PARABOLA

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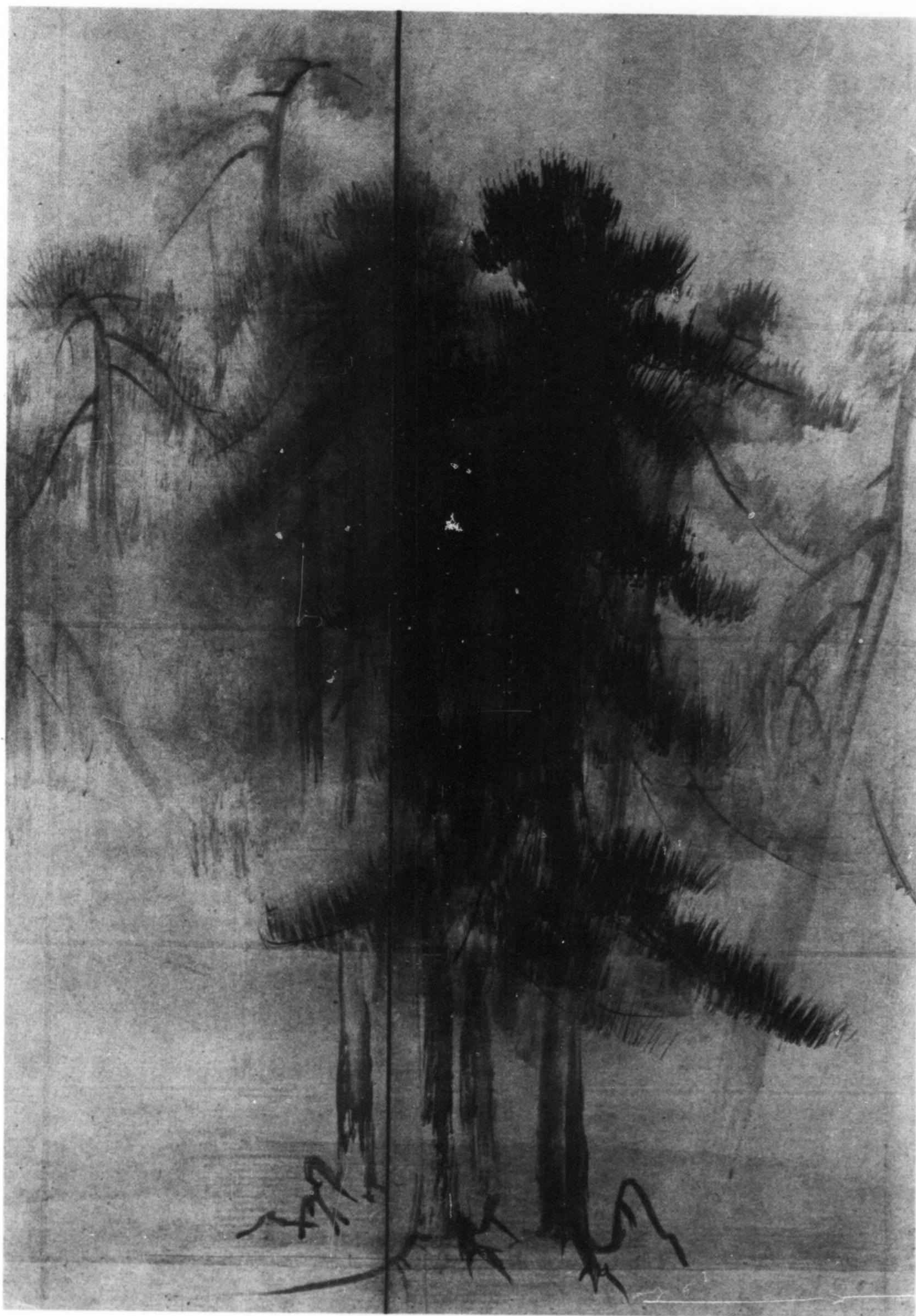
THE MAGAZINE OF MYTH AND TRADITION



MEMORY AND FORGETTING

PARABOLA

MYTH AND THE QUEST FOR MEANING

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PARABOLA (ISSN: 0362-1596) is published quarterly by the Society for the Study of Myth and Tradition, Inc., a not-for-profit organization. Contributions are tax-deductible.

Single issue: $5.50. By subscription: $18.00 yearly, $32.00 for two years, $46.00 for three years. Postage for outside territorial U.S.: add $6.00 for surface rates, $20.00 for air, per year.

Address all correspondence regarding editorial matters, subscriptions, and advertising to PARABOLA, 656 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012-2317. Tel: (212) 505-6200.

Postmaster: Send address changes to PARABOLA, 656 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012-2317. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and additional offices.

Distributed in the United States and Canada by Eastern News, 1130 Cleveland Road, Sandusky, Ohio 44870. Other foreign distribution is handled by Feffer & Simons, Inc., 100 Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.

Microform copies of PARABOLA may be obtained from University Microfilms Inc. PARABOLA is indexed in the *Religion Index of Periodicals*, *Abstracts of English Studies*, and *Book Review Index*.

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VOLUME XI, NUMBER 4, NOVEMBER, 1986.

Cover: *Pine Forest*. Hasegawa Tohaku, 1539–1610. Momoyama period. Panels from a pair of screens of six panels, ink on paper; classified among national treasures of Japan. Collection Tokyo Museum.

FOCUS

We knew when we began working on "Memory and Forgetting" that it was an essential theme for PARABOLA, and as the issue developed, these two movements opened into a greater and greater mystery. There is the memory of a race, of a culture, of the earth, of the universe itself. Every individual has memory, of course, but here, as everywhere, it is on many levels. No one's memory is whole—the body has a memory, and the feeling, as well as the mind; and there are conscious memories and subconscious ones. Who remembers? And what is the role of forgetting?

"Memory," wrote Plotinus, "is for those who have forgotten." But it is important to note that only those who have forgotten can be called to a moment of remembering, a moment of search, a moment of presence. Keiji Nishitani asks in our interview with him in this issue what it is in ourselves that is dissatisfied, that recognizes a lack. "That question comes from somewhere deep in myself," he says, "and cannot be answered by any other question or anyone else . . . and it is the only question I should be answering."

At the same time, questions remain. Dr. Alan McGlashan tells us that the human being "must remember if he is not to become meaningless, and must forget if he is not to go mad." But what erratic internal computers we seem to have that determine what we remember and what we forget; or perhaps it is

the inconstancy of the electric current on which they operate. A flicker, and a whole disk is erased; a part of our life has vanished and seems to be negated.

But is it so? Does nothing remember? Life itself is a continuous process; it is not interrupted by our seemingly inevitable, involuntary forgetting. Rip van Winkle slept for twenty years, but the process of his life went on; he awoke an old man. Something acts upon us, whether we know it or wish it or not; something remembers us.

How much of our forgetting is a kind of instinctive self-protection, as Dr. McGlashan suggests, something really on the side of life—and how much an escape or a denial? Or are we entirely dependent on the vagaries of some cosmic electrical station? Must we simply be acted upon like the sleeping Rip, or is it possible to be awake and in touch with the process that doesn't sleep, that always remembers? How can we remember? What "must" we remember if we are "not to become meaningless"?

Stephen of Hungary said that "without a past, a nation has no future," and the same is true of the human being. For the sake of my future and its possible significance, I must remember what the past has brought me; *I know* only what I have experienced, and I must remember what *I know*. It sounds quite easy, to remember what I know; but there is no better definition for faith, and it is not easy to have faith. Knowing and remembering are the elements of faith; true faith has nothing to do with "belief." Belief and doubt are two sides of a coin whose only value is in an exchange for knowledge. They can crystallize as opinions and buy me nothing, or work for my profit as questions; for since both are really saying "I don't know, but . . .", they can lead me to ask "What then is certain?" and if the question is pursued in fact, not fancy, it will bring me to a new knowing.

But I am unfaithful; I forget. I forget my own experience, which has shown me that the unknown exists and that I am contained in it. I know this, when I can remember it, because I come up always against the limits of my knowing and the fact that there is something beyond them; because I have experienced "miracles"—inner (and outer) events that cannot be explained by anything I "know." So it is certain that the unknown surrounds me. Mostly I forget it; but when I remember, I know the unknown as much as it can be known; I am open to it, I feel my relation with it, and I understand that it is the source of all knowing. I understand that it is the unknown that remembers me, and that in remembering it I find my own meaning. "For sixty years I have been forgetful," Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī wrote, "every minute, but not for a second has this flowing toward me stopped or slowed."

—The Editors

FULL CIRCLE

A Readers' Forum

In Philip Zaleski's review of Michael Denton's *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (PARABOLA XI.3, pp. 112–115), the point is not clearly made that in authentic scientific circles it is not the theory of evolution that is now in question, but Darwin's explanation of the observed evidences of evolution as announced and demonstrated in *The Origin of Species* (1859). Darwin was not the originator of the theory of evolution. Goethe, already in his *Metamorphose der Pflanzen* (The Metamorphosis of Plants), published 1790, had recognized the evidence, declaring that along the two lines of animal and plant evolution the culminating and noblest forms were the human body, respectively, and the tree. The French biologist Lamarck, in 1809 (half a century before Darwin's day), put forward his theory of an influence of the environment upon the metamorphoses of organisms (a theory lately supported in Russia by the biologist T.D. Lysenko), while Schopenhauer in his important paper *On the Will in Nature* (1836) suggested that in the line of animal evolution the transformations must take place in the egg at the moment of conception. At the opening of the present century, finally, the Dutch biologist Hugo de Vries proposed in *Die Mutationstheorie* (published 1901–1903; English, *The Mutation Theory*, 1910–1911) a theory of sudden jumps, "sports," or mutations, to account for the abrupt appearances of unprecedented forms without any such gradual succession of intermediate, minor changes as Darwin's theory of (1) random variation, (2) natural selection, and (3) survival of the fittest required.

Indeed, during the 60 million years or so that have elapsed since the first appearances of primates on the zoological scene, and especially during the great Glacial Ages when there were occurring throughout the world tremendous transformations of environment to which organisms had to adapt, there were a number of periods of (so to say) spasms of mutation, when new species emerged in abundance. And it was precisely during these ages that our human species evolved from its primordial primate base. Those who with Mr. Zaleski find that it "gnaws" at their "sense of self-worth" and "religious convictions" to think of their forebears as having evolved from "snorting beasts that tromped an ancient earth" will perhaps be unhappy to learn that, although "we have found no trace of 'missing links' between the modern whale and its land-based ancestor," there have indeed been established between the primeval primate "Proconsul" of circa 20,000,000 years ago and our own so noble humanity a now abundantly evidenced line of graded species, from Kenyapithecus, through a variety of Australopithecine types, to (1) *Homo habilis*, c. 5,000,000 to c. 1,600,000 years ago (cranial capacities, from c. 480 cubic centimeters, about the size of a male gorilla's, to c. 800 cc.); (2) *Homo erectus*, c. 1,600,000 to c. 75,000 years ago (cranial capacities, from c. 774 to c. 1250 cc.); (3). archaic

Homo sapiens, c. 500,000 to c. 40,000 years ago (cranial capacities, from c. 1300 to c. 1700 cc); with (4) *Homo sapiens sapiens*, our own highest development of the species, emerging c. 40,000 BCE.

But why anyone writing for PARABOLA, where so many inspiring articles have appeared on the immanence of divinity in the phenomenal forms of the universe ("the Kingdom of Heaven is within you and without you," "all things are Buddha-things," "split the stick, you will find Me there," etc.) should find it denigrating to participate with Wordsworth, for example, in the recognition of "A motion and a spirit, that impels / All thinking things, all objects of all thought, / And rolls through all things," I find it difficult to imagine—unless, of course, his sentiments are trapped forever in the *Book of Genesis*.

Joseph Campbell
Honolulu, Hawaii

Philip Zaleski replies:

I think Mr. Campbell misunderstands my position; perhaps this comes from lack of clarity in my presentation. Yes, evolutionary theory is here to stay. As to its validity, I leave that to future generations to decide. Speaking personally, and strictly as an amateur, I'm inclined to think that Darwin knew what he was talking about, although I wonder whether biologists will ever discern the animating spirit behind evolution as long as they search for it exclusively on the physical plane.

Certainly, there is nothing in evolutionary theory intrinsically damaging to a religious world view. But there is much that is challenging, that calls us to renew our vision of the sacred and our place in the cosmic order. In the eyes of millions of educated men and women, evolutionary theory has shot a poisoned arrow (but perhaps not a fatal one) through the traditional Judeo-Christian understanding of man created in the image of God. Writing about the devastating effect of his theory on others, Darwin himself felt the sting of this blow: "When I am dead, know that many times I have . . . cried over this." Moreover, many religious thinkers in non-Western traditions have also been sorely troubled by the theory of evolution; I myself once heard the Dalai Lama confess his difficulty in reconciling evolutionary theory and belief in reincarnation.

I agree with Mr. Campbell that sentiments can be "trapped" in the *Book of Genesis*; but it is important to add that *Genesis* can also be a passageway to a deeper understanding of the mystery of creation.

(*Continued on page 124.*)

The Translucence of Memory

ALAN McGLASHAN

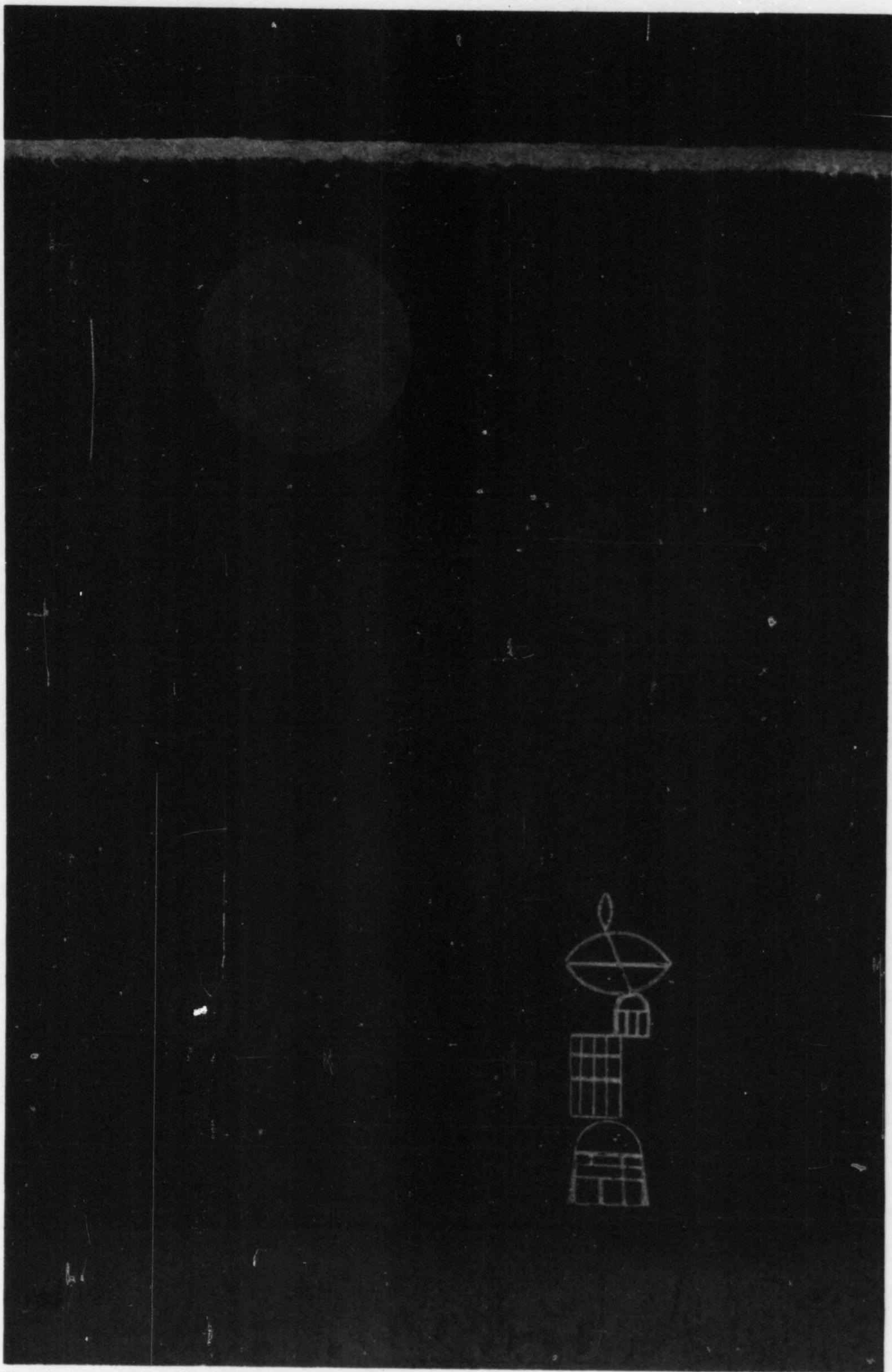
Perhaps the two most moving chords that can be struck from the human heart are contained in these four words: I remember, I forget. For the unheard anthem of our whole existence is created out of the antiphonal movements of remembering and forgetting; not only the remembering and forgetting of individuals, but of races and cultures. Perfect balance between this pair of opposites is the mark of maturity.

Memory, the psychologists briskly tell us, has two main aspects. The first is Reproduction—"not necessarily exact," as they concede with the *naiveté* which is the birthright of academic psychologists. The second is Recognition—that rainbow bridge flung in a magical instant between the present and the past. Recognition is the core of memory and of mental life. Without it nothing could be experienced, neither love nor hate, hope nor fear, beauty nor ugliness; and a merely vegetative existence would remain. Hardly even this perhaps; for as the physical world is held in being by the all-pervasive, unobtrusive force of friction, so without the act of remembering the entire architecture of the psychic world might at once disintegrate.

It is true, certainly, that according to the Common Law of England—that cozy little world of cobwebbed fantasies—memory begins with the coronation of Richard I in 1189. But this, alas, is too charming to have more than legal meaning, whatever that may be. Memory is, in fact, the mortar between all events, a veritable *glutinum mundi*.

This basic function apart, memory has other and more equivocal uses. It is, for instance, the guardian of self-love, the busy spider in the brain, interposing between past and present its invisible web, through which can pass only selected and fondly edited items into the specious records of the conscious mind. Memory has its graces, too, storing sharp images of happiness and grief, laying a soft patina on the past, giving to the unripe act of living what autumn's gold gives to the mellowing peach.

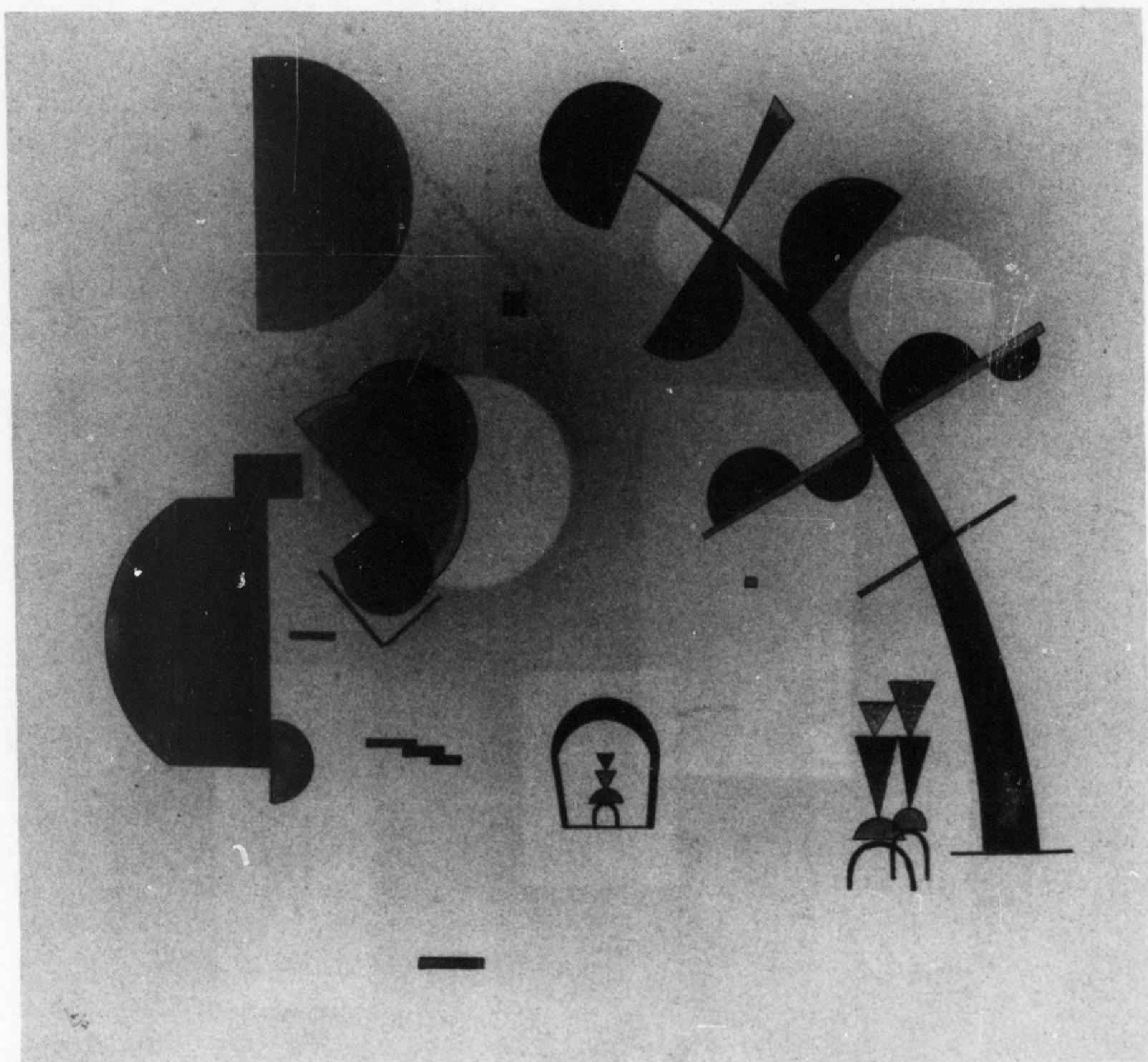
But if remembering is a vital function, so also is forgetting. To forget is essential to sanity. Like a clumsy mother the huge inchoate body of past events, recalled in their entirety, would overlay the infant mental life and suffocate it. Even if this were not so, the loss would be immeasurable if all things were clearly remembered. Experience would lack its chiaroscuro, and history's canvas would have the maddening facial iteration of a mammoth end-of-term school photograph. Not even historians would benefit from this, except that they would have more to argue about. Man owes more than he guesses to the gray waves of oblivion. Through forgetting comes much beauty into life, much richness and strangeness.



Far Away. *November 1930. Vasily Kandinsky*

Since man must remember if he is not to become meaningless, and must forget if he is not to go mad, what shall he do? The dilemma, not logically resolvable, has been subtly resolved. Within man the past is perfectly contained—but he is allowed to live as if it were lost. He is tolerantly permitted to taste a naive pride of discovery, a childish delight in new toys; as when William Harvey staggered the seventeenth-century world by his discovery of the circulation of the blood—in which he had been anticipated by Hwang Ti, Emperor of China, in 2650 B.C., who quietly noted that "all the blood in the body is under the control of the heart . . . the blood current flows continuously in a circle and never stops." Or, to come nearer to our own time, when the recent discovery that the inner structure of the universe is found to be but one more illustration of the fact long known to mystical thought, that the microcosm mirrors the macrocosm, "as above, so below"; each succeeding illustration of which will doubtless be celebrated by peal upon peal of contemporary trumpets.

Yet these pristine forms of knowledge are not wholly forgotten. Mixed always with the joy of new discovery is a shadow of disquiet, a teasing half-recollection of things long past—the secret penetration of the archaic into the present, of the timeless into the temporal. To the percepts of the conscious mind are added intimations from an unimaginably distant and forgotten past, still alive in the depths of the psyche. Nowhere is



Burdened. *July 1931. Vasily Kandinsky.*

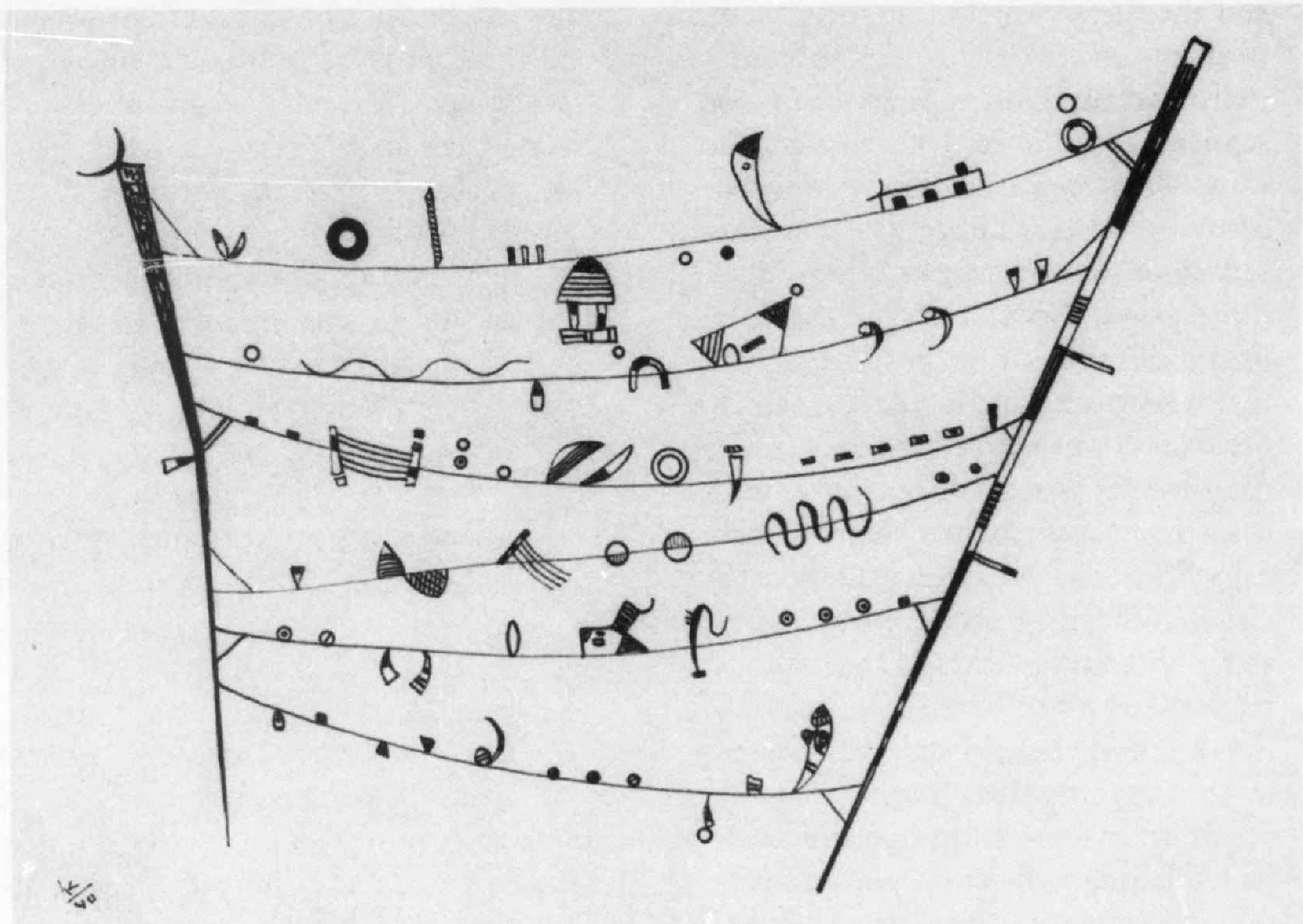
this more clear than in the magical quality of the enjoyment we derive from myth and parable and fairy tale. Good stories are very rare, and these are the three forms in which they are most often contained. The best of them have indeed been told countless times through history and prehistory. This would be intolerable were it not for the grace of half-forgetting, as children do, which allows us to receive with an ever-fresh delight tales first heard, perhaps, in some lake village of the Neolithic age. Like fascinated children, openmouthed and a little frightened, we listen to our songs and stories echoing faintly back from the walls of eternity.

The tragedy is that it is fatally easy to lose the precarious balance of these opposing and compensating functions of remembering and forgetting, whereby the imaginations of men are grouped and regrouped in endless intricate patterns of wisdom and folly, kindness and cruelty, insight and illusion. It is so hard to grasp the essence of this reciprocal movement. Human minds can only circle about such a concept as blinded moths round an invisible source of light. Equivocal, indefinable, slipping untouched through the most delicate web of words, it is perhaps this factor beyond all others that creates the lovely iridescence on the surface of life, the fathomless quality in its depth. Genius has sometimes known this, and to see life *sub specie aeternitatis* is no new thing. In his book *Cumaean Gates* Jackson Knight has suggested that the essence of genius "consists in the power to find contacts further back in time beyond the reach of others, and to evoke latent stores of feeling and of meaning in the collective mind of the present."

Genius is not the only guide. The evidence abounds, for it is inherent in all things. Even in the daily paper, that faithful mirror of disintegrated existence, faint intimations can be caught by an attentive ear. From what distant sources, and through what indefinable media, have lingered on such delightful and shame-faced fancies of the countryside, as that fresh earth from the grave of a baptized infant will make the blossoms of a plant larger and more handsome; that the cuckoo changes into a hawk at the end of summer; that driving rusty nails into a barren apple tree will cause it to bear fruit? All these, with many more, were seriously advanced within the last few years by correspondents to the English national newspapers.

There is a type of mind, otherwise intelligent, that reacts with a sort of snorting fury to these naive beliefs, that feels outraged and genuinely shocked if such bucolic fantasies are not instantly dismissed with an impatient shrug. For many purposes, of course, they must be so dismissed. Science has built its high roads of fact and reason only by resolutely ignoring the lovely wayward blossoms of the countryside. Unfortunately for the not unworthy aims of the planning type of mind life is so constructed that resolutely to ignore a thing is to ensure being eventually tripped up by it. One of the gayest, saddest sights on earth is to see the good nag Rosinante carrying the scientific world on its back and confidently cantering along to its ultimate *quod erat demonstrandum*, suddenly put its foot in a *quod est absurdum*, and throw its illustrious burden: gay, because it is pleasant to see the rationalist with his heels higher than his fastidious nose for once; and sad, because he learns so little from his tumble.

In medicine alone there have been many such embarrassing *faux pas*. Not so long ago the doctors were loftily amused to hear of an old countrywoman who used to treat dropsy with decoctions of foxglove from her garden—and



Study for "Little Accents." *1940. Vasily Kandinsky.*

who was finally proved to have been, in fact, dispensing a hitherto unknown drug called digitalis. And it is only yesterday that the mold on damp cheeses, kept in many a farmhouse scullery in our great-grandfathers' time to make a rude plaster for infected wounds, was shown to be the source of penicillin. In the country they know that things are only half-discovered—and half-remembered. The precarious balance is unconsciously preserved, and with it the secret of the crude sanity of country life.

It is really amazing how blandly the scientific mind ignores these constant exposures of its own limitations. Like Theseus in the Forest of Arden, it "never can believe these antique fables, nor these fairy toys." Random proof, however startling, of the practical wisdom hidden in simple hearts seems only to serve as the origin of fresh distortions. With indecent haste the humble ladder is kicked away, and the thought to which it leads is separated, fatally, from the feeling that was its partner, and from the human context in which they quietly met and married.

For the essence of this earthly wisdom lies precisely in its slow, centuried synthesis of thinking with feeling, of remembering with forgetting. It cannot be invented or new minted from any single mind, but forms itself mysteriously, with the imperceptible accretions of a stalactite, in the tenebrous caverns of the collective mind. And we do wrong if we dismiss this process as merely passive. Such silent, patient waiting for truth, as Simone Weil has said, is an activity more intense than any searching.

The products of this activity are unlike the clear concepts of the classroom

and the laboratory. It is neither very difficult nor very clever to prove them logically absurd. In any case, being a human process it is as fallible as all things human. But empty of value as many of these country tales undoubtedly are, childishly ridiculous as they all appear, they deserve a handling that is gentle and perceptive, as of an archaeologist with his broken relics, in virtue of the mystery of their origin. For these are the wayside flowers of another world than the everyday, the timeless paradoxical world of myth and fairy tale, of fantasy and dream; a world where startling absurdities and glaring inconsistencies are but secret signals to the instructed mind, bidding it note the crossing of an invisible frontier.

It would be well if man could recapture this richer, older mode of response to the enigma of existence, wholly lost to us these last three hundred years, which recognized that the final secrets of life may often be reached less by what we learn than by what we half-remember. What is needed is an extension of contemporary consciousness to include what can be defined as the translucent quality in all things; the quality by which an object or an event is seen not only as a thing-in-itself, but also as a membrane through which can dimly be discerned the foetal stirring of a different order of experience.

This once caught, even for a moment, transforms the sensible universe, investing all objects with a sharp intensity of being. The seeming-solid world grows permeable, beginning to transmit, not merely to reflect, the light. The quality of translucence is the key; a golden key that is the careless plaything of all children, and the conscious instrument of a few geniuses. In exceptional moments of their lives ordinary men and women may fleetingly hold it: in the first days of overwhelming love, in the final moments of overwhelming peril, in the presence of new life, and sometimes on the unheralded news of death.

At such moments a man stands on tiptoe, and may catch a startled glimpse of another level of being, where all values are changed, and everything is understood differently; the level of which Chekhov dreamed where "everything is forgiven, and it would be strange not to forgive"; that Goethe experienced when he murmured to his friend, "That fig tree, this little snake, the cocoon on my windowsill quietly awaiting its future—all these are momentous signatures"; the level touched in the Parables, the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, the "Ode to a Nightingale," and anonymously, and perhaps incomparably, in the mysterious golden light that shines through myth and fairy tale; the level of the kingdom of heaven that is within. It is a quality often missing in works of loftiest genius. Milton, for all the splendor of his planned achievement, and all the wealth of his well-chosen mythological themes, had not a trace of it; nor Shelley, despite his earnest preoccupation with eternity.

To become aware of this translucent quality in all things is no vague romantic goal. It is a sharply defined, delicately poised effort of mental vision, a state of harmonious balance of forces in the Pythagorean sense, born of the union of many opposites: of remembering with forgetting, of thinking with feeling, of the temporal with the eternal, of personal conscious perceptions with faint echoes from the remotest regions of the archaic psyche. It is the basis of all true science, the essence of ritual, the constant attribute of wisdom. It may be the nearest that human minds can reach to the meaning of meaning. ■

Reprinted from Alan McGlashan's The Savage and Beautiful Country *(Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967), by permission of the author.*

Seven Long Years

ANNE TWITTY

For years, starting some time in childhood, coming back—I never knew when it would come back—but from time to time, I would hear words from a fairy tale I had known as a child. "Eat out of my right ear," the black bull would say, "and drink out of my left ear, and set by your leavings."

Hearing this, I would feel under me the broad, steady back moving, the black hairs lying close against the skin, the animal heat rising, and along with these a spreading sense of peace and safety that carried me through the dark wood, the branches parting on either side as the bull moved through the trees.

Riding through the dark wood, the wood as wide as my life was long, echoing in my ears the words I heard—and felt as much as heard . . .

Eat out of my right ear and drink out of my left ear, and set by your leavings.

Those ears, lying so close to the dangerous horns, those ears, the inexhaustible and ever-present horns of plenty.

The words would come to me sometimes, and along with them, pieces of a song:

Seven long years I served for thee,
The glassy hill I clomb for thee . . .

Of the story they came from, I remembered nothing else. Until one year, the year of the tall stone house that looked over terraces and farther over the sea, the house where at night the wind would come up to whine and threaten, tearing at the crumbling mortar between the stones . . .

That year I turned back to myth, apocrypha, fairy tales, finding in them a truth that ran like a silver thread through and past the condescension that surrounded them. Mornings, I struggled with a fairy tale I was writing, not finding a way through it, not yet having lived past the knot set into its frame.

One day I mentioned to a friend the

lines that sometimes came to me. "Oh," she said, "that's from 'The Black Bull of Norroway.' Tolkien's *Tree and Leaf* is all about that story."

Not long after, someone sent me an old edition of Lang's *Blue Fairy Book*. Reading it late one night, I found the beginning:

In Norroway, langsyne, there lived a certain lady . . . .

Reading on, I knew it all so well. It came whole to me again, how the young girl, youngest daughter, looks for a prince to come down the road and finds instead a black bull. "Yon's for you," says the witch washerwife. How the girl rides on the bull's back, visits the grand houses where his two brothers live, and is given the gifts she is to keep and not to break open "until she was in the greatest strait ever mortal was in in the world." How the bull goes off, saying:

Here ye maun stay till I gang and fight the de'il. Ye maun seat yoursel' on that stane, and move neither hand nor fit till I come back . . .

And, inevitably, the forgetting: how she crosses one foot over the other in her joy—and after that, the long search, her work.

I knew it all so well, and yet there was one part I could not find: the dark wood, and the long ride through it. It wasn't there, not in the words at any rate, only:

Aye they traveled and on they traveled . . .

There was a drawing, though, in the middle of the page, and in it the black bull, the girl on his back, moved through black trees. And then, the words—not "Eat out of my right ear" but "Eat out of my right lug." Was it in the book I had known, and had I lived my way into the illustration that made a small world set between the lines of print? Had I heard, or read, "lug" and understood it or found it to be "ear"? Or had it been another version of the story altogether, with the "hard" words made familiar? And if so, what of that picture etched in black?

No matter. The faith that carried her on was still there. And the joy of the ending, when, after finding again the prince, the bull that was, and giving up her precious gifts to buy a night beside his bed, she finds him twice asleep, drugged with the potion the witchwife has given him. Two nights she sits and sings, and goes off lamenting, and then on that last night she sits and sings once more:

Seven long years I served for thee,
The glassy hill I clomb for thee,
The bluidy shirt I wrang for thee . . .

But this time he is not sleeping, this time he has poured out the sleeping draught, this time, the moment of recognition.

She sings: "And wilt thou not wauken and turn to me?"

And then: "He heard, and turned to her."

Now again I had the story whole. And much later, when I found a copy of Tolkien's *Tree and Leaf*, and found there only a brief mention of it, that no long-

er mattered. The links of the girl's journey were fastened together again, and no one moment of it divided from the next.

Sometimes, in performances, I told it. Once I got early out of bed in a house on Albion Road to type up a copy for a sleeping lover, who carried it to

Scotland with him. And yet, I was beginning to learn that "The Black Bull" was more than a love story, that the harsh trials and the final reunion spoke of a condition that went far beyond romantic love.

One day, as a break during a drive down from Vermont, I stopped at a friend's house in the Catskills. Looking almost without reading, I turned the pages of a novel on one of the shelves.

There I found the story of a woman whose lover has been injured in an accident. His car has crashed, and he lies in a hospital bed in a coma. It is during the time of her daily visits to the hospital that the woman remembers:

One day I came down just as *Jackanory* was ending, and I heard a man reading the end of a fairy story that I had known as a child and which I have never since been able to find. There was a verse in it that was so profoundly affecting that I stood there transfixed, feeling the hair rise on my head. The serving girl says to the sleeping knight whom she loves:

For seven long years I served for you,
The bloody cloth I wrung for you,
The glassy hill I climbed to you,
Will you not wake and turn to me?*

Someone else, I thought—one of many someone elses—had been haunted as I had been haunted, and this one had not only remembered, but had put the story into another story, called a "novel" this time. The conjunction of this

*Margaret Drabble, "The Waterfall"

memory with my own history of memories seemed so wonderful to me that later on, whenever I told "The Black Bull of Norroway," I told, first, of the years when those few lines had traveled with me, then of the way in which they had found their place, and then, of finding in a new book testimony to the life this story had, after all the years of telling, the words floating this time out of a television box, the novelist giving from her own memory her heroine a memory.

I thought of that fictional woman. I thought: She sits by her lover's bed and sings, not knowing if he will ever wake, calling him back to memory, to recognition, while he lies in a coma, that state from which—we are told—the returnees awake remembering what has been done and said around them while they lay motionless, unable to respond, giving no visible sign of consciousness. I thought of that fictional woman sitting by the bed of her lover, singing to him the song the girl sang to the prince. I thought of him waking to that song.

Looking again at the novel, I discover no such thing. In the novel, the woman's remembering comes, and goes. The woman does not enter the hospital and sing the song. The lover does wake, but not to her and not to those words.

Did my memory betray me? Or is it that the story still lives in the flow of ever-shifting images that create it and from which it emerged sometimes as "The Black Bull of Norroway" and sometimes as "The White Hound of the Mountain"? Nowadays, we think in terms of authors, and of copyright, of characters as entrapped in their identities as the paper spirits that a Chinese magician kept shut up in a closed book. Yet our memories continue to discard what does not essentially belong to us, to select a line, a scene, and to deliver these up to the visionary mind. What happens then is transformation. How often I have heard a gifted friend describe a story—whether Russian bawdy, or the myth of the Pachamama, or the tale of a circle of women dancing for the moon as Moses brings the tablets down the mountain—and, after searching for and finding the printed source, found it dull and skimpy in comparison. "Inaccurate," a voice says severely. "No," I say, "Alive, and therefore, fluid, capable of growth, of change."

So I return to the fictional woman, the one who heard the song and remembered the lines, but had forgotten what to do with them.

"Let the words become part of you," I silently say to her. "Take them into your own life. What happened once goes on happening. What happened once can happen again. Wake the Lover."

And still I ride through the dark wood, listening to the words that tell me there is food and drink and sustenance in the force that carries us, knowing that the glassy hill is high, can be seen through—though it blocks the path—but that hard labor forges the iron shoes that will not slip in climbing it, knowing that stains, even blood stains, can be washed out once the heart is clear as rinsing water, knowing that a sleeper may not hear the song, but that it is sung over and over, until at last someone—you/I?—chooses to pour out the drug that holds us in forgetfulness, knowing that Spirit sits and sings to a sleeping world.

He heard, and turned to her. ■

Walking on The Waves

AN INTERVIEW WITH KEIJI NISHITANI

Discouraged by the aridity that afflicts modern Euro-American philosophy, many Westerners have cast their eyes on the philosophical traditions of the East. Increasingly, these seekers have been turning to the thought of Keiji Nishitani, widely recognized as Japan's foremost living Buddhist philosopher, a man whose deep sympathy for both Western and Eastern ways of seeing the world sets a new standard for philosophical investigation.

Born in 1900, Nishitani has spent a lifetime studying philosophy and testing its claims through the discipline of Zen practice. He has known personally some of the century's prominent thinkers, including Martin Heidegger (with whom he studied in Germany), D.T. Suzuki (who helped him begin his Zen training), and Kitarō Nishida (from whom he inherited leadership of the "Kyoto School," a philosophical movement that seeks to reconcile Eastern and Western modes of thought). From 1935 to 1955, Nishitani served as professor of philosophy at Kyoto University; from 1955 to his retirement in 1963, he was professor of religion at the same institution, where he continues to teach small groups of students.

Nishitani's work begins from the observation that Western philosophy, in its theoretical pursuit of an absolute, ends in nihilism and despair; Buddhism, on the other hand, starts in despair, in the awareness that there is something fundamentally awry in human experience, and converts this awareness into a life-giving realization of the ultimate emptiness and interrelatedness of all things. To bridge these two traditions requires nothing less than a spiritual awakening. Nishitani insists that philosophical and religious speculation be rooted in practice. He is concerned with religion as it is practiced by men and women in the world today, religion "as it emerges from man himself, as a subject, *as a self living in the present." His most important book,* Religion and Nothingness, *rests on two fundamental premises: that to understand religion, "the religious quest is the sole key," and that we can grasp the meaning of religion only when we confront the devastating question "For what purpose do I myself exist?"*

We met Professor Nishitani one steamy June afternoon at his home on the eastern perimeter of Kyoto. He ushered us into his Western-style living room, where he offered us green tea and yōkan *(sweet bean-paste jelly). Nishitani chain-smoked American cigarettes as he conversed, ashes flecking his black silk robe. A spray of pink cherry blossoms stood in a vase by his left hand; a picture of Amida Buddha hung over his head. For more than three hours his conversation ranged from "memory and forgetting" in Christianity and Buddhism to zazen to astrophysics; he spoke in a faint, heavily*

accented voice, pausing now and then as he searched for the proper English word.

When our interview ended, Nishitani took us along on his regular evening stroll—an exhausting constitutional up and down hundreds of stairs, through shrines, cemeteries, and crooked, dark streets. Every so often Nishitani slowed down to light a cigarette and let us catch up with him. A small, thin, black-gowned figure leaning on a cane, he looked like a character in a Zen ink-painting as he gazed down from a hillside shrine upon the night-time lights of Kyoto, the holiest city in Japan.

PARABOLA *would like to thank Mark Unno, research student at Kyoto University, for his kind help in arranging this interview and in translating, when necessary, for Professor Nishitani.*

—Carol and Philip Zaleski

PARABOLA The theme of this issue of PARABOLA is "Memory and Forgetting." That can mean many things, but perhaps what's understood by it here is remembering our true self or our innermost self, our original self—and forgetting our true self. We move back and forth from one to the other; we spend most of our lives in forgetfulness, but there is a possibility of remembering. The basic question might be, why do we forget our inmost nature and how can we remember it again?

Keiji Nishitani Big question! The basic question may be different from what you ask—you ask *why* do we forget our true self. What is the meaning of the *why*? Do you think that question is the fundamental question in all religions? How is it for instance in Christianity?

P. I don't think that all traditions are trying to answer *why*. It makes me think about how the Buddha himself cut off some kinds of questions. But the

Photographs by Philip and Carol Zaleski.

question of *how* I can remember my true nature is, I think, universal. In the Christian tradition it is expressed in the doctrine of original sin and the fall, the idea that we need to recover our true nature as a mirror of divine reality. I have the impression that this is a fundamental question, that it occurs in different forms in different traditions, including philosophical traditions. People such as Plato have asked themselves, what is this lost knowledge that would allow me to function in a way proper to my being? It's a mythic theme, too—there are so many stories about people who have fallen into a deep sleep and have to be awakened, have to be reminded of who they are.

K.N. I think that I have some understanding of the meaning of that kind of question in the history of philosophy, for instance in Plato or Socrates. And in Christianity, one can speak of having a kind of recognition of one's own true self. But is it so common in Christianity, that idea of self-knowledge? I don't know. Maybe in Christianity you would call it salvation. But is salvation a kind of remembering? It would be a help if you could quote some sentences from the Bible.

P. Ok! Chapter & verse! The first thing that comes to mind is the Last Supper, when Jesus said "do this in remembrance of me." So not only in Christian Platonism, but in Christian devotional practice, the aim is to recollect a central event, which is kind of an axis of history. Everything is meant to come back to enact this great sacrifice. I think if you look at it in terms of the liturgy and not just in terms of the Platonic idea of remembering, then remembering is also a theme that runs through Christianity.

K.N. I can't remember the actual scene where Jesus was speaking. So what is important to remember? What is there about this scene that suggests remembering the true self?

P. Are you asking, Sensei, whether the Eucharist is just an ordinary memorial, or whether it is for the purpose of remembering one's true self?

K.N. Remembering—and a kind of forgetting.

P. The *Letter to the Hebrews* says that the Eucharist is different from ordinary commemorative rituals where people repeat the same act over and over again. It's not just repeating something from the past, but bringing it into the present, in order to bring oneself into an eternal present.

K.N. Yes, I understand. When we say, "Don't forget this," or "I'll remember for a long time," or "I'll not forget this meeting," that is different from speaking of remembering one's own self, one's own nature.

P. A higher level of remembering . . .

K.N. Yes. Is this kind of remembering or forgetting involved in that scene? I don't know. Was Christ saying, "I'm afraid I'll be forgotten and I think I should be remembered, and so . . . "?

P. Who knows what Christ was saying?

K.N. Christ said you must remember when you eat, wine is my blood, bread is my body. And therefore, when I take a cup of wine and at the same time remember the existence of Christ, the Christ who saved me from my sins, do I also remember my own true nature? Maybe through Christ? Then should I have a remembrance of Christ—or not?

Perhaps the people who were eating supper with Jesus did remember when they came home; they took a cup of

wine and remembered Jesus, his existence and also his death. That is easy to understand. But then the question is knowledge of my own true nature; perhaps my own true nature has something to do with Christ. And therefore when I remember Christ, I must at the same time remember my own true nature. Right now, while we are eating, I have forgotten my own true nature. That means that sometimes I forget my own self. It means at the same time that I forget Christ, Christ in me. So. That is one way to understand it. But I don't know that it is usual, that every religion can say the same thing.

P. That's the way Augustine talks about memory in the *Confessions*—what you were saying before. But we're also wondering what the word memory suggests to you.

K.N. Memory implies forgetting. In Buddhism and maybe in Christianity, you start from a recognition or self-recognition, a self-knowledge, of the fact that my own usual life may not be a true way of life. There is something lacking. And therefore I'm not quite self-satisfied. That is the actual fact, and then comes the question of where such a feeling or recognition—it is not knowledge, yet—comes from.

P. It's true, everything begins there, from this awareness of something missing. Everything proceeds from that.

K.N. And then people give very different answers to the same problem. And then maybe comes another question: Why are there so many answers? And then begins philosophy. Philosophy is a kind of universal knowledge and there-

fore seeks a kind of truth which is common to all. Instead of *doxa*, opinions.

P. Yes, the "wilderness of opinions."

K.N. Many answers belong to opinions. "I think so and so"—statements of that kind are opinions, and not true knowledge, true cognition. And then came Socrates. Yes, according to Plato, Socrates was the first to arrive at the true question, at the cognition of ignorance, the first to see that I have not got true knowledge. What I thought was my knowledge was opinions. The cognition of my own ignorance starts philosophical thinking.

P. Is the Socratic doubt like the Great Doubt in Zen?

K.N. Yes, the Socratic doubt and the Great Doubt in Zen are fundamentally the same truth about human nature. But there are some differences.

In the case of Socrates, we can say that he was the original philosopher, the founder of philosophy. He did not found a philosophical system, yet through him was opened the basic field of philosophical thinking. Socrates said that he had been ignorant, but that now he had found a true knowledge: a true awareness of his own ignorance. This makes him a kind of religious person as well—you can compare him to other religious teachers. But at the same time he is the founder of philosophy.

But in Zen, the Great Doubt means that even all philosophical knowledge, the philosophical way of thinking itself, is not final knowledge. This is true even though there are many specific philosophical systems in Buddhism. There are many books written in Buddhism about the theory of cognition, about metaphysics, ontology, epistemology. Especially in so-called Mahāyāna Buddhism. Nāgārjuna was a great philosopher. There are many systems—Tendai in Japan, for example. But when Zen speaks of a Great Doubt, it means that even that kind of knowledge—philosophical knowing as opposed to mere opinion—must be held in doubt. Every kind of philosophical knowledge must be held in doubt.

P. Everything is put into question.

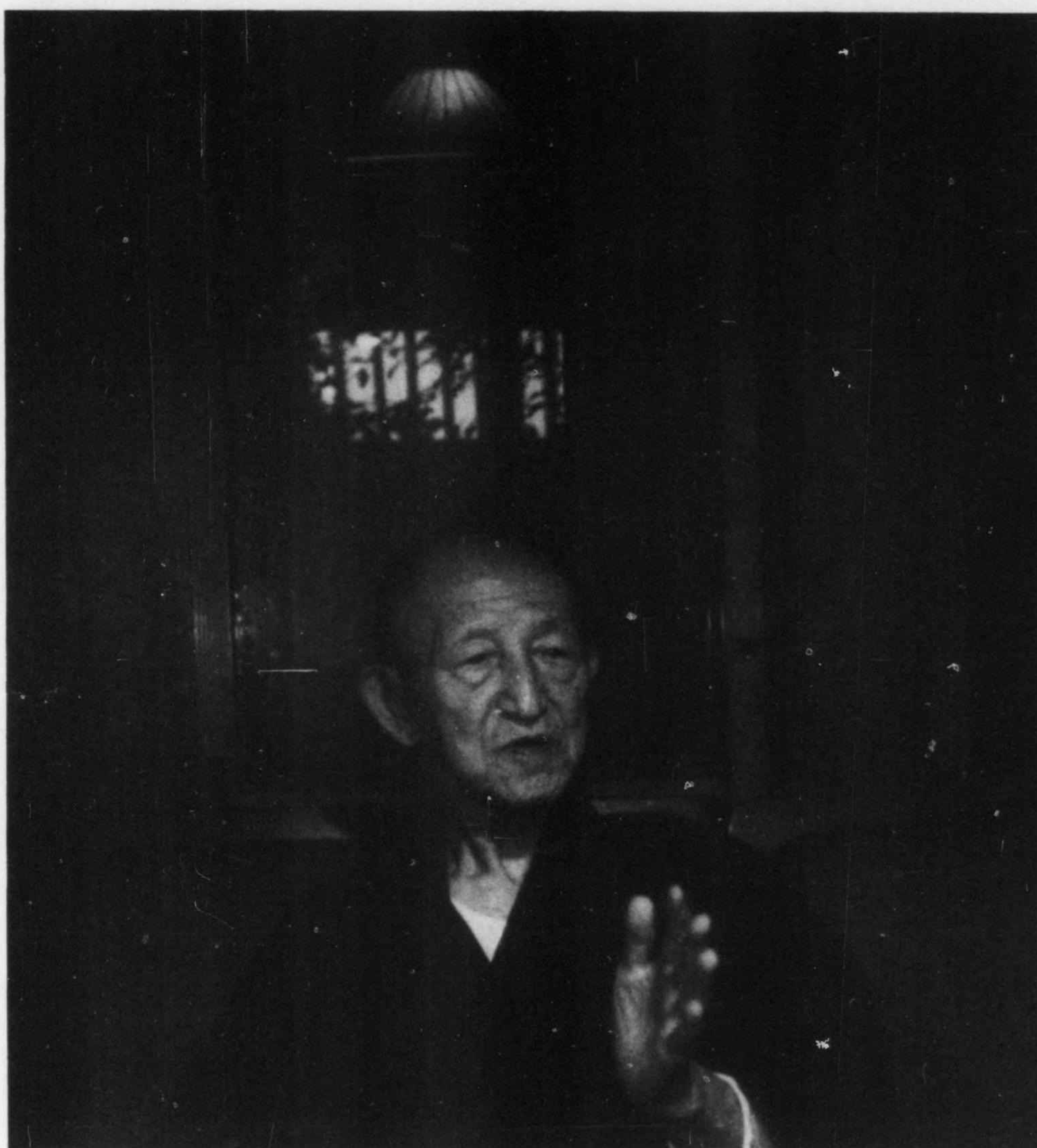
K.N. Yes.

P. What does Zen say in response to our original question about remembering the true self? Is that done by putting everything into question?

K.N. Great Doubt is a way of finding truth. All must be doubted. The aim of such doubting is true knowledge—true doubtless knowledge. Let's return to Socrates. Socrates arrived at great knowledge, but in a negative way, through a kind of self-knowledge of his own ignorance. That awareness of his radical ignorance is a kind of Great Doubt. All philosophical systems before him were thrown away. And that great self-knowledge, that awareness of his ignorance, is a negation of philosophy in a sense.

P. It seems that philosophy has moved very far away from the Great Doubt and from self-knowledge.

K.N. You know, even to talk about self-knowledge, about my own true being or my own true nature, raises a serious question. I speak of my own nature, my own mind. My mind, which is *my own*. This is not so simple. The recognition or remembering of my own nature should be at the same time a kind of remembrance of Buddha mind, of the Mind of Shakyamuni Buddha. And at the same time, it also raises metaphysical questions about the world as a whole. In Buddhist philosophy, my own nature and the nature of all things are . . .



P. Non-different.

K.N. Inseparable. Therefore, this flower on the desk [he points to a cherry blossom] has something essential to do with my own nature. Maybe the flower will fade; what does that say about my own nature? That kind of thing is presupposed in Buddhism. And then the question on the way of Great Doubt: when I ask, what is my own true nature, in that question is implied also a question about true being in general, about actual being and essential being. It is a question about heaven, about the stars, about the angels (if there are angels).

P. So part of what I've forgotten is the interrelationship of all, or the non-difference between myself and the world.

K.N. Yes. Then there remains the mystery of remembering my own nature, of remembering and forgetting. That is a fundamental question about my own existence, about my self-knowledge. Not only knowledge in the usual sense, but something more fundamental. In that way of examining how I am aware of myself is implied all phenomena—the whole world, the whole cosmos, even black holes. All our enterprises, technology, and political problems.

P. It's easy for me to understand with my intellect the idea that I have the same essential being as that flower, but this is very different from really experiencing it with my being as a living reality, to actually know as a fact that I and the flower are one.

K.N. All things in the world are involved in this place, here, now. All things: atoms and Christ. I read in the Bible that Christ walked on the waves. People say that this is a kind of myth, that it belongs to an old history of religious teaching. But now, when we speak of truth, of remembering our true nature, that true nature is not any kind of miracle, it is an actuality. Well, that is a miracle, but not in the common sense! When I speak of my own true nature, I speak of a fundamental truth upon which the whole cosmos may be developed. When we remember our own true nature, we are doing the same thing as Christ, fundamentally—we are walking on the waves.

P. People need miracles sometimes just to remind them of the miraculousness of the ordinary, just to shake them up.

K.N. To see the true meaning of a miracle is a kind of true knowledge of true nature; there is implied a remembrance of my own true nature. I see the flower there. It is very beautiful. In that flower is some truth. That truth is a remembrance of the flower's true nature, and therefore a remembrance to me of my forgotten self as well.

P. Sometimes it seems that the flower

always remembers its true nature; that only we humans forget our true nature.

K.N. In a sense, forgetfulness is the final stage in Mahāyāna Buddhism, and especially in Zen. In Zen, all things should be forgotten. Here, I see only a flower. If I say that when I see the flower, I see my own true nature—all that is useless! I wish only to see the flower, here and now. In that is contained everything fundamental. In Zen you must forget all things. And when that forgetting is analyzed in a philosophical way, when you ask, What is there to forget? What is true knowledge of your own nature?—that kind of analysis is all useless. You have to *see*. In that sense, the state of forgetfulness is the final thing.

P. Some Christian mystics speak of the cloud of unknowing. They say that in order to be what one is meant to be, certain things must be forgotten.

K.N. Yes.

P. What about remembering one's past lives? Some people feel that part of self-knowledge is to be aware that one has lived in previous existences, and that part of the darkness of ignorance in which we live is our lack of this knowledge. Does this make sense to you?

K.N. Perhaps the value of thinking about previous and future lives is that it leads me to ask, "Where did I come from and where am I going?"

The question makes sense, yes, but perhaps not in the way in which ancient peoples understood such questions. Ancient peoples spoke of former and future worlds, of life after death, when I will be cast down to hell or picked up to heaven. They spoke of such things with brilliant, vivid images. That kind of thinking about the world was very common amongst ancient people, and I think that it had its own truth. Today, after all, we have the same questions about our preexistence and afterlife—and not only in a religious sense. For instance, we know that the earth is a little bit of a star, and that the earth has its own birth and death. We can also see that in religious terms: the end of the earth, a little bit of matter on the field of the cosmos, of endless space, existing for just a fraction of all time—time which is endless. But perhaps endless time and space are unthinkable.

P. I used to think about that when I was very young. I thought there was a wall at the end of the universe. But what was beyond the wall?

K.N. In the history of Christian and Buddhist thought, all these problems have been treated. There is still interest in these questions, even today. Did ancient peoples ask the same questions as we? It must be . . . Therefore, we can find in ancient thoughts hints about such things.

P. Many people think that it's important for them to remember as much about their lives as they can. People worry about their memory declining as they get older. I wonder if remembering our true nature is related to remembering the things that happen to us in our life. Some people speak of a "life-review" as an important stage in spiritual development. Is that a part of this pursuit of self-knowledge, or is it just a way of shoring up the ego?

K.N. Now I remember! I forgot. Now I remember a story in Zen. When Shakyamuni Buddha was born from his mother's side, instantly he stood up and took seven steps. Why seven, I don't know. But it is written so. And he delivered a kind of declaration of independence. He said, literally translated, "Up in the heaven and down on this earth, I

alone am the honored one, I am the sole one." In Zen this is a fundamental truth.

And it is the same for all of us. When a baby is born, it first emerges from its mother's body. And then it cries. In Japanese, "kaka" is the sound. This is the voice of the baby. The baby is the sole one in this world. When you were born and made a cry, that was your declaration of independence. And that independence is eternal, and at the same time very temporal, very limited. *You* are born. You have a date of birth: nineteen hundred and so on. You have a date, a time—but the ground of temporality is endless time. An infinity of time, and an infinity of space. On a particular space and time, on the ground of endless space and time, you declare your own freedom.

I think that Buddha and Jesus Christ had the same kind of feeling, of living in time and eternity. It's a sense of myth . . . a kind of feeling that is being lost today.

P. I think one of the aims of PARABOLA is to keep that feeling alive.

K.N. There's much interest in myth in America, isn't there? I visited America once, many years ago. I was invited by a Zen center in Los Angeles for one whole month. I was very interested in Indian people, and I went to many reservations. I liked them very much. Especially in the West. I met many old, religious Indians and saw many ruins. There was an Indian village near Sante Fe . . . along the river, near the canyons. What was its name? I am also fascinated by the Incas of Peru. There is some archaeological interest now, not only in America, but everywhere. There's an interest in recovering lost knowledge.

P. What was your impression of American Zen?

K.N. I went at a time when Zen was in fashion. Then the fashion went away, and there remained a kind of hippy group. But they were very sincere as practitioners and scholars.

P. May we ask what attracted you toward Zen?

K.N. This is very hard to explain. When I was a boy I grew up in Tokyo. I came to Kyoto for the first time as a student, to go to university. As a boy I didn't read many novels, but I read our great writer Natsume Sōseki [1867–1916, author of *Wagahai-wa-neko-de-aru* (*I Am a Cat*)]. He had a great interest in Zen, and very often his novels were about Zen. I learned about Zen from his books, and I went to visit him in Kamakura. Then during high school, I read some of Dr. D.T. Suzuki's books. At that time, Zen was a kind of fashion in Japan. Many books were published about it.

After I came to Kyoto, I had the intention of making some contact with Zen. There are many sects of Buddhism here—Pure Land, Shingon, Nichiren, and also Zen. There are many Zen temples here. But I didn't go to any temples. I just read some books. And then when I was studying Western philosophy—it's very hard to express my inner state at the time—I felt a place of emptiness somewhere in my mind. Yes, emptiness. A lack. The study of philosophy could not satisfy me wholly. Something was lacking. But I could not tell what it was, because in a common sense I should be satisfied, you know. But in actuality I had a feeling of not being quite whole, quite satisfied. I began to think, what might be the solution? At that time I decided to be at a Zen temple, a Zen monastery. At first, I asked Dr. Suzuki who was the best Zen master. He mentioned the name of someone at a temple in Kamakura. So I went to

Kamakura to have an interview with the master. He gave me a koan. The first time I went to see him, I began to speak. Instantly he rang his bell—end of interview! I didn't understand what it meant, I only knew that I should leave until the next time. But later that same day, after the end of the practice, the master invited me to his own room. The place had a big garden, and he had his own small temple. There was a very beautiful garden, with a pond and trees. And there was his own small house. There I could say anything and everything to him; I could ask him whatever I wanted, and he answered me very kindly. I was treated very kindly there, as a sort of guest. I was still very young, you know, and I couldn't get anywhere in Zen—just [waves his hand as if ringing a bell].

I couldn't go to Kamakura very often, so I decided to practice in Kyoto. I decided to go to Shokokuji because it was close to my university. I would go there every day after my lecture, around 3 o'clock, on foot; and I would stay until 8 or 9. And then from time to time I would go to a seven-day big *sesshin*.

The main point is I could not satisfy myself with the study of philosophy. Reading books and discussing ideas could not satisfy the whole of me.

P. Do you think that for a philosopher to explore basic questions he has to have some sort of practice like zazen?

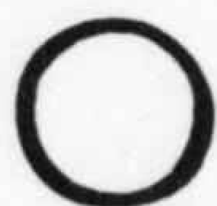
K.N. Maybe the main point is that when we speak of questions, what kind of questions do we mean? When I am studying philosophy, there are all kinds of questions. But when I find that I am lacking something and then ask myself what I am lacking, how can I answer that kind of question—then I can call it *my* question, but in a new sense. It is a question that comes out of the depths of my own nature, of myself. It is not "I" that ask that question, but something in myself that is saying, "I am not satisfied." The question of whose question it is, is called into question.

In any case, it is not a question in the usual sense. The question comes up like a fruit on a tree. You can't say that the tree *wants* to produce a fruit—it belongs to the nature of the tree to produce a fruit. Zen questions are, or should be, in their essence the same kind of questions.

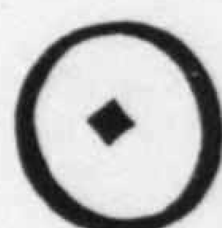
And the question that arises from somewhere deep in myself cannot be answered by any other question, or by anyone else. In that sense, it is the only question that I should be answering. In Zen, there are many things that similarly only you can do. Like sleep. Everyone else can sleep, but it will do you no good. When it is time to sleep, you yourself must sleep. If you are hungry, you yourself must eat. No matter how many other people eat, you will remain hungry until you yourself eat. ■

The Palaces of Memory

AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO



And what is this? I asked the earth and it said: "I am not He," and all things in it made the same confession. I asked the sea and the deeps and the creeping things and they answered: "We are not your god; seek above us." I asked the blowing breezes, and the entire air with its inhabitants said: "Anaximenes was deceived; I am not god." I questioned the sky, the sun, the moon, the stars: "Nor are we the god whom you seek," they said. And I said to all these which surround the doors of my flesh: "Tell me about my God, since you are not he, tell me something about Him." And they exclaimed in a loud voice: "He made us." My question was in my contemplation of them; and their answer was in their beauty. And I turned my attention upon myself and said; "Who are you?" and I answered: "A man." Now I find in myself a soul and body, one exterior, the other interior. Which of these should I have used in seeking for my God? I had already searched for Him by means of the body, searching from earth to sky, as far as I could direct the beams of my eyes as messengers. But the interior part of me is the better. To this part all my bodily messengers gave in their reports and this inner reality sat in judgment weighing the replies of heaven and earth and all things within them when they said: "We are not God," and when they said: "He made us." The inner man knew these things through the ministry of the outer man; I, the inner man, knew all this; I, the soul, through my bodily senses; I asked the whole mass of the world about my God, and it answered me: "I am not He, but He made me."



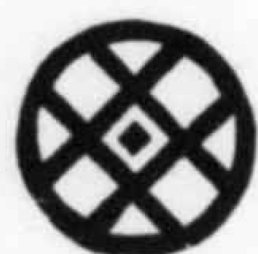
What then do I love when I love my God? Who is He above the summit of my soul? Through this very soul of mine I shall ascend to Him. I shall go beyond my life-force by which I cling to the body and fill its frame with life. Not by that force do I find my God: If so, "the horses and mules which lack understanding" (Ps 32:9) could find him since their bodies also live by that same force. But there is another force, not only that by which I not only give life, but give sensation to my flesh which the Lord fashioned for me, commanding the eye not to hear, and the ear not to see, but giving me the eye to see by and the ear to hear by, assigning to each of the other senses its own particular duty and function. Through these senses, with all their different functions, I act as one soul. I shall also go beyond this force, for this also the horse and mule have: They also sense through the body.

I shall therefore also go beyond this power of my nature, ascending by degrees to Him who made me. And I come to the fields and spacious palaces of memory where lie the treasures of innumerable images of all kinds of things brought into it by the senses. There is stored up whatever we think, if by thought we have enlarged or diminished or in any way altered those things which the sense has touched, and there also is everything else that has been brought in and deposited and has not yet been swallowed up and buried in forgetfulness. When I am in this treasure house, I ask for whatever I like to be brought forth to me; whereupon, some things are produced at once, some things take longer and have, so to speak, to be fetched from a more remote part of the store, and some things come pouring out all together and, when indeed we want and are searching for something quite different, they thrust themselves forward as though saying: "Perhaps you are looking for us?" These I drive away with the hand of my heart from the face of my remembrance until I discover at last what I desire, emerging from its hidden place into my sight. Some things are produced easily and in perfect order just as they are desired: What comes first gives place to what comes next, and, as it gives place, it is stored up ready to be brought forth when I need it again.

But when I hear that there are three kinds of questions—"Does the thing exist? What is it? What kind is it?"—I do indeed hold in mind the images of

the sounds of which these words are composed, and I know that they have noisily passed through the air and have now ceased to be. But as to the things themselves signified by these sounds, I never attained them by any bodily sense nor discerned them anywhere else than in my mind; yet in my memory I have stored up not their images, but the things themselves. How they got into me, let them say if they can. For as I examine all the gateways of my body, I cannot find by which one they entered. The eyes say: "If these images were colored, we announced them." The ears say: "If they made a sound, we reported them." The nostrils say: "If they had an odor, they entered through us." And the sense of taste says: "Unless there is a taste to them, do not ask me." Touch says: "If the thing is not a body, I did not handle it, and if I did not handle it, I gave no information about it."

From where then and how did they enter into my memory? I do not know. For when I learned them, I was not accepting them because of trust in another; I was recognizing them in my own mind; I approved them as true and committed them to my own mind, so storing them that I might recall them when I wished. So they were in my mind even before I learned them but they were not in my memory. Then where were they? Or why was it that, when I heard them spoken, I recognized them and said: "That is right; that is true" unless indeed they were already in my memory, but so remote and so buried, as it were, in the deepest recesses that if they had not been drawn forth by the encouragement of someone else I should perhaps not have been able to conceive of them?



We find, consequently, that to learn those things which we do not draw into us as images through our senses, but which we discern inside ourselves as they actually are without the help of images, means merely this: By thinking we are, so to speak, collecting together things which the memory did contain, though in a disorganized and dispersed way, and by attending carefully to them we arrange for them to be, so to speak, stored up ready at hand in that same memory where previously they lay hidden, disregarded and dispersed; so that now they will readily come forward to the mind which becomes familiar with them. My memory included many things like this which have been discovered, and, as I said, placed ready at hand. These are the things which we are said to have learned and to know. Yet if I stop, even for a brief span of time, bringing them up into my mind, they are submerged again and slip back into some kind

of distant hiding place, so that I have to think them out anew from that same place—for they have no other place—and once again collect them so that they may be known. They must be collected as from their scattered sites: so one speaks of "cogitating."

Great is the power of memory! It is something terrifying, my God, a profound and infinite multiplicity; and this is the mind, and I am this myself. What therefore, am I, my God? What is my nature? A life various, manifold, and utterly immeasurable.

Behold the plains, caverns and abysses of my memory; they are filled beyond number with innumerable kinds of things, present either in their images as in the case of all bodies or by means of their own presence, as with the arts, or in the form of some kind of notions or impressions, as with the affections of the mind which, even when the mind is not experiencing them, the memory still retains, although whatever is in the memory is also in the mind! Through all this I range in all directions and flit here and there. I dive down as deeply as I can, yet there is no limit. So great is the power of memory, so great is the power of life in man who lives mortally.

What, then, shall I do, my true Life, my God? I shall pass even beyond this power of mine called memory, I shall pass beyond it that I may draw near to you, sweet Light. What are you saying to me? I am now ascending through my mind to you who dwells above me. I shall pass beyond this power of mine called memory in the desire to touch you at the point where you may be touched, to cleave to you where it is possible to be in contact with you. For even beasts and birds have memory; otherwise, they could never find their lairs and nests, or the many other things to which they become accustomed. In fact, without memory they could not become accustomed to anything. I shall pass beyond my memory, therefore, to attain Him who separated me from four-footed beasts and made me wiser than the birds of the air. I shall pass beyond memory to find you—oh, where, where shall I find you my truly good and serene delight? If I find you without memory, I shall not remember you. And how shall I find you if I do not remember you? ■

Adapted from *Augustine of Hippo: Selected Writings.* Translation and Introduction by Mary T. Clark. The Classics of Western Spirituality series. (Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1984). Reprinted by permission.

Lively Oracles

P.L. TRAVERS

Bright one, moon of the mind, mother of the muses, be for me, as for Taliesin, Shining Brow, not the archivist of the common round but the soul's remembrancer. Leave yesterday in the hands of time and of time itself make one living moment. Remind me of what my blood has known since a sudden cry of mutual rapture opened to me the door of life and I began my journey.

Couched under the drumming heart-beat, hearing the sound of many waters, I was fish of the sea, fowl of the air, beast of the earth until I came forth, a child of Adam, a speck of planetary dust, weeping as all men weep.

Even so, Heaven was about me. Angels and cherubim played beside me, their feet not bending the tops of the grass. Cats composed tunes on fiddles, making music that only I could hear. Dishes ran away with spoons; rabbits, wearing neat blue coats, drank camomile tea at bedtime; king's horses and king's men tried and failed to mend a broken egg.

And my shadow ran about me in the morning, changing its shape to match my own as I grew like a plant in the sun and the rain, with the lively oracles of men speaking to me in their ancient voices.

I waited for a hundred years sitting beside a hedge of thorn till the one hero without a name came to wake the Sleeping Beauty.

I was eaten by my father in a stew and my sister, Marlinchen, gathered my bones to bury them under the Juniper Tree where a bird sang magic in the branches and I was whole again.

I herded the King's geese with the Goose Girl—(O Fallada hanging there!); stirred the King's soup with Allerleirauh; sewed shirts for my brothers turned into swans; heard Rumplestiltskin's cry as at last his name was spoken; drank of the water of the Well of Life; learned that one was one and all alone and ever more would be so.

And at noontide my shadow stood under my heel. I was caught between it and the sun as the day of my life proceeded.

Lead on, Taliesin, and I will follow, remembering what you, too, like a bee, have gathered from the ages.

I have been in the trains of Inanna and Ishtar, goddesses of the antique world, givers of life, givers of death, kin to the morning and the evening star, and seen them descend to the Land Below Earth, each rescuing a lover-son, Dummuzi and Tammuz.

I have heard the wailing of Gilgamesh when, waking from a moment of sleep (Watch and pray, Gilgamesh!) he found the snake devouring his treasure, the flower of immortality. Men come and go. The serpent abides.

I was with Isis, sister-wife of murdered Osiris, searching the land for his scattered parts and burying them by the banks of the Nile—all but one, all but one—so that he, below, should be Judge of the Dead and, above, the Lord of the Living Waters.

With Drapaudi I bewailed her fate when Heaven closed its doors to her because, of all her five husbands, the tiger-waisted Pandav Brothers, her heart preferred Arjuna—Arjuna who drove to the battle of Kurukshetra with the god Krishna as his charioteer, reciting the Bhagavad Gita. "Thou grievest for those who should not be grieved for, The wise grieve neither for the living nor the dead. Never wast thou not, nor I, nor these princes of men, Nor shalt thou ever cease to be."

Photograph by Arthur Tress

I was among the populace when Sita, queen of the god-king Rama, required for a second time, alas, to defend her wifely virtue, called upon the earth for help and the furrow opened and took her in.

I was warmed by the rays of Amaterasu, sun goddess of the Eastern Isles, when they lured her from sulking in her cave by means of a looking-glass. As she came forth, rapt at her own splendor, I watched as they tied a loose rope behind her. Only so far, Amaterasu! You may only go back to the mouth of the cave. Men cannot live in the dark forever. They need you to shine on the world.

I was with those who stood gazing when Lao-tzu took his leave of the world, riding up the slopes of the sky on the back of a buffalo.

I followed in Demeter's footsteps as she crossed and recrossed the Nysan plain, crying aloud to the gods for vengeance for the loss of her daughter, Kore. And the leaves fell and the herb withered and the corn put forth no life-giving seed. Mother, mother, do not grieve. Let the Spring come and your child will come with it, her arms full of crocus and narcissus, in her hand the sacred sprouting grain to be shown forth at Eleusis.

I was on the windy plains of Troy, with Helen watching from the battlements, as Achilles and Hector met in battle. Was it better, O Beauty of the World, to see men fight and die for you than to sit at home weaving counterpanes for Menelaus' bed? You could not choose. No man chooses his fate.

I saw tears leap to Odysseus' eye when, on the last lap of his voyage, the helmsman, spying land ahead, shouted the one word "Ithaca!" Athene had brought her wanderer home.

I was there when Odin hung on the Tree, nine days and nights on Yggdrasil—offering himself to himself. Who gave and who received?

I trembled when Frigg passed the mistletoe by—of all plants the one not to be forgotten!—and when Hoder flung the magic sprig, I joined in the earth's lament to the sky "Balder the Beautiful is dead, is dead!"

I have heard the Western Mountains singing songs of praise to the Great Spirit through the mouths of feathered braves.

I stood by when the mighty Quetzalcoatl, plumy serpent lord, brought up the bones from the Land of the Dead and ground them with manioc and his own blood to fashion the primal man.

I have been at the dark corroboree where the feet of men make a drum of the earth and heard them call to the Rainbow Snake to take them into the Dreaming.

I paddled in Maui the Trickster's canoe when he cast his line for *ulua* fish and drew up a string of coral islands.

I heard Setanta make his promise when he killed the guard-hound of Culain the Smith—"Sir, I myself will be your hound," thus assuming his solar name, Cuculain, which of all the hero names of Erin is most sweet in the mouths of men.

I have seen the white horses of Mananaan racing toward the Land of Youth, Tir n'an Og in the Western sea, where

> Boughs have their fruit and blossom,
> At all times of the year,
> And rivers are running over with red beer
> and brown beer,
> An old man plays the bagpipes in a golden
> and silver wood,
> Queens, their eyes blue as the ice, are dancing in a crowd.
>
> —*W.B. Yeats*

I was there with Merlin when Arthur drew the sword from the stone and regaled myself at the Round Table with all his company of knights, the Siege

Perilous empty and waiting for the one that would come at last.

I have been in the company of Bran the Blessed, king of the land westward of Logres, and have dipped my ladle in his Cauldron of Plenty which foreshadowed, men say, the Holy Grail.

And the Grail, the inexhaustible cup, that, too, I have encountered, deciphering in its winey depths a green hill topped by crossed branches cut from a tree in Eden, with hanging upon them, arms outstretched, their inevitable burden. And again, as I looked, I heard the earth lament to the sky "Balder the Beautiful is dead, is dead."

Take me no further, Taliesin, if indeed there is anywhere else to go; if indeed, in all our mutual remembering we have not been always at this point, where the vertical pierces the horizontal and North, South, East, and West are met.

Go where we will—to Arcturus or Aldebaran—there is only one place, only one moment and here, where Heaven and Earth conjoin, all things are gathered in. The ancient springs arise here and memory, seeming to come from afar, is forever in this now. If there are to be new mythologies—and why should we need new mythologies?—they cannot but congregate to this point.

So à Dieu, Taliesin, Bard of Elphin! Where the center holds and the end folds into the beginning there is no such word as farewell . . .

My shadow follows me as I walk westward. The sunset spreads it along the grass, taller and lordlier, now, than I. What will be remembered in it, this changing incorporeal shape compact of myself and the sun? When the tides of evening come flowing in we shall both be lost to sight.

May the Lord have mercy on me and my shadow! ■

Photograph by Arthur Tress

Dante's Magical Memory Cathedral

MARTHA HEYNEMAN

The real apocalypse comes, not with the vision of a city or kingdom, which would still be external, but with the identification of the city or kingdom with one's own body.[1]

My husband and I have come out in the evening, into the country, to look for Halley's comet. We are climbing up a gentle slope. At the top, where a lone tree stands, we turn and look around. Our son, who directed us to this spot as a likely place for viewing the comet, told us that here, where the meadow slopes away toward the evening, a farmhouse once stood. We can see no trace of it now. We sit down under the tree and wait. It is not cold. A breeze, soft and moist, stirs the hairs on our arms and the sparse grass on the ground around us.

Looking up, we vie with each other as to who can see the first real star. One by one they appear, until there are too many to count. We have little hope now of singling out the comet amid the numberless swarms of stars in the southwest, but we are grateful to it for bringing us out to attend to the night sky for the first time since we were children. We have paid no attention to it since we worked for merit badges in the Boy and Girl Scouts.

Chiamavi 'l cielo e 'ntorno vi si gira,
mostrandovi le sue bellezze etterne,
e l'occhio vostro pur a terra mira.[2]

Never, not even in the Girl Scouts, have I sat and watched for as long as I am watching, like an ancient shepherd, tonight. Orion is lower now in the west. Hamlet's Mill—the great transparent sphere of the fixed stars—slowly revolves, pivoting on the still point of Polaris.

Of course, I know there is no sphere of the fixed stars. It is the earth that's turning, and what seems from down here under our tree so breathlessly hushed, so slowly, soundlessly, and geometrically revolving, is in fact, according to present views, full of immense violence: exploding supernovae, black

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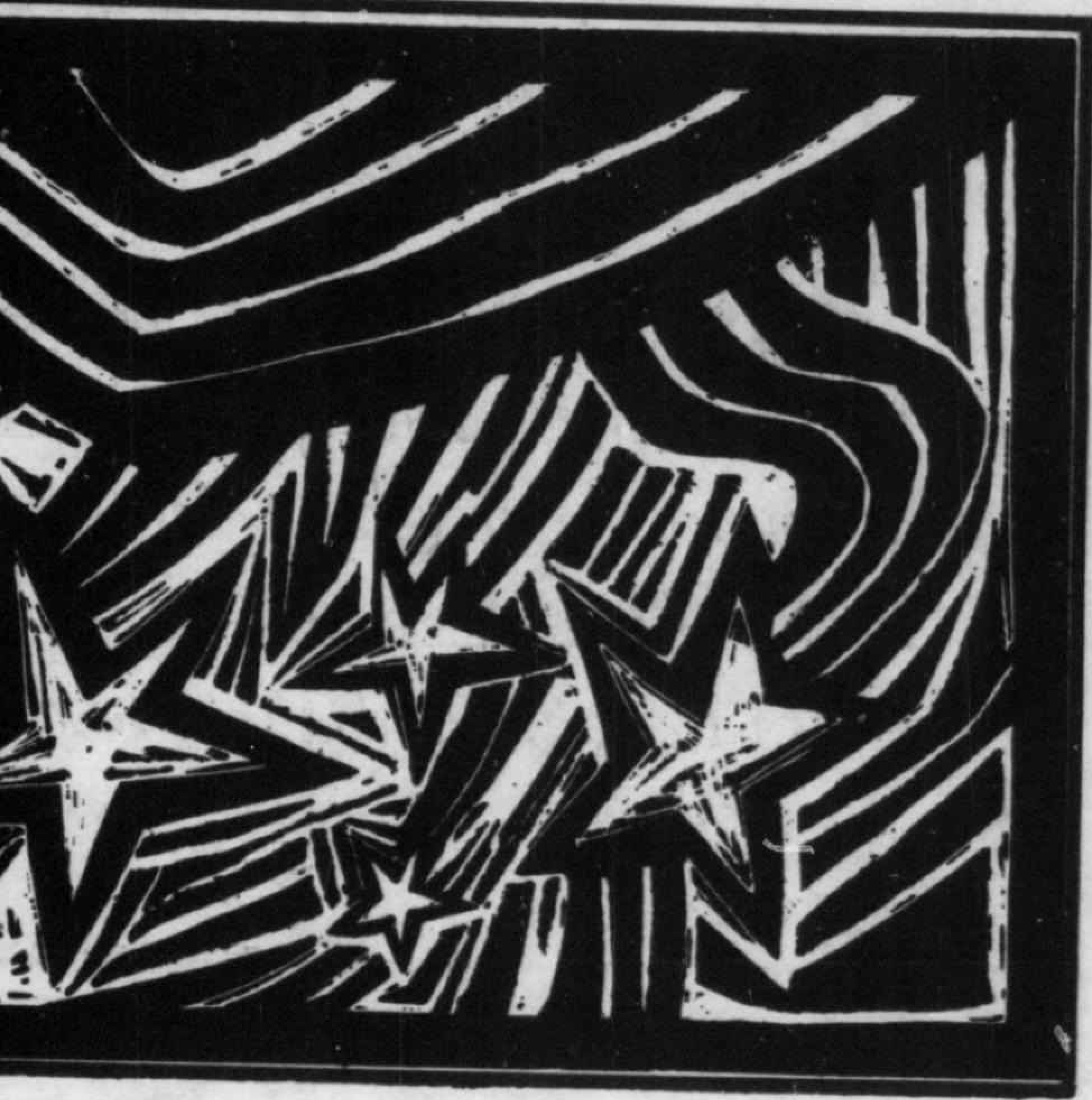

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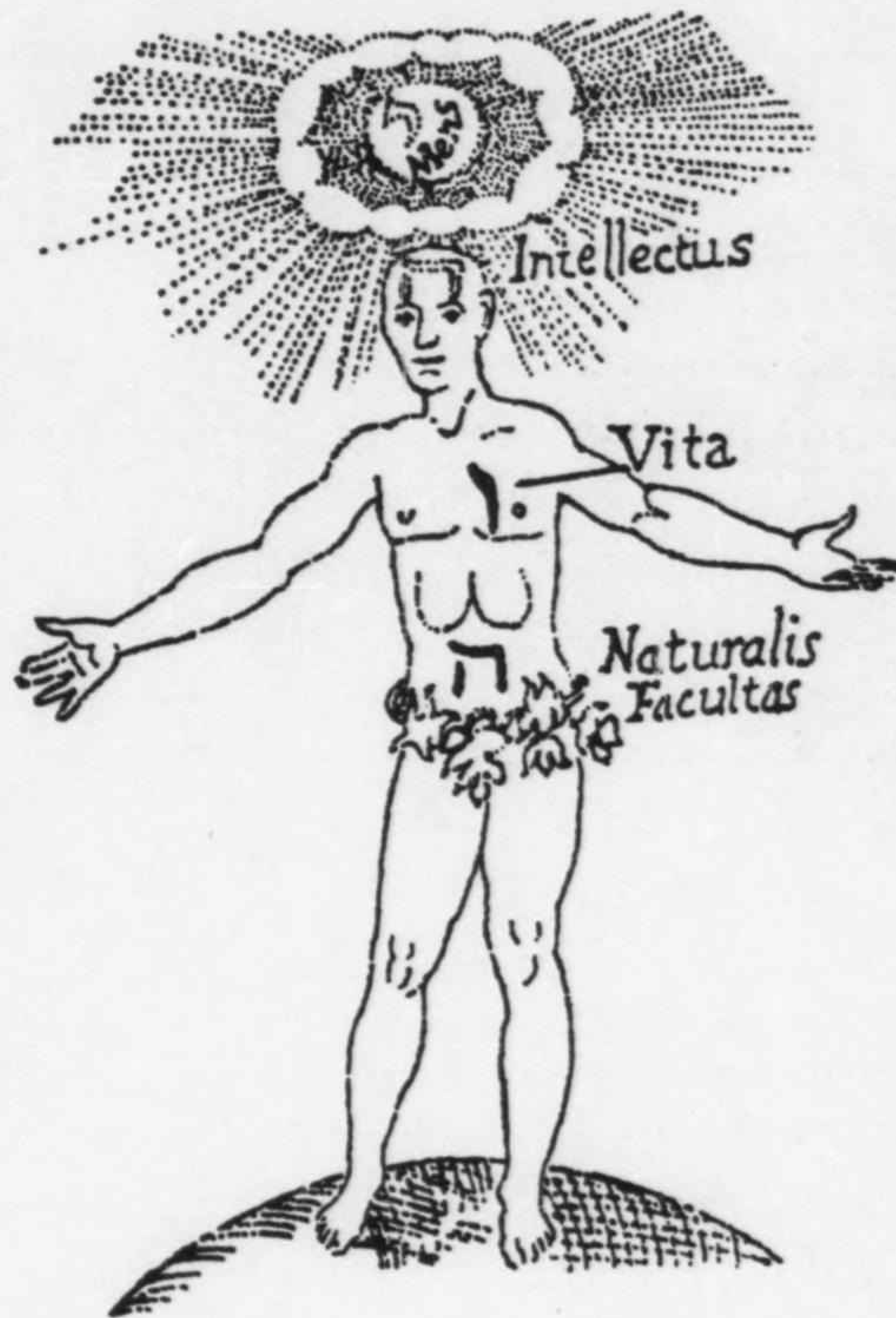


holes, pulsars, quasars, galaxies all rushing apart at breakneck speeds. Astronomy long since ceased to have anything to do with heaven, and geology never did have anything to do with hell. Virtue does not vary directly with altitude.

Nevertheless, as Czeslaw Milosz says, "Trees were writing their own Divine Comedy about the ascent from hell to the high spheres of heaven long before Dante wrote his." I feel the rough strength and vertical endurance of this tree against my back, like a second backbone. It has outlasted the house it sheltered. "The thrust of the trunk, from roots beneath the earth, through our middle dimension, to the sky, where the leaves sway, has always lent credence to the division of existence into three zones."[3] The way this sentence speaks to the body betrays how Milosz is a poet, even when writing in prose, even in translation.

Helen Vendler says of the poet Seamus Heaney: "In a typical passage, Heaney as a boy sits in a beech tree, where

> 'the very ivy
> puzzled its milk-tooth frills and tapers
> over the grain.'

. . . A poet can find such words only by analogy with his own inner life; he feels what it is like when consciousness or perception leafs itself out along a new puzzling path. When he needs a word for the ivy, it comes from his own kinesthetic awareness of the body."[4]

There should be some such word as *stat-esthetic* awareness, as well as *kinesthetic*, for in addition to a sense of movement, the body has an architectural sense of forces in equilibrium, thrust and counterthrust—the delicate adjustments required for keeping perfectly still. Sitting here in the dark at the foot of this tree, where a house once stood and none stands now, I notice that in my own statestetic and kinesthetic awareness of the body I continue to feel, in defiance of my education, that the center of the universe is right here, in my own center of gravity, and that I am surrounded by a sphere whose radius is the limit of my vision in every direction.

The sphere is not so much transparent as it is mirrored on the inside, and reflected on the inside of this vast, mirrored sphere are all these beautiful things, these swarms of stars, *le bellezze etterne*. If I got up and walked, in this awareness (of which, paradoxically, I am usually unaware), this mirrored sphere would follow me, and across its inner surface would sweep, as the wind sweeps the reflections of clouds across the glass walls of Manhattan skyscrapers, all the multiplicity of sensory impres-

sions that surround me at any time.

Every cosmogony begins with this kind of awareness: "*Here*," says every tribe (wherever it may be located on the surface of the earth) "is the center of the universe"; and out of that central point, sensed as being within the body, blooms the whole three-dimensional flower of spatial orientation—the sensation of forward, back, to the right, to the left, up, down, inward (toward the center), and outward (away from it); north, south, east, west, zenith, nadir.

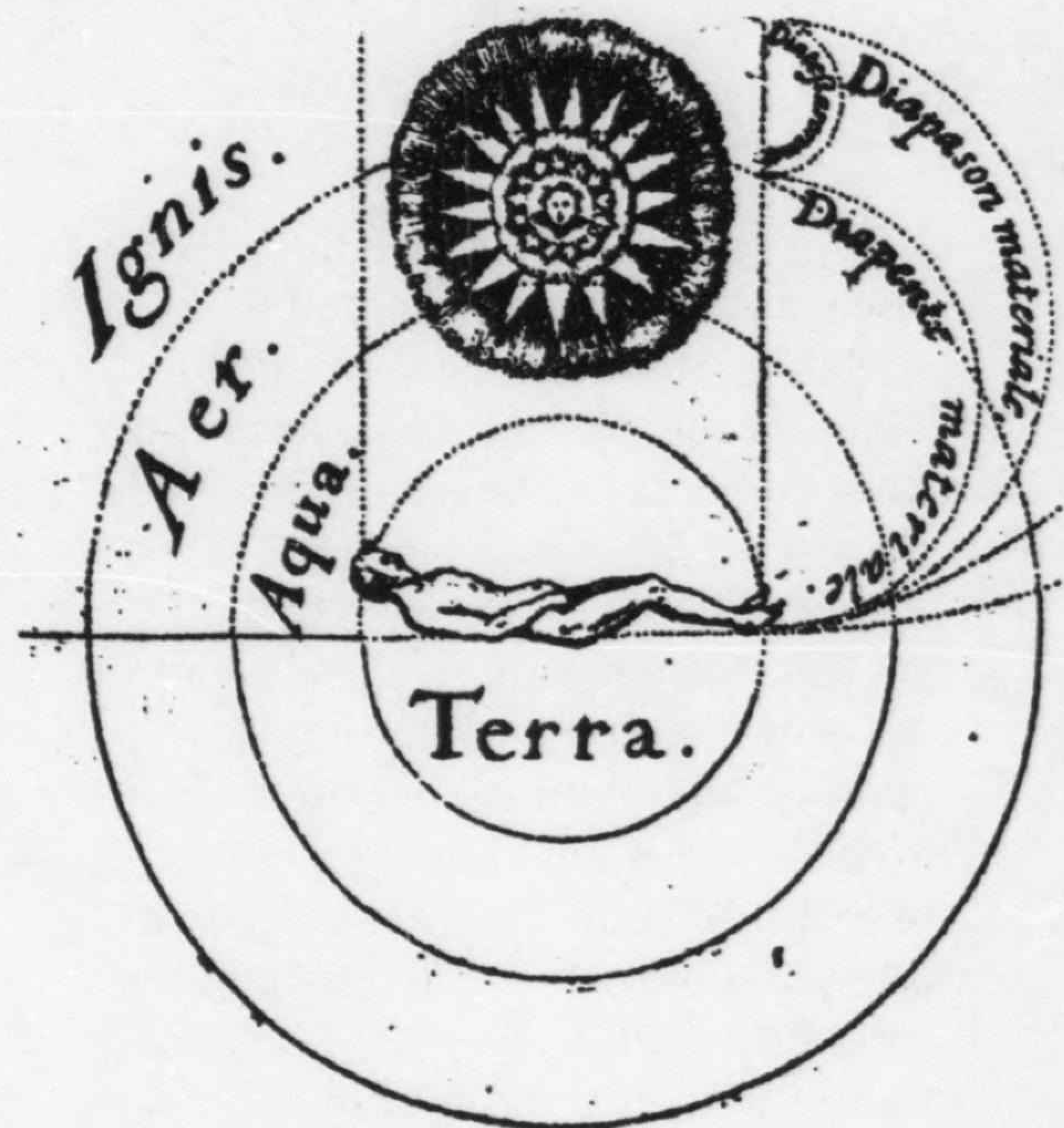
"Being is round," says Gaston Bachelard; and also, "Being is alternately condensation that disperses with a burst, and dispersion that flows back to a center."[5] Being breathes.

Within the closed sphere of the fixed stars, Renaissance men felt suffocated, and so they dispersed it with a burst. Copernicus himself kept it, and Galileo stopped short of disowning it publicly. But "for Giordano Bruno, it is with a burning enthusiasm—that of a prisoner who sees the walls of his jail crumble—that he announces the bursting of the spheres that separated us from the wide open spaces and inexhaustible treasures of the ever-changing, eternal and infinite universe." "There is a single general space," Bruno said, "a single vast immensity which we may freely call Void: in it are innumerable globes like this on which we live and grow; this space we declare to be infinite."[6] This model of the universe continues obstinately to dominate my mind, although I know it is as obsolete as the medieval one.

The mind can say what it likes about infinite space and infinite time; the body knows nothing of it. It can sense itself in almost any size or any shape provided there is *some* shape, some geometrical totality, it can crawl inside or shrink down and put it into its pocket. If a sequence of postures also has a shape (becomes a dance), the body's imagination can embrace it four-dimensionally. It can remember it. It's a whole lot smarter than we are. (With what other faculty did Einstein imagine himself riding on a beam of light, initiating thereby the present cosmological revolution?) But from infinity it secedes, and slinks away to go on sullenly living its own life—and to hell with your wispy theories. No matter what the schoolbooks say, it senses itself and the surrounding world as a unity composed of many parts, *e pluribus unum*—a cosmos.

When the glistening membrane of the sphere of the fixed stars was pricked, leaving a precision clockwork solar system ticking away in the vast inane (beginningless, endless, absolute space)—the mind's image of the universe ceased to correspond to the body's, and integrity (unity of knowledge, being, and action) disappeared. In order to act as an integral whole I would have to knit together what I do at any moment with the whole of what I know (repressing nothing), and I would have to be able to *remember* the whole of what I know, all the time, all at once. It would have to fit into the sensed contours of my body (or the sensed contours of my body into it) so as to render it portable, at my fingertips in the moment of decision. In order to retain knowledge, I need an imagined container, something with at least three dimensions. A one-dimensional mind is a hemorrhage and not a granary.

Frances Yates tells the traditional story (from Cicero's *De oratore*) of how



the poet Simonides of Ceos invented the art of memory. He had been attending a banquet but was called out for a moment, and in that interval the roof of the banquet hall fell in, crushing the host and all the guests and mangling their corpses beyond recognition. Simonides was able to identify the bodies for the relatives, because he remembered where everyone had been sitting.

> He inferred that persons desiring to train this faculty (of memory) must select places and form mental images of the things they wish to remember and store those images in the places, so that the order of the places will preserve the order of the things.[7]

Quintilian, in his *Institutio oratoria*, explained how this memory system works by reminding us that

> it is an assistance to the memory if places are stamped upon the mind, which anyone can believe from experiment. For when we return to a place after a considerable absence, we not merely recognise the place itself, but remember things that we did there, and recall the persons whom we met and even the unuttered thoughts which passed through our minds when we were there before.[8]

"Cicero emphasises," Yates continues, "that Simonides' invention of the art of memory rested, not only on his discovery of the importance of order for memory, but also on the discovery that the sense of sight is the strongest of all the senses."[9] I would say, rather, that his invention rested on the discovery that the strongest of all the senses, in terms of durability, is the kinesthetic/statesthetic awareness of the body. It was Simonides' sense of sight that remembered the images of the guests in their places, but it was his body that remembered the order of the places. Our sense of order has its origin in our sense of our own bodies, which are ordered to a degree excelling anything we have yet discovered in all the violent starry heavens.

The classical art of memory was a part of rhetoric, and its purpose was to enable orators to deliver long speeches learned by heart. A mere dining room could not provide enough places, so whole buildings were remembered—facade, forecourt, living room, bedrooms —and reminding images placed on each stair, door, window, niche, statue. "This done," Quintilian explains, "when it is required to revive the memory, one begins from the first place to run through all, demanding what has been entrusted to them, of which one will be reminded by the image."[10]

"The word 'mnemotechnics' hardly conveys what the artificial memory of Cicero may have been like," Yates reminds us, "as it moved among the buildings of ancient Rome, *seeing* the places, *seeing* the images stored on the places, with a piercing inner vision";[11] and, I would add, *being* the places, *being*

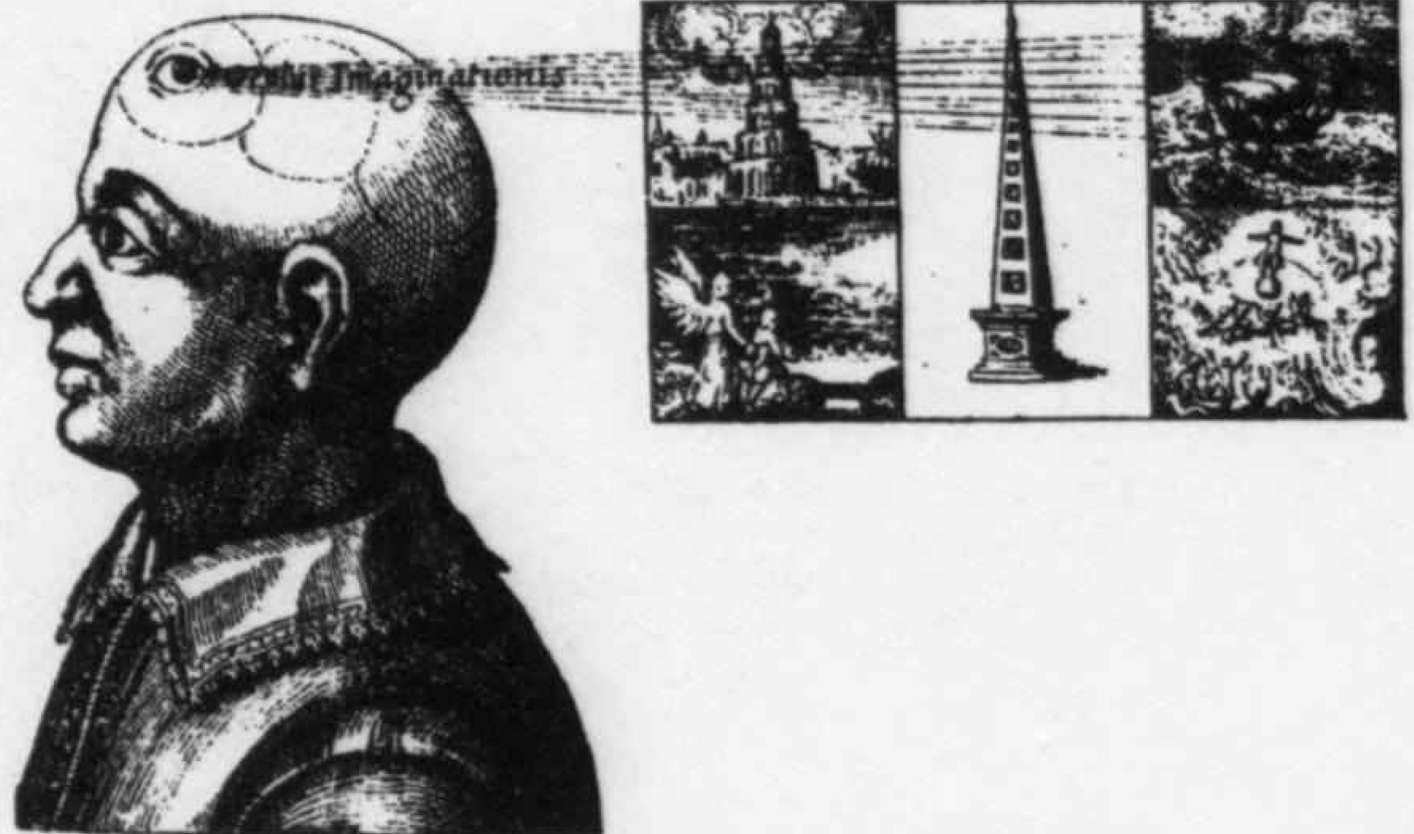
ancient Rome with its buildings (as James Joyce became the city of Dublin as well as all the characters he caused to move through it on a single imagined day—and became the globed day itself, the four-dimensional container). The imagination of the eye sees the images (and the imaginations of the other external senses recover their appropriate vibrations); but the imagination of the muscles, bones, and blood (of the "proprioceptors ") divides in two, into a still part and a moving part, statesthetic and kinesthetic, and *becomes* both the motionless city with its motionless buildings and the figure who moves, in kinesthetic imagination, through them. The one who moves through, collecting the images in sequence from their places, perceives in linear time; but the one who *is* the places perceives the whole speech at once, as Mozart perceived his symphonies all at once before he "unrolled" them and wrote them down.

In my dreams I walk, run, fly; am swept through corridors, up and down long flights of stairs, into great halls with crystal chandeliers, or caverns where the green light of underground rivers trembles on the rocky ceiling, or over "cliffs of sheer fall"; and I say, "*I* was walking down this long corridor" or "running up these stairs." But *I* am also the corridors, flights of stairs, sparkling ballrooms, underground rivers, and precipices—or rather, the sensation of moving through the space and the sensation of being the space are equally myself. The imagination is both still and moving, and because, like the moving part, it is alive, the still part—the container (cave, corridor, building, house, cathedral, cosmos)—can change shape as our imagined cosmos has changed shape over the centuries, achieving, with Dante, globed perfection, bursting shortly thereafter, the contents of our knowledge spilling out into disconnection like the sawdust from the head of the Scarecrow of Oz, flowing, now, toward a center again), so that the contents move into a new relation and take on a new meaning.

In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard takes us much deeper than Quintilian into the memory of our skin, muscles, and bones. It is not necessary to "return to a place" in the flesh; the place is in us, unforgettably. "House images . . . are in us as much as we are in them. . . . With the house image we are in possession of a veritable principle of psychological integration." The most important house for each one of us is the first one, the one where we lived as children. Like the tree, it was writing a Divine Comedy for us before we could read at all, much less read Dante's. "Verticality is ensured by the polarity of cellar and attic." You can go right now, if you wish, and walk again up that front walk, between the rose bushes on the left (upon whose dark green glossy leaves the snails made silver tracks) and the hydrangeas on the right (under which you tossed your burnt-out Fourth-of-July sparklers, to make the blossoms turn blue).

> The house we were born in is physically inscribed in us. . . . After twenty years . . . we would recapture the reflexes of the "first stairway," we would not stumble on that rather high step. . . . We would push the door that creaks with the same gesture, we would find our way in the dark to the distant attic. The feel of the tiniest latch has remained in our hands. . . . The word habit is too worn a word to express this passionate liaison of our bodies, which do not forget, with an unforgettable house.[12]

Whereas the Greek and Roman orators of the Classical period acquired the art of memory to help them remember long speeches (and, later, Renaissance men like Bruno, precursors of modern science, would try to use it for magical purposes, to tap the powers of the cosmos), the purpose of the art in the Middle Ages was "to hold in memory the scheme of salvation,"[13] so as to know what to do at any moment. No room, building, or city will suffice, then, to contain all the "places" of Dante's memory. The whole cosmos is his memory house.



Dante did not intend that his poem should become an adornment for the vanities of an elite, nor a carcass for scholars to pick at. He intended it for use: a practical handbook for the conduct of everyday life, and because it was intended for use in everyday life, the *Divine Comedy* speaks very strongly to the body. The feel of the tiniest latch in his cosmos has remained in Dante's hands, for as pilgrim he has traversed the whole in the kinesthetic imagination of his body and as poet he has become the whole in its architectural imagination.

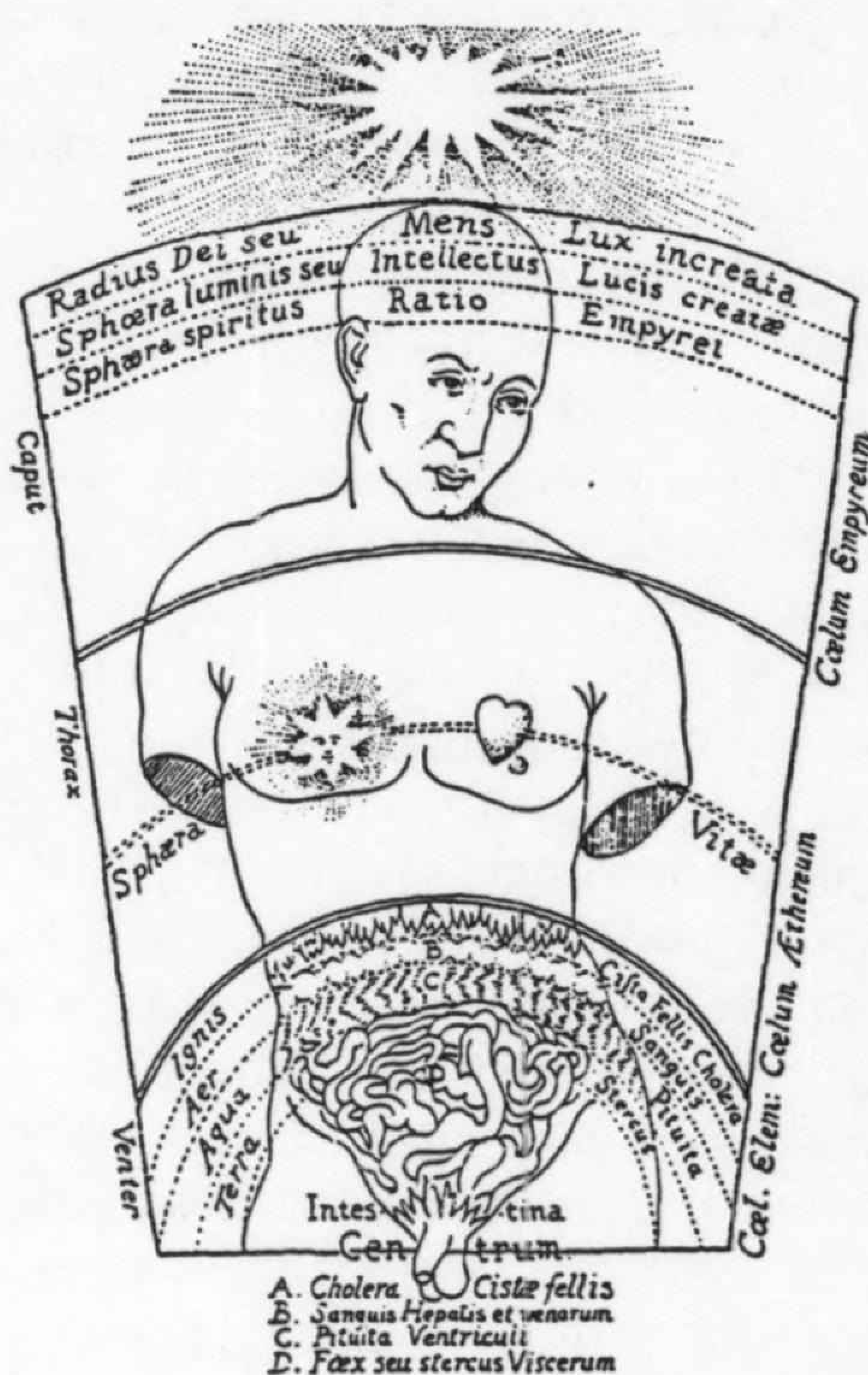
Scholars have noted that throughout the *Divine Comedy* Dante maintains a double perspective: of himself as pilgrim, making the journey through the whole extent of his universe, not knowing what lies around the next corner; and of himself as poet, looking back upon the pilgrim after the journey is over, knowing the whole. The pilgrim moves through the memory places in linear sequence, and the poet holds the totality of the places, the whole edifice, in his mind all at once. But the poet also *is* his universe, and true to the etymology of the word (uni-versus), his universe is not a unity at the beginning of the poem but turns into one during the course of it. The poem is Dante's at-one-ment, and the "container" (the topological sense, which seems to be located in our very skin—in its sense of its own seamlessness, all-inclusiveness, and flexibility) participates fully in the process, changing shape until (when the pilgrim has "seen the point") it attains to perfect wholeness and balance.

Thus the pilgrim's "space" is at first a chaos, like ours—what infinite space is to the imagination of the body: a place of disorientation, a "dark wood." Or is it a shoreless sea? The pilgrim is not sure in the first canto where he is or what kind of space he's in. He thinks he sees a mountain (though we see later that in relation to the real mountain of Purgatory this first mountain is upside down: a reflection or hallucination) and tries to run up it, but is prevented and forced back down. His space then becomes a hollow inverted cone, whose apex is at the center of gravity of the earth. Then it becomes a dark tunnel leading back to the surface on the other side of the earth. Then a solid upright cone: the island-mountain of Purgatory, with the earthly paradise at its apex. The two cones of Hell and Purgatory together are equivalent to a sphere. When the pilgrim has traversed them both, his being is whole (and in

union with Beatrice, spherical, like the prelapsarians in Plato's *Symposium*), so that he is now able to receive whole knowledge: he now sees the universe in the familiar medieval form of nested spheres, with the earth at the center. When he and Beatrice arrive at the outermost sphere, they see another set of nested spheres, diminishing in size from large to small, and at the center "the point of it all." Mark Peterson, professor of physics at Amherst, has noticed that, so far from being "a naive geocentric system," Dante's universe is a three-sphere (a three-dimensional spherical surface in a four-dimensional space, as the surface of what we usually think of as a sphere is two-dimensional in a three-dimensional space), one of the forms currently proposed for the universe as a whole and the one favored by Einstein.

The body can thus imagine itself in passionate liaison with each of these geometrical shapes, changing seamlessly from one to the next without "breaking its skin." At the same time, in its architectural awareness, the body holds the whole structure at once, in stillness and in memory.

And it imagines itself, in its kinesthetic awareness, moving with the pilgrim through this total space (in *terza rima*, two steps forward, one step back), with, at first, the sensation of disorientation; then relief at coming to shore; then attempting to climb, prevented by obstructions that seem external; then forced back down; then deliberately descending, conducted by a guide who knows the way, from circular ledge to ledge, down a gradient of increasing density of materiality, to the center of gravity of the whole universe, where to continue in the same direction is to begin to ascend, so that pilgrim and guide are obliged to turn completely upside down (or rather, right side up), putting their heads where their feet had been before. Then groping one's way upward through a dark tunnel, against the stream of forgetfulness, and issuing forth through a round opening to see



again the stars. Then climbing up the real mountain, having understood (fruit of the descent all the way to the root) that all obstructions are in oneself, exerting effort resolutely against their gravity and at the same time experiencing how it is not by one's own power that one is ascending, since no one can move a step upward at night, in the absence of the radiations of the sun. The climb up this mountain resembles interplanetary travel more than mountaineering, in that it becomes easier to climb the higher you get, until you are "fall-

ing up," toward Beatrice and the earthly paradise—but not without passing through a wall of fire. Then, having reached the top, having completed his self-knowledge and his being, the pilgrim is "transhumanized" and ascends with Beatrice effortlessly through the spheres.

Thus, if you read the whole poem through once, although you may not remember who is lodged in which circle of Hell or on what terrace of Purgatory, you will remember the form of the whole, because it has been communicated to your body. It is really of no interest, in any case, to anyone but Dante scholars to know who was placed on which shelf of Dante's universe. What is of intense interest to all of us is to experience, with mind, heart, muscle, and skin, a cosmology that could contain all knowledge, of all kinds, organized in such a way as to give us, in our very flesh, a sense of direction in deciding what we ought to do and an ardent understanding (ardent because of its clear relation to our deepest, most inarticulate heart's desire) of why—to what end—we ought to do it.

The early Renaissance, which began a century after Dante's death, was a moment of euphoria: a trip, an inflation, a flight; and you and I are in on the crash thereof. "There are no ends," said Bruno,

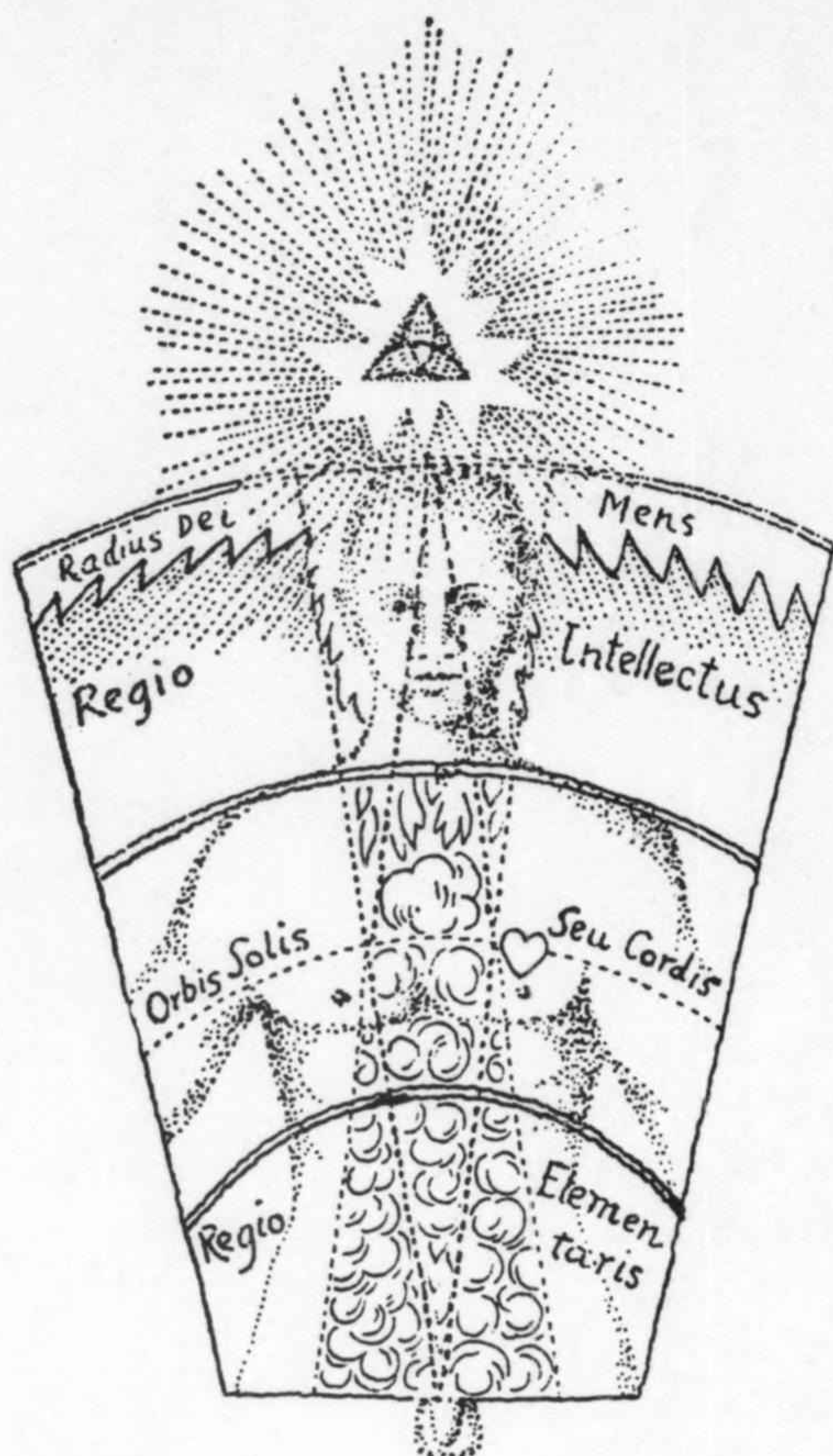
> boundaries, limits or walls which can defraud or deprive us of the infinite multitude of things. Therefore the earth and the ocean thereof are fecund; therefore the sun's blaze is everlasting, so that eternally fuel is provided for the voracious fires, and moisture replenishes the attenuated seas. For from infinity is born an ever fresh abundance of matter.[14]

We believe now that neither the phenomenal world nor anything in it is infinite. The fecundity of neither earth nor ocean is inexhaustible, and even the sun's blaze is not everlasting, nor its supply of fuel eternal. At the same time, cosmic dispersion presupposes a center. Since Hubble's discovery in 1929 that the universe is expanding, physicists and astronomers have been engaged in an ever-accelerating race, extrapolating backward toward that point Dante saw at the end of the *Divine Comedy*: "where every where and every when are gathered." The subject of cosmology has reappeared in our textbooks of physics and astronomy, and the question What form has the universe as a whole? has again become respectable.

Certainly no one has yet suggested that this new cosmology might be of any help to us in making life decisions. But as an all-embracing imagined shape, it may gradually come to include more kinds of knowledge that the strictly physical and astronomical. Although it now seems far-fetched, the purpose of cosmology was once to provide us with a map to guide us in knowing what we ought to do and a background for our own understanding of why we ought to do it. Dante's *Divine Comedy* can help us imagine what that may have been like.

Nothing could be more disastrous than to try to crawl back into the medieval universe literally understood. Freud has shown us, and experience has amply demonstrated, what happens to knowledge we know to be true and try to deny. What men like Copernicus, Galileo, and Bruno rendered obsolete was not the medieval sense of cosmology but a literal interpretation of it.

By *heaven* or *highest heaven*, neither the ancients nor the medievals meant the



material sky that we perceive with our physical eyes:

> The heavens of course belong to an order of being different from the extended universe below, and consequently require a mode of perception other than our senses. The heavens are perceptible to the intellect alone. . . . The two levels of existence . . . derive ultimately from the distinction made by Plato between a world of being and a world of becoming. . . . The world of becoming is perceptible to the senses, and consequently is said to be 'sensible.' The world of being is perceptible to the intellect only, and consequently is said to be 'intelligible.'[15]

If Plato meant by *intellect* a human faculty capable of perceiving the world of being, then he meant something very different from what we mean by *intellect* today. Those who are "just sitting," in zendos or comparable meditation halls, searching for "no-mind," are, paradoxically, searching for this kind of intellect. What *we* usually call intellect, so far from being the contemplator of timeless being, is just the opposite: linear, discursive—even, according to the Zen story ("Does the wind move or does the grass move?" "Your mind moves."), the very creator of the experience of passing-time. The world perceived in this latter mode—ephemeral, in flux, where nothing stays and we can't remember anything or anyone for long—is what both Christ and the medievals meant by *earth*, and not our beautiful, irreplaceable planet. When we are "converted"—turned right side up, so that "heaven" is above "earth," the chaos and wispiness of our inner world begin to take on order and durability, allowing Wisdom to build her house.

Flight is one thing—a trip, an inflation, a "high," followed, as in the cases of Phaethon and Icarus (and us), by a crash; a cathedral another: rooted deep in the earth with the altar of the horned god buried beneath it and the holy well and chapel of the Black Virgin in the crypt; powerfully and enduringly built upon the surface of the earth in a music of symmetry and balance, thrust and counterthrust, powerful supporting pillar and soaring vault—a permanent connection between earth and heaven, becoming and being, multiplicity and unity, time and timelessness—with room for all who wish to enter and contemplate the totality of knowledge (the treasure of the community) displayed there in the form of timeless art; a cosmos, both many and one, perceptible to the senses.

Plato saw the visible sky as such a work of art, "the union of the same and the different," the soul of the universe. "While the celestial bodies measure the passage of time, yet they and their patterns are immutable. . . . They are both

timely and timeless."[16] Just as the ephemeral world of becoming is perceptible to the senses (or their extensions in instruments) and the timeless world of being to the intellect (in Plato's definition of the word), the soul of the world requires for its perception the corresponding faculty: the human soul. The soul must unite senses and intellect, changing and changeless, many and one, into one cosmos, one body; or its perception must penetrate beyond these opposites "to see the world in a grain of sand." Nothing less than a soul will ever satisfy all our heart's desires, because, amphibious creatures that we are, with the idea of changeless unity we grow restless, suffocated, bored; and wandering too far into disconnected multiplicity, we get lost.

The soul, according to Plato, is a harmony. "Things compounded," says St. Augustine, "imitate unity by the harmony of their parts, and, so far as they attain to unity, they are." The Taj, according to P.D. Ouspensky, is the soul of Mumtaz-i-Mahal. The *Divine Comedy* is the soul of Dante, his church, enshrining both the memory of Beatrice and "the point of it all" in an enduring structure that others can enter and both "get the point" and experience the harmonizing influence the contemplation of a great work of art can have upon us.

That is the purpose of beauty, whether of art or of nature: it is not to be possessed in its materiality but to be contemplated in its harmony, so that it can have its immediate, ordering effect upon our inner chaos.

My husband and I have long been quiet here now under the stars. Even the faint ambition to locate the comet has dropped away. What the heavens are in their materiality no longer concerns us. What they are in their form, as Plato saw them—"a moving image of eternity"—is having its immediate effect upon us. Without a word they are transmitting to us the idea of what it is to be both still and moving, many and one. ■

NOTES

1. Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 431.
2. "Heaven calls you and revolves around you, showing you its timeless beauties, and your eye looks only at the earth." Dante, *Purgatorio* 14.148–150.
3. Czeslaw Milosz, *Visions from San Francisco Bay* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1975), pp. 14–15.
4. Helen Vendler, "Echo Soundings, Searches, Probes," review of Seamus Heaney's *Station Island* (*The New Yorker*, 23 September 1985, pp. 108–116).
5. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), pp. 234 and 217.
6. Alexander Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), pp. 43 and 40.
7. Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 2.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
12. Bachelard, *op. cit.*, pp. xxxiii, xxxii, 4, 14–15, 17.
13. Yates, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
14. Koyré, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
15. S.K. Heninger, Jr., *The Cosmographical Glass: Renaissance Diagrams of the Universe* (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1977), pp. 33, 27.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

ARCS

The Structure of Recollection

Thou believest thyself to be nothing,
And yet it is in thee that the world resides.

Avicenna

You and I, Arjuna,
Have lived many lives.
I remember them all.
You do not remember.

Bhagavad-Gita

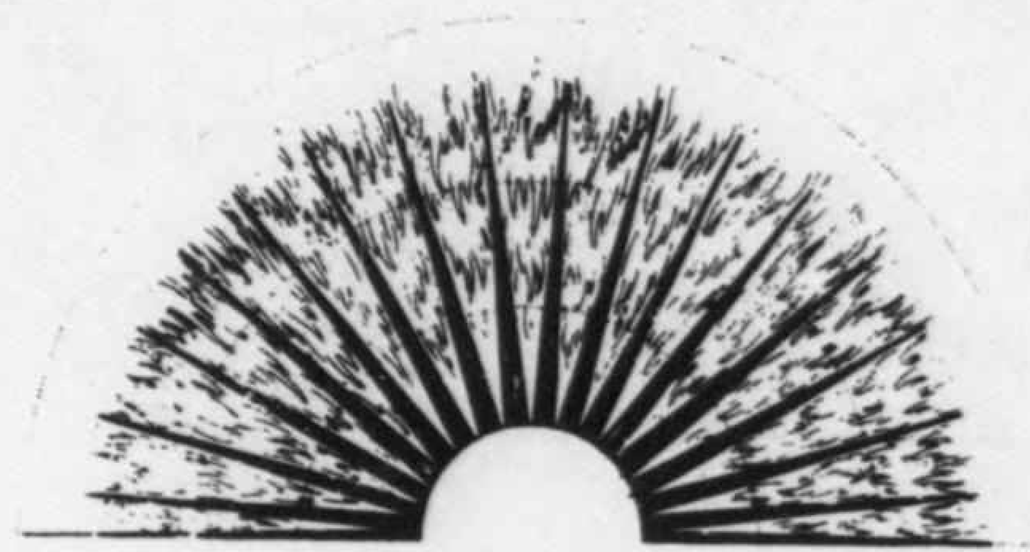
When from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, still, alone, more fragile, but with more vitality, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, the smell and taste of things remain posed a long time, like souls, ready to remind us, waiting and hoping for their moment, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unfaltering, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.[1]

Marcel Proust

Moreover, something is or seems,
That touches me with mystic gleams,
Like glimpses of forgotten dreams—

Of something felt, like something here;
Of something done, I know not where;
Such as no language may declare.[2]

Alfred, Lord Tennyson



At the moment of the creation of the child God ordains that the seed of the future human being shall be brought before Him, whereupon He decides what its soul shall become: man or woman, sage or simpleton, rich or poor. Only one thing He leaves undecided namely, whether he shall be righteous, for, as it is written "all things are in the hand of the Lord, except the fear of the Lord. . . ." Thereupon God orders the angel in charge of the souls living in the Beyond to initiate this soul into all the mysteries of that other world, through Paradise and Hell. . . . At the moment of birth, however, when the soul comes to earth, the angel extinguishes the light of knowledge burning above it, and the soul, enclosed in its earthly envelope, enters this world, having forgotten its lofty wisdom, but always seeking to regain it.

Qabbalah

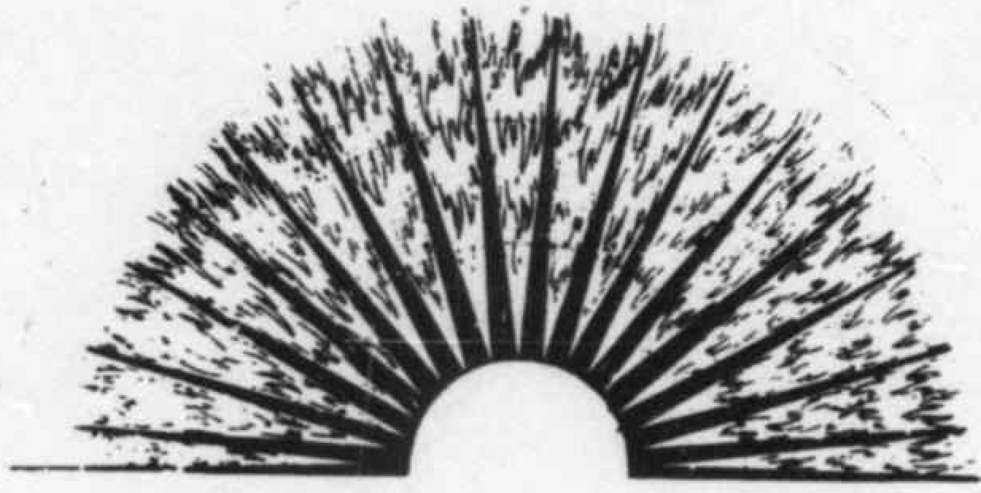
"Cannot a man *remember*?" Plato asks. "This invention [of letters] will produce forgetfulness in the mind of those who learn to use it, because they will not excercise their memory. Their trust in writing, produced by external characters which are no part of themselves, will discourage the use of their own memory within them. You have invented an elixir *not of memory, but of reminding*; and you offer your pupils the appearance of wisdom, not true wisdom, for they will read many things without teaching, and will therefore seem to know many things, when they are for the most part ignorant and hard to get along with, since they are not wise but only wiseacres." He goes on to say that there is another kind of "word," of higher origin and greater power than the written (or as we should say, the printed) word; and maintains that the wise man, "*when in earnest*, will not write in ink" dead words that cannot teach the truth effectively, but will sow the seeds of wisdom in souls that are able to receive them and so "to pass them on for ever."[3]

A.K. Coomaraswamy

Most people think of forgetting as a defect. But I consider it a great benefit.

If you did not forget, it would be utterly impossible to serve God. You would remember your entire past, and these memories would drag you down and not allow you to raise yourself to God. Whatever you did would be constantly disturbed by your memories of the past.

But God has given you the power to forget and disregard the past.



This is very important to consider when serving God. Most people are distressed by past events, especially during prayer. When a person recites his prayers, his thoughts are constantly disturbed by memories of the past. He may think about his business or household affairs, worrying whether he did something wrong or neglected something important. While attempting to serve God through prayer or study, he might become troubled by his many sins and shortcomings.

The best advice for this is simply to forget. As soon as an event is over with, forget it completely and never think about it again. Understand this well, for it is a very important concept. Because you can forget, you can relearn a lesson or review, and it is like learning anew.

A good illustration is provided by men hired to fill leaky barrels. The more they pour into the barrels, the more leaks out.

The fools complain, "Why are we working in vain? What good is it to fill the barrels if it all leaks out?"

But the wise ones reply, "What difference does it make? Don't we get paid for every day we work? If the barrels leak, our wages are not reduced."

The same is true of your sacred studies. You might forget them, but your reward is not reduced.

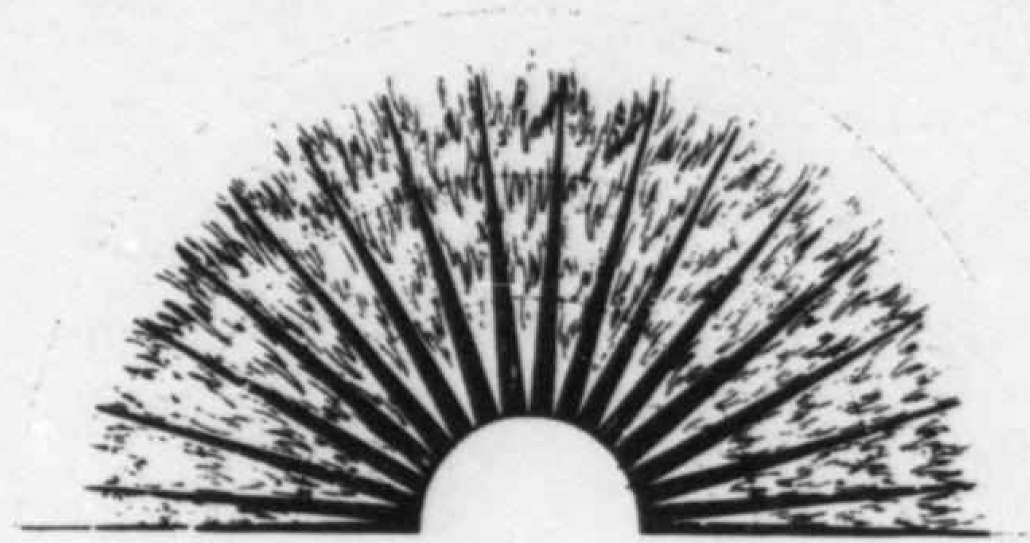
In the future God will make every one remember everything he ever learned, even if it was forgotten during his lifetime. In the future life, all souls will remember and understand everything they heard and studied in this world.[4]

Rabbi Nachman

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Race out the written troubles of the brain,
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?[5]

Shakespeare

The process of repression is not to be regarded as something which takes place once for all, the results of which are permanent, as when some living thing has been killed and from that time onward is dead; on the contrary, repression demands a constant expenditure of energy, and if this were discontinued the success of the repression would be jeopardized, so that a fresh act of repression would be necessary. We may imagine that what is repressed exercises a



continuous straining in the direction of consciousness, so that the balance has to be kept by means of a steady counter-pressure. A constant expenditure of energy, therefore, is entailed in maintaining a repression, and economically its abrogation denotes a saving.[6]

Sigmund Freud

The metaphysics of man is the same in the private sphere as in the public one. Take the other theme of the book, forgetting. This is the great private problem of man: death as the loss of self. But what is this self? It is the sum of everything we remember. Thus, what terrifies us about death is not the loss of the future but the loss of the past. Forgetting is a form of death ever present within life. This is the problem of my heroine, in desperately trying to preserve the vanishing memories of her beloved dead husband. But forgetting is also the great problem of politics. When a big power wants to deprive a small country of its national consciousness it uses the method of *organized forgetting*. This is what is currently happening in Bohemia. Contemporary Czech literature, insofar as it has any value at all, has not been printed for twelve years; 200 Czech writers have been proscribed, including the dead Franz Kafka; 145 Czech historians have been dismissed from their posts, history has been rewritten, monuments demolished. A nation which loses awareness of its past gradually loses its self. And so the political situation has brutally illuminated the ordinary metaphysical problem of forgetting that we face all the time, every day, without paying any attention. Politics unmasks the metaphysics of private life, private life unmasks the metaphysics of politics.[7]

Milan Kundera

NOTES

1. Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past: Swann's Way*, translated by C.K. Scott Moncrieff (London, 1955).
2. Alfred, Lord Tennyson, from "The Two Voices."
3. A.K. Coomaraswamy, *The Bugbear of Literacy* (London: Dennis Dobson Limited, 1949).
4. Quoted in Rabbi Nathan of Nemirov's *Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom*, translated and annotated by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan (Brooklyn, Breslov Research Institute, 1973).
5. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* act 5, scene 3.
6. Sigmund Freud, *Repression*, in *Complete Psycholcgical Works*, 24 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1964).
7. From an interview by Philip Roth in the *New York Times Book Review* (30 November 1980).

Living Stories

PAUL JORDAN-SMITH

The expression "that reminds me of a story" is probably as well known to storytellers as "once upon a time" and "happily ever after," and may in fact be more often used than either. It is a fact known to storytellers of all sorts (and whenever we tell so much as an anecdote or a joke, we enter the august ranks descended from Homer and his spiritual ancestors) that stories remind one of other stories. Of course, one need not hear or tell a story to be reminded of one. The exigencies of life, our human condition, news events, and perhaps most of all our questions whether trivial or searching—in short anything—can remind us of a story. That is one form of memory that storytelling depends on: the associative response by which we link ideas. It is a kind of thinking that is not peculiar to receiving a story, since it operates in our everyday life and in our more profound intellectual activity as well. It is by means of associative reflection that the art of interpretation proceeds, and this leads not only to additional stories but also to a pondering on our nature and condition, on our life and future, to a questioning, perhaps even a search for the meaning of our existence.

This is one kind of remembering connected with the reception of stories. An altogether different sort of experience, one that reaches more deeply into our being, can also occur, and it often takes us by surprise. Some stories give rise to a feeling of familiarity, not with the story itself, but with something that lies behind the story, its undercurrent or

its overarching idea. The story touches us unexpectedly, setting off chains of association perhaps but affecting us in other ways as well: not only emotionally and viscerally, but somehow beyond ordinary self-experiencing. It is a kind of recognition, utterly different from those essentially intellectual methods we use to identify and classify stories. What is the nature of this recognition? What is recognized, and who in us recognizes?

Stories that touch one person do not necessarily touch another, but there are stories that over the ages have touched many and that are repeated again and again, even if the original impulse and understanding have been long forgotten, even if the circumstances of the tale seem alien and remote. In such stories, at the hands (or tongue) of a true storyteller, the characters come alive in us. We incarnate them in our imaginative response, and they live within us, beheld by the mind's eye and the other inner senses. In some cases, this experience of recognition is so strong that we find ourselves saying "this is my story" despite all demonstrable dissimilarities between the character and action and ourselves and our own life. Of course, even if it is "my story," it is (or was) someone else's as well, otherwise it would not have been told and retold, would not have lasted through the ages.

So when we are touched by a story, when this phenomenon of recognition takes place, we are somehow connected with someone else for whom the story also had meaning. The story, like any linguistic construct (including simple declarative sentences like "The ball is red"), is a symbolic structure. What differentiates it from the language of ordinary discourse is that it is a description of people that are not here now and perhaps never existed, doing things that are not happening now and perhaps never happened (in the historical sense), usually in places other than this place here, in which we are hearing the story told. And yet there is a recognition that the story is in some sense true, that it describes real people, real events, the here and now. How is this possible? Is it simply a delusion? Do we trick ourselves into some kind of sentimental fantasy? Is the story no more than a means of escaping from the cares and responsibilities of our lives?

Of course these doubts are well founded, at least in part. What are TV soaps, sitcoms, and mysteries if not precisely escapist narratives into which we plunge, sometimes so deeply that we replace the immediate outer world with an imaginary one and feel sorrow, anger, joy, indignation, sexual arousal—whatever the producers want us to feel. What are all the myriad examples of mass media fiction but means of withdrawal from the humdrum, care-ridden world into a fantasy life that seems so much more exciting, so much more meaningful than our own? But there are certain notable differences between the hearing or reading of traditional stories—myths, legends, and other folktales for the most part, but not excluding literary works—and the reception of the bulk of mass-marketed fiction. Putting aside any question of the principles by which we judge and rank the literary productions of our culture, there are still palpable differences between the ordinary response to a narrative and the intensely personal, apparently completely subjective response that says, "This is my story." What seems to make an examination of the matter more difficult is that we can have this response to a story of the cheapest sort, for example, to a piece of fiction that critics would judge as being beneath contempt, while a classic like *The Gilgamesh Epic* might leave us cold.

I refer specifically to the story of Gilgamesh, because it is a story that I personally have a "my story" response to, one I have turned to again and again for some fifteen years, and one that repeatedly reveals something new; but another person will not have the same reaction at all. As an example of contemporary fiction having a similar, if less intense, effect (on me), I would cite Colin Wilson's novel *The Space Vampires* (which was made into a perfectly ridiculous film called *Lifeforce*). Here it is not so much a matter of a "my story" response as it is the recognition of the truth of a certain metaphor, an image, or perhaps an archetype upon which the story depends. This kind of response is less charged than the other and is strongly accentuated by an intellectual element, but its experiential effect is qualitatively very similar. In the case of my response to *Gilgamesh*, while it is possible to engage in interpretation and hermeneutical analysis of the text, my tendency is towards a reintegration of the intellectual with the intuitive and feeling aspects—towards a "total" response, rather than a partial one. The recognitive response is so strong in this case that it acts as a magnet, drawing partial and temporary responses back to an integrated attitude towards the story as a whole. One might describe this integrated attitude as intuitive, both immediate and total, and not reflective or dominated by any one of the three principle functions of thought, feeling, and sensation.

It may seem that undue emphasis is placed on the intuitive approach to the story and that interpretation and the hermeneutic art are relegated to an inferior position. In fact, the hermeneutic approach is vital to a deeper understanding of a story, and perhaps even inevitable. As long as there is a return to an integrated appreciation of the story, not only is there no danger, but indeed a positive result ensues: the original intuitive perception is enhanced by the new material provided by the intellect. The danger of engaging in interpretation lies only in the intellectual charge we may derive from the mental act itself. At such times we risk being caught by one part of ourselves, namely the mind, and this is no small risk as witness the mass of dry scholarship that folklore and mythology produces.

There is another danger, a complement to the supremacy of the intellect over the feelings, and that is the danger of giving too much weight to the emotional response. This results in sentimentality, also highly energized and therefore enticing. It is subjectivity taken to an extreme, and it is strengthened by yet another element in the spectrum of human response, sensation. There is no denying that stories that evoke a strong emotional response have a visceral effect on us as well. We can probably all

recall stories that frightened us as children, and the kind of sensations that such fear produces. Indeed, sensational fiction such as horror stories capitalizes on the visceral response: a tightening of the stomach muscles, neck and shoulder tension, the hair "standing on end" (which may be literally true), and "the sweats." But these reactions take place in milder stories than those of Stephen King and may be found in a less exaggerated form in fairy tales and myths as well. Violent reactions can seize even the most cultured people when they recognize and sense the significance of an image or idea. When that paragon of musty scholarship George Smith, a hitherto unremarkable man devoted to poring over clay tablets in the British Museum, discovered that one of his tablets contained the story of the Flood, his reaction was profound and extreme. Unable to voice the full dimension of his discovery, and yet compelled to communicate it somehow, he leapt from his seat in the Reading Room and began tearing off his clothes. Only when he had been quieted by his fellow scholars was he able to say what he had found; and so the epic of Gilgamesh came to light.

Yet this response is still only partial. It is dominated by feeling, despite its scholarly origins, and it gives only one kind of recognition. One wonders what force was exerted by the story itself on George Smith's inner life. It may be that there was none, and that the excitement he felt ran a course, familiar to the psychiatrist, ricocheting between the feelings and the intellect without resolution. Whether that was the case is moot. The fact is that these partial responses form a kind of Symplegades, through which lies a dangerous, though not unnavigable, passage. The navigation of that passage involves, as it did with Jason and the Argonauts, a matter of timing: knowing when to reintegrate the material gained from a sojourn in one part of our being.

There are many disciplines—psychology, semiotics, structuralism—that can help us to plumb the depths of a story, and each can add to our intellectual understanding. There is, however, one element that is lacking in all contemporary disciplines, and it has been missing ever since Descartes formulated those principles by means of which Western science fell into disarray while at the same time gaining precision. This missing element, which no syncretism can ever provide, is *metaphysical relatedness*. This lack is caused principally by the absence of a metaphysical substrate in our culture, that is, the absence of a monolithic world view that would pro-

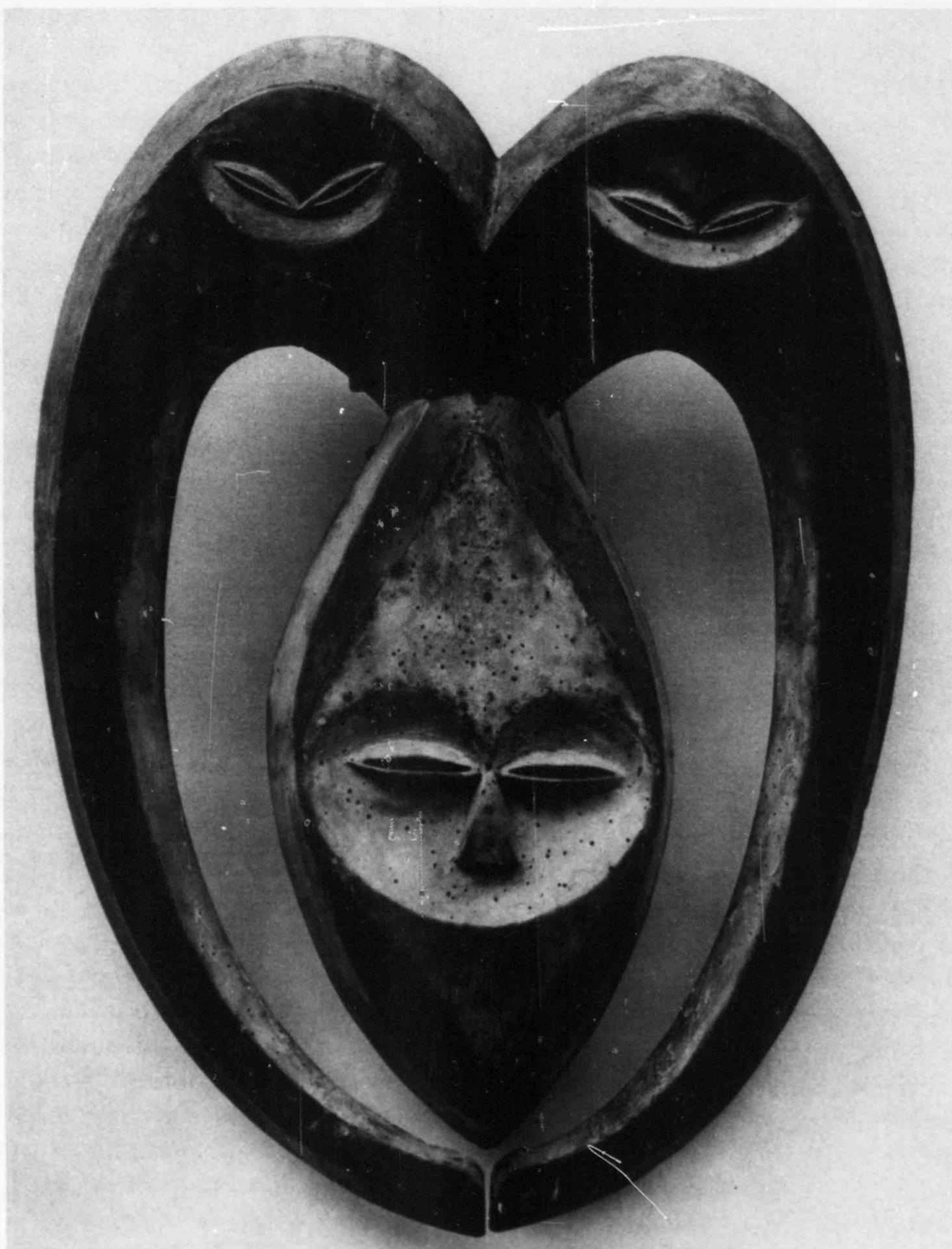
vide a common foundation for all the sciences and at the same time give them shape and substance.

The reasons for the dissolution of metaphysics as an integral and even central part of philosophy are many and varied and need not be discussed here. That there is no contemporary or even traditional metaphysic to shape the various sciences and relate them to one another is undoubtedly the reason why the proponents of each science claim the primacy of their field. The need for a unifying metaphysic is so much a fact of our intellectual existence that without it every science can and does lay claim to that role. At the heart of this problem is the absence of a clear idea of scale allowing for the vision of a multilevelled world in which the principle elements of metaphysical discourse—for instance, the concept of *being*—can be understood to have meaning on many levels concurrently instead of only on one level, namely that of a particular discipline. The notion of scale that operates in contemporary thought, based as it is on *number* (and expressed therefore in terms of magnitude, quantity, etc.), bears little resemblance to that of traditional science, which is founded on the idea of a *continuum* encompassing and relating everything in the universe, as expressed in the Hermetic dictum "As above, so below," or by the ancient doctrine of the Great Chain of Being.

In the case of myths, legends, and other tales, what often passes unnoticed is that the stories themselves indicate the presence of an underlying metaphysic. This is easily overlooked by the specialist whose domain is well defined but restricted to the partial world that is the field of study. Thus the folklorist concerns himself with cataloguing related materials and classifying them according to discernible types and motifs, without regard for the metaphysical truths that they may express. The psychologist defines a partial ontology that is open to expansion only within the realm of the human psyche, and demurs regarding all cosmological questions. The gods cease to be gods and become parts of the human psyche—which they may also represent—but the question of an order of reality existing beyond the bounds of human self-experience is obviated by such an approach. If the psychologists err by omitting cosmology, the ethnologists err in the other direction, neglecting an ontology that relates the story to the reader. What interests the archaeologist about the Gilgamesh legend might be the existence of the mysterious land of Dilmun, where Utanapishtim was set down after the Flood and to which Gilgamesh makes his way despite every difficulty. But what is that mysterious land of Dilmun in terms of our own experience? Here the historian of religion and the psychologist can contribute to our understanding, but still the basic connection between *ōntos* and *kosmos* is lost in a welter of relativism and aberrational explanations.

It is the fundamental lack of a metaphysic that brings one back to the story itself. This is nothing less than a return to ourselves, made necessary by the fragmentation that characterizes the hermeneutic art, however pursued, and made possible by the trace in us, now remembered, of that initial intuitive response that is a shock of recognition. What we recognize in a story is ourselves; this is what we mean when we say, "This is my story." It is an experience that goes beyond a random coincidence of life circumstance with the events of the story, one that touches us differently at different times, corresponding no doubt to different states of our own being. The journey of inquiry that this shock initiates takes place as a continual struggle between the urge to formulate and express meaning and the need to remember our first response and to refrain from crystallizing our understanding by such formulations. The rhythm of fragmenta-

tion and reintegration that characterizes this inquiry feeds both our knowledge and our being, and so can deepen our understanding. The recognitive experience to which we return, as to a well of pure water, refreshes the inquiry, which constitutes the means of our working on a story as well as its working on us. What we are reminded of is ourselves; and we are reminded of what we already know. We know it, and yet it strikes us as if for the first time: it is knowledge both old and new, a seeing of ourselves from a new perspective. This can happen only if somehow we are able to stand above our lives while, at the same time, we discover that life, as it exists in our fragile and temporal skins; that is, only if we can be present to the moment in this double sense. Such stories call us to a deeper inquiry, one that can provide the metaphysical understanding of our own relation to what is higher, of our place in that larger world that comprises all worlds. ■



Smaran: A Narrative

PADMA PERERA

Right there, where the subcontinent starts to taper like praying hands held upside down, there on the west coast where we live, the little boy upstairs is named Smaran.

He will be five next August. "Smaran" in Sanskrit means memory/memorizing, also repetition—from the faithful discipline of repeating the names of God (with or without a rosary of 108 *tulsi* beads), to the beat and resonance of human experience, and much else besides.

Smaran has a face like a chapati, our three-cornered unleavened bread, with enormous eyes that seem to look back and back, forward and forward. Most days he is lively as a leveret, but can fall into fits of abstraction.

"He's becoming his name," his great-grandmother says then, with absolute authority. "He is remembering his past life. Why do you smile? Why else would you be so attached to each other? Tell me that. From the very first day he sees you—scarcely a few months old, imagine—he jumps into your arms and won't even return to his own parents in this life. Of course you knew each other before."

"Well, I certainly have the pleasure of him while his parents have the responsibility. It doesn't seem fair."

Always I've known that living abroad too long has distorted my vocabulary; never as sharply as now. "Fair, not fair," she says. "What kind of talk is that?"

The fact remains that Smaran remembers other things, recapitulates them. Stomp, stomp, stomp, he comes step by step down the stairs, light from the landing window angled bright upon his head, one hand on the banister and the other clutching his father's handkerchief. He pats it into a curve and tweaks one end until it protrudes. "Parrot's beak," he says. He slams it flat, pushes it, pummels it, fluffs it out into a substantial rectangle, and points to the rarity of a refrigerator: "That." Then both ends are pulled smoothly out and we have a boat. He remembers, he takes note of what he sees, and wants to make a shape of it.

The garden outside has a date palm by the front gate, five varieties of mango, three clumps of coconut trees, sandalwood, anona, guava, lemon grass, pomegranates displaying fruit and flower simultaneously, and barren avocado. In December, when the poinsettias growing at the base of the date palm have reached almost as high as its top, leaves stippled sharp as blood against the mopheaded green above, Smaran's father

goes abroad on a business trip and returns with 84 Dinky Toys for his son. The handkerchief falls unattended behind a chair. Washed and retrieved, it's only a handkerchief.

By March it has become too hot to go outdoors at noon, though millions do. Smaran stands on a windowsill so he can crook his arm around my neck, and we look out together at the dussehri mangoes ripening on the tree.

Having grown up myself in the far south, I never see a dussehri until we move here, only recognizing it from Mughal and Rajasthani miniatures. . . . It all seems so remote, up north, that I presume stylized renditions of some perfectly conceived Platonic ideal of a mango tree. Graceful, endless droop of stems delicately lineated against a cloudy billow of leaves, with the fruit pale and pendant below. Smaran presses his arm closer around my neck, solemn. "Those mangoes have l-o-n-g tails." And I know the links and recollections of his name haven't betrayed him after all. We are monkeys together; he hasn't lost the handkerchief.

Early mornings are spent by both households, upstairs and down, at the side gate, which has access to the kitchens. The milkman bicycles up at six-thirty or seven, huge cans clattering against handlebars that match his mustache, followed by the fruit seller pushing his cart, which is painted a vivid blue and hung with marigolds. Then two vegetable vendors appear in turn, the younger sporting a dapper cloth cap and specializing in herbs and greens. After the street vendors have gone, a tapping sounds around the corner, and the old man comes into view: a stick in one hand, a begging bowl in the other, a sling bag of gunny sacking hung around his shoulder. Once a construction worker who helped build the houses along this street, he is now too old to work but likes to keep limber by walking. "Rama Rama," he murmurs as he walks, doing his *naama-smaran*, repeating the name of God. The neighborhood has found him a place to live; in our house, as in others', we cook extra food every day to fill his bowl.

Standing on tiptoe to reach it, Smaran says "Rama Rama," as he hands over our share, and the old man answers "Rama Rama" as he takes it. Once the great-grandmother calls down from her place on the upstairs verandah: "Smaran, remember. Rama is giving the food through you, you are only passing it on." Perhaps he understands, or imbibes it by osmosis, perhaps he doesn't: this sense of our temporary human roles, of our being instruments in an encounter, so that givers don't have to plume themselves on their charity and takers don't have to feel diminished. At any rate, for Smaran it is a litany as daily as the names of vegetables. His first word when he started to speak has been *batato*: potato.

This March morning by the side gate, his mother stops me, stuffing okra back into her spilling basket. She's exquisite as a miniature herself. "Since you're going to Bombay soon, can you look after him for a few days until we move there? It will have to be after the moon's eclipse. As soon as we're settled

we'll take him back."

Back. Back to 84 upwardly mobile Dinky Toys? The wrench of vocabulary. Of remembering the meaning of a moment of a word. Yes, I say; yes, says my sister, since we will be staying in her flat overlooking the Arabian Sea, past the unredeemed poverty of the pavement-dwellers. Have his parents allowed Smaran to take note of this as well? But we have no way of knowing. We travel at night to avoid the heat, my sister and I, and the child sleeps between us.

On our second day in Bombay we sit on the grass of the Hanging Gardens on Malabar Hill and consider a total lunar eclipse: an orange, a guava, and a gooseberry making sun and earth and moon. Smaran makes a differently thoughtful face for each taste (each an eating experience to remember) after it has all been explained but still doesn't make much sense. "Wake me," he says finally, and I promise.

The night of the eclipse the three of us, he and my sister and I, climb to the roof of her apartment building, armed with a quilt, a coin purse, and a small but stalwart pair of binoculars. Blinking and downy as an owl with sleep, Smaran suddenly wakes up. "Let me see! Let me see!" I pass on, I imagine,

that unutterably dazzling, phantom and very real moon, magnified, with its disappearing edge of light. Grown as we are, we women stand awed on that disappearing edge of things.

"*Sfumato*," she says, being a painter.

Let-me-see, let-me-see, disappears too. Smaran is standing very still and silent, head back, binoculars jammed against his chapati face.

"Do you see it?"

He nods twice, very slowly up and down. We take a sideways peek and discover his eyes are clamped tight shut.

"I used to do that too," my sister says. "Here, hold it a bit away, and open your eyes."

He opens shuts opens them again, pushing the offending binoculars at me, running to look over the western parapet at the sea: now only a sound in the dark, flecked with pale foam by the shore. We unfold our quilt and spread it on the flat top of a water-tank, so he can lie back and look up.

That disappearing edge disappears further; hidden stars begin to glimmer. The wind drops, even the sound of the sea is stilled: not a breath of air stirring, not a door slammed or a window banged open, not a clink or a sigh or a murmur or a dog's bark; not even any traffic on the midnight roads. Only that single halo in the sky. And its incandescence muffled like everything else.

Smaran burrows out of his quilt, mumbles "Look, the moon shut its eye too," and burrows back.

Then, as the shadow starts to recede, to move away, wind and the sound of the sea return. Thousands upon thousands of voices (unknown and yet now known; ours with the rest) rise together in a vast, illimitable chorus from all the streets and sidewalks and alleys and hillsides and hovels and compounds and shanties across the city:

Suté graan Dé daan!

In double rhyme:

The eclipse has been released.
Give alms.

Everyone begging mercy: from the sky, from each other.

As Smaran's great-grandmother might say, it is not an abased begging. It is as if all humanity has one throat. Asking becomes mutuality, reminder, surcease, affirmation, even hope.

From either side of the quilt, my sister and I can barely begin to talk in half-sentences about how we hate so many aspects of our culture . . . its pettiness, cruelty, capacity for individual destruction . . . but how we can't help cherishing and celebrating its constant, intimate touch on the cosmic. No words now, no words.

"I want to see!" Smaran sits bolt upright, broad awake.

My sister fishes for the purse; I pick him up so he can reach across the eastern parapet and respond to that enormous continuing echo of *Suté graan / Dé daan . . . Suté graan / Dé daan . . .*

At his age I remember standing on tiptoe in this city to get my arm over my uncle's balcony and throw coins down into the street. Now, adult, I remember too the necessary coinage that belongs to all of us—worn thin, worn ragged, in the old words "give" and "take."

When the last coin that Smaran flings out has clattered on the sloping road of the hill, and the moon is full again, we take each other's hands as we go slowly down the stairs, taking with us also the reminder and renewal of his name, of the eclipse, and that jointure between and beyond us all.

Self-remembering

P.D. OUSPENSKY

"Not one of you has noticed the most important thing that I have pointed out to you," G.* said. "That is to say, not one of you has noticed that *you do not remember yourselves*." (He gave particular emphasis to these words.) "You do not feel *yourselves*; you are not conscious of *yourselves*. With you, 'it observes' just as 'it speaks,' 'it thinks,' 'it laughs.' You do not feel: *I* observe, *I* notice, *I* see. Everything still 'is noticed,' 'is seen.' . . . In order really to observe oneself one must first of all *remember oneself*." (He again emphasized these words). "Try to *remember yourselves* when you observe yourselves and later on tell me the results. Only those results will have any value that are accompanied by self-remembering. Otherwise you yourselves do not exist in your observations. In which case what are all your observations worth?"

These words of G.'s made me think a great deal. It seemed to me at once that they were the key to what he had said before about consciousness. But I decided to draw no conclusions whatever, but to try to *remember myself* while observing myself.

The very first attempts showed me how difficult it was. Attempts at *self-remembering* failed to give any results except to show me that in actual fact we never remember ourselves.

"What else do you want?" said G. "This is a very important realization. People who *know this*" (he emphasized these words) "already know a great deal. The whole trouble is that nobody knows it. If you ask a man whether he can remember himself, he will of course answer that he can. If you tell him that he cannot remember himself, he will either be angry with you, or he will think you an utter fool. The whole of life is based on this, the whole of human

G.I. Gurdjieff

existence, the whole of human blindness. If a man really knows that he cannot remember himself, he is already near to the understanding of his being."

All that G. said, all that I myself thought, and especially all that my attempts at self-remembering had shown me, very soon convinced me that I was faced with *an entirely new problem which science and philosophy had not, so far, come across*.

At the same time I saw two things clearly. In the first place I saw that self-remembering resulting from this method had nothing in common with "self-feeling" or "self-analysis." It was a new and very interesting state with a strangely familiar flavor.

And secondly I realized that moments of self-remembering do occur in life, although rarely. Only the deliberate production of these moments created the sensation of novelty. Actually I had been familiar with them from early childhood. They came either in new and unexpected surroundings, in a new place, among new people while traveling for instance, when suddenly one looks about one and says: *How strange! I and in this place*; or in very emotional moments, in moments of danger, in moments when it is necessary to keep one's head, when one hears one's own voice and sees and observes oneself from the outside.

I saw quite clearly that my first recollections of life, in my own case very early ones, were moments of *self-remembering*. This last realization revealed much else to me. That is, I saw that I really only remember those moments of the past in which I *remembered myself*. Of the others *I know only that they took place*. I am not able wholly to revive them, to experience them again. But the moments when I had remembered myself were alive and were in no way different from the present. I was still afraid to come to conclusions. But I already saw that I stood upon the threshold of a very great discovery. I had always been astonished at the weakness and the insufficiency of our memory. So many things disappear. For some reason or other the chief absurdity of life for me consisted in this. Why experience so much in order to forget it afterwards? Besides there was something degrading in this. A man feels something which seems to him very big, he thinks he will never forget it; one or two years pass by—and nothing remains of it. It now became clear to me why this was so and why it could not be otherwise. If our memory really keeps alive only moments of self-remembering, it is clear why our memory is so poor.

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A Piece of Him

DANIEL SCHILLACI

"Remember me." This is the oath that the ghost in Shakespeare's masterpiece has Hamlet swear to—an oath that seems to enslave him to the past, to burden him with a terrible responsibility to what is already dead. Yet there is some living and universal truth in this, something that touches us all. The command to avenge a father's murder may be far more severe than anything we are likely to confront, yet who cannot find some point of identification here? Who has never felt compelled to "set right" an inherited situation; to somehow repair the past? We may bitterly regret, as did Hamlet, that such reparations often lead us far afield of where we wished to go. Yet we obey, and we may even perceive, however dimly, that to obey is part of our fate.

Perhaps to this extent we are all more or less victims—bound by the "tables of memory" to spend a certain amount of our precious time in the service of a past that marches into the present and casts its shadow over the future. In *Hamlet,* the injunction "remember me" leads to a series of catastrophic events, resulting in the destruction of everyone it touches: Polonius is slaughtered by accident; Ophelia goes mad and drowns; Gertrude unwittingly drinks poison. Dead, too, at the end are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Laertes, Claudius, and Hamlet himself.

If this were the entire content of the play the result would be a nihilist drama, closer in spirit perhaps to the mood of our own epoch. But Shakespeare was not a nihilist. At the end of every one of his tragedies, the hero experiences an authentic moment of self-knowledge that redeems him. These moments are what bring about in the viewer a catharsis evoked by a confluence of powerful emotions. Among the most powerful of these is the feeling of awe at recognizing the nobility of a human creature capable of distinguishing what is essential and true in his being from what is acquired and therefore false. Shakespeare emphasized the transformative power of these moments of revelation. At the end of one of his tragedies the stage may be strewn with corpses, but a vivid moment of self-knowledge brings a note of hope.

What exactly did Shakespeare mean

by self-knowledge? Evidence in the play suggests that his view of it was definite, and he went to some lengths to distinguish it from conventional wisdom. Here, for instance, is Polonius voicing a conventional wisdom:

This above all, to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

It often has seemed peculiar to commentators on *Hamlet* that Shakespeare should put such words of wisdom into the mouth of a fool. On further consideration, Polonius's words do not seem so wise, for one of the great questions posed by *Hamlet* is: to which of our many selves shall we be true? How can the fickle human with his parts at war with each other claim unity? The theme is writ large in Shakespeare's depiction of Hamlet's fragmented self and amplified in countless details and deceptively casual exchanges. For instance, this exchange between Hamlet and Polonius:

Hamlet: Do you see yonder cloud almost in shape of a camel?

Polonius: By the mass, and 'tis like a camel indeed.

Hamlet: Methinks it is like a weasel.

Polonius: It is backed like a weasel.

Hamlet: Or like a whale.

Polonius: Very like a whale.

So much for the man who advocates being true to oneself. If in passages such as this Hamlet's goadings possess a gallows humor, it is because he is all too aware of his own lack of unity. When he declares "I am too much i' the sun," he may be referring to just this aspect of his predicament—and the human predicament in general—that others do not see. Again Shakespeare amplifies the theme with myriad details that saturate the play with meaning on every level—just as we imagine our own lives would be filled with meaning if only we were aware enough to perceive it.

Some of these details go by so rapidly that their inner significance touches us only subconsciously, but each one illumi-

nates the theme from another perspective. "Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight / Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all," brings the idea that the disconnection among the human senses gives rise to a view of the world that is necessarily partial and distorted. A remark that Hamlet makes a little later to Guildenstern, "The body is with the King, but the King is not with the body. The King is a thing—," is often interpreted as meaningless talk aimed at confusing the king, but in context, it calls to mind the previous speech beginning "Eyes without feeling" and adds resonance to the idea that a lack of connections between the human parts renders a person useless, a "thing."

No other play of Shakespeare's is so full of talk about "parts," as though to suggest that in the absence of a unified self with a single will these parts lead errant lives of their own. Consider Hamlet's remark, "It was a brute part of him to kill so capital a calf there." Such a line conditions us for a way of understanding Hamlet's eleventh hour apology to Laertes: "Was't Hamlet wronged Laertes? Never Hamlet. If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away, / And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes, / Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it. Who does it then? His madness." This can sound like a rationalization, but in context it may be understood as a poignant admission of real helplessness. In a condition of disunity, it is a brute part that kills and madness that manifests indiscretions. It is not the self that does these things because the self does not exist, that which we typically call our self being nothing more than a repertory of roles. In light of this revelation, dozens of lines can seem to take on meanings far greater that their surface meanings suggest. For example:

King: These words are not mine.

Hamlet: No, nor mine now.

Or this line, with which Hamlet closes his letter to Ophelia: "Thine evermore, most dear lady, whilst this machine is to him, Hamlet." How can a king who is "a thing" possess words that truly belong to him? And how can Hamlet, recognizing that his words are not his own either, presume to call himself anything more than a machine?

With Horatio's entrance into the play, the theme is represented in its pithiest form:

Bernardo: Say—What, is Horatio there?

Horatio: A piece of him.

Because the men on watch are stumbling in the dark outside Elsinore castle, it makes sense that only "a piece" of Horatio should emerge at first out of the blackness. Here we have the perfect metaphorical image: Man is only a fragment; never does he meet a situation with the whole of himself. Yet Horatio, knowing himself to be only such a fragment, emerges somewhat out of the dark into the light of truth. It might be said that everything Shakespeare has to say about self-knowledge is encapsulated in this one supremely subtle and penetrating image. It can be stated only in terms of a paradox: it is by remembering that he has no real self that a man begins to acquire one.

If our present life, consisting as it does of a repertory of parts, represents the limit of human evolution, then a "thing" we are and a "thing" we must die, with no greater purpose than to serve as "loam" to "stop a barrel." But in Hamlet, Shakespeare implies that that is not the limit of our potential. He claims that a human being can acquire a real self, and that the first action of a person on the path toward that goal is to remember the truth, that, as he is, a real and unified self is exactly what he

lacks. As soon as Hamlet begins to remember this truth, he begins also to live two lives—an outer life that ends in the death of the physical body and an inner life that "dies" to its old delusions and is reborn with a new understanding of man's situation and potential.

This inner awakening does not happen all at once. Hamlet reacts initially to his new understanding with the debilitating emotions of bitterness and despondency. The event that changes his state is a "happy accident," the arrival of the players. Shakespeare is often criticized for contriving a fortuitous event for the sole purpose of forwarding his plot. But the fact is that we don't sense it as an accident, any more than we perceive as an accident the moment in our own life conditions when something suddenly "breaks" to show us the way. Rather, what we feel is that it is Hamlet's own heightened awareness that evokes this help. Goethe puts it well:

Until one is committed, there is a hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation) there is one elementary truth the ignorance of which kills countless plans: That the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too! All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issue from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no one could have dreamed would have come his way.

This interpretation of the way the world works may appear to have little value for logical, scientific reasoning. And, of course, one of the other great themes of the play is the limitation of just such logical reasoning. Hamlet himself gives voice to it in the famous exchange:

Horatio: O day and night,
but this is wondrous strange!

Hamlet: And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.

There are more things in heaven and earth,
Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

Wondrous strange, indeed, and perfectly logical in its own way is the fact that just as Hamlet begins to remember that as we are we are always playing roles, the players arrive in Elsinore. Not only does this aid him in his plot to ensnare

the king, it puts him in a situation where he is truly in his element spiritually. And that in turn propels him into the soliloquy "To be or not to be," which shows him having a new, clearer picture of the human being's inner prerogatives and, too, shows him beginning to untie the knot of negative emotions that has thus far hampered his inner growth.

"To be or not to be—that is the question." Probably no words in any play, by any author, make a stronger impression. They are a revelation—a lightning bolt of understanding. To be—to remember man's lack of unity and accept responsibility for it. Or not to be—to fall back into sleep, to forget, to become numb, a thing and no more. It would seem now that Hamlet has attained enough sense of self behind the constantly shifting roles to be able to state the prerogative in these elemental terms. Later on, Shakespeare amplifies his meaning by bringing in an allusion to the New Testament: "For some must watch, while some must sleep; thus runs the world away." For Hamlet, and for Shakespeare, one feels, religion is not a matter of dogma, not a matter of our vaunted morality of right and wrong, good and evil; it is a matter of whether or not the human being is remembering or forgetting, awake or asleep in the psychic sense—awake to his impartiality, his multiplicity and contradictions, or asleep, dreaming that he is whole.

The next time we see Hamlet in a musing state, he delivers his famous speech in praise of Horatio, wherein he is able to see a higher quality in his friend, having come to touch a bit of it in himself:

For thou hast been
As one, in suff'ring all, that suffers nothing.
A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards
Hast ta'en with equal thanks, and blest are
those
Whose blood and judgment are so well
commingled
That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger
To sound what stop she please. Give me
that man
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear
him
In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of
hearts.

This beautiful tribute to friendship is similar to some of the sonnets on the same theme: whoever is worthy of being loved is one who has looked unflinchingly at the truth, and, through the steady facing of it, built up something "as one" behind multiplicity. "It will be short, the interim is mine," Hamlet later reiterates. "And a man's life no more than to say 'one.' "

How many of us will be able to say at our eleventh hour that our life has been "as one"? Shakespeare's ability to touch the conscience may bring that

question to the fore in us with stunning force. Oneness is certainly what Hamlet is pondering at *his* eleventh hour. There is no more cursing of fate, no more antic disposition, no more plotting, even. The brief remainder of his life is informed with a harmony that stands in contrast to the discordant, seemingly unjust and tragic events around him. This explains perhaps why our emotions at the end of the play are strangely ambivalent: the bloodbath is awful, but Hamlet's inner transformation may seem curiously more real. Shakespeare has helped us to feel with Hamlet that along with the fragility of the flesh to which we are heir is a finer quality of being that is indestructible. ■

Mythologies of Memory and Forgetting

MIRCEA ELIADE

When a yogi falls in love with a queen . . .

Matsyendranāth and Gorakhnāth are among the most popular master yogis of the Indian Middle Ages. Their magical exploits have brought forth a rich and extensive epic literature. One of the central episodes of this mythological folklore is the amnesia of Matsyendranāth. According to one of the best-known versions the master, traveling in Ceylon, fell in love with the queen and went to live in her palace, completely forgetting his identity. A Nepalese variant relates that Matsyendranāth succumbed to temptation in the following way: while his body lay guarded by a disciple, his spirit entered the corpse of a king who had just died and restored it to life. (This is the well-known yogic miracle of "entering another's body"; the saints sometimes make use of this method to enjoy the pleasures of love without polluting themselves.) Finally, according to the poem *Goraksha-vijaya*, Matsyendranāth was made a prisoner by the women of the country of Kadalī.

On receiving news of his captivity, Gorakhnāth realizes that his master is doomed to die. He accordingly descends into the realm of Yama (Death), searches the Book of Fates, finds the leaf containing the destiny of his *guru*, and erases his name from the list of the dead. "He then goes to Matsyendranāth, in Kadalī, presenting himself under the form of a dancing girl, and falls to dancing, at the same time singing enigmatic songs. Little by little, Matsyendranāth remembers his true identity; he understands that the 'way of the flesh' leads to death, that his 'oblivion' was, basically, forgetfulness of his true and immortal nature, and that the 'charms of Kadalī' represent the mirages of profane life."[1] Gorakhnāth urges him to return to the way of Yoga and make his body "perfect." He tells him that it was Durgā who had brought on the "forgetfulness" that had almost cost him immortality. The spell, Gorakhnāth adds, symbolizes the eternal curse of ignorance laid on the human being by "Nature" (that is, Durgā).

This mythical theme can be analyzed into the following elements: A spiritual Master falls in love with a queen or is made prisoner by women; in either case, there is a physical love that immediately provokes a state of amnesia in the Master; his disciple seeks him out and, through a series of symbols (dance movements, secret signs, mysterious language), helps him to recover his memory, that is, consciousness of his identity; the Master's "forgetfulness" is assimilated to death, and—vice versa— his "awakening," or *anamnesis*, proves to be a prerequisite for immortality.

The central motif—especially the amnesia-captivity brought on by an immersion in Life, and the *anamnesis* procured by the signs and mysterious words of a disciple—rather suggests the celebrated Gnostic myth of the "Saved Saviour," as found in the *Hymn of the Pearl*. As we shall see later, there are also other analogies between certain aspects of Indian thought and Gnosticism. But in this particular case there is no need to assume any Gnostic influence. Matsyendranāth's captivity and forgetting are a pan-Indian motif. Both misfortunes plastically express the fall of the spirit into the circle of existences and, as a consequence, loss of consciousness of the Self. Indian literature uses images of binding, chaining, and captivity interchangeably with those of forgetting, unknowing, and sleep to signify the human condition; contrariwise, images of being freed from bonds and the tearing of a veil (or the removal of a bandage from the eyes), of memory, remembering, being awakened, the waking state, express abolishing (or transcending) the human condition, freedom, deliverance.

Indian symbolism of forgetting and recollection

The *Dīghanikāya* affirms that the Gods fall from Heaven when their "memory fails and they are of confused memory"; on the contrary, those Gods who do not forget are immutable, eternal, of a nature that knows no change. "Forgetting" is equivalent, on the one hand, to "sleep" and, on the other, to loss of the self, that is, to disorientation, or blindness. The *Chandogya Upanishad* tells of a man whom bandits carried far from his city, blindfolded, and abandoned in a lonely place. The man begins to cry: "I have been led here with my eyes bandaged, I have been left here with my eyes bandaged!" Someone removes the blindfold and points out the direction of his city. Asking his way from village to village, the man manages to reach home. In the same way, the text adds, he who has a competent Master becomes able to free himself from the blindfolds of ignorance and inevitably attains perfection.

Sankara's commentary on this passage is famous. It is the same, he explains, with the man carried by thieves far from Being (that is, from the *ātman-Brahman*) and trapped in this body. The thieves are the false ideas of "merit, demerit," and the like. His eyes are blindfolded with the blindfold of illusion, and he is hobbled by his desire for his wife, his son, his friends, his cattle, and so on. "I am the son of so-and-so, I am happy, or unhappy, I am intelligent, or stupid, I am pious, etc. How shall I live? where is there a way of escape? where is my salvation?" So he cried out, caught in a monstrous net—until the moment when he meets one who is conscious of true Being, who is freed from slavery, happy, and, in addition, full of sympathy for others. From him he learns the way of knowledge and the vanity of the world. Thus the man who was the prisoner of his own illusions is liberated from dependence on worldly things. Then he recognizes his true Being and understands that he is not the lost wanderer he had thought himself to be. On the contrary, he understands that what Being is, is the very same thing that he, too, is. His eyes are freed from the bandage of illusion created by ignorance, and he is like the man from Gandhāra returning home, that is, rediscovering the *ātman*, full of joy and serenity.[2]

We recognize the clichés through which Indian speculation attempts to make the paradoxical situation of the Self comprehensible: entangled in the illusions created and fed by its temporal existence, the Self suffers the consequences of this "ignorance" until the day it discovers that it was only *seemingly* involved in the World. Sāmkhya and Yoga take a similar position: the Self is

only apparently enslaved, and liberation is simply its *becoming conscious* of its eternal freedom. "*I* believe that I suffer, *I* believe that I am bound, *I* desire liberation. At the moment when—having 'awakened'—I understand that this 'I' is a product of matter (*prakrti*), I at the same time understand that all existence has been only a chain of moments of suffering and that true Spirit 'impassively contemplated' the drama of 'personality.' "[3]

It is of importance to note that for Sāmkhya-Yoga, as well as for Vedānta, liberation can be compared to an "awakening" or to a new consciousness of a situation that existed from the beginning but that one was unable to *realize*. From a certain point of view "ignorance"—which, in the last analysis, is an *ignorance of oneself*—can be thought of as a "forgetting" of the true Self. "Wisdom," which by tearing the veil of *māyā* or overcoming ignorance makes liberation possible, is an "awakening." The Awakened One par excellence, the Buddha, possesses absolute omniscience. Like other sages and yogis, Buddha remembered his former lives. But, the Buddhist texts insist, while the sages and yogis were able to remember a certain number of existences, even a considerable number, only the Buddha was able to know them *all*. This is a way of saying that only the Buddha was omniscient.

"Forgetfulness" and "Memory" in ancient Greece

Memory, Plotinus held, is for those who have forgotten. The doctrine is Platonic: For those who have forgotten, remembering is a virtue; but the perfect never lose the vision of truth and they have no need to remember. Hence there is a difference between memory (*mnemne*) and recollection (*anamnesis*). The Gods of whom the Buddha spoke in the *Dīghanikāya*, who fell from heaven when their memories were troubled, were reincarnated as men. Some of them practiced asceticism and meditation, and by virtue of their yogic discipline succeeded in recollecting their former lives. A perfect memory, then, is superior to the ability to recollect. In one way or another, recollecting implies having forgotten, and in India, as we just saw, forgetting is equivalent to ignorance, slavery, and death.

In India, as in Greece, beliefs more or less similar to those of the protoagriculturalists were analyzed, reinterpreted, and revalued by poets, contemplatives, and the earliest philosophers. In India and Greece, that is, we no longer have to deal only with religious patterns of

behavior and mythological expressions, but instead, and above all, with the rudiments of psychology and metaphysics. Nevertheless, there is continuity between the "popular" beliefs and the "philosophic" speculations. It is this continuity which is of particular concern to us.

The Goddess Mnemosyne, personification of "Memory," sister of Kronos and Okeanos, is the mother of the Muses. She is omniscient; according to Hesiod, she knows "all that has been, all that is, all that will be." When the poet is possessed by the Muses, he draws directly from Mnemosyne's store of knowledge, that is, especially from the knowledge of "origins," of "beginnings," of genealogies. "The Muses sing, beginning with the beginning—the first appearance of the world, the genesis of the gods, the birth of humanity. The past thus revealed is much more than the antecedent of the present; it is its source. In going back to it, recollection does not seek to situate events in a temporal frame but to reach the depths of being, to discover the original, the primordial reality from which the cosmos issued and which makes it possible to understand becoming as a whole."[4]

By virtue of the primordial memory that he is able to recover, the poet inspired by the Muses has access to the original realities. These realities were manifested in the mythical Times of the beginning and constitute the foundation of this World. But just because they appeared *ab origine*, they are no longer perceivable in current experience. J. P. Vernant rightly compares the poet's inspiration to an "evocation" of a dead person from the world below or to a *descensus ad inferos* undertaken by a living man in order to learn what he seeks to know. "The privilege that Mnemosyne confers on the bard is that of a contact with the other world, the possibility of entering it and freely returning from it. The past appears as a dimension of the beyond."[5]

This is why, in so far as it is "forgotten," the "past"—historical or primordial—is homologized with death. The fountain Lethe, "forgetfulness," is a necessary part of the realm of Death. The dead are those who have lost their memories. On the other hand, certain privileged mortals, like Tiresias or Amphiaraus, preserve their memory after death. To make him immortal, Hermes gives his son Aethalides "an unchangeable memory." According to Apollonius of Rhodes, even when he crossed Acheron, forgetfulness did not submerge his soul; and though he inhabits now the realm of shades, now that of the sun's light, he always remembers what he has seen.

But the "mythology of Memory and Forgetting" changes, and becomes enriched by an eschatological meaning, when a doctrine of transmigration takes shape. It is no longer the primordial past, but the series of *former personal lives* of which a knowledge is important. The function of Lethe is reversed. The soul newly freed from the body no longer finds in its waters forgetfulness of earthly life. On the contrary, Lethe blots out memory of the celestial world in the soul returning to earth to be reincarnated. "Forgetting" no longer symbolizes death, but returning to life. The soul that has been rash enough to drink from the fount of Lethe ("gorged with forgetfulness and vice," as Plato puts it), is reincarnated and again cast into the cycle of becoming. In the gold plates worn by initiates in the Orphico-Pythagorean brotherhood, the soul is commanded not to approach the spring of Lethe, on the left-hand road, but to take the road to the right, where it will find the spring that comes from the lake of Mnemosyne. "Quickly give me the fresh water that flows from the lake of Memory," the soul is told to ask the guardians of the spring. "And of themselves they will give you water from the sacred

spring and, after that, among the other heroes you will be the master."[6]

Pythagoras, Empedocles, and others believed in metempsychosis and claimed that they could remember their former lives. "A wanderer exiled from the divine dwelling," Empedocles said of himself, "in former times I was already a boy and a girl, a bush and a bird, a mute fish in the sea." And further: "I am delivered forever from death." Speaking of Pythagoras, Empedocles described him as "a man of extraordinary knowledge," for "wherever he directed all the power of his spirit, he easily saw what he had been there in ten, twenty human lives." Then too, memory-training played an important role in the Pythagorean brotherhoods. This training is reminiscent of the yogic technique of "going back." We may add that shamans, too, claim to remember their former lives, which indicates the archaism of the practice.

"Primordial" memory and "historical" memory

In Greece, then, there are two evaluations of memory: that which refers to primordial events (cosmogony, theogony, genealogy); and the memory of former lives, that is, of historical and personal events. Lethe, "Forgetfulness," has equal efficacy against the two kinds of memory. But Lethe is powerless in the case of certain privileged persons: those who, inspired by the Muses or by virtue of a "power of prophecy in reverse," succeed in recovering the memory of primordial events; and those who, like Pythagoras or Empedocles, are able to remember their former lives. These two categories of privileged persons overcome "forgetfulness," which is in some sort equivalent to overcoming death. The former class attain to the knowledge of "origins" (origin of the Cosmos, of the Gods, of peoples, of dynasties). The others remember their "history," that is, their transmigrations. For the former, the important thing is what took place *ab origine*. This consisted in primordial events, in which they were not personally involved. But these events—cosmogony, theogony, genealogy—in some sort constituted them; they are what they are because these events took place. It is unnecessary to show to what an extent this attitude resembles that of the man of archaic societies, who accepts himself as constituted by a series of primordial events set forth in the myths.

Those, on the other hand, who are able to remember their former lives are above all concerned with discovering their own "history," parceled out as it is among their countless incarnations. They try to unify these isolated fragments, to make them parts of a single pattern, in order to discover the direction and meaning of their destiny. For the unification, through *anamnesis*, of these totally unrelated fragments of history also implies "joining the beginning to the end"; in other words, it is necessary to discover how the first earthly existence set in motion the process of transmigration. Such a concern and such a discipline suggest the Indian techniques of "going back" and recollecting former lives.

Plato knows and employs these two traditions concerning memory and forgetfulness. But he transforms and reinterprets them to fit them into his philosophical system. For Plato, learning is, in the last analysis, recollecting. Between two existences on earth the soul contemplates the Ideas: it shares in pure and perfect knowledge. But when the soul is reincarnated it drinks of the spring Lethe and forgets the knowledge it obtained from direct contemplation of the Ideas. Yet this knowledge is latent in the man in whom the soul is reincarnated, and it can be made patent by philosophical effort. Physical objects help the

soul to withdraw into itself and, through a sort of "going back," to rediscover and repossess the original knowledge that it possessed in its extraterrestrial condition. Hence death is the return to a primordial and perfect state, which is periodically lost through the soul's reincarnation.

Plato's theory of Ideas and the Platonic *anamnesis* can be compared with the attitude and behavior of man in archaic and traditional societies. The man of those societies finds in myths the exemplary models for all his acts. The myths tell him that everything he does

or intends to do *has already been done*, at the beginning of Time, *in illo tempore*. Hence myths constitute the sum of useful knowledge. An individual life becomes, and remains, a fully human, responsible, and significant life to the extent to which it is inspired by this stock of acts already performed and thoughts already formulated. Not to know or to forget the contents of the "collective memory" constituted by tradition is equivalent to a retrogression to the "natural" state (the acultural condition of the child), or to a "sin," or to a disaster.

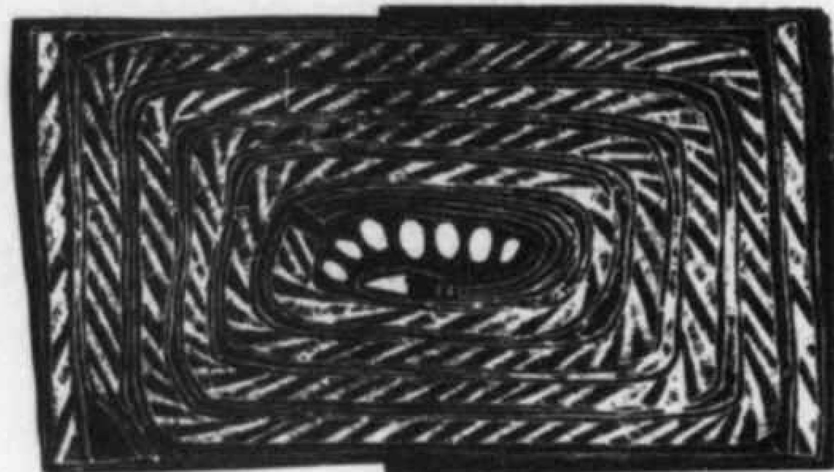
For Plato, living intelligently, that is, learning to know and knowing the true, the beautiful, and the good, is above all remembering a disincarnate, purely spiritual existence. "Forgetting" this pleromatic condition is not necessarily a "sin" but is a consequence of the process of reincarnation. It is remarkable that, for Plato too, "forgetting" is not a necessary concomitant of the fact of death but, on the contrary, is related to life, to reincarnation. It is in returning to earthly life that the soul "forgets" the Ideas. Here we find not a forgetting of previous lives—that is, of the sum of personal experiences, of "history"—but a forgetting of transpersonal and eternal truths, the Ideas. Philosophical *anamnesis* does not recover the memory of the *events* belonging to former lives, but of *truths*, that is, the structures of the real. This philosophical position can be compared with that of the traditional societies: the myths represent paradigmatic models established by Supernatural Beings, not the series of personal experiences of one individual or another.

Anamnesis and historiography

Historiography begins in Greece, with Herodotus. Herodotus tells us why he went to the trouble of writing his *Histories*: so that the deeds of men should not be lost in the passage of time. He wishes to *preserve the memory* of what the Greeks and Barbarians did. Other historians of Antiquity will compose their works for different reasons: Thucydides, for example, to illustrate the struggle for power, a trait which he considered characteristic of human nature; Polybius to show that the whole history of the world converges toward the Roman Empire and also because the experience gained from studying History can be the best education for life; Livy in order to find in History "models for ourselves and for our country"—and so on.[7]

None of these authors—not even

Herodotus, with his passionate interest in exotic Gods and theologies—composed his *History* in the way that the authors of the oldest historical narratives in Israel did: in order to prove the existence of a divine plan and the intervention of the Supreme God in the life of a people. This does not mean that the Greek and Roman historians were necessarily unreligious. But their religious conception had no place for the intervention of a single and personal God in History; hence they did not give historical events the religious meaning they had for the Jews. Then too, for the



Greeks History was only one aspect of the cosmic process conditioned by the law of becoming. Like every cosmic phenomenon, History showed that human societies are born, develop, decay, and perish. This is why History could not be an object of knowledge. Yet historiography was useful, for it illustrated the process of eternal becoming in the life of nations, and especially because it preserved the memory of the exploits of various peoples and the names and adventures of outstanding personages.

It is not within the scope of this essay to examine the various philosophies of History, from Augustine and Gioacchino da Fiore to Vico, Hegel, Marx, and the contemporary historicists. All these systems set out to discover the *meaning* and *direction* of universal History. But that is not our problem. What is of interest to our investigation is not the meaning that *History* may have but *historiography* itself—in other words, the *endeavor to preserve the memory* of contemporary events and the desire to know the past of humanity as accurately as possible.

Such a curiosity has developed progressively ever since the Middle Ages and especially since the Renaissance. Certainly, in the time of the Renaissance ancient history was studied primarily for the sake of finding models for the behavior of the "perfect man." Indeed we could say that, by supplying exemplary models for civic and moral life, Livy and Plutarch played the same role in the education of the European elites as myths did in traditional societies. But it is from the nineteenth century on that historiography has been led to play a role of primary importance. It seems as if Western culture were making a prodigious effort of historiographic *anamnesis*. It seeks to discover, "awaken," and repossess the pasts of the most exotic and the most peripheral societies, from the prehistoric Near East to "primitive" cultures on the verge of extinction. The goal is no less than to revive the *entire past of humanity*. We are witnessing a vertiginous widening of the historical horizon.

This is one of the few encouraging syndromes of the modern world. Western cultural provincialism—which began history with Egypt, literature with Homer, and philosophy with Thales—is being rapidly outmoded. But that is not all: through this historiographic *anamnesis* man enters deep into himself. If we succeed in understanding a contemporary Australian, or his homologue, a paleolithic hunter, we have succeeded in "awakening" in the depths of our being the existential situation and the resultant behavior of a prehistoric humanity. It is not a matter of a mere "external" knowledge, as when we learn the name of the capital of a country or the date of the fall of Constantinople. A true historiographic *anamnesis* finds expression in the discovery of our solidarity with these vanished or peripheral peoples. We have a genuine recovery of the past, even of the "primordial" past revealed by uncovering prehistoric sites or by ethnological investigations. In these last

two cases, we are confronted by "forms of life," behavior patterns, types of culture—in short, by the structures—of archaic existence.

For millenniums man worked ritually and thought mythically concerning the analogies between the macrocosm and the microcosm. It was one of the possible ways of "opening oneself" to the World and thereby sharing in the sacrality of the Cosmos. Since the Renaissance, since the Universe proved to be infinite, this cosmic dimension that man ritually added to his life is denied to us. It was to be expected that modern man, fallen under the domination of Time and obsessed by his own historicity, should try to "open himself" to the World by acquiring a new dimension in the vastness of the temporal realm. Unconsciously, he defends himself against the pressure of contemporary history by a historiographic *anamnesis* that opens perspectives he could not possibly suspect if, following Hegel's example, he had confined himself to "communing with the Universal Spirit" while reading his newspaper every morning.

To be sure, this is no new discovery: from Antiquity on, man consoled himself for the terror of History by reading the historians of past times. But in the case of modern man there is something more. His historiographic horizon being as wide as it has become, he is able, through *anamnesis*, to discover cultures that, though they "sabotaged History," were prodigiously creative. How vitally will it affect the life of a modern Westerner when he learns, for example, that though the Indian peninsula was invaded and occupied by Alexander the Great and though his conquest had a capital influence on its history, India has not even remembered the great conqueror's name? Like other traditional cultures, India is concerned with exemplary models and paradigmatic events, not with the particular and the individual.

The historiographic *anamnesis* of the Western world is only beginning. At least several generations must pass before its cultural repercussions can be gauged. But we may say that, though on a different plane, this *anamnesis* continues the religious evaluation of memory and forgetfulness. To be sure, neither myths nor religious practices are any longer involved. But there is this common element: the importance of precise and total recollection of the past. In the traditional societies it is recollection of *mythical events*; in the modern West it is recollection of *all that took place in historical Time*. The difference is too obvious to require definition. But both types of *anamnesis* project man out of his "historical moment." And true historiographic *anamnesis* opens, too, on a primordial Time, the Time in which men established their cultural behavior patterns, even though believing that they were revealed to them by Supernatural Beings. ■

Adapted from "Mythologies of Memory and Forgetting" in Mircea Eliade's Myth and Reality *(New York: Harper & Row, 1963). Reprinted by permission.*

NOTES

1. M. Eliade, *Yoga, Immortality and Freedom* (New York, 1958), p. 314.
2. Sankara, commentary on the *Chandogya Upanishad*, VI, 14, 1–2.
3. M. Eliade, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
4. J. P. Vernant, "Aspects mythiques de la mémoire en Grèce," *Journal de Psychologie* (1959), p. 7. Cf. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "Recollection, Indian and Platonic," Supplement to the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, No. 3 (April–June, 1944).
5. J. P. Vernant, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
6. Plates from Petelia and Eleuthernae. On the "Orphic" plates, cf. Jane Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Cambridge, 1903), pp. 573 ff.
7. Cf. Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago, 1949), pp. 6 ff.

For the Sake of a Single Verse

For the sake of a single verse, one must see many cities, men and things, one must know the animals, one must feel how the birds fly and know the gesture with which the little flowers open in the morning. One must be able to think back to roads in unknown regions, to unexpected meetings and to partings one had long seen coming; to days of childhood that are still unexplained, to parents whom one had to hurt when they brought one some joy and one did not grasp it (it was a joy for someone else); to childhood illnesses that so strangely begin with such a number of profound and grave transformations, to days in rooms withdrawn and quiet and to mornings by the sea, to the sea itself, to seas, to nights of travel that rushed along on high and flew with all the stars—and it is not yet enough if one may think of all this. One must have memories of many nights of love, none of which was like the

others, of the screams of women in labor, and of light, white, sleeping women in childbed, closing again. But one must also have been beside the dying, must have sat beside the dead in the room with the open window and the fitful noises. And still it is not yet enough to have memories. One must be able to forget them when they are many and one must have the great patience to wait until they come again. For it is not yet the memories themselves. Not till they have turned to blood within us, to glance and gesture, nameless and no longer to be distinguished from ourselves—not till then can it happen that in a most rare hour the first word of a verse arises in their midst and goes forth from them.

Rainer Maria Rilke

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A Little Salt, a Little Pepper/Jewish

The old people in the neighborhood used to tell stories about the Finkel brothers, Reuven and Moshe. They resembled each other enough to be a family, but in character they were miles apart. Reuven, the firstborn, had a memory like a rabbi. If he looked at a word, he had the word. Little Moshe, on the other hand, could forget your face as soon as you left the room.

Speaking of faces, Papa Finkel had one that made a person think of a scholar. Even if *Abba* never read a book in his entire lifetime, what did it matter? One look at that face and anyone would have said, "King Solomon himself couldn't have looked otherwise!"

Actually, the senior Mr. Finkel lived exclusively by aphorisms and a naturally pleasant disposition. He used to say, "My sons, a good memory is worth more than a good suit."

At which little Moshe would interrupt with, "Papa! Papa! This ain't the old country no more. It's America. Here a suit is important."

And Papa, the ever-patient pedagogue, replies, "To begin, *shmendrick*, this 'isn't' the old country no more, not 'ain't.' But one country is like another—if you're lost, you're lost! Whereas, if you're only naked, you can always find a leaf. But without a past, a man is only skin and bones." And Mr. Finkel gets this strange, faraway look in his eyes—as if he is speaking to somebody not there—and adds, "If you forget to remember, you're worse than the dead."

The best of intentions, unfortunately, can't always correct nature. The boys being what they were, Papa would sometimes take his eldest aside and tell him, "Reuven, stay close to your brother. He's as sweet as sugar, but he can't remember to tie his shoes."

Reuven, it goes without saying, was a dutiful son. Where he went, Moshe went and where Moshe went, Reuven would follow. Sometimes the arrangement was all right, sometimes there was a problem. Life with the Finkel family wasn't always the Garden of Eden.

Particularly annoying were routines that developed around the visits of important guests. For example, Mrs. Bernstein, the downstairs neighbor, would come up for afternoon coffee.

With a crescent smile, little Moshe throws open the front door and begins, "Good day, Mrs. . . . ." Then he goes into one of those big-eyed stares that already at five he was famous for. Mrs. Bernstein, if she hadn't known better, is thinking apoplexy, when suddenly up pops Reuven to announce, "In the time it takes you to sneeze, my brother could forget the whole world."

Such a remark, like a knife to the heart! It is enough to bring Mama Finkel flying from the kitchen. "Mrs. Bernstein, come in," she says, "make yourself comfortable and please excuse me." And *Ema* retires to her bedroom, quietly closing the door, and cries loud enough for the entire household to hear her.

Mr. Finkel already is standing, looking at Reuven like a man who believes in telepathy and has started transmitting: Since you remember so much, he's thinking, don't forget what happened between Yosef and his brothers. To which he adds aloud, "A little salt, a little pepper, and the soup is made good."

Once the brothers went to summer camp. Being Jewish boys, they got lost. Around the time the sun was setting, they had nothing on their minds except their stomachs.

"I'm starving," Moshe moans. "You're the oldest, how can you stand around and let your kid brother die of hunger? What will you tell Mama and Papa when I'm dead and it's all your fault?"

"No one dies so easy," Reuven sagely informs. Then, the essential message delivered, he makes a face, hard like a stone.

This, however, is long since a tactic to which Moshe knows how to respond. Before *alef, bet, gimel*, the youngest Finkel has a rubber mask where there used to be a child's innocent features. He squints his eyes, then pops them out. He blows up his cheeks and sticks out his tongue. In short, Moshe puts the image and likeness through every possible distortion, as if to say, "You think I'm impossible, I'm showing you impossible!" When all else fails, he holds his breath.

"Breathe, Moshe! Breathe!" Reuven screams, taking his brother by the shoulders and shaking him forcefully. And, after a while, when everyone is behaving next to normal again, he says, "Look, somebody'll find us soon. In the meantime . . . "

"In the meantime, my stomach is eating me between rye bread!"

"Moshe, don't start again," Reuven warns. "Just try to remember the tastes of your favorite foods. It'll help the pain."

"Remember! How?" Moshe pleads. And to accommodate the question, Reuven gets a thoughtful expression and fixes his eyes on a patch of darkening sky showing between the trees above their heads.

What works for Reuven, unfortunately, doesn't work for Moshe. Pretty soon little Moshe is getting the flavors mixed up: strawberries with smoked fish, onions with cheesecake, peppermint and hard-boiled eggs. Result: Moshe Finkel ends up with a stomach-ache, glaring at his brother for being a glutton and enjoying it!

Two hours later, the boys are rescued.

Years went by. Papa Finkel passed on. Mama Finkel's hair turned white, like a blanket of snow over good black earth. The boys grew into young men.

One night the Finkel brothers were walking home, having one of the arguments that typified their relationship. Suddenly, the point of no return: Reuven, a face of stone; Moshe, a rubber mask. The outcome was silence, and silently they turned into the park and walked on until they came to a huge tree surrounded by a ring of tall bushes. From inside the hedge, they could hear three voices.

The first voice says, "Where's the loot?"

"Hid, like I told you," replies the second voice.

"Yeah, but hid where?"

"In a safe place."

"Safe place, break your face," threatens a third voice. "We all did the job; we all want to know where the money is."

"O.K., O.K.," the second voice agrees. "You know where Mendelsohn's department store is, right? Well, across the street from the back lot are three vacant buildings. The money's in the place in the middle."

"Yeah?" challenges the first voice.

"I'm tellin' ya straight," says the second. "You go up the stairs to the fourth floor, turn right and count three doors. Go in the third door and the money is in that room, in a shoe box inside the furnace duct."

"O.K.," says the third voice, "let's go get it."

"We'll go, we'll go," begins number two. "And we oughta do it all together, too. Only not just now. I got a little job ta do, so why don't we meet behind Mendelsohn's at midnight?"

"Twelve o'clock? That's a whole hour!"

"Yeah!" says the third voice. "How do I know I can trust you not to go there first?"

"Look," replies number two, "you two can come with me. When we're done, we'll go get the loot together."

Having heard this much, the Finkel brothers remove themselves as quickly

and quietly as they can. Outside the park and around a corner, Moshe grabs Reuven by the arm and says, "Did ya get that?"

"Sure I did," answers Reuven.

"Do you remember what they said about the money and where it's stashed?"

Reuven nods.

"Then what are we waiting for?" Moshe questions. "Let's go get it!"

"What are you talking?" asks Reuven. "We should go to the police. The money was stolen. It isn't ours."

"A herring would know that that money is quicker to belong to a Rothschild than a Finkel," answers Moshe. "Which is not to say that there couldn't be a reward. If we go straight to the police, we get nothing. On the other hand, if we take the money in personally and there is a reward, they have to let us have it."

Reuven thinks this over. He nods agreement and starts off with his brother close at his heels. Forty-five minutes later, they are both at the back lot of Mendelsohn's store.

"You remember?" Moshe asks.

"Over there," says Reuven, and he crosses to the middle one of the three empty buildings.

"This is it?" asks Moshe.

"I told you, I remember. Now follow me."

The Finkels enter the building, Reuven in the lead. They go up to the fourth floor, turn right and count three doors. They open the door and enter.

The room is empty and dark. "There's nothing here," says Moshe. But Reuven smiles at his brother and crosses to the furnace duct. He bends down, pulls off the screen, sticks in his hand, and draws out a shoe box.

"Just like I remembered," Reuven announces. He opens the box, and they both stand staring at three big stacks of hundred dollar bills.

"*Oy*!" says Moshe.

"*Ge-valt*!" cries Reuven.

"What do you mean, '*gevalt*'?" Moshe inquires. "There's no one dying here that I can see."

"Maybe not," Reuven replies. "But if my ears are working, somebody just came into the building." And he goes white like a sheet.

Moshe takes one look at his watch. Midnight! "Come on," he whispers, "we gotta get out of here!" He grabs the shoe box with one hand and his brother with the other, and in a flash they are out in the hall, at the top of the stairs, looking down.

Below are three shadows, steadily approaching. "What are we going to do?" Moshe asks himself. But before he can come up with an answer, his mouth opens by its own power and out comes one long and terrifying howl, like the dead coming up from their graves. Down the stairs Moshe plunges, screaming all the way.

Poor Reuven, whose nerves are undone by his brother's behavior, follows suit and before they know it, they are out on the street, running as fast as they can. Five blocks, ten blocks, fifteen. They stop to catch their breath and look behind them. *Mazel tov*! Nobody in sight.

Well, it's like the *gonif* says: "The faster the horse, the shorter the track." And a story is a lot like a race. To see who wins, you have to get to the end.

The money is taken to the police, and there actually is a reward! Moshe stands looking at it and says, "Reuven, we wouldn't have this if it wasn't for your memory."

"It's true," Reuven answers. "On the other hand, we wouldn't have gotten away from the thieves if you hadn't forgotten to be afraid."

Moshe savors this remark. He smiles. "It's like Papa always said, 'A little salt, a little pepper, and the soup is good.' "

A story by David Sparenberg

The Young Man, the Lion and the Yellow-Flowered Zwart-Storm Tree/African

A young man of the early race once went up a hill to hunt. He looked around. He felt sleepy. He lay down by a waterhole. What had happened?

A lion came to the pool to drink. It saw the young man asleep and lifted him up. The young man woke and knew that he had been lifted up, and he thought that he would not move, in case the lion would bite him, kill him. So he waited, for the lion thought he was dead.

The lion carried him to the yellow-flowered zwart-storm tree, and put him in the tree, and his legs were sticking out. The lion was thirsty and had to drink before eating the young man, for the blood would make him thirsty and the day was hot. So he went to the waterhole. But before he left the young man he pressed his head firmly between the branches of the zwart-storm tree.

The young man moved his head a little. The lion looked back, and was

puzzled. How could a head move when it had been pressed firmly between the branches of the zwart-storm tree? He had not fastened the dead young man enough.

Just then the young man fell over. So the lion went back and pushed the head into the middle of the zwart-storm tree. And tears came into the young man's eyes and the lion licked them away.

The young man lay there, and a stick was pressing into the hollow at the back of his head, but he faced the lion steadily with closed eyes, and again the lion licked his tears away. And again the lion trod the young man's head among the yellow flowers of the zwart-storm tree, and went away. He was very thirsty.

The young man lay for a long time without moving, for the lion is a cunning thing, and then he arose and sprang forward to a different place. He ran this way. He ran that way. He did not run straight to his house shelter. He knew the lion would follow.

He came to his people, and he called out that he had been lifted up while the sun had stood high. He would not say more. He had been lifted up! He made them gather hartebeest skins and roll them around him, for he had just been lifted up while the sun stood high, and the lion would track him out. It is the way of a lion, with anything it has killed, not to leave until it has eaten.

So the people did this for the young man, for it was their hearts' young man who had asked them, and they did not want the lion to eat him, and they hid him well. Indeed they loved this young man greatly, and said they would cover him with skins and with bushes: all this they would do to stop the lion from taking their hearts' young man.

And at just about this time, an old Bushman saw a lion coming at the place where the young man had appeared. Speaking, he said, "Do you see what it is that stands there at the place where the young man appeared?"

And the young man's mother, looking, said, "Not for any reason must the lion come into our shelters! You must shoot it and kill it before it ever comes that far!"

So the people slung their quivers and went to meet the lion. Again, again they shot at him, but he would not die.

Then another woman said to the people, "How are you shooting at this lion that you do not kill him?"

But one of the older men said, "It will not die. It will have the young man that it has lifted up."

The people now threw children for the lion, but the lion looked at them and left them alone.

Again, again the people shot at the lion, but the lion was not hurt, and kept

smelling for the young man. And the people said, "Bring spears." So they began spearing it, and others went on shooting. But the lion would not be hurt, for it wanted the young man whose tears it had licked. It wanted that man, no other.

It came to the shelters. It tore them. It broke them. And the people said to each other, speaking, "The lion will not eat the children. Give him a woman, to eat her and then to go away."

But the lion did not touch the woman. It wanted the young man it had lifted up, no other.

Then the wise people said, speaking, "Tell the mother. Tell her she must give her son to the lion, who is walking about and will not be hurt."

The mother heard. "Let it be so. Give my son to the lion. But not for any reason shall you cause him to be eaten, not for any reason shall you suffer the lion to walk in this place about here. You must kill him and lay him on my son. Let the lion die and lie upon my son."

And the people took the bushes and the skins from their hearts' young man, and gave him to the lion. And the lion lifted him up and killed him, and the people shot and stabbed the lion.

Then the lion spoke at last, saying, "Now I am ready to die. For I have the young man that I put in the yellow-flowered zwart-storm tree, the young man whose tears I licked, the young man that I have all this time been seeking. Now I have hold of him, for I am his."

And so the lion died, and the young man and the lion lay there dead. And they and the people were at peace.

From The Guizer: A Book of Fools, *by Alan Garner (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975). Reprinted by permission.*

Hiku and Kawelu/Hawaiian

Hiku lived high on the mountain, and the Princess Kawelu lived in the lowlands. She lived apart, with only a few women to attend her.

Hiku had a magic arrow named Puane. One day he went down toward the lowlands and met some boys playing the game of casting arrows. He offered to try his arrow against theirs. They cast their arrows, which flew a certain distance, but when Hiku cast Puane, it soared far over the heads of the other

boys, soared over fields and the tops of trees, and fell at last at Kawelu's door.

Her women brought her the arrow. Kawelu hid it. When Hiku came searching for his arrow, the princess said to him, "Can you tell your arrow from any other?"

"Yes," said Hiku. "My arrow answers if I call it."

"Call it, then," said the princess.

"Puane, Puane!" called Hiku.

"Here I am," answered the arrow.

"I knew it was here!" Hiku cried.

"Come and find it," the princess invited him.

And so Hiku entered the princess' house. He looked around him, and almost forgot the arrow he was searching for. The house was filled with beautiful leis, with the wonderful feather capes of royalty, with woven mats, with coral and seashells. Among all these, Hiku found his arrow. And, most beautiful of all, he found Kawelu. When he looked at Kawelu, it seemed to him her beauty blazed like the torches lit on a dark night. Hiku and Kawelu looked at each other, and they loved each other.

He stayed for days in her house. They loved each other, and yet, Kawelu was a princess, and Hiku of a lower rank. When it came time to eat, Kawelu and her attendants ate by themselves and gave nothing to Hiku. It was not right, said the attendants, to share food with a common man.

Hiku became angry, then angrier, and yet angrier. After a few days, he took his magic arrow and angrily left the house. He went up the mountain. Kawelu saw him go and called after him, but he would not look back.

She went after him quickly, calling as the plover calls, calling for him, for she deeply loved him. But Hiku would not look back. Instead, he chanted to the maile vines, the ie vines, and to the ohia trees, to close the path behind him with their branches. Still, Kawelu followed, but Hiku climbed higher and higher.

She sang:

> My flowers have fallen from me,
> the flowers we twined into a lei.
> Hiku, fling me a flower.
> Hiku, my flowers are gone!

He did not throw back a flower. He did not even look back at her. The vines and branches held her. Then she sang again:

> Do you hear me, my love?
> Kawelu will live down below.
> My flowers have fallen from me.
> Far far down I will go.

Still, Hiku climbed on, and at last he could no longer hear Kawelu's voice.

He entered his parents' house.

When he entered the house, his anger was still hot within him. But the next day, it was gone. Then he thought of Kawelu, thought of her beauty. Her image came to him, and again he looked at it with love.

For a time, her image was always with him. And one day, while he walked along a mountain path, a song came to him, a song for Lolupe, the god who brings together friends who have lost each other.

Hiku sang:

> Hiku is climbing the mountain ridge,
> the branch hangs straggling down.
> Its blossoms lie on the ground.
> Give me a flower, Lolupe,
> to twine again my flower lei.

Hiku walked and sang. When he came to his parents' house, there were strangers there.

"What have they come for?" asked Hiku.

"These men have come for timbers to build a house for the dead," answered his parents. "Kawelu, the princess of Kona, is dead."

When Hiku heard this, he wept for his great loss. And then he left his parents' house and went searching for the god Lolupe, god of the lost things. Hiku searched for Lolupe, searched for the god who takes the form of a kite, a kite that rides high in the air, that can look down and see everything, a kite that can find whatever has been lost.

Outside the house of a kahuna priest, Hiku saw a kite in the form of a winged fish. Hiku went to it and said his prayer to Lolupe. Then he sent the kite high into the winds.

That night Lolupe came to him in a dream and showed him visions of Kawelu. She was down below the ocean, in the spirit world. Hiku saw Kawelu there, among the spirits, with Milu, the ruler of the world below the ocean. Hiku, as he dreamed, heard Lolupe speak. Lolupe told him how to find Kawelu, and how to bring her spirit back to the human world.

Lolupe told him to take morning-glory vines and to make from them the longest ropes that had ever been made, then to make a swing of each of these ropes and to lower himself down on one, taking the other with him. Lolupe told him everything that he must do.

Hiku went to the place of the morning-glory vines. He took two friends with him. They helped him to make the long, long ropes. They went with him in a canoe out onto the ocean. They lowered the ropes of vines, and Hiku lowered himself down on one of them. He came to the place of the spirits, under the ocean, the place where Milu rules.

When Hiku came down to that place, the spirits gathered around him. They saw him swinging, and they wanted to swing too. But Hiku went on swinging, and he sang to himself as he swung.

He saw Kawelu's spirit standing there among the rest, but she did not know him.

Milu, the lord of the spirits, came to the place where Hiku sat swinging. He, too, wanted to go on the swing. Hiku gave him his seat. Milu began to swing. He asked the spirits to pull on the vines and swing him higher and higher. In the joy of the swinging, Milu closed his eyes.

Then Hiku went to Kawelu. "Here is our swing," he said. He took her to the other vine and began to swing her. As he swung her back and forth, he chanted as they chant in the world of the living, the chant of the swing.

O Love! Love came to me.
Where has it gone?
O Love! Love came to me.
Where has it gone?

He chanted, thinking Kawelu would remember her life among the living. But Kawelu did not remember.

Then Hiku sat down on the swing and took Kawelu on his knees. They began to swing back and forth, back and forth. And Milu, the lord of the dead, swung back and forth, too, closing his eyes in joy.

Then Hiku pulled on his morning-glory vine. His friends, waiting in their canoe on the surface of the ocean, felt the signal and began to pull the vine up. Up and up they pulled it. Up toward the surface of the ocean, up toward the light, came Hiku and Kawelu.

Hiku held Kawelu in his arms. But as they came closer and closer to the sunlight that sparkled on the surface of the sea, she began to shrink. She shrank until she was as small as a young girl, as small as a child, as small as a bird, and even smaller. Hiku held her, even as she shrank. And holding her, he came to the surface of the sea.

Still, he held Kawelu's spirit. He carried it with him in the canoe, back to the place where the house had been built around her body. He brought the tiny spirit back to Kawelu's body, and he held it to the soles of her feet.

Hiku chanted. He chanted until the spirit entered the soles of the feet. He chanted until it passed upward, until it came to the breast, until it came to the throat. Hiku knew that when the spirit reached the throat, the place of speaking and singing, it would stay in its home. When the spirit reached the throat, Hiku took up Kawelu's body. He warmed it. Slowly, Kawelu opened her eyes. At last, she spoke to him.

These two, Hiku and Kawelu, lived long together in a place between the mountains and the lowlands. Every day, they twined flower leis for each other. Every day they made songs and sang together, and every day they left an offering for Lolupe, the god who tells people where their lost things are.

Adapted from "The Arrow and the Swing," in Legends of Hawaii *by Padraic Colum. Retold by Anne Twitty.*

CURRENTS & COMMENTS

MUSEUMS

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art will inaugurate its Robert O. Anderson Building with **The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985,** a major international loan exhibition that will open on November 23, 1986, and close on March 8, 1987. The exhibition of approximately 230 paintings and works on paper, and 125 related books and diagrams, will demonstrate that the genesis, development, and continuation of abstract art was inextricably tied to spiritual and metaphysical ideas current in Europe and the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The roots of abstraction in mystical and occult concepts and belief systems will be traced in the chronologically arranged exhibition, starting with symbolism in the 1890s. For further information, telephone (213) 857-6222.

The University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania has been collecting archaeological and anthropological materials from Africa for nearly a century, with particularly rich holdings from Zaire, Gabon, Angola, and Nigeria, but also including examples from many other art-producing areas of West Africa. **African Art from the University Museum,** a selection of 89 sculptures, masks, and other objects of ceremonial and everyday use, will be displayed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art from November 23, 1986, to February 8, 1987, in honor of the Centennial Celebration of the University Museum. Most of the carvings are of wood, and many are painted and/or embellished with such materials as copper, brass, nails, and beads, as well as animal and

vegetable matter—including antelope hide, basketry, textiles, seeds, twine, hair, claws, and beeswax, which were believed to have particular significance or magical powers. This exhibition, while not a comprehensive survey of West African tribal art, provides an opportunity to view these powerful carvings (many of which have rarely been shown) as beautiful and eloquent works of art. For further information, telephone (215) 763-8100.

An exhibition of more than 120 masterpieces drawn from one of the finest private collections of Japanese art in the world will highlight the year-long 30th anniversary celebration of The Asia Society in New York City. The exhibition, **Art of Japan: Selections from the Mary and Jackson Burke Collection,** spans eleven centuries of artistic achievement and features a significant number of works that have never been on public view in this country. Part I of the exhibition (on display from October 2 through December 7, 1986) is composed of folding screens, scrolls, and other painted works illustrating popular

Japanese legends and tales; Buddhist paintings and sculptures; ink paintings from the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries; and ceramics. Part II (on display from December 13, 1986, through February 22, 1987) will focus on poetry and calligraphy; ink paintings from the seventeenth through the nine-

teenth centuries; painted works based on scenes from nature and daily life; and lacquer objects of exquisite beauty. The exhibition was first shown in Spring 1985 at the Tokyo National Museum and subsequently at four regional museums in Japan. The Asia House showing will be the final (and only American) showing of this extraordinary collection. For further information, telephone (212) 288-6400.

A sculptural exhibition illustrating how various cultures view the idea and the image of Buddha will remain on view at the Oglethorpe University Art Gallery in Atlanta, Georgia, until December 20, 1986. One of the most extensive exhibitions on this subject shown in the West since World War II, **The Many Faces of Buddha** includes forty works in bronze, stone, ceramic, and wood in the forms of masks, heads, and several full figures of Buddha. Most of the faces are many centuries old; one piece dates from the fifth century A.D.

The works come from ten Asian countries (Japan, China, India, and Tibet among them), and the traditional influence of each represented country on the visual rendering of the many faces of Buddha is evident. This is the first time these art works have been presented together. Some of them are recent acquisitions to private collections and have not been exhibited in this country before. For further information, telephone (404) 261-1441.

Treasures dating from 8000 B.C. to the 17th century A.D. and representing the Akkadian, Hittite, Assyrian, Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic presence in Syria, provide an insight into the great Syrian cities and their influence on the development of western civilization. **Ebla to Damascus: Art and Archaeology of Ancient Syria** will be on display at the Cincinnati Art Museum from November 19, 1986, through January 18, 1987. Statuary, mosaics, frescos, inscriptions, and jewelry are among the 281 beautiful and extraordinary objects on view. The exhibition is organized and circulated by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES).

TANGENTS

Fools on a Precipice

ROB BAKER

Ran
A film by Akira Kurosawa. Screenplay by Kurosawa, Hideo Oguni, and Masato Ide. Music by Toru Takemitsu. Shot on location at Himeji Castle, Kumamoto Castle, Nagoya Castle, and in the cities of Gotemba, Kokonoe, Aso, and Shonai in Japan. Orion Classics. 1985. 160 min.

I was in the washtub naked. The place was dimly lit, and I was soaking in hot water and rocking myself by holding on to the rims of the tub. At the lowest point the tub teetered between two sloping boards, the water making little splashing noises as it rocked. This must have been very interesting for me. I rocked the tub with all my strength. Suddenly it overturned. I have a very vivid memory of the strange feeling of shock and uncertainty of that moment, of the sensation of that wet and slippery space between the boards against my bare skin, and of looking up at something painfully bright overhead.

Akira Kurosawa
Something Like an Autobiography

This opening paragraph to Japanese film director Akira Kurosawa's autobiography offers a somewhat eerie insight to a recurring image throughout his most recent film, *Ran*: that of fools on a precipice, poised precariously, like the figure in the Tarot, on the brink between steadiness and uncertainty, innocence and experience, order and chaos ("chaos" being the English translation most critics have given to Kurosawa's Japanese title, *Ran*). But unlike the esoteric archetype of the Tarot, Kurosawa's fools in a sense have already taken the spill: The tub has overturned, and they have discovered the "wet and slippery space between the boards," where they sit dripping and dazed, totally naked, staring with weak infant eyes up towards the light.

Kurosawa has long wanted to make his own movie version of Shakespeare's *King Lear* and spoke movingly of the difficulty and scope of the project at a luncheon at Japan House in New York in late 1981, for the opening of a retrospective of his films there. Altogether, Kurosawa spent almost ten years completing the project, and *Ran*, released in 1985, is the crowning achievement of a career that has spanned almost five decades. It is a work that reflects, as did its literary source, the painful transformational experience of a lifetime confront-

ing inner and outer chaos in order to come out, somehow, more whole than before.

It is curious that in modern times, a work so full of piercing truths as *Lear* is so seldom even attempted on stage or screen; in recent years only the highly praised portrayal by Morris Carnovsky at Stratford in 1964 and Peter Brook's film of 1970, set so powerfully in an icy Danish wasteland, come to mind.

But now Kurosawa has given moviegoers not only a definitive *Lear* but also what may well be his own most masterful and telling film, one that powerfully explores an image that has haunted him since early childhood, a primal memory that, like that of mankind itself, is, not coincidentally, of the Fall from comfort and grace—and the chaos that follows it.

Like Shakespeare's play, *Ran* is full of fools of both the positive esoteric type and the negative exoteric variety, but all walk the razor-sharp precarious cliff, whether they play the fool consciously or take on the motley through their own ignorance, rashness, or deceit. Leaving behind tradition for rebellion, fidelity for betrayal, sanity for madness, or physical comfort for spiritual asceticism, all move daringly along the precipice, carrying all they own in a pack on a stick over their shoulders, oblivious to both the dog or crocodile snapping at their heels and the chasm before them—until the shock of awareness comes.

It is perhaps not so curious that Kurosawa, now in his mid-70s and probably nearing the end of a long and illustrious career, would return, for this central metaphor, to "my very first memory of myself," an image full of both fear and wonder, re-examining it after the experiences and follies of a lifetime. Some younger directors and critics in Japan have dismissed much of the main body of Kurosawa's work as sentimental humanism—a criticism that, if valid at all, certainly doesn't hold true for *Ran*, the film of a director not afraid to see the fool, for better or worse, in himself and the world, and to examine it with a cool, unblinking eye.

Kurosawa's autobiography covers only the first half of his life and career, ending just after his being awarded the Grand Prix at the Venice Film Festival for *Rashomon* in 1951—an event that brought not only his own work but Japanese cinema as a whole to the attention of the Western world. By stopping where it does, the book does not deal with the difficulties Kurosawa has encountered getting his projects financed in the past two decades (*Ran* is only his fourth film since 1965) or with the period of personal crisis in the early 1970s, when he attempted suicide and had what we in the West so facilely refer to as a "nervous breakdown."

But to take such factors into account in considering *Ran* would hardly be inappropriate, since Kurosawa has always admitted that the core of his work is always imagery based on memory and experience. "The clarity of my memory seems to improve in direct proportion to the intensity of the shock I underwent," he writes in the autobiography, and throughout the book he gives the reader vivid and very visual nature-based metaphors to depict major events in his experience: gates to be passed through, mountains to be climbed, whirlwinds to face.

Another early reference from the memoirs, in which Kurosawa recalls seeing a dog being hit by a train ("Right before my eyes the white dog tumbles down, split neatly in half. The body of the instantly killed beast was round and bright red, like a tuna sliced crossways for sashimi.") may help explain the violence of some of the more horrifying images of war and destruction in *Ran*, particularly the unforgettable shot of a soldier sitting on the battlefield, convulsed with a kind of silent hysteria, holding his own severed arm in front of him.

All of Kurosawa's works have some visual metaphor as their central image, and that of fools on a precipice recurs over and over again in *Ran*, paving the way for a powerful epilogue that is poignantly and potently Kurosawa's own ironic postscript to the *Lear* canon. But this final image works only because Kurosawa has so carefully set up the metaphor throughout the film.

One instance in particular stands out. Well into the second half of the film, the Lear figure, Hidetora (Tatsuya Nakadai), having survived the violent thunderstorm on the heath (central to both the film and the play), is walking along a cliff near the ruins of a castle with his Fool and, for the time being, sole companion, Kyoami (played by a young actor who goes by the single name Peter and is well known in Japan for playing transvestite roles in stage

plays). Surveying the terrain and pulling back in fright, the old man says to the Fool, "This place I remember. We came this way before."

Kyoami, impatient to continue on their journey, tries to get the old man to move, but Hidetora stays glued to the spot, so the Fool at last shrugs in desperation and says, "If you're afraid, jump."

Without hesitation, Hidetora leaps off the precipice and disappears from sight. Kyoami rushes down the path and back below, finding the old man lying a bit stunned, but otherwise uninjured, in the dirt at the foot of the embankment. But as in the equivalent scene in Shakespeare's play, where the blinded Gloucester similarly tries to commit suicide by jumping off a small hill, the leap into the unknown brings a shock of recognition. Just as Gloucester finds new solace with his banished son Edgar (who has actually been beside him all along, in disguise), Hidetora realizes where he is as well ("This ruin was once a castle. I destroyed it.") and, full of that past guilt, looks up to see (like the infant Kurosawa's "something painfully bright overhead" or "the shrill-gorg'd lark" that Edgar describes to Gloucester) the truth of reality.

In Hidetora's case this sight is the very evidence of his own past crime: the survivors of his destruction of the castle now in ruins, Lady Sue (Yoshiko Miyazaki), whom his second son Taro took for his bride as spoils of the battle, and her brother Tsurumaru (Takeshi Nomura), whom Hidetora had blinded after the battle (a possible parallel to Shakespeare's wronged Gloucester, as Kurosawa does not replicate the Gloucester/Edgar/Edmund sub-plot in the film otherwise).

When Hidetora looks up to see Lady Sue and Tsurumaru, they too appear as fools on a precipice, an old wall

of the castle ruins. The two characters (who are Kurosawa's own invention and do not appear in the original *Lear*) represent two responses to the chaos Hidetora was guilty of, even before the fiasco of turning his kingdom over to thankless heirs. Lady Sue worships the Amida Buddha and, in an earlier scene, tells Hidetora, who cannot understand her kindness to him, that she has no bitterness: "All is decided in our future lives. The Buddha embraces all."

Tsurumaru likewise has encountered Hidetora once before in the film. When Hidetora and the Fool seek shelter from the raging storm, it is to Tsurumaru's shack that they come (just as Lear and his Fool seek shelter in the shack where Edgar is hiding out as Mad Tom of Bedlam in the play). Tsurumaru has been living there since being blinded, dressing as a woman, trying to come to terms with his bitterness ("I try to be like my sister, to pray to Buddha, to forget") and playing his flute ("Lacking anything else, I offer you the hospitality of the heart. The only pleasure I have left to me.").

But Hidetora, his mind and body already wracked by the storm, can't face this "hospitality of the heart," which cuts his own emotional center to the quick. Hearing the mournful keening of Tsurumaru's flute, he flees once again into the night—only to rediscover his blind and desexed victim the next day, on the precipice with his sister.

By focusing so centrally on these four "fools," Kurosawa gives full development to two of the most interesting themes of *Lear*—the awakening of the Lear character to his own folly and the follies of the world around him, and the paradoxical balm of religious faith in dealing with such universal or personal chaos. To achieve this, Kurosawa in turn somewhat downplays the two conventional approaches to the original play—the focus on Lear's madness as a kind of man-against-nature tour de force, or that in which the whole drama becomes a rather simplistic cautionary tale of filial ingratitude.

Kurosawa has kept the idea of an old king foolishly deciding to divide his kingdom among three bickering children, but he has made the daughters into sons, partly no doubt because turning over property or power to daughters would have been unthinkable in feudal Japan. Still it is unquestionably the women (now daughters-in-law) who are far more interesting in the film than are the husbands. The eldest son, Taro (Akira Terao), is a weakling married to Lady Kaede (Mieko Harada), a vicious serpent with all the venom and sexuality of Shakespeare's Goneril and Regan combined. Her obsession for revenge against Hidetora, who was responsible for the slayings of her father and brothers and the suicide of her mother, are in startling contrast to the calm resignation of her counterpart, Lady Sue, the wife of the second son Jiro (Jinpachi Nezu).

The third son, Saburo (Daisuke Ryu), the Cordelia figure, is, like the youngest daughter of Lear, outspoken in opposing the father's irrational decision, but he is likewise the only one of the

three to show real affection and devotion to the old king.

But it is Hidetora/Lear who interests Kurosawa most from the beginning: his failures, his foolishness, his slow trial by suffering, and the transformation it brings to his character, are what the film (and quite arguably the play) is really about. The theme of filial ingratitude and the last-minute reconciliation of the child unjustly banished are subordinate to the overall lessons that Hidetora must learn on the path that leads to exile and a modicum of wisdom, which, like the reconciliation, seems to come almost too late. His madness, too, is merely part of the tempering. As Kyoami says after the scene on the heath, with Hidetora wandering about in the fog on a precipice, the tall grass whipping around him: "In a mad world, the mad are sane. The failed mind sees the heart's failings."—a lesson Kurosawa himself may well have learned while facing his own precipice in 1971.

The scene on the windswept hill is one of the most arresting sequences Kurosawa has ever filmed—and an image he has used before, in his very first film as a director, *Sugata Sanshiro* (1943), in which a cocky young judo apprentice must learn that fighting is a spiritual discipline; and, most recently, in *Derzu Uzala* (1979), in which an old Chinese trapper teaches a young Russian surveyor the craft of surviving in the wilderness. As in the earlier films, nature in *Ran* is a mysterious and powerful force; it is not the elements themselves that are the "chaos" of the title but man's relationship to those elements: the test of man's fragile attempts at discipline versus the ultimate, ever-incomprehensible order of Nature.

The struggle of man against the seemingly senseless and brutal onslaught of nature is another metaphor Kurosawa learned from experience. At the age of twelve, he witnessed the ravages of the great Kanto earthquake in Tokyo firsthand, and his description of that real event fits perfectly the stylized horrors he filmed sixty years later in the fiery destruction of Saburo's castle in *Ran*:

> Then, before our eyes, the two storehouses belonging to the pawnshop started shedding their skins. They shuddered and shook off their roof tiles and then let go of their thick walls. In an instant they were skeletons of wooden frame. It wasn't just the storehouses that were doing this either. The roof tiles of all the houses, as if they were being put through a sieve, suddenly danced and

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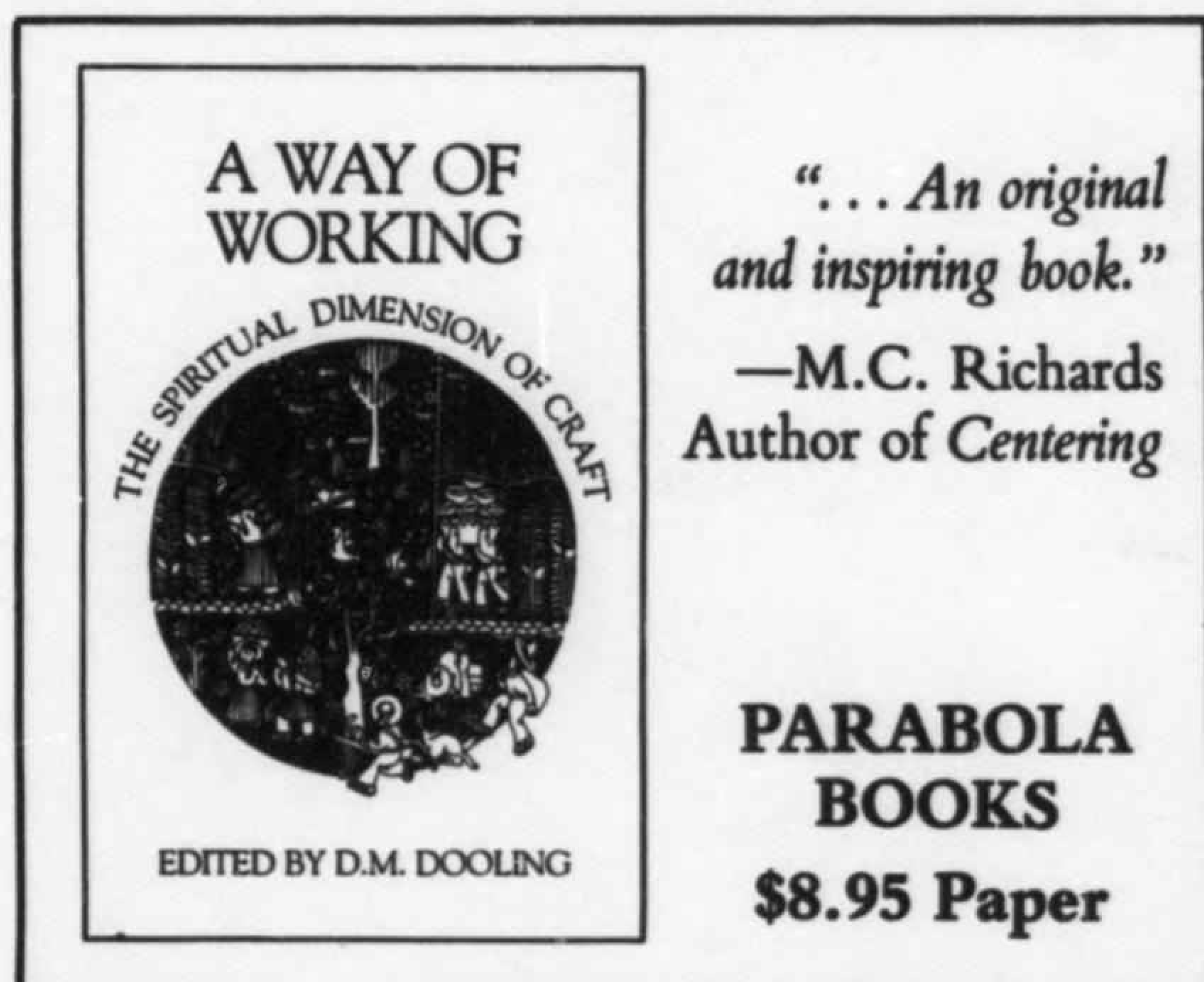

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shook and slipped off. In the thick dust the roof beams lay revealed.

After the earthquake and the fires that followed it were over, Kurosawa and his older brother went to explore the nightmarish scene of destruction, walking in silence past heaps of charred corpses. Later the young Kurosawa asked his brother the reason for the excursion, and the older boy replied, "If you shut your eyes to a frightening sight, you end up being frightened. If you look at everything straight on, there is nothing to be afraid of."

Though the credo served Kurosawa well as a director, he has also indicated in a postscript section to the autobiography entitled *Some Random Notes on Filmmaking* that that "straight-on" way of looking at things can at the same time be limiting:

> During the shooting of a scene the director's eye has to catch even the minutest detail. But this does not mean glaring concentratedly at the set. While the cameras are rolling, I rarely look directly at the actors, but focus my gaze somewhere else. By doing this I sense instantly when something isn't right. Watching something does not mean fixing your gaze on it, but being aware of it in a natural way. I believe this is what the medieval Noh playwright and theorist Zeami meant by "watching with a detached gaze."

A similar detachment, layered in irony, marks the imagery at the end of *Ran*. As in Shakespeare's play, the film comes to a bleak and unsettling climax, with Lear/Hidetora reconciling for one brief scene with Cordelia/Saburo, only to have the falsely accused Prodigal Son figure murdered before the parent's eyes. This final blow, too much for the old parent to bear, mentally, emotionally, or physically, pushes Lear/Hidetora over the edge into the final reality of death.

Echoing Gloucester's bitter, agnostic remarks in the play ("As flies to wanton boys, are we to the Gods;/They kill us for their sport."), Kyoami rages, "Are there no gods, no Buddha? . . . You crush us like ants."

But Hidetora's one loyal retainer, Tango, counters with, "It is the gods that weep. They see us killing ourselves over and over again since time began. Men prefer sorrow over joy, suffering over peace."

Yet Hidetora is transformed, if only for a few brief moments, by such sorrow and suffering—gaining an understanding that a lifetime of military victory and the power of rulership never brought him. Is such a moment of redemption enough, and is it really redemption at all?

Kurosawa not only leaves the disturbing question unanswered (as it always is in life), but complicates it even further with a startling brief epilogue in which we see Tsurumaru tapping blindly up a steep precipice. Having lost both his sister (who was murdered under Lady Kaede's orders) and his flute, he has only one solace left, a scroll of the Buddha that Lady Sue left with him the last time he saw her alive, so that "you won't be alone."

Tsurumaru stumbles and drops the scroll.

And Kurosawa's cool, unblinking eye zooms in on the enigmatic smile of the Buddha painted on the scroll, which unfurls in the air as it falls into the chasm.

Rob Baker is a former editor of PARABOLA *and has written frequently about film, theater and the arts.*

BOOK REVIEWS

On Dreams and Death: A Jungian Interpretation
By Marie-Louise von Franz. Translated by Emmanuel Xipolitas Kennedy and Vernon Brooks. Boston and London: Shambhala, 1986. Pp. *xvi* + 193. $17.95.

The ability to foresee and prepare for the hour of death is a traditional mark of the saint or sage. In her latest book, Jungian analyst and scholar Marie-Louise von Franz reveals that even ordinary people have this capacity: when death approaches, it sends its calling card through the gate of dreams.

On Dreams and Death is an interpretive study of dreams collected by von Franz from her own patients and from other published accounts. A sixty-one-year-old cavalry officer, just weeks before dying unexpectedly from heart failure, dreams that an old corporal (significantly named "Adam") leads him into a cellar of the officer's school and opens a leaden door to reveal the rotting carcass of a horse. A doctor dreams of attending the funeral of a male acquaintance; after a procession to the town square, the coffin is set ablaze, and from its flames a beautiful woman springs forth to embrace him. A year later he succumbs to influenza, consummating his romance with death. A dying seventy-five-year-old man dreams of an ancient, gnarled tree, whose roots are gradually detaching themselves from the earth; he is relieved to discover that the tree, once uprooted, does not fall but floats freely.

Treated as a sensation, this could be the stuff of talk-show and tabloid metaphysical thrills. Fortunately, although von Franz evidently believes that death is not the end, she does not belabor the parapsychological angle. Instead, she attends to the images by which death makes its presence known to the psyche—images that recur in myths, scriptures, and esoteric literature as well as in dreams: among them, the perilous bridge or ladder, the passage through fire or water, the encounter with death's messenger. Burglar, bride, dog, angel, uncle—death takes many guises. One patient undergoing analysis dreams, while dying of lung disease, that he leaves the hospital, exiting through an old gate, and encounters the king of the realm of the dead, who turns out to be none other than Jung himself. In such dreams, von Franz suggests, the personification of death is a wise strategy of the unconscious: the Self plays psychopomp for the self.

In contrast to much recent literature on the spiritual charms of death, von Franz does not sentimentalize dying, but underscores its brutality. Several of the dreams she narrates depict death as a fearsome event, a cruel sundering of mind, body, and spirit. While the Freudian school asserts that the unconscious supports the ego in its efforts to deny the reality of death, the Jungian school holds that the unconscious (as nature's ally) wishes us to face death squarely and to complete the task for which we were born.

Like her mentor Jung, von Franz believes that the task of aging is to cre-

ate—through a fusion of personal and collective symbols—a living myth. Only in mythic terms can one make sense of death, or make sense of oneself in the face of death. Von Franz brings this lesson home by embedding her accounts of extraordinary death-dreams in a dense thicket of parallels, drawn from Egyptian mortuary manuals, early Christian teachings on the resurrection of the body, Gnostic and Hermetic lore, Western and Taoist alchemy, Tantric yoga, and other religious and esoteric traditions.

Because she believes that the physical body holds within it the principle of individuation, von Franz favors traditions that depict death as a crisis in which there is a potential, at least, for psychophysical metamorphosis. The final goal of spiritual effort, she suggests, is not to transcend the material world but to transmute the elements of ordinary psychic and physical life into a diamond vehicle, a philosopher's stone, a glorified body. The Egyptian cult of mummification, the early Christian idea of the corpse as a seedbed for the resurrection, the esoteric physiologies of yoga, the alchemist's quest for physical immortality, all pay heed to the mystery of the body. Von Franz points out that depth psychology has neglected this whole area of research.

As a psychologist, von Franz is also aware that notions of an afterlife raise problems of identity. The sense of "I" migrates to different parts of one's psychosomatic system; wherever it settles, it raises its banner of sovereignty, but it never stays in any one place for long. If it is difficult to envision continuing after death, that is partly because, when we examine ourselves closely, we discover so much discontinuity and fragmentation in life. Dreams, according to von Franz, can remind us of those aspects of our being that deserve to endure beyond the disintegration of personality and flesh.

Von Franz is well qualified to bring Jungian insights to the interpretation of death. She met Carl Jung when she was eighteen and worked with him for over three decades, as analysand and analyst, disciple and scholar in her own right. She cofounded the Jung Institute and in previous writings has applied Jungian methods to the study of fairy tales, myths, alchemy, and modern physics. Like her other works, *On Dreams and Death* is obviously the product of a distinct school; one might almost call it a mystery school. Noninitiates who read this book may feel as though they are entering an enchanted garden: the symbolic landscaping is attractive but corresponds perhaps only in an idealized way to our sprawling and chaotic inner life. Yet there is wisdom in this book, and it is graced by a gentle, thoughtful style; it will fascinate even those who remained unmoved by the rituals of mummification or the ingredients in an alchemical alembic.

Von Franz concludes by calling for a team of experts in psychology, ethnology, and the history of religion to engage in a large-scale study of dreams and images of death; if such a team is ever assembled, then *On Dreams and Death* will have made a significant contribution to its work.

Carol Zaleski

Carol Zaleski is a Lecturer on the Study of Religion at Harvard University. She is the author of Otherworld Journeys: Accounts of Near-Death Experience in Medieval and Modern Times, *which will be published by Oxford University Press in November.*

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The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions
By Paula Gunn Allen. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986. Pp. 228. $24.95.

Paula Gunn Allen is a leading American Indian poet, novelist, and essayist. The current collection, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*, reprints the best of her earlier essays and adds several new ones. The twenty pieces that make up the new book represent attempts to measure her distance from any sensibility or historical paradigm imposed by cultural outsiders, and through that measuring to situate events and texts within alternative historical codes. In such a project, the writer's own position is basic. Her background is certainly not one that belongs to any "dominant culture" in America or the western world in general. She comes from New Mexico where she grew up participating in the Laguna Pueblo traditions of her mother's people and in the Lebanese ways of her father's side of the family. Her formal education, which includes a Ph.D. and an M.F.A., gave her access to the analytic perspectives of mainstream culture, but the necessity to enter these alternative histories as acting subject rather than as uncomprehending victim meant years of thought and work, which gradually allowed an understanding of how her own peoples' histories can help shape a future shared by people of widely divergent pasts.

Allen grounds her entire project in religious assumptions as they are enacted ceremonially and transmitted through the myths of various tribes. Having established the foundations for her arguments, she is free to employ the combination of descriptive explication, personal meditation, and informed academic commentary that is the source of the essays' strengths and vulnerabilities. In her introductory comments she lists seven major themes that recur throughout the essays. The first and last of these establish the place of the sacred in her endeavor, and many of her other themes refer to what she sees as a source of fundamental distortions in mainstream approaches to American Indian thought and history—namely, the inability to recognize the place of the feminine in Indian cultures. But while she firmly defines herself a feminist, she also asserts her sense that mainstream feminists, unaware of the ceremonial foundations for tribal ideas of sexuality, miss the significance of their stance for tribal peoples.

Although Allen faces problems that others choose to ignore, her approach remains unabashedly idealistic, even didactic. For her, thinking and remembering is a mission; it is the means whereby she lives as witness to values that she sees as endangered. She speaks of America's "amazing loss of memory concerning its origins in the matrix and context of Native America," and in the face of such amnesia she speaks directly and personally. She is an accomplished poet and has recently written a novel. Among today's

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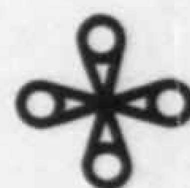

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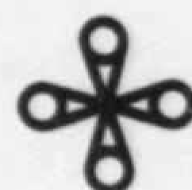

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American Indian writers, many of whom are producing strong literature, she stands out as a teacher, using that term in its broadest sense to include the tasks of working out basic paradigms and helping others to see their significance for their own writing and thinking. She has a formal academic position at the University of California at Berkeley, but her teaching role is by no means limited to this. She continues to talk, think, and meditate with women especially, many of whom will never take university courses, and she has always a special concern for the younger or less experienced American Indian writers.

All of Allen's essays have a graceful complexity that charts her responses to the pressures of insights and ideas that seem elusive, not because they are so difficult, but because of their oblique relationship to the accepted and expected. To give her prose writing its required coherence, she has sought analogies among various systems of order; the model that I found most illuminating is found in the chapter entitled "The Ceremonial Motion of Indian Time: Long Ago, So Far"; here Allen describes how her conversations with the Navajo mathematician and physicist Fred Young gave her a way of visualizing the tribal sense of self "as a moving event within a moving universe," a view that corresponds to physicists' understandings about space and time. She then comments on various works of American Indian literature, including one of her own poems and her novel, showing how their structure "emphasizes the motion inherent in the interplay of person and event." She makes the point that structural innovations in American Indian literature are efforts to allow literature to reflect a mode of consciousness that belongs to ceremony as well as to the advanced frontiers of scientific inquiry.

Change and transformation preoccupy Allen. All of her writing is an attempt to work out what it means to retain a traditional identity in spite of change. In "Answering the Deer," a discussion of American Indian women's poetry, she writes of her own search for "the ideal metaphor" that can "harmonize the contradictions and balance them so that internal equilibrium can be achieved, so that each perspective is meaningful and that in their joining, psychic unity rather than fragmentation occurs." Through such metaphors, the poet and writer does more than merely record continuity; she establishes the means of achieving it, and her language engenders hope—the kind of hope "that comes about when one has faced ultimate disaster time and time again over the ages."

What Allen attempts in her essays is a staggeringly difficult task. Recasting basic cultural assumptions about time, space, sexuality, and history and establishing that recasting within discourses like that of feminism, which is itself a mark and force of change, render all language more than usually vulnerable. Because of her maturity and breadth of experience, Allen succeeds in giving us what no one else has, a highly intelligent yet personal critique of basic cultural assumptions from a Native American feminist perspective.

Elaine Jahner

Elaine Jahner teaches in the English and Native American Studies Department at Dartmouth College. She is the editor of Lakota Myths, *by James R. Walker, and is currently at work on a book examining cross-cultural literary criticism.*

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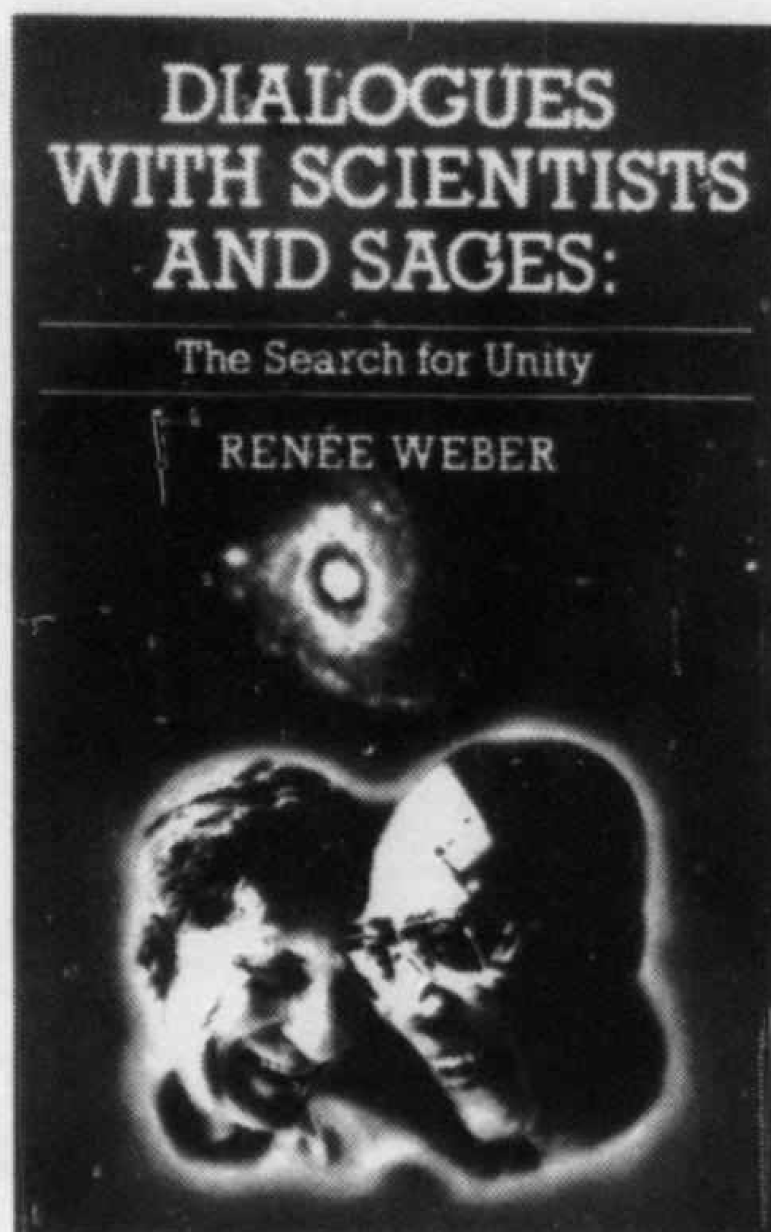

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Barawa and the Way Birds Fly in the Sky: An Ethnographic Novel
By Michael Jackson. Washington, D.C. and London: The Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986. Pp. 212. $18.95.

Over a span of more than 150 years, three Europeans trek their way into an African chieftaincy, set in the midst of contested territory at the meeting place of forest and savannah, Islam and traditional cultures, close to the source of the great Niger River. The first two, explorers, are bent on finding the river's source, but never do; it bubbles out inconspicuously from a pile of rocks revered by local people but yielding neither to them nor to ambitious visitors any hint of its eventual growth into vast channels, confluences, and deltas. The last, an anthropologist, is also searching for a source: the origin and meaning of his own work in the Kuranko chieftaincy. He looks for it not in a fixed point—personal growth, a book, or a career—but in the spaces between, in the dialogue, the coincidence, the journey.

This recapitulation is an intriguing way of framing an ethnographer's experience: Part One traces the intersections between the careers of the two explorers, the development of a colonial presence, and the lives of various members of a Kuranko chiefly family. Part Two is concerned with Jackson's first field trip to the Kuranko. Part Three centers on a return trip by Jackson and his family some years later, and focuses around the emerging political solidarity of Barawa on the Sierra Leone national scene, a process to which Jackson's first book contributed.

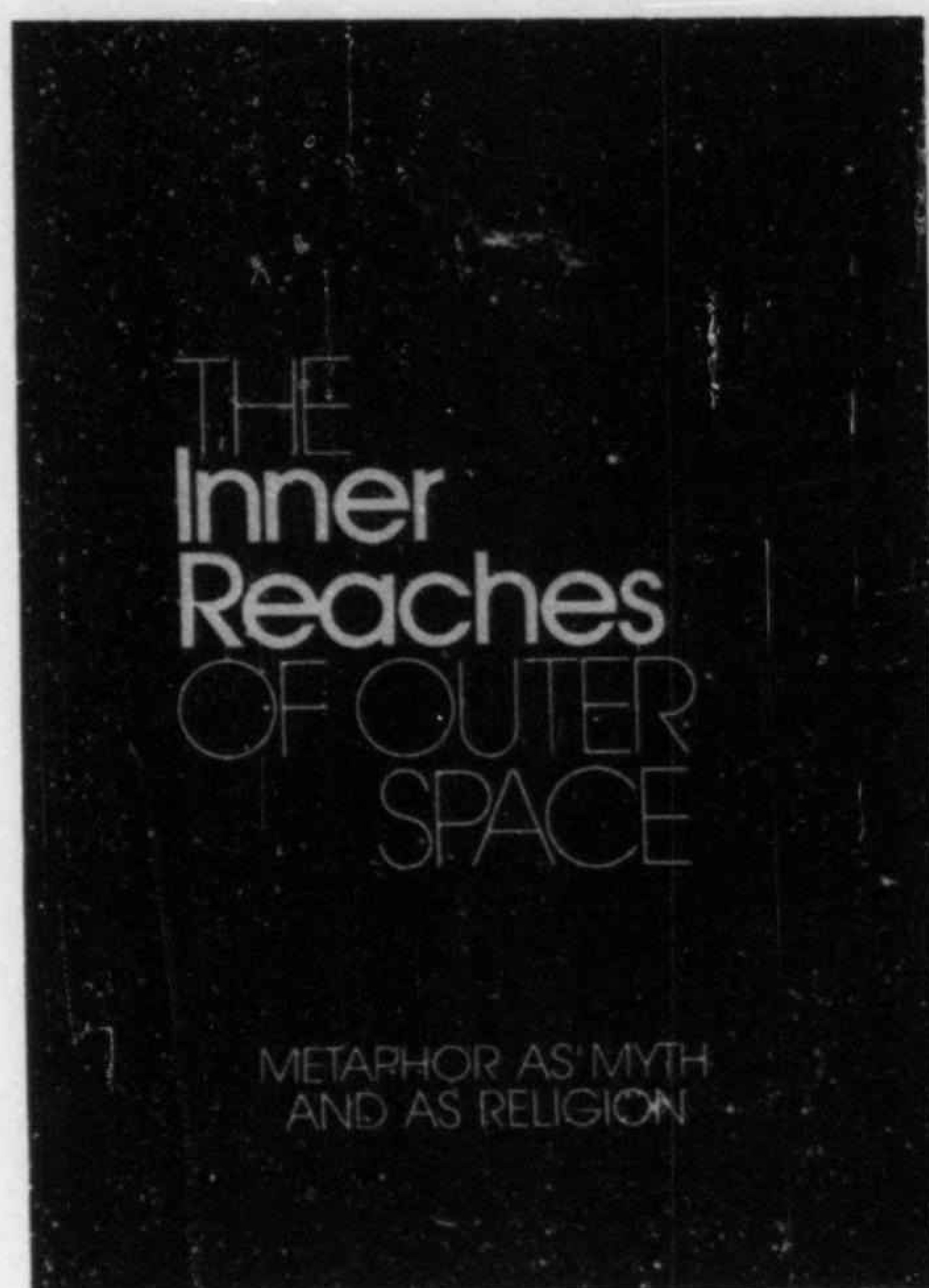
The style is unusual. The history in Part One is written in novel form. Parts Two and Three are autobiographical. Seven poems are interspersed in the text, capturing a mood, a moment, or an image. In brief comments, here and there, Jackson intervenes his purpose: to escape the formulas of anthropological thought and composition. "I've made Kuranko life intelligible but at the expense of the sensible." He aims now to give himself "a task that might be totally authentic—to enter freely and imaginatively in (their) lives," to engage in the "kind of dialogue which might open up the possibility of amity rather than produce bits of information sealed off from life," to capture the "particulars of event and mood," to learn "to write as they might sow. . . . we do not make it grow, we point the way."

The title refers to a Kuranko saying that no two birds trace the same path across the sky, and this is a recurrent image throughout the book, indicating in some places the singularity of individual journeys, in others the overall pattern of intersection, in yet others the seemingly aimless, but effortless and soaring, quality that unites the two.

The enormously puzzling issue in all this is the vision Jackson is sharing with us—fellow Africanists, fellow Europeans, fellow anthropologists—as his audience. The two dominant thrusts of narrative form and style summarized above give two fundamentally different messages: The first forces us to face the extraordinary recapitulations in the

JOSEPH CAMPBELL

■ In this major new statement, Campbell articulates the basic tenets of his pioneering work. He locates the source of all mythological "elementary ideas" in the human imagination and then examines the role of the human body in their "ethnic" manifestations. He argues that mythology can best be defined as "metaphor transparent to the transcendent" and that religion is misunderstood mythology ■ Turning his attention to the Space Age, he posits that the laws of "outer space" are within us, that outer space and "inner space" are therefore one and the same, and that a new mythology is implicit therein. Noting that metaphor is the language of art, Campbell concludes that in the psyches of today's artists are the seeds of tomorrow's mythologies ■ *The Inner Reaches of Outer Space* is available at all bookstores.



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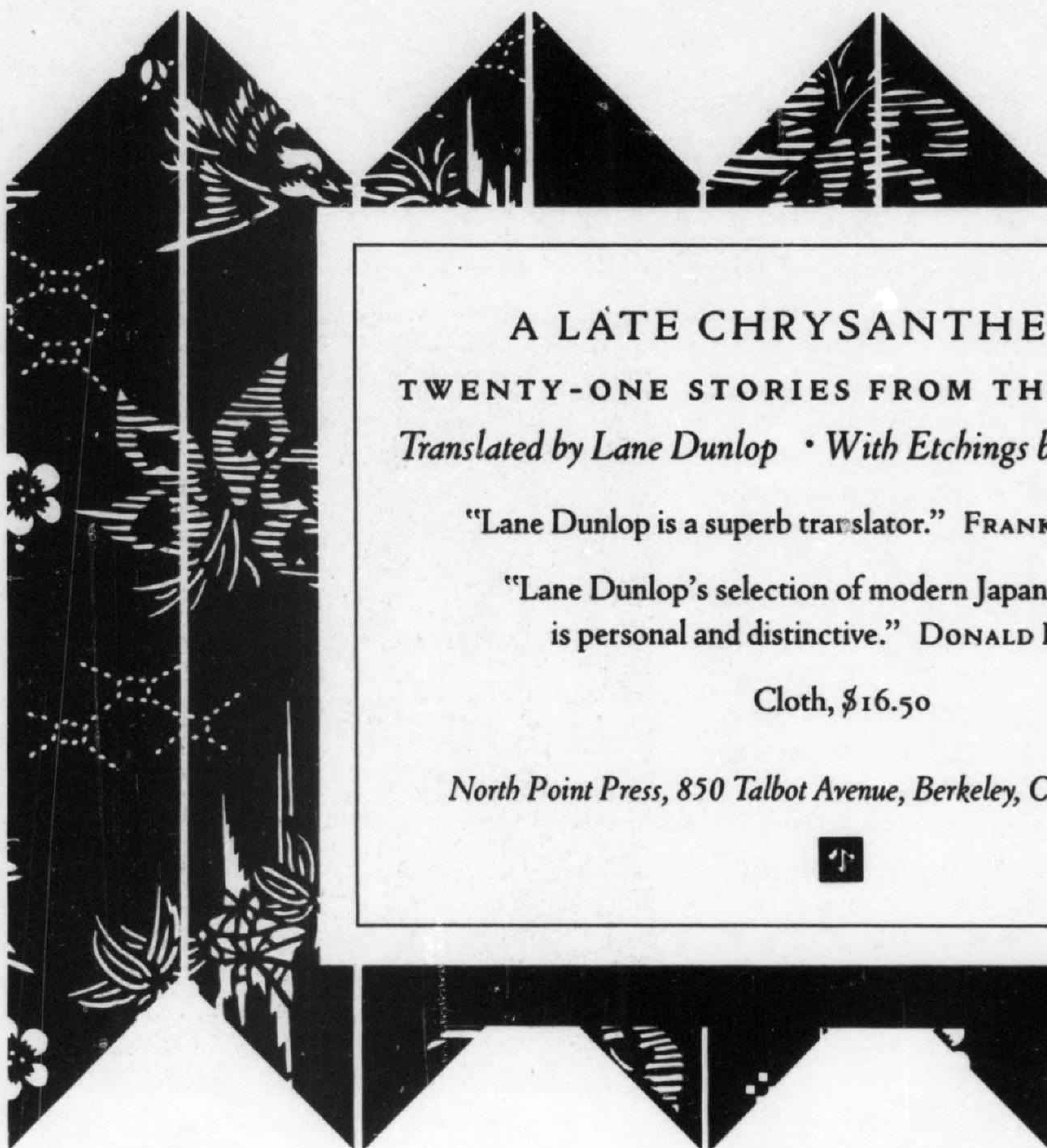
White presence in Africa. The parallels of mood from explorer to anthropologist are striking: the combination of determined ambition and compassless wandering, of intersection and lack of connection, of certainty about the enterprise and vagueness about its realization. The second purports to move us beyond recapitulation, to tell of a journey different in kind, the search for authentic connection.

The confusing thing is that neither is resolved—perhaps, of course, deliberately. The early chapters depicting the truly haphazard intersection of the "flights" of Europeans and Kuranko have vigor of expression and confidence of interpretation, whereas the later chapters depicting the search for connection are often hesitant, tedious, repetitive, and seemingly simple to the point of naiveté. Whereas the events covered in Part One are pivotal and passionate, even if ultimately of little significance, the "events" chosen for description in Parts Two and Three are often insignificant, and one searches in vain for ways in which they might ultimately be pivotal and passionate. Many of the conversations reported verbatim seem to go nowhere, with people's names constantly repeated, as in "I've had enough, Mike" and "Mike, have you eaten?" What one learns then about the author's vision is that it consists of neither methodological illumination, nor personal growth, nor cynicism, nor a sense of overpowering forces being unleashed.

I was so puzzled by the deliberate muting of affect, by the banal level to which the concept of interconnection is reduced, that I returned to his earlier



work and hazard the following illumination. In his book of oral narrative, *Allegories of the Wilderness,* Jackson writes: "By Western standards Kuranko narrative figures seem passionless and flat, and if they set the world to right they do so not because of personal reasons or visions but because they are active agencies through which such changes take place." I can only think that Parts Two and Three of *Barawa* represent an effort to tell his own story as if it were a Kuranko folktale. If so, then the unresolved incongruities are between the vigor of biography and history, and the "everyman" quality of a temporality of the folktale, in which nothing is presented authoritatively enough—or bizarrely or beautifully or cruelly enough—to impose new refraction on our vision.

Perhaps then, it is the repertoire rather than the individual story that matters. Taken together, there may be a cumulative wisdom built up by debates within and beyond the tradition of intersubjective ethnographic writing to which this book adds. The merit of all work done across cultural barriers lies, in the end, not in individual statements but in the quality of debate it feeds: among whom, about what, and with what kind of mutual engagement. Here we need, I think, a more acute sense than Jackson's to show that different flights produce different patterns in the sky, and that different ways of sowing a field produce different qualities of fertility to the growth and the harvest.

Jane I. Guyer

Jane I. Guyer is Associate Professor in the Department of Anthropology of Boston University.

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Image as Insight
By Margaret Miles. Boston: Beacon Press, 1985. Pp. *xiii* + 200. $24.95.

Of all religions, Christianity seems to have been the one most entangled in words. Through the centuries preachers have rambled and theologians have wrangled over conceptual complexities and the finer points of language. Where has all this verbalizing of the intellectuals left the unlettered majority?

Looking. For most of Christian history they have been getting their theology through their eyes—from painting, sculpture, and the architecture of churches.

Wielders of words have tended to look down on this theology of images as crude and primitive, when they have not preempted it as Art. But Margaret R. Miles, professor of Historical Theology at Harvard Divinity School, is one intellectual who takes the power and importance of images very seriously indeed. In her new book, *Image as Insight*, she investigates the role of the visual in several periods of Christian history; her book's subtitle is *Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture*.

We see things very differently from the way our forbears saw them. For one thing, we are overloaded with visual stimuli—we have had to learn to ignore much of what is presented to our eyes, while for them a picture or a statue was

something of an event. But the difference is deeper that that; St. Augustine's influential theory of vision held that it was a two-way operation, with a ray emanating from the viewer to the object viewed. This made seeing a kind of touching, with power for good or evil. Some things could be dangerous to see, while gazing at others could produce physical as well as spiritual benison. And Christian images were experienced in the context of group worship and devotion. "The position in the church building of the various depictions of Christ, the Virgin, saints, and scriptural events indicated their relative importance in the religious life of the community."

The use of images in places of worship goes back well beyond Constantine's state recognition of Christianity in 313. The buildings used for church services during the first three centuries were private houses, necessarily inconspicuous, that were adapted for worship by placing an altar in the largest room. From the pictures in what remains of these, and in the catacombs, it is interesting to note that while there was consistency in both subject matter and treatment, certain themes fundamental to later Christianity do not occur. "We have," writes Professor Miles, "no surviving depiction of the resurrection or ascension of Christ, and the Eucharist cannot be positively identified in pre-Constantinian art. There are no portraits of Christ and no depictions of the crucifixion. Scenes of the Last Judgment are also conspicuously absent. Human figures are depicted praying in the customary position, standing with raised arms . . . . Numerous symbols appear again and again, such as a fish, loaves of bread and the chirho monogram."

Later in the fourth century, as the churches became more elaborately decorated, pagans were eased into their new faith by a melding of Christian and traditional symbols. Tendrils of Dionysian vines curled around Eucharistic chalices, and in one mosaic Christ rides an Apollonian chariot as the sun god. "The ability of the new churches to provide a vivid new context for ancient symbols . . . is probably the most striking aspect of fourth century visual evidence."

The fourteenth century was especially visual. According to Professor Miles, conversions prompted by seeing—a crucifix, a painting, a vision—predominated over those sparked by hearing the word of God. And the churches of Italy, which accumulated great wealth from bequests of victims of the Black Death, spent much of it on paintings and frescos.

An important subject in these fourteenth century pictures was Mary Magdalene, whose cult reached its zenith in Italy. Because tradition (but not scripture) held the Magdalene to have been a prostitute before her conversion, she was a symbol, writes Professor Miles, of the possibility of moving from deep sin to high sanctity. Though the Virgin was certainly loving, she "Could not represent shame and sorrow over sinfulness; nor was she capable of the extreme gratitude of the forgiven sinner. Mary Magdalene's emotional repertoire was much broader than the Virgin's, and thus her figure evoked the heightened emotional response so valued in 14th century piety."

Her image was a balancing symbol to that of the Virgin Mary. She was "quite as flamboyant, uninhibited and sensual" as a saint as she had been a sinner. "She is portrayed as touching Christ—even in Giotto's crucifixion scene—or wanting to touch him (Do not hold me) throughout the fresco

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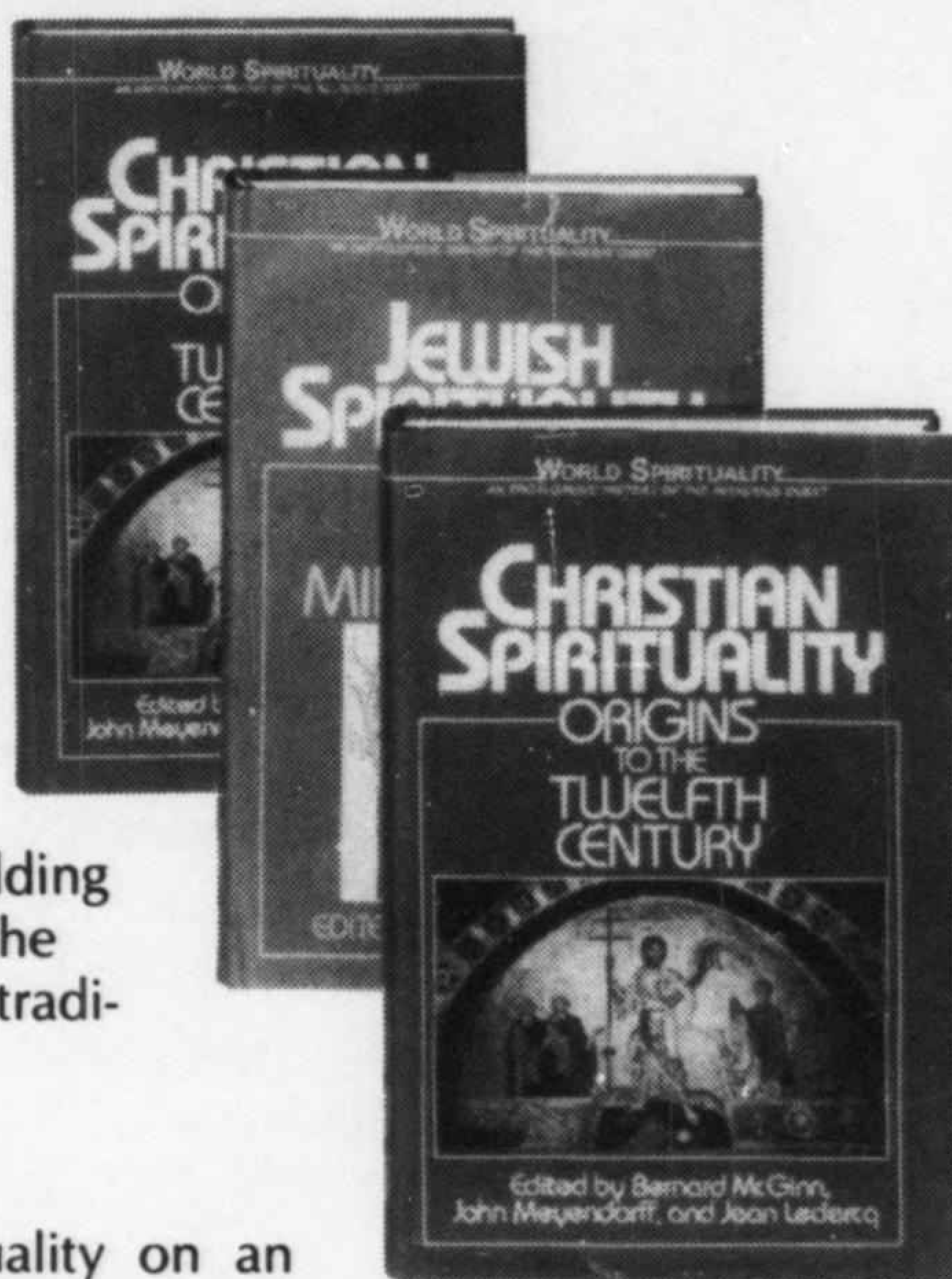

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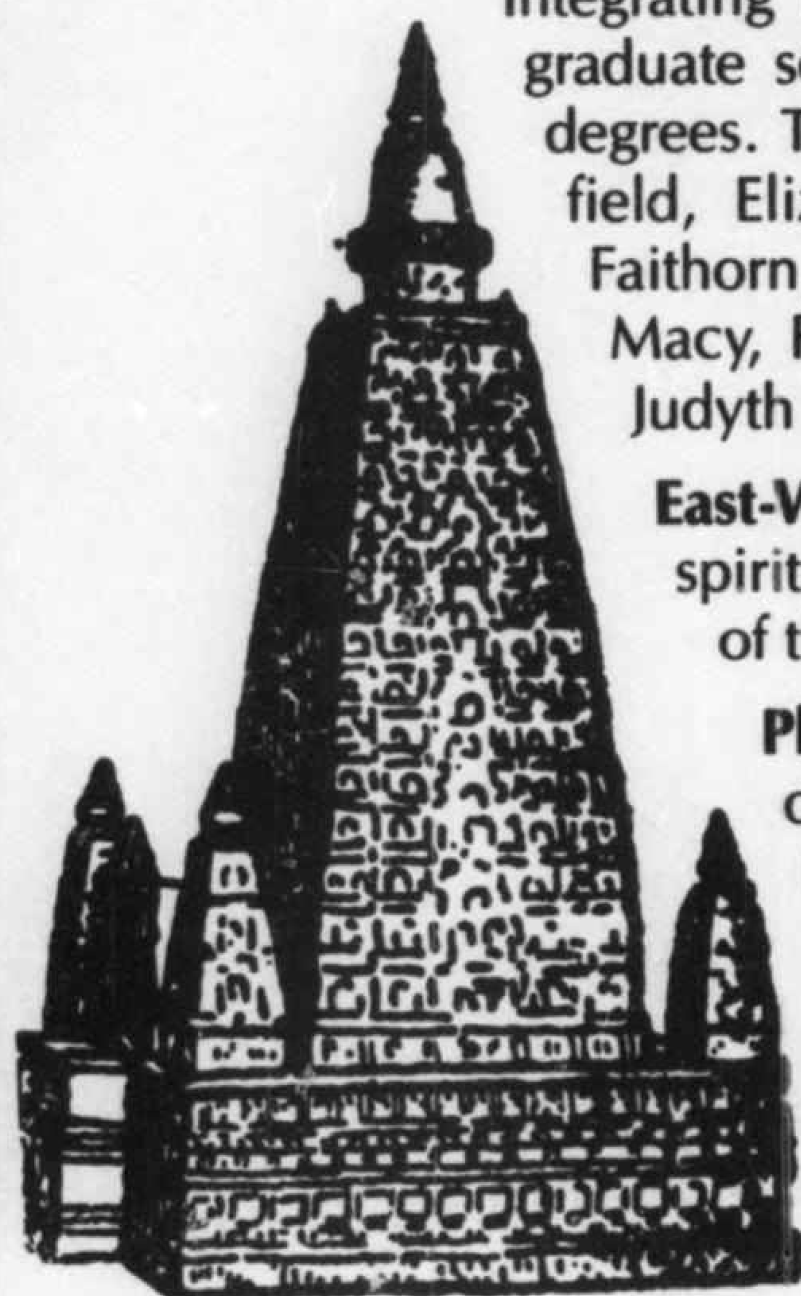

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cycle. She does not become bland, restrained, or polite after her conversion, nor does she cut or cover her flaming hair. And she was prized, in painting and stories by 14th century viewers precisely for her lack of restraint."

A reaction against the churches' rich imagery came with the Reformation in the sixteenth century. "The ears are the only organs of a Christian," said Martin Luther. In a single fortnight Zwingli managed to strip every church in Zurich of its art, and the iconoclastic movement spread rapidly through Swiss and German Protestantism. The temper of the time was expressed in a petition from a group of Strasbourg burghers: "We see all images as evil, for they appeal not to the perfected Christians but to the weak and those whom the Word has not yet possessed."

Not surprisingly, Professor Miles takes a dim view of the image-drenched times we live in, besieged as we are by news photos of crimes and disasters on the one hand and alluring advertisements promising sex and excitement on the other. Television, she notes, supplies a new version of St. Augustine's theory of rays; physiologically, TV rays can cause eye damage and heart-rate changes, psychologically its effects can be deleterious and addictive.

She takes the churches to task for abandoning the potent visual world to the secular consumer culture. They have not only failed to provide Christians with life-enhancing images but failed to train them in critical discrimination and appreciation of the images that beset them.

So, she says, we must do it for ourselves—learn to weed out the images that merely titillate or that attract us to

dangerous or destructive values. And we should also develop our own repertoire of positive images.

"Like Socrates, who listened only to his daemon, we must listen only to the sense of importance and delight that identifies for us a visual image we can use. It may be the label of a can or it may be a painting that we go to see again and again in a museum. A line, a color may be enough to touch us; we will contemplate that line, that color, until we recognize in it, perhaps, the perfect mother none of us has ever known, the stimulating or comforting touch for which we long when we feel 'the mortal cold of the universe.' "

Douglas Auchincloss

Douglas Auchincloss was for many years an editor at Time, *primarily in the Religion Department, but also for the book and essay divisions. He is presently retired and divides his time between Maine, Florida, and New York.*

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Nine-Headed Dragon River: Zen Journals 1969–1982
By Peter Matthiessen. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1986. Pp. *xii* + 288. $16.95.

Peter Matthiessen does not live in a Zen monastery or community. He comes and goes. He sits *sesshin*—extended week-long periods of sitting meditation—but he also sits at home and, on the road, in hotel rooms and tents and, occasionally, on mountain tops. He pursues his family life and his work as a writer interested in social issues as well as in fiction. In this sense he is emblematic if not typical of most American Zen students, and his Zen journals, which span some fifteen years, in many ways sum up the history of American Zen so far.

Matthiessen is not a professional Zen man. Rather he is an inspired amateur in the best sense of the word. And it is just as the record of such a student that his account will have value for so many of his fellow and future companions on the path.

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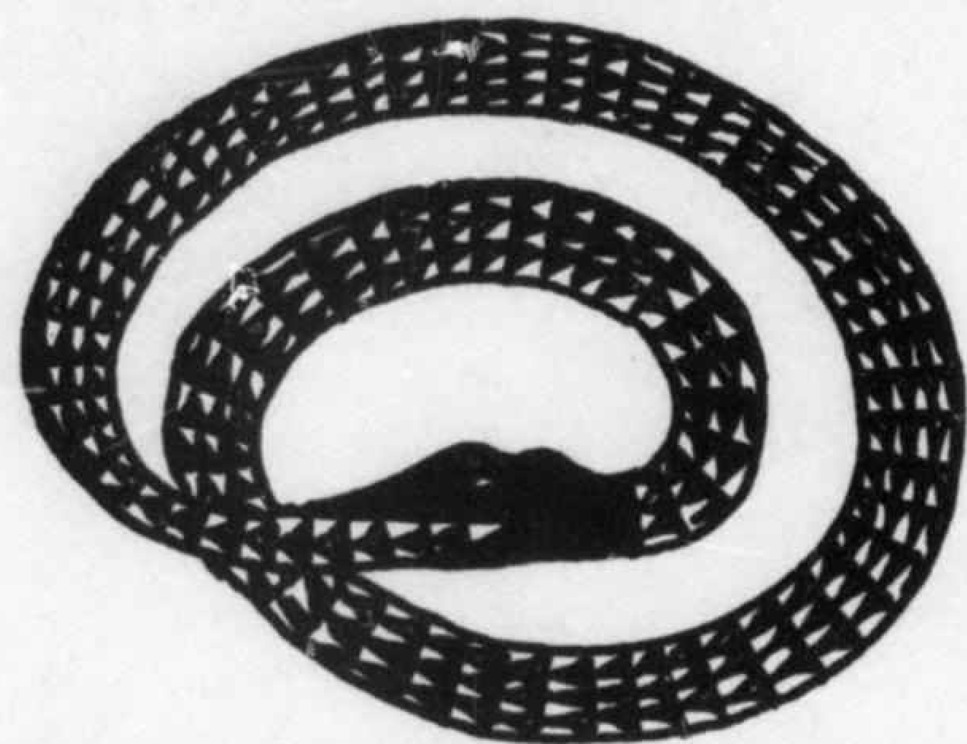

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He encounters his first *roshis* (Zen masters) by chance in the driveway of his home in Sagaponack, Long Island. They happen to be there visiting his wife, Deborah. He has appeared unannounced after a seven-month journey in Africa. Curious, he tries sitting *zazen* (Zen meditation) and decides that this is not for him: "I swore that this barbaric experience would never be repeated; in addition to all that pain, it had been so *boring*!"

But, then, "that winter, to my own astonishment, I found myself sitting *zazen* everyday, not only in my Australian hotel room but on shipboard." His practice is deepened, tragically, when his wife begins to die of cancer, and her teacher Eido-roshi, as well as her fellow students, care for her with compassion and strength. The account of this period is piercing and spare, and the experience of impermanence and suffering—central elements in Buddhist teachings—runs like a thread through the book.

Though Matthiessen gives clear and useful accounts of the philosophical rationale for *zazen* and Buddhist practice, it is not as philosopher or scholar that he comes most alive to the reader. Nor is it in the descriptions (abandoned halfway through the book) of his own meditation experiences. Rather, it is as a naturalist, an observer and participant in the world of nature, that he comes closest to expressing the fundamentally inexpressible experience of Zen. In this, of course, he follows many of the Chinese and Japanese Zen adepts, who like the haiku poet Basho found Zen revealed or embodied in the everyday world of nature—from the grandeur of Mount Fuji to the wonder of a frog, or of fleas and lice, for that matter.

Like his Asian predecessors, Matthiessen finds shining transcendence in the creatures and plants around him—in a Spring Peeper sitting in the dark *zendo*, in a white moth alighting on his aching knee, in a beaver slapping its tail to mark territory in Beecher Lake at Dai Bosatsu Monastery in the Catskills. This is a sensibility—a naturalist's sensibility—to which American Buddhists, or American spiritual seekers of any tradition, might well pay closer attention. Matthiessen's grounding in the natural world, and the precision of an eye trained by both *zazen* and a naturalist's exactness, gives rise to what might be called a prose style of Zen realism. Aside from its own virtues and delights, such an eye might serve as a useful corrective to the lofty flights of metaphysical kite-flying that "spiritual" people seem so prone to. Matthiessen's powers of obser-

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vation keep our feet on the ground—a good place to begin from.

But there is yet another, even more engaging sense in which Matthiessen might be called a naturalist of Zen. In the early days of his *zazen* practice, we learn from these journals, he takes support and delight in imagining or becoming—somewhat hesitantly, for this is not, as it were, by the book—various creatures he has observed. He sits, at dawn, as "a deer in the early woods," or he becomes "an eagle on a mountain ridge, entirely alert and full of its own eagleness . . . gold eye fixed on the first streak of dawn. . . ." Here the Zen naturalist approaches the realm or at least the technique of the shaman—he takes on the power and clarity of the natural world. Not much is made of this—it's presented as his own little trick, which "will fall away like armatures, like scaffolding"—but it is nevertheless all the more charming and convincing for being presented so modestly, as nothing more than what it is.

The journals are divided into three periods: The Rinzai Journals cover the early days of Zen, when *sesshins* were full of "tears, laughter, and small miracles" and the headlong pursuit of *kensho* (seeing into one's true nature) was paramount. The most memorable figure sketched in this section is that of Soen Nakagawa-roshi, the now legendary Zen master who died in 1984. Intent on puncturing his American Zen students' "self-conscious spirituality, 'the stink of Zen,' " Soen once "put a large pumpkin on the roshi's cushion, then hid behind the door, snickering wildly as earnest students prostrated themselves before the pumpkin, only to hear the laughter of the bell that ended their 'confrontation with the roshi' and sent them packing back down stairs to their black cushions."

The second section is made up of excerpts from the Himalayan Journals of *The Snow Leopard*, which won the National Book Award in 1979. This material, which will be familiar to readers of the earlier book, gains rather than diminishes by its placement in this new setting. Here, of course, nature is very much the teacher. Slipping on a narrow ledge, at nearly 15,000 feet, the Zen naturalist reflects that "What is exhilarating is to extend the acute awareness of such split seconds into ordinary moments, as in the moment-by-moment experience of the lammergeier and the wolf, which, finding themselves at the very center of things, have no need for any secret of true being."

In the last section of the book, the Soto Journals, the Zen student finds

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himself a close student and dharma heir apparent of Bernard Tetsugen Glassman-sensei, a Brooklyn-born former aeronautical engineer ten years his junior, whom he accompanies on a pilgrimage to Japan. It is here that the themes of the earlier sections of the book are woven, ever so subtly, into a quieter, more orderly pattern. The Zen student is no longer so impressed with the tears and laughter of his earlier days, and the figure of Dogen, the thirteenth century founder of Soto Zen and the master of "just sitting," comes to the fore. The pilgrimage traces both Glassman-sensei's lineages and the career of Dogen, and the author's journey is now interwoven with the history and settings of those who have, in the course of time, become his Zen ancestors.

In the first sections of the journals, visits to his wife's grave in the meadow of Dai Bosatsu and to his home on Long Island punctuate and mark the years. Later the pilgrimage brings him to the memorials and shrines of Dogen and other great Zen masters of the past. A golden autumnal hue, a tone—the continuity of impermanence again—softly lights the way.

The living Zen masters encountered are deftly drawn in all their humanity, drinking sake and whiskey past midnight, and then rising for *zazen* before dawn. (Some students "want to dehumanize the teacher so that he reflects some personal deity of their own," Tetsugen reflects. "We try to improve a little, but we are who we are.") The most moving encounter is with his old teacher, the great eccentric Soen-roshi, who has been in seclusion for years and who unexpectedly comes out of his retreat to greet the pilgrims. "Nine years later, on the forest path, he was still offering appreciation of his life, cheering a late-blooming cherry, pointing his long stave at the sun. 'The sun, the moon are buddhas, all the human beings of this earth are buddhas, *all* is Buddha! Everything and everybody is a teacher. Sometimes you are my teachers, *you* are so-called roshi! Everybody is so-called roshi, okay? *All* is enlightened as-it-is-now!' "

The journey of the naturalist continues on as well, though his Zen master and travelling companion is not quite as interested as he is. ("It is difficult to interest Tetsugen in wagtails, short of pointing them out as expressions of the One," he remarks.) Still, ever the spiritual and naturalist seeker, Matthiessen searches for the source of an elusive and haunting bird's song. All the Zen masters he meets tell him it is the nightingale, but the naturalist knows that the nightingale is not found in Japan. Final-

ly, he does spot it, as he did not, quite, spot that other elusive quarry of the spiritual search, the snow leopard, in the Himalayas of the earlier book. "A fresh wind down off Fuji-san . . . and the one sound strong enough to carry over wind and river was the light, sweet song of that unseen bird, lost in the leaves of a maple overhead. A moment later I laid eyes on it at last. The bird had none of the magical colors with which I had painted it in my imagination, 'nothing special.' It was small and plain and brown, the *uguisu* or bush warbler. . . ."

Rick Fields

Rick Fields is the author of How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America, *an updated edition of which has just been published by Shambhala Publications. He lives in Boulder, Colorado, where he edits the* Vajradhatu Sun, *a bimonthly Buddhist newspaper.*

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Health Through Balance
By Dr. Yeshi Donden. Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1986. Pp. 252. $10.95.

One of the world's oldest, self-contained, indigenous forms of traditional medicine is that of Tibet. Synthe-

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sized from the surrounding traditions of India, Persia, and China a millennium ago and containing elements that undoubtedly date back to the Greeks, this system has been developed, refined, and preserved atop the isolated Tibetan plateau, merging ultimately with the Buddhist tradition that was also practiced so diligently. Long renowned in Asia for the variety of healing plants found in its Himalayan valleys and for the expertise in both diagnosis and treatment of its physicians, Tibet has supplied doctors to the heads of state of both medieval China and modern India. Indeed, in the widespread destruction of indigenous Buddhist culture by the Chinese during the Cultural Revolution, the Tibetan medical system was the most spared.

Access to the intricacies of Tibet's medicine by the West has come only since the upheavals of 1959, when the Dalai Lama and a portion of his following escaped to India following the takeover by the Chinese. The author of this volume, Dr. Yeshi Donden, a Tibetan monk and premier physician, was soon appointed personal physician to the Dalai Lama and participated in the founding of the Tibetan Medical Center in Dharamsala, India. A monk since the age of six, Dr. Donden was enrolled in the Medical College of Lhasa from the age of 11 to 21, beginning his medical practice in 1951 in rural Tibet and escaping to India in 1959. *Health Through Balance*, an edited collection of Dr. Donden's lectures to a Western audience, serves as both a comprehensive introduction to Tibetan medicine and a window into the style and character of the individual practitioner himself.

One of the great strengths of Tibetan medicine, and one of the reasons that its insights may more easily come to benefit the West than other traditional systems, is the voluminous literature describing every aspect of the practice—from classification of disease, to diagnosis, treatment, and pharmacology. Illnesses are meticulously classified; pulses are read for both diagnosis and prognosis, not just with one finger but with both divisions of each of six fingers, each division reading the health of a different organ system. Urine is analyzed for color, vapor, froth, temperature, odor, and sediment, the various combinations of which all indicate different specific disturbances. Medicines are mixed from scores of ingredients, with each being rigorously catalogued. Students of Tibetan medicine traditionally memorized entire medical texts, then gained the practical experience necessary to bring their knowledge alive. Most previous introductions to Tibetan medicine written for the West have essential-

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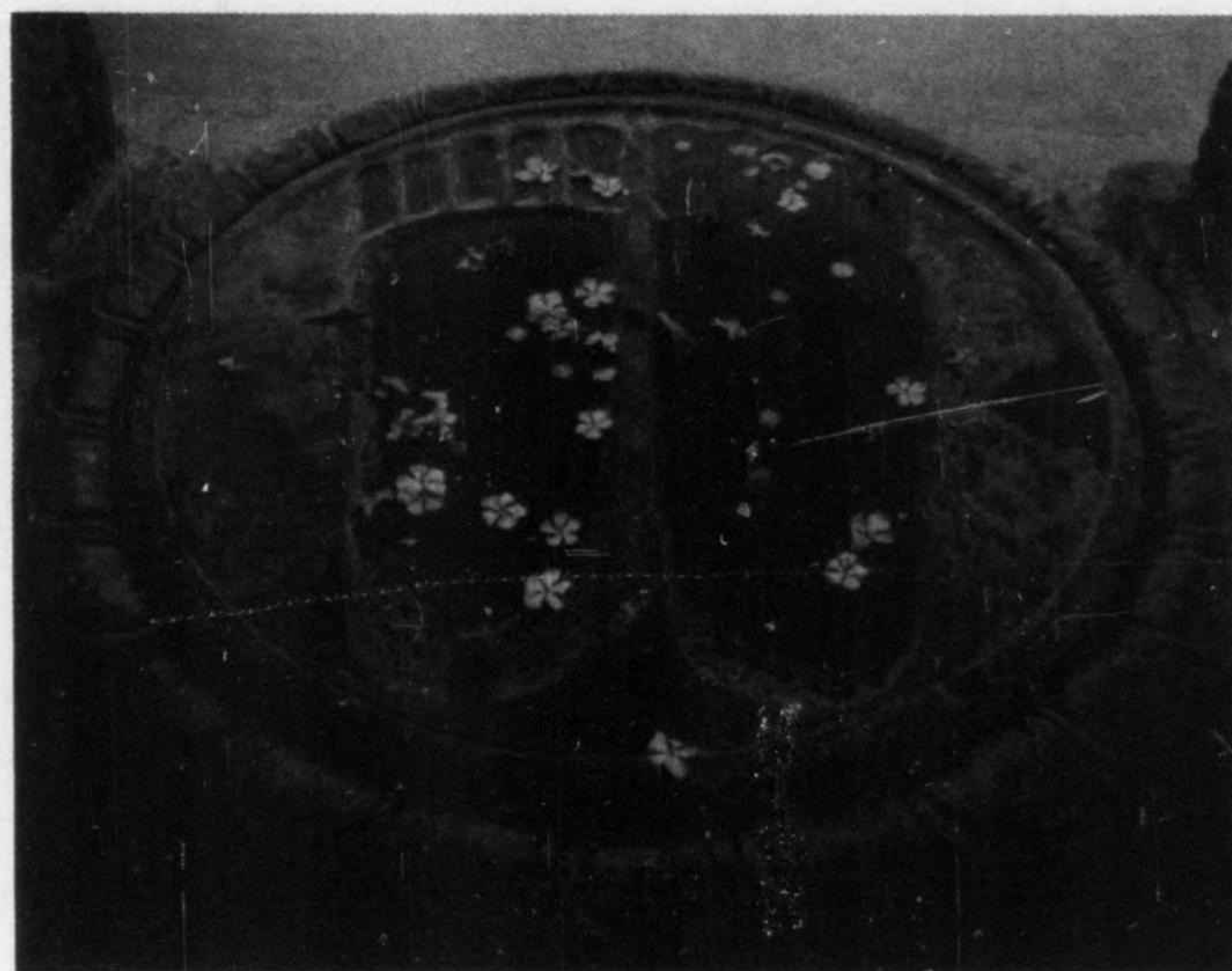

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ly outlined the divisions of the most commonly used Tibetan medical text. There is evidence of this recitation in Dr. Donden's volume, as well; at times it is not clear what is original to Dr. Donden and what he is quoting. Yet the beauty of this book, due in good part to the quality of the editing and translation, is that the living practitioner comes through so clearly.

To witness Dr. Donden's examination of a patient, his concentration as he reads the pulses and examines the urine, his skill in eliciting symptoms, and the accuracy of his diagnoses makes one appreciate the great subtlety, complexity, and power of the Tibetan approach. Dr. Donden's lectures reveal the incredible density of a medical system particularly attuned to the infinite variety of physical, mental, and spiritual symptoms, none of which are slighted or ignored. His lectures act as brush strokes that not only reveal the outline of the tradition but hint at the substance that lies within. The text is liberally sprinkled with questions from the Western audience, the answers to which allow Dr. Donden's humor and insight to emerge. That an effective balance is reached is a tribute to all involved with this project. The work serves not only as a medical reference text but also as an introduction to basic Tibetan Tantric precepts and as a portrait of the work of a very compelling individual.

As befits a work of Tibetan origin, there is also a moral and spiritual dimension. The "eighteen malignant disorders that were prophesied for the future due to sentient beings engaging more in the non-virtues and due to the construction of new materials" are all detailed. The power of visualization and meditation to activate inherent healing properties is described. Life span, death and spirit pulses are described, as is the psychic anatomy of "winds" and "nerves" that figure in all Oriental medical systems. With all of its expertise, Tibetan medicine does not claim ultimate success; it rests on a philosophical premise succinctly put forth by Dr. Donden: "The root is beginningless ignorance. Due to its force we are caught in cyclic existence, in the round of repeated birth, aging, sickness, and death. Ignorance is with us like our own shadow; thus, even if we think that there is no reason to be ill, even if we think that we are in very good health, actually we have had the basic cause of illness since beginningless time."

Mark Epstein

Mark Epstein is a psychiatrist in private practice in Manhattan who has a longstanding interest in the relationship between Buddhist and Western psychologies.

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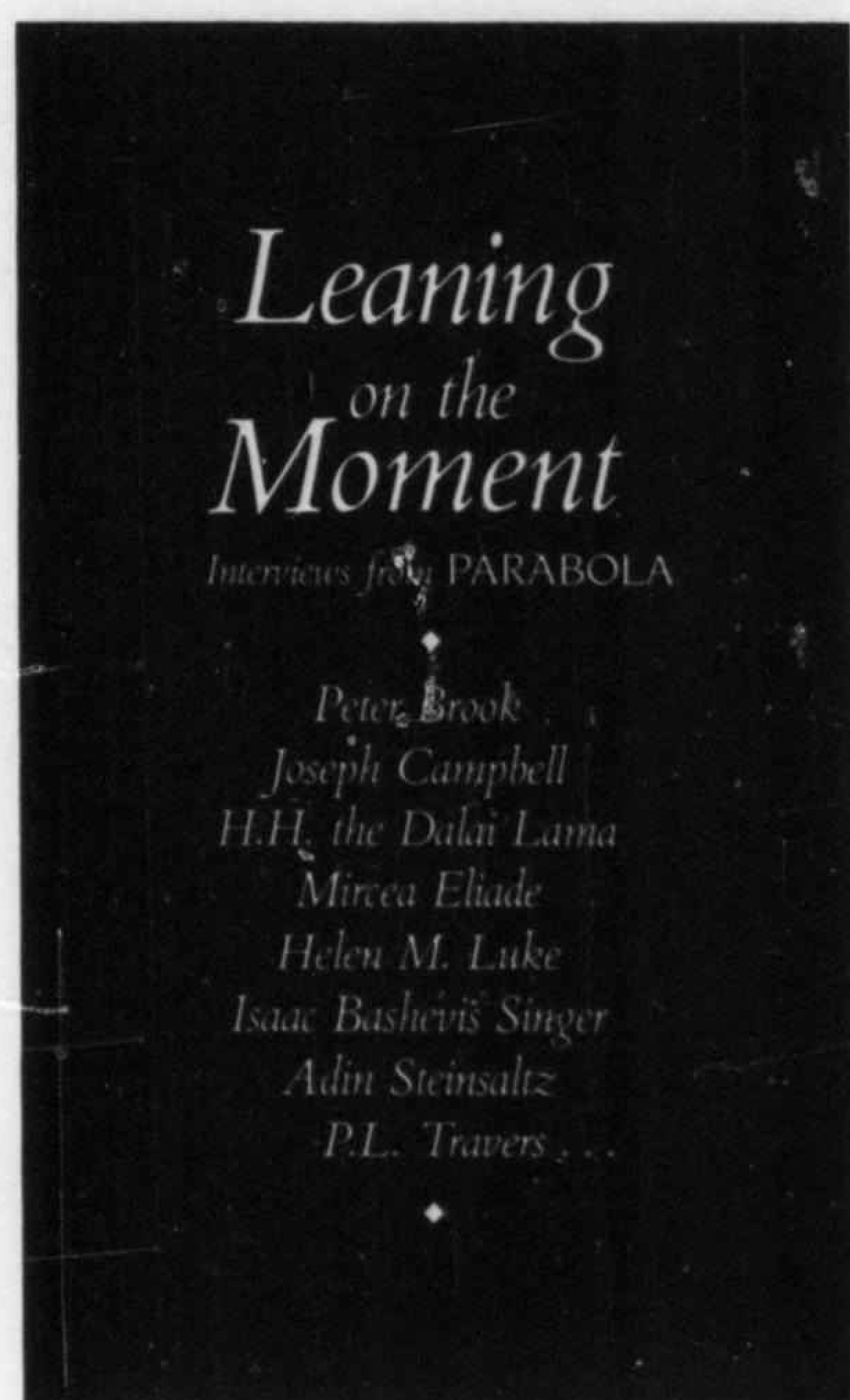

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November, 1986. 272 pp., photographs. $13.95, hardcover.
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ISBN: 0-930407-02-4.

"In order to engage in dialogue," the poet Antonio Machado once said, "first ask a question. . . then listen." For more than 10 years the editors of Parabola *have engaged in such dialogue with distinguished and truth-bearing persons—the curiosity, clarity, and modesty manifested in these questions have elicited an illumination of thought that will always remain a source of concrete but timeless wisdom.*

—Jonathan Cott

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—Janwillem van de Wetering

PARABOLA

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(*Continued from page 5.*)

Last week a copy of the magazine PARABOLA was delivered to me in the mail; and in the letters column was one by a Christian minister, complaining that the magazine always quotes the King James Version of the Bible instead of one of the modern translations. The editors responded by saying they liked the KJ translation better and gave as example the verse "The Kingdom of God is within you," which modern versions translate as "The Kingdom of God is among you" and "The Kingdom of God is in your midst."

I had to chuckle to myself because all these years I have been reading Eastern religious writings, the one saying of Jesus that keeps appearing is "The Kingdom of God is within you."

I prefer the translation "The Kingdom of God is in your midst." I prefer to think that the presence of God in our being together is fully as real, and as crucial, as the presence of God in our solitude. One can't say in theory whether one is more important than the other, but we can testify to what we know. And I know that God comes alive when we sing and pray *together*, and when we look each other in the eye, and when we listen carefully to each other, and when we embrace as friends or hold each other in a comforting way. The exalting religious experience may come to us when we are alone, but it blossoms from the stem of communion.

Christians are more accustomed to hear words like St. Paul's: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). According to him, fulfilling the law of Christ means being so intimate with one another that we share our burdens. You help me carry my burdens, and I'll help you carry yours; thus in Christ do our burdens become lighter, even a joy! The message is: you get enlightened in concert, not on your own.

"To fall down you manage alone, but it takes friendly hands to get up" (Yiddish proverb). So I ask, Who doesn't fall down?

In his preaching, Jesus always encouraged people to reach out. Thus we have the Parable of the Good Samaritan: The lawyer asks how one attains eternal life? Jesus' answer is uncomplicated: We inherit eternal life by seeing someone in need and by responding compassionately.

Rev. Finley Schaef
Brooklyn, New York

I want to write to you first of all to express my great admiration for the articles by D.M. Dooling that appear regularly in your magazine. I have just read "Through a Glass Darkly" and find this piece as thought-provoking as the others in earlier editions.

Secondly, I want to make one comment, pertaining more or less to "Through a Glass Darkly." I have spent many years as a teacher—with people of many different ages—and have always been surprised to realize that most people have never thought much about the light that God created on the first day of creation (and, by the way, I am pretty sure that I myself read this chapter a number of times without ever noticing this "discrepancy"): on the first day God said "Let there be light: and there was light," but then He did not create

the sun until the fourth day, verse 14—eleven verses later! A difference, then, is presented between the light and the light. The first light has nothing to do with the sun; the second is the light of the sun.

Now if D.M. Dooling wants us, as she asks in her article, to *look* at this man who has been created in the image of God, the question naturally arises (or it is the question I am suggesting) concerning the light we need to do this looking. Do we use the light created on the first day, the light created on the fourth day, or both? I am not trying to be facetious. As a matter of fact, to the extent that I *am* asking a question, I do not believe that the question has an answer. The question itself is what, for me, is important.

What is the light that God created on the first day? Intelligence? Consciousness? Awareness? Perhaps each person will have an entirely legitimate answer to offer. The one thing I am sure about is that the light He created on the fourth day is a lot easier to talk about and, probably, a lot easier to use. D.M. Dooling goes on, in her article, to speak of the "real guilt" that humans seem to have. Could it be because of our negligence of our own likeness to God as expressed in the idea of the image of God: "So God created man in his own image"? It seems to me that we have to use the light created on the first day—that is to say, our *own*. And maybe that's *very* hard.

By the way, I was deeply touched by Jacques Lusseyran's article several years ago in the edition of PARABOLA entitled "Obstacles" (Vol. V, No. 3). Mr. Lusseyran spoke of his accident at the age of eight, an accident that rendered him blind. His phrase was: "The light never went out." For me, he was talking about that first day light!

Dick Killen
Kilchberg, Switzerland

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Title of Publication: PARABOLA. Frequency of issue: quarterly. Location of Office of Publication: 656 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012. Location of Business Offices of the Publisher: 656 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012. Name and address of Associate Publisher: Joseph Kulin, 656 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012. Editor: Lorraine Kisly, 656 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012. Managing Editor: Beverly Moon, 656 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012. Owner: Society for the Study of Myth and Tradition, Inc., 656 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and other Security Holders: None.

Extent and Nature of Circulation (first number gives average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months, second number gives actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date): Total no. of copies printed (23,262; 24,336); Paid Circulation through dealers, carriers, street vendors, and counter sales (3,925; 3,937); Mail subscription (15,071; 15,283); Total paid circulation (18,996; 19,220); Complimentary and other free copies (392; 347). Total distribution (19,388; 19,567). Copies not distributed, office use, left over, unaccounted, spoiled after printing (1,394; 1,619); Returns from news agents (2,480; 3,150). Total (23,262; 24,336).

I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete, Joseph Kulin, Associate Publisher, October 1, 1986.

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Page 52 Keaka, Cameroon. *Ibid.*

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Page 68 *Krishna Venugopala.* Bronze, eighteenth century. British Museum, London.

Page 70 Abraham. Cod. Hebr. 37, folio 26 recto. Hamburg, Staats-und Universitätsbibliothek.

Page 73 Mnemosyne, mother of the Muses, with Calliope. Greek vase. National Museum, Syracuse.

Page 74 The rainbow-serpent Julunggul. Australian.

Pages 78–82 Illustrations by Daniella Dooling.

Page 88 Mask. Galwa, Galson. University Museum, University of Pennsylvania.

Page 89 *Narihira Viewing the Waterfall, Yoshino, and Tatsuta.* The Mary and Jackson Burke Foundation. Photo: Otto E. Nelson.

The Singer Ur-Nanshe. Museum of Damascus. Photo: Lorenzo de Masi.

Seated God. Museum of Damascus. Photo: Lorenzo de Masi.

Seated figure of Amida Buddha with hands in meditation. Japanese: Momoyama period, c. 1600 CE.

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PROFILES

Mircea Eliade (1907–1986) is known throughout the world for his scholarship in the history of religions and as the author of numerous novels and plays. A native of Romania, he spent the last decades of his life teaching alternately in both Paris and Chicago. His most recent works include *A History of Religious Ideas* and the *Encyclopedia of Religion*.

Martha Heyneman, a poet and essayist, is an editor of *A Journal of Our Time*.

Paul Jordan-Smith, a freelance writer and storyteller, is also a Contributing Editor to PARABOLA.

Alan McGlashan is a psychiatrist and the author of several books including *The Savage and Beautiful Country* and *Gravity and Levity*. During the second World War, he served as a pilot in the Royal Air Force. In addition, he has been an officer on a tramp steamer, a drama critic, and a country doctor.

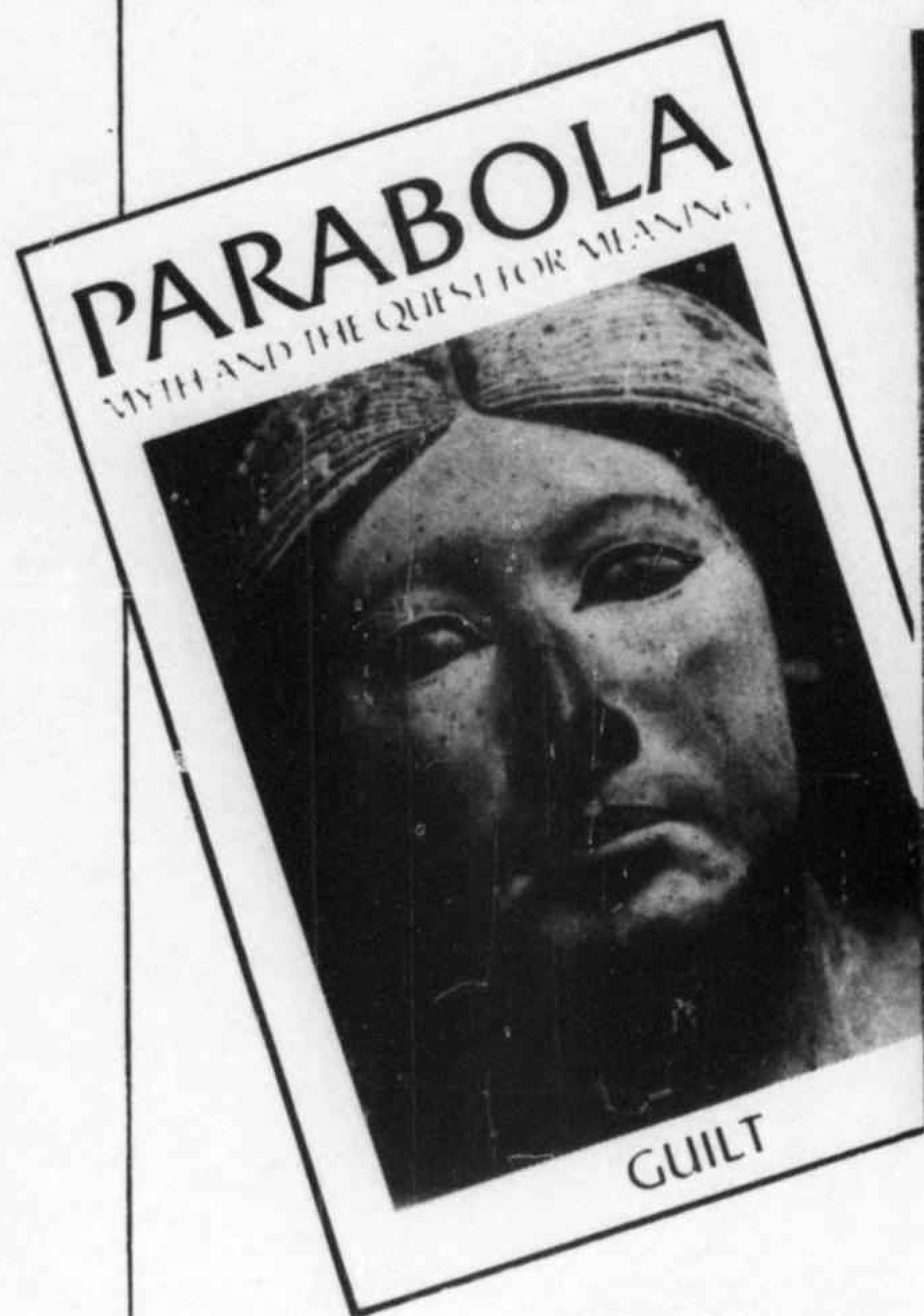
Padma Perera has published three collections of short stories, one in India, one in the United States, and the latest in England (*Birthday, Deathday*, Women's Press, 1985). Her writing appears in the *New Yorker* and elsewhere.

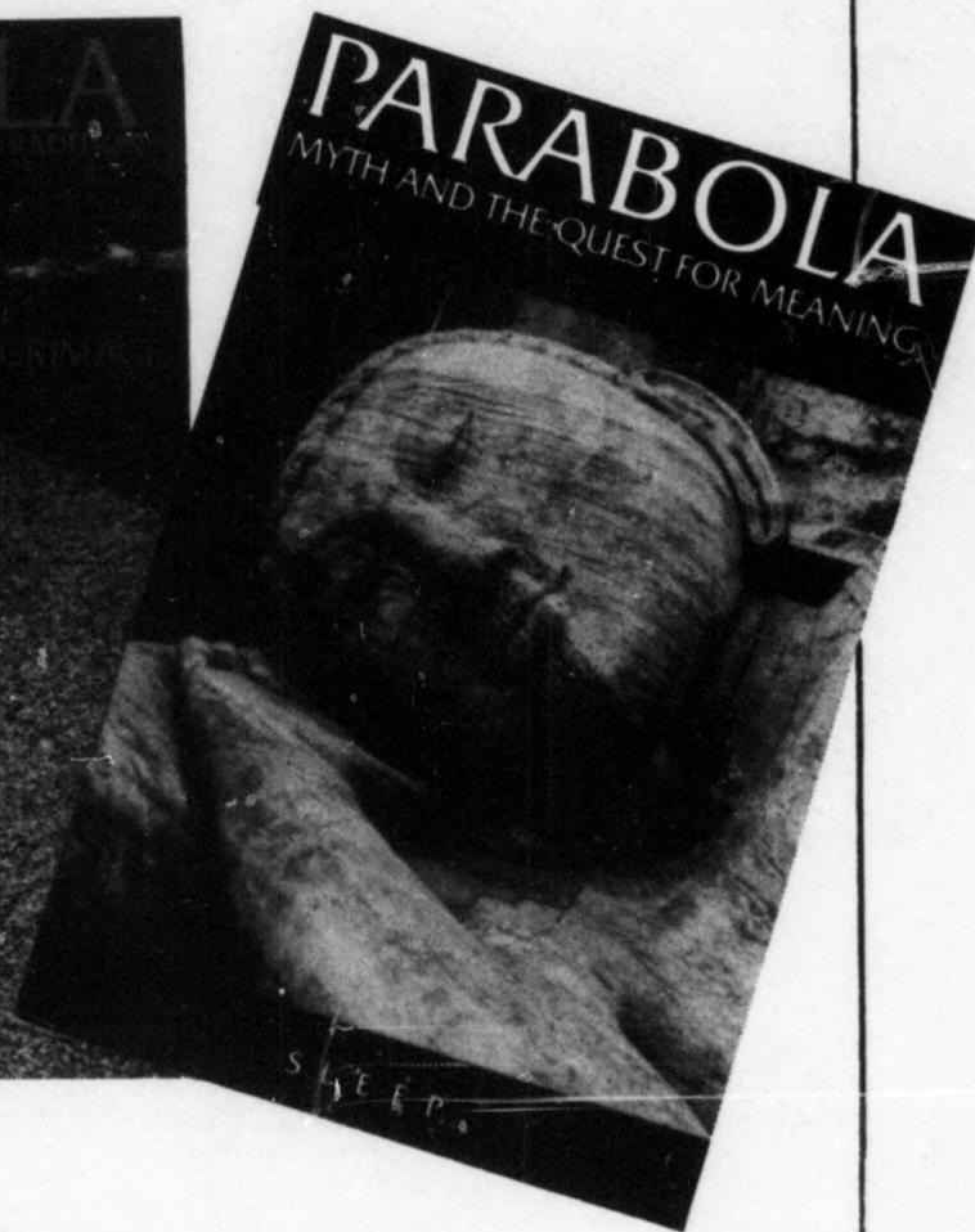
Daniel Schillaci teaches in the Critical Studies Division at California Institute of Arts, where he also is editor of the magazine *Articles*.

P.L. Travers, a Consulting Editor to PARABOLA since the magazine began, is the author of the Mary Poppins books, as well as of *Friend Monkey*, *The Fox in the Manger*, *About Sleeping Beauty*, and *Two Pairs of Shoes*.

Anne Twitty is a storyteller, poet, teacher, and the Epicycle Editor of PARABOLA.

A SPIRITED GIFT





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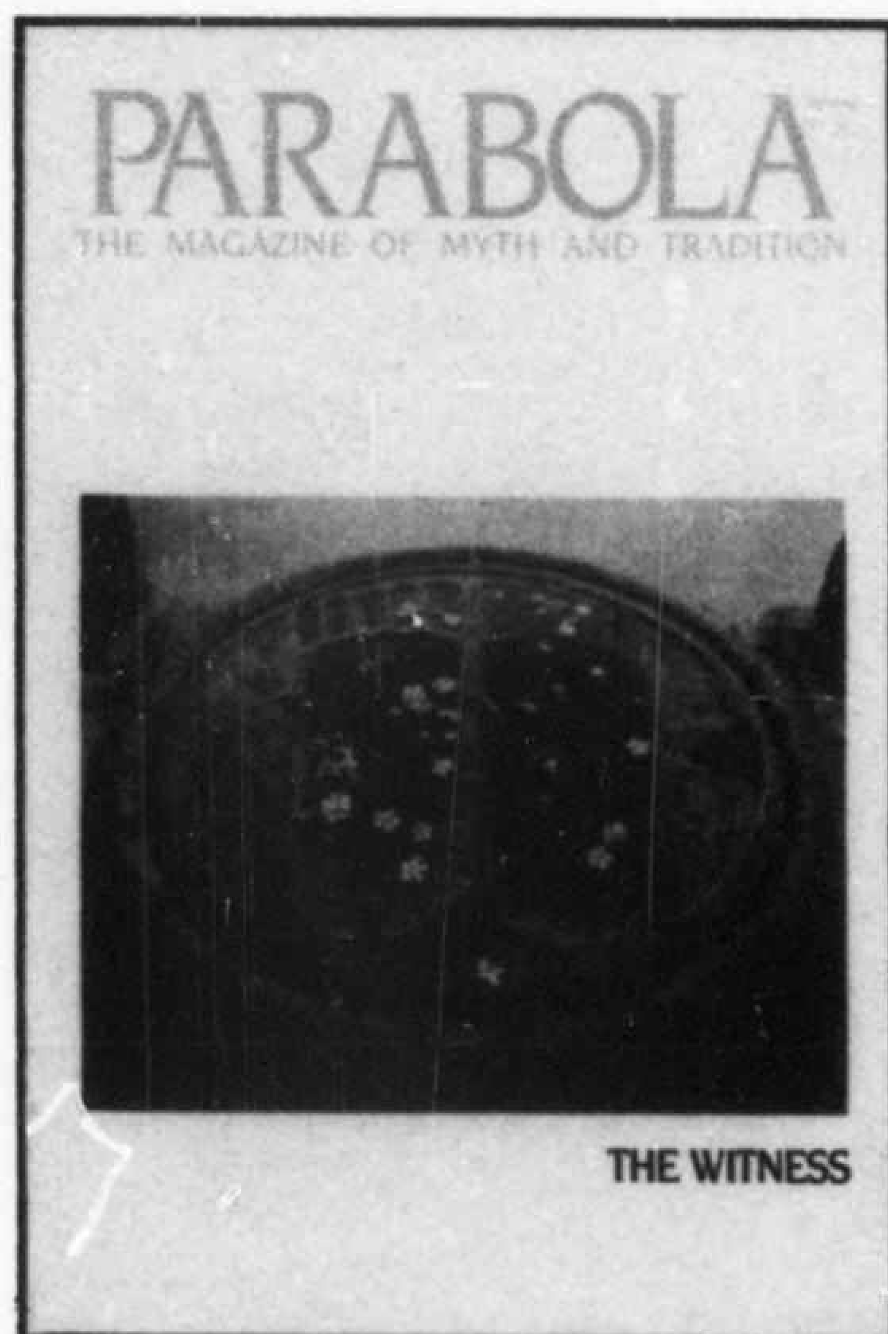

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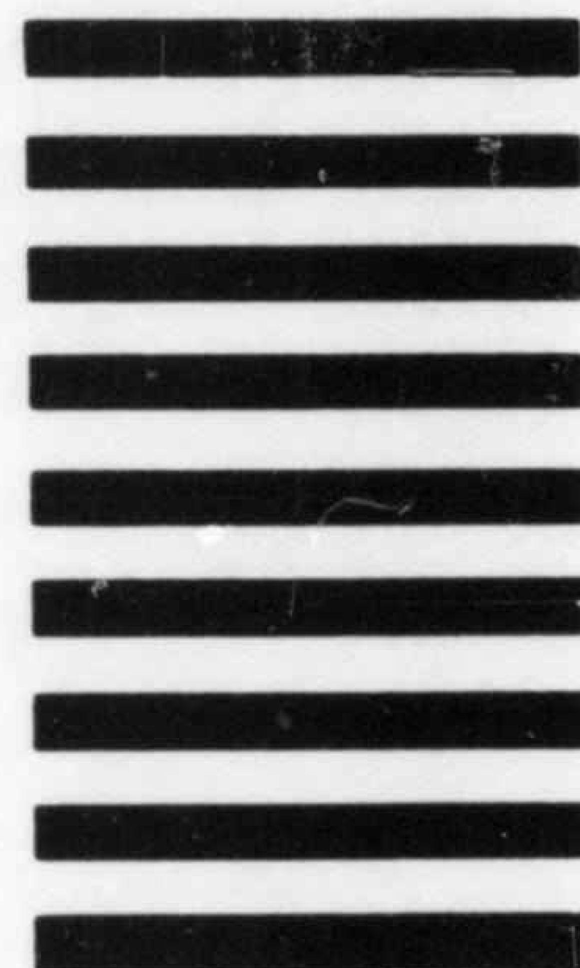

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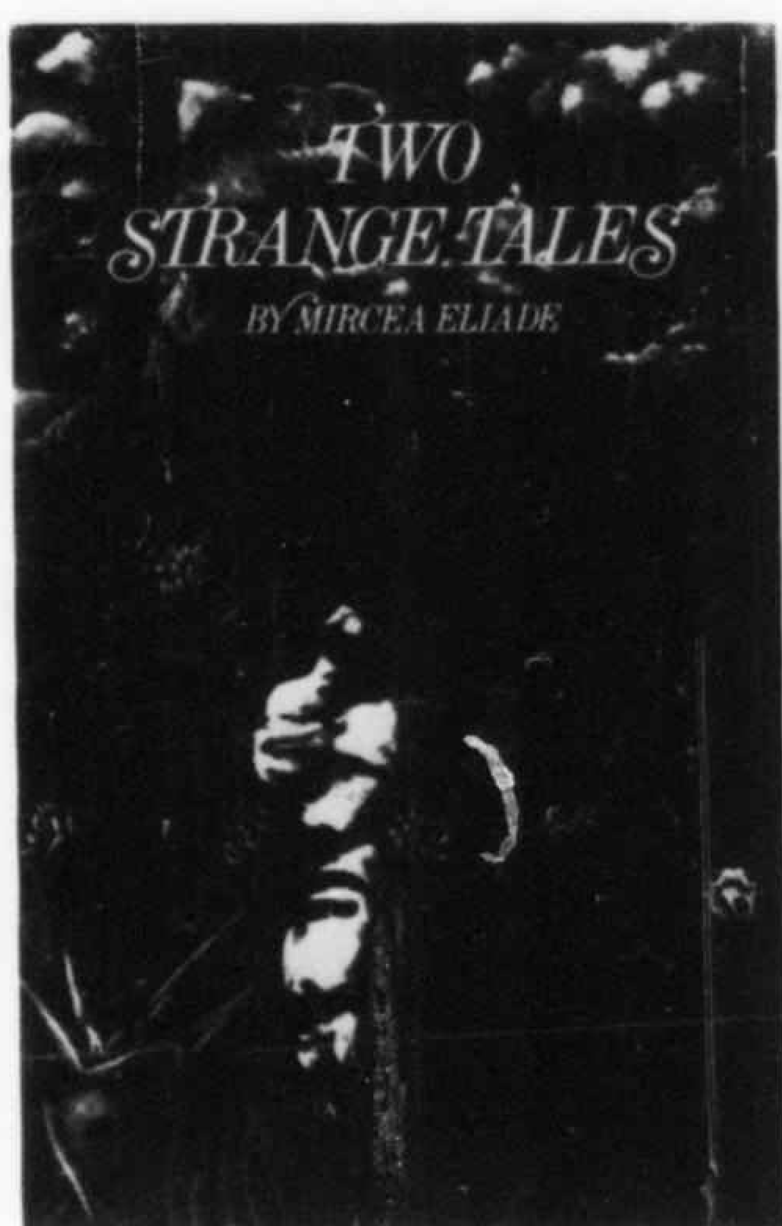

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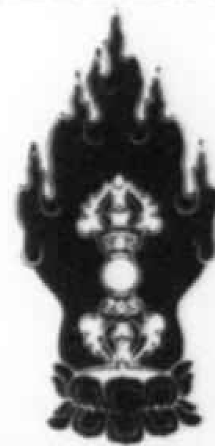

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