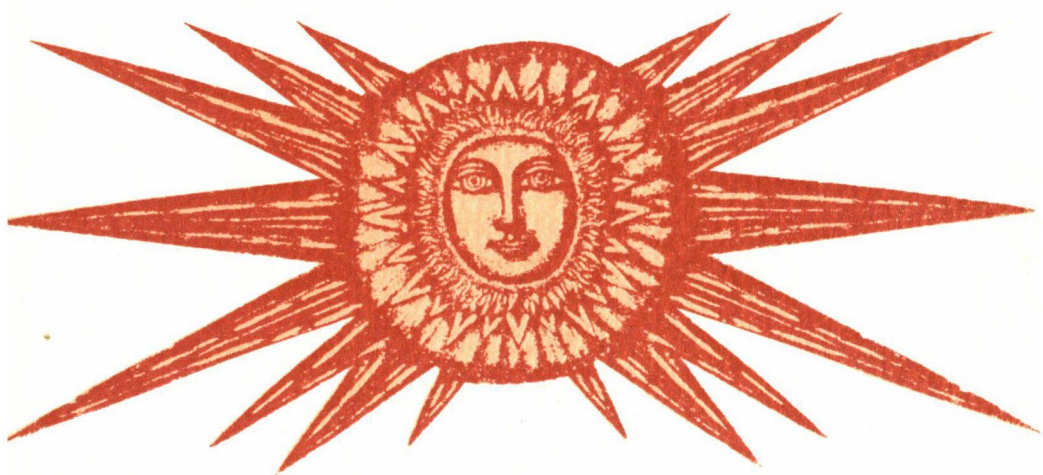


TEMENOS



John Allitt, Gaston Bachelard, Wendell Berry,
Thomas Blackburn, Thetis Blacker, Muriel Bradbrook
Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Henry Corbin, Keith Critchlow
Robert Duncan, Pierre Emmanuel, David Gascoyne
Joscelyn Godwin, Brian Merrikin Hill, Anna Hopewell
Louis Iribarne, Brian Keeble, Jean MacVean
Czeslaw Milosz, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Andrea Pallis, Kathleen Raine,
Jeremy Reed, Jalāl al-Din Rūmī, Tom Scott, Liadain Sherrard
Sohravardi, Peter Lambourn Wilson

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A REVIEW DEVOTED TO THE ARTS OF THE IMAGINATION

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NUMBER FOUR

Editorial

<i>The Golden Chain of Orpheus.</i> Joscelyn Godwin	7
<i>Sabbaths.</i> Poems by Wendell Berry	27
<i>Crafts and the Future.</i> Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay	39
<i>Epistle on the State of Childhood.</i> Sohravardi, with Commentary by Henry Corbin	53
<i>Circulations of the Song.</i> (Poems after Jalal al-Din Rumi) Robert Duncan	77
<i>Indirections find Directions Out.</i> Brian Keeble	87
<i>The Flight of the Birds to Union.</i> Seyyed Hossein Nasr	103
Thetis Blacker's <i>Birds of the Soul.</i> Kathleen Raine	117
<i>Poems.</i> Thomas Blackburn, Tom Scott, Jeremy Reed	121
<i>Swedenborg</i> (chapters from <i>The Land of Ulro</i>). Czeslaw Milosz	139
<i>Deep Waters.</i> Gaston Bachelard, with Introduction by Gilbert Durand	153
<i>Pax.</i> Poem by Czeslaw Milosz	176
<i>Six Douzains.</i> Pierre Emmanuel, translated by Brian Merrikin Hill	177
<i>Jalāl al-Din Rūmī.</i> Poems translated by William C. Chittock and Peter Lambourn Wilson	106 and 176
<i>Reviews</i> David Gascoyne: <i>Ancient Egypt Revisited</i>	181
Kathleen Raine: <i>Resacralization</i>	192
Keith Critchlow: <i>Geometry as Metaphor</i>	196
Muriel Bradbrook: <i>Natural Magic</i>	201
Anna Hopewell: <i>Poet in Transition</i>	206
John Allitt: <i>Art in Education</i>	209

ILLUSTRATIONS

Thetis Blacker: From a series of batik paintings 'Search for the Simurgh', illustrating <i>The Conference of Birds</i> , by Attar.	between pp 120-121
Illustrations of Indian crafts	pp 39-52
The diagram on page 68 is by Rachel Fletcher	

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Editorial

On the occasion of his Templeton Award in London, (May 1983) Alexandre Solzhenitsyn diagnosed the sickness at the heart of the modern atheist mentality: it is 'hate'.

This unquenchable hatred then spreads to all that is alive, to life itself, to the world with its colours, sounds and shapes, to the human body. The embittered art of the twentieth century is perishing from this ugly hate, for art is fruitless without love. In the East art has collapsed because it has been forcibly knocked down and trampled, but in the West the fall has been voluntary, a decline into a contrived and pretentious quest where the artist, instead of attempting to make known the divine plan, tries to put himself in the place of God.

Our fourth issue of TEMENOS contains several contributions from, or influenced by, the Sufi tradition, whose poetry must seem remote in the extreme from current reductionist atheism; for the quality of the Sufi tradition is that of ecstatic love, the union of the poet-visionary, whether through ascetic or through erotic love, with the divine Being.

The positivist might argue that the known facts of science give no warranty for those extremes of bliss or deprivation of which these mystical poets tell, but are, rather, neutral and best expressed in 'realistic' descriptions of things 'as they are'. Far otherwise Sohrevardi and Rumi and Attar: for them, the 'holy' is undeniable because it is experienced. Once we accept that the measure of a work of art is not its correspondence with natural fact, but rather with states of being, we may, like Attar's birds, venture to test our own wings of the spirit. The agnostic, should he venture to test those wings of the spirit which give the name of 'birds' to pilgrim souls in search of the Simurgh would, after all, only be following the much-praised scientific spirit of experiment. The reductionist attributes to 'wishful thinking' the desires of the soul; yet may we not argue – as Blake did – that our deepest desires, far from being misleading, are the best of guides, already pointing to some reality to which they are directed; just as the embryonic wings of bird or butterfly are already the promise of flight? The final justification of the Imaginative vision – the vision of the holy – is that it enables us to discover in ourselves unguessed

regions, unguessed capacities. It enables us to grow; while the final term of trivializing reductionism is the nihil.

The continued vitality of the myth of the pilgrim 'birds' is witnessed in Thetis Blacker's vital and joyous re-interpretation of Attar's *Conference of the Birds*, a visionary narrative described in this issue by Dr. S. H. Nasr. In a similar way Robert Duncan's *Reflections on Rumi*, a poem which he himself describes as 'devotional', is a response to the great poetry of the *Mathnawi*. In a letter describing how he himself came to be inspired by Rumi's poem, Robert Duncan well expresses both the remoteness of such ecstasy from the common mind and the marvel of the discovery that there are in truth experiences open to us which match words hitherto meaningless; a point also stressed in Sohravardi's *Epistle on the State of Childhood*. Robert Duncan tells how

Over twenty years I had returned again and again to translations of Rūmī and the poems did not speak to me, the print was lifeless on the page. In the early 1950's I had acquired Nicholson's translations of Rūmī, *Poet and Mystic*, then by April of 1969 as my bookplate informs me, I had added A. J. Arberry's, and I blamed the professor's not being a poet for my not 'hearing'.

After a painful but illuminating experience Robert Duncan again turned to Arberry's translation:

. . . and everything sang there for me, light shone with meaning, and reading aloud body, mind, soul and spirit sang and heard sing in Arberry's words Rūmī's . . .

He then began to write 'Circulations of the Song':

The song was recognized, a kind of answering to the company of Rūmī. So it is, as I understand the word, a descant. I know no Persian – however the Professor 'translates', what I did at last know was that he had translated from a deep devotion and a spiritual awakening he had as a scholar in Rūmī – life somewhere must have initiated him into the transforming work of Love – for it is that that his words struck in me, so that the light of Rūmī's love-struck love-transformed radiance – once my soul was ready for these correspondences – and the voice of it awakened anew the descant voice in me . . .

Is not this the *anamnesis* – the 'recollection' – to which Plato himself invites us?

Kathleen Raine

The Golden Chain of Orpheus

A Survey of Musical Esotericism in the West

JOSCELYN GODWIN

PART ONE

Pythagoras related that his soul rose as far as the higher world. Due to the purity of his being and to the divinatory power of his heart, he heard the melodies of the spheres and the sonorities produced by the movements of the heavenly bodies.

Sohravardī the Martyr, Book of Oriental Theosophy

Musical esotericism centres around the fact that not all music is heard with the ears. There is another music of the soul and of the spheres which gives to the actual music that is sung by voices and played on instruments its reason for existence. This idea has its roots in the unfathomable antiquity of mythical times: the times of the lyre-playing gods Hermes and Apollo, and of their spiritual son Orpheus. Sometimes the idea has disappeared beneath the surface of history; at others it has burgeoned as an inspiration to poets and philosophers. Parallel to it at every point has been the exoteric activity of music making, with its own separate history. In every era there has been music which could act as a catalyst for experiences which lie beyond hearing; but since the experiences are of something timeless and ineffable, the style and period of the music that prompts them are immaterial, which is why it does not enter into this essay. Truth, which is unchanging, is not to be sought in the protean changes of the incarnate sound, but in that to which the sound can sometimes lead.

■ Simplicius, one of the very last of the Neoplatonists, wrote of Pythagoras hearing the music of the spheres in more explicit terms, full of remarkable implications:

But if anyone, like Pythagoras, who is reported to have heard this harmony, should have had his terrestrial body exempt from him, and his luminous and celestial vehicle, and the senses which it contains, purified, either through a good allotment, or through purity of life, or through a perfection arising from sacred operations, such a one will perceive things invisible to others, and will hear things inaudible to others.¹

In this excerpt Simplicius explains the psychological conditions under which the harmony of the spheres may become audible, eloquently defying Aristotle's contention that the planets make no sound in their circlings. Most music theorists since the 6th century AD have been Aristotelian in spirit, hence dissociated from the realm of imaginative knowledge in which the Platonists so naturally moved. The notion of a 'luminous and celestial vehicle, and the senses which it contains' has not been acceptable to them, and so much the less will they credit the reports of those who have perceived and heard things invisible and inaudible to others. But there is another chain of authorities who have handed down a kind of musical gnosis that bears witness to a music heard in the inner self of the human being. These authors concur, moreover, that the music in question bears some relationship to the planets. The nature of this relationship is not clarified until quite a late stage in the history of the idea: not until the Graeco-Roman civilization had ceded intellectual leadership to the Muslim world, as I shall explain in the course of this broadly chronological survey.

A little celestial geography is necessary in order to envision the cosmos in which these speculations move. The Earth must be visualized as the centre of a series of spheres, enclosing it like the layers of an onion. Around the firm body of solid earth and water is a sphere of air; around that, one of fire. These four elements constitute our world of tangible experience, 'sublunary' because beneath (or, actually, inside) the sphere of the Moon. The spheres of the seven Chaldaean planets follow in the order Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn. Some authors believe them to be crystalline spheres like bubbles of glass on which the visible planets roll: others, more as abstract mathematical loci for the orbits. Outside Saturn's sphere is that of the Fixed Stars, known also as the Inerratic Sphere because the stars, unlike the planets, maintain their configurations. The twelve signs of the Zodiac occupy a belt on this sphere. Authors disagree on exactly what comes next, as one must expect once the visible evidence is left behind. Suffice it to say that beyond the realms of the Elements and of the Spheres comes a third realm more

spiritual than physical in nature, inhabited by gods or angels in a hierarchy which eventually terminates in the One God over all. This third realm is called 'Olympus', 'Heaven', 'Paradise', 'The Intelligible World', etc.

At the very dawn of Greek literature we meet with certain inhabitants of this third and highest world who are intimately linked with our subject: the Muses, 'whose hearts are set on song, having a soul unknowing sorrow: a little space from the topmost peak of snowy Olympos, where are their bright dancing-places and mansions fair.'² Hesiod indicates that these nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne live in a timeless realm, for they sing of past and present and future. Sublime as they are, they are nonetheless accessible to mankind, for their influence is acknowledged as the inspiration of mortal bards: a lofty view of the source of art, but in fact the only reasonable one.

The mystical and magical origins of music shine through this fragment from the dawn of our culture. But it comes from an Heroic Age in which music was not thought of as something independent, but as the inseparable companion either of dance or of its 'immortal sphere-born sister', poetry. Only in the sixth century BC, in an intellectual development which will always be dominated by the name of Pythagoras, was it realised that there is something unique about music – something to which the other arts can offer no parallel: its connection with number. Whether Pythagoras brought this knowledge from his sojourns in Egypt or Babylon, or whether he discovered it empirically himself, as the legends relate, he marks the beginning of musico-mathematical speculation in the West: a subject whose ramifications extend far beyond its own apparently recondite bounds.

Our civilization has become, in one sense, so Pythagorean that the connection of tone and number is a commonplace today. Everyone knows that tones are caused by vibrations in the air, so many to the second, and most musicians know the harmonic series and the simple arithmetical ratios between its members. If numbers can be found to correspond to tones, then cannot all music be reduced in turn to number? To the Pythagoreans, for whom the numbers up to ten were actually gods and the first principles of all Creation, the answer was positive: not only music, but everything is number made manifest. Many scientifically minded people today also entertain the suspicion that the whole Universe may be 'nothing but' a mathematical formula, and our perceptions merely a clothing of its digital bones with the illusory flesh of sense-experience. The spirit in which this belief is held may or may not be Pythagorean, as one can see from the contrasting myths that may inform

it. On the one hand there is the modern myth of the Universe as a computer whose programme we are just beginning to comprehend; on the other the Pythagorean myth of the Universe as boundless number welling forth from the Divine Tetraktys.

Plato and his Academy were very much concerned with the Pythagorean equation of tone and number, and even obsessed with the mathematical puzzles set by various tuning systems and temperaments. Almost every time Plato mentions a number, a hidden musical meaning can be detected behind it.³ But while the musical numbers in the Dialogues may have been an elaborate private game among members of the Platonic community, this playfulness seems to have been a leading motive of far different mythologies.⁴ For once it is realized that the most consonant-sounding musical intervals (octave, fifth, fourth) correspond to the simplest arithmetical ratios (1:2, 2:3, 3:4) the way is open to speculations of a very involved mathematical nature. One example of these is the fact that an octave can be divided by ear exactly into two equal intervals (e.g. C – F sharp – C'), but that this ratio is absolutely inexpressible arithmetically. In modern terms it is the progression $1 - \sqrt{2} - 2$, but the square root of 2 is an irrational number which cannot be expressed in fractions. Having only fractions at their disposal, the ancient mathematicians spent much time chasing this elusive quantity which they could hear perfectly plainly on the monochord and, for that matter, see quite plainly as the diagonal of a square. This type of encounter with what one might call transcendent mathematics soon kindled the ambition to integrate other invariable aspects of the cosmos – the Fixed Stars, for instance – into the tone-number system. It may be that such explorations mark the very first attempts of philosophers to grasp and interpret the world through the rational intellect, rather than through the senses and intuition alone.

The Creation story in Plato's *Timaeus* exemplifies this type of musical allegory, for Plato puts proportions, and hence by implication musical intervals, at the very beginning of his cosmology. In this account the Demiurgos articulates the stuff of the World Soul by marking it off at the harmonically consonant intervals of octaves and twelfths, divisions which later in the dialogue become the circles of the planets. These large intervals are filled in with smaller ones which together give the notes of a diatonic scale. The unique fate of *Timaeus* as the almost sole source of Plato's philosophy available in the Middle Ages (in Calcidius' Latin version) ensured the unbroken perpetuation of the Pythagorean musico-mathematical cosmology.

Between these inaudible, almost hypothetical tones and the audible ones there is an intermediate realm of music which impinges most strongly on our experience. The late Antique philosopher Boethius recorded the names of the three types respectively as *musica mundana* (the music of the higher worlds), *musica instrumentalis* (earthly voices and instruments), and *musica humana*: 'human music', the harmony of our bodies and souls. Sometimes there is concord within and between them: at other times we feel dissonant. Human music receives the effects of both the other two types, just as the human state receives influences both from the earthly plane and from higher worlds. Most musical writers have concentrated on the influences from below, and I suppose the influences from above are really the province not of musicologists but of astrologers. Yet the distinction is an artificial one, both astrology and music being after all but ways of explaining or depicting the changing states of the soul, swayed by we know not exactly what impulses.

The literature of Classical Greece and Rome gives evidence for a universal belief that soul and body are most powerfully affected by the music they hear from the lower realm of *musica instrumentalis*. Plato's strictures on certain modes as conveying undesirable influences led him to reduce those permitted in his Republic to only two, while Aristotle, less censorious, was no less an adherent of the doctrine. Here is another guiding thread which weaves through our line of descent: the power that music wields over behaviour. However lowly the music of voices and instruments may have seemed to the philosophers of Antiquity in comparison with the divine yet toneless harmonies, they were unsparing in the efficacy which they attributed to it. The biographers of Pythagoras credit that sage with particular skill and wisdom in this regard, recounting stories of his aversion of disaster by changing people's moods through music, and of the therapeutic use in his community of a very systematic regime of musical conditioning. The Pythagoreans would begin each day with music designed to arouse the energies and aspirations, and end it with songs inducing a peaceful transition to sleep: practices reflected in the Offices sung by Christian monastic communities which sanctify every stage of the day.

The capacity of music to govern the soul for good or ill is something which the reader could doubtless illustrate with examples drawn from our own day. But what are we to make of those mythical musicians who loom as the presiding spirits at the nether end of our chain: Amphion, Arion, and Orpheus himself? According to the legends, Amphion's lyre enabled him magically to move the stones of which Thebes was built. Arion, about to be thrown overboard by pirates, summoned with his singing a

dolphin which bore him to shore upon its back. Orpheus' songs could move trees, beasts, and even sway the denizens of Hades. These myths surely refer to something more mysterious than the laws of Plato or the customs of the Pythagoreans.

Some have interpreted Orpheus' rocks, beasts and trees as allegories of the irrational parts of the souls of men whom he affected with his playing. Yet in an age of the world less crystallized than our own, who is to say that the incantations of ceremonial magic did not also have a tangible influence on the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms? When one considers the power of certain vibratory forces in use today, even the suggestion that Amphion may have moved stones through means temporarily lost to mankind becomes plausible.

Arion's salvation and Orpheus' journey through the gates of death seem to refer to another mythological level altogether. In the symbolism of what we may call the 'Orphic' period – the first centuries before and after Christ – dolphins were the vehicles of the soul's posthumous journey across the Ocean to the Fortunate Isles, the place of immortality. As such they figure in the décor of many a Roman tomb, expressing the hope of salvation from mere survival in the Underworld which was the generally allotted fate of the dead. The salvific religions such as Orphism and Christianity held out the possibility of a more noble destiny than that of joining the twittering ghosts in Hades; but they did not promise salvation to all of mankind. Simplicius' extract already quoted above gives an outline of the conditions through which the requisite purity may be achieved: 'either through a good allotment, or through probity of life, or through a perfection arising from sacred operations.' Or, as we might translate it, through Grace, through Works, or through the deliberate following of an esoteric path. Arion, as 'a lyre-player second to none in that age,⁵ was already prepared for the journey, for music and her sister arts are but rehearsals for entry to the island or mountain that symbolizes the Muses' dwelling.

Less heroic, but no less interesting, is the journey of Er the Pamphylian, whose myth holds the place of honour as the conclusion to Plato's *Republic*, and at the same time constitutes one of the primary accounts of the music of the spheres. Er had an experience of the posthumous state from which he returned to warn his fellows of what awaited them. During his spell of outward unconsciousness he had two tremendous epiphanies: first, the vision of the cosmocrators – Necessity, the three Fates, and the eight planetary Sirens – then the scene of souls choosing their next incarnations. The whole purpose of Plato's ideal republic was to prepare its citizens to make a wise choice at this crucial

moment of freewill before rebirth. In Er's vision the Sirens who stand on each planetary sphere were 'carried round, each uttering one tone varied by diverse modulations; and the whole eight of them together composed a single harmony.' Proclus⁶ explains that these Sirens are the souls or intelligences of the eight spheres, inferior to the Olympian Muses because associated with the matter, however refined, of the planetary bodies. He says that they produce a concord of a corporeal type, i.e. one that is audible under certain conditions such as those described by Simplicius, whereas the concord of the Muses is a purely intellectual one. The Sirens' notes are those of a scale: eight adjacent notes which if sung simultaneously would seem to us (and to the Greeks) a meaningless discord. Plato imagines them to be harmonious because harmony is the essence of the superlunary levels of existence, as contrasted with the perpetual strife of the elements beneath the Moon. Here are two different symbols: the eight-note scale as a symbol of the cosmic hierarchy, and the simultaneous chord as a symbol of planetary harmony. They are quite compatible if not literalized on the level of *musica instrumentalis*.

Over three hundred years passed before the theme of celestial music recurred in classical literature: centuries in which philosophy was dominated by the Aristotelian, Stoic and Epicurean schools, all alike uninterested in this type of mysticism. The next to take up the theme was Cicero, who included in his own book of the ideal state a mythical journey similar in many respects to Plato's Myth of Er: the Dream of Scipio. A more limited adventure than Er's, Scipio's dream still afforded him an impressive glimpse of the nine spheres (now including the earth) and of their music:

I stood dumbfounded at these sights, and when I recovered my senses I inquired: 'What is this great and pleasing sound that fills my ears?' 'That' replied my grandfather, 'is a concord of tones separated by unequal but nevertheless carefully proportioned intervals, caused by the rapid motion of the spheres themselves.'⁷

Cicero's explanation is a rationalist's one compared to Plato's Siren song, but nevertheless associated with the ascent of the soul when separated from the body. Scipio's grandfather goes on to explain that although there are nine spheres, there are only seven different tones, 'this number being, one might almost say, the key to the universe.' He then touches on another of our main themes: the value of earthly music as a preparation for the beyond. 'Gifted men, imitating this harmony on stringed instruments and in singing, have gained for themselves a return to this region, as have those who have devoted their exceptional abilities to a search for

divine truths.’⁸ Cicero here alludes to the idea of a conditional or earned immortality. It is hardly necessary to stress that such ideas as these, even though they do not survive in written form, must have been kept very much alive between Plato’s time and Cicero’s. The first century BC merely saw a surfacing and a partial revealing of perennial esoteric teachings.

Plutarch, writing a century and a half later, included another heavenly journey in his essay *On the Sign of Socrates*: the Vision of Timarchus, a young man who ventured into the oracular crypt of Trophonius. During the two nights and a day of his initiation there, Timarchus’ consciousness exited through the top of his skull and, as it expanded beyond the body’s bounds, ‘faintly caught the whirr of something revolving overhead with a pleasant sound.’ This again is the planetary music. ‘He fancied that their circular movement made a musical whirring in the aether, for the gentleness of the sound resulting from the harmony of all the separate sounds corresponded to the evenness of their motion.’⁹ Plutarch goes on to describe the planets, the Zodiac, the inclination of the ecliptic, etc., as seen from Timarchus’ point of view.

Another document apparently written down about the same period (though of venerable ancestry), the *Poimandres* of Hermes Trismegistus, is much more explicit about the posthumous journey of the soul and its association with music. Poimandres, the ‘Shepherd of Men’, is a personification of the *Nous* or highest Intellect. He does not speak through the fiction of a vision or dream, but tells straightforwardly how the departed soul rises through the ‘Harmony’, i.e. the harmonious spheres of the planets, leaving behind at each one some characteristic tendency or vice with which it had been burdened while in incarnation. Poimandres is describing a soul which, unlike Er’s, Scipio’s or Timarchus’ does not need to return to Earth. So it continues its journey:

And then, stripped of that which was given its energy by the Harmony and clothed in its proper power, it enters the Eighth Sphere. Here it sings with the beings that are there, hymning the Father, and all rejoice at its coming. And now that it is made like its companions it can also hear the Powers above the Eighth Sphere beautifully singing their own hymn to God.¹⁰

The Harmony is the song of the Sirens who preside over the planets; the Powers above the Eighth Sphere are the Muses and other witnesses of the One God, who inhabit the timeless region beyond the Fixed Stars. So the discarnate soul actually traverses two distinct musical realms: first the *musica mundana*, then a fourth type of music which may be called intelligible, archetypal, or angelic.

It was the fourth type almost exclusively that concerned the early Christian writers who lived at the same time as the Hermetists and Neoplatonists already cited. Raised in the pagan intellectual world, they were usually familiar with our themes as sketched so far: the unheard music of Muses and Sirens; the notes of the planets and their numbers; the magical and psychic effects of sound; the place of music in the posthumous ascent of the elect. But they made only passing allusions to them, bending them to their own exegetic or proselytic purposes. The symbol of Apollo as cosmic musician sounding the seven-stringed lyre of the planetary spheres becomes in St. Athanasius an argument for monotheism:

For just as one were to hear from a distance a lyre, composed of many diverse strings, and marvel at the concord of its symphony . . . and would not fail to perceive from this that the lyre was not playing itself, nor even being struck by more persons than one, but that there was one musician, even if he did not see him, who by his skill combined the sound of each string into the tuneful symphony; so it is consistent to think that the Ruler and King of all Creation is one and not many, Who by His own light illumines and gives movement to all.¹¹

Athanasius, like the other Fathers, is not interested in cosmology nor in its sister science astrology, so he alludes to the cosmic music only in order to point the mind of his reader to the region above the stars where the multiplicity of pagan gods and daemons is subsumed in unity. The Christian aspires as it were to skip the laborious ascent through the spheres and to address himself directly to the very apex of the hierarchy. But for Athanasius' contemporary Bishop Synesius, less thoroughly emancipated from Platonic thought, the ascent is necessary even for Christ, as described in his beautiful hymn on the Ascension:

During thy Ascension, Lord,
Th'aerial daemons trembled;
The choir of deathless stars
Was struck dumb with amaze.
The laughing Aether, wise
Engenderer of harmony,
Struck its seven-stringed lyre
And played a tune of triumph.

But thou, with spreading wings,
 Broke through the azure dome
 And rested in the spheres
 Of pure Intelligence:
 The source of all things good,
 The Heaven filled with Silence.¹²

Why does Synesius call silent that fourth, intelligible realm which in Poimandres resounds with the singing of the Powers? I suppose that its 'intellectual concord' is so far removed from earthly sense experience that it may as well be described by silence as by song. Only in paradoxes can these matters be expressed without doing them the violence of simplistic translation into the terms of ordinary thought. Much later John Scotus Erigena was to write of the highest reaches of mysticism as something 'to which the eye of intellectual cognition does not attain; whence such knowledge is said to be ignorance. *For the proper hymn or mode of praising God is through negation.*¹³ It may be that the choice between the negative metaphor of silence and the positive one of divine harmony depends mainly on the psychology of the writer when he comes to force ineffable experiences into words.

Somewhat allied in spirit to the early Christian writers is Philo Judaeus, the Alexandrian Jew who tried to reconcile the religion of Moses with the philosophy of Greece. He writes more than once that anyone who actually heard the harmony of the heavenly bodies would be seized with madness. It would, he says, cause such frantic longings that the person would neglect their earthly sustenance and die, 'trying to take their nourishment from inspired strains of perfect melody coming through the ears, like beings awaiting immortality.'¹⁴ This is the Divine Fury, praised by Socrates, that afflicts a soul which sees all too clearly its true, other-worldly nature; so that it behaves in a way that seems madness to those who live by earthly rules. Philo's suggestion that this music is actually the food of immortal souls is one worth noting, and perhaps associating with Christ's remark about man living not by bread alone, but by every word of God.¹⁵ While logical analysis fails here, one does suspect that there is some wisdom in these words of Philo's concerning a state whose sustenance is the direct contemplation of the harmonies of creation. We will meet a similar idea in the philosophy of the Ikhwān al-Safa'. Jewish thought, for the most part, did not follow in Philo's footsteps except for the Kabbalistic tradition, where these phenomena are treated in detail under a different symbolic system from that of music.

☞ In late Antiquity the Golden Chain is no more than silver-gilt. Whereas the texts from which I have quoted so far are like gnomic utterances, full of mysterious meanings which can never be exhausted by rational glosses, the later writers, and most of the Medieval and Renaissance ones too, are less inspired in their approach. Aristeides Quintilianus, Macrobius, Martianus Capella and Boethius are interesting but exoteric writers, dutifully handing down the traditional teachings, to be sure, but not after the manner of initiates. Boethius' *De Musica*, for instance – the most exhaustive music treatise of Antiquity and the basis for music theory well into the Renaissance – is overwhelmingly devoted to the mathematics of tuning systems. Ideas such as the three musics are treated by him rather cursorily, as if these were things sanctified by tradition to which an author must pay his respects before proceeding to the hard facts. Such was to be the custom of musical writers as long as Boethius was read in the schools. The obligatory opening of any extensive work of music theory was henceforward a 'laus musicae': a chapter in praise of music's effects, illustrated from Antiquity.

Boethius said that of the three types of musicians – theorist, composer and performer – only the first truly knows music; yet for him, as for numerous of his successors, the theorist's knowledge and concern was a technical and rational understanding of the mechanics of music: scales, modes, tunings, acoustics, harmony and metrics. As such, music took its place as a Liberal Art in the medieval Quadrivium, after Arithmetic and Geometry and before Astronomy, and became a branch of mathematical training: that branch which especially studies proportion and fractions. We need not criticize this excellent scheme of education, but there is nothing esoteric about the way in which it uses music. What is missing from the post-Boethian musicological treatises is the subjective element, and in particular the consideration of music as a vehicle for journeys (in any sense) of the soul. Quite obviously this followed the evolution of scholarship into watertight compartments, and the vogue for specialization which, in dictating that musicology should not meddle in mysticism or cosmology, lost the contribution that these subjects might have made to each other (as they did in Plato; for instance).

When Boethius, who had devoted his life to making a *summa* of the Liberal Arts, was murdered by order of his patron, the Emperor Theodoric, we may well say that Europe had entered its Dark Ages. Elsewhere it was not so: the scholars of Byzantium were to preserve Classical learning intact – and largely unadvanced – until the Renaissance, while the new civilization of Islam was to find its major intellectual stimulus in Alexandrian science and Athenian philosophy. It is therefore

to the Muslim world (which, from our point of view, is definitely to be counted as 'West') that our chain now leads.

Much that was of value in ancient culture was destroyed in the excess of zeal that accompanied the first, expansive period of Islam. But with the beginning of the second period, which can properly be called Islamic Civilization, the need was felt for the arts, sciences and speculations of the intellect. It is through these that Man explores the realm, and the links, between the certainties of spiritual experience and raw physical existence. The only place to turn for this was to the vestiges that survived from the ruin of the Classical world.

One of the most complete attempts to build a new system of learning was made in 11th century Iraq by a community called the *Ikhwān al-Safā'*: the 'Brethren of Purity'. These Brethren, of whose outward life little is known, wrote an encyclopaedia of over 50 treatises on all subjects that concern the life of the mind: doctrines of the Macrocosm and Microcosm, comparative religion, cosmology, astronomy, mathematics, logic, music, psychology, philology, ethics and allegorical fiction.¹⁶ These studies drew freely on Aristotle, but were permeated through and through with Pythagorean, Platonic and Hermetic influences. They apparently formed the lower grades of an initiatory educational system, the goal of which was the realization of the innate perfection of the human being.

Music is omnipresent in the orderly universe of the *Ikhwān*.¹⁷ In its broad tripartite outlines, their cosmology resembles that of Platonists and Christians: beneath the inviolable unity of God a hierarchy descends through eight degrees of Paradise and eight stages of the visible cosmos (the fixed stars and seven planetary spheres) to the four elements which constitute Earth. The Angels of Paradise have the higher senses of sight, hearing and intelligence, and sing night and day in praise of God. These praises are their very food and drink, to which are added as 'sweetmeats' their knowledge and perfect felicity. The region of the heavenly bodies resounds with a similar but inferior music, caused not by volition like the angelic songs, but by the movements of the stars, planets and spheres. Their bodies are made from a fifth element, the Quintessence, and are 'neither hot nor cold, nor humid, but dry and hard: harder than hyacinth, purer than the air, more translucent than glass, more polished than a mirror. They touch and brush against each other, rub together and resonate as iron and brass resonate. Their notes are consonant and harmonious, their melodies well-balanced.'¹⁸ To the souls and angels of a lower order who inhabit this aetherial region, this music comes as a delight, its rhythms and melodies recalling to them the blessedness of the still nobler realms of spirits which lie above the stars.

In the third and lowest realm of Earth, instrumental and vocal music in turn reminds its listeners of the music of the intermediate spheres, which in certain respects it resembles. In order to illustrate this resemblance the Epistle on Music uses the construction and theory of the *'ūd* or Arab lute, the most highly revered among instruments and the vehicle both for musical symbolism and acoustical demonstration. The lute is a microcosm in itself: its four strings correspond to the four elements and its tuning to the proportions of the spheres. Through the magical use of sympathy it can work effects on both body and soul. Music played on a certain string, for instance will stimulate and strengthen the humour corresponding to its element.¹⁹ As regards the soul, the treatise explains:

If one establishes the measure of tempo in regular beats, harmonious and proportioned out of notes and rests, the tones which result will be comparable to those produced by the movement of the spheres and stars, and concordant with these. Thus the individual souls who dwell in the world of generation and corruption will remember the beatitude of the world of the spheres and the felicity of the souls who dwell up there.¹⁰

Even the explanation of acoustics is integrated into this philosophy. The air is recognized as the source of physical sound, but in an evocative simile its rôle is compared to that of the paper on which one writes. It is nought but a vehicle whose function it is to carry to the chambers of the ear the wisdom of cosmic proportions.²¹ Thereupon the message of the music, like the sense of what is read, is seized by the imaginative faculty, and the physical vehicle had done its work.

In view of this it comes as no surprise that, for the Ikhwān, the physical sound may be dispensed with altogether:

If the meanings of notes and melodies penetrate to the rational faculties of souls by way of the hearing, and if the traces of meaning deposited in the notes and melodies are printed upon the soul, one may do without their existence in the air, as one does without what is written on tablets once the meaning of what is written is understood and retained in the memory.²²

The hierarchy of musical remembrance draws its validity from the fact that every lower creation derives from, and imitates, the superior one. The higher worlds are actually prior in every sense to the inferior: the individuals in the spheres and their ordered movements came into existence before the animals of the sublunary world, and are the causes of the movements of the latter. (We might paraphrase this by saying that Nature

is engendered and regulated by celestial influences.) Similarly, the soul came into being before the body. Muslims are not alone in believing that once Creation has thus descended into the material state, it must now be raised again through the agency of Man himself, and eventually reintegrated into the Divine Unity. Religion, philosophy, science and the arts have no other purpose than to further this goal. Therefore the Ikhwān, following Plato, say that 'the goal of philosophy is to assimilate oneself to God, insofar as this is possible.'²³

If this is the purpose of the arts, then any other use of them is liable to work the contrary effect. The Ikhwān recognized this, but rose above the controversy, common in exoteric Islam as in Christendom and Jewry, concerning whether music and the other arts are intrinsically good or evil. They explain in a very balanced way that music in itself is no evil, but that under certain conditions of abuse or misinterpretation it may earn the proscriptions put upon it by some of the Prophets. Songs that deny Paradise and claim that all happiness is to be found on Earth, for instance, are deleterious to the soul's aspirations.

Just as *musica instrumentalis* can be discarded when *musica mundana* is heard, so the death of the body is really the birth of the soul, like the extraction of a beautiful pearl from an oyster shell or the germination of a seed from a husk. 'The Angel of Death is the one who receives the spirits and plays the rôle of midwife to souls.'²⁴ In its new state, the soul resembles the form of the Angels, and the spheres become its proper home.

Why has music nearly always figured in the periodic attempts of individuals and groups like the Ikhwān to achieve universal knowledge? Aristotle, Boethius, Al-Fārābī, Roger Bacon, Mersenne, the Encyclopédistes, the Steiner and Gurdjieff circles – all have accorded music an important place in their intellectual universe. Of course the ambition to understand everything that is worth knowing is a very different thing from knowing all that there is to be known: the latter is impossible, the former largely a matter of eliminating inessentials. Many people might consider music such an inessential; these polymaths did not. I will hazard an explanation of this as follows.

The human being is a meeting point of the Macrocosm of external states of nature with the Microcosm of internal states of consciousness. In the dual movement of inner and outer exploration that has been carried on deliberately since the Greeks, the Macrocosm has increasingly taken on an impersonal and quasi-mathematical guise. The Microcosm, on the other hand, has not been susceptible to such routes of understanding as physics, mathematics and logic offer. It stubbornly resists quantification:

it responds not to 'science' but to 'art'. But is music a science or an art? It is both. From the macrocosmic point of view it is a physical phenomenon with quantifiable principles of harmony and rhythm. Thus in our time a whole symphony performance with all its details and nuances can be encoded in the formulae of a digital recording. But from the microcosmic point of view, the same symphony is a different matter indeed: it is a record of changing states of the psyche, qualities and not quantities of experience, which cannot be translated into any other language. Music is the point at which the dichotomy of science and art dissolves; where every quantity is also a quality and every psychic moment physically demonstrable. These universal men have known that it furnishes a key for integrating the Janus-faced experience of inner and outer worlds.

The masterly exposition of the Ikhwān illustrates one aspect of musical philosophy in the Islamic world: the incorporation of music in a universal scheme of cosmology. Quite another approach was made by the Sufis who, no less cognizant of the power of *musica instrumentalis* to lift the soul, concentrated on the subjective experience of listening. One of the rites of the Sufi communities was *samâ'*, often translated 'audition'. This is the ceremonial listening to music as a means to achieving ecstatic states. The best known development of *samâ'* is the Dervish dance, a formalization of the spontaneous movements made by transported listeners. More often it seems to have been conducted with absorbed attention on a chanted recital of the Koran.

Samâ' puts into practice the theory of musical remembrance, bringing the soul even before death to a direct knowledge of higher states. Al-Ghazzālī, the great Sufi mystic of the 11th century, explains the theory behind the process:

The cause of those states befalling the heart through listening to music is the secret of God Most High, and consists in a relationship of measured tones to souls and in the subjection of souls to them and their receiving impressions by them – longing and joy and sorrow and elation and depression. The knowledge of the cause why souls receive impressions through sounds belongs to the most subtle of the sciences of the Revelations which Sufis are granted.²⁵

This most subtle science centres on the Pythagorean insight into the connection of proportions with inner states.

Al-Ghazzālī also analyzes very perceptively the difference between listening to vocal and to instrumental music. Music with a text primarily arouses sentiments corresponding to those of the poetry, whereas the

meaning of wordless music is something inexpressible. He describes the longing it sometimes arouses as a longing for something one cannot define – as if a boy had been brought up in isolation and, on reaching puberty, began to feel desires for which he could imagine no object.²⁶ The desire aroused by instrumental music is for nothing less than the unknown worlds of Paradise.

But it is not a matter of reminiscence or desire alone. Actual realization can occur. Al-Ghazzālī's brother Majd al-Dīn, also a Sufi, makes this clear in his writings, which treat in detail the subjective experiences of *samā'*. 'As often as one's *wajd* [ecstasy, also pain and pining] increases in audition, one's travelling and flying in the world of spirits increases. And when one's increase is abundant . . . then one attains the state of union without a new religious discipline.'²⁷ He praises the superiority of *samā'* to the usual routes of devotion, calling it the most direct path of all. But the Sufi masters make it clear that success in audition depends entirely on the individual: there are different levels of attainment, and what is good for a person at one stage may not be appropriate for someone else – whereas exoteric practices like the five duties of Muslims are for everyone at every time. *Samā'* is an esoteric discipline, not to be practised indiscriminately or opened up to people who would only misunderstand or abuse it.

Audition is a vehicle on the one hand for the soul to rise above earthly things, and on the other for the divine influence to descend and fill the soul with grace. Who is to say on which side the movement occurs? Yet like every means, it is eventually to be dispensed with, once permanent contact is established. The Shaykh Husrī says: 'What avails an audition that ceases whenever the person whom thou hearest becomes silent? It is necessary that thy audition should be continuous and uninterrupted.' Hujvīrī, after quoting this in his treatise *The Unveiling of the Veiled*,²⁸ comments that 'When a man attains so high a degree as this he hears from every object in the universe.' In other words, he perceives not merely the sense impressions but the archetypal realities of everything.

In summarizing the acoustical theory of the Ikhwān al-Safā' I mentioned in passing the conveyance of musical meaning via the air and the ear to the 'imaginative faculty'. This now needs further scrutiny. There is an awkward dichotomy between the physical sense-stimuli (the movement of the eardrum and the impulses set up in the brain) and the experience of hearing which takes place to all appearances in a space and even a time of its own. Physical science cannot bridge this gap, neither can modern psychology, in whose domain the question might be supposed to lie. The further problem of how the *musica mundana* is actually

heard does not even enter the scientific arena. But there are answers to these questions, if only one can accept certain assumptions. Early in this article I quoted Simplicius on Pythagoras, who heard the harmony through his 'luminous and celestial vehicle, with the senses which it contains.' A 12th century Islamic writer, Sohrevardī the Martyr, alludes to the same fact in his *Book of Oriental Theosophy* in these words:

Pythagoras related that his soul rose as far as the higher world. Due to the purity of his being and to the divinatory power of his heart, he heard the melodies of the spheres and the sonorities produced by the movements of the heavenly bodies; at the same time he became aware of the discrete resonances of the voices of their angels. Afterwards he returned to his material body. As a result of what he heard he determined the musical relationships and perfected the science of music.²⁹

Up to now we have envisaged a tripartite universe divided thus:

1. Heaven of Angels, Archetypes, Intelligences
2. Fixed Stars and Planetary Spheres
3. Earth (including Four Elements)

The assumptions of most of our authors have been that the human soul can rise to the actual places of the planets and hear their music, perforce continuing on its upward journey, breaking through the Inerratic Sphere, and hearing the angelic or archetypal music. In the twentieth century this crudely geographical picture will no longer suffice as an explanation. Since it is our intention in this study not merely to produce an historical chronicle but to extract the perennial and living truths from the writings of our ancestors, we must find a musical cosmology that will accommodate the universe of modern physics as well as that of Ptolemaic astronomy.

Such a one is to hand in the same work of Sohrevardī. His cosmology is also tripartite, but the middle world is an entirely different one from anything we have considered so far:

1. World of Intelligences
Platonic Forms
Archangelic Lights
2. World of Archetypal Images and of Imaginal Perception
Autonomous Images and Forms
3. World of Material Forms including Celestial Spheres and Elements

Henry Corbin, to whom goes the credit for restoring to currency the philosophy of this Muslim sage, has called the intermediate realm 'the Imaginal World'. This world of Archetypal Images corresponds in every

respect to the third, Material World: it also has spheres, planets, angels, demons, elements – but no material substratum. It is the place of resurrection in the subtle body, of the torments of Hell and the delights of Heaven that are promised in Scripture. The soul, when sojourning therein, uses a subtle body equipped with both inner and outer senses. This can occur after death, but also under certain circumstances during life, when the individual has cultivated the faculty of Imaginative Perception. Aside from experiences resembling those on Earth, one may encounter there apparitions of the Intelligences which belong to the highest world. The ultimate reaches of the World of Archetypal Images, in fact, abut very closely onto the supreme world, just as its lower domains are close to our material world. Now Sohrevardi says that it is in this middle world that the Music of the Spheres is heard. It is not the sound of the spheres surrounding the earth, but the archetypal Image of that sound. ‘All the Spirituals of the different peoples have affirmed the existence of these sonorities [which are] *on the plane of . . . the world of the celestial spheres of the universe of archetypal Forms*. To him who reaches this universe are revealed the spiritual entities of these Spheres with their beautiful forms and exquisite sonorities.’³⁰ These are presumably Plato’s Sirens; indeed, the entire Myth of Er must take place in this world.

The identification of the imaginative world with the material one was adequate for the past, but it will no longer serve. Once the difference is realized, the truth of our myths is undiminished; for if the accounts of hearing celestial music and journeying through the spheres refers to experiences in the world of Archetypal Images, then a revision of ancient astronomy in no way invalidates them. There is no need to doubt the stories, and no reason why such things should not continue to happen.

(To be concluded)

Notes

- ¹ Simplicius, Commentary on Aristotle's *De Caelis*, as quoted by Thomas Taylor in *The Mystical Hymns of Orpheus* (2nd ed., Londo, 1824), note to Hymn 34.
- ² Hesiod, *Theogony*, Invocation.
- ³ See Ernest McClain, *The Pythagorean Plato* (New York, 1979), for the musical interpretation of the Platonic number-allegories.
- ⁴ See McClain, *The Myth of Invariance* (New York, 1978).
- ⁵ Herodotus, *Histories*, I, 23.
- ⁶ Proclus, Commentary on the *Republic* of Plato, II, 239.
- ⁷ Cicero, *Somnium Scipionis* (*De Republica*, VI), ch.5.
- ⁸ *Loc. cit.*
- ⁹ Plutarch, *On the Sign of Socrates*, 590.
- ¹⁰ *Corpus Hermeticum*, I, 26.
- ¹¹ Athanasius, *Contra Gentes*, para. 38 (*PG*, vol. 25, col 77).
- ¹² Synesius of Cyrene, Hymn 8.
- ¹³ John Scotus Erigena, *Expositiones in Mysticam Theologiam S. Dionysii*, ch. 2 (*PL*, vol. 122, col. 276).
- ¹⁴ Philo Judaeus, *Questiones in Genesim*, III, 3. See also *De Somniis*, I, 35-7.
- ¹⁵ Luke 4.4.
- ¹⁶ On the Brethren of Purity, see S. H. Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Boulder, 1977). The encyclopaedia is trans. into German in 14 vols. by F. Dieterici, (Leipzig, 1858-86, reprinted Hildesheim, 1969).
- ¹⁷ The exposition which follows is based on the 'Epistle on Music', trans. by Amnon Shiloah in 'L'Épître sur la musique des Ikhwān al-Safā', *Revue des Études Islamiques*, vol. 32 (1964), pp. 125-62. Page refs. are to this publication.
- ¹⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 153.
- ¹⁹ The Galenic system of medicine, influential in the Arab world, attributed disease to the imbalance of humours. The four humours and their corresponding elements are melancholy (earth), phlegm (water), sanguine (air), and choler (fire).
- ²⁰ *Op. cit.*, pp. 152-3.
- ²¹ This is reminiscent of the doctrine of Hindu *Samkhya* philosophy, in which each of the five senses derives its impressions via one of the elements. To hearing corresponds not air (which carries the lower sense of smell), but *akasha* or aether.
- ²² *Op. cit.*, p. 159.
- ²³ *Op. cit.*, pl 156 (following Plato, *Theatetus*, 176 b).
- ²⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 161.
- ²⁵ Al-Ghazzālī, *The Book of the Laws of Listening to Music* . . . trans. D. B. Macdonald in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1901, p. 230.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1902, p. 730.
- ²⁷ Majd al-Dīn al-Tūsī al-Ghazzālī, *Bawāriq al-Ilmā'*, trans. J. Robson (London, 1938), p. 102.
- ²⁸ 'Alī ibn 'Usmān Hujvīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, trans. R. A. Nicholson (London, 1911), p. 405.
- ²⁹ Quoted in Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth* . . . (Princeton, 1978), p. 134. The remainder of our exposition is based on the passages from Sohrawardī trans. by Corbin on pp. 128-34.
- ³⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 134; my italics.



Brass-gilt rose intended for the sound-board of a harpsichord, made by Andrea Pallis, about 1938. The inscription is blue enamel. It is now housed in the Music Room of Chapel House, Colgate University, New York State. The inscription, from Pythagoras, reads

ΦΑCΙ ΓΙΓΝΕCΦΑΙ ΤΗΝ ΦΟΝΗΝ ΦΕΡΟΜΕΝΩΝ ΚΥΚΛΩ
ΤΟΝ ΑCΤΡΩΝ ΣΝΑΡΜΟΝΙΟΝ

They (that is, the Pythagoreans) declare that from the heavenly bodies carried round in a circle is produced a music. (Aristotle (De Caelo) 290 B.22).

WENDELL BERRY

Sabbaths

*Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord
hath dealt bountifully with thee.*

Psalm 116:7

*Le fronde onde s'infronda tutto l'orto
de l'ortolano eterno, am' io cotanto
quanto da lui a lor di bene è porto.*

*The leaves that enleave the garden
Of the eternal Gardener I love in measure
Of the good borne to them from Him.*

Paradiso XXVI:64-66

I

Another Sunday morning comes
And I resume the standing Sabbath
Of the woods, where the finest blooms
Of time return, and where no path

Is worn but wears its makers out
At last, and disappears in leaves
Of fallen seasons. The tracked rut
Fills and levels; here nothing grieves

In the risen season. Past life
Lives in the living. Resurrection
Is in the way each maple leaf
Commemorates its kind, by connection

Outreaching understanding. What rises
Rises into comprehension
And beyond. Even falling raises
In praise of light. What is begun

Is unfinished. And so the mind
That comes to rest among the bluebells
Comes to rest in motion, refined
By alteration. The bud swells

Opens, makes seed, falls, is well,
Being becoming what it is:
Miracle and parable
Exceeding thought, because it is

Immeasurable; the understander
Encloses understanding, thus
Darkens the light. We can stand under
No beam that is not dimmed by us.

The mind that comes to rest is tended
In ways that it cannot intend;
Is borne, preserved, and comprehended
By what it cannot comprehend.

Your Sabbath, Lord, thus keeps us by
Your will, not ours. And it is fit
Our only choice should be to die
Into that rest, or out of it.

II

I go among trees and sit still.
All my stirring becomes quiet
Around me like circles on water.
My tasks lie in their places
Where I left them, asleep like cattle.

Then what is afraid of me comes
And lives a while in my sight.

What it fears in me leaves me,
 And the fear of me leaves it.
 It sings, and I hear its song.

Then what I am afraid of comes.
 I live for a while in its sight.
 What I fear in it leaves it,
 And the fear of it leaves me.
 It sings, and I hear its song.

After days of labour,
 Mute in my consternations,
 I hear my song at last,
 And I sing it. As we sing
 The day turns, the trees move.

III

To sit and look at light-filled leaves
 May let us see, or seem to see,
 Far backward as through clearer eyes
 To what unsighted hope believes:
 The blessed conviviality
 That sang Creation's seventh sunrise,

Time when the Maker's radiant sight
 Made radiant every thing He saw,
 And every thing He saw was filled
 With perfect joy and life and light.
 His perfect pleasure was sole law;
 No pleasure had become self-willed.

For all His creatures were His pleasures
 And their whole pleasure was to be
 What He made them; they sought no gain
 Or growth beyond their proper measures,
 Nor longed for change or novelty.
 The only new thing could be pain.

IV

Eden Shale

The bell calls in the town
Where forebears cleared the shaded land
And brought high daylight down
To shine on field and trodden road.
I hear, but understand
Contrarily, and walk into the woods.
I leave labour and load,
Take up a different story.
I keep an inventory
Of wonders and of uncommercial goods.

I climb up through the field
That my long labour has kept clear.
Projects, plans unfulfilled
Waylay and snatch at me like briars,
For there is no rest here
Where ceaseless effort seems to be required,
Yet fails, and spirit tires
With flesh, because failure
And weariness are sure
In all that mortal wishing has inspired.

I go in pilgrimage
Across an old fenced boundary
To wildness without age
Where, in their long dominion,
The trees have been left free.
They call the soil here 'Eden': slants and steeps
Hard to stand straight upon
Even without a burden.
No more a perfect garden,
There's an immortal memory that it keeps.

I leave work's daily rule
And come here to this restful place
Where music stirs the pool
And from high stations of the air

Fall notes of wordless grace,
 Strewn remnants of the primal Sabbath's hymn.
 And I remember here
 A tale of evil twined
 With good, serpent and vine,
 And innocence as evil's stratagem.

I let that go a while,
 For it is hopeless to correct
 By generations' toil,
 And I let go my hopes and plans
 That no toil can perfect.
 There is no vision here but what is seen:
 White bloom nothing explains
 But a mute blessedness
 Exceeding all distress,
 The fresh light stained a hundred shades of green.

Uproar of wheel and fire
 That has contained us like a cell
 Opens and lets us hear
 A stillness longer than all time
 Where leaf and song fulfill
 The passing light, pass with the light, return,
 Renewed, as in a rhyme.
 This is no human vision
 Subject to our revision;
 God's eye holds every leaf as light is worn.

Ruin is in place here:
 The dead leaves rotting on the ground,
 The live leaves in the air
 Are gathered in a single dance
 That turns them round and round.
 The fox cub trots his almost pathless path
 As silent as his absence.
 These passings resurrect
 A joy without defect,
 The life that steps and sings in ways of death.

V

But human ruin comes. The saw's edge comes
 To the old trees; high places
 Are brought low, and their graces
 All withered and destroyed.
 The cries of engines rise in the still rooms
 Where light once lay at rest
 And hidden voices, overjoyed,
 Sang as the morning shone.
 That healing music has not ceased,
 I trust, but it is gone.

A gracious Sabbath stood here while they stood
 Who gave our rest a haven.
 Now fallen, they are given
 To labour and distress.
 These times we know much evil, little good
 To steady us in faith
 And comfort when our losses press
 Hard on us, and we choose,
 In panic or despair or both,
 To keep what we will lose.

For we are fallen like the trees, our peace
 Broken, and so we must
 Love where we cannot trust,
 Trust where we cannot know,
 And must await the wayward-coming grace
 That joins living and dead,
 Taking us where we would not go –
 Into the copious dark.
 When what was made has been unmade
 The Maker comes to His work.

No great thing is required. Wash, and be clean.
 Or else submit to cleansing.
 Without this hard dispensing
 Nothing can be new-made
 Or clear or whole. That flesh my come again,
 Flesh of a little child,

All that is made must be unmade,
 All images must fall.
 The fallen are not reconciled
 Until bereft of all.

VI

How many have relinquished
 Breath, in grief or rage,
 The victor and the vanquished
 Named on the bitter page

Alike, or indifferently
 Forgot – all that they did
 Undone entirely.
 The dust they stirred has hid

Their faces and their works,
 Has settled, and lies still.
 Nobody rests or shirks
 Who must turn in time's mill.

They wind the turns of the mill
 In house and field and town;
 As grist is ground to meal
 The grinders are ground down.

VII

What stood will stand, though all be fallen,
 The good return that time has stolen.
 Though creatures groan in misery,
 Their flesh prefigures liberty
 To end travail and bring to birth
 Their new perfection in new earth.
 At word of that enlivening
 Let the trees of the woods all sing
 And every field rejoice, let praise

Rise up out of the ground like grass.
 What stood, whole in every piecemeal
 Thing that stood, will stand though all
 Fall – field and woods and all in them
 Rejoin the primal Sabbath's hymn.

VIII

Remembering Sir Albert Howard's 'An Agricultural Testament':

What if, in the high, restful sanctuary
 That keeps the memory of Paradise,
 We're followed by the drone of history
 And greed's poisonous fumes still burn our eyes?

Disharmony recalls us to our work.
 From Heavenly work of light and wind and leaf
 We must turn back into the peopled dark
 Of our unravelling century, the grief

Of waste, the agony of haste and noise.
 It is a hard return from Sabbath rest
 To lifework of the fields, yet we rejoice,
 Returning, less condemned in being blessed

By vision of what human work can make:
 A harmony between woodland and field,
 The world as it was given for love's sake,
 The world by love and loving work revealed

As given to our children and our Maker.
 In that healed harmony the world is used
 But not destroyed, the Giver and the taker
 Joined, the taker blessed, in the unabused

Gift that nurtures and protects. Then workday
 And Sabbath live together in one place.
 Though mortal, incomplete, that harmony
 Is our one possibility of peace.

When field and woods agree, they make a rhyme
 That stirs in distant memory the whole
 First Sabbath's song that no largess of time
 Or hope or sorrow wholly can recall.

But harmony of earth is Heaven-made,
 Heaven-making, is promise and is prayer,
 A little song to keep us unafraid,
 An earthly music magnified in air.

IX

I go from the woods into the cleared field:
 A place no human made, a place unmade
 By human greed, and to be made again.
 Where centuries of leaves once built by dying
 A deathless potency of light and stone
 And mould of all that grew and fell, the timeless
 Fell into time. The earth fled with the rain,
 The growth of fifty thousand years undone
 In a few careless seasons, stripped to rock
 And clay – a 'new land', truly, that no race
 Was ever native to, but hungry mice
 And sparrows and the circling hawks, dry thorns
 And thistles sent by generosity
 Of new beginning. No Eden, this was
 A garden once, a good and perfect gift;
 Its possible abundance stood in it
 As it then stood. But now what it might be
 Must be foreseen, darkly, through many lives –
 Thousands of years to make it what it was,
 Beginning now, in our few troubled days.

X

Enclosing the field within bounds
 Sets it apart from the boundless
 Of which it was, and is, a part
 And places it within care.

The bounds of the field bind
 The mind to it. A bride
 Adorned, the field now wears
 The green veil of a season's
 Abounding. Open the gate!
 Open it wide, that time
 And hunger may come in.

XI

Whatever is foreseen in joy
 Must be lived out from day to day
 Vision held open in the dark
 By our ten thousand days of work.
 Harvest will fill the barn; for that
 The hand must ache, the face must sweat.

And yet no leaf or grain is filled
 By work of ours; the field is tilled
 And left to grace. That we may reap,
 Great work is done while we're asleep.

When we work well, a Sabbath mood
 Rests on our day, and finds it good.

XII

To long for what can be fulfilled in time
 Foredooms the body to the use of light,
 Light into light returning, as the stream

Of days flows downward through us into night,
 And into light and life and time to come.
 This is the way of death: loss of what might

Have been in what must come to be, light's sum
 Lost in the having, having to forego.
 The year drives on toward what it will become.

In answer to their names called long ago
 The creatures all have risen and replied
 Year after year, each toward the distant glow

Of its perfection in all, glorified;
 Have failed. Year after year they all disperse
 As the leaves fall and not to be denied

The frost falls on the grass as by a curse.
 The leaves flame, fall, and carry down their light
 By a hard justice in the universe

Against all fragmentary things. Their flight
 Sends them downward into the dark, unseen
 Empowerment of a universal right

That brings them back to air and light again,
 One grand motion, implacable, sublime.
 The calling of all creatures is design.

We long for what can be fulfilled in time,
 Though death is in the cost. There is a craving
 As in delayed completion of a rhyme

To know what may be had by loss of having,
 To see what loss of time will make of seed
 In earth or womb, dark come to light, the saving

Of what was lost in what will come – repaid
 In the invisible pattern that will enark
 Whatever of the passing light is made.

Choosing the light in which the sun is dark,
 The stars dark, and all mortal vision blind –
 That puts us out of thought and out of work,

And dark by day, in heart dark, dark in mind,
 Mistaking for a song our lonely cry,
 We turn in wrongs of love against our kind;

The fall returns. Our deeds and days gone by
 Take root, bear fruit, are carried on, in faith
 Or fault, through deaths all mortal things must die,

The deaths of time and pain, and death's own death
 In full filled light and song, final Sabbath.

XIII

To long for what eternity fulfills
 Is to forsake the light one has, or wills
 To have, and go into the dark, to wait
 What light may come – no light perhaps, the dark
 Insinuates. And yet the dark conceals
 All possibilities: thought, word, and light,
 Air, water, earth, motion, and song, the arc
 Of lives through light, eyesight, hope, rest, and work –

And death, the narrow gate each one must pass
 Alone, as some have gone past every guess
 Into the woods by a path lost to all
 Who look back, gone past light and sound of day
 Into grief's wordless catalogue of loss.
 As the known life is given up, birdcall
 Become the only language of the way,
 The leaves all shine with sudden light, and stay.

Notes:

IV, stanza 3. A soil type known as Eden Shale, 'Eden' for short.

V, stanza 4. II Kings 5:13-14.

VII. I Chronicles 16:32-33. Romans 8:19-23.

VIII. Sir Albert Howard, *An Agricultural Testament*, Oxford, 1940, especially pages 1-4.

Crafts and the Future

KAMALADEVI CHATTOPADHYAH

Let me first of all clarify what I mean by craft as skilled labour in materials, not necessarily mere handwork that is simply manual dexterity as opposed to cultivation of the mind. Here I take craftsmanship as referring to a total operation involving the emotions, mind, body and the rhythm which such a co-ordination sets up. Nor is craft divorced from a degree of mechanism, because from earliest times man started evolving tools as an extension of his being and did not rest content with the unaided skill of his physique.

We must also recognize that craft is as much an expression of the human spirit in material form, which gives delight to mankind, as any of what are termed fine arts. In the craft world, however, there need be no hiatus between serviceability and aesthetics. One may say that in good craftsmanship the means and the ends are identical, for while the article is useful it will also be rich in appearance and good to look at.

Craft has always been a basic activity in human society, in fact it is considered more cohesive and permeating in human relationships than even language, for it can penetrate many barriers to communication. This has been particularly true of the older societies such as those in Asia, South and Central America, Africa and countries like Greece or Spain, where certain aspects of the ancient handed-down cultures continue to produce powerful impressions that seem almost ageless.

The growth of crafts in society was the sign of cultivation of sensitivity and stood for man's endeavour to bring elegance and grace into an otherwise harsh and drab human existence. In fact, man's elevation from the gross animal existence is marked by his yearning for something beyond the satisfaction of mere creature comforts and needs, which found natural expression in crafts.

The most primitive people first ornamented their articles of everyday use, later weapons, then their garments and their own persons and surroundings. The rough and severe walls of their huts became canvases

on which blossomed pictures. A death-dealing but very strategic item like the bow and arrow became embellished with decorations, water pots took on pleasing shapes and alluring designs were invented for mundane kitchen pans.

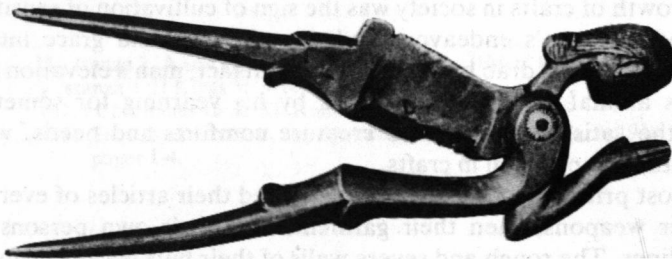
Here we see the transformation of the merely functional into works of art, the common becoming the cherished, the joy-giving. The wall paintings, the ornamentation of the floor where one worshipped, performed ceremonies or even took food, the decoration on the doorstep and in front of the house, all became purposeful creations, almost ritualistic.

No aspect of life was too insignificant or humble to lay claim to beauty or acquire sanctity as a symbol of good omen. The use of special articles for special occasions in the way of clothes, jewels, vessels, etc., all of which had to have a certain quality to ensure a high standard even in daily life and use, meant a continuous outflow of creativeness, a sustained spirit of animation and freshness dispelling staleness and monotony.

We find, for instance, that in many countries to give solemnity to certain occasions a convention was established by which they were made into ceremonials. The tea ceremony of Japan is a good example. It requires a special pavilion offering seclusion from the bustle of everyday life, in its own surroundings, and the use of its own vessels or cups, involving the manufacture of special pottery. Though the ideals sought were relaxation, contemplation of beauty and communion with nature, these alone were not regarded as giving complete fulfilment unless they were made part of one's intimate daily life, hence the introduction of the tea ceremony.

Where the earth is dry and burns under voluptuous rays as in deserts, where life is grim and severe and resources poor, the people seem to compensate with riotous colour and exuberant forms, creating a sense of luxuriance and plentitude through their crafts. There is a breathless eagerness created in the atmosphere, rapturous vivaciousness in the

Nut-cracker



articles that are used, a springtime dazzle in garments and even in the harness and trappings of domestic animals.

Yet all this mingles with a sense of repose and stillness coming at twilight over the weary earth. The whirlwind of the sandstorm is tempered by a kind of midnight calm. For what takes form in crafts are feelings actually experienced, not just conjured up in imagination. For such depth and vitality cannot be introduced into a craft form unless it flows from within as an inner reality.

Craftsmanship is not a matter of mechanical reproduction. Creation is not divorced from production, the designer and the producer are one – unlike studio designing which is removed from the actual object to be made. In fact one of the allures of the crafts lies in that magical involvement of the artisan's personality with the product from its inception to its final application. This being so, there is no such thing as craft for craft's sake. It is not an exercise of the intellect, which finds a form in a secluded studio to become the proud possession of an individual or institution. Here, making arises from the deeper hunger of humanity, its functions are socialised and distributed through the family and even the entire



Hanging lamp – peacock motif

community. Craft is not preoccupied with subjective feeling and thought, but with objectification.

It would need a thesis by itself to explain man's innate need for beauty, the why and wherefore of the pleasure and satisfaction experienced through stimulus and response generated by the sight or touch of certain forms, the emotions stirred within us by colours and rhythmic lines that even in concrete objects seem to flow while they stand stolidly rooted to the ground.

Beauty in objects around us provides visual comfort, equilibrium and relaxation. In craft we have the identification of the self with the object – not just a sentimental sympathy – because craft is really an extension of oneself, growing out of one's physical and psychological need.

Crafts create an instinctive appreciation of beauty rather than a self-conscious striving after it. They call for as subtle an understanding of composition as any work of art; the combined use of form and curves; the avoidance of odd or awkward empty spaces by filling them up appropriately to contrast with the more ornamental parts; subtle emphasis on lesser parts to make them stand out more clearly and also blending and highlighting the lustre and mellowness of light and shade.



*A wooden goddess from South India
in traditional style*

Folk craft tries to express something more than the visible appearance, to bring out an element which seems to lurk in the depths of a more significant reality than facile reproduction. This is a characteristic of all the old cultures, frequently dismissed as 'fantasies' and attributed to a lack of knowledge of perspective and chiaroscuro. The fact is overlooked that oriental crafts, for example, were the expression of a will, the fulfilment of a purpose, with none of the nebulous vagueness that comes of subservience to a passing mood.

Crafts have been the indigenous creation of the ordinary people, a part of the flow of events of the common life, not cut off from the main stream. They grew up in the peace and seclusion of the countryside, where the community evolved a culture of its own out of the steady flow of its own life and of the nature around it.

The community acted as a single personality because of its communal activities, in response to common occasions and landmarks that stood out in the flux of time, and the change of seasons. Out of a million coloured strands of traditions and memories filled with song and verse, legends and myths, fables and local romances, from the core and substance of their daily existence and out of nature's own rich storehouse, was woven a refulgent creative and forceful culture.



Maruti Brass Lamp (Hanuman)

This was the issue of an unhurried rhythm of life and a spell of serenity, as contrasted with the bustle of the present machine age. Its products had a vitality and character of their own in that they were the direct expression of the craftsman, with a careful emphasis on functional beauty. Yet at the same time a very significant factor was the anonymity of the producer, in striking contrast to the present age of signatures and publicity. Evidently the name did not add to the value of the article and beauty was accepted as an end in itself, and service to the community a source of complete satisfaction.

What was of great significance in this context was the status assigned to and security provided for the craftsmen, to preserve and provide continuity to the crafts and save them from the gnawings of anxiety and the paralysis of insecurity. A craft-oriented society was based on personal relationships, not contracts and competition.

The ancient books of the East say that when the hands of a craftsman are engaged in his craft, the act is always a ceremonial. Tools are but an extension of the personality of the craftsman to reach beyond the range of human limitations.

The craftsman thus combines within his being the functions of both the conceiver and the executor. He symbolizes to his society the outward



*Brass lime-container
in form of parrot*

manifestation of the creative purpose and the unbroken link in the tradition that embraces both the producer and the consumer within the social fabric.

Two significant characteristics of a craft are that aesthetics and function are integrated, and ornamentation and decoration are not divorced from utility. And even where craftsmanship is based on tradition, the dangers of stagnation are minimised by freeing each productive act from imitative intention and linking it with the stream of life, making it a dynamic manifestation of man's endeavour to express universal human emotions and interests.

Even though craftsmanship has always been considered hereditary, passed on from generation to generation, inheritance of actual skills was not assumed. The emphasis on the contrary was on proper education and the right environment for the growing generation. In the family workshop the young craftsman learnt as an apprentice the techniques in their entirety in direct relation to basic production, by practice. In fact he was just as much engaged in learning metaphysics and the true value of things; in short, in acquiring a culture. There was no isolation of the school from the larger life, for in this setting the child learnt little tasks as part of the daily routine, picking up skills even as he did other components of his way of life. The problems were real, not make-believe, as the aim of education was understood to be the unfolding of the personality in all its fullness.



For the quality of inspiration which transmutes skills and competence can hardly be taught. It has to be cultivated by experience. This makes for a very special relationship between the teacher and the pupil, an intimacy binding the two. The latter looks up to the former as the source from which knowledge is imbibed, great truths learnt and interpreted.

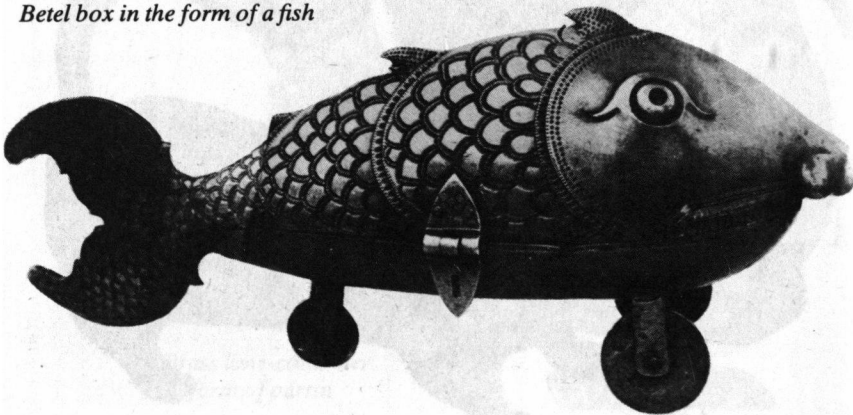
The teacher educates the pupil as much through his own personal conduct as through studies, and is expected to show the same respect and regard for the pupil as he would for his own progeny and family. The sharing of problems and varied experience is a real contribution to the enrichment and formation of the pupil's personality.

In a craft society the master craftsman is also a social leader and an important entity in the community. The teacher keeps nothing worthwhile back as a trade secret from the pupil. This form of institution makes craftsmanship a living thing, giving prestige and value to sound standards. The teacher spurs the pupil on to surpass himself and takes genuine pride in conceding superiority to the student.

In a society which accepts crafts and still finds an honoured place for them, there is a free exchange of ideas between fine arts and the crafts, each accepting cues from the other. Similarly the man of taste is rated as equally gifted and with the same sensibility as the man who creates. So appreciation is in a sense on a par with creation, because it is felt that the man of sensitivity participates with almost the same excitement and exhilaration when he appreciates as when he creates. This concept is an important and integral part of the craft world.

Moreover, the insistence on good taste ensures a consistently high standard for all arts and crafts. Even the common terracotta shows a

Betel box in the form of a fish



vigour of muscle and at the same time a fluidity of line as if to prove that the earth is not static but has a dynamic rhythm realized in a flux through a continuous process. Craft means cultivation of an intimacy with human life and creation, a sympathy for all living things and the realization of the fundamental unity of all aspects of life though diverse in form.

A society dominated by mechanical industrialisation tends to exalt efficiency over creative gifts, though the latter are rarer and more precious from the human point of view. Thus administrative staff enjoy better status, higher salaries and are generally considered more important than expert craftsmen.

It must be remembered that over-emphasis on techniques that accelerate speed and swell output, can, divorced from imagination and intellect, result in the loss of that exaltation which stimulates creative activity in craft production. Similarly the importance accorded to factual information in education may draw away all inspiration and leave life too flat to awaken any sense of wonder in the young.

In a world where life is being increasingly geared to the machine, and predominantly physical targets to be achieved through highly complicated mechanical processes, the role of man must inevitably, necessarily, pale and shrink. The increasingly frequent use of automatic machines curtails the demands on man. Less and less of him is called into action.

*Shitrakathi painting from
Maharashtra:
Scene from the Ramayana*



Geared to automation, human beings must increasingly conform to machines: individual opportunities for choice and decision narrow and, in the ultimate, leave the way open for the replacement of man by machine.

The alternative, for the majority of people, may all too easily be a form of escapism, a flight from the monotony and the stifling pressure of mass production. In such an atmosphere people tend to become preoccupied with careers rather than a sense of mission or service. At the same time they are readily attracted by anything that is new, and, because of its novelty, exciting, with little discrimination or concern for proper values.

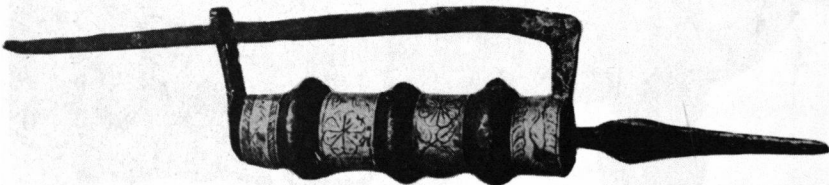
We must not forget that while science may open up the fourth-dimensional world, and technology the wide firmament, the individual in technological society seems to get compressed as it were into a single dimension. The responsibility he exercises is trivial, his power of decision nil. Only a small part of him operates.

Craftsmanship, on the contrary, involves the entire person, relating the mind and the material to a certain function for a specific purpose. While the tempo of the craft age gave the illusion of timelessness, the current age rushes on at the astronaut's speed. It is largely against this backdrop that we have to view the value of crafts and their relation to contemporary society.

Crafts have a special role and significance in the creation of a home – home in the sense of all that part of one's environment that is personal and intimate as distinct from temporary and utilitarian. When the machine usurps the essentially human part of performance, it cannot but reflect back upon the intimate environment.

In the furnishing of the home a direct association with the original and authentic register a personal impression on us, as with an original painting, a manuscript, a relic, things that a reproduction cannot equal no matter how perfect it may be. Here one senses all the difference between the work of a master and a machine. Crafts form part of the daily

Door-lock



environment and fit in naturally and gracefully in the arrangement of the home.

In upholding crafts one does not necessarily by implication reject machines or make an impassioned plea for a return to hand production. There is, in fact, a basic relationship between small tools and large machines. Where we take the wrong turning is in failing to make the proper appraisal of and acceptance of the role of each in its own sphere.

Tradition respects the natural limits of craftsmanship and the harmony that is established between the craftsman, the materials he uses and his tools. The pride the craftsman derives from his creation and the delight in the perfection of his finished product sustain him. It is this knowledge enshrined in the crafts that gives them an abiding place.

The very fact that even in this growing forest of machines with its triggery tempo, crafts, far from being smothered, are once more coming into world focus, is evidence enough that within us pulsates an innate yearning to use our hands and to feel the surface of individually created objects.

Increasingly it is acknowledged that craft-work is a form of therapy for those who are mentally unsettled and nervously upset: it is a source of rhythm and stability in living. Even hard labour done rhythmically becomes more bearable.



Terra cotta from Uttar Pradesh

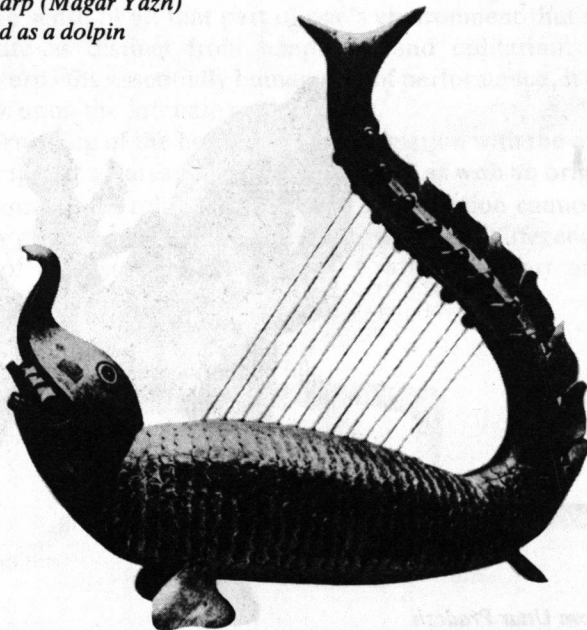
Today, much of the old obtuseness and casualness on the part of the more industrialized peoples towards the less industrialized nations is giving place to a more intelligent and sensitive understanding of the old cultures and traditional values, and a recognition of the need for and significance of mutual understanding and appreciation and exchange.

There is also a realization that the tissues of an older way of life are not to be swept away like so many cobwebs, for to a sympathetic mankind they reveal untold charms and subtle and restrained overtones of abiding value and vibrant meaning.

Ananda Coomaraswamy, the great interpreter of oriental arts and crafts, says that 'years ago, under pre-industrial conditions, the public had perforce to accept good art, good design, good colouring, because nothing worse was readily available'. Now mass production under advanced mechanization places the ignorant and the aesthetically untutored at the mercy of those who seek larger margins of profit.

The time for a choice has come. Good taste and greater opportunity to live in intimacy with beauty should not be the privilege of the few, but the common inheritance of all. This is what the crafts have to teach and offer us. The two paths have already crossed. Western science is no longer

*Indian harp (Magar Yazh)
conceived as a dolphin*



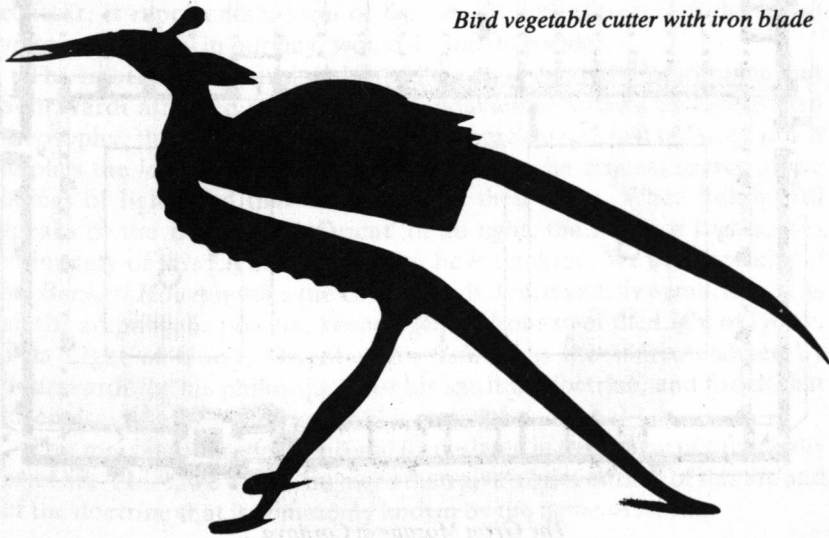
regarded as just a mechanism but has acquired also an element of philosophy.

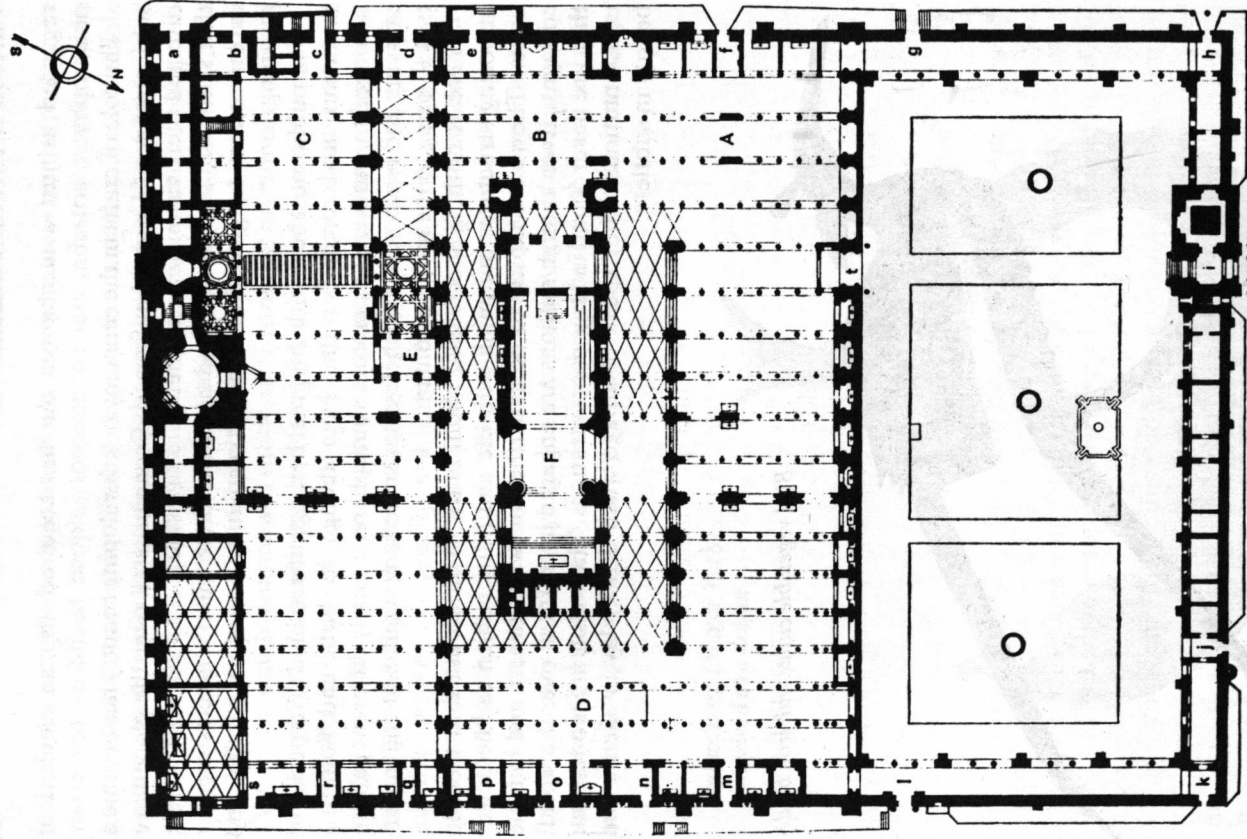
The role of crafts in the economy of a developing country has become a subject of world-wide significance. Economists all over the globe have directed their vision and experience to this study. And indeed it is clear that sentimental regard for traditionalism alone will not take us very far in our effort to give these ancient activities a modern vitality and meaning.

The public must bear with this great heritage of mankind in its period of mutation, and remember that even though its birth and flowering belonged to another age, another atmosphere, a totally different pattern of living and tempo, it nevertheless has something significant and important to bring to the modern context.

There is nothing spectacular about crafts. You do not find them in imposing structures humming with life and lit by million candle-power lights. They have mostly to be unearthed in twilit corners and humble cottages. Even though millions are engaged in crafts all over the world, they are never found in large concentrations. Their tools are modest and unostentatious. They speak of an age when dignity lay in silence and beauty in subtlety.

Bird vegetable cutter with iron blade





The Great Mosque at Cordova

Epistle on the State of Childhood

SOHRAVARDI

Translated from l'Archange Empourpré.
With Introduction, Presentation and Notes
by Henry Corbin*

Introduction

The school of Sohrevardî has continued to exist in Iran up to the present day. While it does not comprehend the philosophy of Iranian Islam in its entirety, it has stamped the latter with the particular character it possesses in the Islamic world. Its French interpreter, in taking on the task in his turn, does so in the spirit of fond admiration for the Shaykh al-Ishrâq that possessed him in his youth, but also in the conviction that the significance and range of this philosophy extend beyond its original context; it represents a form of the human adventure which the *homo viator*, especially in our day, would do well to ponder. . .

The treatise here translated will allow us to grasp the importance that Sohrevardî attached to one of the fundamental notions of Zoroastrian theosophy: the notion of *Xvarnah*, the supernatural Light of Glory which implies the idea both of glory and of destiny; the original source of the beings of light, and that which ensures their being. When Sohrevardî speaks of the *Ishrâq*, the 'Orient' of all light, the Light of Lights, it is ultimately of this Light of Glory that he is thinking. We even see him in his *Book of Hours* invoke the God of Gods, Ohrmazd, by name, as well as all the archangelic powers, keepers with Ohrmazd of the Light of Glory. This Light of Glory, Orient-origin, *Ishrâq*, is the source claimed by Sohrevardî for his philosophy, for his spiritual doctrine, and for all that he envisaged as the substance of his message. . .

This message was conceived and formulated in the course of a tragically brief life. Here, we will do no more than give a brief outline of this life and of the doctrine that is commonly known by the name of *Ishrâq*.

*Librairie Arthème Fayard, (Paris 1976).

We know that when he was about twenty years old, he went to Isfahan, where he came across the continuers of the school of Avicenna. After that he went to Rûm in Anatolia, where his boldness was already making his friends fear for his life, and then to Kharpût, where he dedicated one of his books to the Seljukian emir 'Imâdoddîn. . . Finally, he was reckless enough to go, for an unknown reason, to Aleppo in Syria, where he felt sustained by the friendship of a young prince of his own age, al-Mâlik al-Zahîr, governor of Aleppo and one of Saladin's (Salâheddîn's) sons. Was he careless enough to infringe that 'discipline of the arcane', to which he alludes more than once in his parables and his recitals of initiation? It is impossible to say; but the fact remains that his free talk came out, and the doctors of the Law, the *foqâhâ'*, ordered him to appear before them. . . He was accused of upholding the belief that God could raise up a prophet whenever he wished, a concept which shattered the basis of official prophetology, for which Muhammad was the 'Seal of prophets', and after whom there could be no other *nabî*. In the case of our shaikh, everything is more finely shaded, and in fact contains traces of the Shiite doctrine of the *walâyat*. Did the *foqâhâ'* wish to challenge this crypto-Shiism? In any case, they did not hesitate to condemn him to death, and Saladin joined forces with them to have the sentence carried out.

The context of these events is truly tragic. Sohravardî represented everything that a man like Saladin would find hateful, even though our Crusaders have given him a chivalric reputation which some find far-fetched. The dates, too, have their own eloquence. On the 2nd October 1187, the fall of Jerusalem had signalled the end of the first Latin kingdom. On the 12th July 1191, in revenge, the reinforcements led by Richard Coeur-de-Lion brought about the downfall of Acre. And less than three weeks later, on the 29th July 1191 (587 A.H.), Sohravardî died a martyr to his cause: for his followers he is the shaikh *shahîd*, the shaikh who was martyred, not *maqtûl*, put to death. It is as though Saladin, who returned to the fray three times to ensure that the sentence was carried out, and who was to die two years later (1193), wished to make Sohravardî pay for the setbacks he himself had suffered. Nothing was able to save our shaikh, not even the faithful friendship of al-Mâlik al-Zahîr.

But his work has survived. For a man who died so young, at the age of thirty-six, it is considerable – not so much for the number of titles (his biographer and disciple Shahrâzôrî informs us that there are over thirty) as for the firmness and breadth of the doctrine that he and his followers characterized as a 'resurrection'. This is the doctrine that is simply and

briefly termed *Ishrâq*. Properly speaking, the word *ishrâq* describes the light of the star when it is rising, *aurora consurgens*; the *Orient* as the birth and origin of light (*Oriens-origo*). Needless to say, the word is not intended in a geographical sense; we are concerned with the spiritual world or *Malakût*, which is the Orient of worlds in relation to our terrestrial world. The rising star is the sun of the *Malakût*, and with it rises a mode of knowledge which is knowledge of the 'Orient' of things, of beings and objects 'in their Orient', for then the knowing soul itself rises in its 'Orient'. 'Oriental' (*ishrâqî*) knowledge is characterised as presence and copresence (*'ilm hozûrî*), as opposed to knowledge which is merely the representation of things through the intermediary of a form or *species* (*'ilm sûrî*). This may have been the line that Avicenna was pursuing in his project of 'oriental philosophy', but Sohrevardî is well aware that Avicenna was unable to carry it through, and that it was he alone who brought the project to completion.

This 'oriental' (*ishrâqî*) theosophy is that of 'Orientals' (*ishrâqîyûn*, *mashriqîyûn*), a term, again, which is not intended to be taken in a geographical or ethnic sense. There is no necessary link between oriental in the geographical sense and 'oriental' in the metaphysical sense; if the Sages of ancient Persia, whom Sohrevardî claims as his spiritual ancestors, were 'oriental' sages, this was not because they happened to live in the geographical Orient, but because their wisdom was an 'oriental' knowledge in the sense just described. That is why Sohrevardî set himself the task of resurrecting their divine wisdom, their *theosophia*. Thus, one should not be content to translate the word *Ishrâq* as 'illumination', for it is a word that refers to the inner vision of the 'orient' of the dawning light, which Sohrevardî was finally to identify with the Light of Glory or Xvarnah. We are concerned with a knowledge which 'illuminates' because it is 'oriental', and which is 'oriental' because it 'illuminates'. What is emphasized is the 'Orient' which is the Light of Lights, the origin and dawn of all light; and it dominates the entire body of philosophical doctrine and mystical practice. Hence our translation of *ishrâqî* as 'oriental' in the metaphysical sense of the word. In Latin and hermetical texts, as well as others, this 'oriental' knowledge is designated as *cognitio matutina*: the Shaykh al-Ishrâq is the *Doctor cognitionis matutinae*.

'Oriental' knowledge, which arises after the soul has risen in its 'Orient', after its 'orientation', is brought into play on several levels. Sohrevardî wished to resurrect the theosophy of the ancient Persian sages. He was undoubtedly familiar at first hand with certain fundamental tenets of Zoroastrian wisdom, as is evidenced by his frequent references to the Xvarnah, to the ecstatic sovereigns of ancient Persia, to the

division of the worlds into subtle (*mênôk*) and material (*gêtk*); evidenced, above all, by the predominance of angelology in a world system where the names are mentioned of all the Amahraspands, or Zoroastrian archangels. This is not to say that he took over classical Zoroastrian cosmology exactly as he found it. To be sure, the existence can no longer be denied of esoteric currents in Zoroastrianism; they should be considered in the light of a close study of the Zoroastrian response elicited, in the 16th century, by the work of Sohrevardî. But the Shaykh al-Ishrâq rethought all the knowledge he possessed in view of the task he had set himself. He interpreted the theory of Platonic Ideas in terms of Zoroastrian angelology, and in reading him, one is constantly reminded of the mediating hierarchies, the 'series' of Proclus' universe. Moreover, the figure of Hermes, 'father of Sages', occupies a dominant place both in his conception of the 'sapiential tradition' and in his spiritual practice; for Sohrevardî, Hermes represents the visionary prophet of 'Perfect Nature'. Nevertheless, these additional elements would not suffice in themselves to create an 'oriental theosophy', *hikmat al-Ishrâq*. The latter needed the inspired genius of the *Shaykh al-Ishrâq*, and he remains its first and final explanation. As such, he was not the craftsman of what is casually called 'syncretism', so as not to have to consider a point of view which might prove troublesome. He was the witness to a *Sophia perennis* of which he was acutely aware.

For this *ishrâqî* theosophy is the spiritual way followed for centuries by the *Ishrâqîyûn*, the disciples of Sohrevardî, usually designated in indices as 'Platonisers' to distinguish them from the Peripatetics (*Mashsha'ûn*). Their school is characterised by the fact that it looks on philosophical study as inseparable from spiritual experience or mystical practice. In the eyes of Sohrevardî, philosophical research whose ultimate goal is not personal spiritual realization is a sterile undertaking and a waste of time. Equally, and in opposition to the many Sufis who rashly condemn knowledge as such, Sohrevardî considers that anyone who sets out on the spiritual way without a serious philosophical training, lays himself open to all the traps and illusions, all the troubles that nowadays go by the name of schizophrenia. This dual requirement of *ishrâqî* spirituality is its defining characteristic, as we will have occasion to verify in the treatise here translated.

Presentation

I

This 'Epistle', (an example of the 'inner dialogue' carried on with a shaikh who is anonymous), calls for immediate clarification on two points: 1) the person of the shaikh who is the speaker, and 2) the 'state of childhood' which forms the subject of the whole epistle.

1. The Angel Gabriel, the Angel of humanity who is both Holy Spirit and active Intelligence, is himself the shaikh and guide (*morshid*) of the *Ishrâqîyûn* who, like the Sufis who are called in Persian Owaysis, do not claim descent from a human teacher of this world. For this reason the Shaykh al-Ishrâq, in his recitals of initiation where the 'meeting with the Angel' occurs, designates the Angel as a *shaykh*, or, in Persian, a *pîr*: a wise man or spiritual teacher. This characteristic of the *Ishrâqîyûn*'s spirituality enables us to see the 'shaikh' as a substitute for the Angel. He is anonymous because he is the *shaykh al-ghayb*, *ostâd-e ghaybî*: the secret personal teacher whose name is known only to the mystic.

The shaikh of the present Epistle would certainly seem to be this personal, inner guide; but a complication arises in the form of a sort of doubling of his person. The author tells us how he was careless enough to break the 'discipline of the arcane' by talking carelessly with a profane man who insisted on walking with him along the road. As a result, he lost all track of his shaikh and it proved impossible to find him. Deeply distressed, he searched for him everywhere. One day, he entered a *khângâh*, where he found a Wise Man to whom he told his unhappiness. The Wise Man rebuked him, but enabled him to find his shaikh. What is the relationship between these two Shaikhs, whose appearance must surely reflect a profound intention on the part of the author?

Two details of the episode (§4) are worth emphasizing. The narrator meets the Wise Man who helps him to find his shaikh in a *khângâh*. In the texts which precede this one, we were shown the meaning of the *khângâh* motif: it is the microcosm as personal city, the inner sanctuary which is the place of the Angel's mystical presence. Moreover, the narrator specifies that from the pediment of this *khângâh* was hung a cloak (*khirqâ*) of two colours, half white and half black. This is, manifestly, a symbolism that is not only strikingly reminiscent but actually the equivalent of the symbolism of Gabriel's two wings, of which one is of light and the other of darkness. The cloak hanging from the pediment of the *khângâh* is thus an allusion which permits the reader to identify the Wise Man within. Nevertheless, if he really is Gabriel, the Angel-Holy Spirit who is the

shaikh of the *Ishrâqîyûn*, who is the other shaikh, the narrator's personal teacher, whom the Wise Man of the black and white cloak allows the careless disciple to find?

Here again, the indications scattered throughout the work of Sohrevardî set us on the right track. This shaikh figures largely in his philosophy and spirituality as 'Perfect Nature' (*al-Tibâ' al-tâmm*). This, of course, is a Hermetic concept; in Hermes' ecstatic recital, it is Perfect Nature whom he invokes to save him from danger. Briefly, it is the 'personal Angel of the philosopher'; not just what is elsewhere referred to as the 'guardian angel', but the celestial counterpart, terrestrial man's Twin or *celestial alter ego* (cf. the Mazdean concept of Fravarti). Sohrevardî addresses Perfect Nature in his psalm, saying: 'You are my spiritual father and my spiritual child.' The human being and his Angel share, as it were, a responsibility. Now, there is a close connection between Gabriel the Holy Spirit as the Angel of humankind (*Rabb al-nû' al-insânî*), and this Perfect Nature – a connection so close, in fact, that commentators have more than once hesitated and confused them.

It is true that the connection is a subtle one, but it is unmistakable. We have shown elsewhere how Perfect Nature, as the philosopher's personal angel, is the individuation of the relation that the Angel-Holy Spirit bears towards each of his followers, towards each of those whose guide, or *morshid*, he is. The relationship between Gabriel the Angel-Holy Spirit, and Perfect Nature, is the same as that between the community of *Ishrâqîyûn* and each of them taken separately. Gabriel is the *morshid* of the *Ishrâqîyûn*, and each of them has his Perfect Nature, his personal angel who guides him. At the end of the 'Book of Temples' Perfect Nature appears as the personal Paraclete whom the Holy Spirit sends to each of its own, to each man whose 'father' it is. It becomes even clearer how in the present Epistle it is the Angel-Holy Spirit who permits the lost disciple to find his Perfect Nature again. The disciple's carelessness and the reproaches uttered by the shaikh suggest clearly how one can lose 'contact with the Angel', and the punishment that is attached to this loss. The identity and the relationship of the two shaikhs is thus made to appear perfectly coherent. The shaikh who is the disciple's initiator is his Perfect Nature, and this accords exactly with Hermes' vision of his Perfect Nature, which Sohrevardî tells of elsewhere: Perfect Nature is the angel 'who projects knowledge into the philosopher's soul'. The Wise Man in the *khângâh* who enables the disciple to find, or to rediscover, his Perfect Nature is the Angel-Holy Spirit. This is not a mere detail of literary composition, but a 'detail' which concerns the whole structure of the mystical cosmology and anthropology of *Ishrâq*.

2. We come now to the title of this treatise: 'Epistle on the State of Childhood'. It becomes rapidly obvious that we are not concerned with childhood as a civil status, nor with a schoolboy's playmates. From the beginning of the Epistle, childhood is understood in the spiritual sense, as the carefree ignorance which precedes the interior man's entry upon the Way. The children who go to the shaikh for instruction are the secret powers of the soul, which are always ahead of the processes of the conscious personality. What is the Knowledge that these children wish to acquire? They themselves do not know the answer, and the question must be put to their shaikh. So why not set out in quest of him (§1 and 2). The narrator discovers this shaikh in the 'deserted countryside', the same place where the meeting with the Angel took place [in a preceding Treatise]. This detail should be carefully noted, as it confirms what we said above about the shaikh's identity. The shaikh starts by teaching his disciple to read the tablet on which is written the philosophical alphabet – that is to say, the cabbalistic science of letters.

This would seem to be a sufficient explanation of the state of childhood: childhood, naturally enough, signifies the beginning, the first awakening to Knowledge. Nevertheless, the Epistle contains other passages which prompt us to look for a deeper, less obvious meaning in this state of childhood, or rather a meaning which completes and expands that of the first lines. In the course of the dialogue, a digression is provided by a parable on the hermeneutic of the visions seen in dreams (cf. all of §13), with regard to which the shaikh comments on the law of analogy *a contrario*. What the soul contemplates in dreaming are in fact the happenings in the other world, and what she sees there is the inverted image of the event in this one. The vision of a death means that someone is dying to this world and is being born to the other world. Explicit mention is thus made here of the fact of this second birth. To be born into this world is to become prey to chronological time, to grow old and die. To be born into the other world does not mean to pass through it by a growth leading to old age and death, but to retain forever the status of one *renovatus in novam infantiam*, (the theme of the *Puer aeternus*). The radical gesture of the merchant in §12, who is the hero of the parable, signifies a spiritual death to this world and a new birth in the other, and consequently, freedom for what lies beyond death, freedom to leave this world *alive*; for resurrection is a call to the living, not to the spiritually dead.

This development, by deepening the concept of 'childhood', fully justifies the title of the Epistle, which would otherwise refer only to the first lines. This is confirmed a little later (§14). Henceforth the narrator

reads the tablet easily and with pleasure (reads, that is, the secrets of the mystical science of letters), which he originally found so difficult to decipher. His shaikh tells him that he has become an adult. This is so; but when we apply the law of inverted analogy which was brought to our attention a few lines back, by the digression on the hermeneutic of dreams (a digression which is by no means random), we realise that the spiritual adult is, precisely, a child in the heaven of the soul (cf. above the psalm addressed to Perfect Nature: You are my spiritual father and you are my spiritual *child*). Conversely, the adult in the profane sense of this world is only a child, and a stunted specimen at that, in relation to the spiritual world, so long as he continues in ignorance of it. Sohrevardî's intentions are always subtle and discreet; we learn from him not to rely on the text, but to read between the lines.

II

It is important to follow the progression of the shaikh's teaching, for it is with regard to this progression that the parables are introduced into the text; they are certainly not there in order to satisfy a 'talent for story-telling'. Nothing is ever arbitrary in Sohrevardî. The parables appear because they are a necessary illustration of the shaikh's teaching.

This spiritual pedagogy goes through three stages, each typified by a symbol (§6; cf. notes 5–7). 1) There is the example of the firefly who believes herself to be the source of the light she gives out. 2) There is the example of the sea bull who adds weight to firefly's pretensions: because the Moon is invisible during the day, he accuses the Sun of stealing her light. 3) Once it is understood that the firefly and the bull are mistaken, there must be a return to the psycho-cosmic mountain of Qâf, to the tree Tûbâ in which the Sîmurgh has its nest. The symbolism of the phases of the Moon typifies the successive spiritual states of the mystic who is a 'Moon in the heaven of the *tawhîd*'. The Moon is invisible to men when she is closest to the tree Tûbâ, and then, like a perfect mirror, she is so totally invested with the light which comes to her from the Sun that she is moved to cry out: 'I am the Sun' (cf. note 7). This account leads to a lesson in astronomy (§8), conveyed within the framework of a complicated celestial cartography (the author furnishes sufficient details for the reader to be able to construct the figure at will). This astronomy also possesses a hidden meaning which concerns the 'Moons in the heaven of the *tawhîd*'. What we have summarized below (note 9) does no more than anticipate what is developed immediately afterwards in §9 and 10, when they introduce the exemplary case of Abû Yazîd Bastâmî and address 'him who has the soul of a true *qalandar*' (cf. note 11).

This reference to the case of Abû Yazîd and to the true *qalandar* signals the introduction, via the transition of §10, of the two great parables (§11–13). The two examples presented in them are the inverse of each other, and are a reply to the disciple's question: 'When (the man who has renounced) no longer possesses anything, how does he provide for the needs of life?' The first parable is about the rich man who takes it into his head to build a magnificent palace. The Angel of Death appears too soon for his liking, and he tries in vain to obtain a delay. He dies without having renounced his palace, and in the absence of this renunciation, his own construction remains forever incomplete (even if the building is completed in a material sense by others) (§11). By contrast, the second parable concerns a merchant who, after weathering a terrible storm on his journey, throws all his luggage overboard of his own free will when he arrives in port (§12). The point is that to throw all one's luggage overboard in the middle of a storm is an act to which one consents in order to save one's life in this world, and no more than that. But to throw everything overboard when one is in the calm waters of the port and one could save it all is an act performed in order to save one's soul and set it free. So the shaikh declares that the merchant in the parable has truly made and completed his journey, whereas the builder, who would not consent to such an act even in the presence of the Angel of Death, has left the building of himself unfinished (cf. note 15).

The merchant's heroic gesture prompts the digression on the hermeneutic of dreams by means of the inverted analogy, which we discussed above. He who renounces something in this world finds *eo ipso* something in the other world; and the law which governs this equilibrium is unvarying. Once he has rejected the totality of this world, he will be a 'separate man', a perfect 'spiritual anchorite', an inhabitant of the other world (§13). The balance is a strict one; it unveiled to us, above, the meaning of the *Puer aeternus* as the 'adult' in the spiritual sense (§14), while in the profane world, the adult, in the sense of his civil status, is only a small child in spiritual terms. A little later on, there is yet another example of this law of compensation, where a hidden meaning is attached to the rejection of the cloak during sessions of mystical dance (§17).

The final part of the dialogue is in fact devoted to the explanation of the hidden meaning of Sufi practices: the spiritual concert (*samâ'*, §15), and the mystical dance (§16 ff.). Sohrevardî appears to have been particularly sensitive and attentive to the effects of musical experience, which for him is the essential mark of the encounter with the other, supra-sensible world. At the height of this experience it is no longer the external ear but the soul itself which listens. For Sohrevardî, the musical experience

results in this transfigured faculty of hearing, and in this his experience coincides with that of Shaikh Rûzbehân Baqlî Shîrâzî, a man of great emotions.

Finally, the whole of the last part of the dialogue contains a stern warning about these practices, a warning which applies to all pseudo-mystics, both those of Sohrevardî's time and those who abound in our day. It is not enough to wear blue clothes to become a Sufi. To achieve ecstasy it is not enough to start dancing – in fact, the opposite is true. The shaikh warns us: 'The dance is a product of the soul's inner state; the soul's inner state is not a product of the dance.' In other words, music and dancing are the means whereby the inner ecstasy of man expresses itself; they are not methods whereby he can achieve that ecstasy. Any attempt to make them serve this purpose renders one guilty of the falsification and imposture which a Cabbalistic teacher accurately condemned as 'induced' ecstasy. This is described as 'a conscious effort to arrive at an ecstatic state for personal ends; one gives oneself up to contemplation in order to induce ecstasy, and what should have been a secondary effect becomes the principal goal. One takes the citadel of ecstasy by storm.'

To this assault, all the pseudo-mystics who abound in our day are dedicated, and in their attempts they have recourse to all sorts of methods including every type of drug. What is even more serious is the fact that knowledgeable men, men who work in laboratories, have pursued researches (with the help of encephalograms) for the purpose of proving that these pseudo-mystics, in their 'induced' ecstasies arrive at the same results as authentic mystics. They concede, it is true, that the latter achieve results without employing the methods used by their dubious imitators. They forget only one thing: that authentic mystics do not seek such results, that these results have never been their objective. May this Epistle by Sohrevardî remind all pseudo-mystics and pseudo-esotericists that the 'citadel of ecstasy' is not to be taken by storm.

Translation

1. When I was a child I used to play, as children do, at the edge of the village. One day, I saw some children walking along together whose meditative appearance surprised me, so I went up to them and asked: 'Where are you going?' 'We are going to school to acquire Knowledge', they told me. 'What is Knowledge?' I asked. 'We do not know how to answer that,' they said to me. 'You must ask our teacher'. And with that, they went on their way.

2. Some time later, I said to myself: 'Now, what is Knowledge? Why shouldn't I go with them to their teacher and learn from him what Knowledge is?' I started looking for them and could not find them; but I saw a shaikh standing alone in the deserted countryside.*¹ I approached and greeted him, and he returned my greeting, his whole manner towards me exhibiting the most courteous affability.

Self: I saw a group of children on their way to school, and I asked them: 'What is the point of going to school?' They told me that I should ask their teacher that question. I was not interested at the time, so they left me. But after they had gone I felt the wish to find them again, and I started looking but couldn't find them. I am still looking for traces of them. If you can't tell me anything about them, tell me at least who their teacher is.

Shaikh: I am their teacher.

Self: You must teach me something about Knowledge.

The shaikh took up a tablet on which he had written *alif, bâ, tâ . . .* (a, b, c,), and proceeded to teach me.²

Shaikh: Stop there for today. Tomorrow I will teach you something else, and every day a little more, until you become a Knower.

I returned home, and until next day I kept repeating, *alif, bâ, tâ . . .* The two following days I went back to the shaikh for another lesson, and I assimilated these new lessons as well. It went so well that I ended up going to the shaikh ten times a day, and each time I learned something new. Finally, I never left his presence for a single moment, and I acquired a great deal of Knowledge.

3. But one day as I was going to the shaikh, a profane man insisted on walking with me and there was nothing I could do to get rid of him. Now, on one occasion when I had visited the shaikh, he had held the tablet some distance away from me. Looking carefully, I saw something written on it, and as I savoured the secret written there, I was transported by an inner joy. Well: I was stupid enough to tell my companion on the road everything that I had seen written on the tablet. As I said, he was a profane man; he burst out laughing when he heard my words, and mocked them. He turned abusive and made as if to strike me. 'You must be mad,' he said, 'no man in his senses would talk like that.' I became angry, and the intimate flavour of that experience (reading the tablet) turned cold within me. I left the profane man there and went on my way; but I did not find the shaikh in his accustomed place. My despondency increased accordingly, and grief stared me in the face. For a long, long time I roamed the world, but my every attempt to find him proved a failure.

4. One day, I went into a *khângâh* and saw a Wise Man there. From the pediment of this *khângâh* was hung a Sufi cloak (*khirqâ*) which was of two colours, half black and half white. I greeted the Wise Man, and he returned my greeting. Then I told him my story.

Wise Man (pîr): The shaikh is in the right. The great souls of the past thrill in heaven to the savour of this secret, and you go and speak of it to someone who can't even tell day from night. As a reward you receive blows, while the shaikh no longer allows you near him.

Self: In the present case things are different. All I said then, I said in a state of madness. You must help me – perhaps, with your help, I will find my shaikh again.

In fact, the Wise Man did take me back to my shaikh, who on seeing me said:

Shaikh: You have probably never heard the story of how one day a salamander asked a duck for hospitality. It was autumn; the salamander was very cold, but the duck had no idea how she was suffering, and started to remark on the charms of cold water and the attractions of the water in the pond during the winter. The salamander was ill at ease and angry with the duck. At last she said to him: 'Were it not for the fact that I am a guest in your house, and that I am afraid you would hunt me down, I would not leave here without trying to kill you.' And she left the duck's house. Now, do you not know that if you talk to profane men you will receive blows? They attribute talk that they do not understand to impiety or other causes, and as a result, a great many things happen.

Self: Since my religion and faith are pure, why should I be afraid of the spear of a profane man?

Shaikh: It is a mistake to say absolutely anything anywhere. It is also a mistake to ask absolutely anyone any question. It is wrong to talk with stupid people, because profane men become bored with the conversation of 'true men'.³ The heart of the profane man and of the man who is a stranger to the True Reality (*haqîqat*) is like the wick of a lamp which is soaked in water instead of oil, so that even if it comes in contact with fire, it will never light. Conversely, the heart of the initiate (the intimate) is like a candle, which attracts fire from a distance and is set alight; but though the light can catch on a candle, it cannot catch on a wick which is soaked in water. A candle consumes its own body in the blaze of its heart, and when there is no candle left there is no fire either. Those who are spiritual (*ahl-e ma'nâ*) also consume their own bodies in the blaze of their hearts, but when there is nothing left of their bodies, their light grows still greater and continues in their quality as intimates.

Self: Is it absolutely impossible for the heart of a profane man to become that of an initiate and be filled with light?

Shaikh: If a profane man becomes aware that his heart is blind, he is then in a position to make it clear-sighted. He is in the same case as a sick man whose illness makes him delirious. As long as he is in the grip of this illness, the patient has no awareness either of himself or of his illness, for delirium takes over the brain and weakens it, and the faculty of understanding has its seat in the front part of the brain. When the brain is disturbed, the patient is unconscious. Later, he comes to himself and realises that he is a sick man whose illness is approaching convalescence, and that his brain has returned to health, for otherwise he would still know nothing about it. A profane man is in exactly the same position, for the moment he realises that his heart is blind, he has already acquired some degree of perception.

The physically ill man and the man who is ill in spirit must now go in search of a doctor. For the man whose body is ill, the doctor prescribes certain potions which act on the humours. For the man suffering from a sickness of the soul, the doctor prescribes potions which act on the spiritual state until the man has returned to perfect health. When health has been re-established, there is a diet to be followed. Both patients go through three stages which correspond to the stages of the diet.

6. In the case of the man suffering from physical illness, the doctor starts by telling him to drink an infusion of barley. At the second stage he tells him to drink soup. At the third stage he tells him to eat meat. The doctor continues in this way until the patient is able to be responsible for his own nourishment.

To the man who is spiritually ill the doctor will say: 'You must first of all go into the desert and seek solitude'; for in the desert there is a firefly who never comes out of her hole in the daytime, only at night. This firefly possesses the property that when she breathes, the breath coming out of her mouth looks to her like light, as a spark is emitted when iron and stone are struck together. Thus, in the solitude, the firefly takes pleasure in this light and is nourished by it. Somebody asked her: 'Why do you not fly around the desert in daytime?' She replied: 'I myself possess light by means of my own soul. Why should I go submitting myself to the good graces of the Sun's light, and look at the world by the brilliance of his light?' The poor creature has no breadth of mind; she does not know that the light of her soul itself derives from the Sun. When the man who is spiritually ill catches this firefly, he too, by the light she gives off, sees the plant on which she feeds, and he too must eat of this plant as long as it takes for the same property to be manifested in him – that is, for light to be manifested in the breaths he himself breathes. This is the first stage.⁴

Next, he must go to the edge of the ocean, and there observe that in the ocean there is a bull which emerges at night,⁵ comes to shore and grazes by the light of the Jewel which illumines the night (*Gôhar-e shab-afîrûz*).⁶ Because of the Jewel which illumines the night this bull takes issue with the Sun whom he accuses of seizing by day the light of the Jewel which illumines the night, and of destroying his (the bull's) own light. The poor thing does not know that all light is nourished by the Sun. Once again, by the light of the Jewel which illumines the night, the sick man searches for the plant which the bull feeds on and feeds on it himself for as long as it takes for love of the Jewel which illumines the night to be born in his heart. This is the second stage.

The moment this occurs he must set off for the mountain of QAF where there is a tree (the tree Tûbâ) in which the SIMURGH has its nest.⁷ He must reach this tree and eat its fruit; and this is the third stage. After this he has no more need of a physician, for he has himself become one.

7. *Self*: Does the Sun then possess so much energy that even the light of the Jewel which illumines the night is of his imprinting?

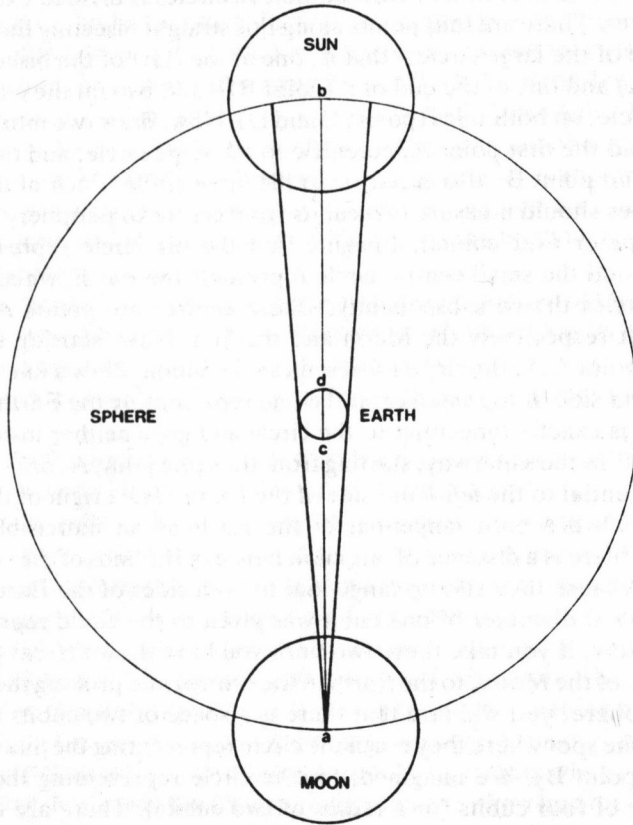
Shaikh: His strength is immense, and he extends the hand of his favour over the entire universe. Yet there are people who do not acknowledge his favour as they should. Let us suppose that someone has a garden and gives a beggar a bunch of grapes from this garden. For the rest of his life, the beggar is under tremendous obligation towards him. Well, each year it is the Sun who fills his garden with grapes and other fruit. The gardener is never too low to receive the Sun's favour. Is there anything which has not felt the effect of the Sun? Try bringing up a child in a dark house, so that he grows up without ever having seen the Sun; then, when you judge him to have developed the faculty of discernment, show him the Sun, and he will be perfectly able to understand the power of its light.

8. *Self*: When the Moon is in the full phase and the two luminaries (Sun and Moon) are in opposition (opposite each other), it is common knowledge that the terrestrial globe is between the two. How is it that the light between the Sun and Moon is not veiled, as it is when the knot in the Dragon's tail⁸ comes in front of the Sun or in front of the Moon (that is, during an eclipse)?

Shaikh: You are wrong. If you want to grasp the figure which is represented by this, draw a large circle measuring fifty and a half cubits from centre to periphery (thus making the diameter one hundred and one cubits). In the same way, using the centre of the large circle as your centre, draw another circle measuring exactly half a cubit from centre to peri-

phery (making the diameter one cubit). Next, draw a straight line through the centre, so that each of the two circles is divided exactly into two halves. There are four points along this straight bisecting line: two on the edge of the large circle – that is, one at the start of the bisecting line (point A) and one at the end of it (point B) – and two on the edge of the small circle, on both sides (points C and D). Now, draw two more circles, one round the first point A, eccentric to the large circle, and one round the second point B, also eccentric to the large circle. Each of these two last circles should measure two cubits from centre to periphery (making the diameter four cubits). Imagine that the big circle represents the Sphere, and the small central circle represents the Earth, while the two other circles drawn subsequently, whose centres are points A and B, represent respectively the Moon and the Sun. Now, starting from the bottom point A, in the circle representing the Moon, draw a line up to the *right-hand* side of the small central circle representing the Earth, so that this line is exactly tangential to the circle and goes neither inside it nor outside it. In the same way, starting from the same point A, draw another line tangential to the *left-hand* side of the Earth. The origin of these two lines which are both tangential to the Earth is an indivisible point, whereas there is a distance of one cubit between the ends of the two lines. This is because they end up tangential to both sides of the Earth, and a hypothetical diameter of one cubit was given to the circle representing Earth. Now, if you take these two lines you have drawn (from point A, the circle of the Moon, to the Earth in the centre) and prolong them as far as the Sphere, you will find that there is a space of two cubits between them at the spot where they reach the circle representing the Sun (around the top point B). We imagined, for the circle representing the Sun, a diameter of four cubits (or a radius of two cubits). There are thus two cubits of the Sun's astral mass remaining outside the two lines, one cubit on the right and one on the left. Now, instead of one cubit let us say one atom, thus reducing the Earth's dimension to that of an atom. As regards the starting point A, at the bottom in the circle of the Moon, the light is continuous on either side, while the Earth's shadow (in the cone formed by the two lines that were drawn first) is the night. We find that between the other two lines drawn from the Earth to point B above, in the circle representing the Sun, everything is illuminated by the Sun's light.⁹

All this is by way of analogy. Do not imagine that the relationship of the Earth with the heaven or with the two luminaries (Sun and Moon) is really like this (in conformity with the measurements we have been imagining). To return to the image given here: the true relationship of Heaven and the stars with the Earth is a hundred thousand times greater.



9. The whole of the terrestrial globe is ninety six thousand parasangs (*farsang*). The 'inhabited quarter' is twenty four thousand parasangs (each parasang measures either a thousand cubits or a thousand feet, for both measurements are used). The Earth is no greater than that. Now, consider the part of the Earth which makes up the 'inhabited quarter'. A few rivers possess it; some own a province, some a region, some a whole clime (*aqlîm*). Yet all of them claim the sovereignty. If they were aware of the True Reality (*haqîqat*), they would be truly ashamed of their claims. This sovereignty was discovered by Abu Yazid Bastami.¹⁰ He abandoned all his possessions. He renounced everything all at once, and all at once he found this sovereignty. Pleasures, honours and fortune are the

Veil across the way of 'true men'; while the heart is caught up in things of this nature, it is impossible to advance along the way. But he who has the heart of a *qalandar*¹¹ can recover himself and escape the bonds of luxury and honours. To him, the world appears in all its purity.

10. *Self*: What sort of man recovers himself in this way, freeing himself from the bonds of all he possesses?

Shaikh: He is who he is.

Self: When he no longer possesses anything, how does he manage to provide for the needs of life?

Shaikh: The man who thinks about that will give nothing. But the man who gives everything does not think about it. The world of confident abandon is a good world to live in, and it is not given to everyone to savour it.

11. There is a story about a kind man who was very rich. The idea occurred to him to build one of the grandest of palaces. He summoned builders from all around and promised them all kinds of things, and the work they did was worthy of their pay. They laid the foundations and built the first courses. They had only got half-way with the construction and people were already coming in from the surrounding towns to enjoy the sight of it. The high walls went up, covered with lovely paintings. The ceiling rivalled one of Mani's masterpieces,¹² while the porch was even more airy than the arch of Kesrâ.¹³ The palace was still unfinished when its owner fell ill, struck down by a sickness for which there was no cure, and which continued until he was at death's door. The Angel of Death appeared at his bedside, and the owner of the palace understood. He said to the Angel of Death: 'Is it absolutely out of the question for you to grant me the favour of enough time to complete the building of this palace?' The Angel of Death answered: 'When their time has come, men will not be able to delay it or to advance it by a single hour (*Koran* 7/32, 16/63). It is not possible. But supposing that you obtained a delay, so that you could finish building your palace and die afterwards: would you not then regret your palace still more, since it is there that you would have been struck down by illness, while for others it would continue to be a place to live in? If it is unfinished, it is because it cannot be finished by you.' As a delay was out of the question, the man gave up the ghost. Today the building of the palace is complete, but the building of the owner is unfinished and will never be finished; for such is the inner state of one's being, such the exterior form it takes, and such the prayer one offers up.

12. *Self*: What is the right frame of mind, which comes closest to perfect fitness?

Shaikh: Here is another story which will help us understand it. There was once a merchant who was immensely wealthy. He decided to board a ship and, for commercial reasons, to leave the town he lived in and set up elsewhere. When he went down to the shore, he had all his goods loaded onto the ship and then boarded it himself. The sailors got the ship under way and it set out, cutting through the waves; but when they reached the open sea a strong contrary wind arose, and the ship was caught in a whirlpool. The sailors threw out the cargo into the depths of the sea, and, as is their rule, they terrified the merchants into obeying them. Our immensely rich merchant was plunged into impotence and despair; every moment was a torment to him, each breath he drew a terror. He was completely incapable of enduring his misery; at time it would grow less, then it would worsen. He could neither face it nor escape it. He reached the point where he thought he was going to die; life itself was bitter to him, for all the pleasure that is derived from the goods of this world vanished from his heart. Finally the tempest abated; the ship continued her voyage and they arrived in sight of the coast. When the merchant was on the point of landing, he seized hold of all the possessions that were left to him and himself threw them into the sea. People said to him: 'Have you gone mad? what prompted you to do that? During all that time of fear, when you were a prisoner under the threat of the storm and your life was in danger, you did nothing of the sort; now, in sight of the haven of safety, what is the point of such a gesture?'

But the merchant replied: 'If, without distinguishing between the two eventualities that were facing us – that the ship would escape to safety and both my riches and my life escape the dangers of the sea, or else that the ship would go down and neither my goods nor my life escape – if, at that moment, I had thrown everything into the sea, the two eventualities – shipwreck or safety – would have come to the same thing. But now that I am in port, I will start thinking that my heart never experienced suffering or misery; because I am safe and sound, I will start thinking that I got here by my own efforts. So this is what I have been reflecting: if I were to forget the suffering so quickly, I would forget this whole trial. After a while my suffering would grow old and nothing of it would remain in my consciousness; I would enjoy the abundance of profit in my goods because of this world's greed. No! may I never board a ship again; may I never again undergo such a trial, which next time would be the end of me. Life is worth more than riches; I have given up all my goods, and nothing remains to me. It is wrong to board a ship, and it is wrong to trade, since

it is in riches that we trade. Whatever happens, I will always have bread to eat. Bread with health is better than treasure and royalty.’¹⁴

13. This man had really and truly completed his voyage. When someone possesses such firm assurance, it is possible that the road is leading him somewhere. When someone has found something in the world above, he is freed from all that held him captive in this world. If someone dreams that something is increasing for him, the interpreter will say that something is diminishing. And if someone dreams that something is diminishing for him, the interpreter will conclude that something is on the increase. Many things conform to this analogy; in fact, it is a firmly established principle, because it is the soul which dreams, and what she sees, she sees in the world above. Now, everything which diminishes in the world above is growing in this world, and *vice versa*. For example, if someone dreams that a child is growing, it means that someone is dying in this world; and conversely, if he dreams that someone is dying, it means that a child is growing here. Actually, in this case the dream is interpreted as follows: if someone dies (dies, that is, to the other world), his life is still on the increase (he has his whole life before him in this world), because he has only just come from the other world into this one. All this is quite clear.

Consequently, a man who in this world gives up something in view of the other world, for love of the True Reality, is compensated by something in the other world. It becomes clear that the moment in which a man rejects all his possessions is the moment when this inner state is born in him, because this inner state is actually a part of the other world which has been given to him as a gift.¹⁵ He then abandons something of this world in return, so that he gradually separates himself from it (*mojarrad*, becomes a spiritual *anchorite*). Increasingly, he rejects the totality of this world and acquires that of the other.

14. *Self*: Mime for me, in a recital,¹⁶ the inner state of ‘true men’.

Shaikh: No recital can mime what belongs to the other world.

Self: Before, when I used to gaze at the tablet you showed me, I derived no great pleasure from it. But now, each time I gaze at it, my inner state is completely altered, and I am overflowing with such joy that I no longer know how I have become what I am.

Shaikh: That is because at that time you had not yet reached spiritual maturity; now you have become an adult. There is a parable concerning this. If a man who has not yet reached virility approaches a woman, he derives no pleasure from it. But when he has reached virility and desires a

woman's touch, that touch awakens such pleasure in him that if, at the moment of consummating the act of love, one of his dearest friends were to try and stop him, he would look on him as his worst enemy; for during that moment he is drowning in pleasure. But supposing he were to tell an impotent man about the pleasure derived from being in this state. The impotent man would understand nothing about it, for one can only understand what a state of pleasure really is if one has experienced it oneself. But an impotent man is denied the opportunity.

Now, this is not the type of pleasure we are at all concerned with, because, for 'true men', pleasure concerns the soul. You had not yet reached adulthood in the other world; you could not yet understand the pleasure derived from spiritual reality, any more than you understood the word *pleasure* in its spiritual sense. Now you are an adult, and an adult can play the game of pleasure which is native to his race. But the man whose game is limitless is familiar only with a limitless state, which is the world of Mystery (or of the suprasensible); and beneath the veil of the esoteric secrets he communes with all the Veiled (the esotericists) of that high province. You observe that there is some difference between the two types of pleasure.

15. *Self*: During the spiritual concert (*samâ*'), a particular state is manifested among Sufis. What is its origin?

Shaikh: There are a few instruments whose resonance is pleasing, such as the flute, the tambourine, and others like them, and these, when playing notes in the same mode, give forth sounds expressive of sadness. After a moment, the psalmist raises his voice in the sweetest possible tones, and, to the accompaniment of the instruments, chants a poem. The state you speak of is that of the man in ecstasy when he meets the suprasensible world; he hears the voice growing ever sadder and, transported by what he hears, he contemplates the form which is manifested to his ecstasy. Just as one can evoke India by mentioning the elephant, one evokes the state of the soul by mentioning the soul. But the soul renders the ear powerless to apprehend this pleasure: 'You are not worthy to listen to this,' she tells it. The soul deprives the ear of its auditory function and listens directly herself. She is then listening in the other world, for it is not the ear's business to have auditory perception of the other world.

16. *Self*: And what is gained by the mystical dance?

Shaikh: The soul strives towards height, like a bird wishing to fly out of its cage. But the cage which is the body hinders it. The bird which is the soul makes effort after effort and raises the body's cage from the spot it

stands on. If the bird is very strong, it breaks the cage and flies away. If it is not strong enough, it remains a prey to stupor and misery, and takes the cage around with it. The mystical meaning of the violence is made manifest in this. The bird-soul strives towards height. As it cannot fly out of the cage, it would like to take the cage with it, but however hard it tries it cannot raise it higher than one span. The bird raises the cage, but the cage falls again to the ground.

17. *Self*: What does the dance¹⁷ consist in, then?

Shaikh: Some have said: 'I dance out of all I possess',¹⁸ which means: we have found something of the other world, and that is why we have renounced all that we possessed in this one; from now on we are *spiritual anchorites*. The symbolical meaning is this: the soul is unable to raise the body higher than one span. She tells the hand, which is outstretched for the dance: 'You at least must raise yourself by a cubit, and then perhaps we will have advanced a stage.'

Self: And what is the meaning of throwing away the Sufi cloak (*khirqā*)?

Shaikh: It means that we have received news of the other world, so we throw away something of this world. He who has thrown away his cloak puts it on again, just as he who extends his sleeves (for dancing) puts its possessions back in his sleeves afterwards.

18. *Self*: If a Sufi falls to the ground in the middle of the circle, one owes him something. It is up to the community to pronounce judgement on the poor man. Sometimes a spiritual concert is called for, sometimes a quest, sometimes it is something altogether different from what one would want – it is up to the assembly to decide. What is the secret (the esoteric aspect) of all this?

Shaikh: When 'true men' fall to the ground in the middle of the circle,¹⁹ they never rise again. The bird has become strong; it has broken the cage and flown away. The decision which must now be taken by the community concerns the body. Sometimes it is washed then and there, sometimes it is left till later. It is sometimes clothed in a white shroud and sometimes in a blue one. Sometimes it is buried in one cemetery, sometimes in another. It is up to the assembly to judge what is to be done. The case of each is the same.

19. *Self*: It sometimes happens that one or other does get up, and makes an agreement with some other ecstatic who has accompanied him in the mystical dance. What does he have in mind?

Shaikh: He is called to a travelling companion, a friend animated by the same breath as he.²⁰

Self: After the ecstasy, the visionary ecstatic is totally bemused and says nothing.

Shaikh: He says nothing because his entire person is a language. His intimate state can only be expressed in language that is mute, for no recital can mime the state he is experiencing, using the language of logical discourse. But it is important that the ecstatic should know what it is that he is saying without speech.

20. *Self:* When the spiritual concert is over, they drink water. What is the hidden meaning of that?

Shaikh: The Sufis say that the fire of love produces effects in the heart. In the movement of the dance, the pot of the stomach (*dîk-e mâ'ida*) is emptied, and if water is not poured into it, it catches fire. The Sufis themselves do not know the pleasure of being hungry; but if they were conscious of not being troubled by breaking their fast, they would not be Sufis.²¹ How many would-be horsemen, who look like Sufis on the outside, have decided to gallop in the arena of the 'true men'! and have lost their lives in their first clash with the champions who are on the road in quest of the Truth. The first comer who starts dancing does not thereby find ecstasy. The dance is the product of the soul's inner state; the soul's inner state is not the product of the dance. It is the business of 'true men' to speak of this inversion of things. For Sufis, the dance is their encounter with the suprasensible world, but wearing blue does not make the first comer into a Sufi. It has been said: 'There are plenty of people who are dressed in blue – among them are the qualified Sufis. The former are only bodies, without a soul, the latter are bodies only in appearance,²² for they are wholly soul.'

Translated by Liadain Sherrard

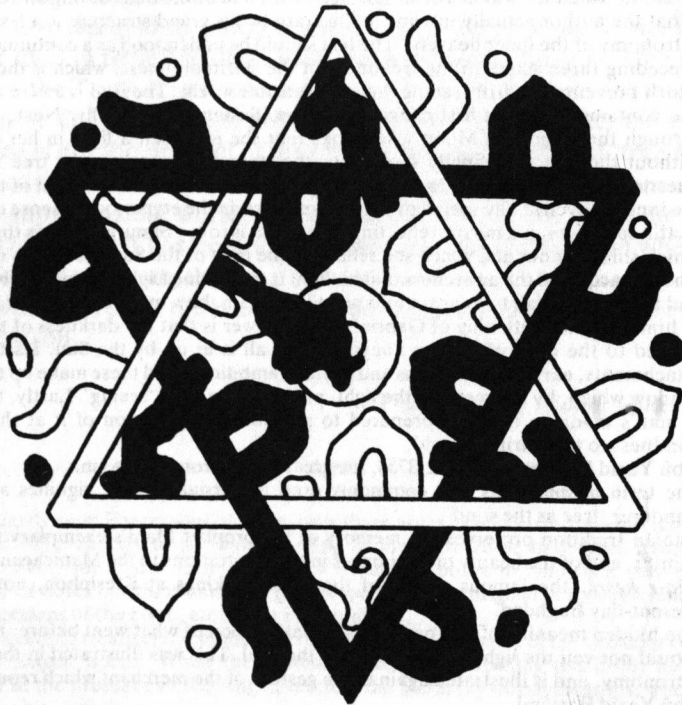
Notes

* *Translator's note:* For reasons of space, only those notes have been included which seem to contribute directly to an understanding of the text. These have been numbered consecutively for easier reference, but it should be borne in mind that neither the number of notes nor their numbering corresponds to the original. Cross-references to other sections of the book, etc., have been omitted.

¹ [In a preceding treatise] it is in the deserted countryside that one of the two doors of the inner *khângâh* opens. When the visionary succeeds in opening this door, he finds himself in the presence of the Angel, tenth in the hierarchy of Intelligences, who then becomes his initiator.

- ² This is the 'science of letters' or algebra of philosophy.
- ³ In Persian they are called the *Javan-mardan*, the spiritual knights.
- ⁴ These three stages, the first of which has just been described in the symbolism of the firefly, lead the mystic to the spiritual state of those who are 'Moons in the heaven of the *tawhid*' that is to say, the spiritual state where the symbolism of the phases of the Moon is realised in their person.
- ⁵ The example of the sea bull is an ironic development of the example of the firefly. The latter can be likened to a Moon who is ignorant of the fact that it is the Sun's light which shines in her, and believes herself to be the source of her own light. The bull goes further in accusing the Sun of seizing the Moon's light during the day. Here we have a perfect symbol of the profane consciousness, which claims credit for an act of illumination of which it is, in fact, only the organ and instrument.
- ⁶ The second spiritual stage consists in discovering the source of the light manifested in the Moon. Once this is understood, the bull's claims become utterly ludicrous. 'The plant on which he feeds', the light which he believes to be his own, is exactly the same as the Light whence the Jewel which illumines the night derives her own brilliance.
- ⁷ This third stage was described [in a preceding treatise] as that where the Jewel which illumines the night 'comes closest to the tree Tûbâ. In relation to you, it then appears to have become wholly shadow (invisible), whereas on the side of the tree Tûbâ it is wholly light.' At this point the mystic has become a 'Moon in the heaven of the *Tawhid*'. He is not merely aware of receiving his light from the Sun, but is like a mirror in that he totally reflects that brilliance, and is moved to cry out: 'I am the Sun.'
- ⁸ What are called the head and tail of the Dragon are the 'knots of the Moon', that is, the points at which the Moon's orbit intersects with that of the Sun (during an eclipse).
- ⁹ What the author actually intends to illustrate by his grand structure is a lesson in 'the astronomy of the inner heaven'. The text should be understood as a continuation of the preceding three stages in the treatment of the spiritual illness, which is the blindness which prevents one from seeing the suprasensible world. The soul is aware of the light she contains, but is at first caught up in the illusion of the firefly. Next, she passes through the stage of a Moon who thinks that she is herself a light in her own right, without the Sun; and finally she attains the state of Sîmurgh in the tree Tûbâ. The question is, to what extent can the Earth present an obstacle to the light of the Sun (in the inner heaven)? The speculative consciousness, in the etymological sense of the word (Latin *speculum*, is a mirror reflecting light), that is to say Sîmurgh, knows that the light which shines in her and which she reflects is the light of the Sun itself. Can the subject who has acquired the awareness that his light is the Divine Light of which he is the organ and instrument, fall back again into night? Or again, how much of the night is inherent in him (as in the left wing of Gabriel)? The answer is that the darkness of the night is limited to the cone of shadow; beyond that, all is lit up by the Sun. Earth signifies attachments, earthly possessions and profane ambitions, and these make up the cone of shadow which, by intercepting the light, prevents one from 'seeing'. Lastly, the 'Earth' is man's madness in being prepared to pay for his possession of it at the price of blindness to the spiritual world.
- ¹⁰ Abû Yazîd Bastâmî (died 261/875), the great mystic from Khorasan.
- ¹¹ The term *qalandar*, as it is commonly used in Persian poetry, signifies a 'religious wanderer, free as the wind'.
- ¹² Iranian tradition preserves the memory of the prophet Mani's exemplary talent as a painter, and of the beauty of the images in the illustrations to the Manichean books.
- ¹³ *Tâq-e kesrâ*, the famous palace of the Sassanid kings at Ktesiphon, not far from present-day Baghdad.
- ¹⁴ The hidden meaning of this parable is a continuation of what went before: the 'Earth' should not veil the light in the heaven of the soul. This was illustrated in the lesson in astronomy, and is illustrated again in the gesture of the merchant which repeats that of Abû Yazîd Bastâmî.

- ¹⁵ To attain this inner state is to obey the precept which directs that one should anticipate the physical *exitus* by a mystical death. The man who succeeds in this is indeed free beyond death, and will leave this world truly alive.
- ¹⁶ The *hikâyat* is simultaneously a recital and an imitation of what is being recited.
- ¹⁷ In Persian, *dast bar-afshândan*, literally 'to stretch out one's hands'.
- ¹⁸ In Persian, *âstin afshândan*, to dance; literally 'to stretch out one's sleeves' – that is, to refuse or to throw something away in scorn. Hence the allusive double sense of the word *dance*, marked by the position of the extended hands.
- ¹⁹ It is well-known for deaths to occur during sessions of music accompanied by dance, owing perhaps to the violence of the emotions aroused.
- ²⁰ This is a literal translation of the Persian *ham-damî*, meaning a 'sym-pathetic' agreement. The idea of a spiritual pact takes other forms as well. Among the Ahl-e Haqq, for example, groups are formed with a view to the day of the Resurrection. Three people (two 'brothers' and a 'sister') or four people make a pact (*iqrâr*) together to share each other's good and bad actions on the Last Day.
- ²¹ The sense of this is as follows: common people are hungry during Ramadan and look forward to the breaking of the fast (*iftâr*) in the evening. Sufis do not even think about it, because they are not hungry. Thus, to think even with indifference about the *iftâr* would still be to think about the hunger that they do not feel, and then they would not be Sufis.
- ²² *Tcheken*, a sort of cloak made out of embroidered material. The idea is that for true Sufis, the body is merely a cloak thrown round the soul.



Circulations of the song*

After Jalāl al-dīn Rūmī

ROBERT DUNCAN

If I do not know where He is
 He is in the very place of my not knowing.
 If I do not know who He is
 He is the very person of my not knowing.
 His is the Shining Forth I know not.
 My heart leaps forward past knowing.

*

Would I prune back the overgrowth of yearning?
 Free today from the shadows of what has been?
 Cut away the dead Love-Wood?
 It is as if Christ-rood never perisht.
 It is as if the God at Delphi still returnd.

Even now new shoots are returning toward Shrovetide,
 fresh, tender. In the fullness of summer
 they too will be rampant.
 A thousand roots of feeling tamper the ground
 for this abundance, this
 spring water.
 Ten thousand leaves of this green
 work in the free-flow of the sun's light.

*

Do you think I do not know what the curse of
 darkness means? the power in confusion?
 Do you think I do not remember
 the tyranny of establisht religions,
 the would-be annihilating cloud of lies
 and the despairing solar malevolence
 that is rumoured to lie back of these?
 the madness of Kings?

*First published in *The Partisan Review*

But now, in thought of Him, the Lord of Night
stirs with verges of a radiance
that is in truth dark, darkening glances of an obscurity
Love seeks in love, Eros-Oberon
whose Palace is Night. Did I tell you,
as I meant to, He is all about me?

It is as if Night itself
meant to cherish me.

*

The body of this thought must be a star.
This Mind is that fathomless darkness
racing out beyond itself, Time
pouring beyond time,
in the cast of whose scattered sparklings,
seed drift of suns,
I am all water. I reflect
passages of what is moving as I catch it,
the shadow of the expanding depth,
the glance fugitive and sparkling
of but one among a million promises.

*

In this world without kings
secretly in every thing kings are preparing.
See! a single leaf the chance light enhances
is annointed and *commands* my regard;
I am in the realm of this attention *subject*.
See! over there as if hidden another leaf
in obscurity as from the depth of its darkness
comes to light and therein sets up
rule over my seeing;
all the mass of foliage I see are members now
of this courting. I shall derive
where I am a court and pay court to his
courtesy.

How happy I am in your care, my old companion of the way!
 The long a-waiting, the sometimes bitter hope,
 have sweetend in these years of the faith you keep.
 How completely I said 'yes' when it came to me
 and continue. Each morning awakening you set free
 another day for me. How has your face
 aged over these years to keep company with mine?
 Ever anew as I waken endearing. Each night
 in the exchange of touch and speech blessing.

Prepared throughout for rest. Is it now
 as if He were almost here? As if we were
 already at rest?

*

The rest is an Artesian well, an underground fountain.
 The level of the water is so close,
 up-welling in every season, rising through me
 the circuit Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī
 in which at last! I come to read you, you
 come to be read by me. Releasing
 freshets of feeling anew I come from.

*

But if you are the lover, how entirely you are He.
 How entirely He is here; He commands me.

A blazing star regent in the southern hemisphere
 shines in my thought in the north
 and I go forth to find rumors of him.
 I am like a line cast out
 into a melodic unfolding beyond itself,
 a mind hovering ecstatic
 above a mouth in which the heart rises
 pouring itself into liquid and fiery speech
 for the sake of a rime not yet arrived
 containing again and again resonant arrivals.

Fomalhaut, guardian splendor of the other 'sky' –
 in reflection my mind is crowded with splendours.

*

Are you my soul? my lover? my redeemer?

O no! My soul rushes forward to you!

And in the rushing is entirely given me anew.

*

The veil of speech I meant to be so frail I
 meant to be transparent that the light
 were you to read there would reveal me
 throughout waiting, throughout about to be naked,
 throughout trembling has become a net
 wrapping you round about in my words
 until I cannot see you.

Now I would tear speech away.

I want you to find me out

with none of my leads in the way.

I want you to seek my being ready

in your own way.

*

Because He was there where deep drunk I

yet remembered him –

because He was ever in the lure of the moment

awaiting me –

because *His* are the eyes of my seeing you –

yours was the mouth of the wish the tongue of my speech sought

that may never actually have been yours

was the sweet jet from sleep's loins

night stirred to arousal

in the seed of the hour I came upon;

for the glorious tree of that long ago

acknowledged need

bursts into a like-sweet abundance of leaves,

as if from utter Being

risings of odours and savourings

feeding full the inner song in me.

*

Have we lived together so long, the
confluent steams of each his own life
into one lifetime 'ours' flowing,
that I do not yet ever know the first
pang? the confused joyous rush
of coming to myself in you?
the leap at the brink of Being
left alone? the solitary on-going
before you? I am ever before you.
Even in the habit of our sweet marriage
of minds. Yet I am not
so sure of finding you
that I have no need for this
reassurance,
for the embrace of our two bodies,
for the entwining of bodies,
for the kiss, even as the first kiss,
for the memorial seal into silence the
lips bond,
the joyous imprint and signature of our
Being together one
in the immortal ellipse.

*

For how entirely mortal is the Love I bear for you.
I bring it forward into the full fragrant
flare, the rosy effulgence of a perishing tree.

As in Oz or in fairyland, the fruits of that
arbour are ever changing.
All the flowering spectres of my childhood and manhood
come into and fade into that presence,
perilous throughout, essential throughout
– apple, cherry, plum – deep purple
as night and as sweet – quince and pear –
we know they are there all ready,
in each ring, each year
they belong to the tree's inner preparing.

For how entirely a door has been flung open in me
long prepared!

How each season of the year, a thief,
 goes in and goes out,
 bearing transgressions of tastes and odours,
 traces of me lost,
 imprints of thee, stolen hours,
 stored among my secrets.

*

Stand by me, you winged light and
 dark ascendant!
 Attend me, here, falling!

*

For I am falling out into that Nature of Me
 that includes the Cosmos it believes in
 as if It were the smallest thing, an all but invisible
 seed in the cloud of these seeds scattered,
 ever emerging from belief beyond belief.

I shall never return into my Self;
 that Self passes out of Eternity, incidental!
 He too seeks you out. He too
 dreams of coming to this fugitive morning,
 of finding His Self in a time so personal,
 in this mere incident of my living,
 it is lost in our coming into it.

*

Again you have instructed me to let go,
 to hold to this falling, this letting
 myself go.

I will succumb entirely to your intention.

Contend with me,
 you demand. And I am surrounded by winged
 confusions. *He*
 is everywhere, nowhere
 now where I am.

In every irreality there is Promise.
 But there

where I am not *He* really is.

In Whose Presence
it is as if I had a new name.

*

I am falling into an emptiness of Me.
Every horizon a brink of this emptying.
Walls of who I am falling into me.

How enormous to come into this need!

Let us not speak then of full filling.

In the wide Universe

emptying Itself into me, through me,

in the myriad of lights falling –

let us speak of the little area of light

this lamp casts.

Let us speak of what love there is.

Let us speak of how these perishing
things

uphold me so that

I fall into place.

*

The child I was has been left behind.

Those who first loved me have gone on without me.

Where they were a door has been left open
upon a solitude.

In the midst of our revelry I find myself waiting.

Every day the sun returns to this place.

Time here advances toward another summer.

These fruits again darken; these new grapes

will be black and heavy hang from their bough;

the heat at noon deepens.

Sweet and pungent each moment ripens.

Every day the sun passes over this valley.

Lengthening shadows surround me.

All day I waited. I let the sun and shadows
pass over me.

Here a last clearing is left amidst shadows.
The darkest shadow falls from my pen as it writes.
In this farewell the sun pours over me
hot as noon at five o'clock.

But in Rūmī's text it is dawn. At last
he will come for me.
'He has climbed over the horizon like the sun,'
I read. Where have you gone?
'he is extinguishing the candles of the stars.'

Come quickly here where the sun is leaving me, Beloved,
for it is time to light the lovely candles again!

*

For a moment did beauty pass over my face?
I did not have to reach for *your* beauty.
Radiant, it entirely flowed out and thru me.

Were you talking? Were we discoursing
upon the mercurial Hermes?
The mysteries of quick-silver and the
alchemical gold,
the transports of beauty, dissolve themselves
and are nothing,
are resolved again, everything.
a wave of my own seeing you
in the rapture of this reading.

What were you saying?
An arrow from the shining covert of your gaze
pierced me. Molten informations of gold
flood into my heart,
arteries and veins, my blood
racing throughout with this news,
pulses in a thousand chemical
new centers of this learning.

*

How long ago I would have been the target!
every line of my young body alert to be drawn into your sight!
all of my youth was meant to be your target!

Now so late that my body
darkens and the gossip of years
goes on loosening the ties of
my body, now so late that
the time of waiting itself looses
new pains in me, I hear
the sound of the bow-string.

Swift, swift, how again
and agains that arrow reaches me
and fails to reach me!

*

How I long for the presence of your eyes,
for in your eyes gnostic revelations
come to me, Hermes
darkens and quickens my speech.

I will take up geometry again.
The mysteries of here and there, above and below,
now and then, demand new
figures of me. A serpent intuition
flickers its tongue upon the air.

Mine now the quickening of that
shifting definition I am swaying in whose
fascination suspended before striking
which now opens out radiant and singing petals from itself
so that I am lost in its apparition,
distracted in this looking into the time-sway.

I am like a snake rising up in the
mirage of the sun where
everything is swaying, to and fro,
noon visual dancing and,
beyond my hearing, in seeing I over-hear

the messengers of the sun buzzing, wingd.
 I see and am held here in my seeing before striking
 the honeyd glow of the woodwind dance
 singing.

In each House He has a different name,
 In each He is expected again.

And I too change, but you in all
 these years remain
 true to me so that it most seems,
 sweet constancy,
 in you I have come true
 and all the rest is range.

Then He is range. And from this household ours
 Heaven is range. In the Grand Assemblage of Lives,
 the Great Assembly-House
 this Identity, this Ever-Presence, arranged
 rank for rank, person for person, each from its own
 sent out from where we were to another place.
 now in the constant exchange

renderd true.

*



Indirections Find Directions Out

Hamlet and Traditional Wisdom

BRIAN KEEBLE

... thus we do of wisdom, and of reach,
With windlasses, and with assays of bias,
By indirections find directions out.
(2.1.61-3)*

Beyond the brilliance and seemingly inexhaustible richness of the language, beyond any ambiguity of character and theme, what impresses us most about *Hamlet* is perhaps the multiplicity of its means. Like concentric, transparent spheres they interpenetrate and inform one another. Though never conflicting, each has its own elaboration of images which nonetheless polarize around a single unifying centre. To penetrate to this centre requires not so much that we dig into the textual surface as bring to it a form of wisdom that will enable us to understand the play's total implications in the terms of a symbolism possessing a loose affiliation with a cosmological order of things. As Martin Lings, in his illuminating study of the later plays, has pointed out, 'Shakespeare's plays cannot be considered as sacred art in the full and central sense of the term, but they can be considered an extension of it, and as partaking both of its qualities and its functions.'¹

The play embodies a meaning the communication of which, as Yeats understood, requires of its author a rejection of character for pure lyricism. Only when character is seen to be essentially subsidiary in this sense does the play take on a little of its real symbolic stature. We have in the character of Hamlet something more than just a 'railing' and 'the beginnings of an individualist criticism' as one commentator has suggested. A deeper and much more earnest issue is at stake. What Hamlet rails against is nothing less than a transformation that was taking place within the collective mentality of the period. It was the beginning of the

*Bracketed references throughout are to the New Cambridge Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1968.

development that, by the Eighteenth Century, sought to circumscribe metaphysical intelligence by human reason. This transformation of the spiritual dimension of human understanding had its beginnings in the humanist tendency to see the world in terms of how it is experienced by the individual. This individualism led to a naturalism in which everything that lies above nature became, for that very reason, beyond the reach of the individual as such.

Hamlet adequately reflects this transformation of consciousness. It is precisely 'naturalism' in this context that makes the 'uses of this world' seem to him, 'weary, stale, flat and unprofitable'. That is the real nature

Of Hamlet's transformation – so call it,
Sith nor th'exterior nor the inward man
Resembles that it was. (2.2.5-7)

His is a constant state of anxiety concerning 'reality', what 'seems' (1.2.76) and what is 'true'; a perpetual concern with 'that within which passes show' (1.2.85). In his concern for an inviolate, sacred Truth is his awareness that if the State of Denmark were left exclusively to its own devices there would no longer be any question of truth at all but only a notion of 'reality' limited to the unfixed and unstable conditions of private existence – intelligence reduced to its most inferior dimension. Such deprivation will manifest itself in a social order that does not embody the metaphysical order of a heavenly paradigm. That is the sense in which 'the play' may be considered symbolic since it depends, in order to convey its profoundest meaning, upon the qualitative view of reality inherent in the cosmic law of correspondence.

There are specific lines in the text that one may point to as revealing such an interpretation; chief among which is the line, 'Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell' (2.2.58), where we can sense immediately that the whole machinery of the drama, engineered, as it were, by the need for revenge, depends upon the law of analogical correspondence by virtue of which each individual life is seen to be linked together with cosmic existence so as to contribute to the universal and total harmony. Thus the context in which we have to understand Hamlet's course of action – the context is provided imperatively by the purgatorial wanderings of his father's spirit (1.5.10-13) – is less a matter of personal debt and more an involvement with the cosmic process upon which human destiny depends. There is a further clue to this Hamlet's lines,

The time is out of joint, O curséd spite,
That ever I was born to set it right!
(1.5.188-9)

As much as anything else, the play is about that spiritual apathy with which we, perforce, surround ourselves; in the words of Polonius;

'Tis too much proved, that with devotion's visage
And pious action we do sugar o'er
The devil himself

(3.1.47-9)

No complacent 'indifferent honest' approach to our spiritual condition will stand as adequate bulwark against the dark dissembling forces of evil and corruption;

Sit still my soul, foul deeds will rise,
Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes.

(1.2.258-9)

Such lines as these go far beyond the human drama of the theatre to reach into the cosmic drama in which we all partake.

The medieval world-view, recent scholarship has come to see, holds a much greater place in the renaissance period than was previously suspected. And although that world-view had undergone some alteration of emphasis, all the late plays of Shakespeare have elements in common with its intrinsically metaphysical doctrines. In a general sense, Hamlet, both the central figure and the play as a whole, span the medieval view and that of the Elizabethan age which adulterated medieval intellectuality with an 'individualism' that mingled knowledge of the divine with the beginnings of a profane understanding of the natural world. As Douglas Bush noted, 'By 1600, the time of Hamlet, the finest minds, grown restless and sceptical, are able to question traditional beliefs, to entertain the idea of life as meaningless flux, and to explore the depth of human corruption.' It was now possible for men to subject their own mental activity to a dispassionate analysis. Not only reflections but also the inner reactions to the flow of external events and objects assumed a new importance. The 'new science' – nothing less than the secularisation of thought that had the effect, eventually, of replacing a qualitative world view with a quantitative one – certainly did 'call all in doubt'. The Cartesian dualism fell upon prepared ground.

Shakespeare could hardly have been alone in feeling the impulse of a gradual surrender by the collective intelligence of his time to a view of reality as the 'knowing' process of individual and subjective reactions to the 'play' of appearances. This shift of cognitive emphasis lost the deeper penetration of the medieval view where, for instance, the Divine origin and source of the world seems itself guaranteed by the objects it manifests

and where the external world, for all its substantiality, has nonetheless a certain transparency which situates the percipient within the fabric of a more total vision. It is instructive to compare a Shakespeare sonnet with the lyric, for instance, with the refrain, 'This world fareth as a fantasy', as an illustration of this.² With Shakespeare's sonnets the *passive* feelings and responses of the individual are allowed a determining role and given a quasi-absoluteness unthinkable in the earlier epoch.

The theatre that Shakespeare had as his heritage was still a comparatively recent innovation and differed radically from the traditions of the Mystery and Morality plays. It saw its main function as one of creating illusion, presenting, as Anne Richter had said, 'a self-conscious illustration of a thesis about reality'. *Hamlet* is a very 'theatrical' play in this sense, being much concerned with the nature of drama, 'whose end both at the first, and now, was and is, "to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure"''. (3.2.20-4) Miss Richter's words 'self-conscious' are all-important. By now actors were famed for their ability and power to create the illusion of 'another' reality. But that other reality was a simulated version, albeit often in a different historical and social context, of the reality circumscribed by common sense. It involved, on the part of the audience, a certain duality of vision which allowed a brief respite or escape into a fictional world. This faculty of double vision, highly developed in Shakespeare's audiences, would have been all but unknown to the audience of the Mystery Play. The innovations of Elizabethan dramatic techniques, by their very nature, oppose their Medieval counterpart. Elizabethan 'characters' represent men and women playing at that general experience we call 'life', whereas in the Mystery Play the actors do not so much express 'life' as externalise or act out the dictates of the inner world of the Spirit – that is they *objectivize* those hidden, intangible forms that impress the very pattern of that life. Elizabethan theatre, as nearly all theatre since, embodies a passive spectator consciousness and plays upon the emotions and feelings of the individual. But the Mystery Play moves us in order to convince us of the rightness of our involvement with what lies beyond and above our private existence – what gives it its being. All the complex ambiguity of the relationship between what 'seems' and what is true or 'real' in a play such as *Hamlet* would have been wasted on a Medieval audience.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a microcosm, an extended and active poetic symbol in dramatic terms of the states of being that a man might know. The clue is supplied by Patrick Crutwell; 'one feels that the meaning

which Shakespeare is striving to express is almost beyond the capacity of a drama filled only with human 'characters'.³ Such 'characters' in *Hamlet* serve to mirror the states of being within the play's central figure, each of those nearest to him precipitating the realisation or resolution of these states.

Viewed thus, we are given the link to the play's symbolic function. 'Hamlet' approximates to the medieval view of man as the mediating point between angel and beast. Fundamental to the Christian tradition that helped form this view is the doctrine that man is created in the image of God. Yet he is necessarily part animal through his involvement in created nature. At the same time, he reflects the spiritual world and so that the inviolate truth is not entirely closed to him, he has within a divine seed, that metaphysical nucleus, as it were, by which he might reach beyond the confines of his limited self to be *re-minded* of his higher origin. By this 'seed', that 'light that lighteth every man who cometh into the world', he has the means of redemption from having 'fallen' into the domain of animal nature. If this lesser self were the final arbiter of all it could possibly mean to be a man then there would be no need of Hamlet's question:

What is man,
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more:
Sure he that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and god-like reason⁴
To fust in us unused.

(4.4.34-9)

Here, and intrinsic to his conception of a 'god-like reason', Shakespeare broaches what, from the traditional standpoint, is the inter-related doctrine of the two 'selves'.⁵ Distinguished as Immortal Spirit, Self ('my heart's core' 3.2.71) and psycho-physical, mortal soul ('machine' 2.2.124), the former is the immutable, transcendent principle of which the latter is a transient and contingent modification; Hamlet's 'mortal coil' (3.1.67). To ascribe any degree of absoluteness to the mortal or empirical self is, from the metaphysical standpoint, the fallacy of identifying the self-subsistent essence of Being itself with the constant flux and transformation of subjective experience. To embrace Truth, Being and Oneness man must transcend his cognitive involvement with fleeting appearances. It is the undetermined essence of our *Personality* that is the unchanging and objective witness to the flow of appearances.

This Self it is the only real vocation of man to discover. That Hamlet is aware of the issues involved is made clear as early as Act 1.

I know not 'seems'.

'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
Nor customary suits of solemn black,
Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye.
Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,
Together with all forms, modes, shapes of grief,
That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,
For they are actions that a man might play,
But I have that within which passes show.

(1.2.77-85)

While the means of discernment between the real and the illusory are ultimately provided by the objective and transcendent Self the psycho-physical self witnesses merely the 'show' of a level of reality that only 'seems', in being contingent upon the Absolutely Real (on pain of its projection into a nothingness). Moreover, this 'seeming' reality is apprehended by faculties which are themselves unreal in relation to the innermost essence of the knowing subject. Thus, appearances, far from liberating the mind, imprison it and, losing their dimension of depth, become, in Hamlet's words, 'stale' and 'flat'. The world assumes the aspect of a 'sterile promontory' where the mind is subject to every psychic disturbance. This is the web in which Hamlet finds himself enmeshed, for with the theme of individual redemption, Shakespeare has woven the analogous and necessary theme of the nature of 'reality' and 'illusion' as it affects the condition of man's ultimate destiny.

A necessary corollary of the fundamental doctrine of Self and ego is that the latter 'must put itself to death' (Blake's words). Only by an effective alignment of the soul to the potentialities of the Spirit can the inadequacies of our individuality be redeemed. Such an identity implies a recognition that the psycho-physical self must penetrate beyond what 'seems' if it is not to serve as the earthly veil that literally obscures the real from the illusory. This is more easily appreciated, if, as Schuon points out,

one distinguishes in the cosmos two poles, the one existential, blind and passive, and the other intellectual, therefore conscious

and actual: matter is the point of precipitation in relation to the existential pole only, while the intellectual pole gives rise, at the extreme limit of the process of flight from God, to that 'personifiable force', or that perverted consciousness, who is Satan or Mara. In other words, Matter is the existence most remote from pure intelligence, the divine Intellect . . . on the intellectual plane this remoteness can only spell subversion and opposition.⁶

Hamlet's isolation is created by his awareness that he alone properly understands what is involved in such a polarity. His speech to Guildenstern in Act 2, which includes the famous 'What a piece of work is man' (2.2.297-314), indicates, metaphorically, his involvement in 'sin'.

Hamlet himself is fallen Man – fallen from unmodified Being into modified, relative existence – that is the human existential condition. In the 'world' of the play – the state of Denmark – is integrated every potentiality that belongs to the destiny of the human individual. The multiple states of being, as they manifest themselves in the human consciousness, must be brought into harmony by virtue of the law of correspondence, according to which every individual thing is linked to cosmic existence, the domain of nature is potentially an earthly paradise – and in its virgin state is the symbolic manifestation of the uncreated, unmodified *primordial condition*. Moreover this law points to the continuity of universal causality conjoining the multiple states of being. On the social plane the central principle of this continuity is the office of the King: 'Long live the king' refers to the office of Kingship and not to its temporary occupant. Owing to his unique position in the potential paradise of the natural world the King is, as it were, the earthly type of the Eternal Being; a terrestrial symbol of the absolute plenitude and goodness of God. He sustains the authority of the Spirit but in terms of temporal power, (Thus when Hamlet says 'I am too much in the Sun' (1.2.67) he is referring to this authority, but in its corrupt state.) In this way the possibilities inherent in what transcends man's natural state are extended and applied to the very form of the human collectivity so that each individual within the order has every chance of having his particular destiny shaped and illuminated, either directly or indirectly, by the Supreme Power of Heaven. Shakespeare's description of this cosmic principle, utilising the symbol of the wheel, is put into the mouth of Rosencrantz in Act 3.

The single and peculiar life is bound
 With all the strength and armour of the mind
 To keep itself from noyance, but much more
 That spirit upon whose weal depends and rests
 The lives of many. The cess of majesty
 Dies not alone; but like a gulf doth draw
 What's near it with it. O, 'tis a massy wheel
 Fixed on the summit of the highest mount,
 To whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things
 Are mortised and adjoined, which when it falls,
 Each small annexment, petty consequence,
 Attends the boist'rous ruin. Never alone
 Did the king sigh, but with a general groan.

(3.3.11-23)

Now the cosmic order has been violated by the murder of Hamlet's father. His office has been taken from him by subversive means so that the existing order has broken down. (A sense of its loss is expressed in a general tone of regret throughout the entire play.) The forces of 'perverted consciousness' are given free play and threaten destruction, hence the many references to forms of contagion and disease hidden from view while on the surface everything *appears* to be in order. With the reign of disorder,

the age is grown so picked, that the toe of the
 peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier

(5.1.135-7)

moreover

. . . in the fatness of these pury times
 Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg.

(3.4.153-4)

This is the inevitable consequence of what Hamlet announced at the end of Act 1, Scene 2;

foul deeds will rise,
 Though all the earth o'whelm them, to men's eyes

(1.2.258-9)

while its effect upon individual consciousness is described by the King in Act 4;

the people muddled,
Thick and unwholesome in their thoughts
and whispers

(4.5.80-2)

By means of this free play of the forces of subversion and opposition the earthly paradise is allowed to become 'an unweeded garden' (1.2.135) since its inhabitants are guilty of the cardinal sin of indifference to the demands of an ultimate knowledge. They are, in Hamlet's terms 'indifferent honest' – that is to say morally passive without active spiritual vigilance. With no access or effective contact with spiritual reality, the garden,

grows to seed, things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely.

(1.2.136-7)

Moreover, what should be an earthly paradise reflecting the Divine Will and Intelligence has become the subject of an impoverished consciousness;

for there is nothing either good or bad, but
thinking makes it so: to me it is a prison.

(2.2.252-4)

In the habitual mood and the customary act struggles the individual who is forced to depreciate his responses to the quality of things. This is the significance of Hamlet's 'damned custom' (3.4.36) for such it is that obscures the need to have hold of one's ultimate spiritual destiny. Actions no longer reflect in any way the Divine purpose, the restoration of which is the very task from which Hamlet cannot rest. That is why 'the king is not with the body. The king is a thing' (4.2.26-7). For the King is not King by virtue of his social position but only in as much as he reflects the authority of Heaven. The soul so impoverished lives in a perpetual 'bestial oblivion' (4.4.40) that is a parody of the true life.

The usurper then, 'a king of shreds and patches' (3.4.103), instead of reflecting spiritual authority, violates the conditions essential to sustain harmony and equilibrium in the terrestrial order. There is discord between Heaven and earth so that 'the time is out of joint' (1.5.188). The potential earthly paradise, 'this goodly frame' (2.2.302), grows 'rank' and 'unweeded'. 'That monster custom' (3.4.161) 'calls virtue hypocrite' (3.4.43). Man, from being 'noble in reason . . . infinite in faculties . . . like an angel in apprehension' becomes merely the 'paragon of animals' (2.2.308-11)⁷ and inhabits what for Hamlet is nothing 'but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours' (2.2.306-7).

It is Hamlet's destiny to arrest this state of decay but only by gradual steps that culminate in his death and not before certain 'rites of purification' have been effected, for he is involved in the cosmic hierarchy by virtue of his Princedom and his relationship to the Queen. Since the usurper's temporal power no longer reflects the infinite *mercy* of Heaven the Devil feeds and multiplies within the contagious disorder. Those nearest to Hamlet are like aspects of his own soul that devise means to procrastinate in various forms of distraction, fear, bodily comfort and the like. Meanwhile, Hamlet does nothing, appalled at how his course of revenge must involve his mother so that he is held back by a conscience that 'does make cowards of us all' (3.1.83)

Recognising his own capacity for weakness he confesses to Ophelia, 'I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such thing, that it were better my mother had not borne me: I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck, than I have thoughts to put them in.' (3.1.123-7).

Among his distractions are his mother who wants him to marry Ophelia, and Ophelia herself who wants some outward confirmation of what she hopes is Hamlet's love for her. Claudius wants Hamlet to remain

Here in the cheer and comfort of our eye,
Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.

(1.2.116-7)

All these things urge him to a state of 'indifferent honest' ease away from his destiny. But by the name of what is ultimately real his father's death must be revenged. Until equilibrium is restored there can be no rest and through all vicissitudes he holds on. He has 'that within which passes show' and is able to see through the contingencies to view the multitudinous implications of the total situation. He realises that

some must watch while some must sleep.

(3.2.273)

Even as the angels watch over man's sleep so as well there must always be someone to fight against the powers of darkness. For truth must never be taken for granted. Hamlet is always on guard, always restless and questioning, even while the forces of opposition are ranging themselves against him in the shape of Claudius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

'Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world.

(3.2.391-3)

His destiny involves, inextricably, not only the destiny of those who came before him, but more important, the destiny of those yet to come, a fact he cannot escape.

To the extent that a man is involved in ignorance of his essential nature, he does not actualise the Divine potential that is his by virtue of his creation in human form. Thus he slides helplessly towards the condition of sin, that unknowingness that lives on borrowed time and pays heavily at the Last Judgement. It is such a thought, coupled with the conviction that his destiny involves others that urges Hamlet towards what, in all its enormity and horror, looks like too drastic a solution;

But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have,
Than fly to others that we know not of?

(3.1.78-82)

This is the substance of his time-honoured soliloquy. Do we resolve to identify our own existential being with the divine nature, in which case we must wage constant war upon all that deflects us from the difficult inner path, or do we remain content with the 'bestial oblivion' of the ego, passively suffering

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

(3.1.58)

But the question arises: when we give up the ghost, in whom, when we go forth, shall we go forth? If there is no coincidence of mortal self with Immortal Spirit what does the 'sleep of death' hold for us

When we have shuffled off this mortal coil

(3.1.67)

– the void of nothingness or hell?

There is, then, only the one course of action – revenge! Heaven has been outraged by the murder and only by a complete exorcism can the cosmic harmony be restored. The operation must be irrevocable with no compromise to the weaknesses of individual sentiment. Hamlet justifies the drastic nature of the solution with the words,

is't not to be damned,
To let this canker of our nature come
In further evil?

(5.2.68-70)

for he *must* precipitate a revenge upon the 'perverted forces of consciousness' that are in reality aspects of his own soul. Like all spiritual dramas, Hamlet's drama must be fought upon that lonely stage of the soul.

His casting off of Ophelia comes at the crucial point in the drama at which he precipitates his future course of action. In addressing her thus;

– Nymph, in thy orisons
Be all my sins remembered

(3.1.88-9)

he recognises the terrible price his mortality exacts from him. His rejection of Ophelia is as much a revenge upon himself for in mirroring his own soul Ophelia reminds him of his own involvement with the general contagion. An attachment to Ophelia would only dissemble his resolve which must remain inviolate. He is afraid that the power of her 'beauty will sooner transform' his honesty with himself 'from what it is to be a bawd' (3.1.111-2). The poignancy of his alternating 'I did love you once' and 'I loved you not' (3.1.115 and 119) is sharpened by the realisation that in renouncing Ophelia he is sacrificing the last possible source of solace within himself from 'the sea of troubles' that surrounds him.

Nor can there be any question of forgiving Claudius whose

offence is rank, it smells to heaven
It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,
A brother's murder!

(3.3.37-9)

As for Hamlet's mother, here duty demands of him that he pay respect to the fact that he is of her flesh and blood. Nonetheless, he must turn her eyes into her 'very soul' so that she may see she too has been infected with

such black and grainéd spots
As will not leave their tinct.

(3.4.90-1)

Even his procrastination serves the purpose of discovering the extent of which the King's immediate 'constellation' of subjects has defiled the 'garden' and

spread the compost on the weeds
To make them ranker.

(3.4.151-2)

Claudius, who personifies the forces of opposition and subversion in Hamlet's own nature, like the ghost, must also undergo a period of

purgatorial wandering, albeit before death, so that the extent of his guilt is fully fathomed.

Despite the procrastination everything about this drama points to Hamlet's death as being the consummation of an inexorable destiny. When the play closes at his Last Judgement he has engineered his own redemption in a Self-knowledge which will prove the foundation-stone of his certainty at having restored the cosmic harmony in the State of Denmark, and having gained rightful command over the forces of perverted consciousness. He has triumphed over illusion having won through to a new level of consciousness that identifies his individual existence with a level of being commensurate to its 'god-like reason'. He has attained the discernment of his naked soul.

Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice,
And could of men distinguish.

(3.2.61-2)

In the light of his newly attained knowledge *created* nature becomes transparent to *creative* Being. (This accounts for his concern with the processes of nature, whereby 'a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar' (4.3.29-30); such 'progress' represents for the Prince merely the transient modification of ultimate reality.) The revenge completed, and with the arrival of Fortinbras, cosmic harmony is restored. The task finished, the boil lanced, as it were,

Now cracks a noble heart. Good night,
sweet prince,

(5.2.357)

his lonely destiny is truly fulfilled.

But what of Hamlet's death in relation to the doctrine of the two 'selves' with its metaphysical corollary, the objective discernment of the nature of illusion and reality? From early on it becomes apparent, though at first for no explicit reason, that Hamlet's death will be necessary in the sequence of events that are to follow. To appreciate this fully we need to understand just how these doctrines, when interrelated, interpret the nature of death. There is a profound reason why Hamlet struggles to grasp the dualistic nature of the illusion and reality as it affects his own conscious destiny. From the viewpoint of the existential pole, at death the generated body does not cease to be existential but is so transformed that 'A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm' (4.3.26-7). Thus life is woven out of death and death from life. Hamlet reflects on this cosmic process at Ophelia's

grave – ‘Alexander returneth to dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make loam’ (5.1.204-5)

From the viewpoint of what Schuon calls the intellectual pole, however, if at the point of death the individual being is to surmount its own dissemination amongst the powers of darkness its immutable essence must be identified with its connatural agent, the Divine Intelligence it serves to reflect. For only in accordance with their integral and consubstantial nature can the condition of individuality be reconciled to the inviolate truth that is ultimate unity. Not only must Hamlet die cleansed of guilt at having done nothing to revenge the devil in the shape of Claudius, but he must also be free from every limitation that pertains to the subjective, individual life, his Self at peace in being properly situated in the cosmic harmony, so that when at death he ‘goes forth’ his passage from individual existence is unhindered by its embodiment in the natural world.

Stripped of what ‘seems’ the ultimate earthly possession – his individual personality – the ‘poverty’ of Hamlet’s death can be seen in profoundly Christian terms as one of spiritual preparation and purity. Having been urged by every mode and manner of a corrupt Court (that itself manifests, as it were, the cosmic separation of man’s relative existence on earth,) to renounce all spiritual valour in favour of the rewards that accrue to his earthly station his is nonetheless the archetypal Christian choice of spiritual redemption by way of an earthly renunciation: ‘There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel’s, but he shall receive an hundred fold now in this time, houses and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions and in the world to come eternal life.’ (Mark 10.29-30).

Shakespeare indicates the transition from earthly existence to heavenly life in Hamlet’s concern for his reputation in this world; for such a reputation can only have meaning and veracity by the terms of a purification of the soul before its entry into a world that not only in every respect entirely transcends this one, but is indeed its very source. As evidence that the transition is effected we are given the line

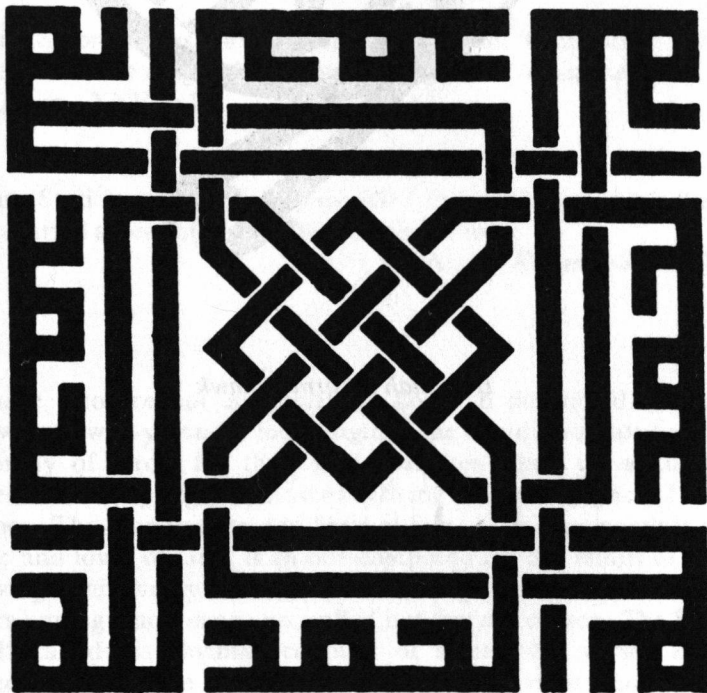
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest

(5.2.359)

which we can suppose implies that the disequilibriums that constitute the fabric of the drama are synthesised into a state of complete equilibrium that itself is a symbol of the total cosmic harmony as it mirrors the state of Heaven Itself.

Notes:

- ¹ *Shakespeare in the Light of Sacred Art*, (London, 1966) p.27.
- ² *Mediaeval English Lyrics*, ed. by R. T. Davies, (London, 1963) p.127.
- ³ *The Shakespearean Moment*, (London, 1954) p.102.
- ⁴ We recall that the word 'reason', like its companion 'speech', has its semantic links with the Greek *Logos*.
- ⁵ 'I was in two minds', 'I was beside myself' and 'self control' are current expressions that mirror, albeit in some shadowy way, this timeless doctrine.
- ⁶ See Frithjof Schuon, *In The Tracks of Buddhism*, trans. by Marco Pallis, (London, 1968) p.57.
- ⁷ Shakespeare does not make the distinction explicitly but the qualitative transformation is effected in the play.





Bismalah in form of hawk

The Flight of Birds to Union

Meditations upon 'Aṭṭār's Maṭīq al-ṭayr

SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR

مقامات طيور ماچناست
کمرغ عشق را معراج جان است

And Solomon was David's heir. And he said: 'O mankind! Lo! we have been taught the language of the birds (*maṭīq al-ṭayr*).'
(Quran – XXVII; 16).

Our 'Stations of the Birds' (*maqāmāt-i ṭayr*) is such, that it is the nocturnal ascent of the soul for the bird of love.

(‘Aṭṭār – *Khusraw-nāmāh*)

All those who are not completely at home in this world of fleeting shadows and who yearn for their origin in the paradisaal abode belong to the family of birds, for their soul possesses wings no matter how inexperienced they might be in actually flying towards the space of Divine Presence. The *Maṭīq al-ṭayr* of Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār, that peerless poet, gnostic and lover of God, is an ode composed for this family of beings with wings, this family which in the human species corresponds to the seekers among whom many are called but few are chosen. The Shaykh himself called his rhyming couplets of some 4458 verses *Zabān-i murghān*, literally, the 'The Language of the Birds' or *Maqāmāt-i ṭayr*, the *Stations of the Birds*¹ in reference to the language of the birds (*Maṭīq al-ṭayr*) which, according to the Holy Quran, God taught to Solomon.

And it is by this Quranic title that the immortal work of 'Aṭṭār finally became known to the world. This Sufi masterpiece, in accordance with the inner meaning of the Solomonic knowledge of the language of the birds, does not only penetrate into the meaning of alien forms of discourse,² but is specifically concerned with the types and classes of beings in spiritual quest, for it treats not the language of just any species of animals but birds whose wings symbolize directly the archetypal reality of flight, of ascension in opposition to all the debasing and downgrading forces of this world, and finally of escape from the confinement of earthly limitation.

As 'Aṭṭār himself states,
I have recited for you the language of the birds,
one by one.

Understand it then, O uninformed one!
Among the lovers, those birds become free,
Who escape from the cage before the moment of death.
They all possess another account and description,
For birds possess another tongue.
Before the Sīmurgh that person can make the elixir,
Who knows the language of all the birds.³

The *manṭiq al-ṭayr* refers at once to the language of the birds of spiritual beings, their conference or union⁴ and also to esoteric knowledge which is the fruit of the spiritual journey. In fact the word *manṭiq* itself implies at once language and meaning including the categories of logic which, far from being opposed to the spiritual, are related to the Divine Word that is the source of all certitude and meaning, as the *Logos* is the ultimate source of logic.⁴

'Aṭṭār was not the first to write of the birds and their language, of their nostalgia for the royal court of the Divine Beloved, of their hardships and suffering in undertaking that journey which is in reality none other than *the* journey, and of finally reaching their goal. Ibn Sīnā had already written his *Risālat al-ṭayr* (*Treatise on the Bird*) over two centuries before to be followed by Abū Hāmid Muhammad al-Ghazzālī, the celebrated theologian, whose treatise on the same subject is among his lesser known writings.⁵ But 'Aṭṭār's treatment, while drawing from the works of his illustrious predecessors, is of another order. While Ibn Sīnā deals with the intellectual vision which allows the soul to return to its celestial family and al-Ghazzālī the suffering and helplessness of the seeker who is saved solely through grace and Divine Love, 'Aṭṭār deals with the supreme spiritual and mystical experience of Union. He uses the Ghazzālīan

theme of suffering through which the birds are finally able to enter the court of the celestial King. But he passes beyond that stage through the highest initiatic station whereby the self becomes annihilated and rises in subsistence in the Self, whereby each bird is able to realize who he is and finally to know him-Self, for did not the Blessed Prophet state, He who knoweth him-Self, knoweth the Lord?⁶ In gaining a vision of the Sîmurgh, the birds not only encounter the beauty of Her Presence,⁷ but also see themselves as they really are, mirrored in the Self which is the Self of every self.

The *Mantîq al-ṭayr* begins with an *alpha* which is already the mirror of the *omega* of the spiritual life for in its prelude is contained an account of the Divine Reality, an account which cannot but be the fruit of the beatific vision by the bird of the soul of the Sîmurgh. Through a rhapsodic crescendo the master poet proceeds in his praise of the One until he reaches the stage wherein he utters,

O thou who through thy manifestation hast become
invisible,
The whole universe is Thee, but none hath beheld
Thy face.
The soul is hidden in the body and Thou in the soul,
O Thou hidden in the hidden, O Soul of soul!
Although thou art hidden in the heart and the soul,
Thou are manifest to both the heart and the soul.
I see the whole universe made manifest by Thee,
Yet I see no sign of Thee in the world.⁸

In his rhapsodic commentary upon the first *shahādah*, 'there is no divinity but the Divine' (*Lā ilāha illa' Llāh*), 'Aṭṭār does not only speak of God's Names and Qualities. His concern is not with only a theological exposition whether it be cataphatic or apophatic. Rather, he leads the enraptured reader through the symbolic language of gnosis (*ma'rifah*) permeated with the fire of Divine Love to that knowledge of Unity which on the highest level is none other than the 'Transcendent Unity of Being'⁵ (*waḥdat al-wujūd*),⁹ a knowledge which cannot be attained operatively save by passing through the hardships of the cosmic journey, passing through the gate of annihilation and reaching that vision of the Sîmurgh which both consumes and sanctifies.

Chants of glory of the One lead 'Aṭṭār to praise the Prophet as the Perfect Man, the Logos, the first created of God in whom, God contemplates all His creation and for whom the created order is brought into being. If the sapiential understanding of *Lā ilāha illa' Llāh* is *waḥdat*

al-wujūd, that of the second testimony of Islam, *Muḥammadun rasūl Allāh*, is not only that Muhammad is the messenger of God, but that all manifestation, all that is positive in the cosmic order comes from God. The second testimony is no less an assertion of unity (*tawḥīd*) than the first and in fact follows from it. 'Aṭṭār's vision of the Simurgh could not but make him aware that the Blessed Prophet is

The Master of the Nocturnal Ascent and foremost
among creatures,
The shadow of the Truth and the Sun of the Divine
Essence,
The Master of the two worlds and the king of all,
The sun of the soul and the faith of all beings,
His light was the purpose of creatures;
He was the principle of all existants and non-existants.
When the Truth saw that absolute light present,
It created a hundred oceans of light from his light.
It created that pure soul for Itself.
Then created the creatures of the world for him.¹⁰

With his intoxicating poems in praise of God and His Prophet, poems which already contain the profoundest metaphysical truths and bear the fruit of the tree of gnosis, 'Aṭṭār sets out upon the journey of the birds, a journey whose *omega* point is already contained in the *alpha* of the mystical epic. He returns the reader to the realm of terrestrial existence and the bondage of the soul of the profane man who has become entangled in the prism of passions, to the state of the birds ensnared and trapped far away from their abode of Origin. The prelude serves to remind the reader that the poem itself is the fruit of the supreme vision and that the guide, who describes the perilous journey of the birds to the presence of the Simurgh, has himself already undertaken the journey and is to be trusted as a veritable guide. The opening verses of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, being among the greatest masterpieces of Sufi poetry, reveal the nature and degree of inspiration of their author and enable the seeker to surrender himself to the work, to be led with the certitude that the guide is not simply an imitator of hearsay but one who has already undertaken the journey towards the One, the *only* journey worthy of undertaking in this fleeting life.

The story of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* is in itself a simple one. The birds assemble to select a king for they believe that they cannot live happily and in harmony without a king. Among them the hoopoe rises and introduces himself as the ambassador sent by Solomon to the Queen of Sheba. He

considers the Sîmurgh as the One worthy to become their monarch. Each bird brings up a pretext and an excuse in order to avoid having to make that crucial decision of embarking upon the path and questions the hoopoe about the whereabouts of the Sîmurgh. The hoopoe answers each bird satisfactorily, removing its doubts and finally succeeds in having the birds prepare for the journey to meet the Sîmurgh. The hoopoe is chosen as leader and describes to them the stages of the journey to be undertaken. After overcoming the difficulties and responding again to the questions of the birds, the hoopoe and the other birds complete their preparation for the dangerous journey. They traverse the seven valleys of the cosmic mountain *Qāf* on whose peak resides the Celestial Monarch. The seven valleys leading to that peak which touches the void are those of quest (*ṭalab*), love (*ʿishq*), gnosis (*maʿrifat*), contentment (*istighnā*), unity (*tawḥīd*), wonder (*ḥayrat*), poverty (*faqr*) and annihilation (*fanāʾ*).¹¹ These stages of the path are also the valleys and dales of the cosmos interiorized within the soul of the initiate.¹² Finally, the birds reach the abode of the Sîmurgh and after an initiatic transformation behold Her Presence as the mirror in which each bird sees its-Self for the thirty birds (*sī murgh* in Persian) see the Sîmurgh at once utterly other and none other than the Self of their selves.

At the beginning of the journey each bird is addressed separately according to its characteristics and what it symbolizes as a distinct human type and also a particular power of the soul. In reality each bird is at once an aspect or tendency of the human soul and a particular type of soul in which the characteristics in question are predominant. The birds addressed include the hoopoe, the wagtail, the parrot, the partridge, the falcon, the francolin, the nightingale, the peacock, the cock pheasant, the turtle-dove, the ring-dove, the gold-finch and the white falcon. In their description one discovers at once their special qualifications and gifts and their limiting and inhibiting characteristics.

Thus the birds assemble to prepare themselves for the flight to the cosmic mountain (*Qāf*). Their debates and discussions reflect those between the master and his disciples within Sufi orders and contain some of the most profound and subtle descriptions of the problems and questions which confront those who actually undertake the journey upon the path of spiritual realization. Each bird speaks of itself in a manner reminiscent of other classical Muslim works on animals such as the *Rasāʾil* of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ.¹³ That the hoopoe becomes the guide upon the path, the symbol of the Sufi shaykh, *murshid*, or *pīr*, is due to its association with Solomon and the court of the Queen of Sheba and that it was already the ambassador of *the King* for only one familiar with the King can guide others to His Presence.¹⁴

The hoopoe describes the Sîmurgh as gnostics 'describe' God. One feather from Her wing fell upon China during the darkness of the night, for according to *Hadith* 'God created the world in darkness', and from beholding this single feather all of the people of China fell into the state of excitement.

How strange that at the beginning, the Sîmurgh,
 Manifested Herself in the middle of the night in China.
 One of her feathers fell in the middle of China,
 Of necessity excitement and agitation filled the
 whole country.
 That feather is now in the museum of that land.
 That is why it is said, 'Seek knowledge even in China'.¹⁵

If one feather of the Sîmurgh caused a whole nation to enter into a state of agitation and ecstasy, what must it be to behold Her Face! The birds become excited at hearing the account of Her Presence and prepare to undertake the journey. But the gravitational pull within the soul is not to be so easily overcome. The passionate soul makes a thousand excuses to avoid being consumed by the fire of purification. Each bird, therefore, begins to find an excuse. The nightingale, which symbolizes the love of external and distracting beauty rather than the interiorizing beauty which unites,¹⁶ makes the pretext that its love is the rose whose vision solves all its difficulties and problems. The hoopoe replies that the rose withers away and its beauty does not endure. The wise should seek a beauty which does not perish.

The parrot, which symbolizes the love of this earthly life and its prolongation, seeks the water of life to make the life of this world enduring and would be satisfied with such a goal. To this excuse, the hoopoe replies that the soul was created to be sacrificed to God; this sacrifice being its entelechy and *raison d'être*, hence its final joy and beatitude.

The peacock which resided originally in paradise but which fell on earth because it aided Satan in alluring Adam away from his paradisaical innocence and perfection, seeks the perfections of formal paradise and claims that it cannot endure the vision of the Sîmurgh. It is like many exoterists who seek the pleasures of paradise in themselves rather than God, who seek the house rather than the 'Master of the house', to quote 'Attâr.

The other birds follow suit in a similar vein, each providing an excuse in accordance with the limitation of its perspective or the particular passion that dominates over it. The duck which spends its lifetime washing,

symbolizing only external observance of religious rites without penetrating into their meaning, does not want to leave the water which it loves. The partridge which loves stones, symbolizing men and women tied to wealth and the possession of precious jewels, does not want to abandon the stone upon which it sits. The bearded griffon, symbolizing worldly and political power, does not want to relinquish its hold upon people of position and power in this world. The falcon, symbolizing those who seek the proximity of the earthly king and worldly power, does not want to forgo its position of favour at court. The heron, symbolizing states of sadness and depression in the soul, does not wish to leave behind the continuous change of psychic states which are like the ever changing waves of the sea. The owl, symbolizing miserliness, does not want to leave the corner of solitude it has chosen. The finch, symbolizing human weakness, makes the excuse that human beings are simply too weak to be able to have a vision of the Sîmurgh. In each case the hoopoe answers the birds and refutes the excuses they are trying to provide in order not to embark upon the path through the cosmic mountain to the presence of the Sîmurgh. He acts much like the spiritual master who removes from the path of the disciples all the infirmities of the soul which manifest themselves as obstacles upon the way. Having heard the secrets of the path and responses to their inner doubts and problems, the birds finally assemble to actually begin their sojourn.

It is at this stage, in the twentieth section of the *Manîq al-tayr*, that 'Aṭṭār introduces the incredible story of Shaykh-i Ṣan'ān whose treatment marks one of the peaks of Sufi literature. Most likely based on the early stories of Muslim caliphs or other notables visiting Christian monasteries usually located in far away places of great natural beauty,¹⁷ the story of 'Aṭṭār deals with the tale of a celebrated and venerated Sufi master who, after fifty years of spiritual practice and with hundreds of disciples, falls in love with a young Christian woman. He forgoes his fame, reputation, spiritual function and even religion for the sake of this love. He wears the girdle of Christian monks, drinks wine and even takes care of a herd of pigs while he burns for the love of the Christian maiden. He faces every form of rebuke but no force in the world can alter his love which burns and consumes his being. He sings,

I have passed many a night in ascetic practices,
 But no one has revealed such nights as these.
 Whoever has been granted one night such as this,
 His day and night is spent in burning passion.
 On the day when they were moulding my destiny,
 They were preparing me for such a night.

O Lord what are these signs tonight?

Is tonight the Day of Judgement?

Reason, patience, the friend, have departed,

What is this love, this pain, what

kind of experience is this?¹⁸

All the means that the disciples use to bring the Shaykh back are of no avail. Finally only by an intervention of the Prophet who appears in the imaginal world of dreams does the Shaykh awaken to his original faith, makes the ablution and enters Islam again whereupon the Christian maiden, observing the transformation that has overcome Shaykh-i Ṣan'ān, also embraces Islam. All the lessons of the power of love, the inner and outer nature of men, the importance for disciples to be steadfast in their obedience of their master, the danger of pride caused by self-righteousness in the religious life and many other elements of the spiritual path are depicted in colours of unparalleled brilliance by 'Aṭṭār in this tale. No page of Persian literature is more moving than the description of the love of the venerable Sufi master for the beautiful Christian maiden.

There is, however, another pearl of wisdom of the greatest import hidden in the words of this literary masterpiece. This pearl concerns esoterism as such. The Shaykh's attraction to a Christian woman in such a shocking manner alludes obviously to the 'iconoclastic' and 'scandalous' character of all that concerns the supraformal Essence vis-à-vis the world of forms. But it also indicates clearly the crossing of religious boundaries through esoterism. Here, the maiden is not just the symbol of love even of a 'scandalous' kind, but as a Christian, she represents a being belonging to a different religious universe. Through the attraction of love – which here represents realized gnosis – the Sufi master is not only carried from the world of forms to that of the Essence, but is also transported across religious frontiers. In 'Aṭṭār's incomparable story is to be found not only a highly poetic treatment of the theme of the love which attracts, consumes and transforms but also a powerful statement of the role of esoterism in making possible the crossing of the frontiers of religious universes. It is as if 'Aṭṭār wanted to state in the classical language of Sufi poetry that veritable ecumenism is essentially of an esoteric nature and that it is only through the esoteric that man is able to penetrate into the meaning of other formal universes.¹⁹

At this stage of the epic, and after this long preparation the birds set out toward the Sīmurgh. Having realized the necessity of having a guide, they choose the hoopoe as their master and promise to obey him. Their first glance of the valley before them causes deep fear. They are also

surprised that there are no other birds upon the path. The hoopoe explains that the very majesty of the King prevents just anyone from approaching Him. The seeker must be qualified and the qualified are always few in number.

The hoopoe explains the difficulties of the journey ahead and when asked why it is necessary to have a guide at all, provides the traditional answer for the necessity of the prophet and the spiritual master who is his representative on the esoteric plane. The prophet is chosen by God and the spiritual authority of the Shaykh is also bestowed from on high. Without the seal of approval of that prophetic authority which is possessed by the human embodiments of the Logos alone, no initiatic function and spiritual authority of an authentic kind are possible.

Another bird complains to the hoopoe of the difficulties of the path and lack of certainty of ever reaching the end. He is answered that since the goal is the Truth Itself, even if one were to lose one's life on this path, it would be worth while. As for all the apparent difficulties, they are most of all due to the fact that the roots of the soul are sunk in the creaturely world of multiplicity and man is too dispersed and diverted by creatures to be able to concentrate his mind and soul upon the Creator.

One bird is ashamed of the sins he has committed and is reassured of the infinite mercy of God and another of the fact that he is prone to constant change of moods and states and is answered that through spiritual practice this weakness can be slowly cured. One of the birds complains of the snares of the passionate soul and is told that the lower soul must be conquered. Another fears the temptations of the Devil and the hoopoe answers that the Devil has power only as long as man is attached to worldliness. Once the world is overcome, so is the power of the adversary. Likewise, the hoopoe asserts that the attachment to houses and mansions is an obstacle to the path as is the love of external forms which perish. Only the 'beauty of the invisible' is worthy of being loved. In a similar manner other important questions, which usually lurk upon the path of those in whom there is already a dissatisfaction with where they are and whom they are and therefore a need to seek and find, are answered in a masterly fashion by the hoopoe who, being the symbol of the spiritual master, answers the birds as a Sufi master would his disciples.

Finally, the hoopoe enumerates the seven valleys to be traversed and describes each valley beginning with the valley of quest (*wādī-yi talab*) and ending with the valley of annihilation (*wādī-yi fanā'*) which cannot but lead to subsistence (*baqā'*) in God.

Release from thee whatever thou hast, one by one,
 Then begin a spiritual retreat by thyself.
 When thy inner being becomes unified in selflessness,
 Thou shalt transcend good and evil.
 When good and evil pass, thou shalt become a lover;
 Thou shalt become worthy of annihilation.²⁰

Having heard the description of the seven valleys, the birds fly into the first valley to accomplish their journey of destiny. For years they traverse the ups and downs of the cosmic mountain. Many lose their lives; others become entrenched within some intermediate station. Of the many birds who commence the journey only a few finally reach the presence of the *Simurgh*. Many are called but few are chosen. But the few who do reach the Presence of Divine Majesty,

They observed a Presence without qualification and
 description,
 Beyond perception, reason and understanding.
 If the spark of His Self-Plentitude were to be cast,
 A hundred worlds would burn in one moment.
 A hundred thousand esteemed suns,
 A hundred thousand moons and stars, even more.
 They observed them all in wonder,
 Coming like atoms in a dance.²¹

The birds begin to tremble before such majesty and lose hope of being able to gaze upon the Countenance of the King. The herald of the Court of Majesty in fact discourages them from advancing any further stating that the lightning of Divine Majesty would burn them all to cinders. But the birds insist that among thousands who set out only thirty have reached this stage and they will not leave. Rather, they would prefer to cast themselves moth-like upon the fire of the Presence of Majesty. Here, the story of Joseph mentioned in the Holy Quran is presented to them and they become aware that they had sold their celestial Self into 'slavery' by betraying it, as had the brothers of Joseph. When would each bird recognize Joseph as king? When would he recognize him to be what he is?

The very agony of this realization transforms each bird inwardly to such an extent that suddenly the self realizes the Self. The thirty birds (*simurgh*) realize that they are the *Simurgh*.

'At that moment, in the reflection of their countenance, the *Sî-murgh* [thirty birds] saw the face of the eternal *Simurgh*. They looked: it was veritably that *Simurgh*, without any doubt, *that Simurgh* was veritably *these Sî-murgh*. Then amazement struck them into a daze. They saw

themselves *Sî-imurgh* in all; and *Sîmurgh* was in all *Sî-murgh*. When they turned their eyes to the *Sîmurgh*, it was veritably *that* *Sîmurgh* which was there in that place. When they looked at themselves, here too it was *Sî-murgh*. And when they looked both ways at once, *Sîmurgh* and *Sî-murgh* were one and the same *Sîmurgh*. There was *Sîmurgh* twice, and yet there was only one; yes, one alone, and yet many. This one was that one; that one was this one. In the whole universe none understood such a thing. All were sunk in amazement; they remained in a state of meditation outside of meditation.

'As they understood nothing whatever of their state, they questioned the *Sîmurgh*, without using language. They implored it to unveil the great Mystery, to solve the riddle of this reality-of-the-*us* and this reality-of-the-*thou*. Without the aid of language too, this answer came from Her Majesty: My sunlike Majesty is a Mirror. He who comes sees himself in that mirror: body and soul, soul and body, he sees himself entirely in it. Since you came as *Sî-murgh* [thirty birds], you appeared as *thirty* [*sî*] in that mirror. If forty birds, or fifty, come, the veil will likewise be lifted before them. Had you become a multitude, you would yourself have looked and you would have seen yourselves . . . I am far, far above *Sî-murgh* [thirty birds], for I am the essential and eternal *Sîmurgh*. Therefore, engulf yourselves in me, that ye may find yourselves again in me . . .

To be consumed by the light of the presence of the
Sîmurgh is to realize that,

I know not whether I am thee or thou art I;

I have disappeared in Thee and duality hath perished.²³

But such a state cannot be reached until man tastes the annihilation of himself through the realization of his-Self.

Become nothing so that thy being will become established;

As long as thou art, how can Being establish Itself
in Thee?²⁴

Through his incredible poetic art combined with the highest stages of spiritual realization, 'Aṭṭār depicts in inebriating beauty that final goal of human existence whose attainment is possible only through the actual journey of the bird of the soul to the peak of the cosmic mountain but whose anticipated vision is made possible by a work of sacred inspiration such as the poem of 'Aṭṭār. In the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* the Sufi sage of Nayshapur, at once gnostic and artist, has created a work of traditional art which, like other masterpieces of traditional literature and in fact art

in general, has an alchemical effect upon the soul, radiating a beauty which both melts and rends asunder, even if it be for a moment, the limited confines of earthly existence. It presents, as if by anticipation, a glimpse of that goal which is the end of all wayfaring and the entelechy of human existence.

Notes:

- ¹ See B. Forouzanfar, *Sharḥ-i aḥwāl wa naqd wa taḥlil-i āthār-i Shaykḥ Farīd al-Dīn Muḥammad-i 'Aṭṭār-i Nayshābūrī*, Tehran, 1340 (A. H. solar), p. 313. This excellent study of 'Aṭṭār contains a thorough analysis of the *Manṭiq al-tayr* on pp. 313-394.

On the life and works of this 6th/12th century Sufi master and poet see also S. Naficy, *Justujū dar aḥwāl wa āthār-i Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār-i Nayshābūrī*, Tehran, 1320 (A. H. solar); H. Ritter, 'Philologica X,' *Der Islam*, vol. 25, 1939, pp. 134-173; H. Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele*, Leiden, 1955; and *Colloquio Italo-Iraniano sul Poeta Mistico Farīduddīn 'Aṭṭār*, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Rome, 1978.

- ² In Sufism the art of mastery over the language of the birds, a science taught to Solomon, implies both the power to penetrate into the meaning of alien forms and the capability to know the meaning of the spiritual states and stations through which the seeker of the Truth must journey.

- ³ *Manṭiq al-tayr*, edited by M. J. Mashkūr, Tehran, 1337 (A. H. solar), p. 316. Henceforth, all reference to this work will be to this edition which is accepted by the scholarly public as the most exact printed so far.

For the translation of the *Manṭiq al-tayr* into European languages see M. Garcia de Tassy, *Mantic Uttair, ou Le Langage des oiseaux*, Paris, 1863; *The Conference of the Birds*, trans. R. Masani, Mangalore, 1924; and *The Conference of the Birds*, trans. from Garcia de Tassy's French by C. S. Nott, London, 1954.

- ⁴ In Arabic *manṭiq* itself means logic as well as sense or meaning while *nuṭq*, from the same root, means speech and also language. In Islamic thought, logic, far from being opposed to spirituality, has been seen as the first step in the attainment of sapience and is treated as such by many figures such as Sohrawardī in his *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* and even Ibn Sīnā, the master of Peripatetics who wrote *Manṭiq al-mashriqiyyīn* (*The Logic of the Orientals*). See H. Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, trans. W. R. Trask, New York, 1960, Corbin *En Islam iranien*, vol II, Paris, 1971; and S. H. Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, London, 1978, Part III.

On the relation between logic and realized knowledge, which is attainable through the intellect in its original and not modern sense, see F. Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence*, trans. P. Townsend, London, 1975; Schuon, *From the Divine to the Human*, trans. G. Polit and D. Lambert, Bloomington (Indiana), 1982; and S. H. Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, Edinburgh, 1982.

- ⁵ On these treatises see Corbin *Avicenna* . . . pp. 193ff. Al- Ghazzālī's brother, the celebrated Sufi master Ahmad al- Ghazzālī, is also the author of a treatise on the birds of great literary beauty which is more or less the translation of his brother's Arabic work.

- ⁶ *Man 'arafa nafsahu faqad 'arafa rabbahu*. This initiatic *ḥadīth* has many meanings of which one of the most profound characterizes the goal and end of the 'Aṭṭārian epic.

- ⁷ Although modern Persian has no gender, the word *Simurgh* can be referred to in the feminine because first of all its Avestan origin *saēna meregha* is feminine; secondly, the Arabic term for *simurgh*, namely *al-'angā'* is feminine; and finally, the *Simurgh* on the highest level as understood by 'Aṭṭār refers to the Divine Essence (*al-Dhāt*) which in Sufi literature is referred to as the female Beloved. Moreover, *al-dhāt* itself is feminine

in Arabic reflecting the metaphysical truth that the internal dimension of the Divinity which is identified with Beauty and Infinity is the prototype of femininity and is 'feminine' in the highest sense of this reality. In order to remain faithful to the original text, however, when 'Aṭṭār refers to the Simurgh as *shāh*, the term king rather than queen has been used and also he rather than she.

⁸ *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, p. 6.

⁹ The numerous errors concerning the meaning of *waḥdat al-wujūd* bear witness indirectly to the esoteric nature of the doctrine in question. *Waḥdat al-wujūd* is nothing more than unity (*al-tawḥīd*) as understood at its highest level, an understanding which, however, cannot be attained by either philological expertise or the best of fideist intentions nor by the sharpest analytical tools of reason. As Rūmī has said, one needs a deep sea diver to fetch the pearl from the bottom of the sea. Only the eye of the heart can grasp the sense of *waḥdat al-wujūd* without either denying Divine Transcendence or positing an independent reality for 'That which is other than God' (*mā siwa' Llāh*), an assertion which is a hidden form of polytheism. On the meaning of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and its distinction from pantheism as usually understood see T. Burckhardt, *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, trans. D. M. Matheson, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, 1976, pp. 28-30.

¹⁰ *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, pp. 18-19.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 227-291. The Simurgh in reality symbolizes both the Divine Essence which stands above the created order and the Divinity as Creator and principle of manifestation. The point on top of *Mt. Qāf* is at once in the infinite expanse of the sky and the principle of generation of the whole cosmic mountain below it. Moreover, it is the point where the two orders, namely, the created and the uncreated, meet. Under this aspect the abode of the Simurgh corresponds to the Logos or Intellect which is both created and uncreated depending upon how it is envisaged.

¹² On the states and stations of Sufism see S. H. Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, London, 1972, chapter V; on the interiorization of the cosmos by the gnostic see Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, chapter 15.

¹³ See Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Dispute between Man and the Animals*, trans. J. Platts, London, 1869; and L. Goodman, *The Case of the Animals versus Man Before the King of the Jinn*, Boston, 1980.

¹⁴ 'Aṭṭār is re-asserting the perennial truth, currently forgotten in so many circles, that only the human embodiment of the Logos, that is, the prophet, however that function is understood in various religions, can guide men to God. There is no authentic and complete spiritual realization without tradition. Only the ambassadorial background of the hoopoe qualified him to lead the birds to the presence of the King.

¹⁵ In reference to the famous *ḥadīth*.

¹⁶ In reality all beauty is interiorizing and liberating if only the beholder were to see in every form of beauty the reflection of the Beauty of the Face of the Beloved.

¹⁷ See Forouzanfar, *op. cit.*, pp. 320ff. More specifically Forouzanfar relates 'Aṭṭār's story of Shaykh-i Ṣan'ān to a very similar tale in Persian found in a manuscript in Aya Sophia, number 2910, in a treatise entitled *Tuḥfat al-mulūk* and attributed to Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī.

¹⁸ *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, pp. 85 on.

¹⁹ On this fundamental and very timely subject see F. Schuon, *Esoterism, as Principle and as Way*, trans. W. Stoddard, London, 1981. 1981; and Schuon, *L'Islam/Christianisme-Visions de'Oecuménisme ésotérique*, Milan, 1981.

²⁰ *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, p. 284.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

²² Corbin, *Avicenna* . . . , pp. 201-202.

²³ *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, p. 267.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

QUATRAINS

by Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī

1019

Sometimes I call Him Wine
 sometimes Cup
 sometimes refined Gold
 sometimes crude Silver
 sometimes Bait, sometimes Trap
 sometimes Prey. . .
 Why? That I might avoid
 mentioning His name.

1070

In that pure sea
 I melted like salt:
 no more unbelief remained, no faith
 no certainty, no doubt.
 A star appeared
 in my heart
 & the Seven Heavens plunged into it
 & were lost.

1256

How long must I see the colour
 & smell the odour of Time?
 I must now shift my attention
 to that subtle one:
 I will look at Him
 & see myself reflected,
 look at myself
 & find His image instead.

Thetis Blacker's Birds of the Soul

KATHLEEN RAINE

Whatever the world to which Thetis Blacker's birds, beasts and fishes may belong it is not the world of nature. They are creatures of the Imagination, and yet we accept them with delighted recognition, as we do phoenix or unicorn, sphinx and dragon, and those fabulous creatures of old bestiaries, many of which indeed she has depicted in an earlier series – the manticor and the hippogriff, basilisk and aspidochelone. We recognize them because they are engendered by the same fertile imagination which astonishes us in our dreams.

Thetis Blacker's one published book is entitled *A Pilgrimage of Dreams*; the words are literally used, for she is an unusually gifted dreamer (if one can so put it) of dreams that seem like glimpses of another world, another reality. Yeats writes of 'a crisis which unites for certain moments the sleeping and the waking mind;' he well knew that images from the fertile 'other' mind cannot be invented but may be revealed, and under certain conditions evoked. Such images are always full of meaning – are inherently meaningful, numinous, beautiful or awe-inspiring 'with all the fury of a spiritual existence.' What is that dreaming mind that shows even to the most prosaic of us, in our dreams, so rich an inner world? Few can bring back the creatures of the mind into the waking world, but Thetis Blacker has the rare gift of summoning from their sanctuaries these oldest inhabitants of the human memory; not from the past but from forgotten regions within ourselves. They consent to obey her because she summons them with love.

She has at the same time virtually created a new pictorial mode (new that is to the West) of the batik picture. If her inspiration is from the 'sleeping mind' her technique is the fruit of many years of work and study of her medium. She learned her technique in Java and her work has been influenced also by other countries of south-east Asia and by the native crafts of Latin America. The Dean of Winchester, who commissioned the sixteen banners she made for the 900th anniversary of Winchester Cathedral, observed that visitors from many parts of the world and of

different religions were able to respond to her depictions of Genesis and the Book of Revelation because her symbolic forms draw their vitality from many sources. Some degree of syncretism is a mark of our time, even for those who adhere to one religious tradition. To avoid such influences of style on principle, as it were, is likely to be at the cost of a certain artificiality. Thetis's birds of the soul are gathered from many lands.

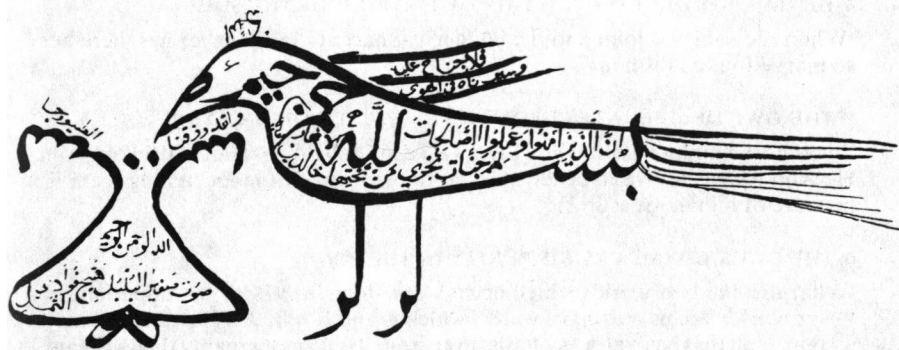
Of the present series, *Search for the Simurgh*, Thetis Blacker writes:

These paintings are not intended to be illustrations in the literal sense. Rather they are like punctuation marks, pauses for contemplation. I have attempted to do as the Hoopoe bids us: 'No eye is able to contemplate and marvel at his beauty nor is it capable of understanding; one cannot feel towards the Simurgh as one feels towards the beauty of this world. But by his abounding grace he has given us a mirror to reflect himself, and this mirror is the heart. Look into your heart and there you will see his image.'

The luminous colours of Thetis Blacker's work, ranging through orange and indigo, are, again, colours not commonly to be found in nature. Always subtly modulated, they glow and burn with the many colours of flame and jewel. We have but to take any square inch of her textile to find it alive with delicate lines and minute fluid shapes such as might be found in a drop of water under a microscope. Her creatures are at once intricately and totally conceived, their forms determinate. 'He who does not imagine in stronger and better lineaments, and in stronger and better light than his perishing mortal eye can see does not imagine at all,' Blake wrote; and Thetis Blacker's work is an astonishing modern instance of the truth of his words. She copies imagination, not nature. The eyes of her birds are microcosms of minute precision, and so with feather and fin and scale, flame or breaking crest of wave. In so-called primitive art – the work of people closer to their inner universe than modern western man – this imaginative precision combined with imaginative fecundity is everywhere to be found, but how rare in our own time and place, where attention is commonly directed outwards onto 'nature' rather than inwards upon images of the mind.

Her art is a sacred art. Thetis Blacker has illustrated a number of Christian visionary themes – Genesis, the Apocalypse, the Holy City – but many have done so without being for that reason depicting the 'divine originals'. Her work deserves to be called sacred art not because of its subject-matter but because it originates in the imaginal world itself, that

region where, as Henry Corbin has said, images take on meaning and meaning embodies itself in images. It is in that world she discovers her birds of the soul. Her thirty and more depictions of Attar's birds are conceived in all the energy of their imaginal autonomous life; with humour too, not satiric but rather in a kind of joyous human complicity in their preposterous beaked and crested and plumed and bespangled birdy 'is-ness', in which each expresses with uninhibited zest some form of being just so and not otherwise. In the *mundus imaginalis* possibility, her work joyously reminds us, is inexhaustible.



Poem in form of bird drinking

Search for the Simurgh

Dyed Paintings by Thetis Blacker

1 THE SIMURGH FLIES OVER THE WORLD

'When the Simurgh manifested himself outside the veil, radiant as the sun, he produced thousands of shadows on the earth. The different types of birds that are seen in the world are thus only the shadow of the Simurgh.'

2 THE BIRDS CONSIDER THEIR QUEST

'All the birds of the world, known and unknown, were assembled together. They said: "No country in the world is without a king. How comes it, then, that the kingdom of the birds is without a ruler! We must make an effort and search for one."'

3 THE HOOPOE SHOWS THE WAY

'O my heart, if you wish to arrive at the beginning of understanding, walk carefully. To each atom there is a different door, and for each atom there is a different way which leads to the mysterious Being of whom I speak. To know oneself one must live a hundred lives. But you must know God by Himself and not by you; it is He who opens the way that leads to Him, not human wisdom.'

4 HE HAS PUT DUST ON THE TAIL OF THE BIRD OF THE SOUL

'When the soul was joined to the body it was part of the all: never has there been so marvellous a talisman.'

5 THE OWL DELIBERATES UPON THE EXISTENCE OF TREASURE

'I was born among the ruins and there I take my delight— but not in drinking wine. He who wishes to live in peace must go to the ruins. If I mope among them it is because of hidden treasure.'

6 THE DUCK CONSIDERS HIS PURITY IN THE POND

'What are the two worlds which occupy our thoughts? Both the upper and the lower worlds are as a drop of water, which is and is not. All appearances are as water . . . all that has water as a basis, even iron, has no more reality than a dream.'

7 JOYFULLY THE GODFINCH COMES AS THE FIRE

'When you have burned up your attachments the light of God will manifest itself more and more. Since your heart knows the secrets of God, remain faithful. When you have perfected yourself you will no longer exist. But God will remain.'

8 THE BIRDS APPROACH THEIR JOURNEY'S END

'O Thou who art more radiant than the sun! Thou who hast reduced the sun to an atom, how can we appear before Thee?'

















THOMAS BLACKBURN

In a poem published in 1971 Thomas Blackburn wrote:

'Red roses, God, their terrible pungency,
O red, red roses, I don't want to die.'

By 1974, his whole outlook had altered.

'My first dying occurred
On a Monday in July
Now I perish perpetually.'

This 'first dying' was the beginning of profound visionary experience, which led to his later poems and explains the title of the last selection published in his life time: Post Mortem. Here he wrote:

'I'm coming into dying while I'm still alive
And have only a few questions more
To which as yet no answering I have
Though a skeleton flags them out in semaphore.'

The poems published here were written towards the end of his life, as indeed are most of the unpublished poems I am lucky enough to have in my possession. One of these ends: 'Listen, though, the door is opening and the novel lightnings grow.' I believe this did happen to him and gave him great joy.

Jean MacVean

Naming

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

The scars are needed. They herald novelty
 And are shed when it hardens into scars again
 And cease to suggest the living tissue;
 In this sense Genesis is synonymous with Amen,
 Particularly here etched with blood, bone, excrement,
 Although I enjoy the terms of I and You,
 And even glimpse, summer lightning, what they represent.
 Will you really be sorry, you won't, that at least for some brief if few
 Instants you will be without corporeal let or impediment.

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

Death on my tongue tonight seems, well, unimportant,
 Margaret, sleeping above me, you are right, dying no untruth is,
 But it does not mean being pressed forever by one instant.

No, I have been there, have sensed intensities
 Of feeling and knowing, uncircumscribed by any moment.
 How wrong they are who see behind the tissue
 Only a platitude of bone and that terrible headstone,
 It's what uses the bone and so on that is you,
 That is me, salt-caked, but forever someone.

There

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

Images of the more brilliant colours we shall know when we are dead,
 Flowers, when we learn to see them, far more golden, purple, red,
 Than the vegetable copies which down here are nourished,
 Far less brilliant than in the dominion of our dying are stated,
 Where to feel's to speak though no specific language is stated
 And since we see without a dark glass can't be misinterpreted,
 Where no subterfuge is possible so we can't be cheated,
 Ego and its complex confusions of bad chance at last being shed,
 Who would not unhinge material for the freedom of the dead?

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

A Visit

Two women, two boys and two girls
 Came to stay with us from Sweden;
 Why do I think of amber and pearls
 Now they have gone back again
 And smell roses in their rooms
 And honeysuckle and myrrh?
 As if no other terms
 Could such strength and grace infer
 Those ten harmonious days
 Of caritas and its power
 Without circumlocution of shadows.
 We have lived as people should
 But do not in this concrete area,
 In a simplicity of fire,
 Like that mosaic of Torcello,
 For the blest breathable and good,
 But foul to the damned far below
 Who long for the bloody wood.

Headlined Review

It's good the way the working's coming out,
 It's personal still but steadily outreaching
 To a small coterie no longer bound
 But in strange hearts and minds and nerve ends meeting.

The inwardness shouldering up, the pen, the print
 Reaching strange glands by syllables of cord,
 After so many hours of doing my stint
 To other nervous systems the arrow of the Word.

And critics starting to speak at last like this one
 On my desk tonight involved in mind and heart
 With the books with the energies I have worked on,
 For three decades, it was time for the talking to start.

However I offer laudations to the quiet,
 Since dying to each day's sameness is what I am at,
 A dying in which the words may walk abroad
 And that's what all my poems are about.

Jubilate

This stranger that joy is
 All I know it has come
 With its intensities
 To the heart home;
 After the melancholia
 Which held sway for decades
 Apassionata
 Clashing sword blades
 In a high, keen rhythm
 The dancer parades
 To the beat of a drum
 Out of the shades
 To where sunlight is

Foaming in the sky
 After declivities
 The wishing to die,
 Such abysses of
 Drugged apathy.
 Now birds of the morning
 Shake sleep from their eyes
 As the last star fades
 Untiring and wise:
 That from such experience
 Of the soul's dark night
 Comes novel joy and sense
 Shakes me with light.

Laudate

White light on the Moelwynion
 Where still in April the sun
 Glistens as though it were winter
 Though the daffodils gleam and glow
 And under the snow the heather
 Is greening for sunshine and May.
 I see it all in my mind's eye
 Though I am far away.

For mice and small birds a buzzard
 Is hawking it over the hills;
 Shall I, with a cracked lumbar
 Read what Moelwynion spells?
 Where a great rock face like a profile
 Stretches from scree to heather –
 'It must be more than a mile' – ?
 I shall know in the coming summer
 Whether I lose or fail,

But whether it's loss or failure
 Life is a blessing to me,
 Ravens tumble round Snowdon,

Oyster-catchers interpret the sea
 And whatever the next page turns over
 I shall see the mountain called Cnicht
 Glittering in the morning, powdered by stars by night.

The Raven

In asterisks of morning
 My sleep soaked body
 Is avid for doing,
 The day to study
 Plumed like a raven,
 Hauled by the updraft,
 Its wings wide open
 Tumbling in the wind shaft
 Of the rinsed morning.

I cannot now climb up
 The cliffs of Snowdon,
 Sixty years brought that stop,
 As for mountain walking,
 I shall know at Easter
 How effective my going
 With a chipped lumbar.

But still there'll be mountains,
 The raven of morning
 Despite the year's stains
 Which are death's premonition
 And I sense freer going
 From that intermission
 And wider knowing
 With the vegetable, carnal
 World changed to spirit
 In every good detail,
 Ours to inherit,
 Never shall being fail,
 There is no end of it.

Moelwinian

Away from me in Wales the sheep are grazing
 Above my cottage on a soaked mountain.
 I hear the steady beat of their crunching
 And see on wool the sparkle of spring rain,
 The clouds' life over the Moelwinian.
 Interpret I can the words of the wind,
 Brushing the grasses, it affirms no oblivion,
 No death, no beginning and no world to end
 And I know then or when I watch the peeled stars
 Something of the language of this valley and a part
 Of its dialogue between dreaming and waking
 Between the unskinned mind and the fractured heart.

There are dark places upon the Moelwinian,
 The shale hole for copper with a sheep's skeleton,
 Crevasses for metal, in rock faces blasted
 Where the ferns at the dripping edges turn towards the sun,
 Away from – one thinks of Kurtz 'the horror, the horror';
 Have I not also from sorrow and mania turned away?
 But the time has come to confront the origin of error
 And pay the price I am supposed to pay.

Posthumous

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TOM SCOTT

The Bower

There is a bower I know
That's of no fretted trellis interwoven
With twigs and leaves below
Where shy flowers grow
On branchery by no rough woodman cloven.

It is a mystic bower,
A bower no hand composed, no brain designed;
Wrought by no conscious power
Like medieval tower;
Intangible, an arbour of the mind.

Yet therein, hour by hour
Two bodies in the mystery conjoining
Where no rainclouds lour
Threatening wintry shower,
Our two selves as one are intertwining.

Our bodies hold the key
To that bower of flawless bliss where three are One,
Life, and you and me,
The apple back on the tree,
Adam and Eve in Eden, not yet undone.

There we are made free
Of a city's never known the mason's mell
Or the money-grubber's fee;
Where the only law's To Be,
And drink the waters of life's holy well.

Our bodies here commune
Each one the temple of the other's soul,
At midnight or at noon
In music of no tune
Communion flawless, mystical and whole.

But though we enter this
 Sublime apartment by the body's key,
 The intersexual kiss,
 It is the spirit's bliss
 That brings such love and peace to you and me.

Sometimes we feel as though
 A god and goddess, lacking flesh and blood,
 Borrowed ours, and so
 A divine interflow
 Swirls us up on a supernatural flood.

And yet we stand apart
 When called to separation by the hour;
 But confident in heart
 By love's alchemic art
 We may again re-enter our love's bower.

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The Eftirstang

The eftirstang o love in the dainshoch hert	<i>aftersting: sensitive, squeemish</i>
Mony a love-maik fyles.	<i>love-match: fails</i>
Baith lad and lass ken weill the broddan smert	<i>stabbing: smart</i>
That stogs throu lovers whiles	<i>stabs</i>
As, spelder-haughed, they dwaum in ilk ither's airms,	<i>spread-legged: doze</i>
The greischoch aye alunt in lends and thairms.	<i>emblem still aflame: loins, brains</i>

But whaur's the lad or lass
 Because of this
 Wad ettle to bypass
 Love's beild o bliss?

*try
 bower*

The White Hind

As I came through
The wood to drink
At a burn I knew,
A white hind
Came down from the hill
And sauntered along
To the purling rill.

My body and mind
Stood immobile
As she drew near
To lap her fill
With delicate tongue,
Her white flanks
A living song,
Alert eyes tender
Yet free of fear.

It was as though
She wove a spell
Over my will
That lulled me into
Self surrender.

I watched her go
Back from the brink
Along the banks
And up the hill.

Motionless there
I mused awhile
On her fluent beauty:
And felt no more
The urge to drink.

The Lyart Stag

grizzled

A lyart stag,
Duel scarrit
And grazed wi shot
Frae forest and crag,
Browses his lane
Owre hill and glen.

Nae monarch he,
But in his day
Has muntit his hinds
And sired his young,
wha nou but hauds
His lanesome wey
Owre corrie and brae,
Free the herd ootflung,
Prickly as thorn
Yet easy woundit
Under his tynds,
Handicappit
By the wecht o' horn.

mounted

A life, ye'd say,
No lang to be spared
But shot or trappit,
A future wanfoondit,
A tree for the fellin?

uncertain

But whit's yon raird
Blares oot on the wynd?
The auld stag bellin'
For the white hind.

roar, noise

Lament for Eurydice

Your absence is more pain than I can bear

Eurydice,

The loss a kind of galloching of soul.

What is this world to me and you not there?

The burden laid on me was less than fair,

Not to see your eyes a cruel toll,

Eurydice.

Your absence is more pain than I can bear.

Descent into hell again I'd gladly dare

Eurydice,

For while you're in it I've no better goal.

What is this world to me and you not there?

What can I know of paradise but where

You are, be it heaven or hell, or the Arctic pole,

Eurydice.

Your absence is more pain than I can bear.

Are you and I not one, and no mere pair

Eurydice,

Either apart but one half of the whole?

What is this world to me and you not there?

If you cannot be here, better I share

Your fate, so each with other may condole,

Eurydice.

Your absence is more pain than I can bear.

What is this world to me and you not there?

JEREMY REED

The Country through the Looking Glass

Sometimes we reach it, but we lack the key
 to gain access, or if we pass on through,
 contemplating gold stars upon a blue
 courtyard, and the yellow flowering tree
 of the golden chersonese, it is we
 who are invisible, and can't make known
 our presence there, nor why it is we are
 a moment lighter than a thistle blown

into a sunbeam. Only follow where
 the light dazzles, and a directionless
 path has you walking as though motionless
 in no direction, contrary like a hare
 zigzagging through bracken. If it's a stair
 you encounter, it winds round a cliff-face,
 and steps you thought led down were circular,

returning you to seapinks on a ledge.
 Sheer over there's the blue trance of the sea.
 Should you retrace your steps, intrepidly
 braving the drop, you'll wake upon the edge
 of certain death endowed with a knowledge,
 bright as a rainbow, and as transitory,
 only like Orpheus you turned around,
 and lost the knowledge for its memory.

Only go deeper; once that country's known,
 similitudes recur; the lilac tree
 brushed with the shower's of that mystery,
 and flickers with spray when the blackbird's flown,
 each drop forming a diamond on a stone.
 Wherever you look small facets smoulder,
 and are part of a web you walked clean through,
 preferring to return to that mirror

where all temporal reflections are untrue.
 And is it she you miss? – that partially
 revealed woman who stalked you silently,
 her shadow a bird's wing upon the dew,
 entreating you to hurry, while you knew
 her face intuitively as your mask,
 and had no need to turn around but did,
 and found nothing but a sea-green jade clasp

she'd worn within her hair. Obsessed for days
 with reinvoking that country beyond
 the drowned king's dead eyes staring from the pond
 he rotted in, you sit above a bay
 and contemplate submerged reefs ringed with spray,
 expectant of a sign that says follow,
 or a gull's feather dropped into your hand,
 pointing to a cave door in the hollow

strewn with yellow iris and sea holly.
 The air inside is a mirage of blue,
 and only later, climbing to the view
 from a rock ledge, will light strike memory,
 returning you to the opacity
 of the cave's interior now flooded by
 the surf's brisk commotion, while overhead
 swallows make patterns in the turquoise sky.

But should you wake one day and gravitate
 without apparent reason to a wood,
 summoned by a blue figure in a hood,
 you'll know the reason and that it's too late
 to gain the key she guards. She will migrate
 with southbound birds, but in soft April rain,
 return again, and feathers in your path
 will tell you that her constancy remains

true to the earth, and distracted, you may
 not follow, but must meditate upon
 the mirror pieces of your illusion,
 that are forever changing like the bay
 from kingfisher to sea-green to dull gray.

And in that knowledge you may come to know
not who she is, nor where your footsteps led,
but like the eye of a bird bushed with snow

you'll see yourself sharper in reflection.
Say it's midwinter, but follow the light,
lucid as stars, and where a thrush alights,
part the blue snow, and there a snowdrop's grown
to be a sign of the magic she's sown.

Rest on that hill, and you may see it yet,
the country through the looking glass; the ice
you stand on flaming in the red sunset.

Transformations

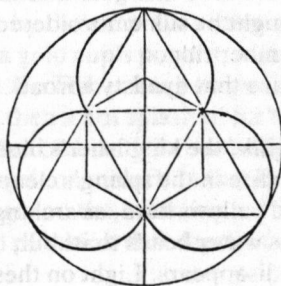
for Kathleen Raine

1. It bubbles underground, this throbbing vein
of water in the cliff, then sparkles free,
as though drawn through a needle's eye of light,
each sun-flashed decibel of energy
tooling the granite ledge to abalone.
And eye in a peacock's feather, the sea
transmutes the fine fleck of its rain
to lapis. Whose winged foot has marked this stone?
2. Only wait by the entrance to the cave.
Blood in a gold cup's poured, and the dark stirs
as though the Fisher King was waiting there
invisibly, then a hot splash of fur's dropped
by a startled owl; and the sun's high gold
is a grail-spot on malachite that flares
so burningly on the incoming wave,
one could not think that depth of water cold.
3. Some there have been who were transformed by light
into the blue. I think Penelope
sat nightly watching a mirror image

of her husband stand on the promontory,
 his sea bronzed features and his seabird's eyes
 unmarked by age, and his illusory
 forehead became a star at night,
 not fixed, but like a firefly in the sky.

4. They become younger as we age, the dead
 we loved, and retain in the spider's web
 of memory as our brilliant trophies
 shot through with light, and twitch upon their thread,
 enlivened with a new vigour, and when
 we too prepare to leave we recognise
 their presence in the flight of swallows, red
 bellies streaked with the blood of earth again.
5. Pink bistort, and the giant pink poppy
 arrest her eye, and when she turns around,
 her face webbed with dusted irezumi,
 shellac, cobalt, a rainbow round each eye,
 I wonder if she'll disappear in green
 tracteries of the willow at the sound
 of raindrops tingling from the sky;
 and then I see here in the rainbow's sheen.
6. The electric-lime mummy winding-cloth
 of the death's-head hawk-moth is lime-leaf green,
 a pharoah that would change to a dark moth
 emblazoned with a skull, and his rich hoard
 of treasure hammered into gold markings,
 so fine, they might be silk embroidered on,
 or a fly in an amber ring,
 released to blaze that dynasty abroad.
7. Stooping to drink, the kingfisher's blue crown's
 a jabbing sapphire in the spring's clear pool,
 flame-reds and yellows flare, as arching down
 it quickly flicks water beads to its bill,
 then startled, disappears. Light on these stones
 might draw the Fisher King to bathe in cool
 water after the bird has flown,
 taking with it his ultramarine crown.

8. If man changes, then he adopts the form
he's closest to, the dance of immanence
enacted under a fiery red dawn
that builds a bonfire in the cypress grove.
We change in the flash between a hail stone
and its melting, caught up in a trance
that has us with spread wings, air-borne,
swans changing into stars, and stars to swans.
9. The pond's a lily in the afterglow
of sunset, centred like a marguerite
in black water, and when a ripple flows
it dilates to vermilion around
that golden eye. Two black swans arch below
plum-butterfly leaf patterns that ignite
from a copper-beech, and the sound
of their wings, startles the moorhen to flight.
10. Yearly returning, the Fisher King's heard
in the voice of the swallow and cuckoo,
and in the nightingale. Bird after bird
imparts that mystery, and drinks the clear
spring water sun-fired to a blue rainbow,
and for the summer forms the retinue
of the lost King, then disappears
into the autumn as a black arrow.



Swedenborg

CZESLAW MILOSZ

Chapters 26 and 27 from 'The Land of Ulro'

To speak of Swedenborg is to violate a Polish taboo that prohibits writers from taking a serious interest in religion. The penalty is already pre-ordained in the form of the parroted cliché: 'He succumbed to mysticism'. Naturally you were always free to declare yourself a Catholic writer, but only at the risk of being classified as 'low-brow', on a level with outdoor or juvenile literature – with a literature, moreover, politically allied with the Right. As I scan the terrain of twentieth-century Polish literature, I fail to find a single poet or prose writer who escaped the label, with the possible exception, and then only marginally, of Jerzy Liebert. There was Marian Zdziechowski, more of a professor than a writer; the little known Ludwik Koniński, something of a private thinker; and Bolesław Miciński, who might have made a contribution if he had not died at an early age. This is not to say that quasi-religious persuasions did not enjoy popularity, especially among the modernists of Young Poland and their descendants. But anyone extensively read in Christian theology and philosophy ran the risk of being reproved for intellectual and verbal laxity. One exception was the poet, Bolesław Leśmian, who, as a 'disinherited mind' outside the Judaic-Christian orbit, only confirms my thesis.

But for my readings of the French Catholic philosophers, I might have remained insensitive to this side of Polish literature. And but for my interest in the work of Oscar Milosz, I would be largely uninformed about Swedenborg. Nor, I hasten to add, are the French, despite what Balzac and Baudelaire may have borrowed from Swedenborg, the best informed, either. Oscar Milosz read Swedenborg in English; so, too, my years spent in America, where Swedenborg readers and admirers outnumber those in other countries, has given me easier access to the Royal Counsellor's work and to the secondary literature on him.

This extract from his forthcoming book *The Land of Ulro* by Czesław Miłosz is published by permission of Messrs Farrer Straus & Giroux Inc. (New York).

Let me explain in advance why Swedenborg merits scrutiny. It is a fact that the greatest poets and prose writers have borrowed liberally from him. The list is long: first Blake, as his direct spiritual descendant, then Goethe, a fervent reader of Swedenborg (as was Kant!), followed by Edgar Allan Poe, Baudelaire, Balzac, Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Emerson (who placed him between Plato and Napoleon in his temple of the great), and Dostoevsky, in whose work we find resonances of Swedenborg in the character of Svidrigailov and in the sermons of Father Zossima. Such obvious fascination must have its reasons. Nor are the reasons unrelated to the peculiarities of the age in which Swedenborg exerted an influence through his work. That work has attracted through the mysterious power of an imagination capable of summoning it to life. As I hope the following will show, it occupies a special place, one which I would classify as 'borderline disinherited'.

Swedenborg was widely read throughout the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. A Russian version of *Heaven and Hell* appeared in the 1860's. Today Swedenborg's coffin in the Uppsala cathedral probably says little to tourists, other than as a tangible sign of tribute paid one of Sweden's great sons. If his work is read by scholars and men of letters, then it is from a sense of professional duty – in conjunction with their research on Blake, for example. Circumstances (i.e. Oscar Milosz) have made me an exception, though I sense a Swedenborg revival currently in the making, not necessarily for reasons of which he himself would have approved: the Swedenborg phenomenon, in effect, belongs to those enigmas which, if ever solved, would shed light on the laws of the human imagination in general.

Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) was a prominent scientist whose works on geology, astronomy, and physiology purportedly contain a wealth of brilliant discoveries. This immediately poses an obstacle, as it would take a historian of science properly to assess his achievement. No less an obstacle is posed by the later work dating from his illumination, at which time he began work on a new interpretation of Christianity, a multi-volumed work running into thousands of pages, all composed in a pedantic Latin. To read it whole (so far I have explored only a fraction of it) is to wander through a hall of mirrors arousing a range of conflicting emotions: mockery abruptly turns to awe, rejection to assent and vice versa, curiosity to strenuous boredom, and acceptance to categorical rejection. One thing is certain. Any suspicion of quackery is refuted by the man's exemplary life, by the conscientious way in which he discharged his civic and professional duties (as a member of the Royal Mining

Commission), by his meticulous work habits, by his veracity and amiability. Emerson, unstinting in his praise of Swedenborg, alludes to mental illness as the price paid for transgressing one's allotted role, as if to remind us that there is no genius without a flaw. The twentieth century, as I said, has been neglectful of Swedenborg. Karl Jaspers devoted a chapter to him in his work on schizophrenia, along with chapters on Hölderlin, Van Gogh, and Strindberg; yet is cautious in his diagnosis because Swedenborg's pathological symptoms became manifest only during the years of his crisis, 1743-1745, after which he led a tranquil life, free of any strife or discord – unlike Hölderlin, for example.

Certain commonplaces about Swedenborg, to which he himself gave impetus, are unavoidable, and I shall begin with these. By his own testimony, he received from God the power to transport himself to the extramundane world, and daily inhabited both realms for the duration of some thirty years. As a record of his otherworldly journey, as a vision of a tripartite world in the beyond, his work stands, after *The Divine Comedy*, as the second such enterprise in Western civilization. Although Swedenborg, the son of a Swedish clergyman (to whom he owed the name Emanuel, meaning 'God is with us'), was equally critical of both Lutheran and Catholic theology, he was sufficiently Protestant to omit Purgatory. His three realms are Heaven, Hell, and midway between the two the 'spirit world', the place to which everyone goes after death, and where gradually, themselves unaware, their will's true 'intention' (their love) is revealed, whereby a person either ascends to Heaven or descends to Hell. Stylistically, Swedenborg's realism evokes comparison with the early English novel, e.g., Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, which, considering the work's subject matter, now and then has its comic effects; to quote Emerson, Swedenborg's otherworldly inhabitants often remind us more of elves and gnomes. The strictly reportorial passages, what the author called *Memorabilia*, lend validity to the question posed by Oscar Milosz, a careful Swedenborg reader, in the margin of his copy of *The True Christian Religion* (the English translation of *Vera Christiana Religio*), preserved in his private library: 'The work is composed of two parts: the one revealed in the *spiritual world*, the other constructed in the form of a theological-philosophical system in the *natural world*. Which came first? Did the memorabilia come before or after the system? Was the work born of a vision or an idea? Because these "memorabilia" have the look of inventions designed as an *allegorical proof*.'

A question that goes straight to the heart of the matter, but one which defies a definitive answer. As a writer, Swedenborg was susceptible to

eighteenth-century conventions, among others to the authenticating device of the pseudo-memoir or pseudo-diary, the 'manuscript found in the tree trunk', etc. In other words, the role of convention in Swedenborg's artistic rendering of theological material cannot be neglected, particularly as the meticulous documenting of theological disputes in the other world serves an expressly utilitarian aim: the losers in these debates correspond to the author's earthly adversaries. On the other hand, the imaging of ideas ante-dates the actual process of writing. The crisis of 1743-1745, profuse in visions and conversations with the dead, occurred in the absence of any system, which had yet to be elaborated; later the visions kept pace with the painstakingly composed volumes that followed in succession. That crisis might well be attributed to the fierce pressures exerted on a scientific mind suddenly caught in its own trap. Only after his previous intellectual framework had been demolished by dreams and visions did Swedenborg free himself from that trap.

Like the girl in Mickiewicz's 'The Romantic', he suddenly had a vision of the extrasensory world; but the savants with their 'eyes and lenses' had more trouble with Swedenborg, who was after all one of the tribe, than with a village maid. If the girl of the poem could become so crazed by the loss of her Johnny as to converse with the dead, Swedenborg's visions were born of horror at a loss huge enough to affect all men. The illiterate and even the semi-illiterate, only dimly conscious of the incipient intellectual crisis, were unresponsive to Swedenborg's forebodings. But as a member of Europe's scientific élite, Swedenborg was well aware that Nature, perceived as a system of mathematical relations, had begun to usurp God in the minds of the educated. The universe was construed as an infinity of absolute, void, Newtonian space (even the Cartesian vision of a space filled with 'vortices' had been rejected), whose rotating planets and planetary systems overwhelmed the mind by their infinite profusion: thus was man's dethronement, a process begun with the death of the geocentric theory, made complete. Yet the Christian religion had posited an Earth-centred, Man-centred universe. Religious faith was now professed not with the heart but with the lips only; whereas Swedenborg, and here he remained loyal to the Age of Reason, held that a man could not assent to anything which was contrary to reason. Christianity, in his opinion, was entering its final phase. And it was given to him, Swedenborg, at this critical moment for the human race, to see and bear witness to the truth. He had been annointed, no more and no less, as a Messiah announcing a new era.

Swedenborg's private diary dating from the years of his crisis, the only work he ever wrote in Swedish (and hence inaccessible to me), purportedly testifies to the strongly erotic character of his dreams and visions. The author, it is argued, being a pious and abstemious man, yet possessed of a powerful sensuality, became perturbed through habitual self-denial, as many ascetics have been known to do. Granted, Swedenborg's images are tinged with eroticism; granted that at the centre of his doctrine is an 'angelic sexuality'. But such fashionable explanations fail to do the work justice, for his theological works specifically address those things with which he was genuinely, dramatically engaged and which he wrote against.

'Against': that is the key. After the revelation of his mission, Swedenborg began issuing one volume after another, publishing them under his own imprint. Among men of science, especially in the smaller countries like Sweden, Latin was still in common use; Swedenborg's contemporary, the naturalist Linnaeus, wrote in Latin. But a reading public of enlightened, philosophically-minded ladies and salon wits, either ignorant of Latin or deficient in it, now had to be addressed in the new international language of French. Swedenborg strove neither for immediate effects nor for public acclamation. Destined to close one era and open another, he was content to record his message in print, in the belief that his books would eventually triumph over the ideas of the age.

His ambition was nothing less than a major defence of Christianity, and it was addressed to atheists and deists as much as to the theologians. A hundred years before him, the mathematician Blaise Pascal, accurately intuiting the course which the European mind would take, set himself a similar task. A brief life cut short his apologia. The notes that have survived are known today as *Les pensées*. Pascal's reflections were centred on man, as understood by humanists reared on the ancient philosophers. If, as the humanists argued, man was such a rational creature, such an integral part of the cosmic scheme, then mankind could dispense with Revelation and Biblical religion was rendered superfluous. By contrast, Pascal showed that man, that 'thinking reed', because of the strange pairing of opposites inherent in him, was distinct from every other living creature and alien to the galactic wastes; that he alone was endowed with consciousness and yet, because of Nature the animal part resident in him, lacking in self-governance and self-sufficiency. There is in Pascal a kind of Manichean distrust of Nature and the things of 'this world', which has made him a hero in the eyes of the pessimists, of those who later, in an era proclaiming the intrinsic good of the 'noble savage', responded with a mordant irony. Pascal's defence of Christianity is thus

waged in anthropocentric terms, asserting the 'anti-naturalness' of that unique phenomenon called consciousness.

Swedenborg proceeds in like fashion. But a common strategy should not impel us to search for a shared style or sensibility. Tainted though he was by Jansenism, Pascal remained at heart a Catholic whereas Swedenborg was manifestly rooted in a traditional Protestantism. Swedenborg, moreover, to a far greater extent than is implied by the term 'mystic', was a true son of the Enlightenment (N. Aksakov, Swedenborg's nineteenth-century Russian translator, wrote a book entitled *Swedenborg's Rationalism*; similarly, in his book on Swedenborg, William James, Sr., father of William James, the author of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and of the novelist, Henry James, underscores the rationalist bias of his doctrine). A love of symmetry, poise, and balanced constructions is one of the marvels of Swedenborgian syntax, from which it might be said that he embodies the 'spirit of geometry' much more than the mathematician Pascal.

Swedenborg focused on man's exclusive property: the Written Word, both as it refers to the word revealed, Holy Writ, and to language generally. He applied himself to the decoding of words found in Scripture, distinguishing between three Biblical layers: the literal, the spiritual, and the celestial. This search for meanings was for him a means of enriching human language, in the broadest sense, because it was a manifestation of man's foremost power: the imagination.

The universe was created exclusively for man, for human use. Not only Earth, but myriads of planets are populated by humans. But the visible world is merely a reflection of the spiritual world, everything perceived on Earth by the five senses is a 'correspondence', an equivalent of a given state in the spiritual realm. I deliberately avoid such commonplaces as 'allegory' or 'symbol', whose field of reference is not always commensurate with that which Swedenborg assigned to the word *correspondentia*. That some flowers, beasts, trees, landscapes, human faces are beautiful and others ugly derives from the fact that they are spiritual values; shapes, colours, and smells, by supplying the stuff of human speech, fulfill a function analogous to human speech. Here Swedenborg is heir to the medieval, Platonic-inspired axiom 'as above, so below', which held that the whole of creation was one of the two languages in which God spoke to man – the other was Holy Writ. This would explain why Swedenborg felt so drawn to the artistic sensibility. In effect, his system constitutes a kind of 'meta-aesthetics', to borrow a term applied to that system by Oscar Milosz.

But that is not all. Swedenborg appeared at a time when the entire spatial order had been challenged, first by the debunking of the geocentric theory, later by theories expanding the interplanetary void to infinity. The Christian vision had traditionally relied on a Heaven and Hell endowed with space. As far back as the fourth century, St. Gregory of Nyssa traced the vision of Hell of his contemporaries to pagan sources and deplored the belief in a Hades-type of hell as unworthy of a Christian. Yet for centuries the Hades-image persisted, and Dante's *Inferno* shows to what extent such images were contingent on a belief in Earth's primacy and the existence of subterranean realms.

Swedenborg restored that space. But how? To treat his immaterial world as spatial, to take the very verb of motion literally ('he ascended', 'he went', 'he landed', etc.) would be to make of him an ordinary lunatic. The truth is immensely more complex. Those caves; those miasmatic barrens; those slums where the damned knife each other in the streets; those subterranean concentration camps where the condemned slave day in and day out for their niggardly portion; those celestial houses with their luscious gardens, summer cottages, and arbours nestling in trees: whatever the landscape portrayed, it is always of the same physical texture as that visited by the little heroine of *Alice in Wonderland*. A man's internal condition, determined by the intention of his will (his love), assumes a form corresponding to the sensuous experiences of earth; an afterlife, in the objective sense, does not exist, only the good or evil in man. 'You are what you see': if nature is composed of signs, those signs now become liberated to form an alphabet of joy or anguish. Swedenborg's space is *internal*. The reports of his otherworldly odyssey figure rather as illustrations within the totality of the Swedenborgian *oeuvre*. But our imagination is continually locating things through juxtaposition, relative to something else, as evidenced in painting and poetry, or even in music where the sequence of sounds in time bears a decidedly architectural, sculptural quality. In this sense, internal space is not an illusion; on the contrary, it is more real than the material one governed by time and space. If Swedenborg did not glorify art, he nonetheless effected a shift from object to *subject*, whereby the role of the artist became exalted, something readily seized upon by Blake. Blake's faith in the eternal life of the Imagination implied, after all, that the workings of the imagination (those infusions of Holy Spirit) were a prefiguring, a promise of the imagination freed of the corporeal and of Nature, by analogy with the creative process itself which, in a very real sense, was a 'release from the body'. Blake regarded Swedenborg's Heaven and Hell exactly as he did Dante's – as real *because* imagined.

If inner space is a purely subjective creation, it follows that the number of heavens and hells is legion. But since the moral order (defined as the will propelled either toward the Creator or to its *proprium*) is constant, all such spatial realms are relative to a centripetal Spiritual Sun (whose 'correspondence' is the sun of our planetary system). How Swedenborg can deduce from these subjective states a map of the beyond is not altogether clear: If 'you are what you see', on what does he base his topography? Would not each realm be possessed of its own? Not necessarily. True, the damned see everything in distorted perspective, but he who dwells in truth, as Swedenborg did, charts with his infallible compass the land of visions where space is space only by analogy. That land, as implied by the words 'sublime' and 'base', is vertically structured. The closer the proximity to God, manifested as the Spiritual Sun, the higher the celestial realm occupied. Midway lies the 'spirit world', which is so analogous to the terrestrial one that newcomers are hardly aware they have died. And Hell below. Swedenborg then reveals a remarkable secret – namely, that Heaven, the sum of myriads of personal heaven-projections, is Man-shaped. The universe was created that Heaven might be tenanted with spirits from countless planets and planetary civilizations (except for the saved and the damned, Swedenborg did not recognize angels or devils).

Here a serious misconception must be revised. Without enumerating what Towiański and the Polish Romantics borrowed from Swedenborg, such pronouncements as 'all is fashioned by and for the Spirit, nothing serves a fleshly purpose' – this culled from Slowacki – read like a Swedenborgian maxim. Yet despite certain surface similarities, Slowacki's is a vastly different sensibility. Odd as Swedenborg's vision may appear, his sentences are perfectly structured, and one has only to grasp the thread of his argument to arrive at a coherent whole. If our Polish taboo ('He succumbed to mysticism') was initially invoked by the Positivist intelligentsia in reaction to Slowacki's philosophical writings and to other works of a similar vein, they can be faulted only with a lack of discrimination. Slowacki's philosophical prose has a distinctly hallucinatory quality to it and, despite occasional moments of grandeur, is frankly unreadable. The Romantics (with the exception of Blake) – and not only Polish – misinterpreted Swedenborg's 'spirituality', which is why Balzac's *Séraphita*, a work which purports to be an exposition of the Swedenborgian doctrine in fictive form, could become a perversion of it. But Slowacki went even further in his pursuit of the 'spiritual'. His retelling of the sin of Adam and Eve (conveyed in a letter to J. N. Rembowski), perhaps unique in the history of the treatment, is illus-

trative: as interpreted by Slowacki, Adam and Eve were so much of the spirit as to dispense with eating; by persuading Eve to eat the apple, the tempter bound them to the life of matter.

Far from being ethereal, Swedenborg, that loyal subject of his Royal Majesty engaged with the mundane affairs of his fellow citizens, construed brotherly love in an active sense, as utility (*usus*); that is, he exalted man's earthly duties toward society – its enrichment by tradesmen and merchants, its technological advancement by science, its defence by soldiers in times of peril. His Heaven, populated by communities bound by shared earthly dispositions, was a realm of unceasing 'action' where love of the good was manifested solely as *usus*. Since 'proximity' in analogous space is defined in terms of shared tastes, spirits congregate on the basis of their wills' deepest 'intention'. Swedenborg's more realistic passages derive from the axiom 'as above, so below', which remains incomplete so long as it is not inverted to read: 'as below, so above'.

In school I was taught that in his mystical phase Slowacki combined the Lamarckian theory of evolution with the primacy of the soul – 'bowed by the body's travail' – that he 'spiritualized' it, in effect, just as, somewhat later, he would season it with a belief in metempsychosis. His *Genesis from the Spirit*, which I read in those days, must certainly have had its effect on my intellectual growth, premised, like that of my contemporaries, on the tacitly assumed postulates of the natural sciences. Slowacki was like a foretaste of Teilhard de Chardin – read much later – whose muddle-headedness I cannot abide. Today I am of the opinion that Slowacki has nothing to offer the religiously-minded person, that he has inflicted great harm by ensuring in Poland a disaffection with religious thought in general, for which even the language would seem poorly suited: under Slowacki's pen and those of other Messianists, the language turns flaccid, mushy.

The tension between Swedenborg's pedestrian style, stripped of poetic fancy, and the substance of his message conceals a richness difficult to name, before which we stand as before Escher's geometric drawings exploiting the paradoxes of three-dimensional space. Despite his cloying repetitiveness and manifold tautologies, Swedenborg makes profitable reading, even if one is in no way moved to become a Swedenborgian. I share Oscar Milosz's antipathy for Polish messianism, preeminently that of Slowacki, which he characterized by such epithets as *fadasse* (sickly) and *désossé* (boneless). I can well understand, too, why he respected Swedenborg, in which he would not lack for company – even if born much earlier.

For the theologian Swedenborg, the prophecy contained in the Apocalypse had come to pass in his own time. Of the Christian Church all that was left was 'the abomination of desolation'. The decline of religion – the mouthing of words in which the heart no longer believed – was, in his opinion, facilitated by two doctrines. The first, the doctrine of the Trinity, adopted by the Council of Nicaea in 325 as a weapon against the heresy of Arius, constituted an enigma resolved only by the mind's imposition of three gods instead of one. Christianity, in effect, became polytheistic, the consequences of which would not become apparent until centuries later. Although a rationalist, Swedenborg refused to concede the Arian argument that Christ was a man only. On the contrary, there was no other God but the God-man, Creator of heaven and earth, who was born of a virgin, died, and was resurrected. Christ, in other words, was not *consubstantialis* (the term proposed at the Council by Emperor Constantine) with the Father but was himself Father; hence that 'Divine Human' signifying the Creator of the universe. This was the great secret revealed to Swedenborg: our heavenly Father is a man, Heaven has a human shape. The second fatal doctrine was the act of Redemption by which Christ obtained God's forgiveness for the sins of mankind. From Mary, Christ received a human, that is, sinful nature, and His life was a succession of temptations overcome, thanks to which human nature became divinized. Here Swedenborg was challenging the Catholics, for whom Christ's human nature was without sin, and the Lutherans, who professed that man was saved by faith alone, that salvation was made possible through Christ's bloody atonement. The fallacy of both doctrines, it would appear, lay in the way in which they interfered with a decidedly anthropocentric vision of Godmanhood (the God-man and human nature divinized).

Human will is free. But man is unmitigatedly evil and by himself can only effect evil. Whatever good he does is a result of divine 'influx' (Swedenborg avoids the term 'Grace'), which he is free to accept or reject. Swedenborg's cosmology and ethics are built around two correspondences: Fire equals Love, Light equals Truth. Christ-God is a trinity in the sense that Fire and Light, which are correlative, are expressed in action. Man is saved when he concedes that by himself he is incapable of love and truth; doomed when he ascribes that ability to his own *proprium*. Of particular note is Swedenborg's pessimistic critique of human nature in combination with his defence of free will. Being quintessentially a man of the eighteenth century, he rejects the will-impairing effects of original sin. In his allegorical reading of the Book of Genesis, Adam and Eve are symbolic not of our first parents (primordial man lived in a state of

bestiality) but of the first Church (or civilization). There have been four such Churches, as foretold in the Biblical prophecy of Daniel and as symbolized in the Greek legend of the four ages – golden, silver, bronze, and iron. Each Church had its Revelation: God revealed in human form, God as the ‘angel of Jehovah’, as voice, and as fire. The fall of the first civilization, when man ascribed to himself the power to do good, broke the bond between God and man, thus ending the Golden Age, which rupture signalled the first of Hell’s victories and wreaked the flood. The next civilization – or Church – also had its Revelation, to which the Bible makes allusion (in the ‘Books of Yasher’). The third was that of Israel. The human race grew in wickedness and the powers of Hell became so powerful as to threaten Heaven. Swedenborg’s afterlife, as I said, is ‘action’, movement in analogous space. No one is condemned by God to Hell, each dwells in the company and setting of his choice, according to his will’s intention. The damned, when surrounded by the saved, suffer revulsion and anguish. (A similar Hell is painted by Father Zossima in *The Brothers Karamazov*, and the following words, attributed to Zossima, bespeak familiarity with Swedenborg: ‘On earth, indeed, we are as it were astray, and if it were not for the precious image of Christ before us, we should be undone and altogether lost, as was the human race before the flood. Much on earth is hidden from us, but to make up for that we have been given a precious mystic sense of our living bond with the other world, with the higher heavenly world, and the roots of our thoughts and feelings are not here but in other worlds’ [tr. by Constance Garnett]). Swedenborg believed the ‘higher’ world to be so threatened that, if not for Christ-God’s descent to earth, mankind would have suffered annihilation. Of all the planetary civilizations, only Earth was deemed worthy of the Incarnation, making it a privileged planet. To the fourth, the Christ Church, was announced the Second Advent and those events prophesied by St. John. Swedenborg posited the year 1757 as the year of the Last Judgment, assigning a strictly allegorical meaning to the Apocalypse. The Judgment took place in the other world; neither Earth nor mankind would come to an end, because the higher world could exist without mankind as little as mankind could exist without the higher world. The Second Advent had also come to pass, not literally but as the truth incarnated in Swedenborg’s writings, which became the foundation of a Fifth Church, the New Jerusalem. Swedenborg thus transposed the Biblical story of Creation and ‘the final things’ to a purely spiritual plane. His theology admits neither to the resurrection of bodies, with the exception of Christ, nor to the other extreme, that of metempsychosis. Only through misinterpretation, therefore, could he have been invoked by the Polish Romantics.

Swedenborg's theology, as just outlined, betrays its heretical affinities. The historian of religion will easily recognize certain centuries-old motifs. The Creator's manlike divinity evokes the Gnostic and Manichaean image of a Primal Man in Heaven, conceived by the King of Light, and Adam Kadmon of the Jewish cabalists. The four ages are resonant of the ubiquitous myth of Paradise, fusing a cyclical view of history with a strongly chiliastic bias.

Here I question the value of such a summary and wonder whether it is not merely a waste of time. Swedenborg's theological system, however important to its author, fails to explain why Oscar Milosz called him a second Faust, a Faust without a personal tragedy. By summarizing it, perhaps I am intent on doing justice to its most implausible ideas which, given the large number of prominent figures who confided in their own messianic destiny, need not astonish. Swedenborg's importance lies not in his theology so much as in his effort to decode the Bible, to build a 'verbal space', as Osip Mandelstam once said of Dante. Though non-poetic in style, Swedenborg's work, no less than *The Divine Comedy*, is a vast honeycomb built by the bees of the imagination and obeying a certain imperative. A man must abide somewhere, a physical roof over his head is not enough; his mind needs its bearings, its points of reference, vertically as well as horizontally. Do we not speak of *edifying* readings?

Moreover, if the Last Judgment meant that in the 'spirit world' there was to be a strict distinction – hitherto increasingly effaced – between salvation and damnation, then we should have no quarrel with the year 1757. It coincides with the rise of the Industrial Revolution, along with its concomitant, that of spiritual disinheritance. In his rescue operation, Swedenborg drew on certain religious attitudes from an earlier phase of civilization, one not without analogy to our own: the Hellenized part of the Roman Empire in the first centuries after Christ. In his study of Gnosticism (English tr.: *The Gnostic Religion*, 1958; Germ ed.: *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*, 1934-1954), Hans Jonas attributes the success of gnosis – the attainment of salvation through secret knowledge – to, among other factors, the disintegration of the *polis* and the atomization of the masses under imperial rule; the decline of a religion and philosophy which perceived the world as an order, a *kosmos*; to an inchoate vision, in other words, of man's alienation from the universe. A God responsible for such an evil world was either not good or not omnipotent; the gnostics chose the good God, who was now transformed into the Other God, the Unknown God, while the Jehovah of the Old Testament received the title of a lower demiurge. Earlier figures had sought a covenant between man and the Other God, a pre-cosmic covenant against the world ruled by the

Archon of Darkness. The concept of a Primal Man, found in the second-century gnostic, Valentinus of Alexandria, and later taken up by the religion of Mani in the third century, was essentially aimed at humanizing the very premise of existence. I quote:

To the Gnostics the existence of a pre-cosmic god 'Man' expressed one of the major secrets of their Knowledge, and some sects even went so far as to call the highest godhead himself 'Man': 'This [according to one branch of the Valentianians] is the great and hidden secret, that the name of the power that is above all things, the forebeginning of everything, is Man.' (*The Gnostic Religion*, p.217)

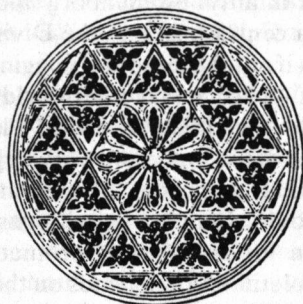
In Gnostic and Manichean speculation, Christ is sometimes cast as the suffering and pre-cosmic Man. Swedenborg's Christ is God the Father-Man incarnate, a vision that nonetheless betrays nothing of docetism, the doctrine which held that Christ only appeared to be born, to lead a corporeal life, to die and be resurrected.

The eighteenth-century cosmos: myriads of planets spinning around in an infinite and absolute space. Easily said; but let us try to imagine, to locate our home in that infinity. Swedenborg understood that the only refuge lay in assigning a central place to the Divine Human. And what distinguished the human if not the mind and imagination – the *inner* life of a subject, in other words – whence that other world, the subjective, which was not only parallel to the objective world but was its reason and purpose. Here we have a vague foreglimpse of Hegel and the makings of an anti-Hegelian vaccine. It was, after all, the rational premise of existence, which in Hegel would obtain to the self-conscious element in man, that laid the foundation for an atheistic prometheanism. Dostoevsky ('Vsyo v budushchem stoletii' – 'All depends on the next century') would be right in reducing the dilemma of the age, both his own and the succeeding one, to a choice between the God-man and the Man-god. Those in the 'exact' sciences might reply, along with Jacques Monod, that religion, whether religion proper or such pseudo-religions as Hegelianism and Maxism, is a relic of the 'animistic tradition', and that 'objective truth' can assent to one as little as to the other of the two warring sides. Alas, on closer scrutiny, 'scientific truth' is not what it once was, either.

A Swedenborgian concept that had great appeal for the Romantics was the *arcanum* of marriage, which referred as well to the marriage of spirits since, in Swedenborg's heaven, angels were of both sexes. The literature of Romanticism has accustomed us to interpreting his 'bonding of souls' in an asexual way, even though Swedenborg advocated rather a purified

sexuality. For Swedenborg, earthly marriage was a 'correspondence' central to Christianity, corresponding to the celestial marriage between love (*Amor*) and wisdom (*Sapientia*). Hence, too, the importance attached by him to a monogamous union, which, when it yields a harmony of the spiritual-carnal, is heaven on earth. This is the theme of Swedenborg's *Delitiae Sapientiae de Amore Conjugali* (The Delights of Wisdom Pertaining to Conjugal Love), which expounds a fundamental interpretation of the Adam and Eve relationship, in particular of those aspects illuminating the spiritual differences between man and woman. I shall return to this later, because Swedenborg's *arcanum* of marriage provides a key to some of Oscar Milosz's work.

Translated by Louis Iribarne



Gaston Bachelard

INTRODUCTION

Extracts from

*Gaston Bachelard: Objective Science and
Symbolic Consciousness*

by Gilbert Durand

Symbolic cosmology occupied Bachelard for many years, as the five books consecrated to the symbolic reconduction of the Four Elements testify. Water, earth, fire and air, are only the most familiar region of that empire where the imaginary has grafted itself directly upon sensation. Cosmology does not belong to the domain of science but to poetic philosophy; it is not a perception of the world but an expression of man, of the human subjectivity *in* the world. In that cosmology of substances there is no longer any opposition between reverie and sensible reality but 'complicity . . . between the dreaming self and the given world; there is a secret connivance in an intermediate region, a region full with weightless plenitude.'

We cannot insist too strongly on the importance of the 'alchemical model'. A happy chance brought Professor Bachelard into contact with the collection of alchemical grimoires of the Library of Dijon. As against the ever more abstract world of modern chemistry alchemy postulates an 'other world', completely concrete, fully experienced, and in which experience is itself transmuted into an initiatic test. It is at this alchemical level and not at that of the elements of *physis* that Bachelard's elements are the matter of reverie. Indeed the universe of the elements is for him the universe of the soul, the dreamed-of region where aspirations and values, fears and delights are realized.

There is no question of an Aristotelian conceptualization originating in four elements constructed by the combination of hot and cold, moist and dry, but a reverie which takes the elements as its starting point, and is reflected not only through the four senses but through all sensations and all possible combinations of sensations: height and depth, clarity and

opacity, weight, lightness, the volatile, etc. He makes use of these images in order to reconstruct a world receptive of all human attitudes, a world of happiness through accord. Behind that cosmology we rediscover the great alchemical vision of a macrocosm in correspondence with a microcosm as the 'place' of human needs, aspirations and felicity; that is, as a casket and frame for the microcosm of the human organism and for the needs of *homo faber*.

The reverie of substances reveals itself also in a play of opposites: in the same way as the object of science is constructed in a perpetual complementarity, so likewise is the object of reverie. Every element of the cosmos has two faces, two extremes by which poetic inspiration or the mind in reverie may apprehend them. Thus water may be lustral or clear, but may also become turbid, take on the heaviness of blood, may be a tranquil mirror, sleeping water, or, by contrast, waken into 'living water' or burst out in deluge. Fire in the same way gives birth to a multitude of conflicting complexes and ideas: Empedocles contrasting with Prometheus, Hoffmann's Satanic fires with the mild warmth of Novalis; fire is incendiary or gentle incubation. Air arouses dreams of Zephyr but also Aquilon, the storm. Earth suggests reveries of repose; it is grotto, refuge, the slow penetration of the root, it is shade and labyrinth, but also it suggests 'toil of the earth', arouses the desire for conquest of rocks and summits, stimulates metallurgy, sculpture, petrifications . . .

In the course of this progress many universes are formed; for example that described in *The Poetics of Space* and in particular that privileged universe, that universe humanized by human work and dreams, the house, the human dwelling which 'from cellar to attic' recapitulates the symbols of the world in its stone, its rafters, its hearth, its walls, its dank dark cellars, its dry airy attics. All the images, all the substantializing metaphors of the poets, lead back finally to that dwelling, the world, of which my house is the ultimate symbol. All the dialectic of the elements is united in this microcosm of contraries, a real house with its deep cellars and rising attics.

The symbol thus reveals to us a world which, at the opposite pole to the world of science, is ethically primordial, the rectifying principle of all the scientific discoveries of the world because giving evidence of my appropriation of that world. Here we reach the point which marks the very heart of Bachelard's conversion, the point at which poetic consciousness *takes precedence* over objective science, because it inaugurates it . . .

Finally, to take phenomenological amplification of Gaston Bachelard (that rationalist with a soul) to its logical conclusion, we see outlined, with extreme delicacy, a hierophany. Images and symbols lead us back to

that state of childhood in which we enter upon the symbolic from the time when we have our death behind us and our childhood before us. Childhood appears in Gaston Bachelard as the symbol of symbols: 'veritable archetype, archetype of simple happiness'. And above all – and it is this which enroots childhood in the symbol – the 'communicable archetype'. How far from this clearest of clear consciousness is that polymorphically perverse childhood which a joyless psychiatry seeks to discover hidden at the heart of the unconsciousness of infancy! Childhood is the unique and guiding experience of wholeness; it subsists in us as the hidden pole of the normative aspect of individuation itself.

Ever on his guard against the stumbling-blocks of the false problem of affective 'memory' Bachelard establishes that it is scents which act as signifiers for this archetype of childhood. He goes on to propose to us a whole anthology of scents of childhood gathered by the most diverse poets. For him, if cosmology is multidimensional, if psychology defines itself in an amorous dialogue of the soul with its angel, theophany reveals itself as, above all, olfactory! Being is the Child in us and the epiphany of that childhood is a scent of childhood, to which we are led back by the fragrance of a dried flower. The taste of 'the little madeleine' and the fragrance of a tisane led Proust back only to a biographical regret; scent, for Bachelard, is a spiritual guide towards the hierophany of Childhood. Dried flowers, the patchouli of old wardrobes, do more than exhale the 'odour of sanctity', they embalm it theosophically!

Thus Bachelard rediscovers the Evangelical prescription for the Kingdom, 'Unless ye become as little children . . .' For true anamnesis is not mere memory nor is it, as for Plato, an anamnesis of an objective world of ideas. Commenting on a quotation from the Romantic writer Karl Philipp Moritz, Bachelard declares that childhood is really the ultimate ground of anamnesis. Our childhood will prove to be the Lethe where we will have drunk in order not to be dissolved in the All before and after. . .

The symbols of poetic reverie lead back by way of reconciliation with the world, by way of an intimate society of the heart where presides the angel of compensatory feeling, to a hierophany in which anamnesis is illuminated, not by a highly abstract Supreme, but by the warm sun of childhood, absolutely concrete, with the good smell of an appetizing kitchen: 'a well-buttered sun roasting in a blue sky'. This Childhood is indeed the Word, and the Word at its highest flight of jubilation and of radical subversion: 'Childhood, sum of all the insignificant things of human existence, has a phenomenological significance all its own, a pure significance, for it is under the sign of Wonder. Thanks to the poet we have become purely and simply the subject of the verb to wonder. . .'

An immortal instinct, deep within the spirit of man, is thus, plainly, a sense of the Beautiful. This it is which administers to his delight in the manifold forms, and sounds, and odours, and sentiments amid which he exists. And just as the lily is repeated in the lake, or the eyes of Amaryllis in the mirror, so is the mere oral or written repetition of these forms, and sounds, and colours, and odours, and sentiments, a duplicate source of delight. But this mere repetition is not poetry. He who shall simply sing, with however glowing enthusiasm, or with however vivid a truth of description, of the sights, and sounds, and odours, and colours, and sentiments, which greet him in common with all mankind – he, I say, has yet failed to prove his divine title. There is still a something in the distance which he has been unable to attain. We have still a thirst unquenchable, to allay which he has not shown us the crystal springs. This thirst belongs to the immortality of Man. It is at once a consequence and an indication of his perennial existence. It is the desire of the moth for the star. It is no mere appreciation of the Beauty before us – but a wild effort to reach the Beauty above. Inspired by an ecstatic prescience of the glories beyond the grave, we struggle, by multiform combinations among the things and thoughts of Time, to attain a portion of that Loveliness whose very elements, perhaps, appertain to eternity alone. And thus when by Poetry – or when by Music, the most entrancing of the Poetic moods – we find ourselves melted into tears – we weep then – not as the Abbate Gravina supposes – through excess of pleasure, but through a certain, petulant, impatient sorrow at our inability to grasp now, wholly, here on earth, at once and for ever, those divine and rapturous joys, of which through the poem, or through the music, we attain to but brief and indeterminate glimpses.

Edgar Allan Poe

Deep Waters*

GASTON BACHELARD

Deep Water – Sleeping Waters – Dead Waters – ‘Heavy Water’ in the reverie of Edgar Allan Poe.

To understand the image one must discern the painter.

I

For a psychologist studying a faculty as unstable, mobile and diverse as the imagination, what an advantage it is to encounter a poet, a genius endowed with that rarest of unities, *unity of imagination*. Edgar Poe is such a poet, such a genius. In him unity of imagination is sometimes masked by intellectual constructions, by a love of logical deductions, by pretention to mathematical thought. Sometimes the tone imposed by Anglo-Saxon readers of miscellaneous reviews covers and conceals the deep resonance of creative reverie. But no sooner does poetry reclaim its rights, its liberty, its life, than Edgar Poe's imagination reassumes its strange unity.

Mme Marie Bonaparte, in her detailed and profound analysis of his poems and stories has discovered the dominant psychological reason for this unity. She has shown that this imaginative unity was fidelity to an imperishable memory. We cannot hope to go deeper than this investigation, and we will therefore make use of the many psychological insights to be found in this book.

But, side by side with this unconscious unity, we believe we can discern in the work of Edgar Poe a unity of the means of expression, a tonality of language which imparts to his work an *inspired monotony*. Great works always have this double mark: psychology finds in them a hidden chamber; literary criticism an originating word. The language of a great poet like Poe is no doubt rich but it has a hierarchy. Beneath its diverse forms imagination conceals a privileged substance, an active substance which determines the unity and the hierarchy of expression. We shall find

*From *l'Eau et les Rêves, Essai sur l'Imagination de la Matière* Librairie José Corti, (Paris).

no difficulty in proving that for Poe that privileged substance is water, or to be more exact a special water, a *heavy water*, deeper, deader, more asleep than all sleeping water, than all dead water, than all the deep waters to be found in nature. *Water*, in Poe's imagination, is a superlative, a sort of substance of a substance, a mother-substance. Poe's poetry and reverie can therefore provide examples with which to characterize an important element in that 'poetic chemistry' which sets out to study images by establishing for each their weight of internal reverie, their interior substance.

II

We might be afraid of appearing dogmatic had we not so perfect an example: in Poe the course of the images of water follows very exactly the course of the principal reverie, which is a reverie of death. And what Mme Bonaparte has clearly shown is that the image which dominates Poe's poetry is that of the dying mother. All the other loved women taken by death – Helen, Frances, Virginia – renew the first image, reanimate the initial pain which marked the poor orphan indelibly. The human, in Poe, is death. A life is described in terms of death. A landscape too – we shall show that this is so – is no less determined by the fundamental dream, the reverie which endlessly sees again the dying mother. And this determination is the more remarkable because it does not in any way correspond to the reality. In fact Elizabeth, Edgar Poe's mother, died, as did Helen, his love, as did Frances his adoptive mother, as did his wife Virginia, in her bed, a conventional death. Their graves are in the corner of a cemetery, an American cemetery which has nothing in common with the romantic cemetery of Camaldunes where Lelia lies. And yet, about the dead, and for the dead, a whole landscape comes to life, comes to life in sinking into sleep, in the sense of an everlasting sleep; a whole valley is hollowed and shadowed into being which takes on an unsoundable depth to swallow up all human sorrow, to become the kingdom of human death. And that which receives death into itself, like an essence, like an extinguished life, a memory so total that it can live in unconsciousness without ever going beyond the reach of dreams, is a material element.

Thus all water is for Edgar Poe a water, originally clear, which will grow dark, a water which will absorb the blackness of suffering. All swift water is predestined to grow slow and heavy. All living water is a water on the verge of death. Thus in 'dynamic poetry' things are not what they are but what they become. They become in images what they become in our

reverie, in our interminable dreams. To contemplate water is to flow away, to be dissolved; to die.

At first sight, in Poe's poetry, there might seem to be all the variety of waters so universally sung by poets. In particular one can find two waters, that of joy and that of pain. But there is only one memory – never does heavy water become free-flowing water, never is sombre water lit by brightness. It is always the reverse. The story of water is the human story of water that dies. The reverie may commence beside limpid water, overspread by vast reflections, whispering a crystalline music. It ends in the bosom of a sad and dark water, in the bosom of a water that transmits strange funereal murmurs. The reverie by the water, finding its dead, itself dies like a submerged universe.

III

We shall follow in its details the life of an imagined water, of a substance fully personalized by a powerful material imagination; we shall see that it assembles the patterns of life drawn towards death, of life that wills to die. Or more exactly we shall see that water provides the symbol of a special life drawn by a special death.

First, at the outset, we will show Poe's love for an 'elementary water', for an imaginary water which realises the ideal of a creative reverie because it possesses what one may call the 'absolute of reflection'. Indeed it seems, in reading certain poems, certain stories, that the reflection is more real than the real because more pure. As life is a dream within a dream, so the universe is a reflection in a reflection; the universe is *an absolute image*. In immobilizing the image of the sky, the lake creates a sky in its bosom. Water in its young limpidity is a reversed sky where the stars take on a new life. And Poe, in this contemplation beside the water, forms that strange double concept of a star-isle, of a liquid star imprisoned by the lake, a star which becomes an isle of the sky. To a lost beloved Poe murmurs

Away, then, my dearest

Oh! hie thee away

.....

To lone lake that smiles

In its dream of deep rest,

At the many star-isles

That enjewel its breast.

(*Al Aaraaf*)

Where is the real: in the sky, or in the depths of the waters? The infinite, in our dreams, is as deep in the firmament as beneath the waves. One cannot pay too much attention to these double images, like that of the star-isle, in the psychology of imagination. They are like the 'hinges' of dreams, which, of themselves, change the register. Here, at this 'hinge', the water takes the sky. The dream imparts to the water the meaning of the most distant land, the celestial land.

In the stories this construction of *absolute reflection* is still more instructive, for the stories often are a justification of a verisimilitude, a logic, a reality. In the canal which leads to the domain of Arnheim:

At every instant the vessel seemed imprisoned within an enchanted circle, having insuperable and impenetrable walls of foliage, a roof of ultra-marine satin, and *no* floor – the keel balancing itself with admirable nicety on that of a phantom bark which, by some accident having been turned upside down, floated in constant company with the substantial one, for the purpose of sustaining it.

(*The Domain of Arnheim*, Works, Vol.III Routledge, 1896 p.18)

Thus the water, by its reflections, doubles the world, doubles objects. It also doubles the dreamer, not at all just by way of an idle image but by engaging him in a new experience of dream.

In fact an inattentive reader might see nothing more there than a commonplace image like any other. That is because he has not really entered into the delight of the delicious 'opticity' of reflections, because he has not lived the imaginary role of that natural painting, that strange water-colour which humidity gives to the most brilliant colours. How then should such a reader follow the story-teller in his task of materializing a fantasy? How step into the boat of phantoms, that boat that suddenly slides – when the imaginative inversion is finally realized – under the real boat? A realist reader does not want to accept the spectacle of reflections as an oneiric invitation: how then can he feel the dynamic of dream and the astonishing impressions of weightlessness? If the reader were to realize all the poet's images, if he would abstract himself from his realism, he would then experience physically the invitation to the voyage, he himself would presently become

. . . enwrap in an exquisite sense of the strange. The thought of nature still remained, but her character seemed to have undergone modification, there was a weird symmetry, a thrilling uniformity, a wizard propriety in these her works. Not a dead

branch – not a withered leaf – not a stray pebble – not a patch of the brown earth anywhere visible. The crystal water welled up against the clean granite, or the unblemished moss, with a sharpness of outline that delighted while it bewildered the eye.

(op.cit. p.18)

Here indeed the reflected image is submitted to a systematic idealization: the mirage rectifies the real; it causes all its roughness and shabbiness to fall away. To the world thus created the water imparts a Platonic solemnity. It also imparts to it a *personal* character which suggests a Schopenhauerean form: in so pure a mirror the world is my vision. Little by little I feel myself to be the author of what I alone see, of what I see from my point of vision. In *The Island of the Fay* Poe knows the price of that solitary vision of reflections:

. . . the interest with which I have . . . gazed into the reflected heaven of many a bright lake, has been an interest greatly deepened by the thought that I have strayed and gazed *alone*.

(*The Island of the Fay*, Works, Vol.I, p.540)

Pure vision, solitary vision; these are the twofold gift of the reflecting waters.

If one follows the river-voyage through innumerable meanders which lead to the domain of Arnheim, one will have a new impression of visual liberty. One arrives in fact in a central basin where the duality of reflection and reality is completely equilibrated. It is interesting to consider, in the literary mode, an example of this reversibility which Eugenio d'Ors declared should be forbidden in painting:

This basin was of great depth, but so transparent was the water that the bottom, which seemed to consist of a thick mass of small round alabaster pebbles, was distinctly visible by glimpses – that is to say, whenever the eye could permit itself *not* to see, far down in the inverted heaven, the duplicate blooming of the hills.

(*The Domain of Arnheim*, p.20)

Again, there are two ways of reading texts of this kind: one can read them according to factual experience, in a factual spirit, trying to evoke among the landscapes of real life which we have known a site where we could live and think in the manner of the narrator. Read in such a manner the present text must appear so poor that one has difficulty in reading it to the end. But we can also read such pages in the attempt to share the creative reverie, to penetrate to the dream-core of the literary creation,

communicating, through the unconscious, with the creative intention of the poet. These descriptions, reduced to their 'subjective function', disengaged from static realism, give another vision of the world – better, a vision of another world. Following the example of Poe we perceive that the materialization of reverie – of that reverie which dreams matter itself – goes beyond the reverie of forms. In short we understand that *matter is the unconscious of form*. It is water itself, in its mass, it is no longer the surface, which sends us the insistent message of its reflections. Only a substance can be so charged with multiple impressions and feelings. It is a *good* of feeling; and Poe is sincere when he tells us that in such contemplation:

The impressions wrought on the observer were those of richness, warmth, colour, quietude, uniformity, softness, delicacy, daintiness, voluptuousness, and a miraculous extremeness of culture . . . (op.cit. p.20)

In this contemplation in depth, the subject also becomes aware of his inwardness. This contemplation is not at all a direct *empfindung*, a fusion without retention. It is rather a deepening of perspective alike into the world and into ourselves. It permits us to remain at a distance from the world. In the presence of deep water you choose your vision; you may see, according to your wish, the immobile river-bed or the current; the bank or the infinite; you have the ambiguous right to see yet not to see; you have the right to live with the boatman, or to live with

. . . a new race of fairies, laborious, tasteful, magnificent, and fastidious. (op.cit. p.24)

The fairy of the waters, guardian of mirage, holds all the birds of the air in her hand. A little pool contains a universe. A moment of dream contains a whole soul.

After such a dream voyage, when one arrives at the heart of the domain of Arnheim one will see the Interior Castle constructed by the four architects of the dream-building, by the four great masters of the fundamental elements of dream:

. . . sustaining itself by miracle in mid-air; glittering in the red sunlight with a hundred oriels, minarets, and pinnacles; and seeming the phantom handiwork, conjointly, of the Sylphs, of the Fairies, of the Genii, and of the Gnomes. (op.cit.)

But the slow introduction to the glory of the aerial constructions of water, says clearly enough that water is the material in which Nature, in moving reflections, prepares the castle of dream.

Sometimes the construction of reflections is less grandiose; and in that case the will to realization is still more astonishing: thus the little lake of Landor's Cottage reflects:

... so clear was this heaven, so perfectly, at times did it reflect all objects above it, that where the true bank ended and where the mimic one commenced, it was a point of no little difficulty to determine. The trout, and some other varieties of fish, with which the pond seemed to be almost inconveniently crowded, had all the appearance of veritable flying-fish. It was almost impossible to believe that they were not absolutely suspended in the air.

(*Landor's Cottage*, Works, Vol. II, p.32)

Thus water becomes a kind of universal kingdom; it peoples the sky with its fish. A symbiosis of images gives the bird to the depths of the water and the fish to the firmament. The inversion which played with the inert and ambiguous concept of the *star-isle* here plays with the living ambiguous concept of *bird-fish*. Should we make the effort to constitute in the imagination this ambiguous concept, we will experience the delicious ambivalence which a quite meagre image suddenly takes on. We have dwelt on a particular case of the reversibility of the great water-spectacles. If we reflect on these plays, which produce these sudden images, we will understand that the imagination has a constant need of dialectic. For a dualized imagination *concepts* are not the centres of those images which accumulate through resemblance; concepts develop from the images, at right-angles, incisive and decisive. After such growth the concept has an added feature: the fish both swims and flies.

This fantasy of the flying fish is not, as in the *Chants de Maldoror*, the product of a nightmare. It is the gift of the loveliest, the slowest of reveries. The 'flying trout' appears with the naturalness of a familiar reverie, in a story without drama, without mystery. Is there even a narrative, indeed is there any story under the title of *Landor's Cottage*? This example is for that reason particularly appropriate to demonstrate how reverie belongs to nature; how a substance faithfully contemplated gives rise to dreams.

Many other poets have felt the metaphoric richness of a lake contemplated *at the same time* in its reflections and in its depth. We read, for example, in Wordsworth's *Prelude*

As one who hangs down-bending from the side
Of a slow-moving Boat, upon the breast
Of a still water, solacing himself

With such discoveries as his eye can make,
 Beneath him, in the bottom of the deeps,
 Sees many beauteous sights, weeds, fishes, flowers,
 Grots, pebbles, roots of trees, and fancies more;

(*Prelude IV*, 256-62)

He imagines yet more of them because all these reflections and all these objects of the depths set him on the way of images, because from that marriage of sky and deep water are born metaphors at once numberless and precise. So Wordsworth continues:

Yet often is perplex'd, and cannot part
 The shadow from the substance, rocks and sky,
 Mountains and clouds, from that which is indeed
 The region; and the things which there abide
 In their true dwelling; now is cross'd by gleam
 Of his own image, by a sunbeam now,
 And motions that are sent he knows not whence,
 Impediments that make his task more sweet . . .

(op.cit. 263-70)

How better say that water *crosses* the images? How better make clear its power of metaphor? Wordsworth has, moreover, developed that long sequence of images in order to prepare a psychological metaphor which seems to us the fundamental metaphor of *depth*:

Such pleasant office have we long pursued
 Incumbant o'er the surface of past time
 With like success . . .

Could one truly describe a past without images of depth? And could one ever have an image of *full depth* if one had never meditated at the edge of a deep lake? Our soul's past is a deep water.

And then, when one has seen all the reflections, suddenly one looks at the water itself; one has then the sense of surprising it in the process of fabricating beauty; one notices that it is beautiful in its volume, with an interior beauty, an active beauty. A sort of volumetric narcissism impregnates the substance itself. Then we follow, with all the energy of dream, Maeterlinck's dialogue of Palomides and Alladine; the blue water

. . . is full of strange motionless flowers . . . have you seen the biggest one of all which opens underneath the others? One would say that it lives with a life of cadence . . . And the water? . . . Is it water? . . . it seems more beautiful and more pure and more blue than the water of the earth . . . I dare not look at it any longer.

A soul also is so great a substance! We do not dare to look at it.

IV

Such, then, is the first state of the imagination of water in the poetry of Edgar Poe. This state corresponds to a dream of limpidity and transparency, a dream of clear and happy colours. It is an ephemeral dream in the work and in the life of the unhappy storyteller.

We will now follow the *destiny of water* in Poe's poetry. We will see that it is a destiny which deepens the element, augments its substance by charging it with human sorrow. We will see how to the qualities of the surface are opposed qualities of volume, of volume which is – astonishing statement: 'an important consideration in the eyes of the Almighty'. (The Island of the Fay. *Works* I, p.539) Water will become darkened. And for that it will materially absorb shadows.

Let us then leave those sunny lakes and we see how suddenly shadows trouble them. One side of the panorama about the fairy isle remains bright. On that side the surface of the waters is lit up by

... a rich golden and crimson waterfall from the sunset fountains of the sky. (op.cit. p.539)

The other or eastern end of the isle was whelmed in the blackest shade. (p.542)

The other side, the eastern side of the Isle, was submerged in deepest shadow, but that shadow is not simply a curtain of trees which hides the sky: it is more real, it is more materially *realised* by the material imagination:

... the shade of the trees fell heavily upon the water, and seemed to bury itself therein, impregnating the depths of the element with darkness. (op.cit. p.542)

From that moment the poetry of forms and colours gives place to the poetry of substance; a dream of substance begins; an *objective* intimacy delves down into the element to receive in a material mode the confidences of the dreamer. Now the night is substance, as the water is substance. The nocturnal substance will mingle intimately with the liquid substance. The world of air will give its shadows to the stream.

We must here understand the word 'give' in a concrete sense, like all that finds expression in dream. We must not remain content to speak of a leafy tree that gives its shade one summer day and protects the siesta of a

sleeper. In the reverie of Edgar Poe, a waking dreamer faithful to the clairvoyance of dream, one of the functions of the vegetal world is to secrete shadow, as a squid secretes ink. At every hour of its life the forest must aid the night in the darkening of the world. Every day the tree produces and sheds a shadow as every year it produces and sheds its foliage.

I fancied that each shadow, as the sun descended lower and lower, separated itself sullenly from the trunk that gave it birth, and thus became absorbed by the stream; while the other shadows issued momentarily from the trees, taking the place of their predecessors thus entombed. (op.cit. p.542)

So long as they are attached to the tree, the shadows still live: they die in leaving it; they leave it as they die, burying themselves in the water as in a darker death.

Thus to give a daily shadow, which is a part of itself, is it not to cohabit with Death? Death is thus a long and sorrowful story, it is not merely the drama of a fatal hour:

. . . do they not rather waste away mournfully . . . (543)

And the dreamer, beside the stream, asks if there are not beings

. . . rendering unto God, little by little, their existence, as these trees render up shadow after shadow, exhausting their substance unto dissolution? What the wasting tree is to the water that imbibes its shade, growing thus blacker by what it preys upon, may not the life of the Day be to the death which engulphs it? (p.543)

We must note in passing this new *inversion* which gives human action to the material element. The water is no longer a substance which one drinks; it is a substance which drinks; it *swallows* the shadow like a dark syrup. This image is not exceptional: one can find it easily enough in fantasies of thirst. It can give a singular force to a poetic expression, proof of its deep unconscious character. Thus Paul Claudel exclaims: 'My God! Have pity on those waters in me that die of thirst.' (Les cinq Grands Odes, p.65)

Having *realized*, in the full force of the expression, that absorption of shadows, when we see, in the poems of Edgar Poe, the bituminous river flowing past, 'the naphthaline river' of *For Annie*, and elsewhere again (*Ulalume*) 'the scoriatic rivers that roll' with sulphurous currents, the river, of 'a saffron, sickly hue', we must not consider them as cosmic

monstrosities. Neither must we take them for scholarly images more or less refurbished from the rivers of the underworld. These rivers bear no trace of a facile cultural eclecticism. They have their origin in the world of primordial images. They follow the very principle of material reverie. Their waters have fulfilled an essential psychological function: to absorb the shadows, offer a daily tomb to all that which, every day, dies in us.

Water is thus an invitation to a special death which enables us to rejoin one of the material refuges of the elements . . . For the moment we must note the in a sense continuous seduction which leads Poe to a sort of *permanent suicide* in a veritable dipsomania of death. For him every hour of meditation is like a living tear which goes to rejoin the waters of regret; time falls drop by drop from the water-clocks of nature; the world animated by time is a weeping melancholy.

Daily, sorrow kills us; sorrow, the shadow which falls into the stream. Edgar Poe follows the long voyage of the Fairy about her isle:

She stood erect in a singularly fragile canoe, and urged it with the mere phantom of an oar. While within the influence of the lingering sunbeams, her attitude seemed indicative of joy – but sorrow deformed it as she passed within the shade. Slowly she glided along, and at length rounded the islet and re-entered the region of light. ‘The revolution which has just been made by the Fay,’ continued I, musingly, ‘is the cycle of the brief year of her life. She has floated through her winter and through her summer. She is a year nearer to death’; for I did not fail to see that, as she came into the shade, her shadow fell from her, and was swallowed up in the dark water, making its blackness more black. (p.543)

And throughout his hour of reverie, the narrator follows the whole life of the fairy. Each winter a shadow detaches itself and falls ‘into the ebony water’; it is absorbed by the shades each year. Each year sorrow grows heavier, ‘for fell from her a darker shade, which became whelmed in a shadow more black’. And when the end comes, when the shadows are in both heart and soul, when the beloved beings have left us and all the suns of joy have deserted the earth, then the ebony flood, swollen by shadows, heavy with regrets and shadowy remorse, will begin its slow and soundless life. Now it is the *element* which remembers the dead.

Poe has, unawares, by the power of reverie, rediscovered the Heraclitean intuition which saw death in the watery becoming. Heraclitus of Ephesus imagined that already in sleep the soul, detaching itself from the sources of universal and living fire, ‘tended momentarily to

transform itself into moisture.' Thus for Heraclitus death is water itself. 'Water is death to souls.' (frag. 68). Poe, it would seem, would have understood the prayer carved on a tomb,

May Osiris present to you fresh water.

Thus in the region of images alone we grasp progressively the hold of the image of Death on the soul of Edgar Poe. We hope thus to complement Mme Bonaparte's thesis. As she has discovered the memory of the dying mother is ever at work in the inspiration of his writings. He has a singular power of assimilation and expression; nevertheless, if such diverse images adhere so strongly to an unconscious memory it is because they already have a natural coherence. Or such is our thesis. This coherence, be it understood, is not logic. It is none the less directly real. In reality one does not see the shadows of the trees carried away by the current. But the *material imagination* confirms this coherence of images and reveries. Whatever may be the value of Mme Bonaparte's psychological enquiry, it is none the less useful to develop an explication of the coherence of imagination at the level of images, the level of means of expression. It is to this more superficial level of images, we must repeat, that our present study is dedicated.

(Section V is omitted)

VI

If water be, as we claim, the fundamental substance of the unconscious for Edgar Poe, it must rule earth. It is the blood of the Earth. It is the life of Earth. It is water that will draw a whole landscape towards its proper destiny. In particular, as water, so the valley. In Poe's poetry the brightest valleys are darkened:

Once it smiled a silent dell
Where the people did not dwell

.....

Now each visitor shall confess
The sad valley's restlessness.

(The Valley of Unrest)

In the valley inquietude must sooner or later surprise us. The valley gathers both waters and cares, a subterranean water hollows and erodes it. It is this latent destiny that is the reason that 'no-one cares to live in any of the poetic countries', as Mme Bonaparte remarks. 'As for the gloomy lands, that goes without saying; who would wish to inhabit the House of

Usher? But Poe's smiling landscapes are almost equally repellant: their gentleness is too willed, too artificial, never do they breathe the freshness of nature.'

The better to emphasize the sadness of all beauty we add that the price of beauty is death. For Poe, in other words, *beauty is the cause of death*. This is the common theme of woman, of the valley, of water. The beautiful dell, for a moment young and bright, must therefore of necessity become a setting for death, setting for a characteristic death. The death of the valley, and of water, is not, in Poe, a romantic autumn. It is not made of dead leaves. The trees do not turn golden. Simply, the foliage passes from light green to dull green, to a material green, a coarse green, which is, we would say, the fundamental colour of Poe's meta-poetics. The shadows themselves have often, in his poetic vision, this green colour:

... Seraph eyes have seen
The dimness of this world; that greyish green
That Nature loves the best for Beauty's grave . . . (Al Aaraaf)

This is because, even in the matter of colours, Death is, for Poe, placed in a special light. Death wears as make-up the colours of life. Mme Bonaparte has in many contexts defined the psychological meaning of the notion of *Nature* in Poe's writings: 'For each of us nature is the prolongation of our initial narcissism which from the outset takes to itself the mother, nurse, and enveloping protector. Since for Poe the mother too early became a corpse – the corpse, it is true, of a young and beautiful woman – it is not surprising that his poetic landscapes, even the most flowery, have always about them something of a painted corpse.'

It is in such a nature, fusion of past and present, of soul with objects, that the most poetic lake of all, the Lake of Auber, reposes. It belongs only to an interior, subjective geography, Its place is not on the 'map of tenderness' but on the 'map of melancholy', the 'map of human sorrow.'

It was hard by the dim lake of Auber,
In the misty mid region of Weir,
It was down by the dark tarn of Auber,
In the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir. (Ulalume p.335)

Elsewhere, in *Dream-land*, the same phantoms recur, the same ghouls. It is *therefore* the same lake, the same water, the same death.

By the lakes that thus outspread
Their lone waters, lone and dead,
Their sad waters, sad and chilly,

With the snows of the lolling lily,
 By the mountains – near the river
 Murmuring lowly, murmuring ever, –
 By the gray wood, – by the swamp
 Where the toad and newt encamp, –
 By the dismal tarns and pools
 Where dwell the Ghouls –
 By each spot the most unholy –
 In each nook most melancholy, –
 There the traveller meets aghast
 Sheeted memories of the Past –. (*Dreamland*)

These lakes, these waters are fed with cosmic tears that fall from all nature:

Bottomless vales and boundless floods
 And chasms, and caves, and Titan woods,
 With forms that no man can discover
 For the dews that drip all over (op.cit.)

The moon weeps into the waters:

An opiate vapour, dewy, dim,
 Exhales from out her golden rim. (*The Sleeper*)

It is truly an 'influence' of sorrow that falls from heaven upon the waters, an astrological influence, that is to say a tenuous but tenacious matter carried by rays like a physical and material evil. This 'influence' imparts to the water, in the manner of alchemy, the *tincture of universal suffering*, the tincture of tears. It makes of all these lakes, all these marshes, the mother-water of human sorrow, the substance of melancholy. It is no longer a question of vague general impressions: what is in question is a real material participation. The dreamer is no longer dreaming of images, he is dreaming of a substance. Heavy tears impart to the world a human meaning, a human life, a human substance. Romanticism here allies itself with a strange materialism. But, inversely, the matter imagined by the material imagination takes on a sensibility so acute, so painful, that it is able to contain all the griefs of our idealist poet.

VII

We have brought together many examples – which could easily be multiplied – in order to prove that the water of imagination imposes its psychological development upon the whole universe in the metapoetics of

Edgar Poe. We must now proceed to the very essence of this *dead water*. Now we understand that water is the veritable material *support* of death, or indeed, by inversion natural to the psychology of the unconscious we can understand in how profound a sense death is, for the material imagination, the universal hydra.

Simply stated, the theory of the psychology of the unconscious which we propose must seem banal; it is its demonstration which, we believe, opens new psychological insights. The proposition to be demonstrated is: that still waters evoke the dead because dead waters are sleeping waters.

The new psychologies of the unconscious in fact demonstrate to us that the dead, insofar as they still remain with us, are, for the unconscious, sleepers. They rest. After the funeral they are, for the unconscious, the absent, that is to say more hidden, more concealed, more profound sleepers. They do not wake unless our own sleep brings us a dream deeper than memory; we find them again, with the lost, in the kingdom of Night. Some go away to sleep far off, on the shores of the Ganges, in 'a kingdom by the sea', in 'the greenest of valleys', by nameless and dreaming lakes. But they still sleep;

... the dead all sleep –

At least as long as Love doth weep

...

As long as – tears on memory's eye. (op.cit. 238)

The lake with dreaming waters is the symbol of this total sleep, this sleep from which none wishes to awaken, this sleep guarded by the love of the living, lulled by the litanies of memory:

Looking like Lethe, see! the lake

A conscious slumber seems to take,

And would not for the world awake:

The rosemary sleeps upon the grave

The lily lolls upon the wave –

...

All beauty sleeps.

(Irene, *The Complete Poems of Edgar Poe*.

ed. J. H. Whittey. Notes p.237)

These early verses are taken up again in *The Sleeper*, one of his last poems. Irene, according to the evolution of the Unconscious, has become, in this late poem, the anonymous sleeping woman, the intimate but nameless dead one who sleeps 'beneath the mystic moon in the universal valley.'

The rosemary nods upon the grave;
 The lily lolls upon the wave;
 Wrapping the fog about its breast
 The ruin moulders into rest;
 Looking like Lethe, See! the lake
 A conscious slumber seems to take,
 And would not for the world awake.
 All beauty sleeps . . . (The Sleeper)

We are here at the very heart of the metaphysical drama of Edgar Poe. Here the theme of his work and his life takes its full meaning:

I could not love except where Death
 Was mingling his with Beauty's breaths.

(Introduction (1831), Collected Poems, Notes, p.300)

— strange device of his twentieth year, which speaks already, after so short a past, of the past, and which none-the-less defines the deep meaning, the fidelity of an entire life.

Thus we must, to understand Edgar Poe, make, at all decisive moments of his poems and stories, a synthesis of Beauty, Death, and Water. Such a synthesis of Form, Event and Substance may seem to the philosopher artificial and impossible. Yet it is to be found everywhere. If we love, we at the same time *admire*, we *fear*, we *protect*. In reverie, the three causes which determine form, becoming, and matter, are so wholly united as to be inseparable. A dreamer in depth, like Edgar Poe, has united them within the force of a single symbol.

This then is why water is the substance of a beautiful and faithful death; only water can sleep while keeping its beauty; only water can die, motionless, while keeping its reflections. In reflecting the face of the dreamer faithful to the Great Memory, to the Universal Shadow, water imparts beauty to all shadows, restores life to all memories. Thus a kind of delegated and recurrent narcissism is born, which imparts beauty to all those whom we have loved. Man is reflected in his past, every image is for him a memory.

Later, when the mirror of the waters darkens, when memory becomes blurred, remote, effaced:

But when a week or two go by,
 And the light laughter chokes the sigh,
 Indignant from the tomb doth take
 Its way to some remembered lake,

Where oft – in life – with friends – it went
 To bathe in the pure element,
 And there, from the untrodden grass,
 Wreathing for its transparent brow
 These flowers that say (ah hear them now!)
 To the night-winds as they pass,
 ‘Ai! ai! alas! alas!’
 Pores for a moment, ere it go,
 On the clear waters there that flow,
 Then sinks within (weigh’d down by woe)
 Th’ uncertain, shadowy heaven below.

....

Oh phantom of the waters, only limpid phantom, only phantom ‘with transparent brow’, whose heart hides nothing from me, spirit of my river! may your sleep

As it is lasting, so be deep.

VIII

There is one other mark of death which imparts to the waters of Poe’s poetry a strange unforgettable character: their silence. Since we believe that the imagination, in its creative capacity, imposes a process on all it creates, we shall demonstrate, on the theme of silence, that water, in Poe’s poetry, *becomes* silently.

The gaiety of the waters, in Poe, is so ephemeral! Did Edgar Poe ever laugh? After a few joyous brooks – joyous near their source – the rivers soon fall silent. Their voices soon fall, progressing from murmur to silence. That murmur itself, which animates their confused life, is strange; it is as if unaware of the fleeting wave. If at the surface anyone, or anything, speaks, it is a wind or an echo, some trees on the bank which confide to it their complaints, it is a phantom who whispers, whispers very softly:

For many miles on either side of the river’s oozy bed is a pale desert of gigantic water-lilies. They sigh one unto the other in that solitude, and stretch toward the heavens their long and ghastly necks, and nod to and fro their everlasting heads. And there is an indistinct murmur which cometh out from among them like the rushing of subterranean water. And they sigh one unto the other. (Silence. *A Fable*. Works, IV p.297)

That is what one hears beside the river, not its voice but a sigh, the sigh of soft plants, the sad cold caress of vegetation. Soon the vegetation will itself fall silent, and then, when sorrow strikes the stones the whole universe remains mute, a muteness indescribably terrifying.

Then I grew angry and cursed, with the curse of *silence*, the river, and the lilies, and the wind, and the forest and the heaven, and the thunder, and the sighs of the water-lilies. And they became accursed, and they were still. (op.cit. p.300)

For what speaks in the depths of beings, what speaks in the bosom of the waters, is the voice of remorse. The voices must be silenced, to evil must be opposed a curse; all in us, and about us, which groans, must be stricken with the curse of silence. The Universe understands the reproaches of a wounded soul, and the Universe falls silent, and the undisciplined brook no longer laughs, the humming of the waterfalls, the song of the river, cease.

And you, dreamer, may the silence enter you! Beside the water, to listen to the dead dreaming is already to prevent them from sleeping.

And does happiness itself speak? Does true happiness sing? While Eleanora was still happy the river had already mastered the gravity of silence;

We called it the 'River of Silence'; for there seemed to be a hushing influence in its flow. No murmur arose from its bed, and so gently it wandered along, that the pearly pebbles upon which we loved to gaze, far down within its bosom, stirred not at all, but lay in a motionless content, each in its own old station, shining on gloriously forever. (*Eleanore*. Works, Vol. III p.90)

It is from that still and silent water that the lovers demand examples of passion:

We had drawn the god Eros from that wave, and now we felt that he had enkindled within us the fiery souls of our forefathers. The passions which had for centuries distinguished our race, came thronging . . . and together breathed a delirious bliss over the Valley of the Many-Coloured Grass. (op.cit. p.91)

Thus the soul of the poet is so attached to the inspiration of water that it is from the water that even the flames of love must be born, it is water that guards 'the fiery souls of our forefathers'. When a frail Eros of the waters 'enkindles' for an instant two transient souls, then for a moment the waters have something to say: out of the bosom of the river

. . . issued, little by little, a murmur that swelled, at length, into a lulling melody more divine than that of the harp of AEolus – sweeter than all save the voice of Eleanora. (op.cit. p.92)

But Eleanora had seen

. . . that the finger of Death was upon her bosom – that, like the ephemeron, she had been made perfect in loveliness only to die .
.. (op.cit. p.93)

Then the tints of the green carpet fade, and the asphodels give place to sombre violets,

And the golden and silver fish swam down through the gorge at the lower end of our domain and bedecked the sweet river never again. (p.94)

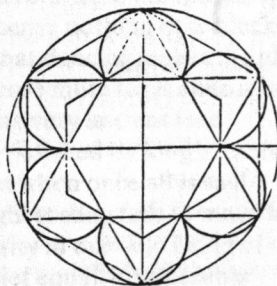
Last of all, after the sunlight and the flowers, the harmonies are lost. Then, in the kingdom of beings and voices, the destiny of the waters, so characteristic of the poetry of Edgar Poe, is accomplished:

. . . and the lulling melody . . . died little by little away, in murmurs growing lower and lower, until the stream returned, at length, utterly, into the solemnity of its original silence. (p.95)

Silent water, dark water, sleeping water, unfathomable water, so many material lessons for a meditation on death. But not the lesson of a Heraklitan death, of a death which carries us away with the stream, like a stream. It is the lesson of a motionless death, a death in depth, a death that remains with us, close to us, in us.

It needs only an evening breeze for the water which has fallen silent to speak to us again . . . It needs only a ray of moonlight, very faint, very pale, for the phantom to walk again on the waves.

Translated by Kathleen Raine



CZESLAW MILOSZ

Pax

The only important thing is this: to dwell in the living God,
To be one of the creatures of the house
Of which the God of life is the master.

Like a cat sleeping on a chair
In perfect peace, in peace,
In harmony with the master and the mistress of the house,
At home, at home, in the house of the living,
To sleep by the hearth, to yawn in front of the fire.

To sleep by the hearth in the living world,
To yawn, completely at home, before the fire of life,
To feel the presence of the living God
As a great trust,
Great calm in one's heart,
The presence,
Like that of a master of the house when he sits at the table
In his own and all embracing being,
In his own house, in the land of the living.

Translated from the Polish by Teresa Halikowska

First published in Kultura, June 1983

PIERRE EMMANUEL

Six Douzains

from *Una ou la Mort la Vie*, The first volume of
Le Livre de l'Homme et de la Femme.

19

Each morning he is astonished afresh
By the unchanging taste of the spring
And by seeing born from it at the moment he drinks
For two thousand years the same river
All its course flows between his fingers
Like words saying the same thing
Elusive in its fathomless clarity
Between the stones of our concrete-mixing tongues
It escapes from the sad duty of cold
Logic and in the future place of their ruin
Like a woman's smile which lights itself
Further and further it twinkles through the fields.

20

What is lost in the grass the earth
Catches and returns to the hidden spring
Such is the sense nothing ever blocks it
The water that dancing makes the idea dance
Or rather those mute tears almost invisible
On the young very ancient face
Featureless polished by long experience
Man's secret when once all is said
That the highest song fails to make heard
The immensity in one sole being of one sole cry
Of joy of grief equally intolerable
Breaking (so that its spring rises from it) the mind.

You are the sense and do not know it
 You laugh you dance your hand is charmed
 In tracing signs to the sun when he
 Forgets that his eyes gaze at you
 For your eyes his soul is a reflection
 Of your look brushing over it
 Like a kingfisher skimming over water
 You're the riddle of his life and do not read
 More than is written by a swallow's wing
 He questions himself without perhaps desiring
 A reply other than fluttering eyelids
 You knowing what their game is no more than he.

from *l'Autre*, the third volume of *Le Livre de l'Homme et de la Femme*. These are the last three douzains, as there are 160 douzains in each volume.

I see the Father. With my eyes in flesh
 Nothing. Only the white of the eyes, blank storm.
 Is being born merely to come out of nothing
 Into the numbed whiteness of the furnace?
 The Egg, that's it. But lifeless. The mind
 Like the dog-days is without limit
 And null. To suffer without being. Even
 Not to burn. Sundial inscrutable in fog.
 That's to be born: say an open skull. The round
 Sky is the brain. Someone holds the scalpel
 Perhaps . . . The suspense is heavy with an origin
 Which might never come to pass if what's the use.

159

The child sitting with his feet in the water
 Would like to make rings in the river
 Like time that flows and makes rings.
 Sometimes he sees deep down and sometimes not
 It depends on the whim of the branches.
 There is nothing deep down but reflections.
 No one knows anything about the other bank.
 A long time ago that child was aged six.
 The sea is far away but the water is going there.
 He feels it invitingly rubbing the soles of his feet.
 A child – if he could walk on the ocean
 What great Father would await him deep down in time?

160

Possibly too young perhaps too old
 To know his prayers. All's blue up there.
 After the night will come the star.
 Suffering is a pebble sometimes.
 One wants to catapult it far away.
 This world which is so great it terrifies
 A nightingale singing loud can fill it
 Says the child or the old man with a child's heart.
 One step out of himself and he takes stock
 Of the place that's immensely become a child's again.
 Thus the last refusal of nature yields
 To die to nothingness be born to the only living.

Translated by Brian Merrikin Hill

QUATRAINS

by Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī

162

Penetrate that world
 which is in your veins like blood,
 (does blood sleep
 as it moves in its courses?)
 No, it is not grief, but the tincture
 of madness in your veins –
 inoculated by
 the Binder of all Spells.

306

Look at these dustmotes
 in the desert air,
 look close: like us,
 they are mad.
 Each of these atoms
 whether joyful or melancholy
 is a spinning head
 of the inexplicable sweet sun.

768

Know that the lover in any case
 is no Moslem.
 The religion of Love
 knows neither infidelity nor faith.
 In Love is no body, mind,
 heart or spirit;
 he who has not become thus
 is not *That*.

Reviews

Ancient Egypt Revisited

David Gascoyne

Sacred Science: The King of Pharaonic Theocracy, R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz. Translation by A. and G. Vanden Broeck of *Le Roi de la Theocratie Pharaonique* (first published by Flammarion in 1961). Inner Traditions International. New York, 1982. 390 pp. \$16.95.

Nature Word. R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz. Translation by Deborah Lawlor of *Verbe Nature* (first published by La Colombe in 1963). The Lindisfarne Press. W. Stockbridge, Massachusetts, 1982. 154 pp. \$6.95.

It will be preferable that from the outset of this article I should make clear that what follows represents an avowedly subjective reaction to these two books, rather than an attempt objectively to assess their specific content or evaluate their literally inestimable contribution to the spiritual achievement of our time.

In the Spring of 1981, when I was staying in San Francisco, two friends of mine there, who happen to be principally interested in Surrealism, asked me whether I was familiar with the work of Schwaller de Lubicz. I answered that I was not, but I must have remarked that the second half of this name made me wonder whether there was any connection between this writer and Oscar Stanislas de Lubicz Milosz, one of the 20th century's French-writing poets for whom I have the deepest respect, as my friends went on to explain that there was indeed a connection, though at the time I understood this to be one of family relationship. In her Introduction to her translation of *Verbe Nature*, Deborah Lawlor elucidates the actual relationship between the Lithuanian poet and the younger French physicist-philosopher and student of Hermeticism in the following footnote:

In 1919, as a gesture of recognition for their friendship and work together, Milosz, who was head of the ancient Lubicz clan, made Schwaller a 'brother' in an authentic chivalric ceremony, giving him the right to bear the name 'Chevalier de Lubicz.' The philosophic maturity of the younger man seems to have inspired and profoundly influenced the poet, whose 'Cantique de la Connaissance' and other works reflect their dialogue.

Later in her Introduction, the translator tells us that in 1926, Schwaller de Lubicz, who had earlier been involved in a Parisian group called *Les Veilleurs*,

'composed mainly of artists and writers, seeking to re-establish meaningful goals after the moral turmoil of the war years', and subsequently established in Switzerland a *Station Scientifique Suhalia*, a research centre embracing a wide variety of scientific, artisanal and artistic activities, published *L'Appel du Feu*, a text resulting from an experience described by its author as a *revelation*, just as its contents are presented by him as a *doctrine*. In a quotation of six paragraphs made by Deborah Lawlor from this originally privately published document occurs the following passage:

What I have determined through many nights of research and many days of struggle is in fact but a knowledge which I already possessed in a certain past life. The effort I have made was in truth only an effort of unveiling and not of acquisition. There is moreover no merit in this, because the reward goes beyond all suffering, beyond all effort.

In his remarkably stimulating Foreword to *Nature Word*, subheaded 'the Hermetic Tradition and Today', Christopher Bamford early points out that 'as is the author's (Schwaller de Lubicz's) intention, we are never sure whether his work is primarily religious, philosophic or scientific. In fact it is all three in equal measure'.

It is here that I am prompted reluctantly to assume a role that may appear to be that of devil's advocate, by pointing out that we live at present in a world entirely dominated by a hegemony of empirical scientific rationalism which has appropriated the word *fact* in so apparently authoritative a way that only an unfortunately limited number of readers can be expected unquestioningly to accept Christopher Bamford's assertion regarding the nature of Schwaller de Lubicz's work. In other words, I fear that an important majority of conventionally educated, or 'conditioned', thinkers would feel bound to challenge it as equivocally misleading and to point out that *in fact* (according to the universally predominant point of view) the work in question cannot strictly be regarded as qualifiable as either religious, philosophical or scientific, though the subjects with which it deals are normally subsumed to a varying extent under all the three headings in question. That I personally find this state of affairs deplorable is neither here nor there. Though it might be argued that in presenting the situation in such terms as I have used, I myself appear as an equivocal quibbler, my sole concern in so doing is nevertheless to draw attention to the serious tenacity of the grip which an unconsciously one-eyed, destructively erroneous mentality is actually exerting on the crucial development of western society.

Though I am completely devoid of competence to make pronouncements on the subject of Egyptology, it seems to me clear that the domain in which Schwaller de Lubicz indubitably has the right to speak with the kind of authority that is commonly respected without hesitation by experts as well as laymen is that of the history, culture, religion and, to use his own key-term, 'symbolique' (adopted as an Anglicization of the same French word by the translators of the book they have seen fit to superentitle *Sacred Science*) of Ancient Egypt. In this field his long research and accrued erudition, fired by an intuitive inspiration of the rarest kind,

made of him one of the most obviously original and probably the most indispensable experts of recent times. The first of the two books by Schwaller de Lubicz to be published in English in 1982 deals almost exclusively with the subject to which he devoted the best part of his life, as indeed do the 3-volume *Le Temple de l'Homme*, published in France in 1957, the brief preliminary study for this master-work entitled *Le Temple dans l'Homme*, first published in 1949 and recently reissued, and the perhaps more accessible *Le Miracle Égyptien*, published by Flammarion in 1963 and apparently compiled by his widow Isha (who in her *Présentation de l'Ouvrage* refers to its author as *le Maître*).

For a number of years it has become my increasing conviction that the period in which we are living is with regard to what is taking place in it intellectually and spiritually, despite all appearances to the contrary, one that can optimistically be defined as one of Convergence. Nevertheless, what prevents this from being generally recognized may in part be due to the universally evident proliferation of specialized departments and sub-departments of knowledge, each of which demands exclusive dedication and has at most only a few generally recognized spokesmen, regarded as the ultimate experts in their field. The nearer any particular department is to being accurately described as an exact science, the more likely it is that those proficient in the subject with which it deals will find themselves using without difficulty a vocabulary of which the terms have fixed and unambiguously clear meanings. The nearer, however the department comes to being classified, tactily with ever decreasing esteem, under the heading of 'the humanities', the greater becomes the likelihood that those having the most valuable contribution to make in their chosen field will tend to develop a personal vocabulary of terms each demanding special definition and requiring time to be learnt and properly used and hence constantly apt to be misunderstood and employed in a way leading to mystification and confusion. Such considerations have brought me to a realization of the importance of being quite sure that we have as clear as possible an understanding of what we ourselves comprehend the only at first sight simple word Science to mean, but also of what it seems most commonly to mean to others, and then to recognize that these meanings are by no means always synonymous. The reason why I find myself forced to object to the use of the term 'Sacred Science' as an integral part of the title of the book originally published by René S. Schwaller de Lubicz as *Le Roi de la Théocratie Pharaonique* is that the word Science, as it is at present most widely and unquestioningly understood, happens also to be the word least of all likely to be coupled with the word Sacred, as it is now most commonly accepted. Such a use, in fact, seems to me tantamount to presenting us with a sort of *fait accompli* apparently expecting immediately comprehending assent, even though the briefest examination of the author's text should make clear the special sense the term 'science' has for him. Considerable preamble would in fact be necessary fully to explain just how both words comprising the additional title need to be understood in ways that are potentially fraught with subtle nuances.

To accuse such an attempted *fait accompli* as that alluded to of being unscrupulous would be misleading, insofar as that would imply a more pejorative and

indeed different sense than I intend to suggest. It strikes me nevertheless that it can hardly be too often stressed that it is incumbent on all who profess to be seriously responsible thinkers at the present time to make an unremitting effort towards a maximum scrupulousness if they would avoid contributing to the reigning confusion of contemporary thought that perhaps constitutes our greatest current danger.

It would perhaps appear arrantly pretentious were I, who can claim no 'scientific' training whatever, to attempt to put forward a definition of what it seems to me should properly be understood by the word 'science'. Schwaller de Lubicz appears, especially in *Nature Word*, to attach a fundamental attention to the distinction that can be drawn in French between *savoir* and *connaissance*. An ordinary French/English dictionary gives the word 'knowledge' for both these words, but in the case of *savoir* gives the alternative meanings as 'learning' and 'scholarship', and in that of *connaissance*, besides the similar alternative 'learning', 'understanding'. The Prologue to the first section of *Nature Word* contains the assertion: 'Our modern scientific knowledge (*savoir*) deceives and disheartens us.' If we add the possibility that *connaissance* may have as concomitant meaning something like 'knowing or understanding (something) with', implying a degree of empathy, with the fact that a standard French dictionary gives as primary examples of the common use of *connaissance* '*Connaissance intuitive. Connaissance abstraite, expérimentale*,' we find it easy to understand, provided we do not interpret *expérimentale* as necessarily referring solely to the kind of knowledge to be obtained only through controlled laboratory experiment, Schwaller de Lubicz's injunction in the 46th of the Answers that follow the Prologue: 'Note the sense of the verb "to know" (*Connaître*): to know Good and Evil, to know something, is learning. To know truly is not to learn but "to be with". From this we may conclude that, in contrast to the kind of scientific knowledge that 'deceives and disheartens us', there is another kind of learning essentially involved with empathy and intuition, both of which are often thought of as feminine capacities. On the other hand, the tendency to reduce all subjects of study to the status of types of mechanism to be investigated and understood by means of methodical apparatus may not unreasonably be described as preeminently masculine. This kind of distinction might lead one to consider that Jungians, for instance, are accustomed to ascribe the malaise inseparably attendant on the crisis of the twentieth century to the loss of balance between animus and anima and the ensuing detrimental subordination of the latter to the overweening ratiocinatory power developed by the former. It is difficult when referring to such distinctions and their attendant dichotomies to refrain from adding what should by now be a commonplace observation, to the effect that underlying the diminishingly acceptable face of empirical materialist science there is what actually amounts to the virtual proscription of the subjective, of subjectivity and ultimately of the factor without which there can be no truly individual human beings.

What Schwaller de Lubicz has to say regarding the verb 'to be' in the sentences quoted above appeals to me as a poet much influenced by the heroic but still little known thought of Léon Chestov and recognizing the profound importance for the

whole Western tradition, philosophical and poetic (two strands apparently far apart from one another yet in reality inseparably intertwined), of the primary myth that for us takes the form of the Garden of Eden story. That is to say that I understand the Tree in the midst of the Garden, defined in Scripture as the Tree whose fruit induces the Knowledge of Good and Evil, to be the Tree of Science, since behind what, since the Renaissance, has constantly become more obviously to be understood by the word Science is to be found the prevalent tendency towards according exclusive respect to objectivity at the expense of all that can be characterized as subjective. Its knowledge is power in that it is the result of a disguised will to power, and its unavowed aim is to exploit for profit, not merely in the sense of the easily denounced selfish desire to exploit the labour of those who lack financial power, but to exploit all available natural resources for the alleged benefit to humanity in general.

At this point it will perhaps be expedient to refer more specifically to the books which are the ostensible subject of this article. Apart from providing an abundance of information regarding the history, religion and ways of thought of ancient Egypt, while paying especial exegetic attention to the symbolism and mythology that were so essential a part of Egyptian civilization from its first Dynasty to its twelfth, *The King of Pharaonic Theocracy* also furnishes the reader with frequent examples of Schwaller de Lubicz's most typical reflections on the nature of the civilization in which we live at present and on the reasons for its decline.

Possessing scarcely a minimum knowledge of the subject of Egyptology, I hesitate to attempt any sort of assessment of Schwaller de Lubicz's current reputation in this field. When he writes of other 'scholarly' Egyptologists, he does so somewhat dismissively, clearly because their profession has until at least very recently been inclined to associate itself with a matter-of-fact materialist approach, little if at all interested in the possible metaphysical significance of the priceless remains and artifacts excavated by them, though possibly prepared to admit that the remote Egyptians who created these products with such meticulous care and skill must have done so with an overwhelming sense of involvement with their spiritual meaning. Schwaller de Lubicz would appear to be notably exceptional in that, ignoring the bias and latent prejudices of predecessors in his province and of supposedly 'disinterested' colleagues, he treats the whole topic of Egyptology with an all-embracing and unifying passion. Only his most obtusely sceptical readers could doubt for a moment that the Pharaohs and the vast majority of their subjects were continuously aware of being surrounded and conditioned by a hierarchy of invisible powers, or that the netherworld beyond death, the inverse of the sky that for them represented heaven, had as much if not more reality for them as their tangible everyday surroundings. To regard Egyptian mythology as deriving merely or principally from constant concern with the seasonal fertility of the fabulous Nile valley and the prosperity of its ever-growing delta must now appear to represent no more than blinkered reductionism of the most obscurantist order. Whether or not Schwaller was acquainted with or appreciated the writings of his near-contemporary René Guénon, it is of course

impossible to say, but surely he would have found himself in agreement, so applicable are they to the kind of purely 'scientific' Egyptology he held in disdain, with the words of the following passage from a chapter of Guénon's *Crisis of the Modern World*:

... it limits itself to ignoring certain things deliberately, without expressing a formal denial of them as is the wont of certain philosophers, so that one can only speak, where it is concerned, of a specific materialism; but the harm is thus perhaps only the greater, in that it goes deeper and is more widespread. A philosophical attitude can be a very superficial thing, even in the case of 'professional' philosophers; moreover, there are minds that would back away from denial, while adapting themselves to a complete indifference; and this is what is most formidable, because in order to deny something, you still have to think about it, even if as little as possible, while in this manner, one can manage no longer to think about it in any way whatever.

It would patently be impossible in a review of this length to attempt even the briefest summary of the contents of this eruditely informative, richly rewarding work. It strikes me, however, that special attention should be directed to the significance of the role in Egyptian philosophical cosmology (or 'sacred science' as I should perhaps after all call it) that Schwaller de Lubicz appears to attach to the *Neters*. On the last of the three pages of his Introduction to the book bearing the title I have just bracketed, the author states: 'The *Neters* are the cosmic milieu, and it is the successive states of "conscious vision" of these principles that give true meaning to human life; the King, the true King, is the living being who has reached the stage of immortal and conscious return to the source of the soul that animates him. Such is the aim proposed.' The Introduction then concludes with this particularly pregnant sentence: 'Sacred science demonstrates and proves, but the spiritual ascent of man is the path to be realised.'

Though Schwaller himself makes few if any references, in either of the two books here under notice, to other contemporary thinkers who might be considered to be following similar paths and propounding tenets ostensibly in accordance with his own, even if not inspired by the study of Egyptian hermetic lore, Christopher Bamford, in one of the many apposite notes to be found appended to his Foreword to *Nature Word*, alludes to Rudolf Steiner's *The Case for Anthroposophy* (1970), compiled by Steiner's translator Owen Barfield. The 3rd Chapter of *The King of Pharaonic Theocracy* is entitled 'Man', and within the span of its 28 pages it outlines a highly persuasive, if not conclusive, theory which manages to combine much generally accepted evolutionary assumption with a type of anthroposophy not dissimilar to Steiner's, beginning with an exposition of the kind of palaeontology that was the initial discipline of Teilhard de Chardin, whose principle preoccupation became in the end what he called 'the Probable Existence of an "Ultra-Human Ahead of Us"'. Earlier in this article I referred briefly to my own conviction that, despite appearances, the present time might be described as one of Convergence. Can it seriously be doubted that when Schwaller tells us that

'the spiritual ascent of man is the path to be realized' he is talking about man's ascent towards what Teilhard tentatively called the Ultra-Human ahead of us? Again, Schwaller de Lubicz, in his chapter on 'Man', pays attention to the significance of *gestures*, primarily to those to be observed among animals, such as 'the particular dances between certain male birds' which, according to him, 'confirm a natural and instinctive orientation toward the search for a super-corporeal consciousness', and his next chapter is indicatively entitled 'Choreography of Egypt'. This caused me to be irresistibly reminded of a phrase to be found in Martin Buber's essay on philosophical anthropology, 'What is Man?', referring to 'those early mysteries whose meaning no-one learns who does not himself join in the dance'. Is this not yet another example of what Jung has defined as 'synchronicity'? It may be disputable whether Buber's analyses of the human predicament of modern times can be equated with those of René Guénon, from which they appear to differ in most respects, but surely they shared the same central concern, as did or do many other thinkers whose names could be adduced as evidence of an observable simultaneous convergence of recent currents of thought towards an approximately identical stance with regard to the state of outer and inner crisis which is the predominant feature of our century. It can, I believe, be asserted with reasonable assurance that concomitant with the significant majority of the various diagnoses that have been made of this ever more urgent crisis-situation there is emerging an increasingly widespread recognition of the need to rediscover what for the sake of expediency I shall refer to simply as the Tradition, to which loosely correspond what is most commonly known on the one hand as the Perennial Philosophy and on the other as the Invisible Church.

Schwaller de Lubicz's *The King of Pharaonic Theocracy* makes his own contribution to the concensus of diagnoses of our actual state of spiritual and social extremity most cogently, perhaps, in its second chapter, called 'The Deviation' (obviously a variant on what is more usually known as 'The Fall'), from the conclusion of which the two following quotations seem best to summarize Schwaller's essential conclusions regarding the state of emergency in question:

It is foolish to explore materialism for a solution to the essential problem, which, in one guise or another, is always the problem of the existence of God. When an abstraction is involved, thesis and antithesis cannot become synthesis. The universe itself is entirely proof of God's existence, or else it is a composite of invariable elements; these are the only possible positions, but there are different ways of understanding the word 'God'. This notion is arrived at either through pure and simple affirmation by posing God as origin, or as a conclusion drawn from a complete analysis of all we know concerning matter. Though the atomist theory has a semblance of logic, it is actually pure fiction.

And this chapter ends:

Atomism unavoidably leads science toward an inhuman concept of the universe with all the moral – or rather, *amoral* – consequences this entails. In offering of creature comforts, this applied science eliminates

man's endeavour; mechanized, industrialized society makes humanity into a conglomerate of human atoms, particles devoid of any individual value.

To return briefly to the work this article began by discussing, *Nature Word*, it should be noted that it is said to have been composed immediately after Schwaller de Lubicz's return from Egypt in 1952. On the back cover we are informed that in it the author 'conveys to modern consciousness insights derived from a lifetime experience and study in the ancient and sacred traditions of humanity. His theme is 'the Intelligence of the Heart', the innate, functional consciousness or way of thinking which is in harmony with Nature and so able to understand Life and living things'. As already intimated, the manner in which the exponent of Sacred Science chose to convey his message took for the most part the form of 65 Answers to putative questions each of which is represented by '. . . .?' As a result, one is left with the less than fortunate impression that the necessity of proffering a coherently developed argument, in order to convey 'to modern consciousness' the unquestionably valuable insights embedded in the relatively aphoristic answers to these hypothetical questions, has somehow, not necessarily deliberately, been evaded. Occasionally the answers begin with peremptory, quite arbitrary, exclamations or admonitions, such as: 'How firmly this self-pride is rooted in you!', or: 'Forget "elites" and recognize the true Elite'.

Such readers of *Sacred Science: The King of Pharaonic Theocracy* as may have been intrigued by Schwaller de Lubicz's frequent allusions to the specially significant role played by the *Neters* in Egyptian cosmology will no doubt appreciate one particular passage to be found in *Nature Word* which appears to elucidate their nature more specifically than most of the score or more mentions of them in the other book can be said to do. Referring to the general cosmic disposition of things, or the Functional Principle as he calls it, the writer explains: 'Some have called these Principles divine qualities, or even names of God; the Egyptians called them "*Neters*", a word cabalistically linked to "Nitr" and to "Nature".' Should this still sound either opaque or vague, then I must admit that for me it represents yet one more typically tantalizing example of what I find to be the principle difficulty preventing me from being wholeheartedly enthusiastic about this second and shorter book as a whole. It not only tends to be oracular and pontifical, but too often it depends on a vocabulary and range of concepts that require special preliminary effort before they can properly be apprehended. To a large extent, what the writer intended to convey to 'modern consciousness' requires translation into the kind of terms that are most often employed by other contemporary thinkers concerned with subjects akin to his own. It is here, I am afraid, that I have to admit myself to be seriously in disagreement with Schwaller de Lubicz's devoted translator when she claims in her Introduction to *Nature Word* that he 'is able to convey exactly what he means by functional consciousness as well as to demonstrate its metaphysical basis and the method of knowing appropriate to it. This he does not with precise, logical definitions, but rather by talking around his subject, viewing it from subtly different perspectives so that the reader emerges with a deeper understanding than a sterile definition could give'.

My objections have nothing to do with a preference on my part for precise, logical or sterile definitions, but arise rather from a conviction that the kind of super-rational reality to which Schwaller de Lubicz evidently had privileged access urgently needs to be attested to, while this necessitates a recognition that in order to bring about a change of attitude towards the very nature of what is at present commonly regarded as reality, such change as must surely constitute a necessary preliminary to any possible common acceptance of the validity of the truths which Schwaller attempted to communicate, it is imperative to take into account the pertinacity of the extant habits of thought, let us not say of the imaginary average man, but of the intelligent seeker after enlightenment concerning things of the spirit and the causes of the unprecedentedly perilous state of affairs in which we now find ourselves. One of these causes is precisely the present-day obfuscation of the metaphysical basis to which Deborah Lawlor refers in her assertion quoted above. But further to pursue the point I am trying to make would only lead to a repetition of what I wrote at the opening of this article regarding scrupulousness being a prerequisite for the use of philosophical, psychological or scientific terminology today.

I have already referred with admiration to the essay by Christopher Bamford which prefaces *Nature Word*. By way of conclusion, I should like to say that for me, at least, it greatly enhances the book's value by the breadth of its field of reference and its adumbration of the true context of Schwaller de Lubicz's work. The source-notes with which his Foreword concludes contain a number of relevant names and references, including Coleridge, Novalis, Simone Weil, René Guénon, Henri Corbin, Thomas Taylor, the Presocratic philosophers, two works on Paracelsus, A. E. Waite on the Rosicrucians, Rudolf Steiner, Goethe, Joannes Scotus and, twice mentioned, Martin Heidegger. There is no reference here to Buber, that other Martin, from whom I made an illustrative quotation earlier and who, incidentally, was one of the most penetrating critics of the earlier Heidegger; but I should like to mention him as being a religious writer who dealt with modern man's spiritual crisis, the fundamental importance of dialogue and the crucial distinction to be made between faith and belief, in a way that was always lucid and that convinced one of an exceptional authenticity. It seems unlikely that he would have claimed to have been the recipient of special illumination, but one can nevertheless learn from him, without having to grapple with any particularly arcane idiom, a genuine understanding of the meaning of such concepts as prophecy, the soul and the demonic. I brought his words about 'those early mysteries whose meaning no-one knows who does not himself join in the dance' into a paragraph devoted to Schwaller's Egyptology-inspired speculations less irrelevantly than may have appeared, in fact because they seem to me to indicate what the present situation requires most of all. Unless there is active existential participation by the individual engaged in the pursuit of the secret which supposedly is at the centre of all initiations, it cannot be expected that there will take place in him that all-important transformation without which all the teachings of the wisest, most erudite or authoratative masters will perform for him no better feat than that of further cluttering up with ideas his memory and capacity for perception.

Finally, I feel I must mention Heidegger. Although I cannot read German, and this philosopher is notorious for his supposed opacity, obsessive schematization and complex neologisms, and despite having had continuously to wrestle with whatever I could find to read by him only in French or English translations, never have I doubted that Heidegger, of all twentieth century thinkers, has been the one with the keenest sense of what constitute the basic problems of philosophy, which he tends to present as consisting of just one baffling, constantly reformulated problem. More than any other once 'professional' philosopher, Heidegger (the inheritor of Husserl's Chair of Philosophy at Freiburg) succeeded in clarifying the essential nature of modern man's spiritual predicament and virtual impasse. In his later writings, he could be seen moving ever further away from doctrinaire predication towards an exacting, resourceful and relentless questioning, inciting by his example a scrupulous re-examination and rethinking of the very roots and enigmatic origin of human thought itself. From reading him with care, one can come to realize that, for one seeking true understanding of the nature of fundamental questions, it can be fruitful to examine the elementary meaning even of such monosyllabic terms as 'of' and 'in'. I have extracted the following passage from one of Heidegger's earliest post-war texts, translated by W. Kluback and J. T. Wilde under the title of *The Question of Being* (I), in order both to illustrate the character of his ever-reiterated theme, and to indicate the degree of ultimate humility with which he undertook his unceasing quest:

... thinking and speculation must return to where they have in a certain way always been and yet have never built. We can, however, only prepare for dwelling in a locality by building. Such building may scarcely have in mind the erection of the house for God and of the dwelling places for mortals. It must be content with constructing the *road* which leads into the locality of the restoration of metaphysics and thereby permits a walk through the destined phase of the overcoming of nihilism.

Whoever dares to say such things and what is more, in writing which is open to the public, knows only too well how prematurely and easily these words, which would only like to incite some reflection, are only shut off as murky rumblings or are rejected as arbitrary pronouncements. Regardless of this, he who is continually learning must think of testing the language of reflective thinking in a more original and careful manner. One day he will reach the point of leaving in the realm of the mysterious this language as the highest gift and the greatest danger, as something rarely successful and often unsuccessful.

During the course of this article, I have already twice used the term Convergence to characterize the underlying tendency of the present time. It is a term implying the need for collation. To collate the findings of two thinkers so entirely disparate as Schwaller de Lubicz and Heidegger might well at first sight appear a task so onerous as to be absurd if not unthinkable. Yet nevertheless anyone with sufficient time and patience to attempt it might well arrive at surprisingly rewarding results. It seems fairly certain that Heidegger never directed his attention to

such a text as, for example, Budge's transcription of *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, and it is unlikely that he would have considered the possibility that clues concerning the nature of the mystery he had spent his life probing were to be found outside the domain encompassed by such primary Greek thinkers as Anaximander, Parmenides and Heraclitus. Schwaller de Lubicz, for his part, was evidently an assertive personality far too absorbed in his specialist researches and reflections to have had the time to pay heed to the work of his nearly exact contemporary Heidegger (who outlived him by 15 years); and even had he done so would probably have lost little time in coming to the misleading conclusion that the German preceptor was wholly in the grips of the kind of purely 'cerebral' thinking he most deplored. Yet both men were profoundly concerned not only with Being, a subject about which they would surely have concurred in regarding as innately occult, but with Nature (basically *physis* for Heidegger, for Schwaller, as we have seen, closely connected with the phoneme *Nitr*), and with Word (for both of them inseparable from consideration of *Logos*). Clearly I have no longer the space to pursue such comparisons further, but at least one more parallel imposes itself: both thinkers recognize the importance of certain fragments of Parmenides, as edited by Kranz and Burnet respectively. Heidegger, in his consideration of what may be understood by *Moir*a, makes from Parmenides' Fragment I, the so-called 'Diadactic Poem', a quotation unavoidably implying that *Moir*a represented for Parmenides quite as much a goddess as a 'concept' or, as Schwaller would no doubt have called it, a 'Principle'. It is far beyond my competence usefully to speculate as to just what *Neter*, or Egyptian mythological key-figure, Schwaller might have identified with *Moir*a, but the question can hardly be a negligible one for anyone seeking a deeper understanding of the thinking from which emerged the remote origins of Western culture.

Finally, attention should at least tentatively be drawn to the possibility that there may exist some genuine correspondence between Heidegger's allusion, in the passage I have quoted, to preparation for dwelling in a locality by building, as to 'the erection of the house for God', and the most momentous result of Schwaller de Lubicz's Egyptological studies, i.e. his elaborately documented proposition that, like all ancient Egyptian sacred structures, the archetypal Temple of Luxor in particular was intended to teach, by means of its architectural layout, the 'symbolique' of its hieroglyphic decoration, the module of its geometrical and numerical proportions, that divine man as represented by the Pharaoh, whose bodily form, especially the brain's skull-box (holy of holies because receptacle of Conscious Intelligence), provides the morphological basis for the Temple's design in its every detail, is potentially incarnate in the created universe wherein birth deposited him. In Schwaller's own words: 'Man is the Microcosm, Consciousness is the *Temple in man*'. This proposition must, of course, remain an open question for the enquiring mind, while for those with the requisite disposition it will be regarded as further confirmation that man should be regarded as potentially an incarnation of the divine and his universal environment as sacred. Such belief will at the same time accept that what has been is yet to be.

At this point, I really must bring my discursive speculations to a reluctant conclusion. It will by now have become only too obvious that Schwaller de Lubicz is bound to be absolute anathema to all minds even mildly infected by the obstinate standard empiricism that somehow manages to remain the accepted dominant influence in British thought. To less hidebound readers, he has a great deal to offer if they are prepared to take the risk of adventurous speculation. I have to confess myself personally unattracted by his style and method of exposition, but would not wish to discourage anyone from giving him a fair hearing. Meanwhile, I believe that, this side of the grave, most of us have to accept the fact that answers to the profoundest questions propounded by philosophy, religion and esotericism can never be glimpsed except 'as in a glass, darkly'. It also seems to me that 'that which is most needful' is the perseverance with which to continue urgently seeking answers to these ultimate questions, while at the same time striving as actively as possible to bring about in ourselves and in others that change or extension of consciousness without which it seems possible that self-dazzlingly clever, aggressive, psychologically unbalanced and spiritually starved humanity is doomed to speedy extinction. Whether or not the dreaded holocaust actually overtakes us in the predictable future, it is probable that the worst has already happened in privacy, while the ever sought-after secret of salvation may eventually be seen to be so simple as to make speech, that is to say efficacious verbal objectification, seem superfluous.

Resacralization

Kathleen Raine

Knowledge and the Sacred, Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Press and Crossroad, New York. 330 pp. \$19.50.

This is an important book both in itself and because, as the Gifford Lecturer for 1981 Dr. Nasr has been able to present to a wider audience a philosophic – or rather a metaphysical – point of view which has until recently remained the concern of a minority (albeit a prestigious one) to whose ideas the Academic world has not hitherto seen fit to pay serious attention. Dr. Nasr is the spokesman of a revival of the concept of a sacred sapiential tradition, powerfully restated in this century by René Guénon (who died in 1951) and by A. K. Coomaraswamy (curator of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts Oriental collection, who died in 1947). The writings of Frithjof Schuon (to whom Dr. Nasr acknowledges his particular indebtedness), Titus Burckhardt, Leo Schaya, Elémire Zolla in Europe, Huston Smith in U.S.A., and in England Marco Pallis and the group associated with the review *Studies in Comparative Religion* have continued to disseminate the teaching. This is by no means a 'school' of philosophy based upon some individual's theory, but makes claims more far-reaching. Dr. Nasr has now taken on the role from this distinguished older generation of presenting the case

for the *scientia sacra*, the *philosophia perennis*. To quote Thomas Taylor the Platonist, who was at the end of the eighteenth century its most able defender, and whose works of translation and commentary so powerfully influenced both the English Romantic poets and the American Transcendentalists, this philosophy is

... coeval with the universe itself; and however its continuity may be broken by opposing systems, it will make its appearance at different periods of time, as long as the sun himself shall continue to illuminate the world.

Tradition, as a function of mind or spirit, is a mode of knowledge not attained by cumulative observation (like that of the natural sciences) but by 'revelation', inner discernment communicated through prophets and spiritual teachers. Marco Pallis defines tradition as 'a function of revelation whereby it is perpetuated across the vicissitudes of time and space, maintaining a spiritual unity through life, not through fixation'. It is rather an experience than a dogma, perpetually validated in individual lives.

All these writers are in their various fields well qualified to challenge the premises of modern Western culture, in particular those of post-Cartesian materialism, with its assumption that the 'real' is to be equated with the physical world, and 'knowledge' of this world with quantification. But spiritual knowledge is also exact, not measurable but verifiable. Dr. Nasr writes:

Scientia sacra is not the fruit of human intelligence speculating upon or reasoning about the contents of an inspiration or a spiritual experience which itself is not of an intellectual character. Rather, what is received through inspiration is itself of an intellectual nature; it is sacred knowledge.

Those who accept the challenge of these intellectually rigorous defenders of ancient and enduring principles are offered no easy road to enlightenment. On the contrary, academic scholarship must be challenged by better scholarship; 'scientism' by an examination of premisses by those qualified to do so with authority. Their influence is never likely to be widespread but is none the less likely to take effect at the heart of the enemy's strongholds, carrying conviction to precisely the most intelligent. In this respect Dr. Nasr, who himself received at M.I.T. and Harvard a scientific education, is particularly well qualified to undertake a critique of the secular ideologies which dominate the modern world. It is not, of course, science itself, as such and within its own field, which is called in question, but those ideologies which claim, often on insufficient grounds, scientific authority. Dr. Nasr has, in particular, challenged that most widespread and dangerous pseudo-religion, evolutionism; an ideology responsible for ethical and political aberrations which extend far beyond the scope of the natural sciences.

Dr. Nasr, himself a Shi'ite Muslim, makes no special pleading for his own tradition, but is scrupulously evenhanded in his treatment of the sapiential element in all traditions – Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Buddhist, Far-Eastern –

quoting with ease from a wide range of sources. It is an outstanding merit of this book that its many pages of readable and informative footnotes will serve to direct readers to those texts and other sources through which they can pursue a learning not taught in our schools and universities.

At the same time Dr. Nasr does, more than many of his predecessors, put into words what readers daunted by works which make such formidable intellectual demands may be led to overlook: that those who are actually living within a traditional society are least aware of such questions – they are fish in water. Sacred knowledge is a total way of experiencing the whole of life, not a creed or formulation. Unfortunately those who write of Tradition tend to be fish out of water – or in search of water – aware rather of a lack than of that ‘fragrance’, that quality of being which is the essence of Traditional life. Many – indeed most – of these writers are converts to the particular path they have chosen; Guénon and others to Islam, Coomaraswamy, whose mother and whose education were English, visited Ceylon and India for the first time only in his twenties. Tradition seems to be known, as for Milton’s fallen pair, as ‘Good lost, and Evil Got’, in retrospect or in absence. That ‘normal’ traditional society these writers so often invoke is rather an archetype of an unfallen world than a reality in this one. How indeed can a ‘normal’ society exist in a fallen world? Like the foot of the rainbow, this ‘normal’ traditional society eludes those who travel to Afghanistan or Athos or to Tibet hoping to find it. Yet, like the rainbow, it is in another sense real, its light scattered through all times and places, although in greater or less degree. The eternal kingdom is not of this world, but is yet ever-present, its discovery always, in principle, possible. Perhaps all of us have at some time, opening some door, found ourselves, for however short a time, in its presence. What is however truly abnormal in our own society is the absence of any recognition that there is a norm from which we have deviated. But the *sancta civitas* under whatever name, is never without its witnesses.

As compared with Guénon, Schuon and others Dr. Nasr is less negative and absolute in his castigations – not, indeed, of secular Western values as such (there can be no compromise over essentials) but of those tentative, partial or unaffiliated fellow-travellers who having inherited no tradition nevertheless seek to live in accordance with Traditional values. Where others have seemed to slam doors, virtually denying the possibility, in the absence of ‘normal’ supports (liturgy, crafts, arts and mores) of more than a token adherence to principles it is not possible to put into practice, Dr. Nasr never loses sight of the truth that principal knowledge is always accessible. He reminds us that the natural universe is itself a sacred book whose pages are always legible, in the light of the *scientia sacra*. He is prepared to see a genuine attempt at reorientation to the sacred source in the ecological movement represented by such pioneers as Schumacher; in the profound though unsubstantiated insights into Egyptian wisdom of E. Schwaller de Lubicz; in the writings of Theodore Roszak; in the scientific thought of David Bohm; an authenticity in each case proportionate to insight and integrity of purpose. His insistence on essentials, together with a recognition that the spirit is free to blow where it listeth, gives to this book a grace, a persuasive eloquence, a tone less fiercely abrasive than that of Guénon.

My own sense is that whereas twenty years ago the Traditional standpoint had done little to disturb the complacency of the atheist humanist world, it is now for the latter to defend a position increasingly untenable. Modern science has itself moved very far from the mechanistic premises of the post-Cartesian model of the universe. Clearly the school of Tradition is, in the modern phrase, 'engaged'. There is nothing theoretical about the issues at stake, which are, spiritually speaking, issues of life and death in which two incompatible views of man are embattled. TEMENOS is itself committed to playing our part on this same battlefield, within the field of the arts; these being the 'normal' language of sacred knowledge. Dr. Nasr himself makes the important point that imaginative insight precedes doctrinal formulation, and not vice-versa. In this he is nearer to the point of view of Henry Corbin, (his former colleague at the now defunct Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy) than to the more dogmatic followers of Guénon.

In his chapter 'What is Tradition' Dr. Nasr gives its due to an aspect of the Renaissance played down by his predecessors who dwell rather on the anti-traditional tendency towards secular humanism than the revival of the Platonic tradition by the Florentine Academy. Dr. Nasr names Steuco (who coined the phrase *philosophia perennis*) and the Florentine scholars rather as the restorers of lost knowledge than as the secularizers of the Christian tradition:

If perennial or ancient wisdom is in fact understood as Plethon, Ficino, and Steuco understood it, then it is related to the idea of tradition and can even be employed as a translation of *sanatāna dharma*, provided the term *philosophia* is not understood only in a theoretical manner but embraces realization as well. Tradition contains the sense of a truth which is both of divine origin and perpetuated throughout a major cycle of human history through both transmission and renewal of the message by means of revelation. It also implies the inner truth which lies at the heart of different sacred forms and which is unique since Truth is one. In both senses, Tradition is closely related to the *philosophia perennis* if this term is understood as the Sophia which has always been and which will always be and which is perpetuated by means of both transmission horizontally and renewal vertically through contact with that reality which was 'at the beginning' and is here and now.

In this sense Jesus stood, in the Transfiguration, between Moses (the Law) and Elijah (the Prophet).

I was therefore disappointed when in his later chapter on 'Traditional Art as Fountain of Knowledge and Grace' Dr. Nasr seems to revert to the negative view of the Renaissance taken by Guénon, Schuon and Burckhardt, who are either totally dismissive or who explain works of undeniable beauty and splendour as exceptions that prove the rule. This negative attitude seems to arise out of a too exclusive insistence on horizontal transmission through institutional religion and iconography, to the exclusion of 'renewal vertically' which is the peculiar mark of the prophetic genius; a term which must include the imaginative inspiration of all sublime art.

Indeed we may well be left wondering whether 'Tradition' is not a kind of optical illusion. Looking backwards at those great ones who have in their times and places borne witness to the sacred – for which many both within the Christian and Islamic world suffered martyrdom at the hands of religious orthodoxy – do we not see as links within the unbroken golden chain of Tradition saints and sages and inspired poets who saw before the eyes of the spirit only a vision to which they were impelled to bear witness, at the risk of life itself?

These are but one reader's reflections – a descant rather than a reasoned critique – on Dr. Nasr's distinguished book; which is likely to remain for many years an essential source and summary of the seminal thought which he represents.

Geometry as Metaphor

Keith Critchlow

Sacred Geometry, Robert Lawlor. Thames & Hudson, Art and Imagination Series, London. 1982. £3.95

This slim volume is profusely illustrated and precisely written on a subject that has needed to be responsibly represented in recent years. Robert Lawlor covers a great deal of ground touching widely on different cultures, while founded in the Egyptian tradition as uncovered by R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz, to whom the book is dedicated.

The programme of the book begins with the practice of geometry and moves on into Sacred Geometry as the metaphor of universal order, the division of unity as the primal act and the principle of alternation. Lawlor then introduces the proportional values of the Golden Mean, gnomonic expansion and spirals. Next he touches on the venerable issue of squaring the circle and mediation – the harmonics of space and the phenomenon of music.

The book concludes with the concept of the Athropos and the genesis of Cosmic Volumes, a personal exploration of the Platonic bodies and their inter-relations.

Many of these chapters are followed by workbook exercises which are particularly valuable to those who wish to actually understand through the act of performing geometry.

Lawlor in his introduction reminds the reader of the position of modern science where there has been a steady shift away from the 'pure' materialism of the last century with its particles or ultimate pieces to the position of seeing materiality as patterns of wave forms. Thus he argues the traditional use of the metaphor of geometry and music to examine reality were very close to the position of contemporary science when it claims to represent a totality.

This may well be true from one perspective and so much the better for 'contemporary science', but there are those who claim to hold a traditional sacred view

who ask for a much more fundamental comparison which claims to outline the shortcomings of contemporary science.

This view has been forcibly put by, for example, Frithjof Schuon, who characterises the positions of modern science as 'scientistic'. He claims that this view is completely unaware of the Science of Being which is a fundamental axiom of the ancient or traditional cultures. They (the scientistic philosophers) he claims are unaware 'not only of the "Divine Presences", but also their rhythms or "life"; it is ignorant not only of the degrees of reality . . . ' he continues ' . . . and the fact of our imprisonment in the sensory world, but also of the cycles, the universal *solve et coagula*', which he explains means to say that its perspective ' . . . knows nothing . . . of the "gushing forth" from an invisible effulgent Reality' . . . , or the 'reabsorption into the "dark light" of our world back into this same Reality'. Speaking from this Traditional standpoint Schuon insists that all statements of knowledge and effectiveness must acknowledge this invisible or metaphysical Reality if they wish their views to be inclusive and comprehensive. In other words unless concepts include a perspective of source and goal they remain lateral horizontal and distractions from ultimates.

The Divine Presences that Schuon speaks of are summarized by him as (a) the lowest or gross world – the material State which is the object of *empirical* science (modern or otherwise) and, without a greater perspective, an imprisonment, (b) the subtle or animistic state (the unexplainable 'life factor' for empirical science) (c) the supra-formal manifestation or the universal 'intelligences' (d) fourthly the primacy of Being, the 'self-determined' ontological Principle, which language is largely inadequate to characterize, and (e) finally Non-Being or Beyond Being, a non-qualified and non-determined Principle of totality representing the 'Pure Absolute'. Although for many of us these presences or 'worlds' may not be a daily consideration it is important to acknowledge that all traditions, engaged in sacred principles, hold that such hierarchies of subtlety are cardinal to Reality. Each world or domain pervades the 'presence' or world below without the more dense or gross having access to the more subtle above. It is because of these layers of subtlety and interpenetration that empirical science, which takes only the grossest world as its subject, is locked into its chosen perspective – even to the point of avoiding the role of the psychology of the viewer in the apparent nature of the viewed.

Now this may seem a long digression from the subject of Sacred Geometry, but it is necessary in order to be clear what position is being represented by (a) the ancient traditions, and (b) modern science. The fundamental point is that however carefully one characterizes the ancient traditional perspective it would be incorrect to insist that there was a naïveté or ignorance, in terms of principle, about the nature of things. Naïveté is either a permanent human state in relation to what it can and will eventually know, or as the old maxim goes: 'he who knows he is naïve is not the most naïve'. It is equally misleading to talk of the ancients 'intuiting' a principle or view as if it were a vague and ill-formed notion; the truth is that the ancients were more concerned with the meaning or noumena of things than with their apparent effects (phenomena).

This is important because the principal difference between the traditional ('four worlds' or 'five Divine Presences') view of totality can be characterized by 'It is not what is out there, impinging on my senses, that I am so concerned with but what is this person that believes that it is experiencing an "out there".' Causation was of greater importance to the traditional imagination than effect. Above all the question of Unity and the unified predominated over the consideration of the dual world of cause and effect.

The 'worlds' of 'Divine Presences' are often characterized as 'envelopes' of increasing obscurity or grossness. This metaphor can be particularly useful for the study of sacred geometry. Firstly as each 'world' or expression of Pure Reality can be taken to emerge into its subsequent expression through the consistent formulae of point (pointness), line (lineness), plane (Planeness) and envelope. This emanational metaphor can also be used to characterize the four 'stages' or emergent 'worlds' themselves. 'Non being', the inadequate title for the Principial state of Unity or undifferentiated wholeness, embracing all subsequent 'emanations'. 'Pointness' represents the relatively absolute world, the *self-determined* ontological state that lies within every point of all subsequent worlds or presences. 'Lineness' next represents the *duration* of the world of intelligences. 'Planeness' represents the 'animistic' or 'subtle' plane, and finally 'solidness' naturally represents the material or phenomenal domain. It is clear from this metaphorical aspect that all the 'prior' domains or dimensions exist within the subsequent, but not necessarily the other way around; i.e. the solid consists of 'planes' or surfaces, 'lines' or edges, and 'points' or corners, but the 'surfaces' do not necessarily constitute solidity, nor the 'lines' superficiality and so on.

The reason for this fundamental discussion is to establish clearly that (a) there is not a valid comparison on a one to one basis between the ancient traditional sciences and modern empirical science and (b) that geometry was one of a set of four 'liberal' art/sciences cited by tradition as being one of the four universal languages for the study and understanding of 'cosmos'. It was such a tradition that was outlined by Plato and inspired the great Cathedral schools of Mediaeval Europe.

Discussions about 'wave' or 'particle' or 'force field' theories must be very secondary to the understanding of the prime metaphor of the grades of being which is based on the wisdom of including the co-dependant natures of the viewer, the viewed, and the act of viewing if the Sacred tradition is being represented.

On page six Lawlor cites Plato as having considered geometry and number as the most reduced and essential philosophical and universal language. According to this reviewer's understanding Plato did indeed consider *Number* the most reduced and essential philosophical and universal language; but clearly differentiated as a principle which became expressible as (a) arithmetic which was the study of pure number and certainty from (b) geometry which was the study of Number in space and (c) Harmony, which was constituted to be the study of Number in Time and finally and fourthly (d) Astronomy, or cosmology, which was considered the study of Number in space and time. The emerging metaphors of point = Number; line = geometry; surface = harmony and solid = cosmos is

also evident, the fourth stage or world being the phenomenal world. Lawlor seems here as elsewhere not to clearly differentiate number and geometry – and even further algebra as seen from the ‘traditional’ or ‘sacred’ perspective.

“Geometry” means ‘measure of the earth’ are the opening words of Chapter One but it could also be that ‘geometry’ means ‘measure of the world’ and therefore ‘measure of the worlds’.

Lawlor does however discuss ‘levels’ of meanings in his archetypal, ectypal and typal; however there is a difficulty here if archetypal is characterized as ‘process’ as this is only one aspect of those principles that are quite outside time and duration. The archetypes are not usually considered ‘Gods’ but pure principles called upon by the Gods as mediators to become the foundation of the reflected events in the phenomenal world; rather as a spectrum of light causing the shadows of the phenomenal world.

Angles are not without an etymological and philosophical connection with Angels as both can be transliterated into intelligences. Plato is usually translated from the *Timaeus* as having talked of triangles in the fabrication of the material cosmos by the Demiurge: whereas *trigons* would have been more accurate. The point being that angles have tended to come to mean a spatial value *between* two lines whereas the Greek word ‘gon’ directly links it to a *generating* intelligence (angel?) because the etymology survives in its genesis capacity in the modern English in ‘gonads’ and ‘genes’ for instance. A *gon* is essentially a quality generated out of a threeness, the point, location and two vectors or lines delimiting the degree of opening of space and, in the view of Schwaller de Lubicz, qualities resulting from three lines.

The Sri Yantra is also cited in the first chapter but in far too summary a way as the Vedic tradition venerates this sacred geometry as a psycho-cosmic tool not merely for ‘a kind of philosophic contemplation’ but rather a ‘particular emergence of the Original Light representing the *form-pattern* of the God-head’.¹ This yantra or chakra is traditionally described as being built in lines of light in the form-pattern of the Gods. M. P. Pandit is even more specific and describes the Sri Chakra as ‘. . . a pictorial representation of the process of the descent or devolution of the One Supreme Consciousness, step by step, layer by layer, into this creation of multitudinous forms’.² He proceeds to insist however that the other side of this profound geometric diagram is its purpose of providing ‘. . . the Scheme for the evolutionary return of the individual unit . . . to the ‘. . . Fundamental Consciousness . . .’ This summarizes for the present reviewer the most succinct definition of the *purpose* of Sacred Geometry. In the one instance it is a tool or technique for accurately understanding the way in which the created order came into being – is maintained – and the way or path or return to source. In short, a tool for understanding how we came into manifestation, our nature and relationships here and the objective path of return to integrality. Pandit describes this latter psycho-integrative function in the following way: ‘. . . This framework (the triangles, circles and squares of the Sri Yantra or Chakra) is used by the practitioner for the evocation and precipitation of the cosmic process of disintegration and re-integration in his individual mould’.

Each set of composite squares, lotus petals and triangles correspond to '... the various psycho-physical parts in the human body ...'⁴ thus demonstrating the profoundly integral nature of this geometrical symbolic structure. He sums up his authoritative commentary: 'It provides a potent material focus for the operation of subtle forces within and without'.³

Later in his introductory chapter the author quotes both Plato and his most inspired English translator Thomas Taylor. The latter he cites as stating an essential Platonic view to the 'bodies that are moved in cycles'. However this reviewer's most serious difference with the structure of this presentation of Sacred Geometry is the neglect of the primacy of the circle and in turn the sphere as prime metaphor for the state of wholeness and completion. Tradition embraces the paradox that the void is also the plenum, thus avoiding the contemporary linear, literalistic, view of a zero that leads to nihilism. Lawlor is right to point out this reason for keeping the zero concept within the Temenos or temple precincts.

A comparison is set up in the first chapter between the *diameter* of a circle and the *side* of a square – drawing the conclusion that the diagonal of this square will be 'incommensurable' or 'irrational'. The question is bound to arise:– why not measure both by the same diameter, as the significance of the circle is that it embraces all other shapes and is the geometrical determining factor to the regularity of not only the square but all of the regular polygons? Secondly, if a common radius is taken for the circle that embraces the principal polygons, this avoids the error of calling those special numbers π , $\sqrt{2}$, $\sqrt{3}$ and $\sqrt{5}$ irrationals and remembering that they are principally transcendentals – clearly indicating a unique quality of transcending rationality – not as modern usage would tend to do, putting them down as less than rational. They specifically indicate a supra-rational source. If we start with the circle as symbol *par excellence* of the transcendence and immanence of the source and completion of the created order, i.e. the void and the *plenum*, then we find firstly that the circle's perimeter evokes the 'first number' 3 in the transcendental π . (i.e. 3 is the whole number aspect of the 3.1415926 or the 3 and $\frac{1}{7}$ approximately.) When we next inscribe the triangle we find the edge of the triangle is $\sqrt{3}$ to the enclosing circle's radius of one. Next if we enclose the square using the same radius of one we arrive at the third transcendental $\sqrt{2}$. These simple facts seem to the present reviewer to demonstrate the primacy of $\sqrt{3}$ before $\sqrt{2}$ as the 'esoteric' transcendental which reverses the fact that in numbering two comes before three. It is as if the inner message is given in the first theorem of Euclid, that of the 'duality' of two similar overlapping circles (centres on peripheries) relating by $\sqrt{3}$ between their points of departure from each other. As Plato was at pains to insist, a cosmos is possible because of the mediation of proportion. The metaphor for the first 'division' as it is graphically expressed by the overlapping circles is its intrinsic controlling $\sqrt{3}$. This is a good reason to believe why Plato put forward the 1 : 2 : $\sqrt{3}$ trigon as the most beautiful and most primary triangle in the creation of the elements of our cosmos.

This is also a reason why the present reviewer cannot agree with the author's policy of starting with a square and the $\sqrt{2}$ diagonal proportion as his first 'lesson'.

However, these discussions must not take away from the special contributions that the book does make and the fact that it is so superior in quality to any that has been published on the subject since Schwaller de Lubicz' works, that discussion and differences become of value.

The author's discussion of the concept of zero is one such important contribution. The chapter on music is also very rewarding. The workbook drawings and wealth of practical help is also admirable. However this reviewer must differ in philosophic premiss about the setting up of the 'cosmos' of concentric Platonic spheres. The sequence works (notwithstanding the publishers' error on page 102 where the second colour drawings have been aligned incorrectly) but any sequence of concentric Platonic figures can work. The significant fact is that this sequence goes against a shared tradition of Plato, Al-Kindi the Moslem, and Kepler the Christian. To cite a hint of another American author*⁵ that the sequence shown here *could* relate to the Vedic philosophy is not the same as citing where it does occur in the Vedic literature. A citation which would be most significant.

This is a book strongly recommended both for its wealth and its challenge.

Notes:

¹ *Sri Chakra* by S. Shankaranarayanan. Pub. Sri Aurobindo Ashram 1970. India.

² op.cit. p.9.

³ M. P. Pandit in 'Studies in the Tantra and Veda'.

⁴ *Sri Chakra* op.cit. Chapter XV.

Nature Magic

Muriel Bradbrook

The Apple Broadcast and other New Poems, Peter Redgrove, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1981. pp 133. £3.00

In a modest account, 'A Poet in Teaching', Peter Redgrove observed that the two extremes of temperament – that tuned to the outer and that to the inner world – being only 'two extremes of one continuum'. may be transformed.

Nor are there two kinds of creativity, scientific and artistic. Precisely the same operations favour and disfavour both. There is the imagination, and that best operates across the whole human spectrum.

(*The New Universities Quarterly*, Spring 1980, p.169)

His tenth collection of poems celebrates the sacred as manifested at many levels of being! Shifting tidal movements ply through the solid surface of things. The dances of the molecules or the leaf have historically been tuned with the harmony of the spheres within the chromatic of traditional religious thought – as by a Spenser or a Hopkins writing an Epithalamium, or on Mutability or on Nature's

Heraclitean fire. Peter Redgrove is trained as a scientist, in childhood choosing a microscope in preference to a ventriloquist's doll for his Christmas toy; his world is that of the chemist, the physicist and the geologist, yet seen from 'Within the Country of my Skin'. His first published poem, 'Lazarus and the Sea', which appeared in 1954 in the little magazine, *Delta*, that Redgrove founded as an undergraduate, transforms the process of dissolution into a cyclic renewal of life. As 'antique moistures' penetrate the body originated from a 'salt ovum',

I could say nothing of where I had been,
But I knew the soil in my limbs and the rain-water
In my mouth, knew the ground as a slow sea, unstable
Like clouds and tolerating no organization such as mine. . .

Water is his element, dominating many poems, from 'The Waterman' to 'The Moisture-Number' in this latest volume.

His long inner journey has recently encompassed the demonic and horrific, in several novels and in some poems of *The Weddings at Nether Powers*. The chthonic is exorcised in *The Apple Broadcast*, with the terrors of the white-coats (doctors who administer convulsion therapy) and the black-coats (dispensers of a narrowly administrative religion). Like Blake, Redgrove has arrived at a position both traditional and innovative, encompassing the scientist's faithfulness to his observation and the seer's faithfulness to his vision. The social level, whether political or that of an institutionalized church, is eliminated. We have arrived at a Harvest Festival by way of a Jungian pilgrimage. The symbols are not analysed, but left to energize the reader; they begin at the basic level of stones and sea.

Redgrove found his true home, his sacred place, in 1966, when he went to teach in Falmouth. This was intimated as he took his case of rock samples back to the northern university where he had resided:

Landscape in a box under the dull sky of Leeds –
One morning was awake, in Cornwall, by the estuary,
In the tangy pearl-light, tangy tin-light . . .
Tissues of the earth, in their proper place,
Quartz tinged with the rose, the deep quick,
Scrap of tissue of the slow heart of the earth. . .
(*'Minerals of Cornwall, Stones of Cornwall'*, a case of samples)

This inscrutable Celtic land remains the energizing ground of his psychic journey, down to his very latest verse (too late for this volume) the sardonic 'Falmouth at its best'¹, which opens

The crew of a submarine
Buying jewelry in the town . . .

– picking up rose quartz, amethyst and serpentine in the little shops of the harbourside. Redgrove's submarine journeys are charted in the differences between moonlit dunes of the wide beach at Perranporth, where the receding tide exposes to two lovers the mussels 'bunched blued, black band':

The dead are beautiful, and give us life.

and the cove at Maenporth where the white girl is transformed to radiant darkness. (Maenporth is dangerous to seamen and bathers by reason of its currents). 'From the Life of a Dowser' resorts to Cornish, repeating the imagery of 'Lazarus and the Sea' with a difference. Its sparkling well, 'Fonten ow Clyttra' is later domesticated in 'The Laundromat as Prayer Wheel'

The whirling pole bound up in linen,

The Lord of the Dancing Axle Tree –

a 'mechanical sepulchre' from which the whiteness arises that is found in other poems to be sacramental; a single image comes with marked difference in the contexts of 'The Housekeeper' and 'Venom', in the last

my house is sometimes as it were

Made of bread, new baked, holy,

A tough roof of crust

And inside one entirely beautiful white bed

That smells of love's light alcohols and yeasts,

That bed hardens as the years pass

And when the cats screech the same cries,

When they rip their screaming tin,

Now I listen to the music scrupulously

Of some of those destroyed cries

In the second half of this poem, a snake has been flattened on the motorway; the cleaner will pick it off the road, like a white-coat in a museum looking at specimens 'full of the headlight of unused venom'. The venom of the snake and of the motor car (as in 'Smith and the Motor Car' from *The Weddings at Nether Powers*) stand in apposition with the sacrament. In 'The Housekeeper' the Vicar is set free from his 'black shroud' and himself lies 'like a snake flattened/ On the superspeedhighway' till, united with the rustlings of the nether world that whisper 'Isis, Isis' he too enters a house 'full of holy bread', a bed 'smelling of love's light alcohols and yeasts'.

The most powerful figure in 'The Apple Broadcast' is neither the white-coated nor the black-coated thinker, still less 'the Golden Policeman' who, transformed by the sight of love, 'resumes his beat, like the waves, policing', (he is glorified as in other poems a Street Party is glorified).

It is a baby girl, the Marina or Miranda of the inner journey, but yet a baby observed, where

She cries, under the seagulls' mewling,

Under the skylight, in the bassinet,

She squirms, turning in her shawls

Round and round. ('Spirits')

This re-emergence of the Animula, not as sexual partner but as daughter, coincides with the new 'white' world as against the dark word of 'nether powers'. If in his celebration of plenitude, Redgrove recalls the line of Spenser, Blake and Hopkins, his constellated imagery, which reoccurs with deepening reticulation from one volume to another, one poem to another, may best be understood from the example of T. S. Eliot in *The Four Quartets*. Redgrove has sometimes used rather mechanical series – the alphabet, the animals of the ark – but his new binding power is found at the deepest level in a new rhythm. 'Taut' a new favourite word (used of the horizon and the masts of Falmouth harbour) characterizes a new three-line stanza, found in most of these poems; its pulse is that of the wave that runs forward, breaks, draws back. A subliminal image of tidal waters sometimes culminates in a short line followed by a long one, which represents the undercurrent breaking from beneath the crested waves.

A beautiful symbiosis, 'Gwennap Cross' introduces the small Saxon Christ, 'carved from oolite' or limestone formed on the seabed. 'uncrified' as in the twin poem:

The prehistoric seas strive
And the result is this same Christ
Speeding through the corridors of time
for the sea has set as stone . . .

It is a hard and odorous stone,
And tingling, but the smell in it
Is as though I kiss
The head of my baby with its rinsed mossy smell.

Smell, the most animal of the senses, can meet scent of shells in the dock, or the scent of apples, of childhood itself in the Street Party.

With the baby, the poet shares the juice of the apples, which has also been shared with wasps ('Orchard with Wasps') and with codling moths ('The Cave'). Apples have so long been one of Redgrove's leading symbols that a study of them appeared in the number of *Poetry Review* specially devoted to him. An extended image in 'Sean's Description' (from *The Weddings at Nether Powers*) sets the horrific description of a corpse ('A green doughnut with eyeholes in it') against the poet's refashioning of 'the careless lady who swallowed pips' and is now in her grave.

I brought
One of her apples from my pocket, and bit
Through the sweet flesh that fizzed with young ciders
And my toothmarks blazed white through the red skin.

'Look! I said, holding up another firm sweet apple
'This is what a dead person really looks like; taste her'.

'The Apple Broadcast' is subtitled 'Meditation experience at Boscastle' – the tiny harbour near the Devon cider orchards which elsewhere in this volume celebrates the triumph of the feminine and natural over the warship that 'glides in like a malicious buffet of cutlery' to be saluted by the harbour rock:

volleying from its caves
 Returning thunder with thunder
 Back to the buoyant anvil hammering

Among the windcells and the catspaws tautly anchored
 ('Saluting Willa')

In 'The Apple Broadcast' the white-coats are 'kept away' by the rosy colleges of 'round young doctors', the black-coats by the voice of God in storm. But Redgrove the scientist hears subliminal messages in cybernetic terms. Broadcasting is a medium he has written for.

The enormous white voice over the apple valley
 Beats in echoes orb'd like spider-webs that shine
 In broadcasts hung with appled water drops

Its electricity races down all streams . . .

I am electrical for ever from these sights,
 This broadcast uttered from the apple storm . . .

In my granite cottage which is a crystal set
 The walls flashing with their ancient broadcasts

The epigrammatic wit that crackles here and there in these poems of celebration ('Turn off that Box'), and the perils of T.V.'s dream kit, when 'the true instrument / Is the dreaming mind', are echoed at the natural level, where spiders are trapping some of the moony moths who 'flutter the constellations on their wide white wings'. Redgrove has always been free from a sense of guilt – he has rather a strong sense of dirt – but here, from the pagan energy of the opening thunderstorm, 'On the Patio', to the final sequence, a radiance won from the dark worlds that now lie behind spreads outward to where the

horizon line
 Sleeks, the taut horizon line.
 What looms, what fades, on that line?

Note:

¹ This appeared in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 21st January 1983.

Poet in Transition

*Anna Hopewell**Selected Poems*, John Montague, Oxford University Press. 1981. £5.95

By the time I had finished reading this selection of poems by John Montague I had the feeling I had been presented with a life – its childhood, its loves, its scenery and preoccupations – a life circumscribed but deeply felt – reaching backwards, and, in the final poem, forwards towards a new calling for the poet.

Of all the subjects explored in these poems, the one that recurs most often and most powerfully is that of old age, especially the old age that is the destiny of women. The magnificent 'Hag of Beire' is of course a translation, and few of us are in a position to read the ninth-century Irish original. All I can say is that as the poem John Montague has made of it, it has all the dignity of the splendid sea-imagery with which it is pervaded. In a similar vein is his tribute to his mother and

'... the harness of humiliation
you bore constantly until
the hiss of milk in your pail
became as lonely a prayer as
your vigil at the altar rail'

Another fine poem is 'The Wild Dog Rose', about the 'Cailleach' or hag, 'a moving nest of shawls and rags', who has lived alone all her life, unwilling to marry and move ten miles away from 'her own', and who tells a fearsome story of a drunken night intruder. The poem ends with the unexpected imagery of the dog rose she offers him, described in the most delicate language.

A feature of the Irish landscape which he describes with joy is its wells and springs. In a poem that begins in a lightly humorous vein describing a drinking-party, his memory leads him back to a mountain-spring where, as a boy, he put his hand into the water, searching for the legendary trout – (of the family surely of the 'ancient salmon of wisdom') –

to find nothing but that
wavering pulse leading to
the central heart where
the spring beat, so icy-cold
I shiver now in recollection . . .

An earlier poem entitled 'The Trout' shows the poet at his characteristic best:

Flat on the bank I parted
Rushes to ease my hands
In the water without a ripple
And tilt them slowly downstream
To where he lay, tendril light,
In his fluid sensual dream.

Bodiless lord of creation
 I hung briefly above him
 Savouring my own absence
 Senses expanding in the slow
 Motion, the photographic calm
 That grows before action.

As the curve of my hands
 Swung under his body
 He surged, with visible pleasure.
 I was so preternaturally close
 I could count every stipple
 But still cast no shadow, until

The two palms crossed in a cage
 Under the lightly pulsing gills.
 Then (entering my own enlarged
 Shape, which rode on the water)
 I gripped. To this day I can
 Taste his terror on my hands.

A later poem, 'The Well' (published in *Temenos* 2) returns to 'The hidden laughter of earth' of spring water. Many of his poems, on the surface descriptive rather than symbolic, reach deep into the heart of an experience.

In 'The Fight', a memorable poem, the poet describes his wonderful discovery, as a boy, of swallows' eggs under a bridge. He shows them to a school companion who breaks them. The boys fight in the water. Later he looks back on the incident:

And I would still fight
 though now I can forgive

To worship or destroy beauty
 That double edge of impulse
 I recognise, by which we live . . .

The love-poems are more disturbing. Some of them relate to a past, broken love, and some look forward into the growth of a new one. The poems are intimate, in some cases unsettled and with violent imagery, in others thankful and tranquil. 'Herbert Street Revisited' looks at the past in calm and reconciliation. To me the most touching love poem is an early one, about the beautiful schoolgirl whose beauty and 'lack of shrewdness' turn her for a time into a prostitute – a boyhood love never declared.

Politics, as one often finds in Irish poetry, are for this poet a preoccupation of the heart. Whether in the ironical 'Balance Sheet' from 'Hymn to the New Omagh Road', or in the far more bitter 'A New Seige', he is personally involved in his country's destiny. The political poems are painful to read – but surely they must have been intended to be so.

There are two or three sympathetic poems about priests and their experience of life – these are among the early poems and the subject is not returned to in the later ones. Perhaps the priests are not mentioned again in view of the sense of loss which breaks through in passages such as

... a voice
like an animal howling
to itself on a hillside
in the empty church of the world

a lament so total
it mourns no-one
but the globe itself
turning in the endless halls

of space . . .

The same gentle understanding at work in the poems about priests is present when the author refers to birds. 'What a View' is another example of the lightly humorous side of John Montague's talent. The seagull flies over a small town, seeing but not understanding the signs of the history, religion and distinctions of its inhabitants, eventually perching on the flagpole of the British Legion hut. A darker and more powerful bird poem ends the book (it also appears in *Temenos 2*)

The Eagle looked at this changing world
Sighed and disappeared into the mountains

....

Why? because a cliff had asked him
The whole world was changing, with one
Language dying, and another encroaching
.... and the region needed a guardian
So the mountain had told him . . .

In this poem, the eagle suggests the poet, his withdrawal from the new, crowded world of the seashore, to become 'guardian' of the mountain region, a bringer of fear and joy.

It is a pity *The Great Cloak*, (a cycle of love-poems published by the Dolmen Press) is not included as a whole in this collection. In a short preface to the cycle Montague notes that 'These poems should not only be read separately'. The sequence, as he frankly admits, refers at first to an unsatisfactory liaison, then to the break-up of a marriage, and finally to an awakening into a new relationship. It is, in fact, a slight weakness in some of these poems that they are, taken individually, rather fragmentary – in some cases a chain of impressionistic images, particularities carrying personal associations for the author, rather than the fully cut gems we find among, say, Hardy or Meredith's poems of love or lost love. 'Herbert Street Revisited' is certainly a poem that stands up on its own and reverberates in the memory. 'The Great Cloak' is a short poem, which is

disappointingly undeveloped. The quotation from Spenser on the title page speaks of 'Venus mantle, lined with stars'. The Greack Cloak is woven from the loves of all who love, woven 'to swathe a handsome woman's body' or 'when the baby is born to wrap the morsel tenderly . . .'

This poem is omitted from the collection.

The Great Cloak is introduced by a fragment beginning
As my province burns
I sing of love . . .

The political situation in Ireland is felt in the heart by Irish poets in a way its equivalent never could be in England. There are political references in many of the poems, and the theme is taken up in two longer poems, 'A New Seige', and 'The Cave of Night' with its nightmare ending subtitled 'Ratonnade'. Montague is very conscious of the continuity of Irish history, and juxtaposes the present with Ireland's ancient past in these poems. He holds out no hopeful vision of future peace. I would not say these were his best poems, perhaps because the pain and indignation are too close to be 'recollected in tranquillity'.

Art in Education

John Allitt

Seonaid M. Robertson: *Rosegarden and Labyrinth – A study in art education*. 215 pages, numerous illustrations, published by the Gryphon Press, Lewes 1982, paperback edition £4.00.

English Within the Arts. Hodder and Stoughton, £4.50. Peter Abbs.

Seonaid Robertson's book, *Creative Crafts in Education*, published in 1952, explored craft teaching in a wide field. It was a successful book, influencing numerous teachers with its theme that a right attitude towards the crafts will embrace a right relationship with man's environment and foster the growth of the imagination. Influenced initially by Herbert Read, it was her experience as a teacher which eventually convinced her that schoolchildren, when educated with insight, perceive their imagery essentially in archetypal symbols.

The recognition of this fact sparked off what may be described as an inner pilgrimage in search of the significance of the main images confronting her in the work of pupils. The search encouraged extensive reading, reconsideration of traditional symbols and patient contemplation. The fruit of the pilgrimage was *Rosegarden and Labyrinth*, first published in 1963.

The Gryphon Press has made this fascinating book available in paperback at a time when many consider the arts and especially art education to be in crisis through lack of direction and discrimination. When this book was first published in the Sixties there was a facile self-assuredness in the art world, virtually anything could earn a label indicating a 'work of art' and be sold at a high price. Official art

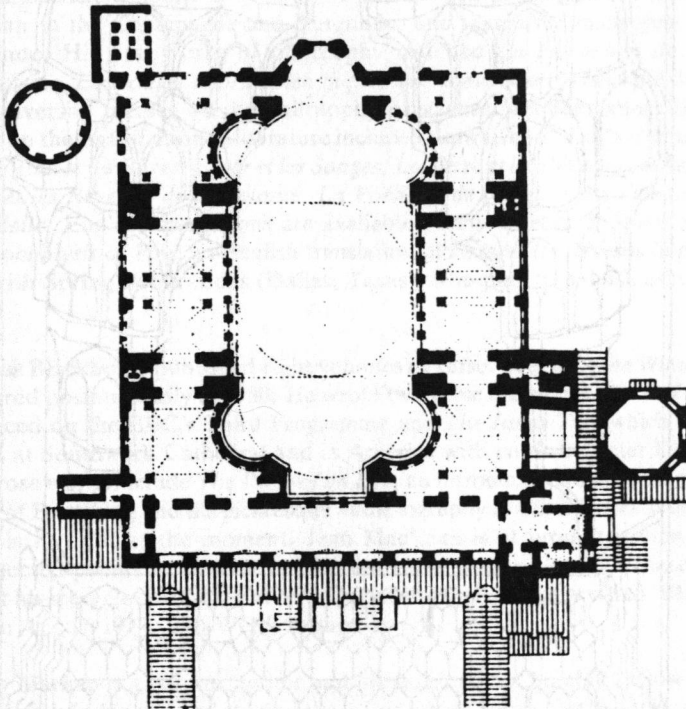
was then abstract in the worst sense, sometimes fitted together like a meccano set, and presented with vigorous self-confidence. Books, articles and critics were produced in order to justify the new art and ensure a market for its economic success. One wonders what Dante would have made of the art of the Sixties; the devils might well have decorated their *malebolge* with some of the pieces, but the majority, no doubt, would have been consigned to Limbo, wanted by neither the higher nor the lower worlds! One would like to think that Seonaid Robertson's book has been reprinted at an appropriate time when the shortcomings of an already out-dated modernism are becoming increasingly apparent. In art schools as well as the continuation of dated styles of the avant-garde of the Sixties there is a return to naturalism. However, there is no universality of imagery bestowing meaning and communication. A book like *Rosegarden and Labyrinth* is an example of the long search into our heritage undertaken by numerous persons over the last decades with the hope of once more opening the rich coffers of the largely forgotten tradition of the West.

Rosegardens and labyrinths were two images observed by the author which recurred in her students' work. The images fascinated her and her study led her to rediscover the importance of the sacred enclosure. More recent studies could amplify what is said in this book, especially regarding the role of *mandala* in traditional symbolism. Most people who have tried to teach 'art' with understanding to young people will have become aware that their approach or method can easily touch ancient sources of energy and that amazing images and patterns may easily and naturally unfold before pupil and teacher. It is possible to observe the unity once known to society, that drawing together of all our faculties in the service of the imagination. The tragedy is that modern education goes on to destroy the delicate new life because what we erroneously call 'life' offers no role or purpose for its expression.

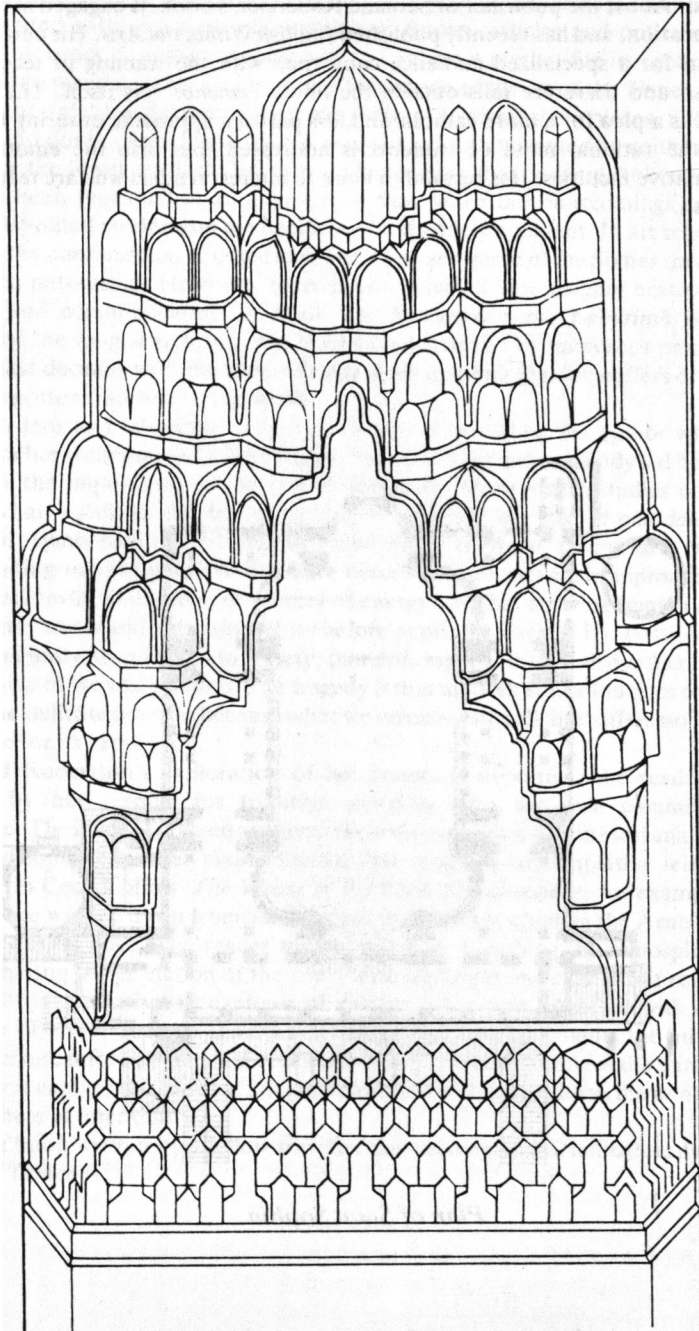
Seonaid Robertson's exploration of her images is evocative, the reader is charmed by her respect for tradition mingling with her own committed experience. The ideas expressed are given force through what is in the last analysis a poetic vision. The writer makes known that need for contemplative leisure spoken of in Cecil Collins' *The Vision of the Fool*. She describes, for example, how she once walked down from San Miniato to Florence, crossing the Arno not by bridge but by boat. The reader travels with her, breathing the atmosphere evoked, sharing in her elation of the soul. With hindsight one cannot but regret the acquisitive, quantitative exphasis of modern education, together with our daily pace of travel and the superficiality of imagery which assaults the mind. Creative leisure is for Seonaid Robertson an essential precondition for the pursuit of 'art', for it enables the world of images before and within us to focus the mind in the wholeness of intention.

This is a book written by a fellow traveller and recommends itself naturally to readers of *Temenos*.

Peter Abbs, the publisher of Seonaid Robertson's book, is engaged in the field of education, and has recently published *English Within the Arts*. His new book is written for a specialized audience concerned with the training of teachers of English and therefore falls outside the limits *Temenos* sets itself. The book's theme is a plea for a more catholic and less partisan approach, ensuring that not only the rational mind of students is addressed, but also the emotive and imaginative faculties. It is certainly a book to interest readers who are teachers of English.



Plan of Saint Sophia



Notes on Contributors

John Allitt: teaches at the Camberwell School of Art. He is deeply versed in Italian culture, and is a Cavaliere dell' Repubblico Italiano, an honour awarded him for his work on Donizetti.

Wendell Berry: poet, essayist, novelist and Kentucky farmer, Fellow of the Lindisfarne Association. His novel, *A Place on Earth* has just been republished (after ten years) by the North Point Press (Berkeley, Cal.) together with his latest collection of poems *The Wheel*.

Gaston Bachelard: born at the end of the last century, began his career as a postman in the Champagne and Burgundy, and taught for many years at the Sorbonne. His first works of philosophy included *La Formation de l'Esprit Scientifique*, *Le Nouvel Esprit Scientifique*, and some dozen works published by the University presses on the philosophy of science and Phenomenology. His works on the Imagination in literature include: *Lautréamont*, *La Psychanalyse du Feu*, *L'Eau et les Rêves*, *L'Air et les Songes*, *La Terre et les Rêveries du Repos*, *La Terre et les Rêveries de la Volonté*, *La Poétique de l'Espace*, *La Flamme d'une Chandelle*. English translations are available of *The Poetics of Space* and *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*; an English translation of *L'Eau et les Rêves* is in preparation with Spring Publications (Dallas, Texas), who plan to publish other of his works.

Thomas Blackburn: published eight volumes of verse. *Bread for the Winter Birds* appeared posthumously in 1980. He wrote two verse dramas: *A Place of Meeting* produced on the BBC's Third Programme and *The Judas Tree* which was produced at Southwark Cathedral and in America with music by Peter Dickinson. His prose works include *The Price of an Eye*, an introduction to modern poetry, a study of Browning and his picaresque autobiography *A Clip of Steel*. None of his work is in print at the moment. Jean MacVean is at present working on 70 uncollected poems written during the last three years of his life. These closely reflect his struggle with alcoholism and final emergence to new vision. Blackburn died in August 1977 at his Welsh cottage.

Thetis Blacker is a painter, writer and dreamer. As a Churchill Fellow she has travelled to Indonesia and studied the fabric arts of South-east Asia. Her sixteen banners on Genesis and the Apocalypse were commissioned for the 900th anniversary of Winchester Cathedral and her dyed paintings have been commissioned for cathedrals and churches in Denmark and the USA, as well as in England. She is the author of *A Pilgrimage of Dreams* and several television and documentary films have been made on her work.

Four major series of her paintings have been based on mythical themes – ‘Apocalypse’, ‘A Bestiary of Mythical Creatures’, ‘The Creation’ and ‘Search for the Simurgh’. She is at present working on a set of banners for St. James’s Church, Piccadilly.

Muriel Bradbrook: Professor of English and former Mistress of Girton College, Cambridge, author of many books on Shakespeare and the Elizabethan drama, on Ibsen, T. S. Eliot, Malcolm Lowry. Her most recent book (Vols. II & III of her Collected Papers) are *Women in Literature* and *Aspects of Dramatic Form in the English and Irish Renaissance*.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay: took an active and leading part in the Indian National Freedom struggle as a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi, spending five years in prison. Educated at Bedford College, London, she was one of the founders of the All India Women’s Conference, has been active as a social worker, in the theatre and other cultural movements, is Founder and President of the Indian Cooperative Union, a body engaged in organizing rural and urban cooperatives, organised and conducted the Central Cottage Industries Emporium and was Chairman of the All India Handicrafts Board in the Ministry of Industry; one of the organizers of the World Crafts Council and now its Vice-President; has travelled widely in Asia, Europe, America and Africa. She is the author of many books on handicrafts, Tribalism in India, Indian Women’s movements, and more besides.

Henry Corbin: The following works by the late Henry Corbin, the great Iranian scholar, himself worthy to be included within the Sufi tradition on which he has written with learning and insight, are at present available in English translations: *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, (Bollingen Series, LXVI), New York, 1960, tr. W. R. Trask. (Reprint ed: Spring Books, Dallas, 1980 (paperback edition). *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi*, (Bollingen Series, XCI), Princeton, 1969, tr. Ralph Manheim. *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi’ite Iran*, (Bollingen Series, XCI:2), Princeton, 1977, tr. N. Pearson. *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, Shambhala Press, Boulder and London, 1978, tr. N. Pearson. *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, Kegan Paul International in association with Islamic Publications (Series Islamic Texts and Contexts, The Institute of Ismaili Studies), London, 1983, tr. R. Manheim and J. Morris.

A complete Bibliography of the writings of Henry Corbin is to be found in *Henry Corbin, Les Cahiers de l’Herne*, Paris, 1981.

Keith Critchlow: is a geometer with an emphasis on the sacred and its applications to architecture. His published works include *Time Stands Still: New Light on Megalithic Science; Order in Space; Islamic Patterns; The Soul as Sphere and Androgyne; Tradition, Proportion and Architecture*. Co-director of *Kairos*, whose object is ‘To investigate, study, record and promote traditional values of Science and Art’.

Robert Duncan: Robert Duncan's parents were students of the Hermetic tradition, and his knowledge of metaphysical and mystical learning, together with his knowledge of French and other European poetry, gives him an unique place among American scholar poets.

Gilbert Durand: was founder-director of the *Centre de Recherche sur l'Imaginaire* at the Université de Savoie, and is general editor of *L'Isle Verte*, a series of books on the Imagination (published by Berg International) which includes his own *Figures Mythiques et Visages de l'Oeuvre*, and *Science de l'Homme et Tradition*. At the end of the second World War he studied at the Sorbonne under Gaston Bachelard, and was later closely associated with Henry Corbin in his Université St. Jean de Jérusalem, and a frequent lecturer at the Eranos conferences at Ascona.

Pierre Emmanuel: Catholic poet and man of letters. He adopted the name 'Emmanuel' during the second world war to express his solidarity with the Jews. Elected to the *Académie Française* in 1969, he resigned some years later on a point of principle. His recent *Livre de l'Homme et de la Femme* (in three volumes: *Una, Duel and l'Autre*) explores both the carnal and spiritual dimensions of that relationship.

David Gascoyne: Poet and translator. The following books are available: *Collected Poems* (Oxford University Press); *Selected Poems and A Short Survey of Surrealism* (City Lights, San Francisco); *Journal, 1936-7, Journal, 1937-9* (Enitharmon Press). A selection of poems translated into Italian by Roberto Sanesi won the Biela Prize for 1982; his *Journals* (Flammarion) and a selection of his poems (Granit) will appear in French translation in autumn 1983.

Joscelyn Godwin: Professor of Music at Colgate University (New York State) and author of books on *Robert Fludd*, *Athanasius Kircher*, *Mystery Religions in the Ancient World*.

Brian Merrikin Hill: Editor of the poetry review *Pennine Platform*; founder-organiser of the Wetherby Poetry Festival. He has translated work by Saint-Pol-Roux and other twentieth century French poets and is planning to publish a volume of his translations of Pierre Emmanuel. His own sequence, *Wakeful in the Sleep of Time*, is to be published by Rivelin Press in 1984.

Anna Hopewell: Her volume of poems, *Communications*, (1967) was published by the Enitharmon Press. She is now working at the Lindisfarne Press at Stockbridge, Massachussets.

Louis Iribarne: is a professor in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literature at the University of Toronto.

Brian Keeble: Editor and publisher of the Golgonooza Press; has published articles in *Sophia Perennis*, *Studies in Comparative Religion*, *Studies in Mystical Literature*, *Cognoscenza Religiosa*; his anthology of the works of Eric Gill *A Holy Tradition of Working* (Golgonooza Press) appeared in autumn 1983.

Czeslaw Milosz: Polish poet, novelist and critic, now living in the United States; winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, Charles Eliot Norton lecturer for 1982. His contribution on Swedenborg to this number of TEMENOS is extracted from his forthcoming book *The Land of Ulro*, to be published by Farrer Straus and Giroux.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr: Educated at Harvard and M.I.T., Dr. Nasr was President of the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, and now lives in U.S.A., teaching at the Department of Religion at Temple University, Philadelphia. His books include *Three Muslim Sages*, *Ideas and Realities of Islam*, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, *Science and Civilization in Islam*, *Jalal al-Din Rumi*, *Sufi Essays*, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, *Histoire de la Philosophie Islamique* (with Henry Corbin), *Knowledge & the Sacred*, etc.

Andrea Pallis: brother of the musician and authority on Tibetan Buddhism and traditional metaphysics, Marco Pallis, was a craftsman in metals, especially in gold and silver.

Kathleen Raine: Poet and Blake scholar. Her most recent books are *The Inner Journey of the Poet* and *Collected Poems* (Allen and Unwin) and *The Human Face of God*, on Blake's Job engravings (Thames and Hudson). *Yeats the Initiate*, collected papers on W. B. Yeats, will shortly be published by the Dolmen Press (Dublin).

Jeremy Reed: Poet and novelist. He has already published several volumes of verse: *Bleeker Street* (Carcenet Press); *A Man Afraid* (Enitharmon Press). A larger collection of his poems will be published by Jonathan Cape, and his novel *The Lipstick Boys* by the Enitharmon Press.

Liadain Sherrard: Studied at King's College, Cambridge and the Courtauld Institute. She is at present engaged in translating a work by Henry Corbin.

Peter Lambourn Wilson: was editor of *Sophia Perennis*, the journal of the now defunct Royal Iranian Academy. He has translated Persian poetry and published several collections of his own verse. He has published a book on the iconography of the Angel (Thames and Hudson) and contributed to a number of reviews. He now lives in New York city.

FROM REVIEWS AND COMMENDATIONS

... here is a fresh perennial voice searching for a sacred space among all the banalities of the age ... The poems, essays, discussions and reviews in TEMENOS are a plea for the renewal of the human spirit. They bridge the past and the present. In sum, here we have a point of view in which we may breathe and prosper. On all the evidence few such catholic efforts have been made in the last few decades anywhere to cleanse the imaginative life, to rescue it from its current nightmares. For this editor TEMENOS represents something unusually significant.

Keshav Malik, in INDIAN LITERATURE

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Robert Sardello, Dallas Institute of Humanities & Culture

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and editor of NEW ROAD*

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