Eye of the Heart is a scholarly journal providing a forum for the exploration of the great philosophical and religious traditions. It addresses the inner meaning of philosophy and religion through elucidations of metaphysical, cosmological, and soteriological principles, and through a penetration of the forms preserved in each religious tradition.

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Vincit Omnia Veritas
Collected Essays

Edited by
Renato Fabbri & Timothy Scott

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Editorial

We have had a wonderful response to the first two issues of *Eye of the Heart*. The diversity and quality of submissions demonstrate the rich vein that a journal such as this mines. This was particularly evident in the entries received for the Ananda Coomaraswamy Prize. Congratulations to Dr Emily Pott for winning the Open category with her essay, ‘The Zaqqūm Tree,’ found in the current issue. Emily is a tutor at the Prince’s School of Traditional Arts in London. Congratulations also to the Graduate category winner, Mr Graeme Castleman, for his essay, ‘The Primordial in the Symbols and Theology of Baptism.’ Graeme is a doctoral candidate in the Philosophy and Religious Studies program at La Trobe University at Bendigo. His essay will appear in Issue 4 in November.

In addition to a selection of the entries received for the Ananda Coomaraswamy Prize, Issue 4 will also feature a republication of Ananda Coomaraswamy’s essay, ‘The Iconography of Dürer’s “Knots” and Leonardo’s “Concatenation”.’ This essay is of great value for both its rarity and for offering a “statement of intention,” insomuch as Coomaraswamy regarded it as a model of the method for any serious investigation of symbols.

The third issue of *Eye of the Heart* opens with Dr Samuel D. Fohr’s, ‘Spiritual symbolism in the Grimms’ tales.’ Dr Fohr has developed this paper—at our request—from his book *Cinderella's Gold Slipper: Spiritual Symbolism in the Grimms*. Our intention with this is to demonstrate the diverse interests embraced by the traditional study of philosophy and religion. This diversity is evident as we move to the following essay, ‘The Bosom of the Father: Notes on the Negative Theology of Clement of Alexandria,’ by Dr Andrew Itter, a work favourably compared to the exquisite writings of Dierdre Carabine on this subject.

In her paper, Dr Angela Voss, uses Henry Corbin’s idea of the *mundus imaginalis* as a springboard to argue for a “methodology of the imagination” within an academic context. Dr Roger Sworder engages such a methodology in his exploration of the macrocosm-microcosm relationship found in the Zodiac, as indeed to some extent, does Dr Edward Butler in his insightful symbolic exegesis of the Egyptian myth.
known as the Book of the Celestial Cow. Dr Emily Pott’s examination of the Zaqqūm Tree of Islamic tradition offers a vision of this tree, found in Hell, as the lowermost extension of the inverted Tree of Life. Even in Hell the “way of the Tree of Life” offers hope of eventual return to the divine Source.

The final essay included in this issue is from Mr Tom Bree. His paper, ‘Symbolism as marriage and the symbolism of marriage,’ was one of the finalists in the Ananda Coomaraswamy contest. It is an exploration of some of the geometric symbolisms of “union” together with a wonderful reflection on the symbolism of the Christian marriage ritual. What is most impressive is the fact that this paper represents Mr Bree’s first attempt at an essay of this type, his principle roles being that of an artist and teacher (not to mention, a husband).

We are most happy that the Ananda Coomaraswamy competition has allowed people like Mr Bree to share their knowledge with a wider audience. The judges would like to make special mention of Professor K. S. Kannan’s essay, ‘The Metaphysics of Ānandatāēòava,’ which will be in Issue 4. All entries in this competition were read by the editor of Eye of the Heart before being sent to members of the editorial board for blind review. The finalists in both the Open and Graduate categories were then sent to an independent judge for a final decision. We would like to thank everyone who helped in whatever way. A particular dept of gratitude is due to Fons Vitae Publishing and World Wisdom Books, who generously supported the Ananda Coomaraswamy Prize and without whom this opportunity would not have been possible.
Folktales as spiritual teachings
With the publication of his essay ‘Primitive Mentality’ Ananda Coomaraswamy put on notice those who would assess folklore without the requisite knowledge to do it justice. Due to the lack of such knowledge the spiritual dimension of folklore had been all but ignored. For our purposes the two key statements of his essay are: ‘The content of folklore is metaphysical. Our failure to recognise this is primarily due to our abysmal ignorance of metaphysics and of its technical terms.’

Some people will wonder about the importance of the first statement. They will admit that at least some folklore is concerned with metaphysical subjects but conclude that it should not be taken seriously for that very reason. Sadly, ever since David Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature* and *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* metaphysics has been shunted aside as unimportant. According to Hume, any word which could not be tied down to a sense experience or combination of sense experiences is meaningless. But according to the traditional world view, beyond the physical and subtle sides of the world there is a formless aspect, and what is more important, there is a level of reality beyond the cosmos which forms its basis. Metaphysics is just that discipline which deals with what is beyond the cosmos (or physis—nature in its entirety) and hence involves the highest knowledge. So to say that the content of folklore is metaphysical is to say that it should be taken with the utmost seriousness.

Why should an essay titled ‘Primitive Mentality’ focus on the subject of folklore? The connection between the two is not difficult to comprehend. Broadly speaking, a primitive society is one which does not possess a written language. To quote from Coomaraswamy,

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By “folklore” we mean that whole and consistent body of culture which has been handed down, not in books but by word of mouth and in practice, from time beyond the reach of historical research.2

This is not to say that it is impossible for folklore to exist in a society which possesses a written language, but in such a society the folklore component remains unwritten. By the time folklore material has found its way into books it has, generally speaking, ceased to exist as folklore, and incidentally is no longer taken seriously. But there are exceptions. If the folklore of one society has been transcribed by members of another, it may continue to function as folklore in the first. Again, if the folklore of one segment of a society has been transcribed by members of another segment, it may continue playing its original role in the former. But where written versions of folklore have received wide currency in a society, one can be sure that it has come to be taken lightly. We have seen this happen all over the Western world in the last two centuries, and considering the metaphysical content of folklore this constitutes a serious loss for Western culture.

The view of folklore just described is somewhat different from the view of contemporary folklorists like Alan Dundes and Dan Ben-Amos. In his article ‘Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context,’3 Ben-Amos identifies as folklore events featuring certain forms of communication in small (or at least not large) homogeneous group contexts. These forms would include riddles, tales, songs, games, proverbs, jokes, superstitions, works of art, and dramas. Dundes constantly published examples of current urban folklore in his Paperwork Empire books and articles. Tradition here is obviously unimportant; new folklore is being created (or taking place) all the time.

Folklore still exists in the world, but in a very much diminished state. There is traditional folklore and new folklore. The folklore of earlier times really did represent a world view different from the modern one. This world view is not quite dead (witness the alligator-in-the-sewer stories that surface now and then), but it is being pushed aside slowly but surely, and not just in the Western World. As a result

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2 Ibid., p.286.
there is less folklore in the world, and what exists is mostly new folklore with no metaphysical overtones. Our current interest is in analysing traditional folklore, and all of my subsequent comments will be about folklore in this sense of the term.

Now one kind of folklore is the folktale, and if Coomaraswamy’s stricture is correct then the content of folktales is metaphysical. In other words, folktales deal with the highest levels of reality. I will add that they also deal with the cosmos from the perspective of the highest levels of reality and, generally speaking, from the traditional point of view. Many commentators have noted that, as with all folklore, folktales show cross cultural similarities. Some would explain this by postulating a collective memory or collective unconscious, but there are far less speculative hypotheses, such as cultural diffusion, which will account for the facts. More important, the origin of folktales is indeed “beyond the reach of historical research.” It is to be sought in the origin of the cosmos which, in the traditional view, is God. God as he reveals or manifests himself is One; hence it is not surprising that stories which are the result of the divine influence in people’s lives should exhibit similarities over the whole earth.

As Coomaraswamy argues, the basis of folktales is spiritual; they were told ‘not primarily to amuse but originally to instruct; the telling of stories only to amuse belongs to later ages in which the life of pleasure is preferred to that of activity or contemplation.’ And in his essay ‘Symplegades,’ he states, ‘But actually, that such myths are transmitted, it may be for thousands of years, by the folk to whom they have been entrusted is no proof of their popular origin.’ He states further,

It would be superfluous to emphasise that the traditional symbols are never the inventions of the particular author in whom we happen to find them … Our scholars, who think of myths as having been invented by “literary men,” overlook that traditional motifs and traditional themes are inseparably connected. The traditional raconteur’s figures, which he has not invented but has received and

faithfully transmits, are never figures of speech, but always figures of thought.\(^5\)

In short, in this view the origin of these stories is divine, and the storytellers are doing their part to safeguard a spiritual tradition. Coomaraswamy talks of myths rather than folktales, but it is clear from his essay that he includes them both in his comments.

It is only because our culture as a whole is so anti-spiritual that we have difficulty accepting the view of folktales just outlined, a view which is taken for granted in the East. But in the Middle Ages a group of such tales was collected under the title *Gesta Romanorum* (*Acts of the Romans*), and each story was given a Christian symbolic interpretation. So the idea of folktales having a spiritual symbolism is not foreign to the West. This is not to suggest reading a Christian interpretation into the Grimm tales, for they transcend any such narrow exegesis. And one should not be disconcerted by the seeming immorality of the hero’s actions in certain tales. Once again, I quote Coomaraswamy, this time from a footnote in ‘The Loathly Bride.’

For so long as men still understood the true nature of their myths, they were not shocked by their “immorality.” The myths are never in fact, immoral, but like every other form of theory (vision), amoral. ... The content of myths is intellectual, rather than moral; they must be understood.\(^6\)

There is another way to approach the spiritual content of folktales—through their relation to myths. Most commentators on myths have found everything in them except spiritual content. Yet the sacred nature of these stories is shown by the fact that they were typically recited in ritual situations. If any one or combination of the other interpretations of myths (Freudian, Jungian, structuralist, agricultural, meteorological, etiological, and zodiacal) is the whole truth, then in what way were these stories sacred? Or better, why were they considered sacred by the people who used them? In order to answer this


question we must look deeper than most interpretations do. The most profound symbolism underlying myths must be spiritual.

Linking myths, and through them folktales, to rituals should not be misconstrued. I do not hold to the view that myths and folktales are merely warmed-over rituals left over from a more primitive past. Marie Von Franz rightly rejected this idea in chapter two of *An Introduction to the Interpretation of Fairy Tales*, but unfortunately it became quite popular in the last century. We first notice this idea in a footnote to chapter six of Arnold Van Gennep’s *The Rites of Passage*. Commenting on the writings of another author he states, ‘He did not perceive, however, that these myths and legends are in some cases only the oral residues of rites of initiation; one should never forget that in the ceremonies of initiation in particular, the elders, instructors, or ceremonial chiefs recite what the other members of the group perform.’ In the 1920’s Paul Saintyves (Emile Nourry) promoted this view in *Les Contes de Perrault et les Recits Paralleles*, followed by Alfred Winterstein and J. F. Grant Duff in articles which appeared in *Imago*. The 1950’s brought Jan de Vries, Mircea Eliade, and Max Luthi into the fold, and in the 1980’s N. J. Giradot and Leo Schneiderman expressed such ideas.

Two related but different ideas should be distinguished. In chapter eleven of his *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, Eliade hints at the connection between the secluded forest huts of folktales and initiation rites. Indeed, for some authors, every trip of a boy or girl to a hut in the woods refers to the rite by which children were initiated into adulthood. Thus ‘Snow White’ would be about the initiation rites of a girl. But one would look very far to find an actual rite in which a female was sent into a forest hut with a group of males. This idea practically discredits itself, but there is another that is not quite so far-fetched. In his review of de Vries’ book on folktales and myths (which is found in *Myth and Reality*) Eliade states that the tale

...presents the structure of an infinitely serious and responsible adventure, for in the last analysis it is reducible to an initiation scenario: again and again we find initiatory ordeals. ... We could almost say that the tale repeats, on another plane and by other

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means, the exemplary initiation scenario. The tale takes up and continues “initiation” on the level of the imaginary.8

Luthi, in chapter four of his book *Once Upon A Time*, commends Eliade’s view and adds, ‘The fairy tale is an initiation.’9

To the extent that initiation rites have a spiritual component, we can agree that folktales are a sort of substitute for them. But to think of folktales in this way is very limiting. Folktales have a significance of their own, and that significance is to a great extent independent of their cultural context. They are not a substitute for anything but rather one more means of helping people toward spiritual advancement.

I must also challenge a comment made by the Freudian psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim in the introduction to his *The Uses of Enchantment*. He states, ‘As with all great art, the fairy tale’s deepest meaning will be different for each person, and different for the same person at various moments in his life.’10 Rather, we should say, the deepest or most profound meaning of these tales is the same for all people. However, each person, or the same person at different times, may receive different information from them depending on that person’s spiritual development. The role of these tales has always been the same: to enlighten people about the true nature of the world and its origin, and to help lift them from this vale of tears to the realm of bliss.

The history of folktale interpretation is littered with casualties. Perhaps that is why so many scholars in the first half of the twentieth century considered interpretation a waste of time. W. R. Halliday is representative of this group. In the first chapter of his book *Indo-European Folktales and Greek Legend* he summarised what had gone before and gave some advice for the future. Among other views he mentions the doctrine of a fifth century BC commentator that ‘all Greek legend is disguised cosmological myth and consists essentially of highly obscure talk about the weather,’ and the Stoic view that the Greek gods and goddesses were really ‘representations of natural phenomena.’ He concludes with the following statement:

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It will be generally agreed today that a legend must be approached on its own merits and not as a riddle which conceals some hidden meaning. Indeed, it is now pretty generally accepted that all those methods of interpretation are liable to lead astray which begin by assuming that everything means something other than it says, and then juggle with fanciful ingenuity until all these hidden meanings miraculously turn out to signify the same thing in the end. For this release from the allegorical method, which has a long history stretching back through the Middle Ages and the Christian fathers to later classical antiquity, we have the comparative study of mythology largely to thank. It is true that, in its initial stages, it was itself given to these ingenious and thankless pursuits, but the absurdity of supposing that our nursery tales were all sun myths, that Little Red Riding Hood represented the setting sun and the wolf the black cloud with its flashing teeth of lightning, and so on, did much to give the quietus to the allegorical method ... Today at any rate no apology is needed for approaching folktales as stories and not as allegories.11

It may be that no apology is needed for taking folktales as mere stories, but that is hardly a reason for leaving matters there. However, before I pick up the gauntlet that Halliday so confidently threw down, I would call attention to the fact that he spoke of myths and folktales interchangeably. This was quite proper, but not for the reasons most people would think. There is a widespread view that folktales are watered-down or degenerate versions of earlier myths. This may indeed be true in some instances, but the opposite is also possible. Rhys Carpenter has shown in his book Folk Tale, Fiction and Saga in the Homeric Epics that some of the stories told by Homer seem to be degenerate forms of folktales.12 Thus, even though the tales collected by the Grimm brothers in the nineteenth century were committed to writing 2,500 years after the Homeric epics, we have no right to conclude that they are any younger. They may in fact be older, and they may antedate some ancient myths with similar themes. And this brings

us to what really links myths and folktales. Although the two genres are obviously different, they share many of the same themes.

**Cosmology and wolves**

One of the most prominent themes of folktales is the swallowing up of one or more beings by another, and the eventual disgorging of same. Halliday mentions the Grimm tale ‘Red Riding-Hood,’ but a similar tale, ‘The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids,’ is also well known.

In ‘The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids’ a wolf who has disguised himself gains entry into the goats’ home while the mother goat is away. He eats up six of the seven kids, the youngest escaping by hiding in the clock case. The wolf then trots outside and lies down under a tree to sleep. The mother goat comes home and discovers what has happened. In sorrow she leaves the house with her remaining kid and soon comes to the meadow where the wolf lies snoring. She sees movement in his stomach and decides to take action. She cuts open his belly, and out come the kids. She refills the belly with stones and sews it up. The wolf awakes and goes to a well to drink. When he leans over the stones pull him into the well, and he drowns.

It is hardly necessary to relate the story of ‘Red Riding-Hood.’ But the main points to keep in mind are that a wolf devours an old woman and then waits for her grandchild, whom he also eats. A huntsman comes by and hears the wolf snoring. He cuts open the wolf, lets Red Riding-Hood and her grandmother out, and fills the wolf’s belly with stones. When the wolf wakes up he tries to run off but sinks to the ground and dies. There is another version of the story, which closely resembles the well-known tale of ‘The Three Pigs,’ in which the wolf is led to falling into a boiling trough of water.

If the human version of the wolf story seems like a pale imitation of the other it is probably because the animal version came first. Georg Husing has shown that ‘Red Riding-Hood’ is derived from two

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13 AT 333. [The Finnish folklorist Antti Aarne divided up European folktales into different types based on their plots and assigned a number to each type. The American folklorist Stith Thompson revised the listing (see The Folktale, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977). Where possible the “Aarne-Thompson” numbers for the tales have herein been indicated.]

14 AT 123.

15 AT 124A.
authentic tales. One is ‘The Wolf and The Seven Young Kids,’ and the other is Charles Perrault’s ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ from his seventeenth-century collection of tales. However, Perrault tampered with his sources. George Delarue has described more authentic European versions of this story which involve two sisters and a wolf, while Wolfram Eberhard has found Chinese versions about two sisters and a tiger.\footnote{On all of these versions cf. Alan Dundes ed., \textit{Little Red Riding Hood}, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.} The important thing is that, in order to fully understand the significance of any of these stories, it is necessary to delve into traditional cosmology. By “cosmology” I do not mean ‘highly obscure talk about the weather,’ as Halliday would have it, but a description of the source and formation of our cosmos.

As I have used the phrase “traditional cosmology” it will be necessary to explain what I mean by “tradition.” Literally, the word means what is handed on. Borrowing some phrases from Jaroslav Pelikan’s book \textit{The Vindication of Tradition}, by “tradition” I mean the universal tradition of God’s existence and of the knowledge of him. (God is, of course, sexless, but is conventionally referred to with masculine pronouns. For convenience I follow conventional practice.) This tradition has been handed on from generation to generation down through the millennia. It is found in the ancient Hindu Upanishads, the Buddhist Sutras, Daoist writings such as the \textit{Dao De Jing} and the \textit{Zhuang Zi}, the Bible of Judaism and Christianity, and the works of Plato and Aristotle. It is also found centuries later in the doctrines of Kabbalists, Sufis, and Christians with an esoteric viewpoint such as Dante and Meister Eckhart. Readings from ancient, medieval, and even modern sources are presented in books such as Aldous Huxley’s \textit{The Perennial Philosophy} and Whithall N. Perry’s \textit{A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom}. This tradition is believed to come from a divine source and it shows up throughout the world, even in so-called primitive societies such as those of the Americas, Africa, and the South Pacific. It includes an account not only of God but of God’s relationship to the cosmos. Understanding that relationship, as explained below, will make the subsequent discussion of folktales much more comprehensible.

According to the traditional view, the source of our cosmos is the Ultimate Reality or Supreme Principle—God as he is in himself. There
can be nothing outside of God, so the universe is a manifestation of God, but there are a few steps along the way. God first manifests or reveals himself as the Godhead or Being. While Being is One, it is generally understood as tripartite or “three in one.” Thus in Hinduism the first manifestation of God is called Sat Chit Ananda or Being-Consciousness-Bliss. It is to be understood as the Universal Self inhabiting the world and constituting our real selves. (Different spiritual traditions characterise these three aspects variously, but this need not concern us.)

In order for Being, with its three aspects which are One, to manifest the multiplicity which is the world it must bifurcate or polarise, thus producing a seeming duality. So the One becomes two—the Active Pole and the Passive Pole of existence. The Passive Pole is the stuff or substance of creation. It is the *hyle* or *materia prima* of Aristotle. Before creation this Substantial Pole is totally chaotic or without form. But under the influence of the Active Pole, which is itself unmoving (and which, as it were, reflects the attributes of Being more fully), the Passive Pole takes on various forms and becomes the cosmos. In the Chinese spiritual tradition the Active Pole is called Heaven and the Passive Pole is called Earth. In the Judeo-Christian tradition they are called the wind (or spirit) and the waters (Gen.1:1). But for the process to begin there must be a Divine Impulse from within Being, the Spiritual Sun, and in the Bible this Impulse is the Word (Gen.1:3): ‘Let there be light.’ From this Impulse comes the Celestial Ray which shines on the waters bringing form out of formlessness.

The first production of the Passive Pole is the World Spirit or Divine Spirit (also called the Cosmic Intellect, the formless realm) which is generally pictured as the World Axis cutting through the centre of the cosmos which revolves around it. The World Spirit can be understood as the reflection of Being as the Spiritual Sun on the waters or Substantial Pole of existence. Or it can be seen as the reflection of the Celestial Ray emanating from the Spiritual Sun. (The Ray and its reflection are the trunks of the two trees mentioned in the Zohar – 3.156B; the first is usually described as upright and the second as

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inverted since it is a reflection of the first.) Again, it can be called the expression of the Self in the world and thus the true self of all, or the boundary of God and manifestation (at least when God is understood essentially or as beyond manifestation). From the World Spirit comes the World Soul (the subtle realm) and from the World Soul the World Body (or physical realm). Thus the World Spirit is not only, as one would suspect, the centre of divine influence in the world, but the source of the rest of the cosmos as well. Alternatively, the creation of the three realms which make up the cosmos is sometimes pictured as a rending apart of the Passive or Substantial Pole to produce the sky (formless realm), earth (physical realm), and the atmosphere (subtle realm) between them.

In a way, the birth of the cosmos means the “death” of the Passive or Substantial Pole of existence, since the latter in effect turns into the former. All transformation involves the death of one thing and the birth of another, and this case merely illustrates the general rule. With this in mind we may say that the Active Pole must slay the Passive Pole in order to produce the cosmos. The importance of this point is made clear by the large number of stories in which a hero slays a great serpent or dragon who is menacing the world. These narratives symbolise the creation of the cosmos, and many of the stories which have been identified in the past as solar myths can be seen as cosmological in nature. The so-called solar hero is really a personification of the Active Pole, and he is attempting to bring the light of creation to the chaotic darkness of the Passive Pole. Seen in this way the story of St. George and the dragon is symbolic of the process of creation.

There are many reasons why serpentine creatures have been chosen to represent the Passive Pole of existence. The stuff of the cosmos, as mentioned, has been called both earth and water. Either of these substances can take on different shapes and is thus eminently suited to symbolise the plastic principle of creation. Serpents have an obvious relationship to both earth and water as most species reside in one or the other. But serpents also move in curves that suggest furrows in the earth and waves in bodies of water. Jacqueline Simpson, in her Folklore article ‘Fifty British Dragon Tales: An Analysis,’ notes that ‘There is a striking preponderance of water in various forms (river, lake, pool, swamp, well, sea), this being mentioned in no fewer than twenty-three tales.’ She adds, ‘the link between dragons and water can be traced back to
early stages of Near Eastern, European, and Oriental mythology.'18 The serpentine creatures most closely connected with water are crocodilians, and among the Sepik River peoples of New Guinea, we find the belief that a crocodile brought up mud from the bottom of the primal sea to create the earth which it now supports on its back. In some cultures a turtle is cast in this role; examples are the earth-diver stories of the American Indians and the Chinese tradition that the world rests on the back of a turtle. The reason for this substitution is the special nature of a turtle: its shell consists of a curved surface above a flat surface and thus can symbolise, in Chinese terminology, Heaven and Earth with the cosmos between them.

The wavy shape that serpents take as they move is similar to the way in which sun rays are portrayed. For this reason the serpent is linked with the sun in some versions of the creation story. In a typical example the hero frees the sun from the grasp or maw of a serpent, thus allowing light to permeate the world. It is due to these versions of the story that the protagonist is called a solar hero. But there is an even better reason to refer to him in this way. As a personification of the Active Pole he is ultimately the agent of Being—often called the Spiritual Sun—who works through the aegis of the Active Pole to bring the cosmos into existence. (Thus in Ps.74:12-14 we read, ‘Oh God, my king from of old, who brings deliverance throughout the land; it was You who drove back the sea with Your might, who smashed the heads of the monsters in the waters; it was You who crushed the heads of Leviathan, who left him as food for the creatures of the sea.’) Being provides the spark that begins the process of creation, and the solar hero is the Divine Impulse. Those schooled in the mythology of the world can easily think of examples. Indra, slayer of the serpent Vritra in Hindu mythology, comes immediately to mind.

Greek mythology provides a peculiar twist to this story. While still in his mother Leto’s womb, Apollo, a solar hero, is pursued by the serpent Python (just as in Egyptian mythology Horus, while still in the womb of Isis, is pursued by Seth). To make the solar symbolism even more obvious, Hera has decreed that Leto may not give birth anywhere the sun shines. In the end, Apollo is born and kills Python.

One may also view the connection between the Passive Pole and the world as a mother-daughter relationship; the first gives birth to the second. Since daughters tend to resemble their mothers, it should come as no surprise that serpentine creatures also symbolise the formed world, as in the case of the serpent in the Garden of Eden and all other serpents connected with trees in world mythologies. These serpents either guard trees, preventing people from reaching them, or draw people away from them. The trees in question all symbolise the World Spirit, so we have a picture of people being kept away from God by the coils of worldliness. In actuality, not many folktales feature serpents or dragons, but they often include characters that are the equivalent of these, and that is why I have taken the time to detail their symbolism.

Returning to the description of the traditional worldview I must point out that it includes the idea of the world degenerating once it is created. All ancient traditions refer explicitly or implicitly to former ages which were superior to our own. In Greek mythology we find references to a Golden Age, Silver Age, Bronze Age (divided in two), and Iron Age, the last being our present age. (These ages have nothing to do with the various ages marked out by modern archaeologists.) In the Judeo-Christian tradition the serpent in the Garden of Eden begins this process of degeneration, but this means only that the world is subject to wearing down and hence ultimate dissolution. According to the traditional view, every cycle of ages ends in a general destruction which is merely a prelude to a new creation and new golden age. (The sand running down in an hourglass symbolises the degeneration of the cosmos and turning the hourglass over symbolises the starting of a new golden age. As we read in Matt.20:16, ‘Thus will the last be first and the first last,’ a phrase with other meanings as well.) With this in mind we turn to some of the Greek myths with cosmological themes.

According to Hesiod’s Theogony, we begin with Gaia, Mother Earth, who emerged from chaos and bore Uranus, the Sky. They produced many children, some of whom Uranus would not allow to be born. At the request of Gaia, her sons the Titans, led by Kronos, attacked Uranus. Kronos castrated Uranus and replaced him as the chief god. He married his sister Rhea and had children of his own, but as they were born (Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, and Poseidon) he swallowed them. When Zeus, the sixth child and third son, was born, Gaia hid him and gave Kronos a stone wrapped in swaddling clothes to swallow. Zeus survived, and with
the help of Gaia finally caused Kronos to vomit up his earlier children. All the sons then waged war on Kronos and the other Titans, and Zeus finally killed his father with a thunderbolt. In this way Zeus, in turn, replaced Kronos as the ruler of the cosmos.

The symbolism of this account is not too difficult to decipher if one is acquainted with the traditional worldview. From chaos or the Passive Pole of existence emerge earth and sky, the physical and formless realms, which must be separated for creation to develop. The separator is Kronos who castrates his father Uranus as the latter is about to engage in sexual union with Gaia. Thus Kronos separates his parents, allowing space for the subtle realm and permitting creation to proceed. Like Marduk in the Babylonian myth he symbolises the Divine Impulse. But for our purposes the important part of the story is yet to come.

Kronos swallowing his children symbolises the degeneration or destruction of the cosmos in a particular cycle of ages, a return to chaos. His disgorging the stone and five children is a symbol of recreation, the six objects being comparable to the six days of creation mentioned in Genesis. The subsequent defeat of Kronos and the other Titans represents the “defeat” of chaos which is necessary for creation to occur. It is interesting to note that the Titans, who first represented the forces of creation (the Active Pole), end up representing the forces of destruction (the Passive Pole). Now the young gods and the Titans are equivalent, respectively, to the angels and devils of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and we are taught that devils are really fallen angels. Chaos becomes cosmos but degenerates once again into chaos, and the cycle must then begin all over again. Thus what is new and conquering becomes what is old and needs to be conquered.

These stories of the generations of the Greek gods are echoed in folktales about aged kings setting themselves against young heroes. Most commentators on these tales see them as portraying the age-old societal conflict between the decaying established order and the needed forces of renewal. Perhaps they do symbolise this conflict, and perhaps the success of the young hero symbolises the renewal which is so badly needed. But these tales also symbolise the renewal of the whole cosmos, and this renewal is the paradigm of all the others.

There are striking similarities between the account of the wolf eating the kids and the myth of Kronos swallowing each of his children as they were born. The substitute stone motif is present in both stories and
even the number of items swallowed, six, is the same. Finally, where Gaia and Zeus help the latter’s brothers and sisters escape from Kronos’ belly, the mother goat and one of her kids play the same role in the Grimm tale. We have, then, another creation story, or rather, as in the case of Kronos and his family, a story of cosmic degeneration and recreation. In Norse mythology there is actually a wolf figure connected with cosmic degeneration. The gods bind the wolf Fenris so that creation will not be destroyed. But he finally breaks his bonds and helps lead the destruction of the world, swallowing the sun in some versions of the myth.

An interesting detail of ‘The Wolf And The Seven Young Kids’ which lends credence to the view of it as a creation story is the youngest kid escaping the wolf by hiding in the clock case. Since the time of day is apparent only to those who are standing outside the clock case and thus can see the clock, hiding in a clock case is equivalent to going beyond time. In all destructions of the cosmos which precede creations there is left a seed or germ beyond space and time from which the new cosmos will develop.19

From the spiritual point of view, it is very important to have a grasp of traditional cosmology. Western religious doctrine tends to treat the world as the creation of God rather than his manifestation. Thus the world and every being in it are seen as separate from God. Traditional cosmology teaches us that there is nothing other than God; hence essentially we are all God. The goal of the spiritual life is to realise this essential identity. Thus the aim of spiritual life is not, as some imagine, to have special experiences. Rather it is nothing less than gaining the highest knowledge. This is a recurrent theme in most folktales which teach us how to fend off the attractions of the world and reach the spiritual goal.

**Stepmothers and dwarfs**

The chief culprits in most stories—along with giants, with which they share certain roles—are stepmothers and witches. The most familiar stories involving stepmothers are ‘Snow White,’ ‘Cinderella,’ and ‘Hansel and Gretel.’

19 For more on this subject see the chapters titled ‘The Symbolic Meaning of Early Biblical History’ and ‘The Ark and the Tower’ in Fohr, *Adam and Eve*. 

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*Fohr: Spiritual symbolism in the Grimms’ tales*
Any analysis of the mother-stepmother motif is complicated by some facts pointed out by John Ellis in *One Fairy Tale Too Many.*\(^{20}\) He has shown that in retelling ‘Snow White’ and ‘Hansel and Gretel,’ the Grimms made what seems at first glance to be a very important change. In the original folktales the real mothers of the children turn against them. However, in the Grimms’ final versions the real mothers are replaced by stepmothers. However, while this may seem like a momentous change, symbolically it is of no consequence. Instead of the shift from the mother before the birth of her children to the mother after the birth of her children, we have a symbolically equivalent shift from a real mother to a stepmother.

‘Snow White’\(^{21}\) begins with an interesting episode which is usually ignored. ‘Once upon a time in the middle of winter when the snowflakes were falling from the sky like feathers, a queen was sitting by a window with a black ebony frame and was sewing. As she was thus sewing and looking at the snow, she stuck the needle in her finger, and three drops of blood fell to the snow. Because the red looked so pretty in the white snow, she thought to herself, “If only I had a child as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as the wood of the window frame!” Soon thereafter she had a little daughter who was as white as snow, as red as blood, and whose hair was as black as ebony. Therefore she was called Snow White, and when the child was born, the queen died. A year later the king married a second wife.’

Compared to this beautiful opening, the symbolism of the rest of the story is practically transparent. On one level, the opening lines of ‘Snow White’ are a description of the creation or manifestation of the world. The queen’s needle is, of course, a symbol of the Divine or World Spirit, and the drops of blood represent the essentially sacrificial character of creation. One is reminded of the blood contained in the Holy Grail and of the lance associated with it in legend. But in this story, we have something a little out of the ordinary in Western culture—the connection of creation with the colours white, red, and black. In the Sankhya tradition of Hinduism the Passive Pole or substance of creation is called *Prakriti.* It is said to be made up of the three gunas—strands or tendencies—held in equilibrium. They are


\(^{21}\) AT 709.
called *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, and they are associated with the colours white, red, and black respectively. These tendencies are described in many Hindu scriptures including the *Bhagavad Gita* (chapter fourteen). It may seem improper to cite Hindu sources to explain the symbolism of a European folktale, but we must keep in mind that most European languages are part of the Indo-European language group which includes Sanskrit, and that there are cultural affinities between Hindus and Europeans as well. In fact, a number of so-called European tales have been traced to the East, and Hindu mythology and Greco-Roman mythology have been shown to be related.

In the chapter ‘The Ark and the Tower’ of my book *Adam and Eve* I characterise *sattva* as illumination or the upward tendency, *rajas* as activity or the expansive tendency, and *tamas* as darkness, inertia, or the downward tendency. But noting some interesting comments on this matter by John Dobson,\(^{22}\) I wish to add the following. Dobson refers to the veiling power of *tamas*, the projecting power of *rajas*, and the revealing power of *sattva*. He also indicates that literally speaking, the term *rajas* does not mean activity but rather some impurity which obscures like smog. His idea is that this tendency in *Prakriti* obscures Reality. That is to say, *rajas* leads us to experience Reality or Being, which is really changeless and undivided, as the changing and multifarious world which seems to exist. Since the usual kind of activity people engage in when impelled by desire and anger is precisely obscuring in this way, I have no disagreement with Dobson’s view.

To sum all this up, in human beings *tamas* shows up as passivity, *rajas* as activity, and the *sattva* as balance or the middle way. As the *Gita* says, this middle way involves acting without attachment to the fruits of action. Only by taking the middle way can we climb the ladder of enlightenment and see Reality or Being for what it is (*sattva* includes the word *Sat* which can mean Reality or the Real as well as Being). And seeing Reality is tantamount to seeing ourselves for what we are. The true self of each of us is this Reality. Being expresses itself as a spirit to remind it of its true nature. Being also takes on a body and a psyche or soul, which in turn create a sense of ego. But Being rests tranquilly behind all of these sheaths. As we read in the *Gita*:

But, O mighty-armed, the one who knows the truth of the distinction (of the self) from the gunas and action knows that gunas act upon gunas, and does not become attached (III.28; based on several translations).

All action is confined to Prakriti—the substance of creation—which is distinct from our true self. The folktales we are considering detail how Prakriti works to hide this truth from us.

According to Hindu tradition the Active Pole of creation, which throws the three gunas of Prakriti into disequilibrium, is called Purusha. As a result of Purusha’s action chaos becomes cosmos, and the world is born. In scholastic terms natura naturans (nature in her natural or formless state) becomes natura naturata (nature natured, or nature formed into the world), and folktales symbolise this change either by having the natural mother die, giving way to the stepmother—as in ‘Cinderella’—or by having the natural mother change in character—as in ‘Snow White’ and ‘Hansel And Gretel.’ Metaphorically the birth of the formed world is the death of Prakriti. But in actuality the formed world is identical with Prakriti, which has merely changed in character. Perhaps this interchangeability accounts for the ambiguous nature of the Great Goddess (or Great Mother) found in many cultures of the ancient world. Her descriptions often seem to fall halfway between the unformed substance of the cosmos and the cosmos itself, or chaos on the way to being cosmos. The Greek goddess Gaia, mentioned earlier, is a good example of this tendency. Gaia is sometimes indistinguishable from the chaos from which she arises.

To sum up, in the Grimm stories the stepmother or changed mother symbolises the cosmos or world, and her children symbolise human beings in the world. The stepmothers’ callous treatment of their children is only to be expected. Symbolically, the treatment meted out to Snow White, Cinderella, and Hansel and Gretel represents the treatment of all human beings by the world. The world uses us up and spits us out, but most of us do not realise our predicament, or do not realise it in time. It is interesting that the fathers of these children, who symbolise the Active Pole of creation, either disappear from the picture completely or seem unable to do much to counter the actions of the mother figures. This reflects the idea that the pull of the world generally overwhelms the pull of God in most people’s lives.
The changed mother in ‘Snow White’ not only represents the world but also worldliness. Similarly, Snow White not only symbolises human beings but also the innocence or non-worldliness of youth. This interpretation is made clear in the famous mirror episodes of the story. Amusement park mirrors may be set up to confuse people, but under ordinary circumstances we believe that mirrors do not lie. Now any reference to truth in a story is also a reference to ultimate or spiritual truth—indeed, one of the Muslim names for God is “the Truth.” Besides, just as a mirror remains essentially the same though it contains changing images, so too God remains essentially the same though containing all the changing phenomena of the world.

In line with the idea that the mirror in ‘Snow White’ represents spiritual truth is an interpretation mentioned by Maria Tatar in *The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales*. She cites with approval the view that ‘the disembodied voice in the mirror’ is really ‘the wicked queen’s husband.’ Tatar sees nothing spiritual in this interpretation, only a rivalry for the love of Snow White’s father. However, if the father in ‘Snow White’ symbolises *Purusha* or the Active Pole of creation, then Tatar’s identification only confirms that we are really dealing with spiritual truth. The mirror is stating that according to the highest, most spiritual standard, innocent Snow White is “fairer” than her worldly mother.

The world responds to innocence by trying to kill it, and it usually succeeds at puberty if not earlier. (For what the fall from innocence entails I refer the reader again to the chapter ‘Adam and Eve’ in my book *Adam and Eve.* ) In our story, *the queen orders her huntsman to take Snow White into the woods and kill her.* The mother’s jealousy begins when Snow White reaches her seventh year, and we must admit that children lose many aspects of their innocence by this age. But it is obvious from the prince’s interest at the end of the story that Snow White must have reached puberty by the time her mother ordered the huntsman to kill her.

The huntsman in this story is essentially equivalent to the woodcutter of ‘The Strange Minstrel.’ They both symbolise God who

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24 AT 151.
is ever ready to come to the aid of innocence or spirituality. The woodcutter of ‘The Strange Minstrel’ stands immobile (as befits God in the role of unmoved mover) listening to the fiddler (minstrel – a man on a spiritual journey) play his instrument, and by merely raising his axe he protects the fiddler from animals that have come to harm him, animals that symbolise various lower cravings. Similarly, in a manner reminiscent of the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac, the huntsman selects an animal to be killed in place of Snow White, the human being. In this case it is a wild boar, an animal that seems to play a negative role in many European stories from the time of ancient Greek civilisation. Although the boar may carry with it certain Celtic overtones, its function in European folktales is to represent the lower tendencies, especially bodily cravings. Thus instead of Snow White or innocence being killed off, innocence is preserved while the desires are killed off. Similarly, instead of Isaac being killed, God substitutes a ram, another animal which symbolises bodily cravings.

A second version of this section of ‘Snow White’ is found in the Grimms’ 1810 manuscript. According to this account, Snow White’s mother leads her out into the forest to look for roses, hoping Snow White will get lost and be eaten by wild beasts. But Snow White safely makes her way to the house of the seven dwarfs. The mention of roses is spiritually suggestive. The rose at the top of the rosy cross of the Rosicrucians symbolises the Spiritual Sun, or God as he reveals himself. Though this is the usual meaning of the rose, the rose also symbolises the spiritually perfected state which humans can attain. The thorns on its stem symbolise hindrances that keep us from realising God or from reaching the state of perfection. These hindrances are brought out very clearly in Snow White’s subsequent dealings with her mother. At any rate, in this version of the story Snow White is not saved by God’s intervention (in the form of the huntsman) but by her own innocence. That is to say, her unworldliness protects her from the “wild beasts” of worldly temptations, at least until she gets to the house of the dwarfs.

We may wonder why helpers in folktales are often portrayed as dwarfs or small animals, for example, the fox which helps the youngest brother in ‘The Gold Bird.’ (The three siblings of traditional stories

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25 J. M. Ellis, One Fairy Story Too Many, pp.74-77.
26 AT 550.
represent the three parts of a person—the body, soul and spirit. The youngest represents the spirit because it is the last side to be developed.) Suppose I put the question this way: If hinderers are portrayed as giants, why are helpers portrayed as dwarfs? When asked in this way, the question practically answers itself. As in the case of the titans of Greek mythology, hinderers in folklore are often described as giants. Helpers must therefore be the opposite—dwarfs. We also find that certain beings represent Prakriti and others represent Purusha in the Hindu and Christian traditions. Thus in Hindu mythology, we have demons (asuras) and gods (devas), while in Christianity we have devils and angels. To relate these figures to my question about giants and dwarfs, in our own age the “forces of evil” or materiality seem much greater than the “forces of good” or spirituality. In other words, the forces of Prakriti often seem much greater than the forces of Purusha.

Of course, folktales such as ‘Rumpelstiltskin’ and the English ‘Tom Tit Tot’ (AT 500) feature evil little people. These stories contain the well-known motif of selling one’s soul for material gain. In the first story, a woman can redeem herself, and in the second story, redeem her baby son by guessing the name of the dwarf who is her “benefactor.” Naming these little devils represents recognising their true nature and hence recognising the pitfalls of greed and other cravings. Generally, emissaries of the devil, as we might call them, come in both large and small sizes, but they are always at one extreme or the other. Thus the trolls of northern European folklore may be either giants or dwarfs. But whether they play positive or negative roles in folktales, dwarfs and giants symbolise influences from above and below. In the most narrow terms, they represent the pulls of the spirit and the pulls of the body on the psyche or soul. From a wider perspective, they symbolise the pulls of the Active Pole and Passive Pole of existence on human beings.

In ‘Snow White’ the dwarfs represent the positive, or Active Pole. They mine gold ore, and gold is a symbol of what is everlasting, namely God. The fact that there are seven dwarfs also points to a positive interpretation, since the seventh day of the week—the Sabbath—is God’s day, and seven always signifies the centre or source of creation. Is it purely coincidental that Snow White tries all the beds but does not find one that fits her until she gets to the seventh? As the story goes, ‘she lay down in it, commended herself to God and fell asleep.’
The dwarfs tell Snow White that she can stay under their protection if she does certain chores around the house. In this regard the dwarfs represent spiritual masters or the teachings of spiritual masters. We are all exposed to these teachings, but few of us follow them. In fact, Snow White has difficulty following their instructions. Although the dwarfs warn her not to open the door to anyone while they are away (in other words, not to open herself up to worldliness) Snow White disregards their advice and allows her disguised mother to give her things on three occasions. The first gift is bodice laces, which her mother wraps around her too tightly; the second is a poisoned comb, which her mother runs through her hair; the third is a poisoned apple, which her mother entices her to eat. In each case, Snow White falls down as if dead. Vanity and gluttony are typical worldly temptations that spell spiritual death. In fact, people may die a thousand deaths in their lifetimes over these very matters. 

The dwarfs are able to rouse Snow White from the sleep caused by the laces and the comb, but they are unable to do anything about the effects of the apple, since they do not know that a piece of it is lodged in Snow White’s throat. Through the intervention of the prince, Snow White is brought back to life when the apple falls out of her mouth as he is carrying her away. The prince—or the rescuer of Snow White—represents the call of God. This interpretation is brought out even more clearly in the Grimms’ 1810 manuscript. In that version, there is no prince. Snow White’s father—symbolising the Active Pole of existence—finds her and brings her back to life. Snow White’s mother is punished for her cruelty by being made to wear red-hot slippers and to dance until she is dead. If Snow White is the psyche caught between the pull of God and the pull of the world, her spiritual progress can be assured only by eliminating one side of the controversy.

Snow White’s repeated disregard of the dwarfs’ warnings finds an echo in ‘The Gold Bird.’ In that story, after the hero listens to the fox and chooses the shabby inn over the fine one he disregards everything else the fox says. To begin with, he arrives at a palace where the soldiers are asleep. When he comes to the chamber containing the gold bird, against the advice of the fox, he transfers it from its ugly wooden cage to a beautiful gold cage standing nearby. Immediately the bird utters a piercing cry, and the soldiers wake up and arrest him. The hero can avoid death only by fetching the gold horse that is swifter than the wind. He finds the palace where the horse is stabled, but against the advice of the fox, he puts
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a beautiful gold saddle on the horse instead of a mean leather and wood one. At once the horse neighs and wakes the grooms who have been sleeping. Once again the hero is caught and can avoid death only by fetching the princess in the gold castle. The hero reaches the castle and waits until everyone is asleep before he asks the princess to flee with him. Against the advice of the fox, the hero allows the princess to say good-bye to her parents. When her father wakes up, everyone else does as well, and the hero is caught once again. Now the hero can save his life and marry the princess only if he removes a mountain blocking the king’s view. With the help of the fox he succeeds in this feat, and thus he obtains the hand of the princess. Finally, by following the advice of the fox and using split-second timing, the hero is able to obtain the golden horse and carry off the golden bird as well.

When we compare the choices of the hero in ‘The Gold Bird’ with the choices of Snow White, we find that they are based on exactly the same considerations. In accepting the laces, comb, and apple from her mother, Snow White is indicating that these items are better than the laces, comb, and food she already possesses. Similarly, in placing the bird in the gold cage, saddling the horse with the gold saddle, and allowing the princess to say good-bye, the hero of ‘The Gold Bird’ is indicating that certain states of affairs are better than others. This is quite usual, but it is not spiritual. It is indicative of a dualistic outlook and the desires such an outlook engenders. These desires get us into a lot of trouble and keep us from reaching our spiritual goal.

And what is this goal? We come from God and we are going back to God at death. But the spiritual goal is to get back to God in this very life (as Dante describes himself doing in the Paradiso). That is, the spiritual goal is to reverse in consciousness the course of events leading to our appearance in this world. There is one stepmother story which epitomises this journey from and to God, and that is ‘Dame Hulda’ (AT 480A). (It is related to certain versions of the ‘Cinderella’ story.) Here the heroine falls down a well into a world which seems very much like our own. When she follows the orders of Dame Hulda, who symbolises a spiritual teacher, she is rewarded with a heap of gold and allowed to go back up to where she came from. Gold, as I mentioned before, symbolises what is eternal, namely God. It does not take much thought to realise that the whole story symbolises our plight of being
thrust into this world and also what we can do to get back to our true home.
The Bosom of the Father:  
Notes on the Negative Theology of  
Clement of Alexandria  

Andrew Itter

No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to  
the Father’s bosom, who has made him known. (John 1:18)

It is fair to say that the negative theology of Christianity achieved its  
most complete expression in the works of Dionysius the Areopagite.  
However, as Pierre Camelot remarks, it was Clement of Alexandria  
who laid the foundation for the negative theology that continued  
through Gregory of Nyssa and lead to the Areopagite. ¹ Levasti calls  
Clement the ‘founder of Christian mysticism,’ ² and Wytzes refers to  
him as the ‘father of Orthodox mysticism.’ ³ Justification for such high  
praise may be found in Clement’s interpretation of John’s Prologue—  
which itself might well be regarded as the bedrock of Christian negative  
theology. In particular the exegesis Clement offers of John 1:18 and his  
treatment of the word ἱλαρχῶς—often translated as “heart” but better  
read as “bosom”—show the unique vision and power that allows one to  
argue for Clement as the founder of the Christian mystical tradition.

Clement’s interpretation of John’s Prologue is primarily concerned  
with God’s act of self-generation. Clement refers to God as  
“beginningless” (ἀναρχος), the “perfect beginning” (ἀρχη) and also the  
“producer of the beginning” (ἀρχης ποιητκός).⁴ This antinomy of God  
who is both beginningless and beginning explains, for Clement, the  
rationale behind ‘the Word that was with God, and which was God’

¹ C. Mondésert & P. Camelot, Clément d’Alexandrie. Les Stromates: Stromate II, Paris:  
Sources chrétiennes, 1954, p.36, n.5.  
² A. Levasti, ‘Clemente Alessandrino, iniziatore della Mistica cristiana’, Rivista di  
Ascetica e Mistica 12, 1967, pp. 127-47.  
³ J. Wytzes, ‘Paideia and Pronoia in the Works of Clemens Alexandrinus’, Vigiliae  
⁴ Stromateis [Miscellanies] 4.25.162.5 and Str. 5.14.141.1.
(Jn.1:1). The Word is the first principle of all things as the Son, ‘without which not one thing was made’ (Jn.1:3) and also co-eternal and uncreated with the Father who is the producer of the beginning. Clement addresses this idea again in a Commentary on the First Epistle of John attributed to Clement:

For when he says, “That which was from the beginning,” he touches upon the generation without beginning (sine principio) of the Son, who is co-existent (simul exstantis) with the Father. There was then, a Word importing an unbeginning eternity; as also the Word itself, that is, the Son of God, who being, by equality of substance, one with the Father, is eternal and uncreate (infectum).⁵

John’s language of self-generation is that of paternity: the Son, who is the principle of creation—through whom ‘all things came into being’ (Jn.1:3)—is one with the uncreated Father. But in John 1:18 Clement sees also a distinct feminine aspect of God. Drawing on where the Son of God is said to be in the “bosom” of the Father, Clement remarks,

What else is necessary? Behold the mysteries of love and then you will look into (ἐποπτεύσεις) the bosom (κόλπον) of the Father, whom God the only begotten alone showed the way. And God Himself is love; and out of love to us became visible to us. In His ineffability (ἀρρητον) He is Father; in His sympathy (συμπαθὲς) for us he became Mother. The Father by loving became feminine (εθηλύνθη): and the great sign of this is He whom He begot of Himself (ἐγέννησεν ἐξ αὐτου); and the fruit brought forth by love is love.⁶

The Greek word for “bosom” (κόλπος) has interesting connotations not readily translated directly into English. It is often read as “bosom,” but can also carry the sense of a “bay” or “gulf” or “hollow.” It can also refer to the womb, the vagina, or the lap, even the folds of a woman’s garment. Ultimately, however, it appears to signify the sympathetic quality of a woman’s embrace, such as when a child is held within the

⁵ 1 John 1:1 Clemens Alexandrinus dritter Band; Stromata Buch VII und VIII; Excerpta ex Theodoto; Eclogae Propheticae; Quis dives salvetur; Fragmente (GCS 17, Leipzig, 1906-36, p.210).
⁶ Quis Dives Salvetur [Who is the Rich man who will be Saved?] 37.1-2.
folds of its mother’s arms, and kept close to its place of origin and to what sustains its life. In this passage the Father becomes feminine in order to become known to us as motherly and as sympathetic; this is the “mystery of love” since the soul is “shown the way” (ἐξηγήσατο); that is, made visible to that which is ultimately ineffable and invisible. As Father, God remains ineffable, but as Mother, God becomes accessible, embracing us to her bosom and drawing us into the unfathomable depths of God’s love.

The use of sexual symbolism to describe the act of generation is entirely appropriate and immediately intelligible for the human condition. When applied to God we risk introducing a dichotomy into the Godhead. Clement, however, is careful to maintain the essential unity of God. Elsewhere, for instance, Clement defends the Orphic term μητροπάτωρ,7 saying that ‘the expression μητροπάτωρ not only intimates creation out of nothing (εκ μη οτων ένεσιν), but gives occasion to those who presently introduce and imagine a consort (σύζυγον) of the Deity’.8 However, Clement continues then to tell us that when Orpheus used this term he was actually paraphrasing the prophetic Scriptures, which tell us: ‘Behold, behold that I am He, and there is no god beside me’.9 It is wholly applicable then to use sexual symbolism when referring to God’s act of generation, and can be linked with Clement’s exegesis of John’s prologue.

Clement takes up his exegesis of John 1.18 in the fifth book of the Stromateis offering an exposition, not just of God’s first self-generating act, but also of the distinction between God’s transcendence and immanence. This distinction sows the seeds for Christian negative theology and it is worth quoting this passage at length:

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7 G. W. H. Lampe, A Patristic Greek Lexicon, Oxford, 1961. Lampe translates μητροπάτωρ this as “mother’s father” or “grandfather,” hence Wilson’s translation has “sire of our Mother.” However, I agree with what A. Le Boulluec’s suggestion that the word means, ‘mother and father at once or at the same time’ and leaves it untranslated (Clément d’ Alexandrie. Les Stromates: Stromate V, Sources chrétiennes [SChr]).

8 Str. 5.14.126.1-4. Clement is challenging the Gnostic idea of a separate deity called the Mother (i.e. Achamoth. See Irenaeus, adversus haereses 1.5.1) who the spiritual race (πνευματικοι) unite with in the ogdoad; ‘the eternal marriage of the Syzyge (συζυγίας)’ (Clement, Excerpta Ex Theodotos [Excepts from the Gnostic Theodotos] 63.1-61.2. See also Str. 5.14.102.2; exc. Thdot. 6.2-4.).

9 Str. 5.14.126.1-4 citing Deut. 32.9.
And John the apostle says: ‘No man has seen God at any time. The only-begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known,’ calling invisibility (α̉όρατον) and ineffability (ά̉ρρητον) the bosom of God. Hence some have called it Depth (βυθὸν), as containing and embosoming all things (ἐγκολπισάμενον τὰ πάντα),¹⁰ inaccessible and boundless. This discourse respecting God is most difficult to handle. For since the first principle (α̉ρχὴ) of everything is difficult to find, the absolutely first and oldest principle (ἡ πρώτη καὶ πρεσβυτάτη α̉ρχη), which is the cause of all other things being and having been, is difficult to prove. For how can that be expressed which is neither genus, nor difference, nor species, nor individual, nor number; no more, is neither an event, nor that to which an event happens? No one can rightly express Him wholly... Nor are any parts to be predicated of Him. For the One is indivisible; wherefore also it is infinite, not considered with reference to inscrutability, but with reference to its being without dimensions, and not having a limit. And therefore it is without form (α̉σχημάτιστον) and name (α̉νωνόμαστον). And if we name it, we do not do so properly, terming it either the One, or the Good, or Mind, or Absolute Being, or Father, or God, or Creator or Lord. We speak not as supplying His name; but for want, we use good names, in order that the mind may have these as points of support, so as not to err in other respects. For each one by itself does not express God; but all together are indicative of the power of the Omnipotent (τη̑Ϛ του̑ παντοκράτορος δυνάμεως). For predicates are expressed either from what belongs to things themselves, or from their mutual relation. But none of these are admissible in reference to God.¹¹

Clement makes the distinction here between the principle (άρχη) of all things and the first and eldest principle that signifies the God which no one has seen, recalling the distinction he makes between God who is άρχη (beginning) and God who is άναρχος (beginningless). This passage places the emphasis on God’s ineffability and invisibility more so than the previously considered passage concerning John 1.18. Here Clement develops his interpretation of κόλπος (bosom) according to the manner in which it connotes a “gulf” or “hollow.” Hence he observes that some

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¹⁰ Following Philo, De Confusione Linguarum 137.  
¹¹ Str. 5.12.81.3-82.4.
have called this “the Depth” or “the Abyss” (βυθὸν). Le Buelluec believes that the Depth here recalls the immensity (τὸ ἄχανές) into which the soul ascends in the greatness of Christ.

The ineffability and invisibility of God means that any predication of God is ultimately inadmissible and must only be understood as indicating the “power” of God rather than God in and of himself. God is not the One, or Good, or Mind, or Being, or Father, or God, or Creator, or Lord; he is beyond all of them, inaccessible, boundless, without form, and nameless. Elsewhere in the fifth book of the Stromateis Clement informs us that ‘we may somehow advance to the conception of the Almighty, knowing not what he is, but what he is not (οὐ̂ς ὁ ἐστιν, ὁ δὲ μὴ ἐστι γνωρίσαντες’). If we refer to God as “being itself” we do so in order to grasp what is actually ungraspable, supplying a name for that which is nameless. God is non-being (μὴ or οὐκ ὁντος), not because he does not exist as such, but because he is the cause of existence and therefore prior to it. This is the first and eldest principle, the ἄναρχος (beginningless) that produces the beginning.

The account of God in John’s Prologue, whom ‘no man has seen at any time,’ provides Clement with the basis of an apophatic theology. We can enter into a relation with God through the power that manifests itself in the form of the Son through the feminine and sympathetic love “he” has for us, but in remaining an unattainable Depth to us, we have no natural or ontological relation to him.

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12 Le Buelluec (SChr 279, 263) notes the confusion in Segaar’s MS between βυθὸς and βαθύς and points out the close connection between the latter and κολπός by directing the reader to the poetic term βαθύκολπος, an adjective referring to the deep folds of a dress. He also believes that the Depth here recalls the immensity (τὸ ἄχανές) into which the soul ascends in the greatness of Christ (See Str. 5.11.71.3).

13 See Str. 5.11.71.3

14 Str. 5.12.71.3.

15 Str. 5.12.82.1. οὐ κυρίως καλοῦντες ἦτοι ... ἢ αὐτὸ τὸ ὄν. S. R. C. Lilla points out that the identification of μὴ ὁν ἀνουσίαστος with the highest divinity features in much mystical thinking. This “does not imply the denial of [Gold’s] existence, but simply the fact that he cannot be considered as a “real being” since he is beyond (or above) οὐσία’ (Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism, London: Oxford University Press, 1971, p.196, n.6. This idea was articulated much earlier by Plato, Parmenides 141e-142a & Republic 6.509b. Cf. Plotinus, Enneads 5.4.1; Corpus Hermetica 2.5; Basilides as cited in Hippolytus’ refutio omnium haeresium 7.21; Dionysius the Areopagite, De divinis nominibus PG 3:588B.

16 Str. 2.16.74.1 ὁ θεὸς δὲ οὐδεμίαν ἔχει πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἡμίας φυσικὴν σχέσιν.
Clement’s argument becomes clearer in the second book of the *Stromateis*, where he speaks of how Wisdom leads the soul on to God, but to a God who is at once very close and yet who is always receding.17

[T]he Ruler of all [is] a Being difficult to grasp and apprehend, ever receding and withdrawing (πόρρω) from him who pursues. But He who is far off has come very near, oh ineffable marvel! ‘I am a God that draws near,’ says the Lord. He is in essence remote (πόρροω οὐσίαν); ‘for how is it that what is begotten can have approached the Unbegotten?’ But He is very near in virtue of that power (δύναμις) which embosoms all things (η τὰ πάντα ἐγκεκόλπισται) ... For the power of God is always present, engaging us in the power to see (ἐποπτικὴ) and to benefit and to instruct. Therefore Moses, persuaded that God is not to be known by human wisdom, said, ‘Show me your glory’; and into the thick darkness where God’s voice was, pressed to enter—that is, into the inaccessible (αδύτουϚ) and formless (αειδεις) ideas respecting existence (ό̄ντος).18

The passage announces a crucial distinction that became vital to Christian mystical traditions—the distinction of God in essence (οὐσία) and in power (δύναμις). This distinction received its foremost expression in the theology of St. Gregory Palamas.19 For Clement, God’s creature is never capable of comprehending or participating in God as He is in essence, but only as He is expressed by His power. God in essence is remote, but by virtue of His power, is very near to us.20

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17 The image of God as “always receding” is complemented by the image of the soul’s perfection being realised in an eternal reaching forth (επεκτινομενον) as found in St. Gregory of Nyssa’s idea of epektasis, based in turn on Philippians 3:13 (see J. Danielou ed., From glory to glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa’s mystical writings, London: John Murray, 1962).

18 Str. 2.2.5.2-6.4, working from Wisdom 7:17-22. See also Str. 5.11.71.3-5 & 5.11.78.1-2. As P. Camelot points out, Clement here is lays the foundation for the negative theology that continues through Gregory of Nyssa, *de vita Mosis II*, PG 44:372C-380A, and Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, *de mystica theologia* PG 3:1000C-1001A (Clément d’Alexandrie. Les Stromates: Stromate II, SChr 38, 36 n.5).

19 See Triads 3.2.5-18; 3.3.5-15; also J. Meyendorff, ‘An Existential Theology: Essence and Energy’ in A Study of Gregory Palamas; V. Lossky, ‘Uncreated Energies’ in The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church.

20 See also Clement’s interpretation of Genesis 22.3-4: “Abraham, when he came to the place which God told him of on the third day, looking up, saw the place afar off.”
Ostensibly this is close to a theory of emanation in that essence and power are only distinct in the way that the source of light is distinct from its rays. As light the rays are not other than its source, yet they are distinct in that they are not actually the source and are contingent on it. Elsewhere Clement refers to this light as that spoken of in 1 Timothy 6.16: ‘For that which is called the descent on the mount of God is the advent of divine power (ἐπίφασίς ἐστι θείας δυνάμεως), pervading the whole world, and proclaiming “the light that is inaccessible”’. The light then is both the immanent power of God that “embosoms” us and the transcendent essence of God that ultimately remains inaccessible to us.

For Clement then there is both continuity and discontinuity between God and his creature. Clement clearly establishes that God, in essence, is at utter remove from the creation and is therefore discontinuous with it. However, it was important to Clement that Christians retain the notion that we are also in some sense continuous with God. As Clement observes, when God made the human race He...
'breathed into [us] what was peculiar to himself';

thus Clement insists, ‘Let us not then, who are sons of the true light ... close the door against the light; but turning in on ourselves, illuminating the eyes of the hidden man, gazing on the truth itself and receiving its streams, let us clearly and wisely reveal such dreams as are true’. If God were utterly discontinuous the door of heaven would be shut against us, thereby removing beyond our reach the light by which we illuminate our souls and receive the power of God through gnosis. Hence, Clement is ‘of the opinion that man was called by the ancients light (φωτα)’. The light of God’s power is bestowed by grace, yet for Clement it is a light that we possessed all along but failed to recognise within us. The purpose of Clement’s negative theology ultimately is to remember that, as the first fruits, we are sons and daughters of the true light of God, who is, as the letter of James 1.17, the “Father of lights.”

Dionysius the Areopagite took the “unknown God” of Acts 17.23 and the account of Moses’ ascent of Mount Sinai (Exodus 20.21) as the bases for his negative theology. Dionysius was working from Gregory of Nyssa’s Life of Moses, which also focuses on the Exodus passage. Clement’s negative theology also draws on Moses’ ascent, yet it finds its clearest expression in his interpretation of John’s Prologue of John. As a foundation, not only for a Christian negative theology, but also for the distinction between the essence and power of God who lies beyond all linguistic, conceptual, and ontological barriers, Clement’s exegesis of John 1.18 is fundamental for the Early Fathers. His willingness to admit the sexual symbolism of God as both Father and Mother is also quite unique, and demonstrates the congeniality we have come to expect from Clement’s power to synthesise and find meaning where others may only find a reason for contention.

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23 Paedagogos [Instructor] 1.3.7.1.
24 Paed. 2.9.80.4.
25 Paed. 1.28.1-3. The word φωτα for light is the attic contraction of φαος. Hence Clement takes it in the same form as the accusative, φωτα, of man, φος. See also eclogue ex scripturis propheticis [the prophetic eclogue] 32.3-33.2.
A methodology of the Imagination

Angela Voss

‘After speaking a lot, change, but don’t be silent’

In his work on Sufi mystics, Henry Corbin uses the term *mundus imaginialis* to designate the psychic space in which the “super-sensible” reality of dreams, theophanies and spiritual beings are manifested, in a visionary sense, to the individual. This is the “intermediate place” in the neoplatonic cosmos of emanation from spirit to matter where the former is given a perceptible form through an image, and the latter loses the density of embodiment and is “seen through” to its immaterial essence. This is the place revealed through the symbolic image and perceived by the corresponding soul activity of the active imagination, an approach which has been developed extensively by C. G. Jung and James Hillman through the disciplines of depth and archetypal psychology.

In this paper I want to consider the possibility of a “methodology of the imagination” as a basis for the symbolic interpretation of texts and images in an academic context. Such an imaginal methodology would honour, and speak from, this meeting place of literal and spiritual realities. Corbin’s articulation of this world (which is described as more “real” than that of sense-perception alone) is of primary importance for studies in traditional cosmology and divinatory or magical practice. It grants the creative imagination an interpretative function in the realm of visionary experience, whether this is entered through divinatory methods or spontaneous intuitive insight. It allows imaginal perception to be understood as engendering a kind of knowledge which arises from the confluence of inner recognition with “external” reality. The study of esoteric traditions which incorporate astrology, alchemy, Cabala and

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1 A. Bocchi, *Symbolicae Quaestiones*, Bologna, 1555.
other divinatory and magical forms requires an understanding of this kind of knowledge, as these practices arise from, and depend on, the capacity of the imagination to form and interpret symbols in order to gain deeper insight into the spiritual dimensions of human life. It has been argued persuasively by Arthur Versluis that an authentic methodology for esotericism must include an understanding of the premises of esoteric practices (a “sympathetic empiricism”), if not necessarily an actual expertise in those practices (although this would be recommended). Furthermore, Versluis maintains that scholars of esoteric traditions should beware of

the dangers inherent in approaching this delicate, subtle, and sophisticated field without a sufficient appreciation not only of their subject’s historical context, but also of its underlying premises, or to put it another way, of their subject’s metaphysical and cosmological self-understanding.3

He makes the point that for the rational or scientific mind, the premises of esoteric understanding are “unfamiliar.” I would go further than that, and suggest that they are in fact opaque to a such a mind, if it is bound by its own convictions about the true (and only) nature of human knowledge as quantifiable. Most importantly, Versluis advocates a willingness to ‘enter into the perspective one is studying’ through the imagination, shifting from a stance of objectivity, of ‘self and other’ to one of imaginative participation in the underlying philosophy of the texts or images under consideration which then may reveal something of their transcendental meaning.4

This method is further explored by Jeremy Naydler.5 Taking a phenomenological approach, he again argues that the attempt to understand religious experience from a secular perspective and the disengagement from its “reality” for the subject cannot do justice to the

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existence of the spiritual as ‘as a real and operative dimension of existence’. This is also the concern of transpersonal research methods, as we shall see, and both these approaches emphasise that when the researcher moves into the realm of spiritual knowledge, understanding can no longer be acquired by rational or objective assessment alone. The tools of scholarship may then be applied in conjunction with a mode of empathy with one’s subject matter, in which insights are revealed through a ‘knowing... driven by devoted love’; in other words, deeper understandings are only available to the extent to which one desires to know them. Naydler implies that a successful methodology for understanding religious texts inevitably involves a change in consciousness on the part of the researcher, a deepening of perception, as the dynamic content of the text or image becomes personally meaningful and not simply an interesting object of critique:

Explanatory reductionism... will take the researcher halfway to an actual engagement with the spiritual content of a religious document or ritual then save the researcher from direct encounter with it by concentrating on its historical or social context or its linguistic structure.

Research for Naydler, then, itself becomes an act of gnosis where skills of scholarship are combined with openness and soul-engagement in an attempt to do justice to the numinous “truth” conveyed by the particular text or tradition under review. There could be no more convincing example of this “direct encounter” than in the writing of Corbin himself; or one might think of the differentiation made by the Platonic philosophers (and developed in Christian theology) between “human” reason or opinion and revelatory insight from the divine source: the former, as discursive thought (episteme), was always in service to the latter, which was a primary encounter with metaphysical reality as in prophecy or gnosis. Corbin’s is certainly not a fashionable scholarly method, and I am not suggesting it should be the only one. But if we are to pursue an approach in which the imagination is allowed to become a primary research tool, then we have to consider the nature

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6 Ibid., p.141.
7 Ibid., p.127.
8 Ibid., p.143.
and function of such an imagination, its *modus operandi*, its rightful way of expression and its relationship with other discourses. Most importantly, true imagination (from *im-ago*, ‘I act from within’), whether one considers it from neoplatonic, Romantic or archetypal psychological perspectives, is the mode in which the soul reveals its nature through the language of symbol and metaphor. As such, it is active and creative and will always seek to amplify and enhance that which it touches.

To bring the imagination to bear on a research topic requires that the metaphorical mode is honoured as a primary means of investigation. Marie Angelo, in her ground-breaking invitation to allow images to speak in academic research, refers to Jung’s definition of the psyche as ‘a series of images in the truest sense’, and suggests that if that is so,

then image is the substance of our most direct, immediate perceptions, and the characteristic moves of academic thinking: keeping a distance, interrogating, translating or interpreting, need to be recognised as only one style of rhetoric; a particularly iconoclastic, uninviting one. By maintaining the conventional “two cultures” opposition between image and concept, imagination and cognition, this rhetorical mode will take us into abstract definitions, but not into the imagistic deepening called for if we took Jung’s claim seriously.

Angelo herself teaches a programme in which “the art of seeing” is a primary method. She approaches images “from the inside out,” as objects of intelligence which have something to teach the observer about the very processes of observation. The impulse to abstract symbolic meaning prior to simply contemplating details is resisted, so that the student can begin to move into the image itself as “a poetic ground.” It is from this position that he or she may then begin to “move out,” to explore the historical and cultural contexts of the symbolism, to investigate the deeper meanings glimpsed during the

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11 Ibid., p.15.
12 Master of Arts in Transpersonal Arts and Practice at Chichester University, UK.
period of contemplation through appropriate source material and critiques. The study then becomes a dance of perspectives, perhaps initiated by a powerful recognition of the relationship of a life-event to the symbolism, or generating a creative element such as narrative, poetry or art-work as an element of amplification.

As an initial experiment in “image-teaching,” I asked my MA/M.Phil. students to illustrate the mundus imaginalis by bringing along images, texts or objects which they felt demonstrated it for them. The material offered included paintings, crystals, sculpture, poetry and a Tarot image, which each student connected to their life experience before exploring the archetypal or mythic dimensions of significance. In doing this, it was agreed that the levels of perception described by Corbin, the movement from sense perception to “internalisation” of the image were grasped more immediately and dynamically than had been possible through reading his text and attempting a conceptual understanding. The images were allowed to “speak” in the way advocated by Angelo (even acted out, in the case of the Tarot card), and in effect they became vessels for an active research process, whereby critical and discursive perspectives could always be referred back to a living connection with their symbolic properties. It was also noted (and I do not consider this as extraneous or irrelevant to a discussion of research methods), that through this creative sharing the group as a whole developed a deeper sense of its own purpose, and individuals felt the link between their inner vision and their research projects considerably strengthened.

Transpersonal Research
All the approaches so far considered find common ground under the general umbrella of transpersonal research methodology (defined as “qualitative” rather than “quantitative” research). I realise that I am opening a can of worms here, in the light of Jorge Ferrer’s recent exhaustive critique of the transpersonal movement. Ferrer questions the ‘intrasubjective empiricism imported from empiricist science that has dominated the field and colonised it with inapt and self-defeating requirements for replication, testing and falsification’, and seeks to

15 Richard Tarnas, Foreword to Ferrer, Revisioning Transpersonal Theory, p.xiii.
promote a participatory and pluralistic view through establishing ‘alternative epistemological and metaphysical grounds’ for research.\textsuperscript{16} Whilst his post-modern stance rejects any “a priori” assumptions of the “perennial wisdom” and its truths,\textsuperscript{17} it does prioritise an approach based on ‘direct, intimate contact with the world’ wherein the researcher participates in its ‘self-disclosure’ in order to understand the resonances between macrocosm and microcosm that we term “spiritual experience.”\textsuperscript{18} I will return to this radical “turn” later, but firstly want to consider some broad themes that arise in the work of William Braud and Rosemarie Anderson,\textsuperscript{19} insofar as they are A) of direct relevance for researchers of cosmology and divination, whether this involves client-based research or investigation into the spiritual dimensions of divinatory practice, and B) bear on the question of imaginal discourse.

Expansion of research methods.

In ‘Can Research be Transpersonal,’ Braud describes the tension existing between traditional or conventional research methods and “transpersonal” subject matter, concluding:

However, if the assumptions, methods and praxis of research can be expanded, extended, enriched and enlivened, so that they better address the deep, expansive, subtle and profound experiences that characterise the transpersonal, these tensions and ill-fittings can melt away.\textsuperscript{20}

By “transpersonal,” Braud is referring to the particular category, within psychology, of EHE (exceptional human experience), i.e. including the “spiritual” in its huge variety of manifestations. In the context of religious and divinatory studies, “transpersonal” then can refer to the incorporation of spiritual experience into research, however broadly that is defined. I would suggest that one route this might take is that of the image-work I have already described, as a pathway to a deeper

\textsuperscript{17} Ferrer, \textit{Revisioning Transpersonal Theory}, p.87.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p.173.
\textsuperscript{20} W. Braud, ‘Can Research be Transpersonal?’ (www.integral-inquiry.com/cybrary/crbt.html).
understanding of the nature of symbolic perception through “doing it” rather than relying on others’ descriptions, or analyses, of it. In other words, it would involve reflexive attention to one’s own participation in the process being studied, looking at it from many different angles, both inner and outer. This would provide a means of connecting research material with the researcher’s own search for meaning, and would promote deeper understanding by both researcher and reader. The corollary to this, of course, would be that the researcher would only be drawn to investigate in the first place a theme which “captured” his or her imagination like a bait that “called” for attention. As Braud comments (here echoing both Versluis and Naydler), ‘research may share commonalities with individuation’ (in the Jungian sense), and it could be argued that the most effective and transformative research is that in which the researcher feels something is “at stake” for his or her life and is impelled to get to the bottom of it. A sense of the writer’s passion and commitment is much more likely to engage the reader and even promote new insights which could change previously held assumptions:

If the research findings are presented to audiences in a sufficiently rich and particularised manner, the audience, too, may experience transformation. Thus, the typical boundaries among research, practical applications, and psychospiritual growth and development melt away during rich qualitative studies of meaningful topics.21

In my opinion, one of the most important aspects of transpersonal research is its insistence on addressing “multiple levels of knowing,” in which Braud includes

...conventional sensory information about the outer world, proprioceptive and kinaesthetic information about one’s inner world, thoughts, images, feelings, bodily knowings, tacit knowings, intuitions, direct knowing—including paranormal modes and a mode of knowing through being or becoming the object of one’s enquiry... meditation, deep contemplation, entering silence and emptiness, entering various altered states of consciousness and partaking of the different varieties of non-ordinary knowing

21 Ibid., p.4
available therein, accessing one’s dreams, using all faculties of the imagination... 22

The stylistic forms which could contain such expressions not only include conventional prose and critical discourse, but also narratives, poetry and artwork. I have already suggested that in the symbolic analysis of an image or textual image, critical sources on the symbolic meanings could dovetail with poetic or narrative methods of interpretation which allow the image to “speak” in many voices. These could include autobiographical references or examples of symbolism “working” in the world. More widely, by using the word “intentionality,” Braud is touching on a largely ignored aspect of academic research, namely the impact of “affectivity” on the quality of research which is determined by the researcher’s love and enthusiasm for their subject. 23 This desire, which can be directed towards specific aims, ranging from the gathering and cataloguing of information to the enhancing of spiritual awareness (of self and/or reader), is surely the “qualitative” essence of the work. It may even facilitate the marriage of intuitive/reflexive and critical/objective modes of study and heal the age-old split between head and heart, for love—as the impulse of eros—demands the union of opposites (in the sense of the alchemical coniunctio). That, as I understand it, is one of the motivations behind transpersonal research—to reach the place where the distinction between “outer” and “inner” moves into single focus, where the many forms of things disclose hidden, unifying themes:

...through endeavouring to plumb the depths of a given experience, not only can we appreciate the experience more fully, but we also can increase the possibility of encountering the universal lessons deep within all particulars. 24

Divinatory systems using symbolic images are of course the supreme models for this movement from universal to particular meaning (and vice versa), and it opens the possibility for astrological researchers to move between theories of symbolic interpretation and particular

22 Ibid., p.7.
23 Ibid., p.8.
24 Ibid., p.9.
examples with clients or in their own lives of universal meaning “realised” in concrete events in the world. The experience of symbolic “instantiation”\(^\text{25}\) can then explored on its own terms in a variety of ways: as a phenomenon of “transpersonal” understanding, a “truth” of participant and practice (which can be both related to tradition, source-material, symbolic theory as well as revelatory significance for the individual) or as an living image. For example, the researcher could present an initial narrative on, say, the significance of an astrological transit, or divinatory image, in his or her life. This could then be developed via an exploration of the universal principle in question with its traditional meanings and associations, symbolism (e.g. neoplatonic, Jungian) and questions of the function of the imagination as an organ of interpretation. If it is emphasised at the outset that imaginal research does not seek to “reduce” symbolic experience to rational/scientific norms and terms, nor to “explain” it through an objectivist discourse which is alien to its own terms of reference, then it may perhaps be granted a basis in a mode of “seeing” which operates through analogy and speculation.

**Intuitive Inquiry**

This leads us to Rosemarie Anderson’s paper “Intuitive Inquiry”\(^\text{26}\) in which she develops some thoughts on a transpersonal method which values the “immediate apprehension of meaning” within a given research context. This “immediate knowing” is linked to the idea of sympathetic resonance, where poetry, metaphor and symbol are used explicitly to connect directly with the reader’s intuitive understanding. The idea of sympathetic resonance as a way of uniting like with like is of course an ancient one, and takes us deep into the heart of esoteric cosmology (although this is not acknowledged by Anderson). Taken up by Jung with formulation of the “acausal connecting principle” underlying synchronistic events, it is a powerful image, which justifies the principle that to “know” a thing requires “believing” it, in the sense that true understanding arises from the sympathetic resonance of the


\[^{26}\text{R. Anderson, ‘Intuitive Inquiry’ in Braud & Anderson, Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences, Ch.4.}\]
knower’s soul with the matter under investigation.\(^{27}\) Anderson uses the term “focal depth” to refer to the quality of attention given to the research material, and suggests that the research activity itself is a form of ritual which creates a space for the sacredness of human life to reveal itself under the researcher’s gaze. In this expanded state of awareness, the researcher is guided by intuition as to the most appropriate methods for the particular topic of enquiry. The problem remains, however, that useful as Anderson’s proposed guidelines are (and they are undoubtedly of interest for the exploration of the divinatory “moment” or revelation) the word “intuition” remains somewhat vague. Despite the social science/psychology context, Anderson is clearly referring to an orientation which we could define as religious as it seeks to open up the potential of an imaginative “knowing’ with access to a “sacred dimension.” I would argue that this can be much more clearly developed and the word “intuition” given a stronger foundation if we now take as our model a system of interpretation which arose through the neoplatonic school of philosophical hermeneutics and became established in early Christian theological discourse. I will then show how this way of working could become the framework for our methodology of the imagination, and how it can help us locate and identify the work of Corbin, Jung and Hillman on active imagination at a very particular level of intellectual understanding. It also provides a philosophical rationale for transpersonal theory, which as I see it is struggling in the dark as long as it maintains a firmly secular or psychological orientation.

Symbolic Method
The fourfold method of interpreting a text or image immediately presents us with the problem, as in all hierarchical systems (especially Platonic), of discrete levels ascending like a ladder, which tend to be laden with value-judgements.\(^{28}\) However, I would invite you to suspend


\(^{28}\) On the four levels of interpretation see John F. Boyle ‘St Thomas Aquinas and Sacred Scripture’ (www.nd.edu/~afreddos/papers/Taqandss.htm); Geoffrey Cornelius, *The Moment of Astrology*, Bournemouth: Wessex Astrologer, 2003, Ch.14; Dante ‘Letter to
Voss: A methodology of the Imagination

this over-literal image in favour of a free-flowing movement of perceptive intensity, which encompasses different conditions of relationship between the observer/reader and what is studied. For the purposes of clarity, however, we must distinguish between four stages which are described as having their own distinct modes of expression; the literal, allegorical, symbolic (tropological) and anagogic. A researcher using this framework would be able to locate him or herself at a particular stage, which would then require a mode of discourse appropriate to it. They could also move between different levels (the seeing with many eyes that Braud advocates) and alert the reader to the dangers of confusing “literal” discourse, for example, with symbolic interpretation. This could be especially important in writing about divinatory experiences and honouring the mode of intelligence which uses intuitive (symbolic) insight rather than logical/rational (literal) deduction. That the final goal of this hermeneutic unfolding is anagogic or mystical unity of the individual soul with the ground of its being (i.e. knowing God is becoming God), implies that the previous three stages describe a continuum along which the division between knower and object of knowledge gradually decreases. However one might understand the anagogy, at any rate, “knowledge” or “vision” proceeding along these lines ultimately culminates with a sense of the unus mundus of the alchemists and firmly places the use of symbol and metaphor within a teleological and purposeful process of ever-deepening insight. It does not have to include a blinding revelation of divine light—it may be glimpsed in any divinatory practice as a profound sense of merging between self and world.

The literal and allegorical ways of knowing are self-evident. The former sees things “as they are,” as literal facts “out there”; the latter sees one thing in terms of another thing, but still keeps its distance from


29 It is not difficult to see the correspondence here with the four alchemical stages of nigredo, albedo, citrinitas and rubedo.
both. As Corbin explains, symbolic revelation is of another order entirely:

The current attitude is to oppose the real to the imaginary as though to the unreal, the utopian, as it is to confuse the exegesis of the spiritual sense with an allegorical interpretation. Now, every allegorical interpretation is harmless the allegory is a sheathing, or rather, a disguising of something that is already known or knowable otherwise, while the appearance of an Image having the quality of a symbol is a primary phenomenon, unconditional and irreducible, the appearance of something that cannot manifest itself otherwise to the world where we are.\(^{30}\)

In relation to our imaginal method, I would like to draw attention to this third stage of interpretation, the tropological, which designates the point at which “facts” in the text or image under study are “realised” to be of direct relevance and import for the reader/viewer, not in a personally subjective sense, but in the sense of the reader’s participation in a reality which encompasses and is much greater than his or her “experience.” *Tropos* means a “turning,” and this is the point at which apprehension turns back to acknowledge its own implication in the “knowing” process. To return to Ferrer, this is, I believe, what he is referring to as the “participatory turn,” a ‘creative and multidimensional human access to reality,’ (whatever “reality” may mean here) and he contrasts this vision with the “intrasubjectivity” of the mind which cannot see past its own personal imperatives:

...the crux of this participatory turn is a radical shift from intrasubjective experiences to participatory events in our understanding of transpersonal and spiritual phenomena. In a nutshell, the participatory turn conceives transpersonal and spiritual phenomena, not as individual inner experiences, but as participatory events that can occur in different loci, such as an individual, a relationship, a community, a larger collective identity or a place. The intrasubjective dimension of these phenomena, then, can now be better understood as the participation of

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individual consciousness in these events and not as its fundamental essence or basic nature. In contrast, the emergence of a transpersonal event can potentially engage the creative participation of all dimensions of human nature, from somatic transfiguration to the awakening of the heart, from erotic communion to visionary cocreation, and from contemplative knowing to moral insight.\textsuperscript{31}

This is the point at which traditional research methods inevitably fail to do justice to the richness of the vision, and it is, I believe, what transpersonal research methods are attempting to address. Despite his fundamentally different orientation to spiritual experience, Ferrer would seem to be talking about what for Corbin would be an interiorisation of the cosmos, realising that to adequately convey the symbolic level of understanding, inner experience must be evoked as a direct and intrinsic part of its expression, and located in a larger whole. But whilst this can easily be described, it is more difficult to speak or write from this place, or rather it is impossible to do so, without changing to a self-reflexive, metaphorical or poetic discourse. I will give here an example of what I mean: in Joanne Snow-Smith’s book \textit{The Primavera of Sandro Botticelli, a Neoplatonic Interpretation} she takes the reader through the four levels of interpretation in relation to this famous painting. The literal and allegorical perspectives do not present a problem for the art historian—there is an abundance of fact and narrative to inform the viewer from historical and contemporary sources. But what does the symbolic level demand? It is quite appropriate that Snow-Smith refers to this level as that of the spiritual initiation, and locates the imagery of the painting in the context of the mystery rites of Persephone and Demeter. She then moves to the anagogical, demonstrating that the painting has subtle resonances with what was the fount of all truth for the Renaissance humanists, the Christian revelation.

However, in taking the same “objective” stance for these two levels as she does for the first two, she is surely mis-representing them. The tropological may well be about the initiation process, but it must, inevitably, be about \textit{her} initiation, the implications of the symbolic meaning for \textit{her} life, as it must be for all viewers. She cannot be exempt

\textsuperscript{31} Ferrer, \textit{Revisioning Transpersonal Theory}, p.184.
from this, if she is going to lead the reader through the levels in a way which authentically conveys their essential nature. Of course then the anagogic becomes problematic, for it would involve a realisation and a mode of writing that would become “gnostic” or revelatory, and cease to be “academic” in the accepted sense—which is exactly why writers like Ficino or Corbin are problematic for the current secularist approach in religious studies.

This is also the problem that diviners, who work with the third level—if not often the fourth—encounter in their studies, for in locating themselves at the symbolic level of insight, they have to find a way of articulating “the participatory turn” which does not just resort to the bald and “literal” statements of the “intrasubjective” experience: for example, ‘the client was depressed because she had a Saturn transit.’ Such an experience may well provide the impetus for an exploration of the Saturnine principle, but to do so one must explain the difference between a literal and a symbolic statement, knowing that poetic metaphor belongs to a different discourse. Even the deepest spiritual insight can be given a context, a tradition, a framework which defines it and gives it an identifiable credential, and he challenge lies in moving, and knowing that one is moving, from one world to the other. One is reminded of the metaphor of Plato’s cave, where the philosopher must come back into the cave to explain what he has seen; or the alchemical insight that the final stage of the opus, or *rubedo*, consists of an all-encompassing and immediate sense of all previous stages. Indeed the anagogic level itself is often described as a simultaneous grasping of literal, allegorical, symbolic and mystical senses all in one—it is not a re-location on some higher, other-worldly plane, but a deep wisdom which knows exactly how to express itself in an appropriate mode for the level of understanding of the reader or audience. How does this relate to our imaginative discourse? For one thing, an image is the supreme means by which all four levels can be negotiated, and it is to this process of active engagement to which I now turn.

**Conclusion: Ta’wil**

It is fitting to return to Henry Corbin (and James Hillman, who was deeply indebted to his work) for a method of working with images or themes which allows the researcher to create a deliberate trajectory of intent, encompassing concrete experience or manifestation,
interpretation and symbolic meaning. Corbin uses the Arabic term *ta’wil* to describe what is essentially a journey of spiritual hermeneutics through the fourfold, the interpretation of the cosmic dimension of a text or image: in *ta’wil* one refers sensible forms back to imaginative forms and then may be led to still deeper, numinous meanings. This cannot be done in reverse, as it would destroy the potentialities of the imagination. Nor can it be done through reverting to either sense-perception or “universal logic,” but only through staying with the intuition of meaning grasped by the active imagination.32 This is echoed by Hillman who insists on the differentiation between the mental process of associative interpretation and the intuitive process of staying connected to the image:

To see the archetypal in an image is thus not a hermeneutic move. It is an imagistic move. We amplify an image by means of myth in order not to find its archetypal meaning but in order to feed it with further images that increase its volume and depth and release its fecundity.33

Although one could argue with this clear-cut distinction between thought and imagination (and I would certainly suggest that the modes can inform each other) Hillman valuably points out the danger of losing hold of the embodied significance of image (and thus failing to make the “participatory turn”) and falling back into allegory:

Unless we maintain this distinction between inherent significance and interpretative meaning, between insightful an image and hermeneutics, we shall not be able to stay with the image and let it give us what it bears. We shall have the meaning and miss the experience, miss the uniqueness of what is there by our use of methods for uncovering what is not there. We shall forget that wholeness is not only a construction to be built or a goal to achieve, but, as Gestalt says, a whole is presented in the very physiognomy of each event.34

34 Ibid.
We are back to Rosemarie Anderson’s “intuitive moment,” and up against the extreme difficulty of staying on the “knife-edge” between analysis and synthesis, between “diabolic” and “symbolic” modes.35 This then is what I am moving towards in my attempts to define a “methodology of the imagination.” It is a marrying of worlds, a dance of perspectives, an intentional bridging of concrete/literal observation with participatory meaning. I would argue that it is only the active imagination that can make these fluid moves, that can mediate between worlds, that can bring the “light of human nature” into a single focus with “the light of divine revelation.”36 In this sense we might say that all research models can be regarded as “imaginal” in that they ally themselves in varying degrees with contrasting perspectives on the literal-symbolic spectrum. To describe the location of the researcher as medial in this sense does mean that secular/sacred divides no longer apply to kinds of knowledge, for all are understood as being in service to the union of the human soul and its cosmological counterpart. In essence, this is the metaphor that informs the kind of imaginal research I am proposing, and takes us back to Corbin to whom I leave the last word:

The way of reading and comprehending to which I refer presupposes, in the strict sense of the word, a *theosophia*, that is, the mental or visual penetration of an entire hierarchy of spiritual universes that are not discovered by means of syllogisms, because they do not reveal themselves except through a certain mode of cognition, a *hierognosis* that unites the speculative knowledge of traditional information to the most personal interior experience, for, in the absence of the latter, technical models alone would be transmitted, and these would be doomed to a rapid decline.37

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36 On the Platonic idea of the two lights of the soul, see Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium*, ed. S. Jayne, Dallas: Spring Publications, 1985, Ch.4.
Three short essays in astrophysiology

Roger Sworder

The Man in the Zodiac

To this day there is no wholly plausible explanation, nor yet range of explanations, for the twelve Zodiacal signs. No single set of phenomena has been identified to which the twelve signs correspond in their sequence. Least of all may we see them unambiguously in the stars.¹ On the explanations presently available, the twelve Zodiacal signs were already the result of a hotchpotch of influences by the time of Aratus (c.315 BC-240 BC) and the temples at Esné and Dendera.² But this is to take an unduly pessimistic position. The chances of finding a single persuasive explanation should be much better than this. Our situation is like that of a detective with certain items of information to help him identify his quarry. Suppose X to live in Manchester. This reduces the pool to a few million. Suppose X red haired. This reduces the millions to a few hundred thousand. Each new item of information further reduces the pool which contains X. If there are enough items of information, and they are specific enough, then the pool reduces to a single individual. Similarly with the twelve signs in strict order. It is most unlikely that there are even two sets of phenomena which will fit the series sign by sign. Twelve is a huge number of separate items of

¹ As Louis MacNeice remarks: ‘Of the constellations, Leo is the only one who looks like his name’ (Astrology, London: Aldus Books, 1964, pp.75-76). MacNeice observes attempts to derive the Zodiac names from seasonal activities, or in accord with the four elements, or attempts to recognise certain psychological traits in the depictions of the signs. Moreover there are different signs used in the various forms of astrology found around the world; see for example the accounts of the “zodiac” in China, Mexico, Tibet and India in Rupert Gleadow’s, The Origins of the Zodiac, New York: Castle Books, 1968. In the present context we are primarily interested with “classical” antiquity, which concerns the Greco-Roman world, from where the recognisable basis of the modern western Zodiac is derived.

information, and their being in strict sequence is a further extremely limiting factor. The riddle begs for a solution.

Let us rehearse just one feature of the Zodiacal calendar. The first degree of Cancer is the Summer Solstice in the Northern Hemisphere; the first degree of Capricorn is the Winter Solstice. From Cancer through Sagittarius is the descending half of the year during which the sun moves South; from Capricorn through Gemini is the ascending half of the year during which the sun moves North.

Aratus begins our earliest complete account of the twelve Zodiacal signs from Cancer, but he does not ascribe the signs to parts of the human body. Aratus, Phaenomena L.542-552. Manilius is the first to do so and he begins from equinoctial Aries at the head. Manilius, Astronomica 2.446-471, tr. G. P. Goold, Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, 1977. I say that the twelve Zodiacal signs represent the head and torso of a man. The signs from Cancer through Sagittarius represent his back in descending order; the signs from Capricorn through Gemini represent his front in ascending order. As follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FRONT</th>
<th>CROWN</th>
<th>CANCER</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GEMINI</td>
<td>HEAD</td>
<td>LEO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAURUS</td>
<td>NECK</td>
<td>VIRGO</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARIES</td>
<td>THORAX</td>
<td>LIBRA</td>
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<tr>
<td>PISCES</td>
<td>WAIST</td>
<td>SCORPIO</td>
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<tr>
<td>AQUARIUS</td>
<td>LOINS</td>
<td>SAGITTARIUS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPRICORN</td>
<td>PERINEUM</td>
<td>BACK</td>
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</table>

3 Aratus, Phaenomena L.542-552.
CANCER is the year’s zenith, the top of the skull. A crab because the cranium is the most exoskeletal part of the body.
LEO is the mane of hair which grows over, or only round the cranium.
VIRGO is the nape of the neck, defenceless and mortally vulnerable.
LIBRA is the scales of the shoulders and arms.
SCORPIO is the vertebrae at the small of the back.
SAGITTARIUS is a backside with legs of its own.

CAPRICORN is the nadir, the anus through which waste is ejected and the scrotum from which new life is generated. Rank and horny.
AQUARIUS is the ithyphallic pipe which carries the living stream.
PISCES is the ejaculated spermatozoa.
ARIES is the hairy chest of a ram.
TAURUS is the bull’s roaring throat.
GEMINI is a pair of eyes.
CANCER is the cranium again.

The twelve Zodiacal signs symbolise all the parts of a line or band around the torso and head of an adult human male. This line is comparable to the two Great Meridians of the human body in Chinese medicine, the first such lines in the study of acupuncture. As the Zodiac the line represents the human male at the very peak of sexual arousal, and the ejaculated seed is also represented. This ascription of the twelve signs to the parts of the human body differs from the traditional doctrine where Aries represents the crown of the head and Pisces the feet. The traditional theory includes the legs but does not distinguish between the ascending and descending signs. As a result Aries is as far from its adjoining sign Pisces as it can be. The traditional theory applies the signs to the body; the account offered here derives the signs from the body. Here the links between body part and sign themselves explain the choice and order of the twelve Zodiacal signs.

If the Zodiacal signs refer to the parts of a man’s body, back and front, then these same parts of a man’s body relate to the seasons of the year. The head comprises three summer signs of the Northern Hemisphere; the loins three winter signs; and the thorax the equinoctial signs. The male body is a representation of those astronomical movements which generate the seasons. The male body is a microcosm of the particular astronomical conditions experienced on earth,
geocentrically considered. Here purely temporal divisions are transformed into the spatial articulations of a body. But we achieve a similar transformation every time we recognise how the seasons of the year correspond to the arctic, temperate and equatorial zones of the earth in space.

Let us consider Capricorn. Capricorn is a very odd sign, comprising the front half of a goat and the rear half of a fish. This unfortunate hybrid is in the act of clambering out of the water onto dry land. All this reflects how the Sun’s entry into Capricorn marks at once the moment of the Sun’s furthest withdrawal from the Northern Hemisphere and the earliest moment of its return. We call this moment a solstice, a stasis or suspension of the Sun’s movement north or south, geocentrically considered. According to Aristotle the Sun’s approach to the Northern Hemisphere generates life there, while its withdrawal causes destruction.\(^5\) So Midwinter’s Day is at once the fullest triumph of chaos and the beginning of a new order. The Greeks and Romans consecrated Capricorn to Saturn since in this sign the Sun was furthest away as Saturn was the most distant of the planets. The Roman Saturnalia and later Greek Kroniades celebrated this God at Midwinter by making the householders slaves and the slaves their masters and mistresses.\(^6\) In a season of good cheer everything was turned upside down and the Lord of Misrule presided over a ritualised revolution.\(^7\) This is the dissolution represented by the fishtail and the water. The goat’s clambering onto the land is the salvation of the New Year which begins the recovery of a pristine order.

The perineum exhibits this same dissonance and doubleness, the weirdness of the goat fish. The defecatory organ is right next to the generative organs. Here too is an end and a beginning. Worse, the urinary organs are, in part, identical with the generative organs:

But Love has pitched his mansion in
The place of excrement.\(^8\)

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\(^6\) Macrobius, Saturnalia VII.


\(^8\) W. B. Yeats, from ‘Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop’ from Words for Music Perhaps, 1933.
The waste of the anus is most dead and foul to us, ultimate dissolution. But the testicles are the source, with the female ovaries, of new life. In both sexes the closeness of the excretory to the reproductive organs is a startling thing. The organs which give us our greatest physical pleasure and the organs which most disgust us are side by side or actually identical. And all this is hidden away as secretly as our bodies allow, in the very depth of our winters. The descending path of the Sun from Cancer to Capricorn is the passage from mouth to anus, while the energies generated in the sexual organs rise up and invigorate the body from below. Those energies enable tumescence; the spurting seed; the hair on the chest; the deep loud voice; and most subtly of all, that gleam in the eye.

The Sun’s course through the Zodiacal constellations is often represented by an astronomical circle drawn right round the sky above and below the horizon at an angle to the equator. The Zodiacal constellations above the equator are in the Northern Hemisphere where they are the signs of Spring and Summer. The signs south of the Equator accompany the Sun during the darker half of the Northern Hemisphere’s year. The circle of the Sun’s journey through the fixed stars bisects the equator at an angle of some 24 degrees; the constellations of Cancer and Capricorn occupy areas of the sky 24 degrees above and 24 degrees below the equator. But because Cancer and Capricorn are traditionally the Solstitial signs and mark the Sun’s most extreme movements north and south, these two signs are themselves taken to represent North and South. The Zodiacal hoop which is actually set at only a slight angle to the equator is now forced onto its edge at right-angles to the equator. In this way the astronomical circle which we call the ecliptic is converted into a meridian. Now the line drawn from the first point of Cancer to the first point of Capricorn represents the pole itself, with the first point of Cancer as North Pole and the first point of Capricorn as South Pole. This pole is then assimilated to the human spine. Similarly the equinoctial signs correspond to the tropics and human thorax.

In this way a geocentric and Northern Hemisphere perspective on the cosmos enables an identification of the Zodiacal signs with the latitudes and of both with the male form. Summer is northern, Spring and Autumn equatorial, Winter is southern. Like the seasonal structure, this polar structure too is found in the male body, as the spine. Since a
man’s body is connected not only with the seasons but with the latitudes, the Sun’s journeys between its Northern and Southern tropics are one basis for understanding human anatomy.

I have used the expression “geocentric perspective.” We have been concerned here with the relations between the heavenly movements and a man’s body. We may think of that body as a microcosmic representation of the particular astral conditions which bear upon the earth on which men live. It is just these astronomical conditions as they affect the earth that shape the human body. So the heliocentric system is much less useful here than the notion of the Sun’s moving through its signs. The derivation of the correspondences between the living body and the stars proceeds quite properly and scientifically on the geocentric system as the one applicable in this context of astro-anatomy.

Let us now bisect our solstitial Zodiac through the Equinoxes and not the Solstices. We draw an imaginary line from the first point of Aries, the Spring equinox, to the first point in Libra, the Autumn equinox. If we do the same to our male head and torso we divide it into two halves. The upper half comprises the head with the front of the torso as far as the sternum, and the back to the base of the nape. The classical bust.

According to Porphyry, Homer’s ‘Cave of the Nymphs’ in the Odyssey has Cancer and Capricorn as its two gates north and south. The Northern gate is the way down for mortals; the Southern gate is for immortals only. We may assume that it is through the Southern gate that Odysseus passes with Athene. René Guénon identified Porphyry’s reading of Homer’s Cave with Hindu doctrine concerning the light and dark halves of the year, interpreted solstitially. If Porphyry is not anachronistic, then Homer knew the Zodiac as having two halves and as turning on what were traditionally the most northern and the most southern constellations in the Sun’s path.

Proportions of Venus
The equinoctial and solstitial readings of the Zodiac both ascribe the signs to parts of the human body. These ascriptions demand

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10 R. Guenon, Fundamental Symbols, p.159.
methodological justification since scientists now generally dismiss them. Ascribing the star signs to the human body has this much in common with contemporary scientific theory: these ascriptions too are fully expressible mathematically and are quite as exact. So, on the solstitial reading:

\[
\text{Cancer: crown : : Taurus: throat}
\]

\[
\text{and}
\]

\[
\text{Cancer: Taurus : : crown: throat}
\]

Euclid developed the theory of ratios and proportions in the fifth book of the *Elements*. In song the same science is realised in metre, metaphor and the musical intervals; Platonic astronomy turns on the mathematics of the diatonic scale;\(^{11}\) again, according to Plato, fire is to air as air is to water as water is to earth.\(^{12}\) Anatomy and sculpture are also based on the proportionate relations between all the parts and wholes of animal bodies, amply shown in the works of Polycleitus. Ancient science and art exhibit a general preference for rationalising in terms of proportion.

The case of metaphor is most striking. *If brains were dynamite, yours wouldn’t blow your hat off* identifies the relation between brain and hat with that between say, mine and dirt. *Stephen Dedalus walked the streets of Dublin like the old moon looking at the young earth* identifies the relation between Dedalus and Dublin with that between old moon and young earth. Literature and wit too are often mathematical arts by which we come to understand the unknown, your brain power, Stephen’s mood, by solving an equation in which all the other terms and the ratio are known to us.

The same science of proportions accommodates theology too. Take as an example an ancient rite of the goddess Athene. In Homer’s *Iliad* the Trojan noblewomen present a robe to a statue of Athene as they


\(^{12}\) Plato, *Timaeus* 32B.
pray that the goddess defend the walls of Troy against attack. In the yearly festival of the Panathenaea the Athenians also presented a robe to a statue of the goddess. It seems that the robe of the goddess is the wall of the city metaphorically. The Athenians began the weaving of their robe nine months before its presentation to the goddess. The weaving began at the Chalkeia, a festival which celebrated group marriages. From this point of view the robe is a symbol of the human body which is nine months in the weaving or gestation. For just as the robe clothes the body, so the body clothes the soul with the unfamiliar tunic of our flesh.

Soul/body = body/robe = robe/walls

With these successive investitures we have a parallel to the notes of the musical scale, which also can constitute a series in which a note is linked to the one before it and the one after it by the same ratio. One ratio generates the intervals of a regular gradation along a single continuum. In the case of the musical notes the continuum is pitch. In the case of Athene successive sheaths. In the case of the four elements it is their relative density. But a single ratio may also organise a number of terms discontinuously. So instead of the same ratio in the intervals of the terms in a series along one continuum:

\[ \frac{a}{b} = \frac{b}{c} = \frac{c}{d} = \frac{d}{e} = \frac{e}{f} \ldots \]

The same ratio may organise the intervals of terms discontinuously across two or more different continua. In this way we can apply the one ratio or relation to connect things of quite different kinds, not merely the terms in one continuous range but the terms in two quite different ranges. This is what is happening with the Zodiacal identifications with parts of the human body.

Take another astrophysiological example, the name Venus. The word “Venus” names a planet and also the Roman goddess of sexual love. The word “Aphrodite” did the same for the Greeks. The goddess

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13 Iliad 6.286-311.
14 Empedocles, frag.126; cf. frag.120, Homer’s account of Athene and Odysseus at the Cave of the Nymphs on Ithaca, and Porphyry’s account of both.
and the planet have the same name. The goddess of love stands over copulation on the pubic mound which bears her name.\textsuperscript{15} The planet is the Evening Star which stands over the Sun’s entry into the Western darkness. The Sun is the phallus of the Sky God which charges like a chariot into Night’s palace. The delicate limbs of love are as full and as pink as the red sky of evening. Venus the planet stands in the same relation to the transition from day to night as Venus the goddess of love stands to the sexual act of male and female. This is why the planet and the goddess of love have the same name. The name is the key to a complex teaching which binds the phenomenon of dusk to animal copulation by virtue of a single ratio or pattern in two different dimensions. The evening sky and the act of love are identifiable.

\textbf{Day/night = male/female}

The word Venus is the clue. Once the thought of comparing day and night with male and female crosses the mind, the discovery of the correspondences continues indefinitely. So day is male, night is female. The galaxy is the milk of night’s breasts. The moon measures her menstrual cycle. Through her Western doors the rounded phallus of the sky god enters his wife; in the womb of night the child is conceived and gestates; through her Eastern doors the rounded head of the sky god is born from his mother. There too Venus stands as Morning Star to aid this other passage.

Let us assume for the moment the equivalence between the heavenly movements and animal reproduction. What follows? We might say that the equivalence arises because animals on earth are formed after the pattern of the astral events which condition their existence under the sky. The microcosmic mortal creature reproduces itself in ways which copy the unions and divisions of day and night under which it lives. From a materialist point of view this has a certain appeal: the gross movements of the heavens determine and dominate the puny formations of the animals under them. Or we may prefer the ancient Greek cosmogonists who placed love at the very first beginning of things.\textsuperscript{16} In their view, the heavens formed themselves around Love.

\textsuperscript{15} In females the \textit{mons pubis} is sometimes called the \textit{mons Veneris} (mound of Venus).
\textsuperscript{16} For example, Parmenides, frag.13.
In this duplication of a single ratio between day and night and between male and female, it seems that neither the astronomical nor the sexological can be given precedence over the other.

We may express the ratio in an indefinitely long and arbitrary sequence as follows: Sun/phallus = milky way/milk = moon/menstrual cycle = planet Venus/Goddess of love, and so on. It was precisely the noticing, developing and symbolising of such patterns which sustained the Greek and Roman theologians. The Greeks thought of order, *cosmos*, as the systematic repetition of a single pattern. The pattern is repeated uniformly in a continuous series, like the musical notes or the elements, or it is repeated in two quite different and discontinuous dimensions, as in the evening sky and the sexual act. The “rationalising” bent of the ancient mind could reach for profound connections between things in ways which we have lost, for all that the musical series is as well known to us as it was to them. Certainly, the application of the one ratio discontinuously and between dimensions is a technique unknown in our sciences now.

Imagine you are standing at some point on the Equator. The Sun will be directly overhead this point at midday at the Equinoxes. Imagine, too, that you are looking West to the Western horizon, and that you have carefully marked in times past the most Southerly point just touched by the Sun’s orb as it sinks below the horizon at the Southern Solstice. You have also marked the most Northerly point at the Northern Solstice, and the point where the centre of the Sun’s orb sinks below the horizon at the Equinoxes. Imagine now that these three points mark the threshold of a great doorway reaching up to Heaven. Beginning from the furthest point South touched by the Sun, draw a line straight up into the sky. This line is the Southern doorpost of the doorway. From the farthest point North do the same to make the Northern doorpost. The threshold of the doorway is the section of the Western horizon between the Tropics; and overhead is the corresponding arc of the celestial meridian between the celestial Tropics.

Imagine now that this doorway in the Western sky is filled by a pair of great doors, as high as the Heaven. The door on the left has as its doorpost the line drawn straight up from the Southernmost point. The
door on the right hangs from an equivalent post in the North. The junction formed when the two doors are closed together is the line from the terrestrial Equator to the celestial Equator. We may imagine that during the six months the Sun is south of the Equator, the door on the left is open. During the six months the Sun is north of the Equator, the door on the right is open. At the Equinoxes both doors are open. Or perhaps they are both shut then and through the tiny aperture between them the Sun passes.

We have imagined the doorway as based on the section of the Western horizon between the extreme points of the Sun’s Southern and Northern courses. These points are determined by the eye alone. The same is true of the Sun’s risings over the Eastern horizon. At sunset and sunrise we can mark most easily the Sun’s courses against the earth. But the doorway we have constructed with its doors may be said to stand at every point along the Sun’s journey, though the exact location of its doorposts and doors are indeterminable by the eye except at setting and rising. On every meridian, on every line of longitude drawn round the globe through the poles, we may theoretically mark off the section between the Tropics to serve as the threshold, and the corresponding section of the celestial line of longitude to serve as lintel. In this way we may think of the Sun as passing through the doorway at every point on its journey. When the Sun sinks in the West, we think of it as entering through the doorway; when the Sun rises in the East, we think of it as leaving through the doorway. But it is just passing through the doorway at every moment and may equally well be imagined as entering or as leaving or as doing both simultaneously at every instant.

So far we have considered the doorway only in respect of the Sun’s daily journey from East to West, by which it completes an entire circuit of the earth every day and night. But the Sun also moves against the fixed stars, relative to which its position changes as they all revolve around the earth. In relation to these fixed stars, the Sun fails to keep pace with them by a little less than one degree a day, and it takes a whole year to complete its retrograde circuit round them all. So while the passage of the Sun through the doorway on its daily circuit is the passage of a point between limits vastly wider than itself, the passage of the Sun through the doorway on its yearly circuit completely spans the distance between the limits of the doorposts twice. And though it is paradoxical it is quite proper to speak of the Sun’s yearly journey
through the fixed stars as a passage from West to East. If we imagine for a moment the fixed stars actually stopped in the sky but the Sun continuing to move in its usual relation to them, then indeed the Sun would slowly move across the sky from West to East, taking six months in one continuous day before disappearing for six months completely. From this point of view the Sun passes through the doors of the doorway going from West to East, just as Apollo is represented in his chariot emerging from the Eastern pediment of his temple at Delphi, above the doorway and double doors of his temple.

This doorway is a symbol of that doorway we have been cutting into the illimitable sky over the last paragraphs. But it is still some conceptual distance from Apollo’s temple at Delphi to the movements of the Sun. Building the Sun’s doorway into the walls of a temple at once removes the ambiguity between entering and leaving which was a feature of the doorway by itself. On the other hand the pediment of the emerging Apollo is appreciated typically by someone entering the temple. Leaving the temple, one would be turned away from it. The God’s emergence balances the worshipper’s entrance. The doorway in the sky was determined entirely by the Sun’s movements and the horizon. They were the only material phenomena in an otherwise undifferentiated and limitless expanse. The temple is the solidification of this empty space, which is limited in this representation by the ends of the Eastern wall in which the doorway is set. We may imagine the Sun’s journey through space not as the passage of a solid body through a vast, dark void but as the penetration through what is dense and heavy by something extremely light and mobile. In this symbolism the interstellar spaces are assimilated to earth and the passages of Sun, Moon and planets to the tunnels and chambers in a labyrinthine building, say, or a system of underground caves.17

In these ways and with these qualifications the doors of Apollo’s temple may be compared to the doors of the Sun, and the temple itself may be compared to the cosmos, geocentrically considered. But it is a truism that where temple and cosmos are analogous to each other, both will also be analogous to the human body.18 The cosmos, the temple

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17 For example, Plato, *Phaedo* 111-130.
18 See for example, Ananda Coomaraswamy’s essay, ‘An Indian Temple: The Kandarya Mahadeo’ in *Selected Papers Vol.1: Traditional Art and Symbolism*, ed. R Lipsey,
Sworder: *Three short essays in astrophysiology*

and the human body are the three primary houses of the spirit. To what
in human anatomy do the doors of the temple correspond? The answer
is clearly the female *labia majora*. The name Delphi was closely related
to the Greek word for womb, *delphys*, and here too was the navel
stone, the *omphalos*, which marked the first point of creation.

This account of the doorway began by constructing it on the
Western horizon, after marking the Sun’s settings. To think of the Sun’s
journey through the doorway as from East to West is less
comprehensive than to think of the movement as from West to East.
But at sunset particularly, Venus often appears in great glory on her
mount and even the Sun is afraid of her. This Venus is Justice, who
measures the Sun’s courses. No longer the laughter-loving Goddess of
Homer, now she is much-punishing and the agents of her justice are
the Furies formed at her birth.

**Head and Face**

First, then, the gods, imitating the spherical shape of the universe,
enclosed the two divine courses in a spherical body, that, namely,
which we now term the head.

In Plato’s *Timaeus* the gods who make the human head are the stars and
planets, to whom the Creator gave the task of creating mortal creatures.
The Creator could not accomplish this task himself since anything
which the Creator made would last forever. The Creator made the
Heavens and the Heavens made us.

The human head is the prime creation in the mortal realm because it
most closely follows the pattern of the cosmos. For the purposes of
Plato’s analysis, the organisation of the cosmos has been founded on two
related but distinct phenomena, geocentrically considered: the rotation
of the fixed stars and the varying rotations of the planets. Plato calls the

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analysis of the Temple of Luxor based upon the correspondence of the design of the
pharaonic temple with the image of man (*The Temple in Man*, New York: Inner

19 Parmenides, frag.1.
20 Heracleitus, frag.94.
21 Tim.44D.
rotation of the fixed stars the course or circuit of the Same, and the rotations of the planets, all taken together, the circuit of the Different.\textsuperscript{22} Clearly the rotation of the fixed stars, including the circumpolar stars, generates a sphere, and this is the model or pattern of the human head.

But Plato supposes that both the divine circuits are found in the human head, not just the circuit of the Same. Somehow that other circuit which comprises all the motions of the planets in contradistinction to the motion of the fixed stars, somehow this circuit too is bound into the human head. Plato transposes the cosmic motions into a metaphor of human thinking. When the motions of our thinking correspond to the heavenly motions, then we can see what is the same and what is different accurately. But when the motions of our thinking are disrupted, then we lose the capacity for rational judgement.\textsuperscript{23} So disrupted can the interior motions become that they are the very reverse of the proper motions. Then everything appears to the judgement as if it were upside down and left to right. This is what the flood of experiences does to us while we are growing up, and it is only with maturity that the real circuits of the soul can reassert themselves and return us to a harmonious and rational state of mind. In animals this disruption of the proper circuits is not temporary but permanent, and this is reflected in elongations and other distortions in the sphericity of their skulls.

The race of wild pedestrian animals, again, came from those who had no philosophy in any of their thoughts, and never considered at all about the nature of the heavens, because they had ceased to use the courses of the head … In consequence of these habits of theirs they had their front legs and the heads resting upon the earth to which they were drawn by affinity, and the crowns of theirs heads were elongated and of all sorts of shapes, into which the courses of their souls were crushed by reason of disuse.\textsuperscript{24}

Leaving aside comparative cranial morphology, I find it hard to think of my mind or thoughts as moving like the fixed stars and planets in their courses. Plato makes clear that this is a case of “Use it or lose it.”

\textsuperscript{22} Tim.35.
\textsuperscript{23} Tim.89E-90D.
\textsuperscript{24} Tim.91E.
Human beings who do not practise theoretical astronomy, who do not consciously exercise their spherical mental motions, will be reborn as quadrupeds. Physical astronomers who gape at the actual stars without working out their motions from first principles are reborn as birds. Their heads are still round but on thickish necks and rather small, we are left to infer, and they have wings. But they are also, of course, still bipeds.

Plato here is a philosophical Aristophanes. But the point remains that there is little serious evidence for assimilating our minds and thoughts to the cosmic motions. Though the rotation of the fixed stars provides the model of sphericity after which the human head is made, we have not discovered any link between that head and the circuits of the planets. But there is one feature of the human head which may matter here. In the Myth of Er Plato represents the planetary motions as like the rims of several bowls nesting inside each other. These rims form a kind of plane surface like the whorl of a spindle, through the centre of which a shaft or pole passes. The same idea is conveyed by the spinning surface of Homer’s Charybdis. The crux is that the motions of the planets, including Sun and Moon, are all unidirectional and they all fall within a narrow belt between Tropics like those of the Sun. The planets rarely move more than 26 degrees north or south of the Equator. From this point of view, the Earth stands in relation to the planets as Saturn to its rings.

If we apply this schema to the human head, we draw a band around the middle of the head, the band’s width corresponding proportionately to the tropic band around the earth. This band, it seems to me, would cover the eyes and ears like a blindfold. So the locations of the organs of seeing and hearing in the human head correspond to the location of the planetary tropics in relation to the whole earth. Seeing and hearing are, for Plato, the best of all our senses because they are connected to the heavens. Sight has been given us to see the heavens, whose motions

25 Tim.91D.
26 Rep.616C-617B.
28 Tim.47.
stimulate us to conceive of numbers. From the study of numbers comes philosophy, the best gift of God to man. As for hearing it is made to hear the voice. The voice provides rational speech and singing. Singing employs those intervals which organise the planetary motions, so that listening to music helps to re-establish the planetary motions in our own heads. In this way, though music is not connected directly to the heavens, it is organised by the very same principles which organise the planetary motions, and so is cognate with those motions. There is then, a certain aptness in the placing of these two senses within the area cut out by the motions of the planets. They are the divine senses, the binding of the divine circuit of the Different in our heads.

Select any point on the surface of a sphere. Mark the point diametrically opposite to it on the other side of the sphere. Through these two points draw two great circles round the sphere at right angles to each other. The sphere now looks like an orange which has been cut into four equal segments and reassembled. Now draw a third great circle equidistant from the two points at which the first two circles crossed and at right angles to those circles. We now have three interlocking circles, each of which is at right angles to the other two, so this figure has much in common with the three dimensional cross.

Applied to the cosmos, the selected point is the celestial North Pole; the point opposite is the celestial South Pole; the first two great circles are two celestial meridians at right angles to each other; the third great circle is the celestial equator. The same account holds, mutatis mutandis, if we apply our sphere to the earth. Applied to the head, the selected point is the fontanelle; the point opposite is the opening to the throat; of the first two great circles, one passes through the fontanelle and the ears, while the other passes through the fontanelle and along the nose; the third great circle passes through the eyes and ears. Of course on this view, strictly, we should have one eye at the front of our heads and one at the back. But, as Plato points out, the Gods who made us felt that we needed a distinct forward direction and for this reason shifted all sight to the front and made the human face.

The face is the epitome of the head. The head in all its aspects is more than our seeing can grasp at once. We do not see in the round but

29 Plato, *Epinomis* 978; Tim.47A-B.
30 Tim.45a.
from one point on its circumference. The face represents the beauty of the head as seen from the limitation of a single point of view. The Sun, Moon and planets shine from our eyes. The eyes move freely in contrast to the face as the planets move variously against the background of the fixed stars. The hairline and the line between the closed lips suggest the arctic and antarctic circles. The point of the chin is a projection of the head’s South Pole, to sustain the face’s presentation of the head in its entirety. Even the furrows of a worried brow suggest an astronomer’s lines of latitude round the Northern Hemisphere. When we look into the face of another person, we are seeing the cosmos as a mortal animal like ourselves. The cosmos, too, is a living animal but an everlasting one, and much too big and too complex for us to see with our eyes and know.

Is it true that the head, the face and the human reproductive systems are homologous with the movements of the stars and planets, viewed geocentrically? This is a question in morphology, of the same kind as questions concerning the relations between comparable organs in animals or in plants. In our times morphological studies of animals often proceed on the hypothesis that animals evolve from each other, while Plato supposed that they all descended from the human, becoming increasingly many-legged until they form into snakes and eventually disappear into the sea as fish.31 Compared to seeing the differences between kinds of animals, the shift from studying the stars to seeing comparable formations in the human is enormous. But there is a certain intuitive rightness in Plato’s notion that we are in this way microcosmic representations of the whole, and the physical similarities between the Sun’s doors and the female doors, between the human face and the solar system, are immediately engaging, even if outré.

Such a physical similarity cannot be claimed in the case of the Zodiac’s relation to the human head and torso. Seeing the seasons of the year as

31 Tim.91.
patterned in the same way as the human frame takes more than just a liberated morphological imagination. But even here the claim stands on its own terms. It is simply and strictly a scientific claim even by contemporary uses of the term science. Many, no doubt, would argue that these macrocosmic analogies to the human are bad science, but they would not, I think, dispute that they were scientific hypotheses. Certainly they are not religious or spiritual claims. Plato may have fantasised as to how those correspondences occur in a creation myth, but even in the myth it is the stars and planets which determine the human form. Even here there is nothing in play beyond what is strictly observable.

From a certain point of view, it is quite surprising that this way of reading the Zodiacal signs, these ways of understanding the human head and reproductive system, are not much better known, in outline if not in detail. After all, they make no claims on faith, they analyse observable data according to known methods, and they provide explanations of phenomena which are peculiarly dear to us. Furthermore, these ways of reading ourselves are enshrined in traditional forms still in vogue among us. But the only explanations current concerning the human complex seem to be socio-biological or neo-Darwinist. Reasons for this oversight are not hard to find. Part of our pride in ourselves comes from our having outstripped our ancestors in our knowledge of the cosmos. Our competitiveness insists that the Einsteinian theory superseded the Newtonian, and the Newtonian superseded the Ptolemaic. We would do much better to suppose that the Ptolemaic system provides us with an adequate account of the universe geocentrically considered; the Newtonian provides the heliocentric account; and the Einsteinian the relativist account. We need all these accounts but the geocentric most of all, because this is the one which tells us most of how we ourselves are shaped.

But even if we had retained a lively picture of the geocentric cosmos, would we, then, have infallibly identified the forms of that cosmos with those of the human body? Not, I think, if we were empiricists of the Enlightenment. Even though all the data necessary to these identifications are empirical, and the method is a form of morphological analysis, even so modern empiricism could not entertain these identifications. In the first place they are not quantifiable in the requisite manner. The determination of the identity between ratios in two
different dimensions, the astronomical and the zoological in this case, is not a matter of measurement. No imaginable meter could ever compute it. Secondly, the modern empiricist will argue that no physical explanation has yet been offered of how exactly the movements of the geocentric cosmos come to form the human body after their own pattern or vice versa. No evidence has been advanced even to indicate such a causal link. The identifications turn, in fact, upon an absurd and antiquated aetiology by which cause is to effect as original to image. The human body images the stars and planets or the other way round. But in modern empiricism cause and effect are merely events bound to each other more or less invariably.

These objections have some weight but they are not conclusive. There is nothing unscientific about the notion that certain physical features of the human being parallel features of the planets and stars viewed geocentrically. We can easily imagine data which would confirm or contradict such an hypothesis. If we were to find life forms elsewhere in space which were more or less identical to the human on planets utterly unlike our own macrocosmically, or if we were to find life on planets like our own but no life forms like ours in these respects, either of these discoveries would contradict the hypothesis developed in this essay. But until that time we must, I think, admit most of the claims of this essay into the ranks of scientifically sound empirical hypotheses.

A low rank, but at least it is respectable by the stern standards of modern empiricism. For the ancients, of course, these identifications of cosmic with human formations were much more than mere so-far-untestable possibilities. They were the observable facts which grounded their understanding. It is just here that we can examine more closely the differences between our empiricism and theirs. The ancients admitted many more analogies than we do and founded their understanding on them. Neither we nor the ancients have moved beyond the observable data. So how are we to judge between these two empiricisms?
The *Book of the Celestial Cow*: A Theological Interpretation

Edward P. Butler

In certain Neoplatonic philosophers, such as Proclus, Damascius, and Olympiodorus, we find a mode of mythological interpretation we may term “theological.” This article attempts a “theological” interpretation of the Egyptian *Book of the Celestial Cow*, a text inscribed in five royal tombs of the New Kingdom. Although the concept of the “theological” hermeneutic comes from Neoplatonic thought, the point of this reading is not to impose Greek philosophical concepts upon the text, but to borrow Neoplatonic textual strategies the aim of which is to deploy the concepts *immanent* to a particular body of myth to illuminate myth’s specifically theological dimension, that is, the contribution its iconic content and formal narrative structure make to that culture’s picture of the dispositions of the Gods in a pantheon and the divine activities constitutive of the cosmos. The key issues arising in this reading concern the distance between Re and humanity; the relationship between Re and Nūn as that between the demiurgic principle and the preconditions of its emergence; the “Eye of Re” as an hypostatized site of divine agency occupied successively by Hathor and Sekhmet in the myth; and the meaning of the death or destruction of mortals in the myth.

This essay is not intended to offer a philological contribution to the literature on this important Egyptian text. Rather my aim is to explore a method for the interpretation of myth drawn from the thought of the Platonists of late antiquity. I have discussed the theoretical foundations of this method elsewhere,¹ but will summarise those results here. I have attempted to discern in the readings of myths that Neoplatonists incorporated into their philosophical works, as well as from programmatic statements by these philosophers about the nature and interpretation of myth, certain universal methodological principles

separable from the Neoplatonic metaphysics itself. In this essay, I attempt to apply these principles to the reading of a text unknown to Platonists and unconnected to their own, Hellenic traditions. If the method is successful, it should help to elucidate the text in a manner which does not constitute a “Platonising” interpretation.

I wish to emphasize that the choice of an Egyptian text constitutes no claim whatsoever to a necessary connection between Platonism and Egyptian thought. Nor, if certain Neoplatonists such as Iamblichus, for example, made specific reference to Egyptian myth, is this any part of the present essay’s concerns. Perhaps it would have reduced the potential for such confusion had a text been selected, instead, from the Andes, say, or East Asia. There still would have been occasion, however, for the misapprehension that my purpose is to uncover some universal theological contents. This reading seeks to apply formal Neoplatonic hermeneutical principles to an Egyptian text, not to conflate the contents of Neoplatonic ontology and Egyptian theology. It should also be understood that no claim is being made that only these hermeneutical principles can be profitably applied to this text. There is no necessity to the application of this hermeneutic; I will rather explain why it might be fruitful, and then hopefully demonstrate its fruitfulness.

The term “theological” for this mode of interpretation comes from the fourth-century CE Neoplatonist Sallustius. Sallustius is not himself an important figure in the history of Neoplatonism, but he expresses concisely certain principles pertaining to the interpretation of myth that, I would argue, are largely embodied in the interpretive practices of later Platonists like Proclus. These later Platonists do not derive these principles from Sallustius. Rather, Sallustius arrives at his classificatory structure by applying the fundamental principles of an evolving Platonic understanding in his day of the relationship between philosophy and theology.² In chapter three of his On the Gods and the Cosmos, Sallustius discusses five types of myth and ways of reading myths, namely the theological, the physical, the psychical, the material, and the mixed. These categorisations apply to the entities taken to be the

myth’s referents. A theological myth, or a myth *qua* theological, concerns primarily the Gods, a physical myth (myth *qua* physical) treats of nature in a universal sense, a psychical myth of the soul, a material myth of certain concrete substances, and a mixed myth of entities in all these classes. Sallustius speaks ambiguously of types of myths and modes of interpretation, but it is clear from his exposition that the hierarchy is of interpretive methods, that multiple methods can be applied to the same myths, and that the different methods are appropriate to different discursive contexts, the theological mode being particular to the philosopher but also, on that account, having the highest truth value, if not the broadest. The broadest truth value, on the other hand, belongs to the mixed mode of interpretation, which integrates interpretation on all the other levels, but this is the mode of interpretation practiced in an initiatory context, and thus not easily appropriated.

The theological method, by contrast, is quite practicable. Its fundamental principle is that myths reveal the nature of, and relations between, different classes of Gods, that is, Gods active on different planes of being and whose activities are constitutive of those planes of being. This involves, for the Neoplatonist, classifying the Gods in a myth in relation to a Neoplatonic taxonomy of divine orders, but the method does not require the Neoplatonic taxonomy, or indeed any abstract system of classification. Instead, the goal is to develop the theological categories immanent to the culture whose myths are being examined by analysing the structural relationships posited in the myth itself and in myths and iconography from the same tradition. Because the method cannot begin *ex nihilo*, certain minimal propositions about the nature of the divine are adopted as heuristic devices. Where these have been applied in the essay I have noted them. Should any of them be felt to be alien to Egyptian thought, they may be replaced by axioms deemed valid.

What matters for the method is that myths be interpreted as theological statements of their culture, rather than reductively. Examples of reductive readings in this sense are Sallustius’s three modes other than the theological and the mixed. Reductive readings of myth have not lacked for modern practitioners. Interpretations of myths which understand their primary referents to be natural or psychological phenomena or socioeconomic dispositions are reductive in this sense.
For the theological method, the myths concern the Gods as actual existents, real agencies whose activities and relationships are constitutive of the order in the cosmos. One consequence of this is that the theological method of interpretation is effectively ahistorical, treating a deity’s successive historical appearances, not as a development of the deity, but as an ongoing revelation of that deity’s integral nature.

Theological interpretation does not rule out any other mode of interpretation, such as, for example, that which emphasizes a myth’s role as a charter for certain social institutions, whereas other modes of interpretation, in their exclusivity, rule out theological interpretation by effectively interpreting away the objects of theology. Analysing the myths of a culture reveals immanent typologies and functions, positions which can be filled by different deities in variant versions of a single myth or in related myths. These positions or functions in turn can form the vehicle for comparisons between cultures; but these types or functions must be derived in the first place from myths presenting themselves as accounts of the actions of particular Gods, and in the second place, must derive their meaning from their own place in the holistic system of the culture in which they arise. Only in a third stage can cross-cultural comparison be envisioned, and only if genuine functional homologies between discrete theological systems can be established on the foundation of a sufficient understanding of the discrete theologies involved. The dangers of hasty comparativism are more to be feared than excessive caution in this regard.

The status accorded to “function” in the theological mode of interpretation offers a contrast between it and hermeneutic of “translation” discussed by Jan Assmann.³ Within the “translation” paradigm, functional equivalences between deities of different national pantheons, or even within the same pantheon, are treated as indicating that different names signify the same small set of deities, or the differentiated potencies of a single divine substance. For the

“theological” mode of interpretation, by contrast, function derives from identity, and not identity from function. In this fashion the theological mode of interpretation seeks to avoid yet another form of reductionism, which we might label the “cosmotheistic” reduction, after the “cosmotheism” Assmann sees as the historical outcome of the translational hermeneutic of myth. In the “cosmotheistic” reduction, a unitary cosmotheistic philosophy effectively displaces the theologies of diverse cultures, whose particularity is treated as mere materiality. Such an approach, because it dualistically posits a substance or substances prior to or underlying the Gods themselves and external to the myths themselves, could never be regarded as the primary mode of mythological hermeneutics, if indeed it is even to be regarded as a way of interpreting myths, and not rather as a method of demythologization.4

The myth I am treating5 begins its narrative at a time when Re exercises a unified sovereignty over humans and Gods alike. The temporal process of mythic narrative is converted in Neoplatonic interpretation into a progression from lesser to greater differentiation within a static hierarchy.6 Hence the initial phase of Re’s sovereignty does not need to

4 Some mention at least should be made here of a method of interpretation which is perhaps not reductionistic in the sense that I have used the term here, namely structuralist interpretation, as demonstrated (briefly) by R. A. Oden, Jr. upon a text closely related to the one treated in the present essay, in “The Contendings of Horus and Seth” (Chester Beatty Papyrus No. 1): A Structural Interpretation,’ History of Religions Vol. 18, No. 4, May 1979, pp.352-369. I believe that “theological” and structuralist interpretation are not necessarily at odds with one another, but the present essay is not the place to discuss their relationship.


be understood as an early state of the world, but as a state of affairs true in a qualified sense at any and all times. The qualified sense in which it is true at all times is obtained by abstracting from the difference between humans and Gods. The development of the mythic narrative serves, however, to articulate this difference. Re learns that there are humans plotting against him because the furthest limits of his realm are far removed from his living divinity. The myth offers two immediate symbols of this distance or gap between Re and his subjects. The first is Re’s elderliness and, the second, the mineral metaphors used to describe him: his bones like silver, his flesh like gold, his hair like lapis lazuli. Re is elderly, not as an absolute quality, but relative to those of his subjects who are much younger in the scale of being. The distance between creator Gods and worldly beings can be seen in the motif of the deus otiosus or “retired God,” or from Gnostic myths concerning the demiurge, who is seen, in the obverse of the type of myth presented here, as provoking rebellion on the part of his cosmic subjects. This distance can be seen as expressing the difficulty of reconciling the viewpoints of particular beings, their desires and strivings, with the universal or cosmic perspective: the good of the whole is, unfortunately, seemingly consistent with a privation of good in many of the parts. Formally, it presents a type of whole or manifold of which the cause belongs to a transcendent register, and identifies mortal beings with this manifold. In Proclean mereology, this relationship is expressed in the notion of a “whole-before-the-parts,” as in proposition 67 of the Elements of Theology.

Re calls together the Gods in his retinue. They are to assemble at the Great Palace and propose plans for dealing with the rebellion. Re intends particularly to confer with Nūn, the watery abyss which pre-existed the cosmos. This makes sense inasmuch as disorder within the cosmos is the continued presence within it of the precosmic disorder.

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8 On the applicability of this motif to Egyptian theology, see the nuanced discussion by Susan Tower Hollis in ‘Otiose Deities and the Ancient Egyptian Pantheon’, Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt, Vol. 35 (1998), pp. 61-72.
This seems to be a matter of Egyptian theological doctrine, but also invites comparison with a Neoplatonic doctrine on causality, namely that the “higher” or more primordial a principle, the further “down” the scale of being its causation reaches. The lowest of Re’s subjects, therefore, over whom his sovereignty cannot be asserted with total effectiveness, manifest the broader, albeit more indifferent, causality of Nūn. This will be significant, too, in light of the artificial inundation with which the episode of the rebellion is resolved. Furthermore, the renewal of Re in returning to Nūn is a theme in the Amduat book, which treats of the nightly voyage of the boat of Re through the hours of the night and Re’s encounter with Osiris.

Re addresses himself mainly to Nūn, asking his advice: humans, who came into being from Re’s “eye,” plot against him. Re asks Nūn to tell him what he would do about it, remarking that he cannot slay the humans before having heard what Nūn will say. Re stresses the origin of humans (rmṯ) from his eye, namely from his tears (rmyt), a well-known pun in Egyptian. But his reference to his eye here anticipates that it is his “Eye” that he shall send against them. The word ir.t, or “eye,” evokes the participial form of the verb ḫr, hence ir.t, “doing” or “doer.” Re’s “Eye” is thus a functional paraphrase for his action or agency, and not a part of his body, however metaphorical, but a sort of executive position in his regime (one might tentatively compare the position occupied by Athena with respect to Zeus). Nor is Re the only deity whose “eye” or agency is hypostatized in this fashion. The example of Atum’s “eye” is closely bound up with Re’s due to these deities functional assimilation and hence shall be dealt with below; but there is also Nūt, of whom it is said in utterance 443 of the Pyramid Texts, ‘O Nūt, the eyes have gone forth from your head … O Nūt, you have mustered your children …’.

When Re expresses his intention to kill the humans, we should not jump to the anthropomorphic conclusion that Re takes such an action vindictively, or even reactively. An interpretation inconsistent with the goodness of the Gods as well as with their power of self-determination

10 See for example, Proclus, Elements of Theology prop.57.
Ex hypothesi in the mythological hermeneutics practiced by Neoplatonists. However, Neoplatonic axioms concerning the goodness and activity of the Gods may not be transferable to all other cultures. The basic principle in a theological interpretation is that every element of the myth be interpreted with reference to and consistent with whatever set of beliefs about the nature of the Gods or the divine can be discerned as basic or fundamental for a particular culture. Interpreters may differ with respect to the fundamental theological beliefs held in a given culture at a certain moment, while nevertheless practicing theological interpretation as long as they rigorously relate the narrative data of the myths to the theological principles they propose. The limits of theological interpretation lie, not in the substantive theological doctrines which are proposed, but in the abstention from reductive interpretations or from a scepticism so ascetic that no domain of principles is legitimate to postulate. This being said, it is not a bad heuristic or working hypothesis to assume, in advance of evidence to the contrary, that a given culture believed that its Gods were fundamentally good, each in their own way—even Seth, after all, exhibits goodness in certain contexts—and that the overall cosmic order was essentially providential. These are not proposed as universal theological postulates, but simply as potentially hermeneutically fruitful since they do not permit the hermeneutic to stop prematurely. Instead of simply assuming, therefore, that Re behaves like a jealous human sovereign, we must ask what is the cosmic problem the myth presents here in narrative form.

The rebellion is itself a manifestation of Re’s inability to control certain aspects of his domain. It is not an accidental, but an essential effect of the structure of the cosmos, which is providential overall, but obviously requires divine activity at every level to resolve the problems which are constitutive of each plane of being. The plane of being treated in the myth, which includes mortal particulars, has certain constitutive tensions which are, if not resolved, then at least analysed in the myth. Humans, in plotting against Re, that is, against the cosmic order which he represents and has instituted, plot their own extinction;

13 For numerous examples, see the defence of Homer in Proclus’ commentary on Plato’s Republic.
and this is the problem with mortal beings. It is their nature to assert themselves against the cosmic order, that is, to require, and thus to demand, a disposition of things inconsistent with the universal disposition of the cosmos. In seeking to quell the rebellion, therefore, Re is not passively reacting to a breakdown in order but is seeking the resolution of a tension, a contradiction, which arises at the limits of his domain.

In asking Nūn’s advice, Re opens the possibility that Nūn might assert ultimate control over the cosmos by expressing a will independent of Re’s. Nūn refuses to become the primary power in the cosmos, however, by denying any claim based upon his own seniority, calling Re the God mightier than the one (Nūn) who produced him and telling him to retain his throne. Nūn seems to encourage Re to send forth his Eye against the humans, which is synonymous, apparently, with slaying them. Nūn’s association with wine and beer implies that the resolution of the crisis, which will turn upon the use of an intoxicating beverage, involves his further participation in a way, but not in a way subversive of Re’s will. Mortal particulars are perhaps to some extent irreducibly disordered, and thus akin to Nūn. But rather than stress an irreconcilable opposition between them and the universal order of the cosmos, the resolution, in evoking Nūn, perhaps affirms the availability of the precosmic chaos (the waters of the Nile’s annual inundation) as prime matter for the demiurgic work.

The humans have fled into the desert, ‘their hearts fearful over what I [Re] might say to them’ (290/11). Here again we see that humans distance themselves from Re’s communication, from an understanding of the cosmic order which is, in some fashion, available to them. It seems to have been a commonplace in Egyptian thought that humans possess an innate sense of right conduct which they alone are culpable for failing to respect.14 The other Gods encourage Re to send his Eye against the humans, for ‘No eye is as capable as it to smite them for you’ (291/12) An eye strikes something when it perceives it. And so it is in some sense Re’s gaze or viewpoint upon humans which punishes them. It is not merely a question here of the sun’s rays, but of the cosmic viewpoint which Re holds as universal sovereign. Hence the “Eye of Re” is a potency pertaining to the office of divine sovereign and

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14 E.g., Coffin Texts VII, 462-464.
which Re exercises because he holds this office. For this Eye to punish the humans is for them, *qua* mortals, to lack any place in the universal order of the cosmos. This leaves one at the mercy of entropy, as one of the “nonexistents.”¹⁵ The rebellion and the punishment are thus two perspectives upon the same event of being. (By contrast, note that in virtue of his different sphere of activity from Re’s, Amun is hymned as ‘protector of that which is and that which is not’.¹⁶ This underscores the point that deities such as Amun and Re, though they may enter into relationships of “fusion” as, e.g., “Amun-Re,” nevertheless remain distinct.)

The Eye goes forth first ‘as’ or ‘in the form of Hathor’ (291/13). The preposition *m*, translated “as,” has a range of meanings which are insufficient to really determine the relationship between Hathor and the Eye. It is reasonable therefore to interpret the Eye as an executive function taken up by one deity or another, as long as they are in the proper relationship to Re and his cosmogonic works. Does the fact that the Eye is always embodied by a Goddess indicate that the Eye is something which not only *gazes* but also *attracts* or *elicits* Re’s gaze so as to awaken his creative eros?¹⁷ If so, it would provide an interesting contrast between Re and the primordial creator Atum, whose erotic power is awakened by no *image* at all but only by his *hand* upon his phallus, the hand being itself personified (or, again, turned into an office or function)¹⁸ as the Goddess Iusâas. That Re’s desire should involve

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¹⁷ Compare *The Contendings of Horus and Seth* 4.1-3, p.94 in Simpson ed. *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*. Re (actually the conjugate deity [P]re-Harakhti, “Re-Horus-of-the-Horizons”), having withdrawn from the scene of action after being mocked by the phallic deity Babi or Bebon with the charge that ‘Your shrine is vacant’ (3.10), i.e., has no cult image in it and thus embodies no efficacy, is induced to return after Hathor exposes her genitalia to him.

¹⁸ See, again, the remarks of te Velde 1977 cited above, as well as the article he cites by W. Helck, ‘Bemerkungen zu den Bezeichnungen für einige Körperteile,’ *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 80, 1955, 144. “Hand” (*drt* or *dȝt*) evokes the participial form of the verb *ḏȝ*, “to seize,” similar to *irt*, “eye,” evoking *ir.t*, “doer.”
images or forms speaks to the different level at which the primordial creator and the cosmic sovereign or demiurge (i.e., the one who orders the cosmos) operate.

Spatiality is prominent in connection with the Eye of Re as well, especially in the complex of myths concerning its absence and return, which is in turn often juxtaposed with the myths concerning the Eye of Horus, or *wedjât*, its wounding and renewal. These myths are not to be conflated with one another; rather, their similarities and differences allow us to discern the different registers in which myths can operate to give the maximum meaning to experience. This can be illustrated in a manner productive for the text presently under consideration by the myth-complex concerning (in its simplest terms) the *return* of his ‘Eye’ to Atum or, later, through a process of functional assimilation, to Re. The Eye is the effective will of deities such as Re in the world; its “return” therefore expresses the circling back to its source of this energy, which occurs in many different ways on different planes of being. Sometimes it has the sense of the God’s coming to awareness through the experience of separation and reunion. Hence in the Bremner-Rhind Papyrus (27), Atum states that his Eye ‘followed after’ Shu and Tefnut, who, after having been ejected from his body, were ‘brought up by’ and ‘rejoiced in’ Nûn, the precosmic abyss, and were hence ‘distant’ from him. In returning to him, Atum says that Shu and Tefnut ‘brought to me my Eye with them.’ This leads to a new stage in the creation, for Atum states that ‘After I had united my members’—Shu and Tefnut being like parts of his body—‘I wept over them. That is how humans came into being from the tears which came forth from my Eye,’ a play on words I have noted previously. From another perspective, Shu states in spell 76 of the Coffin Texts that ‘Atum once sent his Sole Eye [lit. “his Sole One”] seeking me and my sister Tefnut. I made light of the darkness for it and it found me as an immortal [lit. “man of eternity”].’

This is on one level; on another level, the Eye which seeks out Shu and Tefnut may be identified with Hathor, as in spell 331 of the Coffin

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Texts, where Hathor, speaking in the first person, identifies herself with the Eye of Horus as well.\textsuperscript{21} The cosmogonic myth of Atum’s Eye, in this more, so to speak, encosmic form, merges with a radically different myth which also, however, paradigmatically involves Tefnut and Shu, though it is told of other deities\textsuperscript{22} as well, and which is generally known as the myth of the Distant Goddess.\textsuperscript{23} In the myth, Tefnut, who is residing in a vaguely-determined foreign land\textsuperscript{24}—hence she is a “distant” Goddess—is induced by Shu to return with him to Egypt. The return of the fiery/wrathful Distant Goddess involves her appeasement or purification, observed especially at Abaton on the island of Bigêh, the site of the “tomb” of Osiris.

Although only imperfectly understood, it is clear that the myth of the Distant Goddess unites cosmogonic and Osirian themes, as would befit the cosmogonic Eye myth’s deployment on, or, better, specification to, the psychical plane. In a popular form of the myth, Shu’s role is taken by Thoth, who convinces Tefnut to return with him by a series of arguments, fables, and hymns. Thoth’s role in this popular narrative echoes his hieratic function of pacifying “wrathful” Goddesses, a role expressed in his epithet \textit{sehetep neseret}, ‘the one who pacifies/propitiates the divine flame’. Thoth mediates in this way between the mortal and the divine, for the fiery blast of these Goddesses, which is called \textit{neseret}, forms a barrier or veil of sorts between these realms; and this is perhaps a reason for his replacing Shu when the myth takes on this form.

I shall have more to say below about Thoth’s role in the \textit{Book of the Celestial Cow}, but it is important to connect his role in this particular

\begin{footnotes}
\item[21] Ibid., p.256.
\item[22] Indeed, historically speaking it may originally have “belonged” to Mehyt and Onuris; on Mehyt, see S. Cauville, ‘L’hymne à Mehyt d’Edfou,’ \textit{Bulletin de l’institut français d’archéologie orientale} 82, 1982, pp.105-125.
\item[23] On this myth, see D. Inconnu-Bocquillon, \textit{Le mythe de la Déese Lointaine à Philae}, Cairo: IFAO, 2001. The myth is alluded to in many temple inscriptions but not preserved in any early narrative form. Attempts have been made to reconstruct it with the help of a demotic text (part of which also survives in Greek translation) which tells what appears to be a highly narrative version of the same myth (see below). Inconnu-Bocquillon is properly critical of earlier, overly ambitious syntheses which obscured the very diversity of the source material which the present interpretation wishes to highlight.
\item[24] Often called Bougem or Keneset and regarded as lying to the south and east of Egypt—e.g., Somalia—but essentially a mythical place.
\end{footnotes}
phase of the multivalent Eye myth to his role as the healer of the so-called Eye of Horus, the wedjât, or “Sound (Eye),” from w-ð-, meaning healthy, flourishing, or prosperous, or, as a verb, to proceed or attain. The wedjât is a highly multivalent symbol, being used to represent everything from the moon to Egypt itself, but if we seek its essence, it seems to be that the wedjât represents the beneficial power contained within every kind of offerings to the Gods. Whatever the substance offered or otherwise utilised in ritual, once it has been ritually activated, it becomes the Eye of Horus. One can see this formula, for instance, throughout the Pyramid Texts, where the most varied offerings and ritual items are identified as the “Eye of Horus” in the act of deploying them. The wedjât is the most universal symbol in Egyptian theology for any helpful substance or object and a general term for any amulet. As the ritually effective substance as such, the wedjât can therefore, when it converges symbolically with the Eye of Re, be seen as harnessing and rendering beneficial to humanity the power of Re’s fiery “judgment” (that is, as I have argued, his disintegrative universal perspective) upon the chaotic forces that threaten the cosmos through the very deployment of symbols themselves. The wrathful Goddesses, in particular Sekhmet, are hence often understood to participate in Thoth’s regeneration of the wedjât. In the Tenth Hour of the Amduat book, for example, the healing of the wedjât is shown being carried out by Thoth, in baboon form, and eight forms of Sekhmet, four with lioness heads and four with human heads.²⁵ Hathor, a “wrathful” Goddess as the “Eye of Re” in the Book of the Celestial Cow, heals the injured Eye of Horus in the Contendings of Horus and Seth (10.8-10.11). In this way, we can see how the complex declensions, as it were, of a single mytheme can serve to virtually delineate the different planes upon which divine action is posited.

The arrival of the Distant Goddess is seemingly conceived in two ways: first, as Re’s daughter—extant references to the “Distant Goddess” identify her, not as the daughter of Atum, as Tefnut properly is, but of Re²⁶—coming to his defense against his enemies and the

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²⁶ On the significance of the Eye of Atum as symbolically distinct—or, at least, symbolically distinguishable—from the Eye of Re, see P. Koemoth, ‘L’Atoum-serpent magicien de la stèle Metternich,’ Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur 36, 2007, pp.137-146.
enemies of the cosmic order he represents; and second as the theogamy, or divine marriage, of Shu and Tefnut, this being understood, not as that which produced Geb and Nūt at the beginning of the world, but rather as a reunion of Shu and Tefnut and an indwelling of each in the other which also, in its most theologically complex form, entails the reunion of Geb and Nūt with Shu and Tefnut. 27 This reunion thus confirms the creation, so to speak, closing a cosmic circle in which the conflict characterizing the “younger” generations of the Gods gives way to reconciliation and the spiritualisation of the cosmos. An ancient commentary on spell 17 of the Book of the Dead identifies the soul of Re and the soul of Osiris (i.e., the mortal being as such), who come together in the resurrection, as indwelling in Shu and Tefnut, because Shu and Tefnut embody the whole latter development of the cosmos, the order and harmony of which has as its prerequisite the development of complexity, for there cannot be order without complexity. 28

At the level on which myths concerning the Eye of Re seem to operate, the crucial issues seem to concern the ability for order and form to be established within a distinct and hence restive substrate. Re’s creative eros proceeds to a place far removed from him, extending his divine activity to its limits, into a domain where the mediating activity of other Gods is obviously indispensible. To return to the Book of the Celestial Cow, we read that humans are attacked first by Hathor, who reports back to Re that she has ‘overpowered’ them, and that it was agreeable to her. Re responds by affirming his intention to ‘gain power over them as king’ (291/14-15). The repetition of “power” (sekhem) by Hathor and Re in this exchange introduces Sekhmet: ‘And so Sekhmet [the Powerful One] came into being’ (ibid., 15). Wente and Lichtheim read after this an introduction to the following portion of the myth: ‘The nightly beer-mash for wading in their [humans’] blood starting from Heracleopolis’, but Piankoff reads here a continuation of the

27 See especially the texts from Kom Ombo edited and translated by A. Gutbub, Textes fondamentaux de la théologie de Kom Ombo, Cairo: IFAO, 1973, e.g. 2f (monograph 709): ‘Shu, the son of Re, rejoices with his son Geb as Tefnut with her daughter Nūt, they are in joy here [Kom Ombo] eternally, having put an end to rebellion, having expelled calamity.’

28 Hence the tendency to functionally assimilate Tefnut and Ma’et, the personification of right order, as in spell 80 of the Coffin Texts (p.83f in Faulkner, The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts).
previous sentence that refers to Sekhmet as the ‘Mixed/Confused one in the night,’ with šbbt in line 15 meaning ‘the mixed or confused one’ as well as ‘beer-mash.’

This could refer to the confusion which results from intoxication or to the substitution of coloured beer for blood which will resolve this portion of the narrative. But the concept of mixture is inherently relevant here inasmuch as Sekhmet’s intoxication is a consequence of her mixing with mortals: she ‘wades in their blood’ not merely as a metaphor for slaughter but pointing to her immersion in animal life through the element most symbolic of it, namely blood. Hathor has ‘killed humans in the desert,’ but Sekhmet will ‘wade in their blood.’ Hathor and Sekhmet represent here two potencies beyond Re’s own sphere of activity which he calls upon in order to integrate rebellious humanity into the cosmic order. Sekhmet’s sphere of activity is obviously relatively further from Re’s and more immanent than Hathor’s inasmuch as Sekhmet acts autonomously once Re sends her forth. This would be consistent with the more physical domain of action which is indeed characteristic of Sekhmet. She comes forth as a total mixture or infusion of animal life by the divine, allowing the divine to operate in the “night” lying beyond the reach of solar form.

What is the difference between the “smiting” or “overpowering” of humans by Hathor and their slaying by Sekhmet, which is prevented? First, Hathor strikes as the Eye of Re, whereas Sekhmet is not explicitly designated in this way, although she is broadly speaking one of the bearers of this epithet; second, Hathor strikes humans “in the desert,” where they have fled, out of reach of Re’s speech, while Sekhmet strikes humans in a place where they ordinarily live. Rather than seeing Sekhmet’s attack upon humans as a simple repetition, a second wave, the two attacks can be understood as parallel, the same attack seen on two different levels. In this respect one might note that the word translated as “desert” can also carry the connotation of “mountains.” Hathor, as the Eye of Re, operates on a “higher” level than Sekhmet, whose simultaneous presence is symbolised in the verbal exchange between Hathor and Re by the word “power” (sekhem) which Hathor


and Re exchange. Hathor and Sekhmet are therefore not identical in the myth. The slaughter which, on the level at which Sekhmet operates, is a matter of *blood*, is on the level of Re and Hathor a matter of *words*. The “overpowering” suffered by humans to the degree that they are distant—or distance themselves—from Re’s formative utterance is actually carried out on the level of flesh and blood by Sekhmet, a Goddess associated both with illness and with healing; her mythic presence among humans can thus be taken as symbolising both simultaneously. That Hathor and Sekhmet are not to be regarded as identical in the myth is not to deny their analogous function in it. Thus, in the context of the “beautiful festival of the desert valley,” held in the necropolis, Hathor is referred to as “mistress of inebriety.”

Re’s next action involves stopping the slaughter of the humans. Theological interpretation as practiced by the Neoplatonists would not consider this an instance of Re having decided upon one course of action and subsequently changing his mind, nor of a punishment which is to stop at some arbitrary point. This is because of Neoplatonic notions about the essential nature of divine action and cognition, and of the orderly nature of the cosmos, which does not allow for sheer voluntarism at the level of high principles. These Neoplatonic ideas, however, are not incompatible with notions about mythic discourse which seem to be present in many cultures: namely, that the temporality of myth is a “mythic time” outside of and fundamental in relation to ordinary, linear time. Philosophically, it is the “time” of an ideal genesis which is not an actual, temporal coming-to-be. This idea was articulated quite early as an apologia for Plato’s seeming recourse to a temporal generation of the cosmos in the *Timaeus*. The significance

32 See, for example, the way in which Olympiodorus interprets the motif of Zeus changing his mind in the *Gorgias* myth, discussed in Butler, ‘The Theological Interpretation of Myth’, pp.35-37.
33 Xenocrates, as reported by Aristotle, *De caelo* 279b 34: ‘They claim that what they say about the generation of the world is analogous to the diagrams drawn by mathematicians: their exposition does not mean that the world ever was generated, but is used for instructional purposes, since it makes things easier to understand just as the diagram does for those who see it in process of construction.’
of this for “theological” interpretation is that, as has been seen at several points in the present essay, the successive or diachronic events in the narrative have been interpreted as simultaneous and eternal, or synchronically.

Piankoff’s translation indicated that some slaughter of humans did indeed take place before Re takes action. This may be implied by the reference to the episode in the Instruction Addressed to King Merikare, which states that the God who ‘shines in the sky’ and of whom humans are ‘images who came from his body,’ ‘slew his foes, reduced his children, when they thought of making rebellion.’ A variety of outcomes—“smiting” by Hathor, “killing” by Sekhmet, rescue through Sekhmet’s intoxication—is, from the point of view of the theological interpretation, not a difficulty, but rather a virtue of the text, since these are all regarded as simultaneous and hierarchically disposed, referring to the fates of different elements of the person or to the entire person as seen from a succession of distinct perspectives. The context of the Instruction is explicitly governmental, and different horizons of interpretation for myth are to be expected in any culture. From another viewpoint, if a quantity of humans are slain but a quantity saved, if, in other words, reference can be made to a distinction between some humans who are initiates or who accomplish some spiritual task and the rest; or from another viewpoint yet, the “elect” could as likely be those who are slain as those who are preserved. The latter is unlikely, but I mention it simply in order to illustrate the way in which a formally possible permutation of the mythic narrative could yield interpretive insights worth testing, even if they are subsequently to be rejected.

The question of an experiential dimension to the myth leads us naturally to the metaphor of intoxication which lies at its heart. Sekhmet becomes intoxicated by the beer which, due to the additives in it, looks like blood. If Sekhmet is indeed here “the mixed one,”

35 It was once thought that the substance put in the beer to colour it red might have been a substance like mandrake, which could at once impart redness and intensify the intoxicating property of the beer, but the consensus among contemporary scholars is that the term used in the text, didi, can only refer to powdered hematite. On hematite in Egyptian theology, see the aforementioned article by S. Aufrère, ‘Caractères principaux et origine divine des minéraux,’ p.15f and n.124; on the rejection of the
then it is on account of “mixing” with us, i.e., on account of her immanence, that she is intoxicated. Our blood is her beer and her beer is our blood. The intoxication in the myth can therefore be interpreted as the intoxication of the embodied condition, which is both the cause of our failing to perceive Re’s speech, but also the route to recognising it, since the capacity to understand it is equally innate, equally “in our blood.” The real intoxication is the ecstasy which is symbolised in the myth, on the one hand, and in the ritual beer drinking at the festival, on the other. It is an ecstasy of embodiment for us and for the Goddess alike. The beer is poured out in such a manner as to create an artificial inundation. The inundation always invites comparison to the watery abyss of Nūn, from out of which the primordial mound emerges through the self-creating activity of the Gods. The pouring out of the beer is done while it is still night, Re rising early for this purpose. For the God of the sun to rise when it is still night is for illumination to emerge from out of the depths of confusion. Thus does Re, as he had said he would at the beginning of the myth, go into the Nūn, ‘the place where I originated’ (290/6). In the intoxicating inundation the Goddess sees her face reflected in the beer and drinks. This is said to take place when the Goddess set out in the morning (291/23), but the morning is none other than this very event, the Goddess’s self-recognition in the intoxicating abyss. She drinks ‘and it was just fine in her estimation [lit. “in her heart”]’ (291f/23), just as Hathor said overpowering the humans was agreeable to her “heart.” The brilliance of solar form, which is nevertheless mineral and cold, gives way to the “night” of confusion, blood and intoxication, from out of which, however, emerges a more profound spirituality born from the warmth and spontaneity of embodiment and feeling. Since they have transcended the condition of the merely human, Sekhmet becomes unable to recognise humans (292/24). People are thus able, through the very essence of their corporeality (blood), to transcend that inevitable destruction which attends the body. At the accomplishment of this, Sekhmet is referred to as “Beautiful One.” Humans thus come into true humanity; and in this way also the Eye of Re, through having undergone a process, becomes analogous to the restored Eye of Horus, the wedjât; hence the

Butler: *The Book of the Celestial Cow*

deceased affirms, in chapter 167 of the *Book of the Dead*, ‘Spell of Bringing the *Wedjât*,’ that ‘Thoth brought the Sound Eye, he pacified the Sound Eye, after Re sent it forth (when) it was greatly enraged ... If I stay sound, it stays sound.’\(^{36}\) One might speak in this respect of a “greening” of Sekhmet, evident in the references in magical texts to Horus as the “sprout of Sekhmet.”\(^{37}\) The word translated as “sprout” is *wadj*, literally “green,” referring to the green shoots of the papyrus; from the same root comes *wedjât* as the “sound/healthy” eye. Horus is thus literally the “greening” of the Goddess paradigmatically red with blood (note that the papyrus scepter which Sekhmet and a number of other Goddesses carry is also *wadj*).

The next event in the text, after the establishment of appropriate ceremonial commemorating the intoxication of the Goddess, is Re’s decision to withdraw from the immanent exercise of mundane authority. He seems to cite two reasons, the first being his bodily weakness and the second being the concern, apparently, lest he destroy all the humans. The notion of bodily weakness in a God presents a paradox. How can Gods share the frailty of mortals and yet be truly Gods? The Neoplatonic method is to attribute weaknesses or vulnerabilities in Gods to the points of closest interaction between the divine and mortal realms. Thus Hephaestus is lame because his zone of activity lies in the constitution of the physical cosmos, and Aphrodite receives an injury intervening on the battlefield to rescue Aeneas. Similarly, in Egyptian myth, injuries sustained by the Gods provide openings for mortals to participate immediately in eternal, mythic actions. The primary examples, of course, are the identification of the deceased with Osiris and the identification of substances utilised in ritual with the restored Eye of Horus. There are a host of minor examples, however—in a fragmentary spell from the Ramesseum Papyrus (XI), for example, the operator declares ‘My heart is for you ... as the heart of Horus is for his eye, Seth for his testicles, Hathor for her tress, Thoth for his shoulder.’\(^{38}\) Whenever a God is injured, and

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therefore shares in a mortal state, it would seem that it is a question of transmitting to mortals some share in a divine potency. Re himself participates in such an economy in the myth involving himself and Isis, in which he must share with her a significant portion of his power in order to be cured of the sting or bite that has been prepared for him from out of the secretions of his own body—that is, once again as a result of extending his causality to the point where an opposition between core and periphery in his own person has arisen. Moreover, if Re remains fully immanent amongst humans, they shall all be slain; that is, there will be no genuine existence for mortals, who would be in immediate unity with him.

Re takes up his position upon the back of Nūt, who transforms into the celestial cow from which the text has received its modern title. Some humans petition Re at this point for divine sanction, as it were, to fight on his behalf, to fight themselves against the rebels. But Re rejects them, and hence when they go to fight anyhow, it is in darkness. This seems as though it is the same iconic moment as the slaughter of humans by Sekhmet, although a different aspect is articulated here. Re next asks Nūt to raise him up to a position of visibility over all things. Once there, he begins to establish a distinct celestial realm, including places important in the afterlife literature such as the Field of Offerings (or Field of Peace) and the Field of Rushes (293/39f), as well as the stars and the limitlessness embodied by the eight Hehu, the Ogdoad of Hermopolis. A strong contrast has now been established between the upper and lower world. This is underscored by Re’s next action, which is to summon Geb and give directions for the disposition of the subterranean realm. Re summons Geb through the intermediary of Thoth, a small detail and yet one which emphasises the space for mediation which has been established between the different planes of being by the actions in the mythic narrative. The substance of Thoth’s mediation can be seen in the fact that Re gives detailed spoken directions to Geb.

The substance of Re’s address to Geb is that Re directs Geb to cooperate with Nūn in order to establish authority over certain snakes that live in the earth and in the waters. Re affirms both the legitimacy of their presence and the necessity of maintaining control over them, control which he transfers to Geb and Osiris. Re warns Geb particularly about the magical power they possess. One should note in this regard that in the Instruction Addressed to King Merikare, in the same passage which mentioned the present myth, magic is specifically referred to as a gift conferred upon the God’s “children” in the wake of his withdrawal from immediacy: ‘He made for them magic as weapons to ward off the blow of events.’\(^{40}\) Are the “snakes” in question then to be identified with the powers which belong to mundane or mortal beings as such, especially since they are placed in the charge of Osiris, and thus apportioned to the land of the dead? A comparison with chapter 175 in the Book of the Dead seems relevant. Here Atum states to Osiris—i.e., the deceased or the mortal \textit{qua} mortal—that after the eschatological flood which returns the world to Nūn, ‘I [Atum] shall survive together with Osiris, after I have assumed my forms of other snakes which men know not and Gods see not.’\(^{41}\)

Next Re speaks directly to Thoth, allotting him a crucial position. He directs Thoth to create writings pertaining to the netherworld, where those who rebelled and were slain now reside. Here we see the divine charter for the composition of the very afterlife literature for which Egyptian civilisation is so famous. This body of texts serves to re-establish the communication between Re and his most distant subjects which was broken off at the beginning of the myth. Before Re’s withdrawal from the mortal realm, access to his spiritual illumination was universal and immediate for mortals; after his withdrawal, this illumination is dependent upon their own wisdom and virtue. Thus mortals will require knowledge. The importance of the role Thoth plays here can be seen from Re’s affirmation that Thoth, as his “vicar,” will

\(^{40}\) Lichtheim, \textit{Ancient Egyptian Literature}, p.106.

\(^{41}\) Allen, \textit{The Book of the Dead or Going Forth by Day}, p.184. Note that R. O. Faulkner, \textit{The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead}, New York: Macmillan, 1985, p.175, translates Atum’s statement as ‘I will transform myself into something else, namely a serpent [...].’ Also, though he never comments on \textit{BD} 175, valuable materials on the symbolism of the serpent form of Atum are collected in the aforementioned article by P. Koemoth, ‘L’Atoum-serpent magicien de la stèle Metternich,’ 2007.
possess authority to “send out” even those primordial Gods who are greater than he (295/71f), for it is no longer a matter only of the afterlife literature, but of the whole body of sacred books and ritual procedures, which were often known as the *bas*, or “manifestations,” of Re. Between Thoth and Re there is such a close relationship that Thoth is commonly referred to in later texts as the “heart” (i.e., mind) of Re.42 A text from Esna states that Thoth came forth from Re’s heart ‘in a moment of grief,’43 in very much the same way humans are said to have come into existence from tears shed by Re or by Atum. Thus the distance between humans and the natural or cosmic order, a distance constitutive for the intellect, is nevertheless even painful on some level for the Gods themselves.44 At any rate, the domain of ritual stands in the gap created between Re and the cosmos. A degree of power within the cosmos has been ceded to the autonomous operation of innerworldly beings; this was, in effect, already the situation at the myth’s beginning—for how else would beings have the power to rebel?—but now it has been regularised. Finite beings will not, on account of their finitude, be relegated to divine representation solely by “the Irascible One,” (295/69f) meaning presumably Seth, embodying disorder. Instead, appropriate provision will be made for liminal beings.

After Re’s address to Thoth, the text continues with prescriptions for the recitation of a formulary which follows. The address to Thoth thus effects the transition from a narrative mode of discourse to a ritually effective utterance. One could hypothesise a unity to the text such that the formulary encapsulates and, so to speak, renders operational the contents of the foregoing narrative portion of the text. In the formulary, Re is said to have embraced Nūn, and to have addressed the Gods coming after him with a discourse concerning the *ba*, which seems to have the value in this context of manifestation, that is, of something through which something else is present. Thus, in the most concrete examples, wind is the *ba* of Shu, for the airy divinity Shu makes his presence known through the activation of air; night is the *ba*

of darkness, its source and prime exemplar, so to speak; and crocodiles are the bas of Sobek, the crocodile deity, for this is how he is present in the world. Re identifies his own ba with Magic, Heka, thus affirming that it is the effectiveness of magic which is his presence. Furthermore, Re identifies himself as the ba of Nūn—thus the “embrace” of these two Gods. These two ideas can be conjoined in a single complex proposition stating that the cosmic order is the becoming-manifest of what was latent in the pre-cosmic chaos, while magic is the becoming-manifest of the providential ordering of the cosmos. Re also states in his utterance concerning the bas that the ba of each God and each Goddess ‘is in the snakes’ (296/86f). Does this perhaps refer to the snakes which were discussed in the address to Geb? In that address the disposition of magic was also discussed.

It would be unwise to venture too deeply into the details of texts whose very reading is in many respects uncertain, but there is a general significance to the discourse on the ba which relates it to the mythic narrative which has come before. The very concept of the ba expresses a distinction between the explicit and the implicit, signifier and signified, phenomenon and essence. Of course, the range of variation in its use shows that it is not a perfectly refined and specific term, albeit it was surely a good deal more refined and specific to the Egyptian thinker than it is for us. But we can understand enough of what is meant by the concept to see that it pertains to the world as constituted by Re’s withdrawal from immediacy. Indeed, the notion of the ba could be seen as the essence of all the mediating structures Re institutes to affect this withdrawal. For it is not a matter of a withdrawal and then the creation of mediating agencies to bridge the gap, but of the withdrawal by means of the mediating agencies, whether these are the Goddesses who function as the “Eye of Re,” or the celestial cow of Nūt, or the sacred books of Thoth, or the authority vested in Osiris with respect to the mortal qua mortal. It is significant in this respect that the text emphasises Re’s encounter with Nūn: Re consults with Nūn, embraces Nūn, goes forth to see Nūn. This suggests that a major theme of the text is the turning back of the formative principle in the cosmos upon its sources in latency and indefiniteness, so that these may after a fashion be incorporated into the cosmic order, an action precipitated by the state of the beings at the limits of the natural order. Thus a primary
axis of the myth connects the rebellious mortal subjects of the cosmic order with the primordial formlessness of Nūn.

This last point could provide matter for reflection regarding the relationship between the “metaphysics,” if indeed we might characterise it as such, which is immanent in Egyptian myth and theology, and some of the categories of Greek philosophy. For Aristotle says of the Hellenic theologians (Metaphysics 1091a30f) that they, like ‘some modern thinkers,’ meaning a Platonist like Speusippus as much as atomists and other “natural philosophers,” posit the good and the noble as having appeared ‘after the nature of things progressed ... saying that the good belongs not to those who were first, as, for example, to Night and the Ouranoi, or to Chaos, or to Ocean, but to Zeus, insofar as he is a king and a ruler.’ On the one hand, it could be said that the Celestial Cow text shares this quality with the works of the Hellenic theologians, for the chief goodness in the cosmos is clearly Re, rather than Nūn; hence Nūn does not contest Re’s legitimacy, despite the problem of the rebellious subjects. The inability of formation, which belongs to Re, to completely subordinate its other, which is associated with Nūn, does not subvert the authority of the formative principle. Rather, Nūn cooperates with Re. The distinction between form and matter is not dissolved, but matter is seen to be inherently cooperative with formation. Matter is sufficiently autonomous as to negotiate a contract, so to speak, with the formative principle. But it is not simply a question here of the relationship between a formative principle and a material substrate, but with any substrate or, indeed, any superstructure which escapes comprehension within a particular level or regime of formation. Only a concept this broad of the other of form sufficiently takes into account the priority of Nūn to Re. And this is where the metaphysics of the Egyptian text appears irreducible to either a strictly evolutionary formula, such as Aristotle attributes to the theologians and certain “moderns,” or to a view which would see the good as solely or primarily vested in the first principle, the procession of being amounting thus to a decline. The Egyptian model appears to be one which is both hierarchical and yet featuring many sites of power, with principles at different levels possessing distinct agency within an overarching structure in which these different agencies achieve

equilibrium. And this equilibrium, because of the ability for Egyptian theologians to shift their viewpoint among these different levels of organisation, can be seen either as a looser, “contractual” establishment based upon the settling of opposing claims, or as the concise manifestation of a single demiurgic will, and this will itself conceived in any number of ways (e.g., as more intellectual, in the Memphite Theology, or as more vitalistic, in cosmogonies associated with Gods like Khnum).

Also significant in Egyptian thought as it may be recovered from this text, is the ability of those at the end of the procession of being to actively appropriate for themselves the knowledge of this procession for practical benefit. I do not mean “practical” in a deflationary sense, but in the widest possible sense, for it is a question not in the first place of worldly benefit but first and foremost of the ability of particulars to stabilise themselves in existence. ‘If they ask, “What are your names?” (answer), “Eternal Recurrence and Eternal Sameness.” Then they are bound to say, “[He is truly] a God,” and to say, “He has reached us here by this route”,’ the text directs its operator (297/93f); and just below, the operator affirms that ‘I am one belonging to the flame, which is the ba of fire. I have no eradicators among men, Gods, spirits, and the dead or in anything in this whole world.’ The flame, which in being identified as “the ba of fire” is, one could argue, thus distinguished from mere natural fire, is typically the weapon of choice against those who rebel against the cosmic order embodied by Re, and is wielded by Goddesses bearing the designation “Eye of Re.” If we assume that rebellion and its punishment are not understood in Egyptian theology in crudely anthropomorphic and voluntaristic fashion, then this flame can be understood as nothing other than the forces of disintegration which are inherent to the natural world and require some special dispensation, not to be deployed, but to be arrested. Re grants such dispensation in the narrative portion through the device of the intoxicating beverage, but in the operational portion of the text, at the end, it seems that the operator goes a step further, identifying with the very disintegrative forces themselves. Through identifying with the agency of annihilation, annihilation becomes impossible, and indeed unthinkable in principle. Of one capable of mastering this insight, indeed, the text affirms ‘his provisions’ (or “entrance,” access) ‘cannot be diminished, nor can a net be readied against him’ (297f), for no contradiction remains between
the operator’s particularity and the universality of natural (i.e., cyclical) being.

In closing, some remarks are perhaps appropriate on the reasons why such a method of interpretation as I have pursued here might be fruitful in the broader context of the social sciences. When the discourse of philosophy is delimited according to the manner in which it emerged historically in the West, and considered to be susceptible to extension only to those discourses which emerged in sufficiently similar disciplinary settings to the West (e.g., Indian and Chinese philosophy), philosophy seems as a discourse too narrow to accommodate the venues in which many of the most trenchant “philosophical” issues are addressed, discourses which are considered to be theological or mythological and hence to fall outside its disciplinary boundaries. And yet this seems in certain respects an illegitimate restriction, especially insofar as if the discursive boundaries of philosophy could be extended to include, under some rubric, theological and mythical discourses, then the philosophical dialogue would be universalised with respect to place and time, and immeasurably broadened as a result.

This is not to say that narrower and broader definitions of philosophy should not be maintained side-by-side. It is important to recognise, for instance, that in a culture such as Egypt, one encounters texts that address more narrowly “philosophical” concerns with a methodology distinct from mythological cognition. Some examples of this are the allegorical fragment concerning Truth and Falsehood, or the allegory concerning Sight and Hearing which is embedded in the Demotic narrative of Thoth and Tefnut mentioned above. Perhaps even a third category, drawing upon both “theology” and “philosophy,” but reducible to neither, can be glimpsed in the speculative literature attested in fragmentary form in the Demotic text which has been dubbed the “Book of Thoth.”

The practice of “theological” interpretation, however, can serve to bring purely mythic discourse into the dialogue about the nature of

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being on its own terms, and not merely as a desideratum of social structures. This is not to dissolve disciplinary categories, but to recognise the natural breadth of philosophy to incorporate a variety of disciplines, when these are seen as different methods for engaging a common body of problems. Thus Socrates, in Plato’s *Meno*, acknowledges the influence of ‘certain priests and priestesses who have studied so as to be able to give a reasoned account of their ministry.’ A distinction should be drawn, however, between “theological” interpretation and any exegesis aspiring to a strong universality, examining particular theologies for material to substantiate cross-cultural theses about a singular divine substance. “Theological” interpretation seeks rather, to the degree possible, to apply beliefs about the divine immanent to a particular culture to the interpretation of that culture’s body of myth. It is thus a tool for making myth more productive as a tool for articulating the unique self-understandings of particular cultures, which can then be engaged in virtual dialogue, instead of being reduced to a common denominator.

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The Zaqqūm Tree

Emily Pott

O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness darkeneth thee not; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. (Psalm 139:1-12)

In common with the descriptions of Paradise from many traditions, trees feature prominently in descriptions of the Islamic Paradise, both in the Qur’ān and ahādīth. The inhabitants will enjoy their “spreading shade” and eat of their “fruits in plenty.” In addition to the nameless trees populating Paradise the Qur’ān mentions some specific trees; the tree related to the Fall of man, the date palm of Sayyidatna Maryam

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1 ‘Reclining therein upon couches, they will find there neither (heat of) a sun, nor bitter cold. The shade thereof is closed upon them and the clustered fruits thereof bow down’ (Qur’ān 56:13-14). Translations from the Qur’ān are from Pickthall unless otherwise noted.
3 See for instance, Qur’ān 56:28-34; 76:14.
(the Virgin Mary), the olive tree that is neither of East or West, the Sidrat al-Muntahā, and a tree called Zaqqūm that grows in Hell. Previously the relationship between these trees has been explored suggesting that each of these trees represent different hierarchical orders, different aspects, of the symbolism of the World Tree, the cosmic and supracosmic Tree of Life, which stretches along the length of the Axis Mundi passing through and connecting all of the created order—all worlds and beings—at the centre. Perhaps the most troublesome aspect of the previous statement is the relationship of correspondence between the Tree of Life and the accursed tree, the Zaqqūm Tree. This tree that grows at the centre of Hell is described in graphic detail in the Qur’ān. Just as the fruits of the trees in Paradise will delight and nourish those who enter the garden, those who enter

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6 See Qur’ān 24:35.
7 The Sidrat al-Muntahā, which is translated as “the Lote-tree of the uttermost boundary,” is mentioned only once in the Qur’ān, in the Star Sūrah referring to the vision of the Prophet during his Ascension. See Qur’ān 53:13-18.
8 Another tree, the Shajarat-al-Ṭūbā is not mentioned in the Qur’ān but is prominent in ḥādith and in the writings of later mystics. The Shajarat-al-Ṭūbā was described by Ibn al-ʿArabī in his Futūḥāt al Makkīya as growing down from the roof of Heaven and penetrating all of the spheres of Heaven. Miguel Asín-Palacios describes the tree in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s “plan of Paradise” as “a mighty tree depending from the heaven of the Primium mobile, or roof of the abode of glory, whose foliage spreads throughout the seven celestial spheres and each branch of which penetrates one of the countless individual mansions of bliss. This tree he calls the ‘Tree of happiness or bliss (ṭūbā)’ (M. Asín-Palacios, (Islam and the Divine Comedy, tr. H. Sunderland, London, 1926, p.152). See again the present author’s unpublished doctoral thesis, Chapter 6, ‘The Tree.’
9 It is described in its inverted aspect in the Upanishads, ‘Its root is above, its branches below—This eternal fig-tree (aśvattha)! That indeed is Pure. That is Brahma. On it all the worlds do rest, and no one sover goes beyond it’ (Katha Upaniṣad, 6.1, in R. Hume, The Thirteen Principal Upaniṣads, London, 1931, p.358). This is elaborated in the Bhagavadgītā, ‘Men tell of the changeless Fig-tree, with roots that upward rise and branches that descend; its leaves are [Vedic] hymns; he who knows it knows the Vedas. Upwards and downwards its branches spread, swollen by the Gunas; their shoots are the objects of sense; and downward do the roots extend; and their effect is work in the world of men. Its form is not here [in the world “below”] understood, nor its end, nor its beginning, nor yet its ground’ (Bhagavadgītā, Bk.15, 1-4, W. D. P. Hill, The Bhagavadgītā: An English Translation and Commentary, Madras, 1953, p. 185f) See also in this context A. K. Coomaraswamy, Selected Papers Vol.1: Traditional Art and Symbolism, ed. R. Lipsey, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977, p.397, n.49, where he recalls that, ‘This pillar is omnipresent and passes through the centre of every being.’
the fire will ‘eat of a tree called Zaqqūm,’\textsuperscript{11} ‘the food of the sinner, Like molten brass, it seetheth in their bellies,’\textsuperscript{12} ‘it is a tree that springeth in the heart of hell, Its crop is as it were the heads of devils. And lo! They verily must eat thereof and fill their bellies therewith.’\textsuperscript{13} Not surprisingly, while the symbolism of Shajarat-al Ṭūbā (Tree of Bliss) and of the Sidrat al-Muntahā (Lote-tree of the Uttermost Boundary) has been unfolded by the Islamic mystics, and images of the blessed Tree are used throughout Islamic art and architecture, little is said about the infernal Tree and its image is rare in Islamic art. It appears to be distinct and opposed to the Tree of Life, to represent the Satanic forces of darkness and evil as opposed to the divine forces, thus it is difficult to reconcile with the other trees of the Qur’ān.\textsuperscript{14} The purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between the Zaqqūm Tree and the Tree of Life. It is proposed that their apparent opposition is the result of misperception, disorientation or lack of recognition. The Zaqqūm Tree as described in the Qur’ān embodies “evil” and, although the trees can be seen to occupy two poles, if they are recognised as part of a continuum the Zaqqūm Tree is potentially a Tree of Life; they are essentially one. Dionysius the Areopagite entreats us to ‘run counter to mass prejudice and … to make the holy journey to the heart of sacred symbols’\textsuperscript{15} and perhaps his words are more important to heed in the midst of the “darkness” of modern life. It is in the hold of such “darkness” where the potential for a “return to light” can be seen to offer great hope and it is humbly wished that through touching on some

\textsuperscript{11} Qur’ān 56:52.

\textsuperscript{12} Qur’ān 44:44-45.

\textsuperscript{13} Qur’ān 37:63. Eating of the fruit of this tree is always followed by a drink from a boiling spring. See Qur’ān 56:54, 44:48, 37:67 and 88:05.

\textsuperscript{14} It should be noted in this context, as has been pointed out by Marco Pallis in his illuminating chapter, ‘Is there a problem of evil?’ in his book, A Buddhist Spectrum, 1980, p. 31-51, that ‘the idea of “a problem” of evil originated in Christianity and is largely confined to that field.’ My thanks go to Timothy Scott for directing my attention to this book.

\textsuperscript{15} Dionysius the Areopagite, The Complete Works, tr. C. Luibheid, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987, p.284. The entire quote from Letter 9 reads: ‘We have therefore to run counter to mass prejudice and we must make the holy journey to the heart of the sacred symbols. And we must certainly not disdain them, for they are the descendants and bear the mark of the divine stamps.’
of the aspects of the symbolism of the Quranic “Tree of darkness” this hope can be rekindled.\(^{16}\)

In exploring the symbolism of the Tree, as George Lechler has explained, ‘we have to deal with an idea—more than 5000 years old—common to all Indo-European branches.’\(^{17}\) The universal recognition of the tree as a symbol has been well documented in ritual, mythology, cosmology, and sacred art from Ancient Mexico to Africa to Japan.\(^{18}\) The tree growing upwards towards the heavens, reaching towards the light of the sun, presented an obvious symbol of heavenly aspiration. With its branches outstretched, one above the other, extending from the central trunk, each branch depending on the roots for its initial growth and sustenance, it could be seen as a reflection of the “degrees” of cosmic manifestation, of the hierarchy of the created order. The seed of the tree that contains the tree itself *in potentia*, can be understood as an image of multiplicity contained in Unity and Unity revealed through multiplicity.\(^{19}\) The tree is associated with the *Axis Mundi* and was often

\(^{16}\) In the modern world the word symbolism requires definition. Throughout this paper the word symbol will be used in the sense that it is spoken of by Al Ghazālī in *Mishkāt al-Anwar* with the regard to the correspondence of the cosmic with the supracosmic: ‘Were there no relation between the two worlds, no interconnection at all, then all upward progress would be inconceivable from one to the other. Therefore the divine mercy gave to the World Visible a correspondence with the World of the Realm Supernal, and for this reason there is not a single thing in this world of sense that is not a symbol of something in a yonder one’ (Al Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-Anwar* [*The Niche for Lights*], tr. W. H. T. Gairdner, Lahore, 1924, p.71). Dr. Martin Lings, in his book *Symbol and Archetype*, has perhaps given the most clear and concise definition of a symbol as, ‘a reflection or shadow of a higher reality’ (*Symbol and Archetype: A Study of the Meaning of Existence*, Cambridge: Quinta Essentia, 1991, p.1).

\(^{17}\) Lechler, ‘The Tree of Life in Indo-European and Islamic Cultures’, *Ars Islamica* Vol.4, 1937, p.381. He explains that the Tree of Life had a central position in the religious life of the past and ‘it is equally established in all branches of Indo-European culture. Its origins lie farther back than Neolithic culture’ (p.372).


\(^{19}\) Recall that the Greek word for the universal substance is *hylē*, meaning literally “wood.” ‘In certain Asiatic traditions, notably in Hindu and Tibetan symbolism, wood is regarded as a “tangible” equivalent of the *materia prima*, the universal plastic substance’ (T. Burckhardt, *Sacred art in East and West: Its Principles and Methods*, tr. Lord Northbourne, London: Perennial Books, 1967, p.56).
used to represent this in ritual. Trees were used to mark the omphalos, to represent the “place” of the manifestation of the Divine in this world and a “point” of access to the “worlds above.”

Early references to the Tree, from the earliest surviving references placing the Tree at the centre of the Sumerian Paradise, through to those in later Rabbinical literature, describe it as embracing all the possibilities of manifestation. Another reference describes a jewelled house in Paradise where all the ‘pleasant things of heaven and earth are stored,’ again representing the Infinite Qualities of the Divine, all of the possibilities of manifestation. In the midst of this Paradise is a Tree of Life, whose height is said to be a ‘journey of five hundred days,’ to express the incommensurable distance between the “worlds” it unites. In its shade Abraham and Isaac and Jacob are seated with Moses and Aaron who teach the Law, and a crowned David and Solomon. The tradition continues, ‘And from the Tree of Life rise and descend the souls of the righteous in Paradise, like a man mounting or descending a ladder’, connecting this Tree with the Axis Mundi. Yet, how are all of these trees, the celestial trees in Paradise, the Tree as Axis Mundi, the Tree that represents the repository for all of the Divine Qualities as they

20 Mircea Eliade describes an Altaic ritual where a spot in a meadow is chosen and a new yurt erected, ‘setting inside it a young birch stripped of its lower branches and with nine steps (tapty) [representing the stations of ascension or degrees of knowledge] notched into its trunk. The higher foliage of the birch, with a flag at the top, protrudes though the opening at the top of the yurt...’ (Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy, tr. W. R. Trask, New York: Pantheon Books, 1964, pp.190-91). Professor Keith Critchlow writes of the first act in the establishment of a Hindu temple as it is described in ancient manuscripts, ‘the erection of the central upright pillar recalling the world tree echoing the Hindu symbolism of the sushumha which is described as a “ray joining every being to the spiritual sun”’ (Time Stands Still: New Light on Megalithic Science, London: Gordon Fraser, 1979, p.29f.) In Mesopotamia ritual temples were built to represent on earth the heavenly dwelling place of the deity. These were often surrounded by a grove of trees, not only offering shade in a hot climate but reminiscent of the sacred tree. In rituals, a sacral King was crowned with wreaths of blossoms and anointed with the oil of the sacred tree, he carried a rod or sceptre of its branches. See G. Widengren, The King and the Tree of Life in Ancient Near Eastern Religion, King and Saviour IV, Uppsala, 1951, and L. Yarden, The Tree of Light: A Study of the Menorah, the Seven-branched Lampsstand, London, 1971, p.35. Note also that these rituals are paralleled in the Hebrew tradition.

21 Thus it was often used in connection with other symbols of the omphalos.

22 Many of these references are collected in the present author’s unpublished doctoral thesis.

will be manifested in the cosmos, related to the accused Zaqqūm Tree that grows in the centre of hell?

The Zaqqūm can be seen as an inevitable result of the desire of the Hidden Treasure to be known\textsuperscript{24} based on the Pythagorean principle that ‘when from the Cause there emanates one there emanates from it not one.’\textsuperscript{25} To understand this, consideration must return to the first stirrings of becoming, the separation of the primal unity, or as it is spoken of in the Abrahamic Traditions, the ‘separation of heaven and earth.’\textsuperscript{26} This “separation” which results in a duality represents the beginning of cosmogonic manifestation, an ontological level wherein the primal Unity is refracted into so many reflections of the Divine Qualities or possibilities of manifestation. Thus a movement “away” from Unity has been made, a movement “away” from the Absolute and

\textsuperscript{24} This is in reference to the ḥadīth qudsi wherein the Divinity speaks on the tongue of the Prophet Mohammad, ‘I was a Hidden Treasure and I loved to be known and so I created the world.’

\textsuperscript{25} See H. Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, tr. W. R. Trask, New York: Pantheon Books, 1960, p.68. This is, perhaps, Corbin’s concise way of expressing what Plato discusses in the *Timaeus* when he speaks of the World Soul as being comprised of sameness, otherness and essence.

\textsuperscript{26} See *Qur’ān* 21:30 where the heavens represent supraformal or Spiritual manifestation and they are divided from the earth representing formal or subtle celestial and corporeal manifestation. See also *Genesis* 1:4 where light and darkness represent the division between formal and supraformal manifestation. The darkness here is the primordial Darkness which Dionysius describes as ‘impervious to all illumination and hidden from all knowledge,’ and of which St. Thomas says it is called “Darkness” ‘on account of its surpassing brightness’ (see A. K. Coomaraswamy, ‘Angel and Titan: An Essay in Vedic Ontology’, *Journal of American Oriental Studies* Vol.55, 1935, p.384. See also Coomaraswamy, ‘The Darker Side of Dawn’, *Smithsonian Collections* Vol.94, no.1, 1935, p.8, where he quotes from the Upanishads that it is only ‘when the parents that cohabit in the dark are separated do they pass over the babe.’ This “separation” can also be recognised in the many creation myths which tell of the large chthonic or theriomorphic beast—the ‘deity in the darkness, unmanifested, in his ground, not proceeding, or as it is technically expressed *ab intra*’ (‘The Darker Side of Dawn’, p.2)—is “separated” head from body and the head used to create the heavens and body used to create the earth. See Coomaraswamy, ‘Angel and Titan: An Essay in Vedic Ontology’, p.400 and Eliade, *The Two in the One*, tr. J. M. Cohen, London, 1965, p. 90 for further references. See also the *Prose Edda* where the body of Ymir is divided and they “made the world from him,” his skull becomes the sky and his flesh the earth (S. Sturlson, *The Prose Edda of Snorri Sturlson*, tr. J. Y. Berkeley, 1964, p.35). As Coomaraswamy writes, ‘The creative act involves a maiming, division, or transformation…” (‘The Darker Side of Dawn’, p.2). For the Tantricist it is the ‘separation of the two contrary principles incarnate in Shiva and Shakti. All relative existence implies a state of duality’ (Eliade, *The Two in the One*, p. 117).
into the realm of relativity. To return to the symbol of the Tree, this is the realm of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. At this level the Tree can be recognised as a “Tree of Knowledge” in the sense that it is through reflection or manifestation of the Divine Qualities in the universe that man is able to know the Divine. But it is also the “veil,” the illusion of multiplicity that separates all manifestation from its Source; it is the realm of relativity, of Maya, the realm “under the Sun.”

It is this phenomenon of apparent separation, this illusion that, if not recognised for the illusion that it is, can be described as “evil.”

As the words of the early Sufi Al Niffarī (d. 971 AD.) explain it is this ‘experience of otherness,’ man’s inability to recognise his participation in the Spirit, that is the actual ‘evil.’ He writes that, ‘the fire is otherness’.

This loss of knowledge or “veiling” is represented in the

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27 This perception of the tree as barrier or veil is implied in St. Ephraem’s writings describing the architectural expression of the symbolism of the tree. He describes the Tree of Knowledge as a ‘boundary’ equating it with the sanctuary or veil within the basilica, and the Tree of Life as the Holy of Holies. ‘In the very midst He planted the Tree of Knowledge, endowing it with awe, hedging it with dread, so that it might straightway serve as a boundary to the inner region of Paradise.’ In the midst of Paradise, God had planted the Tree of Knowledge, to separate off, above and below, sanctuary from Holy of Holies’ (Hymns of Paradise 3:3, 14, tr. S. P. Brock, New York, 1990, p. 91). Note also Hymn 15:2, which recognised in a reversal of orientation that the “barrier” is also the “door”: ‘The tree that is called the Tree of Knowledge symbolises the gate of Paradise; it is through the gate of knowledge that one is able to enter in; it is the likeness of its glorious Creator, in whose hidden abode through the gate of knowledge all who are perceptive may approach His hiddeness’ (p.182). Recall also in this context the strait-gate of the Gospels, the Quranic barzakh, the ṭāqīa of Genesis 1:6, 8 and that the two Cherubim are set as guardians of the gate (Genesis 4:24).

28 Coomaraswamy collects some of the textual references that describe the ‘act of creation and procession as an extroversion’ that leads to a reversal of the order or a disorientation (‘The Darker Side of Dawn’, p.14, n.8). Frithjof Schuon writes, ‘Nothing can be opposed to God absolutely since nothing existent escapes from Divine Possibility; apparent opposition is consequently only symbolic but it is nonetheless real on the plane of its relativity...’ (Esoterism as Principle and as Way, tr. W. Stoddart, Ghent, NY: Perennial Books, 1981, p.80, n.85).

29 ‘Experience of other than Me does not dwell beside Me ... Banish from thee all experience of otherness, and of what is derived from otherness ... Thy experience of otherness is derived from otherness and the fire is otherness, and it has a lookout over the hearts: it sees in them otherness, when it looks out over the hearts, and so sees what is of itself, and unites with it; but when it sees not what is not of itself, it unites not with it’ (Mawāqif 17:1-2, 6) and ‘He unveiled for me His gnoses of uniqueness, and Fire died down’ (Mawāqif 16:3) and in the Kitāb Mukhātabāt: ‘Name is a veil over essence ... Unveiling is the Paradise of Paradises: veiling is the Hell of Hells’ (27:7, 10). Al Niffarī
Abrahamic Traditions by the exile or Fall of Adam. The relation of the Tree to Adam’s exile is well known. A perceived separation is the inevitable result of the misplaced recognition of the Tree of Life as a Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. When Adam turned away from the centre, when he choose to experience the one and the other, when he mistakenly took the relative to be real, he turned towards “otherness,” he set foot on a path of forgetfulness, he lost consciousness of his participation in the Divine. But, although this symbolic revelation of Adam’s plight elicits, and rightly so, man’s greatest sense of loss, its exegesis can also lead to the recognition that the relative, by its very nature, by its existence, must contain “otherness,” must contain “distance,” must even contain “evil.”

It may be helpful at this point to turn to the oral tradition of Judaism as recorded in the Kabbalistic texts where the initial refraction of Unity (the reflection of the Sephiroth or the Aspects of the Divine in the cosmos) is seen as arising from a primary “contraction” (tsim-tsum) wherein God in the midst of His Infinity must deny himself in order for Unity to unfold into the reflections, more or less perfect, that make up the created order—the relative. If there was nothing aside from His Infinity there could be no cosmos for there would be no limits and endless infinitude would be the result. It is the Absolute aspect of His Perfect Unity that allows for the “denial” that makes possible the

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30 See Genesis 2-3, Qur’an 20:123, also Qur’an 95:4-5.

31 As Frithjof Schuon writes, ‘Positively speaking the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is All-Possibility as Divine Freedom; negatively, or in a limiting sense, it is that same possibility when, unfolding into Existence and thus, one might say, in a downward direction, it necessarily moves far away from the Divine Source’ (Islam and the Perennial Philosophy, tr. J. P. Hobson, London, 1976, p. 190).

32 As Pallis writes, ‘if one pauses to look really closely into the premises of creation, one must surely wake up to the truth that a paradise—any paradise—to be a paradise must contain the serpent’ (A Buddhist Spectrum, p.38). This is what allows Coomaraswamy to write, ‘For anyone who holds that “God made the world,” the question, Why did He permit the existence in it of any evil, or that of the Evil One in whom all evil is personified, is altogether meaningless; one might as well enquire why He did not make a world without dimensions or one without temporal succession’ (Selected Papers Vol.2: Metaphysics, ed. R. Lipsey, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977, p.23).

creation of the cosmos.\(^{34}\) Thus, as Leo Schaya writes, ‘Satan was born from this “contraction” or illusory negation of God.’\(^{35}\) This relative reality, the emanation of the Divine Qualities as so many reflections, would not be possible without the determination of the cosmic limits. These limits are finally achieved through the aspect known in the Abrahamic Traditions as the “Rigour” or “Justice” or “Majesty” of the Divine.\(^{36}\) This aspect, which in manifestation masquerades as a negation, appears as an opposition of the relative to the real, of the world to God. It is sometimes equated with the “anger” or “wrath” of God. Instead it is an aspect of His Truth, for its role is to affirm His Truth, that He alone is Reality, to negate all negation of Him. Thus this limit to the unfolding of Infinity, the limit to the cosmogonic expansion, which marks the final boundary of the cosmogonic trajectory, negates the negation and thus is the death of the created and “hell.”\(^{37}\) Nevertheless, and here we return to the verses from Psalm 139 that are quoted at the beginning of this paper, there is nothing that exists that is not to some extent touched by the Spirit.\(^{38}\) There is nothing in the created order that is anything but a reflection of the Divine Order and thus all of manifestation is waiting to be recognised as

\(^{34}\) Schuon writes, ‘To say Absolute is to say radiation, and thus relativity, and to say relativity is to say movement away from the Absolute, and thus the possibility of evil’ (Esoterism as Principle and as Way, p.83, n.89).

\(^{35}\) Schaya, The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah, p.101. He explains, ‘the cosmic possibilities, issuing from the divine grace affirm themselves; but by being attached to existential happiness, they forget the pure and divine affirmation, the cause and very sense of their existence. Their affirmation of themselves degenerates into a negation of their transcendental essence and divine grace is obliged to assume the aspect of rigor in order to deny this negation of God.’ This in the language of the symbol of the Tree is the eating of the fruit for the sake of the fruit while forsaking its Source.

\(^{36}\) Coomaraswamy writes, ‘In general theology these contrasted aspects of the deity are those respectively of Mercy and Justice; in Islamic metaphysics for example, Heaven is the reflection of his absolute Love, Hell of his absolute Majesty’ (‘Angel and Titan: An Essay in Vedic Ontology’, p.407).

\(^{37}\) ‘He is the creator of the relative, as required by His infinity; of that relative the thing we call evil is a necessary function, being in fact a measure of the world’s apparent separation from its principle, God—an illusory separation...” (Pallis, A Buddhist Spectrum, p.43).

\(^{38}\) Pallis writes, ‘a hell, to be a hell must contain a trace of the Tree of Life concealed in it somewhere; it cannot be a place of absolute evil or absolute imperfection or absolute anything. It is in the realm of the relative’ (A Buddhist Spectrum, p.39). ‘The world whatever it may contain of things permanent or transitory, is never detached from God; it is always the same celestial substance fallen into a void and hardened in the cold of separation... ’ (Schuon, Dimensions of Islam, tr. P. N. Townsend, London, 1970, p. 37).
such. Every illusory projection that makes up the “worlds below,” regardless of how remote or broken contains at its core and is essentially something of the perfect model that it reflects. Although “hell” represents the outermost extremity of the Divine Order reflected in the cosmos, its manifestation would be impossible if it were not the reflection, however dim and dismembered of Unity. Ibn al-ʿArabī writes of the relationship of analogy between Heaven and hell saying, “The degrees of Heaven are as many in number as the degrees of hell; for each degree in the one has its counterpart in the other ... Thus were a stone to fall from any one degree in Paradise, it would of surety fall in a straight line in the corresponding degree in Hell.” These analogies, these traces of the Spirit within the created order, however dim, await the recognition of man through his capacity to remember and to recognise his participation in the Spirit. This is possible, for through His aspect of Rigour, God creates the worlds by “separating” them from Himself but the final act of this separating power is to separate all the worlds, beings and things from their illusion of separation and to cause them to return to Unity. Although “The word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the

39 Coomaraswamy in his study of the Yaksas writes of this choice or recognition that, ‘In the Vedic tradition “Yaksa” is a designation of the Supreme Identity of Mitra (Indragni, king-and-priest) and Varuna, apara and para Brahman and either of these aspects considered apart. Agni is a preferred name, “his is the likeness both of Life and Death” (Rg Veda 10.121.2). As the Sun he is the Friend (Mitra), but as the Devourer, Death (Yama, Varuna, Vrtra, Ahi, Atri); one or the other accordingly as men “approach him, making him their Friend” (Aitareya Brāhmaṇa 3:4) or look upon him as Enemy’ (Yaksas: Essays in the Water Cosmology, ed. P. Shroeder, Oxford, 1993, p.25).

40 Ibn al-ʿArabī, Futūḥāt al Makkīyah 4 Vol., Qustantiniyah, 1876 (1293), Vol.2, p.898. In the same way the fountains of Paradise are reflected in the boiling springs of Hell. Also, in a ḥadīth which Al Ghazālī discusses, the mention of sījīn in Qur’ān 83:7-8 is said to be referring to ‘a rock underneath the seventh earth [the “lowest” of the chaotic “earths” of the phases of clarification of matter which preceded the primordial earth],’ underneath which is found ‘a book of evil.’ Al Ghazālī calls this ‘a rock in Hell to which the spirits of the wicked are brought’ (The Marvels of the Heart, in Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al Dīn, The Revival of Religious Sciences, Book 21, tr. W. J. Skellie as The Religious Psychology of Al Ghazālī, Ann Arbor, 1977, p. 138). As Schaya writes, ‘hell is identical with “chaos,” nevertheless a kind of hierarchy of states or degrees can be distinguished here; this hierarchy is the last reflection of the cosmic order, projected into the primordial disorder of nature. There the formative radiation of the spirit barely touches created being, but nothing could possibly exist without having been conceived and “touched” by that Spirit and without possessing an eternal Archetype’ (The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah, p. 100).
dividing asunder of soul and spirit’, 41 ‘the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.’ 42 For fallen man, who chose the knowledge of the one and the other over knowledge of the One the first step towards a return to Unity is the recognition of the opposites as held within God.

In his paper on Mephistopheles and the Androgyne, Mircea Eliade collected many traditional myths whose exegesis could lead to recognition of the union of the opposites. 43 Many are also to be found in the writings of Ananda Coomaraswamy in his studies The Angel and the Titan and The Darker Side of Dawn. Eliade associated these early myths with the far later writings of Nicolas of Cusa concerning the coincidentia oppositorum. The contemplative, reflecting on these myths can be led to the realisation that, as Heraclitus wrote, ‘God is day night, winter summer, war peace, satiety hunger.’ 44 All of these traditional teachings, and it is certain that they would be paralleled by many to be found in the oral teachings of traditional peoples throughout the world, lead to the realisation that wherever there is opposition it is reducible to complementarism, that opposition although counterfeiting as reality, is bound to be resolved at a higher level and to disappear within the Real. Any pair of contrasts, which are divided in the created order, are recognised as united once consideration is raised to the level of the Absolute, as the principle of Unity demands. In reality, in the realm of the Eternal, ab intra, the opposites are united. It is only from the viewpoint of the limited and multiple, the temporal and spatial, ab extra, that they are divided. 45 From without the Tree is a Tree of

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41 St. Paul’s Epistle to the Hebrews 4:12.
42 Ecclesiastes 12:17.
43 Eliade, The Two in the One, p.80ff. The word exegesis is used in its etymological sense of “a guiding out” which could be accomplished through a traditional teaching or through contemplation. In addition, as Eliade writes, ‘The whole man is always engaged when he listens to myths and legends, consciously or not, their message is always deciphered and absorbed in the end’ (ibid. p.83). The importance of myth, degraded by many scholars and largely ignored or sentimentalised in the modern world, cannot be underestimated.
45 As Coomaraswamy writes, ‘the Devas and Asuras, Angels and Titans, powers of Light and powers of Darkness in Rg Veda, although distinct and opposite in operation, are in essence consubstantial, their distinction being a matter not of essence but of orientation, revolution, or transformation’ (‘Angel and Titan: An Essay in Vedic Ontology’, p.373) and ‘There can be no question that the Powers of Light and the Powers of Darkness are the same and only Power. Devas and Asuras are alike Prajapati’s or Tvastr’s children: the Serpents are the Suns. It is entirely a question of “orientation”’
duality, the knowledge is of good and evil, regarded from the centre there is only one Tree. The distinctions are relative and not essential. These contrasted orientations can be seen as the inevitable result of the One Brahman, apara and para, described in the Upanishads as mortal and immortal, in a likeness and not in any likeness. But men are warned that they ‘may mark the one and fail to mark the other.’

Remembering that the Tree has been described in relation to the Vedic teachings as either ‘a Single Tree to which contrasted elements of the Deity are ... differently related, or as two different Trees, respectively cosmic and supracosmic, manifested and unmanifested, but indwelt throughout by the single Brahman-Yaksa,’ there is perhaps in the Tree a symbol to lead man to “mark the other.” The Zaqqūm Tree in its relation to the Tree of Life, like the myths telling of the relationship of the coincidentia oppositorum, can act to awaken within the contemplative mind knowledge of the relationship between “good” and “evil.” The Zaqqūm can be seen in the context of the first phase of the spiritual journey wherein the traveller must “descend into hell” to undertake a reversal of corruptio optimi pessima, the inevitable result of the trajectory of the descent of spirit into matter and of the severing of soul from Spirit. Through consciousness of the worst, and knowledge of the Divine, the worst can again become best, the metanoia or conversion can be achieved. The possibility of the recognition suggested by the symbolism of the Zaqqūm Tree can be seen also in the

(‘The Darker Side of Dawn’, p.2). Dionysius writes in The Divine Names 725C, ‘So therefore the tribe of demons is evil not because of what is in its nature, but on account of what it is not ... I would claim that the angelic gifts bestowed on them have never been changed inherently, that in fact they are brilliantly complete, even if the demons themselves, through a failure of their powers to perceive the good, are not able to look upon them’ (The Complete Works, p.91). Recall also in this context the ḥadīth, ‘My shaytān has become Muslim.’

49 To quote from the The Coptic Gospel of Thomas: ‘When you make the two one, and when you make the inside as the outside, and the outside as the inside, and the upper as the lower, and when you make male and female into a single one, so that the male is not male and the female not female ... then shall you enter [the Kingdom]’ (log.22 tr. B. Blatz in W. Schneemelcher ed., New Testament Apocrypha Vol.1, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991, p.120).
Pott: The Zaqqūm Tree

representations of the Vedic deities where, besides a gracious form, each has a “terrible form” (krodha murti), the fierce, menacing and frightening aspect. It can also be recognised in the descriptions of the sacred ash, Yggdrasil, of the Prose Edda, which tell of the presence of Nithhögg (the Striker that destroys), who gnaws at the root of the Tree from below and is surrounded by ‘so many serpents that no tongue can count them.’ Perhaps this knowledge can lead to the recognition of what Ananda Coomaraswamy describes as “the older teaching,” that “good” and “evil” like all of the opposites, are only “real” “under the sun” and “within the worlds,” they are features of the cosmos, but in the ‘Supreme Identity are coincident without opposition or composition.’ For fallen man who has “tasted” of the multiple, who has chosen knowledge of the one and the other over knowledge of the One, the Tree of Life takes on the appearance of a tree of opposites or contraries. For him the Tree is broken and separated into innumerable “levels” that appear as separate from one another but, if recognised as such, are really the connection between man and all of the levels “above,” eventually reuniting heaven and earth, soul and spirit, shattering man’s illusions of separateness and allowing reintegration, a remembrance of the Self. In Sufism it is said, ‘knowledge of the Truth entails the grasping of “the union of opposites” (jam‘ad-diddayn),’ the recollecting and reassembling of the scattered pieces of man’s spiritual

50 Sturlson, The Prose Edda of Snorri Sturlson, p.45. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, the relationship to Christ’s crucifixion on the Cross set between the crosses of the “good” and “bad” thieves could be explored as well as to the representations in European art of the two heads of Janus, and to the Kala-mukha (Death mouth), the Aztec Garuda with the man’s head in his open mouth, and the Makara crocodile with open jaws that holds itself “against the current,” and also to the two angels who sit on the right and the left of the Mercy Seat in the Judaic Temple.

51 This is why it is said in Galatians 5:18, ‘If ye be led of the Spirit, you are not under the Law.’

52 Coomaraswamy, ‘Angel and Titan: An Essay in Vedic Ontology’, p.409, n.42. Eliade writes of the ‘fundamental Indian doctrine that good and evil have no meaning or function except in a world of appearances, in profane and unenlightened existence. From the transcendental viewpoint good and evil are on the contrary illusory and relative, as are all other pairs of opposites: hot cold, etc.’ (The Two in the One, p.96). Lings writes, ‘every single thing in existence, therefore every pole of duality, is bound to have in itself two complementary aspects’ (Symbol and Archetype, p.24) and that, ‘The notion of a pair implies complimentarity, which is a condition and an anticipation of union’ (p.19).

53 Lings, Symbol and Archetype, p.44.
possibilities, leaving behind the knowledge of duality, of good and evil, in the quest for the knowledge of Life, of Unity. The Judaic oral tradition describes a tree of two faces, a “Tree of Life and Death.” It relates that when night falls, the Tree of Death appears, but as dawn breaks the Tree of Life is in the ascension and the Tree of Death falls away and people come to life again. It is said that this happens in order to ‘see if there were any man of understanding that did seek after God.’

It is a Tree of Life to the man “awakened” and a Tree of Death to the man still concerned with the world, and thus “dead.” In order to recognise the Tree as the Tree of Life a man must perform a re-orientation, he must “turn his back” on this world, he must awaken himself from his “death in this life” and experience the “death” of those worldly qualities within himself so that he may replace them with the spiritual qualities, which are his birthright. It could be said that he must recognise and nurture the Tree that grows at the centre for it is also the Tree that grows within his own heart.

Although the One is the source of being, He is also non-being, He is both life and death, outwardly seemingly opposed and yet inwardly impartible. In order for the spiritual seeker to reach his goal, to become

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54 This is quoted in Coomaraswamy, *Traditional Art and Symbolism*, p.391.
55 This brings to mind the depiction in a Mithraic cave vault of a tree that meets at the top of the vault, its left side in full leaf and its right completely barren. The sun and moon are depicted in its branches. This tree is described in J. Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography and Ideology*, Leiden, 1968, p.35.
56 Abu Sa‘id asks, ‘What is evil? And what is the worst evil?’ and answers, ‘Evil is “thou,” and the worst evil “thou” if thou knowest it not’ (cited in R. A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, Cambridge, 1921, p.53). ‘If any man come to me and hate not his own life, also, he cannot be my disciple’ (*Luke* 14:26). ‘Heaven and Hell are the divided images of Love and Wrath in divinis where the Light and the Darkness are undivided, and the Lamb and the Lion lie down together. In the beginning, as all traditions testify, heaven and earth were one and together; essence and nature are one in God, and it remains for every man to put them together again within himself’ (Coomaraswamy, *Metaphysics*, p.32).
57 It is in this sense that Lings writes of *corruptio optimi pessima* in the context of human vice and virtue (evil and good) as ‘a bridge across the gulf that appears to separate them’; a bridge that can be crossed ‘both by way of corruption, and also from the other side by way of redemption’ (*Symbol and Archetype*, p.103). It is an example of the reversal of the inversion, for it is possible that ‘The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner’ (*Psalm* 118:22), or that ‘The serpents are Suns (and) He who follows the same course shall shine with the Suns’ glory’ (*Pañcaviṃśa Brahmana* 25:15:4 as quoted by Coomaraswamy, ‘Angel and Titan: An Essay in Vedic Ontology’, p.404).
Pott: *The Zaqqūm Tree*

a Comprehensor, he must through his will, through grace and through knowledge be able to recognise in the relativity of the created order the compliments or opposites, as manifestations of the real at their given level but not as the real in themselves. None of the created order can be called real in its own right but it can reveal Reality, it can be recognised as a symbol. The Comprehensor must be willing to see his own position as subjective, and thus subject to the illusions of multiplicity and separation. But through his efforts to transcend the opposites, through his knowledge of God, through recognising the Divine as revealed in the created order, he is able to move beyond his immediate and personal situation. The *Zaqqūm* Tree grows even in the centre of “hell.” It is there, even in the midst of the darkness to be recognised as the lowermost extension of the inverted Tree of Life. And even here hope is offered for the possibility of a return to the Garden, for ‘the way of the Tree of Life’ eventually and inevitably leads to the Source. *Zaqqūm* symbolises the greatest separation, but even at this greatest “distance” there is still a symbol of the possibility of reintegration. The very trajectory of creation pre-supposes a return.58 It is the light of the knowledge that can transcend duality and opposition that can turn the Tree of darkness into a Tree of Life. Recognition of this symbol offers the opportunity for the reorientation, the turning process, a return from the state of mind symbolised by hell, a result of forgetting the ‘way of the Tree of Life,’ of the inability to recognise the unity of reality.59 To

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58 As discussed earlier, in order for creation to proceed, for the Hidden Treasure to be known, God must become “world” on some level. Thus cosmic manifestation, what appears as a “negation” of God is really an affirmation of Reality. Man, in his attachment to the world, to his existence, forgets this affirmation and his Divine origins. But, as Schaya writes, ‘The dark reversal of the divine order implies the possibility of a return from chaos, of “inversion of the inversion”...’ (*The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah*, p.101). As Rūmī, following Rābi’ah, writes in *Divan*, Ode XIII: ‘There is no crime worse than thy ex-istence.’ The etymology of the word existence is *ex*+*alio+sistens*, “to stand forth, to stand apart.” There is always the possibility for reintegration.

59 As Coomaraswamy explains, ‘It is only from our temporally human point of view that “good and evil” are opposed to one another, but “to God all things are good and fair and just” (*Heracleitus*, Fr:61)... to Him in all conflicts, both sides are right (*Rg Veda* II.7.15) ... *there*, [beyond the clashing rocks, the *barzakh*] as Meister Eckhart says in full agreement with Chuang Tzu, the *Upaniṣads*, and Buddhism, neither vice nor virtue have ever entered in’ Coomaraswamy, “Symplegades” in *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Winter, 1973, p.38, n.3; he continues on p.49, n.1, “The distinction of Heaven from Hell is not of places but in those who enter; the Fire, as Jacob Boehme is fond of
“enter the Fire” is a lack of recognition, but to “enter the Garden” is to have followed the “path” of Mercy and to realise that the Trees are in essence One Tree, to realise that, ‘As is the tree, just such is the Lord of Trees, so indeed is man.’ For, ‘When the Holy One grants the sinner grace and strength to accomplish his return to righteousness...the man himself (who as a sinner had been “dead”) is truly and perfectly alive, being joined to the Tree of Life.’

Symbolism as marriage and
the symbolism of marriage

Tom Bree

When Face Looks Upon Face

The process of “development” might be described as a movement from Essence towards Substance—from that which is qualitative towards that which is quantitative. Humanity’s knowledge of its origin and destiny has thus “developed” so that it might be said that it has become more outwardly orientated as time goes on. This seems particularly so within the sciences. In past times science looked inwards, viewing the universe in terms of Divine causes and numinous Mystery; modern science turns its gaze outwards seeking empirical data.

The science of symbolism relies upon a balance of quality and quantity—of inwardness and outwardness; more to the point, it relies upon a recognition of their interdependence. The word “symbol” literally means “to throw together”; the opposite of “symbolic” is “diabolic,” which means “to throw apart.” The recognition of a symbol relies upon our capacity to marry together, and thus unify, an inner essential Idea with its outward, substantial and manifested counterpart.

Modern man appears almost ignorant of the traditional language of symbolism. Certain symbols, such as the cross in Christianity for example, are said to have become “exhausted.” There is talk of the need to replace traditional symbols with new symbols. Though it may be true to say that the language of symbolism is in urgent need of resuscitation, it misses the point to suggest that particular symbols should be discarded due to having become “exhausted.” It is not symbols that have become exhausted, rather our capacity to perceive and “know” their numinous quality. A true symbol participates in the Eternal and is thus eternal. It is the “lunacity”\(^1\) of the human condition, a condition that is subject to a perpetual waxing and waning in terms of

\(^1\) This word was coined as it was felt that the word “lunacy” has too many associations with mental ill health.
our capacity to know the Real, which leads to our exhaustition. Thus, while one era of humanity will see the Divine Image in everything, another will embrace the purely outward forms of Idolatry.

Humanity’s “solar” potential, on the other hand, illuminates the whole world around us, revealing everything that is hidden. Face forever looks upon face because the sun always sees a full moon. The sun sees everything in full illumination because it is the “Illuminator” and whosoever the sun may behold with its auroral gaze, its light will be returned back, with love, from a fully illuminated face. In the Ethiopian Orthodox Icon painting tradition, the faces of Biblical heroes are depicted front on where both eyes can be seen by “us” the viewer; in contrast Christ’s enemies are depicted in profile, in which only one of their eyes is visible. When we see the full face (or the fully illuminated moon) we are in the “solar” line of view whereas when we see a profile view of the face (a waxing or waning half moon) we have left that solar line of view and have entered into the vicissitudes of lunality. That which was unchanging and “whole” has fallen into the perpetually changing world of highs and lows, ups and downs and stops and starts. The perfect unity of the circular full moon has been ruptured and thus that which was symbolic has become diabolic.

In the current era of humanity, characterised by an excessive emphasis upon materiality, there is blindness to the profound language of symbolism. The phenomena of the world have become for us, as it were, “opaque Idols” rather than “transparent Icons.” We see veiled mirrors that condemn us to a blindness that means that face is utterly unable to look upon the face that “Is” before it. It seems tragically inevitable that the overly exoteric world-view associated with Islamic Wahabism seems to show itself all too clearly in the excessive degree of face covering worn by the women who follow this ultra-modern form of Islam.

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2 The notion of “opaque idols and transparent icons” is written about by Henri Corbin; see ‘Theophanies and Mirrors: Idols or Icons?’, tr. Pratt & Donohue, Spring Journal, Spring 1983, pp.1-22 (La philosophie Iranienne Islamique aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles, Paris, p.364).
‘Deposition of Christ’ (The *Kwer ata re’esu*), 17th century. Full moon flanked by waxing and waning half moons?
In contrast, the mystical traditions of Middle Eastern monotheism often use the face as a symbol of the Divine. In Z’ev ben Shimon Halevi’s book about Kabbalah he writes,

The oral tradition of Kabbalah states that the reason for existence is that “God wished to behold God” thus there was a previous non-existence in which, as the written tradition says, “Face did not gaze upon Face.”

The Sufis of Islam use the Arabic word for “face” (Wajh) as a name for the Divine Essence—which is feminine—and, as Frithjof Schuon points out in his essay ‘The Mystery Of The Veil,’ this use of the word Wajh for the Divine Essence, ‘... at first sight seems paradoxical but becomes comprehensible through the symbol of veiling’.

Christianity, perhaps inevitably, puts the greatest emphasis upon the “Face of the Divine” due to it being a religion of Incarnation. The Icon painting tradition and, more generally, the emphasis upon figurative art brings to the fore the Christian belief in Jesus Christ as the incarnation of the Divine Word and Christians are encouraged to recognise the face of Christ within their fellow human being. In Matthew’s Gospel there is the essential saying attributed to Christ, ‘Whatsoever you do to the least of my brethren you do it unto me’ (25:40).

It is with ideas such as these in mind that this writer takes an interest in the symbolism of the western Christian wedding and particularly of the wedding veil as well as the face which it covers.

The wedding veil has, in more recent times, come to be viewed, through sociological eyes, as an item of clothing that controls or dominates women, making them into the property of men; this has, in turn, led to the wedding veil becoming an item of apparel that many brides will wear “open” as opposed to down over their face, where this is seen as a symbolic act of liberation from male oppression.

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Such an anti-symbolic reading of the veil is perhaps inevitable when we consider the intellectual poverty that characterises the current era. This is not to say that symbols don’t become corrupted overtime within the perceptions of humanity, and that the wedding veil isn’t one such example; but to only see a symbol in its corrupted form means that we are not allowing it to be reborn anew in our understanding and thus, in turn, we become partly responsible for it remaining in its corrupted state. The idea that what lies behind the veil is “property” of any sort or under the dominion of a particular section of humanity is a corruption of the highest order, but how are we to possibly relate to the inner world of “meaning” when we are constantly encouraged to deny its very being?

That which lies behind the veil is, in symbolic terms, the hidden “inner world.” There is an unfortunate irony that when many brides wear an open veil it is not because the inner world has, as it were, “become revealed” or, so to speak, liberated. Rather it seems more the case that the inner world has become subsumed by the outer world which, in terms of geometric symbolism, is much like saying that it is possible to have a circumference without first having a centre.

Certain forms of feminism have done a great deal of good in areas such as reminding us of the essential nature of the Divine Feminine and highlighting the brilliance of women such as Hildegard of Bingen as well as some of the social changes that they have brought infusing modern culture with a much needed breath of fresh air. But feminism, like anything else, collapses when it loses touch with its own archetype which in terms of feminism is surely ‘An attempt to bring about a rebalancing of opposites so that they can then enter into harmonious union.’

The principle of the harmony of opposites is one of the most fundamental within all spirituality. One of the many ways in which this union shows itself is within the western Christian wedding ceremony. The wedding ceremony, in one sense, marks the earthly legal union of two individuals; in a higher sense the ceremony could be looked upon as a form of sacramental mystery play in which the Divine and the human join together as one. Here we are talking about something that is not, as

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5 An active encouragement towards being in a perpetual state of antagonistic opposition, power struggle and conflict is surely a classic example of “fallen” feminism.
it were, dependent upon the presence of the two particular individuals who are involved in the rite, for they are actors who are playing archetypal roles within a heavenly drama.

Similarly, when we bow at a monarch it is not specifically the individual to whom we bow. No doubt their presence before us is beneficial but ultimately we are bowing at the principle of “monarchy” and it is this monarchical principle that the individual embodies. This is an important distinction to recognise and it is the reason why when a particular monarch passes away the monarchical principle does not pass away with them, it simply passes over to the next living human who is in line to the throne. ‘The King is dead, long live the King!’

The higher meaning contained within the wedding ceremony is not dependent upon the two particular individuals who are getting married. There obviously needs to be a bride and a groom for there to be a wedding but this same “mystery play” is repeated over and over again week after week with new couples playing the appropriate roles within the ritual.

There is a Chinese saying which says, ‘The village comes and goes but the well is forever there.’ If the well, from which we draw up life giving water, is like the principle of wedded union or monarchy, in the sense of it being a thing that is drawn upon generation after generation, then the villages around the well that “come and go” are the particular human beings who play the roles of bride and groom or monarch for a certain period of time before someone else takes their place to draw up the well’s life giving water that feeds both body and soul.

The Geometry of Marriage
A veil is something that demarcates two areas, one “behind” the veil and thus hidden, the other before it, making it visible and within “this world.” On the one hand we have a sense of “two-ness” by virtue of the two areas; on the other hand we have a “three-ness” because the veil is, as it were, the mediating relationship between the two areas. It is the form that gives identity to these two areas through defining their limits and by obscuring one area and not the other.

A similar principle can be seen within geometric symbolism. The first principle of geometry is the hidden “point” of unity. If we think of this point as expanding outwards in all directions (on a two dimensional plane) we then obtain a circumference which, if taken in its entirety,
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can be viewed as a visible outward reflection of the unity of the original point. Through this we have a polarised two-ness in terms of there being a hidden centre and a manifest circumference but in reality we are, again, looking at three-ness because the moment that we have a circumference we have a radius or radial measurement, the distance (or relationship) between the centre and the circumference.

Prior to the emergence of the veil or radius, there was unity—then when the veil/radius came into being it brought about a two-ness due to it causing the division of the original Unity into “hidden being” and “revealed form”; along with this two-ness we see the third aspect in the veil/radius itself which brought the two-ness into being but which is also their unifying principle. In the words of Hildegard of Bingen, ‘The Holy Spirit produces Eternity and Identity, and then joins them so that they are one’.

A similar principle can be seen within the *taijitu* of Toaist tradition, the well known image of yin and yang, united in the circle that results from their togetherness. Also of interest here is the fact that the distance between the eyes of yin and yang is the same length measurement as the radial measurement of the circle that embodies their union so again here we see the radial measurement as embodying the relationship between the two polar opposites.

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6 Hildegard, Letter to Eberhard II, Bishop of Bamberg 1163-64.
A kindred geometric form that shares some of the characteristics of the *taijitu* is the hexagram. In the monotheistic tradition it is most commonly known as the Star of David or the Seal of Solomon, in the Hindu tradition, the Satkona Yantra or *satkoan*. It consists of two overlaid and opposed equilateral triangles—one pointing upwards and the other downwards.

The geometric form of the Star of David, Seal of Solomon, Satkona Yantra, *satkoan*.
Like the *taijitu* the hexagram consists of the same shape repeated twice but with one of them rotationally inverted in relation to the other. The product of the triangle’s union (i.e. their area of overlap) is the hexagon which is, in a certain sense, the “rectilinear representative” of the circle by virtue of the fact that its edge length is exactly the same as the radial measurement of the circle that contains it and in this way it is the first polygon to come forth from the circle.

Again the radial measurement of the circle that contains the hexagram can be seen within the relationship between these two opposed triangles. The inversion of one triangle in relation to the other requires a rotation of sixty degrees which is the equivalent of one radius in rectilinear terms.

Though if the symbolism of polar opposition is to be applied rigorously—in the sense of us looking at the two triangles as being diametrically opposed in their orientation—we would then say that the rotation in question is actually one hundred and eighty degrees which is the equivalent of three radii.

If the *taijitu* is drawn within the same circle as the hexagram, an interesting relationship becomes apparent via the hexagon that is at the centre of the hexagram. The halfway points along the top and bottom edges of this hexagon (effectively the hexagon’s head and feet) coincide with the position of the yin/yang eyes and thus the distance between the hexagon’s “head” and “feet” also measures one radius. It is also clear to see that the central point of the circle is the pivot around which the rotational inversion occurs between both yin and yang as well as the two triangles.
The two triangles of the hexagram express polarity through their opposing orientations. Within sacred art this polarity may also be shown through the colour or shading, of the triangles, as it is shown in the yin and yang. In the example (below)—a stained glass window from Wells Cathedral—the light triangle ascends, while the dark triangle descends.

Yet another geometric form of significance here is the one that is known as the *Vesica Pisces* or the Mandorla, as well as a whole host of other names. It is a particularly important form within Christian geometry and can be seen regularly within Christian art forms, particularly ones that date back to medieval European Christendom. The form in question consists of two overlaid circles that are the same size and whose centres both coincide with a particular point on each others circumference.
This form is a quintessential geometric expression of two-ness plus its unifying relationship as seen in terms of the two circles plus their area of overlap. This overlap creates an almond shape, hence the name mandorla, which is the Italian word for “almond.” The two circles symbolically represent polar opposites such as the “inner” and the “outer,” God and Man, Heaven and Earth or the sun and the moon (in the sense of “illuminator” and “illuminated,” or the Eternal and the changeable). The area of overlap is the relationship between these two opposites and thus is, again, a third aspect which unifies them as well as acting as a doorway between them. In medieval Christian architecture this form is often seen above a doorway or even as a doorway (whereby the doorway’s arch is derived from the top half of a vesica).

As we walk through this doorway we move from the mundane outer world through to the inner world of prayer. In Christian iconography Christ will often be depicted within the vesica form; thus in St John’s Gospel Jesus says, ‘I am the door: by me if any man enter in he shall be saved’ (10:9).

The “inner” and the “outer” can also be seen in terms of an actual almond itself which consists of a hard outer shell as well as a soft, hidden inner kernel and so it incorporates the two polar opposites within itself by embodying their relationship. Yet again the radial measurement of the circles that are involved here is particularly apparent within this “relational” third aspect that is the vesica.

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7 The veil and the radius also “embody” this dual unity. A veil has two faces, one that can be seen and one on the other side of it that is hidden from the “outward” eye. The radius presents us with an intriguing dual union in the sense of it being both manifest and unmanifest at the same time thus expressing the “hidden-ness” of the centre as well as the “embodied” nature of the circumference (the two of which it runs between and thus unites). The radius is dyadic in the sense of it being a one dimensional line that runs between two points. A dyad will sometimes be described as “the flowing of the point.” If the monad is an unmanifest point then the first dimension, in terms of space, sees the flowing of this point in one direction which creates a line though it is a line that could described as being indefinitely thin because, being one dimensional, it has no breadth or depth. So it is effectively an invisible line though the fact that the point has moved into the first dimension means that it has become manifest. In this way it is both hidden and revealed at the same time. In Proclus’ commentary on Euclid’s Elements it states, ‘He taught us what the point is through negations only, since it is the principle of all magnitudes; but the line he explains partly by affirmation and partly by negation. The line is length, and in this respect it goes beyond the undividedness of the point; yet it is without breadth, since it is devoid of the other dimensions’ (Proclus: A Commentary on the first book of Euclid’s Elements, tr. G. Morrow, New Jersey: Princeton, 1992, p.79).
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The central bay of the Royal Portal of Chartres Cathedral in France

The Vesica drawn onto a photo of the west door of Wells Cathedral
The two overlaid circles provide us with four focal points, firstly the two centres of the two circles (which in the most direct sense are the two opposite poles) and secondarily the two intersections of their two circumferences and these four points could be looked upon as the four extremities of the vesica. If we first look at the relationship between the two centres of the circles we see straight away that their proximity is equal to the radial measurement of either circle. If we now consider all four focal points and use them to draw a rhombic (diamond shaped) polygon within the vesica we find that all four edges of this polygon are equal in length to the radial measurement of either circle. It is only when we look at the distance between the two intersections that we find something new—a square root of three measurement in relation to the radius—and this is the first dyadic proportional relationship within Euclidean geometry. Despite this departure from the radial measurement, the fact that it is a “proportional relationship” means that the very being of this root three measurement depends upon the existence of the radial measurement, which it is a root three “in relation to” so even here the radial measurement is key.

If the two circles that form the vesica are arranged so that one is above and the other one below, the vesica then takes on the resemblance of an eye which brings to mind the words of Meister Eckhart, ‘The eye by which I see God is the same eye by which God sees me.’ Eyes, like windows, are doorways through which we can see from the inside to the outside or vice versa. As well as looking outwards toward the outer world, the eyes—which are known as the windows to the soul—are the organs through which we look “inwards.” Though having said this, the one part of ourselves that we definitely cannot see is our own eyes unless we look in a mirror and then we can behold them. Thus it is the case that we need outward forms through which it becomes possible for us to look inwards. We will return to the mirror later on.

As well as being an item of clothing worn by humans, various other versions of the veil can also be seen in religious sanctuaries in the form of something that covers a sacred object or sacred space. In Orthodox Christian churches there is the Iconostasis, the Icon covered screen that
stands between the Nave and the Sanctuary. Older European churches have a similar, though usually more transparent, screen called a Rood Screen.

The “stasis” of Iconostasis means “a standing still,” which perfectly describes the appearance of the object in question but this stationary verticality also speaks of the vertical nature of the relationship that there is between the two areas—one before the screen (the Nave) and one behind it (the Sanctuary). These two areas have a horizontal relationship within three dimensional space; however, in terms of what they represent there is a strict vertical hierarchy in which what is beyond the screen is higher than that which is before it. A movement from the Nave to the Sanctuary is, in symbolic terms, one of ascension even if the actual physical movement in question is a horizontal one.

The word “rood” derives from the old English word “rod” which means “pole.” Rood also means “cross” and the Rood screen is always adorned with a crucifix, hence the reason for it being called a Rood Screen. With the cross we again have here an image of vertical ascension—from the grave of Adam at Golgotha rising to Christ enthroned in Heaven.

In the Gospel of Matthew the vertical “way of the Cross” is inversely answered by the rending of the veil of the Temple. This “revelation from above” reveals the Holy of Holies which, in turn, reveals to the Centurion the true nature of Christ’s identity.

The word “reveal” is most appropriate for what is being talked about here due to its etymology connecting it with the word “veil.” The “re” of reveal means “opposite of” and then “veal” is derived from the word velare, meaning “to cover or veil,” which in turn comes from velum meaning, “sail.” So to reveal is effectively to “unveil.”

The Mystical Marriage at the End of Time
The joining together of the Bride and the Groom in the marriage ceremony can be looked upon as a “Mystical Marriage” in which humanity joins together with the Divine. In the Jewish tradition, Israel is described as being the Bride of God. This follows through into Christianity where the Church is described as the Bride of Christ. The Church is betrothed to Christ and the final union will take place at the end of time. In the meantime the Church aspires to “be true” to Christ, which is what the word “betroth” means. In the Book of Revelation the
Heavenly Jerusalem is described as being dressed ‘as a bride adorned for her husband’ (21:2). It is also described as being cubic (21:16), which, within geometric symbolism, relates to the end of a cycle that started with the sphere. According to René Guénon,

...the cube is opposed to the sphere as being the most ‘arrested’ form of all, if it can be so expressed; this means that it corresponds to a maximum of ‘specification’. The cube is also the form that is related to the earth as one of the elements, inasmuch as the earth is the ‘terminating and final element’ of manifestation in the corporeal state; and consequently it corresponds also to the end of a cycle of manifestation, or to what has been called the ‘stopping point’ of the cyclical movement.8

The sphere and the cube can also be looked upon as opposites via their inverse relationship whereby they are the two opposing poles of three dimensionality itself.

If a sphere is cut along three of its circular planes or more specifically the three circular planes whose intersections mark the axial coordinates of three dimensional space (length, breadth and depth), we end up with eight identical sections of sphere. If each of these sections is then inverted, effectively turning the sphere inside out, we end up with a cube.

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The eight corners or extremities of the cube were all united and hidden in the central point of the sphere at the beginning of the process; they become the points that are most far removed from the centre when they inverted to create the cube. This inverse relationship has, as its intermediary, the very coordinates of three dimensional space itself, which is sometimes referred to as the “six armed three dimensional cross.” So the process begins with that which is most internalised and then moves into, and through, this manifested world of three dimensionality until it terminates in the form of a cube, which embodies that which is most externalised—the New Jerusalem dressed “as a Bride adorned for her husband.”

This union at the end of time brings to mind the “Wedding Night” (Sheb-i Arus) of the great Muslim mystic Rumi, who often spoke of God as his Lover. Rumi’s “wedding night” is the night on which he passed on from this world; thus as the sun sets in the West and becomes reunited with its own principle in the hidden world beyond the horizon, so the great mystic finally became fully united with his Love at the end of his time in this world. The image of a couple walking into the sunset is surely an expression of this reunion on the western horizon even though it is generally only viewed in a rather sentimental way in the current era.

The sun rising in the West, on the other hand, is an idea that is found within Islam as well as in Plato’s writings, and is also associated with “end times.” At the end of the cycle everything becomes inverted, much like the inversion of sphere into cube, and one expression of this inversion is the sun rising in the west rather than in the east.

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9 Another “veiled bride” that is associated with the cube can be found within the Jewish tradition. The Shekhinah is the Divine presence that dwells within the cubic Holy of Holies in the Temple of Solomon and is known as the “Bride of the Sabbath”: ‘I can descend and restrict My Shekhinah within a square cubit’ (Exodus Rabba 34.1). The Sabbath, as the seventh day, is also associated with the centre of the “six armed three dimensional cross” as the seventh “direction” from which the six arms (or directions) emanate. This Holy Palace, as it is known, is the dwelling place of the Shekhinah and is the centre or interior of the cubic form whose six faces are orientated towards the six directions of three dimensional space—fowards and backwards—(length), left and right—(breadth) and up and down—(depth): ‘The house ascends and takes up its position, and joins itself to both realms ... and the house shines with six lights that cast radiance on every side’ (Zohar I, 172a-172b).

10 Plato, Politicus (Statesman), 269A.
It is here, with the sun’s appearance in the West, that we begin with the Christian wedding ceremony and the appearance of the bride at the west door of the church—thinly veiled light that she is. She moves eastwards through the church, slowly moving towards the groom who, unlike her, is standing still at the altar.

One of the most popular Bible readings within the modern western Christian wedding is chapter 13 of St Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians. It speaks in beautiful terms of the significance and importance of “Love” over all else. Towards the end of the chapter St Paul speaks of a future time of perfection, which we have a sense of now but have not yet fully realised: ‘Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully even as I am known’. This image of a partially obscured mirror that will one day become clear so that face can look upon face is also described in Sufi ideas. In her book about Sufism, Laleh Bakhtiar speaks of the unpolished mirror,

Before the creation of human beings, the universe had been brought into being but it was unpolished, unreflective and unconscious of the Divine presence….the mystic aspires to become this reflective mirror….the Sufi thus becomes the instrument by which the Divine can have vision of self in another form. The mystic, empty of self, then has the capacity to reflect the Divine to the Divine. The mystic has been unveiled so that light comes to reflect light...

This mirror is none other than the moon which receives and returns the light of the sun and this brings us back to where we started with the “lunacity” of the human condition. The unpolished or veiled mirror is the partially illuminated, waxing or waning moon or St Paul’s description of “knowing in part” or “seeing a poor reflection” whereas the polished mirror is where we “see face to face” for the mirror’s veil has been removed. It is where we “know as we are known” for it is where we view the moon from the position of the sun and thus see a fully illuminated circular form of light that returns our loving gaze.

In Rumi’s epic poem *Masnavi*, there are the following few lines that speak of the glories of this world. It finishes with something that sounds

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remarkably similar to the end of chapter 13 of St Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians.

I am ever in concord with this father of ours,  
And Earth ever appears to me as a paradise.  
Each moment a flesh form, a new beauty,  
So that weariness vanishes at these ever fresh sights.  
I see the world filled with blessings,  
Fresh waters ever welling up from new fountains.  
The sound of those waters reaches my ears,  
My brain and senses are intoxicated therewith.  
Branches of trees dancing like fair damsels,  
Leaves clapping hands like singers.  
These glories are a mirror shining through a veil;  
If the mirror were unveiled, how would it be?12

A mirror shows an inverted image of that which is before it and thus if the bride is a ‘mirror that is shining through a veil’, this light that we see before us—this light that is the sun rising in the West at the end of time—is nothing but a reflection of the sun rising in the East at the dawn of time. When the bride enters the church from the West, Aurora, the goddess of the dawn, simultaneously enters the church from the East with a procession of divine light that would surely blind all of those present were they not looking westwards towards Her veiled reflection. These equinoctial twins of East and West—they who are the duality of the Tree of Knowledge—slowly move closer to the stationary solstitial groom—the Tree of Life in whose unity they will join together as one at the midpoint of the day; Aurora, the one who will “crown” him and the bride, the one who will enthrone him. The beginning looks to the end, the end back to the beginning. The groom awaits their arrival as they slowly move closer towards him. Finally the bride and the groom are standing side by side and the ceremony is ready to begin.

When the sun is in the East or the West it casts shadows but when the East and the West meet at midday—the point of the day at which the sun is at the zenith of Heaven directly overhead—there are no shadows, just pure light.

The Kaaba (or “cube”) in Mecca becomes shadowless at the mid-point of the day just before and after the northern hemisphere summer solstice. Mecca is just a couple of degrees south of the tropic of Cancer—the part of planet earth that is closest to the sun on the northern hemisphere summer solstice. Depending upon which part of the tropics one is in, and on which particular day of the year that one views it, it is possible to see the sun rising perpendicular in relation to the horizon and then rising upwards to the very centre of the sky directly overhead for pure local midday. It is the sun reaching its peak in the sky that actually defines this mid-point of the day when for a fleeting moment the sun leaves the eastern side of the sky but has not yet entered into the western side of the sky and at this moment of “coronation” all the shadows disappear. The eastern sun—the one that casts shadows westwards—becomes wedded to the western sun—the one that casts shadows eastwards—and together in union their conjoined light shines vertically downwards from Heaven to earth. This can be seen if one is standing on the tropic of Cancer on the summer solstice and thus at Mecca just before and after the solstice. The Kaaba, which is a pre-Islamic building, also has one of its faces orientated towards the summer solstice sunrise.

The word “solstice” literally means “The sun standing still.” This image of the sun standing still directly overhead speaks again of a “stationary verticality,” which in this case is between the sun shining and crowning us from above, and the earth below our feet that receives the sun’s ontological path of light—a shadowless light whose omniscience shows itself in the fact that there is nothing that is hidden from it. Shadows are areas that are hidden (or veiled) from a light source but this moment of no shadows is one of complete revelation where the heavenly face gazes downwards at a fully illuminated and unveiled earthly face “and it is light upon light.” In this way, midday on the

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summer solstice is a moment of blissful matrimony when the two join together as one.

The bride and the groom are now standing together in front of the religious minister, officiator of the ceremony. This religious figure is the third aspect or unifying principle within the wedding ceremony. The minister embodies the oneness that brings the bride and groom together into their unified oneness.

It is traditional for the father of the bride to bring her to the altar and to then “give her away.” When this happens the bride is not given straight to the groom, she is given to the minister who then, as it were, passes her on to the groom so again we see the religious minister as the intermediary between the two opposite halves of this union.

The point at which the bride’s veil is raised differs from one rite to another. Sometimes it will be raised once the bride has reached the altar—the holy inner abode where nothing remains hidden. It may be raised immediately before the vows so that the vows can be spoken face to face without there being any barrier between them. It may also be raised after the vows so as to actualise the union that has now taken place by removing the barrier which had been obscuring the face.

The vows are spoken by both the bride and the groom but it is the groom who speaks his vows first followed then by the bride. In this way the sun shines its light outwards and the moon then returns it. But having said this, when the groom speaks first he speaks on behalf of the whole of humanity and requests entry to the inner sanctum—that which lies beyond the veil—and to knock on the door is essential if one wants the door to be opened. By reciprocating the spoken vows the bride opens the door and effectively gives permission to the groom for union to take place. In this way we see an inversion of hierarchy whereby, on the one hand, the groom, as the sun, is primary whereas the bride, as the moon, is secondary, but on the other hand the bride is the hidden inner world behind the veil—that with whom humanity longs to become reunited and there is no question that the Divine Essence is greater than man. So within this “reunion,” both the bride and the groom embody the Divine and the human at the same time in relation to each other.
At this point there is the exchanging of wedding rings. A temporal symbolism that is associated with the wedding ring is the eternity of a never ending circle, in the sense of an unending movement around its circumference, and this relates to the eternal nature of marriage but, along with this, the fact that the circle has one centre that is outwardly reflected by its circumference means that the wedding ring is also symbolising unity—the place where time stands still and where all dualities are resolved.

The wedding ring differs from the engagement ring in the fact that it is, as it were, “equal in all directions.” The engagement ring has a precious stone at what might be looked upon as its “zenith” and so this brings an element of hierarchy into the circumference of the engagement ring. By hierarchy it is meant that there is one point on its circumference that is more distinguished than all the others. A helpful symbolism here can be seen within the sun’s daily arc through the sky. The sun rises from the East, higher and higher, until it briefly stops at the zenith of its circular path. From then onwards it begins to descend westwards. Within this transitional point, where the sun is stationary at the top of Heaven, we are able to see a particular point in its circular path that stands out from all the others. In this way the focal point of the engagement ring is the diamond at the zenith of its circumference; henceforth, this circumference has a top and a bottom and so thus its expression of hierarchy is a vertical one.

On the other hand, within the wedding ring, we see equality in all directions. There is no particular point on the circumference of the wedding ring that is anymore distinguished than any other and so the focal point in terms of the wedding ring is the central point in the middle of the ring—a point in space which is effectively within the actual ring finger of the ring wearer—and thus hierarchy is expressed here via inwardness towards a centre.

We can see this principle within a vesica shaped door handle from the Vicars Hall in Wells Cathedral. If the lower circle is the engagement ring and the upper circle the wedding ring, it is the axis of the door lock—the form whose turning allows the door to open—that is the focal point of both of the circles. This cubic shaped form that marks the visible end of the lock’s axis is at the zenith of the lower circle and it is the one point of the lower circle that remains stationary. It is the diamond of the engagement ring and its focal point. This same cubic
form, however, is at the centre, or the heart, of the upper circle of wedded union. If the transition from engagement to marriage can be expressed as a movement from the centre of the lower circle to the centre of the upper circle, we are able to see an upward and an inward movement occurring simultaneously. From the perspective of the lower circle there is a movement from its centre up to its zenith whereas with the upper circle we see a movement from its circumference inwards to its centre.

An important point to make in relation to all of this is that the two focal points in question are the same thing being viewed from two different directions. When we see the focal point as being at the top of a vertical hierarchy we are looking at the “holy mountain” from a terrestrial viewpoint, in the sense of viewing it along the horizontal axis whereby we can see the bottom of the mountain (that begins from the earthly plane where we are standing) as well as its peak above us.

When, on the other hand, we see the focal point as being at the centre of a circle we are viewing that same mountain along the vertical axis from directly overhead of the mountain so that the peak of the
mountain is the centre of the circle whereas the base of the mountain is the circumference.

In this way the engagement ring is something that relates to the outwardness of this world “down here”—the circumference that is the base of the mountain—and indeed the focal point of the engagement ring, the diamond, is on the circumference of that ring for all to see. The engagement ring relates to our life in “this world” where we are betrothed to Christ.

The wedding ring, on the other hand, relates to the finality of union and is thus pointing towards the inwardness of the other world “up above” and henceforth the focal point of the wedding ring is within the ring finger itself, where there is traditionally believed to be a vein that leads straight to the heart, the “centre” of the body and symbolically the centre of all being.

In some Christian denominations the religious minister wears a long scarf called a “stole” and at this point it will be used as a symbol of unification, again expressing the minister’s intermediary role within the wedding. The bride and groom, who are holding each others right hands, have the stole wrapped around these hands and the minister then quotes verse 6 of chapter 19 of the Gospel of Matthew where Jesus says ‘What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder’.

Another very beautiful ritual is the lighting of candles. There are three candles standing in a line with the central candle raised up above the other two. For the duration of most of the ceremony the two side candles are alight whereas the central candle is not. At an appropriate point in the ceremony, the bride and groom go over to the candles with the bride standing on one side of them and the groom on the other. The bride and groom then use tapers to take a flame from the particular side candle that is next to each one of them and they then bring the two flames together as “one” to light the central candle. After this has happened the two side candles are sometimes blown out. The symbolism here is obvious and only goes to emphasise yet again that the wedding ritual expresses “three-ness” in terms of the bride, the groom and their union.

By this point in the ceremony the veil has been lifted—face now looks upon face—but the final moment of union takes place as the two faces come together to join as one for a final cleaving kiss. After this
kiss, husband and wife walk westwards down the aisle towards the place of the setting sun.

Creation is allowed in intimate love to speak to the creator as if a lover. As the Creator loves the creation, so the creation loves the Creator. The whole world has been embraced by this kiss (Hildegard of Bingen).

Final Word
To understand the language of symbolism relies upon an equal balance of inwardness and outwardness, or more to the point, a recognition of their interdependence as a dual unity. With this idea in mind, it is only when the inner face opens its eyes, and thus shines its light outwards, that the outer face becomes illuminated and henceforth unveiled. But this revelation of divine light is nothing but an inverted mirror reflection of the inner face that gazes outwards—towards the outer face that gazes inwards—and it is in this loving gaze that the Knower and the Known join as one in a blissful marriage of Knowing.
Contributors

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Roger Sworder graduated Master of Arts from the University of Oxford, taking his degree in the study of Classical Philosophy and History in the original languages. He undertook doctoral studies at the Australian National University with a thesis on Plato’s theory of knowledge. For the past thirty-five years Roger has taught Greek Mythology, Greek Philosophy, Enlightenment and Romantic thought and the Philosophy of Work and Art for the Philosophy and Religious Studies Department at La Trobe University in Bendigo. His is the author of Mining, Metallurgy and the Meaning of Life and Homer on Immortality: the Journey of Odysseus as a Path to Perfection.

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