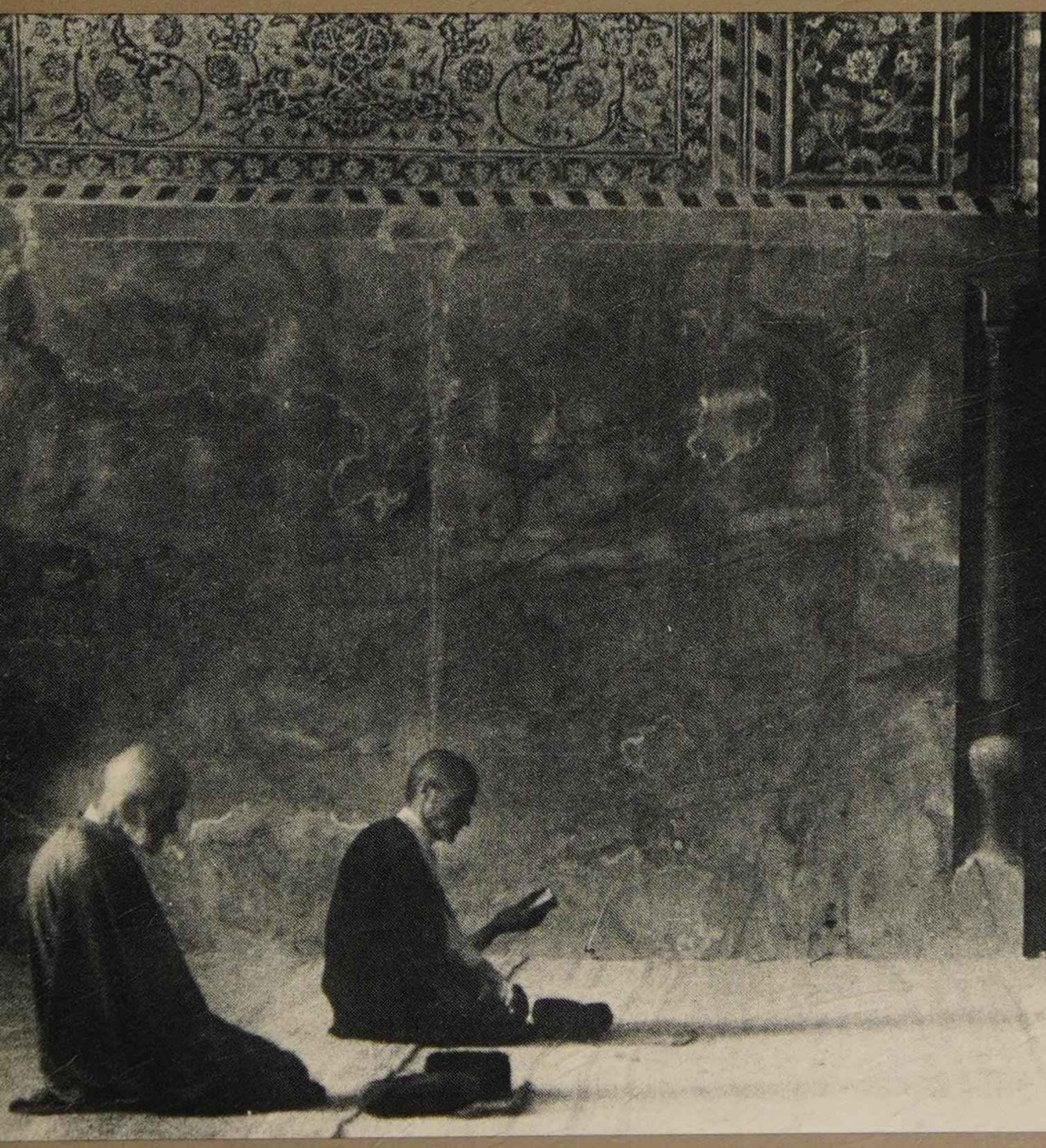
PARABOLA

MYTH AND THE QUEST FOR MEANING

Words of Power



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PARABOLA

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Cover: Isfahan, Iran, photograph by Simon Goldschmidt.

Inside cover: As Buddhist priest Kūya-Shōnin chants, his words are visualized as small statues of Amida Buddha. Sculpture in the Rokuharamitsu-ji Temple, Kyoto. Sekai Bunka Photo Library.

FOCUS

The themes which PARABOLA explores in each issue are always too big for it. Each is a challenge which can never be fully met, and it is precisely this condition which generates its interest for readers, contributors, and editors alike. The challenge is particularly evident in this issue, where we stand in front of the greatest, most central mystery of all the traditions, the mystery of creation itself, of the beginning, the Word. How can we approach what is meant by the Word? How is it related to the nature of our being? And what is its link to human speech, to the language in which we think and which surrounds us throughout our lives?

"Our only word to a thing, when we desire it, is to say to it Be! and it is," we are told in the Koran. "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light," we read in Genesis. And in the Vedas we find, "by that word of his, by that self, he created all this, whatever there is." Again and again the traditions speak of the Word as the primordial principle of creation. These statements are pointing the way to ultimate reality, to the source and ground of all being. They are affirmations beyond argument, beyond opinion or belief, with the character of revelation, of something given.

In a commentary on the Vedas, Raimundo Panikkar has pointed out

that the mystery of the Word can disclose to human beings the essential quality of their own natures. "[The Vedas show that] there is something that does not come from Man as involution, evolution, or development, but falls upon him and hits him as a revolution, revelation, and surprise. It is the mystery of the Word which makes Man aware that he is primarily a spoken rather than a speaking reality, a spoken rather than a speaking Word, a receiver rather than a giver, created rather than creator . . . . When the Word overshadows Man, when it dawns upon him, then Man shares in the Word, participates in the speaking structure of the universe, and enters into the dialogical reality . . . . Man is Word shared . . . . Man is by participation in the Word." The Word is the mediator between the uncreated and created worlds; it is both the ultimate reality and the instrument through which this reality is expressed.

We cannot know with our minds alone what is meant by "participating in the Word." It is clear that saying words—even sacred words—is not enough, and that not all words are words of power, with the capacity to transform. In Linda Hess's new translation, Kabir scolds:

"Ram! Ram!" they cry,
Till there's a callus on their tongue.

If saying Ram gave liberation,
saying candy made your mouth sweet,
saying fire burned your feet,
saying water quenched your thirst,
saying food banished hunger,
the whole world would be free.

Yet the numinous quality of words remains and can be experienced even in ordinary speech. "All words are spiritual—nothing is more spiritual than words," Walt Whitman exults in this issue's lead article, "An American Primer." Kathleen Raine says in our interview with her that we live in a culture which is determined to empty words of their spiritual content, of their innately sacred dimension. Our present-day language is based on a secular, humanist view of the world, she says, and it is our task to reclaim a common language which acknowledges the existence of *levels* of meaning. For this we need a renewal of culture itself, and Raine sees just such a countermovement appearing. "We're on the attack; we're not on the defensive," she says. "We're the new influx coming into the world."

Perhaps only now that we have emptied words can they again be filled; only now, when our dissatisfaction is so acute, can our need to reclaim the fullness of language be heard.

—Lorraine Kisly

FULL CIRCLE / A Readers' Forum

We encourage readers to use this space to share their thoughts and questions, either in response to a particular article or in order to raise matters of general interest. We are looking for letters which will help to open new ideas, and we will offer a free back issue for every contribution we publish.

As one of PARABOLA's faithful readers, I am deeply disappointed in Gautam Dasgupta's review of *Gandhi* in your last issue. Let me hasten to say that my protest is not influenced by the Motion Picture Academy of America's recent choice of this film for a whole clutch of Oscars; I think it is probable that their reasons for the awards arise from a point of view as opposed to my own as do Mr. Dasgupta's strictures, and if so, miss the point by an equally wide margin.

Whether or not the film represents "correctly" the historical and political situation of India during Gandhi's lifetime, whether or not Gandhi himself was actually a saint, a politician, or just possibly both, makes no great difference to me nor, I suspect, to the large majority of American viewers. What matters, and what makes the film extraordinary, is that it is a *successful* representation of the life and growth, the becoming, of a great man. Whether or not Mohandas Gandhi was such a man is, perhaps, a matter of opinion; that there have been, in the course of human history, some great men, that greatness is possible, is a matter of fact—a fact that we all need to be touched by. And for three and a half timeless hours, the audience of this film sees greatness develop and is in its moving presence.

Mr. Kingsley's breath-taking performance of a good man who becomes a great one is, incredibly, dismissed by your reviewer as "elegant." I should like to refer to an interview with Peter Brook published in PARABOLA four years ago (Vol. IV, No. 2), in which he says that only an actor who has a serious search in his own life is capable, with great effort, of coming to moments of representing *what he wishes to be*; and "at that moment," says Brook, "two worlds meet . . . He becomes the meeting point with something else which expresses itself through him."

I would suggest that the capacity demonstrated by Mr. Kingsley to achieve this is a good deal less common than elegance, and a great deal more to be honored.

Catherine Sawyer
Mt. Kisco, New York

As I was reading Dorothea Matthews's beautiful and thoughtful article, "A Flash of Living Fire" (Vol. VIII, No. 1), I found myself expecting,

from paragraph to paragraph, even from sentence to sentence, to run into the name of Paul Diel, the French psychologist. For the past few months, I have been working and reworking my way through Diel's *Symbolism in Greek Mythology* and have found Diel's "explanation" for one of the origins of guilt the most meaningful I have ever read. I don't know if Dorothea Matthews knows Diel's work, but there seems to me to be some striking and wonderful parallels in the work of the two writers. The topic under discussion here, specifically, is guilt, and I'd like to draw your attention to at least one of the ideas that comes up both in the book and in the essay.

Diel writes:

> The real meaning of life is summarized by evolution. Psychic functioning, the theme of myths, is an evolutionary constellation. It is the result of past evolution and it aspires to future evolution, not only of individual man, but of the whole human race.

Diel makes the point over and over, as I understand him, that when a man shirks or tries to avoid his evolutionary "responsibilities," he experiences or can experience this shirking, this avoidance, in the form of guilt feelings. Diel illustrates his thesis by reference to Greek myths.

It seems to me that Matthews is making a similar point when she writes: "He [man] is given the responsibility for his own evolution, and his *guilt* is the measure of his failure to respond to his unique opportunity."

Both Diel and Matthews seem to be saying that man's willing acceptance of his role or responsibility in the very process of evolution itself requires that a man accept his "guilt" without shirking or avoiding or sentimentalizing it. Frankly, I find it easier to write those words on paper than to do what the words would have me do. It helps a little, perhaps, when I realize that both writers also seem to say that "guilt," rightly understood, can be a great helper, a great reminder.

The task is so monumental.

Richard Killen
Kilchberg, Switzerland

Your inside cover illustration, "Adam Naming the Animals" (Spring, 1983, Vol. VIII, No. 2), reminded me of passages in Milton more favorable to animals than Emily Dickinson's predictable Christian revulsion for snakes in "Zero at the Bone," quoted in the same issue.

In *Paradise Lost*, when a fatherly God is bringing the animals to Adam for naming, thoughtfully he excuses the absence of fish: "They cannot change/ Their element to draw the thinner air." The ant "in small room large heart enclosed." God thinks well of all his creation. Beast, bird, and fish to him are living souls. Responding to Adam's desire for a mate, he asks: "knowest thou not/Their language and their ways? They also know,/And reason not contemptibly." Adam, upon creation, asks of nature and the "fair creatures" living and moving about him how came he here. And in a beautiful moment God answers, "Whom thou sought'st I am."

Ida Fasel
Denver, Colorado

An American Primer

WALT WHITMAN

Much is said of what is spiritual, and of spirituality, in this, that, or the other—in objects, expressions.—For me, I see no object, no expression, no animal, no tree, no art, no book, but I see, from morning to night, and from night to morning, the spiritual.—Bodies are all spiritual.—All words are spiritual—nothing is more spiritual than words.—Whence are they? along how many thousands and tens of thousands of years have they come? those eluding, fluid, beautiful, fleshless, realities, Mother, Father, Water, Earth, Me, This, Soul, Tongue, House, Fire.

What beauty there is in words! What a lurking curious charm in the sound of some words! Then voices! Five or six times in a lifetime, (perhaps not so often), you have heard from men and women such voices, as they spoke the most common word!—What can it be that from those few men and women made so much out of the most common word! Geography, shipping, steam, the mint, the electric telegraph, railroads, and so forth, have many strong and beautiful words.

To all thoughts of your or any one's mind—to all yearnings, passions, love, hate, ennui, madness, desperation of men for women, and of women for men,—to all charging and surcharging—[in] that head which poises itself on your neck and is electric in the body beneath your head, or runs with the blood through your veins—or in those curious incredible miracles you call eyesight and hearing—to all these, and the like of these have been made words.—Such are the words that are never new and never old.

What history is folded, folded inward and inward again, in the single word I.

The words of *the Body!* The words of Parentage! The words of Husband and Wife. The words of Offspring! The word Mother! The word Father!

The *words of Behaviour* are quite numerous.—They follow the law; they are courteous, grave, have polish, have a sound of presence, and abash all furniture and shallowness out of their sight.

The words of maternity are all the words that were ever spoken by the mouth of man, the child of woman—but they are reborn words, and the mouth of the full-sized mother,

daughter, wife, amie, does not offend by using any one of them.

A perfect writer would make words sing, dance, kiss, do the male and female act, bear children, weep, bleed, rage, stab, steal, fire cannon, steer ships, sack cities, charge with cavalry or infantry, or do any thing, that man or woman or the natural powers can do.

Latent, in a great user of words, must actually be all passions, crimes, trades, animals, stars, God, sex, the past, might, space, metals, and the like—because these are the words and he who is not these, plays with a foreign tongue, turning helplessly to dictionaries and authorities.—How can I tell you?—I put many things on record that you will not understand at first—perhaps not in a year—but they must be (are to be) understood.—The earth, I see, writes with prodigal clear hands all summer, forever, and all winter also, content, and certain to be understood in time—as, doubtless, only the greatest user of words himself fully enjoys and understands himself.

Names are magic.—One word can pour such a flood through the soul.—To-day I will mention Christ's before all other names.—Grand words of names are still left.—What is it that flows through me at the sight of the word Socrates, or Cincinnatus, or Alfred of the olden time—or at the sight of the word Columbus, or Shakespeare, or Rousseau, or Mirabeau—or at the sight of the word Washington, or Jefferson, or Emerson?

Out of Christ are divine words—out of this savior. Some words are fresh-smelling, like lilies, roses, to the soul, blooming without failure.—The name of Christ—all words that have arisen from the life and death of Christ, the divine son, who went about speaking perfect words, no patois—whose life was perfect,—the touch of whose hands and feet was miracles—who was crucified—his flesh laid in a shroud, in the grave.

The Morning has its words, and the Evening has its words.—How much there is in the word Light!—How vast, surrounding, falling, sleepy, noiseless, is the word Night!—It hugs with unfelt yet living arms.

Many of the slang words among fighting men, gamblers, thieves, prostitutes, are powerful words. These words ought to be collected—the bad words as well as the good.—Many of these bad words are fine.

Music has many good words, now technical, but of such rich and juicy character that they ought to be taken for common use in writing and speaking.

New forms of science, newer freer characters, may have something in them to need new words.—One beauty of

words is exactitude.—To me each word out of [those] that now compose the English language, has its own meaning, and does not stand for any thing but itself—and there are no two words the same any more than there are two persons the same.

The English tongue is full of strong words native or adopted to express the blood-born passion of the race for rudeness and resistance, as against polish and all acts to give in: robust, brawny, athletic, muscular, acrid, harsh, rugged, severe, pluck, grit, effrontery, stern, resistance, bracing, rude, rugged, rough, shaggy, bearded, arrogant, haughty. These words are alive and sinewy—they walk, look, step with an air of command.—They will often lead the rest—they will not follow.—How can they follow?—They will appear strange in company unlike themselves.

I like limber, lasting, fierce words.—I like them applied to myself—and I like them in newspapers, courts, debates, congress.—Do you suppose the liberties and the brawn of These States have to do only with delicate lady-words? with gloved gentleman-words? Bad Presidents, bad judges, bad clients, bad editors, owners of slaves, and the long ranks of Northern political suckers (robbers, traitors, suborned), monopolists, infidels, castrated persons, impotent persons, shaved persons, supplejacks, ecclesiastics, men not fond of women, women not fond of men, cry down the use of strong, cutting, beautiful, rude words. To the manly instincts of the People they will forever be welcome.

In words of names, the mouth and ear of the people show antipathy to titles, misers, handles. They love short first names abbreviated to their lips: Tom, Bill, Jack.—These are to enter into literature, and be voted for on political tickets for the great offices. Expletives, words naming the act male and female, curious words and phrases of assent or inquiry, nicknames either to persons or customs.

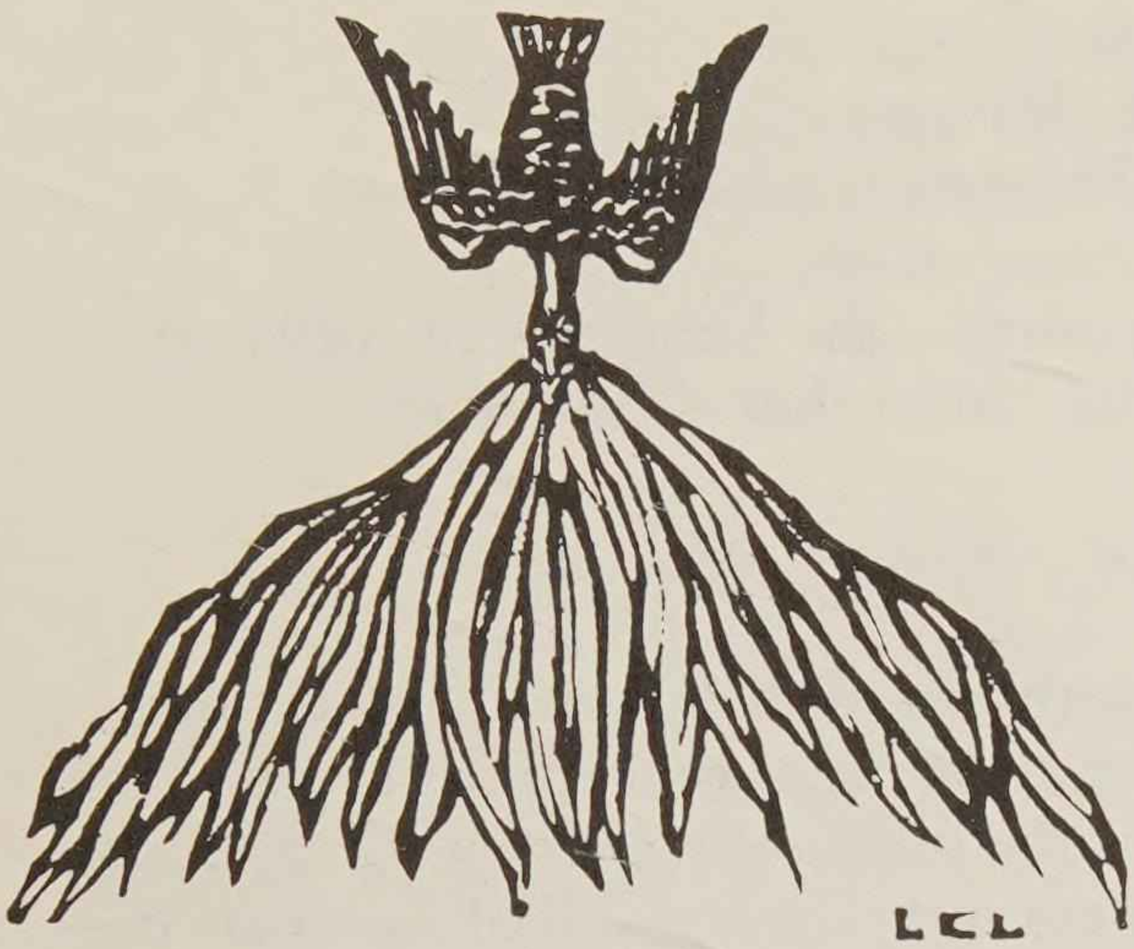
The different mechanics have different words—all, however, under a few great over-arching laws.—These are carpenter's words, mason's words, blacksmith's words, shoemaker's words, tailor's words, hatter's words, weaver's words, painter's words.

Words of the Laws of the Earth,
Words of the Stars, and about them,
Words of the Sun and Moon,
Words of Geology, History, Geography,
Words of Ancient Races,
Words of the Medieval Races,
Words of the progress of Religion, Law, Art, Government,
Words of the surface of the Earth, grass, rocks, trees,
flowers, grains and the like,

Words of like climates,
Words of the Air and Heavens,
Words of the Birds of the air, and of insects,
Words of Animals,
Words of Men and Women—the hundreds of different nations, tribes, colors, and other distinctions,
Words of the Sea . . .

Never will I allude to the English Language or tongue without exultation. This is the tongue that spurns laws, as the greatest tongue must. It is the most capacious vital tongue of all—full of ease, definiteness and power—full of sustenance.—An enormous treasure-house, or range of treasure houses, arsenals, granary, chock full with so many contributions from the north and from the south, from Scandinavia, from Greece and Rome—from Spaniards, Italians and the French,—that its own sturdy home-dated Angles-bred words have long been outnumbered by the foreigners whom they lead—which is all good enough, and indeed must be.—America owes immeasurable respect and love to the past, and to many ancestries, for many inheritances—but of all that America has received from the past, from the mothers and fathers of laws, arts, letters, &c., by far the greatest inheritance is the English Language—so long in growing—so fitted. ■

"An American Primer" is a collection of notes from a lecture on language by Whitman. It was originally published in a facsimile edition of 500 copies in 1904, edited by Horace Traubel. The above version has been abridged.



Tongues of Fire

L. CHARBONNEAU-LASSAY

Among all the ancient peoples whose civilizations are known to us, especially those of Asia, Europe, and North Africa, and up to modern times, the image of the heart is used much more as the ideogram for knowing, for reasoning, and for understanding, than for affective or physical love. The sages of Egypt affirmed that the heart is the source of all that man knows, and all that he can do; and from it, they said, human activity receives its inspirations and its force in the realm of thought as well as of physical action.

The whole point of view of ancient times, both in the Orient and Occident, was summed up by Pliny in the words: "Inside itself, the heart in its winding passages provides the first home of the soul and the blood . . . there the Intelligence resides." Starting with such concepts, the religious thought of the ancient Egyptians quite naturally also made the heart of the One God the seat and source of divine perfections. And consequently we see old texts expressly evoking the divine Heart. Ramses II, after being ill-supported by his officers in a battle, ended his reproaches to them by saying: "I will no longer carry you in my heart."

In one of the hymns composed by the Pharaoh Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten) and his lovely wife Nefertiti to Aton, the image of the Divinity symbolized by the solar disc, we read in the course of a long text:

> Thou hast created the earth in thine heart, when thou wast alone . . . thou hast made the seasons to give birth and growth to all thou hast created . . . thou hast made the distant sky that thou mightest rise up into it and see from there all that thou hast created, thou alone. Thou appearest in the form of the living Aton; thou risest shining, thou goest away and returnest, thou art in my heart . . . .

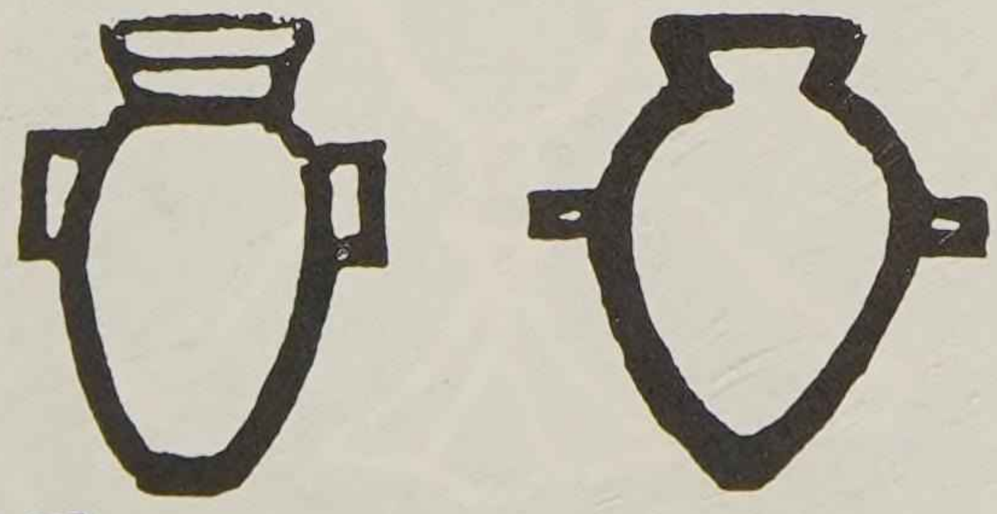
The same concept is expressed in the funerary inscription of a priest of Memphis, the text and meaning of which have been established by Maspero, Breasted, and Erman. It appears that the theologians of the Memphis school made a distinction, in the work of the Author of all things, between the role of creative thought, which they called *the action of the Heart*, and that of creation's instrument, which they called *the action of the Tongue*, the *Word*. Another theological school that we learn about from the monuments of the time of Ramses (XIXth dynasty, about 1200 B.C.) expresses a theory according to which God, the One God, whose *nature* (literally, *name*) is mystery, is presented as being formed of three distinct entities which make up a true Triunity: *Ptah, Horus,* and *Thoth*. *Ptah* is the Supreme Person, the Perfect Intelligence. *Horus*, according to a belief which was already ancient at that time, is the comprehensive and affective Heart of the divinity, the spirit which animates all of life. *Thoth* is

the Word, the instrument of the divine works.

Ptah is delineated as the Supreme Being, because in a way the whole triad comes from him. According to the evidence mentioned above, he is "he who becomes *Heart*, he who becomes *Tongue*."

Horus, the divine Heart, was represented in sacred art in the form of a falcon. From the time of the Fourth Dynasty, about 2840 to 2680 B.C., he appeared under this symbol; for instance, on the beautiful statue of Chephren in the Cairo museum, the sacred Bird leans his heart, his whole body, against the nape of the pharaoh whom he protects and inspires, and whose head he enfolds with his spread wings. This singular attitude of the falcon god means very much more than just an attendance on the pharaoh, the back of whose neck he covers and warms at the very sensitive spot which neurology calls the "Bridge of Varolius," which puts him into almost immediate contact with the cervical nerve ganglion which certain anatomists call the "Tree of Life." Could it not be said that by means of this warm touch the divine Bird, symbol of the heart of the deity, in some way fecundates Chephren's spirit in the brain, in that hostelry where, according to the sages of that epoch, the thoughts conceived and born in the heart stay a while before they can be sent out into the world by the movement of the tongue and the opening of the lips?

The vase, a hieroglyphic representation of the word "heart" among the ancient Egyptians.



The Pharaoh Chephrem and the divine falcon.

The sublime hymn in honor of the eternal Word with which St. John begins his Gospel has been inscribed in the Christian liturgy since its inception and forever after: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . All things were made by him . . . In him was life, and the life was the light of men . . . that was the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world . . . the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us . . . and of his fullness we all have received . . . " (St. John 1:1-16, Douay-Rheims Bible). At the close of each celebration of the Mass, the church acclaims and recalls the gifts of the Word, and its dues.

In symbolic terms, it is the human tongue that represents this eternal Word, the Christ; but in fact, in literature as well as in art, the tongue is identified with the lips which are more visible, more expressive, even more important because they form the chief gate of the breath, which is aspiration and expiration; they call forth or put a stop to this factor which is necessary to life. Only through them can pass exhalations charged with the particular influences which have such specific

roles in various liturgies, as well as in magic. The Catholic Church sanctifies breathing from the first moments of the baptismal liturgy, and introduces it into her exorcisms; and in the rites of Holy Saturday, the celebrant begins by breathing three times on the water which he blesses in the name of God, to whom he says: *Tu has simplices aquas tuo ore benedicito* ("Thou thyself, O God, with thy mouth bless these pure waters"). Then he calls upon Virtue, the power from on high, and again breathes three times on the water, adding: "May the Virtue of the Holy Ghost make this water fruitful and give it the power to regenerate."

Here, the lips of the priest, by means of words and breath, can take the place of the divine mouth and breathing whose image and interpreters they are. This same role devolves upon them when they pronounce the sacramental words of the consecration of the bread and wine in the canon of the Mass: "This is my Body; this is my Blood."

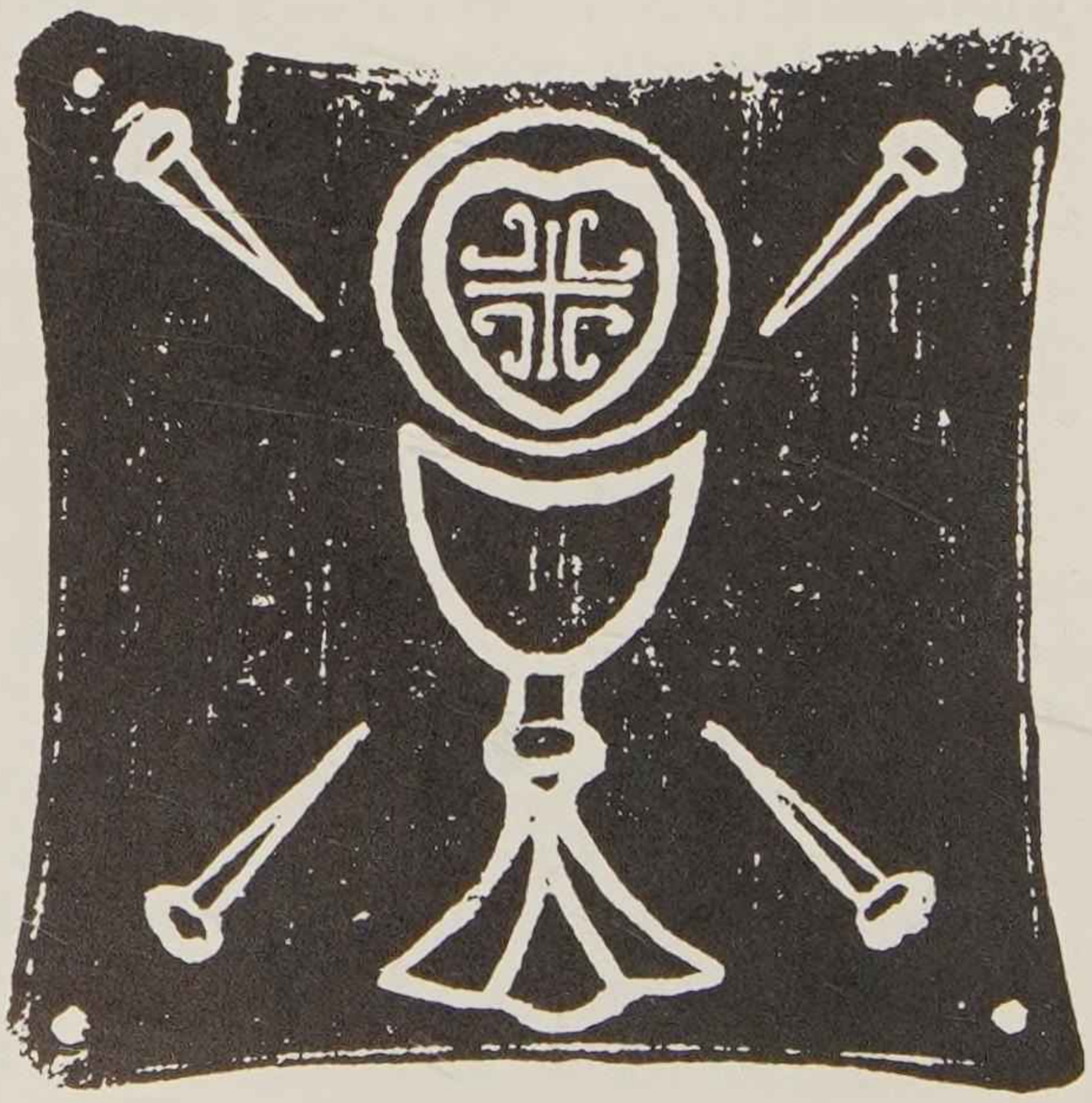
In the human mouth, the lips guard the door, for they stop the breath or let it pass as they do speech. Acting with the tongue and the vocal cords, it is they who give the word its form, its clarity, its beauty, its power to act. It is they who seal the vows of love or faith with the kiss of loyalty, giving them their supreme consecration; and when they betray, an echo is heard of Gethsemane: "and forthwith coming to Jesus, Judas said, Hail Rabbi. And he kissed him" (St. Matthew 26:49).

There are many passages in the scriptures that praise pure lips. David prayed that his might be opened by Jehovah himself, so that he might praise him fittingly (Psalm 51:15); and he attributes the privilege of perfect praise to the lips of innocent children: *Ex ore infantium et lactantium perfecisti laudem* ("Out of the mouths of infants and of sucklings thou hast perfected praise"—Psalm 8:30). Our illuminators of the first fifteen centuries of the Christian era, especially in Byzantium and the Orient, reproduced a number of times the scene where Jehovah's seraphim place a burning coal from the altar on the lips of the prophet Isaiah, saying to him: "Behold this hath touched thy lips, and thy iniquities shall be taken away" (Isaiah 6:5-7).

It is the divine Word, expressing

The astronomical marble slab in the ancient charterhouse of Saint-Denis d'Orques. Late fifteenth century.

The heart of Jesus on the host. Stamped copper, early sixteenth century, found in London.



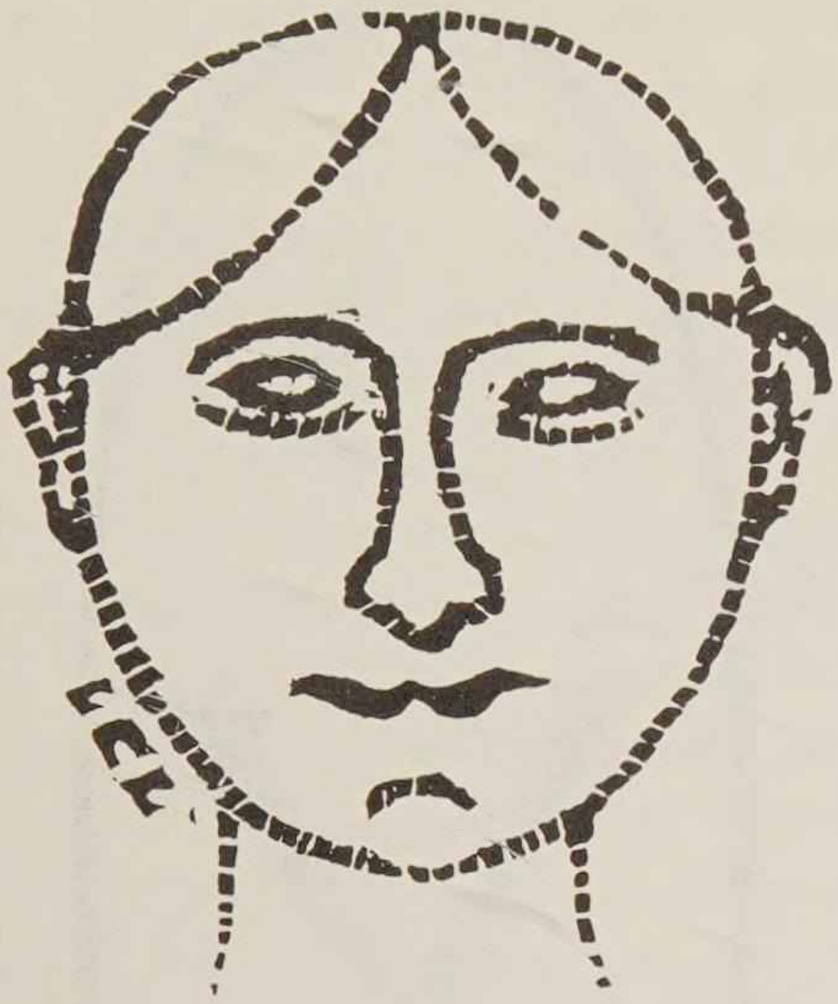
itself through human lips, that our forefathers honored by giving the name *Chrysostom*, "golden mouth," to John, holy bishop of Constantinople, who lived in the fourth century, and that of *Chrysologue*, "golden word," to St. Peter, archbishop of Ravenna, a century later.

To symbolize Jesus Christ under the aspect of the Divine Word, the artists of antiquity sometimes made use of animal and other forms that had been chosen by the writers of Scripture: the lion roaring in the desert, the bellowing bull in the pasture, the eagle crying in the cloud, the swan's final song, the cock saluting the dawning day, the nightingale's nocturnal melodies—and also, the thunder that follows lightning, and the trumpet, the conch, and the bell, which call and command. The anatomical shape of the tongue does not lend itself at all to such images; so in most cases, when artists have tried to show the Savior as the Word, they have done so, following the text of the Apocalypse, with a sword blade between the lips: "and out of his mouth proceedeth a sharp two-edged sword; that with it he may strike the nations" (Apocalypse 19:15). The word strikes and penetrates like a sword. Few artists have risked using the image of the tongue itself, and the results of their daring have not been happy. About the end of the fifteenth century the symbolists of *L'Estoile internelle* showed it as a sort of oval form inscribed with a V, probably alluding to the "lingual V" formed by the thick, chalice-shaped papillae on the human tongue, and to the initial letter of the accompanying inscription, taken from St. John: *Verbum caro factum est* ("The Word is made flesh"—St. John 1:14). This image is very similar to the wax tongues which mothers offer at the tomb of St. Radegonde in Poitiers so that their children may speak readily and clearly.

The tongue as emblem of the divine Word.

The Kabbalah and several hermetic groups of the Middle Ages preferred to make use, for their initiates, of the Hebrew letter *Yod* reversed and doubled—an arrangement which produces a form quite like that of human lips. The letter *Yod* has always been considered a divine symbol, here applied to the Eternal Word. *"Yod,"* said René Guénon, "besides being the first letter of the Tetragrammaton, constitutes in itself a divine name, whether alone or repeated three times" (*Le voile d'Isis*). St. Jerome tells us that *Yod* is "the symbol of the principle of goodness."

The two *Yods* together mirror the "heraldic" or "gliding flight" made by two wings outstretched and joined together; and this resemblance reinforces the symbolic idea, for the Word flies with the power and speed of the most agile spirit. Like the Tongue, the "flight" created by the two *Yods* put together sometimes stands for the Holy Ghost—when pictured above the terrestrial sphere, for example, or above the image of the sea. Then it evokes the creating and fecundating Spirit which, the Bible says, moved over the



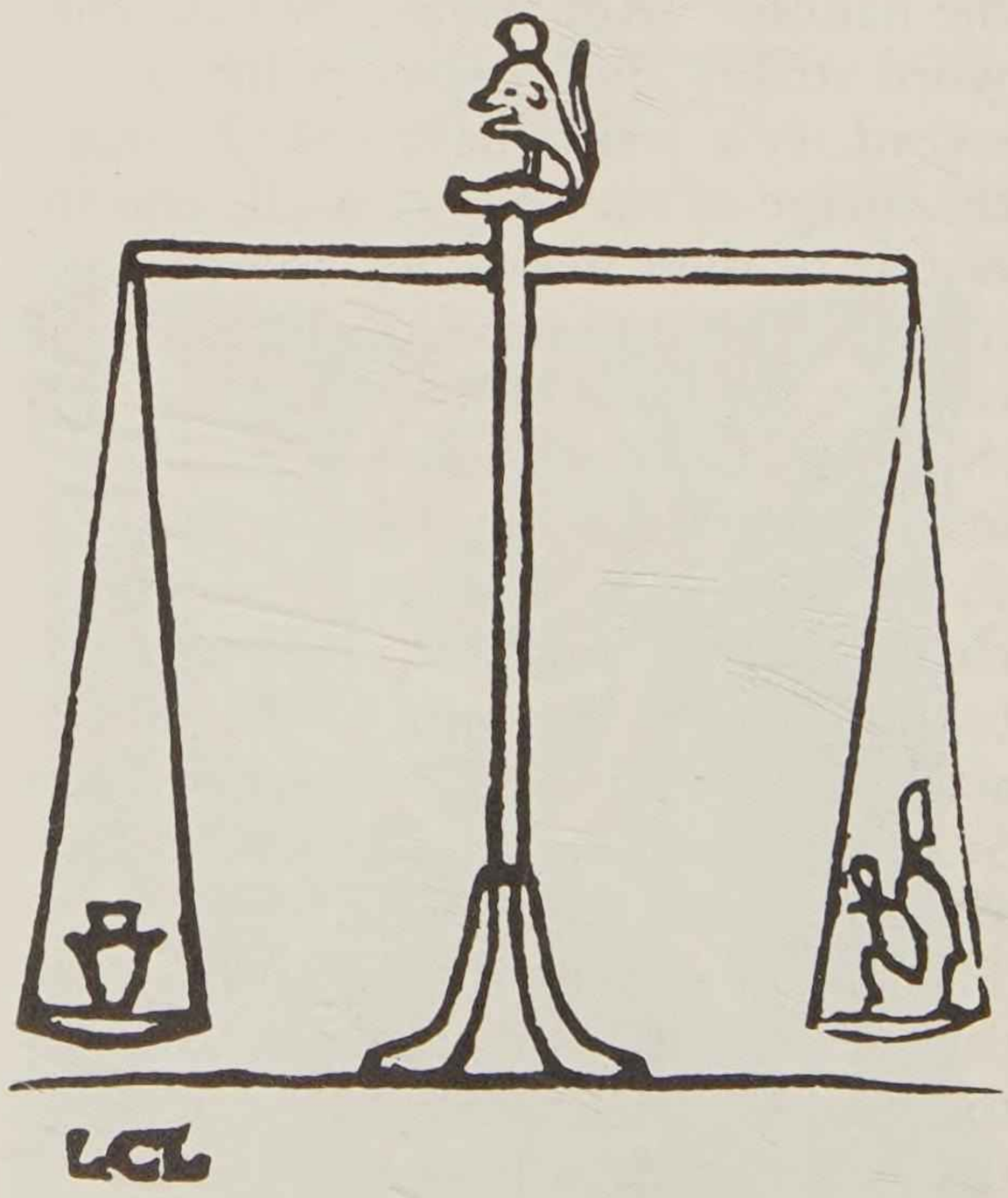
The use of the two Yods as lips on the human face.

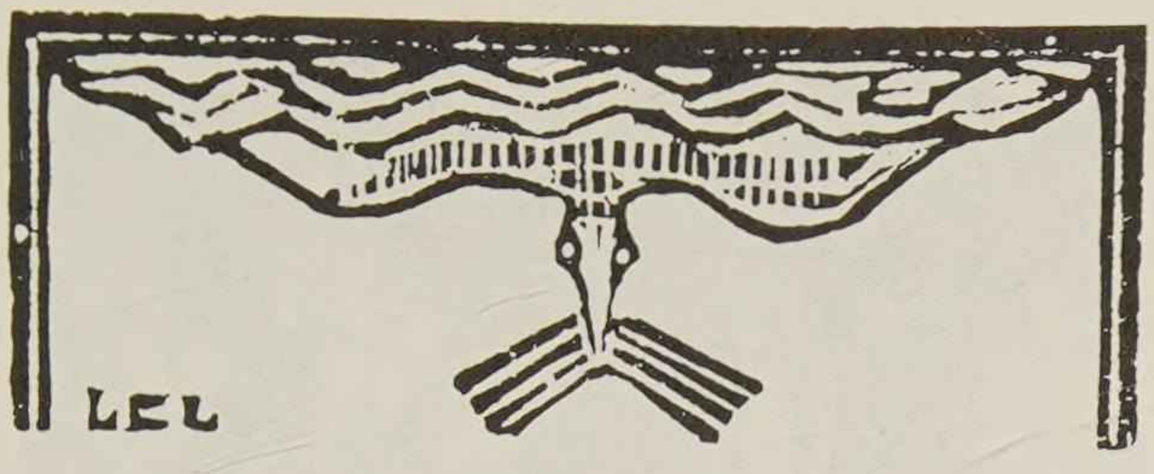
first waters among the shadows covering the abyss, "in the beginning," when "God created heaven, and earth" (Genesis 1:1).

The description of the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles in the feast of Pentecost was naturally symbolized by tongues of flame. The sacred text tells us that when the Apostles were assembled, "there appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire, and it sat upon every one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they began to speak with divers tongues, according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak" (Acts 2:3-4). Artists of the Middle Ages represented the fiery tongues, in which dwelt the Holy Spirit, by straight rays coming from the hand of the All-powerful or from the beak of the Divine Bird. Sometimes the flames undulate like blazing swords which spring from a cloud or from the beak of the Holy Dove. With the dawning of the Renaissance, artists gave these tongues the form of fiery drops or tears placed on the Apostles' brows, something like the flames which the illuminators and the even earlier painters—the Byzantines, for instance—put on the brows of certain angels, or on those of some of the ideal personifications of great virtues, such as Giotto's Charity. At about this same time another symbol was added, that of the inner fruit, the edible nut, or the almond tree, whose shape is like that of the human tongue. Like the tongues of fire, this symbol referred to the gift of tongues which the Apostles received at Pentecost. These tongues of fire which decended upon the Apostles only after Christ's death seem not to refer to him; however, it must be remembered that he had said, "The Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things" (St. John 14:26).

Truly the best and worst of all things, as Aesop says, is the human tongue. The spirit of the old Phrygian fabulist still lends itself to the game of contraries so dear to former symbolists. We have just seen how the Word of salvation came to us by the tongue and lips of Christ; nevertheless,

The Heart and the Truth on the scales of judgment. From a painting on the coffin of a priestess of Amon.





The Holy Spirit casting radiant tongues of fire on the Apostles.

speaking in the name of the Teacher of the whole world, his disciple St. James affirms that "the tongue is a . . . world of iniquity" (Epistle of St. James 3:6). Under this aspect it symbolizes the Evil Spirit; and Christian symbolists then show it as forked like that of a serpent, or arrow- or harpoon-headed, a shape they attribute to the tongues of dragons. It is supposed to wound like a dart or to carry a mortal poison, for evil speech always causes pain or corruption.

From the eleventh to the sixteenth centuries, medieval sculpture often placed in the symbolic decoration of churches the faces of men, women, or devils, exhibiting monstrous tongues. A Satan on the towers of Notre Dame de Paris sticks out a long, pointed tongue over the city; one of the devils on the Cathedral at Bourges has one that is wide and pendulous. At Santa Maria Formosa de Venise, at Rheims, strange figures loll out their tongues to one side. Very different feelings are expressed by these hideous faces. We read in them despondency or breathless anguish, as the case may be, and often mockery and scorn, as at Magdalen College at Oxford. Elsewhere the protruding tongue may be the symbol of greed or even of the most repugnant lust.

Yet, in its other aspect, the tongue represents the Logos, the creative Word, which has remained above the world since its beginning like a gliding bird, if one may so describe it, to ensure the continuation of life, its perpetual fecundation, and to inspire the wise. It is in fact by means of it that chosen souls lift themselves as far as it is possible to go toward the unknowable mysteries, which they know to be the necessary cloak in which Divinity must hide itself from our eyes while we live on earth. ■

This article is excerpted, with permission, from Le Bestiaire du Christ *by L. Charbonneau-Lassay. Subtitled "The Mysterious Symbolism of Jesus Christ" and illustrated with hundreds of the author's own woodcuts, it was originally published in a limited edition in 1940 by Desclée de Brouwer et Cie. The selection has been translated from the French by D.M. Dooling.*

Seraphim purifying the lips of Isaiah with fire. Tenth-century ivory.

What Aileth Thee?

P. L. TRAVERS

We know him, the Grail Hero, under many names—Gawain, Perceval (Parsifal in Wolfram von Eschenbach's version), Bors, Galahad. Lancelot is not in the list, for though he is brought near to it, he is denied the full sight of the Grail because of his long liaison with Guinevere—though whether that event ever really occurred needs, I think, in spite of all the corroborative evidence, to be questioned.

Malory, quite probably, may not have heard of Tantrism, but he could not have failed to be familiar with the ordinances of the Courts of Love. It is, therefore, quite possible that those two doughty combatants may have taken on a far more poignant and rigorous task—that of faithfully serving their mutual love while mutually foregoing the taste of its wine. Otherwise, how account for Arthur? The High King, *sans peur et sans reproche*, who with Merlin's help laid down the rules of knighthood—is it conceivable that he would have allowed his paladin among knights to cuckold him at his own Round Table and not reach for Excalibur? Did he look on consenting? It has always seemed to me that in this matter the myth is hiding a card up its sleeve.

Galahad, whom we may think of as Lancelot's unspotted part, is par excellence the Grail's true man, but he dies of his own wish so early in the story that he does not serve to carry it forward so that it can speak to *our* needs.

So let us settle for Perceval, the widow's son, sealed from the world by his mother's love and arriving tardily at court, a homespun and untutored warrior. He is received with mockery. Churl, clown, clodhopper, they call him. But his enthusiastic habit of bringing defeated vassals to the King and lugging in the bodies of hitherto unbeatable villains, stuffs their mockery back into their mouths. His bumpkin herohood forces them to accept him as a true member of the Round Table.

But, cloudily, in his innocent heart though not yet in his rustic head, he knows there is something more to knight-errantry than demolishing giants and rescuing damsels. He is called to something else—but what?

So he sets out, not choosing, merely letting himself be drawn to whatever adventure lies in wait. Wandering through woods and wildlands, following chimerical roads that cross and wind about each other with no apparent destination, he comes, on a sudden, on a magical tower, the great walled keep of Montsalvesche.

Not knowing it for the Grail Castle and all unlearned in knightly procedure, he enters it as he would any other and stands transfixed by what confronts him. This is nothing less than the ceremonial of the Grail feast. Before him reclines the Grail King, *Roi Pescheur*, *Roi Mehaigné*, unmanned by his secret wound and about him, in a blaze of moving light, knights and maidens led in procession by the Grail

Queen carrying the Grail itself.

Undone at finding himself in such surroundings, he watches the pageantry in silence, partakes in silence of the sacred meal, in silence allows the shining figures to bow him to his bed place. And in silence he awakes at daybreak to find that the Castle has disappeared. He is alone in a vast spreading wasteland where all streams are dry and voiceless, trees naked of their leaves and no bird sings.

Bemused, knowing himself under enchantment, he makes his slow way back to the court to be accosted at the entrance by a boar-tusked female riding a mule. And there, amid his welcoming peers, he is arraigned for unknightliness. Why, the creature demands, having seen the Fisher King sore wounded and because of that wound the land itself wasted and wounded, had he not asked the healing question?

Unknightliness! The sting of it, to one who has valiantly, if belatedly through no fault of his own, set himself to master the courtesies of knighthood, of which to refrain from unasked-for questions is high among the list!

Within himself Perceval rages, even against the God he is seeking, and determines at all costs to find again the place of his misjudgment.

Now, the myth requires that the question be asked even if it means thereby that one of its own rules be broken. It gives him a second chance. After long years of searching he finds himself in the place where he had stood before. The miraculous ceremony is once more performed. And he, gathering all his forces, steps forth and asks the question.

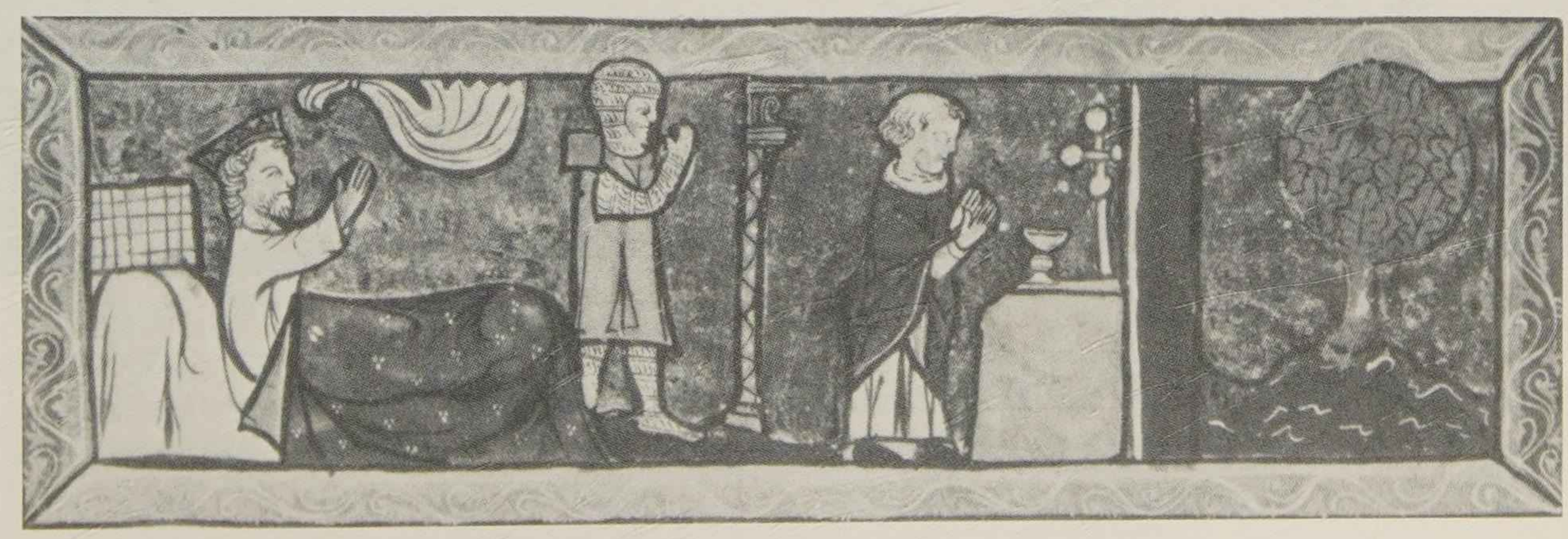
"Sir, what aileth thee?"

We know the rest. The King is healed and therefore the land. Birds sing and the desert blooms. We know the rest, for the myth takes us back to the first syllable of recorded time, to its roots in the pagan vegetation rites of the death and resurrection of such heroes as Tammuz, Adonis, Attis.

The theme of the question is a late addition. It arose because it was required. Myth answers every need. It is not static, once and for all, a phenomenon caught in the web of the past but rather an ever-living process. It speaks to us with an ancient voice that is forever new and properly to understand it we will have to live it as it marches with us.

For the question is our own question. In our rational, fragmented, technological world, it is we, seeking deliverance, that need it to be asked; we ourselves must become the Grail Hero who will set the waters free, not only in ourselves but in others. Secretly, we are all sore wounded and need that the wound be noted and the necessary words of power spoken.

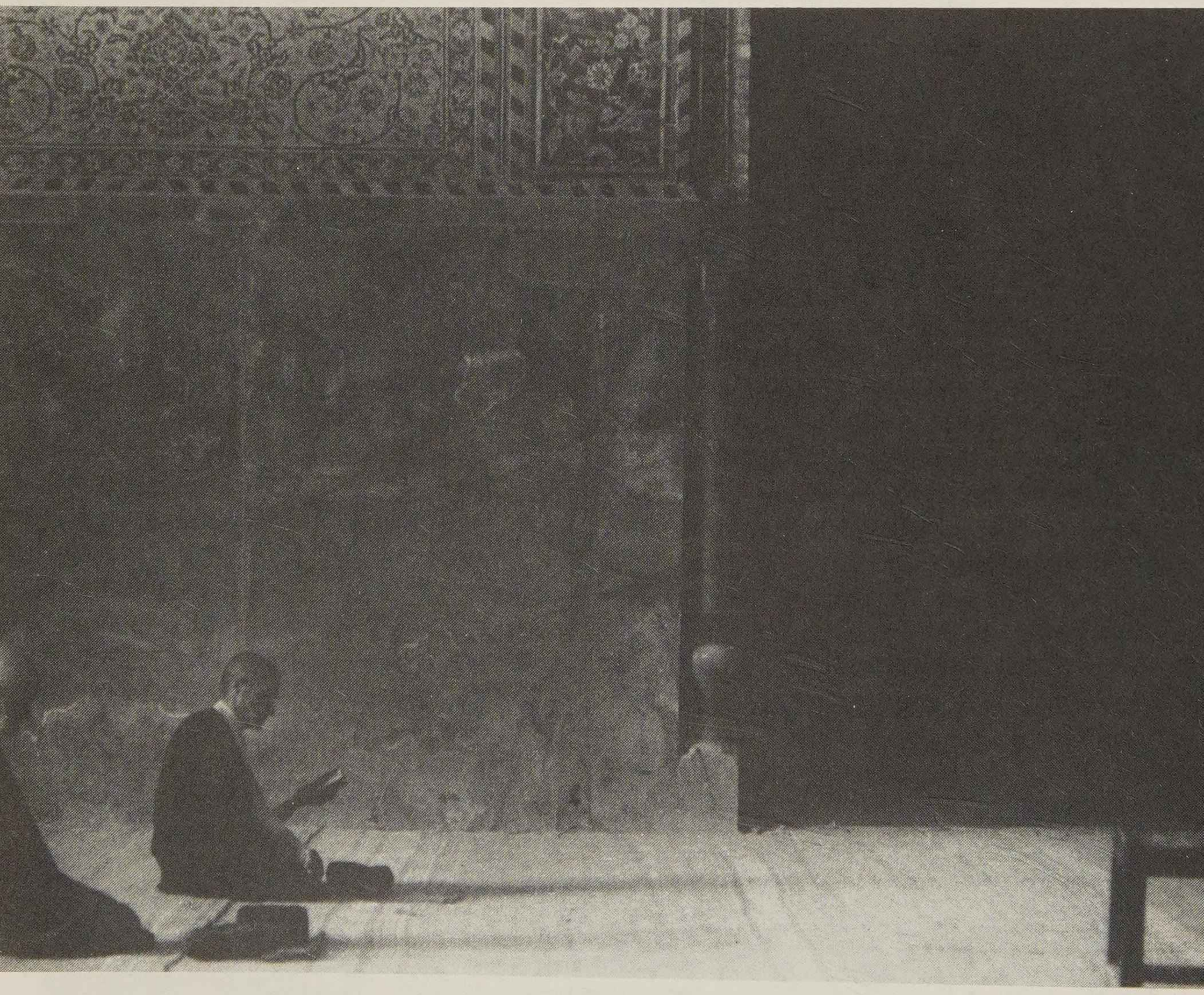
What aileth thee, neighbor? Friend? Brother? ■



The Words of the All-Merciful

WILLIAM CHITTICK

Photographs by Simon Goldschmidt



The Koran is the Word made Book, just as Christ is the Word made flesh. The images of the Koranic revelation are the pen and the tablet, ink, paper, letters, words, and verses. The first verses of the Holy Book revealed to the Prophet set the tone:

> Read: In the Name of thy Lord who created, created man of a blood-clot.
> Read: And thy Lord is the Most Generous, who taught by the pen, taught man what he knew not.[1]

Imagery connected with the word and the book suffuses Islamic thought and colors the everyday life of Islamic society. Ritual centers on the recitation of the Koran, architecture is shaped by the needs of listeners and decorated with written verse, calligraphy is regarded as the supreme art, music is preeminently Koranic recitation, and literature, especially poetry—known by literate and illiterate alike—rings with the resonance of the Scripture.

All the words of the Koran are God's words, but the most fundamental are His Names. Islamic theology, both scholastic and mystical, is a great commentary upon the Names of God, which reveal His nature to mankind. God's primary utterance, whereby His Books were revealed and man and the universe created, was His own Name. Alluded to in the Old Testament as "I AM THAT I AM," it is rendered in the Koran as "Verily I am Allah: There is no god but I."[2] Allah is the "Supreme" or "All-Comprehensive" Name, since it refers to God's very Self. The other names mentioned in the Koran and in the Hadith (prophetic sayings) are subordinate to it. It is Allah who is the Hearing, the Wise, the Vengeful, the Powerful, the Forgiving, the Life-Giver, the Exalter: "The Most Beautiful Names [i.e., the "Ninety-Nine Names of God"] belong to Allah, so call Him by them" (Koran).[3] According to the Sufis, these very Names demand and bring about the existence of the cosmos. For what meaning has the Name "Creator" without creatures, "Light" without illuminating rays, "Forgiver" without sinners, "Life-Giver" without death?

In one of his sayings, the Prophet alludes to the "Breath of the All-Merciful"; and in the Koran God says, "My Mercy embraces all things."[4] As the All-Merciful, God exhales His Breath, and the universe is born. The Breath is also referred to as the "Cloud" (*al-ᶜamā'*) that envelops the Divine Essence. When the Prophet was asked, "Where was God before He created the creatures?" he replied , "In a Cloud, neither above which nor below which was any space." Thus the famous Sufi Ibn al-ᶜArabī (d. 1240) writes that "in its state of existence the cosmos consists of the forms assumed by the Cloud . . . . So the Cloud, which is none other than the Breath of the All-Merciful, is the substance, while the world and all the forms manifest within it are the accidents."[5]

But the Breath or Cloud is not a simple exhalation; it is the articulated speech of God. "Our only word to a thing, when We desire it, is to say to it 'Be!' and it is."[6] Elsewhere, in place of "Our only word," the Koran has "His only command."[7] These terms are joined in the verse, "Our Command is but One Word, like the twinkling of an eye."[8] Through the Command the One Word issues from its Source like a ray of light, refracting itself into the ontological words that

are the creatures. Thus Ibn al-ᶜArabī writes, "The Cloud derives from His exhalation, while the forms that take shape within it, which are called the 'cosmos,' derive from the word 'Be!' So we are His words that are never exhausted."[9] Here he alludes to the Koranic verse, "Though all the trees in the earth were pens, and the sea were ink—seven seas after it to replenish it—yet would the words of God not be exhausted."[10]

The Koran repeatedly refers to God's "signs" (*āyāt*), which are the creatures on the one hand and the verses of the revealed Book on the other:

> Surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and in the alternation of night and day are signs for men possessed of mind.
>
> It is He who made the sun a radiance and the moon a light . . . . God created that not save with the Truth; He deploys the signs for a people who know.
>
> A book We have sent down to thee, Blessed, that men possessed of minds may ponder its signs and so remember.[11]

These signs, whether revealed in the cosmos or the Book, are the theophanies of God's Names and Attributes:

> Know that the creatures are pure and limpid water,
> shining within them the Attributes of Almighty God.
> Their knowledge, their justice, their kindness
> are stars of heaven reflected in flowing water.
> Kings manifest God's Kingness,
> the learned display His Knowledge.
> Generations have passed, and we are a new generation—
> the moon is the same, but the water has undergone change . . . .
> All pictured forms are reflections in the river's water—
> when you rub your eyes, you see that all are He!
>
> —Rūmī, *Mathnawī* [12]

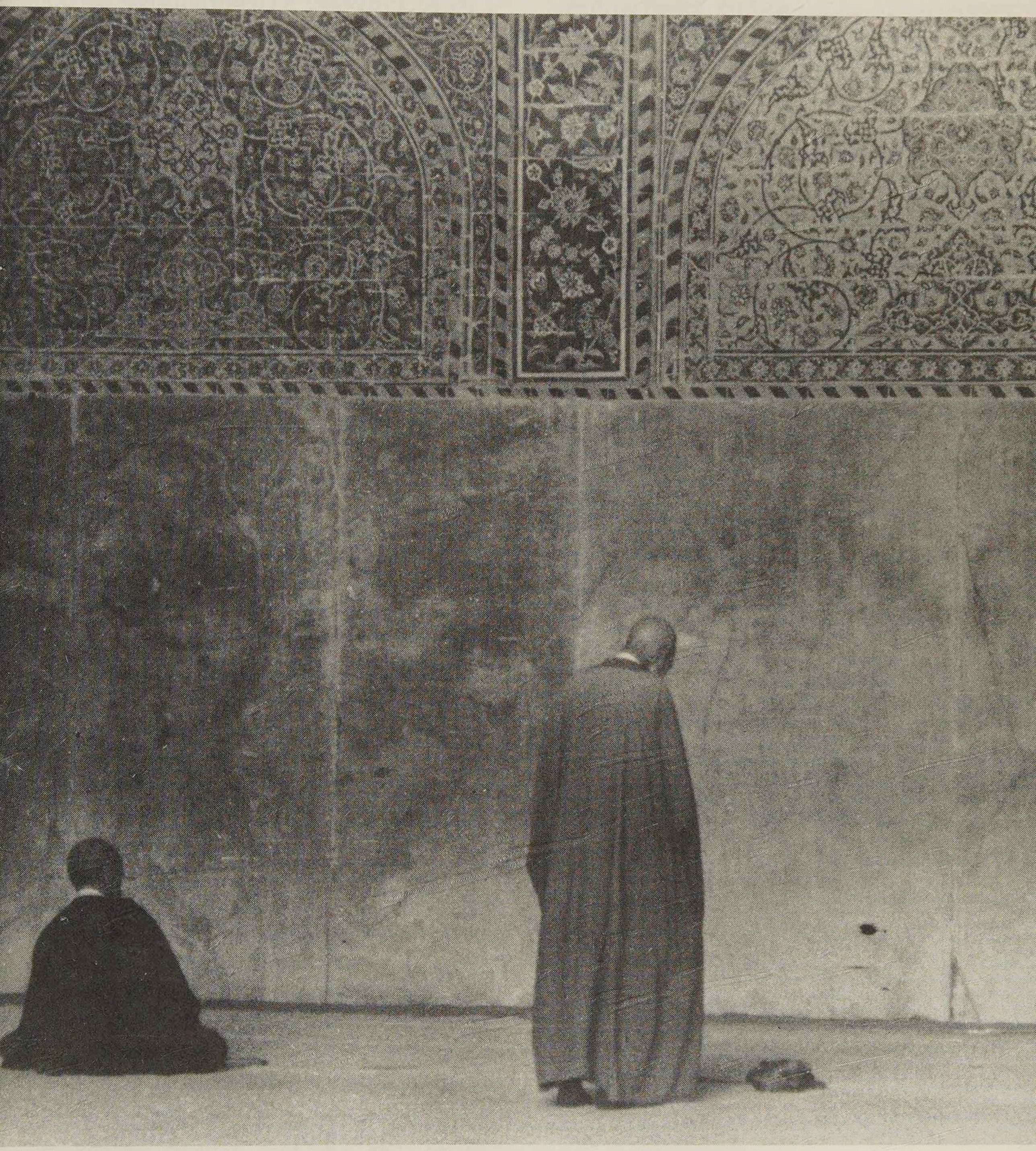
Because all creatures are signs displaying God's Names and manifesting His creative Word, all are constantly speaking: "There is nothing that does not proclaim His glory, but you do not understand their glorification" (Koran).[13] Ibn al-ᶜArabī comments: "There is no form in the world—and the world is nothing but forms—that is not glorifying its Creator with a special praise with which He has inspired it" (*al-Futūḥāt*, II). Rūmī writes:

> The speech of water, the speech of earth,
> the speech of clay—
> The Possessors of the Heart perceive
> each one with their outward senses.
>
> —*Mathnawī* [14]

Man plays a unique role among the world's creatures since he was created to be vicegerent (*khalīfah*) to Allah.[15] According to the Prophet, man was created "upon Allah's Form"; he manifests the All-Comprehensive Name and thus reflects all other Names as well. This is one meaning of the Koranic declaration that God "taught Adam all the Names."[16] Another meaning is that Adam was taught the names of all created things, which are the signs and "effects" (*āthār*) of the Names.

Certain hadiths add that Adam was taught not only the names but also "100,000" languages. Here there is an allusion to the all-comprehensiveness—at least potentially—of human knowledge. In a similar vein, the expression "man is a rational animal" was translated into Arabic as "man is a speaking animal," since it is speech—his knowledge of the names—that sets man apart from all other animate things.

Man, then, is the integral and summary reflection of the Divine Name—or Divine Word—Allah. Opposed to him stands the cosmos (*al-ᶜālam*), which also reflects the Word, but de-



ployed in its infinite possibilities of outward manifestation. Thus the microcosm corresponds to the macrocosm, a fact often referred to as the "collation of the two transcripts" (*taqābul al-nuskhatayn*)—again an image drawn from writing. Because of his knowledge of the names of all things, man is active, while the cosmos is the passive object of his perception. This is why some Sufis have said that man is the macrocosm, while the universe is the microcosm.

Though man is the slave (*ʿabd*) of God, he is also His vicegerent; because he has knowledge of all creatures, they are his slaves: "Do you not see that God has subjected to you everything in the heavens and the earth?" (Koran).[17] This power over other creatures helps explain the grave responsibility of the human state, the "Trust" (*amānah*) man accepted to bear even before his physical creation (cf. Koran VII:172, XXXIII:72). The responsibility for the corruption of the earth—or the destruction of its natural environment—lies squarely on his shoulders.

Man's superiority over all creatures extends even to the angels. They are "partial" or "peripheral" creatures, while the Perfect Man is known as the "Point at the Center of the Circle." According to the Koran, the angels were commanded to prostrate themselves before Adam because they had knowledge of only some of the Names: "We know not save what Thou hast taught us".[18]

Ibn al-ʿArabī summarizes the relationship between man and the Divine Names as follows: "Man is the utmost limit of the Breath . . . . The potentiality [or "power," *quwwah*] of every existent in the cosmos lies within him. So he possesses all ontological levels; that is why he alone was singled out for the Divine Form. He comprehends the Divine Realities—which are the Names—and the realities of the cosmos. Thus the Breath of the All-Merciful did not reach its farthest extension within his existence until it gave to him the potentiality of all the ontological levels of the cosmos. In man becomes manifest that which does not become manifest in the separate parts of the world, nor in the individual Divine Names."[19]

To become the "vicegerent of Allah" (*khalīfat Allāh*) is to act as a conscious locus of manifestation for all of God's Names and at the same time to encompass the myriad perfections of the macrocosm. When the Sufi hears the Prophet's words, "Assume the moral traits (*akhlāq*) of Allah!" he understands this to mean that man must attain to a state of perfection wherein all of the Divine Names display themselves within him. Ibn al-ʿArabī writes:

> "Allah did not create the heavens and the earth and what is between them for vanity" (Koran),[20] nor did He create man "for sport" (Koran).[21] He created him so that he alone might be "upon His Form." So everyone in the cosmos is ignorant of the whole and knowledgeable only of a part, with the sole exception of the Perfect Man. For God "taught him all the Names" (Koran)[22] and [according to a prophetic saying] gave him the "all-comprehensive words." Hence he combines the Form of God with the form of the cosmos.
>
> —*al-Futūhāt*[23]

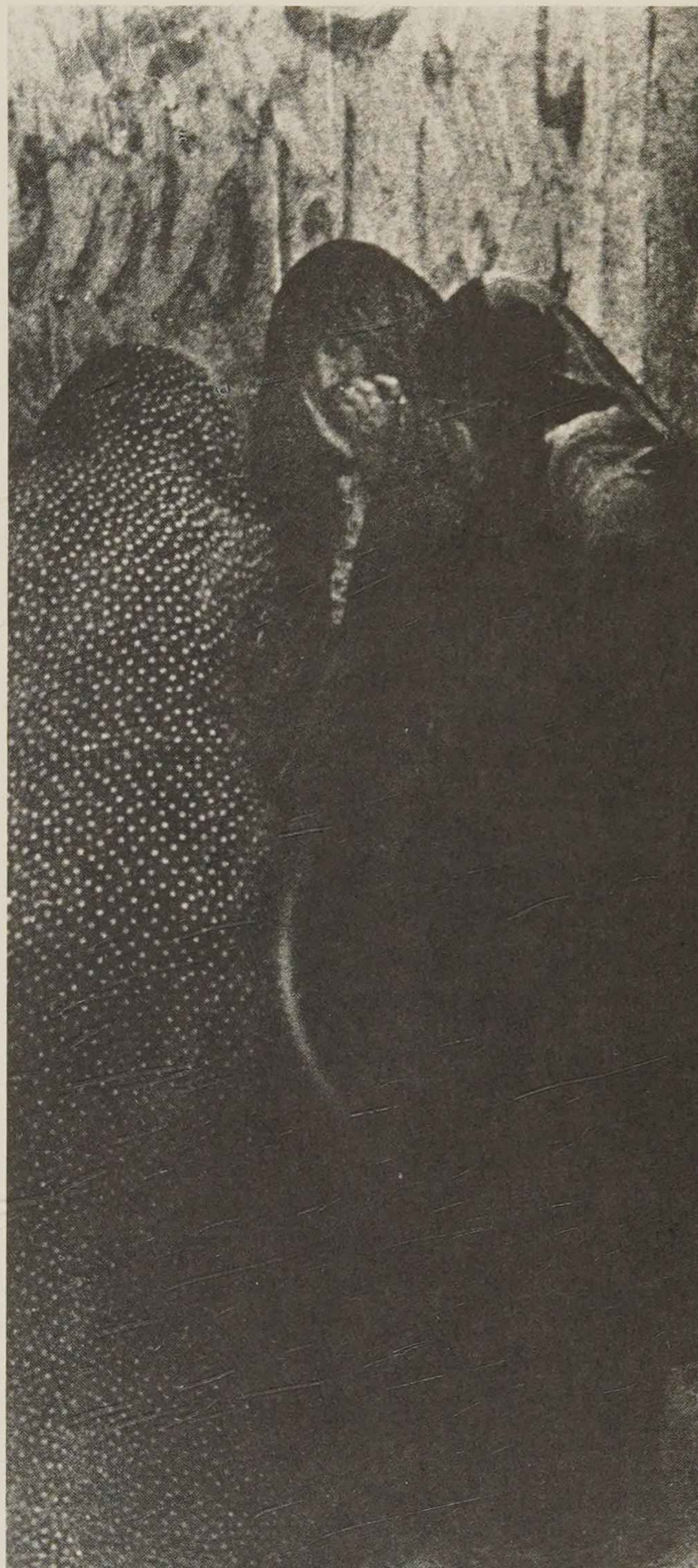
The Breath of the All-Merciful acts as a vehicle for the Creative Word "Be!" which appears outwardly as the ontological letters that make up the cosmos: "In the same way, the human breath encompasses all letters" (*al-Futūḥāt*).[24] Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers develop the symbolism of the letters and words transmitted through the Breath into a complicated cosmology. For example, his son-in-law and chief disciple, Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 1274), writes that the things of this world exist in God's Knowledge before their creation as "non-manifest letters," though if we consider them in relation to their properties, attributes, and con-

comitants, they are called "non-manifest words." Then these letters and words become outwardly manifest within the Breath.[25] Elsewhere he deals in similar fashion with phrases, verses, chapters, and books. He compares each universal level of existence, from God down to the physical universe, with a Scripture, and he declares that the Perfect Man is like the Koran, the Scripture that encompasses all other Scriptures:

The Perfect Man is a book that comprehends all the divine and created books . . . for he comprehends all things, both in the manner of summated unity and in that of particularized deployment. The Prophet said, "Whoso knows his own self knows his Lord" and all things. It follows, my son, that your meditation upon yourself is enough for you, since nothing is outside of you . . . . Have you not heard the words of God? "Read your book! Your self suffices you this day as a reckoner against you!" (Koran),[26] for whoso reads his book has come to know what has been, what is, and what shall be. So if you cannot read all of your book, read of it what you can. Have you not seen God's words? "And in your selves: What, do you not look?" (Koran).[27] And have you not seen His words? "We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in their selves, till it is clear to them that it is the truth. Suffices it not as to thy Lord, that He is witness over everything?" (Koran)[28] . . . .

When the army of ᶜAlī gained the upper hand over the army of ᶜA'ishah—peace be upon them both—in the battle that took place after the murder of ᶜUthmān, ᶜA'ishah's party held the Divine Book aloft with a spear so that ᶜAlī's followers would not slaughter and rout them . . . . Then ᶜAlī said, "Oh people! I am the *speaking* Book of God, but that is the *silent* Book of God! Attack them and leave them not!"

In the same way God says, "Say: 'God suffices as a witness between me and you, and whosoever possesses knowledge of the Book'" (Koran).[29] So this, my son, is the Book and the knowledge of the Book. And *you* are the Book, as we said. Your knowledge of yourself is your knowledge of the Book. "And there is not a thing, neither wet," which is the world of the



visible creation, "nor dry," which is the world of the Spirit and everything beyond it, "but in an Elucidating Book" (Koran),[30] which is you.[31]

Unless man "carries the Trust," the Names—or "moral traits"—encompassed by the Supreme Name remain as so many potentialities within him. He is a book, the manifestation of the Divine Word, but he is shut off to himself without the guidance referred to again and again in the Koran: "These are the signs of the Koran and a Manifest Book, a guidance, and good tiding unto the believers."[32] Without the light of heaven, his book cannot be read, nor can the two transcripts be collated. Man is in need of God's guidance in order to regain his primordial nature (*fiṭrah*) according to which he was created, i.e., his Divine Form. Since man is a theophany of the Word, he must return to the Word. The Koran provides the means, for it is the One Word of God revealed to creatures in the form of a multitude of words; thus creatures, mired in multiplicity and dispersion, may be drawn back to Unity. All of Islamic ritual revolves around the assimilation of the Koran, the Word made Book, just as Christian ritual centers on the assimilation of the body and the blood of the Word made flesh.

One of the names of the Koran is "Reminder" or "Remembrance" (*dhikr, dhikrā*), while one of the Prophet's titles is "Remembrance of God" (Dhikr Allāh). As a result of the fall, man has forgotten the Trust and turned away from his primordial nature. The Koran is a Reminder, and the Prophet is the living exemplar of God's remembrance: "You have a good example in God's Messenger for whosoever hopes for God and the Last Day and remembers God often" (Koran).[33]

To recite the Koran and to imitate the Prophet are both means of remembering God. But there is another act of remembrance, taught explicitly by the Prophet to some of his companions and mentioned in numerous Koranic verses, and that is the "remembrance" or "invocation" (*dhikr*) of God's Name. All believers remember God through recitation of the Koran and certain Divine Names at least five times a day, during the ritual prayer. But God has placed special power in the remembrance of His All-Comprehensive Name: "Recite what has been revealed to you of the Book, and perform the ritual prayer. The ritual prayer prevents indecency and dishonor—but verily, the remembrance of Allah is greater!" (Koran).[34]

The relationship between the revelatory Book and the microcosmic Book is prefigured in the "Night of Power," during which the Koran descended upon the Prophet, and the "Night of the Ascension," during which the Prophet was taken through the heavens to God's Presence. The descent of the written Book results in the ascent of the human Book. The Muslims were not commanded to perform the ritual prayer until after the Prophet's ascent to heaven, during which it was taught to him. Thus the prayer is known as the "ascension of the believer" (*al-ṣalāt miʿrāj al-mu'min*), and its physical movements retrace the Prophet's experiences during his journey. The peculiarly physical nature of the Islamic prayer corresponds to the absolute necessity of reciting the Koran in Arabic for ritual purposes, since Arabic is the physical form of the descent, or the "body" of the Word made Book. The physical body of the human word is as much a manifestation of the Divine Word as his soul; therefore both prayer and resurrection are bodily.

But the greatest power of the recited word is found in the remembrance of Allah, which is greater than the ritual prayer (though invalid without it). The remembrance of many different Divine Names is practiced by the Sufi

orders. Often the spiritual master or "shaikh" will choose a Name on the basis of a disciple's particular need. Once a character trait is developed through constant concentration upon that Name, another Name will be given. Other masters prefer to turn all of their disciples' attention to the Supreme Name, upon whose Form man was created. Through constant perseverance in the remembrance of God, the adept gradually turns his attention away from all other things. His own attributes are annihilated (*fanā'*) and only those of Allah subsist (*baqā'*).

This then is the ultimate power of the word: just as it creates man in the first place upon the Form of Allah, so in the end it reintegrates him into his prototype. He thus becomes what he ever was, the Logos, God's Word, the intermediary between God and creatures, the Vicegerent, the bearer of the Trust. "The All-Merciful taught the Koran. He created man, and He taught him the Explication" (Koran).[35] ■

NOTES

1. *Koran* VI 25, VIII 31, XXIII 83.
2. Ibid., XX 14.
3. Ibid., VII 180.
4. Ibid., VII 156.
5. *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah*, III.
6. *Koran* XVI 40.
7. Ibid., XXXVI 81.
8. Ibid., LIV 50.
9. *al-Futūḥāt*, II.
10. *Koran* XXXI 27.
11. Ibid., III 190, X 6, XXXVIII 39.
12. Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, VI, 3172 ff.
13. *Koran* XVII 44.
14. *Mathnawī*, I 3279.
15. *Koran* II 30.
16. Ibid., II 31.
17. Ibid., XXXI 20.
18. Ibid., XXXVII 164.
19. *al-Futūḥāt*, II.
20. *Koran* XXXVIII 27.
21. Ibid., XXIII 115.
22. Ibid., II 31.
23. *al-Futūḥāt*, III.
24. Ibid., II.
25. Al-Qūnāwī, *Miftāh al-ghayb* (Tehran: *1905–6)*.
26. *Koran* XVII 14.
27. Ibid., LI 21.
28. Ibid., XLI 51.
29. Ibid., XIII 43.
30. Ibid., VI 59.
31. *Al-Qūnāwī, Mir'āt al-ᶜārefīn fī multamas Zayn al-ᶜĀbidīn*, ed. and trans. by W.C. Chittick, forthcoming.
32. *Koran* XXVII 1–2.
33. Ibid., XXXIII 21.
34. Ibid., XXIX 45.
35. Ibid., LV 1–4.

Prayers at the Broken Gate

LAWRENCE RUSS

In the outer hall, old men, with stiffened fingers,
strap onto their arms and foreheads
leather boxes filled with the sacred words.
They adjust their gear with care, like elderly
spacemen, absorbed, preparing themselves
for groundless voyaging.

Inside, the air is dense, the *shul* is dim.
Black skullcaps bob in the rising tide
of fervor, like buoys above a reef-lined shoal.
And soon it begins in earnest, the soul-drunken swaying,
the grumbling and moaning in a foreign tongue
drenched with muddy currents of time.
Eyes closed, their bodies tossing forward and back,
they bring into waking the broken, impassioned
speech of dreamers—the inarticulate pleas,
tense questions, professions of fault or grating need.

But in all this crude counterpoint
only the cantor truly sings, as if to sing
is a terrible privilege. His high voice lifts
with the sorrows of unseen women, crying
for the womanly Presence, the *Shekinah*.
He calls to her loudly, as into a sandstorm,
while the fringes of worshippers' prayer shawls shake
as the spirit does, unravelling
at the edge of endless space.

In truth, it's the other world
that seems to grow familiar,
while this one seems incredible, bizarre,

with its hacking of neighbors, its habitual lies.
Even the menorah, at times, reminds them
of the burnished, many-branched horns of the Beast.
Again and again, they dream of stalking him—
weird hunters with nets of prayer, clubs of grief—
to his final, indefensible lair.

Above them, stained glass windows dye the light,
because it isn't the light of day
that's wanted, but the light that wakes men
from a different sleep, that falls from the deeds
of those pictured by the glass: from Abraham,
carmine, raising his knife, strident with the cutting
of his heart's obedience;
from Ruth, on her knees, who kisses the green
hem of a poor woman's dress; from Job,
gazing upward, open-mouthed and quaking,
at roiling, unfathomable clouds of gold.

Expectant still, the old men peer
across the borders of their lives at a promised,
unpossessed land of redemption.
Like dust motes swept around them, their own souls drift
in and out of heaven's rays,
while the *ner tamid*, the eternal light,
hangs from its chains of linked brass
in the small vault of darkness above their heads.

I see them there, rocking, in that troubled chamber,
half-remembered, half-imagined.
They pray together, strangers in Egypts of their own,
some plagued by fat toads of pride,
and some by a black rain of bitterness—
believing, nonetheless, in more than legend,
believing in the evidence of unseen things.
Like *yahrzeit* candles that gutter through the night
of Death's own anniversary, they burn
to believe even Death is an angel,
they work, in their flickering ways, to free
words of praise, and the joyous white fire that flares
from the buried Root of this thorn-bush world. ■

Recovering a Common Language

AN INTERVIEW WITH KATHLEEN RAINE

Poet, philosopher, editor, scholar, Dr. Kathleen Raine is a British writer well-known for her concern with spiritual quest. She is a frequent guest of the Lindisfarne Press, a small publishing community in western Massachusetts, and it was there that we met her, in a New England farmhouse on a wet spring day.

A small kindly person of alarmingly large scope, Dr. Raine is a self-described neo-Platonist and symbolist poet in the tradition of Yeats, Coleridge, and Blake. She is the author of eight books of verse, a three-volume autobiography, and a seminal study of the philosophic and religious sources of Blake. A child of the countryside, she grew up just south of the Scottish border. After studying biology at Girton College in Cambridge, she passed twenty years in what she describes as "a term of spiritual exile." Struggling to free herself from the materialist codes of the century, Dr. Raine did not really come to herself, she says, until she began her studies of Blake. "I was a late developer," she has written, " . . . for the one value to which I instinctively clung, astray as I was among so many conflicting ideologies, was the sense of the sacred."

Now in her seventies, Dr. Raine lives in London, where she edits Temenos, *a journal devoted to the "Arts of the Imagination." Through* Temenos, *her writings, and her conversation, she imparts a keen sensitivity to the invisible source from which men, women, and words take their meaning. Dr. Raine has written and said many times that poetry is the language of the soul—the utterance of our quest. Though Dr. Raine's criteria for poets are rigorous and her formal demands exacting, her sense of the poetic is vast and contagious. It touches on nature; it touches on silence; and it permeated the room as rain washed the windows and she spoke about words and the sacred.*

Photos by Alice van Buren

—Alice van Buren and Ken Krushel

Alice van Buren: You have written that the problem for any serious artist or educator is to re-create a common language for the communication of spiritual knowledge.

Kathleen Raine: It is a problem. We don't have a common language because we don't have a common view of the universe we're living in. We don't share premises anymore. There is a common language for those who hold a secular, humanist, materialist, positivist view of the world. They have a common language and are very happy with it. But those of us who feel a change of premises taking place have to reestablish a common language *not* based on the premises of materialism which have held for the past three hundred years. I don't think we can resurrect any of the traditions in quite their old forms. We can't become Zen Buddhists or honorary Hindus or even go back to the old Christian theological terms as such—or in my case to the Platonic tradition. But we can reexplore these civilizations, which did have a spiritual basis, and retranslate their ideas into forms appropriate to the present.

AvB: What forms can we look to for this new-old language?

KR: We won't find them. We won't find ready-made the culture which it is our task to create. But we will re-create our culture by going back to the roots. That means a lot of hard work. Blake did this. He bypassed the materialist epoch of Bacon, Newton, and Locke, and went back to neo-Platonism, to Boehme. He found the roots, and they resurfaced again in his work. This has happened in this century many times. The Theosophical movement is a reassembling of the threads. Yeats studied Swedenborg, Blake, Theosophy, neo-Platonism, Buddhism, the Noh theater, and finally Hinduism; he scanned the horizon for those sources which are available to us today. It's for us to rediscover the threads which were once in our hands.

Ken Krushel: If each generation has to reexamine these roots, isn't there a danger of the language or idiom changing too frequently?

KR: It is changing too frequently. There is a confusion of tongues.

KK: Such as Freudianism, Jungianism—

KR: No, Freud won't do. That isn't traditional. That's personal invention. I'm talking about tradition in the strict sense of a revealed spiritual tradition carried by a whole culture, and not theories. The problem is that so much in this world is opinion. I think that Gurdjieff was pretty clear about that. You see, science is inventive, whereas spiritual knowledge is part of revelation, something which is always itself. Experiment belongs to science and material knowledge, but in the last three hundred years, the West has lost track of its traditions because the Christian tradition has become so extremely externalized, and lost its own roots. Most Christians see the world in the scientific mold and add on a sort of cosmetic Christian good will.

AvB: Are the language and symbols of Christianity still useful to us?

KR: All these languages in themselves are totally valid. As a Westerner, I feel myself committed to Christianity because it is our Western tradition. I don't know how it may be in America, but in England, in Europe, we are still within Christendom. I would wish to use Christian terms as far as possible, but revitalized through the study of, say, India, or Platonic or Sufi traditions. I think the Catholic Church went badly astray when it adopted Aristotelian philosophy rather than Platonic metaphysics. Aristotelian philosophy ran down into materialist science, dragging the Christian church along with it. I would like to see an abandonment of Thomist theology and a reconsideration of Christianity in the light of a more spiritual knowledge. Blake was such a Christian, speaking the language of mystics.

AvB: You've spoken of a secret language of poets, of poets taking on the duties of philosophers and churchmen.
KR: When I say poets, I don't mean anyone who writes verse. But, yes, the sacred language has been kept alive by those poets in the underground stream who speak the language of neo-Platonism. You see this in the Renaissance and even in Shakespeare, and of course in the great Romantic revival, which was really a philosophic revival. Coleridge read Plato in the original, and so did Shelley and Wordsworth to a certain extent, whereas Keats and Yeats read the first translation of Plato in English, made by Blake's friend, Thomas Taylor the Platonist. And Blake himself was very much part of the Greek revival which took place at that time; he also knew the Christian esoteric tradition, and Jacob Boehme. And Keats's adage, "Truth is beauty," comes from Plotinus.

But there's never smoke without fire. You can't ask poets to renew culture just off the top of their heads, because they themselves must be the carriers of true knowledge. To look for the revival of culture through the arts is futile, unless the arts themselves are renewed.

When I was young, Eliot was thought to be a wonderful philosophical poet. Eliot was, in his way, quite important as a part of the exoteric Christian tradition. But the poet of the future was really Yeats. Yeats was saying there was going to be a reversal of the gyres, that this was a new age and a crisis of civilization. Now it's very obvious. Scientists themselves have reached the realization that naive materialism is just not on. The idea that solid matter is somewhere outside of consciousness is no longer scientifically tenable. Nevertheless, the establishment goes on. The universities don't want this; they try to cut everyone down to their own measure. But there's a very vital countermovement now. We're on the attack; we're not on the defensive; we're the new influx coming into the world.
KK: Does it take a great deal of education to participate in this renewal? What about people who can't read?
KR: Literacy and culture are not the same thing. Look at the works of art we study with such passion in the West. Chartres was built by people who couldn't read or write. There are a thousand ways in which tradition can be communicated—in sacred stories, and images, and mythologies. Language at the present time is in the hands of very ignorant people.

I've known some very wise, traditional cultures in Scotland. Unfortunately, in the United States a primitive people hardly exists—though you do have a great indigenous culture that many Americans are looking at rather carefully. I think it is a great pity that the grassroots of Western society are so terribly cut off. Because in traditional societies, the grassroots are very well nourished and they are the nourishment for the more learned levels.

I've just been in India; and while the sun is setting on India and it will all be destroyed in fifty years, *there* is a pre-industrial society. And it's marvelous, because the people live by certain values, they live from a sense of the sacred. And they have marvelous crafts—the things they wear, the way they build their houses—the whole of their culture is there at a very simple level. I saw a wonderful puppet show in the villages; the narration was done by an old, old woman in a tattered sari; she sat on the ground and recited the *Ramayana*.

In America, you have the Native Americans, and the Blacks, and jazz—that is perhaps your greatest living tradition. But otherwise, your grassroots are receptacles for the worst of commercialism, television, and all the rubbish.
AvB: It's certainly true that gospel singing has kept the language of the Gospels alive.

KR: Yes, absolutely. The language has to be kept alive at both ends—by scholars, philosophers, and great artists, and at the simple level also. I hope it can begin to permeate again those alienated areas that are furthest from their true roots. Look at the number of people who can't bear their lives and go to psychiatrists. Meaning can be communicated from within—this is an important concept. But that's been confused by the psychiatric profession.

AvB: I enjoyed the anecdote in your autobiography about your friend whose psychiatrist said, "I can't help you." And your friend said, "Pray for me, then." And the psychiatrist said, "We don't believe in prayer."

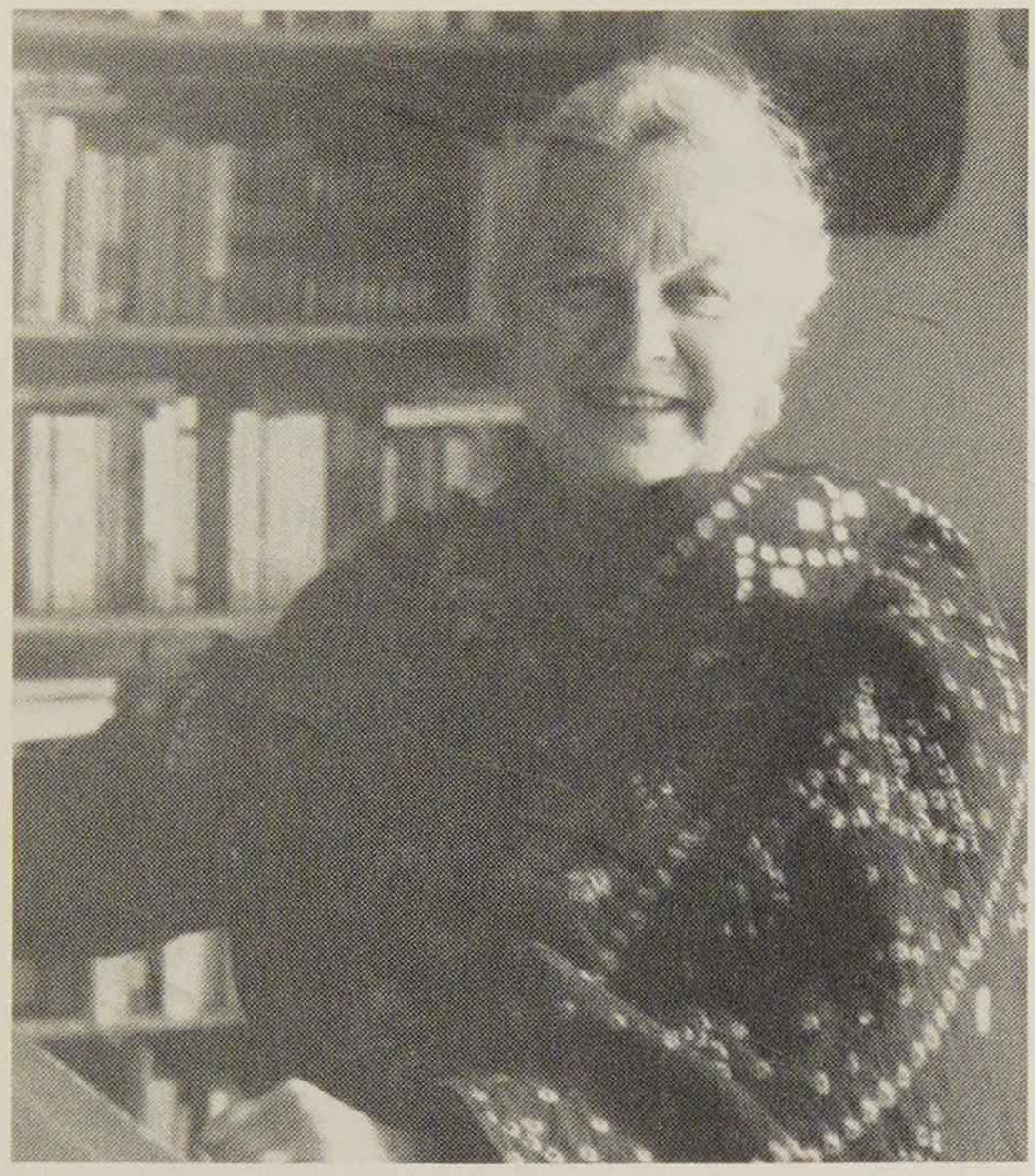
KR: Yes, I know, that was true!

AvB: Who, then, are the guardians of language, other than poets, of course, who care so much about language?

KR: I don't think a poet as such is a guardian of language. Poets are guardians of language only when they are guarding tradition. Others who are guardians are the philosophers, insofar as they are using words as the medium for communicating true knowledge. But linguistic philosophers like Ayer—they're not guardians of knowledge. Really, anyone who uses words in order to communicate true knowledge is a guardian of language. Whereas anyone who is using words which once had spiritual content in a reductionist manner is emptying words.

You see, you can either fill words with meaning or you can empty meaning out of words. We're living in a linguistically reductionist society. Everything means less and less. But words can be retrieved and reused so that meaning is put back into them.

I had a letter from the poet Robert Duncan, who wrote a sequence of poems, "Meditations on Rumi." He said that for years he had been reading Rumi in different translations and the words remained pretty meaningless. And then he had a very painful personal experience and something said: Go back to Rumi. And he said the words were absolutely on fire. In Arberry's words, he could hear Rumi's voice. And he said that as he read



Rumi, his own answering poem came to him, as if he were talking to Rumi.

It's very interesting that the words were meaningless. Because words in themselves have no meaning. It's only the necessary experience that fills the words. Many people read poems which assume a certain experience, and the words are meaningless to them. But if they have even a little of that illumination, then the words will relive. You can read the Bible and it means nothing. Or, suddenly, given some personal experience, you read the same words and the tears flow to your eyes!

AvB: Do you have a theory about the origin of language? Was it to sing or to pray or to say: "Pass the fire, please?"

KR: Oh, no. I haven't any views at all about that! But I do think man was a spiritual being from the very beginning. I don't think language was meant only for material things. I think that language had many meanings from the beginning, as in the Jewish scriptures, where they say there are four meanings for every text: it has its historic meaning, its psychological meaning, its analogical meaning, and so on. This idea that there are different levels of meaning is the traditional one. The idea that words only mean a fact is a diminution of the normal. The normal, you see, is complete. In early use of language, I imagine, if you named a tree you weren't just naming a species you were going to cut down. Language had an innately sacred dimension. Insofar as it named something, it was naming something that had an existence in all four worlds. But I'm speculating. I'm not a linguistic philosopher.

AvB: But what about revelation through speech? Words come to us, we are inspired, we hear certain phrases. Surely you have this experience in the making of a poem.

KR: Christ was called the Word in the sense of being the medium—in the sense that meaning precedes articulation. That is what I've been trying to say, really. Articulation and the imitation of articulation, which is common speech, isn't really communicating meaning. It is meaning that is primary. But Christ is the Word in the symbolic sense because the Word is all created beings, because nature is a great utterance, because everything in nature is entrusted with meaning from the highest level of creation. We've lost that sense: that we cannot have, as it were, a physical sensation without its also being a communication of knowledge. This is what is so wrong with materialist thought. We say things, but they haven't meaning. They only have the properties of existence, which, if you like, is the very lowest form of meaning.

In its purity, creation is totally meaningful and in that sense imbued with the Word, because the whole creation exists in the manifestation of Christ. The Father is unknowable but Christ is knowable. But I'm guessing. I'm only trying to answer questions that can't really be answered.

AvB: Your poems make a great use of nature and natural imagery. You use vocabulary, it seems, in which even a stone is a word.

KR: Oh yes, that is quite true. From my peasant childhood until now, this is one of the things which has not only stayed with me, but renewed itself—the meaningfulness of nature. It *is* a book: the book of nature. There are two Words of revelation: one through the Scriptures, and the other in nature.

I know that urban, industrialized, computerized man utterly exposed to television and the movies is about as cut off from this as anyone can be. We indoctrinate the whole society with materialism; the West and the Communist countries are equally brainwashed into this way of seeing the universe; it's soul destroying.

KK: There are words which are negative and destructive and very, very strong.

KR: Yes, there are. All the time, there are words of, so to speak, anti-power, which reduce or destroy the capacity to experience.

KK: Sometimes people hear words and latch onto them, thinking they understand the meaning. Even the word "holy."

KR: All the words in the present climate of thought have been emptied. There are no words which will hold their meaning in the absence of that meaning. So it's the meanings that have to be rediscovered, and then the words will be refilled.

AvB: It's what we bring to words, and where they come from in us.

KR: It is. Spoken from a cynical, commercial point of view, words mean nothing. You see, commercialism takes everything that is sacred and destroys it immediately. It becomes kitsch. Kitsch is anything which can be bought and sold.

AvB: You have written on Coleridge's definition of the symbol. How does that pertain to sacred language? What is a symbol?

KR: Difficult questions! A symbol presumes the existence of different levels. A symbol isn't using a part as representative of the whole. A symbol presumes that everything that is known by our senses has a corresponding meaning in other levels of experience. The symbol is the natural object, whatever it may be, which will communicate the other levels of the language. There are two kinds of symbols: there are natural symbols, where the meaning is contained in the thing itself, and there are cultural symbols. For example, the cross, for a Christian, immediately means something other than itself. It resonates at every level, through the whole of our being, not just our senses. It's partly a cultural thing, and partly in nature itself.

I don't know if PARABOLA has gotten around to Gaston Bachelard. He was a phenomenologist who tried to purify the language of science of such figurative phrases as "acids *attacking* a base" or "iron magnets *attracting* filings." He said these were anthropomorphic concepts. He found himself at home in the symbolist tradition and he wrote books on the four elements, on water and air, earth and fire. And he said that each of these elements reflects us; the match is absolute. Still water corresponds to a certain mood in us. The ascent of the skylark is the ascent of the spirit.

Nature hands you this marvelous vocabulary every day! And we don't hear it. But primitive people are very sensitive to the language of nature; they notice, for example, the omens of birds.

In my own poetry, I try to use these very simple words of nature, which don't have a lot of recondite associations. To read Yeats, you need to know the sounding board of our whole culture, you need to know about Pythagoras and Hamlet and Phydias, because Yeats touches these strings. But Blake writes:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour

Anyone can understand that. ■

The Wind of the Marigold

RICHARD LEWIS

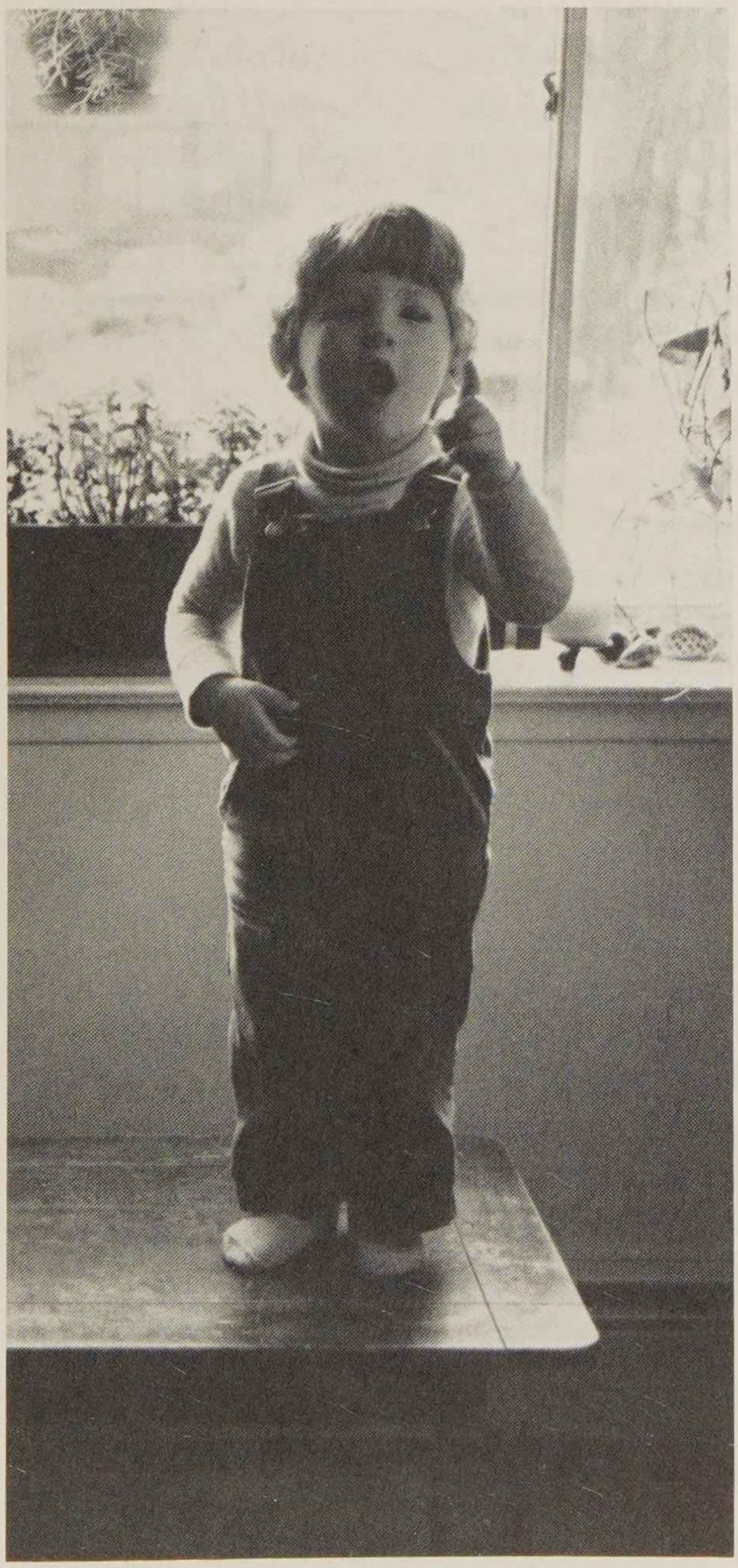


Photo by Johann Schumaker

I remember my son, when he was two or three years old, standing on top of a large rock and talking to the trees in front of him. Every once in a while he would shout a word—a swirling of sound pressed out toward a rock, a tree, a cloud passing by. This ritual became part of his daily exploration of a small forested area where we had been staying during the summer. He had entered a period of his language development where words had taken on a kind of magical power; their very sound seemed to be heard and received by objects around him—and these objects, once touched by his words, were changed forever.

In some ways my son's new-found ability paralleled what various cultures, including our own, have taken for granted: the special power of words to change and—in the most profound sense—to create. From the New Testament's "In the beginning was the Word" to the Maori "The word became fruitful; it dwelt with feeble glimmering; it brought forth night" to the Indian "'On the Spoken Word all the gods depend, all beasts and men; in the Word live all creatures; in the Word is the Imperishable, the first born of the Eternal Law, the mother of the Vedas, the navel of the divine world," the word has been charged with a strength and presence which brings life. Edmund Carpenter, referring to Eskimo poetry, says: "Words do not label things already there. Words are like the knife of the carver: they free the idea, the thing, from the general formlessness of the outside. As a man speaks, not only is his language in a state of birth, but also the very thing about which he is talking."

This bonding between words and their objects is one of the stunning attributes of childhood. But in very young children, we should remember, the making of sounds precedes the making of words. It is through aware-

ness of sound and its power that the child slowly evolves the meaning that underlies words. Those fortunate enough to hear an infant's babbling—particularly the bird-like warbling just before sleep—are aware of the playfulness with which it experiments with sounds, rolling them in its mouth, letting them enter the silence of the darkened room, changing the silence so that it has been comforted by sounds. We cannot overestimate the importance of this period of sound-making in a child's life. Like scribbles, they are the first declarations of our inner and outer space. The making of sound must give us, if only dimly, our first awareness that we are able to make something that did not exist before. It is, in the most elemental sense, one of our primary acts of imagining.

Eventually sounds evolve into words. In whatever language they appear, they must also be, to the child, no less than magical. For words not only signify things; they are the thing itself. To be able to say "mama" and "dadà" and to see one's mother and father respond, to repeat "mama" and "dada" when they are not there and be able to have the word suggest the touch, feel, and sound of mother and father, to be able to have an image, within the speaking of the word, of one's mother and father—how intriguing and delightful!

Octavio Paz has spoken of words as "a cluster of living beings, moved by rhythms like the rhythms that rule the stars and the plants." For the young child, they are exactly that. They are alive, not only because they are moving sounds, but because the sounds seem to influence and change the things they are about. When a child learns the word "sun" and then one day sees the sun and pointing to it says "sun," a relationship has changed; the child now has the possibility of speaking to the sun, of bringing it into the context of his mind. Such "naming" in time allows him to speak with the sun in poetic terms. A seven-year-old writes:

Sun, Sun do you know
You are beams in the flames,
With glowworms in the light
And bright yellow red
Sharp silver flames
Spinning up,
Like a big block of gold
The sun is a very magic fellow.[1]

Children are attracted by the rhythmic and melodic elements of language. Through chanting, repetition, word-play, and nonsensical chatter, language not only delights but acts as a doorway to secret visions. When I was in Ghana, many years ago, an eight-year-old child came up to me and as a way of introduction began to sing an "enchantment" song. The words made no sense, but the way she sang revealed her delight in their magical properties. I had the impression that her singing was her way of capturing my attention and bringing me into her sphere of being. She later wrote the words down:

Big ones small ones ten
and yellow red ones
blue and pinkish white ones
Mother wants a red one
give her red and red
mine will be enough
two for blue 1 boy
1 dove 2 doves
two and three
five one
give him one a blue
Pinkish is the best.

Many children are intoxicated by the sheer musical seductiveness of language. Like many adult writers, they enjoy words for their sensuous appeal, and the power of this sensuousness to provoke and elicit moods and feelings beyond a word's initial meanings. Such fascination leads the child to wonderfully wild metaphoric leaps in which combinations of words and phrases create a landscape of images that has

enormous imaginative possibilities. The following poem—or chant, since it was sung by a child in Ireland as she rushed into the house to greet her mother—has an almost bardic quality. In the tradition of shamanism, Etain, age four, evokes the spirits beneath things:

The wind of the marigold,
The flies of the American Bird,
The shamrocks of the stones,
The Lord of the Fieldmice,
The marigold's lavender,
The marigold of the shamrocks,
The mice of the round-a-gold.
The tractors of the storm
How the wind blows
The wolves howl,
While the moon moves
Along in the sky.
The wind blows people's hats off
And blows people's dresses up.
The Lord Mayor of the Dreams,
The mari-of-the-golds,
The Lord Mayor of the Golds.[2]

At some time in their development, most children become intrigued by the "special" word—the word which will make the window open, the door shut, the table move, the light go out. Some of these words are made-up, others are real words with remarkable powers. This too has parallels in a variety of cultures in which certain words should not be spoken for fear of invoking powers which could, in some cases, kill. Edward Field's translation of the Eskimo chant "Magic Words" has this to tell us:

In the very earliest time,
when both people and animals lived on
earth,
a person could become an animal if he
wanted to
and an animal could become a human
being.
Sometimes they were people
and sometimes animals
and there was no difference.
All spoke the same language.
That was the time when words were
like magic.
The human mind had mysterious
powers.
A word spoken by chance
might have strange consequences.
It would suddenly come alive
and what people wanted to happen
could happen.
Nobody could explain this:
That's the way it was.[3]

Photo by Elizabeth Hamlin

Photo by Elizabeth Hamlin

Here are two stories that reassure us that the tradition of magic words is indeed still part of childhood:

My friend Tommy is interested in magic words. I told him that most magic words were backwards words. So Tommy said "Office" backwards and then it made me see things like white lightning that struck everything that was green and my wallpaper and blanket are green. I saw red snakes and blue snakes. And space ships and people pushing me. So I didn't get to sleep last night at all and I was almost late for school.

Eric Johnson, age six

Once there was a man who had some gold. Whatever he said the gold would do. If he said "Tree" a bit of the gold would turn into a tree, and if he said "Ham" a bit of the gold was it. Once the man said "World" and on his birthday he got a little picture of the world, and on Christmas, each birthday and each Christmas, he'd have a little picture of the world. One day on his birthday he got a silver suit: a silver pants and a golden shirt, and once he said to the shirt, "Pumpkin," but nothing happened, and he thought only the gold he had would do it, so he asked the gold for a pumpkin but nothing happened. But one day there came to the door a green pumpkin with a triangular nose and round eyes and a dreary half-way smile . . .[4]

Christopher Pirtle, age five

As soon as children reach seven or eight years of age, they discover that the word which invokes mysterious powers can be turned to other means. It can curse, tease, ward off, intimidate, parody, and mock; many of these powers are contained in childhood chants and rhymes. The foremost collection of such word-use is found in *The Lore and Language of School Children* by Iona and Peter Opie. This collection verifies the existence of an oral tradition among children passed on to each succeeding generation. Words, in

their affective power, in the degree to which they can protect by their very utterance our fear, weakness, and vulnerability, as well as expose the weakness and vulnerability of others, have been made into a survival mechanism by children.

For better or worse, as the child grows the magic of words is turned towards aggression and defense to meet the pressures of peer groups and the child's cravings for acceptance and belonging:

See my finger
See my thumb
See my fist—
—You'd better run.

—English

Bug off!
Bug off!

—American

While this use of language is common to children everywhere, and is a kind of weapon which, once uttered, will bring adversaries to their knees, there remains in many children a fascination, even awe, for the way language operates within us:

Where
do words come from?
The throat
and the tongue
work together
and mass-produce them.
The special liquid
of a new-born baby's
heart,
stomach,
and liver
soaks into
the throat
and the tongue.
If you carelessly speak too much
the liquid will be gone
and you'll become dumb.
If you don't speak a word
words will come out by themselves
while you are sleeping.
The control of words
is difficult.[5]

Iijima Kenji, age eleven

And language, as the child discovers, can also be the means to describe and evoke the magic of events and things themselves. For many children the startling sonority of words becomes its own magic, taking us into a deeper realm of consciousness and perceiving:

Gentle as a feather
Cat quiet
Snow soft
Gentle, gentle as a feather
Softer than snow
Quiet as a cat
Comes
The evening breeze.[6]

Maria Hourigan, age eleven

Shh—silence, splash the sound of seagulls
the silence of nowhere is there while the
sea rocks itself to sleep.[7]

Gina Rose, age nine

Fortunate indeed is the child who never gives up the original impulse to bring forth from silence words which not only name and give meaning to the unknown, but which, in their wondrous way, take on, like the child itself, a life of their own. As Owen Barfield puts it in *Poetic Diction,*

"The full meaning of words are flashing, iridescent shapes like flames—ever-flickering vestiges of the slowly evolving consciousness beneath them.[8] ■

NOTES

1. Richard Lewis, ed., *Miracles: Poems by Children of the English-Speaking World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1966).
2. Ibid.
3. Edward Field, trans., *Songs and Stories of the Netsilik Eskimos* (Cambridge, Mass.: Education Development Center, 1967).
4. Richard Lewis, ed., *Journeys: Prose by Children of the English-Speaking World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1970).
5. Richard Lewis and Haruna Kimura, eds. and trans., *There are Two Lives: Poems by Children of Japan* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1970).
6. Lewis, *Miracles*, op. cit.
7. Lewis, *Journeys*, op. cit.
8. Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning*, 3rd ed. (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1973).

Voice Above, Voice Below

ANNE TWITTY

The poet is a failed magician . . .
who has substituted metaphor for
metamorphosis.

—Andrei Sinyavsky

Scattered here and there in collections of folklore, anthropological studies, and treatises on shamanistic healing, we find vital words and images not written by poets and not called poems. They once formed a part of magical rites or medical lore, and were it not for the sophisticated curiosity of outsiders most of them would probably never have been written down at all. Many of these formulas were long kept secret; to reveal them was to destroy their usefulness. And the people who invented and employed them treasured these charms, not as verbal objets d'art, but for their working powers.

Some of the great incantations, like the Hebrew *abreq ad habra*, were handed down through centuries, reaching us as the abracadabra epitome of nonsense. Others were valid for only one person, whose name appeared within the charm—or for a single season, a single year, like a shed snakeskin. In grouping together examples of magical formulas from different times and countries, we in effect alter their definition. For they are stripped of the essential condition of secrecy, and their original purpose is transformed. They were intended, after all, to bewitch, to allure, to propitiate; to drive the cow plague into someone else's herd, or to rid a man of sickness by wedding his fever to the willow tree.

Since we have other techniques for achieving our ends, what remains of the incantation? An elemental shiver. It opens up a world in which everything is alive: wood, stone, lead and honey, blood, sweat, spittle and excrement—all are filled with natural force. Open sesame! swings back the door for Ali Baba because of the magical properties of the sesame seed. The moon is an agent, not a symbol, and its phases alter living organisms, as twentieth-century scientists are beginning to confirm.

In this world of swarming energies, where one element strives against another—scissors cut paper; rock crushes scissors; paper covers rock—

the word is the most compelling natural force of all. A verbal stick puts out the Evil Eye. *Sticks and stones may break my bones* is the materialist answer, once again, and even while denying their power, uses words to fend off words.

Of course, if we were not dulled to words by our mundane use of them, we would be forced to call them supernatural. What physical measurement of sound or duration, or of the marks on a page, could explain the way they turn us pale with anger or sick with fear? Magic belonged to a type of medicine that we label psychosomatic—it worked on the body through the emotions. Poetry has always done this, yet no one has succeeded in reducing it to a materialistic science. Like science, it is concerned with the nature of reality. But it refuses to impoverish existence in order to define it. "Natural" and "supernatural" become meaningless distinctions within the mental world where poetry originates.

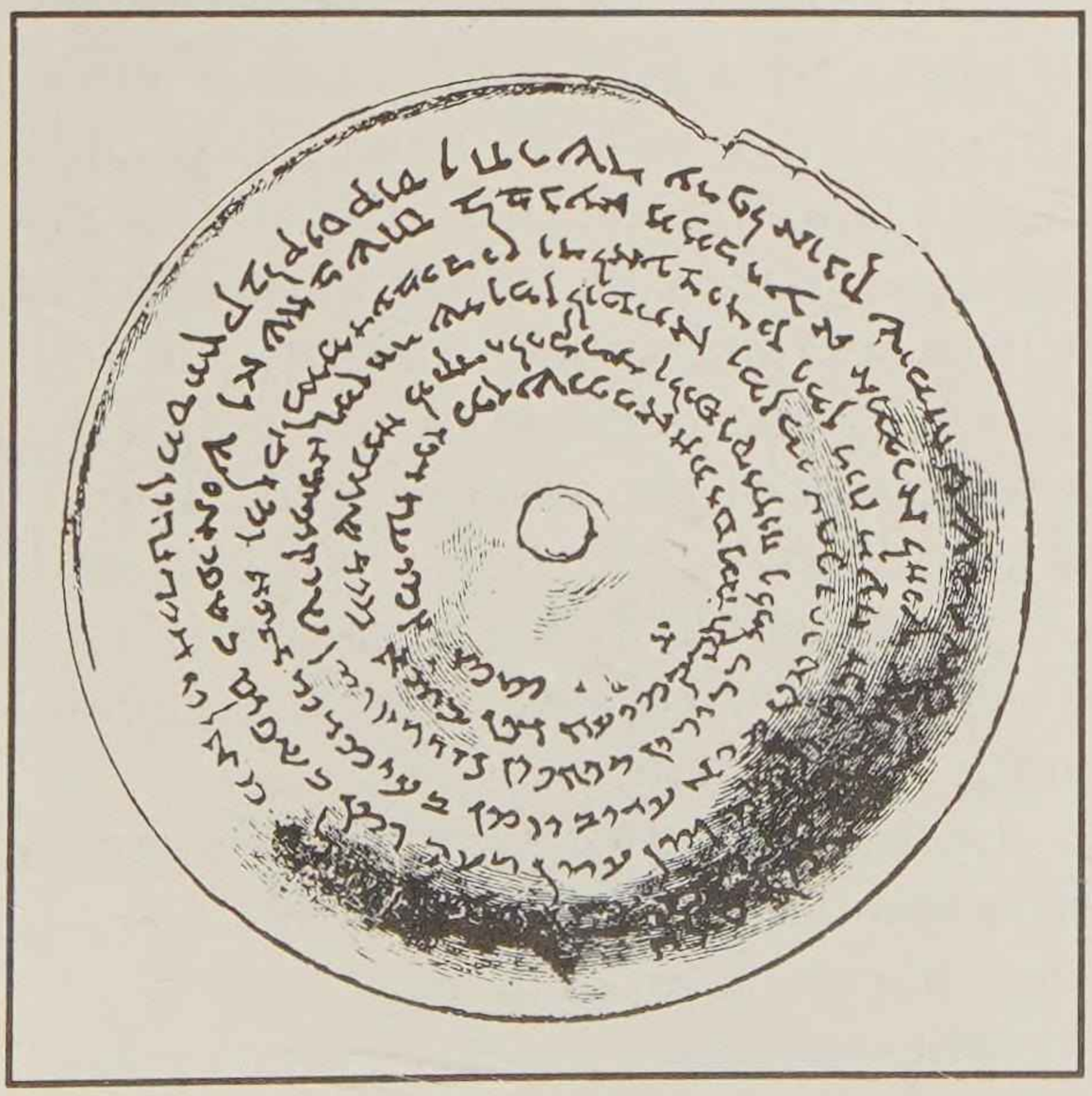
There is a sort of crazy aspiration, a continual striving to transcend the as-if, in the use of the tropes that we call metaphors or similes. They bring different levels of reality together. How then, do we describe a world in which the levels have never been separated, a world where the action is the word and the word the action, where the subjective and objective merge? We speak of regression or of schizophrenia. There is another possibility, and that is an everyday and unself-conscious perception so extraordinary to most of us that it is labeled "magical," "mystical," "supernatural." We come to it attempting to heal the breaks between one way of seeing and another. In this condition, words can at best imitate or re-create reality within a separate world of their own. Pope's wounded snake "drags its slow length along" in an imitation of nature, in a world where Art is not to be confused with Life. Here is a Russian charm for curing snakebite:

Reptile
thou reptile

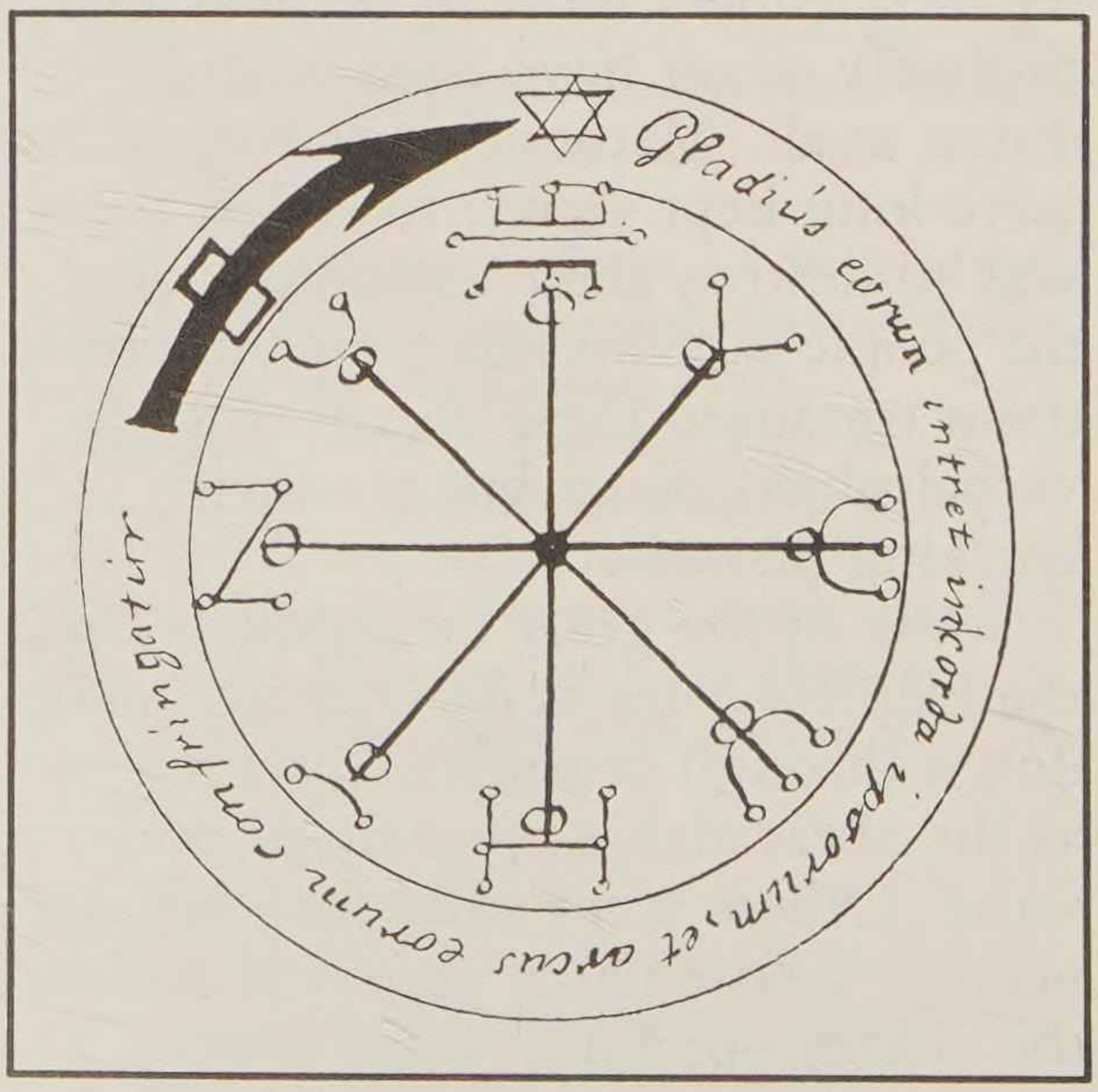
paper body
sugary lips
perfume
charms!

Reptile
thou reptile
take away thy seed and jealousy!

Terra-cotta devil trap from Babylonia, with spiral inscription in Hebrew letters.



Eighteenth-century talisman for resisting attacks of evildoers.



I blew and spoke,
quickly my breath and words
fell from me to the ground.

So quickly,
snake's sting,
come from God's slave!
Amen.

The healer must have drawn the figure of a snake, perfumed it, burnt it, and blown the ashes away. The steps are these: gesture; words; event. Metaphor stands on its head, and instead of imitating nature, words compel nature to imitate them. When there are no barriers between inner and outer reality, word, gesture, and event exist in a flowing state of potential transformation. And in this state, poetry does make something happen; words take themselves literally.

When the word happens to be the name of a god, it becomes in itself an amulet, the verbal equivalent of a blue hand hanging from a Berber wedding necklace. To name a god or spirit is to summon it. So the names of gods and demons are deformed to keep their owners from appearing at inconvenient moments; thus the innumerable nicknames a feared spirit like Satan will acquire. Spirit names—words of power—are guarded carefully, just as some tribal people guard their own "true" and private names, or as they guard cuttings from their hair or fingernails. Like words of power, these can be used to help or harm.

A powerful being may be invoked for protection, and for those requiring multiple protectors the names of gods were strung together in litanies, Mithras, Abraxas, and Adonai reinforcing the powers of Jehovah. To keep off crocodiles, an Egyptian might chant:

Do not try to surprise me! I am Set.
Do not raise thy arms against me! I am Sothis.
Do not seize me! I am Seth.

We know the invocation: in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

The hypnotic roll of the invocation is one example of verbal power; another is the word that accompanies a rite or a gesture. Someone binds a length of red thread around an egg, places a bee in a hive, gathers earth from a graveyard, or passes a gold ring from hand to hand. The spell said as these things are done is not just a description of the act; it is a confirmation of it. By means of the spell the action becomes firm and binding; it is rehearsed and sealed by the words. An oral charm is moving from the dumb but eloquent world of gesture toward the fixed and ordered hierarchies of the written word. A charm to turn a person into a werewolf ends with the declaration:

My word is firm
firmer than sleep
or the strength of heroes.

The word that names, the word that seals a ritual, the word that transforms—all these are interchangeable aspects of the magic word. The technique of the spell that will, for example, ward off the Evil Eye or staunch the flow of blood, is to combine gesture with a verbal reordering of the world. An event that is about-to-take-place is described, an event that is in its own terms imminent, but in ours will perhaps remain in the realm of may-be. Flowing blood is transformed into a stiff blade of sedge in the moss, into a boulder. A sickness is led out to settle in the earth, or if the healer is malicious, into someone else. Transformation; transfer; binding: a new event. "Let the Evil Eye melt away like lard on the coals," "Melt the bullet, rot the club, blunt the knife," "You are not a woman, you are a young reindeer doe. The smell of carrion comes to you, and you flee away, and come into my possession."

The mood ranges from the subjunc-

tive to the inexorable; the powers are implored, threatened, commanded, coaxed, or lured away. Sometimes a charm tells a story: how St. Paphnutius met the fever sisters and beat them into submission, how Mary the Mother of God subdued Lord and Lady Werewolf and the Vampires. Often the story recreates a primal myth, but it may also be a story that hasn't happened yet. The Russians send grubs off to a great grub wedding feast across the sea, hoping they will roast to death in the fire of burning brimstone and boiling tar that they find there.

The impact, the shock waves these words set off, is due in part to the direct and confident way they manipulate matter. They are unabashed statements of omnipotence. What the formula states is a name, an act, or an alchemical change in nature. But poetry, like a volcano, has subterranean dimensions, and magical poetry more than any other enhances the sensuous aspects of the word.

It may be true that poetry originated in log-thumping ritual, that "if poetry did not exist, it would not be reinvented"* As inner and outer reality mingle within it, so do "sense" and "nonsense," "form" and "content." Whether in the rhythmic beat that once made it part of music, or in the insistent aural values that threaten to lead sound away from sense, even the most cerebral of poems retains a hint of the senseless. For some, these links that hold poetry to gibberish form a chain, for others, a life line.

Even restrained and classical poets like T.S. Eliot and Ossip Mandelstam have been described as composing their poems to fit a wordless "tune in the head." At the other end of the spectrum, an Ethiopic invocation is a frankly magical shout: *El, M'el, Jane'el, Ilil-farsangana-el, M'el, Telk'el, Walil-el, Z'el, B'el, M'el, Nothing is impossible with God!* Much nonsense is divinest sense, and the poem that ceases to tug at the edges of the incomprehensible accepts a fatal limitation.

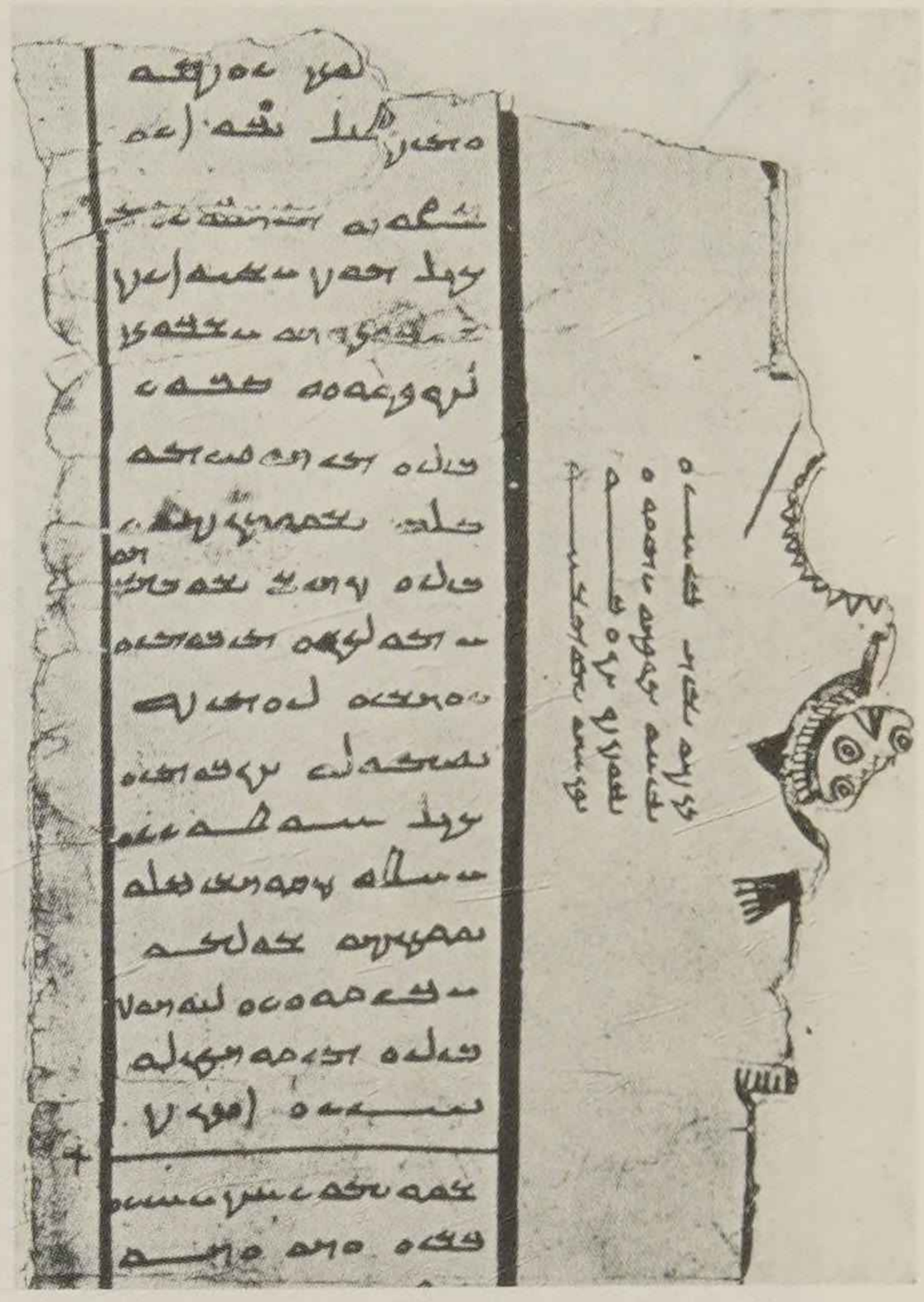
For generations of silent readers, the sounds of words have been muted, and since the standardization of spelling and printing, letter and word forms have varied so little that they, too, seemed irrelevant, secondary properties, the desirable typeface, like the desirable style, being one that did not call attention to itself. Yet the physical word is both a sound and a shape. The makers of amulets wrote magical names and formulas in diagrams which could then be worn about the neck for protection. With a more literary end in view, Elizabethan and Jacobean poets teased the relation between shape and meaning into the odd stanzaic formations of their iconic poems. And this century has seen numbers of typographical experiments in poetry, culminating in that most blatant assertion of the substantive nature of the word, concrete poetry. There the stanza vanishes in a riot of prankish distortions, to be replaced by forsythia branches, swans, ships under full sail, and popsicles.

It is tempting to see these forms as the latter-day descendants of talismans and pentacles. Transcending the need for translation through self-explanatory shapes and simple codes, they share with magic a certain claim to universality. Yet their claim is to universal intelligibility, not universal validity, and neither concrete poetry, Dada sounds, nor Surrealist imagery is a true equivalent of the magic poem. Surrealists admired primitive poetry, as they did other primitive arts, but they used it as a literary key to the one-sided world of dreams or madness, while Dadaists opted for their syllables *because* they were meaningless. The existence of this kind of literature is testimony to the degeneracy of

*Paul Valéry

magic. Nowhere do we find that essential faith in the underlying correspondences between language and reality, the absolute belief that sustains the maker of a spell.

For many of us, except at moments, the connections have been cut; the word has turned in on itself to create a self-justifying world. But the magic poem is numinous. The word and its sound, its meaning and its shape, are in substance identical with the thing it signifies. Therefore, the prohibition against making images of God, which the Muslims share with the Jews, proscribes the use of the undisguised name of Allah in textile designs. Whenever the name is so employed, the letters must be distorted or defective to avoid portraying the image of God. Similarly, Jewish mystics have speculated for centuries on the underlying identity of the word and the thing. In one Kabbalistic vision, a great jumble heap of Hebrew letters awaits the creation of the world, and not until each act of creation is performed do the letters that describe it fall into place to form the words of the Torah. *And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.* It is this sense of the sublime word that suggests a way of reading even the simplest and most utilitarian doggerel muttered by a Slavic householder to stop his cow from kicking while he milked her.

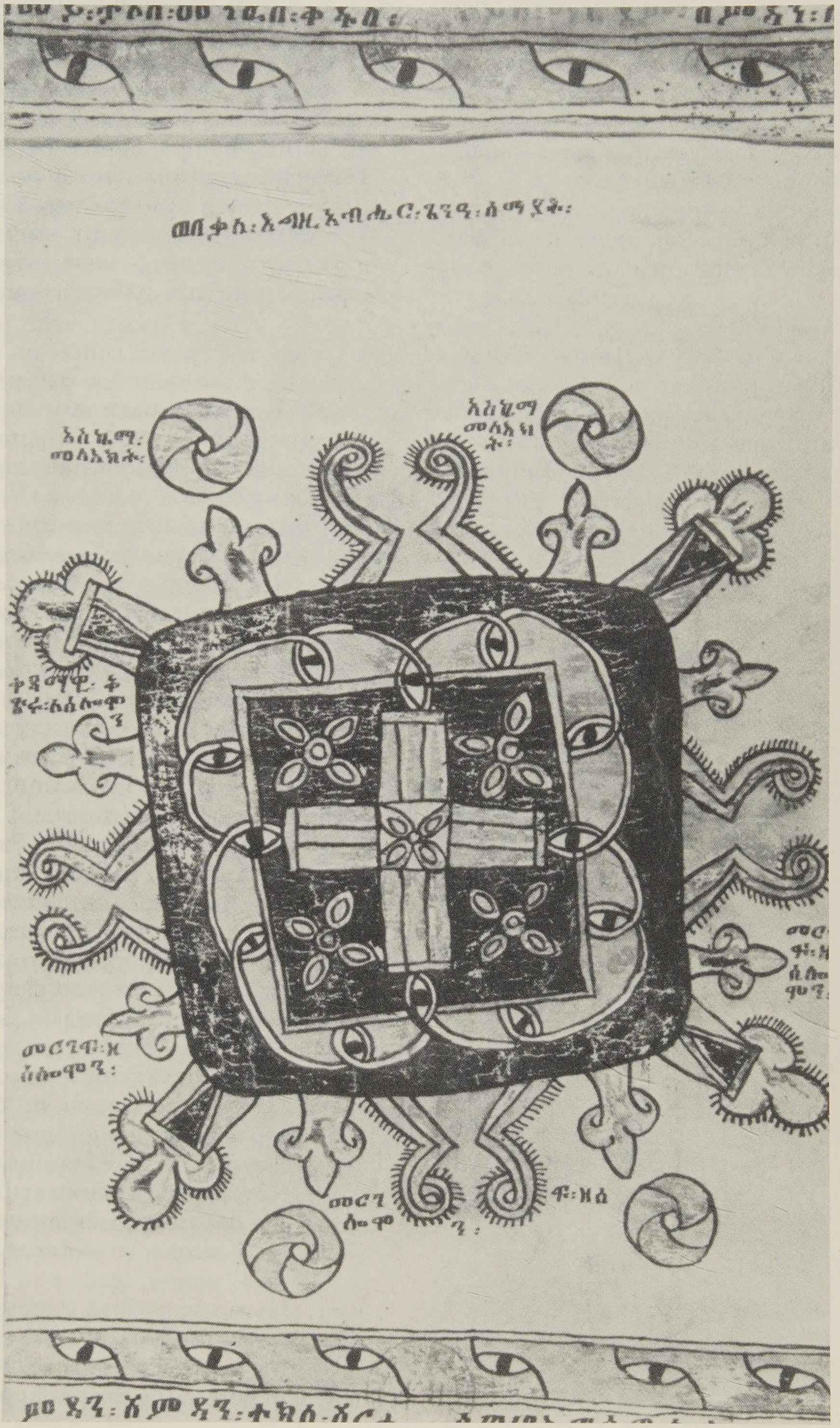


Fragment from a Mandaean amulet with magical drawings and incantations.

The selection of charms that follows is not inclusive. From our own continent there are Native American ceremonial songs firm in their oneness with the natural world. Another type comes from people living within the larger civilizations of Europe and the Middle East. They were peasants rather than tribal people, and their imagery is often familiar to us because of its presence within the Semitic world we know from the Old Testament and the European witchcraft that survives in part in fairy tales. Yet beyond the differences there is an intuitive sameness. When we find Bulgarians, Africans, Anglo-Saxons, Ancient Egyptians, and Malays using similar techniques, it is less a question of influences and transmission than of basic concepts. Eggs hold the soul; black wool contains sorrow—and magic is a language both universal and conservative.

These lines can now be read as poems in their own right, groups of words that excite the mind and the senses. True, they exist in a kind of metaphysical no-man's-land, transplanted, translated, and deprived of the climate of belief in which they once flourished. But that climate of belief still lives somewhere in us.

Some of them are no more than fragments from broken or illegible tablets. Knowing that the Finns, among others, never reveal the whole of a



Ethiopian talisman designed to ward off invisible powers.

magic song for fear of breaking the charm, we may suspect that many of these formulas have been incompletely transmitted. That is no reason for discounting them, any more than we discount the remaining fragments of Sappho's poems. Fragments often appeal, not just to the romantic taste for ruins, but to a deeper pessimism about the final nature of completion. Even mistranslation is not always a cause for regret; sometimes it adds another shade of meaning or suggests a different view of the world. And simple error has been known to lift a line: "brightness falls from the hair" to "brightness falls from the air." One form of authenticity prevails over another.

In reading the following incantations, we may marvel at their commanding intimacy with nature or simply be astonished by their strangeness, their exotic quality. But perhaps it is best to approach them with the realization that, in order to truly perceive them, we must return to possibilities we have been taught to despise as superstition and recover abilities we have largely abandoned or ignored. Then the beautiful or frightful more-than-images of magic will become signposts to a world of interconnecting meanings, and reminders of our place within that world.

❖

Voice above
Voice of thunder
Speak
from the dark of clouds.

Voice below
Grasshopper voice
Speak
from the green of plants.

So may the earth
be beautiful.[1]

—*Navajo*

The seeress takes off the sick one's shirt, leaving the patient naked. She holds a hoop made from the branch of a wild-rose bush on his head and pours water drawn at midnight over his head and body.

We free the sick from the sound
the firm from the soft
water from the earth
known from unknown
loved from unloved
the dead from the living
the moon from the stars
and our man we raise to his feet.[2]

—*Southern Slav*

For a woman with fever

Sacred trembling, great trembling,
trembling *ba bu ba*,
stubborn trembling, Lord Trembling,
trembling of children easily come into the world,
trembling of seven easily come into the world.
The trembling descends to the pores of the skin (mute mouths open in fear),
the tremblings descend and are cupped in the wells of the heart, alloyed of gold and of copper,
trembling *di wa di* of sperm and pearls
I will nail you to the floor, your feet dangling, sheltered by a yellow canopy.

The jimbalang pass, the jimbalang pass on toward the forest, toward the rhinoceros horn,
toward Ganesha's ivory.

It is not for me to drive the soul of trembling away.
It is for an ancestral spirit to drive the soul of trembling away.
It is not for me to drive the soul of trembling away.
It is for a white spirit to drive the soul of trembling away.

It is not for me to drive the soul of
trembling away.
It is for a white god to drive the soul of
trembling away.
Let it turn away![3]

—*Malay*

I, the servant of God, begin
by blessing myself and crossing myself.

I shall go to the blue sea.
On the blue sea lies a white burning stone
on this stone stands God's throne
on this throne sits the very Holy Mother,
holding in her small hands a white swan.
She plucks,
she pulls from the swan a white feather.

As the white feather jumped
and sprang back,
so jump and spring back,
cut from the servant of God,
you inborn fevers and inborn heat—
from the poor raging head,
the bright eyes,
the dark brows,
the white body,
the warm heart,
the black liver,
the white lungs,
the poor hands and feet.

If it came from the wind
back to the wind.
If it came from the water
back to the water,
If it came from the forest
to the forest let it go
from now
to forever.[4]

—*Russian*

Eat your anger up yourself,
put your malice in your mouth.
Down your throat the pain you made,
down your gullet.

Drink your anger down like brandy,
like ale the pain you sent,
your bitterness like brine,
like milk your spell-made sickness,
your sourness like honey,
like buttered eggs your fever fits.

Down your bony jaw,
down your aching teeth,
down your dry throat channel,
through your tongue's root
into your golden belly,
your copper paunch,
your dainty liver and your yellow lungs.

Let your lungs coil round your heart
and squeeze your gall![5]

—*Finnish*

When the wife of Samareul heard that the bard of Gaweg had changed her dirge for her husband into a song, she sang another dirge in this way:

May the lion take you
coming out of the thicket.
May he eat your flesh.
May your bones be lost.
May Gaweg beat you
when he is angry.
May God protect me!
How can weeping be stolen?[6]

—*Ethiopian*

Let dream sleep,
Evil-Eye find no sleep.
If he finds it,
let him wake
in a dream.

Two eyes
two Evil-Eyes,
one watery, the other fiery.
I took the watery one,
quenched the fiery one.

You Evil-Eyes, run away like waves
through the wheat and the streams
and the small green grassblades.[7]

—*Southern Slav*

A black raven flies through the air. Blood
trickles.
Great Mara came running. Stopped the
raging stream.

A black raven flies through the air. Blood
trickles.
Take, Marina, a golden broom. Sweep up
the blood of the black raven.

Black snake flew through the air, spilling
black blood,
spilling black blood, biting slender nettles.

The swamps are full of black birches.
The fields are full of bones, bones of fallen
cattle.

The sea is full of ice-floes.
The fields are full of plowmen.

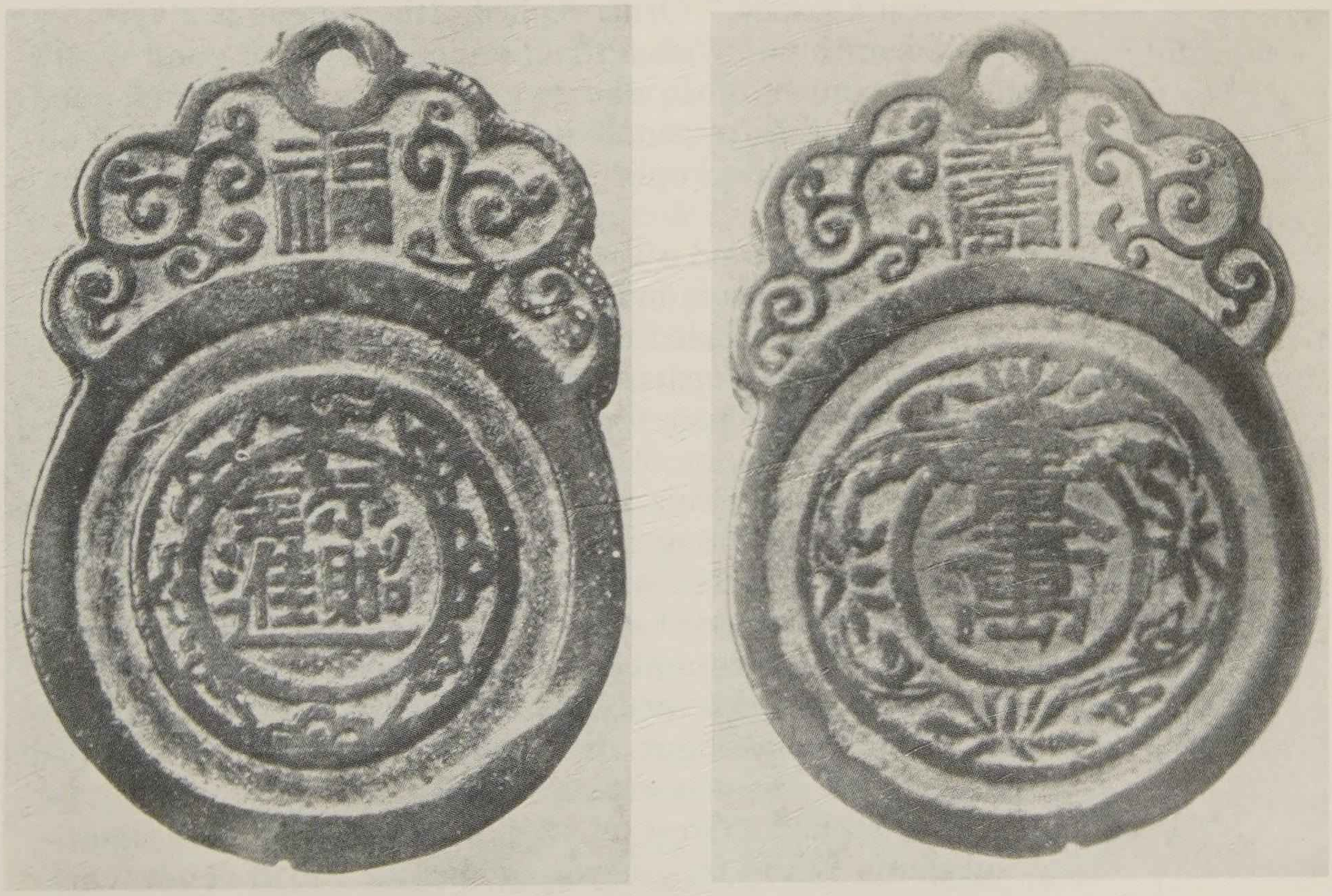
Gather up, O Sea, your floes of ice.
Great Mother, gather your plowmen.[8]

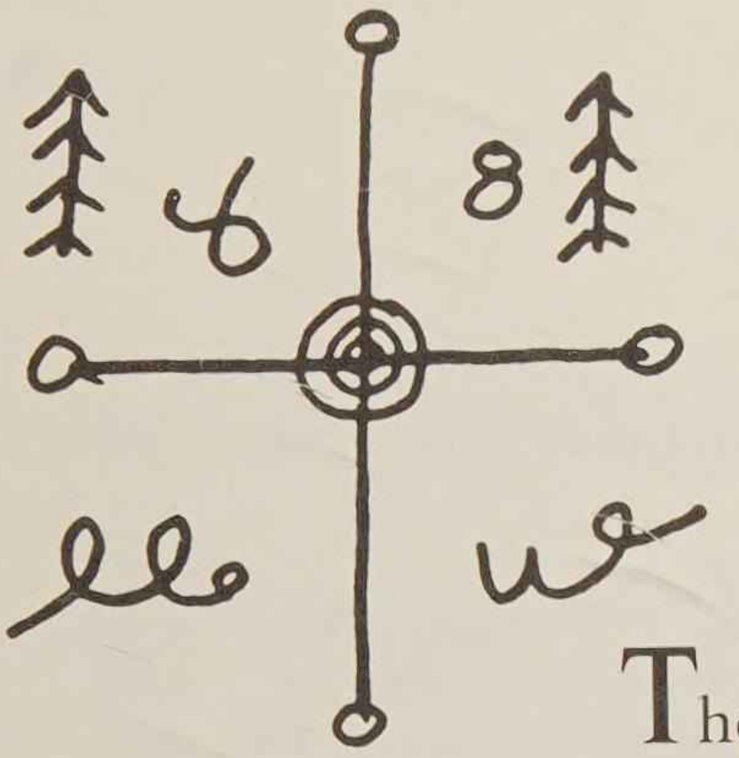
—*Latvian* ■

NOTES

1. Gary Witherspoon, *Language and Art in the Navajo Universe* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977).
2. Phyllis Kemp, *Healing Ritual: Studies in the Technique and Tradition of the Southern Slavs* (London: Faber and Faber, 1935).
3. Jeanne Cuisinier, *Danses magiques du Kelantan*, Travaux et mémoires de l'Institut d'Ethnologie, vol. XXII (Paris, 1936). Author's translation.
4. John Abercromby, *The Pre- and Proto-historic Finns* (London: David Nutt, 1898). Author's revision.
5. Ibid.
6. Enno Littmann, *Publications of the Princeton Expedition to Abyssinia* (Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1910-1915). Author's revision. This dirge appeared in *Hermes*, no. II, 1978.
7. Friedrich Krauss, *Volksglaube und religiöser Brauch der Südslaven, Darstellungen aus dem Geviete der Nichtchristlichen Religiongeschichte, Bd. 2* (Munster: Aschendorffschen Bchhdlg., 1890). Author's translation.
8. Abercromby, op. cit.

Chinese amulet for attracting wealth.





A Tongue for Obatalá

The great god Obatalá has as his helper another god by the name of Orula. When Obatalá determined one day to appoint a ruler of the world, he thought first of Orula. But he was hesitant and undecided, for he feared that perhaps Orula was too young and inexperienced for such a task. And so Obatalá decided to test Orula's wisdom. He sent for Orula and asked him to prepare the finest possible meal.

Orula went off to the public market and looked at everything that was for sale. At last he bought a beef tongue and brought it home. He cooked it with great care, preparing it with all kinds of herbs and spices. When it was done, he carried it to Obatalá, and Obatalá tasted it. Never had Obatalá eaten anything so good. When the food was gone, he complimented Orula and said to him, "Tell me, Orula, when you had the choice of all the different meats in the market, why did you choose a tongue?"

"Great Obatalá," Orula replied, "the tongue is a very significant thing. With a tongue you can praise good works and compliment those who do good deeds. You can tell good news and influence people in the way they should go. You can even promote people to high rank," he added, smiling at Obatalá.

"All you have said is very true," Obatalá replied, thinking to himself: "Orula is indeed filled with knowledge."

But Obatalá decided to test Orula further, and he said to him: "You have prepared for me the best of all dishes. Now I want you to prepare for me the worst food you can imagine."

So once again Orula went to the market. After looking at everything there, he again bought a beef tongue. He brought it home and prepared it with spices and herbs, and when it was cooked he carried it to Obatalá and put it before him.

Obatalá was astonished. He said, "First you brought me this dish and represented it as the best of good things. Now you again bring tongue and represent it as the worst of bad things. How can you explain this?"

Orula replied, "Great Obatalá, the tongue is a very significant thing. With a tongue you can belittle a man's endeavors

and destroy his good reputation. You can influence people to their disadvantage, and with an evil word you can deprive them of their livelihood. With a tongue you can betray a country and sell its people into slavery."

When Obatalá heard this, he said, "All that you have said is true. You are wise beyond your years."

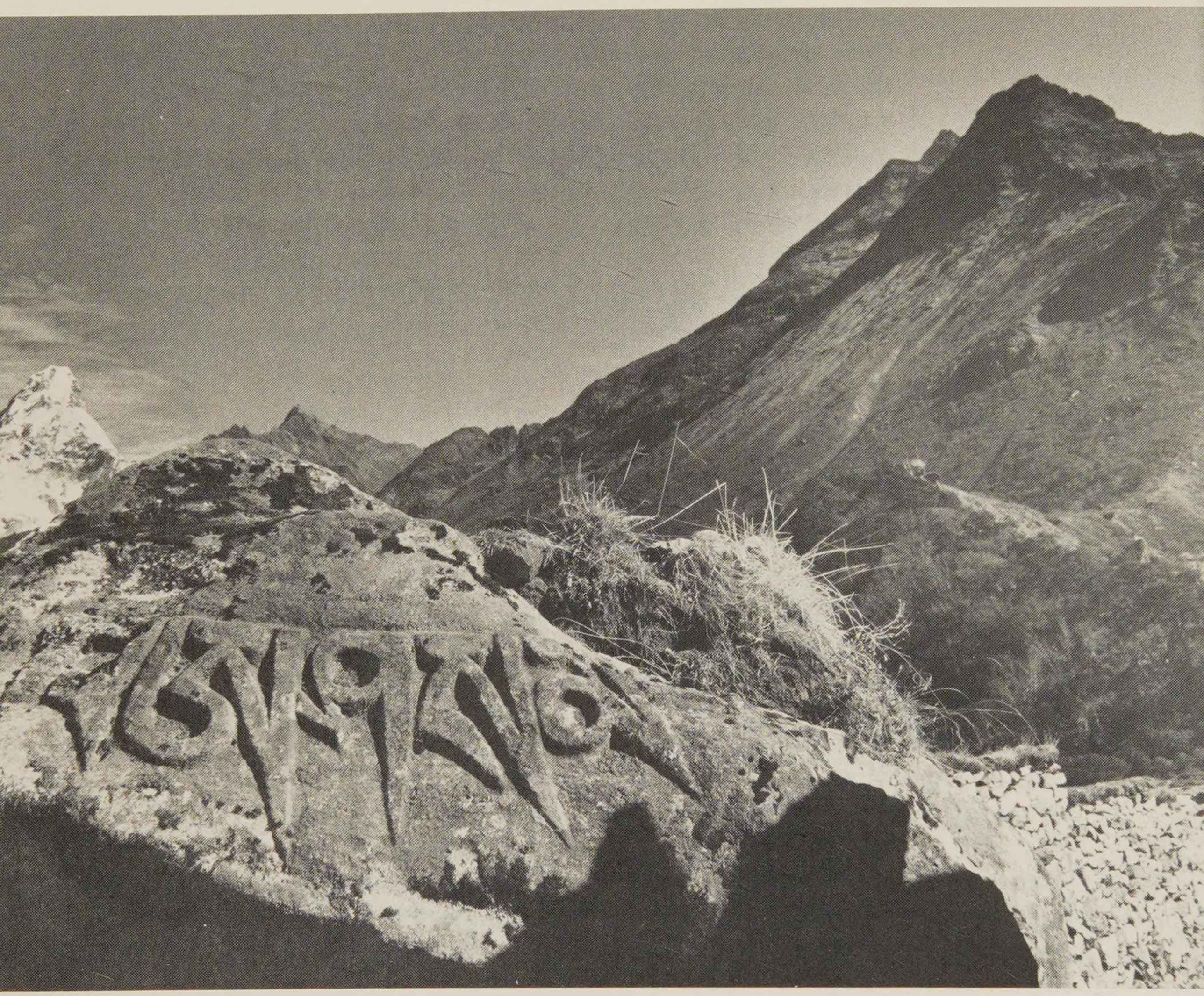
And then and there he made Orula master of the world.

Reprinted from *Ride With the Sun* by Harold Courlander, Edmund Ward, Ltd., 1957.

Generation

When the Baal Shem had a difficult task before him, he would go to a certain place in the woods, light a fire and meditate in prayer—and what he had set out to perform was done. When a generation later the "Maggid" of Meseritz was faced with the same task he would go to the same place in the woods and say: We can no longer light the fire, but we can still speak the prayers—and what he wanted done became reality. Again a generation later Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov had to perform this task. And he too went into the woods and said: We can no longer light a fire, nor do we know the secret meditations belonging to the prayer, but we do know the place in the woods to which it all belongs—and that must be sufficient; and sufficient it was. But when another generation had passed and Rabbi Israel of Rishin was called upon to perform the task, he sat down on his golden chair in his castle and said: We cannot light the fire, we cannot speak the prayers, we do not know the place, but we can tell the story of how it was done. And, the story which he told had the same effect as the actions of the other three.

Told by S.J. Agnon to Gershom Scholem. From *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* by Gershom G. Scholem, Schocken Books, 1954.



The Protection of Dolma

Erudite as he was, Ngawong Gyatso recognized the limitations of mere academic learning and increasingly retreated into a life of spiritual contemplation. Once while looking down from the Potala he saw an old man making his circuit of the sacred city, followed by the figure of a woman whom he instantly recognized as Dolma, the heavenly consort of Chenresig. Every day at the same time the old man appeared on his pilgrimage, and every day he was followed by the image of Dolma. Ngawong Gyatso asked for the old man to be brought to him and then questioned him. The man knew nothing of Dolma following him and amused the court by his ignorance and apparent stupidity. He was merely making the prescribed pilgrimage, he said, and reciting the holy *ngag*, or prayer, as he had been taught. When he recited

the prayer for all to hear he was ridiculed for the number of mistakes he had made, and he was carefully taught how to recite it correctly.

The next day Ngawong Gyatso watched from the roof of the Potala with members of his court but when the old man appeared as usual, he was alone. There was no sign of the goddess Dolma. Once more the Gyalva Rimpoche had the old man brought to him. There, in front of everyone, he told the old man that he was more fortunate than those who had presumed to try to correct him for his faulty recitation, for in his ignorance he nevertheless had the protection of Dolma, whereas in his new-found learning he had lost it. He told the old man to return to his pilgrimage and to continue as he had begun, with his mind and heart fixed on their purpose, for it was devotion and not learning that brought such blessings. The old man did as he was told and was once again seen making his round of the city, mumbling his faulty prayer, but with Dolma once again following and protecting him.

Reprinted from *Tibet* by Colin Turnbull and Thubten Jigane Norbu, Simon & Schuster, 1968.

Simeli Mountain

There were once two brothers, the one rich, the other poor. The rich one, however, gave nothing to the poor one, and he gained a scanty living by trading in corn, and often did so badly that he had no bread for his wife and children. Once when he was wheeling a barrow through the forest he saw, on one side of him, a great, bare, naked-looking mountain, and as he had never seen it before, he stood still and stared at it with amazement.

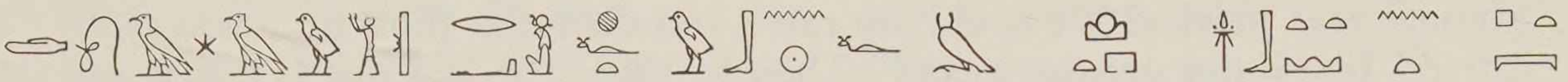
While he was thus standing he saw twelve great, wild men coming towards him, and as he believed they were robbers he pushed his barrow into the thicket, climbed up a tree, and waited to see what would happen. The twelve men, however, went to the mountain and cried: "Semsi mountain, Semsi mountain, open up," and immediately the barren mountain opened down the middle, and the twelve went into it, and as soon as they were within, it shut. After a short time, it opened again, and the men came forth carrying heavy sacks on their shoulders, and when they were all once more in the daylight they said: "Semsi mountain, Semsi mountain, shut yourself "; then the mountain closed together, and there was no longer any entrance to be seen to it, and the twelve went away.

When they were quite out of sight the poor man got down from the tree, and was curious to know what was secretly hidden in the mountain. So he went up to it and said: "Semsi mountain, Semsi mountain, open up," and the mountain opened to him also. Then he went inside, and the whole mountain was a cavern full of silver and gold, and behind lay great piles of pearls and sparkling jewels, heaped up like corn. The poor man hardly knew what to do, and whether he might take any of these treasures for himself or not; at last he filled his pockets with gold, but he left the pearls and precious stones where they were. When he came out again he also said: "Semsi mountain, Semsi mountain, shut yourself"; and the mountain closed itself, and he went home with his barrow.

And now he had no more cause for anxiety, but could buy bread for his wife and children with his gold, and wine into the bargain. He lived joyously and honorably, gave help to the poor, and did good to every one. When the money came to an end, however, he went to his brother, borrowed a measure that held a bushel, and brought himself some more, but did not touch any of the most valuable things. When for the third time he wanted to fetch something, he again borrowed the measure of his brother. But the rich man had long been envious of his brother's possessions, and of the handsome household which he kept up, and could not understand whence the riches came, and what his brother wanted with the measure. Then he thought of a cunning trick and covered the bottom of the measure with pitch, and when he got the measure back a piece of gold was sticking to it. He at once went to his brother and asked him: "What have you been measuring in the bushel measure?" "Corn and barley," said the other. Then he showed him the piece of gold and threatened that if he did not tell the truth he would accuse him before a court of justice. The poor man then told him everything, just as it had happened. So the rich man ordered his carriage to be made ready and drove away, resolved to use the opportunity better than his brother had done, and to bring back with him quite different treasures.

When he came to the mountain he cried: "Semsi mountain, Semsi mountain, open up." The mountain opened, and he went inside it. There lay the treasures all before him, and for a long time he did not know which to grab first. At length he loaded himself with as many precious stones as he could carry. He wished to carry his burden outside, but as his heart and soul were entirely full of the treasures, he had forgotten the name of the mountain, and cried: "Simeli mountain, Simeli mountain, open up." That, however, was not the right name, and the mountain never stirred, but remained shut. Then he was alarmed, and the longer he thought about it the more his thoughts confused themselves, and all his treasures were of no help to him. In the evening the mountain opened, and the twelve robbers came in, and when they saw him they laughed, and cried out: "Bird, have we caught you at last!

Did you think we had never noticed that you had been in here twice? We could not catch you then; this third time you shall not get out again!" Then he cried: "It was not I, it was my brother," but let him beg for his life and say what he would, they cut off his head.



ṭua - ṭuau *Rā* *χeft* *uben - f* *em* *χut* *ábtet* *ent* *pet*

An adoration of Rā when he riseth in the horizon eastern of heaven.

The Legend of Rā and Isis

Now Isis was a woman who possessed words of power; her heart was wearied with the millions of men, therefore she chose the millions of the gods, but she esteemed more highly the millions of the spirits (*khu*). And she meditated in her heart, saying, "Cannot I by means of the sacred name of God make myself mistress of the earth and become a goddess like unto Rā in heaven and upon earth?" Now behold, each day Rā entered at the head of his holy mariners and established himself upon the throne of the two horizons. Now the divine one [i.e., Rā] had grown old, he dribbled at the mouth, his spittle fell upon the earth, and his slobbering dropped upon the ground. And Isis kneaded it with earth in her hand, and formed thereof a sacred serpent in the form of a dart; she did not set it upright before her face, but let it lie upon the ground in the path whereby the great god went forth, according to his heart's desire, into his double kingdom.

Now the holy god arose, and the gods who followed him as though he were Pharaoh went with him; and he came forth according to his daily wont; and the sacred serpent bit him. The flame of life departed from him, and he who dwelt among the cedars was overcome. The holy god opened his mouth, and the cry of his majesty reached unto heaven; his company of gods said, "What hath happened?" and his gods exclaimed, "What is it?" But Rā could not answer, for his jaws trembled and all his members quaked; the poison spread swiftly through his flesh just as the Nile rusheth through all his land. When the great god had established his heart, he cried unto those who were in his train, saying, "Come unto me, O ye who have come into being from my body, ye gods who have come forth from me, make ye known unto Khepera that a dire calamity hath fallen upon me . . . I came forth to look upon that which I had made, I was passing through the world which I had created, when lo! something stung me, but what I knew not. Is it fire? Is it water? My heart is on fire, my flesh quaketh, and trembling hath seized all my limbs. Let there be brought unto me my children, the gods, who possess the words of power and magical speech, and mouths which know how to utter them, and also powers which reach even unto the heavens."

Then the children of every god came unto him uttering cries of grief. And Isis also came, bringing with her her words of magical power, and her mouth was full of the breath of life; for her talismans vanquish the pains of sickness, and her words make to live again the throats of those who are dead. And she spake, saying, "What hath come to pass, O holy Father? What hath happened? Is it that a serpent hath bitten thee, and that a thing which thou hast created hath lifted up his head against thee? Verily it shall be cast down by my effective words of power, and I will drive it away from before the sight of thy sunbeams." The holy god opened his mouth and said, "I was passing along my path, and I was going through the two regions of my lands according to my heart's desire, to see that which I had created, when lo! I was bitten by a serpent which I saw not." . . . Then said Isis unto Rā, "O tell me thy name, holy Father, for whosoever shall be delivered by thy name shall live." And Rā said, "I have made the heavens and the earth, I have knit together the mountains, I have created all that is above them, I have made the water, I have made to come into being the goddess Meht-urt, and I have made the Bull of his mother, from whom spring the delights of love. . . . I am Khepera in the morning, I am Rā at noon, and I am Temu at evening." Meanwhile the poison was not taken away from his body, but it pierced deeper, and the great god could no longer walk.

Then said Isis unto Rā, "What thou hast said is not thy name. O tell it unto me, and the poison shall depart; for he shall live whose name shall be revealed." Now the poison burned like fire, and it was fiercer than the flame and the furnace, and the majesty of the great god said, "I consent that Isis shall search into me, and that my name shall pass from me into her." Then the god hid himself from the gods, and his place in the Boat of Millions of Years was empty. And when the time had arrived for the heart of Rā to come forth, Isis spake unto her son Horus, saying, "The god hath bound himself by oath to deliver up his two eyes [i.e., the sun and moon]." Thus was the name of the great god taken from him, and Isis, the lady of words of magical power, said, "Depart, poison, go forth from Rā. O Eye of Horus, go forth from the god, and shine outside his mouth. It is I who work, it is I who make to fall down upon the earth the vanquished poison, for the name of the great god hath been taken away from him. Let Rā live, and let the poison die! Let the poison die, and let Rā live!" These are the words of Isis, the mighty lady, the mistress of the gods, who knew Rā by his own name.

Adapted with permission from *Egyptian Magic* by E.A. Wallis Budge, Citadel Press, 1978.

Glory

THOMAS DOOLING

"But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument,'" Alice objected. "When *I* use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."

—Lewis Carroll,
Through the Looking Glass

Our society is becoming increasingly inarticulate. We use words, to be sure; in fact we are drowning in them. We are inundated with the shapeless and meaningless words of modern music from our radios, with words from our telephones—and now telephones are becoming cordless so that we cannot ever be free from them—and from television and computer-generated newspapers, lists, magazines, and so on ad nauseam. It is so easy to put words on paper, or expose them over the radio or via the telephone or on record or on tape, that today anybody can have his voice heard, and does.

I do not decry this fact in and of itself. The problem is that we have made words cheap, and in so doing, shouldn't be surprised that they no longer have value.

When I was a law student, the subject of "law latin" came up in one of my more practical courses, like Evidence or Civil Procedure. I recall my classics-trained sensitivity cringing when the professor, a trial attorney and legal authority of some potency in the profession, enunciated the following theory on its use and pronunciation. "Don't use it," he said. "But if you must, pronounce it the way the judge did. If the judge didn't use it, and you still feel the fatal urge, pronouce it however you want to, but in a loud, clear, *confident* tone of voice."

Where he missed the boat, I thought then and still think now, is that "law latin" like "law french" is not only used to blow away a judge, but at least occasionally because it has a specific

meaning not confused by modern connotation. When a lawyer rattles off "*res ipsa loquitur*" he is not just impressing the civilians, but is making a very compact reference to a specific legal doctrine with specific and known meanings.

It has been my experience in the years since then that one of the most commonly held lay opinions of lawyers is that we don't "speak English." By the same token, it has been my experience and understanding of my fellow lawyers that we tend to regard the written word, the "record," as somehow sacrosanct and especially worthy of trust, while the spoken word, as found either in casual conversation, telephone communication, or legal argument, is regarded as mutable, impermanent, and untrustworthy.

Personally, I have come to the belief that if I am to make any lasting contribution or achieve any real professional satisfaction, I can only do so in the form of the written word. The love affair over centuries between lawyers and the written word, the record, has been both caused by and is a cause of the organic nature of the common law, made up as it is of written reports of judicial decisions going back in some cases as far as seven or eight hundred years. For a lawyer, immortality often consists of his association with—if not his authorship of—some important case. The words men write often live on after their good deeds have been forgotten.

The body of the common law, the living portion of that vast reef of written material that constitutes the reported decisions of the judges of our civilization going back to the time of William the Conqueror, includes writing and thinking that ranges from the magnificent to the ludicrous, embodies decisions from the epochal to the retrograde, and contains within it a "secret code." This "secret code," a kind of reading between the lines, is a distillation of how a representative cross section of honestly striving, educated, and intelligent men have carefully expressed their understanding of some aspect of Christ's second great commandment, to love our neighbors as ourselves.

From His two commandments, said Christ, "hang all the law and the prophets." Today, however, the legal professions seems to want to hang the law and go for the profits. Of course, my doom-saying about the state of the law is not significantly different from Micawber's of a hundred years ago or Richard II's before him. Still, one area of the law is now changing, not only at a rate faster than that of its previous change, but in a way that is—frighteningly—different. The distinction between the written word—what could be called verbal—and the unwritten or "oral" word seems to be blurring. Without that distinction, the quality of the written word and record that we leave for the future may deteriorate to the point of extinction.

The mechanism of creeping imprecision in legal writing seems to me to be at least threefold. The first is the mechanical ease of recording and promulgating written words. Second is our growing reliance upon recorded *oral* statements rather than documents. The third is the overall deterioration of linguistic communication.

Both as a lawyer and as a writer, I am hardly blameless, and am even somewhat hypocritical in my criticism of the technological aids to recording words that have become available to the legal profession during my lifetime. This very article was "written" by dictation into a miniature hand-held tape recorder and then transcribed onto a computer-controlled word processing system for storage and editing. The words of which this article (and indeed all the legal writing which I do) are made up, have become for me much more easily manipulated and therefore,

I suspect, I take them more lightly. Yet, does not the relative physical ease with which I can now write impose upon me a correspondingly greater burden to utilize the time thus saved to write with greater care, precision, and clarity?

The law, which still retains some of its fascination with words, still refers to a legal wordsmith, or draftsman, as a "scrivener," a word stemming from the same roots as "scribe," "scripture," and "scribble." I confess to being fond of the word, although every time I use it, it conjures up a mental image of a Dickensian clerk on a high stool scratching away in a laborious Spencerian hand with a quill pen dipped in liquid ink—a far cry from the way in which legal drafting is done today. It is perhaps the separation of the legal draftsman from the laborious, and therefore careful, scrivening of his words that leads him into the temptation of quick verbal imprecision and, inevitably, to mental sloppiness. If the written expression of a thought is fuzzy, the thought itself remains unclear and incapable of being communicated effectively.

A second trend in modern law which is removing it ever further from the cool, calculated precision of the written word is our increasing tendency to create and keep part, if not all, of the previously-mentioned, all-important "record" in *oral* form.

Two or three centuries ago, courtroom proceedings were recorded in the form of notes taken by clerks which were then used to re-create the gist of what had actually taken place in the courtroom. I am sure that the great jurists of eighteenth-century England and America must occasionally have succumbed to the temptation of buffing up the record of their courtroom rhetoric by the simple expedient of "assisting" the clerks in reconstructing the events of the day.

In the nineteenth century, the invention of shorthand permitted the taking of verbatim notes which could be laboriously hand-transcribed when necessary. Later, the invention of the stenotype machine increased the speed and accuracy with which reporters could record the actual statements of lawyers and witnesses in the courtroom, and the typewriter permitted more efficient transcription of these notes into a written and permanently stored record.

Of course, the documentation of a legal case did and does not consist purely of the proceedings in the courtroom at the trial, but of recorded depositions—transcripts of examinations of witnesses under oath but outside the courtroom—and of other documents written during the course of preparation for trial and argument prior to trial.

In any case, the final record of each case consisted of selected excerpts, all of which had been recorded, transcribed, copied, and recopied by *people*, all of whom had been, at one time or another, subject to the temptation to clarify or beautify otherwise infelicitous phrases—either for purely esthetic purposes or to modify an evidentiary point. Modern aids now permit recording the words of witnesses, through stenotypic recordation by a skilled technician, in a computer program and then into a transcript of written words. At present, the technique still requires some human participation, in order to "make sense" of the uttered words as they emerge on the page. (Computers can't make sense of what people say. At least, they can't do it *yet*.)

Increasingly, courts and lawyers are taking to using direct audio and video tape recordings in the courtroom. Arguments are strongly advanced for the use of what are called "video deposition" for preserving the testimony of witnesses who cannot appear at the trial. There are those who also argue

for preserving the transcript of testimony of a trial for review by a superior court by video and sound recording. The argument is that, in the determination of truth and falsity, a great deal of weight must be given to the observation of what the law calls the "demeanor of the witness." In other words, jurors and judges alike, and now apparently appellate judges as well, may observe nervous mannerisms, methods of speaking, facial expressions, tones of voice, and the like in weighing the probable truth of testimony. The fact that appellate courts, in reviewing decisions of trial courts, are not traditionally supposed to substitute their judgment for the trial court's factual findings, but merely to review the procedure in that court to determine whether or not legal error has been committed, does not seem to deter the proponents of TV courtrooms one whit. The journals are full of photographs and artist's renditions of what the so-called "courtroom of tomorrow" will look like, with its projectors, its TV screens, and its multiple concealed TV cameras that will record in the minutest detail every facial twitch and hiccup of every participant in every trial.

What frightens me as a lawyer is that the process of making tape record-

ings of everything and keeping them is another phenomenon of our computerized age that is nonselective. There is no discrimination involved. There is no distillation of what is essential from the record and discarding of the rest. While in the past distillation may have changed the essence, nondistillation may bury it completely. While there may be something theoretically offensive about both practices, I continue to prefer the former because it at least involves a process of informed choice. I suspect that any changes that are made in the essence in the process of distillation tend to push the record towards, rather than away from, the ideal.

A third factor leading to the deterioration of our understanding and use of words in law—and elsewhere—may be nothing more than another inevitable result of our computer-age desire to keep everything indiscriminately stored on magnetic tape.

It has been suggested that electronic storage, broadcasting, recording, and dissemination, if they destroy literacy, will be doing our civilization a service by returning us to the earlier and better days of the oral tradition. Theoretically, I can sympathize with that position. However, the civilization that spawned Homer or the later societies that created the Norse sagas and Beowulf were far smaller and simpler than the civilization in which, willy-nilly, we must live. It is also said that seven great cities claimed Homer, dead, through which, alive, he begged his bread. We not only have to bear in mind that the oral tradition of the world in which Homer lived did not provide him many rewards, but must also remember that the greatest of these "great cities" was, by the standards of either modern America or modern Greece, a fairly small town.

Both our small-town law and our small-town societies have their oral traditions, even today. But the "oral traditions" of a small town in Montana and of one in upstate New York are foreign to each other, just as were those of Homer's Corinth and Alexan-

dria were self-sufficient civilizations and societies, our small towns are not. An oral tradition will not serve to bind together a large and complex society, in which it is a mathematical certainty that no single individual will ever meet, much less know, more than a miniscule fraction of his contemporaries.

The oral tradition can neither disseminate nor preserve the complexities of modern knowledge. This is, I think, the logical fallacy which belies Ray Bradbury's otherwise fascinating *Fahrenheit 451*. When the latter-day barbarians finally destroy our libraries and ban our books, there will be no underground of people large enough to preserve and pass on the totality of human insight that is recorded in written words. The burning of the library in Alexandria was a tragedy, diminishing the lives of the entire human race since then. If, as I understand, the Chinese are presently destroying the ancient records of the Tibetan lamaseries, it is also a tragedy of awesome proportions, because there is real and true knowledge of the human race which is preserved, at present, only within those scrolls awaiting the time when it shall, in its turn, be reawakened to live among men again for a time. The insidious but nonetheless real destruction of our ability to record a *distillation* of our thoughts, as individuals, as representatives of our civilization, and perhaps, from time to time, as avatars of something bigger, is, in my mind, as great a tragedy, and as avoidable.

The clarity and precision with which we speak informs the clarity and exactitude of our thought. In my own case, my thoughts on any topic are little better than amorphous until I have at least attempted to articulate them and express them in words. To the extent that my words are vague, poorly understood or poorly expressed, my thoughts may be stillborn.

In every walk of life we encounter examples of verbal inexactitude. Perhaps as much from resentment at being corrected as from any other wellspring, young people often say, "What difference does it make? You knew what I meant." This is particularly in response to the use of "whatchamacallit," "whats his name," or nonverbal gestures accompanied by grunts. And why should young people be inspired to be articulate? In their steady fare of television "drama," they see thought expressed, not in words, but by action—usually direct and brutal—accompanied by musical conventions. No wonder they're not verbal! They often "communicate" in terms of shared visual experience: they watched the same television show in which any words that may have been spoken are entirely eclipsed by the power of the visual image.

It is often clear to me in conversations with young people that they have a vivid mental image which they are totally incapable of communicating to anyone who does not already share it, and that many conceive communication to consist merely of shared reliving of a common experience without anything new being transmitted from one side to the other.

In our complex civilization in which relationship of people to each other may be one of the few shreds of meaning left, the words with which we describe relationships are vastly important. And law, in my view, is more concerned with understanding relationships, or the consequences of not understanding them, than with anything else. Words of causality, connection, and relative position, both in a purely three-dimensional sense as well as in a moral sense, are fast vanishing from the language, and they are also beginning to disappear from the specialized language of lawyers.

For example, a term which used to appear in every contract was the word

"*Witnesseth.*" A contract used to say, literally, that "This agreement, made some certain date, by and between the parties, whose names are thus and so, and live in such and such a place, *Witnesseth* that, since thus and thus and so is true and this and that is also true, the parties agree to do this and that."

Today, when a lawyer sets out to write a contract, he discards that ancient form as too fustian for his purposes and, considering that the old contract doesn't even appear to be grammatical, he writes something approximately as follows: "This agreement is made on such and such a date between such and such parties who live at such and such addresses. The parties recite the following things to be true and to constitute reasons for entering into their contract. The parties therefore agree to do the following things: so on and so forth."

In discarding the old form, we have lost sight of the fact that in and of itself, and on its very face, it was a memorial and a living witness to the pact between the parties.

Another ancient form falling into desuetude is that of "Know all men by these presents . . . ," a formulation which used to open declaratory documents executed by a single individual, such as deeds, declarations of trust, wills, and powers of attorney. The old form constituted a public utterance of a man's intention and commitment before his community to do and perform a certain act. Maybe it's too risky to use, now?

Two other terms which, it seems to me, lawyers no longer understand well are "malice" and "intent."

"Malice," in its commonly understood sense, means "bearing ill will towards" someone. It is falling into disuse in law because malice is now thought of as somehow *malignant*, or even, perish the thought, *evil*.

We are reluctant, nowadays, when "non-blaming" is encouraged, "value judgments" are old-fashioned, anti-progressive, or downright destructive, to label behavior as "good" or "bad." As lawyers, we shy away from characterizing an act as malicious since it seems to contain a moralistic judgment. We are taught that we should not condemn the personality, but only the behavior.

What we forget is that "malice" in its original legal sense meant "wrong doing," and an act was characterized as malicious if it consisted of wrongdoing either in a known, intentional, and moral sense, or if it consisted of breaking the law.

By way of a very crude analogy, if I hit a child with my car, I have been negligent. If I hit a child with my car while I am breaking some other law, even one as morally unfreighted as the speed laws, my behavior is still, as a legal matter, malicious.

As lawyers, we are no longer being trained to understand the history, the etymology, the past, the "biography" of words. A word like "malice" is totally nonjudgmental, and contains within it a wealth of specific meaning in regard to the relative legal positions of the parties. In discarding the word because it is "old-fashioned" and "judgmental," we lawyers are not improving the breed, but revealing our own inability.

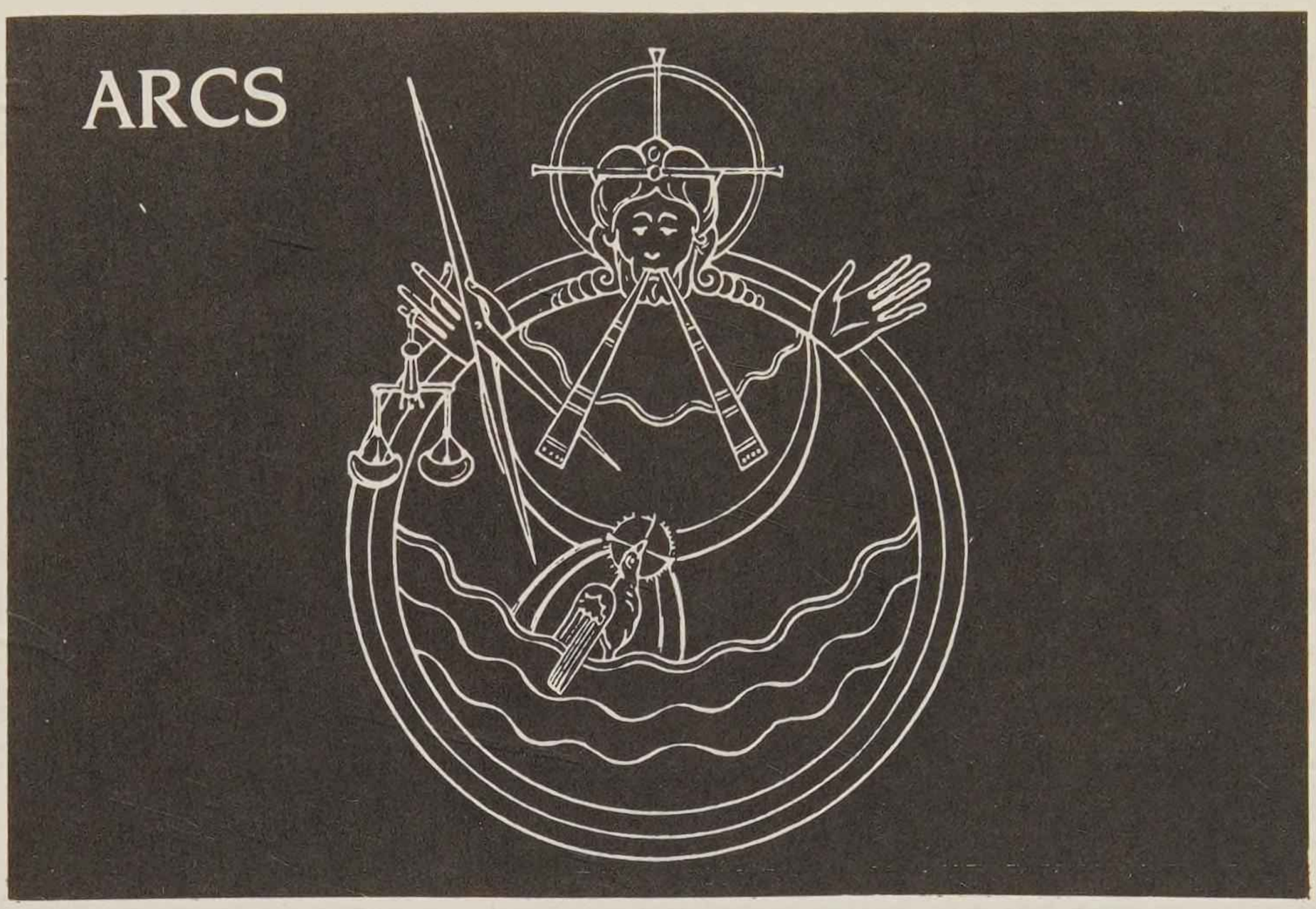
"Intention" is another word with which modern lawyers have problems. Young lawyers wrestle with it in cases where intent is a part of the element of the offense charged, whether criminal or civil, and one or another of the parties involved was acting under the influence of some form of temporary insanity, whether or not self-induced. "How then," they argue, "can my client be found to have intended the damage he did, when at the time of striking the blow he was incapable of forming the requisite mental impulse to constitute what psychologists understand to be intention?"

Lawyers are not like Humpty Dumpty. We do not make words mean what we wish them to mean. But this does not excuse us from the obligation of understanding what they do mean and using them in that sense. If we understand that "intention," as used by lawyers for generations, means "to act, of one's own free will," in such a manner as to cause a result which would have been foreseeable by a reasonable man acting in similar circumstances, we resolve many of the dilemmas raised by this word.

One of these is the doctrine of "transferred intent." This doctrine underlies the so-called "felony murder rule," which is currently under scrutiny because of its involvement in the death of John Belushi in California. By that doctrine, an individual who commits a felony of any sort can be charged with murder if, as a foreseeable consequence of the train of events set in motion by the felony, someone dies. For instance, in a celebrated California case, a bank robber was found guilty of murder when, in the confusion surrounding the robbery, one policeman accidentally shot and killed another.

Young lawyers decry the rule on the grounds that the bank robber certainly did not intend the death of the police officer and was not, in fact, even there when the shooting occurred. However, we can consider that the bank robber certainly intended to commit the original felony of holding up the bank. The fact that tense, excited, armed police officers would arrive at the scene was foreseeable. It's also foreseeable that, sooner or later, under such circumstance, a gun will probably be fired and a bullet may hit someone. It seems to me perfectly justifiable that an individual, such as a bank robber, who takes gun in hand to force property from another in violence, be found guilty of having "intentionally" caused the death of the police officer. After all, but for the malicious acts of the robber, the officer would probably have been engaged in a policeman's primary function, which is drinking coffee, not being shot at.

Humpty Dumpty asks which is to be master; himself, or the word that he uses. By implication, the question is whether the word should compel the thought, or the thought the word. Humpty Dumpty raises a question, but it's the wrong one. The question is not whether the word or the speaker shall be master, but whether the two together shall serve, correctly, the thought. ■



In the Beginning . . .

The sound Om is Brahman . . . . You hear the roar of the ocean from a distance. By following the roar you can reach the ocean. As long as there is the roar, there must also be the ocean. By following the trail of Om you attain Brahman, of which the Word is the symbol.[1]

—Sri Ramakrishna

God can do nothing but speak the Eternal Word. If we are to be we must do and our doing is hearing the Eternal Word.

God is the Word which pronounces itself. Where God exists he is saying this Word: where he does not exist he says nothing. God is spoken and unspoken.[2]

—Meister Eckhart

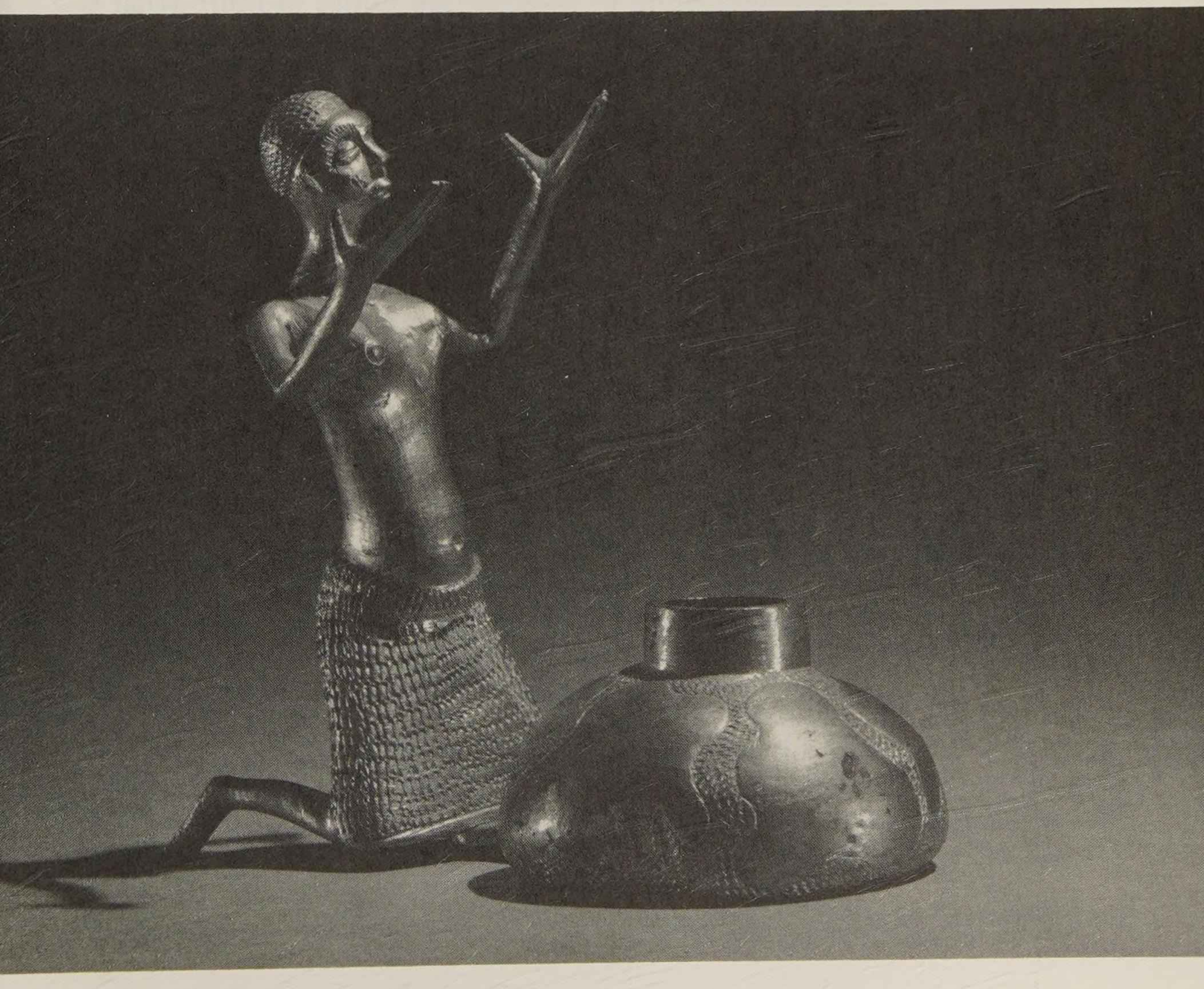
The purpose of all prayer is to uplift the words,
to return them to their source above.
The world was created
by the downward flow of letters:
The task of man is to form those letters into words
and take them back to God.
If you come to know this dual process,
your prayer may be joined
to the constant flow of Creation—
word to word, voice to voice,
breath to breath, thought to thought.[3]

—Liqqutim Yeqarim

A man or woman, suddenly frightened by fire, or death, or what you will, is suddenly in his extremity of spirit, driven hastily and by necessity to cry or pray for help. And how does he do it? Not, surely, with a spate of words; not even in a single word of two syllables! Why? He thinks it wastes too much time to declare his urgent need and his agitation. So he bursts out in his terror with one little word, and that of a single syllable: "Fire!" it may be, or "Help!"

Just as this little word stirs and pierces the ears of the hearers more quickly, so too does a little word of one syllable, when it is not merely spoken or thought, but expresses also the intention in the depth of our spirit. Which is the same as the "height" of our spirit, for in these matters height, depth, length, and breadth all mean the same. And it pierces the ears of Almighty God more quickly than any long psalm churned out unthinkingly. That is why it is written, "Short prayer penetrates heaven."[4]

—*The Cloud of Unknowing*



One must learn to pray, just as one must learn everything else. Whoever knows how to pray and is able to concentrate in the proper way, his prayer can give results. But it must be understood that there are different prayers and that their results are different. This is known even from ordinary divine service. But when we speak of prayer or of the results of prayer we always imply only one kind of prayer—petition, or we think that petition can be united with all other kinds of prayers. This of course is not true. Most prayers have nothing in common with petitions. I speak of ancient prayers; many of them are much older than Christianity. These prayers are, so to speak, *recapitulations*; by repeating them aloud or to himself a man endeavors to experience what is in them, their whole content, with his mind and his feeling.

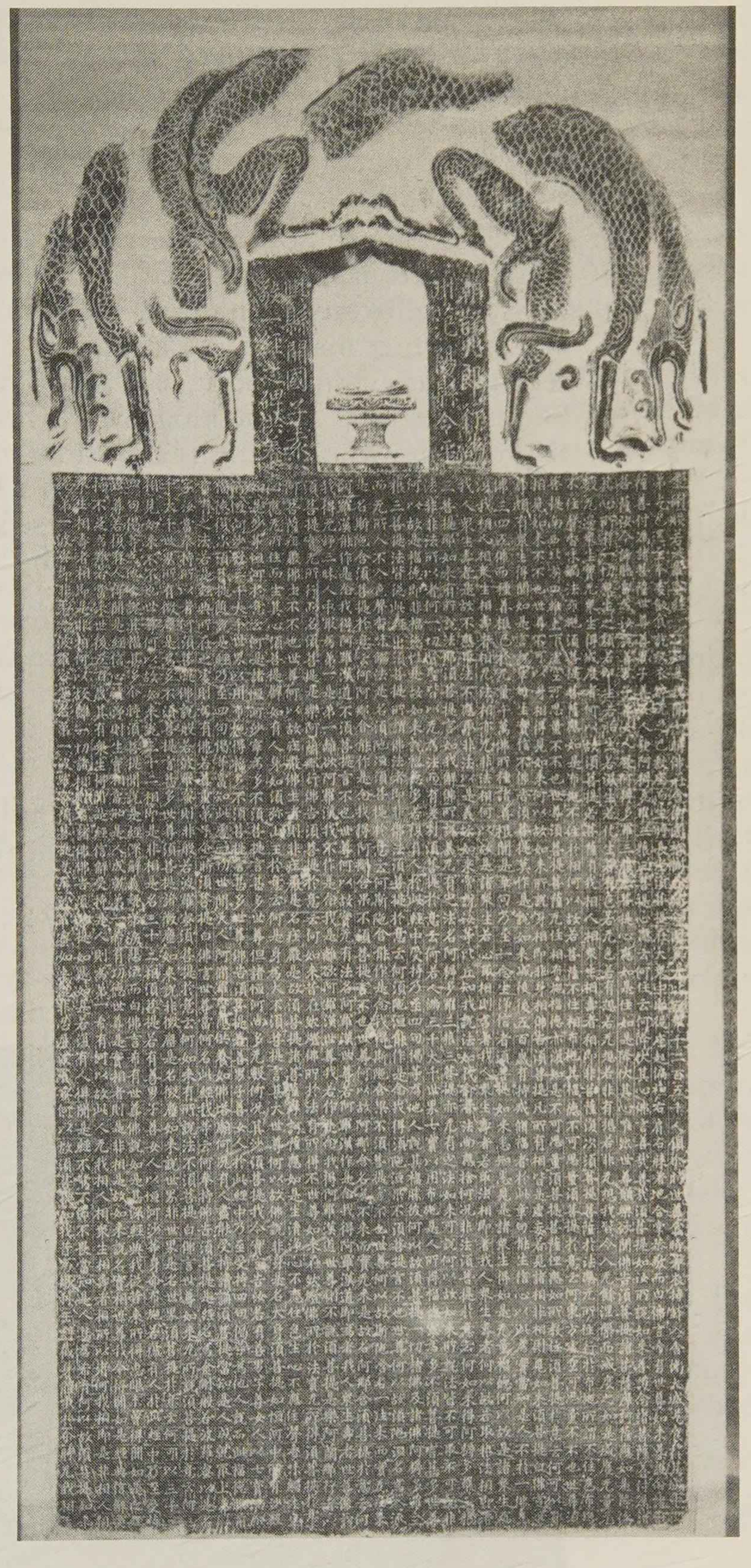
In Christian worship there are very many prayers . . . where it is necessary to reflect upon each word. But they lose all sense and all meaning when they are repeated or sung mechanically.

Take the ordinary *God have mercy upon me!* What does it mean? A man is appealing to God. He should think a little, he should make a comparison and ask himself what God is and what he is. Then he is asking God to have *mercy* upon him. But for this God must first of all *think of him, take notice of him*. But is it worth while taking notice of him? What is there in him that is worth thinking about? And who is to think about him? God himself. You see, all these thoughts and yet many others should pass through his mind when he utters this simple prayer. *And then it is precisely these thoughts which could do for him what he asks God to do*. But what can he be thinking of and what result can a prayer give if he merely repeats like a parrot: "God have mercy! God have mercy! God have mercy!" You know yourself that this can give no result whatever.[5]

—*G.I. Gurdjieff*

When you speak, think that the World of Speech is
at work within you,
for without that presence,
you would not be able to speak at all.
Similarly, you would not think at all were it not
for the World of Thought within you.
Man is like a ram's horn;
the only sound he makes is
that which is blown through him.
Were there no one blowing into the horn,
there would be no sound at all.[6]

—*Maggid Devaraw Le-Ya'aqov*



A word is not a crystal, transparent and unchanged; it is the skin of a living thought and may vary greatly in color and content according to the circumstances and time in which it is used.[7]

—*Oliver Wendell Holmes*

Words and deeds are quite indifferent modes of the divine energy. Words are also actions, and actions are a kind of words.[8]

—*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

. . . as soon as one scratches the surface of the familiar and comes face to face with the nature of language, one also finds himself face to face with the nature of man. What took place when the first man uttered a mouthy little sound and the second man understood it, not as a sign to be responded to, but as "meaning" something they beheld in common? The first creature who did this is almost by minimal definition the first man . . . . Naming is unique in natural history because for the first time a being in the universe stands apart from the universe and affirms some other being to be what it is.[9]

—*Walker Percy*

And he called the multitude, and said unto them, hear and understand:

Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.

—*Matthew 15:11*

I must tell you that in our brotherhood there are two very old brethren; one is called Brother Ahl and the other Brother Sez. These brethren have voluntarily undertaken the obligation of periodically visiting all the monasteries of our order and explaining various aspects of the essence of divinity.

Our brotherhood has four monasteries, one of them ours, the second in the valley of the Pamir, the third in Tibet, and the fourth in India. And so these brethren, Ahl and Sez, constantly travel from one monastery to another and preach there.

They come to us once or twice a year. Their arrival at our monastery is considered among us a very great event. On the days when either of them is here, the soul of every one of us experiences pure heavenly pleasure and tenderness.

The sermons of these two brethren, who are to an almost equal degree holy men and who speak the same truths, have nevertheless a different effect on all our brethren and on me in particular.

When Brother Sez speaks, it is indeed like the song of the birds in Paradise; from what he says one is quite, so to say, turned inside out; one becomes as though entranced. His speech "purls" like a stream and one no longer wishes anything else in life but to listen to the voice of Brother Sez.

But Brother Ahl's speech has almost the opposite effect. He speaks badly and indistinctly, evidently because of his age. No one knows how old he is. Brother Sez is also very old—it is said three hundred years old—but he is still a hale old man, whereas in Brother Ahl the weakness of old age is clearly evident.

The stronger the impression made at the moment by the words of Brother Sez, the more this impression evaporates, until there ultimately remains in the hearer nothing at all.

But in the case of Brother Ahl, although at first what he says makes almost no impression, later, the gist of it takes on a definite form, more and more each day, and is instilled as a whole into the heart and remains there for ever.

When we became aware of this and began trying to discover why it was so, we came to the unanimous conclusion that the sermons of Brother Sez proceeded only from his mind, and therefore acted on our minds, whereas those of Brother Ahl proceeded from his being and acted on our being.[10]

—G.I. Gurdjieff

What is originality? To *see* something that has no name as yet and hence cannot be mentioned though it stares us all in the face. The way men usually are, it takes a name to make something visible for them. Those with originality have for the most part also assigned names.[11]

—Friedrich Nietzsche

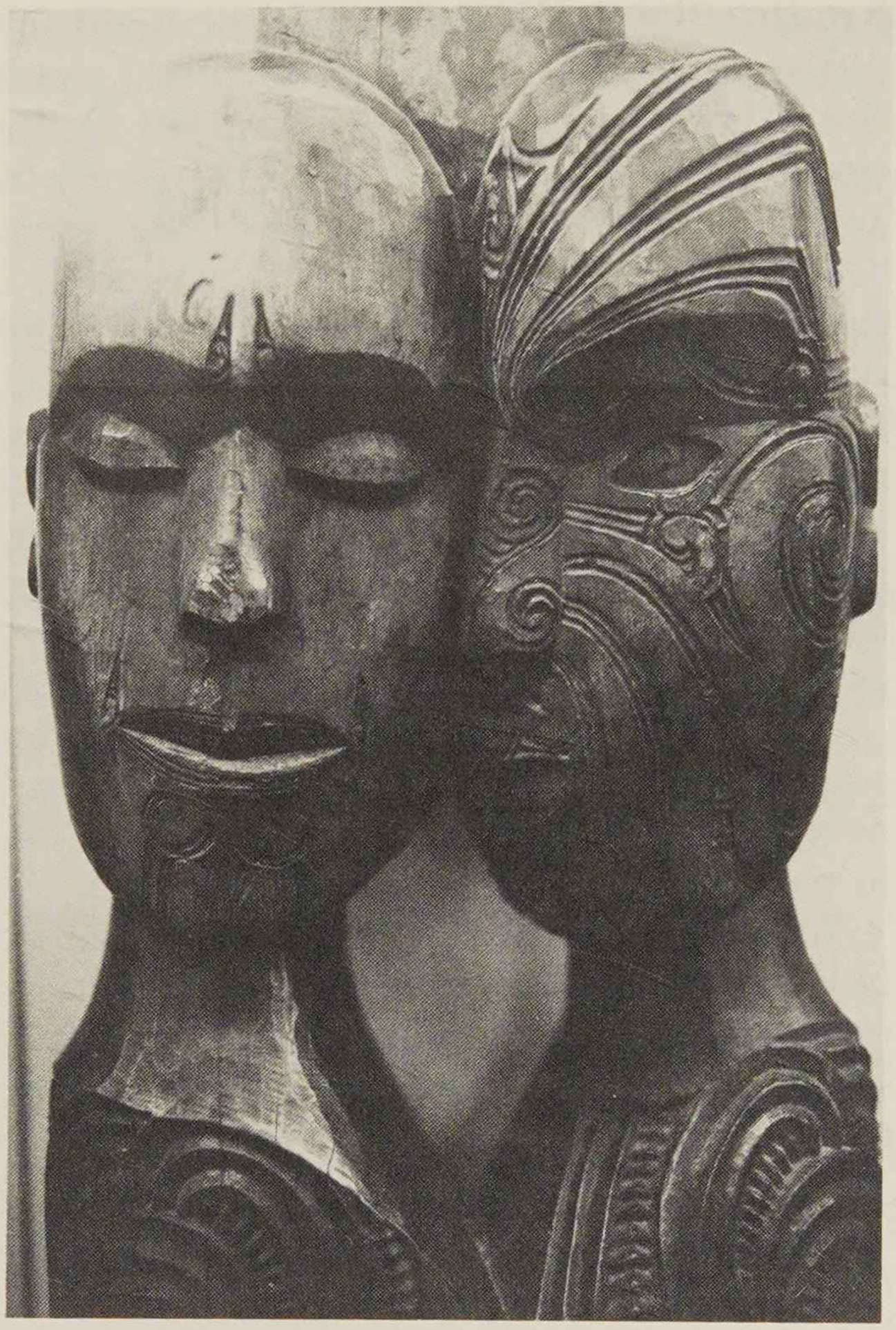


Photo by Helen Buttfield

It is an occasion of great psychological significance when one speaks to one person or to many persons, because it has its echoes in the cosmos. No word spoken is ever lost. It remains and it vibrates; and it vibrates according to the spirit put into it.[12]

—*Inayat Khan*

The smashers of language are looking for a new justice among words. It does not exist. Words are unequal and unjust.[13]

—*Elias Canetti*

Words exist because of meaning; once you've got the meaning, you can forget the words. Where can I find a man who has forgotten words so I can have a word with him?[14]

—*Chuang Tzu*

Wheresoever manners and fashions are corrupted, language is. It imitates the public riot.[15]

—*Ben Jonson*

And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.

And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there.

And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them throughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.

And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.

And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.

Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad on the face of all the earth.

—*Genesis 11:1-9*

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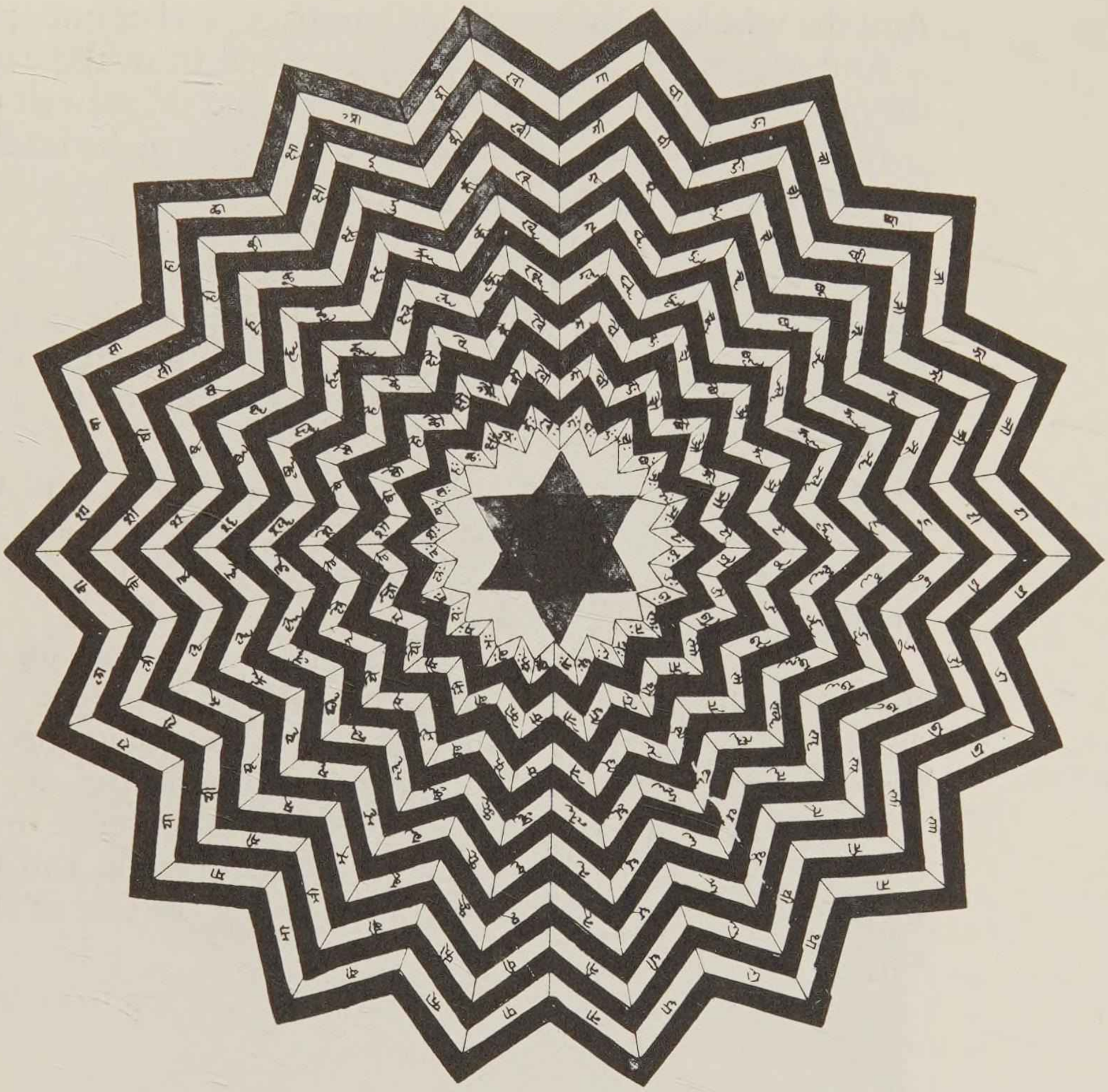


Regression Toward the Real

HARVEY ALPER

Nearly ten years ago, the *New Yorker* published an essay by F.P. Tullius entitled "Mantras for Everyone." In that essay Tullius recounted a sort of counter-epiphany: "On a summer Sunday in San Francisco," at the corner of Sutter and Fillmore Streets, he realized that "mantras don't really have to mean anything, but their sounds are terrifically important." Thus liberated from the oppressive hold of ritual and semantic conventions, Tullius proceeded to compose some "mantras" of his own—mantras for the masses, one might say—in a kind of flip Middle Americanese:

Aam co trans mis sion
Aam co trans mis sion,

Bro moseltz erbro moseltz
Erbro moseltz erbro . . . ,

and, with a nod at contemporary India,

Conduc torzu binmeh ta
Conduc torzu binmeh ta.

For Tullius, since mantras were meaningless, any morpheme in the language might function mantrically and might, he seemed to imply, refer equally to anything at all or to nothing whatsoever.

Just a few months later, across the

bay in Oakland, the S.Y.D.A. Foundation brought out a tract entitled *Siddha Meditation*. In that volume Swami Muktananda, a contemporary Hindu "missionary" to the West representing a traditional tantric preceptorial line, offered a brief interpretation of the *Śivasūtras*, an anonymous text presumably written during the middle of the first millenium A.D. The second section of the *Śivasūtras* deals with the "spiritual path of Śiva's divine capacities" (*śaktis*). Its first verse says: "*citta*, consciousness, is mantra."[1] Swami Muktananda comments:

> Parashiva is the cause of the universe; from Him alone the entire gross and subtle cosmos comes. His Shakti, Chiti, creates the world for Her sport, holds it in Her own being, and gathers it up into Herself. Thus deities, mantras, rules and rituals, time and space are all nothing but universal consciousness. The consciousness of unity pulsing within a seeker is mantra. The mantra practiser is Shiva, the mantra *namah Shivaya* is Shiva, and the Lord of the mantra—its goal—is Shiva. The secret of the realization of a mantra lies in repeating it, having identified oneself completely with Shiva.[2]

For Muktananda, in contrast to Tullius, mantra is a sacred term. Used in the singular, it refers to the totality of the cosmos as such; far from being meaningless, it is for him the sum and the source of meaning. Mantric utterance is classically held to be a form of human discourse whose scope is limitless. It is understood to be capable of effecting events far more miraculous than "moving mountains": it grounds human existence in truth; it is understood to have the power to eradicate all the ills which afflict human existence. Obviously modernity, East or West, is sceptical about many of the powers attributed to human consciousness in the Hindu tradition. As moderns we view ourselves as being at the mercy of forces which transcend us and which render us insignificant. Under these circumstances, is there any way to begin to understand mantric utterance and its place in the cultural cosmos of South Asia without—for me this is an indispensable qualification—uncritically accepting a purely "magical" view of the world?

An answer cannot come cheaply. To confront mantras abstracted from their context is to guarantee that they will strike us as unintelligible. We must examine them as acts of cognition informed by the various interlocking social, ritual, mythic, and philosophic frames of Indian civilization. One point of departure is a stylized narrative motif, probably found as early as the *Ṛgveda*, known as the "Act of Truth" and identified in Sanskrit by terms such as *satyakriyā, satyavacana* or *satya-mantra*.

An example of the Act of Truth is found in the Jatakas:

> In a previous existence the Great Being, he who was destined to become the Buddha, was born in the seaport Bharukaccha (Broach) in a master mariner's family. Before he reached the age of sixteen he had become completely versed in the art of seamanship, and when his father died he became head of the mariners. So skillful was he that no ship with him on board ever came to harm. Unfortunately the sight in both his eyes was destroyed by salt spray. Nevertheless he was renowned as supreme in recognizing signs by feeling objects with his hand . . . .
>
> [At a certain time] a large group of merchants outfitted a seafaring expedition and looking about for a skipper decided that they wanted the blind mariner, in whose wisdom they had more confidence than in any other man's. Reluctantly he yielded to their importunities, and the ship with merchants and crew set sail, seven hundred souls in all. For seven days they had fair weather; then came an unseasonable wind and for four months they were tossed about, coming first to one ocean and then another, seeing fearful and wonderful sights . . .
>
> At last they came to the terrifying Vaḷabhāmukha ocean, where the water is sucked up on all sides until it rises as a

Śiva, Lord of the mantra, from a temple in Southern India.

great precipice leaving a pit at its bottom. The Great Being said to them, "Friends, no ship that has entered the Vaḷabhāmukha ocean can ever return from it. If this ship enters it, it is sure to be destroyed." At this all seven hundred persons on board in mortal terror uttered a cry like that of creatures burning in the Avīci hell. The Great Being reflected, "There is none other that can save these traders from death, but only I. I will save them by an Act of Truth." He said to them, "Quickly bathe me in perfumed water, clothe me in fresh garments, prepare me a full bowl, and set me in the ship's bow." They did so. The Future Buddha, taking the full bowl in his two hands and standing it in the ship's bow, then made the following Act of Truth: "So long as my memory serves me, since I reached the age of reason, I am not conscious of ever having deliberately injured a single living creature. By the power of this Truth Utterance may the ship return to safety!" Though the vessel had been journeying for four months, now as though invested with supernatural power, in a single day it went to Bharukaccha, and there leaping over a distance of eight *usabha* . . . came to rest on dry land at the mariner's door.[3]

What is one to make of such a tale? E.W. Burlingame defines the Act of Truth as "a formal declaration of fact, accompanied by a command or resolution or prayer that the purpose of the agent shall be accomplished." The unwary secularist might easily jump to the conclusion that one has here a hagiographical motif concerning the miracles of the saints. Nothing could be further from the case. According to the tradition, one need not have been a "realized being" or even a "renouncer" in order to have had and to have used an Act of Truth. On the contrary, as W. Norman Brown documents, Acts of Truth could be used by any person who performed their own duties perfectly, be they prostitutes, gamblers, thieves, or householders. What distinguishes an Act of Truth from, say, a truthful act, is the conjunction of two cultural convictions. One concerns the nature of truth, the other the power of certain sorts of human utterance. Brown eloquently describes the sort of truth presupposed:

> [It] is not mere factual or existential or empirical truth. It is not simple accuracy of statement concerning some fact or occurrence capable of comprehension or verification by our senses and so capable of description in physical terms, such as "It rained this morning" or "Babe Ruth hit three home runs yesterday!" Nor is it logical truth, truth reached by deduction from accepted premises. Rather, it is truth of life, personal integrity, truth in one's personal conduct in its totality, truth in acceptance of responsibilities and fulfillment of them. It is Truth as the metaphysical basis of the cosmic order, which for every human being—and each divine being as well—is the sanction and ethical basis of his actions.[4]

The Act of Truth is evidence of traditional India's faith in the efficacy of the right sort of human utterance. It is particularly striking because it was usually put into play in contexts the modern world would classify as secular. Needless to say, it has its counterparts in the intellectual and spiritual spheres. In the Veda one can already discern a complex of convictions affirming the world as an object of religious fascination: the conviction that there is a transcendent reality which is the ground and source of the ordinary world; that it is desirable to perceive that transcendent reality directly; and that certain privileged ones, through a special gift or through intense personal exertion, gain access to this unseen reality and give expression to it as poetic utterance, as the mantras collected orally as the *ṛgvedasaṃhitā*. The scholastic traditions arose in large measure in order to provide an exegesis of the Vedic word.

In Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist circles, systematic reflection on poetic and ritual utterance presupposed that truth was both experienced and expressed through well-crafted utterance. Only

later were elaborate meditative and cosmological schemes created to explain the experience of verbal transcendence. According to *Nyaya* tradition—*astitvaṃ jñeyatvam abhidheyatvaṃ*—"to be is to be knowable and nameable."

Everything that exists may well be nameable, but that does not mean that mantric utterance as ritual discourse may be easily comprehended. On the contrary, there is no scholarly consensus concerning the definition, classification, or post-Vedic development of mantras. Perhaps the best point of access is through that late, quasi-popular, "gnostic" movement known (at least in the West) as Tantrism. After the middle of the first millenium A.D., various forms of tantra refined the traditions of mantric utterance into a complex, subtle "science," *mantraśāstra*. In Tantric treatises, mantra for the first time emerges as a well-honed, systematic tool for the attainment of desirable goals, an integral part, if not the most significant instrument, of that spiritual quest known as *sādhanā*.

Among the various sorts of Tantrism, the literature of the Śaivism of Kashmir has something of a privileged position. Often learned, clear, and systematic, it can assist one in understanding the world-view implicit in mantric utterance.

A verse of Maheśvarānanda's *Mahārthamañjarī* says (I translate freely):

> "Mantra" refers to a perception which swallows up all discursive cognition; it shelters (*trāṇa*) one from the fear which arises in the sphere of Śiva's contraction [i.e., the ordinary world, the world of *karma* and *saṃsāra*]; it leads one to cognize (*manana*) Śiva's glorious ubiquity.

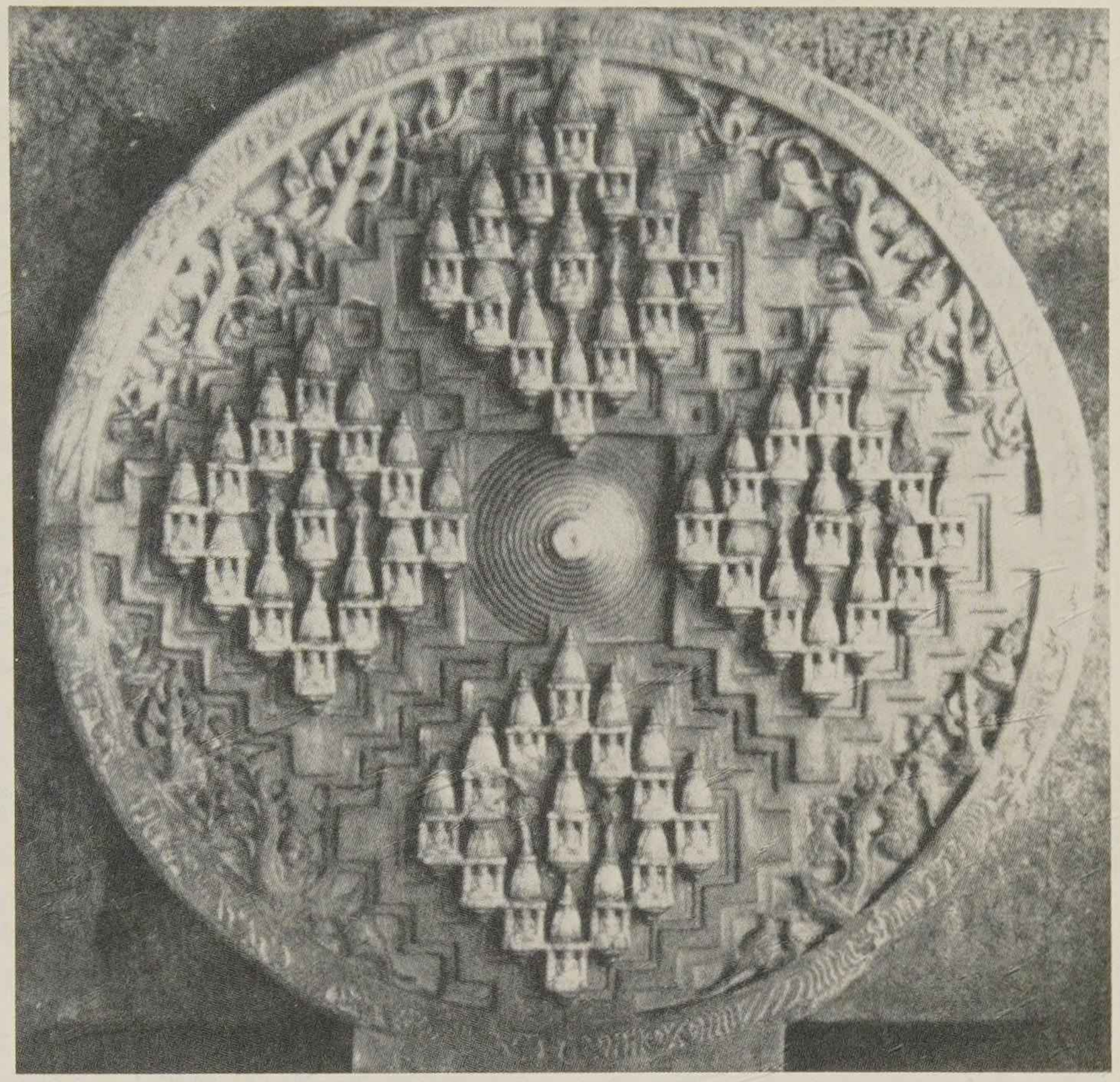
This verse makes use of the most common, if—as the authors themselves presumably well know—false tantric etymology of the word mantra. According to this tactical etymology, mantra means "soteriologic thought." A mantra is so called because it offers protection (*trāṇa*) from all ills, that is, because it saves (*trāṇa*) one from the bondage of *saṃsāra*. It does this because it is one with ultimate consciousness (*manana*) as such, free of limitations and duality.

The correlation of mantric utterance with ultimate reality, especially ultimate reality conceived as objectless consciousness, is not an invention of Tantrism. For example, a late Vedic text roughly contemporary with the principal *Upaniṣads* states: "the mantra [being referred to here] really is Brahman." It is with this more-than-thousand-year lineage that a tantric work such as the *Śiva Sūtras* identifies Śiva, who is consciousness, with mantra. Kṣemarāja (c. 1050 A.D.), one of the last major Kashmiri Śaiva thinkers, alludes to the derivation of the word mantra from the two verbs *man* and *trā*. The opening of his comment may be summarized as follows:

> Consciousness (*citta*) is that supreme reality (*paraṃ tattvam*) by means of which one functions cognitively; it is that awareness (*saṃvedana*) whose form is reflection upon [the mantras called] *Praṇava* [i.e., *Om*] and *Prāsāda* which are truly and fully real; mantra is that by the uttering of which the reality of the lord (*parameśvara*) is internally cognized as non-dual (*abheda*) . . . the term mantra is to be explained in terms of the fact of the cognition (*manana*) which is supreme and the fact of that cognition's being characterized by "salvation" (*trāṇa*), which amounts to the pacification of the cycles of duality (*bheda . . . saṃsāra*).[5]

Further insight can be gained by following up a lead of Kṣemarāja. It is probable that the mantra he denominates as *Prāsāda* (the word means something like "dais," e.g., in a throne room, but should not be taken literally) is one central to Kashmiri Saiva tantra: the *bīja* ("seed") mantra SAUḤ, known as the Heart-*bīja*.

According to Abhinavagupta (c. 1000 A.D.), the most creative and prolific of the Kashmiri Śaiva sages, SAUḤ is interpreted as built up from: S(A), the mantric form of Śiva as ultimate, the third level of Brahman; AU,



Temple ceiling in Western India with patterns symbolizing the unfolding of sábda, the sound element. Thirteenth century.

the mantric condensation of Śiva's potencies, his capacities to will, to cognize, and to act—his transcendence (*anuttura*) and beatitude (*ānanda*), his unfolding (*unmeṣa*) and contraction (*ūnatā*); and ḤḤ, Śiva as the externally emitted cosmos. In other words, SAUḤ is the refined mantric expression of Śiva's entire cosmic act. No wonder that Abhinava goes on to observe that he who utters the mantra SAUḤ correctly (who "attains" [*labh*] it, one might say "who sets it in motion") may obtain liberation while alive (*jīvanmukta*).

Informing this conception of the nature and function of mantras is a view of the cosmos whose origin is neither Śaivite nor tantric. According to this view, ultimate reality—call it Brahman—may be personified as the goddess Speech (Vāc). That *vāc* is hypostasized as a goddess should not obscure the fact that the concept is used as early as the *Ṛgveda* to draw attention to language as a human-cosmic potency. For example, in ṚV 8.100:10, in the same moment as being personified as a cow whose "milk and nourishment are fourfold," *vāc* is characterized as "discourse expressing the inexpressible [Brahman]." In the next verse *vāc* is portrayed as the "euphonious cow who dispenses nourishment and refreshment," as well as "the goddess begotten by the gods who is spoken by all manner of creatures." Even more suggestively, in ṚV 1.164:42 *vāc* is pictured as that cow who is the source of the sea, the support of the quarters of the sky, the support of the imperishable syllable on which everything lives. Clearly the *Ṛgveda* is in these (and similar) places

attempting to deal with the ground of the human capacity to speak, and of the world to be spoken.

Vāc does not and cannot exist simply in herself, as an inert monad. She exists embodied formally as the world of speech, as uttered in human discourse. It seems that even in the *Ṛgveda, vāc* denotes both the actual variety of human speech and that which makes speech possible. From the earliest time, *vāc* was conceived of as existentially multi-modal, as mythically polymorphous. Given the Vedic sensibility to the variety of both ritual and poetic utterances, it is not surprising that the Vedic age conceived of a theory of the three (or four) levels of *vāc* nor that the later tradition developed this theory further. In this matter the experience of the Vedic seers must have been decisive. They and they alone were believed to have the power not merely to use but to see *vāc*, to see the unseen roots of discourse itself, the hidden or transcendent aspect of *vāc*.

References to the secret roots of *vāc* are numerous. *Vāc* is, for example, spoken of in the Veda as the great syllable found at the beginning of time in the footsteps of the (cosmic) cow. Discourse, in other words, is extolled as that beyond all things which becomes all things, the "secret" within the heart of ordinary, manifold, contingent human acts of speaking. Nowhere is this sacral role of Speech more eloquently put than in Ṛv 10.125, where Vāc speaks in the first person. O'Flaherty's translation is propitious. I quote verses 3, 4, and 8:

I am the queen, the confluence of riches,
the skillful one who is first among those worthy of sacrifice. The gods divided me up into various parts, for I dwell in many places and enter into many forms.

The one who eats food, who truly sees, who breathes, who hears what is said, does so through me. Though they do not realise it, they dwell in me. Listen, you whom they have heard: what I tell you should be heeded.

I am the one who blows like the wind, embracing all creatures. Beyond the sky, beyond this earth, so much have I become in my greatness.[6]

Śaivite tantra, putting its trust in the efficacy of mantric utterance, inherits not only this mythology of Utterance but also its philosophical correlate: the theory of the four quarters (*pada*) of Speech. Ṛv 1.164:45 states:

Speech was demarcated as having four parts,
these the kenning Brahmans understand;
three parts, deeply hidden, humans do not set in motion,
the fourth (*turīya*) part of speech is what they speak.

Here we begin to see *vāc* conceived as that force which discriminates between the one "beyond" and the many who are phenomenal. More than a thousand years later, the theory emerges as a full-blown metaphysics understood to provide the rationale for the soteriologic use of mantric utterance, at least in Śaivāgamic circles.

According to the typical account in the Śaiva canon, that beyond which there is nothing further may be conceived as sonic energy holding latently within itself all sounds: noises, animal cries, musical notes, ordinary speech, Sanskrit speech, poetic discourse, and the uttering of mantras. This sonic ultimate is understood to evolve successively into three states without at any time losing touch with its pure, original, ultimate, fourth state. This cosmic evolution is further understood to be correlated with the sequential unfolding of the phonemes of the Sanskrit language. *Vāc* is in part embodied in, in part mirrored in the sequence of phonemes.

The first and lowest state of Speech is called *vaikharī*, which probably means "gross." It is the mundane (*apara*) mode of sonic-verbal energy, the level of manifestation, activity, and differentiation. More subtle is the

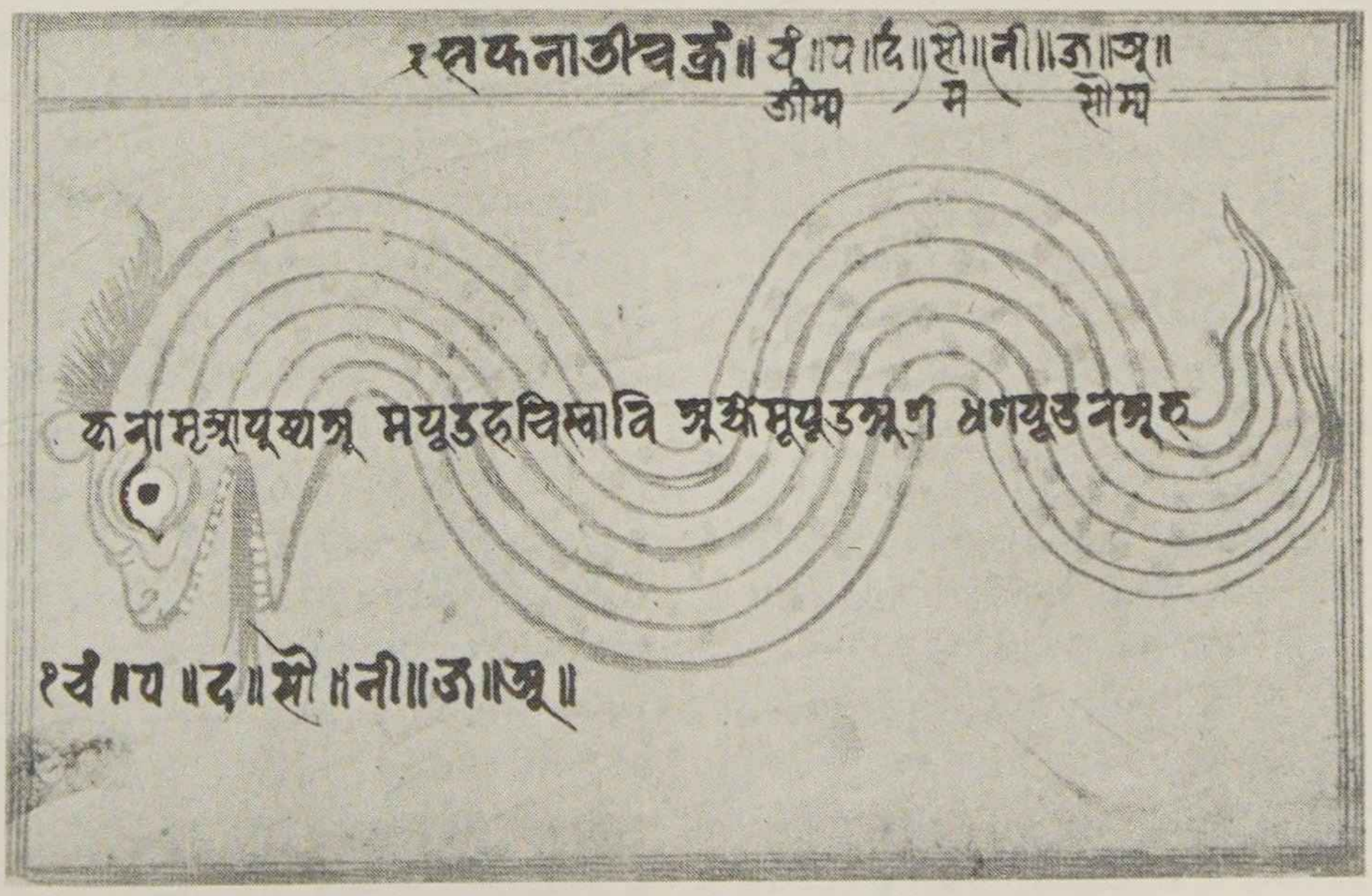
second level, *madhyamā*. *Madhyamā* means "mediating" or "intermediate" and reflects the historical fact that the Śaivāgamic conception of *vāc* as fourfold is a development of an earlier conception of *vāc* as threefold.

In the earier scheme *madhyamā* would, in fact, have been "in the middle." Even when *vāc* is considered fourfold there are still only three stages or states of *vāc, parā* (supreme) *vāc* being the fount from which the three emerge, the substratum upon which they subsist. Insofar as I understand the somewhat obscure accounts, this middle level of Speech "contains" all of the *elements* out of which spoken language arises, without giving rise to the latter itself. *Madhyamā vāc* is then of little independent interest; it is a dialectical necessity accounting for the unfolding of sonic-verbal energy into actual speech. Still more subtle is *paśyantī*, "seeing," *vāc*; that level of reality wherein the development of actual speech is "foreseen," prefigured, willed to be but not yet actualized. Finally, there is *parāvāc*, primordial Speech, identical to Śiva who is consciousness as such, in which and yet out of which the cacophony of the divine, human, animal, and demonic voices of the ordinary world arise.

The theory of the levels of *vāc* is an abstract cosmogony. Whatever the original motivation for its creation might have been, by the time of the Śaivāgamas it has been inextricably linked to the religious. If the four levels of *vāc* are "inverted," viewed acosmically from a mundane perspective, the scheme functions soteriologically. So, too, the belief in the liberating efficacy of mantric utterance is informed by the theory of fourfold *vāc* as seen from the level of ordinary life. The articulation of the right mantra, in the proper circumstances, with the proper attitude, with the proper technique, leads the utterer back, level by level, realm by realm, to reclaim the treasure of his own identity with Śiva who is consciousness, a treasure which, in one sense, has been buried but never lost. In that sense mantras are understood to liberate; and it is as such that they are cherished, venerated, remembered, and passed on.

Dare one go on to ask the more general questions: How may mantric utterance be understood in contemporary Western terms? Is there any way

Diagram for seed-sounds



in which we moderns can credit mantric utterance?

Although there is certainly no consensus, a few scholars propose that certain tools of contemporary Western philosophy of language may help to explicate the nature of mantric utterance. In particular, Wade Wheelock has broken new ground by attempting to understand mantric utterance in terms of the theory of "Speech Acts" developed by J.L. Austin and John Searle.

Wheelock begins from the observation of Vedic ritual, pointing out that "the basic intention of [Vedic] ritual utterances is . . . to create and allow the performance of a known and repeatable *situation*."[7] In other words, Vedic "ritual utterances both affirm the existence of a particular situation and create that situation by their very uttering." If correct—and I think it is correct—this is astonishing: Wheelock observes that in a Vedic context the uttering of a mantra is itself an act which has the effect of creating a "fact." Often, at least within the world of Vedic ritual, the sphere in which this linguistic transformation takes place is somewhat restricted even though it involves "the linguistic transformation of a tangible entity [i.e., a ritual implement, performer, or patron] . . . into something of divine or cosmic magnitude." In a second article, Wheelock proposes a theory of ritual utterance sufficiently general to account for the Vedic case. He argues that the intended effect of ritual utterance is "situating" rather than "informing": "*One must make a broad distinction between all those speech acts whose fundamental intention is the communication of* information *between a speaker and a hearer, and those speech acts whose intention is to create and allow the participation in a known repeatable* situation."[8]

One virtue of Wheelock's suggestion is that it provides an account of how mantric utterance works in modern terms, an account broadly compatible with traditional South Asian conceptions of mantras. Another advantage is that it suggests a theoretical point of departure for examining certain aspects of mantric utterance which have often puzzled Westerners: the use of "nonsense" syllables, that is, phonemes not otherwise found in the language—*stobha* mantras in the Veda, and *bīja* mantras in tantra; the fact that tantric mantras are really efficacious only when repeated numerous times; and the fact that in both Vedic and tantric settings mantras are optimally "articulated" in silence.

A linguistic analysis of mantric utterance reminds one that the meaning of language is determined by context and convention. In the case of ritual repetitions, as Wheelock says, the desired situation "must and can be concretely realized at every repetition." In the case of tantric ritual, the repetition of *bīja* mantras is the ever more sophisticated reclaiming of a paradigmatic reality that is understood at once in mythic and metaphysical terms. In the *Veda* there is a progression from the "loud statements" of one sort of priest to the "muttered formulas" (*japa*) of another to the "silently rehearsed knowledge of the most esoteric" cosmic connections.[9] So, too, in the apparently senseless repetitions of tantric practice there is understood to occur, as it were, a regression toward the real; it is for this reason that the internal articulation of mantras is considered more efficacious than external utterance.

It is one thing to analyze how mantras are intended to function in either traditional or contemporary terms, and another thing altogether to decide whether they live up to their intention. At least in those sections of the Śaivāgamas which concern the attainment of liberation while alive, the intention with which mantras are brought into play is redemptive: they are intended as the tool to achieve a reclamation of one's forgotten, neglected identity with God, Śiva who is

the world. According to this tradition, the happy uttering of a mantra is, in the end, redemptive: mantras are the tools to achieve the ever-achieved, tools to effect participation in a reality in which one cannot but participate.

It is not sufficient to suggest that the reality achieved by mantric utterance is merely "linguistic," nor is it sufficient to leave the question of the truth and value of *mantraśāstra* bracketed. I have no doubt that under some circumstances mantric utterance does effect changes of status, of mode of being in the world, so radical as to merit being called "religious." If this, in fact, is the case, then it follows that mantric utterance does intend to involve, and does involve, communication of a certain sort—not, surely, the conveying of information, but the *disclosing* of value.

Sceptical and mystical exegetes of mantras oddly wind up with identical positions. The sceptics argue that mantras can't work because they are meaningless. Mystics argue that they do work precisely because they are absurd. I prefer a third alternative: mantras work because of the sort of language they are. One need not ascribe to any particular metaphysic to account for mantric efficacy. Mantras work because they are self-transforming.

It is ironic that we in the West accuse India of pessimism. In fact, the South Asian traditions understand human beings to have limitless potential. If we but take charge of ourselves, they say, we cannot help but discover our inner "divine" identities.

Whether or not one is persuaded that this ultimate faith in human potential is plausible, one can learn much from mantras. Most of us in the West have been raised on a diet of prayer, praise, and petition. To those forms of religious utterance, mantras come as a significant counterweight, teaching us to view ourselves *in some sense* as the fabricators of our own bondage and our own liberation. It is no accident that certain Sanskrit phonemes are called "mothers" (*mātṛkās*). They are the matrix out of which mantras are engendered, and they are the capacities, the energies, which they bring into play. Mantric utterance proposes itself as an instrument to reappropriate this fundamental creativity in all of us. Can't we, then, understand these lines of Wallace Stevens as referring to the transformation of ourselves by means of the well-said word?

She was the single artificer of the world
In which she sang. And when she sang, the
sea,

Whatever self it had, became the self
That was her song, for she was the maker.
Then we,
As we beheld her striding there alone,
Knew that there never was a world for her
Except the one she sang and, singing,
made.[10] ■

NOTES

1. The Kashmiri Śaiva theological traditions, drawing at once on Advaita Vedānta, Hindu Philosophy of language, and Vijñānavāda Buddhism, have a rich vocabulary no single term of which is quite adequately conveyed by the English "consciousness." *Citta* seems to be something like consciousness considered as the substratum of individual cognition.
2. *Siddha Meditation: Commentaries on the Shiva Sutras and Other Sacred Texts* (1975).
3. "Duty as Truth in Ancient India," *India and Indology: Selected Articles by W. Norman Brown*, Rosane Rocher, ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978).
4. Brown, op. cit.
5. *The Śiva Sūtra Vimarśinī* (Srinagar: KSTS, vol. 1, 1911).
6. "Dīrghatamas's Vision of a Creation," *India and Indology*, op. cit.
7. Wade Wheelock, "A Taxonomy of the Mantras in the New- and Full-Moon Sacrifice," *History of Religions*, vol. 17, no. 4.
8. Wade Wheelock, "The Problem of Ritual Language: From Information to Situation," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 50, no. 1.
9. Wheelock, "Taxonomy," op. cit.
10. Wallace Stevens, "The Idea of Order at Key West," *The Palm at the End of the Mind* (Knopf, 1971).

The Whole and the Flowing

LAWRENCE RUSS

The Poetry of Robert Bly, Gary Snyder, Galway Kinnell, William Stafford, Gregory Orr, and others

At the turn of the century, American poetry was in a dismal state. The verse which prevailed in the literary journals was mawkish in sentiment, hackneyed in language, stultified in rhythm. Such verse seemed to have grown from a tradition that included few authors besides Longfellow, Tennyson, and Sir Philip Sidney. One young scholar and poet by the name of Ezra Pound, however, was soon to set off powder kegs under the walls that hemmed in that blighted little garden of poetasters.

Pound eventually succeeded, almost by force, in making the American literary community admit to its "tradition" not only the authors of medieval Europe, but poets as "primitive" as the *Beowulf* bard and as foreign as the Chinese Li Po. He persuaded American poets to take their art seriously; to study the technical tradition of their craft as meticulously as composers or scientists do theirs; and to enter the modern age.

As a doctoral candidate at the University of Pennsylvania, Pound prepared a thesis on the medieval literature of the romance languages, which he later reworked and published as *The Spirit of Romance*. Certain ideas which in retrospect seem quite out of character for Pound are tucked into a chapter of that book significantly named "A Divagation from Questions of Technique." There Pound speculated that the songs of the Provençal troubadours contain covert references to a spiritual tradition and practice. "Consider," he suggested, "the history of the time, the Albigensian Crusades, nominally against a sect tinged with Manichean heresy, and remember how Provençal song is never wholly disjunct from pagan rites of May Day." Did this ring of wandering poets, he asked,

> evolve, out of its half memories of Hellenistic mysteries, a cult—a cult stricter or more subtle, than that of the celibate ascetics, a cult for the purgation of the soul by a refinement of, and lordship over, the senses?
>
> Some mystic or other speaks of the intellect as standing in the same relation to the soul as the senses to the mind; and beyond a certain border, surely we come to this place where the ecstasy is not a whirl or a madness of the senses, but a glow arising from the exact nature of perception . . .

Pound went on to make a personal declaration about the mystic interrelatedness at the heart of poetic experience:

> I believe in a sort of permanent basis in humanity, that is to say, I believe that Greek myth arose when someone having passed through delightful psychic experience tried to communicate it to others . . . Our kinship to the ox we have constantly thrust upon us; but beneath this is our kinship to the vital universe, to the tree

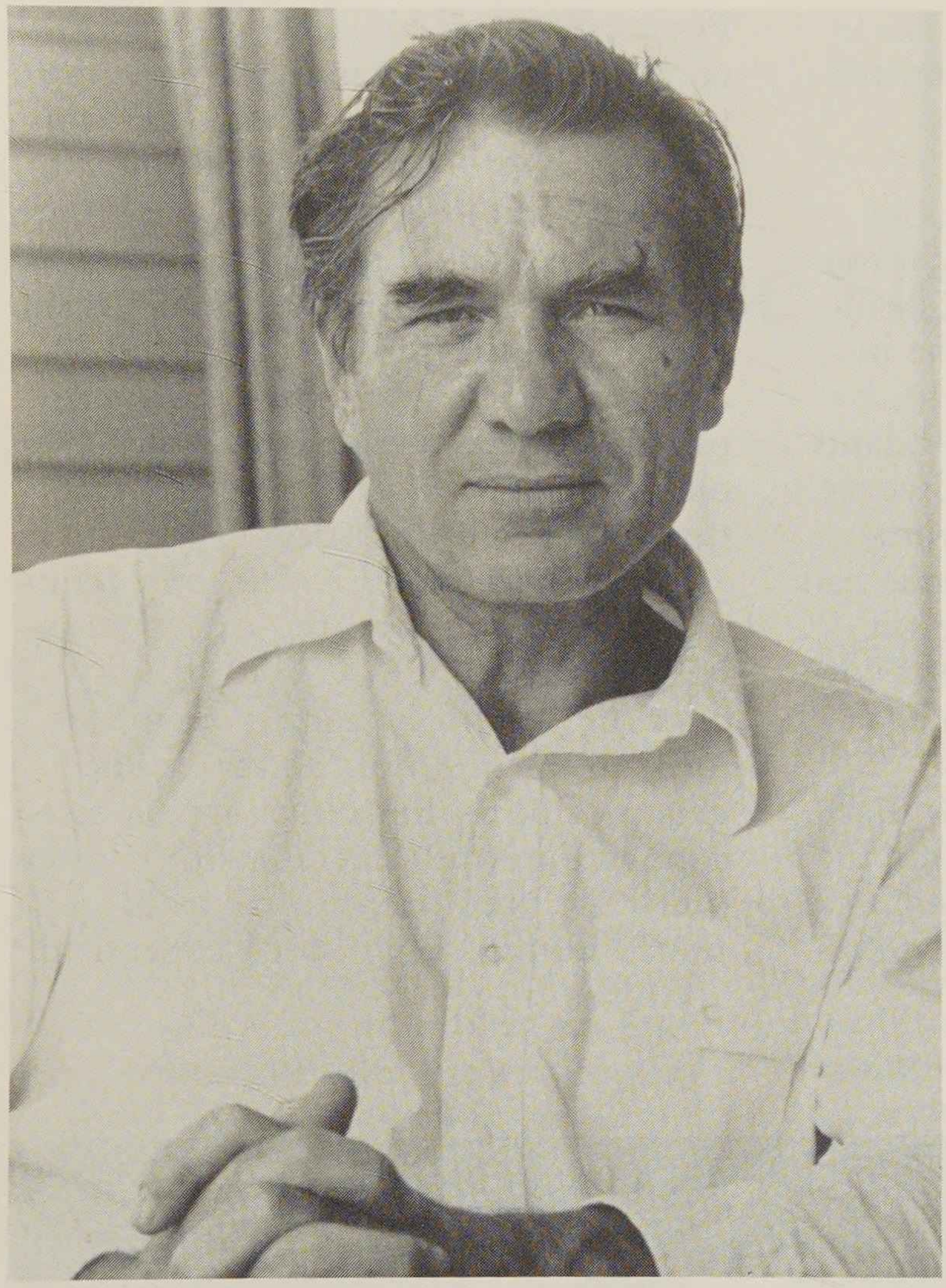
and the living rock, and, because this is less obvious—and possibly more interesting—we forget it.

Pound proposed further that the poetic mind "is close on the vital universe; and the strength of Greek beauty rests in this, that it is ever at the interpretation of this vital universe, by its signs of gods and godly attendants and oreads . . . " He noted, however, that in Western poetry this spiritual connection with the vital universe had faded: "After the Trecento, we get Humanism . . . Man is concerned with man, and forgets the whole and the flowing."

Unfortunately, it came about that Pound, too, forgot "the whole and the flowing." As he grew older (and, one is tempted to say, more dissociated), Pound divorced himself from spiritual concerns more and more. By the time he came to write *The Cantos*, he had come to believe only in economic, social, and aesthetic solutions. He expressed disdain for seekers of the spirit, for monks and meditators. While fashioning his scheme for utopia from economic and rationalistic Confucian principles, he poured nothing but scorn on Taoists ("dowzers" as he called them) and other mystical sorts.

And while Pound had a great influence on many poets, the critical writings of his friend, T.S. Eliot, held sway over the American literary establishment in the 30s, 40s, and 50s. The group of poets and critics which constituted the American orthodoxy, often called the New Critics, followed Eliot's lead in being much concerned

Robert Bly



Galway Kinnell

with the "Tradition," but a tradition that held the line against almost anything other than the ancient Greeks and Romans, and the Renaissance and post-Renaissance literature of Western Europe. They valued technical sophistication, emotional distance, "objectivity." They, like Pound, ignored "the whole and the flowing."

Even their view of classical antiquity was curiously dry and truncated. They saw the Greeks as controlled rationalists, and gave little recognition to the cults of Dionysus, the Eleusinian mysteries, and other non-rational elements that played so large a part in Greek culture. Among American poets, Whitman, in particular, was ignored and denigrated, his passion viewed as melodrama, his Biblical prosody labeled sloppy and clumsy. The word "mystical," applied to him as a pejorative, was a common insult of the time, meaning "muddle-headed" and "superstitious."

Not only was American literature under the spell of "Enlightenment" ideas, but Americans in the 40s and 50s were still intoxicated with the material wealth and political ascendancy that modern empiricism had brought them. After all, hadn't industry and scientific know-how won the war against the power "mysticism" of the Germans and the tradition-blinded fanaticism of the Japanese? The cracks in the American dream of a technological utopia were not yet plain to see.

But dissident voices began to be heard, and disturbing realities began to reveal themselves. Louis Simpson described this in "The Inner Part":

When they had won the war
And for the first time in history
Americans were the most important
people—

When the leading citizens no longer lived
in their shirt sleeves
And their wives did not scratch in public;
Just when they'd stopped saying
"Gosh!"—

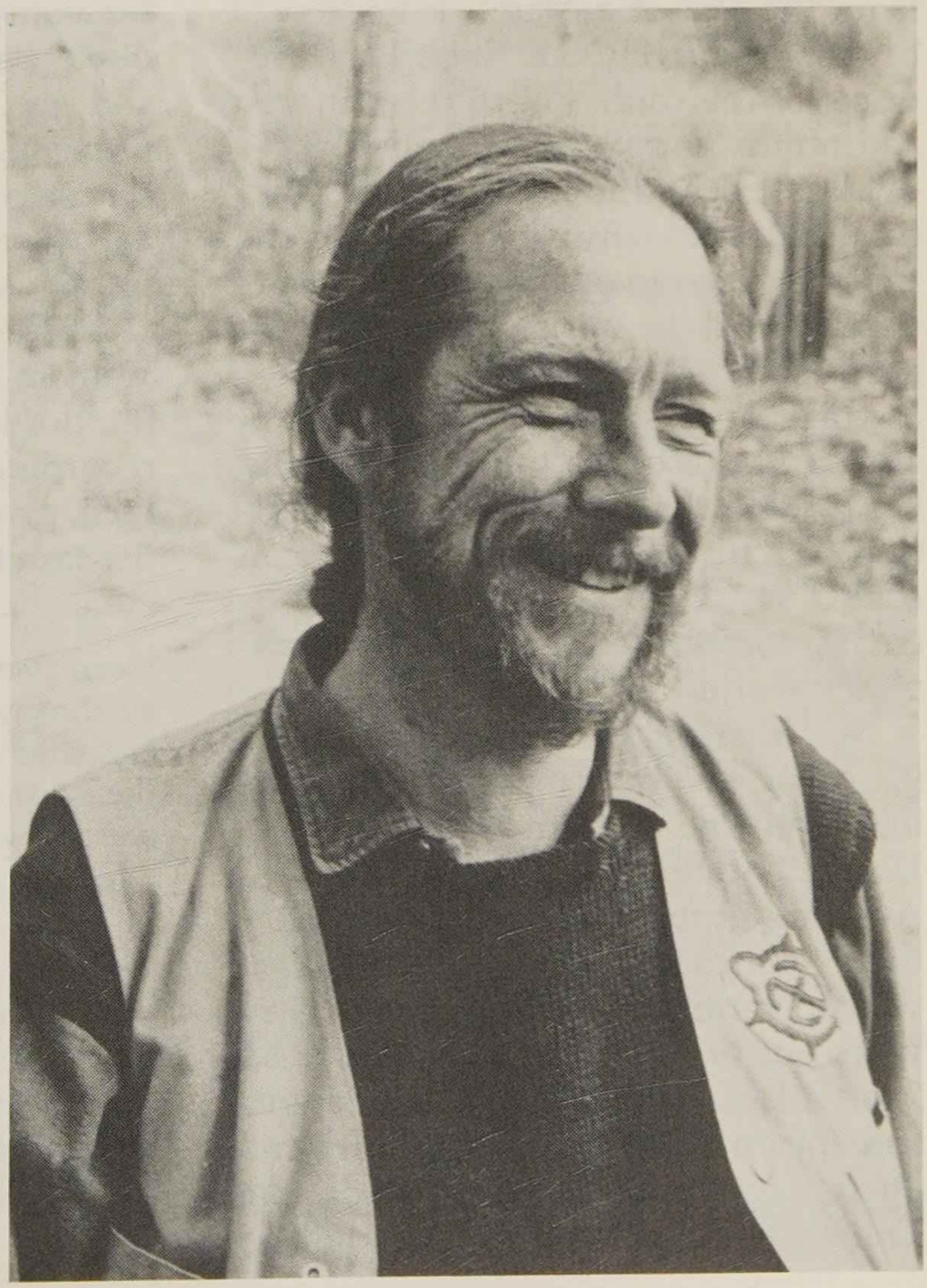
When their daughters seemed as sensitive
As the tip of a fly rod,
And their sons were as smooth as a V-8
engine—

Priests, examining the entrails of birds,
Found the heart misplaced, and seeds
As black as death, emitting a strange odor.

We began to notice troubles in our material Paradise—emotional isolation in the midst of conformity, heart attacks and ulcers, divorces and nervous breakdowns, billions being spent on weapons of annihilation, polluted rivers and fouled air, restless discontent, emptiness of spirit.

The grumbling of scattered poetic malcontents became audible. On the Pacific Coast, Kenneth Rexroth criticized the artistic status quo. He translated Oriental poems from before the time of Christ, talked about Buddhist values, and rendered into English strange poems by writers from "underdeveloped" countries like Chile and Cuba. But the orthodoxy dismissed him as a beatnik and a crank.

In 1956, the priests of literary positivism could still bar the gate against the onslaught of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*. Ginsberg railed against the American culture of conformity,



Gary Snyder

materialism, and sterile rationality. He insisted on the necessity for visionary experience, sacred love. He claimed to have heard the voice of William Blake speak to him in New York. This the rear-guard could easily withstand. After all, Ginsberg was aberrant, a hallucinating drug-taker, a communist homosexual.

Still, the spiritual rebellion gained momentum. Growing awareness of impending ecological disasters, of the pointless cruelty to which our "logic" and technology were leading us in Vietnam, caused many American writers to look differently at other cultures, literatures, and modes of being. Many began to perceive the destruction wrought by neglecting the spirit and spiritual traditions. Whole continents began to open up, buried treasures were uncovered.

Certain poets, particularly in the West and Midwest, more removed from the seat of cultural orthodoxy, began, tentatively but thirstily, to rediscover the soul, and to turn up vast and nourishing spiritual traditions overlooked by the purveyors of cultural hubris. Many writers blazed the trail, but two in particular radically transformed the spiritual life of American poetry: Robert Bly and Gary Snyder. They showed that the poetry and traditions of the spirit had actually constituted the norm, the great tradition, and that the supposed "Tradition" of the New Critics was really an insular enclave defensively marked off from a wider world.

By criticizing the tenets of the reigning ethos, and by translating and writing about the modern poetry of Europe, Scandinavia, and Latin America, Robert Bly demonstrated that American poetry as it then existed was operating in a mode at least fifty years out of date, and that it suffered from a lack of emotion, imagination, and spirituality. Bly gave us an introduction to writers such as Neruda and Tranströmer, Trakl and Alexaindre, poets whose deepest spirituality was in accord with contemporary psychology and physics, as well as with ancient Buddhism and Christian gospel.

Gary Snyder's work in poetry and prose showed that the traditions of the spirit had governed art for centuries before the Industrial Revolution. He helped to teach us the sophistication, precision, and wisdom with which Buddhists and Native Americans had dealt with spiritual problems, while we in the modernized West fumbled our way around matters of heart and soul like a fullback on a blind date.

Both Bly and Snyder showed American poets our roots in the universal tradition of the shaman—the master whose spirit, in trance, travels to other worlds to confront natural forces and spiritual beings; and who shares with the tribe, through his power-filled words, the experience and wisdom gained on that other plane. This idea, for many of us, changed or clarified our thoughts about ourselves as poets and our purposes in society. It placed in perspective and underscored the central value of the gifts of the spirit, and redefined poetry as part of an expressly spiritual tradition.

At first, we could see such poets as William Stafford and James Wright on the borderline of spiritual territory, recording their sense of past loss and their growing intuition of wonders beneath the surface, just beyond sight.

Corn that the starving Indians held
all through moons of cold for seed
and then they lost in stony ground
the gods told them to plant it in—
west of your city that corn still lies.

—William Stafford

Beneath the waters, since I was a boy,
I have dreamt of strange and
  dark treasures,
Not of gold, or strange stones, but the true
Gift, beneath the pale lakes of Minnesota.

—Robert Bly

By the mid-70s, instead of confining himself to the old "classics"—to Homer, Shakespeare, and Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*—the young poet would often also read, as part of his training and tradition, Mircea Eliade's *Shamanism*, the haiku of Basho, the poems of St. John of the Cross, and the *Bhagavad-Gita*. Along with the latest volumes of such *spirit*ed American poets as John Haines, Denise Levertov, Mary Oliver, and David Ignatow, the young poet might read Vasko Popa's address to the Yugoslavian folk-deity, the Lame Wolf, and Yves Bonnefoy's mystical sequence on the mysterious "Douve."

Sometimes, in these new American poems, a spiritual tradition is explicitly acknowledged, and sometimes felt only as an influence. But the signs came to be many, the myths resurgent. They could be seen clearly in Gary Snyder's *Myths and Texts*, in which a new tradition is "created" and the doors thrown open on a more spirit-filled and all-encompassing poetic community. Snyder's poem embraces without apology land, beasts, and spirits, and draws upon the words of Marx and Buddha, the facts of forestry, and the myths of Coyote, Bear, and Raven.

In Galway Kinnell's *The Book of Nightmares*, allusions to Christ's crucifixion mingle with medieval alchemical terms and expressions of spiritual longing:

. . . I long for the mantle
of the great wanderers, who lighted
their steps by the lamp
of pure hunger and pure thirst,

and whichever way they lurched was the way.

Jung was rediscovered and adopted as a patriarch of the new poetry. One finds quotations from his work as epigraphs for poems, and one can see his influence in the poems of young writers like Gregory Orr:

When I was about ten
I glued together an old
white turtle's shell,
a woodchuck's skull,
and a red squirrel's tail
to make my first
mythical beast.
What has been created
is never lost. It crawls
up through my thoughts now
on the feet I never gave it.

One can now find in American poetry a sense of global community and a valuing of traditions, especially those of the spirit. Carolyn Forché's aptly-titled *Gathering the Tribes*, for instance, is the work of a young poet grateful for the teachers and traditions of Eastern European folk-wisdom, Native American spirit-gathering, and Christian devotion.

For those of us who embrace spiritual traditions and concerns, the developments described here have created a singular release and exhilaration, and have helped to provide us with moments in which one feels the flight of the soul:

Sometimes I go about pitying myself,
and all the time
I am being carried on great winds across
the sky.

—from the Chippewa
(adapted by Robert Bly)

Although many American poets still neglect such matters, and many appropriate only the vocabulary of spiritual concerns, others have discovered again words of true power. A saying of Juan Ramon Jimenez has been quoted repeatedly in the last decade or so: "Roots and wings—but let the wings grow roots and the roots fly!" In discovering its spiritual roots, American poetry has grown new wings. ■

Lawrence Russ's poem, "Prayers at the Broken Gate," appears elsewhere in this issue.

Seeing Stories

PAUL JORDAN-SMITH

American Storytelling Series
Second Story Television

Given that television has found sufficient general acceptance in our culture as a medium for the communication not only of drivel and trivia but of classical theater, music, and dance, the idea of telling stories on TV seems at first a natural extension of what is coming to be called "video arts." By "telling stories," of course, I don't mean simply dramatization of myths, legends, fairy stories, and folk tales, but the presentation of a "real, live" storyteller engaging in his profession. After all, storytelling has been available on radio for years—why not translate it to TV? The question seems natural at first, until one considers the commitment to visual movement that dominates video production, and particularly the tendency for the visual dimension to take precedence over the auditory, a condition pervading not only the domain of production but of technology as well, as anyone can tell from the terrible sound quality of orchestral transmissions. How, then, to present storytelling, which is essentially an auditory activity, in a medium devoted to visual entrancement?

In part the answer may be a-borning in a fledgling production company called Second Story, which is going after a rather unusual but quite appropriate time-slot, namely between the end of one movie on cable TV and the beginning of the next event. Movies, when they are not sliced up on the Procrustean bed of commercial television, tend to run to odd lengths, but broadcasting companies generally begin their regular feature presentations on the hour or half-hour. This means that there is a need for filler material of random length—three minutes here, seventeen there—with which to plug the video gap. Enter Second Story, which will attempt to fill the gap with material of a quality appropriate to cable (though probably not commercially viable), namely with professional storytellers plying their craft. The only question is, as I said before, can an essentially auditory activity hold the interest of a visually oriented audience?

The answer appears to be yes, at least to judge from the pilots I saw, which featured storyteller Michael Parent in two segments of five and thirteen minutes each. In both productions, the auditory dimension predominated, as it must with storytelling, allowing the storyteller to provide the visual interest through his facial features and eye-camera contact, in the framework of a simple set that did not try to be more than what it was. In other words, there was no attempt (miracle of miracles) to supplant the audience's inner picturing with elaborate visual substitutes through "realistic" sets or changes of scene. It is true that the camera changed position

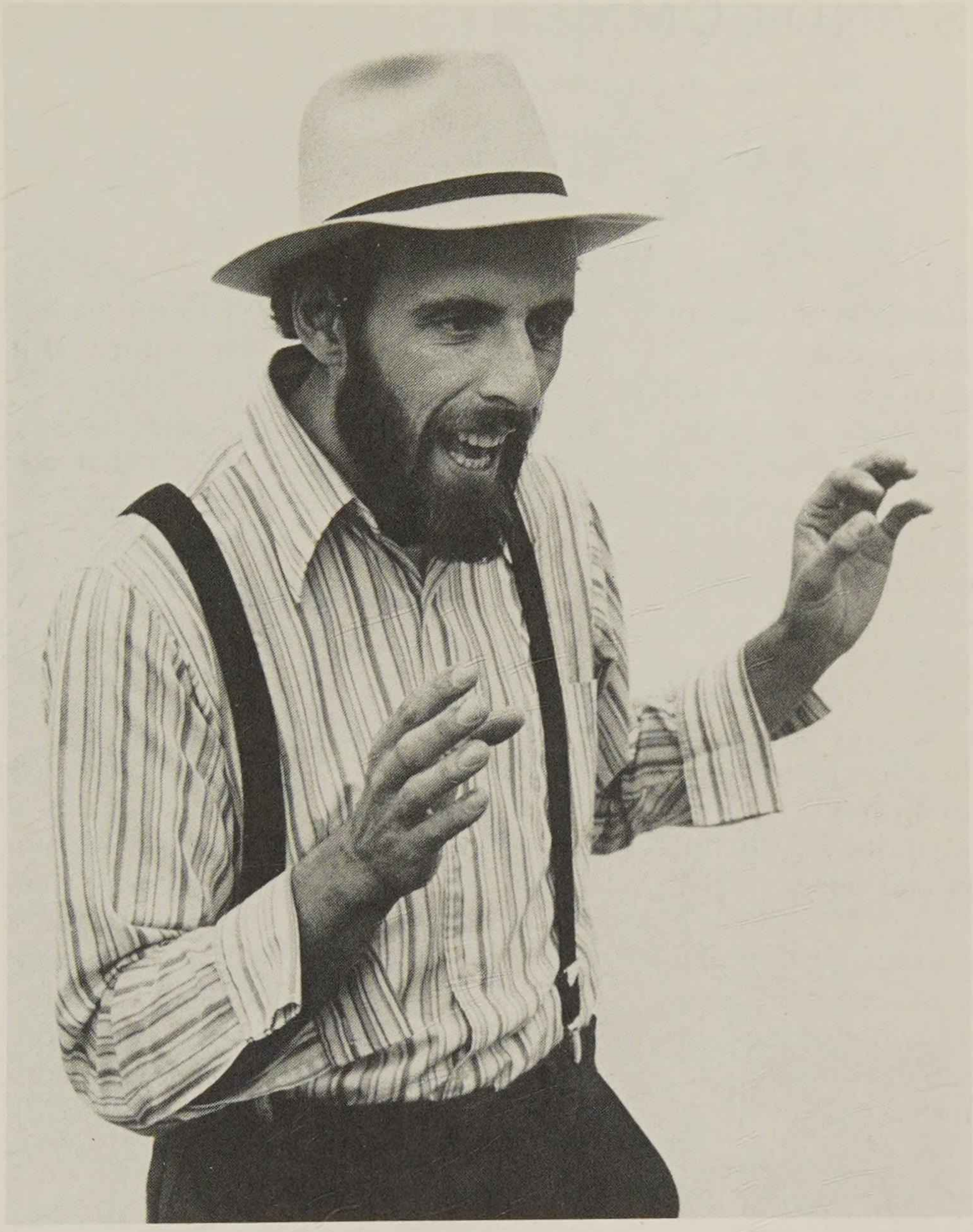


Photo by Erin Garvey

from time to time, which is necessary cinematically, probably due to the small pictorial framework of the screen, but the camera work was in general unobtrusive.

What was also unusual about these productions was the natural and relaxed quality of the storyteller himself. He seemed to be telling the story for a live audience which included the viewer, not simply for the camera; yet there was none of the exclusive quality of filmed theatrical productions in which one has the general impression of being backstage rather than in the audience. This feature suggests documentary possibilities: a kind of visual counterpart to "oral history" programs and recordings of traditional storytellers; and it particularly recommends this new venture, which one hopes will continue to keep the standards it has set for itself through its pilot programs. Most important, in this reviewer's estimate at least, is the attempt to acknowledge that an audience can listen—simply listen—to a story, without the importunings of visual excitement. It is a bit of fresh air in the rather stale atmosphere of television. ■

Paul Jordan-Smith is a Contributing Editor to PARABOLA.

CURRENTS AND COMMENTS

TALKS

Jiddu Krishnamurti, at the age of eighty-six, once again brought his apocalyptic message to a large audience at the Felt Forum in Madison Square Garden on April 9 and 10. The crowd he confronted, accustomed no doubt to less serious sorts of entertainment, but with almost incredible rudeness, took fifteen minutes to settle down on the first day, somewhat less the second. Once settled, the small man on the small chair on the very large stage held his audience in an impressive silence for more than an hour, listening to his rigorous description of the horror of our situation and our responsibility for it.

We are slaves to time and thought, he told us; and the limited content of human thought and consciousness inevitably creates conflict instead of relationship, problems instead of harmony, fear and desire instead of love. Our gods and our religions, being our own inventions, are as limited as we are; yet there is "something sacred, holy, untouched by thought, that doesn't belong to any religion" to which the way is not closed to us, if we can be attentive to it. It is possible, Krishnamurti said, to learn to use that attention to create a hiatus in our thinking, an inner pause before the limited mind comes in, a silence in which we can listen and discover the origins of desire and fear and all our conflicts. In this silence, time and thought, humanity's conflict-creating enemies, disappear. Only this inner silence is true meditation, and only this can bring about a new hope for our violence-torn society.

It is a message he has been bringing for many years, and every passing year brings more testimony to support his view of the doom of our culture. But it is hardly enough merely to acknowledge this. "The present crisis," Krishnamurti said, "demands that we should see the urgency of change."

STORYTELLING

On November 18, 1983, Diane Wolkstein will tell the two-hour cycle of Inanna (stories and hymns) from her new book, *Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth* (Harper & Row), at 8:00 P.M. in the Kaufmann Auditorium of the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. The stories will be accompanied by Geoffrey Gordon on harp, drum, and flute. For tickets, contact the Museum office (212-873-1327) or the C.G. Jung Foundation (212-697-6430).

MUSEUMS

The word of God is revered in Islamic tradition, which ranks calligraphy as the highest form of sacred art. Several outstanding examples of Arabic calligraphy, including Korans in golden script on multi-colored paper, are on display in the traveling exhibit, **The Heritage of Islam**. The most comprehensive collection of Islamic art and artifacts ever assembled in North America, this exhibition also features religious objects such as antique prayer rugs and mosque lamps, as well as a wide variety of golden jewel cases, carved shadow puppets,

ceramic plates and tiles, and other secular objects. Islamic science is represented by a group of astrolabes and quadrants, medieval instruments for time-keeping, navigation, and charting the heavens.

Tour itinerary: June 1–Sept. 5, Smithsonian Institution; Sept. 29–Dec. 25, Brooklyn Museum; Jan. 18–April 5, 1984, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.

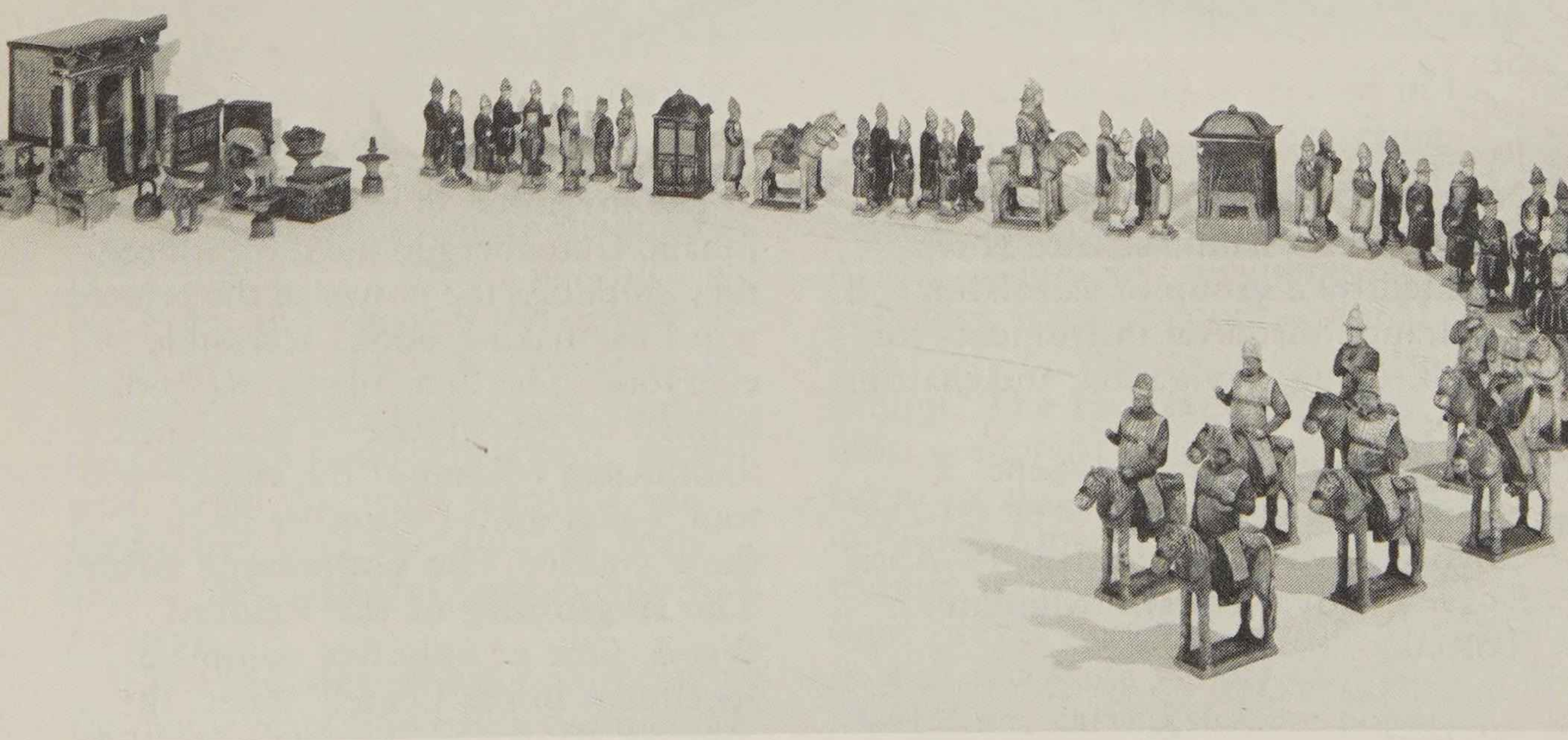
❖

The invention of movable type by Johann Gutenberg in the fifteenth century amplified the power of the printed word by making books accessible to everyone. The first substantial book printed by Gutenberg—a renowned illuminated edition of the Bible—will tour Texas until December 26 in a show entitled **The Gutenberg Bible: The Beginning of the Printed Word**. One of only five complete specimens in the United States, the copy on display was purchased in 1978

by the University of Texas at Austin for more than two million dollars. A six-minute color videotape accompanies the exhibit.

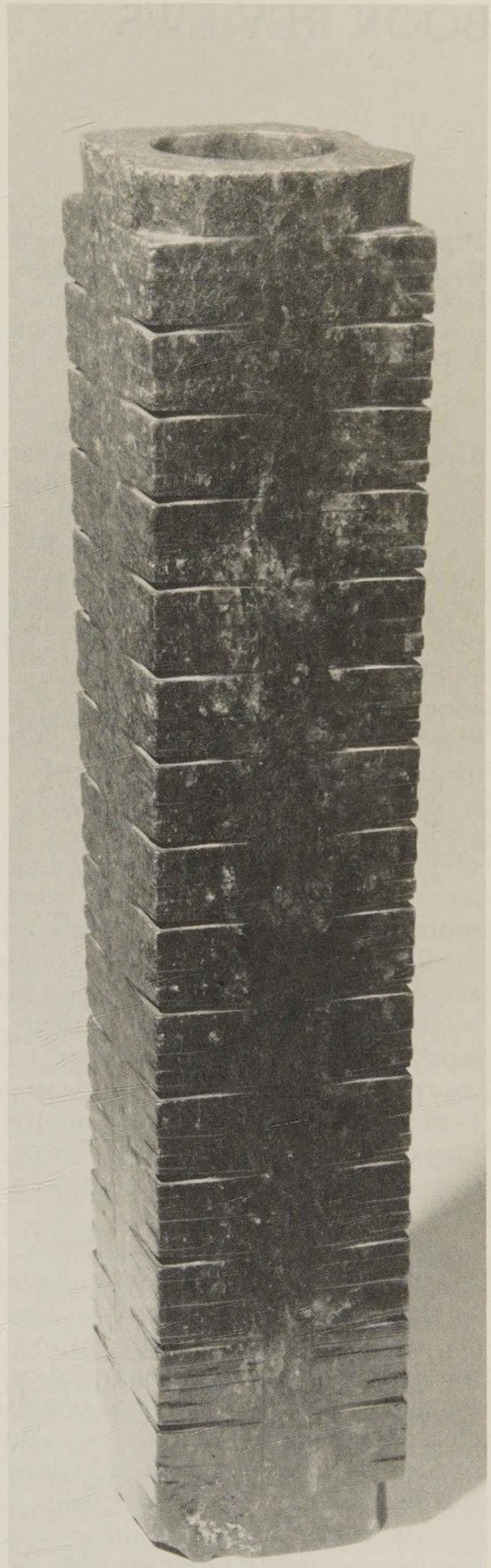
Tour schedule: July 14–Aug. 1 Beaumont Art Museum; Aug. 4–22, McAllen International Museum; Aug. 25–Sept. 12, Amarillo Art Center; Sept. 15–Oct. 3, Abilene Fine Arts Museum; Oct. 6–24, Dallas Public Library; Oct. 27–Nov. 14, Blumberg Memorial Library, Sequin; Nov. 17–Dec. 5, Art Museum, Corpus Christi; Dec. 8–26, El Paso Centennial Museum.

Treasures from the Shanghai Museum: 6,000 Years of Chinese Art will now be in the spotlight for fresh eyes. Among the artifacts recently unearthed in Shanghai are a procession of 66 glazed Honor Guard figurines from a Ming Dynasty tomb, a bronze "Water-Spurting Basin," and an intricately carved red lacquer pavilion of the Qing dynasty. On display at museums across the country through November 30, 1984, this collection



covers the entire span of Chinese art from prehistoric to modern times.

Tour itinerary: May 4–Sept. 30, Asian Art Museum of San Francisco; Nov. 1–Feb. 14, 1984, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago; Mar. 16–July 9, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Aug. 11-Nov. 30, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.



CONFERENCES

The **International Transpersonal Association** will hold its annual conference from August 27 to September 2 in Davos, Switzerland. His Holiness the Dalai Lama, psychiatrist Stanislav Grof, philosopher Graf Durckheim, and anthropologist Michael Harner are among those who will address the theme of "Individual Transformation and Universal Responsibility." The special role of the arts in promoting inner growth will be discussed by poet Robert Bly, jazz musician Paul Horn, and others. For details, contact the ITA at 3519 Front St., San Diego, Cal., (619) 295-4778.

Ethnoastronomy, defined as the study of folk astronomies, calendars, celestial lore, sky mythology, and related ritual, will be examined in depth at the first international **Ethnoastronomy Conference**, to be held at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. September 5 through 9. Jointly sponsored by the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum, the University of Maryland's Center for Archaeoastronomy, and the American Astronomical Society's Historical Astronomy Division, the conference will offer scholarly presentations covering anthropology, archaeology, art history, history of science, and history of religion. For more information contact: Ethnoastronomy Conference, Center for Archaeoastronomy, University of Maryland 20742, (301) 454-4460.

BOOK REVIEWS

Pipers at the Gates of Dawn
By Jonathan Cott. New York: Random House, 1983. Pp. 296. $19.95.

Reviewed by Roger Lipsey

Jonathan Cott's passion for children's literature, which he makes easy for us to share, led him to questions that few of us might have thought to ask. Who are the authors *behind* the best books for children in our time? What sort of people are they, what do they think of children and of books for children, what do they think now about their own work, and what do they have in mind for the future? These questions, carried to the homes of seven authors, expose him and the reader in turn to a shuffle of possibilities. Some authors really do shine more in their work than in their living rooms, while others have a knack for the illuminating remark or the telling anecdote. For the latter group, personal meetings are a continuation of their work by other means. I have never felt enormous sympathy for those who prefer their authors to remain anonymous, heard but not seen. In this perspective, Jonathan Cott's enterprise is very welcome.

Mr. Cott's authors are Dr. Seuss, Maurice Sendak, William Steig, Astrid Lindgren, Chinua Achebe, P.L. Travers, and Iona and Peter Opie (who worked as a team). All are famed or much respected as creators of popular children's literature, with the exception of the Opies, who collected children's folklore and tales in Great Britain somewhat as the Grimms did in nineteenth-century Germany. Mr. Cott's introduction, giving the history of his interest in children's literature and suggesting a point of view about this literature as a whole, is free and stirring. He explores the early history of children's books, tells us what it is like to be the only adult browser in the children's book section of the public library, makes real for us through his own lucidity of feeling the imaginative power of the best books. Mr. Cott clearly need not rely on dialogue to find his way to his readers:

> Beatrix Potter's mischievous rabbits, Gelett Burgess's ill-mannered Goops, and Palmer Cox's trickster Brownies allow the reader to fantasize the subversion of the restricting moral and social order and to envisage a reality more open and connected to the instinctual forces of childhood . . . . In his "Immortality" ode, Wordsworth states that "our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting"; and the older we get, the harder it is for us to wake up. Children's literature—and what is that but tales and rhymes writ and drawn large or small?—helps us to wake up. It brings us back to experiencing our earliest and deepest feelings and truths. It is our link to the past and a path to the future. And in it we find ourselves.

It was too great a task to sustain uninterruptedly this degree of engagement and focus through a predominantly conversational format. The best, rising at times to fascination, lies in chapters devoted to P.L. Travers and the Opies, each of whom manages effortlessly to convey a sense of passionate commitment and ceaseless exploration. Mrs. Travers is a special writer but also a special speaker; she seems to have an unwavering awareness of the outer shape, as sound and rhythm, and the inner content of words. An English tidiness in her speech and ideas is balanced by a love of surprises and an ability to see things in unexpected lights. To wit, the au-

thor of the Mary Poppins books, as sparkling at home as in her stories.

Iona and Peter Opie, whose major work stretches from *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* (1951) through *The Classic Fairy Tales* (1974) and beyond, spring similarly to life before the reader. Of their studies of children's folklore and all kinds of printed literature left untouched by other scholars, they said, "We're really reading for human life on an unofficial level." These people, with magical minds and infinite patience, have been able to trace such things as a jump-rope chant heard in the playground to its centuries-old origin, where it is often something other than a play-song. Through their efforts, one receives the impression of an ancient oral tradition passed from child to child without recourse to adult means, of a culture parallel to our own but infinitely wilder. Although the Opies are scholars, they have the vigor of their subject; the pages concerning them burst with joie de vivre. It is extraordinarily timely that Jonathan Cott found his way to Mr. and Mrs. Opie at the moment he did, for Peter Opie died not long ago; an exemplary life, gracefully rendered.

There is a thin but worrisome line between scholarship and reportage, on one side, and direct creation on the other. Many gifted people, strongly drawn to try their hand at direct creation, spend years doing other, preparatory things. This book, giving the oral history of children's literature in our time, may be such a preparation. Perhaps Mr. Cott will soon join the ranks of those he interviewed, together with their rabbits and heaven-sent nannies and self-sufficient small heroes and heroines.

Roger Lipsey is the author of Coomaraswamy: His Life and Work *and the editor of* Coomaraswamy: Selected Papers, Volumes I and II, *in the Bollingen Series, Princeton University Press.*

The Bījak of Kabir
Translated by Linda Hess and Shukdev Singh. Essay and notes by Linda Hess. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983. Pp. *xiii* + 200. $12.95.

Reviewed by John Stratton Hawley

The poet Kabir—his name means "great"—was born in fifteenth-century Benares into the weaver caste, a group so close to the bottom of the ladder of social hierarchy that most of his castefellows had disowned their Hindu roots some years before and converted to Islam. This religious sleight-of-hand didn't entirely work. Centuries of Hindu heritage were still in the blood, and the priests and merchants knew exactly who everyone was. To be a weaver in holy Benares meant that one had plenty of opportunities to view those who were counted among the great—both the pugnacious, word-wielding Brahmins who had twisted the religious life of the city around their fingers since time immemorial, and the self-confident Muslim newcomers who had moved in to replace them—but it was far from being great oneself. In choosing the name Kabir, his parents merely hoped that their son's life would reflect something of the glory of the truly "Great One," God himself, for Kabir is one of the titles of Allah. As it happened, however, the name fit even better than

his parents could have imagined. Even in his own time, people recognized a greatness in Kabir.

His trenchant verses found a prominent place in the earliest anthologies of Hindi religious poetry, which date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. And popular legends about his life flourished like jungle vines. Before long he was held up for veneration by a sect that enshrined him as their patron saint, even their god. Others, perhaps alarmed at such adulation, attempted to preserve for Kabir a pious humility and guard him from any posthumous charge of hubris. They added a second element to his name so that he would be called Kabir Das, "the servant of the Great One."

Both these efforts—to enshrine his divinity and to ensure his piety—seem bland and paltry in the light of the poetry itself. Kabir would have been appalled to find himself an object of worship, for he excoriated such mindless credulity in others; he would have been equally disgusted to find his profile sanded down to suit the religious etiquette of future generations. Though many of his poems contain his own name, he certainly never referred to himself as Kabir Das, and after reading Linda Hess's translations the notion of a "Kabir Das" seems more misguided than ever. Hess's Kabir is the servant of no one, not even God himself; he hasn't a servile bone in his body. God may be great, but so is Kabir, and it is Hess's achievement to have transmitted a sense of his plain and powerful stature to English readers.

The voice that speaks through Hess's words has an authority and self-confidence that rarely has been heard since Kabir's time. It is stringent, passionate, clever, direct, angry, magisterial, upsetting, silent. It calls names:

Son of a slut!
There. I've insulted you.
Think about getting on the good road.

It pries:

Where are you going alone, my friend?

It starts arguments:

Qazi, what book are you lecturing on?
Yak yak yak, day and night.

It undercuts:

Maya's a female scavenger,
her husband's a scavenger-man.
She mixes up son and father
and runs from both when she can.

It epitomizes:

What's the world like?
A flock of sheep.
One falls in the ditch,
the rest jump in.

It suffices:

Wherever you are
is the entry point.

Hess has liberated this fresh and stunning voice from centuries of pious encrustation on the Indian side, and decades of unwitting conventionality on our own. Unlike the best-known translator who preceded her, she has been able to go to the original. Robert Bly's "versions" of Kabir are winning and evocative, but they are admittedly second- or third-hand. Bly reworked Tagore's translations—airy, dignified, dated—and Tagore found his Kabir in

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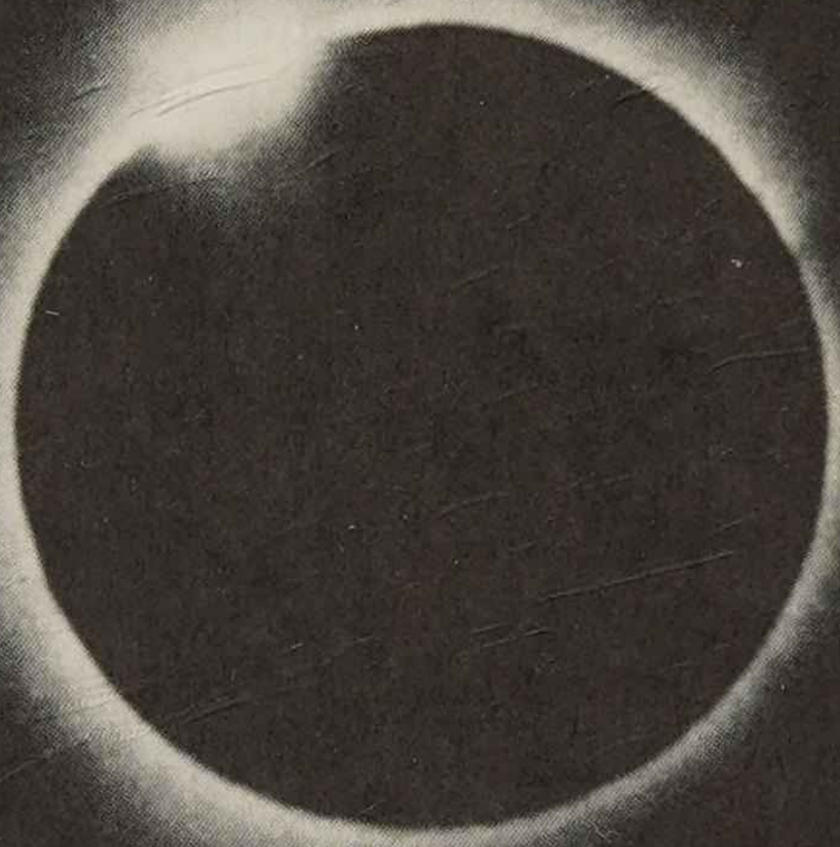

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a collection assembled somewhat impressionistically by a friend who compared printed texts with versions sung by itinerant ascetics.

The French scholar Charlotte Vaudeville has turned instead to what can loosely be called the Rajasthani recension, and though she is superbly able to decipher the original, a question remains as to how original her originals are. By the time Kabir's songs had made their way across North India to Rajasthan, Hess argues, many of them were essentially new creations, infected with the softer devotionalism of regions that worshipped Krishna.

Still another Kabir can be found in the *Adi Granth*, the scripture of the Sikhs. These verses are the ones to which the earliest date can be assigned, save for the smaller number found in the *Fatehpur Sur Sagar*. But it appears that even they had been passed through a sieve, as Karine Schomer has pointed out. The coarse grains were eliminated—the unexpected, elliptical, or unduly harsh verse—and only the more open, more standardized moral messages remain. This is the sort of Kabir Indian school children know by heart.

The Kabir of the *Bījak* is different. The *Bījak* is a collection of Kabir's poems made by his followers in Benares and eastern India; in earlier writings Hess has suggested that the undomesticated, unspiritualized Kabir who emerges from its pages may be closer to the real man of Benares than any of the others. This is so even though none of the manuscripts in the *Bījak*'s tradition bears a very early date. As Hess explains, such manuscripts were in constant use by Kabir's followers in Benares and elsewhere, so the old manuscripts rapidly wore out and had to be recopied. The tattered originals were consigned to India's holy rivers. Hess's argument for the unvarnished Kabir is worth considering, especially since the Kabir to whom it gives us access has much more of the peculiarly forceful voice that sets his poems apart from others.

It is this voice for which Hess acts as such a remarkable ventriloquist. Some translators would have been delighted to find a work in the original Hindi for which there is a direct English cognate—"thug," for instance—and settled for the obvious translation. But Hess sees beyond the cognate. This thug (who is God, by the way) becomes a "con-man" at her hand. Brahmins are not "counterfeit" or "false," as we have become accustomed to hearing, they're just plain "phony"; not "expert meat dealers" because some of them officiated at animal sacrifices, but "slicked-down butchers." These inventive choices sometimes do stretch the text a bit, particularly if one just looks from one word to the next. But more often they convey the poem with exactitude, and even when they reach slightly farther they succeed in capturing the tone of the whole as a more conservative approach might not. Hess gives us the pungency of the alleys and bazaars where Kabir really spoke, and she rescues him from the fatal honor so often chosen by his earlier admirers: that his poems become scripture.

Hess's accomplishment is more than a matter of word choice, more even than a triumph of literary and cultural imagination. This is a deeper kind of accuracy, and it seems to stem from her genuine belief that Kabir is right. She thinks life is too much of a jumble of hypocrisies, too far from the guid-

ing silences, too full of sentences that go on so long they forget how they started. So she is willing to travel with Kabir to the nameless, unsettling, near-to-home truth we congenitally prefer to ignore. Like Kabir she seems to write here with Death at one shoulder. His words, polished and sharpened by her hands, can cut like knives:

Makeshift man,
witless, weightless,
a red flower
without fragrance.

*John Hawley is Associate Professor of Asian Languages and Literature at the University of Washington. He has recently published a volume on Indian goddesses (*The Divine Consort, *co-edited by Donna Wulff) in the Berkeley Religious Studies Series, and his* Krishna, the Butter Thief *has just appeared from Princeton University Press.*

The Third City: Philosophy at War with Positivism.
By Borna Bebek. London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983. Pp. *xii* + 307. $29.95.

Reviewed by John Loudon

In a recent review in PARABOLA, I celebrated the publication of Jacob Needleman's *The Heart of Philosophy* as a spirited call to restore philosophy to its authentic role as an essential of human life. Philosophy's aim, he argues, is to stimulate relentless questioning of our conventional assessments of what is really true about ourselves and our world and ultimately to make a real difference in the quality of our lives. Now comes *The Third City*, a remarkably original and provocative work of philosophy that speaks precisely to Needleman's challenge to free philosophical quest from its current status as an almost wholly academic preoccupation.

Borna Bebek, a brilliant Yugoslavian in his early 30's who has studied philosophy, economics, comparative religions, and mythology in Europe, the United States, and Asia, has produced nothing less than a contemporary manifesto for the perennial philosophy—that way of thinking and being that constitutes the living center of authentic philosophical paths and vital religious teachings. He displays a mastery of the history of philosophy from Heraclitus and Parmenides to Gadamer and Habermas, of the primary texts of the great religious traditions, and of modern scientific and economic theory. More significantly, he has penetrated this material with fresh insight and a bold, cohesive vision of the dialectics of the search for truth and wholeness over the centuries.

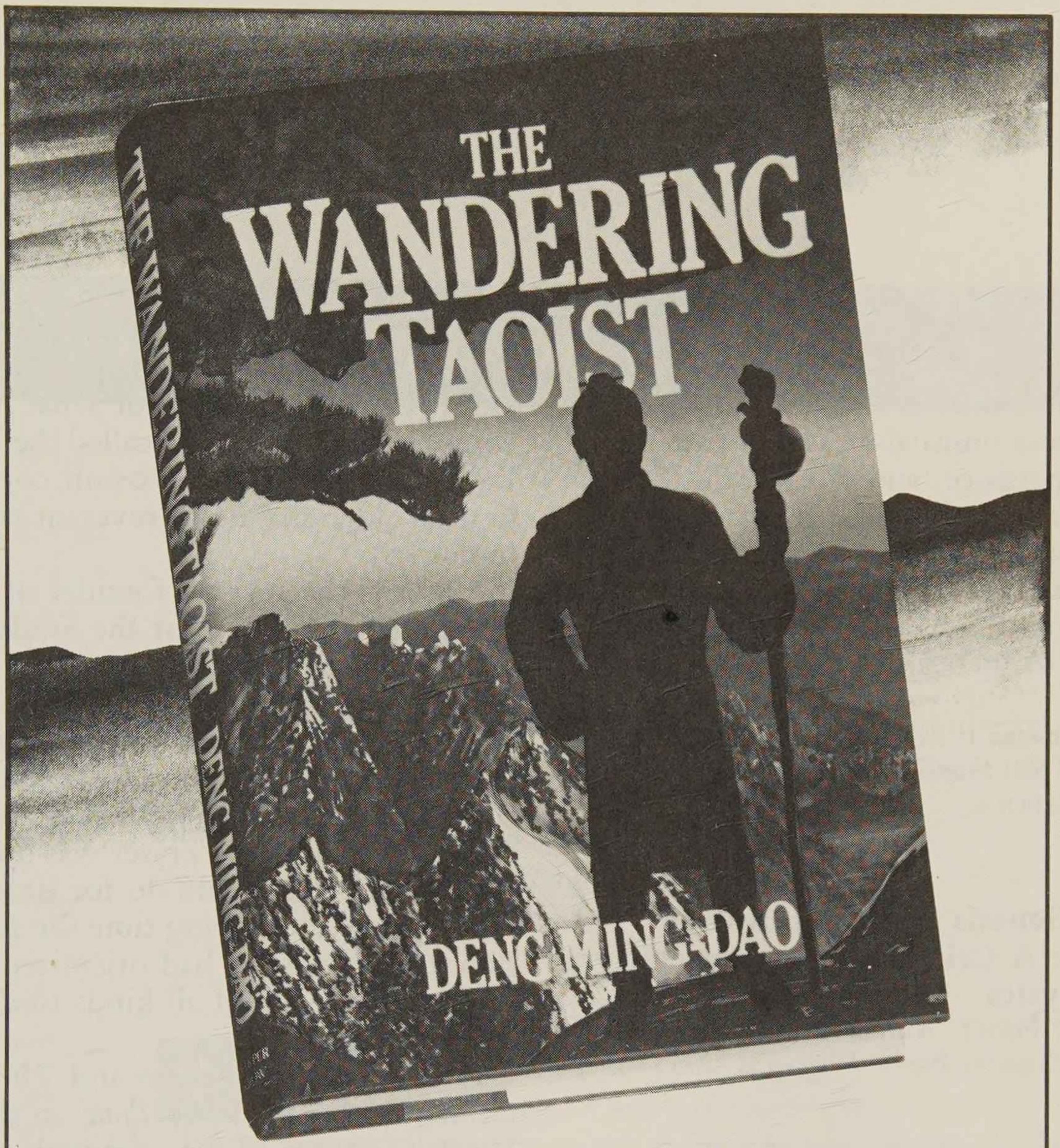
He depicts, with verve and audacity, the perennial struggle between, on the one hand, philosophy, religion, and authentic human living as a *way*, as a never-finished adventure of discovery, and on the other hand, the ineluctable tendency to establish fixed systems of thought, dogmatic orthodoxies, political ideologies, and exoteric criteria of the meaning and worth of human activities. The first approach—which Bebek identifies with the pre-Socratics, Socrates, Plato, certain great theologians, such modern philosophers as Kierkegaard, Marx, and Heidegger, great teachers such as Lao Tzu, Jesus, and Zoroaster, and the primary scrip-

tures of the religious traditions—involves the realization that the human subject and the whole of reality, the knower and the known, are fluid, constantly changing, and interconnected (as modern physics and biology keep telling us). Hence, our task is to think, to act, to be—in body, soul, mind, and feelings—in harmony with the real currents at work in us and in the world.

Such harmonious living requires the attainment of a discipline and a higher perspective that can resolve paradoxes (the one and the many, self-interest and death to self) that inevitably emerge from a linear viewpoint. The alternative, which has dominated much of the history of philosophy (as well as economics, politics, and theology) from the sophists and Aristotle down to modern-day positivists and bourgeois consumer society, is to resolve paradoxes into finite, culture-bound systems. The limited capacities of the human intellect and the rudimentary satisfactions of pleasure and avoidance of pain become the only determinants of meaning, truth, and value. True philosophy and religious teaching wake us up to the deceptions entailed in taking provisional and partial conceptual systems as ultimate. But the vested interests of the ego and particular societies in establishing identities and patterns hold us captive. Real philosophy thus appears as prophetic and counter-conventional, challenging us (by resorting, ironically, to the riches buried in encrusted traditions and discounted myths) to discover anew where our real interests lie and what our real place is.

Unfortunately, such a summary of Bebek's achievement makes what is alternatively charming, elusive, contentious, and tiresome seem bland, vague, even soft-headed. His book is a bravura performance, rife with the arrogance of youth and the passion of personal conviction, studded with stimulating ideas, novel interpretations, startling contentions and generalizations. It is rooted in a fresh reading of the notoriously difficult later dialogues of Plato, as well as the *Republic* and the *Symposium*. Bebek liberates Plato from his conventional classification as the prototypical systematic idealist, exploring his work as a rich articulation of basic Logos philosophy and playing it off against texts and ideas of similar thinkers and ways, especially Taoism, the Gospels, and the Upanishads.

At one point Bebek compares *The Third City*'s "rhythmical expositional technique" to the complex structure of Ravel's *Bolero*; the book is composed as a kind of intellectual score that each reader must play in his or her own way. For its aim is, obviously, not to present yet another conceptual system, but to initiate readers into a new way of thinking free of the positivism that he contends has dominated thinking since the Renaissance. It reminded me even more of the operas of Philip Glass, for it involves regular repetition of themes that are experienced anew by being recast in new ways; the very difficulty of the strange sounds, the arid stretches of abstraction counterpointed by oases of delightful observation, the reader's wondering and frustration about just what is going on—all this aims to wrest us from ingrained habits of mind and to move us to a new perspective. But for many the tedium, obscurity, and length of



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Glass's works outweigh the rewards, and that surely will be the case with Bebek's book. It is difficult and demands an unusual measure of attentiveness, patience, and work. Still, Bebek says early on that the noetic thinking he aims to induce has not had a major spokesman in philosophy for several centuries, and his is a message that needs to be heard.

John Loudon is Editorial Manager of Harper & Row San Francisco and a Consulting Editor to PARABOLA.

The Genesis and Evolution of Time: A Critique of Interpretation in Physics
by J.T. Fraser. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982. Pp. 205. $20.00.

The Dance of Life: The Other Dimension of Time
by Edward T. Hall. Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1983. Pp. 232. $15.95.

On Time: An Investigation into Scientific Knowledge and Human Experience
by Michael Shallis. New York: Schocken Books, 1983. Pp. 208. $14.95.

Reviewed by David Finkelstein

Zeus, king of gods, is unfilial son to Kronos, who may be chronos, time itself, deified. Thus the idea of the primacy of time is ancient. In one of its senses, time is eternity, history, the entire universe. Thus physics is a quest for a fit theory of time. But Kronos has a father too, Chaos. J.T. Fraser, author of *The Genesis and Evolution of Time*, proposes that time itself evolves, starting, if not from the primordial chaos, at least from the primordial atom (Lemaitre's name for what has come, regrettably, to be called the Big Bang, as if to jeer at the cosmic copulation of older and more reverent cosmologies).

Fraser is the spritely founder of the International Society for the Study of Time. I stumbled across him and his Society just when I had become painfully aware that time was being woefully neglected by science. The encounter brought me quick relief: I was delighted to find that Fraser was doing all that one man could do for time. Not only was he paying time the attention it deserved, he had organized scores of scholars of all kinds to do likewise.

Fraser bases his system and *The Genesis and Evolution of Time* on the *Umwelt* concept of the twentieth century biologist Uexkuell. The *Umwelt* of an animal (or better, of a species) is the universe accessible to (or created by?) the stimuli and actions of its receptors and effectors. Simple species, simple *Umwelt*; complex species, complex *Umwelt*. Fraser extends this concept to species even simpler than bacteria: viruses, molecules, atoms, and finally photons, for him the simplest creatures of all. Each of the levels of organization in the hierarchy of the world has its own *Umwelt* and in particular its own time. Fraser's thought is a grand extension of the standard kind of relativity of time, which allows each observer to have his own concept of time and space but insists on the possibility of mutual understanding between such observers. Simpler creatures in his hierarchy cannot understand more evolved ones. Fraser charts

and explores this hierarchy of times using the insights and conclusions of modern physics and biology. His book is thus, in part, a survey course in modern physics. There are tell-tale traces of the auto-didact: some old heuristic devices and some new speculations are presented as if they had equal authority with standard basic principles; but few professionals could do as well over the wide front that Fraser traverses. Moreover, he has the good taste to conjecture the existence of "chronons" well in advance of any physical theory of these elusive quanta of time.

There is, notwithstanding, a basic conflict between the evidence that Fraser presents and the opinions he holds. As he puts it, "Albert Einstein would have objected to the notion of a hierarchy of causations." And so would most physicists. He goes on to say that "most physicists are ready to live with two kinds, one for quantum theory and one for everything else." One might add that the wall between these two kinds of time is under increasingly heavy attack by some of our greatest physicists. The readiness to live with this schizophrenia is wearing out.

Edward Hall is a student of intercultural relations, best known for his work on "proxemics," the cross-cultural study of personal space. He turns in *The Dance of Life* to the personal time of different cultures. The linear hierarchy of Fraser will not accomodate the plurality of times considered by Hall. Time is what clocks tell, and there are as many times as there are clocks. The times of a culture are determined by the clocks it uses, and these include the sacred, biological, kinaesthetic, and social as well as the astronomical. The principle distinctions of Hall are not hierarchic but dialectic. For example, his primary division is between "monochronic" cultures with time organized as a simple line and "polychronic" cultures with time organized as a tree or net of overlapping activities. His principal new technique is a kind of time-microscope. Following the kinesiologist William Condon, he takes motion pictures of people in interaction and studies the film one frame at a time. (For example, Condon spent a year and a half studying four and a half seconds of a family dinner.) Thus he explodes an otherwise imperceptible fraction of a second into as many minutes or hours as he wishes. In this way, Hall discovers a system of communication of which even the communicators are unaware, much as William Condon discovered a system of synchrony outside the awareness of those being synchronized. "God is in the details." Much of his narrative concerns his experience with American-European, Native American (especially Hopi, Navajo, and Pueblo), African, and Japanese times, and intercultural conflicts between them. The writing is thick with cliches and heavy-handed attempts at cosmological syntheses, but Hall believes he is onto something important, and this belief illuminates the book in places. The new ideas in this work can change the way we see each other.

Michael Shallis, in *On Time*, tries, he says, to bridge a gulf, that between time as change in the physical universe, devoid of meaning, and that time which carries meaning and wisdom. The gulf crosses his own life. Shallis has a doctorate in astrophysics from Oxford, where he teaches in the Department of External Studies, and is also a confirmed astrologer.

The gulf divides the book as well. The first part presents some of the aspects of time in modern physics, both quantum and gravitational, and is mostly right. In the early 60s, when Kruskal's description of the gravitational field near very dense bodies came out, there was a great upsurge of research into what has come to be called black and white holes. Lemaitre's much earlier description of the situation was right but hard to follow, and there was much confusion among physicists working before Kruskal. Some of this confusion seems preserved in this work, together with correct recent insights.

The last half of the book takes up extrascientific notions about time, with a final chapter on astrology. Who has not had moments when Nature seemed preternaturally full of human meaning, or flashes of unreasonably accurate intuition? Shallis collects a good many such incidents and presents them more convincingly than he does the lore of relativity and quantum theory, which I must admit is less plausible on its face. I believe Shallis accepts Jung's

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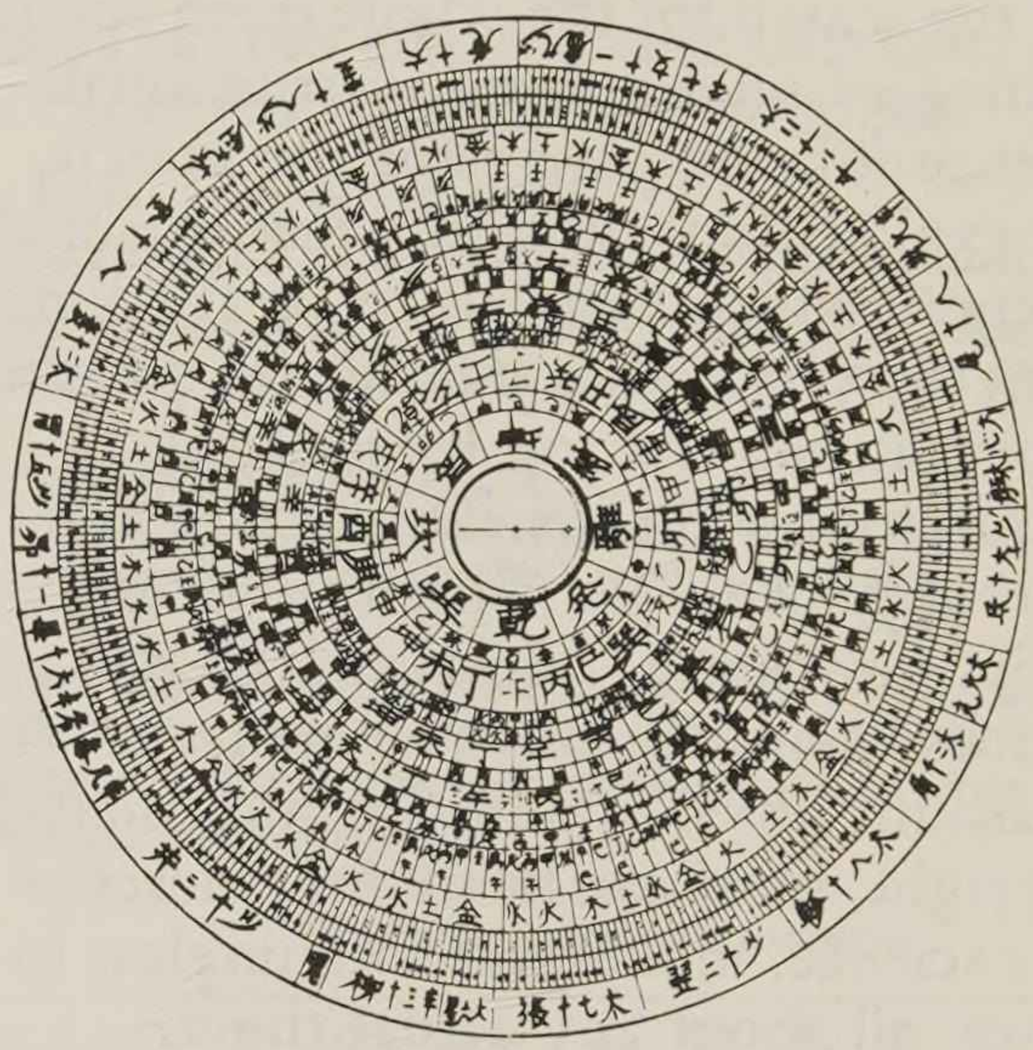

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theory of synchronicity, acausal connections between inner and outer experiences, as a way of handling those times in life when the unexpectedly meaningful event occurs. Shallis tries to extend science to cover such coincidences by distinguishing between descriptive science (Schumacher's term for the search for the whole truth about a thing of interest) and instructional science (Shallis's term for the search for explanation). It is only instructional science, which happens to be the kind done by physicists, that leaves out the supernatural, the top level of the hierarchy for Shallis. Divination and astrology cause no difficulty for descriptive science, which simply describes them. If, however, current quantum physics (and common sense) are right, there can be no fully descriptive science, in that it is meaningless to know all about any actual thing. Beyond a certain point mapped by Heisenberg indeterminacy relations, to know one thing is to forego or invalidate knowledge of another.

The book suggests that Shallis is a fuzzy thinker, for he is certainly a fuzzy writer, unable to carry a construction from beginning to end of his longer sentences. It also suggests that he has the courage of his convictions, for it takes that to practice both astrophysics and astrology openly. I am glad he does not try to explain divination and precognition physically, for I do not think our physics is appropriate for that. Indeed, if you take the present physics seriously, the safest conclusion is that the synchronicities Shallis describes are not significant phenomena at all, but superstitions of the same general kind that Skinner induces in his pigeons, who come to act as though they control their food supply by their intricate turning and bobbing dance rituals, even when the feeding is purely random.

We need meaning in our lives. Those like Shallis who depend on miracles to satisfy this need seem closed to the daily miracle. This calls for a cleansing of the gates of perception more than a new kind of science. I will not exchange my uncertainty for the comfortable certitude of either the true believer in the supernatural or the hard-nosed physicist.

David Finkelstein is Professor of Physics at Georgia Insitiute of Technology in Atlanta. He edits the International Journal of Theoretical Physics.

Now That the Buffalo's Gone: A Study of Today's American Indians
By Alvin M. Josephy, Jr. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982. Pp. *xv* + 300. $15.95.

In the Spirit of Crazy Horse
By Peter Matthiessen. New York: The Viking Press, 1983. Pp. *xli* + 628. $20.95.

Reviewed by David P. McAllester

Most of us assume that the era of physical abuse of Indians and expropriation of Indian resources is over. We hear of generous land settlements, as in Maine where the United States honored a treaty of 1790 by returning thousands of acres of land and paying impressive reparations. The sacred Blue Lake and 48,000 acres of forest preserve around it were returned to

the Pueblo of Taos in 1970. In the Northwest, courts upheld the ancient fishing rights of the Pullayup, Nisqually, and other Indians against extreme pressure from sportsmen and big business, and this judgment was sustained by the United States Supreme Court in 1979. These and other encouraging events are presented in Alvin M. Josephy's comprehensive account of the Indians' struggle to maintain their native culture and the privileges they reserved by treaty in exchange for the cession of virtually the entire continent to European invaders. But Josephy also reveals how difficult it was for the Indians to win these few settlements and how many other decisions have gone against them. A treaty, whenever enacted, ought to be honored without the necessity of years of struggle in the courts, but it seems the White man signs these documents with a forked pen.

New threats to the Indians' resources are now developing on an ever-increasing scale. One might think that the long tale of chicanery and outright theft would be over since Indians have so little left, but in the last few decades it has become apparent that the arid, submarginal remnants of land still in

their possession contain a tenth of the nation's future fuel resources. It is now multi-national corporations that threaten environmental disaster as well as new styles of exploitation in disadvantageous oil, coal, and uranium leases.

Josephy's book, the latest in a distinguished series about American Indians, is a compendium of recent issues and gives valuable historical and cultural background on some of the most important of these: the Seminole-Miccosukee land dispute in Florida (with origins going back to 1513 and before); the flooding of the Seneca reservation by the Kinzua Dam in New York; the subversion of Pyramid Lake waters in Nevada; the fishing rights battle in Washington and Oregon; the occupation of Wounded Knee in South Dakota. An introductory section on early Indian-White relations in New England shows how the expropriatory mind-set of the Europeans was established 350 years ago.

The shape of Indian resistance in recent years emerges from these pages in an interesting pattern. It began with long, seemingly hopeless struggles in unsympathetic courts by single tribes. After sixty-four years the Taos Indians succeeded solely because President Nixon took an interest in their cause. The Senecas, with equal justice on their side but with more powerful interests against them, failed, and the Pickering Treaty of 1794, dishonored, stands as a reminder to us all of our shortcomings as a democracy.

The occupation of Alcatraz, the "Trail of Broken Treaties," and the occupation of Wounded Knee are significant because they were multi-tribal protests. In fact the FBI claimed that the latter also included the international Communist conspiracy. These events were also confrontational and included all our own devices of protest: civil disobedience, publicity, literary satire, and rallying songs like the "BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs] Song":

B.I.A., don't you blame me for your
problems,
I'm not your Indian any more,
You belong to Whiteman, weya, ha-ya-ya!

Young Indians educated in our colleges, on our city streets, in our jails and penitentiaries, and in the armed forces made up the spearhead of the new forms of resistance. The American Indian Movement (A.I.M.) began in Milwaukee in 1968 to defend Indians in the streets from police violence and increased in numbers and standing in Indian eyes to the point where it was invited to the Pine Ridge reservation by the traditionalist faction of the Lakota Tribe to aid in protesting BIA domination and in reclaiming the sacred Black Hills, promised to the Lakota forever in a treaty of 1868.

The multi-tribal, multi-cultural nature of recent Indian protest is exemplified in the International Indian Treaty Council, which went to Geneva in 1978, appealed to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, and has been granted official standing in the Movement of the Non-aligned Nations of the World.

Peter Matthiessen's book deals with the most dramatic of the recent protests, Wounded Knee. He focuses on bringing to life the moment-by-moment hopes, fears, bravado, desperation, heroism, and brutality of both sides of the struggle. The FBI, how-

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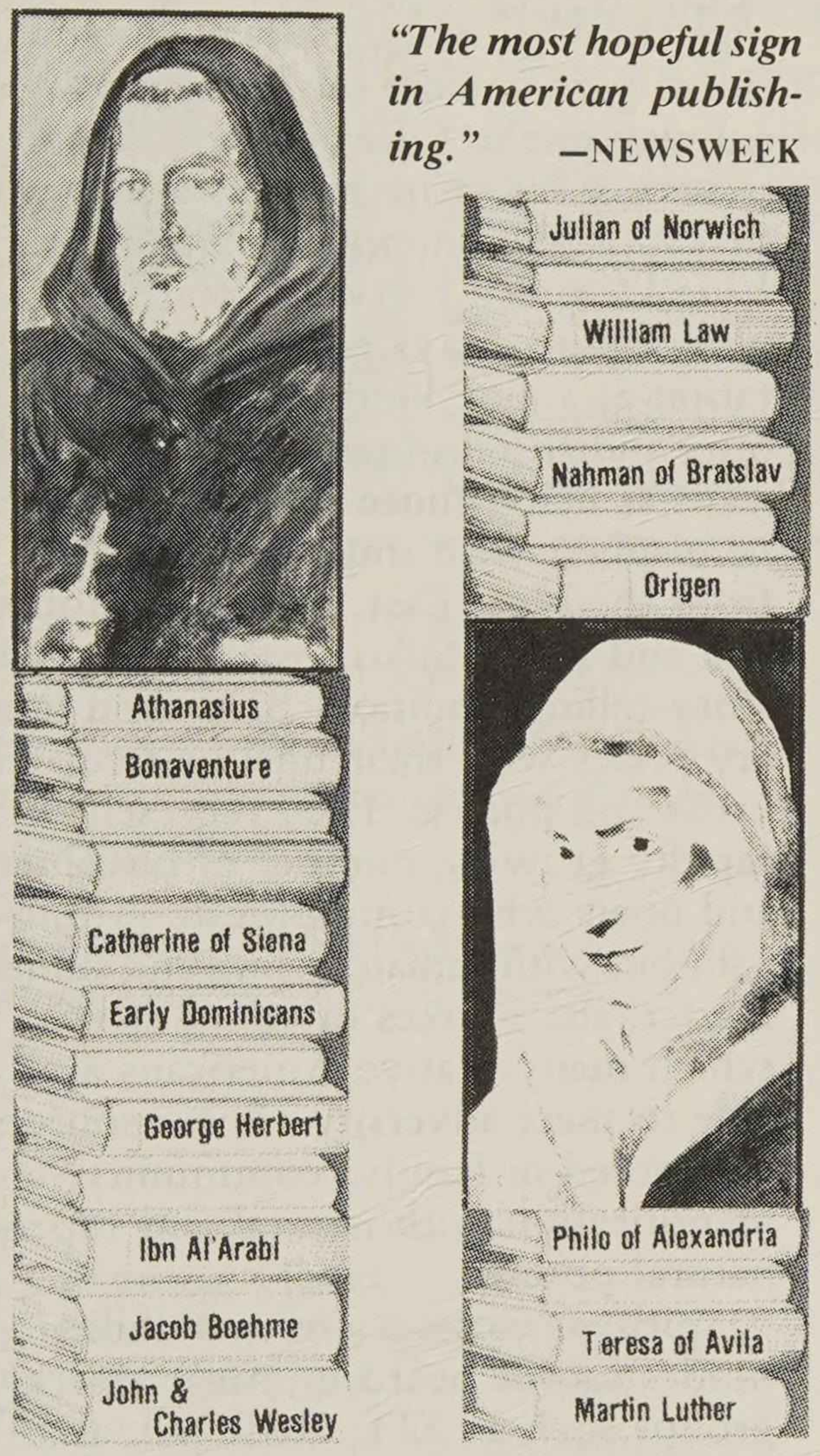

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ever, is shown as inept and repellent, clearly the bad guys, while the protesting Indians are seen as heroic warriors fighting for their rights. The writer's involvement in the events seems to have overcome his judgment in communication, and the reader is buried in sheer quantity of narration, court proceedings, testimonies, interrogations, citations, and tape transcripts. A major emphasis of the book is the raising of doubts as to the legality of the conviction of Leonard Peltier for the death of two of the FBI agents at Pine Ridge. It seems that much of the court procedure was so prejudiced and irregular as to support Matthiessen's contention that there should be at least a retrial.

The title of Josephy's book is taken from a protest song by Cree Indian popular folksinger and television personality Buffy Sainte-Marie. I could not find this fact cited in the book and its omission points up a narrowness of perspective for a work with the broad subtitle, "A Study of Today's American Indians." Both volumes under discussion here frequently mention the cultural and spiritual heritage of the Indians as a supporting factor in their struggle for justice, but this point is not developed in any real depth. Even Josephy's extensive background material consists largely of military and political history. But the Indians have more to tell us than their "plight." Something needs to be said about the inner resources that have sustained them through hundreds of years of unequal battle.

The moral and spiritual values of the Indians, are, in part, available to us in the published record of their religious, philosophic, and artistic traditions. In addition, new strengths are developing as Indian artists and intellectuals grow with the times. Fritz Scholder's paintings show grotesque Indians in traditional garb against the backdrop of a subway or the Eiffel Tower. The power of his satire has put him in the first rank of contemporary painters. Vine Deloria's witty political and philosophic essays point to the corporation as a new kind of tribalism and offer Indian religious values to Americans as being more pertinent to our hemisphere than imported religions from the Near East. N. Scott Momaday and Leslie Silko, exemplifying the story-telling tradition, have won literary prizes with their finely articulated prose and poetry. They represent a rapidly growing number of novelists and poets who communicate in English, but with Indian feeling and subject matter, the sources of strength with which many Native Americans are able to meet adversity. These sources are rooted in family, community, and identification with natural and supernatural power.

Spiritual messages in new Indian modes can be heard in music. Rock groups such as XIT, Redbone, and Mr. Indian in Time have mastered the idiom and also include in their repertoires songs with elements of Indian music. Their messages include protest against injustice and statements on the value of old people in the community, an unusual rock subject. In uniquely mingled Indian/European art songs, composer-singer A. Paul Ortega depicts Native American modes of friendship and human compassion.

Increasingly, and in a rich variety of ways, all these voices call for a new unity of humankind, and harmony among all the forms of nature. It is

very much a message for these times and for all the passengers on this endangered planet.

David P. McAllester is Professor of Anthropology and Music at Wesleyan University.

A Listening Heart
By David Steindl-Rast. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1983. Pp. 96. $7.95.

Reviewed by Vincent Rossi

David Steindl-Rast, the peripatetic Benedictine monk, has earned a reputation as a bridge-builder between East and West in matters of religion and is considered by many to be the foremost bearer of the standard of Christian ecumenism laid down by Thomas Merton in Thailand nearly fifteen years ago. With the publication of *A Listening Heart: The Art of Contemplative Living*, Brother David proves to be adept at bridging a far more profound chasm than that between Christianity and Buddhism: the gap between ordinary conscious experience and genuine contemplation.

The contemplative state is difficult to achieve not because it is so far removed from everyday experience; on the contrary, as Steindl-Rast points out, at every moment and in every place the life of every human being is filled with seeds of contemplation. The difficulty lies in how to plant, nurture, and harvest these incipient mystical moments so that our lives become a feast of contemplative experiences. This requires an awakening, a return, and a celebration, or in Steindl-Rast's words, recognition, acknowledgment, and gratitude.

We must begin, Steindl-Rast tells us, by realizing that all are called to the contemplative search for meaning, though all are not equally sensitive to it. "To be human means to be contemplative at heart." To accept the fiction that only a select few are destined to be mystics is to deny a universal dimension of human experience and to impoverish our inner life.

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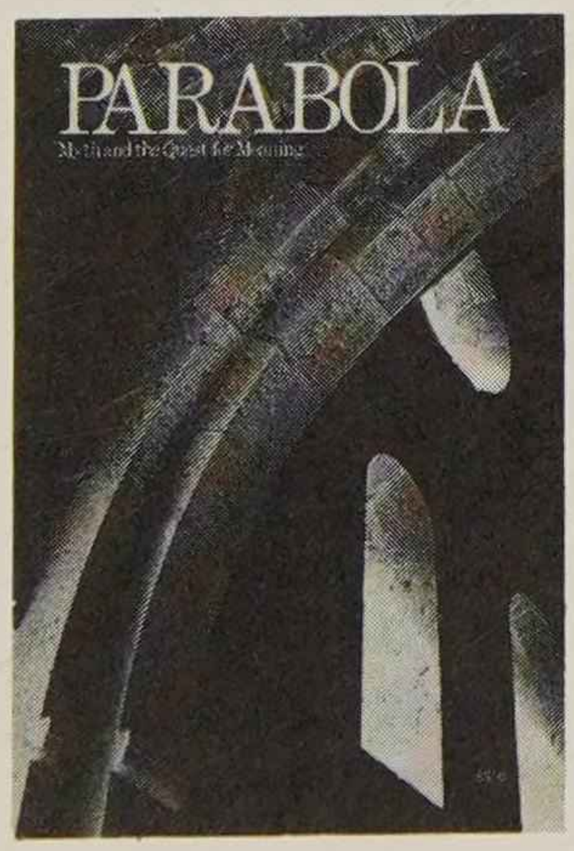

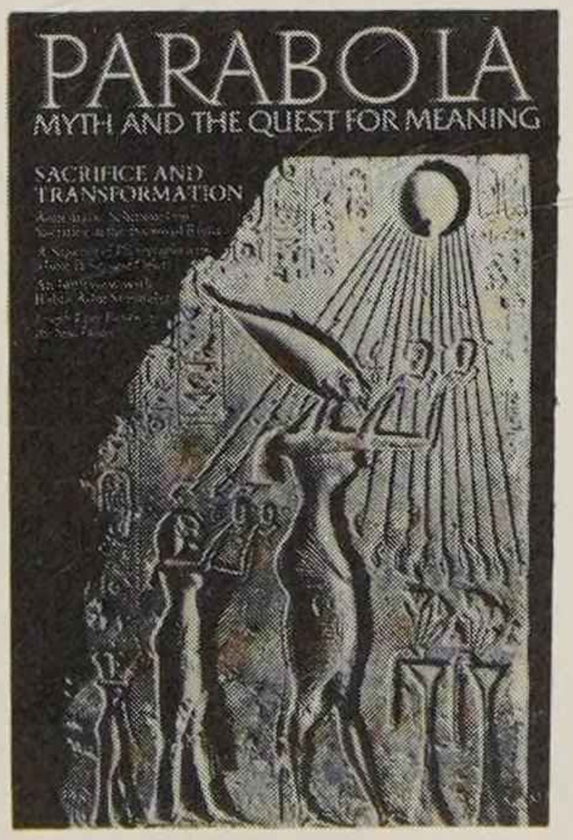

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Steindl-Rast's insistence on this point recalls Ananda Coomaraswamy's teaching on art: the artist is not a special kind of man, Coomaraswamy was fond of saying, but every man is a special kind of artist. Similarly, Steindl-Rast says, "Let no one say, 'Me? I'm not a mystic!' A mystic is not a special kind of human being. Rather, every human being is a special kind of mystic. We better believe this and live up to our vocation."

A Listening Heart gives us essential instructions in how to live up to our universal contemplative vocation. It can be read with profit by all seekers, whatever their level of experience or realization, because the essence of contemplation is to cultivate the "beginner's mind," the mind that sees all things fresh and "makes all things new." Steindl-Rast's prose is plain and clear and wise. He uses no rhetorical flourishes, no obscure language, no special effects to make his points. Blessedly concrete and straightforward, he reveals a disciplined intelligence whose light is directed and liberated by the clarity that contemplation brings.

In order to harvest these mystical seeds, which Steindl-Rast, following Abraham Maslow, calls "peak experiences," we must first "plant" them. To plant them, we must find them, and we find them by "listening" with the heart or practicing "bare attention." Examine your own past "peak experiences" and you will discover in them the three paradoxes which Steindl-Rast calls the "seeds" of every mystical experience. The first is a sense of losing oneself that at the same time is a discovery of one's true Self. The second is a sense of being alone that is at the same time such an expansion of heart that everything is embraced in a feeling of being "one with all." The third is the experience that suddenly everything makes perfect sense in a way that transcends or bypasses one's problems or questions: "When I drop the question, the answer is there." Any experience, however humble, of communion with ultimate reality, says Steindl-Rast, is bound to be paradoxical, since ultimate reality is the very "coincidence of opposites."

Between these seeds of contemplation and their harvest lies asceticism, or spiritual discipline, especially an "environmental asceticism of space and time." Traditionally, this involves participating fully in a specific monastic community, but Steindl-Rast shows how monastic spiritual disciplines can be cultivated anywhere. To one who is *awake*, any place can be holy ground. "All around in every direction; Holy of Holies" (Ezekiel 45:1). One learns to take off one's shoes, as Moses did before the Burning Bush. To "take off your shoes" is to practice "mindfulness" or "recollection." To one who is mindful, who takes off his shoes in recognition that every place is Holy Ground, the asceticism of space leads directly to the asceticism of time. Every moment is Kairos, the holy moment, the acceptable time.

Steindl-Rast draws insight into contemplative experience not only from sacred scripture and the tradition of Benedictine spirituality, but also, and most effectively, from poetry, in particular the poetry of T.S. Eliot and classical haiku. "Among all poetic forms there is not one in which awareness is more central than in haiku." In his hands, haiku becomes a crystal mirror that reveals the meaning in the

half-guessed hints and half-understood gifts of everyday life. The ease with which he draws upon the resources of oriental wisdom, and Zen in particular, without striking a wrong note in his Christian witness, exemplifies the possibilities for Christians to deepen and enrich their own tradition in open dialogue with Asian traditions. What is Kyoto to Jerusalem? Steindl-Rast would answer this paraphrase of Tertullian's rhetorical question in a more positive way than that sour Church father ever would have.

The contemplative life is not all "sudden illumination," but an art that must be practiced daily. Steindl-Rast grounds contemplative living in the proper understanding and practice of obedience. A "listening heart" is an obedient heart. Steindl-Rast returns again and again to this theme, pointing out that the root meaning of *oboedire* is to listen intently or thoroughly. The only alternative to the "listening wisdom" of obedience is absurdity, from *absurdus*, which literally means to be utterly deaf. "If I call a situation absurd I admit I am deaf to its meaning." Obedience, then, is "the daily discipline of listening and responding to meaning."

Steindl-Rast's use of the term "peak experience," although more descriptive than substantive, sounds the only discordant note in the book, in the first place because the term has become a popular bit of "psycho-babble" that can mean almost anything, and also because Abraham Maslow, who coined the phrase, gives it a humanistic and biological meaning that is inimical to genuine contemplation. The man who wrote that "the highest experience ever described . . . can be seen as the deepest experience of our ultimate personal animality" is no thinker to turn to for support in describing the contemplative life!

In his remarkable final chapter, "A Deep Bow," Steindl-Rast presents a "phenomenology" of gratitude that reveals this universal experience as, first, a proof for the supreme personhood of God; second, as a bridge between the seemingly irreconcilable opposition of Christianity's belief in the existence of God and Buddhism's supposed "atheism"; and third, as a contemplative insight that engages and unites the whole person: the intellect recognizes, the will acknowledges, the feelings resound in gratitude.
For Steindl-Rast and all contemplatives, gratitude is incipient mystical experience.

Thomas Merton wrote that "the highest vocation in the Kingdom of God is that of sharing one's contemplation with others and bringing other men to the experimental knowledge of God that is given to those who love him perfectly." On the other hand, he reminds us that "no one teaches contemplation except God, Who gives it. The best you can do is write something or say something that will serve as an occasion for someone else to realize what God wants of him." In *A Listening Heart*, David Steindl-Rast has written a book that succeeds beautifully on both counts. His insights, so plainly and simply expressed, are clearly the fruit of his contemplative experience. And for this reader at least, *A Listening Heart* provoked many moments when what God wants of us seemed as close as a heart beat. To Brother David Steindl-Rast, for his gem of a book, a deep bow.

Vincent Rossi is the Director of the Holy Order of MANS, an ecumenical order and community of men, women, and children in San Francisco.

Nature Word
By R.A. Schwaller de Lubicz. Translated from the French by Deborah Lawlor. West Stockbridge, Mass.: The Lindisfarne Press, 1982. Pp. 154. $6.95.

Egyptian Mysteries
By Lucie Lamy. New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1981. Pp. 96. $9.95.

Sacred Geometry
By Richard Lawlor. New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1981. Pp. 112. $9.95.

Reviewed by John Anthony West

Nature Word was written by R.A. Schwaller de Lubicz immediately following his fifteen-year sojourn in Egypt, and the magisterial reinterpretation of ancient Egyptian civilization for which he is principally known.

But Egypt, for Schwaller, was not an end in itself. He was basically a mathematician and philosopher, determined to understand the very nature

of creation and man's role within it. A lifetime of study had convinced him that this knowledge had existed in the past, but had been either perverted or forgotten.

In the stones of Egypt—in their measure, proportion, geometry, and harmony—Schwaller discovered proof of the sacred science of the ancients. He did not expect humanity suddenly to start building pyramids, but the testimony of the stones allowed him to recast ancient doctrine in a contemporary mold, in a body of work that eludes precise definition. It is not philosophy or theology or science in the usual sense, and yet it is all of these things. Though the language is abstract, its impact is emotional, even revelatory. It is wisdom literature in the true sense, and like all such literature, by no means easily accessible. Try to imagine a cross between Platonic dialogue and the Tao Te Ching, and you may get some notion of *Nature Word*. It takes the form of answers to questions that are not in fact posed, except by an interrogation point. The answer reveals the question:

No! Others preach to you, upon the basis of their faith, religious disciplines or methods of yoga. As for myself, I have to speak of this in another way. Following the teachings of the ancient Sages, what I have to offer you is a logical basis which, by means of a philosophy rich in analogues, can lead you toward knowledge, because:

the same Cause, with different subjects, gives similar effects.

The questions are posed by the troubled, rational, argumentative, intellectual, questing self. They cover the full range of mankind's concerns, including science, religion, esotericism, time, space, sex, and art. The answers are provided by the inner sage—immanent in all of us according to the doctrine—the spokesman for what Schwaller calls "the intelligence of the Heart."

The text follows no logical sequence yet has an inner associative logic. Read through at a sitting, this short book demands impossible concentration. *Nature Word* is pure, distilled Schwaller. But perhaps because it is the Intelligence of the Heart speaking, something takes hold. If the book is opened

a week later, suddenly it seems lucid, definitive, and, for all its abstractions, perfectly rational.

Lucie Lamy, Schwaller's stepdaughter, is best known for her meticulous diagrams and beautifully copied drawings of Egyptian originals, which illustrate Schwaller's books. She is, however, an accomplished scholar in her own right, and will soon make public a number of important discoveries in Egyptian mathematics and astronomy. But it may be that her greatest talent is organization. Without oversimplifying, yet without skimping, Mlle. Lamy in *Egyptian Mysteries* needs less than one hundred pages to show the sacred sciences *in action* within the immensely complex civilization that was Egypt. She demonstrates how the great universal themes of "Creation/Becoming/Return" pervade Egyptian mythology and symbolism; how the sacred sciences, based upon a knowledge of the "Laws of Genesis," command architecture and art, as well as systems of weights and measures, the calendar, and other seemingly mundane concerns; how the spiritual themes of death, resurrection, and reincarnation underlie the elaborate funerary texts and rituals that seem so bizarre and alien to us.

No other book gives so clear and so succinct a picture of ancient Egypt. To fully appreciate its value, it is worth reading in tandem with some standard, academic book intended for the layman. The contrast is illuminating and raises interesting questions, not only concerning variant views of Egypt, but about history, modern scholarship, and modern education.

God geometrizes, declared Plato. Behind this statement lies the understanding that Number and the interplay of Numbers define the laws that make up the world of our experience. Geometry schematizes these fundamental laws, allowing us to visualize them and to apply them to our own artistic creations. Sacred geometry is responsible for the breathtaking religious architecture of Egypt, India, and elsewhere, as well as for the symmetry of the rose and the chambered nautilus.

There is a considerable body of literature devoted to sacred geometry, dating back to classical antiquity. Schwaller de Lubicz was thoroughly familiar with this work. But his own study supplied the missing key. He was able to explain what had eluded some of the greatest minds of the last two thousand years—*why* sacred geometry necessarily commands the creations of both gods and men.

Schwaller's findings, however, are inextricably embedded in the mighty and as yet unpublished *Le temple de l'homme*, inaccessible to all who do not read French, and by no means easy going for those who do. Robert Lawlor has therefore performed an inestimable service in *Sacred Geometry* by extracting the essence of Schwaller's discoveries, amplified and illustrated by a wealth of examples from nature and art.

To appreciate sacred geometry, it is necessary only to walk into Chartres Cathedral or look at a rose. To grasp the principles upon which it is based, careful study will suffice. But to truly understand sacred geometry, there is no substitute for doing it yourself. Lawlor's book is half-text, half-workbook. As he explains and illustrates the fundamentals of sacred geometry and its innumerable applications, he guides

the reader through an easily-followed, step-by-step process that leads from the simple square and its diagonal to the geometry of the cathedral and Platonic solids. These simple exercises have a revelatory power; the inordinate praise lavished upon geometry by the ancients suddenly no longer seems excessive. The truth of the lesson imposes itself, and reflection provokes an ironic conclusion: to understand the most profound secrets of the universe, particle accelerators are quite unnecessary. All that is needed is a compass, a ruler, and a flat surface.

John Anthony West, novelist and playwright, is the author of Serpent in the Sky: The High Wisdom of Ancient Egypt *(Harper & Row, 1979), a detailed examination of the work of R.A. Schwaller de Lubicz.*

Yet Being Someone Other
By Laurens van der Post. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1983. Pp. 352. $15.95.

Reviewed by William P. Marsh

On a winter's afternoon in 1926, Laurens van der Post, then nineteen years old, was quietly enjoying a plate of waffles in a Pretoria coffee house when he was disturbed by an altercation at the counter. The near-hysterical proprietor was refusing to serve two small, confused "colored" men—actually they were Japanese—and trying to evict them. Van der Post came to the aid of the two strangers and, before the bewildered proprietor could react, insisted that they join him at his table and have coffee with him. These seemingly insignificant cups of coffee set in motion what was to become a major current in van der Post's life, one that provides most of the material in *Yet Being Someone Other.*

The book is primarily an acknowledgment of "gratitude to life for giving me so privileged a chance of communion with the sea and its meaning, both in the dimension of the here and now and in the spirit where, through the symbolism of the external world made manifest, we are in touch with all that has been and all that is to come." Van der Post, of Dutch and French Huguenot ancestry, was born and grew up in the interior of South Africa, "one thousand and one miles from the sea," in a small, isolated Voortrekker community beyond the Orange River. The reverential feeling for the African land and the lives, outer and inner, of its native peoples engendered by such a boyhood in the bush has been movingly evoked in many of van der Post's other books, most notably his two volumes on the aboriginal Bushmen, *The Lost World of the Kalahari* and *The Heart of the Hunter.*

When he was seventeen, rejecting university and desiring to be a writer, but not "just a writer," van der Post went to Durban, where he landed a job with the Port Natal evening newspaper. Eventually he was given the job of covering the port and the ship movements, an assignment that brought him into contact with the life of the waterfront and with several memorable characters, among them two crusty signal station keepers, a Wagner-loving tugboat captain, and a Norwegian whaling captain obsessed with finding a gigantic singing whale

that haunted him in a recurring dream. Van der Post sailed with this captain (whose ship's company included a magnificent Queequeg-like Zulu stoker) for part of three whaling seasons, and his account of this experience is the first of the two great sea adventures that make up most of the book.

The second adventure was a result of the incident in the Pretoria coffee house. The two stangers whom van der Post befriended were journalists on a trade mission. Impressed by his lack of prejudice and hopeful that he might use his position as a journalist to present a favorable picture to his countrymen of expansionist-minded Japan, they invited him, along with his friend William Plomer, to come to Japan as their guests. His long, Conradian sea passage there is the centerpiece of *Yet Being Someone Other*, and, like all of van der Post's explorations, it was an inner and an outer journey. As guides he had two remarkable men: the ship's captain, who became a lifelong friend, and the purser, who tutored van der Post in Japanese language and culture. They taught him, as much with deeds as with words, two concepts that came to have a special significance for him: "Maru"—a reminder that the material things fashioned by man are more than matter and carry a symbolic meaning; and "Li"—the attempt to achieve harmony in human relations through "good manners," and to join this harmony to that of the universe through courtesy to the gods.

The Japan that van der Post visited in 1926 had been opened only two generations before to the outside world by the guns of Commodore Perry. Despite growing dreams of trade, expansion, and empire, its traditional culture was essentially undisturbed. Most of all van der Post was impressed by the respect shown in Japan to the natural world; wherever he looked the earth was cared for and revered, evidence of man's attempt to be obedient to his contract with life. Here, and on the return voyage to Durban with its many stops along the way, van der Post began to feel that the whole world was his home.

However, the episode of the "two cups of coffee" had not yet come full

cycle. When World War II came, van der Post joined the British army, and, after leading the famous "March of the Camels" into Abyssinia, he was posted to Java to harry Japanese lines of communication. There, the seemingly random elements of his life fell into place. Early one morning as he walked alone outside his camp he was suddenly surrounded by bayonet-wielding Japanese soldiers who did not kill him instantly only because he spoke to them (or rather, he says, a voice, an "other voice," spoke through him) in their own language with the utmost degree of politeness. This "other voice" enabled him to survive and to help many of his fellow prisoners survive the three and one-half years of harsh imprisonment that followed. As he puts it, "I realized with a shock of lightning revelation how on that cold winter's day in Pretoria, South Africa, in 1926 when I obeyed without hesitation the prompting of instinct and invited Messrs. Shirakawa and Hisatomi to have coffee at my table with me, I was saving my own life in Batam in 1942; and now, in the same fashion, might be able to save the lives of thousands of others." By remembering his Japanese friends, and remembering for his captors the truths of their own culture and history, he was able to act with proper behavior and to show his fellow prisoners how to do likewise, so that they not only survived, but survived without bitterness or desire for revenge.

Sir Laurens (he was knighted in 1980) has, as he points out, been more deeply involved with more races and cultures than perhaps anyone else of his time. All the while he has been a voice for the truths of the inner, spiritual world and has warned against the obsessive Western rationalism that ignores these truths. In this book he reminds us that "a memory cultivated out of honor for the quality rather than the quantity of human experience will retain all that is necessary to make it a compass for man in his search for truth." Throughout his life Sir Laurens has been true to his course, and he shows us here once more that his course has been true.

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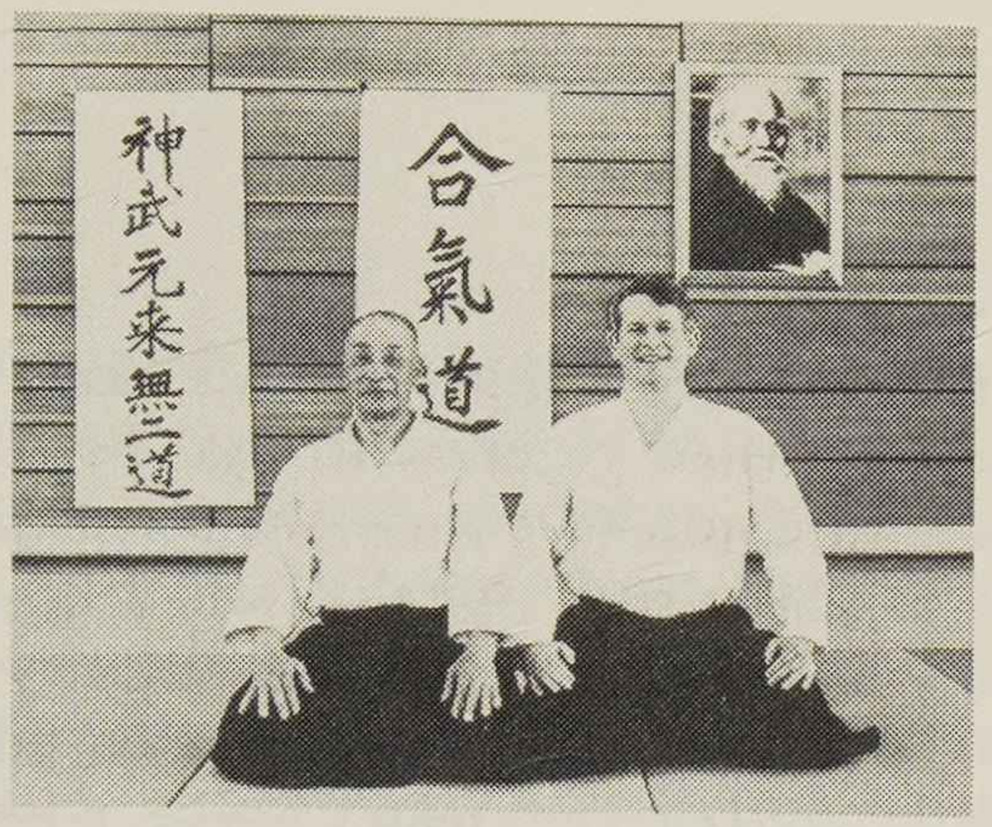
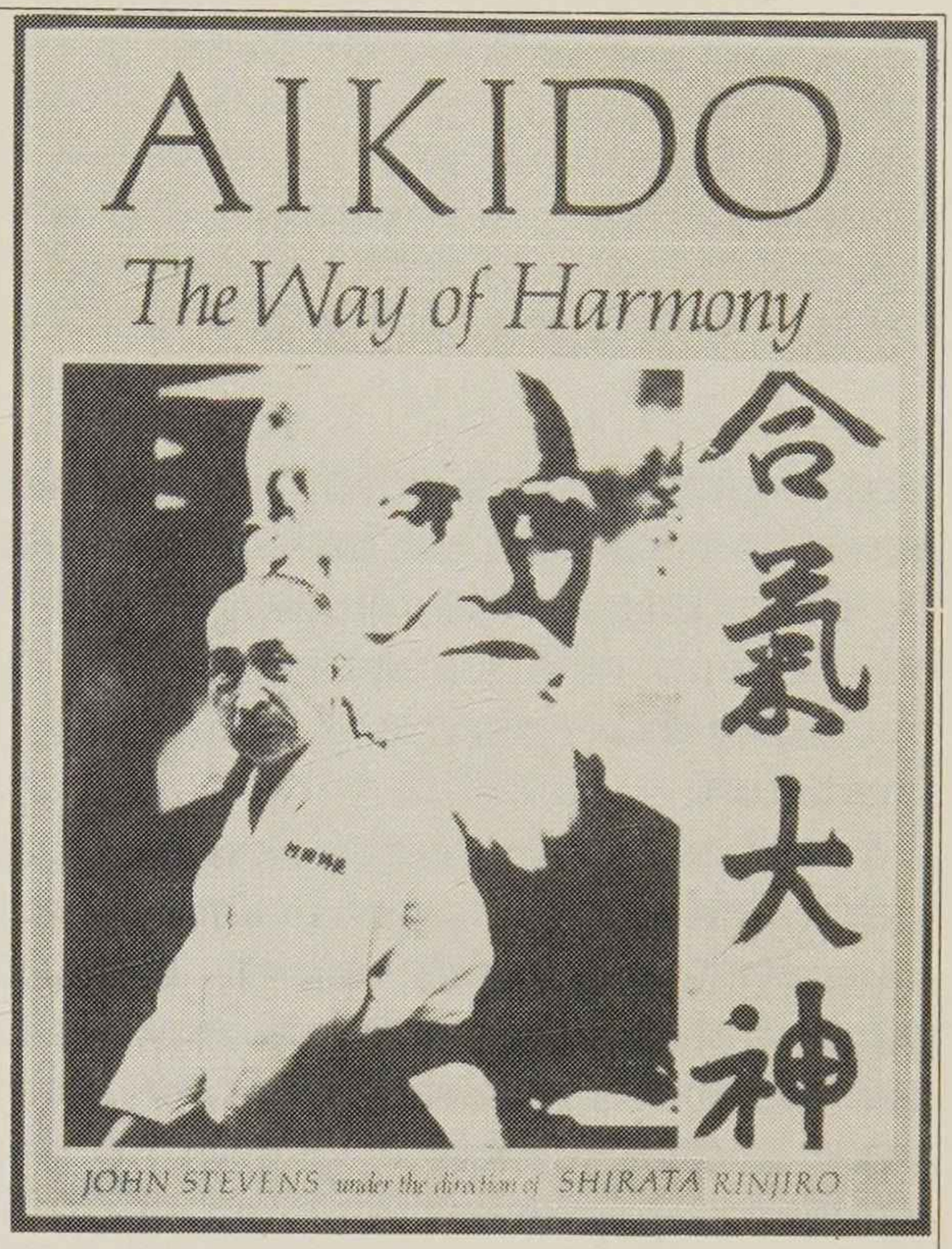
The Journey to the West
Translated and Edited by Anthony C. Yu. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Vol. 1: 1977, pp. 530, $25.00, paper $8.95. Vol. 2: 1978, pp. 438, $25.00, paper $12.50. Vol. 3: 1980, pp. 453, $30.00. Vol. 4: 1983, pp. 469, $35.00.

Reviewed by Paul Jordan-Smith

Some forty years ago, the Chinese folk-novel *Monkey* appeared in print in English for the first time in an extended, continuous narrative form. It was a little over three hundred pages long, covering but a fraction—some thirty chapters—of the original. The translator, Arthur Waley, gave such life and zest to this work that the novel immediately entered Western culture as a classic, and it has remained in print continuously since 1942. Now, for the first time in English, the entire novel—all one hundred chapters—is available. With some exceptions, the new prose of the new translation remarkably resembles Waley's nearly perfect rendi-





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tion, so readers who delighted in the earlier version will not be disappointed by the present work, although some adjustments of orientation may be necessary to keep track of some of the characters.

For those who are not familiar with either version, the story is about the journey of a Buddhist monk, Tripitaka, to the Thunderclap Mountain and the abode of Buddha to obtain three baskets (hence Tripitaka) of Buddhist scriptures for China. The monk is accompanied on his journey by three most unusual disciples—two converted demons in the forms of a pig spirit and a "sand spirit," and Monkey. Although it is Tripitaka who must make the journey, the real hero of the tale is Monkey, or, as he has variously styled himself, Handsome Monkey King, or Great Sage, Equal to Heaven. This outrageously picaresque character so captivates the reader in episode after episode of demon-slaying, rescue, and other grandiose and heroic escapades that, with the exception of the pig-spirit (called Pigsy by Waley, but in the new translation by various other names), the other characters are almost incidental.

Nevertheless, it is Tripitaka, the all-too-human being, with his aches and complaints, dim-wittedness, gullibility, and general insipidity, who must make the journey, step by step. This is so despite the fact that his fantastic disciples soar into the sky and journey hundreds of thousands of miles in an instant, go up to heaven itself and talk to the Jade Emperor, Lao Tzu, Buddha, the mythical demi-god Ehrlang, and the Boddhisattva Kuan-yin, and who (especially Monkey) have mastered the powers of transformation so that they can assume all kinds of disguises or gigantic forms. For the commission to obtain the scriptures was given to Tripitaka, and to the others was given the opportunity to redeem their former misdeeds. This is true even of Tripitaka's horse, a former dragon whose youthful energies set fire to his father's palace and burned up some valuable pearls. The pig-spirit and the sand-monk (called Sandy in Waley's version) were both destructive demons, and Monkey himself, after stealing the peaches of immortality and Lao-Tzu's golden elixir, was imprisoned by Buddha for five hundred years under a mountain, awaiting the coming of the Scripture Pilgrim.

Were the story simply the collection of folk-tales and adventures that it is, there would be interest enough to warrant a reading. There is much more to it than that, however. Originally attributed to Wu Ch'eng-En, a writer in late sixteenth-century China, the stories are in fact much older, and the authorship of the present hundred-chapter version cannot be definitively attributed to anyone. As the translator, Anthony Yu, points out in his introduction, Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian themes appear throughout the book. Not only does Taoist alchemical symbolism dominate the poetical passages (most of which were omitted by Waley), but the structure of the adventures themselves follows a recognizable and esoteric process. The action of each chapter is described in a couplet, the precise meaning of which is not often apparent without reference to works like Needham's *Science and Civilization in China*. Together, the chapter-couplets form a long Taoist poem.

Though a reader brought up on Waley's version may find the names in this one confusing—Monkey, as well as being referred to as Great Sage, is also called Pilgrim Sun (Sun being the Chinese for Monkey), and referred to by his religious name, Wu-k'ung—the names, especially the religious ones, and the Taoist references in the poetry, are full of meaning and give quite another dimension to the story. For Monkey is referred to as Monkey of the Mind, and his religious name means Awake-to-Vacuity. Pigsy (Wu-neng) is Awake-to-Power (he is also called Chu Pa-chieh, which means "Eight-Commandments Hog," a reference to the fact that he obeys eight of the ten Buddhist commandments, the two remaining having to do with eating). Sandy (or Sha Monk) bears the name Wu-ching, meaning Awake-to-Purity. The style of each of the three disciples, as well as of Tripitaka's erstwhile dragon (referred to at times as the Horse of the Will), together with Tripitaka himself, turns the story of a specific journey into a saga of Man's pilgrimage: the ordinary, somewhat ridiculous, but absolutely necessary Self, accompanied by a Mind, clever and powerful (within its limits), a Body alternately lazy and enthusiastic, a mysterious and rather gloomy Spirit, which could be our unknown emotional functioning, and a Will whose most important role may simply be to get us where we are going. Encountered along the Way are the Bandits of the six senses, monsters and demons, temptations and deceptions. There are times when the Mind Monkey is banished and times when his return is desperately required, times when Eight-Commandments Hog must be tricked into doing his duty and times when his rapacious appetite is appropriate; all of this as Tripitaka plods on towards the West.

Addicts of the Waley translation may have some difficulty with language, since Pigsy and Sandy do not appear under those names, and all three disciples are referred to by their Chinese names quite frequently. Sometimes Yu leaves a reference in Chinese when English would do quite as well. The footnotes leave much to be desired. They are often redundant, sometimes obscure for nonscholars, and inadequate for understanding various terms or expressions. It seems as if Yu could not decide whether to render the story for scholars or ordinary readers. There are a number of instances where admirers of Waley's flawless and appropriate prose will yearn for his touch, but withal the text reads smoothly and in style captures much of Waley's flair.

Waley omitted most of the poetry, however, and this is where Yu excels. Poetry most often appears when a new scene begins, or when a battle takes place, as a memorial verse describing some past event or condition, or at the beginning of chapters, when the present circumstances are recapitulated, often in symbolic form. The most striking are those evoking a change of scene:

Maple leaves red all over the mountain
Golden blooms prevail over the night-wind.
The old cicada's song turns languid;
The sad cricket ever voices his plaint.
Cracked lotus leaves like green silk fans;
Oranges tangy like balls of gold.
Lovely, those rows of wild geese,
Spreading dots in the distant sky.

There is not a season or even part of a season which does not have its poetic description, nor a mountain pass its memorial. Battles between Monkey and various demons are more effectively described in verse than in prose (which may be generally true in other epics as well). Amid laughter at the outrageous doings of Monkey and Pigsy, irritation at Tripitaka's persistent stupidity, and the poignancy evoked by the circumstance of the journey itself, the story evokes an exuberant celebration of life which encompasses folly as well as exaltation, despair as well as hope, timidity and courage, the ordinary and the bizarre.

Some of the episodes are even more remarkable than those included by Waley. For instance, there is a group of tales about one of Monkey's former demonic companions, Bull Demon King, his son Red Boy, his wife Rakshasi, and his paramour, culminating in the story of the Mountain of Flames (the fire on which, it turns out, was started by one of the coals kicked out by Monkey when he escaped from Lao-Tzu's brazier in heaven). In connection with that tale, there is also the story of Monkey's first banishment. There is the wonderful story of the Kingdom of Women, how Tripitaka and Pigsy become pregnant, and how Monkey and Sandy combine forces to rescue them, followed by the first two attempts on Tripitaka's vow of chastity. Then there is the story of Monkey's second banishment and the appearance of a false Monkey, complete with his own Tripitaka, Sandy, horse and all, and not even Kuan-yin can tell the two Monkeys apart: only a beast, who lives under the desk of a Boddhisattva in the World of the Dead, and Buddha himself know the true identity of Monkey's double. Here too is the story of the Cobweb Cave and the attack of the Seven Passions, and in the fourth and final volume, the story of the Lion-Camel Kingdom, the attempted seduction of Tripitaka by Jade Hare, and the glorious end of the journey. The one hundred chapters comprise some seventeen hundred pages of the new translation, more than five times the length of the earlier version.

But let no one think that Waley's work will be supplanted by the complete edition. If nothing else, Waley's *Monkey* stands as a model of English prose and a testimonial to his remarkable ability as a storyteller, for he captured in thirty chapters the essence of the full version and brought to the West the marvelous character of Monkey himself. For children, Waley's version is indispensable; for the majority of adults the same is true, inasmuch as the full four-volume edition represents a major task for any reader (it took this reviewer a month to read them all). But for those whose appetite for the adventures of Monkey has been whetted to the intensity of Eight-Commandments Hog before a feast, the complete version is a blessing indeed: a long journey, but one well worth making.

Paul Jordan-Smith is a Contributing Editor to PARABOLA.

CREDITS

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PROFILES

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