A REVIEW DEVOTED TO THE ARTS OF THE IMAGINATION
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Acknowledgments


The four etchings by Brigitte Simon between pages 120/121 were specially designed for Temenos to accompany poems from La Saison du Monde by Jean Mambrino. We also thank Lorraine Gill for permission to reproduce the etching on an Aboriginal theme on p.183. The reproductions of Aboriginal drawings are taken from a Government publication sponsored by the Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies, by E. J. Brendl. For permission to reproduce the self-portrait drawing of Gerard Manley Hopkins on p. 217 we thank the Society of Jesus, and Campion Hall, Oxford.

COVER
Our cover design 'Phoenix Egg'
is specially designed for Temenos by
Thetis Blacker.
Foreword

Instead of an Editorial, this is an expression of thanks on behalf of Temenos to those friends known and unknown who have sent us gifts to enable us to continue publication. Besides the faithful friend who has from the first issue contributed towards editorial expenses, a new friend has made us a gift which has enabled us to meet the printing costs of Temenos 7. Since both these, in their disinterested generosity wish to remain anonymous – as also did the very first giver of support to Temenos 1 – I will not name, either, those other contributors and subscribers who have come to our aid. An American poet sent us 20 dollars and has offered to give a poetry-reading whose proceedings will go to Temenos. An English poet followed suit. The artist who designed for us the Phoenix Egg on our new cover has offered us a percentage of sales of special copies of this design. Another painter offered us lithographs to sell for Temenos funds; another contributor sent us four-hundred dollars. Many subscribers have added a few pounds to their subscriptions. Others (to judge from our sales) must have bought extra copies for friends. Temenos is now set fair to reach our planned edition of ten issues.

Even more than the money, we value the support of all those givers – and the givers who have paid for our colour pages in earlier issues. Money is indeed a most mysterious thing. It is not a material substance that can be weighed and measured, but a flow, like a river that irrigates land, the bloodstream of civilization. (Robert Sardello has written on this theme in a Dallas Institute publication discussed on p. 315). For all those ingots of gold that lie in vaults, money is more like manna, given daily but not something that can be kept. Better that the beautiful metal should be made into cups and necklaces and earrings like those that adorned the kings and queens of Mycenae; for money is essentially something that passes from one to another, that makes links between people, between giver and receiver in a reciprocity in which, ideally speaking, each is at once giving and receiving. Cowrie-shells or squirrel-skins would serve as well, as purely symbolic
tokens of generosity and magnanimity on the one hand, and the value of human handiwork on the other. In some Golden Age such tokens were or will be perhaps related to things of true worth, the work of craftsman and architect, painter and musician, the teachers of children and the makers of homes. When we consider the budgetting of any modern state we may well be appalled and ashamed at the expenditure on instruments of death and the trash of the machines that litters and poisons our earth. But, now as at all times, there are Blake’s ‘Golden Builders’ at work and we are happy to know many of these. That we have been endowed by persons who believe in us, and whose values we share, whom we recognize as fellow-workers, truly does mean more than the money as such. The same sum from some impersonal source would not, for us, have had the same value or meaning.

We would, of course, have sold the furniture if this had become necessary in order to complete the work that Temenos has undertaken. But if this had been so we would have had to ask ourselves why we had not found friends. Sometimes it is necessary and salutary to make personal sacrifices and to work without material reward. Many artists, musicians, poets and others besides have died in poverty, as we know. Yet, finally, they too have not been alone, their work has reached multitudes. We are all parts of the human whole from which we receive and to which we give. There is a kind of mysterious law that operates in these matters that those discover who are prepared to entrust themselves to it. Temenos is an offering made by many people – our distinguished but seldom wealthy contributors give their work unpaid, and so do the editors. We have all received much in this world, of beauty and knowledge and human kindness. Temenos is one means of passing on a little of all this wealth of the spirit. Money too, within this wholeness, is a gift of the spirit.

Yet another outcome of the growing support that is coming to us is the First Temenos Conference, to be held at Dartington Hall from November 13–17th 1986. That we should hold such a conference was suggested by our friends John Lane of Dartington Hall, and Satish Kumar, President of the Schumacher Society and Editor of Resurgence. Through their help and heartening support plans have now been completed. The speakers will be contributors to, and others associated with Temenos. The theme of the Conference will be Art and the
Renewal of the Sacred – such renewal having been our purpose from the outset. Four lectures on each day will be devoted to one aspect of our threefold relation to the world – the transcendent, the human, and the natural orders. In the evenings there will be music, Classical Indian dance, poetry and films.

The very existence of Temenos (as our letter-files abundantly show) has been felt as a source of strength by many who had thought themselves alone in their questioning of the reductionist values of current secularism. But that we represent a minority is no cause for discouragement since it has at all times been through minorities that change has come. The title of the Conference is an expression not of an empty hope, but of the vitality of those perennial living roots through which the holy spirit of life flows into every present.

Enquiries should be addressed to The Conference Secretary, The Elmhirst Centre, Dartington Hall, Totnes, S. Devon.

The Editor
In opening this very important session, I would not wish to begin with abstract considerations, and certainly not with considerations which I must leave to specialists, or to those more competent than I am in the world of the mystics. I can but speak simply of my own experience and perhaps, beyond this experience, lay the beginning of a way.

It is now forty-seven years (not counting my embryonic period) that I have, as one says, composed poetry. La Tour du Pin said of himself that he lived in poetry. With all due respect to the great poet, I do not like that expression. I live in the world of other men, that of the street, of the newspaper, that also of my private world which is not in itself poetic. To build up my work for those forty-seven years I have had to make an effort. The effort has not been to leave those worlds but to construct within them, with the materials that they gave me, an ensemble of forms and spaces, a network of paths and canals, buildings that tower high and go deep, all different although equally habitable. That ensemble is both the mediator between the worlds it is made of and a reality which is other, which it tries to make perceptible, sensitive, in the heart of those worlds – the world of men, yours, mine – where in the main it is not seen by other people or myself. But although these forms, these erections, seem to most people to constitute one œuvre, they are separated from each other by more or less long periods of exhaustion or shadowy periods of incubation.

The lecture reproduced here is from the original text which was spoken by Pierre Emmanuel, transcribed from a tape-recording and compared with his manuscript notes (with the kind permission of Madame Pierre Emmanuel). The paper was delivered on 18 May, 1984 and the poet died on 22 September, 1984. The theme of the conference was 'La Contemplation comme action nécessaire'.
When I agreed to come and speak to you, glad to address an audience widely knowledgeable in the order of the soul, I had achieved three quarters of my most ambitious work – and the work which relates best to the connection which I would like to establish before you between a certain act and a certain regard. This work was created in a great tension in my being, a tension which, together with outside conflicts, had doubtless made me very fragile. Last August I almost lost my life as the result of cerebral illness. My convalescence was long: I wanted to cancel my appointment to be with you, but the anxiety to finish the work, in a way under threat, worked on me. I was able to bring it to fruition in the following months and to repeat once again the words of Katherine Mansfield: 'God be praised for giving us the grace to write', words which in their way summarise what I have to say to you this morning.

I called that poem of four hundred pages The Great Work, not in the sense that the alchemists gave to those words, but because I had in writing it at last achieved the cosmogony I was already dreaming of in my earlier works, which all contain sketches of the genesis of the universe. No sooner was it finished, than I had a symbolic accident: too heavy a load of wood . . . four bruised vertebrae; and at the same time the impression that the work had crushed me, that it had broken me, that it had caught me 'full in the back'. A total calling in question of about five years of daily effort intimately devoted to the work: what good is it? It was as if I had built in the open desert a pyramid that the sandstorms were shortly to erode away. It was only then that I felt this, for the first time, possibly because previously ambition had been total. Who will ever read it? What does it mean? Who is it that built this ungainly thing where I do not recognise myself? But this thing – it was I who wrote it, word by word, built it stone by stone. I listened to it line by line, sentence by sentence; I developed each image and linked each image to others to make them a symbolic song. I conceived each part of the poem as one of the movements of a whole musical work, attentive to each sound, to their relationship in each phrase, to the development of themes in each movement and from one movement to another in each section of this immense poem, and from one section to another in the whole poem. And now I do not hear anything any more, I do not understand anything, I do not see
anything; I am exhausted, empty; my life has returned to its narrow limits; I hear myself uttering commonplaces. The faith that I had in my being, in a principle higher than I, has disappeared, without my even being able to say that I have become unbelieving. Quite simply, I am not.

In that suffocating period from which I have not yet emerged, I went to my office every morning, a briefcase in my hand, like dozens of office workers whom I passed on the rue de Bellechasse, occupied, on government business; I took the tube, I got off at the Hôtel de Ville, and there again I passed dozens of others going to the ‘Hôtel de Ville Bazaar’ or to the bus-stop. They were so many vaguely luminous bubbles, without substance, which burst punctually, immediately, or dissolved in the void, like me. This inanity – theirs and mine – aroused no feeling in me, awoke no desire to escape from it. The bubbles brushed against each other, went off in their own directions, and each had a name, an identity, a consciousness related to being, an Ego, a me. Ego, me. In fact the state I had been in for some weeks was below that state of relative coherence which permits an adult to be on view and allows his personality to present the appearance of a certain continuity. It was at the same time an internal fatigue, a visceral nausea, a sort of infantile anguish. I caught myself waking shouting ‘Mummy!’; even though my mother left me when I was a few weeks old. As for the work that I had brought into the world, I was not able to recognise it as mine. Certain women to whom I described my state told me they had such feelings after childbirth. And indeed I came to think that the words gestation and labour used of a work by analogy really belong in the most concrete sense, and that what is formed so slowly, effected by an incessant inward attention, in the secret place of the being to which the everyday me has no access, is itself of the order of being. Of being, born of my being which I do not know and formed of its elements and those of the world which has nourished it. Of being which is extra, added to that already created like a new but recognisable form. Now why thrust aside that living form, this new thing whose destiny no longer depends on me, this Being called if God wills to give life to other beings and be in its turn given life by them, and, even more, to be strengthened by them in its essentially mediating role?
The first and most obvious reason to thrust it aside is the author’s lack of confidence in himself and his work. One must be mad, in the Twentieth Century, even to write a cosmogony, never mind to expect that anyone will read it. Five years lost, then? This continuous discipline of concentration, this forgetting of the self, in waiting for the word to suggest itself, the image or the phrase to arise, this slow elaboration for weeks or months of each part of the vast whole, whose ambitious plan becomes clearer but whose achieved pattern will not appear till the last pages: the little me, the banal ego – has it some kind of right to deny them or call them illusory? May it not rather be that these five years were a step by step struggle of the being to repress, to drive out that Me and prevent it encroaching on the space which it regarded as its own to build its own thing there? Its ‘object’, its aim – difficult to define this phrase, as difficult to define as ‘poetry’, one being definable only in terms of the other. Jean-Paul Richter perhaps came near to their joint definition when he wrote about poetry: ‘This instinct of the mind which eternally sees its ‘object’ and claims it with no regard to time, because it lives in a place superior to duration; it explains why man can only understandingly think of the words terrestrial, worldly, temporal, as this instinct gives meaning to them only as an opposite.’

The aim of poetry, according to Jean-Paul, would be the unexplainable antithesis of our experience of the concrete as a whole, but also, one might add, the experience of all the means of knowing which are bound up with it. Note the words: this instinct of the mind which eternally sees its aim, a higher instinct, or in addition, as the same Jean-Paul says of the poetic faculty, ‘the high discernment by which genius draws from itself a whole world hidden in the folds of the soul’. To bring to light that reality hidden both in the folds of the soul and in a place superior to all duration, would then be the function of poetry and the peculiar vocation of the poet. Without denying outright the sublimity of the poetic act thus conceived, I have reservations about its application to poetry as a whole. For many poets poetry is, as for Shakespeare, simply the music which each man carries in him. For others it is even less – Beaumarchais ironically says, ‘What isn’t worth the trouble of saying, one sings.’ For others, again, it is bound up with the state of civilisation and culture, precisely in this
initial state. Thus Chateaubriand distinguishes, as we could do today, between poetry as the expression of the infancy of peoples and history as the expression of their old age. 'Must we then put poetry in nappies?' wonders old Pierre Larousse, and he certainly knew what greatness there can be in poetry.

I too am well aware of this. It is even because of that greatness that I came to poetry — or, to be more precise, poetry happened to rise up before me, enigmatic, unbounded. And it is poetry that from the beginning I passionately wished to make mine as an inexhaustible spring of meaning. Such was my wish, but also from the beginning an energy manifested itself which exceeded my understanding. I accepted, I put into rhythm, I articulated as best I could an offering in which my part was almost purely that of a craftsman. Not knowing a thing about what one writes and receiving it as an Utterance, a Word — that is a strange division of being in a writer! Every poet, I suppose, lives it more or less. But I have lived through it and with it increasingly for fifty years and for fifty years it has cast its shadow on my everyday life. I shall come back to this later.

For the moment I would like to suggest that I know as well as anyone how the major arts meet with a general lack of comprehension. And considering poetry, the greatest of them all, few understand what keeps alive in its author not so much youth of mind as eternity of mind for a whole life. It is simply that the mind is without a place in our world, without a topos: and that poetry, one of those high places, is in exile. 'Anywhere out of the world', to recall a Baudelaire title. Even poets who are supposed to read each other's works have in their library some elect brothers, some poetic landscapes traversed in all directions, to the exclusion of all others. Some landscapes they do not enter because they find no tracks; or they possibly wander through them without stopping much, not seeing what their creators have seen and felt. I know that few people are aware of poetry, while popular versifiers are 'our great living poets'. I know also that thousands of people, young and old, write poetry, as one makes one's own music to oneself so that the soul breathes better and one is touched and healed, sometimes grows up. Confessional poetry is a dialogue among the selves which one wants others to share but has not known how to achieve the detachment from oneself, that
 impersonality which makes real dialogue possible. It is that impersonality, or rather that effacing self-forgetfulness in a will which is other, that is the element which makes great works and assures their continuity and timelessness. There are poets who know this by instinct, from the first poem they write, almost from the first lines: sometimes literally they do not know what they are writing and spend years in understanding what occupies them, which is being expressed through them in their first writings, their first books, the landscapes they have hazarded themselves in. To understand that is to apprehend the secret force in the work of certain artists, a creative intuition in some way given, well before the word inspired by it is captured. Think of the energy necessary to carry through, not one poem, however fine, which even if it encloses the infinite within it, is circumscribed within its limits of precise duration, shorter or longer, but one of those works whose author, when he begins it, literally does not know where it will lead him, like the Divine Comedy, Jerusalem Delivered, Paradise Lost, the second Faust or Tête d'or. This immense moment which can last for years is totally isolated from temporal duration. It is more than isolated, it is a different kind of being lived by the poet in a state one might call secondary but which is of a supreme vigilance and lucidity. It is lived outside the self and yet inside the being, in what the being has most intimately within. So true is this that once the work is finished, the author will find himself expelled from his own being like an abortion from it. The longer the temporal duration, the more sustained and intense and the greater the concentration of the being on itself, the more exhausting is the process: there is something demanding to be made word by word, as it were, rhythm by rhythm, without the poet's ever knowing what will be the next word, the next rhythm, but knowing that the word that comes to the mind and to the lips, the rhythm structured by previous rhythms, is the right word, the right rhythm. Sometimes, even one page before the end, a few bars before the interior music fades, the author does not know that it is done with. He does not know that in finishing the work he has finished himself. This means that the artist has no model, that he invents from himself, from inside himself, that thing which he sees only when once achieved, or which, when it is achieved, he does not see. This conception is exactly opposite to that which prevailed
THE POETIC ACT

for so long among critics in their analysis of the creative act—an analysis that wanted the artist to begin from a reality outside himself, a reality embodied as 'nature', and that it was a question of the nature of the world, that of man, or that of God.

I find in a recent novel, High Flight, whose author, Jean-Pierre Maurel, is half Austrian and half Albigeois (it is interesting that he is Austrian) a very just description of this inversion, of which artists (few of whom up till now thought of it) are beginning to take account. It is a fragment of conversation between an art critic and an engineer, looking across the landscape of a high Tyrolean valley. 'How was one to reinterpret the principle of the imitation of nature by which previous centuries had lived and which the age was not ready to abandon? A man had given the reply in 1785: Karl Philipp Moritz shifts the relation between the copy and nature it imitates. Nature will be considered, not in its products but in its active and creative principle—ultimately God. In shifting the accent of representational relation from that between the work and the world to the expressional relation between the artist and what he produces, Moritz inaugurated Romanticism. Now, look again at this landscape. When God created the world he followed his plan: nature is only a copy of supernature. But there are some places in the world—and this is one of them—for whose creation God became a Romantic. He imitated himself in his creative process. He made this place the norm of judgment on his creation. You know perhaps what Moritz said: "The nature of the beautiful consists in that its interior being finds itself outside the limits of the faculty of thought, in its arising, in its own becoming." This valley is splendidly beautiful because God inscribed in it the very becoming of its creation. The secret of the universe is before your eyes... One could die looking at this landscape.'

If we follow this text more closely, we see that what the artist perceives and will reproduce in his work derives from the active and creative principle, 'ultimately God'. Ultimately, the creative energy of the artist springs from that of God and the work he produces is the work of God. To demonstrate this the critic says to the engineer: This landscape before our eyes is not only born of the plan which God fixed for himself to create the world, like architecture predetermined in the plans of the architect. When he followed his plan he created
nature. But here, in this landscape, he imitates himself, and, even more, he surpasses himself. He creates for man the norm of judgment, the criterion for creation. This norm is the opposite of a rule: it is the ceaselessly active power of continued creation, of the eternal and uncreated becoming. We others use these weak words for want of words that are less abstract and more directly comprehensible by our own experience, but our experience, in its very limited degree, corresponds to them when the creative spirit possesses us. For we are possessed, from the first words which we trace on the page through all those which will follow as they are animated and carried along by a powerful breath we do not recognise. Hence the rightness of the quotation from Moritz. Like the interior being of God — must one dare to go so far as to say because it is that interior being? — our being finds itself beyond thought, in its uprising, in the becoming of its creation, in what is added to it and ceaselessly amplifies it beyond itself.

And yet! This same intuition (obscure and unconscious as it may be to the poet, though often proudly affirmed) that his own creation prolongs, enlightens, orchestrates those still shadowy parts of the divine creation, of the work of God — that boldness which, for example, makes me call my last book *The Great Work, Cosmogony* — is either the manifestation of excess, an escape from proper bounds, or the desire which the artist experiences in fulfilling himself in that boldness and the desire that his last breath should coincide with the last bar in an accomplishment which is at the same time an exhausting. On the crest of the life instinct, the death instinct precipitates the poet. The last words of Karl Philipp Moritz — ‘The secret of the universe is before our eyes . . . One can die facing this landscape’ — say just that. But the death instinct can take two contradictory aspects, both well noted by Jean-Pierre Maurel. The first is the desire for an impossible fusion with supernature, a desire born of the inequality between any terrestrial beauty and the beauty the spirit feels. And I quote Jean-Pierre Maurel again: ‘Does there exist in the human being a quality, however great, a beauty, however marvellous, which one can never tire of? No. One gets tired, one day, of man. I believe there is nothing and nobody existing on this earth that a man can attach himself to . . . To love? It seems to me that I could love only the superhuman or something that has been lent to man, to his being, to
his soul, but which did not truly belong to him as his own.' And the same Jean-Pierre Maurel makes one of his characters, an art critic looking at one of the landscapes of Caspar David Friedrich, say: 'Looking at some of these pictures I come near to a sentiment I had two years ago: the serene, slow but almost melancholy, flow of the river of time, bathed in the pure feeling of the immutable. What one sees in these pictures is only a sad moment set in a Presence that has always been and always will be there. Don't you find this?'

'Don't you find this?' It is a question addressed to us, the question we put to a friend who contemplates beside us a masterpiece of painting or watches a tragedy. 'Don't you find this?' means: 'Do you feel, as I do, this invisible Presence? Do you feel it so much that it invades you and that the feeling of the immutable in some way blots out the everyday in time?' Then we are ourselves in presence. Our being awakes in us. But at the same time as that awakening, if the awareness of that Presence extends and becomes clear, its unattainable character, our inability to comprehend it, becomes more and more grievous to us. One can imagine that the creative force of the artist comes to him at the same time from the intuition of this Presence and the dark, nostalgic grief, growing at each moment of his work, which is the grief of his certainty that the Presence will escape him always. He is like that young merchant in a story by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, who, dreaming of the great Alexander, understands 'that the great king of antiquity would die if his lands were taken from him, those lands he had crossed and subdued piece by piece and dreamed of ruling, but which were so immensely vast that he had no power over them; he drew from them no other tribute than the thought that he had subdued them and no one else was king of them.'

Thus for the artist his art is sometimes the worship that he renders to himself, to his elusive being, not because he is subdued by it, nor because that being is subordinate to him, but because he is king of it. Listen to me charming the soul of it in Tombeau d'Orphée, at twenty-four, almost in the same terms of Hofmannsthal:

'The enchanter spellbound by himself is the king
of those countries where no one ever stops
those countries which are only passage and distance
of a yesterday always left for a tomorrow
that recedes towards the impossible . . .'
But this hope is vain: one must come back, come back from being to the me, from the eternal to the moment, from the limitless to the limits. God, Hölderlin rightly says, sets a limit to steps that are excessive. And even when it is not a question of excess, properly speaking, but of an extreme effort to do what the being demands of us (to abolish the me), the me, as I said, always resumes its rights over the being. Once again, I take as witness one of the characters of Jean-Pierre Maurel, the young engineer who, with the mad exactness of a mathematician of the soul, seeks identity in the being of science and art and loses himself in research or contemplation. 'Someone — was it still his soul as if she had refused to reintegrate the body in its ancient place — showed him his life as a web made up only of pettinences, basenesses, vile lies, faults and hypocrisies; it was a denial of the whole of himself, an implacable rejection of his spiritual substance, as if the essential and vital self-esteem had been transformed into a black light which darkened even the flesh.' Note well those words — a denial of the whole of himself. Such is without doubt for certain artists the origin of their disgust when face to face with their finished work. The work judges them and asks them to render accounts. If the work is true, where is its truth? Always the debate between being (which is there only in the work) and the me, the more so as the work compels comparison — and before whom? Before it? No, before himself. Witness this letter of Claudel, written to Madame Romain Rolland on the night of 20–21st March 1943, when he was finishing the translation of the De Profundis, of Psalm 129: 'The current Paul Claudel, the superficial Paul Claudel, of whom you complain — with what pleasure I hand him over to you. You don't think worse of him than I do, and I have more reasons than you to have been disgusted with him for the sixty-five years I've been compelled to drag him about with me and fit into him. What distaste to see him in a mirror and the poignant irony in the flattering things that some people with good intentions think themselves obliged to say to me and which seem a mockery. But in me there is a quite different Paul Claudel, new, true. How cruelly embarrassing to be compelled to talk to you about it! How can I explain myself, how make you understand the cohabitation of a being so mediocre, so repulsive, and someone else? How explain this sinister mistaken identity which is the drama of my existence and
prevents there being true intimacy between me and those who often think they love me most and succeed only in looking for me where I am not? You would not be far from the truth, and I understand the recoil that you are going to experience, if you perceived that in me you’re really dealing with a priest. But the tragedy is that this call from God did not come about by a simple vocation. The day I tried it I was not clearly driven back and from that day I have had to fit in with this false companion, idiot, grotesque, soiled, a liar – of whom up to a certain point you are right to complain, not more than I. He nearly dragged me to hell, and thanks to him I knew its depths. And whoever knows, who knows that he cannot doubt what I know, does not judge, cannot judge things in the same way. Between him and other people there is a difference he is not slow to see and which causes a kind of embarrassment between them and him, a sort of fundamental misunderstanding he is not slow to see, which is as cruel for them as for himself. No, I am not insensitive, and it is not being insensitive to realise with a poignant intensity the true situation of souls around you and when you collide with them (and collide everywhere atrociously with those who are dearest) through this inertia, this irreducible blindness. You feel that the most loyal efforts made to reach you serve for nothing. They serve for nothing because the inestimable things you carry do not vindicate your life and behaviour. On the contrary, you drag them along with you in your indignity.

Nothing Claudel wrote, not even certain passages of the canticle of Mésa in Le partage de midi, have the reach of this lucidity of judgment, not only of his own life but of our own. The words apply, certainly, to the life of those who believe themselves invested with the role of messenger. I say this with more tranquillity of mind in that some who hear me are such messengers, or think they are, and will understand this confession of Claudel: ‘Be witness that I am unpleasing to myself.’ This verse which Claudel puts in Mésa’s mouth is the cry torn out by the desire or the certainty of a face-to-face totally lucid on one side and totally accepted on the other. The desire for, the certainty of, a regard on us. As long as this regard is only ours, it has no meaning, it leads only to the sad evidence that we are always inferior to what we claim to be, and, as artists, inferior to the unknown force which drives
us to create, immeasurably inferior, unless another regard, other than that of the ordinary me is reflected in the work, which has become foreign, sometimes incomprehensible. But the regard which Claudel calls for is that of a personal Presence, of a witness. That is because his face-to-face is real and not an illusion of the guilty conscience; Mésa is thrust into solitude and takes God as witness that he, Mésa, is nothing, that his author, Claudel, is nothing:

‘And I have found myself before you as one who perceives he is alone.
Well! I have renewed acquaintance with my nothingness, I have tasted the matter I am made of.
Be witness that I am displeasing to myself.
I can no longer bear being deaf and dead.
You see well that I am good for nothing and make everyone uneasy.
That for everyone I am a scandal, a question.
That is why, O Father, gather me and hide me in your bosom.’

God’s regard! The regard of the hidden Face! The greater part of the psalms and the prophetic books celebrate this regard and invoke it with humility. The whole of Genesis unrolls in its dazzle, the Catholic liturgy ceaselessly invokes it, the mysticism of all the religions of the one God have as principal theme the calcination and the transfiguration of the human regard, the human soul, by the invisible regard of the omnipresent Face, which none may contemplate without being reduced to the evidentness of his nothingness. To contemplate this regard is not to see it in the physical sense of the term: it is to pray.
Pure prayer, having no other object than this regard, is the very regard of him that prays and who in praying contemplates that invisible regard. Prayer thus conceived is as near as possible to silence, which, taken to the extreme limit of attention, is the perfect prayer which makes an emptiness in the soul so that nothing can come there but one immutable regard. ‘The eye gazes ever fixedly only at one object and the soul can stop only at one good,’ says Bossuet. But the regard of the eye thus fixed is in no way at a loss or vague: on the contrary it is penetrating, quick, all-embracing and centripetal at once. The poet in his hours of intense concentration knows this faculty of vision, which is analogous – but only analogous – to that of the mystics, who (in
moments perhaps least contemplative) are poets also. It remains that the mysticism – or the mysticity – of poets, in its difference from contemplation among mystics, would deserve what Montaigne said about reason, that ‘it is a pot with two handles, that one can take with the left or the right’. I say again, remember that truth – so that there is no confusion in our mind between the poetic impulse, the poetic uprising induced in the artist by a force and a Word that go beyond him, and the spiritual struggle of the mystics, made manifest in each moment and each word of their lives, in each silence in their lives, by that same force and same Word and that same silence of which they are the living tabernacles.

My task here is to speak of the first, the poets, and not of the second, the mystics, with whom I confess to feeling no spiritual affinity, experiencing in their presence something of the mysterium tremendum et fascinans which to my eyes makes them into inhabitants of a world other than mine; mine is very materially this one. But, finally, if the ‘contemplative regard’ of the poet is only a wan twilight of the contemplative regard of the mystic, talking of the first is not altogether a verbal deception. The quarrel, on another plane, existed between Bossuet, for whom certain mystical ecstasies were ‘madnesses of senseless lovers rather than pious raptures of divine love’ and Fénelon, one of these senseless lovers at whom Bossuet took aim, saying that these ecstasies and raptures ‘pass for visions in the world’. Let us preserve from this quarrel only one word, not raptures but ecstasy. There is certainly, in the concentration every work of art demands an impetus to movement corresponding to that going out of oneself towards: and all the work of the artist is precisely to define this towards what. In this it differs from the mystic whose ecstasy carries him not outside but into the depth of the within, of the Bottomless which is in himself. Towards what? Lamennais said, in the language of his time, that ‘the function of form is to render present to the mind the ideal model – ideal in its directing the interior regard towards itself.’ The interior regard cannot be turned towards its own self. It turns towards the mind as the global mirror of reality, as sum of attention paid to the world and oneself. This sum of the virtualities of the mind cannot be confused with the pure interiorness of ecstasy, in which the mind no longer even plays a passive role but in which it abolishes itself in a
presence which it cannot give name or form to. When the artist, all his powers suspended, thinks of the image, of the measure, of the touch which will follow, he is steering towards, he is outstretched towards something which does not yet exist, but which, once it does, will appear as bound up with all his imaginative and sensory experience. He perhaps adds a new touch, but he adds it to a picture inexhaustibly rich, painted a thousand times but yet always original. One cannot say of the artist, as one might of the mystic, that he is as a stranger to outside things and turned towards the unthinkable oneness of God. The artist knows that oneness, and he adores it, knowing also, sometimes from long experience, that every effort to express it runs into silence, and that silence, even in the space between words, will always escape him.

Nevertheless there are two last meanings of the word regard on which I would like to conclude. Though it may seem bizarre to some, a kind of well arranged at ground level for underground inspections is called a regard. That regard defines pretty well one of the forms of poetic attention, its infernal form, to be precise, which is a mode of contemplation apparently opposite to that which I talked of earlier. This definition, however foreign it may seem to our subject, nevertheless brings us back to creation as gestation, in the visceral sense of the term. Every artist knows that such phenomena exist and can arise in him. Why not see here the participation of the world in the process of generation, as the artist lives it? Does not the ‘abnormality’ which those called ‘normal’ often see in the artist come from the foreignness of his regard, of his quite subjective way of possessing or being possessed? He synthesises all in one multiformal experience, an experience in which, without knowing how or wanting to, without even the artist’s understanding how, all those called ‘normal’ (all those bubbles he contains within him) participate?

You must have felt in my exposition how much I fear for the poet the trap of false mysticism which I see opening for me at every step. I fear it all the more in that the Nineteenth Century and a good part of the Twentieth in its turn have not only fallen into the trap but set it for themselves. Post-Mallarmé verbiage, itself born of Wagner and idealism, more or less haunts us all. One last proof – words that a painter
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(admirable nevertheless) Gustave Moreau wrote about his work Jupiter and Semele: 'In this incantation and this sacred exorcism, all is transformed, purified, idealised; immortality begins, the Divine spreads itself in everything and in all beings, and all beings, sketches still formless, detach themselves from their terrestrial clay and aspire towards the true light.' In my eyes, nothing is as simple as that. I think rather, with Claudel as ever, that poetry can become 'an attitude of the soul, the transformation of the gift, the talent, into a state, a sympathetic disposition welcoming towards and interested in everything which, outside it, expresses the glory and the will of God.' Only that – without even hazarding myself in my own imaginative territories, however spell-binding they might be for me.

Translated by Brian Merrikin Hill

Note

I have translated the French word regard throughout by the English word regard, to keep the multiplicity of meaning in the French word, there being no comprehensive English equivalent.

The word mind is used to translate esprit, rather dangerously in 1985. By mind I mean what is understood by Jung, not necessarily by Eysenck.

In one place in this paper Pierre Emmanuel attributes to Karl Philipp Moritz words that really belong to the critic in the novel by Jean-Pierre Maurel, not to Moritz (who has just been quoted). Compare Keats’s ode To the Nightingale.
PIERRE EMMANUEL

To the Ten Thousand Living
To Brian Merrikin Hill

'The Name is the mother of ten thousand living beings.' Lao-Tse.

1

Why does man hear only his own language
And never that of those living around him?
And if he does not hear theirs, can he understand
His own? Is what springs from the depth of his word
Himself or really the utterance of the unnumbered,
Leaves speaking to the wind, dogs barking in the night?

Man decides: Nothing thinks, nothing articulates
In sounds become words then sentences, nothing builds
Any meaning, mine or any other. The Unique
Is I, the abstract who defines all that lives.
But formerly, when Nature was the book
Of the great Rites that also found place in her
Men could not there name even their Gods
Without the mediating beasts, even though
They were dedicated to the knife on the altar.
The trees stood above and man scarcely
Dare raise his eyes on high to decipher
Augury in a bird’s flight or the breaking
Of a branch. To stretch out in their shadow
Was for him who listened to hear the oracle
Or perhaps an invisible angel smoothing
His diaphanous wings, at leisure among branches.

The soft earth seized man and dragged him
Towards the ditch his own size opened for him
While the tree’s own energy pushed it towards
Height though as it climbed the more it felt
Its roots go deep, the contrary of man
Aspirate, engulfed but never rooted.
But it happened that men took root and fastened
By their base became trees! in the mingling
Of the humid and the dark that is woman
Not knowing that earth in her is in labour.
Today, in the gardens of great nostalgic towns
Trees that are dark and trembling freeze
At the foot, in Winter, like men, but there were
Eras almost unfathomable (so far
Does that moment flee by now so distant
From its shadow) when man was a huge oak at whose feet
Enthroned was the beloved whose gaze was space.

There were even eras when the trees spoke
Better than men, in subterranean tongues
Which the soul was too naive to understand.

These utterances deployed their fronds of dream
And in the evening their trunks crowded together
Round terrified men who were lost in their forest
In which their fear sought vainly for clearings.
As soon as evening smothered them they felt
Strangled by a thousand springes of fine branches
Sacred horror made them fall on their knees
Trying to exorcise the furies of vegetation
Which the winds unloosed above their heads.

But their soul did not know that these winds of anger
Blew also within it and made such an echo
That, soul’s or nature’s, even God himself
Could not have perceived which was in him
The vortex of the abyss in centrifugal spirals,
Dividing him endlessly from the creative void
Grief, grief! Every being is only a rootlet
Of that gulf, the sole taproot . . . Only He
Whose abyss stretches Being beyond beings
Creating to devour, devouring to create,
Suffers every grief from the grassblade to the star
Soul outmeasuring every other grief
Which each grief yet contains! Dawn brought the morning
Of the blood of beasts hurrying to eat each other
Before on the sixth day man came.

2
God saw in himself the dull stretch of empty skies
Which were not reflected by the deaf mute bottomless
Dead calm abysses face to face! His light
That was widowed of depth and height struggled
To blaze a new day, and the immense soul sought
How to create a way out of this silence
Whose motionlessness was outspread unbounded
Paralysing divine immutability.

Now searching, he dreamed that he traced in the sky
With his right hand on outstretched arm a circle
And myriads of birds took flight, drunk
With all the colours of their own plumage.
Then he blew on the bottomless in the palm of his hand –
And from it gushed a flashing of blue scales
Fish, waves! catching these colours and plunging
In the bosom of the seas where now the abysses sparkled.

And when God saw these living beings swarm
In the sky and the sea, as evening came he said,
It is good, and slept till morning dreaming
That there remained the whole surface of the earth
Still vacant of any creatures that would suit it.
And in his dream he said, Let it bring forth
Let tree and grass, its issue, give shade and pasture
To what crawls, slides or has feet on the ground.

Let the earth bring forth, says God, but he makes the animals
Out of earth – wild things, beasts, snakes –
And then he blows into them a very little
Of his spirit, according to their kind, because of
That other he is going to create otherwise
In the centre and yet outside the fashioned creatures
And he sees it is good. All is present
Before him on the sixth day, except that other.

No longer does he say, Let it bring forth, but, ‘Let us
Make man. Let him be in our image, like us
Let him rule over those who people the universe
Let him fill the earth which will submit to him
So there is grass and fruits for food, and the beasts
Nibble and graze on the greenery of the plants.
And thus it is. And God sees it is good.
And on the seventh day God rests.

Now this mixture of earth and spirit, made of breath
And clay, knowing the language of angels
Like the tongues of beast and tree (often
Mixed with his words still unformed, deaf
To the original murmur dying in them)
This mixture, now that God, tired, sleeps dreamlessly
Dreams of war in itself between man and woman, spirit
And earth: the tree of knowledge already is stirring.

But this dream in the all-enfolding silence
Passes from man to God, becomes Destiny, wakes
To the dawn of the eighth day a universe
Torn before even it was! A savage place
Where division gains even the heart of God
Without man comprehending that his being's darkness
Is unawares the author of it all
And henceforth worsens it in all that's conscious.

From that time suffering God, conflict within him,
Will endlessly spread himself into every life
Sparing not even the stones and all will be
Seized with a mutual appetite to destroy
Talons, teeth and fangs will grow to claw each other.
There will be strong and weak, the carnivorous earth
Will be their stage – but there one day the Spirit
Red with blood will hear itself say, I love . . .
Mad word! Password of the Great Return!
Sometimes a dog seeks to say it: but this man
Who does not hear himself speak, how will he hear
His dog's whole being speak to him? That same man
Will perhaps say that word to unhearing God
But God? Does he utter this word to the dog, to the man?
By what teaching will all together the Ten Thousand
Beings alive recapture that password?

From Le grand œuvre pages 179–186: translated by Brian Merrikin Hill.
Cuchulain. Mask by Edmund Dulac for the first production of At the Hawk's Well, 1916.

'The face of the speaker should be as much a work of art as the lines that he speaks or the costume that he wears, that all may be as artificial as possible. Perhaps in the end one would write plays for certain masks.' (Introduction to Four Plays for Dancers, 1921)
So runs the opening chorus of *At the Hawk's Well*, the first play that Yeats framed in the mode he derived from the Noh drama, as he understood it from Ezra Pound’s reworking of the versions and notes of Ernest Fenellosa. In these versions of Noh drama Yeats found the model he had been seeking for over a quarter of a century on which to base the form of his own dramatic work. His introduction to Pound’s first edition of Fenellosa’s work, *Certain Noble Plays of Japan*, published in Dublin at the Cuala Press in 1916, reflects his concern to keep intact the quality of imaginative art, a quality which was central to his concept of dramatic form.

All imaginative art remains at a distance and this distance, once chosen, must be firmly held against a pushing world. Verse, ritual, music, and dance in association with action require that gesture, costume, facial expression, stage arrangement must help in keeping the door. Our unimaginative arts are content to set a piece of the world as we know it in a place by itself, to put their photographs as it were in a plush or a plain frame, but the arts which interest me, while seeming to separate from the world and...
us a group of figures, images, symbols, enable us to pass for a few moments into a deep of the mind that had hitherto been too subtle for our habitation. As a deep of the mind can only be approached through what is most human, most delicate, we should distrust bodily distance, mechanism, and loud noise.

And in his Note on *At the Hawk's Well*, which he published in a journal under the title 'Instead of a Theatre' he celebrated his new approach to his own dramatic work,

I need a theatre. I believe myself to be a dramatist; I desire to show events and not merely to tell of them; two of my best friends were won for me by my plays; and I seem to myself more alive at the moment when a roomful of people have the one lofty emotion. My blunder has been that I did not discover in my youth that my theatre must be the ancient theatre made by unrolling a carpet, or marking out a place with a stick, or setting a screen against a wall. Certainly those who care for my kind of poetry must be numerous enough, if I can bring them together, to pay half a dozen players who can bring all their properties in a cab and perform in their leisure moments.

... I have found my first model – and in literature if we would not be parvenus we must have a model – in the 'Noh' stage of aristocratic Japan. I have described in the introduction to Mr Pound's 'Certain Noble Plays of Japan' (Cuala Press) what had seemed to me important on that subtle stage. I do not think of my discovery as mere economy. It has been a great gain to get rid of scenery and substitute for a crude landscape painted upon canvas three performers who, sitting against a screen covered with some one unchangeable pattern, or against the wall of a room describe landscape or event, and accompany movement with drum or cymbal, or deepen the emotion of the words with zither and flute.

... It would be a stirring adventure for a poet and an artist, working together, to create once more heroic or grotesque types that, keeping always an appropriate distance from life, would seem images of those profound emotions that exist only in solitude and in silence.

These ideals, expressed here in 1916, at the middle point of Yeats's
Cloth designed by Edmund Dulac for the first production of At the Hawk's Well, 1916.

'As they unfold the cloth they go backwards a little so that the stretched cloth and the wall make a triangle with the First Musician at the apex supporting the centre of the cloth. On the black cloth is a gold pattern suggesting a hawk.' (Stage Direction)

creative career, do not deviate in any way from his lifelong definition of a theatre of the imagination, a theatre of Art which would have its proper place in the Ireland he visualised - a newly vitalised nation in which the dramatic arts would make their full contribution to the revival and be in its special way an extension of the other works of his imagination, the poems and the mystical system he would later embody in A Vision. His whole creative life was integrated. The mysteries of A Vision are glossed in the plays, their themes again reflected in the poems and his life in theatre commemorated over and over.

Yeats's quest for the kind of imaginative theatre which developed from his contact with Noh drama can be traced back to his beginnings as a dramatist. His earliest pieces of dramatic writing sprang from his longing 'for pattern, for Pre-Raphaelitism, for an art allied to poetry', as he wrote in his early Autobiography. From these longings came The Island of Statues and the other dramatic poems of his late teen years, including his first publication in book form, Mosada, which was first printed in the pages of The Dublin University Review in 1885, when he was twenty. These early exercises in dramatic writing however sprang more from the romantic notions of his adolescence than from a unity
of dramatic purpose and the real beginning of Yeats’s development as
a dramatist, and specifically an Irish dramatist must be dated from his
meeting, in the same year of 1885, with

... old John O’Leary the Fenian Leader, in whose library I found
the poets of Young Ireland and Standish O’Grady, who had
rewritten in vigorous romantic English certain Irish heroic
legends.

His introduction to the epic literature of Ireland, and to the ideals of
Irish nationalism provided a central direction to his life and work. As
he put it, he ‘turned his back on foreign themes’ and ‘decided the race
was more important than the individual.’

By 1891 he could, in reviewing an English play for United Ireland,
express his hope for an Irish national theatre,

When our political passions have died out in the fulfillment of
their aims shall we, I wonder, have a fine native drama of our
own? It is very likely. A very great number of the best playwrights
who have written for the English stage, from Sheridan and
Goldsmith to our own day, have been Irishmen. We are a young
country, and still care, I think, for the high thoughts and the high
feelings of poetry, if in a somewhat uncultivated fashion. We love
the dramatic side of events and have too much imagination to
think plays which advertise ‘a real locomotive engine’ or ‘a real
fire engine’ as the chief attraction to be a better form of drama
than the heroic passions and noble diction of the great ages of the
theatre. We have never yet been fairly tested. Our playwrights
have been poor men who were forced to write for an English
public in the very last stages of dramatic decadence.

While all the time he continued to learn about theatre as a medium
through which to communicate his own theories of certain aspects of
aesthetic experience. His first play to be staged, The Land of Heart’s Desire,
produced at the Avenue Theatre in London in March 1894, was a
slight romanticised folk legend but it does introduce a conflict
between the non-earthly faery folk, the ‘people of the Sidhe’ with the
ordinary people, with a priest-directed rule of life and this confronta-
tion prefigures the dramatic tensions in much of his later work.
Perhaps even the mysterious lady peering through gauze draperies
created by Aubrey Beardsley as a poster design for the Avenue Theatre
production also prefigures the mystery and the mask Yeats was to find

'...we who will ride the winds, run on the waves
And dance on the mountains are more light
Than dewdrops on the banner of the dawn.'

(The Land of Heart's Desire)
decades later when he adapted the 'Noble Drama' of the East to his own purpose.

Yeats's other plays of the eighteen nineties were typical of their time and bear the mark of his friendship with William Morris. In his Yeats memorial address, delivered at the Abbey Theatre in 1940, T. S. Eliot found Yeats 'by no means the least of the Pre-Raphaelites' and the play (or rather, dramatic poem), The Shadowy Waters,

one of the most perfect expressions of the vague enchanted beauty of that school: yet it strikes me – and this is what may be an impertinence on my part – as the western seas descried through the back window of a house in Kensington; an Irish myth for the Kelmscott Press; and when I try to visualise the speakers in the play they have the great dim, dreary eyes of the Knights and ladies of Burne-Jones. I think that the phase in which he treated Irish legend in the manner of Rossetti or Morris is a phase of confusion. He did not master this legend until he made it a vehicle for his own creation of character – not really, until he began to write the Plays for Dancers. The point is, that in becoming more Irish, not in subject-matter but in expression, he became at the same time universal.

In The Countess Cathleen I think Yeats comes closest to expressing his dramatic ideals in a Pre-Raphaelite framework. His stage directions in that play closely reflect images which can be found in Burne-Jones' woodcuts for the Kelmscott Press Chaucer, but at the same time, as his experience of the theatre grew, he came closer and closer to defining his ideals. In his review of Villiers de l'Isle Adam's symbolist drama, Axel, which he travelled to Paris to see in 1894, he wrote,

The imaginative drama must inevitably make many mistakes before it is in possession of the stage again, for it is so essentially different to the old melodrama and the new realism, that it must learn its powers and limitations for itself. It must also fail many times before it wins the day, for though we cannot hope to ever again see the public as interested in sheer poetry, as the audiences were who tolerated so great a poet, so poor a dramatist as Chapman, it must make its hearers learn to understand eloquent and beautiful dialogues, and to admire them for their own sake and not as a mere pendent to the action.

Two years later, in a letter to Fiona MacLeod he states that plays would
be more effective than lectures and might do more than anything else to make the Irish, Scotch and other Celts recognise their solidarity. And he defines,

My own theory of poetical or legendary drama is that it should have no realistic, or elaborate, but only a symbolic and decorative setting. A forest, for instance, should be represented by a forest pattern and not by a forest painting. One should design a scene which would be an accompaniment not a reflection of the text. This method would have the further advantage of being fairly cheap, and altogether novel. The acting should have an equivalent distance to that of the play from common realities. The plays might be almost, in some cases, modern mystery plays.


'I have always thought it the most beautiful of all printed books. The pictures have already raised images of stage scenery . . .' (W. B. Yeats to John Quinn, 29 June 1905)
And in less than six months the idea of an Irish theatre became a reality with the meeting of Yeats, Edward Martyn and Lady Gregory at which the historic appeal was drafted for a guarantee fund of three hundred pounds with which the project was launched.

We propose to have performed in Dublin, in the spring of every year certain Celtic and Irish plays, which whatever be their degree of excellence will be written with a high ambition, and so build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature. We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our desire to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will ensure for us a tolerant welcome, and that freedom to experiment which is not found in theatres of England, and without which no new movement in art or literature can succeed.

The first performance of the Irish Literary Theatre, with a programme that included The Countess Cathleen took place on 8 May 1899. In the programme Yeats predicted that,

It will take a generation, and perhaps generations, to restore the theatre of Art; for one must get one’s actors, and perhaps one’s scenery, from the theatre of commerce, until new actors and new painters have come to help one; and until many failures and imperfect successes have made a new tradition, and perfected in detail the ideal that is beginning to float before our eyes. If one could call one’s painters and one’s actors from where one would, how easy it would be.

The three seasons of the Irish Literary Theatre were presented by English actors engaged for the performances. However, the emergence of the theatre movement aroused the enthusiasm of Frank Fay, writing on theatre in The United Irishman. Fay endorsed Yeats’s call for a national drama, for a company of well trained Irish actors and went further to call for a permanent home for the company. And with Frank Fay and his brother William, the Irish Literary Theatre became, in 1902 transformed into the Irish National Dramatic Company and eventually the Irish National Theatre Society whose permanent home, the Abbey Theatre in Dublin opened its doors to the public on Tuesday 27 December 1904.
After the second season of the Irish Literary Theatre, early in 1901, Yeats went to London where he chanced to attend the revival of Gordon Craig's production of *Dido and Aeneas*, Henry Purcell's opera, at the Coronet Theatre. He was so moved by the performance and the staging that he wrote to Craig, 'You have created a new art', and invited Craig to dinner. This led to a close friendship which lasted until Yeats died almost forty years later, and an exchange of ideas and experiments in stage-craft which provided Yeats with the practical tutorship and assistance which would form his approach to stage practice.

In 'At Stratford on Avon' (Ideas of Good and Evil, p. 116) Yeats wrote of Gordon Craig's scenery for the Purcell Society's performance:

... it was the first beautiful scenery our stage has seen. He created an ideal country where everything was possible, even speaking in verse, or speaking in music, or the expression of the whole of life in a dance.
He wishes that Shakespeare's moments of deep emotion might be played with scenery 'as simple as Mr Gordon Craig's purple back cloth that made Dido and Aeneas seem wandering on the edge of eternity.'

Edward Gordon Craig was the son of Ellen Terry the actress and of Edward Godwin the architect and stage designer. As a young actor in Henry Irving's company he played many roles, but his real interest was in design and stage production. With his friend the composer Martin Shaw he first produced Purcell's Dido and Aeneas in 1900 and a revival of this, in a double bill with the Masque from Purcell's Diocletian was the production which Yeats attended in the following year. Craig's approach to staging the production must have proved to Yeats that the symbolic and decorative simplicity he had called for in his ideal theatre was exactly what Craig had achieved and which Yeats hoped that Craig would accomplish for the Irish theatre. Craig was working towards the principles he would define in his books, principally in On the Art of the Theatre and in the pages of the journal he published for many years, The Mask. Some years were to pass before the collaboration of Yeats and Craig was to result in a stage presentation as each had to meet the demands of other involvements in their creative lives.

With the help of the Fay brothers and of his friends Lady Gregory, Edward Martyn and John M. Synge, Yeats devoted much of his time in the first years of the century to establishing a national theatre for Ireland. He was the spokesman of the movement and the pages of the theatre's journal Samhain reveal how closely these people worked together in the almost uniform expression of their ideals. The manifesto of the movement, entitled 'A Plea for a National Theatre in Ireland', in the October 1901 issue of Samhain, although signed by Martyn, expresses the common hope,

Is it not time that our dramatic art should be placed on a national basis? Are we so degenerate that we cannot meet this demand also by a supply of national art? The first requisite is to provide a stock company of native artists because the foreign strollers are too wedded to the debased art of England to fall in with the change. This can only be done by instituting a school for the training of actors and actresses, a most important branch of which should be devoted to teaching them to act plays in the Irish language.
With a company of artists such as I have described we might put before the people of Ireland native works, also translations of the dramatic masterworks of all lands, for it is only by accustoming a public to the highest art that it can be led to appreciate art, and that dramatists may be inspired to work in the great art tradition.

Yeats saw the theatre as a significant part of the general revival of native culture which we now know as the Irish Renaissance and commented in his editorial paragraphs in Samhain,

... we have for good and all taken over the intellectual government of our country, and if the degeneration of England goes on as quickly as it has these last years, we shall take over for certain generations the intellectual government of that country also whether we will or no; and because we believe, when others have ceased to believe, we have, I think, taken up the wheel of life in our hands that we may set it to whirl upon a new axle tree.

and, he felt, the theatre company would

do its best to give Ireland a hardy and shapely national character by opening the doors to the four winds of the world, instead of leaving the door that is towards the east wind open alone. Certainly, the national character, which is so essentially different from the English that Spanish and French influences may well be most healthy, is at present present like one of those miserable thorn bushes one sees twisted towards one side by some prevailing wind.

Yeats's own dramatic writings of these years reflect this concern with the establishing of a truly Irish theatre and in style and content approach the themes of his contemporaries. Cathleen Ni Houlihan is a popular patriotic piece, in which the symbolic figure of the old woman echoes the centuries-old aspirations of Nationalist Ireland. Yeats himself regarded the piece as 'the first play of our Irish school of folk drama and, in dedicating it to Lady Gregory, who helped with the folk idiom of the dialogue, revealed,

She was Ireland herself, that Cathleen Ni Houlihan for whom so many songs have been sung and for whose sake so many have gone to their death. I thought if I could write this out as a little play I could make others see my dream as I had seen it.
Device of the Abbey Theatre, woodcut by Elinor Monsell, 1904, on first programme cover of the theatre.

'It . . . represents Queen Maeve, the heroic queen of ancient Irish legend. The dog is the Irish wolf hound, and it is not known, whether it was with intention or not, that Miss Monsell put into the background the raying sun, which is one of the symbols of Ireland'. (Programme note, probably by Yeats, The Abbey Theatre, Dublin 1908)
That many did indeed see this dream is reflected in Ireland's history, the Rising of 1916 and the subsequent 'troubles' which led to the Anglo-Irish Treaty establishing the partition of Ireland and its consequences. In a late poem Yeats could ask about his little 'patriotic realistic' piece,

Did that play of mine send out
Certain men the English shot?

And history becomes myth in the final lines chanted by the Old Woman as she leaves the stage,

They shall be remembered for ever;
They shall be alive for ever;
They shall be speaking for ever;
The people shall hear them for ever.

Yeats's other plays of these years show his concern to provide texts for a developing national theatre drawing on folk themes. The Pot of Broth is a slight one-act piece written with Lady Gregory's help as a vehicle for the comic talents of William Fay. Where There is Nothing is a realistic piece conceived in the mainstream of European drama, involving Yeats's mystical system in its protest against the world. This was not produced in the Irish theatre until a rewritten version entitled The Unicorn from the Stars was achieved with Lady Gregory's help and presented at the Abbey Theatre in 1907. But gradually Yeats returned to his own concerns and had a success with his morality play, The Hour Glass, presented in March 1903 under the direction of William Fay and with setting and costumes realised by Lady Gregory's son Robert after suggestions made by T. Sturge Moore. The simplicity of these effects and the subtlety of the carefully conceived colour balance, described by Lady Gregory as 'our first attempt at the decorative staging long demanded by Mr Yeats' was enthusiastically welcomed and endorsed the validity of Yeats's approach. His next play for the Irish Theatre, The King's Threshold, from a folk tale about a poet's protest in defence of his ideas against the indignities of his treatment by courtiers and clerics, is the most skilfully constructed of Yeats's early plays and prefigures later developments in his writing where things of the mind triumph over material things and, while the theme of the fable is universal, the locale and language is very specifically drawn from the indigenous
lore of a specific place in the west of Ireland, a quality which is of
great importance in the later works influenced by the Noh drama.

The Abbey Theatre in Dublin, the permanent home of the Irish
National Theatre opened on 27 December 1904. This was made
possible by the financial support of Miss Annie Horniman, Yeats's
wealthy friend. 'The first endowed theatre in any English-speaking
country', Yeats described it in the 1904 issue of Samhain, and went on,
restating the policy of its founders in relation to Gaelic speaking and
nationalist drama. He saw, however, that

Before this part of our work can be begun, it will be necessary to
create a household of living art in Dublin, with principles that
have become habits, and a public that has learnt to care for a play
because it is a play and not because it is serviceable to some cause.

He also defined his own part in the movement,

I would not be trying to form an Irish National Theatre, if I did
not believe that there existed in Ireland, whether in the minds of
a few people or of a great number I do not know, an energy of
thought about life itself, a vivid sensitiveness as to the reality of
things, powerful enough to overcome all those phantoms of the
night. One thing calls up its contrary, unreality calls up reality, and
besides, life here has been sufficiently perilous to make men
think. I do not think it a national prejudice that makes me believe
we are a harder, a more masterful race than the comfortable
English of our time, and that this comes from an essential
nearness to reality of those few scattered people who have the
right to call themselves the Irish race. It is only in the exceptions,
in the few minds, where the flame has burnt as it were pure, that
one can see the permanent character of a race. If one remembers
the men who have dominated Ireland for the last hundred and
fifty years, one understands that it is strength of personality, the
individualizing quality in a man, that stirs Irish imagination most
deeply in the end. There is scarcely a man who has led the Irish
people, at any time, who may not give some day to a great writer
precisely that symbol he may require for the expression of
himself.
The symbolic character that Yeats chose for the central dramatic expression of his ideas was Cuchulain, hero figure of the ancient Irish epic, the Táin, one of the heroic Irish legends which John O’Leary and Standish O’Grady had recommended to him twenty years before, and which Lady Gregory had recently translated as Cuchulain of Muirthemne. In his Preface to that book Yeats wrote,

Perhaps I should say that it is the best book that has ever come out of Ireland; for the stories which it tells are a chief part of Ireland’s gift to the imagination of the world – and it tells them perfectly for the first time.

He derived six plays from the material in Cuchulain of Muirthemne, five based on the hero, Cuchulain, and his beautiful tragic drama, Deirdre. His first Cuchulain play, On Baile’s Strand, was produced as part of the opening programme of the Abbey Theatre. This piece is written in blank verse and was beautifully spoken by Frank Fay as the hero. At the same time he restated his theatrical principles in his essay ‘The Play, the Player and the Scene’ in which he predicted that ‘the hour of convention and decoration and ceremony is coming again.’ He sought music for the lyrics in his work, and designers who would produce costumes and scenery for the Abbey in accordance with his views. Robert Gregory continued to design scenery and, in London, Yeats commissioned Charles Ricketts to design costumes for several productions of plays both by himself and J. M. Synge, among them his Deirdre which was produced at the Abbey Theatre in November 1906. Deirdre, although the verse is still the blank verse of the English tradition, is cast in a very different mould from all Yeats’s previous plays. The central action is framed within a chorus of three women musicians and anticipates the form of much of his later Noh-inspired plays. Within this frame the tragic queen must convince the audience of the dramatic veracity of her fate – a fate predestined before her birth, its resolution decided by the ever-watching gods. Robert Gregory’s setting of a great curtained hall so impressed Yeats that he mentioned it in his dedication of the play. The Golden Helmet, the next play in the Cuchulain series, produced in March 1908, was written in what Yeats called ‘ballad metre’, a further departure from English stage
tradition and, in its abstract approach to the subject, a further step towards the later drama. This was the least successful of the Cuchulain plays, even in the rewritten version of 1910 which he called The Green Helmet. He thought of making a version of Sophocles’ Oedipus the King for the Abbey and commenced work on a tragi-comedy which would become The Player Queen, all the time hoping to enlarge the scope of the repertory of the Irish theatre he had largely created, but, at the same time, I feel, by this sacrifice of his energy, allowing the pre-occupations of ‘theatre business, management of men’ to slow down the process of his own development as a dramatist.

A meeting with Craig early in 1910 at which Craig revealed the theory of stage management and scenery which he had patented and described in The Mask gave Yeats new hope. He saw in it a means of staging everything that is not naturalistic and that out of his invention we may grow a completely new method even for our naturalistic plays.

Yeats ordered a model stage from Craig to experiment with arrangements for various plays, while Craig agreed to make designs for an edition of Yeats’s Plays for an Irish Theatre. With Craig’s model to experiment with, Yeats discovered a new freedom in stage presentation and the possibilities of lighting the screens that made up the setting in different ways. He described the experience in his essay, ‘The Tragic Theatre’,

All summer I have been playing with a little model, where there is a scene capable of endless transformation, of the expression of every mood that does not require a photographic reality. Mr Craig – who has invented all this – has permitted me to set up upon the stage of the Abbey another scene that corresponds to this, in the scale of a foot for an inch, and henceforth I shall be able, by means so simple that one laughs, to lay the events of my plays amid a grandeur like that of Babylon;

Henceforth I can all but ‘produce’ my play while I write it, moving hither and thither little figures of cardboard through gay or solemn light and shade, allowing the scene to give the words and the words the scene.
Robert Gregory. Watercolour design for setting of *Deirdre*, the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, 1906.

'To Robert Gregory, who invented for this Play beautiful Costumes and a beautiful Scene.' (Dedication of *Deirdre* by W. B. Yeats, Dublin and London 1907)

An arrangement of Gordon Craig's model screens for the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, 1911.
The primary value of Mr Craig's invention is that it enables one to use light in a more natural and more beautiful way than ever before. We get rid of all the top hamper of the stage, all the hanging ropes and scenes which prevent the free play of light.

One enters into a world of decorative effect which gives the actor a renewed importance. There is less to compete against him, for there is less detail, though there is more beauty.

Yeats entered enthusiastically into this 'world of decorative effect', and recorded his arrangements in a notebook which related his settings of Craig's screens to the scale of the Abbey stage. The largest group of designs relate to Lady Gregory's play Mirandolina which was playing when Yeats returned from his meeting with Craig, full of enthusiasm to reform. This group of sketches is followed by designs for Deirdre, which could be adapted for On Baile's Strand, The Land of Heart's Desire, which could serve as an alternative arrangement for Deirdre, for The King's Threshold in three versions, the last of which could also be used for On Baile's Strand and then two designs which were used in full scale for The Hour Glass and Lady Gregory's The Deliverer, staged on 12 January 1911, the first occasion on which Craig's screens were used in any theatre, and a year before their most famous use in Craig's own production of Hamlet at the Moscow Art Theatre. For The Hour-Glass the costumes and masks were also designed by Craig, without specific reference to period, but derived from his reading of Yeats's text. But perhaps Craig's greatest contribution to Yeats's theatre was in emphasising the power of the mask as a device. As Craig wrote, in the catalogue of the Dublin exhibition of his stage designs in 1913, of his design for Yeats's 'Blind Man',

This is a design for a mask. It is rather more realistic than a mask should be, but as a beginning I dare say it will do. The eyes are closed, they are still cross, and I take it that the man sees with his nose. I imagine that he smells his way in the dark, and he seems to keep up an eternal kind of windy whistling with his pursed up lips. The advantage of a mask over a face is that it is always repeating unerringly the poetic fancy, repeating on Monday in 1912 exactly what it said on Saturday in 1909 and what it will say on Wednesday in 1999. Durability was the dominant idea in Egyptian art. The theatre must learn that lesson. 'But,' you say,
Edward Gordon Craig. The Hour-Glass. Design in watercolour for the play by W. B. Yeats, 1911.

‘Last winter . . . we revived the play with costumes taken chiefly from designs by Mr Gordon Craig, and with the screens he has shown us how to make and use, arranged as in the drawing in this book, and with effects that depend but little on colour, and greatly upon delicate changes in tone.’ (Plays for an Irish Theatre by W. B. Yeats, London 1912)

Edward Gordon Craig. Mask for the Blind Man in On Baile’s Strand, etching, 1911.

‘I should also like the Abbey to be the first modern theatre to use the mask.’ (W. B. Yeats to Lady Gregory, 21 October 1910)
Edward Gordon Craig. Design for the Fool in The Hour Glass, 1911.

'The Fool was dressed as in Mr Craig's drawing, but he advised us against using the mask till he was able to see to the making of it himself. The same Fool and mask, the Fat Fool of folklore who is "as wide and wild as a hill" and not the Thin Fool of modern romance, may go with a masked Blind Man into On Baile's Strand.' (Plays for an Irish Theatre)
‘the actor does not live for ever, he is not immortal.’ Exactly, my friends, but his mask can live for ever. Let us again cover his face with a mask in order that his expression – the visualised expression of the Poetic spirit – shall be everlasting.

The Craig screens continued in use at the Abbey for poetic plays, principally Yeats's own.

The programme note on the Abbey production of Rabindranath Tagore’s *The Post Office*, directed by Lennox Robinson on 17 May 1913 states that ‘the scene, composed of Gordon Craig screens was arranged by J. F. Barlow.’ Yeats had met Tagore in London in June 1912 and later that year contributed a Preface to *Gitanjali*, Tagore's English prose versions of a selection of his Bengali poems. Yeats found ‘great beauty’ in these English versions of ‘the great poet of Bengal’ and was glad to recommend the Abbey production of his play, *The Post Office* in an English translation by Devabrata Mukerjea, which the Cuala Press printed in a limited edition with a Preface by Yeats in 1914. Tagore was his key to the systems of Indian thought and to knowledge of a theatre which, in its external expression in speech, music and dance conveyed an inner experience and overstepped the realistic theatre’s boundaries and could present in an abstract and beautiful way a whole range of themes from myth to everyday life.

In December 1926 the Craig screens were used to stage Yeats's version of Sophocles' *King Oedipus* and they were eventually reduced in height and used at the Peacock Theatre for verse plays and experimental drama until both theatres closed after the Abbey Theatre fire in 1951.

After *The Hour-Glass* production Yeats did not use further costume designs by Craig, but returned to Charles Ricketts from whom he commissioned a magnificent set of costume designs for a revival of *The King’s Threshold* in 1914. Yeats thought these were

The best dramatic costumes I have ever seen. They are full of dramatic invention, and yet nothing starts out, or seems eccentric. The Company never did the play so well, and such is the effect of costume that whole scenes got a new intensity, and passages or actions that had seemed commonplace became powerful and moving.

And Lady Gregory's response, in a letter to Ricketts, was equally enthusiastic,
I really felt quite overcome when I saw both the beauty and carefullness of your designs. I have had a copy of Deirdre sent for your acceptance. We shall be very grateful for any suggestions about shuffling the costumes.... I feel you are giving us a new start in life. Yeats will enjoy seeing his plays, which he hasn't done for some years.

Ricketts' costumes with their rich abstract and geometrical designs provided a highly colourful and decorative style for the characters of the Heroic Age as Yeats conceived them in his dramas. As well as The King's Threshold, Ricketts designed Yeats's Deirdre and On Baile's Strand in 1915, and Yeats hoped he might also design for his new play, The Player Queen, but this project was not realised. Ricketts' notes on the drawings he made for Yeats show his concern with purpose as well as with colour and form. He suggested that elements in the designs were interchangeable, they were costumes for types rather than characters and were not really tied specifically to country or period (other than 'the Heroic Age'), and so in use would have a flexibility which retained an overall richness in visual impact which must have done much to enhance the impact of these plays on the audience. In being removed for stage realism, they made possible the 'hour of convention and decoration and ceremony' Yeats had predicted in his essay on the occasion of the opening of the Abbey Theatre. With the exception of The Player Queen, which he was constantly revising with a stage in mind which would combine Craig's theories with elements of the staging and techniques of Renaissance Italy, which had been extensively described and illustrated in the pages of The Mask, and which did not have an Irish theme, but marked the final phase of practical collaboration with Craig, Yeats, at fifty, was ready for his initiation in a form of theatre from which the thrust of his activity in the theatre would take a new direction - the Noh drama of Japan.

From John O'Leary and Standish O'Grady, Yeats had learned the themes for his drama, from Gordon Craig a stagecraft which avoided the trappings of realism and with finely disposed shapes, with light and shade, created a place for the imaginations of his audience, from

‘When some years ago we produced my “Baile’s Strand” with scenes and costumes designed by Mr Charles Ricketts, my imagination was greatly stirred, and I wanted to take up my theme once more, but to make it more mythological, more indefinite.’ (Preface to *The Cat and the Moon* by W. B. Yeats, 1924)
Ricketts an approach to robing his actors formally and decoratively for their parts, from Craig, too, the doctrine and discipline of the mask and from his colleagues in the Irish theatre an immense practical knowledge, which could only be gained from his years of work in the theatre. The theatre he had helped to found had developed in a different direction to his. Realistic drama and comedy had become its stock in trade, with occasional excursions into poetry and experiment, but it had given Ireland, in the work of Synge and Lady Gregory Padraic Colum and the other dramatic writers of the decade 'a fine native drama' of its own which had won critical acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic. Yeats, too, now found the form he sought when Ezra Pound introduced him to the Noh theatre of Japan.

The concept of the mask is central to the Noh theatre, a dramatic system of absolute beauty presented in a symbolic and inflexibly ordered ritual framework in which every element — mask, costume, the unchanging stage arrangement, the music, the dance movement, the speech are dedicated towards the achievement of this absolute beauty. The word itself means 'talent' or, as Pound translates it, 'accomplishment'. The actor's whole life is dedicated to realising this 'accomplishment' in its finest form, and to this end he is trained from his early years in the various disciplines which his chosen vocation demands. Never must his personality intrude on his performance in the roles of Noh, a resolution which must, for Yeats, have echoed his thoughts of a decade earlier in 'The Play, the Player and the Scene'.

Everybody who has spoken to large audiences knows that he must speak difficult passages, in which there is some delicacy of sound or thought upon one or two notes. The larger his audience, the more he must get away, except in trivial passages, from the methods of conversation. Where one requires the full attention of the mind, one must not weary it with any but the most needful changes of pitch and note, or by an irrelevant or obtrusive gesture. As long as drama was full of poetical beauty, full of description, full of philosophy, as long as its words were the very vesture of sorrow and laughter, the players understood that their art was essentially conventional, artificial, ceremonious.

That was written in 1904. In 1915, with Pound's edition of Fenellosa's materials on Noh Theatre as text, Yeats could set to adapt the Japanese form, which echoed so many of the ideas he had formed over the
decades, to his own purpose. The mask for instance added the
dimension needed for the conventional presentation of character, or
as Craig had expressed it, a mask is 'always repeating unerringly the
poetic fancy'. To Yeats,

A mask will enable me to substitute for the face of some
common-place player, or for that face repainted to suit his own
vulgar fancy, the fine invention of a sculptor, and to bring the
audience close enough to the play to hear every inflection of the
voice. A mask never seems but a dirty face, and no matter how
close you go is still a work of art; nor shall we lose by staying the
movement of the features, for deep feeling is expressed by a
movement of the whole body. In poetical painting & in sculpture
the face seems the nobler for lacking curiosity, alert attention, all
that we sum up under the famous word of the realists 'vitality'. It
is even possible that being is only possessed completely by the
dead, and that it is some knowledge of this that makes us gaze
with so much emotion upon the face of the Sphinx or Buddha.

A year or so later after his first play in the new form had been realised,
with costumes and masks created for it by Edmund Dulac, he could
feel that

It would be a stirring adventure for a poet and an artist, working
together, to create once more heroic or grotesque types that,
keeping always an appropriate distance from life, would seem
images of those profound emotions that exist only in solitude
and silence.

The Abbey Theatre, however, was not the environment in which to
develop Yeats's new direction in drama. His first play in the style, At the
Hawk's Well, a continuation of the Cuchulain cycle, was presented
privately in the London drawing room of his friend Lady Cunard on
2 April 1916. Yeats wrote of this that he hoped 'to create a new form
of drama which might delight the best minds of his time. Although
the performance cannot have been fully satisfying to Yeats, it helped
to crystallise the thoughts which guided him in all his subsequent
dramatic writing. Even when he deviated from the form the inner
construction of his plays after 1916 always reflects his experience of
the Noh. The many hours shifting pieces about on Craig's model
stage, of recording the scenic arrangements in his notebook, to a scale
drawing of the Abbey stage were ended. As he wrote in his 'note' to

'What a relief after directing a theatre for so many years — for I am one of the two Directors of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin — to think no more of pictures unless Mr Dulac or some other distinguished man has made them.' (W. B. Yeats in *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1917)
At the Hawk's Well, his theatre was now 'the ancient theatre made by unrolling a carpet, or marking out a place with a stick, or setting a screen against a wall.' And to the theatrical elements which made up his adopted new form of drama Yeats added a device of his own making, the ritual of 'unfolding and folding of the cloth' with which his plays were to begin and end. The three Musicians who made up the Chorus entered, the First Musician carrying a folded cloth.

He goes to the centre of the stage towards the front and stands motionless, the folded cloth hanging from between his hands. The two other Musicians enter and, after standing a moment at either side of the stage, go towards him and slowly unfold the cloth, singing as they do so:

I call to the eye of the mind
A well long choked up and dry
And boughs long stripped by the wind,
And I call to the mind's eye
Pallor of an ivory face,
Its lofty dissolute air,
A man climbing up to a place
The salt sea wind has swept bare.

As they unfold the cloth, they go backward a little so that the stretched cloth and the wall make a triangle with the First Musician at the apex supporting the centre of the cloth. On the black cloth is a gold pattern suggesting a hawk. The Second and Third Musicians now slowly fold up the cloth again, pacing with a rhythmic movement of the arms towards the First Musician and singing.

At the end of the play this ritual is repeated to cover the exit of the players while the closing chorus is being sung, and when the chorus has ended the acting area is bare, as it was before the beginning of the play. The stage direction reads:

The Musicians stand up; one goes to centre with folded cloth.
The others unfold it. While they do so they sing. During the singing, and while hidden by the cloth, the Old Man goes out.

Three weeks after the London performance of At the Hawk's Well the course of Irish history was changed by the Easter Rising in Dublin,
when several of the Irish Nationalist groups rose together in arms against the seven-centuries-old occupation of Ireland by England and proclaimed an independent Irish Republic. Within a week the Rising was crushed and soon after sixteen of the leaders were executed, among them the seven signatories of the Proclamation of the Republic. The Rising and its aftermath in Irish history affected all of Yeats's subsequent thinking and by September his famous poem, 'Easter 1916' had been printed. He postponed work on the play he was writing for the Cuchulain cycle and conceived a new play 'in the manner of The Hawk's Well' inspired by the tragic history of Ireland. By June 1917 he could write to Lady Gregory that he had almost finished the play, The Dreaming of the Bones, but was afraid that it was 'too powerful politically'. He commissioned a musical score from Walter Rummel, which was finished by October when he sent the piece to be printed at the Cuala Press with the play he had interrupted to write it, The Only Jealousy of Emer.

Of all Yeats's plays, The Dreaming of the Bones corresponds most closely to a specific Noh play, Nishikigi, of which he had written in the 'Introduction' to Certain Noble Plays of Japan.

The ghost lovers in Nishikigi remind me of the Aran boy and girl who in Lady Gregory's story come to the priest after death to be married. These Japanese poets too feel for tomb and wood, the emotion, the sense of awe that our Gaelic speaking country people will sometimes show when you speak to them of Castle Hackett or of some Holy Well; and that is why perhaps it pleases them to begin so many plays by a Traveller asking his way with many questions, a convention agreeable to me; for when I first began to write poetical plays for an Irish Theatre I had to put away an ambition to bring again to certain places their old sanctity or their romance.

For this drama, inspired by the events of the 1916 Easter Rising, Yeats took as theme a historical incident, the betrayal of Ireland to the Normans by Dermot MacMurrough King of Leinster and his mistress, Devorgilla, wife of a minor king. Their act determined the whole succeeding course of Irish events. Yeats shows the guilty pair as wandering ghosts seeking forgiveness, confronted by the 'traveller' of his model, a young man who has fought in the Dublin Rising and has fled from the authorities. The locale of this confrontation is the
neighbourhood of the ruined Cistercian Abbey of Corcomroe in County Clare, a barren rock-strewn peninsula near Ireland’s Atlantic coast. This place surely suggests the sense of ‘dreaming back’ into the historical past according to Yeats’s purpose to ‘bring again to certain places their old sanctity or their romance’.

In his stage directions to the play, Yeats has developed further the ideal screen which forms the background to the action,

A screen, with a pattern of mountain and sky, can stand against the wall, or a curtain with a like pattern hang on it, but the pattern must only symbolise and suggest.

The symbolic pattern of mountain and sky called for here must, I feel have its real basis in a landscape close to Yeats – a landscape that had already more than once figured in his dramatic work, the landscape of the Irish west which was the backdrop for the ancient hero-tales and for much of his own work. When he edited his early poems for Bullen’s Collected Edition of 1908 he wrote,

When I first wrote I went here and there for my subjects as my reading led me, and preferred to all other countries Arcadia and the India of romance, but presently I convinced myself that I should never go for the scenery of a poem to any country but my own, and I think that I shall hold to that conviction to the end.

Earlier, in his Introduction to Lady Gregory’s Cuchulain of Muirthemne he confessed,

When I was a child I had only to climb the hill behind the house to see long, blue, ragged hills flowing along the southern horizon. What beauty was lost to me, what depth of emotion is still perhaps lacking in me, because nobody told me, not even the merchant captains who knew everything, that Cruachan of the Enchantments lay behind those long, blue, ragged hills!

Cruachan was the fortified palace of Cuchulain’s antagonist, Queen Maeve, that legendary warrior queen finally, it is told, laid to rest on the summit of one of those same hills, Knocknarea,

the cairn-heaped, grassy hill
Where passionate Maeve is stony-still.

So the appropriate setting for his drama derived from the modern epic struggle for Irish independence, the 1916 Easter Rising is not set
in Dublin's General Post Office, the centre of the struggle, but in the remote west of the country, in a landscape of ancient myth, a Cuchulain related place, foreshadowing the symbolism which would have the Rising officially commemorated in the General Post Office by a statue of the same hero-figure, of whom, according to Yeats, the 1916 leader Patrick Pearse had 'made a cult'.

If the suggestions about the background 'screen' for his plays, a device directly taken from the Noh, where the playing area is always backed by a wooden screen on which a symbolic pine tree is painted, are put together, one can derive a background against which Yeats's dance plays may be performed. I once used such a screen, painted on a background of natural wood and suggesting the forms of the two mountains that frame Sligo Bay — Knocknarea, and Ben Bulben where the tragic story of Diarmuid and Grainne ended and under whose shadow Yeats himself rests for ever — and between them the sea, the water element; air, earth and water. Before these the thorn tree, ragged, 'wicked, crooked' stands, the immediate symbol. Later versions of my screen had the same symbolic arrangement, but were composed of symbols and techniques suggested in Yeats's dramatic writings. The decorative effect called for in The Countess Cathleen, 'painted in flat colour upon a gold or diapered sky' helps fuse the symbols into a unity and this 'gold and diapered sky' of the illuminator can become, in a Japanese idiom, squares of gold leaf laid over a golden yellow ground, perhaps as in 'the gold mosaic of a wall' or over a cold coloured ground which perhaps suggests the cold light from the full moon of March. The patterned curtain for The Cat and the Moon suggests St Colman's well, the water element, and for Fighting the Waves in 1929, Yeats had Dolly Travers Smith design a magnificent abstract of tumbling waves which recalls the great screen by Korin which Yeats saw in a London exhibition, 'where the same form is echoing in wave and in cloud and in rock' as he wrote in his Introduction to Certain Noble Plays of Japan. 'Tree, like a sooty finger starts from the earth', in 'The Tower' is the 'wicked crooked hawthorn tree' of The King of The Great Clock Tower as drawn by Victor Brown for the first printing of that chorus at the Cuala Press in A Broadside for February 1935 and rounds out the decorative design of the screen — a final break from realism and the Yeatsian simplification of Craig's screens presented to the Abbey a decade before, the 'thousand scenes in one'
Liam Miller. Seven-fold painted screen to be used as a background for certain plays of W. B. Yeats, designed from elements suggested by the poet. Gouache, 1976.

'Those images that yet Fresh images beget . . .'

(W. B. Yeats, 'Byzantium' 1930)

become one symbol only. The final break with traditional stage setting would come later in The Death of Cuchulain, to be played on 'a bare stage of any period'.

In The Dreaming of the Bones Yeats brings a young man fleeing from the aftermath of the Rebellion in Dublin, his Waki, the traveller of the Japanese Noh, to the summit of a western hill from which he can survey for the audience a landscape desolated by centuries of oppression:

I can see
The Aran Islands, Connemara hills,
And Galway in the breaking light; there too
The enemy has toppled roof and gable,
And torn the paneling from ancient rooms;
What generations of old men had known
Like their own hands and children wondered at,
Has boiled a trooper's porridge. That town had lain,
But for the pair that you would have me pardon,
Amid its gables and its battlements;
Like any old admired Italian town;
For though we have neither coal, nor iron ore,
To make us wealthy and corrupt the air,
Our country, had that crime been uncommitted,
Had been most beautiful.

This ‘dreaming back’ into history closely follows Yeats’s Japanese model but he felt perhaps that his non-forgiving of the ghosts of Dermot and Devorgilla may have been too strong in the light of the new system of thought which he was developing at the same time and which reached its public expression in A Vision eight years later. In a note on The Dreaming of the Bones he wrote,

I wrote my play before the Robartes papers came into my hands,
and in making the penance of Dermot and Devorgilla last so many centuries I have done something for which I had no warrant in these papers, but warrant there certainly is in the folklore of all countries.

Neither The Dreaming of the Bones nor the next play that Yeats composed in the style of the Noh, The Only Jealousy of Emer were produced in the theatre he had founded, the Abbey, for over a decade after they were written and even then they had low key productions. Walter Rummel’s score for The Dreaming of the Bones, which was published with the play in Four Plays for Dancers was not attempted, nor as far as I know has it been used in a presentation of the play.

Perhaps the greatest success that attended one of Yeats’s Plays for Dancers came when The Only Jealousy of Emer attracted the attention of the Dutch actor manager Albert van Dalsum, who had a translation made by the poet Helen Swarth, who had written several verse dramas. Van Dalsum was a student of Craig’s theories of theatre ever since The Art of the Theatre had appeared in a Dutch translation in 1906 and he may well have known Yeats’s essay ‘The Tragic Theatre’ which Craig printed in his periodical, The Mask in 1910. Also, between 1919 and 1922, when van Dalsum staged the first production of The Only Jealousy of Emer, Craig published several essays in the Dutch periodical, Wendigen, among them his essay ‘The Living Scene’ in a special issue of January 1922 devoted to the International Theatre Exhibition in Amsterdam at which a selection of Craig’s theatre designs were shown. Vroue Emers Groote Strijd had its first performance three months later, on 2 April 1922 at the Hollandsche Schouburg, Amsterdam, with
Hildo Krop. Cuchulain. Mask for Vrouwel Emer's Groote Strijd, the Dutch translation by Hélène Swarth of The Only Jealousy of Emer, Amsterdam 1922.

'I am trying to get some magnificent masks made by the Dutch Sculptor Von Krop for my Only Jealousy of Emer. With these masks I shall be able to give a series of Dance Plays here as we have just added to the Abbey Theatre a small perfectly equipped theatre which holds a hundred people.' (W. B. Yeats to Sturge Moore, 1927)
music by Alex Voormolen and choreography by Lili Green, who also danced the Woman of the Sidhe. The costumes were by Frans Huysmans and the masks were made in papier mache by the great sculptor Hildo Krop. The production was extensively noticed in the Dutch press and was generally thought to be an interesting experiment which one reviewer thought pointed out the way theatre should develop with ‘more style, more severity and lack of freedom, less action, fewer unimportant details.’ Another found that

Yeats’s play, a work of divine and human life, a play in which the grief of life lasts as a profound echo, has qualities which are to be felt by being gleaned from what is hidden in the performance. This is, above all, Yeats’s sphere, in which a darker nature breathes.

(Algemeens Handelsblad 3.4.22)

Although van Dalsum’s production had revivals in 1923 and 1924, Yeats did not come to hear of it until after the play had been performed in Dublin by the Dublin Drama League for two nights in May 1926. In November of the same year van Dalsum staged a new production of the piece at the Stadsschouwburg in Amsterdam, retitled Maskerspel Vroue Emer, again with Hildo Krop’s masks. For this revival van Dalsum wrote in the programme, after explaining the basis of the plot taken from Irish mythology,

there is also the mask-play in which the poet Yeats revives these legends for us in a new light. For him this legend is the eternal great conflict between Man and Woman. He sees here in its clearest form the enigma of sex which, as in previous times, is the great problem in modern life. . . . What binds man eternally to, and what alienates him eternally from woman has been brought to life by Yeats in this mask-play.

When Yeats saw photographs of van Dalsum’s 1926 production, especially of Hildro Krop’s masks, he saw a new direction which his Plays for Dancers could take. By Summer 1927 he was planning a season at the little Peacock Theatre, lately opened as an experimental annexe to the Abbey, for which he would borrow Krop’s masks from Amsterdam. Although the projected season did not come off, Yeats began to think of his dance plays in a more public context and he set to writing ‘for the public stage’ a version of The Only Jealousy of Emer.
which could be seen by a wider audience than he had so far envisaged for the play. When this version, entitled Fighting the Waves was published, it was dedicated to the mask-maker, Hildo Krop and a device on the title page of Wheels and Butterflies, the book in which the play is printed, is based on the masks. In his Introduction to the play Yeats wrote,

I wrote The Only Jealousy of Emer for performance in a private house or studio, considering it, for reasons which I have explained, unsuited to a public stage. Then somebody put it on a public stage in Holland and Hildo van Krop made his powerful masks. Because the dramatist who can collaborate with a great sculptor is lucky, I rewrote the play not only to fit it for such a stage but to free it from abstraction and confusion. I have retold the story in prose which I have tried to make very simple and left imaginative suggestion to dancers, singers, musicians.

In Fighting the Waves, Yeats comes close to making a popular art of his theatre of the imagination. In Rapallo, where he wrote the play in the early months of 1929, he had the encouragement of Ezra Pound, who introduced him to the composer George Antheil and a plan emerged that Antheil should score three of Yeats's dance plays. The music, he wrote to Lady Gregory, seemed to him, 'the only dramatic music I ever heard – a very strong beat, something heroic and barbaric and strange.' The production of the play at the Abbey Theatre in August 1929 was, I feel one of the great moments in Yeats's life in the theatre. He described the occasion as 'my greatest success on the stage since Kathleen-ni-Houlihan' and in making his private dramatic form public, he had claimed a place for poetry and the arts of the imagination on the public stage.

Fighting the Waves had reclaimed the public stage for poetry with considerable success, but a success that was not to be easily repeated. The Dublin performance and a showing in London a little later represent the only production of the piece. It was not revived, wrote Yeats in Wheels and Butterflies,
because Mr George Antheil's most strange dramatic music requires a large expensive orchestra. A memory of that orchestra has indeed roused a distinguished Irish lyric poet to begin a dance play which he assures me requires but a tin whistle and a large expensive concertina.

He would return, he felt, to 'imaginative nationalism', and his next play developed 'amid considerations such as these'. He organised themes closely parallel to his personal 'system' as exemplified in A Vision and to his Noh inspired dramas in his play on the enigma of that great eighteenth century Irish figure, Jonathan Swift, The Words Upon the Window Pane. In this play for the public stage, written with the actors of the Abbey Theatre in mind, he employs the device of 'dreaming back' which he had employed to evoke the shades of Diarmuid and Devorgilla in The Dreaming of the Bones, summoned into the action by a character in present time. In The Words Upon the Window Pane the medium at a seance, Mrs Henderson, summons the spirits of Swift, Stella and Vanessa to re-enact, through her voice, the tangled and enigmatic interweave of their lives.

The success of The Words Upon the Window Pane, first presented at the Abbey Theatre on Monday 17 November 1930, and revived many times in theatres all over the world is the complete justification of Yeats as master craftsman of twentieth-century theatre. All his apprenticeship of experiment with form, as in the dance plays bore magnificent fruit in this great piece of the final decade of his life.

Despite his failing health, Yeats continued through the nineteen thirties to work at his theatre of the imagination. His personal symbols continued to dictate his themes, 'the symbol used by Wilde in his Salome', the severed head and Salome's dance before it was, he thought, 'from the old ritual of the seasons, a celebration of the Mother goddess and her slain god, enacted probably at a full moon in March at the opening of the new year'. Two plays, or rather two versions of Yeats's treatment of this theme emerged a 'private' play, A Full Moon in March, which was not performed in his lifetime, and The King of the Great Clock Tower which was produced with great success at the Abbey Theatre in July 1934. Ninette de Valois danced the Queen's part and the King was played by the fine Abbey actor, F. J. McCormick. Later in the year Yeats was invited to Rome to address the International Congress on Dramatic Theatre of the Royal Academy of Italy.
‘Gemistus Plethon not only substituted the sea for Adam and Eve, but, according to a friend learned in the Renaissance, made it symbolise the garden’s ground or first original, “that concrete universal which all philosophy is seeking”.’ (Introduction to Fighting the Waves in Wheels and Butterflies by W. B. Yeats, London 1934).

at which Luigi Pirandello presided. There, for the last time, he met Gordon Craig who expressed a willingness to work again for Yeats and who proclaimed to the whole Congress his belief in Yeats as a great dramatic poet. Yeats’s address to the Congress echoes his earlier definitions of the theatre he sought. In 1899, when the Irish Literary Theatre began, he wrote,

The theatre began in ritual, and it cannot come into its greatness again without recalling words to their ancient sovereignty.

In 1903, when the Abbey Theatre was being planned, he stated in his essay ‘The Reform of the Theatre’,

We have to write or find plays that will make the theatre a place of intellectual excitement – a place where the mind goes to be
liberated as it was liberated by the theatres of Greece and England and France at certain great moments of their history, and as it is liberated in Scandinavia today. If we are to do this we must learn that beauty and truth are always justified of themselves, and that their creation is a greater service to our country than writing that compromises either in the seeming service of a cause.

A year later, when the Abbey, his 'household of living art' was opened in Dublin, he reaffirmed his approach,

I would not be trying to form an Irish National Theatre, if I did not believe that there existed in Ireland, whether in the minds of a few people, or of a great number I do not know, an energy of thought about life itself, a vivid sensitiveness as to the reality of things, powerful enough to overcome all those phantoms of the night.

In 'A People's Theatre', addressed to Lady Gregory in 1919, after his experiences with Craig's methods of staging, and his discovery of the Noh, he wrote, proposing a style that has perhaps only been realised today,

I desire a mysterious art, always reminding and half-reminding those who understand it of dearly loved things, doing its work by suggestion, not by direct statement, a complexity of rhythm, colour, gesture, not space-pervading like the intellect, but a memory and a prophecy.

Accepting the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923, he addressed the Royal Academy of Sweden on 'The Irish Dramatic Movement' and acknowledged his position in the Irish theatre, saying that he might not have been nominated for the award,

if I had written no plays, no dramatic criticism, if my lyric poetry had not a quality of speech practised on the stage, perhaps even – though this could be no portion of their deliberate thought – if it were not in some degree the symbol of a movement.

In his address to the Rome Congress he again surveyed the Irish Theatre, this time over forty years, and saw that after the betrayal of Parnell, 'in the midst of that disillusionment, of that bitterness, the Irish imaginative movement began'. His speech began,

I am about to describe the rise and achievement of a small, dingy,
impecunious theatre, known to Irishmen all over the world because of the fame of its dramatists and its actors, because of the riots that have accompanied certain of its performances, because of its effect on the imagination of Ireland.

and he ended,

Ireland has won its political freedom; the struggle for intellectual or imaginative freedom, for an escape from the tyranny of the second-rate, whether it comes from the commercialised newspaper, or from the commercialised art of the contemporary stage, or from the nightmare in our own souls, must, in some measure, be fought out upon the stage.

Yeats's next play, loosely based on the Irish legend, Congal was The Herne's Egg, written in between bouts of work on the Upanishads which he was editing with Shri Purhoit Swami. He acknowledged that much of the Swami's philosophy combined with the Irish traditional material can be found in the wild ballad rhythm in which the play is written, as did much of Yeats's own mystical system. Yeats conceived the piece in the tragi-comic manner, as he had The Player Queen two decades earlier. However, when the Abbey Theatre decided, probably because of its outspoken eroticism, not to produce the play, Yeats expressed relief, and wrote to Dorothy Wellesley, 'I am no longer fit for riots and I thought a bad riot almost certain'. The Herne's Egg was not revised by Yeats and, as he has left it is a treatment for a piece that, had it achieved production, he would certainly have extensively revised.

Purgatory, the last of Yeats's plays to be staged in his lifetime, is a perfect little piece of theatre. It uses, in a new way, the 'dreaming back' device which he adapted from the Noh, and in its writing is so spare and simple that it is the play from all of Yeats's twenty five or so that I feel will continue in the repertoire of international theatre. Purgatory can be successfully played in any of several theatrical conventions from the realistic to the abstract form of his own dance plays. It is the prelude to Yeats's dramatic testament, bringing, as he wrote 'all back to syntax that is for ear alone'. Into its writing he put 'my own conviction about this world and the next' in presenting the collapse of the Ireland of the Big House, and his suspicion that the weaker and more sinister traits of the old regime could remain equally sinister in the new Ireland, and perpetuate ancient wrongs.
Purgatory was staged at the Abbey in August 1938 and at the first night he spoke for the last time from the stage of the theatre he had helped to found. 'I have embodied my thoughts about this life and the next in my play', he said, and then retired, but his final masterwork for theatre was yet to come. By mid-October he had drafted The Death of Cuchulain and wrote to Ethel Mannin,

I am writing a play on the death of Cuchulain, an episode or two from the old epic. My 'private philosophy' is there but there must be no sign of it; all must be like an old faery tale.

And, waiting for his end, he went on to clothe the skeleton of his 'private philosophy' with layers of deep dramatic mystery and so round off the epic that had occupied him for half a century. In this last play he widened the scope of his 'accomplishment' to accommodate idioms from the various forms of theatre in which he had worked. Characters return from his earlier plays, Cuchulain, Eithne, Aoife, Emer and the crow-headed goddess, types as 'Old Man' all appear. The removal of the inessential, for which Yeats had striven all his life, is complete as 'a bare stage of any period' is presented to the audience and the old man, 'looking like something out of mythology' enters. He speaks:

I have been asked to produce a play called The Death of Cuchulain.

He is the producer, and here I believe, Yeats pays a tribute to his long time friends and associate, Gordon Craig,

out of fashion and out of date like the antiquated romantic stuff the thing is made of. I am so old that I have forgotten the name of my father and mother, unless I am, as I claim, the son of Talma.

In Talma, the revolutionary, the reformer of speech, of costume, of acting style, Yeats echoes the lifelong devotion of Craig to all the arts of the theatre. Craig, son of Ellen Terry and of Edward Godwin the architect, stage designer and producer at Todhunter's experimental theatre in Bedford Park a half century before, 'wrote certain guiding principles on a bit of newspaper' in his On the Art of the Theatre and several later books and in his journal The Mask to which Yeats contributed some of his own 'guiding principles'.

The play is 'the last of a series'. Yeats acknowledges that his statement of the epic cycle for the modern stage must end with this
piece, which has echoes of the plays that have preceded it in the series. It has a dancer, not one as ‘painted by Degas’ but

the tragi-comedian dancer, the tragic dancer, upon the same neck love and loathing, life and death.

Such a dancer perhaps as Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller’s protégé, Craig’s mistress might be the one to convey the tragic ecstasies of the play. And for music Yeats returns to ‘the music of the beggar-man, Homer’s music’ performed by a singer, a piper and a drummer, ‘picked up here and there about the streets’. They introduce the play, its action, dance and dialogue, and accompany the final ballad which, on the face of it is a good Irish street song but here, at the very end of his final play, Yeats still strikes the echoing gong and his special images surface but do not disturb the public nature of the piece which the harlot sings to the beggar man, returning the action to our own time, Ireland after the revolution, Patrick Pearse and Cuchulain merged,

No body like his body
Has modern woman borne,
But an old man looking back on life
Imagines it in scorn.
A statue’s there to mark the place
By Oliver Sheppard done.
So ends the tale that the harlot
Sang to the beggar-man.

At the end he realised that his theatre of the imagination was but part of his great gift to Ireland. He had created a fine native drama for his country and established a national theatre to play it, which had achieved world fame, he had learned and practised fine stagecraft, had managed the business of the venture, and all the time worked at his own ‘accomplishment’. In his last year he wrote in On the Boiler, paying tribute to those who had been part of his adventure in theatre,

I say to myself, I have had greater luck than any other modern English-speaking dramatist; I have aimed at tragic ecstasy and here and there in my own work and in the work of my friends I have seen it greatly played.
Harmonies

Seamus of the Smart Suit, box player, made signals to us across the grass tussocks and graves the day we all came down from Cork to commemorate our musical friend.

By Gobnait’s sculpted lump— a slab of a woman on a frieze of stone buds and the locked bodies of bees—he struggled in his nose with English, showing the Holy Stations and instructing with rigid finger and embarrassed snorts, his box squeezed shut back in the house with Mairtín’s pipes and the pair of fiddles, the same instruments, ranging together in natural sweetness, with a many-sounded and single voice, that gave Johannes Scotus— Eriugena, and instructing the known world—his harmonious certainty: that the world’s parts, ill-fitted in their stresses and their pains, will combine at last in polyphonic sweet-breathing union and all created Nature ascend like joined angels, limbs and bodies departing the touch of Earth static in a dance of return, all Mankind gathered stunned at the world’s edge silent in a choir of understanding.

The Furnace

Imperishable creatures
returning into God's light.
A resurrection, not a vanishing.

Intensifying, as iron
melts in the furnace
– intensified into flowing fire,
aching for a containing Shape.
Eriugena's notion matching
my half-baked, bodily own,

who have consigned
my designing will stonily
to your flames

and will turn again toward the same furnace
that melted the union of our will
to ineffable zero

how many times in its radiant clasp
(a cancellation
certainly speechless for a minute or two)

in token of the Union and the Light.
Until gender returned
and we were made two again

Male and Female
in punishment for Man's will
and reminded of our Fall.

In token of which
I plant this dry kiss
in your rain-wet hair.
Thomas Street 1803

After the engraving by George Cruikshank

Lord Kilwarden, genuflected
prim and upset outside his carriage door,
thrown back rhetorical
among a pack of hatted simians,
their snouted malice gathered
into the pike-point entering his front.

His two coachmen
picked, like his horses, from a finer breed
register extremes of shocked distress.

Somewhere a nephew,
Mr Richard Wolfe, is fallen
and spilling his share of blood and matter.

From a non-contemporary nationalist
artist's impression

And Robert Emmett on the scaffold high,
as close as possible to the site of the outrage,
is dropped from his brief height
into a grove of redcoats
mounted with their rumps
toward a horrified populace.

The torch of friendship and the lamp of life
extinguished, his race finished,
the idol of his soul offered up,
sacrificed on the altar of truth and liberty,
awaiting the cold honours of the grave,
requiring only the charity of silence,
he has done.
The sentence pronounced in the usual form,
he has bowed and retired.

The pasty head is separated and brandished aloft,
the dead forehead with the black wet lock
turned toward the Fountain.
When He was barely five
Jesus, the Son of God,
blessed twelve water puddles
He moulded out of clay.

He made a dozen birds
- the kind we call the sparrow -
He made them on the Sabbath,
perfect, out of clay.

A Jew there criticized Him
- Jesus, the Son of God! -
and to His father Joseph
took him by the hand.

'Joseph, correct your son,
he has committed wrong.
He made clay shapes of birds
upon the Sabbath day.'

Jesus clapped His palms,
His little voice was heard.
Before their eyes - a miracle -
the little birds flew off.

The sweet, beloved voice was heard
from the mouth of Jesus pure:
'So they will know who made you
off with you to your homes.'

A man who was there told everyone
the wonderful affair
and overhead they all could hear
the singing of the birds.
ELEVENTH CENTURY

ANONYMOUS

Eve am I, great Adam's wife.
I wronged Jesus long ago.
I stole Heaven from my kin.
It is I should hang upon the Tree.

I had a royal house to rule
but evil choice has brought me shame.
An evil crime has withered me.
My hand, alas, it is unclean.

I it was that plucked the apple.
It overcame my greedy will.
As long as womankind shall live
they will not lose their foolishness.

No ice anywhere would there be
nor winter bright with all its blasts.
There'd be no Hell, there'd be no grief,
there'd be no terror, but for me.

ANONYMOUS

Praise of God

It is senseless for any man
to cease in the praise of God.
The birds, they never cease
and their souls are only air.
GEARÓID IARLA MAC GEARAILT –
‘GERALD THE EARL’ FITZGERALD
d. 1398

Woe to him who slanders women.
Scorning them is no right thing.
All the blame they've ever had
is undeserved, of that I'm sure.

Sweet their speech and neat their voices.
They are a sort I dearly love.
Woe to the reckless who revile them.
Woe to him who slanders women.

Treason, killing, they won't commit
nor any loathsome, hateful thing.
Church or bell they won't profane.
Woe to him who slanders women.

But for women we would have,
for certain, neither kings nor prelates,
prophets mighty, free from fault.
Woe to him who slanders women.

They are the victims of their hearts.
They love a sound and slender man
– not soon do they dislike the same.
Woe to him who slanders women.

Ancient persons, stout and grey,
they will not choose for company,
but choose a juicy branch, though poor.
Woe to him who slanders women!
Flowers

I
Carnac

Majesty may not go unaccompanied.
In the crevice of a rock at Carnac
I found a small blue flower – a harebell.
Fed by flying dust and rain it flourished in its pocket of dour granite;
a child clutching a giant’s arm.

II
Rocamadour

A gold medallion graces her dark neck

The line of the body a sturdy promontory

warmed & hollowed by tidal centuries

to hold a solemn child already man, already god

a flower crevice-lodged under a cliff of wood.
Knockmany

You do not forget
and I always come back.
Stepping from the car
outside Clogher, I saw
a brilliant rainbow
lifting its prismatic arch
across Knockmany Hill
as in a healing dream
in savage Chicago. It
shone both a secret
and a sacrament, a promise
and its fulfilment
I still live by it.

(Hans) Baldung

I saw a tiny Christ
caper on the cross

silent as a salamander
writhing in fire. Or

a soldier triumphant
when the battle’s lost.

Wine burst from
his body’s grapeskin:

‘The suffering you see
is our daily mystery

so follow my body
as it sings silently

– a lantern, a ladder,
a window, a pathway –

of pain calcined away
in a dance of ecstasy.’
The Hill of Silence

I
From the platform
of large raised stones
lines appear to lead us
along the hillside
bog tufts softening
beneath each step
bracken and briar
restraining our march
clawing us back, slowing
us to perception's pace

II
A small animal halts,
starts, leaps away
and a lark begins
its dizzy, singing climb
towards the upper skies
and now another stone appears
ancient, looming, mossed
long ago placed,
lifted to be a signpost
along the old path.

III
Let us climb further.
As one thought leads
to another, so one lich-
ened snout of stone
still leads one on,
beckons to a final one.
Under its raised slab
thin trickles of water
gather to a shallow pool
in which the head stone
mirrors, and rears
to regard its shadow self
& a diligent spider weaves
a trembling, silver web
a skien of terrible delicacy
swaying to the wind's touch
a fragile silken scarf
a veined translucent leaf.

This is the slope of loneliness,
This is the hill of silence,
This is the winds' fortress,
Our world's polestar,
A stony patience.

We have reached a shelf
that surveys the valley
on those plains below
a battle flowed and ebbed
and the gored, spent warrior
was ferried up here
where water and herbs
might staunch his wounds.
Let us also lay ourselves
down in this silence
let us also be healed
wounds closed, senses cleansed
as over our bowed heads
the mad larks multiply
needles stabbing the sky
in an ecstasy of stitching fury
against the blue void,
while from clump and tuft,
cranny and cleft, soft footed,
curious, the animals gather around.

Signs and Wonders
for Robert

The time has come: tomorrow I drive back, the day after you leave for your island. When I ask you to accompany me you rise without question. We walk down the avenue towards the mountain lake. There are a few stars out, including a ruddy Venus, and the moon casts a faint glow over dark water.

Suddenly, over the cliff face, a star appears. We both notice it at the same time, but say nothing. As we watch, it climbs until it reaches a mid-point, a zenith, where our looks meet. Then it seems to hover, as it were waiting. 'Do you see it' I say, softly. You nod — almost abruptly — 'of course'.

Could it be a helicopter, a climber or hunter with a torch, a lantern? There is a great stillness in the air, broken only by the wash of the lake. Finally, we turn back towards the house, towards your farewell party. Incredibly, the light starts to follow, moving along the top of the cliff,
still with that slight up and down motion, a sway or glide, like a balloon bouncing. But the shape is not round, but pointed, six pointed, two triangles superimposed and shining.

The gravel grinds under our feet as we reach the main door. Before we go back into light and talk, we turn together to watch the flickering presence of the star. 'What do you think it is?' I ask. 'I don't think one is meant to ask' you rebuke me, gently, 'but it is friendly'. Planet, weather balloon, satellite or shooting star, as we open the door it disappears, suddenly as it came, plummeting out of sight, down the river gorge. Around the fire in the main room we are greeted by everyone, assembled.

Michaël

A sword clangs in the air,
An archangel is standing there.
A sign on his shield,
The sign of renewal,
Virile thrust of will.

Flowing beneath him
A dragon form, with all
The coiling langour of summer,
An odour of sulphur,
A procession of glowworms
In a burning stream.

Between, a shooting star,
A flaming meteor, the hammer
Of an iron sword being forged,
To subdue, to control
The unfolding dragon.

Over our century
Michael broods, our angel
Come to guide, not rule,
Watching with terrible pity
As the man created dragon
Extends the glowing city.
Hindustani Music: an Inward Journey

SHEILA DHAR

The Indian word for music is sangeet, which means 'bringing it all together and expressing it'. The 'all' that is brought together is body, mind and spirit. Ideally, the Indian musician sets out to experience the infinite and to share his striving with the listener. The traditional goal of all spiritual seeking in India has been to identify with and merge into the vastness of the eternal being. This attitude is central to the practice of music as to most traditional arts in India. The preoccupation of the traditional Hindustani musician is predominantly spiritual in the sense that he must first find and activate the inner source, the centre of his being, the bindu within himself where he rings most true and then draw it out with his life-breath, prana, and offer it in an expression of sound. To transcend the human condition, a concern implicit in all art, tradition exhorts the Indian musician to plunge inwards, to trust depth and intensity rather than range and variety.

In the music of both Northern and Southern India, the shadaja* or the tonic is the musical bindu which symbolises eternal being. It is the key which admits the listening ear to the meaning of the music. For the performer, the shadaja could be located at whatever pitch the voice or instrument is most comfortable, but once established it must remain the same for the entire duration of the music and may not be changed even between pieces. The tanpura, the stringed drone which invariably accompanies Indian music, continuously offers the sound of the shadaja more commonly called Kharaja or sa. The bowed sarangi which is the traditional instrument of vocal accompaniment and the tabla or the right hand drum also echo the sa. Both the performer and the listener must identify with this tonic for the music to be intelligible because in this system a tone acquires musical meaning only when heard as an interval in relation to the sa. It is this sa that all aspirants must cultivate with assiduous concentration. Gurus often forbid their

* The term shadaja literally means 'born of the six (notes)'. The implication is that each note in the scale aspires to the sa or do.
charges to sing or play any other note until they have ‘found’ and mastered their true sa. It is almost a cliché amongst Hindustani musicians that all music lies in the womb of the sa. Every musician starts the day with Kharaj bharna, a practice of embodying and exploring the sa. In Hindustani classical music all melodic lines are seen as an extension of the sa and draw their being and energy from it. The music unfolds when the reposeful but dominant tonic nucleus of the sa becomes charged through concentration and intensity and begins to emit musical rays. These rays and lines strain away from the sa and return to rest in it, thus creating pulsing patterns of tension and release.

Hindustani musicians undergo rigorous training and possess incredible skill and control. However, the central object of their labours is not the cultivation of a ‘beautiful’ tone but the development of an almost limitless capability in articulation. The physical sound of the music is, in ideal circumstances, only a medium and not the end product. To the connoisseur, a voice is only as beautiful as what it conveys. The physical body of the music is to the musician what a writing tool is to the poet. The listener is trained to tune in to the highly charged state of consciousness of the performer rather than to the physical condition of the sound that carries the music. Consequently, Indian ears are somewhat indifferent to the outer perfection of musical sound. Some of the most revered musicians have been and are people in their seventies. Their glory is in the truth of their experience and though their voices might have lost superficial lustre, the purity of their intention still shines through and is always the focus of attention for the initiated listener.

The human voice is considered to be the supreme instrument and the major musical tradition is embodied in a great variety of vocal styles and forms. Most stringed and wind instruments recall some quality or aspect of the voice. The singing voice in Indian music is the earthy, unbeautified voice of everyday speech, not a musical escape from it. All music in the traditional mode adopts the characteristics of intimate conversation. Occasional disturbances like the clearing of the throat or the pause for retuning are therefore no disasters and take nothing away from the poignancy of the whole.

Raga is a central concept in all Indian music. It is a Sanskrit term which literally means passion, colour and attachment, something that
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The raga has ‘the effect of colouring the hearts of men’. There is an implied value here of an intensity, a singleness of colour – not a rainbow – that the performer must create anew to suffuse ‘the hearts of men’ with. Most of the raga which inhabit the world of today’s musician are highly developed and grammatized versions of the primitive melodies of the various tribal and folk cultures of the country. Each raga is an incipient melodic idea which uses at least five tones of the octave. Each has strict rules of ascent and descent, prescribed resting places, characteristic phrases and a distinct ethos of its own. Each is assigned to a particular time of day or season and is invested with the power to evoke a state or feeling related to both the human condition and to nature. The raga cycle starts even before daybreak. There are pre-dawn ragas like Lalit which are associated with the meeting of darkness and light. All major morning ragas such as Bhairav and Todi are sombre and devotional, for morning is a time for prayer and meditation. As the light gets stronger, more luminous ragas such as Jaunpuri, and Bilawal enter the field. The Sarang family of ragas, performed between midday and afternoon are full of sunlight and emit a ‘shimmering, leafy green colour’. The late afternoon ragas, like Multani and Patdeep, are restless, intense with heat and seem to speak of a time when the day’s activity is at its peak. As the sun sets, the sedate and tranquil evening ragas take over. Most members of the Kalyan family of ragas belong to this time of calm introspection and radiate a deep serenity. Between sunset and late night lie light, lyrical and romantic ragas such as Des, Tilang and Khamaj. Ragas that are performed deep into the night, for example, Darbari, Kanhara and Malkaus, are profoundly searching creations, full of magic, mystery and depth. Additionally, there are ragas for the rainy season, for the springtime and for the harvest festival of Holi. Today, there are no more than a hundred ragas in the collective repertoire of the Hindustani musician. These are survivals from the thousands that were introduced at one stage or another through permissible permutations and combinations within the octave which recognise twelve tones and ten microtones.

To the conditioned ear, each phrase of one of these ragas is like a limb that reveals the identity of the whole being and has the power to evoke in the listener its entire image. It is significant that the sequential order of tones in a melodic line does not signify anything in itself. Its expression and effect depend on its dynamics – on how it swerves
towards or away from a tone or from silence; how it curves, dives, wafts, spirals, trails or plummets; on where it gathers its greatest weight and luminosity and on its grain and texture. Two entirely different ragas quite often have the same sequence of tones. It is the sculpting of the melodic line connecting the sequence that distinguishes one from the other, just as the usage of a word and the tone of voice in which it is spoken are what determine its exact meaning in a particular instance.

In Hindustani music, a note is not conceived of as a fixed point but an area through which a melodic line passes. The more developed a musician's sensibility and concentration, the more extensive this area becomes. It is these 'areas' that the musician shapes with delicate nuances and elaborate graces in the course of his extempore exploration of the raga. Obviously this kind of music cannot be captured in its entirety in a written score. Even if a suitable system of recording it in writing could be evolved, it would have limited relevances to the practice of the art, in the same way in which the art of conversation would cease to be itself if it resorted to predetermined sentences. The way to enter the music is by attentively following the moving melodic line whose many subtle and dynamic forms of movement etch shapes far more detailed and intricate than in most musics.

The musical vocabulary of intervals is a shared heritage familiar even to the uninitiated. Each note in the scale when heard with the tonic yields, as a word does in language, a colour and emotional charge. For instance, one might say arbitrarily that the perfect fifth is red, positive, strong; that the third is sky blue, tranquil and lucid, and that the flat* third or sixth is grey, introspective and plaintive, and so on. This sense of the inherent emotional content of intervals is a common language understood in general terms by all who share the regional culture of which this system of music is a product, just as those who are not themselves painters might still react to an array of primary colours. The skilled musician uses these colours, leading his audiences into delicately shaded areas, carrying them all through the creative process, line by line, stroke by stroke, colour by colour - until he has infused into them the portrait of the raga as he conceives of it at that point in time.

* The Indian equivalent for 'flat' is komal which means 'delicate'.
The ancient music of India had been fed from the earliest times by diverse streams, including the religious, the folk, the tribal and the courtly. Around the twelfth century, it began to receive a fresh infusion, the gifts of Persian elegance and sufic ecstasy. By the fifteenth century, the musical idiom that we associate with Hindustani music today had taken distinct shape. The most widely practised classical form of the Hindustani system is the Khayal, a Persian term loosely meaning 'idea' or 'flight of the imagination'. The Khayal tradition abounds in elaborate compositions or songs in which the composer's interpretation of a raga is encased in suitable words. These are not compositions in the Western sense and allow far greater latitude to the performer.

If the musician is a painter, let us say, and the chosen raga the person he wishes to paint, the Khayal 'composition' is the sketch of an earlier musician's view of this person. The performer chooses it from amongst many, because it is in sympathy with his own vision at that time. If he were to sing or play the same raga on five different occasions, his renderings would be comparable to five original paintings of the same subject, not five copies of the same work.

Thus the Khayal composition is primarily a musical conception, clothed in suitable words that physically synchronise with the dynamic of the melodic line or enhance it. The presentation of a Khayal is not the rendering of a song, for here it is not the words that are set to music but almost a reverse process. An extremist view of the Hindustani tradition is that music speaks of nothing but itself and is not concerned with the meaning of the words that accompany, embellish or assist it. Some less rigorous forms such as Thumri, Dadra and Bhajan, where the music is used to project the word content of the song, are exceptions to this. The wealth and variety of vowels and consonants provided by the words of the Khayal enter the music primarily as raw material for shaping sound and only secondarily as meaning. In a tradition where music is passed on orally, this packaging of a composition in poetry is an invaluable aid. It helps ready identification of the composition, preserves the original melodic lines in tight fitting moulds and reduces greatly the risk of distortion in transmission from teacher to pupil. Generally speaking, the long vowel encases the graceful arc of the meend or glide so characteristic of Hindustani music, while the hard consonants act as anchors. Nasal,
sibilant and aspirated sounds are also used with telling effect and great skill to sculpt the musical line and explore tonal possibilities.

The khayal is set in a known tala or rhythmic arrangement of beats in a cyclic manner. Each rhythmic cycle is divided into sections which may or may not be equal. It is complete in itself and continues to repeat itself faithfully throughout the performance of a particular khayal. As the melodic lines strain away from the sa and return to it, so the beats of a tala emanate from the sam, the first beat of the cycle which carries the greatest emphasis and travel in a descending arc to the khali (empty), at which point the rhythm gathers momentum again to ascend and culminate in the sam. The tala sets up an elaborate, pulsing rhythmic pattern which the musician uses as a sort of frame to weave his melodic threads on. The sam is both the beginning and the end of the cycle; and commands special attention, as the drum stroke here coincides with a melodic climax in the khayal composition, creating each time a burst of musical energy, a sense of arriving. This repetitive musical travelling and arriving generates a tension and dynamic characteristic of Hindustani music.

Every sound made on the drums is represented by onomatopoeic syllables such as dha, na, ti, dhage, tirakita. A drummer could beat out a rhythmic cycle with the intended accents simply by listening to the teacher recite the theka, or the verbal mnemonics of the tala. There are about twelve talas in slow, medium or fast tempos, that are commonly used today. The talas of Hindustani music are extraordinarily expressive and each could be said to have a temperament (mizaj) which stems not so much from the tempo as from the internal arrangement of the beats. Talas of very fast tempo, for instance the drut teental, could be much more restrained and 'classical' than the slower, dadra which has a lighter more languorous intention. Among practitioners of Hindustani music, the movement of talas is often likened to that of elephants, birds, horses or swans. In an actual performance, the singer first 'awakens' the sa, then in wordless syllables and in free rhythm draws some evocative melodic lines to usher in the raga in which the khayal is set. This is the crucial alaap part, the foundation on which everything else will rest. He then begins the composition, guiding the drummer as to the intended tempo and indicating where he must come in with the first stroke or sam of the tala. After the first cue, the tabla player needs no further direction, only the most
sensitive listening so that the beat is in sympathy with the musical intention and provides an unobtrusive setting.

After the khayal composition has been outlined, the performer develops the raga in the manner of a pyramid, often using the suggestions implicit in the composition as a model for the proliferating lines. He explores and cultivates the lower regions of the scale in great depth in slow tempo and then rises in the scale of the raga, gradually increasing the tempo. The nature of the expression that develops vertically as it were, is an intensification, a gradual accumulation of meaning, rather than an extended statement. However, it still demands to be heard as a totality, for a part of it would be as meaningless as a truncated sentence. The first sounding of the upper octave of the tonic or sa, is a moment of great excitement, for only at this point is the persona of the raga finally laid bare. This process could have taken an hour or more.

The music is never 'prepared' beforehand and rigidly presented but rather a live communication in which the listener contributes to the reality of each moment. The ideal of the singer is to share with the listener all phases of the creative process, much like an idea developed in extempore speech. The live chamber concert would therefore be its best chance. The portrait of the raga, presented by the musician is in a sense the product of the attention of all those present to its unfolding. This is quite different from the Western composer or the painter whose work is undertaken in relative isolation.

In raga development, the musician envisions a heightened state of being through its portraiture in the lines of the raga. The lines, colours, and feelings offered by the raga create a field of awareness in which the listener can share in the intended evocation. What the listeners hear and acknowledge is the validation of what the singer is discovering in the moment. This live chemistry of participation is a vital factor in traditional performances where the performer is the leader and the listener, the follower. Ideally, both experience the full portrait in sound simultaneously.

The slow khayal is usually followed by one or two faster-paced arrangements in the same raga. Here the melodic lines already etched in the slow development are stressed and ornamented with flourishes and fast runs. This part of the performance is a sort of celebration of what the music has already said and is specially prized by those who
enjoy displays of virtuosity. But it is an old saying often used by ustad s for course-correction that when the first run (taan) enters, the raga departs.

The Hindustani musician uses the highly charged and highly evolved traditional idiom of the interval to make his own statement. Because his listener is responsive to if not familiar with this idiom, it offers the fantastic possibility of saying the unsayable in a language that is known and shared. The language of raga ensures that the most singular utterance, the subtlest flash of evanescent creativity will become articulate in a recognizable form so that it can be retained in the mind of both creator and listener.

Music can and is, of course, made at many levels. There is greater demand for and therefore greater abundance of the musical product with ready appeal. What makes such music unacceptable to the connoisseur is not its elementary character – for the greatest music can be extremely simple – but the fact that the musician is not seriously involved with a vision and is only making a studied effort to simulate it. What is significant here is that even in this simulation he acknowledges by taking the trouble to imitate it, the essentially spiritual character of Indian music.

The unbroken melodic line of the sung breath is the script of this music and the career of this line is intended to be the focus of attention at all times. That is to say there must be only one sound at any given moment. The wealth of other sounds – the drone of the tanpura strings sounding the sa and other dominant notes of the raga, the accompanying sarangi or harmonium and the two drums – seem to contradict this, but the fact is that they are only a setting for the travelling melodic lines, echoing it, accenting it, holding it for the performer or ornamenting it. No sounds used as accompaniment are intended to be heard independently.

As there can be many styles of calligraphy so there are a number of styles in which the melodic line can be drawn on the canvas of silence, as it were. These styles of Hindustani classical music are called gharanas, and function like closed guilds.

Gharana literally means ‘family’ in the sense of lineage. The personal style, musical attitudes and predispositions of an acknowledged master are what give a gharana its distinctly recognizable melodic movement and dialect.
The transmission of traditional music from master to disciple is a very serious business in India. Sometimes, the ceremonies formalizing the initiation of a disciple can be as elaborate as a wedding. There are religious rites that sanctify the event in the presence of the entire musical community, followed by a performance by the disciple whose acceptance is being celebrated. Suitable offerings are made to the master and there is much feasting. Seena dar seena, from breast to breast, is a commonly used phrase in this context. What the ustad (master) passes on to the shagird (disciple) is the whole experience of his inner musical self, his entire 'quality'. Therefore nothing less than total commitment on the part of the pupil is acceptable. He has to be a vehicle that is fit to receive, cherish and perpetuate the life and work of a great musical mind. The teaching is oral and very often secretive. The father teaches the son, the son-in-law or the deserving pupil who has proved himself trustworthy in every sense. The ustad-shagird link sets up a continuity of extraordinary warmth which is nourished by the absence of conservative teaching aids. For an 'outsider' to be accepted by a master as a disciple is rare, an overwhelming and remarkable thing which happens only to the fortunate few. Reverence, humility and the aspiration to merge with something bigger than oneself are such an integral part of the imbibing process that they almost enter the music as values, along with the values of purity and restraint. The highest compliment for an Indian musician is to be told that his work is reminiscent of the masters he admires and that he is a torch bearer. To most, this brings more satisfaction and fulfilment than being dubbed unique.

The outstanding khayal gharanas today are Gwalior, Kirana, Jaipur, Agra and Patiala, each named after the original place of residence of the ustad or family of ustads around whom closely guarded musical guilds grew and flourished. The Gwalior gharana is the oldest and links the formal structure and sacred intent of the Dhrupad with the more impersonal and introspective idiom of the Khayal. It is thus the precursor of all Khayal Gharanas, each of which adopted and developed those aspects of it which appealed to the genius of the progenitor of a particular gharana. The Kirana gharana traces delicate, three dimensional arcs, draws from silence deeply searching spirals and abhors sharp angles. It is truer of the Kirana musician than of any other that each 'place' in the scale of a raga is an area that must be
explored anew each time and brought to life in the living moment. This introspective approach is also reflected in their technique of raga development. The base of the edifice, that is the sa and the mandra saptak (the lower octave) claim the greatest attention. Once the foundation is laid, the angles of the rising structure are gently indicated while the apex is often left to be achieved in the mind of the listener, in deference to the idea that something is exquisite as the portrait of a state of being cannot be completed by a mere human. The Kirana temperament prefers suggestion to statement, restraint to overflow and repose to gaiety.

The Agra gharana, affectionately called the Rangila or colourful gharana, uses bold, pulsing strokes and is far more extrovert in intention. The compositions tend to be in faster tempo and their powerful musical persuasion leans heavily on explicit rhythmic interplay.

The Jaipur gharana is known for its sharply etched filigree of alankars or note patterns. In a traditional rendering, the whole raga is outlined at the outset in a few sharp strokes and then filled in, detailed and ornamented like a miniature painting.

The characteristics of the dialect and style of each gharana originate in the personalities of the individuals who founded them. Even though the faithful preservation of these characteristics is applauded by purists today, with the greater access provided by electronic aids and increased physical mobility, there is much more exchange and contact, acknowledged and unacknowledged, between the gharanas and many examples of borrowing and mixing are audible on concert stages in India.

One of the most remarkable things about traditional Hindustani music is the co-existence in its practice of the most rigorous discipline and a degree of freedom that is truly astonishing. The manifold disciplines are rigid and uncomprising: the rules of the raga, the time of the day, the intention of the composition, the confining frame of the tala, the prescribed form of presentation, faithfulness to the vani or style of utterance. These and many other considerations bind the musician, but at the same time tradition offers him extraordinary freedom to express his being.

He is free to explore the areas in between the rigid 'notes' of the keyboard and free from objective time. The raga performance is an
evocation that aspires to break free of time by itself becoming a kind of time, with a breath and movement of its own. The unfolding of a raga is an act of persuasion and the time it takes is a purely subjective matter for both the musician and the listener. It is the attention of the listener, mobilised by an abundance of shared conditions, which can help this experience come to life.

Bengali ritual painting (alpona) for the festival of the Goddess Lakshmi, who is represented by her jewels, crown and the print of her feet. (From Art et Anatomie Hindous, Abanindra Nath Tagore, tr. Andrée Karpelès, Editions Bossard, Paris, 1921).
Artist unknown: Anthology: Mountains and Streams, Fars, Persia, 1398. Museum of Turkish & Islamic Art, Istanbul
Nature as Theophany

DAVID MITCHELL

What we call the Western venture is the application of the intelligence to the scientific investigation of a nature that has been desacralized, which must be violated in order to find out its laws and to subject its forces to the human will. It has brought us to where we are now: a prodigious technical impetus which has transformed the conditions of our life; there's no denying the whole world has been benefited by it. But at the same time also, it has brought us to a situation which we shall call antidemiurgic, in the sense in which it is the negation of the creative work, since it puts earthly humanity into a position of destroying, of annihilating his 'habitaculum,' this Earth from which it takes its name and its subsistence. A work of nothingness and of death which must be looked in the face if it is to be denounced, in the way in which the sages of ancient Persia, who were the first if not the only ones to do so, looked into the eyes of the atrocious Ahriman.¹

Henry Corbin

During the past few decades, much attention has been focused on the science of ecology. Research has been carried out and the results have appeared in scientific treatises as well as in popularized versions of these treatises, which, in turn, have engendered various 'back to nature' movements. Unfortunately but perhaps inevitably, the motivations behind these movements are restricted to the biological level or to a rustic and rather insipid 'nature mysticism' with overtones of pantheism, and all for the want of a truly spiritual understanding of nature. What is urgently needed is what we are venturing to call an 'imaginal ecology' based on traditional metaphysical principles which are anchored neither in biology nor sentiment nor a degenerate occultism. The present brief essay is an attempt to move in the direction of such a metaphysic, drawing largely on the writings of Henry Corbin and the Iranian traditions.
Nature and the Active Imagination

It must be stated at the outset that the perception of nature by mystics has always been strangely ambivalent. At times, nature would seem to be antithetical to the Spirit, its elements often discordant, its beauties elusive, and its forces harsh and unyielding. This obvious fact is often overlooked by our latter-day nature mystics, who invariably revere nature ‘as it is’. On the other hand, traditional mystics have realized that corporeal nature does not always reflect the formal, not to mention spiritual, perfections of its archetypal counterparts. As Shaikh Abu’l-Qasim Khan Ibrahimi has written:

Indeed, they have shown that those universes resemble and correspond to this universe of ours, which is the world of sensory phenomena. However, there is a difference, in that our sensory universe is the universe of ephemeral accidental; in it, the deteriorization of forms and matters increases from day to day, from hour to hour; or rather, every minute some change for the worse takes place. ²

Corbin writes to the same effect:

. . . all the beauties of our terrestrial Earth are included in it (the imaginal world*), but in the subtle state, as pure light without an Ahrimanian shadow.³

And Rumi in his Mathnawi:

Kings lick the earth whereof the fair are made,
For God hath mingled in the dusty earth,
A draught of Beauty from his choicest cup.
'Tis that, fond lover – not these lips of clay –
Thou art kissing with a hundred ecstasies;
Think, then, what must it be when undefiled.

On other occasions, however, nature, at least in its ideal reflections, is transformed into the paragon of the mystic’s goal. This ambivalence is

* The imaginal world is ‘an intermediate universe, having its own existence – a world of symbol and archetypal images . . .’ in which spirits are corporealyzed and bodies spiritualized. (Avicenna and the Visionary Recital, p. 35). It is the world where the formless intelligibles of the spirit are epiphanized (but not incarnated) in forms which correspond to those of the sensory world and are perceived by the active imagination, in an intermediate world of subtle matter between these pure intelligibles and the corporeal world.
evident in the works of many poets and mystics. Wordsworth, in his *Intimations of Immortality* expresses precisely this feeling, where he reminisces about a transfigured nature ‘apparelled in celestial light,’ while at the same time admitting ‘that there hath passed away a glory from the earth’. Wordsworth seems to suggest that there are, in fact, two natures – the first perceived by the youth who is ‘nature’s priest’ and the second experienced by the man in the ‘light of common day’.  

In the latter case, the mystic is experiencing nature ‘in the raw,’ that is, physical nature as it presents itself to the corporeal senses and to the ordinary thoughts and emotions arising from this mode of perception. This is probably how the average ecologist would encounter it. In the former situation, what is witnessed is a transfigured nature, a nature transparent to the spiritual states it ‘symbolizes with.’ As Corbin explains:

> Geographical features, mountains for instance, are here no longer merely physical features; they have a significance for the soul; they are psychocosmic aspects. The events that take place there consist in the very seeing of these aspects; they are psychic events.  

This mode of perception was vividly described in symbolic language by Ibn ‘Arabi:

> In that Earth there are gardens, paradises, animals, minerals – God alone can know how many. Now, everything that is to be found on that Earth . . . is alive and speaks, has a life analogous to that of every living being endowed with thought and speech . . . every stone, every tree, every village . . . he may speak with . . . as a man converses with a companion.  

These words are echoed, almost verbatim, by Blake:

> . . . A Rock, a Cloud, a Mountain  
> Were now not Vocal as in Climes of happy Eternity,  
> Where the lamb replies to the infant voice, & the lion to the man of years  
> Giving them sweet instructions; where the Cloud, the River & the Field  
> Talk with the husbandman & shepherd.
When Ibn 'Arabi and Blake describe how everything 'speaks', it goes without saying that they do not imply that a rock, for example, possesses a mouth and larynx and carries on a 'conversation' with the visionary, but that a spiritually active imagination itself becomes the new 'field' where such theophanic perception occurs. To use another analogy, the ordinary perception of nature could be compared to viewing a page of script in an unfamiliar alphabet. Perception by the active imagination would amount to understanding the language in question. In the former case, one would perceive only an abstract pattern of lines and dots. In the latter, these characters would not be abolished but 'opened up' to the meanings they reflect. Of course, in many ways, this comparison is inadequate, for the ineffable and multidimensional character of the mystical experience prevents it from being describable in any language. It is for this very reason that we prefer the analogy of music (see section III below). In this 'opening up' each object, each event and each scene in nature radiates consciousness — a consciousness that inevitably 'registers' in the consciousness of the mystic. From then on, every form, every sound, and every scent emanates a particular spiritual nuance, a particular spiritual tonality, infinitely subtle and complex, that emerges from its transparency and surrounds it like an aura. These auras, being essentially suprarational (but not irrational), cannot in any way be equated with ordinary rational concepts, but, as we have said, are more akin to the way we apprehend 'music' from sound.

This experience is by no means comparable to a 'hallucination,' drug-induced or otherwise. According to reports, drug-users undergo, for the most part, bizarre sensory distortions and mental vagaries with no influx or control from the intelligible worlds. Since the imaginal worlds are precisely what conjoin the intelligible worlds to the formal worlds, the absence of the intelligible in the drug-user's so-called visions can only betray their subconscient, rather than supraconscient, origin. These hallucinations, therefore, are demonic counterfeits of that nature perceived by the spiritually active imagination.

The traditional mystic experiences through the senses rather than with them. As Corbin explains:

The active imagination thus induced will not produce some arbitrary, even lyrical, construction standing between us and
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'reality,' but will, on the contrary, function directly as a faculty and organ of knowledge just as real as – if not more real than – the sense organs.\(^9\)

Consider also Blake's words:

I would no more question my eye than I would question a window concerning a sight. I look through it, not with it.\(^10\)

In this interiorization of the senses, the primary organ of perception is the active imagination, or consciousness itself, again, not ordinary mundane consciousness, nor a consciousness debased with hallucinations, but a consciousness anchored in the imaginal world, which, as we have seen, conjoins the formal and intelligible, the latter protecting the former from hallucinations or whims of any kind. This fact has often been stressed by Corbin:

Imagination is thus solidly placed around the axis of two other cognitive functions: its own world symbolizes with the worlds to which the two other functions correspond (sensible cognition and intellective cognition). In other words, there is a type of control to protect imagination from straying and from reckless wastage.\(^11\)

The 'aura' mentioned above does not consist, for example, of a 'psychedelic' cloud of colour that a drug-user would perhaps see surrounding a particular form. The aura consists, rather, of consciousness itself which the genuine mystic can perceive precisely because his senses have been interiorized. As nature and the mystic are reciprocal entities in a single 'field of imagination', the relationship is circular: The visionary 'projects' his ta'wil,\(^12\) and the corresponding receptacles 'open up' and become transparent to their imaginal counterparts in the Malakut, these counterparts, in turn, 'projecting' themselves back into the consciousness of the visionary:

To say that one of our thoughts, sentiments, or desires is concretized in a form specific to the intermediate plane of Idea-Images of subtle matter, is the same as to meditate before a flower, a mountain, or a constellation in order to discover not what obscure and unconscious force they manifest, but what divine thought, flowering in the world of Spirits, is epiphanized, is 'at work' in them.\(^13\)
This event, of course, does not occur sequentially. It takes place instantaneously, outside of time, or rather, in the ‘vertical’ time of the Malakut. It is a ‘new creation’. To put it differently, we could say that ‘time’ in the Malakut is ‘eternity’ for the corporeal world, just as the ‘times’ of the planes above the Malakut are, in turn, ‘eternity’ for it. Form and sequence are not merely dissolved. Again and again one must return to the theme of transparency. In the Malakut, the indefinite and the temporal are not liberated through a dissolution but through an ‘apotheosis’, perceptible only to the active imagination. This apotheosis corresponds to the ‘coincidentia oppositorum’, where the finite becomes a window opening onto the infinite, or where the ‘face of light’ and the ‘black face’ are perceived simultaneously. The identical scenes, the same scenes witnessed by the ordinary observer, are thus interiorized by the mystic. And yet, paradoxically, this interiorization enables him to perceive them on a higher plane, outside the physical universe. This is not to suggest that there is an exact correspondence between the imaginal world and the physical world down to the last pebble on the path, but that the consciousness experienced by the mystic as a result of his contemplation of a particular earthly scene is ‘crystallized’ in whatever archetypal forms are appropriate to this particular state of consciousness, so that it can be re-experienced when he is no longer present at the respective terrestrial scene. This has profound implications for one’s posthumous development.

This new world, perpetually re-created, is a world of a spiritualized nature, an exalted nature, besides which its material counterparts as perceived by the corporeal senses appear as little more than corpses. Bereft of their auras (that is, the quintessential consciousness they radiate – indeed are ‘constructed’ of – in the Malakut), natural forms in the physical state as perceived by senses immanent to this state, appear mechanical and dull as compared to their originals in the archetypal world, where their ‘matter’ is the intelligible itself, embodying a beauty, joy, and felicity far more intense than anything that can possibly be experienced on earth. As Shaikh Ahmad Ahsa’i explains:

... the capacity to feel and enjoy is ... seventy times greater in this essential body than in the material body, because its enjoyment is both sensory and spiritual.
We might add that the ‘sensory’ aspect of this twofold enjoyment does not in any way imply a ‘supernatural sensuality’.

Nature and the Hierarchies of Being

This consciousness in nature that we have discussed cannot, under any circumstances, be assimilated to the ‘vital force’ worshipped by many primitives in their fertility rites, nor is it something altogether impersonal such as the Buddhist ‘sunyata’ (which corresponds to the ‘black light’ of the Iranian Sufis, or to the ‘cloud of unknowing’ described by Christian mystics). This consciousness is a transcendent angelic consciousness, and its theophanies, perceived by the active imagination, take place in the Malakut, which, as we have seen, conjoins the formal and the intelligible worlds. In fact, as we indicated above, it is the intelligible itself that constitutes the ‘matter’ of the Malakut. This conjunction is explained by Shaikh Ibrahimi:

What God’s Book and the prophets indicate is the existence of primordial or archetypal human bodies. They originate in their own world, the world of the Soul; as for their matter, it comes from the world of the Intelligence. . . . The second Treasury is the world of the Intelligence, which is the world of the ‘materia consubstantialis’, for the ‘materia prima’ of beings and things was created first, and afterwards their form.\textsuperscript{18}

Compare this with Corbin:

The ‘acts of light’ actualize their own receptacles which make the light visible. ‘Light without matter’ means here the light whose act actualizes its own matter. . . .\textsuperscript{19}

This ‘black light’ is nevertheless an indispensable element of any traditional spirituality, corresponding to mystical poverty and protecting the visionary from idolatry and anthropomorphism (‘assimilation’ as Corbin calls it) as, simultaneously, theophany shields him from agnosticism (‘evacuation’).\textsuperscript{20}

In terms of Mazdean angelology, this consciousness in nature is the consciousness of Spenta Armaiti, the Archangel of the Celestial Earth (Malakut). Through her emanations, or ‘daughters,’ she is intimately related to the individual mystic, though neither she nor her emanations are ‘personalities’ in the ordinary human sense. They unite personality and impersonality, poised on the fine line that passes
between ‘assimilation’ and ‘evacuation.’ They can be visualized as exalted human forms and symbolized by natural features, but their consciousness, omnipresent throughout the Celestial Earth, is not ‘localized’ in these features. As indicated in Section I, natural forms on the physical Earth are mirrors which reflect (often imperfectly) their imaginal counterparts on the Celestial Earth. The latter, in turn, are theophanies of the angelic entities which are epiphanized on this Earth, which itself epiphanizes the intelligible worlds, these, in turn, ascending to the ‘Deus Absconditus’ – the supreme limit. This brief analysis should leave no room for doubt as to the distance we are from pantheism, as Corbin has emphasized:

Spiritual bodies or entities are not in any world, nor in their world, in the same manner as a material body is in its place or may be contained in another body. On the contrary, their world is in them.  

It is indeed this consciousness that permits the perception of beings and things in their person – that is, as thought by a person – just as each Angel thinks its heaven and each heaven is the thought of an Angel, symbolizes with him.

As has been said, Spenta Armaiti and her emanations, as well as the other Archangels and their emanations, constitute a ‘world’, i.e. the Celestial Earth of the Malakut. Moreover, their symbols are transparent to each other and must not be considered as mutually exclusive. In other words, each theophany in the Malakut is really the entire Malakut in a different ‘frontal appearance.’ The emanations or ‘daughters’ mentioned above, composing a hierarchy in the Malakut lower than that of the Archangels, are, in this particular example, ‘reflections’ of Spenta Armaiti and derive their essence from her. These ‘reflections,’ as well as Spenta Armaiti herself and the other Archangels, are Divine Modalities, each mirrored in theophanies which in turn mirror their own Modality as well as those of the entire Pleroma:

So there is, among the Seven Archangels, a sort of ‘unio mystica,’ which makes the divine Heptad as different from the current ways of describing monotheism as from those referring to polytheism; we would do better to speak of a ‘kathenotheism,’ in the sense that each of the Figures in the Heptad can be meditated in turn as actualizing the totality of the relations common to the others.
Corbin presents a particularly striking example of this phenomenon:

In their turn, the art of gardens and the cultivation of a garden thus acquire the meaning of a liturgy and a mental actualization of a vision. In this art, flowers play the part of the ‘materia prima’ for alchemical meditation. This means mentally reconstituting Paradise, keeping company with heavenly beings; contemplation of the flowers which are their emblems evoke psychic reactions, which transmute the forms contemplated into energies corresponding to them; these psychic energies are finally dissolved into states of consciousness, into states of mental vision through which the heavenly Figures appear.

Islamic Iran presents a constellation of symbols that would be equally suitable in the context of our present discussion, but transposed to a higher octave. Especially notable is Khidr, the ‘green prophet’, who has attained the status of ‘puer aeternus’ through immersion in the ‘spring of life.’ He is sometimes identified by the Shi‘ites with the Imam of Resurrection. During his present ‘occultation’ he is believed to dwell on the ‘green island in the sea of whiteness’. At his epiphany, the ‘Religions of the Book’ will be liberated from the ‘winter’ of literalism, just as the advent of spring frees nature from its dormancy. Above all, we should mention Fatima, who, as daughter of the Prophet, is the earthly reflection of ‘Fatima the Resplendent’, herself the Soul, not of the Celestial Earth (Malakut) as is Spenta Armaiti, but of the Supracelestial Earth (Lahut). According to the Shi‘ites, this Pleroma of the Supreme Theophanies, the ‘Fourteen- Very-Pure’, is above both the Celestial Earth (Malakut) and the world of formless intelligibles (Jabarut).

Springtime, as it occurs in the deciduous forests of the northern temperate zone, is Nature’s supreme theophany, reflecting an Earth in the paradisal state, and taking the form of exalted and mysterious Personages. It is a season of luminous buds and blossoms enveloped in a pervasive sunlight. It is a time of rustling breezes that seem to originate over vast distances and are full of a spacious and penetrating sweetness that carries the ineffable fragrance of the Infinite:

Can we distinguish in the winter, as Nasir-e Khosraw says, between a living tree and a dead tree? Both, it is true, are materially there. But in one the sap flows secretly. In the other the sap does not flow, because its roots are dead. When the spring
comes — that is, the Imam of Resurrection — only the first will be covered with flowers and savorous fruits at his call. It is no indulgence in a mere literary reminiscence if the image of the Iranian philosopher suggests this thought of Balzac: ‘Resurrection is accomplished by the wind of heaven that sweeps the worlds. The Angel carried by the wind does not say: Arise ye dead! he says: Let the living arise!’

Unlike the dark and overgrown foliage of summer, when the forest is a realm of shadow, the foliage of spring is a net of jewels, a shimmering mosaic of pastel green, white, and honey. It is a season that calls to mind a passage in Faust:

An inconceivably sweet longing
Drove me to roam through woods and meadows free,
And with a thousand burning tears
I felt a world arise in me.

It is a curious fact that spring ignites an expectation which summer cannot fulfil. As Thoreau notes in his Journal:

It is dry, hazy June weather. We are more of the earth, farther from heaven these days. We live in a grosser element. We are getting deeper into the mists of earth. Even the birds sing with less vigor and vivacity. The season of hope and promise is past; already the season of small fruits has arrived. The Indian marked the midsummer as the season when berries were ripe. We are a little saddened, because we begin to see the interval between our hopes and their fulfillment. The prospect of the heavens is taken away, and we are presented only with a few small berries.

On the other hand, one might object that the ‘eternal spring’ so often evoked by poets and artists from various traditions is a contradiction in terms, the very essence of spring being its recurrence, its newness, its transitional quality. Due to the poverty of a ‘horizontal’ imagination, such criticism confuses an eternal spring with an indefinite spring, intimating that the formal elements of spring would be preserved within the profane time of ordinary experience. We would be the first to admit that in such a situation, spring would indeed become commonplace, stale, even ‘old.’ This objection overlooks the fact that time in the Malakut, the only world where an eternal spring truly exists, is radically different from unidimensional, linear time. As we
mentioned above, time in the Malakut is ‘vertical’ in relation to the horizontal time of the corporeal world. This fact has often been stressed by Corbin: ‘Every event, every person, has its own time there.’

In the Malakut, time and form are aspects of consciousness, and, as such, are subordinated to it. The forms and events of an archetypal spring resemble those on earth, but their substance is ‘palingenesis’ as it exists in the Jabarut, the world of the intelligibles. When one correlates Corbin’s observation with the fact that the very essence of the intelligible light which corresponds to what we call ‘palingenesis’ is nothing less than unending exaltation, one cannot but realize that spring in the Malakut is indeed eternal.

To be even more ‘concrete’, in an imaginal spring there are budding woodlands and scented glades, endless meadows and drifts of daffodils, rippling lakes and streams, flocks of innumerable birds, mountains enlaced with cascades, omnipresent sunlight and luminous nights, all resembling down to the last detail and finest texture those of the terrestrial world (but perfected and glorified as only the subtle matter of the Malakut can permit them to be). Yet the ‘substance’ of these woodlands is not chlorophyll and cellulose, but the ‘mind’ of Amertat. The scents are not gases conveyed by air molecules, but angelic radiances carried on the ‘breath’ of Spenta Armaiti. The daffodils are not botanical specimens, but scintillations of Ashi Vanuhi trumpeting the Xvarnah. The water of the lakes, streams, and cascades is not the H2O of the chemists, but the ‘thought’ of Ardvi Sura Anahita contemplating rejuvenation. The birds are not the subjects of ornithology, but avatars of the Simurgh, each a mirror reflecting the Face of the Soul as it takes wing. The mountains are not geological phenomena, but an immortal Elburz ascending to the Garotman – the realm of the Infinite Lights. The sunlight is not composed of electromagnetic waves, but of the brilliance of Bahman, nor do the nights negate this light, but proclaim its eternal syzygy with the black light of the Absconditus (see note 20 and section III dealing with Zen painting).

Thus the light of the Intelligible, in its resplendent theophanies, is the very ‘substance’ of an imaginal spring, epiphanized in its every form and event. Spring in the paradise of the archetypes indeed lasts forever, and yet, paradoxically, it is always a unique and particular spring, emerging incessantly from winters that never were and preceding summers that never come, poised on the verge of new burgeonings of glory.
As was suggested in Part I, the mystical experience, being indescribable in terms of language, is more akin to the experience of music. To extend the analogy, the ordinary perception of nature could be compared to a piece of music as registered on an oscilloscope, which, as we know, measures sound waves. A sensitive listener is well aware, however, that the phenomenological reality of the music does not in fact consist of sound waves carried by the atmosphere but of what occurs in his consciousness as a result of these sounds, the latter being symbols to be ‘deciphered’. As Corbin puts it:

Sohravardi 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, suprasensible world. At the height of this experience it is no longer the external ear but the soul itself which listens.

It is precisely therein that Ibn 'Arabi discerns the cause of the emotion we experience when we listen to music, for there is sympathy between on the one hand the response of our eternal virtuality to the Imperative that has awakened it to being and on the other hand our presentiment of the virtualities which the musical incantation seems to evoke and release.

This, according to Corbin, is precisely what is achieved in the ‘sama’ or spiritual concert of the Sufis. Because consciousness is primary for the mystic, he can, paradoxically, ‘see’ sounds and ‘hear’ sights:

Vision goes beyond sounds; the ears become the eyes. Philo furthermore explains: during the theophany of the Sinai it was said that ‘the entire people saw the sound’ and did not hear it, ‘because the voice of mortal beings is received by the ear, whereas that of God is perceived by the eye like light.’

This, in fact, is a variant of the Docetic experience. In generalized terms, we could say that Docetism, in contrast to Incarnationism, maintains that an archetype is not embodied ‘in’ matter or ‘in’ history any more than an object is embodied ‘in’ a mirror. In other words, the identical intelligible light can be epiphanized in a variety of imaginal modes, i.e. visual, aural, or olfactory, and perceived by the suprasensory senses that correspond to these modes, which, in turn, are interchangeable.
In keeping with our theme of a Theophanic nature, Debussy's *La Mer* comes to mind as an outstanding example of this phenomenon. To the eardrum, of course, the terrestrial sea does not literally 'sound like' an orchestral arrangement of strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion, nor do these instruments actually 'sound like' vast quantities of wind-blown water. The archetypal sea, however, is powerfully re-created in the receptive listener's imagination. In the same way, imaginal glimpses of a breezy Arcadian copse are mirrored in *Prelude a l'apres-midi d'un faune*. Also notable is the 'daybreak' movement of Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloe*, which reflects the vision of a radiant spring dawn filled with birdsong. In this category would certainly belong many of Sibelius' works, which evoke archetypal visions of brooding forests, the northern lakes and nights filled with auroral light. Another prime example is Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*, which overflows with imaginal perceptions of an idyllic countryside. Indeed, imaginal nature, spiritualized nature, is a nature that, while preserving — indeed enhancing — all its rich textures, individual forms, and clear-cut contours, is transformed into music — a vast symphony of consciousness 'playing' form.

Here a few words must be said about two venerable traditions which express incomparably, each in its own way, a vision of nature transfigured — that of the Persian miniature, fostered by both pre-Islamic and Islamic themes, and that of the Zen ink landscape, nourished by Buddhist as well as Taoist metaphysics. The Persian miniature, especially those inspired by Mazdean motifs, can be considered as a response to a vision described by Corbin:

How can one represent an earthly landscape in which everything is transfigured by that Light of Glory (*Xvarnah*) which the soul projects onto it? When the Mazdean soul perceives that this Energy of sacral light is the power that causes the springs to gush forth, the plants to germinate, the clouds to sail by, human beings to be born, that it is the power that lights up their intelligence, endows them with a victorious and supernatural strength, and consecrates them as beings of light by clothing them in hieratical dignity — none of this can be expressed in representative painting, but only by a preeminently symbolical art. As the earthly splendor of the divinity, the *Xvarnah* imagined by the soul transfigures the Earth into a heavenly Earth, a glorious landscape symbolizing with
the paradisal landscape of the beyond. This requires, therefore, a form of expression combining all the hierophanic elements of this Glory and transmuting them into pure symbols of a transfigured nature.\textsuperscript{36}

In Section II, we discussed the significance of spring as it relates to our theme. It has been suggested that this vision of a celestial springtime is precisely what inspired many Persian miniatures. Compare these lines of Burckhardt:

What gives the miniature its almost unique kind of beauty is not so much the scenes it portrays as the nobility and simplicity of the poetical atmosphere that pervades them. This atmosphere \ldots occasionally confers upon the Persian miniature a kind of Edenic reverberation, and this is profoundly significant, for one of its basic themes, with distant Iranian roots, is that of the transfigured landscape, symbolizing both the earthly paradise and the "heavenly land," which, while being hidden from the eyes of fallen humanity, remains existent in the world of spiritual light that is manifest to God's saints. It is an unshadowed landscape, in which each object is made of exceedingly precious substance and where every tree and flower is unique of its kind. \ldots Paradise is an eternal springtime, a garden perpetually in bloom, refreshed by living waters; it is also a final and incorruptible state, like precious minerals, crystal and gold.\textsuperscript{37}

These lines also point to the essential difference between Persian art and the Zen landscape. While both the miniature and the ink landscape often employ a vertical perspective, omit shadows, and can be considered "incorruptible," there is nothing "final" about the typical Zen landscape. In fact, at first glance, the two traditions would appear to be antithetical. As we see it, they are complementary. Let us first examine the two traditions, noting basic differences. We will then attempt to explain why we believe that they are indeed complementary. The typical Persian miniature, as Burckhardt has explained, expresses a crystalline perfection and is essentially static, not in the sense of abolishing movement, as Corbin has made clear in the above citation, but in the sense of depicting an ordered, predictable, and flawless theophany. Chinese landscapes, particularly those of the Southern Sung school represented by Ma Yuan and Ma Lin, as well as landscapes by such Japanese masters as Sesshu, Soami, and Shubun
Sesshu: Haboku Landscape, 1495, Tokyo.
National Museum.
(especially in their ‘haboku’ or broken ink styles), depict nature as evanescent, undefined, and shifting – a suggestive world eternally suspended between Form and Void. Indeed, as D. T. Suzuki has stated:

All things emerge from an abyss of mystery, and through each one of them we may have a peep into that abyss.38

These landscapes are, without a doubt, ‘icons of the Void’, visual reflections of the Zen maxim ‘whatsoever is Form is Void; whatsoever is Void is Form’. While the order expressed in the typical Persian miniature is lucid and crystalline, that of Zen landscapes is best characterized by the Chinese term ‘li’, a word originally designating the grain in wood or the markings in jade. It is an order so assymetrical, incalculable and multidimensional as to be virtually undefinable. On the other hand, it can be readily distinguished from the mere chaos of scattered garbage. Superficial observers have often believed that typical Zen or Taoist landscapes, with their figures solitary and nearly invisible, symbolize the insignificance of man when confronting the vastness of nature. This, however, betrays a profound misconception of the artist’s intention as well as a misunderstanding of Buddhist and Taoist metaphysics. The landscape and its contemplator are not two separate entities, nor is the contemplator ‘one’ with nature seen in a pantheistic context. As we explained earlier, the two entities are reciprocal poles in a single ‘field of imagination’. What the contemplator sees ‘out there’ is in reality his own consciousness, his own Self – not the ego and its ordinary consciousness but the Celestial Self and its supraconsciousness. This statement, however, could equally apply to Persian philosophy and its respective art forms. What differentiates the two traditions and at the same time makes them complementary is the fact that Persian art expresses the absolute necessity for theophany, the imperative need for the ‘Hidden Treasure to be known’ in a multitude of resplendent images, entities, and events, liberated from the darkness of corporeal matter and the unconscious. Consider, for example, these lines of Massignon:

The art of Persian miniatures, without atmosphere, without perspective, without shadows, and without modelling, in the metallic splendour of its polychromy, peculiar to itself, bears
witness to the fact that its originators were undertaking a kind of
alchemic sublimation of the particles of divine light imprisoned
in the 'mass' of the picture. Precious metals, gold and silver, come
to the surface of the fringes and crowns, of the offerings and
cups, to escape from the matrix of the colours.39

Zen art, on the other hand, highlights the intrinsic voidness, spontaneity, and unpredictability of these theophanic forms and entities, the fact that the source of their being does not originate in themselves but in 'sunyata', or, to use Sufi terminology, in the black light of the Absconditus. For this reason, Zen art is often described as 'dark'. Haiku poets call this darkness 'yugen', which, as Suzuki suggested, designates an unfathomable mystery never to be penetrated. Rikyu, a Japanese poet and tea master, once said that to experience yugen

is to watch the sun sink behind a flower-clad hill,
to wander on and on in a huge forest with no thought of return
to stand upon the shore and gaze after a boat that goes hid by far-off islands,

to ponder on the journey of wild geese seen and lost among the clouds.

Yet this 'darkness' is not the darkness of matter, of a shadowy unconscious, or the demonic, and its mystery, forever unknowable, is pregnant with limitless theophanic potency. This is why we have emphasized that the two traditions — Persian and Far Eastern — are complementary. In a very general sense, one could say that Persian art depicts the 'face of light' and saves one from agnosticism, while Zen art represents the 'face of darkness' and prevents any form of anthropomorphism or metaphysical idolatry.

Conclusion

At this point, the reader should have a clear presentiment of what is to follow. To put it as succinctly as possible, the 'nature' that the visionary aspires to become 'one' with is not the nature of biological determinisms or of a pantheistic cult of the picturesque, but the imaginal nature of the Malakut. In Corbin's analyses, this theme takes on far-ranging and unexpected significance. Briefly stated, the doctrine is this: The mental states of the visionary, achieved through his contemplation of a transfigured nature, constitute the very 'substance'
of his archetypal body in the Malakut. Each object, each event, and each scene in a transfigured nature radiates consciousness—a consciousness that intrinsically ‘registers’ in the consciousness of the visionary. According to the Iranian traditions, both pre-Islamic and Islamic, these ‘registrations’ of consciousness compose the archetypal form of the mystic’s Celestial Self and Resurrection Body. And ‘this, states Corbin, is what is meant when the Mazdean traditions affirm that Daena (the mystic’s Celestial Self) is the ‘daughter’ of Spenta Armaiti and the ‘sister’ of her other reflections. Moving to Islamic Iran, the symbolism reappears in the doctrine which teaches that just as the ‘clay’ of the carnal Adam was formed from the elements of the physical earth, the ‘clay’ of the Gnostic is derived from ‘the Earth of his Paradise’. Moreover, as Corbin explains, the process is reciprocal: By contemplating a nature transparent to its eternal archetypes, the mystic not only ‘substantiates’ his Resurrection Body, but aids in the redemption of that very nature which, according to certain of our ecologists who have to learn otherwise, can only be ‘refined’ through technological means:

... the substance of the celestial ‘I’ or Resurrection Body is engendered and formed from the Celestial Earth, that is, from the Earth perceived and meditated in its Angel. What it also means is that the destiny of the Earth entrusted to the transfigurative power of the souls of light leads to the fulfillment of these souls, and that this is reciprocal. And such is the profound meaning of the Mazdean prayer. . . . ‘May we be among those who are to bring about the Transfiguration of the Earth.’

We have since learned that the flowering of the spiritual body, which is the awakening and birth to the celestial ‘I’, takes place in the form of a meditation that transfigures the Earth into a celestial Earth, because, reciprocally, it is said that ‘the clay of every faithful gnostic was taken from the Earth of his Paradise.’

Notes

At this point, it would seem useful to briefly define several key terms to be used in this essay. By 'consciousness,' which we feel is a more comprehensive term than 'mind,' we are referring not to ordinary mundane consciousness, rationalistic or emotional, or to any form of subconsciousness, and even less to the so-called collective unconscious, but to an essential supraconsciousness, the gradations of which are too complex to be discussed in the present context. As for the above-mentioned collective unconscious, see Corbin, 'The Imago Templi & Secular Norms' in Spring, 1975, Dallas & Zurich: Spring Publications, p. 166: '...it becomes all the more important that any vision of the Angel, and hence the "Imago Templi," does not emerge from the negativity of the unconscious, but that it descends from the level of a positively differentiated transpersonal consciousness (surconscious).'

'Spiritual' is used in this essay as a generalized term referring to the above-mentioned supraconsciousness, especially in its formless state of pure intelligibility - the 'Jabarut' of the Iranian theosophers. The Soul is precisely the place where the formal (but not material) and the spiritual meet, and corresponds to the 'Malakut' - the imaginal world of the archetypes, or the 'Celestial Earth.' The true Soul, epiphonized for each individual mystic by an angelic figure, must never be confused with the ego and the lower functions of the psyche.

A technical term used by Shi'ite theosophers to designate the hermeneutics whereby outer, literal reality is made transparent, or 'carried back,' to its archetypal source. Each archetype, on whatever level, has another archetype which it reflects. Authentic ta'wil thus reveals an ascending series of theophanies in the 'Gothic style,' as pointed out by Corbin. See his Avicenna & The Visionary Recital, trans. by W. Trask, Dallas & Zurich: Spring Publications, 1980, I-3: 'Ta'wil as Exegesis of the Soul.' See also his 'Cyclical Time in Mazdaism & Ismailism,' reprinted in Cyclical Time & Ismaili Gnosis, London et al.: Kegan Paul Intl., 1983, pp. 19 and 54 for an elaboration of this 'Gothic cosmology' as it relates to the Mazdean and Ismaili traditions respectively.

See ibid., pp. 237-245 and passim, on this theme of 'new creation.'

See Corbin, 'Divine Epiphany & Spiritual Birth in Ismailian Gnosis,' reprinted in *Cyclical Time*, op. cit., p. 86, on these themes of 'assimilation' and 'evacuation.'

Corbin, 'The Imaginary & the Imaginal', op. cit., p. 12.


Corbin, 'Cyclical Time,' op. cit., p. 58.


See Corbin, 'Cyclical Time,' op. cit., p. 19, on the Mazdean vision of 'the eternal advent of unlimited Zervan,' the latter epiphazining 'eternal time.' According to this vision, each archetype is eternally projected into a higher archetypal dimension, again bringing to mind a 'Gothic cosmology.' See ibid., pp. 53–58 for an elaboration of this 'perpetual exaltation' as it relates to the Ismailian 'cycles of Resurrection.' Cf. 'Divine Epiphany,' op. cit., passim, for a vivid description of the ascending 'Temple of Light of the Imamate.'

See Corbin, *Spiritual Body*, op. cit., Part 1, Chapter I, for amplifications on this Deity and those that follow.


Corbin, 'Epistle on the State of Childhood,' in *Temenos* No. 4, p. 61. Cf. J. Godwin, 'The Golden Chain of Orpheus' in *Temenos* Nos. 4 and 5. See especially No. 4, p. 19: '... the message of the music, like the sense of what is read, is seized by the imaginative faculty, the physical vehicle having done its work.'

Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, op. cit., p. 152.

See Corbin, 'Epistle,' op. cit., pp. 61–62 and 72–74, where the sama, as well as the mystical dance, is described.

Corbin, 'The Imago Templi', op. cit., p. 184.


D. T. Suzuki, *Zen & Japanese Culture*, op. cit., p. 257. See also pp. 220–221 for a discussion of 'yugen,' which we will touch on in text of essay below. Note that Suzuki does not equate yugen with 'utter darkness.' We, in turn, will emphasize, as does Corbin, the difference between the 'divine darkness' and the 'demonic darkness.'


Corbin, *Spiritual Body*, op. cit., p. 15.

ibid., p. 104.
JEAN MAMBRINO

Eleven Poems from 'La Saison du Monde'

Translated by Jonathan Griffin

These poems are a small selection from a very large and wide-ranging work called La Saison du Monde, now almost completed; it consists of 160 poems of different lengths arranged in five parts. Part I is called Rumeurs, Part II Récits: in this selection each of these is represented by a single poem. Part III is called Fragments d'une Confidence and divides into 5 sections, each represented here, some by one poem, some by more since the poems are short. Part IV, Une Langue d'Ailleurs, and Part V, Paroles Cacheées, have here one quite long poem each.

Obviously a small selection cannot convey fully the weight and sweep of the whole, but this one is designed to give some idea of it.

The Revealers

They speak in our dreams that we may not understand them,
they are always disguised,
they infiltrate sidelong with a different face, not at all frightening,
but calm with the life of ordinary days,
an almost anonymous face, quite near, lightly erased by a very long distance,
they suggest without insisting, and with a single movement withdraw the thing they present to our dream-dilated eyes,
their unveiling offers a fresh secret,
soon multiplied to infinity by mirror-play where always a fresh face flashes,
to disappear and be reborn elsewhere,
a brow where eyes beckon, a different face's mouth, an unknown profile in which the shape of the nostrils reminds us of familiar features,
dispersed here and there like a shredded sentence, whose limbs it is impossible to re-assemble, and yet it
never ceases to recompose itself further on to confide
something necessary and urgent,
ironically, peacefully delayed.
To be and have been, be no more what one is, be what
one is no more,
be here in the elsewhere, the elsewhere of here
for ever unreachable,
so old, so ruined, in some ineffable childhood,
so young, with an auroral youth that has the
fragrance of a pure beginning.
with so heavy a secret,
every face the disguise of an ultimate identity
which is the first identity
happy to be a stranger to itself,
for the heritage of the true name is too vast,
and the seal of origin numinously sealed.

They speak in our dreams that we may not understand
them.
We thought we were seeing them face to face, but
their visage turns towards us a fresh absence,
which protects us, lights us with a veiled light,
makes transappear, and transfigures, wounds and
shadows, tenderness of flinching,
introduces distance, the trudging whose
transparent necessity we shall only later see,
(a sudden flash, a glimpsed vision of a visage in
the form of a thunder-bolt, a sun regardant)
but the minute we thought we understood and had
finished,
there is no more than the sound of a little spring,
the time from spring to ocean, and the roar of
ocean peace in the sibilance of memory
always across distance, even though nothing be
outside the instant,
repose in the passing, embrace in escape,
another – sorrowful, and radiant – face.

They speak in our dreams, they teach us in our
absence what they cannot say to us,
and what all our words never cease to resume, to
transmit, and to erase.
Petrarch's Sigh

I shall depart from here. I shall end. Absolutely.
A single instant, which is the end. The Mid-day of Midnight.
The non-passing of time. Effacement.
It is life in me that thinks, thinks only of life.
I cannot think the end because I glide on the sea.
(Life, sea, the long glide of the days)
The ship glides, lives on the sea, its gliding
under the hull, the marriage of hull and sea,
the water that glides and bears, the winged weight
that floats and flies and fares, the embrace of ship
and waves, the battle against hard water, the squalls'
machinengunfire, or the luxury of a sleeplike
balancing over the inexhaustible abyss.
I think my life, I live my breath, my instant
which breathes, under the trees, along this stream
in Provence, not far from the small village, eternally
ephemeral, paradise of a moment in which I know
my moments are numbered. I shall end absolutely,
disappear with no swirl, and that instant is one
no-one will share. The sill where the self is sole.
I cannot see, This speck escapes me. I bless
the brief sigh among leafages filling my
breast this minute with eternity which dances.
You who read these words will depart too. End absolutely.
It is fine that life crams us with its absence.

(Puyricard 29 July 1982)

Wanted

Encircled since the origin, and leaping the
whirlwinds.
Mixing the tracks, opening them, pursued,
leading the chase.
Eager dreamers and mute messengers. Walkers,
ferreter, breathing the wind.
Stripped, possessors of an accumulating treasure.
Leaders of flowery intrigues that drip blood.
Bearers of water towards blind life. Hiders
in the reeds and swamps.
Carefree at watch. In the open sky gliding.
Free to the very heart.
The Alchemist

He does not possess the sense, is possessed by it.
He translates the images the nonchalant mountain
is fashioning, the clouds costumed by sunset,
the silent eyes of animals that distil their forgetting,
and the page with the sympathetic ink of night.
He receives the feminine face, like the soaked light
of dawn on the skin of leaves. He is some no-one.
He understands inside what is understood.
He names what contemplates him, fashions him.
If he gives light, it's that he is alight.
Displaces nothing, and all by him's transformed.

Holy War

Eyes of water that fill slowly with a
clay frozen below the disaster of the stars
gaze in their mud at a final memory,
the aspen of a face in which only the eyes are smiling,
deep in an evening where the world's whole past is asleep,
when they walked on the light at low tide.
The crumbled body loses its blood, very far off. The dead
cover the ground with their skin bags full of worms.
On the walls of nothing are hanging your black flags.

end of 2nd millennium

Writ on Dust

The scent of red summer persists, still impregnates
the skin of the leaves and flowers that strip naked
as they accept weakening, weakening. The sleep
of September gives to the air's transparency
a diagram immobility, when a child's
shed skin disintegrates into the dryness
and humility of the soil. The dust disperses
its enigmas over the tracks of the twilight.
Unheard weepings touch the heart, far from the hurt.
All of what one no longer knows remains for ever.
Human is this whole earth, and superhuman.
The scent rises, without moving, while the year's
splendour shines still through the crystal.

Out Shortly
An eddy the shape of a face speaks the invisible.
The fingerless hand tests the small blocks of thought.
These translucents are the sun's latest familiars.
When points in flight sculpt the finest of fine.
What lasts less than a flash still does not die.
The untouchable is the first pinch of dust.
It looks through the ash of the eyes and says: I.

The Wakened Dream
When trees, mountains, roses,
were still no more than crystal,
recognise this thought in the crystal
which was already fighting against shadows,
was drawing difference, imagining the nudity
of roses, the fabulous dissymmetry.

Say, if you wish, that the growth of the crystal,
the blossoming of its multiple geometry,
operated in the depths of a kind of sleep,
with as much grace and subtlety
as when you draw the distances of night
or kiss that face more nude than the sun.
The Gift

'Izbrannye stixotvorenja ...'
'My sister life ...'

Pasternak

The munificence of the lilacs upon the heights of evening is no less ephemeral than their scent which never ceases to spread about, to conjure the dawn sky in the deep of the twilight, blood on the sea, sombre love, suavity of tears, the blue trace of a wound, and always the abundance of the fragile flowering. when lovers breathe their bliss, have longed, since they were born, to retrieve the useless fulness exhaled by each fragment of life, at each secret instant of the world, where they nest in the assurance of that gift which speaks only of April and prepares summer where the lilacs will be no more.

Stridency

The exhilarating smell of fire, of harsh air that parches the soul's mucous membranes announces treeless shoreless greenless space, the unlimited open, place of ecstasy and dereliction, where is accomplished in the dark of the sand-wind the embrace of desire and the desert.

Here stripping becomes mystery, being's energy, concentrated in its naked will, in the enjoyment of its essence, cognisant That no spring is profuse enough to dilute the grains of sulphur that grind between its teeth.

Here is the empire of delectable nullity, place of conflagration, in the narrowness of the soul, veiled in black, whose flames feed on a violence and vacuity that issue from the gorgeing of the Third Eye, whose name is Joy of the Hopeless.
Reproduced from
Four etchings by Brigitte Simon
Is there anything more sure and more voluptuous than the suppression of all the forms of life, the endless unrolling of void, when distance, dissipated in immensity, merges with the very intimacy of the spirit?

The dunes quiver, as a truceless hand smoothes them and fines them down, the russet flesh undulates, stretches at ease, the whole great body lies at full length, the hips roll and grow calm, like the mirage of humidity trembling in the aura of drought and dream.

Kinds of humped and belled centaurs, whose eyes are reduced to folds, dawdle where they are and lope off to nowhere, into the incandescence, drunk with their own thirst, having abolished even the memory of fruit on branches.

The world has taken the consistency of the heat's sea-swells; skin, bones, rocks flare under the breath of the god, and hooves sink into the softness and crumble of matter undoing itself without keeping more traces than water's surface does.

Elsewhere the slither has been so hardened by the labour of the furnace, that the sun and sand amalgam stiffens to glass crests where at each step time grates itself and loses blood which, we then see, is the colour of earth.

The fascination of that world without law or link, whose only frontiers are the wind, is born of the nakedness and monotony of the hours merged with space, when beginning again offers no more sense and surprise than survival.

The dust of the nada, the particles that whirl in fire's folly, intensify the melopeia of silence to shrillness,
set vibrating the stridency and lightning of the sky
irritated by its whiteness,
which shouts rather than sings the persistence of
its refusal.

Only the inconceivable and the inaccessible fill to
the brim
the death-rattle of voracity, the impatience and
greediness
of her who, with ravishment, sees at last moving away
for ever
all the objects of her expectancy and covetousness.

Magnificent is the majesty of the useless, the certainty
that there is nothing
other than the nothing behind numbers, ever since the
diverse
took the face of the Unique, invisible by force of neutrality
and of burial in the mad insignificance of light.

But night immobilises the seekers of the non-treasure,
and wraps them
in the cool of another world where on-rushes of plump
stars, in relief, wipe
their fingers on the foreheads of those rare watchers,
who are trying to hear and translate, far under the
sands, the inaudible dialogue of the wells.

And it is there, precisely, the secret of the Fable,
from the Thousand and One Nights the one story to hear
tell.
The Interrogator

Where then are you, who interrogate your absence?
The undulating centuries of matter,
mountains and seas that modulate on their surface,
were they meditating on your absence and oblivion,
although your shape inhabits every atom?
Did you think your arising?
did you know to arise is to change? do you, now?
Can you know your being at its instant of changing?
do you know you are what is changing, your being
is passage, your substance metamorphosis, oblivion
of the memory when you remember you are changing?
Do things think in you their metamorphoses?
What in you becomes of the scent of that rose
in a garden at Mont Saint-Michel, when the dawn
is mingling with the waters, the stones and the dead?
Is it that your thoughts go to sleep in matter
and change it, when you go away?
Your thoughts which have the colour of matter,
a certain thickness of blue, a warmth
of green and the opacity of the waters,
a certain red of bark and earth?
How come your thought is made of earth?
Why does your brain sweat love?
Do the atoms meticulously savour
their presentiment of your shape, your weight,
or are they acting in a dreamless sleep?
But since animals, since plants dream,
why not the atoms, divided in themselves?
Are not we the images in their vast dream?
Do the atoms of glow-worms and nebulae
continue to communicate, even when they
are going away for ever from each other?
Does that tearing slake a fresh desire
or do they join again at the end of the curve
at every instant, undoing all distance?
Is it the lightning in you recalls their brightness,
or your awareness relumes from their oblivion
in its relish and the forgetting of its abyss?
How is clay able to become music
which vanishes into itself to let one hear it?
And what is this pleasure of measure,
among the millions of pleasures of desire,
the plenifying suffering and the pleasure
of desire never slaked,
the terror and the ecstasy of the dreams that hurl you
towards perpetual metamorphosis?
Is it the star of your adrift being
that tends towards its constellation?
But if all the stellar hordes are dancing
in measure, even in their explosion,
how can the measure be open and closed?
Are not all things vacant,
all concerned with some other thing,
each atom a star for its constellation
which exists only for a vanished star?
What is it, burns so under the world's
season, in this inapprehensible instant?
How is what changes what endures?

Who are you, then, who survive in your absence?

From Art et Anatomie Hindous, Abanindra Nath Tagore,
Editions Bossard, Paris, 1921.
Henry Miller’s Divine Comedy

BERTRAND MATHIEU

‘...if I must live only once on this earth,
I prefer to know it as Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise ...’

Henry Miller, in The Time of the Assassins

1. INFERNO

On the opening page of the first book he ever published, Tropic of Cancer, Henry Miller suddenly finds himself thrust, somewhat bewildered, among the ‘dead’, in a murky cul-de-sac in Paris which he calls the Villa Borghese. ‘We are all alone here,’ he writes in the first paragraph, ‘and we are dead.’ Then a few moments later, in a sentence which nicely objectifies his sense of bafflement and immediately brings to mind the perplexed ‘mi ritrovarai’ (literally ‘I found myself again’) of Dante Alighieri, similarly lost and bewildered, in a dark forest, at approximately the same crucial moment in his own life, Miller exclaims: ‘I was sent here for a reason I have not yet been able to fathom.’

Like Dante, Henry Miller opens his ‘Inferno’ with the realization that he has strayed from the path and has stumbled into a place of pure ‘despair.’ (‘There will be more calamities, more death, more despair. Not the slightest indication of change anywhere.’) Like Dante, he also seems gripped by the sensation that there is ‘no escape’ from this place. Like Dante, he gives the impression of groping, in the first few pages of his book, for a Virgilian ‘wise old man’ with the knowledge and power to lead him back out of the ‘state’ in which he is suddenly lost. But how can a latter-day Dante seriously hope to find such a guide in a world where all our heroes ‘have killed themselves, or are killing themselves’?
For I'm convinced after many years of careful attention to the writings of this outlawed and woefully misunderstood American writer — 'banished,' likewise, from the 'Florence' of full literary recognition — that Henry Miller, in his own fashion, is a sort of slapdash, comic, devil-may-care Dante to our century. Three books by Henry Miller strike me, notably, as being the counterparts of the Divina Commedia of Dante in the vast and otherwise rather sprawling œuvre of Henry Miller. His first book, Tropic of Cancer, published at the start of Miller's long 'exile' from America by Obelisk Press in Paris (1934), seems to me incontrovertibly to be Miller's Inferno. Tropic of Cancer is, in the main, a hard, bitter, cynical canticle of a book — a despairing burst of music by a man who almost got sucked down permanently into Hell. But seven years later, in 1941, Henry Miller publishes a book which could legitimately be called his Purgatorio. The Colossus of Maroussi, Miller's poetic account of a 'cathartic' six-month trip to Greece on the eve of the outbreak of the Second World War, records the beginnings of an ascent which this rough-and-tumble modern Dante — half buffoon, half visionary — undertakes out of the 'infernal' spaces he had earlier wandered into, down-and-out, in Montmartre in the nightmarish Tropic of Cancer — an ascent which would culminate with what can only be called Dantesque logic, some eighteen years later, in the serene, ecstatic, light-splashed pages of a book I've come to regard as Henry Miller's Paradiso, the very beautiful Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch (1957).

In a mythoanalytical book on Henry Miller which I published in 1976, Orpheus in Brooklyn, I compared Henry Miller with the half-mythical, half-historical Greek enchanter Orpheus and argued that, like the Thracian singer of antiquity (and, to a certain extent, like Rimbaud, Orpheus' heir in France), Henry Miller had also had to make the perilous journey into Hades in search of the lost Eurydice of his own dreams. I referred to such a descent as a 'katábasis' (literally 'down-going') and suggested that only by risking such a descent could anyone hope to attain to the state of 'palingénesis' ('rebirth') — the paradisal condition of enlightenment which Orpheus achieves after his emergence from Hell. But I now see that I could even more readily have compared Miller's three-levelled account of his Orphic trajectory with the threefold pilgrimage made earlier by Dante, the Florentine Orpheus of the Middle Ages. In the course of three visits
which I made to the home of Henry Miller in California before his death in 1980, I had occasion to talk frequently with Miller about Dante. He told me Dante’s Divine Comedy had made ‘a tremendous impression’ on him when he had read it in his youth. But he quickly added that he’d never returned to Dante’s poem later in life, and nowhere does he mention the author of the Divine Comedy in the exhaustive listings of favourite writers whom he recalled, half a century later, in a book entitled The Books in My Life (1952). The three volumes of Henry Miller’s own ‘Divine Comedy,’ however, tell a very different story.

Tropic of Cancer, to begin with, mentions Dante by name five times. Each of these allusions to Dante makes it perfectly plain, in its context in Miller’s book, that the American writer is invoking this prestigious and resonant name in what Miller himself would later call a ‘heraldic’ fashion, i.e., as a sort of illustrious forerunner who’d previously made this ‘journey’ himself, a sort of Virgil. The first of these allusions to Dante occurs virtually at the beginning of Tropic of Cancer, on page 30, when Miller places Dante among those gods of literature who are ‘raised to apotheosis’ and therefore destined ‘not to die’: Zola, Balzac, Strindberg (the author of an Inferno which Miller had read). Later, in fact, Miller is shown leaving the library of Strindberg’s Pension Orfila in Paris and ‘after bathing in the Ganges and pondering over the signs of the zodiac,’ he begins ‘to reflect on the meaning of that inferno which Strindberg had so mercilessly depicted.’ He goes on to reflect on some of the artists who have made ‘their pilgrimage to Paris’ (Dante, Rabelais, Van Gogh) and concludes that they too, like Strindberg, had been ‘ordained to re-enact a lost drama, the heroic descent to the very bowels of the earth, the dark and fearsome sojourn in the belly of the whale, the bloody struggle to liberate himself, to emerge clean of the past, a bright, gory sun god cast up on an alien shore.’ Miller had made it clear, on the previous page, that it was now his turn to be ‘sucked down into the vortex.’ He reserves a special place, later, in the ‘hell’ of a provincial school in Dijon in which he is employed for a while (as ‘exchange professor in English’) for some of his faint-hearted and dispiriting fellow-professors, who, according to Miller, ‘belonged to that category of colourless individuals who make up the world of engineers, dentists, pharmacists, teachers, etc. [those guilty of Dante’s “gran rifiuto”]. There was nothing to distinguish them from the clods
whom they would later wipe their boots on [their students]. They were zeros in every sense of the word, ciphers who form the nucleus of a respectable and lamentable citizenry. They ate with their heads down and were always the first to clamour for a second helping. They slept soundly and never complained; they were neither gay nor miserable. The indifferent ones whom Dante consigned to the vestibule of Hell. The upper crusters.'

In addition, there are pointed references at no fewer than thirty different places in Tropic of Cancer to the fact that Miller's characters are indeed inhabiting various circles of a latter-day 'inferno'; it's clearly the varied 'calamities' and 'terrors' and 'deaths' of this inferno that the author of Tropic of Cancer is depicting as he himself journeys through the sordid Paris demi-monde of the 1930's, with its circle upon circle of ego-crazed and suffering ghosts. Hell, as the Dante scholar George Holmes aptly defines it, is 'a place where punishment can be observed [but] also where the shades of the friendly dead can be interrogated about their fate.' Dante, like Virgil before him in Book VI of the Aeneid, has given us a personal account of a journey into the underworld to meet the souls of the dead. In Canto III of Inferno, he tells us: '...i non averei creduto / che morte tanta n'avesse disfatta.' ['I had not believed... / That Death so great a legion had undone.'] — the very lines which T. S. Eliot was to translate so brilliantly in his own 'Inferno,' The Waste Land, as 'I had not thought death had undone so many.' [All Italian quotations of Dante are from Dante Alighieri, La Divina Commedia, Firenze: Salani Editore, 1958. The accompanying English versions by Laurence Binyon are from The Portable Dante, New York: The Viking Press, 1947] Henry Miller has informed us on the first page of Tropic of Cancer that it is the 'dead' whom he will be interrogating in the pages of his book. And as if to make the point more emphatic, he quickly after compares the denizens of this sordid world to 'lice' who get under his skin and bury themselves there: 'Everywhere I go people are making a mess of their lives. Everyone has his private tragedy.' He enumerates 'ennui, grief, suicide' — an atmosphere 'saturated with disaster, frustration, futility.' In a burst of Dantean irritability, he even imagines every one of these wretches 'scratching' himself to death.'

Later, Miller shows us 'the little whore with the wooden stump' who stands 'opposite the Gaumont Palace day in and day out,' not far from the little alleyway that 'blazes like an inferno.' A few pages later, he
vents his anger at a much greater villain — America — which he regards as 'the very incarnation of doom' which will someday 'drag the whole world down to the bottomless pit.' When he is employed for a while, unhappily, by the Paris edition of the New York Herald, as a proof-reader, he deplores the fact that 'all that is requested of me is to punctuate the calamities.' And he adds sardonically that 'in this chthonian world the only thing of importance is orthography and punctuation.' Later still, we see him 'flee[ing] when overhead I suddenly see 'Impasse Satan' printed on a sign. This leads him to a shuddering realization that all over Paris, in every Métro station, there are 'grinning skulls that greet you with “Défendez-vous contre la syphilis!” Wherever there are walls, there are posters with bright venomous crabs heralding the approach of cancer.' In this twentieth-century inferno which Miller is depicting, 'no matter where you go, no matter what you touch, there is cancer and syphilis. It is written in the sky; it flames and dances, like an evil portent. It has eaten into our souls and we are nothing but a dead thing like the moon.'

The principal 'Beatrice' of Miller's work is a woman he calls Mona ('the Unique') in Tropic of Cancer. Like Dante's own Beatrice, she is as notably 'absent' in Cancer as she is in the first cantica of the Commedia. We are merely given to understand that her apotheosis awaits ahead. At one point in Cancer, Miller becomes conscious of this absence: 'When I realize that she is gone, perhaps gone forever, a great void opens up and I feel that I am falling, falling, falling into deep, black space. And this is worse than tears, deeper than regret or pain or sorrow; it is the abyss into which Satan was plunged. There is no climbing back, no ray of light ... (My italics).’ It's this very Mona who, in her moments of exaltation, had, Beatrice-like, persuaded Miller earlier that he was 'a great human being,' and yet who has now 'put beneath [his] feet a great howling pit of emptiness.' He is now 'lost in the crowd, whom the frizzling lights [make] dizzy, a zero who [sees] everything about him reduced to mockery.' At this abysmal point, Miller's style turns positively Dantesque: 'Passed me men and women ignited with sulfur, porters in calcium livery opening the jaws of hell.' He goes so far as to invoke the very geography of Dante's Inferno to describe this grotesque world into which he has been thrust: 'A lane of dead bones, of crooked, cringing figures buried in shrouds. Spines made of sardine bones. The Lycée itself seemed to rise out of a lake of thin snow, an
inverted mountain that pointed down toward the center of the earth [See Canto XXXIV of Dante’s Inferno] where God or the Devil works always in a strait-jacket grinding grist for that paradise which is always a wet dream.’

There are many other points of resemblance between Dante’s Inferno and Henry Miller’s. One of them is in the choice of a male guide, a ‘Virgil,’ to assist him in making the descent. ‘Dante, who could not bear his scorn alone,’ wrote Edward Dahlberg, ‘took a guide to accompany him — Virgil. Don Quixote, no less desperate, had as only solace and friend, Sancho Panza, “Son of my entrails.”’ Henry Miller takes several guides. Each is manifestly like himself, a true ‘son of [his] entrails’ — a ‘poet,’ the way the poet Dante had chosen the poet Virgil to lead him down. The first of these guides is Boris [in real life, Michael Fraenkel], who was not only, like Virgil, a great pagan but also a great prophet — ‘a weather prophet,’ as Miller pointedly calls him on the threshold of their ‘descent.’ It is this Boris/Virgil who informs Miller/Dante at the beginning of Tropic of Cancer that ‘the weather will continue bad,’ that they must ‘get in step, a lock step, toward the prison of death.’ There is ‘no escape.’ But like Virgil, he also gives Henry a small ray of hope before they descend, and Henry is reassured: ‘The hero, then, is not Time, but Timelessness.’ The direction of this ‘descent’ is thus ultimately towards Eternity.

Later on in Tropic of Cancer, the role of Virgil devolves upon Carl [Alfred Perlès], who, like Dante’s Virgil, is also a real person, full of charm and inventiveness, a sort of incarnation of worldly wisdom and art who greatly resembles both Boris and Henry but who, like Virgil, cannot himself enter Heaven or bring anyone else there. Interestingly in this connection, Miller likes to dwell on Carl’s ‘hopelessness.’ Despite his attractiveness and literary creativity, Carl/Virgil is invariably ‘hopeless’ when it comes to providing real solutions. Hopelessness, it goes without saying, is an essential feature of Hell. Readers of Dante’s Inferno will recall that before entering the Vestibule of Hell, Dante reads on the lintel of the gateway: ‘LASCIATE OGNI SPERANZA, VOI CH’ENTRATE’ [‘ABANDON ALL HOPE, YE WHO ENTER HERE’]. At the beginning of Tropic of Cancer, likewise, Henry Miller implicitly announces that he knows he’s entering a similar region: ‘I have no money, no resources, no hopes.’ But, not surprisingly, Miller (again like Dante) proves to be ‘immune’ to the worst torments of the damned in the course of his own imaginal pilgrimage. ‘S’ i vegno, non rimango’
["I come,' says Dante, ‘but not to abide], when the myriad of the
damned cry out angrily at him: ‘Who goes there? why walks this man,
/ Undead, in the kingdom of the dead?’ Likewise, when Miller hears the
cries of anguish of Van Norden and Cronstadt and the countless other
‘weird, ghostly’ people around him in ‘the dying business’ of Hell, he
feels quite secure vis-à-vis ‘all these abstract deaths which involved a
bloodless sort of agony. Now and then they would compliment me on
being alive . . .’. Like Dante, Miller’s vision of Beatrice, earlier on, appears
to have reassured him that he’d eventually emerge from Hell alive:
‘Nothing that had happened to me thus far had been sufficient to
destroy me; nothing had been destroyed except my illusions. I myself
was intact.’

Just as Dante finds a certain comfort in encountering his favourite
poets in Hell (Homer, Horace, Ovid, Lucan), so Miller finds a similar
relief from the horrors of his Paris Inferno in his ‘encounters’ with
Emerson, Goethe, Dostoevsky, Rimbaud. In fact, it could even be
argued that Henry Miller has an ‘unexpected’ encounter in Paris with
his own ‘Brunetto Latini,’ his own ‘old teacher,’ in the guise of Walt
Whitman! It will be recalled that in Canto XV of his Inferno, Dante has a
memorable meeting with his former teacher, Brunetto Latini, whom
he addresses with affectionate regret and deep gratitude for past
benefits that had proved indispensable in his development as a poet.
Likewise, Miller suddenly and unexpectedly finds himself face to face
in Paris, one night, while conversing with a friend, with the ghostly
‘figure of Whitman, that one lone figure which America has produced
in the course of her brief life. . . . Whatever there is of value in America
Whitman has expressed, and there is nothing more to be said. . . . The
first and last poet. He is almost undecipherable today, a monument
covered with rude hieroglyphs for which there is no key. It seems
strange almost to mention his name over here [in Hell].’ One can almost hear
Dante’s own astonished exclamation of disbelief: ‘Siete voi qui, ser
Brunetto?’ [‘What, you here, Ser Brunetto?’]. It’s even more striking that
Miller’s Latini/Whitman is described by Miller as one who had taught
him how to be ‘a free, healthy spirit, what you might call a MAN’—
Miller even insists, at that point, that there is ‘no equivalent in the
languages of Europe for the spirit which [Whitman] immortalized.’ The
chief lesson which Dante had himself learned from Brunetto is ‘the art
/ By which men grow immortal’ [‘come l’om s’eterne’]!
For those who haven't learned this lesson, however, there are concentric circle upon concentric circle of pain awaiting in Hell. The Despairing, the Gluttonous, the Lustful, the Corrupt Clergy, and, at the very lowest circle of all, the Traitors—each gets his just deserts in Miller's Inferno as in Dante's. The Despairers, first of all—who have not believed that 'l'om s'etene' by certain available means, who had denied the doctrine of the immortality of the soul—all lie trapped, to emphasize their fault, in a kind of graveyard in an open tomb. Dante hints darkly, here in Canto X, that the 'sane intellects' [li 'ntelletti sani] of human beings, like those of Farinata and Cavalcante Cavalcanti, are invariably in danger of being destroyed when they reject the truth of the soul's immortality. This, not surprisingly, is the same vicious circle of pain in which Carl and Van Norden are trapped in Henry Miller's Tropic of Cancer. Van Norden, especially, more than any of the damned in Miller's book, refuses to believe he can 'rise again.' No one sinks lower into despair in Miller's Inferno than Van Norden. His mind, and that of a number of others like him, is in process of disintegrating before our very eyes. Not surprisingly either, Miller describes this 'procession' of despairing souls, like Dante, as being 'like a cortege entering the cemetery gates.'

The Gluttonous get curiously similar treatment in Dante and Miller, except that instead of being assailed by the three-headed dog Cerberus (as in Dante's Canto VI), in Miller they are afflicted by hungry bedbugs! But the setting for the punishment of this sin is the same: rain. A 'rainy season' in Hell! In Dante, the Gluttonous lie wallowing in the mire, drenched in perpetual rain; in Miller, the gluttonous lovers, their minds filled with images of a day opening 'in milky whiteness, streaks of salmon-pink sky, snails leaving their shells,' anticipating another 'warm meal' from 'the Spanish woman on the Boulevard Raspail' after they have cabled 'the fetus with the long juicy cigar in his mouth [in America]' for more money for food, go anxiously to bed: 'The rainy season has commenced.' The Lustful, naturally, fare no better. In Dante's Canto V, where Virgil points out to Dante the ill-fated Francesca da Rimini and her tender-hearted Paolo among the many other illustrious lovers, the souls of the Lustful are tossed forever on a howling wind. The sound of that same 'whirling wind' can be heard distinctly in the lives of the 'carnal' that fill out the pages of Tropic of Cancer, but nowhere more clearly than in the tempestuous experience
of the romantic Tania and her inept but irresistible Sylvester (‘with a heart full of love’). The charmingly affectionate but weak and self-indulgent couple strike me as a kind of cheap but brilliant burlesque of the undisciplined love of Paolo and Francesca in Dante’s poem.

Nor is the Corrupt Clergy treated more kindly in Miller’s Inferno than in Dante’s. Dante himself is merciless towards the greedy clergy whom he places in the Fourth Circle, among the Hoarders, rolling huge rocks against one another [Note well]. In Section 14 of Tropic of Cancer, Fillmore persuades Henry to accompany him to Mass (‘For the fun of it!’) at the Eglise Ste-Clotilde on the Rue St Dominique. It’s a cold, snowy day and the two down-and-out cronies hope to find a little warmth in the cosy interior of the church. But a suspicious priest quickly spots them among the faithful and, as if able to smell out the anticlerical thoughts which Miller’s been thinking, he gives them ‘a push and out we stumbled into the blinding light of day.’ When they turn back, they see the priest still standing on the steps, ‘pale as a ghost and scowling like the devil himself. He must have been sore as hell.’ This episode greatly angers Miller and prompts him to muse on an earlier sojourn to Florida when, unemployed and broke, he’d turned for help, in desperation, to a Catholic priest to relieve his hunger. The priest – a ‘big, bloated turnip-faced bastard’ – had brutally ‘shoved the door’ in his face and sent him away empty-handed. Miller had later spotted this ‘big, lecherous-looking turnip’ in a limousine – ‘and a beautiful limousine it was, with a couple of spare tires in the back, and the good father sitting at the wheel with a big cigar in his mouth. Must have been a Corona Corona, so fat and luscious it was. Sitting pretty he was, and no two ways about it. I couldn’t see whether he had skirts on or not. I could only see the gravy trickling from his lips – and the big cigar with the fifty-cent aroma.’ Shortly after this, in a stream of pitiless invective in which he identifies the greedy clergy with all the horrors of modern progress, Miller lets loose: ‘Holy Mother of God, what does this crap mean? The earth is parched and cracked. Men and women come together like broods of vultures ... who drop from the clouds like heavy stones. ... Forward! Forward without pity, without compassion, without love, without forgiveness. Ask no quarter and give none. More battleships, more poison gas, more high explosives.’ He concludes his tirade, a few pages later, with a Dantesque vision of the church of St Michel [the Winged Warrior] covered with ‘a cloudy
absinthe-like drool of fog and frost': 'Here, where the church stood, everything seemed turned hind side front. The church itself must have been twisted off its base by centuries of progress in the rain and snow. It lay in the Place Edgar-Quinet, squat against the wind, like a dead mule.'

But it's not solely others who are responsible for the horrors of Hell; it's ourselves. This is a lesson which both Dante and Miller learn in the course of their respective descents. 'Perhaps Dante's meeting with the beast in the forest was his first glimpse of the Shadow, as a protean, theriomorphic form, like some dream monster who may inspire terror without obliging us to recognize in so alien a shape an aspect of ourselves,' writes Kathleen Raine in the title essay of The Inner Journey of the Poet. 'But, just as in a series of human dreams the same archetype may present itself in a series of guises,' concludes Dr Raine, 'Dante was to meet the Shadow again, in more terrible and inescapable form. He confronts Satan, the ruler of evil who has his throne within each of us . . .' She ends, however, by saying that 'the confrontation with the principle of evil face to face proves to be the point of reversal (My italics).’ Such was Henry Miller's experience in Tropic of Cancer. Towards the close of his Inferno, after a series of 'meetings with the beast' in protean guises, this half-clown half-visionary Dante of the grubbier purlieus of modern Paris writes: 'I look down into that sunken crater, world lost and without traces, and I hear the bells chiming, two nuns at the Palace Stanislas and the smell of rancid butter under their dresses, manifesto never printed because it was raining, war fought to further the cause of plastic surgery, the Prince of Wales flying around the world decorating the graves of unknown heroes. Every bat flying out of the belfry a lost cause, every whoopla a groan over the radio from the private trenches of the damned. Out of that dark, unstitched wound, that sink of abominations, that cradle of black-thronged cities where the music of ideas is drowned in cold fat, out of the strangled Utopias is born a clown, a being divided between beauty and ugliness, between light and chaos, a clown who when he looks down and sidelong is Satan himself and when he looks upward sees a buttered angel, a snail with wings.'

Just before Dante reaches 'the point of reversal,' towards the close of Canto XXXIV of Inferno, he allows us to 'confront Satan, the ruler of evil who has his throne within each of us.' This is the nadir of Hell,
and the sin which is so horrendously being expiated in that ‘dark, unstitched wound’ of the human ego is the sin of the Traitors. It is with grim appropriateness – but an appropriateness, as usual, mixed with laughter – that Henry Miller brings Tropic of Cancer to a close with a conscious and deliberate act of treachery on the part of his ‘hero’ – and this ‘hero,’ naturally, is Miller himself! His friend Fillmore,terrified that he will be prosecuted by her family for failing to marry the pregnant Ginette, escapes to America in a state of panic after making Miller ‘promise’ he will accept a sum of money from him to ensure that the girl he’s abandoning will be provided for. No sooner has Fillmore embarked for America than Miller decides to give the needy and hysterical Ginette nothing. He spends the money irresponsibly on himself instead! The clown is transfigured, before our eyes, into a smirking Satan, Lord of Traitors. And it is precisely at that moment that the ‘buttered angel, [the] snail with wings’ begins his emergence from the pit of Hell: ‘After everything had quietly sifted through my head, a great peace came over me. Here, where the river gently winds through the girdle of hills, lies a soil so saturated with the past that however far back the mind roams [My italics] one can never detach it from its divine background. Christ, before my eyes there shimmered such a golden peace that only a neurotic could dream of turning his head away.’

The last two pages of Tropic of Cancer uncannily resemble the concluding stanzas of Dante’s Inferno, both in mood and in imagery. Dante invokes the ‘icy flat’ of Cocytus, all frozen over; Miller invokes ‘Alaska’ and a creek whose water is ‘green and glassy.’ Dante makes his poet emerge from Hell along the river Lethe (the river of oblivion); Miller emerges along the quietly flowing Seine (whose ‘course is fixed’), after consigning to forgetfulness the Hell of Fillmore and the others which he is leaving behind. When Dante climbs up towards the Antipodes, he completes his ascent ‘back to the lit world’ at the foot of Mount Purgatory. Miller, leaving behind the grotesque ‘fauna and flora’ among which he has been journeying in Hell, emerges with relief into what he calls ‘sufficient space’ – where he will ‘look around [him] to take in the meaning of the landscape.’ He even places before our eyes, like Dante ascending from his own Abyss, at the close of Inferno, the image of a ‘high mountain.’ The stage is set for the ascent of Mount Purgatory.
2. Purgatorio

'While we are in Hell,' writes Kathleen Raine, 'it seems that there is no way out; we are there, as it seems, eternally. Only as we emerge do we see evil in its true proportion. Once we have set foot on the Mountain of Purgatory we are free from those inner prisons – the self-enclosed worlds of the ego cut off from God – and are already aware of belonging to a greater whole.' This is precisely the discovery which Henry Miller was to make in his own 'Purgatorio,' The Colossus of Maroussi, the radiant account of his journey to Greece out of the 'self-enclosed' 1930's Gehenna of Tropic of Cancer. Prior to going to Greece, he had not been 'aware of belonging to a greater whole.' He had first had to descend into the depths of the Abyss. Greece made him see the meaning of that Abyss. 'I had walked blindfolded, with faltering, hesitant steps; I was proud and arrogant, content to live the false, restricted life of the city man [in the City of Dis?]. The light of Greece opened my eyes, penetrated my pores, expanded my whole being. I came home to the world, having found the true center ...' (Italics my own).

Before entering the Purgatorial worlds of Dante and Henry Miller, it might be a good idea to cast one final glance backwards in the direction of the City of Dis from which both poets have emerged and ask ourselves a final question about Henry Miller's notorious Tropic of Cancer. Why had Miller chosen to give his book this title? Unfortunately, I must admit I never had the presence of mind to ask Henry that question during his lifetime, in the course of many conversations with him, but in Orpheus in Brooklyn I venture the hypothesis that Henry Miller's whole literary output seems to me akin to the log-book of a loquacious latter-day Argonaut in his quest for the 'golden fleece' of the Absolute of joy. Tropic of Cancer and Tropic of Capricorn, with their cartographer's references to the high and low points (parallel to the equator) touched by the sun in the earth's journeyings around it, seem to me appropriate titles for books that record journeys of self-exploration. But I can now see that there's even greater precision in Miller's choice of Tropic of Cancer as a title for his own Inferno. Kathleen Raine, citing Porphyry in her Blake and Tradition, says that the great Neoplatonist philosopher considers the Sun and the Moon 'the gates of souls' which 'ascend through the Sun and descend through the
Moon.' Tropic of Cancer is 'attributed to the Moon,' because this tropic – the northern gate – is that through which souls descend to earth.' This descent is naturally associated with sleep and, ultimately, with death in Neoplatonic thought. Interestingly, another important writer on Tradition, René Guénon, states that 'as soon as the depths of Hell are reached, the ascent or return towards the true center begins, immediately following the descent; and the passage from one hemisphere to the other must be achieved by climbing up the sides of Satan's body, in a way that leads us to believe that concern with this key event is not unrelated to the mysteries . . . of death and resurrection (My translation).'

Henry Miller's The Colossus of Maroussi is precisely, like Dante's Purgatorio, a Book of Resurrection. But neither the Purgatorial Colossus nor the Paradisal Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch of Henry Miller, strange to say, has ever been as popular or as widely studied as Miller's more sensational Tropic of Cancer. In this respect, both books have suffered a fate similar to Dante's Purgatorio and Paradiso vis-à-vis the better-known Inferno. So powerful is the vision of horror given to us by the Inferno, in fact, that the book has permanently fastened on Dante the epithet of 'Poet of Hell' – as well as a reputation for gloom and sadism so absolute that it has all but eclipsed the marvellous lyricism and the humour that occur everywhere in Dante, even in the Inferno! (Humour is naturally another point in common between Dante and Miller.) Not only that, but many readers of Dante simply never venture beyond the masterfully evoked 'Gothick gloom' of the Inferno into the tenderest, subtlest, and most human section of the Commedia, the Purgatorio, to say nothing of the tremendous and uniquely 'metaphysical' experiences of the Light-bedazzled world of the Paradiso. I think it's no exaggeration to say that Henry Miller's The Colossus of Maroussi and Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch, his more free-wheeling and more beautiful (as well as more 'important') ascents to regions of greater wisdom than those he had plumbed in the lower depths of Tropic of Cancer, have suffered identically the same fate as Dante's later works and for largely the same reasons.

The Colossus of Maroussi, like Dante's Purgatorio, opens under the protective aegis of Beatrice. As Canto I of Purgatorio gets under way, Dante is instructed that Beatrice – the same Beatrice Portinari who had assured Dante he would be able to pass through the horrors of Hell
intact and eventually reach the highest pinnacle of Heaven, at the opening of the *Inferno* — has ‘stooped from bliss’ to be his aid and comfort during this Purgatorial quest. She alone, we are told, is ‘responsible’ for his making this journey [Commedia, pp. 260–261]. In Colossus, she is called, quite simply, Betty Ryan. ‘I would never have gone to Greece had it not been for a girl named Betty Ryan,’ opens the first sentence of Miller’s *Purgatorio.* Betty Ryan is a real-life personage whom I have the pleasure of counting among my friends. She has just turned 70 years old, recently [1984], and continues to devote herself to the art of painting, commuting between her chosen island of Andros in Greece in summer and the State of Vermont in the U.S. in winter. Her brilliant descriptions of Greece, at the Villa Seurat [Villa Borghese] in Paris in the late 1930’s, when she was a mere girl of about 19 or 20, already had the power to enchant Miller ‘like finished canvases by a Master.’ He listened to her with rapt attention: ‘And then, suddenly, she was all alone, walking by a river, and the light was intense and I was following her as best I could in the blinding sun . . . and I found myself wandering about in a strange land listening to a language I had never heard before . . . [in] a world of light such as I had never dreamed of and never hoped to see.’ The eyes of Beatrice, as readers of Dante’s *Purgatorio* will recall, are ‘bright with bliss’ and Virgil’s advice to Dante to ‘sound / Beatrice’s mind alone, for that needs faith’ is advice that would have made perfect sense to Henry Miller in the mood of enchantment in which he’d been put by Betty Ryan’s ‘bright’ and ‘prophetic’ images.

But it’s naturally to Virgil that the task of guiding Dante up the slopes of Mount Purgatory is entrusted, and it’s to the ‘Virgil’ of Henry Miller’s *Colossus of Maroussi* that I now turn — to the character after whom the book is named, the light-bearing George Katsimbalis. It will be recalled that the original Greek ‘colossus’ was an immense lighthouse in the form of the god Apollo that guided ships to safety at the entrance to the harbor of Rhodes. Katsimbalis, in Miller’s *Purgatorio,* functions transmutatively, in fact, as Virgil — a sort of cocky, garrulous, somewhat Falstaffian latter-day Virgil from the Athenian suburb of Amaroussion. He is Virgil insofar as he serves Miller as host and guide in his wanderings through Greece. But he is a Virgil who brandishes his torch of wisdom with a truculence and verve that the author of the *Aeneid* might have found a trifle unseemly! Miller’s encounter with the
‘Colossus’ is led up to very tactfully. Not until page 28 of Colossus do we actually ‘meet’ the formidable man whose existence Miller has been hinting at since the start of the book. ‘I didn’t have very much to say that first evening,’ writes Miller. ‘I listened spellbound, enchanted by every phrase he let drop.’ Katsimbalis is a protean figure with ‘the general physique of a bull, the tenacity of a vulture, the agility of a leopard, the tenderness of a lamb, and the coyness of a dove.’ Like Virgil, he could ‘galvanize the dead with his talk.’

The journey which Virgil and Dante take together, up the slopes of Mount Purgatory, is one which they take ‘walking hard and talking hard,’ as Dante puts it in Canto XXIV. In this Canto, the supple rhythm of Virgil’s walking keeps pace, quite deftly, with the rhythm of his talk, in Dante’s masterful terza rima. There’s a moment in Henry Miller’s The Colossus of Maroussi where Miller’s admiration for Katsimbalis’ nimble talk closely matches that of Dante for Virgil’s. In both passages, ‘walking’ and ‘talking’ are artfully blended: ‘As he talked, I was taking in for the first time with my own eyes the true splendor of the Attic landscape, observing with a growing exhilaration that here and there over the bare brown sward, amidst anomalous and eccentric growths, men and women, single, solitary figures, were strolling about in the clear fading light, and for some reason they appeared to me as being very Greek, walking as no other people walk, making clear-cut patterns in their ethereal meandering, patterns such as I had seen earlier in the day on the vases in the museum. . . . And this walking about on the brown sward . . . blended strangely with the Katsimbaline talk . . . which I heard, digested, and silently communicated back to the Asiatic loungers below who were fading softly now in the dimming light. . . . He went on and on, unhurried, unruffled, inexhaustible, inextinguishable, a voice that had taken form and shape and substance, a figure that had outgrown its human frame, a silhouette whose reverberations rambled in the depths of the distant mountain sides (my italics).’ The passage may lack the terseness of Dante’s terza rima in that Canto XXIV, but it has all of the substance and much of the magic of the Virgilian moment of enchantment.

The name of Dante isn’t invoked often in Miller’s Colossus — only once, as opposed to the five pointed references in Tropic of Cancer. But this one allusion occurs when Miller visits Kyrios Ypsilon [literally ‘Mister Y’ or, as we would say, ‘Mister X’], the exiled and rather
pathetic victim of a political 'purge' conducted in the late 30's by the Fascist dictator Metaxas. It's an important moment. Miller carefully looks over the books which Kyrios Ypsilon has brought with him to the 'big deserted house' on the bleak and lonely Greek island of Spetsai and enthusiastically approves of the 'most excellent diet' which the prisoner has brought with him 'for a prolonged siege.' The first book which Miller spots among Ypsilon's collection of classics is Dante's Divine Comedy. In my own book on Miller, I had called the second part of Colossus the most 'purgatorial' section of the book because (among other reasons) Miller himself must undergo a 'purge' when he's afflicted, for days, with a miserable case of diarrhoea which constrains him to alter his own 'diet' to mere 'soggy rice with a little lemon juice in it!' I'd done so only half-jokingly. For the poet in Miller knows very well that even though he's reached 'Purgatory', the struggle isn't yet over to attain to the Earthly Paradise that awaits at the summit of Mount Purgatory. It's while he's at the mercy of this diarrhea, in fact, that he insists most eloquently on the power of the Greek 'light' and 'poverty' to purify human life: 'I'm crazy enough to believe that the happiest man on earth is the man with the fewest needs. And I also believe that if you have light, such as you have here, all ugliness is obliterated.'

To achieve this transformation, however, one clearly has to learn how to seize this circumambient light. And this brings us to one of the important themes of Purgatorio: what might be called the 'part' of friendship. In their respective Infernos, Dante and Henry Miller had walked among the damned – whom the very nature of the place had driven to scorn and sometimes even to brutally taunt each other, sadistically at times; in their Paradisos, later on, they will both be thoroughly bedazzled, again and again, by the circles upon circles of 'angels' and 'saints' that move there, in unison, in a kind of choreography of mutual praise and love. But in their Purgatorios, both are permitted to walk among friends whom they recognize as friends and by whom they are sustained in their own perilous and difficult ascent. Here are no Charon, no Minos 'horrible and grinning,' no Cerberus or Phlegyas to be subdued with 'words of power' by Virgil. The 'courteous porter' at Saint Peter's Gate in Dante's Purgatorio cries out 'Welcome!' to the delighted Dante, just as, centuries later, the 'courteous porter' (Kyrios Alexandros) at Phaestos in Miller's Colossus of
Maroussi warmly welcomes Miller: "God has sent you," he said, pointing heavenward and smiling at me as if in ecstasy.' In Hell, all sense of community has been lost or perverted into hateful antagonisms; but in Purgatory, all are harmoniously united in bonds of friendly goodwill towards earth and towards heaven.

Just as Henry Miller's journey in Greece is made more illuminating by the presence of boon companions who instruct his eyes to behold the 'secret things' (Katsimbalis, Seferis and Durrell, both fellow poets, and Alexandros, a spiritual master), so some of the most memorable figures whom Dante encounters in Purgatory in his quest for increase of light turn out to be his most affectionate friends and masters during his life on earth: Forese Donati, Bongiunta of Lucca, a fellow poet, Guido Guinicelli, the illustrious founder of the dolce stil nuovo, and Arnaut Daniel, whom Dante honours memorably with the title of 'il miglior fabbro.' As he puts it in Canto XII: 'What different passes these from those we knew / In Hell! for there with hideous howls of pain, / But here with singing, we are ushered through' ['... chè quivi per canti / s'entra ...']. (Binyon, p. 249, Commedia, p. 337) Miller is just as enchanted by his own singing throng in Greece as earlier Dante had been. When Katsimbalis/Virgil takes him to explore Mycenae, he is moved to the point of saying: 'At Mycenae the gods once walked the earth, of that there can be no question. And at Mycenae the progeny of these same gods produced a type of man who was artistic to the core. . . . Nobody has yet penetrated the secret of this hoary scene. It defies the feeble processes of the intellectual mind. We must await the return of the gods, the restoration of faculties which now lie dormant.' How closely this moment of epiphany resembles the famous lines in Canto XXII of Purgatorio, where Dante apostrophizes his own Virgil and thanks him for having announced that 'the world [will be] new-born' ('secol si rinova') when 'a new progeny from heaven' descends ('progenie scende da ciel nova'). [Binyon, pp. 301–302; Commedia, p. 404]

The encounters with god-like friends which Dante records in his Purgatorio are too well-known to quote here; they can easily be located in standard translations of Dante's work by those who want to refresh their memories – and their souls! The quality of love which these figures inspire in the poet has about it something of wondering adoration. Dante calls it stupore, sometimes umilità. Henry Miller pays a
similar ‘adoring’ tribute to Katsimbalis towards the close of Colossus: ‘But there is something colossal about any human figure when that individual becomes truly and thoroughly human. A more human individual than Katsimbalis I have never met. Walking with him through the streets of Amaroussion [italics mine throughout] I had the feeling that I was walking the earth in a totally new way. The earth became more intimate, more alive, more promising. He spoke fervently of the past, it is true, not as something dead and forgotten, however, but rather as something which we carry within us, something which fructifies the present and makes the future inviting. He spoke of little things and of great with equal reverence; he was never too busy to pause and dwell on the things which moved him; he had endless time on his hands, which in itself is the mark of a great soul [One can see how long a distance Miller has travelled from the whining, desperate, ego-driven damned of the Villa Borghese!]. There are men who are so full, so rich, who give themselves so completely that each time you take leave of them you feel that it is absolutely of no consequence whether the parting is for a day or forever. They come to you brimming over and they fill you to overflowing. They ask nothing of you except that you participate in their superabundant joy of living.’

And precisely this, it seems to me, is the ‘secret’ which Katsimbalis and his friends have imparted to Miller – this daring to surrender to the living light of love and let it burn out the dross that prevents the ‘superabundant joy of living’ from becoming manifest in the crucible of the soul. There’s a marvellous passage towards the close of The Colossus of Maroussi, where Miller becomes consciously aware of this secret. He’d already caught glimpses of it earlier, in joyous moments at Mycenae and Epidaurus which he beautifully describes in Colossus, but it’s after the purgatorial blaze of awareness at Eleusis that the secret is fully disclosed to him: ‘For the first time in my life, I had met men who were like men ought to be – that is to say, open, frank, natural, spontaneous, warmhearted. . . . In every possible way that I can think of Greece presented itself to me as the very center of the universe, the ideal meeting place of man with man in the presence of God. Greece had done something for me which New York, nay, America itself, could never destroy. Greece had made me free and whole. . . . I walked about as if on velvet, rendering silent homage and thanksgiving to the little band of friends whom I had made in Greece.
I love those men, each and every one, for having revealed to me the true proportions of the human being. I love the soil in which they grew, the tree from which they sprang, the light in which they flourished, the goodness, the integrity, the charity which they emanated.' And as if to emphasize that the purpose of a 'Purgatory' is to purge, Miller concludes: 'They brought me face to face with myself, they cleansed me of hatred and jealousy and envy.'

While he had still been walking through the City of Dis, Miller seems to suggest in The Colossus of Maroussi, he had 'walked blindfolded, with faltering, hesitant steps; [he had been] proud and arrogant.' But it was precisely this faltering and this blindness which had led him, like Dante, to the 'dark wood' which is the photographic negative of the 'earthly paradise' he has now finally reached at the top of Mount Purgatory — a place he could never have reached except by passing through Hell! Now that he has completed the descent into the depths of the pit and has reemerged, he 'knows.' He finds himself, suddenly, during the visit to Phaestos (which he explicitly refers to as being 'at the very gates of Paradise') wanting to give, 'to give prodigally and indiscriminately of all I possessed.'

Readers of Dante's Purgatorio will recall that Mount Purgatory has seven Cornices and that as the inhabitants of Purgatory leave each of the seven Cornices, an Angel of the Cornice pronounces a benediction on them which purges the soul of each of the Seven Roots of Sin. These seven benedictions, in effect, are the final cleansing ('purge') that qualify the wayfarers in Purgatory to enter into the great happiness of Heaven ahead. The Greek sun has had a peculiar effect on Henry Miller's mind at Phaestos. What he calls the 'ultimate violet light' of Phaestos makes everything seem 'holy' to him, and he's suddenly seized by a desire to 'float in the air like an angel.' A moment later, he finds himself wondering 'what I might do myself to make men realize what great happiness lies in store for all of us.' It's at this moment of extreme euphoria that he impulsively sends out 'a benediction in every direction' — and, whether coincidentally or not, this 'benediction' takes the form, like Dante's in Purgatorio, of a sevenfold benediction — 'to old and young [1], to the neglected savages in the forgotten parts of the earth [2], to wild as well as domesticated animals [3], to the birds of the air [4], to creeping things [5], to trees and plants and flowers [6], to rocks and lakes and mountains [7]. This is the first
day of my life,’ concludes the chastened Miller, ‘that I have included everybody and everything on this earth in one thought. I bless the world, every inch of it, every living atom, and it is all alive, breathing like myself, and conscious through and through.’

3. PARADISO

Saint Catherine of Genoa has given us one of the most astonishing definitions of Hell which I’ve ever seen. ‘The fire of Hell,’ she writes, ‘is simply the light of God as experienced by those who reject it.’ But this, obviously, is merely the negative side of things. The light of God’s love is manifestly a different sort of phenomenon to those who don’t reject it. It’s rather, as Dante Alighieri puts it in one of the most exalted lines of his entire Commedia, ‘l’Amor che move il sole e l’altre stelle’ [‘the Love that moves the sun and all the other stars’]. (Paradiso, Canto XXXIII, line 145) One Dante scholar argues that it may even have been as a result of reading Boethius that Dante consciously adapted a vision of the universe governed by the principles of emanation from a divine centre of pure light and goodness. He sees a metaphysic of this kind first emerging in the poem ‘Amor che movi tua vertu’ (‘Love, who sendest down thy power from heaven as the sun does its splendours’) in the Convivio of Dante.

Be that as it may, there’s nothing the least bit theoretical about the way Dante has transmuted this Boethian idea into superlatively living poetry in his Paradiso; it’s clearly the result, here, of a profoundly personal visionary experience. When Beatrice fixes her gaze in the direction of the zenith, in Canto XXIII, and helps Dante see the ‘one Sun which kindled each and all, / As light from our sun lights the celestial pageantry’ [‘un Sol che tutte quante l’accendea, / come fa’l nostro le vista superne’ – Commedia, p. 628], we take our first step in the direction of that tremendous transfiguration of Beatrice which follows later, in Canto XXX of Paradiso, in the course of which Dante’s sight will be so strengthened that nothing will now be able to vanquish it again, as a result of his having learned from Beatrice that, in their upward journey through Paradise together, it’s the Empyrean itself they’re entering. Throughout his climb in the direction of the Empyrean, Dante has spoken exaltedly of ‘those heights far above’ that lure him upwards and of ‘the holy joys’ that ‘grow purer as they mount.’ It’s not
so surprising, when we turn to Henry Miller's 'Paradiso' after this, to find that Miller has situated his own Heaven on the dizzying heights of Big Sur, on the California coast — 'far above'!

Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch is the last important book to have been written by Henry Miller. It's a luminous account of Miller's idyllic later years in the breath-takingly beautiful mountainous region of Big Sur, in northern California, among 'saintly' friends, neighbours, and fellow-artists, all living, as if 'upon a peak in Darien,' in full view of the light-dappled Pacific, and it embodies — incomparably well, in my opinion — Miller's own vision of Paradise. In a short prologue to Big Sur, Miller asks himself an indicative question: 'From what realm of light were we shadows who darken the earth spawned?' Shortly after, he returns to the subject of 'the light' and makes it clear that, like Dante, he associates the light with love: 'The man who has seen the light follows the light. And the light usually leads him to the place where he can function most effectively, that is, where he will be of most use to his fellow-men.' But Miller becomes much more eloquent about this light, in Section 4 of Big Sur, while writing about (of all the down-to-earth things) his efforts at making water-colours: 'What is maddening is not to be able to capture the light which permeates the world of Nature. Light is the one thing we cannot steal, imitate, or even counterfeit. Even a Van Eyck, a Vermeer, a Van Gogh can but give a feeble illusion of its mysterious splendor. I recall the pang of joy which I experienced on viewing for the first time, in the cathedral at Ghent, Van Eyck's "Mystic Lamb." That, it seemed to me, was the closest I would ever get to the divine light of Nature. It was, of course, a light that came from within — a holy light, a transcendent light. It had been achieved by artifice, the most sublime, skilful artifice, which, if we understood it properly, if we were receptive — and how is it that we are not? — might yield us intimations of that imperishable light which outshines all the suns of the unspeakably vast multiverse in which we are drowned.'

It strikes me as another of those important symbolic 'trifles' which one so often finds in his work that Miller, again paralleling Dante, places the figure of Santa Lucia (Lux, of course, means Light) both at the threshold and at the close of his own journey through Paradise. In Dante, Santa Lucia figures as one of the 'Three Blessed Ladies' who interest themselves in Dante's salvation and whom scholars see as 'female' analogues to the 'male' trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Lucia is viewed as the counterpart of the Holy Ghost (as 'bond and messenger' between Father / Son and humankind), or as 'the Gift.' In Henry Miller, Santa Lucia is a mountain range! And, 'like Big Sur, [it is] just a pin point on the map.' But this seemingly insignificant mountain range, pointedly alluded to both at the beginning and at the end of Miller's journey through Paradise, is clearly a kind of 'bond and messenger' also. At the opening of Big Sur, Miller calls the Santa Lucia mountains 'hermaphroditic.' 'In form and contour,' he tells us, they are 'feminine' but in strength and vitality they are 'masculine.' There is a 'pristine quality' to their beauty that inspires in Miller a desire to 'lift [his] arms as in prayer, achieving a wing-span no god ever possessed' as well as 'a nimbus' around his head. And in the very last paragraph of Big Sur, he returns to Santa Lucia (as does Dante at the end of his Paradiso) to tell us that he will 'remain here, on the slopes of the Santa Lucia [Holy Light], where to give thanks to the Creator comes natural and easy . . . [where] there is abiding peace, the peace of God.' Santa Lucia, it will be recalled by readers of the Paradiso, is Dante's 'gift-giver of the Holy Ghost,' one of the three who, along with the Virgin Mary and Beatrice, direct Dante's footsteps unfailingly towards 'the peace of God,' towards Paradise.

Dante pictures Paradise not only under the somewhat allegorical figure of the ten Heavens of medieval astronomy and that of the Mystical Rose, but also as a place where the soul can actually come to know all the joy it's able to experience. His Paradise is 'the soul of the world, formed in the divine mind, the source of influences which radiate throughout the universe.' This conception of things enables Dante to establish a link between a purely spiritual heaven and the created world: eternity and the material world are joined in one system. His whole scheme permits him to unite the Eternal City with the Earthly City, the spiritual with the terrestrial. Salvation thus isn't merely for the individual man but for man-in-community. Dante's Commedia can indeed be viewed as a poem which celebrates 'that union of our wills with the Universal Will in which every creature finds its true self and its true being.' The imagery of this poem, clearly, encompasses both the way of the artist and the way of the lover.

I think it can be argued that Henry Miller takes account of both these ways in Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch. In fact, Miller himself might simply insist (as he does admirably, I believe, in The Time of the
Assassins and The Smile at the Foot of the Ladder) that the two ways are one and the same! It's rather interesting to me that one of the things that prompted Henry Miller to write Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch was an enthusiastic reading of a book by Wilhelm Fraenger called The Millenium of Hieronymus Bosch. Miller approvingly quotes a passage from this book in Big Sur: 'The Brothers and Sisters of the Free Spirit called their devotional community-life 'Paradise' and interpreted the word as signifying the quintessence of love.' This passage prompts Miller to make some revealing observations of his own about Paradise. 'The longing for paradise, whether here on earth or in the beyond,' he writes, 'has almost ceased to be. Instead of an idée-force it has become an idée-fixe. From a potent myth it has degenerated into a taboo. Men will sacrifice their lives to bring about a better world — whatever that may mean — but they will not budge an inch to attain paradise. Nor will they struggle to create a bit of paradise in the hell they find themselves in. It is so much easier, and gorier, to make revolution, which means, to put it simply, establishing another, a different, status quo. If paradise were realizable — this is the classic retort! — it would no longer be paradise.' But the visionary traveller through Hell of Tropic of Cancer and the Purgatorial places he was guided through in The Colossus of Maroussi isn't so easily inclined to abandon the struggle before reaching the goal. 'The windows of the soul are infinite,' he insists, 'and it is through the eyes of the soul that paradise is visioned. If there are flaws in your paradise, open more windows! Vision is entirely a creative faculty [the way of the artist]: it uses the body and the mind as the navigator uses his instruments. Open and alert, it matters little whether one finds a supposed short cut to the Indies — or discovers a new world. Everything is begging to be discovered, not accidentally, but intuitively. Seeking intuitively, one's destination is never in a beyond of time and space but always here and now. If we are always arriving and departing, it is also true that we are eternally anchored. One's destination is never a place but rather a new way of looking at things. Which is to say that there are no limits to vision. Similarly, there are no limits to Paradise (Italics mine).'

What does Henry Miller mean, exactly, when he says we are 'eternally anchored'? One of Miller's best books is entitled Remember to Remember, and in that book he seems to me perfectly aware that the function of the poet is to practice that Platonic anamnésis (literally
unforgetting') whose chief goal is not remembering the past but remembering the timeless, the Eternal. As early as the opening page of his log-book of Hell, Tropic of Cancer, Miller had served notice of this awareness: 'The hero, then, is not Time, but Timelessness.' By the time he reaches his Paradise, this notion has become habitual with him. 'Big Sur will be here forever,' he tells us, emblematically, at the start of the California book. It has the 'look of always. Nature smiling at herself in the mirror of eternity.' Later in the book, he tells us of his astonished delight when some of the playmates of his boyhood in Brooklyn — 'all going on seventy now' — decide to write letters to their now-famous former schoolmate in Big Sur, and he adds, in a sardonic parenthesis: '(Time is running out, wrote one of the boys. I suppose he meant clock time.)' For Henry Miller is convinced that even little boys from Brooklyn have an 'imperishable soul.'

In fact, Miller persists in believing that Paradise itself is available to all but that the road that leads to it is the road through Hell. That's the catch. Writing of a young Canadian friend who is now living, a little lost, in the 'city of vice and corruption, Paris,' in 1957, Miller adds pointedly: 'He has not yet taken his soul to the underground — but give him time! After the imaginary ailments come the real ailments. After inoculation, immunity. After immortality, eternity. After Jesus first, second, third and last, old Adam remains. Adam Kadmon.' He concludes this passage with a playful and sassy outburst of irritability with those who have failed, repeatedly, to understand that his message is essentially soteriological: 'Aren't the hollyhocks just glorious? And have you seen those Johnny-jump-ups? Why did you take the crucifix down from the wall? Put it back! Haven't I said that every crucifixion is a rosy one? "Sauve qui peut"? Poouah! Try this Liederkranz . . . it's sublime. . . .'

This half-jesting reference to rosy crucifixions merits a glance in passing. Earlier in Big Sur, Miller affectionately describes a very poor Mexican Catholic family named Lopez whose devotion to 'a picture of the Madonna, a taper burning before a crucifix, a rosary hanging from a nail in the wall' touch him deeply. The mother's name (by yet another of those 'coincidences' with which the life of the author of The Rosy Crucifixion abounds) is Rosa. And although Miller states categorically that he is 'not a Catholic' and does not approve of 'rosaries, crucifixes, ikons, and chromos of the Madonna,' yet every
time he visits Rosa and her kids he feels ‘as one ought to feel, but seldom does, after visiting a church.’ He concludes by expressing satisfaction with Rosa’s crucifix: ‘I say it is good that there is one family in Big Sur where these appurtenances of the faith are in evidence and convey what they were meant to convey.’ Henry Miller is, in fact, though ‘no Catholic,’ a man of prayer. Dante, in Paradiso, places the role of prayer at a very pivotal point in his poem to show its primacy in human life. So does Henry Miller in Big Sur. Writing of a moment of excruciating lonesomeness when his estranged third wife has taken his own beloved kids away from Big Sur and he has no idea where they are, he says: ‘What does one do in such a case – the wild waves going up and down, the gulls screaming at you, the buzzards sniffing at you as if you were already so much tripe, and the sky so full of glory yet empty of hope? I’ll tell you what you do, if you have an ounce of sense left in you. I’ll give it to you the way William Blake answered when a visitor once asked him what he did in moments of dire extremity. William Blake calmly turned to his good wife Kate, his helpmate, and he said to her: “Kate, what do we do in such cases?” And his dear Kate replied: “Why, we get down on our knees and pray, don’t we, Mr Blake?” That’s what I did, and that’s what every bleeding mother’s son has to do when things get too unbearable.’ For Henry Miller has by now learned what Dante had learned in Paradiso, namely, that eternal life means ‘an endlessly deepening vision of the inexhaustible.’ (There’s always more where this came from, to those who know how to ask.) At the threshold of the ‘new era’ which he feels he has entered, Miller has discovered that ‘the resources of this world are inexhaustible. I refer to physical resources,’ Miller adds. ‘As for spiritual resources, has there ever been a deficiency? Only in man’s mind.’

I mentioned at the start of this section of my essay that Henry Miller lived in Big Sur among ‘saintly’ neighbours and artists. The saints, no one will deny, play a paramount role in Dante’s Paradiso, of course. If Dante has wandered in Hell among damned souls and in Purgatory among those who will eventually be saved, in Paradise he arrives among the saints and angels who already enjoy the vision of God. The circles of saints are impressive and include such figures as Saint Thomas Aquinas, Albertus Magnus, Dionysus the Areopagite, Richard of St Victor, Saint Bonaventure, and Saint Dominic. But none is more lustrous among Dante’s saintly hierarchies than Il Poverello, Saint Francis
Saint Thomas Aquinas' story of the wondrous love of Saint Francis for the Lady Poverty, to which Dante listens enthralled, is surely one of the zeniths of beauty in the Paradiso, as well as an obvious antithesis to the more lurid and debasing episodes of greed and hatred which are told in the Inferno, at the lower end of the scale. By stressing with such epic fervor Saint Francis' utter renunciation of worldly possessions (which he judged, evidently, to be the most outstanding and most efficacious feature of the Franciscan message), Dante virtually sees Francis as a new embodiment of the spirit of Christ on earth. No one has risen higher among Dante's saints than this simple man, whose ideal was to own nothing.

Henry Miller once told me that Saint Francis of Assisi was 'second only to Christ' in his own eyes. In The Wisdom of the Heart, years earlier, Henry had written that by embracing poverty so whole-heartedly, Francis had 'acquired the strength to accomplish miracles, to inspire a joy such as few men have given the world, and, by no means the least of his powers, to write the most sublime and simple, the most eloquent hymn of thanksgiving that we have in all literature: The Canticle of the Sun.' Miller refers twice to Saint Francis in Big Sur, but he refers with even greater enthusiasm to Francis' 'Beatrice,' Lady Poverty. Early on in his book, he insists that every genuine artist or saint must soon 'make sacrifices which worldly people find absurd and unnecessary' — especially, and 'inevitably if he truly follows an "inner light," [he must make] poverty his companion.' One of Henry Miller's octogenarian saints in Big Sur, Oden Wharton, 'had the good sense' to quit a hundred-thousand-dollar-a-year job, as executive of a steel corporation, to become an artist; he lives 'like the lilies in the fields. He hasn't a penny now, dear Oden, but God looks after him.' The Lopez children, whom I mentioned earlier, live on the brink of indigence. They have no fifty-dollar toys that are 'rubberized, chromium-plated, jet-propelled, and of the very latest model.' Yet, with 'absolutely nothing to play with,' they have more fun than any of the richer children around them: 'By contrast, look at the recreation grounds attached to the public schools in our big cities. Millions of dollars spent on expensive apparatus, yet the poor urchins look like little convicts who have been given permission to exercise — or else like pent-up demons who have a half-hour in which to wreak havoc.' But Miller's finest model is no less a figure than William Blake's Jesus.
the Imagination himself. 'As for Jesus, by all accounts he didn't own a toothbrush. No baggage, no furniture, no change of linen, no handkerchief, no passport, no identity card, no bankbook, no love letters, no insurance policy, no address book, no home (not even a winter palace), and no correspondence to look after. As far as we know, he never wrote a line. Home was wherever he happened to be. Not where he hung his hat — because he never wore a hat. He had no wants, that's the thing. He didn't even have to think about such a menial job as wardrobe attendant. After a time he ceased working as a carpenter. Not that he was looking for better wages. No, he had more important work to do. He set out to prove [among other things] the absurdity of living by the sweat of one's brow. Behold the lilies in the fields...'

It must be clear to any attentive reader of Henry Miller's Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch that Miller's is what Réne Guénon calls an 'initiatory' journey. The 'saints' whom Miller meets in Big Sur have made him a gift outright of what he calls 'an initiation into a new way of life.' Again and again, he stresses that 'these isolated individuals are bringing about a community which will one day replace the dismembered warring communities which are a disgrace to the name.' Men like Walker Winslow and Hugh O'Neill the poet, for instance, have 'the soul[s] of saint[s]' and 'remain poor' — ('Deliberately so!'). O'Neill seems to 'live on air. His walk too [is] a sort of walking on air. He [is] swift and noiseless.' Jack Morgenrath, another visionary and 'absolutist' of Miller's acquaintance, 'thinks and moves like eternity itself' because 'he's living in a state of eternity.' 'Little Mike' Hoagland, on the other hand, has 'something of the sage and something of the saint. A saint more on the order of Joseph di Cupertino... [who] was farmed out to the monks because he was such an utterly incapable dullard. In the eyes of God he was one of the blessed ones. It was his ecstatic love which sustained him in his spectacular flights of levitation.' Finally, there's 'that unknown Mexican peon' whom Miller's friend Ephraim Doner brings to his house one day to help clear the weeds in Miller's garden. Miller unabashedly insists that of all the 'saints and seers' whom he's ever known, this penniless and lowliest of human beings (whose very name he cannot recall because he was even 'truly without a name') is the one he cherishes the most. This man had been 'more than any saint' because he had been 'the truly selfless individual. He was also the most handsome, in a spiritual sense. In behaviour and
appearance he was what the Christ would be like, I imagine, if He were to appear again on earth. (Has He ever left it?) One is reminded, unavoidably again, of Dante's Francis. One is reminded also of the beautiful phrase of Arthur Rimbaud, himself a nameless and penniless peon/seer during his lifetime — the phrase which Rimbaud uses to designate such rare beings: 'fils du soleil.' ('Naming them,' sings Dante's Saint Bernard in the Paradiso, 'I go / Down through the rose, proceeding leaf by leaf.')

But it's with the 'angels' of Dante's and Miller's Paradises that I bring this journey of ours to an end. The attention Dante devotes to the Angelic Orders and to the functions of Angels in Cantos XXVIII, XXIX, XXX, and XXXI of the Paradiso is among the most brilliant and most essential things in the poem. Dante naturally accepts the traditional division of the angels into nine orders, corresponding to the nine spheres of the heaven in his day. Allegorically, the angels represent the operations of divine Providence, their varied and coordinated power imaging the whole spiritual order of the universe quickened and sustained by love. Literally, they are God's agents in carrying out His divine will in the cosmos. But not all angels are alike and not all perform the same sort of function; there are even degrees in which God's light is received by the angels as Dante knew them. All, however, are 'emissaries' or 'messengers' (the literal meaning of the word 'angel') and all live in joy and light. This is something Henry Miller also knows full well. In a chapter entitled 'The Poet as Angel,' in my Orpheus in Brooklyn, I give ample evidence of Miller's conscious awareness of both the etymological and cosmological lore pertaining to angels — even in the early Tropics, where he brilliantly describes the experiences of the telegraph messenger/angels whom he meets while working as employment manager for a rival firm called the 'Cosmodemonic Telegraph Company of North America!'

But the lesser angels of the earlier Henry Miller books are succeeded, in Big Sur, by angels who belong far higher up the scale of the Angelic Orders. 'Butch' Eames, for example, is a little boy about the same age as Henry's son Tony and 'blessed with the disposition of an angel,' as Miller puts it. Butch is 'like no other child in these parts.' He always 'comes running to greet you' with 'a radiance [that] emanates from his shining countenance! He makes you feel as if you also were a divine emissary, as if he saw you through a vision.'
HENRY MILLER’S DIVINE COMEDY

thing no more important than run, skip, or jump, ‘you realize that if we possessed nothing more than this animal endowment we would still be blessed. Butch makes physical exertion seem like divine play. Indeed, every gesture which animates him is like a prayer of thanksgiving, like the rejoicing of an angelic being (My italics throughout).’ A little later in the book, in a chapter devoted to the extraordinary healer, Jean Wharton, a neighbour of his, Miller describes her as being more ‘an angelic being than ... a doer of good deeds.’ He goes on to say that angels often face the problem of having to ‘refrain from intervention.’ ‘Fools rush in where angels fear to tread,’ he quotes Alexander Pope. ‘Obviously, angels see farther and deeper than ordinary mortals; if angels give pause it is assuredly from no thought of self-protection.’ In fact, he is even mildly critical of the splendid Jean Wharton ‘who has spent so much time, so much effort, developing positives for those who see only negatives, or rather are unable to read negatives, for if they could they would have no more need for positives than for negatives.’ His last word on the subject, characteristically, is the word of a visionary: ‘The angel in man is ready to emerge whenever that dread human will to have it one’s own way can be kept in abeyance. Things not only look different, they are different, when perfect sight is restored. To see things whole is to be whole.’ Nor is Henry Miller merely preaching to others when he talks of ‘that dread human will to have it’s own way.’

Recalling the Armenian soothsayer, Aram Hourabedian, of The Colossus of Maroussi, he concludes the next section of Big Sur with these words: ‘When the Armenian soothsayer, in Athens, was predicting [in 1939] the varied and exciting voyages I was yet to undertake, when he was indicating the general directions of these voyages, one indubitably toward the Orient, another unmistakably toward the South Pacific, and so on, the question which was hammering in my brain was: ‘Be specific! Tell me if I [italics mine] shall ever get to Lhassa, to Mecca, to Timbuctoo!’ Today I realize that if I do not get there in person one of my ‘emissaries’ will, and I’ll one day know everything I long to know, not in the life to come but in this life here on earth.’

But the most remarkable and most illuminating of all the paeans to ‘angels’ in his book occurs towards the midpoint of Miller’s Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch, in a section innocently entitled ‘A Fortune In Francs’ – which I consider one of the most splendid things in Miller’s whole oeuvre. ‘A Fortune in Francs,’ which begins in a
rambling and downright comic vein and ends in something like sheer ecstasy, tells about an immense sum of money which Miller's Paris publisher, Obelisk Press, had accumulated for Miller, around 1946–1947, after the American G.I.’s had been snapping up the Tropics ‘as fast as they were thrown on the market.’ Due to complicated French banking regulations, it proves impossible to transfer this fabulous sum of money to Miller's bank account in California and, in the end, because of the publisher's unwise investments and mishandling of the money and a few other preposterous (and rather hilarious) factors, Miller ends up getting next to nothing. Eventually, the matter becomes merely a bad dream to Miller, 'something to joke about' occasionally. ('Remember when you almost became a millionaire?') But the episode prompts Miller to reflect on the reputation he continues to enjoy in certain quarters as a writer who wrote 'all that pornography' just to make money. He insists that he had no choice in the matter because, as a writer, he has merely been receiving 'messages' all along from something which he calls 'the Voice,' which comes to him 'from the celestial recording room.' The closing pages of 'A Fortune in Francs' are stunning in their brilliance, but they are also especially pertinent to the thesis which I advance in this essay of mine on Henry Miller's 'Divine Comedy.' It's in these pages that Miller himself, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, is vouchsafed an uncanny apparition by his own ultimate 'angel,' his ultimate Virgil.

It all starts with a simple nap which Miller takes in his Big Sur house after brooding a while on the 'money question,' a nap which is made virtually impossible on this particular day because Miller keeps insistently getting 'messages'! 'This noon,' he complains, 'it was bad, very bad' – so bad that, even afterwards, he was hardly able to 'taste the delicious lunch my wife, Eve [his fourth wife, Eve McClure Miller], had prepared for me.' After lunch, he even has to call on Eve to help jot a few key phrases down, hoping this will 'turn off the current.' But the effort fails: 'Whole sentences poured in on me. Then paragraphs... Then pages. . . . It's a phenomenon that always astounds me, no matter how often it happens.' He's reminded of a time, shortly before, when he was at work on Plexus, the second volume of the Rosy Crucifixion trilogy: 'Huge blocks – particularly the dream parts – came to me just as they appear in print and without any effort on my part, except that of equating my own rhythm with that of the mysterious dictator who
had me in his thrall [my italics].’ But the mere thought of this ‘messenger’
impels Miller to think even further back in time, to the Paris days of
the 1930’s, when ‘the Voice’ had put in its first important appearance
and had appeared to dictate Tropic of Capricorn: ‘I didn’t have to think up
so much as a comma or a semicolon; it was all given, straight from the
celestial recording room. . . . I could almost see the Voice, so close, so
compelling, so authoritative it was, and withal bearing such ecumeni-
cal import. At times it sounded like a lark, at other times like a nightingale,
and sometimes — really eerie, this! — like that bird of Thoreau’s fancy which sings
with the same luscious tones all day and all night.’

The next paragraph is particularly interesting in light of Henry
Miller’s perennially prevailing reputation as a ‘pornographer’: ‘When I
began the Interlude [in Tropic of Capricorn] called `The Land of Fuck’ —
meaning ‘Cockaigne’ — I couldn’t believe my ears. ‘What’s that? I cried,
ever dreaming of what I was being led into. ‘Don’t ask me to put that
down, please! You’re only creating more trouble for me.’ But my pleas
were ignored. Sentence by sentence I wrote it down, having not the
slightest idea what was to come next. Reading copy the following day
— it came in instalments — I would shake my head and mutter like a
lost one. Either it was sheer drivel and hogwash, or it was sublime. In
any case, I was the one who had to sign his name to it. How could I
possibly imagine then that some few years later a judicial triumvirate,
eager to prove me a sinner, would accuse me of having written such
passages ‘for gain.’ Here I was begging the Muse not to get me into
trouble with the powers that be, not to make me write out all those
‘filthy’ words, all those scandalous, scabrous lines, pointing out in that
deaf and dumb language which I employed when dealing with the
Voice that soon, like Marco Polo, Cervantes, Bunyan, et alii, I would
have to write my books in jail or at the foot of the gallows . . . and
these holy cows deep in clover, failing to recognize dross from gold,
render a verdict of guilty, guilty of dreaming it up “to make money.”

And then, quite unexpectedly, the thing happens. Out of the
depths, and coming as much as a surprise to the reader as it must have
come to Miller himself, the powerful numinous image comes welling
up. Miller, characteristically, calls it ‘a coincidence.’ Here’s what he
writes: ‘And only yesterday — what a coincidence! — coming back from
a walk in the hills, a thin, transparent fog touching everything with
quicksilver fingers [an unconscious allusion, perhaps, to the uncanny
hand of Mercury/Hermes the Messenger of the Gods?), only yesterday, I say, coming in view of our grounds, I suddenly recognized it to be the very “wild park” which I had described myself as being [italics mine throughout] in the same Capricorn. There it was, swimming in an underwater light, the trees spaced just right, the willow in front bowing to the willow in back, the roses in full bloom, the pampas grass just beginning to don its plumes of gold, the hollyhocks standing out like starved sentinels with big, bright buttons, the birds darting from tree to tree, calling to one another imperiously, and Eve [whom Dante, it will be recalled, places near Beatrice as her earthly prototype in the Sempiternal Golden Rose in his Paradiso – but, here, transmutatively but appropriately, in the shape of Eve McClure Miller, wife of Henry “Adam Kadmon” Miller] standing barefoot in her Garden of Eden with a grub hoe in her hand – while Dante Alighieri, pale as alabaster and with only his head showing above the rim, was making to slake his awesome thirst in the bird bath under the elm!

Earlier in this extraordinary epiphany, while Miller is still groping through the ‘thin, transparent fog’ that conceals the true nature of his ‘Voice’ from him, he compares it, it will be remembered, to the ‘lark’ and the ‘nightingale’ and the ‘bird of Thoreau’s fancy.’ But who is this mysterious bird? Kathleen Raine offers some interesting suggestions. She writes, in the title essay of her book The Inner Journey of the Poet, that the poet ‘is held to be “inspired” by the Muse, the Holy Spirit, the Instructors – that is to say from the “other” mind. . . . Yeats had his “instructors,” Robert Graves his White Goddess. Often the figure of the Muse is projected, as Dante projected his Beatrice or [Alexander] Blok his “beautiful lady,” onto some human figure. Many still hold the belief, inherited by Christendom from the Greeks, of the holy guardian angel who accompanies each of us through life.’ She concludes her essay by telling us that Yeats ‘meant us, perhaps, to be reminded [in
Sailing to Byzantium] of Hans Christian Anderson’s story of the dying Emperor and the nightingale who restored him to life and drove away his terrors by her song. It was through the magical power of Virgil’s golden bough, she suggests, that Aeneas ‘was able to descend into Hades.’ And she adds: ‘The bird is also the type of Plato’s “musical soul” who sings on earth the music of eternity. Therefore the poet, ‘once out of nature,’ aspires to be the voice of the soul and to speak from a knowledge not to be learned on earth of the timeless order of the things of the Kingdom of Heaven, which is, as all know, within [My italics].’

On the very threshold of his descent into Hades, on page one of Tropic of Cancer, my readers will remember that Henry Miller had said: ‘I was sent here for a reason I have not yet been able to fathom.’ Many years later, in an essay on the art of writing, he declared: ‘I obey only my own instincts and intuitions. I know nothing in advance. Often I put down things which I do not understand myself, secure in the knowledge that later they will become clear and meaningful. . . .’ The Dante who appears, unexpectedly and in a flash, in Miller’s garden at Big Sur, is a Dante who must ‘slake his awesome thirst in the bird bath.’ Is he a ‘bird’? Is he ‘the Voice’ of the ‘nightingale’ suddenly and numinously made visible? Is he Henry Miller’s ultimate Virgil? It’s very difficult to answer such questions with absolute certainty. Matters of literary ‘inspiration’ of this kind are mysterious and might more appropriately be dealt with by the Holy Ghost Himself. But at least, by the time we arrive at Miller’s bright moment of illumination in Big Sur, we are made to feel we have a little bit more light on the subject of why Henry Miller was ‘sent here’ – and by whom.
Rock painting.
A female being with barbs in vital parts of the body – features that are associated with sorcery. Mt Brockman area, near Djerlandjal Rock.

Rock painting.
The Rainbow Snake.
X-ray style.
Deaf Adder Creek, Site 5.
PART I: THE OUTWARD JOURNEY

In Australia during the 19th century European settlers coined a phrase which was to describe a particular ritual journey that Aborigines made to celebrate and renew their relationship with their 'country'. It was called 'walkabout' and to this day the term implies both moral condemnation of the Aboriginal absence of the white man's work ethic, and a desultory incomprehension of Aboriginal religious life. If an Aboriginal stockman chose to go walkabout — that is, make a Dream journey — his employer would inevitably conclude that the man wished to avoid work. Thus an attitude of suspicion was born which pervades any dialogue between white and black Australians even today. For most white Australians who continue to have contact with these people are firmly convinced that the traditional Aborigine has no spiritual life to speak of, and that he lives surrounded by a veil of animist superstition.

Even ethnologists and anthropologists working in the field late last century tended to reinforce this prejudice. A great deal of research has been done since, of course, highlighting familial and tribal relationships, customs, initiatory techniques, ritual life and artistic expression, much of which has centred around survival modes and how most Aboriginal cultural activity is directed towards assuring physical continuity. Such noted anthropologists as R. M. Berndt and A. P. Elkin, while admitting for example that the sacred Wandjina of the Kimberley region of North-west Australia contain sacred energy or power, nevertheless attribute periodic retouching of these cave paintings to a
desire for rain.¹ Yet in contrast, Aboriginal custodians of the Wandjina clearly recognize that these spirit representations have a far wider cosmic role.² It is this desire to describe the ritual act, whether it may be expressed in painting, song or dance, in essentially materialist terms that calls into question the so-called objectivity of the anthropologist in his contact with the Australian Aborigine.

In fact it was stated by one European observer of the Aboriginal people as far back as 1798 that ‘no country has yet been discovered where some trace of religion was not to be found. From every observation and inquiry that I could make among these people, from the first to the last of my acquaintance with them (Aborigines), I can safely pronounce them an exception to this opinion’.³ Since then the Aborigine has been condemned to living a half life on the fringe of white Australian society, regarded by most as barely human and in no way deserving of respect. In the two hundred years since European settlement their numbers have been so reduced, their self-respect so eroded that it would be difficult to find any left today living the full traditional life as of old. The Dream journey as a ritual act has instead found its substitute in alcoholism and alienation.

These preliminary observations are essential if we are to understand the true nature of the Dream journey as a cultural affirmation in the face of the inevitable destruction of Aboriginal society today by Western cultural imperialism. Government agencies are preoccupied with ‘solving’ the problems that an indigenous race of people present, precisely because they are unable to deal with the inherent metaphysical nature of the Aboriginal way of life. The Aborigine’s insistence on the primordial sanctity of his ‘country’ is not an act of possession in terms of European property laws (as mining companies and graziers are so afraid of) but an act of being possessed by the land itself.⁴ Such an ‘inversion’ of property values, or the value placed upon land as a harbinger of all that is spiritually important in a man’s life, is at the root of the current antagonism between mining interests, graziers and government agencies on the one hand and tribal elders on the other.

The basis of the Dream journey for the Aborigine is a ritual cooperation with nature. If a man fails to do his part in maintaining this relationship, he is liable to distance himself from his origins and so destroy the primordial empathy that has always existed between
himself and nature. It is a mistake to assume that the reason why an Aborigine makes a Dream journey is simply to reinforce nature’s ability to renew itself. This belief implies a simplistic world-view which the general sophistication of Aboriginal culture, in terms of its understanding of the role of mythology and symbol, does not suggest. In fact the Aborigine is highly conscious that his enactment of a Dream journey involves a personal renewal that reaches far beyond any so-called increase ritual.

There are two levels to the Dream journey. One is largely a social activity in which participation is encouraged by all the members of a family group. The other is a more personal activity embarked upon alone in order that the individual might experience a closer understanding of his sacred nature. In both cases, however, there is a certain amount of ritual activity designed to encourage a new awareness of environment and the way personal ‘country’ can inspire a greater understanding of nature itself. If these two dimensions of the same journey were to be compared, then we might regard the former as being exoteric or outward and the latter as an esoteric or inward journey. Yet both journeys overlap in their significance because many of the stories, myth cycles, sacred environments (known as ‘hot places’) and cave paintings are common to both.

The outward Dream journey is perennial and follows a seasonal movement. While it is evident that such a journey is linked to the disparity of natural increase within a given environment (fruit ripening in one place, the birth of turtles in another; geese laying their eggs at another time and place), it does not mean that any ritual activity engaged in en route is automatically designed to insure that such increase comes about each season. For the journey is cyclical and involves a return to a place of origin each year. It also involves investing normal day-to-day activity with a significance that reaches beyond the practical application currently being invoked. In other words, while the tribal group may be deeply committed to a hunter-gatherer mode of existence, moving from one place to another as food sources exhaust themselves, they are also made fully aware of the underlying reasons for their activity through the recitation of primordial events by way of dancing, story-telling and song.

In the north, for example, in the Aboriginal reserve known as Arnhemland, there are six seasons, not four or even two as in the
southern areas of the continent. But unlike our own seasons which formally begin at particular times of the year, the seasonal cycle of the Arnhemlanders is a movable feast integrally associated with natural events. If these events do not happen for any reason, or are delayed, then the people might perform rituals to enhance their empathy with the natural event – that is, with the failure in the cosmic cycle already observed. To say that they wish to bring on the event that has not occurred through ritual activity is to attribute to the Aborigines a naive mechanistic belief in the way nature operates. Yet in terms of empirical knowledge these people are acute observers of natural phenomena and are well aware of how the seasonal cycle manifests itself. They are aware too of how it can break down, and consequently how this ruction can best be expressed at a symbolic level through the use of myth and ritual.

Thus we are not dealing with an unending journey back and forth across tribal territory solely in pursuit of food. Instead we are looking at a sacred journey in which each stage is imbued with sacred significance. The role that ritual and the myth-life of the tribe take in all this as they roam across their Dream landscape is to enhance the significance of what would otherwise be fairly mundane events. One writer has stated that the Aborigine ‘moves, not in a landscape, but in a humanised realm saturated with significations’. It is these significations that make the Dream journey such an important cosmic event in the lives of Aborigines. Each time they make the journey they are encountering what Satose Wanabe explained as ‘the entire past existing integrally in their present’.

A tribal elder living near the Arnhemland Escarpment outlined the way the seasonal cycle was differentiated in a recent field trip that we made to the region. Toby Gangele, a member of the Mirarr Kunjai:mi tribe, occupies country that embraces both tropical bushland and vast swamps that in season are home to countless numbers of magpie geese. In his own words, he explains:

‘We have six seasons. But our season don’t come regular like they do for balanda (white man). Yegge (April–mid June approx) be cool time for us. We know when it begin because Yamidji the green grasshopper, he call out that cheeky yams are ready. When Andjalem (woolly butt trees) comin’ up all over flowers, we know Wurrng (late June–mid August) cold season starts. T’at time we
light fires to burn off undergrowth, make land new again. Come Gurrung season (mid August—early October) and all best fruit trees like green plum and white apple comin’ up pretty wi’ flowers. It hot and dry t’en. Starts to get humid pretty soon as Gunumelong (October—December) comin’ along. Meantime, rain start fallin’ and land all over flooded. We callin’ t’is time Gudjewa (December—end of March). Magpie geese layin’ plenty eggs t’en, and goanna (a lizard) he start callin’ from trees. Tribes joinin’ us here at about t’is time from far away as Stone Country (Arnhemland) to eat eggs wit’ us. It good time t’en. Plenty dancin’, singin’ songs. When knock-em-down storms comin’ at end of monsoon time, all of us head up into Stone Country durin’ Bang Gerang (April). After t’at we hear Yamidji green grasshopper, he callin’ out about cheeky yams once more and we comin’ down to wetlands again.6

So the seasonal cycle is completed in terms of the natural cycle. During this time, of course, Toby Gangele and his family would have travelled over a region of approximately 1000 square miles looking for sustenance in a time-honoured way. The route that they had taken would vary little, if at all, from that covered by their ancestors for perhaps thousands of years. At the same time they would have observed a series of rituals entirely governed by the location that they happened to be in. These rituals would vary from place to place, however, depending on the hot places (both positive and negative) that they might have had to encounter along the way. But to use the word ‘ritual’ does not mean that whatever celebrations, song cycles or stories were invoked along the Dream route had to necessarily conform to some rigid, hieratic formula of expression. Indeed much of the ritual associated with Aboriginal tribal life is spontaneous, even joyous, a product of a people profoundly content within their environment. Only certain ceremonies such as those associated with initiation take on the more formal aspects of what we might consider as a carefully orchestrated ritual act.

The seasonal cycle is a practical reason for making a Dream journey. Toby Gangele and his relatives are well aware of why they make the journey, considering it an important part of their food-gathering activities and a way of coming in contact with other tribal groupings and various relatives. But they are also well aware of another reason for making the journey; a reason integrally associated with their
spiritual life. For the land they cross is a part of themselves.\(^7\) The Dream journey on the ritual level is a way of renewing contact with themselves, since they and the land are inseparable. It is at this point that the Aborigine enters into a Dream world where the land is transformed into a metaphysical landscape saturated with significations. In the same way that Homeric heroes live in close proximity and contact with the Olympian gods, so too do Aborigines recognize the immanent presence of their own spiritual exemplars.

The metaphysical landscape, then, is transformed into an ideal landscape, a hagiographic history of the people's origins, their struggle to survive, how and from whom they received their cultural gifts such as the ability to dance, sing songs, make spears, and hunt during that timeless moment known as the Dreaming. It is timeless because these primordial events took place both in the far distant past before even their ancestors had appeared on the earth – and are continuing to occur even as they are making their Dream journey in the present.\(^8\) Their encounter with their 'country' as they roam across it is an encounter with spiritual genesis, both personal and collective.

It is at this point that the landscape becomes fully humanised. In other words the Aborigines begin to recognize what the anthropologists refer to as a 'totemic landscape'. Unfortunately the term 'totem' has denigratory connotations associated with an infantile spirituality, or fetishism, made popular in the past by a whole generation of anthropologists eager to downgrade Aboriginal spirituality. But if we regard a totem in the way that Stanner was at pains to describe it as 'a sufficient condition, not a determinant, or any other relationship. It is a sign of unity between things or persons unified by something else';\(^9\) then we begin to perceive the complex symbolism inherent in a Dream landscape. What had previously been linked to a range of food-yielding determinants has now been raised onto another plane altogether.

Along the Arnhemland Escarpment there are vast rock galleries which house some of the finest rock art in the world. Some of the tableaux reflect religious themes, while others are more concerned with secular events such as hunting, animal portraits and general social activity among the clans. Many of these paintings are quite old, their origin reaching back into distant antiquity. Conversely, they are also quite new as they are being continually retouched by tribal elders and custodians of the land in which they appear.\(^10\) All this means that
the actual topography has been fully integrated into the speculative belief of the clan members past and present, at least at the symbolic level, as well as acting as a point of identification (ie, a recognizable hot place) in terms of Aboriginal cosmology. The tribal land, the hot places scattered about it, the painting depicting Dreaming events, the mythology derived from individual landmarks such as boulders, trees, waterholes et al. – all these contribute to defining the spiritual landscape encompassed in the Dream journey itself.

Throughout the journey the clan members come into contact with evidence of their spiritual ancestry. At Deaf Adder Creek (Arnhemland), for example, they must cross the watercourse in order to make their way to Goose Camp where they will hunt magpie geese and collect eggs. But they do not simply swim the creek. Instead they enlist the aid of the Rainbow Serpent, a world-creating entity that figures very largely in the mythology of Aborigines throughout Australia. Quite often a waterhole may be the precise spot where the Rainbow Serpent or similar Sky Heroes re-entered the earth after their world-creating effort at the time of the Dreaming. Cullymurra waterhole on the Cooper Creek in Central Australia is one such place. To the Dieri tribesmen it was known as the 'Hole of Life' and represented a powerful hot place filled with all the import of world-creation itself.¹¹

The Dream journey is in a sense a replication of the world-creating trek of the Rainbow Serpent and other Sky Heroes because all the topographic landmarks feature in this primordial event that occurred at the time of Dreaming. At Djuwarr lagoon, for instance, on the Escarpment, the Rainbow Serpent is reputed to have split the cliff-face on its way up the gorge to a deep pool below a waterfall. Here the Snake disappeared. Though no longer manifest, the Rainbow Serpent’s presence has imbued not only the gorge which it has created with sacred significance, but also the pool where it disappeared. Until recently, each year at this spot both the Mirarr and Badmardi tribes gathered to perform important ceremonies in honour of the Great Snake’s world-creating efforts. In so doing they were able to renew contact with the Dreaming, reinforcing at the same time their own participation in such an important metaphysical event.

Other spots, however, have been created by lesser spirit entities such as the Mimi people – a small, wraith-like people shaped in the
image of thin sticks who have the power to re-emerge from the rock-
face on which they are so often painted. Aborigines are in awe of
these spirit-people since they can alternate between a state of benevo-
rence or that of deliberate malignity whenever they choose. It is this
ambivalence that makes them genuine spirits rather than allegoriza-
tions of natural forces such as the anthropologists might have us
believe. At the same time the Mimi only appear when there is silence
and can be invoked only if one is susceptible to their presence. If one
breathes too hard, or a wind suddenly blows up, the Mimi are liable
to be broken into little bits. It is this state of spiritual readiness that
characterizes the Dream journeyer whenever he wishes to invoke the
Mimi and so enter more fully into a relationship between himself and
these spirit people.

Of course, animals and fauna in general play an important part in
world-creation as well. In the Central Desert region inhabited by the
Arunta people, one observer discovered a series of sacred sites linked
to the Dream journey of the red kangaroo (the First Beast of its
species). This in turn had inspired a number of ceremonies and songs
depicting the supernatural trek of the original red kangaroo, Kolakola,
as it moved across the landscape. In a highly evocative song cycle the
journey is detailed, culminating in the celebration of a particular hot
place where the red kangaroo was reputed to have disappeared.

'I Kolakola, am hurrying on without delay;
From my hollow I am hurrying on without delay.
I, the young kangaroo, am journeying
a far journey without a halt;
Leaving behind a thin trail I am journeying
on a far journey without a halt.'

The song cycle concludes:

'Hail to thee, Krantji, mother of men!
Be fruitful in the ancestral embrace,
Filled with game for the use of men!
The crutch fat is gleaming white,
The crutch fat is white like sand
The Rock-plate quivers as the avengers arrive:
Our Rock-plate of white fat –
Our Rock-place is quivering, our Rock-plate
The outward journey explores a number of certitudes at different levels. There is the constant search for nourishment, of course, which is a practical concern for all the clan members. This concern is often identified with particular landmarks where traditionally food has
always been found. However, such landmarks also exist within a symbolic landscape and invoke ceremonial activity as the clan is passing through a particular region. If a clan leaves its own country in order to link up with neighbouring clans on the occasion of important ceremonial activity, there are songs that poignantly render the sense of loss experienced at this separation,

‘Hands swinging, swinging, Wurei walks quietly away from Miningdjabu.
Maiawulu and Maiamai both look ahead as they leave Burarineibu.
They follow the bushes, the stones and trees looking for signs in the sharp grass.
Over flat stones, past high cliffs they walk to open ground.’

Then the spirit people recall where they have come from:

‘Looking back at the cliffs, towards the long hills, and Bunggarindji, towards Wurei and Laglag as we move along the gully to the plains, I am overcome with sadness as we leave camp – those stone hills at Darngaua and that cliff-face known as Blaweru.
As we follow the red kangaroo’s path across the open plain, the loss of my own place makes me sad as I stood on the open plain hoping for rain.’

In such a song there is both a feeling of sadness as a result of the exodus from their personal country, as well as a feeling of profound love for the very stones that make up this country. One also senses a relationship between these spirit people making the journey (in which men inevitably identify) and the land itself – as if they are essentially made up of the same substance.

The outward journey culminates in a cyclical return. From this point the tribal member has entered into what Stanner called the symbolic complex ‘one flesh – one spirit – one country – one Dreaming’. He has sought and experienced spiritual renewal
through participation in the Dream journey. He has witnessed once again a symbolic landscape that is both personal in relation to his own growth, and collective in respect of its identification with his ancestors. He has participated in the world-creating process as it was enacted during the Dreaming, or Great Time. In the process, he has engaged in a ritual act of identification with his country similar to Goethe’s observation: ‘Man knows himself insofar as he knows the world, becoming aware of it only within himself and of himself only within it’. This is only the beginning of the outward journey, yet in it are the seeds of the inward journey which we will explore in detail in the second part of this article.

Unfortunately a number of other points pertaining to certain aspects of Aboriginal mythology and belief are only touched upon in the present piece. However, it is hoped that these will be enlarged upon at a later date. We are referring here in particular to such items as the Dreaming, hot places and the positive or negative power that they possess (known as djang), the sacred nature of Wandjina and the Mimi and the role of art as a ritual act. This information will, we hope, throw more light on the sacred Dream journey as a cosmic pilgrimage and its role in the spiritual life of Aboriginal people.
Rock paintings.

In Part I of this study emphasis was placed upon the more exoteric aspects of the Dream journey as a way of fulfilling sacred obligations in terms of the landscape — that is, personal or tribal country — as well as that of the traditional encounter with age-old food sources. It was established also that aside from food requirements the Dream journey embarked upon each year by Aborigines was a replication of world-creating events that took place at the time of Dreaming. Thus the topographic landmarks, or hot places, that they observed along the way were noetic points contingent to a metaphysical landscape that had been divinely constructed by Sky Heroes such as Lightning Man and the Rainbow Serpent, the Mimi people and the First Animals among others. The creation of tribal land through the activity of the Sky Heroes making their sacred Dream journeys, then, was not only a microcosmic event relative to the individual or clan concerned, but also macrocosmic insofar as such an event had occurred both inside and outside time. In other words, these world-creating events still occur whenever there is Aboriginal participation in them via ceremony and ritual.

Which leads us to the inward or esoteric Dream journey that is principally the exclusive preserve of the menfolk within the tribal community. It is a ritual act intimately associated with making contact with a man's Dreaming, with his primordial ancestors, and with his totem or spiritual alter ego. For it is only when he makes this journey, often alone or at least with fellow initiates, that he begins to perceive his relationship with the unmanifest powers embodied in his mythological heroes. An analogy to the inward Dream journey might be found in an early Christian pilgrimage route (the Via Dolorosa), or in the more ritual sense — recitation of the Stations of the Cross or the Jesus Prayer in Eastern Orthodoxy. Though it must be emphasised that this is only an analogy and implies no similarity among the respective spiritual disciplines even if they are found to exist.

One myth related among north Australian tribes tells in striking detail of an important Dreaming event. A great man, Angamunggi, was treacherously killed by his son who had already committed incest with his sisters. The son, Tjinimin, was filled with guile, malice and lust. Having seduced his sisters, he next speared his father while he
was sitting surrounded by his children enjoying a festive moment during a gathering of all the clans. In agony and about to die, the father nevertheless lingered on to perform a series of marvels. He moved from place to place and in doing so formed a track or path which is now sacred (our italics). At each resting place he tried without success to staunch the flow of blood from the spear wound in his side. In some mysterious way his blood produced perennial pools and springs of water, which remain today as his marks or signs upon the land. After a long trek he took all the fire then present in the world, tied it on his head with his own hair, and waded into the sea. At the last moment another man courageously snatched a brand from his head just as Angamunggi was about to disappear beneath the waves. In this way fire was saved for men who would have otherwise been forced to eat raw food, like animals. Even in his death agonies, however, Angamunggi had given men perennial, life-giving waters in which he also placed the spirits of all those children who have been born since then.

Even at its primary symbolic level this myth finds echoes in Christological and Osirian cosmology. One cannot help noticing iconic parallels with the Crucifixion and the subsequent bestowal of the ‘waters of eternal life’ by way of the shedding of blood. Even if these parallel religious motifs are intuitional, they are no less real for being so. But what is important in this myth is the italicized remark suggesting the primacy of the sacred journey at the very moment when mankind was receiving what Stanner called the ‘metaphysical gift’ – that is, the ability to transcend oneself. For it is this gift that becomes the object of the inward Dream journey for all Aboriginal initiates. Among other things they are journeying in order to experience an epiphany.

This journey, however, is both lineal and metaphysical. While it is important for initiates to visit Dreaming sites (hot places) in order to perform ceremonies, there are times when the Dreaming site can be invoked simply by declaring an area sacred for the duration of these ceremonies. This is done by mounting a watchman on a high rock to warn off approaching intruders. Once a site has been declared sacred, then the initiates are able to perform their ‘big rituals’ much as they might have done if they had been located in the region of the actual Dreaming site itself. Such spontaneous ceremonial activity usually occurs when the men are outside their territory, or when the territory
has long since been encroached upon by white graziers, making a return to it difficult for one reason or another.

Though a great deal of importance is attached to the actual hot place itself, particularly because of the power or djang that it might possess, this power is implicitly expressed in the ceremonies themselves when a group of initiates happen to be performing at a fabricated sacred Dreaming site. In other words, the ceremonial function will be no less effective because it happens to be performed not at the actual hot place itself. The important point in all this is the principle, not the accident of location. Initiates clearly identify the inner landscape as being more important than the country over which they might be traversing, even if this also has a sacred significance in terms of what it represents. The initiate, whether he be alone or in a group, knows that he can recreate the conditions conducive to entering the Dreaming – that is, experiencing for himself the epiphanic state that is one of the objects of the Dream journey.

A. P. Elkin outlined a ‘big ritual’ he observed in north-western South Australia sometime in 1930 in response to his inquiry about the Dreaming. After a sacred precinct had been made, the men sat on the ground in two ceremonial rings. They then proceeded to sing a series of chants to the rhythm of sticks vigorously beaten on the ground. In the meantime two performers disappeared for an hour or so behind a clump of bushes in order to paint and decorate themselves. While they did so the singers continued to invoke the names and achievements of Sky Heroes and their ancestors to the point where the presence of these spiritual entities was strongly felt by all those participating in the ceremony. At a critical moment when the chanting had reached its climax, Elkin was asked not to look up suddenly in case he might destroy the epiphanic event being played out before him. Only when the performers had appeared from behind the bush and commenced their enactment of the mythical event was he told that the men were in a state of Dreaming – that they had ‘become’ the Sky Heroes and First Animals already described in the chants and songs. Not only had the men dancing transcended themselves, but also those who had invoked the Dreaming by recitation of these primordial events through their music and song.

Contact with the Dreaming is the sole object for all the participants during these ceremonies. It is not a divine place that they are
endeavouring to enter by way of ritual gesture, but a state of mind — a return to the source. All acts embodied in the Dream journey, whether they involve visiting hot places or sanctifying space at any given locality, are designed to create conditions acceptable to the emergence of Sky Heroes from the Dreaming. It is therefore important that the initiates concerned acknowledge the presence of these spirit entities through the use of complex symbolism and ritual activity designed to bring on an ecstatic or epiphanic state. Only then can it be said that the initiates have transcended the relativity of the exoteric or outward Dream journey in their quest for a greater degree of spiritual empathy with the realm of Dreaming.

C. P. Mountford once described a Dream journey dedicated to Jarapiri, the Great Snake, that he experienced in the company of an Aboriginal of the Walbiri tribe in Central Australia. It is a remarkable document outlining the exact route that Aboriginal initiates must take when celebrating the world-creating activity of the Great Snake at the time of Dreaming. While there is a physical journey involved, encompassing a trek of more than 100 miles in length, there is also a ceremonial route that must be taken as well. Such a route involves a complex set of rituals, body-paintings and the recitation of various song-cycles at different hot places along the route. These songs recall not only the activity of Jarapiri as he moved along, but also that of other spirit-figures that feature in the mythology of the Dream journey itself.

A typical Jarapiri song details the creation of certain landmarks in the form of the movement of a snake:

Jarapiri's ribs move him along,
he leaves a meandering track.
Jarapiri's ribs move him along,
he leaves a meandering track etc.'

In contrast, there are other songs dedicated to mythical insects or animals integral to the world-creating process such as Mamu-boijunda, the Great Spider.

'Mamu-boijunda, great spider barking
in dawn light.
Risen creatures come strange, light filled
into this world.
Mamu-boijunda, great spider crying—
Latalpa snakes and death-adder women
inhabit the dawn.
Mamu-boijunda, his task completed,
rests among his creations on Winbaraku—
snakes and insects all.\(^5\)

There is also an invocation which suggests that the initiate is extremely conscious of the process, and sacred import, of creation as originated by the Great Snake, particularly when it comes to a declaration of that activity with the aid of ritual gesture and invocation. The words, ‘Balga-ma-ni!’ (Bring all into being) indicate the extent to which the initiate acknowledges the world-creating role of the Great Snake and other spirit entities even as he participates in the process himself. This is confirmed in the following song:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Great Snake, Jarapiri, singular being} \\
\text{wander Walbiri earth.} \\
\text{Great Snake, Jarapiri, give name} \\
\text{to all Walbiri plants.} \\
\text{Great Snake, Jarapiri, wind source} \\
\text{with rain on your forked tongue.}\end{align*}
\]^6

In this way the landscape is humanized through a series of song-cycles dedicated to Jarapiri and the spirit people who accompanied him across Walbiri country. The initiate’s role in all this is to recreate the journey that the Sky Heroes once made. As well as walking in the path of Jarapiri, he is also required to engage in ritual body painting suitable to the different sites visited, and to the different spirit entities invoked. Thus he will body paint himself in the symbols of the great Snake, or perhaps Mamu-boijunda, the Great Spider, depending on which hot place he is visiting. This form of activity helps to enhance the separation of the initiate from the mundane world in order that he might experience an epiphany.

Of course, this does not always happen. Like all rituals they tend to become and end in themselves when merely mouthed as ancient formulas. Yet the possibility for epiphany is always latent and really only depends upon the level of commitment of the initiate concerned. For the man who undergoes initiation as an adolescent and later as a full warrior under the auspices of fellow tribesmen and
elders, there is also the possibility of undergoing a third stage of
initiation that is both voluntary and, to a certain extent, entirely
contemplative. A man will rarely embark upon such a Dream journey
until he has fulfilled most of his social duties within the tribal context.
Nor does he do it alone – at least, he is responsible to a qualified
person or guide when he embarks upon such a journey, possibly
alone. Such an ‘Order’ of men of knowledge depends on an un-
broken succession of qualified persons. These men are known as
‘clever men’, or men of ‘high degree’.7

Unfortunately, what little material there is on the making of a man
of high degree suggest that the process was entirely associated with
the creation of a medicine man. Elkin did go so far as to acknowledge
that few men of high degree ever spoke English and that as an
anthropologist he did not have command of the ‘native’ language
anyway.

‘Hence, they (the men of high degree) could not discuss ade-
quately the philosophical and psychological aspects of the triune
system of specialist knowledge, faith and ritual, which was the
basis of their craft’.8

It might be suggested here that they could discuss their triune system
quite adequately with someone who was both a man of high degree
or a postulant, or indeed a man who spoke ‘their’ language. Because
the question of language is at the very heart of the making of a man of
high degree.

Indeed the concept of the witch doctor or medicine man is linked
almost entirely to the idea of psychic hegemony over the group or
individual by way of his ability to deceive, or at the very most his
ability to heal various physical and spiritual disorders. Hence the man
of high degree is perceived as having a functional role within his
community in keeping with the anthropological bias towards seeing
Aboriginal society in terms of its empirical requirements. Such an
approach has led to the man of high degree being partly dismissed as
a genuine hierophant whose principal responsibility is not only to act
as a model within the context of his tribe and heal the sick when his
services might be required, but also to preserve the sacred mysteries
which, after all, are the tribe’s metaphysical patrimony entrusted to
him for safe-keeping. So that the terms ‘clever man’, ‘witch doctor’
and 'medicine man', though probably rough translatory meanings made by Aborigines initially to describe the principle and function of the man of high degree within their society, have since become reductive in tenor. A man of high degree has subsequently been regarded as being at the very least a trickster, a manipulator and a practitioner of magical arts rather than a genuine hierophant, or possibly even - a holy man.

This is important to appreciate as the idea of the sanctified man within the context of a traditional society like that of Aborigines is virtually unheard of. Some concessions have been made to Aboriginal spirituality in the guise of animism or pantheism, but these have only led to an assumption of a certain level of primitive belief which is inevitably reductive as well. Yet the reality is that this third level of initiation and the contemplative Dream journey embarked upon in order to achieve the status of a man of high degree, reaches far beyond the context of merely attaining to the level of a medicine man or clever man. Though a medicine man is invariably a man of high degree, he is also a man who has reached a level of profound spiritual insight in accordance with the ritual belief of his culture. Such men, according to Elkin, possess the knowledge, psychic insight, mystical experience and personal authority that make them worthy members of this sacred Order known as men of high degree. Quite obviously such men, when they have attained to this status, must be similar to what we might know as prophets or saints.

Thus the contemplative or inward Dream journey no longer places so much emphasis on the physical landscape as in the outward Dream journey. Hot places remain important, of course, but only as aids to contemplation through ritual activity. This activity is often enhanced by the use of churingas as iconic representations of the actual journey taken by the Sky Heroes. A churinga is usually made of wood or flattened stone upon which the sacred tracks of the Sky Heroes are carved. These in turn are produced from secret hiding places during ceremonies at the hot place or Dreaming site. When the ceremony has been completed, the churingas are returned to their hiding place until the next visitation. What few churingas are left are sometimes very old, having been made by the ancestors themselves. They are often kept and used during the ceremonies even when they are breaking up. For they contain kurunba or djang - that particular spiritual
power or emanation associated with life essence. The Aborigines often refer to its emanation as being ‘like a mist’, so subtle is its appearance. Nevertheless, a churinga is much more than a totemic representation as is so often suggested. These sacred objects are primordially created by the Sky Heroes as aids to contemplation for those who wish to use them. As such they partake of the divine essence in the same way as an Orthodox icon might do.

It is clear that this third initiatory stage characterized by the Inward journey has much to do with learning secret rites from older tribal members, and learning how to communicate in a language understood only by spirit entities and fellow initiates. Stanner described this state as a transition into Aboriginal High Culture or entry into the Order. A man of High Degree often no longer speaks in the words of mundane language, expressing himself instead in the mystical language of his ancestors. While we might be tempted to correlate this sacred language with shamanic trance-states among other traditional cultures, this could lead to misinterpretation. The language they speak is the ‘language of the Gods’ and is only partly related to visionary experience in the ordinary sense. We are looking here at a symbolic language heavily impregnated with the syntax of myth. Only those who fully understand and appreciate the esoteric significance of the myth journey (ie the Dream journey) are able to communicate in this sacred language.

In the North-west of Australia in an area known as the Kimberley there is an important but sparsely documented doctrine associated with spirit entities known as the Rai. These Rai are said to be spirits-of-the-dead with both male and female characteristics. According to Coate⁹ one of their principal tasks is to ‘teach’ those who wish to become magicians or diagnosticians. The suggestion, of course, is that the Rai have a functional role in keeping with the empirical objectives of the tribe. Yet they are also manifestations of the Wandjina¹⁰ and as such partake of the source in the same way as angels do in Christic and Islamic cosmology. They usually manifest themselves to the ordinary observer in dreams,¹¹ otherwise they remain invisible except to men of high degree. More important perhaps, the Rai are acknowledged as being indispensable to men’s wellbeing. They are in a sense guardian spirits. As one Aboriginal informant explained, ‘The Rai never let us become separated from
them. We ourselves don’t have pleasure (without them). We might not be a people in this world unless they had stuck to us right through.’

It is this spiritual allegiance between the initiate and the spirit entities such as Rai or Mimi people that characterizes an essential aspect of the Inward Dream journey. While it may be true that clever men are on intimate terms with the Rai, it would be a mistake to assume that this relationship is exclusive to the magician. Because the Rai has the power to ‘teach’ men in the way that an elder or fellow initiate cannot. As our informant says, ‘The other man says (in his mind) the Rai will help me. The Rai is teaching the man who wants to be a magician.’ Here we see acknowledged a specific integration between the Rai or spirit entities and the initiate’s inner world. He knows that the Rai are talking to him in a language intelligible only to himself at the given point on his Dream journey. In contrast, ordinary observers are regarded as being ignorant of the Rai. They do not see them because they lack the knowledge to do so. ‘We are ignorant, we don’t see these Rai. They (the Rai) only talk to experts, and only experts know them,’ says our informant.

So that when an initiate experiences an epiphany, whether it be during the course of an inward Dream journey or during the process of being made into a man of high degree, he attains to a level of spiritual perception where he is able to ‘see’ with an inner eye. This eye has been termed a third eye, presumably to identify it with the third eye and its significance in the Eastern religious tradition. In one part of Coate’s document we are confronted by a quite explicit and often moving description of the spiritual state of the initiate who has seen the Rai with his inner eye.

‘The bodies of the magicians overflow with magic stones called gedji. They (the hierophants) can see those different lands. They can see the country underneath. There in the underworld they can see them, bunched up together, they can see them. In the unguir place are the only ones we know. The helpless ones – the aged – tell us those stories. Grandfather was telling us and our fathers and (tribal) brothers. These were famous ones, but they have already gone. “There are none today,” they said. “They had it that way in the old days when he, this man, was a magician. These things pertaining to the body we call magic stones. They
are eating (possessing) the magician. They are eating his blood. They are changing him. We call him an expert because the stones changed him. His flesh becomes light in colour.\textsuperscript{12} This one is called an expert. That's how he was separated from the others. It exalted him! Made him a man of high degree. Our bodies are not the same as his. We are ignoramuses. He is different. He becomes light.\textsuperscript{13}

It is evident from this report of the qualitative and physical differences perceived between an ordinary man and a man of high degree that we have at last encountered the epiphanic objective of the sacred Dream journey. Through the skein of language it is nevertheless possible to recognize a genuine transfigurative experience lying at the core of the actual journey itself, whether this journey is made in the exoteric sense or whether it is the fulfillment of an interior journey made in the course of becoming a man of high degree. To say that Aborigines prior to the collapse of their culture after their contact with Europeans during the past 200 years did not possess any religious sentiment\textsuperscript{14} is to fly in the face of substantial evidence to the contrary. In the Rai document we are encountering the kind of visionary experience, though admittedly second-hand, similar to the one that Black Elk spoke of in his Great vision.\textsuperscript{15}

The Rai enable men to see with an inner eye. This eye is a metaphysical gift akin to Grace or Nirvana, if not in its overall implications, then at least in terms of the qualitative identification between the man of high degree and the supra-mundane world. The initiate who has embarked upon the Inward journey and participated in the ritual activity associated with various hot places or Dreaming sites, has, by his actions and involvement with tribal elders, entered into a metaphysical relationship with the Sky Heroes themselves. It is this relationship that so profoundly affects the entire Aboriginal culture even today, because through the Dream journey all Aborigines are able to share in this principal bonding, each according to his or her nature and aptitude. Without the Dreaming, the Aboriginal culture would have disintegrated long ago. Their spiritual relationship with the land is not so much an end in itself as it is so often depicted by institutions and corporations eager to discount its authenticity. Because what these bodies consistently fail to recognize is the essential nature of this relationship and its role within the spiritual life
of a traditional people whose theocentric pre-occupations take precedence over all other concerns. For the land, the hot places filled with djang, the mythological landscape that brings to bear a metaphysical perspective upon every outcrop and contour, the ritual invocation of spirit entities and the possibility of epiphanic identification that necessarily arises, these elements are at the root of an Aboriginal's love of his land. He or she does not love its materiality as such — although at times this love might be expressed in such terms because of the inadequacy of language — but instead what the land represents at a principal level. In the end, the land is no more than a bridge between himself and the sacred realm of the Dreaming.

The Inward Dream journey is the culmination of the cosmic pilgrimage. No Aborigine makes it unless he feels he is ready. The route is littered with psychic terrors that have the power to destroy a man if he does not possess the inner certitude to resist. For this reason it is important to be under the guidance of a tribal elder or magician. Only these men know the barriers that exist barring entry into a full experience of the Dreaming. Ritual and hieratic song are thus important elements in a successful journey from one realm to another. But once the initiate has successfully made that journey he returns a different person. In the words of one informant, . . . such a man returns as a 'spirit-of-the-dead'.

'This puts him apart from others, it exalts this magician. They (the Rai) followed the "aerial rope", that's the one they followed. They are spirits-of-the-dead, they don't walk on the ground. The world is big. They travel in the air following the "aerial rope" all the time. Only magicians can see it. He is a magician who follows the aerial rope all the time.'

Thus only the man of high degree, the spiritualized man, can become totally identified with the Sky Heroes, in this case the Rai. It is he who has made the Inward Dream journey and returned as a dead man living, speaking the language of the Gods. And it is he who is at last in possession of that inner knowledge prized above all else by a race of people whose entire culture is dedicated to the sanctity of life. In the end, the Dream journey is much more than a 'night-sea journey across paradisal waters'. It is the beginning of a collusion between the man of high degree and the Spirit that made him.
Notes to Part I

1 R. M. & C. H. Berndt, The World of the First Australians. 'The Wandjina are mythical beings, male and female, the great creators and guardians responsible for the continuing welfare of the local Aborigines; and around them are drawn the totemic beings and creatures, on which these people depend for sustenance . . . the ritual act of painting or touching them releases sacred energy or power: bringing on the wet season . . .'

2 Crawford, The Art of the Wandjina. 'Wandjina djini jeijo: ru. Dambun djuman mumana'. (transl. Wandjina is the important one. He made the world.) Attributed to Mowaldjali, a Narinjin tribesman of the Kimberley region.

3 David Collins, An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales.

4 Tribal elder’s remarks: ‘We do not say that the land belongs to us, but that we belong to the land’.


6 Author’s field notes, 1983.

7 ‘The people of the whole country are one. George used to go all over the area to fetch Butcher Knight and take him to his place for a while. They are all one company, one mob.’ George Namingum, tribal elder.

8 What Mirca Eliade calls illud tempus, or the Great Time. Myths, Dreams and Mysteries.

9 Ibid.

10 Crawford, The Art of the Wandjina. ‘Because you are looking so dull – you’re not looking right – I’ll try and draw you. I’ll try and put new paint on you people to make you new again. Don’t get wild, don’t send rain! (cf. Bernt’s remarks in Note 1). You must be very glad that I am going to make you new again’. Attributed to tribal elder, Charlie Numbulmoore.

11 This waterhole is the largest and deepest in Australia. In 1861 the explorers Burke and Wills (who had crossed the continent from south to north) both died here in the midst of an abundance of wildlife.

12 According to Toby Gangele.

13 Cf. Henry Thoreau, ‘We must learn to reawaken ourselves and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn, which does not forsake us in our soundest sleep’.

14 T. G. Strehlow, Aranda traditions, 1947.


16 Ibid.

Notes to Part II


5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.


8 Ibid.

Ibid. 'Wandjina is the important one. We say concerning him that he designed the world'.

A. P. Elkin, Totemism in North-Western Australia; Oceania Vol. III, No. iv. 'They (the spirit entities known as Rai) live in the bush and wandering about at night are met by men in dreams.' cf. Jacob's dream, Genesis 28:12. 'And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.'

cf. Wallis Budge, The Book of Paradise 1–11, London 1904 p. 1004. Also C.-M. Edsman, Le baptême de feu, p. 155. We read here where the Egyptian Fathers recognized a monk who 'shone with the light of Grace'.

We are reminded here of a report on Saint Sabas being seen by the Emperor Justinian as 'a divine grace in the form of burning light . . . that radiated like the sun'. Vita S. Sabae, ed. E. Schwartz, p. 173; J. Lemaitre, Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, 1952.


Ibid.

A view from one of the caves in Obiri Rock, Arnhemland Escarpment area. Many of these caves have been overpainted by successive generations since the first inhabitants arrived over the land bridge from Asia, 50,000 years ago. Obiri Rock, like Nourlangie and Uluru (Ayers Rock), is an 'Open-air Cathedral' recording the sacred images of the Aboriginal culture.

Lightning Man, Nourlangie Rock. Note the tiny axeheads protruding from his body and limbs. These, clashing against the heavens, create lightning during the rainy season, a pontifical statement nevertheless from the Dreaming.

Lightning Man, Namargin, painted in the X-ray style unique to this region of Australia. His 'inner' body is revealed in its physiological exactitude as well as a patterned work of art.

Barramundie fish and Spirit Figures, Nourlangie Rock. Without facial expression, these Spirit Figures are iconic representations of spirit types rather than individual people.

Male tribesman painted in the 'stick' style, an earlier style to that of X-ray. He is carrying hunting equipment such as spears and a stone axe, as well as dilly bags.

Part of the main frieze, Nourlangie Rock, depicting a confrontation between Lightning Man and his wife (top figure) and Namanjolk, a malign Spirit Figure. This frieze was last retouched by Barramundie Charlie some 20 years ago. Since then he has died. It is unlikely that any of his friends have the technical expertise to renew this remarkable painting. Unfortunately, ritual renewal by surviving members of his tribe has so far failed to re-occur. If this situation should continue, then the djang of this important hot place will eventually diminish.

Barramundie fish and female Spirit Figure painted in the X-ray style, Nourlangie Rock.

Sea turtle painted in the X-ray style. Turtles are speared in the ocean off the coast of Arnhemland.

Photographs by Colin Beard
PETER REDGROVE

Legible Hours

The legibility of the evening,
The union of grapes,
We drink it and its spiritous consummation
In this brandy that shines in the dark within,
With the lamps blowing,
The flames like enraged tigers
Roaring in their thin glittering cages,
Ravenous oil-eaters.

The stinking shadows fly out of the wooden windows.
In the dawn, the brittle machine of salt,
The salt bread of the sea, fish for breakfast,
Feathery skeleton, pinion of the sea;
On the smooth-spun sand
Imprint of constellations,
Starcast of the brine, starfish.

Then the evening made legible
By the recording of a ghost
Or an opera of ghosts, the impress,
The mediumistic conches attending, the ear-shells,
The ghost’s whorls spinning in their skirts,
Her contractions and ululations,
Her abyssing to her still axle,
Her repeats, her expansion
To the night sky, circling,
The display and occultation
On the night air of her grave that turns.

The legibility of the house.
The courtyard tree,
Green harbour of ten thousand ships
Tending anchor, optical toy of deep shade;
Can you hear the light hum circling in echoes
Around the stream, and the reflections
Caught in the woods and the inextricable shadows
All combing one way, can you see? and there
As the tide turns the weir sound changes
Its pictures and the tree-head lightens.
Clouds

The Censer Mountain and its swagging mists.
The ant that strokes the slug for its sweet jelly.
The lily, the nostril of Hat-hor.
Dancing with the pneuma, its gentle sheathed claws.
I kneel among the stars of the stones,
The ivy, growing out of the stones,
Converting this wrecked tombstone into small legs
With broad backs like sequences of tables,
Like sequins of a green dress;
And in October all the greenbottle flies
Feasting together with the wasps and bees
At these broad tables, as the dead carouse,
Nodding their begemmed skulls
At the tables of the knobbly green flowers
Like a peaceable kingdom. The clouds above
Are water-temples and their pillared precincts,
The pleated sculptures drift away; look at the stars!
It's like all-interested and careful parents hovering,
While, after feasting in the evening, the streets
Fill with rain like the frou-frou of silk skirts,
Ceaseless circulating, and feasting
In autumn, when the plants give up their spirits
Exhaling their vinous last breaths
Like rapt flushed drunkards. Look where he lies!
And in the ivy-ridden churchyard
The skeleton will be clothed in a new blossom,
A clinic of new blossom,
And a different wine exhaled,
At which the feasting dead will surely carouse
Helped to their potations by buttling clouds
With their rainy shirtfronts and napkins
Showering over thundery arms, but mostly
All-white and interested, sounding like silk,
On Censer Mountain, among its sensing mists.
Breads of Life

Breath-lady, spirit-lady with the fan,
The stale bread sacred to the priests,
The flat bread, the unleavened bread,

The dead bread, offered to the dead,
The manes with their bony hands;
The lady with the fan,

The lady of breath, the fan
Of the waves, like the sea
The pleated sea,

The breath over the waters
Pleating them,
The waters held in the belly

The pod-waters
And the breath coming and going in its dome,
Its ceiling, and the tap tap

Of the heart in its high ceiling,
A place where you say
God goes, tap tap in the heart;

The Pegasus-moths tapping at the window-pane,
The gorgeous caparison, the little hooves
Peeping under, the floury fans

Of their wings at the pane dabbing, dabbing,
Striking dabs of smoke or a kind of pollen,
Riding the pleated air

As the pollen does, fanning from the flower,
Riding the waves of breath
And the great scented thoroughfare of all perfume

Of the night air running up into the sky
Of pine and bluebells fanning their own night-odours,
And on the roof of it stars
Tapping, tapping,
Day and night fanning us
With shadow and light.

Lady with the fan,
Ladyhead moth,
The sugar-bread

Offered to the moths
By the lady of human breath
Her breath lightly clouds the window

As she stretches to open it
On to the feathers
And the flours of night

And the stars
Are twinkling
With the sound of more wind to come.

Mineral Theatre Rising

The brink of the mine, sliding silvery slate-litter,
Bloody fragments stained with iron ore, quartz
Like the gorgonized blossom of may, corrugated
Iron, a torn flap, I crane on this spillery edge
To see what shines in the dark, there is a water-mark
Of rust-red shaft flowers, in the jagged dark
Water gleams, or a great crystal beneath.

A small stand of birch, its chromium bark-glitter.
I see the sheen of the cars and the chromium bumpers,
The rock in its traffic rising, the armamentarium of flowers,
And the whole apple-cup of the valley, for the rock of metals
Is pestled by frost in the mortar of winter
And the valley is full of alchemists devouring this bran,
Their rosy limbecs, their distilling stems,
Their blind white beards of blossom.
Each seed planted a new engine, a new leaven,
An alchemist, a sceneshifter, it is spongy with mines,
It flies up in a great leavening like a baking.
The powdery meadows with their cool touch
In broad stages down the valley, the wind-winches
Hoisting the leaves, the roping tasselled breezes,
The birds in the wings and the sliding cloud-flats,
Behind the muslin of rain the waters gleam out
As if the sun were entering a mine in mineral rainbows!

The mineral theatre rising out of the rock
To the sound of the sun, glittering console,
Through the foyers of the lily-throats
Gilt with powders, the scene-docks
Of the seeds swarming with carpenters,
The orchestral pit of the swamp
Bubbling with frog-tunes,
The estuary robed in black harpist satin,
A dragon-fly on its taut chord
Like a tuning-fork of black and gold,
Like a flying lode of mineral light.

A shell like a humming mine gone under the sea.

A thick shift of gossamer like spun tin
Has falled across the ploughed field,
The furrows clothed in loose silk
With a sheen bending on it like a lake
In the sun, whose path wavers
Across the field of silk
That mists our feet. In the cliff
Wasps build with stone-dust and paper;
At home in the yard, where the quarried stones
Rise in their gardens, bees
In a tin pail silvery as birches;
The pail sounding its tune like branched birches
A galvanised bloom the bees visit drinking.
Let me tell you

For G.M.

The serpent emaning himself from his own mouth
Without help from another. Outside, the terrible sun,
Scarcely is one dead from exhaustion in the evening
Than another just as bad grows in the morning,
Visible hellfire. Life can exist only
In the gentle balance, Darkness,

The Gentle Mother, in which however
The Sun gestates with his raging breath.
Our Serpent is the zig-zagger, the braided ric-rack,
The Maker of Invisible Existence Apparent,
The wave-nature, the shadower,
Serpent of speech, of water, with which I tell you this
In the shadowed library, out of the sun; though when

Water devours by drowning, it
Wears a tail and teeth and is known as Hippopotamus, and though the forest
Brings forth the Howler which is the great Ape
At his extremity, the figure of anger in the sun,
The chattering wind of purposes,
With the Lion, (which is as if
The solar furnace was heard to roar,
The Jackals attendant screaming back at his thunder),

This shaded library is the abode of the serpent still, let me tell you,
Winding with volumes that make the invisible life apparent.
Hopkins’s journal entry for May 1873 reads — ‘Bluebells in Hodder wood, all hanging their heads one way. I caught as well as I could while my companions talked the Greek rightness of their beauty, the lovely / what people call / 'gracious' bidding one to another or all one way, the level or stage or shire of colour they make hanging in the air a foot above the grass, and a notable glare the eye may abstract and sever from the blue colour / of light beating upon so many glassy heads, which like water is good to float their deeper instress in upon the mind.’

You could mistake the man for a bat in his black Jesuit clothes, and in the weird eccentric manner in which he threads his way through a country lane, pausing, going down flat on his stomach to investigate the reflection of hemlock in a puddle, flitting from bank to bank, turning his head round and round a blue eye of speedwell, coming at things so many ways that he sees the odd, the particular, the inscape and instress of each fibre of growth. He doesn’t want to be seen, he talks to himself enthusiastically about his findings — these are his only real friends, the flowers of field and hedgerow, they are also the guide-lines to his sanity, familiar things that can help ward off the dark hours that were increasingly to eclipse him.

The naturalist is invariably taken for odd, to the uninitiated he’s either up to no good in a hedgerow, has lost something he’s diligently trying to find, or else the man is out on a walk from the local asylum. In his essay on Hopkins called ‘A Passionate Science’, Geoffrey Grigson relates how ‘A story is told of one of the Jesuit fathers at Stonyhurst pointing out the young Hopkins to the gardener and telling him that Hopkins was a very fine scholar. The gardener replied that he had seen him hanging round and staring at a piece of glass on
one of the paths: he had taken him for a "natural." It's not hard to imagine the poet approaching the sparkle of quartz with the inquisitiveness of a magpie – crouching down, distinguishing the refraction of light rays, finding correlative metaphors in the quartz chips, lifting the glass into his eye in the way a magpie compelled by curiosity might retrieve it for his nest. "Ay, a strange yoong man, crouching down that gate to stare at some wet sand. A fair natural 'e seemed to us, that Mr. 'opkins."

Like Smart's 'Jubilate Agno', Hopkins's poems pursue an odd tangent; they are a triumph of the intensely seen and felt, they are individual in a way that makes them inimitable, they exemplify the secret union between poet and poem, they bring about a marriage between the eccentric and the neglected. It is as though the isolation of the poet seeks out those things in nature which had been correspondingly overlooked, fretty chervil, bugle, a skate's heel, fawn-froth, the proliferation of tiny hedgerow growth that the uninformed are prepared to designate as weeds.

How did Hopkins come to this, or moreover what brought him to be stubbing his toe on a pebble in the lane near St. Beuno's College above the Vale of Clwyd in 1877? In September of that year he was to be ordained a priest. He was thirty three years of age, he had grafted his will to a hard religious discipline, for almost ten years he had written no poetry apart from 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' in 1875, an enforced and not a natural silence, but a period in which he had kept copious journals and forged the poetic method that was to so estrange him from his contemporaries.

It seems pointless to argue about what Hopkins would or would not have done had he not entered a religious vocation, his sensibility sought discipline in all things, that and individuation, 'what I call inscape – that is species or individually distinctive beauty' or again 'the outward reflection of the inner nature of a thing.' There are truths which can be known to only one man, Hopkins's poetry is a realisation of this, what he sees leads to an inexhaustible metamorphic trail, it is as though he has lit a heath fire, one which will blaze for him and which he can extinguish in secret. When he turns his back upon the object observed, it reverts to its singular being, he the poet carries the secret of its inner life as perceived by the senses. But it can't ever be the same again, the bugle will never shine as bluely as the day
in which it found a place in a poem, the ‘rose-moles’ on the trout will lessen in intensity. Poetry does this, for a brief moment it has things shine out.

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

The telling word here is ‘charged’ – one thinks of a current or a circuit – a connective that transmits force. Hopkins’s Parmenidean, Ignatian, Scotian world in which natural phenomena are endowed with minutely individual characteristics, all of which are part of an ecological unity, demands from the poet the affirmation of praise. If on a philosophic and mystic level Hopkins appears to anticipate Teilhard de Chardin, then on a poetic level he has no successor. There is in Hopkins’s luminous depiction of nature a correspondence to the work of the contemporary American artist Morris Graves. Graves’s Flight of Plover,* describing as they do a powerful audible whiplash movement in their flight towards migration is the closest artistic expression to the hawk’s steps in the wind in The Windhover. I am reminded of Graves’ painting when I read the movement of

then off, off forth on swing,
As a skate’s heel sweeps smooth on a bow-end: the hurl and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird, – the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

What is so marvellous about The Windhover is the poet’s own ‘Brute beauty and valour and act’ – the poem is the hawk and not a poem about a hawk. Within its fourteen lines one feels enclosed within a hawk’s body, its fast heart-beat, its high metabolic rate, its side-shift as the wind veers, its stupendous calm in sitting in the wind, something it does by an assertion of energy which exactly corresponds to the wind-force. The link of empathy between man and bird is so strong that their relationship is interdependent – the pride of watching is

* Reproduced in Temenos 6.
such that the poet’s ‘heart in hiding / Stirred for a bird, – the achieve
of, the mastery of the thing!’ It’s almost as if his heart has identified
with the vole or lizard that has become aware of the hawk’s cross-like
shadow; but at the same time the man must respond to the physical
beauty in the hawk’s exercise of killing, the accuracy of eye, the
blood-fuse that will have him plummet vertically out of the wind,
talons and beak scruffing a vole, the thin jet of blood streaking a gorse
flower.

This poem has attracted exhaustive analyses; the best, for it is the
only one written by a critic who knows the natural world is Geoffrey
Grigson’s. You can’t understand this poem from the confines of a
classroom – you need to know hawks, to have been up in the wind
and watched the red-eyed kestrel drop. As Grigson writes, ‘No
commentator seems to have studied the wing-beating, hovering,
gliding, swooping and recovering of the kestrel or wind-hover, the
way the bird forces itself into equilibrium against the wind, a study
which cannot be conducted inside a dictionary, a Cambridge college,
or a religious seminary.’ Hopkins lived nature, one expects a corres-
ponding knowledge of it on the part of any critic who would write
competently of inscape.

It’s May 1871. Years of denying himself poetic expression and of
passionately inscaping nature in his journals have left the young
Hopkins overstrained. At any hour of the day in solitude a man may
question who he is, and why he’s where he is. For Hopkins the
question must have turned in him like a knife. Deeply repressed
homo-erotic propensities have in part accounted for the severity with
which he treats himself, but the roots of the self go deeper than that.
In the middle of a field or anywhere for that matter man is physically
small, his perception can take in the visible horizon, but he’s
impotent to record what he cannot see. Hopkins’s desire to know, to
omnivorously consume the visible world was in itself a frustration, his
manner of seeing was such that it transformed multiply: the more he
isolated the object perceived the more it grew. Uncontainability can
be a terrible thing – the ungraspable diffuseness of life can lead to
suicide; the dilation of things can be as much an enemy as their
contraction. Hopkins was attracted to bluebells, primroses and sorrel
in Hodder Wood in 1871, his journal notes have not only the
observation of a nauturalist, but also the originality of a great poet.
The half-opened wood-sorrel leaves, the centre or spring of the leaflets rising foremost and the leaflets dropping back like ears leaving straight-chipped clefts between them, look like some green lettering and cut as sharp as dice.

Take a few primroses in a glass and the instress of – brilliancy, sort of starriness: I have not the right word – so simple a flower gives is remarkable. It is, I think, due to the strong swell given by the deeper yellow middle.

The banks are 'versed' with primroses, partly scattered, partly in plots and squats, and at a little distance shewing milk-white or silver – little spilt till-fulls of silver. I have seen them reflected in green standing farmyard water.

It’s clear form the originality of his observations, his stress upon physical form, and the unusual muscular energy of his language, that Hopkins is set apart from his contemporaries by his insistence on knowing nature as a reality, or as Grigson has it, a passionate science, and not as the artificial world of sentiment popularized by mid and late nineteenth century Victorian poets. In fact Hopkins in his insistence upon minutely recorded detail shares more in common with the Victorian naturalists from P. H. Gosse to the Reverend Wood than he does with nineteenth century nature poetry. The colouring in the primrose which is like 'little spilt till-fulls of silver' and their grouping 'in plots and squats' strikes a language that is uniquely his own, an energetic mapping out of characteristics which are individual. In their irregular clusters, in their low growth to the earth, primroses appear to be plotted out, their leaves are wrinkled like a frog’s skin, rub them and you will feel the soft hairs on the underside. To the eye their beauty appears ‘versed’ – they are a part of the order the poet commands, their sum contributes to the experience that naming calls primroses. Inscape demands the interplay of all the senses, Hopkins's observations have the richness of poems even if they are not cast into the form of poetry. Moving from primroses to bluebells, he perceives things not only through sight but also through their tactile quality.

The bluebells in your hand baffle you with their inscape, made to every sense: if you draw your fingers through them they are lodged and struggle / with a shock of wet heads; the long stalks rub and click and flatten to a fan on one another like your fingers themselves would when you passed the palms hard across one
another, making a brittle rub and jostle like the noise of a hurdle
strained by leaning against; then there is the faint honey smell and
in the mouth the sweet gum when you bite them.

The description doesn't stop here but goes on, he sees in the
arrangement of the bells 'a fancy of panpipes and of some wind
instrument with stops – a trombone perhaps.' What could be termed
odd here is that what is described has evidently been tried. What if
there was someone watching when Hopkins mouthed the flower's
'sweet gum', bit into it, crouched face down in the mauve bank,
measured the audible friction of the flowers by rubbing his palms
together, would the poet not be considered a 'natural'? What one
does alone in a quiet place is an act of secrecy, nature prompts a
release of repressed energy, it may be that the young man in
preparation for his priesthood, urinates in tall ferns, charges to left and
right through the brake, and talks out loud to the blue sky above. The
wood is his stamping-ground, here he is free to individuate the
separate strains of the self 'Of reality the rarest-veined unraveller' and
to find in the manifold detail of flora the correspondingly inexhaust-
able mysteries of the self.

Whatever was amiss in himself he buried deep, yet there was in
Hopkins an inexhaustible energy to know, to have consciousness
preoccupied to the full. By describing what he saw or felt he could up
to a point fill in the empty spaces that otherwise threatened. Deprived
of the notation of the immediate he touched bottom, he sunk into a
self-reproaching impotence every bit as omnivorously self-destructive
as its counterpart was ennobling.

Oh, the sots and thralls of lust
Do in spare hours more thrive than I that spend,
Sir, life upon thy cause. See, banks and brakes
Now, leavèd how thick! laced they are again
With pretty chervil, look, and fresh wind shakes
Them; birds build – but not I build; no, but strain,
Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes.
Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain.

One can only minimalize the self to a point, no matter how austere or
remorseless the inner sacrifice. Hopkins's 'spare hours' provoke an
expansion of the mind that nature study and spiritual nutrition could
not always satisfy.
What if he'd been different, would his attraction to the perverse have been still more powerful than his gravitation to things sanctified by the spirit? He could have been numbered among the aesthetically decadent fin de siècle Roman Catholic poets – Lionel Johnson, John Gray and of course the high priest of decadence, Oscar Wilde. If he'd lived by his senses, and no poet creates a more sensuous poetry than Hopkins, he would have defined limits of experience that his altogether more rigorous narrowing of physical premises allowed him to bypass. For all of their posturing with homosexual decadence there's little in the poetry of Johnson, Gray or Wilde that approaches the erotic. But what of Hopkins? If he'd allowed himself to explore the physical plane he would surely have brought to it the same passionate intensity as he brings to nature. His exactness of detail creates fullness – his eye delights in articulate sensation.

See, banks and brakes
Now, leaved how thick! laced they are again
With fretty chervil, look, and fresh wind shakes
Them;

Fretty chervil is the hedgerow plant Anthriscus sylvestris or cow parsley, the white umbels of which have leaves which are fern-like or lace-like. It proliferates in colonies; if you watch the wind move through it the whole bank floats like the topspin of swell over a submerged reef. 'Fretty' is exactly the right adjective for a flower so responsive to each motion of wind. The alliteration of leaved and laced creates the green density of a bank in May. Anyone who knows a wood and the lanes leading to it knows fretty chervil, even if they have not paid undue attention to it, but what of the human 'strain' of the poet – he is agonized by his infertility, stick-dry and parched in the rainy season. In terms of worldly evaluation he has no book, no offspring, he is an odd man in black poking amongst cow parsley in the bank.

If Hopkins's poetry struck Bridges as off-beat and almost unreadable to his altogether narrower sensibility, then we must all the more commend Hopkins for his conviction in sprung rhythm, his absorption with inscape. Isolated as a man and a poet he was aware of his peculiarities.

'No doubt my poetry errs on the side of oddness', he was to write to Bridges, but he hoped
'in time to have a more balanced and Miltonic style. But as air, melody is what strikes me most of all in music and design in painting, so design, pattern or what I am in the habit of calling “inscape” is what I above all aim at in poetry. Now it is the virtue of design, pattern, or inscape to be distinctive and it is the vice of distinctiveness to become queer. This vice I cannot have escaped.'

What Hopkins had over and above his contemporaries, and which could not be learned, was the power of the transforming eye. There's a manner of seeing which is visual retrieval or restoration of the thing perceived to its existing independent of being named. The poet is not obstructed by the nominative, his manner of seeing is one of metaphorical association, a swift's banking veer in the air can describe the sweep of a skate's tail, the circular swing of a whirlpool, a choreographed movement within the self, the vibratory arc of a spider's leg inside its web, only that these instances appear isolated selectively, whereas in the quicksilver of the poetic moment they may appear inseparable. The focal centre has attracted rays like the petal divisions of a flower. Incorporated within the poem one may be aware of the separation of metaphorical components, but rarely of the chemical solution that brought the parts into a coherence of unity. Hopkins's poetry perhaps more so than any other relies on the elimination of easy connectives, it demands that we see and feel by inscape and not by a process of objectification. The sort of curiosity that distinguished Hopkins as a man can go to extremes, nothing is allowed to escape his sensory inspection.

'Some yellow spoons came up with the tumblers after dinner. Somebody said they were brass and I tasted them to find out and it seemed so. Some time afterwards as I came in from a stroll with Mr. Purbrick he told me Hügel had said the scarlet or rose-colour of flaminggoes (sic) was found to be due to a fine copper powder on the feathers. As he said this I tasted the brass in my mouth. It is what they call unconscious celebration, a bad phrase.'

But 'unconscious celebration' is an integral part of inscape, the perfume of a flower may appear edible, and that it isn't means one must transpose it to another sensory function. The smell of rain on
ferns can stimulate a sensory and olfactory response analogous to biting into a disc of cucumber, and somewhere there's a correlation between the two. This is the world that Hopkins celebrated, one in which inscape plays the vital transforming role, and one in which the apparent oddity of the poetry is no more than the heightened response of all the senses to the instress of the natural world. We get it in Henry Purcell.

so some great stormfowl, whenever he has walked his while
The thunder-purple seabeach plumèd purple-of-thunder,
If a wuthering of his palmy snow-pinions scatter a colossal smile.
Off him, but meaning motion fans fresh our wits with wonder.

What we have here in relation to Purcell is odd, but not unintelligible to the senses, a stormfowl patrolling a shore threatened by thunder is not unlike the musician or poet awaiting inspiration. ‘Wuthering’ Hopkins tells us is ‘a Northcountry word for the noise and rush of wind’. What is carried on the wind is articulate, its music or motion ‘fans fresh our wits with wonder’. Earlier in the sonnet Hopkins had written, ‘It is the forged feature finds me; it is the rehearsal / Of own, of abrupt self there so thrusts on, so throngs the ear.’ It is these characteristics of inscape that Hopkins finds fit to praise. Purcell is not seen as a part of music, rather ‘it is the rehearsal / Of own,’ the pronouncement of the individual self, ‘the forged feature’ inimitably struck from fire that is the music of Purcell. The man and his genius are inseparable, and they are made so by his ‘quaint moonmarks’ – that is his unique distinction, the timbre of his spirit, or as Hopkins would have it, ‘By moonmarks I mean crescent shaped markings on the quill-feathers, either in the colouring of the feather or made by the overlapping of one on another.’

Yesterday I was up in the wind and there were scarecrows. They were waist-deep in the unripe grain, yellow vinyl coats tied to poles, and further on they were more humanly fashioned, one had a child’s mask and a properly buttoned coat, the raked hat resembled a guy dressed to burn. Yellowhammers kept diving into the corn, I saw a cirl bunting, the elusive flash of green finches, the air was fast and blue. The scarecrows reminded me of Hopkins, the odd man in black out in the fields. ‘Tuncks is a good name’, he wrote, ‘Gerard Manley Tuncks. Poor Tuncks.’ A line of poplars showed the silver undersides
to their leaves, in the distance each seemed a fountain, the droplets caught and distributed by the wind. Poor Tuncks.

On reading Hopkins’s Journals and Letters as well as the poems, it becomes impossible to think of him as pollarded or in any way maimed by the peculiar bent of his vocation. Even if he did entertain the severest doubts about whether poetry was or was not a distraction from his calling, he nonetheless left the stamp of poetry on everything he wrote or observed. He was hard on himself in ways that others wouldn’t have been. His spiritual conflict is mirrored in his tortured syntax and in his hammering words hard into the iron-face of an anvil. He would wring his sentences, words must learn to walk roughshod again down country lanes. Although he composed little, his mind was forever at the task. It was as though the richness of his mind needed weighting, he could not cut loose for fear he discovered what he didn’t want to know, the predicament of he who is not bound by morals. He incised his own discipline on his spirit; its signature was so deep it was ineradicable.

‘... my vocation puts before me a standard so high that a higher can be found nowhere else. The question then for me is not whether I am willing (if I may guess what is in your mind) to make a sacrifice of hopes of fame (let us suppose), but whether I am not to undergo a severe judgment from God for the lothness I have shewn in making it, for the reserves I may have in my heart made, for the backward glances I have given with my hand upon the plough, for the waste of time the very compositions you admire may have caused and their preoccupation of the mind which belonged to more sacred or more binding duties, for the disquiet and the thoughts of vainglory they have given rise to ... However, I shall, in my present mind, continue to compose, as occasion shall fairly allow, which I am afraid will be seldom and indeed for some years past has been scarcely ever, and let what I produce wait and take its chance; for a very spiritual man once told me that with things like composition the best sacrifice was not to destroy one’s work but to leave it entirely to be disposed of by obedience. But I can scarcely fancy myself asking a superior to publish a volume of my verses and I own that humanly there is very little likelihood of that ever coming to pass.’

Hopkins made this confession to the sympathetic Dixon, and
through the personal admissions of this letter we are able to assess much of the man. The fulness of Hopkins’ poetry, and his ability to compound metaphors which are universal in their collision and fusion of the senses, suggests at all times someone who is open and not shut to temporal experience. He must have been conscious of living a double life even if he only owned to the one. Poetry was both his solace and his irritant, he couldn’t in conscience have denied his creator the genius that he knew himself to possess, but at the same time he couldn’t reconcile the latitude that poetry afforded him on a human plane with the cramped confines of his spiritual discipline. It must have been miserable walking with Mr Rickaby, Mr Bacan or Henry Kerr to Cwm churchyard and back. What they saw was most certainly not what he did,

‘A sodden twilight over the valley and foreground all below, holding the corner-hung maroon-grey diamonds of ploughfields to one keeping but allowing a certain glare in the green of the near tufts of grass.’

Would they have guessed he was a poet? Probably not, his sense of vocation was absolute. What he saw he had to commit to his inner eye, relay it in a journal, and then much later bring it to the test of poetry. Even to the poet who is not morally constrained to silence, much of the grain of poetic substance goes missing by the time he comes to formulate words for a given experience. Aware of this Hopkins had to overcompensate for lack of writing time, detail by detail he mapped out his territory for future use, he would have to endure retreats, the rigorous life of a priest, exhaustion of the mind and body; when the poetic moment arose he would need vivid recollection; he therefore painted things into his mind’s eye. When the creative impulse permitted, he could realise that in spite of all things,

This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal diamond,
Is immortal diamond.

But what of the poet in the man, the immortal diamond that Hopkins couldn’t be rid of? Uncorroded by literary fashions, shielded by the necessity of remaining a shadow-image to the Jesuit priest, the poet in Hopkins was licensed to take risks and big ones at that. At
times it must have appeared like a voice of madness – the chuckle of a
stream that not even long drought could extinguish, and at times the
beginning of a flood that he had to stay. Inaccessible to Bridges and
Dixon, his poetic correspondence assumes that staking out of mental
liberties that a meeting might have dashed. Hopkins is not without
dogma in his setting out of poetic principles; he could afford to laugh,
the circumspectly unadventurous Bridges, and the good minor poetry
of Canon Dixon were no match to his own bat-chase for the eccentric.
Hopkins must have needed to release his pent up feelings when
alone, in the way that a man sings for company when he walks along a
dark country road.

'I laughed outright and often, but very sardonically,' he wrote to
Bridges, 'to think you and the Canon could not construe my last
sonnet; that he had to write to you for a crib. It is plain I must go
no farther on this road; if you and he cannot understand me who
will? Yet, declaimed, the strange constructions would be dramatic
and effective. Must I interpret it? . . .'

Time and again the word strange or odd arise in connection with
Hopkins's poetry, he himself uses it, his critics accentuate it as the
informing characteristic of his work. And given this oddness, Hopkins
does not fit into any poetic school, what is the attraction of the
twentieth century towards his work? Is it the man or the poetry?
Neither are popular in the sense of being easily assimilable, both go
against the grain of the natural trajectory. And where does the
influence of Hopkins surface in English poetry? He is a mole who has
left little trace of his whereabouts. Occasionally a mound appears in
the field. Ted Hughes's early alliterative poetry with its monosyllabic
churning of heels owes much to Hopkins, so too does John Berry-
man's 'Homage to Mistress Bradstreet.' But in large Hopkins's work
cannot be built upon – its source was so strained, so uniquely a part of
the man's genius, that it doesn't lend itself to assimilation. While his
contemporaries nosed downstream into oblivion, he forced himself
against the current. He was a salmon migrating upstream, but going in
the contrary direction gave him advantages; he had to test his poetry
in solitude, challenge his own deeply critical self with it, and carry
within himself the spawning seed of self-doubt. What if he was
wrong, had he risked God's wrath for messing with his vocation?
Writing to Bridges from University College, Dublin, he spoke of madness, he was forty at the time of writing, tired; his nerves must have longed for sedation.

'I must write something, though not so much as I have to say. The long delay was due to work, worry, and languishment of body and mind – which must be and will be; and indeed to diagnose my own case (for every man by forty is his own physician or a fool, they say; and yet again he who is his own physician has a fool for his patient – a form of epigram, by the bye, which, if you examine it, has a bad flaw), well then to judge of my case, I think that my fits of sadness, though they do not affect my judgment, resemble madness. Change is the only relief, and that I can seldom get.'

Hopkins's strain, the rift that widened in him, came about as a consequence of having to live two intensely demanding lives. The poet in him wouldn't be silenced, yet his relationship with that irrepressible force was one of awkwardness, severity, embarrassment and self-mutilation. Was it not that he partly equated poetry with a moral laxity that he would not countenance in himself? Bridges and Dixon were married men, so too was Patmore, but either way in or out of his vocation Hopkins would have been 'time's eunuch'. His sexual instincts, which judging by his poetry would have been passionate and sensuous had to be dulled; the embers of the unfulfilled self blaze into the Heracleitian fire of his poetry.

Hopkins, the bat, I've called him, the man trying so hard to see that he recreates the object of perception. But what of his physical characteristics? In a letter to Bridges written two years before his death, and evidently in response to his correspondent's curiosity, he gives us a sketchy head and shoulders: he was at the time of writing 43 years old.

'The irises of the present writer's eyes are small and dull, of a greenish brown; hazel I suppose; slightly darker at the outer rims. His hair (see enclosed sample, carriage paid) is lightish brown, but not equable nor the same in all lights; being quite fair near the roots and upon the temples, elsewhere darker (the very short bits are from the temple next the ear, the longer snip from the forehead), and shewing quite fair in the sun and even a little
tawny. It has a gloss. On the temples it sometimes appears to me white. I have a few white hairs, but not there.

It is very pleasant and flattering thought that Wooldridge is painting my portrait, but is it (and was yours) wholly from memory? I am of late become much wrinkled round the eyes and generally haggard-looking, and if my counterfeit presentiment is to be I shd. be glad it were of my youth.'

The exactness of observation, the self-conscious minutiae of detail, tell us that Hopkins had a very true sense of his physical presence. Did he in secret, with the use of a mirror, examine the inscape of his features? It may have been an obsession, the one fetish that he could reconcile with his self-effacing vocation. If one lives in a world of dualities one has to be sure of a composite identity, looking into a mirror often forestalled estrangement, it can help one to oppose the mental pack-ice that's breaking up inside. In 'Felix Randal' the physicality of Hopkins's poetry finds a corresponding counterpart in the rugged anatomy of the farrier.

Felix Randal the farrier, O is he dead then? my duty all ended,
Who have watched his mould of man, big-boned and hardy- handsome
Pining, pining, till time when reason rambled in it and some
Fatal four disorders, fleshed there, all contended?

Felix Randall was one of Hopkins's parishioners during his appointment to Liverpool in 1879, and both the grimness of the place and his exacting duties combined to bring the poet to a state of irrepressible despair. What he sees in Felix Randall the man, is not simply religious virtue, he had received the last sacrament of extreme unction, but what he might have admired in a big wind in a rugged landscape, the power, instress or 'mould' of the person, the indelible stamp of individuality that sets someone apart from everyone. The compassionate simplicity of 'Sickness broke him', and the man's reconciliation to the idea of dying after his initial reaction of fear, are the bridge-thread around which the poem builds. It can't have been easy for either party, the sensitive priest and the obdurate farrier, where was there a link other than through the common bond of religious faith, the intellectuality of the one and the unquestioning simplicity of the other.

This seeing the sick endears them to us, us too it endears.
My tongue had taught thee comfort, touch had quenched thy tears,
Thy tears that touched my heart, child, Felix, poor Felix Randal;
How far from then forethought of, all thy more boisterous years,
When thou at the random grim forge, powerful amidst peers,
Didst fettle for the great grey drayhorse his bright and battering sandal!

It’s in the last three lines of the sonnet’s sestet that we mark the inimitable alliterative sinew of Hopkins’s poetry, the power of the language evokes the once powerful physique of the man shoeing horses, hammering the metal into shape by his forge. In the last line we are aware of the onomatopoeia of a hammer’s metallic ring, and the battering iron-shod clatter of a drayhorse clopping over cobbles. This hard physicality of man and horse is counterbalanced against the spiritual compassion that precedes it, the man growing weaker over a period of months, settling into illness, searching with his hand for the comfort of his priest’s, reliant now on the comfort of words and not the assurance of tools to execute his craft.

In his correspondence with Bridges and Patmore, Hopkins shows himself to be both unsparingly self-critical of his own work and of the poems submitted to him for comment. In view of his own penchant for the rootedly English and philologically odd, it’s not surprising that we should find him championing the dialect poems of William Barnes, but whereas Barnes’s eccentricity is provincial, Hopkins’s oddity is universal. Hopkins could temper language, beat it like embers into conflicting red and blue sparks, Barnes’s method is to plod, his language has been too long earthed to make it resonate with the vibrancy of poetry. Hopkins saw in Barnes a matrix of language that could, submitted to a forge, be revivified, but in the case of the good parson remained inert. ‘Talking of chronologically impossible and long words’, he was to write to Bridges,

‘the Rev. Wm. Barnes, good soul, of Dorset-dialect poems (in which there is more true poetry than in Burns; I do not say of course vigour or passion or humour or a lot of things, but the soul of poetry, which I believe few Scotchmen have got) has published a “Speech craft of English Speech” = English Grammar, written in an unknown tongue, a sort of modern Anglosaxon, beyond all that Furnival in his wildest Forewords every dreamed. He does not see the utter hopelessness of the thing. It makes one weep to think what English might have been; for in spite of all that Shakespeare and Milton have done with the compound I cannot doubt that no beauty in a language can make up for want
of purity. In fact I am learning Anglosaxon and it is a vastly superior thing to what we have now. But the madness of an almost unknown man trying to do what the three estates of the realm together could never accomplish! He calls degrees of comparison pitches of suchness: we ought to call them so, but alas!

Hopkins and Barnes were the odd men at work in English 19th century poetry, neither wished to be constrained by the hollow sub-Tennysonian language that had come to settle on mid and late Victorian poetry, Hopkins’s vision was too intense, too vital to employ anything but a language charged with natural energy. His lines catch fire, reading him is like watching a moth pupate from its chrysalis, the poet’s world becomes by an act of charged metamorphosis a vision of reality. The beauty of such immediacy finds its perfected eloquence in the sonnet beginning ‘As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame.’

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
    As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell’s
    Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same;
    Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves — goes itself; myself it speaks and spells,
    Crying What I do is me: for that I came.

The opening line crackles with turquoise electricity. A kingfisher’s blue bolt is so sudden that one can’t distinguish between the bird’s form and its colour – it is pure motion, energy catching fire, whereas the iridescent wavering of a dragonfly over a pond is such that the insect appears to draw its own needle-fine thread of flame. Everything in these lines finds a corresponding resonance, the circles described by the dragonfly are repeated by the ripples of a stone making concentric circles in a ‘roundy’ well; it’s noticeable how the well seems to create its own vigorous shape, and in the image of the bell, we’re reminded of how ‘a skate’s heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend’ except that here it’s the bell returning on itself that is the individual action. How we individualize is by the recognition of the inner life of a thing being manifest in its external properties. Each thing in creation passionately proclaims ‘What I do is me; for that I came’. It’s also the
frustrated cry of the priest-poet, when and how will he integrate the duality of his life; if there is to be a separation of human qualities, is it right that the poet should be silenced, the priest made eloquent? I don't think Hopkins ever resolved that conflict, he attached personal guilt to the writing of poetry, and this is the root of tension in his work. Both Clare and Smart had felt guilty of the impracticality of poetry, but while their respective families starved, they were unable to extricate themselves from the source of their undoing. But what of Hopkins? If his material needs were catered for it was through the exercise of an unworldly vocation, his position was the reverse of Clare's and Smart's: poetry meant spiritual trouble for him and not material discomfort.

Even as a priest you can still kick a stone down a country lane, still vault a stile or cross a stream at a leap, only you must do these things in secret. The austere circumspection demanded of his life meant that Hopkins had to live inwardly, what he knew he had come by alone, and most often it would end there. No-one can entirely forego the self and Hopkins was painfully aware of the passing of his youth, in 'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo' he touches on what he felt most deeply.

Nor can you long be, what you now are, called fair,
Do what you may do, what, do what you may,
And wisdom is early to despair:
Be beginning; since, no, nothing can be done
To keep at bay
Age and age's evils, hoar hair,
Ruck and wrinkle, drooping, dying, death's worst, winding
sheets, tombs and worms and tumbling to decay;

Throughout his journals and letters this theme is taken up; the human man with his intense awareness of self could not easily reconcile himself to the demotion of age and unbeing. The inner fear of being marked by age or physical blemishment is poignantly brought out in a letter to his sister from Stonyhurst in 1871.

'One thing made me very sad the day we were vaccinated. I was coming away: I left a number of my companions in a room in the infirmary – some had come from the doctor and others were waiting for their turn – all laughing and chatting. As I came down one of the galleries from the room I saw one of our young men
standing there looking at a picture. I wondered why he stayed by himself and did not join the rest and then afterwards I remembered that he had had the smallpox and was deeply marked with it and all his good looks gone which he would have had and he did not want to face the others at that time when they were having their fun taking safe precautions against catching what it was too late for him to take any precautions against.

This seemingly uneventful incident tells us a lot about Hopkins the man. His acute state of sensitivity, almost embarrassment on behalf of another, is mirrored in his own refusal to allow his human potential to come to fulfilment. If he worked inwardly, against the grain of himself so to speak, then the slow dissolution of the self would not be easier to bear, but it would at least go unnoticed in a world of public values. Hopkins would never like Yeats make a poetry out of the stages of the self; rather he would project that inner agony on to the cyclic changes of nature. Nothing in Hopkins's life could deflect from inner awareness; he had too much of it, both as a priest and poet. He must have known what Rilke did, 'Every angel is terrible.' His aesthetic sensibility, and one which needed pampering, must have flinched from his self-imposed ascetic rigours. Plainness of dress, inattention to the self's needs, deprivation of human comfort, these are the antitheses to the rich line of his poetry.

I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree
Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me.

And it's this insolubility of the self which is at the heart of the poetic madness that I have chosen to explore. There can be too much of the self or too little of it, both are conditions of human estrangement. It was not that Hopkins bit too richly on the apple and choked on the juices, it was more that the potential of the fruit had to be constrained, he would allow himself only the thinnest of diets and this was fermented into a poetry charged with inner dynamism. What could have resulted in an over-ripeness is checked, human imperfection is weighed against God's completion; at times the resulting poetry is as near perfect as anyone has got it.

Glory be to God for dappled things —
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches’ wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced — fold, fallow, and plough;
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

Such poetry defies analysis, it is closer to the art of the watercolorist, to the red and gold fires of autumn — the blaze of the podless chestnut in grass, the flash of finches’ wings as they rise from feeding on the seeds of globe thistle flowers. Everything here is coupled, the black and white of clouds resemble the markings on cows — most black cows are distinguished by their white cloud patterning, and trout by the iridescent rainbow spotting and sheen that characterizes their skin. Hopkins’s line creates that luminous pink stippling one finds on the rainbow trout, and looking out across country the landscape with its red, green and brown alternation of fields is likewise noticeable for the variation of its harmony, each field is parcelled out according to crop rotation, and these colours pattern the landscape with their peculiarity of growth. The inner discipline and line of the poet is mapped out in inscape and landscape, there’s no division here between language and the textural qualities it describes. What Hopkins saw he realised not as potential poetry, but as the living manifestation of the transforming eye. Poetry and landscape were inseparable.

‘Below at a little timber bridge I looked at some delicate flying shafted ashes — there was one especially of single sonnet-like inscape — between which the sun sent straight bright slenderish panes of silvery sunbeams down the slant towards the eye and standing above an unkept field stagged with patchy yellow heads of ragwort.’

One notices how the particular stress of an ash tree is seen as possessing ‘single sonnet-like inscape’ as though the poet had already hewn his words from bark, and caught in the rush of the tree’s response to wind the vitality of shape his poem would create.

July brings things up close, beaded by the heat one seeks out things of the shade, unconsciously one trails one’s fingers through the clear current of a stream, turns up stones for the dark in which woodlice and spiders live, or else one gravitates towards shadow, a beech wood’s depth or the stone coolness of a barn floor. Hopkins’ Journal entry for July 19 1872 reads:
'Stepped into a barn of ours, a great shadowy barn, where the hay had been stacked on either side, and looking at the great rudely arched timberframes — principals (?) and tie-beams, which made them look like bold big As with the cross-bar high up — I thought how sadly beauty of inscape was unknown and buried away from simple people and yet how near at hand it was if they had eyes to see it and it could be called out everywhere again.'

He missed nothing, most of us are deficient in seeing, the stream of our inner dialogue preoccupies, we don’t see things until they impress themselves on us or are pointed out. We’re unable to shift our vantage point, we think where we should see. The poet is distinguished by the faculty to suspend the inner dialogue and pick up on a world that is vitally immediate, spontaneously accessible to visual sensitisation. What Hopkins saw on entering that barn, the bigness of things with their articulate detail, could only be achieved by allowing inscape to grow clear on an unclouded consciousness. If there’s a cross wire of thought, an inner preoccupation, the visual image doesn’t snap out of its design at one. Seeing should be tantamount to recreating; with lightning precision the eye lays bare what the sculptor knows is in the stone. Hopkins was saddened at how beauty or inscape was ‘buried away from simple people,’ that is the individual characteristic wouldn’t come clear of its mass or density, the blue eye of speedwell would be indistinguishable from nettles. It is this that in the sonnet ‘God’s Grandeur’ ‘will flame out, like shining from shook foil.’ Hopkins defended his choice of the word ‘foil’ with indignation; Bridges who had compared a goblet to ‘golden foil’ in one of his own poems, had to be brought nose-down to the image before realising the full force of its resonance. Hopkins wrote,

‘You were, you say, driven to it: I protest, and with indignation, at your saying I was driven to the same image. With more truth might it be said that my sonnet might have been written expressly for the image’s sake. But the image is not the same as yours and I do not mean by foil set-off at all; I mean foil in its sense of leaf or tinsel, and no other word whatever will give the effect I want. Shaken goldfoil gives off broad glares like sheet lightning and also, and this is true of nothing else, owing to its zigzag dints and creasings and network of small many cornered facets, a sort of fork lightning too.’
What Hopkins is at pains to accentuate here, cannot however be
carried by a word, his explanation accounts for the inexhaustible
metaphoric associations that the poet’s imaginal eye releases.

But the shadow grew on Hopkins, despite his unflinching devotion
to his religion, and his conscious refusal to seek worldly fame,
something wouldn’t rest within him, wouldn’t be pacified by the life
he had chosen. There were too many nerve-ends left unappeased in
his chemistry. In 1885 we find him writing to Alexander Ballie from
University College, Dublin, where he was lecturing in classics, of the
recurrent inner eclipse which was darkening his life.

‘The melancholy I have all my life been subject to has become of
late years not indeed more intense in its fits but rather more
distributed, constant, and crippling. One, the lightest but a very
inconvenient form of it, is daily anxiety about work to be done,
which makes me break off or never finish all that lies outside that
work. It is useless to write more on this: when I am at the worst,
though my judgment is never affected, my state is much like
madness. I see no ground for thinking I shall ever get over it or
ever succeed in doing anything that is not forced on me to do of
any consequence.’

Would Hopkins have ended up like Clare or Smart? Probably not,
his inner discipline was too strong; the madness he felt threatened by
was the diffuseness of things he couldn’t control, it had to do with the
unrealised potential within him, the angularity of the man had the
key-serrations of an oak-leaf, he did not readily fit the mould he chose
for himself. What we have come to call the dark or terrible sonnets
would seem to owe their origin to 1885, the year when Hopkins felt
most estranged, most near to madness. These are the poems of self-
questioning, they reveal the agonized inner conflict of a man who felt
both spiritually and humanly unworthy. Doubt offers no corner in
which to hide; the glare of self-exposure is excruciating, one rolls over
and over into flames. His complaint is terrible for its being without
consolation.

O the mind, mind has mountains cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man fathomed. Hold them cheap
May who ne’er hung there. Nor does long our small
Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here! creep
Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all
Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.
What Hopkins relays here is not simply the vertiginous depths of human consciousness, but also that state in which panic or psychic momentum has built up to a whirlwind. The self can't hide, even asleep we are awake, there's no corner of the mind in which we can canopy ourselves from the responsibility of living out who we are. The 'I' is insoluble, it is bitter grist for the mill, it is an insomniac, it is awake as long as we are. The only hope lies in extinction, 'all / Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.' But before that and after? Is there ever an end to the mystery of it, or is it that 'More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring.' Hopkins's state in the dejection of 1885 was comfortless. He was overworked, there were lectures to prepare, examination papers to be marked, his faith to be maintained, but all that aside, there was the deeper fear that he had failed both in his vocation and as a poet. There was dark and dark not dark and light.

I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.
What hours, O what black hours we have spent
This night! what sights you, heart, saw; ways you went!
And more must, in yet longer light's delay.
With witness I speak this. But where I say
Hours I mean years, mean life. And my lament
Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent
To dearest him that lives alas! away.

These lines hurt in the way that an axe will fell a tree, and did in the case of Binsey Poplars; but there the inscape violated is that of the human spirit. The torment is such that it is the eye of the heart that has seen, and what has been felt has been committed to the mind's eye. Feeling and seeing are interrelated here, it is a part of the poet's inner confusion. He had been too long alone, he knew better than anyone that the right function of poetry is communication, and that the latter implies publication. The tragedy of Hopkins is not so much that he neglected poetry for his religion, but rather that he knew he was wronging himself in shielding his work away from the world. As an appendage to a letter to Bridges he was to voice his true feelings on the subject.

'By the bye, I say it deliberately and before God, I would have you and Canon Dixon and all true poets remember that fame, the being known, though in itself one of the most dangerous things
to man, is nevertheless the true and appointed air, element, and setting of genius and its works . . . To produce then is of little use unless what we produce is known, if known widely known, the wider known the better, for it is by being known it works, it influences, it does its duty, it does good. We must then try to be known, aim at it, take means to it. And this without puffing in the process or pride in the success.

In view of the tenor of late nineteenth century poetry, and the oddity of his own work, it's unlikely that Hopkins would have found a large readership, but a book would have been a live rather than dead letter sent 'To dearest him that lives alas! away.' But by 1885 the year of the terrible sonnets, Hopkins had relinquished hope of producing a work that would make his labours known. He had become in his own eyes 'time's eunuch'. He was exhausted and in a very real sense of the term as walled up from human recognition as was Smart at the time of writing Jubilate Agno, and Clare during his long years at Northampton. He had to have the pain out, and confided in a letter to Bridges,

'if I could but get on, if I could but produce work I should not mind its being buried, silenced, and going no further; but it kills me to be time's eunuch and never to beget . . . I am afraid I shall be ground down to a state like this last spring's and summer's, when my spirits were so crushed that madness seemed to be making approaches – and nobody was to blame, except myself partly for not managing myself better and contriving a change.'

There was nobody to blame and nobody to help, this was precisely his situation. He could neither accept it nor be rid of it, this self, poor Gerard Manley Tunks; the realisation that who one is carries with it the responsibility of what one has or has not done, was a burden he could not shift. The terrible sonnets find him in the position of a small frightened animal darting from corner to corner, unable to find a hiding place from the creature which has its scent. You can do something with most tangible materials, fire them, cast them, hammer them into shape, but the protean irreducibility of the self remains like the cornea of the eye that the murderer can't dissolve in sulphuric acid. 'Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours' he was to write of himself. It's characteristic of poetry that the eloquent expression that Hopkins
finds in these sonnets should be as a consequence of a torment that drove him to the brink of madness.

My own heart let me have more pity on; let
Me live to my sad self hereafter kind,
Charitable; not live this tormented mind
With this tormented mind tormenting yet.

I cast for comfort I can no more get
By groping round my comfortless, than blind
Eyes in their dark can day or thirst can find
Thirst's all-in-all in all a world of wet.

He was hard on himself, unduly hard, but he rarely complains of privations in his letters. The latter are full-blooded with his passionate enthusiasm for art, his ruthlessly critical eye for what appeared jaded or outworn in poetry, his testing of poetic theory on the anvil of human experience. Doubt as he did, deep down inside he must have known he was right. As charming as the poems of Dixon, Bridges and Patmore may sometimes have appeared to him, he could nevertheless perceive the power and originality of his own work in relation to theirs. His self-assurance when writing of poetry, and in particular when enumerating his own, tell us he knew the value of his own genius. In accordance with a life dedicated to Christ, he could find comfort in the thought that his work was not lost to his maker. At a time before his despair over anonymity had set in, he had written to Dixon that

'\text{the only just judge, the only just literary critic, is Christ, who prizes, is proud of, and admires, more than any man, more than the receiver himself can, the gifts of his own making.'}

But where does a life and the poetry contained in that life lead? You can stand at a window and watch a red sunset turn the elder flowers salmon-pink, or kick a pebble nonchalantly down a lane, but neither is an escape, both actions have the mind turn its kernel of doubt over and over. Fulfilment isn't a part of the human condition, it isn't a part of poetry, and was even less so a part of Hopkins. The poem written to give voice to suppressed or unconsummated potential doesn't erase the years of sterility or ease the future ones to come, it simply affords assuagement for the duration of the poem. This was Hopkins's predicament; his later poems are the anguished cry of a man who couldn't retrieve the years in which he had allowed poetry to lie
fallow. Poetry seldom comforts the poet no matter what consolation it may bring to his readers. Perhaps no-one has so wrung the sinew of language, or so bared the nerve of human suffering as Hopkins did in Carrion Comfort.

But ah, but O thou terrible, why wouldst thou rude on me
Thy wring-world right foot rock? lay a lionlimb against me?
scan
With darksome devouring eyes my bruised bones? and fan,
O in turns of tempest, me heaped there; me frantic to avoid thee and flee?

Hopkins alluded to this sonnet as having been 'written in blood,' and the relationship between man and God, man and despair is enforced by predatory images. The adversary is a jackal or vulture, to the human man 'heaped there' as though brought down as the quarry of a lion. If in the first stanza the refusal is to vulture-like slit 'slack as they may be—these last strands of man / In me', that is, to become a party to the tyranny of despair, then in the second stanza which I have quoted, the onus is upon God terrorizing the man 'frantic to avoid thee and flee?'
The power of the predator, its turning up a tempest or dust storm reminds one of a big cat circling its exhausted prey. The physical force within Hopkins's poetry, its masculinity, the virtue he admired in Dryden, is something terrible in itself, it is on the level of the brutal spiritual combat that Rimbaud remarked as being more devastating than that of battle between men. One gets too the drumming power and incision of hooves, he would have his body fly like chaff, his 'grain lie, sheer and clear.' This is one of the most perfect instances of physical dissolution in English poetry. The sifting, the paring down of the man to pure particle, is as forcefully enacted as dust rising from the aftermath of smoking hooves. But dying, breaking out of the human fabric, and its dimension of time, was as Hopkins knew a bitter struggle, a reverse process of the pangs of birth. And who was there to praise in so bitter a conflict?

Cheer whom though? The hero whose heaven-handling flung me, foot tród
Me? or me that fought him? O which one? is it each one?
That night, that year
Of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling with (my God!) my God.
The conflict of inner darkness, the savage terror in which man wishes neither to live nor die, nor to place faith in God or himself, is here enacted with remorseless uncompromise. To wrestle with intangibilities – God and the self, and the fusion of the two in man, is to shadowbox a mirror. Only here the mirror is eternity – that spiritual locus in which Hopkins had placed his life trust.

Hopkins referred to himself as a bat, as someone who lived in the twilight, and whose manner of seeing was the more original for its peculiarity. A black bat in an English lane. Sometimes at twilight you can watch noctules picking off insects with swifts, the two birds hardly distinguishable in their powerful aerobatics. The bat’s flight is silent, often too silent for the moth it picks up on its radar, they hunt by a system of echolocation, a series of high-frequency sound waves which when they detect something are transmitted back to the flight-path. They have an erratic beat. On a warm day in December I’ve seen a pipistrelle come out from hibernation and monotonously pursue an erratic course round a farm gable. They achieve things by oblique strategy, and it is to the odd in Hopkins I wish to return.

It’s dark tonight, hail pimples the road, and the big chips run with the wind. If you go down to things, kneel in the road, as Hopkins would have, and move your eye square up to a hailstone you’ll meet with its blue, fractured angularity. It scintillates, star-fires are compacted in that berry-sized globule of ice. They have their own music on hitting a road or roof surface, you have to think of peas being shelled into a bowl, or the brisk friction of a match-head snapping into flame. Hopkins was attuned to each rhythm of nature. He not only tested it with sight, but also touch, taste, smell and hearing. He had to know things. He was once badly stung by a starfish when attempting to wear it as a decoration on his forehead. His ability to coordinate and interlink the senses had him refer to the feeling of gout in the eyes as comparable to soap or lemons. He wanted to penetrate the form and consciousness of all that he perceived, inscape or individuation was a way of seeing that was inexhaustible. The eye always misses something, Hopkins took upon himself the self-imposed duty to reclaim what we habitually miss. You can think you’ve seen something all of your life, and then one day you find out that what you have missed is the true nature of the thing. Nineteenth century poets, barring Coleridge, Clare, and a little of Wordsworth
and Cowper, never really looked at nature, they were content to inherit it through literary sources, or inform it with a sentiment that is altogether missing from Hopkins's work. Only Clare had the latter's knowledge and eye for actual detail. With Hopkins nature represented a scientific beauty, for the Romantics it was the dwelling place for the spirit of beauty.

Let's take a last look at the poet. We see him rather in the way that he drew himself reflected in a lake at the age of 20. The inversion gives us the dual nature of the man, the divisibility between matter and its reflective transfer, man and his image. The eyes which are both looking the same way have become conscious of a distilled reflection. The hat controls the unkempt hair, the feet are graceful — Gerard Hopkins, reflected in a lake Aug. 14. the signature reads. One can feel the suspension in the drawing, the floating image does not give us the likeness, it prepares us for it. A poem is the same, we are divided from a poet by the depth of the experience he records. Hopkins never did resolve this duality. Instinct warned him to keep away from beauty of the body. 'I think then no one can admire beauty of the body more than I do,' he was to write to Bridges, 'and it is of course a comfort to
find beauty in a friend or a friend in beauty. But this kind of beauty is
dangerous. Then comes the beauty of the mind, such as genius, and
this greater than the beauty of the body and not to call dangerous.' If
only things were so easily divided; they aren't, and it was Hopkins's
determination to avoid the gravitation towards physical beauty that in
part accounted for his removing himself to the Jesuit order.

But the man, the poet in the man, is portrayed in his response to
each nuance of the natural world.

'At the end of the month hard frosts. Wonderful downpour of
leaf: when the morning sun began to melt the frost they fell at
one touch and in a few minutes a whole tree was flung of them;
they lay masking and papering the ground at the foot. Then the
tree seems to be looking down on its cast self as blue sky on snow
after a long fall, its losing, its doing.'

Again we have the reflection, the image of the tree looking down at
itself has the delicacy of Japanese art.

And where do we go when we die? Did Hopkins stop seeing, stop
knowing the things he loved with such intensity? When he died in
1889 his poetry was known only to his most intimate friends. The
nineteenth century crossed the threshold of the 20th carrying in its
wake the scandal of Wilde, and the already flagging poetic influence
of Tennyson and Swinburne. Hopkins had died unknown as a poet;
I cannot believe he wished this, but it was the way of his life. There
must have been a last look at the hedgerows in May, his month, fretty
chervil would have been there, and the blue of bugle, the surf of
cherry blossom and the cuckoo's call ranging across the countryside.
If he was alone and unseen he probably kicked a clod the length of
a lane. It broke up at the last stub, sunlight magnified its fragments,
he could be heard talking to a mauve cluster of bluebells.
It is the octave that Mallarmé sought, 
letting his eye ponder upon the pool, 
and settle on it like a dragonfly 
so that his reflection upon the cool 
pattern of clouds flecking an azure sky 
was indivisible from both; two blues 
composed liquid reflections for his eye.

And where that conjunction of blue creates 
a Japanese brushstroke of water light, 
the mind becomes a crystal, each facet 
igniting to a sapphire star, and bright 
tracings that cross it are when a carp frets 
emerging from beneath a lily pad. 
For an instant the sky's forget-me-not.

If there's a colour to contemplation, 
then there's a music too if we could hear 
beyond the word eluding us, for air 
is resonant with notes that disappear 
on our awakening, much as the flare 
of a blue match flame turns invisible 
when held up to the sun. Mallarmé's fear 
was that the blue was untranslatable, 
and words were quartz crystals that wouldn't flow 
but interfaced themselves. Yet blue is sheer, 
demanding we brush it like the swallow 
with quick wing-beats, for that altitude's clear 
both in the passage out, and the return, 
there is a blue above the grey below.

(First published in Twofold (Paris, Spring 1982) with a translation by Paul Le Jéoux. A part of this poem is included in Nero (Jonathan Cape, 1985)
Gradations of cerulean engage
the eye in distinctions, for water keeps
no constant hue, and I could name fifteen
subtleties of sea-green and grey that meet
on a sea horizon, blues that are green,
and a brilliant turquoise turns to cobalt,
or becomes a sultry aquamarine,
as clouds compose and recompose the sky.
There's challenge here above a shifting bay
of luminous sky lakes; such flux demands
a music that is neither blue nor grey,
but isolates all colour in one band
of light, energy fired in a crystal, –
as sunlight strikes on a lit cove of sand.

Mastery of the blue means equipoise,
if vision clarifies with depth we need
motion to create resonance, the two
maintained as dynamic antitheses,
create those atmospherics of true blue
that give the poem mood, as a sad man
might walk here in rain, and colour the view.

Shelley lived in the azure, Stevens found
a blue attributable to the mind,
the basic slate, the universal hue.
I watch a bay's cloudy glintings as wind
turns it to pigeon grey, and gulls review
the water's bottle-glass opacity;
its shot-fleck's the green of a melon rind,
but one streak of ultramarine persists
in the cove's shelter. Something else is here
other than a sea-change, it's a cadence
of grief, as though the spirit lost its clear
blue eye of knowing, and woken from trance,
recognised that in its pursuit of blue
it would learn in its absence light more dear.

From water in flux I return to calm,
this lily pond, in which clouds seem answers
to buddah-squat pads and their pink-tipped flowers,
is a mirror in which the sky's transfer
is lapis lazuli, and clouds are burs
upon that pool. If the mind's a fixed beam
it will attract each ring sprung from a shower.
Mallarmé fell into a mirror-trap, and allowed words to crystallize, and so became a fixed star in the cooling night, his mind tempered to a cold, polished glow that found its assuagement in ice, the light that mesmerised his swan, so it preferred to contemplate the sky in static flight and stay. We must forever like the sky be moving into a new quality of light, intent upon a music known in the wake of migratory swifts, and see — their arrow strains toward a hidden sun, composing clear notes for our memory to reassemble when those birds have flown.

Anemones

In Redon’s vase of flowers one’s concealed, eclipsed by the poppy’s red parasol, marguerites, cornflowers, it cups the light, transforming it in ways wholly its own, and directs the eye to its inner fire that refracts with a mineral’s quality to be all colours as a consequence; naming’s selective, not a part of sight. These I’ve arranged; the dark storm of their eye dilated in a chalice opens out at the centre of a circumference that’s still, but could be the revolutions of an aircraft propellor. If I try, I get a colour that’s approximate, but this one’s blue is mauve and that one’s pink is more a red, and split with white disowns a colour definition. I stand back craning from oblique angles, diving down, gannet-pokered into a well of black.
Water Shrew

Snouty, a small amphibian, nesting in thimble-wide bank-galleries, they burrow voraciously like the mole, nesting in a ball of oak leaves they'll rear their litter in, a squeaky, blind, throat-fed issue, so badly vulnerable, they have the pink nakedness of a worm crammed in a starling's craw.

Blueblack, velvety, water shrews dive with alacrity for beetles, snails, the larva of the caddis fly. The air bubbles are traced out in silver along the fur, they elude the pike's mouth but fall prey to the kingfisher's bolt from a stunted alder, stunned and gobbled.

Look at them, swimming with a fish wriggle, high in the water, steering with forelegs, and able to jump clear of the surface on to an overhanging stalk. Small things, their dangerous foreshortened lives are bloody with survival, shrew fights, birth, the instinctive radar of survival.

Their death-rate's high in autumn, it's a time of shrew deaths by the hedgerow or river. Half an ounce of volatility curled up, and stiffening in the slime.
The Daughters of Memory

JOHN CAREY

... The mind, that Ocean where each kind
Does straight its own resemblance find;
Yet it creates, transcending these,
Far other worlds, and other seas... .

Andrew Marvell

Before philosophy first challenged the paradoxes of the myths, the Muses ruled over that ambiguous territory which is now the province of the aesthetcian. It was through the Muses that folk sought to conquer time with poetry, to penetrate the secrets of the world, and to capture the real in the beautiful. And it was in contemplating the Muses, perhaps, that the wise may have brooded upon a further puzzle: the nature of the poet's craft itself.

Yet they figure little in the surviving tales. Even when invoked with heartfelt devotion — and increasingly, as the centuries passed, such devotion became an empty commonplace — they appear shadowy and almost abstract, without the vivid personalities of the great Olympians. Eventually they were no more than emblems of the arts, or of the artistic spirit; and whatever further meaning they now may bear is given them by their interpreters, not discovered within their essence. They have become signs, not symbols.¹

I believe that, if we ponder their attributes, we may draw nearer to the poetic doctrine of which the Muses were the guardians. That it is from this idea that our own notions have derived, however long and tortuous the lineage, may encourage us to persevere: to seek our forebears is to seek ourselves.

The Muses were, first and most simply, the goddesses of springs. Their earliest holy places were the fountains around Olympus and Helicon; and wherever their cult spread, it was at water-sources that their altars were established. No sharp line seems, at first, to have distinguished them from the Nymphs, and the two groups shared many names and attributes.²
The Nymphs were feared for their ability to derange the minds of those who strayed into their domain, unseating reason with the uncanny contagion of their wildness: to be ‘seized by the Nymphs’ (nympholéptos) was to be frenzied or entranced. Similar beliefs are attached to nature-spirits elsewhere in the world: it is easy to see why madness, the lapse from society and humanity, should be linked with the powers of the untamed world, the woods beyond the limits of the sown. But such madness could open a window into supernatural truth: Bacis became a prophet through being ‘maddened by the Nymphs’ (Pausanias 4. 27. 4), and Hesychius (s.v. nympholéptos) describes seers and ecstatics as being possessed by them.

That among nature-deities it was the Nymphs who were specifically linked with madness, and that this madness should have had a holy, prophetic character, are circumstances perhaps connected with the springs in which they dwelt. For in Greece springs were intimately associated with the sites of the sacred oracles, with the trance of revelation. The primordial water, gushing and bubbling from its secret depths, may well have suggested the mystery of inspiration; and the infernal river Styx, by which even Zeus dared not to swear in vain, seems to reflect an identification of the dark streams underground with the immutable Truth which governs and maintains the universe. In languages as remote from one another as Akkadian and Welsh, the word ‘eye’ can mean ‘spring’ as well: the source of water is the means of vision.

It is in this context that we should consider the inspiration which the Muses bestowed upon their votaries; we may be led to a deepened understanding of the recurrent equation, extravagant to modern sensibilities, of inspiration and insanity. Plato includes ‘possession and frenzy from the Muses’ among the kinds of ‘higher madness’, a power ‘awakening and enrapturing’ the soul to a poetic eloquence which no unimpassioned skill could hope to equal (Phaedrus 245A; cf. 265B). A poet was said to be seized by the Muses, or maddened by them (mousoléptos, mousomanēs). It is the voice of the goddess which sounds through the poet’s mouth: the words are holy because they are not his. ‘Foretell, O Muse,’ sings Pindar (fragment 137), ‘and I will prophesy.’

This would seem, then, to have been the most ancient aspect of the Muses: they are keepers of fountains in the lonely places, givers of madness and of prophecy, spirits of the water of truth.
But the Muses were more than Nymphs; and their madness belonged, as Plato was careful to point out, to a loftier order. The Nymphs were bound to their streams, but the Muses ranged across the world; the Muses were numbered among the deathless Olympians while the Nymphs, though they outlived the Phoenix, were mortal at the last (Hesiod, Precepts of Chiron). The key to the difference lies, I think, in their parentage; for the Muses are the daughters of Mnemosyne, of Memory personified.

Other sources assign them different parents, but it is this tradition which has endured, enshrined in the verses of their votary Hesiod. And the link with memory is a close one, depending not on Hesiod alone. In their ancient temple on Mount Helicon, where they were reckoned to be three in number, one of the Muses was named Mnēmē, 'Memory' (Pausanias 9. 29); and Plutarch gives Mneiai, 'Memories', as an alternate name for the Muses as a group (Table-talk 9. 14. 1).

Why were they thus bound up with memory? A part of the answer springs to mind at once: before the adoption of writing, the craft of poetry was a craft of memory; composition was an exercise in memorization, recitation an exercise in recall. The researches of Milman Parry and Albert Lord have demonstrated the influence of memory techniques on the fundamental structure of the Homeric epics: it is when the greatest demands are to be made upon his memory that Homer invokes the Muses. Although we have no longer the absolute dependence on memory of the pre-literate, its artistic necessity has not lessened: the contemporary painter Robert Henri has written that 'All work that is worth while has got to be memory work'.

There is a deeper level too. In a culture governed by myths all validity, all meaning derive from a correspondence between the phenomena of daily life and the deeds of the first times, when the gods and demigods created the world and established all things in it. This correspondence is perceived and maintained through memory, the trained and instructed memory of the wise: it is the bridge between the Ages of Gold and Iron, and our protection against the chaos of lost categories. In Greek, 'truth' (αλήθεια) is the formal opposite of 'forgetting' (ληθή); to remember is to preserve the Truth on which the world is founded.

Memory is not only a bridge; it is also — some might see the distinction as a mere shift of phrase or emphasis — the world as a whole, the universe as it has been taken into the mind. Here are the
JOHN CAREY

‘fields and broad palaces of memory’ which Augustine praises in a famous passage in his Confessions:

Men set out to wonder at the heights of mountains, at the huge surges of the sea, at the ample glidings of rivers, at the circumference of Ocean, and at the wheelings of the stars; but they forsake themselves. They do not marvel that, when I spoke of all these things, I did not behold them with my eyes; nor could I have spoken unless, within my memory, in spaces as vast as any I might see outside, I beheld the mountains and waves and rivers and stars which I have seen, and the Ocean which I believe to be.

(Confessions 10. 8)

No wonder that the Pythagoreans called memory ‘the blending and harmony and, as it were, the common bond of all things; of which, everlasting and unbegotten, each thing is a part and emanation’ (Porphyry, Life of Pythagoras 31). The water-symbolism discussed above is extended to memory also. Whoever descended, seeking oracles, into the cavern of Trophonius, drank first from the spring of Mnemosyne, in order to remember what he learned there (Pausanias 9. 39); and an Orphic tablet found in Petelia warns the initiate that, in his journeys through the afterworld, he must drink the water of Mnemosyne in order to join the company of the gods.

In the traditional view, then, memory and inspiration are the same. The rapture of holy madness is the recollection of an archetypal reality, situated in the world’s beginnings or, for Plato, in the supernal kingdom of the Forms. ‘A few remain,’ says Socrates to Phaedrus, ‘for whom something of that memory is sufficiently present. These, whenever they behold some likeness of what lies There, are overwhelmed, yet do not know whereby; nor do they know what the passion is, for they do not perceive enough’ (Phaedrus 250A). Rapture and recollection, the bursting of waters from below or of radiance from beyond, are facets of a single mystery; it is in this region that the Muses are our guides.

If the fields of memory indeed contain the universe, and the higher madness is a vision of transcendent truth, then the Muses are, no less than their father Zeus, world-rulers: but his is external reality, theirs the cosmos of consciousness. And it is through the Muses that the
outer world is humanized, endowed with meaning and with spirit: through them that it is made real for us and so, in a sense, through them that it is real at all. This seems to have been the theme of Pindar’s lost hymn to Zeus, as we learn of it in the paraphrase of Aristides:

(Pindar) says that, when Zeus inquired if they desired anything, the gods asked that he create certain deities who would arrange these mighty deeds and this whole edifice of his, with words and music.

(Aristides 2. 142)

The Muses complete the creation. As Walter Otto admirably observes, ‘The being of things is not total so long as there is no speech which expresses it. Things and their majesty must be expressed; that is the fulfilment of their being.’

From sovereignty over the world’s true pattern, it was but a step to dominion of the world itself. Plutarch identifies the Muses with the Fates, and with the Sirens to whom Plato assigned the charge of the heavenly spheres. Like the Sirens of Homer, they tempt us to forget home and safety in the yearning for fabulous knowledge; but the death to which their music lures us is in reality birth into a higher state (Table-talk 9. 14. 4–6).

All knowledge belongs to them: it is they who taught its riddle to the Sphinx (Apollodorus 3. 5. 8), they who possess the secrets of past, present and future (Hesiod, Theogony 38). Pindar says that ‘The minds of men are blind, whoever without company of the Heliconian goddesses seeks with mere cleverness to travel the deep path’ (Paean 7B. 3–5); and Homer appeals to them as universal witnesses,

For you are goddesses present everywhere, and know all things, But we hear only rumors, and have not knowledge.

(Iliad 2. 485–6)

Shelley was in this tradition when he wrote, in his Defense of Poetry, that poetry ‘strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty, which is the spirit of its forms’.

These considerations suggest a comparison, rough and most likely over-bold, with Augustine’s famous doctrine of the Trinity. The saint proposed an analogy between the three persons of God and the three mental faculties of traditional psychology: the Father likened to
memory, the Son to understanding or vision, and the Spirit to will. We are concerned only with the first two parts of the comparison: for even as Son proceeds from Father, and understanding from memory, the Muses are the daughters of Mnemosyne.

Of greatest interest here is the implicit likening of the Muses to the Son; for the Son is of course the Logos, the Word — and, in Augustine’s Platonic Christianity, the unity and agent of the Forms. No Greek divinity embodies the Word more truly than do the Muses, who know all things, reveal all things, lead men beyond the world and, in Pindar’s hymn, complete the creative enterprise of their father Zeus. The masculine Logos is in the Old Testament the feminine Ḥākhmāh, consort and collaborator of the Lord:

When He gave a limit to the sea . . . and when He ordained the foundations of the earth, I was the architect beside Him. And I was His delight day after day, dancing at all times before Him, dancing in the world of His land; and my delight was in the sons of Adam.

(Proverbs 8: 29–31)

Augustine arrived at his analogy by reasoning that, if man is made in the image of God, then the mystery of the Trinity must be hidden in the essential structure of the mind; this is the glass in which we darkly see.

This mental trinity is not God’s image because the mind remembers and understands and loves itself, but because it is able to remember and understand and love the One Who made it. When it does this, it becomes wise.

(On the Trinity 14. 12. 15)

It is curious to observe Greek mythology, as it pondered the same problem of the link between mind and the Absolute, shadowing forth the thought of the great theologian.¹⁵

The resemblance of the Muses to the Logos emphasizes yet further the divinity inherent in the creative act, and hence in the creating mind. Dante sets the name Musa in apposition with mente and alto ingegno, ‘mind’ and ‘lofty brilliance’ (Inferno 2. 7–9),¹⁶ and Coleridge called the imagination ‘the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and . . . a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of
creation in the infinite I AM'. For Eckhart, the path to God involves the imaginative re-creation of the cosmos:

On coming to [the Godhead's] knowledge the soul sees God and glancing back into herself she sees that the Godhead is in all things. Receiving into her the likeness of the creator she creates what she will but cannot give it essence; she gives it form and is herself its matter and its eternal activities are in her; these are in the eternal birth.

Through poetry, we create what God has created, building the world of names and images: to this extent, we are partakers in His lordship. In poetry, the polarities of truth and fiction, memory and experience, sacred and profane, are reconciled in wholeness — the fulfilment of their being.

In some parts of this essay I may seem to have strayed far from Greece; but I have sought only to explore ideas which are, I believe, clearly discernible in the ancient texts. The identification of memory with inspiration, their sanctification through contact with the mythic past, and the cosmic potencies of art as mirror of the world's primordial pattern — all these appear in the shrines and rituals, the verse of Pindar and the speculations of Pythagoras. Memory and poetry burst from within, like holy water welling from the rocks; the secret of the Muses is hidden in the miracle of consciousness.

Notes

1 An excellent discussion of the decline of the Muses in our culture is provided by E. R. Curtius, Europäische Literatur und lateinische Mittelalter (1948), 233–50. He dates their final eclipse as roughly coincident with the Industrial Revolution.

2 Walter Otto, Die Musen (1955), 18–20, 28–35; note further the glosses of Hesychius, s.vv. nymphai and nympha, which equate the Muses with the Nymphs. Otto's book is enormously illuminating; I owe it many of the references cited in this essay.

3 The lunatic is in many traditions the 'wild man', covered with leaves and matted hair, companion of the creatures of the forest. The most comprehensive study of this important symbol seems to be that of Richard Bernheimer, Wild Men in the Middle Ages: a Study in Art, Sentiment and Demonology (1970).

4 Akkadian inu, Welsh Ilygod; see further my article 'Irish Parallels to the Myth of Odin's Eye', Folklore 94. 214–8.
The shrines of the Muses were erected as far as possible from human habitation (Plutarch, On Curiosity 12).

The evidence strongly indicates that the belief in nine muses represents the expansion of an older triad. For a legend to account for the multiplication see Augustine, On Christian Doctrine 2. 17.


Henri, The Art Spirit (1960 ed.), 171. Cf. 32: 'The development of the power of seeing and the power to retain in the memory that which is essential and to make record and thus test out how true the seeing and the memory have been is the way to happiness.'

The Renaissance magician Giordano Bruno sought to control all reality by arranging it within his memory; his efforts are admirably described by Frances Yates, The Art of Memory (1966), chapters 9–14.


The word which I have rendered 'arrange', katakosmein, can mean either 'to beautify' or 'to set in order', even as kosmos means both 'universe' and 'ornament'.


The Fates are elsewhere described as 'dwellers beside a heavenly pool' (Orphic Hymn 59. 2–5).

The Pythagoreans too had ascribed the cosmic harmonies to the Muses (Porphyry, loc. cit.).

For Blake the Logos was 'Jesus the Imagination'; the best discussion is probably that of Kathleen Raine, Blake and Tradition (1968), 2. 189–213.

The invocation of one's own faculties instead of the Muses goes back to classical times (thus Curtius, 238–9); but only Dante seems to have identified mind and goddess.


DAVID GASCOYNE

Thalassa: The Unspeakable Sea

Sitting on a beach facing the foaming collapse of the waves of a vast expanse of acrid water stretching away as far as the distant line that indicates the curvature of the globe

Sitting in a deckchair with ballpoint and notepad facing the theme of Thalassa

Vociferations uninterrupted since before the first emergence of all animal life. Thunders – murmurs : furies – calms. Ultimate challenge to language. Total proscription of words

Primal matrix : insatiable grave. Unalterably other. Unlikeness extending out of sight

We are a minority inhabiting an environment unaware of having given us birth

Swimming, sailing and fishing : ephemeral superfluities

How long before the final drowning of that book wherein is written that our finest order is no more than a heap of garbage dumped at random on the verge of the purest and most polluted of waters, undrinkable and deadly to all but the Kraken and its countless amphibious hordes?

Triumphant rise, fall and crash of a last billow against the definitive deserted shore : all too human imagining that no incarnate consciousness will ever realize

Note. David Gascoyne writes: ‘In the seventh and penultimate verset of this piece, I have amalgamated references not only to Prospero (his magico scientific “philosophy”) but the 124th and 61st Fragments of Heraclitus: in the first of these two I understand him to refer not to us (“we”) i.e. humankind as such, but to our best and finest “order” (civilization?). The Kraken comes from Tennyson’s short poem of 1830, which seems to suggest that the young Tennyson may well have been reading Heraclitus, as it ends with the Kraken rising to the surface of the ocean because of the world ending in fire.’
November in Devon

Leaving Plymouth last seen after first smashed by bombs,
Driving North all the morning after rain
Towards Hartland’s hospitable hearth
Through landscapes clad in disruptive pattern
Material edged by hedge or walls of dry-stone:

Under a cover of commingling cloud and clear,
Drifts of drab haze slashed through by wet blue slate,
Between lofty moor and deep glen
Past lanes twisting off into the arcane
We went towards midday’s strengthening sun.

After Launceston eleven o’clock approaches
With a thousand revs per minute four times
Beneath us: the car radio
Picks up brass playing Nimrod in Whitehall,
Rearousing a reticent love for this land.

While memory brings back like a sepia still
Holding my mother’s hand in a Bournemouth
Doorway during the first of all
Remembrance Day’s two minutes of silence,
Today I anticipate the advent of death.

A parade of folk sporting mass-produced poppies
In the next village briefly delays us
At a border-point round which spread
Areas of age-old non-violence.
In ivy-dark gardens hang white rags of late rose.

An abrupt paranoia wonders just how sure
One can be now that no secret convoy
Was out during last night on roads
Linking Hinkley and Bull Head, that nearby
Tin-mines or tumuli conceal no lethal hoards.

At half my age this might have worried me more.
The South country of childhood was secure.
Now I know that to Whinny-moor
Before long I shall come, as one more year
Declines towards departure in deceptive calm.
JEAN TARDIEU

Hölderlin’s Grave

The day the day hums with confused rebukes
The night complains and complains
it complains without saying why

The rising sun
speaks to us like a father
but we don’t listen to its advice

Space is inhabited by numberless fires
which send us signals we can never understand
and time for a long while
worries our memory
like a face it’s impossible to find again.
Alone after a long day’s walk
often I go to the foot of that shadow-show
and before the empty stage
I watch with anguished heart
calling without echo
to those great actors who for a hundred thousand years
have reigned over our ingratitude
and speak without being heard.

Forest, why keep silence still?
Awaken and step out! O sky,
why close your eyes in broad daylight?
Mingle with the sun’s gold chains
the hidden treasures of your Night! Let times
be mixed, and everything,
past present future, be together given
to the indomitable spirit which is hoping for you
and awaits you! ...

And if, from this tumult,
a unique voice emerges, that with its quietness
can dominate the thunder, and that Smile
stronger than the mortal combat of the elements,
then may we learn at last
from the unalterable peace
the seed of which lies in the spirit of men
since the first day!

But none finds in himself other reply
than his own heart’s sound, and ever the silence
alone seems to announce the word, and evermore
in us the immense voices fade away
with the remembrance of the Promise
like a withdrawing storm.

From: Une voix sans personne
Translation by David Gascoyne

KATHLEEN Raine

Light over Water
(Martindale 1983)

I
Brilliant
Myriad instantaneous alighting raindrops on a stream
That has run unbroken down and on
Since this once familiar place was home,
Each in its alighting flashes sun’s glitter and is gone
As another, another and another comes to meet me,
Angel after angel after angel, its dancing-point
Always here and now
The same bright innumerable presence arriving
Anew the present always absolving from time’s flow.

Old, I know
How many, many, many the epiphanies of light.
II

And yet now as I write
They are only memories,
Those bright arrivals of the travelling light
Now nowhere, never again.
No road or bridge or gate
Into the past, once now, once here.
Not farthest star comes near
Where they are gone, who once were dear;
For memory is Hades' house
Where none is present, where none meet.

III

And yet again, always,
Those presences come to us, are seen, are known,
Messengers of meaning, sacred, indecipherable,
Present everywhere, to all.
Inaccessible as life their source;
We know untold, untaught
Who they are, what holy truth proclaim,
The knower a mystery, a mystery the known,
Forms of wisdom in perpetual epiphany, they and we
Light and eye, seer and seen daily angels,
Sun and stars, river and rain.

Lily-of-the-valley

It is not different,
Now I am old,
The meaning and promise
Of a fragrance that told
Of love to come
To the young and beautiful.
Still it tells
The unageing soul
All that heart desires
For ever is
Its own bliss.
named

I
In dream, a voice
Called me by my name,
Unknown, or known from some far other time
Or place, or state or world, yet nearer
Than here or now, that hidden one;
And was it I,
Unselved by sleep that takes away
All daily doing and being,
Absolved for a space of what we are, or seem,
Am I, who remember,
Another or the same
Who stirred,
Who answered to my name
Recalled from lifelong years away, astray,
Forgetful or forgotten, since I had been
One named.

Strange among strangers my face,
Defaced, obscured, obliterate,
Falsified by the years, disguised,
Anonymous, who, when addressed,
Some other, or no-one.

Yet by that unknown knower I am known,
And who I am.

II
But by what name
Did the voice summon?
The name my mother gave, not knowing
What child I was, who came
Into her house of life
To be her grief?
She gave me a name not mine
Who have so long forgotten
Who, whence, whither I am.
Glimpsed

That flash of joy –
Mine, or another’s, or from elsewhere, far,
Like scent of budding birch, borne on the wind,
Or pure note, clear,
Heart trembles to, like water in a glass,
Like flame that bows and leaps
As sound-waves pass,
Poignant as first love remembered,
The past, the lost, the never-to-be
Glimpsed between the coming and the gone.
It seemed a room that I have lived in once
And found again just as it was,
But where that country out of time?
Was that recollection mine,
Or being itself, life in all its sweetness
Known for a moment, understood?

A 77th birthday

For Harold Morland

I tell myself that I am old,
That time grows short,
But presence, now as always,

Brimful of world,
Heart, sense and mind,
My small cup overflows.

O ceaseless wind,
I have hard you on the wild hills –
Enclosing walls

Cannot hinder the unconfined
Continuous
With all that is.
Glimpses

I
Downpour from thunder-cloud
Falling on cascade
Of white wall-roses
Burnet-scented,
And in a swarm
Gnats are dancing
In the dancing rain.

II
Flies –
But what I see
Flashing under leaves
As morning sunbeams fill the sycamore tree
Is flight
Of minute meteors, rays
In living transmutation of light

*   *   *

World's music changes:
The spheres no longer sing to us
Those harmonies
That raised cathedral arches,
Walls of cities.

Soundings of chaos
Dislodge the keystone of our dreams,
Built high, laid low:
Hearing, we echo
Rumours of the abyss.

There was a time
To build those cloud-capped towers,
Imagined palaces, heavenly houses,
But a new age brings
A time to undo, to unknow.
Change

Change
Said the sun to the moon,
You cannot stay.

Change
Says moon to the waters,
All is flowing.

Change,
Says the field to the grass,
Seedtime and harvest,
Chaff and grain.

You must change,
Said the worm to the bud,
Though not to a rose,

Petals fade
That wings may rise
Born in the wind.

You will change
Said death to the maiden, your wan face
To memory, to beauty.

Are you ready to change?
Says thought to the heart, to let pass
All your lifelong

For the unknown, the unborn
In the alchemy
Of the world's dream?

You will change,
Say the stars to the sun,
Says night to the stars.
The Fore-Mother*

I am spread wide, far
On the tide of the one sea;
As I ebb away
In lives not mine
My blood flows on.

Like a mist lifting
I fade,
I no longer am
Who through new eyes see
The green, the vein,
The flower, the tree.

I am an echo
You do not hear,
Who, gone from myself,
Am near
Your hear and now
Of elsewhere.

I am long ago
Who am with you –
In your first love
Age-old, the untold
I speak to you.

*First published in Labrys, 1984

Even now, sky,
Sometimes I look up and say,
‘No, I have not forgotten,
Though for the time
Going from here to there
From this to next, I promise
(So I say to blue spaces and high clouds)
To be again, someday
In your great ever-presence.’
But silently you remind me always
That I have left, lost, gone away.
The Poetry of Language-making
Images and Resonances in the Chinese Script

ARTHUR COOPER

...i filologi han creduto nelle nazioni esser nate prima le lingue, dappoi le lettere; quando (com'abbiamo qui leggermente accennato e pienamente si prouverà in questi libri) nacquero esse gemelle... philologists have believed that among the nations languages first came into being and then letters; whereas (to give here a brief indication of what will be fully proved in this volume) letters and languages were born twins...


...these artists and ancestors of ours... were indistinguishable from ourselves, physically and in mental capacity. They had not yet experienced our history, and that is the measure of the difference between us.

N. K. Sandars: Prehistoric Art in Europe.

Vico in the 18th century saw as one great discovery of his New Science that 'letters' (elsewhere he talks of 'poetic characters') and 'languages', were, as he put it, born twins; the birth being in what he calls the Poetic Age. Today philologists would see his claim as incomprehensible, or nonsense. As a learned sinologist friend put it, 'Spoken language comes first. Graphs are only a secondary and makeshift way of recording speech.' That spoken language had to come before the writing of it seems indeed obvious; but in what sense could it have come first, and was it from nowhere?

The ancient script of China (from which the Chinese script of today, employed also by the Japanese and other great civilizations of the Far-East, is descended) may, I believe, contribute to answering this question; and to justifying Vico's provocative claim, if that is properly understood.

The Chinese language has always been founded on more or less separable syllables, each with a meaning, whether or not you like to
call these ‘words’; and it is with these, not with individual sounds merely, as in the case of a phonetic script such as an alphabet, that the Chinese method of writing has always been concerned. Hence it is sometimes called ‘logographic’. There is no exact number of ‘logograms’, characters, that can be given for the Chinese script: the largest dictionaries list nearly 50,000 including many very rare and ‘variant spellings’; but nobody has to know anywhere near that number. Indeed, ‘knowing’ Chinese characters is not like knowing one’s alphabet or arithmetical tables, more akin to knowing people; not so much how many one knows but how well one knows them, to account for their behaviour. To attach to Chinese characters glosses in another language is not enough and can seriously mislead. One needs to try, at least in imagination, to share the observations and experiences of those who created them and to study a whole variety of contexts in which they are used. Their senses are not finite.

The earliest Chinese script of which we have clear evidence is from the 2nd millennium BC, already showing the three basic kinds of logograms as its characters: pictograms, ideograms and what have been called phonograms. Of these the pictograms are simple drawings of objects or actions.

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{SUN} & \text{MOON} & \text{MAN} & \text{TREE} \\
\text{(Ancient)} & \text{(Now)} & & \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{HAND} & \text{FOOT} & \text{or} & \text{FOOT} \\
\text{(putting, doing)} & \text{(departing, stopping)} & \text{(approaching)} \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
\text{(It made no difference in early script whether drawing faced to left or to right, but the way up it was drawn changed a meaning)}
\]

\[1\] ‘Ancient’ is applied to the script from the oldest found (ca. 14 c. BC) to its first regularization (3 c. BC). A most important source of the earliest script, ‘oracle bones’ recording questions asked in divination, is a discovery only of this century; another main source is inscriptions on ritual bronzes. Sources are not specified in examples here, only one or two for each character illustrated out of many variants over a period of more than a thousand years from the various sources; examples chosen for the purpose of illustration are copied in pen. ‘Ancient’ where in the text it refers to
Such figures relate to the most primitive form of 'picture-writing' which was not writing in the true sense of recording the spoken word; but as the script developed each such figure came to represent not just the object or action depicted but a particular monosyllabic word for it in the language, then truly 'writing' it. The number of words that could be represented by simple pictograms of this kind was always very limited, so that the simple pictographic class of characters is the smallest of all though including many common words; but the chief part that pictograms played in the script as a whole was as elements in the construction of the other two basic ways in which a word might be written and serving therefore as the ingredients of the entire script. They were never like the beautiful statuesque drawings seen in Egyptian hieroglyphs; their beauty lay in their simple economy and liveliness. From its very beginnings Chinese calligraphy has always related to choreography rather than to architecture. The ancient Chinese did not build in stone.

The second way of writing words, giving scope also for abstract notions, was by combining simple pictograms to make ideograms: 'combining ideas' as the Chinese call it. For instance, a word for 'love', with extended meanings such as 'lovely, good' and so on, was expressed by combining a pictogram for a mother with another for a child. The child is shown with a large head, arms outstretched, and only a single line for the rest as if swaddled; the mother by a kneeling figure, done by a sinuous line for the body, knees kneeling and feet behind, with superimposed on it a frontal view of the breast showing the nipples, but more often by a kneeling figure with a loop around the body to show 'attachment' and 'lack of independence'. This, with the imaginary loop, is itself an ideogram rather than a pictogram and it was used on its own for a 'girl' originally in its older English sense of someone who is attached, dependent, but of either sex; hence, for example, a young person still living with parents, or a servant attached to a family. (One interesting development was its ancient use as the pronunciation, as that cannot now be known, relates to the most probable approximations scholars have been able to make from various kinds of evidence available without a phonetic basis for the script.

2 'Now' is applied to standard and printed forms of the script, current now and for nearly two thousand years; these are written here with writing-brush. 'Now' of pronunciation relates to the 'standard language', that foreigners used to call 'Mandarin'.
familiar, unceremonial pronoun for 'you', like French tu, toi; but now it is the ordinary word for a 'woman'. Like 'girl' in English, words change their meanings.)

Whereas the word shown for 'love' might be regarded as depicting a scene, 'mother and child', the principle of the ideographic construction of such characters has more often to be seen as that only of juxtaposition; as in the ideogram for a 'man' as an able-bodied male human being, combining a pictogram showing a simple drawing of an arm for 'strength' juxtaposed with one for 'fields'. In this way much detailed and explicit drawing, as in the Egyptian hieroglyphs, was avoided; making possible far simpler and fewer basic drawings. The Egyptian hieroglyphs, for instance, included forty or fifty beautifully accurate drawings for different kinds of bird; but the Chinese script had basically only two: a cock or any slim, long-tailed bird; and a hen or any plump, short-tailed bird.

Different kinds of birds were expressed in writing mainly by means of their names written according to the third basic way of writing words, that which has been called 'phonographic': by far the largest class of characters now, accounting for some 90 per cent of those listed in the largest modern dictionaries. These, like the ideograms, consist of combinations of pictograms juxtaposed but each allotted a separate function: one as the 'determinative' to give a general category of meaning for the word being written – so either of the bird pictograms if the name of a bird; and the other as the so-called 'phonetic': a character for a word of different meaning but apparently felt to be similar enough in pronunciation to the word intended, to be able to guide the reader to it with the assistance also of the determinative for its general sense. For instance, a pictogram of a mouth, serving
as determinative for speaking, is juxtaposed with one for a knife, pronounced anciently something like tog (now dāo as romanized for the presentday standard language), to represent a word, anciently something like diōg and now zhāo for ‘to call to come to oneself, summon’. Adding another pictogram, for the sun as determinative for light, to this combination then produces the representation of another word, now zhāo, for such meanings as ‘brilliant, glorious’ and ‘to display, make evident’. The connexion of a ‘knife’ with these words seems only phonetic.

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{knife, now 刀} \\
\text{mouth, now 口} \\
\end{array}
\]

The description as I have given it, with this example, of the very prolific so-called ‘phonetic’ or ‘phonographic’ method of creating characters in the Chinese script accords with what is generally accepted by the palaeographers and philologists who take the view that the spoken language first came into being and that the script could only have been a ‘secondary and makeshift’ way of recording it. They say the ‘knife’ therefore had no significance in making these characters apart from the resemblance of the word for it in Chinese, by its mere sound, to the various others incorporating it only for that reason in their ‘spelling’. Such a view, indeed, fits well with what is known of some other ancient scripts including the Egyptian, which had an alphabet of consonants to add to its pictographic ‘determinatives’ for the spelling of words. The work, in particular, of Jean-François Champollion (1790–1832) on Egyptian hieroglyphs prepared the sinologists of the last century for just such a phonetic system in the Chinese script; and nothing that the Chinese themselves had said, ever since some 2,000 years ago they had first written analytically about their script, seemed to contradict such a view of the ‘phonographic’ characters in it. As a result, questions which could prove highly awkward for such a view have never been asked.

In the first place let us look again at the pictogram said to represent a knife, which is used also as the determinative in characters for cutting. There can be no question of its meaning, but even in its earliest forms it seems to bear little resemblance to a picture of a knife;
and, although Chinese scholars have recently pointed to an image on ancient bronzes, seen as representing a knife of a kind that archaeologists have found,

there is no evidence of the use of such an image as this in the script at any time. But there is an alternative to trying to guess how an ancient pictogram may have been derived from an image (which can be an exercise rather like reading tealeaves); and that is to try to find something shared semantically among characters containing it. This seems here to be the idea of ‘drawing’ (traction, attraction) as in fact one’s hand draws a knife along, in whatever direction but not pushing it, when cutting with it; as one is drawing people towards oneself when summoning them to come; and as that which is ‘brilliant, glorious’ or ‘displayed, made evident’ may be imagined as drawing the light of the sun to itself.

One then also sees the same idea in this image in characters where the part it plays cannot in any way be ‘phonetic’ as they bear no resemblance at all in sound to the word for ‘knife’: for instance in

anciently pronounced something like kat which meant originally ‘to draw, delineate’; as well as, adding another hand as determinative to this, ‘to draw’ for instance water from a well; while with other determinatives added it had such meanings as ‘to draw up, draft a treaty or contract’ – in which, it may be noted, both ‘treaty’ and ‘contract’ derive from Latin trahere ‘to draw’; as ultimately do also words like ‘to trace’ meaning ‘to delineate’.

With these uses of it in mind, one may then look again at the ancient pictogram and see it perhaps as a profile of a hand with forefinger extended, drawing? ‘That which one draws (along with the hand, when cutting with it)’ may then be the origin of the Chinese name for a ‘knife’; and the pictogram can then be seen in its various
uses for constructing characters not as merely a meaningless phonetic symbol, but as imaginative and semantic in the making of the words themselves.

A hand in the posture of cutting was (so it seems) used as determinative in characters for ‘cutting’ and on its own for a ‘knife’ itself; but the image of the hand retained for some words written with it as part of their characters its original basic idea of a hand drawing. When it had become the way of writing the word for a ‘knife’ as the thing drawn along by the hand for cutting, the gesture, that had given birth both to the word and to the character for it, was reinterpreted in the script as if representing a kind of knife; which the very economic pictogram fortuitously resembled. Thereafter it could only seem to play a merely phonetic rôle in characters for words felt to be related in sound but with meanings having nothing to do with knives or cutting.

This profile hand can in fact be seen in other senses than ‘drawing’ and in characters unrelated to that idea in sound or meaning: for instance placed on either side of a man, it suggests squeezing, holding between, and such meanings; and so (adding the determinative for ‘metal’) ‘metal tongs, forceps’; but adding instead that for an ‘insect’, it meant a ‘butterfly’ – referring to the so-called ‘clubbed’ antennae, like tongs, that distinguish butterflies from moths. However, the profile hands, pressing, were also reinterpreted here: as if two men, one on either side of the man in the middle, making the use of this ideogram harder to understand semantically in writing a word for a butterfly; and so again appear to be ‘merely phonetic’ as this word sounded like others seeming irrelevant: all these words anciently something like kap, now jiā:-

Reinterpretations of this sort abound: words as in all languages became free of their origins, with lives of their own; and the way of writing them merely a script, free to acquire other kinds of beauty. But in the ancient Chinese script it can be seen how the ‘letters’ and ‘language’ were indeed, as Vico said, ‘born twins’. It was only by their observations and sharing images of the world around them that people could make words, and with them language, in the first place.
The elements in the Chinese script, which philologists in the West have taken to be merely 'phonetic', on the rebus principle (as when one starts a letter to a child with a drawing of a deer for 'dear' just for the sound of the word), in fact originally recorded the observation from which the word was created. It is not surprising to see then, sometimes aided by this visual creation of a Poetic Age, that often people in different parts of the world, making similar observations, made words in supposedly unrelated languages in similar ways. A universal case seems to be the 'pupil' of an eye: Latin pupilla, a puppet or poppet for the little figure one sees on looking into one, the tiny reflexion of oneself; kore, a girl, in Greek, and tong, a boy or girl (the Chinese language had no grammatical gender) in Chinese, written with the character for that but adding 'eye' as determinative to show the sense intended.

The ancient Chinese character for this, however, takes one further and shows the origin of the word used for boy or girl itself in Chinese.

In this the top element is a version of the pictogram already seen for a 'baby'; below that is the 'eye'; and under all is an ideogram with a horizontal line for earth and a vertical line, swollen, rising from it for the rising stem of a plant growing. There remains one further element in the original four-tiered structure and that when on its own meant, surprisingly, 'East'; but it is pronounced dòng and so taken to be only 'phonetic', near enough, in the spelling of the word, tong, for a boy or girl, or the pupil of an eye. This was
The traditional explanation of the later forms is that it represented the sun behind a tree because not yet fully risen, hence in the East (compare the pictograms for 'sun' and 'tree'): a possibly pleasing symbol to describe a growing boy or girl but neither fitting the earliest forms found of the image (such as on the left above where 'sun' and 'tree' could not have been the intention) nor apparently relating to the meanings of different characters incorporating it in their structure; but having some similarity in the pronunciation of the various words they were used for. Whatever it was, its use therefore seemed to be no more than as a rebus playing in the script a phonetic part only, as far as the palaeographers and philologists were concerned: so they cared relatively little about what it had represented.

When, however, one thinks about the different meanings of characters incorporating either image, 'East' or 'boy/girl' which originally incorporated that, one begins to discern something in common behind them all, apart from a degree of resemblance in the sounds of the Chinese words in question: the idea of growing (just as the idea of a forefinger extended, drawing, was seen to be behind the supposed phonetic rebus of a 'knife' but in fact showing just that.) 'East' itself is where daylight grows; the 'boy or girl' is growing; the same image with 'sun' determinative, and like it pronounced tóng, is the growing light of sunrise (helping to confirm the explanation of 'East'); whilst with 'moon' determinative it means moonrise; but with 'disease as determinative of sense and pronounced chòng, it is used for painful swellings on the body; whereas with 'metal' determinative, zhōng, a bell, had swelling shape and sound: different words, some with different pronunciations. This is clearly more than a mere phonetic symbol and as that would be deficient for reading, giving only various unpredictable degrees of approximation to the pronunciation of words:

But if the symbol, in the ancient script common to all these words, was not, as the philologists and palaeographers have supposed, merely phonetic, the question remains: what could it have represented?
Before trying to answer this, one must look at a small but important class of characters in the oldest Chinese script, unnoticed by palaeographers, having characters the same either way up; resulting from a form of graphic reduplication, with an original drawing repeated upside-down. This, like reduplication in speech, could express continuity or repetition: for example, a human figure praying or invoking was reduplicated in this fashion

With the determinative for ‘divinity’, this, as shown in the third drawing above, created the character for ‘god’ as one invoked repeatedly (‘god’ in English had a similar etymology, as I found on looking it up!). But the palaeographers and philologists, not recognizing the reduplicated image, have taken it for a pictogram representing lightning, then used only as a rebus for the approximately phonetic spelling of other words, including ‘god’. On recognizing how this image was made (which I have nicknamed ‘court-card’ as resembling a King, Queen or Knave on playing cards) I then found other ancient characters of similar construction and similar implication of continuity or repetition; of which I believe ‘growth’ is one.

There were two ancient characters, the same in pronunciation (zhān) and very similar, in some contexts the same, in meaning; but made from entirely different images:

The one on the left had a pictogram of a foot, heel down, over one for a root of a plant: so ‘to heel in, plant young plants’; whence various meanings were developed metaphorically, such as the tip left showing of such a plant, thence ‘tip’, ‘extremity’ of anything, and so on. (Planta in Latin meant a young shoot one pushed into the ground with the sole, also planta, of the foot.) With another ‘foot’ as determinative beside it, this makes the character in Chinese for a heel, or as verb to press down with the heel; and with other determinatives, other verbs for to press or be pressed.
The ancient character to the right of this was a pictogram of a plant’s swelling bulb or tuber in the ground, but most often drawn with the addition of a hand for manipulation: hence, with various determinatives, verbs from the idea of packing soil around, for to mould, to shape, to make pottery and so on. (Either of these images, the character for heeling in or that for packing around, having the same pronunciation, can be used for ‘concentrating’; hence in the term for one who concentrates on something, a specialist.

Making a ‘court-card’, reduplicating the bulb or tuber as a device in the script for showing continuing growth and the verb to grow, was, I believe, the most likely origin of the image for growing we have been examining and that philologists have treated as no more than a rebus or phonetic symbol in so many characters. (It seems probable, by the way, that our own words ‘East’ and ‘Easter’ had a similar origin, as the growth of light: austr, ‘East’ in Norse is certainly related to Latin auróra, ‘dawn’; auster in Latin, on the other hand, meant ‘South’ for the fully grown light of mid day; all these words probably related to Norse auka, Latin augere, ‘to grow, increase’, English ‘to eke’ and ‘to wax’. As very often, the Chinese script, ‘born twins’ with the language, provides hints of the natural origins of words in our own unrelated tongue.)

The original poetry of language-making relates to the senses people share of the world, directly and without conscious analysis or categorization. This is Vico’s senso commune, which is rather dangerously translated as ‘common sense’; but is a more useful concept, I think, than Jung’s ‘collective unconscious’ because shared consciousness is its only begetter. It is quite concrete and un-mystical but also lacks ‘logic’ without the analysis and grouping necessary to that: it need only provide a sensual ‘case in point’ and develop from there with the aid of whatever else of the kind may be necessary to achieve understanding of the intention by another sharing similar consciousness and experience of the world. (Vico speaks of ‘Poetic Logic’ but tends, because of his Classical upbringing, to think of its poesis too much in terms of ‘myths and fables’; which, however, were the product of language, not the prime makers of it, in his ‘Poetic Age’. Origins of words, and of the ancient Chinese characters, never relate to myths or fables; nor to that symbolism which is also a creation of language and literature.)
This can be illustrated by a Chinese word and the character for it, which, when encountered in a dictionary, can alarmingly mean either 'to rest' or 'to go busily to and fro',

Here is a ‘tree’ as the determinative, with a character, ‘West’ on its own, as the supposed merely ‘phonetic’ element; and the opposing meanings have been explained by some as originally two different words, coinciding in sound so written the same; whilst other scholars refuse to accept the second meaning where it is indicated by contexts in ancient poetry. The character for ‘West’ can be seen, however, in its oldest forms to have been a pictogram for a ‘bird’s nest’; where birds go to roost in the evening (English ‘West’ and Latin vespèr, ‘evening’, are known to be related in origin), but to and from which birds go busily at other times, building it, feeding their young, and so on. Contexts must show which sense is intended. The word and character were created in an age which had not yet felt the need for words to appear to have definitions independent of consciousness of the world in which they were made.

Yet, as said when introducing the so-called ‘phonograms’ above, those seemed to have parallels in other ancient scripts including the Ancient Egyptian, and nothing the Chinese themselves had said about them since their first analytical study 2,000 years ago seemed to contradict that idea.

The Chinese word, shēng, however, which foreign scholars have translated as ‘phonetic’, must now be considered together with the ancient character by which it was written, to see if any light is thrown by that

First on the left above was the character for a ‘stone’, consisting of a pictogram of one triangular in shape used as a musical instrument of percussion, to which a ‘mouth’ is added to indicate ‘sound’ produced by it. This, as in the presentday version shown, has long been used for
a 'stone' or 'rock' of any kind or as a material, but the interest of the ancient artists who made the character was in its musical qualities. There follows next the same shown suspended and beside it a hand with a hammer striking it; and next to that, the same combination with the addition of the ancient pictogram for an 'ear'; shown also in the current form as this is written, more than 3,000 years later, in the script of today. This is the word shēng used for a musical sound, a tone, a voice and such meanings and, since early native analysis, technically for a part of a composite character, the part that has been translated as 'phonetic' by foreign scholars; perhaps influenced by the fact that that word in turn derives from the Greek phōnē for a sound, tone or voice, as well as by their expectations of its function as being (like the letters of our own alphabet) of a purely physical nature for recording the sounds of speech (which to them came first) and no more than that.

Not only has this 'just phonetic' explanation in examples here appeared as untrue of those, but a similar poesis of the so-called 'phonographically' composed characters in the Chinese script will be found generally. Once the idea that these were attempting to record only the sounds of speech is abandoned, the seeming phonetic inefficiency for the purpose of reading back what had been written, accepted by philologists as a sign of the 'primitiveness' of the script, can be recognized as an illusion of which the philologists, by ignoring the human faculty of Imagination, have been the sole originators. The early Chinese analysts of the characters never defined the concept shēng but accepted a character as having shēng so-and-so when to a phonetician the sounds might be extraordinarily different; yet to someone looking for one, a common image could be found to lie behind all the words sharing it. Those who created the Chinese script did not make a mental separation between sounds and images but saw certain kinds of images as suggested by certain kinds of sounds: to them sharing origins in their type of 'resonance', shēng, for which they made this character.

Our minds are accustomed to distinguishing sight from sound, but both can be perceptions of the same activity: oral gestures originally having created the sounds of speech, but those gestures and their sounds also imaginatively able to suggest all human experience. The shēng image itself, represented (as seen) by a hammer striking a stone chime, when given instead of an 'ear' the determinative for a delicious
savour, is then used as a word for 'far off fragrance' (xing), because it was felt as cognate. We however, can also speak of 'sweet music' and 'sweet smelling' and are not deterred from describing musical timbre (a word itself originally for a 'chime') as 'tone colour'. Nevertheless the different way found in the ancient Chinese script of associating things often seems so alien to the modern, not only Western, mind that semantic links have not even been sought but a form of phonetic spelling, however unreliable, preferred as explanation.

The difficulty to minds of later ages, in understanding the light thrown by the Chinese script not only on the creation of the Chinese language but on the making of other languages in the distant past, results from our history: the increasing complexity and multiplicity of influences on our lives and the need for new kinds of categorization, abstractions, for the organization of society. There is therefore a mental barrier that nowadays has to be broken through in order to understand the origins of human language-making: a process still important to our creation of ideas, even in our materially complex and abstract environment. As in recent times scientists have observed, the great discoveries seem always to have been the result of something else besides 'scientific method'.

The origins of the Chinese script in Vico's 'Poetic Age' were etymological, made with the words it represented from what really 'is' as observed by its makers: Greek etymológia is ultimately cognate with English 'sooth' for what 'is' (so). Etymologies therefore sometimes have similar origins in otherwise unrelated languages; and the Chinese script can be helpful for demonstrating this, as may be seen among the few examples of it given here: such as 'to draw' in different senses, 'pupil' of an eye, 'God', 'East', 'plane'; some already recognized by our philologists and some not. There are, of course, very many more. But the original poesis of each of these words has been forgotten, as it needs to be once it has been established in any language for a special use: the mind for everyday practical purposes has to convert into a new currency and would gain no advantage if it had, for instance, to refer to the original image whenever thinking or speaking of the 'pupil' of an eye, which in Chinese as in English has become a different 'word'.

Unlike the Ancient Egyptians, the Chinese, instead of representing different kinds of birds in this script by beautiful drawings, juxtaposed
a determinative for birds in general (most often from the drawing of a
cock bird) with a shēng associating a particular species with something
characteristic whereby it got its name. A 'pelican' had a 'dewlap' under
its beak which it clapped in regular 'sequences' (thus pélekan in Greek,
related to péleks 'axe', also meant a woodpecker); 'woodpigeons'
flocked into the air like a 'fountain'; a 'snipe' had a beak like a 'spear';
a 'grebe' 'sank', dived, under water; a 'spoonbill' 'gleaned'; and so on.
Similarly, the imaginary, mythical bird, the Chinese 'phoenix', was
written with a 'sail' which stood for 'wind' because it was the bird of
wind and fire. But names for other, common birds, as the reasons for
their names and the way they were written ceased to be understood,
also sometimes created new myths: poison could be let drop to sink
in wine, hence 'poison' was written with 'winebottle' as determinative
and the same shēng as 'grebe'; so what had once been an innocent
grebe became a mythical bird that fed on poisonous snakes and dived
with poisoned wings. And 'gleaning' suggested needing something
extra, the meaning it had come to have in other characters with the
same shēng; so the 'spoonbill' turned into a mythical bird with only
one wing and needing to find a mate with the other wing in order to
be able to fly: hence a Chinese symbol of conjugal happiness, referred
to in the poem Zone by Guillaume Apollinaire! As the Chinese ceased
to make their language and script from direct experience of the
natural world, the power of human imagination that had made that
possible did not cease to be exercised but found new images, in
poetic reinterpretations, for the expression of ideas.

Very little of the original images on which the language and script
were built, or their resonances, was felt, at least consciously, by the
Chinese of later ages. Their imaginations became free to work in other
ways, but they continued in the calligraphy of their script, the queen
of all the arts to the Chinese through the ages, to draw inspiration
from the study of Nature. In a chapter, 'Abstract Beauty', of his book,
Chinese Calligraphy (Methuen, 1938), Chiang Yee, himself a modern
master of calligraphy, demonstrated this by putting imaginative draw-
ings of his own, but having no relation to the meanings of the characters, beside
characters taken from the writing of famous calligraphers. Here are
four, also illustrating different styles of calligraphy, reproduced by
kind permission of Methuen & Co. The last is 'Yee', 'Constant', from
his own signature.
This character, Chiang Yee's personal name, has long been no less obscure than that in neatly printed forms for showing what it originally depicted: as usual no picture of any kind can now be seen. It was the name of a kind of sacrificial wine-cup in ancient times, thence it came to mean a sacred observance and from that 'true, constant'. It is only in the earliest script of the 2nd millennium BC, discovered within this century, that the original image emerges showing hands raising a sacrificial cock from which blood is sprinkled; but Chiang Yee himself, when making his imaginative drawing to show his conception of the character's poise, can have had no idea that a bird had been there originally.

The ritual depicted, reminiscent of the origin of our own word to 'bless' as once meaning to sprinkle blood from a sacrifice, tells something about the people who first created this language as well as its script. They were those who performed such rituals, the wise men whom we might call 'priests' but who were much more than that categorization implies; they were also both the poet-artists and the men of science, the men (and women, which, like the sibyls, they
often were) of understanding of all kinds. They studied the stars, especially for making calendars important to agriculture but also because their movements seemed to reveal something of the mysterious divine order, the rhythms they expressed also in dancing. Their interests can be seen in the character they made for 'stone' for its qualities as the musical guide to their dancing; and in the character they made for a 'staff', 'stick' or 'pole' of any kind which they chose to illustrate with the kind most familiar to themselves: the forked staff they used (sometimes also mounting a frame) when observing the heavens.

In the 2nd, 3rd and 4th ancient drawing here, two stars were shown at the tips of the Y-shaped fork, and in the 4th, represented now by the 2nd modern character, the sun was shown rising behind the instrument. The 5th ancient character and the corresponding 3rd modern one showed the sun rising over an open space which the ancient character depicted but not in perspective. This was the sacred cleared space, the temenos or templum, on a hill where the wise men could observe the heavens and assist the rising of the sun by sacrificing. The sacred cleared space itself was shown by the addition of the determinative for 'earth' (the swollen stem rising from it); whilst the view of the heavenly bodies (both 'contemplation' and 'consideration' derive through Latin for this) was expressed by the addition of the determinative for 'divine' showing rays descending from the heavens.

1 The cleared space on a hilltop, the temenos for observation of the heavens and for worship, caught the winds and so was also the suitable place for threshing and winnowing corn. It was a threshing floor therefore that the angel commanded that King David should buy in order to raise an altar, the place where his son King Solomon built the Temple of Jerusalem. In Chinese the temenos is depicted, adding a pictogram of a granary, for the related word translated in dictionaries as 'sincere': Latin sincerus meant originally 'pure, unadulterated' from sim- as in 'simple' and a word related to 'cereal'; so the pure grain without the chaff as after winnowing; compare Shakespeare: 'such a winnowed purity in love'. Another word of similar meaning in Chinese is written with 'rice' as determinative and the same shēng as a 'kingfisher' because the winnowed rice, much heavier than the chaff and dust, falls down to earth in the winnowing like a kingfisher diving.
All these characters, now ɡān, dān, dàn, shàn, chán in the modern language, not only rhymed but were recognized as having the same 'resonance', shēng, even when that was differently written. One reason for the Chinese retention of their script with its ancient origins is that their language shares these origins, though meanings have developed and changed through the centuries, and even now the Chinese have little inclination to take words from outside their ancestral vocabulary. When their wise men first encountered another culture they felt worthy of their respect, Indian civilization through the spread of Buddhism, they did not at first just take the foreign words for the new ideas into their language, transcribing them phonetically, but found Chinese notions and words near enough like the Indian terms to fit them. Thus Indian dhyānaḥ, 'sacred contemplation', they made chán and wrote with the image for the unobstructed view of the heavens, that with the 'divine' determinative; using a character they already possessed and extending its meaning. This is the character for the word the West knows in its Japanese pronunciation of Chinese as Zen.

A keyword in Japanese Zen is satori, translatable as perception, awareness, awakened consciousness: something the ancient Chinese script makes it possible to share with its creators in the distant past and on the other side of the world, once one allows oneself the delight of recognizing in them people fundamentally like ourselves even if without our history or particular surroundings. Our own language was first created out of similar perceptions in a world very like theirs. People today are not their superiors but need their powers of imaginative creation from own perception no less for all the ideas that, both in the East and in the West, we have inherited ready-made.
Pearl-bordered Fritillaries

Each year about this time –
mid May, the larches' crimson stars
needle-wounds in their emerald fur,
their trunks on parade, right-dressed
at the edge of the glade,
where now a five-year jungle
hides old stumps, lopped branches
in a camouflage of bramble,
the sunlight probes and pierces
fuses a length of root, explodes
a cluster of leaves.

The layman never sees them.
For him a butterfly must flutter
or float across his garden on the breeze
like a helpless scrap of paper.
Here they rise on strips of light
and skim across the glade
like miniature jets, their copper-bladed wings slicing the air:
a sight for the connoisseur!

A Night-reading
(Jersey 28/8/85)

For Jeremy Reed

A full moon rises through the trees
pattern of leaves picked out against amber,
wax torches spit out a bouquet of sparks
to embroider unfolded veils of smoke.
You draw your poems from the flames
a crouching shaman scattering words
like bright confetti on a spellbound
audience seated in conspiracies of shadow.
A plane hums overhead, moths seek the light
and move through smoke pale ghosts of fireflies,
the aspen's upper leaves embossed with silver
barely tremble in the windless night
and a late bird sings a snatch of song
a treble echo of your baritone.
We share with you your Hobby's swift precision,
your Dogfish lurking in its green opacity
and somewhere in the rustling grass behind us
your snail accelerates in bottom gear.

JOHN MOAT

Welcombe Beach

The pebbles are out of order. Some man's
Been down to meddle with the stones again.
On all the wide mindless beach his one thought
Breaks out to spoil the sea's unthinkable design.
He's been building – stone lifted onto stone.
No one else on the beach, and he builds a fort
To live with himself: Sandcastles and forts
And wailing walls and burial mounds. And then
At sundown, after the last man has gone
From the shore, the sea moves in without a thought
And smooths the beach. And now the builder has gone
And the patient sea is on the move again.
It smooths the pebbles into place, and the thought
Falls into place, and I, this last thought standing alone,
Am drawn to the peace that will follow when I too have gone.
From the ‘Prelude to the Apocalypse of Quintilius’

Quintilii Apocalypseōs Fragmenta

I have returned home
To find the roof fallen in
The floor a jagged pile
Of broken tiles

Sky
Where were once rafters
Smokehole

Hypaethra
An elder-tree
Fills up the living room

Yellowing leaves
Dropping on pink
Shards
Golden leaves
Clashing

I shall sit under my bo-tree
The fat figs falling
Daily upon my head

The fire unkindled
Hard earth beneath
Air my bread

The brightness of the Sun
What is it
But intensity of Splendor
Hiding the source
My weak flame
Like a guttering candle
Goes up
From pillar to post
To tree-top
And in through the hole in the sun
Flame
Become purer flame
Nothing else
You are the end of the thread
You go through the needle's eye
But you must leave your camel's hair coat
Behind
There's not room for both
Those who reach the top of the tree
Having wings
Fly away
The rest
Fall to the ground
You will hear me muttering to myself
But it will be the silences
That speak of worlds
And if I wax melancholy
About the fugitiveness
Of transitory eternities
Look up at your own roof
ο μέλε
and count the cobwebs
from Codex Disco
Quintilii Apocalypses Fragmenta

We are the gods themselves
If we but have the will

You won't get godly by refraining
Your sensibles and partials as a rule
Whole worlds are tainted by morality
Our partial heavens are sullied
Colourless light of the intelligible
Good converted into goods
Stolid and solid by moralists
Listed as virtues

Man may well be an intellectual animal
Naked and hairy
But who can say in all justice
He is essentially intelligible?

The subcelestial arch
The lovers' habitation an alliance
Or habitude to Heaven

Its object beauty its essence is desire
Is this the needle's eye the outlet through the dome
The ports in the nave of the wheel
Where holy oil flows?

Whether eternity is contained in time
Or time in eternity

For my part, I am stalled
The bird at my window, the urchin at my door

Time going by dropping an empty purse
And Uranian Love, amnesiac, calls out
'Obey your Beloved's desire!'

I am gripped like a bird in a trap
By love's universal
Influenza
Life itself is an anachronism
Residence itself is brought into doubt by Authority
A fixed address not being accepted as evidence

That old hard-core, Augustine, has reported
In a recent letter an awful dream
He has had Malefic demons
Revealed to him ways in which men
Could make nature work changes foreign
To the familiar seasonal schema

A chariot without horses is flying through the sky
Rome is speaking to Constantinople
Quicker than meteors without interval
Words beat on the drums of the East
Carried on the lightning's back
Worse they make magical images
Flash on the cave-walls where the prisoners cower
Showing Britannia now to the now in Mediolanum
And the prisoners' chains are drawn tighter
And far-off Samaritans are hurling Jove's thunderbolts
Over mountains on Gallia's thriving cities
And a pen without a hand is writing down every word
Spoken by plebs or illustres

The East Goths
Are experts in commentaries now
On Parmenides

John, Son of Thunder, is knapping stones

I looked up from Augustine's letter

A tangerine moon near the full
Was dropping through night's ebony
Punctured with little stars
Like the tinsel in Haiva's hair
Or the elecktron sparklers
Amber on green of her luminous
Jade eyes

That moon condescending
Come hither She said
I will place this mandarin slice
On your harsh tongue, you peasant
And you shall have a piece of my mind
Somewhere between wisdom and folly
Somewhere between legend and flesh

The clay on the potter's wheel
Rises
The flask-shaped form
Trembling like the white poplar
On the rigid spindle

You'll find yourself transformed
To a much superior lover
Through my mediation

We shall whisper Pelasgian secrets
Love's not the first or even the last of things
He moves the stars with a divine lubricity

Let him set up his goat-hair tent
Between the wolf-pack and the fold
He is the shepherd of burning flesh
His savour is sapience
He matches desire with the desired
Blind heaving earth
With the processions of blessed gods

His wisdom is also a skill
His knowledge a certain craft

The crop of my mouth
Is a sowing of words together
An amiable music in the Olympian mode
Hung between field and sky
Linking abundance with want

Perpetually abounding Love
Perpetually wants
And this is immortality

One night I'd like to come and sleep
With you and your pretty girl friend
There's no shame in letting a goddess
Let down her hair and pet your sweetheart
Rather consider, the sacred rite,
Being unnatural, a remedy

At that moment the moon went down
And the dawn was darker than midnight

I am tangled in soul, I opine

That amber! I ask
What things there are ideas of, what not
Passions of matter, icons of the intelligible
'Something better than intellect' Archytas said
The One as the measure of all things (Surianos)

Scriptures say Phoebe's a virgin
But what if her brother Phoebus came up
With the same spiel?

I am a profane old man
But sometimes when cocks are crowing
In the far distance across the misty olive fields
At dawn a Goddess touches me

The rabbis in Alexandria told me
It takes three to make a new soul

'Such then is the Intelligible Triad'

'And this is the life of the Gods'

Codex Disco
Question: If one had to situate you in a movement or a poetic tradition, which would it be?

Reply. It's obvious that at first I was under the influence of the Imagists, as you can see in Roman Balcony, actually through a close friend of my mother's, Miss Wright, whom I mention in my Journal under the initials R.F.W. After I had left the Salisbury Cathedral School one of the first things I read was Harold Monro's anthology Twentieth Century Poetry. After my father had been transferred to London I often visited one of his brother-in-law's aunts, where I used to play the piano, Satie or Schonberg; she was very fond of modern poetry and had a number of anthologies. But it is difficult to say exactly which of my favourite poets influenced me unless perhaps a general idea of a 'Christian totality'. In a sense, I feel in sympathy with a specifically English metaphysical tradition.

Q. And more recently?

R. I've recently been impressed by the writings of George Steiner and his pronouncements on the state of the language in the second half of the twentieth century, after the Holocaust. It's a period when what has happened can barely be expressed in poetry, because it lies beyond language, and this seems to be getting worse every day, as I have tried to express in 'Speechlessness', a poem I wrote after the assassination of Mountbatten.

Q. What does religion mean to you?

R. Heidegger made it clear that language in some ways conceals rather than reveals, and this comes about especially with key-words like God, or religion, so that certain concepts are used so much that they no longer mean anything. One might perhaps say that I am, in the wide sense of the term, of a religious nature. You see, I used to be a chorister in the choir of the Salisbury Cathedral School, we sang twice every day and three times on Sundays, and there were many hours of religious instruction. But when I moved to London for my secondary studies I reacted against all that and was an atheist for some
time: then I met the French Surrealists in Paris with their specifically French form of anticlericalism. I have never been a practising Christian and I don't go to church. I read Kierkegaard, who was very radical, and authentically religious; he was against the compromises and commercialism of the churches. It is true that I have used the figure of Christ and I would be an apostate if I were to say I do not believe in Christ and in the Second Coming, but as Kierkegaard has said, one has to struggle in order to believe. I had had periods when I was completely out of my mind, three times at least, when I was suddenly confronted by all the darkness in me, with my own particular devil, but all the same I could not say that I found myself a 'believer'. It is something that goes beyond all formulation and I prefer not to speak of it more than necessary. I have a faith which I cannot put into words, not because to do so would endanger it, but because their inadequacy would sully it.

Q. Does the idea of redemption have reality for you?
R. For some time a question has kept coming into my mind: why are there so many important words now-a-days that begin with the prefix 're' – redemption, revolution, return, reality even. I think there is an underlying idea of recommencement, of rebirth.

Q. Is that connected with Nietzsche's idea of Eternal Return?
R. Certainly. Also perhaps with the exegeses of Mircea Eliade. Nietzsche's idea of the 'superman' for me means simply the human struggle to become that for which man was created. Man evolves towards a point where he will assume being what he is essentially.

Q. Can you explain how you relate this to your conception of a 'dialectical supermaterialism'?
R. It's true that at the end of the war I wrote a book which dealt with a philosophy I called 'dialectical supermaterialism'. You see, Marx speaks of the objective outer world, and Kierkegaard of the soul's inner world and, my attempt was to synthetize the two. I also had the idea of a 'logontology' (logos ontology) which I have since found implicitly supported by Heidegger; and I gave a prominent place to those always neglected Presocratics, Parmenides and Herakleitus. Gollancz at one time considered publishing it, and the Harvill Press too, but I have never really had a systematically disciplined philosophical mentality, and so all that remains of it is a MS in New York. One might be struck, at this moment, by a return to something near
that way of thinking, but I would not want to state this in terms of philosophy, I would be afraid one would have to say that all philosophy ends in dogmas, and existential philosophy isn't suited to being taught in schools and universities.

Q. Could Alchemy help in developing these ideas?
R. It was through reading Jung, and during the war, in search of new sources of images, that I read many books on alchemy. The allegories and images which one finds in them do indeed correspond to ideas for which one would go far in order to find equivalent images for the formulation of these ideas. They are all inspired by nature, and natural forms like metals, stones, flowers, sun, stars, moon. These are regarded as imaging inner realities. But, again, and this is important, and concerns poetry, it is the profound sense of wonder that drives one continually to ask oneself these questions.

Q. According to Heidegger, the foundation of all metaphysics is the revelation of the Nothing through the experience of Dread. Can you relate this to the idea of the search for truth?
R. Truth is no jest. (Note: An allusion to Francis Bacon's 'What is truth? said jesting Pilate'.) There is Goethe's Dichtung und Wahrheit (Note: a kind of autobiography) and there is Eluard's Poésie et Vérité and my own Apologia and also in a surrealist poem The Truth is Blind. I have also said in a recent poem that truth is the silence through which God can speak the All. I consider now that truth can even be destructive and to reach Truth might mean something destructive. Even the idea of complete objectivity is an illusion. What is much more important is the effort to search for truth and to resist what is false. What people do in a court of law, swearing to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, is something quite impossible. Truth is a great mountain, like Everest, and we are minute dots here or there on the slope of that mountain and to speak the truth would be to be able to give every minute detail of the contour of that mountain.

Q. And the experience of 'Nothingness'? (le Neant, das Nichts).
R. The expression of Heidegger's that you have used comes from Henty Corbin's translation.* I find something extraordinary in Coleridge's having spoken in the 1820s of the link between fear and astonishment in the nature of the very thought of existence. It would

* Qu'est-ce que la metaphysique?, Gallimard 1938, from Was ist Metaphysik?, Freiburg 1929.
be better to use the word 'dread' rather than 'fear'. 'Fear' is something specific, while 'dread' is something indefinable. The English positivist philosophers influential after the war, in the heart of the English school of philosophy, especially A. J. Ayer in *Language Truth and Logic* (1936) spoke of Heidegger's *das Nichts* as though he intended it to mean something. The English philosophers in fact resist all attempts to think *das Nichts*, or 'le néant', the *nothing*. You must always add a suffix, -ness at the end so as to make it a concept; but this Nothingness is an absence of concept.

Q. In the Review *Encrages* (No. 6, Summer 1981) you say that to write creates the possibility of danger.

R. Yes, that is the theme of one of Heidegger’s essential commentaries on Hölderlin, who referred to writing poetry as ‘that most innocent of all occupations’ but designated language, on the other hand: ‘most dangerous of possessions’. To create is to take risks. Hölderlin wrote that ‘God is near and difficult to grasp but danger strengthens the rescuing power’ (opening of the poem ‘Patmos’), and it is true that a hard winter will produce a good harvest. That seems pitiless, Nietzschean: perhaps, but the danger lies in that as a writer one sets in motion a renewal of vision, and one can come to grief.

Q. What, for you, is an image? The creation of a third reality?

R. A symbol is a thought which precedes experience and an image is something which illustrates the experience. I agree with Reverdy’s definition ‘The spontaneous convergence of two distant realities’. But you spoke of a third reality. Yet there is only one reality, isn’t there? Or, yes, if you are thinking of a dialectic movement, a synthesis, between reality and the way in which one approaches it. Objective and subjective reality cannot be reduced to a single objective reality. I was reading Paracelsus recently and found again that same idea of the identical value of the mind and objective reality. One comes back to André Breton, to be sure, and what he has attempted to formulate in *Les Vases Communicants*.

Q. What do you see as the importance of Surrealism?

R. It’s very great. Never for a moment have I regretted taking part in the movement, but I could not have remained in it for long, like many others who left it, with the exception, indeed, of Péret. On that

* Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung. 1936.
subject one must read the volume of Textes et Débats on surrealism compiled by Michel Carassou.* Official surrealism had probably come to an end within three years of the death of Breton (Note: in 1969; Breton died in 1966) but I think the spirit of surrealism is eternal.

Q. In 1981, in your preface to the catalogue of the exhibition of collages by Roland Penrose in Paris, you seem to come back to surrealism.

R. No, for the good reason that I never renounced it, but there came a moment when I recognized that I did not want, like Kenneth White for example, to try to become a French poet, even though Philippe Soupault once said to Kathleen Raine that I was ‘a French poet writing in English’. But I am before all else an English poet, I am a part of that poetry which is continuous from Langland to the present time (and which has been my reading); of course I have certain preferences, but I belong to that tradition. ‘Poetry’ and ‘poésie’ are not the same thing. I had to begin by separating myself from surrealism in order to develop what was in me. To continue to write purely automatic poems, and to claim that this is the only valuable kind of poetry, seems to me very limited. As I try to say in Departures, if poetry is the fabrication of verbal objects, ‘containers’, the content is often very ephemeral or purely personal, more satisfying to the writer than to the reader. I may have written of my state of mind, or about purely personal experiences, but I have never written only for my own satisfaction, I have always wanted to communicate, in the hope that readers will find that I have felt what they themselves might also feel. The phrase at the end of Night Thoughts expresses my ideal, in a way, ‘solidarity with the solitary’: ‘Friends, fellow beings, you are not strangers to us. We are closer to one another than we realize.’ That perhaps is where philosophy rejoins poetry.

Q. What have you read recently that you have particularly liked or been impressed by?

R. Saul Bellow’s book The Dean’s December. Bellow puts his finger perfectly on the malady we are suffering from. That human malady is, to have an exterior without having an interior. ‘Soul’ is a dead word. Psychology has avoided it as the object of its research and study. It is forgotten that ‘psyche’ means a butterfly which emerges from the

* Le livre de Poche, 1984.
crysalis which is nothing less than the human body. Keats formulated what I think all poets believe, that life is 'a vale of soul-making'. The present threat is the dictatorship of bureaucrats – spiritually bankrupt bureaucrats at that. We must react, and transform this situation, by becoming aware, I think, of a despairing vision, remote from that fashion which consists of speaking of things in terms of pedantry, or adopting an attitude of superiority. Despair, or seriousness, are regarded as almost sins in present-day England. And yet, at the same time, I think humour is very important. One should re-read Nietzsche's Le gai savoir (1882) or think of certain Far-Eastern ways of thought, in which one has to see things with impersonal detachment. There is too much of that 'dry-as-dust' thought Carlyle wrote of. Philosophy and poetry are passionate, really, for they are the communication of a wonder, and the greatest of wonders is to find oneself living.

Q. What is your favourite colour?
R. Blue.

Translated by Kathleen Raine
Reviews

The Transparent Mirror


Kenneth White — Une apocalypse tranquille, Paris, Bernard Grasset, 1985. 75FF.

David Gascoyne's translation of Les champs magnétiques, the first surrealist book, in which André Breton and Philippe Soupault collected their experiments in automatic writing, brings us near to one of the sources of much of his work and difficulties in translation provide us with a title which establishes his rightful place in twentieth century literature. La glace sans min (the title of a section of the book and also of a painting by Matisse) is rendered as 'The Unsilvered Glass' but David Gascoyne says in his introduction that in a literary translation it could be 'The Transparent Mirror'. The task of the poet has been variously interpreted as to hold up a mirror in which the world may be reflected or to express himself, not out of vainglory or exaltation of le moi but as expressing the experience and longings of humanity through himself as vehicle.¹ Hugh MacDiarmid, the only poet writing in English other than Gascoyne and D. H. Lawrence to be greatly influenced by Chestov, wrote to R. E. Muirhead, 'I do not write poetry — I am merely the vehicle for something greater than myself' and MacDiarmid quoted from Chestov the sentiment 'The abyss is our element. Flung into it . . . we sprout wings'.² Surrealism is still sadly misunderstood in England: in my presence a poet who should have known better, when asked what surrealism basically was replied that it was a desire to shock. This puts the movement on a par with irresponsible Dadaism and ignores the salient characteristic and aim — to plunge into the chaos of the mind, the unconscious, and by that action discover the bases of thought and feeling. True surrealism plunges into chaos and sprouts wings (as indeed in The Magnetic Fields) but it can slide into untrue surrealism, merely alleged surrealism — and that is the English danger.³ David Gascoyne did not remain a pure surrealist for very long: he learned other ways of exploring the chaos and emerging with truths, through the influence of Chestov, Berdyaev, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard — but surrealism gave him a lead into his territory of exploration, being one gate into this territory: there are others.

In so far as surrealism was a protest movement it protested against the logical image, or the rationalisation, the logicalisation of the image. It may
have been necessary to make this protest in the interests of true expression. Linear logical thought and linear logical imagery may prevent expression of subtle thought and feeling, forcing them into the moulds ("mind-forged manacles") of pre-existent thought-forms. Gascoyne explored the problems of Hölderlin and thinks deeply about the problems of language as explored by George Steiner and Roland Barthes. Michel Rémy subtitles his book on Gascoyne L'urgence de l'inexprimé, showing that he is going to plunge into the heart of the problem and the wonder of the achievement (the mirandescence of the achievement). One of the contemporary aspects of the problem – the urgency of the unexpressed – is identified by Gascoyne in the preliminary interview with Michel Rémy, when he praised Saul Bellow's The Dean's December: 'Bellow puts his finger precisely on the malady we suffer from. This malady of man is having an outside without having an inside. . . . The soul is a word that has died. Psychology seized on it as an object of research and study. It is forgotten that the word psyche is the word for a butterfly which emerges from the chrysalis which is none other than the human body. Keats stated what I think all poets believe – that life is a valley in which the soul is created. . . .5 The threat weighing on us now is the dictatorship of computers, computers which are breaking down. We must react and transform this situation across and through the seizure of consciousness by a despairing vision, I think, far from the present fashion of taking things pedantically from a high view. . . . Despondency and serious-mindedness are almost sins in the England of today.'

It is for me axiomatic that a computer cannot write a poem: it can only combine elements from existing thought, language and poetry and create a pastiche; it lacks an unconscious and has not passed through, is not even passing through, Keat's vale of soul-making. Similarly it is not possible for the living poet to speak solely in referential or 'scientific' language: to try to do so is a recipe for warped thought. (I remember a chapter in an English textbook explaining 'referential' and 'emotive' or 'poetic' language which without intending to do so and even against the wishes of the author as seen elsewhere in the book, obliged the pupil to conclude that fact or truth could be expressed only in 'referential' language, so that other forms or modes of language came to be regarded as marginal, superfluous, irrelevant or dangerous. Blake's fourfold vision became an impossibility: only 'Single vision and Newton's sleep' was legitimate.6)

David Gascoyne stressed to Michel Rémy the enormous importance of surrealism: 'At no moment have I regretted being part of the movement, but I would not have been able to remain in it for long, like many others who distanced themselves from it, with the exception, indeed, of B. Péret. . . . Official surrealism perhaps ended three years after the death of Breton (i.e. in 1969) but I think that the surrealist spirit is eternal.'
Surrealism was a liberating force for one who learned from Berdyaev that freedom was the natural milieu or environment of the human spirit; but from Chestov and Berdyaev comes also the realisation that in this freedom one faces the black holes in oneself, one's own devil, the Jungian shadow; Benjamin Fondane (another disciple of Chestov) replied to Rolland de Renéville's *Rimbaud le Voyant* with *Rimbaud le Voyou*; and it is worth while recalling Rimbaud's words to Isabelle: 'Je ne pouvais pas continuer, je serais devenu fou et puis... c'était mal'. And Gascoyne himself quotes Chestov's *All Things Are Possible*: 'There is no mistake about it, nobody wants to think. I do not speak here of logical thinking. That, like any other natural function, gives man great pleasure. For this reason philosophical systems, however complicated, arouse real and permanent interest in the public provided they only require from man the logical exercise of the mind, and nothing else. But to think — really to think — surely this means a relinquishing of logic. It means living a new life. It means a permanent sacrifice of the dearest habits, tastes, attachments, without even the assurance that the sacrifice will bring any compensation.' Depths exist as well as heights and the tension caused by the unexpressed or inexpressible may, for Hölderlin and Gascoyne, endanger sanity. C. S. Lewis somewhere expressed his doubt that 'courageous thinking' really required more courage than getting into a cold bath; it is here that he would find the answer — and in the quotations from Traherne and Kierkegaard that precede the words from Chestov in Gascoyne's article. Certain writers and poets manage to remain 'balanced' by separating their high spiritual thought or their exploration of the depths from their lives as 'honnetes hommes', as Claudel implied in his letter to Madame Romain Rolland quoted by Pierre Emmanuel in his final lecture; they do not surrealistically synthesise the dark and the light, the man and the poet, but remain sane by dichotomy. Certain writers and poets, like Blake (the man without a mask) and Gascoyne refuse this escape.

That this is far from modern English discussion of poetry shows why the first book on Gascoyne is in French and why the greatness and importance of Gascoyne have been forgotten in England. We discuss the surfaces and trappings of poetry, not its substance. David Gascoyne as 'The Transparent Mirror' is too serious a poet, too truly poetic a poet for journalism to regard seriously. It is appropriate to quote from the prologomena to Breton's Third Surrealist Manifesto: '. . . at the end of twenty years, I see myself obliged, as in the time of my youth, to pronounce myself against all conformism, and in saying this to take aim at a certain too conformist surrealism as well. Too many pictures, especially, deck themselves out in the world, that have cost nothing to the numberless followers of Chirico, of Picasso, of Ernst, of Masson, of Miro, of Tanguy — tomorrow it will be of Matta — having cost nothing to those who do not know that there is no great enterprise in art that is not undertaken
at peril of one's life, and the road to follow is not, on the evidence, that with safeguards and guard-rails, and that each artist must undertake alone the pursuit of the Golden Fleece.' David Gascoyne undertook the pursuit of the Golden Fleece at peril of his life and Michel Rémypad retrospectively charted the voyage. Gascoyne was influenced not only by Chestov, Berdyaev, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Hölderlin, but by Buber, Boehme and Eckhart — yet his work is not syncretist or an amalgam; it is with the knowledge that these also travelled in the unmapped that he took his own journey. Michel Rémypad, meeting the problem of influences, says that the solution of the dilemma is to see the 'influences' as integrant parts of the writing of the text, which proceeds not in a linear but a tabular manner and is a lateral communication, always free and open, not a plumbing of a known depth. 'The poet is he who does not know; he is not the reflection of knowledge he has learned nor the place for its repetition; he alone possesses the measure of his knowledge: far from being the "honnêté homme" of the classicists, for whom there was an ideal knowledge, he is the only origin of the extensibility of his knowledge.' In as much as what is effectively put into words is fixed and dead, each poem is in fact an approximation in a perpetual always of expectation and only 'the poem I can never write is true'. And this needs to be understood within a context inaugurated by these passages in The Magnetic Fields, since no one other than Gascoyne could have translated this book with a mastery of English and French and the necessary sympathetic fluidity of mind:

This evening there are two of us faced with the overflowing river of our despair. We can no longer even think. Words escape from our twisted mouths and, when we laugh, the passers-by look back terrified and hurry off to their homes. . . .

With our itineraries interrupted and all journeys brought to an end, can we really now admit to them? The abundant landscapes have left us with a bitter taste on our lips. Our prison is built of well-loved books, but we can no longer escape because of all the passionate odours that send us to sleep.

Our habits, frenzied mistresses, are calling to us: they sound like fitful neighings followed by even more ponderous silences. There are those posters that are an insult to us, we used to love them so much. Colour of the days, perpetual nights, are you too about to abandon us?

The immense smile of the whole earth has not sufficed us: we have to have greater deserts, those suburbless cities and dead seas.

It is in aimless lanes that the great mortal sins condemned to forgiveness are born. Sinister finger-posts, it is useless to rush forward provided with your bottle of smelling salts.

I have been told about a sumptuous restaurant where the most various dishes are to be obtained. There are musical undersides of plates, carafes with two spouts, stemmed glasses and a magnificent entrance door.
The most magnificent doors are those behind which the words: 'Open
in the name of the law' are spoken.

I prefer to such dramas the silent flight of bustards and the family
tragedy: the son is leaving for the colonies, the mother weeps and the
little sister thinks of the necklace her brother will bring back to her. And
the father is inwardly rejoicing because he thinks that his son has just
found a job.

Love shines in the woods like a great candle.

Street-singers, the world is wide and you will never succeed.

What are we waiting for? A woman? Two trees? Three flags? What are we
waiting for? Nothing.

Harangue the waves, multicoloured Doges, emphatic sun, avenger of
dancing-girls wearing crowns of blazing fish.

The scavengers of paradise are well acquainted with those rats that run up
and down beneath God’s throne.

David Gascoyne’s Night Thoughts end with some of the noblest words he has
written:

Greetings to the solitary. Friends, fellow beings, you are not strangers to
us. We are closer to one another than we realize. Let us remember one
another at night, even though we do not know each other’s names.\textsuperscript{13}

In rhythm of utterance these words belong in the context of the surrealists
and Reverdy. Night Thoughts was described by Michael Hamburger\textsuperscript{14} as ‘the
most Baudelarean exploration of an urban inferno written since the last war’;
it is indeed that, but is also, as Robin Skelton pointed out in the introduction
to Collected Poems about the condition of man and it is a bitter, relentless
exposure of what Paz has characterised as history and Borges described as
‘frightful’ when it was merely the catalogue of irreversible events. As Ham-
burger has pointed out, Gascoyne uses the archetypes of the Good City to
raise Megalometropolis to Promethean or Luciferian heights, so that the
Battersea Power Station’s ‘giant stacks’ become ‘the pillars of a temple raised
to man-made power and light’, part of a grandeur which is infernal – yet man
in the city is, as is often so in similar literature (Reverdy, again) man in the
world. One is not certain that even if Kenneth White’s apocalypse tranquile had
indeed taken place and man was on the earth again, instead of in the world,
his situation would be as satisfactory as White supposes, as White ignores
those aspects of nature that Ted Hughes explores and forgets Borges’s frightful
events. The individual souls condemned to be in this torment (the city, or
historical life) have thoughts similar to surrealists, Paz, and Gascoyne: hence
the love in the final words: fellow-feeling for souls in a universe which is
mainly uncharted but one in which in the Blakean sense of ‘chartered’ there is accurate mapping of what is indubitably factual but quite intolerable. Few English poets apart from Gascoyne have genuinely contemplated this phantasmagoria. Only R. S. Thomas would understand, along with the shade of Thomas Blackburn. Ted Hughes sees the natural terrors but minimises or fails to see the organisational ones. ‘Poetry is one of the most innocent, and at the same time most dangerous of occupations . . . to create is to take risks . . . . Hölderlin wrote that “God is near and difficult to grasp, but the danger strengthens the rescuing power”, and it is true that a hard winter is one that will bring a good harvest . . . . That seems pitiless, nietzschean . . . . Perhaps, but the danger lies in the fact that by writing one puts at risk a renewal of vision and one may fail.¹⁵

And asked if the image was the creation of a third reality, Gascoyne was dubious about the existence of more than one reality, though ‘objective reality and subjective reality cannot be brought round to a single objective reality. At present I am reading Paracelsus and I never cease finding and refining this idea of the identical importance of the spirit and of objective reality. One joins André Breton and what he tried to say in Les vases communicants.¹

Breton, again! But a few moments later Gascoyne says he is an English poet in the tradition dating from Langland and it was necessary for him to separate himself from surrealism to develop what was within him (though in 1981, in the catalogue of the Paris Roland Penrose exhibition he did not ‘go back’ to surrealism because he had never abjured it). Philippe Soupault described him to Kathleen Raine as ‘a French poet writing in English’ but he has not gone the way of Kenneth White, although the Strophes Elégiaques à la mémoire d’Alban Berg in Poems 1937–1942 are a third version (in French) as the two earlier versions (in English) ‘were not satisfactory enough to be printed’. Yet he is an English poet – and it is interesting and significant that he talks of a tradition dating from Langland rather than Chaucer: he is in the world of a field full of folk, and concerned with communication between souls, though

The true witnesses are no longer heard today
Silence hides them.

The silence is compelled by tyranny and the forces of history; I would add also that the calculated unreceptiveness to the spiritual is in my opinion one of the subtle and horrible ways in which tyranny and the forces of history are at present working in what is a worldwide Megalometropolis.

One can find in the Intermezzo of these Memorial Strophes a theme expressively descriptive of Gascoyne’s oeuvre:

Every song is triumph and every complaint
Is reconciliation. Burn still
Burn, O lyre of the larynx, heal the torment
Which does not know how to find a way out
Amid the labyrinth of the breast. Again
Plunge into melody, O sonorous wings
In search of peace and repose.

Every complaint is reconciliation
With the lamentable, and can resolve
The tears, the ruins, the sickness
Of empires, into arabesques
Of cancerous corruption and the rain
Of sparkling sterile seed, such as
‘The sound of a music enervating and caressing

‘Like to the distant cry of human grief;’
And such a music can console us
For the condition of damnation, the secret wound,
Which, climbing towards silence through the invisible
Ear of space, with burned songs
In the kingdoms of the unheard creates
Far countrysides, exalted and profound.

In the Epilogue Gascoyne laments that the true witnesses are no longer heard because

The unjust reign, their perfidious orators
Deafen the people while the axes fall

but the final rise of the elegy to hope is more than a conventional one:

But what a terrifying storm coming out of the future
Will efface the last traces of them with its lightnings!
The true witnesses remain with us always.

This connects with the penultimate stanza of Ecce Homo:

Involved in their own sophistry
The black priest and the upright man
Faced by subversive truth shall be struck dumb,
Christ of Revolution and of Poetry,
While the rejected and condemned become
Agents of the divine.

We need to remember all the meanings of the remark of Benjamin Fondane:
‘The need for poetry is a need for something quite different from poetry.’

The epigraph to Miserere, of which Ecce Homo is a part, is Jouve’s
It is a need to escape from the world into the territory of the spirit and the freedom (even dangerous freedom) in which the spirit belongs. The original, virgin vision the soul in freedom has of 'the world' is seen in Pierre Emmanuel's Babel, a parallel to Gascoyne's Night Thoughts and a poem in which the surrealist street-walking inspiration reaches its non-surrealist, more conscious peak in a devastating analysis. Both Gascoyne and Emmanuel were greatly influenced by Jouve.

The poem After Twenty Springs, written on the appearance of the Penguin Lawrence, comments on the gospel of Lawrence, noting in a loving, ironic tone that the New Spring seems to take a long time in coming or we take a long time to recognise it. It is a welcome from those 'On dead man's isle' to Lawrence's apocalypse, with hope that

'The bones shall live, the dust awake and sing.'

I would apply a similar irony to the 'apocalypse tranquille' that Kenneth White believes to have taken place. Une apocalypse tranquille is persuasively written, hiding much learning under an apparently easy style, and greatly concerned with freedom of the spirit seen as a theme in Joyce, Lawrence and De Quincey (White is excellent on The Spanish Military Nun). These are preludes, in one way, to the return of the free spirit of man away from the world and back to the earth, seen as a being crying to be loved (in a marvellous quotation from Michel Leiris). The book should be read as possibly offering a solution to some of the problems we are facing, as Pierre Leyris has said that White 'is passionately in love with this world and unconditionally rejecting any other... Completely opposed to the pseudo-fatality of History. Conceding to cities only the most accidental parts of his being, between two visits to his mother, Earth.' The discussion of White in Michael Hamburger's The Truth of Poetry still seems to me to be true: he is right to protest against the dehumanising of man by what Gascoyne calls Megalometropolis, but he ignores or forgets the ruthlessness in nature. It is welcome, however, that someone from the isle of Britain (though Scotland) is prepared to wrestle with these problems rather than settle down in Megalometropolis as most contemporary poets do.

David Gascoyne has reminded us time and time again of the certainty of redemption, revolution or change, most recently in 'On Rereading Jacob Boehme’s Aurora'. In the Boehme poem and in the imaginary interview in Temenos 1 (reprinted in Rémy's book) Gascoyne recognises, like Pierre Emmanuel, the domination of the world by Babel and the dire results of that
domination: but he sees (again like Pierre Emmanuel in *Le grand œuvre*) the possibility of man reincarnating God as Christ was God incarnate and bringing 'the sun at midnight' with 'healing wings'. But this is something genuinely apocalyptic, almost eschatological, not as tranquil or quietly assured as the hopes of Kenneth White. Indeed, in this Gascoyne must seem Augustinian in the eyes of Kenneth White's mild Pelagian hope.

Michel Rémy emphasises the importance of problems of individual being (moi and l'Autre) and the importance of the Fall (or the Fault, geologically understood) in David Gascoyne's work – and it is significant that Gascoyne himself wrote that he saw evil as a force in the world and had come face to face with it in himself and regards it as necessary for the poet (as individual and professional) to strive against it politically, rejecting Yeats's abrogation of such activity by remarking that unless we discover what is happening, which side we are on, and what we can do, there will be no more young girls or old men to delight; and he returns to this theme in his introduction to the surrealist film scenario (given in Rémy's book) with a significant quotation from Berdyaev.

My calling attention to these things and to the perceptive analyses of Rémy is a method of praising the book: indeed, anyone, French or English, who endeavours to praise or understand Gascoyne without diligently reading Rémy would resemble a man who went walking into a lonely mountainous region and ignored the large-scale ordnance survey maps of the area. The reprinting of the imaginary interview from *Temenos* 1, the new interview between Rémy and Gascoyne and the reprinting of fugitive articles make the book a fundamental guide. Astonishingly apt now is also the film scenario already mentioned; in the mid-Thirties it was called *The Wrong Procession* but has been updated to *Procession to the Private Sector*, with notable quotations from Wittgenstein, Rimbaud and Nietzsche. The last is of great importance in the understanding of Gascoynian antinomies: presence/present; being as être/being as étant; reality/the real world. The BBC might produce this film instead of the succession of crime-films it favours, for it would appeal for the same reasons as they do; as Gascoyne says, 'many second-rate, banal but popular films often embody myths of authentic importance, which satisfy audiences which appreciate subliminally their possibly unintentional socio-psycho-analytic content.'

Michael Schmidt says in the preface to *An Introduction to 50 Modern British Poets* that his own first point of access to a poem is the rhythm, the work's 'residual magic'. He rightly emphasises the surrealist influence of Gascoyne's rhythms and calls attention to the poet's syntax. This latter is seen not only in the Elegy for Paul Eluard but in poem after poem: Schmidt remarks on the delaying of his in the third, fourth and fifth lines of this passage from 'Figure in a Landscape' in Hölderlin's *Madness*:
Infinitely small among the infinitely huge
Drunk with the rising fluids of his breast, his boiling heart,
Exposed and naked as the skeleton — upon the knees
Like some tormented desert saint — he flung
The last curse of regret against Omnipotence
And the lightning struck his face.

It is possibly this Englishness that Rémy understresses. Gascoyne also amazes
by his opening lines and by the sweep of his utterance. Though not
necessarily proud of the ‘finish’ of a poem (in a way, all poems are unfinished)
Gascoyne can also amaze by the ending, since his good poems are their
utterance without separation between form and content – there is an integrity
of speech that is characteristic. He can, rarely, be a master of intricate form
(Sonnet: The Uncertain Battle would be in all anthologies had it been by Auden or
Muir) but usually speaks in his natural voice in organic form (as understood
by Herbert Read), making language a flexible medium – rhetorical as in Ecce
Homo, naturally but indubitably celebrant as in The Sacred Hearth, conversation-
ally and anecdotally assured in Innocence and Experience in a style reminiscent of
Henry James, or what can only be the naturally prophetic, as in the poem on
Boehme. An occasional poem on the sun in a park can attain pure splendour
of speech, while irony and satire also succeed in Demos in Oxford Street and
Beware Beelzebub. This variety needs stressing, as it is easy to praise or attack
David Gascoyne on the basis of single pieces, whether one agrees or not with
the sentiments. However one regards, say, The Gravel-Pit Field or Miserere, one
cannot avoid the greatness of

But when some stranger gust sweeps past,
Seeming as though an unseen swarm
Of sea-birds had disturbed the air
With their strong wings’ wide stroke, a gleam
Of freshness hovers everywhere
About the field: and tall weeds shake,

Leaves wave their tiny flags to show
That the wind blown about the brow
Of this poor plot is nothing less
Than the great constant draught the speed
Of Earth’s gyrations makes in Space . . .
As I stand musing, overhead
The zenith’s stark light thrusts a ray
Down through dusk’s rolling vapours, casts
A last lucidity of day

Across the scene:
or the whole poem Lachrymae in Miserere.
I hope these identifications join the exhaustive learned exposition by Rémy to establish David Gascoyne as one of the great poets of this century and of English poetry itself.

Brian Merrikin Hill

Notes

2 The first quotation is from a letter quoted in The Observer review of The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid, ed Alan Bold, Hamish Hamilton 1984, the second from Lucky Poet Methuen 1943, Cape 1972. Alan Bold points out to me that the translation of Chestov’s All Things Are Possible, attributed to Koteliansky and Murry, was partly the work of Lawrence. Lawrence’s own summary of Chestov is in Phoenix, page 216.
3 The discussion of true surrealism and planned surrealism is fraught with danger; I would not wish to criticise Magritte.
4 See Blake’s London in Songs of Experience.
5 Keats – Letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 14 February to 3 May, 1819. For this theme see also Pierre Emmanuel’s Le monde est intérieur. Editions du Seuil, 1967.
6 The Complete Writings of William Blake, ed Keynes, 1957, in a letter to Thomas Butts, 22 Nov 1802:

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

7 For a long and deep discussion of this see Alexis Klimov’s De l’abîme. Création et contemplation in ‘Cahiers de l’Université Saint Jean de Jerusalem’ no. 11, Berg International, Editeurs 1985.
8 See Oeuvres de Arthur Rimbaud, ed Paterne Berriichon, préface de Paul Claudel, page 12, Mercure de France 1947.
10 ‘Poète et non honnête homme.’ Pascal, Pensée 38. See Pierre Emmanuel’s L’Acte poetique et le regard contemplatif (his final lecture) in op. cit. note 7.
12 Rémy, page 62. The poem is Collected Poems page 65 and has as epigraph the Pascal Pensée quoted in note 10.
Oskar Milosz and the Vision of the Cosmos


Readers of Temenos will have no need to be introduced to the life and work of Oskar Milosz, for an article on him, as well as a few translations from his poetry and prose, have already appeared in the third issue of this journal. But now the author of that article has edited a selection of Milosz's writings, translated into English, which include the greater part of his major work. The translations of the poems are accompanied by the original French texts en face, while his two great metaphysical works, Ars Magna (1924) and The Arcana (Les Arcanes, 1927), which he also described as poetry, as well as the exegetic notes Milosz provided for the latter, have been translated by the author's distant cousin, Czeslaw Milosz, Nobel laureate, who has also written a comprehensive introduction placing Oskar Milosz in the tradition to which he is related. The editor himself has also contributed a foreword, in which he seeks to decipher some of the features of the inner landscape through which this noble traveller journeyed in order to arrive where he did arrive. The result is that English readers, especially those who lack a knowledge of French, have now been given access to a body of poetry and thought which, if one is to
believe both the editor and the author himself, they can ill-afford to disregard. For according to the editor, Milosz must be measured against the giants, Dante, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Goethe; and Milosz himself had no doubt of his status and of the ultimate significance of what he had to say, however long it might be before it could be received and understood. ‘My knowledge’, he writes after the completion of his major works, ‘surpasses that of a Dante’; and a few years before those works were written (although he had already completed and published the Epistle to Storge which constitutes the first part of his Ars Magna), he confided to a friend in a letter: ‘Thus I live, as little the superman as possible, but with the terrible and dear feeling that the day approaches when I shall begin to talk to God as no one, not even Dante, not even Goethe, has spoken to him yet. And I do not mean to say by that that I shall write a poem more beautiful or even as beautiful as the Divine Comedy or Faust; but only that I am certain of creating something equally and perhaps even more sincere... If such statements are not to be regarded as hyperbole or evidence of an advanced state of megalomania, it can only be because what Milosz has to communicate, and succeeds in communicating, is of such importance that a failure to take heed of it is to ignore what a most clear-sighted — if not the most clear-sighted — spirit of this century has to say about the plight of modern man and how he can recover from it.

What, then, does Milosz have to say in this respect and why is it so important? He himself describes his mission as the renewal of Christian metaphysics and as the annunciation of a future Christianity. At the same time he claimed that his doctrine did not in the least degree differ from traditional Christian doctrine, and clearly the last thing he wished was to establish a new form of Christianity or a new religion of any kind. Rather what he attempted to do was to diagnose why the spiritual universe of western man — essentially and inevitably a Christian universe — had been shattered and man himself ejected into a kind of infernal void, and to reaffirm the metaphysical principles whose rejection had produced this state of affairs and whose reaffirmation is a precondition of any spiritual or artistic renewal. The dedication of his Ars Magna to Renaissance — ‘my spouse Renaissance’ — testifies to his deep hope in the possibility of such a renewal — an era of reborn humanity to which his own works were an immediate and crucial contribution. Indeed, he saw no point in any art or philosophy that did not contribute directly and consciously to such a rebirth — that was not, in other words, devoted to the promotion of religion and spiritual knowledge. Any art not so devoted, he confessed, whether poetry, music or painting, ‘makes me shudder with unspeakable horror.’

Milosz’s diagnosis of the abysmal state of present-day humanity has its start in a proposition which he accepts as axiomatic. This is that our spiritual potentiality — our true being — cannot be actualized unless the way in which we represent to ourselves the physical universe and man’s place in it accords
with things as they are in reality. In other words — to put the same thing in more specifically Christian terms — there must be a correspondence between the way in which God actually creates and sustains the world and the way in which we ourselves conceive it if we are to realize the relationship with and participation in the divine that is also the reality of our own innermost being. Unless there is such a correspondence we become victims of an inner dislocation and blindness which imprison us in a false vision of our life and of the life of things about us and produce a chronic perversion in every aspect of our existence and activity, spiritual, psychological, artistic and social.

Such a dislocation and blindness have in fact been brought about, according to Milosz, by our acceptance of the world-picture of modern science. Man’s deepest need — that which corresponds to the innermost reality of his being and on whose realization depends his release from a state of anguish, torment and mental and physical disease — is to live and love eternally. Yet modern science has presented him with a concept of the universe in which this is an impossibility, for the simple reason that, according to this concept, everything inevitably has a beginning and an end. ‘Ever since the first victory of materialism over revealed truth,’ Milosz writes, ‘our concept of space, and consequently, of the universe and of life, which space seems to contain, has been absolutely incompatible with the healthy logic surviving intact in the depth of our latent memory. Man, created free, has materialized his secret being and, together with it, Nature in the universal sense of the word. His folly has prompted him to situate the containing space to which he has ascribed a real existence; this space, in his sacrilegious thought, became stretched to infinity and became identified with the spiritual absolute. Now, this precisely is Hell . . .’ — in other words, imprisonment without release in a state of anguish, torment and mental and physical disease.

Put in its simplest terms, what Milosz calls our criminal pride has led us to propose a totally unreal connection between the idea of space and that of the infinite. Hence the idea of space — identified with that of the container of all life — appears to us as an immense curtain of darkness hanging in an eternity of time. In thus identifying the absolute with space and eternity with time, both determinable by endless multiplication and division, and in crowning ourselves king of the infinite universe-space situated by itself in endless extension — a universe of matter situated in itself — we have effectively deprived ourselves of any place in which the basic needs of our own being can be expressed, let alone fulfilled. For what we have done, when stripped to its bare reality, is to proclaim ourselves sovereign for a day of a lump of matter sentenced to slow decay in the darkness of a death without beginning or end. There is literally nowhere where we can live and love eternally: we are not situated anywhere, have nowhere to lay our head, we are lost, astray in this false space which is but our own illusion, our own animation of what is not actually there, eternally displaced, rootless, dispossessed. Hence our endless
psychoses, our atrocious metaphysical terror, our frenzy and torment, absolutely inescapable so long as we persist in clinging to this false and sacrilegious concept of the world and our own existence in it. In other words, the space-time concept of modern science, accompanied as it necessarily is by what Milosz calls the great illusion of evolution — the concept, in short, regarded by such writers as Teilhard de Chardin as the greatest achievement of the human mind over the last few centuries — is in reality a torture-chamber in which we endlessly punish ourselves for our self-apostasy and self-blinding.

The first stage therefore in any recovery of true identity on our part is to free ourselves from this tyrannical illusion in which we have become entangled and which lacks all reality except that conferred on it by our own deluded mind. We have, literally, to change our mind. And the first sign that we are beginning to do this is that we start to ask ourselves seriously, not 'What am I?', but 'Where am I?' Modern science can answer only that we exist in space, or in space-time. But this is to beg the question, because in that case where is space itself situated? For unless the question, 'Where is space?', is answered we cannot escape from the infinity of darkness in which the world-view of modern science places us. Modern science of course cannot answer this question for us and must declare its impotence when faced with it. But neither can any metaphysical doctrine or religious teaching which suggests that it matters little how we conceive the physical universe either because all mental constructs are basically delusion or because the spiritual world is opposed to the physical world and exists on an entirely different plane, so that whatever the idea we may possess of the physical world it does not inhibit our capacity to live a full spiritual life. For Milosz, both these attitudes contradict his basic axiom, indicated at the start of this exposé of his thought, to the effect that unless man's concept of the physical universe does accord with reality, his spiritual life will be crippled at its roots, with devastating consequences for every other aspect of his life. The modern world would seem amply to verify this contention.

Hence it is not simply a matter of demonstrating the inane unreality of the modern scientific world-view; it is a matter also of affirming a concept of the physical universe and of our place in it, down to the most seemingly insignificant aspects of our physical life, that is in accord with reality and corresponds consequently with our deepest and most ineluctable being. Initially, this means shaping a new concept of space and time, or, rather, of space, time and matter, since these are the three basic elements of the modern scientific concept and Milosz's avowed intention was to metamorphose this concept. Yet so ingrained are the centuries-old habits of our mind that it is by no means easy for us to grasp the metamorphosis which he proposes: as he himself writes, it is easier to preach the truth to trees and rocks than to make people grasp it.
Yet we have already advanced some way towards understanding what it is by perceiving what it is not. As we have seen, the basic perversion of human thought is the absurd identification of space with the absolute. This idea of space — the idea of a space extended to infinity, with all its darkness, cold, and insensibility — and its corresponding idea of an eternity of succession divided into past, present and future, are indeed, Milosz states, Satan himself in all the immense black majesty of his terrors. As for Berkeley, so for Milosz such an idea of absolute space is a phantom of the mechanical philosophers, and like Blake he saw the 'fathomless void' implicit in such an idea as the 'soul-shuddering vacuum' into which the human mind plunges when its intellectual sight is blinded and it loses contact with the real world of vision. It is of course also this idea of space that has given rise to all those cosmogonies — equally false — that presume that the universe is the outcome of some kind of organization of chaos within a pre-existing void, as though there were a prior and pre-existing receptacle or container into which the waters of space-time could be poured.

The materialization of thought which such a concept of space-time presupposes — this multiplication and division to infinity in a vain attempt to fill a black eternity of terror by locating an infinitude of cosmic points in a movement cut automatically into the three slices of past, present and future — amounts to a lapse into the darkness of the infernal world in which we have the illusion of ruling over a universe situated in its own matter. But if this concept of a monstrous material deity extending to infinity is not only wrong but also positively evil, in that it perverts and deforms the actual truth and reality of things, with what concept does one supplant it?

As a Christian, central to Milosz's thought is the traditional Christian idea of the Incarnation, an idea which involves the recognition, in his own words, 'that the matter which clothes us and surrounds us is absolutely identical with that in which all-powerful Love humbled Himself during the years of the Incarnation', and which He continues to hallow, he might have added, at every celebration of the Eucharist. He could not therefore respond to the 'universe of death' promoted by such as Locke and Newton in quite the same way as, for instance, Berkeley and Blake, however much he would have agreed with them in condemning it. He had to wage his battle as it were on two fronts, first and foremost against the materialists, but also against the exponents of what one can describe as immaterialist philosophy. This is the kind of philosophy which affirms that the material world has no reality apart from the mind that perceives it — has no reality independent of mental perception — and that consequently the existence of material things or sensible objects is dependent upon their being perceived: their esse is percipi. Blake, following Berkeley in this respect, is expressing such a philosophy when he states in a typically aphoristic manner: 'Mental Things are alone Real:
what is call'd Corporeal, Nobody Knows of its Dwelling Place: it is in Fallacy, and its Existence an Imposture.'

Moreover, to reduce the physical universe to a category that has no existence distinct from being perceived by the human mind comes dangerously close to investing man with a sovereignty even more flattering to his ego than that with which modern science invests him. For once I accept the idea that what is called the material world – the world immediately accessible to our senses – exists only in the mind and that mental things alone are real while all the rest is illusion, it is but a short step to my assuming that my own purely subjective mental state is the supreme arbiter of things and determines their true nature, and that how I see the universe is consequently just as valid as the way in which anyone else sees it. In other words, my own subjectivity alone provides the criteria for determining what constitutes reality and what unreality: I myself, in my own right and without reference to anyone else or to anything else other than my subjective mental images, am virtually creator of the universe. And the way is open to all the excesses and aberrations of modern psychology and modern art.

In addition, a purely immaterialist idea of space and time – of extension – is, Milosz maintains, something which, from the purely human point of view, is beyond our understanding and feeling: it cannot orientate us in our actual experiential world. Hence it leaves the Lockeian and Newtonian concept undisplaced on its own level as the model which in fact determines our pragmatic life and thinking. The same applies to the ideas on time and space put forward by Swedenborg: basically Swedenborg accepts the Lockeian concept of space on its own level, that of the natural world. He merely insists that spaces in the spiritual world, although like those in earth, are not fixed and stationary, nor can they be determined by measurement as can those in the natural world. Such a view virtually strengthens the already disastrous dichotomy between the concept of an external reality subject to immutable natural laws which is the sphere of science and the concept of an inner reality of human subjectivity or spiritual vision which is the sphere of religion and whose coordinates, so to speak, have no relationship to the physical world.

Milosz fully acknowledges that, as he puts it, 'the mystics alone have a precise and sane notion of space and time', just as he fully acknowledges that Reality itself is beyond space and time – beyond 'space-time'. He recognized as distinctly as Berkeley and Blake that for thought concerned only with sensible objects the question of reality arises only in correlation with those objects. But he regarded it as his task to heal the dichotomy that has bedevilled western thought at least from the time of the Renaissance, if not from the fall of man, by so metamorphosing our idea of the physical universe that the sphere of science should be at one with the sphere of religion and there would be an identity of religious dogma and scientific concept. He believed that only a metaphysician nourished above all on the central verities of the Christian
tradition was in a position to carry out such a task, for the simple reason that Christianity possesses at its heart a vision in which, far from there being any opposition between spirit and matter, Creator and Creation, both remain in indivisible unity, however clearly distinct they are in manifestation. Milosz's thought eschews pantheism just as severely as it eschews a devaluation of the physical world in the name of a purely transcendent spiritual or mental world. But it could be said, paraphrasing Blake's words quoted above, that his purpose was to show that the material world has a dwelling-place which is anything but in fallacy and that its existence is anything but an imposture.

To this end, the first step was, as we saw, to dispel the basic error of post-Cartesian physics and to divorce the idea of space from all connection with infinity. Space — the very space that surrounds us — is absolutely alien to any idea of the infinite, just as it is absolutely alien to any idea of the finite. The question of the infinite or of the finite does not arise concerning it. It is not its own container, nor is it the container of other things. It is not even the place in which we are situated as substance. Consequently it cannot be sub-divided or multiplied. And the same applies to time: time is not a category which can be cut into the three slices of past, present and future. It cannot be multiplied to eternity. The infinite and the eternal are qualities that pertain to the non-spatial and non-temporal Reality of the Divine alone. In other words, the whole concept of duration, far from being the greatest achievement of the human mind over the last few centuries, is a false concept and corresponds to nothing in the reality of things.

Yet since this concept itself is a consequence of the idea that the only reliable knowledge we can have about the physical world is that which can be obtained from the application of modern mathematics to sense-data, it follows that, if this concept is false, either the mathematics which determine it is a false mathematics, or it is incapable of providing an adequate knowledge of the physical world, or both simultaneously. In fact — although Milosz does not say this in so many words — since the calculations and demonstrations of modern mathematics presuppose the deployment of an entirely negative and non-existent category and are impossible without deploying it, the knowledge which can be derived from this mathematics can only be a negative — that is to say a non-existent or false — knowledge. I am referring to the use of the symbol 0 — nothing or nought — understood in a purely privative way, as the total absence of both quality and quantity. Since there is absolutely no correspondence between this symbol and any reality in the physical universe, to deploy it in attempting to reach conclusions about the nature of this universe is to vitiate one's efforts from the start. No calculation or demonstration involving a false — a non-existent — category of thought can produce anything but an entirely fictitious knowledge of what it purports to explain or describe. As the post-Cartesian concepts of space and time have been determined by a mathematics that does involve such a category, and as without it it is incapable
of performing the operations of multiplication and division which actually
determine the concepts in question, the concepts themselves must be
fictitious. And the same may be said of all other concepts of the physical
universe determined by such mathematical procedures. Well may Milosz call
modern mathematics the fetish of a barbarous science.

If space-time is entirely alien to any idea of the infinite or the finite, is it
therefore illusion? Milosz would reply that it is illusion when envisaged in
itself, independent of a context within which it is embraced and apart from
which it has no existence whatsoever. In grasping this context, one must
realize first of all that the three elements of empirical perception — space, time
and matter — constitute a single indivisible concept. Matter, that is to say, is
identical with space and time, and we know and can know of no other matter
than space and time. The origins of space are thus physical: space is identical
with universal matter, a single and perfect body, the notion of which is
inseparable from that of time. But this space, this time, this matter, where are
they to be found? The answer is that they are to be found in movement. Space,
time and matter, themselves identical, are the elements of a tripartite concept
of movement which itself embraces them. This is to say that the trinity of
space, time and matter is given to us simultaneously, as a whole, in the unity of
movement: Space-time is not the place of movement: space-time is the
creation of movement, is the matter of movement. Movement is therefore the
generator of space-time-matter. It is the contemporary and synonym of space-
time-matter in the actual world.

Manifestation — the physical universe — is thus a movement in which space,
time and matter are identical. This movement is one, because it is space and
time apprehended in matter. Matter is consequently itself one, like that by
virtue of which it is matter — and it is matter by virtue of movement. A single
movement is the unalterable matter of space and time. Correspondingly, the
idea of diversity exists solely because things are in movement. The sun is a
movement we call the sun, the heart is a movement we call the heart, and so it
is with everything before our senses, physical and mental. Everything that can
be grasped by our senses is pure relationship between moving bodies.
Relationship is the fundamental law of all phenomena. Space, place, is nothing
else than the relation between movement A and movement B. The materiality
of space is but the relationships between moving bodies. The cosmos itself is
a perfect sphere of movement-space-time-matter whose interior space is a
pure relation of these moving bodies.

Total space — the whole physical universe — is therefore real: it is matter itself.
Or, to put the same thing the other way round, matter — universal matter — is a
single whole forming total space. And this perfect cosmic body — this perfect
simultaneity, absolute identity and indivisible unity of space, matter and time —
is movement. It is thanks to movement that the cosmos is.

Yet movement, which is matter, space and time, also possesses an anteriority
with respect to the other three elements of the fundamental cosmic notion. For space, time and matter are given by movement, and this in spite of the fact that movement is their contemporary and synonym. Hence there is the need to reconcile the priority of movement and its perfect simultaneity with space, time and matter, and such a reconciliation is achieved by positing an initial movement which is antecedent to cosmic movement. For although space is, so to say, subsumed and embraced in cosmic movement, the origin of this movement itself has not yet been identified. Hence the question, 'Where is space?', or, more pertinently, 'Where am I?', with which we started, still remains unanswered in any definitive sense, for we still do not know where cosmic movement itself is situated.

This necessity of giving an account of the origin of cosmic movement leads Milosz to his reaffirmation of a Christian metaphysics — a metaphysics that could replace the dynamic concept of sequence proposed by modern science with that of what he calls divine instantaneity. This metaphysics could be described as a metaphysics of light in the sense elaborated by Grosseteste in his works, De Luce and the Hexaemeron, themselves greatly influenced by the Hexaemeron of St Basil the Great and in certain respects by St Augustine and the mediaeval philosophic school of Chartres which preceded that of Oxford. It also has affinities with the metaphysics of light in Sohravardi's 'oriental theosophy'. According to this metaphysics, God exteriorizes the non-manifest archetypal world of his thought in an emission or projection of incorporeal light. He exteriorizes it in what Milosz calls the Nothing. This Nothing is not to be confused with the void, still less with the modern mathematical concept of nothing — the nought — which is a purely negative category. On the contrary, this metaphysical Nothing is Nothing simply from the point view of material existence. It designates the absence of space-matter, not the absence of spiritual energy.

The incorporeal Fire, then, projects its incorporeal light upon the Nothing, upon what is not a place but simply the idea — the idea-archetype — of an exterior. This is the original Fiat Lux; and through it all the ideas of creation (including the idea-archetype of the exterior or Nothing upon which the incorporeal light is projected) are made manifest uncreatedly in this light. The incorporeal light is as it were an image of the non-manifest Divine occulted in his indivisible Unity. Simultaneously, it is the archetypal world prior to manifestation in the physical universe, the place in which everything that is created is contained. It thus constitutes a link, an intermediary plane between the Universe-archetypae as thought by the Divine and the world of created manifestation. It is a kind of stage where all things happen in instantaneity, simultaneity. In other words, it constitutes what Henry Corbin was to call, some quarter of a century later, the mundus imaginalis.

This original Fiat Lux by means of which God as inconceivable fire transmutes himself into incorporeal light — a transmutation synonymous, Milosz tells us.
with that by means of which God as Law transmutes himself into the God of universal sacrifice and inexpressible love and beauty – is succeeded, not temporally but in terms of instantaneous and contemporaneous succession, by the metamorphosis or transmutation of incorporeal light itself into physical light. In instantaneity God ‘exteriorizes’ himself in non-corporeal light, and in the same instantaneity does non-corporeal light create physical light, the clothing of the universe in its form of beauty and bride. This is the creation ex nihilo, out of the Nothing-Universe of incorporeal light: a Nothing which is not a negative category but the plenitude of divine uncreated energies.

The origin of cosmic movement, therefore, lies in incorporeal light itself. The initial movement antecedent to cosmic movement is that imparted to physical light through the transmutation of incorporeal light into physical light whose expansion creates the universe of manifested matter. But physical light is closely related to blood. In fact essentially they are one and the same thing: they constitute the living cosmic matter endowed with movement and may be said to correspond to the vital spirit – quicksilver – of the alchemists or to the Hindu prāṇa or to the Orenda of the North American Indians. Contemporaneous with the original Fiat Lux, this cosmic matter – blood and light – is the sum of the spiritual energies manifested in creation; it is the beauty and love of God manifest uncreatedly in immaterial light transmuted into a single movement. The first mover, it teaches us how to situate all spatial things in movement alone and all temporal things in instantaneity alone, allowing us to perceive how everything that was, is and will be happens in the same single instant.

This single movement which is the transmutation of incorporeal light is, therefore, the unalterable matter of space and time. It is not the inconceivable passage from one place to another place, but the intelligible metamorphosis from a state to a state. The entire secret of manifestation – of creation – resides in the transmission through blood and light, living cosmic matter, of a movement in which space, matter and time are identical. Blood, the essence of movement and universal rhythm, is the container, the foundation, the place, of the simultaneity and instantaneity of these three basic elements of the cosmic notion. They are enclosed within the unfathomable but tangible unity which blood – our inner movement – emits and projects.

For the source of blood is the indivisible unity; and yet, by virtue of instantaneity, blood is also this unity itself. At the same time, blood takes us into the tripartite world. By becoming the movement of physical light, spiritual light also produces the movement of blood, and this movement generates space-time-matter. The whole universe runs in us: it is our blood. Our blood is the fiat that, even before the cosmic blossoming, received the first imprint of movement for the sole purpose of clothing with a physical container the indivisible concept of matter-space-time. Space, time and matter are given in the instantaneity not only of knowledge but also of simple awareness by
universal movement, which is the flat, that is the projection of our blood beyond its original unity. Yet, again by virtue of instantaneity, this cosmic blood is still in the impetus of the first emission by means of which God projects incorporeal light: it perpetuates this first emission and is simultaneous with it. Hence light — the spiritual light produced by this original emission — is the soul in our blood. And since this blood is the creator of organic space-time-matter, the soul of the physical universe is also spiritual light.

The place of a man, therefore, as of the physical universe in its entirety — their ‘where’ — is a spiritual place: neither man nor the physical universe has a physical situation, and the idea that they do have a physical situation is the original error of thought that alienates man from his true place and casts him out into the wilderness. A creation of God’s incorporeal light, man and the finite universe can be situated only in this light, and they can be situated nowhere else, however much we may pretend that they can be. Moreover, as this light is the knowledge that God has of himself — the projection of the non-manifest archetypal world of his thought in a vision of love and beauty — to say that man and the finite universe are situated in it, and are only situated there, is to say that they really exist only in the spiritual vision of the Creator. The universe — created space-matter — is a vision of beauty and love seen by the only Seer. My only place is in the one who has breathed into the Nothing the ecstatic mirage of the world’s beauty.

Yet at the same time this vision — this knowledge that God has of himself — is identical with what is deepest and purest in our own being. It is the infinite within. I am a heartbeat of God, a pulsation of divine love. If I am to find my true place — to be where I truly belong — I can only do so consequently in a gravitation which is that of this love. This love is our only true reality and when it transports us into the incorporeal light which it makes visible, the whole universe is restored to its place, a place determined by the relation of this light to the divine hidden fire. As we said above, however much Creator and Creation are distinct in manifestation — there is no question of any pantheism — they are none the less an indivisible unity in spirit. The world, material in appearance, is a spiritual vision of the Divine: it is situated in the incorporeal light that is synonymous with the mundus imaginalis — and woe to those, Milosz adds, who make of it a monstrous material deity extended to infinity or situated in an absurd void without end.

The whole history of mankind since the fall, Milosz maintains, has been in essence a battle between the idea of infinite eternal matter on the one hand and that of the incorporeal light on the other. Straining to embrace a universe of which matter itself is the place, we displace ourselves from this light and exchange the infinite within ourselves for a space without end, the eternally fleeing product of ceaseless multiplication in which there is room for anything except for place. The ideas of multiplying and of extending are the true origin of all the misfortunes of mankind and nature. And what finally is
the concept of the black hole which so preoccupies modern scientists but
the projection, on to the so-called external world, of the black hole — the
'soul-shuddering vacuum' — which man opens in his consciousness when he
commits his original act of apostasy, alienates himself from the light, and
plunges into the void of spiritual darkness and self-oblivion?

This, then, is the vision of the cosmos with which Milosz presents us and
which he hoped would, in due course, supplant the materialist interpreta-
tions of the physical universe — indeed, which he believed must supplant these
interpretations if we are to escape from the infernal world into which our
denial of the uncreated spiritual universe — the Nothing-universe — has
plunged us and in which, as he puts it, we suffer endlessly from the torment
of being in God and of not knowing it. Naturally, in an article such as this it is
impossible to do more than to outline the bare contours of the vision. It is not
possible to convey the richness, warmth, colour and sheer poetry with which
Milosz himself clothes these contours. It is not possible to convey his
profound articulation of such themes as the feminine principle of manifesta-
tion, or the nature of man and woman, or the redemptive power of beauty, or
to give a sense of the deep compassion for man as for all creatures with which
his writings are imbued. To experience these qualities one must read and
reread his own works now made available in the book, The Noble Traveller, to
which I have referred.

Milosz was anything but an abstract impersonal philosopher. He consi-
dered that all thought, all art, all science not generated out of love and prayer,
and not baptised and confirmed in inner experience, was a defamation of life
and intelligence, however impressive it might appear. His own later poetry, as
well as his metaphysical works, were born out of year after year of persistent
struggle, suffering, loneliness and study, to be consummated finally in a
mystical transport in which the last veils of illusion were torn away and he was
granted the vision of the universe, divine, human and natural, in all its
magnificence, beauty and love. This is why they are impregnated with the
kind of authority and incontrovertible authenticity which one finds only in
scripture and sacred art. And this is also why we can ill-afford to disregard.
This is particularly true with respect to two of the central spheres of our life,
that of art and that of religion, both for Milosz inextricably interconnected.

Milosz felt that something very wrong had befallen the whole of modern
European art. All poets of modern times, he wrote, except Dante, Goethe and
two or three others, are blind children of fallen natural muses; and no doubt
he would have said the equivalent with regard to the other arts. What does he
mean by the 'fallen natural muses' of which modern artists are the blind
children? We can begin to discern this if we pause to consider the few
remarks he makes about art that is not the product of these fallen natural
muses and which he would regard as great and truthful: sacred art which is
inspired by the divine muse. The prime characteristic of such an art, Milosz
states, is that in it everything is phenomenon, nothing is image. What appears to be meant by this is that in an art of this kind there is nothing that does not correspond to an object or a fact of the three worlds, the celestial world, the spiritual world of incorporeal light (the mundus imaginalis) and the natural world of physical light. Any image therefore which does not correspond with – or symbolize with – an object or a fact of this nature is on that account a purely literary image, make-up concealing the inexpressive faces of the natural muses.

Sacred music and sacred dance, Milosz writes, express the acquisition of the highest knowledge through the divine numbers whose source is in the movement of incorporeal light, mother of physical light. Incorporeal light is an indivisible unit; physical light is a unit of velocity; and all sacred music and sacred dance imitate their inter-relationships: they represent the cosmic choruses which gravitate round the spiritual unity of the central divine Sun. This is to say that they are all examples of a symbolism brought into being by an awareness of the basic concept of Milosz's vision of the cosmos: that of the simultaneity of space, time and matter in movement. Christian processions, he adds, have the same significance, and the torches carried depict the transmutation of incorporeal light into physical light.

Art provoked by the natural fallen muses — nearly all modern art — is, then, that which fails to express the highest knowledge — a knowledge which is of a purely objective kind, however much it has to be transmuted into personal experience and vision before it can become the matter of art. In default of such a knowledge and its actualization in personal experience, art can no longer mirror the permanence of divine things. All the artist can now express is his purely subjective individual and basically aesthetic reactions and responses to a state in which he and the universe in which he lives are no longer seen as situated in the incorporeal light in which they are created and which is their true reality. Consequently the images in which he expresses his reactions and responses to this state of self-alienation and displacement from his true place will not be phenomena in the sense that they correspond to objects and facts in the three worlds, for the simple reason that he no longer possesses the knowledge and vision of these worlds. On the contrary, they will be images projected upon the screen of his sensorium by his purely subjective – unconscious, psychic or aesthetic – reactions and responses to the state in which he now finds himself. It is these reactions and responses that constitute the promptings of the fallen natural muses by which his art is provoked. Considered in this light, one can say that the great body of modern art does in fact express, not a vision of the cosmos, but simply aspects of the Hell in which man finds himself when he has lost that vision and lives in a state of chronic metaphysical amnesia.

This vision is a religious vision and on its recovery depends, according to Milosz, any true renaissance of our life and art. Milosz was not a hidebound
doctrinaire. He acknowledges that the truth is one and that some respect and love are enough to discover it in the depths of our consciousness. For him there are but two kinds of men: the negators who profess irreconcilable systems and the modest affirmers who all say the same thing to anyone who knows how to listen. He specifies among his spiritual ancestors ‘modest affirmers’ like Pythagoras and the Pre-Socratics, Plato, the initiates of Alexandria, the Neoplatonists of the Middle Ages, the Christian mystics and later adepts like Paracelsus and Claude de Saint Martin. Tireless reader of the Bible – his knowledge of Hebrew gave him direct access to the Old Testament – his early studies had initiated him into the world of Egyptology and of the pre-Greek and pre-Roman civilizations of the Near East. Though he regarded the Reformation and Protestantism in general as a total disaster, he was fully capable of learning deeply from such Protestant writers as Boehme, Swedenborg and Goethe. Far be it from him, he wrote, to judge the good Jew, the good Muslim, the good Buddhist.

Yet in spite of his eclecticism Milosz was a Christian – a Catholic Christian – and as we have already remarked he insisted that his own teachings were in complete accord with those of traditional Christian doctrine. His metaphysics, he affirmed, were a Christian metaphysics. He maintained that any discovery of our reason which does not conform to the teachings of Christian doctrine can only be, even when based upon the most rigorous mathematical and physical evidence, an illusion of our senses and of our tiny and arrogant insect mind. His aspiration was to prepare for the reconciliation of Christian doctrine and the concepts of science – not of course of our infamous and blind contemporary science which, he states, is powerless where anything is concerned that is not lucre or murder, but of true science, the passionate and loving science of the Divine. Without such a reconciliation, he affirmed, there could be no spiritual or artistic regeneration, no reborn humanity. It was because of this that he considered that the greatest spiritual task which confronts us today – a task which, he thought, only Christianity possesses the inner potentiality to achieve – is to metamorphose the modern scientific concept of the physical universe from within, because, for reasons that we have explained above, such a metamorphosis is the sine qua non of this reconciliation and hence itself the precondition of any genuine renewal. If Milosz is right, then the challenge which he presents to those of us who claim that we too aspire to such a renewal of things – to the rebirth of the sacred in our life and our art – is too obvious to need stating; and we do Milosz scant honour if, while acknowledging him to be a significant, even a great literary figure, we yet at the same time refuse to confront it.

Philip Sherrard

Here, for the first time under one cover, are English translations of nine of Zeami's sixteen secret treatises on the No. Here may be found the aesthetic theory, deploying a vocabulary of mysterious words denoting spiritual beauty, which was to raise the art of No from fair-ground buffoonery, a 'trade of beggars and outcasts', to the grave and spiritual drama which captivated the Shogun and the Emperor in 1374, and Fenollosa and Yeats five centuries later.

For six hundred years No has stood apart from other forms of drama in Japan. In its stage, which is a representation of holy space, in its masks, which transform the actor, to himself as well as to the audience, into a god or a troubled ghost or a mad woman, in its language which is replete with subtle devices of allusion, incantation, evocations of forgotten meanings and overtones which take us 'through' into another region of the mind – No is no mere spectacle. It is a spiritual way and a passage to another world.

Two men were responsible for this remarkable transformation. In a mere thirty years Zeami, the writer of these treatises, and his father Kan'am, succeeded in transforming a collection of rustic plays full of juggling, acrobatics and folkdances, into a high and solemn drama. It was as though, in one town in England during the reign of Edward III, the Mummers' Play was transformed into a mystic tragedy, its noble and ghostly characters moving in a dimension of dream, its dialogue embodying passages of ancient plainsong, tunes from French troubadours, chanted sequences from Latin litanies. And all this without losing the sense of origin among the common people when, as Yeats put it, 'the singer sings as if mere speech had taken fire.'

Kan'am it was who in the mid 14th century wrote the new plays, added a new music, kusemai, with a strange new rhythm and drumbeat, and trained his troupe to a general level of excellence in music, chant and dance such as fitted them to perform before the Shogun and the Emperor. Zeami it was who, as a boy of ten in a three-day performance at the Imagumano Shrine in 1374, first captivated the Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, ensuring thereafter the favour and patronage of the nobility and the Court.

This transformation is all the more remarkable when we remember that this access of inspiration and genius arose against a background of turbulence, cruelty, famine, sporadic civil war and a divided Imperial House, and in which success too often followed the whim of homosexual favouritism. It is more astonishing still when we remember that No actors were in medieval Japan regarded as untouchable outcasts, counted with the numeral classifier reserved for animals. Zeami was fortunate in being singled out by the Shogun who was the best of a bad line, and who also patronised tea masters, poets,
painters and builders of temples of shimmering beauty. Under his patronage Zeami's troupe rose to a zenith of inspired performance. With his death in 1408 less worthy favourites were preferred, and Zeami fell from grace and favour so far as to suffer exile to the remote island of Sado. To this day nevertheless his plays and those of his father constitute more than half the accredited repertoire of 240 plays.

Kan'ami wrote many plays, and his new music, deriving from the songs of wandering women minstrels, imparted an instant vitality and appeal. But he left no written advice on the technique of acting the Nō roles he devised, nor any explanation of the subtle aesthetic of spiritual beauty which he strove to weave into his art. His wisdom on these matters was passed down to his son by word of mouth alone. But Zeami chose to commit his father's teaching to writing, and recorded both what he remembered, and what he himself had discovered about the Nō Way, in sixteen treatises written between 1402 and 1430. These writings were intended for no eyes save those of his son and heir. They were the secret of his craft, to be passed down in the family line to one person only in each generation. Much as in every branch of art and craft in medieval Japan, from tea, poetry, music and the making of porcelain, to cookery and the dignified football practised in Court circles, the okugi or innermost secrets were passed on to the heir alone. The knowledge was not for all and sundry; it was for the head of the 'house' responsible for the proper training and initiation into the craft.

Because these writings were hidden or secret transmission, they were not made public for nearly five centuries. It was only in 1908 that copies of the sixteen treatises, the genuineness of which was eventually established beyond question, were discovered in a secondhand bookshop in Tokyo. They were edited and published the following year by the scholar Yoshida Tōgo.

The nine works translated in the present volume constitute the most important of these writings. They begin with Zeami's earliest and most celebrated work the Kadensho, or Book of the Transmission of the Flower, written probably about 1402. They continue through three more treatises, in the titles of which there appears again the mysterious Flower. There follows the Kyū or Nine Levels of mastery of the Nō, and, after three more writings on discipline and the Way, they conclude with the longer Sarugaku Dangi, compiled by Zeami's second son from his father's recollections of his art.

They deal, as we might expect, with all matters pertaining to the training of the Nō actor. They discuss the varied skills he must demonstrate. For the Nō actor must not only act; he must chant, sing, dance and comport a complex disguise of mask, wig and voluminous costume. Zeami offers advice first on how to achieve correct monomane or mimesis in the various roles he must play. In demon roles, for example, one must try to convey the terrifying essence of the demon without actually frightening the audience. A paradox, he adds, which only the Flower can solve. When playing a mad woman, one should
hold a flowering branch loosely in one hand, taking care meanwhile not to hold the neck too stiffly or the head too upright. One must also pay attention to the different kinds of madness; frenzy due to possession by a god or a dead spirit must not be confused with the distraction due to grief for a lost child. A very difficult role, he warns, is that of a woman possessed by a dead warrior for here, at one and the same time, one must convey both masculine rage and feminine gentleness. Most difficult of all is the role of an old man, particularly an old man of high degree, which requires a Flower of an advanced kind to be successfully done.

Masks are another subject on which Zeami had much to transmit. For Nō masks are themselves magical objects, imbued with the soul of the figure they represent. The okina or Old Man mask in particular, which represents a god, is even today treated with the reverence due to a divinity; the actor who wears it must, before he steps on to the stage, stare through the eyeholes at his reflection in a mirror. His personality by this means suffers a change, and he becomes a vessel for the god.

Zeami says that the best demon masks are to be had from Nikkō and Miroku; also Shakuuzuru of Ōmi. The province of Echizen, to the north east, has produced some good mask makers. Those made by Tatsuemon can be used by anyone, but Yasha's masks are only efficacious when worn by certain actors. The mask used in his troupe to represent the ghost of Sugawara no Michizane was retired from use for a season because someone had a warning dream. Only when a second dream was vouchsafed was it returned to service.

Zeami gives useful tips about costumes and properties. In the play Aridōshi, let the actor make his entrance with an umbrella and a flaming torch, you will ruin the effect if you try to substitute a fan. In plays featuring a boat, it is not advisable to wrap the oars with cotton or silk; you will lower the tone of the Nō. In the play Miidera, the bell must always be set up and struck to the left of the actor. Do not put a child on the stage unless his presence is really required by the text.

There is advice on chanting, on music, and on how to speak and stamp. In reciting the name of the poetess Ono no Komachi wa, the particle wa should be sounded lightly. In the play Ukon no Baba you can extend the syllable ma in the phrase hanaguruma.

There is advice on the composition of plays, embodying the principle of jo-ha-kyū, beginning, break and climax, which is still fundamental to the Nō to this day.

Some of this advice seems today hardly worth committing to so solemn a secrecy, But all such technical instructions are to be understood on the basis of a special aesthetic, deploying a vocabulary of words extremely difficult for us to grasp. The intention of the words is to convey a particular type of beauty, removed from mere phenomenal appearance, and taking us behind and beyond to a world where ordinary language is useless. Some are old words
which Zeami used in a new sense. Others are terms which he coined himself
to convey the beauty which pertains more to the invisible than to the visible.
The most important of these terms is hana, the Flower, which appears in the
titles of four of the treatises. It seems to derive from the Flower which the
Buddha once wordlessly held up, at the sight of which the disciple Kasyapa
smiled, and which gives us the first instance of the ‘special transmission’ of
Zen illumination. Zeami’s Flower thus recalls this spiritual gift. It is the special
quality which is essential to the actor’s success. Without it he is dead and flat.
With it he can play any role, be it god, ghost or old man, with that magical skill
that educated audiences have come to demand of the Nô.

But for all that Zeami says about the Flower, its transmission and its
acquisition, it remains elusive and mysterious to the end. It is passed ‘from
soul to soul’ from the earliest ancestors of the art. It is the greatest secret in
Nô. It is not a separate ‘thing’ that can be grasped. Yet there are different kinds
and qualities of Flower which the actor must learn to recognise. The boy’s
Flower, for example, which comes almost naturally as part of his youth and
beauty, and which will captivate high and low alike, will vanish at puberty, and
the actor must steel himself to start again from the very beginning.

There are no less than nine levels of proficiency for the actor, the four
highest of which display the Flower. These Nine Levels Zeami discusses in the
treatise of that name, Kyôô. They are couched in dark and enigmatic language,
reminiscent of the Zen koan.

At the pinnacle and apex of the nine is the Flower of Mystery, symbolised
by the phrase ‘In Silla at midnight the sun is bright.’ The mind cannot grasp
this high mystery, nor can we praise an actor gifted with it because he is
showing us something invisible to the ordinary eye.

Next comes the Flower of Profundity, symbolised by the words, ‘Snow
covers a thousand mountains; why is one peak alone not white?’ Here at least
there is one distinguishing feature that the mind can grasp amidst otherwise
limitless whiteness.

The next stage down is the Flower of Stillness, with ‘Snow piled in a silver
bowl,’ an image of utter purity and quietude. Such mysterious and scarcely
describable qualities then give way to the notions of correctness, precision,
energy, strength, until at the ninth and lowest level we confront the image of
the flying squirrel, which can climb, swim, fly and run, but does none of these
things very well.

Surrounding and suffusing the Flower is another mysterious term, to the
supreme importance of which Zeami again and again reverts: yûgen, here
rendered as Grace.

Yûgen is an older term, much used in the poetry of two centuries earlier. It
denotes that which is dark and shadowy, that which hints at mysterious
depths beyond the reach of the physical eye; a floating airy quality, removed
from the density of physical matter. A snipe standing alone in a pool on an
autumn evening; the call of quails wafted on a chilly autumnal breeze, a white
bird with a flower in its beak – all these show us yūgen. And again it has to do
with nobility, the special elegance of the high born, to be found in the grace
of a boy or a Court Lady. Indeed, for Zeami in the 15th century, the term had
a ring of nostalgia for the world of Genji, four centuries before, and the lost
golden realm of elegance which his image evoked.

We are clearly in a realm where any attempt to describe or analyse is futile.
Even Zeami, speaking of yūgen, is led into paradoxical statements. Now he tells
us that the actor must not try too hard to imitate the role he is playing, or he
will lose yūgen. Whether he is acting a man or a woman, priest or beggar, it
should seem as though he were holding a flowering branch in his hand. Yet
elsewhere he assures us that if an actor can imitate a character perfectly, yūgen
will spontaneously appear. We suspect that, like the Flower, these words can
only be comprehended by a leap in awareness which, like the ‘solving’ of a
Zen kōan, takes us beyond the reach of ordinary language.

Zeami uses some dozen more words to denote this quality of spiritual
beauty: shiore or ‘withering’, kotsu or ‘bone’, mushafu or ‘style without an
owner’, take or ‘height’, isshin or ‘one mind’. They are almost impossible for
the layman, uninitiated in the art of Nō, to comprehend.

In the present volume they are even further removed from our under-
standing by the rather insipid English words used to denote them. Mutuality
in Balance, Mutuality in Movement beyond Consciousness, Peerless Charm,
Magnitude – these ordinary words, despite their capitals, scarcely lead the
mind to the realms of inviolate, mysterious beauty that Zeami seems to have
intended to convey, and which Yeats, from even a short acquaintance with
Fenollosa’s book, appears to have grasped and allowed to work with powerful
effect on his own imagination.

Yeats saw hints in the Nō of something ‘far’, of another reality beneath the
surface. The ‘noble’ and ceremonious images of the Nō, sufficiently removed
from the ‘disordered passion of nature’, together with the sense of com-
munion with the dead, ‘enables us to pass for a few moments into a deep of
the mind that had hitherto been too subtle for habitation.’ The rhythm of the
Nō recalled the deep rhythm of the world in which the mind ‘liberated from
the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols.’ The ghosts, appearing to the
travelling priest in the place where long ago they met their death, recalled
Irish legends and his own state of ‘dreaming back.’ The Nō canon of beauty
seemed to fit his own requirement, hard and cold like the ‘cutting of an agate’,
and he went on to write At the Hawk’s Well and The Dreaming of the Bones.

Zeami clearly believed that the Nō with the right Flower pertained to a super-
natural skill, its sounds and movements reaching out over the barrier which
divides our world from the invisible one of divinities and spirits. Divine beings
are pleased by Nō, he tells us, citing in proof examples of divinities who
‘ordered’ performances of Nō through dreams and possessions, ‘and who
were so delighted with the plays that they caused people at death's door to recover at once.

He says nothing in these treatises, alas, about his own inspiration in writing at least fifty plays and adapting many more, and why he should have composed so many of them on the theme of the troubled ghost. His father's plays had been mostly genzaimono, pieces about this world. There are few supernatural figures and no ghosts. But many of Zeami's plays belong to the Second Group in the repertoire, the shura or tormented dead warrior. Again and again he shows us a travelling priest, who in the course of his wanderings arrives in a village. An old woodcutter, or charcoal burner appears. Is there anything special about this place, the priest asks. Oh yes, the old man replies. A battle was fought here, or a girl was drowned, or a warrior was killed. With strange emotion he describes the scene, until the priest is impelled to ask him who he is. The scene shifts, a different mask appears, and the ghost of the tormented dead person speaks, recounting the manner of his death and describing the tortures of hell. The priest prays, recites the Lotus Sutra, and at last the unhappy spirit is laid to rest.

We long to know why Zeami composed so many plays on this theme. But he tells us nothing at all. After all, such notions were not part of the secret skills which he desired to transmit to his family line.

It is good to have all nine of the principal works under one cover in English. All have been translated before, by one hand or another, but they are scattered in back numbers of journals not always accessible. The notorious difficulty of Zeami's style, its allusive vagueness, is reflected in the varying versions to be found in English. Here also we have two good essays by the translators; Thomas Rimer recalls, rather briefly, the background to the treatises, and Yamazaki Masakazu compares Zeami's aesthetic theory with that of Aristotle. The translations, with the reservation mentioned above, read well, if a little stodgily, but the index, despite its complexity, is tiresomely inadequate. There is no entry for masks, for example.

One more small point worries me. At the end of the True Path to the Flower treatise, Zeami invokes as a symbol of yūgen, a white bird with a flower in its beak. The Chinese characters for 'white bird' can also, read differently, denote a swan. The version here given is: 'Cannot the beauty of Grace be compared to the image of a swan holding a flower in its bill, I wonder?'

Surely not! Swans migrate from Siberia to the north of Hokkaido in winter, and never come further south than the north of the main island of Japan. It is very unlikely that Zeami ever saw a swan, and in any case, Japanese cognoscenti assure me, a swan is too new, too foreign, too large to be a symbol of yūgen. Zeami must have meant the characters to denote simply a white bird, probably a seagull, or perhaps a heron, sagi, on the theme of which he himself wrote a notable play.

Carmen Blacker
Monsters at the Tate

Exhibition of Paintings by Francis Bacon. Tate Gallery.

Francis Bacon, aged 76, was recently given the honour of a major retrospective at the Tate Gallery (May—August 1985). The one thing to be said about this artist, which all who know his work will surely agree with, is that he is remarkable. It is not surprising that his exhibition gave rise to a considerable amount of writing. From the professional art critics it consisted in different degrees of adulation. In his foreword to the exhibition catalogue the director of the Tate, Alan Bowness, had proclaimed Francis Bacon to be 'surely the greatest living painter', the one who 'sets the standard for our time'. This statement set the tone of the critical response to Bacon's show.

There were, however, a few dissenting voices, mostly from laymen. Writing in The Times (June 28), Bernard Levin bluffly declared that Bacon's works, and the whole art industry devoted to puffing up his reputation, were 'very great nonsense'. In fifty years time, he prophesied, Bacon's paintings will be worthless. Meanwhile, said Mr Levin, it is our duty to make distinctions between the true and the false in art. 'A Genius? I say Rotten' was the title of his rumbustious article.

It was meant to provoke, and it did so. In letters to The Times which followed, a repeated complaint was that, as one writer put it, Mr Levin 'concentrates on the subject matter, or content, of Bacon's paintings'. This, said the writer, 'is a very old-fashioned way of looking at pictures'.

Fashions in art, of course, are merely for those who enjoy such things or who make their living by manipulating them. For the rest of us it is no crime to be old-fashioned, and if, having paid our money at the Tate, we wish to remark on the content (thus scornfully italicized) of what their artist presents to us — then why not? Bacon himself is by no means disposed to conceal the contents of his work. Indeed he flaunts them. Skilfully and even beautifully displayed, clearly defined in isolation against his flat, colourful backgrounds, is a series of the most foul, beastly images that could possibly be dredged up from the pit of the imagination. Vilely distorted figures, vicious or victimized, writhe, fight, copulate, vomit, defecate and scream in torture. One has a grossly swollen arm and a hypodermic syringe sticking from it; another consists oddly of sexual parts and cricket pads; others have half turned into wounded worms enacting a verminous crucifixion. They are spattered with blood, slime and ordure, which besmirches also their surroundings. The artist has cast his net deep indeed; and the content of that net, the awesomely disgusting creatures he has brought to the surface, are quite impossible to ignore. They are, moreover, Bacon's stock in trade, the product for which he has become famous, displayed in his shop window. Thus, even with the best will to be fashionable, one can hardly avoid, in any worthwhile discussion of Bacon's work, touching upon its content or subject matter.
Before going further into the question of Bacon’s imagery, it is fair to consider that aspect of his work which appeals most strongly to his critics, his mastery in the use of paint. No doubt Bacon is a fine painter. His love of colour, however much he tries to suppress it, is apparent in all his pictures, and so is his love of the medium. Oil paint is Bacon’s means of divination. In published interviews he tells of mystical affairs with the colours on his canvas, how the chance flow of paint suggests and prompts images and how communication with his medium is sometimes achieved when he is drunk, sick or overtired. If the one mark of a great painter was that he should love and understand the process of painting, then Bacon would certainly qualify.

Of course, there are other ways of looking at the matter, old John Ruskin’s for example. He indeed ‘set the standard’ for his times, a very different standard from that which Bacon is alleged to be setting today. Ruskin believed that artists are influential, and from that assumption he went on to address the question of how their influence might best be directed. The definition he offered of a great picture was ‘that which conveys to the spectator the greatest number of the greatest ideas’. Technique he took for granted. Obviously the first thing required of any artist or craftsman is that he becomes adept in the mechanics of his trade. Thus a great artist will naturally and unremarkably have mastered the craft of painting. The ‘judicious critic’, said Ruskin, ‘will be careful to distinguish what is language (i.e. the technique of painting) and what is thought, and to rank and praise pictures chiefly for the latter’.

John Ruskin is hardly the latest thing in art fashion, but fads and fashions in painting were not his concern. The questions he raised about the effects of art on people exposed to it were much the same questions as had been asked in every generation since long before Plato restated them. Plato himself says that, in earlier times, art and music were thought to have such direct social effects that limits were imposed by law upon the range of proportions and harmonies which an artist might express, permitting only those types which were considered therapeutic and psychologically beneficial. More clumsily, but with the same understanding of the potential influence of art, modern dictators forbid the exhibition of pictures which are not in accordance with state ideology.

Faced with the choice of either tolerating the exposure of sickening and disruptive images in art or of supporting censorship in such matters, most of us would almost certainly opt for continuing the present course. One excellent reason for that is that there are no agreed standards for guiding any such censorship. It is not in any case a practical proposition. Our present liberal democracies give no official standing to theories of proportion in art, so very properly there is no attempt to impose arbitrary standards. Values in art are left for the public’s decision. The weakness in that otherwise decent procedure is that it allows manipulation of values. Even that is not always a serious matter. The machinations and follies of the modern art market have
long been a public laughing-stock, and the market in blatant trash between art
swindlers and rich idiots probably causes more amusement than harm. Less
innocent is the rigging of art values to suit particular philosophies and
theories of history. Of this process Bacon has been made an involuntary
instrument. With no warrant from the artist himself, many of the leading
critics have interpreted his revolting images as comments on the rottenness
of modern society and the tortures inflicted by it. Thus Mr Bowness of the Tate,
he who proclaims Bacon the ‘greatest living painter’, goes on to claim that, ‘no
artist this century has presented the human predicament with such insight
and feeling. The paintings have the inescapable mark of the present’.
‘If you say so, squire,’ was P. J. Kavanagh’s response to that statement in his
Spectator review of Bacon. Probably most laymen would approve his laconic
scepticism. Life certainly has its grisly side, which Bacon very powerfully
illuminates. But the majority of people who see his pictures will find little in
common between the world of their own experience and that which Bacon
presents to them. His is a private world, populated by monstrous denizens of
the nether regions. By exposing them to public view he activates certain
powers, whose existence has always been recognized, but which, in times
when the nature of such things was better known, were confined to their
underground realm and there encountered only by initiates of the Mysteries.
They are mentioned in Ezekiel 8 where the prophet, having found his way
into a chamber beneath the Temple, sees the priests there worshipping ‘every
form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house
of Israel, portrayed upon the wall round about’ – a fair description of a Francis
Bacon show. There was no art critic present to explain to the prophet that
what he saw was a brilliant exhibition of the human predicament. Instead, a
voice spoke: ‘Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of
Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say,
the Lord seeth us not . . .’

Bacon is an honest guide to the underground world of his own peculiar
imagination, a world of vicious abominations and perversions. The forms he
gives to it are partly reflections of the artist’s personal predelictions, but
similar forms are latent within every individual, though deeply buried in the
recesses of the mind. In bringing them to public awareness Bacon has
incurred a grave responsibility, and so have those who foist them off on
impressionable viewers as typifying the whole nature of life. If, as all who
engage in art presumably believe, painting is influential, then Ruskin was
surely justified in considering the quality of that influence. Few people will
be so moved by Bacon as to reproduce in life his horrendous images of
homosexual sadism and so on, but such images have nonetheless been set at
large in our world, and they are not easily rebottled. The amount of damage
that Bacon – and more culpably his backers – have done to innocent minds is
in the nature of things incalculable. His great talents have proved his curse. In
him are the true qualities of a great painter, which makes it all the more disastrous when his powers are used to such loathsome effect. Flashes of love and fine spirit break through from many of his pictures, but his misfortune has been to gain recognition as a painter of hell. To that realm his reputation has ever more firmly confined him. Whatever the consequences may have been for his own private life, they are of no one's concern but his. His public effect, however, is the concern of everyone, certainly not of professional art critics alone. One may thus take issue with the proclamations of Mr Bowness and his colleagues, and venture certain counter-proclamations, as follows.

Bacon is not the world's greatest artist, but a technically adept and deeply imaginative painter, who has applied his talents largely to the depiction of filthy and degraded images.

By his obsessions he has been diverted from the normal ambitions and purposes of an artist and led to become a specialized illustrator of morbid psychology. In that field his work has been honest and proficient, of considerable interest to students of medicine and the imagery of esoteric mystery cults.

Bacon's work is not of a nature that befits it to be exhibited as fine art in public galleries. The influence which such places exert might best be used for exalting and refining, rather than corrupting, the minds of the public. Bacon states that some of his paintings were inspired by illustration in clinical books on diseases of human organs. This makes appropriate the suggestion that the most suitable place for his work to be exhibited is in a museum of medical curiosities.

John Michell

'A Rest for the People of God'


La Valle della Visione. Roberto Sanesi (Garzanti 25000 lire) 1985.

A friend once remarked that the perplexities of life may only be thrown into perspective by the light of theology, for it would clarify the perennial, cast shadow on the ephemeral, unmasking the sham so often adulated by fashion. My friend was without doubt thinking of contemplative theology, not the world of theologians committed to the social upheavals of the present.
Samual Palmer’s writings respond gladly to being appreciated in theology’s light, for Palmer was a man to whom the knowing of God was of supreme importance ... scio cui credidi. His art was the chosen path for what Martin Buber termed the ‘Encounter’, that meeting with the Deity by which the Creation is revealed as sacramental.

With theology as the measuring stick, the writings gladly leap off the page, vibrant in sincerity, honesty and vulnerability. There is in vogue a patronizing attitude to the past, especially history’s key figures, as if it was a moral duty to lower them to whatever level wills the mind in a moment of time. Lacking the fulcrum of theology, we miss the simple clarity of the heart of the matter, for a profusion of quantifying details. Thus the Palmers of this world are often interpreted ignoring the essential clues to their creative worlds. In this respect, Mark Abley’s introduction becomes unstuck due to his lack of sympathy for theology. He praises the early visionary years whilst showing little understanding or respect for the artist’s devotion, the hallmark of his vision, a vision not of five years or more, but a lifetime of trial and inward growth.

I have always been suspicious of appreciating Palmer in terms of ‘the Shoreham Years’ at the expense of the period in Italy and the latter years. The weakness of such an approach is that it fails to recognize the whole man, the meaning of a life’s pilgrimage, as well as the powerful works coming from fulfilment, pictures that resonate from a wall like echoes from Beethoven’s last quartets. Surely, it does no justice to Palmer to ignore the fact that he matured from a curious baggy figure caught in drawings and memories, to the saintly man to be seen in the last photographs. Art is never an easy passage for those who seek first the kingdom of heaven.

The visionary years produced psalm-like images, visualized not in far off Palestine but through the contemplation of our own soft and kind landscape:

‘The visions of the soul, being perfect, are the only true standard by which nature may be tried. The corporeal executive is no good to the painter, but a bane. In proportion as we enjoy and improve in imaginative art we shall love the material works of God more and more. Sometimes landscape is seen as a vision, and then seems as fine as art; but this is seldom, and bits of nature are generally much improved by being received into the soul . . . ’

(From the Notebooks, 1824–1835.)

Palmer without his religious faith would have produced a very different kind of art. Most certainly his life would not have taken the way of pilgrimage that it did, a way that led from the exuberance of youthful vision to the soul’s aridity, a condition from which matured the final great vision, as unique as the early years, but in quite another octave, with fuller harmonies, profounder in content.
The early vision may be compared to Dante’s awakening on seeing Beatrice, an ecstasy which in the spiritual life is always taken away. It is a loss which crucifies the very vision given, but its death looks towards resurrection. The dying is quite other than the ‘death of God’, it is the stuff of that strange alchemy which draws the greater Art from the West’s heritage. George Richmond wrote to Palmer: ‘We all wanted thumping when we thought in a dream of sentiment we were learning art’. After the Shoreham Years, Palmer was led on to learn the toughness of the practise of art.

If Palmer’s early vision was to emerge today, it would either be despised and killed within a year at art school, or be praised into a false idol and made into what the Renaissance would have called a ‘trastullo’, a plaything, a trap impeding growth, a convenient lap dog for social consolation.

The Parting Light is a glorious sequence of extracts from Palmer’s writings. It is the best introduction available for appreciating the meaning of the artist’s work; it also provides a starting point for reading the collected letters, a daunting task without a little preparation. There are numerous themes, gratitude to Blake; a deep respect for the visual contrasts of light and shade; the sure knowledge of working within a tradition; concern for the conservation of the countryside; a sense of order in society which would give dignity to those who till the land, friendships with fellow artists; struggles with his father in law, John Linnell; the grief experienced by the death of his son, Thomas More; respect for the work of Claude Lorrain. . . . It is a book to keep besides one, for a letter read between the tasks of daily routine will provide a lingering thought or image. Perhaps the sight of some lady fainting at morning prayers due to overtight stays commented with Palmer’s tirade against ‘hateful corsets’, or, ‘I dislike writing about art because the comparative ease of talking twits me with the difficulty of doing . . .’

Raymond Lister’s selection of paintings is a good companion to the writings. The small format does not always do justice to many of the paintings illustrated and not all the plates are well printed. However, the author’s text provides a secure framework in which to hold the insights gained; furthermore, the notes to the illustrations aid to focus the image without ever over-interpreting. The reader is left to eventually contemplate the picture for himself.

The two books complement each other and are a valuable asset to anyone wishing to come closer to Palmer’s art.

Roberto Sanesi’s La Valle della Visione makes a sensible postscript to Samuel Palmer. Sanesi is one of Italy’s leading scholars and it is reassuring to know that there is an ever-increasing circle of interest in what Alberti and Vasari erroneously described as the ‘barbaric’ Gothic vision of the north. The richness of the Italian vision finds expression in the Trecento and the influence of Ficino which is like salt to all that is abiding in the Renaissance
and its wake. I think especially of Italian music, which Simon Mayr described
as the womb of Western music, for the science upon which it blossomed is
the expression of a profound sacred tradition.

Alas, Italy has lost so much of its tradition through the Inquisition and
Modernism. There was a fragile resurgence at the beginning of the nineteenth
century, with the creativity of figures like Bellini and Donizetti, but it was
quickly swallowed up by the Risorgimento to be spilled over in D'Annunzio
and the tragedy of fascism.

Perhaps the Italian's interest in our 'gothic' tradition with its rich chrono-
logical golden chain from the world of legend and mystical insight until
the present, stems from a nostalgia for his own lost worlds of heightened
sensibility - worlds which conceal the fertile soil in which grew so much of
the West's heritage.

Sanesi has brought together under one cover eleven memorable essays on
Dylan Thomas, Ceri Richards, T. S. Eliot, Henry Moore, David Jones, Paul
Nash, Vernon Watkins and Graham Sutherland, with extensive reference to
Blake and Palmer, in which he explores metaphor, symbol, archetype and the
analogy between word and image. The book is most sensitively illustrated.

The essay on Vernon Watkins's poem Taliesin in Gower suggests why our
tradition is so important at the present to Italians. The 'gothic' vision of all
created things as vibrant correspondences of the Eternal Imagination stands
in dramatic contrast with the precise visionary world of the Italian tradition.
Its precision is recognized in Dante's cosmology, Ficino's metaphysics, or
the science of music in which the passionate life becomes part of cosmic
geography. If 'gothic' and 'classical' may be borrowed as imprecise labels
indicating two creative worlds of imaginative power, then maybe it will be
seen that the genius of the West depends on the interaction and reconcile-
tion of these 'opposites'. We depend on Italian classicism as much as the
Italian depends on the 'gothic' north for the continual revitalization of our
imaginative mutual worlds.

John Allitt
There are two basic modes of obscurity in poetry: that which 'closes in' upon the personality of the poet, and that which 'opens out' onto deeper realms of knowledge and being. The two are not necessarily mutually exclusive though by far the most prevalent shortcoming of most of the poetry of our time is of the former kind.

The poetry of David Jones has from the beginning been associated with a certain degree of obscurity; justifiably so but for very complex reasons, reasons that the imaginative qualities of the poetry itself persuade us must at least be entertained before being dismissed as fatal. The obscurity of David Jones is both objective and subjective. It is objective in that his imagination works at the confluence of many cultural and historical levels. In addition these levels are interwoven in the texture of the poetry always with the double perspective that sees the flux of events and the particularity of things as sharing in an eternal, unmoving economy. Something of this is meant, I think, by Jones's phrase 'archetypal meaning' in his explanation, in a letter to Desmond Chute (4 Feb. 1953), of his handling of certain verbs. 'I love “brights” as a verb. It seems to have more power than “brightens” and I expect you are guessing aright when you suggest it may be that I’ve used it to strengthen the figurative meaning, if by figurative we mean the archetypal meaning or something like that'.

Jones's subjective obscurity, such as it is, stems from the fact that the selection of his materials is based upon his own predilection as a Londoner, born of Welsh ancestry and having an interest in Roman, Early Britain and Welsh history, Arthurian legend and much else that has gone into the making of the cultural history of European Christendom. On top of this we have the recalling of his experiences as an infantryman in the First World War to contend with.

David Jones is the polar opposite of Yeats in this respect. Yeats also worked, especially in his later years, at the confluence of many cultures – Celtic legend, Irish history, Neoplatonism, a vast array of hermetic doctrine, the Vedanta, the Japanese Noh, and so on. But in the case of Yeats, the obscurity is refined out of (one might even say alchemised into) the texture of the poem itself to give us, for instance, something like the deceptive simplicity of the Crazy Jane poems. Here, the ‘density’, as it were, of allusion must be teased out with the aid of a related and circumstantial knowledge acquired from a study of his work as a whole. The ‘obscurity’ of Yeats is far from obvious. With David
Jones the 'obscurity' is for the most part obvious, although just as deceptive; so much so that it tends to make the poetry something of an assault course at times.

This makes easy ammunition for his detractors and, it must be admitted, some of his admirers have not always done him a service in making light of the difficulties. There would seem to be little to gain from pretending that his use of remote, archaic and technical language often comes across to the reader, at least initially, as a device 'got up' for the occasion. It may well come as a shock to find the poet confessing, as he does in a letter to Desmond Chute (29 Dec. 1952) 'my "method" is merely to arse around with such words as are available to me until the passage in question takes on something of the shape I think it requires & evokes the image I want'.

This could be put down as an excess of modesty towards a man he respected as an intellectual equal were it not for the fact that Jones was acutely aware of the difficulties engendered for the reader by his 'method'. Explaining his scansion to Chute in another letter (6 Feb. 1953) he confesses: 'no thought of either scansion or stress (as such) was in my mind as I wrote. The "prose" bits of The Anathemata "just happened" in accord with some interior requirement to do with the thought, content, nature of the passage and the "verse" bits "just happened" in accord with requirements of the same kind. The breaks in lines that would ordinarily run on were all made with the intention of enhancing the meaning or feeling of that particular passage. That is to say, the "forms" were determined by the "content". While I cannot conceive of myself proceeding in any other way, I do see that this leads to grave difficulties of "interpretation". That is the weakness of the procedure... one may be pursuing a mistaken method, for it is easy enough to deceive oneself over what is ultimately rewarding & what is not in the practise of any one of the arts. It is all too easy to make a virtue of a necessity which has as its cause one's own limitations as an artist, and p'raps as a man of prudence also.'

In an earlier letter (27 Jan. 1953) to Chute, Jones had wrestled with the question of what was, if not entirely lost, at least considerably undermined by his 'method'. These misgivings, it might be added, could equally well apply to the absence of a 'shared background' as between the poet and his audience: 'one thing yr comments re all this business of prosody... has made me see is that a work made to recognizable & known "laws" of metre, scansion, accent, etc. has this great advantage of being read in a way intended by the writer... whereas the eclectic or patch-work or catch-as-catch-can method I employ... leaves a wide no-man's-land for debate as to exactly how a given line or passage should be read in order to get the full intention of the writer.'

In the face of such honesty and humility, and on the evidence of his final achievement we have to remind ourselves, so as to check ourselves against the too easy temptation of being dismissive, that underlying whatever misgivings Jones had about the effect of his work was a deeply intuitive grasp
THE POETRY OF INNER NECESSITY

of the central cohesion of the multilayered allusions of his vision. This remains true as much for *In Parenthesis* and *The Anathemata* as it does for his 'bits of lettering'. The poet could, in his correspondence to Fr. Chute, write, in a letter already quoted (29 Dec. 1952), 'as far as I am consciously aware the form of *The Anathemata* was determined by the inner necessities of the thing itself ...' and elsewhere, in a letter dated 13 March 1953, 'It must be remembered that none of these ideas were planned. None of the ideas were purposely arranged. They came naturally as the work proceeded.' But this need not blind us to the fact that *The Anathemata* is a work of great literary depth and range whose imaginative resonances place it among the major works of our time. Likewise, with his 'bits of lettering', the fact that his procedure was to prepare in advance for every conceivable necessity of alteration and correction before he even begun (a most un-Gill-like method this!) should not prevent us from seeing that what emerges is an object of great plastic subtlety and formal distinction that somehow has an integrity and law all its own. The inscriptions are a unique and inimitable addition to the art of formal lettering this century.

So what was the central node or pivot of this vision called forth against 'the character & trend & ethos of our civilisational phase'; and why against!

It was to see, through the eyes of a deeply committed Catholic, the dilemma of being an artist in a 'civilisational phase' that to all intents and purposes makes do without a properly human self-image. The 'descent' from the concept of man as made 'in the image of God' to one that sees him as a sort of complex accumulation of biological components mysteriously cut off from, but nonetheless part of, psychological factors has the reductive effect of defacing the vision of what man ought to be in favour of one that shows him as he merely can be. For David Jones the terms 'man' and 'artist' were interchangeable and whenever he uses either term, or even in the most oblique reference to their inter-relationship, he has in mind that central act of the Catholic faith, the celebration of the Mass with its sanctifying injunction, 'do this in remembrance of me'. For Jones, to consider man from the point of view of his being a creature who of necessity has to make things inescapably involves him in the question of what it means, what significance attaches to the act of making in a *Zeitgeist* that has largely renounced the sacramental dimension of human life. The poet's subscription to Catholic doctrine sharpened his awareness of the artist's dichotomy whose nature 'is illustrated, or in part illustrated, by observing what is ultimately inimical to the whole notion of "man-the-artist" is also alien to the cult man, to sacramental man.' (letter to Chute dated 29 Dec. 1952).

Jones was wholly absorbed in the ramifications of this question. This absorption, coupled with his imaginative tendency to render the concrete (always the immediate substance of his work) in the light of a timeless transparency so as to show forth the numinous significance of its particularity, gives his writings, as well as his paintings and drawings, their idiosyncratic and
sometimes obsessive, ‘density’ of meaning. Their ‘obscurity’, made doubly
difficult by their author’s uncommon learning and the scope of his frame of
reference means that the reader or viewer needs all the help he or she can get.
And what better guide than the artist himself. This places a special value upon
anything Jones wrote himself by way of explaining his intention, and makes
the two volumes under review essential reading for anybody already beyond
the point of approaching Jones’s work for the first time.

The Long Conversation is based on the friendship between Jones and William
Blissett which began tentatively by correspondence in 1954 and lasted until
the poet’s death in 1974. The content of the book comprises the subsequent
correspondence between the two with largely unaltered contemporary
accounts of the conversations that took place on each of thirty visits to the
poet’s home. It has to be said that the book is not as revealing as one might
have hoped for. It gives the impression that Mr Blissett, who is an academic
Professor, did not inspire much out of the way of the ordinary to-and-fro one
might expect from two cultured minds. What Mr Blissett knows he knows, as
it were, professionally. What David Jones knew he knew imaginatively, which
is a different thing. It means that the conversation never rises to the point
of becoming a sustained and stimulating exploration of mutually held ideas. This
is no doubt in part due to the fact that during the period covered by the book
Jones was frequently suffering ill-health. Amongst the book’s pages one can
gather much ancillary knowledge although nothing that substantially reshapes
the picture of the poet’s life’s work. We learn which painters he admired:
Turner, Bewick, Samuel Palmer, Blake, and surprisingly, at least for me,
Bonnard! In a letter dated 11/12th June 1967 there is an extended and
interesting discussion of the Celtic influence upon Jones’s work. Elsewhere,
Mr Blissett reports Jones’s disclaimer that he was a mystic in any strict sense –
and did not understand the mystics. The poet’s claim that a real major
influence on his style was St-John Perse’s Anabase in Eliot’s translation is
something I cannot recall ever being mentioned elsewhere. Throughout the
whole book there are useful corrigenda to In Parenthesis and The Anathemata
as well as many opportunities to gloss passages of these poems on the basis of
points raised in discussion.

Inner Necessities, a short but elegant volume done very much in the manner of
Eric Gill’s books, gives us the surviving letters of Desmond Chute to David
Jones. It is immediately evident from them that the poet had a very high
regard for Fr. Chute and this gives the letters a special significance. They were
nearly all written in 1953 and stem from a series of questions from Fr. Chute
on the occasion of his preparing a review of The Anathemata. The subsequent
review is printed as an appendix. Alas, Fr. Chute’s half of the correspondence
has not survived. While it in no way approaches the importance of René
Hague’s Dai Greatcoat it nonetheless is of special value in recording the poet’s
attempt to answer with candour and, one suspects, at times excessive
modesty, the questioning mind of one who was both intellectually and imaginatively more than able to respond to the intrinsic qualities of Jones's vision. As the editor Tom Dilworth points out in his introduction, the chief value of the letters to Desmond Chute is their elucidation of *The Anathemata*.

Brian Keeble

(Note: *The Long Conversation* was originally published by Oxford University Press in 1981. It is now solely distributed by Anson-Cartwright Editions, 229 College Street, Toronto, M5T 1R4, as is *Inner Necessities*. In U.K. from Bertram Rota, 30 Long Acre, London, WC2E 9LT.)

**Guides and Fellow- Travellers**


Insel Verlag, Frankfurt am Main.


The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture publications; by the Pegasus Foundation, Dallas, Texas.

These three names – Eranos, l'Université Saint Jean de Jérusalem, and the Dallas Institute for Humanities and Culture – here listed in order of seniority – stand for three seminal groups, or, in the ancient sense of the word, 'schools', each representing and promoting some aspect of what we regard as the most significant movement of thought in this century, the rediscovery and reaffirmation of the spiritual 'ground'. Yeats named this movement as 'the rise of soul against intellect, now beginning in the world' – intellect being here used in the sense of that positivist rationalism which all these are in various ways challenging. Coleridge wrote of 'facts of mind' as distinct from those 'facts' of external nature which have so long laid claim to the title of 'reality' as such, of which mind is the passive mirror and spectator according to the maxim that nothing is in the mind but what comes through the senses. Yeats (to quote once more one of the supreme minds who challenged this view) wrote that man has become passive before a mechanized nature; and it is already plain that the most significant thought of this century has been, and is, engaged in the rediscovery and reaffirmation of mind, or spirit, psyche, Imagination as an active principle (or the active principle) in the unus mundus torn apart by the externalization and quantification of nature, once deemed animate with the 'soul of the world'. The tide has now turned, and science itself is alive to the implications of these changes.
The Eranos conferences, which have taken place annually since 1933, were associated at the outset with, above all C. G. Jung and his circle, although in fact they were never so limited, and the names of Henry Corbin, Adolf Portmann (whose transforming ideas of instinct and other formative psychic patterns in nature deeply influenced Jung), Rudolf Otto, the religious historian and Olgo Froebel, active in the foundation, without whom Eranos would never have existed, Gershom Scholem the profound scholar of Jewish mysticism, Van der Leeuw (a pillar for ten years), Quispel the Gnostic scholar, Mircea Eliade and Carl Kerenyi were early members of the circle; whose wider purpose has been the study of whatever is related to the role of ‘spirit’. This area has included, on the one hand, studies of traditional cultures and ancient mythologies, and on the other the speculative and experimental psychology of Jung himself, and more recently the American school of ‘archetypal psychology’, represented by James Hillman and David Miller. There may well have been differences from the outset, as between Corbin and Jung on the transcendent source of the ‘imaginal’ order of psyche. On this issue Jung remained reticent, not to say evasive, until near the end of his life, with consequent wide differences among his successors, the Analytical Psychologists. This remains an issue with the followers of the Hillman sect of ‘Archetypal Psychology’, who, while paying tribute to Corbin’s great work on the ‘imaginal’ order as expressed in the works of the Islamic mystics, and claiming to be his followers, likewise evade the issue of transcendence. The ‘new polytheism’ seems, for all its laudable intent to affirm the place of psyche in the face of materialism on the one hand and conceptual thought on the other, in danger of making psyche in its turn a closed order in a way similar to the science of the eighteenth century which did the same for the world of matter.

Nevertheless it is one of the virtues of the Eranos circle that it has from the outset maintained itself as a group in which a variety of views have been presented, all at the highest level, and dogmatism discouraged. Exchanges between minds of such quality are fruitful and nourish development – as perhaps we see in Hillman himself, whose mind is by no means closed. Doubtless with the deaths of many of the original circle – most recently Gershom Scholem and Adolf Portmann, who with Rudolf Ritske long continued to plan the themes and attendance of the Eranos gatherings – Eranos has passed its zenith. Yet in recent years also there have continued to be outstanding names – above all, Gilbert Durand, friend of Corbin and formerly student at the Sorbonne of Gaston Bachelard, and Toshihiko Izutsu. Not only has the diversity of standpoint been maintained, but – and this is more important – there has been a continuing dialogue, a deepening of ideas, growth, modification rather than the retrenchment into dogmatism that comes always with the founding of sects and societies with defined programmes and positions.
The kind of themes set for discussion are always helpful in making possible this variety of approach. Thus, the theme for the 1981 Jahrbuch, 'Rise and Descent', includes Jean Brun (Paris) on 'Le Sommet et l'Abîme', a fine exercise in the classical French style; Daryush Shayegan (former colleague of Henry Corbin in Tehran) 'De la pré-éternité à la post-éternité le cycle de l'être; James Hillman on 'The Imagination of Air or the Collapse of Alchemy' — fine aerobatics after the manner of Gaston Bachelard's 'L'air et les Songes'; Dominique Zahan on Tower and Lightning according to certain African myths and beliefs; Morton Smith (New York) on 'The Ascent to the Heavens and the beginning of Christianity' and much besides. The theme for 1983 itself derives from Henry Corbin, 'Material and Imaginal bodies', and ranges, again, from Michel Hulin (Indianologist) on 'Corps de transmigration et corps de résurrection'; Hayao Kawai on 'Bodies in the dream-diary of Myoe', a Japanese Buddhist monk of the 12th century, and a paper on St Paul's familiar and obscure words on the natural and the spiritual body by Morton Smith of New York. Of the 1982 Jahrbuch, on the theme of 'The Play of Gods and Men' the range is no less wide; from James Hillman on animals in dream, to Toshihiko Izutsu on Chinese Shamanic 'journeys' and Gilbert Durand on 'Le Génie du Lieu et les Heures Propices'. The range and imaginative scope of the Eranos Jahrbucher would have astonished scholars of earlier times and must surely deserve the respect of the future. The freeing of the imagination is their constant theme.

I regret that difficulty in reading German prevents me from commenting on the German contributions, which make up more than a third of the contents; for this meeting of cultures is seminal for all. Indeed the world of ideas is now international. Eranos has not only set a pattern and a standard followed by the two other groups here discussed, but is the interface where these – and others no less notable – have made contact. From the outset Eranos was associated with the Bollingen Foundation, that prestigious series of publications and research projects sponsored by Paul Mellon, at a time when he was grateful for the part played by C. G. Jung in his own life. Professor Izutsu and Henry Corbin were, with Dr S. H. Nasr, Directors of the illustrious but short-lived Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy in Tehran with which Dr Shayegan, another Eranos speaker, and Herman Landolt were also associated. Dr Nasr, who might quarrel with the psychologists, has close links with the Traditional school of Guénon, Frithjof Schuon and Marco Pallis and has, since the fall of Tehran to the Shi'ite extremists, established an Institute of Traditional Studies in Washington D.C. James Hillman, on the other hand, is the moving spirit of the Dallas Institute, closely associated with the psychology journal Spring and the related Spring Publications on archetypal psychology. Thus are the threads interwoven in a living and worldwide network, which includes Temenos itself, representing as we do in England that 'rise of soul against intellect' at a time of the last gasp of secular materialism in this country. So also does Keith...
Critchlow's Kairos, a school for the study of sacred number, geometry and architecture, itself in succession to the Research into Lost Knowledge Organization (Rilko). We might add other names—the Lindisfarne Association and the names of William Irwin Thompson and Christopher Bamford, and even the newly-formed ‘Kali Yuga Society’ founded in Australia by James Cowan, a follower of Guénon’s Traditional school and a friend of Temenos.

I have written at length of this network through which a culture is diffused as a living example of the way in which the world has at all times been changed and directed by minorities possessed by some seminal idea. Happy are those who have felt the pulse of such a living network circulating through our most hidden thoughts.

L’Université Saint Jean de Jérusalem, founded in 1974 by Henry Corbin, is organized on a more modest scale than Eranos but its contributors are no less distinguished. It is essentially a French group (all papers are in French) consisting of Corbin’s friends and former students. Gilbert Durand and Jean Brun are also of Eranos, of which it can be seen as a daughter group. The main difference is that the emphasis of the Université (a centre of conferences on spiritual research) is on the Imaginal world seen in the context of sacred tradition. There are no psychologists among its speakers. Thus the points of difference between Corbin and Jung become clear. As between Jung and Corbin the common ground is an understanding of the vital importance of the mundus imaginalis, the world of images, psyche, so long disregarded. Corbin has (as in an important review to Answer to Job) defended Jung against those who would speak of ‘only’ psyche, asking what such reductionists can have done with their own souls. He has gone further: a warm letter of support from Corbin is published in David Miller’s The New Polytheism (1981) in which he writes of the necessity of freeing the world of the soul from what he sees as an idolatrous monotheism. Thus Corbin fully understood the immense importance of the field under investigation, while clearly defining his own view that these forms are revelatory to, and not merely, of, psyche. He writes:

I believe that our guide par excellence on this road remains the great and so long misunderstood Proclus. His work speaks of the henad or henads, and the henads monadizing the monads are on a level with Ibn ‘Arabi’s cosmology of Divine Names. The theophanic and cosmogonic function of the twelve great gods in Proclus, the twelve Imams in Shi‘ite neo-platonism, the ten Sephiroth in the Kabbala—it is the One (l’Unique) himself who attests to these multiplicities of ones (uniques). Compare also the hypercosmic and intercosmic gods and the Dii-Angeli of Proclus. . . . I believe our researches open the way, of necessity, to Angelology (that of a Proclus, that of Kabbala) which will be reborn with increasing potency.
For Jung, all must be discovered anew; for Corbin, the mundus imaginalis must be seen within a traditional theology (or metaphysics). But this view does not place Corbin with the Traditional school of Guénon, Schuon and others, who see Tradition in terms of doctrinal orthodoxy and for whom the mundus imaginalis — the world of psyche — is a blind spot. Both Jung (in his origins) and Corbin in lifelong practice were Protestants; in the sense in which Protestantism was (and remains in some respects) an affirmation that the final authority is not a body of doctrine but the 'god within'. The Cahiers of the annual conferences of the Université are, as with Eranos, devoted to some chosen theme, very much those of Corbin himself — 'Sciences Traditionnelles et Sciences Profanes'; 'Jérusalem la Cité Spirituelle'; 'La Foi Prophétique et la Sacré'; 'Les Pèlerins de l'Orient et les Vagabondes de l'Occident'; 'Les Yeux de Chair et les Yeux de Feu' are the titles of the first five conferences; Corbin himself took part in the first four. No. 8 'Le Désert et la Queste' contains contributions by the faithful group — Gilbert Durand, Jean Brun, from Eranos, Jean-Louis Vieillard Baron, Armand Abécassis and the brilliant former student of Corbin, Christian Jambet, among the newcomers. Richard Stauffer, Protestant theologian and friend of Henry and Stella Corbin, himself died in 1983. The three-day annual conference in the plain assembly-hall of a convent school in the rue Notre Dame des Champs (with the same hole in the green baize cloth, the quiet sense of unbroken history under the trees of the convent garden) is for those present a rare participation in 'things new and old', in theme universal and timeless, and illuminated by the spirit of Henry Corbin and Mme Corbin who is now the President of this small but radiant University of the spirit.

It should further be said that besides the annual Cahiers, the related series of publications (Berg International) publishes, in the beautiful volumes of the Collection l'Ile Verte (edited by Gilbert Durand) important works by associates of the Université. Like so many excellent things, these are not subsidized by some millionaire but the fruits of the devotion of Georges Nataf, who in his single studio room in the Boulevard Saint-Michel is his own editor, typist and postman. So many of the best things are done in one room with a table and chair, with or without a typewriter.

The Dallas Institute itself started that way, in an old 'frame' house on the outskirts of that city of unlimited money. The Dallas Institute too is a swarm from the Eranos hive, whose moving spirit was James Hillman. In contrast with Paris, the emphasis in Dallas is psychological rather than metaphysical, but also practical and moral. The Institute was founded by a group who together resigned from the small Catholic University of Dallas in order to carry on work first projected from that University, under the Presidency of the scientist Donald Cowan; whose wife, Louise Cowan, was Director of the English Department. On their retirement from the University Donald and
Louise Cowan, with James Hillman and Robert Sardello (now, with Gale Thomas, director of the Institute) set about the heroic task of making the brash, naive, but in many ways open-hearted city of Dallas aware of that other City of which Plato and Aristophanes, St John and St Augustine, Blake and the rest, have written. Appealing at once to civic pride and civic conscience, harnessed to the individual dreams of its citizens (held up to them in the mirror of James Hillman’s eloquence), the dialogue is certainly in progress, and has even had important practical results in the area of town-planning; what it means to plan a town is something Dallas is prepared to think about. Unlike Eranos and the U.S.J. the main work of Dallas is directed towards the citizens of that city, a task rather of communication than of research; whose moving spirit of lodge patriotism is the co-director Carl Thomas. Robert Sardello’s witty, brilliant and trenchant analysis of such immediate issues as Money, Education, ‘City as Metaphor, City as Mystery’, ‘A Cultural Psychology of the Computer’, supported by the hope, dedication and hard work of the whole group (weekly courses, annual conferences and much besides) the Institute has made itself a force for good in this new city seeking an identity and a purpose. Or rather, the Institute has succeeded in interesting Dallas in the novel notion that they might have such an identity and purpose. The humour of the town-planner H. Holly Whyte, the frontal attacks of crude but effective figures like the urban sociologist Ivan Illich have proved immensely effective. James Hillman had already brought with him the Psychological journal Spring, with by now an impressive series of books under that imprint; and now from the same frame house the Institute has embarked on its own series of publications, fruits of work in progress by members of the group working in close cooperation (unlike in this respect the Eranos and Saint Jean de Jérusalem scholars, who in general work independently). In their immediate confrontation with the actualities of the community of which they are members, the Dallas Institute is probably closer to Plato than most Platonists. ‘Money and the Soul of the World’ by Robert J. Sardello and Randolph Severson wittily, radically, and frontally challenges the quantitative concept of money and reveals other possibilities of money as the energy-flow of the imaginative life of the polis. Tom Moore writes of Rituals of the Imagination, developing the theme of the ‘personal myth’ by which each might live; a typical product of the way in which American individualism approaches even so collective a theme as myth, but it is precisely in its newness and ‘nowness’ that the Dallas group’s vitality lies. Whatever they may lack in sense of history, they have the virtue of courageous confrontation of an immediate problem, not in purely practical but above all in imaginative terms; something very valuable. Eileen Gregory writes a descant on the myth of Prometheus, pointing to the positive side of this ambiguous benefactor of man, whose gifts were fire, techne, and ‘blind hope’. Hope she defines as ‘simply a keen steadiness of spirit, operating within the ordinary moment, the more or less
shabby event, continuously to open the horizon, or to preserve us from final self-abandonment when the horizon seems unalterably closed. Techné divorced from hope or desire becomes mere 'thing-making'. These are sane and sensible thoughts which people of any technological city can understand. And Dallas listens, as they might not listen to a course on Platonic philosophy or Augustinian theology.

Meanwhile Joanne Stroud and Robert Dupree are engaged in translating the works of Gaston Bachelard; Water and Dreams is the first of the series to appear. Louise Cowan's The Terrain of Comedy is an excellent collection of papers by former students and colleagues, outstanding in its humane wisdom and good sense. Her definition of the terrain of Comedy as 'the realm of faith, hope and love in a fallen world; endurance, regeneration - the community within the city' is, in both senses of the word, Catholic in outlook. She herself contributes a paper on 'Aristophanes' Comic Apocalypse', seeing in those bawdy and delectable comedies a brightening in the sky of the dawn of the later Christian vision of the City 'coming down from heaven'. Not all contributions are of equal value but an excellent paper on 'Faulkner's bachelors and Fertility' in the Snopes Trilogy by Mary K. Mumbach is, again, like letting clean daylight into the murky academic closed world where great humane books are sacrificed to some fatuous -ism of the moment. Has Louise Cowan set a new standard, reversing the ever-downward trend of popular reductionism, in reminding us that 'faith, hope and love in a fallen world' are not for an elite! They can be practised and understood by the citizens of Dallas or any other city, in any time or place. All these 'golden builders' of Dallas are dedicated to the 'life of the imagination' at all levels and aspects of life public and private. Dallas of all places!

Kathleen Raine

Magic Mirrors and Grass Roots

Wakeful in the Sleep of Time. Brian Merrikin Hill. 70 pp. Taxus. £5.50.

Jeremy Reed is without question the most imaginatively gifted poet since Dylan Thomas. His linguistic virtuosity, his range, his familiarity with the poetic inheritance of English, and also French and Italian literature is exceptional in his generation (he is just into his thirties). From childhood he has, seemingly quite effortlessly, composed poems almost daily, and does not expect more than a fraction of these writings ever to be published. He does
not so much compose as (so he puts it) ‘secretes’ poems. He has but to attune himself to some invisible source and the poems come to him. He has been called ‘a young shaman’ and the comparison is a just one. The presence of such a poet is an awesome reminder that the gift of inspiration (whatever that may entail) is a reality which no discussion by literary critics can afford to ignore.

How easy to write poetry ‘from inspiration’! How fortunate is such a poet! – so the aspiring uninspired might think. They would be wrong: to be in the possession of (or possessed by) such transpersonal energies (once called the gods but now anonymous or worse) is a heavy burden to bear. ‘Every angel is terrible’ as Rilke wrote; a poet whom Jeremy Reed holds in the highest regard. He is writing a book on the theme of poets under threat of insanity, destroyed by their gift or almost – Christopher Smart, John Clare, Hölderlin, Rilke, Hart Crane and others – remarkable for its insights into the shamanic predicament, the price the poor mortal individual has to pay for his daimonic election. (His chapter on Gerard Manley Hopkins appears in this issue of Temenos.) The poet ‘becomes what he beholds’: the phrase is Blake’s and describes not only a gift but an anguish, even a peril of the poetic imagination.

His is the gift of Keats’s ‘negative capability’; a gift not of observation (though from the minuteness of Jeremy’s descriptions we might see it as such) but of empathy. Like Keats watching the sparrow picking about in the gravel Jeremy Reed does not so much watch, as become whatever it may be – a spider, a violet, a dying gull, a fish or worm or water-vole or burying-beetle; (he has an especial fondness for the little nameless creatures who survive on the fringes of nature). Some have seen him as another ‘nature-poet’ in the genre of Ted Hughes, but this is a misconception: where Hughes observes, or projects into animals or fish moods on his own, Jeremy Reed is rather hypnotized, dissolved into, sometimes almost paralysed by his identification with dead weasels or wounded gull or the terrible teeth of the conger. At times this may be a delight, as the poet takes refuge in the ‘hermetic violet / its white spur opening to meet the shower’. Always there is beauty; the dead weasels

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{their long slender bodies hung vertical,} \\
\text{the fur a straggling ripple on the bone} \\
\text{was like a current chased out of a stream,} \\
\text{the forepaws stylized were two brittle hands} \\
\text{raised in supplication . . .}
\end{align*}
\]

– or ‘the quality of under-water light’ under the chestnut-trees in autumn; a Samuel Palmer touch. The poet experiences the world in an absolute sense as might a spirit native of some far star enjoying, or enduring the often traumatic impact of what he experiences, fallen into this world trailing not clouds of glory but those darker clouds of the deadly fall-out that envelope this world.
Unlike that other 'nature-poet' Peter Redgrove, for whom nature is rather a force than a form, Nature is for Jeremy Reed what the senses perceive. To read Peter Redgrove is to have all the doors and windows blown open while the four elements (water especially) pour through with the impact of a fire-hose turned full on. This is a refreshing and cleansing experience, even a sacred lustration, of sorts. Jeremy Reed's 'nature' is rather a still image in a magic mirror, a passive surface that reflects marvels.

According to the Neoplatonists the soul is indeed a mirror which reflects whatever it is turned towards, the lower depths or the higher worlds. To ensure the purity of that vision was the purpose of the 'thaumaturgy' practised by Plotinus, Porphyry and their successors. In 'the reign of quantity' only phenomena are regarded and of these all are equal: there is no hierarchy of values, no degrees of reality. Few poets of Jeremy Reed's generation have escaped from the prevalence of this way of experiencing the world. Yet empathy can imply sympathy. Jeremy Reed's empathy with the poets and others of whom he has written either in prose or verse (Christopher Smart and Dorothy Wordsworth among these latter) does involve sympathy, even compassion. In the present collection a sequence on 'Baudelaire's Paris', is a technical tour-de-force in which the obsessive world of le poète maudit is rather seen than felt. More human I found a group of poems which both in theme and verse reflect the poet's close reading of Dante. The shades in this modern hell are those Jeremy Reed has elsewhere called 'the night-lost'; 'Kleptomania', 'Heirloom', the 'Regular' who

... faced the bar like someone who had won
The right to be recognized, but ignored,
an oxygen plant drinking all the air
so that the others laboured breathlessly

... You were a dog
begging acceptance, swallowing your bark,
following an invisible keeper
out of the swing-doors into the pitch dark.

Beautiful among the shades is 'A Girl in Summer', her hair dyed marigold, who

... resurfaced
in the foggy interior of a bar
your eyelids like the pink of a dicentra's
heart-shaped locket-flower, your eyeballs stars
that flashed like rain-drops on a trembling leaf.

Jeremy Reed does not explore the hells for literary effect. His lower depths have that reality which made Dante faint with grief in his encounter with
Francesca and wrung from him the cry, meeting there his old master Brunetto Latini, 'What, are you here?' Imagination harrows the deepest hells.

'Nero', the title-poem, and several ‘versions’ raised from ‘the decent obscurity of a learned language’ of Horace and Catullus will be popular for the wrong reasons. Violence, and its accompaniment obscenity, is the stock-in-trade of journalists who play on sensation, trying to impress the man-in-the-street with an enhanced ‘reality’. Yet these things are more properly seen as the term of the nihil and the absence of reality rather than ‘things as they really are’. ‘Corruption and decadence in human affairs, the stark beauty of the natural world’ as the dust-jacket announces to attract readers accustomed to a coarser fare than the poetry of this inspired poet. Certainly Jeremy Reed is a child of his (and our) apocalyptic time in which the falconer is out of hearing; but is it not precisely the task of the poet to listen for his sound?

I believe that Jeremy Reed could become much more than a child of his time. The present collection, like the previous one, By the Fisheries, is a publisher’s selection of certain types of poems calculated to be popular with a public accustomed to cruder work. Only a few poems, like ‘The Music of Blue’ reveal other aspects of the poet’s vision, the redemptive light of Dante’s paradises rather than of his lurid hells. Only a part of this poem is published; the whole poem is printed on p. 219; (it is as if Shelley’s publisher had decided that ‘The Witch of Atlas’ or the ‘Ode to a Skylark’ exceeded the attention-span of the average reader!) We consider this one of the finest poems Jeremy Reed has written. With his ambiguous gift of ‘negative capability’ will this poet progress, as did Dante, from the hells where people are shades, to the purgatories where they are journeying souls, or from the purgatories to the paradisal vision, the poet’s native country? Was it not Dante’s greatness that he saw the whole in its true proportion?

It must be said that the human element is sadly lacking or defective among contemporary English poets. One has but to cross the channel to find in France a very different set of values and a nobler poetry – that of Bonnefoy or Celan or of Jean Mambrino, to mention only three published in Temenos. To our shame, we must admit that the same would be true were we to cross the Atlantic – Robert Duncan and Wendell Berry – or for that matter the Irish Sea. In the reductionist climate of contemporary England the human has been lost in the sub-human – Ted Hughes’s Crow is typical. Even for Peter Redgrove the divine energy is perceived as such almost only as it is manifested in the macrocosm. David Gascoyne is almost alone in his affirmation of the sacred dignity of man. This is the element I find lacking in Jeremy Reed’s two Cape volumes. As I have indicated, he has written poems like ‘Hospital Ward’ or ‘The Guardians’ and others we have published which suggest that he could develop another range of possibilities implicit in his gift of empathy. The missing element in his work (possessed by David Gascoyne, and by David Jones) is a vision of the innate nobility of man, of Plato’s and Blake’s ‘true
man' from whose divine image we have, as the theologians say, 'fallen'. The monstrous is no more the human norm than is the commonplace and the average; which sacred norm consigns the monstrous to the kingdom of unreality.

Brian Merrikin Hill possesses just those qualities Jeremy Reed, in common with most of his generation, lacks, above all the element of human wisdom so evident in the work of Eliot, in whose succession he must be placed. Like David Gascoyne, this poet stands close to the French tradition and is the translator of Saint-Pol Roux, of Pierre Emmanuel and other French poets. He is one of the few who maintain a link with our great European inheritance, so dangerously disregarded by the contemporary literary world in this country. About half the poems in Wakeful in the Sleep of Time are addressed to that Refuge of Sinners, the Virgin Mary or to that other Mary, the Magdalene. Their churches may be derelict in some modern inner city area or deserted in the countryside, but the heart must still pray to woman's healing love. The human infuses all Brian Merrikin Hill's landscapes, whereas for Jeremy Reed 'nature' is often an escape from the intolerable human world. For Brian Merrikin Hill holy wells and ruined chapels, old tracks across the fells (Local History is poetry of this topographical kind) are a commemoration, a consecration, traces of a continuous human experience of the earth we inhabit. In his wisdom and maturity, as also in his love of mountains and large landscapes, Brian Merrikin Hill recalls such poets as Michael Roberts, who have in every generation upheld certain values not of unique inspiration, but of common humanity, ancestral and hallowed by time. He is a poet who deserves respect.

Kathleen Raine

Things Reborn


Translation of poetry is not, as some say, impossible except in so far as the writing of a poem that fully satisfies author and reader is impossible – but like original composition it is possible only by inspiration. This does not deny the painstaking labour of translation: it illuminates it. The labour is the exhausting waiting upon the Goddess, so that the inspiring breath blows on a mind ready for incandescence. In any comparison of translations from the same original
one will find that in some places in each the incandescence is present and it
would be unkind to specify invidiously whose prayers were here or there
more assiduous and fruitful. It is a great advantage to have Anthony Rudolf
and Richard Pevear translating Bonnefoy and joining John T. Naughton,
whose own translations and interpretations were praised in Temenos 6. Richard
Pevear gives us the whole of Pierre écrite and Dans le leurre du seuil in a bilingual
edition, followed by a notable essay by Jean Starobinski entitled Poetry Between
Two Worlds. The reader with some knowledge can thus check Pevear with his
own intuitions—though the translator provides the assiduity of devotion
to prepare the ground for him. Anthony Rudolf’s Things Dying Things Newborn
(still between two worlds like the seminal Winter’s Tale) ranges more widely,
containing forty pages of Douve, seventeen of Hier Régnant désert, sixteen of Pierre
écrite and one section of Dans le leurre du seuil. It also has an introduction which is
original but has benefited from association with John T. Naughton. Both
books are therefore invaluable to the English reader; with Naughton’s book
they form an excellent apparatus for appreciating Bonnefoy, whose import-
ance is undoubted and whose influence and conception of his art are greatly
needed in Britain.

Anthony Rudolf has considerably revised some of the translations pub-
lished earlier—but this has not been a dull but enlightened and enlightening
process. Rudolf has the knocking

On the door, sealed,
On the sentence, empty.
In iron, waking only
These words, iron.

for Pevear’s

At the sealed door,
At the empty phrase.
In iron, awakening
Only the word, iron.

But later on Pevear has

In speech, blackness

for Rudolf’s

In language, dark.

Similarly Rudolf’s

The lights are clouding in the sleeper’s waters
seems to me better than

In the waters of the sleeper the lights are dim
though Pevear's

And all the roads of the sky grew dark
Over this shipwrecked song, over our obscure way

is, though less meticulously lexical, better than

All the roads of the starlit sky casting shadow
Over this shipwrecked song and our dark way.

(I prefer 'dark' to 'obscure', though.)

This game is not the invidiousness I forbore; it is an indication of the incandescent assiduity of both translators and the process of it shows how deep and remarkable a poet Bonnefoy is. In both books the reader does find himself meeting with things dying and things newborn and should be grateful for both, since, as Rudolf says, 'We shall not hesitate to speak of this voice as one which names our time and our place to themselves, which speaks a hope to those who will listen.'

Let a place be made for the one who draws near,
The one who is cold, deprived of any home,

Tempted by the sound of a lamp, by the lit
Threshold of a solitary house.

If he is overcome by anguish and fatigue
Say again for him those words that heal.

What does this heart need which once was silence
If not those words which are both sign and prayer,

Like a fire caught sight of in the sudden night,
Like the table glimpsed in a poor house?

(tr. Rudolf.)

Brian Merrikin Hill
Tributes to Eliot

Agenda. Vol. 23. Nos 1–2. T. S. Eliot Special Issue. Published from 5, Cranbourne Court, Albert Bridge Road, London SW11 4PE. pp. 194. £5.00.


A dozen tributes to Eliot from modern poets are preceded by a previously unprinted address given by Eliot himself to a French audience in 1952. Mallarmé and Valéry, both poets of importance to Eliot, appear as figures in a debate on the relations of a poet’s philosophical beliefs to his poetry. When it is achieved, his poem may surprise the poet; only in composing does he find the word which is ‘right’ or more frequently learn to reject the word which is wrong. In ‘The Dry Salvages’, looking for a word for the twilight before dawn, he found only ‘antelucan’, which he rejected as too ornate, settling for ‘waning dusk’. Eliot dismisses authors who make use of verse, ‘exploiting its resources for purposes of exposition or persuasion’.

Homage ranges from notes and queries about lilacs to the large structures of Eliot’s lyric (Heath-Stubbs and Massey). C. H. Sisson prefers the poet of The Waste Land, who so decisively changed the course for other poets. Studies of the plays include Jonathan Barker’s placing of Sweeney Agonistes as antitype of The Hollow Men and Peter Levi on the ‘drab’ last plays. The presupposition throughout is Eliot’s mastery of his craft, illustrated by Peter Dale from the terza rima of ‘Little Gidding’.

Another thread is represented by the moving personal evocation of friendship by Joseph Chiari, and E. W. F. Tomlin’s ‘Expostulation by way of a Memoir’ (with spirited support from Daniel Massey and Roger Sharrock) on the recent fiction-faction of Michael Hasting’s play Tom and Viv, and in a lesser degree, Peter Ackroyd’s biography (faction is applied to this in a review in The London Review of Books). Tomlin writes out of deep personal friendship to rebut by what might be termed in a court ‘evidence from character’ the treatment of Eliot’s first marriage (which F. T. Prince dismisses more briefly as ‘prurient interest’). Some allegations have been dealt with by Mrs Valerie Eliot, L. C. Knights and Helen Gardner; Tomlin nails a few more. I will offer one final nail; it is implied that Eliot gratified social ambitions by marrying into the Irish gentry. There is one simple test for this, jealously maintained in Ireland to this day: appearance in Burke (otherwise known as The Stud Book). The Haigh-Woods do not qualify; their gentry is as much a myth as their fortune.

Hasting’s play is an example of the desecration fashionable against the dead, their principles being attacked through their achievements, and imputed secret shames. Graffiti appearing on academic walls this summer have included ‘Vandalism lives’ and ‘Theatre of Hatred’. In this mood, Captain Scott is revealed as self-regarding and incompetent, Winston Churchill as
practising assassination (Hastings uses much of Hochhuth's technique). Recently the dramatic critic of The Observer, interviewed in Words and asked if he thought Eliot 'fair game' replied 'I thought it absolutely fair game' though 'admittedly Hastings's play is a piece of speculative biography. He went into areas that the facts couldn't prove'. Eliot, who thought the truth of poetry more inclusive than the truth of philosophic concepts, is exploited for 'opinion' by what are termed 'strategies'.

Among other contributors to Agenda, Heather Buck dwells on the union of mystery and commonplace within the sacral, Kathleen Raine on Ash Wednesday, where the feminine principle of love and compassion is receding, yet in her departure shines out as 'the divine figure - rather its absence'; for the poem was 'written at a moment when the secular was about to obliterate from modern experience the old vision of human love as something holy, sacramental'.

Finally, in a psychologically directed encounter with Ackroyd, Derek Stanford and Julie Whitby enlarge points to be met in Eliot's own lecture, on the progress of historic episode into tragedy, finally into a musical unity, a new creation which like the poems of Mallarmé, distills experience into a Quintessence.

The Southern Review celebrates its fiftieth year with a large issue of 300 pages on T. S. Eliot, but dedicated to Cleanth Brooks, one of the original group of Southern New critics, on his seventy-ninth birthday. He himself writes on Eliot and the South; Austin Warren and Harry Levin also contribute from the older generation; Brand Blenshard describes Eliot's year at Oxford (1914–1915), Peter du Sautoy and Janet Adam Smith later years; Valerie Eliot offers a group of photographs of the happy unbuttoned Eliot, his neat pinstripe suit put on casually, that is an eloquent witness to his transformation by his second marriage. The solid contributions on Eliot's poetry and his philosophic stance end with a symposium of poets' views, which displays the amplitude of Eliot's achievement. No single image emerges, no easy formula; Eliot appears here as a force in other lives, which is how a poet lives, in the tradition that transcends the individual talent.

M. C. Bradbrook
Notes on Contributors

John Allitt is a Senior Lecturer at Camberwell School of Art and Crafts, working with the ILEA Art and Design Inspectorate. His books are: Donizetti and the tradition of Romantic Love (1975), Piero Broils; le Medaglie (1980), Sixteenth Century Venetian Painting (1983). In 1980, President Pettini of Italy conferred on him the Order of Cavaliere 'Al Merito della Repubblica'. He is at present occupied in reviving unknown works of Meyr and Donizetti, in partnership with Ian Caddy as soloist; and has created a Meyr-Donizetti Foundation for encouraging the revival of both composers' music, especially their sacred works.

Michael Armstrong. Born in Northumberland, he has lived in Jersey, Channel Islands since 1957. Nephew of poet and novelist Martin Armstrong. Poet, painter and publisher; for a time in the 1970's he ran a small press dedicated to publishing promising young poets. Poems have been published in various literary magazines in Britain and U.S.A. Composer William Alwyn and Madeleine Dring have written settings to his poems and recently an L.P. of seven poems, 'Invocations' for soprano and piano (music by William Alwyn) was issued by Chandos Records.

Colin Beard is a photographer and has worked in collaboration with James Cowan. Born in North Yorkshire, and living in Australia for the last 25 years, he has contributed to many books, magazines and exhibitions. He is currently lecturer in photography at the Sydney College of the Arts. Also, working on a new book on 'The Yorkshire Dales: Heritage & Tradition'.

Carmen Blacker is Reader in Japanese at Cambridge University and the author of The Catalpa Bow, a study of shamanistic practices in Japan, and other writings on Japanese religions and folk-lore. She has travelled widely in Japan, visiting shrines and temples and places of pilgrimage.

Muriel Bradbrook, Professor of English and former Mistress of Girton College, Cambridge, author of many books on Shakespeare and Elizabethan drama, on Ibsen, T. S. Eliot and Malcolm Lowry. Her most recent books (vols II and III of her Collected Papers) are Women in Literature and Aspects of Dramatic Form in the English and Irish Renaissance.

John Carey has studied mythology and Celtic literature at Harvard University and the Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies; he lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.
Arthur Cooper served in the Foreign Office from 1938 to 1968, then returning to a special interest in Chinese poetry and script. Published Li Po and Tu Fu (Penguin Classics) in 1973 and a monograph on The Creation of the Chinese Script (China Society) in 1978; both reprinted 1985. Has contributed to forthcoming Oxford Companion to the Mind and is now completing for OUP 'Heart and Mind': Ancient Language-Making as recorded in the Chinese Script; showing how similar were the beginnings of all human language, often by comparing English etymologies with ancient Chinese characters depicting them.

James Cowan, novelist and short story writer living in Australia. Among his more recent books are The Mountain Men (1982), The River People (1983) and Starlight's Trail (1985). A new work This Earth My Mother explores the metaphysics of landscape and a Dream journey among Australian Aborigines. At present he is working on a new book of short stories, Visionary Tales.

Sheila Dahr, one of India's most distinguished singers. Musician and musicologist.

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, and was actively engaged in the French Resistance movement. Elected to the Académie Française in 1969, he resigned some years later as a point of principle. Author of many books of verse and prose, including a distinguished autobiography (1970) which first appeared in two volumes, Qui est cette Homme, and L'Ouvrier de la Onzième Heure; active in the PEN Club, regular contributor to the Journal France Catholique. His Livre de L'Homme et de la Femme (in three volumes, Una, Duel and l'Autre) explores both carnal and spiritual dimensions of that relationship; and his last poem Le Grand Œuvre was completed shortly before his death in 1984.


Lorraine Gill is a Fellow of the International Biographical Association. Born in Australia of Scottish Munro clan, and aboriginal descent. Painter, etcher, lecturer, she has exhibited one-woman shows in Australia and England. At present completing a series of etchings and paintings based on impressions gained from a two-year stay in the outback of Australia, learning with aboriginal friends.
Brian Merrikin Hill, a former headmaster, is now engaged in writing and translating Pierre Emmanuel and Saint-Pol Roux. His own poems have appeared in reviews since 1942. Recent publications are Wakeful in the Sleep of Time (Taxus Press 1984), Local History, poems, (Littlewood Press 1985), and The European Letters will come from Taxus Press in March 1986. He edits Pennine Platform, a poetry review now in its twelfth year. The Mammon Press will be publishing a collection of translations of Saint-Pol Roux in 1986.


Jean Mambrino, French poet and critic; has translated much English poetry, including Donne, Herbert, Hopkins, de la Mare, David Jones, David Gascoyne and Kathleen Raine. He writes regularly on literature, film and theatre for Etudes. His volume of poetry l'Oiseau-Coeur was awarded the Prix Apollinaire for 1980 and his translation of Hopkins the Prix de Meilleur Livre Etranger (shared with Pierre Leyris) in 1981. Glade (English translation by Jonathan Griffin) is published by the Enitharmon Press (1986). L'Or Intérieur (The Interior Gold) was published bilingually by the Menard Press in 1979. His published works in French are: Le Veilleur Aveugle (Mercure de France) 1965; Le Ligne du Feu (Éditeurs français réunis) 1974; Clairière (Desclee de Brouwer) 1974; (out of print) L'Oiseau-Coeur, preceded by Sainte-Lumière and Clairière (Stock) 1979; Ainsi ruse la Mystère (Corti) 1983; Le Mot de Passe (Granit) 1983; Le Chant Profond (Criticism) (Corti) 1985. La Poesie Mystique Française (Seghers) 1973 (Anthology).
Bertrand Mathieu has taught American literature in the United States, France, Germany, Greece, the People's Republic of China and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. His published works include Orpheus in Brooklyn (1976) on Rimbaud and Henry Miller; a book of verse, Landscape with Voices (1965) and he has translated Rimbaud’s Saison en Enfer (A Season in Hell, 1974, Pomegranate Press, Boston, Mass, preface by Anais Nin and etchings by Jim Dine) and Illuminations (1979, BOA editions, Brockport, New York, with preface and lithograph by Henry Miller.) He lives in France, in Rimbaud's native Charleville, where he is working on a novel and other writings.

John Michell is author of some fifteen books, mostly on aspects of ancient science and philosophy and their relevance today. Most recently published is his Eccentric Lives & Peculiar Notions, on the careers of some favourite madcap thinkers. Forthcoming is The Dimensions of Paradise (Thames & Hudson), his work on the number code behind traditional cosmology which was the subject of his earlier City of Revelation.

David Mitchell is an American scholar who would like to form a loose network of English-speaking readers who are interested in the activities of l'Université St Jean de Jerusalem (an association of scholars founded by Henry Corbin), and in expediting the translation and dissemination of Corbin’s remaining works in English.

Liam Miller studied architecture before deciding to establish the Dolmen Press in 1951, which has published over 300 books, principally Irish poetry and drama and historical and critical works relating to Ireland. He has worked in the theatre as a producer and designer, has designed several Abbey Theatre productions including The Plough and the Stars (1966) and The Countess Cathleen (1969). He was director of The Lantern Theatre, a small experimental theatre in Dublin which produced works by Joyce, Beckett and O’Casey as well as new Irish and foreign plays. Presented two Yeats programmes at the Lantern Theatre in 1965 1972, and in 1979 a programme of Yeats’s plays in Toronto. He has been prominent in Irish cultural affairs in many capacities and is the recipient of numerous awards and medals for book-design. He designed the Irish postage-stamps to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of the Folklore Society of Ireland in 1977. As Typographical Adviser for Liturgical Books he designed The Roman Missal (Dublin, London and Sydney), The Veritas Missal and other liturgical books.

John Moat, novelist, poet, co-founder of the Arvon Foundation and regular contributor to the ecological review Resurgence, has published several volumes of verse. The Welcombe Overtures (verse) is scheduled for publication in 1986 by the Dartington Poetry Press. His latest novel, Mai’s Wedding, is published by Collins. He has been an active worker in the 'Prayer for Peace' movement.
John Montague, poet and scholar, edited the Faber Book of Irish Verse which includes some of his own translations from the Irish. From his seven earlier collections of verse, Selected Poems (Dolmen Press) was published in 1982. He has also published a collection of stories, The Dead Chieftain. He teaches at the University of Cork.

Kathleen Raine, poet, Blake scholar etc. Her most recent publications are Yeats the Initiate (Dolmen Press and Allen and Unwin) and a new edition of her critical essays Defending Ancient Springs (1967) by the Golgonooza Press in conjunction with the Lindisfarne Press, U.S.A. A new collection of papers is in preparation by the Golgonooza Press with Allen and Unwin.

Peter Redgrove, poet, novelist, broadcaster, student of Hatha and Taoist yoga and trained as a lay analyst. He read natural sciences at Cambridge and worked as a research scientist and scientific editor and journalist. His most recent book (verse) is The Man Named East, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985. He is at present working on an important book on The Black Goddess and the Unseen Real.

Jeremy Reed, poet and novelist. His collection of poems, At the Fisheries was a Poetry Book Society recommendation, and is shortly to appear, with additional poems, in the Penguin series. Nero (poems) appeared in 1985 and he is completing a collection of essays on the mental stresses of certain imaginative poets, including Christopher Smart, John Clare, Hart Crane, Hopkins, Rilke and others, in relation to the writing of their poetry.

Peter Russell, poet, translator, one-time editor of the Poetry Review Nine. Until the overthrow of the Shah he was teaching in association with the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy in Tehran. His most recent collection of poems, All for the Wolves was published by the Anvil Press in 1984. He is at present engaged in a translation of poems of Novalis. He was a friend of, and is an authority on, Ezra Pound.

Brigitte Simon is descended from a family who have made the stained glass windows of Rheims since the building of the Cathedral in the thirteenth century. She herself has designed and constructed five of the great windows whose original glass was destroyed in the first World War. She also makes drawings and engravings, many inspired by the rock-formations of the region of Ardeche. Some of these were exhibited at the Taranman Gallery in London in 1983. She lives in Rheims and Paris.

Philip Sherrard, theologian and well-known authority on, and translator of, modern Greek poetry. Among his recent publications are the Philokalia (Translation, with G. E. H. Palmer and Kallistos Ware, Faber & Faber) and (with Edmund Keeley) Selected Poems of Angelos Sikelianos (Anvil Press and Princeton University Press). The Rape of Man and Nature (based on the Frederick Denison Maurice lectures, 1975, King's College, London) will be published in 1986 (Golgonooza Press and Lindisfarne Press).