TEMENOS

HRH The Prince of Wales

Eleanor Allitt, John Allitt, R. E. Alton, Andrew Benjamin, Wendell Berry,
Thetis Blacker, John Carey, Noel Cobb, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Henry Corbin,
Z'ev Ben Shimon Halevi, Wilson Harris, Joy Hendry, Jack Herbert, Edmond Jabès,
Brian Keeble, Eva Loewe, Grevel Lindop, Jean MacVean, Peter Malekin,
Keshav Malik, Caitlin Matthews, Joseph Milne, Harold Morland, S. H. Nasr,
Peter Norman, Kathleen Raine, Jeremy Reed, Anthony Rudolf,
Peter Russell, Tom Scott, Philip Sherrard, Arseny Tarkovsky, Roger Tully,
Arthur Versluis, Rosemary Waldrop, Francis Warner

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A REVIEW DEVOTED TO THE ARTS OF THE IMAGINATION
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How many, I wonder, who heard His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales's inaugural speech announcing the opening of his Institute of Architecture in October 1992, felt that his words marked the turning of a tide? So it may well be seen by a future historian; for the Prince stated in few, clear and heart-felt words what many have been waiting to hear – an affirmation, in the face of the still generally received materialist opinions of our time, of the universal and unanimous tradition underlying all spiritual civilizations. These courageous words (printed below) might stand as a summary – and a manifesto – of all Temenos has stood for during the last decade.

Such essential unanimity is of an altogether different kind from the adoption by a majority consensus of some political programme, or the tenets of a religious sect; for opinions – all the ...isms and original theories invented by human ingenuity – are fashions that come and go, whereas reality is always itself. For whoever has come, whether in this or any other time and place, to recognize the cosmos, not as a mindless mechanism, but a creation of the Holy Spirit, living in its parts as in its whole, the rest follows – and such knowledge is of the nature rather of an experience than an adopted opinion. The words, so long absent from all discussions of the arts – beauty, wisdom, the sacred, awe and reverence – spoken by the heir to the throne of Shakespeare's England, must have resonated in the hearts of many, thinking themselves alone, perhaps, in their inner rejection of a materialist system so prestigious, but so little in accord with heart's truth. That reality, 'in which we live, and move, and have our being' is a mystery which no scientific 'research' can ever fathom; but whether we consider the nature of the universe, or human nature, the 'Word' written in us 'in the beginning' is our innate truth, in whose light we are empowered with wisdom. To that oldest of questions, 'What is Man?', Oedipus answered the Sphinx in the language of the materialist bias of subsequent Western civilization: 'Four legs, two legs, three
legs’ is mortal man on his way from the cradle to the grave. But the answer of spiritual understanding is otherwise — ‘What is man that thou shouldst desire him, or the son of man that thou visitest him? Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, full of grace and truth.’

It gives us great joy, therefore, in this last issue of Temenos, to be the first journal to publish the full text of a speech which has already set its mark in history. We are happy in His Royal Highness’s recognition and we share with him these fundamental values. But, what is more, His Royal Highness has offered us a base for the Temenos Academy of Integral Studies (which is to succeed the Review Temenos) in his Institute of Architecture. From that base we will pursue our programme of lectures and seminars as from October 1992.

Architecture is of all the arts the most immediate in affecting the lives of the inhabitants of the human city; but all the arts of the Imagination spring from the one root. We hope to provide a background in accord with the educational vision of the Prince of Wales’s Institute of Architecture. The opportunity is one which Plato or Ficino might have welcomed, but the challenge is daunting. As we grow older we realize that all those great figures – philosophers, artists, the good and the wise, are not fixed in our firmament like stars – suddenly we wonder where they are. But in this late age of the world we can but do our best, entrusting ourselves to those invisible powers whose instruments we are, be we princes, or poor stand-ins for those great and wise ones we wish were here. Some might say we are foolish to imagine that we can influence the inevitable fate of this earth; and yet hope – the last word in the Prince’s speech – is implicit in the vision of the cosmos as a continually renewed living manifestation of a purpose greater than ourselves, within which we must play our parts.

Kathleen Raine
Excellence is an unfashionable value in this terminal phase of Western civilization; but, being timeless, must always prevail. In this faith Temenos was conceived and has been realized in our thirteen volumes, whose contents have been matched by their execution. The beauty of these volumes we owe in the first place to Christopher Skelton, and to Skelton’s Press, latterly continued by his former partner Alan Bultitude in the September Press.

A review proclaiming its dedication to ‘the Arts of the Imagination’ must recognize the full range of both words. Both operate at all levels of human making, from the writing of inspired words to their inscribing in books, whether in the Lindisfarne Gospel, the hand-printing of William Morris’s Kelmscot Press, or Gill’s beautiful types, many of these in use today.

Christopher Skelton (who left this world on 1st February, 1992) was a master-printer in the tradition of Eric Gill, who was an uncle on his mother’s side. After reading English at Oxford he was fired with enthusiasm for publishing by a lecture given by Rupert Hart-Davis, whose own books kept such a high typographical standard. He chose printing as the best way in which he could make his contribution, and over the years Skelton’s Press has been unsurpassed in the production of books which, though not hand-printed, rival these in quality. It has been my privilege to have been published by Liam Miller’s Dolmen Press, whose books have made history in the second half of the twentieth century, and Temenos by Skelton’s Press. If for no other reason Temenos will be remembered.

When the profit-motive dictates the appearance of our books, the words themselves become subtly devalued, as if they too were cheap. ‘They’ (the readers) ‘won’t notice the difference’ say those who put profit before beauty and fitness of appearance. That may be so, but what a tragedy! It is such artists as Christopher Skelton who sustain the foundations of civilization. I am privileged to have known him.

Kathleen Raine
I am enormously grateful to you all for coming here this evening to a reception to announce the creation of my Institute of Architecture. Some of you may think it rather dramatic, even foolhardy, on my part to attempt something quite so ambitious. Indeed, I wake up sweating in the middle of the night sometimes with exactly the same thought! But I have thought long and hard before taking this step. So it seems to me that, rather than bore you with a lot of detail, which is all set out in this brochure, I should just say that my Institute will open here in London in October 1992. It will be a place for teaching, research and the exchange of ideas.

I will try to explain why I have concluded that this is the right step to take.

Although it may sound pretentious to say so, I remember when I was much younger feeling very disturbed by the trends of the time which seemed to be directed, like a well-orchestrated artillery barrage, at destroying the traditional foundations on which so many of our human values had been based for thousands of years. I remember reading that God was dead. I remember familiar buildings vanishing, bomb sites in London being redeveloped in a way that was totally alien to the urban fabric of the city, the uncompromising brutality of which continues to depress me. I remember the centres of our old towns being ripped apart in the interests of what was called ‘progress’ and being replaced by the uncompromising starkness of purely functional buildings. I remember vast housing estates mushrooming around our cities with no sensitivity whatsoever to the landscape. I remember hedgerows being uprooted by the mile; wet places and wild areas being drained and ‘improved’ (albeit because everyone was told we needed such places in order to become self-sufficient in food) and everywhere this urgent, almost missionary, zeal to sweep away all the traditional bric à brac which had outlived its usefulness.
All the professions seemed to encourage it. The ‘experts’ and scientists encouraged it. The result, of course, was the inevitable one – that the ‘baby’ went out with the bathwater. My thought is now to try and find a way of resuscitating the baby – but without refilling the bath with dirty water!

As I grew older I wondered why it was that, in my heart of hearts, I had minded so much about the changes that were taking place (like many other people, I suspect, I had not dared to express my true feelings for fear of being thought ignorant). I then learnt about Descartes and scientific rationalism. I discovered that this led to a mechanistic view of the Universe and of Man’s place in it and I began to realize what lay at the root of this feverish revolution. In the simplest of terms, we were being persuaded to see the cosmos as a gigantic machine which could be examined, experimented with and manipulated by Man for his own exclusive use. Everything was explainable by science and anything that couldn’t be explained simply didn’t exist. In this scenario Man himself becomes a mere mechanical object and any notion of a metaphysical reality disappears altogether. The sense of humanity’s uniqueness as a microcosm of the whole Universe is thrown out of the window, to be replaced by an egocentric world view which denies that all-encompassing sense of the sacred and stresses the purely rational.

I have often wondered why it is that I was not seduced by this conveniently logical, but utterly soulless philosophical approach. The pressures to yield to this concept of life have been and still are, to a certain extent, enormous. At best you are described as eccentric; at worst as a dotty crank. The temptation to conform can be very powerful. So why haven’t I? What is it that produces this overwhelming feeling – for it is only a feeling – in my heart that the whole Universe is based on the most profound principles which in themselves represent a giant paradox, but which for me inspire a continual sense of awe and reverence? I confess that I don’t know what it is, except that it comes from my heart and envelopes my whole being. It is an awareness of something beyond the confines of Self and it becomes more evident when in the presence of great beauty.

Many people will doubtless recognize such inexplicable feelings as are induced by the proportions of a building; that extraordinary sense of ‘harmony’ which such proportions can engender. Many
people will feel the same when they see a landscape sculpted and fashioned over thousands of years by the hands of men whose customs, passed down orally from one generation to another, and whose reverence for the natural world, for God's place in it, led them to create a harmonious synergy with their surroundings rather than imposing themselves on it. Clearly, the fact that they had no machines with which to dominate their environment must have played a large part in the whole equation, and I can understand how quickly the industrial revolution, when it comes to each country, helps to eliminate that innocent and unquestioning sense of the sacred in Man. And yet, despite all the dramatic changes that have been wrought by science and technology, and all the remarkable benefits they have indeed brought us, there remains deep in the soul (dare I mention that word?!?) of mankind a persistent and unconscious anxiety that something is missing – some vital ingredient that makes life truly worth living; that provides that inexplicable sense of harmony and beauty to a world which is in danger of sacrificing these elements on the altar of an outmoded, unbalanced and irreverent ideology. We are told that our contemporary built environment must reflect the 'spirit of the age'. But what concerns me most of all is that we are succeeding in creating an 'age without spirit'.

What, then, is spirit, and how can its essence be restored to an appropriate place in the totality of our experience? I am no philosopher, but I can try to explain what I feel spirit to be. It is that sense, that overwhelming experience or awareness of a one-ness with the Natural World, and beyond that, with the creative force that we call God which lies at the central point of all. It is, above all, an 'experience'. It defies conscious thought. It steals upon you and floods your whole being despite your best logical intentions. It lies deep in the heart of mankind as if some primæval memory. It is both 'pagan' and Christian, and in this sense is surely the fundamental expression of what we call religion.

As Wordsworth put it so succinctly, there is

... 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.
The ancients seemed in some way to understand the subtle blend of matter and spirit in the Universe. Around this the ancient Egyptians formulated the mathematical and geometric principles that were inherited in turn by the Greeks. The whole of European culture is based on our Græco-Roman heritage, at the root of which lay what many consider to be these profound and, indeed, ‘sacred’ principles. The question of how to restore the element of ‘spirit’, as contained in such timeless principles, to its rightful position in the overall balance that I believe needs to be achieved in the education of an architect is a difficult one. But I believe that there is a growing desire on the part of many people to search this missing part of their experience, which has been so obviously derided and abandoned in the education of architects. In many ways architecture surely provides the most effective means by which to translate both the overwhelming, unconscious experience of the heart, and the conscious principles of the mind into a ‘concrete’ way of enclosing space.

In this belief and very much taking my courage in both hands, I have spent the last three or four years working with a team of remarkable people until we reached the point of being able to launch this new Institute of Architecture this evening. What I would like to be taught and explored and studied in my Institute, is the fact that the architecture that nourishes the spirit is not so much a traditional architecture, which resembles or apes the past, but rather a particular kind of architecture whose forms, plans, materials, are based on human feeling.

Recent research in the field of architecture has begun to identify the particular forms and types of organization which are able to create such an ‘architecture of the heart’. It is perhaps surprising in our age of pluralism, where everyone imagines themselves entitled to any view whatever about anything, to discover that the kinds of buildings that tend to appeal to the human heart, and which make us feel at home, are a very specific range of buildings; very particular in style, organization and physical character. These are, in fact, the buildings which we have always loved. They include, of course, all the great traditional architectures of the past – enormously varied as these are.

But they also include new forms of architecture, based on new materials, new ways of building, new forms of technology. This is
where I hope that my Institute might become a kind of crucible where the architecture of the 21st century can be forged.

So my hope, and my intention, is that the students who come to this new Institute of Architecture will be taught these underlying facts about any human architecture — that they will then be able to play an imaginative role in society; that they will be able to set in motion new processes of construction, new forms of management and new ways of building our towns, which then provide for the 21st century what all the great architectures of the past have provided for their respective eras.

It is also my heartfelt hope that the students will be able to learn specific things — largely forgotten today — which will set the architecture of the future on a more realistic basis, less controlled by images and fantasy as unfortunately the architecture of the last fifty years has often been. Instead I hope it can be based on real principles and on factual knowledge about the nature of space, which unites objective knowledge with profound human feeling.

My aim in wanting to establish an institute of architecture is, above all, to respond to what I believe is a more widely held desire on the part of some architecture students to be provided with a course of study which, in part, reflects the more profound and indefinable aspects of life and therefore which re-introduces the delicate thread of wisdom that connects us with the great tapestry woven by our forebears.

I would like the students to appreciate that there are certain timeless values which we can learn from the past, and apply to the future. I would like the students to learn that in order to be able to design with sensitivity and an appropriate sense of reverence for the natural surroundings, they first need to learn humility and how to submerge the inevitable egocentric tendencies that we all experience. They also need to learn to observe Nature which, when all is said and done, provides us with a bright star by which to navigate. Again, this is not to say that technology should be decried — rather, that the Institute should encourage experiment in order to find better, more sensitive and imaginative ways of using modern materials to create buildings that reflect a hierarchy of scale.

I should perhaps stress that the aim will be to produce practitioners,
not just theoreticians. The Institute’s curricular programmes will contain all the rigour consistent with the technical and economic demands of such a complex profession. But these will be placed within the wider context of our history and our culture and, indeed, other people’s cultures and geographical locations.

In this sense I have already asked Brian Hanson and Keith Critchlow, Director of Studies and Director of Research respectively, to work towards establishing outposts of the Institute’s activities in a variety of areas — in Britain, in Europe, and beyond.

Above all, however, the overriding aim of my Institute is to bring people together, both to help heal the wounding fragmentation of building disciplines characteristic of our century, and to break down the demoralising barrier between the values of professional experts and those shared by the great body of people affected by development of various kinds.

So, at the end of their course, I would like the students to leave my Institute with a feeling that they have experienced something rather special in their lives; that a new dimension of life has been revealed to them which has struck a chord in their hearts that will never stop resonating. I hope this will enable them to have the true vision to see that although styles may vary, proportion is in itself a reflection of the order inherent in the Universe. They will need to discover these great truths, I believe, in order themselves to provide the beacons of civilized values in a world increasingly in need of real meaning and of that most precious of commodities – hope.
I.

The year begins with war,
Destruction without mercy.
Our bombs fall day and night,
Hour after hour, by death
Abroad appeasing wrath,
Folly, and greed at home.
Upon our giddy tower
We'd oversway the world.
Our hate comes down to kill
Those whom we do not see,
For we have given up
Our sight to those in power
And to machines, and now
Are blind to all the world.
This is a nation where
No lovely thing can last.
We trample, gouge, and blast;
The people leave the land;
The land flows to the sea.
Fine men and women die,
The fine old houses fall,
The fine old trees come down:
Are not missed or replaced.
Highway and shopping mall
Still guarantee the right
And liberty to be
A peaceful murderer,
A murderous worshipper,
A slender glutton, or
A healthy whore. Forgiving
No enemy, forgiven
By none, we live the death
Of liberty, become
What we have feared to be:
Unworthy of our gifts,
Deserving of our ruin.
Give trust into the dark –
Or else how will you sleep?

II.

The ewes crowd to the mangers;
Their bellies widen, sag;
Their udders tighten. Soon
The little voices cry
In morning cold. Soon now
The garden must be worked,
Laid off in rows, the seed
Of life to come brought down
Into the dark to rest,
Abide a while alone,
And rise. Soon, soon again
The cropland must be plowed,
For the year’s promise now
Answers the year’s desire,
Its hunger and its hope.
There is no need for this,
Which goes against the time
When food is bought, not grown.
O come into the market
With cash, and come to rest
In this economy
Where all we need is money
To be well-stuffed and free
By sufferance of our Lord,
The Chairman of the Board.
Because there’s thus no need,
There is the greatest need
To plant one’s ground with seed.
Under the season’s sway,
Against the best advice,
In time of death and tears,
In slow snowfall of years,
Defiant and in hope,
We keep an older way
In light and breath to stay
This household on its slope.
III.

Now with its thunder spring
Returns. The river, raised,
Carries the rain away.
Carp wallow in the shoals
Above our flooded fields.
Jonquils return to dooryards
Of vanished houses. Phoebes
Return to build again
Under the stilted porch.
On thicketed hillsides
The young trees bud and bloom;
They stand in poisoned air
In their community.
Twinleaf and bloodroot flower
Out of the fallen leaves.
At flood’s edge all night long
The little frogs are singing.
In the dark barn, hard rain
Loud on the roof, long time
Till dawn, the young ewe calls
The lamb yet in her womb.
Edmond Jabès

After Edmond Jabès died I was given only a few hours by The Independent to prepare an obituary. This appeared on January 4. A revised and expanded version of this text appears in The Jewish Quarterly (July 1991) and I take the liberty of referring Temenos readers to the later article. Pending an eventual essay which will accompany an expanded book of my translations of his early work I have little to add to what I wrote in the Quarterly. I would like here to explain the provenance of 'My friends know how much ...'. Edmond Jabès made the first of his three visits to Britain in 1974. I arranged a few readings, including one at the Poetry Society on May 31. He wrote to me that he would prepare a special text to introduce his work. A letter dated May 22 begins: 'voici la traduction de ma petite présentation que Rosmarie Waldrop vient de m'envoyer'. Its centre is a personal reading of Le Livre des questions whose seventh and final volume had just come out. It ends with a brief account of his early work. Rosmarie Waldrop is the translator of all the prose published after the collected poems and aphorisms of 1959. Two selections from that book, Je bâtis ma demeure, have been published, one in my translation, and one in Keith Waldrop's. Sometime in March, while preparing the more considered text on Jabès requested by The Jewish Quarterly I went through my Jabès files. There I found the French and English versions of 'My friends know how much ...' Jabès rewrote the first part of it, which you can find in the first section of Ça suit son cours, Fata Morgana 1975, reprinted in Le Livre des marges, Fata Morgana 1984. But after discussing the matter with Arlette Jabès and Rosmarie Waldrop I am absolutely certain that the rest of the text has never been published, in French.

Anthony Rudolf
The Book Belongs to the Reader*

EDMOND JABÈS

My friends know how much I live by myself. It's not that I make an immoderate cult of solitude, but that the work of writing isolates and destroys you where you thought yourself saved.

I can't therefore try to place my works tonight – nor myself.
I'll talk very little about writing and more about reading – but don't both come out of the same creative act?

The book belongs to the reader.

As long as 25 years ago I wrote: ‘Only the reader is real.' I was aware that, as my sentences formed, I became a reader of my own text; and this reader supplanted and rejected me.

The writer can free himself of his writing only by the use he makes of it, that is to say, by reading himself. As if the goal of writing were, after all, to found on the basis of what is written the reading of what will come to be written.

Moreover, what is written is only read in the process of being written and therefore constantly modified by this reading.

So every book writes itself by letting itself be read such as it will be. Its future as a book depends on the one – or the several – readings which it was able to elicit.

Thus the book is rewritten by the reader who has got hold of it. It is in this second book, which the reader opposes to the author and in which the writer finds the pages he has given him, but as it were metamorphosed by their passage from one to the other – it is in this second book that we have the real stakes of the enterprise. Granting this, there would be at least two books in any one, which gives all books an unsuspected dimension.

The written word introduces reading. That's how it differs from words proffered as speech. Writing does not substitute itself for what is said in order to fix it or formulate it better, but, on the contrary, in

order to enjoy its explosion by exposing each of its parts to a reading, and not just each part but each in its various states or in all its different levels of meaning.

It is the eye that sets off the true question, the interrogation of all the interrogations which sleep in the letter. The eye, not the ear.

Reading is master of the sign. But it is from the sign and in the sign that reading is born and fulfilled, that the eye exhausts itself.

The book is saved by the death of the book.

I have always found absurd this question often asked of a writer: ‘Do you write for others or for yourself?’ Of course we write for ourselves – and how could we do otherwise since, riveted to the word, it is a face-to-face with ourselves that we set up. But it is the chance reader who gives us a reading of our own reading; and it is somehow through this reading that the book faces its completion.

I have more and more the feeling that it is to my reading of each of them that my books owe their existence and that this existence is a privileged meeting place for new readings.

Adhering to or opposing an entire work is a priori suspect. We admire or condemn what we have retained; that is to say, the work we have drawn from it and made our own. Hence the immense liberty that any reader takes with a book. But the latter is never one person’s property. It only seems to submit to the reader. By virtue of being prey to all possible readings it is finally prey to none.

In this perspective, an author’s reading of his book is marked with dangers. Since perhaps a bad book is at the start only a book ill read.

Literary history is, in some sense, only a poor history of vengeance: sometimes it is the book which, carried by the enthusiasm of a few, triumphs over the ignorance, the indifference or the hostility of the public. Sometimes it is the reader who, turning towards other readings closer to him, makes a clean slate of a sometimes cumber-some past.

So goes the time read, written; re-read, rewritten.

One day, the writer sees himself confronted with the commentaries
his work has inspired. He feels suddenly at the mercy of the paired
lights of innumerable projectors trained on him, which pursue or
threaten him wherever he goes, wherever he takes shelter. These
projectors trace indifferently the roads of his glory or misery.

Of those roads we'll obviously not talk tonight.

* * * *

What I would like to define here, and in the simplest manner, is the
sense – or nonsense – of a work which has built up over 30 years of
doubts, anxieties, reflections and persevering.

The sense of a work which has claimed and continues to claim my
energies; the nonsense of a work of enormous ambition. But is it not
the enormous which affirms any norm that is giddy with going
beyond?

If writing means taking on the ultimate reading, first mentally, then
through the transcribed word, reading of a book whose necessity is
our reason for being, then everything is at stake in this word. This
word is the universe. It contains all other words which it alone can
make visible and legible.

It is this word which is our world.

Thus, what is being written puts us into words in order to treat us as
syllables, as vowels and as consonants, in order to integrate us into its
movement, its dynamic of an expanding book and universe.

But neither book nor universe can be closed in on. Drawn by the
pen, every word by itself is a whole book.

With regard to the seven volumes of The Book of Questions I note
that there were a few obsessive words at the origin of these works:
The word: God. The word: Jew. The word: Book. The word: Law. The
word: Eye. The word: Name.

God, as the extreme name for abyss. Jew, as a figure of exile, of
wandering, of strangeness and separation – a condition shared by the
writer. Book, as the impossibility of the book or, rather, as the place
and at the same time the non-place of all the illusory possibilities of
constructing a book. Eye, which is the law. [The word loi is contained
in the word oeil]. The law is in the look. Name, as the unpronounceable
name, as the hidden name of the Name. Yahwe remains the unpro-
nounceable name and is venerated for this very reason, being the
silent name of INVISIBILITY, of the INVISIBLE.
All it took was an abrupt break with a country, a climate, a way of living, a break with the familiar book of my days up till then – and these words exploded with all the contained force of a new book.

Behind these words stands my history and the history of my history. So much hope, so much distress, so many births and so much mourning.

After all, as I once said to a novelist, why try so hard to invent a story and then, in telling it, make it plausible like a true story when all you have to do is question one of the words charged with the weight of our anxieties, our feasts, and our lonely mornings after, one of those stubborn key-words for which we are veil and face, void and victim. One of those words – and stories will rise from the bottom of our memory, stories heard, found, or lived.

How many beloved, sought after or despised dead people are buried in the word DEATH. How many loves which marked our lives still flower in the word LOVE. But perhaps we never invent stories anyway. Perhaps they are all given to us through the word we approach and wed in its intimate, carnal reality, through the word we spell as one fuses with a body through all its members, in the intoxication or despair of intertwined life and death.

It would take too long to explain my obsession with these words from which I could free myself only by pulverizing them. What I have tried with The Book of Questions, what now looking back on it seems very clear, is marking out the place of my questioning. BUT this place could not but be a dizzying absence of place. The book is an unbearable totality. Therefore my books have been thought and written on a ground of nothingness.

In what category should they be put? – But can the Book be classified at all? – I have ventured the answer: in none or in all, because they can be read at the same time as a poem, a story, an essay or a novel.

Nietzsche had warned us: ‘Good prose is only written face to face with poetry.’

Thus poetry is the best reference, even the only one.

This face-to-face of prose and poetry is found especially in the aphorism, highest expression of language.

In the first trilogy of The Book of Questions the form of the aphorism
forced itself on me as one of the essential moments of the vast
dialogue which its elect characters carry on: dialogues of unplaceable
rabbis, interpreters of the Book, owners of the book, that is to say of
Nothing because only precarious traces and embryonic discourse are
left where there has been articulation of the book and irrepressible
unfolding of the word. The book takes shape against the book and
therefore undoes itself at the same time in order to preserve its
availability as a book to come. And one word detaches itself from
another only to die after it in the place it has been assigned. Even with
what can be seized: no sooner have we seized it than it escapes its
servitude and gets gradually involved in a net of contradictory
relations which, if they reduce it to the function of sign, image, or
sound – of sign among signs, image among images, sound among
sounds – if they reduce it they at the same time free it from the
oppressive yoke of sense and from the tyranny of Totality. As if it had
to become the Everything of Nothing in order not to be the Nothing
of Everything.

Pure advance in negativity, because, as Kafka said: 'It is up to us to
achieve the negative. The positive is already given.'

Like the universe the book engenders space in its breaks. It is the
spaces which make it legible. For we can get a glimpse of the
inconceivable Totality only in mastered expanse, in the fragment.

So it is fragments. But in my books they are so bound to, so
dependent on one another that they can only be read with regard to
the Totality from which they borrow the name of the Book. They are
works tending towards this Totality, fascinated by unity whose
dramatic tension you cannot measure unless you have yourself felt its
fascination. Every book infiltrates into the next and calls its reading
into question. Books which are above all disturbing, subversive in
their infinite power to rebegin.

The seven wings of The Book of Questions present themselves as seven
books in one; but within it one could distinguish four parts:

Historicity with the first trilogy: The Book of Questions, The Book of Yukel,
Return to the Book.

The relation of the writer and his word with Yael and Elya.

The eye with Aely.

The point with El, or the Last Book whose actual title is the small red
full stop on the cover.
I won't go into details because I don't want to impose on future readers a reading which would never be altogether their own and which would risk being rigid. The ways of the book are innumerable. Where do they lead? No doubt beyond memory, beyond the book where the book will still be testing its chances.

On the very first pages of *The Book of Questions* a sentence stops us:

> You are the one who writes and who is written.

'The universe exists only on paper,' Paul Valéry noted. Was it the book he was thinking of?

White pages inhabited by signs like so many near or remote worlds, every second is the dawn of a century and the abyss of its night. Every sign is the vibrant support of a century.

'When, as a child, I wrote my name for the first time I was aware that I was starting a book,' we also read in *The Book of Questions*.

In order to exist we have to have a name, and having a name already means being in the book. Could the space assigned to writing be just the immeasurable space of a name?

* * *

As a fore-word, as a book behind *The Book of Questions*, I should say a word about the collection of poems I called *Je bâtis ma demeure*, which groups together texts written between 1943 and 1957. Fourteen years of poetry.

The occasion of its being reprinted has led me to relive each of its pages with their old writing.

Long walks back to the war years when these 'Songs for the Ogre's Feast' rose from my earliest childhood while death raged without pity. Lifesaving words when everything was crumbling.

Long walk, indeed, into a written past that has become my real past across intrusions of poems and a rush of aphorisms.

The distance between those texts and me today is filled in by *The Book of Questions*. But they bear witness to the excitement and fear of the first steps towards the unknown where there will never and nowhere be any rest.

Translated by Rosmarie Waldrop
In Search of the Threshold*

EDMOND JABÈS

If a man teaches you certainty do not reproach his method, but his assertion.

1

'So many centuries between me and the moment I got my name, so many now return my lost, forgotten name that I no longer know when I was born nor where I died.' Reb Sadim

The threshold is perhaps death.

A road stretched in front of him: always the same.
He felt he had never left it.
Had he really not lived anywhere until now?
Absent names echoed in his memory: cities, villages, countries, deserts.
Did not Reb Essine say: 'I inhabit God who has no habitation'?
He had stopped asking how he could have walked for such a long time.
He dimly sensed that the threshold was within reach and that his sheltering horizon was but a page of eternity to be turned where emptiness ravages emptiness.

(... the one whose face was for him alone froze as he passed, and he understood that from now on all words would be etched in the already closed space of their solitude.)

2

'A page of writing is like the dawn – a whole day to live – which, once here, turns its back on the dawn, ...
... and also like the night which, even turning its back on the dark, still follows the night,' Reb Peraha had written.

* From 'The Ineffaceable, The Unperceived' (The Book of Resemblances, III).

25
They complained. They appealed to God. There were five of them. ‘Am I not your favourite, Lord, I who have everywhere been the shadow by Your side?’ said the first.
‘Am I not your favourite, Lord, I who have dug my road in Your Light?’ said the second.
‘Am I not your favorite, Lord, I whose loving words are feminine echoes of Yours?’ said the third.
‘Am I not your favorite, Lord, I whose silence, soft linen garment, was cut from Your Silence?’ said the fourth.
The fifth did not speak, but when hassared about the reason of her indifference said:
‘What shadow could move Him who is pure Light, what light seduce Him who has no shadow?’
And added, more to herself than to her rivals:
‘For what word could we hope from Him who has banned the word, what silence expect from Him who is beyond silence?’

‘It is in the book that an adolescent discovers the face of the world. ‘It is in the book that he later contemplates that of his beloved. ‘It is in the book that, middle-aged, he takes the pulse of life and death. ‘It is in the book that, grown old, he suddenly stumbles on his name,’ wrote Reb Gabbar.

And Reb Daod: ‘We go toward a face in order to catch death napping, unawares.
‘This is why we often die beforehand.’
‘Of what death, Reb Daod?’
‘The death of walls, the death of the hard dream of walls.’
And he added:
‘... of the stones the dust thinks it is holding up whereas they are miracles of balance whose infinite dreams join the broken dream of the grain of salt in the sea.’

Shores! There is a time of the earth, but will there ever be a time of the water?
Eternity of time tied to the time eternity denies. Similar, our ties to emptiness, to death.

'The sound of death,' said Reb Tob, 'is the same as the sound of the sea.'

'Islanders, we cannot do without it.'

And Reb Rahach: 'We swim, we swim from pier to pier to be one with our death.'

And the child said: 'Am I not a reflection of Your innocence, Lord? Should You not show preference for the creature who has nothing but his becoming?'

And the rabbi who heard him said: 'Does the sea know from birth that it is but the sea? Does the universe know that it corresponds only to universe?

PASSAGE

FACE

1

(Every word has a word for its destiny.

'Readable yet unreadable.

'Audible yet inaudible.

'Ah, will you ever be able to read me?

'Ah, will you even just once be able to hear me?' wrote Reb Samha. And Reb Altiel: 'Not even a whole name. Not even a recognizable sound: barely a silence claimed at will.

'I shall never be on your lips or inside your moist, warm mouth.

'I shall never be in your memory, O my dear ones, my brothers.

'Yet I exist. And shall soon die of this imperilled life, of this same fleeting moment pursued in a haunting face.)

'At no moment will the book tell of the face. It will, at best, tell of its passage.

'It tells of the nomad, the Hebrew, whose name is Ferryman, as it tells of the desert of the name which, in my ancestors' language, means also place of the word.

'Therefore my book is a Jewish book,' he had written.
Separate in order to unite: so countless the alliances.

‘Foolish fishermen that we are, we have only the pile of nets knit by reason to catch the universe in.

‘The infinite is studded with useless, indecent knots,’ wrote Reb Sari.

‘You think you can cross out a word by drawing a line through it. Do you not know that the line is transparent?

‘It is not the pen crosses out a word, but the eye reading,’ wrote Reb Taleb.

‘The word advances only in daylight. It is a bird whose shadow is writing,’ said Reb Naoumi.

To which Reb Haled replied: ‘Then writing is the test of the word, as the shadow is, at any moment, that of the light.’ And he added: ‘Which day could we recall that was not first exclusive night?’

My books lean on chance quotations from fictional characters: dubious security; hence, in the face of death, they lean only on themselves – on me? But is it a matter of leaning? They rest on their own say which leaves them no rest. They refer to no authority, claim no truth except one that constantly questions itself. Therefore they cannot aspire to any security, lay claim to any help.

Books of a voice never peremptory, as uncoercive as it is unpersuasive, no surer of itself than of any other words.

Books of a book nailed to the four horizons, whose sentences streak space with thin trickles of blood …

(‘The blood of the universe feeds the word that names it,’ said Reb Asfi. And added: ‘Dawn and dusk are perhaps the two poles of the word.’

‘But between,’ he was asked, ‘what is between?’

‘No doubt the day and night of undatable pain,’ replied Reb Asfi.)

Outside time, the time of the book at its prelude. Thus every beginning might have an unthinkable start, echo smothered by echo.

Only water can lift up water.

‘The ocean,’ said Sarah, ‘is perhaps only a grain of salt in distress that all the water in the world has answered.’

(‘If we cannot know what truth is,’ wrote Reb Naouab, ‘can we at least know where it is?’

... sometimes it is the disciple’s question that reveals the teacher.

‘The disciple warrants the teacher,’ wrote Reb Sod.)

‘There is no reading of eternity,’ Reb Medid had written.
‘Reading the infinite never means more than reading the break-up of time in the time of the word, which we bank on.’

3

‘Sand against time and its immediate legibility.
‘White on white is the Book of God within man, sand on sand, that of man within God,’ wrote Reb Sarar.

And Yukel said: ‘Of concrete or stone, built in preconceived sequence, books rose up everywhere in the city. I searched in vain for mine.’

And Sarah said: ‘We shall never have a house.’

And Yukel said: ‘It was dark. You were leaning on your elbows in one of the lit up windows of the building before me.’

And Sarah said: ‘We could have been in this book.’

And Yukel said: ‘I was getting ready to join you in your room when I was suddenly surrounded by so many faces like yours I no longer knew which one to turn to.’

And Sarah said: ‘We could have been in all these books.’

And Yukel said: ‘Which book could be ours where there are no more books?’
And Sarah said: ‘Perhaps the book that comes before the first and after the last. Perhaps the book in which all books form and crumble.’

Had Reb Arwab not written: ‘The infinite opens like a book, and inside all is blank?’

To become as nothing as one might become as all.

Abundant water does not increase thirst.

THE FINAL OVERTURE

‘Learn to regard words as the sea, for it is their first vocabable, just as Adam is our first man,’ wrote Reb Siami.

‘... it all began by the sea while, from one of the overhanging rocks, I watched her relax in the sun, play with the rays as with swords, set the dark – her secrets – against the light – her intoxication. It began while I was all eyes and ear for her expressive, heavy silence, her glistening speech, her sporadic onslaught, her outbursts as well as her barely audible confidences. On her calm surface, at first a few wrinkles; then suddenly huge holes from which she reared up metamorphosed, hostile to the world and herself, rending herself, spitting out her soul, her liquid body, she seemed to howl: this is what I carry, salt-burned ocean, untamed, mad, these unsuspected, countless words of a different alphabet, too cumbersome, too crowded, and this silence of swallowed skies to which I owe my infinite variety of color.'
'I bent over the sea as over the last page of an unfinished story whose vastness froze my hand in a void and — had I not often done so in love? — I closed my eyes to melt into her,' he had written.

'This is how we learned,' said the disciple, 'that the universe had entered into the book.'

* * *

She had said: 'Look how words break in the sea. Our last glance is for a surface of water, for skin ...'

He had said: 'The seventh Book of Questions is the book of this glance.'

* * *

('What are these clouds that hide the limits of the book?' asked Reb Assod.

'... as if they were clouds, Reb Assod,' replied Reb Fahoud, 'not of the sky, but of smoke ...'

And he added:

'Once the night is clear again you will not see stars sparkling, but our martyrs' eyes out of their orbits.

'The universe burns with them, inside their pupils.'

And Reb Lanoual said: 'Eternal, the death of the innocent.'

Had Reb Laouan, the teacher of all of them, not written: 'The eternity behind and before us is but time forever consumed and reborn in pain: identified ashes among so many anonymous ashes?')

Had it lingered long on the beach? Less disappointed than sad, no doubt, had it then, frail light, vanished with the day?

When I arrived, after much running to catch up with the sun, the eager dark was ready to receive me like a shadow.

* * *

'You can count the wrinkles of my forehead,' said Reb Labdi, 'but not those of my soul: O furrows bluer for the blue depth of the sea.'

And Reb Dabad:

One horizon at a time
for stubborn eyes.
Mystery of things, O night.
Sun at the feet of the law,
no soil or shade at dawn,
at dusk, all light.
Serenity of the Law. God is without wrinkles.

Man is on one side or the other of the law: swimming among the turbulent rapids of doubt; everywhere, like a gull, facing himself and the ocean.

'Inasmuch as one question remains unanswered, all are discredited.'

Reb Salsal

trans. Rosmarie Waldrop

EDMOND JABÈS

Always this Image

Always this image
of hand on forehead,
of the written word
restored to thought.

Like a bird in the nest,
my head rests in my hands.
I'd celebrate trees
if the desert were not

all over. Undying
for death, sand is our
crazy inheritance.

O let this hand
where the spirit nests
be filled with seeds.

Tomorrow's another term.

Did you know our nails
once were tears? We scratch
the walls with our tears
hardened like our child-hearts.
Our lives can't be saved
when the world's drowned in blood.
We have only our arms
to swim back to death.

(Beyond sea, over mountain
unidentified, tiny
planet, hands clasped, full
round hands, free from gravity.)

When memory's restored to us
will love find its age at last?

Joy of an ancient secret shared.
Hope in the first spoken word
clings still to the universe;
to the hand, the crumpled page.

There's time only for the awakening.

Translated by Anthony Rudolf
From Des deux mains, Section IIA
La Mémoire et la main, 1974–80

He had – he thought – a thousand
things to say
to those words which had nothing to say;
which were waiting, in a row;
to those words, those clandestine
words without a past or destiny.
And this upset him endlessly;
to the point where he himself had nothing
more to say,
already now.

Translated by Anthony Rudolf
from L'appel, 1985–8
The Farewell

‘Every book is written in the transparency of a farewell’, he said.
‘A day comes when you have to consent to stay silent, when words have no longer any need of you’, he also said.

Stay silent. Go to earth.

The wise old man says to his disciple:
‘Write down, to my dictation, what my hand can no longer, so great is its weakness, consign to the page’, then closes his eyes and drops into a drowse.

From this collusive silence is born the book of the primordial night, which will later engender the book of days.

When each star is a salvaged word.
A night for death; a day for life.
Unchangeable is the altering cycle of the years.

Autumn is at the heart of the seasons.
‘Dawn is not the farewell – he had noted – ; but every farewell is the dazzling daring of a dawn.’

Tomorrow: the guilty horizon.

And the wise man says: ‘To God falls the burden of the Whole.’

‘To man, his share of the scant’.

from the Livre de l’hospitalité
Translated by David Gascoyne

Last Poem (untitled)

Look for my name in anthologies.
You will find it and you will not find it.

Look for my name in dictionaries.
You will find it and you will not find it.

Look for my name in encyclopaedias.
You will find it and you will not find it.

What does it matter? Have I ever had a name?

Therefore, when I die, do not
Look for my name in cemeteries
Or anywhere.
And stop tormenting now the one
Who cannot respond to the call.

Translated by Anthony Rudolf
When Edmond Jabès died, who died? With what death, with whose death, have we been confronted? Questions which while measuring loss — noting and respecting its presence in addition to its marking an absence — are, nonetheless, those which had already been posed by Jabès’s own project. At the end of Le retour au livre, at the book’s closure, the end is marked out by the presentation of finality in terms that turn it away both from that particular summation and termination which would seek to set out the final enclosure; ‘L’homme n’existe pas, Dieu n’existe pas. Seul existe le monde à travers Dieu et l’homme dans le livre ouvert.’

An opening always resisting closure, such is the book in which man and God come to take their place. This opening without end is not to be understood as the simple but inexorable mark of a time trapped by and thus reduced to that constraining presentation occurring within the ends of teleology. Here, despite the constraint of sense, something else is at stake. The necessary presence of distance works to position the book and the Jew. What emerges from Jabès’s own work is the recognition that the question of identity, be it of either the book or the Jew, is one without end. It remains a question.

The immediate difficulty however is not just the question of to what does this opening refer but the more complex one of how it is to be thought. It will be seen that the question involves complexity and that therefore Jabès’s thinking in this regard will demand a reconsideration of how that thinking is itself to be understood. It is that the language of traditional ontology — and with it the pregiven unity of God — will have been displaced by the process of having to think through this opening. Stasis will yield to becoming to the extent that closure gives way to opening. (While it cannot be explored here, the movement in question is not the simple and inherently nihilistic oscillations within the frame of a binary opposition.)

The opening refers, referring within the world of its multitude of possible referents, first to the Torah, or its very structure as book and
thereby to the temporality of that structure; the co-presence of repetition and renewal. And second, reference is made to the recurrent possibility of the enactment of the famous revelatory if not redemptive component of Lurianic Kabbalah. The component in which it is suggested that the ‘white fire’ which is the absent presence of writing will finally – even though it is a finality eschewing finality – burn through the ‘black fire’ or printed page to reveal itself as the true writing. In both cases the end of revelation is a revelation without end. The movement or process signalled by these formulations, their evocation of flight, is not intended to retell, even if it were only as a recalled figure, the story of Ahasuerus.

Jabès’s concern with movement needs to be situated in terms of his frequent evocation of ‘la brisure des Tables’. The fragmentation of the word of God does not introduce an element of nostalgia into his work, one which works in terms of deliverance towards – a work still turned by a type of hope – a return to the unity of man and God. The futural project of nostalgia is not involved. It is rather that he rejects the desire for what would amount to a pre-Babelian paradise and in so doing both time and hope come to be reworked. The question to which this gives rise is, what is at play in the reworking? In spite of its apparent simplicity the enormity of this question must be appreciated since for Jabès Judaism does not demand distance and exile: it is distance and exile itself. Even with the possibility that exile were to be overcome then the Jew would remain as exiled from exile. The position of the exile is thereby compounded. In Le Parcours Jabès voices this dangerous position for himself both as writer and as a Jew. ‘Je me suis senti l’exilé de l’exilé, le jour où je me suis reconnu juif’. 3

The doubling in this passage is both striking and disturbing. It introduces the paradox of identity that emerges for the writer and for that which is considered in the writing (and, of course, which in being the place of consideration also includes the writing itself) when what is involved is an attempt to articulate the relationship between Judaism and writing. In Dans la double dépendance du dit the doubling of distance, the movement that effaces distance by maintaining it, is once again pronounced. ‘Le rapport à la judaïcité, à l’écriture est rapport à l’étrangeté – dans sans sense primitif et dans celui qu’il a acquis depuis. Il peut faire de nous, au plus fort de notre incondition, l’étranger de l’étranger.’ 4

In Le Livre des Questions the interplay of Judaism and writing is also
charted in a way such that in the end, and thereby also from the start, they are positioned as inextricably linked; a simultaneous identity and difference. This link, while a continual and redolent moment (de paroles à l'écriture) within his own writings, is succinctly presented in a line that has almost become a sine qua non within commentaries on Jabès. Despite the line's familiarity it remains problematic and thus still engenders questions pertaining to the identity of that which has come to be linked. (It should already be clear that what will count as delimiting identity is itself already a complex issue.) 'Le judaïsme et l'écriture ne sont qu'une même attente, un même espoir, une même usure.'⁵

Again what is central is 'hope' (espoir). Later in the same text hope is presented anew – though this new presentation resists novelty in being a form of repetition – in terms of the book. 'L'espoir est à la page prochaine'. The introduction of 'the next page' (la page prochaine) reintroduces time and the book. (It will be essential to return to the temporality of the 'next'.) This connection is also present in Le petit livre de la subversion hors de soupçon, where in response to the question 'Quelle est ton espérance?' comes the reply, 'Celle de mon livre'. The response of the book to the question of hope needs to give the larger context of writing itself. For how can the question of hope be addressed let alone answered by the book? The response to this question will stem, in part, from what is signified in the opening; in other words marked out by the book as open.

A further part of the answer is provided by Jabès's own description, given in response to a question from Marcel Cohen in Du Désert au Livre, of the necessary role of 'interrogation', of questioning, in establishing identity. 'Je crois que c'est par l'interrogation que nous créons notre identité. Être juif signifierait donc le devenir peu à peu. Nous ne serions, chaque fois, que sur le point d'être juif.'⁶

He goes on in the same passage to suggest that to do no more than remain with the simple affirmation of Jewish identity articulated in the phrase 'I am a Jew' is to encourage complacency. While he does not suggest it, as such this would have the further consequence of reopening the trap of a traditional ontology. The contrary should be the case. Identity will inevitably have to endure as a quest always marked by doubt.⁷

The formulation of 'Être juif' (a term whose very specificity resists any straightforward let alone automatic translation) takes place in
terms of the process of a becoming that only yields identity via a continual deferral. What is deferred is the finality demanded by a traditional philosophical conception of identity and therefore the question of Jewish identity comes to be posed – perhaps as a continual reposing – within the temporal structure that positions ‘hope’ in relation to ‘the next page’. However the distancing of completion should not be understood as failure, as something still undone. It is not as though identity has yet to be achieved or finality to be attained. Identity is not presented as the incomplete moving toward an inevitable completion. Any such movement would entail a devalued present, marked by loss and failure and where hope would be no more than the desire to efface the present. The present, thus construed, would only attain value in its having attained the future. As the question of identity is however no longer posed within an ontology of stasis the strategy of overcoming the incomplete in order to establish identity is no longer apposite. Identity as present in Jabès’s writings works otherwise. The question opens and there is therefore no pregiven answer that can be given. Jabès’s work should be read therefore as enacting a dramatic shift within the practice of questioning. The reposing of this question – its mode of being in having been reposed – works on hope. Rather than designating a future which in being gestured at causes the present to have become empty, hope will be the continuity of the process of questioning itself. Hope is the continuation of that process. The ‘next page’ is the book as continually read. The book is henceforth the book of questions and hence there is the Book that is always to be questioned.

It is this continuation which means that hope is not to be relegated to the future. Hope informs the present by yielding a present that is continually charged with hope. (Indeed it is possible to argue that such is the Messianic impulse within Judaism.) Hope taking place in and as the now. Expectation therefore is always to be lived out now. This is the opening. The future is not dismissed, it is present. The contemporary presence of the future means that it exists as an always present possibility. Its being at the present however has the result that were the future to be achieved hope would have been abandoned. The book would have been finished, at last. The question would have been answered, finally. Standing apart from this finality – though part of it in terms of its inherently critical dimension – is the temporality of
the ‘next page’. It is not just that the hope may lie on the ‘next page’ and therefore to be only ever futural. It is more profoundly at work in the always present possibility of there being the ‘next page’. This thereby generates a present whose complexity is marked and maintained by the copresence of an irreducible ontological and temporal difference. Hope is at the present in being ‘à la page prochaine’. There is the book. This is Jabès’s hope.

The singularity of death has been opened even though the personal force of that singularity – its pathos – must endure. The always already present location of hope is the present – a present opening – and thus a future which signals the impossibility of a finality. It is this impossibility that confronts all actual and possible finalities. The question remains.

Notes

1 See for example ‘L’appel’, one of his final poems. However this theme is not just an afterthought. The activity of writing and its relation to death is a recurrent theme in his work. It, perhaps, pays re-reading in relation to Blanchot’s ‘L’œuvre et l’espace de la mort’ in L’espace littéraire (Paris: Gallimard 1955).

2 ‘Man does not exist. God does not exist. All that exists is the world through God and man in the open book.’ Le retour au livre (Paris: Gallimard, 1965) p. 100. All translations are my own; unfortunately they defy the poetic by being limited to sense.

3 ‘I felt myself to be exiled from the exiled the day when I recognized myself to be a Jew.’ Le parcours (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), p. 93. The ambiguity of the expression ‘l’exilé de l’exilé’ should be noted. It contains the sense of the exiled of the exile as well as from the exiled. A similar situation emerges in the translation l’étranger de l’étranger’ in footnote 4. Furthermore it should be noted that the possibility of completion would signal the end of Judaism. In the modern period it is Hegel’s interpretation of Judaism and thus the legacy of Hegelian thinking that works against the possible singularity of Judaism.

4 ‘The relation to Jewishness, to writing is the relation to foreigness – in the original sense of the word and in the sense that it has come to acquire. It can make of us, at the highest point of our non-condition, the stranger of the stranger/estranged from the estranged.’ Dans le double dépendance du dit (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1984), p. 85.

5 ‘Judaism and writing are one and the same wait, hope and wearing away.’ Le livre des questions (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), p. 53.

6 ‘I believe that it is by interrogation that we create our identity. Being a Jew/Jewish being will mean becoming it little by little. At every moment we will only be at the point of being Jew/Jewish being.’ Du désert au livre. Entretiens avec Marcel Cohen (Paris: Pierre Belfond, 1980).

7 I have attempted to take up elements of Jabès’s approach to the question of Jewish identity in a discussion of Kitaj’s paintings. See ‘Kitaj and the Question of Jewish Identity’ in Art, Mimesis and the Avant-Garde (London: Routledge, 1991).
The universe is a work of art. According to the Kabbalah, which is the esoteric aspect of Judaism, ‘God wished to behold God’, but as the Kabbalistic classic, the Zohar, says ‘face did not gaze upon face’. By this is meant the Absolute had nothing in which to mirror itself. Existence was brought into being to make such a portrait possible.

The Divine Biblical name EHYEH ASHER EHYEH – I AM THAT I AM defines the purpose of Existence. However, in order for this statement to be fulfilled, a whole process had to be set in motion, like any creative project. First there had to be moment of conception. This is symbolized in the New Testament sentence ‘In the beginning was the Word’. The word was EHYEH – I AM, the SELF which contained the seed of everything. Then came the connective ASHER, which can be translated as ‘that’ or ‘which’. This moved the process out from the point of origin to generate four great worlds, called in Kabbalah: Emanation, Creation, Formation and Action. These constitute a descending and ascending scale by which the SELF may behold its reflection in the echo of the second I AM, when Existence returns to its source.

The highest world of Emanation is the realm of pure consciousness. Such a reality holds all that is possible. Any work of art can remain in this potential state, and go no further, if the Creator does not will an act of creation. Kabbalah symbolizes this dimension of undifferentiated unity in several ways. One is an anthropomorphic figure of Adam Kadmon. This was a primordial outline. As such it was devoid of detail and depth. To give it life, character and substance; movement, form and materialisation had to occur. These were to be manifest in the three lower realms of the mental, astral and carnal, as some traditions call them.

The Seven Days described in the Bible is a transformation from the simplicity of Eternity to the complexity of Creation. Here the Existence began to differentiate into seven distinct levels with their
spiritual inhabitants. Platonists would call this the Cosmos of Ideas. Here in human terms, an inspiration has to be thought out, before considering a suitable form of expression or medium. Creation is the place of principles, such as the essences of the heavenly hosts, animals, plants and minerals. These are the dynamic spirits behind every creature that has, is and will come into being.

The next world is that of Formation. Here archetypes are turned into a variety of models and their patterns. Thus the prototype of the angel, cat, rose and diamond are formulated into all their modes. In human experience this is the process of design, be it the plan of a building or the plot for a novel. The Kabbalists equated this level with the Garden of Eden and its wondrous variety of species. The two Trees of Life and Knowledge in the midst of the Garden represented the Divine and Creative worlds. Another symbol of the three upper worlds was Ezekiel’s vision of the Chariot (Formation), the Throne of Heaven (Creation) in which was seated the fiery Adam Kadmon (Emanation).

The lowest world, symbolized by Ezekiel’s exile in Babylon, was that of Action or Nature into which Adam and Eve had descended. They took on coats of skin or physical bodies after they had broken the one rule they were given. This error, according to some Kabbalists, was part of a scheme to get humanity, in which individuals are the cells of Adam Kadmon, to incarnate, so that the Divine can experience every level of reality. As beings possessing free will, unlike any other creature, humans have capacity to self realize, that is, to know what and why they exist. Life on Earth is the turning point in a vast process. As humanity lifted itself above the dominance of Nature so it began to reflect on its position and start to return to its origin. When the first bone was carved into the likeness of a human figure, self consciousness became physically manifest and art was born. With this act the Absolute began to paint in the details of Its portrait. Art became a mode of expression, not just for mankind, but of God.

As civilization developed, so its perception of Existence became more refined. An awareness of the earth spirits and the celestial gods led to the birth of creative imagination and more profound expression. Legends and myths recorded, moreover, not only heroic human experiences but speculation about the purpose of the universe and the meaning of life and death. The contemplation of such matters
generated a whole genre of major works of art in the ancient world which reflected a deepening understanding of the soul and its destiny. By the medieval period a whole cosmology had been developed that mapped out a picture of all the worlds. The great Gothic cathedrals came out of this. Such buildings had a profound effect upon society which tried to model itself upon cosmic and spiritual order. Inspired by such advanced souls as Moses, Zoroaster, Jesus and Mohammed, people were encouraged to regain Paradise and even enter Heaven by developing their psychological and spiritual potential. The arts were very influential in this field in the rise of the painter, sculptor and writer. Their portrayal of beauty expressed the virtues of goodness and truth – and the reverse in ugliness. Indeed the Arts of a civilization reveal, in its preoccupations, exactly at what phase it is in its evolution, while fashion demonstrates its trend. At the material level, such practices as architecture reflect the attitude of a culture towards its environment, even as the fine arts illustrate the psychological and social situation. Those who seek to make their fate a work of art represent the highest form of expression. These individuals can be peasants, poets or even rulers. True greatness is not confined to class or nation, but it always has the cosmic quality of spirituality or the timelessness of Divinity.

Art is an imitation of the Creator. Artists in whatever medium seek to make their version of reality. This can contribute to humanity’s perception, or through distortion, impair their own and others’ evolution. According to Kabbalah, each life adds in its success and failures to the light and shade of the Adam Kadmon picture. The saints and sages produce masterpieces in living out their destinies, while the rest of us are learning how to scribble and sketch. In time we too will add a fine piece of brushwork to the great SELF portrait that is being slowly built up over many incarnations. When the ‘Work’, as some esoteric traditions call it, is complete and the image of Adam Kadmon is finished, then it will be the perfect reflection of the Absolute and I AM THAT I AM will have realized its intention.
HAROLD MORLAND

From: A Scatter of Seed

I feel the grass's
delirium of delight
in a little wind

Why long for a storm?
This rose breathes its best self
in a quiet air.

I broke just a twig
from a growing tree, and know
the pain of life's sin.

Only after an hour
of storm and pain can I see
why this primrose smiles.

I am weary of words.
They are the dead leaves falling
from a creaking bough.

Tintern still at prayer
raises its worn saintly hands
in benediction.

All tears are easy,
like a heart's mere weather.

Grief
builds a cairn of stones.
I am tired of words.
   They shape my heart's life into
   idols to worship.

*     *     *

Let me be quiet.
   My mind needs time ... Time? It needs
   all eternity.

*     *     *

Turn to this flower,
   alive two days. Yet it smiles
   everlastingly.

*     *     *

Why should love endure?
   Washed by long waves of silence
   it rounds to a world.

*     *     *

I need no more faith.
   I simply touch my friend's hand
   with belief enough.

*     *     *

Still in my garden
   I bend to pluck a weed but
   see its smiling face.

*     *     *

I only worship
   like one in a quiet church
   after God's Sabbath.

*     *     *

Only a picture
   looking at me can tell
   that I am looking.

*     *     *
Let me watch this bloom –
nameless to me – that dances
in the living air.

Strange! Without a creed
I need tonight to kneel down
for earth's forgiveness.

The snow was pure white
being God's truth, until I
took the first steps there.

I scatter my mind
in dry crumbs of living bread
to tempt a wing'd soul.

This slow insect crawls
across my subtle Plato …
Comment
On him?
Me?

I've touched the petal
with a finger's soft greeting.
Neither needs to speak.

Yes, the flame flickers,
then suddenly it blazes
time's rubbish to ash.

I chip my silence.
Shall I shape a truth, or count
this mound of debris?
Time, like the slow blood  
in my veins, beats the drum-roll  
of a dying age.

* * *

I watch busy ants  
bustling about with white grubs  
of the same old selves.

* * *

Day shades down to dusk.  
Though no sun shines, human lights  
glow now more clearly.

* * *

Only the gargoyles  
dare to be quite honest  
about the parson's sermon.

* * *

On a gray silk ground  
morning, in the Chinese way,  
sketches the black trees.

* * *

My empty shoes gape  
at me, their dumb tongues asking  
'Who is going where?'

* * *

Night, the black hunter  
of the wounded sun, lets it  
bleed out on the hills.

* * *

Just a cup-handle  
found in digging in my garden  
asks its own question.

* * *

You are impatient.  
First meet yourself, my good man,  
THEN wish to meet God.
I would like to suggest, in a few pages, how I see the fact that among all the forms of mysticism our science of religions has made known to us, Persian mysticism is notable as having always tended towards musical expression, and as never having found its complete expression otherwise than in that form. The part played by music in Islamic countries has not, over the centuries, followed the same course as in the West; doubtless because those who condemned its use saw in it nothing more than a profane diversion. By contrast, what our mystics have produced is in the nature of an equivalent of what we call sacred music; and the reason for this is so profound that, rightly understood, all music, provided it be devoted to its supreme end, cannot be seen as other than sacred music. But is that not another paradox?

I believe that every Iranian must remember, more or less, the famous prologue to Jalâlodîn Balkhî Rûmî's Mathnawî, more often known in Iran as Mawlânâ. This prologue perhaps serves to justify the paradox I have just stated. Of this I have been convinced by the recent discovery, in the course of my researches, of an eminent Iranian thinker, at present almost unknown to the general public, but who deserves, when the time comes, I truly believe, to figure in our anthologies of the history of philosophy and spirituality – I mean the 17th century Qâzî Sa'id Qommî. In one of his great works, still in manuscript, this philosopher recalls, and comments at length on certain propositions of one who is equally dear to Iranian hearts, the first Imâm of the Shi'îtes, Mawlânâ 'Alî ibn Abî Tâlib. According to this tradition the first Imâm said one day, in the presence of his friends, 'Because in my heart there were anguishing cares which I was unable to find anyone in whom to confide, I struck the ground with the palm of my hand and confided my secrets to it, so that every time a plant germinates from the earth, that plant is one of my secrets.'

This is not a question, to be sure, of some secret of rural economy. The earth of which he speaks is not the earth under our feet and which is today in process of being devastated by the ambitions of our inordinate conquests. Is is the ‘Earth of Light’ perceived only with the eyes of the heart. But it is for us – for each of us – to behold that Earth with eyes capable of seeing it and, so beholding it, to ensure that the ‘Earth of Light’ still matters to us, concerns us too. It depends on ourselves whether (striking the ground of that Earth of Light with the Imám) we see emerging certain plants which reveal to us our scarcely suspected secrets. And occupying a pre-eminent place among these plants the philosopher Qâzî Sa‘îd Qommi names the reed from which the mystic flute is cut, whose lament is breathed in the prologue of the Mathnawî, and of which we know that it is associated with the religious services of the Mawlând Order.

We have all heard chanted at least a few verses of that prologue:

Listen to the story told by the reed flute, of the partings whose lament it breathes,
Since I was cut from the reed-bed my plaint has made both men and women mourn their lot.
Whoever is parted far from his native place longs to return to the time of union.
My secret and my plaint are one, but both eye and ear lack light.
Body is not veiled from soul, nor soul from body; yet none is permitted to see the soul.
The sound of that flute is not a breath of wind, it is fire! He who has not that fire, let him be nothing!

Certainly no-one has seen the soul with the eyes with which we normally perceive the things of this world. Only the lament of the mystic flute cut from the source, from the Earth of Light, can give some premonition of it. All that grows from that Earth and is separated from it, the story of exile and return, this it is that haunts the mysticism of Persia, something which can neither be seen nor proved by reason, which cannot be said or seen by direct vision, but of which musical incantation alone can give us a foretaste and make perceptible, insofar as it belongs to listening to music to make us suddenly into clairvoyants.

The unsayable which the mystic seeks to say is a story that shatters what we call history and which we must indeed call metahistory,
because it takes place at the origin of origins, anterior to all those events recorded — or recordable — in our chronicles. The mystic epic is that of the exile, who, having come into a strange world, is on the road of homecoming to his own country. What that epic seeks to tell is dreams of a prehistory, the prehistory of the soul, of its pre-existence to this world, dreams which seem to us a forever forbidden frontier. That is why, in an epic like the Mathnawi we can scarcely speak of a succession of episodes, for all these are emblematic, symbolic. All dialectical discourse is precluded. The global consciousness of that past, and of the future to which it invites us beyond the limit of chronology, can only attain musically its absolute character. In order to have their ‘Holy Book’, that Mathnawi which is often called ‘the Persian Qurʾān, the mystics are, essentially, obliged to sing in order to speak.

Such too is the structure of all those musical auditions which often, spontaneously, are improvised in Iran. The instrumentalist begins with a long prelude whose sonority continues to amplify. Then the human voice comes in, like a paroxysm, itself leading to deep sonorities, to culminate in turn in a paroxysm of feeling and gradually redescending towards silence. And the postlude, with which the instrument accompanies that silence, seems at last to lose itself like the arpeggio of a far light, that light whose new dawn all mystics await.

What is known as the ʿSamaʿ, the spiritual concert, the oratorio, of course goes beyond the special case of the Mawlānā and its Order. The whole story of Iranian Sufism is before us, certain severe Masters (puritans that is to say) holding the spiritual concert in suspicion, while others, by contrast, practise it with the assiduity of a cult, from which each retains an overwhelming impression. Among the latter I would cite one example, a great twelfth-century Master, Rûzbehān Baqīl Shīrāzī, compatriot of Ḥāfez of Shīrāz, whom he preceded by some two centuries and with whom he is linked by many affinities.

At the end of his life, however, we see Rûzbehān abstaining from the practise of listening to music: he no longer needed the intermediary of sensible sounds, the inaudible had become audible to him as a pure interior music. Thus his whole life exemplifies that structure of musical audition of which I have just spoken. To a friend who questioned him on the reason for his abstention, Shaykh Rûzbehān made this reply: ‘Henceforth it is God in person who gives me his concert (or God himself is the oratorio I hear). That is why I abstain
from listening to anything other than He would make me hear (or any other concert than Himself).’

At the end of a lifetime’s experience, when the ear of the heart, of the interior man, becomes indifferent to sounds of the outer world, at that moment it perceives harmonies which can never be heard by the man dispersed outside himself, torn away from himself by ambitions of this world. What the ear of the heart then perceives are the harmonies of the music beyond the grave which certain privileged ones have already perceived even in this world, rendering that opaque barrier transparent for them.

At his death a friend and disciple of Shaykh Rûzbehân remained especially inconsolable. For years, every morning, at dawn, they had made it a habit to chant alternately verses of the Qur’ân. Such was the grief of the lonely friend in Shîrâz that he used to go and sit at the head of the tomb and there to begin, alone, the chanting of the Qur’ân. But one day, as dawn came, it came to pass that the voice of Rûzbehân made itself heard from the invisible, from one world to the other, or rather the two friends took up again, in the same interworld, the antiphonal chanting of the Qur’ân. And so it continued each day, at dawn, until the friend confided in one of his acquaintance. ‘From that time,’ he said, ‘I no longer heard the voice of Rûzbehân.’

This, as if to suggest that, if the mystic must sing in order to speak, if the meaning of the mystic is essentially musical, this meaning remains incommunicable. From the moment we have the temerity to communicate, to reveal the fugitive instant when ‘the soul becomes visible to the body’, then that secret is lost to us.

Therefore I wish to say no more. But I would hope, in conclusion, that this sacralization of music by Persian mysticism may help us to some presentiment of the meaning of a ‘beauty’ which arouses in the modern world a veritable fury of denial and destruction. I would hope that we may perceive the significance and the permanent presence of an art which is not a province of fashion. The work of a Mawlânâ, like that of a Rûzbehân and many more besides, which illustrates the spiritual history of Iran is, every time, essentially the expression of a personality whom we shall not find twice among men. To whoever, then, has truly understood, it will never occur to suppose that they have been ‘superceded’.

Translated by Kathleen Raine
Before the war Ivan would walk by a stream,
Where a willow-tree grew – no one knows whose.
It had no idea, why it leaned over the stream,
But that was the willow of Ivan, of Ivan.
In his cape-tent, butchered in battle,
Ivan returned to the foot of his willow.

The willow of Ivan,
The willow of Ivan,
Like a white ship, is floating downstream.

Oh, if only half to rise, come to, wake up, and
At the most burdensome hour bless the toil
Which watered the meadows and fed the gardens,
And for the last time swallow from a convex dish
The crystal marrow of water from the downy leaf.

Give me but one drop, oh my earthly grass, give me
In exchange an oath – to take as inheritance my speech,
To open wide the throat, not to spare your blood,
without remembering me, and breaking up my words,
Inflame your dried up mouth with my burning fire.
Late Maturity

Was it not the fate of my late maturity
That, heart in mouth, I should bemoan
The mellowness of September in every word,
The weight of the apple, the flesh of the wild rose,
The smoke of the powder, drifting over the clearing,
The dryness of cranberry groves, and for the sake
Of the truth – the return to my poetry, of which
There remained but blots in my notebook.

All that was gathered was folded in baskets,
And a cart rumbled by on the bridge.
Grant me once more that I should lean over the top,
Grant me that I should last to the first of the snows.

Translated by Peter Norman
The Love of Art*

ANANDA K. COOMARASWAMY

Most of us take a certain pride in the great collections of works of art preserved in our museums, and in the systematic efforts that are made in schools and universities to teach the appreciation of art and to bring about improvements in taste; we congratulate ourselves upon the presence amongst us of individual collectors and ‘lovers of art.’ I am not going to maintain that these cultural activities are, humanly speaking, altogether insignificant, but I am going to suggest that they represent very little more than palliative measures applied to symptoms of what is really a fundamental spiritual deficiency in ourselves, too deep-seated to be dealt with by such indirect methods. I am going to suggest that the love of art, and the collection of works of art, when regarded as ends in themselves, imply the view that art is essentially an emotional luxury, that art can be divided off from and known apart from every-day social, industrial, and political activity, and should be seen only in museums and private collections, or heard only in great concert-halls; just as we have come to think of religion as a luxury product, distinct from social, industrial, and political functions, and to be considered only in church and on Sundays.

What we have to say may be summed up in Ruskin’s devastating criticism of modern life, ‘Industry without art is brutality,’ a saying comparable to that of St Thomas Aquinas, that ‘There can be no good use without art’: and in the incisive words of William Morris, who pointed out that the objects that we now exhibit in museums were ‘once the common objects of the market place.’ In what were called the Dark Ages, and amongst all those whom we dare to call ‘uncivilized’ peoples, ‘art’ had no other meaning than ‘the right way of making things,’ ‘things’ being anything whatever required by man to

* Broadcast by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, in ‘Educational Programs’, WIXAL, Boston, 12th April, 1936, published in Blackfriars, 17.434 (1936) and subsequently in Catholic Art Quarterly (1960) and in Good Work (1965). Copyright Dr Rama P. Coomaraswamy.
serve his needs, whether physical or spiritual; the maker of things was therefore called an ‘artist’ or, to use the mediæval word, an ‘artificer,’ or ‘maker by art.’ Whatever was made, was made by the artist, not for connoisseurs, but for consumers, not for exhibition but for use. It was taken for granted that the consumer is the critic: as Plato expresses it, ‘the judge of shuttles is the weaver, the judge of ships the pilot.’

Man as artist was then the servant of man in general: what was to be made, and what was to be expressed, was determined by man as Man, for as Plotinus says, ‘In the matter of the arts and crafts, all that are to be traced to the needs of human nature are laid up in the Absolute Man.’ The artist’s peculiarity lay only in knowing how the particular work could be done, and this knowledge was called his art. Man thus came first: the artist claimed no right to use the consumer’s need as the opportunity for the expression of his private personality, views, or tastes. Artist and consumer were culturally unanimous; they shared the same views and tastes and recognized the same needs. They had a common interest, but it was not in one another’s personalities, unless they happened to be personal friends; their mutual interest was in ‘the good of the thing to be made.’ No one supposed that the artist was a more sensitive or more intelligent being than other men, but simply that he was expert in some department of manufacture, either as a blacksmith, painter, architect, or in some other field. There were once no trades that were not also vocations, and this is how it was when the works of art that we now preserve in museums, perhaps I should say in cold storage, were common objects of the market place: for as Plato says in words which are effectively a definition of caste, ‘more will be done, and better done, and with more ease, when everyone does but one thing, according to his genius, and this is justice to each man in himself.’

It is we – you and I as consenting members of a society based upon the principle of competitive production not for better use but for more profit – who have been, historically speaking, the first to take for granted the propriety of an industry without art: the first to bring into being a recognized proletarian class of unskilled labourers, working without intellectual responsibility for what they produce, and to whom we are therefore forced to make the pious recommendation to cultivate the higher things of life in those hours of leisure which have been so providentially increased by the continual invention of labour-
saving devices. We, within the terms of Ruskin's definition, are the first 'civilized brutes.'

In thus appointing one large class of men, workers in factories and offices, to mindless labour, and in consenting to the parasitic existence of a smaller class of men called artists (in our restricted modern sense of the word) it is we ourselves who have brought about that very lack of artistic understanding and want of taste that we are now so laboriously attempting to correct in our educational institutions. We seem to think that a few hours of instruction, the hearing of a few lectures, or the reading of a few volumes on the appreciation of art will set a man in the right way to be an artist at heart for the rest of his life, even though the greater part of his waking hours be spent in a factory moving a lever to and fro. The only men who can nowadays be called artists in the original sense of the word are the engineers, and independent plumbers or carpenters who still like to do a job 'right,' which corresponds to the old idea of working for 'the good of the work to be done,' and not at all to that of 'art for art's sake,' which is as much as to say 'talking for the sake of hearing one's own voice.' When therefore we propose to bring about such a state of affairs as is implied in the expressions 'art for everyone,' and 'everyone an artist,' we are not trying to bring about something new in the world, but to restore something very old and very normal.

In the meantime the contagion of competitive industrialism is very rapidly destroying every remaining vestige of this old and normal life in the farthest corners of the world where the arts of the people still maintain a precarious existence. Is it just because the folk arts are now in extremis that we feel it so urgent to preserve examples of them in museums before it is 'too late.' Humanly speaking, it is already 'too late'; we have already confessed that it is a pity that St Thomas Aquinas, who knew so much about art, 'did not understand business,' though we are much too sentimental to admit that 'business,' i.e. production for profit, and art, i.e. production for use, are incompatible. Humanly speaking, it is too late; for when men can no longer sing at their tasks, it is poor consolation to offer them the songs of labour preserved between the covers of printed books. Our whole attempt to 'bring contemporary movements in art to those who live in remote places where museums and libraries are inaccessible' is based on false assumptions, and presents a sorry case of the right hand seeking to
build up what the left destroys. As Professor Cox lately remarked: 'Our main streets have grown nightmarish, our suburbs slatternly, and our cities almost wholly deprived of any claim to represent an intelligent civilization.' It is our own senile indifference to disorder and ugliness that we are really introducing to the remote places of the world; for as Blake expresses it: 'When nations grow old, the arts grow cold, and commerce settles on every tree.' For example, as Mr Iklé says of what has been called one of the most delicate and intricate arts that has ever been invented: 'It is a question whether the beautiful art of ikat weaving can long survive in the Dutch East Indies. Like many other crafts it does not find sufficient appreciation in the Western World, this same world which is so ready to flood the remainder of our globe with inferior mass products, thus destroying among native peoples the concepts of quality and beauty, together with the joy of creation. ... Only on the remote islands ... not so easily reached by foreigners, do arts and crafts preserve their ancient beauty.' Civilizations such as ours, founded on economic slavery and the prostitution of science – which is not a matter of this or that political system, but simply one of spiritual inhibition – can neither rectify their own errors by calculated educational procedures, nor offer anything of value to their victims.

I am by no means making an indiscriminate attack on mechanized production, or pretending that things made by machinery can be anything but works of art, or may not be beautiful. A thoroughly modern kitchen, or anything made in the vitally contemporary modern style, which is that of the laboratory or operating room, is not only adapted to use, but also pleases when seen. A flight of aeroplanes, a modern bridge; or the New York skyline, with its spires, may be very beautiful. What I am trying to point out is that in making the majority of individual men themselves a part of the machinery, in denying to all but the engineer a share in the creative and most godlike part of art, we are making machines of men themselves. I am suggesting that the price of our so-called standard of living is too high, and that we are sacrificing realities for shadows, happiness for pleasures, eternities for temporalities, and cannot make up for this by introducing a reproduction of 'Whistler's “Mother” and a copy of the ‘Five-foot shelf’ into every workman's tenement. I am suggesting that of all our lovers and collectors of art, only an infinitesimal fraction feel
in their very hands the instinct of workmanship, on which is founded that 'good taste' which demands in everything made that it be well and truly made. I am suggesting that by and large we get just what sort of art that we deserve: that it is vain to speak of 'art for everyone' so long as we deny to the majority of men an individual responsibility for all they make.

The productions of robots may be beautiful. But to make something beautiful has never been the aim of art or artists. The artist is concerned with uses, physical and spiritual; it is the philosopher who speaks of beauty. For him the beauty of the thing well made is not its use, but an invitation to use, whether physical or spiritual. If now those who make things are themselves rather machines than men, it follows that what they make, although it may be beautiful, can only have that kind of beauty that invites to comfort and physical uses, and not that kind of beauty that is intellectual. It is precisely at this point, and not simply because we make use of machines, that our industrial production differs from that of the Dark Ages and uncivilized peoples, to whom it had never occurred that man could live by bread alone. It is not a matter of indifference from the consumer's point of view; for as William of Thierry has said: 'The inward things of us are touched not a little by the things without us, which are made and shapen unto the likeness of the mind and after their own fashion answer to a good (or evil) intent.'

At the opposite extreme we have the modern artist, whose productions are supposed to serve only intellectual and spiritual uses. These social parasites are expected to provide for other men what their own occupations forbid; very much as the football star provides them with exercise. If you cannot afford an original, buy one of our admirable reproductions; if you must work in an office, you can pay the star to play your games, and everyone will be pleased. But the modern artist has long since renounced his allegiance to the world and duty to the patron, and asserted his independence. Every one of these artists must have a biography, must be separately studied, and separately misunderstood. Meanwhile the normal human being remains uninterested in artistic personalities, and is no more inclined to go to one man shows than to go to church on Sunday. It is in fact far more reasonable to accept the arts of physical comfort and resign ourselves to do without the higher things of life, than to pretend that the
exhibitionism of peculiar people has really any serious intellectual or spiritual value.

It will be another matter if one proposes not merely to be a lover of fine sounds and colours, not merely to be a connoisseur and collector, but to understand the reason of art, to understand that all peoples and all ages other than our own have created works of art, not for ornament, but use; and that to make anything solely for physical and not at the same time for spiritual uses is something rather less than human. But everyone who becomes a lover of art in this sense must realize that he can only do so as an enemy of all that we generally mean by civilization; he cannot serve God and Mammon at the same time.
A Scroll of Fern

1.
True poems I call fingerprints
That show upon their grain of skin
Those delicate labyrinths within
Which are the essential her or him.

Yet poems are like footprints too,
Precise across a field of dew
To lead us on some echoing trail
To where that hidden trove, the secret source
Of resonance, can be hailed:
A frozen gleam, a buried seal of gold,
This unseen watermark upon the page.

2.
Renounce all blandishments, all curtain-calls,
Those attitudes to self that choke
And dry the streambeds of the mind.
Explore instead the heart’s lost wilderness,
Where wavering forms and sudden glooms
Wind through the hushed tangle of clouded afternoons;
Where just ahead in that ghostly forest-ride
Loose threads of sunshine unravel now
Into a quick pattern of brief glitters and glides.

3.
Somewhere at the cave’s mouth,
Buried within its fringe of ice,
A living frond, a scroll of fern,
That source of every sign we seek:
A bud’s embedded crozier unfurled,
A crook that’s sentinel and cannot break.
Afternoon Lions

In such heat the lions unsnarl
Upon their headlands of rock
As the long hiss of grass-surf
Curls around their feet.

At ease now,
Their tawny bodies full of sunlight,
Their maned faces somnolent sunflowers
Slowly turning in the sleepy warmth
Of sultry savannah afternoons,
The friendly topaz of their eyes
Is now asleep on riverbeds of peace.

Night-Thrushes

All night, it seemed, thrushes
Were singing their heart out,
Threading the sleepy treetops all around
With thrilling, complicated webs of sound
In which my heart was spun about
Dazed with delight — a shuttle
Tossed from side to side as they wove
And wove strands that mistily glowed:
A swung, a swaying hammock of sound
Slung from tree to tree, in which I slowly
Turned to rest, sleeping soundly through the light.
An Island of Dew

I am haunted by the dew;
Not simply its grassblade beauty
Trembling but its secret operation
By night, whose darkest alchemy
Precipitates tears
Out of a velvet sky.

Dewfalls at evening sweeten
A parched land, are signs of greening:
Exhausted nature’s cooling sweat.
Yet dew is shortlived now,
Evaporates in our sun’s dry glare
Transient as wind, as late time.
Once in dawns so thickly laid,
This eye of noon will seek it everywhere;
Yet it has aged invisibly, fled
Like the vanished god of the white mistletoe
Whose pearly berries likewise thickly lay.

This was an island rich in dew,
With God’s name trembling on every leaf
Turning the shadows and all shapes
To what thought dreamed or craved:
Ladders of air rooted in the soil,
On which, like scales of music,
Delighted feet climbed up and down –
Skylarks forever rising out of sight
And dropping back to earth to rise again
Into thin air like the soaring dews exhaled.

Note: This poem contains a pun on the word ‘dew’ and the Welsh ‘duw’ (pronounced ‘dew’) = God. The poet is a native of Wales.
Once upon a time, in the depths of the forest, in the deepest green of the forest, there dwelt a speckled bird. He dwelt, he lived there, he inhabited that place, that particular spot. It was his place. Everyone knew it.

‘That is the place of the speckled bird,’ they would say. ‘It is most certainly his place.’

The birds knew it; the furred animals and the scaled animals knew it. The ants, spiders, midges, mosquitos, bees, hornets, even the leeches there knew: ‘In the depths, in the deepest depths there is the centre of the forest, where the speckled bird has his place. All other places in the forest are less deep than his place, his home. They are deep in the forest according to their placing near or far from the place of the speckled bird. And because of his place we know where we are. If it were not for that deepest depth of a forest place we would not know where we are. We would look all around not knowing. We would be lost, we would be bewildered. We would go here and there and here and there not knowing. We would follow the night, we would follow the day, but we would not know at all where we were or where we went. But because of the place of the speckled bird we can fly or creep or run or lie quite unmoving and know the place where we are, the place where we go, our place. Blessings upon the place where dwells the speckled bird. Blessings upon the bird of that place. He blesses and is blessed by providing accommodation for all other places; for making our places freely directed, for making the knowledge of places.’

The green leaves of the forest shimmered in the wind that curled among the trees. The tops of the trees, sometimes crowned with orchids, nodded to the sunlight, and the creepers entwining the branches stretched themselves from one place to the next, delineating their existence, making a meshwork of ways. The animals proceeded likewise, going from here to there with their own intent, making their ways into threads of purpose.
Meanwhile the speckled bird within his place reflected the other places. Upon his feathers the leaf shadows flickered. From above the sunlight dabbled upon him, from below the shadows of the deepest depths of the forest brushed his feathers with dusk. Who therefore
could tell on seeing him in his dappled plumage whether his feathers were speckled with light and shadow or with intrinsic variegated spots? That was the great mystery of the forest's heart. Who, who indeed, could tell of the nature, the actual not apparent nature, of the speckled bird? The difficulty, first and foremost, was to see him there at all. He was so much part of his place with the sunlight and the shadow; so much part of his place, sitting among the leaves that trembled in the wind; so much part of his place by his inward stillness, his being there; his heart within the heart of the forest, his eye within the inscrutable eye of the forest, his life within the reverberating life of the forest, that anyone who saw him there at all would have found it difficult to pronounce what was bird and what was not. Yet there was no doubt that he was there. About that there was no question. He was there and because of his being there, the other creatures knew that they were there too. From his forest perch he would look out. He would observe. Into his reflective and reflecting eye all things converged. He saw. With his eye he looked, drawing the many, the multitudinous directions into his gaze. And within his gaze all the many, manifold things of the forest, each in its own place, converged into his place, his ineffable place.

When light falls upon leaves, it falls in many ways. It dapples, streaks, shimmers, blotches, discovers, reveals what lies beneath. In just this way in the heart of the forest the light fell upon the leaves and upon what lay beneath them. It fell upon the speckled bird elucidating his mysterious presence. And it fell upon the ground beneath the tree wherein the bird was perching. There on the ground, on the carpet of forest plants the light dappled and shimmered. And thus the toad was revealed. There he sat, blinking his prehistoric eyelids, wrinkled and warted, and looked at the speckling bird in the branches above his head. And he too was speckled. He blinked again and the light was speckled.

'In this place,' he considered, 'the admixture of darkness with light is particularly pleasing. Here everything is wonderfully warted, wonderfully variegated.'

He gazed up towards the branch where sat the bird. He gulped, and stretched out his three-toed hand in salutation.

'Greetings, O bird.'

'Greetings, O toad,' the bird replied.
There was silence. No more was said. The toad had come there with a purpose. He had come there with a question. ‘What’ he thought ‘is my purpose? What is my question?’

As he sat there blinking it was as if he could not remember. Perhaps his question and his purpose had been left behind in those other places on the way. Or had they melted away into the dappled shadow and light of that place? The toad had come thinking that he wanted an answer to something or other, but in the place where he now was no answer seemed to be needed. His protruberant eyes mirrored the eyes of the bird.

‘This is unquestionable,’ he nodded to himself.

‘Greetings, O bird,’ he said again.

‘Greetings, O toad,’ the bird replied.

Again the eyes of each mirrored the eyes of the other. And the inner eye of each reflected the image that the outer eyes saw, and stored that image, that vision, in the memory of the soul, as a pearl in the forehead. Thus each contained the other, a talisman, in his soul.

And the toad lolloped away. Back he went to the other places, the mud places and the hole places and the tangled tree-root places of the forest. And wherever he went, he carried the talisman in his soul with him, so the place of the speckled bird in the deepest depth of the forest was every place where the toad was. The muddy swamp was that place, the grass bank was that place, the bed of fallen leaves was that place. And in every place which was that place, the toad was, and in each place he reflected the speckled-light and shade with his own splendid squamosity. There was no question that he was there. About that there was no doubt. His variegated appearance, his wonderfully warded skin reflected the conditions about him, so that all the other creatures looked where he was and said: ‘He is most certainly there. We know because the pearly mirror of his soul’s eye confirms our presence also in this place.’

Thus each and every creature became aware not only of where they were, but of who they were. And they rejoiced in their variety. Each was uniquely himself (or of course herself), but in his soul’s gaze he saw the reflection of all other creatures, who in their turn reflected him in his uniqueness. Thus the forest could be named a Place of Paradise, yet it could at the same time be named Here or There or Wherever You Are. Written at Ninfa for Hubert Howard
The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination*

WILSON HARRIS

Here on the surface of mystery (table and tablecloth, book and page)
World's inexhaustible heritage
Into the present rises, the unregarded familiar
Where, in ignorance and wonder, I receive and praise.

These lines by Kathleen Raine are, I believe, acutely relevant to the passion which informs the founding of the Temenos Academy in these critical and dangerous times as we move into the last decade of the twentieth century.

A few weeks ago I met a German publisher, a man of sensitivity and sensibility, and he told me of an unusual difficulty he faced in his publishing business. He had received a manuscript which he and his readers perceived as clinically brilliant and impressive. But it left them with an unhappy and bitter taste in the mouth. As though they had been consuming ashes. The writer had analyzed the state of civilization, the pollution, the greenhouse effect, the devastation of landscapes, the rising tide of anti-semitism, the possibility of ethnic and racial conflicts, the division between cultures, famine on one hand, prosperity on the other.

He had concluded that civilization was subject to a circumscription of values, an incorrigibility, that was propelling it into an abyss. The fatality was endemic and could not be overcome.

I understood the publisher's hesitation in publishing the thesis. I have not heard what decision he may have reached in this matter. On the surface of my mind I felt the German writer may have made a logical analysis one could not overturn. Unless one could breach his argument in the light of a vision of resources, available to the Imagination, he had not considered in the pattern of his thesis. Perhaps within the abyss of which he speaks there are proportions

* Address to Temenos Academy, 18th March, 1992.
through and beyond models of discourse, models of tradition we have been conditioned to accept as absolute. Perhaps there is a strangeness, a series of strangers within the body of the self, so to speak, that may offer us a wholly different intuitive penetration of the life of the Imagination. Perhaps the abyss so-called secretes unsuspected resources that may alter circumscriptions of fate.

I would like to pursue this in my address this evening which, in some degree, takes the form (if ‘form’ is the word) of a journey …

May I start somewhere in the ancient world. Antigone by Sophocles. Sophocles, it seems to me, has addressed the blindness of his society, its circumscription by ritual habit, its restrictive or restricted vision, in a peculiar and uncertain way. Paradoxically it is this peculiarity, this uncertainty, that makes him a great playwright of the ancient world. Tiresias — the seer in the play — was spiritually sighted but physically blind. He tries to persuade Creon, the king of Thebes, that Antigone’s brother who lies on the street should be given a proper burial. But Creon is intent — in the exposure of the corpse — on scourging everyone who may contemplate rebellion. Creon though physically sighted was spiritually blind. How may we plumb or address the nature of vision in such a world? Antigone’s father Oedipus was blind. All the characters in the play seem to have inherited a cloak over their eyes which they hold up in varying degrees as the flag of self-righteousness or conviction or hubris. In the end Hades triumphs. Some scholars would call this ontic or aboriginal tautology. Hades is Hades is Hades for ever and ever.

As I reflect on this now it seems to me that the German writer — despite his clinical logic and brilliance — is the victim of ontic tautology. The endemic fatality of his discourse — with all its statistical and convincing panoply — is circumscribed by classical Hades.

It is interesting to note that many of the outstanding American playwrights — Eugene O’Neill, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams — are deeply enmeshed in patterns of classical tragedy in their twentieth-century plays.

Now, there is something in Antigone I would like to address quickly. There comes a moment when Antigone abandons her traditional or ritual plea. She concentrates with extraordinary and irrational exclusivity upon her brother’s plight. It is almost as if he is occultly alive and she is pleading for his life. Prior to this moment her plea was based on
the sacred laws of the state, a plea that Tiresias endorsed. The particular lines expressing this divergence in the substance of Antigone’s plea have been disputed by scholars. Goethe was amongst these who claimed that Sophocles did not write those lines. They had been planted in the text by a stranger hand. And yet Aristotle who knew the play raised no such questions.

I tend to feel – as an imaginative writer subject to uncanny lines sprung from unconscious/subconscious memory, and appearing within the drafts of fiction I write – that Sophocles planted those lines in his play. I see such lines as ‘intuitive clues’. A term I have adopted in previous essays. I interpret ‘intuitive clue’ as implying that the visible text of the play runs in concert with an invisible text that secretes a corridor into the future, a future where the burden of classical blindness – as in the instance of Sophocles’s Antigone – needs to be taken up and treated differently. That corridor for me, in this context, runs into the dawn of the Christian age.

How do the texts of the Gospels take up the burden of classical blindness? The occult life of the risen Christ confuses Mary Magdalene. Christ is not immediately recognizable. The resurrected body of Christ walks on the road to Emmaus but is not recognized by his companions who knew him well before the crucifixion. And yet a breach occurs in the tautology of Hades. That breach constitutes a kind of subtle abyss in a story-line we take for granted. Christ – let us say – crosses from one bank of the subtle abyss to the other. He is apparently the same person but – in acquiring or absorbing unsuspected particularities and elements in the fabric of the risen body – he is not immediately recognizable. It takes a new concentration, a new way of reading reality, for his companions to recognise him and begin to come abreast of the resources of the subtle abyss. Thus the resurrection-body does not conform to a story-line upon which everything is immediately clear and conformable to a ruling pattern.

The tautology of the story-line is fractured in favour of a mysterious continuity that defies absolute models, absolute formula. One senses that the models we have enshrined – whether tragedy, epic, allegory, documentary realism – are partial, and if we invest in them absolutely then alas the abyss into which our civilization is slipping has nothing to offer us but an ultimate divorce from the genesis and mystery of consciousness, ultimate divorce from reality, ultimate loss.
The motif of the resurrection-body appears to have its unfathomable roots in an occult dimension within the life and unfinished genesis of the Imagination such as erupts I feel in Antigone's exclusive and re-visionary alignment with her dead brother who became mysteriously demanding and alive. But also when we attempt to give historic certitude to the resurrection-body of Christ in the first century A.D. we are confused and puzzled as that body appears to elude us and to slip away into the future as though something that may have happened in the past relates to the mystery of time, to the future.

Let us visualize an invisible arch, an invisible text, running from the ancient world into the originality of the future. How does this bear upon, or address, for instance, Dante's 'divine comedy'? You may recall that Virgil was barred from the paradiso. He had come from a pre-Christian age. He had come from the pagan world. He was a pagan. Virgil's exclusion from the paradiso raises momentous – however disguised – questions about the character of tradition in the modern world.

It is easy to say to ourselves – why bother with a thirteenth-century poet whose great allegory is remote from us? Indeed why bother with Sophocles? I do not agree. Herman Melville and Malcolm Lowry – American and English writers of genius – were profoundly aware of the dimensionalities of allegory within the modern world. Whether we are conscious of it or not there are pre-possessions within our civilization that make us susceptible to patterns of property which are securely guarded in one shape or form until they border upon an authoritarian paradiso. The authoritarian texture tends to be hidden beneath various legal codes that enshrine cultural and economic and racial distinctions between outsiders and insiders, economic migrants and political refugees.

The barriers between religions today are notoriously visible. We invite obscenities or shout abuse at each other across those barriers. How intractable are such barriers? What are the tasks of imaginative genius to begin the transformation of such barriers in the light of numinous and unsuspected resources available to the Imagination within the abyss of our late twentieth-century age?

Clearly there are no answers to such questions in terms of pure tradition which may offer us patterns of satire, of comedy, of fantasy, patterns in which we make game of each other, post-modern game
with glosses upon freedom of speech, terrorist game, ideological game, advertising game, but a deeper answer, an unpredictable breakthrough, must awaken us to a counterpoint between originality and tradition unlike the models we possess.

I mention this because I shall soon speak of my own work. But the pressure to do so — strange as it may appear — is free of egocentricity. It is a pressure that arises from strangeness, from abysmal strangeness. Abysmal not in a despairing sense. Surely this is clear by now! Abysmal in the sense of the subtle abysses that lie between all partial models of tradition, subtle abysses that make strangeness into intimacy, intimacy into what is at first unrecognizable until one perceives there a medium of extraordinary re-visionary momentum and truth.

It is not only the gulf between religions and cultures that plague us today. There is the widening gulf between the rich and the poor, the world of plenty and the world of famine. We may think we can make a good patchwork or mechanical arrangement to ameliorate such a division. But this I feel is an illusion. There is no economic solution to the ills of the world until the arts of originality — arts that are driven by mysterious strangeness — open the partialities and biases of tradition in ways that address the very core of our pre-possessions. This involves paradoxical orders of readership. As an imaginative writer I find myself reading in continuously changing ways. I re-read works by writers I may have misjudged and which I return to and perceive differently. I re-read my own fictions after a long while and see connections there I planted and yet which seem utterly new. Let me attempt to illumine what I mean as concretely as I may. Let me commence with Carnival, the first novel in my Carnival trilogy. The second is called The Infinite Rehearsal, the third The Four Banks of the River of Space.

A word about the characters in Carnival. Jonathan Weyl is — let us say — a twentieth-century Dante figure. He is secreted in the carnival of the twentieth century. The particularities of his existence make him intimate with some of the proportions of a thirteenth-century Dante even as they move him light years away, so that the origination of a Dantesque formula, a Dantesque investiture, a Dantesque mask, is called into question. There are stars in Dante’s thirteenth century cosmos he would never have perceived as we perceive them. They were fixed. Whereas for us the light that comes across space from a
star is but the shadow of an object that may have vanished. News of its disappearance has not yet been transmitted to us. To put it differently. Within the abyss of tradition – within the spatiality, the spectrality of tradition – the original nucleus that motivates us is so peculiar, so unidentifiable, that singularity needs plurality. Dante – in other words – needs a twentieth-century carnival of masks even as those masks look backwards to him and through him into the mysterious origins of Imagination in science and art.

There is also Amaryllis who is a Beatrice figure. She has acquired particularities of numinous sexuality in the twentieth century carnival. I shall touch upon these in due course for they help in the transformation of the barrier between the Virgilian pagan and the paradiso.

There is Everyman Masters the twentieth-century Virgilian guide. As ‘Everyman’ he cannot escape his pagan body. Indeed he visualizes Christ as riding into Jerusalem on a pagan donkey, a donkey that is another kind of Trojan horse. In it lies an invisible text, an invisible army, that will overturn Jerusalem itself as well as the Roman age.

All these complications imply various fractures and subtle abysses in story-lines we take for granted. The reader – as I said before – has to read differently, to read backwards and forwards, even more importantly forwards and backwards. All the imageries are partial though attuned to a wholeness one can never seize or structure absolutely. Wholeness becomes a thread or a continuity running from the inferno into the paradiso. I said earlier that ‘wholeness’ cannot be seized or structured. Wholeness is a rich and insoluble paradox. Wholeness has to do with an origination of the Imagination whose solidity is interwoven with a paradoxical tapestry of spectrality, of the light year. Thus it is that Everyman Masters is both dead and alive when he dies and returns into Jonathan Weyl’s dreams, into Amaryllis’s dreams, as their Virgilian guide. The rich but insoluble paradox that clothes him brings an impulse into the text of Carnival to transform an authoritarian paradiso.

The ecstasies and torments that run parallel through the twentieth-century age made it inevitable that the dead king should descend into the living Inferno the moment Amaryllis and I glimpsed heaven and consummated our secret marriage vows. The Inferno lives when the dead retrace their steps around the globe. Our marriage was unique heart and mind but for that reason – unique tranquillity and ecstasy, unique
revolution and peace — it was inevitable that a master spirit would return
to counsel us and to bear the penalty of the Inferno that runs in parallel
with heaven. Masters accepted the penalty. He became my guide and
opposite (our guide and opposite) in arriving from the kingdom of the
dead to counsel us in the land of the living and to guide my pen across
the pages of this biography of spirit.¹

The use of the word ‘inevitable’ in the passage above from the novel
Carnival is intended to pre-empt fate and in so doing to steep us in a
continuity that is other than fate, the continuity of insoluble whole-
ness. As a consequence the dead/living king (that Everyman Masters
is) bears the penalty of the Inferno in order to make of every erasure
of pagan labour’s claim to the paradiso a fracture or subtle abyss in the
story-line of the paradiso. That fracture, that subtility of penetration,
is lifted into the bliss of the coniunctio between Amaryllis and Jonathan
Weyl as a portent of a healed humanity across all terrifying barriers.

What is divine comedy? In the light of the abyss of space and time
of which a thirteenth-century poet was unaware, may not divine
comedy transform itself into light-year comedy, may not a numinous
equation exist between spectrality and blissful sexuality as the seed of
the Incarnation?

Light-year comedy within the context of numinous sexuality brings
the rhythms of obsolescence into youth and vice versa. In such
rhythms landscapes/riverscapes/skyscapes are miniaturized into
bodily/bodiless continuities we do not immediately recognize as
pertinent to the sacrament of sex. Let me read another passage from
Carnival.

Our naked flesh was inhabited by mutual generations clad in nothing but
obsolescent organs, obsolescent youth. What obsolescence! What inti-
mate renewal of being beyond age and youth! We were intimate, ageless
being, we were four years short of thirty, we were young, we were old as
the coition of the hills and waves miniaturized in our bodies. We were a
dying fall into deeper orchestration of mutual spaces.²

When I wrote that passage — and though it came out of intense care
and concentration — I did not realize (it may well have been written by
a stranger) the continuity it sustained with future work, the corridor
that ran through it into the characters that would appear in the second
novel of the Carnival trilogy, namely The Infinite Rehearsal. Many imagina-
tive writers know of the legacies one work offers another that is still to
be written. What I am referring to, however, is deeper than this. It is as if those legacies are overturned by the hand of a stranger to imply a continuity the legacies themselves may have eclipsed. It would never have crossed my mind – when I wrote The Infinite Rehearsal – to associate Jonathan Weyl, Amaryllis, Everyman Masters in Carnival with Robin Redbreast Glass, Emma, and Peter in The Infinite Rehearsal. Even now I advance the association with some trepidation. Yet it is blindingly clear that it exists. Robin Redbreast Glass is immortal Faustian youth. He sustains a link with Jonathan Weyl (the 20th-century Dante figure in Carnival) because of the mediumistic bliss that erupts into his relationship with Emma. Emma – the female priest in The Infinite Rehearsal – an ageing woman (presumably therefore obsolescent in sexual terms) validates Amaryllis, the Beatrice figure, in Carnival. Numinous intercourse occurs between her – the ostensibly aged woman – and the immortal Faustian youth Robin Redbreast Glass. Peter – as Robin's alter ego – is a mediumistic Everyman Masters and a shadowy Virgilian guide in The Infinite Rehearsal.

Robin Redbreast Glass arises from the grave of the sea to become immortal Faustian youth. There had been a boating accident in which Robin, his mother, his aunt, and others were drowned. Peter and Emma were in the capsized boat but they escaped and lay on the beach exhausted. Peter lay with his head under Emma's hair and upon her breasts. When Emma and Peter are old they meet the resurrected Faustian youth (who therefore has not aged) in the tunnel of the light years. Robin sees himself within alter ego Peter as if the years fall away and he (Robin instead of Peter) lies with Emma on the beach. He lies with his head beneath her hair and upon her breasts. And yet he recognizes her as an aged woman simultaneously. He sees her as a female priest. It is this saving paradox within age and youth, within the translation of obsolescence and fertility, that gives to the spectrality of encounter a wholly different apprehension of the living in the dead, the dead in the living, absence in presence, presence in absence. I am not sure that the terms 'dead' and 'living' apply in this context for one is dealing with a continuity of encounter that nourishes itself by overturning legacies of expectation. That is how it seems to me. I have no dogma or absolute theories about the unfinished genesis of the Imagination.

Robin is amazed to discover that Emma is a priest. So was I, the writer.
Prior to writing this novel I believed women should not be priests. I changed my mind in the light of the subtle abysses that appeared in the Carnival trilogy. Robin records his astonishment in a series of short passages I shall now read. The allusion to Skull is to a city of prosperity littered with desolations.

Robin exclaims inwardly:

I saw in a flash that she was a priest, a female priest, she was hope in the city of Skull, revolutionary hope, unconventional hope. ³

Let me confess that the issue of the female priest is one that startles me. It overturns a certain legacy of expectation that I have entertained from childhood. The priest is male is male is priest is male for ever and ever. Aboriginal or ontic tautology enshrined in so many story-lines. But a question arises: are the stigmata upon the body of Christ a story-line? Do they not imply an abyss at the heart of history? Is the crucifixion of the Son of God — no less a person, mark you! — the very Son of God — is this not an abyss at the heart of human history? If so then the stigmata may imply a range of association we do not recognize and have scarcely begun to gauge. That is how I felt when I came to Emma — the young/old, obsolescent/fertile priest. Through her my grasp of Faust underwent a profound change. My apprehension of the stigmata underwent a profound change. Let me come first to the stigmata. Robin addresses Emma inwardly again:

All this made me scan Emma’s features closely. She was veiled by dateless day infinity comedy. I saw her innate sorrow. I suddenly saw how worn she was. It was as if a nail had woven its innermost weblike constancy into her flesh, an ecstatic nail, a sorrowing nail. Ecstatic and sorrowing! ⁴

When Robin alludes there to ‘dateless day infinity comedy’ as a veil upon Emma’s features he draws upon an ancient pre-Columbian, calendrical perspective. This matches I think the notion of light-year vistas. But I wish at this juncture to remind you of the ‘nail’, its ‘innermost, weblike constancy ..., ecstatic nail, sorrowing nail ...’

It is as if one glimpses numinous sexuality within Robin’s blissful relationship to Emma on the beach beside the sea, a numinous sexuality that becomes a spectral nail that pierces through the inferno into the paradiso.
In such a nail that shatters one’s pre-possessions I knew the construction of a sound that echoed in the air and in the sea. It was the music of the priest, of the God of nature. ‘One comes,’ said Emma, ‘to a beloved creation, to the divine, in every moment that one survives in the inimitable textures of nature, truly lives and survives.’

All this I feel brings a wholly unexpected variation into the stigmata we tend to identify tautologously with the body of Christ. Through Emma the female priest—Emma the body of the womb—a multiple counterpoint—weblike yet constant—is woven that involves Faustian, immortal youth, the resurrection body, ecstatic numinous, paradisean nail, and sorrowing nail that pierces the tyranny of the inferno.

As I lay on the beach I was pierced by the cry of the gulls, the laughing sea gulls. Were they gulls or were they cranes? I could not tell. It was a cry from heaven and yet it was a subtle, piercing, shaking laughter. A shaking note like strings of music in the sea. The motif of an incomparable composition...

It may interest you to note that the cry of the gull echoes a pre-Columbian motif which relates to Quetzalcoatl. Quetzal the bird. Coatl the snake, the abysmal yet fertile earth which is ‘beloved nature’.

Now, may I return to Faust and the way in which the multiple counterpoint—of which I spoke above—affect my vision of Faust. There is an aspect to Faust, immortal youth, when he seems to achieve a divorce from the resurrection body in The Infinite Rehearsal and looms as absolutely dominant. He buries the ecstatic, sorrowing nail within a hubris of immortality. He seeks implicitly to abort the mysterious buoyancy that is open to him as he lies beside Emma. Weblike constancy becomes a sterile rigidity. And then he gains a position by which to manipulate a series of ageing masks. One such mask bears the initials W. H. (my own initials). A joke, a serious joke. Except that Faust sees the ageing masks he wears as expendable. And in that sense the joke may hurt. Despite one’s labours for Faust—despite the labour of one’s antecedents across generations—one and they are expendable and doomed.

The rigidity of the perpetually young immortal Faust secures the tautology of tyranny, the worship of fascism, of evil. Faust’s ageing masks include the ageing institutions of democracy, of the Church, of the humanities, the universities. We have seen how such ageing institu-
tions may be worn to the detriment of peoples in Hitlerite Europe, in Field-Marshall Amin's Africa, and most recently in Saddam's Iraq.

I do not have to remind you that tyrannies have been nourished by the ageing Church which turned a blind eye to injustice, by ageing democracies which have been the suppliers of machinery of war or have stimulated in the commercial field gross, materialistic ambitions.

I cannot easily explain it but the curious fractured story-lines within The Infinite Rehearsal drew me intuitively to sense that the numinous body of the womb in the female priest implied unsuspected fabric that breaks and alters the rigidity of Faustian hubris. The substance of the nail, the substance of instrumentalities linking cultures, turns institutions around to examine and re-examine themselves in creative and re-creative lights. Robin Redbreast Glass yields to the priest Emma.

I felt her lips upon mine. The kiss of all loves and all true lovers. The numinous instrumentality of the nail becomes the seed of invisible texts in which ageing, expendable masks become the secretion of strangers who are intimate to ourselves and who will sustain continuity into the future.

One needs to be cautious for the issues we are exploring do not turn on dogma or intellectual formula. Yet one may have, I think, a certain true confidence in the intuitive life of the Imagination, its spectrality and miraculous concreteness beyond implacable identity or formula.

It is the nail, the paradox of associative instrumentalities, which brings me now to the last volume in the Carnival trilogy, namely The Four Banks of the River of Space.

Let me commence by presenting a cross-cultural parallel between an aspect of Homer's Odyssey and South American/Guyanese legend relating to the figure of Canaima. Telemachus is approached in Ithaca by a friend who tells him that his father Ulysses is alive and will return home to redeem the kingdom and to destroy Penelope's suitors who are wasting the substance of the state. The next day when Telemachus runs into his friend and reminds him of their conversation the friend is astonished. He has no recollection of it. He was somewhere else. Homer covers the discrepancy by saying that a god or a goddess had appeared in the shape of Telemachus's friend. A similar yet enigmatic
confusion of identity occurs in South America and it relates to the revenge apparition or fury or god called Canaima. Ulysses does return as prophesied and is not immediately recognized. He comes in the rags of a beggar.

An aspect of Ulysses' fury when he returns which I find horrific is his slaying of many or some of Penelope’s serving women who had slept with some of the suitors in the palace in Ithaca. One accepts the necessity to slay the suitors but the hanging of the serving women filled me with dread as a child when I read Homer. Upon reflection across the years I find it endorses another parallel with Canaima. The aspect of terrifying revenge! True, Ulysses was a great hero, a returning hero but the redemption of his kingdom is tainted by the horror of revenge.

I recall coming upon a group of Macusi Indians in the Potaro river in British Guiana in the mid-1940s. They told me Canaima was active amongst them and in pursuit of some obscure wrong he had judged their people had done – some crime they had committed in the past – and as a consequence he was spiriting away their young men and maidens. It is hard to describe their state of misery in the face of Canaima who is indeed a formidable legend associated with the enactment of revenge upon wrong-doers. The pathology of revenge in him becomes a form of evil.

It is important to note in charting the parallel with Homeric epic that Canaima may appear in an encampment – intent on sowing fire like a terrorist or causing some bitter distress – and be recognized as a neighbour, as one’s cousin, or someone’s brother or father. Yet the following day when the recognized person is cornered he makes a good case for being somewhere else, hunting, fishing. An uncanny confusion overwhelms the tribe. Not only are they confused about the crime they or their antecedents have committed and which brought Canaima into their midst but they are confronted by an abyss within which lurks the identity of terror. If only they could seize the instrument Canaima uses!

The instrument becomes both spectral and concrete. And this explains in some degree the ascendancy of the camera amongst deprived peoples. If they are to deal with such spectrality, such concreteness, a shift has to occur in the premises of their reading of
reality in the sky, in the land, in the river, everywhere. That shift seems almost impossible in a mass-media world and yet a moment may have arrived when the apparatus, the instrumentalities we take for granted, are susceptible to cross-cultural and re-visionary momentum. Take the camera. Disadvantaged peoples become pawns of the camera. Their ills are made visible to millions of viewers and then they fade from the news. The camera becomes a weapon with which we shoot an animal or a savage and bring him home as a trophy in the television box. There are passages in The Four Banks of the River of Space which extend the complications I have raised but — for the purposes of this talk — I wish to restrict my emphasis to the matter of weaponry and instrument.

A camera is a weapon in some instances. In other instances it is an extension of the caring eye. It could also be a private excursion into the future through recorded relics of memory. Each relic implies a fossil dimensionality that enriches the present and the future. The camera is also an eye of spirit as when one encounters people — as I did in a marketplace in Mexico City — who are alarmed that their souls may be imprinted or captured on the glass eye staring at them.

If all this is true of the camera how much more varied are the weapons and instruments of past civilizations. The bow of Ulysses in Homer's epic is not the same bow for us. How it lived for him, how it felt to him, the faint tremor and music of the string, the sound of the wind that whispered in the branches of trees from which the bow came are not the same for us. But tremor, sound, wind, incomparable composition at the heart of words may awaken us to the mystery of trees, the precious life of trees. The abyss that has opened between ourselves and Homer — the greatest of epic poets — nourishes a fantastic and mysterious continuity that breaks a pattern of sameness, same bow, same arrow, even as it enriches the numinous raw material from which we fashion a bow, or a vessel, or a ship.

To destroy our rainforests now is to place our civilization upon another hill of Calvary. The three crosses fashioned from trees become the eloquent masts of a sinking ship from which Robin Redbreast Glass would be taxed, as never before, to arise. A bow, or a ship, or a camera, or a sword, or a knife, or an axe are not singular or same objects. They are instinct with pluralities. On one level that
instinct cements violence. On another level we fashion, and are fashioned by, the enigma of constructive truth. The two levels or forces resemble each other but they are not the same.

The resemblance cannot be dismissed however. It achieves an overlap that resists absolute model or formula. There is no absolute model for constructive truth. There is no absolute imprint upon violence. Justice can be tainted by revenge. The resemblance assists us to make differentiations that are sometimes shockingly new in abysmal circumstance between our proneness to violence (as a solution to the world's ills) and a blow we may strike that liberates our prepossessions, unshackles our bondage to fate. The latter blow is inimitably creative, inimitably constructive, in apprising us of the burdens of an imperilled globe that may only be borne in intimate and far-reaching alignment to strangers who are pertinent to us as we are pertinent to them. This issue of knowing ourselves, recognizing ourselves differently, implies a creative/re-creative penetration or blow directed at models of tradition whose partiality engenders an accumulation of crisis.

That such accumulation is visible everywhere makes clear, I would think, the rituals of sameness, of repetitive slaughter ingrained in violence within the symbols of world politics. One returns to the issue of instrumentality, the life of the extended body, in visualizing the stranger in ourselves. The mould of revenge gives way to profoundest self-confessional imagination. We may not recognize ourselves in the evil-doer but our dismemberment at his hands need not be a prescription for ultimate self-destruction. To jettison such a prescription is to perceive within the threat of a dismembered world an instrumentality that has chiselled us, shaped us, across aeons of space. We cannot seize such instrumentality but we can release in it, from it, proportions that begin to overturn the aboriginal tautologies that condition our responses to evil. Evil seems to be evil for ever and ever until it voids self-confessional creativity. In The Four Banks Canaima, the evil-doer, returns to Anselm, the good man, after forty years. Alarming as it appears Canaima has changed. He has been dislodged within the instrumentality of a cosmos he abused. An abused cosmos which has shaped one, sculpted one, across aeons and evolutions, is a paradox no one can solve. Can one abuse a creator that has sculpted one, written the word of being into dust and marble and
flesh? The extremities of evil are woven into such a paradox which Canaima begins to illumine when he returns to Anselm in a Dream.

Canaima the fury becomes a redemptive daemon. Has not Anselm, the good man, the architect, the saint — in the nameless proportions of artifice and instrumentality, religion and law which have their roots in well-nigh forgotten pagan realms — conspired inadvertently with powers that bred catastrophe? Canaima’s return therefore is self-reversal in such illumined conspiracy. His return is an illumination of restrictive vision into shared evil, shared faculty of redemption through the arts and sciences that have been abused in the prosecution of fundamental causes.

Anselm sets out on his odyssey into the past with Canaima’s dislodged knife in his side. It is as if he gathers up into his arms — in a wholly new, abysmal, terrifyingly creative light — the corpse of the bird-dancer Canaima had slain forty years previously on the bank of the Potaro River in South America. The corpse is but a mask to be worn by endangered species whose life is now wholly precious, sacred.

Canaima’s knife ... had metaphorically killed me ... pierced me to the core of the body’s waking instrument. 8

The Body’s Waking Instrument. The arousal of the body to itself as sculpture by a creator one abuses. The body wakes to itself as inimitable art, inimitable multi-faceted, living fossil extending into all organs, objects, spaces, stars, and the ripple of light. Wakes also to self-confessional blindness, blindness to self-destruction and the destruction of others.

The body wakes to the instrumentality of breath — ‘sharpest extension of breath in sculpted body-senses’. 9

Perhaps I was the medium of the dance in touching the earth, in touching the light, in touching the sculpture of appearances as if every structure one shaped, or ordered, or visualized, was a sacred infusion of slow-motion lightning into substance, substance into life. 10

I appreciate the difficulty in a phrase embodying ‘slow-motion lightning’. It was the closest I could come to a visualization of the energies of the cosmos as sleeping/waking life, as station and expedition, as the transfiguration of technologies into a therapeutic edge
within the malaise of gross materialism that threatens to destroy our planet.

I would like to close by reading the following passage:

One could hear a murmuring vibration in Shadow-organ space. One could hear one's voice issuing from the body of a stranger.

'It is a sounding cornerstone that exists everywhere, in the soil, in the air, in the fire, in the water. It exists in the singing chorus of the Waterfall, in the greenhouse Shadow of the drowned in space whose indeterminate age makes them as much our victims as our attackers, as much our killed as our killers.

'Are we too old, too young, to dream of the knife and the Rose? When do dreams commence? In the womb or in the seed of the womb? I have drawn the Shadow of my brother from the river of the dead. And still I ask myself: whose Shadow? whose brother? whose stranger? A life or a death that baits the unconscious is not to be equated with conventional structures, or conventional hubris, or conventional uniformities and clarities. The sweetest song of unconscious beauty may turn and rend a theatre of technicalities, technical apparatus, technical nudity, technical descriptions of the act of love or death, purely technical climax that averts its head from the anatomy of the abyss.

'Is it the anatomy of the abyss that I glimpse in myself, in him, in nameless others one bears – who bear one – into the parentage of Being? Have I borne a spatial being that is capable of taking upon itself familiar/unfamiliar resemblances? Does the burden of art involve a confrontation with an ultimate loss of fear? Nothing that is or was, nothing that bears or is borne, was created in the beginning from fear, fear of one or fear of the other, though fear may come in the wake of a Presence with which one needs to be reconciled through stages of haunted masquerade, the haunted sinner in one's arms, or in the cradle, or on the stage of Memory…'

The uncanny, unfinished body of music within us ceased. But it had invoked a change in the transparencies of the unconscious. The paint of the sun began to lift. Everything had been passive, fixed. Now a spark in the sun lifted, the sun itself moved and began to fall. The spark unravelled the sky to touch the high precipice of the globe in the Dream.11
Notes

1 Wilson Harris, Carnival (Faber and Faber, 1985), page 125.
2 Ibid., page 124.
3 Wilson Harris, The Infinite Rehearsal (Faber and Faber, 1987), page 59.
4 Ibid., page 60.
5 Ibid., page 61.
6 Ibid., page 60.
7 Ibid., page 61.
8 Wilson Harris, The Four Banks of the River of Space (Faber and Faber, 1990) page 15.
9 Ibid., page 16.
10 Ibid., page 8.
11 Ibid., pages 153–154.
Everyone can dance. Everyone knows about the dance. The whole creation is a dance. What then does man seek to express through the dance? Is it to reflect the Universal dance? Performing art being the art to reproduce a given experience, uniquely, an infinite number of times, through different mediums, connects the experiencer with that experience of the artist in a preordained way – given the willingness of the experiencer – that which moves in the artist responds in the audience.

A classical art accords with certain fundamental principles which are founded in natural law. It speaks to the whole man, spiritual, mental and physical, and is for humanity and all time. Its concepts are grounded in antiquity, apprehended in the present, and reformulated for future generations. The forms thus brought into being span several centuries but in the final run-down the artist has to return to source. The rebirth is another flowering of those fundamental principles, natural laws, governing the particular art. The way back is the diligent, truthful practice of the inherited traditions of the art; it can connect backwards with its source and expand forward into new expression.

The physical forms of the dance are expressions of movements that have taken place elsewhere, either mentally or spiritually. To work only on the physical plane may effectively block out these finer movements leaving the mental and spiritual content as only ideas from the past.

It is not easy for an artist to work directly in the spiritual world, more accessible is the mental world where the ideas and attitudes may be examined and explored. Two movements can then take place, the discriminating and refining of the contents of the mind, a movement backwards to the spiritual, and a movement outwards through the senses to the physical where then it can be a connection to all three.

The dancer, because of the use of his own body as the instrument
of the visible form of the dance – unlike the pianist or violinist – is prone to become locked in the physical world. The arduous training of the dancer requires, first the preparing of an instrument able to respond naturally to the dance and secondly, the playing of the dance upon that instrument. In the same way that a musician is detached from the instrument and connected through the music so the dancer should be connected to his physical body, the instrument of the dance, through the dance.

This process should reflect in the training of the dancer. To train the physical body and responses, hoping that it will connect with the dance, is to put the cart before the horse. The dance must be the first consideration, from the beginning and throughout the training of the dancer. It is through confusion as to what the laws governing dance, in its many forms, are, that the principles have become obscured by the physical form.

One of the terms that would seem to indicate a fundamental principle of the dance is ‘à plombe’. This in its simple meaning is the plumb line used by architects and builders to establish a vertical upright over the centre of gravity. This would be a principle and a natural law. The dancer by so establishing himself in relation to the centre of gravity would have not only a centre, but a circumference also, a special dimension: a centre or still point from which movement may move out, to which it will return, and will be present throughout: ‘en dehors’, ‘en dedans’, ‘en place’, the three great expressions of the classical dance, the outward movement, the inward movement and being in place.

‘A plombe’ provides the dancer with his basic geometry through which extension and spacial directions may be understood.

The three circles represent the three worlds or bodies of the dance, physical, mental and spiritual, and the radii give principle directions from the centre. It should be realized that the diagram represents a sphere with radii extending out in all directions.

The dancer, being centred, may experience these radii as directions of potential energy and poles of opposition through which the forms manifest and movement is released. It also provides spacial directions and dimensions into which the dancer may move, remaining himself centred.

The radii hold the possibility of connecting the physical, mental and
spiritual dimensions of the dance into one experience and expression, being connected at the centre.

The geometry is essentially practical and is to be known in experience. The ‘turn-out’ or outward rotation of the limbs arises from the whole concept of the outward movement – ‘en dehors’ – of the classical form. It is a movement out to manifestation. This will facilitate a particular kind of expression conveying certain clear movements and emotions. The mere outward rotation of the limbs, the legs in particular, will carry no conviction unless it be prompted and supported by an inner ‘en dehors’. This outward movement presupposes the inward movement, the return to place, the centre. The great movements of the dance will be this arising out from, and the return to, a still centre.

A close examination of the French terms or names given to the steps, movements and expressions of the classical dance will reveal depths of meaning more subtle than is immediately apparent. The choice of the particular word or expression used shows a profound understanding of the inner nature and relationship to the whole of the thing being described. It is intended that a variety of these words and expressions will be examined; for the present two will be sufficient to show the deeper levels of their meaning.

If we return to the terms ‘en dehors’ and ‘en dedans’, it will be found that these terms refer to all the movements and expressions of the classical dance and that not only does it describe the physical directions of the movements but also the meaning and expressions – emotions. What has to be clearly born in mind is that these two terms presume a centre and it will have to be clearly understood where that centre is in experience.

The other term where a closer examination shows more than is at once apparent is ‘port de bras’. What it does not say is ‘the movements of the arms’ or ‘the position of the arms’. What it does say is ‘the carriage of the arms’. Carriage implies a carrier and it is revealed that what is being indicated are the position and movements of the back, telling us so much more than just the position and movements of the arms. A whole range of emotions and expressions are found to have their origin in the back. The poetry and emotions of the ‘port de bras’ are found to have their seat elsewhere.

With the preoccupation of the question ‘how’, the dancer has failed
to pursue the question of 'why'. Even if the question of 'how' is answered – albeit only superficially – and a certain accomplishment is achieved, it still leaves unanswered the question 'why', and only the understanding of that will satisfy. This latter question will lead the dancer into the realm of the art itself where he must examine in a quite different way the art and his relationship to it. Not only will it inform him more deeply of the art of the dance but will reveal its inter-dependence on other arts. Also the function of art, in the development and uncovering of the nature of man and his relation to his universal environment. Unless the dancer and those who teach him and provide the direction and choreography, think on this scale, the dance must lack stature and real substance.

In the study of the dance two aspects play an important part. One, the form, in a physical sense the shape of the body, the particular pose at a given time. The linking of these static poses provides the second aspect, that which we more readily accept as the dance. This linking creates the movement, the flow from one position to another, and it is this that we recognize as the dance, the movement from one position to another, arising as a response to the music.

The movement of the dance cannot directly be controlled. If one takes as an analogy, water, it is readily seen that the use and control of the water is through the channels, rivers and pipes, and that without direction and checks water flows in all directions. So it is with the movement of the dance, without the form, the positions and poses, there can be no control and proper direction of the responses to the music.

This offers a twofold study in the training of the dancer and also indicates the prime mover in the volition of the dancer, the music. The time-space relation between movements has a rhythmical pattern suggesting music of its own; when this accords with the music the two become one and the same thing. Then does the dancer experience 'being danced', the dance flows through him, the instrument, and his delight and the delight of the audience are one, they are the enjoyers of a common experience.

Let us return to some of the fundamentals. The centre of gravity of the dancer – the 'à plombe', will be the first principle to be recognized. At the centre there is no movement, stillness – pure movement can only arise from stillness and any subtle movement or
tensions around the centre will affect the ‘placement’ of the dancer and produce additions to any intended movement. As the natural conclusion to any movement is to return to the stillness from which it came, any additions there at the beginning will remain at the end, obscuring the stillness and continually disturbing the purity of the arising movements. All this is not to be confused with the play of opposites about the centre which provide the impetus and volition of movement. The five positions are themselves such relationships about the centre, each holding a different potential. This will be gone into in greater detail later.

We speak in the dance of the ‘turn of the head’, but before the turn of the head can be spoken of it must be established from what it turns – this is called ‘en face’. ‘En face’ is looking straight out, forward, to the front, from ‘en place’, the centre. Therefore, all turns of the head infer the centre and will most naturally return to it.

The purpose of turning the head is for looking, and the positions of the head are different ways of looking, the ‘en dehors’ looking is totally different to the ‘en dedans’.

If the first finger of each hand is placed on the outer corners of the eyes, and the eyes look straight ahead – ‘en face’ – a natural line of the extension of the arms is seen that places the arms, with the hands still just in view, to the side.

The turn of the head is a little in front of this line. The ‘en dehors’ turn of the head has two movements, first looking out to the side along the line indicated, and second a slight lift of the face releasing the eyes and looking outward and up. For the ‘en dedans’ turn of the head, the head moves downward very slightly first, then turns and the looking is along the same line, just inside the line of the arms to the side. Looking is through the eyes; both ‘en dehors’ and ‘en dedans’ imply the centre and the understanding in experience of the difference in looking, through the eyes and face, enables the head to reflect these in the physical and emotional expression of the dance.

For natural looking, the eyes remain centred, looking straight out of the face, any turn of the eyes is an addition and for the purpose of increasing or changing the natural expression.

The gestures of the hands and the expressions of the eyes should carry the same meaning. The gestures of the hands, carried by the arms, moved by the back and having their seat elsewhere, when
connected to the eyes carry conviction and give natural turns of the head, conveying like emotions. If the gesture and the eyes are not connected it disturbs and shows a distraction of mind and spirit. Again this must reflect in the fundamental training where an awareness of the meanings conveyed by the use of hands, eyes and head become a conscious communication between the performer and the spectator, filling out the dance with intelligence. All this will arise naturally from the same source as the movements and poses, giving co-ordination and wholeness.

The training of the dancer begins with ‘deportment’, ‘the carriage of’. The carriage is of that very person himself, that person the dancer experiences himself to be. It is a pure and simple presentation to the discipline of the dance, that the glories of the dance may be made known for the delight of the spectator.

Arising from ‘deportment’ will be much of what has been spoken of before, ‘en place’, ‘en face’, and most important of all, ‘à plombe’. This all gives placing and position, giving rise to ‘en dehors’ and ‘en dedans’ indicating direction and space; the movement into the space manifests that dance as a spontaneous arising from music. The training of the dancer is that such arising may be spontaneous and perfect every time.

The whole training of the dancer will be spiritual, mental and physical, and the emerging artist must be fully conversant in all three, speaking to the whole man. All three will carry appropriate techniques and, in fact, develop together. The physical world being the most accessible, the training begins there. The technique is for the releasing of potential, much of the technique is to do with the interplay of opposites, but the dancer should not be allowed to let this releasing and interplay become an end in itself; the technique is a tool for manifesting the dance.

The dancer is a response to a movement in the mind, seeking in his unique way to praise and glorify the creation and its creator. The technique practised just for its own sake will obscure the very thing it seeks to express. At all times, the pure aspiration of the dancer must be met by the inspiration of the teacher, if the full glory of the dance is to manifest.
Can a king hear the voice of an Aunt?
Conversations with a Painter

KESHAV MALIK

What we call Being is the essence of non-Being –
We still are dreaming, having woken up in a dream.

Mirza Ghalib

The first that I remember of K. Khosa’s work was some twenty-five years ago in a group show in a small New Delhi Art Gallery. One of these works hung in a corner. I have not forgotten this incidental detail. Evidently it had made an impression on me. Of course I had not heard of the painter till then. I cannot recall the work of any other painter from that show. What was in Khosa’s work that had cast its spell on me?—something akin to a supernatural visitation. But still this was too brief, the proverbial ‘flash in the pan’.

Subsequently the painter seemed to have strayed away in contrary directions. He tried out all sorts of masks, emulated the several available models. But all these, he eventually found out—and as he divulged to me—were ill-fitting. Some residual integrity, some native innocence, had brought him back to his truer first self. This retracing of his steps has of course not been easy, so enormous are the sundry pressures that bear down upon the being of the artists of our day. The usual stance of the modernist painter is to have no truck with his community or responsibility towards the tradition of the human. It therefore took Khosa time too to recognize the obligations beyond the claimed freedom of the artist. An artist lacking in such knowledge but well equipped with skills cannot come into the power of spirit. The desacralized intellect can do wonders in art but one thing it cannot do, bring intimations of life everlasting. Hence, it follows, that the patina of deep feeling and personal sentiment are a must for the ambitious and perforce, rather over confident modernist. The inner chemistry that fructified the work of the traditional artists was a little otherwise, and so no end to life-giving celebration. They knew that, plain facts by themselves make no more than poster art. For them the creative imagination had to be deeply rooted in the common ground
on which they stood. Certainly, art when it brushes aside the common subjecthood and opts for sheer inventiveness and experiment, tends to become self-destructive. Art, unlike technology is not an instrumentality alone.

'The relationship of the artist to the ethos, to the sum and substance of life, ought to be once again like a sacrament. Our art markets are making it contractual, not irrevocable.' It is from this hard earned personal knowledge that the painter has come into his present cycle of potent, what may be called hallucinogenic images — figures deliquescing into the air and space around them. Well here is a stab of the imagination alright, hinting at the great silence beyond the sound and fury. Khosa is not transcribing the body of reality but manifesting its vesture. If there is any fleeting moment or private excitement in the work's warm detail it is nothing if not on the background of eternity, and which is the same thing as the perfect fusion of subject and object. The painter's shifting forms in all their transactions or transitions are focused on the surface of the timeless stream. At moments there is the atmosphere of a blissful dream — the mystery of reality at the heart of solitude. The spirit-wind broods over the waters, the breath of power about to blow down and awaken the potentiality of love in the creature. ('Eternity'.)

'Even as we try, we cannot explain away and empty life of its mystery. Life is a complex of fact and fancy, logic and meaning; and, but of course, art pierces life where it is most sensitive. But yet of that mystery something remains to tantalize and silence us.' Yes, Khosa has been trying to touch this mystery's hidden centre through the purity of his images. 'The reality within is of far greater consequence than all the appearances.' Even so, Khosa's painted parables seize a portion of the universal to become art; the communicated sensibility is laden with the undertones of enough significance to kindle magic in the soul. Art like this transports us; there is some double vision here so that we may be able to perceive the visible and also invade the invisible; that we mark the immediate contours of appearances, yet peer beyond them and glimpse the very image of a splendorous reality.

It is this way, by a process of idealization, the artist has passed from personal emotion to the serenity of contemplation. The resulting relish is therefore neither pain nor pleasure — so understood, that is, in
the natural sense – but pure joy. Khosa’s life attitude, very clearly, is quite other from that of most fellow painters on the Indian art scene. With him we have states of soul, a contemplation of the absolute, whereby the natural or the empirical world, receive their enlightenment. He draws the viewer’s eyes away from the forces that keep him confined within tragic narrow confines. Regeneration of the self seems to be his secret aim.

A genre that at times encloses a strange, inscrutable space. A space full of suspense, with no temporal suggestions, no terrestrial bodies present. However such absence itself becomes a commanding presence. The manifestation is, as if, of the spirits of all five elements of
nature, quite like those invoked in the Vedic hymns. Indeed the theme of the earth and waters constitutes the basis of innumerable life-giving myths. It is such life-giving attributes which are involved in this painter’s art. The fertilizing waters and the sanctity of the earth have remained fundamental to the Indian world view, at least up to the preceding generation. Its potency can be seen in tribal and rural ritual, and on occasion at the more sophisticated levels, in some contemporary art.

This metaphysical realism, if that’s what the painter practices, is completely free of the pointlessly fantastical. A dream it is, but a
believable one, one which the sage viewer's mind accepts willingly, since it squares with the more inclusive reality.

The figures that Khosa draws are as if sculpted rather than painted. There is no attempt to show off painterly skill but merely the anxiety to explore the timeless dimension, for his art is not that of a perfectionist and performer but of one in favour of regeneration of the deeper self. Part reality, part unreality, but in this very undefinable something is the essence of art: images searching for the truth of existence, they groping for the missing light, for the responsive human face.

Ideal art is the truest form of realism, for it involves eternal truths, where the ordinary realist is satisfied with the rather crude test of everyday experience alone. But that first art is achieved through an elevated concept of what essentially is. Only finely contemplative minds could perhaps create works of that order. Here the artist is one who has some quintessential personal knowledge of humane existence; one who has unified himself sufficiently enough; or who has sensed that the empirical or pragmatic reality is coloured by the prism
of eternity. This is no momentary beauty but momentous mind-grasped tidings. It is this inner world of meanings to which this class of artist clings. There is a stillness to these compositions, the stillness at the heart of stones, in unpeopled spaces. It is the stillness of the moon. Thus too, the figures – angelic or serene – in Khosa’s work seem to float in ether – that sacred postulate of deep self-communings.

Yes, art such as the painter has been lately pursuing is a yearning for the miraculous. It is the hope to transmit in our bones the wonder of the seemingly impossible. But this is the prerogative of true envisioning. There is a spectral quality to the painter’s images. But such
supernaturalism, if we may dub it that at a pinch, easily comes to one who is not overpowered by a world of muchness, by the glare of the insistent present moment. Being contemplative, Khosa’s is not a world of darkening shadows; a paradisical inscape it is, reserved as it were for the spirit to glide in. These new compositions have moved away from all the earlier quotidian associations, excitements, or disarranging agitations. Learning to focus his eyes steadily on the verities, the painter’s work is now freed of the trying predicaments of actuality, the confusing maelstroms rising from the personal unconscious. He, to repeat, presents us with a clarified reality. To create an area of peace and prayer is necessary, and necessary all the deeper self-questionings.

Khosa’s is one among those who help art return to its primary duties. And though he is not a man of words, he has over a course of time inscribed a few of his thoughts on paper and from which the following may bear on his work. ‘Most often one is merely “outside” experience – things happen to one. One is “inside” when one ponders over all experience, over the very stuff of life, and to that extent becomes an instrument of truth. At this point the duo of “outside-inside” becomes redundant.

‘There are certain images that come to one only when one’s eyes are shut. The open eyes keep away a reality, call it inner or outer (depending on your relative position). With eyes shut one comes into a sudden comprehension, of cosmic silence, the stir of your body surrounded by an ageless quiet. Such comprehension could turn us into a wheel of fire that knows no arrest: It could turn the substance of experience, of living – all the raw fact, all the rock and rubble – into motion and bright flowing movement. Movement that delights the eye, regales the heart.

‘Only the soul-rulled body possesses a knowledge of the vital truth, of the earth’s ever burgeoning green. Only so can we extend the hand of mercy over those who lie in the line of shadows. Yes, it lies within us to turn the angle of the sun, so that it brings the warm curative balm of compassion on the prone.’
2. Blessedness 1991
Size 36 × 32 inches
3. Eternity 1991
Size 61 x 49 inches. Collection of Priyanka Verma, India
4. The Force of Destiny 1991
Size 36 x 32 inches. Collection of Sweaty Thukral, India
5. Surrender 1991
Size 36 x 32 inches
6. Electrified 1990
Size 50 × 35 inches. Collection of Gallery 7, Hong Kong
7. Reeling under the Truth 1986
Size 50 × 50 inches
8. Shock of Recognition 1984
Size 50 × 70 inches. Collection of Manjula and Gopal Menon, London
Symbol and Mystery in Irish Religious Thought

JOHN CAREY

The appearance of the form, as revelation of the depths, is an indissoluble union of two things. It is the real presence of the depths, of the whole of reality, and it is a real pointing beyond itself to these depths.

Hans Urs von Balthasar

‘In conversation they are terse and cryptic, hinting at many things in a few words’ — thus Diodorus Siculus paraphrases the lost observations of Posidonius, a Greek traveller in Gaul in the first century BC. It may be helpful to bear these words in mind when considering some insular cousins of the Gauls: the Irish in the centuries immediately following their conversion to Christianity.

To the modern student early Irish literature, both in Latin and the vernacular, can seem both lavish and impoverished: on the one hand, a wealth of poetry and legend, radiant with unforgettable imagery and often contorted with its own verbal exuberance; on the other, an apparent paucity of theoretical or speculative thinking. There are annals, but for centuries no historiography; treatises on metrics, but none on aesthetics; hymns and scriptural commentary, but virtually no philosophy or indeed theology. Many scholars have taken this as evidence of a collective cultural deficiency, one distinguished historian going so far as to refer to the Irish as a people ‘incapable of generalization.’

But arguments from incapacity are risky enough when applied to the men and women whom we can observe: as conjecture concerning the dead they are treacherous indeed, not least so in the present instance. In the zest and versatility with which they embraced Latin culture, the Irish compare favorably with their recently converted contemporaries elsewhere in barbarian Europe. Nowhere in the Germanic lands — among Saxons, Franks, Goths, Lombards, or Germans — was there the same precocious literary outpouring in the native and adopted tongues, the same swift mastery of foreign
learning. On the Continent, moreover, Irish thinkers masterfully embraced the discursive idiom: Saint Columbanus, perched precariously in the hostile forests of sixth-century Gaul, transmuted pilgrim fervour into an existential theology;4 while the Irishman Johannes Eriugena, some centuries later, ‘constructed a philosophical summa which classes him as a forerunner of Aquinas.’5 Erudition and intellectual power were not in short supply, any more than imagination or poetic vision. In seeking to understand such men, to condescend is to have failed already: we must approach the problem from another angle.

The literature is as rich in metaphor and image as it is poor in theory and abstraction, and it is surely here that the key is to be found. The indigenous Irish mentality tends to find expression in symbolic rather than in analytic terms: concepts are not extracted from phenomena in order to be manipulated on the plane of ‘pure reason,’ but are instilled and contemplated in concrete entities. In this way experience and meaning are not correferent merely, but consubstantial also. The tuath, the traditional Irish polity, had no constitution nor even any organs of government; but it had a king who by the simple fact of his existence defined and personified its unity and the mutual obligations of its members. Such native words for ‘knowledge’ as fis, eicse, and senchas never simply designate a disembodied cognitive faculty, remaining always inseparable from the contexts of prophetic insight, poetic skill, and the lore of origins. A symbol, unlike an abstract concept, is alive and therefore inexhaustible: it can embrace contraries, point the way into deeper or subtler realms of thought, or be itself transformed and reinterpreted by the unfolding of history. Profound and complex ideas are indeed to be found in early Irish writing; but it is here that we must seek them, not in the syllogisms and postulates to which our own culture has accustomed us.

The role and significance of symbolic expression in early Ireland are evident in many areas: the subject is a vast one, and has barely begun to be explored.6 Here I shall confine myself to what I believe to be one of its most important aspects: the impact of the indigenous mentality upon Christian spirituality.
It is a truism that symbolic thought is, mutatis mutandis, the natural mode of cognition among archaic peoples. The Irish are noteworthy in that they not only preserved this way of thinking following their conversion, but in fact applied it to the new religion. Latin Christianity had of course evolved (primarily in the service of biblical exegesis) an impressive array of hermeneutic techniques, but these were primarily allegorical in tendency: the signs and emblems in the ‘Book of Nature’ were, like the words in any other book, important because of what they referred to, and the correct approach to them was one of translation. For an Irishman significance, to whatever extent it might transcend the symbol, seems nevertheless to have been situated within it; nor could it be extracted by any single interpretation. This has the paradoxical consequence that the symbol is ultimately inscrutable: if its significance is its essential being, rather than an interpretation imposed upon it, it must by the same token participate in the mystery of existence, the secrets behind the veil of the phenomenal. The symbol is closer to God than the interpretation. It is in this context that Columbanus, whose Instructions provide an unusually lucid and comprehensive picture of the religious ideas of an early Irish cleric, denounces speculative theology:

Inquire no further concerning God; for to those who wish to know the lofty profundity of things, it is proper to study nature first (ante natura consideranda est). ... Therefore if anyone wishes to know that most deep sea of divine understanding, let him first — if he is able — survey the visible sea; and by how little he can know of those things which hide within it, let him understand how much less he is able to understand of the depths of its Creator. ... If you wish to know the Creator, understand the creature (intellege, si vis scire Creatorem, creaturam); if you will not do that, then be silent concerning the Creator, but still believe in Him. For silent piety is better and wiser than impious loquacity — surely it is vain and impious to turn from faith to the hollow words of one holding forth concerning the invisible, unguessable, unglimpsable Lord.

This idea — that created things are the mysterious traces of a God inaccessible to intellect — was widespread and deeply felt in early medieval Ireland: the contemplation of nature recommended by Columbanus seems to have had a spiritual significance difficult to parallel elsewhere in contemporary Europe. It is in these terms that we can understand the pious cosmology of such works as the
pseudo-Isidorian De ordine creaturarum or the first canto of the Middle Irish poem-cycle Saltair na Rann; in these terms also that we are to consider the belief of the remarkable seventh-century thinker known to us as Augustinus Hibernicus that it was his Christian duty to prove that God had accomplished all of His miracles by natural means:

... Indeed, the whole of this book is governed by the premise that God, whenever He is seen to do something outside (His) daily governance, does not thereby make a new nature, but shows His sovereignty over that which He created in the beginning.

In one of Saltair na Rann's concluding cantos a sense of awe at the wonders of the universe leads to abasement before God, but also to contempt for those blinded by pride of intellect:

The place where the ocean has its boundaries –
dangerous is their voyage, kingly the path –
my King has never revealed it.
before death to anyone in the flesh.

What do the waves chant, a mighty noise,
unwearying in their fierce chase?
How do the mists seize their wretched prey
everywhere across the wall of the great sea?

Whence comes the floodtide which the sea casts
in a great circle across the ship of the world?
Whither beneath the earth does it flee
when there is ebb on every shore? ...

It is He who created each thing
without sorrow, our lofty Abbot who is not false:
the King who laid death upon the peoples,
even as He humbled the wisdom of the Greeks ...

Curb your vaunting speech:
you are pathetic weaklings beside the King.
May you have innocence, humility and wisdom:
do not embrace folly or violence ...

All the many creatures of God –
beloved and clever, a mighty multitude –
after the fair shaping of each of them,
I have no true understanding of any ...
My King of mysteries, of fair fame,
wherever in His creation He dwells above the world,
mighty and glorious – in my life
I can do nothing but worship Him.¹²

Reverent wonder is more concisely and joyfully expressed in a lyric preserved in a metrical treatise:

Let us adore the Lord,
with His marvellous works:
  vast bright heaven with angels,
  the white-waved sea on earth.¹³

That this distinctive attitude might be frowned upon by other Christians seems to have occurred to the Irish themselves: one tradition holds that when Saint Columba sent his hymn Altus prosator as a gift to Pope Gregory the Great, the latter observed that 'there was no fault in the hymn save that there was little praise therein of the Trinity per se, though it was praised through the creatures'.¹⁴

When the world and all things in it are seen to be sanctified by the fact of their creation, and contemplation of the universe becomes a mode of gnosis, then erudition and curiosity are purified by devotion and guided by humility. It is this which grants Irish learning a vitality and a poetry which seldom entirely succumb to the merely pedantic or cerebral – a scribe at work on a text of Cassidorus will pause to appreciate the sunlight on a page's margins.¹⁵ The papal librarian Anastasius, marvelling that Eriugena, 'that barbarian dwelling upon the edges of the world', should translate Greek so well, concluded that

... in this matter that skilful Spirit (ille artifex Spiritus) has wrought, who made him both burning and eloquent. For unless by Its grace he had been kindled with the fire of love, he would undoubtedly never have received the gift of speaking in tongues. For love was his school-mistress (nam hunc magistra caritas docuit), who taught him what he has brought forth for the instruction and edification of many.¹⁶

A particularly vivid instance of the link between wonder and devotion is provided by the Middle Irish voyage-tale Immram Curaig Úa Corra. The Úi Chorra, three brothers vowed to the Devil's service from the womb, repent after a career of brigandage and undergo a lengthy penance. At last they are restored to grace.
One day when they went to the edge of the harbor, and were watching
the sun sink to the west, they felt a great wonder at the journey of the
sun. 'And whither does the sun go,' said they, 'when it goes beneath the
sea? And what could be more wondrous,' said they, 'than that there
should be no ice upon the sea, and ice upon all other water?' This is the
plan that they made: to summon a certain craftsman in that region who
was a friend of theirs, and to have him make them a boat of three
hides.17

The voyage which they undertake is a pilgrimage, a voluntary exile
undertaken for the love of God; and in their wanderings 'there were
revealed to them by God many singular wonders'.18 Here a sense of
the mystery of the world is itself the stimulus to a consecration of
one's life to the Creator, and spiritual progress goes hand in hand with
further experience of the marvellous.

When we feel awe, it is precisely our sense of wonder at a thing's
essential particularity which leads us to look beyond it. The sign is not
emptied by the fact of reference: it functions by virtue, rather than by
default. Awe is accordingly symbolic rather than merely allegorical. In
this sense all creation is a symbol of its Maker; in the episode just
quoted, it is awe at nature which leads the Uí Chorra to place
themselves in God's hands upon the ocean.

* * *

Although the fact that they are creatures gives all things value and
significance, they become valueless as soon as they are esteemed for
themselves: each thing's individual worth depends on its connectedness
with God. All else is chaos and deception, as Columbanus says in his
fifth Instructio: 'a fleeting or empty image, or an uncertain, frail cloud
and shadow, like a dream'. The true pilgrimage lies within, and the
road to be trodden is life itself:

What therefore are you, human life? You are the road of mortals, not
their life (via es mortalium et non vita), beginning from sin and continuing
until death. For you would be true, if the sin of the first human
transgression had not sundered you; but now you are treacherous and
deadly, since you consign to death all those who walk upon you. ... So
therefore you are to be questioned and not believed or credited,
traversed but not inhabited, wretched human life; for no one dwells on a
road, but journeys thereon, so that those who walk upon the road may
dwell in their own country (ut qui ambulent in via, habitent in patria).19
These are dark words, but it is the darkness of a world that man has marred: but for the Fall, all things would still point clearly beyond themselves, even as they now do in essence. For the immortal dwellers in the Otherworld, Adam's unfallen children, the world's beauty is no barrier to contemplation. The deathless Manannán tells the voyager Bran:

We are since the beginning of creation
without age, without a covering of earth;
hence we do not expect loss of vigor:
the Fall has not touched us.\(^{20}\)

The setting of this speech deepens its significance, for mortal and immortal behold a single world through different eyes: Manannán drives his chariot across the flowering plains of an unfallen paradise, but Bran and his ship are in the world of flux, tossed on a waste of barren waters. Crucial here is the rift between time and eternity, equated by Manannán with that which separates sin from blessedness, and by Columbanus with the contrast between via and patria — or indeed, in one striking passage, that between illusion and reality:

For what, I ask, distinguishes what I saw yesterday from what I dreamed last night? Do not both alike seem vain to you today? And indeed I am no more convinced by what flee as soon as glimpsed than by what deceives a dreamer: for I find both empty. For I am what I have not been and will not be (quod enim sum non fui et non ero), and every hour I am something else, and never stand still. ... Thus always moving and wavering I will go through the remaining intervals of my life, so that from moment to moment, from moments to hours, from hours to days, I will hasten through the unsure stages of my life toward death, that there I may see true and certain things, and all things together in one (tota simul in uno), as I cannot here.\(^{21}\)

* * *

To see the mark of God's hand on every creature is the path of positive mysticism; to reject all contingent things for the sake of the eternal, perceiving that they are 'to be questioned and not believed' (interroganda ... et non credenda), is to undertake the pilgrimage of negative mysticism. Beyond both lies union, encounter with the 'single Trinity and manifold Summit' (simplex Trinitas et multiplex Apex).\(^{22}\) Hither we can come only by God's grace, not through our own wisdom or
virtue; it is appropriate therefore that this union should be experienced as immersion in a divine light, streaming outward from the Eternal Sun – 'Christ the true sun, who will never set', as Saint Patrick called him. It is for such grace that Columbanus prays:

I pray, my Jesus, that You will grant my lamp Your light, so that in its radiance that inner shrine may appear to me, where You are the eternal Priest of the eternal things, entering there by the pillars of Your great temple.

The enlightening flame appears again in Navigatio Sancti Brendani:

As they discussed these things, they saw a fiery arrow shoot in through the window, kindle all the lamps which were set before the altars, then immediately turn and depart. But a precious light remained in the lamps. The blessed Brendan asked, 'By whom are the lights extinguished in the morning?' The holy father answered, 'Come and see a holy thing made manifest (sacramentum rei). See, there are candles burning in the lampstands. Nothing of them will burn away, decrease or dwindle, nor will any ash be left in the morning; for the light is spiritual.' Saint Brendan said, 'How can an incorporeal light burn physically in a bodily creature?' The old man answered, 'Have you not read of the burning bush upon the mountain of Sinai? For that bush was unharmed by the fire.'

In this 'incorporeal light in a bodily creature' (in corporali creatura lumen incorporale) we discern again the integral character of Irish symbolic consciousness – the belief that sacred meanings are, in scholastic terminology, substantial realities rather than mental accidents. Even as the phenomenal participates in the transcendental, the transcendental participates in the phenomenal. This light is not simply a metaphor for Columbanus, nor an allegory in the Navigatio: Adomnán devotes several chapters in his biography of Columba to accounts of the 'heavenly brightness' (caelestis claritudo) with which the saint used to be visited. Bathed in this radiance, Columba was granted miraculous powers of inner vision:

There are some, though very few, to whom the divine grace has granted that, the mind's limits being miraculously loosed, the whole of the earth, together with the circuit of the ocean and the heavens, in one single moment, as if beneath a single ray of the sun (uno eodemque momento quasi sub uno solis radio), should be clearly and most plainly visible.
The themes on which I have touched in this essay require, of course, a far deeper and more extensive treatment than that attempted here. Even the few points which I have raised could be more amply documented and more subtly analysed; while their implications for such topics as Irish monasticism, scholarship, hagiography and visual art could be profitably explored in a whole series of further studies. Both my own competence and the space at my disposal limit me, however, for the present to the suggestions advanced above.

In conclusion, I should stress that early Irish spirituality, although in many respects unlike the rationalistic Latin theology which was in later centuries to evolve into scholasticism, is in no way alien to the faith of the Bible. Some of the most sublime poetry in the Psalms and the Book of Job celebrates a universe which is to be marvelled at but not believed in for itself; and in their preference of story and analogy to abstract systematization the Irish had Christ for an exemplar. It is, of course, in the Incarnate Word that we confront the ultimate concrete symbol, the wholly present manifestation of the wholly Other. Man, made in God's image, is himself a sign of this mystery; our own being, as Columbanus observes, is itself a holy reference:

The all-powerful, invisible, incomprehensible, indescribable, unreckonable God, making man from clay, ennobled him with the dignity of His image. What comparison can there be between man and God, between earth and spirit? For God is spirit. Great is the honor, that God granted man the image of His eternity and the likeness of His ways. ... Let Christ paint His image in us, as He does when He says 'My peace I give you, My peace I leave to you'.

Notes

2 Diodorus Siculus 5.31.1; Greek text in J. J. Tierney, 'The Celtic ethnography of Posidonius', Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy 60 C (1960) 228.
His system is expounded in a series of sermons or instructiones, ed. G. S. M. Walker, Sancti Columbani Opera (Dublin, 1970), 60–121.

Kathleen Hughes, 'Irish monks and learning', in Los Monjes y los Estudios (Poblet, 1963), 74.

Tomás Ó Cathasaigh's work is particularly deserving of mention in this regard; an example is his article 'The theme of lommrad in Cath Maige Mucrama', Eigse 18 (1981) 211–24.

With the 'organic' symbolism of archaic cultures we may compare the 'involuntary' symbolism of dream. The dream's multidimensional significance can never be wholly explicated by the waking mind; and it guards at its center, as Freud himself acknowledged, an umbilical link with the ineffable.

It should be noted that there are Irish Bible commentaries in which the allegorical method is freely employed; cf. e.g. Bernhard Bischoff, 'Turning-points in the history of Latin exegesis in the early Irish church: A.D. 650–800', in M. McNamara, ed., Biblical Studies: The Medieval Irish Contribution (Dublin, 1976), 87. Considerably more characteristic however are commentaries which show the influence of the predominantly anti-allegorical school of exegesis associated with Theodore of Mopsuestia.


Preface to De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae, in J.-P. Migne, Patrologia Latina, 35.2151.


Normalized text in Gerard Murphy, Early Irish Metrics (Dublin, 1979), 64; cf. R. Thurneysen, 'Die mittelirische Verslehren', Irische Texte 3.43.

J. H. Bernard and R. Atkinson, edd., The Irish Liber Hymnorum (London, 1892), 1.64.

'Delicate for us today is the sun's radiance on the margins ...'; text in K. Meyer, 'Neue aufgefundene altirische Glossen', Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie 8 (1912) 175.


A. G. van Harnel, ed., Immrama (Dublin, 1941), 100.

Ib. 102. Similarly in the Navigatio Sancti Brendani, Brendan is told that God prolonged his wanderings because He 'wished to show you various of His secrets in the great ocean' (Carl Selmer, ed., Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis (Notre Dame, 1959), 80.)

Walker, 84–6.


Instructio VI; Walker, 89.


Confessio, chap. 60, in A. B. E. Hood, ed., St. Patrick: His Writings and Muirchú's Life (London, 1978), 34. Cf. the sixth-century Briton Gildas, who wrote of 'that true (sun) Christ, showing forth His dazzling radiance to all the world, not from the mere firmament of time but from that highest citadel of the heavens which surpasses all times' (De excidio Brittonum, chap. 8, in M. Winterbottom, ed., Gildas: The Ruin of Britain and Other Works (London, 1978), 91).
24 Instructio XII; Walker, 114.
25 An extended discussion of this terminology is provided by Aquinas, Summa Theologica 3 q.60; see in particular art. 2, where sacramentum is defined as sacrae rei signum.
26 Selmer, 36–7.
27 A. O. Anderson and M. O. Anderson, edd., Adomnán’s Life of Columba (Edinburgh, 1961), 184, 502–12; thus on one occasion Columba was locked for three days in a house ‘from which ... beams of immeasurable brightness, bursting through keyholes and the cracks of doors, were seen in the night. ... And he beheld, as he afterwards related to very few, many mysteries (arcana) which had been hidden since the beginning of the world, openly revealed’ (ib. 502).
28 Ib. 308; cf. 204. The phrasing is influenced by that of Gregory the Great, Dialogues 2.35.
29 Instructio XI; Walker, 106–8.
The Muses
Archetype of the Divine Intellect in Feminine Form

PETER RUSSELL

So all day long till set of sun the Gods feasted on Olympus
and had their heart's desire of justly portioned abundance, –
Sound of the lovely lyre struck by Apollo,
And the Song of the Muses – their sweet voices
Echoing and replying to one another

Iliad, I 1601–4

I have always found this passage irresistibly gladdening and unlike the
song of the Sirens or of humankind, it never cloys. It is not the music
itself, which of course we shall never hear, at least in this existential
world, but it represents the effect of that immortal music. It is of
course an image, – in deference to an audience of analytical psycholog-
ists, let me call it an IMAGO, a representation perhaps, a basic
component of the whole Imagination, the healing imagination. And
just as music is therapeutic, as Pythagoras and Plato well knew, so is
this imago therapeutic, – it quickens the pulse of both physical and
spiritual life, the natural, the vital and the animal spirits, – themselves
precious images which post-Renaissance Western man has erased
from his consciousness.

For three millennia the image of the Muse has dominated all
Western culture and it is only in our lifetimes that this image has
withered away to less than a wraith. If fifty years ago and more, we first
heard of the Industrial Muse, the Scientific Muse, the ‘Muse of
Commerce’, and very many poets wrote of their all-too-human
sweethearts or wives as ‘the Muse’, we should remember that at least
one important poet, dead only a few years ago, namely Robert Graves,
fully equated in all seriousness the Muse with the archaic or pre-
historic Great Mother.

* A lecture given at the Carl Gustav Jung Institute, Zurich (24th October, 1991).
IN DEDICATION

All saints revile her, and all sober men
Ruled by the God Apollo's golden mean—
In scorn of which I sailed to find her
Whom I desired above all things to know,
Sister of the mirage and echo.

It was a virtue not to stay,
To go my headstrong and heroic way
Seeking her out at the volcano's head,
Among pack ice, or where the track had faded
Beyond the cavern of the seven sleepers:
Whose broad high brow was white as any leper's
Whose eyes were blue, with rowan-berry lips,
With hair curled honey-coloured to white hips.

Green sap of Spring in the young wood a-stir
Will celebrate the Mountain Mother,
And every song-bird shout awhile for her;
But I am gifted, even in November
Rawest of seasons, with so huge a sense
Of her nakedly worn magnificence
I forget cruelty and past betrayal,
Careless of where the next bright bolt may fall.

If Graves came late to this view of the Muse — he must have been fifty when he began to formulate his ideas — and if there are strongly Euhemeristic elements in his vision, it doesn't alter the fact that for a certain exiguous but important section of post-war humanity his view of the Muse has been compelling. If this poem has a vehement effect on us, I ask myself what the poet's own reaction to this violent invasion must have been. This truly was possession by a savage Muse, not the elegant young lady image of conventional iconography.

But perhaps I should remind you how at one time poetry and song were truly important to the ancient peoples.

Odysseus, at the court of Alcinous invites the bard Demodocus to recite a lay:

He spoke, and sat down on a chair beside King Alcinous. And now they were serving out portions and mixing the wine. Then the herald came near, leading the good minstrel, Demodocus, held in honour by the people, and seated him in the midst of the banqueters, leaning his chair
against a high pillar. Then to the herald said Odysseus of many wiles, cutting off a portion of the chine of a white-tusked boar, whereof yet more was left, and there was rich fat on either side:

'Herald, take and give this portion to Demodocus, that he may eat, and I will greet him, despite my grief. For among all men that are upon the earth ministrels win honour and reverence, for that the Muse has taught them the paths of song, and loves the tribe of ministrels.'

So he spoke, and the herald bore the portion and placed it in the hands of the lord Demodocus, and he took it and was glad at heart. So they put forth their hands to the good cheer lying ready before them. But when they had put from them the desire of food and drink, then to Demodocus said Odysseus of many wiles:

'Demodocus, verily above all mortal men do I praise thee, whether it was the Muse, the daughter of Zeus, that taught thee, or Apollo; for well and truly dost thou sing of the fate of the Achaeans, all that they wrought and suffered, and all the toils they endured, as though haply thou hadst thyself been present, or hadst heard the tale from another. But come now, change thy theme, and sing of the building of the horse of wood, which Epeius made with Athene's help, the horse which once Odysseus led up into the citadel as a thing of guile, when he had filled it with the men who sacked Ilios. If thou dost indeed tell me this tale aright, I will declare to all mankind that the god has of a ready heart granted thee the gift of divine song.'

This is a reality if only because in the early stages of our evolution the magician, the seer, the prophet, the healer and the wise man and the poet, were one and the same personage. One doesn't need to have read Engels and Marx to know that after this, a division of labour set in. By the time of Homer, the magician, the prophet, the medical man, the political advisor and the poet were separate professions.

I have quoted this passage at length not just to make a conceptual point – 'bards were honoured once, now poets are just poor fish', but to give you the whole flavour of the Homeric cult of the bard. Could one speak like this of television?

But I have not come here today to impose on you any dogma, religion, philosophy or scientific conclusion – only to present to you certain powerfully telling effects or symptoms. In so far I have spoken of European culture in the main, let me switch suddenly to an area in which European culture can have had no influence whatever. Years ago reading Marius Schneider's brilliant book on the meaning of music I was taken aback by a quote from Theo Preuss The Uitoto: 'In the
beginning there was a word, and the word generated the Father of All.’ This surely is just as profound as St John! The LOGOS is a sophisticated product of the meeting of ancient Jewish and Greek ideas in Alexandria in the 3rd and 2nd century BC? Or is it?

Neumann, in his splendid study The Great Mother, at page 88 quotes:

The Mother of Songs, the mother of our whole seed, bore us in the beginning. She is the mother of all races of men and the mother of all tribes. She is the mother of the thunder, the mother of the rivers, the mother of the trees and of all kind of things. She is the mother of songs and dances. She is the mother of the older brother stones. She is the mother of the grain and the mother of all things. She is the mother of the younger brother Frenchmen and of the strangers. She is the mother of the dance paraphernalia and of all temples, and the only mother we have. She is the mother of the animals, the only one, and the mother of the Milky Way. It was the mother herself who began to baptize. She gave us the limestone coca dish. She is the mother of the rain, the only one we have. She alone is the mother of things, she alone. And the mother has left a memory on all the temples. With her sons, the saviors, she left songs and dances as a reminder. Thus the priests, the fathers, and the older brothers have reported.

— Song of the Kagaba native people, Colombia

I feel at this point that I have nothing else of value to say. I would like to go home and recontemplate these profound thoughts. I would suggest that the enchanting power of this statement comes from its expression of man’s relation to nature in all its aspects. At some later stage male culture heroes introduced practical things — agriculture, writing, commerce, war and munitions, architecture, the sowing of seeds, digging of drains, etc.

The feminine component represents the emotional impact of the civilizing process, the male the achievement of certain practical aims and understandings. The poet, musician or artist mediates between these two quite different modalities or sensibilities. Not only was Tiresias blind, but he was changed from male into female, and back into male.

The whole of our culture comes out of Memory, Mnemosyne, — in every language the name of Memory is feminine. And I hardly need remind you that the Nine Muses were the Daughters of Zeus (whose etymology seems to oscillate between the pulse of life zo-, and light or shining, diF, – Latin Deus), and Memory, Mnemosyne. Hesiod tells us:
Them in Pieria did Mnemosyne (Memory), who reigns over the hills of Eleuther, bear of union with the father, the son of Cronos, a forgetting of ills and a rest from sorrow. For nine nights did wise Zeus lie with her, entering her holy bed remote from the immortals. And when a year was passed and the seasons came round as the months waned, and many days were accomplished, she bare nine daughters, all of one mind, whose hearts are set upon song and their spirit free from care, a little way from the top-most peak of snowy Olympus.

You will note that Hesiod starts by saying that Mnemosyne bore the Muses as ‘a forgetting of ills and a rest from sorrow’ and then says that ‘they were of one mind’ (homophrones). There are no records of the Muses ever quarrelling with each other (unlike the faculties in modern universities who apply themselves to the same fields of arts and sciences as the Muses did). The only slightly bad habit the Muses had was occasionally blinding people like the poet Thamyris who were unwise enough to challenge their authority, but this in fact turned out to their advantage because it strengthened their memory, mother of the arts. We all know that Homer and other great poets like Al-Ma‘arrî the Syrian, and the English John Milton were blind and had prodigious memories, as do the Slav and Siberian bards still living in our days, very many of whom likewise are blind. You will remember too that the Scandinavian god Odin (whose etymology lies somewhere between ød-song and wôd- madness or divine fury), when he wanted the gift of prophesy or second sight, went to the Well of Mimir. Mimir’s price was one of his eyes.

According to the late mythology of the patriarchal tradition of Homer and Hesiod the Muses were daughters of Zeus and most closely associated with Apollo, the god of the masculine Sun and Intellect – definitely daylight figures, images you might say of the rational consciousness. But according to tradition as recorded by Pausanias, they were originally mountain nymphs associated with Cybele, the Great Moon Mother. As such they are essentially lunar, and as Daughters of Memory, like the lunar sphere, seem to be aspects or mediators of the great matrix of the human mind which in modern terms we call the unconscious. Pausanias says they were originally three (the Great Mother was triple) and we may assume that they thus represented the Lunar (the Greek mên – moon or month, may well be connected with the name Muse), the terrestrial, and the chthonic realms.
Mnemosyne (and you will note the resemblance between MNÊME—memory, and mën—moon) was the daughter of the first generation of Gods, Uranus and Gaia, who represent an age incomparably more ancient than that of Zeus. She was a Titaness, and by her nature, of the matriarchal stage. Pre-agricultural peoples measure time (ΜΕ = to measure) by the moon, not the sun. I would suggest that for these very archaic peoples Memory was a source of awesome wonder, a numinous phenomenon, the primary source of all magic, sorcery, prophecy, oracles, healing and poetry—and all the words for these activities seem to come from some common root—MAGIA, MANTEIA, MEDICUS, MELOS—all in some way connected with ‘moon’, ‘measuring’ and ‘mind’. It is natural to think of memory as the mother or matrix of all mental activities when you reflect that most of the time there is nothing in our heads, but that at any moment the mind like a womb can give birth to any number of memories. Memories come as images (connection with magic, making?), and by the process of putting images in meaningful (mën—again) relation, that is, imagination, man can communicate not only facts and situations, but also make stories or myths—MUTHOS. Kerenyi’s discussion in his Eleusis of the etymology of the mu-root in ‘mysteries’ is very much to the point here, since the Eleusinian Mysteries were under the aegis of the moon Goddess, Demeter or Koré or Persephone, and the verb MUEIN meant to ‘close up oneself’ as it were for contemplation or meditation, and the closely connected verb MUEEIN came to mean to ‘initiate’ or ‘teach’. The initiations at Eleusis consisted in mysteries or teachings by means of a shared and wonderful spectacle, a sort of collective vision of hidden or forgotten memories of the history of Demeter and Persephone and their transformations. I am tempted to compare the mysteries to something like the representation of an archetype (in the Jungian sense even) or in terms of psychology a collective hallucination.

 Whatever the numinous qualities of the epopteia in the Mysteries may have been, we might well take as an outstanding example of the archetypal representation of the Divine Mind as a feminine figure Odyssey IX, 21 ff when Odysseus and his son Telemachus prepare to take down the arms from the walls of the Palace, before killing the Suitors.

 The old nurse Eurycleia asks:
Who then shall fetch a light and bear it for Thee, since Thou wouldst not suffer the maids, who might have given light, to go before Thee?

Telemachus dismisses the old lady, and father and son

set about bearing within the helmets and the sharp-pointed spears, and Pallas Athene before them bearing a golden lamp, shedding a beautiful light.

It was a holy undertaking, this proposed slaughter of the suitors. Only a Goddess could help them.

I hope that my learned audience will not feel that in talking in such simple terms I am talking down to them, or even just being vague. If I were to get into technical details I would require not one hour but a hundred, and after all, the subject of the talk is the feminine figure or image – not that never-ending problem of the Mysteries or the nature of Memory, which was judged by Dante's fellow poets to be nothing less than the seat of Love!

One of the main ideas I want to suggest to you is that the Muses considered as a feminine archetype represent the communication not so much of actual knowledge and crafts, but of the emotional component of knowledge and the arts, – what Henry Corbin called 'affective tonality', and it seems to me that what the arts of the post-war period absolutely lack, indeed what society as a whole lacks today, is precisely 'affective tonality'. A successful work of art immediately defines its own context by creating an atmosphere, a Stimmung, which although impalpable and indeed undefinable, communicates an awareness of the sum total and more, of our individual and collective awareness. It quickens our being, without the mediation of linear argument or explanation. It is a Presence of the Other. Dare I say, of Truth?

Novalis's statement: 'We cannot know Truth. Only by means of illusions can we come into its presence' precisely implies what I am talking about. And when we are in the presence of the unknown, although we may not know it, we can and do certainly feel it. It may well be that this sort of feeling is more fundamental and meaningful than all the scientific and philosophical analysis and description put together. This THAUMASTA HEDONEIA or wonderful pleasure as Aristotle calls it is the Gift of the Muses. The Muses were called daimones, that is spirits who carry men's prayers to the Gods, and the Gods' tidings to men. Man in the Kali yuga or iron, or post-industrial age, cannot
converse direct with the Gods. The last time that happened was at the wedding feast of Cadmus and Harmonia, as Roberto Calasso has so eloquently reminded us in his great retelling of Greek mythology.

In a strange sense these 'illusions' are real in as far as they arise compellingly and spontaneously. The Greeks thought of them, as of the Gods, as coming in dreams and visions from outside themselves. They are 'real' for us because they arise in identical form in all men's minds – if the Muse were the creation of the imagination of the individual poet she would be different for each poet, only partially recognizable for other people. That is, the Muse would be an ideal figure, not a real or universal Image. While the presence of the Muse is numinous, that of the 'ideal' woman, being individual, is erotic and sentimental and deeply disturbing, but such only to the individual subject. Some of the women Robert Graves called his Muses were not only trivial but even repulsive to some of his close friends, nor did he communicate his vision of them in his poems, as he does so splendidly in the White Goddess poem. They were not universal epiphanies but personal obsessions, illusions for him, quite unreal for others. The contempt he expressed for Jung stemmed perhaps from his own ultimate sense of uncertainty, of self-deception, negative psychic phenomena.

If Novalis's 'illusions' are positive, in the sense that they are healing and integrating, 'making whole' and atoning, and conducive to some sort of joyful sense of the presence of a reality, — we might propose as analogies in much more limited fields of consciousness Von Helmholtz's concept, in scientific discovery, of 'necessary fictions', or in law, the employment of 'legal fictions'. But the Muse in her unique domain has an absolute reality.

I imagine that one of the commonest things psychiatrists hear from patients must be 'Doctor, I have lost all my illusions'. As a poet I hear the same expression from other poets, good and bad ones, young ones and old ones. But surely the only people who really have no illusions are the yogins, the Sufis, the mystics. People whose ideals and illusions are personal and egoistic rarely have the spiritual stamina to accept disappointments and recognize that the egoistic will cannot achieve its ideals unless they are purely material ones. Modern society has sacrificed its spiritual ideals to material ones in the name of 'realisticness' — surely the most extreme of all illusions. A society that
thinks it has no illusions is doomed to interior psychological disturbance, and so, of necessity, chronic bodily ill-health as well. Without such ‘illusions’ man will never be able to set his soul at harmony with itself, and so will never even glimpse the Eternal Verities.

When the Greco-roman world was Christianized the Church usurped the role of the Daimon, and took in as much of philosophy as was compatible with its absolute daimonic power. But it threw out the Orphic, Pythagorean and Platonic theologies, mythologies and mysteries, vestiges of which it proscribed as gnostic and heretical. Its emphasis was placed on male will as opposed to feminine or lunar sensibility. The new Christians who found it easier to approach God through the mediation of the female face of El or Jahve, the numinous figure of Hokmat as described in Proverbs VIII and later Hellenized by the Alexandrian Jews as Sophia in the Wisdom of Solomon, (curiously enough a canonical book for Roman Catholics but apocryphal for Protestants!) were condemned as heretics. More than a thousand years later, the Roman church was to slaughter a couple of million of these wicked gnostics in the Albigensian crusade, and a hundred years later, at the same time as its monstrous purge of the Order of the Templars, was persecuting Dante and his fellow worshippers of the Deity in a female image. The numinous figure or Imago of the Muse had blended with that of Hokmat/Sophia (and other aspects of the Great Mother as Love Goddess) and both in medieval Christianity and Islam was symbolized (or dissimulated) at first as ‘Il Fiore’ or ‘The Rose’, and finally as Beatrice, the beatifying (note, Beatrix, is the female agent form in the Latin language). The last example of the ascent of the soul to the presence of God through the mediacy of his feminine face is John Donne’s Anniversaries and The Progress of the Soul (AD 1610–1614), in which the dead thirteen-years-old Elizabeth Drury has no more importance than Mrs Dei Bardi née Portinari in the Commedia. Beatrice and Elizabeth Drury, for la gente grossa as Dante called them, are the poets’ fancy girls. For those ‘che hanno intelligenza di amore’ they are the psycho-pomp, or in Jewish terms the shekina or indwelling spirit of the Deity. The Sufi mystical love poets of the absolutely patriarchal Islam adored the uniquely macho Allah again and again as a feminine and often quite erotically feminine figure. Jung, of course, was absolutely right when he said that the Trinity lacked the feminine component and should be a quaternity.
The Muse, the figure of Wisdom/Hokmat/Sophia/Beatrice is an illusion for the modern mind and sensibility, but a necessity for the healthy mentality, the whole or integrated psyche; lacking such an 'illusion' the modern mind cannot cope with even its trivial little problems. The Beatrice Portinaris and Elizabeth Drurys of today become power-greedy self-seeking female preying mantises who instead of leading their male adorers to Paradise gobble them up, and then feel unfulfilled and lonely! The males are equally stupid because they have abstracted from their existential experience an ideal or illusory woman, whom they want to possess and exploit, instead of adoring the God-given figure or Imago of the supra-personal feminine. Is one's ideal figure of woman to come from one's mainly sordid and disappointing experience of quotidian pseudo-reality, or from a higher source? — Higher because not tinged with all-too-human individuality. Swedenborg, at the height of the Age of Reason, said that love was 'obedience to the Beloved'. But the true beloved can only be the Divine, the Absolute, Parmenides' the One, the true self, as opposed to the individual egoistic self. The ancient Indians called it Atman, the indivisible. The atom is divisible, the 'individual is all too divided within himself, but the true self is that which has total identity with itself. Apollo’s gnothi seauton, know thy self, doesn’t mean know your individual faults and quirks, but know who and what is your true and universal Self. That is, what is universal, always the same and One. As we can see from the expression 'selfsame' — 'same' and 'self' are cognate, even identical concepts, and the 'am' of I AM is merely a verbal form of the same adjective, as we see in the Russian ya sam sam, 'I am alone' (that is, one only). The Jewish god JHVH told Moses that he was I AM THAT I AM (which is the central meaning of JHVH). In Sanskrit, the word ATMAN, 'universal spirit' is identical to the reflexive pronoun 'self', and of course is allied with the Greek 'auto'. We can now better understand why al-Hallaj on the scaffold cried out 'I am the truth' just as Jesus did, and why Islamic and Christian mystical poets alike, in poems purporting to be love poems, uttered the amazing words I AM SHE — Cecco's 'donqua io son Ella'. 'Ella' — she — is El, Allah, in the form of 'Universal Spirit', pneuma, Plato's nous or the First Intellect, Sapienza/Hokmat/Beatrice. In Persian khud means 'self', khudá means 'God'.

Thus, I would say, the Muse is not so much impersonal as
non-personal, or beyond individual trivial personality. The Muse, Wisdom, Beatrice, are far beyond individuality, and yet speak to the individual, be it Hesiod or Dante, like a living mother or sister. The Muse resolves the conjunctio oppositorum of the personal and the impersonal. One can thus understand why several of Dante's friends and fellow poets complained bitterly that in the Commedia he had made Beatrice 'his' Beatrice, and forgotten that really she was 'our' Beatrice. The Muse is all humanity's Muse, not mine, or yours or the late Mr Robert Graves's.

But how did the ancient Greeks themselves really envisage the Muses? We get the fullest view of them at the beginning of Hesiod's Theogony, and it tells us all the essentials. I must read all of the first 177 lines because they tell us almost every aspect of the Muses' activities ('ideal mental culture' as we might say). In a more extended study I have examined each of these announced tasks or functions of the Muses as they were developed over a period of fifteen hundred years. I have not condensed this long passage because its solemn but graceful unfolding and the melody of the hexameters, provide not only individual facts and concepts, but also communicate that sense of joy and celebration we experience in contemplating the wonders and mysteries of the creation.

From the Heliconian Muses let us begin to sing, who hold the great and holy mount of Helicon, and dance on soft feet about the deep blue spring and the altar of the almighty son of Cronos, and, when they have washed their tender bodies in Permessus or in the Horse's Spring of Olmeius, make their fair, lovely dances upon highest Helicon and move with vigorous feet. Thence they arise and go abroad by night, veiled in thick mist, and utter their song with lovely voice, praising Zeus the aegis-holder and queenly Hera of Argos who walks on golden sandals and the daughter of Zeus the aegis-holder bright-eyed Athene, and Phoebus Apollo, and Artemis who delights in arrows, and Poseidon the earth-holder who shakes the earth, and reverend Themis and quick-glancing Aphrodite, and Hebe with the crown of gold, and fair Dione, Leto, Iapetus, and Cronos the crafty counsellor, Eös and great Helios and bright Selene, Earth too, and great Oceanos, and dark Night,
and the holy race of all the other deathless ones that are for ever. And one day they taught Hesiod glorious song while he was shepherding his lambs under holy Heli- con, and this word first the goddesses said to me:

‘Shepherds of the wilderness, wretched things of shame, mere bellies, we know how to speak many false things as though they were true; but we know, when we will, to utter true things.’

So said the ready-voiced daughters of great Zeus, and they plucked and gave me a rod, a shoot of sturdy laurel, a marvellous thing, and breathed into me a divine voice to celebrate things that shall be and things that were aforetime; and they bade me sing of the race of the blessed gods that are eternally, but ever to sing of themselves both first and last.

Come thou, let us begin with the Muses who gladden the great spirit of their father Zeus in Olympus with their songs, telling of things that are and that shall be and that were aforetime with consenting voice. Unwearying flows the sweet sound from their lips, and the house of their father Zeus the loud-thunderer is glad at the lily-like voice of the goddesses as it spreads abroad, and the peaks of snowy Olympus resound, and the homes of the immortals. And they, uttering their immortal voice, celebrate in song first of all the reverend race of the gods from the beginning, those whom Earth and wide Heaven begot, and the gods sprung of these, givers of good things. Then, next, the goddesses sing of Zeus, the father of gods and men, as they begin and end their strain, how much he is the most excellent among the gods and supreme in power. And again, they chant the race of men and strong giants, and gladden the heart of Zeus within Olympus, — the Olympian Muses, daughters of Zeus the aegis-holder.

Them in Pieria did Mnemosyne (Memory), who reigns over the hills of Eleuther, bear of union with the father, the son of Cronos, a forgetting of ills and a rest from sorrow. For nine nights did wise Zeus lie with her, entering her holy bed remote from the immortals. And when a year was passed and the seasons came round as the months waned, and many days were accomplished, she bare nine daughters, all of one mind, whose hearts are set upon song and their spirit free from care, a little
way from the topmost peak of snowy Olympus. There are their bright dancing-places and beautiful homes, and beside them the Graces and Himerus (Desire) live in delight. And they, uttering through their lips a lovely voice, sing the laws of all and the goodly ways of the immortals, uttering their lovely voice. Then went they to Olympus, delighting in their sweet voice, with heavenly song, and the dark earth resounded about them as they chanted and a lovely sound rose up beneath their feet as they went to their father. And he was reigning in heaven, himself holding the lightning and glowing thunderbolt, when he had overcome by might his father Cronos; and he distributed fairly to the immortals their portions and declared their privileges.

These things, then, the Muses sang who dwell on Olympus, nine daughters begotten by great Zeus, Cleio and Euterpe, Thaleia, Melpomene and Terpsichore, and Erato and Polyhymnia and Urania and Calliope, who is the chiefest of them all, for she attends on worshipful princes: whomsoever of heaven-nourished princes the daughters of great Zeus honour, and behold him at his birth, they pour sweet dew upon his tongue, and from his lips flow gracious words. All the people look towards him while he settles causes with true judgements: and he, speaking surely, would soon make wise end even of great quarrel; for therefore are there princes wise in heart, because when the people are being misguided in their assembly, they set right the matter again with ease, persuading them with gentle words. And when he passes through a gathering, they greet him as a god with gentle reverence, and he is conspicuous amongst the assembled: such is the holy gift of the Muses to men. For it is through the Muses and far-shooting Apollo that there are singers and harpers upon the earth; but princes are of Zeus, and happy is he whom the Muses love: sweet flows speech from his mouth. For though a man have sorrow and grief in his newly-troubled soul and live in dread because his heart is distressed, yet, when a singer, the servant of the Muses, chants the glorious deeds of men of old and the blessed gods who inhabit Olympus, at once he forgets his heaviness and remembers not his sorrow at all; but
the gifts of the goddesses soon turn him away from these.

Hail, children of Zeus! Grant lovely song and celebrate the holy race of the deathless gods who are for ever, those that were born of Earth and starry Heaven and gloomy Night and them that briny Sea did rear. Tell how at the first gods and earth came to be, and rivers, and the boundless sea with its raging swell, and the gleaming stars, and the wide heaven above, and the gods who were born of them, givers of good things, and how they divided their wealth, and how they shared their honours amongst them, and also how at the first they took many-folded Olympus. These things declare to me from the beginning, ye Muses who dwell in the house of Olympus, and tell me which of them first came to be.

In this wonderful passage of sheer poetic imagination – the clarity of its images makes the modern Imagists look shoddy by comparison – Hesiod projects a scene, a context, and tells a story, or many stories (the Greek muthos simply means a story, or a libretto, ‘the words’); But in these stories we find all the characteristic functions of the Muses in outline. He gives us information, but the tone or Stimmung of the poetry gives this information an emotional and intuitive significance which is far more powerful in its total impact than the sum of the effects of the individual parts.

Purification. The Muses purify themselves and so provide purification (catharsis). There is an Altar for sacrifice.

Dance or voice by night (lunar inspiration is supposed). In the Indian myths ‘Voice’ is a powerful Goddess Vac – Latin vox.

Praise to all the gods is obligatory; that is celebration of every aspect of mental life.

Inspiration of individual poet with spoken word (in this case Hesiod himself). Illusion and reality: ‘Shepherds of the Wilderness’ etc. One thinks of Graves’s idea of the feminine as deceitful, mocking, but also true when it chooses to be. Plato said ‘All poets are liars’, and mere mimics to boot. He wanted to boot them out of his Polis. Yet he loved poetry, especially Homer and Hesiod.

Gift of a rod or sceptre of laurel, the symbol of divine, royal and heraldic sacred authority.

‘They breathed into me a divine voice’ to celebrate things that were and that should be – Prophecy.
Order to sing of the Gods who are eternal, but always of the Muses themselves first and last (without inspiration, what?). Poets must worship the Muses above all.

Song, or art, as sacrifice to Muses as Goddesses.

Gladness accompanies the Muses' prophecy and praise of Gods. They celebrate the origin and the generation of the Gods (Cosmogony)

But first Zeus (life).

Then the race of men and giants (History)

Birth of the Muses 9 daughters all of one mind (homophrones)

'a little from the topmost peak of Olympus' i.e. the penultimate level before the absolute peak. Analogy with later cosmologies. i.e. the nous or first mind, the first emanation of the Absolute One. cf. how when Dante reaches the Empyrean Beatrice is no longer his guide but St Bernard takes over. Even Wisdom is abandoned in the world of pure contemplation or ecstasy. The realm of the nous in 9th or crystal sphere, the Primum mobile. Aristotle held that in the pure Intellect there is no memory.

They sing the laws of the immortal Gods. cf. Dharma, rta, Din, al-Haqq.

They celebrate the 'just-portioning' of Zeus. Moirai, the portioners.

Names of the 9 Muses.

Calliope, epic song, is the first. She attends on 'worshipful princes'. Praise of royal justice and prudent mediation by Kings. Eloquence, the Muses' gift to royalty at birth (? a rite or ceremony. They pour sweet dew [cf. MU, note Widengren, The Manichees 120] into their mouths, a sort of baptism).

Reconciliation:

Persuading quarrelsome people with words, i.e. eloquence, rhetoric.

The great, the worthy king, as a God. Deification and heroisation are subsumed. A sort of immortality!

It is through the Muses and Apollo that there are singers and harpers, but princes are from royal Zeus.

'Happy is he whom the Muses love'

The singer is the servant of the Muses. The word for servant, Theraps, minister, is connected with therapeuein, to heal. Song dispels grief and gives forgetfulness, Letheia.

Note

If the Muses are the Daughters of Memory they also give Forgetfulness. All learning is through and from memory as Plato demonstrated in the Meno. The Muses are par excellence the Goddesses of learning. As for 'forgetting', in Greek, Lethe, we should recall that aletheia, 'not forgetting' is the standard word for Truth. This is the basis of Plato's anamnesis – the process of learning by 'un-forgetting'. The Muses thus give Forgetfulness of trivial and existential preoccupations and of life's evils. In short, contingencies.
In Dante’s Terrestrial Paradise, also at the top of a mountain like the home of the Muses, the soul before rising to Heaven had to drink of two rivers, Lethe – to forget evil things, and Eunoe – to remember good ones. Many people think this doubling of the river was a happy invention of Dante’s. In fact we find it in many cultures, notably in Islamic descriptions of Eden or the Earthly Paradise, even five hundred years before Dante. But the same two rivers are found at the oracular shrine of Trophonius at Lebadea in Boeotia, which was intimately connected with Apollo and the Muses (Pausanias IX, 37).

So the Muses’ gifts of Memory and Forgetting are therapeutic, a ministering to the mind, healing or ‘making whole’, salving, salvation, which themselves are related to our words self and same. It is intriguing that in Arabic salla means health (cf. salute/health and salutation, especially as Dante uses them). But in Arabic salwa means ‘forgetting’. In the Grail Legend the final goal and the resting place of the Grail is Monsalvat, the spiritual equivalent of the Cathars’ earthly city of Monségur, ‘Monte sicuro’, ‘Monte salvo’. In Arabic munsalvat would mean both ‘made whole’ and ‘forgetting’. In the religion of the Cathars the confirmatory rites were called the Con solamentum, ‘the completion of making whole’ and some scholars believe that a form of baptism by water was administered at death, as seems likely in Manicheanism in Persia. This was a rite behind which the ancient Middle Eastern Mother Goddesses Inanna and Anahita loom large with their ‘waters of life’ (see George Widengren, Manicheism, p. 120).

The Middle Persian word for this water was mu. Jung somewhere quotes a medieval christian writer who derives the name Moses, Moisē, who was found in the waters, from an ancient.moys meaning precisely water. Etymology as far-fetched as that of Cratylus, but an excellent example of the symbolism of depth psychology.

This mu or moys may well be related to the classical Persian mei—the word used in Persian mystical poetry for wine in the symbolic sense of Wisdom. In vino veritas?

It is not by any means irrelevant here to bring to your notice that the female figure of wisdom is almost always associated with water, Rebecca and Rachel at the well, and the Woman of Samaria, for instance. The Phaedrus is set by the stream of Ilissus, and Dante and his fellow fedeli di amore all have visions of their Muse/Wisdom figure beside the fountain of Knowledge, or of Love beside a flowing river (end of note).

To return to our list of the Muses’ functions and prescriptions:

Celebrate … those that are born of Earth (Gaia) and starry Heaven (Uranus) anticipates Orphic cosmogonies and the first generation gods – and the creation of the world. A cosmology, as one might say.
‘These things declare to me, Muses’ – they are the stock of memory and give traditional knowledge to the poet. The poet can only know true knowledge from the transcendent Memory vested in the Muses, as opposed to booklearning of philosophers and scientists.

How all these multifarious duties were put into practice, how all these fields of study were developed by the Muses and by men in their cult of the Muses, with its rites and ceremonies, and in innumerable festivals, is an infinitely vast subject, especially when we consider that the Muses were associated at times with almost all the other Gods – even Poseidon (ocean), Hades (the Underworld) and Pan (the All). The study of the Muses ultimately is coterminous with the study of all knowledge, divine and human, but it is a study that is almost always illuminated by the warm light of the feminine intelligence. That Orpheus and Pythagoras were devotees of the Muses goes without saying, but that the pre-Socratics, Socrates himself, Plato, Aristotle and Theophrastus (all strongly rational spirits), Epicurus, and even Lucretius, worshipped the Muses, may come as a surprise. The active cult of the Muses persisted right down to the last generation of pagans, Proclus’ fine Hymn to the Muses being by no means the last word.

Even after Christianity became universal in the Empire, the Muses continued to be invoked in all seriousness, as a glance at Seznec’s The Survival of the Pagan Gods confirms. I have found no less than seventeen substantial references to the Muses in Dante alone, and everyone knows how Milton opens Paradise Lost with

Of Mans First Disobedience, and the fruit
Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast
Brought Death into the World, and all our Woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
Restore us and regain the blissful Seat,
Sing Heav’ny Muse …

The Heav’ny Muse is Urania, as again at VII, 1, but is equated with the Holy Spirit or ‘Siloah’s brook … the oracle of God’, that is, the Temple in Jerusalem which is the site of Divine Revelation.
Already it's getting light and the first birds
Are twittering in the walnut tree, and you
Are hidden everywhere from my fallacious eye.
Some of the pale green leaves at this hour
Appear bright yellow, smooth grey of the walnut bark
Jet like the young girl's cable braids swinging like bell ropes.

There is a mirror you cannot see and a rose in it.
Sun is already up behind the trees,
But the moon, lemon-coloured, lingers reluctant
Like the windhover before he drops. Everywhere you,
Body and spirit, screened by each ovate leaf. What should I say?
Green leaves, running water, a beautiful face. It is permitted
To love these things with a passion pure but intense?
The young boy with his cap awry passes
With his fishing-rod and his wicker basket.
But what is it between my eye and the passing of Beauty?
The prism of air and the sun's transparent light
Bend in perpetual duel the living rods.
Wherever Beauty is revealed, there out of necessity
Love must grow. Why should today
Be an exception? Love is its own reality.
A metaphor is a bridge to reality. Surely
A single thought of that Beauty is a ladder
To higher branches. I am straw to Love's amber,
And willing to be tossed to and fro on the wind
Of whatever makes for cohesion in our mutable world.

Running water, green leaves, reflections,
A beautiful face. The weir and the waterfall.

Love is a medicine that makes pains into cures,
But there are people who think that Love is a mere illusion,
Like physicians and vendors of money and weapons
And the learned in universities and the assessors of culture.
Stone, if you wish, is bread, is living flesh,
And the rough wine of the country is Love himself.
There is no sweeter poison to drink than Love,
No sickness more bracing than this sickness of Love.
Love is the cat o’nine tails that strips off the skin,
Implanting a coat of many colours where before
There was only a grey epidermis of scale and scab.
Love is the fire that burns all deadness away.
A ferocious burnishing that leaves only light to the eye.

A voice from the forest, the pheasant’s cry,
A cry from the waters’ depths, a woman’s cry,
But it is not a woman. It is the cry of Love himself.

Her very veils are Revelation itself,
Her black tresses, yes, conceal the mole in her white neck,
But they display oceans of shining darkness.

Out of the blackness of the pool spreads the image of her face.
Do not touch it, or it will disappear.
As you look in the pool, you look in the rose.
In the centre that is yellow, a sea of light.
A vision of clouds and roses, the clouds themselves are roses,
The roses themselves are light, the light is clouds,
Clouds eternally moving in the still mirror of sky,
And the Empyrean is intense motion, utterly at rest.

The call of a dove, it is the call of a woman
Who is not a woman, the woman calling her lover.
On that same path, for love of a Christian girl,
The pious Sheikh took to herding her swine.

What is the world without longing, without desire?
Without desire, neither a man nor the nightingale can sing,
Nor can the rose bloom or her petals blow on the wind.
The Sheikh has broken his pens in bewilderment,
The pious girl has given succour to an Infidel.

The air is an oil of roses distilled in the dew of dawn.
It burns with a light blue flame, silent as moonlight.
The sounds of the goldsmiths’ hammering in the bazaar,
The sound of the watermills in the Gardens of Meram,
The playing of the children in the square, the silence of deserts.  
The voices of space, and the spaces between the voices,  
The tongues of the moods, of wind and earth, of fire and sea,  
Of running waters, the yearning of all creatures for home.  
It is pure, but not like water; subtle, but not like air;  
Luminous, but not like fire. Spirit it is, that never knew body.  
That wine never dwelt with Care, that Sorrow never with Song.  
Joyless he is who lives sober, he that does not die drunk,  
Let him weep, for he will lose the way towards wisdom.  
Be thinking of beautiful things that neither age nor winters  
Change. Listen to a thousand tongues reciting before thee.  
And as for the lays of old time, a thousand have been scattered  
On the wind, a thousand buried in the snow.  
These the Teutonic Knights trampled with heavy boots,  
Those the spells of maleficent priests rooted out.  
A thousand tongues could never have recited them all.  
There are a thousand tongues in the wood, a thousand tongues in the sky,  
In the running brook; in the deep lake, a thousand more.  
The states of mind of the gnostic seek out and find  
These thousands of tongues, unforgetting, and thousands more.

I shall pursue the woman to the new pastures where rain has fallen,  
And the thorn-bushes are green and the small bird sings.  
Meanwhile the mill-wheel turns and the noise of the children in the square  
Reverberates clearly, though the City is three hundred miles out of earshot.  
It is the silence of these sounds that knits my mind,  
And the roar of many waters in the night refreshes me.  
A constant sound, more various than many words  
Of maenads, maniacs, mystics, — all the sober Bards.  
Eros is everywhere, and everywhere Eris  
Threws Love's pure harmonies into the jangle of the street,  
Chaos of market-place and battleground, the jungle of the world.  
Rapture itself calls out in rut for cleaving rupture,  
Still ocean cloven silently by the immane waves.  
Moses with his rod slew the Pharaoh of worldly existence,  
The Muses gave Hesiod their wand and he harmonized worlds,  
Singing of generations of Gods he welded in one the saeculum.  
Somnun the lover said that you cannot define anything  
Unless in terms more subtle than that thing.  
There is nothing subtler than Love. How shall it be explained?  
The rational interpreter is like the donkey carrying books.  
He brays loud, but nothing unclouds the lover's furrowed brow.
And I ask what Kant ever said about Love, or Hegel, 
Contradicting his contradictions, about the eye of the Beloved? 
Thinking of the Muses, envious of love-crazed mystics, 
I am Drosophila in the harvester's web.

In that mysterious solitude when she unveils herself, 
When no more thought of battling self-regard, 
The sentinel on the lip, the watcher in the heart, 
Persisted in their censorship, I said to Her: 
Separation has been hard; in this proximity 
Naked beholding alone divides. 
Dart now on me that glance, like one who looks on a lover 
Before Love blinds him to himself and all appearances, 
And body vanishes in Love's effulgence. Say: 
'Thou shalt not!' Others before me have heard this commandment 
And known increase of love. Can man ask more 
Than once united with thee he no more needs to see? 
This mystics call, in the anguish of their love 
And stark clairvoyance, the Second Separation. 
The mountains crumble, even Sinai is laid low, 
And words fail utterly in the darkness of this joy. 
'O fire of the burning furnace, be coolness and peace!'

And what is Death, the dissolution of the body, 
A fair young woman who well knows how to treat 
Dissolute bodies. Let her come with her seductions, 
Showing her nakedness, irresistibly dissimulating 
The wanton harlot. Welcome, O harlot! Welcome! 
O holy saeculum, and O unholy heavens, 
Open with all your awful revelations!
I am here.

1991
On being Seventy

Siccome il ciecero* che more in cantando
la mia vita si partte e vuol morire
(Dogliosamente, A. N° 98) (xiii c.)

Ma Dio, fam no pensà

Franco Loi

The loves and the illusions all are gone,
Vanished the graces and dear vanities,
Old energies converted to disease
And lassitude, and simply holding on.
You who would climb the slopes of Helicon,
Know that the nymphs and the sonorous bees
Are elemental speaking deities, —
Th'wild cyclamens eclipse oblivion.

The senses dwindle as the air gets thin.
It is the heart that hears the angelic voices,
And knows the lay of phoenix and of swan.
The music of the world's disordered din
That loads the air with its malignant noises, —
Here one clear note can blot out Babylon.

1991

Pratomagno
Last Night

Deep in the night in this lonely house on the mountainside
I hear a child's voice singing, one walking the night.
Perhaps I should get up and go out and search for the stricken waif,
A soul in pain escaped from perdition or cast out by man's brute blows,
A child in years but older than epochs and aeons. That singing
Was very clear in the night, in the dark, very strange.
It is warm in my house. The coffee and wine on the table
Refresh me, keep me awake, reassure me, as I read in an ancient book
Of the one true love that is obedience to the Beloved. Who is the Bride
That I should obey her call? Who is the Bridegroom? A virgin
From before the beginning of time, one uncreate but creating,
A word that created this God that created the world, and who now walks
alone,
Through fields and pastures, a spirit deserted none cares to call on
At his own cost, — one nobody knows and nobody wants to know,—
Yet he knows every balk and furrow, every shoot in the vineyards of heaven.
He is the child, the bride, the bearded woman, Krishna the black, Arjuna
shining white,
The old woman with her pale lantern, the grandfather with his plutonian
bolts,
Barefoot on the hills he walks, a cry poured out on the world's stricken altar,
An ancient condemned to the scourgings, the chambers, the poisons,
The imposts of hunger, of pests, and of ignominious crushing defeats,
A figure who haunts every age, every soul, who would be no more than a
friend.
And I am an old poet prowling the night's loose tiles, a sick or a senile ghost
Drunk and abandoned, lost in the billowing mists before dawn.

1989

Pratomagno
At some time during 1824 and 1825 Samuel Palmer painted an unusual picture now known as ‘The Rest on the Flight to Egypt’, or ‘The Repose of the Holy Family’. It was begun in the painter’s nineteenth year. The picture, painted in oil and tempera, is curious for two reasons. First, there had not been anything quite like it in the history of English painting. It is stylistically almost without precedent. Secondly, the picture is an odd mixture of not quite resolved pictorial features. It shows the Holy Family in what appears to be an English landscape. But, incongruously, to the right, is a large palm tree. In the middle distance is a richly autumnal wooded landscape typical of the Kentish hills around Shoreham with which Palmer was already familiar and with which, in the following decade, he was to become intimately associated. Yet this wooded landscape gives way, towards the skyline, to another sort of landscape more reminiscent of the Alps than anything one might see in England. To the left of the picture is a steeply banked field which reveals, rather too precipitously, a cottage with a smoking chimney. In the right foreground the Holy Family are at rest. It is not quite clear on what they are resting owing to the ambiguity of the ground plane beneath them. For this reason it looks the most unlikely place to rest with, presumably, the hill falling away just behind them. There is considerable distortion in the figure of Mary; and Joseph makes a somewhat token and over-large appearance just behind her.

All this would not matter were it not for the fact that the picture is painted in a style that is, in its detail, representative of natural appearances. Any prolonged contemplation of the picture is likely to leave the viewer with the impression that the representation is not sufficiently removed from naturalism for its incongruities to be resolved. It is a beautiful picture, richly worked and yet it has something of the appearance of a transitional work, as important for
what it heralds as for what it accomplishes. And what it heralds is a style of painting that immediately after was to result in the six masterpieces of the year 1825. These are the six sepia wash drawings that are arguably Palmer’s greatest works.

These six pictures are painted in a style that manages a fruitful and balanced tension of naturalistic and abstract elements. They present a convincing and homogeneous pictorial reality that only partially corresponds to the reality of physical appearances, and yet in such a way that any visual incongruities we might find in the pictorial reality seem to be acceptable and do not disturb the mind’s eye. In ‘Early Morning’, for instance, it does not strike us as incongruous that it is not clear where the source of the light is. Does it come, as perhaps it should, from the large mushroom-shaped tree? Or does it come from a source beyond the left side of the picture. The three slender tree trunks that dominate the right-hand half of the picture seem to indicate this, but then their shadows are not angled consistently.

In ‘A Rustic Scene’, the spatial depth from the head of the front ox to the thatch of the cottage is foreshortened to the point of having no extent at all. Again, the ground plane is ambiguous so that it is not certain on quite what the black ox is standing. The ears of corn in the middle distance are of a size that would, in natural fact, make them the size of small trees. (Such corn is also a feature of ‘The Valley thick with Corn’ and ‘Late Twilight’.) In front of the cottage to the left of the picture there appear to be three wooden palings of a fence that seems stout beyond its function as such. And what is the fringed triangle of leaves that cuts across the bottom left-hand corner of the picture?

In ‘The Valley thick with Corn’ multiple perspectives seem to operate so that one part of the scene is inconsistent with another from the unifying point of view of the observer’s eye. Separate areas or ‘patches’ of the picture are ‘sewn’ together, quilt-fashion. It is as if the painter wants us to look closely and be absorbed into areas of the picture to the exclusion from our field of vision of other areas, so that a minutely articulated series of scenes join up at their edges to cohere pictorially as we draw away and take in the whole picture at a glance. By means of this sectioning we are made to inhabit a sense of imaginative space which itself replaces physical space. This lack of physical depth is registered in several instances: by the two birds to the right of the trunk of the mushroom-shaped tree in ‘Early
Morning', for instance, and those to the left of the central tree, as well as the shepherd and his sheep on the escarpment in the top right-hand corner of 'The Skirts of a Wood'. The bats in 'The Valley thick with Corn' and the three fruits in the top left-hand corner of 'A Rustic Scene' are all devices that in conventional pictorial language would be used to measure distance. But here they do not quite succeed in that function.

More generally, we note that in all the pictures there is no atmosphere. No mist has ever formed, no wind blown through, no rain fallen upon these landscapes. In their ecstatic ripeness they are aloof from the transitory, the vicissitudes of weather, of the seasons. These, and any other ambiguities and incongruities we might find seem rather to be beside the point in the context of the stylistic means that Palmer deploys, and which is entirely consistent on its own imaginative terms. The stylistic balance of naturalism and abstraction,
depicting as it does a rapt stillness that honours the theophanic miracle of the observable creation was never again brought to such a pitch of perfection as here in these six works.

We cannot say how our overall view of Palmer's Shoreham period would be altered were the works destroyed by his son restored to us. But in only a few other pictures does this stylistic synthesis of naturalism and abstraction form such an integral part of the pictorial reality. These are 'A Hilly Scene' of 1826, 'A Shepherd and his Flock under the Moon and Stars' of 1827, 'Ruth Returning from the Gleaning' of 1828/29, and perhaps 'The Magic Apple Tree' of 1830. All Palmer's other paintings, including the typically 'Shoreham' works show scenes that are plausible in terms of naturalistic representation. In the six sepia works of 1825 such representation does not seem to be in question. They stand apart, so much so that we must conclude that here something different was intended.

The maturity of the conception and the mastery of the execution of these works are, to say the least, surprising in a painter of only twenty years of age. The possible iconographic sources for their pictorial and stylistic richness have been well researched and identified. But useful as they are such studies cannot tell us much about the motivation — the creative impulse — behind the making of these pictures. Apart from the literary sources (no less important in this case than the pictorial) the only visual precedent for them from his own hand that we have are to be found in his sketchbook of 1824. Here, in embryo, along with intensely detailed studies of natural forms, are those radiant scenes of magical intimacy; here is the landscape forming itself into unlikely extra-geological configurations; here trees and plants no longer quite answer to strict botanical categorization. In these pages the elements of a pictorial style are being tried and tested for their imaginative significance no less than for their pictorial value.

Something of Palmer's mental state can be gathered from an entry in another notebook described by his son A. H. Palmer as covering the period November 1823 to July 1824: 'I ... shall try to work with a child's simple feeling and with the industry of humility'. Nothing could be further removed from simplicity than the painter's work of this period, unless we understand him to mean innocence of vision — the direct imaginative apprehension of the child. Indeed, in another entry of the same notebook Palmer refers to his 'very early years, in
which I distinctly remember that I felt the finest scenery and the country in general with a very strong and pure feeling'. Yet another entry for 2nd January, 1825 gives us an insight into his somewhat febrile mental condition with its highly strung spiritual pre-disposition:

Now is begun a new year. Here I pause to look back on the time when I laid by the Holy Family in much distress, anxiety and fear; which had plunged me into despair but for God's mercy ... I then sought Christ's help, the giver of all good talents whether acknowledged or not ... I improved more since I resolved to depend on Him till now ... and have felt much more assistance and consolation. For very soon after my deep humblenment and distress, I resumed and finished my Twilight, and quickly took up my Joseph's Dream, and sketched in my sketchbook ... knowing my own stupidity ... I gave back the praise to God who kindly sent it, and had granted to me desponding, that at eventide it should be light.
If we are searching for the 'source' of Palmer's art at this time then we must, surely, on the basis of such confessions, reckon with that of a direct spiritual influence that will always defy precise, formal determination.

At the time of writing the above passage Palmer had known John Linnell some fifteen months. The older man had encouraged Palmer a good deal and of this fateful friendship he was to write 'it pleased God to send Mr Linnell as a good angel from Heaven to pluck me from the pit of modern art; and after struggling to get out for the space of a year and a half, I have just enough cleared my eyes from the slime of the pit to see what a miserable state I am now in'. During 1824 Linnell also introduced Palmer – in 'fear and trembling' – to William Blake.

It is difficult to ascribe the greater degree of importance either to Blake’s personality or to his work in so far as they were to influence Palmer. But of one thing we can be certain, the incalculable influence on him of Blake’s half visionary, half pastoral woodcuts executed for Dr Thornton’s Virgil in 1821. The impact of these small pictures on Palmer was immeasurable: his own testimony being well known. He described them as

> Visions of little dells, and nooks, and corners of Paradise; models of the exquisitest pitch of intense poetry ...There is in all such a mystic and dreamy glimmer as penetrates and kindles the inmost soul, and gives complete and unreserved delights, unlike the gaudy daylight of this world. They are like all that wonderful artist’s works the drawing aside of the fleshly curtain, and the glimpse which all the most holy, studious saints and sages have enjoyed, of that rest which remaineth to the people of God.

What emerges from this confluence of training, of influences and inspirations is that Palmer, whose first recorded drawing had been executed at the age of seven, and who had sold a picture at the Royal Academy at the age of fourteen, had reached what he considered an artistic impasse at the age of seventeen. This impasse – the 'pit of modern art' – was clearly the more of less unquestioned assumption of the age that the art of painting was the art of naturalistic representation. Yet within three years, at the age of twenty, with the help of Linnell and Blake, Palmer had painted six masterpieces in a style that had little in common with either of his mentors or any of his contemporaries. Blake was thought to be mad by some of his
contemporaries because there was no widespread convention in contemporary taste to grasp the meaning of his images. The same fate befell Palmer's works of the Shoreham years for they remained mostly unsold. A baffled critic commenting in the *European Magazine* of August 1825 wrote of two of them that they are 'so amazing that we feel the most intense curiosity to see what manner of man it was who produced such performances'. We forget how recent is our appreciation of these pictures, and for reasons that are not always helpful for an understanding of them, as we shall see.

In order to grasp more fully Palmer's achievement in these six pictures we must recall that neither Blake nor Linnell painted in a style such as we now associate with Palmer's Shoreham years. It seems likely that Linnell had re-focussed his sense of pictorial value by directing him to certain 'very ancient Italian and German masters'. His recent friendship with Blake no doubt re-inforced his incipient
awareness of the significance of imaginative vision – of the supremacy of the soul’s cognition over the sensory apprehension of the world of appearances. With his newly clarified vision Palmer felt sufficiently confident to dismiss his contemporaries’ attempts at naturalistic representation, saying he ‘wondered what the moderns could mean by what they called their “effects”’ – that is, seeing nature as a series of retinal impressions. A memorandum of the period – ‘guard against bleakness and Grandeur’ demonstrates his early resolve to resist the eighteenth century artistic ideal of the sublime.

It must be assumed that Blake’s friendship gave Palmer’s naturally Platonic bent just the support and encouragement it needed seeing that, with the exception of the Virgil woodcuts, the human dynamic of Blake’s figurative compositions has little in common with Palmer’s empathic pastoralism. Whereas Blake transcribed what he saw inwardly, Palmer alchemized what he saw outwardly. But what is meant by speaking of Palmer’s ‘Platonic bent’? To understand this we must examine more closely Palmer’s own record of his intentions. In this we are fortunate since the painter was hardly less able to describe in words his intentions than he was able to execute them by pictorial means.

When Palmer wrote, in a letter to George and Juliet Richmond dated June 1836, and quoting from Milton’s Comus, ‘every little self denial and agonizing brings after it “a sacred and home-felt delight”, so, on the large scale, our whole earthly existence ought to be a short agony to secure eternal blessedness’, we might be forgiven for thinking that he was prey to a degree of morbidness. But we cannot gainsay the other-worldly direction of the sentiment, one which remained with him throughout his life. Moreover, it is obvious from much that he wrote that the painter had at times a pressing acquaintance with the powers of evil. An entry for 31st August, 1826, in his notebook reads:

After dinner I was helped against the enemy so that I thought one good thought. I immediately drew on my cartoon much quicker and better ... Satan tries violently to make me leave reading the Bible and praying ... O artful enemy, to keep me, who devote myself entirely to poetic things ... I will endeavour, God helping, to begin the day dwelling on some short piece of scripture, and praying for the Holy Ghost thro’ the day to inspire my art.
A few years later he wrote again to Richmond (21st September, 1832): ‘If only people knew how deeply the whole world lieth in wickedness, and how totally it is estranged and set in opposition to God’. Obviously Palmer shared with Blake a keen sense of the fulcrum of good and evil at the point of inspiration for human motivation and action.

Yet Palmer was far from seeing man’s position in this world as being one of sin and hopelessness. In the same letter he refers to man’s pre-fallen image as ‘the similitude of a divine parentage’. And in a letter to John Giles’s family dated October 1838 he advised his brother Albert to go on drawing, continue to study from the divine, eternal, naked form of man ... The devout and holy study of the naked form purifies the imagination and affections, and makes us less pervious to evil temptation ... in eternity that human form is, as it were, the body and symbol of goodness and truth ... it existed from eternity in the Divine Idea.

This ‘archetypal perspective’, as one might call it, remained with Palmer throughout his life. Writing from Italy in 1838 to the Giles
family he ranged the ‘old Platonic philosophy’ against the materialistic, pragmatic ‘Useful Knowledge Society’ of his day, remarking ‘money and beef are not, as people imagine, the solid things of the mind; but as unreal and unsatisfying to the immortal part, as a lecture on metaphysics could be to a hungry belly’.

Palmer must have read Plato in the translation by Thomas Taylor whose Works of Plato was published in 1804. Doubtless such a reading would have familiarized the painter with the idea that the human soul, while in its earthly body, is an exile from its true state in the divine realm. If we add to this what Palmer would, as a Christian, have understood of the Creation as the artifice of God, a manifestation of His goodness and beauty, then we have the essential sources for nearly every one of Palmer’s reflections on the human condition in relation to his vocation as a painter of created appearances. But the reality beyond appearances is at all times the focal point of Palmer’s art and thought. On the evidence of his writings the Platonic myth of the Cave was a leitmotif of his thinking from first to last. From the time of his adolescence to his old age it was natural for him to think of the world of nature in terms of its insubstantiality, its ephemerality. In his ‘Observations on the Country and on Rural Poetry’, written in his more philosophical old age (in fact the last year of his life and published in 1883 as a Preface to his Eclogues of Virgil), he rejected the ‘Facts and Mutton’ vision of the universe habitual to the modern intelligence but doubted whether he could warn such as were possessed by it of the unreality of what they saw: ‘We must not tell him that perhaps his back is to the light, like those men in Plato’s Cavern; and that though his eyes are wide open, he may be watching shadows’.

Palmer never makes the naive assumption that reality is what we observe. For him appearances are the shadows, the language, even, of a veiled world we should strive to see. To this extent art, for Palmer, has a moral obligation – a spiritual import. There is on the one hand the perfect form of man, the immortal Soul, divine in its essence, and on the other hand there is the insufficiency of the natural world acknowledged by our senses. The resolution of this duality, the very condition of man’s earthly existence, is for Palmer the task of art. Nature, as he wrote to Linnell in December 1828 ‘does yet leave a space for the soul to climb above her steepest summits: as, in her own
dominion she swells from the herring to leviathan; from the hodman-dod to the Elephant, so divine Art piles mountains on her hills, and continents upon these mountains'. The nature we see is not another reality 'opposed', as it were, to the divine: it is rather as if what we see is the 'wrong side of the tapestry'. (The six sepia works do indeed have something of the texture of a tapestry in the way they are closely worked with interwoven shapes over their entire surface.) It is not for sensible perception to countenance the right side, for only the cognitive vision of the soul, imagination proper – 'intellectual eyes' as he called it – penetrate to the true reality. Palmer used this phrase in a letter to George Richmond in September of the same year, where he complained of the danger to students of having their 'intellectual eyes jaundiced' from merely copying from natural appearances.

This duality suggests if not an opposition between art and nature at least a distinction in their purpose. And so there is. Writing to his patron Leonard Rowe Valpy in May 1815 Palmer notes, 'Nature
knowledge and art knowledge ought to be in harmony, but they are two distinct things'. That this harmony is not brought about in the attempt to represent natural appearances becomes obvious from much that Palmer wrote in an effort to explain his intentions. For instance, in a letter to Philip Gilbert Hamerton in February 1874, long after his Shoreham years, he concluded,

As for the last thirty years we have been working backwards, not towards nature but naturalism.

The Philosophers, who are by no means too imaginative, can set us right. Lord Bacon says it is the office of poetry to suit the show of things to the desires of the mind. We seem to aim at suiting the desires of the mind to the show of things. Does not the former imply a much more profound and inclusive study of the 'show of things'—'nature', as we call it, itself?

Unlike Blake, Palmer had little to say on his concept of the imagination. But clearly it was for him the faculty that joined sensible perceptions of beauty through imagination to their paradigms in the divine. Writing in his In Memoriam for Oliver Finch in 1863 he observed, 'He had imagination, that inner sense which receives impressions of beauty as simply and surely as we smell the sweetness of the rose and the woodbine'. And later, in his 'observations' of 1883 he elaborated: 'A bird deprived of her wings is not more incomplete than the human mind without imagination, a faculty distinct from the spiritual and rational, yet having a common language; for the language of imagination is poetry, and it is in poetry that both sacred aspiration and secular wisdom have found their noblest utterance'. The use of imagination is to resolve the opposing tensions that exist between the demands the outward world make upon the senses and the aspiration that beauty inspires in the soul. The symbol of the bird is aptly chosen for does not the bird's wing presuppose the possibility of upward flight? It must surely be to this imaginative resolution that Palmer was referring when he wrote, in a letter to Linnell on 21st December, 1828, 'creation sometimes pours into the spiritual eye the radiance of Heaven', so that the effects of natural beauty 'not only thrill the optic nerve, but shed a mild, a grateful and unearthly lustre into the inmost Spirits and seem the unchanging twilight of that peaceful country, where there is no sorrow and no night'. In other words, the resolution of opposites that is the 'rest which remaineth to the people
of God' is an act of imaginative perception – the greatest art, as he wrote to Valpy in May 1875 addresses 'not the perception chiefly, but the IMAGINATION, and here is the hinge and essence of this whole matter'.

But how is this resolution between the generated creation and the divine reality, and between nature and art effected? For the depiction of what is beyond the ‘fleshy curtain’ by means of some semblance of outward appearance must surely have inherent in it the danger either of an idolatry of those appearances, and thus increasing the possibility of our being attracted to sensible beauties rather than to the truth of their unmanifest source, or of some form of pantheism that obscures the distinction between the Creator and the Creation? The dilemma Palmer, in effect, posed in the letter to Linnell of 21st December, 1828:

I have … no doubt that the drawing of choice positions and aspects of external objects is one of the varieties of study requisite to build up an artist, who should be a magnet to all kinds of knowledge; though, at the same time I can't help seeing that the general characteristics of Nature's beauty not only differ from, but are, in some respects, opposed to those of imaginative art.
But does not the very existence of the Incarnation imply the sacramental nature of material things? In which case the Creation is best seen as a theatre of redemption, a vehicle of grace where the minute study of its forms — 'Temporal Creation, whose beauties are, in their kind, perfect' (as he called it in the same letter) — leads to contemplation of its hidden prototypes — ‘those abstracted, essential, fiery, and eternal conceptions known by few in any age' (letter to Richmond September 1828). It is precisely this intimate correspondence between the revealed manifestation and the veiled essence that permits the ‘material tablet’ to ‘receive the perfect tracings of celestial beauty’ (notebook 1824).

The ‘material tablet’ is not, after all, some vague, amorphous entity but a theophanic array of living minute particulars. For the artist the study of nature is not so much the imitation of how those particulars appear as the use of them to dismask appearances — to reveal the ‘right side of the tapestry’ — nature used as the language of forms to convey the very sacredness of the Creation. Martin Butlin, in his edition of the 1824 notebook, has pointed out how the power of Palmer’s drawing is related to a heightened vision of direct perception of natural forms and how this power diminishes in so far as it draws upon the imagination – (meaning, in this case, personal phantasy).

This being so, it is noticeable how during the Shoreham years (we must remember that the six sepia pictures were not executed at Shoreham), Palmer had an almost obsessive concern to balance an intense study of natural detail with his spiritual preoccupations. Both the written and drawn entries to the 1824 sketchbook show his absorption in physical details, but on page 81 we find,

...it is not enough on coming home to make recollections in which shall be united the scattered parts about those sweet fields into a sentimental and Dulwich looking whole. No. But considering Dulwich as the gate into the world of vision one must try behind the hills to bring up a mystic glimmer like that which lights our dreams. And those same hills, (hard task) should give us promise that the country beyond them is Paradise.

Seen in this light, to suppose that the ‘abstract’ element of Palmer’s style during the Shoreham years reveals a desire to experiment with form obscures the point: it suggests that the painter’s intentions were more or less exclusively aesthetic and artistic whereas he was obviously
and equally concerned to make a faithful rendering of his spiritual discoveries.

It seems likely that Palmer's spiritual ardour was at its most intense during the time of his early acquaintance with Linnell and his introduction to Blake; the years 1823 to 1825. And if Linnell's influence led him to the minute study of natural forms then the influence of Blake was no doubt instrumental in showing Palmer how the inspirational and observational impulses could be joined in creative fruition. Blake's advice to the young painter was to 'draw anything you want to master a hundred times from nature till you have learned it from 'heart'. Such advice could only mean to receive the image of a thing into one's very soul so that it is freed from the accidentality of its appearance and may be recognized from an interior, visionary state of concentration. This assimilation of the knower and the known in an act of self-identity explains another entry in Palmer's 1824 sketchbook. 'Nature is not at all the standard of art, but art is the standard of nature. The visions of the soul, being perfect, are the only true standard by which nature must be tried.' Some years later, in 1845, Palmer was still referring to this process of inner purification as one of the essentials of artistic practice: 'It is almost impossible to do rightly or wisely. That conceit, self-complacency, and indolence, should be incessantly hunted out of the inner man'.

Blake further advised Palmer: 'You have only to work up imagination to the state of vision and the thing is done'. And A. H. Palmer spoke of his father's 'vivid intensity of mental "vision" that preceded the actual working of a design'. This faculty Palmer evidently shared with Blake. Indeed, the 'ripeness' of the things of nature's garment that is such a telling characteristic of the 1825 sepia works seems in itself to be mysteriously consistent with the intensity of the painter's absorption in the imagery of nature. It is as if the sheer abundance of the latent spiritual possibilities that might exist between observer and observed, between man and nature is suddenly unlocked and realized in a unity that is greater than their simple addition. And does not this explain the profound 'interior' stillness of these works, their lack of that climatic atmosphere which is the life-blood of a Constable or a Turner landscape?

A. H. Palmer wrote in his Life of his father
Judging by the hundreds of other examples I have of my father’s work, executed before and since he became acquainted with Mr Linnell – judging by the most characteristic works of any period, it is possible to maintain that what made him ‘singular among his fellows’ ... was not borrowed from anybody but was essentially his own. Further, that his art is particularly remarkable for belonging to no school; and that his ‘pictorial genealogy’ cannot easily be traced through any other artist.

This observation remains largely unchallenged. The efforts of commentators have only marginally traced his stylistic antecedents, and such sources could never, given the nature of the case, adequately account for the sudden flowering of the six sepia masterpieces. There is nothing transitional about them; their style is as mature as their appearance is dramatic. The fact is that in his journals, notebooks and letters Palmer is nearly always speaking, in effect, of his attempt to visualize nature internally. Here was an artist, barely out of adolescence, yet already his own master, who had been granted a direct inspiration to record an hermetic vision of nature.

Palmer’s stylistic innovation seems all the more audacious when we realize that it was also a challenge to the whole ethos of the modern intelligence in respect of its post-Cartesian heritage of a split between spirit and matter. The young Palmer was, by implication, striving to repair the rupture brought about by the agnostic, nominalist view of nature as simply a mechanistic, external process devoid of any spiritual significance.

In his ‘visionary’ years Palmer was a gnostic who looked to nature as the channel of grace which mitigates man’s fallen condition and so narrows the gap between God and creature. If art differs from nature it is precisely because of the need to bridge this ‘distance’, for the very multiplicity of nature, by turns ensnaring and dissipating the senses, divides us from the divine unity in which multiplicity itself participates. But in those arts in which the imaginative act is allowed its proper function, as Palmer understood it, unity is sought and recovered not by abandoning the immanent beauties of nature, but through the convivial stimulation they afford as energizing the aspiration to reach their transcendent source.

Terrestrial Spring showers blossoms and odours in profusion, which at some moments ‘Breathe on earth the air of Paradise’; indeed sometimes, when the spirits are in Heav’n, earth itself, as in emulation, blooms again
into Eden... Still the perfection of nature is not the perfection of severest art: they are two things: the former we may liken to an easy charming colloquy of intellectual friends; the latter is 'Imperial Tragedy'. That, is graceful humanity: This, is Plato's Vision; who, somewhere in untracked regions, primigeneous Unity, above all things, holds his head, and bears his forehead among the stars, tremendous to the Gods!

Palmer's endeavour, especially during the Shoreham years, was thus analagous to that of the mystic who seeks to attain the truth by breaking through the world of appearances. The fact that spiritual mastery is not lastingly attained by artistic means should none the less not disguise from us the significance of that spiritual nostalgia that floods both his writings and his pictures during this period. For Palmer art is a form of the pursuit of wisdom, and the attainment of Truth comes via the soul whose own pre-fallen essence is of the same substance as the energies that spread the 'fleshy curtain' of the world before our eyes.

Palmer's pre-occupation with light, for instance - 'to bring up a mystic glimmer like that which lights our dreams' - is as much a concern with those consonances between the soul's faculties and their proper object, the self-illuminating interiority of things, the sacredness of their being, as it is with the 'material light' which must in some mode or other engage the painter. In an entry to his 1824 sketchbook written at 9 o'clock pm on 15th July, describing a tower observed in the summer twilight, he spoke of just such an 'inherent light' as seemed to make a thing 'luminous in itself'. Natural objects merely reflect 'the gaudy day light of this world', but to penetrate beyond 'brute matter' to this interior illumination of things is to perceive 'a subdued solemn light which seems their own and not reflected send out a lustre into the heart of him who looks - a mystical and spiritual more than a material light'.

To this painter's eye mass, line and extension are the harbingers of a qualitative mode of discourse. The 'abstraction' of Palmer's style in the sepia works must be seen as an attempt to deploy empathic symbols; not, as in the immemorial symbols of the Christian tradition that are 'unlike' their referents (those vigorously analogical metaphors, that do not depend upon sense perception, such as the Cross, the Lamb and the Dove and which are intrinsic to the Christic revelation), but here 'like' nature, yet imbued with the sentiment of
personal emotion and the mystical overtones of a visionary intuition. Such symbols allow him to reveal the eternal face things: ‘After all, I doubt not but there must be the study of this creation, as well as art and vision; tho’ I cannot think it other than the veil of heaven, through which the divine features are dimly smiling’ (letter to Linnell 21st December, 1828).

No truly symbolic language was available to Palmer who was, in a manner, obliged to adopt the naturalistic conventions of the art of his time. In practise this meant using, so to say, natura naturata to give a countenance to natura naturans – the ever-becoming forms of generated nature to show forth the eternally fecund source that gives birth to them, original nature; paradisal because innocent of the contraries that form the warp and weft of generated existence. The dangers of this ‘like’ symbolism have already been noted. Little by little and with the loss of the contemplative leisure the Shoreham years afforded him, the painter’s eye was drawn more and more exclusively into the intensive study of natural detail to become, eventually, the observation of appearances. That is to say visionary contemplation became absorbed imitation as the painter’s eye became ensnared, woven into the living texture of appearances. As we have seen, during the period of the 1824 sketchbook and the sepia works of 1825, in aspiring to render the spiritual essence of nature Palmer was confronting his own spiritual self. For as men envisage themselves so they envisage nature. There is no such thing as a spiritually enlightened soul that looks upon nature as the manifestation of a profane, mechanistic universe.

All this is borne out by Palmer’s writings as well as the pictures themselves. In the years that succeeded his Kentish sojourn he gradually became solely pre-occupied with the rendering of observed effects as the spiritual ardour of his imaginative vision declined. And here indeed we do find ‘transitional’ works. In the pictures listed earlier as sharing the extreme stylistic features of the six sepia works we notice a growing dependence upon naturalistic representation. By 1828 we have the Lullingstone Park tree studies that are almost wholly based upon observation as well as such works as ‘Sepham Barn’ and ‘Barn with Mossy Roof’. By the time he painted ‘Pastoral with Horse-Chestnut’ in 1831–2 the abstract element of the sepia works is all but absent, and is totally so by 1833 in a work such as ‘The Gleaning Field’. In ‘The White Cloud’ of 1833–4 and ‘The Bright Cloud’ of the
following year climatic atmosphere becomes a constituent of the landscape; and in ‘A Pastoral Scene’ of 1835 the ‘sublime’ manner of Turner makes an entry. By 1835, and away from Shoreham, in a work such as ‘Pistyll Mawddach, North Wales’, we see not only a total preoccupation with depicting observed detail (even if recollected in tranquillity) but Palmer’s mastery of it as well. His correspondence at this time shows him searching for ‘views’ to paint as he travels through Devon and Wales. Such mastery of ‘realism’ was to earn the painter Ruskin’s approbation, for he wrote (in the 3rd edition of Modern Painters) ‘A less known artist, S. Palmer … is deserving of the very highest place among faithful followers of nature. His studies of foreign foliage especially are beyond all praise for care and fulness. I have never seen a stone pine or a cypress drawn except by him’. And this of a man who had written to George Richmond in 1828, ‘I will, God help me, never be a naturalist by profession’. Palmer’s memoranda and journals of 1839–1845 are full of notes of physical effects he had observed and prescriptive of how they might be rendered.

In the light of this development it is revealing to compare the vocabulary of his notebook entries. For instance, writing at Princes Risboro’ in 1845 after noting the inherent limitation of art to imitate natural effects he concludes of his efforts that they ‘should perhaps only be considered as the corpse which is to be ANIMATED’. By contrast, an entry in his 1824 sketchbook, after speaking of possible subjects for pictures he might with the help of Christ’s inspiration undertake, he writes, ‘But smaller studies of separate glories of Heaven might be tried’.

In his Catalogue Raisonné of Palmer’s work Raymond Lister draws attention to the fact that among the painter’s favourite books was John Flavell’s Husbandry Spiritualized (1669). The preface to this book contains the alchemical formula, ‘That the world below, is a Glass to discover the World above’ (which reads like a pre-echo of Blake’s famous phrase ‘this Vegetable Glass of Nature’). The spiritual intent of the formula would certainly have had Palmer’s sympathy. But the pursuit of nature, or more exactly for the painter the imitation of nature’s effects, has always proved to be problematic. Another Hermetic formula is ‘Nature loves to hide’.

In other words, what constitutes the essential reality of a thing is not obvious to sensory perception. For nature is a kind of generative ‘play’, a form of cosmic magic so sustained in attunement to the
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senses that it produces the illusion of being permanent—of being a fixed reality. But the history of the idea that art should imitare la natura has over and over again demonstrated the elusiveness of nature’s identity. The Renaissance rediscovery and application of perspective and the re-presentation of physical space did not make the imitation of the reality we perceive any the less elusive. The development of pictorial styles from the sixteenth to the twentieth century illustrates nothing if not that sensible perception is never free from presumptive conventions in the rendering of physical appearances. Even with the advent of the humanist ideal of verisimilitude it took a long time for artists to really look at natural appearances.

Turner thought he saw nature at its closest in her moods of grandeur and sublimity. Constable sought to capture nature in the mutability of her habitat as providing the background to man’s life in the landscape of earth. Artists were still searching for nature at the time of the Impressionists. Monet thought he could capture her very impermanence and took the logical step, in his paintings of the façade of Rouen Cathedral, of trying to fix her movement through the passage of time. For Seurat the true imitation of sensory perception required the atomism of the spectrum, and hence of the artist’s palette. With the cubists nature was absorbed back into the psychology of the cognitive act: form is what you know is there and not what you see. It is obviously one thing to decide that art should imitate nature but quite another to determine quite what nature is. The history of post-Renaissance European painting can be seen as a series of attempts to answer this question.

It ended in the breakdown of the idea altogether; in abstraction. Finally, shape, colour and line are released from the necessity to re-present anything but themselves and so become the arbitrary tokens of emotional volition. Had not nature, in keeping with its immemorial designation as illusive ‘play’ (maya), proved to be a chimera after all? And is not natura naturata precisely the ‘phantasy’ of natura naturans? Nature, true to its nature, proved as elusive as ever and in abstraction disappeared! It was then but a short step to concluding that abstraction is the appropriate mode of expression for the intangibles of spiritual perception because it seems to accord so innately with subjective impulse. But to this merely conceptual process nature (as all objective reality) is redundant and the senses
prone to be hopelessly deceptive in being unable to provide any sort of language appropriate to spiritual discourse. But if there is no possible analogy between the natural world we perceive and the spiritual reality we seek – between, that is, creature and Creator – then why, as creatures are we so evidently fitted for a world that turns out to be unnecessary? And why seek to be transformed by a supra-human reality if all that is needed is an act of psychological volition? In natureless abstraction the mind acts as if reality is given out from the human subject. But intelligence is nothing if it is not meant to take in reality. All this Palmer, at the height of his visionary powers, implicitly challenged and rejected. In so far as he has left a visual and written record of his struggle against the conventions of his time so we must understand that for him reality is ‘hidden’ in the very forms that pre-determine the mode and manner of its actualisation. That is to say, nature, the theophany of the Creation, is nothing more and nothing less than a series of epiphanic moments prepared for the senses – divine gifts thence to be transmitted in the interiority of the soul.

It has been perhaps necessary to have rehearsed something of the logic of the development of the imitation of nature in art so as to clarify an area of misunderstanding with regard to Palmer’s visionary style. This concerns the view that Palmer’s Shoreham works, and especially the six sepia works of 1825, look forward to the twentieth century. One must suppose that this is because several modern painters who have confessed to an admiration and an indebtedness to Palmer’s work have deployed a semi-representative, semi-abstract style. However, the stylistic ‘abstraction’ in the works of such painters as Sutherland, Nash, Minton, Vaughan, Reynolds and others clearly cannot be said to spring from the same source as it did for Palmer. In the case of these painters the element of abstraction is merely a feature in the evolution of a personal style, and as such has never anything more than an aesthetic significance. Which is to say, such means begin and end and do not refer to anything beyond the intrinsic, formal considerations of pictorial conventions. Palmer’s visionary style is inexplicable in terms of such a self-defining limitation that would in any case make nonsense of all he ever wrote concerning his intentions. Palmer’s visionary style was, so to say, forced upon him and in defiance of any contemporary convention and precedent of picture making.
To speak of Palmer’s landscapes as having an ‘idealized content’, or of their being in any way ‘escapist’, as has been suggested, is to misread both his intention and his achievement. In this case Palmer’s ‘abstraction’ is taken to imply that his visionary works have a theoretic content and his style is interpreted as taking natural forms as a starting point for a movement that becomes the more expressive of personal emotion as it moves away from specific empirical reality. Such a misreading of his work could only arise from a one-dimensional view of what constitutes the real—a view that was certainly not shared by Palmer himself. Palmer’s abstraction does not move away from the real but seeks to locate it in and through the particularity of observed phenomena. Surely the ‘escapist’ is one who will not face the fact that the manifest world—‘this outward perishable creation’—is the fleeting image, the shadow of an unmanifest and permanent reality, what Palmer himself referred to in a letter to Leonard Rowe Valpy dated September, 1864 as

that mystery which cannot be commanded, that immaterial and therefore real image, that seed of all true beauty in picture or poem falls into earthly soil and becomes subject in a great measure to the conditions of matter, and fails or fares as the soil permits—the desert sand; the ploughed field; the rich garden mould.

In the final analysis the imagery of Palmer’s visionary works, and especially the six sepia works, is iconographic rather than abstract, their latent import hieratic rather than ideal. His inability to sustain the implications of this were as much due to the age and its artistic conventions as to any personal failure. His vision demanded an art impossible on the terms of his age. But he never lost sight of the goal he wished to attain even though he had not, in the end, been able to throw off the yoke of the ‘naturalism’ he so abhorred. He caught a glimpse of that far-off goal to which his visionary propensities had earlier driven him when he wrote to L. R. Valpy in 1875, earth hath not many things to show more fair than the west front of Wells Cathedral. It shows what Christian art might have become in this country, had not abuses brought it down with a crash, and left us, after three centuries, with a national preference of domesticated beasts and their portraits, before all other kinds of art whatsoever.
The Sorceress
A hitherto unknown poem by Samuel Palmer

FRANCIS WARNER and R. E. ALTON

As August of 1838 opened Vesuvius began to erupt. The rumbling, 'sometimes a noise like the incessant discharge of cannon', and the 'brilliant and highly finished white cloud issuing from the crater' were witnessed by an English honeymoon couple, the painter Samuel Palmer, aged thirty-three, and his nineteen-year-old bride Hannah, daughter of the painter John Linnell. Their vivid letters home convey their excitement as 'our papers were sprinkled with little black particles of ashes'. 'As I sit writing 10 P.M.' (says Samuel Palmer) 'the door is again shaken, two or three times more violently than before – and now I hear the giant begin to growl – which in the stillness of night is rather awful'.1 During these days, Palmer painted a series of water-colour sketches of the spectacular event.

Though it cannot be proved, it seems likely that it was at this time that Samuel Palmer wrote the unfinished draft of the poem which we have for convenience called 'The Sorceress', tentatively deciphered here. The single sheet of paper, both sides of which are entirely in Palmer's hand, was found amongst the honeymoon letters, and belongs – as they do – to Joan Linnell Ivimy, John Linnell's great granddaughter, for whose kind permission to print we are grateful.

The honeymooners had come south to the Bay of Luxury from Rome, where they had been greatly helped on their arrival by Joseph Severn, another painter, who some eighteen years earlier had devotedly cared for the dying Keats, even hiring a piano on which to play arrangements of Haydn's symphonies (Haydn being Keats's favourite composer) to rally him. Keats meant much to Palmer. We have a letter, written in September 1851 to George Richmond², which playfully quotes 'Provençal song and sun-burnt mirth' from the Ode to a Nightingale; and many years later Palmer was to draw 'The Burial-place of Keats' for Keats's Poetical Works and Other Writings, edited by H. Buxton.
Forman in 1883. In ‘The Sorceress’ it seems that Palmer is trying to capture something of the opening of ‘Hyperion’:

But where the dead leaf fell, there did it rest (line 10)

And not a leaf did move upon the trees (The Sorceress, full transcript, line 15)

and other lines and images in this poem remind the reader of Keats.

An equally powerful influence on Palmer as he wrote this poem was Coleridge. In an undated letter, probably written to Frederick Tatham a few months earlier, he writes:

Meanwhile the cranium becomes stuffed with gallipots and varnishes; the blessed winter-evening talks are curtailed; and with the exceptions now and then, of a whole play of Shakespeare at a gulp and now and then your favourite Christabel, matters go on much more prosily and orderly.³

‘Christabel’ did indeed appeal to the more gothic side of Palmer’s imagination, and its influence throughout ‘The Sorceress’ is pervasive. In addition to Keats’s ‘Hyperion’, we may also hear behind the above line 15 Coleridge’s lines from ‘Christabel’:

There is not wind enough to twirl
The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
That dances as often as dance it can,
Hanging so light, and hanging so high,
On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky. (lines 48–52)

The Geraldine of ‘Christabel’ who refuses to pray, who drives away the guardian spirit (the spirit of Christabel’s dead mother), who is described as ‘the worker of these harms’; together with the castle bell that will ‘Strike twelve upon [Christabel’s] wedding-day’ (eleven strokes, not twelve, and of an Abbey bell, in line 61 of Palmer’s poem, but the final stroke is expected) and much of the atmosphere leading up to:

Her bridal peal rung with the flames and fiend of Hell (line 52)

all seem echoes from Coleridge’s poem.

These and other memories are set in a framework that has parentage in Marlowe’s Dr Faustus, and probably the Ambrosio of Matthew G. Lewis’s The Monk (1796). Both Marlowe’s scholar and Lewis’s monk
sell their souls to the devil, only to discover that the devil expects his bond to be honoured.

The Romantic poets, the gothic novelist, the Elizabethan dramatist: we should not forget the book that Samuel and Hannah were reading as the ‘thick, sulphurous closeness stifled everything’ (line 14), the anticipation

That oft devoted cities hath o’erhung
Ere earthquakes

was felt by the attentive couple, their minds filled with Milton:

I fly
These wicked tents devoted, lest the wrath
Impendent, raging into sudden flame
Distinguish not

(Paradise Lost V. 889–892)

I used to stand and watch it at night (writes Hannah to her parents),
sending up flames and bright stones, while the noise was fearful ...
The noise kept me awake some nights before I left Pompeii, and gave me a headache; but I am now quite well.

The book was, of course, Edward Bulwer Lytton’s historical novel, published four years earlier, before he became Lord Lytton. Samuel wrote to John Linnell:

I think it is worth while to skim the ‘Last Days of Pompeii’ ... as he has woven into his tale ... almost all that history and a residence on the spot with careful investigation can give.

These experiences, and something like this combination of influences, fired Samuel’s poetic imagination.

Palmer had written poetry before. In his 1824 sketch-book he left two completed poems, ‘Twilight Time’, and a draft of a poem with emendations in ink and pencil, to be entitled either ‘The Shepherd’s home’ or ‘The old Churchyard’. There is a second draft of the final verse of ‘The old Churchyard’ on page 184 of the sketch-book. Both poems are Christian and didactic. Each in its different way is of great interest.

‘Twilight Time’ is strongly indebted to the Milton of ‘II Penseroso’, and to such seventeenth century poets as Vaughan and Crashaw:

All is safe, and all is still
Save what noise the watch-dog makes
Or the shrill cock the silence breaks ...
While angel music haunts the air
Heard dispersed, here, and there,
Or in distant choral swell
As they take the spirit to dwell
Ever, ever, ever, ever
Fast by his spear-pierced side
Who pitied, pardoned, loved, and Died
There to tell (though griefs no more)
What did here once vex him sore …

(lines 83–91)

The second poem takes Gray’s Elegy, and tries to make it more convincingly Christian. In Gray’s stoic poem, the only false rime is the last, on ‘God’. In ‘The old Churchyard’ the shepherds, rather than the plowman, ‘wind their homeward way’.

Low lies their home ‘mongst many a hill,
   In fruitful and deep delved womb;
A little village, safe, and still,
   Where pain and vice full seldom come,
Nor horrid noise of warlike drum.

(stanza 2)

Where Gray’s ‘rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep’ ‘Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap’, Palmer tells us that

… there’s a church-yard something raised
   Above the more unholier ground,
Where swains unnoted, and unpraised,
   In innocent sleep lay sound.

(stanza 5)

The poem closes with stanza 8:

For I ‘though base believe that Thou for me
Hast better things prepared than village gardens be:
By streams of life, and th’ ever blooming tree,
To walk, and sing with antique saints, & see
Bliss above all, dear Lord, thy face eternally.

There has been, before this conclusion, a gothic touch:

Free from press of stony tomb
Or gloomy vault, shall they from earth’s kind womb
   Joyous at the last trump rise
   Light of heart and win the skies
While many more in sculptured marble bound
Shall wake with sudden horrid shriek …

(stanza 6)
Gray, too, when not elegiac, could close ‘The Bard’ with

‘Be thine despair and sceptered care;
To triumph and to die, are mine.’

He spoke, and headlong from the mountain’s height
Deep in the roaring tide he plunged to endless night.

At least Gray’s Bard was spared the lingeringly described torments that await ‘Monk’ Lewis’s Ambrosio, when
darting his talons into the monk’s shaven crown, he sprang with him from the rock. The caves and mountains rang with Ambrosio’s shrieks. The daemon continued to soar aloft, till reaching a dreadful height, he released the sufferer. Headlong fell the monk ...

The landscapes of the gothic novels fascinated Palmer. ‘Mrs Radcliffe far exceeds Sir Walter Scott in descriptions of scenery’, he was to write to Laura Richmond.

In the end, though, it was to be the classical side of Gray, the classical side of Palmer, that was to flower. From schooldays to his deathbed, Palmer was to love the early poetry of Virgil. In his late teens he was to write:

I sat down with Mr Blake’s Thornton’s Virgil woodcuts before me, thinking to give to their merits my feeble testimony. I happened first to think of their sentiment. They are visions of little dells, and nooks, and corners of Paradise; models of the exquisitest pitch of intense poetry. I thought of their light and shade, and looking upon them I found no word to describe it. Intense depth, solemnity, and vivid brilliancy only coldly and partially describe them. There is in all such a mystic and dreamy glimmer as penetrates and kindles the inmost soul, and gives complete and unreserved delight, unlike the gaudy daylight of this world. They are like all that wonderful artist’s works the drawing aside of the fleshly curtain, and the glimpse which all the most holy, studious saints and sages have enjoyed, of that rest which remaineth to the people of God.

In 1883, posthumously, his translation of Virgil’s Eclogues was published. Though we may raise our classical eyebrows at some of the liberties he takes with the latin, the translation does convey, beautifully, what Palmer found in Virgil. He had little formal education, and the translation is the fruit of a lifetime’s devotion. To it was prefaced Palmer’s essay ‘Some Observations on the Country and on Rural Poetry’, in which he defined and defended his view of poetry. He sets poetry against war:
By night, on the St Lawrence, General Wolfe, having repeated Gray’s *Elegy* to some of the officers of his staff, told them he would rather have written that poem, than achieve the victory for which, a few hours later, he was content to have given his life...

against politics:

It was shrewdly said, ‘Let any one make the laws of a country, if I may make the songs’; for its national lyrics are the animal spirits of the body politic. Its graver verse tempers public morals and even the established faith ... The influence of poetry pervades all civilized life; the more so from its point and brevity and because metre and rhyme are easily remembered ...

beside reason and religion:

A bird deprived of her wings is not more incomplete than the human mind without imagination, a faculty distinct from the spiritual and rational, yet having a common language; for the language of imagination is poetry, and it is in poetry that both sacred aspiration and secular wisdom have found their noblest utterance.

And, as if subconsciously justifying his use in the nineteenth century of a gothic past in his poem ‘The Sorceress’, he writes:

The mind of a great poet is thrown back into antiquity, whence he symbolizes the present: sometimes, in various mood, refreshing attention or awakening sympathy by allusion to passing affairs; adding mystery by these flashes of the hour, to the twilight of an ideal past: but he who lays his story in the present, is little likely to grasp it, for contact is not vision, and he has no vantage ground of observation; but is himself an atom of his subject, a fly upon the axle.\(^{11}\)

In Samuel Palmer’s poetry he tries to evoke the Christian faith of the age of the cathedrals, to depaganize the Augustan and yet retain its idyllic pastoral serenity. In his poetry he failed: but that failure was the cause, in etching, sketch and paint, of his lasting triumph.

A selective outline of the poem, edited and punctuated but by no means definitive, may help the reader approaching this complicated text to appreciate Palmer’s intentions.

A sorceress has made a Faustian pact with the devil, and this poem describes her emotions on the last evening of her life before she descends into hell, or is saved through confession and repentance.
Thus sat the thin red woman and the cat,
Her fierce familiar. Twilight’s dunnet pall
With clouds and hovering cloudlings hung around
Her dusky banner, and a death hush sat
Upon the forest. Not the smallest sound …
Broke the death hush of nature …

Flitted not the bat …
The low’ring clouds had long been gathering
Without a noise of wind or moving breeze.
A sulphurous closeness stifled everything
And not a leaf did move upon the trees.
Such is a stifled conscience, not at ease,
Like the dull heart that feels not any sting
Within the breast when it has cause to speak
But mars the quietness it will not break.
Like this dread evening is the ominous calm
That oft devoted cities hath o’ercast,
Though on that morn the bells have rung their last,
Ere the grim earthquake takes his dread repast.
The owl whooped not, the wolf was not abroad;
Only the sorceress seemed wakeful then,
And black remorse the vulture in her breast.
A murderess she, and Vengeance from his den
With stealthy steps was moving to inherit
Body and soul …
Helpless and hopeless the vile creature lay
Counting the hours till she be taken away.
That night, that dreadful night, the bond expired,
Sealed with her hand, and written in her blood,
And yet not prayer for heavenly ruth she saith.
All was corrupt, and nothing left of good
Which she so many a year had still withstood.
Prayer came not forth but as a stifled breath
Amidst unconfined darkness left to grope –
No outlet.
A wilderness of horror without hope.
O, who can paint – O who can sing the horror
With which she counts the distant abbey bell
Which was her soul’s and body’s knell,
Her bridal peal rung with the flames and fiend of Hell.

So ends Phase I (see p. 170). Phase II reveals the prayer that does, finally, find an outlet:
O, suddenly she arose, and bursting forth
Into a bitter, lamentable cry:
'Is there no mercy — mercy for the worst?
Or cannot the blood-guilty spirit die
And live no more? Cannot some angel thrust
The fatal bond aside? O tears of sorrow burst
Forth from this flint, and cool my burning heart
And quench the fierce, intolerable smart!
I cannot pray, cannot repent, in guilt ...
But is not Mercy made for blackest guilt
If penitential tears be spent? ...
The murderer's hand is cleansed if he repent!
But O, this bosom knows not to repent —
Iron shall melt in dew ere the soft rain
Of Bliss cools my scorched heart again.
The hard, unpitying eye can not distil
Tears even for its own calamity ...
Harden thyself at once. Prepare ...
The fire! ...
Then flung upon the ground, writhed did she lie ...
And groaneth
'Hell is my bed, my horror nigh to hell! ...
With hollow gaze fixed on the hour glass still,
The running sand relentless she doth measure ...
The golden train.
'Bid it run quick that thou may'st know the worst!'
In horrible surmisings more accurst
Then stares ...
Upon the hollow monitor ...
So fixed she seems like terror carved in stone.
Only when sudden a quick glance is thrown
To corner of the cell, she, frightened, shivers
Expecting the foul fury to be near ...
The Abbey bell now struck, she shrieked and rose
She shrieked and rose and then in frantic mind
In spite of pain and the long fear:
'I will, I will confess!' Then rushed she forth
Into the darkness ...
If she might gain the Abbey gate
Before it should forever be too late,
And all convulse.

In this outline much has been omitted, as the reader may see from the following transcript.
A note on the transcript

The poem survives in draft on both sides of a single sheet of paper measuring 228 × 182 mm. It was apparently composed in two main bursts of activity. Palmer wrote what must be the earliest phase (hereafter ‘Phase I’) in light brown ink down the left-hand column of the recto, and continued in the same ink for four lines at the top of the left-hand column of the verso. Phase I totals 52 lines. At the head of the right-hand column of the recto Palmer, in a smaller and in the main less cursive hand, has recorded in four narrow columns fourteen groups of words which he has used or might use as rimes. There are ten groups of three words, one of four, two of seven, and one of eight. Immediately to the right of lines 1 and 2 of Phase I there appear again three monosyllables identical with the first three in a group of seven, and related to the final words of lines 1, 3, and 4 of Phase I. In the right-hand column of the recto and in the left-hand column of the verso, in a smaller hand and darker ink than Phase I, Palmer subsequently added a further 75 lines or parts of lines (hereafter ‘Phase II’). The track followed by the left-hand margin of Phase II on the recto side is dictated by the line lengths of Phase I and must therefore be later. Some additions and amendments to the early phase are, however, in the smaller hand and darker ink of the second phase of composition, and at some time Phase II has been separated by rules from the groups of words, and from the concluding lines of Phase I on the verso.

The draft provides many alternative readings, some written above the line and some below. There are, however, few cancellations such as are found in the opening line of Phase II, and even here the choice between ‘aloud’, ‘at last’, and ‘forth’ as the adverb to modify ‘bursting’ has been left quite open. Throughout, Palmer has not made up his mind about the way a line or series of lines should develop. Sometimes he has left a gap in a line or at the end of a line intending to complete it later (e.g. Phase I, lines 7 and 8); sometimes a dash indicates that composition is still in progress (Phase I, line 20); sometimes a rule joins an alternative reading to the word which seems to be intended to follow it in a reorganization of the line. In Phase II, line 3, for example, Palmer seems first to have written ‘Is there no mercy in the heavens’, then added slightly below the line and in a different ink ‘for the worst’, with ‘accurst’ interlined above as an
alternative to 'the worst'. Presumably uneasy about the metre of these two possibilities he next wrote in a second 'mercy' below the line, and joined it by a rule to the first, thus producing a more acceptable version:

Is there no mercy – mercy for the worst

But none of the other words is deleted. Similarly in line 25 of Phase II a short double rule angled from the lower interlineation and followed by a single 'o' may indicate that the line could read either

Tears for its own – its own calamity

or, if we give weight to the careful placing of the interlineation,

Tears even for its own calamity.

Again, we cannot be sure whether Palmer would have left the last line of Phase I with twelve syllables, or what he would have omitted to compensate for the insertion of 'rang' above the line and of 'the' below it. Phase I, lines 5, 6, and 7 present another kind of problem. It is likely, but by no means sure, that the jumble of words inserted at the end of lines 5 and 6 is intended to form an additional line between lines 7 and 8, so that the passage may read:

not the smallest sound
broke the death hush of nature of all things
which stillness the senses might astound
more fearfully than thunder.

At the end of the poem Palmer seems to indicate by a caret and a short rule that 'And all convulse' should appear above the longer rule with which he had closed the draft.

Because of the impossibility of being secure of Palmer's intentions we have provided a transcript which tries to indicate in type the marks on the manuscript and their placing. We have, however, not distinguished between the size of the hands in Phase I and Phase II, and, since normally Palmer does not use a smaller hand for interlineations than he does for text, we have used the same size of type throughout, with words lined and placed as in the manuscript.

We have numbered what we take to be separate lines or what were intended to be separate lines, whether completed or not, and whether they are first thoughts or afterthoughts. The spacing shows where Palmer has inserted a new line.
Palmer’s writing is very hurried: letters are omitted, especially at the ends of words; final ing is usually represented by no more than a couple of minims and a descender; final m and n are frequently merely a flourish; medial vowels are often suggested by undulations in a horizontal line. So that the transcript can be read, therefore, without more difficulties than Palmer’s layout imposes, we have normalized all expansions of what is a sort of short-hand, without indication by pointed brackets or other means. Where we are convinced that we are faced by an idiosyncratic or metrical spelling by Palmer we have retained it (e.g. equathquaqs, earquaques, in line 24 of Phase I; takn, Phase I, line 40). After the full point in line 2 of Phase I punctuation is minimal. We have made no attempt to supply it.

We have employed the following conventions: square brackets denote deletions, thus:

aloud
[Form rises] O suddenly she arose & bursting [out] forth
at last (Phase II, line 1)

Where a word has been cancelled by writing the substitution directly over it we again use square brackets, thus:

It seemed as [if cancelled by] all the world within the graves –
(Phase I, line 8)

Where a reading is no more than a conjecture we precede it by a question mark in pointed brackets, thus: ⟨?⟩

A few words seem not to be recoverable and are indicated by: ⟨?⟩
Notes


2 Letters, p. 485.

3 Ibid. p. 84.

4 Ibid. p. 701, where Palmer writes to Leonard Rowe Valpy, August 1864: 'I am never in a "lull" about Milton in the abstract, nor can tell how many times I have read his poems, his prose, his biographers. He never tires. He seems to me to be one of the few who have come to full maturity of manhood; not however to infallibility, which is superhuman...'

5 Ibid. p. 168.

6 Ibid. p. 171.


9 Letters, p. 672.


This is the red woman of the old town. From her countenance, her fiery temperament, and her wild and free life, she was a typical witch. Her eyes were like coals, and her hair was as black as night. She was feared by all who knew her, and her powers were said to be greater than those of any other sorceress in the land.

She lived in a small cottage on the edge of the forest, surrounded by the secrets of nature. She knew the herbs that could heal or harm, and she could control the elements with ease. Her magic was said to be beyond compare.

One day, a group of merchants passed by her cottage, and they were struck by her beauty. They asked her to come with them to the city, where she could live in luxury and enjoy the fruits of her magic.

But the sorceress refused, saying that she preferred to live in peace and quiet, surrounded by nature. She warned them of the dangers of the city, and told them to be careful.

The merchants were curious, but they did not believe her. They insisted that they would protect her, and that she would be safe in the city.

The sorceress smiled, and said that if they truly cared for her, they would let her live as she wished. She told them that she would stay in the forest, and that they should respect her wishes.

The merchants were disappointed, but they respected her decision. They left, and the sorceress remained in the forest, surrounded by the beauty of nature and the secrets of her magic.
FRANCIS WARNER and R. E. ALTON

Who can paint or who can thy the heart

Which own her soul of beauty for trouble

To know his mind with Phem of men of men

The feeling of a setting leaf - and the

Desiring none to know a moos

When sound about the very by morning

Will darkness night to the sun give this

The meaning good without the will mean

or about an hour among of all

The noise of the story falling in the earth

As these - as these the field - with soft silence

Not so - can quench that the th eye through the wind

So hard, so waking, from account

Out three - will it burst

The whole paper, secretly again

Upon the morning steeping the hard of ground

Or the others with the soft by little

Nor that the friend. the other was cosmic in this

Who in so the left place in them

To the book of all - the love

Sounding like the first thing to be

To have a part of the sea return

And at on other the world's love

This holding then this the glory - and the

Nor where the sea from to earth, from

The with a little bravery conjunctio

The weather from it let there

Till join to Burma & London

To join it for

The ally made one night at third time

Deserted hope it within to man, than it fed

The strength of men then. therefore, which

Great spirit of this he big sanguine - then reach the part

With the Descendants

If a might join the other gate

Before or where success in the lost

And all consider it
Samuel Palmer: The Sorceress

Phase I

Thus sat the thin red woman & the Cat beast

Her fierce familiar. Twilight's dunnest pall & hovering

With clouds cloudlings— hung around

Her dusky banner & a death hush sat

Upon the forest — not the smallest sound the senses of nature which stillness broke the death hush of all things might astound

more fearfully than thunder profound

flitted not the bat

It seemed as [if cancelled by] all the world within the graves-

And echo dead within her stony caves

The lowring clouds had long been gathering breeze

without a noise of wind — or moving breath thick

A sulphurous closeness — stifled every thing qu

& not a leaf did move upon the trees

Such is a — a stifled conscience not at ease

Like the dull heart that feels not any sting speak

Within the breast when it has cause to

from the hushed conscience

But mars the quietness it will not break ominous calm.

Like this dread evening is the sultry [hush] oercast

That oft devoted cities hath oerhung

Quiet & — [ & calm]

Ere equathquaques = dreaming naught of harm

Ere earquaques —

But in the fullness of their

Tho on that morn the bells have rung their last;

And the grim earthquake takes his dread repast birds on this night abough

The doleful owl [was] whoop not — the nights shrouded deaths

The owl whooped not the wolf was not abroad seemed wakeful

Only the sorceress was then — then wakeful ravening on her brest brest

Alive with vultures feeding on her heart

& black remorse the vulture in her breast
A murderess she — & Vengeance from his den & the smart
With stealthy steps was moving —on— [blood] & apart to inherit the dart without rest no rest small delay
[A cancelled by] Body & soul was aim [that] & in the solitary den

From help or hope

W Helpless & hopeless the vile creature [stood] lay
In bond —

Counting the hours till she be takn away death

That night that dreadful night the bond expired in

[With cancelled by] Sealed with her hand & written with her blood

And yet not prayer for heavenly ruth she saith

All was corrupt & nothing left of good a year

Which she so many years had still withstood

Prayer came not forth but as a stifled Breath died with her lips as —

Amidst unconfined Darkness left to grope

No outlet — A wilderness of horror without hope —

O, who can paint o — who can sing the horror with one by one

which she counts the distant abbey bell

Which was her souls & bodys [Tr] knell rung

Her bridal peal with flames & fiend of Hell the

PHASE II

[Form rises] o suddenly she arose & bursting [out] forth at last

Into a bitter lamentable cry — accurst

Is there no mercy in the heavens mercy for the worst
[And cannot] by th] the blood guilty spirit die
Or cannot
And live no more [O tares of pi] cannot some angel thrust
The fatal bond aside. [Flint] 0 tears of sory burst
Forth from this flint & cool my burning heart
And quench the fierce intolerable smart
I cannot cannot pray cannot repent
in guilt
Is not soever mercy for the guilty dares repent
Who saves the vilest that will yet respond
But what is that to me the blood I spilt
The murderers hand is cleaner if 'tis red
But long ago was all compunction sped
From out my spirit all
But how shall I relent
But is not Mercy made for blackest guilt
If penetential tears be spent
What if the sea of hardship should be spilt
The murderers hand is cleansed if he repent
But 0 this bosom knows not to repent
Iron shall melt in dew ere the soft rain
of Bliss cool my scorched heart again
The hard unpitying eye can not [distil] shed
Tears for its own o
even for its own calamity —
on
all is sulphurous blue & red
all all is stench & [loathly cancelled by] deathly dry
Harden thyself at once Prepare here
The fire 0- now I have
might I should
This thirst of death
assuage
Then flung upon the ground she
with with (sic) not - no sound Is my inmost Hope This
And groaneth [until hid so] she
Hell Is my bed my horror nigh to hell
Then stifled her big groanings in dust

The falling of a solitary leaf - And her
[Startles her like a mass]
[Bo] Cant startle now - by stillness
___
With hollow eyes fixed on the hour glass still
The running sand relentless -- she doth measure
or starts as from a corner of the cell
And [with] if the Way depend on her will
[do stay] with her
Run out at her run swiftly out the golden train
bid it or slow or as some quick false gift
And gnashing then her teeth with fierce displeasure
Bid it - run quick that thou then may know the worst
In horrible surmisings more accurst
Then stares in wild & fixedly
Then [fixes] gazes accurstly again
Upon the hollow monitor
the glass with [a] sigh or groan
Only Despair & deepest dread do utterance
So fixed she seems like terror carved in stone
when a last
Only - when sudden a quick glance is thrown
frightened
To Corner of the cell, & she [? cancelled by] shivers
Expecting the the (sic) foul fury to be near
him to whom she must deliver
Same like a leaf on twig doth
it stirs & still
till any sound startles her troubled brain
the distant bell doth toll.

This Abbey Bell now strikes - but then

Must strike one more - it struck eleven

hear it strike strokes

Then with a sudden frantic anguishing

She rushes from the hut & hearth

Yes from her Brain & Nerves

This - -

To gain the Ab --

The Abbey Bell now struck she shrieked & [rose]

[And] Must hear it [still cancelled by] strike once more eleven it told

She shrieked & rose [& mastered all her flesh]

[She] then in frantic mind

In spite of Pain & the long fear

I will I will confess — then rushed she forth

Into the darkness —

If she might gain the Abbey gate -

Before it should forever be too late

And all convulse
Infidelity

Enough! I have received enough for this one life!
Do I betray you, father, mother, home,
Long-ago friends to whom my heart was given
Who have shared today gladly with a stranger
To those who were?
To whom have I been true? Unending Time
That brings us to one another, sweeps us on,
We were made so,
Though old loves pull at the heart from the gone.
We live in transience – fidelity itself
Is false, that would stem that flow
Of the one stream we are with one another.

1992

Each night I turn
In deepest longing
Into that other
State of being,

Dream or deep
And boundless sleep,

Night’s enigma
For ever never
Resolved, unsolved
Mystery unending.
Remembering Francis Bacon

It's not the hells where soul suffers that are eternally
Outside the divine humanity
But the indifferent, the trivial and the vulgar.
Through you we know that our modern Dis
Is a city infinitely terrible,
But from the commonplace
I have learned nothing of the great gulf fixed
Between the nihil and God.

At some party years ago you spoke to me
Of Yeats, and of your sole desire
Once, if once only, to touch the real.
You were speaking from the heart, and I
Who have proclaimed Blake's doctrine of the Divine Body,
Imagination, in which the heavens and hells are redeemed together,
Know that my master would have understood why
You must keep faith with your despair
Who have shown us those dead faces of the damned.
Or am I saying only that you and I
Shared a world, though we seldom met, and therefore
Are bound together
In the unbroken love that runs from friend to friend for ever.

'For the place whereon thou standest is holy ground'
(Exodus 3.5)

And in whatever place, here or elsewhere,
Beyond the desert of past and future,
Here and now that holy ground, the ever-
Presence accompanies us, who are
Source and arrival-place:
The divine face
Looks from all that is, always.
Out of the rich chaotic present
I would draw a poem's simplicity
As the tall spathe of a white amaryllis
Has risen from the root of darkness.

Epiphanic, its four-faced great angel
Visited, unfurled in my room presence
Of beauty, eloquent and boundless,
Then, carried by time, left me,

Reascending the ladder of mystery.

*   *   *

How hard we try, foolish and ignorant,
Who would do better to follow heart's desire
Or the way the quiet clouds are carried afar.

How hard we have tried, yet have done wrong always –
Better to have followed the heart
Whose love is without knowledge of evil and good.

We try so hard to do right
Who do not know the purposes
That have brought us from the beginning to our times and places.

I have tried, through the long days of sorrow,
But there is no certainty of tomorrow:
Through the dark ways what guide
But heart's delight?
Young Tree

Green leaves playing
In living air swaying,
Young tree bending
In the gentle wind,

Seven years grown
From seed self-sown
To virgin blossoming,

Whose the womb
Where a seed was hidden?
Who is the earth
And who the sun
Showering gold?

Who the young tree,
Who the wind caressing
Green foliage, white blossom?

*       *       *

Unknowable ground,
Being or nothing,
It is enough
That from you rise
Near and far
Birds and trees,
Earth and skies.

Fullness or void,
Enough for me
That from you smile
Human faces
Of friends I have loved,
Familiar and dear.
Frontier

May
Sunlight, liac, columbine, Lily-of-the-valley,
Each a chord whose overtones
Resonate in memory
    yet today
The garden with its bird-song seems to thin away
Fading between the mystery of what is
And mystery to be:
Death’s initiates lay
Finger on lips of silence.

Devotees
(Remembering Maharaj Charan Singh)

Then, when I saw them running to watch him
To the last moment, when his car drove away

I thought, 'Superstitious devotees! I would not!'
But now, his serene turbaned face shining into my room
From a photograph, I think, what a marvel it was
That he lived in this world, and not he
More than many I knew once, whom now I would strain to see
Whom I have treated so casually,
Dear unprized once only
Faces of friends and strangers who have been present to me.
Temenos: A Paradigm Shift

PETER MALEKIN

Temenos, the sacred enclosure, symbolically bounds infinitude to make it useful within the world of time. However, in reality it is spacetime that rests within the unboundedness of infinity. Here and now our task is consciously to hold the whole of spacetime within the unboundedness of the infinite, to expand temenos so that the whole of space and time is included within it. In this task Temenos itself has played its part, centering upon visionary art as a vehicle of the sacred; but the very opposition of the sacred and the profane is a western and partial view, and the necessity of giving art the mode of prominence it holds in post-Renaissance culture comes from the dearth of awareness of spirit in all other aspects of life, in the sciences and scholarship obviously, but also in religion.

Spirit is universal. If it exists at all it exists as the substratum of all things without any exception whatsoever. Spirit and the spiritual is not confined to religion as such or to any particular religion, nor is it confined to art. An idea of spirit is not spirit, any more than the codified abstraction of a map, produced in a particular convention of mapping and for a particular purpose, is the territory mapped. A feeling about spirit, however intense, is not spirit, for spirit is not an emotion. A merely objective knowledge of spirit is distortion, since, underlying all things, spirit underlies all subjects as well as all objects. A full knowing of spirit entails its knowing as the basis of our own minds as well as the basis of the objective world, or in reality worlds.

Inevitably the first step towards the knowledge of spirit is to know ourselves, for our own consciousness is nearer to us than any object, and if we do not know spirit as the basis of our own minds then we will be unable to know it anywhere else. Since spirit is in-finite, beyond all boundaries, and therefore the only freedom there is, we cannot know it as we would know an idea of ourselves, as an object. As Plotinus said long ago, if you wish to know the infinite, you must enter a state in which you are your finite self no longer.
If we are to know spirit, then we leave our baggage outside. We leave behind our formulations and cherished ideas, our sex and gender, our religion, culture, politics, race, language, personality and place in history. We leave behind our ego, which we usually refer to as ourselves. Yet the direction is always twofold; the going is a return, apparently separated in time. On our return our baggage also regathers to us, only transformed in the light of eternity, which is itself only the inner light of life, the corona of the timeless silence. The process is indeed the beginning of the glorification of nature, which is the function of mankind, just as the catching of the vision of that glorification is the highest function of art. Its culmination is a glorified cosmos. Another name for the process of glorification could be love, that most abused of English words, for it is a conscious participation in the nature of the divine, an ingathering of all things without their diminution, from which wisdom and kindness increasingly flow.

The transformation of our knowing and perceiving selves is also the transformation of sensory perception and of the objective world that is sensed. The deeper resources of the human mind are as yet untapped in our present age. As they start to wake up they will shift the very foundations of the arts and sciences, economics and economic life, politics, medicine, religions and their theologies, education, agriculture, architecture and town planning, and the whole conduct of human life. Inevitably the new keynotes will be joy, full responsibility – and freedom.

‘Eternity,’ said Blake, ‘is in love with the productions of time.’ It is time for the productions of time to be in love with eternity. When, in consequence, the temporal world is perceived as the offshoot – Böhme would have said the outbirth – of eternity, then alone there is full responsibility. Such perception is not emotion. It stems from a changed and subtler form of cognition brought about by the purification of the senses. Blake’s phrase for it was the ‘improvement of sensory enjoyment’. It is, among other things, perception that does not threaten the freedom of the perceiver.

True responsibility is being, perception and action on the basis of unity. It respects the integrity of all things. Action based on unity is the only action that does not produce harm. It depends on whole awareness in the actor, and whole awareness does not react to problems purely in isolation. Such whole awareness is intelligent, and
intelligence is the nature of spirit. Intelligence is unitive. To define intelligence as the ability to solve specific problems is to limit intelligence to the localized mind that defines the problems and to the mind set in which they are formulated. Individual minds reflect more or less intelligence at different times, but it belongs to none of them. They belong to it.

The traditional basis of western science and technology has been divisive, positivist and exploitative. The mind has been divided from its base in universal intelligence and subject has been divided from object. Western science has prided itself on 'objectivity', the basing of its findings on shared sensory perception, which is provided by the grossest level of the operation of the human senses. Observation was ideally to be divorced from the observer. The objectivity thus achieved is in fact a shared subjectivity, a group subjectivity imbued with a system of values that preselects certain data as significant and seeks explanations for them in terms of its own overall paradigm.

This approach, however limited, is in itself unobjectionable, and the successes of science as well as its disastrous consequences are known and acknowledged. But as a human power structure science has gone much further, moving beyond its claims to be a provisional mode of explaining certain classes of phenomena in terms of an effective assumed framework, to become widely accepted as in principle the explanation of all phenomena and all life. At this point science becomes what one of the characters in Doris Lessing's Briefing for a Descent into Hell called it, the latest earth religion. As such it is no advance on its predecessors.

However, like all other institutions, science has changed and is changing, however unwillingly. First there have been the well known changes in some of the less traditional sciences, especially physics. In the last seven decades the notion of matter as an absolute has gone, time and space have become relativized apart from the stable velocity of light, and at the quantum level at least the observer has been recognized as part of any observation. Nonetheless, conventional physics still remains true to its inherited orthodoxy. As it faces now the ultimate question of metaphysics, the relationship between mind and matter, it continues to envisage its unified field purely in terms of the substratum of matter, discounting any possibility of the field also being intelligence itself. Consciousness it still sees as a mere by-
product in a fundamentally material universe. This is an outlook that it
shares with conventional medicine, and with biology and the other
major sciences. Orthodox science is not engaged in questioning the
validity of its own paradigm.

The same is not true of a number of individual scientists, Capra,
Bohm, Sheldrake, Hagelin among them. These have often jeopardized
their careers by daring to offend their respective establishments. In
our society of ‘experts’, as Foucault pointed out, official discourse is
controlled in conformity with the dominant mind set, and those who
disagree are marginalized or silenced. This is true not only of scientific
‘experts’, but of ‘experts’ in politics, economics, medicine, the arts,
and knowledge of God. We bow to ‘authorities’. The marginalization
or silencing of opposition is paralleled by a discreet silence about the
unproven and unprovable assumptions which underly the very
notion of such expertise, its very existence as a function merely within
the limitations of the contemporary mind set. That mind set is now
obsolete.

Temenos does not exist merely to penetrate that mind set from the
margins, adjusting it a little here and a little there. That process has
already been started by ecologists and environmentalists, many of
them scientists, by political leaders seeking self-determination on a
local scale, by financial reformers such as the founders of ethical
trusts, by practitioners of alternative medicines and their attempts to
gain a place within the financial and intellectual establishment, and by
some developments in the arts, such as renewed interest in music as a
cosmic phenomenon and in theatre as a non-realist discipline. There
is also a converse but complementary process at work. On the crudest
level modern technology is choking in its own filth. The historical
problems of poverty and epidemic disease are reappearing in the
so-called first world, which is beginning to resemble the third. In the
third world countries there is an uneasy scrabbling towards a sup-
posed consumerist paradise, while in the first there are early signs of a
dissillusionment with consumerism. In the west and perhaps through-
out the world there is an alarming increase in casual sadistic crime,
part of a way of life that does not fulfill deeper human needs. In short
there is no society on earth that is peaceful, contented and pros-
perous.

This state of affairs is a terrible indictment of the modern mind set.
It is the product of human thought and human action. Fortunately human thought and human action can also change it. In the mathematics of catastrophe theory the accumulation of minute changes within a stable system will eventually produce a sudden jump, a change of state. This is a modern and specialized analysis of an ancient perception. We and our world are very clearly on the verge of such a change of state. The question is what change and to what new state. Climatologists and environmentalists tend to forecast disaster, and they may be right. But their forecasts are still made on the basis of the old and merely objective mind set. It is the role of temenos to heal the breach between mind and matter and help to induce change that is life-supporting. If human beings do not live fullness of life, then everything around them will die.

To be aware of temenos as the whole of spacetime 'enclosing' infinitude is to be aware that the changes in progress have a common origin and a common direction. This awareness transforms each area of change, for each microcosmically reflects the others, each shares the strength of all, and each draws on the inexhaustible through the intimacy and connectedness of subject and object, mind and matter, spirit and world. What comes from this realization is not a return to some past, but a renewal that can draw on the past. Temenos is not a vehicle for resuscitating dead forms, but for revitalizing formativeness through the formless.

The new mind set will be a spontaneous disclosure rather than the work of any individual. However it will come into being as the culmination of the work of individuals. The kind of change required in various areas of thought is already apparent. Economics, currently the dominant thought system in immediate practice, must cease to operate purely in terms of a monetary system. Money is a product of the human imagination, and when that imagination ceases to invest money with its validity, then money loses all value. The market is not a god, but a creation of the human mind. Money and market change in nature and operation if the human mind changes. The product of economics is secondarily money, goods and services, primarily human happiness and well-being. Economics cannot ignore the happiness or misery caused by its products and modes of production. Efficiency cannot be measured simply in terms of cash flow and financial profit. The reason why it is so measured now, is the current
weakness of the human mind and consequent half dead state of the imagination; if the mind is ignorant of or appears cut off from the infinite source of happiness within it, then it will seek happiness purely in objective terms and invest objects with an illusory power that they do not have. The mind then lays itself open to political and commercial manipulation. The deciding factor, however, remains the mind.

Current psychology has no adequate model of the mind. Orthodox medicine seems to see the mind as nothing more than a by-product of brain physiology, to be manipulated by drugs, surgery and behavioural therapies. True, the physiology does provide means for the expression of the mind on the gross physical level, and in that frame of reference appears to produce the mind, but there are other physical levels also, including the somewhat subtler level on which the mind normally becomes conscious upon the death of the gross physical body. In the case of near relatives especially it is perfectly possible to follow the mind of the dying and 'dead' through these stages and beyond. It is also possible to be aware on these levels in ordinary life. The claim that the mind is merely a by-product of the gross physical body is based upon limited experience and the pre-suppositions of the investigators. Similarly psychoanalytical models of the mind envisage it as relative, projected by an unconscious, whether individual or racial, that is a kind of memory. They do not allow for the infinitude at the basis of the mind, which is certainly not unconscious, which is aspatial and atemporal, within which the objective world and the perceiving mind can both be experienced as emerging. Time and space change their nature on different levels of awareness and perception. All levels, as well as the timeless and spaceless beyond levels, need to be accounted for in a valid model of the human mind.

One of the mind's most central functions is the production of language. Contemporary linguistics is attempting to move from verbal structures towards the principle of structuring which underlies them. In ordinary life it is only the verbalized level of language that is conscious, and this state of affairs may well be necessary for the efficient functioning of language in everyday circumstances. However, it is once again perfectly possible for the human mind to move beyond this level and experience the whole linguistic process cons-
ciously. If that is done, then a thought emerges from the unbounded intelligence at the base of the mind in the form of a non-verbalized totality, akin to the flash of recognition in the eureka experience, and devoid of sequentiality or any time sense. This may then project a syntactical utterance in the language system of the conditioned surface mind. However, even in ordinary life, some lingering awareness of the deeper level remains, for mis-statements or inadequate statements on the surface level provoke dissatisfaction and can be corrected according to an inner standard, so that they conform with 'what you meant to say'. Words can also be invented and syntactical systems changed to accord with inner demand.

The inner level of the mind is possessed of highly subtle discriminative power, but such discrimination is in the nature of a direct cognition, it sees 'at a glance'. Analytical and discursive language does not catch the nature of inner thought as well as poetry or language that infolds normal structure towards totality, and brings the sound or vibratory aspect of language nearer the sense, for on the deeper levels vibration and sense are one. It appears to be the inner reaches of language that enabled people like Jacob Böhme, the western mystic, or His Holiness Brahmananda Saraswati, the Shankaracharya of Jyotir Math, to understand languages that they did not know. Such occurrences are not 'miracles', simply use of the resources of mind. The whole phenomenon of language was analyzed long ago in Sanskrit linguistics, with its four stages of speech, para (the 'beyond'), paśyanti (the stage of non-verbal totality), madhyama (mental speech) and vaikhari (uttered speech), but the classification only makes sense if all the levels are open to conscious experience.

On the inner levels of the mind subject, object and language come together and perception is a vibration that is the origin of speech. It was this conjunction that led to Böhme's category of the language of nature, which also figures in the Indian traditions.

A knowledge of the origin of language has implications for modern critical theory and for Christian theology. The idea of language as a code devoid of ontological centre is partial; there is a 'centre' to language which prevents language systems from being totally arbitrary, though there is also randomness and distortion in surface usage. The 'centre' is, however, not a spacetime referent or any object. Because of its vertical dimension, language remains essentially speech
rather than ‘writing’, though speech must include preverbal levels of consciousness. The decentering of language thus cannot legitimately be used to dismiss the theology of the Word, whose limitations lie elsewhere.

Christian theology is a discipline subpended from one of the twenty thousand religions known to exist on earth. A number of the larger ones have traditions of authoritative texts often regarded as ‘revelations’, an ambiguous word which could merely mean vehicles of insight, but tends in the theistic religions to mean messages delivered by a revealer, usually identified with a particular concept of personal God. The authority of the texts is often claimed to derive from that God, but since we only have the word of the texts for it, or the word of the various traditions that accept different texts, in immediate terms at least their authority derives from other sources. Given this situation and the welter of texts that are or have been claimed as revelatory and authoritative, a decision whether to accept all or any of them rests with the reader, as does a decision about how the texts should be interpreted. The fact that many people simply go along with the cultures and religions they were born in does not alter the ultimate responsibility of the individual or place any supposed revelation beyond question and examination. If the individual chooses to go along with his tradition that is his choice.

Supposed revelations do not, however, have to be accepted on the basis of authority alone. Since the individual mind opens into infinitude and since that and all intervening levels are available to man, it is possible to check the revelations of prophets of God or incarnations of God by direct cognition, and this possibility exists in principle for all human beings. The texts, or central parts of them, then become records of experience that are useful to others who are exploring the same areas of experience. Respect for the text grows according to its accuracy corroborated by direct cognition. In this regard the scriptural texts of religions merge with certain texts now categorized as philosophy, pre-eminently the work of Plotinus in the West and Shankara in the East. Their central findings can also be tested by direct cognition. So also can the statement that ‘in the beginning was the Word’, for the beginning is what Böhme called an ‘eternal beginning’, the level of reality where timelessness gives rise to
spacetime, a level accessible from any point within spacetime and hence, from the point of view of spacetime, all-pervading.

Truth is greater than any religion or philosophy, which is at best merely a formulation of truth. The mind that is whole does not mistake the formulation for the truth. On this basis temenos can be expanded to include all the major religions without limitation to any, and those who find benefit in the disciplinary and ritual practices of their own religion can do so without molesting the peace of those who follow other religions. Only on this basis is tolerance possible. It is the antidote to the curse of fundamentalism that is now afflicting all the major religions.

Religion, language, psychology and economics come together because all exist in human consciousness. So does architecture, that provides housing for the human body. The substances, the shapes and the proportions employed all have a profound effect on the human psyche. An architect should know what effect the shape of a pyramid or a dome has on human beings, as well as the effects of different types of material on the physiological balance, and therefore also the psychological balance of those in contact with them. He also needs some awareness of space as well as the relationship of objects in space.

In the Indian tradition space (ākāśa) was traditionally regarded as the subtlest of the elements, and it is subtle indeed. Space only comes into existence when there are material objects. Imagine space with no material object and it becomes virtually unbounded (virtually, because it remains distinguishable from other factors, such as time, which comes into existence together with space). In itself space has no dimensions, for dimensions appear in relation to material objects. It is a field of virtuality, which becomes manifest when objects appear. Distances between objects can be measured, but space cannot be measured in this way; space can only be measured and 'located' in terms of pure consciousness. Ākāśa is the verge where consciousness begins to give rise to matter.

It is the fundamental job of architecture to manifest ākāśa. This means that a building must maintain the spaceness of space even while producing bounded enclosure for practical living. This is achieved effortlessly if the building enacts cosmogony, for the
material universe emerges in space in a way that does not violate its heritage. Buildings thus constructed do not have to be large, but they will create the effect of ‘spaciousness’, they will be liberating. Many traditional buildings were constructed to some degree in this way and a whole affective vocabulary (‘grandeur’, ‘lofty’, ‘elegant’, etc.) related to its impact. If the spaceness of space is retained in a building, this automatically registers in human awareness. Since space is the nearest material equivalent to the absolute ground of the mind, the minds of those influenced by such a building will automatically tend to reunite with that infinite ground. The building will be a ‘happy’ building, it will ‘feel good’, and those in it will find it conducive to clarity and peace of mind, emotional positivity and physical good health.

If the mind of an architect is whole, he will automatically tend to produce this kind of building. However, there are in all the main architectural traditions formulated laws of proportion and geometrical specifications to assist him. A whole branch of Vedic literature, sthapatyaved, deals with these matters in exhaustive detail, and they figure more cursorally in the architectural treatises of post-Renaissance Europe. All enduring traditions of building also embody the results of learning by trial and error.

These traditions are now largely lost or ignored. Contemporary post-modern architecture, while a vast improvement on what went before, is easily seduced into a vacuous play with architectural motifs, viewed as ‘signs’ in a decentered architectural linguistic ‘code’. But architecture is no more unrooted than verbal language, for both belong in consciousness.

The skill of architecture extends beyond buildings to townscapes. Some of the principles involved are obvious. Human beings need contact with the green of vegetation for their own mental health, and there should be room for other living creatures besides human beings and rats. Pure flowing water and large forest trees have their place in towns, and there should be space for the gentle movement of air. Above all there should be points of rest in any town. Again many of these considerations are traditional to the older sense of town layout. There are also subtler considerations, the alignment of towns with natural forces and the movement of sun, stars and planets, as well as the retention of absolute space within the relativity of domestic and
urban function. All modern towns are built in violation of natural law and encourage violence and imbalance in the human psyche.

The establishment of initial balance in the human psyche depends in large part on the presence or absence of it in human parents. After birth the main influences are education and upbringing, supplemented by medicine and agriculture, since mind and body go together and balance in one tends to entail balance in the other. The primary aim of education must be the cultivation of wholeness in the minds of the pupils and only secondarily the acquisition of skills or information. Wholeness of mind is the basis of all activity, and without it any skills or information will be used harmfully, in life-destroying rather than life-supporting ways. It also makes easy the interrelating of various fields of knowledge with one another and with the knower. A grounding in relevant cultural traditions is also important, whether or not they have immediate practical relevance, since they help to stabilize and orient the external level of identity and minimalize the strains placed on the individual.

Wholeness of mind goes naturally with balance of physiology. Orthodox medicine treats the body as a biological machine. Alternative therapies usually have more grasp of mind–body as an entity. The concern of medicine as a whole needs to shift away from cure, especially cure involving last minute and desperate measures, and towards prevention, and the general population needs training in how to maintain balance of body and mind for themselves so that most problems do not develop to the stage where medical treatment becomes necessary. For this to be achieved medicine needs to become more aware not only of the mind–body relationship, but also of the subtle levels of the body where mind is intimately connected with and directly controls the substratum of physiology. The subtler aspects of the human nervous system are a closed book to medical orthodoxy, though a knowledge of them lingers in Chinese medicine and is strongly present in certain of the ayurvedic traditions of India.

The other main element in maintaining health is diet, which raises questions of food production and economics. Like everything else in the universe, material food also has its subtler levels, and food produced from cruelty and greed is poisonous, coarsening the minds and bodies of those that eat it. That modern biology and modern
medicine cannot locate these subtler levels does not preclude their existence or importance. If economics and economies exist to promote happiness and well-being, then farming for immediate cash profit alone is grossly inefficient.

Plotinus, discussing the spiritual in art, said that a work did not consist of an aggregation of detail co-ordinated into a unity, but a unity working out into detail. The idea of the universe as a work of art is ancient. Certainly the principle ascribed to art by Plotinus is the organizing principle of the universe, the part contains the whole. This is so because the ultimate reality from which the universe and everything within it emerges is beyond space and time. It is for this reason that Julian of Norwich could say that the whole world was contained in a hazel nut, or a yogi like Yogananda could see the whole universe residing in himself.

It is a unity of this sort that is emerging in the varied fields of learning and life today. Precisely because it is not co-ordinated and forced, it is a unity in diversity. It maintains the integrity of the part and the organic relatedness of parts, for each part contains the others. Life-supporting economics cannot be divorced from psychology and ecology, these cannot be divorced from architecture or medicine or agriculture or education. The divorce between subject and object, language and truth is part of the modern mind set. Because the human mind has the full range of life, from timeless silence to transient phenomena, in its potential grasp, it also possesses self-determination. What it sees, that it becomes. That is why the direction of individual minds is all-important.

The beginning of the mind’s seeing is imagination; the hunger of the imagination draws the rest of the mind after it. If the imagination focuses purely on differences the world becomes differenced and disjointed. If the imagination is whole, then wholeness becomes a possibility and the first step has been taken towards realizing it. It is here that temenos as an ideal and a broader concern has its common root with Temenos as a periodical. It is important that the whole be sensed within the part of Temenos’s concern with imaginative art. Art by itself will not change the world, but the energy and intelligence arising from infinitude will.
The Bards

Sea and Wrack. The bitter tide.
Gull screams against stone cliff.
Tiger claws at the harbour wall
Searching, seeking.
Old enmity of land and sea.

How these years have flowed over us
How rived at the rock,
Wearing, tiring.
But rock held,
Land firm against gnawing tide.

And when these decades shall have done
Death shall be no stronger to kill
Than life to turn attack.
Days and nights
Over us have gone, ourselves have gone over.

But not under.
We are the ancient seamen,
Eye strong to face the wind.
Gnawed at by the sea's creatures,
Pincer and sucker.
Know we her moods, her briny ways.

Faithful to the wave-slap
Riders of the bucking horses.
We know the fulmar's lingo,
The frigate bird's blether,
Converse with the petrel:
Sing up with the banshee out of the storm.

Earth has not loved us,
Our home we have made
In the heart of the enemy
Like the whale and the porpoise,
Pushing land's luck on the eternal ocean.

Eternity wears our names like medals.
Signs of...

No –
Not a smoking battlefield
churned-up mud pounded by desperate feet
irrigated by rivulets of blood
dead, black-scorched trees skeletal
against a lowering sky –
treachery, palpable as smoke
hanging in the air –

No –
Not a ruined city, blitzed
municipal pride brought to rubble,
churches burned, crows cawing in and out
where once light refracted through
a blue-clad virgin nursing a swaddled infant.
No roofless town halls, toppled gargoyles,
wingless putti with smashed cheeks
and Corinthian pillars supporting the sky –

No –
Not a ghost town, echoing
with past footfalls: the weary miner,
face ashed with toil, spectral milkmen
delivering to empty homes, the anxious click
of high heels, office-bound and dressed to kill.
No plumber lowers his bag of tools
or factories lowse like a damn bursting
in water-logged spring. No hopeful shoppers
scour the windows for bargains –
not even cratered precincts in streets
busy with silence.

No –
No statues atop mountains
overseeing a northern firth,
erected by an obligatory pittance
from empty pockets and loyal, bitter hearts.
No standing stone, plaque or cairn,
no remembrance book whose pages daily turned
toll the passing years like bells.
Not even a withering clutch of flowers
on a nameless grave.

There is not a sign of the generations gone,
a race exported like butter mountains
to do, those who survived, to other ‘natives’
extactly what had been done to them.
The glens are empty, but in a seaside cottage,
crouched over the spluttering fire,
a cailleach sings Croth Chailein to an empty room
in a language her rich new neighbours
shake their heads at.
And in a white-painted bungalow, a son
of heroes, dressed in cowboy boots,
drawls out a country tune in mid-west Gaelic tones.

But there are roofless homes
on the beach at Mingulay, waves riding home
to a beach pacific with turquoise ripplings
where windsurfers round the headland
like Vikings whose shields are stockmarket shares
whose swords are in their wallets
and whose winged helmets are cordless telephones.

And on that hillside, bright green strips
celebrate a lazybed of years ago
cascading down like ribbons on a maypole
nettles carpet the earthen floor
where once a steaming black pot
smoked out a chimneyless room
and fed many mouths.

Granny’s heilan hame is a tussocky hump
of unrecognizable stones, walls decorated
by sheep droppings, lintels, even heat-welded chimney-stacks
are tumbled by victorious weathering or the factor’s fire.
You would see nothing if you drove by.

But if you climbed the hill your foot
would strike a hearth-stone, your ear would catch the smirr of a forgotten pibroch or the hint of an old song. And where a people lived, breathed, fed, husbanded, made love, grew crops and tended their black cattle – there is heather and bracken, heather and bracken, heather and bracken.
The Vertical Dimension*

KATHLEEN RAINE

When I was invited by you the theme which instantly came to mind was, ‘The Vertical Dimension’; in part that is what, for me, is essentially what poetry and all the arts of the Imagination represent in our lives – a scale of values, call it Jacob’s Ladder, on which spirits of higher mental regions descend to earth, and on which we, from the realities of this world ascend in vision. And in the second place because, having lived a long life in this changing world, ‘the vertical dimension’, in this sense, is what I feel has come to be neglected, not to say altogether lost, from much of the poetry now being written and from our expectation of it. But when I came to put pen to paper I found such a flood of thoughts pressing in on me that it seemed I could not even begin; for the theme involves so much, involves the very oldest of questions, ‘What is man?’, the question of the Sphinx, the question of the Psalmist, the question my own Master, William Blake, asked again in an emblem depicting a crysalis with the face of a sleeping child: into what state of consciousness will that sleeper, in metamorphosis from the caterpillar to the winged life, awake? An ancient emblem of the classical world, implying, again, a change of state, a transmutation of consciousness itself. We live in a world to which the very notion of a hierarchy of states of consciousness, is alien. Yet this is the theme which has, in various forms, been central to my life-work, both as a poet and a scholar, and during the last ten years, as editor of the Review, Temenos, devoted to the arts of the Imagination – a Review devoted to affirming, defining, attempting to re-establish, that vertical dimension.

But where to begin? What is poetry, that it should have occupied the hours and days and years of my life? Or of any life? ‘Man shall not live by bread alone’ we are told, ‘but by every word of God’. Living as we do in a culture circumscribed by a materialist scientism, we have

indeed seen in the Communist world a deliberate attempt at a human society which provides ‘bread alone’ and deemed the ‘word of God’ an unreality, something needless. How often do we not read or hear on the media Man described as a clever, tool-making trousered primate with an exceptionally large brain capacity and so on. Yet man is not a species, but a kingdom, as different from the animal kingdom as the animal from the vegetable, the vegetable from the mineral. The texture of the universe is seamless, yet each kingdom, whatever the overlap, is distinct; and what, if not the Word, is unique in the human kingdom? ‘In the beginning was the word’; Adam ‘named’ the creatures in Paradise; and if a beautiful painting by Blake is to be believed, Eve named the birds. Or Rilke, in his ninth Elegy, considers what in this boundless universe we are here for? And he writes:

For the wanderer does not bring from mountain to valley
a handful of earth, of for all untellable earth, but only
a word he has won, pure, the yellow and blue
gentian. Are we perhaps here just for saying: House,
Bridge, Fountain, Gate, Jug, Fruit tree, Window, –
possibly: Pillar, Tower?

– and he goes on, considering what to so vast a universe, we can contribute:

Praise this world to the Angel, not the untellable: you
can’t impress him with the splendour you’ve felt; in the cosmos
where he more feelingly feels you’re only a novice. So show him
some simple thing, refashioned age after age
till it lives in our hands and eyes as a part of ourselves.
Tell him things.

By the word we create a world far other than the material order of the utile that serves only our material needs, that can be quantified, but lies outside the order of meanings and values which, through the mystery of the Word, constitutes the human order: without the Word there can be no civilization.

So we are told that ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.’ That is an amazing claim to make for language, for it points to a source that used to be called ‘inspiration’ when people spoke of such things – the ‘inspired’ Word of God, a God (if one dare use the word) who ‘spake by the prophets’, and what else is the spirit of prophecy (Blake asks) but ‘the poetic
genius'? If the name of poet is still held in honour is it not because it still carries with it a certain remote echo of that age-old belief that the poet is 'inspired'? An honour due to poetry only when, and insofar as, it does, in a measure, aspire to participation in a sacred vision of the Word that is 'with God', on that vertical ladder which has in our time for the most part been lost?

Is not poetry the inspired word by which we name – and by naming create the human kingdom of meanings and values? Without the Word our humanity languishes, we revert to the order of animals whose food is material. When I was a child we believed that the sacred scriptures were 'inspired'; and if we venerated poets it was not for their craftsmanship or 'relevance' in terms of current affairs but because they too were held to be inspired. If and when we left school for a University it was more than likely that we read in Plato's Ion of the 'sacred power' of inspiration:

For the best epic poets, and all such as excel in composing any kind of verses to be recited, frame not those their admirable poems from the rules of art; but possessed by the Muse, they write from divine inspiration. Nor is it otherwise with the best lyric poets, and all other fine writers of verses to be sung. For as the priests of Cybele perform not their dances when they have the free use of their intellect; so those melody poets pen those beautiful songs of theirs only when out of their sober minds. But as soon as they begin to give voice and motion to those songs, adding to their words the harmony of music and the measure of dance, they are immediately transported; and, possessed by some divine power, are like the priestesses of Bacchus, who, full of the god, no longer draw water but honey and milk out of the springs and fountains ... For they assure us that out of certain gardens and flowery vales belonging to the Muses, from fountains flowing there with honey, gathering the sweetness of their songs, they bring it to us like the bees; and in the same manner withal, flying. Nor do they tell us any untruth. For a poet is a thing light, and volatile, and sacred; nor is he able to write poetry, till the Muse, entering into him, he is transported out of himself.

To poets of the inspired kind the ‘measure’ of song and dance is a magical means of transporting poet and listener from the common world into that other realm; Shelley spoke of the ‘incantation’ of his verse; we have but to hear the first words of any ballad,

The King sat in Dunfermline town
Drinking the blood red wine
There lived a wife at Usher’s well
And a wealthy wife was she
to be transported into that other state, as by the words ‘once upon a
time’ into fairyland. And indeed the poetic intoxication is a theme of
poets from Arabia to W. B. Yeats, he too a Platonic poet, who invokes
that state:

Because I have a marvellous thing to say,
A certain marvellous thing
None but the living mock,
Though not for sober ear –

The invocation of the Muse has become a literary commonplace,
but to poets of the Imagination it remains a reality; Milton invoked his
‘heavenly muse’ and Gray wrote of Shakespeare who beheld ‘such
forms / As glitter in the muse’s ray’. Blake, more down-to-earth,
summons the ‘Muses who inspire the Poet’s Song to

... Come into my hand,
By your mild power descending down the Nerves of my right arm
From out the portals of my brain, where by your ministry
The Eternal Great Humanity Divine planted his Paradise’

– for the Inspirers are within. Yeats had his ‘instructors’ who spoke
through the mediumship of his wife; or in more modern terms we
may invoke Jung’s ‘transpersonal’ mind. By whatever name, the
Inspirers are a reality of imaginative experience.

If I speak of a ‘vertical dimension’ I must make it clear that what is at
issue is not any question of ‘another world’ but the manner in which
we experience this one. The vertical dimension is in the beholder, its
transforming power operates in this world; as Blake wrote to an
employer who accused him of not painting the world as it really is:

I see Every thing I paint In This World, but Every body does not see alike.
To the Eyes of a Miser a Guinea is more beautiful than the Sun, & a bag
worn with the use of Money has more beautiful proportions than a Vine
filled with Grapes. The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the
Eyes of others only a Green thing which stands in the way. Some See
Nature all Ridicule & Deformity, & by these I shall not regulate my proportions; & Some Scarce see Nature at all. But to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination, Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is, So he sees. As the Eye is formed, such are its Powers. You certainly Mistake, when you say that the Visions of Fancy are not to be found in This World. To Me This World is all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination.

Blake’s vision is simple and universal; and there are surely few of us who have not at some time seen the simplest things ‘apparel’d in celestial light’ – in the phrase of another poet, Thomas Traherne, for whom also the simplest pebbles on the path were radiant with that light. It is not the pebbles or the trees that have changed: it is we who no longer participate in that light of vision. There are poets – I think of Larkin – who at best regret its absence; few indeed who attempt to re-kindle that vision at the source, though there have been some, during my lifetime; not merely Eliot and Yeats and Rilke, but Dylan Thomas, who used that unfashionable word ‘holy’ or his friend Vernon Watkins, who, no less than the bard Taliesin knew the reality of inspiration.

* * *

I have lived to see the rise and fall of the Communist empire, proclaimed in my student days as the advent of Utopia – a sincere if misguided attempt to prove that humankind could live by ‘bread alone’. Edwin Muir, in a poem written at a time when he was witnessing in Czechoslovakia what this doctrine represented in human terms wrote of the diminution and obscuring of the human image by the denial of the sacred nature of man; by exalting the image of natural man, what makes man great is lost:

At a sudden turn we saw
A young man harrowing, hidden in dust; he seemed
A prisoner walking in a moving cloud
Made by himself for his own purposes;
And there he grew, and was as if exalted
To more than man, yet not, not glorified:
A pillar of dust moving in dust; no more.
The bushes by the roadside were encrusted
With a hard sheath of dust.
We looked and wondered; the dry cloud moved on
With its interior image.
Presently we found
A road that brought us to the Writers' House
And there a preacher from Urania
(Sad land where hope each day is killed by hope)
Praised the good dust, man's ultimate salvation,
And cried that God was dead ...

.....
And in our memory cloud and message fused,
Image and thought condensed to a giant form
That walked the earth clothed in its earthly cloud,
Dust made sublime in dust. And yet it seemed unreal
And lonely as things not in their proper place.
And thinking of the man
Hid in his cloud we longed for light to break
And show that his face was the face once broken in Eden,
Beloved, world-without-end lamented face;
And not a blindfold mask on a pillar of dust

Such was Edwin Muir's imaginative perception of the human image in the Communist empire - 'far Urania'. Nor has Western technological prosperity given rise to a flowering of the poetic genius. Where now is the once confident assurance of Western materialism in the ever onward and upward march of 'progress' through the forces of 'evolution'? Contemporary poetry and painting, and even music which reflects the materialist mind of the time reflects rather the uncertainties, the desperation, the cynicism or the despair of an age that has lost its roots in a spiritual order, deemed to have been made invalid by our materialist science, but with nothing to put in its place. The palliatives of modern technology do not feed the human hunger, when the image of man made 'a little lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour' has given place to some genetic formula. Reaffirmations of human dignity, rather, have come from the heart of Soviet Russia where the extremity of the need has generated a heroic response in such poets as Pasternak, Mandelstam, and Arseny Tarkovsky, father of the great film-director. No such heroic response has been demanded of us, and we adapt ourselves to our comfortable hells with acquiescent self-pity. The Waste Land Eliot prophetically described has invaded the arts themselves. Not even the artificial paradise of psychedelic drugs can take the place of mankind's spiritual food, once provided by the poets, painters and musicians -
Poetry, Painting & Music, the three Powers in Man of conversing with Paradise' – Blake again.

In contrast with what I have called the vertical dimension, the materialist ideologies can operate only on a horizontal, a flat-land world. On that level there can be, at best, political propaganda and social protest, a heightened journalism. Eliot in his use of free verse gave expression to the 'waste land' for which there is no incantation, no poetic frenzy of music or dance-rhythms. What for Eliot was a lament, for later generations became merely a style; for loss of form follows on loss of the poetic exaltation of which Plato speaks, that intersection of time with the timeless, the 'still centre of the turning world' of which Eliot writes in the Four Quartets. It is notable that it is the poets who still affirm that centre whose work retains formal verse – Yeats, Edwin Muir, Vernon Watkins, Dylan Thomas and Robert Frost. Blake declared long ago that naturalism leads to loss of form, whether in painting or in verse. 'Nature has no Outline, but Imagination has. Nature has no Tune, but Imagination has. Nature has no Supernatural & dissolves: Imagination is Eternity.' The present time demonstrates in the loss of form in all the arts – the dribbles of Jackson Pollock and the 'abstract impressionists', the tuneless twelve-note scale, the 'free verse' that has no more structure than a news-item, which are the inevitable expression of the loss of access to the rhythms of life itself, the formal principle which is, as Blake affirms, not in nature but in what Coleridge called the 'shaping spirit of Imagination'.

Throughout the nineteenth century descriptive verse, and painting which reproduced natural appearances with minute and photographic accuracy abounded. Much of this continued to present the natural world as pleasing to behold, continuing unquestioned earlier schools which had held beauty to be a supreme value. Now beauty is a word scarcely used, for what meaning has the word in the context of the neutrality of nature, unrelated to the vital form-creating power of Imagination? We have seen the emergence first of 'social realism' and then of a grimmer realism of poets and painters who have ceased to discover beauty in nature or in human nature. There has emerged a school of writers and painters who describe appearances not to enhance, but to dislimn, not a discovery but a denial of form, beauty and meaning. The kitchen sink is ever with us; but I think of
Vermeer's kitchens where daily occupations at household tasks are bathed in what I can only describe as the light of love; so unlike the resentful and negative fashion of reducing our simple works and days to something valueless, to be resented rather than enjoyed. Again, it is not the bowls and dishes that have changed—though by our machines these too are made without the informing spirit of craftsmanship—but the light in which these are seen no longer shines from some inner vision of meaning and beauty. The song of birds has been a source of delight to poets from the troubadours to Chaucer, from the nightingales of Persia to Keats, from Shelley's skylark and Milton's to Hopkins. Now children's schoolbooks contain poems informing them that the voices of birds are not a song but a scream; it is deemed more 'honest' to note nature's warts and blemishes than to observe its daily panorama of sun and moon, clouds and stars, birds and trees as the epiphanic language of a living mystery; or indeed to see that 'The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword are portions of eternity, too great for the eye of man.' All is meaningless and human fantasy, severed from its sacred source, becomes a Disney-land of vulgarity.

It would be unjust to hold poets and other artists individually responsible for the climate of an age and a materialist ideology which implicitly or explicitly affirms the cosmos to be an autonomous mechanism—or a meaningless accident—a view which precludes an entire realm of values. When Wordsworth wrote (paraphrasing Plotinus) 'Tis my belief that every flower enjoys the air it breathes' he was not indulging in poetic make-believe, but affirming that nature is a living presence, as other cultures have held as a self-evident truth. As indeed it is, if not matter but spirit, not the object perceived but the perceiving consciousness, be taken as the ground of reality as we behold and experience it. Yeats saw the post-Renaissance concept of a material universe as a mere brief deviation from the immemorial wisdom of mankind and predicted its end: 'The three provincial centuries are over' he wrote, 'Wisdom and poetry return'. Are not the predictions of the poets self-fulfilling? Let us hope so.

We all know Blake's lines that so clearly affirm a hierarchy of mental worlds, or states of consciousness:
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.

– Newton, creator of the cosmology which some leading scientists have already challenged but which, imaginatively, modern Western man continues to inhabit. Yeats, first editor of Blake's Prophetic Books, followed his Master in his total rejection of the premisses of Western materialism, and in the course of his intellectual pilgrimage he scanned the entire horizon of the long excluded knowledge of the learning of the Imagination, ranging from theosophy and magic, folk-beliefs of the West of Ireland and psychical research, to the writings of the Neoplatonists, the Sufis, the ghost-drama of the Japanese Noh. He came, finally, to his final commitment to the great source of that learning, the Vedic tradition. With his Indian Teacher, Sri Purohit Swamy he made, in his last years, translations of the principal Upanishads. These studies were ridiculed at the time by both Marxist and American materialist critics. George Orwell did not hesitate to refer to these studies as 'hocus-pocus'.

One has not perhaps, the right to laugh' (Orwell wrote) at Yeats for his mystical beliefs – for I believe it could be shown that some degree of belief in magic is almost universal – but neither ought one to write such things off as mere unimportant eccentricities.

It is a measure of the changes of the times that it would no longer be possible for an intelligent critic to write in such a way. He laughs best, we may be inclined to comment, who laughs last! No one can any longer dismiss the Perennial Philosophy, comprising as it does the philosophical and metaphysical literature of all civilizations prior to our own, as 'hocus-pocus' – to do so is provincial indeed.

In a seminal essay entitled 'The Necessity of Symbolism' prefaced to the Ellis and Yeats edition (1893) of Blake's Prophetic Books, Yeats takes up the theme of the 'vertical' dimension so uncompromisingly stated by his Master; a hierarchy of states of consciousness which are themselves the agents which create different 'worlds'. Yeats saw as the underlying fallacy of the materialist view:
the belief that material and spiritual things do not differ in kind; for if they do so differ, no mere analysis of nature as it exists outside our minds can solve the problems of mental life.

Yeats then goes on to elaborate on Blake's master, Swedenborg's doctrine of "correspondences":

Degrees are of two kinds (Swedenborg writes) there being continuous degrees and degrees not continuous. Continuous degrees are like the degrees of visual clearness, decreasing as the light passes from the objects in the light to those in the shade ... But degrees that are not continuous but discrete, differ from each other like that which is prior and that which is posterior, like cause and effect, and like that which produces and that which is produced ... He that has not acquired a clear apprehension of these degrees cannot be acquainted with the difference between the exterior and interior faculties of man; nor can he be acquainted with the difference between the spiritual world and the natural, nor between the spirit of man and his body (Heaven and Hell, 38).

The materialist thinker (Yeats comments) sees "continuous" where he should see "discrete" degrees and thinks of the mind not merely as companioning but as actually one with the physical organism. The degrees correspond to one another only by 'correspondence' as Swedenborg calls the symbolic relation between outer and inner; which 'begins with a perception of something different from natural things with which they are to be compared'.

The vertical comparison is the key to the power of the symbol, in which the natural world is used, not (as in nature-poetry in the horizontal dimension) as an object to be described, but as the poet's language, the keyboard, as it were, upon which he strikes resonances of inner experience, by the skilful use of correspondences. Mountain and river, tree and garden, bird and cloud, are words in the language of Eden in which Adam 'named' the creatures. One thinks of that supreme genius of the poetic art, Shelley, whose soaring lark (as the French phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard has so beautifully shown), is not so much a bird as an emblem of ascent, the soaring mood of poetic aspiration itself. Shelley does not describe the bird, as a naturalist might do, feather by feather — Shelley's skylark is not visible at all, as 'singing still it soars, and soaring ever singeth'. It is the poet's spirit in flight, like Plato's rhapsodist, to the 'Garden of the
Muses', the 'skies' of Blake's 'supreme delight', a region of spaciousness, freedom and light above common consciousness of which the 'skies' have always been the natural symbol. Shakespeare's lark sings at 'heaven's gate' and Milton's at the 'watch-tower in the skies' and Blake's mounts through the 'crystal gate' of heaven. Hopkins's lark is a musician reading his score:

Left hand, off land, I hear the lark ascend,
His rash-fresh, re-winded new-skeined score
In crisps of curl off wild winch whirl, and pour
And pelt music, till none's to spill or spend.

To what good purpose does a poet for whom these regions are closed inform us that the bird-song that has delighted generations, is not singing but screaming? What do such facts, true or false, tell us of music, of inspiration, of human experience?

Keats's words still remain true:

The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown,
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charmed magic casements opening o'er the foam
Of perilous seas, and faery lands forlorn.

The nightingale too is a word in the language of poetry. Yet English poets seem to have fallen into the habit of thinking that the function of poetry is descriptive — descriptive of the natural world, the one real world to the 'single vision' of materialist thought. It is true that for a poet like Peter Redgrove, nature is no mere mechanism, but a living, vital, magical process of Goethean 'formation, transformation'. But there are a few poets who retain, as does David Gascoyne, England's one great poet at this time, the high role of the poet as the spokesman of the human spirit. The poetic exploration of the human kingdom, its moods and meanings has, since the last war, become incalculably impoverished. Poetry, from Homer, Dante, Rumi and Shakespeare, to Eliot and Rilke, to Edwin Muir to David Gascoyne has continually explored the human kingdom in all its heights and depths, seeking to extend the frontiers of that kingdom and record its fine subtleties of wisdom and beauty and moral perception. In an age when there is
only natural man the higher realms of Blake’s fourfold vision are lost, and with that loss, as Yeats foresaw,

Conduct and work grow coarse, and coarse the soul …

We are misreading the works of poets of the imaginative tradition if we read their symbolic discourse in terms of another ideology; as indeed we have seen in much modern criticism, especially criticism of the romantic poets – of Shelley, whose exquisite imaginative landscapes, reminiscent of Turner, are taken as such. In Shelley’s great Ode on the ‘wind’ of inspiration, every image resonates overtones in the scale of ‘correspondences’. Shelley is invoking – affirming – not a material world but a living, epiphanic cosmos –

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.

Those who know him best will not fall into the mistake of imagining he uses the word ‘angels’ for aesthetic reasons. For all his knowledge of science – the electrical charge of the storm-cloud producing the fringes of cloud – he held the cosmos to be informed by living intelligences – angels, who, like the bright cloud itself, undergo a metamorphosis into the fiercer form, of ‘Maenads’ – of the approaching storm. The allusion to the passage from Plato’s Ion, on poetic inspiration, is clear. The hair of the Maenad, frenzied follower of the god Dionysus, rises on the head as the divine inspiration possesses her. Shelley in these images is communicating his own deepest belief about the nature of poetic inspiration. Symbolic thought establishes by means of multiple allusion through images, associations with a whole field of thought, which I have called the ‘learning of the Imagination’. Unless we know who the Maenads are, and the character of the god Dionysus and his cult, those frenzied rites that swept over the classical world, unless we have read or seen performed Euripides’ play The Bacchae, in which the women draw honey and milk from the fountains, and tear to pieces Pentheus, the king who cast doubt on their god, we shall not be reading what Shelley wrote.
We have seen much misreading of this kind, in modern criticism; even to the point of one critic who goes so far as to propose 'simply to brush aside' Yeats's own reading of his own words (on the allusions in 'Among Schoolchildren' to Porphyry's *De Antro Nympharum*).

What youthful mother, a shape upon her lap  
Honey of generation has betrayed  
And that must sleep, shriek, struggle to escape  
As recollection or the drug decide

- Platonic recollection or the Lethean 'drug' of forgetfulness. This symbolism from the main-stream of European tradition, John Wain dismisses as 'a personal fandango of mysticism and superstition'. Instead of 'the drug' of Lethean forgetfulness, Mr Wain suggests we take 'the drug' to be administered by the midwife at childbirth! Such critics are not reading, but misreading, the works of the poets. Both Shelley and Yeats employ a language of symbols which resonate within a whole context of civilization, of whose continuity every present is a part. If that civilization be forgotten or discarded we have indeed already entered a new Dark Age. Nor is the loss a matter simply of historical memory, it is a loss of 'the vertical dimension' of consciousness itself.

A still greater impoverishment follows from the abandonment by the poets themselves of their age-old task of establishing in every present a relation with the timeless world which is the soul's country, the invisible kingdom humankind has from time immemorial laboured to realize on earth in works of art. There is, as my parents' generation would have said – as I would still say – no 'poetry' in so much modern verse – no poetry in the sense of no resonances of imaginative meaning and beauty, but merely descriptions of facts or events we might find as well or better presented by a television commentator. I. A. Richards, himself one of the 'new critics', described poetry as 'the house of the soul'. Poetry and the other arts are indeed the world we inwardly inhabit, the human kingdom built over millennia in the full range of the height and depth of human experience by means of symbolic correspondences on a vertical axis of consciousness itself, with its whole range of values which it is the nature of the arts to explore and embody. If the material world be the
body's country, the arts are the soul's country; where the realities are of a different order, where the rules are different, where (Blake again) 'All Things are comprehended in their Eternal Forms' and warty-face can never come.

In that world are heraldic animals and oracular birds, the walled garden of Paradise and its trees and rivers, a whole inner landscape of soul's country, mountains and caverns, demons and enchantments. Do we not all visit that country in our dreams? Jung somewhere has written that when words are spoken from that world (whether in dream or in some other state which unites, at certain moments, the sleeping and the waking mind) it is in a high exalted tone, fraught with meaning beyond the mere designatory significance of some object or event in the external world. In contrast with the trivial chatter of the daily mind of the commonplace there is a solemnity and dignity which meanings and values impart to communications of the 'other mind'. In much poetry of the recent past there has been a deliberate avoidance of the incantatory, the lyrical, the solemnity and grandeur of speech proper to the image of man as made 'a little lower than the angels' but not to the materialist image of man – 'all that great glory spent', as Yeats laments. It is surely through no mere change of literary fashion that this has come about, but inevitably in terms of the exclusion and denial of soul's country, which nevertheless we continue to visit in dreams – or which continues, in dreams, to visit us. Poets who deny that dimension can no longer write, or desire to write

... whatever most can bless
The mind of man or elevate a rhyme;
But all is changed, that high horse riderless,
Though mounted in that saddle Homer rode
Where the swan drifts upon a darkening flood.

So we have a revised prayer-book, a Good News Bible rewritten in the language of a chat-show, we have productions of Shakespeare which deliberately flatten out his verse to be read as a paragraph of prose, not to elevate but to depress a rhyme. The 'high horse' Pegasus on which, in the Greek myth, the poet ascends, has withdrawn to the world of dreams. David Gascoyne described this school of poetry as 'a
celebration of the commonplace’ — not as Vermeer and Traherne celebrated the commonplace, illumined by celestial light, but as such; like the dust that enveloped Edwin Muir’s labourer in the fields of Czechoslovakia under the Communist rule.

The renowned French Ismaeli scholar, Henry Corbin, a co-founder with Jung of the Eranos circle, coined the word ‘Imaginal’, in distinction from ‘imaginary’ — which in common parlance signifies the merely unreal — to designate that inner world of psyche, recognized within the rich Ismaeli tradition he studied as the universe of the soul, the ālam al-mithāl. This mundus imaginālis is soul’s universe, and the whole immense world of the imaginable, the universe of symbol, would not exist without the soul. Here thought is materialized as image; and the sensible image, conversely, is imbued with meaning from the angelic intelligences of the inner worlds. This inner universe of soul is the human kingdom proper, an immeasurable kingdom native to us (or to which we are native) with an order of its own. It is the world which from the beginning of humanity poets and painters, dance and story, all the arts of the Imagination have embodied in countless forms, according to each nation’s — or each period’s, or each individual’s — perception, and the current language of symbol and myth. In a time when there is no received language these living forms still present themselves to us, nameless but still intelligible. I see in the work of the painter, Cecil Collins, the fullest embodiment of the soul’s country that we have seen in England in this time — the beautiful gentle forms of the vulnerable soul, moving within a landscape of sacred trees and birds, rivers and mountains, the Holy Grail, the beautiful adornments imagination imparts. Collins uses no religious iconography, but these nameless figures, characteristic of this time in which many look for reality in our own dreams rather than in the iconography of religion, are no less recognizably holy than the Russian icons of the figures of the Christian story or the gods of Greece or India. We recognize the presences themselves of angels and oracles, kings and holy fools, sibyls and oracles, and we know that country and its landscape as one to which we are native. And for what other purpose has humankind built temples and palaces, painted and sculpted and told all the fairy-tales and visionary recitals, but to embody and make known to ourselves our inner kingdom? And what is music but the native speech of that country? If man does not live by
bread alone is it not because the human kingdom must be fed on the milk and honey of the fountains of the muses, by the 'bread of angels'? The quest of the soul as it seeks the Holy Grail or the rose-garden or the emerald cities, a world of marvels and meanings and metamorphoses and ordeals and revelations bears little relation to 'social realism' or minimalism or post-modernism and the rest. The mundus imaginalis is, furthermore, a world of true imaginings, (unlike the 'imaginary' as conceived in factual terms) since the intelligences – archetypal forms – which embody themselves in that interworld have their origin in reality itself. It is the true world, whose forms we see reflected in the 'vegetable glass' of nature, and without which 'nature has no outline and dissolves'. The imaginal world is, in Blake’s terms, 'the Nature of Eternal Things Display’d All springing from the Divine Humanity'.

The greater part of the poetry of all times and nations tells and retells the soul's story, her loves and sorrows, her desires and her quest. These are guidance on the way as each individual takes up that story, realizes some part of it, and by the poets we are enabled to experience a whole beyond our partial personal lives. No poet understood this better than did Edwin Muir, who in his beautiful autobiographical book The Story and the Fable wrote of that archetypal story as 'the fable', of which each individual life is a reflection:

... the life of every man is an endlessly repeated performance of the life of man. It is clear ... that sleep, in which we pass a third of our existence, is a mode of experience and dreams a part of reality. In themselves our conscious lives may not be particularly interesting. But what we are not and can never be, our fable, seems to me inconceivably interesting. I should like to write that fable but I cannot even live it; and all I could do if I related the outward course of my life would be to show how I have deviated from it; though even that is impossible, since I do not know the fable or anybody who knows it. One or two stages in it I can recognize: the age of innocence and the Fall and all the dramatic consequences which issue from the Fall. But these lie behind experience, not on its surface; they are not historical events; they are stages in the Fable. (p. 49)

Edwin Muir’s fable is Corbin’s mundus imaginalis, the Imaginal world, not an imaginary world, but reality itself, where our human truth resides. In every generation the circumstances of life are different, so that every generation needs its poets to re-tell the endlessly repeated story anew. We have, as Muir elsewhere wrote, 'one foot in Eden' and
from Eden look into 'the other land', the time-world, the world of history. But when that link is broken can civilization survive?

According to sacred tradition, the universal Imagination – Blake's Divine Humanity – knows all things – such is the wisdom embodied in the Welsh myth of Taliesin. Vernon Watkins, himself a great underrated poet of the Imagination, has written his own version of the Taliesin poems, wherein this claim is made. In 'Taliesin and the Mockers' he paraphrases the age-old claim of the legendary poet:

Before men walked
I was in these places,
I was here
When the mountains were laid.

I am as light
To eyes long blind,
I, the stone
Upon every grave.

I saw black night
Flung wide like a curtain,
I looked up at the making of stars.

I stood erect
At the birth of rivers.
I observed the designing of flowers.

Who has discerned
The voice of lightning.
Or traced the music
Behind the eyes?

My lord prescribed
The paths of the planets,
His fingers scattered
The distant stars.

The poem continues to tell the story of creation, and of human history, to the Incarnation –

Certain there were
Who touched, who knew him,
Blind men knew
On the road their God.

– and ends with Taliesin, the inspired poet’s challenge to those who assume the title of poet without knowledge of that sacred source:

Mock me they will
Those hired musicians,
They at Court
Who command the schools.

Mock though they do
My music stands
Before and after
Accusing silence.
It's hard to stay there, drifting to the edge and back again, whatever the demands made by the age, I stay with poetry as it asserts a vision, lifts the poor, the bruised metallic litter in the street to whatever's affirmative, a new people without oppression, death from manufactured pollution, dictators, credos, there's a line so taut, it's like a bridge, and resonates with light, a leopard stalks across it, and someone, a messenger perhaps, free-floats slowly into this other dimension, a liberated cosmonaut. Mostly I trust in sensory expectation, the heightening of the immediate raindrop to a pear-shaped diamond, a smile that shows a sunrise in the mouth, a spoken word that makes a down mood spiral to an up, gives possibility when there's no hope apparent anywhere. A friend is more than any other gift a certainty that there's a power transcends disparagement by the collective greed, indifference to individual suffering and need. Defiant lyricism, I can send elemental devastation into the city's hurried afternoon, defend the infractioned with words, have a panther enter a shopping store, and listen, wait to know the message gets there in the end.
Counting The Dead

The torrent's white thunder, sliding away
to a less pressurized, sinuous Z
cut in the valley, water rushing stone
with an incisive clarity
to disappear like most things we forget

when we are disengaged, elsewhere,
recalling much later how an ear placed
flat to the ground interpreted the roar
as seismic, a live tremor in the air,

the summits pushing forward, forests uprooted,
the human pulse \( \cdot \infty \) fragile in that sound.
I give space to the dead. Early or late
they seem always to be around
as very different from who they were
or are, the private and public faces
we formulate as images
in an ESP computer,

keeping what's human as the prominent
engagement in a look, a way of speech,
because it's best relatable
to what we know. How do they de-construct
into a sensory black-out,

the impressions, bodies that we'd retain,
leaving us disconnected, feeling round
for what we too will come to know, and fear
as wave-lengths communicating no sound.
History

A man crashes into a tall ferned brake; 
rises again from a lacework of blood 
and disappears. At the near farm, 
three are strung up in barbed wire; a black wick

of smoke billows into the blue. 
An ordinary day; we’re so inured 
to war and its reprisals, we don’t flinch. 
It’s all on film and we’re the spectators.

History repeats itself. It’s the black snake 
choking on its tail, impotent to free 
itsclf of the deadlock. 
It’s manic tyranny accelerates; 

it won’t have done until there’s nothing left, 
the few survivors launched towards the stars. 
Stand in a field, a city in Europe, 
and one can sense the victims. An old rope

hangs from this beech. A child’s swing? 
It seems uncanny we’re alive 
to eat at the small inn, pick lavender. 
We all seem unreal as a photograph.

Man never knew the tolerance 
to live without war, settle to the years 
with expectation. The rich vine was fired. 
The harvest grape was blood.

We wait for history to smash the clock. 
The light will still fall in this empty field. 
Perhaps we’ve always been running away 
to out manoeuvre the impending shock.
The True ‘Postmodernism’

ARTHUR VERSLUIS

Many readers will no doubt balk at what I have here to say, a rebellion about which I can only note that I wish it were not so, that we lived in a unitary age, all conjoined, all conjured by a common culture, by truth. But we do not: ours is the strangest of all times, an age in which so much is ‘known’ that nothing is truly known at all, an age in which anything might be invoked to any purpose. In such an era it no doubt seems strange to speak of eternal verities, of standards by which art may be judged – all that is presumed to be long ‘behind’ us. Yet it is not so; and as the illusions of ‘progress’ are dispelled round about us, perhaps there will open, amid the despair, perversity and nihilism of a waning world, openings through the carapace we have created, into the open sky, into the truths which by so much of humanity were taken for granted. At all events, we will in this essay point to some who, today, manifest that which is eternal, true – but in the main the focus will be on what has come to be called ‘postmodern’ literature; for those who wish to re-establish Temenos, to invoke anew the sacred order amid chaos, must recognise that which is outside the sacred ground. For the true ‘postmodernism’ is not at all that which now goes under that name.

But let us begin with one who does indeed stand on sacred ground: Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. In his 1972 address upon receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature, Solzhenitsyn said the following:

All those prophets who are predicting that art is disintegrating, that it has used up all its forms, that it is dying, are mistaken. We are the ones who will die. And art will remain. The question is whether before we perish we shall understand all its aspects and all its ends.

Not all can be given names. Some go beyond words. Art opens even the chilled, darkened heart to high spiritual experience. Through the instrumentality of art we are sometimes sent – vaguely, briefly – insights which logical processes of thought cannot attain.

And again, says a prominent contemporary literary critic at Harvard:

For the world is our beloved codex. We may not see it, as Dante did, in perfect order, gathered by love into one volume; but we do, living as
reading, like to think of it as a place where we can travel back and forth at will, divining congruences, conjunctions, opposites; extracting secrets from its secrecy... This is the way we satisfy ourselves with explanations of the unfollowable world.\(^2\)

Granted, the latter critic makes only an implicit claim for a spiritual order, for the spiritual origin of literature, and excludes the possibility of any ultimate knowledge of this ‘unfollowable world’ – but still, the correlation between literature and living, living truly, is explicit. By contrast, one can hardly imagine a ‘postmodern’ novelist, under the current definition of the term,\(^3\) willing to affirm even that literature can convey meaning in any transcendent sense.

Now the question we want to pose here is simply this: how can these statements, by two contemporary authors, be correlated to the present so-called ‘postmodern times’, to ‘postmodern art’, to ‘postmodern literature’? For surely it is signal that both works are devoid of reference to any contemporary writers or artists. And indeed, one can hardly imagine the reaction of the likes of, say, Burroughs, Pynchon or Kosinski to the statement – to the values implied in – ‘For the world is our beloved codex.’ No – to these, the ‘postmoderns’ by current definition, the world is a nightmare, devoid of continuity and filled with violence. How are we to take this disparity between the words of so eminent a man as Solzhenitsyn, and the ‘reality’ of so much contemporary literature? Is it possible, or even desirable, to bridge that disparity?

I ask this because while it is apparently not possible for the ‘postmodern writer’ to regard this world as his ‘beloved codex,’ it is, some would say, true that ‘art opens even the chilled, darkened heart to spiritual experience’, and what is more, they would put forth various ‘postmodern writers’ as evidence that, while the world is no longer regarded as a ‘beloved codex,’ the literary work can still be a means of spiritual illumination. Yet is this so? That is: can one who regards the world, not as a theophany, as divine revelation, but as only a place of Gnostic terror, abandonment, and submission to malign forces (cultural or demiurgic) truly offer or know spiritual illumination? Or are they not bound thereby to an irreconcilable dualism, able to offer only an inverted reflection of traditional theophanic understanding?

Granted, there are numerous contemporary works – fiction and poetry both – which incorporate what we might call the residuum of
religion: one acclaimed work ends in a flurry of Tarot symbolism and ‘magical’ images; another is peppered with references to the Egyptian Book of the Dead, and to the nether realms; yet another is set in ancient Egypt, but is utterly free of any religious sensibility whatever. But we ought not to think, simply because there are in a work of literature references of this sort, that the work thereby fulfills Solzhenitsyn’s call, that it necessarily opens into spiritual experience, illumination. Quite the antithesis, in fact. For although there is today a marked tendency to be indiscriminate in one’s turning away from the hell toward which technocratic materialism is dragging us, the fact is that not everything nonmaterial is necessarily spiritual, and many scriptures refer, as does Saint Paul, to the Deceiver disguising himself as an angel of light. ‘So it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.’

At all events, it is safe to say that ours is a crucial time, one in which it is more than ever essential to distinguish between pseudomysticism which, drawing upon the residuum of religions, aims into the depths of things, and true mysticism which aims toward the light supernal. Moreover, one must be chary of works — fiction or poetry — which invoke a spiritual tradition while remaining essentially nihilist in import, for in so doing the work serves not as a means toward spiritual insight, but as a corroder of spiritual truths; through it, they become as ‘ashes in the mouth,’ as Czeslaw Milosz says.

It is here that the dilemma lies: for in truth, what ‘postmodern writer’ would today even dare to suggest that there are eternal verities, that, as Dostoevsky said, ‘Beauty will save the world?’ The ‘postmodern’ smiles in ironic derision: he knows better; we are beyond all that. But where are we then? And how is that place better? ‘Postmodernism’ is nothing if not uncertain, and in this uncertainty the writer reaches out for those fragments of tradition still afloat and, drowning, takes them down with him.

There is an abyss between ‘postmodern’ nihilism on the one side, and true postmodernism, which is the sophia perennis, on the other, and between them we must, finally, choose. Or, to make the analogy more accurate: nihilism is the abyss, and we must choose between it, and life.

If one is to truly provide a critique of ‘postmodernism,’ one must recognize the nature and gravity of this choice — yet it is precisely this which most contemporary critics fail to see. One contemporary critic,
for instance, in a half-hearted attempt at criticizing ‘postmodern literature,’ says that when writing is effective

we are reminded that perhaps the most unusual act of a modern writer is not to overthrow one’s father’s forms, but to write about one’s own time and place without self-consciousness.

and if he had gone on to say, ‘realizing anew the perennial, transcendent truths,’ he would no doubt have made a true, a strong point. But instead, he feels compelled to give ground, to lamely finish, saying:

recognizing simultaneously how fast our particular culture dates us, and how ... consumption patterns ... consign us ... to the periphery of the honoured and unread.\(^8\)

Why bother to pose as a critic – why write at all? – if one cannot make even the simplest affirmation, if one’s opponents are given all the ground to begin with? If literature is restricted to dealing only with localized events, then the newspaper is the ideal art form, is it not? Great literature, Art, is out the window and one is left clutching tabloids with J. Alfred Prufrock.

Many other ‘postmodern’ critics are not even so daring as this: attempting to turn a loss into a gain, they look forward to the complete obliteration of tradition with a bizarre relish, duly noting the destructiveness of modern society and then lauding the ‘liberatory function’ of that destruction.\(^9\) One is tempted to ask: liberation into what manner of world? As Yevgeny Zamyatin saw near the beginning of this century with such clarity, secularized modern culture oscillates between chaos and fascism, its two poles; and those who sing praises of anarchy serve the Benefactor in their own way.\(^10\)

In any case, surely this is letting the cat out of the bag! A celebration, a lauding of destruction is overt enough: by their fruits shall ye know them. But what of the claim that the awaited ‘collapse of art’ shall lead to a union with ‘primitive art,’ that the end of the ‘Western tradition’ of art will result in a new ‘universal culture?’\(^11\) This suggestion sounds fine enough – until one considers its implications. For in essence violent, chaotic, nihilistic ‘postmodern’ literature signals a society that has gone bankrupt, that, separated from the vertical, or transcendent dimensions which infuse life in a traditional culture with meaning, has no way of valuation, of determining meaning. Realizing this in some way, the ‘postmodern’ reaches out for those fragments of the ‘primitive’, of the
traditional still extant – and quantifies them, makes of them a ‘product’, incorporating them into the consumer-mentality, thereby destroying the meaning they once had. And so the circle widens.

It is, alas, no longer possible to believe that simply because an author – or for that matter, a critic – invokes a traditional culture or religion, he is himself traditional. Indeed, as we said earlier, quite the contrary – for the traditional culture is often now invoked only to assimilate it into the reigning ideology, which is to say, to strip it of its universal meaning. Now this is not done, of course, by dark intent – for the most part – in fact, again, quite the reverse – for the author or critic no doubt has the best of intentions: he is only depicting, trying to make sense of the angst, the horror of existence in a modern, ahistorical, secularized and indeed deranged society in which nothing makes sense. How could he not include in his work some reference to the traditional, to the Bhagavad Gita, to the Tarot, to Siberian Shamanism, to magic? But the reference leaves little or no hope, finally; and so the circle grows, the maw of despair relativizing all, devouring all.

Yet at times, one cannot help but laugh – as at the spectacle of thirteen radios in a room, playing thirteen different stations, this being justified as art by reference to the I Ching and to Zen Buddhism.

At all events, just as ‘postmodern criticism’ tends either to celebrate the dissolution of traditional forms as remnants of a ‘patriarchal past’ best destroyed, or to merely lament the downward course of things without contesting the assumptions upon which that course is based, so too ‘postmodern literature’ tends either to revel in violence and destruction, or in a perverse, self-devouring irony. At times it seems that the most one might expect from the ‘postmodern’ is the barest hint of nostalgia, of reminiscence for a time free of anguish – but even that soon dissolves into irony, despair.

One finds, in fact, much in common between ‘postmodern literature’ and ‘postmodern architecture,’ a relationship we can see by referring to the work of Adrian Snodgrass. After noting that non-symbolic art includes those modern buildings which were decorated with Greek and Roman styles, but in utter ignorance of their symbolic content, ‘a literally superstitious architecture, a “standing over” (Latin: super-stare) of mere superficies, the outer shells of what once had possessed inner and essential meaning,’ Snodgrass goes on to note that ‘postmodern architecture’ is an architecture
whose 'semiological meanings' are at best a congeries of mental and emotional associations, and at worst a degeneration of an art that at least satisfied genuine utilitarian needs to one that merely amuses. In all of these [modern to postmodern] the building has no references beyond itself or its own level of reality; it signifies nothing of an intellectual or truly formal order, and rightly belongs to that 'theatrocratic' art despised by Plato. 19

These provocative words bear more than a little relation to the passage from 'modern' to 'postmodern' literature as well: for whereas, say, Joyce weaves the various threads of traditional myths to his own patterns, in a 'congeries of mental and emotional associations,' by the time of the 'postmodernists,' these associations themselves are regarded with distrust – and one has either an all-consuming irony, or the 'collage technique,' 20 or any number of means to relativize history, reducing it to a mere plaything, and symbols to mere arbitrary toys, to mere amusements. 21

Says Snodgrass, relying directly upon Plato:

Symbolic art and symbolic architecture, by contrast, embody true meanings, not meanings by association or by reference to physical and mental entities, but to Intelligibles ... they serve as a 'representation of reality on a certain level of reference by a corresponding reality on another.' They satisfy both a physical and a metaphysical indigence; they act as supports for the contemplation of supra-empirical principles, leading to an intellectual identity with the Real. 22

Now the 'true meanings' to which Snodgrass refers imply a transcendent hierarchy: that is to say, symbolic art and symbolic architecture have their existence by relation to the Intelligible Reality, and thereby to the Origin of all realms. 23 'Modern' literature and architecture, conversely, have their meanings in general through mental and physical relationships alone; and 'postmodern' literature and architecture often jettisoning, or having little relation to even these, is deliberately chaotic and disorienting. When St Dionysius the Areopagite says that the image of the lion signifies a celestial aspect of the Divine, he is invoking the traditional, 'vertical' relation symbols have to their transcendent Origin, and this understanding is universal amongst traditional cultures; 24 but because the 'postmodern' has cut himself off from this understanding, he is left with disconnected phenomena, mere events. 'Postmodern literature' is simply one more manifestation
of the modern arc away from the traditional, away from an hierarchic, theophanic understanding, and toward chaos, dissolution.

Indeed, for some ‘postmodern’ writers, whose anti-metaphysical bias is notorious and self-proclaimed, even mental referentiality is decried: one is left with, in effect, a flat, two-dimensional, dead world, from which all valuation is excluded. A murder, for them, evidently has the same value or significance as an oak tree or an insect crawling on the sidewalk – no distinctions are made. Just description: endless, agonisingly detailed, boring description. Now it may be objected that this relentless ‘objectivity,’ (which is really nothing of the sort, but is in fact astonishingly exclusionary) is somehow akin to mystical objectivity, to that state in which as Blake said ‘all appears as it is, infinite.’ For in such a state, what is good, and what evil? Dualities are transcended. But the anti-metaphysical postmodern hardly attains to such a transcendence; rather, he is beneath moral understanding itself, and his exclusionary perspective may well be termed sub-human. ‘New realism’ doesn’t transcend good and evil, it does not even recognize them – a very different thing.

As one French critic has said, for such writers ‘the object is no longer a common-room of correspondences, a welter of sensations and symbols, but merely the occasion of a certain optical resistance.’ Moreover, once the object’s ‘appearance is described, it will be quite drained, consumed, used up.’ This is the language of a consumer society all right: it is the language of pure, or nearly pure, quantification. Indeed, the more critically inclined of these ‘new realists’ (one cannot but laugh at the term) are infamous for their outspoken hatred of any ‘metaphysical depths,’ let alone metaphysical heights, of which they seem incapable of even conceiving.

Ah – you might respond – but this is only a French fashion, a symptomatic fad, nothing more. Perhaps. But even so, its influence has spread – indeed, how could it not? It fits in so well with a consumer, a materialist society: the ‘artist’ provides a neat, two-dimensional ‘product’ that can be ‘consumed,’ and in such a horizontal transaction there is little question of qualitative analysis, much less of spiritual symbolism. Writer and consumer continue in their separate ‘shells,’ undisturbed by any hint of qualitative valuation. And lest you think this, the path of least resistance, is not followed by many contemporary writers, visit one of the proliferating ‘writer’s workshops’ which,
industrially, turn out 'new realists.' An easy path, perhaps – but let us not call it 'art.'

No – but such people do perform their function in a mechanized society, and in their own way, probably mean well. Much more disturbing, much more destructive, is the 'postmodern writer' out to 'liberate' mankind from the 'bonds of the past.' Czeslaw Milosz writes of Henry Miller that he seemed

like a medium in a trance. A medium shouting, shaken by a powerful current, whose violent gestures, vulgarities, and floods of invective were clearly directed against some enemy, though his yammerings made it impossible to decide who or what the enemy was.\(^{28}\)

And speaking of those who came after Miller (the 'beats,' the 'postmoderns') Milosz writes that

Whatever Miller's influence was … it was not he who produced the host of kinsmen. They were called into being by the same forces which tore the indecent words from his lips. ... Miller brings no glad tidings, no _gaia scienza_ to a humanity which he finally condemns to incipient chaos, meaninglessness and, finally, extermination.\(^{29}\)

All this, no doubt, sounds remarkably familiar: it is by no means only Miller who on the one hand celebrating sexual narcissism, of whatever stripe, on the other condemns humanity to incipient chaos, meaninglessness and extermination. Indeed, these have become cliché, so that unless taken to extremes, even bestiality and violence have no 'impact;' the reading audience is, presumably, numb.\(^{30}\)

But such concerns beg the central import of Milosz's charge – coyly put here, yet clear nevertheless: there is such a thing as demonic possession, and writers, artists may be subject to it too. Such an observation – like Solzhenitsyn's Nobel address – no doubt strikes most modern readers as hopelessly antiquated. Demons? And yet again: let us not be too hasty.

Milosz observes that:

_There was a time when only wise books were read helping us to bear our pain and misery._
_This, after all, is not quite the same as leafing through a thousand works fresh from psychiatric clinics._\(^{31}\)
In ancient times, says Milosz,

> Convulsions, foam at the mouth, the gnashing of teeth
> Were not considered signs of talent.
> The demonized had no access to print and screen
> Rarely engaging in art and literature.\(^{32}\)

But they are given such access today — no doubt about that. And lest we think that all writers are ignorant of the source of their inspiration, the force which compels them, we include the invocation which precedes one such ‘postmodern work.’ The invocation reads, in part:

> This book is dedicated to the Ancient Ones, to the Lord of Abominations, Humwawa, whose face is a mass of entrails ... [to the] Dark Angel ... with rotting genitals from which he howls through sharpened teeth over stricken cities ... to all the scribes and artists and practitioners of magic through whom the spirits have been manifested. NOTHING IS TRUE. EVERYTHING IS PERMITTED.\(^{33}\)

Ah – some will say – but these writers are merely depicting the underlying disease of our modern era. Their purpose in including such inscriptions is satiric, and hence intended to be critical, to ‘unmask’ society. Perhaps. Let us grant them the benefit of the doubt. That by no means exonerates the effect of the work – for we are among those who are unable to believe that if one invokes the Qlipoth, some manifestation of its dark power will not appear, nor that such powers are merely ‘psychological.’ And it is, one must suspect, no accident that the Qlipoth themselves recur in so many ‘postmodern’ works, either openly, or by indirect reference. For if such works be satiric, they feed, reinforce that which they satirize. To say the world is meaningless, or demonic, is in a sense critical of it, but nonetheless reinforces that which it decries.

Some, however – Malcolm Lowry, for instance – transcend this dilemma. The power and the beauty of Lowry’s *Under the Volcano* arises precisely from his awareness of the ‘music round the portals of the Qlipoth,’ which governs the modern era, and from his refusal to submit to it even while impugned, even while a symbol of it. Dante, Faust, are very much with him – Lowry was a tragic figure, damned in the classical sense, and in that redeemed. But the ‘postmodern’ has no such glory, only the flat, desolate landscape of a violent chaotic world, all white noise and relativism. Perhaps the sign of the truly damned is that he
cannot even conceive of heaven, or realize he is in hell: for is not true hell solipsism, a figure frozen in its own ice, barely able to move its wingtips?\(^{34}\)

It is not, I think, too much to say that ‘postmodern literature’ is in truth the literature of the damned, for what else are we to think of those wraithlike beings who float through these novels, devoid of self even as they are wholly trapped in self, often merely reflexes of various obsessions, generally sexual obsessions? Surely it is no coincidence that there exists such a parallel between ‘postmodern’ characters reduced to sexual obsessions, and Dante’s characters in the Inferno. Indeed, this is precisely Dante’s point – is it not? – that those who focus upon temporality are by virtue of that wrongful focus obsessed, rendered mere caricatures of the truly human, their pathos consisting in their awareness of their loss.\(^{35}\)

Says Dante: the damned have lost the gift of the Intellect, which is to say, a sense of their relation to the Divine, and of the love which appears from that knowledge (for which reason the heart is said to be the center of the being).\(^{36}\) The damned can reason, can argue, to be sure, but they have lost contact with that Divine Ray which is knowledge, and which is the Origin and Aim of the entire being.

And again, says Dante: ‘L’affetto l’intelletto lega’ – ‘passion fetters the Intellect.’\(^{37}\) This is not a localized, situational statement, but universal and what is more, would be understood, affirmed, in any traditional culture: Dante had no fear of making universal statements. Nor, for that matter, did Dante fear the recognition that acts upon earth have vast posthumous implications for the individual, that the arc each individual transcribes does not run only from birth to death. Indeed, he took such things for granted.

I mention Dante here above all by way of comparison, for he represents a point of view which, despite cultural variations, would be understood in any traditional culture, and what is more, because he has no fear of affirmation: like Solzhenitsyn, like Ruskin, he seeks to speak the truth in a beautiful way. Conversely, the ‘postmodern writer’ is chronically afraid of any affirmation whatever; he ‘erases himself’ at every turn for, since he is no longer part of a unitary culture, words can no longer be trusted – a relativism has arisen, against which he feels powerless. Even if he wishes to make an affirmation, he cannot: weakly, often the best he can manage is a limp listing of vague words –
Renewal, Value — and the listless declaration that though the meaning is
drained from these, he affirms them nonetheless. This, from the best of
the lot — others, frustrated, have become perverse, nihilist, lauding
violence, invoking demons: if we cannot have truth, let us revel in
error.

Moreover, because he has — unlike Dante — no traditional culture to
infill his words, no tradition of which his work may be a glorious
manifestation, the ‘postmodern writer’ is adrift, isolated — indeed
solipsistic.

Now these are, as I am all too well aware, generalizations against
which many readers may rebel, citing one or another example in order
to prove me wrong. But alas, in the main these generalizations are not
wrong; if anything, they are not strong enough. For indeed, the
‘postmodern writer’ is uncertain if anything at all may be communi-
cated, the natural corollary to which is the critic’s concern that there
can be no common understanding of any given work. It is this
uncertainty which has spawned enormous, grotesque commentaries
and elaborate interpretive ‘systems’ for reading literary works — as
though the critic were so unsure of his fellow readers that he must
guide them every step of the way, an attempt which results in a
curiously fascist, collectivist approach to literature and, finally, creates a
reader as monster, the ‘deconstructive’ critique consuming everything,
including ‘text’ and author alike.39

And one must concur with this sense of incommunicability in
‘postmodern literature,’ for it is only within the sphere of a traditional
culture, drawn together by a unitary symbology, and focusing upon a
religious centrum, that one can have true communication, for only in that
situation can audience and author be united in the same self-
transcendent aim. Any merely temporal goal — even that of a socialist
utopia — is by definition only ‘horizontal’ and can never end in
self-transcendence, but only in fragmentation or in fascism, both of
which imply self-dissolution.40

If one excludes the theophanic, hierarchic nature of existence, if one
excludes the vertical, one is trapped in the horizontal, in the ‘nothing-
but-ness’ of mere behaviourist determinism, and it is no wonder that,
assuming a merely physical existence, the ‘postmodern author’
doubts the possibility of communication. Why, we might well wonder,
even try to communicate if the world is a mere concatenation of atoms,
perilously strung together upon the tenuous thread of random 'evolution'?

But we need not, indeed cannot exclude the traditional emanatory understanding of the world, call it Platonic or Vedantic or Buddhist or Amerindian — for it is from this exclusion, as from Pandora's box, that the chaos and contagion and fragmentation of modernity arises. Once this exclusion is made, once the recognition that this world is a theophany, and that our purpose here is to fully realize this, to fully realize the transcendent — once this understanding is gone, the very source of cultural and religious unity is cut off, and the course toward solipsism is set.

What modern, or 'postmodern' can even believe in the existence of a self at all? Rather, like Melville's Ishmael in Moby Dick, the self in 'postmodern literature' has no permanent identity whatever: nightmare and reality are one, each voice fading into the next. One thinks of Joyce's narrative flux, of modernist 'stream of consciousness' — but in 'postmodern literature' even this mental interconnection is severed, and often the reader is subjected to a mere 'cut and paste' work, in which the author has merely slapped passages down at random in a 'collage effect.'

And even those works which are not composed in this high-handed style are often — indeed, virtually by definition — devoid of 'realistic', which is to say, human characters. Rather, the characters depicted are for the most part hardly that at all, but instead are but pawns, two-dimensional obsessions 'fixed' under a given name. What is more, in many works even this obsessional 'fixation' is discarded, so that the character wholly loses identity; the work becomes utter fluxion, and the reader is unable to differentiate anyone clearly.

Now as we noted before, this flux, this dissolution of identity is the inverse of a mystical state, of awakening; it is a giving up, a sinking into the Lower Waters of undifferentiation, of insentience. The mark of the true mystic, on the other hand, is a strength of identity, a strong personality which is transcended: we think here of St Bernard of Clairveaux, of St Francis, of Meister Eckhardt — men of action who did much, drew others to them by their virtue, and might well be reminded here of the Greek arete, of the Latin virtus, of the value, the valor of a man, of the solitude, the humility, the mystery of the human state. Then let us compare this virtus with the 'postmodern state' depicted in so many
novels: what virtue is there, is even possible, if one is denied character, if the unique mystery of the human condition is reduced to a reflex of the ‘cultural matrix’, or to a manifestation of psychological or behavioural obsessions, impulses, effects?

For all that the ‘postmodern’ writers and critics might say to the contrary, it is not language which is fascist – it is their conception of language which is fascist. By restricting language to a mere determiner, a mere manifestation of social conditioning, the transcendent is by definition excluded. Language, culture from the ‘postmodern’ perspective, rather than being recognized as a means of transcendence, of illumination, are viewed as traps, as darkness, as imprisonment. Granted that this picture of modern language, of modern society may not be wholly inaccurate, but it is an unconscionable leap to say that all language, all cultures are thus. To do so simply ignores the theophanic nature of traditional cultures and of religious language at all times and in all places – open to us if we are but willing to perceive that hand kindly bent to ease us.\footnote{Grant}

The poet, the artist in the traditional culture is not a reflex of cultural hegemony, or of whatever fancy term we might dredge up – he is the transmitter of the illuminative Word, and through his songs can the ancient path be seen, and walked, through him life is illuminated, shown to have ever more profound meanings, ramifications, so that even the simplest act, like drawing water from a well, is redolent with spiritual significance. If we, in this ‘postmodern age,’ cannot grasp the transcendent significance of the mythos, let us at least not, muddle-headedly, make mythos synonymous with ‘lie.’

And so we draw near the end. But before we conclude – near the beginning of this essay we alluded to some contemporary authors who propose, not a chaotic, dissolving, in-human, nihilist world, but rather a traditional, theophanic cosmos; offering not mere caricatures or obsessions, but rather human characters; proffering not a cynical, arrogant abuse of the reader, but a gentle, bemused vision of the mysteries, the beauty, the suffering and the delight of the human condition.

Surely one such author is Czeslaw Milosz, whose Dolina Issy – The Issa Valley – is one of the most lyrical, moving and delight-filled works one could ever read; for it presents his native Lithuania with all its ancient traditions, with all its ghosts, and demons, and angels intact, yet infused
with the pathos of a world now only remembered, the book shot through with faint echoes, glimpses of the modern world, of the ‘Land Reforms’ and other means by which the ancient ways were destroyed, yet still, triumphantly, remembering the beauty of a theophanic cosmos which shall never finally disappear, but only ceaselessly die and be reborn anew.

It is perhaps revealing – since he now resides in California – and certainly a pity, that Milosz has written no more such novels, but on the other hand, perhaps like Zamyatin’s We that one work is that by which all others in its sphere might be judged, understood. And perhaps too, like Zamyatin, Milosz, expatriated, could not, had no need to repeat such a masterwork.

Another such writer – though one of a different kind, being American – is Wendell Berry, whose novels and stories are also infilled with the love of nature and of humanity characteristic of American writers like Faulkner and Thoreau as well. Berry’s novels, poems and essays – for like Milosz he is a fine poet and essayist also – reflect a connection with, a rooting in the earth to which he was born, without which one could hardly hope to gain stature, strength, stability. But in America it is difficult, if not impossible, to maintain contact with the ancient cultures, the traditional religions; America was founded upon, in, primordiality itself, and she still awaits her true voice – for it is this voice which shall, with all the ancient voices heard anew, manifest the true postmodernism.

For even today there are those – some of whom we have mentioned, many whom we have not – who courageously stand midway between the serenity of the traditional culture on the one hand, and the nihilism of modernity on the other, all aware of the disparity, and all willing in the midst of the latter, to point toward the salvific beauty and truth of the former.

Hence we here address ourselves to, aim at the distant future which shall be identical with, and yet unique from the most distant past, with both of which we are conjoined, always, in the eternal now. For this is – I assure you – the true postmodern literature: that of the Golden Age, of the kōan, of the primal song. There is, ultimately, no other, and it is into this, as Solzhenitsyn has rightly said, that all true art opens.
Notes

3 'Postmodern literature' is often defined as that written since the Second World War, and as that which manifests the instability, the 'formlessness' of the present era; at the end of this essay, however, we present another possibility.

Cf. for example, the works of Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, Norman Mailer, and Angela Carter. In the latter's Nights at the Circus (New York: 1974), pp. 76 ff., we read of a gentleman named 'Mr. Rosencreutz' who, through some form of 'heretical possibly Manichean version of neo-Platonic Rosicrucianism' seeks to sexually assault the main character, and again, near the end of the work, we read of a Siberian Shaman whose cosmogony is described as 'a human invention' which is, 'intellectually speaking, three sheets to the wind.' (pp. 252 ff.) It may be of interest here to recall the observations of René Guénon on Shamanism in relation to the modern era in The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times (London: 1953); in any case, without delving further into the complications here involved, we can say that the prevalent attitude here is a curious mix of nineteenth century Western arrogance, and of what might be called 'neo-Shamanist surrealism,' in which while the ancient traditions are mocked, a peculiar sort of surrealistic 'magic' is endorsed.

5 II Cor. 11.14 ff. Cf. also the Surangama Sutra, in A Buddhist Bible, D. Goddard, ed. (Thetford: 1938), pp. 266 ff., in which it is said that 'in the last kalpa of this world, there will be plenty of these goblin-heretics around ... the better to carry out their deceiving tricks.'
6 II. Cor. 11.15.
7 Cf. again, Guénon, The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times, passim.
10 Yevgeny Zamyatin, We, Mirra Ginsburg, trs. (New York: 1971).
11 Foster, op. cit. 181 ff.
12 Cf. for instance R. Barthes, S/Z (New York: 1974), in which he begins by citing a 'Buddhist tale' of the world being glimpsed in a bean (to what is he disdainfully referring? The majestic Avatamaaka Sutra?) or Derrida's citation of Plato, of Hermetism.
13 This despair is eloquently expressed in Jacques La Carriere, The Gnostics (New York: 1977) a work which bears a striking resemblance to that of Emile Cioran.
14 Cf. the music of John Cage; a less amusing example might be the New York 'performance artist' who slashed himself with a razor as an exhibition, though in the latter case, it is unclear what text he cited.
15 Foster, op. cit.
16 One thinks here especially of the work of William Burroughs and Jerzy Kosinski.
17 Perhaps the foremost ironist is Donald Barthelme.
18 Cf., for instance, Vonnegut and DeLillo — especially the former, whose work, in its ironic fury, never quite gives in.
20 Once again, one thinks of Burroughs, who made a 'sensation' with his revelation of this marvellous technique.
21 Cf., for example, Thomas Pynchon's disjointed rendition of the Second World War in Gravity's Rainbow (New York: 1978), which might better have retained its original title: Mindless Pleasures.
22 Snodgrass, op. cit. p. 20.
We rely here on the Plotinian Neoplatonic understanding, but not exclusively; for one could just as well call it, with minor changes in terminology, Buddhist, Vedantic or Taoist.

Cf. Dionysius the Areopagite, Cel. Hier. (Shrine of Wisdom trs.). Haiku poetry also displays this relation to the Transcendent, but rather than being analogical, as is the understanding St Dionysius discusses, it is in Buddhist tradition, which is to say, non-dual. The Origin is wholly revealed in the instant. This is of course also true of the analogical reference — but in the haiku there is no gap between the Transcendent and the immanent.

One thinks here of course of Robbe Grillet, for he is perhaps most well known in this camp, but his followers are legion.

Exclusionary, that is to say, of all that is Real, that gives meaning. Truly, the modern is as S. H. Nasr has said, encased in a kind of shell, a Qlipoth. Cf. Knowledge and the Sacred (New York: 1981).

Cf. R. Barthe’s introduction to Robbe Grillet’s (Jealousy) and (In the Labyrinth) (New York: 1965), p. 13.


Ibid., pp. 138, 139.

Cf., for instance, the frenzied adulation bestowed upon that tawdry criminal, Genet, or upon Mailer.


Ibid., p. 10, ‘Readings.’


Cf., in this regard, Coleridge’s late poems ‘Limbo,’ and ‘Ne Plus Ultra,’ which point toward the solipsism to which modernity inevitably leads. In this connection also, see Gerald Graf, Literature Against Itself (Chicago: 1979), p. 215, to wit: ‘subjectivism and solipsism have so invaded the novel’s point of view that … (they) have been normalized as part of the very definition of fiction.’ Not, however, in our definition.

Often ‘postmodern writers’ don’t even allow their characters pathos, but leave them as inhuman, or perhaps better, subhuman.


Paradiso, XIII.20.


One thinks, here, of Barthes’ nightmarish work, S/Z.

It is interesting that Nathaniel Hawthorne, a pessimist on the order of his friend Melville, should have been drawn into the utopian pipedream of Brook Farm, only to later mercilessly satirize it in The Blithedale Romance, whereas Emerson, an incurable optimist, always stayed aloof from the Brook Farm experiment. Emerson took the middle way; Hawthorne wavered from one extreme to the other. Cf., in this regard also, Zamyatin’s We.

Cf. the work of Pynchon, Barthelme, Burroughs et al.


Cf., again, S. H. Nasr’s Knowledge and the Sacred, op. cit., for a discussion of Tradition and modernity.

Cordoba, 5th September, 1950.

Andalucia. Red earth and olive trees. Red earth combed into ribs between steel-grey, flint-like olive trees. Olive trees slipping old shadows to red earth. And above, the sun. And in the distance, a blue suggestion of mountains, Sierra Morena, Sierra Nevada. And sometimes tiny white-washed cottages in a splash of green. And sometimes a whole village – white houses and windows with grills and little balconies with hanging flowers and blue doors and everywhere children or old women sitting on door-steps. Or sometimes we pass small groups of men and women at work in the bare fields, open to the sun, digging out some root crop, and all looking like something caught up in the measures of Heracleitan fire. But mostly it is the folds of hard baked earth, and row after row of olive trees, like endless fans opening out one after another.

I travelled down through this, tunnelling into the heat, over the red earth, through the olive trees, on and on, for many hours. And as I went, and as the landscape became more absolute, more zero, only sun and red earth, so I too felt as if some chemical change was taking place within me, as if I were being broken down to some terrible simplicity. A kind of initiation, a descent to the underworld, a dipping into hot fire, for purification. The sun a high priest, the earth an altar. And because the whole atmosphere is full of these things, it came into my mind that the drama of the bull-fight is really the microcosm of some bigger drama which goes on between the sun and the earth of Andalucia, between the white light and the red blood of the earth. And in that way which happens when the nerves are excited, all the time I travelled I kept repeating a small poem of Lorca’s:

Córdoba.
Lejana y sola.
Jaca negra, luna grande,
y aceitunas en mi alforja.
Aunque sepa los caminos
Yo nunca llegaré a Córdoba.

Por el llano, por el viento,
jaca negra, luna roya.
La muerte me está mirando
desde las torres de Córdoba …

For this too fitted in, and became part of the drama, a small motif woven into the bigger symphony, until I became quite certain that death indeed was there, looking from the towers, and it was personal, I should never reach Cordoba. And when at last I saw the big sign at the entrance to the city saying Cordoba, it was a great relief. I felt I had won some battle, cheated some fate. I had reached Cordoba, and there was not death, only again white houses, and streets, bigger streets, and a policeman directing traffic in the central square, dressed beautifully in white, with a whistle, much too tame to be Lorca’s figure on the towers …

But Cordoba anyway is quite different, a new world after Toledo, sweet-smelling, light, feminine. I walked in the dusk through some of the small back-streets, looking in through open doors at the patios inside, cool with green fern or palm and small fountains playing: hints of a lovely hidden world, of that lost sensual Arabian world of the Thousand and One Nights. And in the streets young girls swept past leaving a wake of flower-scent, from the white or red carnation pinned against the ear, pinned against the black hair. And all the time the air is warm, sweet and warm, and full of these clean scents, and one looks through a window to see the shining spotless pots and pans hanging on a white wall and everywhere is the sense of lightness, of laughter, of delicate things, of the rustle of silk, fans slipping in and out in the hands of women …

Granada, 14th September.
Once again the gardens. This time at Granada, the Generalife, high up above the city, above the Alhambra, looking out across the roofs below to the open plain, which seems this morning as if cocooned in soft enfolding air – a film of silk over the earth’s body, transparent, delicate, pierced only by the shrill of cocks, the barking of dogs, and, more intimate, closer to me, the vibration of invisible bees in the flowers and the lovely splash of water from the fountains:
... hablan las aguas y lloran,
bajo las adelfas blancas,
bajo las adelfas rosas,
lloran las aguas y cantan,
por el arrayán en flor,
sobre las aguas opacas.

Again this remote tranquillity, as I sit tucked away in an obscure corner of the garden, visited only by the wind, that comes tip-toeing up, brushes my cheek with its breath, and slips away, round the corner: a most tender, gentle caress. Strange that Lorca was killed here, at Granada:

Muerto cayó Federico
- sangre en la frente y plomo en las entrañas -
... Que fué en Granada el crimen
sabed - ¡pobre Granada! - en su Granada...

Impossible, it seems, from these gardens, looking across the brown roofs, across the plains, across to the blue haze of the mountains; in this peace, with only the waters speaking, and the sound of a spade chopping the red earth.

One thing at least I now understand, the unreality of the image of romantic Spain. There is no romantic Spain. Search a little, feel a little, below the surface, and there is the reality, the struggle, the struggle to exist, to be, to achieve dignity, to remain human. That seems to me the great struggle, to achieve, and to retain, a human dignity. And that means that life can never be romantic, that it must, on the contrary, be tragic. For to achieve such human dignity one needs to be a whole man. And to be a whole man one needs to have a heart as well as a head. And whoever has a heart as well as a head knows that the heart always demands what to the head, to the practical, sceptical, common-sense part of man, is foolishness. For the heart demands things like immortality and will not be reconciled to the annihilation of what it loves. The heart wonders and venerates and sends man on strange journeys. The heart will make a man utter such perplexing words as ‘Beauty will save the world’. The heart will make a Don Quixote. Not the head. The head will only make a Sancho Panza. The head will see the heart’s mistress as an ugly cowhand and nothing more. The head has only a single vision. But the whole man, the man
who achieves human dignity, has a double vision, has heart as well as head. He is Don Quixote as well as Sancho Panza. Hence his contradictions, his tragedy. One half of the whole man never quite believes what the other half is doing. Sancho Panza is sceptical of Don Quixote. So what to one half is an act of extreme chivalry is to the other half a joke, a frightful blunder. And this is tragic, and must always be tragic for the man who remains a whole man, who does not surrender his heart's imagination to the single vision of the head. And because what is tragic is not a joke, is, on the contrary, something infinitely noble, in the end the dignity is achieved. In spite of the joke, in spite of the scepticism, in spite of Sancho Panza. Is it not strange, that Quixote should be a joke, and yet should be nothing of the sort, but should be a terrible, a tragic sufferer and, besides that, a man of profound dignity? And that seems to me a vital paradox: that the ridiculous man is the noble man; that the dignity should be achieved through the absurd, through the practical failure, through incompetence in face of the world. There is something fine in that, something which eludes and really triumphs beyond measure over the naive scientific western conceptions of man. Because to live a contradiction of this kind, to let such a paradox incarnate itself in one's actions, needs the highest kind of spiritual courage — the daring to be ridiculous in the eyes of the world, the daring to be a mockery of common-sense, of practical reason; in short, the daring to be absurd, to live an absurdity. But thus only is that full human dignity achieved.

 Isn't it something like this which is expressed in, for instance, a cathedral like that at Burgos? — this ridiculous nobility or noble ridiculousness, this dignity which is achieved in spite of itself. For in Burgos cathedral also there is the feeling that one half does not quite believe what the other half is doing. It is as if the faith were never quite released from doubt, as if the whole exploit had to be carried through in a spirit of passionate unreason, because there was always present this uncertainty: the whole thing might be an illusion and nonsense, a comic farce. And the result is really a tragic dignity, or dignified tragedy, which makes Burgos, although it is gothic and derives from French models, quite unlike Chartres. Looking at it one doesn't know whether to laugh or to weep, as one doesn't when one reads Don Quixote. Because there must be faith, the faith must be true, the windmills must be giants, if life is to go on. The truths of the
imagination fired by the heart, however ridiculous they seem and whatever contradictions are involved, must not surrender to what the head conceives as truth. As soon as man doubts his imaginative vision to such an extent that he abandons it, he stops living, as Don Quixote stopped living as soon as he became reconciled to Sancho Panza’s world, to the world of common-sense; as soon, that is, as he discarded his heart’s vision as illusion. And the man of heart and head, the whole man, both Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, knows this, knows that he may be nothing but a stage-prop in a comic opera, yet knows also that if he is only this, he is doomed to death. And this kind of awareness gives to Burgos an almost agonized desperateness, something far removed from the quiet intensity of Chartres.

And what after all is Baroque art, the art of the Counter-Reformation, in which Spain played such a great part, but the despairing cry of someone who, feeling the approach of death, feeling, that is, the roots of his faith, of his heart’s vision, wither before frozen mental winds, endeavours, vainly, to turn back from the head to the heart? — the death struggle of Don Quixote, the man of feeling and imagination, before Sancho Panza, the man of empiric common-sense and practical reason.

So it is not surprising that on the reredos of Burgos, as at Toledo, behind the High Altar, right at the top, above the saints, above the Assumption of the Virgin and the Coronation, in the Heaven of Heavens itself, is, not the Christ resurrected, not the Transfiguration, but the Christ crucified, the Christ in his death struggle. For Sancho Panza and all the other worldly wise might be right; there may be nothing more than the world of appearances, of ordinary facts, which empiric common-sense and practical reason, with their single vision, would have us believe. And it demands a divine foolishness to keep the double vision, the vision which sees the windmills as giants; the sacred vision of Don Quixote.

Yet this is not all. When we came from Sevilla to Granada we stopped at that village of Estepa — white houses lodged on the side of a hill, something like Assisi, but white and harsher, with the naked rock of a higher hill behind jutting up into the sun’s glare. And we walked towards evening up through the village to where above was a cemetery: a square encircled by walls, and cypresses, and coffins pigeon-holed in the walls. And as we wandered we went through a
porch into a little courtyard with two gaunt, rather starved-looking cypresses, and an old woman and two children sitting in the sun. One side of the court was the woman's cottage, at right angles to it the wall of a farmyard – we could hear an ass kicking the ground inside. The two other sides of the court were formed by a big, window-less building, which gave one the feeling of a dungeon. No doors – or, rather, one door, but so barred and bolted and rusted up that it looked as if it was never used. Small slits high up in the stone walls, to let in air. As we sat there sipping a glass of water the woman had brought us, thinking how here one might find rest, or come with someone one loved, the old woman went into a kind of lean-to shed built against one of these forbidding walls. She tugged a chain, hanging from the wall. Faintly, somewhere in the bowels of the building, we heard a bell ring. There was a pause; the old woman stood waiting. What for? Then there was another, longer, rattle of chains, and a wooden panel in the wall opened, revealing a hatch. The woman took from the hatch a basket and a jug. Then she spoke into the hatch. As if coming up from the bottom of a well a voice answered her, a woman's voice. Then another rattle of chains, and the hatch shut again. Silence. Who was in there? Prisoners? Madmen? I asked the woman. No, not prisoners, not madmen. Monjas. Nuns. It was a closed order of Clarissas. There were about thirty women. Shut in. Never speaking. Never seeing the outside world. In darkness or semi-darkness. Shut away, on this hill-top, in Andalucia, the gay, the sensual Andalucia, with, behind, the bare rock of the hills, breathless in the evening air, and, in front, the blue expanse of the plain, scored with rows of olive trees or sprinkled here and there with the white dots of cottages, of other villages.

And when I think of Ignatius Loyola, of St. Teresa, of St. John of the Cross, of Gongoré mad, of Manolete even, or Lorca, I realize that the Christ crucified, the Christ in his agony between life and death, death and life, is a far more complex image than that I have sought to describe. How different is this Christ, for instance, from the Christ of the gospel of St. John, or of St. Paul, who is more the Christ as the Greeks see Him, El Greco's Christ. For the Greek Christ is not so much the Christ crucified as the Christ resurrected, the transfigured man with a new light shining through his limbs: the Christ of spiritual flesh from whom the Roman Church seems always to have shrunk.
The Greek Christ is perhaps too much Adonis. In the Spanish Christ, on the other hand, there is something quite alien to the Greek Christ, something which one is tempted to call a cruelty, a self-torture perhaps, with a terrible deliberateness about it. A spirit of self-laceration, of self-castration, such as possessed the priests of Cybele and Attis in the old Roman rites. I think of some of Loyola's exercises; of St. John of the Cross' 'dark night', when the last vestiges of man's instinctive responses to life and of his conscious thought must be put to death, deliberately: of the penitentes who on certain feast-days walk in chains through the streets of Madrid; of the Clarissas at Estepa; of the bull's horn piercing thigh or stomach; of Lorca's 'apetencia de muerta y el gusto de su boca'; and I see that this agony of the Spanish Christ is also an agony of flesh that wishes to burn in laceration, until it is felt to the point of anguish, until it is felt to a point at which it can no longer be endured ... in order that the soul may be compelled to utter its cry to the Spirit. And this is part of the Crucifixion of the Spanish Christ, the Spanish man – an impassioned creature whose real consummation is achieved at the moment of utmost pain, utmost anguish: for it is at this point that the soul will utter its cry – Muero porque no muero, I die because I do not die, wrote Santa Teresa de Jesus – which, if it is a cry of anguish, is also a cry of birth, of new life, of hot searing ecstasy which pierces the heart at the limit of endurance and despair, as the bull-fighter's sword pierces the bull's heart also at this point.

Barcelona, 18th September.

How curious it is that this taste of blood and death which one is aware of almost continually in Spain should somehow preserve the nerve of life, of personal life. How curious that when this taste of blood and death is lost, as it is lost for instance in England, is lost also the sense of human personality, of man – man becomes depersonalized, an object in a world of inanimate objects, of machines and newspapers and wireless-sets and money. And it is not without significance that the Spaniard, who preserves and even nourishes this taste of blood and death, so that frequently one hears the word 'cruel' applied to him, is yet the warmest, the kindest, the most human of people. I suppose it is that here one is continually in the presence of the finalities of life, is continually aware of mortality, of the conflict of the individual with
the apparent limitations of his existence, of his own death — which he sees reflected in, for instance, the bull-fights, which bring the play of the individual with death to the foreground of the consciousness. And this consciousness of the extremes of existence — a consciousness in England smothered beneath a world of artifice — this continual awareness of the frontier between life and death, a line drawn with blood, provokes the inmost fibres of being to activity, to a determination to transcend the frontier, to go beyond death. Which is, as far as the sceptic mind is concerned, impossible. Which is, at the same time, the demand of the heart, its refusal to accept the annihilation of personal identity which death, in the sceptic's view, necessarily involves. So there is always the struggle of the heart for the impossible ... and only the struggle for the impossible can really provoke life.

And further: if you are aware of that situation, the frontier situation, the par excellence human situation; if you are aware of that struggle continually in your own life, then you are aware that it is everyone else's situation as well, everyone else's struggle as well. Whether they know it or not. And this is a tragic situation, this being caught between the iron hand of the necessary — I must die, what I love must die — and the demand of the heart for the impossible — I must defeat death, what I love shall not die: which two, the necessary and the impossible, play out their drama in the life of man. And as it is a tragic situation, and as you are aware of it in your own life, and thus aware of it in other people's lives, so the sight of each man, woman and child in that situation, not just impersonally but intimately, as you yourself are, calls out in you all your compassionate warmth. Not for humanity in general, which is a bastard, conscience-appeasing cold charity which we, having lost our sense of the person, have substituted for true charity, destroying slowly but surely human beings in the illusion that we work for 'the good of mankind'. No, not for humanity in general, but for man, for the single person, for the neighbour. And my neighbour is not everyone in general. I know no one in general, it is impossible. I can only know what is particular, the concrete person, the differentiated being, whose arm I can touch, and in whose eye I can feel sympathy or distress, or even hate. We, having grown afraid of the true neighbour, having grown afraid of giving ourselves away, or showing our feelings, or of letting it be seen that we love or hate, turn the particular neighbour into everyone in general, something which,
being an abstraction, we can deal with abstractly, without fundamentally committing ourselves. And one of the reasons for this is that we have pushed away from ourselves the consciousness of blood and of death, of man's frontier situation. We do not feel for one another as victims, men of flesh and blood caught in the same prison, the same bull-ring, hopeless and baffled before the red rag of the world, alone there with death, in the bull-ring of the heart, fighting. And suffering. Fighting for the impossible, for the endurance on the other side of death, beyond the blood, of the person—not of the ego, which is merely an undifferentiated thing I share with everyone else, my selfishness; but of the I at the heart of myself, of what I wish to become, warm, pulsing with life, delivered, no longer a victim, beyond the blood, out of the bull-ring.

And the Spaniard has preserved something of this consciousness, in his life, in his poetry, in his art. He has preserved this sense of man the victim. I think of all those Goya pictures, that huge demonic brute devouring a human being, those wild faces in ecstatic delirium before the firing-squad. I think of the Ribera Christs, of St Sebastian with an arrow through his throat. No allegories these, but terrible images of man's situation on earth.

That is why it seems just that El Greco should have painted in Spain. For El Greco and Goya are reverse sides of the picture. Or El Greco and Ribera. Goya and Ribera deal with the world of the struggle and its enormous pain. In order perhaps to heighten the individual's sense of his own mortality and hence to increase his resistance to it. But Goya and Ribera never actually show one beyond the struggle, never give the cool green place flesh. Yet this is what El Greco tries to do; he seeks to give the feel of another life, after the agony, the release from the bull-ring, the transfiguration, beyond death. For it is only in this way that the inexorable tragic circle can be broken, only in this way is the conflict of man's spirit with the annihilating forces of blood and death brought to an end. Only in this way is the impossible actually accomplished, is the necessary made to seem no more than a nightmare from which man has at last awoken.

Barcelona, 19th–20th September.

El Greco. Yes. I've been seeing his works over and over during the past month. It is difficult to speak to him. So many phrases come into
the mind. I try to find the key that will open the door, let me see El Greco against some background. Where did he come from, this man, what was his ancestry, in what tradition did he move? In the Christian tradition? Certainly in the Christian tradition, since his pictures are full of God, and His Holy Mother, and the saints and the apostles. Yet it does not seem to be to any form of western Christianity that he belongs. There is no morbid preoccupation with sin in these paintings, with the evil of the world, no puritanical hostility towards it, no blocking of the consciousness before the threat of eternal damnation. They do not preach in moral tones, imprisoning the internal life, they do not present allegories of human existence. Ascetic they may be called. Yet the feast of naked limbs in the St Maurice is hardly ascetic. The Mary at the foot of the Cross in the Prado, her ripe full breasts raising the rich green of her dress, is hardly ascetic. Or you may say that they refer to man's inner world, that they are mystical works, speaking of the transcendent Godhead that dwells in a region beyond us, where our feet cannot tread, in the dazzling obscurity of the secret silence. And that also would be true, as to say that they are ascetic works is true. Yet how then is nature — rocks, trees, flowers — given such a feeling of life, so that indeed it is like living tissue, like the flesh of a human body.

Yet this is not all, or anything like it. I remember how sitting one evening on a high rock outside Toledo and looking across the Tagus at the roofs and the towers of the city, at the violent sunset, I felt that El Greco’s painting expressed not only this sense of man and his destiny, but also some older and now all-but-lost vision of nature, of the world around us. For we live, most of us, so estranged from the outside world, in profound estrangement, that grows greater the more we know of nature in a scientific sense, the more we analyse it and dissect it. We have lost the sense of sharing with nature our own inner life. And this relationship is something quite different from the attitude to nature promoted by hiking clubs, youth hostels, nudist colonies and the like, which are merely escape-valves for the townsman but which leave him as much a townsman as ever. It is something other than that. I envy the people of those times who felt so much the oneness of life that the merest movement of a bird or an animal was charged with intense, subjective significance; that the eagle flying to the right or the lines on a cock's backbone could be felt to correspond to, to indicate,
the course of human action. And there was no deception in this, all was one, and movement in one part of the organism set up repercussions in another part of the organism. Only you had to experience your oneness, you had to belong together at some deep level, as if you possessed antennae within you that touched each point of the universe, linking you to it. And this could only have been possible if you loved deeply, inwardly, as one person with another. I mean as a man may suffer pain when his wife is in labour, although many miles away, and although quite unaware, consciously, that it is now, at this moment, that the woman he loves is giving birth.

And there came into my mind the image of the soldiers at the foot of the Cross casting lots for Christ’s garment. For we are told that this garment, the garment of life, of light, of man, was seamless, woven into one piece. And the soldiers cast lots for it, and, to continue the story, divided it up, into shreds, and each one went off with his bit. And each one in his egoism, having torn this garment from life, from man, having depersonalized it, began no doubt to examine it, and to measure it, and to analyse it, and to cut it up, and to try to fit it to his own use, according to his own standards. And hence, in a nutshell, began science; and hence, in a nutshell, began analysis and dissection. For you do not measure and analyse and dissect what you experience as a person, what you sense as a living being, an Other whom you love. It is only when you have stripped off the personality, when you have stopped loving, when you have achieved an impersonal objectivity that you can measure and analyse and dissect. And so it is that we, having stripped this garment, nature, from man, from life and light, having turned it into an object, existing outside ourselves, impersonal, turn upon it our microscopes and analyse it; and, incapable of responding to its pain, we go on exploiting it, holding it bound down in objectivity, divorced from life, subject to the blind world of chance, to the soldiers who continue to cast lots for it at the foot of the Cross.

We have to go back to the time before the soldiers began to cast lots for the seamless garment. For then nature, this garment, the outside world, was felt as an Other, was felt as a person, sharing the intimate life of man. And man felt for it as a fellow-sufferer, and perhaps he also felt, somehow obscurely, responsibility for its suffering, as if he had brought upon it disaster. Is not the earth really the home of the animals and the plants and the birds, who once lived in peace there?
Does not man belong to a higher world? And is it not because man has deserted his higher world, and ruptured it, that he has brought conflict and anguish into the lower world, and ruptured that also, and was it not with some presentiment as this that the old Greeks used to make a prayer and an offering before they ate an animal, as if to apologize, or the Mexican hunter said to the bear he killed: 'Rest, elder brother.' 'All creation sighs and throbs with pain,' St Paul wrote. And this sense of fellow-suffering, and this sense of his responsibility, called forth in man his deepest compassion, so that often he could not look upon a single creature or a single flower without his eyes filling with tears. And perhaps then he began to pray that this person, nature, whom he had so injured, might find peace from its torment, might find deliverance. And, because miracles are like this, the moment he began to feel such compassion, the moment love passed from him towards the injured person, at that moment the hard shell of his egoism began to break, the Albatross fell off, and he began to feel the springs of a new life well up within him. He became conscious of the Other in himself; he became conscious of himself, and of his responsibility to restore the integrity of human nature, which is all nature, to knit once more together the garment of his first glory.

And hence in El Greco's paintings the sense of tension, of conflict, of suffering and anguish; hence that tenderness conveyed in the least gesture of a hand; hence too the dignity of his figures, men who realize that within themselves they hold the keys of life and death, and that upon them depends the destiny not only of their own life but of the life of all creation as well. And this is not a little thing.
Reviews

Beyond Sorrow*


NIRMAL VERMA: The Crows of Deliverance. (Stories) Translated by Kuldip Singh. Readers' International, 183 pp, £6.95 UK, $10.95 USA.

The name of Rabindranath Tagore I first heard in my childhood; my mother always kept near her a copy of Gitanjali (1913) translated by the poet himself, whose imposing and beautiful figure seemed at that time the living embodiment of the India of the Imagination — as indeed he was. He looked more like a sage than a poet and was, in fact, an aristocrat and land-owner (a zamindar). He was the darling of the West and his renunciation of honours bestowed by the British Government (in 1915), after the massacre of Amritsar, four years later, was the more effective. Truth to say I found the Gitanjali over-sweet, with too many phrases like 'endless worlds', 'Infinite sky', 'vast day', inversions like 'find her not', 'know not', 'seek not' and the liberal use of the second person singular. Yet these 'song-offerings' brought India's stephanotis-breath of beauty and spacious solemnity, a universe of feeling unknown to the West. To my mother, whose feelings had been formed by Scotland's songs and ballads, Tagore's world, rooted likewise in a rich folk-culture, was less strange. Yeats, who admired and not a little envied Tagore his roots within the unity of Indian civilization and Bengali culture, wrote (in The Celtic Twilight, 1902) 'Folk art is, indeed, the oldest of the aristocracies of thought, and because it refuses what is passing and trivial, the merely clever and pretty, as certainly as the vulgar and insincere, and because it has gathered into itself the simplest and most unforgettable thoughts of the generations, it is the soil where all great art is rooted'. ('By the Roadside') In his Introduction to Gitanjali Yeats wrote of what is at the same time the essential greatness of Tagore, and his deepest understanding of the rôle of the poet:

'These lyrics — which are in the original, my Indians tell me, full of subtlety of rhythm, of untranslatable delicacies of colour, of metrical invention — display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my life long. The work of a supreme culture, they yet appear as much the growth

of the common soil as the grass and the rushes. A tradition, where poetry and religion are the same thing, has passed through the centuries, gathering from learned and unlearned metaphor and emotion, and carried back again to the multitude the thought of the scholar and of the noble. If the civilization of Bengal remains unbroken, if that common mind which — as one discovers — runs through all, is not, as with us, broken into a dozen minds that know nothing of each other, something even of what is most subtle in these verses will have come, in a few generations, to the beggar on the roads.

As one understands is the case with Tagore’s many songs.

Yeats had worked, with their mutual friend William Rothenstein, in revising (for Macmillan) Tagore’s translations into English acceptable to the English ear, and was annoyed when Tagore, not recognizing his own limitations in a language he knew well by Indian-English standards, took to publishing his own translations. Tagore continued to send Yeats his books as they appeared; and his Kabir translations Yeats certainly read with profit to his own work.

It is largely because of the inadequacy of his translations that Tagore’s great genius, recognized by Yeats and once acclaimed possibly for the wrong reasons as a Western fashion, has since been neglected. Penguin Books published William Radice’s Selection of Tagore’s poems in 1985. (We had the privilege of publishing a group of these in advance of that Collection in *Temenos* 5.) Himself an excellent poet (nurtured in those English values of the soul which were the theme of Shakespeare and other unfashionable creators of English civilization), William Radice is one of those rare translators, in the tradition of Edward Fitzgerald and Arthur Waley, who can claim to have naturalized some writer, or school of literature, into the English language. His translations of Tagore’s poems have enabled English readers to appreciate for the first time that Tagore truly is a great poet. Since Tagore’s own there have been several Indian translators, notably those of Aurobindo Bose, a friend and follower of Tagore at his famous International University of the learning of the Imagination at Santiniketan. These may be correct but are pedestrian in the extreme; and Indian English is — above all in poetry — another language. (How many Indian friends have been unable to understand that Sri Aurobindo’s long narrative poem *Savitri* is excruciating to the English reader, bearing no relation to the genius of the language it uses with such fluency.) Radice’s translations, Indian readers may complain, miss this or that nuance of the meaning of the original; but in comparison with all previous versions they have the freshness of an old master from which layers of dust and varnish have been removed by an expert hand. In this last decade of the century few writers have a mastery of the English language in all the grammatical subtlety and command of near-synonymns of a century ago. ‘Educated English’ is not a respected standard, as in France the French language is taught in the State
schools – rather the reverse, some notion that excellence is undemocratic has
gone far to destroy that language, which is surely our greatest national
inheritance. Not that William Radice’s English is either pedantic or written for
the page: on the contrary, he writes with ease and simplicity, and for the ear.
The beauty of English for the ear in the babel of demotic speech that assails us
continually from the ‘media’ has become as rare as pure water in our springs
and rivers.

The present collection of short stories is, again, a model of excellence; in
the translation itself, and the illuminating notes, containing a rich selection of
letters, and an Introduction both informative and, as a critical assessment of
Tagore, the best since Yeats's Introduction to the Gitanjali.

The stories themselves are taken from a large number written in the 1890’s
at a time when Tagore was living much of the time in the riverine country
(now Bangladesh) of North Bengal. That landscape forms as it were the tanpura
continuo which accompanies the human melodies. There both nature and
the human world spoke to his soul in the intimate way the West of Ireland
spoke to the young Yeats (The Celtic Twilight was published in 1902) or the Lake
District to Wordsworth.

William Radice perceptively compares Tagore to Wordsworth as a master
of what he describes as a ‘realism of feeling’. He is surely thinking less of The
Prelude than of the author of ‘Michael’ and the Lucy poems; and I can think of
no other English writer, unless Hardy at his best, who can be compared with
this Indian master of the soul’s whole gamut of the world of feeling, from the
purest love to the purest sorrow, and the most awesome, unendurable
regions of Hades, and neither Yeats nor Wordsworth – nor any modern
European writer I can think of – sees the scope of humanity in such
amplitude, doubtless for the reason Radice gives, that his art is rooted in a
spiritual civilization such as the modern West has not known:

In Tagore’s art – even in his most realistic, prosaic, ironic or sceptical art –
we are never far from the transcendental Spirit that Indians through the
ages have attempted to know and articulate. The sages who wrote the
Upaniṣads in the seclusion of their forest hermitages realized that there
must be a supreme cosmic force behind the samsāra of mortal existence,
the maya (illusion) of sense-perception, or the svaṛgāloka (heaven) of the
Vedic and Hindu gods; and Tagore’s spiritual endeavours were in direct
descent from theirs. He took it for granted that higher levels of human
consciousness were made of this Spirit. The aim of spiritual life was to
unite human with cosmic consciousness. As a romantic artist, Tagore
strove to do this through art rather through meditation or mysticism; but
in this he was extending the central Indian tradition, not diverging
from it.

The stories are simple, about unselfconscious people, illiterate women, the
unloved schoolboy who pined away from home, the school-friend whose grief was total when the little girl next door would no longer speak to her after a family law-suit; the child-wife whose heart was shattered when her husband confiscated the notebook in which she used to write poems and thoughts; the childhood lovers who should have married who spent a night together, long after, on a mud-bank waiting for a flood to subside, without exchanging a word. Stranger and more fearful stories of the woman returning from the cremation-ground after a supposed death; and the miser who sacrificed a child so that his spirit might guard his hoard. Modern people too, like the neglected wife who runs away and in her bitterness becomes a great actress. But the common theme of all is the immeasurable scope of the heart.

Raja Rao, India's greatest novelist in the English language, wrote (in The Serpent and the Rope) that 'India begins beyond sorrow'. Sacrifice has ever been deemed the price at which the heavenly gifts are to be bought. The American culture of the 'pursuit of happiness', all but precludes such experiences as Tagore describes in all their simplicity and dignity in these great stories; every one of which comes from that place beyond sorrow.

To Western readers Tagore's 'realism of feeling' has often seemed sentimental — that is to say feeling in excess of the real situation. Radice writes:

Tagore's art is a vulnerable art. Nearly all his writings are vulnerable to criticism, philistinism and contempt, because of his willingness to wear his heart on his sleeve, to take on themes that other writers would find grandiose, sentimental or embarrassing, and his refusal to cloak his utterances in cleverness, urbanity or double-talk. The fact that his works are so difficult to translate has made him doubly vulnerable to criticism by foreigners able to read him only in bad translations.

Seen, however, from an Indian perspective, it is rather that Western feeling-responses are inadequate; and what was true when Tagore wrote has since worsened into an insensitivity ever cruder and more callous. William Radice, who is by no means uncritical in his admiration of Tagore, nor glamourized by Indian mysticism, goes to the heart of the matter when he relates these differences to the values of two very different civilizations. Tagore himself, for all his openness to the Western world (excessive, some might say) has this to say on Europe. After writing lyrically of an evening scene by the Gorai river, he goes on to say: 'Perhaps I shall never get back such an evening again in any future life' and then continues 'It is strange that my greatest fear is of being born in Europe — because in Europe there is never a chance to bare one's soul so loftily; or if one does people are ever critical ...!' Europeans have 'a stiff, durable sort of mind, clipped and hammered into shape by strict laws.'

There is little point in arguing as to whether Tagore is greater as a lyric poet or as a writer of stories — or indeed of plays, songs, essays, besides paintings and much besides; for the greatness of genius lies in some vision that
transcends these expressions with their appropriate skills. To me these stories are a shaming reminder of how far our coarsened Western souls have fallen below the human norm of fitting sympathy with daily love, daily sorrow and grief and beauty; or the recognition of the daily cruelties of human beings to the simple and vulnerable soul, insensitized by our materialist values. It is not for us to evaluate Tagore by Western standards but rather to measure those standards against a lost, but immemorial norm. To invoke Raja Rao again, India is not a nationality (he writes) but a state of mind, discovered by whoever attains it. We have far to go!

One's Bengali friends are never satisfied that Western readers have appreciated Tagore's great art, as it has flowered from the refined culture of Bengal. It is reassuring to know that William Radice's translations have earned him literary awards both in India and in Bangladesh, from Tagore's ever-protective compatriots.

Nirmal Verma's stories are likewise about love, and they too are full of sorrow, but he speaks for the India of two generations on from Tagore's, for an India whose unity of culture is fast unravelling, and his central characters have also, in one way or another, lost their cultural identity. The author has himself been caught in that disintegration: at one time he was a Communist and lived for a number of years in Czechoslovakia, returning disillusioned to an India whose seemingly inevitable dissolution he sees with sorrow. As novelist, essayist and story teller, he is the writer who most profoundly understands the tragedy of India at the present time and its many causes. First came the introduction of an alien scale of values and laws with the British raj, to be replaced by faceless multinational imperialism. There seems no trace in his works of his former Marxist ideology – or of any ideology, unless perhaps a regret that the thought of Mahatma Gandhi has not been more influential – only a deep and sorrowing love at the de-Indianizing of India by influences both from without and from within.

Once I asked Nirmal Verma if he thought these influences could have been avoided. He replied that India might have come into the modern world on her own terms; but these are stories of unwavering truth to what has happened and is happening, not to what might have been. This process he has himself proved on his pulses. The first story is located in what I take to be Prague, where he himself had lived. It takes place in a sordid basement where transient aliens await their visas, a crude limbo where identities are eroded, where old mores give place to a loss of all norms except the crudest. Yet it is a tender story of the brief encounter between a young man fresh from home and a young prostitute. Even here love seeks to survive.

The Visitor tells of a dispossessed Indian father whose wife has settled in a provincial English town with their daughter. The wife does not want him even to visit his daughter, and he has no longer any place in what was once
THEIR SHARED LIFE. A COMMON ENOUGH SITUATION FOR FATHERS IN THIS AGE OF DIVORCE. IN GOSAMER ANOTHER BROKEN MARRIAGE AND THE STRANDS OF LIVES BEING TORN APART. MOST QUIETLY HORRIFYING OF ALL I FIND LAST SUMMER, IN WHICH A SON HOME FROM ABROAD (WHERE HE IS STUDYING) HAS SILENTLY REMOVED HIS LOVE FROM PARENTS, SIBLINGS, FRIEND AND SWEETHEART. THE AUTHOR AND THE READER KNOW THAT THESE ARE THE SEVERED ROOTS OF LIFE ITSELF, BUT THE YOUNG PRODIGAL DOES NOT KNOW IT AND CANNOT GET BACK TO EUROPE FAST ENOUGH. THE LAST STORY, DELIVERANCE, IS THE STRANGEST OF ALL – HERE THE PRODIGAL IS TRACED TO HIS RETREAT BY A BROTHER; HE HAS ADOPTED, THOUGH WITHOUT FAITH OR CONVINCION, THE ROLE OF A 'HOLY MAN' AND IS VISITED AS SUCH, THOUGH HE REJECTS AND REFUSES THE SERVICE OF DEVOTEES, KNOWING IT IS NOT HIS DUE. 'HE HAD WANTED TO BREAK WITH US, WITH ALL OF US, ONE LAST TIME. FINALLY. A CLEAN BREAK.' NIRMAL VERMA'S STORIES ARE HAUNTED BY THE GHOSTS OF MURDERED LOVES.

His commitment is, finally, to no ideology, he offers no solutions, but comments on a remark by the Soviet writer Isaak Babel, "I am practising a new literary genre, the genre of silence". But then silence itself can be dangerous to those who live on slogans. Babel perished in a labour-camp. 'He proclaims his commitment to 'the language of truth, without which all social commitments lose their value. You corrupt the language before you destroy the man; or perhaps you don't have to destroy, he exists no more when his language is dead.' This surely is how civilizations are also destroyed, so effortlessly, and from within. Not a problem of India alone, has it not already happened in our post-civilizational Disneyland? Nirmal Verma's love of that fast-unravelling India is itself perhaps a faint gleam of hope? For surely where there is love there is hope.

Kathleen Raine

VOTARY OF THE GREAT GODDESS


A study that invites us to explore the mythological structure of Shakespeare's works must surely be welcomed by those who recognize in them an articulation of the Eternal Imagination. Few studies of Shakespeare have been undertaken on so grand a scale as Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being, either in terms of its all-embracing thesis or of the closeness of its exegetical detail of individual plays. The painstaking labour that Ted Hughes has expended on this enormous, minutely argued work of itself demands respect. This is a book that requires careful assimilation and long reflection before serious judgement can be made of it.
The thesis that Hughes sets before us is that Shakespeare absorbed the archaic myths of the Great Goddess and 'secularized' and adapted them as the underlying structure of his plays. From Hamlet onwards the myth produces the tragic action, while from Cymbeline onwards it produces the redemption of tragic action. Shakespeare's two prototypes of the tragic myth are his two early long poems, Venus and Adonis and Lucrece. These two opposing myths Shakespeare combined into what Hughes calls his Tragic Equation.

Hughes summarises the tragic myth of Venus and Adonis into the following motives: The Great Goddess who manifests as the Goddess of Benign Love, Mother, or Sacred Bride, but who when her love is rejected manifests as the Goddess of the Underworld in the form of a Boar. The Boar aspect of the Goddess may also manifest as the martial 'twin' or 'brother' who is displaced in a frenzy of jealously through a 'sexual wound' which slays the god. His death is accompanied by chaos and terrible lamentation. From the blood of the wounded god spring forth 'blood flowers', often violets, through which the god is reborn and cherished by the Goddess who carries him to heaven.

The Great Goddess existed in prehuman form as the 'creative womb of inchoate waters', taking on human form only gradually, and known to Shakespeare, Hughes suggests, as 'Tiamat, the monstrous Mother of First Created Things in the Babylonian creation myth'. From then on she appears under many different names – Ishtar, Astarte, Athtar, Ereshkigal, Allatu etc., in Greece as Aphrodite and eventually as the Roman Venus. In the Christian 'myth' she is, according to Hughes, the virgin mother of Christ, Mary. Shakespeare has blended together various aspects of these mythic manifestations of the Goddess to create his Great Goddess of destruction and redemption.

The core of her tragic power over Adonis (or any of Shakespeare's tragic heroes) is her demand for absolute, unconditional love which Adonis inevitably rejects in the belief that such 'total love' is both unchaste and a privation of his own being. But, combined into the Venus/Lucrece figure, the Goddess is, unbeknown to the rejecting hero, 'the truth of the hero's own soul, the sacred element in his being'. His rejection of her love is an act of self-ignorance. The unconditional love for the Goddess is in fact the primary condition of the hero's own existence. Thus when he rejects Venus she must take on her dark aspect and slay him, or when he rapes Lucrece and so slays her, he has in fact slain his own soul. Whether it be the death of the hero or the heroine, both amount to death of the soul, a death from which the soul may be reborn only through the redeeming power of the Great Goddess herself. Yet, Hughes argues, it is only through combining the Venus and Lucrece aspects of the Goddess that she becomes, through her cruel and benign aspects, both slayer and redeemer – and so the Goddess of Complete Being.

Beneath the union of Venus and Lucrece into a single Goddess lies a deeper
story of reconciliation. According to Hughes Venus and Adonis embodies the myth of the Great Goddess who sacrifices her god, while Lucrece embodies the archaic myth of the Goddess-destroyer. In the first, through the demand of absolute love, the Adonis figure is destroyed through rejecting such love as unchaste, while in the second the Tarquin figure, through uncontrollable passion, destroys the ‘chaste’ Goddess through rape. In these two tragic sequences Hughes perceives the respective underlying myths of Catholicism and Puritanism which were at war with one another during the Reformation, although this struggle between the two opposing Christian myths was pushed underground during the reign of Elizabeth I. Catholicism and Puritanism were of course only instances of the two opposing mythic types that have been at variance with one another from the infancy of Western religion, the one representing the tragic sequence of passion overthrows reason, the other the tragic sequence of reason overthrowing passion. For Shakespeare the resolution of the conflict is achieved only through a marriage of the two mythic types, which is in fact a restoration of the original unity of the two myths into their single archetype, for the separation of the one Goddess into two, the lustful and the chaste, the ‘whore’ and the ‘virgin’, is a figure of the Fall, the original split and consequent struggle between the Adam and Eve aspects of the soul.

Venus and Adonis embodies the Catholic myth and Lucrece the Puritan. Yet Shakespeare has interpreted each poem from the point of view of the other. Adonis sees the uncontrollable Love Goddess through the eyes of the Puritan young god who is rejecting her with his scholastic distinction between ‘love’ and ‘lust’, and who sees in her what the Puritan sees in the Goddess of Love – the voluptuary demoness who will destroy him. In the second poem, which exploits the Puritan myth, he [Tarquin] represents the irresistible warrior god (secularized) through the eyes of the Goddess (secularized), and sees a martial, homicidal, lust-maddened, pitiless rapist, who will destroy her.

Having juxtaposed the two myths, Shakespeare divines that they are two images of the same spiritual act, the tragic crime of dividing the soul, though on different levels, one following from the other. For Venus and Adonis represents the tragic act on the mythic plane, while Lucrece represents the consequences of that act on the human or secular plane. Thus, Hughes argues, the two poems taken together make up the two halves of the Tragic Equation that is the paradigm or template of all his later plays.

If Shakespeare’s preoccupation with these two myths, and their reconciliation, were no more than the poet's utilization of mythic motives from the repository of Western imagination merely to sustain his own creative output, then we might be satisfied to accept them along with all the other sources we
know Shakespeare to have drawn upon. The 'researches' of Hughes would simply add to our historical knowledge of Shakespeare and leave us free to interpret his plays in whatever way we might feel inclined. But this is not the case. What Hughes is offering us is not 'literary sources' but rather a key with which to unlock the hidden spiritual meaning of Shakespeare's works, the meaning Shakespeare himself intended and which the inner circle among his contemporaries recognized and were equally concerned with. That the outer circle did not perceive the Tragic Equation but saw the plays according to their own lights is not a matter for concern, Hughes suggests, since the power of the enacted myth worked to transform the consciousness of his audiences regardless of whether they apprehended it or not, even as the religious rite transforms its participants whether they know its meaning or not. The outer meaning of the plays, even if regarded merely as entertainment, is sufficient for the uninitiated to be spiritually renewed, since in assimilating the secular appearance he imbibes the sacred substance.

Such a view of the hidden working of art, of art with an outer and an inner meaning and a power to transform consciousness, will seem strange, or even arrogant, to many modern literary critics, but to those familiar with Jung's archetypal psychology and the way myths work in the collective unconscious it will not. Nor would it to those esoteric philosophers of the Renaissance such as John Dee and Giordano Bruno who, though with a very different language, mapped out the topology of the universal mind and the mnemic potency of images. Sacred art has always been understood to have a transformative function, and the Poet has traditionally been regarded as both founder and preserver of civilization, hence there is nothing strange in Hughes's thesis here. In line with this tradition Hughes sees Shakespeare as a shamanic healer:

Throughout history, as countless precedents show, wherever a people, or a culture, or social group, is threatened either with extinction or ultimate persecution and assimilation by the enemy, the great shaman tends to appear. The lesser shamans heal and solve problems with transcendental help. The great shaman, typically, gathers up the whole tradition of the despairing group, especially the very earliest mythic/religious traditions, with all the circumstances of their present sufferings, into a messianic, healing, redemptive vision on the spiritual plane. These figures are not always warriors of the Christ type.

They may come as artists. Hughes sees Shakespeare as an instance of the great shaman artist, as were Homer, Dante, Milton, Blake, Yeats and Eliot, some of whom were also prophets like Shakespeare. To regard Shakespeare as a shaman may evoke strange images for many, yet every religious tradition has always had its shamanic aspect, though it may go under quite other names. The Christian sacraments are mostly shamanic. Sidney, in his Defence of Poesy
(which is virtually the ‘manifesto’ of English Renaissance poetry), laid it down that the poet is the founder of civilization. What is indeed new and strange is that so many modern poets see their task as other and less than this.

It will serve little purpose, nor do justice to Hughes’s detailed expositions, to summarize here the Tragic Equation as it appears in individual plays. For this the book must be consulted. I believe the thesis of Hughes stands up to examination. It confirms, though perhaps from an unexpected angle, that Shakespeare’s plays are informed by and express a single sacred idea, and that that single idea is indeed the source of their transformative power. Where one feels discomfort with the Equation, and here I think many readers will feel the same, in its reduction to a particular primitive expression of the myth of the Great Goddess — primitive in time, that is. Here I wonder if Hughes has confused historical precedent with psychic origins. Hughes might easily have traced the myth to other sources less remote. For example, Marsilio Ficino in the Platonic Academy in Florence had already, in his quest to reconcile Platonism with Christianity, developed a full theology of Venus in which the two aspects of the Goddess, the creative and the mystical, are combined. Venus has two faces, one turned to God eternally drawn by Love to her origin, the other away from God radiating Love downwards, as the generative power of creation, bringing all into being. In his Commentary on the Symposium Ficino explains:

The first Venus, who is in the Angelic Mind, is born of Heaven: she is said to have no mother, because mother signifies matter to the natural philosophers, and the Angelic Mind has no trace of materiality. The second Venus, who is in the Soul of the World, is called the daughter of Jupiter and Dione. What is meant by Jupiter is the power in the World Soul that moves the visible heavens, and generates all lower forms; and because this is infused into matter, and appears to unite with it, the second Venus is said to have a mother. To sum up, there are two aspects of Venus: the intelligence in the Angelic Mind, and the generative power of the World Soul. They are both accompanied by love, the first is compelled to contemplate the beauty of God, and the second, to re-create this beauty in material forms; the one, having embraced the divine splendour, sheds it on the other, who imparts scintillations of its glory to the Body of the World.

Our mind corresponds to the first Venus; and because of the divine provenance of beauty, the mind is moved to a reverential love when the beauty of a human body is presented to the eyes; while the power of generation in us, which is the second Venus, is stimulated to create a similar form. Love acts in both — in the one, as desire to contemplate, and in the other to propagate the beautiful. In reality, each love is that of the divine image, and each is pure. (Translation, S. R. Jayne, University of Missouri Studies, vol. XIX, No. 1, 1944.)
Ficino goes on to remark that love is corrupted when generative love blots out the contemplative, or when the body is considered superior to the soul. Love thus separated from its heavenly aspect is no longer worthy of the name Venus but is to be called Cupid. This detailed philosophy of beauty and love must have been familiar to Shakespeare, as it certainly was to Spenser and Sidney, if not directly then at least through Castiglione's The Book of the Courtier. The two aspects of Venus surely correspond with Hughes's Goddess in her seductive and chaste forms, and Ficino had already searched the problem of the separation of the two Venus's and their proper reconciliation. And by reconciling Platonic love with Christian love he had reconciled the creationist theology with the emanationist theology, which are more nearly at the root of what Hughes understands as the Catholic and Puritan conflict. There cannot be two 'Christian' myths, although the one can certainly be divided – but that is the loss of the myth, not two myths.

Again, the distinction Hughes makes between love and lust may also be more immediately illuminated by Ficino's description of the separation of the two aspects of Venus, the contemplative and the generative. The generative impulse in human nature is not confined to reproduction, it is the power through which man may 'regenerate' himself, and is expressed in Shakespeare's plays in the form of regenerative mercy. But also, as Nicholas Cusanus explained, it is the imaginative power of the mind to discern, through intellectual re-creation, the true nature of the world which lies outside man's own cosmos of mind in a manner parallel to its disjunction from God. Through crafts and artistic creation man is brought to contemplation of God. This idea, Cassirer argues (The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy), is fundamental to the Renaissance conception of art as a mode of knowledge, and it brings together in mutual co-operation the generative and contemplative aspects of Venus.

Implicit in Ficino's philosophy of love is that, ultimately, God is to be known within man and not through the external knowledge of things. This conception of knowledge is fundamental to Bruno too, whom Hughes cites as a source of Shakespeare's reflections. Summarising Bruno's epistemology J. C. Nelson writes:

Knowledge is not the assimilation of doctrine, but intuition, fantasy, rapture. And he who intuits God in the universe is beyond pain and death, fearless of whatever eventuality, conscious of his own divinity. The same God who dwells within man's soul animates everything in the entire universe; hence human consciousness need but call upon its own resources to discover the divine truth latent in the universe, which reflects God not in the way of medieval trinitarian symbolism, but by way of natural inhering causality. Man belongs to the cosmos; his spirit is united with the absolute. (Renaissance Theory of Love, New York, 1958.)
The ‘intuition, fantasy, rapture’ Bruno contrasts with the mere ‘assimilation of doctrine’ combines interior knowledge (intuition) with knowledge through re-creation (fantasy) and love (rapture). These three elements are each to be found in Shakespeare’s love comedies – as the demand for self-knowledge, the lover’s ‘sonneteering’, and final union.

Since all these materials lay close to hand for Shakespeare to gather into his plays, the question must be raised as to why he gathered from remoter sources, if indeed he did. Or are we rather to wonder why Hughes seeks to explain Shakespeare’s myth from sources so remote? One senses in reading his book that he is himself drawn to these earlier articulations of the myths of the Great Goddess, and because they strike a note for him, attracted as he is to their more wild and ferocious expression, he reads them forward into Shakespeare. The same Great Goddess undoubtably appears at crucial moments in our civilization, but on each occasion she dresses, as it were, in the attire of the time, as indeed she did for Dante. In the Renaissance she appeared attired in grace and beauty, as the fount of beauty that shines in all things, as the creative reconciler of intellect and sense, of heart and reason, and, above all, of Christianity with Platonism. She was the mother of the eternal wisdom or the perennial philosophy that renews and sustains civilization. And Shakespeare was surely her greatest English votary, giving full expression in his works to the sophia perennis as it was understood by the elect of his time, not to an independent personal vision of his own. Shakespeare’s plays are the flowering and culmination of a community of artists, scholars and philosophers, of a culture which for a brief moment was of one mind and one vision.

Had Hughes gone on to relate the mythic paradigm he has found in Shakespeare’s works more closely to those forms in which it was given expression by Shakespeare’s contemporaries, his thesis would have gained considerably in force. As it stands it is likely to win few adherents who are not in some measure already attuned to Shakespeare’s theology of love. There remains the question, granting that Shakespeare has indeed structured his plays upon the mythic pattern Hughes suggests, of how each particular play has a content and a meaning of its own and how the myth serves him in drawing forth those different meanings. How does the myth function as a ‘mirror held up to nature’ in which the whole spiritual drama of creation, of the fall and ascent of the soul, may be seen? And how does the myth, given ‘local habitation and a name’, transform the audience?

The answer to these questions lies in the nature of drama itself. Shakespeare’s plays are ‘ritual dramas’, controlled re-enactments of mythological and metaphysical ideas designed to maintain or re-establish a communities connection with the mythic plane. This connection with the mythic plane is vital for the communities’ psychic health. ‘It acts as a natural form of deep therapy, where the mythic plane holds the keys to health, vitality, meaningfulness
and psychic freedom on the outer plane.' In this lies the true function of the artist: to externalize the events of the mythic plane so that they may be shared by the community and enable it to maintain harmony between its inner and outer life. When that harmony is broken, as when the outer life completely overshadows the inner life, then a community falls prey to psychic and spiritual sickness, it fragments and loses its meaning. Art is then needed for the community to recover its soul and participate once again in its spiritual life. This, ultimately, is the 'meaning' of art, and meaning on this level lies beyond ordinary exegesis and critical analysis. Meaning is transformation through participation. This, Hughes argues, is the traditional understanding of drama. That it is Shakespeare's own understanding of drama is suggested by Hippolyta in the final act of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*:

But all the story of the night told over,  
And all their minds transfigur'd so together,  
More witnesseth than fancy's images,  
And grows to something of great constancy,  
But howsoever strange and admirable.

If I have a complaint against Hughes's work, it is his recurrent use of anatomical and brash machine-age similes, neither of which help clarify his meaning. They often confuse it. Nevertheless, his study is undoubtedly one of those rare contributions to the study of Shakespeare that throw real light on the plays, as well as upon the tradition of sacred art and its function in civilizing, healing and transforming the human soul.

Joseph Milne

Hamlet's Search for his Brothers


The title of Murray Cox's recent anthology of writings on the performance of tragedy in a secure psychiatric hospital, *Shakespeare Comes to Broadmoor* seems at first glance about as likely an event as Burnham Woods coming to Dunsinane. Yet, as the subtitle shows – 'The Actors are Come Hither' – that is exactly what happened. The book tells the story, through the combined efforts of clinicians, patients, actors and directors, of how members of the Royal Shakespeare Company performed first *Hamlet*, in 1989, then *Romeo and Juliet*, 1990, and, finally, *King Lear*, 1991, inside the walls of Broadmoor.

To understand how innovative this move was, it is necessary to know a little about the context. Broadmoor is much more than an ordinary psychiatric hospital. Its patients have not only been diagnosed as mentally ill, but they
have also committed such serious crimes as to be regarded as criminals of
dangerous propensities. The institution was opened in 1863 because, as its
present director, Harvey Gordon, says, by the mid 1850's it had become clear
that 'a large national institution was required to relieve the prisons of their
mentally ill offenders who could not easily be accommodated in county
asylums by reason of public safety.'

Before 1989, no attempt had ever been made to introduce the performing
of plays by Shakespeare, let alone tragedies, into this secure hospital for those
diagnosed 'criminally insane'. Drama was limited to the annual performance
of a traditional three-act farce by the patients' dramatic society. Social activities
revolved around bingo, cricket, football and dances.

As Ian Bayne, Head of the Creative Department, writes, 'Never, in its 125
years had this hospital seen anything like this before.' There are obvious
logistic reasons why — security, expense, lack of theatrical facilities, institutional
inertia, to name a few. One of the largest factors, however, was fear. If the
amount of pre-performance anxiety expressed in this book by the actors who
participated in these events is any indication, then one must conclude that a
minor miracle had to take place before Shakespeare’s tragedies could be
performed in the intimate, improvised setting of Broadmoor’s Central Hall.

This miracle is necessarily due to the archetypal power of Shakespeare
himself to stir the depths of the compassionate imagination of all those who
immerse themselves in his work and to complexify understanding of what it
means to be human — and not in the naive, idealized, shadowless way of
twentieth century humanistic psychologies. Shakespeare’s tragedies portray
some of the darkest, cruellest, most heartless and vicious sides of humanity
that can be found in any literature. Yet, if that were all, he would never have
achieved the extraordinary capacity for what his devotee, John Keats, called
'soulmaking' (from Keats’s 1819 letter to his brother — ‘Call the world if you
Please “The vale of Soul-making” Then you will find out the use of the world’).
No, there is an alchemical magic in Shakespeare that, once felt, never ceases to
open new depths of soulmaking.

However, Shakespeare at Broadmoor would never have happened had not
two very exceptional people met and acted on their great trust in the
soulmaking potential of Shakespearean theatre. The first of these two men is
Murray Cox, Consultant Psychotherapist at Broadmoor since 1970 and
Honorary Research Fellow, The Shakespeare Institute, the University of
Birmingham. Murray’s life-long passion for the poetry of Shakespeare and his
belief in the power of Shakespeare’s ‘mutative metaphor’ is well-known
among his colleagues and by all those who have read his brilliant studies of
the power of poetry in therapeutic contexts.

The second individual whose presence was necessary for the miracle at
Broadmoor is that greatly gifted Shakespearean actor, Mark Rylance. It was
Rylance, who, on his very first meeting with Cox at a Shakespeare conference
in Stratford, suggested that the RSC could bring Hamlet to Broadmoor. Rob Ferris's interview with Rylance, who played Hamlet on that historical occasion in 1989, contains, for me, by far the most profound and psychological thinking in the book. Rylance's startling honesty and his deeply intelligent reading of Hamlet will be familiar to all who were fortunate enough to see him in this role during the RSC's run of the play.

I was astonished at the psychological sensibility evident in the following quote from the interview (the interviewer has been trying to get Rylance to speak of his interest in bringing Hamlet to Broadmoor):

... I remember now feeling that Denmark is 'a prison' and feeling that there was something of Hamlet in me that wanted to go there. There was something— you know, if you do something eight times a week you take on the character's objectives and their desires and passions. They do infiltrate your own life a bit. And at the time I think it was largely unconscious, but there was in Hamlet a feeling that there are brothers of mine there, of wanting actually to go somewhere where there is chaos, utter chaos internally, and so I think in a sense he wanted to go and see if he had brothers there.

I find this a most extraordinary statement. How wonderful that an actor can trust the promptings of the imaginal person he has come to know through his acting! Without this trust in the imaginal, Rylance could never have made the step of suggesting that the cast take Hamlet to Broadmoor. And there is no doubt that the effect of this action has been vitally regenerative, not only for the patients who came to the performance, but for the staff of the hospital, including the nurses and the clinicians, and the actors themselves. Nearly one hundred of Broadmoor's 500 patients attended the first performance, and many have given witness to its effect in anonymous comments published in this book.

In particular, the impact on 'incorrigible' patients was pronounced. As Rob Ferris says, 'As a clinician, the principal problem for many of these patients seems to be that they can't or won't face up to themselves and take responsibility for what they have done ... We attempt to help them to do it but generally that task in a place like Broadmoor is a difficult one ... In contrast, the play, through the telling of that story seemed to have a remarkable power to get people to look at those things.' Later, he added, 'Often, the conventional means of going and talking rationally with them about what they have done, may go on for years without much certain benefit. Yet in a single afternoon I can feel the power of that performance to reach them, and their capacity to respond.'

Significantly, Mark Rylance's views on the therapeutic power of Shakespearean drama were, for me, the most original in the book. Speaking of playing Hamlet's madness, Rylance says, 'I thought it must be odd for them if
someone can transform themselves, someone who is not mad, to a level where they look completely mad — well, then, what are the limits of what human beings can do? Can they transform? Any play if it is done well, and particularly a Shakespeare play, breaks down our conceptions of the limitations of human beings. You can change. You can be something different.' Again, Rylance speaks of hoping to give the patients, through the performance of Hamlet, 'a reference point that is not personal but imaginary'. As a clinical psychologist, I would say that this reference point, not being personal, is archetypal, and thereby it bestows a certain dignity on the criminal which allows him to begin considering that he still has a place in human society and a particular kind of responsibility to that society.

In his concluding remarks on forensic psychiatry and psychotherapy, Cox refers to Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark’s idea of invisible loyalties which may beset the patient through ‘transgenerational existential obligations’. I think that an equally valid imagination of ‘invisible loyalties’ would be to conceive of them as existential obligations to the mythical dominants of our lives. After all, the great tragedians of the Greeks, like Euripides, always portrayed the victims of tragedy as hubristically ignoring the ‘existential obligations’ of one or another of the Gods. When it comes to murder, the great tragedy is when an individual literally kills another person instead of metaphorically murdering his own tendency to literalism. This is my only critique of the book — that it does not sufficiently examine the possibility that pathology is inherently mythologized, just as all mythology is pathologized. And thus, psychopathology can only find a truly poetic basis in mythology.

But, in the words of one Broadmoor Clinician:

> Who does understand madness? We are the people who are supposed to be at the forefront of understanding it, and we know how much we don’t know. In a sense Shakespeare understands it as well, if not better, than we do.

Noel Cobb

A Great Traditional Teacher


The reprinting of The Way and the Mountain thirty-one years after its first appearance is itself testimony to the enduring value of this penetrating book by the author of the classical Peaks and Lamas. Marco Pallis, one of the important writers and followers of the traditional perspective, composed this book, which is comprised of a number of essays, over three decades after writing his early masterly study of Tibetan Buddhism which presented this
tradition for the first time in a serious manner to the Western world. These
intermittent decades were marked by the author’s profound concern for the
spiritual life and spirituality itself which was being eroded away to an ever
greater degree, particularly in the West, for the presentation of traditional
doctrines especially as they concern creating a better and deeper understand-
ing between religions and for elucidating some of the more difficult aspects of
the Tibetan tradition. The present work reflects all of these concerns in a
number of profound and at the same time clearly written essays.
Pallis was not only a metaphysician and expositor and practitioner of
Tibetan Buddhism, but also an expert musician and an avid mountain
climber. And it is with a seminal essay entitled ‘The Way and the Mountain’,
which has given its title to the book, that he begins this work, crossing many
different traditional worlds to bring out the symbolic significance of moun-
tain climbing as it relates to ascent upon that path whose goal is the peak
which touches the Void. He then turns to a discussion of the active life and
what it means to follow such a life in a traditional society where work is
related to one’s dharma and can become a means of salvation.
In the third chapter entitled ‘On Crossing Religious Frontiers’, Pallis gives
one of the most readable and appealing accounts of the traditional doctrines
of the ‘transcendent unity of religions’ about which F. Schuon has written so
many illuminating works. This chapter reveals directly the debt of Pallis to
Schuon as well as to Guénon and Coomaraswamy with all three of whom he
had a close bond of respect and friendship. This chapter also reveals Pallis’s
intimate and direct knowledge of several religions with whose followers he
held long spiritual and doctrinal discourses over the years. And it is with this
experience and the necessity of providing spiritual counsel for many who
came to him for help in mind that he composed the next chapter entitled ‘On
Soliciting and Imparting Spiritual Counsel’. This is a chapter which should be
of great aid for anyone seeking serious spiritual guidance in an age character-
ized by not only the eclipse of spirituality but also its perversion.
The rest of the book is devoted to specifically Buddhist themes, comprising
chapters with such titles as ‘The Place of Compassion in Tibetan Spirituality’,
‘Sikkim Buddhism, Today and Tomorrow’, ‘The Dalai Lama’, ‘The Tibetan
Tradition: Its Presiding Idea’ and the afterword ‘The Everlasting Message’. All
of these subjects are treated in great depth and on the basis of both existential
experience and metaphysical insight in addition to scholarly and historical
knowledge.
The only chapter in the second part of the book not directly concerned
with Buddhism is ‘Do Clothes Make the Man?’ which is one of the author’s
finest and most pertinent essays in an age given on the one hand to the
worship of the body and on the other its defilement through styles of
clothing which bring out the animality of human beings while hiding the
theomorphic nature of the human body. Pallis emphasizes the significance of
the art of the dress and makes clear the impact that clothing has upon the
human soul when he writes, 'Of the many things a man puts to use in the
pursuit of his earthly vocation there are none, perhaps, which are so
intimately bound up with his whole personality as the clothes he wears' (p.
144). The author then goes on to show how the various styles of clothing
worn in the modern world reflect the anti-traditional view that modern man
has of himself and why when still traditional societies tried to modernize they
first began to adopt the Western dress.

The style of Pallis throughout these essays is gentle but his exposition of
traditional truths firm and unwavering. The book is full of wisdom and also
compassion for those in search of wisdom. It is gratifying to see it back in
print in a handsomely produced paperback edition which is the same as the
original save for the illustrations many of which have been changed. This is
especially unfortunate as far as the chapter 'On Crossing Religious Frontiers' is
concerned, a chapter for which Pallis had chosen carefully photos of some of
the greatest spiritual figures of this century from diverse traditions, making his
choice after much deliberation and consultation in which we were also
intimately involved. All of those particular illustrations have been deleted in
the new edition. The new illustrations are, however, in the spirit of the book
and present some of the finest examples of Buddhist art of Tibet and the Far
East. Lovers of traditional wisdom and those especially attracted to the
Buddhist tradition must be thankful to the publishers for making this work of
the late Marco Pallis, that wise and gentle expositor of traditional teachings,
available once again.

S. H. Nasr

From Renaissance Florence

The Letters of Marsilio Ficino, volumes 1–4, translated by members of the


Good texts were scarce on the shelves of red brick universities in the Fifties.
For example, if students wished to understand the platonism of the Renais-
sance they had to gather smatterings of knowledge from various sources.
However, prejudice ruled against authors such as Ficino and one did not get
very far. John Addington Symonds's translation of Michelangelo's sonnets
could be found but the teaching that lay behind the verses was obscure,
dubious.

Then matters changed from the Sixties onwards and Platonism and the
Hermetic Wisdom began to take on a more definite profile. New publications
were, unlike the present, generally affordable and students built up libraries of their own.

A curious body of souls, some caught in the psychic worlds, others tending towards more traditional values, emerged like a remnant, translating, commenting and teaching the existence of another way, a way which contrasted with the prevailing follies engendered by materialism. Temenos has drawn together its own family of souls, at first publishing, now also teaching. Those of us involved cannot claim anything of our own or presume to teach anything new, for that is not the way of wisdom, we may only restate through the limitations of ourselves, that which has always been known. In this task the writings of Marsilio Ficino, the leader of the Florentine Academy, are vital documents, demanding study. Their influence has endured far beyond the brief life of the academy at Careggi outside Florence. However, there can be no uncritical, star-glazed acceptance of everything that Ficino wrote or the entourage he was caught up in, for Ficino has to be carefully balanced with Savonarola, whose preaching and writings are often found to be far from the negative role assigned to him today.

Various American scholars have over recent years been translating, commenting and editing Ficino's basic writings. In particular the pioneering and essential work of Michael Allen should be noted; but these are in general expensive books and hard to come by. Therefore, the four volumes so far issued by Shepheard-Walwyn should be of particular significance to the discerning reading public of these isles. They are beautifully produced books, scrupulously translated and edited, books that are a pleasure (unlike many books produced today) to hold and to read.

We are told by the media that the art of letter-writing is dead; that it has been substituted by the telephone, by chat and faxing factual information. The world caught between profit and loss boasts that it has no longer the time to write letters. It is said that people are afraid to commit their hand to the pen due to graphologists analysing their deficiencies, but more often than not they have nothing of substance to communicate by the written word and to chat aimlessly on the telephone is the easier alternative. Consider that pile of mail falling through the letterbox day by day, all at the expense of the rain forests, most of it finds its way immediately to the waste bin. How rarely does a letter of worth come into our hands.

It is salutary to read through Ficino's letters, for here is courtesy, respect, restraint, thought, structure, an invitation to communicate with the heart as well as the head. Here are recorded values that our foolish world cries out for, if only it would pause and reflect for a while. It is possible to waste an hour or more on the media to no gain whatsoever, but two minutes given to a short letter written by Ficino will supply the mind and the soul with a fragrance for the rest of the day. Take, for example Letter 48 from Volume II. It offers advice to all caught in the veils of ephemera as valid as the day it was written:
Since almost every moment we are deceived and go astray, there is no better way to reach stillness or mistakes than to think few and excellent thoughts, to speak fewer and carefully chosen words, and to undertake even fewer actions, and only those which are possible and honourable.

Ah! to block out the endless traffic without, to consider the true meanings of words, to replace the many by the few, to begin to hear the still small voice within.

The first four volumes offer many brief, to the point letters, desirous to communicate advice, insight and consolation. They stand to teach us that the briefest note to a friend may contain understanding and wisdom; and that to attain such knowledge it is needful to create time and space within our consciousness.

Scattered among the brief letters to friends and colleagues are what may be described as ‘epistles’. These are concerned with the platonic teaching and are gems of succinct writing and are of far greater value to the perceptive reader than a contemporary academic analysis.

Volume I is the most useful to the student of neo-Platonism; it contains a fine collection of pedagogic 'epistles'. Clearly, Ficino’s intention when he made his collection of the letters which he wished to preserve, was to set out the essential principles in his first two books through which the rest of the collected letters should be approached. Unfortunately, Book 2 in Ficino’s order has not been translated, thus Volume II represents Book 3. Book 2 is the volume concerned with Ficino’s theological and metaphysical thought, and so the reader is robbed of basic insight into the philosopher’s thought. Even though the remaining published volumes follow chronologically Volume I and deal with crises, such as the Pazzi Conspiracy (which sought to overthrow his patrons, the Medici), something vital is missing, that is, the grounding of Ficino’s message stated in its theological roots.

In order to focus Ficino’s contribution, it is essential to set him besides the other influential Florentine soul of his generation - Gerolamo Savonarola - the friar who turned many followers, including Ficino himself, from certain aspects of the gnosis he had taught.

Savonarola, whose aquiline profile is known to us by Fra Bartolomeo’s sombre portrait, is often portrayed as an iconoclast. In fact, he was a democrat standing opposed to the hegemony of the Medici. He also preached against the corruption of the Papacy. Within twenty-five years of the friar’s ordeal, Luther was preaching and Europe’s bitter division between protestant and catholic begun. Savonarola also preached apocalyptic sermons and encouraged bonfires of vanities, but to portray him as a crank is to distort the truth. In the terms of Tradition alone, Savonarola had far deeper insight than did Ficino. It was he who recognised the ‘signs’ and saw that the West was losing its roots in the didache, that is, the essential teaching to have come down from
the Apostles. He saw that the so-called ‘renaissance’ was pushing aside that carefully evolved framework of traditional iconography for the cult of individualism. For example, he explained that artists no longer painted icons but merely an extension of themselves (Savonarola’s friary of San Marco during the previous generation had been the centre of Fra Angelico’s art), often projecting and portraying as ‘religious art’ their own disturbed problems. Such teaching cut hard into the young, newly converted Michelangelo; it was to remain with him throughout the remaining years of his life and no doubt lies behind the last, great penitentiary poems he was to write in old age. He preached against the confusion of imagery which had broken out during his times. This he saw had weakened and had even undervalued the spiritual in ecclesiastical art. He also preached against a facile synthesis of knowledge which easily gravitated to a convenient, lowest common denominator. For example, the Theotokos for the Christian may never be replaced by Venus, God the Father by Jupiter, the Son by Apollo, or the Holy Spirit by Mercury. For Savonarola Christ had not destroyed the old but had fulfilled it through the revelation of grace.

The tension between Ficino’s Platonism and Savonarola’s emphasis of faith runs as a lietmotiv through the poems of Michelangelo. It is good for the English reader to have at last a complete translation. Indeed, Michelangelo draws on much of the imagery he gleaned from Ficino’s Platonism, however his pursuit of the ideal must also be tempered by his committed study of Dante. It is said that he kept beside his bed the Divine Comedy and the Bible. Michelangelo’s work is a fine example of how the imagery of the platonic myths was revived under Ficino’s influence. The myths were given a new emphasis and found their way into the visual vocabulary of the Cinquecento; we only have to think of the mythological paintings of Bellini, Giorgione or Titian to grasp their importance for the development of Italian cultural life. Fra Francesco Colonna’s Hypnerotomachia Poliphili stands as a fine example of how teaching from Dante, Ficino and alchemy combined to form a tale concerned essentially with initiation. It was Dante and his imagery, drawn from both the Classical and the Christian worlds which enabled Michelangelo to find balance after the traumatic collapse of the Medici and the ordeal of Savonarola.

Prof. Saslow’s book is welcome but its weakness lies in an over emphasis of Michelangelo’s supposed homosexuality at the expense of knowledge and insight into the faith and philosophy which sustained his life. In this sense it is a modern book, placing psychology before a meaningful and spiritual understanding of the soul. It is an error of judgement to read back into history the mœurs of the present. It distorts and all too often makes an illusion in our own image of the past.

John S. Allitt
An Indian View


This book is a remedial analysis of the contemporary intellectual and cultural imbalance in the world, an imbalance that leads to individual malaise and worldwide destructiveness. Dr Malik sees humanity as cut off from its ontological root, its own basis in what he calls 'beingness', by the dominance and reification of a scientific world view which is 'only a sketch map to one aspect of the cosmos, not the whole of it'. Science has become widely accepted as 'the only possibility of our perception and construction of reality'. Dr Malik is particularly aware of the effect of the consequent 'epistemological imperialism' on the culture of India, which has its own ancient scientific tradition, though it is non-western in nature. He therefore seeks a way to bring wholeness back to the human mind, while avoiding a simple rejection of Western scientism and collapse into the perils of the anti-rational.

As an anthropologist Dr Malik has a training that is in many ways similar to that of a material scientist, though anthropologists as a whole tend to be more aware than scientists of the influence of cultural paradigms on epistemological frameworks. Against the backdrop of evolutionary theory, and a universe of randomness and probability, Dr Malik explores the limitations to human choice and the concomitant necessity to exercise it in our contemporary predicament. He gives a stark analysis of the broadly Cartesian episteme underlying conventional science, which leaves man struggling for survival and mastery in a basically mechanistic, materialist and purposeless universe. He then picks up Sheldrake's idea of the morphogenetic field and morphic resonance across space and time, linking this with Lyall Watson's observation of the ability of animals of the same species to learn from one another without physical contact, and to Bohm's idea of an implicate or 'enfolded' order. While these ideas are speculative, Dr Malik points out that the mechanistic paradigm assumed by most modern scientists is equally so.

One thing that is called into question by these new ideas is the concept of time as a linear sequence accompanied by a linear series of cause and effect. This notion still dominates, though it has been abandoned in specialist fields such as quantum physics. Dr Malik sets it over against cyclical time as one alternative conceptualization, and highlights the need for awareness of cultural conditioning, if the mind is to be freed for creative learning, rather than the aggregating of information within an unchanging frame of reference.

Seeing the universe as a quantum construct, even on the macro level, Dr Malik argues from notions of evolution, brain functioning, and personality development, towards the sense of human identity as rooted not in externals,
the role-playing within a cultural matrix, but in undifferentiated consciousness (the idea is similar to Kant’s ‘transcendental ego’, except that it is a transcendental non-ego, what Stace referred to as ‘pure consciousness’, or consciousness devoid of empirical content). This line of argument is complemented by an analysis of everyday experience of the mind. The ‘I’ is perceived as a thought stream, a function of the cycle of remembered impression, stimulus, action and the consequent reinforcement of mental impressions (the argument thus far is reminiscent of Hume’s analysis of the falseness of the notion of ‘self’). The ‘I’ thought stream is identified with a psycho-somatic organism, and played out on the ground of eternal silence, pure consciousness at rest in itself.

Dr Malik argues that the body is an integral part of the material cosmos, from which it arises, and that the material cosmos is integral to pure consciousness, which is a necessary precondition for body awareness and the ‘I’ to emerge. The universe thus becomes an expression of ‘Universal Consciousness’ and humanity, growing out of this whole, has the wholeness of ‘Universal Consciousness’ within itself. If the world of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ is relinquished, consciousness becomes a focus of the Self rather than focused on the persona or personality, the role-playing mask. The confrontational dualisms of western thought, including domination versus subordination, give way to the values of balance, harmony, proportion and co-operation. Unless this transformation is effected in human minds, we are faced, in Dr Malik’s view, with the horror of global catastrophe.

The concluding chapter points to the ‘space between’ thoughts as an everyday indication of the nature of pure consciousness (compare Heidegger’s assertion that to understand thinking you have to know the source of thought, a source which is not thinking). Dr Malik also gathers some references to silent or still mind in western mystics, Vedanta, and Zen and Taoist masters, and sees this experience, rather than conceptual ‘chatter’, as central to the world’s major religious traditions.

Dr Malik’s book moves skilfully from Western to Eastern thinking. From an initial basis where the mind might seem a byproduct of evolution and brain functioning, the reader glides into a position where the material universe and the brain are expressions of ‘Universal Consciousness’. Nonetheless the book does attempt reconciliation rather than simple rejection of current Western ways of thinking.

The analysis of the empirical experience of the mind is cleverly executed, and the concluding ideas do appear in a context where a Western reader should find them comprehensible. Nevertheless, as Dr Malik himself emphasizes, ideas are one thing, experience is another, and a change in both is required for our survival. In a number of passages he seems rather to imply that a change in thinking would automatically create room for the realization of what is. It is true that, for instance, in the Zen tradition a brief injunction of
the master could, according to traditional accounts, produce enlightenment, or that in Vedanta the ‘That thou art’ of the guru can tip the disciple into a realization of enlightenment, but it is also true that the disciple had usually spent many years ripening in the immediate presence of his master before the apposite moment arrived. He had also pursued meditation and other practices conducive to growth in consciousness. Ease in the attainment of ultimate reality is a consummation devoutly to be wished, but in terms of the probabilities of this random universe those of us who identify with the chatter of the chattering mind are more likely to find ourselves in for a hard slog and unremitting effort in the attainment of effortlessness. However, this is a slight cavil, which does not detract from the value and impressive range of Dr Malik’s analysis.

Peter Malekin

To Live for the Blaze of Metaphor that Unites Incongruities


The surrealists were anticipated by almost half a century in the figure of Isidore Ducasse, a young man from Montevideo, who upon his arrival in France, decided to write under the nom de plume of le Comte de Lautréamont. He died young, at the age of 24, but his œuvre, ‘Poesies and Les Chants de Maldoror’ (1869–70), was described by André Breton as ‘the very manifesto of convulsive poetry’. It placed him on a par with Baudelaire and Rimbaud – thus forming the notorious triumvirate hailed as the ‘unholy trinity of genius’ by the astonished later generation of writers.

Much since has been discussed and written about the extraordinary and the violent in ‘Les Chants de Maldoror’. Celebrated as the first ‘stream of consciousness’ novel, the book, nevertheless stayed ‘underground’ because censors and wary publishers delayed its release to the general public; its author too remained hidden behind the enigmatic action of destroying every document relating to his existence just before he died (during the Siege of Paris), in 1870. Gaston Bachelard, in his book on Lautréamont, wrote that ‘We know nothing about the inner life of Isidore Ducasse, who remains thoroughly concealed behind his pen name of Lautréamont’. Jeremy Reed, with true poetic impudence, sets out to contradict this.

I want to raise three points that make the reading of Isidore a thrilling experience: one is the language, the second is the construction, and the third the impressive psychological invention of not only the protagonist but also of his entourage – an evocation of great finesse conjured from a few meagre biographical details and resulting in a fully fleshed out ‘history’ of the poet’s life.
In fact Reed follows so closely in the footsteps of his hero that he becomes Isidore, convincingly depicting a suffocating colonial background, an ocean-dominated adolescence, explosions on the inner plane and outrage at the patriarchal sterility on the outer. Isidore then transmutes into the creator of Maldoror: he is the Comte de Lautréamont, all black velvet, white linen and a bow of soft red silk, obsessively playing the piano in his Parisian quarters, late at night, fastening his gaze on his creation, Maldoror, while Reed, in the Paris of the Imagination, exchanges glances in a mirror, with Isidore.

Being-Watched is a notion of hauntedness that Reed explores further by creating 'The Eye', an unnamed character employed as a detective by young Isidore’s father. He follows the boy to France and reports as one of the last people to have seen Lautréamont-alias-Isidore, in the streets of Paris, arm in arm with his double. The ultimate doubling-up of this figure of the poet may be the poet to whom we owe this book, green eyes, slightly stooped gait, in identical clothes. 'Imaginative involvement does this – it demands that the author follows his own downward slide rather than steps aside to direct his work independent of his being.'

Already in the days of Montevideo the ripples of mysterious observation go well beyond the official spy until they reach a lonely figure on the beach, Isidore’s alter ego: the provocative sailor/harlequin who, during the effervescence of the town’s carnival, confronts the young man with the reality of an as yet unexplored sexuality and uncertain identity.

There is also a watchman placed even closer to the adolescent in the person of his private tutor, Monsieur Flammarion. This ambivalent mentor inveigles himself into becoming a duplicitous intermediary between father and son. Innuendoes of interests other than those of facilitating the approved literature to his pupil are only hinted at.

With impeccable Lautréamontian verve, Reed demonstrates already in the first pages what he later pronounces: 'I raise a whiphand to metaphor: I possess nothing but contempt for cliche.' (p. 136). Here is a sample that illustrates Reed’s deep insight into the world of the gifted child:

Monsieur Flammarion lapsed into a partial silence; he was seeking my tacit approval by allowing his words to weigh in my mind. They went the way you throw stones in the shallows and watch them plummet in delayed spirals to the sandy bottom. I could pick them out by their mineral patterns – a blue, green, an ox-blood stone embedded in its own shadow...

I looked out of the window and felt the blue air beating its cool volutes of flame against my chest. What I saw with unmitigated clarity was not the whitewashed villas holding to the arc of the coast but the opening out of a timeless dimension, a cone of light through which I saw the gathering of peoples, the survivors milling together in a lunar landscape, the sky
livid with warheads, a black rainbow arching over all. This visionary landscape had excluded the immediate one. I was realizing the transforming power of the imagination and how reality was an inexhaustible lake inside me, a water rising on me. If I were to live, I had to learn to defend that province, to sit and meditate on black lakes like a swan quiet in the smoky reprieve of twilight. I was made suddenly aware that the secret was within me. The red jaguar running across a royal-blue beach under a zebra-striped sky existed because I had conceived it. (p. 50)

Besides the gloom of an imperious father and his untrustworthy double, there is the shadow of the dead mother tailing Isidore. We know from 'the ruff of the surf' and 'the wave unrolling a white hem of lace on the sand' or 'the sea dragging her ballgown' that watery metaphor mirrors feminine presence (precisely that into which young Isidore escapes when 'the fathers' coerce him) — yet the lunar pole of his mother is tragically obfuscated. Her life has ended in a watery death, even before the narration begins. With great subtlety Reed evokes a picture of a woman, in her sensitivity and gentleness, overpowered by the crudeness of her husband, the unreflective masculine, a 'taurine masculinity' debauching into a sybarite, a dark solar force, who may even have caused her death.

She is remembered as the source of an ineffectual love, a clinging to romantic values that could neither save her marriage, nor herself or her son, who turns to the opposite of romanticism, decrying it as impotent and adopting a self-styled, ravenous, shamanic, werewolf-like existence, though in bearing and in dress an aristocrat, with a self-bestowed title to spell out the true rank of the poet.

What startles on reading this novel is that Jeremy Reed's language rivals that of the author of Maldoror, it embraces Lautréamont's iconoclasm and heaven-storming ardour. But Reed's is also lyrical: I was particularly sensitive to the crescendos of silence (in Isidore's encounters with either his father or his tutor) in metaphors borrowed from his beloved ocean (an ambiguous fascination Reed clearly shares with Lautréamont). Observe how many situations in Isidore's boyhood gain urgency through the imagination of water. Water lends a desolate pathos to his loveless existence. Reed exemplifies Bachelard's 'Water is the matter of despair', describing with unfailing power the isolation of the precocious child amidst mediocre adults by allowing the swell of aquatic metaphor whenever the boy is transfixed by the authoritarian gracelessness of his two fathers, his own and his conspicuously appointed one (Monsieur Flammarion). Later, we still recognize the adolescent's predilection for the sea in Lautréamont, during his last nights in Paris, listening to the roar of black surf in his veins.

But, by way of relief, Reed also enjoys evoking the magic of the other elements: one of the most moving stories is a parable that takes its poignancy
from the action of the wind; the grip of fever and the fire of early sexual appetite make the boy surrender to the advances of an anima, the maid (and soul) of the house, Alma, who sometimes appears in the clothes and perfume of his mother; the sensuality of earth floats on the air awash with potent scent. Wafts of something tepid and fragrant hit the nostrils, or blood is carried on the wind, spraying the uninvited witness to animal death in the wings of the slaughter-house; rare aromas fill old rooms heavy with Empire furniture that knows it will outlive those who glance at it. Ultimately, it is, in Reed's story, the smell of death in his Paris room that determines Lautréamont's decision to fall over his papers and destroy everything. Reed again and again proves to be an accomplished phenomenologist and a master of conveying the poetry of the senses.

The other marvel is the construction of this imaginal biography. Isidore opens with a posthumous interview with Lautréamont in the reflecting sands of the desert. This fata morgana sets the tone, for it and everything that follows is a mirage of the creative mind — everything is, of course, imagined (vulgo: fictitious), and only a poet can anoint fiction with such a dazzle of congruity, can intone in another poet's voice with such a subtle ring of authenticity. Reed's evocation of Isidore Ducasse's life is a recit or — had it been written in the Persia of Avicenna — a 'visionary recital', allowing us insight into a poet's fervent plea for the articulation of individuality, in art and in life, while, by the same token, oracularly revealing a terrible collective compulsion in the century ahead, a century that will go to any length in its will to power, leading to unheard of extremes of intolerance and violence.

An impressive description of the solitary existence of a poet whose inner revolution cannot be paralleled by the outer riots on the streets of Paris closes the book. With 'Death on the inside' that requires no journey to reach him, the poet's intense dialogue is with his shadow, with the youth Isidore Ducasse whom the Comte de Lautréamont had killed some time ago and who now demands recompense for never having lived. The ending is a triumph of poetic invention.

A minor point is that there could have been more links made between the vehemence of the Lautréamontian imagination and the creation of Maldoror. I was missing some elucidation on the connection between human will and animal ferocity, the mystery of metamorphosis which occasioned Maldoror's joy and his pain on returning to human form. Lautréamont's style of bestiary observation, the minute details of animal attack, their devouring and their mating rendered in stark nouns, not in 'as-if' likenesses expressed in adjectives, has often been considered dangerous, unnerving and repulsive by readers. Reed tantalizes by suggesting that there is more to explore in the Lautréamontian cosmos: 'Who is opening the door of my funeral chamber? I had said no one was to enter. Whoever you are, get out;' (p. 124)

But then — Reed does something infinitely more delicate and sensitive than
a literary critic’s quoting or eliciting from texts: he recreates the atmosphere in which the protagonist breathes, the light, the shadows, the temperature, the delirium of intoxication with the imagination. Jeremy Reed has been blessed with a precious poetic sensibility which renders the ‘outer’ scholarship of the academic superfluous.

The biography of a poet is written on the inside. My days correspond to those of my fiction, and there is little overlap left in which to pursue the autonomous drift chronologized by literary historians. I keep the duality secret; in that way no one can slip between it and me. (p. 126)

When the poet says ‘I live for the blaze of metaphor that unites incongruities’ we understand that Reed has reached the edge from which Lautréamont must have spoken. When ‘scarlet passion-flowers and orange begonias create a sun-storm in the garden’, incongruities are the spice of life.

Eva Loewe

Looking at the Self


It was Coleridge who best summed up the challenge of autobiography, when he claimed to have a method whereby even ‘the dullest author’ could write ‘an interesting book’. Nothing could be simpler: merely ‘Let him relate the events of his own Life with honesty, not disguising the feelings that accompanied them.’

An obvious truth, but also a teasing paradox; for what ‘dull’ author could have the courage to do such a thing? Anyone who can face the events of his own life without falsification or disguise is already beyond dullness – is, indeed, on the path of the artist or the sage.

Hence the rarity of good autobiographical writing, and the importance of these two books, which are in many ways complementary and record with exceptional honesty the spiritual quests of two sensitive and courageous people in a dark time.

Most readers of Temenos will need no introduction to Kathleen Raine’s autobiographies. Many, indeed, may recall experiences similar to this reviewer’s, of finding a copy of the newly-published The Land Unknown on a friend’s shelf and settling down on the spot (not even troubling to find a chair) to spend most of the night devouring it at a single sitting, so urgent was the need for the intellectual nourishment of a second volume once one had read the first.
Grevel Lindop

Autobiographies collects into one volume Farewell Happy Fields (1973), The Land Unknown (1975) and The Lion's Mouth (1977), adding a new and illuminating preface by the author, written in 1990. Those who already have them will cherish the original hardbacks, with their elegant dustjackets of symbolic gold, silver and bronze, but for others this is the chance to acquire the whole work in one solid, well-printed volume and to read it as a continuous sequence; better still, an opportunity to introduce others to a book that is likely to be pondered and re-read many times.

The early chapters are memorable for their crystalline re-creation of childhood years in the Northumbrian village of Bavington – 'a place of perfect happiness, filled with the bright sun of Easter, pure living light and warmth.' This is a traditional country childhood, lived in the last generation before the radio and the motorcar arrived to dissolve the human and environmental patterns that for so long had sustained a sometimes hard but generally fruitful and truthful way of life.

The Bavington years become a standard by which author and reader can assess other phases of life, for most of Dr Raine's childhood, we soon learn, was spent in suburban Essex, and the dismal spread of the housing estates, obliterating favourite trees, turning the open fields into the anxiously regimented gardens of the socially-ambitious, become the inevitable outer signs of a deadening modern culture in which true feeling goes unacknowledged, tradition is discarded in the name of social progress and education concerns itself solely with the cleverness of the head.

The narrator experiences this process with particular acuteness through the natures of her parents: her mother bearing a mind stored with traditional song and story, still living in memories of the country beyond the Scottish borders; her father a conscientious schoolmaster, determined to help others, committed from the best of motives to socialism, science and the common good. Inevitably, her father's well-argued views, with all the twentieth century on their side, determine the course of events, and we watch Kathleen, a brilliant science undergraduate at a Cambridge where science and poetry alike are severed from spiritual values, run into perplexity and emotional chaos.

One perceives the resonance of the second part's title, The Land Unknown: like Blake's Thel, the protagonist is drawn into dark realms of spiritual blindness where passions become destructive and the voice of the true self goes unheard. The wanderer is almost completely lost, but a glimpse of love and an interlude of wartime tranquillity in the remote valley of Martindale - a haven not unlike the long-lost Bavington - allow a first radiant flowering of creativity.

Almost at once the darkness returns, but as we follow the narrator's path through the chaos of wartime London, then into the complexities of a profound but intensely painful relationship with the naturalist and author Gavin Maxwell (a part of the book which communicates a sense of purifying
pain to the reader, and must have cost a great deal to write) we feel that there is a struggle towards the light. The protagonist is coming to know herself, to reunite at whatever cost the separated parts of the self. The great scholarly enterprise which led to *Blake and Tradition* begins, and the work ends on a note of sad serenity: there is loss, but also acceptance.

Beautifully written, engrossing as a story, full of generous insight, this is one of the important works of the century: as Eliot said of Yeats's *Autobiographies*, it tells 'of just those things which are important to poetry'; accordingly, it will speak to the imagination of every reader.

It is good in this new edition to have a preface hinting at the riches which have rewarded the author's quest. 'As for myself,' Dr Raine writes, 'I am no longer much concerned with her.' The writing of the *Autobiographies* proved to be a way of letting go. Involvement in the toils of personal life has been replaced (though Dr Raine modestly does not say so) by poetry, scholarship, the ceaseless giving of inspiration and encouragement to countless other writers and artists, and an increasing effect on the direction of contemporary culture.

Dr Raine attributes some part of the perplexities through which she has lived to the moment of history where she found herself: 'I lived, as it were, upon the watershed between the Christian era and what is now called the Age of Aquarius.' Western Christianity had already lost much of its vital force; yet Eastern religions, and the various systems of 'esoteric' traditional wisdom, were far less accessible than they have become in the past twenty years. Has there ever been a more difficult time for the spiritual seeker?

David Gascoyne's *Collected Journals 1936–42* testify also to the peculiarly distressing inner ordeal through which the first half of this century has drawn so many gifted people. Where Dr Raine's book gives us the shape of a life viewed in retrospect, David Gascoyne's gives us the day-to-day struggle for psychological survival and development, a struggle conducted almost completely unaided and often in dire poverty.

The Journals accompany Gascoyne from the day after he joined the Communist Party at the age of twenty, through a visit to Spain during the Civil War, a series of friendships and love-affairs, and laborious and unsuccessful attempts to write novels and a long poem, to the early years of the Second World War and his realization that the nature of his quest has from the start been a spiritual one, a pursuit not merely of Jungian integration but of enlightenment.

For much of the time, Gascoyne is outwardly 'doing' very little; and indeed, in this lies the extraordinary courage one perceives in the work, for he persistently refuses to evade what he believes to be his primary task:

the unblindfolded contemplation of existence, of one's own existence and that of the universe in general ... It can lead only to disgust, horror
and despair ... [yet] I have gone to these extremes; I have looked at
myself, and seen the void; I have lived in despair for more than a year,
and I intend to persevere in it. I would not commit suicide even if I had
sufficient courage (which I have not); because I believe that one can get
beyond.

If this sounds depressing, the reader should be reassured that the Journals are
full of acute observation, wry humour, passages of vivid prose and material of
great historical interest (for – like Kathleen Raine – Gascoyne seems to
encounter most of the leading artists and writers of his day and have
penetrating comments to offer on all of them).

Yet the value of the journals remains their record of an acutely sensitive
poetic intelligence vibrating to the tremors of a world sliding into war and
cultural collapse. David Gascoyne’s 1989 ‘Afterword’, besides dealing with
some biographical matters not mentioned in the Journals, tells us how nearly
this precious record came to nothing: all three of the diary-notebooks were
lost, in different ways and apparently irrevocably, only to return, in reverse
order, just when it became most desirable that they should be published and
shared with others. They are here collected in one volume, with the author’s
later reflections, for the first time. Together with David Gascoyne’s wartime
poems – the most austerely honest and classically perfect of the time – they
form precisely that major body of creative work which the author modestly
refuses to believe he has achieved.

Skoob Books are to be congratulated on their publication of these impor-
tant works. Both offer courage and food for the true imagination, and if
English poetry should live and even flourish again beyond our time, it will be
in great part owing to the dedicated courage of these two poets, who (in
Blake’s words) ‘kept the divine vision in time of trouble’.

Grevel Lindop

The Art of Enchantment

JOHN MICHELL & CHRISTINE RHONE: Twelve-Tribe Nations and the Science of

It is an esoteric truth that innate patterns occur within the microcosm,
mirroring the macrocosmic order. This book is a study of one such pattern,
that of the twelvefold division occurring within tribal peoples and national
boundaries. Twelvefold groupings such as the zodiac, the tribes of Israel, the
apportioning of Athens, the followers of Odysseus, Arthur and Charlemagne
are considered here, as are numerous twelvefold pantheons. Like the
ninth-century chronicler, Nennius, the authors have ‘made a heap of all they
could find’: and it is indeed an impressive collection of evidence.
From the universal observance of the sun's year circuit as a circle divisible by twelve, many countries derive their own code of sacred order. The twelvefold divisions of countries are traced from Iceland to Africa, from Asia to Ireland, showing that, anciently, twelve kingdoms or tribal units constellated around a nationally venerated sacred centre. One of our own national models can be observed in the ancient divisions of Ireland, where the four provinces of Ulster, Connacht, Munster and Leinster, each with a subdivision of three, clustered about the sacred province of Midhe (modern Meath) where the sacred kingship of Tara was established.

The authors describe a golden age scenario which still haunts the imagination:

The traditional history of 12-tribe states is that in the beginning the gods themselves ruled on earth. They apportioned the world between themselves into 12 allotments ... the wandering tribes passed through all twelve signs of the zodiac in the course of their annual circuit of their sacred centre. The gods moved among them, instructing them by oracles. This ensured a balanced pattern of living, requiring no science, religion nor legislation. However,

The departure of the gods and the beginning of settlement and agriculture are coeval events. As a substitute for their direct guidance, the gods confide to the keeping of the wisest men a code of law which, if instituted and upheld, will reproduce virtually the same conditions as when the gods ruled directly.

There follows the regulation of laws governing music, customs, and festivals which devolve upon both home and state. This set of laws constitutes the enchantment.

What is enchantment? Like 'imagination' and other terms, it has lost its currency and slid into dissuetude. It is perhaps associated in most minds with the tinselly phenomena which conjurors are supposed to invoke, or with the evil designs of malign faeries. To enchant is literally 'to en-chant', 'to infuse with song'. The tradition of the primal note by which creation comes into being is well-attested in many spiritualities. The first utterance of the gods gives forth vibrations and harmonies whose interweaving causes variety within creation. These vibratory rates are distinguished by colour, number and qualitative functions which influence the whole of our life. Music is the first ordering of chaos. When the music of enchantment ceases to sound, chaos returns.

There is a strong tradition that both druids and Christian religious maintained 'perpetual choirs of song' which perpetuated Britain's sacred order. Its receipt and remembrance of the god-given statutes is somewhat questionable in our own age, for the enchantment has certainly fled to the most secret fastnesses of the imaginal treasury.
A sub-theme of the book is an exposition of the alignment of Greek and English sacred centres where we see a fusion of the authors’ own study of the St Michael Line, a ley-line which intersects many English sites dedicated to St Michael, with the work of Jean and Lucien Richer who between them investigated a similar alignment of Apollonian sites which intersect Delphi and other Greek centres. This study also considers the nature of terrestrial zodiacs, a phenomenon that becomes more easily explicable in the context of this book.

The book ends with the application of the twelvefold order upon the Pentecostal revelation to all the nations which is manifest in The Acts of the Apostles and whose mystical resonances assume a more clarion voice in The Book of Revelations, where the New Jerusalem is proclaimed. Alas, despite the massive concentration of mystical alignments and geometric perfections about the sacred centre of terrestrial Jerusalem, the celestial city remains a prophetic promise, hovering with the wings of the Shekinah about its war-torn walls and yearning to gather it under her wings.

There is always the danger in books of this kind, where the spectre of Blake’s Newton lurks ready to geometrize the Divine and confound the first principle of ensouled love, that the reader may become obsessed solely by commensuration for its own sake. This book is mostly free of such traps, although the authors fail to offer practical solutions as a conclusion to their findings. Yet this is a skilful book that shakes ideas out of the reader’s head in surprising and startling ways, persuading her to seek those conclusions in an immediately relevant sense. How can any land be re-enchanted once it has lost its grasp of the golden links of tradition? This book does not attempt an answer to this important question, beyond reminding us of the ancient templates which underlie our increasingly chaotic civilization. There are people of goodwill aplenty, but can they sing the old song which restores the enchantment?

We stand like Abraham interceding with God on the matter of the imminent destruction of Sodom. But are there even ten just men who merit the revocation of the edict of destruction? This idea of a quorum of just ones has remained enshrined within Qabalistic tradition: it is believed that the action of only ten such luminaries will maintain creation. Myths are gathering on the horizon of the millennium when the gods, according to many spiritual traditions, make ready their return. What account will we give of our stewardship then? Have we realized the wisdom of the ancient earth’s enchantment too late to catch the divine note? Or can we still, in the deep recesses of the heart, catch echoes of the celestial harmony and dance hand in hand in the chorus of the gods?

Caitlin Matthews
Three Ways of Looking

GEORGE BARKER: Street Ballads. Faber & Faber, £4.99.

CHRISTOPHER LOGUE: Kings. Faber & Faber, £4.99.


These are George Barker’s posthumously published poems, and, as such, fill one with some melancholy. This poet of legendary fame, the unnamed protagonist of Elizabeth Smart’s By Grand Central Station I sat down and Wept, leaves his last songs and a whole poetic style goes with him.

In Ben Bulben Revisited he speaks to Yeats, and, in particular, the Yeats of The Second Coming.

But now the beast is real
Slouching from Nazareth
With death under its elbow
And filthy on its breath
The ordure of Armageddon.

The poem extends Wordsworth’s ‘Whither is fled the visionary gleam / Where is it now the glory and the dream?’ in mourning the loss of ‘the dream with which we began’:

That vision of walking through
The common or garden wood
Until we came home to
The knowledge of evil and good
Wherein, like a holy house
We sat down at last
And found ourselves free to choose
An agape, or feast
With the black mystical beast.

This is a dark vision:

Time
And the triumphant fiend
Have blown the house down
Bombed and blasted and blown
The homely house down
And now nothing remains
For all our many pains
Save us and a few ruins,
Neither evil nor good,
Only wrack and the wreckage,
And where old Adam stood
Only the beast and its carnage.
Barker faces, without evasion, what Nadia Mandelstam called ‘the century of Cain’ and the rising tide of evil which overwhelmingly removes personal choice.

This is probably the most important of these poems, carrying Yeats’s vision towards the Apocalypse, clearly and terrifyingly visualized, by such great film directors as Tarkovsky, Werner Herzog or Kurosawa.

There is, however, a beautiful Critical Sonnet for William Shakespeare based on a quotation from Hamlet: ‘Anon, as patient as the female dove, / When that her golden couplets are disclosed, / His silence will sit drooping’.

What most I wished to hear from you I heard; 
It was the silence in between the speaking, 
the golden silences that charged the word 
with correspondences I had been seeking 
in all vocables. But only your 
silences like the patient female dove 
disclosed the secret I had been looking for: 
language is the golden cage of our love.

To John Heath-Stubbs is a tribute to the distinguished blind poet for whom meanings are altered:

All stood in darkness, but it was the dark 
that favours lovers, and 
your shadows were birds and lovers 
whom we cannot see or hear or touch: 
they and you stand in the dark 
like statues of the Gorgon’s heart 
and for them and you the blind 
nightingales in the gale of night 
perform their harmonies.

The poems, although written at the end of Barker’s life, are filled with sharp insights, energy, and a kind of poetry we no longer find in a time which increasingly relies on surfaces.

In his introduction to Kings, Christopher Logue explains ‘I have concocted a story line based on the main incidents of the Iliad’s first two books, added a scene or two of my own, and then, knowing no Greek but having got from translations made in the accepted sense of the word the gist of what this or that character said, attempted to make their voices come alive, and to keep the action on the move.’

Logue’s poem opens dramatically: the humiliated Achilles ‘whose beauty’s silent power stops your heart’ runs ‘with what seems to break the speed of light’ towards the sea.

For Catullus who wrote his own ‘version’ in the Argonautic Expedition Achilles was the child
THREE WAYS OF LOOKING

of happy wedding-fates
the Parcae sang
to Peleus
in old days.
For once
when piety had place on earth
the gods themselves
stood at our chaste doors
or drank the bride-ales
of mortal heroes.

(tr. Peter Whigham)

Here, however, Achilles, stung by Agamemnon’s overbearing behaviour, has come to beg his mother Thetis to side with Troy against the Greeks. Logue has an imaginative passage:

Sometimes
Before the gods appear
Something is marked:
A noise. A note, perhaps. Perhaps
A change of temperature. Or else, as now
The scent of oceanic lavender
That even as it drew his mind
Drew from the seal-coloured sea onto the beach,
A mist that moved like weed, then stood, then turned
Into his mother, Thetis.

Achilles describes Agamemnon’s abduction of the daughter of the priest of Cape Tollomon; now he proposes to take Achilles’ battle prize, Briseis, instead. He tells of his impulse to kill the king, checked only by the arrival of Athena. To the Greeks Achilles had cried:

Do not tell Agamemnon honour is
No mortal thing, but ever in creation.
Vital, free, like speed, like light,
Like silence, like the gods!
The movement of the stars! Beyond the stars!
Dividing man from beast, hero from host,
That proves best, best, that only death can reach,
Yet cannot die, because it will be said, be sung,
Now, and in time to be, for evermore.

Appalled that Achilles is to withdraw from the battle the Greeks whisper: ‘Without him we are lost’, and Catullus:

No warrior dare confront Achilles
Where the Trojan rivers stream with
Trojan blood, and the Greeks raze stone
From stone of Troy, ten years consumed.

(tr. Peter Whigham)

Eventually Thetis answers:

'I love you, child. But we are caught.
You will die soon. And sadly. And alone,
While I shall live forever with my tears.
Keep your hate warm. God will agree,' his mother said.

Logue has an imaginative version of the sacrificial ceremony when an ox is
killed and hymns are chanted to appease Apollo. After the ceremony when
'we sang. And made the day divine', the Greeks return to Troy.

The moon lit this side and the sun lit that
Side of the blade we lifted to salute
The evening star
Safe in Apollo's custody we slept
Sailed on Aurora's breath
Over the shaggy waves:
Regained our war:
Heard that the plague had gone: were glad:
And said goodnight to one another
In sight of Troy's dark wall.

The priest's daughter has been returned and the plague of mice visited on the
Greeks has been lifted.

The scene with Hector and Andromache, so moving in the Iliad, is much
condensed and amounts to the suggestion from Andromache that Helen
should be sent back and peace restored. Hector, however, 'knows another
way'. Hector's little boy, crying at the sight of his father's helmet, is omitted
and with it the full poignancy of his future fate and that of his mother.

The savagery of the sporadic fighting is also hardly mentioned, reminiscent
as it is with its arrows and chariots of the great battles in the Mahabharata.

A dream, sent by Zeus (with Thetis in mind) urges Agamemnon to throw all
his men into a final battle. Kings ends with a scene which might have come
from a Hollywood spectacular as the Greeks 'all those who answered
Agamemnon's call / Moved out, moved on, and fell in love with war again.'

'King!' 'King!' the deafening battle cry.

Kings is not the Iliad, but a lively dramatic poem with some of the epic's
characters and meanings. It moves at a tremendous pace over the surface of
the story with felicitous moments.

Peter Redgrove's Under the Reservoir introduces a very different way of
looking. The poems are concerned with the interior world out of which, at
his best, Redgrove creates strange and utterly new events.
   In The Small Earthquake he almost domesticates a time when the ground
   Bumps slowly, like a ferry as it is steered
   Into the quay, bumps on its rope fenders:
   And afterwards you cannot believe
   The ground shifted

and

   I recollect a certain
   Tang passed through the air, like
   A champagne elixir passing from the abyss, creating
   A freshet that soaked the grass, a web-crack,
   And a jammed window in Zoe's room upstairs.

A Secret Examination is 'echt' Redgrove. Everybody
   In this well-lighted room
   Of sharp pencils and dazzling pages
   And cleanest clothes is exhaling subtexts,
   Is inhaling information secretly colluding:
Since the answers, given this curious empathy, are identical, the examiner,
   baffled, 'is suspicious of the brightest boy / And the dullest, equally.'
   There is, therefore, for Redgrove, an underground current connecting all
   the minds in the room, from which only the examiner is excluded.
   Pineal House is a delightful and comparatively straightforward Christmas
   poem, almost childlike in its feeling for the tree:
   I fill the watering-can
   And wet it with the rose; at once
   A full rich smell of pine fills the house,
   Like summer mountains taking residence;
   Pine-smelling breezes fill the room from that tree.
When Alice stretches up to put 'a white fairy patron princess' on the tree's
   peak, 'the whole tree is like her green gown.' And the magic begins.
   Its folds of glass residences, budding light,
   Fabled beasts riding on their boughs; so then
   Arms full we bring them in and pile them up
   Against her iron roots, the gifts
   Which are further sorceries, and secrets for now.
The Town Alters so the Guides are Useless could only have been written by Redgrove. Everything in the town is changed as the old mine on which it stands collapses. 'It drives down the street like a furrowing earthquake.'

Like marsh bubbles of midnight
Mines rise through the houses
As the houses fall;

The airing cupboard opens on a gritty precipice.
Your shirts fall into the unlaundered blackness
Scented with arsenic and mouldy copperas.

There is something exhilarating in this transformation. Eventually a group go into a root-roofed gallery half a mile down and find

The descended forests are glowing with fruit, in their orchard caverns,
In all the hues of copper, tin and iron.

The collapse of the surface and the underground revelation is like a descent into the unconscious after the shaky insecurity of the surface.

No collection of Redgrove's is complete without a ghost. The Grey Ghost arrives just as the whisky bottle 'like a cage of lions / Tawny-maned and with a ferocious bite', and 'the champagne mild-mannered, feudally potent' are put out, but the ghost cannot drink.

He has 'a heart to break from the grey scraped face', but in a disquieting ending, and, in answer to the unuttered question, 'turns down all offers but the name of Void.'

Buveur's Farewell is the last and the longest poem; in fact rather too long, like one of those interminable conversations pinning one to the bar. Redgrove does, however, give us all the discomfort, uneasiness and feeling of guilt of the addicted drinker and the squalor of the surroundings.

Later, and maybe for ever,
I lift my glass,
And salute my fate,
My Grail
Which shows me everything at once.

I write of this as I drink
And find in the morning only spidertracks:
And drunk up.

This is a sad poem. Drink may yield sudden insights, even a glimpse of Traherne's orient wheat, but

Time is called again. I walk back
From the pub like blind Oedipus
Sockets weeping brown ale.
I will return again to these bars
In the town called Colonus, again and again
Until I can no longer be found.

Do they call these sanctuaries gracious
When they show me as I am to my lover and child first
And to myself only at the very last.

Redgrove is a serious, probing poet, concerned with stripping illusion from the self. He has lost some of his sparkle in these poems, but this may well be because he himself is going through a transitional state rather like that of the mine-invaded town. He is a continually interesting poet.

Jean MacVean

Tapestry – time to reflect and connect


Tapestry is perhaps the most laborious of the visual arts, nothing can be added or taken away – each of the many threads are interdependent, each plays its part, just as members of an orchestra each contribute their own particular sound. The tapestry makers by their art are connectors, communicators, using each thread to play its role in the great and varied whole. They link us to the warm and appealing world of colour and texture, the direct contact with the threads beneath their fingers inspires the vitality to be found in all true craft. Their art invites the allegorical, the symbolic, for the tapestry weaver works slowly, gradually building each image, there is time to reflect on each one as it slowly emerges.

The medium is sympathetic communicating the power of the symbol, both because of its suitability to large buildings and also because the rich and colourful textures of the threads are well set off by stone and even concrete interiors. The potential to communicate in this way is infinite, the power of colour and texture are indeed powerful messengers.

The art of tapestry declined during the industrial revolution, partly due to the invention of analine dyes which gradually replaced the rich softness of vegetable dyes, but also because the over elaborate clutter of the machine age left little time or respect for the medium. The revival started with William
Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement, however the first half of the twentieth century failed to perpetuate this renewed interest until after the second half of the century when Jean Lurçat and others updated the old art. Graham Sutherland with his ‘Christ in Glory’ at Coventry Cathedral showed how artists may interpret this neglected form. Once again tapestry is important, not only as an unique combination of art and craft, but also because of its intrinsic ability to communicate on an intimate as well as on a grand scale.

Perhaps we need also to look again at the huge and controversial tapestries by Lurçat, Piper and Benker in Chichester. Many argue that they are aggressive, discordant, and contrary to the spirit of contemplation, but perhaps these are the very qualities which serve to challenge and to stimulate. Perhaps their dramatic and violent interpretations (two of which depict the cross as their focal point) contribute to the breaking up of all the old tired images, and it is only in their fragmentation and demise that we can begin to recreate.

In complete contrast tapestries made by the children of Harrania in Egypt during the Forties, Fifties and Sixties showed some interesting results. Children from the age of eight, living in the country and virtually isolated from outside influences were given wool and looms and taught the art of tapestry weaving. They worked in pleasant surroundings but were left almost entirely unsupervised to create as they wished. The aim was to remove all visual distractions and to encourage the utmost spontaneity. The results were formidable. The children worked long and hard, producing strong rich images drawn from their own experiences – trees, animals, people, stories. The colours are rich and varied, the impact phenomenal and the images communicate with a freshness which is exhilarating.

What have these children taught us?

Is it that the huge tapestries of the twentieth century with their self-conscious and troubled images suffer from a lack of connection, a lack of relationship to the qualities that really matter? These modern artists had a variety of materials at their disposal, yet just because of this huge choice and also because of the many distractions which beset the artist, especially one working on a public commission, the results have sometimes shown a confusion of conflicting energies.

Many of today’s tapestry makers and craftsmen are people who have rejected the pressures of modern society, they have chosen to live quietly and simply, often in remote parts of the country. Much of what is produced both in the crafts and in tapestry in particular has a directness and commitment that reminds one of the fresh simplicity of the children’s tapestries of Harrania.

Tapestry makers such as Alec Pearson and Barbara Mullins work mainly in abstract form reminiscent of landscape with soft but vibrant colours, great attention being given to their subtle gradations. Theo Mormon also works with predominantly quiet colours enlivened with occasional energising glints.
of stronger colour, mainly abstract but with hints of the great earthy images, of wheat, sun and rain. The works of all these makers combine inner strength with contemplative stillness. How much more suitable for a place of worship than the frenetic images shown in the tapestries at Chichester.

Much of what William Morris fervently believed concerning the relationship of craftsmen with their material has in recent years born fruit, not only in tapestry but in the crafts as a whole. Evidence shows that there is an honest creative energy here.

Eleanor Allitt

Poet of Eden


Edwin Muir’s latest Collected Poems was published by Faber in 1984; but the present volume contains, in addition to a number of poems omitted by the author from early collections, some thirty pages of uncollected poems, and early and revised versions, all unobtrusively and meticulously edited, with full and useful notes. Peter Butter, until 1986 Regius Professor at Glasgow University, is the author of the biography, Edwin Muir, Man and Poet (1966), Selected Letters (1974) and The Truth of Imagination (uncollected essays and reviews, 1988) reviewed in Temenos 11. This brief note is merely to acknowledge the publication of this volume and to thank Peter Butter for his excellent service in keeping the work of surely Scotland’s finest poet in this century, in print.

Edwin Muir (1887–1959) came from Orkney and his native speech was neither the ‘Lallans’ made fashionable by Hugh Macdiarmid and his school, nor the Gaelic, in which Sorley Maclean still writes noble poetry, but a Norse dialect. (His wife, Willa, who came from Shetland, also spoke a Norse dialect, and in Germany just before the war they would greatly puzzle possible informers on these two innocent wanderers by conversing in these tongues.) He wrote, therefore, in English, as does his one-time pupil, George Mackey Brown, a purer speech than one is now likely to find in England, where the spoken language of the people has so deteriorated.

There comes a moment when the world in which a poet lived and wrote has passed, and the work then stands, or fades, in the light of the enduring and timeless values of the art of poetry. Muir has survived that transition in which many of his contemporaries have been forgotten, to be unearthed only as material for some doctoral thesis. Why? I suggest that of all poets of his time Edwin Muir’s work is the most purely imaginative, and this although he is also the truest and most heartfelt recorder of the historic experiences of Europe (mainly Czechoslovakia) during the Second World War. His poems record
not observed facts or political emotions but what has been lived by the soul—individual or collective. And what is poetry unless the language of the soul? Facts are as well, or better, described by journalists. All is transmuted, in Muir's poetic alchemy, into soul's history. Such poems as The Combat (based on a dream) and The Good Town (observed in Czechoslovakia where he was British Council representative) are equally true at once to history and to the poet's timeless world.

Muir is of all poets writing in English probably the most deeply influenced by C. G. Jung; he understood that the worlds of dream and of waking are not two worlds but regions of the one mind that experiences both states; something few have as yet expressed in their writings—Wilson Harris is a notable exception. He stands in the Scottish ballad tradition (which itself embraces both worlds) and also, especially in such early poems as The Ballad of the Soul, The Ballad of Eternal Life, Ballad of Rebirth), in the tradition of Coleridge's The Ancient Mariner. Indeed no poet since Coleridge has so richly experienced the mundus imaginalis, Henry Corbin's 'imaginal' world, in all its enchantment. At the same time none has seen and recorded with such unwavering imaginative truth world-events. Where the 'Oxford Poets' saw events in the light of their left-wing ideologies, Muir (himself a socialist, and he knew from bitter experience of poverty in Glasgow, more about the lot of the working-class than Auden, Spender or Day-Lewis) saw with the eyes of the Imagination and suffered to the full, the human violations of the Communist years in central Europe; not the wounded vanity of a man who has had to change his opinion, but the empathy of a poet who reads the records of the heart. It is a diminished humanity that we find in a materialist and secular age, for when lost Eden—ever-present measure of Edwin Muir's experience of the world—is not even a memory, and the human face no longer 'that world-without-end-lamented face' of Man 'fallen' from his high estate 'a little lower than the angels'. Without that vision what dignity remains, and what place for love?

Kathleen Raine

Ensoulling Dallas


'Body is that portion of Soul,' William Blake wrote, 'perceived by the Five Senses', but it has seemed otherwise in the modern West, habituated to think of the sensible universe as a mechanism made of 'matter', a lifeless substance independent of Mind, the perceiver of bird, beast and flower, of the houses
and places and things that surround us. Robert Sardello is a member of the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture which has, for more than a decade, been reaffirming a living universe, inspired by James Hillman's 'archetypal psychology'. At the outset this out-growth of Jungian psychology seemed to be concerned, like other schools, with the subjective inner worlds, thereby only adding, as Robert Sardello and other members of the Dallas Institute, have increasingly come to understand, to the sickness of modern western civilization by isolating the 'analysand' increasingly from the world about us. 'The new temple of initiation is the world itself', he writes, and we are hearing from Dallas Texas of the re-awakening of the world-soul; they are speaking of anima mundi: proclaiming that our responsibility does not lie in a world of dreams, but 'the material to work on is right here ... the natural world may in fact be the culmination of the creating force of the soul of the world, in its most highly developed form, the jewel of the world-soul. This jewel is rough, uncut, unpolished, without radiance and glow, in need of work. But throwing it away would be to have no material.' Did we not once hear such things from the alchemists who wrote of that unregarded, commonplace prima materia, to be transmuted into alchemical gold? Robert Sardello is a modern alchemist, summoning Dallas Texas to the Great Work!

He is outspoken in his criticism of current 'psychotherapy',

an abstraction sanctioned, more or less, by society in a world of materialist abstractions ... Learning, however, belongs to the very nature of living, and only when removed from the world produces the self-perpetuating illness of psychotherapy ... That is, the cure of illness becomes the source of illness. The theory perpetuates itself, and what begins as a limited field spreads into a cultural phenomenon. The more it is done the more illness is created.

The missing element in present Western culture is an education into the life of the soul.

Where, then, is to be found an education of the soul today? There isn't one, because the imitation, the double of such a task, occurs as psychotherapy. That is to say, real soul knowledge has no culture. Cultural forms are needed for the cure. But 'soul-learning' is something far other than that kind of further education oriented either towards furtherance of technical skills or further enrichment.

Certainly the situation is not quite the same in Europe as in Texas; but I have myself lived long enough to see the rich European civilization which I inherited as a living culture increasingly displaced by 'psychotherapy', something still unheard of in my school-days. 'What are one's friends for?' I remember T.S. Eliot's friend John Hayward once commenting on the then newly-growing cult of going with one's problems to a professional
psychiatrist. What, for that matter, are Sophocles and Shakespeare, Bach and Beethoven, Durham cathedral and the Piazza Navona for? But our modern and post-modern culture no longer feeds the soul on 'the bread of sweet thought and the wine of delight', and the modern world no longer has shared terms in which to participate in what used to be a civilization that unified our world. Indeed much modern so-called 'art' is itself an expression of the disease of fragmentation – hence the violence and the sorrow. One respects the courage of Robert Sardello and his fellow-workers who are prepared to attempt to re-build a civilization from the ground.

I remember C.S. Lewis delivering I think it was his inaugural lecture as Regius Professor at Cambridge, and bidding us look at him well, for he was a survivor of an all but extinct species, 'Old Western Man'. He was, that is to say, imbued with a culture embracing the recorded dreams of two thousand years of European civilization, once a shared familiar ground where we could meet. I am probably myself a late survivor of that shared world which has at once sustained my solitude with music, poetry, painting and myths both Christian and pre-Christian, and at the same time been the shared ground of my friendships. To me this seems an irremediable loss, but I admire Robert Sardello's courage in undertaking the great work of civilization all over again – for the America I first knew, the America of Eliot and Henry James and Ezra Pound – sustained itself still on Old European civilization. Now that civilization is itself crumbling before the new barbarism.

At the same time I find the whole thing rather sad than otherwise – as I am bound to do with my memory stored with lines of Shakespeare, the King James Bible, phrases of Purcell and Monteverdi and Bach and Mozart and heaven knows how much else. Civilization, whether Hindu or Buddhist, Islamic or any other, is the record of soul’s experience built up over time. Such as I have no need of a culture reconstituted from Jungian archetypes, themselves, reconstituted from old mythologies. Once I went to Dallas immediately after a visit to India (in both cases for a conference of philosophers) and the contrast was indeed dramatic. True, the ‘standard of living’ was, in material terms, incomparably higher in Dallas where in one day at my conference enough excellent food was consumed (or wasted) to feed an Indian village; but the experience of arriving from the richest civilization in the world’s history to an uncivilized New World was no less dramatic. How culturally rich are India’s poor, how culturally poor are America’s rich! All the more credit to Robert Sardello and the Dallas Institute for setting to work from the foundations. The marvel – and the ground surely for hope – is that the desire for meanings and values, for wisdom and beauty, is inextinguishable in U.S.A., as elsewhere and at all times.

Kathleen Raine
Notes on Contributors

**Eleanor Allitt.** Textile Designer and Interior decorator; married to John Allitt.

**John Allitt** has been a senior lecturer in Art History at the Central School of Art and Design and until recently at the Camberwell School of Art. He also worked for a time with the ILEA Art and Design Inspectorate. He has written books on Meyr and Donizetti and in 1981 President Pettion of Italy conferred on him the Order of Cavaliere, ‘Al Merito della Repubblica’. His most recent book is *J. S. Meyr (Life, Selected Writings, and Catalogue of Works)*, Element Books (1989).

**R. E. Alton** is an Emeritus Fellow of St Edmund Hall, Oxford, where for many years he lectured to graduate students on manuscripts and the identification and dating of handwriting. He edits The Review of English Studies.

**Andrew Benjamin** is a senior lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Warwick. His most recent book is *Art, Mimesis and the Avant-Garde* (Routledge 1991).


**Thetis Blacker**, painter, writer and dreamer. Her dyed paintings have been exhibited in cathedrals and churches in England, Denmark and the USA. Five major series have been based on mythical themes: ‘Apocalypse’ (St Andrew’s House), ‘A Bestiary of Mythical Creatures’, ‘The Creation’ (Winchester Cathedral), ‘Search for the Simurgh’ (a selection of these in *Temenos 4*), and ‘Arbor Cosmica’. Her most recent works are the baptistry banner in Aberdeen cathedral of St Machar, and the set of red pentecostal vestments for Westminster Abbey.
John Carey studied mythology and Celtic literature at Harvard University and the Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies. He was until recently Professor of Celtic Studies at Harvard, and is currently holder of a Fellowship at the Warburg Institute.

Noel Cobb, 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 co-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.

Ananda Coomaraswamy 1877–1947. Born and educated in England, but discovered Oriental civilization when he went as a geologist to Ceylon, his father's country. Became a member of the Tagore circle, discovered and collected Rajput painting, went to America in 1916, where he was for the remaining years of his life with the Asiatic department of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, where his collection of Indian art found its home. He became a spokesman of the 'Traditional' school of thought, writing numbers of books and learned papers expressing 'The Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art' (title of one of the best known). Three volumes on his life and works were published by the Bollingen Foundation in 1977 (edited by Roger Lipsey). The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, in New Delhi, has already published several volumes of a proposed complete edition of his works. What is Civilization? Golgonooza Press, 1989, is available in England.


A complete Bibliography of the writings of Henry Corbin is to be found in Henry Corbin, Les Cahiers de l’Hermé, Paris, 1981.

Recently published in France: Histoire de la philosophie islamique (Gallimard,
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS


Z'ev Ben Shimon Halevi is the Hebrew name of Warren Kenton, who was born into an English Sephardic family. After over thirty years of study and visiting the ancient centres of Kabbalah in Europe, North Africa and Israel, he sees it as his task to translate the Judaic line of Kabbalah into a modern form for anyone who wishes to walk the Way of Kabbalah. He has taught groups in Britain and on the Continent and run courses in Canada, the United States, Mexico and Brazil as well as in Israel. His eleven books on Kabbalah, including a novel, have been translated into eight languages. He lives and works in London with his wife.


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.

Edmond Jabès was born in Cairo in 1912. As Jews, he and his family had to leave Egypt for ever in 1956, in the wake of the Suez crisis. He settled in Paris, which he already knew well, having been educated there. His mentor was
Max Jacob. His closest friends and literary peers were Char, Blanchot and Michael Leiris. His early works, poetry and aphorisms, were first collected as Je bâtis ma demeure in 1959 and are now available in a Gallimard paperback together with a few late poems, two of which appear in the present Temenos. Out of the experience of exile came his masterpiece, the virtually unclassifiable Le livre des questions, published in seven volumes between 1963 and 1974. It has been translated into ten languages, and is available in the United States, but not in the UK. The Book of Questions was followed by two major prose sequences of several volumes each, Le livre des ressemblances, and Le livre des limites. Both are about to come out in widely available Gallimard paperbacks. He was awarded several prizes, including Le Prix des Critiques in 1970 and the Prix Pasolini in 1983. He died on January 2 1991 and is buried in Père Lachaise.


Brian Keeble. Founder and editor of Golgonooza Press; co-founder of Temenos. Has contributed to journals in UK and abroad concerned with Traditional studies; has won many distinctions for his book-production and in 1992 five books designed by him were included in The British Printing Industries Federation awards exhibition. In 1983 published Eric Gill: a Holy Tradition of Working. Recent Golgonooza publications are: Golgonooza, City of the Imagination (Kathleen Raine), Standing on Earth (Wendell Berry), Sabbaths 1987–90 The Vision of the Fool (Cecil Collins, forthcoming 1993).

Eva Loewe Practising psychiatrist and co-editor of Sphinx, working in the field of Archetypal Psychology in the field of the arts.

Grevel Lindop is British Academy Reader in English Literature in Manchester University, where he is editing the works of de Quincey; The Opium Eater, A life of Thomas De Quincey, (Dent 1981); A Selection of De Quincey (World’s Classics Series, 1985). His last book of poems, A Prismatic Toy, appeared in 1991.

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. Play produced at the Pitlochrie Drama Festival. The Dolorous Death of King Arthur (verse), The Healing Eye Press 1992.
Peter Malekin. Has translated a selection of Böhme's writing and has translated Strindberg's *A Dream Play* for production in this country. He has had a lifelong interest in spirituality, eastern and western, and in a non-realist aesthetic of literature and art. One of his concerns has been the spiritual potential within contemporary critical theory and in postmodernism. Retired and living in London. Currently co-authoring a study of spirituality and literature.

Keshav Malik. Poet and critic. Has edited several journals of art and poetry in the past, now edits *Poetry Bulletin* (of the Poetry Society of India of which he is one of the founders). Art critic of *The Times of India*; recently awarded (by the President of India) the Padam Sri honour for services to literature.

Caitlin Matthews. Prolific writer (sometimes with John Matthews) on Arthurian mythology and Goddess-lore. Musician (singing and harp) and priestess of 'Celtic' magical rites, and author of an Arthurian Tarot pack.

Joseph Milne, born in Liverpool in 1946. Studied composition under Vincent Batts and is especially interested in the ancient principles of setting sacred words to music. His *Gloria* was performed in London in 1988. Music led him to the study of Theology, and he received his B.A. at the University of Kent at Canterbury in 1991, where he is now researching his Ph.D. in early Christian, Vedantic and Buddhist conceptions of the psycho-pneumatic nature of man.


Peter Norman. Studied Russian in Oxford. Worked for the Foreign Office for two and a half years in the British Embassy, Moscow, then switched to academic work at SSEES, University of London. Worked also for British
Council as interpreter for visiting writers and poets, with many of whom he formed lasting friendships, including Akhmatova and Tarkovsky. He also met Lydia Chukovskaya (friend of Akhmatova and famous dissident writer), whose novel Going Under he translated into English. He has compiled a Russian-English dictionary for Penguin and written a textbook of the Russian language called Russian for Today.

**Kathleen Raine**, Blake scholar, critic, poet etc. Her works are known internationally and have been translated into several languages. The following books are available in English: Selected Works of Thomas Taylor the Platonist; Blake and Antiquity (Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series); William Blake in the Thames and Hudson World of Art Series; also The Human Face of God (on Blake’s Job engravings) Thames & Hudson. New edition of the Everyman Blake with introduction by Kathleen Raine. Yeats the Initiate (Dolmen Press, available from Colin Smythe), Defending Ancient Springs and Golgonooza, Blake’s City of Imagination (Golgonooza Press); Selected Poems (Golgonooza Press) and Living with Mystery (verse) 1992. Her Autobiographies have been republished in one volume (Scoob Books 1991) and are also available in French translation. India Seen Afar (Autobiography) Green Books, forthcoming in French translation spring 1993 (Criterion). Also available in USA, George Braziller. Works published by Golgonooza available in USA from the Lindisfarne Press. Volumes of verse in French translation published by Granit and La Différence.

**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).

**Anthony Rudolf**, born in 1942 in London. His Menard Press has been re-born as a literary house, bringing out a number of titles this year in co-publication with King’s College London. These include selections of Mandelstam, Pessoa, Claude Vigée and Vigée’s translation of Eliot’s Four Quartets. Rudolf’s book on Primo Levi won the 1990 HHWingate/Jewish Quarterly award for the best non-fiction book on a Jewish theme. This was the first book in a trilogy, the second being his Adam Lecture, Wine from Two Glasses (formerly entitled Poetry and Politics: Trust and Mistrust in Language), and the third, I’m not even a Grownup: The Diary of Jerzy Felix Urman. Currently working on his first novel, on the revision of all his poems, and on the Penguin Bonnefoy which he is co-editing with John Naughton.

**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, has lectured at the Jupian Institute in Zurich, at the University of Salzburg, and broadcasts on Italian radio.


**Arseny Aleksandrovich Tarkovsky** was born in 1907 in Elizavetgrad. From 1932 Tarkovsky translated poetry, mainly classical poetry from the Southern republics of the Soviet Union. Owing to the difficult political situation his own poems did not appear in print until he was over fifty years old. He was a friend of Akhmatova, who considered him to be amongst Russia's greatest poets. He kept apart from the official literary establishment. In 1966 he signed a letter, defending Sinyavsky and Daniel. His poetry, much of it of a philosophical bent, was influenced in particular by Tyutchev, Fet, the acmeists, Pasternak, Tsvetaeva and Mandelshtam. Like Blok he felt that poetry should make its humble contribution to universal, world harmony. Over some twenty years he published six collections of verse.

**Roger Tully**. Trained in the Classical Ballet Tradition by teachers and dancers directly linked with the Marinsky-Petersburg School and Company – later the Kirov-Leningrad School and Company. Danced in leading companies throughout the world before beginning to teach twenty-five years ago, at a time of great change in the Dance World. Has researched and lectured on the meaning and relevance of Classical Tradition in our time and place and prepared a book of fundamental principles in the teaching of Classical Dance. Is currently teaching in London and abroad.

**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 — was published in 1988 (Phanes Press). He lives on the family orchards in Grand Rapids, Michigan, teaches at the University of Michigan, and is at present teaching in the Department of English at the Washburn University of Topeka (Kansas). Edits Avaloka, a Journal of Traditional Studies.

**Rosmarie Waldrop** has taught in several American Universities. Her translations of Edmond Jabès have been made in the closeness of a long friendship. She is married to the American poet Keith Waldrop, and both live and work at Providence, Rhode Island. Her recent books include The Reproduction of Profiles (New Directions, 1987) and A Form/ of Taking/ It All (poetry) (Station Hill, 1990).

**Francis Warner** is the Lord White Fellow and Tutor in English Literature, and Dean of Degrees, at St Peter's College, Oxford, where he was formerly the Vice-Master. He has also been Pro-Senior Proctor of Oxford University. He completed his A Bibliographical Edition of the Latin Text of DE OCCULTA PHILOSOPHIA by H. Cornelius Agrippa in 1963. His Collected Poems 1960–1984 was published in 1985. Virgil and Caesar, the last play in AGORA, his epic (a sequence of thirteen plays), was performed by O.U.D.S. and published in 1992. The discovery by Mr Warner of the archive of Palmer letters was announced and described in the Oxford Mail, July 8th 1966; The Daily Telegraph and The Guardian, July 9th 1966.