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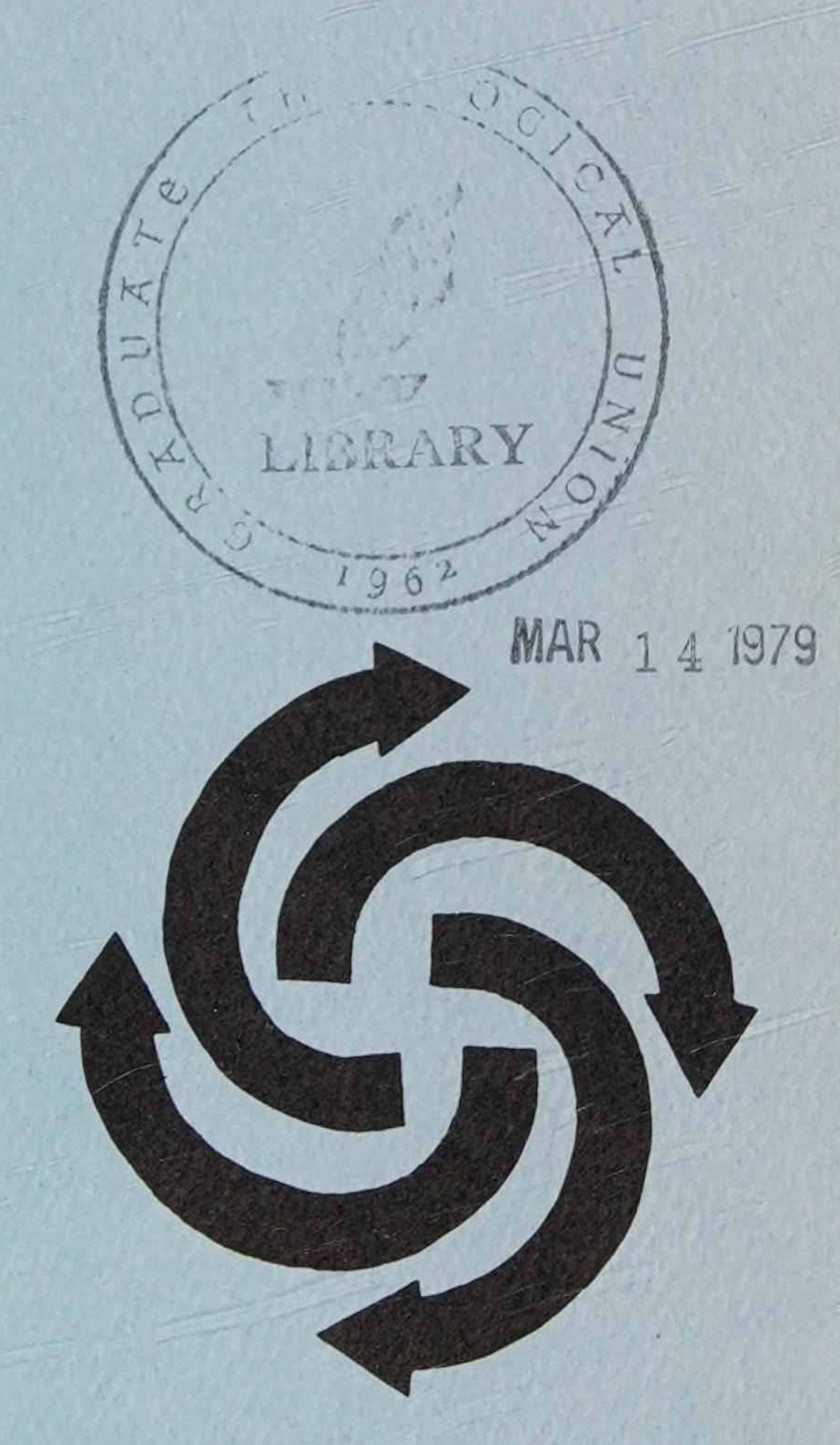

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VOLUME II, NUMBER 1 SPRING 1979

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Subscription rate: $12.50 for individuals
$15.00 for institutions
(Add $2.00 for foreign subscriptions)

Correspondence on editorial matters and subscriptions, changes of address, and other business matters should be sent to the Editor, **Studia Mystica**, California State University, Sacramento, California 95819.

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Cover design by Sr. Marie-Celeste o.c.d.

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Volume II, Number 1, Spring 1979

Printed in the United States of America
By Barlow Printing, Novato, California

Studia Mystica is published quarterly at
California State University, Sacramento, California 95819

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Taizé and Contemplation: A Personal Approach

Mary Anne McPherson Oliver

The ecumenical, monastic community of Roger Schutz is personally known to thousands from all over the world, young and old, who have travelled to Taizé. Some stay hours, some longer, but the most perfunctory visit usually leaves an indelible impression. Catholics expecting a monastery with high walls are surprised to find but a small, Burgundian village of yellowish stone and red tile. Expecting to find monks forward in choir pews, they find them on plain, backless or straight-backed chairs, in the midst of the people. Visitors, including children and "lapsed" Christians, are overwhelmed by the beauty of the monastic services, the intensity of the prayer, and the hospitality of the brothers, which instantly creates the impression that one is part of a large family where social and international barriers do not exist.

I stumbled on Taizé nearly ten years ago, quite by accident. Planning to spend a year in a small university town, we found no lodging for a family available in Dijon, and were en route to Aix-en-Provence when we made a detour, curious to see the place mentioned briefly but appreciatively in a book on ecumenism by the French theologian, Yves Congar. I, too, expected high walls and inscrutable inhabitants, but found instead a beaming, ebullient brother in grey trousers and shirt, whose responses, I was to learn, ranged from "Très bien!", to "Tr-r-ès, très bien!", to "M-m-magnifique!" I, too, expected to watch from afar the saying, more or less impressive, of monastic prayers, but was able to participate immediately in the proceedings, swept away by the quality of the music and by the naturalness (once the first shock was over) of the silences. We went for ten minutes and stayed a year.

I have been asked many times what Taizé is like, and find over and

over how complicated it is to explain, how difficult to give an adequate impression of the place. Fortunately, much has already been written about its history and ecumenism—about the prior's first two years alone at Taizé, praying three times a day and helping Jewish refugees escape from the Nazis, about the boys he and a growing group of brothers raised after the war, about their tireless ecumenical efforts. In 1948 these Protestant brothers obtained permission from the Bishop of Autun to use the small, twelfth-century Romanesque church in the village. By 1961, visitors routinely overflowed that tiny church, and a larger one was built with the help of a German "Sign of Reconciliation" group. Dedicated to the reconciliation of "the father with his son, the husband with his wife, the believer with the man who cannot believe, and the Christian with his separated brethren," it was inaugurated on the Feast of the Transfiguration, August 6, 1962, in the presence of an Orthodox metropolitan, an Anglican bishop, and Lutheran and Reformed pastors. There are now seventy or so brothers from different countries and continents, from over twenty different church traditions (including the Roman Catholic), and relations with the Eastern Orthodox churches are very cordial.

Much has also fortunately been written about the increasing numbers of young people who began to come—1,200 at Easter in 1966, 1,600 in 1967. By 1969 one could count representatives from forty-two different countries. To focus the energies of these young people, the prior began annoucing yearly themes for reflection along with the proclamation of the Joyful News, and in 1970, to an attendance of 2,500, with the concurrence of an international team (Indian, South-East Asia, Latin America, Africa, North America, and Europe), he called for preparation for a Council of Youth, inspired by the council of the first Christians in Jerusalem, to overcome divisions and reinforce the bond of communion among Christians. During the first year of preparation, 20,000 people from sixty-five countries made the trip to Taizé, alone or with friends. The Easter service that year saw the dismantlement of the front end of the large, new church so that tents could triple the space to accommodate the 6,500 who came. In 1972, the next year, the numbers themselves almost tripled to 16,000, requiring three huge circus tents, entirely covering the large plaza in front of the church, and when the Council of Youth opened in 1974, even the circus tents were not enough. Befitting the prior's characterization of the Council as a "long march across the desert," the church moved again, this time across the road, into six enormous tents, a central tent surrounded by five others in portions of which simultaneous translation was provided in German, Spanish, Italian, English, and Portuguese. Cars

were not even allowed on the hill. Those coming had to make the last of the pilgrimage on foot. The tents large and small spread endlessly into the fields. There were forty to fifty thousand people present.

Of course, the prior's books have also all been translated, as have some written by other brothers, and one can even find readily accessible in Peter C. Moore's *Tomorrow is Too Late* excellent and fairly comprehensive descriptions of the prior's background, the physical setting and set-up, the variety of visitors, the daily work and significant accomplishments of the brothers, the structure of their community life, their worship, rule, and commitments.

Taking all this for granted, then, I would here respond to the question of what Taizé is like by going directly to its core, by-passing the rich complexity of its many themes (the risen Christ, the violence of the peacemaker, the reconciliation of the churches, etc.). But what is the core? Francis Walter well defines the essence of Taizé in a most succinct statement in the *SIP Newsletter* (the Monthly Bulletin of the Selma Inter-Religious Project, No. 36, Nov. 1970):

> It is very hard to describe. The style is what predominates, the openness, everything "provisional," yet the feeling of roots locked into eternity. The worldly visitor is unbalanced by what he feels. A sincere and joyful hospitality is offered. Yet within this hospitality the brothers clearly convey that their first calling is to contemplate the face of God, not to entertain and satisfy their guests.

To describe this first calling, then, I would add to what has been written the distillation of my memories of three, four, eight, and nine years ago (I kept all "documentation" that fell into my hands, but took no notes at the time), filtered through my non-male and non-monastic mind, and informed by the discovery (which the brothers proclaim continually but which no one can at first bear to believe) that the important thing about the community is not any of the elements which one can isolate, describe, or imitate, but its existence as a living model of individual and communal encounter with God. What one can take home from Taizé is not a theology, a liturgy, or a program for social action, but a glimpse of the Spirit at work, and a progressive, personal awakening to the communion of saints and to the Spirit within. It is about the contemplative side of Taizé that I would write.

But, some may wonder, can this really be called a contemplative community? Its founder and many of its brothers come from religious traditions which long ago threw out monasticism, its ecumenical vocation calls for working outside the community all over the world, and running a youth-gathering of 45,000 does not seem exactly conducive

to contemplation. The fact that a family of four was allowed to settle in the village for a year seems in itself an anomaly for a "monastery." Technically, I suppose, some would classify it as a "mixed" community, but that designation has always seemed to me to imply a watering-down of the contemplative by the active life. I prefer to think of Taizé as I believe they think of themselves—a worshipping, contemplative community whose existence as such has gradually involved them more and more visibly in the life of the world. It is certainly the discipline and strength of the contemplative life which allows them to carry on their own work and at the same time receive guests, the 45,000 as efficiently, humanely, and warmly as the 1,600, with no commercialism and no outside police force. Doubtless the strain was great. I did overhear one brother in the crush quietly urging another: "Throw yourself into prayer! Throw yourself into prayer!" But even during the period of the Council itself, the brothers remained outwardly calm and had time to receive us as old friends.

There may be some, also, who would separate prayer from contemplation, but in the experience of Taizé prayer itself is not primarily the words that express it or the forms it takes (praise, intercession, repentance) but a "conscious attitude of presence and attention before God" (Pierre-Yves Emery, in *Prayer at the Heart of Life*), that is to say that contemplation is the ground and prerequisite of all prayer. This means that contemplation, far from being an esoteric practice available only to experts, is practiced all the time by all sorts and conditions of men. We may be surprised to find this, like Molière's "bourgeois gentilhomme" when he discovered he had been speaking prose all his life, but in the experience of Taizé, neither silence nor solitude is an extraordinary phenomenon, silence being the best translation of the mystery of God, and all human beings, no matter how intimately related, experiencing solitude within as a fact of life, a reality which only God can fill.

To write about one's own inner life is difficult. To write about the inner life of anyone else is virtually impossible. To attempt to define the spiritual life of a whole community solely on the basis of my own limited experience would be foolish. The most that I can do is to describe individuals who seem to me to bear the marks of the contemplative life which I know is taught and lived within the community. I have been systematic to the extent of choosing brothers who represent different functions within the community and different qualities which I interpret as fruits of the spirit. However, since I will not be describing categories, but people, there will be a great deal of overlap. On the other hand, the descriptions of the brothers will not

be in any sense biographical or exhaustive. They will at most be a series of sketches which I hope will in the aggregate communicate something of the spiritual life at Taizé.

The first to receive us, the brother in charge of welcoming, he of the beaming enthusiasm, exemplifies for me the qualities of openness and availability, a radical presence to others which is made possible by the giving up or ordering of the self in order to be of service to others. He seemed to give his single-minded attention even in the midst of chaos, and even when in fact he had to be alert to other responsibilities—messages to be delivered or phones answered. I would think this a natural gift rather than an acquired art but that I have seen novices develop it over the years.

This brother was solidly, unchangingly, and cheerfully available, assuring us day after day that, yes indeed, some housing would certainly be found, all the while sending us on wilder and wilder goose chases, to a mountaintop, to houses that had no heating, or no floors, or didn't yet exist. It was the sort of availability that presents itself in front of the church after each service, still vulnerably clad in white robes (they are otherwise only worn during the offices), to deal with whatever burning trivialities the guests present. I remember my anxious inquiries one evening being interrupted by a hand suddenly outstretched to call my attention to the sunset behind me. I was forced in politeness to contemplate this wonder (and they were often stunning), and only afterward was thoroughly reassured that things would indeed work out, thus receiving my first lesson in the gentle version of fraternal correction practiced at Taizé. One is never rebuffed at Taizé. If on occasion it is necessary to say no, as brothers often did on being invited into our house when they were bound for solitary walks, one is always certain that the brother is even sorrier about it than you are. If too many old friends and dignitaries show up unannounced at the same time, they may not be able to see the prior at their convenience, but will nonetheless be taken around to inspect the camp kitchens recently improvised or to meet special people who have news about the church in other parts of the world.

This kind of openness, which holds all things in general to be possible, is based on the prior's dictum that at Taizé everything is provisional; anything can be dispensed with if it is an obstruction to charity or unity. Taizé is not bound by what it has done in the past. This meant that even we could be received at Taizé when we turned up on their doorstep. It also means that one can never be sure that what one writes of Taizé is still true. Space may be re-arranged, the liturgy is under slow but constant modification, chance encounters may turn things entirely upside down.

This openness, especially in those who are chosen for the duties of welcoming visitors, includes a spirit of magnanimity. A cup of tea and a dry cookie seem like a feast in that company. When we were invited to eat with a group of brothers, one of them took his free time to bake us a cake to supplement the fare from the common kitchen, and others stayed after the meal to entertain the children with magic tricks. Our children were presented with Taizé's *Children's Bible* by its artist, and we were loaded with many parting gifts. In the brother who received us first, this magnanimity spilled over into an irrepressible playfulness which is rather hard to characterize. It involves laughter, and fun, but is very far from the kind of joking we normally experience. (Monastics have always been wary of levity, which all too often is at someone's expense.) This brother's humor usually lies not at all in the words and only very slightly in the situation. It is the sort of humor that heartened the parents of a large family who, having come for counsel and consolation about a son running away, and having the usual difficulties with their ancient vehicle, wrote me with glee that the brothers were telling everyone that the children had been hitched to the car for the homeward journey. It is the humor of the brother who told me how he had watched to see if the brother in charge would faint away when we announced that we wanted to stay a year. It is the humor which loves to tell the true story of the aristocratic visitor whose chauffeur called for him at the pilgrim's table only to be informed: "Monsieur is not ready. Monsieur is still doing the dishes." It is our first brother following us out into the pouring rain, jubilantly pretending to help push the car halfway down the road to give us a proper send-off when we left at the end of the year. It is in the last analysis the sort of humor referred to in the letter of another brother when he wrote: "Don't worry about what people write awkwardly or meanly about women. In a few years we will laugh." That is to say, it is grounded in a point of view from which all sorrows and anxieties are known to have a happy ending, all incongruities harmonized, and all differences reconciled.

The second brother we met, *le frère hospitalier*, presides every night at a pilgrim's table which might consist of four monks from the Spanish Abbey of Montserrat and a Dutchman, or of an eighty-two-year-old grandmother, an English monk, a Belgian nun, some old people from Le Havre, a young married couple from Grenoble, and a few Swiss, or, on really crowded nights, of twenty-five people from seven different countries. The attentive energy and tact which must be expended to make them all feel at home with each other while learning something about Taizé is enormous. I was only later made fully aware

of this, however, when a younger, less experienced brother at another table resorted to rather authoritarian means to achieve the same ends.

I can perhaps best get at Taizé's particular brand of hospitality by going into the history of the word itself. Hospitality etymologically means one capable of being a host, but, curiously enough, host and guests are variants of the same word; the single word *hôte* is still used for both meanings in French. So that what we now interpret as a word referring to the function of receiving, entertaining, providing for, or presiding over, originally referred (we gather from the Sanskrit root-word [*ghas-*] meaning to eat or to consume) simply to the activity of eating together without reference to who is providing for whom.

And this is indeed the spirit of the hospitality at Taizé. The guest is received gratuitously, without the slightest shadow of condescension or paternalism. One might say that the guest is received as a member of the communion of saints, who will in some way bring as much to the community as the community will give. But it would be even more accurate to say that guests are received, as the origin of the word suggests, without any reference to giving or receiving, with a complete detachment from possessiveness, and with all the emphasis on the joy of communion.

For this reason there is little talk of money on the hill. The brothers support themselves and do not accept gifts. The idea that we would even "rent" the house offered us was almost horrifying to the prior. The few offering boxes that exist are rather hard to find and their contents are used only for hospitality. For retreats, it is suggested that one contribute what a normal day at home would cost. The Council of Youth is self-financing. Each participant is invited to share in the expenses involved in welcoming everyone, according to what is possible. No one is turned away for lack of money.

The brother's gigantic task, then, is to convey this conception of reality to their very disparate groups of guests, all in the space of an evening meal. Little wonder that the responsibilities had been turned over to others when we came again. Little wonder that the brother involved needs a vacation from time to time, though the "vacation" usually takes the form of visiting one of the groups in mission in Africa or elsewhere, doubtless using the self-same skills of creating or re-establishing peace and unity, of trouble-shooting when "Ça ne va pas." Little wonder that it is to this same *frère hospitalier* that people in the region turn when a child is terminally ill. His peace must stretch to be sufficient even for that.

The apparent ease with which this hospitality is carried out results from the unremitting application of the intelligence. There is a constant

internal review and revision going on. Great care is taken to overlook nothing to make the welcome at Taizé complete. Flowers fresh from the garden were waiting for us when we moved in. Someone is found to show a new immigrant wife where the stores are. The neighbors are kept abreast of activities so that they understand what is going on and also, incidentally, so that the brothers can deal with any problems or inconveniences caused by the great hordes. Chairs are always rearranged in a room or in the church to make a group fit most comfortably into the space. No detail is too small to be given attention and no person too insignificant, with the result that things run smoothly, people are impressed, and not only impressed but inspired to come back and volunteer their own services. It is this dedicated efficiency, this refusal to allow the existence of the impossible, which largely explains the seemingly miraculous multiplication of human talents evidenced in the prior's great success, the Council of Youth.

The prior of Taizé, "notre frère" as he is jocularly and affectionately called on the hill, sits, as he insists, not at the head, but at the heart of the community, not to rule it, but to serve as a focus for its unity. "What will make you happy?" is his frequent question. He delighted in buying toys for the many children at Christmas, and is not above giving the grown-ups "toys" as well. He made sure that we got wood so that we too could have a fire to contemplate. I remember his asking me once if I thought it too frivolous to have gotten a horse for one of the younger brothers. "He missed them so," he explained. He went to even greater lengths to bring from Portugal an immigrant child who had to be left behind, because without speaking the language he could see the sadness in the mother's eyes.

In a word, above and beyond the prior's dedication to the ideal of reconciliation, the love he shows forth is profoundly personal. One could almost deduce this from the intimate literary forms he prefers, from short notes to dialogues, letters, and diaries. Ecumenical progress and social action at Taizé have always come about through personal contacts. An enormous part of the work of Taizé is keeping its friends in touch by personal letters from one of the brothers.

This love of people is also non-possessive; there is no constraint attached, no pressure to do tasks other than willingly. No one ever mentioned the garden we let grow wild. Once we were asked to take charge of one of the family tent areas at a time when the community was also besieged with dignitaries who needed housing of the sort we had, but when we found it impossible, this was immediately and completely accepted, we were not made to feel remiss, and doubtless other arrangements were made. At Taizé things always do have a way of working

out, as when next week's young people joyfully clean up the hill after a week-end festival of local Portuguese immigrants. "Be yourself—you are loved as you are" is the prior's message to individuals, and "Thy will be done" his inner prayer when faced with opponents to ecumenical progress.

Many of the brothers we related to primarily in this personal, friendly way, talking about trivia, or exchanging information about other religious groups, art, poetry, books, or music. "Our" grand piano was sometimes borrowed for an hour, or our five-year-old son, to take a walk in the fields. One brother in particular had the talent for friendship to a high degree. He had the gift of always making encounters and outings memorable, toasting our wedding anniversary with cider in a medieval fortified town, or just sitting in a stubbled field for a chat to ourselves. He also knew how to be creatively helpful, finding somewhere a guitar for our son during an extended illness, a ride to enable my daughter to get back to school. He even had the gift of giving us opportunities to help in return, expressing a desire to go see Anzy-le-Duc, or requesting some herbs that grew behind a monastery we were to visit in Provence. His letters, written lengthwise on glossy paper (probably left over from some press run), with uninhibited English and spelling (he speaks four or five languages), were often delivered by courier, a friend passing through. The personal touch prevails from one end of the community to the other.

By extension, the prior's ideal for a group of people is that of the family. (The controlling image of heaven for Taizé is doubtless not that of the kingdom, the banquet, or the royal wedding, but that of the Father's house.) Knowing that the world needs images, not ideas, the prior has shaped Taizé physically and spiritually like a family in all ways possible to a monastic community. He keeps watch that it should remain small enough to be a family in itself and open enough to be a family to the world. He will not let the community grow larger than he can personally oversee, and will allow no permanent foundations outside Taizé. The brothers eat in stable, family-sized groups. And the community's official reception room, for one must call it that, has a large stove at the back, and long tables where friendliness comes naturally. The retreat houses are built in small, low segments, each with its own, small meeting room with fireplace.

Also, families have never been entirely absent from Taizé. Aside from the children raised by the community, the brothers' relatives are often there on visit, and the prior's own mother spent her last years near her son, at ninety or so finally giving up her own house and moving up the road to her daughter's, but alert and busy to the end, writing

letters, knitting baby clothes or making doll furniture for some of her one hundred and thirty descendants in the morning, receiving visitors for tea after a nap in the afternoon, telling them stories of Roger's childhood and the beginnings of the community, and enjoying company in the evening until forced to go to bed ("It's my turn to obey now," she explains.)

The prior's creative imagination, the kind of creativity which reclaimed for Protestantism the values of the celibate, monastic tradition and helped bring the possible out of the impossible (think of the state of ecumenism twenty-five years ago), also makes the liturgy at Taizé dramatically effective. It is the prior's unforgettable voice against the accompaniment of sung alleluias at the noon prayer which epitomizes Taizé for the bulk of the tourists, his counter-tenor which can be heard over all in the psalm "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High" for the impressive candle-light service of compline on Saturday nights.

This creativity is perhaps nowhere more striking than in the vivid images which have caught the imagination of the young. The prior called for the preparation for the Council of Youth as an inner adventure, a long march across the desert, with listening posts in the third world. It was a world-wide conspiracy, whose members recognized each other, even behind the iron curtain, by a white lump of clay with blue glaze pressed into its center, symbolizing the "stone with a new name written on it, known only to the men who receives it" (Rev. 2:17). Some of these ideas may actually have originated with other brothers, but they all illustrate the prior's turn of mind.

Our spiritual advisor, on the other hand, is temperamentally quite different. Where others are mercurial and playful, he is steady and serious. While the prior writes diaries, he writes theology, hymns, and translations of the fathers. The prior peppers his writing with one image after another, while our advisor uses them less often and is more likely to develop them logically, drawing out their implications in extended metaphors. By very different paths one can arrive at that one-pointedness which bears fruit.

I have never known anyone more devoted to the life of the mind than this brother. He lives for his scholarly work, and shares it freely even with young novices. He prefers visiting monasteries to ecumenical conferences. Though he has a splendid voice and great musical talent, he plays the cello only to relax, and foregoes the pleasure of forming a quartet because of the time involved. He searches out homilies suitable for the community from among ancient texts, and his own meditations on Scripture enrich the sermons and seasonal

letters to the married retreatants who are his special pastoral responsibility. For example, one Christmas we read that "the poverty of Christmas permits us to scorn nothing, even the most humble thing, of what makes up the web of our existence. And the hidden grandeur of Christmas allows us to hope extravagantly in our life, and not to consent to the temptation of pettiness or withdrawal." He goes on to say that it demonstrates God's confidence in us and shows that if we accept this confidence, we can transform feelings of wretchedness or distress into a positive "poverty" which can be a waiting for and welcoming of God.

Though this brother balances his activity by doing manual labor in the pottery, his attention is always fixed on Christ. Even his exterior appearance coming into the church betrays this, a measured, mindful pace, totally unconscious of self, eyes fixed on the cross on entering, on his inner prayer or on the psalter while waiting, and on the guests I know not when, but at some time, since he seems to notice arrivals, and often appears out front afterward to greet a visitor or make an appointment for spiritual counselling.

Spiritual counselling is the backbone of the community. For short-term visitors brothers are available in the church at specified times. Directed retreats are scheduled individually and in groups, and the brothers themselves each have "a brother to talk to." The term "spiritual direction" is not used since what goes on at Taizé is entirely non-directive and non-judgmental. It consists in a patient attention to the development of regular prayer and an examination of one's life to see in general the direction the Spirit is taking, to recognize and strengthen positive values and to turn obstacles into trampolines. One is continually pulled into the present ("All that is finished, isn't it?") to listen for today's opportunities, balancing gentleness and force, expecting much and being content with a little.

Moral progress, which must always be initiated by the person himself, not imposed from outside, is considered to be on the order of a game, a challenge, to avoid excessive constraint. Perseverence is seen as a constant creation, not a law, and sanctity a gift given, rather than a duty laid upon us. Smiling, we are to turn gradually away from the selves shackled with fears and constraints, to fix our eyes on the goal, Christian liberty and joy.

The personal prayer fostered at Taizé leads toward contemplation: short readings meditated in depth or recalled throughout the day, the stilling of the mind to be present to God, the silent waiting for or in a presence beyond our conceiving. This can be the prayer of the brothers walking in the lane, kneeling before the common prayer, or

in the silence of their own rooms. It can be the same for the young people who come, who take turns maintaining vigil all Saturday night in the church, who learn Orthodox chants to use as mantras.

The brother who talked to us most about his own spiritual practice was also one especially close to nature. He lived some of the time in one of the little hermitages on the hillside, being allowed to spend all his time there except for the hours of common prayer, experimenting with different sleep and work schedules. At other times he worked as a day laborer on one of the nearby farms, or kept the cows which the prior eventually bought to replace the ones given away six years before. He would accept with dignified, child-like pleasure a glass of our cognac and talk to us about fixing his closed eyes on God at a definite point in front of him. Had he been a scholar one might have called his air somewhat abstracted. Since he was not, it seems more accurate to refer to it as simplicity, the outer sign of inner quiet.

Asceticism there is at Taize, in the sense of a disciplined spiritual training allying realism and hope. Its character is more that of gentle obstinacy than of strenuous muscle-building, of responsiveness to the Spirit rather than mortification of the self. All are encouraged to maintain an alternation of intellectual and manual labor. The superb organist, for example, is responsible for the laundry of the community. In the most general way, their ascetic guidelines could be used by anyone: to accept as from God a service which tears us from ourselves, to carry burdens and accept injuries as our part in the sufferings of Christ. To live as free beings, to remain ourselves in the midst of multiplied possibilities for distraction and superficiality is all the asceticism modern man needs.

There are, of course, other limitations, as is true in any way of life. The specifically monastic ones, the traditional vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, imply a certain withdrawal from the world and its values. Indeed, the training of the novices at Taizé does appear to emphasize this aspect. One may encounter a novice in the town hall practicing "custody of the eyes," and at table they seem not to initiate conversation, though that may be the rule only when guests are present. But this element of withdrawal is perceptible in older brothers only to the extent that it is a natural rhythm or necessary for ordering their lives toward whatever their function in the community happens to be.

The exigencies of their work and the remoteness of the village offer many opportunities for self-transcendence to the brothers: one artist-brother mourned not being able to see the magnificent Russian film on the icon-painter André Roublev, and the prior himself loves cities, and finds the winter at Taizé long and painful. But community life also

has its advantages. It is far easier there to switch jobs, for example, to try out something new. And the remoteness of Taizé is mitigated by its magnetic quality, which draws visitors from all over the world. In a sense, I learned more there about the church in America than I would have in a comparable period of time at home. It can also be pointed out that solitude too has its positive side. It allows a closeness to nature important in understanding many Biblical texts. Nowhere else had the voice of Yahweh sounded in the thunder as on that ridge between distant mountain ranges, magnified beyond belief in the shell of the cement church. The soft tops of the hills as the road winds along the river to Cluny do seem indeed to gambol as the lambs in the psalms, and large, awkward, white owls, the contemplative symbol, flop clumsily out of the way of the car's headlights at night.

Chance and error do provide mortification aplenty: when we arrived one brother had to drop his work at the press to move a stove for us, and the brothers built their walkway to the church with so little headroom that foreheads are struck not infrequently, usually when the brothers are hurried and harried. But extraordinary disciplines seem to be entirely up to the individual, and vary a great deal from brother to brother. Some, in consultation with their spiritual advisor, may choose to fast, but the community food is plentiful and excellent. Some have pallets on the floor and a bare minimum of furniture, while others have a penchant for antiques. Some choose to hold vigils in the night, but it is not required.

Indeed, the spirit of Taizé affirms rather than denies the world. Washing machines and even dishwashers are accepted as technological marvels which free the brothers for more meaningful service. Their cows were indeed given away to the agricultural cooperative they founded, and joyfully given as a lightening of material luggage and sharing with neighbors, but in the long run this particular self-transcendence proved impossible. The prior noted that country life lost some of its meaning without the animals to mark the cycle of the seasons. The joys of milking morning and evening, the birth of calves, the evening visits to the stable with its tranquil, welcoming warmth were too sorely missed. The quality of life was diminished rather than enhanced by the sacrifice, so it was rescinded. The cowbells again mingle their sounds with the singing at prayers. At Taizé, sacrifices are not ends in themselves. The moral tone is that of spare comfort. Materials used are beautiful but inexpensive. The little church is kept warm night and day, but the cane chairs and wooden benches have no cushions or padded kneelers, and the carpeting is a plain, indoor-outdoor variety.

And the goal of all this effort, to be gospel-bearers, is it achieved? The Russian Orthodox monk who lived next door spoke the hope of many when he said: "If I were looking at somebody like me right now, I certainly wouldn't bother to become a Christian, but one of these days . . ." Such a community is designed to help one alone the way, and even in the few years I knew the community, I observed many concrete signs of progress alongside obvious virtues. A very ordinary-seeming, helpless-looking novice becomes over the years a solid, centered brother with an inner sureness and focussed attention. Older brothers gradually feel able to give up personal careers and interests if necessary for community goals. Changes can even be seen in the visitors who pass through: luxuries are foregone to share with the poor, prestigious jobs are exchanged for social service, men take time off from money-making for reflection and renewal, young couples ask for donations to charities in place of wedding presents. It is a young community with no signs of stagnation.

To conclude my sketches, therefore, I have chosen one of the brothers who had been longest with the community, one in whom I saw no change, for he had long since matured before our arrival, one who in the fewest visits made the deepest impression on me, a Protestant minister, a master potter. I see him leaning comfortably against our wall, very slow- and soft-spoken, smiling, without the inner intensity a younger man might have (or the prior), but with an inner calm of equal strength, taking real delight and interest in my five-year-old's drawing of a "machine for collecting monkeys," speaking of clays he had found in the region, and processes for new glazes he had invented, also using local materials.

Perhaps he made such an impression because he reminds me somewhat of a favorite uncle, but the likeness lies more probably in the spirit than in the flesh. One senses from this brother the kind of attention and appreciation one normally receives mainly from members of the family. Perhaps also the impression springs from the fact that this brother seems to recapitulate in his person all or most of the qualities I have been describing, illustrating very well the balanced interplay of the active and the contemplative one finds at Taizé. He is a living justification of the prior's teaching that one need not be afraid to be "used," or inconvenienced, by others. There emanates from him that special quality, that one-pointedness, stillness, or simplicity which stems from a life of contemplation. Yet he doubtless has taken his turn on the welcoming line and in counselling. As one of the first three brothers, he takes charge of the community when both the prior and Max Thurian are away. Though he now works mainly with the pottery,

even this exposes him to the unforeseen complications one associates with the active life. I know, for example, that when a Japanese couple, both potters, came to him as apprentices, and the husband abandoned the wife shortly before she was to give birth, it was this brother who took the young woman to the hospital in Mâcon and eventually found her a place to stay with other potters, not before having grown very fond of the tiny baby named Yah-yo-ee.

The life and work of this brother suggest that perhaps it is in art, where one is working with raw materials, that one can most clearly trace the interaction of spirit and matter, the relation of man and God. This brother explains that the potter identifies himself with his material as he forces it to take on shape, expressing his own sensibility. Work on brute matter therefore is accompanied by work on oneself. One's sensibility is molded as the clay takes form. This points to an intimate relation between art and asceticism, art and contemplation. The disciplines of meditation and an ordered life contribute to the fulfillment of whatever artistic talents one has, and at the same time the process of artistic creation contributes to the furnishing of the inner life. This would hold true for any activity which is entered into whole-heartedly, but is seen most easily in work involving tangible products, and most fully where the human imagination is also allowed to take its part.

Certainly there is a proliferation of art forms at Taizé. All the brothers are involved in the artistic process in one way or another. They produce music, poetry, stained glass, buildings, painting, ceramics, printing, pottery, prints, etching, and wood-carving. If they have no artistic experience when they enter the community, they are given every opportunity to acquire it, and at the least they sing. In testimony to the high quality of their music, achieved by many years of practice together, an American professor of music passing through asked if the brothers weren't required to audition for entrance. There are more individual studios and workshops as need and possibilities coincide. Art is honored as a creator of joy and sharing.

The end product of this, the art, that "trap for meditation" as Denis de Rougemont calls it, naturally enhances the liturgical life at Taizé to the benefit of the brothers and of their visitors. Everything is ordered so that the mind will be taken up into another realm—bouquets of dried herbs for the choir, totem-pole pottery for Easter lights, organ solos, augmented often when groups of young people are there with their own trumpets, recorders, or guitars. In such a setting, where communal witness to silence and prayer is counterpointed by attention to overall artistic effect, things which would otherwise go unnoticed

are able to break through to our consciousness. Thus the spirit is given room to work. Gradually the separate strands that co-exist in each person are so bound to each other that they make up a whole, and the separated wholes become as one body and one mind.

As the brother in charge of corresponding with us wrote: "It seems that everything gets simpler each year, entering more and more into the essential." It is this elusive spirit that I have tried to describe in the openness and availability, hospitality and friendliness, love and intuition, intelligence and one-pointedness, inwardness, simplicity, and devotion to art in the lives of these brothers I have known. I hope I have not been indiscreet in being so circumstantial. I have tried to respect their privacy by not giving their names. The reader should also remember the limitations of my experience and the fallibility of my knowledge. I may be in error in some fact or interpretation, and beyond that, how is it possible to track with certainty the mystical experience, the experience of the living God?

Perhaps I should have tried to capture it in the life of regular worship which brings minds back and back again to God. Or in the Eucharistic liturgy of the little church, with crunching gravel and snow outside, and inside, warmth and early morning particles of dust in the apricot light from the deep-set windows. Or in the proclamation of the Word to the world at large by the appointed brother who stands forth in the big church and prays for the purification of his heart and his lips by God, the God who touched with burning coal the lips of the prophet Isaiah.

For the spirituality of Taizé is that of all the baptized—corporate, liturgical, inseparable from the struggle for justice. This spirituality has been said to stand metaphorically as well as geographically between the urgency of Citeaux and the continuity and unity of Cluny. But Cluny, for four hundred years the largest church in Christendom, now lies in ruins, and Citeaux, though it lives, is still closed to half of humanity. It is to Taizé that modern communities look for revitalization.

And individuals? As I indicated at the outset, the lesson of Taizé is difficult to learn. We came away convinced that a community of families was our destiny, but Taizé defies imitation. What one in fact takes away usually turns out to be hidden baggage at first. For me, at this distance in time and space, Taizé is best summarized in my memories of the bells. There were four of them, mounted over a pool of water to amplify their sound. They rang for ten minutes before each office. The smallest and highest began ringing first. At the first sound, all the sleepiness of weighty past, present impossibilities, psychic division, or hesitant faith would begin immediately and unquestionably to

dissolve. By the time the second bell started, I would be pulling on my clothes, and would set off up the hill to the even deeper tones of the third, carried along by the intricate rhythmic pattern I could never quite unravel, reaching the church usually just as the booming fourth bell joined the other three, loud enough even within the church, and so loud by the pond that tourists could regularly be observed standing around, looking as if they might be about to join David in front of the ark, grinning from ear to ear. Irresistible, penetrating to every fibre of your being, ecstasy-producing, the bells of Taizé provoke explosions of praise, transforming the landscape, little by little, permanently.

I Am Nothing As The Air Is

I am nothing as the air is
when I'm happiest,
without office or obligation,
away from politics, government and regulation,
a single leaf of grass in a meadow
without purpose or meaning,
blown by winds beyond control
bent to tasks that are not mine
breathed upon again as in the Garden.

Daniel E. Davis

Delineating the Tradition: Merkabah and Zoharic Mysticism

Leonard Orr

"Kabbalah," unfortunately, is one of those terms which has suffered from overuse, misinterpretation (both willful and well-intentioned), and deliberate misapplication. A rift developed in Judaism itself between speculative and mystical Judaism and so-called Talmudic Judaism after the Shabbatean movement failed, and this gap has only gradually started to close since Gershom Scholem and others began re-evaluating the vast amount of Kabbalistic literature starting in the 1920's.[1] The great nineteenth century historians of Judaism, particularly Heinrich Graetz, condemned out of hand the ideas and writings of the mystical tradition, and theosophists such as A.E. Waite[2] claimed the Kabbalah for themselves, as did Rosicrucians, astrologers, Freemasons, Yoga enthusiasts, and, more recently, Taoists, Tarot interpreters, and magicians. The terminology was taken over early in this century by the likes of Aleister Crowley and has now been run down to mean merely "magical," "confused," "secret," or "obscure."

The almost two-thousand years of Jewish mysticism, then, is only first being translated into English and studied by scholars and students, rather than being the target of polemicists or the easy prey of charlatans. Also, the tradition is now seen to be not continuous and univocal, but to have a number of different branches, Merkabah, Zoharic, Lurianic, Messianic, and Hasidic. This distinction between the different branches must be made; here we will only have space to discuss the differences between Merkabah and Zoharic mysticism before evaluating four recent anthologies of translations of the mystical texts.

The speculative writings have been generally regarded by Talmudic Judaism to be heretical or, at the very least, wrong-headed and dangerous, leading to an antinomian idea of pure faith becoming more important than Talmud Torah, or study of the Law. In particular, the ideas concerning the ten Sefiroth and the Schechinah lead to charges of polytheism, the doctrine most antithetical to Judaism. However, these charges are based on cursory and prejudiced examinations of faulty texts, the terminology used in the Kabbalah itself, unclear expositions by the anonymous writers of Kabbalistic works, and a general reaction against the Shabbatean and Frankist excesses.

First it is important to keep in mind that the Kabbalah is not one book, but is instead a body of speculative thought of thousands of volumes written by many individuals over the centuries, and that these works build on and refer to one another. In its usual presentation, however, it is subject to being wrenched out of context, mistranslated, inaccurately annotated, or partially destroyed. Second, the times and world-views of the writers of the mystical texts must be taken into account when making generalizations about the concepts underlying the language.

Mystical speculation certainly existed among the Palestinean Jews of the first century, but there is no agreement as to which group among the Talmudic Jews, Jewish heretics (*minim*), Essenes, Pharisees, Qumran sect, or Gnostics developed the ideas found in Merkabah mysticism. Scholem, who has demonstrated that early Merkabah mysticism predates Gnosticism, contrary to nineteenth century historical opinion, simply terms the movement "Jewish and rabbinic Gnosticism."[3] Merkabah mystics had their impetus in the Biblical book Ezekiel but by the end of the third century had turned its interest to gates, palaces, and guardians in the approach to the Throne, and had already developed their Throne-hymns.

Ezekiel's vision of God begins with the approach of a "vast cloud with flashes of fire. . . . In the fire was the semblance of four living creatures in human form" (1:4 ff.).

> Above the vault over their heads there appeared, as it were, a sapphire in the shape of a throne, a form in human likeness. I saw what might have been brass glowing like fire in a furnace from the waist upwards; and from the waist downwards I saw what looked like fire with encircling radiance. Like a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day was the sight of that encircling radiance; it was like the appearance of the glory of the LORD. (1:26-28)

This vision is the point of departure of Merkabah (Throne) mysticism.

The sages did not publicly extrapolate on the implications of God's Throne or chariot. Like the speculation of *Ma'aseh Beresheet* (The Work of Creation) mystics who interpreted speculatively the book of Genesis in general and the first few paragraphs in particular, *Ma'aseh Merkabah* (The Work of the Chariot) mystics did not consider their interpretations appropriate for exposition to the general public.

The Torah, on which all knowledge, mystical and otherwise, must be based for the halakhic Jew, was seen to have two parts or sides: *nigleh* and *nistar*. *Nigleh* (revealed) was the apparent, literal Torah, that Torah open to all intelligent readers. *Nistar* (hidden) Torah was that understanding based on mystical knowledge which searches for the other meanings "veiled" by the literal language. Merkabah mysticism was the hidden science (*hokhmah nistar*) which could only legitimately be shared with the initiate.

Contrary to nineteenth century opinion, the Merkabah mystics were in no way heretics, and did not ignore or do away with halakhic Judaism. Instead, they actually emphasized and encouraged Talmud Torah, and tried to guard against any heresy. It was common to require one who wished to be initiated into the secret knowledge to have some command of the Torah and, in later centuries, the Talmud. Initiates had to be extremely pious, over thirty years old, and married. The mystics were very selective in choosing new initiates to avoid any possibility of selecting someone who would either expose the secrets to an impious public, or who would himself misinterpret the doctrines and texts, and so be inclined towards heresy.

The primary goal of Merkabah mysticism was "travel" to the *Hekhaloth Ha-kodesh* or Heavenly Halls, also known as *Pardes* (Heavenly Paradise), and to there perceive God's Glory (*kavod*). Very clear ideas of the Halls, or Palaces of Silence, were developed. There were seven heavens, and God's throne was in the seventh palace of the seventh heaven. The "living creatures" (*hayoth*) of Ezekiel's vision became part of a hierarchy in the palaces of *Hayoth Ha-kodesh* (holy living creatures). In the New Testament, Paul writes, "I know of a Christian man who fourteen years ago (whether in the body or out of it, I do not know—God knows) was caught up as far as the third heaven. And I know that this same man . . . was caught up into paradise, and heard words so secret that human lips may not repeat them" (II Corinthians, 12:2-4). Not even the angels can see God who is hidden behind a veil, one of many Merkabah concepts later paralleled by Gnostic ideas.[4] The Book of Enoch describes the Halls in great detail;[5] Enoch himself, for example, is apparently changed into the *Sur ha-panim* (Prince of the Presence), the head angel Metatron. Metatron acts as

assistant and scribe to God, and is often referred to as *Sofer Rabbah*, or the Great Scribe.

The veil which hides God has its parallel in the "Holy of Holies" in the Temple which could only be entered by the most pious of the priests on the holiest day of the year. The angel Metatron is generally considered to have been the angel mentioned in the Torah (Exodus: 23:20 ff.): "And now I send an angel before you to guard you on your way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. Take heed of him and listen to his voice. Do not defy him; he will not pardon your rebelliousness, for my authority rests in him." The Merkabah mystics' understanding of Metatron is unclear, as is the etymology of his name. Sometimes he is called Yahoel YAH, but there is a different angel named elsewhere Yahoel, and then there is God's name, the Tetragrammaton.[6] P.S. Alexander has also shown recently that Metatron's name was often interchanged with Michael, and other confusion has been developed through mistranslation.[7]

Metatron's great authority and high position in the *aravot* (seventh heaven) has led some to consider Metatron proof of polytheism among the Merkabah mystics, and have referred to Metatron as "Lesser YHWH." But in *aravot*, although Metatron is in charge of the angels, cherubim, and other *Hayoth ha-kodesh*, he is addressed by God not by any of the seventy names of God which God gave to him, but as *na'ar* (boy, servant, attendant), and obviously does not share on an equal basis God's greatness (*gedulah*) or might (*gevurah*). Those who would "travel" or "descend"'to the Throne in the seventh heaven address their hymns of praise and supplication to God, and not to Metatron.

God is perceived as a king, and the imagery describing his trappings and court are much like an earthly king. He is traditionally addressed as *melekh ha-olam* (king of the world), and his court is formed by the Holy Living Creatures. Other speculations about God in the Halls continue to relate him to the life on earth the Merkabah mystics knew; there are ideas, later exploited by the Hasidic followers of Israel Baal Shem Tov, that God said the *Sh'ma* and put on *tefillin* every day, just as they did on earth. The world of the Halls is often a reflection of life on earth. Also, there is no unity with God, no cleaving (*devekut*); the idea of a mystical union with God belongs to a later period. God is too distant from the Merkabah mystic for such a thing to be conceivable. All that the mystic can expect or hope for is a perception of God's glory when he reaches the dwelling-place of God.

Those who would be the "descenders to the Throne" or *Yorde Merkabah* had to be very pious and learned if they expected to travel to the Throne and return intact. The Babylonian Talmud (*Hagigah*, 14b) contains a famous warning:

> Our rabbis taught: Four entered an orchard and these are they: Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Aher, and Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva said to them: "When you reach the stones of pure marble do not say: 'Water, water!' For it is said: 'He that speaketh falsehood shall not be established before my eyes.'" Ben Azzai gazed and died . . . Ben Zoma gazed and was stricken. . . . Aher cut down the shoots. Rabbi Akiva departed in peace.[8]

As the mystic made his way closer to the Throne, the journey became increasingly perilous. If the mystic were not sufficiently pious, knowledgeable about Halakah, or prepared for the journey, he might be killed, go insane, or become a heretic. Impurity of any sort may cause such a sudden ejection from the Heavenly Halls that the traveller may die. Also, each gate had eight guards or "watchers," who were ready to deal harshly with any presumptious *Yorde Merkabah* who lacked the proper *chotmot* (holy seals) for that gate, or who did not know the secret and magic names. As the traveller came closer and closer to the seventh gate, the secret names became longer and more complex, and the guards and penalties for improper entry became more fearsome. At the sixth gate, in particular, the mystic was "tested" and shown a mirage like the "pure marble" mirage described above. There were some actual transformations in the Halls; some travellers are temporarily transmogrified into angels, others pure fire. Others seem to have their arms and legs burned away and yet continue to stand in the Hall and feel no pain. The traveller is often assaulted with illusions or mirages, and those who do not see the falseness of the mirage are deemed not worthy to continue to the Throne. Once admitted to the Throne palace, the mystic may perceive the glory (*kavod*) of God through the veil, and sing hymns of praise along with the Holy Living Creatures. The literature contains many of these hymns, most of which emphasize the word "holy" (*kedosh*), and the prayer known as *Kedushah* (from Isaiah, 6:3): "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of the hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." At each gate on the way to the Throne, the mystic had to present the holy seal with magic names, give a present to the watchers, and pronounce the magic names; on his return, he needed to know a completely different set of magic names.

To become a traveller to the Halls, physiognomic traits were taken into consideration as well as moral and religious habits and Talmud learning. The improper physiognomy would disqualify a mystic from attempting the journey. Once his decision had been made to attempt the journey, the Merkabah mystic would spend a period of time in preparation (from twelve to forty days). During this time he would

memorize all of the magic names and prepare seals, fast, pray, and sing the special "Merkabah hymns." There were instructions in the literature for the positions of the mystic preparing himself. Gershom Scholem has noted that "the typical position of these ascetics is also that of Elijah in his prayer on Mount Carmel. It is an attitude of deep self-oblivion which, to judge from certain ethnological parallels, is favorable to the induction of pre-hypnotic autosuggestion."[9]

There are two interesting items which come out of the description of the mystical journey of R. Nehuniah ben Hakanah described in the "Greater Hekhaloth."[10] R. Nehuniah makes his journey to the Halls while surrounded by the young and old initiates and masters of the hidden Torah; while he makes his way through the gates and heavenly halls, and as he encounters all of the angels and other holy living creatures, he is able to speak in his own voice and describe to the mystics who listen exactly what is taking place throughout the journey to the Throne. His description is taken down by trusted scribes (who thus reflect the heavenly role of Metatron as the Sofer Rabbah); traditionally, the scribe or scribes who writes down all that the traveler to the Throne has to say during his journey must be as worthy of being admitted to the Halls as the mystic explorer himself. If he is found to be unworthy or unqualified, for one reason or another (and the requirements and standards presumably become more stringent as the journey progresses), then, again, the penalties may befall both the earthly scribe and the mystic journeyer. Certainly, the mystic would be immediately dismissed from the Halls, and this might cause his death or madness. This brings up the other point: strict Halakhic Judaism is always maintained. In an intricate problem of the Greater Hekhaloth, the earthbound mystics are upset because R. Nehuniah, in the midst of his journey, has neglected to tell them some important information which they need to know. The problem is how to summon R. Nehuniah gently back from the Halls so that he can answer their question without suddenly stopping his journey and so causing him harm. After some debate they solve this problem by sending a cloth to a woman who has already bathed twice in the Mikweh, and so, by strictest interpretation of Halakah, is now twice ritually clean after her period. She uses the cloth to examine herself, and the cloth is then further purified and wrapped up in other materials; even this cloth when it touches R. Nehuniah is enough to return him from the Halls long enough for the inner circle to ask their questions of him. There is no working outside of traditional Halakhic Judaism by the Merkabah mystics.

The late book *Shi'ur Komah* and the concept of the Schechinah have

also raised questions not only of anthropomorphism, but of polytheism, just as Throne mysticism in general and the angel Metatron had done. In the *Shi'ur Komah* (Measure of the Body), the mystics speculate on God's dimensions: he is 770,000 parasangs across the shoulders, and he is "236 ten thousand thousands parasangs;" God's right eye is "twenty-two ten thousands and two parasangs," and so on.[11] Medieval Jewish intellectuals, including Maimonides (early in his life), Ibn Ezra, and Judah Ha-Levi, found things to praise in the *Shi'ur Komah* despite its crude form and seeming anthropomorphism. They clearly saw the lists of measurements and parts of the divine "body" as merely metaphorical such as we find in God's "robe of light" (Psalms, 104:2), or, in Ha-Levy's understanding, designed primarily to cause a feeling of awe, as we find in the description of the celestial court in the book of Daniel (7:9-10). Every limb and every individual part of "God's body" is given names made up of largely unpronounceable combinations of letters, growing out of the "secret" or "magic names" traditions. Scholem notes that these measurements could not be taken concretely and still form any sort of "figure." "Again we see," writes Scholem, "that it was the exhaltation of His kingship and His theophany which appealed to these mystics, not His spirituality."[12] Similarly, the Schechinah is described frequently as the "bride of God," and God and the Bride are discussed with images drawn from The Song of Songs. But the Schechinah is usually understood merely as "Divine Presence," and later, particularly after the Zohar, the Bride of God, although still discussed as though the phrase referred to a woman, often in quite graphic terms, is interpreted as being the nation or community of Israel. The Bride is often in mourning or blind because of the condition of the Jewish people in the Diaspora. Although Graetz and many orthodox Jews vehemently condemn the imagery and the idea behind the concept of the Schechinah, the mystics did not see the Schechinah as a goddess of some sort, sharing the Throne of God.

If Merkabah mysticism was developed over several centuries and was built on and developed by a school of mystics, the major work of the Kabbalah, the Zohar, or book of splendor, was written, for the most part, by one man, Moses de Leon between 1280 and 1286 near Guadalajara, Spain. Only about half of the entire Zohar has been translated into English in five weighty volumes.[13] The Zohar is the literary masterpiece of the post-Merkabah tradition.

The Zohar purports to have been written in Palestine about the second century, and it presents the conversations and interpretations of a fictional group of mystical scholars under the direction of Simeon

ben Yohai. The work has been called a mystical novel, designed basically as a commentary on the Torah. But it is not, like the Talmud, a commentary based on the revealed Torah (*nigleh*), but is instead an exposition of the hidden Torah (*nistar*). It is homiletic in character rather than systematic, and written in a mixture of a very literary Aramaic, medieval and Biblical Hebrew, and neologisms often based in Spanish (and occasionally Greek, Latin, or Arabic). Much is left purposely elliptical or obscure as appropriate only for those who had already been introduced to the secrets; sometimes the commentaries quote books or authorities who have never existed, or else use the medieval Spanish Kabbalists' works without attribution.

The work is made up of a number of books or sections. In addition to the commentary on the Torah sections mentioned above, there is the *Sifre Detzniyutha* (Book of Concealment), a poetic and difficult section on the book of Genesis; here, mystery is a virtue, and there are references to the "Hidden within the Hidden," and number symbolism is used. There is also anthropomorphic imagery reminiscent of the *Shi'ur Komah*: "Nine precious formations are given over to the beard," and so on.[14] Much of the discussion of the Hebrew letters and vowels is an elaboration of the *Sefer Yetzirah* (Book of Creation), a major piece of Ma'aseh Beresheet mysticism written between 200 and 500. This work introduces the *Sefiroth* and thirty-two paths of the Hebrew alephbet which become so important in Abulafia's mystical system, and later the unsystematic Zohar. The medieval mystic sees that since all knowledge and all of God's words and laws are contained in the Torah, the Torah itself must be made up of *otiyot yesod*, or fundamental letters.[15] God first formed the Torah out of these letters, and then, using the Torah as His blueprint, He created the world; the materials out of which the world was formed were simply the twenty-two letters and the ten vowels. Zohar mysticism identified the *Hayyot ha-kodesh* of Merkabah mysticism with the letters.

In the *Sefer Yetzirah* the three "matrices" or "mothers" were the letters *alef*, *mem*, and *shin*, identified with the three seasons (of Hellenism), the three higher elements (air, fire, and water), and the head, torso, and stomach. The seven "double" letters (written with or without the *dagesh*) were identified with opposites, the seven planets, the seven days of the week, the seven bodily orifices, the seven heavens, and the seven palaces. The remaining twelve letters, the simple consonants, represent the twelve constellations of the zodiac, twelve months of the year, and twelve organs of the body. The letters are treated as living forces in the *Sefer Yetzirah*, just as they will be in the Zohar. The letters, together with the ten *Sefiroth* make God's powers manifest.

The ten *Sefiroth* are *Keter* (Crown), *Hokhmah* (Wisdom), *Binah* (Intelligence), *Gedullah* (Greatness) or *Chesed* (Love), *Gevurah* (Power) or *Din* (Judgment), *Teferet* (Beauty) or *Rahamim* (Compassion), *Nezah* (Endurance), *Hod* (Majesty), *Zaddik* (Righteous One) or *Yesod Olam* (Foundation of the World), and *Malchut* (Kingdom).[16] These are aspects of God, constantly changing in dominance; although often described as though they, like the letters, are living beings around God's Throne, they are emanations from God, and it is the emanations which the Zohar mystic perceives in his attempts to know God.

Unlike the Merkabah mystics, the Zohar speaks of *Devekut*, or Cleaving with God. Merkabah mysticism stopped with the vision of the Throne, Chariot, or Heavenly Halls. Zohar mystics believed that they could actually commune with God through concentrated meditation or contemplation (*kavannah*) or prayers. The way to God was through the holy words or elemental letters found in the prayers; this concentrated meditation would lead to the stages of the *Sefiroth*, proceeding through the "gates" from *Malchut* to *Keter*, and was intellectual rather than ecstatic. We have already seen how the Merkabah mystic became almost oblivious to those around him and induced a trancelike "autohypnotic" state; the Zohar mystic is aware of his intellectual journey from the lower world to the upper one, and the opening is made through a word-by-word examination of a prayer by which he may see new meanings (the hidden) which must be contained within each word. The way through the paths of the *Sefiroth*, if successful, ends in actual communion or "oneness" with God. The *devekut* unites the two worlds, the upper and the lower; when every word of the prayer is concentrated on, God shares in the praying.

The Zohar contains many other concepts and ideas, far too much to allow for detailed exposition here. There are many secrets revealed about physiognomy and chiromancy, the Garden of Eden, the books of Genesis and Ezekiel, the Halls, and so-called "practical Kabbalah." Practical Kabbalah includes the making of charms and amulets, and the power of the names of God (we hear more about the two legendary sages, for example, who, through using secret combinations of letters and names created a calf each week before the Sabbath), and Torah hermeneutics based in numbers substituting for the letters, and the equations which may be made which allow for new interpretations (this is *gematria*, or *notarikon*). There is also speculation on the nature and composition of the soul, the transmigration of souls (*Gilgul*), evil, demonology, Golems, angels, the Schechinah, cosmology, and cosmogony. While the Zohar is massive, difficult, and frequently

frustrating, it makes for compelling reading and study, and many sections are wonderfully written, the fiction of the setting and speakers is often humorous, and the work has become absolutely necessary reading for anyone interested in the Kabbalah.

For those who would like to become involved in the vast literature of the Kabbalah but whose Hebrew, Yiddish, and Aramaic may be rusty, several anthologies of English translations have recently become available.

The Secret Garden: An Anthology in the Kabbalah edited by David Meltzer (New York: Seabury Press, 1976) is the earliest of these and a good place to begin. Meltzer is a poet long involved with the Kabbalah, and his anthology shows careful selection, and there is much material translated into English for the first time (notably the *Book Bahir*, until now available only in Gershom Scholem's German translation and the original Hebrew). The material is arranged chronologically from an anonymous work analyzing the early section of Genesis by Merkabah mystics to a poem by a disciple of the false Messiah Shabbatai Sevi (1666). In between there is the *Shi'ur Komah*, the *Sefer Yetzirah*, and generous samples of the mystical writings of some of the most important medieval and renaissance Kabbalists, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Eleazar of Worms, Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia, Moses de Leon, Isaac Luria, Hayyim Vital, and others. All the translations are well-done, and preceded by brief notes by Meltzer. However, these notes are not full enough to be useful to anyone just entering the field, and there are no footnotes or other scholarly apparatus. Terminology is not explained, and there is no general introduction or conclusion.

Louis Jacobs' *Jewish Mystical Testimonies* (New York: Schocken Books, 1977) includes some of the same selections, but the selections are very brief, usually four to six pages. He includes a selection from Ezekiel, the story of the four who entered the orchard, from the Hekhalot, Maimonides, Eleazar of Worms, Abulafia, the Zohar, Joseph Karo, Hayyim Vital, Moses Luzzato, the Baal Shem Tov (founder of modern Hasidism), the Gaon of Vilna, Hasidic literature, Dov Baer, and Aaron Roth (1934). Although the selections are short, each chapter contains a few paragraph or two or three pages of introduction, numerous footnotes to the carefully translated texts, and a commentary. There is also a chapter-by-chapter bibliography, and a four-page glossary to common technical or Jewish terms. Jacobs' commentaries and introductions are always helpful for scholar or neophyte, and draw on current research.

Three poets and ethnologists, Jerome Rothenberg, Harris Lenowitz,

and Charles Doria, have edited *A Big Jewish Book: Poems & Other Visions of the Jews from Tribal Times to Present* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978). *A Big Jewish Book* is over six hundred pages long, and contains many very brief selections from Hekhalot mysticism, the Zohar, the *Sefer Detzniyutha*, the *Shi'ur Komah*, the *Book of Enoch*, Moses of Burgos, Eleazor of Worms, Isaac Luria, Abulafia, Moses Cordovero, various Hasidic writers, Joseph Gikatilla, Ibn Gabirol, and many others. In addition, the editors have included brief extracts from twentieth century writers who have been influenced by Jewish mysticism (Nathaniel Tarn, Sigmund Freud, Franz Kafka, Allen Ginsberg, etc.), placing these selections against those from traditional Jewish mysticism with exciting results being produced by the juxtaposition. Often, the editors or others have "reworked" (their word) earlier and dustier translations, and have endeavoured, by this method, to recapture the original spirit of the Kabbalist-author. They have been successful in this. The editors also provide extensive commentary wherever necessary, and over fifty pages of notes on their sources, the original authors, and occasional recommendations for further sources. This is a book which satisfies on all levels.

The most disappointing of these books is David R. Blumenthal's *Understanding Jewish Mysticism, A Source Reader: The Merkabah Tradition and the Zoharic Tradition* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1978), disappointing because it seems, at first glance, to offer so much, and to fill a lacuna, a textbook for teaching Jewish mysticism. Dr. Blumenthal has the credentials (he holds the Jay and Leslie Cohen Chair of Judaic Studies at Emory University), and the cover blurb informs us that "Many of these texts are translated here for the first time and all texts are accompanied by a commentary and by introductory and concluding notes which explicate the text. . . . (a background in Judaism is not required). . . ."

Dr. Blumenthal has chosen commonly available expositions from other writers, Georges Vajda's *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article "Jewish Mysticism," and a section from Scholem's *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*. With the exception of about thirty-eight pages (the *Pirkei Heikhalot* and the *Barukh She'amar*), all of the Kabbalistic texts are readily available in one of the books mentioned in this article, or separately published (these texts are Genesis, Ezekiel's vision, the *Sefir Yetzirah*, some twenty pages from the Zohar, and a few good but too brief articles by K. Kogan). In his Preface, the author informs us that he wished "to help the concerned reader reach an understanding of these texts without having to cope with overly learned footnotes," and, indeed, such footnotes are conspicuously absent; the footnotes

usually just offer summary or charts. His own computer-drawn charts make little sense since "the transliteration of the Hebrew characters varies from figure to figure because of the limits of the computer" (p. 26), and so they do not really illustrate the text. Charts and drawings usually found in all books on the Kabbalah would be much more helpful, and he reprints some of these, too. Careful editing and revision would perhaps have purged from the text the frequent repetitions. On the ideas of the Zohar, Dr. Blumenthal informs us that "Often they will seem far-out, even heretical, over against the usual received knowledge. In fact, if they do not startle you, you have not fully understood them" (p. 101). Some pages later, just before the passages from the Zohar, he writes, "If these passages do not challenge and startle you, you have not understood them" (p. 119).

The author's tone is often condescending and would seem designed to encourage a view of these texts and ideas as "far-out." It is easy to quibble with other flaws, such as his reliance on a mysterious "English translation of an anonymous, uncopyrighted pamphlet which was sent to me through the mail" (p. 14). The index does not include most names and is incomplete in what it does list, there is no glossary, and the suggestions "For Further Reading" take up only about two thirds of a page. On the whole, we can say that the need for a textbook of Jewish mysticism still exists. As more works of the Kabbalah are published and translated, and as more critical, scholarly editions become available, it is likely this need will be filled.

NOTES

1. Scholem's works include *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, tr. Ralph Manheim (New York: Schocken Books, 1965); *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960); *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961, 3rd revised ed.); *Kabbalah* (New York: New American Library/Meridian Books, 1978); and a selection, *Zohar, The Book of Splendor: Basic Readings from the Kabbalah* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963). Scholem has literally dozens of publications in this field. For a general survey of the field, see Georges Vajda, "Recherches recentes sur l'esoterism juif," covering 1954-1962, *Revue de L'Histoire des Religions*, 164 (juillet-septembre, 1963), pp. 39-86; (octobre-decembre), pp. 191-212; t. 165 (janvier-mars, 1964), pp. 49-78; and for the years 1963-1975, t. 192 (juillet, 1977), pp. 30-55; (octobre, 1977), pp. 165-198.

2. See A.E. Waite, *The Holy Kabbalah* (Secaucus, N.J.: University Books, 1960). Two books recently published which are far poorer than anything by Waite or MacGregor Mathers are Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Mystical Qabalah* (New York: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1974), and the nonsensical book by Migene Gonzalez-Wippler, *A Kabbalah for the Modern World* (New York: Julian Press, 1974; Bantam Books, 1977).

3. Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 13.

4. The "veil" may also be found in the Babylonian Talmud, Yoma, 77a; Berakhot, 18b. See also Scholem's *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*.

5. See J.T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumran Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976). Milik provides a long general introduction to the Enoch literature, pp. 1-135. See also P.S. Alexander, "The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch," *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 28 (1977), 156-80; C. Kaplan, "The Angel of Peace, Uriel-Metatron," *Anglican Theological Review*, 13 (1931), 306-13.

6. See Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 68-70; *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 50 ff.

7. Alexander, p. 161.

8. See Louis Jacobs' comments to this passage in his *Jewish Mystical Testimonies* (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), pp. 21-25; also, Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 16.

9. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 49.

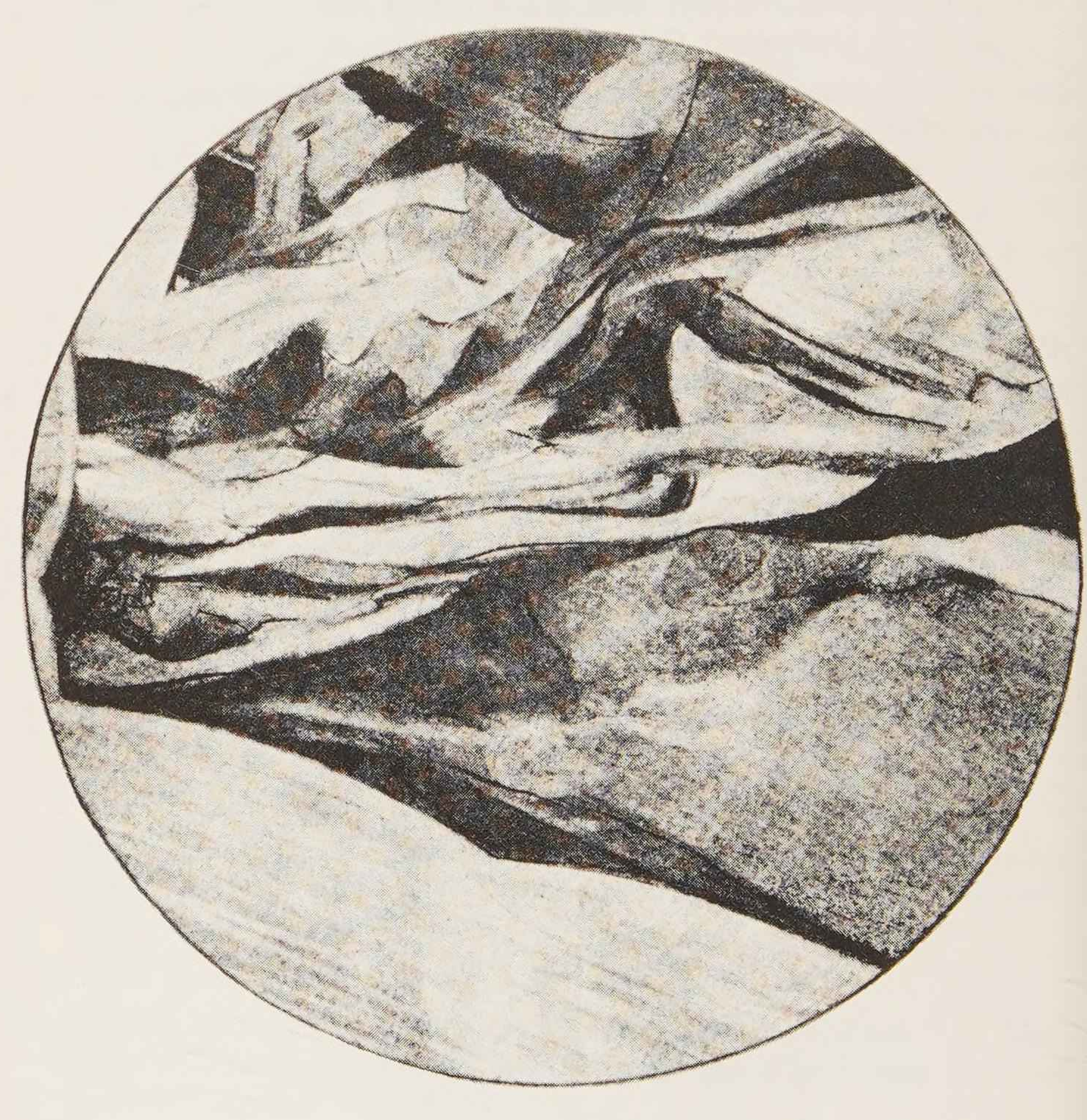
10. See also Morton Smith, "Observations on Hekhalot Rabbati," in Alexander Altmann, ed. *Biblical and Other Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 142-60.

11. I have used the translation of the *Shi'ur Komah* by The Work of the Chariot in David Meltzer, ed., *The Secret Garden: An Anthology in the Kabbalah* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), pp. 23-37. See also Alexander Altmann, "Moses Narboni's 'Epistle on Shi'ur Qoma,' A Critical Edition of the Hebrew Text with an Introduction and an Annotated English

Translation," in his *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 225-88; and Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 36-42, and *Major Trends*, 63-67.

12. Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 64.
13. Maurice Simon, Harry Sperling, and Paul Levertoff, *The Zohar*, five volumes (London: Soncino Press, 1931-34). This is the standard English edition despite its inaccuracies and omissions.
14. Zohar, II, 176b-179a. This has been translated and published separately by *The Work of the Chariot* (Hollywood, Ca., 1971). This includes the Hebrew text.
15. The *Sefer Yetzirah* is translated in the books by Meltzer, Rothenberg, and Blumenthal mentioned at the end of this article; a cheap facsimile edition of Isidor Kalisch's 1877 edition was published in 1973 by Symbols & Signs, N. Hollywood, California.
16. Much has been written on the ten *Sefiroth*. For the best introduction see Scholem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 96-115.

The Mother's Song



Sr. Meinrad Craighead

I
I Am Spring Out Of Winter's Death

I am the first door,
eye in the flower,
orifice: escape or entry?

I lie deepest in ancient seas;
I lift highest in everlasting hills.

In the night silence (half of all enduring time),
out of the bowels of sound,
I hear all the weeping,
uneven sounds from my own uterine world,
the natal hum
soft as nostrils, ears,
eyelids, pollen and the passing of bats.
I am open in endless giving;
I am gorged with all gathering.
I will never be too full of life.
I will never be too full of death.
I will never be emptied of either.
All sound rolls over me.

All choice lies at my breast:
I am release and restraint,
grace and struggle,
healing and corruption,
sweetness and bitterness.

Each seed moves inward to my power
into the hole in every hour
wet with intimacy.
I measure
scattered seed and rotting dead,
embryo and fossil.
I mount the wheel (abiding resurrection)
and rise with the first turning of the year.

Faithfulness springs from me.

II.
I Am Summer Out Of Spring's Death

My heartbeat strikes again and again
eroding stone
evolving seed.
This is the highest morning hour,
the second turning of the wheel,
at the crest of the rising arc,
the sanctuary where you sit watching
leaves come full size.
Here the white animals collapse exhausted,
somewhere between gestation and decomposition.

Cows graze my mouth,
deer my breasts,
birds search my face,
spiders my hands,
snakes my belly.
Summer waits for what I will give.

Waters enter or retreat
pressed to my sides,
passing into my flesh,
rising from deepest springs,
still in quiet mountain craters,
flowing in twisted rivers.

Shrinking flowers and swelling fruits
channel the dim past
through the center of the first crown
into this particularly bright summer.

All your fruitfulness comes from me.

III.
I Am Autumn Out Of Summer's Death

Running through my dark halls and bright courts
and high gates you will reach the place
and walk in,
right through the middle of earth's heart,
into green forests throbbing in endless night,
over white wastelands pressed in deep ice,
through blue mountains humped at every northern horizon,
following every yellow river twisting west,
down into subterranean gardens,
veined gold, silver, crystal,
packed with emeralds, rubies, diamonds,
down to learn the deepest laws and first designs.

It is the third turning
into the somber harvest moons
which scatters flowers, leaves and dust before the wind.
I am autumn out of summer's death,
world granary,
bottomless basket lined with rushes and feathers,
orchids, oranges, all ripe corn;
navel stalk stuck with thorns, teeth, beaks;
a cord twisted with pits and pods and broken shells;
big belly, threshed, husked, sifted, ground: bread;
breasts, bruised, crushed, strained: wine.

Women guard the earth.

IV.
I Am Winter Out Of Autumn's Death

I am winter out of autumn's death,
seeds resting in wet rot
and wooly mould of summer's thick flesh,
watched by moons, lonely birds and
long vaults of naked trees.

Now the fourth turning is into sleep
when I recall all time enfolded in my living flesh.
Then I can count every bone and blade of grass
remembering whole forests now buried in my depths
and rains that lasted a thousand years.
I generate,
enduring the weight of the crushing wheel,
accumulating time, cycles overlaying eons.
Like the moon I wax and wane but do not die.

Children find a home in me.
The patient will inherit me.

Child, lie down
to hear the songs of those condemned to die,
rise up to see midwinter birth of light.

On the beach of some great sea,
beyond the furthest sacred hills,
at the west rim is the last edge
of my ragged silhouette,
as old and far away as my beginning,
and the great night silence
pegged down at the four corners.
Long before remembering
I am deeply dumb,
the first altar standing from age to age.

What rises from me returns to me.

Drawing by Sr. Meinrad Craighead is from *The Mother's Birds* (Stanbrook Abbey Press, 1976).

The Soul at White Heat: Emily Dickinson & Augustinian Meditation

Rhoda Nathan

The widespread practice of religious meditation recurs at particular intervals in our history, and, although the vocabulary and method change from time to time, the underlying motives and procedures remain roughly the same. In the seventeenth century, a system or systems of meditation were developed by St. Ignatius Loyola, Richard Dawkins and others that were destined to have a major influence on several genres of English—and as we shall see—American poetry. Louis Martz outlines the general steps in the following order in his introduction to *English Seventeenth Century Verse*: "The speaker accuses himself; he talks to God within the self; he approaches the love of God through memory, understanding, and will. . . . Essentially, the meditative action consists of an interior drama, in which a man projects a self upon an inner stage, and there comes to know that self in the light of a divine presence.[1] Subscribing to this formula, a meditative poem will begin with one of the following representations: (1) involvement in an event in the life of Christ; (2) a "similitude" or imaginary setting of symbolic act; (3) a straightforward declaration of the spiritual issue to be dealt with.[2] The meditation ends with a "colloquy," in which the penitent expresses to God his most intimate reflections on the state of his soul. The order of meditation, as outlined in a variety of sixteenth and seventeenth century pamphlets, was a culmination of an ancient form of meditation which had been developing since the days of Augustine, and was considered an essential practice preliminary to the act of conversion. The Augustinian way, however, was far less rigid and orderly than the Salesian or Ignatian, having derived from the open and searching quest so vividly described in the Tenth Book of

the *Confessions*. In the Augustinian mode of meditation will be found little exact method, but rather an "inwardness" similar to the interiority of a child locked within himself until he discovers the vocabulary of release. The act of commitment cannot take place until the image of God which lies locked within the recesses of the mind is, in the literal sense, "recollected" into consciousness.

There is an enormous divergence and unequality between the spiritual journeys of Augustine of Hippo and Emily Dickinson of Amherst. The former experienced every bit of the mystical journey, whereas the latter never conquered entirely the informing skepticism behind her spiritual quest. In the guise of a child, she apostrophized her "Papa above." In the role of a coy spinster, she addressed her Savior as "the gentleman in the white robe" who came to court her. On occasion she became a self-styled cynic who demanded to know "whether Deity's guiltless" in the matter of immortality.[3] The alternating personae of guileless child-woman and skeptic appeared side by side in Emily Dickinson's poetry, posing a problem for the reader who brings to his reading a serious theological assumption about her piety. The challenge is not so much to reconcile her opposing postures in a small number of poems—which, in any case, cancel each other out—but to fathom the spiritual sources from which the larger body of her religious poetry sprang. For divinity was Dickinson's "flood subject" and became, as she grew older, the most obsessive preoccupation of her poetry.[4] Her search for reassurance spilled over from her poems to her letters, offering evidence of tension between faith and doubt in a mind which had never been able to embrace orthodox belief.

The plain facts of Emily Dickinson's religious life are few and amply documented by her biographers. Less serious attention has been given to her state of mind—or soul—perhaps because her poems demonstrated considerable shift and ambiguity throughout the years. A close examination, however, discovers in her religious poetry a startling approximation to the poetry of meditation, a genre popularized in the seventeenth century by Donne, Vaughan, Herbert and Crashaw. They practiced many "styles" of meditation, but the mode duplicated in Dickinson's poetry appears to be the Augustinian, a form first favored by Henry Vaughan in his *Silex Scintillans*, a variety of spiritual autobiography. A formula for religious devotion derived from Book Ten of the *Confessions* and then cultivated and regularized by S. Bonaventure in the thirteenth century, Augustinian meditation drew its inspiration from three sources: Scripture, nature and the self. Its general reasoning holds that a man who is enlightened by the Bible may find evidence of divinity in external nature, and finally discover God

within himself. In the quest for perfection, this triad of forces forms a base for the spiritual exercises upon which the art of meditation rests, leading the skeptic to the moment of self-realization when he arrives at the knowledge of God.[5]

The young Emily Dickinson, troubled by the powerful spirit of revivalism sweeping through the Congregational Church in 1850, wrote to her friend Jane Humphrey: "How strange is this sanctification that works such marvelous change, that sows in such corruption, and rises in golden glory, that brings Christ down. . . . It *certainly* comes from God—and I think to receive it is blessed."[6] All the paradoxical elements of the spiritual sensibility which were to dominate her religious poetry were aired at the outset in her frank disclaimer at the end of the letter: "Not that I know it from *me*, but from those over whom change has passed." Even as a twenty year old she was uncomfortable in her isolation from a group swept by communal enthusiasm, and wishing that she too could be overcome by passion in spite of her reservations about its "corrupt" origin.

Like the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century, Emily Dickinson was engaged in endless internal struggle. The elements of conflict took various shapes, alternating as flesh and spirit, God and Satan, and—more abstractly—the emotional and rational faculties of the self. God's "rare life" was eternally hidden from her "gross eyes," but Satan was everywhere in disguise, shocking her into a chill of "zero at the bone."[7] Calvinist hellfire dies hard and was felt as a fearful force, although redemption was its supernal goal. Her poems reflect the metaphysical ambivalence toward voluntary spiritual commitment. As Donne, in Holy Sonnet XIV, dared his God to "batter" his heart and take him by force, Dickinson implored Him to "tie the strings to [her] life"[8] and lift her to Him because she lacked the will. The tyranny of God was deeply felt. In a binding image as powerfully envisioned as Herbert's symbolic restraint of the clerical collar, she besought:

> God of the Manacle
> As of the Free—
> Take not my Liberty
> Away from Me. (728)

In her anguish she employed figurative language comparable to the violent imagery in Donne's Holy Sonnets. Approximating the sexual-sacred ambiguity of Sonnet XVIII, she literalized her physical "ravishment" by God, her "bondage"'to Him, her "immurement" in heaven.[9] Her imagery of rapine arose from a deep-seated skepticism which had to be vanquished before authentic spiritual life could begin.

It should not be assumed that Dickinson's ambivalence was an instrument to free her from her overwhelming preoccupation with the inner life. She drew her vocabulary for ordinary experience from Scriptural sources. A pleasant day elicited from her a rapture of sanctification; the subject was nature, but the allusions were doctrinal. The singing of birds heard in the distance became "far psalteries of summer/enamoring the ear."[10] Entire poems were exercises in meditation, interweaving religious ritual, nature and self into an expression of spiritual harmony:

> Oh Sacrament of Summer Days,
> Oh Last Communion in the Haze—
> Permit a child to join.
>
> Thy sacred emblems to partake—
> Thy consecrated bread to take
> And thine immortal Wine! (130)

The internal structure of these meditative poems appear to follow the "rules" laid down by the tract which spelled out and codified the procedures of the "art" of meditation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Pamphlets such as Edward Dawson's *Practical Method of Meditation* instructed the penitent in spiritual exercises in preparation for meaningful prayer. Their steps and components were familiar elements in the popular culture of the day, by virtue of the proliferation of tracts devoted to methodology. Thus, it is not necessary to prove that Vaughan had actually read any of the instructive pamphlets to find their stamp on poems such as "Religion":

> My God, when I walk in those groves,
> And leaves thy spirit doth still fan,
> I see in each shade that there grows
> An angel talking with a man.

Vaughan's debt to Augustine is as obvious as Dickinson's in her poem cited above. It demonstrates that "coming together in a living harmony" of Scripture, nature and the self which Martz had termed the "paradise within."[11] Meditation, he wrote, may be characterized as an introspection "so intense and imaginative that it brings together the senses, the emotions and the intellectual faculties of man . . . in a moment of dramatic, creative experience."[12] To that experience Augustine's contribution was more significant than mere structure. The *Confessions* imparted the underlying philosophical principle behind meditation, namely the introspective inquiry into the nature of conversion, conducted in a soul-searching spirit. The thrust was

inward, as God and nature were internalized into the self. Turning to nature as a model, Augustine besought the "sun, the moon and stars" as well as "the sea, and the deeps, and the creeping things" to point the way to salvation.[13] In the same vein, Emily Dickinson turned to the creatures of nature to provide the model for communion:

> Because the Bee may blameless hum
> For Thee a Bee do I become—
> List even unto Me.
>
> Because the Flowers unafraid
> May lift a look on thine, a Maid
> Always a Flower would be.
>
> Nor Robins, Robins need not hide
> When Thou upon their Crypts intrude
> So Wings bestow on Me
> Or Petals, or a Dower of Buzz
> That Bee to ride, or Flower or Furze
> I that way worship Thee. (869)

It is not necessary to prove Dickinson's familiarity with the *Confessions* to demonstrate the Augustinian mode of meditation as central to the foregoing poem, any more than Martz saw fit to justify the inclusion of Ignatian meditation into the structure of the Holy Sonnets. "The art of meditation," he wrote, "constituted one of the great developments in European culture; its influence penetrated to the center of the European consciousness in that period. . . . Certainly a Donne or a Herbert or a Cranshaw had no need to read these treatises in translation. . . . These methods had already entered into the English language. . . . and meditative poetry of this time, like all great poetry, was arising from and expressing a central concern of the age."[14] By an extension of this justification, although it cannot be proved that Dickinson read the *Confessions*, her spiritual ancestors did. Agustine, observed Perry Miller, "exerted the greatest single influence upon Puritan thought next to the Bible itself." For that reason their literature had the "turn of mind and sense of values, even sometimes the very accent of Augustine."[15] Emily Dickinson was heir to that legacy in the Augustinian mysticism of Jonathan Edwards, who wrote in an introspective vein: "So a shower of rain is like an outpouring of the spirit; it makes water flow abundantly in the streets and greatly raises streams from livirg fountains."[16] That she was familiar with Edwards' writing is evident from a letter she wrote to her nephew Gilbert: "Jonathan Edwards/and let him who is athirst come."[17] About Edwards' influence on her, her biographer Thomas Johnson

notes that "she would have been surprised to know that the quatrain she wrote in the late seventies is a twenty-word summary of Edwards' thoughts on the subject of beauty and immortality in "The Nature of True Virtue."[18]

Should Dickinson have escaped Augustinian thought in her Puritan heritage, she would have absorbed it in her reading of Herbert and the other metaphysical poets.[19] Like them she learned to look within herself for truth and signs of grace. Nature was the catalyst:

> The Bird her punctual music brings
> And lays it in its place—
> It's (sic) place is in the Human Heart
> And in the Heavenly Grace— (1585)

In this poem, the bird, the human heart and divine grace are the discrete metaphors of the triad of nature, the self and the deity, fused by the poet's imagination into a single flash of illumination. The "punctuality" of the music and its orderly "placement" are suggestive of the discipline laid down in the intellectual formulas for meditation by the Ignatian and Salesian schools, and regularlized by formalists such as Fray Luis de Granada in treatises with titles such as *Of Prayer and Meditation*. The concrete images for the discipline of the spirit may vary just as the procedures adopted by one order may divagate from another, but the internalizing of external phenomena in nature causes the supplicant to cry out in self-recognition: "For behold, thou wert within me!"[20] as Augustine did in the *Confessions*. As God exists within nature, so does He dwell within the human soul. The discipline of meditation acts primarily to make man cognizant of the paradise within:

> Step lightly on this narrow spot—
> The broadest Land that grows
> Is not so ample as the Breast
> Those emerald Seams enclose. (1183)

The three symbolic components of the triad are the green earth, the animating breast within, and the self sojourning to God. The communicant is enjoined to reverence nature because it is invested with a divine *anima*. Nature incorporates the sacramental just as she houses the irregular and profane. The mushroom, the "elf of plants," is "nature's apostate," but the butterfly wears an "assumption gown."[22] Nature provides the analogue for the human spirit, a relationship reminiscent of Emerson's celebrated observation that "nature always wears the colors of the spirit."

Profound self-examination must be distinguished from the trivial in

meditative practice. Again turning to natural phenomena for her model, Dickinson reasons:

> Enchantment's perihelion
> Mistaken oft has been
> For the authentic orbit
> Of it's (sic) Anterior Sun. (1299)

Just as the point in the path of a lesser astral body positioned in front of the sun is often mistaken for the "authentic" orbit of the true sun, so is mere "enchantment" often mistaken for genuine conversion. In the distinction it makes between the genuine and the false, the poem suggests the Augustinian preoccupation with penetrating to the source of spiritual life: "We panted with the mouth of our heart after those upper streams of thy fountain, the fountain of life; that being besprinkled with it according to our capacity, we might in some sort meditate upon so high a mystery."[23] The analogy between the fountain of nature and the fountain of spiritual life rests on the declared humility of the penitent. In Book Twelve, Augustine begins with a passage of self-abnegation: "Unto thy Highness the lowliness of my tongue confesseth, that thou hast made heaven and earth." Dickinson's most sober Augustinian meditations spring from an equivalent humility:

> My worthiness in all my Doubt—
> His Merit—all my fear—
> Contrasting which, my quality
> Do lowlier appear. (751)

In the penitential quest for the perfection of the spirit, the poem begins with the prescribed self-accusation, and then proceeds upon a course of orderly self-examination. In the service of his goal, he draws upon the one faculty that stores the experiences of the spirit against that moment when they will be called upon to release a flash of illumination. The faculty of memory is seen to be the key to cognition in the *Confessions*:

> Great is the force of memory, excessively great, O my God. . . . Nor can I myself comprehend all that I am. . . . And men wonder at the heights of the mountains, the lofty billows of the sea, the long courses of rivers, the vast compass of the ocean, and the circular motion of the stars. . . . Yet could I not have spoken of them, unless those mountains and billows, and rivers and stars which I have seen, and that ocean, which I believed to be, I saw inwardly in my memory.[24]

The penitent must jog his memory into grasping the idea that memory stores eternal spiritual realities, not spatial objects nor temporal events. In faithful imitation of Augustine's tribute to memory, the meditative poet must draw together the items strewn in his mind through an ordering of memory, making spiritual meaning of seemingly random events in nature:

> There came a Day at Summer's full,
> Entirely for me—
> I thought that such were for the Saints,
> Where Resurrection be—
>
> The Sun, as common, went abroad,
> The Flowers, accustomed, blew,
> As if no soul the solstice passed
> That maketh all things new—
>
> The time was scarce profaned by speech,
> The symbol of a word
> Was needless, as at Sacrament,
> The Wardrobe—of our Lord— (322)

The past tense of the poem suggests that the faculty of memory is at work sorting out the events of the near and remote past. The clause "I thought that such were for the Saints" recalls a state of mind which had existed prior to the events recollected in the poem. The poet orders her impressions of the events of the recent past into a coherent vision of the "beata vita," correcting the faulty recollection of the distant past. Only a limited understanding of God's purpose had prevented the penitent in the past from appreciating the events of this world, which were not reserved for the saints alone, but available to every man in his daily conduct of the good life. Through the faculty of memory the penitent begins to understand the spiritual significance of the daily movement of the sun and the nodding of the flowers in the wind. Augustine observes that learning consists in gathering together and collecting items which had "previously lurked scattered and neglected." The penitent is capable of elevating and loving the "fragrant smell of flowers" when God's light shines into his soul, rendering him fit to embrace nature with love. Memory as the controlling agent of salvation is more than mere recall. It is, as in the Dickinson poem above, an illumination and clarification of previously unnoted experience, "scarce profaned by speech."

The characteristic of Augustinian meditation which distinguishes it from the other modes is its formlessness, its dependence on nature as an early source of and guide to authentic inner life, and its conscious

reliance on memory for the Paradisiacal vision. Although it shares with other forms a prefatory posture of humility, it differs in that it is not dependent upon a series of strict-formulated steps as is the Ignatian with its acts of purgation or the required application of the five senses to memory, understanding and will as outlined in Dawson's pamphlet. Leaning on the powers of memory and imagination, Augustinian meditation draws on spiritual recall for "seeing" rather than address itself to formal "points." In this way, in the language of the *Confessions*, "clearer sight would be directed to God's truth." The inner eye of the soul, much like the "inner light" of Quaker faith, and not the organic eye, is the vehicle of memory:

> What I see not, I better see—
> Through Faith—my Hazel Eye
> Has periods of shutting—
> But no lid has Memory (939)

The eye of memory in this Dickinson poem is the truer receptor. It sees the "signs to Nature's Inns," inviting "whosoever famishing/to taste her mystic Bread."[25] The penitent fixes the "sign" with the mind's eye, takes communion, and comes closer to God.

In the *Confessions* Augustine meditates on God's relationship to the universe he has created. Looking back, the regenerate sinner recognizes that God has been acting upon him by the "hidden secret of Providence." In retropect, through the agency of memory, he is able to discern the unrevealed workings of God's providential plan. In his solitude he confesses to God: "All this I do inside me in the huge court of my memory." Alone, the penitent gains insight by looking backward and inward. God has fulfilled His intention and now the penitent admits: "You brought it about through me, and without my being aware of it." In the journey from the things of this world to the rarefied inner life, the penitent confesses to his Creator: "You acted to bring me home to the realization of my misery."[26] These same intrinsic elements of unawareness, inwardness and predestination invest the following Dickinson meditative poem:

> Far from love the Heavenly Father
> Leads the Chosen Child,
> Oftener through the Realm of Briar
> Than the Meadow Mild. (1021)

The "chosen child" must pass through the briar before she reaches her predestined "native land," just as the Augustinian penitent must realize his misery. Note that in the same poem the three central focuses of meditation appear in their traditional order: Deity, nature and the

self, interacting for salvation. The union is a familiar one in Dickinson's poetry:

> The Sun went down—no Man looked on—
> The Earth and I, alone,
> Were present at the Majesty—
> He triumphed and went on—
>
> The Sun went up—no Man looked on—
> The Earth and I and One
> A nameless Bird—a Stranger
> Were Witness for the Crown— (1079)

Two members of the triad are present in the first stanza. In the second, nature and the self ("the earth and I") are joined by the bird, the witness for the "crown," a clear allusion to Christ's assumption. In the Augustinian mode, the penitent has participated in a Scriptural event, which dramatization illuminates the two other experiences.

As the *Confessions* are a biography of spiritual growth through devout and sustained meditation, so are Emily Dickinson's poems an extended history of the inner life. "The soul has bandaged moments,"[27] laments the poet, turning her introspections into colloquies with God, in the traditional mode of formal meditation. As Augustine addressed the unseen "You" who brought about his conversion, Dickinson invokes her unseen spiritual father in dialogue and correspondence: "You love the Lord you cannot see/You write him every day."[28] She describes the intercourse as

> . . . a little implement
> Through which men reach
> Where Presence is denied them.
> They fling their Speech
> By means of it—in God's Ear (437)

Heavily burdened, she confides:

> Savior! I've no one else to tell—
> And so I trouble *Thee*.
> I am the one forgot Thee so—
> Dost Thou remember me? (217)

Implicit in the unspoken answer is God's reassurance that He is ever mindful of the supplicant. Her lament is as poignant as Augustine's lengthy litany in Book Ten: "Thou indeed wert with me; but I was not with thee. . . . Thou calledst and criedst unto me, yea thou even breakedst open my deafness; thou discoveredst thy beams and shinedst unto me, and didst chase away my blindness." Augustine was

certain that God was "ever in action" and cognizant of forgetful man, whose sole desire, in spite of his lapses, was to be united with Him: "When I shall once attain to be united with thee in every part of me, then shall I no more feel either sorrow or labor: yea, then shall my life truly be alive, every way full of thee."

Compare the Augustinian yearning with the Dickinsonian:

> With thee, in the Desert
> With thee, in the thirst
> With thee in the tamarind Wood— (209)

The poet's dependence on her Savior suggests the father-child relationship in Book Ten, Chapter 6 of the Confessions, in which the penitent becomes a "little one." The reader who dismisses Dickinson's outcry to "papa above" as frivolous should be aware that the posture is unequivocally Augustinian. "I am a little one," wrote Augustine, "but my Father liveth forever, and my Protector is sufficient for me." The child takes refuge under the wing of his God, and if the child should be "chosen," as in Dickinson's #1021, he could look forward to being united with God "in every part."

The single most dramatic point made in Book Ten is the same point made in the *Confessions* as a whole: "Cognoscam te, cognitor meus, cognoscam, sicut et cognitus sum": I shall know You, You who know me, even as I am known by You. Knowing God is the beginning of self-knowledge, and that knowing is intuitive. The Augustinian Godhead is ubiquitous, but the penitent must rely on faith, intuition and memory to find Him, for He is all around: "God is hidden everywhere. He is manifest everywhere. No one can know Him as He is, but no one is permitted not to Know him."[29] Emily Dickinson wrote a literal paraphrase of Augustine's declaration of knowing in her celebrated poem comparing the search for God to a grisly game of hide-and-seek:

> I know that He exists
> Somewhere in silence—
> He has hid rare life
> From our gross eyes.

Although the stakes are high in this dangerous game—eye-to-eye contact is possible only in death—still, a certain limited "knowing" is obligatory. To reassure herself about God's continuous being, Dickinson later jotted on a fragment of manuscript the following comforting words: "God cannot discontinue himself. This appalling trust is at times all that remains."[30] A dramatic exaggeration of Augustine's contention that God's existence transcends the measurements of time and

space, her "appalling" trust is the skeptic's reluctant testament of faith. Although she never attained to Augustine's whole-hearted conversion, like him, as far as she went, she relied, not on a systematic theology, but on an intuition abetted by the regenerative act of meditation.

Finally, in the tradition of the *Confessions*, theology begins where Eros and penitence converge. Augustine's self-examination was in a large part a purgation of the flesh, a renunciation of sexual appetite for God's love, which is a desideratum of the spirit. Until Book Ten, the *Confessions* tell a story of conflict. In Book Eight, Augustine is still "tightly bound by love of women," and is struggling toward the achievement of celibacy. The contemplative life he embraced required that he "seek God wholly and a life of happiness," and leave behind the world of "negotium." It was not until Book Ten that he attained the single-mindedness of the true penitent, the "unus ego animas" of the unconflicted self. The Pauline tradition of conversion through renunciation was the great harvest he reaped in the final books of the *Confessions*. In "dying unto death and living unto life," the *Confessions* marked the final goal of the properly executed meditation: the end of the fleshly appetites and the beginning of oneness with God.[31]

The painful transition from things of this world to the next was as pervasive a theme in Emily Dickinson's later poetry as it was in Augustine's most fully realized introspections. The anguish of renunciation was the central theme of her most deeply felt meditations. Conversion from flesh to spirit is gradual, entailing painful discarding of one while taking on the other. First the poet feels bound to explain her enthrallment to earthly things:

> Because you saturated Sight—
> And I had no more Eyes
> For sordid excellence
> As Paradise—

The "you" in this case is the man she has loved and is bound to. Then, like Augustine, turning from the worldly to the spiritual, comes the gradual shift in commitment:

> The Absolute—removed
> The Relative away—
> That I unto Himself adjust
> My slow idolatry. (765)

Finally conviced of the "worthlessness of earthly things,"[32] she chooses the "absolute" ecstasy of the spirit over the "relative" pleasures of the flesh:

Sufficient troth, that we shall rise—
Disposed at length, the Grave—
To that new Marriage, justified
Through Calvaries of Love— (322)

Renouncing the flesh, she still retains the vocabulary of passion, sees God as a "distant stately lover,"[33] and abandons herself to total union:

Rowing in Eden—
Ah, the Sea!
Might I but moor—Tonight—
In Thee! (249)

Sexual-sacred ambiguity notwithstanding, the bulk of her religious poetry is a psycho-history of conversion. As the *Confessions* begin in the present time with a meditation on what the penitent once was and what he is now, so do Dickinson's poems take the measure of the renounced material world and the deeper reality of the realized spiritual life:

Renunciation is a piercing Virtue—
The letting go
A Presence—for an Expectation
Not now—
. . . .
Renunciation—is the Choosing
Against itself—
Itself to justify—
Unto itself—
When large function—
Make that appear—
Smaller—that Covered Vision Here— (475)

Her poems are her confession. They are the matter of her meditation just as the books of the *Confession* are the record of Augustine's conversion from skepticism to faith, disunity to unity, blindness to blinding vision. In both cases, the penitents recall the "piercing" nature of the renunciation of this world, because neither is engaged in reminiscence but in therapy. As the *Confessions* is the painful, self-examining story of inner struggle—"confessio" means, for Augustine, accusation of oneself; praise of God"[34]—the body of Dickinson's religious poetry can be taken to be the manifesto of the conflicted inner life. In renouncing the "presence" of this world for the "expectation" of the next, as she does in the poem above, she confesses the

pain while she affirms the triad of Christian thought: the prepotent God, who created and controls the other two: the natural universe, which offers testimony of God's power; and the human soul, which is capable of intuition into God's being through meditation. When she writes, "A Word made Flesh is seldom/and tremblingly partook,"[35] she is affirming her belief in Scriptural truth. Enlightened by a passage from the Bible, she turns to nature for verification of her intuition, and asks to join in the "communion" of a summer day. At that point, her soul is prepared to "love the Lord (it) cannot see," just as Augustine was finally prepared to see clearly God's invisible works." The triad is complete, working toward the end of spiritual conversion through devotion to the principles of Christian thought. What emerges from Emily Dickinson's voyage of the soul is a portrait of a self-examing Augustinian penitent, seeking perfection of the self as an avenue to the higher life and to an active union with God.

NOTES

1. Louis Martz, *English Seventeenth Century Verse*, 2 vols. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1973), V.2, p. xiv.
2. *Ibid.*, p. xii.
3. All quotations from Emily Dickinson's poems are taken from *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas Johnson, 3 vols. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1955). Quotations are identified by the numbers of the poems and will appear in the end notes. Entire poems or individual stanzas are followed by the number of the poem in the body of the text. The poet's eccentricities of punctuation and capitalization are retained throughout. The poems from which the first three quotations are taken are consecutively 61, 248 and 178.
4. *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward, 3 vols. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1958). Letter 319 to Thomas Wentworth Higginson.
5. See Louis Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954) for a general history of the art of meditation, with particular attention to Chapters 1 and 2. A discussion of the influence of Augustinian meditation on Vaughan's poetry may be found in Louis Martz, "Henry Vaughan: The Man Within," PMLA, LXXVIII, 1963, pp. 40-49. For an essay on the practice of meditation, see Joseph Hall, "The Art of Divine Meditation," London, 1606.
6. *Letters*, L.35 to Jane Humphrey.
7. *Poems*, 338, 986.
8. *Poems*, 279.
9. *Poems*, 1594.
10. *Poems*, 606.
11. Martz, "Henry Vaughan," p. 43.
12. Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation*, p. 1.
13. All quotations from St. Augustine's *Confessions* are taken from William Watts' translation into English in 1631. 2 vols. (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1912). This quotation is from Book Ten, Chapter 6.
14. Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation*, xvii.
15. Perry Miller, *The New England Mind*, 2 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), v. p. 134.
16. Jonathan Edwards, "Images or Shadows of Divine Things."
17. Letters, L.712.
18. Thomas H. Johnson, *Emily Dickinson: An Interpretive Biography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), pp. 145-146.
19. Jack Capp, author of *Emily Dickinson's Reading* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966) tells that E.D. was so impressed with Herbert's "Matin Hymn" that she transcribed the second two stanzas for her

pleasure. By mistake, Millicent Todd Bingham published it over Emily's signature in the first edition of *Bolts of Melody*, thinking it one of Emily's own. The poet also wrote frequently to Higginson about Vaughan's poetry, misquoting Vaughan's line as "My days are at best both dim and hoary," and misspelling Vaughan's name as "Vaughn." L. 653.

20: *Confessions*, Book Ten, Chapter 27.

21. *Poems*, 1298.

22. *Poems*, 1244.

23. *Confessions*, Book Ten, Chapter 49.

24. *Ibid.*, Chapter 8.

25. *Poems*, 1077.

26. *Confessions*, Book Ten, Chapter 8.

27. *Poems*, 512.

28. *Poems*, 487.

29. Eugene Portalie, *A Guide to the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Chicago: Regnery, 1960), p. 125.

30. Charles Anderson, *Emily Dickinson's Poetry: Stairway of Surprise* (New York: Holt Rinehart, 1960), p. 264.

31. *Confessions*, Book Seven, Chapter 17.

32. *Poems*, 1373.

33. *Poems*, 357

34. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 175.

35. *Poems*, 1651.

Of Pilgrimage

Now, Pilgrim,
wish the Holy Mother well,
and follow the mountain trail—
still seized by the mystery.

On the far hills,
the Holy Mothers, the Holy Fathers
gather their faithful
to festivals in the cloister churches.

There the icons shine,
never dim with candle smoke;
plaster eyes weep;
brass hands move in blessing;
believers are confirmed in ecstasy.

Why did you disturb the priest
polishing icons at midnight
in his sleep?
Why didn't you give thanks
for the sponge and tube
behind Madonna's head?
Why did you cut the threads that ran
from the patron saint's arm
to the treadle under the altar?

The cloisters on the far ridgeline
glow with torchlight.
At this distance,
the festivals have no voice.

Here in the wood,
naked flesh meets the wind,
vested only with scars
where old stitching torn open
heals over.

Here the incense of earth and air
rises in evening rain.
Wind chants among the leaves.

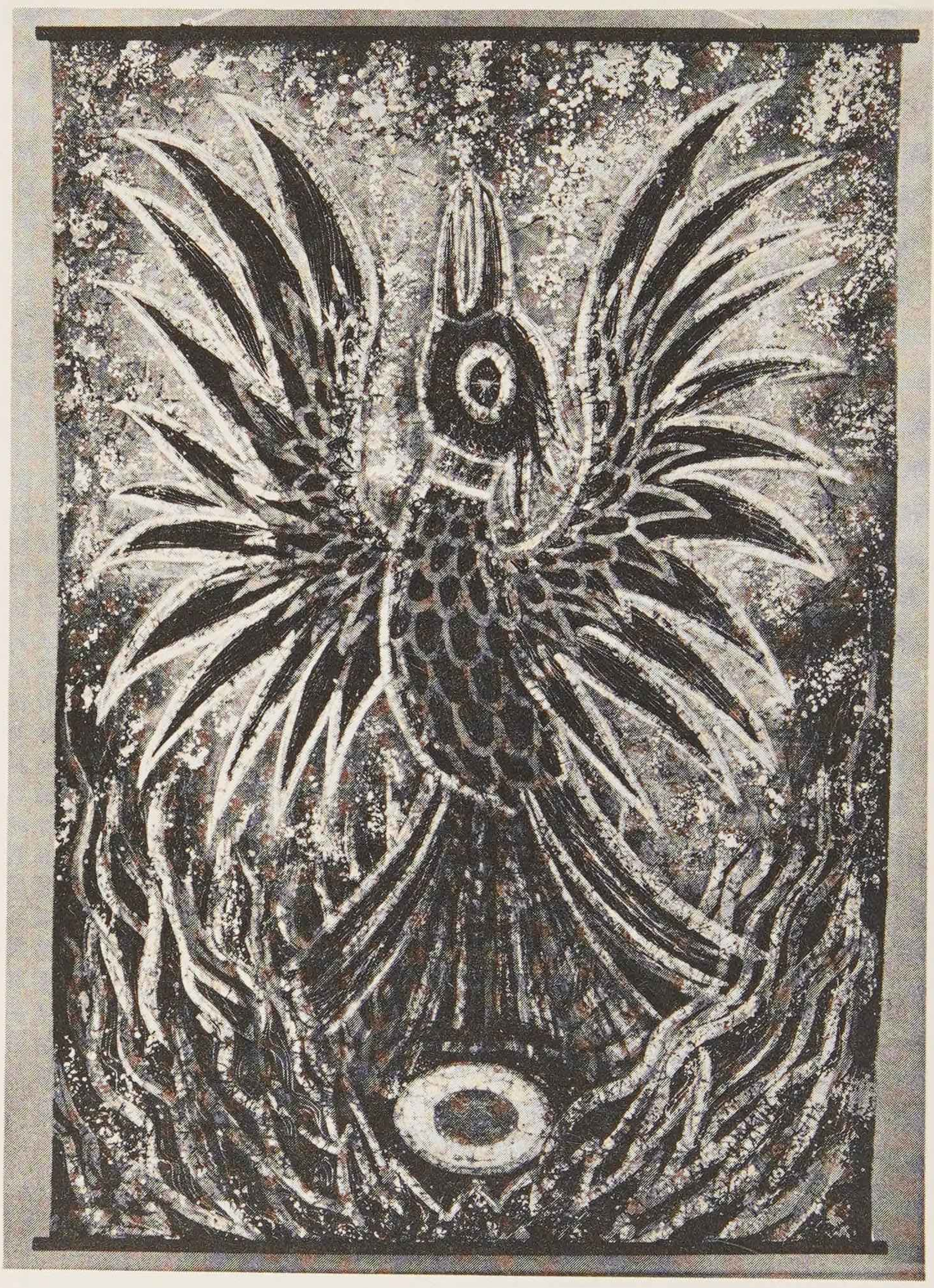
Clouds in purple
shift to break a brief wafer of light
over the mountain.

Lips taste of sweat.

The eye watches the path
dissolve in dusk.

Ahead,
through the syllables of wind
rising in high trees,
the ear catches
a settling of wings.

Ralph S. Carlson



The Phoenix from *A Bestiary of Mythical Creatures*.

"The Phoenix lived alone in an earthly Paradise and fed upon the light from the stars. At the end of a thousand years, knowing that death was approaching, he descended into the outer world and flew to the land of his name, Phoenicia. There in the tallest palm tree he built a nest of spices. At dawn, lifting his voice, he sang a hymn so ravishingly beautiful that the rising sun reined in his horses to listen. In that instant the universe stood still, and sparks from the flaming halo of the sun set fire to the aromatic phoenix nest. Thus the phoenix was consumed in flames. But instantly a new phoenix arose from the ashes of the old."

An Interview with Thetis Blacker

This interview was conducted on June 8, 1978 by Dr. Edward Robinson, Director of the Religious Experience Research Unit, Manchester College, Oxford England.

ER: I'd like to start with something that Mark Rothko said about his own paintings, because as soon as I read it it immediately reminded me of yours. He had this feeling that man's true spiritual situation could only be represented in some kind of drama which involved a world of intermediary beings—monsters, demigods and all other strange creatures of ancient mythology. The trouble was that to-day that world of myth and ritual was no longer acceptable. Yet without it how could the artist evoke any sense of a reality that transcends our everyday life? He ended up, as we know, with this sense of utter solitude, having abandoned all natural forms.

TB: I feel that Rothko's understanding of our condition was a profoundly true one. He was certainly right about the isolation of the artist in our culture.

ER: Yes; he wasn't interested in abstract painting just for its own sake. What he was really after was some means of communicating the sense of mystery for which the old symbolic language would no longer do. It was a practical matter of "ending this silence and solitude," as he put it. Whether to achieve this his methods should be abstract or representational was beside the point. Perhaps art must always have elements of both. These images of yours here, for example, they're certainly not abstract, but they're not representational either, in the sense of being realistic or representing some actual creature or scene. In music we talk about "absolute" music, which is not meant to describe anything in particular, as distinct from programme music, which does have some such definite reference. Perhaps we should speak of absolute art. This would include but not be confined to abstract art, which leaves the natural world entirely behind.

The Mantichora from *A Bestiary of Mythical Creatures*.

TB: Well, not entirely, because abstract art is devoted to the study of space, and space is the world we live in. I think an abstract painter who is particularly aware of space will find that that awareness does keep him in relation to the natural world. If you study abstract painting —I've never done any except as textile design—you become very much aware of—I might almost say of the sacredness of space. Artists who paint in this style do feel that space is in some way the foundation of the world.

ER: But there is nothing abstract in this sense in these pictures of yours. That creature up there, for example; he looks like some kind of lion.

TB: Actually he's a mantichora: a mythological beast which has the head of a man, with three rows of teeth, woman's hair, a lion's body and a scorpions tail; he can run faster and jump higher than any other creature, and he's particularly fond of human bones.

ER: Well even the mantichora, or at least his various attributes, have some origin in the visible world.

TB: Of course.

ER: But you're hardly likely to walk out into the Surrey woods and come face to face with a mantichora, except perhaps on midsummer night under a full moon. So his reality is symbolic, would you say? Or archetypal?

TB: Well yes, I suppose so, although I hesitate to use those labels. They are apt to sound grandiose, and in my opinion are bandied about too freely nowadays, too often applied to inferior works of art, making them seem more important than they really are, especially in what is known as "therapeutic art."

ER: But you would say, wouldn't you, that these images of yours have some kind of universal reference, some universal reality?

TB: Oh yes; and I feel these mythological creatures do still have a meaning for us despite the fact that we know they don't exist physically.

ER: I certainly think this absolute or universal quality is something central to all genuinely religious art.

TB: Yes, indeed.

ER: And you can see how, right back at the beginning of Renaissance art, the figure of Christ began to lose this quality; it became individualized, human in a particular way. Giotto's figures, for example, are not like the idealized forms you find in classical Greek sculpture—the young athletes, the gods and heroes.

TB: Wasn't the turning-point when they [artists] found out how to represent three dimensions in their painting instead of just two? The

old icons were really two dimensional. But as soon as you get that third dimension, of depth, you find the image receeding from you. I feel that when an image is in two dimensions only it is absolutely immediate. I feel this very strongly. I don't often use the third dimension in my work. In that picture for example, although one knows, looking at it, that the feet are a little bit nearer because of the shadows on his body, nevertheless you cannot say that there is any truly three-dimensional effect there. It may be partly due to the fact that I am short-sighted, but I do see things as near. And when I'm painting religious subjects—

ER: Like the mantichora?

TB: Yes; I would say he was; well, real subjects—I don't really know what word to use, but what I'm trying to say is that the thing we are searching for, whatever it is, I don't like to think of it being a long, long way off, as though the goal were far distant, like the light on the top of a far away mountain. I don't feel that at all. I feel that our goal is potentially here right within us; and therefore what points the way to it is something that *confronts* us immediately, like a mirror screen. I think of all my paintings really as mirror screens which are both revealing the way and also guarding that which is sacred. When you face them there is no way round; you have to go through. Then on the other side you find yourself there, in the sacred realm. You see, what I'm concerned with is to show the *immediacy* of things. Just as the abstract painters used space in order to show the stillness of the moment of time, when all the clutter of everything else is removed so that all that is left is the purity of space, in the same way I'm trying to show the immediacy of everything through the two dimensions of my pictures.

ER: That's very interesting.

TB: Also I am very concerned with the way that the image of Christ has become too personal, in a human way, that is; I find that when I come to paint God, or Christ, I cannot paint Him all one colour or shade. I cannot paint Him with light, or dark, or red hair. And when I come to paint His face I can't make Him pink or brown or black; I have to paint Him with a golden face, to show that it is a sacred face.

ER: A universal face?

TB: Universal, yes, but also sacred. The ideal painting—the ideal icon—of the face of Christ must be not only the summation of every face of every human being who has ever lived, but a mirror of the Divine Face that lives eternally. So in looking at an icon of the face of Christ each of us should be able to perceive the face of our own immortal soul. In the same way that in ancient times they used to paint

the sky, in a sacred context, gold, not blue, I find myself doing exactly the same. I find myself using special colours, not because of any symbolic significance in them but because they seem to me the only valid way of representing what is—I want to say an "unreal reality," or an "unnatural reality," though of course I don't really mean that it's unreal or unnatural at all; you know what I mean?

ER: Something distinct from this ordinary world of nature?

TB: Yes, and yet, paradoxically, at the same time including the ordinary world of nature in its multiple forms.

ER: So you feel you've just got to get away from anything that might suggest an ordinary human being.

TB: From the perishable human being, yes. In the same way, now that I am doing this picture of the third day of creation, I cannot represent any one particular kind of tree or flower or herb. I might have taken the rose, perhaps, as typical of a fruit tree—after all, most fruit trees come from the *Rosaceae*—just as the apple has been taken as the fruit in the Garden of Eden, though in fact the Bible never actually says so. But though these images are not taken from any particular model, as I begin thinking about them and painting them, they become inevitable. They just have to be the way they are. And if they're not right, I find they don't work technically either. It's very easy to do a painting which is decorative and perfectly acceptable, but which doesn't have an autonomy of its own. And I feel that my pictures *have* to be autonomous, they really do.

ER: When you are quite free to do what you like, what happens? Do you suddenly wake up in the middle of the night with an idea or an image and think, "That's it; I must get it down"?

TB: Sometimes it is in the middle of the night, because I may get ideas from dreams. Sometimes I wake up early in the morning and I see things in front of my eyes, and that gives me an idea. Sometimes after a day's work I go to bed and shut my eyes and I get these images in front of my eyes in the way I imagine those people do who take drugs. If I'm working on a painting I sometimes see, actually in front of my eyelids, the solution to what I've been struggling to get; or if I'm doing something wrong I see it as it should be—literally, like a picture painted on the inside of my eyelids. At times I see something actually happening in the world; a bird may flash across the window, and I don't just see it as a bird; I get a picture of the atmosphere which I feel that bird created at the moment of my seeing it. That might even turn into a series of pictures. I once did three or four of exactly that kind. I can't really put into words what it is that impels me to paint. It's an inner atmosphere that I get of something exciting and magical and

mysterious all at the same time; and also a kind of activating quality, as if a spark had been struck—almost a shivering feeling. It's like when you wake up early in the morning and you look out of the window and there's dew on everything and the air has a particularly clear smell. That is what I get when I feel a picture has to be painted.

ER: Before you know what the picture actually is to be?

TB: Yes; and I don't ever think of it in verbal concepts. I don't really like *talking* about my pictures because as soon as you begin saying, "This *means* that," it separates things, and . . .

ER: Yes, I know what you mean. It's like having to translate into a different language.

TB: Everything in fact comes from this atmosphere of activated purity which I feel. Sometimes it's when I'm reading something; a line of poetry or just a phrase will spark off this thing in my mind, a kind of vibration, an irridescence.

ER: Then when you come to the cloth for the first time, and have it plain and blank in front of you, can you describe what happens, what your feelings are?

TB: I usually come to the cloth with this feeling of necessity, the necessity of painting a picture. I may have been given a commission or I may not. I have to do a sort of ritual beforehand; it's as if I have to change gear into a state of greater awareness. So I take the cloth in an almost ritual manner, and throw it down on the table in a particular way, rather as one would throw dice onto a board. The way it falls is part of its destiny, and part of my destiny, and part of the whole pattern of things. And then I look at the cloth, and in its folds as it falls, and in the patterns of light and shadow I begin to see my own kind of imaginative creatures. I see, say, a bird there, and a wing there, and a monkey coming in there; and then they very quickly begin to change until eventually there is a whole kind of dance of these shifting images going on. Sometimes they have a rather sinister aspect. I know that this is all part of my subconscious churning away, and I wait—sometimes I will go out of the room and come back and have another look. If the picture doesn't "jell" within, say, three days, I'll pick up the cloth and I'll throw it again and go through the same process. But I never allow myself to throw the cloth more than three times. It's just a discipline, really. When I have looked at the cloth long enough an image will emerge that is still and does not change, and eventually this will become complete. Then I know that this is the image that has to be painted; it comes from the deepest part of me. I can go out of the room then and come back again and the image will remain. It doesn't shift at all.

ER: So in a sense the picture has been painted, at least it is fully formed in your mind, before you apply any colours to the cloth.

TB: Absolutely. Especially in this technique, in which a mistake will turn the whole thing into something completely different.

ER: Then you never welcome a mistake?

TB: No, I don't. A mistake in something the size of this Creation banner will cost me twenty-five pounds for the cloth alone.

ER: But it might turn into something else.

TB: Well, yes, it sometimes does. In fact, two of the ones I've done so far have had mistakes in them; and I've folded them up and put them away. I know one day they'll turn into something else, but they can't turn into pictures of the Creation, because this is a specific subject and I've had to be iconographically absolutely correct.

ER: How far would you describe this art of yours as Christian? It might seem to be sublimely removed from the conflicts of the everyday world and the human decisions we are constantly called on to make.

TB: Well, if you have to represent creation you have anyway to go far behind Christianity itself.

ER: It seems to me one of the characteristics of a religious way of life to feel that the world by itself does not "make sense"; and therefore one shouldn't expect any genuinely religious art to "make sense" either.

TB: Well, it depends on what you mean by "sense."

ER: There is bound, surely, to be something anomalous in such an art, something mysterious. This picture of yours here, for example; this creature—what was his name again?

TB: The mantichora.

ER: Well there's something pretty mysterious for a start about an animal with three rows of teeth. The creation in mythology of such creatures as mantichoras is presumably an assertion of the mysteriousness, not to say the senselessness, of the universe. And this is what Rothko was talking about, surely, when he talked about the need for monsters and gods "to enact our drama." It's a drama that takes us far beyond this sensible, material world and all those "finite associations."

TB: To me this mantichora makes a great deal of sense, with his three rows of teeth, his human head, his lion's body and his scorpions tail and those tremendous claws. There's no escaping such a creature. Life *does* grasp us with those claws, it stings us with that tail. There's a strength there that we cannot resist; however fast we run he comes after us, grabs us with his claws—and then he devours us. He is a death symbol. And why three rows of teeth? They are like the three

days of Christ in the tomb: We are devoured three times. And by being devoured by such a creature we become part of that great company of people who live down in the depths of hell, from which Christ raises us on the third day. This I believe would have been the medieval interpretation of this theme.

ER: What you say makes very good sense to me simply because you are bringing in, so to speak, another whole dimension of understanding in order to make sense of a world that without it does not make sense.

TB: Yes, exactly. In fact this is how I see everything that I do paint. But I much prefer it when my paintings can speak without my having to put any of this into words. I don't think pictures are effective unless they *do* speak for themselves. Some people, of course, look at that and say, "How horrible! I couldn't possibly live with that." Others say, "Oh how I do love that lion; I think he's got such a nice smile, with his jolly three rows of teeth!" It depends entirely on the way people see things. I'm very happy having him there and chewing me up occasionally. Because, goodness! One does need to be chewed up. The trouble is we usually only get past the first row of teeth. It's only when we've gone through the third that we are in that place where we can be reached by Jesus Christ, who rose on the third day. And therefore I feel that these are profoundly Christian works of art. I think that Christian art is not dead at all. I believe the symbols have just become so second-hand and third-hand and fourth-hand that they have lost their tremendousness.

ER: When I said I thought Christian art was dead I was thinking of that main-stream tradition which always regarded the artist as having the function of an illustrator of the story of salvation. This tradition I feel has now run out into the sand, and is completely dead. What I find interesting is that any real live art today is so distant from any popular idea of what religion is that it has to be explained. I've done a lot of going round schools and colleges with pictures of modern abstract, or perhaps I should say absolute, art; and if I show these without any commentary at all, as I should like to do and let the pictures as you say speak for themselves, the response is absolutely nil, or it is actually negative. But if I start by reading out some of the ideas that Nicholson or Gabo or Braque or whoever puts into *words*, then I can sense the wheels slowly beginning to move, and people say, "Ah, yes; I see; well, in that case, yes," and a positive response begins to germinate. But you have to start with words.

TB: I think this is very sad.

ER: And this is because the tradition of communication is broken.

We have become so corrupted by, I would say centuries of bad religious art—or rather illustration which is just not art at all. I sometimes feel we have got to back to Byzantine times to rediscover life in the tradition.

TB: Yes, absolutely. Generation after generation of naturalism, which had as its aim the perfect representation of natural forms; this has been the trouble. Look at almost all Victorian art; they had the skill to reproduce absolutely perfectly the proportions of the human body, and this became an end in itself. But compared to Greek sculpture of the human form, it is all totally lacking in force of spirit, all quite lifeless.

ER: What do you think of Oskar Schlemmer's observation that all art should be "Dionysian in conception, Apollonian in form"? That is that in the earlier stages when the images are beginning to emerge you should open yourself up to whatever comes into the mind without imposing your conscious will, while later on, in the execution of the work, you more deliberately impose your own order, control, design and so forth.

TB: Yes, I recognize these two sides, but I would say you have to have the Dionysian thing going on all the time, because when you're actually painting, in the actual brush-strokes, this Dionysian quality has got to come through. The work has got to be alive. Your controlling mind has to be active of course; you have to have your technique, but only so that your hand is the instrument of the Dionysian force.

ER: Yes, but what about the Dionysian error?

TB: Ah, yes!

ER: Don't you sometimes find yourself saying to Dionysius, "Now, look, you just wait a minute, Apollo's in charge at the moment, and damn it, I've just got to get this thing right"?

TB: Yes, one has the whole of this discipline going on all the time. In my particular technique the Apollonian thing has to be very strong, to keep me going through the immense stretches of boredom. There's a great deal of slogging, slogging, slogging. It's taken me a day and a half to do this one waxing we're looking at now. And I sit hour after hour after hour just drawing and drawing and painting and painting the wax on. But I find very often the purely mechanical aspects of one's work may be therapeutic. The mere business of tidying up, cleaning one's brushes, putting one's paints in order and cleaning off the table—the very activity of imposing order has the effect of cleaning up and ordering one's imagination. All these outer acts are I feel a ritual for a painter; they correspond with what is going on inside. This is why it is very important for me—I don't know if it is for other people—

to work in a highly ordered and disciplined way. Because the Dionysian thing does fluctuate: It fluctuates in a terrifying and tormenting way, and you can never be sure that, as Kathleen Raine says, the daimons will come.

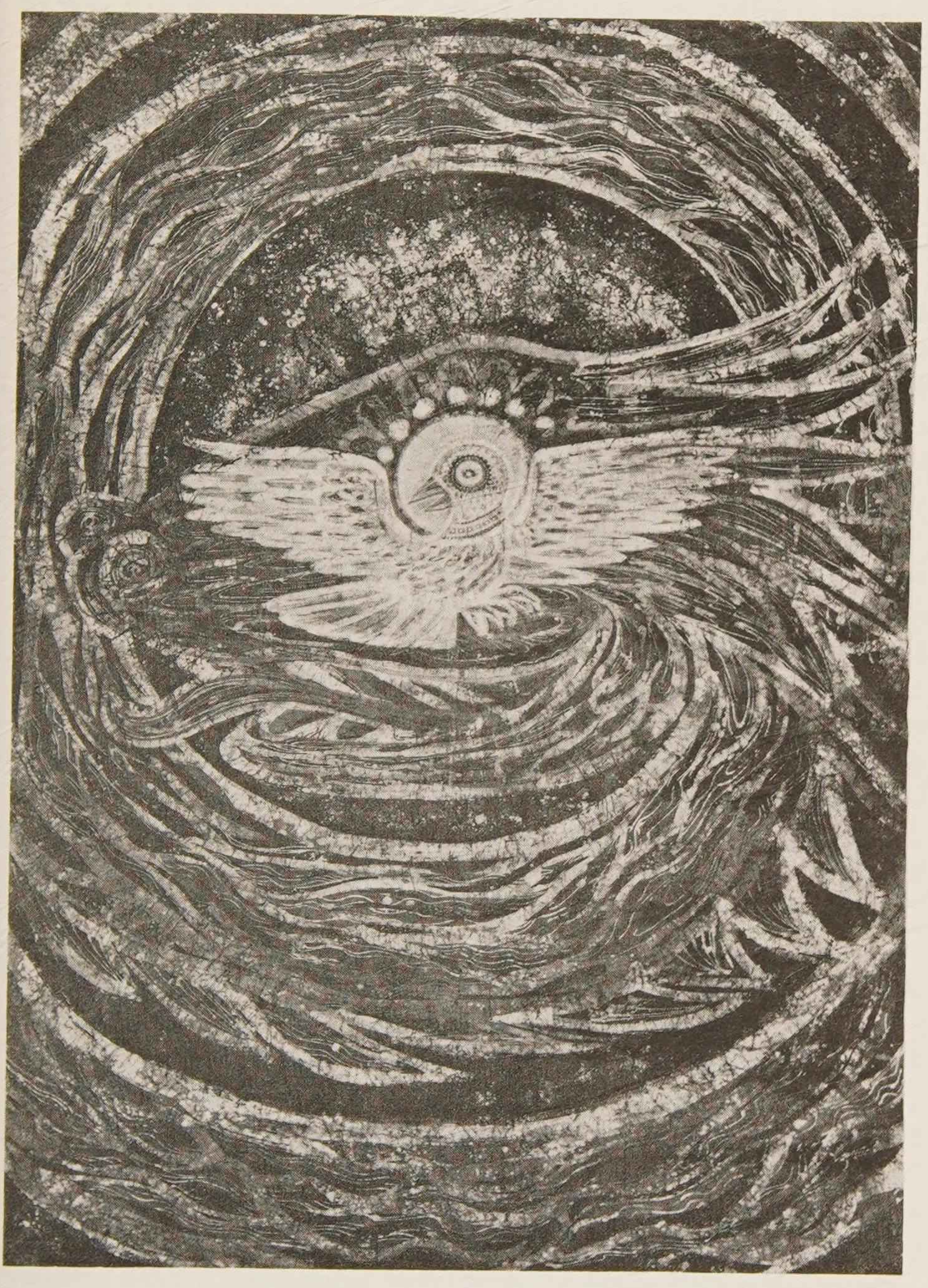
ER: Rarely, rarely comest thou,
Spirit of Delight.

TB: Shelley?

ER: Yes; and Elgar put these same words at the head of the score of his second symphony.

TB: I find the preparation, the setting of things in order, is, in my own work at least, extraordinarily important. Last year I had a very important commission to do for a friend of mine. I wanted it to come out of the depths, really out of the depths. Her mother had been killed in an accident and the money she had received from the court in compensation she chose to use on commissioning a picture from me. She felt that in this way something positive might emerge from so dreadful an event. So I felt a tremendous sense of responsibility over this picture. But I couldn't get going. Every time I wanted to start in my ordinary way I felt so desperately inadequate. And then I found a most strange thing happened to me. I was living on an island in Denmark with an unused castle in the middle, with a moat all round it. My studio was on the south west side. I found myself beginning to count my footsteps from one side of the moat to the other, across the diameter. Then I began counting them going in another direction. And always the castle was in the way, being in the middle. I became completely obsessed to find the exact centre of that island. I would count my steps up to the castle, measure the castle, and then count my steps to the other side. And this went on for about three days. And then I realized what I was really trying to do, which was to find the very centre of myself. The empty castle of course represented the emptiness in me, which was always getting in the way; and I knew that when I did find the very centre of the island I should find the centre of myself, from which, and only from which, the work could spring.

And much of the time now I find I am working on a symbolic level, often without having any knowledge until afterwards that this has been so. When I wanted to start the first of this Creation series, the creation of light from darkness, I spent a year walking round in complete darkness myself. It wasn't an agonizing depression; it was a feeling of blank non-existence; a pervading greyness. Then I began to suffer from attacks of giddiness, in which everything swirled and swirled around me if I bent down. It happened two or three times, and I was told it was the result of an attack of labyrinthitis that I'd had as a form



The Creation of the Bird of Light & the Serpent of Darkness from *A Bestiary of Mythical Creatures*.

of flu. But I don't think that was important. What was important was that in these attacks of giddiness I saw the coiled serpent, this spiral which I have in fact painted; and in the centre was that point of balance which was the only point I could look at, because if my eyes moved at all I would go giddy again. So it was through that year of blankness and darkness, and through these few attacks of labyrinthitis that I was able to see this painting, which is iconographically correct, of the point of light from which all creation begins, in the coiled spirals of the serpent of darkness.

Then when I was doing the second painting of the Creation series which I've shown you I knew that these angels had got to come out of the whirlwind, as in Ezekiel, though in fact I was illustrating Genesis. First of all I made a spiral, so that they were coming in a circular movement. But then after looking at the picture for ten days I realized that my image was wrong. So I had to begin again. I had the four angels, the tetramorphs, and I knew their wings must be of flame; I had seen that already. And then I realized how they came out of the centre of the whirlwind. When I had painted the second picture I realized that what in fact I had painted was a blown-up image of the very centre of the eye of the dove in the first picture. In that moment I conceived the whole of this series, how from the point of light in the very centre of the darkness, the eye of the dove which is the symbol of light, from that point everything emerges, everything explodes; and how the process of creation is not a series of days but rather a continuous explosion. The second day explodes out of the centre of the first one, and the third out of the centre of the second, and so and so and so on. I realized then that nothing is separate, but from the moment that the point of light was created, which is the sword piercing the darkness, the mirror of the eye of God Himself—I saw that from that moment everything is inevitable, including the evil; and when eventually we get to the garden of Eden there is no question what the centre of that will be: It will be the fruit in the mouth of the serpent coiled around the tree, with Adam and Eve on either side; and the centre of that fruit will be the dark seed which will be the black tomb from which Christ emerges—because but for that black centre, the corrupt centre of that evil fruit, the coming of Christ would never have been necessary. But it was inevitable, from the moment of the point of light on that first day. So to me it really does all make sense.

About Thetis Blacker

Thetis Blacker was born and educated in England and studied at the Chelsea School of Art. In 1959 the first exhibition of her drawing was shown at the Bear Lane Gallery, Oxford. In 1960 the British Council exhibited her work in Lima. Thetis Blacker travelled in the Andes and the jungle, and while in Peru she decided to specialize in fabrics.

On her return to England she began to develop her unique method of batik painting. Thetis Blacker showed in five exhibitions 'Inprint in Procion' presented by the Textile Council and ICI in London and Manchester. In 1968 the National Trust mounted an exhibition of her work at the Ickworth Gallery. This was the first exhibition of a living artist's work to be presented by the National Trust. She has had three one-man exhibitions at the Marjorie Parr Gallery, London.

In 1970 as a Churchill Fellow, Thetis Blacker visited Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, India and Iran. In Java she worked at the Batik Research Institute of Jogjakarta. There she devised new techniques of dyeing which are now incorporated in her work.

In 1972 she created the Apocalypse series of twelve vast batik paintings for the King's Lynn Festival. Since then these works, now belonging to the Deaconess Community of St. Andrew, have been exhibited, amongst other places, in the Cathedrals of Westminster, Liverpool, Winchester, Guildford, Worcester, Peterborough, Southwark, Sheffield, Canterbury, New York and Washington, and also in Gavno Castle, Denmark, and the Salisbury Festival.

Thetis Blacker is author of A Pilgrimage of Dreams *published by Turnstone Books. BBC 1 and 2 and Thames Television have shown films of her work. She is also a singer and in 1975 appeared at Glyndebourne singing in Stravinsky's* The Rake's Progress.

Thetis Blacker's Bestiary of Mythical Creatures *has been exhibited in the King's Lynn Festival (1975), the Leek Festival (1977), also in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York, the Artisan's Gallery, Vermont and the Bedford House Gallery, London, and the LYC Museum. Other work includes a series of mythographs* Notes from the Magic Flute *which was first shown in the Foyer at Glyndebourne in 1976.*

Thetis Blacker is a member of the Cathedrals' Advisory Committee.

DR. EDWARD ROBINSON

REVIEW ARTICLE

Gershom G. Scholem and the Study of Kabbalah

Alan L. Berger

It is axiomatic in the scholarly world that Gershom G. Scholem and the scientific study of Jewish mysticism are synonymous. Scholem's research and writings are grounded in exceptional linguistic and historiographical expertise, graced with profound philosophical insight. His works are indispensable sources for the serious student of mysticism as well as those interested in the history of ideas. Professor Scholem's life work demonstrates the centrality and vitality of mysticism in the Judaic tradition. Far from being of merely historical or antiquarian interest, Scholem's efforts may be understood as an attempt at cultural renewal. The study of Jewish mysticism, according to Scholem, involves "bringing back to life an absolutely essential strain in Jewish culture and religion." Unlike the mystical systems of other traditions, Jewish mysticism enriches and deepens the meaning of historical events, rather than attempting to abolish, deny, or transcend history. The mystical element in Judaism confirms the tradition as a cosmic religion, *viz.*, one which is alive to the possibility and necessity of interaction and mutual influence between upper and lower worlds.

Kabbalah[1] is a valuable resource book for understanding these fundamental concepts of the Jewish mystical tradition. The work is based upon Scholem's hundred-thousand word entry on Kabbalah and the entire field of Jewish mysticism which appears in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (1971). The present work is divided into three parts: Kabbalah, Topics, and Personalities. A veritable cornucopia of the history of Jewish mysticism, *Kabbalah* includes such exotic topics as chiromancy, demonology, and messianism. Part one treats, after a brief introduction,

the history and conceptualization of Kabbalah. Scholem's discussion of Kabbalah's influence on both Judaic and Christian spirituality demonstrates the elemental and wide-spread appeal of Kabbalah on the European continent. Part two discusses a plethora of topics, e.g.: *Doenmeh*, the group of Turkish Jewish apostates who remained faithful to Sabbatai Zvi after the seventeenth-century pseudo-messiah's conversion to Islam; *Gilgul*, transmigration of souls, a doctrine prominent among sixteenth-century Kabbalists of Safed; and Metatron, a subtype of Merkabah or ascension mysticism which flourished during the first ten centuries of the common era. Part three considers central figures in the formation and dissemination of the Jewish mystical heritage.[2] Significantly, the list includes one non-Jew, Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, author of the highly influential *Kabbala Denudata* (1677-84). Written in Latin, the work "was superior to anything that has been published on Kabbalah in a language other than Hebrew" (p. 416). This book remained "the principle source for all non-Jewish literature on Kabbalah until the end of the 19th century . ." (p. 416).

Scholem's interest in Jewish mysticism began in his native Germany. The product of an assimilated Berlin family, he rebelled by learning Hebrew and becoming a fervent Zionist. In 1923 he was appointed Librarian at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He retired in 1965 as Professor of Jewish mysticism. Viewing himself as an historian of the Jewish mystical tradition, Scholem asks how and why mystical doctrines have changed. His initial research on the scope, development, and influence of Jewish mysticism and theosophical speculation was made public four decades ago; *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*[3] remains the standard handbook for those wishing to study the tradition.

Scholem's specialized studies have, in their turn, all become basic to the research enterprise. For example, *Reshith ha-Kabbalah* (*The Origins of the Kabbalah*, 1948) treats theosophical speculation in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Southern France and Northern Spain. His magesterial study of Sabbatai Zvi appeared, in two volumes, in Hebrew in 1957.[4] The early period of Jewish esoteric speculation based upon ambiguous, baffling, and eclectic texts, replete with gnostic motifs is treated in *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (1960). *Von der mystischen Gestalt der Gottheit* (1962) is crucial for understanding the role of the *Zaddik*, the righteous man/mystic. Scholem's analysis of the centrality of myth in Judaic mysticism, as well as the relationship of mysticism to rabbinism, is analyzed in his *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism* (English translation, 1965). The fascinating and complex interelationship of Lurianic mysticism and messianism, in its Sabbatian setting, and the force of

messianic tension in Judaism as well as its neutralization in Hasidism comprise the subject matter of Scholem's essays in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (1971). More recently, some of Professor Scholem's articles dealing with modern Jewish history, religion and literary matters have been published as *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis* (1976). A *festschrift* in honor of Scholem's seventieth birthday (1967) lists over five hundred bibliographical entries of his various writings, e.g., articles, books, essays, translations, etc.

Scholem's achievements appear the more remarkable when one remembers that the Judaic tradition was itself initially hostile to the notion of an inherent mystical element. Opposition came from both ends of the religious spectrum, i.e., Orthodoxy and Reform (rationalism). Orthodoxy viewed mysticism with suspicion. This judgement rested upon two factors: the mystic having himself had a "peak" experience of the tradition's most profound and formative events may no longer require rabbinic mediation or any other sacramental assistance, e.g., authorized prayer book, fixed hours of devotion, etc. Mysticism and the mystic may then pose a direct challenge to the authority of Orthodoxy. Second, the kabbalistic notion of a hidden or inner Torah appeared blasphemous. But, as Scholem observes, all Jewish mystics "from the Therapeutae to the latest Hasid" agree that the Torah must be interpreted mystically. This interpretation makes of the Torah a living organism which is:

> . . . animated by a secret life which streams and pulsates below the crust of its literal meaning. The Torah . . . does not consist merely of chapters, phrases and words; rather is it to be regarded as the living incarnation of the divine wisdom which eternally sends out new rays of light. It is not merely the historical law of the Chosen People, although it is that too: it is rather the cosmic law of the universe, as God's wisdom conceived it.

The very letters of the Torah symbolize divine potency, indicating that God's power is continually active in the world. This belief in the efficacy and divinity of the Hebrew Alphabet led to the formation of an elaborate letter mysticism (see Scholem's discussion of Gematria).

Essentially, Kabbalah defines the Torah's essence according to three basic notions: ". . . the complete mystical name of God; . . . a living organism, and the divine speech contained in the Torah is infinitely significant, and no finite human speech can ever exhaust it" (pp.169-170). The thirteenth-century *Sefer ha-Zohar*, "Book of Splendor," which became the "Bible" of Spanish and all subsequent Kabbalism, likens the outer Torah to a garment concealing what lies

beneath. "Just as wine must be in a jar to keep," observes the *Zohar*, "so the Torah must be contained in an outer garment. That garment is made up of the tales and stories; but we, we are bound to penetrate beyond."

Far from worrying about types of religious authority, nineteenth-century Rationalism objected to mysticism on other, secular, grounds. *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Scientific Study of Judaism) was a movement which portrayed Judaism as the archetypal religion of reason. Spokesmen of this viewpoint were convinced that Judaism was about to pass from the scene as a living faith. Consequently, extreme steps were taken to deny the existence of any endemic mystical element in Judaism. Mysticism was identified with obscurantism and superstition, textual references to the phenomenon were attributed to foreign, usually Eastern, sources. Heinrich Graetz, one of the movement's leading scholars, is a case in point. Referring to the *Zohar*, Graetz termed it the "book of lies." Graetz quite wrongly believed that mysticism was unrelated to, and did not reflect, the Jewish heritage. It is clear in retrospect that both Orthodoxy and Rationalism were bound by excessively restrictive notions of normative Judaism. Scholem's subtle and rich erudition coupled with his historian's respect for what the texts themselves yield, opened a new vista in Jewish scholarship. Lines which formerly appeared rigidly to separate normative from so-called deviant modes of Judaism began to collapse. Normative is a term which now is seen encompassing a wide variety of rituals, beliefs, and practices which are conceptually bound together by their collective affirmation of the centrality of Torah and the reality of history.

Kabbalah traces the historical exfoliation of Jewish mysticism. Merkabah (throne) mysticism represents the early beginnings of Jewish esoterism. Based upon esoteric speculation concerning Ezekiel's vision, Merkabah flourished on Palestinian soil and is known already in the Mishnah by the technical term, *ma'aseh merkabah* or works of the chariot (Hag. 1:2-1). Scholem charts the development of Jewish mysticism in the Geonic Age (7th to 11th century), early (11th to 14th century) Hasidism in Europe and Egypt, and the two beginnings of Kabbalah, *viz.*, twelfth-century Provence and Spain, and sixteenth-century Safed. Great attention is devoted to the brief yet disruptive career of Sabbatai Zvi and the subsequent Sabbatian phenomenon. Sabbatianism profoundly influenced both religious and secular dimensions of modern Judaism. Scholem contends that the religious anarchism encouraged by Sabbatianism "played a highly important part in creating a moral and intellectual atmosphere favorable to the reform

movement of the nineteenth-century." The *Terminus ad quem* of Scholem's discussion is the bizarre eighteenth-century charlatan Jacob Frank.

Jewish mysticism captured the popular imagination in an unprecedented manner following the sixteenth-century speculations of Isaac Luria, the holy Ari. Earlier attempts at esoterism warned of the dangers connected with the enterprise. Of the four who enter PaRDes (Paradise), for example, the Mishnah tells us that one lost his faith, one lost his mind, and one lost his life. Only Rabbi Akiba "entered in peace and left in peace." But Lurianic Kabbalah succeeded in its attempt at revitalizing a Judaism in exile. Taking seriously the reality and primacy of basic human impulses and fears, e.g., sexuality, demons, the existence of evil, the Kabbalah of Isaac Luria invested the Jewish exile from Spain with a sense of mission. Jews were scattered throughout the world in order to elevate divine sparks which had fallen to every part of earth. The process of restoration, *tikkun*, characterizes the dynamic of Jewish history. Uplifting divine sparks via proper *kavvanah* (meditation or intention) became a sacred obligation for devout Jews. The role of man was crucial, according to Luria, in the redemption process.

The three most significant texts of Jewish mysticism *Sefer Yetzirah* (Book of Creation), *Sefer ha-Bahir* (Book of Brightness), and the *Sefer ha-Zohar* portray the universe as an "enchanted garden." Between God (En-Sof), who is unknowable, and His creation there exist ten sefiroth or divine emanations. Each sefira reflects one of the divine countenances, e.g., Mercy, Justice, Love, Beauty, etc. There is a notion of a great chain of being linking upper worlds (macrocosm) and earth (microcosm). Events in one realm imitate and stimulate events in the other. God was portrayed as a savior in need of salvation. Consequently, Lurianic Kabbalah penetrated and influenced the mythic and literary dimensions of Judaism in a fashion which was inaccessible to the rigid rabbinic world view and to the excessive rationalism of the philosophers.

Kabbalah suggests that mysticism plays a revitalizing role in Judaism. Scholem has long argued that mysticism is at the heart of the religious life.[5] Kabbalah has also an enormous appeal for secularists. Its creative force appears irresistible to those whose universe is becoming disenchanted, but whose search for meaning continues. The two central events in twentieth-century Jewish history, the Holocaust and the rebirth of the State of Israel, have served, among other things, to intensify the search for hidden or secret meaning. Mysticism, for Scholem, stands at the center of the Jewish historical experience and plays an

exegetical role—interpreting the concealed meaning of the various threads which comprise the rich tapestry of Jewish history. But mysticism is no easy task. From the Mishnah to Maimonides, from the *Zohar* to Reb Nahman of Bratzlav, great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, the message has come down: Mysticism is to be the culmination of one's theological odyssey. Only by having worked one's way through halakhic (rabbinic and talmudic) Judaism is one ready to traverse the more subtle, mystical, path. Scholem rightly warns against the frauds and charlatans who are attracted to the field of mysticism (see chapter four "The Wider Influences of and Research on Kabbalah"). Professor Scholem serves most nearly as guardian of the academic integrity of the study of Jewish mysticism primarily by his own example of scholarship, and by the students he has personally trained and professionally influenced.

NOTES

1. New American Library: New York and Scarborough, Ontario. March, 1978. 494 pp. Index and bibliographies. $5.95.
2. Scholem wrote fifteen of the sixteen essays in this section. The entry on Moses Cordovero, the sixteenth-century Kabbalist who authored *Pardes Rimonim*, was written by Dr. Joseph ben Shlomo, a student of Scholem.
3. Published by Schocken in 1941. The book emerged from a series of lectures delivered at the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York (1938).
4. A single volume (thousand page) English translation, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah* (Bollingen) was published in 1974. The translation was by Professor R.J. Zwi Werblowsky of the Hebrew University.
5. See *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. pp. 7-8.

REVIEWS

Who Shall Be the Sun?, by David Wagoner. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978. 125 pp.

David Wagoner, that steady voice out of the state of Washington, has just brought out from Indiana University Press another startling volume of poetry. In *Who Shall Be the Sun?* he takes yet greater sanction than he has in earlier books to speak for and through, not only the people, but also the creatures and weathers of our Pacific Coast rainforest. Here are narratives and retellings of the poems, legends, and ideas of the Northwest Indianas—the Kutenai, Nez Perce, Coeur d'Alene, Lillouet, Cathlamet, Coos, Chinook, Nootka, Kwakiutl, Haida, Tsimshian, and Tlinglist—stories and attitudes which Wagoner has slowly and carefully absorbed over the years, testimony of which rises from the increasingly timeless concerns of his successive books. So here we have a redoing of native American thought through the touch and tenor of one white American professor's highly individualized and exacting craft. At first this seems daring—perhaps presumptuous.

But Wagoner has earned his closeness to the earth he writes of; he has earned his rapport with fog and field and starlight, earthlight, icelight,—with coyote, moss, and Cedar Woman. His volumes of poetry, plus his novels, have brought him at mid-career to a perfection of craft that is no longer influenced by Roethke,—touched, even marginally, by Dickey. His painstaking record of journeying, with all of its backpacking metaphors of making and breaking camp, of getting lost, of *Sleeping in the Woods* (1975) is a record of moving on, with the

strange body and the stranger spirit, into unfamiliar territories. And he has kept his record in a diction that is at once amazingly clean and spare, yet intellectually cunning and spiritually humble. Readers of Wagoner's works have watched these tensions grow in seriousness and still become more controlled as Wagoner himself grew more at ease in the world, more knowing of death, more released into his loves, more versed in harmonies. Now in his mid-fifties, he has become a poet who, by sheer honesty and what I might call purity of intention can hold together a sense of displacement in the world right alongisde an illuminating comfort drawn from the totality of all we know. The result is radiant poetry. The virtuosity of the human repertoire shines through these evocative and layered tales of our Northwest Indians. So do the virtuosities of the animals and plant worlds. Everything lives —even the voices of the dead, the ghost of fire ashes, the bones of salmon.

And *this* "earth household" (to use Gary Snyder's loving term for an attitude we must take toward our collective creatureliness) is not domestic only, even in its widest sense. This collective reaches back and forth in time and space, down into the methods and tongues of the cold earth, and out into the burning sun. It moves through the bodies' faulted knowing, and into all the ways of knowing of our fellow beings.

Since the publication of his *Collected Poems* (1977), Wagoner has been acknowledged as one of our American poets most freed from the shackles of his own brilliant technical proficiency, most able to serve the voices of the other. As his vocabularies test their reserves, their flexibilities, he has written his way into the languages of the earth, its matted roots, its rainy thoughts. He says in his preface to *Who Shall Be the Sun?*: "The poems that I have called songs are less directly in the debt of Plateau and Northwest Coast Indian mythology, but would have been impossible for me to write without my having heard and read the songs and stories and read about and directly experienced the ways of American Indians." Anyone who has followed Wagoner's career would know that these "songs" would have been impossible without his own grappling with true speech—his rigorous exploration of his own listening-in to the possible languages his own life required. Here there is merging, and one cannot tell Wagoner from the knower in the poem, which is not a persona at all, but a mode of being. As in "Lost":

> Wherever you are is called Here,
> And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
> Must ask permission to know it and be known.