda. As the coolies salaamed and Mangtu the servant pushed them out of the way in the style of a soldier, and as the rickshaw puller in a bright turban got up to his feet in readiness, a miracle happened, which etched itself instantly in the stones around in a hieroglyph of ache no one else could have deciphered, which one carried about forever afterwards like a cross. That ache, that hope, derived from the unexpectedness of the moment.

At the very last moment, just as the rickshaw was about to pull out, Babu had got down and strode back to the house as if suddenly reminded of something he'd overlooked in his haste. He walked up to Mrs Joshua on the veranda and said his goodbyes. 'I was in a hurry,' he laughed apologetically, 'Mind you take care of yourself.' Mrs Joshua blinked up at him; she was hard of hearing and couldn't even lip-read very well. She thought he was worrying about Kaya. 'Don't worry, she'll be all right,' she reassured him loudly in her thin voice; 'She'll be all right.' But Babu had meanwhile turned towards Kaya - and then the miracle happened. It tore like a flash of lightning across a sky suffused with pain. 'I forgot to tell you, Kaya,' Babu was saying, 'I'll be home during the Christmas holiday.' He then spoke about her mother, about Chhote, but she registered nothing. She hung on to just one sentence of his, breathless, and before she could recover, he was gone. His rickshaw was nearing the hilltop, a black speck of a housefly crawling up and away in the distance.

Kaya had in her grasp a four-anna coin Babu gave her at the time of leaving; it was to be shared with Chhote as usual. But what Babu had confided to her was for her alone; she didn't have to share it with anyone.

'Come in,' Mrs Joshua pulled her in by her hand, 'I've baked a cake for you.'

Mrs Joshua was a skinny old woman as stiff as a ramrod. She always wore a woollen hat, beneath which white hair sprouted out over her forehead. She lived on the ground floor. It was said that she and her husband took up residence in this mountain town during the First World War. She came to like the town so much that she stayed on
after the War, although her husband preferred to go back to England. At first, he visited her once every year or so, but then he called it quits. However, Mrs Joshua still got in her mail from England several newspapers and brochures, and occasionally letters too. Her tin letter-box full to the brim hung from the wicket gate across a small garden like a dead bird nailed upside down; it squeaked rustily when rocked by wind. Mrs Joshua seldom bothered to collect her mail. The neighbours said, uncharitably, that it was left to Hariya the sweeper, who came in to clean the commode, to clean up her letter-box as well, and they laughed hilariously. But Kaya could never make out what was so funny about it.

Mrs Joshua laughed, too, but sarcastically. She ridiculed all those who spend half the year in the mountains and the other half in offices in Delhi. Gypsy clerks, nomads, she dubbed them disdainfully. When the migratory population packed up to leave for the plains, Mrs Joshua sat out on her veranda, a walking-stick across her lap, watching with disapproval the bustling coolies, ponies, rickshaws – every unpleasant detail. Everyone who left was, in her eyes, her foe. She waved her walking-stick indignantly. 'Ungrateful lot,' she mumbled to herself. When the same people reappeared in the street the next summer they were greeted by her self-satisfied smirk: 'Ah, the fools are back again!' Sullenly, the newcomers plodded past behind the coolies, trying not to meet her triumphant gaze.

But Mrs Joshua made an exception in the case of Babu. She respected him, for he at least left his family behind. It was extraordinary, she thought, that in the whole neighbourhood there was but one Indian who went away alone. For this reason perhaps she had a soft corner for the children; when Babu was gone she'd feel all the more responsible towards them. She kept an eye on both Kaya and Chhote as they wandered about. She took in their bruised kneecaps, the dust in their hair, the wild animal look in their eyes. 'Tch! Tch!' she grimaced, pointing her walking-stick at them. 'Your father's gone, that's it,' she concluded, as if she blamed his absence for their wildness. She looked the children over thoughtfully and made up her mind quickly. 'Come in,' she invited them rather ceremonially. 'I've some cakes for you in the oven.' Kaya and Chhote quietly followed her in.

* * *
'Are you still awake, Kaya?'
'What is it?'
'I'm cold.'

'Here, come over.' Kaya turned over on her side. The wind had abated. Clothes hung out to dry fluttered no longer. The roof of Mangtu's quarters rang out as ripe apricots fell from overhanging branches and rolled down its slope. They counted the resonant thuds, and sure enough they found an equal number of apricots in the gutter the next morning. These were the last apricots of the season. Before long, the tree would be bare and the roof cluttered with discoloured yellow leaves. The roof and the leaves on the roof played their own variations on the noises of the night . . . until November when at last they were choked by snow.

'You won't kick me in the legs, will you?'

Chhote didn't wait for an answer and jumped out of his bed gleefully. The prospect of a warm bed was tempting enough for him to overcome his fear of being kicked. Kaya moved over to make room for him. Chhote crawled in beside her. The bed, it seemed, was apportioned into an icy North Pole and an African continent of warmth. Chhote wiggled compulsively closer to the domain of warmth but shrank back in humiliation as Kaya pushed him away: 'Can't you keep to your side of the bed?' she snorted. He'd half a mind to clear out but he'd dug in his heels, so to speak; besides, it was already beginning to warm up. Soon he was as warm as ever in Mrs Joshua's room, which was hung with thick curtains that kept out both the sun and the cold wind.

In his dreams, Chhote saw Mrs Joshua's drawing room as a stage on which events unfolded one after another as in a real play. Next morning when he actually went to Mrs Joshua's, he expected a repeat performance and took his ringside seat, as it were, with the air of one who had bought his ticket for the show.

* * *

The two children sank into their chairs while Mrs Joshua retreated behind the curtain over the door to her bedroom. They listened to her pace up and down, up and down, interminably. Apparently she had forgotten all about them. But the children didn't mind waiting; the quietude of a mellow wintry afternoon, underscored by Mrs
Joshua's monotonous footsteps, had a lulling effect; it unloosened their muscles weary after the rough and tumble of play. Mrs Joshua was a frail old woman but as she trod to and fro tremors rippled along the floorboards.

At long last Mrs Joshua looked in, the curtain gathered to one side in her hand. 'You're still here!' she exclaimed. Her amazement launched Chhote on his fantasising; to his mind, to taunt one's guests partook of dreams. He stared at her fascinated. Kaya held her gaze, daring her, weighing her amazement with her own: 'Can we take our leave, Mrs Joshua?'

'No, no! Not yet. Let me bring you some cake and biscuits. How forgetful of me!' Mrs Joshua threw up her hand in self-reproach. As she hurried away to the kitchen Chhote puzzled over how she looked so old and yet was so childish in her mannerisms and gestures.

'What are you staring at — eat it up!' Mrs Joshua commanded, waving her stick over the plate of pastries and biscuits until the children picked up one or the other thing to eat.

Chhote reached out his hand shyly: if only he could slip away into a corner to nibble his biscuit in peace! The sight of Mrs Joshua's threatening stick killed his appetite. A saving grace though was that Mrs Joshua had her attention focused on Kaya, leaving him to his own resources. He let his eye rove all over the place. There was Mrs Joshua's bedroom behind the curtain. Beyond it, over to one side, was the kitchen opposite the bathroom where he'd never been. His fancy sniffed about in its mysterious nooks. Sometimes he wondered if Mrs Joshua also sat on a commode like lesser mortals. Did white memsahibs also have to do such dirty things? Impossible, he told himself. Although it was an important question, he dared not discuss it with Kaya. When his gaze returned from dark interiors it latched on to the gramophone covered in blue with what looked like books or ledgers stacked alongside. Once he'd bided his time to make a beeline for the 'ledgers' to pry one out and found himself face to face with an array of black discs inside staring back at him through eyeholes in their bellies.

'Mrs Joshua, it's time we took our leave,' Kaya said somewhat shamefacedly, for it did not seem right to walk out as soon as one had disposed of her cake and biscuits.

'You're a very jimmewar (responsible) girl,' Mrs Joshua remarked.
She peppered her speech with Hindi words when being funny or sarcastic. 'How is your mother?'

'Very well thank you, Mrs Joshua.'

'Very well, eh?' Mrs Joshua took off her glasses before looking out of the window at the birch and plane trees. 'She is growing big day by day. Haven't you noticed?'

This time Chhote's attention was also arrested. Now that he gave it a thought his mother had indeed grown big over the last few months. But when Mrs Joshua spoke about it they were both ill at ease, as if it were a matter for shame. Their hearts lurched when somebody hauled their household affairs out into the open. They feared they could not protect their home from the curious. They didn't mind so long as Mother stayed inside but when she came out, even if only on to the veranda or to Mangtu's quarters, they felt vulnerable to ridicule — to some nasty or vulgar remark, the kind they had heard bandied about in the streets: that that could be asked about their Mother was beyond their imagination; it was like hell-fire even to think of it. At the mention of Mother's condition by Mrs Joshua, Kaya had a strong urge to drag Chhote out of her drawing room to the kitchen in their own part of the house where she felt safest.

Mrs Joshua tapped on the table with her walking stick. 'What do you keep brooding about?' She sounded impatient.

'Nothing, Mrs Joshua.' Kaya looked up timidly.

'You were never like this before.'

Kaya felt Mrs Joshua's searching glance on her face. The latter had always been there since the earliest days of Kaya's childhood and had watched her grow up. All the same, Kaya was still a little girl.

'Well,' Mrs Joshua took a deep breath. 'It's a good thing you got rid of that witch. Don't ever think about her.'

Kaya went on looking at Mrs Joshua in silence. A shadow of a smile, nebulous like a dream, floated up in her large eyes, and her lips parted. Everything in the room, the rustle in the trees beyond the window, the indolent afternoon sun on the hillside — all seemed to converge on a single point of brilliance: The Witch.

'Mrs Joshua,' Kaya asserted, a strange rueful smile in her eyes, 'she was not a witch, and I know you know it.'

'I know what you know!' Mrs Joshua was livid with anger. 'Tell me, wasn't it Lama who wrote that letter? Did she or did she not?'
'Which letter, Mrs Joshua?' Chhote bit into another scrunchy biscuit.

'You be quiet,' Mrs Joshua cast Chhote a scathing glance. 'Let Kaya speak.'

Kaya, still smiling, evinced little interest in Mrs Joshua's question. Perhaps she was not even listening. Perhaps she couldn't have, from where she had withdrawn into the charmed circle Lama had drawn round her. Nothing ever reached her there.

'Well, let it be,' a disappointed Mrs Joshua conceded wearily. She was confronted by a wilful little waif whose father was away in Delhi, the mother confined to bed and the brother a dreamy puppet. Poor thing! One shouldn't be hard on her.

'Has he started going to school?' Mrs Joshua asked, looking in the direction of Chhote, who dunked the last of the slice of cake in Ovaltine before depositing it in his mouth.

Kaya laughed a slight laugh of derisive disapproval. 'Not yet. He will next summer.'

'Next summer, is it?' Mrs Joshua's face sagged. Wrinkles dug crisscrossing paths under her eyes, along the nose and across the chin.

'Who knows whether I'll still be here then.'

Chhote stayed his hand. The cake in his mouth melted on its own.

'Are you going somewhere, Mrs Joshua?'

Mrs Joshua smiled. 'Have you seen the cemetery near Sanjauli? My brother is there. I'd like to go to him.'

For many years afterwards, Kaya could not forget Mrs Joshua's calm words of a calm afternoon. How did she know? How could one foretell the moment of one's death? Kaya didn't believe her. People went to offices, moved house - but not Mrs Joshua: she would forever be there in her ground floor semi-dark flat, rooted to her place, everlasting as the hills Kaya had known since as far back as the first stirrings of her memory. These curtains, these trees, this gramophone - would they let one who was at one with them ever part?

* * * *

Chhote had fallen asleep. Kaya walked out noiselessly across the hall and past Mother's bedroom, its musty silence punctuated by her breathing. She groped her way along the wall to the kitchen.
The glass pane in the door was frosted. She wiped a spot with her fingertip and looked in. She saw Mangtu hunched on a low plank stool, his pigtails bouncing as he scraped ash off the cinders picked up with a pair of tongs from the clay hearth: a box-framed glass-fronted picture of a frozen moment.

She knocked gently. Just once. And again. Mangtu froze. He sat still, as if unable to make up his mind whether to ignore the knock or get up to answer it. He had, many a time in the past, sent Kaya away by his studied indifference. But tonight he put away the tongs, got slowly to his feet and unlatched the chain on the door.

Kaya slipped in swift as a cat before Mangtu could change his mind, and flopped down on a gunny sack spread out beside the dresser crammed with kitchen gear.

Mangtu said nothing: He didn’t even glance at her, and walked across the kitchen to his almirah in a recess behind it to fetch a white sheepskin coat he wore when it snowed. He draped it round Kaya without a word. Kaya pulled it about her upside down. She was enveloped in its sweet smell, a blend of cumin, turmeric and cardamom. She wondered if the living sheep smelled as nice.

Back on his plank stool, Mangtu fished out a live coal and tossed it on his palm until it was cool enough for him to lick the ash off it. Kaya watched him in rapt attention. The firewood in the hearth gave off a resinous smell. Kaya felt tempted to taste the ash but she knew — and she resented it — that Mangtu would not let her.

Mangtu’s heavy laboured breathing and the clatter and scrape of tongs as the blades bit into coal after glowing coal deepened the silence in the room.

‘Is Chhote asleep?’

‘Yes, he went to sleep ages ago.’

‘And you – couldn’t you get to sleep?’ Mangtu peeled ash off the burnt out coals without a pause.

Kaya kept silent. Snug in the sheepskin coat, she was no longer bothered about sleep or lack of it. What mattered was that the fears and doubts which had pursued her during the day were falling back.

‘What was Memsahib saying to you?’ Mangtu turned his head towards her.

‘She…’ Kaya trailed off. She looked up at him helplessly before dropping her eyes to stare at the cinders in the hearth.
'What did she say?' He looked Kaya full in the face.
'She spoke about Mother.'
Mangtu knitted his brows. 'What did she say?'
'About her growing big.' Kaya turned to him with a look wavering between shame and wonderment.
Mangtu let out a sigh, as if he was sore in all his muscles. Winter was the worst period of the year when the aches flared into an agonising pain in his legs so that he had continually to shift his weight from one hip to the other. His legs were bandaged from ankle to knee in strips of torn cloth like a puttee. Kaya never found out whether he did it to keep out the cold or to quell his pain.
'Mangtu…'
'Yes?'
'How long will Mother keep growing?'
Mangtu took a coal from the fire and gazed into it long for an answer to the child's curiosity. 'Can't say,' he said at last. 'Such things are up to the Lord.'
'What things?'
'Can't you see?' He stretched and yawned so hard that the ash blew off the coal. Of no use to him any more, he returned it to the hearth.
'Once I saw . . .' Kaya laughed to herself. Sometimes she assumed the airs of a grown-up with such alacrity as left Mangtu amazed.
'What did you see?'
'Mrs Joshua's letter-box. Haven't you?'
Mangtu nodded his head.
'It's always open, you know.'
'What do you want to say?'
'We looked into it once — Chhote and I.'
'You shouldn't have.' Mangtu's breathing whistled in the silence across the kitchen.
'But there was nothing inside. Not a single letter.'
'Poor Memsahib — who would write to her?' Mangtu said pityingly as if it was unfortunate that the woman should not receive letters any more. But a glance at Kaya convinced him that it was nothing of that sort, and he went pale. He was a pale-looking man but this moment a sickly pallor of alarm gathered in his face. 'What is it, Kaya?' he insisted.
'I climbed up the grille of the gate while Chhote stood below.' Her
gaze rivetted to the door, Kaya seemed to be unravelling a dream thrown up by memory. ‘I climbed up the grille, threw open the letter-box and looked in. There was nothing there except some straw, bird droppings, and dust — lots of it. When I was about to shut it I’d a feeling someone was watching me... someone from behind it.’

Mangtu threw her a quick glance, and, groaning, got up slowly from his low plant stool. He took a kettle from a drawer of the sideboard and put some water to boil on the hearth.

‘You’re sure you remember it right?’ Mangtu spoke up after a while. Kaya sat huddled against the wall. He could neither believe nor disbelieve her. A simple man from the mountains, he didn’t trust his suspicions nor suspect what the other trusted. For him, an occurrence didn’t have to come to pass to be there — it just was: it was there in a state of suspension between being and non-being, neither impossible nor yet real; something inevitable, which no one could will or wish away. For this reason, he never asked Kaya whether what she said did in fact happen or if she’d merely made it up. For him, the thought was as good as the actual: the two seemed to overlap: each was as much the truth as the other, foreordained, predestined; there was no room for any doubt about it even as it was beyond comprehension.

‘Is it true, Kaya, that someone was watching you?’ Mangtu wanted to make sure all the same.

‘Of course, it’s true! I saw an eye staring back at me... and I slammed the letter-box shut on it at once. But the eye still held onto me.’ Kaya’s eyes were closed. She seemed to go on like a sleepwalker right up to the edge of the roof beyond which there was nothing except wind and darkness.

Wind and darkness. Lord, how the wind blew those days! Babu was away in Delhi. Mother was swelling under her smock. I wandered about the house. Once I opened Mrs Joshua’s letter-box. Chhote stood below steadying the gate for me. ‘Can you see anything?’ he asked. ‘Yes, bird droppings, straw... and an eye peering out of it.’ A single eye, up in the back, devouring the world at large. You don’t believe me, Mangtu — isn’t it? You think I’m mad. Go and see it for yourself, it’s still there. Go out and open the gate. The letter-box remains open at night. It will be in there — that eye, wide awake and white and growing old in its socket of straw. It’s been there all along.

‘What’s been there, Kaya?’ Mangtu’s voice reached her as if from a great distance. ‘Who is it?’

*   *   *
The kettle on the hearth simmered. Mangtu’s shadow wove in the wake of the spiralling steam. It struck Kaya that she had come to the farthest end of the house. The window in front of her, which gave on to the Jakhu Hill, was open to let out the smoke from the hearth. Beyond it, stars twinkled in the muted diffuse bluish darkness of a cold October night. A breeze rustled in the apricot tree; it rose only to be intercepted by tree after tree until the forest chanted in unison all around.

Mangtu took off the kettle and emptied it into a hot-water bottle held by Kaya. He then stoppered the bottle before wrapping it up in a napkin as if it were a baby he was going to put to bed. He gave it to Kaya.

‘You want me to come with you?’

Kaya stood uncertainly with the bottle held to her chest. Mangtu stepped ahead to open the inner door for her. Kaya walked out, alone. Out of the kitchen and into the drawing room, where the wind ballooned up the faded blue cotton matting. It was perhaps the most neglected room in the house, lying in its middle like a patch of uninhabited desert, cold and deserted, the fireplace unlit. With Babu’s departure, the sofa chairs were covered in sheets and the rug rolled up against the wall. The matting stretched bare across the floor, ruffled by wind — only now it looked more like a lake in which Chhote pretended to swim until either the wind dropped or Mrs Joshua downstairs stamped out into the yard on her walking stick. ‘Stop it, for heaven’s sake, will you? You’ll cause an earthquake!’ she screamed, waving her walking stick threateningly while her white hair streamed out from under her hat – a prophet of the desert: ‘What’s going on up there?’ Thereupon, Chhote cowered behind the trellis, looking warily down at her: ‘We were swimming, Mrs Joshua.’ Chhote was a stickler for truth: ‘We were swimming across the matting.’ Wide-eyed, Miss Josuha glared at him: ‘Swimming, did you say? Have you converted the room into a swimming pool?’ A tearful Chhote did his best to explain: ‘No, no, Mrs Joshua! It’s the billowy matting we were swimming on.’ He watched helplessly as Mrs Joshua seemed to crumple to the ground, groaning, her head between her hands. He couldn’t quite grasp what relation his matting or make-believe pool bore to Mrs Joshua’s intense suffering.

Mangtu was annoyed when, having cleaned up the kitchen for the
night, he came upon her dawdling in the middle of the drawing room, the hot water bottle held absentmindedly to her chest. 'What are you doing there? Don't you realize she must be waiting?' he said angrily.

Kaya started. This was not the first time she had been caught. More often than not, she paused in the drawing room on way to her mother's. In that moment the memories of the summers past came crowding upon her even as ghosts stepped out from the dark corners to lure her, to whisper in her ears insistently what she'd heard before time and again.

She shook off the ghosts, walked past them, and turned right to the door under which a rib of light gleamed. She knocked on the door before bursting into the room.

Her eyes dropped to the bed in which lay her mother, a bedside lamp picking out her pillow and her head on the pillow and her own shadow on the wall which appeared to her more real than herself.

'So it's you!' The head on the pillow turned over upwards to face her. 'You're late tonight.'

No hint of anger, petulance or protest. Only a certain weariness which never diminished nor grew: it ever remained the size of the bed: indeed, the bed seemed to personify it. Kaya bent forward as two hands rose from the bed to accept the hot-water bottle. 'Please put it under my feet — they're very cold,' her mother said with a wan smile. Kaya placed the bottle under her feet, struck anew by their smallness. They were smaller than her own feet, and they lay shivering one upon the other, the red rubber water bottle a small consolation, a mere sop to the cold, yet an isle of warmth and happiness before long. Kaya was possessed by a mad longing to snuggle up between her mother's feet within the nest of the quilt. But her hands drew back, slipping off the bottle in the bed. She shivered in the cold. Her mother's voice reached her like a stranger's from the other side of darkness; it rapped gently on the wall between them: 'Is Chhote asleep?' Then she saw her mother peering closely at her.

'Yes, he is. I was in the kitchen.'

'Wouldn't he be frightened if he woke to find himself alone?' her mother observed hesitantly, ashamed of her fear. She feared dogs, Tibetan mendicants, Chinese peddlers. She turned pale with fear if anyone entered her room without knocking.

'No, he'll not get up — he sleeps like a log.' Kaya felt restive while
comforting her mother, as if she was deceiving her. Her mother tended to believe whatever fibs she might tell, so even an innocuous little lie left an unpleasant taste in her mouth.

'Any letters in the post?'
'None. Were you expecting any?'
'Not really.' Her mother hesitated. 'Your Bua (father's sister) has not written for a long time.'

'Is she supposed to visit us?' Kaya's heart throbbed in expectation. 'Why,' her mother looked up eagerly, 'have you heard anything of the sort?' She was more than willing to place her trust in her daughter.

Kaya let her head drop. The shadow on the wall moved. The mother shrank into herself.

'Listen.'

Her mother turned to look up. 'What is it, Kaya?'
'If Bua comes, will Lama be with her?'

The mother nodded. She reached out her hand to Kaya's, shivered at the contact and withdrew. 'You're so cold, Kaya!'

Kaya sat lost at the edge of the bed. She registered neither her mother's touch nor her exclamation. Lama must be in Meerut, she thought; how long and steep is the descent beyond Kalkaji to the plain; there must be a vast level tract down below, rather like the Annandale ground up here, strung out with cities right up to the ocean . . . She'd hoped she'd look down one day from the Hanuman temple on top of the Jakhu Hill, the highest peak hereabouts, to see if she could, on a clear cloudless day, see Meerut, even spot the house in which she lived. She wondered whether Lama would hear her if she shouted to her to come. It might be possible, she told herself. Mangtu said voices carried far in the hills; where he came from, people in far-flung hamlets simply called out to one another if they had to: there was silence there, all over, and so deep that no call went unanswered.

There was silence here, too. In this room. But Mother called out to no one. Or even if she did, nobody heard: we carried on blissfully convinced that she never called out to anyone.

'Isn't it time you went to bed?,' her mother said slowly. 'It's late already.'

No, no, not already – not yet, Kaya said to herself; there was no hurry, for nights in winter are long. The lamplight fell on Mother's averted face. She looked very pale. Locks of her straggly hair had
caught under her pillow. She opened her eyes every once in a while to see if Kaya was still there. She'd insist on her leaving, reassured all the same by her presence, for Kaya had the power to protect her from her fear of impending disaster.

A selfish thought, and the mother was ashamed of it— but she was anxious her daughter should not feel bored so she forced a smile to her lips and said: 'Kaya, did I tell you that Lama was married. She is very happy now and takes full care of her household.'

Kaya, who was watching her mother's lips move, didn't trust her ears when the word 'happy' issued forth; she thought it was a lie, a falsification. Then it occurred to her it was probably the truth as Mother saw it: to her, the four walls of a house symbolized happiness, for out there the world was so oppressive, so callous, so stone-hearted. Mother had always been worried about, and terrified of, Lama who, she said, didn't care what anyone thought. Mother would frighten Bua with her own fears about Lama: 'Look, marry her to the first boy you can find or you'll live to rue the day.' Bua was also worried: 'Where are the boys? How can I find one?' Hearing this, Kaya was astonished: how was it Bua could find no boy when the streets overflowed with boys, playing about, going to school... they were everywhere!

Kaya pulled away from her mother. A fury raised its hood within her. If only Mother wouldn't have importuned Bua Lama would still have been here, in her room, now haunted by wind. Empty. Ever since the morning she opened her door to find she was gone...

But Lama is still here, over there by the railway track, where the midday sun struggles to disentangle itself from the bushes and the green poison ivy, between hills on either side crouched in the dry colourless air. I look about for Lama, taking my clues from rustling bushes. Sometimes I see her legs naked below the hem of her shalwar hitched up to above her knees. She wears her head-scarf round her waist like a belt. Her stringy unbound hair falls all over her shoulders. She emerges from the bushes to walk on up the gleaming railway line. We veer off up the hillside to a yellowing grass patch which opens out like an upraised palm close to the hump over the dank darkness of the tunnel through which the track runs. It is difficult to climb to the hump. Lama reaches there ahead of me. She pulls me up by my arm and gathers me in her lap, but I jump off at once and look up into her big eyes staring through the grass at me. All round rise the hills, and the railway track runs below. We lie down in the grass, our ears to the ground, waiting for the train, but what we hear is the
rumble of the wind in the tunnel . . . One day as we lay there, she clutched at my hand, screaming something at me, but I couldn’t hear her in the roaring clatter of the train wheels. When the train was gone and the silence returned to the hills, I turned to Lama. ‘What was it you were trying to tell me?’ I asked her. ‘Nothing,’ she said, laughing. ‘You heard something?’

It seemed to Kaya she was still swinging on Lama’s laughter, out in the cold beyond the warmth of her mother’s body and of the hot-water bottle, above the dark tunnel heaving with her mother’s breaths, an arm thrown across her face – and then she heard Mangtu’s voice reach her from far off, tumbling her down the hump, away, further away from Lama’s screams.

‘Wake up, Kaya,’ Mangtu shook her gently. ‘Go and sleep in your own bed.’ She got up, surprised she should have fallen asleep on her mother’s pillow. She stumbled dazedly down uneven slopes of sleep to level ground and let herself be led across the drawing room and the passage beyond to her bed which stood empty and cold in the pale moonlight. Chhote turned over, blinked dreamily, wondered where he was and if Kaya was there in her bed alongside – but this surfacing from deep slumber on a wintry night was very nearly a dream in itself, a continuum, just a pit or a log, an obstacle sleep jumped clear of in a jiffy to claim him again. But Kaya’s sleep had vanished. Her loneliness, anger, yearnings, and despair interwove to form a globular mass of mist which was neither so soft that it would dissolve in tears nor so malleable as to be moulded into solace of wise counsel. The mist rose into the bar of moonlight that fell across her bed, and as Mangtu turned away after tucking her in she caught hold of the edge of his coat, pleading: ‘No, don’t leave yet! Please!’ Mangtu looked round hesitantly over the grubby moonlight between the twin beds, his old bones rattling under Kaya’s tugging trembling hands. ‘What a girl,’ he growled. ‘There’s nothing to be afraid of. Nothing at all.’ It seemed it was not Mangtu but someone else, his soul beneath his rags perhaps, which was groaning, and wheedling Kaya: ‘There, there’s nothing to be afraid of. Nothing to be afraid of at all!’ He intoned the words like a charm, a sort of litany, over and over again, as if it was not Kaya but himself he was praying for. Lulled by Mangtu’s somnolent mumb- lings, Kaya’s grip on his coat relaxed, her arm swung down over the side of the bed, her fist unclenched, and one more friable day ran out through her fingers like gritty sand.
There are certain monuments to human striving, love and devotion that emerge from passing time like butterflies from the dormant chrysalis. This parallel is not merely figurative but intended to draw attention to the fact that evaluation of a butterfly, the wonder of its beauty, form and so on, is of a different order from our evaluation of the chrysalis, though these too are wondrous in their own way. Chartres cathedral is one such monument of colour, light and beauty that has emerged from time to offer us an experience of the timeless yet within the flow we call history.

It is inevitable that we are drawn to this monumental other-worldly beauty as it can lift us out of our rational depressions as to the 'state of the world' and the unbelievable self-destruction of recent human behaviour. This contemporary myopic abuse of the natural world is in the name of 'progress' which is the name of passing time.

It is also inevitable that we are drawn to wonder how such a 'miracle' as Chartres was built — on what principles, with what energies and intentions, and for what ends? A civilization has been described as being as accomplished as the questions it raised: this may be so but does not mean that the answers were found in the same way — or as easily.

However, Chartres is. We can investigate both our feelings about it, and the knowledge left behind by the school that built it — both have their value, the former on the basis of the Socratic anamnesis, or remembrance, available to all of us under special conditions of receptivity; the latter on the basis of understanding through the objectivity of knowing the intentions and attitudes of the builders.
‘Chartres has become a hymn of praise for eternity’, so said August Rodin (in his Notes in ‘The French Cathedrals’) as he also called it the ‘Palace of Silence’, thereby linking the centre of time to the centre of sound. ‘When faced with a marvel,’ he explained, one is ‘hushed by … an admiration that surpasses words.’ Rodin regarded Chartres as the ‘… sublime summary of centuries devoted to the research and accomplishment of beauty!’ He saw the sculptures as the human body projecting architecture ‘or to say that better, it (the human body) generates architecture.’ He concludes ‘Is it not precisely this science, this science of sciences, this unique science, the principle of architectural sculpture that is most lacking in our epoch?’ Of these statues Rodin observes ‘The head seems like a winged sphere.’ It is precisely this sense of the Cathedral growing out of the majestic statues which raise the Royal Portal whereby we experience this effect. These analogies will help us in our speculative venture into the relationship between these mysterious and magnificent ‘foundation’ sculptures (the earliest at Chartres) and their relations, both literally and symbolically, to the Jewish testament.

There is unfortunately far less than there might be of the writings of the Masters of the School of Chartres available in modern English – that is, of the works of Thierry, Bernard, Bernardus Silvestris, John of Salisbury and so on, let alone the works of those who inspired these great men – Martianus Capella, Chalcidius, Boethius and the rest. However, we do have the works of Plato and Aristotle and Cicero, as well as some of the important works of the Chartrian School available. What we do know is that the Christian School of Chartres was a Platonizing School and therefore one of the foundations is to be found in the wisdom of such works as Plato’s Timaeus, according to the translations available at the time. The ‘foundation’ that is less well

Opposite: The Royal Portal on the West Front of Chartres Cathedral, showing the four ‘levels’. The shadow at the base is the height of a person; the statues above the shadow are those discussed. Above the door, on the lintel stone, are the Apostles of Christ; above them is Christ in Glory, in the vesica pisces or double arc which represents his ‘light’ body. Surrounding Christ at the fourth level are the four creatures symbolizing the four Gospel writers: Matthew as the human (water bearer); John as the eagle (of Scorpio); Luke as the bull (of Taurus); and Mark as the winged lion (of Leo). The four corners of the heavens are thereby represented by the four Gospels.
known (or considered) is directly related to the 'foundation' of Christianity itself, which we might call the Jewish Bible, the Torah or Old Testament. This brief article will look at this second foundation, in the sense that it might be seen to be evident in the statues nearest the ground on the West Front or 'Royal Portal'.

The first thing that is likely to strike one is the curiously elongated proportions of the figures. Proportion it must be remembered was the key to the Platonic Timaean cosmogenesis. In other words the difference between Chaos or passive non-order and a Cosmos was the establishment of relationship through proportions or ratios. This proportionality Timaeus suggested could be seen as the way in which opposites such as fire and earth for instance could co-exist. That number, proportion, harmony and cosmos were seen as intimately co-defining is evident in the little statue of Pythagoras above the elongated figures and close to the nativity tympanum, on the right of the Royal Portal.

So the proportions are unlikely to be a matter of whim or fashion of the sculptors and more likely to be related to the mathematical 'soul' of the Platonizing school that commissioned the cathedral or 'House for Mary'.

Now to reiterate the 'fourness' of the unfolding of creation as read in the Timaeus we find a direct parallel with this mathematical tetraktys of Arithmetic, Geometry, Harmony and Astronomy (cosmology) in the four levels of meaning the School of Chartres demanded of any work of art. This fourness takes art beyond the aesthetics or aesthetic debate of modern times, since aesthetic means referring to the senses or sense-perception. For a civilization like that represented at Chartres in the eleventh and twelfth centuries the fact of revelation and the reality of the intelligible and imaginable worlds was supreme. In this way the other three dimensions of evaluation were beyond the first which was merely the literal or historic. The second level was the analogic, symbolic or 'hidden' meaning directing the mind to the third level which was the tropological or moral, from the Greek tropos, to turn as in turning around of the soul, the 'conversion' of consciousness. Fourthly there was the necessary evaluation of the anagogical, or final unifying level of simplicity and uniqueness.

The statues are considered to be (a) 'Royal' from the Jewish Testament (b) placed just above the heads of the worshippers
entering the doors of the Royal Portal (c) just below the twelve apostles and the life of Christ and finally (d) part of a four-fold progression to the singular figure of Christ in Glory centrally in the Royal tympanum. Thus they are above us as passers-by or pilgrims, and of the stonework of the columns which 'holds up' the lintel of the apostles who in turn are the support of the life-sized and 'humanly proportioned' figure of Christ in Glory with his light-body or *vesica piscis* surrounding him. This last is important in as much as it is a gesture of form in pure geometry. The shape of this 'light-body' or aureole (the 'vesica') is composed of two simple geometric arcs each of which has the centre of the opposite arc resting with its middle point (see illustration no. 4). This simple shape would not be missed by the geometrizing schoolmen of Chartres as it is also the basis of the very first theorem of Euclid. The geometry of the arches of Chartres has been excellently displayed and demonstrated by the German engineer Ernst Möissel in the 1930's. That geometry should underlie the aesthetics of Chartres both structurally in terms of statics and inspirationally in terms of analogy, tropology and anagogy should not be surprising – these were the very standards they worked by.

So let us return to the statues themselves, their unique proportions and their signification as the Old Testament 'beings' supporting and 'generating' the New.

Far less recognized in the Christian histories of Europe is the influence both Jewish and Islamic scholarship (in the form of sufism) had on the European Christian schools, particularly Paris and Chartres. That there was a meeting-ground in the great translation school at Toledo in the eleventh century, one of tolerance and synthesis before the 13th and 14th centuries, is recognized; but even more important was the living contribution of Judaic Kaballah and esoteric wisdom as it permeated France and Germany from Spain. There was a tradition of Jewish student pilgrimages from master to master throughout Europe during this time.

How many of us are aware of what this may have meant to the Christian scholars, students and masters of the day? How many of us are aware that Chartres at the period of the building of the great Cathedral had a community of between one and five thousand Jews in residence? Not only was there such a community but this Jewish settlement in Chartres gave birth to such 'universal' masters as
Mattathias, a renowned Biblical exegete and poet, also Joseph of Chartres, another poet and scholar who wrote a major elegy on the Jewish martyrs of York in 1190. Samuel ben Reuben of Chartres and Joseph of Chartres, were distinguished masters of their day.

The aspect of foundation scholarship (paralleling Torah or Old Testament exegesis) we would like to highlight in this essay is that of the mystical or contemplative science of Judaism, the Kabbalah. This particular aspect of Judaism grew to its height in Spain by 1150–1260, and was transmitted throughout Europe by such remarkable travelling masters as Ibn Ezra (1089–1164). It is within this last mysterious yet consistently powerful influence in the Schools of Europe that we might expect the transmission of Kabbalistic metaphysics, including the geometry to have taken place. It is recorded that the Jewish community of scholars and the Christian clerics embarked on Biblical discussion, so there is no reason to reject the possibility of the contribution of such as Ibn Ezra, who was a remarkable synthesist and transmitter of Neoplatonism into Christian Europe. Where else would such an influence be welcome but in the Platonizing centre of Christianity of its day, the School of Chartres?

This brings us to what we know of the geometry of the Kabbalah as it has been taught by our contemporary ben Shimon Halevi and others.

As the teaching of the School of Pythagoras is known to have been taught on the figure of the Tetraktys of ten points displayed in triangular form, the teaching of the science of the Kabbalah is taught on a similar geometric structure of ten positions but constructed in a ‘tree’ form. The evolution or emanation of this ‘tree’ form can be simply demonstrated starting as it does from a simple yet comprehensive circle.

Illustration 1
Firstly the circle is drawn to represent unity, wholeness, totality and the One.
Illustration 2
Secondly we draw another circle below to represent the act of exteriorizing or the apparent departure from unity; this circle can be taken to represent the first stage of emanation.

Illustration 3
Thirdly we draw the full emanation which is where the circle has fully externalized; we see the point of reflection where the first circle is touching the one below. We have drawn the intermediate circle as the 'mean' stage. These three circles can now be taken to symbolize (a) the Heavenly or Divine circle above, (b) the Human or psychological circle in between and (c) the cosmological or manifest 'Earth' circle below. These three can also be called from below upwards: 'bodily', 'psychological', and 'inspirational'.

Illustration 4
Next we take these three circles to become the basis of the ten-fold system of unity known as the 'tree of life' in the Kabbalah. By constructing the upper 'vesica' (sephirotic) circles are drawn proportionally at the main intersections. One 'centre' is left blank (or dashed) as it traditionally represents knowledge itself as a principle. Thus we are left with the ten 'lights' or sephiroth which are the ten stages or stations in the emanational unfolding of our cosmos and the creation itself according to Kabbalah. The four 'worlds' are represented by the spaces between the defining circles: they are named in this tradition as the worlds of Emanation, Creation, Formation, and Making (or Fabrication). From the point apex of the topmost circle manifest existence flows 'like a lightning-flash' through all the ten necessary aspects or stages of existence. Thus the four stages become the symbol of perfect order, a perfect and whole existence or cosmos.*

* For a proper description of this tradition see ben Shimon Halevi, 'Kabbalah tradition of Hidden Knowledge'. Thames and Hudson.
Another geometric symbol or construction appropriate to demonstrate this unfolding of the one 'tree of life' extended to four stages so that we find all ten sephiroth or principles aligned up the central axis of the drawing. This is said also to represent the four worlds interpenetrating.

The third figure on the left nearest to the main entrance as one enters the Royal Portal on the West Front of Chartres Cathedral. Nominally one of the 'Royal' figures from the Jewish Testament.
Thus from the unfolding geometry of the ‘Tree of Life’ model we see how the extended Tree aligns four interlocking ‘trees’ to express the ‘four worlds’ or stages in the subtle evolution of the created order. In the tradition of inner reflecting outer and outer reflecting inner we can see how such a model of the wholeness as reproduced by the Kabbalistic tradition could apply to a holy or ‘realized’ person. A person we might say who is aware of the four worlds and lives in the knowledge of them. This, in one sense, naturally takes such an accomplished holy or ‘Royal’ person out of passing time, thus we can also see how appropriate such symbology is to the foundations of a cathedral of the significance of Chartres.

Now let us finally push through our line of reasoning to the practical application of the geometry of the ‘extended Tree’ to become the inner proportional structure of one representation of these ‘Royal’ statues.

To the present writer the most moving and sublime figure of all the sculptures is situated closest to the entrance of the Royal Portal on the left hand side as entering. It is therefore to this figure we will apply the idea of an inner proportioning based on the ‘fourfold’ extended ‘tree’ geometry. We will take it as understood that such a ‘tree’ should be seen to be unfolding or emanating from the principial unity — the circle — which in this case is represented by the halo, the halo being the insignia of a realized being or ‘holy state’. Thus the circle of unity is the source of emanation and yet also the ascending goal of realization.

By drawing the nine overlapping circles upon which the ‘extended tree’ is constructed we find a remarkable coincidence with the proportions of the statue — based directly upon the diameter of its halo. As if to ensure we ‘see’ the figure as a spiritually enlightened person the feet can be clearly seen not to be taking any bodily weight. The proportions correspond exceptionally well and the positions of the features of the statue sparse as they are can also be interpreted according to the inherent symbolism of the positions on the ‘tree’.

To summarize our proposal: this correspondence proves nothing yet it is close enough to warrant consideration. In particular the consideration of the silent mute power of such a figure among figures, its proportions, its meaning, significance and placing within such a magnificent compound unity as the cathedral of Chartres and not
least the contribution that it could signify, coming from the masters of Judaic scholarship and Kabbalah who roamed the cities of Europe teaching and nourishing the flowering of European Christianity.

Chartres, its school, its associated schools, its devotion to Mary, its integration of classical learning and architectural skills its master craftsmen – glaziers, metal-workers, sculptors, painters, carpenters, and above all the anonymous master-geometers who supplied the unifying formal principles, all are to be appreciated, acknowledged and thanked for their unique contribution to the timelessness of the true art of being. May we now add the exegetes of the Old Testament or Torah?

To honour one of the great Schoolmen of Chartres we quote from the Cosmographia* of Bernardus Silvestris. In the Introduction to this two-part masterpiece he says:

In this first work, which is called Megacosmos or the ‘Greater Universe’ Nature as if in tears makes complaint to the Noys (Nous), or Divine Providence, about the confused state of the primal matter, or Hyle, and pleads for the Universe to be more beautifully wrought. Noys moved by her prayers assents and straightaway separates the four elements from one another. She sets the nine hierarchies of angels ... in the second book which is called the Microcosmos or ‘the Lesser Universe’ as the completion of her work ... Physis then forms man out of the remainder of the four elements (worlds) and, beginning with the head and working limb by limb, completes her work with the feet.

Thus we see how the created order is considered to embrace the totality of the cosmos, finishing at the feet of the anthropos. We only need to recall the fourfold necessary levels of meaning demanded of the Chartres school to appreciate the importance of such a work as the Cosmographia and its relationship to the ‘Cosmic Cathedral’ of Chartres.

[November 1988]

The tangible, visible, manifested world of man and nature is as real and important as we ourselves — not merely as individuals but as individual species of beings — consider it to be real and important. It is all about us as palpably as we ourselves are capable of seeing, hearing, touching, feeling, knowing etc. At best, our knowledge of it under the bondage of material conditions is but partial and external. The maximum range of scientific comprehension of the universe we happen to have acquired at any given moment of time takes us thus far and no further. Moreover it is shifting ground. Today's discoveries replace yesterday's certainties. Most of us are content, even happy, to live within the limits of this limited knowledge without bothering too much with what might lie beyond or within, if terms like 'beyond' and 'within' are at all appropriate in this context. Ibn 'Arabi, the brilliant and deeply mystical philosopher of Andalusia (A.D. 1165–1240), speaks of 'the infusion of the Divine mystery into the domain of His loving concern.' Ibn 'Arabi's commentator, puts the idea thus: 'The divine mystery pervades the entirety of the world' and that 'everything other than God is temporal.'

'To God we belong and to Him is our return' (The Qur'an, II:156). A slightly different version to the same effect 'Verily we are from God and verily unto Him we are returning' is a favourite formula with Sufis. All mystical endeavour and Sufi spirituality converge on the act of this nostalgic return-journey towards God. Ibn 'Arabi carefully describes stage by stage in his Journey to the Lord of Power, the finding of links between the temporal and the eternal, between the external cosmos and its inward counterpart, thereby enabling the soul to recognize and know its source and stay in the transcendental order — a spiritual
state expressed in the concept of baqā (attainment of the presence of Allāh and abiding in Him forever).³

One of the oldest means of gaining esoteric knowledge is the classic gnosis, or ma‘rifah, meaning intuitive insight into the nature of Supreme Reality vouchsafed to the mystic in moments of God-sent grace, depending, of course, on the mystic’s own temperament, state of readiness and sensitivity and his freedom from the passions and ambitions of the ego. Ibn ‘Arabi makes fine distinctions between the different planes of knowledge,⁴ when he observes that from ‘ilm (formal learning and knowledge in the sense of general information including scientific facts, theological and rational findings) the mystic proceeds to ma‘rifah and from ma‘rifah to revelation and vision (‘ayn), that is, an actual beholding of spiritual truths in visionary form or in theophanic experience.

Now, all language is a way of knowing. It is significant that at the earliest opportunity ‘the Lord God ... brought (all creatures He had formed) to Adam to see what he would call them; and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.’

And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field (Genesis, II: 19–20).

Before the naming ceremony Adam could see, hear, feel, etc. the dissimilarities between one creature and another. But, without the ability to isolate the unique characteristics possessed by none other than the creatures concerned, he could retain no fixed conception of their identities nor communicate about them to himself or to others. A name distinguishes one entity from another. A name is knowledge. It is communication. ‘Names,’ says Kenneth Craig, ‘are a vocabulary of intercourse.’⁵ Names are also used as part of Islamic theology.

Whereas names bestow individuality and distinctiveness on sensible or non-sensible form, a symbol, which is also a word or a name, bestows a representational quality on the same form. A symbol stands for something other than what it literally means. It makes real and vivid something which is outside the range of sensible form. Incidentally Adam’s initiation into symbolic language began with ‘the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil the Lord God had planted in the middle of the Garden of Eden.’ Sūrah VII, verse 19, of the Qur‘ān also refers to this tree.
O Adam, dwell thou
And thy wife in the Garden
And enjoy (its good things)
But approach not this tree.

The tree was literally there in its appointed place. It had roots, trunk, branches, foliage and fruit like any other tree, but it also represented that which caused the expulsion of man (including woman) and Lucifer from the Garden’s pristine beauty and privileges, and revolutionized life on the good earth. Further, the three characters, Adam, Eve, Lucifer, in the first human drama interpreted the meaning and potency of the forbidden fruit according to their respective understanding, inclinations and motives. Thus God in His mercy gave to everything a symbol which corresponds to its spiritual archetype so that the mind of man picks up hints and suggestions to guide him to appropriate the meaning and the truth he is seeking.

A symbol, then, evokes, as Kathleen Raine writes, ‘one plane [of experience] in terms of another.’ Sufis, particularly the poets among them, employed a diversity of symbols to represent and explain spiritual reality in its wholeness, beauty and equipoise as well as to point out its relation to the non-spiritual. They found no better means of speaking about mystic experiences and eternal Truths (al-Haqq) than the non-discursive language of symbol, myth, fable, dream etc. – all drawn, in the first instance, from the world of the senses and the intellect. Symbolic discourse became the most effective means of unveiling the mysteries.

It is interesting to note that seldom did Sufis use entirely personal and arbitrary symbols. They drew on the learned and sophisticated classical disciplines of universal acceptance and vitality – for instance, Neo-Platonism, especially Plotinus, Pythagorean numbers, and his principles of harmony, proportion and justice represented by sacred geometry, ancient Hebrew and Egyptian Cabbala, Zoroastrian, Buddhist and Christian sources as also popular lore or traditional standing.

According to Ibn ‘Arabi, in certain highly charged spiritual states of contemplative activity and mental absorption or waking dream or visionary moment, spiritual truths become available to the Sufi in that intermediary plane he calls the ‘Ālam al-Mithāl, where the creative imagination, not to be confused with fantasy or some figment of the over-wrought mind, operates at its purest and best and where
Absolute Reality (al-Ḥaqq) as distinguished from the created world (al-khalq) is manifested or reflected in subtle form; where the boundaries between spirit and matter melt and disappear; where figures, functions, situations coalesce; where the disembodied might put on body and vice versa; where the living and the dead or Sufis living at great distances of time and place from each other commune together at one point of time and place.

It is precisely in Ibn 'Arabi's 'Alam al-Mithāl, the 'imaginal plane', when the mystic's whole consciousness is concentrated on and poised for flight toward intuitive revelation that some powerful recurrent symbol or image might appear from nowhere and enkindle a visionary symbolic experience - a spiritual event imparting knowledge and communion to the mystic concerned.

Sufi literature is rich in symbolic language. I give below a few of the much used traditional symbols at random without commenting on their meaning and significance here - the cave of the seven sleepers of Ephesus (mentioned also in the Qur'ān, Sūrah XVIII), the cave of Hira at Mt. Jubbal, Mount Qaf, Mount Sinai, centres of holiness and spiritual awakening like Mecca, Jerusalem, the white hand of Moses, the 70,000 veils, Plato and Galen, Solomon and Bilqis, Laylā and Majnūn, the classical bird imagery from Plato onward, beautifully used in Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār's Manṭiq al-Tayr, a veritable catalogue of birds with the central simurgh, the hud-hud, the parrot, the falcon, a host of astral images, the kahkashān, sun, moon and stars, other symbols of light like candle, lamp, and lightning which might bring flashes of revelation.

In the following pages I shall dwell exclusively on one of the recurring symbols found in the teachings and experiences of Sufi masters, namely, that of the mirror, the mirror of the soul.

The mirror is a means of looking at, of knowing, an object which it is otherwise impossible to know - for instance one's own face and full form. Others know my face by looking at the original, I know it only by reflection. In optics, says the dictionary, a mirror is a reflective surface, that forms an extremely clear-cut and exact reproduction of an object when light rays coming from that object fall upon it. The reproduction is known as the image of the object. A smooth and
highly polished surface of metal or of other substances can also serve the function of a mirror. Of the two types of mirror, spherical (convex or concave) and flat, it is the flat alone that reflects the image exactly to human sight. The exactness or true likeness of the image produced in the mirror depends on the quality, condition and clearness of the glass. It depends also on the angle from which the image is projected. 

A mirror in some places is used for the mundane purpose of advertising the barber’s trade, when the barber holds up a mirror to attract customers to be known by, and incidentally to know them. There is an age-long association of the mirror, often referred to as the crystal, with soothsayers in divination to foresee events and things, howsoever dubious the knowledge.

The ancient Greeks and Romans had no mirrors of the kind we, today, take for granted. They used metals or other highly polished surfaces to reflect images. The Romans used metal discs with handles. In ancient China and Japan, it is believed that any white surface would serve the above purpose. The world-known Venetian mirrors are of very recent origin – 15th or 16th century.

To begin with, even in the literal sense, a mirror is an instrument of knowledge. But mystics and poets have used it as a symbol to probe and gain an inner kind of knowledge for understanding the universe on more levels than one in relation to whatever is the basis of its existence, as also of establishing inter-relationships between man, nature and God. The understanding might be near-perfect in some cases and in other cases, perhaps, a travesty of Reality.

The Myth of Narcissus

One of the oldest myths that relates to the mirror, when only its concept and function, and not the actual product, were in existence, is of Greek origin, that of Narcissus. Narcissus, a beautiful youth, son of the river god, Cephisus and Liriope, the water-nymph, rejected all offers of love, including that of the mountain oread, Echo, who pined away of unrequited love and died of a broken heart. The story goes on to say that nemesis overtook Narcissus when he saw his own reflection in the mountain pool and became obsessively enamoured of it under the delusion that it was the water-nymph of the place. He fell into despair chasing shadows, languished and died. The fault was
not in the mirror which was the best that could have been had in a clear, perhaps also a still, rocky mountain pool. Nor was it due to what later psychologists have interpreted as excessive self-absorption or sexual energy exclusively directed on self to the extent of making Narcissus incapable of emotional responses to others. The delusion, on the contrary, was due to total ignorance of his own face which he had never beheld before. The spell would have been broken had Narcissus taken a friend into his confidence and shown him the image in the pool of what he (Narcissus) had thought was his beloved water-nymph. Ignorance of the self on any level is a terrible veil of darkness. In the case of Narcissus it was unintentional, therefore all the more pathetic! Moreover, it was excessive preoccupation not with the self but with the wrong self. The Socratic wisdom 'Know thyself' is highly relevant in the matter of leading one to knowledge in other directions as well.

The Žām-i Jamshīd

In Persian legend-cum-ancient history and poetry there are many references to Jamshid, king of pārīs (fairies) and jīnns, who boasted of being immortal. As a result he was punished to live on earth as a mortal, subject to all the laws of human life. But his imperial stature was in no way affected. He became one of the most powerful, resourceful and glamorous rulers of ancient Iran and gave, for the first time, many civilizing arts and crafts to his people. I shall refer to only one of the inventions associated with his illustrious name, i.e. the Žām-i Jamshīd in its abbreviated form referred to as Žām-i Jam. Jamshid is said to have been the first man to invent the concept and product of wine. Hence one meaning of Žām-i Jamshīd is a drinking vessel, a wine bowl or goblet, which, when brimful of sparkling delicate wine meant for royal taste and consumption, worked miracles and induced in Jamshid a state of delicate inebriation – a superfine, sensitive state of exaltation and imaginative creativity, so that the gifted king could behold reflected in the Žām of his consciousness images of the universe he wished to see. Secondly, Žām-i Jamshīd means a special kind of mirror, more accurately a crystal globe which under the extraordinary power and talent of Jamshid put on a magic aspect and the imperial personage could behold reflected in it not what was offered to his sight and sensibility by someone else's grace and bounty, but
whatever he himself wished to behold. (This was fully in keeping with his pride and self importance!) Goblet or globe, his Jām-i Jahānnuma—(that which reveals or shows the world) in other words, his knowledge of the external world, past, present and future, was confined within the limits of his human condition and further by his own personal wishes, predilections and aspirations. He was first and foremost one of the master-builders of the Persian civilization. If he had any inner vision of larger application, all to the good, but to my knowledge, there is nowhere any mention of it. The veil of a strong ego hung between the soul’s mirror and divine Reality, which the great Jamshid, had he possessed the Sufi’s humility and patience for waiting, could have glimpsed and experienced, howsoever partially. He missed his chance and was not even aware that he had!

In any case the mystics of Islam took the Jām-i Jamshid, the mirror or crystal (as they had taken the goblet of wine; as they had taken the still earlier Zoroastrian sī-murgh; as they had taken the later al-Khīḍr) as a symbol and extended its scope, use and interpretation for exploring spiritual mysteries. The Jām-i Jamshid became a potent symbol for Sufis in subsequent ages.

From myth and romance, idealized history, to what might very well have been an ordinary historical event, one comes to Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī’s discourse on the symbolic use of the mirror in the Mathnāvī. ¹⁴

There arose a contention between the Greeks and the Chinese in the art of painting and picturing. The Chinese said, ‘We are the better artists.’ The Greeks said, ‘The superiority in power and excellence belongs to us.’

‘I will put you to the test ... ,’ said the sultan, ‘and see which of you are approved in your claim.’

The Chinese and the Greeks began to debate: The Greeks retired from the debate.

Thereupon at the suggestion of the Chinese the sultan assigned each group a room, the two rooms facing each other with an intervening curtain. The sultan provided lavishly out of his royal treasury the hundred colours the Chinese had asked for.

The Greeks said, ‘No tints and colours are proper for our work. Nothing is needed except removing the rust.’

Closing the intervening door each group set about its respective work. The Chinese beat drums of joy when the task was finished.
Verily, the Chinese painting robbed the sultan of his wits. He then moved towards the Greek room. The curtain was removed. All that the sultan had seen on the Chinese walls was reflected in the much polished and burnished surface, freed from rust and stain, of the Greek wall and glowed more beautifully than what he had seen in the Chinese room. It was a ravishing sight. 'It (snatched) the eyes from the sockets.' (Mathnavi, pp. 189–90.)

Using the mirror as a way of knowing I shall use illustrations from the works of Rūmī, Ibn ʿArabī and Jamī for meditation and interpretation on the Sufi's progressive journey in God, with a word of warning that symbolic discourse follows a logic of its own and this logic is not always in consonance with surface meaning.

The mirror presents a pattern of mystical states and stage by stage movement towards spiritual awareness and spiritual knowledge through the beneficence of maʿrifah and symbol.

To begin with, the heart of the Sufi is a mirror. The mirror must be of the right quality and shape, not spherical but flat with no flaw in the glass, nor in its technical composition. Degrees of perfection and imperfection of the image reflected in it are therefore inherent in the nature and texture of the individual mirror and depend on the angle from which the image is seen. In a letter to an unnamed friend, whom he calls 'noble and intimate companion', Ibn ʿArabī observes:

Know, 0 noble brother, that while the paths are many the way of Truth is single. The seekers of the Way of Truth are individuals. .... the aspect which it (Truth) presents varies with the varying conditions of its seekers; .... (his) constitution, ... his motivation, the strength and weakness of his spiritual nature, ... his aspirations, the health and illness of his relation to the goal. Some seekers possess all the favourable characteristics, while others possess only some ... The seeker's constitution, for instance, may be a hindrance while his spiritual striving may be noble and good.15

The mirror of the soul which receives spiritual truths is conditioned by the above factors. Sufis, it is averred, are born. 'I have chosen thee for Myself.' This does not mean that, given the mystical sensibility, Sufis are not made by spiritual endeavour and longing.

'The tablets of the heart are receptive' only in so far as is the Sufi's inward eye open to the light of maʿrifah (gnosis). Given the receptive
tablets of the heart the mirror of the soul must be freed from rust, stains, dust, vapour and other impurities and flaws such as cracks. The emphasis is heavily on removing the rust, from the mirror of the heart, deposited by animal instincts and all devilish traits. When the mirror is polished images of the Truth shine forth in their true nature and beauty.

Dost thou know why the mirror of the soul reflects nothing? Because the rust is not cleared from its face.' (Mathnavi, p.6.)

Rūmī says:

Purity of the mirror is beyond doubt the heart which receives images innumerable. (Mathnavi, p. 189)

The Greeks in Rūmī's story are the Sufis.

The (Sufis) have burnished their breasts (and made them) pure from greed, cupidity and avarice and hatred. (Mathnavi, p. 189)

They that have burnished their breasts have escaped from mere scent and colour. They behold beauty at every moment without tarrying. (Mathnavi, p. 190)

There is a way from many-colouredness to colourlessness. ... The first is a cloud, the second, light and splendour of the sun, moon and stars. (Mathnavi, p. 189)

Thus Sufis are not enticed by the appetites and the senses and the tinsel attractions of the world. They have, in this way, launched themselves upon the first stage of the mystical path.

They have (also) let go of grammar (Nahw) and jurisprudence (Fiqh). ... They have taken up instead mystical self-effacement (Malpv) and spiritual poverty (Faqr). (Mathnavi, p. 190)

They are independent of study and books and erudition. ... They have relinquished the form and husk of knowledge.16 Before the mirror of the heart understanding becomes silent. (Mathnavi, pp. 189–90)

Spiritual communication is given to and received by them without learning, without intellectual stances and without words. The mystifying Reality which is revealed to the Sufis in flashes of God-given insights strikes them dumb with a miraculous sense of enlightenment and freedom.

Nor are Sufis enticed by worldly fame. The mirror of the soul is
cleansed from the pride of learning, ambitions of the intellect and responsibilities that come in the wake of intellectual achievements and excellences howsoever desirable and important these might have been at certain moments of their lives.

‘What is the mirror of Being?’ asks Rūmī. ‘Not-being,’ he replies. ‘Bring not-being as your gift if you are not a fool. ... Being can be seen as not being’ (Mathnavi, p. 174). This passage lends itself to fine metaphysical interpretations, but it will serve my purpose to take a simpler, more obvious meaning, which I feel is intended in the present context. Selflessness, utter self-abnegation and humility permit the Truth to shine through the purified, waiting mirror of the soul. Above all, Rumi warns the Sufi to beware of the disease of Iblis (Lucifer, later known as Satan) – haughtiness and conceit, which prompted Iblis to assert ‘I am better than Adam’ (Mathnavi, p. 174). Jamshid’s claim to immortality was no less arrogant and self-opinionated. ‘If you behold your image in the eyes of any other than me know ’tis a phantom.’ (Mathnavi, p. 175.)

Since mirrors reflect beauty and perfection as well as their opposites it is becoming in the Sufi to recognize and acknowledge his infirmities and smallness. ‘After all,’ I said, ‘What is a mirror for? That everyone may know what and who he is’ (Mathnavi, p. 226). ‘Whoever has seen and recognized his own deficiency has ridden post-haste (made rapid progress) in perfecting himself.’ (Mathnavi, p. 175.)

Sufis spend nights and days in self-examination, vigil, prayer, reading and meditation as a preliminary step towards self-knowledge (Narcissus lacked the most elementary aspect of self-knowledge). They, the Sufis, constantly polish the mirror and cleanse it from the temptations of the appetites, of the senses, of the passions, and the ambitions of the intellect, and of worldly renown, success or failure. Most particularly do they engage in the exercise of dhikr-Allāh,17 which has the virtue of not only cleaning the soul’s mirror, but also of releasing unwonted spiritual energies and of lifting, one by one, the seventy thousand veils that shroud Reality and blur the vision of the mystic. The practice of dhikr brightens images of the Truth reflected in the mirror of the heart so that it breaks through and shines more beautifully than the Chinese painting on the burnished walls of the Greek room. Thus cleansed, the mirror of the soul can both look at the reflection and also be looked at.
Beauty, Love and Spiritual Knowledge

Aesthetic sensibility, love and spiritual knowledge are closely related to one another. Love is induced by a vision of beauty, whether it is seen in physical form or inward quality in the created world.

According to tradition God gave nineteen parts out of twenty of beauty to Yusuf (Joseph) and the remaining one part to the rest of mankind. Those who beheld Yusuf's matchless face and form did not feel the pangs of hunger for seven days at a time! Tradition adds that at the sight of God's indescribable beauty and splendour on the Day of Judgement man will fall unconscious for seventy thousand years. Withal, Yusuf had been chastened and cleansed in the fires of tribulations. His celebrated beauty was an embodiment of his virtue, compassion, wisdom and insight into the mysteries of dreams and visions. These qualities are reflected in his appearance as in a mirror.

Rūmī relates the story of a friend from a far country, who brought Yusuf a mirror. On arrival the friend lamented shame-facedly:

How many a gift did I seek for thee? No (worthy) gift came into my sight, ... thy beauty hath no equal.
I deemed it fitting that I should bring to thee a mirror like the (inward) light of a pure breast.
That thou mayest behold thy beauteous face therein, O thou, who like the sun art the candle of heaven ...
The fair one's business is with a mirror. (Mathnavī, pp. 174-75, passim.)

That mirror is fortunate which reflects beauty in sensible form as well as in its inward form, or beauty which is a representation in sensible form of its spiritual counterpart whether in man, nature or art. Beauty is meant to be looked at both with the physical eye and the inward eye. Fortunate are the Sufis who 'behold beauty at every moment without tarrying' as quoted from the Mathnavī earlier. Beauty has the power to draw, to attract, to waylay. It induces admiration and love and establishes relationships among human beings, and between the human and the divine. In the words of William James, 'love is a longing for immortality' and completeness in a world where nothing is rounded off in its perfect form. Love is also a longing for beauty and knowledge of what one loves and longs to enjoy today, tomorrow and forever: in the case of the mystic it is the Divine Beloved.
With Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī's experience of a profound relationship with his spiritual guide and mentor, Shams-i Tabrīz, which began at their very first meeting, at which, it is said, each recognized in the other a deeply kindred soul. It also became clear that human relationships are the most potent means of realizing human-divine relationships. Rūmī's Divān-i Shams-i Tabrīz presents more fully and in exquisite and impassioned poetry a steady progression in such a relationship, at once basically human and basically spiritual. From Shams' magnetic personality, Rūmī moved on to the beholding of an idealized image of the master and from thence to a vision of the Divine Beloved. In a consummated human-divine relationship Shams became for Rūmī a mirror that reflected Divine Reality and brought messages of spiritual beauty and truth. Rūmī's Mathnāvī records this kind of progressive movement on another level – from true believers Rūmī moves on to friends and loved ones and from thence to God. I quote briefly to illustrate my point.

Since the true believer is a mirror for the true believer his face is safe from defilement. (Mathnāvī, p. 223)

The soul's mirror is nought but the face of a friend who is of yonder country (the spiritual land). (Mathnāvī, p. 226)

The friend is a mirror for the soul in sorrow – breathe not on the face of the mirror, O my soul! (Mathnāvī, p. 223)

In other words, do not becloud and obscure the image in the mirror when your soul is preoccupied with sorrow. Rūmī had experienced the grief and anxiety of separation from his beloved teacher in its deepest darkness and suffering.

I saw that thou art the universal mirror everlasting. I saw my own image in thine eye. (But) my ... image gave voice (spoke) from thine eye (and said) I am thou and thou art I in perfect oneness. (Mathnāvī, p. 227)

The quality of this oneness is like that of the thirty birds filled with the wonder of being at once the thirty birds and the one simūrg in Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār's Manṭiq al-Ta‘īr.

Further,

Moses (the perfect saint) holds in his bosom the formless infinite from the Unseen reflected from the mirror of the heart. (Mathnāvī, pp. 189–90)
When the mirror of the heart becomes clear and pure you will behold images which are outside the world of water and earth. (Mathnavi, p. 225)

This is a reference to reality outside material existence. (Of the classical four elements earth and water are lower than fire and air in the scale of creation.) Moreover,

you will behold both the image and the image-maker, both the carpet of spiritual empire and the carpet spreader. (Mathnavi, p. 225)

The following four quotations are from Mathnavi, pp. 187–19 passim.

Know that the mirror of the heart hath no bound.

The reflection of every image shines unto thy everlasting from the heart alone both with plurality and without.

The Sufi's receptive heart 'receives a hundred impressions from the Empyrean of the starry sphere and the void. What impressions? Nay, 'tis the very sight of God' – the very goal of the Sufis.

Ibn 'Arabi's use of the mirror is related to his aesthetics and to his doctrine of the Divine Names – al-Asmā' al-Ilāhiyyah (the Names of Allāh) described in the Qurān [XXI: 8] also, as al-Asmā' al-Hasnā (the Beautiful Names). The great mystic thinker brooding on the awesome and deeply moving mystery of the Ḥadīth-i Qudsi – 'I was a hidden treasure and I yearned to be known, then I created creatures in order to be known by them' – Ibn 'Arabi developed to a fine point the doctrine of the Divine Names and gave to it a beauty and splendour a poet-mystic alone could give. Other mystics before Ibn 'Arabi, notably al-Hallāj (A.D. 922) and Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (A.D. 1145–1221), had also suggested this mystic concept of the Divine Names as God's epiphanies.21 'May you show yourself to me in the most beautiful of theophanies,' prayed one Sufi.

Ibn 'Arabi, first of all, distinguishes between Divine names of Essence expressing the Godhead's pure transcendence as yet hidden, but potential, and names of Attributes expressing Divine qualities and actions already manifested and continually manifesting themselves in creation ad infinitum. In Ḫūrū's phrase 'God's appearance in the form of creation.'
The Act of Creation

There arose in the Godhead ‘Alone with the Alone’ ... a sigh of primordial sadness’ a longing for knowledge of himself. His beautiful names aspired to be released from their hiddenness. So the Breath of the Merciful (Nafṣ al-Rahmān) breathed the world into existence and made manifest in sensible form a portion of the infinitude of His Divine Names, Attributes, qualities and actions in order that He might know the wonder and beauty of His Being and in turn be known, a perpetual revelation of the unrevealed. Interpreting Ibn ‘Arabi’s concept of the Divine Names, A. E. Affifi observes that it is not the one and the same Reality that is manifested in different things, but one or other part of the same Reality that is reflected in different manifestations. Why does beauty in man and nature move us so deeply? Because each particle of creation represents, as in a mirror, one or other of God’s Beautiful Names. The world is the Godhead’s ‘luminous shadow’. Each created being is an epiphany of a Divine Name. The ‘luminous shadow’ is at once God and something other than God. Thus there are as many mirrors as there are forms. In fact, the whole creation is a series of mirrors in which the Divine Being manifests Himself. Each image reflected is cast in the mould of the recipient mirror, dim or clear, perfect or near-perfect. It is determined by the nature and capacity of the mirror that reflects it. God looks into each mirror and beholds His Divine Names created out of Himself in His yearning to know Himself and to be known. Thus ‘the Godhead is in mankind as an image in the mirror’ and ‘the divine receiver sees in the divine mirror only his own form.’ The highest manifestation in creation is man, ‘the Adamic man’, the twenty-seven prophets. ‘Each Prophet,’ notes Jili, ‘manifests a particular aspect of the Divine Discourse and speaks in the language of that aspect embodying a word. … The Prophet Muḥammad, as the seal and completion of the Prophets, holds within himself all the Prophetic words.’ The Prophet Muhammad, as the historical Muḥammad as well as universal reason and light which issues directly from the Godhead, is identified with the perfect man ... the archetypal man. In the perfect man, Insan al-Kamil, God is reflected most perfectly.

On the side of man, God’s highest creation, there is a reciprocal yearning towards his Creator and man beholds the Creator in every
created form as in a mirror. More specifically does man behold in the Divine mirror those attributes and qualities (the Divine Names) which God in His mercy and love has given him as an individual to distinguish Him from other individuals and from other forms of existence. Now, in turn, God becomes the mirror in which man sees himself as he is. Most Sufis believe that at the height of mystic experience the Sufi attains not complete identification with the Godhead, but recognizes in himself that particular attribute or Divine Name, which is specifically given to him and which is also a portion, an infinitesimal portion of the Godhead's Divine Names. In this sense there is a magnetic attraction between God and man. Thus the infinitesimal part through knowledge of itself returns to its origin and source, and can have communion with the Divine and realize, howsoever partially, a consciousness of unity with the Creator.

It is at the Throne of Mercy ('Sarir al-Rahmaniyyah') ... (that) you will know your destination and the place and limit of your Lord and where your portion of gnosis and sainthood exists — the form of your uniqueness.28

Another aspect of the doctrine of Divine Names is that if man is unable to recognize and identify his particular attribute, his particular Divine Name, that Divine Name remains in a state of hiddenness, is not manifested and it is to that extent that the Godhead is deprived of a knowledge of Himself. Further, Sufis of the school of Ibn 'Arabī believe that the all-encompassing Divine Reality in its totality — manifested and not manifested — can never be comprehended by man nor can man ever have union with the whole of that infinitude of Reality. The mirror of God’s Being reveals the Truth but partially. This belief enunciates the Sufi’s utmost humility in relation to God’s transcendence and amplitude who nonetheless remains, also, pre-eminently the Divine Beloved in a very personal sense.

The mirror symbol has held fascination for Sufis over the centuries as a way of knowing whatever part of Reality they are capable of knowing both within the limitation of their necessary human condition and their individual capacity. For mystics of this school of Sufism knowledge is beatitude. Knowledge is love and union with the Divine Beloved. If knowledge is accompanied by an exalted spiritual state of ecstasy the mystic, I think, is immeasurably blessed!
I can end these suggestions on the mirror symbol in no better way than by presenting two more quotations, one from Jāmī and the other from Ḥāfīz. Both echo Ibn ‘Arabi’s and Rūmī’s concept of the mirror symbol as employed in the search for spiritual beauty and mystic love and knowledge of the Divine.

From all eternity the beloved unveiled his beauty in the solitude of the Unseen;
He held up the mirror to His own face;
He displayed His loveliness to Himself.
The creation lay cradled in the sleep of non-existence.
Although he beheld his attributes and qualities as a perfect whole in His own Essence
Yet, He desired that they should be displayed to Him in another mirror.

Though Ḥāfīz, in my opinion, is not a Sufi in the strict sense of the term, he has some very great and very sensitive moments of mystical insight. Here is a couplet by him with the mirror image.

For years my heart sought of me the Jām-i Jamshid;
Now I find that it sought from others what it carried within.

Notes

1 Sheikh Muhiyuddin Ibn ‘Arabi, Journey to the Lord of Power, A Sufi Manual on Retreat, notes by Abdul Karim Jili, translation by Rabia Terri Harris (East West Edition, 1981), p. 43. Ibn ‘Arabī (1165–1240) was an eminent thinker and ardent Sufi of Andalusia. He was a prolific and eclectic writer and displayed a most generous and enlightened outlook on life in his works. But he held his findings and beliefs with firm conviction even in the face of opposition and severe controversy.

2 ‘Abd al-Karim Jili (1365–1408 or 1417) — His learning and mystical sensibility were put to excellent use as the greatest disciple, exponent and interpreter of Shaykh Ibn Arabi’s mysticism and philosophy. The above quotations are taken from notes to Ibn ‘Arabi’s Journey to the Lord of Power, p. 86 and p. 70 respectively.

3 It would be interesting to make a comparative study of the concepts of baqā’ and nirvān.

4 In the works of Ibn ‘Arabi the terms, know, knower, knowledge, revelation, manifestation, vision, dream etc. occur very frequently.

5 Kenneth Craig, The Dome and the Rock, Chapter 8.

6 Kathleen Raine, Defending Ancient Springs, p. 108.
Ibn 'Arabi warns against 'the deceptions of the imagination'. He makes a distinction between 'Sensory and imaginal subtlety', that is, when you see someone's form or some created action, if you close your eyes and the perception remains with you, it is in your imagination, but if it is hidden from you then your consciousness; if it is attracted to the place in which you saw it (if it is perception of the latter kind) when you turn your attention away from it and occupy yourself with 'Dhikr' you will move from the sensory to the imaginal level.' From p. 35 of Ibn 'Arabi's Journey to the Lord of Power. Dhikr is remembrance of Allah by recitation of His Divine Names.

I am using the term myth in the sense of a story or pictorial representation to depict and explain the laws, habits, movements and purposes of Nature. We explain the same through modern science.

Echo's story is found in the works of the Latin poet Ovid (1st century B.C.). Echo, the mountain oread, was turned into an echo by the goddess Juno because the former was given to talking too much. Echoes of her voice must still reverberate from one hill to another!

Water in this story is used as a good substitute for a mirror.

Narcissus was turned into a flower of that name by favour of the gods.

Interpretations by Freudian schools of psychology.

In one sense the Jām-i Jamshid could be an ancient Persian myth which represented certain aspects of esoteric knowledge.


Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (1207–1273) was famed far and wide for his learning, wisdom and intellectual attainments. At a very early age he began to attract admirers and seekers of knowledge from among the aristocracy, the learned 'Ulama' and lay disciples from all walks of life. There is a story to say that his pile of books was burnt when he met Shams-i Tabriz who became his friend and Sufi murshid (master).

Dhikr-Allah, remembrance and recitation of the Beautiful Names of Allah, was a major discipline of the mystic life.

70,000 is a metaphorical and spiritually auspicious number and is used in sacred writing as well as in poetry in general.

See also Yūsuf's story in the Qur'ān, said to be the most beautiful of the stories in Islamic literature – Sūrah XII; and references to Yūsuf again in Sūrah VI: 48 and Sūrah XL: 36. Jami's Yūsuf-o-Zulaykhā is a celebrated narrative poem in Persian.

For this spiritual movement, see Rūmī, The Divān-i Shams-i Tabriz.

Ibn 'Arabi, Journey to the Lord of Power, p. 40. Jalī reiterates the same idea in his notes on p. 85.

My material and some of the felicitous phrases given in quotations I owe to Henry Corbin's Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi and to A. E. Affifi's The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyiddin Ibn al-'Arabi.


Ibn 'Arabi, Journey to the Lord of Power, pp. 48–49.

Ibn 'Arabī, Shajarat al-Kawn, translation by A. Jeffery, p. 15.

Henry Corbin, Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi, p. 316. I believe, Jalī has dwelt more fully on the concept of Insan-al-Kamil. I have not had access to his work.

Ibn 'Arabi, Journey to the Lord of Power, p. 40.
Beginning a Spiritual Journey toward Enlightenment

KAPILA VATSYAYAN

The Indian landscape is interspersed with man-made monuments in wood, brick and stone, each symbolising man's journey to the divine, known and unknown, concrete or abstract, and to the formless and the unmanifest. Man's first awareness of the eternal waters which sustain him, the earth which supports him and the heaven and ether which protect him and the cardinal directions and space which circumscribe him led him to recreate the cosmos in words, stones, line, paint, colour, sound and movement. Each time man recreates for a particular duration of physical time — a few moments or a whole day, week, month or year, — a cosmos on earth in its never-ending rhythm of evolution, creation and devolution. The homes, cities, temples, 'stupas, churches and mosques man built in permanent material also articulated this selfconscious awareness of his life on earth and his journey towards the infinite, the divine and the unmanifest. In each case, first was the establishment of a centre corresponding to the seed, the beeja, the mythical navel — of the earth as also the human body — thereafter an immediate enclosure, a square or circle, encased the centre; a larger outer space came next and finally there was the outermost spaces, with gateways which represented the cardinal directions. The entire space was now differentiated from mundane, secular space. The enclosure was sacred space hallowed and a pathway to the divine. Vertically also there was the centre, or the seed which emerged as the tree, the pillar, the stambha and finally reached the pinnacle. Sacred architecture of all faiths followed these fundamentals.

This primary conception of consecrating time and space for fixed durations and recreation through either the occurrent or ephemeral or permanent arts or the construction of monumental edifices sums up the universal conceptions underlying both gateways and shrines known to many cultures.
Although the remains of Mohenjodaro and Harappan culture are fragmentary, it is clear that the citadel of Mohenjodaro must have had a grand entry into this architectural edifice. The Vedas speak in many beautiful hymns of the eternal waters, earth, heaven, ether, and fire and the lords of the directions. Man calls out to the elements to protect and guard. The rituals of the Brahmmins concretized these conceptions by enclosing space in the shape of an enclosure (shala) in which were established the three fires, domestic, terrestrial and celestial in the shapes of a semicircle, circle and square respectively. The sacred altar was built with bricks of different sizes. Through incantation and chants, oblations and rituals, the cosmos was recreated for seven, eleven or twenty-one days and then destroyed. The multiple forms merged back to the formless; dust unto dust was the culmination. The ritual over mundane time and space returned. In terms of structures and as an outward symbol of this inner process, the outer enclosure, the three fires and circumscribing of space were essential.

In time to come, the Vedic ritual gave place to actual monuments where, through daily rituals, the same was done. The earliest archaeological remains of the historical period manifest Man’s aspiration and need to relate himself to the elements and to the vegetative, animal, human, and celestial world which surrounded him and on which his life was dependent.

Many religions were founded and each was responsible for giving a distinctive expression to these fundamental concerns. The language, form, shape, design, and architectural style were different but the underlying unity was unmistakable. One outstanding feature of all these architectural edifices, big or small, domestic or sacred, made of ephemeral or permanent materials was the one or many entrances. In domestic architecture the one entrance led to the centre of the home, the inner courtyard. In the plan of the city, the roads led out to the cardinal directions, and converged to a central place which was usually the sacred centre of the city, a shrine, stupa or temple.

In India, it is believed that Mount Sumeru rises from the midpoint of the surface of the earth as the vertical axis of the eggshaped cosmos. The slopes of this mountain are peopled by a multitude of life, the creatures of the waters, the crocodiles, the serpents and fish, the first vegetation of the waters, the beautiful lotus, the flowering
Osian: Jain temple. Torano in front of main temple

tree; the animals on the earth, the deer, the elephant and the monkey come next. The human gnomes, dwarfs and yakshas and the flying celestials, female apsaras and gandharvas follow. On the quadrangular summit stand the palatial abode of the eternal gods, the deathless ones (amara). The summit is known therefore as Amaravati (The Town Immortal).

This mythology of the Sumeru (mountain) and Amaravati (the
eternal or immortal city) was adapted in the early Buddhist stupas in India to commemorate the life and preachings of the Buddha. The gateways represent the four quarters which protect the sacred world. The human figures or deities who are carved on the gateways are called the Lokapala (protectors of the terrestrial world). They stand and guard the four entrances (gates) of the railings of the Buddhist stupas. As the doctrine of the Buddha spread, these deities of the four quarters also travelled and they are integral to the architectural designs of monuments in China, Korea, Japan and Indonesia. The most impressive amongst the early Buddhist monuments are the sites of Bharhut and Sanchi. The stupas have a simple form: the interior is a compact heap of earth, pebbles or stones which is enclosed by a layer of bricks and the bricks are in turn covered with a facade of polished stone. One or several terraces, quadrangular or circular can form the base (medhi) and around this base there is enough space for clockwise circumambulation. The whole structure is enclosed by a railing (vedika) of either wood or stone. In the case of both Bharhut and Sanchi, it is stone. Such railings are created with horizontal beams which are interlinked and vertical pillars (stambha). Finally there is a coping or a crown (diadem or turban). Staircases (sopanas) may lead up to the terraces going around the central bulwark which is called the egg (anda) or the womb (garbha) and which contains the seed (beeja), namely, the relic. It is crowned by a quadrangular housing or terrace (harmika) above which arise one or several canopies (chhatra). The stupa is a symbol of enlightenment and the vehicle of carrying the message of the Buddha to the four quarters. The stupa is also an instrument (a design — yantra) for the guidance of the devout who take the upward journey of the soul by circumambulating clockwise in a reverent attitude. Finally he ascends to the top.

The gates and railings represent the beginning of this spiritual journey. The railings and the gateways are richly carved with reliefs which illustrate the world, its vegetation, lotus trees, flowers, aquatic and terrestrial life, animals and birds, dwarfs, dryads, the yakshas and yakshis. Amongst these are the relief of the vase of fullness, purnakumbha which stands for fertility and fullness. Also there is an abundance of reliefs of the lotus, which symbolizes cosmic order and the wheel which represents the first preaching of the doctrine. There are beautiful animals, rows of elephants and deer, and winged lions.
This is the mundane world (samsara) from which the pilgrim begins his journey: the plenty and abundance lead him to restraint and the desire to know the past lives of the Bodhisattva. So the horizontal and vertical columns of the gateways depict in profusion, the numerous lives of the Buddha in his journey towards enlightenment. The tales of the jatakas depicting the Buddha, as Mahakapi, Mahajanaka and Vessantara and Saddantajataka and innumerable others are seen in reliefs in the architraves in Sanchi and in the railing medallions in Bharhut. All these reliefs are in fact symbolic of the devotees' personal journey. When the pilgrim attains to the crowning terrace, he has anticipated in a figurative way his own enlightenment and the extinction of all passions which fetter him to the round of rebirth. This didactic function of the stupa is clear in all stupas ranging from Sanchi in India to Borobudur in Java. The architectural plan provides the physical opportunity for this metaphysical journey of the devotee pilgrim.
The North Gate of Sanchi is impressive for the two vertical pillars which support two imposing capitals (four elephants back to back) and three superimposed architraves. Each of the faces of these pillars and architraves is richly decorated with reliefs illustrating the Buddhist legend. The Southern Gateway is similar. On the outside of the upper architrave is a beautiful standing figure of Lakshmi with two elephants and surrounded by a luxurious atmosphere of water vegetation and birds. On the middle architrave is a panoramic view of Ashoka’s visit to the stupa of Ramagrama and on the lowest there are six dwarfs spouting lotus stalks amongst leaves, buds and lotus flowers. On the Western Gateway are depicted some of the Buddhist symbols: there is the young elephant representing conception, the tree representing enlightenment and the wheel of the doctrine. In the middle architrave is seen the great renunciation: the riderless horse suggests the Buddha’s departure from the palace. On the lowest architrave is seen Ashoka followed by a crowd of warriors and servants: he steps down from the kneeling elephant to worship the sacred Bo tree. The yakshini, the tree dryad is the most outstanding figure. Her arms are intertwined with the branches of the tree and her foot touches the trunk of the tree. The Eastern Gateway has similar scenes. Through each of these gateways the pilgrim enters the sacred stupa and gradually make a circumambulation clockwise until he reaches the pinnacle. The gateways are the beginning of this journey.

Elsewhere in India, instead of the four gateways, there are the impressive entrances and facades to rock caves. Bhaja and Karle caves in Western India have stupendous entrances which lead the pilgrim into a cave-like structure with a basilican plan nearly 60 feet long and 25 feet high. At the end of the cave is the altar in the form of a stupa around which the devotees can walk. The facade of Karle is decorated with massive figures in high relief. Outstanding amongst these are the couples who seem as if flying in air, soaring towards the heavens through the flowing curves of their bodies. These horse-shoe facades in the rock nut caves of India were the abode of monks and famous monasteries were established here. The facade and the entrance were one with only one source of light, once again suggesting metaphorically the journey of the pilgrim to the divine. These cool, half dark vaults receive dim light through the entrance above. Occasionally there is an additional vaulted upper window. Pure space
without matter, without weight or any figurative sculpture inside invites the devotee to enter into the sphere and face the symbol of his outer extinction and inner enlightenment; the small replica of the stupa within denotes nirvana.

The tradition of the gateways and entrances also applies to the architecture of the Hindu monuments. In Ajanta and Ellora, there are both facades, single entrance and gates, if not gateways.
Bhaja: façade of a Buddhist cave

Karle: Chaitya Hall
Karle: general view of cave no. 1
At the Kailashnath Temple of Ellora, also a masterpiece of rock cut architecture, the pilgrim is greeted with two figures of the water deities, namely Ganga and Yamuna. One stands on a crocodile and the other on a tortoise; both represent the gateway to the mountain Kailash or Hemavata. Ganga and Yamuna are the entries into the journey of the soul to the summit of spiritual ascension. At all sanctuaries in India from Kailashnath in Ellora to the medieval temples of
the plains of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan to the temples in far-off Assam, the two water goddesses representing the two mighty rivers in India, are carved on the entrance gates of temples. The Ganga and Yamuna figures as guardians of the entrances continue to be popular, but in addition in the South Indian temples as elsewhere in India and especially Indonesia and Cambodia, there appear the fierce figures of the dvarapalas (the doorkeepers). They
ward off evil, and protect the innermost shrine. Sometimes they are simple warriors seen in their Indian, Chinese or Japanese garbs. At other times, they are weird fearsome demons who guard and frighten. Metaphorically and figuratively they are the demons within the human psyche who have to be reckoned with and ultimately conquered before taking the inner journey of the soul towards enlightenment.
The devotee enters the massive gateway of Southern Indian temples, the gopuram, as if he were entering a fort. The door lintels are again richly carved with minor and major deities, the life of the vegetative, aquatic, terrestrial and celestial world, though the dvarapalas (the guardians of door) are dominant. Sometimes, they ride elephants, at others lions and other mythical beings. The great gopurams are on the four directions of the outermost enclosure of space, (as in Sanchi) but now enlarged a hundred fold. The temple is the temporary abode of the gods on earth, the re-creation of the cosmos on earth, a fort on earth of the gods. The Central Shrine is metaphorically the Sumeru, the Kailash. The devotee enters through the gateways to take this journey, circumambulates the larger outer spaces, moves inward into smaller enclosures and finally enters the garbhagriha (the womb house) and ultimately the sanctum representing the seed of all creation. From outer light, he moves inward into areas of physical darkness; this is his physical state. Natural light gradually diminishes. Inwardly from the world of multitudes of forms (samsara) and the ignorance and darkness of his psychical state, he moves towards the shrine which will bring him inward light and luminosity. The doors of perception are opened physically and psychically through the gateways, entrances and the facades, the mythical goddesses of the waters, the guardians of the stupas and the temples. The devotee-pilgrim's journey begins here, and these concrete structures are the symbols of an inward journey temporary or enduring.
Imagination: The Reality of the Future

PETER MALEKIN

'The beginning of all existence is nothing other than an imagination of the Ungrund,' said Jacob Böhme, the Ungrund being his term for Brahman, the unconditioned actuality veiled by phenomena. From this source there arose in his view the extraordinary power of the human imagination, for as you imagine, so ultimately you become. Oriental sources are in broad agreement. 'Give up the identification with... the gross body, as well as with the ego or subtle body, which are both imagined by the buddhi [intuitive mind],' says Shankara. Conversely he adds, 'The universe is an unbroken series of perceptions of Brahman'. Here, however, lies a crux, for most of us do not perceive Brahman, and moreover unbounded Brahman cannot be perceived as an object, which is by definition bounded. This crux links with the ambiguity of the imagination itself, for if imagination gives rise to the manifoldness of the manifest, our own poets, Shakespeare and Wordsworth, Blake and Coleridge and Shelley, have also pointed out its unifying power and its ability to transcend the particular. To arrive at a just estimate of its role and possible importance, we need a clearer conception of the human mind and of the imaginative process.

The simplest definitions of the imagination have taken it to be a mere image-making faculty. Such was the view of Hobbes in our own tradition. Such a view tends to start from the sensory perception of gross physical objects and to be thought through in visual terms; thus the image of Ganesh, with his elephant's head on a human body, would for Hobbes constitute only an instance of decaying memory, incongruous details linked together without the discipline of objective observation that would keep them separate. Thus the only meaning that such an image could have from the Hobbesian point of view would be some rational idea foisted on to it allegorically. In this view the human mind itself becomes a mechanistic factory for processing sensory data by reasoning and is essentially isolated from
other minds, except for gross physical and mechanistic modes of communication, while the imagination simply rearranges memories of sensory perception.

Such a mechanistic view of the mind still survives, and is indeed not uncommon, occurring, for instance, in scientific positivism, which sees the mind as an epiphenomenon of human physiology. Indeed it is true that on the physical level the operation of the mind is dependent on the physiology of the human body, though it is also true that the physiology is powerfully influenced by the mind. On a deeper level, however, the two factors assume a chicken-and-egg relationship, while from a deeper level still chicken and egg become virtually one thing as the nervous system becomes an aspect of mind, and on the deepest level there is no chicken and there is no egg. Similarly as the perception of objects moves on to subtler levels observer and object draw towards a unity that is itself ultimately transcended.

That the observer (both mind and physiology) is part of his observation is a truism in the eastern traditions, especially those of India. There, however, it is also held that the human nervous system, dual in its nature, is microcosmic, so that the individual mind raised to its universal power images the sun of cosmic intelligence, and is at rest while ever in movement. This was also the assertion of Plotinus and recurs in the Platonic and neoplatonic traditions, though without a technique of meditation enabling the mind to move beyond the subject-object relationship and beyond all conceptual thinking the claim remains mere empty assertion. Nevertheless, emasculated as it was into scholarly doctrine, the idea remained the glory of the reopening of the depths of spirituality that occurred with the reawakening of the Platonic tradition in the renaissance. The idea was allowed much less scope by the Aristotelian bent of mainstream Christian theology, and by the Christian emphasis on sin and the fall, rather than on regeneration and what the Christian mystics called deification.

In our own time the great tides in the sea of spirit are once again turning. The days are numbered both for narrowly dogmatic and objectivized religion and for materialistic positivism. The new age that Jacob Böhme felt dawning in the seventeenth century is at last moving into daylight. It is new, of course, not a return to the old, though
intellectual history will eventually be rewritten in consequence of it. That the light has barely penetrated the bastions of learning is not surprising. They will be the last to fall. There is nonetheless a groundswell of adventurous minds seeking the unity of branches of learning, of subject and object, of intellect and spiritual reality.

Modern science has itself accepted the observer as part of the observation on the subatomic level of quantum physics, though this is not generally thought of as significant for everyday reality. Similarly objects are thought of as functions of an unmanifest field, though human consciousness has yet to be tied back to the same level. Nor is this final stage possible with a science of the object alone. Nevertheless some acknowledgements are being made that if the mind of man is finite and within the universe, then the universe is unknowable, and all knowledge and statements of truth, even apparently objective ones, are also subjective, being drawn from the interface between observer and object, between knower and known.

The same ground rules apply to the imagination, which is an aspect of human intelligence, and was regarded by Böhme and the romantics as a means of approaching truth. If the mind is finite and separative, then the position of Hobbes, or something like it, becomes inevitable. If Plotinus and Böhme, Shankara and Lao Tzu are right in positing infinitude as the essence of mind, then the situation is very different. The world itself is only consciousness in its objective aspect, just as that tramelled thing we call awareness could be described as matter in its subjective aspect. Seen from the viewpoint of this possibility the imagination also has a double aspect, moving cosmically through the worlds of form to the changing play of physical matter, moving from the localised material focus of ego consciousness through the depths of the mind to the level which could be described as pure consciousness, but is beyond what we know as consciousness and unconsciousness, as it is beyond change and fixity. Part of the function of imagination is to reveal the very idea of surface and depth as merely a metaphor. On its journey from the innermost outwards and from the outer inwards, the imagination discloses the inner values of objects, of necessity at the same time intimating the inner status of the subject.

In the arts the imagination works through some medium, material and formal. In literature the medium is language, and it functions differently from the way in which it functions in ordinary life.
Language on the surface communicates through a confluence of minds derived from shared, closely similar or analogous experience. It is only in their depths, where minds unite in their universal value, that language assumes the characteristics of a frictionless flow. There language is the unitive cognition by the subject of the object, for there the object is directly perceived as an ‘outbirth’ (to use Böhme’s term) of the unboundedness that is one’s own ultimate nature. There, and there alone, knowledge is reliable and authoritative, as Patanjali and Plotinus have both pointed out. There, and there alone is it possible to find what Böhme called the language of nature, a level described in the Indian tradition as one where sabda (subtle sound, or the vibratory aspect of language) and artha (form, signification in its broadest sense) are one. On grosser levels the gap in operative human minds between the level of functioning and this inner unitive reality creates distorted languages marked by a gap between sound and signification, and between word and referent. On these gross levels many of the observations current in post-structuralist criticism hold good. Language and frames of reference are invariably intertextual, culturally inherited, and in some measure arbitrary. Interpretations of texts and categories of ‘fact’ take place within the parameters of an assumed point of view: no statement or interpretation is absolute, none is definitive. This holds true both of intellectual statements and of works of the imagination.

As for paint, stone and other artistic media, they also relate back to the same deep level, for vibration is the prespatial origin of form and of material qualities, and it is the glory of the human mind to be able to move to this level and to its own origin beyond space and time. There indeed is the celestial level, the ‘centre of the birth of [our] life’ where Böhme told us to look for God, and there all things have their celestial value, and are perceived through jyoti, the inner unitive divine light of which our daylight is a faint copy, the light of the intelligible sun of the Platonic tradition: and there, as Plotinus observed, all is living and all is intelligence. This was the level that Kandinsky strained towards as he moved away from entrapment with the external level of objects, and this was the level that he glimpsed in the work of Cézanne when he observed that Cézanne did not paint a teacup, but the life in the teacup. Without this level such a statement would be meaningless, mere emotive vacuousness.
So far we have spoken as if imagination and consciousness were synonymous, for the fully developed human consciousness encompasses the whole gamut from innermost to outermost and perceives all relativity in its absolute value. The imagination is more limited, the term having both a more generalised sense of the mind's power to image and catch in images inklings of realities other than those it knows, and a more specific sense in its application to the arts. An enlightened man can see a world in a grain of sand; a poet can imagine such a perception, and write in such a way that others too may, as Böhme would say, imagine after it. To the conscious the whole universe is nothing but consciousness; to the rest of us who are half conscious it is an alien world of matter, even of dead matter.

Applied to the artist (a term intended to include writers, composers, etc.), the imagination is the power to create forms, vibratory rhythms, which can catch the wholeness within the partial in such a way that attuned minds will respond with an analogous intuition. What is important here is the mode of perception, what Hsieh Ho called the rhythm of life, not the subject matter or the intellectual ideas. This level of response is beyond intellect, and intellectual difficulty or simplicity is irrelevant to it. Moral messages, doctrinal content and social relevance, all central to the concept of art in the Christian and the secular humanist tradition and in its offshoot in materialistic Marxism, are also in principle irrelevant, though they may add to or detract from the surface richness of a work. The essential thing here is not cleverness or the activity of response, but a mind stilled by beauty. That stillness, the taking of oneself out of oneself, is the expansion of the mind beyond active ego consciousness towards pure consciousness, and it can only be hindered not helped by the modern western educational necessity to have opinions about art. In principle this effect can be achieved by using any subject matter, any content or lack of content, for it depends on the state of consciousness of the artist when creating the work, and of the viewer, reader or auditor participating in it. The quality in the work that produces this effect is traditionally known in India as rasa, or relish, and the person able to respond to it as a rasika. Rasa is usually translated into English as 'aesthetic emotion', which is a very misleading term. Emotion usually applies to excitations of feeling, often powerful ones, to feeling operating on a level of movement and
personal identity. We can use the word 'feeling' as well as 'emotion' for this level, but equally we use 'feeling' for the very quiet level of intuitive perception where the ego and its activities have faded into an unimpeding translucence. This is nearer to the level of rasa, for it is nearer to pure consciousness. Rasa is not emotion or even feeling as such, though feeling in its subtle sense may be the means that makes rasa alive in our awareness. It is rather the reordering of the levels of consciousness so that the grosser no longer dominate and the subtler come through. A pool stirred and muddy would perceive itself as a function of mud; grown still the clarity of water comes through, while paradoxically the surface grows sharp in its power of reflection. Similarly rasa is a change in the self-awareness of the rasika, not on the intellectual level, for a change in one’s self-image or sense of role is external to one’s real self and superficial, but on that quiet level of feeling which is the basis of all confidence and wellbeing in life. Rasa is not enlightenment, but it is an intimation of the freedom and bliss at the heart of one’s own being that emerges as the very nature of our relative and absolute life as we approach spiritual enlightenment. This intimation is gleaned from the perception of an art object created by a human consciousness for human consciousnesses. If the art object is in some degree an imitation of a natural object or of an activity in life, then the changed perception may in some measure be transferred to that natural object or activity, and it does, as Heidegger observed in the case of a Van Gogh painting of peasants’ shoes, tend to overflow to the perception of all objects, so that the isness of things shines a little more through the changing surface values. The essential change is, however, in the consciousness of the rasika, not in objects of consciousness, including ideas, whether moral or intellectual, which are objects of mind. The work of art has this particular quality, that it can trigger the awareness of an attuned observer.

For this triggering any object, art content or emotional value may serve. Mu-ch’i’s famous painting of persimmons, simplified to a few brush strokes, intimates a subtle value of a commonplace fruit and carries the observer’s mind almost to the quiet level where it is possible to experience the emergence of the existent from the nonexistent. – It becomes, if you like, an enactment icon rather than a statement icon. – The caricatures of the Japanese Zen master Hakuin are full of humour, humour, be it noted, on a sacred subject, a thing
rare indeed in the west, yet they carry that humour to the profound level of what might be called the cosmic joke (Böhme’s term magia for the emergence of existence from nonexistence, the manifest from the Ungrund or Absolute, has overtones of a conjuring trick). The paintings of Tao Chi that are lodged largely unnoticed and always undisplayed in the Print Room of the British Museum, for me the greatest paintings in the world, yet simple ink drawings, have the same quality of intense humour, as a human figure chuckles his way through a giant landscape that is really an extension of himself. Nothing is stated, nothing is blatant, all is sensed, intimated, implied. This is the Chinese quality, the quality that makes the greatness of the Tao Te Ching, so profound, so empty of imposition, so devoid of noise, thrusting nothing upon or at the mind of the reader, drawing all into complete simplicity.

For art, the greatest art, that has this triggering quality, temenos, the sacred space round a temple, is not any particular subject, doctrine, or archetype, but all time and all space, for all lie equally within the majestic divinity of cosmic mind. The great Zen and Ch’an Buddhist masters who produced the examples I have cited were, however, practising their own meditative discipline and were familiar with the subtler levels of the cosmos. For those artists especially who are not so fully developed a spiritual icon or archetype may serve as a means of so focusing heart and mind that the consciousness reaches a level not open to it in the course of ordinary life. Such an artist is, as Plato said, out of his mind, in the literal sense of carried beyond the limits of his ordinary awareness. This is the divine inspiration, the divine madness, that can occur in art. Two caveats, however, apply to such an idea of inspiration. Inspiration, to be worked out on the material plane, requires a practical skill that usually has to be acquired by hard effort, though technique alone is no substitute for inspiration, and it requires a cooperation of the material element that is only serendipitous if the mind is considered to be divorced from material objects. Secondly the focus on such a divine icon must take place on a subtle level, usually through an effective technique of meditation, or the result will be the gross sentimentality that is the curse of so much religious art the world over. Art of this sentimental kind is, despite any religious subject matter, secular, and indeed crudely so, for its link with the divine is a mockery. Here again the temenos of art is not a matter of subject and content, and certainly not of subject or content alone.
The icons of the divine are themselves subjective in that the externalised form assumed will relate to the level of consciousness, the race, religion and cultural tradition of the perceiver. The conscious forces underlying the traditional iconographies are, however, realities. The mind perceives objects by patterning at the subject-object interface, and just as waves could be seen as isolated peaks, isolated troughs, lines connecting peaks or troughs, moving ridges, or the bulk of ocean thrusting into a welling up, so the one intelligence, manifest in the gods or angels that are waves of its own nature, is perceived in a myriad ways. Moreover divine intelligences are interspective, in that each contains the other and all and is found in all others, though in each certain empirical qualities dominate. My own preference is for Hindu iconography, which is inclusive of the animal orders, the feminine, and sexuality as the iconographies of Christianity and Islam are not, and catches the whole cosmos as the dance of God, the dance of Siva, the majestic silence in the depths of cosmic mind. However, the essential thing is that the iconography should catch in formal and imaginative terms what Böhme described literally of the human mind, when he said, ‘And if you live holily, you are yourself God, wherever you look, there is God.’ To be caught up, even in an aspect of the divine, and enraptured with that beauty, is an enwholing and liberating experience for an artist and his audience alike. There, in that experience, is the peace that wells through when the mind is satisfied in its seekings. The origin of the mind is desire, and the fulfilment of desire lies beyond the origin of mind.

Much of our own contemporary art and literature operates on the surface rather than at the depths of consciousness. This is not primarily a question of secular or religious subject matter, to speak in terms of the unreal distinctions current in western culture. Religious art based on externalised formulations instead of celestial perception, or at least inner perception approaching the celestial, is effete and can do more harm than the overtly secular. In truth the secular and the spiritual are the left side and the right side of the face of life, there is no contradiction and certainly no gulf between them. Modern secular civilisation has brought immense advantages in the west, intellectual freedom and the curtailing of religious persecution among them. Its excesses are the result of a potentially devastating material technology, which has meant that the ways of treating animals, the environ-
ment, and other human beings, inherited from earlier nonsecular civilisation, are being disclosed as indeed horrific. What is now happening in the world in consequence of this crisis is a restoration of balance through a development of inner spiritual awareness. This development is frequently taking place in subcultures rather than within the framework of the older established religions. Religion is, however, not the same thing as spirituality. Religion indeed only becomes necessary when direct access to the inner celestial levels is lost in the community at large.

Because of the discursive power of language, traditional works of literature in particular often bridge the sacred and the secular. The Ramayana and Mahabharata in India or the Iliad and Odyssey in Greece cannot be satisfactorily categorised as spiritual or secular. The same is true of the works of Shakespeare, and perhaps Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* in the States. The ethnical and social values in works of this kind remain culturally active even when they are submerged by later social and technological changes. The key to the surviving influence of such work is, however, not in the values as such, but in the degree to which these values can be experienced through the work as flowing from the unitive depths of human consciousness. From that basis surface laws of action become natural law, and fully humane. The same surface values presented in works that lack depth would fail to attract attention for long. Works that have this depth, a depth frequently hidden from the intellectual awareness of the modern observer, exert an enduring fascination that will survive social changes and the changing frames of reference placed upon them by moralists, academics and critics.

Lesser traditional secular art also has its value. Boucher's 'Birth of Venus', in the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm, is, for instance, a magnificent celebration of the inner joy of life, despite its absence of moral or religious values. It is ridiculous to use surface values in order to deride such a work as superficial, of the surface. To analyse it purely in moralistic terms or in terms of the power relations of a dead society, or of our own society, is to ignore its greatest contribution to human wellbeing.

Much of our own contemporary art is, of course, deliberately of the surface, though it is often marked by wit, cleverness, and the power for the moment to stir the outer levels of the emotions or embody
sardonic political and social comment. Such art has its place, has always existed, and may be of great immediate value, though in the longer run its major interest is likely to be antiquarian and historical. Other contemporary art (and I use the term art inclusively of all the arts), or near-contemporary art does resonate on deeper levels of awareness. I would cite from my own area Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, much of the drama of the absurd, some of the poems of Gary Snyder and of the Welsh poet Morgan Francis, and indeed the work of many poets and painters associated with Temenos. The surface value of these works is very different, but in nature all flowers do not have the same face. The question is not the subject matter as such, but the level of consciousness. It is impossible to create work that will speak to the contemporary world, while ignoring everything about it. The depths of consciousness are as present, and in my view more active, than they were, so far as one can judge, in the generality of human beings, for instance, in the European Middle Ages.

True, we no longer have a unified iconography capable of carrying the mind to the depths of consciousness, but to find that on any scale in Europe it is necessary to go back to the profoundly powerful statuary of the Egyptians, for they most certainly understood not only the evolution of consciousness, but the evolution of human physiology as consciousness evolves. Nothing in Europe has since equalled them. Nevertheless the forms of a new art are now emerging. The icons and archetypes that can, in a tradition that is spiritually alive, be used to focus the mind on deeper or higher or inner levels of consciousness (we speak in metaphors) are themselves discovered through the exploration of those levels. If a celestial art is to be reborn, then human beings must begin to live in their celestial selves.

If the critic is the rasika of the artist, the artist is the rasika of God. The world is full of human beings who are searching for God in their own ideas or their inherited conceptual systems: yet, as Böhme pointed out, to work through sharp speculation is to work in an imaged ground, to arrive only at an idea of something. As Plotinus remarked when discussing beauty:

To see the divine as something external is to be outside of it; to become it is to be most truly in beauty: since sight deals with the external there can here be no vision unless in the sense of identification with the object.
And this identification amounts to a self-knowing, a self-consciousness.

The only true knowledge is unitive, beyond the discursivity of a separated subject and object: all other knowledge is relative and provisional. The artist, however, working through the imagination, can the more easily circumvent the boundedness of conceptualisation. The imagination can catch the whole within the part. Freedom from boundaries comes when the individual imagination unites with the cosmic imagination that is in the mind of the artist, and all our minds, for cosmic imagination, the source of distinct forms, is form-focused but not form-bounded. Thus infinitude will shine through the here and now of our space-time, binding together the existent and the non-existent, which were never separate, and thus the artist completes the cycle of imagination from Ungrund to celestial relative to the most material, and back through the celestial within the individual to the infinitude that is the truth of all things and beyond conception.
The Azure:  
A Study of Shelley’s Blue Interworlds  
For Kathleen Raine  
JEREMY REED

The starting point for any essay on Shelley would seem to be the azure. It is he more than any other English poet who aspires to space and mirrors his imagery in the blue, azure, sapphire or cerulean interworlds created by his transparent imagination, his impulse like Baudelaire to voyage ‘Anywhere Out Of This World.’

There are other blue poets among whom I would name Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Trakl, Rilke and of course Wallace Stevens, and perhaps Shelley’s ‘Ode To The West Wind’ finds its nearest colour correspondence in Rimbaud’s ‘Le Bateau Ivre’; but he is above all the poet most attuned to tonality, harmonics, vibration and the way in which the light generated by the imagination corresponds like a chameleon to the shifting light by which we read the elements. Part of Shelley’s greatness lies in his phototropic sensitivity to mutations of light and shadow; and in magnifying these aspects of the poet I am conscious of focusing on one facet of Shelley’s complex genius to the exclusion of the political import of his poetry, his rejection of the sexual and social prejudices inherent in his contemporaries and of the personal tragedies and disarming courage that characterised his short mercurial life and travels.

If inspiration has a colour it is blue. The spiral flight of Shelley’s mind, as in the graduating colour ascent of his skylark is through blue to gold to purple to silver – an idiosyncratic colour spectrum that finds recurring patterns in his poetry.

In his ‘A Defence Poetry’ Shelley writes that ‘Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man’: and that daimonic, angelophanic afflatus or logos, the crystallization of the Blue Word, the unmediated reordering of the breath-rhythm into the universal one, the sudden adrenal stimulus that lights up the body are consonant with the arrival. The poem reverses through the azure to be earthed by the poet and then reflighted in the manner of Shelley’s
skylark. Transcendence here is radiant, luminious, directed through
the rainbow so that it is the poet’s voice which sings from a light-
tower.

The pale purple even
Melts around thy flight;
Like a star of Heaven
In the broad daylight
Thou art unseen, but yet I hear thy shrill delight,
Keen as are the arrows
Of that silver sphere,
Whose intense lamp narrows
In the white dawn clear
Until we hardly see – we feel that it is there.

Throughout Shelley’s poetry the attainment points to an interchange
of the senses; what we cannot see we feel is there – the imagination
working under heat creates extra-sensory perception; we go beyond
who we are in pursuit of the transformed body we have assumed during
the time of creation. Shelley’s unconscious method is never very
far from Rimbaud’s ‘alchimie du verbe.’ Rimbaud, lacking Shelley’s
Neo-Platonic sophistication, achieves a corresponding sympathy with
Shelley’s theories and practice in his revolutionary statement: ‘Je finis
par trouver sacré le désordre de mon esprit.’

There is of course a subtle difference; Shelley arrives at ordinary
sense limitation and surpasses the marginal obstruction through lyric
momentum, whereas Rimbaud anticipating the obstruction begins
with the premise of a deranged or hallucinated perception. His
frustration is none the less intense: ‘Pleurant, je voyais de l’or – et ne
pus boire.–’

In his profoundly illuminating essay on Shelley ‘The Dream Of
Flight’ Gaston Bachelard speaks of the aerial dynamics of the Shel-
leyean imagination, and how the poet rediscovers the principles of
flight.

I will, therefore, postulate as a principle that in the dream world
we do not fly because we have wings; rather, we think we have
wings because we have flown. Wings are a consequence. The
principle of oneiric flight goes deeper. Dynamic aerial imagina-
tion must rediscover this principle.
The theory is right but few poets have been able to substantiate it. Shelley is perhaps the most perfect of English poets not only because of his startling facility with form, inventing fluid stanzacic patterns to match his translucent thought, but primarily for his interpenetration of nature; his eye metamorphoses in the process of seeing, his lyric is transformed in mid-air, so to speak, in the process of becoming. He is above all the poet of beauty. In ‘Adonais’ he pictures Keats dead, shy as in life, still unrecognised by his company, but set apart by his particular gift and reconstituted by the lines that create a spiritual reality for him.

His head was bound with pansies overblown,
And faded violets, white, and pied, and blue;
And a light spear topped with a cypress cone,
Round whose rude shaft dark ivy-tresses grew
Yet dripping with the forest’s noonday dew,
Vibrated, as the ever-beating heart
Shook the weak hand that grasped it; of that crew
He came the last, neglected and apart;
A herd-abandoned deer struck by the hunter’s dart.

There is something so deeply felt in the emotion expressed here that it becomes an incontrovertible reality. This is Keats’s life-in-death, so real to Shelley’s mind that we do not doubt it. The blue fiction which extends to violets and pansies, leads from that visual image to the disturbing audial realization that the heart or an electromagnetic pulsation is still beating in the etheric body. The poet as the deer who lives in hiding, responsive to all intruders, is seen as marked even in death – he is like Cain or Christ as Shelley’s subsequent stanza makes clear; the one set apart by his message.

As I write there’s a blue break in the grey and amethyst February sky. If I were by the sea that marine sky-ceiling would be a cerulean sky-bird, its extended wings spanning the charcoal and gradually giving rise to pink and green undertones in the dispersing cumulus.

Shelley was so minutely responsive to colour-change, sea-change, a shower throwing its net over the bay, that he saw nature as interchangeable with poetry. An external activation in the universe generated a similar stimulus on an inner plane. These readings became
as it were the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own; but its footsteps are like those of a wind over the sea, which the coming calm erases, and those traces remain only, as on the wrinkled sand which paves it. These and corresponding conditions of being are experienced principally by those of the most delicate sensibility and the most enlarged imagination; and the state of mind produced by them is at war with every base desire.

A Defence Of Poetry

In his ‘Ode to the West Wind’ in which yellow, black, red and azure predominate, Shelley sounds a note which seems to express the definition of poetry itself; he is not so much the recipient of the Blue Word as the embodiment of its force sounding through his disembodied state. Creation has become the poet; he is the blue rider who creates storm, it is the power of his hypomania which achieves the Shelleyean reversion of duality: he is the androgyne compounded out of poet and poetry. The two are so interchangeable that his poems sketch out a universe in which the inhabitants are light-people.

The Shelleyean correspondence is a harmonious relationship of all the dynamic images of phantasmal lightness. If the Baudelairean correspondence belongs to material imagination, the Shelleyan correspondence belongs to dynamic imagination. In Shelley’s metapoetics, qualities are grouped according to their degree of ability to lighten one another. They become sublimated together and continue to help one another to reach ever greater heights of sublimation.

Gaston Bachelard touches upon the nerve-centre of ‘Ode to the West Wind’ – the lightening of the interdependent elements that combine to form a sea-mosaic. Never before has such hectic colour been set as a palette for poetry. And again it is only Rimbaud in Le Bateau Ivre who claims a similar electric involvement with azure. The leaves driven by the autumnal wind are

    Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
    Pestilence-stricken multitudes; O thou
    Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed
    The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,
    Each like a corpse within its grave, until
    Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow
Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
With living hues and odours plain and hill:
Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
Destroyer and preserver; hear, oh, hear!

Here the conflagratory movement of autumn leaves is propelled by colour – it is not so much that Shelley creates a synaesthesia – it is more that the poetic eye sees by non-separation. Colour, sound and motion respond to one extrasensory stimulus, a frenetic dance which is pacified by the control that azure asserts in relation to the eventual spring. ‘Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow/ Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth . . . ’ Blue in this instance is the reflective mode of space; the calm that comes after storm.

And it is in ‘Ode to the West Wind’ that Shelley most fully realises a cosmic vision. The poet like the image of Vitruvian man stands central to the universe. He is encompassed by an azure bubble. He can shake heaven’s boughs, while his feet extend to forests of the deep.

Thou on whose stream, mid the steep sky’s commotion,
Loose clouds like earth’s decaying leaves are shed,
Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,
Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread
On the blue surface of thine aery surge,
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head
Of some fierce Maenad, even from the dim verge
Of the horizon to the zenith’s height,
The locks of the approaching storm.

Angels are shook down in the form of rain and lightning: magnesium-lit clouds stream up to a black zenith; we can recreate the storm as Shelley imagined it: a blue forest releasing wind-driven clouds from a sea and sky which are indivisible. Shelley extends the elemental metaphor to include the subaqueous. As Rimbaud was to see mosques and factories on a lake-floor, so Shelley through the wave’s prism observes ‘old palaces and towers . . . All overgrown with azure moss and flowers.’ The sea has its blue forests – ‘The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear/The sapless foliage of the ocean,...’
Shelley's Ode has to do with speed; and by that I mean the spontaneous light-flash or neural illumination that gives rise to the image. Shelley's manner of seeing is through an index of self-multiplying metamorphoses: one image chrysalises from another and another. Shelley thinks back to childhood 'when to outstrip the skiey speed/Scare seemed a vision…'

Lying back in the grass as a child it's possible to span the sky by using the clouds as stepping stones across a blue flood. But in retrospect, as the man reviewing childhood, conscious of the visionary faculty that has facilitated both, it is the accelerative speed of voyaging through inner space that preoccupies. We can think ourselves anywhere, psychic energy promotes flight. Shelley's impassioned cry is to be lifted free of the earth:

Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

The poem moves from the universal to the personal, and so to an interworld – the space which is peculiar to the poetic image, a mirror in which outer and inner space are mutually reflected. As the poem's trajectory increases speed, so a note of profound personal elegy enters, and we feel the poet's sense of human loss in relinquishing his imaginative flight. The speed rises, checks itself and ends on an agonizing evocation and question:

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!
And, by the incantation of this verse,
Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawakened earth
The trumpet of a prophecy! O, Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

Shelley's concern with physical impermanence – the voice must sing now, of the moment, for it will never come again – is an awareness at the core of the romantic sensibility, a realization that is mirrored by the transient seasons and above all by his recurring image of the rainbow, that eyebrow coloured on the azure with the intensity of a field of wind blown anemones.
If 'Ode to the West Wind' sounds a driving note of urgency never before heard in English poetry, and likewise a sensuous psychophysical submission to the elements – the poet is whiplashed by 'Black rain, and fire, and hail', and ecstatically diffused by the elements – then it is in the imagined paradise of 'Epipsychidion' that Shelley most vividly depicts a paradisal shore; the country of fiction that we meet on the other side of the azure.

Shelley's evocation is of an interworld: 'It is an isle 'twixt Heaven, Air, Earth, and Sea/Cradled and hung in clear tranquillity' – a place of such beauty that we recognize it as the archetypal interstellar enclave in which man re-attains through an imaginative state the sky-garden from which he is disinherit. Shelley's poetry is always an act of repossess; a retrieval through the subliminal unconscious of states that live as coloured negatives of the holistic empyream. Each time man realises the colour blue he is recapturing an area of paradise.

Shelley's invocation is not one of supposition; it is a visionary reality; the images are minted, they come clean from inspirational heat.

Say, my heart's sister, wilt thou sail with me?
Our bark is an albatross, whose nest
Is a far Eden of the purple East;
And we between her wings will sit, while Night,
And Day, and Storm, and Calm, pursue their flight,
Our ministers, along the boundless Sea,
Treading each other's heels, unheededly.
It is an isle under Ionian skies,
Beautiful as a wreck of Paradise…

The wreck or spar of paradise that survives in the 'purple East' is the poet's pre-incarnational star-island. In his short lyric 'An Exhortation' Shelley refers to poets as 'Children of a sunnier star,/Spirits from beyond the moon,' and 'Epipsychidion' is a voyage through poetry to readopt the state of a star-child. The poet's oeniric flight is assisted by waking consciousness, the autonomous suspension between delayed realization of something known but left nascent and the quantum energy released by photons in inner space. The poem is promoted by this dual tension – it is a palingenesis whose sublimate is supraconsciousness. Shelley's interworld carries a prismatic quality.
The light clear element which the isle wears
Is heavy with the scent of lemon-flowers,
Which floats like mist laden with unseen showers,
And falls upon the eyelids like faint sleep;
And from the moss violets and jonquils peep,
And dart their arrowy odour through the brain
Till you might faint with that delicious pain.
And every motion, odour, beam, and tone,
With that deep music is in unison:
Which is a soul within the soul — they seem
Like echoes of an antenatal dream.

This stellar island which is also a blue interworld mirrored in the ocean, possesses a solitary tower, a place fallen into decay where the poet would live with his ‘lady of the solitude.’ What is marvellous here, an adjective that perhaps may be used only in relation to Shelley, is the conjunction of inner and outer — the vision ‘Which is a soul within the soul!’ This seamless unity through which the poet and poem are interchangeable, so that what is imagined is also lived and known is the distinguishing mark of poetic genius. Non-separation: autonomous transparency: the lyric-storm matched by the sky-storm.

Shelley confirms a poetics of space, his poetry which belongs to ‘The light clear element’ of the paradise imagined in ‘Epipsychidion’ creates a geometry of light planes, the interfacing hexagonals of a diamond built in the transparency of air. His imagined worlds anticipate the preoccupation of science-fiction with star-colonization and the android race. Shelley is always moving towards the creation of a new species – the androgyne or he who is deathless by way of implanting the psychic into the physical – the numinous into the temporal. Shelley’s new man retains his individual sensory refinement and transposes this by imaginal energy to an altered state. It is supraconsciousness that houses the place where he would live with Emilia V to whom ‘Epipsychidion’ is addressed.

And I have fitted up some chambers there
Looking towards the golden Eastern air,
And level with the living winds, which flow
Like waves above the living winds below.
I have sent books and music there, and all
Those instruments with which high Spirits call
The future from its cradle, and the past  
Out of its grave, and make the present last  
In thoughts and joys which sleep, but cannot die,  
Folded within their own eternity.

Shelley’s transcendental creation, one which establishes a sky-castle furnished with those aesthetic things most conducive to the poetic sensibility finds a corresponding aspiration in Yeats’s lines from ‘Byzantium’: ‘I hail the superhuman;/I call it death-in-life and life-in-death.’ Shelley reconciles these states by creating them through poetic vision. The over-reach that his senses record pursues a trajectory not towards disjecta or the void but towards an aerial embodiment of his vision. Most poets lack the momentum to become their own creation; their impulse is unattainable, their starting point never gains on its partial ascendancy. But with Shelley the reverse is true: the arc described by the poem is contemporaneous with his flight through inner space: his poems adopt the rainbow’s curve. The poet pursues a physical parabola inseparable from his psychological reality. He goes beyond his creation to experience a fictional satellite, an anti-world in which he consummates the possibilities of narrative.

This recurring concept of flight in Shelley’s poetry – the dance-steps that take us out to the galactic circle, proceeds from the anacoustic zone – that contemplative silence which is there before language – to a vertically dynamised molecular kundalini – a realization that we have eyes in heaven. Shelley moves effortlessly from spatial plane to plane. ‘Epipsychidion’ rises from temporal to ecstatic union.

We shall become the same, we shall be one  
Spirit within two frames, oh! wherefore two?  
One passion in twin-hearts, which grows and grew,  
Till like two meteors of expanding flame,  
Those spheres instinct with it become the same,  
Touch, mingle, are transfigured; ever still  
Burning, yet ever inconsumable:

to a poetics in which according to Bachelard ‘every object is always tempted to leave the Earth for the Sky.’
Shelley's imagery is constantly sky-bound. The 'one/Spirit within two frames 'which symbolises the androgyne is transferred to the image of two meteors lit by the same inextinguishable flame that Yeats drew on for his Byzantium poems.

When I was a child, the image of Shelley, in its psychic representation, bearing all the androgynous sensitivity of Amelia Curran's portrait of him, used to visit me as an imaginative reality - an instructor with violet eyes and blue hair, a luminous energy that displaced me and induced the state of trance from which poetry originated.

In 'Prometheus Unbound' the Fourth Spirit relates the experience of sleeping on a poet's lips; and the rhythmic inhalation/exhalation creates the dynamic interworld between light and water in which Shelley's volatilized imagination ranges.

On a poet's lips I slept
Dreaming like a love-adept
In the sound his breathing kept;
Nor seeks nor finds he mortal blisses,
But feeds on the aereal kisses
Of shapes that haunt thought's wildernesses.
He will watch from dawn to gloom
The lake-reflected sun illume
The yellow bees in the ivy-bloom;
Nor heed nor see, what things they be;
But from these create he can
Forms more real than living man,
Nurslings of immortality!

Shelley in commenting on his own inspirational chemistry illuminates the process of autonomy. It is 'shapes' - dream or waking intuitions, hypnagogic, hypnopaedic trance-suspensions that lead to the animated vitality of the image-form. The poet feels his subject, senses its electric aura as an impending crisis, rather as one smells a storm in the air before it breaks. At this stage he may have no idea of what will arise from the irreversible stream of energy. The poem is the abstract Blue Word seeking to connect with inner space. The shock of its arrival instructs the hand to assume responsibility for translating the abstract into the particularly humanized. The light investing the process finds a perfect correspondence in Shelley's metaphor as a water reflection.
‘The yellow bees in the ivy-bloom’ – in which the colours yellow and green anticipate an unformulated blue, are illuminated by light hit off a lake in a diffused dazzle. Poetry comes out of a quality of light – often a green, a gold or a blue that sensitises the latent impulse and colours the emergent poem.

Shelley’s actual poetics, by which I mean the etherealized sensibility that gave him access to a plane of elemental fluidity, is one so rare, that while the subject matter of his poetry may be submitted to literary analysis and to the whole mythopoeic ethos, the psychological experience behind it cannot. What Shelley sees is what almost all poetry misses, and that is the subtle interworld in which metaphor is transposed by the light of its own reflection into a chain-link of orienting points. Shelley’s chrysalis releases a swallow-tailed butterfly which in turn becomes a hummingbird and so a rainbow. His nervous activation telescopes: one can follow his parabola to its highest transmogrifying point before the fractional descent begins. In this, his poetry is very much like the skylark of his ode; its ascent is from earth to heaven singing through colour graduations. Shelley is a heavenly architect; his sky palaces and towers that rise beyond the stars are built of crystal breath. To read Shelley is to marvel at the unexpected imaginative leaps. He can take one up into the azure or down into the emerald and purple subaqueous forests. His way is towards the instatement of a probable paradise, an imaginary artefact that exists as a reality through the power of his vision. In ‘Prometheus Unbound’ the Second Faun answers the First Faun’s question ‘Canst thou imagine where those spirits live / Which make such delicate music in the woods?’ in terms which express psychic cosmogony: a visionary world is created.

I have heard those more skilled in spirits say
The bubbles, which the enchantment of the sun
Sucks from the pale faint water-flowers that pave
The oozy bottom of clear lakes and pools,
Are the pavilions where such dwell and float
Under the green and golden atmosphere
Which noontide kindles through the woven leaves;
And when these burst, and the thin fiery air,
The which they breathed within those lucent domes,
Ascends to flow like meteors through the night,
They ride on them, and rein their headlong speed,
And bow their burning crests, and glide in fire
Under the waters of the earth again.

Here the metamorphosis is spectacularly achieved. The translucent underwater bubble is a pavilion for a spirit, a green-gold crystalline globule which at night detonates into a meteor. The fire-riders burn through the sky before plummeting back to their aquatic home. In thirteen lines we witness a creation myth, a cosmic light-flash that reaffirms the power of the poet to cosmogonize, to give voice to a visual telaesthesia. It’s impossible to relay the speed at which such transformations take place. The inspirational light which connects with the poet’s nervous charge implodes with the instantaneous creation of myth. It isn’t just that the words serve as indices to the experiential dynamics, it’s rather that universal metamorphoses register within micro-seconds in inner space. What we don’t know is what these visuals comprise. We can call them archetypes, prototypes, blueprints, but their sense-impressions are exclusive and momentary. When we connect them back to an archetypal pattern it is through a selective rational process, an ordering of collective consciousness which has a different speed-pattern, a different location to that of the unpredictable, mobile universes that constellate the poet’s mind in the immediacy of creation. Writing poetry is rather like experiencing photo-flashes that come at one from the inside. The photographer remains unseen: we know of his existence only through an intermittently realized series of thrown lights that we have to slow and isolate for the symbolic content.

Shelley’s own definition of the mind engaged with inspiration has been much quoted, but a re-reading of its brilliant suggestions can only increase our appreciation of its application to his poetry.

for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. Could this influence be durable in its original purity and force, it is impossible to predict the greatness of the results; but when composition begins, inspiration is already on the
decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet.

It is the 'unprophetic' or subliminal conscious that Shelley stresses, we are always fractionally behind the inspired word – there is a gap between the speed at which a word arrives and the ability of the writing hand to record it. Nor is automatic dictation into a tape-recorder a nearer means of translating original inspiration, unless we are to resort to automatic writing, and again there is a difference here, for 'unprophetic' inspiration edits as it arrives, whereas transcription by autonomy allows for no such process. As Shelley notes, even poetry written under incandescent heat is in the process of cooling before its message is written into the nerves. If we could sustain the instant rather than the cooling stream of imagination in which we write, then we would as Shelley implies realize divinity. We would live inside the poem's formulative architectonics. We would lose the contradiction between arrival and reversal, speed and backtracking in order to isolate the now fragmented word-image that we missed in its unanticipated audio-visual pronouncement.

Shelley comes closer in practise to fulfilling his theory than most of his critics have chosen to realize. He is the poet who is closest to pure imagination. Shelley's images are purified by the interaction between light and water. The archetype as we have come to inherit and pathologize it through Jung is of no help in rationalizing imaginative mobility. Criticism and analytic psychology end at the point where Shelley's poetry begins. His work illuminates the unfixable point of fluidity that defines imaginative dynamism.

I cannot tell my joy, when o'er a lake
Upon a dropping bough with nightshade twined,
I saw two azure halcyons clinging downward
And thinning one bright bunch of amber berries,
With quick long beaks, and in the deep there lay
Those lovely forms imaged as in a sky;...

Here the halcyon, or kingfisher, which in myth was believed to make a floating nest on the sea, which remained calm during hatching, is made indistinguishable from the sky by its azure plumage. So deep does the image sink, so vibrant is its translucent vignette that we enter
into the poem as we might a painting — only that the silence transmitted by visual depiction is made active through poetry. The halcyons are busy thinning a ‘bunch of amber berries.’

Shelley’s constant celebration of the beautiful explains his preoccupation with things that are transient. The realization of beauty, a concept deplorably absent from so much contemporary poetry, admits the agonizing realization that the eye cannot retain what it sees, we intrude on the moment of natural colour, elemental beauty as it is expressed in nature or the human face, as witnesses to our own impermanence. Never again will we see that particular sunset fill the lake with scarlet roses, or those green eyes realize in our own a recognition that we too must die in spite of the beauty we have carried. Yeats expressed this excruciating dilemma in a way that typifies his profound lyric simplicity: ‘Nothing we love overmuch/ Is ponderable to the touch.’ Shelley sustains this attenuated emotion throughout the composition of all his great poetry. It is the driving force behind the Romantic impulse. Shelley’s work lives at the heart of mutation; it is a poetry that partakes of the change. It explains the magnificence of those stanzas in ‘Adonais’ that rise with the poet towards the unattainable aspiration of realizing a unity in the dual states of life and death.

The One remains, the many change and pass;
Heaven’s light forever shines, Earth’s shadows fly;
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
Until Death tramples it to fragments. — Die,
If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek!
Follow where all is fled! — Rome’s azure sky,
Flowers, ruins, statues, music, words, are weak
The glory they transfuse with fitting truth to speak.

Shelley’s elegy for Keats is as much an exploration of the poetic state as it is a means of empathizing with the friend and poet he must follow into death. The apprehension of beauty accelerates the death-impulse. Unable to retain the heightened sense-impression that alters and stimulates consciousness, we hope to transfer it to supraconsciousness: to live it again outside the time-decay of the body and in a state that supersedes psychophysical limitations. It follows that the
Romantic sensibility often locates the poem in death. Or in Shelley’s line: ‘No more let Life divide what Death can join together.’

We live within the knowledge of a flaw, a rift. We’re never healed of our sense of only partly belonging here. We’re both now and then; here and somewhere else – creatures of anxiety that can never be reconciled to our disinherited bodies. Poetry is an attempt to heal the rift, to get in on death before it annihilates a particular way of seeing. Within the magnified radius that comprizes poetic vision, everything outside that circle is in shadow. It is retrieved and given name by the poem, only to revert again to the alien, the unknown. Poetry at its best, and in the Shellyean sense, retrieves reflective reality and invests it with the quality of transience.

In ‘The Question’ the dream nature of the poem has Shelley observe flowers that are altered but recognisable. Seeing in this poem is a form of hypnotism: what is perceived attracts by its greater light as though the poet hallucinated his visual field, transradiated the light-waves that determine colour.

And in the warm hedge grew lush eglantine,  
Green cowbind and the moonlight-coloured may,  
And cherry-blossoms, and white cups, whose wine  
Was the bright dew, yet drained not by the day;  
And wild roses, and ivy serpentine,  
With its dark buds and leaves, wandering astray;  
And flowers azure, black, and streaked with gold,  
Fairer than any wakened eyes behold.

The palette here of pinks and greens and whites, moves towards a more vibrant foreground. Receding dream colours are enlivened to dominants: azure, black and gold. The latter three colours suggest seeing as an agent of elevation. Shelley’s chromatic scale rises vertically implying that colour is sustained through his vertical axis. Pre-seen object appearance, by which I mean that the eye remembers in the act of seeing, tonalities that are higher than those registered by vision, may account for Shelley’s prismatic lens. He has experienced colour too intensely to be satisfied by what he sees. What he remembers are colours ‘Fairer than any wakened eyes behold.’ Remembering is a way of seeing: it is the platonic visual-anamnesis.

Shelley’s ‘visionary flowers’, those for whom in the poem there is
no recipient, are part of the mosaic worked into the azure rotunda where his vision culminates. His poetry builds an architecture out of thoughts; a crystalline tower constructed by the mind.

What Shelley sees is what he anticipates is there and in turn makes into a reality. The dawn that Shelley follows through its colour transformations in 'Prometheus Unbound' is such that could only be followed by those who are familiar with the sea, fishermen or lovers of boats as Shelley was in his excursions into the Gulf of Naples.

The point of one white star is quivering still
Deep in the orange light of widening morn
Beyond the purple mountains: through a chasm
Of wind-divided mist the darker lake
Reflects it: now it wanes: it gleams again
As the waves fade, and as the burning threads
Of woven cloud unravel in pale air:
'Tis lost and through yon peaks of cloud-like snow
The roseate sunlight quivers: hear I not
The Aeolian music of her sea-green plumes
Winnowing the crimson dawn?

The observing eye is both painterly and reliant on pre-seen sensory tonalities. From white to orange to purple to blueblack to white to pink to green and crimson, so Shelley succeeds in imparting to each colour-band a distinctive recreation of the day. And not just any day but one peculiar to the dawn of poetic vision. The white star vibrates in an orange diaphragm, it is on a metaphoric level the poet's first sounding of the incipient poem. The vision is still unreadable for it is beyond purple mountains - the Word is a punctum: it is sighted but inaccessible. What is nearer is its reflection in the lake's implied cobalt. The mind picks up on the tension contained between light and dark. When the reflection dies, that is the first mirroring of the poem, so the poem impresses itself through the first pink rays of the rising sun that usher in sea-green music and the presence of the feminine in the form of Panthea whose movements stridently fan the crimson dawn.

This is a personal reading of how Shelley's colour symbolism connects with the various stages of poetic experience. One perception leads to another and so a cosmos is formed.

The poet is both here and there. If we think of the present we've
already overtaken it in thought. It is poetry which slows the stream of consciousness to the only locatable points in our lives. The calm that meditation asserts in inner space, or that slowness of respiration created by yogis, is distinct from the means by which the poet locates the image in a spatio-temporal context and arrests it as a multifaceted crystal in a blue solution.

Shelley’s ‘STANZAS’ Written in Dejection, Near Naples’ are an instance of the poet’s slowing poetic momentum to a series of prismatic film-stills. Dejection as a psychological state has to do with an unopposed filling in of the vacuum. There’s no resistance to the apparent immobilization of time. The image-flow is reduced in speed; the poem unfolds with the leisurely cadence of untroubled surf. The result is a magnified perception; things come in too close and threaten by their overhang.

I see the Deep’s untrampled floor
   With green and purple seaweeds strown;
I see the waves upon the shore,
   Like light dissolved in star-showers, thrown:
I sit upon the sands alone,—
   The lightning of the noontide ocean
   Is flashing round me, and a tone
Arises from its measured motion,
   How sweet! did any heart now share in my emotion.

The slow dazzle, the unanimated but brilliant suspension of these lines, tilt like a crystalline wave above a ribbed sea-floor. Shelley’s mood is dictated by the particularly observed, the minted retinal imagery that responds to his breath-pattern. The imagery is not less scintillating or volatilized than the other passages I have chosen to consider in this essay, rather it is delayed, suggesting the marginal gap between what is seen and experienced.

The poet’s sense of being cut off, his aloneness, his death-wish that resonates through the poem, is deepened by the use of purple in each of the first two stanzas. The hidden blue in purple is diffused through an aqueous prism; the blue concentrate that lifts Shelley is concealed in a deeper mood-tone. And there are states of mind which nothing can alleviate. Expecting too much the poet is invariably the victim of too little. Vision, that sustainer of vertical poetry, that drive which asks
always to go higher and beyond itself returns on a desublimatory arc. Great poetry is created from delirium – the senses trigger on a vertical axis. And when the process isn’t functioning, when the exigencies of life and fatigue isolate rather than involve the poet, so the slowing down process occurs. Shelley’s ‘Dejection’ poem creates rather than analyses despondency – the movement of the poem is one in which the division between inner and outer worlds describes a tension-field that is irreconcilable. The sea is a death-trap. Its motion, its rhythm, the illusory mirror it presents were to claim Shelley, as it was later to swallow Hart Crane. Part of the sea’s fascination lies in the spiritual freedom it represents. We feel we are on the edge of space, and for the Romantic sensibility as it is evidenced in both Shelley and Crane, there was the additional attraction of dying alone and being united to the elemental beauty they had celebrated in their poetry.

For Shelley there is within the context of the mood expressed in the poem neither ‘hope nor health’: there is only receptive consciousness which continues to comment on its own attachment/detachment, its own freedom and irreversible decline. And as with Coleridge’s ‘Ode To Dejection’ it is the act of poetic creation which transcends the static. Shelley is able to realize ‘joy in memory yet’, for the day, the place, the emotional circumstances contributing to his despondency, will in time constellate themselves around an interlude made beautiful by the suffering it illuminated.

I began this essay on La Note Bleu. The unlocatable azure, the Blue Word – the absence that becomes presence in the colour blue as it is employed in inspirational poetry. Shelley is unlike any other English poet in his reading of the blue sky. He sounds a note that has never been returned to in its intense striving to make visible an interworld between vision and imaginative reality. Poetry’s singular aim should be to create worlds and not inherit them. Shelley sets out to make new the previously undiscovered. His poetry lights conflagrations on the opposite shore; the coast to which we are always travelling but never reach. It is fitting that his death should have been at sea on that reflective mirror in which he studied thought in all its forms.

Recommended reading: Kathleen Raine Defending Ancient Springs; Gaston Bachelard Air And Dreams; John Lehmann Shelley In Italy: An Anthology. (The latter remains one of the best selections of Shelley’s mature poetry.)
Poetry as Prophecy

KATHLEEN RAINE

To speak of prophecy is to enter regions of thought unfamiliar to – indeed alien to – the mental world so firmly established in the modern West by three centuries of virtually unchallenged scientific materialism. Every civilization may be seen as a development from certain ideas, certain premises, from which certain consequences necessarily follow while others are precluded. The impressive material discoveries, technology and power which have characterized our own civilization have, nevertheless, as we are at this time uneasily beginning to discover, been at the expense of other excluded areas of experience and knowledge. Western science equates ‘reality’ with a material universe. This world can be weighed and measured and quantified in terms of the infinitely large and the infinitessimal small, and only the quantifiable is deemed ‘real’. Indeed this phase of civilization has been described by René Guénon in the title of his most famous book as ‘The Reign of Quantity’. The world of poetry itself can in such a system be accorded the status only of the ‘imaginary’, of make-believe, a game for children who have not yet acquired real – that is factual – knowledge of the nature and causes of things. Prophecy claims also to be a revelation of truth, but of a truth for which a materialist world-view has no place. It is a concept relegated to the limbo of ‘history of ideas’.

A prophet, according to the Oxford Dictionary, is ‘one who speaks for God’ – another meaningless concept in terms of materialist ideologies, but one upon which great civilizations have been established, which hold the ground of ‘reality’ to be not ‘matter’ – whatever that may be – but mind, or spirit; of which indeed matter may be but one manifestation. William Blake, who described his poems as ‘prophecies’, at the end of the eighteenth century reaffirmed in the face of materialist ideologies already gaining ascendency in his time – and whose supremacy is being called in question only in our own – the prophetic role which speaks from, and for this living spirit which is the true agent of all we perceive as ‘nature’. Instead of deeming the
universe a mechanism, the sensible world is seen to be a system of appearance - a \textit{maya} - inseparable from the mind or spirit which in perceiving also creates what it perceives. Everything is, in Blake's word, 'Vision'.

And every Natural Effect has a Spiritual Cause, and Not A Natural; for a Natural Cause only seems…

(Milton 26.44-5)

What, then, in terms of a world of spiritual realities and spiritual causes, are we to understand by the word Prophecy? In materialist terms the word could at most be understood in the popular sense of foretelling the future. To Blake it certainly meant something more than, and other than the foretelling of events such as we might read in the daily papers; prophecy is concerned with other levels of reality than such things as Nostradamus and others have perhaps foretold. Truth of the prophetic order comes from the perceptions and judgments of the Imagination. It is not, like 'second sight' a faculty possessed by a handful of exceptionally endowed people, but latent in all. Like poetry, it is a gift of seeing and understanding the world, people and events, in terms of the Imagination.

Blake's writings, first and last, are a proclamation of the primacy of the Imagination, which he calls 'the true man', as against the materialist view that man is his physical organism, 'the worm of sixty winters', which, according to the philosopher Locke (and the same view persists to this day) is, in Blake's words, 'naturally only a natural organ subject to Sense'. This Blake vehemently denied: 'the Poetic or Prophetic character' he affirmed is 'the true man'. Later he substituted the term Imagination, identifying the Imagination with 'the God within' of the Protestant tradition in which he himself stood, and he named that inner presence 'Jesus the Imagination'. Jesus is, for Blake, the name of the universal and innate creative spirit experienced as a Person, and called in the Indian sacred tradition the Supreme Self. It is from this Supreme Self and not from the senses that knowledge derives. Nor does Blake use the term 'poetic genius' - or the later term Imagination - in the limited sense of the poet's 'Muse', but in a far more comprehensive sense as the inspiration and knowledge not of the arts alone but of all humankind's deepest intuitions. He understood religions themselves to be of the same nature as poetry:
The Religions of all Nations are derived from each Nation’s different reception of the Poetic Genius, which is everywhere called the Spirit of Prophecy.

Religious differences therefore are merely cultural:

As all men are alike (tho’ infinitely various) So all Religions, as all similars, have one source. The true Man is the source, he being the Poetic genius.

(All Religions are One K.98)

Thus Imagination in Blake’s sense does not mean ‘imaginary’ – that is to say, unreal, make-believe – but signifies on the contrary the principle of reality itself. Coleridge held the same view, distinguishing between Imagination and ‘fancy’ or make-believe. According to Coleridge’s famous definition:

The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.

(Biographia Literaria xiii.5 -9)

More recently Henry Corbin, the great Ismaili scholar, has introduced the word ‘Imaginal’ to signify this reality, in contradistinction to the word ‘imaginary’ which has come in popular parlance to mean unreal. Coleridge’s definition, like Blake’s, identifies the Imagination with the ‘God within’. But Blake’s term ‘the Divine Humanity’ is not however his own, but derives from Swedenborg, whose system is the ground of Blake’s.

* * *

To return to our original argument – that the very conception of prophecy is incompatible with modern materialist ideologies – I must repeat that a view by which mind, spirit, Imagination becomes the cause, can by no means equate reality with Newton’s measurable universe – which Blake calls an ‘abstract void’ – but with immeasurable life. Blake declared that his own ‘great task’ was

To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes
Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought, into Eternity
Ever expanding in the Bosom of God, the Human Imagination.

(Jerusalem 5. 18-20 K.623)
I am told that the Hebrew word for 'prophecy' signifies 'bringing forth out of oneself' and that is also Blake's meaning. When Blake wrote that 'Jesus is God' he spoke as do mystics of all religions; not of a historical supernatural Person, but of that universal indwelling divine presence. His 'Jesus the Imagination' is the Swedish 18th century mystic, Swedenborg's 'Grand Man of the heavens' – that is of the inner worlds, Who is the many in one and one in many of 'the innumerable multitudes of eternity' – all humankind past present and to come. The Divine Humanity is at once a Person and a universe, since that universe is a region not of space but of being:

This world of Imagination is the world of Eternity; it is the divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the Vegetated body. This World of Imagination is Infinite & Eternal, whereas the world of Generation, or Vegetation, if Finite & Temporal. There Exist in that Eternal World the Permanent Realities of Every Thing which we see reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature. All Things are comprehended in their Eternal Forms in the divine body of the Saviour, the True Vine of Eternity, The Human Imagination...

(A Vision of the Last Judgment K.605-6)

Imagination is called 'the Saviour' because it 'saves' from the limitations of natural life and 'steps beyond' these limits into the boundless eternity of immeasurable being.

To some, conditioned, as we all are, by the current assumptions of our society, to a materialist paradigm, such affirmations may seem incomprehensible; to others I may seem to be labouring the obvious, what is self-evident in terms, for example, of Indian and Far Eastern philosophic thought. There is, in any case, no question of Blake's 'Divine Humanity' in any way resembling, or preparing the way for, the purely secular nineteenth century exaltation of the natural man in what is termed 'humanism'. The supremacy of Jesus the Imagination resides solely in the reality of the 'God Within'. Blake speaks as a mystic, who universalizes the divine-human nature the Church attributes only to the historical Jesus. In his last years the diarist Crabb Robinson questioned Blake on his 'opinion concerning the imputed Divinity of Jesus Christ', Blake replied, 'He is the only God'; but then he added 'and so am I, and so are you'. 'We are all co-existent with God', he said, 'Members of the Divine Body'. Humanism exalts the
natural man – whom Blake calls ‘the worm of sixty winters’ who accumulates knowledge through experience. But by virtue of the Imagination, the universal cosmic knowledge is available to whoever, poet or prophet, raises his mind into those regions: ‘One thing alone makes a poet’, Blake affirmed, ‘Imagination, the Divine Vision’.

Blake thus stands centrally within the Protestant tradition which he inherited when he declared that ‘henceforth every man may converse with God & be a King & Priest in his own house’ (K.389 Annotations to Watson).

To Blake the Protestant conception of Conscience, ‘the Word of God Universal’, was no mere abstract theological concept but a continual state of awareness of the divine presence:

He who waits to be righteous before he enters into the Saviour’s kingdom, the Divine Body, will never enter there (he wrote). I am perhaps the most sinful of men. I pretend not to holiness: yet I pretend to love, to see, to converse with daily as man with man, & the more to have an interest in the Friend of Sinners.

(J.3.K.621)

The religious associations of such terms as ‘the Saviour’ and ‘the friend of sinners’ with the evangelical Christianity of Blake’s day – with, for example, Methodism – should not confuse us, for Blake’s meanings are mystical and universal. We may read Blake no less in the light of the Baghavad Geeta than of the words of Jesus; who proclaimed that ‘the Kingdom of God is within you’.

* * *

Blake’s own type of ‘the inspired man’ is the poet, Milton, who gives his name to Blake’s Prophetic Book in which he proclaims the supremacy of the innate law of the Imagination over the moral law of this world imposed by the empirical ego ‘Satan, the Selfhood’, Prince of This World. Milton, great poet of the imagination was, in Blake’s sense of the word, a divinely inspired prophet, whose Paradise Lost describes eternal realities of the imagination. Truth is not fact, or we could abdicate to our computers. ‘As if Public Records were true,’ Blake indignantly exclaims.

In Paradise Regained Milton’s Satan tempts Jesus by discoursing on the schools of Plato, Aristotle and the later Stoics, Epicurus and the rest,
and suggests that by acquisition of learning Jesus (surely here the true prototype of Blake’s ‘Jesus the Imagination’) can prepare himself to be ‘a king compleat’; Jesus refutes Satan by claiming ‘light from above’:

Think not but that I know these things, or think
I know them not: not therefore am I short
Of knowing what I ought: he who receives
Light from above, from the fountain of light
No other doctrine needs, tho’ granted true.
But these are false, or little else but dreams,
Conjectures, fancies, built on nothing firm.
The first and wisest of them all profess’d
To know this only, that he nothing knew.

(Paradise Regained, IV. 287-294)

Milton is affirming that inspiration transcends learning:

... however many books
Wise men have said are wearisom; who reads
Incessantly, and to his reading brings not
A spirit and a judgment equal or superior,
(And what he brings what needs he elsewhere seek)
Uncertain and unsettled still remains,
Deep verst in books, and shallow in himself...

(IV. 32, 1-327)

Jesus then praises the prophets of Israel ‘as men divinely taught’, who excell ‘all the oratory of Greece and Rome.’ Thus it is with good reason that Blake sees in Milton the type of the ‘inspired man’ – that is to say the poet-prophet. Blake’s Milton, who even more explicitly and eloquently denounces human wisdom in the name of inspiration is a portrait that only draws in clearer lines the author of Paradise Lost. If for Milton himself ‘Jesus’ was not explicitly identified with the innate imagination, he is implicitly so, for Milton’s ‘light from above, from the fountain of light’ is that same ‘God within’ as Blake’s ‘Jesus, the Imagination’. Blake’s Milton, the poet-prophet, also confronts and renounces Satan who tempts the poet with acquired knowledge, and comes into the world renouncing the empirical selfhood whose knowledge comes through the senses, memory, and recorded history; the poet comes
In Self-annihilation & the grandeur of Inspiration
To cast off Rational Demonstration by Faith in the Saviour.
To cast off the rotten rags of Memory by Inspiration,
To cast off Bacon, Locke & Newton from Albion’s covering,
To take off his filthy garments & clothe him with Imagination,
To cast aside from Poetry all that is not Inspiration.

- Bacon, Newton and Locke, those culture-heroes of scientific materialism are the enemies of the innate knowledge of the living Imagination. The ‘murderers of Jesus’, Blake declares – Jesus being the Imagination – are those who

...mock at Eternal Life,
Who pretend to Poetry that they may destroy Imagination,
By imitation of Nature’s Images drawn from Remembrance.

(Milton 41.2-24. K.533)

The prophetic spirit, as understood by Blake is by no means remote, but that ‘friend’ with whom Blake conversed ‘daily as man with man’.

* * *

During the nineteenth century poetry and the other arts were to become ever increasingly wedded to ‘Nature’s images’ and expressive of the finite individual on the natural plane, as, at best, in the narrative poems of Browning and Tennyson, and in the novel, the literary form where above all others narrates the annals of natural life. The tide began to turn once more at the end of the century; and by way of Gilchrist’s *Life of William Blake* (completed by William Michael Rosetti, brother of Dante Gabriel and Christina) Blake’s thought came to influence, first, the pre-Raphaelites and, through them, the young W. B. Yeats, who was to become, with Edwin J. Ellis, a member of that same circle, the first editor of Blake’s Prophetic Books. The school which proclaimed a doctrine of ‘art for art’s sake’ may seem remote from Blake’s vision of the indwelling Imagination as the divine presence, yet there is a connecting link. Blake made no distinction between poetry of the imagination and prophecy, nor (in this sense) between art and religion. Near the end of his life he inscribed on his famous engraving of the Laocoon Group his deepest beliefs in this matter:
A Poet, a Painter, a Musician, an Architect, the Man Or Woman who is not one of these is not a Christian

As indeed follows from the identification of Jesus with the Imagination.

Prayer is the Study of Art
Praise is the Practice of Art
Fasting, etc., all relate to Art.
The outward Ceremony is Antichrist.
The Eternal Body of Man is the Imagination, that is,
God himself, The Divine Body, Jesus: we are his Members.
It manifests itself in his Works of Art. (in Eternity All is Vision).

In his engravings of the Book of Job Blake depicts, in the first plate, Job and his sons and daughters sitting, as on a pious Sunday doing 'no manner of work', beneath a tree whereon hang musical instruments, unheeded. In the last plate the same men and women are present but each playing on one of these instruments, or singing, or reading from a scroll representing perhaps poetry – 'Poetry, Painting & Music – the Three Powers in Man of conversing with Paradise, which the flood did not Sweep away' (V.L.J. K.609)

But a secular conception of 'art for art's sake', in exalting art as a supreme value while taking no account of its sacred source is, paradoxically, a diminishment, just as man is diminished when the natural man with his empirical skills and acquired knowledge is exalted, to a supremacy man can possess only as the bearer of the divine image. Yeats as a young man seems poised on a knife-edge between the aestheticism of his contemporaries, Pater and Wilde and the pre-Raphaelites, and the prophetic vision of Blake. In an essay on 'William Blake and the Imagination' Yeats describes Blake as having 'announced a religion of art, of which no man dreamed in the world about him' and this is true; yet as Yeats expands the theme, we are aware that there has been a subtle sleight-of-hand. Yeats writes:

In his (that is in Blake's) time educated people believed that they amused themselves with books of imagination, but that they 'made their souls' by listening to sermons, or by doing or not doing certain things. When they had to explain why serious people like themselves honoured the great poets they were hard put to it for lack of good reasons. In our time we are agreed that
we 'make our souls' out of some of the great poets of ancient times, or out of Shelley or Wordsworth, or Goethe or Balzac, or Flaubert or Count Tolstoi in the books he wrote before he became a prophet and fell into a lesser order, or out of Mr. Whistler's pictures, while we amuse ourselves, or, at best, make a poorer sort of soul by listening to sermons or by doing or not doing certain things. We write of great writers, even of writers whose beauty would once have seemed an unholy beauty, with rapt sentences, like those our fathers kept for the beatitudes and mysteries of the Church, and no matter what we believe with our lips, we believe with our hearts that beautiful things, as Browning said in his one prose essay that was not in verse, have 'lain burningly in the Divine hand' and that when time has begun to wither the Divine hand will fall heavily on bad taste and vulgarity.

(Ideas of Good & Evil p. 131–2)

The sleight-of-hand lies in the very different senses in which both terms of the phrase 'a religion of art' were understood by Blake the prophet and the aesthetes who were in the nineteenth century 'preaching against the philistines in the name of "taste".' Would Tolstoi and Flaubert and Whistler, would Balzac, have seemed to Blake to have been inspired by his 'daughters of inspiration' or by his 'daughters of memory'? True, Blake was himself aware of the difficulty of making hard-and-fast distinctions, for he admits that the work of the muses of memory is 'seldom without some vision'. But the distinction has to be made, Blake insists 'for the sake of eternal life' (V.L.J. K.604-5); because, that is, works inspired by 'vision' originate in the eternal life of the Imagination, whereas secular art is an imitation or manipulation of 'nature's images drawn from remembrance'. Yeats himself falls short of Blake, though less so than a host of his contemporaries who made a 'religion' of secular art as such. It is all too easy to blur the distinction so clearly seen by Blake, for whom the source of true art lay always beyond the reach of all those acquired talents and skills which may be learned in the schools of 'human wisdom', within the innate Imagination.

However, in fairness to Yeats, we must say that the whole of his poetic life was an attempt to attain Blake's vision, for whom it was so simple a matter to converse daily as man with man with the God within. Blake had written those lines we all know:
I give you the end of a golden string:
Only wind it into a ball,
It will lead you in at Heaven’s Gate
Built in Jerusalem’s wall.

Yeats, who by magical techniques, psychical research and other means had attempted to discover that ‘gate’ missed, it may be, the direct way, great poet though he was. Yeats followed magic as a means to unbar the gate not only between the ‘sleeping and the waking mind’, but between our own minds and ‘the one great memory, the memory of Nature herself’. He believed, as an article of magical faith, ‘that this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols’. Magic is an enchantment depending upon ‘the seemingly transitory mind made out of many minds’ and the poet or musician is an enchanter who creates or reveals images from beyond the ‘doors’ or ‘gates’ between ourselves and that greater mind. Poet or musician, in former times,

kept the doors, too, of those less transitory minds, the genius of the family, the genius of the tribe, or it may be, when he was mighty-souled enough, the genius of the world.

— and Yeats goes on to contrast that imaginative activity with the workings of the modern secular mind:

Our history speaks of opinions and discoveries, but in ancient times when, as I think, men had their eyes ever upon those doors, history spoke of commandments and revelations. They looked as carefully and as patiently towards Sinai and its thunders as we look towards parliaments and laboratories. We are always praising men in whom the individual life has come to perfection, but they were always praising the one mind, their perfection of all perfection.

(Ideas of Good and Evil: Magic. p. 42-3)

Again one wonders if Yeats meant exactly what Blake meant; ‘A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees’, (Marriage of Heaven & Hell 7.K151), Blake wrote; and ‘To Me This World is all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination’. (Letter to Dr. Trusler, 23 August 1799 K.793). Blake could ‘see a World in a Grain of Sand/and a Heaven in a Wild Flower,/Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand/And Eternity in an hour.’ (K.431)
But Yeats's poet-magician – or Yeats the poet-magician – seeks to penetrate the frontiers of anima mundi, and of the world of discarnate spirits, as though realities of the imagination lay beyond, not in, the here and now. Blake looked 'not with but through the eye' at all times; whereas Yeats – understandably indeed – sought for 'proofs' and 'evidence' of the supernatural. High as Yeats stands as a poet, Blake's sublime simplicity eludes him. Blake did not for a moment doubt that there are other worlds, other levels of reality beyond 'the world of generation' but for him there were no frontiers to penetrate.

* * *

We owe it to C. G. Jung that whole areas of knowledge of the inner regions of the mind, long discarded by materialist science as meaningless within terms of natural science have been again illuminated by a recognition of the order of things to which they belong. All cosmologies of the realm of mind and spirit recognize the human inner world as basically fourfold. Jung was to rediscover and redefine the inner 'worlds' of feeling, reason, sensation and intuition. These four 'universes' were likewise known to Blake, whose 'four living creatures' (so named from the Book of Revelation) the Zoas, he has characterized and personified so vividly in his Prophetic Books. These four are to be found in all ancient mythologies; in Egyptian mythology, is found a prototype, as Jung points out, of the angel, eagle, lion and ox of St John's vision; in the four-faced humanity of Ezekiel's vision; the four-faced gods of India, the four 'elements' of mediaeval alchemy and so on. Blake understands them as at once regions of consciousness, and persons:

The Four Living Creatures, Chariots of Humanity Divine Incomprehensible, In beautiful Paradises expand. These are the Four Rivers of Paradise And the Four Faces of Humanity, fronting the Four Cardinal Points Of Heaven, going forward, forward irresistible from Eternity to Eternity. Creating Space, Creating Time, according to the wonders Divine Of Human Imagination.

(J.90. 24-32. K.745)
When Blake is difficult to understand, it is never that he is vague and imprecise but rather that he speaks clearly of what to him was plain and simple although within the terms of materialist thought meaningless. Nothing could be plainer than six lines in which Blake describes his fourfold vision; and here it is to be noted that the four 'worlds' are arranged in vertical scale of ascent:

Now I a fourfold vision see,
And a fourfold vision is given to me;
'Tis fourfold in my supreme delight
And threefold in soft Beulah's night
And twofold Always. May God us keep.
From Single vision & Newton's sleep!

(Letter to Butts 22 November 1802. K.818)

To how many of those of us who know these lines, perhaps, by heart, do they communicate those realities which he names? Yet to many systems known to Blake himself that paradigm is fundamental. Plato knew four worlds, from the first cause, descending to the intelligible world to the archetypal, to the world of souls, with the natural world as the lowest of the series; not, as for materialist theories, the cause and origin of higher worlds, but the effect of these. The Jewish Tree of God, the Cabbalistic paradigm, likewise recognises a transcendent world of Aziluth, with three lower hierarchies of Yetzirah and Briah, of which Malkuth, the created world, is the lowest term. Swedenborg knew the celestial, the spiritual (in the sense of 'spirits' as souls,) and the world of generation. Blake's Four correspond to these Swedenborgian orders, with 'Newton's sleep' as an abstract and 'dead' world which is, as he says, 'outside existence', the fourth and lowest.

According to Swedenborg (whose system Blake follows,) the natural, spiritual and celestial orders differ not in degree but in kind. Yeats, commenting on Blake and Swedenborg in the essay prefaced to the Ellis and Yeats's explanation of Blake's symbolic system sees in this difference the very basis of symbolism; 'for if the worlds differ in kind (and not merely in degree) Yeats writes, no mere analysis of nature as it exists outside our minds can solve the problems of mental life'. Within each 'world' there are continuous degrees which Swedenborg likens to '... degrees of visual clearness, decreasing as it recedes from the theme which is its source, till it
is lost in obscurity. But degrees that are not continuous differ as do cause and effect, that which produces and that which is produced'.

The materialist thinker, Yeats goes on to explain, sees ‘continuous’ where he should see ‘discrete’, and thinks of the mind not merely as companioning but as actually one with the physical organism – everything is of the same order of reality. But you cannot, Yeats insists, demonstrate one degree from another, and no increase of natural observations and sensations could in itself awake into being, or ‘open’ the intellectual faculties. Only by way of metaphor, or as Swedenborg terms it, ‘correspondence’, do perceptions of one order relate to another; by a transformation that lifts them into a new world. ‘Study science till you are blind, study intellectuals till you are cold’ Blake wrote in the margins of Swedenborg’s ‘Divine Love and wisdom’ yet ‘science cannot teach intellect much less can intellect teach affection.’ For Blake as for Swendenborg love is the highest term of the ascent of the fourfold ladder.

All these levels are, as Blake knew, present all the time; but according as we ‘expand’ or ‘contract’ what Blake calls our ‘infinite senses’ so we are attuned to lower or higher worlds.

Only if we recognize that there are multiple levels of being, lower and higher ‘worlds’, can we speak of ‘inspiration’. Nor does all inspiration derive from the same world, but may come from the vital, or the level of the soul, or the still higher archetype source. The prophetic genius – to which Blake laid claim – brings its knowledge from the source itself, ‘the fountain of light’. To most these things must seem mere hearsay, or perhaps occasionally glimpsed from afar; yet Blake himself believed and affirmed that the prophetic spirit is not given only to a few, but is innate in all, though unawakened in those whom Blake (following Plotinus) calls ‘sleepers’ – asleep, that is, to higher worlds. The prophet is one who summons us to awake; Milton, his type of the prophetic poet, Blake calls ‘the awakener’, who speaks from the spirit innate in all, to the spirit innate in all. Such is the supreme poetry of the Bible, Shakespeare’s highest flights or of Shelley, or Blake’s own, or the music of Schubert or Bach, and such supreme poetry and music, paradoxically, causes us no surprise, but rather recognition, as if we had always known these things; as indeed the divine indwelling spirit in us, knows all.
There is much fine poetry on the natural level – 'nature-poetry' like that of John Clare or Gerard Manley Hopkins, enhancing, celebrating, the sensible world and its creatures and our living participation in it. Much of the most beautiful poetry comes from the world of feeling of the individual source – much of Shakespeare, Keats’ world, Thomas Hardy, or the songs of every folk-tradition – of Ireland, or Scotland, or England’s madrigals, or those Italian and Elizabethan sonnets which carry human feeling to a point of refinement that has created civilization, in civilized ages. And from beyond this world of feeling we hear, rarely but unmistakeably, another voice, as from an order that would once have been called the celestial hierarchies. Rilke wrote in our own century of the ‘great angels behind the stars’, whose communications are universal and mysterious, summoning us as it were from beyond ourselves – our individual selves – into those regions of ‘supreme delight’ Blake knew.

There is on the other hand much so-called ‘nature poetry’ which does no more than record the observations of ‘single vision and Newton’s sleep’ and which progressively dissolves nature into a formless chaos of impressions and, without resonance from higher worlds of meaning and qualities, denudes its forms. Such indeed has been the story of the progressive invasion of our society by materialist ideologies. The arts, which in their very nature, exist to reflect the higher worlds in terms of ‘correspondence’ of symbol and metaphor, have become opaque to these worlds which, when forgotten or denied, become inaccessible, out of earshot; in Yeats’s words ‘The falcon cannot hear the falconer’. We live in such a time, in which the prophetic voice is seldom heard, since the poets themselves no longer listen or transmit the messages of wisdom that might be heard if we listened. Nature has grown opaque; and soul’s world of feeling, unilluminated from those higher regions of the mind on which that world depends, becomes a closed world of egoistic narcissism, leading progressively from trivialization to nihilistic despair. Only when each ‘degree’ is open to that upon which it depends can the universal life circulate and flow within the Tree whose roots are above and whose branches in the lower world.

The prophetic voice is out of earshot of the closed frontiers of a materialist ideology. The poetry consistent with such an ideology can rise no higher than a perhaps impassioned, or accurate, description of
current affairs, seen in the light of political or other current values, and which the daily press could voice just as well or better. Poetry, and poetry alone, operates on the vertical axis of the four ‘worlds’, opening a way of communication between lower and higher, narrower and fuller experience. Logically there can be no place for poetry in terms of a materialist view of mankind and our universe; for it is precisely to communicate the values of higher ‘degrees’, or worlds, that the arts are empowered.

Not all poets are prophets, since each writes only from that level or degree to which he is open; nor are all prophets poets in the narrow sense of the term; yet poetry and prophecy derive from the same source – ‘the True Man is the source’, as Blake says: the human Imagination. The prophet does not ‘speak for God’ from outside and beyond our humanity but from within it, from Swedenborg’s and Blake’s Divine Humanity, on whom Yeats comments:

... the man he speaks of is the inner and not the outer being – the spiritual and not the physical – the highest ideal, ‘the human form divine’ as he calls it, and not the extrinsic body.

(The Symbolic System, 242)

‘The mind or imagination or consciousness of man may be said to have two poles, the personal and the impersonal’, Yeats continues:

When we act from the personal we tend to bind our consciousness down as to a fiery centre. When, on the other hand, we allow our imagination to expand away from this egoistic mood, we become vehicles for the universal light and merge in the universal mood.

(op. cit. 242)

Thus we must regard prophecy in terms of that cosmology which holds man to be himself co-extensive with the cosmic whole, and prophecy to be at once our own highest expression and that voice of the ‘God within’ affirmed by the mystics of all traditions. To quote Yeats once more:

The mood of the seer, no longer bound by the particular experience of the body, spreads out, and enters into the particular experiences of an ever-widening circle of other lives and beings, for it will more and more grow one with that portion of
the mood essence that is common to all that lives. The circle of individuality will widen out until other individualities are contained within it, and their thoughts... He who has thus passed into the impersonal portion of his own mind perceives that it is not a mind, but all minds. Hence Blake's statement that Albion, or man once contained the 'starry heavens' and his description of their flight from him as he materialized. When once a man has entered into this, his ancient state, he perceives all things 'with the eyes of God'.

(op. cit. 244)

In its nature we cannot attempt to define the prophetic voice; at most we can listen for its utterance. Like the wind, 'man heareth the sound thereof, and it is gone'. Yet we understand prophetic words because they speak from, and to, the universal mind we all share, and they waken in us a knowledge we already possess. The prophetic voice speaks not from 'the trivial daily mind' yet it speaks of this world, viewing (to use the Irish mystic AE's phrase) 'the politics of time' from the standpoint of 'the politics of eternity'. In this sense Blake is a supremely political poet, as was Milton, as is Shelley, and Yeats too, as indeed were the Biblical prophets of the Jewish theocracy. Blake's 'Prophetic Books' – for so he called them – deal with the revolutions of his time in France and America; they denounce war, injustice, the 'cruel' moral law that is not grounded in an understanding of the nature of their 'divine humanity' but sees man only in terms of natural laws. 'Everything that lives is holy' was Blake's message to his nation. Conscripting armies, setting the poor to work at mechanical tasks, punitive laws for crimes against property, oppression of women and children – these he denounced not as a politician but as one who saw in his native London – that 'human awful wonder of God' – a city of bricks and mortar but 'the spiritual fourfold London' among whose 'charted streets' and blackened churches walks the ever-living Imagination. He saw the 'golden builders' who labour always to build Jerusalem, the city of the soul, the invisible city within the hearts of its inhabitants. He saw the reality of which 'those dark Satanic mills' of industry are only the reflection – the mentality of 'Newton's sleep' which sees the universe as a lifeless mechanism, thereby enslaving 'the myriads of eternity' to machines made in the image of that falsehood.
Yeats, both in his greatest poems and in his remarkable work ‘A Vision’ evoked, as it seems, from the transpersonal mind he sought to penetrate by the mediumship of his wife, views this world from a standpoint from beyond the ‘gyres’ of history within an all-embracing unity. A Vision is concerned with the underlying laws of the successive rise and fall of civilizations, and of European history during the last three thousand years.

* * *

Between Blake and Yeats stands a third poet, who may have known certain of Blake’s prophetic books and who was, for Yeats, the supreme poet — that is, Shelley. Blake had known Mary Wollstonecraft, mother of Shelley’s second wife, Mary, daughter of Godwin the political economist. Probably Blake’s ‘Visions of the Daughters of Albion’ was inspired by Mary Wollstonecraft, two of whose books Blake had illustrated. It is not hard to suppose that a copy of Blake’s book might have been in Godwin’s library. Blake’s championing the cause of ‘free love’ and the cause of women seems like a bridge which unites Blake’s with Shelley’s proclamations of the freedom of the soul. For Shelley’s supreme poem on the realms of love, Prometheus Unbound, likewise discourses not on the politics of this world, but sees earthly things with the eyes of the soul, from a higher degree of the scale of being. When Matthew Arnold called Shelley an ‘ineffectual angel’ he spoke as a man of this lower world to be applauded only by those who have little understanding of the power of angels to affect events through those inner worlds which are soul’s native country. Prometheus Unbound is concerned not with some political Utopia, but with the eternal reality of the universe of love that we all recognise and in our hearts desire; and which those only enter who can attain imaginatively that universe Shelley describes, whose ‘freedom’ is not one that can be conferred by any change of existing laws.

All spirits are enslaved which serve things evil.

(Prometheus Unbound II, IV, 110)

Shelley wrote, whose ‘freedom’, like Blake’s, was a state of the soul.

Shelley excels in his gift of creating personae of those archetypes whose reality is of our inner worlds, recognized by all because these forms are inhabitants of the universal, not of the personal, mind.
Prometheus, like Blake’s Albion, is the universal man himself. Asia, beloved of Prometheus, represents the soul, the anima; and does not Asia — and it is specifically India of which Shelley was thinking — represent, in contrast with the Promethean materialist West, the soul? There are other soul-figures, like the Lady of The Sensitive Plant. In the use of enchanted landscape so characteristic of his poetry, of symbolic rivers, caverns, mountains and isles, wind, and light, and night-skies Shelley is the supreme master of symbolic thought, and so only can be read with full understanding, beautiful as many of his poems are in terms of their natural description. But for Shelley natural images are a metaphorical discourse through which he evokes Soul’s country. We may read these correspondences as we would read the language of a dream; as indeed we should read dreams as if these were poems. Thus, whereas Shelley’s friend Byron entered the struggle for Greek independence on a political level — and gave his life for that cause — Shelley is concerned with that same struggle in the light of the ‘politics of eternity’. For him the issue was the eternal struggle against tyranny on behalf of those abiding values that for Shelley were those first defined in an earlier Greece by her philosophers:

In Sacred Athens, near the fane
Of wisdom, Pity’s altar stood:
Serve not the Unknown God in vain,
But pay that broken shrine again,
Love for hate, and tears for blood.

(Hellas 733-7)

The protagonists in Shelley’s Hellas are Mahmoud, the Turkish ruler of Greece, who is the type of worldly power — of tyranny — and the prophetic genius as personified by the deathless figure of Ahasuerus. Ahasuerus (Shelley takes the name from the mediaeval legend of ‘the wandering Jew’) possesses the cosmological knowledge of the universal mind; all past and future ages are known to him. As an archetype he may remind some of Jung’s figure of ‘the Wise Old Man’ who may appear under various guises in our dreams. Ahasuerus is

... so old
He seems to have outlived the world’s decay;
The hoary mountains and the wrinkled ocean
Seem younger still than he...
... But from his eye looks forth
A life of unconsumed thought which pierces
The present, and the past, and the to-come.
Some say that this is he whom the great prophet
Jesus the son of Joseph, for his mockery
Mocked with the curse of immortality.
Some feign that he is Enoch. Others dream
He was pre-Adamite, and has outlived
Cycles of generation and of ruin.

(Hellas, 140–54)

- Enoch was the one son of Adam who was exempt from death. Thus the knowledge of Shelley's potent archetypal figure of the universal mind is not personal, but ageless, and cosmic.

Shelley's Mahmoud, as a ruler of this world, is concerned only to know the outcome of the war in which he is engaged, and for that purpose consults Ahasuerus. He attributes to him that same worldly knowledge Milton's Satan offered Jesus in Paradise Regained. Mahmoud says:

Thou art an adept in that difficult lore
Of Greek and Frank philosophy. Thou numberest
The flowers, and thou numberest the stars;
Thou severest element from element;
The spirit is present in the past, and sees
The birth of this old world through all its cycles
Of desolation and of loveliness;
And when man was not, and how man became
The monarch and the slave of this low sphere
And all its narrow circles . . .

But Ahasuerus replies:

... Sultan, talk no more
Of thee and me, the future and the past;
But look on that which cannot change, the One,
The unborn and the undying . . .

- and he speaks, in words that suggest those of the Lord Krishna in the Baghavad Geeta

... All is contained in each,
Dodona' forest to an acorn's cup
Is that which has been or will be to that
Which is — the absent to the present. Thought
Alone, and its quick elements, will, passion,
Reason, imagination, cannot die;
(the Four again)
They are what that which they regard appears,
The stuff whence mutability can weave
All that it hath dominion o'er — worlds, worms,
Empires and superstitions. What has thought
To do with time or place or circumstance?

Of all English poets it is Shelley who was most learned in the Platonic
and Neoplatonic literature — the Western branch of 'the universal and
unanimous tradition' of the Perennial Philosophy; which in India
finds its supreme expression, in Vedanta, and in the Geeta, known,
alike to Blake and to Shelley, in Wilkins's first translation of that work
into English.

Shelley's art seems to epitomize all that Coleridge meant when he
wrote of the Imagination as 'essentially vital. It dissolves, diffuses,
dissipates, in order to re-create'. Fancy, on the contrary — the merely
'imaginary' in the sense of make-believe — 'has no other counters to
play with but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than
a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space;
while it is blended with, and modified by, the empirical phenomenon
of the will, which we express by the word CHOICE.' (op. cit.) Fancy
belongs merely to the natural world, whereas imagination such as
Shelley's employs nature's images as a language — humanity's primor-
dial language, older than words — to speak of realities of soul and
spirit. Shelley does not assemble his images by 'choice', as it seems,
but summons his magical world as a whole, like a dream, which is its
own meaning, and in which every part, as in music, is essential to the
whole. So with Ahasuerus and his world, in which every natural image
serves as a metaphor of those meanings and values that belong not to
the outer but the inner worlds. Ahasuerus, the cosmic wisdom,
cannot be met with unless he be summoned from those regions
beyond the reach of the common mind, which he inhabits:

He who would question him
Must sail alone at sunset, where the stream
Of Ocean sleeps around these foamless isles
When the young moon is westering as now,
And evening airs wander upon the wave;
And when the pines of that bee-pasturing isle,
Green Erebinthus; quench the fiery shadow
Of his gilt prow within the sapphire water
Then must the lonely helmsman cry aloud
'Ahasuerus!' and the caverns round
Will answer 'Ahasuerus!' If his prayer
Be granted, a faint meteor will arise,
Lighting him over Marmora; and a wind
Will rush out of the sighing pine-forest,
And with the wind a storm of harmony
Unutterably sweet . . .

It is not hard to understand, from such passages as those describing Ahasuerus, why, for Yeats, Shelley, rather than Blake himself even, is the supreme poet, uniting in his symbolic virtuosity meaning and beauty from the three worlds. What, as natural description, could surpass the fiery shadow of a gilt prow within the sapphire water? the ‘faint meteor’ and the wind that will ‘rush out of the sighing pine-forest’ with a ‘storm of harmony’, the ‘sunset where the stream/Of Ocean sleeps around those foamless isles/When the young moon is westering’? With what virtuosity does the poet use these images from nature as the language of ‘correspondences — as metaphors — of the soul’s country. As in our dreams each image is fraught with meaning and value, nothing, as in the outer world, is merely neutral, a fact observed, nor is any detail added which does not serve — again as in our dreams — to communicate reality of another order than that of common daily observation of ‘objects’. The time is twilight, between the light of common day and the mystery of darkness, between ‘the sleeping and the waking mind’, as Yeats has described the place of poetic inspiration. The summoner of secret wisdom must go in solitude, for his is an inner journey none can share. The ‘sea-cavern’ doubtless signifies, for Shelley, Porphyry’s famous ‘cave of the nymphs’, sacred shrine where life itself emerges from a source hidden in impenetrable darkness. That mysterious place is inhabited by ‘the demonesi’ — daimons, messengers between worlds, intelligences once known as angels, those messengers who on Jacob’s Ladder
ascend and descend between heaven and earth, the higher and the lower worlds. Shelley was learned in Greek mythology which for him was the language of his imaginative discourse, and he uses the term ‘daimon’ which is free from religious connotation. So the resonances of meaning are evoked, by Shelley’s potent symbols. Ahasuerus whose knowledge embraces all worlds, may be discovered by the human dreamer or searcher of the inner realms of the soul itself. Ahasuerus knows that ‘The present and the past are idle shadows/Of thought’s eternal flight’ and admonishes Mahmoud to ‘commune with that portion of thyself which was ere thou/Didst start for this brief race whose crown is death.’ None can approach that frontier on which we live without awe, that sense of the sacred, which can be experienced but never defined. The prophetic voice speaks from that mystery which in its nature is beyond comprehension.

It is in India alone that these regions of mind have from time immemorial been the theme of spiritual teachings and scriptures – that ‘India of the imagination’ all three poets – Blake and Shelley, and Yeats above all – had seen afar. For the authors of the Vedas the ultimate reality is sat-chit-ananda – being-consciousness-bliss: bliss not as an attribute of being and consciousness, but of the very nature of these. Being is bliss, consciousness is bliss. For Blake also bliss – delight – was the heart and essence of life itself in its purity. ‘Arise, you little glancing wings, and drink your bliss/For everything that lives is holy’, Blake wrote. Yeats likewise, bitterly aware as he was of this world’s darkness – and so indeed were Blake and Shelley – knew also that beyond and within that darkness itself the living imagination discerns that deathless and eternal essence whose being and whose consciousness is bliss. It is in one of Yeat’s darkest poems – ‘The Gyres’ – that he affirms, as all prophetic poets before him, that the deepest truth lies beyond ‘this low sphere/And all its narrow circles’. After describing the sack of Troy, type of all civilizations that fall to ruin, Yeats continues:

What matter though numb nightmare ride on top
And blood and mire the sensitive body stain?
What matter? Heave no sigh, let no tear drop,
A greater, a more gracious time is gone!
For painted forms or boxes of make-up
In ancient tombs I sighed, but not again;
What matter? Out of Cavern comes a voice
And all it knows is that one word ‘Rejoice.’

- the same voice, surely, as from Ahasuerus’ cavern travelled over
the waters in ‘a music unutterably sweet’ from higher worlds or
regions of being exempt from mortality; regions known to Blake in
his ‘supreme delight’. That delight is not caused by any contingent
circumstance, nor can it be removed by time’s destruction of all
things in this world of generation and death. This joy — ananda — bliss
— ‘eternal delight’ — is the ultimate truth told by the prophetic
utterance from beyond all worlds.

* * *
And finally to India, fountain of all traditions of that sacred knowledge
known to Blake, to Shelley and to Yeats. That voice of joy that comes
from Yeats’s cavern, with its overtones of the cavern of Ahasuerus,
may be traced also to another source, in the Upanishads, well known
to Yeats, since his own translation of the Ten Principal Upanishads
(made with his Master, Sri Purchit Swamy) was published in 1937, at
the time he was also working on his Last Poems (1936–39). There is
yet another ‘cave’ in the famous Katha Upanishad, in which the story
is told of the youth Nachiketas, who confronted Death himself in
order to learn the truth of man’s ultimate nature. The cycle of death
and rebirth, Death tells him, is for the ignorant; but the wise find the
eternal Self:
The wise, meditating on God, concentrating their thought, dis-
covering in the mouth of the cavern, deeper in the cavern, that
Self, that ancient Self, difficult to imagine, more difficult to
understand, pass beyond joy and sorrow. The man that, hearing
from the Teacher and comprehending, distinguishes nature from
the Self, goes to the Source; that man attains joy, lives for ever in
that joy.
The ‘fire’ that leads to heaven also, death tells his pupil, ‘came out of
the cavern’. What is this cavern? Doubtless it is also Plato’s cavern, the
world, but it is, according to the Katha Upanishad, the heart. The Self
is everyman’s secret, yet few find ‘that Person in the heart’, who is the
maker of past and future.
That Person, no bigger than a thumb, burning like flame without
smoke, maker of past and future, the same today and tomorrow, that is Self.

The Self manifests in all things and yet is above and beyond all created forms; and that Self is the source of joy:

He is One, Governor, Self of all, Creator of many out of one. He that dare discover Him within, rejoices; what other dare rejoice? He is imperishable among things that perish. Life of all life, He, though one, satisfies every man’s desire. He that dare discover Him within, knows peace; what other dare know peace?

Surely Yeats had in mind these words — for who, thinking of ‘numb nightmare’, blood and mire and the passing of all beautiful things, ‘dare’ know peace or speak those words ‘what matter’ in the face of Death, but those who in the cavern of the heart have heard the voice that bids us ‘rejoice’?
Technology's Dream of Abandoning Earth


Officially, Robert Romanyshyn is a professor of psychology at the University of Dallas, but at heart he is a deeply cultured phenomenologist in the tradition of J. H. Van den Berg of Holland. Like The Man With the Blue Guitar Who Plays Things As They Are, phenomenology aims at cleansing the doors of perception and allowing things to present themselves in the light of their own intrinsic nature, freed from veils of belief or judgement. Applying this approach to the history and development of modern technology, Romanyshyn gives us a much-needed study of its implicit 'dream': the abandonment of the body and of the Earth.

The complete inter-dependence of technology and culture is something as unpleasant to contemplate as it is obviously true. Further, we cannot really separate psychology from technology either; any distinctions would be purely artificial. Our psyches are inextricably bound up with our technology. Therefore any psychology that would be a psychology of culture must include an appraisal of technology as a psychological event. This is precisely what Romanyshyn has done by seeing technology as both symptom and dream in this remarkable book.

Technology's dream — above all an American dream — of disincarnation, symbolized in contemporary images of the astronaut and the spaceship disembarking for 'other worlds', is a collective and cultural image of enormous power, and, as Romanyshyn says, 'We are all astronauts.'

The body matters as a cultural invention. And, the body of the astronaut is an invention. We are astronauts, for example, when 'we regard out breathing as only or merely a technical matter, as a matter of the lungs, and thereby forget that breathing is also, always and primarily, a matter of inspiration. We are astronauts, therefore, because of what we have come to believe about ourselves and our bodies.'

There is an ironic synchronicity in the disappearance of archaic man and the simultaneous appearance of Space Man. The body of the space man 'is a body of technical functions, a body created or born in and made for distance from the earth. As a body of departure it is a body apart from the earth. In contrast, the body of archaic man is a body of ritual, a body in intimate connection with the earth, a body which is part of the earth.'
Contemporary technological fantasies, from the 'necessity' of colonization of outer space to Francis Crick's proposition that the stuff of DNA has extra-terrestrial origins are, according to Romanyshyn, all proof that we no longer see the Earth as home. 'Our technological power over nature is, and always has been, a matter of obtaining distance from it.'

Jogging through traffic-jammed streets amid toxic fumes of throbbing engines, headphones killing the sounds of the world around him, electronically-linked to his office by the bleeper at his belt, technological man is hardly on the earth at all...

My guess, from my reading between the lines, is that Romanyshyn is one of those who love the earth, its beauty, majesty and mystery. Otherwise, why bother to expose technology in such a brilliant way?

Satellite television, compact discs, microwave ovens, interlinked data-banks, digital memory systems, pacemakers, hormone transplants, oceanic oil-rigs, frozen food, car phones, plastic surgery, credit cards, laser printers, electronic keyboards, polaroid cameras – the list is vast and ever-increasing. And the Bomb appears to be the quintessence of all our technology raised to its highest power.

This prolific variety of technology's offspring can be followed back, according to the author, to a few fairly significant historical inventions which, in turn, made more complex 'discoveries' possible.

Romanyshyn leads us into a brilliant meditation on the history of technology's dream of disincarnation, disembarkation. It is his thesis that modern technology begins with 'a transformation of the eye into a technology and a redefinition of the world to suit the eye, a world of maps and charts, blueprints and diagrams, the world in which we are, among other things, silent readers of the printed word and users of the camera, the world, finally, in which we have all become astronauts.'

This transformation of the eye begins with the invention of the technique of linear perspective by Brunelleschi in 1425, codified by Alberti in his 1435 treatise on painting, De Pictura. It is a tale 'of how the artistic technique of perspective, in becoming a cultural habit of mind, transforms the landscape of the world, the geography of the soul.' Romanyshyn shows how linear perspective, 'in making the eye the world's measure, has transformed the self into a spectator, the world into a spectacle, and the body into a specimen'.

Following Edgerton's 1976 study, The Renaissance Discovery of Linear Perspective (New York, Harper & Row), the author reveals a number of hidden consequences in this seemingly innocent 'invention-discovery'. In the construction of the 'vanishing point' of linear perspective in a painting, the painter (or viewer) imagines that he or she is looking at the subject to be painted (the world to be viewed) as if through a window.

Ensconced behind the window the self becomes an observing subject, a spectator, as against a world which becomes a spectacle, an object of vision. In the
space of linear perspective vision the body is progressively abandoned. And, the world becomes primarily a matter for the eye alone, 'a visible matter, well on the way toward becoming a bit of observable, measurable, analyzable data, readable as a computer print-out, for example, or perhaps a blip on a radar screen.' And: 'Vision, as our only objective and detached sense, when in high definition, discourages empathy.' (McLuhan). 'Ensconced behind a window, cut off from the world, separated and distant from it, we are much more likely to forget that the world matters. And forgetting that it matters we are much more likely to destroy it.'

This phenomenon is paralleled by the transformations of the body as a cultural invention. 'To invent the corpse we have had to distance ourselves from the stench of death, but in doing so have also distanced ourselves from the smell and the taste of life.' 'The corpse is an image of the abandoned body and a way of imagining the body as abandoned.'

How startling to read that in 1543 — the very same year that the modern anatomical body, (the body as corpse, the abandoned body) makes its official published appearance with the work of Vesalius, the Copernican earth also makes its official published appearance. And, as Romanyshyn elegantly points out, 'the daring of Copernicus' imagination, “which lifted him from the earth and enabled him to look down upon her as though he actually were an inhabitant of the sun” lies in this willingness to dispense with the body in order to achieve a vision of things no longer misled by appearances . . . And the body renounced in this fashion for the practice of Copernican vision, the body no longer needed as vehicle for experience, the body now regarded even as impediment and obstacle to infinite vision, is more easily abandoned to the anatomist’s dissecting table.'

To set the earth in motion Copernicus had to forget the evidence of his sensuous body, to abandon his body, to leave it behind, becoming, so to speak, the first astronaut.

The author traces the transformations of this abandoned body, resurrected as machine, reanimated as a reflex body, then becoming the Industrial Worker, the Robot and, finally, the Astronaut. He also examines the shadows of these malconceived forms of the abandoned body in the witch, the imprisoned madwoman, the mesmerized body, the man-made monster, the diagnosed hysteric and the treated anorexic.

'What the shadow history of the abandoned body shows, then, is that technology as a cultural-psychological dream of departing earth and remaking the body is not only a dream of escape from matter but also a flight from the feminine.' ‘The astronaut and the anorexic are the soul of technological culture, its psyche split into the departing masculine self and the abandoned feminine. As we take leave of the earth, then, in a body newly created and designed for space, we might pause, turn back, and catch a glimpse of who and what of ourselves we leave behind. There on the departed and perhaps
fully deadened earth stands the anorexic, starving skeleton who mocks our ideal of mind over body.'

This is a strangely moving and compassionate book, profoundly educative, vital for any understanding of the technological world.

The author's discussion of re-entry or the possibility of a home-coming, a return to the earth as home, left me with a feeling of incompleteness, though what he did say is certainly tantalizing i.e., 'Technology is as much a dream of return as it is of departure and escape ... we might anticipate that technology as a journey of return will involve a reaffirmation of our erotic tie to the earth, and perhaps even a rediscovery of the erotic character of the earth itself.'

The poet most quoted in this book, which doesn't refer enough to poets, is, interestingly, Rainer Marie Rilke, who has left a profound body of work in which he addresses himself to precisely the areas which this book considers. We need to read much more Rilke. He is one of the great teachers of homecoming in this century.

Romanyshyn has given us an excellent method for understanding technology and its dream of departure. We will await a further study developing the germinal ideas expressed in this last thin section.

Noel Cobb

The Cosmos of Iron


This beautiful book of beautiful essays is the fifth in the series of Bachelard translations brought out by the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture. The Institute must be congratulated on this magnificent project: not only for making the work of Bachelard available in excellent English translations, but for honouring it with such handsomely designed and printed editions.

Like his fellow countryman, Henry Corbin, Gaston Bachelard was someone who believed that the cultivation of imagination was the fundamental heart-work of all culture. But, whereas Corbin charted the subtle realms of the Mundus Imaginalis as it appeared in the works of Sufi visionaires of ancient Persian tradition, Bachelard explored the elemental imagination of water, earth, fire and air, then of movement and stillness and the nature of beauty and the poetic moment in the European tradition.

Like Rodin, like Cezanne, like Rilke, Bachelard looked ('but can one really see properly without being struck by wonder?') at things and, seeing their dreams, dreamed with them. His 'engaged reverie' is a wonderful method which opens space, enlarges it and gives the things of the world, no matter how humble, a stage upon which to unfold their hidden talents. How
refreshing to read a mind so deeply attuned to soul that it flies free of the dead
lead ballast of psychoanalysis and yet touches depths unimagined by that
narcissistic pastime's aesthetically crippled theories.

Twentieth-century psychology has a lot to answer for. In particular, for its
unconscious assumption that the 'inner' world is contained solely within the
human psyche and that the 'outer' world is not a place of soul. Analysis, by
focusing exclusively on the psyche of the individual has simply abetted the
Christian-Cartesian fantasy that the world in which we live is dead and
without soul. And now, as Romanyszyn's book so devastatingly describes,
soul has fled the world, and, more and more, we are captives of a soul-less
waste land.

How refreshing then to turn to Bachelard! For, in whatever direction he
looks, he sees soul. Whether he selects water lilies in a cheerful pool on a
bright summer morning or 'the cosmos of iron' to contemplate, he invariably
shows us something we have not noticed until now. 'The world asks to be
seen: before ever there were eyes to see the eye of the waters, the huge eye of
still waters watched the flowers bloom.'

The more of Bachelard I read, the more astonished I become. To read a
page of his prose is to return to the world with new eyes, to see everything
more deeply. And to hear more wondrously. In a reverie on the radio (1951)
he says, 'Radio's evening message to every heavy heart, every tormented soul,
should be this: “It's a matter of no longer sleeping on earth, but entering the
nocturnal world of your own choice.”'

And, on the poetic moment: 'Poised upon midnight, seeking nothing from
the inspiration of the passing hour, the poet unburdens himself of all
unnecessary life; he experiences the abstract ambivalence of being and
non-being. In the darkness he sees his own light better. Alone, he discovers
solitary thought, thought which soars and finds peace in pure exaltation…'

'It is in vertical time - going downwards - that we experience the worst
degrees of distress, afflictions without temporal cause, bitter pains that pierce
the heart for no reason, agony whose edge is never dulled. It is in vertical time
- going upward - that we find the consolation that is without hope, the
Strange, autochthonous solace that needs no patron. Everything, in short, that
loosens the ties of causation and reward, everything that denies our private
history and even desire itself, everything that devalues both past and future is
contained in the poetic moment.'

Arrested by a work of art, Bachelard muses so deeply on it that the work,
like a spirit, possesses him. It speaks with his voice. We hear no clever
criticism, no pompous explanation, no savage abuse, but rather a revelation, a
revelation such as the thing itself might never have dreamed it dared say. And
it stands astonished to hear these words uttered. 'A yellow painted by van
Gogh is an alchemistic gold, a gold plundered from a thousand flowers and
worked like some solar honey. It is never simply the gold of wheat or the
flame or the straw-bottomed chair; it is a gold individualized for all time by the endless reveries of genius ...

'One day Claude Monet wanted the cathedral to be a truly airy thing — airy in its substance, airy to the very core of the masonry. So the cathedral took from the blue-coloured mist all the blue matter that the mist itself had taken from the sky... This mobilization of blue has the effect of mobilizing the cathedral... It has wings, blue wings, undulating wings...'

Of the many meditations of genius in this excellent collection, I mention the androgyny of poetry, the botany of imagination, the glory of the human hand, the dreams of ink, the mysteries of mineral beauty, the anger of the engraver and the phenomenology of oneiric space and the mighty tides of the night.

As the nest of Bachelard books in my library grows and the books seem to become accustomed to this space, it happens that the words flutter out of the pages and explore the terrain of the room, sometimes even landing on my shoulder as I work late into the night, struggling to bring soul back to psychology. I am strangely comforted and encouraged when I notice them sitting on a lampshade watching me. And if I look up they will often sing. Such songs! Then, no more weary, I can return to my task.

Noel Cobb

**Entering the Wasteland**


Belonging as I do to a generation twenty years younger than T. S. Eliot I speak as one of those who, born into a world of very different values, — essentially into the unbroken continuity of English poetry from Chaucer to the Victorian poets, with an emphasis on the Romantics, who then seemed the norm — received the full impact of the revolution Eliot brought about in the style and content of poetry. It was probably in 1926 that I, an ignorant first-year student, picked up, on the table of a provincial newspaper, a copy of *The Criterion* which contained a poem beginning, 'Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper tree / In the heat of the day...’ — a poem whose sad cadences, spoke in a voice to which I was compelled to listen. Mine was neither a learned nor a fashionable response (I possessed no learning and did not know what was fashionable) but rather a kind of recognition. I was a child of my time, and Eliot's was a poetry that seemed so wholly ours that few I think stopped to reflect that his was a personal voice. Returning to Cambridge with my discovery, it was to have scorn poured upon me because I did not already know about Eliot and had not read *The Waste Land*, a shortcoming I hastened to
make good. I put behind me my early love for Keats and Shelley and Yeats and de la Mare and set myself to tune my inner ear to the new sad music. We had reached, unawares, the end of a civilization and Eliot's poetry gave expression to what no other poet had dared to know.

Many consider those wise poems The Four Quartets Eliot's finest work, but the revolution that shook the literary world was that initiated by his early work and especially by The Waste Land. Many felt a sense almost of betrayal (betrayal of a widespread collective state of mind at that time), when it began to be known that Eliot had become a practising member of the Church of England. It was the earlier work which gave expression to the experience of the irreparable, the post-war world upon which our generation had entered.

Up to 1922 (the year of the publication of The Waste Land and also of the inauguration of The Criterion, the Review through which Eliot set about a recreation of the literary standards of England during the years of entre deux guerres), there was no question of Eliot as an English voice in poetry or criticism: he was American by birth and education, in style and attitudes. Had he not been caught, as a student, on Aug. 4th 1914, in Marburg, just able to reach France and make his way to London, he would perhaps have realized his own and his family's expectations and returned to Harvard to take up a lectureship in philosophy – the post was offered to him at the end of the War but his destiny had by then taken another course. In retrospect it is easy to see the Eliot of these years as the young American he was – even to his love of jazz music and dance – bringing to an exhausted English literary scene the keen eye of an alien and the vital shock of an alien culture. New blood, and a new language. It did not take long for the young Eliot's enthusiasm for London as the one place in the world for a young poet to work and live and move along the great ones, to give place to irritation at a country that had had a civilization – once. England, sunk in her habitual 'deadly sleep', needed to be awakened.

Youngest son of a cultured middle-class family in Saint Louis, Eliot was (as he always signed himself) the 'dutiful son' of a rather elderly and staid mother who was able to assure the head-master of Tom's boarding-school that her son was a 'gentleman' and had never given his parents a moment's concern. He wished only to please parents and teachers, was an outstanding student of philosophy at Harvard, absorbed languages with ease. He was never a rebel – his youthful need to 'let off steam' took the form of high-spirited fun, satires and parodies and funny caricature drawings of outrageous personae in letters to his cousin Eleanor Hinkley, with a vein of bawdy verses to fellow-poets Conrad Aiken and Ezra Pound. A brash, boastful enthusiastic letter from Ezra Pound to Tom's father Henry Eliot, announcing to him that his son Thomas and himself were the predestined leading poets of their generation seems rather to have annoyed the family than persuaded them that their dutiful son might find another future than that planned and laid down for him. Was the
‘old Possum’ already playing possum when young? It seems that his instinct was to preserve the poet in him under the protective covering of the culture he had acquired.

In 1922 another letter from Pound rejoices in the advent of a moment of great literature. Pound spoke to, and for, the hidden poet and his poetry, and we must be thankful to the friend who most of all kept Eliot’s soul alive under that formal guise so seldom relaxed in letters to family, friends, and literary acquaintances.

His education and culture were in fact a perfect preparation for entering the literary world of Europe as it was just before the first World War. The love-affair between American expatriates and a Europe that conformed to their picture of a civilized world still peopled with great writers and artists — those Impressionist and later painters whose best works are now to be found in the splendid art-galleries American wealth built for their reception — was at its height. The Paris to which young Tom Eliot came was that of Alain Fournier (Eliot’s tutor in the French language); of Rilke and Rodin, of Proust and Valéry and those minor but remarkable figures admired by Eliot, Laforgue and Apollinaire. European culture was still intact and in place when the young Thomas Stearns Eliot, following in the wake of Henry James and a whole caste of cultured James characters, arrived in pursuit of ‘Kulchur’ — as Ezra Pound called it in his disrespectful way. Pound also of course absorbed and embodied that American expatriate pursuit of culture, as we see from his ‘versions’ of Provençal and other literature; a culture of the consumption, not of generation, of works of human genius whose flower these expatriates gathered but whose roots were hidden from them. Within this cultural commerce between the old and the new worlds Pound and Eliot flourished.

By the end of his life — long before, indeed — Eliot — and Pound more tragically — had seen all that swept away by two world wars; but this is volume 1, and it was very slowly that the realities of the self-destruction of the old Europe in the first World War was seen for what it was, and Eliot’s images for a new poetry proved prophetic. It is one thing to know of events, another to absorb and realize their import. Eliot’s responses to the first World War at the time remained those of a neutral alien, inclined to favour the cause of the allies rather than that of Germany, but concerned rather with his own precarious survival. When his own country entered the war he was perfectly prepared to play his part and took steps to enlist, but in November 1918 came the Armistice, leaving Eliot with problems not of a conscript (it was for David Jones and others to tell that story) but with a nightmare of another kind – an inner rather than an outer holocaust.

What mysterious power works on the life of the dedicated poet — and poets are born not made — decreeing, as it seems, just those ordeals and circumstances that will ripen the hidden genius? First of the many telling illustrations of this volume is a photograph of a baby, about two years old, with tippet and
hood, smiling at the world with a benign sweetness that seems to support his parents’ later assurances that Tom had never given them any pain or trouble.

Eliot, intellectually so prepared for life but emotionally so unprepared, married, at the age of twenty-six, his first wife, Vivien. This impulsive marriage, after a few weeks of acquaintance, was not so much ill-advised as wholly unadvised; a love-match, of an inexperienced, emotionally inhibited, not to say virginal, Harvard scholar to a highly sensitive, intelligent young woman of another culture – one in which perhaps feelings were more freely expressed – seems to have been disastrous from the start. The inner truth of Eliot’s unhappy first marriage is told in The Waste Land – a truth far other than that told in his ever-considerate and guarded letters to his mother. His letters home (Eliot was not given to Coleridgean self-revelation) tell, almost from the first, of one or another of the pair suffering from some minor illness, fatigue, from overwork, from toothache or the weather or some anxiety – from anything, in fact, rather than the unhappiness of a relationship that was in the end to destroy Vivien’s precarious mental balance, and in which Eliot’s poetic transmutation was to be accomplished in the fires of suffering.

What purpose of the ‘zeitgeist’, what hidden mind, brought about that tragic ordeal, undergone by two young people whose fates were joined by so anguished a love, in order to bring into the world a seminal poem that seemed the expression not of a single tortured young poet but of a society where that unspoken suffering was known to many? Anything but sorrow Eliot (Vivien also) would admit to family and friends, anything but soul’s truth in a society that still demanded that outer forms should be scrupulously observed. Eliot was too much the ‘dutiful son’ to speak the soul’s truth otherwise than in the poem which cost him ‘not less than everything’, and he was too much a poet to hand over his suffering to the psychologists. Nevertheless when soul’s protest reached a point of breakdown he visited Switzerland to consult a psychologist whose methods were less notoriously linked than were Freud’s, to the sickness of Eros. How widespread and how unacknowledged was that sickness among Europe’s cultured bourgeoisie through the very decorum of their code, Freud had discerned. The Waste Land is, no less than is the psychology of Freud, (whom Eliot would certainly not have acknowledged as a kindred spirit) an expression of the sickness of Eros in a world no longer sustained by the spirit of Christendom, and comforted by the simplicities of Mother Nature. Eliot’s cry from the heart was the silent cry of many – like Munch’s ‘Scream’ this deeply personal poem was the collective expression of a time whose peace-treaties had brought no true peace to a dying civilization. Later as we know Eliot turned to the Christian religion but not before he had undergone the full experience of alienation from heaven and earth. Is it not that sense of an absence and a lack that distinguishes the early poetry of Eliot from the ‘modern movement’ that followed, including the political poets of the ‘thirties who accepted an
alienated world as a norm – a diminishment Eliot was too true a poet ever to have accepted?

1922 not only saw the publication of The Waste Land but also the first number of The Criterion, the quarterly journal which, under Eliot's editorship, was designed to bring together the best critical and creative work available in England, Europe, and the U.S.A., and until the second World War brought it to an end, did just that. Temenos, although our purpose has been an affirmation rather of the Perennial Philosophy than of Tradition in Eliot's historical sense, has had a similar purpose. True, we have no Proust nor Valéry, Yeats nor Pirandello, nor Pound nor Virginia Woolf nor Lawrence to draw on, – that great flowering ended with the second World War. We have published the best there is available. The Dark Age foreseen by Eliot has come and Western civilization today has no great poets. I must confess, as editor of Temenos, that I read with amused sympathy of the making of lists and the printing of leaflets ('circulars' Eliot called them in his impeccable English) troubles with Lady Rothermere (who supported the paper financially), learned that the initial circulation of The Criterion – six hundred copies – was smaller than our own (2,000 was the circulation of The Criterion in its prime). Then as now – the warning came from Richard Aldington – the English resent excellence. But the main difference lies not in the quality of the contents – we too have found illustrious contributors whose names will endure – but rather in the disappearance, since the end of the second World War, of an educated readership. Rilke held that a poem demands scarcely less of its reader than of its author. Virginia Woolf was able to address herself to a 'common reader' whose education was still rooted in the 2,000 years of Western civilization. The points of reference within that civilization which Eliot could assume to be as familiar to his readers as to himself, are no longer there. The Universities themselves impart no longer an integral but only a fragmented and specialized education. Dante and Plato and Homer and even the Bible and the Greek myths are known mainly to scholars, not, as in my own childhood, to every literate person. All those English prose styles so brilliantly parodied by Joyce in Ulysses and by that young student Tom Eliot in light-hearted letters to his cousin Eleanor Hinkley – who would recognize or relish them or find meaning in them at a time when our new multinational English is a language without associations or overtones, designed for advertisements and news-bulletins? Words have lost their echoes throughout a culture, images their associations, myths their currency, the jargon of the psychologists (Oedipus and Psyche and the Trickster and the rest) notwithstanding. All these have come adrift from that unity of culture in which they originated. When 'things fall apart' the fragments cannot long sustain a life that belongs to a lost wholeness, a unity of culture that no longer exists, unless it be the unity of the television screen, of the simultaneous instant, without a past or a future or more fundamental than these – a timeless dimension. Only the source
remains, and if history tells of the end of a civilization, Imagination speaks always of a 'new age', for the timeless is ever-present. It was in this sense that Yeats proclaimed a Tradition which history can never exhaust – but for that knowledge, few of my generation were as yet prepared, whereas the lessons of history were plain to read.

These letters are, in the light of the story they conceal or reveal, of the price Eliot paid for his poetry, painful but deeply human reading, the more so for the care with which he concealed the inner reality. As a record of the literary world of London they are of course raw material for the researchers and the journalists who thrive on these things. But that, in our view, is not the main point, but rather the inner history of the soul of a poet and of his world. The letters, with a good number written to Eliot, which complete the picture of events and relationships, are impeccably edited by the poet's widow Valerie; the detective-work which has collected them must have been immense. The presence of her name is a silent testimony that life brought to the poet at last what he had so long lacked, happy love. But that awaited him at the end of a long journey and quest, of which this is only the first volume.

Kathleen Raine

Truth of the Imagination


To read – or in my own case to re-read, for I belong to the generation for whom he was writing – this excellent selection from the several thousand book reviews Edwin Muir wrote for The Listener and elsewhere during the 'thirties and early 'forties, is at once a delight and a melancholy reminder of the decline of standards which has since overtaken us. This lowering of standards is self-evident and to seek to improve the situation has been one of the objects of Temenos. There are several reasons for this decline since the Second World War and among them it is not easy to distinguish between cause and effect. There is the general lowering of the standard of our education, at all levels, in the humanities and the arts above all, whose effect has been to reduce the numbers of the literate reading public. Writers and critics alike no longer address themselves to a 'common reader' of the kind Virginia Woolf, for example, had in mind when she used that phrase as a title for a book. One might accuse publishers of cynically exploiting this decline in the interest of 'the profit motive' in the outpouring of rubbish that floods
some sort of market with an output of more than 200 new books a day. Few (other than the University Presses) are any longer concerned with the quality of their publications, and 'take-overs' have progressively eliminated many of the old-fashioned publishing-houses of moderate size which played so great a part in the service of literature. The mass-production of books does not differ from the production of bars of soap or any other commodity. The level of culture (and this both educational and moral) assumed by writers and readers of the 'thirties and 'forties belongs now only to a minority, and that culture itself has become an 'underground' activity which an unholy alliance between publishers and the media can safely disregard as some insignificant novel, potted biography or travel-book is 'hyped' for just long enough to make a quick profit before it is forgotten for ever. At the same time, important books are not kept in print; and we are therefore grateful to the Hogarth Press for reprints of works of Edwin Muir, of which his Charles Eliot Norton lectures, The Estate of Poetry is the most recent.

With the disappearance of an educated reading public the independent 'man of letters' has been supplanted (and what a loss!) by the journalist concerned rather with personalities than with literary values, and the media-men with their smattering of superficial information and ready-made opinions. Not to invoke Coleridge or Ruskin, Edwin Muir's generation included serious critics like Herbert Read, Middleton Murry, Hugh Kingsmill, Ford Madox Ford, besides many of the poets and novelists themselves - Eliot, Yeats, Virginia Woolf, George Orwell, V. S. Pritchett and many besides who were excellent critics. How many regular writers for the weekly papers of this decade will be worth reading fifty years from now?

Edwin Muir's articles, written week by week on new works appearing in those years have all the freshness of first appraisals of authors by a contemporary whose values and standards were those that had held good throughout European civilization (as were those of Eliot, Yeats, Proust, Rilke) which, with various degrees of diminishment whether by deliberate rejection or through provincialism, still were recognized. These standards, now dismissed as 'elitist' (a political slogan, not a literary evaluation) are assumed in all Edwin Muir's writings; although, (to quote Peter Butter) he was 'a sheep-spotter rather than a goat-slayer' and never destructive or unappreciative of such small merits as a book might display, 'he discriminated firmly between the excellent, the good, and the mediocre'. Open-minded, Muir was sure of his own standards; gentle, retiring; without envy or malice, neither fame nor fashion could deflect his judgement from 'the truth of the imagination'. He had a clear eye for the meretricious and could poke gentle fun at inflated attitudes.

As a critic he was at his best on the novel, and the excellence of the novels appearing at that time invited a criticism of equal quality. His essay on Virginia Woolf's The Waves is surely the best criticism ever written on that book - it is
clear that Muir admired her above all contemporary English novelists. Nor
does he obscure the issue of her greatness as an artist by raising the issue of
her sex, and it is refreshing to see the works of women writers discussed on
their merits alone. Whimsey he did not like; Charles Williams, Tolkein and
C. S. Lewis, who dressed up religious propaganda in fantasy could not deceive
the translator of Kafka; who, a poet himself, took the world of Imagination
seriously. Perhaps he is a little hard on Tolkein: his wife Willa loved Tolkein
and periodically re-read The Lord of the Rings whose regions are so spacious and
imaginatively habitable. He was hard, too, on John Cowper Powys; he gently
deflates Powys for his reliance in A Glastonbury Romance on ‘a First Cause,
beyond the silences of the uttermost stellar systems’; ‘Mr Powys makes us feel
at times that he is a man of genuine original power playing at being a genius.’
Proust, by contrast, was the real thing: ‘He is the one writer of our age who
has given us a picture of human life on a full and spacious scale; who with the
lack of embarrassment which reveals a master, has drawn all kinds of people,
ordinary and abnormal, servants and the middle class, the intelligentsia, the
various aristocracies, and who in doing this has made us understand how a
great writer speaks, feels, thinks and sees the world. He has the opulence,
the wastefulness, which only in writers of a certain rank is supportable. He finds a
lesser greatness in the German novelists, Hans Carossa, Hermann Broch,
Thomas Mann; American literature is less congenial to him than European,
and if he underrates any great writer it is surely Faulkner whom he finds
crude and entangled. He early recognized the outstanding gift of Patrick
White; he affectionately reprimands D. H. Lawrence for his slip-shodness, his
reiterations, and that his novel ‘seemed fated to deviate from reality and to
lose itself in chaotic symbols’. The novel was, for Muir, above all, about men
and women and life as it is, and its values, and not a vehicle for personal
theories. About Graham Greene he is lukewarm, finding his ‘distaste for flesh
and blood and the average sensual man’ distasteful, and that he is an author
who has pushed ‘economy to the point where Mr. Greene cannot make his
own statement’. Ivy Compton Burnett’s artistry he admires; but the inflated
reputations of Arnold Bennett and Somerset Maugham did not impress him.

In writing of poets he is more reticent. He clearly did not care for the
political poets of the thirties, although he speaks of Auden’s ‘tormented
humanity’, his ‘extraordinary mastery of form’ and grants that he is ‘the most
serious poet of his generation’. He likes better, it is clear, the imaginative
poets; in this respect, despite his inequalities, he finds George Barker
‘superior to any poet of his generation’. He recognizes David Gascoyne’s great
gift, that he has ‘a voice speaking with its own inflection’, and ‘a sense of the
permanent in human experience’; he is ‘a poet who never goes wrong,
though dealing with the most difficult matters’. With perspicacity he points to
Eliot’s historical sense as the element in his work which explains ‘why his
influence should be so great with poets who do not hold his beliefs’ – an
element which was to lessen as he himself was increasingly concerned with 'permanent things'. Edwin Muir was himself a poet concerned with 'permanent things' and the world of imagination at a time when these were, but for Yeats and the Irish school, out of fashion; which doubtless explains his greater warmth towards David Gascoyne and George Barker than to other poets writing at that time, with the grand exception of Rilke, whose translations by Leishmann and Spender he praises.

Very naturally Peter Butter has selected reviews and articles on writers still remembered, though some of these, like Oliver Onions, L. H. Myers, Forrest Reid, Margaid Evans, Lewis Grassic Gibbon little read (wrongly perhaps) now. But what a delightful (for Muir delighted in works of literature) intelligent, readable book, presenting a panorama, a cross-section of a period. I wonder whether to post-war generations this book can possibly give as much pleasure as to my own, for whom these works appearing in the 'thirties and after were the imaginative context of our own youth.

The reprinting of The Estate of Poetry is also deeply welcome. In these lectures, delivered at Harvard in the winter of 1955-56 Edwin Muir speaks as the poet, of poetry and those to whom poetry speaks. He himself remembered a world of oral tradition, in which poetry was the common heritage of all, speaking in the grandeur of the Scottish and Border Ballads of life's enduring simplicities of birth, love and death, Yeats's 'Book of the People' which stands in its anonymous humanity with the greatest of poets. Wordsworth sought to re-establish the bond between the poet and the 'language really used by men' but succeeded only partially, as 'nature' increasingly became, for Wordsworth, all-important, and 'The Afflictions of Margaret' and Michael, and the rest, receded. His paper on Yeats seems the weakest, for although he sees Yeats as a poet who summoned into being his own audience, and that passages in Yeat's grand style 'draw their power from that rhetorical intoxication of a man conscious of being listened to' he seems to see this as an achievement only of his later life, rather than as a lifelong passion for the traditional imagination of Ireland's country-people. 'Criticism', on the other hand, as it was during Muir's lifetime, he saw as an Academic take-over of poetry, no longer the language of 'the great human family' (Czeslaw Milosz's phrase) but as raw material for the kind of analytical game played in England by William Empson and in America by Cleanth Brooks and the 'new critics.' Some of the examples he gives of this kind of solemn analysis of the simplicities of such lines as 'Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean' (Cleanth Brooks) or 'Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang' (Empson) are delightful. His last chapter, on 'The Public and the Poet' brilliantly exposes the unreality of the very concept of 'the public', and considers how the poet can, in our present situation, once more speak directly to human beings; for poets who speak to the public (surely including 'pop' poets) are no poets, and yet the all too private voice too much disregards
our common humanity. Yet perhaps that very miracle of imagination by which the poet speaks from a source of 'inspiration' within but also beyond his individual self is the surest guarantee that the truths he there finds will speak to others who in their solitude are closer to him than any 'public'. Such is the theme of David Gascoyne's Night Thoughts, in which the poet from his deepest solitude speaks in love to his fellow-humans whose reality 'the public' neither represents nor can wholly take over. A simple, lucid, beautiful treatment of the theme of the place of poetry in real life, as fresh today as it was thirty-five years ago.

Kathleen Raine

A Land Transmuted


There are two kinds of works I love: those which engender insights, and those of elegiac beauty. I do not differentiate between 'fiction' and 'non-fiction' in this regard. One can sometimes go through an entire book without gaining any real insights, even be deadened by some works – one thinks of the myriad books churned out by academic mills – just as one can read whole novels and never be blessed with a passage of surpassing beauty, a passage which takes one's breath away, a passage which, like that golden light sometimes at sunset, lets one see everything anew for a moment. Hence – both despite and because of its familiarity – this new fiction by Wendell Berry is such a delight, not because it is wholly developed, nor because it offers new insights, but because it offers passages of surpassing elegiac beauty and, for this reader – born to an American farming family – because it elicits a sadness almost too deep to be borne.

Of course, in many ways this new, and all too brief novel – less than 130 pages – is familiar territory for anyone who has read Mr. Berry's works before. Here one finds the obligatory sad figures chronicling American farming which grace Mr. Berry's essays in, say, Unsettling America or The Gift of Good Land: from 1950–1976, fertiliser tonnage increased 500%; farm work hours decreased by 69%; the number of American farmers fell from 23 million to 7.8 million; the number of farms fell by half. And one finds echoes of Mr. Berry's own poetry in the novel, lines that awaken memories of lines one has read years before, most clearly in the passages invoking the image of the wheel, or of the circle of community in a normal rural world. Then too, for those who have read Mr. Berry's other three novels set in Port William, Kentucky, there are here familiar characters, familiar territory.

Indeed, one wishes that the novel were more developed: Remembering strikes at the bloodless world of corporate or industrial farming with unerring accuracy in the depiction of an 'agricultural' meeting Andy Catlett, the novel's
protagonist, attends—a meeting filled with men without the heart for farming, but full of the unfortunate figures cited earlier—yet the rural world in America is dying for more reasons than this. There are so many destructive forces one can often hardly believe that farmers are left anywhere, that men with the grit and the heart to work the land still exist. Developers, with greed in their eyes, lure farming families away from the land; banks and foolish government programmes entice them; 'experts' exhort expanding the farm beyond its means; and above all a society with no comprehension for those who love the land and who care for it, a society based upon greed and destruction surrounds the farmer—all these things erode the farming world. On some of them the novel touches, but not enough.

Still, Remembering—perhaps better termed a novella than a novel—contains some exceptional and delightful characters, like the farmer Elton Penn, who would have said to the speakers at the antiseptic agribusiness convention 'If you want to talk to me, fellow, you're going to have to walk.' This saying, the novel tells us, made its way throughout the local family network in Port William—and of course this rings perfectly true, for every farm family or community has its sayings, marvellous in brevity and humour (as when years ago Cecil, one of our apple pickers, plummeted from the top of a ladder, apples and all and, when asked how he was, replied with a crazed cheery smile, 'Everything's great.') And we likewise know Andy Catlett, and his wife Flora, and their world of combined suffering and joy; though readers, we know them as neighbours. One can pay few compliments to a novelist's characterisations higher than this.

In without doubt one of the most poignant and painfully true scenes in the novel we see a warehouse receipt which, making the profits for the year 1906, shows that the Catlett family owed the warehouse $3.57 in costs, on which bill Dorie Catlett had written 'Oh, Lord, what is to become of us?'. This sort of thing still happens today, in American farming, perhaps even with greater frequency: every generational farming family has tales from the past of the year in which everything froze, of the year in which hail struck, or of years in which prices were so low that one took a loss. But as in Remembering, so it usually is in reality: the catastrophe goes down in the family annals, and the farming goes on, somehow. No one farms to make a fortune; one farms in order to live.

So the novel's greatest power lies in its conclusion, in that magnificent depiction of the land to which Andy returns, a land transmuted in paradisal light, a land in which everyone is restored, in which the golden light of the sun and of the 'right hand' of joy drenches the earth and its inhabitants. The Biblical power of Mr. Berry's prose here comes wholly alive; here the novel's elegiac power merges with the Biblical resonances which run inescapably through the work. Here the unity of suffering and joy, of death and life are bodied forth in their indivisible fullness, and here one suddenly realizes that
precisely in the loss of that precious rural community, that farming world, is it
catched up and transfigured — that only something being lost can be so
captured and transmuted, that ultimately everything upon this earth slips
away and vanishes, and yet in it is the eternally beautiful, the eternally whole.
The final vision redeems Andy, returns him to that world to which he at
once belongs, and does not belong, returns to him in a way that right hand
lost in the corn-picking machine so nightmarishly described early in the
book, returns him to the delight in community and in life which the modern
world had taken from him. And yet this vision is all the more pain and joy
mixed, for we know that the world he knows is, for all its eternally human
meaning, endangered and nearly lost already. But we know of the sensible,
right-living Amish farmer Isaac Troyer, whom Andy visits after having seen the
ulcer-ridden, debt-tormented industrial farmer Bill Meikelberger, and this
Amish farmer stolidly working on in the face of the modern world, like the
vision at the novel’s end, gives us hope.
In sum: one wishes the novel were in some ways more developed, that it
took in more characters, more of the ways farming and the land which is
being destroyed by this relentless modern world, more scope. But at the same
time, whether for those long familiar with Mr. Berry’s fine work, or for those
to whom this novel would be their introduction, Remembering is familiar in
every sense of the word, and a wonderful addition to one’s library. One is
cought up by its mingled vision of sadness and of joy – aren’t the two
inextricable? – and by those memories of a paradisal state to which we all long
to return, and which is barred to us by our own greed and delusion. For those
who know the farming life, and for those now in the vast majority who have
never lived it, Remembering offers a glimpse, a brief, loving glimpse into what is
being lost, and what is destroying it. That we are left wanting more is a
compliment to the author; and in a world hell-bent, a work of elegiac beauty
is no minor thing.

Arthur Versluis

Eden in Doubt

268 pp. $16.50.


WENDELL BERRY: The Landscape of Harmony. Two Essays on Wildness and
Community, with an introduction to the writings of Wendell Berry by
Michael Hamburger, and a checklist of Wendell Berry’s books, Five

The ebb and flow of the one current of life, informing the pattern of births
and deaths that is the interlinking of all generations is the point at which
Wendell Berry's poetry begins. Given the integrity of his vision of the interpenetration of the physical with the metaphysical, the life of man's work and prayer in intimate association with the land, it is with equal necessity that we note the sanity of his conception of the place of man in the greater order of reality which reaches beyond man and in which he shares. It could not be otherwise than that his poetry is free from that suffocating self-obsession that is so frequently the nihilistic outcome of the contemporary poetic voice.

In his poems Berry explores life as it has been lived by all men, except for those who, for whatever reason, have lived their life at some remove from the physical and spiritual sources common to all men in all ages. In other words his recurrent theme is man's primordial relationship with the land — the perennial world of his natural habitat. The theme is briefly and unambiguously stated in these lines from 'Rising':

And that is our story,
not of time, but the forever
returning events of light,
ancient knowledge seeking
its new minds. The man at dawn
in the spring of the year
going to the fields.

'the man at dawn / in the spring of the year' is, of course, Adamic man but here seen through the lens of those elementary values native to the American tradition of rural life and writing and which, notwithstanding their denial in the predominantly urban culture of American society, remain an enduring part of the consciousness of the American people.

Berry's 'Adamic man' possesses at all times a clear and direct experience of nature. His vision is uncluttered with the accretions of cultural history except in so far as nature itself is the living repository of man's interaction with the land. Berry goes to some lengths in his essays to show how human culture shapes and provides the 'instructions' by which man either co-operates with or challenges the land.

For the 'Adamic spirit', so to say, nature is self-evidently the 'good' that God sees it to be at the Creation. But for the poet that good is qualified as often as not by the realisation of human guilt at the rejection of the wisdom of the fields that from the beginning of the 'new-found land' has been part of the American way of life. Kathleen Raine, writing of Berry, has remarked that the colonisation of America was western man's 'second chance' with nature. The same could also be said of Australia. But on both occasions the endemic ecological wisdom of the native inhabitants was eradicated. The 'Adamic spirit' and the turning away from the land (perhaps too vast and wild to comprehend) seem permanently to co-exist in the American mind. It is the loss of the Edenic vision native to the American Indian that haunts Berry's
poetry and might be said to be the occasion for all of his writings.

If this loss can be said to be the occasion of his poetry there can be no
doubt as to its substance, which is the created world seen as a theophany:

    The world
    is a holy vision, had we clarity
    to see it – a clarity that men
    depend on men to make.

This theopanlic mirror in which man might come to discern the features of
his nature and his place in the order of created things has its sanction in the
biblical: ‘The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly
seen, being understood by the things that are made’.

The two primary motifs of the poetry in which this theophany is par-
ticipated are the cycles of the seasons, with their parallel cycles of human
generation reaching back into the past and anticipated for the future, and the
revelation of light. Indeed, for Berry the life of the seasons and the beings that
inhabit them are so many modes and patterns of the intangible light of the
spirit made incarnate. Organic growth and spiritual growth, being now
external, now internal are modes of the one same interpenetrating light
descending to be incarnate in the sap of plants no less than in the veins of
men, returning in the subtle fire that is literally the ‘light of life’ that ‘cometh
down from the Father of lights’.

Whether stated or implied the image of light is scarcely ever absent here
understood in all its subtle gradations of meaning. Yet Berry has a sure touch
in handling the distinctions of sense so that the image does not seem
over-burdened with more meaning than it can carry.

In these poems the theophany that is the Creation is the face of the Creator’s
love, making, as the poet has written in his essay ‘The Gift of Good Land’,

the ultimate mysteriousness of Creation a test of intellectual propriety
and humility… The Creator’s love for the Creation is mysterious precisely
because it does not conform to human purposes. The wild ass and the
wild lilies are loved by God for their own sake and yet they are part of a
pattern that we must love because it includes us. This is a pattern that
humans can understand well enough to respect and preserve, though
they cannot control it or hope to understand it completely. The myste-
rious and the practical, the Heavenly and the earthly, are thus joined.

As with the image of light itself, the hidden ground of permanence and fixity
is very often the ‘hidden ground’ of the poem itself, not present as a distinct
image, but all the images of the poem being, so to say, suspended in it.

The poems of The Wheel perhaps most perfectly exemplify Berry’s vision of
the ever-changing lights of the theophany as a circle, a wheel, or a dance, even
as a song, choired by the multiplicity of things. In ‘Our Children, Coming of
Age’, the whole substance of the poem is pulled together into a meaningful pattern – like iron-filings arranged in a magnetic field around a magnet – by the unnamed ‘hidden’ punctum (‘That ghost who stirs in seed and womb’) that is the eternal, creative source of life.

In the great circle, dancing in
and out of time, you move now
towards your partners, answering
the music suddenly audible to you
that only carried you before
and will carry you again.

Since the ‘mysterious and the practical are joined’ part of the cyclical epiphany has to do with the minute interactions of people with their material place on earth. In the attachment of people to the primary sources of their well-being as spiritual and physical beings is nourished the integrity of the body’s transubstantiate of sunlight, soil and rain. In the proper activity of work where the physical, the aesthetic and the spiritual are conjoined, the daily death and rebirth of the flesh reveals the pattern of meaning.

For this poet there is no room for romanticism in approaching nature. His vision of the commonality of the earth and the body precludes those passive, emotional speculations that the surface appearances of nature can be allowed to inspire in the imagination. If

The ground’s the body’s bride,
Who will not be denied

as he states in ‘The Clear Days’, then in a further sense the earth is man’s discipline, even though his ‘marriage’ to it is only consummated beyond the sphere of his direct involvement with it.

Berry’s propriety comes from a concern for what poetry is for – a proper sense of its occasion as a means of making the ‘necessary connections’ that subsist between truth, language, nature and the community of man. In the sobriety – at times even austerity – of his linguistic resources, therefore, Berry achieves the greater freedom that is the polar opposite of self-inflated subjectivity. In his ‘Notes: Unspecializing Poetry’ Berry has stated; ‘When a poet takes himself as his subject, he leaves out propriety altogether. He does not know the difference between what is appropriate and what is interesting, or the difference between what interests him and what interests everybody… By taking oneself too seriously one is prevented from being serious enough’. And in his major essay ‘Poetry and Place’ he also comments; ‘To be trapped in one’s own mind is insanity . . . To be trapped in another person’s mind . . . is imprisonment’.

Berry’s range is narrow and deep. But we must note that his poetry does not function on the level of descriptive nature poetry. Moreover, he is to be
clearly differentiated from the ecologists: man cannot appeal to his humanity through the world of nature if he has not beforehand gained a sanction for his 'humaneness' in what transcends him as a human being per se. Any recovery of the sacred quality of nature inextricably involves at the same time the spiritual destiny of man. There can be no 'saving' of nature without a corresponding 'saving' of man.

Brian Keeble

Magical Mystery Tour

PETER REDGROVE: The First Earthquake. Secker & Warburg, £7.50

Reading Peter Redgrove's selected poems is like travelling on a magical mystery tour at the speed of a roller coaster occasionally accompanied by spiders.

The tour begins comparatively slowly. Redgrove's training as a natural scientist prompts precise and satisfying observation. Flies 'wash their paws and faces like any sleeking cat'; gulls are 'ridden upon by their wings / Their ability for flight / The wings enjoy the use of them / Clapped tight around the panting heart'.

'Mr. Waterman', however, is a magical, Ionesco-like fantasy in which a garden pond begins to invade a house and its inhabitants, and becomes 'Domestic, pastoral-phallic, maritime-ghastly, stately-gracious or grotesque-pathetic', finally obsessing the husband with the idea that it might be his wife's lover.

A statement of Herman Hesse's defining man as 'the narrow and perilous bridge between nature and spirit' influences Redgrove's visionary poem 'The Case', where the tension is between 'something of God' and images of the mother manifesting and dissolving throughout the poem. There is an echo of Eliot in the walled garden, but the expression is entirely Redgrove:

...My mother stared at me from the pool over my shoulder and when I turned she was gone.
Then the wind blew three hot dry gusts to me through the broken rose-bushes
And she came to me dusky with perfume and I walked towards her
And through her, groping for her hand. And it was something about God.
And I searched in my head for it with my eyes closed. But it was gone.
And I became a gardener, a hypothesiser, one who would consult his sensations,
For 'we live in sensations and where there are none there is no life.'

This seems to be an important statement in Redgrove's development.
In 1986 he published 'The Wise Wound' with Penelope Shuttle, a study of menstruation and female sexuality, and, more recently, 'The Black Goddess', where he argues that if we trust our 'sixth sense' we shall discover insights from 'carnal knowledge' which transcend rationality and restore contact with a visionary whole. Here he seems to be taking the idea of Jung's Shadow from the psychological into despised physical processes. There is an obvious attempt to link feminine and masculine aspects of the psyche.

He half expresses this in 'The Idea of Entropy at Meanporth Beach' when a girl after bathing in mud declares:

It is quite wrong to be all white always;
And knowing it a little, I shall take great care
To keep a little black about me somewhere.
A snotty nostril, mourning nail will do.
Mud is a good dress, but not the best. She walks
In streaky white on dazzling sands that stretched
Like the whole world's pursy mud quite purged.
The black rooks coo like doves, new suns beam
From every droplet of the shattering waves,
From every crystal of the shattered rock.
Drenched in the mud, pure white rejoiced,
From this collision were new colours born,
And in their slithering passage to the sea,
The shrugged off richness of deep darkness sang.

In 'The House of Taps' Redgrove shows his talent for extending and transforming the commonplace:

...it is mostly
Womansong, a stream of laughter or of salmon or bright blue pebbles –
And the lion-headed spigot that gushes mead and mead-hall laughter –
There are so many, giving moonlight and in the day bright sunlight, rich
dark barley-wine, and dew...
Is this house of personages that prefer tenants to use the taps and sample the waters
And best of all to install faucets running with their own personal tastes and choices
In the great house of the Reverend Mrs. Earth and Dr. Waters

Redgrove's 'Terrible Jesus' denies every aspect of sensual life. He 'walks on water because he hates its touch.' He will not sleep with the 'smooth ladies.'

This is the terrible Jesus. There is another,
And none will give him a name. He takes care.
He lives all around. I breathe him. He breathes.
Like the air we breathe, he is free to us.
This is a modern viewpoint, but it does not seem an adequate answer to the profound questions posed by the Pharisees’ ‘glutton and wine-bibber’. Resistance to the ‘smooth ladies’ can be seen as a matter of taste. If Redgrove’s Jesus ‘takes care’ he would probably do well to resist them.

‘Delivery Hymn’ has a certain resemblance to Dylan Thomas’s ‘A Saint about to Fall’ written on the birth of his son Llewellyn when ‘the stained flats of heaven hit and razed, / To the last kite hems of his shawl.’ Redgrove bases his poem on the fact that during birth the baby’s head rotates against the os crucis at the back of the mother’s pelvis. Hence

The Ancient of Days is in his Heaven
Dangling like a parachutist in angelic cords
Among white wings feathering and beating.

Thomas’s ‘Vision and Prayer’, another birth poem, turns on the analogy between the birth of a child out of the safety and darkness of the womb into the terror and pain of birth and the blinding sun of life, and the redemption or rebirth of man out of the ‘known dark’ into the light of the ‘blinding One’. Redgrove’s Ancient is ‘to be crucified headlong on bone’ and he ends ‘(The Woman is coming now, and some Christ spills / Bright-red over her clothing)’. For Thomas the unborn child is the saint, the uncorrupted being.

‘Pheromones’ is a poem based on one of the foundations of Redgrove’s Black Goddess philosophy. These are the external chemical messengers given off by the body and are said to communicate profound emotional and physiological effects from person to person. In this poem a urinal conjures up such reactions. Redgrove’s ‘own genius mingles with that of the champion / And the forty-seven assorted / Boozers I can distinguish here in silent music’. The champion is a tennis ace who has already filled the court ‘with the odours of his perfect game / Excellent musk.’ Obviously, new meanings may be found in the odours of urinals, but there is a risk of the farcical, if not the adolescent.

The method is more successful in ‘The Quiet Woman of Chancery Lane’ where the blind girl ‘traces in the air / The slow rising of that mountain that hangs, the full moon.’

It is like the presence of a fountain, she says,
Like the fresh aura of falling water, or like
The full head of the thistle I stroked in the park,
And its sound is like a fountain, too, or like snow thistling.

Redgrove also uses his new philosophy effectively in ‘Into the Rothko Installation. (Tate Gallery)’:

Dipping into the Tate
As with the bucket of oneself into a well
Of colour and odour, to smell the pictures
And the people steaming in front of the pictures,
To sniff up the odours of the colours, which are
The fragrances of people excited by the pictures;
As the paid walk down the gallery
On each side of them the Turners glow
As though they both were carrying radiance
In a lantern whose rays filled the hall like wings
That brushed the images, which glowed;

Redgrove’s exploration of new territory is courageous and is yielding new and original work. The dérèglement de tous les sens and the toute philosophie was the dream of an earlier voyant, summoned to Paris by Verlaine’s fateful telegram: Venez, grande âme.

Rimbaud was, of course, a totally different poet, but his feeling for dangerous experiment and his bravery are not unlike Redgrove’s. Both give us views of a transformed world. Redgrove uses brilliant images in a view of life which he is continually constructing. He reminds one of Jung bending down, looking through his legs, and saying: Why don’t you try it like that?

Both these volumes are the work of a considerable poet. Poems in ‘The First Earthquake’ are charged with an electrical energy, while the themes satisfy Charles Snow’s old plea for the linking of art and science, and attempt, using detail which has been neglected or denigrated, to form a new whole.

They are an important achievement, but I find myself, nevertheless, listening for ‘The still, sad music of humanity’ and for

a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns
And the round ocean and the living air
And the blue sky and in the mind of man
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

Jean MacVean

News from the Otherworld


George William Russell, or as he came to be more widely known ‘AE’, was possessed of one of the most remarkable mystical intelligences of the
modern world. For him the inner life was inseparable from the outer and it was from the overlapping of the two that most of his writing emerged — whether it was the spiritual subjects dealt with in this volume, or the artistic and political writings which form the rest of his oeuvre.

Many mystics of Russell's calibre have tended to become introvert, writing from a personal basis which to some extent excluded all others. But this one-to-one relationship with the Otherworld was not for Russell. He saw his inner self, a divine spark whose existence went back many ages further than his physical body, as part of a universal creative force which was present in everything — and everybody — and which belonged equally to all creatures. This gave him access to a dimension of awareness that recognized the divine and universal truths present throughout all creation. It made his work supremely accessible, though many of his concepts are characterized by great complexity and depths.

Born in 1867, Russell's youth was marked by a refusal to adapt to the formal boundaries of school and home. At an early age he became aware of an inner personality which was both older and wiser than his current incarnation, and from then on he was guided by this being in all things. He daily, even hourly, crossed the boundaries between the apparent reality of the outer world into an inner dimension, from which he was nevertheless still able to see the world and to interpret what he saw. He began to draw and paint this inner world with remarkable fluency, attending The Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin and the Royal Hibernian Academy, where he 'startled teachers and fellow students alike with renderings of his visionary experiences' (Intro. p. 2). There he met Yeats and formed a life-long friendship which survived a considerable divergence of views; for while Yeats sought rather to adorn his writings with mystical detail, Russell turned all his inner experiences outward towards the whole of humanity, whom he saw to be desperately in need of news from the Otherworld which might check its headlong flight towards the wasteland of the spirit.

To this end he pursued an erratic course of studies into the origins of religion and the development of the inner mind of humanity. He found stimulation in the writings of Helena Blavatsky, whose influential Isis Unveiled had demonstrated the reality of the suprasensible world, and showed Russell how he might harness the extraordinary power of his vision to create a body of work that would speak to others of like mind. He joined the Theosophical Society in 1890 and began to write the series of books and articles which form much of the present volume — adopting, more or less by accident, the non-de-plume, 'AE' after a printer mistakenly corrected the word 'Aeon', which he had chosen as representing an earlier phase of human development derived from the Gnostic name for the earliest beings separated from deity.

This separation Russell saw as an essential part of the unease which was apparent in all men, and which he strove to overcome by opening to others
the possibility of an individual visionary state. He recognized as heroic the endless struggle for union with the Godhead which has characterized human evolution, however separated we may seem to become from our point of origin. This struggle Russell saw manifest in the great deeds which have punctuated history alongside the darker acts which have earned the opprobrium of all good men and women. Yet his vision remained essentially non-dual, recognizing, despite appearances to the contrary, the underlying harmony of all created beings.

'What we need,' he wrote, 'is that interior tenderness shall be elevated into seership, that what in most is only yearning or blind love shall see clearly its way and hope. To this end we have to observe more intently the nature of the interior life. We find, indeed, that it is not a solitude at all, but dense with multitudinous being: instead of being alone we are in the thronged highways of existence.' A series of numinous mystical books grew out of this belief. The best known is probably Russell's spiritual 'autobiography' The Candle of Vision (1918) which paints an extraordinary portrait of an inner life rich in perception and contact with the ineffable. This was followed by The Song and its Fountains, (1932) in which Russell sought the origin of poetry and consciousness in the divine root of the soul. In The Language of the Gods (1887) he began an unending pursuit of a primal language which had once been shared by humanity and the gods, and which if rediscovered would enable us to communicate directly with our innermost levels of being. Volumes of poetry (not included here) continued this exploration, and a body of visionary stories, allegories of the inner search which culminated in his last work, The Avatars, (1933) an astonishing recreation of the possible rebirth of the cosmic consciousness in man, a movement which many see as beginning, in however small and misguided a fashion, in our own time.

As an editor and journalist Russell worked on the Irish Homestead and the Irish Statesman, both of which became influential journals under his inspired leadership. He wrote besides numerous reviews and articles which have been painstakingly traced and are reprinted here, many for the first time. Russell died among friends in 1935, loved and respected for his work, which focused on the uniqueness of individual vision and the possibility of a renewal of the old heroic values of ancient Ireland amid the turmoil of the struggle for independence and all that followed. Among the legacies we owe to him are the renewal of interest in the mythology and literature of ancient Ireland and an awareness and deepening knowledge of the inner worlds.

The sheer volume and richness of his work, much of which has been unobtainable for many years, make this a valuable addition to any library of spiritual classics. Above all it shows the astonishing unity of Russell's output, which other than in matters of stylistic development and a deepening maturity, remains remarkably homogeneous from the earliest writings to the final works.
To seek any single quotation from the multitude of wise and shining words written by this finest of modern seers is almost impossible. But the following, from *A Candle of Vision*, perhaps says most about his luminous vision:

...the lover of Earth obtains his reward, and little by little the veil is lifted of an inexhaustible beauty and majesty. It may be he will be tranced by some spiritual communion, or will find his being overflowing into the being of the elements, or become aware that they are breathing their life into his own. Or earth may become on an instant all faery to him, the earth and air resound with the music of invisible people. Or the trees and rocks may waver before his eyes and become transparent, revealing what creatures were hidden from him by the curtain, and he will know as the ancients did of dryad and hamadryad, of genii of wood and mountain... So gradually the earth lover realizes the golden world is all about him in imperishable beauty, and he may pass from the vision to the profounder beauty of being, and know an eternal love is within and around him, pressing upon him and sustaining with infinite tenderness his body, his soul and his spirit.

John Matthews

**Art in the New Age**


John Lane belongs to the generation for whom the writings of Herbert Read, were seminal. *Education through Art* and other of Herbert Read's books on art accomplished a revolution in our schools whose effects are now evident throughout society. We have seen nothing less than a reversal in the way in which the purpose of a work of art is understood. In an older, traditional, world the purpose of a painting was to communicate visually a sacred teaching and vision shared by a whole society; the painters of those early Italian churches John Lane himself loves were often anonymous, as were the gothic sculptors of Chartres and the other great cathedrals. Later, individual artists of outstanding genius emerged, no longer in the service of a common vision. Herbert Read brought the process full circle, the emphasis being transferred from the product to the act itself of 'creativity'. For Herbert Read this creative process is autonomous, there is no unifying vision or cultural common ground.

John Lane seems also to speak for a 'New Age' for which art has become something people do rather than something they contemplate. He speaks for, and to, those who wish rather to express themselves in painting (or poetry or
whatever art) than to possess pictures and visit art galleries, or, as did an older world, to contemplate icons of a collective vision. He cites William Morris who wrote 'I do not want Art for the few, any more than education for a few, or freedom for a few', and calls for 'the abandonment of the personal work of art in favour of 'more participatory communal forms, emphasizing celebration and sacred mystery'. 'We are all artists deeply creative in our unique way. We are creative not by choice but by nature'.

There might seem to be a confusion, not to say contradiction, at the heart of this plea at the same time for the individual and the collective; one has the impression that the author is working out for himself a coherence that will reconcile these and other paradoxes, of which he is himself aware. For has not the most universal vision been discerned by its chosen servants, whose sacrificial commitment commonly sets them at odds with the collective and condemns them to the solitude and suffering of those who in this commonplace world serve a vision of higher and deeper realities? Yet it is these chosen ones who bring to us in their hard-won works — a Mozart or a Beethoven, a van Gogh or a William Blake — a universal vision.

John Lane discovers a resolution of these paradoxes in the universal Self, common to all, Blake's Imagination, the many in one and one in many. 'Soul is the deep centre of personal being which is at one with the ground of universal being, the Spirit', and again, 'The Imagination is the principle of oneness in man, the faculty by which we apprehend living beings and living creatures in their individuality as they live and move'.

John Lane has a rare ability to experience in visual terms and deeply participates in the very culture he seems to reject. Paintings speak to him, move him, yield to him their total meaning. Unlike those cold professionals who are not concerned with meanings and values, but with placing painters within the 'history of art', or who apply some catch-phrase like 'significant form'. John Lane receives each work as a communication at once to the eye, the heart and the mind — a response to the total content of the work with the total receptivity of his own humanity — the delight of the eye, the response of feeling, and something long excluded from art-criticism, response to the meaning and value of the painter's vision.

The capacity to create convincing, replenishing and consoling images of nature depends not only on sight but also on belief.

Amen to that! A work of art should indeed replenish and console. Not indeed that a religious 'belief' in the sense of adherence to a creed suffices — on the contrary (and here John Lane is following Blake) 'It is not the religions they serve which validate the arts; on the contrary it is the validity of its imaginative vision which validates a religion'.

John Lane sees full well when the Emperor has no clothes. No fancy theory but his own simple humanity ensures him against the deception of the
specious. He takes to task Francis Bacon whose aim, as stated by Michel Lieris, is

To strip down the world to its ‘naked reality’, to cleanse it of ‘both its religious halo and its moral dimension’. Such realism is rooted, I don’t doubt, in the painter’s clear-sighted conviction of life’s irredeemable meaninglessness.

So with Warhol, who ‘voiced the view that he wanted to be a machine . . . “No meaning, no meaning!”’ Did it not all begin with Roger Fry’s statement ‘It’s all the same to me whether I represent Christ or a saucepan’? When such a distinction is no longer made what results is not benign neutrality but a loss of all meaning whatsoever. John Lane summons our culture back to abiding values:

A despairing culture is not merely an unfulfilled culture or a culture without happiness, it is one where human beings, however comfortable in material terms suffer an unconscious grief – the knowledge of their self-disfigurement. It is one where an unquenchable hatred represses all that is alive – in particular all kinds of gentleness and refinement, femininity in all its characteristics. It is one where people with no means of repaying the debt they owe to life, project their self-loathing into the good, the true, and the beautiful. It is one where good is hated precisely because we know its rectitude calls our own being in question.

If I were to lay a criticism at his door it would be that he has not truly entered into the spirit of the West’s much-maligned tradition, many of whose works he so sincerely loves. Indeed he confesses as much. The heirarchic art of Duccio and Martini haunts his work, yet he does not relate that work to the unifying vision of Christendom in which it is rooted; and the same evasion is to be found in examples taken from Indian and Far Eastern traditions. True, in these cultures much is the anonymous work of simple people, but these too are rooted in a culture of shared, inherited images and symbols, in no way comparable with the unrooted do-it-yourself ‘creativity’ of Herbert Read’s Education through Art. Can the many sincere but ignorant seekers of the New Age discover for themselves those angels of Duccio and those other painters to whom John Lane is almost in spite of himself attracted, whose secret of beauty haunts him? That is the great question that lies before the New Age. John Lane’s gentle paintings of trees are his own committed attempt to answer this challenge. The book is introduced by Cecil Collins, who has so triumphantly done so.

Kathleen Raine
The Beauty of Great Art

Perhaps the profusion of art books which is to be found in bookshops is a sign of the times. The beauty of the great art of the past is caught in a photograph which captures only a limited view, remote from the work's context. It is safe, catalogued, ready to hand. Thanks to books one may retire into an inner world. At a time when Art books are in general encyclopaedic, few struggle with meaning, the perennial, value (other than financial). They are often no more than expensive 'guide books'.

Traditionalists generally portray western art as a steady decline into secularism. One is left with the impression that the Renaissance broke through the protective wall of traditional art and that all ever since is doom and destruction. Such an interpretation is seductively simple, perhaps it is touched with the dualism of fundamentalism . . . I too lament the loss of the sacred in western art but may also derive great joy from the art (in the widest sense) of the west from its origins to the present. Every work of art is a magic mirror and sometimes it is necessary to walk through the 'hells' in order to recognize modernism's sources and the extent of its malady. In order to heal a sickness one must understand its origins. This is especially the case when teaching and then perhaps a touch of 'homoeopathy' is better than a surgeon's knife.

Of the books I have chosen to review three relate to art, painting in particular, two to music, one to philosophy and one to theology. All are well produced, scholarly and easily find a welcome space in a home library.


The price of this book is also a 'sign of the times'; it is the type of publication which once we could all afford. It is a reference book in the best tradition of the Phaidon Press. Andrew Martindale has written an excellent monograph and the book is a visual joy. As a reference book it will not be superseded for many years to come.

Simone Martini was a contemporary of Dante and his art encapsulates those qualities which distinguish early western sacred art from that of the eastern icon. In Canto 10 of the Purgatorio Dante and Virgil look at reliefs carved into the rocky side of the Mount of Ascent. Dante's reaction to the scenes portrayed are not that of an eastern Orthodox beholding an icon, but is already that of a man of the Renaissance and compares the sculptured work to Polycletus. He considered them to be of great craftsmanship and that the scenes depicted conveyed to the beholder drama. In a scene of the Annunciation Dante says that St Gabriel appeared as if the Ave had just been 'breathed off' from his lips and that the Virgin's face reflected the words Ecce ancilla Dei. Surely no one would consider that Dante remained on the surface of things,
but he like many others in the western tradition considered that the literal contained 'polysemous' layers of meaning. Here perhaps is the difference between east and west, the Orthodox finds theology and contemplation in his icon, for the Catholic the literal, the everyday drama of life, contains layers upon layers of meaning relating to each individual's level of consciousness.

Dante most likely had in his mind examples such as Simone's Annunciation in the Uffizi. Though not icons in the Orthodox sense such masterpieces of western art may still open like windows onto the spiritual worlds. Maybe the genuflecting St Gabriel before the Mother of God speaks to many with more conviction than the way he seems to madly 'rush off' in icons. Furthermore the Virgin's posture plainly indicates grace, beauty and humility.

JACOB BURKHARDT: The altarpiece in Renaissance Italy. Phaidon, 1988, £75.

This is a sumptuous book. The first illustration to meet the eye is a detail of an angel from Cimabue's S. Trinità Madonna. On the reverse side of the page is a reproduction of Giovanni Bellini's sacra conversazione in S. Zaccaria, Venice. In just two images is epitomized the development of sacred imagery in the west. The visual material alone justifies this book. Burkhardt's text is translated for the first time and again one can only lament the price, for this book should be made available for students as a companion to the author's Civilization of the Renaissance. As ever, Burkhardt's approach is scholastic as well as intuitive... how better to study the change in aesthetic perception during the Renaissance than to study the change and development taking place in the altarpiece – the focal point in a church between God and his people. Burkhardt traces an ever-maturing development of visual qualities (as Dante might well have done if his life could have been magically extended for two hundred years) from Cimabue to Raphael. Burkhardt was close to the Nazarenes and, therefore, the preference for Raphael may be appreciated. However, Burkhardt notes the decline of religious art through, on the one hand, overstepping the bounds of naturalism in the pursuit of an ideal beauty and a spiritual inventiveness (Michelangelo), and on the other, a deficiency in the moral sense (Correggio). A further example of Burkhardt's insight is that he singles out Gaudenzio Ferrari for special consideration. He was an artist linked to the spiritual renewal in Lombardy taking place due to persons such as Charles Borromeo. A vision that culminated in the Sacro Monte, Varallo. What would Dante have made of those chapels and their images ascending the hill over Varallo?

PATRICIA FORTINI BROWN: Venetian narrative painting in the age of Carpaccio. Yale, 1988, £35.

This is a purely factual study of Venetian narrative painting from Jacopo Bellini (pere) to Carpaccio which draws attention to the fusion of myth (in David Jones's sense of the word) with daily life through a rich inconography. This
fascinating book sets some of Venice's most memorable paintings in their rightful context of religious confraternities dedicated to good works. Paintings of the legend of St Ursula, the deeds of St George, the life of St Jerome, the procession of the Blessed Sacrament as it meanders along the calle and over the bridges of Venice, such scenes are shown to have been precious meeting points for Venetian life. These enchanting works of art, known to most of us, once hung in the council chambers where the brotherhoods met for prayer. They are reminders of the ceremonial in which the members participated as well as tales which concealed layers of meaning. Indeed, we are still in the world of Dante's patron, Can Grande della Scala.

This phase of Venetian art had its sources in the extraordinary genius of Jacopo Bellini from whom a direct line may be traced to Carpaccio. Bellini père introduced perspective to the Venetians and Carpaccio was to use it to extraordinary levels of meaning. For example the episode of the arrival of the ambassadors at the English court from the St Ursula legend. Here a remarkable pictorial world is structured about a grid of musical proportions indicated by the buildings based on the intervals of the monochord. Sacred geometry lies behind secular pageantry. However it is fair comment that here we have a society about to lose meaning under the cloak donned for the parade of externalities.


**The Florentine Camerata — Documentary studies and translations,** Claude V. Palisca, Yale, 1989, £22.50.

These two books come from a Yale series of music theory in translation which should be noted by all concerned with the sources of western classical music. Boethius laid the foundation of the systematic study of music during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance upon which succeeding generations built. The treatise is translated for the first time and the book is richly illustrated with useful diagrams. The insights of Pythagoras are studied by Boethius in the context of Greek texts, the text is thus unique in the annals of music.

The Florentine Camerata, generally known as La Cammerata Bardi, was one of the most influential groups of poets, musicians, thinkers and enthusiasts to come together in post-renaissance Florence. Their fame in the annals of history is to have evolved the 'Work', opera. The texts translated in Yale's volume show how a concern for the insights of Greek wisdom and theory of music led a handful of perceptive minds to develop musical drama with the ideal that music had as a quasi magical power to cleanse and purify the passions within the human soul. Their thoughts are a long way from the later romantic stirring up of emotion as typified by the operas of Puccini; rather the world we might associate with these men are the religious cantatas of Bach,
or operas such as Gluck's *Orfeo*, Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito* or Mayr's *Medea* in Corinto. The aim of the text, music and performance of such examples is the evocation of purification, even ecstasy in the platonic sense, that alchemical mingling of sadness and joy, through which the soul may recognize a nostalgia for paradise.

When reading the thoughts of the Camerata two qualities cannot help but be felt, qualities sadly lacking in today's so-called 'educational outlook'. Firstly, these writers have a knowledge of the classical Greek ethos; they know with certainty the roots they consider to be tradition. Secondly, their outlook displays a reverence for the 'masters' and a desire for the 'Good'. Hence, considerable space is given to the effect of sound over a people and how the quality of sound may lower or uplift the inner life of the soul.

Claude Palisca has brought to the reader an important volume of documents which in essence matured from the renaissance humanism of the fifteenth century, especially the school of Ficino.


At last another volume of Ficino's letters is available. The letters date from the period of the Pazzi Conspiracy which culminated in Giuliano de' Medici's murder and Lorenzo de' Medici's lucky escape, an event which is felt in Politian's verses, Botticelli's paintings and which is recorded in Leonardo's drawings. Ficino offers council to a society torn by strife and stresses the need for the love of wisdom to take root as the only reconciler. Philosophy is life, not abstract thought.

When reading these letters I increasingly had to place in my mind Ficino alongside Savonarola. The friar of the bonfires of vanities is harder to appreciate. A century ago the New Italy hailed him as a forerunner of democracy as well as a reformer of moral corruption. But study shows that he was something more, his sermons show that he was acutely aware of Florence's loss of the sacred in art due to individualism and the loss of traditional iconography. Botticelli abandoned perspective and turned to Dante, Michelangelo went through a profound crisis which was to become the essence of his art. Even Ficino turned to the preacher.

Savonarola reminds us of one polarity in the Christian tradition, the Hebraic, grounded in the prophetic faith and revelation; Ficino typifies the other polarity, the mind that struggles to reconcile the Christian revelation with the Classical world.


The Book of Job is a fundamental text of our tradition. It is sacred, a text
which requires awe and reverence if its meaning is to be unlocked. When reading Saadiah ben Joseph's translation and commentary it is hard not to think of Blake's memorable and profound illustrations. I approached the book very much through having read Kathleen Raine's study of Blake's 'Job' and found the task rewarding.

Professor Goodman notes in his preface that there are three natural ways of misreading Job. All three negate theodicity. Firstly, one may deny the premise that Job is without sin and hence deny a salient fact of human experience, that is, that innocents do indeed suffer. Secondly, it is possible to negate the ethical orientation of the monotheistic concept of God due to a projection of the passions and the natural visceral response to suffering. Thirdly, we have what Professor Goodman terms 'the easiest escape', that is, pretending that Job's complaint goes unanswered.

Saadiah ben Joseph (882–942) is credited with being the first systematic philosopher of Judaism. A rich concept to be found in his commentary is that the adversary (Satan), the being who put Job to his trial, was no spirit but an ordinary human being. How rewarding is this simple insight, for in this world the power of evil manifests itself through us. We cannot excuse ourselves and blame a fallen angel. We are responsible. Religious persecution is man-made, it is man who sends the innocent to the gas chambers or shoots down unarmed persons in the streets; it is man who threatens to exterminate the African elephant and the whale; it is man who pollutes and who makes his environment a nightmare. The judgement is man-made through humanity's spurning of true knowledge and love, and the twisted jealousy and hatred of innocence.

Professor Goodman encourages his reader to study the Book of Job in the light of the literal, allegorical, moral and metaphysical levels of interpretation, to ponder upon the nature of silence and speech.

To find books such as these being published is a joy and one may forget for a time the vanity fair of the average bookshop.

John Allitt

De-pathologizing the Language


The arrival of Sphinx as a fin-de-siecle journal to take us through the decade preceding the millennium, and hopefully out to a new reality, is an event to celebrate.

As a journal that concerns itself with the inner journey, whether that experience be related to psychology or the arts, the editors have proposed an alchemical and poetic, rather than clinical and linear language when speaking
of inner states. That Jung gave us a vocabulary by which to express and identify the subtleties of the psyche, has by way of his successors too often become an impure jargon, a complex series of indices that point more to a condition dependent for its existence on terminology, than on the elusive, trans-shifting states of inner reality.

The present issue of Sphinx which is devoted to the theme of Dionysos, is stimulating, alive, scholarly but never academic, and fulfils its promise of de-pathologizing the language, and entering into that charged nucleus where the poetic vision and the psychological interpretation intersect. We explain our inner lives by imagery, and Sphinx centres on the image: it is only through the vibrant, pictorial resonance of an imagined state that we can connect.

In his masterful essay on Lorca 'Dionysos and Duende', one of the most searching and profound papers written on Lorca in English, Noel Cobb in describing Dionysos writes:

Dionysos uncurls in the vine; tightens his grip in the ivy. He is as difficult to grasp as a writhing snake. Yet, he is all stillness himself. Music comes towards him from his devotees. To be drunk with this God is to be entheos, filled with the God, 'enthused', yet completely concentrated, like a dervish walking over a bed of hot coals.

And isn't this the language that Lorca would have understood? In writing about poets we must have recourse to the language of poetry and not that of pathology or fossilized academia. And it is here the Sphinx offers a way forward. Almost without exception its contributors implode rather than describe their approach to Dionysian states of consciousness.

David Maclagan's fine essay on Artaud and 'The Theatre of Pathology', deals with poetry on the edge. The confined, paranoid, pathological genius of Artaud illustrates the condition of the twentieth century prophetic poet as a tiger in a cage. Whether that cage is the physical reality of an institution or the social straitjacketing of the poetic voice imposed by the media, Artaud remains as a constant reminder of what society most fears: the primal articulation of the poet. Or in Artaud's words:

I'm rock bottom, says the man in the street, to signify that he's at a dead end, that the silver of his soul's mirror is a pit pierced for him. And this soul is poetry, and lost poetry is a soul that nobody nowadays wants any more of.

In Alfred Ziegler's 'Europe and its Sick God' it is art which can make tolerable our fragmentary ethos, our civilized decay. We are here and now, bewildered by our own history, but still looking for the recurrent message of light. 'All intuitive visions follow one another in a disconnected way; visionary intuitions arise in "quantum leaps", in series, not in continuity.'

And if we are searching for the new vision, then it is through poetry that we
will come closest to finding it. Sphinx 2 includes fine translations of Rumi, Lorca and Trakl, and poetry by, amongst others, Robert Bly and Noel Cobb. But it is in George Trakl’s ‘Passion’ translated by Noel Cobb and Eva Loewe that I hear the enigmatic voice of vision.

Below the sinister pines
Two wolves mixed blood
In an embrace of stone; a goldenness
Lost itself, a cloud over the road

Sphinx is a journal to be read and subscribed to by all those who care not only for the future of the arts, but for the future of civilization. It is now that we must find a unifying poetic language to accommodate inner expression, or else face the increasing prospect of poetry and psychology continuing to speak in languages which in time neither will understand nor share. Technology has given rise to an ultra-specialized, compartmentalized series of meta-languages. It is the hope of the editors of Sphinx that this will not occur in the language used to designate the psyche.

Jeremy Reed

Books from India

The English-speaking world is fortunate in the accident of history which has made English the second language of India – not indeed through the inevitable ‘carbon-copy culture’ produced by Western influences on a certain section of Indian academic and other writers, but because through the English language it is possible for the West to receive a current of thought from India’s ancient civilization, and to view aspects of our own through Indian eyes. Since India is at this time experiencing a renaissance of learning likely to become increasingly influential throughout the English-speaking world, Temenos, who welcomes this current of Imaginative thought, includes reviews of some Indian publications. In particular we wish to draw attention to the important series of works now appearing from the Indira Gandhi Centre for the Arts, under the direction of Dr Kapila Vatsyayan; this ambitious project (to include library, theatre, concert-hall, museum and whatever else is needful for the promotion and recording of the Arts of India will be the largest such centre in the world and central for all scholars concerned with India’s contribution to the Arts of the Imagination. The books reviewed below are no more than a sample of those that have come to our knowledge within recent months. Others will be included in Temenos 12.

This is the first volume of a very important new series documenting the fundamental unity as well as the evolution of the Indian arts. They are considered, as they must be, in conjunction with aesthetics, the broad range of Indian culture, and Indian spirituality. Eventually two hundred and fifty key terms will be covered. This first volume deals with eight (brahman, purusa, ātman, śārira, prāṇa, bija, laksana, and śilpa). Different scholars contribute a lengthy article on each term, and all the articles follow a set pattern, moving from an overview, through sections on etymology, core meaning, historical development, major usages, and applications in the arts, to a concluding summary which returns in some measure to the initial overview. The method provides a kind of interference pattern of the interacting paradigms of a Day of Brahmā and the western linear conception of history.

The scholarship of the volume is impeccable. The range of quoted reference is formidable and illuminating. For this alone the volume would be invaluable. It does also establish beyond any doubt the binding unity of spiritual experience and underlying artistic conceptualization in the traditional arts of India. It also, perhaps inadvertently, illustrates the current state of Indian scholarship.

Western scholarship has been based upon an assumed model of the mind that makes discursive reasoning the mind’s highest power, and takes for granted the limitations of ordinary waking consciousness as universal to all healthy minds. It therefore tends to see all philosophy, and most systematic spiritual writing too, as conceptual systemization arrived at by argument and intellectual speculation on the basis of ordinary experience, at the most aided by occasional illumination or intuition. Since the ordinary level of awareness is dominated by differences, it is difference that dominates scholarly vision, and since reason itself works in terms of differentiation and is regarded as the prime means of arriving at truth, the truth arrived at is a truth of differentiation. Even in the west, however, in the work of Plotinus and some who were influenced by him, there exists a tradition that affirms the existence of higher unitive states of consciousness. If such higher states of consciousness do in fact exist, then the evidence upon which reasoning can then work also changes: if the perceiving mind changes, so does the nature of perception and of the object perceived, the three factors being aspects of one totality. In perceiving, the mind perceives not only objects, but itself. Seen from this perspective, spiritual philosophy ceases to be a speculative system based
upon ordinary experience, or mirroring ideological indoctrination, or merely extrapolated from writing regarded as authoritative. Rather it becomes a systematic description of direct experience, and a means of opening the minds of others to the possibility of such experience. Moreover apparent contradiction may arise more from the discursiveness of description than from fragmentation of experience.

In India the tradition of training the mind to enter higher states of consciousness has been much stronger than in the west, even though that tradition appears now to be in a state of partial decay. It is the lack of any single widespread and effective system of training that has led to the infiltration of western ideas into Indian scholarship, including western conceptions of time and intellectual development. From the perspective of higher states of consciousness, time changes with consciousness, which can move from the timelessness of pure consciousness, through the celestial levels of eternity, to the rapid linear time of contemporary experience, and can indeed experience all these levels together. In doing so it also moves from consciousness beyond the trinity of subject-perception-object through subject and object in unity to the apparent divorce of subject and object on our everyday level. Seen from the point of view of this possibility the Vedas and the Upanishads are records of experience, each true on its own level, rather than the results of ritual composition or discursive philosophical speculation, and the underlying unity shines through apparent contradiction.

This is a point of view that is ruled out a priori by the western assumptions of a single linear time and history and the total conditioning of the human mind and experience within them. In the very scholarly entries in Kalātattvakośa a tension is discernible between the two views, with, on the whole, the western view dominating. Dr Bäumer, the editor of the volume, contributes the opening article on brahman. She is very clear and precise in her definitions of the term, thorough in her coverage, and informative in relating the ‘concept’ to the arts, and she distinguishes clearly between brahman and brahmā, and the brahman with and without sound, etc. However, the assertions that:

It is practically impossible to treat brahman as a unitary concept, making abstraction from its semantical development. It is certain that the Vedic brahman is related to the creative process, unlike its Vedantic counterpart which is far removed from action.

and that:

The grammatical neutrality of brahman has also contributed to the fact that as such it has never been personified,

remain questionable. The main reason why it has not been personified is that in direct experience it is not a person, but beyond the personal-impersonal dichotomy (in this respect akin to the godhead as opposed to God in some of
the western Christian mystics); to 'know' it is, in Plotinus's phrase, to enter a
state in which you are your finite self no longer, to lose yourself in what might
be designated consciousness (or unconsciousness for that matter), but is
certainly not consciousness as known on the relative levels of differences and
distinctions, or in the relative state of the 'unconsciousness' of deep sleep. As
potential it is a stillness that is dynamic, and from it creation emerges, and can
be experienced as emerging. There is a distinction between the two levels, but
no difference: if intelligence becomes intelligent, it remains intelligence
nonetheless for that. All this could be regarded as merely quibbling, but it
does have a practical application in the arts as in the whole of life. Ideally the
artist should create 'out' from the unbounded absoluteness of brahman; only
then will the work or performance resonate with the physical shock of
absolute consciousness. The 'ritual' in drama, etc, is a means of stimulating
audience and performer alike in this direction. Without such a change in
consciousness all art becomes dead signs for dead ideas. What is at stake here
is ultimately the future of the traditional arts in India.

Puruṣa does not offer quite the same problems, since puruṣa belongs to the
manifest subtle levels of existence. Dr Bäumer's article on this term is again
full and meticulously learned, and very informative and valuable about the
micro-macrocosmic correspondences of the human body and their role in
the arts in India. Once again, however, the idea of puruṣa actually comes from
the level of consciousness where pure amness (devoid of one's own personal
identity) is experienced as distinct from unbounded brahman, and personal
identity is traced out from that source, not the other way round.

Dr Prem Lata Sharma picks a delicate way through the problems surround-
ing atman, which are similar to those surrounding brahman, and through the
usages of sārīra. The interpretation of atman changes according to the relative
contexts from which it is being approached, and these contexts themselves
vary from the focus on the Absolute in the Upanishads to the focus on the
patient in Ayurveda. The anatman doctrine of Buddhism is explained as
avoidance of the identification of atman with attributes, and therefore the
avoidance of positive forms of statement. Similarly the relationship of atman
and body in the arts through the realization of rasa is a paradoxical withdrawal
from the boundaries of the body through those very boundaries. Similarly
sārīra, the body, abode or instrument of atman, has divine and earthly or real
and unreal aspects. The arts repeat microcosmically the macrocosmic cycle of
creation, maintaining the intertwining of body and soul, so that body and
gross form lead consciousness back towards the formless.

Pandit H. N. Chakravarty's article on prāṇa develops the same line of
thought by tracing the subtle physiological effects of developing śakti in the
subtler nervous system, and commenting on some of the concomitant
changes in consciousness. The physiological quotations and comments are
very much to the point, though some of the terminology applied to states of
consciousness is questionable. Thus Pandit Chakravarty comments:

Consciousness is indeed and essentially free from all limitations, but on account of self-imposed limitations it shines as the consciousness of the void (sūnyapramātā). This state is the transcendent nature of pure consciousness.

How marvellous and refreshing it is to have somebody comment on this level of consciousness in a central publication focusing on the arts! Pandit Chakravarty is to be congratulated for doing so. The only misgiving is the description of this level as ‘the transcendent nature of pure consciousness’, since it is after all a manifest level of consciousness, and pure transcendence lies beyond even that unitive manifestation. On the relationship between prāṇa, the subtle development of human physiology, consciousness and the arts, however, Pandit Chakravarty is supremely coherent, and what he says is of supreme importance. He sums it up at the end of the article thus:

The vital energy, with the characteristic of universal vibration, has its resting place in the core of the heart from where it expands itself into forms. Vedic altars, sacred diagrams, representations of the deity, arrangement to fingers (mudrā), dance and music are its expressions. But it should be remembered in this context that unless we get everything linked (anusandhāna) with consciousness, installation of life cannot be possible. While watching any beautiful object, the vital energy makes us aware of the presentation of the object. This is the first stage of visual or audiovisual experience of delight. But the highest form of delight is experienced when prāṇa gets merged in the Supreme Consciousness.

This is indeed the essence of the matter. Sensory perception of the gross level of the object is only the beginning, and subsequent levels are only revealed with a shift in consciousness itself, with a move of consciousness into higher (because more integrated and more inclusive) states of consciousness. It is a lack of experience of these levels that makes virtually all western criticism of the arts basisless, and it is the gift of the Indian tradition to bring at least an intellectual awareness of their existence.

In his treatment of bija Pundit Chakravarty links the term back to the same levels of consciousness, sometimes straining slightly to make them clear on the surface level of thought and perception. In the context of the arts he is most interesting on the nature of language and the function of the bija or seed in drama. He knows the root of language in the self-knowing of the One, and the arising of the vowels that are living breath from that level. This is known to very few western writers, though Böhme has described it in his treatment of the language of nature, and this description did have some influence, as an idea, on the German romantics and at least indirectly on some nineteenth-century French poets. Of modern western writers on art only Heidegger
approaches this level, and he carefully avoids definition of it. In drama bija is the seed that unfolds from the commencement of the play and bears its fruit in the consciousness of the auditor. Manifest first as a hint, it lodges the perceiving mind on the level of potentiality, and aids the flow of consciousness through the object and towards the unitive level. Once again art, consciousness and the subtle level of the human physiology flow as one in a cycle that is in little the cycle of creation.

Dr K. D. Tripathi deals with the term laksana. From the sense of the word as sign or symbol he moves to its use in sacred iconography, where it implies a nonarbitrary link between surface sign and the inner levels of a divine cosmos: laksana is therefore not a fit matter for individual inventiveness. While this conception has similarity with some Symbolist thought, it is again at variance with virtually all modern western thinking on the arts. In literature laksana ramifies out into a range of meaning, from a beauty inherent in the conceiving of the work to a beauty in the indirectness of expression, as in the functioning of metaphor to express an otherwise inexpressible inner nature.

Dr R. N. Misra writes on silpa, skill or craft as potential or almost tangible in a work, whether that work be the divine cosmos or the work of a craftsman or artist. It is closely allied to form and rhythm (form being indeed spatial rhythm and rhythm temporal form); it manifests the forms inherent in the original nama-rupa (name-form) differentiation (a level that is indeed possible to experience in consciousness), and in Vedic usage it applies to the material manifestation of divine potentiality. Dr Misra sees the historical usages of the term as reflecting social changes and primarily governed by them, especially the development of an urban hierarchy and the changing status of physical labour.

Kalātattvakośa represents through its varied contributors a number of views, some of them sharply divided, and it represents varying degrees of experience of the inner levels from which Sanskrit terminology originally derives. Perhaps this variation is no bad thing. Being scholarship of a high order all the entries retain at least an intellectual awareness of an original unitive conception, though perhaps Pandit Chakravarty brings out most fully the experiential basis of aesthetic and spiritual theory. At the present time the work is particularly valuable, since the naturalist traditions of the modern west are bankrupt, and the arts in Europe and America are either dissipating in sensationalism or mere cleverness, or are turning towards the inner and spiritual levels of life, while in India there appears to be a crisis in confidence, in which that glorious tradition is in danger of being abandoned in favour of what is taken to be western sophistication and a western way of life. Neither life nor art stand still, but there is little future for any art or any people that is uprooted from the divine inner levels of its own nature and exists in terms of the divided and divisive ego.

Peter Malekin
Vedic Tradition

KAPILA VATSAYAYAN: The Square and the Circle of the Indian Arts. Roli Books International, 4378/4 Ansari Road, Daryanganj, New Delhi 110002, India.

That which is effulgent, subtler than the subtle in which all the worlds as well as their inhabitants are deposited, that is the imperishable Brahmân; this is the vital Breath; this is speech and mind; this is Truth and Immortality:

From whom heaven and earth and ether are woven, and mind too with all the breaths, that One alone the Self, you understand; give up all other worlds; this is the bridge to immortality.

Wherein lies spokes in a wheel are all veins gathered, there in the inner heart moves this Being, who multiplies manifoldly; that Self contemplates as OM; well be it with you in the journey to the shore that is beyond darkness.

Upanishad Mūndaka II i, ii and v

Kapila Vatsayayan sets out in this considerable volume to demonstrate with scholarship, personal conviction and direct experience (as a traditional exponent of Indian dance herself) that the Vedic Tradition is not otherworldly. Rather she points out with clarity that the Indian Arts are equally powerful and full of possibility for externalizing and/or internalizing the realities of existence and their subtle source; ‘... using the senses not as external objects but as vehicles of transcending the world of transient manifold phenomena.’

It is the significant balance between the inner and the outer that characterizes the profundity of the traditional Indian Arts, argues the author; ‘The one who has turned inward, has experienced the formless, can see clearly the world of form (rūpa) and the world of form (of nāma and rūpa) is an actuality to be comprehended but not to be involved in — nor we might say to be attached to.’

At no time are the body and the senses denied is her message. The Square and the Circle of the Indian arts symbolizes the thesis that these two primordial forms are also the two primordial symbols for the transcendant and immanent aspects of the ultimate reality. The Indian Arts owe their depth, vibrancy, power, continuity, or continuous renewal and spiritual direction to the balanced utilization and union of these two forms, and what they symbolize.

The author explains in her very first lines her realization that Indian Dance — the most vital spatial expression of the Indian Arts — was ‘... the most chiselled expression of an Indian world-view with its distinctive speculative thought.’ This volume becomes the unfolding of a brilliant scholar and dancer’s
realization that arose out of her experience and investigations into the concept of movement in space and time. The only claim the author cares to make is that the study of her tradition is as an ‘organic whole’ avoiding rigid models from either east or west, north or south.

Rigidity however is not the nature of essential Geometry or Stereometry, as these are seen as both frozen moments of time in all their symmetrical glory as well as constantly flowing from one to another.

The unfolding of this book follows a most helpful clear and precise introduction which leads into a chapter on speculative thought, the Ritual of the Yajña, the Nātyasāsha, the Vāstu-purusa, the Silpa-paũjara, and the Sangita-purusa to the conclusion.

Nobody who reads through these pages carefully can be left in any doubt as to both the thoroughness of the author, and the breadth and depth of the sources of the Indian Arts as well as their intimate and dependent relationship with the great schools of speculative thought that we know as the venerable Vedic tradition.

To travel through areas as diverse yet related as theatre design, temple building and layout, ritual geometry, dance postures and their underlying geometrical archetypes, the rules underlying the proportions of the sculptures and the sacred prayer yantras, is quite an amazing journey and an equally amazing accomplishment. Naturally there are dangers in attempting such scope but these are offset by the authenticity and integrity of the author who says at the conclusion of the Yajña chapter: 'The system is complex, with a baffling system of interconnections, and provision for autonomous divergences, nevertheless it is as cohesive and valid as a living organism with its diverse nervous, circulatory and digestive systems.'

This volume has thirty-one plates and sixty-two illustrations to its credit. These are of immense value to the thesis and the lively yet summary shorthand breviations of the human figure work well when illustrating the vitality of the underlying geometry, but one has to say the limitations of draughtsmanship become inadequate when it comes to illustrating the sculptural figures in plates 41, 42, and 43, which also lack the numbers explaining the proportional divisions in white in terms of tālas as mentioned in the text.

However the illustrations of the Nātyasāstra chapter of the plans of theatre halls in relation to a classification of the Vedas in charts A, B, and C as well as the use through movement of the spaces in figs 18 to 19 are most illuminating to a Western reader such as the current reviewer.

In summary, author Kapila Vatsayan has done an excellent job in compressing so much sensitivity and care into this single volume that we are left with the distinct impression of what is meant by systems that use the ‘... language of “name and form” (nāma and rūpa) to evoke that beyond form or without form (parārupe and ārupe), however momentarily.'
This reviewer would highly recommend this book to be in the library of every school of Art, Architecture or General education that seeks to promote an authentic understanding of one of our oldest and most venerated art traditions – that of the Vedas and India.

Keith Critchlow

Indian Origins


This sumptuous book, by an eminent and venerable scholar of Buddhism, represents the results of a labour of devotion extending over many years. Professor Chandra, the author of more than three hundred books and editions of texts, set himself more than a decade ago to look into the lost origins in India of the great Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara.

Avalokitesvara, known as Kuan-yin in China and Kannon in Japan, has inspired devotion and cult attention wherever Mahayana Buddhism has spread throughout Asia. In Tibet, China, Korea and Japan temples were raised, statues were carved and pilgrimage routes devised in honour of this saviour, to the praises of whose marvellous and infinite compassion the Lotus Sutra devotes a whole chapter. To any cry for help, the Sutra assures, from whatever peril, Avalokitesvara will extend a saving hand. A man hurled into a pit of fire, or floundering in an ocean of sea monsters, or beset by ghosts and goblins, has but to think of Kannon to be delivered. To accomplish the task of rescue, the Bodhisattva can manifest in an infinite variety of shapes.

Popular though this saviour may be in countries north and east of India, his origins in India itself remain mysterious. Can he (or she) be traced back to a pre-Buddhist source? Does he derive from a Hindu god or goddess, or perhaps even from a Vedic divinity?

Professor Chandra was inspired by a passage in Dr D. T. Suzuki’s Manual of Zen Buddhism to solve this enigma. He set himself to investigate the Indian origins of the Bodhisattva, and also of the dharani or mantric hymn which forms part of his worship. The original Sanskrit form of the dharani has been lost, but versions have survived nevertheless in the languages of the various countries to which the cult of the Bodhisattva spread. Versions are extant in Chinese, Korean, Tibetan, Sogdian, Japanese and in the Siddham script brought to Japan in the 8th century. In all these languages the original sounds have necessarily been distorted and the meaning lost, so that Professor Chandra’s task of reconstruction was therefore a formidable one, requiring the deployment of all his linguistic resources. He became, in his own words, ‘a pilgrim in quest of the semantics of the word dharani.’ For years he
persevered with versions in all these languages, 'to seek from their mute mutilations the silent deeps of substance.' He was to discover as he persevered that the task was not to be one of mere scholarship; it proved to be also a journey of the spirit, every step leading him to ever deepening levels of meaning.

For in reconstructing the original Sanskrit sounds he discovered at the same time that the dharani was not a succession of mere meaningless syllables. It was 'an earnest invocation of ineffable sublimation,' which 'rippled with words that are viaticum for the journey to palingenesis.' The scholarly processes of selection, comparison, analysis and 'rubbing', as the outer layer of a palimpsest is rubbed away to reveal the original text beneath, brought him to an understanding of the inner meaning of the hymn which the foreign transliterations had utterly failed to convey.

Much of this book consists of transliterations of the texts of the hymn in various languages. Facsimiles of the hymn in Chinese, Sogdian, Japanese, Korean and Siddham occupy nearly half the volume, which is further embellished with splendid iconographical drawings, and colour plates of the celebrated Thousand-Handed Kannon in the Fujiidera and Renge-in in Japan. Professor Chandra has given us not only a magnificent example of book production in India, of a lavishness and quality rarely seen in that country, but also an inspiring testimony that a scholarly task, addressed in a spirit of devotion and humility, can at the same achieve 'ineffable' spiritual rewards.

Carmen Blacker

A Language of Music

Matralaksanam. The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Janpath, New Delhi 110001.

First the void:
Second the seed;
Third the emanation of the image;
Fourth the articulation of the syllable,
Fifth the fullness of the void.

Hevajra Tantra

This remarkable book should be read first by anyone before attempting to create anything. I write in ignorance of Hindu culture, but write rather of how it seems to me to connect with the Western consciousness, without any Eastern technical knowledge either musical or religious. All I can do for a book so erudite and highly technical is to introduce it to the public, rather than to seek to make a detailed analysis.
This first volume is one of the most important technical treatises belonging to the Kavthuma-Ranayaniya branch of the Samaveda. Because it deals not merely with both textual and notational formation but also with the chants as they are actually sung. The complex metaphysics governing the aesthetic theories and the artistic expressions goes much further than anything in Western music.

Such a 'cosmic' view of music is not however uncommon or unknown in the West. Think of Ockegem and Josquin with their astrological charts; or Messiaen with his extensive use of bird-song, Hindu rhythms, colour symbolism and Plainsong; and also perhaps my own use of sacred Byzantine Palindromes, magic squares, and my attempting to create an iconographical world of Sacred Geometry and sacred sound imagery.

However, I think it would be true to say that the West has never been so thorough as the Indian mind and spirit in this respect, and that this is to do with the different sacred traditions that permeate our cultures. I have always thought that the Western aspiring composer should at least have a working knowledge of all the different Sacred Traditions of chant at his disposal. His 'essential' tools, if he is interested in writing inside Sacred Tradition. So this remarkable if rather obtruse volume will give him that opportunity. An opportunity to get to know one of the greatest sacred traditions of the world, and for this alone, the book must be applauded and welcomed.

The Indian and English texts appear side by side throughout the treatise:

e.g.

Page 15 (II) There are three tempi: fast, moderate, slow. In the fast Mātrālaksanān tempo a matra has three kalas, in the moderate four kalas, in the slow five kalas. The fast tempo is red, the moderate dark blue, the slow white.

Here is a beautiful piece of intervallic and colouristic iconography, stimulating, and surely immediately translatable into the receptive creative mind Eastern and Western. Indeed all of the basic Sacred Geometry contained in this remarkable book is of huge value to a composer who is seeking to refind the Sacred. I remember attending a conference in Bristol recently and listening to an Indian singer alternate with an Irish singer who was singing ancient Celtic Chants, and I was struck how harmonious was the result. I long for the book which seeks to find the common technical denominator of all Sacred chanting, because the more I hear of it the more convinced I am that they are surely connected but have parted company culturally, parted by the religious 'cloak' which has clothed the bare-bone unity that existed perhaps only when Adam and Eve first walked in Paradise. So much of what we have now are sadly only remnants, having been bedizened by corruptions.

The second half of the book gives very short musical examples in Western notation. The examples leap out at you from the page, and I personally am
most grateful for this part of the book, since I am a natural kleptomaniac and always want to transform what I love.

The excellent translator Wayne Howard ends with a postscript quoting Rowell (1982:27) "Even the 11th century commentator on the Natyasastra, Abhinavagupta, expressed the belief that time is incapable of being measured absolutely. Both he and St. Augustine of Hippo (Algeria), who lived six centuries earlier, are of the opinion that temporality in music is manifested by the internal structure not by fixed duration values." This is a profound thought on the concept of 'time', and it shows that the ancient Indian's and Early Christian's concept of time was markedly different from our own.

However, books on music can only go so far; but they do certainly urge one to go and listen... As Stravinsky said while listening to late Beethoven when he was dying: 'Je ne pense pas, j'ecoute.'

Indian music as this book clearly proves is an exquisite art of agogics, intervals and ornamentation. The next book in this series, I understand, will be on rhythm: perhaps the richest part of all the ingredients of understanding and being able to listen to Indian music. These books should prove to be an essential part of a young composers training, as essential surely as the study of the great ages of Byzantium or of Plainsong and Polyphony in the West.

John Tavener

A Miltonic Tyger


Generations of poetry lovers have been fascinated by Blake's dynamic poem, 'The Tyger', in the Songs of Experience (1794). K. D. Sethna, a Parsi scholar residing at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, has thrown new light both on the imagery employed and on the 'wrath of the Lamb' embodied in the symbol of the tiger as he perceives it.

With consummate skill he analyses the internal pattern of the poem and links it with Christian doctrine. He quotes a key passage from St John's The Revelation, I:13–16:

I saw... one like unto the Son of Man... His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow; and the eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet were like fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace... and out of his mouth went a two-edged sword; and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.
Sethna's comment reads: 'A furnace-forged Tygerish divineness, fire-eyed and burning bright, seems to be here, topped with a Lamb-like purity' (p. 46). Turning to Isaiah, XIV:12-14, he quotes the familiar passage: 'How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! . . . For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . . I will be like the most High.' Sethna adds that by his 'infamous insurrection' Lucifer 'becomes a perverted brilliance, a power of the night, and leads his own starry hosts to do the same' (p. 47). Collecting evidence to show that a winged Christ was a familiar image found both in Biblical sources and in Christian religious poetry, Sethna has an unusual reference to a little known hymn on the Ascension of Jesus by Bishop Synesius; a contemporary of St Athanasius (c. 295–373), the hymn ending:

But thou, with spreading wings,
Broke through the azure dome
And rested in the spheres
Of pure Intelligence

(Sethna, p. 50)

He concludes this part of his argument by discussing the dual relationship between God the Father and God the Son, contrasting sayings such as: 'I and my Father are one,' 'All things that the Father hath are mine,' with: 'My Father is greater than I,' 'I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.'

Having shown that the entire structure of The Tyger is based in Christian doctrine, Sethna proceeds to examine the Miltonic basis of the poem. This long, 75-page chapter is the most exciting and the most illuminating in the whole book. With relentless persistence the author reveals not only Blake's conscious and unconscious borrowings from Milton's Paradise Lost, but also how Blake's poetic consciousness absorbs and recreates the material taken from the older poet. A few examples will suffice. Satan's armies in Paradise Lost stand

Bristl'd with upright beams innumerable
Of rigid spears, and helmets throng'd, and shields...

(Bk. VI, 82–83)

And again:

All in a moment through the gloom were seen
Ten thousand banners rise in the air,
With orient colours waving: with them rose
A forest huge of spears...

(Bk. I, 544–547)

The combination of forests with spears is indeed striking as Sethna remarks, but even more so is the comparison between Blake's
what dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

with Milton's description of Christ amidst Satan's armies:

Full soon
Among them he arrived, in his right hand
Grasping ten thousand thunders, which he sent
Before him...

(Bk. VI, 834–838)

Even more amazing is the comparison between these lines from The Tyger

What the hammer? what the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil?

and the following from Paradise Lost:

A dungeon horrible, on all sides round,
As one great furnace flam'd...

(Bk. I, 61–62)

The chain is compared by Sethna to the Miltonic 'adamantine chains and penal fire' and the phrase, 'Chain'd on the burning lake' (Sethna, p. 65).

Sethna, however, warns the reader that at the time The Tyger was composed, Blake 'stood steeped in Miltonic Christology without the Miltonic Puritanism' (p. 69). Hence the astonished question: 'Did he who made the Lamb make thee?' Sethna continues to examine word and image in Blake's poem comparing these to the relevant passages in Paradise Lost. He concludes this long chapter with the statement: 'So far as intelligibility is concerned, perhaps the best manner of stating the situation is that if we take Blake's poem by itself we have to press its sense out of it, but if we take it in company with Milton the sense Blake has put into it presses upon us on its own' (p. 127).

Nor does Sethna overlook the impressive alchemical and hermetic evidence Kathleen Raine puts forward in her comprehensive interpretation of The Tyger (Blake and Tradition, 1969, II, 3–31). On the contrary, he argues that the Miltonic basis of the poem enriches our understanding of it.

In the brief chapter which follows, Sethna discusses the variant readings we find in the Rossetti MS. of The Tyger as also the illustration which accompanies the poem. Sethna acknowledges that 'The Tyger depicted by Blake is certainly like no physical specimen of Felix Tigris' (p. 133), asserting that whether 'represented as quaint or impressive, the Tyger would equally be the symbol we have made of it' (p. 136).

But there is a hidden significance in the illustration, Sethna himself giving us the clue to it. As early as p. 38 of his study he had said that the question: 'Did
he who made the Lamb make thee?' is 'charged with an intense conflict in Blake’s religious mind: he attempts absolute acceptance yet suffers near-bafflement.' True, the blasted, half-charred tree trunk on the right of the page does reflect the 'devouring fire' of the Tyger in the poem. But the depiction of the Tyger is at variance with the text. Whether we look at the water colour in the British Museum, reproduced in Benn’s facsimile in colour (1927), where one discovers a toy tiger with googly eyes and a smirk on its lips, the whole painted a blotchy pink on the underbelly, and a watery grey-blue on the back, colours one would not normally associate with the handsome animal in Nature, or whether we scrutinize the black and white reproduction of the beast in Wicksteed’s Blake’s Innocence and Experience (Dent, 1928), where the Tyger is shown with eyes staring into futurity and an open mouth, a stricken look pervading the whole, there is no connection between text and illustration. All one can assert is that the stricken look on the face of the tiger would seem to reflect the religious crisis in Blake’s mind referred to by Sethna.

When one turns to the beautiful water colour drawings Blake created to illustrate Paradise Lost, the crisis deepens. Blake had painted two sets, one a series of twelve water colours hung in the Huntington Library, California, and the other a set of nine drawings to be seen in the Fine Arts Museum, Boston. It was these last that were reproduced in colour for the first time by the Heritage Press, New York, in 1940, together with Milton’s Paradise Lost.

The fine water colour design depicting the downfall of the rebel angels reveals a benign Christ kneeling on the cyrstal wall of Heaven shown as the sweep of angel wings forming an arc. In his left hand he holds a massive bow strung with a pointed arrow. His right draws the string taut. The lips are pursed in one-pointed concentration as the Hindus would say, the eyes wide open, serene, dispassionate, the entire figure haloed in a large, round, rose-tinted Sun indicating the new dawn the incarnate Christ will bring with him for all mankind. The Angels of the Divine Presence, three on each side of Christ, are drawn with mournful faces and hands raised in characteristic gestures of pity and sorrow. The lurid flames of Hell are muted into pale, red streaks at the edges of which are discerned two arrows on either side of Christ emphasizing what is to follow. The robust, muscular rebel angels are shown falling headlong into the abyss, their faces contorted with horror and despair. There is not a trace of the Tyger-Christ of Sethna’s interpretation to be found in this particular water colour. Nor do we find the Christ of The Everlasting Gospel, full of ‘furious ire’, scourge in hand, routing the hypocrites from the Temple, in this drawing either.

Turning, just for a moment, to the most poignantly moving painting in the Boston series, the one with the caption: ‘Father, thy word is passed, Man shall find Grace;’ it is again Christ the Compassionate who is shown. God the Father is seated on a massive granite block, his ‘throne’ (the Druid stone of cruel sacrifice?). His head is bowed over the shoulder of his beloved Son, his
hands inert, listless, lie on his knees, the entire posture one of utter desolation. Facing God the Father, the gracious figure of Christ, in floating draperies, rises from a cloud border and dominates the whole composition. His arms are spread wide as if embracing not only all mankind, but the entire cosmos. The face is turned to the left, the eyes wide open, large luminous, serene, the mouth closed, the entire countenance grave, contemplative. Two angels sweep down on either side, laying their crowns at Christ’s feet. Below, is a reclining, guardian angel, an upright spear in his right hand, his left strapped to a shield at elbow and wrist. His brows are knitted, eyes troubled,
mouth half open, questioning. Indeed, the unspoken question seems to hang palpably in mid-air: 'Must it be so? Is there no other way?' The stark horror of the Crucifixion rises before us. Again, one is forced to realize that Christ, who is all-Love, all-Compassion, could not possibly indulge in hatred, revenge, or wrath, even if he was going about his Father’s business.

To sum up. Sethna is at his best when revealing the Miltonic basis of the poem. The last chapter, which deals with The Tyger in the general background of Blake’s work, covers much ground familiar to all Blake students. This, combined with the rather prolix arguments with Kathleen Raine’s interpretation, point by point, is apt to make this concluding chapter more wearisome than convincing. The fact remains that both the Tyger and the Lamb are described by Blake as having been made. To make, implies a maker, a creator. In this instance, God the Father. To equate the Tyger with Christ is not supported by the illustration in the poem. Nor do we find a wrathful Christ in any of Blake’s numerous paintings and engravings. This is significant. The last word on Blake’s Tyger may never be said, for it will remain, in the words of Kathleen Raine, ‘from beginning to end an unanswered question’ (Blake and Tradition, 1969, II, p. 20). Hence the tension underlying the grandeur of the imagery.

Piloo Nanavutty
Notes on Contributors

John Allitt, in collaboration with Ian Caddy, is at present occupied in reviving the music of Johann Simon Mayr and of his student, Gaetano Donizetti. The Mayr + Donizetti Collaboration has prepared musical editions and has helped to bring about unique performances on the radio and in the concert hall. A recording is shortly to be issued, as well as a book on Donizetti's songs. Also in preparation is the first comprehensive study of Mayr.


Carmen Blacker is Reader in Japanese at Cambridge University and the author of The Catalpa Bow, a study of shamanistic practises in Japan, and other writings on Japanese religions and folk-lore. She has travelled widely in Japan, visiting shrines and temples and places of pilgrimage.

Suheil Bushrui, formerly Professor at the American University at Beirut, left Lebanon when teaching became impossible. Now Distinguished Professor of Peace Studies at the University of Maryland. Yeats scholar and also scholar of Arabic literature. Author of works on Yeats's Arabic sources, on Kahlil Gibran, deeply involved in international Peace Studies.

Noel Cobb is a poet, essayist and psychologist who is working to create an archetypal therapy which would pay as much attention to the soul of the world and its sufferings as to that of the individual. He is editor of the annual journal SPHINX and chairman of the London Convivium for Archetypal Studies, the charitable trust which publishes SPHINX and holds annual conferences designed to explore the possibilities of a truly cultural psychology. Published works: Prospero's Island (1984).

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.

Paul Davies, born 1962, read English at Cambridge, has a PhD in modern literature from Reading University, where he has lectured on Romantic and modern fiction, poetry and criticism, and on the relation of literature to film. Lecturer at the University of Ulster, Coleraine. A book on Samuel Beckett is in preparation.

Jack Herbert was born and grew up in Wales, studied Blake under Kathleen Raine at Cambridge, and lectured at Kyushu University, Japan, and the University of Munich before becoming staff tutor in literature with the Cambridge Board of Extra-Mural Studies.


Jean MacVean, radio playwright, novelist, poet, etc, Malory enthusiast. Her novel The Intermediaries was based on Gottfried von Strassburg's Tristan. Edited and introduced Thomas Blackburn's Last Poems (Peter Owen); Eros Reflected a sequence of poems, Agenda editions.

Peter Malekin, Lecturer in English at the University of Durham. He has also taught at the Universities of Uppsala and Tübingen. He is at present working on a new translation of selections from the writings of Jakob Boehme.
Keshav Malik, poet and critic. His latest volume of verse (1986) was titled Shapes in Feeling Plaster (Arnold Heineman, India). He edited Thought (weekly), Indian Literature (bimonthly) and Art and Poetry (quarterly) for several years. He now edits Poetry Bulletin (of the Poetry Society, of which he is one of the founders). He is also the art critic of the Times of India, a morning newspaper published in New Delhi, where he lives.


Akhtar Qamber has taught at Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore; Isabella Thoburn College Lucknow, and at Delhi University, and as visiting lecturer at the International Christian University, Tokio, Western College for Women, Oxford Ohio. She has published papers on Sufism and other Islamic themes in India Cultures (Jabalpur), Islamic Culture (Hyderabad) and Islam and the Modern Age (New Delhi) on the Noh Theatre, Yeats, Joyce and Eliot. Book publications include Yeats and the Noh (Tokio 1974), Sabbatical in Japan (verse) 1976, The Last Musha’irah of Delhi, Farhatullah Baig’s Urdu classic, English translation by Ki Akhri Shama, Introduction, Notes and Bibliography by Akhtar Qamber (Orient Longman 1979).
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 1990 (Green Books). French translations, Visques du Jour et de la Nuit (1989) and La Présence (poems) 1989.

Jeremy Reed was born in Jersey and lives in London. Amongst his books in print are, Selected poems (Penguin) Engaging form, Nineties (poems, Jonathan Cape), Hymns to the Night (tr. from Novalis), Madness: The Price of Poetry (essays, Peter Owen 1989), Blue Rock (novel, Cape 1988), Red Eclipse (novel, Peter Owen 1989).

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.


NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS


Kapila Vatsyayan, dancer, writer, critic and art historian, equally at home in Sanskrit and English literature, combines in herself the rigours and purity of traditional learning and the incisiveness of modern critical analysis. She has written extensively on the theories of Indian art as also of the inter-relationship of the Indian arts. Her first book, Classical Indian Dance and the Arts is an authoritative work and has been followed by many others including the definitive study Dance in Indian Painting, Traditional Indian Theatre and three volumes of the Gita Govinda in Indian Art, etc. besides some hundred research papers. She is now responsible for the setting up of the Indira Gandhi Centre for the Arts, in New Delhi.

Sachchidananda Vatsyayan, or Agnyeya as he is better known, was one of the leading figures in modern Hindi literature. As poet, novelist and essayist, he led the modern movement in Hindi writing and is known primarily as an innovator, constantly experimenting with both form and ideas in his work. Author of several books of poetry, he was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for his collection Angan Ke Par Dwar.

Nirmal Verma was born in Simla in 1929 in a middle-class family and took his Master’s degree in History from St Stephen’s College, Delhi. While at the University he joined the Communist Party but resigned some years later disillusioned with the role of the Marxists both in India and abroad. He went to Prague in 1959 on the invitation of the Czechoslovak Oriental Institute to translate modern Czech authors into Hindi. Helped by the Czech Writers’ Union, Verma stayed on in Prague until 1968 when the Soviet tanks arrived. He published then not only the translations of three Czech novels besides two collections of short stories and a play, but also, in 1964, his own first novel, a collection of short stories Jalti Jhari (The Burning Bush) and a volume of travelogues and reminiscences. After his return to India in 1972 he was invited to be a Fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies in Simla to
explore 'mythic consciousness' in literature. He has published three novels, five collections of short stories and several books of critical essays, travelogues and reminiscences. A film based on his short story, Maya Darpan, was adjudged the best Hindi 'new wave' movie in 1973. His books in English translation are Days of Longing (Orient Paperbacks, Delhi) and Hill Station (Writers Workshop, Calcutta). The latter is an anthology of short stories. Recently Oxford University Press brought out a selection of his stories Maya Darpan and other stories. In 1986 he received the prestigious Sahitya Akademi (Academy of Letters) award for his latest collection of stories.

Arthur Versluis is author of several works, including the novels Telos (RKP: 1987) and The Ghost Dance (forthcoming), as well as the non-fictional The Philosophy of Magic (RKP: 1986) and The Egyptian Mysteries (RKP: 1988). His translation of Novalis' aphorisms — Pollen and Fragments — Selected Poetry and Prose of Novalis — is forthcoming. He lives on the family orchards in Grand Rapids, Michigan, teaches at the University of Michigan, and is at present working on a collection of essays.

Angela Voss studied at Leicester University, the Guildhall School of Music and the City University, London. She is both a musician and astrologer, currently researching for a Ph.D. on Ficino's astrology and music, a section of which has been published as Ficino and Astrology in Astrology, the Journal of the Astrological Lodge.